**Project Rewrite**

by sophie_enoshima

Summary

**SDR2 SPOILERS**

It's been two months since the Neo World Program ended and things are looking bleak. No one is showing any signs of waking up. That's when Future Foundation show up with what everyone needs...a solution.

The only problem...Hajime has to re-enter the game where history will repeat itself. If he can stop the murders from happening again everyone gets to survive. Can he save everyone or will he crumble when new murders occur?

http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/ProjectRewrite

Notes

I've been working on this for a while, so I'm excited to finally share it with you. I wanted to write something that ties in with the actual game. This is kind of an AU I guess, but it takes place after everything which really happened in the game. I have quite a lot written, but I am yet to have edited it. I will do my best to update regularly. I've never written anything canon-ish before, so I hope this is okay. There are going to be new murders and trials too!

As mentioned in the summary this whole thing is a spoiler for SDR2.

Thank you if you take the time to read! It's much appreciated.
Prologue

Hajime turned his attention to the clock on the wall. Eleven thirty. He’d lost track of time and stayed at the hospital much later than planned. He stood up from the chair with a sigh, he sat in it so often he was surprised he hadn’t left an imprint.

“I guess I should say goodnight then.” he said, fully aware he wouldn’t receive a reply from the boy spread out on the hospital bed. He leant over him to straighten the covers, even though he wasn’t awake he didn’t want him to be cold. When moving the sheets, he was careful not to touch the stub where the boy’s left hand used to be. The sight of it still sent shivers down his spine.

“Same time tomorrow.” Hajime mumbled. Only recently had he started talking to the patients, it made him uncomfortable but Sonia insisted it was a good idea. He didn’t see the point in talking to someone who couldn’t reply. It just left him feeling frustrated.

He let out a deep sigh as he switched off the light, it was a lonely feeling spending all day with someone who believed they were dead. He didn’t see much of the other four survivors anymore because they were always busy visiting someone. Private hospital rooms seemed like a good idea at the time, but now Hajime was beginning to realise how isolating they were.

Once in the hall, Hajime briskly made his way to the staircase. Though he didn’t mind the patient rooms, the hospital itself gave him the creeps. He was living on the real Jabberwock Island, it was practically identical to the one he’d experienced during the Neo World Program. Being in the same hospital just reminded him of the despair disease and what Mikan had done, it wasn’t something he enjoyed reliving every day.

He wished he could escape Jabberwock Island altogether. He couldn’t go anywhere without being haunted by a dark memory from his time in the game. The old building where Byakuya died, the beach house where Mahiru was beaten to death, the music venue where two innocent lives were taken, the hotel lobby where Nagito set off a bomb. There was no escape. He’d asked several times if he could leave the island, but Kyoko always rejected his request. Future Foundation still didn’t trust him, or the other survivors, his safety couldn’t be guaranteed off the island.

Hajime pushed opened the main doors, letting in fresh air from the island. There was a depressing cloud that took permanent residence over the hospital, it was nice to get outside.

"Hajime!"

He heard a voice calling him from behind, someone still inside the hospital. There was a time where he would have gotten his hopes up and presumed it was one of the ten comatose students. However, he’d learned his lesson. He wasn’t so naive anymore. It had been two months since he’d woken from the simulation and there had been no sign of progress at all. Every day his hope would shrink even further.

The voice belonged to Sonia, she waved at him to wait up. He kept his hold on the door so it wouldn’t slam shut in her face - the last thing he would want to do to a princess. He hadn’t expected anyone else to still be at the hospital so late. “I didn’t know you were still here.” he admitted.

Sonia nodded, passing through the door “I like to stay for as long as I can, but seeing you leave reminded me that I should probably get some sleep for myself.” her hand grazed across her face, gently touching her scars. A visual reminder of her time as an ultimate despair.
They walked side by side back to the central island. Hajime couldn't remember the last time he'd had a proper conversation with her. Sonia spent most of her time at Gundam's bedside, Hajime never wanted to intrude. “I hate leaving them behind in that place.”

“Me too.” Sonia sighed “It is like we're abandoning them.”

Hajime decided to ask Sonia something since he had her alone. It was something he hadn’t asked anyone, not even the trio from Future Foundation. He wasn’t sure why he suddenly felt like talking to Sonia about it, perhaps it was the presence of the night which always encouraged him to expose the most intimate parts of his thoughts. “Sonia...do you think they’re ever going to wake up?”

“We can only hope.” Sonia nodded with determination and a broad smile.

Hajime shook his head, he didn’t want to be palmed off with an answer that was so contrived it sounded scripted. He wanted honesty. “Is that what you really think?”

Sonia lowered her head “It is what I like to think.” He knew that was her way of saying no to his original question.

He didn’t enjoy being so negative. At the beginning, he was full of false hope, convinced the students would wake up within days. The idea of them never waking hadn’t even crossed his mind. Unfortunately, the days began to pass, leaving him with nothing but a dampened spirit. It was a torturous feeling, knowing all he could do to help was wait.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting.

His life consisted of nothing more than waiting. From the minute he woke up to the second he went to bed, endless, endless waiting. It was a miserable existence. Barely even an existence at all.

The rest of their journey was taken in silence, from the central island to the hotel. It wasn’t an awkward silence, it was a comfortable one. Just having the company of someone else was enough. For once, Hajime didn't feel so alone. He found himself disappointed when they finally arrived at the cottages.

“It was nice speaking to you.” Hajime said, despite not having said more than a few words to the princess.

“Likewise.” Sonia smiled graciously “We must make the effort to talk more often.”

Hajime nodded in agreement. He often thought it would be a good idea for all the survivors to meet in the restaurant every morning like they had done in the game, even if they spent just a few minutes together it would better than not seeing each other at all. No one else seemed interested in the idea, the others just wanted to spend their free time at the hospital.

Sonia said goodnight and disappeared into her cottage, leaving Hajime all alone outside. It reminded
him of the night after his first trial, how he'd looked up at the stars with the uneasy feeling that someone was watching him. For old times sake, he turned his head towards the sky, feeling different this time. He didn’t feel like anyone was watching him at all, and that was the problem. He felt entirely alone on a gigantic island. A loneliness hit him from deep inside his chest.

With a sigh he retreated to his cottage, he couldn’t stay outside all night. He clambered into bed with little excitement, knowing tomorrow would be exactly the same. Waiting, waiting, waiting, sleeping. Even if his life in the Neo World Program had been filled with constant paranoia and terror, it was more exciting than the life he led now.

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“HAJIME! GET UP!”

He woke with a start, alarmed by the shouting and loud knocking at his door. The person on the other side was using so much force he thought it was going to cave in. He jumped out of bed immediately, he wasn’t sure of the time but the lack of sunlight helped him estimate that it was three or four in the morning. What someone needed him for at that time he didn’t know.

He didn’t hesitate to unlock the door. Thankfully the killing school trip hadn’t left him completely paranoid. He knew there was no one to be feared on the island, no one who would want to hurt him. He yanked open the door, before it gave way, to reveal a red-faced Akane. Her fists were clenched, ready to punch the door another time.

“Finally!” she exclaimed “I thought you were never getting up.”

“What’s going on?” Hajime frowned, he couldn’t understand how the girl had so much energy that early in the morning.

Fuyuhiko, who stood at the edge of the pathway, stepped forward to answer his question “Future Foundation are here. They want to see us.”

“Future Foundation?” Hajime raised his eyebrows. Makoto, Kyoko and Byakuya had left the island within a week of the Neo World Program coming to an end. Besides from the occasional email, Hajime hadn’t heard from them since then. “What do they want so early in the morning?”

Akane shrugged her shoulders “I dunno. Their helicopter is over at the beach on the first island, go meet them there.”

Hajime nodded, closing the door behind him.

“You two go ahead, I’ll finish waking up the others.” Akane said.

Hajime followed her instructions and left with Fuyuhiko. They didn’t have far to go. They jogged briskly, not leaving time for any speculation. Hajime spotted the gigantic helicopter instantly. He was surprised he hadn’t heard it land.

“Do you think they’ve found a way to wake everyone up?” Fuyuhiko whispered to him.

Hajime didn’t want to get his hopes up, but it's what he’d been thinking too. He couldn’t conjure up any other reason for Future Foundation to arrive so suddenly at such an inconvenient time.

Upon closer inspection, it became apparent that no one was inside the helicopter. There was a note
taped to the door, telling them to meet in the conference room at the hospital. It wasn’t Hajime’s
preferred choice of location, but he wasn’t in the position to be fussy.

They reunited with the other three on their way so they could all arrive at the hospital together. There
was an excited tension among them, none of them had felt that much hope in weeks.

As suspected, it was Byakuya, Makoto and Kyoko who were waiting for them in the conference
room. The three of them were sat at one end of an oversized table. The five survivors took the seats
opposite, with a clear understanding from the tension in the room that it was going to be a serious
meeting.

“Thank you all for coming.” Kyoko said, she was holding onto a clipboard with the Future
Foundation logo printed on the front “I apologise for getting you up at such an early hour, but I
figured this is something you’d like to know right away.”

Makoto smiled at them, the only one to try and attempt a warm welcome “Don’t look so worried, this
is good news.”

“You’ve found a way to wake them up?” Sonia cried out, almost falling off her seat in excitement.

Byakuya glared at her for the sudden outburst “Don’t get so carried away with yourself.”

The smile quickly disappeared from Sonia’s face. Souda jumped to her defense immediately “Hey,
don’t talk to Miss Sonia like that.”

Kyoko cut in before an argument could unfold “In theory we have a way to wake everyone up, but
it’s not as straightforward as we’d like it to be.”

Fuyuhiko leaned forward in his seat “Whatever it is we’ll do it.”

“Don’t go making any rash decisions until you’ve heard what we’ve got to say. You might change
your mind.” Kyoko said sternly.

Makoto reached into the inner pocket of his suit and pulled out a memory stick. He held it up so that
everyone could see. There was nothing special about it, just an ordinary, plain memory stick “This
here is a backup copy of the Neo World Program. It contains all the data from your time in the virtual
world.”

“A backup? I thought everything was deleted.” Souda said, saying exactly what everyone was
thinking.

“So did we.” Makoto replied, “But Future Foundation managed to salvage this somehow.”

Byakuya cut in “Don’t bother asking how they did it because we don’t know. Just appreciate the fact
it exists.”

Hajime gulped, trying to piece together what he was being told. “So if you put that data back in the
system…”

“Things would run exactly like they did when you were in the simulation.” Makoto said “The same
people would have the same conversations, the same murders would happen. Everything would run
exactly the same.”

“We have the chance to overwrite the data.” Kyoko said, “If you change just one thing, you’re
changing history.”
“If we load the backed up data into the system and send you back into the simulation, you can change history and stop the murders from happening. That will save your friends.” Makoto smiled as he spoke, obviously eager to share the good news.

“We...can save them?” Hajime stuttered, he couldn’t believe what they were telling him.

“If you can help your friends survive the program, then they’ll no longer believe they’re dead and wake up from their comas.” Kyoko explained.

“How is this possible?” Fuyuhiko asked “I mean, their brains have shut down. I don’t understand how they can even be entered back into the program.”

“That’s not for you to worry about.” Byakuya said. He was tapping a pencil impatiently on the table as if he had a million other places he’d rather be.

“The backed up data contains their avatars which we thought were deleted.” Makoto said to make up for Byakuya’s curt answer.

“This is amazing! I didn’t know something like this was possible.” Souda grinned from ear to ear, showing off his shark-like teeth.

Kyoko frowned “You should take some time to think about this before you agree so quickly. Being entered back into the program won’t be easy, it means reliving the killing school trip all over again.”

“I dunno know about you guys, but I’d be willing to do anything to get my friends back.” Akane said, pumping a fist into the air.

“There’s also a catch…” Makoto mumbled, uncomfortable having to tell them.

Fuyuhiko narrowed his eyebrows at him “What kinda catch?”

Makoto took a deep breath before answering “Though all five of you will be entered back into the program, only one of you will be able to keep your memories and rewrite history. Four of you will need to have your memories wiped.”

“Wiped?!“ Akane yelled, she jumped up from her chair

“You will forget your previous experience in the Neo World Program and everything which has happened since waking up. It will be like your first day on the island all over again.” Byakuya explained.

Hajime shook his head in disbelief, surely it wasn’t necessary for their memories to be taken.

“Isn’t there another way around this? You can’t just wipe our memories.” Fuyuhiko snapped, slamming his hands down on the table.

“Your avatars in the game are constructed around specific memories which result in your appearance. If we don’t erase your memories then you’re going to enter the simulation looking how you do now.” Kyoko said, "To look like your high school selves we must take your memories back to the first day at Hope's Peak Academy."

“You only need to look at yourselves to realise you don’t look like normal high school students. You’ll stand out like an eyesore.” Byakuya said unkindly.

Hajime took a second to stare at his friends. Though Byakuya had been rude, he made a valid point.
Not only were they all noticeably older, but their bodies had seen better days too. Sonia’s face was covered in deep scars, Fuyuhiko’s eye was missing from where he’d tried to replace it with Junko’s, Akane was still recovering from starving herself and Souda had covered his body in dark tattoos. There was no way they could blend in with the others.

“You still don’t have your school memories, and by taking your island memories your avatar will revert back to your high school self.” Makoto said, “We’re able to add one of you to the system as an observer, just like Monomi and Chiaki were.”

Hajime flinched hearing her name, no one had spoken about Chiaki since waking up. "But won't that person's avatar stick out too?"

“As an observer, we can easily customise your avatar so we don’t have to worry about taking away your memories.” Kyoko said, “Of course we’d like to make all of you observers, but the program just wouldn’t handle it.”

“Then how do we decide which one of us gets to keep our memories?” Hajime asked. It was a big decision, not the sort of thing to draw straws over. There would also be a serious amount of pressure on that person since it would be down to them to change everything.

“You don’t get to decide, that decision has already been made by us.” Kyoko said sternly “We watched you all during the game so we know how you behave. We’ve decided that for your best chance of survival, the observer is going to be Hajime.”

“Me…?” Hajime cried out. He hadn’t even thought of putting himself forward. He wanted to do it, it would mean getting to see his old friends again, but it would also mean losing his current friends. If everything went to plan, Akane, Fuyuhiko, Sonia and Souda wouldn’t remember the time they’d spent together during the events of the game and the aftermath. It also put an incredible responsibility on his shoulders.

“You have to do this.” Sonia pleaded with him, on the verge of tears.

“Come on Hajime, I trust you.” Akane said.

“You guys understand how dangerous this is, right?” Hajime raised his eyebrows at them “If one of you gets killed, you might never wake up again.”

“That’s a risk we have to take.” Souda said, his voice shaking slightly.

“I don’t mind if it means Peko gets to wake up.” Fuyuhiko said.

Hajime knew it was risky, if he messed up everyone could end up brain dead. The idea of it terrified him, but he knew the reward outweighed the risk. For two months straight he’d sat by the bedside of his friends, waiting aimlessly for the impossible to happen. Now he had finally been given the opportunity to try and save them. He wasn’t sure if he could do it, the only way to find out was to try. He had to do it, he owed it to his friends. He knew they'd do the same for him.

“I’ll do it.” Hajime said, confirming his decision. He tried his best to sound confident.

Kyoko opened up the folder she’d been holding and pulled out five pieces of paper, she handed them out to the survivors. Makoto provided them with pens.

Hajime looked down at the document, it was a contract. Kyoko explained that they wouldn’t be able to go any further unless all of them agreed to sign it. It stated that Future Foundation could not be held liable if Hajime failed to wake everyone up and that it was a risk they had to take upon
themselves. It didn’t put Hajime off, he signed his name at the bottom of the paper.

With all the signatures collected, Makoto led them to the control room on the central island - one of the only things which hadn’t existed in the Neo World Program. None of them had set foot in the building since waking up on the real Jabberwock Island. It’s where the simulator was stored, along with the pods that entered them into it. Ten of the fifteen pods had their lids closed, their friends had been brought over from the hospital by doctors whilst the survivors had been in their meeting. Hajime was surprised that action was being taken so quickly, he thought things were going to take weeks. He was partly glad, by getting on with it right away he wouldn’t have the time to worry himself out of doing it.

“We’re going to set these four up, and then we’ll run things through with you.” Byakuya explained to Hajime.

“I suggest you say goodbye to your friends.” Kyoko said “No matter what happens, they’ll have different memories of you when they wake up.”

Hajime felt a pang in his throat, he wasn’t ready to say goodbye. He first approached Fuyuhiko who was hovering by Peko’s pod, he hadn’t left her side once.

Fuyuhiko shuffled about awkwardly, his hands stuffed in his pockets “I...wanna apologise in advance. You probably remember, I’m kind of a dick at the start of this whole thing. So sorry if I say anything too harsh.”

Hajime gave a small laugh “It’s okay, I’ve gotten to know the real you.”

“Don’t worry about me, just keep Peko alive okay?” Fuyuhiko looked him sternly in the eyes.

Hajime nodded to reassure him “I promise, I’m not going to let anyone die.”

Fuyuhiko pulled free his hand and held it out for Hajime to shake “It’s been a pleasure knowing you.”

Next up was Akane, she’d somehow snuck a sandwich in with her and was eating it happily, perched on Nekomaru’s pod. “So I guess this is our goodbye.” Akane said, spraying Hajime with crumbs “Don’t get all soppy on me or anything, cuz I’ll have to hit you if you do.”

Hajime laughed “I definitely won’t then. I guess goodbyes don’t have to be sad.”

“Just...just being serious for a minute.” Akane paused “Keep Coach Nekomaru safe, okay. Don’t let him become a robot because of me, and don’t let him die either. He’s a good guy.”

Hajime nodded “I’m going to help everyone survive. I promise.”

“Are you going soppy?” Akane narrowed her eyes, clenching her fist at the same time.

“What?! No!” Hajime exclaimed in alarm. He decided to move on before he ended up with a bruise.

Souda hadn’t formed any tight relationships in the game so there was no one particular he stuck by. He stood awkwardly been the pods of Ibuki and Mikan “You better start talking to me in the game.” he said, “Because we’ll need to be friends again.”

“Of course, I will.” Hajime grinned. The mechanic always put a smile on his face.

“Soul friends!” Souda pulled him into a firm hug.
“Soul friends.” Hajime repeated.

Sonia didn’t say anything, she simply threw her arms around Hajime. It seemed like she was doing everything to keep herself together. Hajime didn’t want to let go “I’ll keep Gundam safe for you.” he said softly, she hugged him tighter.

The final checks had been proceeded. Souda, Sonia, Akane, and Fuyuhiko stepped into their respective pods. Kyoko and Byakuya helped set them up while Makoto took Hajime outside to talk. Hajime took one last look at his friends through the doorway, he was going to miss them.

“Since you’re an observer, you won’t have lost any of your memories. It’s really important you don’t say anything to the others about the previous game or let them find out about their history as ultimate despairs.” Makoto instructed.

Hajime nodded “I wouldn’t tell them, I think it’d send everyone over the edge.”

“Everything is going to play out exactly how it did in the game until you change that first murder. Then things might become a little unpredictable.” Makoto said. “Just because you’ve stopped one murder from happening, it doesn’t mean you’ve stopped all of them.”

Hajime knew he was going to have to keep a watchful eye, he wouldn't have a minute to rest. "How long will this last for? When does everyone get to wake up again?"

"To complete the overwrite you must spend the exact same amount of time in there as you did the first time around." Makoto answered. "Which is twenty-three days."

It didn’t sound very long, but Hajime knew a lot could happen in that time. He gulped, it was a lot of pressure. Would he still be alive in twenty-three days?

“You won’t be totally alone.” Makoto said supportively. “Being an observer means you’ll receive help from Chiaki and Monomi since they’ll be in on everything.”

Hajime cut him short “Wait, Chiaki is going to be there?!”

Makoto nodded “Of course, she was recovered in the backup too.”

Hajime couldn’t help but smile. He thought he’d never see her again.

Kyoko popped her head around the doorframe “We’re ready for you now, Hajime.”

Makoto and Hajime headed back into the control room. He noticed his four surviving friends peacefully sleeping in their pods, they would have already forgotten him.

“This is the only backup, Hajime. So we can’t try again if anything goes wrong. What happens this time around is permanent.” Kyoko said sternly to emphasise the severity of things.

“But we understand if you can’t save everyone. It’s going to be tough.” Makoto added to reassure him.

“Just try and not get yourself killed, that would ruin everything.” Byakuya said.

With the final words of warning out the way, Kyoko guided him to his pod. He stepped in hesitantly, his nerves were starting to get the better of him. There was no going back now, everyone one was waiting for him in the simulator. He laid flat on his back, his arms pressed down either side of him. Makoto knelt beside him to attach several wires to his head.
Kyoko towered over him “Are you ready?”

Hajime nodded, his throat too dry to talk.

“Then let’s begin.” she pulled across the lid to the pod, whispering as she did so “Good luck, I believe in you.”

The lid closed, surrounding Hajime in nothing but darkness. The outside world was no more.

The time had come, he was going to save his friends.
Chapter One - Part One

Chapter Notes

You might recognise some of the speech from this chapter. I took some of the lines from the game itself, but don't worry I've only done that for the beginning of this story. The further in we get the more stuff changes so the speeches will be totally new. I'm hoping to get two chapters up this weekend. Things will start heating up soon!;) I hope this chapter is a good length, I wanted to include a lot from the introduction of the game but not tooooo much or we'd be here forever!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His eyes opened slowly, trying to adapt to the harsh sunlight. He could feel the sun blazing down onto his skin, starting to burn him. He wasn’t in the pod anymore. He reached his hand out and curled up his fingers, as suspected, sand ran through them. Above him, he vaguely made out a bright blue sky...and someone towering over him.

“Hey….Can you hear me? Are you okay? You seem pretty out of it. To be honest, I’m also...no, everyone else feels the same too. Since we suddenly...got put in this...weird situation. Hey, are you listening?”

Hajime hadn’t heard that voice in so long, it almost sounded fake. He slowly pushed himself off the ground, his arms weak beneath him. He couldn't understand why he was on the island already. He'd presumed that he'd first wake up outside the classroom where he would then be taken to the island by Usami. Was he that out of things he didn't remember? He stared at the boy in front of him. White fluffy hair, pale skin and a dark green jacket. Sure enough, it was Nagito Komaeda.

“Hey, are you sure you’re okay?” Nagito asked again, frowning so hard his forehead wrinkled.

“Uh…” Hajime was still in a state of confusion, the last thing he remembered stepping into the pod. "How did we get here?"

"That rabbit, Usami, brought us." Nagito replied "Don't you remember?"

"Sorta..." Hajime said. He couldn't remember being brought to the island again, but he didn't want to stand out by making a big deal out of it. He wasn't sure why the memory was missing, but it wasn't like he had anyone there to answer his question. He decided to put it down to the exhaustion of entering the simulation for a second time, nothing to worry about.

“You look very pale.” Nagito pointed out.

Hajime cleared his throat, he had to act confused despite knowing what was going on. “Uh...so that rabbit thing brought us to a tropical island?” if his acting didn't suffice, everything would be ruined before it had even started.

Nagito nodded, he seemed convinced “Yeah, that's pretty much it.”

Hajime pointed over to the security camera, seeing it again sent a shiver down his spine. There
hadn’t been any cameras on the real Jabberwock Island. “Is someone watching us?” he exclaimed, trying his best to channel the emotions he felt the first time waking up on the island.

“I think it’s for our safety.” Nagito replied calmly. “Well it’s a waste of time to think about it, best not to worry.” he broke into a smile.

Hajime knew this time with Nagito was precious, since he was still behaving like a normal human being. He was acting like the friend Hajime tried desperately to remember him as. He knew things would change in Nagito’s head the minute Monokuma showed up and announced the killing school trip. He’d become suicidal, desperate to sacrifice himself or others in the name of hope.

Nagito carried on making conversation “So, how are you feeling? Um...I understand your confusion after everything that’s happened. But why don’t we start with an introduction?”

“Sure...” Hajime tried not to smile, an introduction was the last thing he needed.

“I’m Nagito Komaeda. It’s nice to meet you.” Nagito smiled, he held out his hand for Hajime to shake “I guess I should also tell you about my talent so you know why Hope’s Peak Academy chose me. Well, even if I tell you, in my case it’s a pretty disappointing talent.”

Hajime frowned as he watched Nagito hang his head in shame, at least he had a talent. “A disappointing talent?” Hajime played along.

“I’m lucky.” Nagito admitted “It’s not a joke or anything, it’s my actual talent.”

“So you’re the ultimate lucky student?” Hajime asked. He knew about Nagito’s luck far too much, it made him dangerous.

“I got selected from a country wide lottery, they randomly select one student each year and offer them a place at Hope’s Peak.” Nagito explained.

Hajime nodded, he couldn’t stand there and judge Nagito’s talent when he didn’t have one of his own. He decided to take the time to introduce himself before Nagito started trash talking himself again. “I’m Hajime Hinata.”

“Then let me ask you a question: what is your ultimate talent?” Nagito quizzed him, clearly eager.

Hajime didn’t want to, but he knew he had to lie. Not remembering his talent had isolated him from the other students the last time around, casting suspicion. It had driven Nagito, sending him on a quest to find out the talent which resulted in him learning the truth about the ultimate despairs. Hajime needed to blend in with the other students and pretend he had a real talent. It would only make his job of saving everyone more challenging if they didn't trust him. The question was, what talent was he going to pick? He needed a lie which wouldn't get him caught out. He knew it would be foolish to call himself something like the ultimate surfer when stuck on an island. He needed something no one could ever test him on. Ultimate ice skater? Ultimate skier? Ultimate clumsy student, like Nagito had once said? There was one talent which came to mind. Technically, the talent belonged to him, but he wasn’t born with it like the other students and their specialist skills. It belonged to Izuru Kamukura, not Hajime Hinata the plain old reserve course student. Still, he was going to take it.

Hajime scratched his head, hesitating slightly “It’s a little corny, but I got invited here as the ultimate hope.” the words were out of his mouth, there was no taking them back now. The lie was out and now he had to live with it.

Nagito’s eyes widened, the boy must have been internally screaming with joy. “You’re the ultimate
hope?"

Hajime gave an embarrassed laugh “It is a talent, I promise you.”

Nagito bounced on the balls of his feet “I don’t doubt that at all. That’s an amazing talent, Hajime. I can’t believe I'm in the presence of the ultimate hope.”

Hajime decided to change the subject, he didn’t want to talk about his lie any longer in case he got caught out. It was a risky move but he knew he’d made the right decision. If Nagito thought he was the ultimate hope, he’d be much more likely to listen to him. With Nagito under control, it would be a lot easier to prevent the murders from happening. He could stop Nagito from doing anything stupid.

A distraction was no longer needed, Hajime's e-handbook buzzed from inside his pocket, interrupting their conversation. Nagito took it upon himself to explain the device, Hajime listened patiently despite knowing how to use the thing better than Nagito himself.

“You don’t know anything about the other students yet, right?” Nagito asked Hajime, once he’d finished his demonstration.

“That’s right.” Hajime lied.

“Then...I think it’s best if you at least introduce yourself to them.” Nagito suggested.

Hajime nodded in agreement “That sounds like a good idea. Where is everyone?”

“Perhaps they’re exploring the Island as well?” Nagito guessed “Why don’t we go around together to see everyone? That way you’ll get a good idea of the island too.”

Hajime agreed, it was better than walking around by himself.

“Then let’s go.” Nagito smiled as he led Hajime away from the beach.

Hajime tried not to sigh, he had to go and introduce himself as the ultimate hope fourteen times. It was going to be a long morning.

***

Their first destination was the ranch. Hajime watched Usami, who had not yet been transformed into Monomi, turn a chicken into a cow with her magic stick. He wondered if he could save his friends by keeping the magic stick away from Monokuma. It held a lot of power and would make his job of protecting everyone far easier. He was significantly taller than Monokuma so all he had to do was hold the stick high in the air and victory would be his. An image of the Monobeasts flashed into his mind, and he no longer felt so passionate about the plan.

"Squish! Squish!" Hajime grazed over the fact Hiyoko was killing ants, for once it wasn't the most surprising thing. The Hiyoko Saionji standing in front of him looked so much younger than the Hiyoko Saionji he'd been to visit in the hospital. He really was stepping back in time.

Hajime edged forward to introduce himself "My name is Hajime Hinata...and I'm the ultimate hope.” it still felt uncomfortable to say.

The dancer stopped killing ants just to scoff at him "Pfft, that's a talent for babies!"
Hajime tried not to let it bother him, he shouldn't have expected anything less from Hiyoko. He reminded himself that it was better to stand there and receive abuse from her, than watch her in a hospital bed connected to several monitors.

He his attention was then turned to Akane. "Heeeey! Who're you dudes?"

Her memory really had been erased, she didn’t recognise him at all. Hajime hadn’t realised how much it would hurt. He tried not to let himself get upset as he gave his introduction. It was tough seeing a close friend look at him as if he was a total stranger.

Nekomaru greeted him with a lot of enthusiasm, and seemed motivated when he heard Hajime’s borrowed talent. Hajime’s ears hurt as he walked away, he’d forgotten how loud Nekomaru could be. He’d grown used to the haunting silence of the hospital. It was an improvement, that was for sure.

Mahiru’s welcome came next, it was a little bossier than Nekomaru’s. Feeling slightly lectured, Hajime kept the introduction brief. He knew whose greeting was next, and it wasn’t going to be a pleasant one. He prepared himself for the swearing and approached Fuyuhiko.

“Who the hell are you? Don’t talk all friendly and shit to me, dumbass.” Fuyuhiko snapped at him before Hajime even had time to open his mouth.

Hajime had almost forgotten how aggressive Fuyuhiko had been at the start of the game. He could feel himself missing his friend already. He found it odd seeing Fuyuhiko with both of his eyes intact, he’d grown fond of the eyepatch. Not in the mood for taking abuse, Hajime quickly gave his name and then left Fuyuhiko alone - not bothering to mention his talent. That guy needed space.

Nagito lead Hajime through to the hotel lobby where Peko and Chiaki were waiting for him. Chiaki and Hajime locked eyes right away, they both remembered each other. Hajime considered Chiaki one of his closest friend, even if she was only an A.I. He wanted to run over and hug her, but he knew it would blow his cover. He controlled himself and approached her calmly, doing his best to show little emotion. Chiaki didn't say much to him, she just complained about feeling sleepy. She had to keep her guard up too, Hajime wasn't the only one with an important role to play. He said a quick goodbye, he'd have to catch up with her properly in his own time.

He stopped to talk to Peko before leaving the lobby. She kept her introduction blunt and brief, making no comment on Hajime's talent. Hajime doubted she cared about that sort of thing.

They headed upstairs to the restaurant where Nagito had to convince Sonia not to suck Teruteru’s loins.

"Hello, it is nice to meet you." Sonia smiled at them, as polite as always. Despite talking to Hajime just hours ago at the hospital, she had no idea who he was.

When they were all finished at the hotel, Nagito took him to Rocketpunch market. Hajime stood there for five minutes while Ibuki spelt out her name, and did his best to console Mikan after accidentally making her cry.

He greeted Gundam and Souda at the airport. Gundam seemed particularly judging of his talent, but said nothing too unkind. Souda was as carefree as always, Hajime knew it wouldn't take long to repair their friendship.

They finished up with Byakuya at Jabberwock Park. He knew it wasn’t the real Byakuya Togami, the student standing in front of him was the Ultimate Imposter, he didn’t even know his name. In fact, he didn't know anything about the Ultimate Impostor at all, besides his talent. Hajime
knew the imposter wasn’t a threat, so he didn’t need to pry into his talent anymore than that. He decided it best to still refer to him as Byakuya to stop himself from slipping up and ruining his cover.

With all of the introductions out of the way, Hajime and Nagito headed to the beach to receive Usami’s disappointing present. Hajime felt bad being so rude about it since Usami was now on his side, but he couldn’t deny how ugly the gift was. He wouldn’t even give it to an enemy.

Thankfully, the rabbit didn’t stay sad for long. Usami’s spirits lifted as she presented all the students with matching swimwear. The chance to swim had been robbed from Hajime last time, making him all the more desperate to run after the others and get changed into the trunks. Unfortunately, he knew that Monokuma was going to show up any second and it was therefore important for him to stay behind on the sand. He waited behind with the others who had chosen not to swim, trying not to feel too disheartened about the matter.

It was still fun watching the others splash about in the water. All of them so happy and carefree, enjoying their time on the beautiful tropical island. It saddened him that this would be the last happy moment they would all spend together. Even if he did avoid all the killings, things would still be different among the students from the point of Monokuma’s arrival. Everything was about to change. Fear, paranoia, desperation…it was on its way.

The sky turned grey, no longer looking like a picture from a postcard but instead something from a horror movie. Hajime knew it was time. His knees felt weak beneath him, providing little support. Things were about to get real. The monitor attached to the palm tree began to flicker, displaying the grisly outline of Monokuma.

“Ahh, ahhh! Mike check! Mike check!”

Just hearing his voice again made Hajime want to scream. He chewed down hard on his bottom lip, so much so it started to bleed.

“Ah, ah! Ah, ah! Can you hear me, can you hear me?”

Hajime clenched his fists, trying not to react. He had to blend in.

“Puhuhuh…surprised? You were totally surprised! Riiiiight? Now then, sorry to keep you all waiting for so long. Let’s leave all this worthless entertainment behind. It’s time for the main attraction! You guys better hustle over to Jabberwock Park.”

Now Hajime understood why Usami looked so horrified. Terrible things were about to unfold.

Hajime dragged himself over to the park, he didn’t want to go but he had no choice. No one could defy Monokuma. The others followed behind him, they had to change out of their swimming costumes.

“Puhuhuhuhuh!”

The laughter rang in Hajime’s ears, taunting him. As if appearing from thin air, Monokuma jumped from the sky down onto the statue in the centre of the park. Making a big entrance, as per usual.

Hajime stood there as Monokuma introduced himself, watching the faces of his friends. They all looked confused and terrified, things were only going to get worse for them. He wondered what was going through their heads. They didn’t know the terrible things which were waiting for them. The things that Hajime was determined to stop.

Monokuma fought with Usami, turning her into Monomi. Hajime felt bad for not saving her, but
Monomi wasn’t his priority. Her magic stick was destroyed in the process. Now Monokuma really did have the most amount of power on the island, he could do anything he wanted. Once Monokuma had finished beating up his ‘little sister’ he turned his attention back to the sixteen students standing in front of him. An evil grin spread across his face as he shared with them the details of the killing school trip.

“So, let’s begin our killing school trip!”

From that point mania unfolded. Monokuma beat Monomi up again, Souda screamed his lungs out, Ibuki hyper ventilated, Teruteru shook himself violently and Mikan started crying. It was an utter mess, like a scene from a disaster movie.

“If one of you gets murdered, then the surviving members must participate in the class trial! At the class trial, there will be a showdown between the blackened killer and the other spotless students. During the trial, you’ll present arguments about who you think the blackened is. The outcome will be decided by popular vote and if you arrive at the correct answer only the blackened killer will be punished. The rest may continue their school trip. However, if you choose poorly…then the one who got away with the murder will survive, and the rest of you will receive your punishment.”

Hajime knew he had to avoid the class trial at all costs, because no matter what the outcome at least one person would die. He’d become powerless. It was one thing to stop a murder, but he couldn’t prevent Monokuma from executing someone. Besides, if he didn’t guess the blackened correctly it meant everyone, including himself, would never wake up again.

After more screaming, crying and swearing from the students, Monokuma brought forward his Monobeasts which just caused more trauma. Hajime knew they weren’t any danger so long as he left them alone, but they scared him all the same. He watched as one of the Monobeasts ‘killed’ Monomi, he knew she wasn’t really dead so he tried not to let it bother him. If the students hadn’t been terrified before, they certainly were now.

Looking traumatised, everyone left the park and made their way back to the hotel. All of the students locked themselves in their cottages right away, besides Hajime. There was no trust between any of them. Were they all missing home or were some of them too busy plotting a murder?

It was almost time for the night Monokuma announcement, but Hajime had a few minutes to spare. There was someone he needed to speak to and it had to be in private.

He stood in front of Chiaki’s cottage and knocked softly on the door, she answered instantly as if she’d been expecting him. They didn’t say a word to each other until the cottage door was firmly shut, they couldn’t risk anyone listening in.

“It’s so good to see you!” Hajime cried out as soon as it was safe to speak. He pulled Chiaki into a hug. He understood she wasn’t real, but it felt good to see her all the same.

“It’s good to see you too, Hajime.” Chiaki replied as she hugged him back firmly.

Hajime broke the hug, still smiling “I was worried you wouldn’t remember me, since this is a back up or whatever.”

“I’m an A.I. so I have access to all the files. It means I remember everything.” Chiaki said, doing her best to keep the explanation simple.

“I’m glad you’re here. This is going to be tough, I don’t think I could do it without you.” Hajime admitted. He was still struggling with the fact that everyone had forgotten him, it was an isolating
feeling.

“I’ll do my best to help you, and so will Monomi. We just need to be careful not to blow our cover.” Chiaki said “So long as the others trust us, we’ll be able to help them.”

Hajime nodded, it would be nice to have some people on his side...though he didn’t quite trust Monomi. She was easily manipulated, it worried him that one of the other students might try and get information out of her. He knew it was best to leave as little secrets with Monomi as possible.

Chiaki sat herself on the floor crossed legged, indicating for Hajime to do the same. He sat down besides her, the floor of the cottage comfier than he’d expected. "So Makoto told me that everything is going to play out exactly like it did the first time around."

“If left untouched, yes. But the moment you change something important, you start overwriting the data. By preventing just one of the murders, you have the ability to save everyone.” Chiaki recapped, wanting to make sure he understood the situation fully.

"And Makoto said for the rewrite to complete, we have to make it through twenty three days...” Hajime said, trying to confirm everything he’d been told.

"To complete the rewrite, you need to spend the same amount of days here as you did the first time around. Whoever is still alive at that point gets to wake up” Chiaki said.

Hajime gulped, it was a lot of pressure. He planned for everyone to still be standing strong on day twenty-three, but it was going to require a lot of effort to keep an eye on such a large amount of people.

“Do you have a plan?” Chiaki asked him, fiddling with the sleeves of her hoodie for comfort.

Hajime shrugged his shoulders, he hadn’t had the time to think of one. There hadn’t been a single minute spare since the helicopter had arrived on the beach. “I guess the most important thing right now, is to stop the first murder from happening.”

“We have nearly two days until the party, which gives us some time.” Chiaki said “I think we should write down a timeline of what happened the last time around. It will guide us when to intervene and stop us from forgetting anything...I think.”

Hajime nodded, it sounded like a good idea. He’d never forgive himself if someone died just because he forgot to step in. “Okay, I’ll get some paper from the supermarket and work on that now.”

“Why don’t you wait until morning?” Chiaki suggested "You have enough time."

“I’ll do it now.” Hajime said firmly “I want to be as prepared as possible.”

*Ding Dong Bing Bong*

The sound rang throughout the cottage. With that, the monitor in Chiaki’s room came to life. Monokuma spoke through the speakers “Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. It is now 10:00pm. Nighttime can be confusing...if you’re out at night and accidentally meet a killer, then it sucks to be you! Before you go to bed, I strongly recommend you lock your doors. You never know who might be planning to kill you! Puhuhuh! Bye-byeeee!”

The monitor turned to black once again.
“I’m going to go off to the supermarket to work on that timeline.” Hajime said, ignoring Monokuma’s message.

Chiaki yawned “I hope you don’t mind if I go to bed, I’m really sleepy.”

“It’s fine.” Hajime smiled at her, not wanting to deprive her of sleep. He didn’t mind going alone.

Hajime said goodbye to Chiaki and headed off the hotel grounds, making his way to the supermarket. It was an eerie feeling being out so late on his own, he never used to spend the night hours wandering around. He occasionally checked over his shoulder to make sure he wasn’t being followed. He was back to a life of constant paranoia.

He walked straight into Rocketpunch market, which seemed to be open twenty four hours. Despite being nighttime, all the lights were still on which brightened up the place - and almost made Hajime forget it was dark outside. He wandered around the market until he found some paper and marker pens, he also picked up a bottle of water in case he got thirsty. He didn’t feel like making two trips. He still found it strange leaving the market without paying for the items he was holding, he hoped it wasn’t something he’d adapt to in the real world or he’d get into some serious trouble.

He made it back to his cottage without bumping into anyone. With the lights on and door locked, he sat himself down on the bed with his new supplies. He did his best to remember everything which went down in the original game, it had been over two months ago so his memory was a little stiff. There were certain events, like the murders, which he wrote down straight away. Other events like his time in the fun house took a little longer to recap. He didn’t enjoy bringing up the old memories since most of them were so disturbing, but he had no choice. He couldn’t move forward unless he faced his past.

It was gone midnight by the time he was finished, but he was happy with the list he’d produced. He put it down on the side, he’d talk it through with Chiaki in the morning. It wasn’t fair to wake her. With the task complete, he got himself ready for bed and turned off the lights. It was only the first night and he felt exhausted, there was a deep weight on his shoulders. The lives of his friends rested in his hands.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading ^_^ Stay tuned for the next part!!
Chapter One - Part Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Gooooood morning, everyone! Looks like today is gonna be another perfect tropical day! Now then, let’s show some enthusiasm and make sure to give it our all today!”

Hajime let out a deep groan, there was nothing worse than being woken by the irritatingly high pitched voice of Monokuma. He’d rather have an alarm clock blaring in his ear, heck even being thrown out of bed would be better in comparison.

Day one was over, he just had to make it through another twenty-two days without anyone dying...like it was going to be hard. His eyes grazed across the room, drawn to the timeline he’d written during the night. He needed to check it through with Chiaki, but he had to get her alone. Everything would be ruined if one of the other students saw it.

It took a lot of effort to drag himself out of bed and to the bathroom. He’d gotten carried away writing his timeline and had forgotten about the morning alarm. Perhaps he should have listened to Chiaki and waited until morning. Thankfully, a cool shower helped stimulate his brain and stopped him from wandering around like a zombie.

He took his timeline off the side before leaving, folding it into a rough square. He slipped it into the pocket of his trousers for safe keeping. He didn’t trust leaving the paper unattended in case Monokuma decided to mess around and take it. It was the sort of trick he could see the bear pulling.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” Souda screamed at him the minute he left his cottage.

“Ahh!” Hajime screamed back, caught off guard.

“Oh, it’s just you. Don’t scare me like that!” Souda took a deep breath, recovering from the shock.

Hajime wanted to laugh, he realised how funny it seemed the second time around. “The same goes for you.”

Souda told Hajime about his walk around the central island and how the Monobeasts were blocking off islands two, three, four and five. Hajime nodded along though he knew this already. He hoped they wouldn’t get the chance to explore the other islands, that only happened after the class trials when his friends died. It was less fun being limited to only the first and the central island, but that was better than letting anyone die. He wouldn’t sacrifice someone just so he could use the library.

Peko came out to fetch them but Souda ran off before anyone had a chance to stop him, leaving Hajime to walk over to the restaurant alone. He took a headcount upon arrival, excluding Souda and himself there fourteen faces. No one had died yet.

He made conversation with the others while Mahiru went after a terrified Souda. It was difficult making normal conversation with the idea of the killing school weighing heavy on their minds. The good mornings quickly went out the window, they seemed incapable of doing anything but speculate. Hajime took a back seat and listened while the others spoke about what might happen. He didn’t want to put his foot in things.
Once everyone was finally there, the students tucked into breakfast. Hajime didn’t take much since his appetite had shrunk during the past two months. He’d spend most of his time at the hospital and often forgot to eat. He grabbed a glass of orange juice and helped himself to a slice of toast. Tray in hand, he took a table by himself in the far corner. None of the other students were sitting together, they were all spread out eating alone.

“Hello, Hajime. Is it alright if I join you?”

Hajime looked up to see Nagito standing there with a plate of pastries. Though Hajime had been planning a peaceful breakfast, he liked the idea of spending some time with Nagito. It beat eating alone. “Take a seat.” he smiled.

Nagito pulled out the chair opposite and sat down. “Thank you, I hope I’m not bothering you.”

Hajime shook his head “No, it’s fine.” he kept his voice low, aware that everyone in the restaurant was probably listening to his conversation since no one else was talking.

“So, how did you sleep?” Nagito asked him as he tucked into his breakfast.

For a second, Hajime thought he was asking a slightly creepy and personal question, but he quickly realised that the other students had only just learnt about the killing school trip so it was likely they’d been up all night thinking about it - making Nagito's question more appropraite.

“It took me a while to go to sleep.” Hajime said honestly, this was true since he’d been up writing his list “What about you?” he returned the question to be polite.

“I was up trying to take everything in.” Nagito admitted.

Hajime wondered if Nagtio had been up crafting a plan to kill. He sighed, annoyed at himself for thinking up such a thing. He was tired of thinking and talking about nothing else besides the killings, it had already consumed him for the past two months, draining him entirely. He knew he was back on the island to do a job, but he wanted some time just to relax. It was time to change the subject.

“This food is really good.” he said, it was the first thing which came to mind.

Nagito grinned at him “You’re eating toast, Hajime. Is that something you can really be impressed by?”

Hajime looked sheepish, he only said it to make conversation. “...yeah, you know what I mean.”

“These pastries are pretty delicious.” Nagito agreed, not teasing Hajime any further “Perhaps our ultimate cook, Teruteru, made them.”

“I preferred to be called the ultimate chef!” Teruteru heard him and joined in from a nearby table “And no I didn’t make this. Sure it’s good, but my food is so delicious it’s enough to make your panties drop.”

Hajime’s eyes widened, he didn’t feel like continuing the conversation with Teruteru. Thankfully, he didn’t need to think up an excuse. In the attempt to get up from the table, Mikan provided herself as an accidental distraction.

CRASH.

CLATTER.
“BOOM.”

“AHHHH!”

“What was that?” Nagito whipped his neck around instinctively, along with Hajime.

Mikan was spread across the floor, her legs tangled up in wires. Glasses and plates had smashed to the ground, brought down by her fall. Her skirt had risen up, leaving nothing to the imagination as she bared her underwear for everyone.

“Oh no no no no!” the poor girl wept in embarrassment “I-I-I tripped!”

“How in the world did you end up in such a compromising position after tripping?!” Byakuya the imposter exclaimed loudly.

“Well it certainly makes me happy. I’m verrrrry happy right now.” Teruteru said, Hajime swore he saw him licking his lips.

“Nooooo! I’m so embarrassed! P-please help me.” Mikan pleaded desperately.

“Awwwww! She looks so adorable when she’s embarrassed.” Ibuki teased.

Hajime jumped up from his seat, he didn’t want the situation to go on for any longer than it had to. He rushed to Mikan’s side with some of the others. “Let’s help her up.”

Mahiru seemed to be on the same page “Yes, I agree. This has gone on long enough.”

Hajime stood back as Mahiru untied the wires, he wanted to help but he didn’t want the others to think he was doing it for perverted reasons. It was best just to stay out the way.

“Are you okay?” he asked Mikan when she was steadily on her feet again.

“My head is throbbing a little, but I’m okay.” she replied, her face pale.

“Now that is finally over with, may I have everyone’s attention.” Byakuya said authoritatively.

Everyone strained their necks to look at him. Byakuya continued eating as he spoke “First, I have a question for you all. That Monokuma thing ordered us to kill each other. So under these circumstances, what do you think we need right now?”

Fuyuhiko swore at him “Who the fuck knows? Get to the point already.”

Byakuya continued “If you want me to get to the point, you better hurry up and answer my question.”

“It’s food, obviously.” Akane said.

“No, it’s all about having a good shit!” Nekomaru bellowed.

“Could it be a bond?” Nagito suggested, putting forward a serious idea “As long as the ultimates
work together, there’s nothing we can’t accomplish. You’ll all be able to create a hope that can overcome any despair.”

Hajime cut him off, he didn’t want Nagito to get carried away talking about hope. He already knew the answer to Byakuya’s question “We need a leader.”

“That’s the answering I’m looking for.” Byakuya nodded, seemingly impressed “What we need right now is a disciplined leadership, provided by an unmistakable leader.”

“I see,” Nekomaru said “Even sports teams need captains, after all.”

“What about Hajime?” Nagito suggested, instantly putting him forward “I can’t think of anyone better to guide us than the ultimate hope.”

Hajime could feel his face going red, he didn’t want to draw attention to himself “It’s not really my thing….”

“But as the ultimate hope you can easily guide us, you’ll steer us away from the path of despair.” Nagito smiled at him.

“I think Hajime would make an excellent leader.” Sonia beamed.

“Are you kidding me?” Hiyoko teased “He strikes me as such a pushover.”

“Hey!” Hajime frowned, he hadn’t even volunteered himself and now he was being insulted.

“So what do you say?” Nagito asked, a spark in his eyes.

Hajime had already weighed it up in his head. Though being the leader would allow him to control the others, it would also give him extra responsibilities. He needed to focus on saving the others, he didn’t have the time to lead everyone. His chances of success were better if he took a smaller role. He pushed his hands out in protest “I think someone like Byakuya would make a much better leader.”

“Rejoice. I shall accept the position.” Byakuya said immediately, grabbing at the opportunity with both hands.

Nagito looked disappointed but he didn’t press the issue any further. Hajime let the others argue among themselves about whether Byakuya should be the leader or not.

“Don’t worry, as long as I’m your leader, I won’t let anyone become a victim.” Byakuya spoke with confidence, if only it was a promise he could have kept before.

Not allowing anyone time to finish their breakfast, Byakuya demanded that everyone followed him to Jabberwock park. Hajime sighed and left behind his half finished glass of orange juice, he had no choice but to follow. The others didn’t seem impressed either.

Their newly appointed leader led them to Jabberwock Park. Their attention was caught instantly by the giant timer shaped like Monokuma standing where the statue used to be.

21 DAYS LEFT

The countdown was really meaningless, but of course, the students unaware of this began to panic. Hajime knew that the timer was counting to absolutely nothing and it wasn’t a bomb. It was now an indication of how many days he had left to overwrite the Neo World Program. He wasn’t
sure whether he liked it or not. It was useful knowing how long he had to go, but it was also added pressure.

“A mysterious mystery, isn’t it?” Monomi said casually, as if she hadn’t just appeared from the dead. No seemed particularly pleased to see her.

Disappointed by a lack of answers, Byakuya dismissed everyone. Allowing them to go about their day as they pleased. Everyone headed off in separate directions upon dismissal. Hajime had some free time, he could finally show Chiaki the timeline he’d made. He reached into his pocket to ensure the piece of paper was still there, to his relief it was, the paranoia was getting to him. He knew Chiaki spent a lot of time in the hotel lobby since there were arcade machines, so he decided to try there first.

He was on his way from the central island to the hotel, when a voice called him from behind.

“Hajime!”

Hajime spun around to see Nagito running after him. “Oh, hey.”

Nagito caught up to Hajime, panting slightly. “Since we had some free time, I was wondering if you’d like to hang out. We could explore the island together.”

Nagito had never been desperate to spend his time with Hajime before, perhaps it was Hajime’s ‘talent’ which drew him in. Hajime paused, he needed to see Chiaki about the timeline but he wanted to spend time with Nagito too. Sitting by his bedside every day had been a lonely experience, now Hajime had a chance to hang out with him like normal friends. Hajime still had many questions for Nagito, though he knew Nagito could never answer them because his memory had been wiped. He hoped that being around Nagito would give him a better understanding of why he tried to kill everyone the last time around.

“That sounds fun.” Hajime smiled back at him, he still had time to speak with Chiaki in the afternoon. It’s not like she was going anywhere.

Nagito suggested spending some time at the beach. There was nothing there to explore besides sand, but Hajime agreed to go anyway. He sat himself down on the sand. Nagito was still acting normal, he was smiling, laughing and not babbling on madly every two seconds. Hajime knew things had already turned in Nagito’s head, they would have done from the minute Monokuma appeared. He wanted to do something to try and change his way of thinking, but Nagito was so set it in his ways it wasn’t something he could just miraculously do overnight.

“Aren’t you hot in that thing?” Hajime raised his eyebrows at the green jacket Nagito was wearing. He himself was warm and he only had on a short sleeved shirt.

Nagito laughed “This jacket keeps me at the perfect temperature.”

Hajime knew that Nagito was severely ill. Not only was he dealing with behavioral variant frontotemporal dementia, but he was also battling stage three Lymphoma. Perhaps it was his illness that caused him to feel cold despite being on a tropical island. Hajime suddenly felt guilty for prying.

“Uh...do you wanna build a sandcastle?” Hajime suggested, it seemed like more fun compared to just sitting there.

“We don’t have buckets or spades...” Nagito hesitated “But I think that would be fun.”

Hajime grinned, he wanted to do something normal, something friends would do. He liked this side
of Nagito and planned on making the most of it.

They spent the morning laughing together and building sandcastles. Nagito’s were quite impressive but everything Hajime made was a giant flop. The boys had temporarily forgotten about the killing school trip and decided to have fun. Perhaps if they lived normal lives, this is what their friendship would have turned out like. Their fun came to an end when a giant waved crashed in and destroyed their creations.

“I’m sorry.” Nagito apologised “It’s probably my fault those got ruined, whenever something good happens to me bad luck always follows.”

It wasn’t an issue, it was already lunch time so they headed back to the restaurant where they were met by some of the others. As much as Hajime enjoyed Nagito’s company, he needed to spend his afternoon with Chiaki to go through their plan. Once he’d finished his food, he made his excuses to Nagito and headed to the lobby where he found Chiaki. The pair of them headed over to Hajime’s cottage for privacy, he locked the door behind them.

“Sorry I couldn’t find you earlier, I got caught up with Nagito.” Hajime apologised.

“It’s okay, I was really into my game.” Chiaki smiled back at him.

Hajime reached into his pocket and pulled out the paper he’d been guarding all morning. He passed it over to Chiaki “I think that’s everything. I tried to keep it simple.”

Chiaki’s eyes scanned down the piece of paper, taking in everything that had been written.

Hajime spoke up once Chiaki had finished reading “Let me know if anything’s wrong.”

Chiaki shook her head “It looks accurate...I think.”

“Reading it back was kinda of disturbing you know? It reminded me how horrific things really were last time.” Hajime sighed, even though it was all a game it felt real. His classmates had done such terrible things, all because of Junko Enoshima.

Chiaki looked over at the marker pens Hajime had used and picked up a red one “We need to separate these events in two. Things we can change, and things we can’t.”

“Huh?” Hajime frowned.

Chiaki explained herself “There are some things we have the power to change, for example, we can stop everyone from going in the funhouse. However, there are also things we have no power over like Monokuma revealing to everyone that memories have been stolen.”

“Ah, good idea!” Hajime nodded. It would be pointless worrying over things that he had no power to change.

Chiaki ran down the list with the pen and put a strike through everything they had no control over. “We can’t worry about these issues since there’s nothing we can do to stop them.”

Hajime looked at the newly improved list, it was smaller which made him feel better. “The first thing we need to sort out is this party Byakuya is going to suggest tomorrow.”

“If we don’t trigger the first killing, we might be able to save everyone.” Chiaki said hopefully.

“We could try and take away the note Nagito places in Byakuya’s room. If he doesn’t receive it then
he won’t want to throw the party.” suggested Hajime.

Chiaki tilted her head “I don’t know. We have no idea what time Nagito leaves the note. Besides, I don’t think having the party was the problem, it was the location since a blackout could be triggered.”

“You’re right.” Hajime said, changing his mind “So if pick somewhere else, we might be able to save Teruteru and Byakuya. I think I have a plan.”

Hajime spoke through his plan with Chiaki, she agreed that it would work. She suggested they dealt with the issues one at a time, instead of trying to prevent everything at once. They could return to the list once this problem was out the way. Chiaki offered to look after the paper since she could store it in her backpack. Hajime was worried about it falling out if he kept it in his pocket any longer.

With the plan sorted, Hajime and Chiaki headed down to the ranch where they bumped into Sonia. The three of them spent the afternoon hanging out together, it was peaceful and good fun. They stayed out late into the evening until it got dark. Sonia suggested heading back to the restaurant for dinner. Hajime was surprised to hear his stomach rumbling, he’d forgotten what it felt like to have an appetite.

Just like at breakfast, the food was laying there waiting for them. There was so much choice that Hajime felt overwhelmed. He helped himself to a large serving of pasta and took the same table he sat at that morning.

“Hello again, Hajime!”

The same familiar voice spoke to him from across the table.

“Hey, Nagito.” he smiled back, once again pleased to have company.

“Would it be okay if I sit with you again? I’d hate to bother you.” Nagito stood there awkwardly, trying to balance his plate, drink and cutlery.

“It’s fine.” Hajime said quickly, before Nagito dropped the contents of his dinner on the floor.

Looking relieved, Nagito put his things down on the table. He pulled out the chair and sat down. “I had a lot of fun building sand castles earlier.”

“Me too! Even if mine were a total fail.” laughed Hajime. He wasn’t even lying to protect Nagito’s feelings, he’d actually enjoyed himself.

They made conversation as they ate their dinner, it was light-hearted with lots of laughing. If only every meal could run so smoothly.

Feeling full and well nourished, Hajime returned to his room. Unfortunately, he didn’t have long to rest since Monokuma intruded his monitor.

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Hello everyone! The fun time you’ve all been waiting for is about to begin! I wonder what festivities await you? Oops, don’t wanna ruin the surprise! It was a little ‘meh’ at first, but anyway, please gather at Jabberwock park.”

Hajime wandered over to the park, nothing too dangerous was going to happen so he didn’t feel very
anxious. The other students would be in shock at the news of their missing memories, but it didn’t affect him. He rolled his eyes when he saw the stage set out in the park, he’d forgotten how over the top Monokuma could be.

The students speculated among themselves until Monokuma arrived. He appeared and performed a short ‘comedy’ sketch with Monomi, revealing in the process that she’d taken away their school memories. Hajime blended in and acted surprised as best as he could. Even when he’d woken up from the game, his school memories had not been returned to him, Future Foundation had ensured that. In all honesty he was quite glad, his time at Hope’s Peak didn’t sound a very pleasant one, it wasn't something he wanted to remember.

As if he hadn’t provided enough shocking information, Monokuma hinted to everyone about the traitor. Hajime wasn’t sure if he counted as a traitor too since he was an observer just like Chiaki. Thankfully, for whatever reason, Monokuma didn’t mention any more than one traitor and said nothing about his role in the game. Perhaps Monokuma didn’t consider him traitor since after all, Hajime was one of the fifteen original students. Or was he making Hajime feel safe, just to tear him down when he least expected it?

There was a deep feeling of unease as everyone returned to their cottages. The laughter from dinner had faded, everyone walked in silence not knowing who to trust. No one exchanged goodnights, they all just disappeared into their cottages, preparing for the night ahead.

Hajime collapsed down on his bed. He needed as much sleep as possible, he had an important day ahead of him. He had a party to stop.

***

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

The noise eventually stirred Hajime from his sleep. He woke up in a daze, his entire mind in a state of confusion. He felt like he’d only just fallen asleep, but it was significantly darker than when he’d climbed into bed.

Tap.
The noise didn't stop. He lay there in bed wide awake, trying desperately to work out where the sound was coming from. It was a familiar noise, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

The longer he lay there, the more aware he became. No longer in a dream like state. “Glass?” he muttered to himself, that was it. The sound was someone tapping on glass...the glass from the window.

He jumped out of bed and bolted to the window, pressing his face against it to see what was going on.

“AHHHHHHH!” he yelled.

Staring back at him was the grisly face of Monokuma, claws bared hitting against the window pane.

Why was Monokuma watching him sleep? Hajime wanted answers. He stormed towards the door, unlocking it and pulling it open with force. Monokuma moved to the doorway to greet him.

“Ah Hajime, how good to see you.” the bear said.

Hajime waited for him to enter his cottage before closing the door, shutting out the cold air. “What are you up to?” he snapped, irritated at being woken for one of Monokuma’s stupid games.

“I’m not doing anything.” Monokuma said with forced innocence “I was just out for a nighttime stroll.”

“Were you spying on me?” Hajime narrowed his eyes, that’s what it looked like. “And how’d you even reach the window in the first place? It’s a lot taller than you.”

“I have the ability to stretch my legs.” Monokuma said, putting a disturbing picture in Hajime’s mind.

“Stop avoiding the subject. What are you doing here?” Hajime folded his arms.

Monokuma sighed, too defeated to lie any further “I was looking for that piece of paper. You know, the one you and Chiaki have been acting weird about.”

Hajime knew Monokuma had access to the security cameras, but apparently Monokuma hadn’t seen Chiaki put the paper in her backpack. “I’m not giving it to you.”

“You’re no fun, Hajime. Typical behaviour from your kind.” Monokuma shook his head, referring to the reserve course “I just want to know what’s on it.”

“You already know what’s on it.” Hajime said, he was aware that Monokuma had probably been spying in on his conversations. Monokuma knowing his plan wasn’t an issue, ratting him out would require Monokuma telling all the other students about the Neo World Program. Something which
wouldn’t do Monokuma any favours either, it stood in his favour to stay quiet.

Monokuma laughed “I’ve overheard bits and pieces. But you and Chiaki talk very mysteriously, you’re difficult to understand.”

“Tell me something…” Hajime said, the burning question from earlier still playing on his mind “Why didn’t you tell everyone there are two traitors? I mean technically that’s what I am.”

“I’ve overheard enough to understand why you’re in here. Replaying the game, huh? That’s very clever of Future Foundation.” Monokuma grinned at him evilly, displaying all his teeth “Telling the others why you’re here would be pretty entertaining, I can just picture the despair on their faces. However, there’s something else I can gain far greater despair from.”

“And what’s that?” Hajime asked, he had no choice but to play along.

“You think you can save them. Ha!” the bear scorned “No matter how hard you try, you won’t be able to control fifteen different people. You’re going to fail, and when you do and your friends start dying off one by one you’re going to feel the greatest despair ever. Knowing you had the chance to save them and you still failed! That is something worth waiting for.”

“I won’t let that happen.” Hajime said, he still believed in himself “Doubt me all you want, but I won’t let the despair succeed. No one is going to die on my watch.”

Monokuma rolled his eyes, judging Hajime “Have you ever listened to yourself speak? You say some really embarrassing things.” he edged his way to the door, bored with winding Hajime up. “And you know Hajime...you really shouldn’t have trusted Future Foundation so easily. Those people aren’t your friends.”

Monokuma disappeared before Hajime had time to respond with more questions. What did he mean? Future Foundation were on his side, they were helping him rescue everyone. Was Monokuma just messing with him to make him paranoid? Or was there really some truth in what he was saying?

Chapter End Notes

Get your party hats ready because we all know what’s coming in the next chapter ;D
Hajime groaned as Monokuma’s words rang throughout his cottage. It felt like he’d only just closed his eyes and fallen asleep. He hadn’t slept for nearly as long as he would have liked. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and dragged himself out of bed. He knew a shower would be the best remedy for waking up, even if every bone in his body was trying to drag him back under the covers.

The shower did the job, Hajime felt refreshed and awake. Despite his new lease of energy, he took a few minutes to prepare himself before leaving his cottage. It was the day of the party. He had the chance to save two of his friends. By preventing the party at the old building from happening Teruteru and Byakuya would get to live. No one was going to die on Hajime’s watch. He’d already spoken his plan through with Chiaki, it sounded plausible and he felt confident with his chance of success. So long as he could convince everyone not to party in the old building, lives would be saved. He had to get it right.

Like the day previous, Nagito brought his breakfast over to Hajime’s table. He clung on to every word Hajime said, he’d taken even more interest in him than before now that he believed he was the ultimate hope. Hajime hoped Nagito would never find out the truth because he knew his lies would destroy him, it was something he hadn't properly considered at the time.

Everyone was finishing up their breakfast, besides Fuyuhiko who hadn’t bothered to show. Byakuya called the attention of them once again and made them gather around the center table for a discussion. “Rejoice...I have decided to throw a party tonight.”

“A p-party?” Mikan stuttered, she blushed as everyone looked at her.

“That’s right.” Byakuya nodded, pleased to have such a captivated audience. “A huge party that will last from sundown to sunrise.”

The last party didn’t even make it past midnight, Hajime thought.

Ibuki jumped up eagerly, sending a glass of water flying “Party till the sun comes up!?”

“Just so we’re clear, I will not allow any absences. Your attendance at this party will be absolutely mandatory.” Byakuya narrowed his eyes.

“Now’s not the time to be talking about stuff like partying!” Souda complained.

Mahiru joined in “We shouldn’t really be partying…”

Nagito piped up “Um, hold on. I agree with Byakuya, it doesn’t do us any good to stay bumbled out like this. In fact, because of the situation we’re in, it’s probably best if we all strengthen our friendships with one another.”
Hajime knew that Nagito didn’t really mean this, it was all an attempt to manipulate them. Hajime now understood why he fell for it so easily the first time around, Nagito was smart.

The others gushed about their excitement for the party, and Teruteru promised to cook his best dishes for everyone.

“Where is the party going to be held? Would this restaurant be okay?” Chiaki chimed in.

Byakuya shook his head “No, this won’t do. We need a location that’s impervious to interference from the outsiders. A place even Monokuma cannot enter, what we need is an enclosed space.”

Hajime sighed, an enclosed space would get Byakuya killed.

Gundam folded his arms “If the restaurant won’t do, then neither will the lobby…that’s not nearly enclosed enough.”

Sonia thought aloud “Nor will the cottages, with so many people, we would be pressed up against each other.”

Nagito ignored the perverted comment from Teruteru which followed and spoke up his own idea “Then…how about that old looking building near this hotel? If we do our best to clean it, I think it’d be perfect.”

Byakuya was about to approve of the idea, when Hajime quickly interrupted him. It was time to begin his own plan. “No! We can’t have the party in there.” he protested.

“Why not?” Nagito raised his eyebrows at him.

“Because there aren’t any windows.” Hajime blurted out in a panic, it’d hadn’t come out as smoothly as he’d hoped.

“Huh?” Souda’s face was blank.

“How would you know there aren’t any windows in that building? We aren’t allowed inside.” Peko questioned him.

“I snuck in there when Monomi wasn’t around.” Hajime lied “All the windows are bordered up, so without lights it’s pitch black.”

“Is what you speak the truth?” Gundam demanded.

From nowhere, Monomi appeared. Chiaki had spoken with her earlier so she was in on the plan too. “I’m afraid the windows were being remodeled as part of the renovation. But since Monokuma took my magic stick away I couldn’t fix them.” she hung her head sadly, Hajime couldn’t tell if she was a good actress or genuinely depressed.

Hajime carried on with his point “It’d be pretty dangerous in there, if we lost light something really bad could happen.”

“I…I don’t like the dark.” Mikan trembled.

“No one asked your opinion you trashy skank!” Hiyoko spat at her.

Byakuya frowned “It would be incredibly dangerous if we were to lose power. Perhaps that’s not the best location after all.”
“We’re just being paranoid!” Nagito laughed, refusing to drop the matter “There are going to be health and safety risks wherever we go. That old building fits all our other needs.”

Hajime knew it wasn’t going to be an easy fight to win “That place is being renovated, so it’s going to be really messy.”

“I don’t think it would take too long to clean it out. We could draw straws to see who gets the duty. That seems fair.” Nagito suggested.

“I don’t wanna clean!” Akane protested “It seems pretty pointless when there are lots of other places we could use right away.”

“How about Jabberwock park?” Chiaki proposed “I know it’s not enclosed, but Monokuma does whatever he wants. If he wants to get into our party then he will.”

This was the location Chiaki and Hajime had settled with. Nagito couldn’t perform a blackout if they were outside thanks to the protection of the moonlight. It did mean Monokuma could interrupt their party, but Hajime would rather that than watch Byakuya turn into a human kebab for the second time.

“An outdoor party sounds superrrrrr awesome!” Ibuki cheered.

“I think Jabberwock park would make a really nice background for my photos of you all.” Mahiru smiled.

Nagito hadn’t dropped his cover, despite his plan falling to pieces he still remained calm. “I still think the old building is best, but if the majority are against it…”

“I would have preferred an enclosed space, but it seems we’re left with no choice. Sacrifices must be made. The old building is too unsafe right now, so the party will be held in the park.” Byakuya came to a final decision.

Relief ran through Hajime, he’d averted the problem. There was no way Nagito would try and attempt a murder out in the open. He’d saved two of his friends, and it had been easier than he thought. He mentally high-fived Chiaki.

Byakuya asked for volunteers to help set up the party, Sonia and Mahiru put themselves forward. Now that his plan was foiled, Nagito didn’t seem interested in the slightest. Despite that, he didn’t let the mask drop and carried on acting like his normal self. At least Hajime could enjoy the company of a slightly calmer Nagito for a little while longer. Hajime wasn’t one for party planning so he chose not to put his name forward.

The others were preparing the party and Teruteru was in the kitchen cooking up his famous dishes, this left Hajime with some time to relax. He thought about finding Nagito to build sandcastles again, but he couldn’t find him anywhere, he was most likely sulking. Hajime bumped into Ibuki on her way to Rocketpunch market and decided to tag along. He liked being around Ibuki, her upbeat demeanor was infectious. They spent the morning wandering round the aisles together, scoping out what the store had on offer. It was a lot more fun than he expected it to be. After reuniting with the others for some light lunch, he found Souda in the airport. He’d promised Souda, before entering the program again, that he’d keep their friendship going. He decided to honour his promise and spent a few hours talking with him. There was still some distance between them, but it was to be expected considering this was the first time Hajime had properly spoken to him since arriving back on the island. Everyone decided to skip dinner to save room for the party, so Hajime was able to spend even longer with him. It was time well spent. He headed back to his room for a shower when it grew dark.
It frustrated him that he only had one outfit to wear - he would have liked to make an effort for the party and wear something different.

Monokuma made his usual nighttime announcement, but Hajime chose to ignore it. He had a party to attend.

He bumped into Akane on his way to the park. They walked side by side, Akane speculated about the sort of foods Teruteru might make for the party and salivated as she did so.

All the hours Sonia and Mahiru had spent decorating hadn’t gone to waste, the park had completely transformed. Two elongated tables stood proudly either side of the timer, covered in bright tablecloths and layered with plates upon plates of delicious looking food. Fairylights had been strung around the trees, making the atmosphere magical. Chairs had been laid out at the side too - not that Hajime planned on sitting down with the catchy music that was blaring through a portable speaker.

“What do you think?” Mahiru asked him, standing nearby.

“It’s amazing!” Hajime gasped, seriously impressed.

“Let me take your picture!” Mahiru held up her camera with a grin.

He didn’t particularly like having his picture taken, but he couldn’t bring himself to say no after Mahiru had gone to all that effort. He kept a natural pose and smiled at the camera.

“Say cheeeese!” Mahiru called, blinding him with the camera’s flash. Hajime saw black specks as he walked away, he wouldn’t be having his picture taken again anytime soon.

He approached one of the tables, the one with drinks. He always liked to hold a drink at parties, it gave him something to do with his hand and stopped him from feeling so out of place and awkward.

He reached out for an unopened bottle of lemonade and picked up one of the empty glasses.

“Stop!” Ibuki screamed out at him from behind the table.

“Huh?” Hajime froze, he wasn’t sure what was going on.

Ibuki snatched the glass away from him “This isn’t your glass, it’s Gundam’s.” she put it back down on the table and handed Hajime another glass.

“But there wasn’t anything in it…” Hajime defended himself.

“Read the label!” Ibuki said, pointing to the white sticker pressed on the glass Hajime had just been holding. Drawn on the sticker was a small doodle of a hamster.

Hajime looked down at the glass he’d been given, there was a sketch of his ahoge. “What is this?”

“I made labels for all the glasses.” Ibuki explained “Nagito gave me the idea. This way you won’t drink from someone else’s glass by mistake. Writing names is sooooo boring, so I thought I’d draw something to symbolise each of us.”

Hajime looked over at the other glasses on the table “So Mikan gets a needle, Nagito gets a four leaf clover, you get a guitar and I’m summed up by my hairstyle?”

Ibuki shrugged her shoulders “You try thinking of something which symbolizes the ultimate hope.”

Hajime had never realised his ahoge was such a defining point about himself. He poured the lemonade into his new glass and headed over to Byakuya, the leader's arms were folded and he was
frowning so hard that wrinkles had appeared on his forehead.

“Is everything okay?” Hajime asked. He was relieved Byakuya hadn’t tried to perform a body check, this time around.

“Fuyuhiko is refusing to show up, even though I stressed attendance as being mandatory.” Byakuya complained.

Peko, overhearing their conversation, joined in “I saw him on the way over, he was going for a walk along the beach. He wants to be left alone.”

“Does he think one rule applies for him and another applies for everyone else?” Byakuya glared at her.

“Aren’t we missing Teruteru too?” Hajime asked, he’d scanned the park but couldn’t the cook anywhere.

“Since there isn’t a kitchen here, he’s had to use the hotel restaurant to prepare the food. He’s going back and forth between the two locations.” explained Byakuya.

It was a bit of a walk between the park and the restaurant, something Hajime certainly couldn’t be bothered to do. The old building had been far more convenient, that was for sure.

The party got into full swing, everyone was dancing around and having fun. Hajime could definitely feel his friendships strengthening as he spoke with the other students. He imagined them all having another party like it when everyone woke from the Neo World Program. It was as if the killing school trip had be put on pause, they were allowing themselves to enjoy a temporary moment of bliss, something no one could disturb them from.

Despite it being dark outside, the fairy lights provided enough light for everyone to see. Even if they were to switch off, the moonlight shone down into the park, providing itself as a torch. Hajime knew he was safe, and he felt it. He had nothing to worry about.

He’d never eaten any of the food at the last party, so he made sure to try things this time around. The food was incredible, he could understand why Akane was shovelling it into her face. Everything was cooked to perfection, all he could think about was what he was going to eat next. It was a good thing Teruteru didn’t cook all his meals or he’d never stop eating. Hajime headed back over to the tables of food, he wanted another cheeseburger since the first one had been so good. He looked over at Hiyoko who was inspecting a bowl of fruit salad. “Hey.” he smiled over at her.

“What do you want?” she hissed at him.

Hajime was slightly taken back, Hiyoko had been in a pretty good mood all evening and had even shown off some of her skilled dancing. He couldn’t understand why she was suddenly acting so hostile. “I was just saying hi…” he tried to clear the air “I really recommend some of that trifle, it’s amazing.” Hajime pointed over at the dish he was talking about.

“I can’t eat that.” Hiyoko blushed furiously.

“Oh, are you allergic or something?” Hajime asked her.

“No.” she snapped “I might spill it on myself.”

“That’s okay if you do, just clean it off.” Hajime shrugged, he didn’t understand the problem.
“I can’t!” Hiyoko glared at him “L...I don’t know how to tie my kimono, okay? If I take it off, I’ll never be able to put it back on again.” her eyes welled up with tears.

Hajime felt awkward, the last thing he wanted was to make someone cry “I’m sure one of the others might -”

Thankfully, Teruteru showed up to save the mood. “Ah how’s it going, enjoying my fine cuisine?” the chef asked.

It was the first time Hajime had seen him all evening since he’d been so busy running between the restaurant and the party.

“No.” Hiyoko hissed at him, tears still present “Everything here is garbage, I wouldn’t dream of putting it near my mouth.”

Teruteru’s face dropped “But these are some of my finest dishes! There must be something here you like.”

“Well there isn’t.” Hiyoko folded her arms in a huff “I don’t see any gummies!”

“So it’s gummies you want? I can do gummies.” Teruteru said, full of enthusiasm “Let me whip you up a cake filled with gummies of every flavour.”

“Not any lemon ones though, I hate those.” Hiyoko pouted.

“It’ll be the best damn thing you’ve ever tasted!” Teruteru said.

“That sounds really nice, Hiyoko. I-” Hajime said, in the hope the girl was no longer mad at him.

He was cut short. “Just go away and stop putting your nose in other people’s business, you loser.” Hiyoko snapped at him.

Hajime didn’t need telling twice, he grabbed his cheeseburger and hurried away from the table before any more abuse could be thrown in his direction.

He noticed Chiaki and Nagito sitting together, he decided to join them since they always provided good company.

"Are you enjoying the party, Hajime?” Nagito asked, cleaning his mouth with a napkin.

Hajime nodded "Yeah, I'm having fun." especially since no one was getting murdered this time around.

Chiaki sipped from her drink, a picture of a gaming console on the front curtisy of Ibuki "Everyone seems to be having a really nice time."

"I knew this party was a good idea!” Nagito smiled.

Their conversation didn't progress any further, they were interrupted by uproar.

“Wh-what is this blasphemy?” Gundam cried out, disrupting several of the others from they were doing.

“What’s the problem?” Byakuya folded his arms, responding instantly.
“Maga-Z has been stolen!” Gundam yelled at the top of his voice.

“What’s a Maga-Z?” Akane asked, joining in “Is it a type of meat?” Her eyes widened with excitement.

“Maga-Z is one of the four Dark Devas of Destruction, he is smarter than you’ll ever be...fool!” Gundam shouted.

“Maybe he crawled off somewhere?” Hajime suggested, trying to calm Gundam down.

“MMMMMffffff.” Nekomaru let out a loud roar, interrupting everyone yet again.

“What are you complaining about?” Byakuya snapped at him, his temper rising.

“Where’s the nearest toilet?” Nekomaru asked, clutching his stomach “I NEED TO SHITTTTTTTT!”

“That’s all you ever want to do.” Byakuya reminded him.

“It’s already coming outta me.” Nekomaru said “I can feel it.”

“You’re repulsive.” Byakuya rolled his eyes “Go back to your cottage, use the toilet there.”

“I don’t think I’m going to make it that far.” Nekomaru said, beads of sweat dripping down his forehead “I THINK IT’S TOO LATEEEEEEEEEE!” He ran off before anyone had the chance to stop him.

Hajime seriously hoped that Nekomaru made it to the toilet, he didn’t fancy finding a ‘surprise’ on the way back from the party.

“Give me back Maga-Z!” Gundam yelled, bringing the attention back to himself.

“We don’t have your stupid hamster.” Souda retorted.

“What did you just call him?” Gundam shot him a filthy look.

“Come on Gundam.” Sonia, who had overheard their conversation, joined them “We can go and look for Maga-Z. I’m sure he has not travelled far.”

“Miss Sonia, don’t help him look for that flea ridden thing.” Souda complained, though he still ran off after them.

“Hey, Hajime.” Akane approached him, her mouth full of food. She spat crumbs into Hajime’s face as she spoke “Have you seen Teruteru?”

“No sorry, I haven’t.” Hajime replied, wiping the specs of meat off his face.

Akane folded her arms “He’s meant to be bringing over another plate of ribs from the restaurant kitchen, but he’s been gone ages. I want my meat.”

Hajime frowned “How long ago did he leave?” his heart began to race, everything was happening at once. Why did it all feel so out of his control?

“I dunno, like twenty minutes ago.” Akane shrugged her shoulders.

“Hey don’t forget about me, he owes me my gummy cake.” Hiyoko butted in.
Hajime couldn’t ignore it, an uneasy feeling of doubt had crept into his mind. A trip to the restaurant and back would take no longer than ten minutes. It was suspicious that Teruteru had been gone for so long. Hajime was sure he was only being paranoid, but he needed to reassure himself. “Maybe he’s got too much to carry. I’ll head over to the restaurant to see if he needs a hand.”

“I’ll come with you.” Akane said “I’m not letting you get your hands on my meat.”

“I don’t want your meat.” Hajime protested.

Akane narrowed her eyes “I don’t trust you.”

“Hiyoko, are you coming?” Hajime asked, it would make sense since the girl had the similar interest of finding Teruteru.

“No way.” Hiyoko glared at them “You two are so lame, I wouldn’t want to be seen anywhere with you. I’m going to find him myself.” she strutted off in the opposite direction before anyone had the chance to stop her.

“What’s all this commotion?” Byakuya asked.

“Teruteru seems to have gone missing.” Hajime explained, though hopefully there was a logical explanation for the matter.

“As the leader, I demand you search for Teruteru immediately.” Byakuya declared, though he didn’t budge from his spot.


“No, I’m going to stay here and eat the party food...incase Teruteru comes back.” Byakuya said.

Hajime realised this was a total lie, but he didn’t have the time to argue. He knew how stubborn Byakuya could be.

“I’ll come with you.” a voice piped up, Chiaki. “The more of us looking for him the better.”

Akane, Chiaki and Hajime left the party, the music faded out in the distance. They decided to start their search at the hotel restaurant since it’s where Teruteru was supposed to be. Hajime tried his best to reason with himself but paranoia was interfering. It was eerie walking to the hotel, the moon was their only source of light. Hajime didn’t understand how Teruteru had been so brave to take the walk alone, anyone could be waiting to jump out. The three of them jogged briskly to the hotel grounds, Akane taking the lead.

All of the cottages were in darkness besides one, Fuyuhiko’s. The hotel building stood at the end of the path waiting for them. Straight away things didn’t feel right. Hajime couldn’t see any light coming from the restaurant which instantly struck him as odd, he should have been able to see it through the large, opened windows.

“It looks dark in there…” Akane said.

“Maybe Teruteru isn’t inside?” Chiaki suggested.

The three of them hurried up the stairs. Akane shoved open the door, since she was in front, using more force than necessary. As suspected, the restaurant was in total darkness. They moved further into the room, the door slammed shut from behind causing them all to jump. It was so dark Hajime could barely see his hands in front of his face, though not dark enough to be considered a blackout.
“Teruteru?” Hajime called out. He didn’t want to move in fear of bumping into something. He was right by the door so he could leave if necessary. His hand fumbled along the wall until he found the light switch.

It took everyone a second to adapt to the bright artificial lights. Hajime had to crane his hand over his eyes to protect them.

“Teruteru?” Hajime called out again, the desperation in his voice more apparent this time.

There was no reply and it was pretty clear that the room was empty. Hajime had already scanned the place, he couldn’t see anyone.

“I don’t think he’s in here.” Chiaki said.

Akane frowned “I can’t see my meat either.”

“I don’t think that’s the most important thing right now…” Chiaki corrected her.

“Well it’s obvious he isn’t here, let’s try his cottage.” Hajime shook his head, things weren’t looking good.

He switched off the light and retreated from the restaurant, Chiaki and Akane close behind. They headed down the stairs towards the cottages.

“Is there any point even trying?” Akane asked “The lights in his cottage are off.”

Hajime shrugged his shoulders “It’s worth a shot.”

Akane knocked on the door but it was to no surprise that Teruteru didn’t answer.

“Maybe we could ask Fuyuhiko?” Chiaki said “His light is on so he must have seen Teruteru pass by.”

“On it!” Akane called, sprinting over to Fuyuhiko’s cottage. She hammered on his door.

“Gently…” Hajime winced, he knew that was the sort of thing that would irritate Fuyuhiko. He didn’t want to be on the end of one of Fuyuhiko’s rants.

“He isn’t answering!” Akane gritted her teeth and hammered even harder.

“Maybe he’s gone out as well?” Chiaki said.

“I doubt he’d go out with his light still on.” Akane cracked her knuckles, preparing for round two.

“What he’s doing, he’s clearly not going to answer.” Hajime said, coming to the conclusion that it was pointless to pester Fuyuhiko any further “We should head back to the party, maybe Teruteru’s returned.”

They left Fuyuhiko alone and took the path back to the party, the music becoming louder once again. They kept a lookout but didn’t pass anyone on the way.

“You three look exhausted!” Nagito laughed as they arrived back at the party, he was happily tucking into a plate of ribs.

“THAT’S MY MEAT!” Akane yelled, pouncing on Nagito. She wrestled him to the floor and
snatched the food from his grasp.

“Ahhhhh!” Nagito yelped, not coping with the large weight on top of him.

“Akane, get off!” Hajime cried out.

Akane climbed off of Nagito, clutching the food as if it were her child. “Where did you get this?”

Feeling bad for him, Hajime held out a hand and helped Nagito off the floor.

Nagito swept the dirt off his trousers, red in the face “Teruteru brought it back a few minutes ago.”

“Teruteru was here a few minutes ago?” Hajime asked, brows furrowed.

Nagito nodded “He came by to deliver this meat.”

Hajime felt the blissful feeling of relief, Teruteru was okay. “We just went out looking for him.” he explained.

“I’m surprised we never crossed paths.” Chiaki said.

“Where’s he gone now?” Hajime asked.

Nagito shrugged his shoulders “I don’t know, he gave me the meat and left. Maybe he’s gone back to the kitchen? He said something about making a cake for Hiyoko.”

Byakuya barged in on their conversation “Go and find him, Hajime.”

“But Nagito just saw him, we know he’s safe.” Hajime pointed out, apparently Byakuya had been too busy scoffing party food to have seen Teruteru during his delivery.

“I don’t care.” Byakuya said stubbornly “I want Teruteru back at this party, we’ve got enough food now. He doesn’t need to keep going back to the restaurant.”

Hajime sighed, he’d only just returned “Fine, I’ll go get him. Are you two coming with me?” he didn’t want to take the journey alone, it seemed unsafe.

Chiaki nodded “Sure.”

Akane shook her head “Sorry but I’m gonna be busy eating this meat. I’ve gotta keep an eye on it in case Nagito tries to steal anymore.”

“It was an accident.” Nagito protested, fear in his eyes “I don’t mind coming with you.” probably to escape from Akane in case she tried to wrestle him again.

Hajime could feel his legs aching as he walked back to the hotel, he was just thankful he had Nagito and Chiaki for company. They weren’t in a rush so they strolled leisurely, they had all the time in the world. He could see a light shining from in the restaurant, at least he knew where Teruteru was this time.

Hajime was the first one up the stairs and to open the door. He stepped into the restaurant, everything so much clearer now it wasn't in darkness.

"Teruteru?" to Hajime’s surprise, the chef wasn't there. Plates of untouched food lay waiting on the
side, but there was no cook to deliver them. Hajime moved into the room even further, winding around tables. Was Teruteru really that short that he couldn't see him? He was about to take another step forward when his foot trod down on something hard...

...to Hajime, time fell still.

“AHHHHHHHHHHH!”

*Ding dong, dong ding*

“A body has been discovered! Now then, after a certain amount of time has passed, the class trial will begin!”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is the investigation which I plan to put up Saturday or Sunday :D
Chapter One - Part Four

Chapter Notes

It’s time for the investigation :D Any clues we don’t find out here will be covered in the trial! I've tried to keep this investigation fairly short since the trial goes on for a while in the next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening.

The thought looped in Hajime’s mind, playing over and over like an old record. It had to be a trick, his eyes must have been deceiving him. There had to be another explanation…but of course, there wasn’t. Hajime had stepped on a limp arm, drained of life. The arm belonged to Teruteru who was lying face down among the tables, surrounded by, what Hajime presumed to be, his own blood. A sharp knife lay next to him, Teruteru had been murdered.

Nagito was even paler than usual and Chiaki was trying her best not to shake. Both of them opened their mouths to speak but no words came out. They didn't know what to say.

Things only worsened when the others showed up, everyone went into a state of mass hysteria. Screaming, crying, swearing. Seeing a dead body was somewhat normal for Hajime, he’d gotten used to it - which was something he wasn’t proud to say. It was a different story for the others. It was their first time seeing a corpse, or so they thought anyway. No one deserved to see something so horrific.

It wasn’t the sight of the murder which disturbed Hajime, blood was second nature now, it was the act of the murder itself. He’d been so careful to avoid the party at the old building, making sure he did everything in his power to stop the blackout and save his friends, yet somehow someone had still died. All he could feel was guilt, Teruteru had died because he wasn't careful enough.

“Can you guys clean up already?!” Monokuma joined them, basking in their despair “All these dirty dishes, this place is a total mess.”

“Someone died.” Mahiru snapped at him, her voice cold.

“That’s right.” Monokuma said “So I guess you better start preparing for the class trial, the cleaning will have to wait. Unless I make Monomi do it…”

”A...trial?” Sonia said, her face pale.

“I’ve already explained this to you, right? If one of you gets murdered, the rest of you have to debate who you think is the blackened.” Monokuma smiled, even the mention of a trial excited him.

Hajime had been desperate to avoid a trial at all costs, it meant someone had to die and there was nothing he could do to stop it. Whether they guessed the killer or not, at least one life would be lost.
The thought of the trial made him weak, if they guessed the blackened incorrectly then everyone would stay trapped in their comas. He’d been in the game three days and already failed.

Monokuma continued “From this point on, you guys must investigate and uncover the blackened culprit!”

Nagito closed his eyes, as if to block everything out “I-I won’t believe it...that one of us killed Teruteru. There’s no way...something as hopeless as that would ever happen!”

Hajime stared at the luckster, trying to understand him. Was Nagito really innocent or was it all part of his plan? Had he sacrificed both Teruteru and himself in the name of hope?

Monokuma leaned his head back and cackled “C’mon, c’mon! Let’s hurry up and begin!”

“How are we supposed to begin?” Peko narrowed her eyes at the bear.

“I suppose this might come in pretty handy.” Monokuma laughed “It’s the Monokuma File! Just as I thought, you amateurs need this, right?”

“What is that thing?” Souda asked, eyeing up the file as if it were a threat.

Hajime knew the answer, but stayed quiet to avoid suspicion. He hated Monokuma more than anything, but he couldn’t deny, his file always came in useful. There were certain cases they wouldn’t have solved without it.

“Let’s seeee...the Monokuma File contains precise and detailed information regarding the dead body. I’ve brought it to ya so you guys can smoothly proceed with the investigation. I’m such a nice guy.” Monokuma explained, and with that he disappeared - not allowing the students to bother him for any more information.

The air felt lighter without Monokuma around, even if they were standing next to a dead body. Hajime took the file and read it aloud for everyone to hear “The victim’s body was discovered in the restaurant at the Hotel Mirai. The estimated time of death is 1:30 a.m. The victim was stabbed in the back, resulting in death. Aside from that, the body has no other external injuries and no chemicals such as poison were detected.”

Sonia clutched her hands tightly together “That’s awful.”

“Teammates don’t do this to each other.” Nekomaru sighed, even he seem deflated.

“How could someone do something so fucked up?” Souda muttered under his breath.

Hajime was asking himself the same question.

Byakuya crossed his arms, showing little emotion “We can’t just stand around complaining, we need to begin our investigation.”

“Show a little respect.” Mahiru’s voice cracked as she spoke, her attempt to hold back tears failing.

“Shouldn’t someone get Fuyuhiko?” Souda scratched his head.

Hajime looked around, he’d been so caught up in everything that he hadn’t noticed Fuyuhiko was missing. He thought Fuyuhiko would have joined them when the body discovery announcement sounded but he was still absent. Hajime knew it was nothing to worry about, but it was certainly suspicious considering Fuyuhiko didn’t even know who’d died. Surely he’d want to check that Peko
was okay.

“I shall go and summon him.” Sonia said, parting her way from the group.

No one else moved, their bodies frozen with shock. Moments ago they’d been enjoying an entertaining party, and now they were dealing with a murder. People were starting to crack. They were falling into despair, Monokuma and Junko were winning.

*Straighten yourself out*, Hajime scorned himself. He knew he was being selfish, Teruteru had died and there he stood complaining about his own feelings. He had to put his own insecurity and guilt aside, it wasn’t about him, it was about getting Teruteru the justice he deserved.

“W-we should start with the body.” Hajime cleared his throat, he wasn’t the group leader but it was time to take charge. The previous investigations had given him good experience and he planned on making the most of it.

No one stopped him from crouching down next to the corpse, though no one offered to help either. The students stared at Hajime like he was an animal in a zoo as he got down on his knees.

*Breathe Hajime,* he told himself, there was additional pressure with everyone watching him. He did his best to block out the smell of blood, there sure was a lot of it. According to the Monokuma file Teruteru had taken a single stab to the back, he must have bled out an incredible amount. It wasn’t difficult to see where the knife had entered Teruteru, the wound showed up clearly under his white chef’s jacket.

There was something else which caught Hajime’s attention, something he wanted to look at before he inspected the body. The sharp kitchen knife lying innocently on the floor beside him, so polished Hajime could see his own reflection. *Wait…*

The knife seemed so out of place, there wasn’t a single drop of blood on it. It looked brand new, untouched or at least thoroughly cleaned. Hajime picked up the knife by the handle and held it up towards the light, there wasn’t so much as a fingerprint on it. The killer must have taken the murder weapon from Teruteru’s back, cleaned it and then left it there for them to find. *Odd…*

Hajime planted the knife back on the floor, there weren’t any more clues it could give him. He couldn’t delay any further, it was time to investigate the body. His lack of medical experience would limit his search, but he was at least able enough to look for clues.

Teruteru was sprawled out helplessly, like a bear skin rug. Thankfully, his face was pressed against the floor, meaning Hajime didn’t have to witness his dying facial expression - he didn’t want to see the pain in his eyes. Hajime focused his gaze on the body, something seemed wrong. He couldn’t put his finger on it, but something was…missing.

His long silence caused intrigue, Byakuya spoke up on behalf of the group. “Well, can you see anything?”

Hajime shared his thoughts with the group in the hope they’d be able to work out the problem. “Look at Teruteru…doesn’t something seem off to you?”

Peko peered over his shoulder “He looks different.”

“Exactly.” Hajime said, pleased he wasn’t the only one who’d noticed a change. "The question is, what's different?"

Chiaki moved over so that she could see, Nekomaru had been obstructing her view. “His scarf is
missing...I think.”

“That weird neckerchief thing he wears?” Souda asked.

Hajime took another look at Teruteru’s body, that was it. The red scarf Teruteru always wore was missing, leaving his neck exposed. Teruteru never took his scarf off, so it was certainly unusual for him to be missing it at the time of his death. It had to be a clue.

Hajime looked over Teruteru's body one last time but there was nothing else that stood out to him. He could only investigate the body at a basic level since he had no medical training.

“We’ve got the knife and the missing scarf, but besides that I don’t think I’ll be able to find much else.” Hajime pushed himself from the ground, backing away from the corpse. He wasn't going to stay near it any longer than he had to.

Mikan stood gingerly next to the body, she’d stopped crying but her hands were trembling. “I...I could perform an autopsy. My m-medical knowledge might give us more clues.”

“Trust pig shit like you to be all over the corpse!” Hiyoko spat, cruelly.

“An autopsy is an excellent idea.” Byakuya nodded. “The rest of us need to all split up and look for clues. We can’t let just one person do all the work.”

Upon his approval, Mikan bent down next to Teruteru. The others turned away, they didn’t want to watch her inspecting a corpse.

“We’re wasting time just standing here.” Byakuya snapped. “Let’s get on with this and start investigating. We should split ourselves between both here, and the park.”

The students looked lost and helpless, but they didn’t dare defy Byakuya with his tone so sharp. They branched off into separate directions, no one really sure of where to go or what to search. Most of them were still battling with the shock.

Hajime decided to give Mikan some space, the autopsy was important and he didn’t want to distract her. He wandered around the restaurant in search for clues, but found nothing of any interest. He saw a bowl of cake batter and gummies on the side, it seemed like Teruteru hadn't gotten around to finishing the cake for Hiyoko. Teruteru would never get to bake another cake again.

The sight of the unfinished cake caused a lump to form in Hajime's throat. Just looking at the thing depressed him, it was a reminder that Teruteru's time was up. He picked up the bowl, the guilt was going to kill him if he looked at it any longer. There was only one place for the cake now, and that was the trash.

He stood next to the trash can, bowl in hand. Was it rude of him to throw away the creation of the recently deceased? Even if it was, Teruteru couldn't stop him. Hajime stamped down on the pedal which opened the lid to the trash can. He was about to throw the contents of the bowl inside, when something caught his eye. A piece of red fabric lay on top, burying the rubbish. Hajime rested the bowl on his hip, freeing up one of his hands. He reached inside and retrieved the material, it had been scrunched into a ball. He took his foot off the pedal, closing the lid to the trash can and placed the bowl on top -treating it like a temporary shelf. With both hands free, he unfolded the material and held it out in front of his face. He knew exactly what it was. It was Teruteru's scarf and it was covered in blood.

He walked away from the trash can, clutching the scarf. His attention was focused on the blood, so he didn't look where he was going. As a result, he smacked straight into Nagito.
"Oof!" Nagito winced at the impact of Hajime’s sharp elbow.

"Oh shit, I’m sorry." Hajime apologised upon the realisation of what he’d done.

“That’s okay.” Nagito laughed, Hajime couldn’t understand how he was laughing at such a dark time “What’s that you’ve got there?” he peered at the red material.

"I think it’s Teruteru's missing scarf." Hajime gulped, he shared the evidence with Nagito in the hope he’d be able to make better sense of things.

Blood transferred onto Hajime's hands as he passed the scarf over to Nagito, he tried his best to remain calm.

Nagito inspected the scarf, scrunching it up and unfolding it again. “This is strange.” he frowned "Where did you find this?"

"In the trash." Hajime explained, trying to ignore the blood on his hands, it was just another guilty reminder.

"So it seems like the killer was pretty desperate to get rid of this." Nagito muttered to himself as he analysed the fabric further.

Hajime stared at Nagito, trying to catch his reaction but the boy gave nothing away. He was either truly innocent or a very talented actor. Hajime shook the thought out of his mind, he couldn’t start casting blame on people without any strong evidence, it would lead him through a biased investigation.

“Hajime…” Nagito said.

“Yeah?” Hajime replied.

“I was wondering if you’d like to investigate together. I’m worried people might not talk to me out of caution if I go by myself. You’re easy to talk to and I feel like you have a scent similar to mine.” Nagito explained himself.

“Uh, sure.” Hajime nodded in agreement. He could keep an eye on Nagito and stop him from manipulating any evidence.

Nagito smiled, relieved that Hajime hadn’t rejected him “I can’t believe I get to investigate with the ultimate hope. I’m so lucky.”

“Let’s just get on with it…” Hajime frowned at him, he was growing tired of Nagito referring to him by his ‘talent’ all the time. It was like he had no identity.

Hajime refused to go anywhere else until his hands were clean. Nagito waited patiently while he went and shoved his hands in the sink. Hajime scrubbed furiously, determined to get off every spec of blood. He literally had the blood of Teruteru's death on his hands.

His hands still felt unclean, but he couldn't waste all his investigation time by the sink. It would have to do.

It soon became clear to Hajime that there was nothing else to investigate in the restaurant, the only evidence was the body itself. Byakuya had mentioned searching over at the party for clues too, Hajime decided to make it his next destination. Nagito was happy to follow Hajime wherever he went.
They were stopped by Mikan before leaving, the reports of her autopsy ready.

"B-before you go, I-I can tell you what I found." Mikan said, her hands bloody from touching the corpse.

"That would be very helpful." Nagito smiled at her.

"Did you discover anything?" Hajime asked.

Mikan nodded weakly "I-I think the killer snuck up and k-killed Teruteru from behind. T-there are no signs of a fight...or a struggle."

Hajime took in the information. It made sense considering Teruteru had been stabbed in the back. Mikan continued "F-from the size of the wound...i-it's likely that the murder weapon is a knife. T-there's nothing else that would create a hole of that size."

"Did you find out anything else?" Hajime inquired.

"N-no, I...I didn't." fresh tears rolled down Mikan's cheeks "I'm so s-sorry, I've let you down. I'm such a failure."

"No, it's okay." Nagito cut in to reassure her "The information you've given us is very useful, it's more than enough."

Hajime decided it was a good time to head over to the park, he'd only upset Mikan further by hanging around.

The park looked the same as when he’d left it. The cheery pop music blaring through the speakers made the entire place feel eerie. It was as if the murder hadn't happened. Hajime didn’t know where to begin since everything looked so untouched, he couldn’t imagine any new evidence presenting itself.

He decided to start by investigating the two long tables of food, after all, Teruteru had been the one to cook them. It was by no surprise that he saw Akane there, rummaging around in search of leftovers.

Nagito greeted her “Hey, Akane.” he seemed to have forgiven her for wrestling him to the ground. “Have you found anything?”

“I’m hunting around, my gut can smell fresh meat.” Akane sniffed the air as she spoke.

“Fresh meat?” Hajime raised his eyebrows, he had no idea what the girl was on about.

Akane put her face close to all the dishes “It’s nearby, the smell is overwhelming.”

Hajime pointed to the hot dog right in front of her. "Do you mean this?"

"It ain't that." Akane rejected his suggestion "Like I said, the meat I can smell is fresh."

"As in alive?" Nagito asked with widened eyes.

Hajime ignored Akane and picked up things off his own accord. He poked among the food and looked underneath plates but found nothing. He was on the verge of giving up when something caught his eye, a silver serving dish with the lid still on top. There was probably just food inside but
Hajime felt a sudden urge to check it. He cautiously lifted the lid, unsure what to expect.

“Alright! More meat!” Akane licked her lips in anticipation at what she saw.

“That’s not meat!” Nagito interrupted her in a panic before she did something stupid.

Blinking back at Hajime certainly wasn’t food. On its back was a wide-eyed, fluffy creature. “Isn’t that Gundam’s missing hamster?”

Nagito stretched out his hands and scooped up the hamster, taking extra care not to hurt it. “It’s Maga-Z.”

Hajime breathed a sigh of relief, at least Gundam’s hamster hadn’t been killed too - though he couldn’t imagine that resulting in a class trial. “Where’s Gundam?” he knew how worried Gundam was about his missing friend.

“I’ll go and look for him if you like.” Akane offered, she reached out her hands indicating for Nagito to pass over the hamster.

“Be careful with him.” Nagito said as he gave over the hamster, probably worried that Akane would eat it.

“Yeah, I will.” Akane wandered off, stroking the top of Maga-Z’s head as she went.

“Let’s hope that poor thing makes it back safely.” Nagito said.

“Was that Maga-Z?” a voice asked from behind.

The boys turned around to see Sonia, standing there as elegantly as always.

Hajime nodded, happy he could share something positive. “He was trapped under one of the serving plates. He’s okay though.”

“That’s such good news.” Sonia clapped her hands together, a smile lighting up her face.

“So, how did you get on with Fuyuhiko?” Nagito asked her.

The smile quickly disappeared “He does not wish to join us, he says he has other ways he’d rather spend his time.” Sonia let out a deep sigh.

Hajime gritted his teeth in frustration, it wasn’t fair that they did all the work while Fuyuhiko just sat there. “I can’t believe him. Thanks for trying though, Sonia.”

“That is okay.” Sonia said “Though I’m sorry I couldn’t get him to join us.”

“It’s not your fault.” Nagito reassured her.

Hajime decided to ask Sonia another question whilst he had her “Hey, you went searching for Maga-Z with Gundam and Souda right?”

“I was with Gundam.” Sonia replied. “But I did not see Souda.”

“Huh…” Hajime hadn’t been expecting that. “I thought he caught up with you guys.”

Sonia shook her head “We didn’t encounter him at all. It was just Gundam and I.”
Hajime tried to ignore the suspiciousness of the situation and returned back to his original question “Where did you and Gundam search for Maga-Z?”

“We went everywhere. The market, the beach and even the ranch.” Sonia explained.

“Did you happen to see Teruteru at all on your journey?” Hajime pressed her with another question.

“No, we didn’t.” Sonia said. “Although, I was so focused on finding Maga-Z that I probably wasn’t paying attention. Even if I did see him I would not remember it.”

Nagito watched as Hajime let out a deep sigh. “What’s wrong, Hajime? You seem frustrated.”

Hajime voiced his troubles “I’m trying to figure out a timeline of what happened. I saw Teruteru about twenty minutes before he disappeared, he went back to the restaurant to retrieve some food. We figured he’d been gone too long, so I went over to the hotel with Akane and Chiaki to search for him, but he wasn’t there. That must have been when he came back to the party and you saw him.”

Nagito nodded along “That sounds right.”

“The three of us return to the party while at the same time Teruteru leaves it. Though for some reason, we don’t bump into each other.” Hajime said. “Then somehow in the space of the next five minutes, Teruteru ends up murdered back at the restaurant.”

“When you put it like that, it does sound strange.” Nagito appeared puzzled too.

Hajime shrugged his shoulders “I guess it’s something to think about in the trial, I don’t want to waste time on it now.” he didn’t know how long he had left before Monokuma called them all over to Monokuma Rock.

Hajime hadn’t any more questions for Sonia, so he moved on with Nagito. Chiaki caught Hajime’s eye, she was busy kneeling on the floor inspecting the grass.

“Hey…” Hajime approached her “What are you doing on the floor?”

Chiaki looked up at the two boys towering over her “I found this in the grass.” she picked something off the floor and held it up for them to see.

The object was tiny, Hajime was surprised Chiaki had even seen it considering how dark it was outside. In her hand sat a small, blue pill.

Hajime scrunched up his nose “What is that thing?”

“Let’s find out.” Chiaki opened her mouth and placed the pill on her tongue.

“Chiaki!” Hajime cried out, he couldn’t believe that Chiaki was actually trying it.

Chiaki quickly spat the pill out into the palm of her hand “I don’t think I can eat that, it tastes funny.”

“You have no idea what that thing is.” Hajime pointed out, taking on the role of the responsible friend “Don’t eat it.”

Chiaki smiled “I didn’t swallow it, so I’ll be okay…probably.” she didn’t fill Hajime with much confidence.

“Maybe you should have some water to clean your mouth out.” Nagito suggested.
Chiaki accepted Nagito’s advice and went off in search of her cup. Hajime wasn’t sure what to make of the pill, it was unlikely that it had been placed there on purpose, whoever owned it probably dropped it by accident. What did the pill do anyway? No one at the party had been poisoned and the drinks weren’t spiked. Maybe it was a simple head ache tablet and Hajime was just over thinking things.

Though Chiaki had gone, there still wasn't time to rest. He needed to push forward with his investigation. He decided to speak to Mahiru who was standing by the edge of the park, looking incredibly uncomfortable.

“It’s so sad that someone could do this to Teruteru.” Mahiru lowered her head, her voice softer than usual.

“It is.” Hajime agreed “That’s why we need to find out who did it.”

“I want to help, but I’m not really sure what to do.” Mahiru confessed to him.

“I think you might actually be able to help me.” Hajime said “Were you taking pictures of the party all night?”

Mahiru nodded “I wanted to capture as much as possible. I thought it was going to be a night to remember. I guess it still is, but for different reasons...”

“I don’t suppose there’s a way to see what time the pictures were taken, is there?” Hajime didn’t know very much about cameras, but it was worth a shot.

“Yes, since it’s a digital camera. I can tell you the exact seconds the pictures were taken.” Mahiru said “Why, would that help?”

Hajime explained his reasoning. “I was wondering if you had any photos from around one thirty. It might help us understand what was going on at that time of the party and see if anyone was missing.”

“That’s a great idea! Let me get on it.” Mahiru pulled the camera from around her neck and turned it on, bracing herself to scroll through all the pictures “I have a lot of pictures to look through, but I’ll be able to do it. Give me a few minutes.”

“Thank you.” Hajime said gratefully, if Mahiru could get him that information it would provide some very strong evidence. Maybe even enough to pin the killer.

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Allrighty guys, it’s finally time! That’s right. It’s time for the long awaited class trial! Now then, I shall tell you all the meeting place. At the central island of Jabberwock Island, there is a mountain with my adorable face carved into it. That, my friends, is Monokuma Rock! Once you’re there, please proceed to the underground by taking the elevator located at the secret entrance. Puhuhuh, I’ll see you soon.”

Mahiru's photos would have to wait. The time had come, the class trial was about to begin.

Chapter End Notes

We’ll be moving onto chapter two soon, just got the class trial left! I aim to get it up
some point during the week. It's all written I'm just going through it and making sure all the mysteries are tied up. As always, thank you for reading. I'll see you in the courtroom! ;D
Chapter One - Part Five

Chapter Notes

I had a lot of fun writing this trial so I hope you enjoy. It's a little longer than my other chapters but I really wanted to explain everything :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The walk to Monokuma rock felt like it lasted a lifetime, though it only took minutes. Hajime’s nerves were getting to him, causing him to feel nauseous. He tried his best to ignore the ill feelings, he needed to go into the trial with a clear mind. That was easier said than done. He had to identify the blackened or all of his friends would ‘die’, it would defeat the entire purpose of reliving the game. He’d collected some evidence, but he didn’t feel like he had enough to derive a clear picture of the case. He hoped more evidence would present itself during the trial, or he was going to have a problem.

“Where’s Fuyuhiko?” Chiaki asked as they all waited outside the rock, he was the only one missing.

“I didn’t see him at all in the investigation.” Souda said, casting judgement with his tone.

“Stop talkin’ about me, you bastards.” Fuyuhiko spat, as he made his way over to them, apparently he had good hearing.

“We didn’t think you were coming.” Akane said casually, cleaning out her ears at the same time.

“What were you doing this entire time? You missed the whole investigation.” Mahiru glared at him, unimpressed.

“That’s none of your damn business.” Fuyuhiko snapped at her.

“Our friend was killed, don’t you want to help catch the killer?” Sonia cried, her voice cracked just saying it.

“You knew him for three days, he wasn’t your friend.” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes at her, showing no sympathy.

“Let’s not start fighting.” Byakuya said, bringing everyone to silence.

The escalator appeared from Monokuma rock. The students filed onto it in a single line, one behind the other. Once they were all inside, they boarded the elevator and headed underground. At least one person sharing that elevator with Hajime wasn’t going to make it back to the surface. The thought made him feel faint. He tried his best to keep his balance as the elevator plummeted further underground.

Monokuma greeted them from his throne as they arrived in the trial room. Monomi was left dangling helplessly by his side, stranded from the ceiling. The students took their places behind the podiums. Just like before, Hajime was between Mahiru and Hiyoko. He turned to Mahiru, who gave him a supportive smile. The same couldn’t be said for Hiyoko, she rolled her eyes at him and muttered something under her breath. Monokuma gave a recap of the rules, by this point Hajime knew them off by heart. He was almost tempted to finish Monokuma’s sentences for him.
Nagito spoke first. “Before we begin, I’d like to confirm one thing. Is there really a killer among us?”

“Most definitely.” Monokuma smiled, taking pleasure in telling them. “There’s no doubt that the blackened is lurking among you. Such a sad state of affairs, isn’t it? By the way, this trial is gonna be one hundred percent fair, so there’s no need to worry. Now come on, let’s begin!”

Mikan spoke up, her voice trembling. “Y-you’re telling us to begin...but what are we supposed to do?”

“I’ll just start punching people until the killer comes forwards and confesses!” Akane said, readying her fists.

“I don’t think that’s gonna work!” Souda protested, beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

Fuyuhiko grinned smugly. “That pervert got killed at your party, which makes all of you a fuckin’ suspect.”

Chiaki frowned. “But the murder didn’t take place at the party, it happened at the restaurant.”

“Which means you’re as much of a suspect as the rest of us.” Mahiru said, pointing her finger accusingly at Fuyuhiko.

Byakuya intervened before an argument broke out. “Let’s handle this one mystery at a time. First, we shall review all the information given to us in the Monokuma file.”

“Teruteru was killed in the hotel restaurant.” Sonia said, speaking from memory. “He was stabbed in the back and the time of death was around one thirty in the morning.”

“What was Teruteru doing at the hotel restaurant at one thirty in the morning?” Nekomaru asked the group, scratching his head.

“Perhaps that idiotic fool was lured from the party.” Gundam put forward.

"Maybe he was hungry and fancied a late night snack." Ibuki said.

“That’s not it.” Hajime shook his head, shutting down their ideas. “Teruteru was making the party food over at the restaurant since there isn’t a kitchen at the park.”

"He was travelling back and forth between the restaurant and the park all night.” Byakuya explained, for the members of the group who apparently didn’t know.

"So it isn't suspicious that Teruteru was at the restaurant." Chiaki said. "We can rule out the idea that Teruteru was lured by the killer."

"If it isn't suspicious we mustn't dwell on it." Byakuya said.

Hajime waited for someone else to offer up a suggestion, but no one did. The courtroom fell to silence, no one dared to speak.

“I take it from your silence that you’ve come to a conclusion?” Monokuma said, looking down on them from his throne.

“No, we haven’t!” Mahiru objected.

“Then hurry the hell up and start talking!” Monokuma snapped, growing more impatient by the second.
“Come on you guys.” Monomi said supportively, despite hanging from the ceiling. “Your teacher believes in you.”

“Shut up Monomi, before I tighten that rope around your neck.” Monokuma threatened.

“I-I don’t know what to do!” Mikan whimpered in desperation. "I just w-want to go home."

“Why don’t we talk about the most obvious clue?” Chiaki said, bringing everyone to their senses by regaining focus on the trial. "Which in this case is the murder weapon.”

“According to the Monokuma file, Teruteru was stabbed to death.” Souda recalled.

“As if that wasn’t obvious!” Hiyoko scorned. “There was a knife next to his body. God, you’re such an idiot.”

“You don’t have to be so cruel!” Souda complained, his ego bruised.

“The knife next to his body is the murder weapon, you say?” Gundam inquired, eyebrows raised.

Hiyoko rolled her eyes. “No, Teruteru was stabbed to death by a breadstick.” she let out an exasperated sigh “Of course that’s the murder weapon.”

“Y-you can’t die from a breadstick...unless you choke of course.” Mikan corrected her. “T-the size of Teruteru’s wound matches that of a knife, not a carbohydrate.”

“I did not know breadsticks were so deadly!” Sonia gasped, looking genuinely horrified.

The mention of food caused Akane to drool. "Who's got breadsticks?"

"Can we get back to the topic at hand?” Byakuya glared at them like they were a class of naughty children.

“Ibuki remembers what we were discussing!” Ibuki said, puffing out her chest with pride “The knife next to Teruteru’s body is the murder weapon.”

Hajime shook his head in frustration, how had everyone missed out on something so obvious? “Isn’t it a little strange that the knife we found was totally spotless? There wasn’t a single drop of blood on it.” he'd inspected the knife first hand and it had been completely clean.

“Oh yeah.” Ibuki scrunched up her face. “There is almost always blood when you stab someone!”

Nagito frowned. “That is strange. Perhaps the killer put that knife there to throw us off the scent?”

"Like a decoy?” Hajime said.

Nagito nodded. "The killer wanted us to think they stabbed Teruteru but really they murdered him another way."

“And the Monokuma file lied too!” Nekomaru yelled enthusiastically, pleased with his contribution.

“Everything in that file is the complete truth.” Monokuma interveined. “I don’t tell lies...besides friendly ones.”

“We’ve already established from Mikan’s autopsy that a knife is what killed Teruteru.” Byakuya reminded them.
Nagito hung his head with a sigh. "In that case my theory about a decoy is wrong. Sorry everyone."

"S-so then why did the killer go to all that effort to clean the knife?" Mikan asked.

"To hide their fingerprints of course." Peko said.

"So what if we did find their fingerprints?" Fuyuhiko said "It’s not like we have the technology to analyse them. It would be pointless evidence."

That was something Hajime had never considered. They could only perform the investigation to the best of their ability, and they certainly didn't have the technology to analyse fingerprints. Even if the killer had left marks behind, it would have been worthless to them.

"Why would the killer clean up the knife but then leaving it lying around?" Byakuya asked. "They might as well have put it away."

"The killer could have left it there as a warning." Sonia contributed. "It reminds me of a documentary I watched once on one of my favourite serial killers. They would leave the murder weapon at the scene of the crime as a warning they'd kill again."

"Heh, uh Miss Sonia…" Souda said, wide-eyed. "I don’t think now is the time to be talking about your favourite serial killers."

Hajime knew everyone standing around him, there weren't any hidden serial killers. That couldn't be right.

"Maybe the killer didn't have time to put the knife away?" Akane said.

After listening to everyone speak, Hajime had a theory of his own. "Like Nagito said, the knife was probably placed there to throw us off. The killer wants us to think that’s the real murder weapon."

"You’re saying the killer used something other than a knife?" Hiyoko said. "We just spoke about this! You're slower than Mikan."

"I'm such a slowpoke." Mikan's eyes filled with tears.

Nagito stepped in, answering on Hajime's behalf. "It’s been established multiple times that the murder weapon is definitely a knife. I think, what Hajime is trying to say, is that the knife used to kill Teruteru is not the one we found."

Hajime smiled appreciatively at Nagito, he'd captured everything he'd been trying to say.

"So the knife we found was a decoy, the real knife is elsewhere." Peko said, catching on too.

"I think I have some evidence to back this up…" Hajime nodded. "Teruteru's body was missing the scarf he always wore. I found it scrunched up in the trash can. The whole thing was covered in blood."

Nagito continued on with the point. "Since Teruteru wasn't stabbed in the neck, I think there's a pretty obvious explanation for why the scarf was covered in blood."

"What are you thinking?" Mahiru said.

"I think the killer used Teruteru's scarf to conceal the real murder weapon." Nagito said. "They wrapped the knife up in his scarf so they could dispose of it without getting covered in blood."
Hajime nodded along, they were thinking the same thing.

"So where did the killer dispose of the real murder weapon?" Sonia asked.

"They probably took it to the sink, washed it up and slipped among all the other knives." Nagito answered her. "At the same time taking a clean knife and planting it next to the body."

"So we have no hope in finding the real murder weapon." Mahiru sighed.

"Like I already said, it wouldn’t matter if we did." Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes. "We can’t work out the killer by staring at some fingerprints."

"I don’t think the killer realised that, though." Hajime said. "They were probably in a panic and wanted to get rid of all the evidence they could."

Fuyuhiko gritted his teeth. "I suppose it’s a possibility, though it makes them a fucking dumbass."

Byakuya frowned, his forehead creasing. "This isn't leading us any further. Let's look at the final piece of evidence in the Monokuma file."

"We know why Teruteru was at the restaurant, and how he was killed." Hajime said. "The last clue in the Monokuma file is the time of death, which is one thirty a.m."

"Anyone who doesn’t have an alibi for that time has to be the killer!" Ibuki declared, full of confidence.

"How are we supposed to figure out who has an alibi?" Souda asked. "I don’t remember what I was doing at half one."

"That's because you're the killer!" Akane yelled at him.

"WHAT? NO!" Souda screeched. "I'm not the killer, I just wasn't keep track of time."

Hajime felt the same way as Souda. He had no idea what he'd been up to at the time of death, he hadn't been clock watching. "I wasn’t keeping track of time, I don’t think anyone was."

"I-I think I was eating at that time, but I’m not sure." Mikan said.

"Thinking isn’t good enough!" Byakuya snapped, patience wearing thin. "I need to know for sure what everyone was doing at the time of the murder."

"Yeah Mikan!" Hiyoko joined in, enjoying any excuse to gang up on the girl. "You’re such a waste of oxygen."

"Eeeeeekk! I’m so sorry." Mikan wept. "I-I’ll stop breathing it in." she took a sharp intake of breath and pinched her nose.

"Don’t listen to her!" Byakuya looked like he was going to tear his hair out any second.

Mikan thankfully listened and breathed out.

Though Hajime couldn't remember what he'd been doing at the time of death, hope wasn't lost. He had a plan. "Actually," Hajime said. "I think I have an idea which would allow us to see who was at the party at one thirty."

"What is this you speak of?" Gundam asked. "Do you too have abilities not from this world that
“allow you to see through time?”

“Not quite…” Hajime said, turning his attention to Mahiru who was to his right. “Mahiru, do you have those pictures I asked you for earlier?”

Mahiru nodded. “Yes, I was able to find them.”

Hajime explained his plan to the others. “Mahiru was taking photos of the party all night, so she has pictures that were taken at the time of the murder. Anyone who’s in a photo at the time of one thirty has an alibi.”

“We already know one person who doesn’t have an alibi.” Hiyoko said. “Fuyuhiko.”

“I don’t need an alibi, I was in my cottage the entire night!” Fuyuhiko objected.

“Peko said you went for a walk along the beach…” Byakuya narrowed his eyes.


“I went for a quick walk and then I was in my cottage all evening.” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes. “I didn’t realise I had to tell you my entire life story.”

“Are you sure you were in your cottage all evening?” Chiaki challenged him. “We came knocking on your door shortly before the murder and you never answered.”

Fuyuhiko shrugged his shoulders. “So what? I didn’t feel like answering.”

“Little suspicious, don’t ya think?” Akane eyed him up. “I don’t think you were in your cottage at all.”

“I was.” Fuyuhiko gritted his teeth. “I just don’t hate myself enough to spend my free time talkin’ to you.”

“What did ya say?” Akane rolled her sleeves up even further.

Nagito interrupted them. “Let’s not start fighting. We can’t go making accusations until we’ve seen the pictures.”

Mahiru held up her hand for silence. “Okay everyone, I have the photos. Pay attention.”

“Go on then!” Fuyuhiko snapped. “Show us.”

“Learn some manners.” Mahiru glared at him. She turned the camera around so that everyone could see the screen. “These pictures were taken at exactly one thirty.” she pointed to some text on the screen of the camera. “There’s a time stamp here to prove it.”

The first picture showed Ibuki laughing at the camera, her arm wrapped tightly around a terrified looking Mikan. Byakuya was visible in the background, shooting them disapproving looks.

Hajime recognised the second photo too well. Nagito was lying helplessly on the floor, Akane on top wrestling him for some meat. Mahiru had perfectly captured Hajime’s horrified expression. Chiaki stood helplessly beside him.

The third and final photo was slightly blurred. Only the side of Peko’s head was visible where she’d attempted to jump out the shot, not wanting her picture taken.
"These are the only pictures I have from half past one." Mahiru turned the camera off again.

"From these pictures, it’s clear who has an alibi and who doesn’t.” Hajime said, pleased his idea had been a success.

Peko went to the liberty of explaining it. "In the pictures we see myself, Mikan, Ibuki, Hajime, Nagito, Chiaki, Byakuya, Akane, and Mahiru - who is obviously the one behind the camera."

"Which means those who aren’t present are Teruteru, Sonia, Souda, Gundam, Fuyuhiko, Hiyoko and Nekomaru.” Hajime said, working out those Peko hadn’t mentioned.

"T-that’s a lot of people with an alibi.” Mikan said.

"And a lot of people without one too.” Nagito added.

"Like I said, it’s obviously Fuyuhiko!” Hiyoko said. “Isn’t it suspicious how he’s been missing the entire night? He didn’t even show for the investigation.”

That had crossed Hajime’s mind as suspicious.

“I took no interest in your damn party. How would I know Teruteru was at the restaurant?!" Fuyuhiko snapped.

“If you were inside your cottage, then sooner or later you would have noticed Teruteru’s frequent trips between the park and the restaurant.” Mahiru pointed out.

“Are you calling me a fuckin’ liar?” Fuyuhiko swore aggressively.

“Calm down, you aren’t helping yourself.” Peko said.

“I can tell you right now, it wasn’t me.” Nekomaru raised his hands to show innocence.

“You weren’t at the party, so where were you?” Byakuya asked him.

“Taking a shit.” Nekomaru said simply.

“Too much information.” Ibuki scrunched up her nose in disgust.

“Ah yes, that’s right.” Byakuya said. “I remember the revolting conversation we had.”

Hajime remembered it too, Nekomaru had suddenly become desperate for the toilet. He seemed like he was in a lot of pain. “Did you go back to your cottage? Because I never saw you.” Hajime said. “I would have passed you on my way back from the restaurant.”

Nekomaru shook his head. “That was too far away. I couldn’t hold it in any longer so I stopped at the beach and went in the sea.”

“Gross!” Hiyoko shivered.

“Think of all those poor fish.” Ibuki cupped her hands over her mouth in horror.

“Since we have no proof, we’ll have to take your word for it right now.” Byakuya said.

Hajime didn’t want Nekomaru to produce any proof for that.

“What about the rest of you?” Byakuya continued with the questions. “Why were you all missing?”
“Gundam and I went looking for Maga-Z. He’s one of the four dark devas of destruction.” Sonia explained.

“I went running after them to help but they didn’t wait up for me.” Souda sighed, accounting for his absence.

“If that’s true then Sonia and Gundam have alibis for each other.” Chiaki said.

Gundam nodded his head slowly. “It is indeed true.”

“That means Sonia and Gundam are innocent.” Nagito said. "Unless they're working together..."

“We already know accomplices aren't allowed to graduate.” Hajime said. "It would be pointless for them to work together."

"Team work is the best kind of work." Monomi called over to them.

"Uh, not this kind of team work..." Hajime corrected the rabbit.

Monokuma cut in. "Why does everyone get so obsessed with accomplices? I don't want to listen to your accomplice theories for the next twenty minutes, so to save my sanity I'll give you a clue. There were no accomplices in this case."

Hiyoko spoke up. “Well don’t blame me, I was off searching for Teruteru too. He owed me a gummy cake.”

“We aren’t getting anywhere with this.” Mahiru sighed. “Too many people don't have alibis.”

“Enough already! Show yourself you coward!” Gundam yelled, his voice full of rage.

Hajime was growing frustrated, they were running out of evidence. So many people had been missing at the time of the murder that it was impossible to pinpoint a killer.

So many people had been missing during the murder…

*Could it be?*

Hajime had an idea. “Don’t you think it’s a little suspicious that so many people were missing from the party at the time of the murder?”

Souda shrugged his shoulders. “I hadn’t given it much thought.”

“IT would have been difficult for the killer to sneak off with everyone watching them.” Hajime pointed out. “But with so many people missing it’s impossible for us to grant alibis.”

“A lot of people were missing, seven to be exact.” Sonia said, holding up the right amount of fingers.

"That is a lot of people." Peko agreed. "Especially when all of them left at once."

“Think about why everyone was missing.” Hajime spoke directly to Sonia “You, Gundam and Souda left the party because Maga-Z got lost.”

“Maga-Z would not simply get lost.” Gundam sneered. “I’m telling you, someone took him.”

"Remember where we found him, Hajime.” Nagito hinted.
"Under the serving platter..." Hajime muttered to himself. It was possible for Maga-Z to have trapped himself there by accident, but Hajime knew how clever Gundam's hamsters were. It was certainly convenient for the killer that Maga-Z had gone missing...

“Though it’s possible that the killer took Gundam’s hamster...” Byakuya said - the word hamster caused a vein to start throbbing in Gundam's head. “You cannot tell me that the killer was able to make Nekomaru need the bathroom.”

“Coach Nekomaru always needs the bathroom. It was prolly just chance.” Akane said.

Hajime frowned, trying his best to remember. “There was something different this time, Nekomaru seemed like he really needed to go. What if he was spiked with laxatives?”

“Isn’t that a little extreme, Hajime?” Byakuya rolled his eyes.

“Laxatives...” Chiaki tilted her head. “I found a little blue pill at the park, that must have been a laxative...I think.”

The blue pill Chiaki found could certainly be a laxative. It hadn’t looked like any aspirin Hajime had ever taken. “Nekomaru always goes to the bathroom, so it wasn’t particularly suspicious when he ran off in search of one. The killer could have slipped him laxatives to send him away from the party, and none of us thought anything of it.”

“That ain’t it.” Akane said. “I was eating Teruteru’s food all night and I’m fine. No laxatives at all.”

“Hajime never said it was in his food.” Nagito pointed out.

Hajime nodded in agreement. “I know nothing was put in the food because I was eating it too. But what if laxatives were slipped into Nekomaru’s drink? That way the killer could target specifically him.”

“How would the killer have been able to work that out? Any of the drinks could have been Nekomaru’s.” Fuyuhiko argued.

“Actually, no.” Hajime shook his head. Of course, Fuyuhiko wouldn’t have known since he didn’t attend the party.

“Ibuki made labels for all the glasses, so it was easy to see who was drinking from what!” Ibuki said proudly.

“Wait, why did you do that?” Souda asked her.

“I-It’s kind of suspicious...” Mikan said.

“Having labels made it easier for the killer to identify Nekomaru’s drink.” Byakuya frowned. "And this was your doing, Ibuki?"

Ibuki fiddled with her bracelet. "I made the labels, but it wasn’t my idea."

That’s right, it wasn’t. Hajime knew exactly who had told her to do it. The person who manipulated Ibuki was the same person who had a thing for writing threatening letters - as they’d done in the last game. “Nagito, it was you who told Ibuki to write labels for all the glasses.”

Nagito smiled innocently. “That’s true, I did. But it was for hygiene purposes. You don’t want multiple people drinking from one glass. That’s just unsanitary.”
“Nagito isn’t the killer.” Mahiru crossed her arms. “He has an alibi. He was at the party when Teruteru was killed.”

Something seemed weird, but Mahiru was right. It couldn’t be Nagito, he was there at one thirty when the picture was taken, he had an alibi for the time of death. The time of death…

Not the time Teruteru was attacked, but the time he officially died…

Was Hajime onto something? “Teruteru died at one thirty, but he could have been attacked several minutes before that.” he pointed out, a sudden rush of excitement from his new theory.

“H-Hajime is right.” Mikan said. “Teruteru could have been stabbed and then left to bleed to death.”

Peko collected her thoughts. ”That would allow the killer good timing to leave the crime scene and get back to the party, thus creating an alibi.”

“Which means everyone’s alibi is pretty useless…” Mahiru's shoulders drooped.

"So really, we're back at the beginning." Souda scratched his head.

"Back to the beginning? Even though we have been arguing for so long…” Sonia hung her head.

Nagito lowered his gaze to the ground “Despite the fact we’ve discussed this at length, there’s not even one clue that leads to the killer. But that might be because...there’s no way any of us could be a killer.”

Hajime felt his entire body freeze.

Nagito continued. "I have an idea about what we all should do at this point. Instead of surviving by doubting others, isn’t it better to get killed for believing in others?"

"Are you suggesting we give up?" Byakuya said.

Hajime didn’t know why he’d been so quick to dismiss Nagito, it was obvious he had something to do with the case. Just because the party was held somewhere different, it didn’t mean Nagito had suddenly given up. There was no other explanation, Nagito had to play a part in it all. Things were starting to make sense.

“Nagito?” Sonia stared at him in confusion.

"Let's just stop." Nagito cried out, his voice filled with raw emotion. "We don't have to find out who the blackened is! I don't want to do this to my friends."

One by one the others started to crack.

"T-this is too much." Mikan sobbed.

"I just wanna go home." Hiyoko's bottom lip trembled.

Akane shifted about uncomfortably. "I don't wanna doubt my friends."

"Everyone calm down!" Hajime raised his voice, bringing everyone to silence. "We can't give up yet, we won't give up yet! There are more clues and I know it."

Nagito raised his eyebrows at Hajime, challenging him. "Well?"
It had to be Nagito, of course it was Nagito. But Hajime couldn’t accuse him with so little evidence. He needed more, he had to think deeper. He laid it out in his mind.

- The last time he’d seen Teruteru: With Hiyoko and Akane when they were asking for dishes.
- The last person to have seen Teruteru at all: Nagito who supposedly saw him at the party.

“Nagito, didn’t you say you saw Teruteru back at the party after Akane, Chiaki and I went looking for him?” Hajime glared.

“That’s right.” Nagito smiled. “He came back to deliver the meats. You guys just missed him.”

“I know you’re saying he came back but I never saw him, and I was on watch.” Byakuya folded his arms.

“Ah well, you probably weren’t looking.” Nagito said. “Teruteru was rather short.”

“But we didn’t see Teruteru either. We were going back to the party as he was leaving it, it makes no sense why we didn’t see him.” Akane joined in.

Nagito laughed it off. “You must have taken separate routes, it’s nothing more than a coincidence.”

“It would be fine if it was one minor coincidence. But you’ve got a few pretty big coincidences stacked up against you.” Chiaki said, pulling up her hood.

"Ya know, I did get a pretty suspicious feeling about you after breakfast." Souda said.

"Me?!" Nagito pointed to himself and laughed. "Whatever did I do?"

"Nagito, you were pretty keen on having the party at the old building, even when Hajime warned us about possible blackouts." Souda said, refusing to make eye contact with Nagito. "Part of me wondered if you wanted a blackout to happen."

"Is that why you protested so much?” Mahiru interrogated him.

“Just admit it, you bastard.” Fuyuhiko snapped.

“Gh...gh…” Nagito stuttered.

“Don’t make me punch the truth outta ya!” Akane yelled.

“Ghh…gh…” Nagito couldn’t find his words.

“Just tell the truth, Nagito.” Hajime said. He wasn’t sure if he could deal with Nagito breaking into madness a second time, it had been disturbing enough the first time around. Hajime wished he could believe Nagito to be innocent but there was too much evidence stacked against him.

“Nghhhh…..gh” Nagito still refused to speak.

“Nagito, say something!” Hajime cried out.

“Aahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!” Nagito began to laugh like a complete maniac. “The ultimates are working together to combat the despair of their friend’s death! Ah, how wonderful. How beautiful it is.”

Hajime had to look away, he couldn’t bring himself to face Nagito. His eyes alone were enough to scare him off, they were full of crazy.
Nagito’s laughter continued. “Let’s cut to the chase...you’re correct! It was my doing all along. I’m the one who stole Gundam’s hamster and trapped it. I’m the one who planted laxatives in Nekomaru’s drink. And of course, I’m the one who stabbed Teruteru.”

Ibuki edged away from Nagito who was standing next to her. “I-is it just me or...does he seem a little nuts right now?”

Nagito's smile quickly turned into a sigh. "Of course, my original plan was to kill someone in a blackout at the old building. But plans were changed. With a twist ending like this, I think we can all agree this ended up being a very interesting mystery."

“Just stop it already! What the hell happened to you?” Souda cried.

Mahiru lowered her head. “Don’t tell me this is your true nature. Were you lying to us this entire time?”

Nagito laughed. “Me, lie? That’s outrageous! There’s no way someone like me could ever lie to you guys! I understand better than anyone else that I’m ultimately worthless. I’m too arrogant to have dreams or cling to hope, I’m too disdainful to actually try at anything. I’ve made peace with the fact that I’m a lowly, stupid, insignificant human who can’t do anything right.”

“I’ve met some fucked up people in my time, but none like this.” Fuyuhiko mumbled.

Byakuya narrowed his eyes at Nagito. "So it was you who sent me that threatening letter?”

“What letter?” Gundam asked.

Since Byakuya hadn’t died, Hajime wasn’t able to go his cottage and use it as evidence. He had to pretend he knew nothing about it.

Byakuya reached into his pocket and retrieved the piece of paper. “Someone sent me a letter, saying someone was going to die. As a result, I decided to throw a party to keep us all in one location. It appears this was the killer’s attempt to manipulate me.”

“That was me as well.” Nagito admitted freely, not even trying to lie. “I guess I owe you guys an explanation.”

All eyes were on Nagito, everyone waiting to hear the truth.

Nagito cleared his throat, readying himself. “I knew that it was going to be difficult staging a murder at Jabberwock Park since I could no longer cause my blackout. But I was suddenly inspired when I heard Teruteru telling me that he’d have to travel back and forth between the hotel and the park.”

“Inspired?” Souda repeated, terrified by his choice of words.

“I prepared in advance, taking laxatives from the store and suggesting to Ibuki that she made labels for all the drinks. Then before the party, I went to the kitchen and got myself the sharpest knife I could find.” Nagito continued to explain.

Hajime shivered. “So you had that knife on you the entire night?”

“Sure did.” Nagito grinned. “Man, I’m really lucky that no one hit into me or I probably would have stabbed myself.” he laughed, apparently finding the idea hilarious.

“Just carry on with the story.” Fuyuhiko spat.
“I waited for the party to get going, so everyone was relaxed.” Nagito said. “I then waited for Teruteru to head off to the restaurant. I needed to act fast so I planted the laxatives and hid Gundam’s hamster.”

"Maga-Z is not a hamster!” Gundam yelled.

Nagito ignored him and continued on. “Once everyone started to leave the party, I headed off myself. I snuck into the restaurant from the outside, Teruteru was busy cooking and didn’t even hear me. All I had to do was creep up from behind and stab him in the back.”

“You’re a terrible person.” Mahiru looked close to tears.

“The rest was simple, I left Teruteru and returned to the party with the meat he’d been ready to bring back.” Nagito said. “The search for Teruteru begun but he was already dead. I told Hajime, Akane and Chiaki when they returned that I’d seen him and they all believed me.”

Hajime’s head was hurting, had Nagito really gotten away with the crime this time? If he was the killer then he’d have to send him to be executed, he’d never get to wake up. Hajime couldn’t tell if the endless days by Nagito’s bedside were clouding his judgement, but something seemed off. “Hang on a second…”

“Don’t try and drag this out any further. We know who the killer is!” Hiyoko complained.

“No, wait.” Hajime said. “There’s something about Nagito’s story which doesn’t line up.”

“So you noticed it too…” Chiaki said.

“Don’t leave Ibuki out the loop, what’s going on?” Ibuki tilted her head.

“If Nagito is telling the truth, then Teruteru was already dead by the time we went searching for him.” Hajime explained. “Akane, Chiaki, think back to the first time we searched for Teruteru at the restaurant.”

“No one was there, big deal.” Akane shrugged her shoulders.

“But Teruteru should have been because Nagito had supposedly killed him by that point.” Haime frowned.

“Nagito is spreading more lies?” Gundam said.

“Maybe he moved the body?” Nekomaru suggested.

Nagito laughed. “I assure you I’m not lying, and I didn’t move the body either. Teruteru was there in the restaurant when you went to look for him.”

“But we would have seen him.” Hajime said. It made no sense.

“Maybe…” Chiaki said. “But let’s not forget, Teruteru was on the floor concealed by the tables. We didn’t look for him properly.”

Monokuma sighed. “You guys are soooo unobservant, Teruteru was lying there on the floor and you all totally missed him.”

Hajime couldn’t believe he’d done something so stupid, how could he have been so oblivious? Teruteru had been there all that time.
“Do we really need to be going over this?” Peko asked. “We’re wasting our time, we know Nagito is the killer.”

“I-I just want this over with.” Mikan stuttered.

“Shall we take the vote?” Nagito said, his expression smug.

“If you please, I would like to say something before we vote…” Sonia raised her hand.

“I suppose we have time to listen to one more point.” Gundam said.

“What is it, Miss Sonia?” Souda asked.

“There is something still puzzling me about this mystery.” Sonia said, deep in thought. “Can everyone remember the school rule regarding the body discovery announcement?”

Chiaki recited it off by heart. “The body discovery announcement will play as soon as three or more people discover a body for the first time.”

“That’s the one.” Sonia nodded. “By my understanding Chiaki, Akane and Hajime technically discovered Teruteru's body during their first search. So why didn’t the announcement sound?”

“Oh…” Hajime hadn’t thought of that, Sonia had made a very good point. Even if they hadn’t directly spotted his body, they’d still discovered it. The announcement should have sounded. He knew it wasn’t Monokuma’s doing, the bear was evil but he wouldn’t tamper with the case in that way. Did that mean… “Was Teruteru still alive at that point?”

“I-if Teruteru was alive but barely conscious it would explain why he never called out for help.” Mikan said.

Nagito sighed. “I’m so worthless and stupid that I didn’t even check my victim was dead before leaving the crime scene. I’m so incompetent I couldn’t even commit a murder properly.”

“Wait, now you’re saying you never killed him?” Souda scratched his head. “But you just admitted to it!”

Nagito shook his head. “I said that I stabbed Teruteru, which is true. I never said I killed him.”

“If that’s the case, then someone must have come along and killed Teruteru between the time you three left the restaurant and half past one.” Byakuya said.

“Which means those alibis from earlier aren’t totally useless.” Mahiru said. “Nagito, Hajime, Akane, Chiaki, Peko, Byakuya, Mikan, Ibuki and I were all busy at that time. It definitely isn’t us.”

“Well it’s not me.” Fuyuhiko said.

“Let’s not start this again.” Chiaki frowned. “Instead, let's work with the evidence we have.”

“Someone must’ve known that Nagito planned on killing Teruteru and went off to finish the job.” Nekomaru said.

“So that’s it.” Hiyoko said. “Did you tell someone about your plan?”

“No.” Nagito denied it. “I didn’t tell any one, since my original plan was to kill Teruteru myself.”

“So someone discovered Teruteru by accident and instead of helping they murdered him?” Ibuki
cocked her head.

Mikan raised her hand to speak. "I-it's possible that there's an innocent explanation for all of this."

“What do you mean, ‘innocent explanation’?” Byakuya cut in, desperate for answers.

"The k-killer didn't m-murder Teruteru on purpose." Mikan said. "I-it could have been an accident."

"Explain yourself!" Gundam demanded.

“W-well, imagine you've walked into a room and you see someone there with a knife sticking out their back, still alive.” Mikan launched into her explanation. “W-what’s the first thing you might do?”

"Shit yourself?” Nekomaru suggested.

Sonia came forward with a suggestion of a serious nature. “You might try to remove the knife.”

“E-exactly.” Mikan nodded at her. “B-but that’s the worst possible thing you can do. Removing the knife could cause further bleeding since the wound is totally exposed. The knife could have been blocking blood vessels, removing it would cause them to bleed out.”

Sonia nodded. “Ah yes, I often hear them say that in Japanese medical dramas.”

“So the real killer found Teruteru’s body and pulled out the knife in the hope to help him...but caused him to start bleeding further?” Hajime said, trying to piece together everything.

“It’s possible, y-yes.” Mikan said. “And Teruteru would have definitely been alive if he was still bleeding.”

“That still doesn’t explain how he died.” Peko frowned.

“T-there’s more.” Mikan continued. “If you removed the knife and realised that you were causing Teruteru to bleed further, what might you do next?”

“Put the knife back into the wound to stop the bleeding?” Chiaki said.

“No one would do that.” Byakuya rolled his eyes.

"I'm sure you would if you were panicking." Mahiru said.

“T-the killer probably put the knife back into Teruteru to stop the excess bleeding, and then p-planned on finding help.” Mikan said. “Except, they put the knife back with a little too much force and killed Teruteru as a consequence.”

Hajime focused his attention on Mikan. "You think this is what happened?"

"I-it's the only explanation I can think of." Mikan answered him.

Hajime trusted Mikan's opinion as a medical professional. Though the theory was a little wild, it made sense. If he'd found Teruteru still alive he probably would have pulled the knife out too. It was an easy mistake to make. Of course, if Mikan's theory was right it meant the Teruteru was killed by accident and someone innocent was going to face the punishment.

"They must have panicked when they realised they killed Teruteru." Souda said. "That's probably why they planted a clean knife next to the body, they wanted to throw us off what happened.”
“Well, they didn’t do a very good job.” Fuyuhiko said. “There wasn’t any blood on the knife so we quickly saw through it.”

“They'd just murdered someone, do you really think they were thinking straight?” Hajime reasoned.

“That leaves us with one final mystery, who is the killer?” Byakuya said.

Everyone fell silent, brains whirring away to try and bring the case to its conclusion. Hajime knew it was narrowed down to a few people Souda, Gundam, Sonia, Hiyoko, Nekomaru and Fuyuhiko. Those were the only people missing at the time of the crime. It was absolutely impossible for it to be anyone else.


He muttered their names, over and over. There had to be a way to narrow them down, to work out which one of them killed Teruteru. He thought back to why they were missing in the first place. Souda, Sonia and Gundam had gone in search of a hamster. Nekomaru had gone in search for a toilet. Fuyuhiko had gone in search for some peace. And Hiyoko had gone in search for her cake…

Her cake…

Why hadn't Hajime realised it sooner?

“There’s only one possibility…” Hajime took a deep breath before throwing out his accusation. “It’s you, Hiyoko Saionji!”

“What the..?!” Hiyoko cried out. “Stop spreading lies, you bully.”

Hajime explained his reasoning. “Hiyoko went off to look for Teruteru since he promised to make her a gummy cake. We asked her if she’d like to join us on our search but Hiyoko insisted on going alone. She probably went to the restaurant after we left and found Teruteru.”

“You have no proof. You’re all bullies.” Hiyoko burst into tears.

“Good going, Hajime. You made her cry.” Mahiru snapped.

“Actually, I do have proof.” Hajime said, irritated at being blamed. ”We know the killer used Teruteru's scarf to conceal the knife and wash it up."

“Do you expect us to understand from that foolish explanation?” Gundam challenged him.

“The killer must have covered the knife so they didn't get covered in blood.” Hajime said.

“Does it really matter if their clothes got bloody?” Souda asked. “They could just clean it off.”

Hiyoko carried on crying. “That’s nothing to do with me.”

“Actually, it is. Hiyoko, if I’m correct, you told me that you can’t tie your kimono. If you got blood
on it and had to wash it, you wouldn’t be able to put it back on. Therefore, it was important to you to keep your clothes clean, hence the scarf.” Hajime said.

“That’s not true, he’s a liar.” Hiyoko wailed.

“Prove it to us, then.” Byakuya said. “Untie your kimono and tie it up again.”

“You’re such a pervert.” Hiyoko snapped through the tears.

“If you’re really innocent, then you can prove it by tying your kimono.” Byakuya repeated. “If not, it proves that you’re guilty.”

Hiyoko kept crying, she wouldn’t stop. The others exchanged awkward glances.

“Hiyoko…” Mahiru said gently.

Hajime decided to run through the case in his mind one last time, just to make sure he’d covered everything.

- Byakuya received a threatening note from Nagito, which caused him to throw a party. Nagito wanted to hold it at the old building, but Hajime insisted the party was moved to Jabberwock park.
- Teruteru was busy walking between the restaurant and the party to deliver food since there wasn’t another kitchen nearby.
- Nagito asked Ibuki to label everyone’s glass, so that he was able to slip laxatives in Nekomaru’s drink sending him away from the party. He also took Gundam’s hamster which created another diversion.
- With people already missing, Nagito was able to slip away unnoticed. He went to the restaurant and snuck up on an unsuspecting Teruteru, stabbing him in the back.
- Unaware Teruteru hadn’t died, Nagito left the restaurant with meat which he later pretended that Teruteru gave to him.
- Hajime, Akane and Chiaki went to the restaurant in search for Teruteru, they didn’t look closely enough so never saw him.
- The three of them headed back to the party meanwhile, the killer went to the restaurant.
- They found him there on the floor with a knife sticking from his back. In a panic, the killer pulled out the knife with the attempt to save him but this only caused further bleeding.
- Thinking it would help, the killer stuck the knife back in Teruteru but this actually killed him.
- Realising this, the killer tried to cover up their crime by planting fake evidence. They took Teruteru’s scarf to move the knife, not wanting to get covered in blood.

Hajime nodded to himself, he had no doubts. ”The killer is Hiyoko!”

Monokuma laughed, suddenly joining in the trial “Hahaha, it looks like your argument has come to a close. It’s time for that all important vote. Please pull the lever in front of you and cast your vote.”

The students cast their votes, they all voted for Hiyoko - besides Hiyoko herself who chose Mikan. The results came through.

Guilty.

Relief surged through Hajime, as much as he hated sentencing anyone to an execution, he’d rather it be one of them than all of them.

Monokuma flashed his teeth. “That’s right! This time, the blackened responsible for killing Teruteru
Hanamura is Hiyoko Saionji."

“Wahhhhhhh!” Hiyoko wouldn’t stop crying.

“You stupid bitch.” Fuyuhiko snapped at her.

“I...I can’t believe you’d do something like that.” Mikan said, for once she didn’t get any abuse in return.

“Everyone…” Mahiru said softly. “It wasn’t Hiyoko’s fault, she was trying to save him.”

“I don’t care, she still tried to pretend she was innocent.” Souda said. “She was trying to get us killed.”

“It wasn’t my fault.” Hiyoko wailed. “Nagito's the one who stabbed him.”

“I hope you can live with yourself.” Mahiru yelled at Nagito.

Nagito looked unphased “I wanted to let hope shine.”

“And to do that someone has to die?!” Hajime found himself shouting.

“This trial aided your hope in growing stronger. You’re defeating despair. It’s a true honour for someone as worthless as myself to witness that.” Nagito gushed.

“You’re pissin’ me off!” Akane looked like she was going to jump from her podium and tackle Nagito any second.

"Of course, Hiyoko and I can't take all the glory." Nagito said. “There’s someone else who allowed all of this to happen in the first place. I want to thank you Hajime.”

"M-me?!" Hajime choked, he hadn't expected to hear his own name.

“My original plan was to try and kill someone in a blackout at the old building.” Nagito explained. “But thanks to Hajime that never happened. Who would listen to someone as worthless as myself when the ultimate hope suggests something different? It made me realise that the ultimate hope was preparing me for something bigger and better. Hajime allowed an even greater hope to shine through.”

“What the hell! That wasn’t my intention at all.” Hajime cried out, he couldn't believe what Nagito was saying.

“I was willing to sacrifice myself, to be a stepping stone for you all. But then something even greater happened. What’s better than an ultimate student committing the murder and leading everyone forward? This nearly wasn’t possible, it’s all thanks to Hajime.” Nagito cheered, looking ecstatic.

“Stop it.” Hajime said, his voice weak. He already felt guilty enough, Nagito was making things worse. He’d relocated the party to save everyone, but Nagito had used that as encouragement.

“Is that why you were so willing to take blame for this?” Peko asked Nagito. “You would have killed us all.”

“I’m on the side of hope.” Nagito said. “I thought Hiyoko was the hope that could overcome all despair, but it’s clear to me now that she’s too much of a coward for that.” he glared at Hiyoko like she were vermin.
Hiyoko snivelled “I didn’t kill him for hope, I killed him by accident. He may have been a creepy pervert, but I didn’t want him to die.”

“It’s okay, Hiyoko.” Nagito smiled, his look of disgust gone. “Now you get to live on as a sacrifice, thanks to you the hope of everyone else was able to grow stronger.”

“I don’t wanna be a sacrifice.” Hiyoko cried.

“I don’t even feel safe standing near this guy!” Fuyuhiko exclaimed.

“I hate to interrupt, but I’m getting bored!” Monokuma said. “You all know what it’s time for, rightttt?”

“Wait, you’re not going to punish her are you?” Mahiru said.

Hajime knew the answer, no matter what happened it was always the blackened who got punished. Things were too late for Hiyoko. There was nothing he could do to save her, no matter how much he wanted to.

“You know the rules!” Monokuma teased.

“But it’s not her fault, Nagito tricked her.” Mahiru protested, fighting Hiyoko's case.

“Yeah he’s the crazy one, kill him instead.” Souda said, pointing an accusing finger at Nagito.

“Sorry, rules are rules.” Monokuma laughed, showing no remorse. “I'm not going to wait any longer! I’ve prepared a very special punishment for Hiyoko Saionji, the ultimate traditional dancer. Let’s give it everything we’ve got! It’s...PUNISHMENT TIIIIIIIIIME!”

'Til the curtains falls

Hiyoko stands center stage in all her glory, dressed in her finest kimono. A large black curtain provides a simple backdrop. An audience consisting of students and Monokuma wait in the crowd, full of anticipation. The Ultimate Traditional Dancer is about to do what she does best.

The music starts and the lights drop, a center spotlight follows Hiyoko wherever she goes. No one can take their eyes off her, the girl moves with such elegance and grace. In each hand she holds a fan, they move as gently as her.

The music begins to speed up, a loud drum beat forces its way into the track and begins to dominate. Hiyoko feels her temperature rising as she continues to move, faster and faster. It’s never usually this hot.

She twirls around, maintaining her poise, and notices something from behind. The bottom of the curtain has gone up in beautiful orange flames, accompanied by smoke. Her backdrop is on fire. Hiyoko doesn’t stop, she can’t stop. She’s there to give the best performance of her life, the show must go on.

The students watch in awe, though they’re starting to suffer from the intense heat of the room.

Hiyoko sees nothing but orange when she twirls around. The curtains are totally consumed by the flames. The smoke covers her legs like a fog machine, adding ambience to the
She’s almost through with the dance, though it’s getting hotter and near impossible. Her eyes are stinging she can barely keep them open and she can’t breathe properly. But still, Hiyoko does not stop. She glides around the stage, the paper fans accompanying her.

So close to the end, she can’t stop now. The performance is almost done, just a few more steps. Hiyoko basks in the reaction of her audience, they’re there to watch her. She will make it a performance they won’t forget.

As she twirls, flames catch on to the tail of her kimono. She can feel the heat against her legs, the pain is unbearable but she refuses to break the performance. The drum beat begins to die down, the music lowering. It’s almost over. She takes her final few steps, blocking out the flames that surround her.

Nearly there.

Almost done.

The suffering will end.

Hiyoko returns to the center of the stage as the song reaches its climax, she strikes one final pose. Arms raised above her head, fans spread open. Strong, defiant, powerful, talented. Everyone is captivated, applause roars throughout the crowd.

The flames spread, travelling up the rest of her kimono, engulfing her entirely. She can’t hold it in any longer, Hiyoko lets out one long agonising scream. The flaming curtain drops, concealing her body.

Her performance is over.

Chapter End Notes

Phewwww that took a while to edit, I had a lot of fun with it though. I hope you found this trial enjoyable! Two students down!:D
It's all your fault.

You're the reason they died.

You didn't save them.

You let them down.

You're failing everyone.

You made a promise, and you broke it.

The bad thoughts wouldn't leave Hajime's mind, no matter how hard he tried to get rid of them. The deaths of his friends were like an anchor, weighing deep in the pit of his stomach. He felt guilty for a crime he hadn't committed.

It was dawn by the time the students left the courtroom, the sun was beginning to rise in the sky. They returned to their cottages hoping to get some sleep, but none of them had such luck. Hajime barely slept, the guilt kept him awake. Every time he tried to close his eyes it would pounce, waking him up to remind him of his failure. Hajime admitted defeat and got up when the Monokuma alarm sounded at its usual time, he knew he wasn't going to get any rest. He saw it pointless to stay in bed any longer.

The trio from Future Foundation were watching him, what must they be thinking? So much for saving everyone, he'd fallen at the first hurdle. Two people had died right under his nose. He’d been stupid enough to believe that relocating the party was enough to stop the murders from happening. He was furious with himself for being so naive, so blind. Had he paid more attention, Teruteru and Hiyoko would be getting ready for breakfast.

The restaurant was the last place he wanted to go. Not only did it require facing the other students, but it was also the site of Teruteru's murder. Unfortunately, Hajime's appetite was getting the better of him. He was surprised to find himself hungry, after all he'd been stuffing his face only hours ago at the party. He put his increased appetite down to shock, it seemed to be the only logical explanation. With little motivation, he forced himself to get ready, the anchor in his stomach slowed him down considerably.

It took a great deal of courage to walk through the doors to the restaurant. Teruteru's corpse had been cleared away, along with all the evidence. It was like the murder hadn't happened at all, not even a drop of blood remained. Hajime wished it was as easy to remove the image from his mind.

He didn't speak to anyone upon his arrival, he didn't want to. He needed time to himself to try and accept what had happened. Facing the truth was hard, but it was the only way for him to move on. None of the others, besides Chiaki, would understand what he was going through. They wouldn't get why he was so hung up over the deaths, they didn't know that he'd seen Hiyoko and Teruteru die before.

Hajime helped himself to some bland cereal, he saw it wrong to eat something extravagant when the ultimate chef had just died. He sat at the nearest table, unable to sit in his usual seat because it
reminded him of Nagito - the last person he wanted to think about. He'd been trying his best to give the boy a second chance, but that had been a lot easier when Nagito was acting sane. Nagito was a genius, for a second time he'd manipulated everyone into triggering the mutual killings. Hajime hated himself for underestimating the luckster.

A quick scan of the room told Hajime that Nagito wasn't there. Presuming things were the same as last time, Nagito was tied up in the old building courtesy of Nekomaru and Souda. Hajime wasn't worried, Nagito was alright so long as he had food and water. He'd have to face Nagito sooner or later, and he wanted to, he refused to give up on his friend. There was just something that concerned him, Nagito seemed worse than before. Hajime thought by calling himself the ultimate hope he would have some influence over Nagito, but somehow his plan backfired. Nagito had used Hajime's 'talent' and twisted it into an opportunity to murder.

Hajime kept his head down while he ate, not wanting to be included. The atmosphere in the room was stale but the students still attempted to make conversation with each other. They discussed Nagito's disappearance, leading Souda to accidentally reveal the kidnapping. They also posed questions about Teruteru's corpse and how it had completely vanished. Hajime couldn't help but listen in, though he simply shrugged his shoulders whenever someone asked him a question.

The chatter soon died down, no one had the energy to maintain conversation. They were all exhausted, both physically and mentally. Things only livened up when Monokuma appeared, the silence provided him with a captivated audience.

"You all look so depressed, it’s like someone died or something!" the bear laughed cruelly, no one joined in. "Tough crowd!"

"How can you be so disrespectful?" Mahiru shook her head, unable to keep the disgust she felt to herself.

"Actually, I came to see if any of you idiots could help me." Monokuma said. "One of my Monobeasts has disappeared. You seen him?"

"No one cares about your stupid Monobeast." Souda snapped at the bear.

"Those who take care of their creatures do not lose them." Gundam said, passing judgement.

"I suppose that explains it. I did cut their food allowance, it probably went on strike." Monokuma walked away from the restaurant, muttering to himself.

Monomi showed up right away, like she'd been purposely waiting for him to leave. The rabbit was smiling to herself. "I have some wonderful news to share with you."

"Nobody cares, go away." Ibuki rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, fuck off." Fuyuhiko joined in. "You creep me out."

"Please, don't be so cruel!" Monomi cried out in upset.

For once Hajime decided to stand up for the rabbit, she was on his side after all. "Hey Monomi, do you have something to do with that disappearing Monobeast?"

She cheered up instantly, smiling gratefully at Hajime. "Corrrrrwect! I defweated it all by myself."

"You bullshit more than Monokuma." Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes, not buying it.
"Go and see for yourself." Monomi said. "The gate to the second island is open and the path is fweee!"

"We have access to the second island now?" Peko asked.

Monomi nodded. "That's twue."

"Perhaps we should go and explore." Sonia suggested. "There might be a way to escape."

"That's an excellent idea, Miss Sonia." Souda approved eagerly. "Let's go right now. I'll find a way out for the both of us."

"I-it's always good to get some fresh air." Mikan agreed.

"Let's go!" Akane clicked her knuckles. "We're going to find a way off this island."

Hajime shook his head, getting up from the table. It was pointless, he knew there was no escape. “I don’t feel well, I’m going back to my cottage.” he excused himself. He left the table, food unfinished, and hurried down the stairs out of the restaurant. No one tried to stop him.

He already knew the contents of the second island. He didn’t want to stand around and watch the hope die in everyone’s faces when they realised there wasn’t an exit. He’d rather be alone in his cottage where he couldn’t reflect his bad mood onto other people.

He jumped back into bed and pulled the covers over his head, everyone needed to leave him alone. He didn’t like being miserable, but the negative thoughts in his head weren’t going away. He felt like the word ‘failure’ had been branded on his forehead.

He only got five minutes of rest before he was disturbed by a sudden knock at the door. Hajime sighed and pulled the covers even further over his head, hoping the person would go away if he stayed quiet. Unfortunately for him, the knocking continued. The guest at his door was incredibly persistent.

“I know you’re in there, Hajime. I saw you go inside.” a voice said from the other side, he recognised it as Chiaki’s.

“Come in.” he sighed admitting defeat, if he had to speak to anyone then Chiaki would be his first choice.

The door wasn’t locked so Chiaki walked straight inside, closing it gently behind her. “You seem upset.” she said, pointing out the obvious.

“I let Hiyoko and Teruteru down.” Hajime mumbled from underneath the covers. “They were depending on me.”

“It’s not your fault, we never predicted this would happen.” Chiaki reassured him. She sat herself down on the bed, careful not to squish Hajime’s legs.

“I’m in here to save everyone, it’s my duty. I should have been prepared.” Hajime complained, voicing his inner worries.

“You’re not psychic Hajime, there’s nothing you could have done to stop this.” she slowly peeled the covers away so that she could see Hajime’s face. “You can’t give up, we still have a chance to save the others.”
Hajime sat up, he'd started feeling clammy stuffed underneath the duvet. “I...I guess you’re right.”

Chiaki reached into her backpack and pulled out the timeline she’d been storing. “We can’t change the past, so we need to focus on what’s happening next.”

Hajime moved over so he could see the list too. “Tomorrow night, Monokuma is going to introduce Twilight Syndrome Murder Case. That triggers a chain of events which leads to Mahiru’s death.”

“We need to work out how we’re going to stop Mahiru from dying.” Chiaki said, folding the list up and putting it away again.

“We need to save Peko too, I promised Fuyuhiko.” Hajime said sternly, he took promises very seriously.

"Stopping Peko is going to be difficult, she sees herself as Fuyuhiko's tool.” Chiaki said. "We need to stop Fuyuhiko from playing the game...I think.”

“If Fuyuhiko plays that game then it’s too late, Mahiru’s life is in danger. He'll do whatever it takes for revenge.” Hajime pulled his knees up under his chin, hugging them. “I guess I better start thinking of something.”

“You’re smart, Hajime. I know you will.” Chiaki smiled at him.

“Thanks, Chiaki.” Hajime found himself grinning. “I don’t think I could do this without you, I’m really lucky to have you here.”

Chiaki stood up from the bed. “Most of the others are off exploring the second island. I know you already know what’s there, but it might do you some good to come outside.”

Hajime already felt better, Chiaki’s visit had cheered him up considerably. Exploring the island did sound pretty fun, it beat staying curled up in his room. “Yeah, that does sound good.” Hajime jumped out of bed, throwing off the covers completely.

What happened to Teruteru and Hiyoko was terrible, Hajime knew the guilt would never truly leave him, but it was no excuse to mope around all day. There were still fourteen students left, including himself, and he planned on keeping them all alive. He left his cottage with Chiaki, feeling a new sense of determination. Things were going to be okay.

“I’m pretty excited to be back on the second island again.” Hajime admitted, walking along the bridge. "There are so many great books in the library, and I'm craving one of the milkshakes from the diner.”

Chiaki giggled. “I know I just had breakfast but I might have to eat something.”

They started their tour at Chandler Beach, skipping the diner so they could later return for milkshakes and burgers like they’d discussed. They were just in time to watch Nekomaru and Akane fight each other on the sand, Ibuki stood by as a traumatised spectator.

“Hajime! Chiaki!” Ibuki cried out as soon as she saw them. “You have to help, the killings have started again!”

“It’s okay, they’re just training.” Hajime reassured her, he knew Nekomaru and Akane would never hurt each other on purpose.

Chiaki and Hajime stayed for several minutes to watch the fighting, they found themselves
mesmerised - it was hypnotising. Akane put so much concentration into her punches, while Nekomaru was skilled enough to dodge every one.

They found Souda in the beach house, raiding the fridge. “Drink?” he offered them.

“Yeah, I’ll take a soda. Thanks.” Hajime smiled, the tropical heat was making him thirsty.

Souda reached into the fridge and pulled out a drink, he put it to his mouth using his teeth as a bottle opener.

Hajime pulled a face. “Uh, on second thoughts…”

Mikan was in the pharmacy, delighted with all the new medicines they had access to. Though there had been medical supplies at Rocketpunch market, the pharmacy had three times the amount.

Sonia was in the library inspecting a leaflet on Jabberwock Island, the real one. She'd noticed the differences between the island in the leaflet and the island they were staying on, striking up a suspicion within her. Thankfully, she wasn't able to speculate for long since Peko arrived on behalf of Byakuya to bring them to the ancient ruin.

The others were already there, making Hajime one of the last to arrive. He merged his way into the crowd, trying to catch a listen of what they were talking about. They seemed to have already realised that the ruin was Hope's Peak Academy - or at least something similar.

Hajime still had no real idea of what it was like inside the ruin. He'd been in there before but the game had been glitching so his memories were a mess. He knew the passcode so he could have gone inside if he liked - but of course, that would involve explaining everything to the others. With just over two weeks to go, Hajime wanted to keep things innocent for as long as possible. He made the only logical decision and stayed quiet.

“What the fuck is this place?” Fuyuhiko mumbled, straining his neck to stare up at the ruin.

“It appears to be a portal, leading to another realm.” Gundam said dramatically.

Peko crossed her arms, clearly irritated with their unhelpful comments. “I believe it's an ancient ruin, I tried getting inside but the door's locked.”

“A locked door is no match for me!” Nekomaru yelled, his voice as loud as always. “I can break down anything, I’m NEKOMARU NIDAIIII.”

“I wouldn’t be so fast.” Peko said. “Haven’t you seen what’s guarding the door?”

The students moved in closer to see what she was talking about.

“Holy shit!” Souda yelled, grabbing his hat for comfort. “Is that a machine gun?!”

“That’s precisely what it is.” Byakuya said, pushing his way to the front. “This building is clearly dangerous, and as your leader I ban you all from trying to gain entry.”

“Like we’d try that. That’s a freaking gun on the door!” Souda exclaimed.

“That’s not all.” Mahiru observed. “There seems to be something written underneath all that dust.”

Everyone worked together to clean the door, brushing off the dust and moving the roots. Hajime knew that the writing would lead to a conversation about Future Foundation, but he couldn’t do anything to stop them. He played his part and helped clean up. With the dust out of the way, they
were finally able to see. The futuristic keypad shone light in their faces, but it didn't distract them from the engraved symbol.

“What’s that symbol?” Ibuki tilted her head, looking at it from all angles.

“Hmmm.” Nekomaru paused to collect his thoughts. “Looks like it’s Japanese.”

“Ah you’re totally right!” Ibuki exclaimed, fist pumping the air in excitement.

Mikan spoke up timidly, making a contribution. “I-it might just be my m-misunderstanding...but I think it says ‘Mirai’...or ‘Future’.”

"Who cares what it says? I wanna get inside!” Akane moaned impatiently.

"That looks like the keypad for opening the door." Fuyuhiko said.

“Weren’t you listening?” Byakuya narrowed his eyes. “I told you, no one is to try and open that door.”

"I think the keypad requires a password." Chiaki said.

Akane shrugged her shoulders. “There are only so many combinations it could be, we’ll get it open sooner or later.”

“Or, you’ll be blown to pieces when the gun fires because you entered the wrong passcode.” Byakuya snapped. “I’m not having it, no one is to touch it.”

“Dammit!” Fuyuhiko kicked the ground in frustration.

“Whatever is in there must be very important if there are such lengths to protect it.” Sonia said.

“What the hell could be in there?” Souda asked the question they were all thinking.

It was by no surprise that his question brought Monokuma and Monomi to the scene, though both of them stayed incredibly tight lipped - not revealing anything. Monomi tried to steer them off topic by bringing up the hope fragments, but none of them were having it.

"That door looks incredibly sturdy, I wonder what's inside." Monokuma said, his tone teasing.

"You really expect us to believe that you don't know what's in there?" Mahiru glared at him, hands on her hips.

"This is a Jabberwock mystery that even Monomi and I can't solve." Monokuma said. "Do any of you idiots have an idea about what's inside? How about you, Hajime?"

"Uh..." Hajime tried to stay calm, not wanting to give anything away in his reaction. He couldn't believe Monokuma called him out like that...actually, he could. "I don't know what's in there."

To Hajime's relief, no one pressed him with any further questions. Their thoughts were too preoccupied to pick up on what Monokuma said.

"There's definitely someone here who knows how to open this." Fuyuhiko said. "If this isn't something to do with Monokuma, then the traitor has to be in charge of this!"

"You think the t-traitor knows the password?” Mikan asked.
"That is what I just said." Fuyuhiko spoke through gritted teeth.

"S-s-sorry." Mikan whimpered. "I-I didn't mean to repeat w-what you said."

"The traitor must come forth immediately with the password!" Gundam demanded.

"Phuhuhuh." Monokuma laughed, winding them up further.

"What's so funny?!!" Gundam glared at him.

"Have you guys heard of an organisation called World Ender?" Monokuma said, still laughing.

"World Ender?" Byakuya repeated. "I've heard of no such thing."

"What does this organisation do?" Mahiru asked.

"Clue's in the name!" Monokuma said. "Those guys ended the world."

"Ended the world?!" Souda's eyes widened in horror.

"Don't be ridiculous, the world hasn't ended." Byakuya snapped, though he sounded slightly panicked.

"I'm not exaggerating or anything, those guys really did end the world." Monokuma said.

Hajime's knowledge on the state of the world wasn't clear. Even when he'd woken up, he was still stuck on Jabberwock Island. Makoto had provided him with some photos that had given him an idea of what things were like and it didn't look good. He was desperate to get out there for himself and see what the world was really like.

Mikan hugged herself for comfort. "T-the world can't be destroyed."

"Let me guess, you and Monomi are the ones behind this terrible organisation." Byakuya accused Monokuma.

"That would be telling. Though I can tell you that World Ender are responsible for bringing you to this island, and the traitor is working for them." Monokuma revealed, enjoying the despair on everyone's faces.

"Could a member of World Ender really be hiding among us?" Sonia thought aloud. "No, they can't be. Everyone here is so kind."

"You better hurry up and find that traitor before they kill you!" Monokuma warned them.

Monomi stepped in, ready to protect her students. "No one is going to hurt anyone."

"I'll hurt you if you don't shut up!" Monokuma threatened her, extending his claws.

"N-no, please don't." Monomi wept, shielding her face.

"Let's go, Monomi. Your big brother needs to talk to you." Monokuma grabbed Monomi by the ears and dragged her off, ignoring her cries of pain.

Souda scratched his head. "That sure was...something."

"It's just Monokuma spouting his usual nonsense, ignore him." Byakuya instructed.
Hajime decided to bring their gathering to an end before anyone mentioned the traitor again. The last thing he wanted was Chiaki getting caught out. "I think that's enough for one day, we'll drive ourselves crazy if we listen to everything Monokuma says. Why don't we head back?"

"Suits me." Akane agreed. "I wanna get some more training in before dinner."

Hajime's suggestion went down well. The students turned their back on the ruin, they'd had enough of Monokuma's manipulation for one day.

Hajime spent the rest of the day rather peacefully, despite the drama at the ancient ruin. There wasn't long until dinner, so he decided to save milkshakes with Chiaki for another day. Instead, he joined Nekomaru and Akane for their training session on the beach. They forced Hajime to join in but he didn't enjoy it - he could barely do the pushups. It was enough exercise for one day.

The next day was spent in a similar fashion. Hajime had it to enjoy since Monokuma wasn't going to reveal the game until late in the evening. He spent his morning with Mikan in the pharmacy, trying to learn the different types of medicines. Mikan explained everything well but Hajime still didn't understand, he just nodded along so he didn't upset her. After some lunch in the diner with Souda and Chiaki, he hung out on the ranch with Gundam - who even let him stroke the four dark devas.

Hajime returned to his room after dinner, though the day was over it wasn't time to rest. He knew that Monokuma would call for him at any minute to introduce the new motive. Hajime felt determined, he was going to stop that game being played - no matter what it took.

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Emergency! Emergency! Students, head over to Jabberwock park as fast as you can! Come on, hurry up! Whoever gets there first, I’ll treat you to my special made curry rice tomorrow night. Come on, hurry the eff up!”

The offer of curry rice sounded delicious but Hajime knew he had bigger things to focus on. If only Teruteru had still been around to make some…

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Hajime saw the arcade machine as soon as he passed through the trees. It stood there alongside the gigantic television screen. He eyed it up, no changes seemed to have been made, it was the same game. The same game meant the same story, the murder of Fuyuhiko's little sister. A plan began to form in Hajime's mind, it was risky but worth it if he could pull it off. He decided not to discuss it with Chiaki since she was likely to object.

“The curry’s all mine!” Akane cheered, of course she was the first one there.

“You’re fucking stupid to fall for something like that.” Fuyuhiko criticized her.

Ibuki pouted as she joined them. “Awww, am I too late for the curry?”

“Thank you all for waiting!” an irritable voice called out. Monokuma pushed through the crowd of students, sending himself to the front. Everyone was there, besides Nagito who was still tied up.

"Where’s the curry?" Akane yelled, raising her voice in excitement. “I was here first so it’s all mine.”

Monokuma began to describe his disgusting recipe, but he was interrupted by Gundam who had more important things to discuss. “Why did you bring us here, fiend?” Gundam asked him.
“Haven’t you noticed? Gee, you guys sure are slow!” Monokuma teased.

“You’re talking about the arcade machine!” Chiaki stood on her tiptoes for a better view, straining her neck just to take everything in. Though she’d seen the game before, and even completed it, she was grinning from ear to ear.

Monokuma launched into his explanation of the game, warning them it was the next motive - also getting incredibly defensive when the students insulted it. The bear left them with the hint that the game would help restore certain school memories.

With Monokuma gone, the students were left to talk among themselves. It was to no surprise that the new motive dominated the conversation. A couple of them voiced interest in playing the game, but they were quickly shut down by Byakuya.

“Under no circumstances is anyone going to play this game.” their leader instructed, frowning like always. “It’s to be left untouched.”

“You can’t control me.” Fuyuhiko snapped, being purposely defiant. “If I want to play it, then I’ll fucking play it.”

Fuyuhiko was the last person Hajime wanted playing the game. He'd seek revenge and get Mahiru and Peko killed in the process.

“I won’t play the game, and I do not think anyone else should either.” Sonia said, standing her ground.

“Don’t you guys wanna know what’s in that game?” Souda said. “It might help us remember something.”

“If Monokuma’s using it as a motive then it’s probably something awful.” Mahiru pointed out. “I don’t want to remember anything like that.”

“This appears to be some sort of trap, we should just ignore it.” Peko said sternly.

“If everyone agrees not to play this then we have nothing to worry about.” Byakuya said.

Mikan sighed. “A s-slowpoke like me isn’t any good at video games.”

“I certainly won’t be playing it.” Mahiru clarified.

“You really think no one is going to play this because you’re all making a promise?! Pfft.” Fuyuhiko scoffed. “You’re a bunch of idiots. Promises mean shit.”

*Ding dong bing bong*

The sound of the night time announcement broke their discussion. It was for the best since the tension had started to rise.

“We’ll continue this discussion over breakfast.” Byakuya said. “For now, let’s all go back to our cottages and rest.”

Hajime walked with the others back to his cottage, though he had no plans of sleeping. He paced around his room with the door locked, trying to remember everything which happened the last time. He remembered bumping into Fuyuhiko the next morning, he’d been holding the ending prize. It would be too late to hold off his plan until breakfast like Byakuya had said, since Fuyuhiko would
play the game at some point before then. Hajime had to do something to stop him.

He contemplated playing the game first, it would give him the ending prize and stop Fuyuhiko from seeing the photos. However, it was still possible for him to work out his relation to the game thanks to the end credits. Hajime didn’t feel like guarding the game either, it would be impossible to stand by it twenty-four seven, and he couldn’t see many of the other students agreeing to help. There was only one clear option.

An hour passed before he left his cottage, he wanted to guarantee that everyone else was asleep. Certain no one was still awake, he snuck away from his cottage, leaving the hotel as quietly as possible. There was somewhere he had to go before heading back to the park, and that was Rocketpunch market - there was something he had to get.

The market was empty, but he still found himself sneaking around. The plan would be ruined if he got caught. He hurried around the aisles until he found the desired item...a metal bat. It just so happened to be the one that had killed Mahiru the last time, it made Hajime feel guilty just holding it.

Bat in hand, he carried on his journey to the park, adrenaline building up inside of him. He emerged through the clearing, the park was deserted. He confronted the arcade machine, positioning himself right in front of it. It was time to face his enemy.

Hajime took a deep breath to steady himself. Raising his arms, he swung the bat at the machine, hitting it with such force that the screen smashed instantly - it didn’t stand a chance against him. Hajime didn’t stop there, he took a second swing at the machine, this time using even more power. He kept going, whacking the machine with all his might. He refused to stop until the thing was destroyed entirely. His arms were aching but he powered on, he couldn’t take any chances.

“This is for Teruteru and Hiyoko.” he muttered to himself, releasing the anger inside of him with every hit.

The arcade machine fell apart in front of his very eyes, he finally felt safe. It was beyond repair, no one could play the game now. Mahiru and Peko were no longer in danger.

He stopped off at the market on his way back to return the bat to its rightful place, he didn't want to hold onto it any longer. He took his time sneaking back into the hotel, making sure the lights were off in all the cottages. Luck seemed to be on his side since he made it to his room without being disturbed by anyone. His plan had been a success.

Though he made it back safe, Hajime still couldn’t relax. He was very well aware that he’d broken one of Monokuma’s school rules.

‘It is strictly forbidden to damage any facilities on the island, including any monitors or surveillance cameras.’

Hajime had no regrets, it was the decision he’d made and he was going to stick by it. Despite standing by his choice, he couldn’t deny the nerves he felt. Monokuma wouldn’t let him go unpunished. He couldn’t see Monokuma executing him, since Hajime was aware his life wasn’t in any real danger, but that didn’t rule torture out of the question. Any pain inflicted upon him would feel incredibly real, even if it wasn’t.

Hajime tried to reassure himself from these thoughts as he climbed into bed. If the price of saving his friends was Monokuma’s torture, then so be it. He would have to wait until morning to find out what Monokuma had in store for him...
If you're bored you should totally come follow me on tumblr and say hi. I love talking to people, especially about Dangan Ronpa :D (everything-goes-dark.tumblr.com)
Also don't worry there isn't any torture in the next chapter, I'm not that evil haha! But Monokuma will have something up his sleeve ;D
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Gooooood morning, everyone! Looks like today is gonna be another perfect tropical day! Now then, let’s show some enthusiasm and make sure to give it our all today!”

 “Go away!” Hajime yelled at the recording. He knew his words held no power, but it felt good to release some of his anger. All he wanted was a lie in.

He could feel his eyes closing as he brushed his teeth, he had to splash cold water on his face just to stay awake. Destroying the arcade machine had taken a lot of his energy, and kept him up late too.

Hajime bumped into a disgruntled looking Fuyuhiko on his way to breakfast. He felt a sense of relief when he noticed the absence of the ending prize in Fuyuhiko’s hand. After being sworn at to go away, he made his way to the restaurant. There was no sign of Monokuma, Hajime couldn’t understand why he hadn’t shown up to punish him. Maybe he hadn’t noticed his broken arcade machine...he could only hope.

Mahiru stopped Hajime before he’d even sat down, she handed him a tray of toast and milk and told him to take it to Nagito in the old building. Hajime wasn’t thrilled about the idea, especially after the last time when Nagito had asked to be fed. Still, the whole point of coming back to the island was to try and save his friends...Nagito included. Slightly reluctant, Hajime did as Mahiru said and made his way to the old building.

He was ambushed by cobwebs and dust the minute he walked through the door. Since the party was moved to the park, Nagito was never given the opportunity to clean up the place. It was a tip, junk scattered everywhere. Hajime trod carefully, desperately clutching the tray as he climbed over cardboard boxes. It was like an obstacle course just trying to reach the dining hall.

Hajime found himself hesitating before opening the door. Nagito had tried to kill Teruteru and his failure had led to Hiyoko’s death too. It was all thanks to Nagito that the mutual killings had started again and he didn’t even care that people were dying. Was Hajime really ready to face him?...Even if he wasn’t, he didn’t really have a choice. Nagito would starve to death if he didn’t get some food soon. Pushing his own feelings aside, Hajime opened the door, peering his head around the doorframe.

Tied up on the floor, smiling like an idiot, was Nagito. “Hajime? Ah, could it be? Did you take time out of your busy day to bring some food to little old me? Wow, I’m so happy!”

Hajime moved into the room, closing the door with one hand.

Nagito continued with an apology. “As you can see, I can’t exactly greet you with my full hospitality...but feel free to relax.”

Hajime set the tray down on the floor and lowered himself to the ground. He wanted to be patient with Nagito but that was easier said than done. He’d forgotten how frustrating he could be. “Here’s your food.”
“Huh? You’re not going to feed me?” Nagito pouted, staring Hajime straight in the eyes.

Hajime glared at him, he wasn’t a servant and he certainly wasn’t going to hand feed Nagito. He’d find another solution no matter how much effort it took.

“I can’t feed myself since my hands are all tied up.” Nagito explained. He wiggled around on the floor as if to prove further how incapable he was.

Hajime sighed and picked up the toast. “Do you want this buttered?” he could always cram the food in Nagito’s mouth and leave.

“If it’s not too much bother, yes please.” Nagito smiled. Despite being tied up on the floor he seemed rather contempt.

Hajime buttered the toast, he couldn’t understand why Nagito was so happy. “Why are you smiling like that? You’re tied up in a dirty old building.”

"I'm smiling because I'm lucky enough to be in the presence of the ultimate hope." Nagito replied, his eyes coming to life. "Not only that, but the ultimate hope is going to feed me."

“I’m here to give you some food, that’s it.” Hajime said bluntly, he was tired of Nagito constantly referring to him as the ultimate hope. It was his own fault for lying, but still. He was more than just a talent, he was Hajime Hinata, a person with feelings and a personality. He didn’t like being placed and labeled into a box, it felt restricting.

“Thanks to you we were able to make it through the class trial and strengthen the hope of all the ultimates.” Nagito babbled on. "I'm so glad you suggested relocating the party to Jabberwock Park, this wouldn't have been possible without you."

Hajime put down the buttering knife, feeling the sudden temptation to stab Nagito with it. “Thanks to me? I didn’t do anything, you’re the one who tried to kill Teruteru.”

"But that situation wouldn't have been possible without your great idea." Nagito smiled, he looked over at the toast. “Could I have more butter on that?”

Hajime rolled his eyes, but found himself spreading more butter anyway.

Nagito continued. “It’s all thanks to you that we held the party at Jabberwock Park, I knew as soon as you suggested it that it was your hope guiding me. You helped me create an even greater plan. We had to make sacrifices, but it was worth it.”

Hajime couldn’t listen to him any longer. He rammed the toast in Nagito's mouth before he could say anything else. Nagito choked, overwhelmed by the sudden amount of food in his mouth, he'd been caught off guard. Hajime couldn’t deny how satisfying it felt to get a small dose of revenge.

Nagito quickly recovered and made his way through the toast, having to take incredibly small mouthfuls since his mouth wouldn't open very far. Hajime sat there quietly while Nagito ate, he wasn’t in the mood for making conversation anymore. Nagito had tainted the air with a bitter atmosphere. Though the feeling was unpleasant, he refused to leave. He didn’t trust leaving Nagito alone, if he suddenly choked to death Hajime would be the one responsible since he’d forced the food into his mouth.

Nagito struck up conversation again the second he'd finished eating, “By the way, I heard about Monokuma’s new motive. Twilight Syndrome Murder Case, right?”
Hajime nodded, he was willing to talk to Nagito again now that he’d changed the subject. He didn’t mind talking about the game since no one would be able to play it.

“Are you planning on playing the game, Hajime?” Nagito asked him. He tried to lick away the excess butter from around his mouth but his tongue wouldn’t reach.

Hajime thought about passing him a napkin, but quickly realised he’d have to clean it up himself. He decided to let Nagito suffer. “No, I’m not.” he said coldly.

"I think you should. You aren't confronting despair by ignoring it.” Nagito sighed, sounding genuinely disappointed.

*Ding dong, bing bong*

Saved by the bell. The announcement sounded, Nagito had to shut up. The building was in the process of renovation but there was still a monitor attached to the wall. Monokuma’s face appeared on screen.

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. You punks better get your backsides over to Jabberwock park, IMMEDIATELY! Don’t be late, or you’ll regret it.”

The announcement cut. It had to be about the game, there was no other reason for Monokuma to be so angry. Hajime tried his best to remain calm. The idea of a punishment terrified him, but he still believed smashing the game was the right decision.

He pushed himself off the floor. “I guess I better go.”

“Hajime, aren’t you going to untie me?” Nagito asked, sounding panicked.

“Untie you?!” Hajime exclaimed, he had no plans of the sort.

“You heard the announcement. We’re needed over at Jabberwock park.” Nagito said, attempting to lick the butter off his face once again.

Hajime gritted his teeth, as much as he wanted to leave Nagito behind, he didn’t want him getting punished for not showing up. It took a few minutes, but he managed to undo all the ropes and chains -Nekomaru and Souda had done an impressive job.

“Since I’ve united you, you owe me something in return.” Hajime said, holding out his hand to help Nagito up.

“Of course. Anything for an ultimate.” Nagito smiled. His balance was off as he stood up, the result of being tied up for two days.

“You have to shut up the entire way to the park.” Hajime instructed sternly, he was being serious.

Nagito respected Hajime’s request and didn’t say a word the entire journey. The luckster walked peacefully to the park, swinging his arms as if he didn’t have a single care in the world - apparently not upset for being held captive.

The reception upon their arrival wasn’t exactly welcoming. The students greeted them with looks of horror and disgust.

“What the hell is he doing here?” Souda cried out.
“D-did you untie him?” Mikan trembled, her eyes fixated on Nagito, she flinched whenever he moved.

“Monokuma wanted us all here, I had no choice.” Hajime defended his actions. “I couldn’t just leave him behind, he might have been punished.”

“He deserves it.” Fuyuhiko muttered under his breath, just loud enough for Hajime to hear.

“We can worry about him later!” Mahiru said, glaring at Nagito. “For now, we need deal with Monokuma, he seems really mad.”

“It’s obviously about that.” Byakuya extended a chubby finger in the direction of the smashed arcade machine, it looked even worse in daylight.

"Whoever did this must have pretty strong fists, I'm impressed!" Nekomaru exclaimed.

"I don't think someone did this with their hands." Peko corrected him.

"I could destroy it with my bare hands!" Akane claimed, clenching her fists.

"I don't think that was a challenge." Chiaki said.

Sonia approached the machine, inspecting it carefully. "It's ruined, totally beyond repair."

"Seems like someone was pretty keen for us not to play this." Souda said, staring over at the machine...and Sonia.

They were so busy looking at the arcade machine that they didn't hear the arrival of Monokuma and Monomi, causing them all to jump when the bear spoke. "You guys think it’s funny huh, to go around destroying people’s property?!" he stood among them, paw raised and claws extended.

“Please, do not blame all of us for this. I have no idea what’s going on.” Sonia spoke up on behalf of the group.

Monokuma had to know that Hajime was responsible for the damage. Not only would he have been filmed on the security cameras, but Monokuma was aware of Hajime's mission. Hajime couldn’t understand why he wasn’t being thrown to the wolves, Monokuma wasn’t one to show sympathy.

“I poured my heart and soul into that game!” Monokuma shook his head with a defeated sigh.

"Then it appears you wasted your time." Gundam said, practically mocking him.

Akane shrugged her shoulders. “Just make another one, it’s no big deal.”

“Just make another one?!” Monokuma yelled, his eye flashed red. "You think it’s that easy?"

“It was only some dumb video game anyway.” Fuyuhiko wasn't interested in the drama.

Monomi took the opportunity to try and motivate everyone. "Video games aren't important. There are still plenty of ways we can strengthen our friendships with one another."

If Monokuma wasn't so mad with the students, he would have taken the time to beat up his 'little sister'. “I'm going to teach you all a lesson for messing with my things.” he threatened them, claws still on show. “You kids show no respect these days.”

Hajime felt his body tense up, he was about to be punished. What torturous sadistic creation did
Monokuma have waiting for him? Would he spend the rest of his time in the simulation with his body torn in pieces?

“To teach you some respect for other people’s property, I’m revoking your rights to the cottages.” Monokuma said, a smug grin forming on his face.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Souda raised his eyebrows.

“It means...” Chiaki paused her sentence to yawn. "We're banned from our cottages."

“Banned?” Gundam repeated.

“That’s right. All of your cottages have been locked until I say otherwise.” Monokuma said, enjoying his power trip.

“I’ll just break down the door with my fist!” Akane yelled, punching the air for practice.

"A new addition to the school rules, anyone who tampers with a locked door will be executed. The same goes for breaking windows.” Monokuma warned them.

Hajime felt his e-handbook vibrate from his pocket. Had the rule been added that quickly? Monokuma worked fast.

“But where are we supposed to sleep?” Sonia asked, her forehead creased with worry.

“It’s d-dangerous outside.” Mikan whimpered, voice filled with fear.

“Well you should have thought of that before ruining my game.” Monokuma raised his paw again, causing Mikan to scream.

Souda folded his arms in a sulk. “This is so unfair.”

"You expect the four dark devas to live outside? This is an abomination!” Gundam raised his voice in disgust.

"They're hamsters, don't they belong outside or somethin'?" Souda questioned him...it was a mistake.

"How very dare you!" Gundam roared. "The four dark devas have more purpose in life than you ever will."

"Hey!" Souda complained, looking dangerously close to tears. "Those fuc-"

"Souda, please!" Sonia snapped. "It is impolite to raise your voice like that."

"But...but..." Souda was taken for words, unable to get his point across.

“When do we get our cottages back?” Nagito frowned, asking the most important question.

“Hmmm, I dunno.” Monokuma paused to concoct an answer. "How about...after the next murder occurs!” he finished his sentence with an evil laugh.

“That’s so cruel!” Monomi gasped in horror. The students found her so insignificant they’d forgotten she was there.

“Shut up, Monomi!” Monokuma relieved some of his anger by punching her in the face, using as much force as he could. "Take this you pathetic rabbit!”
“Owww, it hurts when you do that.” Monomi cried out as she flew backwards across the park, landing in an uncomfortable position.

“Will you quit complainin’?” Akane glared at Monomi.

“Yeah, fuck off you molerat.” Fuyuhiko spat, making a cruel comparison.

"M-molerat?" Monomi hung her head in sorrow. "Why are you all so mean to me? All I want is the best for you."

“Come on Monomi, stop throwing your own pity party. Let’s go.” Monokuma snapped. He dragged Monomi away by the ears, leaving the students to reflect on what they’d just been told.

“Someone needs to fess up, who did this?!“ Akane demanded. Hajime didn’t want to answer since she was punching the air again.

“Let’s not blame anyone.” Chiaki said calmly, she most likely knew it was Hajime. “It’s not going to help the situation.”

“I think the perpetrator might have done us all a favour.” Byakuya said.

Souda stared at him as if he were mad. “How? We’ve been kicked out of our cottages! We're all going to die now."

"Don't overreact." Byakuya pursed his lips. “This game was Monokuma’s next motive, it had to be something dangerous if it was powerful enough to trigger another murder. Now we’ll never have the chance to play it, rejoice.”

“I guess you’re right…” Mahiru said. “We won’t have to worry about people sneaking off to play the game. No one can use it to their advantage now."

“What are we going to do about sleeping arrangements?” Sonia changed the subject, the issue seemed to be bothering her.

“Let’s pull an all nighter until Monokuma gives back the cottages.” Nekomaru suggested.

“You heard what he said, we don’t get those back until the next murder occurs.” Peko reminded him.

Souda put forward an idea. “Why don’t we set up camp in groups? If we’re sleeping in the open, then it’s best not to do it alone.”

“That’s a wonderful idea, Souda.” Sonia smiled at him, clapping her hands together.

Souda’s cheeks flushed pink. “Thank you, Miss Sonia. You can be in my group if you -”

Sonia cut him off, excited by her own idea. “We should separate into girls and boys.”

Souda pouted. “But I really think -”

“Yayyyyy it’ll be like one giant sleepover!” Ibuki cheered, not giving Souda time to finish. “We can have pillow fights in our underwear.” she added with a snort.

“There’s no way I’m missing that.” Souda complained, a hint of drool falling from his mouth.

“I’m not sleeping near any of you, I’m doing my own thing.” Fuyuhiko crinkled his nose in disgust.
"Everyone is sticking to the sleeping arrangement, that's your leader's order." Byakuya said sternly. "Boys together and girls together."

"You can’t force me." retorted Fuyuhiko. "I’ll do whatever the fuck I want."

"And I will do whatever it takes." Byakuya folded his arms, he meant business. "And could you please refrain from using such vile language?"

"Lay a finger on me and I’ll fucking kill you!" Fuyuhiko hissed, eyes narrowed.

"Uh, let’s deal with that later…” Hajime changed the subject in a panic. "Where are we going to sleep?"

"S-somewhere indoors in case it rains?" Mikan suggested, though it hadn't rained once during their time on the island.

"Well obviously." Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes.

"Ahhh! I’m s-sorry for suggesting something so stupid and obvious.” Mikan cowered, mentally punishing herself.

"How about the airport?" Mahiru said. "I’ve slept in one before when my flight was delayed."

"That’s why you fly privately.” Byakuya sighed with a shake of his head.

"The airport sounds good since there’s lots of space.” Chiaki nodded in agreement.

"The market stocks sleeping bags, I’ve seen them in there." Peko added.

"This is sooooo exciting!” Ibuki grinned, barely containing herself.

Sonia clapped her hands together in delight. “I’ve never slept in an airport before, I can’t wait.”

"And where are you going to sleep?” Mahiru directed her question at Souda, making it clear he wasn’t invited.

Souda responded with a shrug of his shoulders. “I dunno. Us boys could sleep in the restaurant?”

"Jeez, no that’s disgusting. We have to eat in there!” Mahiru complained, hands firmly on her hips.

Gundam made the decision for them. “We shall take our slumber at the beach house on Chandler Beach.”

“It’s not as big at the airport, but I guess it’ll do.” Hajime nodded his head in agreement. He couldn’t think of anywhere else more suitable.

“There’s a bathroom there, so I’m happy. It’s always important to be close to a toilet in case you need to shit!” Nekomaru boomed.

Hajime wrinkled his nose, he seriously hoped the walls at the beach house were thick, he didn’t fancy smelling things when Nekomaru was in the bathroom.

“So it’s agreed. The girls will be sleeping in the airport, and the boys will be sleeping in the beach house.” Byakuya clarified.

“This is gonna be awesome!” Ibuki cheered.
Hajime didn’t share her feelings of excitement. There wasn’t much room in the beach house to begin with, it was going to be worse with the likes of Byakuya and Nekomaru in there. He wasn’t sure how he felt about the punishment either. On the one hand, he’d been let off pretty lightly. Monokuma hadn’t tried to torture him or even attempt an execution. But what Monokuma had done was far more powerful. He knew Hajime was trying to keep everyone alive, and by locking up the cottages he’d made Hajime’s job even harder. He was punishing Hajime by trying to trigger another murder,

“Well, I guess that’s everything.” Byakuya said. “We can go and get supplies later. For now, I’m going back to my breakfast.”

The students took the opportunity to leave the park, most of them returning to the restaurant for some food. Though the cottages were locked, Monokuma had left the lobby and restaurant untouched.

“Hey, Hajime. Can I talk to you?” Chiaki asked, she grabbed hold of his arm to keep him back.

“Uh sure.” Hajime nodded, she was probably mad at him for destroying the game. “Where do you want to go?”

Since they couldn’t go to their cottages and talk privately, they settled for the ranch as it was currently empty. Hajime leant his back against the gate, he wanted to apologise before Chiaki could get upset. “I know you’re probably mad at me for smashing that game up...”

“I’m not.” Chiaki interrupted with a smile. “I think you made the right decision.”

“You do?” Hajime raised his eyebrows at her. It wasn’t the response he’d been expecting.

“It was a little irrational, yes. And it could have gotten you punished. But I think it’s the only way we could have stopped everyone from playing that game.” Chiaki said.

“This isn’t over yet, Monokuma has provided us with a new motive.” Hajime reminded her, though he was genuinely relieved that she wasn't angry.

“I don’t think someone would commit a murder just to get their cottage back...” Chiaki said gently.

“I guess.” Hajime sighed, it would be extreme. “I’m just trying to be extra cautious, I refuse to let anyone else die. Two people is already too many.”

“I know you’re worried.” Chiaki said. “But it’s impossible to keep a twenty-four hour surveillance on everyone.”

Hajime knew Chiaki was right, but he still found it difficult to listen to her. He’d made a promise to himself to save everyone, he was determined to do so even if meant being paranoid. “I guess for now, all I can do is try.”

“That’s the spirit.” Chiaki said supportively. “And don’t forget, Monomi and I are helping to keep everyone safe too.”

Hajime didn’t agree that Monomi had done anything useful, but he nodded along all the same. “We’ve got this.” he grinned. “I think I’m going to head back to the restaurant for something to eat. Are you coming?”

Chiaki shook her head, declining the offer. “I think I’m going to stay here with the animals a little while longer. I might take a nap...”

"I'll see you later then.” Hajime waved goodbye to Chiaki, leaving her behind at the ranch so she
could find somewhere on the grass to sleep. He barely made it a few steps up the road when he was stopped in his tracks by Byakuya.

“Hajime, you’re coming with me!” Byakuya instructed.

“I am?” Hajime raised his eyebrows.

“Follow me.” Byakuya grabbed Hajime by the wrist and dragged him in the direction of the market. Hajime wasn’t given any choice in the matter, he followed behind like a lost dog.

“Since I’m the group leader, I’ve been put in charge of getting supplies for our new sleeping arrangements.” explained Byakuya once they reached the market. “And you’re going to help me.”

Hajime sighed, if only he’d have spent five minutes more talking to Chiaki, he wouldn’t have ended up as Byakuya’s personal assistant...slave.

Hajime reluctantly followed Byakuya around the market, holding onto the sleeping bags and pillows that were thrown at him. The pile was getting higher and higher, Hajime could barely see over the top. The market seemed to stock everything, and he was glad, despite being on an island it got pretty chilly at night. Sleeping bags and blankets were going to make sleeping in the beach house more of a pleasant experience.

Byakuya took Hajime to the beach house when he was finally satisfied with their collection. The two of them worked together, setting out sleeping bags and pillows, trying their best to maximise the space.

Hajime couldn’t help but sigh, there was hardly any room to walk. It was going to be a tight squeeze, that was for sure.

Chapter End Notes

Twilight Syndrome Murder Case might be gone for now, but it'll be back later in the story to play an important role ;D
Sorry this chapter took a little longer to get out. This week was kind of crazy, I went back to college and also had my car theory test (which I passed - yay!). So any free time I had was spent on work/revision D: I'm going to stop waffling now haha. I hope you enjoy! ^.^

With the sleeping arrangements sorted, Byakuya freed Hajime from being his slave, allowing him to do as he pleased. Hajime scattered off as quickly as his legs would carry him, afraid Byakuya's mind would change. He'd had enough manual labour for one day.

He made his next destination the library, his goal to find a good book which would take his mind off things. It seemed like Monokuma wasn't going to push the matter of the broken arcade machine any further, but Hajime could never be sure. He pushed open the double doors to the library and walked inside, being careful not to trip over the fallen Monomi statues.

“Good day, Hajime.” Hajime hadn't spotted her at first, he thought he was alone. Sonia was standing in the far corner, concealed by books - almost making her invisible.

“Oh hey, I didn’t see you there.” Hajime waved, approaching Sonia with a smile. It would be nice to have some company.

Sonia giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. “The best books are always tucked away in the cooks and rannies!”

“I think it’s said, nooks and crannies.” Hajime corrected her, unsure what else Sonia could mean.

Sonia continued to giggle. “I always get my sayings muddled up.” in her hand she held a book, it was a hardback and looked incredibly heavy.

“What’s that you’re reading?” Hajime asked, he couldn’t see the name of the book since her hand was blocking the title.

“It’s a book on serial killers!” Sonia beamed, happy to talk about something she loved so much. “It’s a fascinating read. They even have my favourite in here, Genocide Jack.”

Hajime couldn’t get his head around her obsession. He tried to brush over it, if that were even possible. “Is it a good thing to have a favourite serial killer?”

“There are others in here too, like Sparkling Justice and ooh….” Sonia found herself overwhelmed with excitement, causing her arms to swing out as she spoke - in the process, hitting Hajime's face with the gigantic book.

“Shit!” Hajime lost his balance, caught off guard. He tried reaching out to regain it, but failed miserably. He collapsed to the floor, pulling down an endless amount of books with him.

“Oh my goodness, I am so sorry!” Sonia towered over him, her cheeks flushed red. “Are you alright?”
“Uh…” Hajime wasn't quite sure how to respond, he was still trying to process what had just happened.

"Oh my, your face!" Sonia gasped, a look of horror cast upon her own.

"My face? What's wrong with my face?" Hajime cried out in panic, from Sonia's reaction it wasn't good.

“Stay there!” Sonia instructed, blatantly ignoring his question. “I will go and get help.”

He didn't have a chance to stop her. She rushed out of the library, leaving Hajime on the floor drowning in books. His face was stinging like crazy, especially his left eye. Who knew a book could do so much damage?! He had no choice but to wait for Sonia's return, which made him feel incredibly helpless.

It was by no surprise that the person Sonia had summoned for help was Mikan. Whether she was nearby by chance, or if Sonia had sought her on purpose, Hajime didn’t know - he was just glad to have some help.

“He’s over there.” Sonia pointed, showing Mikan where to go.

“H-Hajime?” Mikan said timidly. “Are you okay?”

“I just got hit around the face with a massive book, what do you think?” Hajime snapped, annoyed at being asked something so obvious.

“I...I’m s-sorry for asking something so stupid.” Mikan whimpered, eyes filling with tears.

The familiar feeling of guilt crept up on Hajime, something he was experiencing far too often for his liking. He knew Mikan was the sort of person who responded badly to sarcasm. She’d come to help and he’d upset her. He softened his tone. “Thanks for coming to help me.”

“T-that’s okay.” Mikan had brought with her a miniature first aid kit, she knelt down on the floor next to Hajime and inspected his face. Meanwhile, Sonia collected up the books which Hajime had dragged to the ground with his fall.

Hajime winced as Mikan touched his face, it stung badly. “Ow!”

“W-well, you aren’t bleeding.” Mikan reported. “But...I think you’re developing a black eye.”

Hajime frowned, which only hurt his face further, a black eye was the last thing he needed.

“If...if you come with me I can put some ice on your eye. It’ll help ease the pain.” Mikan said, packing away the contents of her first aid kit.

“That sounds good.” Hajime nodded, forcing himself up from the floor. So much for a quiet afternoon in the library.

“I am truly sorry, Hajime.” Sonia apologised again, feeling a great deal of shame. “That was not graceful of me at all.”

“It’s okay.” Hajime smiled to reassure her he wasn’t annoyed. “Accidents happen.”

They left in search for some ice, though Sonia stayed behind to finish cleaning up the mess. Hajime kept his left eye shut the entire time under Mikan's instructions, though it was a lot harder walking with only one eye open - as he quickly found out. He thought about asking Mikan if he could hold
her hand, to ensure he didn’t trip over anything, but quickly decided against it. He realised the girl would most likely freak out at the suggestion.

“S-since it’s nearby...we...we can go to the diner for some ice.” Mikan said as they walked, refusing to make eye contact. “I-it’s easier than going back to the restaurant.”

“I’m really lucky to have the ultimate nurse here!” Hajime laughed, trying to make light of the situation.

“You...you’re lucky to have me?” Mikan squealed, finally looking at Hajime.

“Well of course.” Hajime smiled, he still felt bad for snapping at her earlier. “You look out for everyone.”

“T...thank you, Hajime.” even with only one eye open, Hajime saw her cheeks flush scarlet.

The diner was empty so they could sit wherever they liked. Hajime chose one of the booths since he wanted a window seat. Mikan headed out back in search of ice, leaving Hajime to amuse himself for a few minutes. He passed the time staring into the parking lot, wondering why it existed if there weren't any cars on the island. It silly to think about but it distracted him from the pain.

Mikan returned from the kitchen, clutching an ice pack. She slid into the booth next to Hajime and pressed it over his eye with care. “Sorry, it’s a little cold.”

Hajime winced the moment it touched him. ‘A little cold’ was a total understatement, but he held his tongue and resisted saying something of a sarcastic nature.

“I...I can get you some painkillers too.” Mikan offered, wanting to do everything in her power to make him feel better.

Hajime like being around Mikan, she was patient and nurturing - constantly making sure that he was okay. He understood why she’d earned the title of the ultimate nurse, she did her job exceptionally well. He felt safe in her company.

“You’re really good at looking after people.” Hajime smiled, his way of saying thank you for all her hard work.

“I like looking after people.” Mikan said. “It...it’s the only thing I’m good at.”

Hajime felt bad for Mikan, her self-esteem was pitiful. Unlike Hajime she actually had a talent, yet she couldn't see anything good in herself. He was back in the Neo World Program to help his friends...help them in more ways than one. "That's not the only thing you're good at, there are so many other things.”

"W-well I guess I'm alright at taking my clothes off. That makes p-people happy." Mikan said. "W-would you like me more if I took my clothes off?"

"What?! No, please keep your clothes on!” Hajime exclaimed in alarm. "But that's not what I mean. You're caring, considerate and you certainly make me feel a lot safer. Everyone wants you here, you’re our friend.”

“Friend?” Mikan squealed, making sure she hadn't misheard him.

“Of course.” Hajime nodded enthusiastically. “You’re a great friend to me, Mikan. I really appreciate everything you’ve done.”
Mikan giggled, a look of pure delight on her face. "T-thank you, Hajime. No one has ever been this kind to me before."

It was sweet, but also kind of sad.

They stayed in the diner for most of the afternoon. After the incident, Hajime didn't have the energy to do much else. Mikan was more than attentive, bringing Hajime ice when he needed it and getting him milkshakes to keep his spirits up. He had a lot of fun and was almost disappointed to leave when it was time to go to dinner.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHH!” Souda screamed at Hajime the minute he walked into the restaurant.
“What happened to your eye?!”

“She hit me with a book.” Hajime explained. Was his eye really that bad that Souda had to scream?

Sonia, hearing her own name, looked up from her dinner. “Yes, I’m ashamed to say it’s all my fault.” she lowered her head. “I got carried away.”

“W...what were you doing with Miss Sonia?!” Souda snapped, showing no sympathy at all. “Why were you getting carried away?!”

“H...Hajime?” a small voice said.

Hajime turned around to see who it was. There stood Mikan holding a large plate of food, trying to pass it over to him.

He wasn't exactly sure what she was trying to do. “Do you want me to hold this?” he asked in confusion, unsure whether to take the plate or not.

Mikan shook her head, persistent with the plate. “N...no, it’s for you. It’s all your favourite foods.”

Hajime looked down at the plate, sure enough there were all his favourites. How Mikan knew them, he had no idea. “Oh, thanks.” Hajime gratefully took the plate. He knew Mikan wanted to help but she didn’t need to get his dinner for him.

He sat with Souda while he ate. It hadn’t taken long to rebuild their friendship since Souda was so easy to get along with. Hajime had his friend back. If only things were as easy with Fuyuhiko...

Souda picked at the pizza on his plate, beginning to struggle after seven slices - it seemed like a good idea at the time. He looked across at Hajime and started to snicker, his attempt at being discreet failing.

“Are you laughing at my eye?” Hajime glared him, it was the sort of thing Souda would find funny.

Souda shook his head. “I’m laughing because Mikan keeps staring at you.”

Hajime couldn’t see Mikan, his back was facing her, but he didn’t understand what was so funny about it. “She’s probably worried about my eye.”

Souda laughed again, this time through a mouthful of food. “I mean really staring. Like a stalker or somethin’.”

Hajime didn’t know how Souda had the nerve to call Mikan a stalker when he spent most of his time running after Sonia. He shrugged off the matter. He’d spent his afternoon trying to make Mikan feel better so he wasn’t going to suddenly bully her. “Whatever.”
Souda, thankfully, dropped the subject and they spent the remainder of their time talking about other things. Mainly Souda complaining that he’d had too much to eat. Hajime was too busy dealing with his own pain to give him any sympathy.

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The time soon came, the students had to spend their first night sleeping in groups. Hajime was going to miss the privacy of his cottage, he could already tell that Nekomaru was a snorer. The girls said their goodbyes and left for the airport, leaving the boys to make their way to the beach house.

The sleeping bags were already spread out since Hajime and Byakuya had prepared them earlier that morning. With everyone inside there was barely any room to move about.

Hajime opted for the sleeping bag furthest from the shower room, though it was out of order, the toilet worked perfectly. With Nekomaru in the group, only an idiot would decide to sleep near there. The other boys took their places, Hajime was pleased to see Souda taking the sleeping bag to his right. So long as he didn’t have any dreams about Sonia, it would be okay. He turned to his left, praying it wasn’t Byakuya. Stepping into the sleeping bag was Nagito. Hajime sighed, Nagito hadn’t shown up to dinner so he’d sort of forgotten about him.

“What happened to your eye?!” Nagito exclaimed.

Hajime sighed, he was sick of explaining the story to everyone. He might as well just hold up a sign. “It was an accident involving Sonia and a very heavy book.”

“It looks painful.” Nagito remarked. Though his comment was more of an observation, rather than sympathy.

“Yeah, that’s because it is.” Hajime replied shortly.

Nagito offered him no more attention than that and changed the subject. “I hope you don’t mind sleeping so close to someone like me.”

“It’s fine.” Hajime replied through gritted teeth, he wasn’t in the mood for fighting.

“Ugh, is he here?!” Souda groaned, glaring over at the luckster.

Byakuya clapped his hands together, calling for everyone’s attention. “The lights are going off as soon as the Monokuma announcement finishes.” he said it like they were a bunch of naughty school children. It wasn’t like Hajime was going to sit up until three in the morning painting Gundam’s nails, doing dares and singing karaoke. All he wanted was to sleep.

Byakuya continued, his tone firm. “No one is to leave the beach house until the announcement sounds tomorrow morning. No sneaking off to the airport.”

“Hey! Why’d you look at me when you said that?” Souda complained.

Nekomaru climbed out from his sleeping bag, heading in the direction of the shower room. “Hang on, I need to take a shit.” Hajime knew he’d made the right decision to stay well away.

“This is bullsh*t, I’d rather sleep outside.” Fuyuhiko snapped, seconds away from losing it entirely.

“Well, you can’t. We’re all sleeping in here and that’s an order.” Byakuya spoke coldly, showing no consideration.
“I don’t give a crap.” Fuyuhiko stood up and grabbed his sleeping bag. “I’m sleeping in the closet.”

The closet wasn’t very big, but there was enough room to hold a person - especially someone of Fuyuhiko’s size. At least Fuyuhiko would get some privacy. Hajime was slightly annoyed with himself for not thinking up the idea first.

“That’s fine.” Byakuya didn’t object since the closet was still technically inside the beach house. With Fuyuhiko out the way, the boys had a little more room to move around.

Nekomaru returned from the shower room just as the Monokuma announcement sounded. Byakuya wasn’t joking, he turned the lights out right away. Hajime slid down into his sleeping bag. He knew the night ahead was going to be a long one...

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Hajime’s predictions were right, he got very little sleep. Not only did he feel uncomfortable sleeping on the floor, but his roommates weren’t the quietest of sleepers. Nekomaru snored, and when he didn’t he was getting up for the toilet. Souda talked in his sleep, mumbling nonsense. Gundam’s hamsters kept squeaking, and Byakuya’s sleeping bag sounded like it was splitting every time he rolled over. Perhaps having Nagito next to him wasn’t so bad after all, at least he slept peacefully.

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Gooooood morning, everyone! Looks like today is gonna be another perfect tropical day! Now then, let’s show some enthusiasm and make sure to give it our all today!”

The Monokuma alarm still sounded, despite the cottage shutdown. Hajime woke up feeling terrible, it had been an awful night’s sleep. His neck and back were both aching and his eye felt more painful than ever. His head was pounding and the day had only just begun.

Hajime wanted nothing more than a cold shower, but the shower in the beach house wasn’t working and he was banned from his cottage. He’d have to settle for a swim in the sea after breakfast. He’d slept in his clothes since he didn’t feel like baring all to his classmates, he liked them...but not that much.

“Good morning, Hajime.” Nagito said cheerily, sitting up in his sleeping bag. He was so happy it was like a sequence from a cheesy film.

Hajime couldn’t understand how Nagito had so much energy that early in the morning. “Yeah, hey Nagito.” he didn’t feel like talking but he didn’t want to be rude.

“Did you sleep well?” Nagito asked, putting on his large jacket which he’d taken off to sleep.

“No.” Hajime answered bluntly, crawling out of his sleeping bag. “What about you?”

“I slept really well!” Nagito smiled. He’d somehow slept through all the snoring and Nekomaru’s frequent toilet breaks. “How’s your eye doing?”

“I don’t know, ask it yourself.” Hajime said, making a poor joke in the attempt to cheer himself up.

Nagito leaned back his head and laughed, finding the joke pretty amusing.

It made Hajime feel the slightest bit better, at least someone found him funny. “It hurts a lot.” he said, offering Nagito a serious reply this time. “But I’m starting to get used to the pain, so that’s something.”
“That looks painful, man!” Souda butted into their conversation. He was still lying in his sleeping bag, his hair an unruly mess without his hat to tame it.

The boys began their morning routines and started to get ready. The door to the shower room was locked, but surprisingly it wasn’t occupied by Nekomaru. According to Souda, Gundam had gone in there to fix his eyeliner and ‘look pretty’. Nekomaru was starting his day by performing stretches, Byakuya was polishing his glasses, and Fuyuhiko was still hiding out in the closet.

Byakuya caught their attention by raising his voice. “You’ve all had long enough to get ready. Let’s go!” he stormed over to the closet and tore open the door - exposing Fuyuhiko who was, thankfully, fully dressed.

“What the fuck?!” Fuyuhiko yelled, loud enough to wake up the entire island. “I could have been naked.”

“Well, you weren’t.” Byakuya said, matter-of-factly.

Souda propped himself up on his elbows and leaned over to Hajime. “I reckon Fuyuhiko’s height isn’t the only thing that’s short.” he gave an obvious wink. “If you know what I’m talking about…”

Hajime rolled his eyes, ignoring Souda. It wasn't something he wanted to picture.

Byakuya came for Souda next, kicking the foot of his sleeping bag. “You need to get up too.”

“Oh! I think you bruised me.” Souda yelped, rubbing his leg to prove a point.

Gundam stood in the doorway to the shower room with a smirk on his face, his eyeliner freshly done. “Foolish mortal, you’re so pathetically weak. You don’t even know the meaning of pain.”

“It really hurts!” Souda winged, feeling deserving of more sympathy.

“You think that’s painful? Try having this!” Hajime pointed to his black eye, he was yet to inspect it in the mirror but he knew it would be looking worse. Souda was making a fuss over nothing.

Byakuya forced everyone out the beach house, unable to take any more arguing. It was a miracle his hair hadn’t turned grey from all the stress.

The girls were already at the restaurant, eating their breakfast. They had a shorter distance to travel since the airport was located on the first island too. They greeted the boys with pleasant hellos and wide smiles, none of them looking particularly tired.

“Ah, H-hajime there you are!” Mikan jumped up from her table. She picked up a plate of pastries and made her way over to him. “This is for y-you.”

“You got me my food...again?” Hajime smiled weakly, he didn’t want to upset her by being rude but he was more than capable of getting it for himself. He didn’t like being weighted on when it wasn’t necessary. “That’s uh, good of you, but my eye really isn’t that bad.”

Mikan smiled. “That’s not the only reason. We’re friends, right? That’s what friends do.”

Souda leaned over and whispered in Hajime’s ear. “I told you she’s a stalker.”

“Shut up.” Hajime mumbled, worried Mikan might have heard. “Well uh, thanks again. It’s really nice of you.”

He left her with nothing more than an awkward smile, taking his food to his favourite table. Souda
ditched him, he was getting his Sonia fix since he hadn’t seen her in a whole ten hours. Nagito came instead to keep him company.

“So Hajime, what are your plans for the day?” Nagito asked, making conversation from across the table.

Hajime shrugged his shoulders, he hadn’t really planned anything. “I dunno. I think I’ll just relax somewhere. But I’ll be staying away from the library, I don’t fancy getting any other injuries.” he added with a grin.

Nagito laughed. “That sounds fun, maybe we -” he was cut off before he could finish.

Souda had finally decided to join them, and considered what he had to say more important. “Psst, Hajime.” he hissed.

“Why are you whispering? I’m right here.” Hajime raised his eyebrows at the mechanic.

“Shh! Lower your voice.” Souda waved his arms in a panic. “Today, two-thirty...come to Rocketpunch Market.”

It seemed like the girls were having their beach party again. Hajime couldn’t think of any other reason why Souda would want to see him.

“That sounds fun.” Nagito smiled in Souda’s direction.

“I was talking to Hajime, not you.” Souda glared back. “So, Hajime are you coming?”

It wasn’t like Hajime had much choice, if he said no Souda would only pester him. He might as well give in from the start. “Sure, I’ve got nothing better to do.” he sighed, not meaning for it to sound so insulting.

“I’ll see ya later then.” Souda gave him an obvious wink before heading back to Sonia’s table. His visit hadn’t lasted long.

Nagito spoke up once Souda was out of earshot. “I wonder what he wants…”

Hajime shrugged, playing it down. “Yeah, I have no idea. Weren’t you saying something before he interrupted you?” eager to return to their original topic.

“Oh, that’s right.” Nagito nodded. “I was going to ask if you wanted to hang out together this afternoon, but it appears you’re busy now.” the disappointment clear in his voice.

“I’m still free this morning.” Hajime pointed out.

Nagito shook his head with a sigh. “I’m busy this morning, I have plans with Mikan.”

“Mikan?” Hajime repeated in surprise. “I didn’t know you two were friends.”

“I need to talk to her about something, it’s nothing important though.” Nagito said, moving on before Hajime could ask questions. “But there are plenty of other days for us to hang out together, so it’s not a problem.”

Nagito didn’t stick around once he’d finished his food, he cleaned up his plate and left the restaurant with Mikan. Hajime wasn’t sure what Nagito wanted to talk to her about, but he thought it would do Mikan some good. He was trying his best to make her feel important.
“Good morning, Hajimeee!” Hajime wasn’t left alone for long, Ibuki planted herself in the seat Nagito had just abandoned.

“Hey.” Hajime replied, wishing he had as much energy as Ibuki.

Ibuki pouted at him, leaning across the table. “Is something wrong? You look sad.”

“I’m alright, I just had a rough night.” Hajime explained. He wasn't sad, just exhausted.

“Ibuki won’t allow Hajime to stay down!” she said, unhappy to see any of her friends in a bad mood. “Ibuki will do something about this.” Hajime wasn't sure if she actually meant it, but it was nice of her all the same.

Hajime took his time leaving the restaurant, it wasn't like he hadn't anywhere better to go. He was missing the privacy of his cottage more than ever. After his third glass of juice, he decided it was a good time to leave. He didn't want to waste the entire morning stuck inside.

Mahiru caught up with him of his way out of the hotel grounds, waving her camera about. She asked if he'd like to model for some photography she was working on. He made his mind up as soon as Mahiru mentioned that Chiaki was helping too. Hajime didn't particularly like having his picture taken, but it sounded like fun and the sort of thing he needed to cheer up. A very grateful Mahiru took him to the beach, since she insisted it had the best lighting. Chiaki was already there and looked especially happy to see Hajime. The photos started off serious, but soon enough Chiaki and Hajime were sticking their tongues out and crossing their eyes. Mahiru laughed at them from behind the camera, enjoying herself just as much. Hajime wished he could take the pictures out of the Neo World Program with him, it would be nice to have something of Chiaki to hold onto. She would become nothing more than a memory once the rewrite completed.

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As promised, Hajime went to Rocketpunch Market at half two to meet with Souda. Fifteen minutes passed before Souda bothered to show up. Fifteen minutes wasted which Hajime would never get back. Great.

Souda greeted him casually, with no apology for his lateness. Hajime knew exactly what was coming.

“I overheard something amazing at breakfast. The girls are going for a splash around at the beach, it's all Miss Sonia's idea.” Souda explained, a soppy grin plastered across his face.

“And let me guess...you want me to come with you?” Hajime said.

“The idea of seeing Miss Sonia in a bikini makes my heart wanna explode.” Souda drooled.

Hajime laughed to himself with the knowledge that Sonia would turn up in a wetsuit. Still, he'd let the boy dream.

Souda continued. “I need you to be my wingman. You and I can be at the beach and ‘accidentally’ run into the girls.”

“I think that’s a little obvious…” Hajime frowned, he didn't want to seem like a pervert too.

"Nah it’s fine. We’ll just get there first.” Souda said, confident his plan would succeed. “They’re heading to the beach on the second island, so we’ll go to the diner first. That way it'll definitely look like a coincidence.”
It still seemed obvious, but Hajime wasn’t going to protest any further. Changing Souda’s mind required too much effort.

They arrived at the diner with an entire hour to kill. Hajime helped to himself to some fries in the attempt to pass the time. He was eating purely out of boredom, it hadn’t been long since he’d had lunch. He gazed out of the window as he ate, it was more interesting than staring at Souda. He half expected to see an upset Hiyoko run by, but of course, she was dead. Besides, Fuyuhiko hadn’t learnt the truth about his sister this time around so there was no reason for Mahiru to die.

“Hey, Hajime.” Souda snickered. “Your stalker's here.”

The door to the diner swung open and in walked Mikan. “Ahhhhhhhh!” she squealed as soon as she saw the boys.

“Wow, Mikan. What a coincidence to see you here.” Souda said, his acting wasn’t convincing anyone.

“W-what are you doing here?” Mikan questioned them.

“Oh you know, chilling and grabbing a burger.” Souda said.

“But..but you aren’t eating anything.” Mikan frowned, confused even further.

“Ah...well...” Souda was flustered but tried his best to make a smooth recovery. "That’s because we’ve finished eating. We’re heading over to the beach shortly. Does that happen to be where you’re going too?"

Hajime put his head in his hands, it was so embarrassing. He wanted nothing more than the ground to swallow him whole.

“H-Hajime, are you coming to the beach?” Mikan’s eyes lit up.

Souda smirked, Hajime responded by kicking him under the table. “I guess so…”

Ibuki arrived next, bursting through the door. Her eyes cast straight to the boys.

Souda laughed, before Ibuki even said anything. "You’re going to the beach too? What a coincidence!"

Ibuki folded her arms. “You’re acting suspicious. You're wiggling around like you’ve got worms or something.”

“So uh, when are you ladies getting changed into your swimsuits?” Souda asked, since the girls were both fully dressed.

“W-we’re already wearing them. They're underneath our clothes.” Mikan replied, staring at Hajime the entire time. He felt uncomfortable and had to look away.

“I’m wearing mine too!” Souda exclaimed. “Are you wearing yours, Hajime?"

“Totally…” Hajime lied. He had no intention of putting on the speedos that Souda had given him. Challenging one of the Monobeasts seemed more appealing.

The other girls arrived one by one. Souda's tongue stayed out of his mouth the entire time. Mahiru showed up too, since she hadn't been killed by Peko. She kept herself fairly covered in a one-piece
with a towel tied around her waist. She wasn’t impressed to see the boys there, and accused them of being perverts. It was Sonia’s idea so she got the final say, she was more than happy to let the boys join - much to Mahiru's annoyance.

They spent all afternoon running around on the sand, and splashing about in the sea. They even played the board game Chiaki brought - which caused some laughs. It was how the day at the beach should have gone before. Hajime couldn't stop smiling, everything was going to plan. He’d saved the lives of Mahiru and Peko. It was safe to say he was in pretty high spirits. The day had been perfect, from his photoshoot in the morning to his afternoon at the beach. It was days like these that he treasured. They made him more determined that ever to protect everyone.

Hajime was still smiling when he went to bed that night. He'd had such a great day that he didn't mind sleeping in the beach house. He wasn't going to let other people's annoying sleeping habits ruin his mood.

*Ding dong bing bong*

“Get a move on, I want to turn the lights off.” Byakuya stood by the lightswitch, impatiently tapping his foot on the floor. “Take too long and you’ll be getting ready in the dark.”

Hajime decided to hurry, he knew Byakuya would follow through with his threat. He took off his tie, placing it next to his pillow - not wanting to accidentally strangle himself in his sleep. Ready for bed, he climbed into his sleeping bag - hoping for a better night's sleep. But, of course, luck wasn't on Hajime's side.

It hadn't been long since Byakuya turned off the lights, twenty minutes or maybe even thirty. Hajime was drifting in and out of sleep, dozing off for a few minutes before the other noises in the room would wake him up again.

**BANG.**

The door flung open, filling the beach house with natural light. It smacked against the wall with force, causing a massive crash. Hajime bolted upright in his sleeping bag, violently jumping. A haunting silhouette stood in the doorway.

“Everyone!” the voice cried. “You need to come with me, there’s an emergency.”
Emergency?

Hajime’s throat ran dry, chills travelling down the hairs on his bare arms. He found himself struggling to breathe - it was as if dread itself was grasping at his throat. Something terrible had happened, he could feel it.

He wasn’t the only one disturbed by the noise. The other boys sat up too, all of them wanting to know what was going on. With so many questions that needed answering, they began to shout over each other all at once.

“Huh?”

“Who dares to disturb me?!”

“AHHHHHH! G-g-ghosttttt!”

It sounded stupid, but with the moonlight reflecting upon their skin, the figure in the doorway did look ghostly. Their face was concealed by shadow, hiding their true identity. It could have been anyone.

“You need to follow me, right now!” the stranger spoke again, the desperation in their voice more apparent.

“Mahiru?” Hajime called out into the darkness, recognising the voice.

“Yes, it’s me.” Mahiru replied, moving further into the room so the others could see her. Her hands were shaking, though she seemed to be doing everything in her power to try and control them.

“What’s going on?” Byakuya demanded, fumbling around on the floor in search of his glasses.

The doors to the closet flew open, an aggravated Fuyuhiko stood behind them. “What’s with all the damn shoutin’?”

Mahiru pressed her back against the doorframe, unable to support herself otherwise. Her knees looked like they were going to buckle from underneath her at any moment. “J-just come with me...please.”

No one pressed Mahiru with any further questions, she was clearly shaken up, and none of the boys wanted to be the one to push her to breaking point. The look of horror on the poor girl's face said enough.

Hajime didn’t need asking again, he had to find out what was going on. He unzipped his sleeping bag at such speed, the zipper fell off in his hand. He threw the small piece of metal to the floor, it served no purpose to him anymore. He snatched up his tie and loosely fastened it around his neck, needing something to distract himself while he waited for the others. His brain was trying to take him places that he didn’t want to go. Speculation would be the death of him.

It didn’t take long for the others to get up, seconds - if that. They didn’t need any further persuading,
they were just as curious as Hajime. The situation was so serious that even Fuyuhiko left willingly.

Mahiru led the boys through the tunnel, away from Chandler Beach and out towards the diner parking lot - though she had no plans of stopping there. She took frequent glances over her shoulder, as if to check the boys were still there.

“Hey Mahiru,” Nagito spoke up, breaking the eerie silence. It was so quiet around that he was practically shouting. “Where exactly are we going?”

It was a fair question, something that hadn't even crossed Hajime's mind. He was blindly following Mahiru with no real idea of where they were going.

“To the airport.” Mahiru kept her answer short, making it clear to Nagito that she wasn't going to reveal anything else.

Her response confirmed Hajime’s worst thoughts...something had happened to one of the girls. The question was...which one? Horrible flashbacks forced their way into Hajime’s mind. Ibuki’s hanging corpse, Peko’s body sliced into pieces, the look of fear upon Mikan’s face during her execution. How was he going to face something like that again?

The walk to the airport was exceptionally creepy, a sudden paranoia between them all. Souda screamed at every shadow, and Fuyuhiko cursed furiously whenever he heard a noise. Even Hajime found himself jumping once or twice.

They stopped just outside the airport, Mahiru froze in her tracks as her hand touched the door. Hajime drew in a deep breath, he wasn’t ready to go inside either. Opening the door meant confronting the truth, finding out which one of his friends he’d lost for good. Finding out who he’d let down...

"Are we going inside?" Byakuya folded his arms impatiently, drumming his foot on the floor.

No one bothered to answer him, they just stood in silence for close to a minute - though to Hajime it felt like an hour.

The idea of opening the door was torture, but the waiting was worse. Hajime couldn’t take it any longer, he had to open the door whether he wanted to or not. He leaned over Mahiru's shoulder, taking control, and thrust open the door before he could talk himself out of it. He had to face the truth.

The airport was filled with chaos, it hit Hajime the moment he stepped inside. There was so much going on that it was hard to process. Hajime's eyes darted around the room, desperate to see who was alive and who wasn’t.

Mikan was sobbing hysterically, with Sonia rubbing her back to calm her down. Akane was stuffing her face with chips, comfort eating by the looks of it. Ibuki was pacing across the room, humming an eerie tune under her breath. Chiaki had turned pale, and Peko looked deep in thought.

“Huh…” Hajime blinked several times, just to be sure he wasn’t dreaming. Mikan, Sonia, Akane, Ibuki, Chiaki and Peko. They were all there, alive and breathing. No one had died after all...

...Of course! Hajime was furious with himself for not realising it sooner, the body discovery announcement never sounded. If only he hadn’t jumped to conclusions so quickly, he would have saved himself a lot of worrying.

"Thank goodness you’re here!” Sonia cried, temporarily taking her attention off Mikan to talk to the
No one was dead, or even hurt, so why were the girls so shaken up? Hajime couldn’t even begin to imagine what had happened, it must have been terrible to cause a reaction like that.

Curiosity ate away at Fuyuhiko, he couldn’t take it any longer. “Can someone tell me what the hell is going on here?”

Peko answered him, maintaining her usual calm composure. “It appears we are not alone on this island.”

“What?” Hajime voiced his confusion in chorus with the others. Peko’s words made no sense, it was as if she were speaking in code.

Byakuya massaged his temples, stress getting the better of him. “You aren’t making any sense. I need you to tell me clearly what’s going on.”

Sonia took it upon herself to explain. “We were in our sleeping bags trying to rest, it wasn’t long after the Monokuma announcement sounded. From nowhere we started hearing these strange noises.”

“What sorta noises?” Nekomaru asked, interrupting Sonia's story with his question.

“Footsteps, rustling. That kinda thing.” Akane replied, licking the salt from the chips off her fingers. “It sounded super close by.”

“It was probably Monokuma or Monomi.” Fuyuhiko said. “That stupid rabbit is always trying to join in.”

“No, it wasn’t them. We heard footsteps. Human footsteps.” Mahiru shook her head. “Unless...it was one of you playing a prank?” she froze upon her realisation.

“Boys are creepy like that.” Ibuki added, directing her comment in Souda's direction.

“It wouldn’t be anyone here.” Byakuya clarified. “The boys are under strict instruction not to leave the beach house until morning.”

Not like that would stop anyone. Still, Hajime had been waking up so frequently that he would have heard someone leaving the beach house. No one had anything to gain from pulling a stupid prank, and none of them were that immature either. “No, it couldn’t have been anyone at the beach house. I would have seen them leave.”

“Then it was probably just an animal or something. So what?” Souda said, shrugging his shoulders.

“Have you seen any animals on this island?” Mahiru pursed her lips.

“Well...no...” Souda frowned, reluctant to admit defeat. “Unless you count those rats that Gundam carries with him.”

Hajime knew they were in trouble the second Souda mentioned rats. He cut in before Gundam had a chance to get upset. “Are you sure they were footsteps?”

“Of course I’m sure!” Mahiru snapped, unhappy with his implications of calling her a liar. “There was someone walking around, we all heard them.”
Hajime didn’t know what to say. There couldn’t be someone else on the island, he’d lived the killing school trip out before and nothing of the sort had happened. There was the exception of someone else entering the Neo World Program, but he couldn’t see anyone from Future Foundation coming over when it was still early days. Did Monokuma have something else up his sleeve, or were the girls mistaken about what they’d heard?

With so much going on, everyone turned to their faithful leader for advice. Byakuya remained strong, determined not to crack under the pressure. He took control and spoke calmly to those standing around him. “Everyone be quiet for a moment, I want to hear these noises for myself.”

Silence fell across the airport, everyone listening to hear the mysterious noises the girls had described. Hajime strained his ears, but he couldn’t hear anything - besides Mikan’s sobbing.

“This is pointless.” Nagito sighed, unable to stay silent for more than a minute. “I can’t hear anything.”

“Neither can I.” Gundam frowned, clearly disappointed.

Peko had the same reaction. “I can’t hear it anymore, either. Whoever was here must have gone.”

Byakuya crossed his arms, asserting authority. “We cannot keep making assumptions, there is no proof that someone else is on the island. It seems highly unlikely.”

“But…” Mikan had calmed down enough to speak. “But we….we heard someone.”

“Your mind can play tricks on you, especially in a situation like this.” Byakuya pointed out, not buying into the conspiracy.

“Perhaps it was not a person that you heard, but instead a demon - ready to feast on your souls!” Gundam’s contribution only made things worse.

“It does seem pretty unlikely.” Hajime said, agreeing with Byakuya - not Gundam. He knew there was no one else on the island, but it wasn’t going to be as easy convincing everyone else. Especially when he had no explanation for the noise. “Monokuma watches everything, he wouldn’t just let someone else sneak onto the island.”

Sonia wasn’t convinced. “What if the person has been here all this time?”

“We would have seen them.” Byakuya spoke confidently. “Besides, Monokuma only provided us with sixteen cottages.”

“I guess that makes sense.” Akane said, coming around to the idea. “It just sounded so real, that’s all.”

No matter what the noise was, the girls were still incredibly shaken up. They wanted to believe with the same confidence as Byakuya, but it wasn’t that easy.

“If you’re still unsure we can go and search the island.” Byakuya said. “But I’m telling you, there’s no one else here but us.”

“No, that won’t be necessary.” Peko rejected his offer on behalf of the group. “If someone has been hiding for this long, there’s no reason we’ll find them now.”

“I guess it really was in our imaginations.” Sonia hung her head, as if embarrassed.
“No! Ibuki heard it too, and Ibuki has perfect hearing.” Ibuki declared, still persistent about the matter. “Ibuki heard footsteps.”

The girls weren’t crazy, if they’d all heard the same sound then it had to mean something. It wasn’t another person, Hajime was sure of that, but footsteps were a pretty distinctive sound - not the sort of noise you’d easily mistake. Hajime’s brain was going crazy trying to figure it out. That’s when it hit him, there was something he hadn't considered.

Could it be...a trap?

That had to be it. It was the only thing Hajime could think of that made any sense. It seemed that someone was planning to kill again, and the footsteps were part of the trap set up by the killer. How they were involved, he didn’t know, but it had to be something important. Perhaps it was to make everyone paranoid, or maybe the killer wanted everyone to split up in search of the mystery figure. Hajime certainly wasn’t going to let that happen, he needed to keep everyone together.

“Maybe it’s best if we all slept in one place tonight?” Hajime suggested, it was the easiest way for him to keep an eye on everyone. “If you girls don’t mind, of course.” he added, not wanting to be intrusive.

Akane nodded enthusiastically, waving food in his direction. “Creepy strangers are no match for us if we’re all together!”

“I would certainly feel safer with everyone here.” Sonia agreed.

Byakuya gave his consent too. “Since this is a special circumstance, I will allow for everyone to spend the night together - though it’s back to normal tomorrow.”

Everyone was on board with Hajime's plan. No one liked the idea of sleeping in small groups with the thought of someone else being on the island. Even those who didn’t believe in the stranger were still on edge.

The boys, temporarily, left the girls behind to go to the beach house and fetch their things. It wasn’t necessary, but Hajime didn’t feel like sleeping in the airport without a blanket - even on a tropical island, it still got cold. He collected his stuff, rolling up his sleeping bag so that it was easier to carry. He wasn’t sorry to leave the beach house behind, it would be nice to change up the location - even if it was only for one night.

The airport didn’t seem so spacious by the time the boys trailed in with all their sleeping bags, pillows, and blankets - though there was still enough room for all of them to fit comfortably. The airport was at least double the size of the beach house, there was no reason for them to complain.

Hajime looked around for somewhere to sleep, while trying to manage his stuff. The others had positioned themselves in a circle formation in the center of the airport, rather than spreading themselves out. It seemed like everyone wanted to be as close to each other as possible. Hajime saw a vacant spot and squeezed himself between Fuyuhiko and Mikan. He waved across at Chiaki who was taking the place in the circle directly opposite him.

Mikan had calmed down a considerable amount, she was still crying but nowhere near as badly. Hajime reached out his hand and gave her shoulder a supportive squeeze. “Hey, Mikan.” he said gently, not wanting to distress the girl any further.

“H-hello, H-Hajime.” Mikan sniffed in response, she smiled at him through the tears, “S-sorry I’m such a mess. Hic- .” she’d worked herself up so badly that she’d started hiccups.
Hajime turned to his right to speak to Fuyuhiko. He offered him a friendly smile. “Hey-”

The look on Fuyuhiko’s face said ‘talk to me and I’ll kill you’, so Hajime decided it best not to pursue the conversation any further.

With everyone sat down, Byakuya addressed the group. He looked rather uncomfortable squashed up on the floor. “If everyone could please refrain from leaving the airport until the alarm sounds in the morning. It’s for your own safety.”

There was no arguing or signs of rebellion. Only an idiot would leave the airport during the night after everything that had just happened.

With no objections, Byakuya carried on giving instructions. "It's already gone eleven, everyone needs to get to sleep. I want no further disruptions."

"You wanna go to sleep already?” Souda complained. "I thought we could do something fun since we're all here."

"Like what?" Byakuya raised his eyebrows skeptically.

"We could play a sleepover game." Chiaki suggested, her eyes coming to life.

"Oooh! Truth or dare!" Ibuki exclaimed, fist pumping the air.

"What are you, twelve?" Fuyuhiko scorned her, rolling his eyes.

"How about wink murder?" Nagito said. The smile on his face was innocent, but his smug tone said otherwise.

Akane threw a pillow in Nagito's direction, hitting him square on the nose. "Don't be so annoying!"

"Ow!" Nagito yelped, though he knew he deserved it.

Byakuya raised his right hand, ordering for silence. "There will be no games. Everyone is to go to sleep."

"I-I can't go to sleep yet." Mikan piped up from next to Hajime, afraid to go against her leader.

"And why's that?” Byakuya questioned her, frowning deeply.

"Because...because I need the toilet." Mikan's cheeks flushed red, embarrassed at admitting it to the entire group.

"Well, off you go then." Byakuya waved his hand, dismissing her.

"There isn't a toilet in the airport." Peko explained, on Mikan's behalf. "We found one in the old building, we've been using that."

"We can't send Mikan on her own." Mahiru said. "It might not be safe out there."

"Now that you mention it, I rather need to go myself." Sonia said.
"Well if Miss Sonia's going, it wouldn't hurt for me to go too." Souda joined in.

Several of the others piped up interest, panicked that they would suddenly need to go in the middle of the night on their own. Even Hajime felt paranoid that he needed to go, though he'd been fine moments previous.

"Fine." Byakuya stood up with a defeated sigh. "We shall take a trip over to the hotel so that everyone can use the toilet, after that we're going to sleep!"

Everyone climbed to their feet, it seemed that no one wanted to be left behind. Walking to the old building was going to be creepy, but it was better than being left alone in a deserted airport.

Byakuya led them to the hotel, through the gate and past the cottages, stopping just short of the swimming pool. He said that everyone was free to do what they wanted, so long as they stayed within the hotel grounds and met back at the gate within fifteen minutes.

Hajime watched his friends wander off as he made his way to the old building, he saw Akane charge in the direction of the hotel restaurant. He was feeling slightly peckish himself, and made a mental note to go and join her if he had time.

The conditions of the old building had improved since Hajime had been to visit Nagito. The cobwebs had disappeared, and the endless piles of boxes were stacked neatly against the wall. The girls must have done it to make their trips to the toilet less vile.

A small queue had formed outside of the toilet, there was only one so everyone had to be patient. Hajime tagged on the end of it, stuck behind Peko, Sonia and Nekomaru. It wasn't too long, Hajime knew the line would go down in no time.

"Oh, it's busier than I thought." Nagito joined the line, positioning himself behind Hajime. He couldn't help but frown looking at the four people in the queue ahead of him.

Hajime turned his back on the others so that he could speak to Nagito, he might as well kill time while he waited. "Being in here must bring back bad memories for you."

Nagito shook his head, unphased. "I didn't mind being tied up, I've had worse. Besides, you kept me company."

Hajime frowned. "I visited you once, I wouldn't exactly call that company."

"I'm honoured that you came to see me at all." Nagito said, genuinely humbled. "An ultimate coming to visit trash like me? That's more than I could have ever asked for."

Hajime heard the toilet chain flush, and seconds after Mikan came out the door. She walked past Hajime, giving him a shy wave as she did so, heading in the direction of the kitchen. The line soon began to move, Peko was in there for no time at all, leaving for the office once she was done. Nekomaru was also, surprisingly, fast - which made a nice change. Hajime was looking forward to going back to the airport and getting some rest. The night previous was taking its toll.

He didn't stick around once he'd been to the toilet. Not only did the old building creep him out, but he didn't want to listen in on Nagito going to the loo. He considered it safe to wait outside since he was surrounded by so many people. Some of the others had gone to look at their cottages, but Hajime didn't want to waste his time, he knew there was no way in. He passed Nekomaru and Byakuya, who were talking to each other, and made his way to the exit.
It took him by surprise to go outside and see someone sitting on the steps at the bottom of the old building, it didn't look very comfortable. Hajime waited for the person to turn around so that he could talk to them, he'd been meaning to do so, but they didn't look at him. The person's attention was focused on something else, the item that they were holding in their hand.

The minute Hajime saw what it was, everything clicked. He was right, the mysterious airport stranger had been part of a trap...a trap which he now understood. He was standing right behind the person who'd been planning to kill. Why had he trusted them?

“Hey!” Hajime snapped, he’d caught them red handed. “What the hell is that?”

Caught off guard by Hajime’s sudden appearance, they leapt up from the step - yelping as they did so. “Ah!”

“It was you.” Hajime accused them, feeling a deep sense of betrayal. “You were -”

He didn’t get the chance to finish his sentence since the object the person was holding came into contact with his neck. He felt a sharp stabbing sensation, and from there the world around him phased out.

His thoughts were slowing down, and his body relaxed, slowly falling into a state of drowsiness. It was like he had no control over his body. He tried to stop his eyes from closing but they wouldn’t listen to him. His legs were no longer able to support him, so he found himself on his back staring up at night’s sky - the stars blinking back at him.

The stars.

The beautiful stars.

The...beautiful...beautiful...stars.

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“Wake up! God dammit, wake up you bastard. Hajime, fucking wake up!”

“Oh goodness isn’t he moving? Please don’t tell me he’s dead.”

"He seems injured, he's covered in blood."

“Wake the hell up, come on!”

Slap.

That was enough to do it. A slap to the face caused Hajime to wake with a start. He was greeted by Fuyuhiko, who was kneeling over him, his hand inches away from Hajime’s face.

“Did you slap me?” Hajime yelped, putting his hand to his face - trying to ease the pain. “I already have a black eye, that’s not cool!”

Hajime had no idea what was going on. His brain hurt, his face stung, and his entire body ached. He knew that he was lying on the floor, but he had no idea why. What had happened to him?
Sonia stood behind Fuyuhiko, a look of extreme relief on her face. “You’re alive!”

“Ibuki is so relieved!” Ibuki cheered, taking a deep breath.

Were they feeling alright? “Of course I’m alive…” Hajime said, their comments only added to his confusion.

The others crowded around him, barely giving him space to breathe. Hajime turned to Fuyuhiko, since he was closest, looking at him for some sort of explanation. It was clear from the horror on their faces that something was wrong.

Fuyuhiko lowered his head, breaking the news. “Hajime…someone died.”

“W-what?” Hajime stammered, completely lost for words. Fuyuhiko wasn’t making any sense, was it some kind of sick joke?

A fourth voice spoke, Mahiru’s. “T-there’s all this blood. And the body discovery announcement sounded.” she sounded deeply traumatised.

It only took a quick look around for Hajime to figure out what they were talking about...there was blood all over him. His shirt provided a canvas for the stuff, and it covered his hands like gloves. “Am...am I bleeding?” He couldn’t feel any pain, besides where Fuyuhiko had slapped him, so it made no sense that he was drenched in blood. Hajime tore open the buttons of his shirt, desperate to find the source of it.

“You aren’t injured…” Fuyuhiko muttered to himself, staring down at Hajime’s bare stomach.

Fuyuhiko was right, there wasn’t so much as a single scratch on him. “Then...then this isn’t my blood?” Hajime came to the horrible realisation, his eyes wide. If it wasn’t his, then who did it belong to? And how did it get on him?

He took a deep breath, readying himself to ask a question he didn’t want to know the answer to. “W-who’s blood is this? Who’s died?”

“Phuhuhuhu, it looks like Hajime has finally woken up!” Hajime recognised Monokuma from his evil laugh. The bear towered over him, flashing his sharp teeth. “Wakey wakey! While you were busy napping, one of your classmates died.”

Hajime couldn’t stay on the floor any longer, it put him on edge having Monokuma loom over him. He jumped to his feet, the adrenaline wearing off the drowsiness. His balance wasn’t quite up to scratch, he almost toppled over as he made it to his feet. Thankfully, Ibuki reached out and steadied Hajime before he made a total fool of himself.

He needed to know, why wasn’t anyone answering him? Everyone else seemed to be missing...were they with the body? Hajime’s eyes darted around like a mad rabbit, trying to find some sort of clue which would point him in the direction of the others.

“I think you ought to sit back down, Hajime.” Sonia said gently, looking troubled. “You’ve been through a lot, the others can handle the investigation for now.”

Hajime didn’t reply, he was too busy looking over her shoulder. Behind Sonia stood the old building, the door ajar. He’d come from there only minutes ago, or so he thought, and he’d definitely closed the door behind him. It seemed someone else had used the door since. It was enough of a clue to show Hajime where everyone was.
He threw back his shoulder, removing Ibuki’s grip, and darted towards the old building before anyone could stop him. There were cries from behind, Mahiru shouted, warning him not to go inside - but he didn’t listen. He pushed open the door and darted around the corner, past the toilet, and towards the main hallway. That's where he stopped, skidding to a sudden halt.

His questions were answered...he saw everything he needed to know.

He was wearing the blood of his faithful leader, Byakuya Togami. The ultimate imposter...was dead.

Chapter End Notes

R.i.p ultimate imposter! The next part is the investigation so you can find out lots of clues about the murder.

Also, side note. Has anyone here seen the sdr2 stage play? I watched it yesterday and was blown away! Everything about it was incredible, it had me crying and laughing haha. If you haven't seen it you totally should!! :D
Chapter Two - Part Five

Chapter Notes

During this chapter Mahiru gives Hajime a drawing of where everyone was at the time of the murder, I made a quick copy of one when planning out this case. It's here if you want to look at it, you don't have to or anything but it might help to give you a clearer picture :D It's super basic because I made it in like 1 minute on paint hahaha.

http://40.media.tumblr.com/0070b789152939b704efea412a8bd9e8/tumblr_o5y2yzkW9g1rl2gijo1_1.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hajime wanted to run as far away from the old building as possible, but he couldn't. His legs wouldn't move, they were stuck to the ground like glue, forcing Hajime to look at the horror in front of him. There was no escaping it, even if he were to close his eyes, he could still feel Byakuya's blood on his skin.

Byakuya lay on his back, arms straight by his sides. His body looked rigid compared to the sprawled out corpse which had been Teruteru. From the shoulders down, Byakuya still looked alive. His smart suit was pristine white, not a single drop of blood on it. It was the top half of his body which told the story of his murder. A deep cut ran along the length of his throat, exposing everything. The blood he’d lost had fallen around his head like a pillow, dyeing the ends of his hair. That was disturbing enough, but the worst was yet to come. The killer had sliced open the sides of Byakuya’s mouth, extending his smile so it looked like that of a Cheshire cat. The slits ran to the end of his ears, stopping him from looking entirely human.

It was like something from a horror film, unlike anything Hajime had ever seen in real life. It was too much for him, Hajime doubled over and threw up the little he had left inside his stomach. He was left with watering eyes, a burning throat, and a racing heart. He'd never seen something so disturbing in all his life. The killer had taken it too far.

Monokuma had followed Hajime inside, he stood behind him complaining. “Gee, do you have to do that here? Now I have to clean it up...or maybe I'll force Monomi to do it.”

Hajime cleaned his mouth with the back of his hand, trying to regain some of his dignity. He felt as terrible as he looked, a weak shriveled mess covered in blood and vomit. It wasn’t his finest moment.

“Oh, Hajime.” Sonia gasped as she followed Hajime inside. He couldn't even see her, but her shaking voice told him she was crying. “We didn’t want you to see this.”

“I…” Hajime tried to speak, but any words he had seemed to have escaped him. One minute he’d been leaving the old building, and the next he’d woken up to find himself covered in a dead Byakuya’s blood. None of it made any sense.

The despair on his face was more than obvious, the others exchanged worried glances with each other. They’d all taken Byakuya’s death badly, but Hajime seemed especially fragile. The confusion he felt only made the situation worse.

Mikan was on her knees, midway through an autopsy. She took her hands off the corpse as she spoke, out of respect. “I-I think Hajime is in shock. S-someone should get him some water.”
Peko stepped forward to volunteer herself, she looked straight at Hajime. “Come with me to the restaurant. You can clean yourself up, and it will provide me with the opportunity to explain everything.”

Hajime could barely speak, but he was able to utter a thank you.

“We’ve already started the investigation, but you can come and join us when you’re ready.” Nagito said, smiling as if nothing had happened.

“O-okay.” Hajime said weakly. He didn’t want to miss out on anything important, but he felt like his legs were going to collapse from underneath him at any second if he didn't sit down.

Peko turned to Sonia, taking responsibility upon herself now that their leader was gone. "Could you go to the market and find another shirt for Hajime to wear? We can't let him stay in that one."

Hajime looked down at his chest, it was almost impossible to make out the shirt underneath all the blood and vomit. Along with his black eye, he made a very sorry sight.

Sonia nodded enthusiastically, dashing towards the exit - probably to escape from the body. “I will be as quick as I can.”

Peko guided Hajime to the restaurant, leaving the others behind to continue on with their investigation. She kept her hand on his back the entire time to stop him from falling, she could tell he was on the verge of collapsing. She sat him at the table nearest to the staircase, purposely facing his back to the window so he didn’t have to look out at the old building.

“Drink this.” Peko instructed, presenting Hajime with a bottle of water that she’d taken from the fridge. “Like Mikan said, it will help.”

“T-thanks.” Hajime reached out for the water, he hadn’t realised how dry his throat was until that moment. He sipped slowly at the drink, his shaking hands caused the liquid to spill over the sides of the bottle.

Peko pulled out the chair opposite him, the expression on her face grim. "I'll try my best to explain everything that’s happened, though I'm not entirely sure myself." she sat down, tucking her knees neatly under the table. "Can you remember why we were over at the old building?"

Hajime nodded, already feeling calmer. "I remember most of the night. Things just feel hazy from the time I left the toilet. I remember going outside and seeing someone, they were doing something suspicious...and...and...I don't remember." he let out a disappointed sigh, frustrated with the gaps in his memory.

Peko had a better idea of where to begin her story. “It was Nagito who found Byakuya’s body.”

“Nagito?” Hajime repeated. Nothing good ever came when Nagito was involved. Hajime had no understanding of the case, but he already felt suspicious.

Peko didn’t comment, but it was clear from her expression that she shared his feelings of suspicion. “I was in the office and heard Nagito scream from outside, that’s when I saw Byakuya’s body for myself. Then Nekomaru, Mikan, and Mahiru arrived together, which triggered the body discovery announcement.”

Hajime remembered Mahiru mentioning something about the body discovery announcement. It must have sounded while he’d passed out.
“The announcement brought Souda and Ibuki since they were also inside the old building. We waited, but no one else showed up.” Peko explained.

“No one else showed?” Hajime raised his eyebrows, he hadn’t been expecting that.

“Everyone outside came across your body before they made it to the old building.” Peko stated. The word ‘body’ made Hajime’s skin crawl, it described him like a corpse. “You were unconscious and covered in blood. Everyone thought you were the victim.”

Hajime couldn’t help but wonder what was running through their minds when they came across his body. Were they sad, or secretly relieved that it wasn’t them?

“Souda went outside to fetch the others, when he bumped into Akane who was trying to bring everyone to you. It was at that point we figured out you weren’t dead.” Peko said. “There was only one announcement, and it was clear from Byakuya’s injuries that he was the one who had died.”

Hajime gulped down more water. He couldn’t believe all of this had happened while he’d been out cold.

Peko rounded up her story. “We started the investigation while some of the others went outside to sit with you. It’s not been long since we started, only five minutes or so.” she stopped to take a breath. “That’s the basics of it. You should speak with the others if you need to know anything else.”

Hajime wanted to speak to as many people as possible before the trial begun, he just hoped he’d have enough time. At least he had a better understanding of the case, he thanked Peko for explaining it.

They stayed in silence until Sonia arrived - Peko had nothing more to say, and Hajime lacked the energy. The princess dashed up the stairs in a hurry, clothes draped over her arm. “I apologise in advance, there was not much selection.”

“It’s fine.” Hajime replied. Anything was better than his blood-sodden shirt.

Sonia placed the clothes on the table, holding the items one at a time so that Hajime could inspect them properly. “They do not stock proper clothes at the market, but I managed to find this.” she held up a basic white t-shirt, printed on the front was a cartoon photo of a palm tree, the words ‘I ♥ Jabberwock Island’ written underneath.

The t-shirt was unbelievably tacky, but Hajime wasn’t in the position to be fussy. He took it from her gratefully. “Thanks, Sonia.”

"Put your shirt by the sink, we can wash it after the investigation.” Peko said, not focusing on the embarrassment of asking Hajime to undress.

Hajime didn’t say anything as he unbuttoned his shirt, his trembling fingers made the job harder than it had to be. Thankfully, his trousers were clean so he didn't have to strip down to his boxers. Hajime pulled the fresh t-shirt over his head, not wanting to sit there shirtless any longer than he had to. It fitted perfectly, sitting just below the top of his trousers. It felt strange wearing something different. Though he couldn't deny, the smell of freshly washed laundry was comforting - it reminded him of home.

Sonia picked up the next item. “They didn’t have any ties, but I thought you might be interested in this.” it was a necklace made from seashells and beads. It was pretty, but not to Hajime's taste.

Hajime squirmed. “No thanks, I'm good.”
“Are you sure?” Sonia said, rather taken with the necklace.

“Positive.” Hajime replied. “You can keep it.”

“Thank you, Hajime!” Sonia beamed, sliding the necklace over her own head. “That just leaves this.” she patted the last item sitting on the countertop. It was a lot larger than the other two, she had to spread her arms wide just to hold it up.

A green jacket with baggy sleeves and red detailing on the front, Hajime recognised it instantly. "Is that Nagito's jacket?"

Sonia offered him an explanation. “I bumped into Nagito on my way over here. He said that you could borrow it until your clothes are clean."

Hajime waved his hands in protest. He wasn’t sure why, but the idea of wearing Nagito’s jacket scared him. Was it because he thought Nagito had something to do with the case? Hajime had no proof, but he couldn’t think of anyone else who would do something so horrific to Byakuya.

“I don’t usually wear a jacket, I’ll be fine.” Hajime rejected the item. He wasn't going to put it on, even if they nagged him.

“Well then,” Sonia sighed. “I guess I better give this back to Nagito.” she made her way towards the staircase. “The investigation is still taking place if you would like to join in.”

Hajime jumped up from the table, refusing to sit around any longer. He felt calm enough to go into the investigation with a clear mind. He had to hurry up, it would soon be time for the class trial.

Peko stayed in her seat. "I'll take your things over to the sink to be washed. Get back to the investigation and I will talk to you later."

Hajime left Peko behind, following Sonia down the staircase. He decided to make the most of their time together, though it was only brief. "How's the investigation going?"

"It appears to be going well.” Sonia replied, gracefully taking the steps one at a time. "Mikan just finished her autopsy, you should speak to her for the results. And make sure you check the Monokuma file too, it contains some important information."

“Is there any 'strong' evidence? You know...that points at someone in particular?” Hajime asked.

Sonia shook her head, much to Hajime's disappointment. "I'm afraid not."

It didn't take long to reach their destination, bringing Hajime's questioning to a close. He allowed no time for hesitation, forcing himself to be strong and face the crime scene once again.

Byakuya’s body had been concealed by a large table cloth, much to Hajime's relief - he couldn’t stomach looking at it again. There weren't as many people gathered around, it seemed that everyone had gone off for their own private investigations. There were only two people standing with the body, both of which Hajime needed to talk to.

“A-ah Hajime.” Mikan got to Hajime first, clearly eager to speak to him. She wiped her hands on her apron, though they were already clean of any blood. "I need to e-examine you."

"You do?” Hajime responded, sounding more alarmed than he intended.

"You p-passed out. I have to make sure you're...okay." Mikan said, her explanation flustered. "I p-
promise it won't take long."

Hajime didn't feel in need of an examination, but it was clearly bothering Mikan. She promised it wouldn't take long, so he didn't mind setting a couple minutes aside for her. "You can tell me about the results of your autopsy too."

"Of course. But...but I really think it's important to examine you first." Mikan said, timid at telling Hajime what to do.

"Okay." Hajime nodded, doing his best to be patient. "What do you need me to do?"

"J-just stay still so that I can get a proper look at you." Mikan instructed.

Hajime did his best to stay still, trying to help Mikan out as much as possible. He zoned out as she inspected him, there were too many other things running through his mind. She'd finished before Hajime even realised.

"You aren't wounded a-anywhere." Mikan said, keeping things in simple terms so that Hajime could understand. "The blood on your clothes must have belonged to Byakuya."

That was something Hajime already knew, although he did remember a sharp object coming in contact with his neck. Had that caused any injuries at all?

Mikan gave him the answer before he even had to ask. "H-however, there's a small hole in your neck. It's the sort of puncture a needle makes. I-I think you were injected with a sedative...it's why you passed out."

Hajime reached for his neck in search for the mark. A sedative...that was the sort of thing Mikan dealt with. Had Mikan...? No, Mikan wouldn't do that to him. If Mikan attacked him, then she would have lied about the sedative, she wouldn't tell him about the very thing that made her a suspect. Of course it wasn't Mikan, what was Hajime thinking!

"Whatever they used sure was powerful!" Hajime complained. "I can't remember anything."

"You shouldn't suffer from any more memory loss," Mikan reassured him. "Though...you might still experience drowsiness for the next few hours."

Hajime sighed, hoping it wouldn't affect him during the class trial. "How about the autopsy, did you find anything?"

Mikan shyly nodded her head. "B-besides Byakuya's upper body, there are no other injuries. His t-throat and mouth have been cut open...though the cuts on his face wouldn't have been enough to kill him."

So it seemed the cut to Byakuya's throat had killed him, though that was obvious. However, it left no explanation for the cuts made to his mouth. What was the point of the Cheshire grin cut into his face? Hajime had a horrible feeling that it was the killer messing with him, it seemed unnecessary otherwise.

"As for the murder weapon," Mikan continued. "The only thing that could've created w-wounds like that is a knife."

The killer could have obtained a knife from the kitchen in the old building, or at the restaurant. Mikan's answer definitely added up.
With nothing else to discuss, Hajime turned his back on the nurse - who was now busying herself by talking to Sonia. Nagito had been standing nearby, clearly listening in on their conversation. Hajime knew he wasn't going to get away without speaking to Nagito first.

“I hear you didn’t want my jacket.” Nagito said, trying to mask his disappointment.

“Yeah…I’m not cold. But thanks anyway.” Hajime felt very awkward, Nagito seemed to have taken it personally.

Nagito brushed it off with a smile. “Well, let me know if you change your mind. I’m more than happy to give my clothes to an ultimate.”

“Uh, so…” Hajime said, changing the subject before things could get any weirder. “What did the Monokuma file say?”

Nagito handed Hajime the Monokuma file so that he could read it for himself. The file mainly stated the obvious, Byakuya's body was discovered in the old building sometime after eleven, he'd died from extreme blood loss and oxygen starvation. There was no detection of poison in his body. It was stuff that Hajime already knew.

"Where are you going to investigate now?" Nagito asked, purely out of curiosity.

Hajime shrugged his shoulders, he hadn't decided. "I might go to the kitchen to see if there's any sign of the murder weapon." he hoped Nagito hadn't taken that as an open invitation, Hajime wanted to go alone.

"If you get a moment, you should go back to the airport. There's something there you'll probably be interested in." Nagito said, teasing him with the information. "I found it when we first arrived, I'm surprised you didn't notice."

Hajime wasn't sure if Nagito was playing games, but he was certainly curious. He was determined to make it back to the airport before Monokuma started the trial.

"Oh, and Hajime..." Nagito said.

"Yeah?" Hajime replied.

"Since you'll be leaving to go to the airport, can you do me a favour?" Nagito asked.

Hajime frowned, he knew better than to automatically agree. "That depends on what you're asking."

"Could you stop at the market and pick me up two oranges?" Nagito requested, smiling innocently.

Hajime wasn't sure if he'd heard Nagito right, unless Nagito planned on having a snack break during the class trial. "O-oranges?"

Nagito presumed that was Hajime's way of accepting. "Yes, please."

"Are you going to tell me why..." Hajime raised his eyebrows, still waiting for some sort of explanation.

Nagito shook his head. "I'll explain everything in the trial, but you'll have to wait until then. Actually, there's something I need to get myself." Nagito cut the conversation abruptly, turning his back on Hajime and leaving through the exit.
"Can't you get your own oranges?!" Hajime shouted after him, but Nagito had already gone. It was certainly strange.

There was no one left to talk to in the hallway, Hajime wasn't going to waste time standing around. There were many places he wanted to go: the office, the main hall, the kitchen, the storage room, the airport, and the market. Logic told him that he wouldn't have time to visit all the places he wanted, Monokuma wasn't that considerate, so he'd have to rule out anything he didn't see as important.

Like he'd told Nagito, he headed to the kitchen. His intentions were to find some clues about the murder weapon, but he was distracted from the moment he got inside. Mahiru stood at the kitchen counter, her face full of concentration. She appeared to be sketching something on a piece of paper.

"What's that you've got there?" Hajime asked, hoping he hadn't disturbed her.

Mahiru looked up from the counter, greeting Hajime with a smile. "It's for you." she turned back to the paper, finishing up her sketch. "I just finished it, actually."

"What is it?" Hajime peered over her shoulder, trying to catch a glimpse.

"It's a map of where everyone was during the murder. I thought it might help since you were passed out the entire time." Mahiru explained, handing Hajime the paper. "It's only basic, so don't judge me." she glared at him, showing she was serious.

Mahiru was right, it was basic, but it was also a big help. The sketch provided Hajime with a better understanding, he could see where everyone had been. There were eight people inside the old building at the time of the murder. Peko was in the office, Nagito the toilet, Mikan the storage room, Mahiru the kitchen, Ibuki and Souda were together in the main hall, Byakuya was just outside the toilet, and Nekomaru was outside the kitchen - just around the corner from the main hallway. That left six people outside. Hajime on the floor outside the old building, Akane in the restaurant, Sonia with Chiaki in the hotel lobby, and Gundam and Fuyuhiko hanging around the cottages.

Of course, the diagram wasn't completely accurate, someone wasn't where they said they were - but instead murdering Byakuya.

Mahiru had nothing else to offer him, she'd been on her own in the kitchen when Byakuya was murdered. She'd already searched the kitchen and there was no sign of the possible murder weapon. With nothing else to discuss, Hajime left her behind to continue on with this investigation. The clock was ticking, he didn't have time for general conversation.

He left the kitchen, skipping the storage room since he didn't consider it important enough to spend time investigating. His next destination was the airport, Nagito had purposely told him to check it - he just hoped Nagito wasn't messing with him to waste time.

"Hey!"

Hajime was practically out of the door when a voice called from behind to stop him. He turned his head to see Fuyuhiko leaving the office, hands stuffed in his pockets.

"Oh, hey..." Hajime was taken by surprise, Fuyuhiko never made the effort to strike up a conversation.

"How you feeling?" Fuyuhiko stared down at his shoes, unable to make eye contact while asking something so serious - he seemed uncomfortable.

"Uh...I feel pretty tired, but I'm not so dizzy anymore." Hajime said, answering him truthfully. Was
Fuyuhiko feeling okay? It wasn't like him to take such an interest in Hajime's well-being. "I don't think I'll pass out again, so that's-"

Fuyuhiko cut him short. "Alright, I didn't ask for your damn life story." he rolled his eyes, though Hajime could've sworn he saw a glimpse of a smile on his lips.

"While I've got you here, can I ask you something?" Hajime said. He carried on anyway without waiting for an answer. "Apparently you were out by the cottages when Byakuya was killed. What were you doing there?"

Fuyuhiko looked up from the floor, glaring at Hajime instead. "What do you care?"

Hajime shrugged his shoulders. "I'm just curious. You knew the cottages were locked, so I can't see why else you'd be out there."

"That's none of your damn business." Fuyuhiko snapped, being difficult like always. All signs of consideration had gone out the window.

Hajime sighed, it was like pulling teeth. "I hear Gundam was outside too, did you see him?"

"No." Fuyuhiko replied bluntly.

"You didn't?" Hajime raised his eyebrows. "Were you both investigating your own cottages?"

"Weren't you listening?! This is none of your damn business." Fuyuhiko spoke through gritted teeth, clenching his fists.

Hajime knew when to give up, it was clear that Fuyuhiko wasn't going to tell him anything else. Though Fuyuhiko was back to his old ways, there was no denying the concern he'd shown for Hajime's well-being. Even if it was just for a split second, Hajime had seen a glimpse of his old friend again.

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"Chiaki?" Hajime frowned, hurrying down the steps of the old building - confused at what he saw. "What are you doing?"

Chiaki was on her knees, looking underneath the floor of the old building. She called out to Hajime, without turning around. "I've found something. It's important...I think."

Hajime knelt down beside her on the ground, wanting to get a look for himself.

"I like your t-shirt, Hajime." Chiaki smiled, admiring the latest edition to Hajime's wardrobe. Hajime couldn't tell if she was being sarcastic or not, so he decided to ignore her. "Why are you checking down here?" there was no reason for her to be investigating under the floor. It had nothing to do with the case.

"I wasn't planning to, but something caught my eye." Chiaki held out the palm of her hand, on it sat a small piece of white material. "It was caught on one of the wooden panels."

Hajime reached out and took the fabric, wanting to see it in closer detail. It was so small he couldn't identify where the fabric was from, it could have been from anything. "I have no idea what this is."

"Me either." Chiaki said. "But it seems to have torn from something."
"Do you think you could hold onto this? It might be important." Hajime wasn't ready to get rid of the material, but there was nothing he could do with it at that current moment.

Chiaki took the material back from Hajime, placing it in her backpack for safe keeping. "I overheard Monokuma talking to Ibuki, he's going to call the trial at any minute. Are you ready?"

"Crap, no!" Hajime exclaimed, pushing himself off the ground in a panic. "I still need to investigate the airport, and get Nagito his oranges."

Chiaki stood up with him, brushing the dirt off her knees. "Huh?"

"Nagito said there's something at the airport which is important for the case." Hajime explained. "And as for the oranges...I have no idea. It's just Nagito being Nagito."

Chiaki offered to tag along, an offer which Hajime gratefully accepted, it was nice to have company. They stopped at the market first, collecting oranges for Nagito liked he'd asked. Hajime was beyond the point of questioning it anymore. Thankfully, the airport was right next door so they were able to make it there in good time. Hajime was on edge, waiting for the Monokuma announcement to sound at any moment.

"What are we looking for?" Chiaki asked, moving pillows out of the way so she had space to walk.

"I'm not really sure." Hajime said. "Nagito said he noticed something as soon as he got here, but he didn't say what."

"Hmmm, then maybe we should try thinking like Nagito." Chiaki suggested.

"Oh, I'm not very good at impressions." Hajime said, not wanting to embarrass himself.

"Not like that." Chiaki giggled at Hajime's misunderstanding. "We should trace Nagito's footsteps. He said he spotted this thing as soon as he got here, right?"

"Right." Hajime nodded, relieved he no longer had to attempt his best Nagito impression.

"So let's stand in the doorway, that's where Nagito would have been as soon he got here." Chiaki said, walking backwards until she found herself in the doorway. Hajime copied.

"There's so much to look at." from where Hajime was standing he could see the entire airport, nothing in particular caught his eye. "Though I suppose Nagito wouldn't have stood around in the doorway for too long. Maybe we should move forward a bit?"

They took a few steps forward, but still saw nothing. "Damnit, I knew he was messing me around." Hajime shook his head in annoyance. "I bet he sent me over here so I'd miss something important at the actual crime scene."

"Actually..." Chiaki hesitated before she said anything else. "I think Nagito was telling you the truth."

Hajime narrowed his eyes. "You see something?" If Chiaki saw it then it had to be true, she wouldn't lie to him.

"Look over there." Chiaki pointed over to the left, steering Hajime's direction.

Pushed against the wall was a large stash of pillows and an oversized blanket, none of them seemed to be in use. "The pillows?" Hajime didn't follow.
"Do they look odd to you?" Chiaki said. "They're grouped together so tightly, it's like they're hiding something."

"Well, there's only one way to find out." Hajime approached the mound with caution, he knew it was unlikely to come across something dangerous, but he wanted to be safe. The blanket was poking out underneath three pillows, which seemed to be resting on something. Hajime took the pillows off first, discarding them to the side. He then slowly peeled back the blanket, he could feel something underneath. He wasn't sure what it was, but he knew it wasn't another pillow - it felt too hard.

It wasn't what Hajime had been expecting. "A CD player?" he exclaimed, what a mysterious item to hide.

Chiaki peered over his shoulder. "I can't see any cords, it must be a portable one." it wasn't a gaming console, but she seemed just as interested. "And look there's a microphone attached, it seems like you can record your own songs."

Hajime could tell from Chiaki's reaction that she hadn't seen it before, it seemed like the girls hadn't been using it to listen to music. He resisted the temptation to pick up the attached microphone and start singing. "Lemme see if there's anything inside." he pressed the button labeled 'open' and watched the lid rise up. "Hey there's a disk in here." the disk itself wasn't much help, it was completely plain with no indication of what it played.

"Why don't you try playing it?" Chiaki said.

Hajime did as Chiaki suggested, pushing the lid back down and hitting the play button. Unfortunately, nothing happened. No matter how many times Hajime whacked the button, it made no sound. "How can the buttons be working if this thing's broken?"

"If the buttons are still working but there's no sound, someone must have taken the batteries out." Chiaki explained.

"I guess we'll never find out what's on the disk." Hajime sighed. They were pushing their luck as it was, Monokuma wouldn't give them any longer to go hunting for batteries.

"I don't think we need to know." Chiaki said, remaining calm. "A hidden CD player with a microphone, it explains a lot."

*Ding dong, bing bong*

The airport monitor sprung to life, Monokuma's voice cackling through the speaker.

"I can't wait any longer, the anticipation is going to kill me! Was that joke too soon? Phuhuhu, too bad. Now come on, hurry up. The class trial awaits you all. You know where to go."

Whether Hajime was ready or not, it was time for the class trial.

Chapter End Notes

We'll be rounding off chapter two with the class trial. I'm very excited for you all to read it! :D I'd like to get it up before next Thursday, but it's my longest chapter yet so I'm not
sure how long it'll take me to edit it. But I promise you it'll be worth the wait! ^.^

Also...Happy Birthday to my favourite character Nagito!
Chapter Two - Part Six

Chapter Notes

This has been my favourite chapter to write yet, I hope you have just as much fun reading it ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hajime felt the horrible feeling of familiarity as he walked to Monokuma Rock. He swore that he'd never return, yet there he was. He was going to lose another classmate...a friend.

Monokuma and Monomi were the only ones there when Hajime and Chiaki arrived. Hajime was surprised to see them, he thought they'd be inside setting up the trial. On the ground in front of them lay a white shirt and a green tie.

"Are those my clothes?!" Hajime exclaimed, though he knew full well they were his.

"I made Monomi clean them for you." Monokuma said. "There's no way you're coming into my courtroom in that trashy t-shirt of yours."

"But you're the one who designed the t-shirt." Hajime objected.

"No, it's my design." Monomi said, a proud smile on her face. "Do you like it?"

"Uhh..." Hajime didn't want to break the rabbit's heart by telling her the truth.

"It's repulsive, Monomi. Hajime is just too cowardly to say anything." Monokuma said. He pointed at the clothes on the floor to remind Hajime. "Hurry up and get changed, or you won't be coming inside."

The others arrived as Hajime changed, he was too tired to care about stripping in front of everyone. He wasn't sure how Monomi had cleaned his clothes so quickly, but he wasn't going to complain, it was nice to be back in his normal outfit.

The atmosphere was tense as they rode the elevator down into the courtroom. No one attempted to break the silence, no one could find the words to describe what had just happened. They were all still in shock of finding Byakuya's body.

The courtroom had been redecorated, Monokuma really had a thing for makeovers. The students knew their places, so they went straight to their assigned podiums. There were portraits in place of Teruteru, Hiyoko, and Byakuya. Hiyoko’s portrait was slightly different to the others, instead of a cross, she had two folded fans overlapping one another to form an X.

Monokuma started the trial with a brief explanation of the rules. He'd beaten the students down there so he could take his rightful place on the throne, and tie Monomi to the ceiling. Bursting into uncontrollable laughter, he allowed the trial to begin.

“Where exactly should we begin?” Sonia asked, brave enough to speak first. “So much has happened I’m not sure where to start.”
“Me either.” Akane sighed. “My brain feels fuller than my stomach!”

“A lot has happened over the past couple hours, we need to be careful we don’t confuse ourselves.” Chiaki said, reasonably. “Why don’t we start with the very thing that put us in this situation? The mysterious noises in the airport.”

Gundam nodded approvingly. “That does indeed seem like a good place to begin. I would like to uncover the truth. Was it a fire breathing demon or a ghost coming from the afterlife?”

“Hmmm.” Ibuki tilted her head as she voiced her thoughts aloud. “I didn’t see any fire...so I guess that means it was a ghost from the afterlife?...”

“We’re not even five minutes in and you’re spouting a load of bullshit.” Fuyuhiko looked like he was ready to hit his head against his podium.

Hajime agreed that things were going off topic, he stepped in to bring everyone back on track. “Can you tell me again, what sort of noises were you hearing?”

“There were definitely footsteps.” Mahiru said, confident with what she’d heard.

“And Akane, didn’t you say something about rustling?” Hajime asked, posing the question to the gymnast.

Akane nodded. “Yeah, that’s right. It was some kinda fuzzy sound.”

They confirmed what Hajime knew to be true, he could explain the mysterious visitor on the island.

“Hajime, from the smile on your face it seems like you know something.” Nagito smirked, looking incredibly smug with his observation.

Hajime hadn’t realised he was being watched, it was kind of unnerving. He tried not to let it bother him as he gave his reply. “Chiaki and I found something in the airport. It explains the noises that you heard.”

Chiaki continued on with the story. “We found a portable CD player hidden under some pillows and a blanket.”

“I believe the noises you heard came from the CD we found inside.” Hajime said.

Souda frowned, seemingly skeptical. “Maybe I’m wrong, but don’t CDs contain music? What sorta CD would play...footsteps?”

Ibuki scrunched her nose. “That would sound awful!”

It did sound stupid, but Hajime hadn’t finished. He’d been cut off before he could finish his point. “The CD player has a recording feature. It lets you record over blank CDs using an attachable microphone.”

“So you’re saying someone recorded the sound of their own footsteps?” Nagito said, bringing a hand to his chin.

“That’s what I think, yes.” Hajime said. “The fuzzy sound Akane heard was probably noise coming from the microphone, it didn't look like the most expensive equipment.”

"I know it was hidden underneath a lot of pillows, but it was probably on full volume so we could all hear it.” Chiaki said.
“That’ll explain it!” Akane grinned triumphantly, pleased to put that mystery to rest.

"The market stocks everything, so your theory is plausible.” Peko said, backing up Hajime's point.

“You mean you guys did all that worrying and all along it was a CD? Ha!” Souda laughed, slapping himself on the thigh because he found it so funny.

“Why are you laughing?” Nagito scorned him. “You wouldn’t stop screaming.”

Souda's laughter quickly died down. He clutched his hat for comfort, unable to provide any defense. He had nothing else to say since Nagito was telling the truth.

“Well then, looks like the killer’s obvious.” Fuyuhiko folded his arms, considerably more relaxed now that he’d come to a conclusion. “That was easy.”

“You know who the blackened is?” Sonia looked at him, her eyes wide - Hajime couldn’t tell if it was out of shock or awe.

“Duh!” Fuyuhiko mocked those around him for not realising it too. “The killer recorded a CD for part of their trap. Doesn’t that seem like the sort of thing an ultimate musician would do?”

“Ibuki…” Hajime muttered her name. Fuyuhiko’s point was logical, would anyone besides the ultimate musician really think to incorporate a CD player into their trap? But it was Ibuki he was talking about, he could never see her doing something so twisted and cruel.

“You…you think Ibuki did it?” Ibuki pointed at herself in shock, hurt that her fellow classmates would suspect her. She shook her head with force, as if to prove her innocence. “Ibuki would never hurt Byakuya, he was her friend.”

“You can’t be serious.” Mahiru said, glaring at Fuyuhiko as if he were the killer himself. “I think everyone in this room is capable of using a CD player. All that it requires is pressing a few buttons, and even Souda can do that.”

“What do you people have against me?” Souda hissed, sweat breaking out across his forehead.

“I will not allow you to shift the blame onto Ibuki. That evidence isn’t strong enough.” Mahiru said, the strength in her voice showed she wasn’t going to back down.

Sonia joined in Ibuki’s defence. “I do not think Ibuki is the killer. She would never do something like that.”

“Same here, I don’t think this is Ibuki’s doing.” Hajime agreed, sticking up for her too. “Like Mahiru said, everyone here is capable of using a CD player. That in itself isn’t evidence.”

“At least we know there’s no mysterious stranger on the island!” Nekomaru exclaimed, bringing something positive to the table.

Mahiru brought her hands to her hips. “Don’t be so cocky next time.” her comment aimed at Fuyuhiko.

“Hmph!” Fuyuhiko didn’t respond, he simply turned his back towards her in a sulk.

There was something Hajime had been wanting to ask Mahiru, he hadn’t gotten around to it during the investigation since he was distracted. Since she was already in the ‘spotlight’, so to speak, it made sense to ask her now. He didn’t want to sound like he was blaming her, but it was bugging him.
“Mahiru, there’s something I wanted to ask you.”

“Hurry up with it then.” Mahiru frowned, still irritated from challenging Fuyuhiko.

Hajime gulped, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to ask her anymore. “After hearing the mysterious noises, which you believed to be a stranger, you came by yourself to the beach house to get the boys. Why would you come alone if you didn’t think it was safe?”

“That’s right…” Souda said, catching on to what Hajime was saying. “You came all the way from the first island to the second island in the dark when you thought there was someone else lurking about.”

“Why didn’t you bring anyone else with you?” Hajime said. “That seems pretty dangerous to me.”

“I…” Mahiru paused, she wasn’t shouting anymore. She lowered her head, looking down at the floor. “I don’t know what to say. I didn’t think about what I was doing, I just ran out of the airport to come and get you.”

“That’s your defence?” Fuyuhiko raised his eyebrows, getting his own back.

Mahiru tried to contain her frustration. “I promise you I’m telling the truth. I got carried away with adrenaline. It was incredibly stupid now I think about it.”

“Pfft, such a pitiful excuse.” Gundam shook his head, casting judgement upon the photographer.

“It has to be one of you girls.” Souda said, resting his elbow on the podium in front of him. “You’re the ones who set up the CD player in the airport.”

“Just because the CD player was in the airport, it doesn’t rule you innocent.” Peko fought back. “No one was in the airport during the day, you had plenty of opportunities to sneak inside and plant it.”

Nekomaru cut her off, his voice loud enough to overpower anyone. “The CD had stopped playing by the time we turned up at the airport. One of you girls switched it off while we were gone!”

It was Mikan who fought back next - albeit timidly. “N-not necessarily…it’s possible that the CD could have finished playing on its own.”

“Yeah, well -” Souda stopped mid-sentence, he hadn’t a point to run with. He tried making something up on the spot, but it didn’t go well. “You girls…you girls might’ve…”

Chiaki stepped in, putting an end to his embarrassment. “This isn’t getting us anywhere, we’re going back and forth. We have lots of other evidence, maybe we should look at that instead.”

“Why don’t we move onto the Monokuma file?” Nagito suggested. “It seems like a sensible place to start.”

“Might as well go from the beginning.” Akane agreed.

Nagito spoke from memory, reminding everyone of what the file had said. “Byakuya was found inside the hallway of old building sometime after eleven. He suffered cuts to the sides of his mouth and his throat, which caused excess bleeding and suffocation.”

“T-there were no detections of poison either.” Mikan added.

No kidding, Byakuya’s injuries were so graphic that it was clear poisons weren’t involved.
“Why did the killer cut his mouth open like that?” Akane shuddered. “It’s so creepy.”

Hajime had only seen the body briefly, but the image of Byakuya had been burned in his brain. He found himself shivering as well.

“Was that their way of trying to kill him?” Souda asked.

Mikan shook her head. “H-having your mouth sliced open isn’t enough to kill you. Byakuya would have survived if that was his only injury.”

“The killer was obviously messing with us.” Hajime said. “They cut a smile on Byakuya’s mouth just to be smug, there’s no other reason for it.” It made the murder all the more disturbing.

Nagito nodded in agreement. “That also explains why the killer chose Byakuya as their victim.”

“It does?” Hajime frowned, to him Byakuya had just been in the right place at the wrong time. Nothing more than a case of bad luck.

“You know what they say, take down the leader and soon the people will fall.” Nagito said, rather dramatically. “Murdering our group leader is a pretty bold move, whoever did this wanted to spread fear...no...they wanted to spread despair.”

Killing their leader and cutting a smile across his face, it was hard not to feel despair. Had Byakuya died because the killer was trying to make a point? It sounded plausible, but Hajime wasn’t sure what anyone had to gain from spreading despair. It wasn’t like the despair disease was among them, though that was yet to come.

“So it’s agreed.” Mahiru said. “Byakuya was murdered because he was our leader.”

“That’s gotta be all the evidence we need!” Souda exclaimed, slamming his hand down on the podium. “There’s only one person here who’s psycho enough to do something like this.”

He mentioned no names, but everyone knew who he was talking about. A series of heads turned towards Nagito, accusing him with just their glares.

“You all think it’s me?” Nagito burst into uncontrollable laughter, an inappropriate reaction for such a serious moment. He raised his arms in protest. “I assure you I’m not the killer. Someone like me could never pull off something as talented as this.”

”Talented?” Hajime spat, it wasn’t the sort of thing to be praised.

“I’m sorry, but word of mouth doesn’t count as sustainable evidence.” Gundam waved his arm in dismissal, not buying Nagito’s answer.

“Gundam’s right.” Sonia said. “Everyone is going to say they are innocent.”

Hajime was in agreement with them too, no one was going to stand there and admit to being the killer. Just because Nagito said otherwise, it didn’t make him innocent - especially when there was something which tied him to the case. “Nagito, Peko told me you’re the one who discovered the body.”

"That's right, I was the one to find him." Nagito said. "I came out of the toilet and found him on the floor in front of me."

“He found the body first cuz he’s the killer!” Akane exclaimed, yelling her accusation.
“I told you he’s the only one crazy enough to do something like this!” Souda shouted, riled up by Akane's enthusiasm.

“Not so fast.” Chiaki raised her hand, politely asking for silence. “Nagito wasn’t going to sit around in the toilet forever. It makes sense that he came out first and found Byakuya. So this doesn’t make him suspicious...or so I think.”

Nagito backed himself up further, though he didn’t seem overly defensive. “If I killed Byakuya, then I would have hidden until someone else found the body. It’s more suspicious that the people nearby took longer to show themselves than me.”

Hajime reached into his pocket, retrieving the drawing Mahiru had given him. He wanted to refresh his memory to see who Nagito was talking about. Looking at the drawing, someone in particular caught his eye. “According to this drawing, Nekomaru you were in the hallway, just around the corner, at the time of Byakuya’s death. How come you didn’t hear anything?” he turned his attention to the team manager.

Nekomaru scratched his head, doing his best to recall. “I was on my way to the kitchen, but just outside my stomach started playing up. I knew Nagito was in the toilet, so I tried doing some stretches to ease the pain. I didn’t hear a thing.”

“You’re saying that Byakuya was murdered around the corner from you, and you heard nothing?” Fuyuhiko’s brow narrowed.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.” Nekomaru said, sticking by his story.

“You’re either lying, or the killer was incredibly quiet.” Fuyuhiko crossed his arms, still not accepting Nekomaru’s words.

"The next thing I heard was Nagito’s shouting. I bumped into Mikan and Mahiru, and we found Byakuya together.” Nekomaru explained, finishing up his story.

"You were with Mahiru and Mikan?” Chiaki said. "That means they both have alibis."

"W-we do?” Mikan squeaked, seemingly surprised.

"Well do?” Mikan squeaked, seemingly surprised.

Chiaki nodded her head. “Nekomaru was blocking your path to Byakuya. There’s no way either of you could have killed Byakuya and then snuck past Nekomaru.”

Hajime referred back to his drawing, Chiaki was right. Mahiru had been in the kitchen, and Mikan had been in the storage room. Nekomaru had been stretching just outside their doors, so there was no way either of them could have snuck out, killed Byakuya, and then made it back again unseen.

“That’s right, it’s impossible for the killer to be either of you two.”

“I told you earlier I wasn’t the killer.” Mahiru said, glaring at Fuyuhiko.

“I have an alibi too, and so does Chiaki.” Sonia said. “We were both in the hotel lobby.”

“Speaking of alibis, I have one too.” Souda pointed to himself. “Ibuki was with me.”

“Is that true?” Sonia asked Ibuki, not taking Souda's word.

“Ibuki can confirm that she was with Souda in the main hall.” Ibuki nodded her head firmly.

“But don’t worry Miss Sonia, nothing happened.” Souda cut in, sounding flustered. “You’re the only
woman I care about.”

Sonia ignored him, showing no interest whatsoever. “This means six of us have alibis. Mikan, Mahiru, Chiaki, Souda, Ibuki, and myself.”

“What about me?” Nekomaru said.

“There’s no proof you’re telling the truth.” Hajime said. “We don’t mean to doubt you, but your story can’t be backed up by anyone.”

Being able to rule six people out was certainly a help, it made Hajime’s life a lot easier. He looked back at the drawing once again. There was one person left in the old building that they hadn’t spoken to. “Peko, you were in the office right?”

“That’s correct.” Peko confirmed.

“The office?” Gundam interrupted. “That’s next to the toilet, right where the body was found.”

“Is that an accusation?” Peko asked Gundam, her tone dangerously cold.

“You were as close to the body as Nagito.” Gundam said. “Therefore, it’s possible for you to have killed Byakuya and hidden in the office.”

“Like Nagito said, the real killer would probably wait for someone else to show up first.” Souda said.

“I do not mean to add fire to the fuel.” Sonia began.

Nagito cut in to correct her. "Fuel to the fire."

Sonia started her sentence again. "I do not mean to add fuel to the fire, but Byakuya received a sharp cut to the throat, and Peko is the ultimate swordswoman. Those two things go together rather well."

Nagito expanded her point further with his own theories. "A single slit to the throat was enough to kill Byakuya, you’d have to be pretty skilled to get that right in one go. If things had gone wrong and Byakuya didn’t die right away, he would have screamed for help and the killer would have been caught. Could the killer afford such a risk if they weren't sure what they were doing?"

Things weren't looking good for Peko. Nagito's argument was strong, but for some reason, Hajime didn't trust him. Unless there were special circumstances, Nagito had defended the killer in all the previous trials. Hajime couldn't understand why Nagito was now so eager to jump down Peko's throat and accuse her as the killer. There was the possibility that he'd had a change of heart about his behaviour, but that didn't seem very likely. Was Nagito blaming Peko to cover for the real killer?

Something wasn't sitting right with Hajime, so he decided to jump to Peko's defence. “But it’s not like Byakuya was decapitated.” he pointed out. "We can't blame Peko just because of her talent. It's as stupid as accusing Ibuki of being the killer just because we found a CD player."

“Ah, that’s right Hajime.” Nagito nodded, slowly rocking back and forth on his heels. “I’m getting carried away, there’s another suspect we haven’t even mentioned yet.”

“And who’s that?” Hajime frowned.

“You.” Nagito smiled at he said it, like he got some sort of enjoyment putting others in the firing line.

“Me?!” Hajime spluttered, both shocked and insulted with Nagito’s accusation. “How the hell am I suspicious?”
“You were covered in Byakuya’s blood.” Nagito said, brows raised waiting for an answer.

“I don’t know how that happened.” Hajime protested. “Someone knocked me out, when I woke up I was covered in it.”

“That’s rather convenient, isn’t it?” Nagito raised his eyebrows, arms folded. “Someone ‘knocked you out’ providing you with an alibi, and then covered you in the victim’s blood for no apparent reason.”

Hajime looked around the circle at the others, trying to read their reactions to see if they believed Nagito. No one looked back, they all seemed to be avoiding eye contact with him.

It was Mahiru, surprisingly, who came to his defence. “Hajime was knocked out, I watched over him myself while I waited for him to wake up. There is no way he was faking.”

“Of course Hajime isn’t the killer.” Nagito said, changing his viewpoint entirely. “Your reaction when you found Byakuya’s body was genuine enough, anyone could tell that.”

“But...but you just said -” Hajime couldn’t bring himself to finish his sentence, he was lost for words. One minute Nagito was accusing him of being the murderer, the next he was proclaiming Hajime innocent from the start. It made no sense.

“I was just testing you.” Nagito smirked.

“Now would be a good time to talk about what happened to Hajime.” Chiaki said. “Since it’s likely he was attacked by the same person who killed Byakuya.”

It was more than likely that it was the same person. Hajime couldn’t see two people being involved in the case.

“Tell us then, what do you remember about this attack?” Gundam demanded, pushing Hajime for information.

“I don’t remember a lot.” Hajime admitted, sharing the truth with his friends. “Everything is kind of a blur, so I won’t be able to tell you much.”

“That’s okay.” Sonia smiled at him reassuringly. “Just tell us what you can remember.”

Hajime launched into his story. “I came out of the old building, I remember there was someone sitting at the bottom of the steps, but I can’t remember who. They were holding something sharp in their hand, it might have been a knife or a needle. I realised what they were up to and called them out on it, the next thing I know they’re stabbing me with the object they have. That’s the last thing I can remember.”

“You must remember something about them.” Gundam frowned. “Their hair colour, or what they were wearing.”

“I really don’t remember anything.” Hajime sighed. If his memories weren’t missing they’d be able to solve the case in no time.

“I-I think Hajime was injected with a sedative.” Mikan said, piping up. “It would e-explain why his memories are missing.”

“A sedative?” Fuyuhiko narrowed his eyes at the nurse. “Ain’t that the sorta shit you deal with?”
“Y-yes, it is.” Mikan nodded meekly. “But...but I would never hurt Hajime. It wasn’t me.”

“It can’t be Mikan, she’s got an alibi.” Ibuki reminded Fuyuhiko.

Fuyuhiko said no more, though he looked like he wanted to. It seemed that he was holding his tongue for the sake of no more arguing.

“Are we certain that the killer sedated Hajime? I mean, he was covered in a lot of blood.” Souda said. “Maybe they stabbed him like they did Byakuya.”

“None of the blood was mine.” Hajime corrected him, he’d checked over his body enough times to know he wasn’t injured. “I haven’t got a single cut on me. It has to be Byakuya’s.”

“The killer must have run into Hajime outside after killing Byakuya.” Mahiru said. “Hajime must’ve seen something which counted as evidence so the killer sedated him so he’d forget everything. Then, using the knife they had, covered Hajime’s body in Byakuya’s blood to make him look suspicious.”

“Then what happened to the killer?” Akane asked.

“They wouldn’t have gone back inside, not with Byakuya’s body lying there.” Mahiru replied.

“S-so that means the killer is...someone who was outside the building at the time of death.” Mikan said, piecing the story together.

“Exactly.” Mahiru nodded, pleased that Mikan was following along. “Though we can excuse Sonia and Chiaki because they were with each other.”

“That leaves Akane, Gundam, and Fuyuhiko.” Nagito said, reminding everyone for the benefit of the group.

“Well?” Mahiru thrust her hands on her hips, glaring at the three people Nagito had mentioned. “Which one of you is it?”

“It wasn’t me, I was busy eating in the restaurant.” Akane said. She lifted up the bottom corner of her blouse, accidentally revealing her stomach in the process. With her free hand, she pointed to a mysterious brown stain that had gone through the shirt. “This is where I spilled gravy on myself.” She almost seemed proud.

“Fuyuhiko? Gundam? Have either of you got something you’d like to confess?” Mahiru persisted with her interrogation.

“It is not I that caused such peril for Byakuya.” Gundam denied it also.

All eyes turned to Fuyuhiko. He didn’t appreciate the accusation, nor did he respond well. “Are you that fuckin’ stupid?” he spat, taking his anger out on Mahiru. “If you weren’t so busy trying to use me as a scapegoat, you would’ve realised that giant goddamn flaw in your logic.”

Flaw in Mahiru’s logic? Hajime wracked his brains, thinking as hard as he could to understand what Fuyuhiko was talking about.

Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes, irritated that no one had caught on. “If Byakuya died before Hajime was attacked, then Hajime would have passed by his corpse leaving the old building. Even if your memories are messed with, that’s not the sorta thing you just forget.”

“Oh, that’s right!” Hajime exclaimed. “When I left the old building, Byakuya was having a
conversation with Nekomaru. I was attacked as soon as I got outside. So it's impossible for Byakuya to have died before my attack."

"I left Byakuya to go to the kitchen right after Hajime went outside." Nekomaru said. "So Byakuya would have been on his own."

Mahiru let out a defeated sigh, unable to argue any further. "Jeez! Fine, I guess I was wrong."

Souda scratched his head. "So the killer hurt Hajime, went inside to murder Byakuya, and then came back outside again to cover Hajime in his blood. That's pretty weird."

"I don't think the killer planned on hurting me." Hajime said, working with the little memory he had. "From what I remember, I caught them with the needle, but they didn’t know I was there. It’s not like they snuck up on me."

Chiaki responded with a possible solution. "The killer was carrying a needle filled with a sedative, they probably planned to use it on Byakuya so he wouldn’t make any sounds when they killed him. Except, the killer was caught off guard by Hajime. They must’ve panicked and injected him with the sedative instead."

"But w-why would the killer go to the extra effort of covering Hajime in b-blood?" Mikan asked, struggling to follow along.

Hajime was sure he had the answer. "To confuse us about the order of events of which things happened." he explained himself in more detail. "We automatically presumed that Byakuya was murdered first because I was covered in his blood. That led us to believe the killer was someone outside the old building."

"Do we have any idea how the killer covered you in Byakuya's blood?" Souda asked. "I didn't see anyone going around with blood on their hands."

"T-they m-must have used the syringe to take blood from Byakuya and then inject it over Hajime." Mikan said.

"That still doesn't work." Souda frowned. "You can't get that much blood in a syringe, and Hajime was drenched in it."

"Wait..." Hajime paused, an idea coming to him. "Maybe the blood wasn't Byakuya's, the killer just wanted us to think that. The killer could have used the syringe to inject their own blood over me."

"So the blood wasn't Byakuya's, but the killer's." Souda said, making sense of it for himself. "They wanted us to think it was Byakuya's blood so we'd blame everyone outside the old building."

"They probably cleaned the murder weapon on you too." Nekomaru added.

"We should speak some more about the murder weapon." Peko said. "We’ve not discussed it yet, and it could be important."

There wasn't much else Hajime could say about his attacker, so it was time to move on.

"The murder weapon was a knife, right?" Akane said. "That's what Mikan told me."

Mikan nodded. "From the...the size of Byakuya’s wounds I...I think the murder weapon was a large kitchen knife."
"The killer could have obtained it from the kitchen in the old building, or the restaurant." Sonia said.

"A knife, hmmm?" Nagito’s eyes glistened, a smirk forming on his lips.

"Why are your eyes moving like that?!" Ibuki asked in alarm.

Nagito gave an exasperated sigh. "Didn't any of you take the time to look at Byakuya's wounds?"

"Hell no!" Souda cried.

The body was covered with the table cloth by the time Hajime had started his investigation. He’d seen the wounds briefly when he first walked in on Byakuya, but he hadn't paid too much attention to them otherwise.

"Hajime, do you have those oranges I asked you for?" Nagito asked, drumming his fingers on the podium in front of him with little patience.

"Oh, yeah." Hajime had gotten used to the oranges being in his pockets, he’d almost forgotten they were there.

"Can I have one of them please?" Nagito asked politely.

Hajime retrieved one of the oranges and threw it overarm at Nagito, it was a fairly decent throw, allowing Nagito to catch it with one hand.

Akane watched greedily. "Where's mine?!"

"What is this? Some kinda snack break?!" Souda raised his eyebrows.

"What a brilliant idea!" Monomi smiled, piping up for the first time in the trial. Her spirits were still high, despite being strung from the ceiling like meat at a butchers. "It's always important to have your five a day!"

Monokuma wasn't impressed, cutting them off with a scowl. "Stop stalling for time Nagito, or I’ll end the trial right here."

"You can’t do that!" Monomi objected, fighting against the rope that constricted her. "The students aren’t ready yet."

"This is my courtroom, they’ll do as I say." Monokuma snarled, anger getting the better of him as he jumped to his feet.

Nagito couldn't stop laughing as he shook his head. "I’m not stalling for time. Though I suppose this looks strange, let me explain."

Hajime was waiting with just as much anticipation, he had no idea how oranges were going to play a part in a murder case. Still, it was Nagito so he shouldn’t have been surprised.

Nagito played with the orange as he spoke, absently mindedly throwing and catching it between his hands. "Did you know, when tattoo artists are training they practise on oranges?"

Ibuki raised her hand, full of excitement that she knew the answer. "Ibuki knows! It’s because orange skin resembles that of a human."

How Ibuki knew that, Hajime had no idea, perhaps she had a secret tattoo that he didn’t know about.
“That’s right.” Nagito smiled. “They also practise on pig skin, but I didn’t have any of that to hand.”

Souda fiddled with his hair uncomfortably. “Is this going somewhere? Or….are you just gonna start tattooing people?”

Nagito said nothing. Instead, using his free hand, he reached into the pocket of his coat and pulled out a ten-inch kitchen knife. He waved it around loosely, holding it by the edge of the handle - as if he were holding the string of a balloon.

“Ahhhhhh!” Mikan and Souda screamed simultaneously, though Souda took it to the next level by throwing himself to the floor and hiding behind his podium.

“Can you not make it through a class trial without turning psycho on everyone?” Fuyuhiko groaned, his eyes fixated on the knife.

Nagito ignored everyone’s horrified reactions and carried on with what he was doing. He took the knife and drew it through the orange, as if to cut it open. The knife tore at the orange’s skin and juice went everywhere. "Messy, don't you think?" Nagito held up the orange so that everyone could see it.

Ibuki squirmed. “Yeah, it looks gross.”

“Do you really think this is the murder weapon?” Nagito frowned. “The slits in Byakuya’s neck and mouth were much thinner than this, and neater too.”

Hajime had only seen the body briefly, but even he knew the mark on the orange did not match the marks on Byakuya’s body.

Nagito lay the orange to rest on the podium in front of him, placing the knife alongside it once he’d cleaned it on his trousers. “Hajime, if you could please pass me the other orange.”

Hajime did as Nagito said, it was a perfect throw once again.

“Thank you.” Nagito said, catching the orange. “This time, I’m going to use something different, the item I believe is the murder weapon.”

Nagito pulled something silver from his pocket, sliced the orange, and hid the object in his coat once again. His movements were so fast that no one was able to see what he was using. Nagito held up the orange on display, the cut across the middle was precise and neat. “Now doesn't this look familiar?”

The marks were identical, even Hajime knew that. Whatever Nagito had used the second time was the murder weapon, Hajime was certain.

After a few seconds of silence, it became clear that Nagito wasn't going to give them the answer. A rather impatient Mahiru spoke up on behalf of everyone. "Well, what did you just use?"

“I’m not going to just tell you.” Nagito crossed his arms in defiance. "Work it out for yourself.”

Hajime spoke through gritted teeth, trying his best to control his frustration. "Don’t play games, Nagito. We could die if we get it wrong.”

Nagito shrugged his shoulders, he didn’t care. "If you want to know that badly, you’ll work it out.”

Silence fell throughout court. No one wanted to play along with Nagito's games, but they were left
with no choice.

Somewhat apprehensively, Sonia offered up a suggestion. "Could..could it be a scalpel?" she brought her hand to her chin in thought. "They are always using them in my favourite Japanese medical dramas, especially during operations."

Nagito grinned. “See, it wasn’t that hard.” he retrieved the metal object from his pocket, proving that it was indeed a scalpel.

“So you’re saying the scalpel is the murder weapon?” Hajime said.

“That’s what I think.” Nagito said. "I found a bunch of them over at the pharmacy. They're perfect for making precise cuts, like the ones on Byakuya."

“That can’t be right.” Ibuki shook her head. “Mikan told Ibuki the murder weapon's a knife.”

“Are you calling Mikan a liar, Nagito?!” Mahiru snapped.

Hajime felt himself tense up. Mikan had said the same thing to him too. A scalpel was the sort of weapon Mikan would think to use, and she would also know how to make such precise wounds. She’d killed the last time too, but it was only because she had despair disease. This Mikan wasn't affected by despair disease, and she hadn't been acting strange. No, Hajime wasn’t going to believe it. Mikan had been so kind to him, especially when he’d hurt his eye. Plus, she had an alibi. There was no way Mikan Tsumiki was a killer.

“Someone must be framing Mikan.” Hajime said. “The killer purposely chose a scalpel so we’d all blame her. Why would Mikan use a murder weapon that would draw attention to herself?”

“But she lied to us about the murder weapon. She told us the murder weapon was a knife, when really it was a medical scalpel.” Fuyuhiko said.

“I..I must have been so upset that I made a mistake.” Mikan whimpered. “I was s-so worried about Hajime that I got it wrong.”

"I do not believe Mikan is the killer." Sonia said, standing by her friend's side.

"She does have an alibi." Akane agreed, cleaning out the contents of her ear.

Nagito yawned, exaggerating his boredom. “We don’t need to waste any more time arguing, I have a way to catch the killer.”

It seemed like Nagito was playing more games, Hajime wasn't sure if he could face it.

"You do?" Ibuki gasped, clutching the sides of her face.

"Only three people left the hotel grounds during the investigation; Hajime, Chiaki, and I. We never encountered a scalpel at the hotel during our investigation, and it's against the rules to litter. Therefore, I believe the killer still has the murder weapon on them.” Nagito explained himself, talking slowly so that everyone could follow.

“Who here has pockets?” Akane yelled. “I’ll search everyone!”

"Gundam has a massive coat!” Souda cried, hurling an accusatory finger in Gundam's direction. "I bet it's hidden under there."

"Fool!” Gundam spat, his hatred apparent. "There is only one place the blackened would hide the
scalpel...in their shoes!"

"In their shoes?" Nekomaru repeated uncertainly.

"It is small enough to fit, and a place no one would think to search." Gundam replied. "Of course, I knew you mortals would never have the brains to figure that out for yourselves."

"Everybody take your shoes off." Mahiru instructed, bending down to unlace her shoes as she spoke. "I'll come round and search everyone."

Hajime sighed, lazily kicking off his shoes without bothering to untie the laces. He knew that he was innocent, but he still had to prove himself. He placed his trainers sloppily on the stand and waited for the others to finish.

“This is a load of crap.” Fuyuhiko complained, causing a fuss as per usual.

“Jeez, could you just participate for once?” Mahiru snapped. “Or are you hiding something?”

Fuyuhiko scowled, not bothering to fight any further. He took off his shoes, though he moaned the entire time.

Mahiru moved from behind her podium and into the inner circle. She paced around the podiums, peering into everyone’s shoes. She completed a full circle and stopped back at her own spot.

“Nothing! Everyone’s shoes are empty.”

“That was a waste of time.” Souda complained, snatching his shoes back.

Mahiru frowned, pacing around the circle again. "It has to be here somewhere. Maybe the blackened dropped it by their feet so I wouldn't see it." she peered at the floor as she walked, inspecting the area by everyone's feet.

"Have you found anything?" Hajime asked, from the look on Mahiru's face things weren't looking positive.

Mahiru rubbed the back of her neck, wrinkles forming across her forehead. "Nothing, the floor is completely clean."

"I knew that was a bullshit idea." Fuyuhiko slid his shoes back on, annoyed with having his time wasted.

In defeat, Mahiru returned back to her podium. She turned her attention to Mikan as she did so. "Mikan, the bandage on your leg has started to tear. You'll need to mend it."

“Oh, it h-has?” Mikan glanced down at her leg.

Torn bandage? Hajime had found a piece of white material attached to the paneling surrounding the floor of the old building. It certainly had the potential of being a bandage. His eyes darted to Chiaki. “Do you have that fabric I gave you earlier?”

Chiaki nodded. “I think so.” she took off her backpack and fumbled around inside, finally retrieving the material. “This is it...right?”

"Yep, that’s it." Hajime confirmed, stretching out his hand. "Can I have it?"

Chiaki stepped away from her podium, cutting across the center towards Hajime. She planted the small piece of fabric in the palm of his hand, before turning on her heels back towards her own stand.
Hajime clenched his fist, closing his fingers around the material. He didn't want to look at it, he didn't want to accuse another one of his friends. Taking a deep breath, Hajime uncurled his fingers, forcing himself to face the item in his hand. There were no doubts about it, the material in his hand belonged to a bandage. With context, he was finally able to understand what it was.

The bandage he held in his hand belonged to Mikan, he was certain. What he didn't know, was how it go there. Mikan had been in the storage room, she'd been nowhere near the floor under the building. Hajime had a feeling the answer to that question played an important part in the case of Byakuya's death.

Hajime firmly closed his eyes, blocking out the world around him. It was time for him to piece together the final part of the puzzle. The bandage was stuck to a piece of wooden paneling underneath the floor. It seemed to have torn from Mikan's leg, implying that she'd been somewhere near that area. But how could it be Mikan? She'd been hanging out in the storeroom and bumped into Nekomaru and Mahiru the moment Byakuya's body was found. It would have been impossible for her to sneak past Nekomaru. The storeroom was at the very end of the building.

It was impossible for her to be in two places at once. The storeroom was nowhere near the -

- Hajime cut his own thinking short, suddenly remembering. A flashback to his previous time in the Neo World Program brought him back to Byakuya's original death, the murder Teruteru was responsible for. Teruteru had used a secret passageway to sneak underneath the floor and kill Byakuya. A secret passageway which was located in the storeroom.

"I...I know who the killer is." Hajime said, his words weighing heavy. He didn't want to accuse anyone, but the facts added up. He pointed in the direction of the killer, speaking confidently to prove to the others he was certain. "Mikan, you're the only one!"

"Eeeeek!" Mikan screamed in terror. "Y-you think I’m the killer?"

Akane raised her eyebrows. "You think someone like her could do that?"

Gundam wasn't having it either. "Someone as slow as her could never commit such a crime." he shook his head, disappointed with Hajime.

“E-exactly. A slowpoke like me couldn’t kill anyone.” Mikan protested, wrapping her arms around herself for comfort.

“Gee Hajime, now you’ve upset her!” Mahiru scorned him.

Hajime hadn't expected such a negative reaction, it seemed that nobody believed him. Though of course, no one else had any reason to believe him. He was the only one who knew about the existence of the secret passageway. It seemed like he'd have to lightly twist the truth so they'd understand. "Do you remember that I snuck into the old building during the first couple of days?"

“Ah yes, that’s right.” Nagito said. "It's why you relocated Byakuya's party."

“Well, there’s something I never told you.” Hajime said, hoping that his lies were convincing enough. "There’s a secret tunnel which runs from the storage room underneath the floorboards. It allows you under the entire foundation. There’s a fence which runs around it, preventing you from escaping entirely, but it’s possible to squeeze through.”

"Are you telling the truth?" Peko asked, unsure of what to believe.

"He sure is!" Monokuma clapped his hands together, causing everyone to jump. He was usually so
silent that they had a habit of forgetting his presence.

“I-I knew nothing a-about this secret door.” Mikan denied.

“Haven’t you girls been using the old building for the toilet?” Gundam said. “It’s, therefore, possible that you found it while exploring previously.”

Hajime took the time to explain his theory to everyone, a theory which pieced together everything.

- During the day, Mikan had recorded the sound of her footsteps on the portable CD player, planting it in the airport for later that night.
- Scaring everyone into thinking there was someone else on the island, Mikan was able to get everyone to sleep in one place.
- She requested going to the toilet, knowing the nearest one was the old building.
- She went to the storage room and snuck underneath the floor using the secret door. Managing to squeeze through the panels, though catching her bandage, she made it to the front of the old building where she planned on attacking Byakuya.
- While preparing the sedative she planned on using during the murder, she was caught by Hajime. In a panic, she injected him instead.
- Pushed for time, Mikan ran inside the old building. With the coast clear, she was able to confront Byakuya alone and slit his throat. Most likely making the cuts to his mouth once he'd died.
- To try and cover her tracks, she returned back outside to cover Hajime in blood. Using the syringe from the sedative, she was able to transfer her blood over Hajime.
- She crawled back under the floor and into the storage room, just in time to hear Nagito scream. She ran out of the storage where she bumped into Nekomaru and Mahiru, they had no idea where she'd been.

Hajime's explanation seemed to have convinced the others, looks of doubt formed across their faces. No one seemed so eager to jump to Mikan's defence any longer.

"Mikan did lie about the murder weapon." Ibuki lowered her gaze, unable to make eye contact with the nurse.

“I-I’m sorry for making a mistake.” tears pricked in Mikan's eyes. “I...I didn’t mean to. I r-really believed the knife was the murder weapon. Everyone m-makes mistakes."

“A medical professional who makes a crucial mistake like that? Hmm, it seems a little off to me.” Nagito pursed his lips.

“P-please believe me.” Mikan begged. "I-I am not the killer. I was just upset...it d-distracted me.”

“Even if you were upset, as the ultimate nurse you would have realised right away that a knife wasn't the murder weapon.” Hajime hated to see Mikan cry, but he couldn't give in. The evidence against Mikan was growing by the second. The only thing that didn't add up was the motive, he couldn't think of anything that would trigger Mikan to kill.

Mikan had worked herself into such hysterics that she was unable to defend herself any further, she just cried.

“Stop bullying her.” Mahiru said sternly, firmly sticking by Mikan's side.

“She’s too weak to do something like that.” Akane shook her head. “The killer ain’t Mikan.”

“Are you really going to ignore all the evidence?” Nagito raised his eyebrows. “You’re more naive
than I thought.”

Souda temporarily changed the subject, changing focus to Nagito. "Aren't you on the killer's side?"

“I’m on the side of hope.” Nagito reminded him.

“Are you on our side or what?” Hajime snapped, growing impatient with Nagito. His constant team switching wasn’t helping.

“I wasn’t…” Nagito paused. “But something happened, and it helped me change my mind. Mikan is quite clearly the killer. She murdered Byakuya and hurt Hajime too.”

“I would never hurt Hajime on purpose.” Mikan defended herself once again, but her tone was different this time. The crying had stopped, the tears on her cheeks weren’t fresh. Her voice was colder than ice, void of all emotion. “H-he’s the only one who cares about me, the only one who loves me.”

“Mikan?” Ibuki frowned, unable to recognise her friend. She too could sense that something was wrong.

“E-everyone treats me like dirt. T-they walk over me, they h-hurt me, they treat me like I don’t exist.” Mikan ranted, nothing but aggression in her voice. “But n-not Hajime. He accepts me for who I really am, he appreciates me. Not like any of you do.”

“Mikan…” Hajime tried to speak, but he wasn't sure what to say. He'd only seen Mikan act like it once before, and that's when she was infected with despair disease. But the despair disease hadn't been triggered yet, he had no idea where her anger was coming from. Had it been something she'd built up for so long?

“What the hell is going on with her?” Fuyuhiko took a wary step back from his podium. “Is this some kinda joke?!”

“You said you’d never hurt Hajime on purpose.” Chiaki said, picking up something Mikan had just said. “Is that your way of saying you didn’t mean to hurt Hajime when you sedated him?”

“I…” Mikan reached for a fistful of hair, tugging at it with such force, clumps fell out in her hand. "W-what did I do to make you hate me? You all accept each other, w-why not me? You all hate me, all of you wish I was dead.”

Sonia gasped in horror. "We do not think that at all!"

Mikan babbled on, avoiding everyone's questions. "H-Hajime is the only one who cares about me, he's the only one who would c-care if I died. He believes in me. That’s why I did this, I did this for him.” a grin formed across Mikan’s face, she looked insane.

“Did she just confess?” Souda exclaimed.

Mahiru looked at Mikan sympathetically. "Did Hajime ask you to do this?"

“What?! NO!” Hajime cried, his jaw dropping in shock. He had no idea why Mikan kept bringing him into things, it was starting to scare him.

“It’s all t-thanks to Nagito.” Mikan said, all anger leaving her voice. “He helped me.”

“I knew that psycho's name was written all over this!” Souda yelled.
Nagito sighed, lowering his head. "I suppose this is partly my fault, though I'm starting to regret it now. Things haven't exactly gone to plan."

"What did you do?" Hajime spoke through gritted teeth, unable to cope with the anger he felt.

Nagito looked up at Hajime, doing his best not to smirk. "I noticed the admiration Mikan had towards you, like some sort of developing crush. I wanted to help her out."

"That morning when you were hanging out with Mikan...that's what you were doing." Hajime gasped, remembering suddenly.

"That's right." Nagito said. "I wanted to have a private chat with Mikan, to give her some ideas."

"What did you say to her?" Hajime snapped, unaware he was even shouting. "What the hell did you say to get her to do something like this?!"

"I just told her the obvious." Nagito smiled, talking with his hands. "Hajime you're the ultimate hope, right? If Mikan wanted to gain your approval then she'd have to find a way to allow hope to shine."

"I-I remembered what Nagito said, how the class trials bring hope to us all." Mikan sounded delirious, her sing-song voice like that of a child. "So I killed him for you, Hajime. I’m allowing the hope to shine. I wanted to create the most despairing situation possible so you’d be p-proud of me. It's w-why I chose Byakuya, and w-why I cut his face like that."

"But I don’t understand," Fuyuhiko argued. "You want Hajime's approval, but you killed someone and tried to get away with it. If you'd have succeeded, Hajime would've died."

"I knew t-that Hajime would forgive me. He’s the only one that cares about me so he would forgive me." Mikan said, repeating herself. "He will a-always forgive me. He's the only one who's kind enough to forgive me. B-besides, I would have reunited us together." Mikan, who still hadn’t put her shoes back on, reached for her left sock and tugged it off her foot. Something fell out as she did so...a metal scalpel.

"You hid the scalpel in your sock?!" Nekomaru exclaimed. "YOU MUST BE BLEEDING!"

Mikan picked the scalpel from the floor. "I-I think my foot is bleeding, but I'm so used to the pain I can't feel it." she smiled.

"What are you doing with that thing?" Souda asked uneasily, slowly ducking behind his podium again.

"It was my plan, had I succeeded. My way of b-being with Hajime forever." she pressed the scalpel to her throat. "T-to die the same way as Byakuya."

"Mikan, no!" Hajime yelled, jumping out from behind his podium - desperate to reach Mikan before she did anything stupid. Even though she’d tried to kill him, he was still desperate to save her. He practically threw himself at Mikan’s podium, reaching out to take the scalpel.

Mikan giggled as she threw the scalpel to the floor - leaving Hajime frozen mere inches from her stand. "S-see Hajime, you always care about me. You're the only one h-here who cares about my life enough t-to try and stop me."

"Alright, alright, that's enough." Monokuma instructed, sounding agitated. "This is turning into something from a teen manga, I'm getting bored. Let's do something way more fun and vote! Please pull the lever in front of you and cast your vote. Who will be chosen as the blackened? Will you
make the right decision or the dreadfully wrong one?"

Nothing more needed to be discussed, it was so clearly Mikan. The students voted in unison, all of them choosing the same person, resulting in a united verdict.

**Guilty.**

“Correcccttt!” Monokuma cheered. “The blackened, responsible for killing Byakuya Togami, is none other than the ultimate nurse, Mikan Tsumiki.”

Though defeated, Mikan's spirits weren't dampened. “Ha ha ha ha.” she laughed, eyes set upon Hajime like an adoring puppy.

Peko cut to the chase, asking a question which seemed to have been bothering her. "Nagito, why did you switch sides? You set Mikan up and then help expose her."

“At first, Mikan and I had a common interest. We both wanted hope to shine, it's why I got her to do this in the first place.” Nagito explained. “But throughout the trial I soon saw the despair that was taking over her, she wasn't doing it for hope at all. And that...that is something I will not stand by.”

Hajime felt his knees weakening beneath him, he could barely stand. All his hope and energy seemed to have disappeared. "I never wanted anything like this to happen."

“This is your fault, Nagito!” Akane yelled, clenching her jaw. "You made Mikan do this!"

“I didn’t make her do anything. Scum like me doesn’t have that sort of power over an ultimate!” Nagito exclaimed, genuinely surprised at Akane's accusation. “I just gave her some...'inspiration'."

“I h-hope I made you proud, Hajime.” Mikan spoke with a fond heart. “Y-you’re the only person who’s ever cared for me before, the only one who’s never hated me. I w-wanted to make you proud.”

Hajime wanted to be angry with Mikan, but he couldn't. It wasn't her fault, all she wanted was to be accepted, to be loved. Hajime couldn't imagine how horrible it must be to feel so unaccepted in the world, to feel so lonely. To live in a world where you think no one cares about your existence. All Mikan wanted was to be accepted, to have someone to care about her. She'd been manipulated by Nagito, he'd taken advantage of her vulnerability. No wonder Junko found it so easy to turn Mikan into one of her ultimate despairs.

“She is fifty shades of crazzyyyyy!” Ibuki exclaimed.

“Let’s wrap this up.” Monokuma said. "I'm starting to feel nauseous hearing all this talk of love and friendship."

Mikan bent over, retrieving the scalpel from the floor. She placed it gently in Hajime's hand, being careful not to cut him. "I-I hope you can come and join me. N-no one has ever shown as much belief in me as you."

Hajime’s fingers gripped around the scalpel, though he had no plans of using it. He was pretty sure he was bleeding, but he was too emotionally drained to care. “I can’t do that Mikan.” Hajime wanted to pity the girl, she was about to get killed, but he couldn’t bring himself to lie. He wasn't going to fill her with false promise.

Mikan smiled nonetheless, accepting of his decision. "T-thank you for caring about me when no one else did. I w-will never forget the kindness that you showed me, you taught me that it’s possible to be
loved.”

“Blahhh! Talk about sickening.” Monokuma scoffed. “Okay, I’ve prepared a very special punishment. It’s punishment tiiiiiiime!”

Doctor, Patient.

Mikan finds herself in the operating theatre of the hospital. Her apron strings freshly tied, her hair clipped back, and a stethoscope around her neck. She’s surrounded by Monokuma clones, all of them in hospital slacks, carrying various medical instruments ready for her to use.

A glass panel stands behind Mikan, creating a window into the operating theatre. The twelve remaining students peer inside through the glass, their faces pressed to the panel so firmly they leave behind greasy nose stains - everyone is eager to see what's going on.

The door to the operating theatre slams open with a start. A series of Monokumas rush in, pushing a stretcher with a sheet on top, covering a patient. It stops just short of Mikan, reminding her that she’s in charge. The nurse pulls back the sheet, revealing another Monokuma clone - who appears to be injured. A large shard of glass shines from their forehead.

One of the nurse Monokuma clones thrusts a clipboard into Mikan’s hand, a piece of paper attached to the top. She reads through the instructions, though she already knows what she has to do, it's time to remove the glass. She takes the appropriate tools from the other Monokumas and sets to work, doing her best to carefully extract the glass from her patient's head. She places the glass shard down on the side, surgery complete.

The Monokumas wheel the patient back to the waiting room, as they do so, Mikan feels something trickling down her face. Using the back of her hand like a cloth, she reaches up and touches it, it's blood. She snatches a small mirror off the side, unsure where her injury has come from. To her horror, there’s a gaping wound on her forehead - like that of the Monokuma patient she’d just cured.

She isn't given any more time to focus on it, the door opens once again, another patient being delivered. Behind the cover is a different Monokuma, there are no visible wounds, but they seem awfully lifeless. A new clipboard is handed to Mikan, with the instructions ‘Bring back to life’.

Mikan knows what to do, she reaches out for the defibrillator - two metal plates designed to shock someone’s heart back into action. She readies the device, on indication of the red light, she thrusts the two metal plates to the bear's chest. It sends an electric shock through its body...and hers too. The currents fly through her, reaching every nerve in her body. The pain is unbearable, she’s never felt such horror in all her life, it's like a million lightning strikes at once. She lets out a piercing scream as she throws the defibrillator to the floor, clutching at her chest, which feels like it’s on fire.

Thankfully, one shock is enough to do the job. The patient is wheeled out just in time for another to be brought in. The final patient ready for surgery from the ultimate nurse. At a glance, Mikan can’t see what’s wrong. She turns to the clipboard for instructions. ‘Emergency
heart transparent surgery’.

There's a Monokuma to her left, holding a box which contains the new heart. While the Monokuma to her right passes her a scalpel. It's time for the surgery to begin. Mikan uses the scalpel to slice the patient’s body. Like a voodoo doll, she feels the same pain ripping through her skin, tearing at her fragile chest. She bites her bottom lip as she works, determined to put her patient’s safety before her own. Blood spills from her chest, dyeing her apron and soaking through her clothes. The heart of her patient is exposed, ready to be removed...but Mikan knows what’s coming, she'll be unable to complete the surgery.

She turns around, staring at her fellow classmates through the window. Ignoring their looks of horror, she turns straight to Hajime, offering him one last smile. Satisfied, Mikan returns her attention to her patient. She reaches in for the heart, pulling it straight from the patient’s chest. As she does so, her own heart falls to the floor, making a gruesome splat as it hits the ground. Mikan collapses, her body limp. A green light flashes above the operating theatre, indicating that all surgery is over.

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Hajime unlocked the door to his cottage, his fingers fumbling as he turned the key. He couldn't believe what he'd just witnessed, Byakuya and Mikan dead because of him. It was all his fault.

He was about to open the door, when someone called him from behind.

"Ah, Hajime!"

With the little energy he had left, Hajime turned around. He was greeted by Nagito, who was standing in the doorway of his own cottage. Nagito waved in his direction. “I was just getting some air. How are you?”

“I have nothing to say to you.” Hajime snapped, wanting to be as far away from Nagito as possible. He'd never been so furious with him before.

Nagito didn't give up, despite Hajime's hostile reaction. “I take that to mean you’re in a bad mood, hmm.” his voice practically taunting.

"Don't, Nagito." Hajime said sternly, his voice cold.

"Hajime, is something wrong?” Nagito frowned, moving away from the door of his cottage and closer to Hajime's.

Hajime found himself shouting. "She was innocent!" he didn't mean for his temper to get the better of him, but the rage inside was uncontrollable.

Nagito raised his eyebrows. "Mikan? No, she was guilty. Even Monokuma agreed, his vote doesn't lie."

"I mean she was innocent before the murder." Hajime corrected him.

"Well, Hajime, everyone is innocent before they commit a crime..." Nagito pointed out.

Hajime wanted to scream, Nagito was misunderstanding his point and being smug in the process. "Mikan was innocent until you manipulated her. You got her killed."
"I simply gave her some advice." Nagito pushed out his arms, as if to say 'I'm innocent'.

"Advice?" Hajime spat, horrified at Nagito's lack of remorse. "You told her I'd accept her if she killed someone."

"You're twisting my words." Nagito frowned. "I told her she'd gain your affection by making hope shine. She's the one who interpreted it in that way."

"Because she's vulnerable!" Hajime shouted, feeling dangerously close to tears. "She just wanted to be loved and accepted and you took advantage of that." his voice cracked as he spoke.

Nagito shrugged his shoulders. "She didn't have to listen to me."

"Stop making excuses." Hajime cried. "Mikan did nothing wrong, she didn't deserve this. You fucked with her head."

Gundam emerged from his cottage, disturbed by all the shouting. "What's with all this commotion?" he glared at the boys.

Hajime saw it as the perfect opportunity to free himself from Nagito. "It doesn't matter." he turned away before anyone could stop him, letting himself into his cottage and locking the door behind him right away. He kicked the door in anger, trying to release some of his frustration. He kept kicking, despite the pain travelling up his leg, kicking, kicking, kicking.

"I can't do this anymore." he mumbled to himself, hitting the door once again. "I..I can't do this anymore."

It was like his entire body went numb, he found himself unable to kick any further. Instead, he sunk slowly to the ground, pushing his back against the door for support. He covered his mouth his hands and began to sob.

Chapter End Notes

Mikan is my favourite girl, so I feel pretty guilty for killing her :'( But yeah I'm trying my best not to be biassed. Also, I know she already has an execution but I really wanted to write my own one. Also also, I know I probably got a lot of the medical stuff wrong during her execution, but I really know nothing about medical procedures haha!

That's chapter two wrapped and done! Thank you for all your support so far, it means a lot <3

Time to bring on the despair disease of chapter three ;)
Chapter Three - Part One

Chapter Notes

Just a couple of things to tell you before the chapter begins! :D

1) I'm a total idiot and forgot to mention something in the last chapter haha. It totally slipped my mind to say it, but Monokuma has unlocked the cottages again because another murder occurred. Hajime just sort of went to his cottage and I forgot to say anything, oops.

2) It's exam season at the moment *internal screaming*. Mine begin in a couple of weeks so a lot of my free time is on revision at the moment. If this story takes a little longer to update than usual, that's why. My exams finish at the end of June so things will go back to normal by then.

3) Finally, since we're going into a new chapter I just wanted to take the time to say a massive thank you for reading this story. It makes me so happy that people are enjoying it, and your comments & kudos really mean a lot. :')

Phew, okay. I think that's everything. I hope you enjoy ^_^
Chiaki rejected his offer, shaking her head. “Actually, I’ve come to get you. Do you think you could come with me?”

“Sure.” Hajime agreed, making his way out of the cottage. “Just let me lock up, then we can go to the restaurant.”

“We’re not going to the restaurant.” Chiaki said. “We’re going to the beach.”

“The beach?” Hajime raised his eyebrows, locking the door behind him. “I guess we can come back for some food later.” he hoped they would, his stomach was already starting to rumble.

“The others are there, they’re just waiting for me to come and get you.” Chiaki smiled.

“Wait...everyone’s there?” it seemed like Chiaki was inviting him to some sort of meeting. Hajime had no idea what was going on, but he was certainly intrigued.

Chiaki didn’t elaborate any further, changing the subject instead. “No one else is around, that gives us some time to talk.” she walked alongside Hajime, pushing open the hotel gate.

Hajime passed through, holding the gate so Chiaki could follow. “I don’t want to talk about what happened during the trial...I can’t face that right now.” he didn't want to risk sinking into despair again. “I just wanna discuss our next steps, we should focus on the future.”

Chiaki pulled off her backpack, reaching inside for their timeline. Walking at the same time made the task tougher than it had to be, but she retrieved the paper all the same. She passed it over to Hajime as she fixed her backpack.

Hajime glanced at the paper, the corners had started to tear, but it was still readable. His eyes scanned the list. “I’m guessing we’ll get access to the third island today.”

“I think so too.” Chiaki agreed, looking over at the list in Hajime’s hand. “That’s where Monokuma offers everyone a chance to see his movie...The Wizard of Monomi 2.5D.”

“I don’t think we have to worry about that. It's not enough to be a motive.” Hajime said, before adding with a smirk, “Though it is a pretty terrible movie.”

“If I remember correctly, the despair disease is the motive.” Chiaki said, waiting to see if Hajime agreed.

“Do you think Monokuma will still go through with that?” Hajime asked. “We don’t have a nurse with us anymore.”

“I don’t think that will stop Monokuma.” Chiaki shook her head with a sigh. “If anything, it gives him a bigger reason to create the despair disease. Without Mikan to help, things are going to be a lot tougher.”

“Whatever happens, we’re going to be unprepared.” Hajime pointed out. “It’s impossible for the same murder to happen since we’ve lost Hiyoko and Mikan.”

“We’ll do our best to look out for everyone else.” Chiaki said, her voice filled with determination. “We also have the chance to stop Nekomaru from becoming Mechamaru.”

“All we have to do is stop Akane from fighting Monokuma.” Hajime said. It didn't really matter whether Nekomaru turned into a robot or not. Whatever the outcome, he was still human in real life. That being said, Hajime wanted to prevent the unnecessary trauma.”That shouldn't be too hard.”
“It happened during Ibuki’s concert at the music venue.” Chiaki recalled. “She held it in celebration of Fuyuhiko’s recovery. Since he’s got nothing to recover from, it might not even go ahead.”

With Peko still alive, no harm had come to Fuyuhiko’s vision. It seemed like Ibuki wouldn’t be throwing a concert after all - not that Hajime was complaining. "So long as we keep an eye on Akane, everything should be alright."

"I’ll spend time with her." Chiaki offered. "I can make sure she doesn’t try and take on Monokuma."

"Sounds like a plan.” Hajime grinned, filled with confidence. Once again, he felt like things were under his control.

“We’ve got a couple of days before any of that happens.” Chiaki reminded him. “So I guess we can just enjoy the peace for now.”

It was exactly what Hajime intended to do.

By the time they’d finished talking, they were already at the beach. They hadn’t far to travel, choosing the beach on the first island over Chandler Beach. Like Chiaki told him, the rest of his classmates were already there. They were sat in groups, laughing and playing around. A cooler sat between them, the lid closed to preserve whatever rested inside. Hajime had no idea what was going on, but it looked fun - not a serious meeting like he'd been expecting.

“Wooooh, Hajime’s here!” Ibuki cheered, clapping her hands.

“What’s going on?” Hajime laughed, he hadn’t expected such a warm reception. He bent down to remove his shoes, not wanting to fill them with sand.

“We’re having breakfast on the beach.” Peko explained, a hint of a smile on her lips.

“It’s always so beautiful outside, so why not make the most of it?” Mahiru said, busy applying sun cream to her arms.

“And instead of boring old cereal, we’re having ice cream.” Souda added, patting the cooler.

Hajime wouldn’t describe the usual breakfast selection as boring, but he couldn’t deny the excitement of having ice cream for breakfast. “What’s with all this?”

“It was all Ibuki’s idea!” Ibuki said, pointing to herself with pride. “Ibuki saw how upset you were last night, and wanted to do something to cheer you up.”

“We do not blame you for Mikan’s actions.” Sonia said, her smile reassuring. “None of it was your fault, so please do not take it out on yourself.”

Hajime couldn’t stop smiling. All that effort had been made just to cheer him up, he felt humbled. “This looks amazing.”

“Come sit down, I’ll pass around the ice creams.” Akane said, removing the cooler's lid.

Hajime looked around for somewhere to sit. He couldn't quite believe that all his classmates were there, and willingly too. Even Gundam and Fuyuhiko looked like they were enjoying themselves. “Wait…” it appeared that all of his classmates weren’t there, someone was missing. “Where’s Nagito?”

“I made it clear he wasn’t invited.” Souda said. “That psycho isn’t welcome at our breakfast picnic. I
told him it was an event for real ultimates only.”

Hajime was feeling better, but he still hadn’t forgiven Nagito. Nagito had crossed a line, it was going to take a lot of effort to move on from that. Nagito had used his name to trigger another murder, Hajime couldn’t just sweep it under the rug. He didn’t want to exclude anyone from the picnic, but he wasn’t ready to face Nagito.

Hajime took the spot next to Nekomaru, inviting Chiaki to sit down with him. He edged back slightly, allowing himself more room, accidentally hitting his back against Fuyuhiko’s in the process.

“Watch where you’re going, jackass.” Fuyuhiko snapped, glaring at Hajime from over his shoulder.

Hajime tried not to let it bother him. Fuyuhiko was still treating everyone like dirt, since Peko was still alive. Hajime was missing his old friend more than anything, but he knew things weren’t going to change without Peko’s death. Peko’s survival meant sacrificing his friendship, he just had to accept it.

Akane approached Hajime, the cooler balanced on her hip. The ice creams were in miniature pots, they looked cute. “There’s chocolate, strawberry, vanilla, and mango.” she explained, listing off the four different flavours.

Hajime reached into the cooler, taking one at random, he wasn’t fussy about which flavour he got. He looked at the label, it read vanilla. He couldn’t help but laugh, plain old vanilla for a plain old reserve course student.

The students tucked into their ice creams, using the mini wooden spatulas provided. It wasn’t a nutritional breakfast, but they were enjoying themselves too much to care. Hajime let his sides split with laughter as he listened to Souda’s awful jokes, and tried to control himself when Gundam found a mysterious hair in his frozen treat.

Byakuya and Mikan’s absence was well noticed. Hajime half expected to hear Byakuya tell them off for spilling ice cream everywhere, or to be told by Mikan that they shouldn’t eat ice cream for breakfast. No one spoke about them, or so much as mentioned their names. The trial had been emotionally challenging for everyone, it seemed that no one wanted to relive it.

There was more than enough ice cream, so Akane went round with the cooler again. Chiaki reached in first, taking a strawberry since it matched her hair. Not wanting the same flavour twice in a row, Hajime peered inside, helping himself to a chocolate pot.

He’d barely taken two mouthfuls, when they were joined by another guest. Monomi made her way down the sand, a skip in her step. “Good morning everyone!”

She was greeted by a series of filthy looks. Realising she wasn’t going to get a response, Monomi continued. “No one told me we were having breakfast out on the beach.”

“I wonder why.” Akane rolled her eyes. “Learn to take a hint.”

“Is that ice cream?” Monomi smiled, eyeing up their food. “Is there enough for me?”

“Rabbits don’t eat ice cream. Don’t be so ridiculous.” Gundam folded his arms in outrage.

“Yeah, go eat some sand or something.” Souda said, dismissing Monomi.

“Sand?!” Monomi gasped, clutching her cheeks in horror.
“You’re ruining the mood.” Ibuki scowled. “Go away, we don’t want you here.”

“But I’ve got something important to tell you.” Monomi lowered her head, staring at the grains of sand in front of her.

“We already know what you’re gonna say.” Fuyuhiko said. “You’ve defeated another Monobeast and unlocked the third island. You’re so predictable.”

Defeated, Monomi left the students alone. It was more than clear they didn’t want her there.

“Are we going to explore the third island after we’ve finished eating?” Mahiru asked, waiting until Monomi was out of earshot.

“Is there any point?” Souda scratched his head. “We aren’t going to find an exit.”

“Do not be so pessimistic!” Sonia scorned him. “We cannot give up hope yet.”

Souda gulped. “S-sorry Miss Sonia! I definitely think we should check out the third island, who knows what we’ll find?”

Hajime rolled his eyes, Souda was so transparent. “I don’t think we’re going to find an exit, but it’s still worth exploring.” he knew there weren’t any exits, but he couldn’t let on.

“We have all day to explore.” Chiaki reminded them. “Why do we enjoy ourselves on the beach for a little longer?”

“Is there any more ice cream?” Nekomaru asked greedily, posing his question to Akane.

Akane peered into the cooler, shaking her head. “Nah, there’s only six left.”

“Who is going to have them?” Sonia asked, licking the last bit of ice cream from her spoon.

“Hmm.” Nekomaru brought his hand to his chin in thought. “LET’S COMPETE FOR THEM!” he shouted suddenly, throwing his arms into the air.

“Compete?” Peko repeated, her face blank.

“Yeah!” Nekomaru grinned, full of enthusiasm. “We could hold our own mini sports event, whoever wins gets the ice cream.”

“That’s not fair.” Mahiru complained. “That’s basically your ultimate talent, and Akane’s.”

“Then let’s work in teams.” Hajime suggested, offering a solution. “That gives everyone an equal chance. Besides, it’s more fun that way.”

Fuyuhiko seemed skeptical, his brows furrowed. “What sorta events are you talkin’ about?”

“We could have races and tug of war. That kinda thing.” Akane elaborated. “And boxing too!” jokingly, she took a swing at Gundam’s face.

Gundam moved back, just in time, narrowly avoiding Akane’s fist. “There shall be no boxing!” he declared, cursing Akane with his glare.

“Without Nagito, our teams won’t be even.” Chiaki pointed out, counting the number of people around her.
“Oh well.” Souda shrugged his shoulders, not caring in the slightest. “I’d rather that, than have him here.”

“How are we going to make the teams?” Hajime asked. “I can go to the market and get some paper. We could put names into Souda’s hat or something.”

Akane shook her head. “That takes too long! Let’s just appoint some captains, we’ll need four.”

Captains were decided, it didn’t take long. Nekomaru was automatically given one of the positions. Ibuki eagerly volunteered herself, nominating Hajime too. Sonia took the final position, thrilled at the idea of being a captain.

Everyone else stood in a line, hoping to be chosen - none of them wanting the humiliation of being picked last. It reminded Hajime of gym class.

“Ibuki first!” Ibuki called, waving her hands about. “Ibuki will take…..Peko and Mahiru!”

Hajime didn’t see it fair that Ibuki picked two people in a row, but he wasn’t going to start a fight over it - he didn’t care that much.

Sonia stepped forward next. “For my team, I would like...Chiaki and Gundam.” she smiled at her chosen teammates.

“Mph.” Souda winced, clenching his fists, clearly upset with not being chosen.

Hajime stepped in, trying to save his friend’s feelings. “I’ll take Souda. And, uh, Akane.” he had a feeling his chance of winning would increase with Akane on his team.

“Alright!” Akane bounced on the balls of her feet, full of energy. “We’re gonna win this thing!”

“I guess I don’t get much choice.” Nekomaru laughed, not that he really cared. “Fuyuhiko, it’s just you and me.”

Fuyuhiko scowled, it was to no surprise that he was last pick. He stayed, surprisingly, calm. Either it didn’t bother him, or he was doing a very good job of hiding it. “Whatever.”

The first event was a relay race. It was a race to the sea and back, the team members taking it in turn. The winners were the team that could get all their members back first.

Fuyuhiko sat down on the sand, resting his back against a palm tree. “I’m sitting out.”

“Looks like I’ll be running three times then!” Nekomaru exclaimed, though it was no match for him.

“If you’re sitting out, then you might as well do something useful.” Mahiru scowled. “You can be the referee.”

The teams spread out along the sand. Hajime conferred with his teammates. They agreed to send Souda first, since he was the slowest. Hajime was to follow after him, and then Akane would go last, so she could catch them up if they were falling behind.

Using her shoe, Ibuki drew a start line across the sand. Souda kicked off his shoes, hoping it would allow him to run faster. He positioned himself on the start line, next to the other first runners: Nekomaru, Chiaki, and Mahiru.

“Come on ref!” Akane yelled at Fuyuhiko. “You have to start the race.”
“Uh, fine. Whatever...go.” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes, putting as little enthusiasm into his words as possible.

The students knew they weren’t going to get anything better, so they decided to listen to him and start the race. Arms and legs flew everywhere as they ran down the sand, all of them desperate to reach the sea first. Their teammates cheered from behind, clapping their hands together and whistling loudly.

“Come on, Souda!” Akane called, her voice loudest out of everyone.

Nekomaru was in the lead, with Souda closely behind him. Nekomaru was first to the sea, bending over to run his hand through the water. He was already on his way back by the time the others reached it.

Hajime moved to the start line, Souda was on his way back, he had to get ready. He took a quick glance to the side, it seemed that he was racing up against Ibuki, Gundam, and, of course, Nekomaru.

“Hajime!” Souda yelled, crossing the finish line. He tagged Hajime on the shoulder, changing over their positions.

Hajime started running the second Souda touched him, they were in second place and he was determined not to fall to third. Nekomaru was well ahead, Hajime knew he had no chance of catching up. It was Gundam he was worried about, he was closely gaining speed behind him.

“Out of my way, mortal!” Gundam yelled, shoving past Hajime with full force.

“Ooof.” Hajime winced at Gundam’s impact, but it didn’t stop him. If anything, it made him more determined to win. “Coming through.” he called, taking over Gundam once again - making an extra effort to hit him with his shoulder. If Gundam was going to play dirty, then so was Hajime.

He reached the water’s edge, dipping his hand into the sea to prove he’d touched it. Hajime turned on his heels, half his run already complete. Souda and Akane were waiting at the finish line, jumping up and down while cheering his name.

“Come on Hajime!”

Their encouragement was the motivation he needed. Using all the energy he had left, Hajime sprinted to the finish line, running so fast that Gundam had no chance of catching him up. Skidding to a halt, Hajime hit Akane on the shoulder, allowing the gymnast to finish the race.

Hajime doubled over, trying to catch his breath. It had been a long time since he’d run like that.

“Well done, man!” Souda grinned, patting Hajime on the back.

Hajime straightened himself up to finish watching the race. Those running the final lap were Nekomaru, Akane, Sonia, and Peko. Nekomaru and Akane were already halfway to the sea, while Peko and Sonia were in the process of change over.

It was going to be a close call. Peko caught up to Akane and Nekomaru in no time, her running was flawless, so agile that she practically danced across the sand. The contestants reached the sea and turned tail, all of them wanting to win.

In a change of events, Peko was the first one back. Her legs sliding over the finish line, a triumphant smile on her face. Akane and Nekomaru were neck and neck, with Akane making it over the line
just seconds before her opponent. Sonia returned half a minute later, everyone cheering her to the finish line. Despite returning last, she was grinning from ear to ear.

“That was so much fun!” she laughed, doing her best to catch her breath.

Everyone cheered, it was a friendly competition, they were all as happy for each other. Hajime praised Akane, as well as the other runners. He’d never seen someone run as fast as Peko, and he had no idea how Nekomaru could’ve completed that many laps without collapsing - he certainly couldn’t do it.

“One point to Ibuki’s team!” Ibuki cheered, throwing her arm around Peko.

“So, what’s next?” Hajime asked, already pumped for the next event. There was something so fun and carefree about sports.

“How about boxing?” Akane grinned, bouncing around. “I wanna fight!”

“Uh...let’s leave the boxing for now.” Souda said, wide-eyed - even though he was on the same team as Akane. “What about tug of war? That sounds fun.”

“I’ll go to the store and get some rope.” Nekomaru said, readying himself to leave.

“No need.” Akane shook her head. “I’ve got something else we can use.” she bounced over to Gundam and dragged the scarf from around his neck, holding it up like a trophy. “This’ll be perfect!”

Gundam clutched as his neck, uncomfortable at having it so exposed. “We will not be using my scarf as a toy. Do you know where it -”

Akane cut him off, waving her hand to shut him up. “You got it from killing a demon or something, blah, blah, blah.”

“I’m not sure.” Sonia frowned. “We might rip it. Perhaps we should find something else.”

“It’ll be fine.” Akane said casually. “We’ll be careful not to rip it.”

Neither Gundam or Sonia were filled with much confidence, but they didn’t bother to argue any further.

“My team has already won three of the ice creams, so whoever wins this gets the others.” Mahiru said.

“And what if your team wins again?” Souda asked.

“Then we’ll be getting two ice creams each.” Mahiru teased, meaning it in good nature. “All the more reason to step up your game.”

“How are we going to do this?” Peko asked. “I don’t think it’s sensible to have eleven people pulling at one piece of fabric.”

“It’ll be fine.” Nekomaru said, as relaxed as Akane. “THE MORE COMPETITION THE BETTER!”

“We’ll have two teams on each side, and play a match. The two teams on the winning side will then play each other.” Chiaki said, working out the rules. “Since Nekomaru’s team is short a member, I think it’s fair to ask them who they’d like to play with.”
“Who’d you want, Fuyuhiko?” Nekomaru asked, turning to his teammate.

Fuyuhiko scowled, leaning his head back against the tree. “I ain’t playing. I’m the ref.”

“You’re just being lazy.” Mahiru glared at him, unimpressed with his response. “Get up and join your team.”

“Let us not argue.” Sonia laughed nervously, trying to keep the atmosphere pleasant.

“Come on, Fuyuhiko.” Hajime called over, trying to encourage him. “You’re really missing out, it’s great fun.”

Reluctantly, Fuyuhiko pushed himself from the ground. Glaring daggers at Hajime, though he seemed to be joining in. “I’ll play one game, that’s it.”

“If you don’t get up, you have to go to the back.” Nekomaru said.

Reluctantly, Fuyuhiko pushed himself from the ground. Glaring daggers at Hajime, though he seemed to be joining in. “I’ll play one game, that’s it.”

“Which team do you want to play with?” Nekomaru asked, repeating his question.

“Uh...I’ll take Ibuki’s team.” Fuyuhiko said, speaking vaguely like he didn’t care.

“You only wanna be with them because they’re winning!” Souda pouted.

Hajime didn’t agree, he had a feeling Fuyuhiko wanted to be on the same team as Peko. He elbowed Souda, muttering under his breath. “I don’t know why you’re so miserable, look who you get to be with.”

It took Souda a second to realise. “Miss Sonia!” he no longer felt the need to complain.

Akane laid the scarf to rest on the floor, the teams taking place either side of it - discussing tactics before they played.

“The stronger players need to play to take the back of the rope.” Akane said, she seemed to be speaking from experience. “We need to arrange ourselves in order of strength.”

They didn’t have much time to discuss, so their order was only rough. Hajime placed himself near the middle, behind Sonia, but in front of Souda. He wasn’t weak, but he certainly didn’t consider himself the strongest with the likes of Akane and Gundam on his team.

The other team seemed to have the same tactic, with Nekomaru holding up the back. Together, they picked up the scarf, distributing it fairly so that everyone had an equal grip. Gundam winced as he watched everyone touch his scarf.

Ibuki had knotted the center of Gundam’s scarf, and drawn another line in the sand. The first team to pull the knot across the line won. Ibuki called out loudly. “We’ll begin on the count of three. One...two...three!”

Given the command, everyone began to pull. Hajime practically flew forward as the other team yanked at the scarf, they were even stronger than he’d expected. He dug his heels into the sand, trying to stay put. Akane yelled from the back, instructing everyone to pull harder. Even with a smaller team, the other group were tough competition.

It was stalemate for a long while, just as one team would begin to cross the line, they’d pull back to safety. There were plenty of close calls and near misses, but no clear victors.

Hajime’s legs were beginning to tire, he wasn’t sure how much strength he had left. However, he had nothing to worry about. A miracle, of sorts, performed itself. As Mahiru moved backwards, her
ankle twisted - causing her to fall to the ground with a screech. As she did so, Hajime’s team pulled harder, bringing the knot of the scarf across the line.

Thankfully, Mahiru’s fall hadn’t caused her any serious pain. There was a slight limp to her step, but nothing that would last longer than a day. She’d forget about it soon enough, rather like Hajime and his black eye, it had become part of his face.

With two teams out of the competition, there was one round to go. A final match between Hajime’s team and Sonia’s team. Gundam’s scarf had suffered no damage, so they were able to continue. Hajime had a strong feeling of success, with Akane on their team he couldn’t see them losing. Sonia, Chiaki, and Gundam weren’t much to be feared. The teams took their places either side of the line, picking up the makeshift rope.

Ibuki stood in as ref, watching eagerly from the side. “Three...two...one!”

With less people playing it should have been easier, but the weight was evenly distributed both sides, making both teams as strong as each other.

The spectators cheered from the side, encouraging both teams to do their best. Their kind words made Hajime all the more determined to win, even if the prize was only ice cream.

The second match didn’t last as long as the first one, with Hajime’s team pulling the knot over the line in just a few minutes. The other team had tried their best, but they didn’t stand a chance in the end, they fell to the floor like flowers in the wind.

“Alright!” Akane jumped about, slapping her teammates on the back - a little too harshly. “I knew we could do it.”

With congratulations out of the way, Sonia brought round the remaining ice creams - one for all the winners. Hajime had worked up a sweat, it was relaxing to cool down with an icy treat. His ice cream didn’t taste of mango, it tasted of victory.

Chapter End Notes

That last line was mega cheesy, but I wanted to write something happy after all the despair in the last chapter ;D
It was late afternoon by the time the students explored the third island. They’d spent the entirety of their day down at the beach, sunbathing after their busy morning of activities. Hajime found it relaxing to explore the island during the evening, he didn’t have the hot sun beating down on his neck. The air felt lighter.

There were five locations for the students to explore: the music venue, the theatre, the hospital, electric avenue, and the motel. Everyone spread out, exploring the sites at their own pace, taking in their new surroundings.

Wanting to get it out of the way, Hajime started with the hospital. It was far too familiar for his liking. It reminded him of the past two months, sitting by the bedside of his friends with all hope lost. Hospitals had always given him chills, but now the feeling was worse than ever.

It seemed that his classmates felt the same way, as Hajime didn’t encounter any other students during his visit to the hospital. He put his head around every door, but seemed to be alone - not that he was going to complain, it gave him an excuse to leave.

He continued along the island until he reached Titty Typhoon, though he preferred to address it as the music venue. It was another place that held sinister memories for Hajime. All he could think about was Ibuki’s hanging corpse, and Hiyoko’s limp body tied to the post. He knew it was impossible for those crimes to repeat themselves, but he couldn’t stop thinking about it all the same.

“Yahooooooonn!” Ibuki was standing on the countertop of the bar, jumping around in excitement.

“Uh, Ibuki!” Hajime called out, interrupting the musician’s celebrations. “You might want to get down from there, it doesn’t look very safe.” he wasn’t sure why she was up on the bar when there was a stage right in front of her.

Ibuki ignored him, continuing to dance around on the bar. “I can’t believe there’s a music venue! I love music. Ibuki can’t help feeling excited!”

Akane, who was sitting on one of the bar stools, looked up to Ibuki with a grin. “You’ll have to put on a show or somethin’”

“That idea is super awesome!” Ibuki cheered. “I was writing a new song just the other day, it’s called ‘You missed the toilet, and you’re blaming it on the dog’.”

“Wow, uh, that sounds...great.” Hajime scratched his head awkwardly, doing his best to lie. He wasn’t sure if he could stand through another one of Ibuki’s concerts, the first one had been bad enough.

He left Ibuki and Akane to talk about the concert and headed into the storage room, where he found Gundam. Gundam appeared to be looking at himself in the mirror, but flinched away the minute Hajime came in the room.

“Oh, don’t let me disturb you.” Hajime excused him.

Gundam scowled. Embarrassed, he changed the subject. “What sort of foolery is this place?”
“It’s a music venue.” Hajime explained.

“Hmph, of course you’d say that.” Gundam sneered, looking down on Hajime with his arms folded.

“What’s that meant to mean?” Hajime challenged him, it seemed to be some form of insult.

“The dark lightning, the fire outside, the evil energy in here. Mortals like yourself will see a music venue, but only those with a power like mine will be able to see this place for what it truly is.” Gundam said, his eyes gleaming.

“If it’s not really a music venue, then what is it?” Hajime asked. He didn’t believe Gundam, but he was curious all the same.

“I cannot share such important information with you.” Gundam faced away from Hajime. “Tell the wrong people and you will end up cursed, dead within a week.”

“I won’t tell the wrong people, you can trust me.” Hajime said.

“Hmmm…” Gundam paused, weighing up his decision. “Fine, I shall tell you, but you mustn’t repeat this to another living soul. I will find out if you do.”

“I promise, I won’t be telling anyone.” Hajime didn’t want to tell anyone, they’d probably think him mad.

“This is a lair for dark creatures of the night.” Gundam’s words turned into a whisper, adding drama and suspense.

“Vampires?” Hajime said.

Gundam nodded solemnly. “It is a place for them to run free, where they cannot be stopped by hunters, the fire outside is to warn them off. I could feel their energy as soon as I came inside.”

“But there isn’t anyone else here on the island.” Hajime pointed out. “So this is a vampire lair without any vampires?”

Gundam looked into the distance. “There are vampires on the island, they just wish to stay unseen to the human eye. Someone like you wouldn’t understand.”

“Right…” Hajime said, unsure what else to say. He tried to crack a joke. “Well, maybe I should start looking out for coffins.”

Gundam seemed to take him seriously. “The coffins must be buried underground somewhere close by, I wonder if they’re underneath the floor.”

Hajime decided to go, before Gundam started to dig up the contents of the storage room. He’d seen enough of the music venue, it was time to move on to the motel.

Mahiru was waiting in the parking lot, bent on one knee, taking photos of the motel. Hajime walked carefully, not wanting to interrupt her shots. Two of the motel doors were open, so Hajime figured people were inside.

The door on the far left was open, but no one was inside when Hajime put his head around the door. The bed covers were perfectly straight, the room seemed untouched. Perhaps someone else had been
exploring and forgotten to close the door behind them.

Hajime was about to leave, when he heard a mysterious noise coming from the bathroom. It sounded like a dying dog.

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmpph.”

“H-hello?” Hajime called out, completely bewildered.

“Mmmmmmpmphhh.” The noise came again, even louder, followed by a voice. “Hajime, is that you?”

“Nekomaru?” Hajime replied, he should have realised sooner.

The door to the bathroom swung open. Sitting on the toilet, with his pants at his knees, was Nekomaru. He gave Hajime a friendly wave.

“Gahhh!” Hajime yelled, shielding his eyes with his hands. It was the last thing he wanted to see. “Don’t you wanna shut the door?”

Nekomaru laughed, not humiliated in the slightest. “It’s fine.”

It really wasn’t.

Hajime couldn’t stick around for longer than a minute, he felt highly uncomfortable, and the smell was starting to gas him. He closed both doors on Nekomaru, trying to give him some privacy. The door to one of the other motel rooms was still open. Hajime decided to take a chance and visit whoever was inside - it couldn’t be anything worse than what he’d just witnessed.

Fuyuhiko was the occupant of the other room, running his finger along surfaces in search for dust. He looked up at Hajime upon his arrival, a look of disgust on his face. “This place is a shit hole.”

“I certainly wouldn’t want to stay here.” Hajime shuddered, looking at the bedsheets in fear. “Though I guess this would’ve been pretty handy for when Monokuma took our cottages.”

Fuyuhiko shook his head. “I’d rather sleep out on the parking lot than in here. Who knows what you’re gonna catch?!”

“I bet you’re used to fancy mansions and five star hotels.” Hajime said, he couldn’t imagine anything less for a Kuzuryu.

“It’s none of your business where I stay.” Fuyuhiko snapped, glaring daggers at Hajime.

“Oh...no...I didn’t mean anything by it.” Hajime back tracked, he’d only been trying to make general conversation. “I just thought, because of your family-” he’d only made things worse for himself.

“Don’t talk about my family, dumbass.” Fuyuhiko hissed, his temper rising further.

Hajime knew he’d made a gigantic mess, the safest option was to leave. His conversation with Fuyuhiko was short lived.

Electric avenue was his next destination, a series of shops filled with all sorts of electrical appliances. They alley way he found himself in was gross, but it was a significant deal nicer than the motel.

“Hajime!” Souda waved him over, busy investigating the stand of computer screens. “Look what I’ve found.”
Hajime joined Souda, doing his best to act naive. “Woah, this is great. With these computers, we might be able to contact someone.”

Souda shook his head, sighing in disappointment. “Afraid not, all of the technology here seems to be broken. Although, I did find something.”

“And what’s that?” Hajime asked.

“This laptop here.” Souda pointed to the laptop sitting among all the computer screens. “It won’t connect to anything, but I did find a file on it. Take a look for yourself.” Souda typed away at the keyboard, getting something up on the screen.

**USAMI X FILE**

Hajime froze, he knew exactly what the file contained. He couldn’t let Souda find out the truth regarding Hope’s Peak Academy, or the reserve department.

Souda clicked the file, giving Hajime time to read it.

*About the Biggest, Most Awful, Most Tragic Event in Human History. This horrendous event originated with some students of Hope’s Peak Academy causing a revolt. The students of the reserve department were dissatisfied with being treated differently than the Primary Department, and began to fight the academy. At first, the dispute was confined to the campus, and hopes were high that it would settle down someday. But things quickly escalated. Behind the scenes of that rebellion, a huge authority was exerting its influence. Eventually, it spread like an infection, provoking riots in various parts of the world. It was unlike any previous acts of terrorism or coup d’etat. It seemed to have a much different purpose. However, no matter what we assume, we simply cannot apply reason to this subversive movement. Nonetheless, the destruction is not chaotic or disorganised, it is both purposeful and malicious. Therefore it is a subversive movement full of despair. Hope’s Peak Academy became the origin of the incident, and was forced to put an end to their long history. As for the students who survived, they were forced to kill each other as a lesson in despair.*

Hajime couldn’t read another further, the letters were completely jumbled. He turned away from the screen.

“What the hell is all that about?” Souda exclaimed, as if Hajime held all the answers. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“It’s probably a dumb joke.” Hajime said, trying to steer Souda away from the truth. “I’m sure Monokuma put this here to worry us.”

“I guess…” Souda said, though he didn’t look convinced.

In an attempt to distract him, Hajime took the opportunity to ask Souda about the machines they’d found. Chiaki, who’d been hanging nearby, soon came to join them.

The movie theatre was Hajime’s final destination. He had no intentions of watching the film, but he was going to show his face anyway.

Sonia was lurking around in the lobby, eating from a bag of popcorn. She greeted Hajime by offering the bag in his direction. “Would you like some?” Hajime saw it rude to reject an offer from the princess, but he didn’t want to spend the next hour pulling popcorn from his teeth. He politely declined by shaking his head. “I’m good, but thanks. Have you seen Monokuma’s film?”

“Not yet.” Sonia replied. “But I’m excited!”
“I wouldn’t be. Anything made by Monokuma is destined to be awful.” Hajime warned her. “Where is Monokuma anyway? I thought he’d be hiding around here somewhere.”

“He is through there.” Sonia said, pointing at the door which led to the screening room. “He's showing his film to Nagito.”

"Nagito's in there?" Hajime frowned, no wonder he hadn't seen the boy during his investigation. "I guess I'll get going, I don't really want to see him."

"Do you not want to watch Monokuma's film?" Sonia asked, reaching for another handful of popcorn.

Hajime shook his head, a little excessively. "There are a million other things I'd rather do that watch that." he'd already seen the movie once, he couldn't put himself through it a second time.

Hajime excused himself from Sonia, leaving the theatre before the movie finished. He didn't want to get himself trapped in a conversation between Nagito and Monokuma.

By the time he'd finished exploring the third island, it was time for bed. Spending the day playing sports with his friends had cheered Hajime up significantly. His friends cared about him, and he cared about them just as much. It made him all the more determined to save them.

***

Breakfast, the next morning, was back to usual. As much as Hajime enjoyed eating ice cream on the beach, he knew the novelty would soon wear off if he did it every morning - his teeth would hate him for it too. It had been a special morning, and one of the better memories he’d take from the rewrite. No matter what happened, no one was going to take it from him.

Still on a mission to avoid Nagito, Hajime sat down at one of the busier tables. Seeking company from the likes of Akane, Souda, and Mahiru. With so many people to talk to, Hajime found himself hanging around in the restaurant longer than usual. Most of the students had already come and gone by the time he’d finished eating.

Souda pushed his plate to the other end of the table, not wanting to look at the remaining food. Wiping the crumbs from his mouth, he kicked his legs up on the table. “Y’know, sometimes I think being on this island isn’t so bad. Those eggs were better than anything I’ve ever had.”

“You’re telling me!” Akane grinned, spitting out food as she spoke. “I don’t know who’s cooking all this, but I need to find them.” she was already on her third helping.

Mahiru frowned at Souda, uncomfortable having his shoes so close to her food. “Take your feet down, it’s bad manners.”

“Aw c’mon!” Souda complained, showing no intentions of moving. “I’m comfy like this. I’ve just had a big breakfast, I wanna relax.”

“Take ‘em off.” Hajime hit at Souda’s legs, pushing them off the table with force. He wasn’t particularly bothered, but he could see that it was irritating Mahiru.

“Gah!” Souda yelled as his feet smacked the floor, taken off guard by Hajime’s actions. “What the
“I’m sure you’ll recover.” Hajime rolled his eyes in a joking fashion, Souda would soon forget about it.

Hajime was right, Souda forgot about it almost instantly. A guest at their table gave him better things to worry about.

“Miss Sonia!” the mechanic exclaimed, his face filled with glee. “Do you want some breakfast? I’ll go get you something. You should have the eggs, I just had them and-”

Sonia cut him short, waving her hand to silence him. “I’ve already eaten, but thank you.” she replied curtly.

Undefeated, Souda persisted. “I’m sure you have room for more. Look at Akane, she has several plates.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing.” Akane shrugged off his comment, she saw no problem in helping herself to more, it was better than going hungry.

“I am not here to eat.” Sonia shook her head, rejecting Souda’s offer once again. “Apparently there are going to be reruns of old movies over at the theatre today. I was wondering if anyone would like to accompany me? I would really like to see something.”

It was to no one’s surprise that Souda volunteered first. “I’ll join you, Miss Sonia.”

Sonia smiled weakly. “Does anyone else want to come?” the pleading look in her eyes said ‘please don’t leave me with him’.

“I’m sorry, but I’ve already made plans.” Mahiru apologised, genuinely disappointed to let Sonia down. “I promised Ibuki I’d take some photos of her at the music venue, she wants to see what she looks like on stage.”

“I’ll come.” Akane said, relieving Sonia of being left alone with Souda. “I’ll invite Coach Nekomaru too.”

“That would be great!” Sonia beamed, clapping her hands together in delight. “Hajime, would you like to come too?”

Hajime hadn’t any plans. It was his last day before the despair disease hit, he wanted to make the most of it. Going to the theatre sounded fun - so long as he didn’t have to watch The Wizard of Monomi 2.5D again. “Sure, it sounds cool.”

They headed straight to the theatre, Akane fetching Nekomaru along the way. Excitement ran through them, it would be nice to do something different. Something good had come from the access to the third island.

Monokuma was waiting for them at his theatre, standing behind the counter, serving popcorn into buckets.

“I take it you work here permanently now?” Souda raised his eyebrows, approaching Monokuma.

“Someone has to operate the films, it doesn’t run by magic.” Monokuma said, speaking down to Souda as if he lacked a brain.
“I’m surprised you’re not making Monomi do it…” Hajime muttered under his breath.

“That’s not a bad idea.” Monokuma smirked. “I take it that you’re here to see my movie masterpiece...The Wizard of Monomi 2.5D. Sonia, Souda, Nekomaru, Akane, you’ve already seen it. So you’re gonna have to pay.”

“Hell no.” Akane scoffed, sounding offended.

“I’m not here to see it either.” Hajime said. “Apparently you’re putting on some old movies?”

“Ah yes.” Monokuma smiled. “I made this one a long time ago. Monokuma and the Chamber of Secrets.”

Souda scrunched up his nose. “That sounds awful.”

“I also have Jabberwock Island has Fallen, and Monokuma in Wonderland.” Monokuma said, listing the movies off on his paw.

Sonia sighed, her shoulders drooping. “Those do not sound very good either.”

“I’ve taken shits more interesting than those.” Nekomaru laughed, winding up Monokuma further.

Monokuma slammed his paw down on the counter, sending popcorn everywhere. “Why does no one appreciate fine arts anymore?”

“Are you showing any films that you didn’t make yourself?” Hajime asked, though it didn’t seem very likely.

“No.” Monokuma scowled. “If you don’t like what I have on offer, you can get the hell out of my movie theatre.”

They didn’t need telling twice.

“I am sorry everyone.” Sonia apologised as they left the theatre. “I should have known Monokuma was showing more of his awful films.”

“It’s okay.” Hajime shrugged his shoulders, it was no big deal. “We can do something else.”

“Yeah!” Akane agreed, slapping Hajime enthusiastically on the back. “There’s plenty of other things we can do.”

“We could go and see what Mahiru and Ibuki are up to.” Souda suggested. “It might be pretty fun to hear Ibuki perform.”

It was a decision Hajime knew Souda was going to regret, but who was he to rob him of his naive innocence?

The blaring music hit them as soon as they reached the parking lot. It got even louder the minute Nekomaru opened the door. Hajime had to shield his ears, he wanted to hold on to his hearing.

Ibuki was on stage, singing her heart out. Strumming on the guitar, she screamed into the microphone, putting everything into her performance. Strobe lights flashed across the stage, flickering so violently Hajime started to feel sick - it felt like he was blinking rapidly.

Mahiru stood in the crowd, balancing on a stool to achieve a higher angle. Her attention was on
Ibuki, busy photographing the musician in her element. She seemed to be squirming at the sound of
the music, but she didn’t let it put her off.

The others stood in a line behind Mahiru, not wanting to interrupt the shots. Their smiles quickly
turned into wide-eyed looks of horror, none of them able to understand what was going on.

“Is..is this Ibuki’s song?” Sonia asked weakly, looking at Hajime for answers.

“Yeah, I think so.” he replied, having to shout just so Sonia would hear him.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.” Souda screamed, cowering behind Nekomaru for protection. “I think
she’s trying to summon the devil!”

“What’s all the noise?” Akane complained, seeking no enjoyment from the performance either.

Thankfully, Ibuki appeared to be at the end of her song, as only seconds later she put down the guitar
and stopped singing. She waved to her friends in the crowd. “Thanks for coming to watch! What did
you think of my new song?”

“It was, uh...unique.” Hajime said, doing his best to spare the musician’s feelings.

Mahiru stepped down from the stall, taking her safety into consideration. “Did you finish watching
the movie already?”

“No, we didn't get the chance.” Hajime explained with a sigh. “Monokuma was
being...Monokuma.”

“Ah.” Mahiru nodded her head, she didn't need to know anymore. “Well, you're welcome to stay
here. I've pretty much finished taking photos.”

“Ibuki can't wait to see them!” Ibuki squealed, jumping down from the stage - not bothering to take
the stairs.

“What are the pictures for?” Hajime asked, speaking out of curiosity.

“I want them for them for my invitations!” Ibuki said.

“What invitations are those?” Sonia said.

Ibuki grinned, answering her question. “These are exclusive tickets for a concert I’m putting on
tonight at the music venue.”

“You’re putting on a show?” Souda asked, weakly. “We have to listen to more of your music?”

The last concert had been in aid of Fuyuhiko’s recovery, but since Fuyuhiko hadn’t been injured, it
made no sense that the performance was still going ahead. Ibuki was probably just looking for a
reason to perform.

“It’s a charity gig.” Ibuki said. “For the lost students who have been abandoned here on Jabberwock
Island. Maybe we can raise enough money to buy a boat or a helicopter!”

“But the only ones on this island are the lost students.” Hajime pointed out. “Monokuma and
Monomi are the only ones who could donate to the charity, and I can’t see that happening.”

“And where are we going to buy a boat from?” Nekomaru asked, scratching his head. “I haven’t
seen any down at Rocketpunch Market.”
“Ibuki can worry about that later!” the musician brushed off their concerns - too excited to let them stop her. “Are you excited?”

“NO!” Souda yelled, seemingly distressed.

“No?!” Ibuki echoed, her spirit crushed.

Hajime knew Ibuki’s music meant a lot to her, the last thing he wanted were her feelings to be hurt. He stepped in before Souda dug his own grave. “I think what Souda’s trying to say, is he’s not very excited because of this venue. With all the lights, and everyone stuffed in here, it’s going to be really hot and clammy. Maybe if the concert was elsewhere, it’d be better…”

“Uh, sure. That’s what I meant…” Souda mumbled, pursuing with the lie.

“But that’s part of the fun.” Ibuki protested, not seeing where Hajime was coming from. “There’s nowhere else Ibuki could go.”

“That’s not true.” Hajime said, doing his best to reason. “You could perform in Jabberwock Park. It’d be like a true summer concert.”

“Hmmmm.” Ibuki brought her hand to her chin, thinking over Hajime’s suggestions. “How would Ibuki be able to play her instruments if she were outside?”

“We could bring out an extension cord.” Souda said, speaking with knowledge. “All your musical equipment would run from that.”

“I can set up a barbeque!” Akane yelled, excited with the idea that hit her. “Eatin’ burgers makes anything better.”

Ibuki threw her arms in the air. “Alrightttt! This is gonna be so much fun. The best charity gig Jabberwock Island has ever seen.”

“The only charity gig Jabberwock Island has ever seen.” Hajime remarked under his breath.

The students offered Ibuki their help, but she didn’t want it. She insisted the concert was going to be a surprise, and didn’t want them finding out anything else. Hajime wasn’t quite sure how’d she’d have time to rehearse, set up a stage, and cook the barbecue, but he wasn’t going to intervene. He let Ibuki be, and left, in search of someone else to spend his time with.

Tired of being in the exasperating sun, Hajime decided to seek shelter indoors. The library was his destination of choice, the gigantic bookshelves provided good shade. His black eye acted as a battle scar from the last time he’d visited, he hoped history wouldn’t repeat itself.

The library was deserted, no one for company - besides the broken Monomi statues. Unsure what he wanted to read, Hajime took a leisurely stroll around the library. He took books at random, inspecting their covers, and reading over the blurbs. With so much choice, he found it difficult to settle on just one.

Hajime was in the middle of inspecting a crime novel, which he saw to be rather fitting, when the noise of an opening door sounded from behind him. He turned his head, curious to see the company willing to join him.

“Good morning, Hajime.”

Hajime couldn’t mask his disappointment, his shoulders slumped and he released a deep sigh.
“Hello, Nagito.” he spoke coldly, though he wasn’t rude.

Nagito moved further into the library, allowing the door to slam shut behind him. “The weather’s nice today, isn’t it?” he smiled pleasantly.

“The weather’s always nice, we’re on a tropical island.” Hajime pointed out, unable to return the smile.

Nagito laughed. “Trust someone like me to say something so stupid.”

Hajime changed the subject, before Nagito could bring himself down any further. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to read, of course.” Nagito said. “Why else does someone come to a library?”

It seemed that Nagito’s intentions were innocent, he hadn’t come just to follow Hajime. Even so, Hajime didn’t want to spend time alone with Nagito, he knew he’d start talking about Mikan. He’d have to look for something else to do. “I’m gonna get going, enjoy your reading.”

Nagito frowned. “You’re leaving already?”

“Yeah...I want to read my book in my room.” Hajime lied, thinking on his feet.

“But you haven’t got a book.” Nagito raised his eyebrows, challenging Hajime.

Hajime stretched out his arm, grabbing at the book his fingers touched first. “This is the one. Anyway,” he darted towards the exit before Nagito could stop him. “I’ll see you later.” he was out the door before Nagito even had the chance to say goodbye.

Hajime took refuge in his cottage, he knew he was safe there. He almost felt guilty for rushing out on Nagito so quickly, he wasn’t going to be able to avoid him forever. He locked the door behind him, kicking off his shoes. It was time to relax, and read the book he’d chosen.

Ibuki stopped by after lunch, presenting Hajime with an invitation. She’d printed information of the concert on the back of one of Mahiru’s photos. The pictures looked incredible, the professional standard Hajime would be willing to pay a lot of money for. Once again, Hajime offered her a hand, but Ibuki still refused. She told him to wait until nine o’clock for the concert.

Hajime had gotten rather into his book, it was better than he’d thought, but he couldn’t sit around reading any longer - there was a more important task at hand. He wasn’t sure if Akane still had plans of challenging Monokuma, but he had to put a stop to them, just in case. Thankfully for Hajime, he didn’t need to think up a plan. Chiaki had already offered to keep watch over Akane, and stop her from doing anything stupid...

...Not that Hajime minded doing it himself, but he had a feeling Chiaki would be better when it came to persuasion. Knowing Hajime’s luck, he’d only rile up Akane further.

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Hajime left for Jabberwock park just before nine. Locking his cottage behind him, he made his way out of the hotel. He wasn’t particularly looking forward to the concert, but if Akane’s barbeque was
still a thing, it wouldn’t be so bad.

Hajime left slightly later than the others, he didn’t find anyone on his journey since they’d already arrived. Loud music and the smell of cooked food greeted Hajime as he emerged through the clearing.

A stage had been set up in the center of the park, the same one Monokuma used for his ‘comedy’ performance - how Ibuki obtained it, Hajime had no idea. No one was on the stage, but it was lined with guitars, amps, and a microphone. To the side of the stage was a large table, covered with a plastic table cloth. On the table were plates of salad, chips, and burger buns - as well as bowls of sauce. Next to the table, a barbeque - food being prepared and cooked by Nekomaru and Akane. Chiaki was with them, handing out drinks - it seemed to be part of her plan to keep Akane busy.

“Yo, Hajime!” Akane yelled over to him, an oversized chef’s hat balanced on her head. “You want somethin’ to eat?”

Hajime had already eaten dinner, but he could still find room in his stomach for more. He approached the table, eager to see what they were cooking. “Sure, what’ve you got?”

“Hotdogs.” Nekomaru said, flipping over the meat with a spatula.

“And burgers.” Chiaki added.

“I think I’ll take a burger.” Hajime said, they were all he could smell - it was making his stomach rumble.

“One burger coming right up!” Nekomaru called, taking down his order.

Hajime rested his back against the table, talking to Akane while Nekomaru cooked the food. “Shouldn’t the concert have started by now?”

Akae shrugged her shoulders, unknowingly. “I dunno.”

“I wanna know how she set everything up.” Hajime mumbled, he couldn’t understand where she’d taken Monokuma’s stage from.

“I think Monomi helped her.” Chiaki answered, pouring out fresh cups of soda and juice. “I don’t think Monokuma knows.”

“I don’t think he’ll be very happy when he finds out.” Hajime said. After all, Monokuma loved to create drama. “Did Monomi help her bring over all the instruments?” it wouldn’t have been easy bringing them all the way over from the third island to the park.

“No.” Chiaki replied, with a shake of her head. “Souda volunteered.”

Hajime raised his eyebrows, it surprised him that the mechanic was willing to help someone who wasn’t the Princess.

“Your burger’s ready!” Akane called, wrapping it up in a paper napkin. She passed it to Hajime across the table.

“Thanks.” Hajime said gratefully, taking it from her. “Smells great.”

“You’ll be coming back for more.” Akane grinned, speaking from experience.
The sound system started to screech, the noise of the instruments coming to life. Hajime couldn’t help but wince, the loud wailing set his teeth on edge...it sounded similar to Ibuki’s music. Hajime looked to the stage to see Souda standing in front of the microphone, his shaking hands indicated that he’d rather not be up there.

“Are you gonna sing us something?” Nekomaru heckled, shouting to the stage.

“Testing. One, two, three, testing.” Ignoring Nekomaru, Souda spoke directly into the microphone. His trembling voice echoed throughout the park. “Testing, testing.” Souda didn’t stick around any longer than he had to, darting off the stage.

“Looks like he isn’t one for the spotlight.” Hajime laughed.

“The show is probably about to start, we should move closer to the stage.” Chiaki said.

“You want to be closer to the music?!” Hajime narrowed his brows, he’d have been happiest listening to the music from his cottage.

Besides Nekomaru, who was still running the barbeque, the other students had moved towards the stage - forming their own miniature mosh pit. Hajime wanted to leave the concert with his hearing in tact, so he stuck towards the back of the crowd, away from the speakers.

Excited energy ran throughout the crowd - Gundam particularly vocal about looking forward to the show. They didn’t have to stand around for long, the stage lights came to life, and the speakers began to sing once again.

“Heeeeeey y’all! It’s Ibuki Miodaaaaa!” Ibuki bounded across the stage, guitar in hand. She smiled out at her audience, waving to Peko in the crowd. “Thanks for coming out today. This is a charity gig for the lost students of Jabberwock Island, all donations will be collected after the show.”

“She still thinks we’ve got money?” Hajime mumbled to himself. The only thing he held of value was his student hand book, but that wasn’t going to make them anything.

Ibuki adjusted the microphone, raising it slightly. “I’ll start singing this first song with full-on energy! So put your hands together for ‘From Me to You Too.’”

Hajime recognised the song, from the minute Ibuki started to scream. The heavy guitar set in, along with the strobe lights. Hajime had a long three minutes ahead of him…

The crowd responded right away, looks of horror falling across their naive faces. Hajime was pretty sure he heard Souda screaming from back stage - reliving the horror of the music he’d heard earlier that day. Hajime covered his ears with his hands, making the effort to block out the noise. He was half tempted to run and shove his head on the barbeque.

Blissfully unaware of the reaction she’d caused, Ibuki took a bow. “Thank you everyone!”

Once the song had finished, terror unleashed, screaming and shouting from the crowd. Fuyuhiko spat in disgust, while Gundam muttered some sort of chant under breath. It seemed the concert was just as poorly received as it had been the first time around.

Ibuki leaned into the microphone. “Let’s go right ahead to the next song!” despite the protests in the crowd, she carried on. “This is called ‘Who Moved the Body?’”

The name seemed rather distasteful given the circumstance, but it seemed Ibuki hadn’t realised. The lights went crazy as she began to sing, it sounded exactly the same as the song previous, just with
more screaming. Hajime considered faking stomach ache, he wasn’t sure how much more he could take.

Ibuki had just reached the chorus, when something caught Hajime’s attention...he could smell smoke. Common sense told him it was the barbecue, but something seemed off, it was a different kind of smoke. He’d smelt it before...during Hiyoko’s execution.

The smell grew stronger, too overpowering for Hajime to ignore, it surprised him that no one else had picked up on it. He strained his head, looking over the crowd. Trying to rule it out as a stage effect. When the orange flames caught his eye, Hajime quickly realised it wasn’t part of the act.

Flames, orange like the sunset, had swallowed the speaker - eating it alive with its mouth of fire. Smoke crawled from underneath, creeping along the stage like fog. The fire hadn’t spread, but if it wasn’t stopped quickly, Ibuki would find herself in a lot of trouble.

By the time Hajime opened his mouth to scream, the others had already figured out what was going on. Ibuki, too caught up in her performance, was the only one not to realise.

“Firrrre!” Akane yelled, her voice as loud as the music. “Firrrreee!”

Akane’s shrieking caught Ibuki’s attention. The flames in sight, Ibuki cut her song, her cries echoing down the microphone.

Chapter End Notes

Ending this here on a mini-cliff hanger because I'm mean haha!

I just wanted to let you all know that this story is going on hiatus for a little while (and I really mean little). Exams have now started and I've quickly learnt that multi-tasking isn't my strength haha. It's taken me forever to get this chapter out, and this was mainly free time like events. The class trials and stuff take even longer, and I really like to spend my time on them. My last exam is June 22nd, so there won't be any updates until then. But don't worry, that's less than a month away, so the wait won't be very long! :D And I promise it'll be worth the wait as the next chapter brings many things - including the start of the despair disease! Thanks for your patience & support :3
Chapter Three - Part Three

Chapter Notes

Wooooh the hiatus is over! :D
Exams were stressful omg, but they're all done with now. I also celebrated my birthday on the 14th and got some really cool Dangan Ronpa related presents, so I'm super happy :) I hope life has been treating you all well :D I can't begin to explain how much I've missed writing :o

And shout out to Souji who gave me a super cool idea relating to Hajime and the despair disease! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

All that could be heard was the sound of screaming. Caught up in chaos, no one stepped in to stop the fire - and it wasn't like the fire services were going to rescue them. The fire had caught them off guard, and they weren't sure how to stop it.

Thinking on her feet, Ibuki tried her best to put it out. Holding her guitar high above her head, she charged towards the fire, attacking the flames like her guitar were an axe. She continued to fight the fire, hoping to beat it out, but unfortunately, her plan backfired. The flames caught onto the guitar, rising up its neck. There was no stopping it now. Like knights charging down a battlefield, the flames travelled to the guitar's body - consuming the entire thing whole. Ibuki let out a piercing scream, the fire masking her pale hands like gloves, burning through the fabric on her wrist.

“Ibuki!” Hajime cried out, watching the horror unfold before him. His friend was suffering badly, he couldn’t stand around and watch it any longer. “We have to do something.”

It was Nagito who saved her. Without hesitation, he tore off his jacket, hurling himself onto the stage, he threw the jacket over the speaker - trying to control the flames. With the flames concealed by material, he did his best to beat out the fire, not caring whether he got hurt in the process.

Meanwhile, Akane rushed to Ibuki’s aid. Grabbing a jug of juice from the table, she made it on stage and poured it over the musician’s hands. Ibuki’s hands looked blistered and swollen, the fire had damaged her greatly.

Somewhat confident the fire was out, Nagito lifted his jacket, taking a step backwards in case it was still ablaze. “Looks like it’s out.” Nagito said, wiping the sweat from his brow.

Nekomaru ditched the barbecue, hurrying to join them. “IS EVERYONE ALRIGHT?”

Souda crept out from behind the stage, his knuckles white. “I-I’m okay.” he said, though his voice was shaking. “Miss Sonia?! Miss Sonia are you okay?”

“I am fine.” Sonia said, much calmer in comparison. “Ibuki is the one we should be worrying about.”

Everyone looked to Ibuki, waiting for a response. She said nothing, staring down at her damaged hands in fear. She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out.

Peko pushed to the front of the crowd. “We need to get her to the hospital, she’s seriously injured.”
“Where’s Monokuma?” Souda asked, looking around. “Maybe he can do something.”

Monomi, who’d arrived at the sound of the screaming, climbed the stairs to the stage. “Monokuma isn’t anywhere to be found, I don’t think he’s going to help you. He’s such a meanie!”

“Can you do something?” Mahiru said, asking Monomi out of pure desperation.

The rabbit shook her head. “I’m afraid not, I’m not sure what to do.”

“Useless.” Gundam muttered under his breath.

“I’ll take her.” Peko said, speaking as if Ibuki wasn’t there. “Someone help me to the hospital.”

“No offence, but do you have any idea what you’re doing?” Souda raised his eyebrows at her.

"I'm no nurse." Peko said. “But I'm trained in first aid.”

Most likely for Fuyuhiko's protection. If Peko had been taught first aid by the Yakuzas, she had to be pretty good.

“Peco, do you think you can walk?” Peko asked.

Ibuki said nothing, she couldn't take her attention off her badly blistered hands.

"She's in shock...I think." Chiaki said, speaking softly. "It's probably best if we carry her."

“LEAVE IT TO ME!” Nekomaru boomed, making his way to the stage and scooping Ibuki up in his arms.

Nekomaru left for the hospital carrying Ibuki, Peko and Monomi following close behind. The others stayed put, in shock themselves, no one able to describe what they’d just seen.

Mahiru pointed an accusatory finger at Souda, fury in her eyes. “This is all your fault!”

“My fault?!” Souda yelped, taken back by her words.

“You’re the one who set up the stage, you obviously didn’t take enough care.” Mahiru scowled at him.

“I’m no stage technician, but I know I setup everything up fine.” Souda retorted, not allowing himself to become the scapegoat for the incident. “The fire probably came from the barbecue.”

“Don’t be such an idiot.” Fuyuhiko butted in, rolling his eyes. “The barbecue is nowhere near the stage, and it’s untouched from the fire.”

“Well...” Souda wracked his brains, trying to produce another point of defense.

It was painful to watch, Souda was only digging his grave further. Hajime intervened, he already had an idea of who started the fire. “Have you guys noticed something strange?” greeted by blank expressions, he decided to continue. “Monokuma is nowhere to be found, and usually, he’s all over this kind of thing.”

“Now that you mention it, that's pretty unusual.” Akane agreed. “He’s always at the scene of the drama!”

“Doesn’t the fire remind you of something?” Hajime said.
“Hiyoko’s execution…” Sonia gasped, catching on. “Are you saying Monokuma is responsible for this?”

Hajime shrugged his shoulders. “I dunno, it just seems like a massive coincidence. Speakers don’t just catch fire for no reason.”

“They do if they aren’t set up properly.” Mahiru remarked under her breath.

"You were trying to cause another murder, weren't you!” Fuyuhiko raised his voice at Souda, just as judgemental as Mahiru.

“I wouldn’t do something like that.” Souda hissed. “You might threaten women, but I don’t.”

"No, you're too busy stalking them.” Fuyuhiko retorted, quick on his delivery.

"Please stop arguing." Sonia begged. "There has been enough upset for one day!"

"We should just be glad the fire stopped in time." Chiaki said. "Things could have been a lot worse."

“I dunno…” Akane lowered her head. “I saw the state of Ibuki’s hands, they didn’t look good.”

Nagito was busy inspecting his coat. The bottom was scorched, and there were tiny holes over the body of the jacket. It wasn’t pretty, but it was still wearable. Nagito didn’t seem to care, sliding his arms back through the sleeves.

“Yeah, thanks, Nagito.” Hajime said. Nagito had stopped the fire from spreading any further, putting an end to the dangerous situation. Nagito’s intentions were often wrong, but there was no denying he’d been trying to help.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” Nagito smiled bashfully. “It’s duty for trash like me to protect you ultimates.”

Fuyuhiko scowled at him, not so willing to offer praise. "Why did you help Ibuki? I thought you'd be happy to let her die for the sake of hope - or some bullshit."

"Oh, I would...but it wasn't a proper murder attempt.” Nagito explained. "If Souda really was the one to start the fire, then I wouldn't have stepped in at all. But as Hajime said, it was clearly Monokuma who started it, so I had to protect Ibuki. Her death, because of Monokuma, wouldn't have brought any hope at all."

"You would’ve let Ibuki die if one of us tried to kill her?” Souda cried."That's so fucked up!"

"And we still can't be sure Monokuma was the one to do this." Mahiru added.

Fuyuhiko glanced over his shoulder. “Where’s Monokuma anyway? I thought that son of a bitch would be all over this.” he crossed his arms skeptically, knowing something was wrong.

“He’s probably destroying the evidence of the fire he started.” Hajime rolled his eyes. The fact Monokuma wasn’t there was more than enough proof that he was the one to blame.

"I don't wanna stand around here any longer.” Souda shuddered. "We need to find Ibuki to see if she's okay." it was most likely the guilt talking.

"I think we better clean up first.” Hajime said. "I'm pretty sure this'll break the rules and count as littering if we don't pack away."

The students wanted to go, and leave the ordeal behind them, but they had to clear away the remains
of the concert. Hajime helped Akane return the barbecue to the market, while the others worked on moving the stage - or what was left of it. It was heavy work, especially without Nekomaru there to help, but they managed to get it done between all of them.

It had gone midnight by the time they’d finished, but the students weren’t ready to go to bed. They were desperate to go over to the hospital to see how Ibuki was doing. Hajime didn’t want to overwhelm her, but he needed to make sure his friend was okay.

On arrival at the hospital, they found Nekomaru sitting in the waiting room. He didn’t seem like his usual self, his head in his hands.

“Coach?” Akane rushed to his side. “Is everything alright?”

Nekomaru looked up, making the effort to smile at everyone. “It’s Ibuki…”

“She’s not…?” Mahiru couldn’t bring herself to finish the sentence. Everyone already knew what she was implying.

Nekomaru shook his head. “She’s alive…but it’s just her hands. Peko said something about major burns.”

“Is Peko with her now?” Chiaki asked.

Nekomaru nodded. “They’re upstairs in the first patient’s room. I just needed to come out and take a break.”

“Maybe it’s best if we don’t all go up there.” Mahiru said. “She’s probably exhausted.”

It was agreed for Gundam, Fuyuhiko, Akane, Nagtio, and Souda to stay in the waiting room with Nekomaru, while the others went upstairs. Sonia knocked gently on Ibuki’s door, summoning Peko into the corridor.

"I hope we are not bothering you.” Sonia said.

“It’s fine, I can’t do any more for Ibuki but let her rest.” Peko replied, closing the door behind her so Ibuki couldn’t hear.

“How’s she doing? What’s going on with her hands?” Hajime asked, bombarding Peko with questions.

“She’s suffered third-degree burns. Her hands are in bandages at the moment, but they aren’t in a good way.” Peko hesitated. “There’s something I should tell you…”

“What is it?” Chiaki asked, from Peko’s tone it was clear that something was wrong.

“I don’t think Ibuki will be able to play her instruments again, not for a long while anyway.” Peko said. “She’s lost all use of her hands for now, she won’t even be able to hold a fork.”

Hearing the news felt like a sharp puncture to Hajime’s chest. Ibuki cared deeply about her music, it was her biggest passion, and now she wasn’t going to be able to play it. ‘The ultimate musician’ who couldn’t play music sounded very depressing indeed. They were in a virtual reality, Ibuki’s burns would not affect her when she woke up, she’d be able to play music right away. However, the others weren’t to know that. There was no way Hajime could tell her the good news without revealing everything.
“That is awful!” Sonia gasped, her eyes welling up with tears.

“I haven’t told Ibuki yet, she’s had too much trauma for one night.” Peko explained. “I’ll tell her in the morning. I think it’s best to keep her in the hospital for now.”

The students left without visiting Ibuki, they saw it best to let her rest. Chiaki filled everyone in on the news of Ibuki’s burns, Souda looked especially upset when he found out, the guilt weighing on his shoulders.

Hajime wasn’t sure why he bothered getting into bed, he knew the chance of him falling to sleep was next to nothing. With so much weighing on his mind, he’d need heaps of sedatives to even try and sleep. He had to know more about the fire. Was it an accident? Had Souda done a bad job? Was it really Monokuma’s doing? Was someone else trying to commit murder? His eyes weren’t going to close until he got answers.

Sliding into his shoes, Hajime grabbed the key for his cottage and left out the door. He crept away from the hotel, not because he was sneaking about, but because he didn’t want to wake the sleeping students. He stayed silent until he was a safe distance away from the hotel - far enough that he was able to shout, but not too far that he had to be paranoid of the shadows.

Clearing his throat, he yelled into the night. “Monokuma! Monokuma!” he repeated the bear’s name several times, determined not to give up until he got a response. “Monokuma! Monokuma!”

“Will you shut up?!” the bear’s voice hissed back at him from the darkness. Crawling from out of the shadows stepped Monokuma, he wore a robe, with slices of cucumber over his eyes. “I’m trying to get my beauty sleep.”

It was laughable, Hajime did his best not to mock the bear straight to his face. “I want to talk to you.” Monokuma peeled off the cucumber, narrowing his eyes at Hajime. “Don’t you think it’s dangerous to be out late at night? You never know who’s lurking around.”

Hajime ignored his threats, he had nothing to fear. “Why did you set the stage on fire?”

“That’s a little presumptuous.” Monokuma said, brushing the allegation aside. “Don’t the class trials teach you anything? Innocent until proven guilty.”

“It was just like Hiyoko’s execution.” Hajime objected, he wasn’t going to let Monokuma change his mind. “You could have killed Ibuki.”

“Then perhaps she should learn not to take my stuff without permission.” Monokuma huffed.

“That’s why you did it?!! Because she used your stage?” Hajime cried. “You said in the school rules the principal isn’t allowed to hurt the students.”

“And no one got hurt, you’re all fine.” Monokuma said. “You’re being over dramatic.”

“Fine?!” Hajime spluttered. “Ibuki has third-degree burns because of you.”

“I set a fire, it’s not my fault Ibuki touched it.” Monokuma retorted. “I’ve left you knives in the kitchen, but it’s not my fault if one of you idiots chops off your fingers when making a sandwich.”

“If Nagito hadn’t stopped the fire, Ibuki might’ve died.” Hajime glared at the bear, it wasn’t funny.

“You’re whining is really boring, I’d have more fun talking to Monomi.” Monokuma scowled. “Can
you hurry up and go to bed?” he suddenly began to smirk. “Thought you’d want to prepare for the despair disease.”

“There’s nothing to prepare, Mikan and Hiyoko are already dead.” Hajime regretted the words as soon as he said them. He wasn’t discussing things casually with Chiaki, he was talking to Monokuma.

“I see, is this too easy for you?” Monokuma grinned, an evil glint in his eye.

“That’s not what I meant.” Hajime protested, but he already knew it was too late, he’d landed himself in it.

“Perhaps I should ramp up the difficulty on this game.” Monokuma laughed, turning his back on Hajime. "Let's see how you handle the despair disease this time..."

Hajime called out into the night, but Monokuma had already disappeared back into the shadows.

***

Hajime felt awful from the minute he woke up. His head was pounding like someone was playing the drums from inside his brain. He needed some aspirin right away, the pharmacy was going to be his first stop after breakfast.

He put his headache down to all the stress from Ibuki’s concert, it had gone just as badly as before, even though no one had turned into a robot. He wanted to lie in bed until his head felt better again, but he couldn’t be selfish, he had the despair disease to worry about.

Hajime wasn’t sure what to expect as he headed to breakfast. Monokuma had threatened to change up the despair disease, but his threats were often empty, nothing more than a scare tactic. Bracing himself, he walked up the stairs to the restaurant.

The sound of crying hit him before he got to the top. Akane was in the centre of the restaurant, cowering against a table. “Wahhhhhhh.” she sobbed, crying into her hands.

“Hey, Akane…” Hajime spoke gently, he already knew that Akane was suffering from the coward disease. It seemed like Monokuma’s threats were empty after all.

“I’m...scared.” Akane wailed. “What’s...gonna happen to us...? Wahhhhh.”

Hajime felt someone tap him on the shoulder, expecting it to be Nagito with liars disease, he spun around. “Hey Nag-Fuyuhiko…”

Fuyuhiko stood behind Hajime, beaming from ear to ear. A floral apron tied around his waist, while in his hands, he held a tray of cookies. “Good morning, Hajime. I hope you slept well. If you didn’t, I can fix you a nice glass of warm milk. Speaking of milk, I made you these fresh cookies. The ones on the left are chocolate chip, and the ones on the right are peanut, I can make you more if you don’t like them. You don’t have a nut allergy, do you? Oh dear, I better make some more.”

Hajime’s jaw practically smacked the ground, his eyes had to be lying to him. The person talking to him looked like Fuyuhiko, but his behaviour was a different story.
“You look tired.” Fuyuhiko observed, placing the cookies on the side. “Would you like me to tuck you into bed and read you a story?”

“Uh...no, I’m good.” Hajime said, barely able to speak. “Fuyuhiko, would you mind if I felt your forehead?”

“Of course not.” Fuyuhiko beamed, offering Hajime an angelic smile, it suited his baby face.

Hajime placed the palm of his hand against Fuyuhiko's forehead. He retracted almost immediately, Fuyuhiko was burning up - just like Akane. It seemed that Fuyuhiko had despair disease too, though his symptoms didn't seem to be anything 'despairing'. Whatever was going on, it seemed that Monokuma's threats weren't so empty after all...

“Burrrpp!”

Hajime was so on edge, he found himself jumping at the sound of a loud burp. He spun around to see who was responsible.

Sonia stood by the staircase, looking worse for wear. The bow in her hair caught up in a mass of knots, her socks half up half down, and her dress horrifically creased. “Burrrpp!” she burped again, followed with a laugh. “Haha, that was a good one.”

“Sonia...you too?” Hajime said weakly. He could tell, just from looking at the princess, that she had despair disease too, she would never behave in such a manner otherwise.

The sound of footsteps echoed from the staircase. Hajime couldn't help but feel anxious, he wasn’t sure what else was going to happen. As soon as he spotted her pink hair and backpack, Hajime felt a sense of dread. “Chiaki... is everything 'normal' with you?”

"I'm okay, just a little sleepy..." Chiaki let out a long yawn.

Hajime didn't need to hear anymore, he was certain that Chiaki was free from the disease. He'd been beginning to panic that Monokuma was giving the sickness to everyone, just to mess with Hajime, though that no longer seemed to be the case.

“Fuyuhiko, Akane, and Sonia seem to have despair disease.” Hajime said, filling Chiaki in. “This is different to last time, so I'm not sure who else might have it. Nagi-"

“Wait,” Chiaki motioned for silence. “I think someone else is coming.” reminding him it wasn't safe to talk about the rewrite so freely.

The sound of footsteps travelled up the staircase, accompanied by voices in mid-conversation - hinting that there was more than one person.

“So you're going to let me take their picture?”

“Hmmm, the four dark devas have never done such a thing before...but I will consider it.”

Gundam’s quiff arrived before he did. Hajime watched him walk up the stairs, Mahiru besides him. The conversation between them appeared relaxed, no signs of the despair disease.

“Good morning!” Mahiru presented those around her with a friendly wave.

Hajime’s response wasn’t so cheerful. “Are either of you sick?” the question came out exceptionally blunt, not at all how it sounded in his head, it was almost like his brain had taken control and stolen
the words from him.

“What do you take me for?” Gundam scoffed. “Only pathetic mortals like yourself fall sick, I have never experienced such an ordeal.”

“Wahhhhhh!” Akane’s crying was so loud, that it interjected their conversation. “I’m s-so scared.”

“Am I missing something here?” Mahiru frowned, looking to Chiaki for a stable answer.

“It seems that Akane, Fuyuhiko, and Sonia have all come down sick.” Chiaki replied.

“Then why is Akane crying?” Mahiru followed up, trying to assess the situation further. “Hajime, did you do something to upset her?”

Hajime tried not to crumble underneath Mahiru’s disapproving gaze. In an attempt to defend himself, he said far more than he would have liked. “No, I didn’t! It’s the despair disease causing her to act like this. It’s also why Fuyuhiko’s playing Grandma, and Sonia’s bearing resemblance to a pig.” Hajime couldn’t quite believe what he’d just said, it didn’t make any sense. He’d revealed the despair disease to Mahiru and Gundam, a fatal mistake. He hadn’t done it by accident, he was far too cautious for that. It was almost like a greater force was controlling him…

“Despair disease?” Gundam repeated the words, his expression blank.

“It’s a disease caused by small bugs on the island - apparently anyway. It’s clearly Monokuma’s doing. The disease gives you a high temperature, as well as symptoms that are full of despair.” Hajime’s tongue took control once again, spilling out the words before he had a chance to stop himself. In that moment, he knew something was wrong. He wasn’t choosing to reveal what he knew, something was making him.

Realising something was wrong only panicked Hajime further. If the truth about the despair disease had so easily slipped from his mouth, what else could he possibly reveal? If he said two words about the Neo World Program, he’d ruin everything.

“Hajime, are you feeling alright?” Mahiru narrowed her eyebrows, out of concern, not judgement. “You seem flustered…”

“I’m f-f-.” no matter how hard he tried, the words ‘I’m fine’ refused to leave Hajime’s lips. “I’m f-- anxious.” his true feelings were the only ones that surfaced. His attempt at lying was useless. It seemed that he had the inability to lie...which brought Hajime to a horrible realisation. If Mahiru asked him why he was anxious...he would reveal everything.

Chiaki, equally releasing that something was wrong, stepped in. “Hajime is probably worried about Ibuki’s condition, we all are. Why don’t I take him to the hospital to put his mind at rest?”

Sonia let out another burp, it was perfect timing for a distraction. She grinned over at Mahiru. “Wanna see me burp the alphabet?”

Mahiru ignored Sonia, replying straight to Chiaki. “Alright, but be quick. Gundam and I shall stay here and wait for the others. There are no signs of Nekomaru yet, or Souda, and Nagito is missing too.”

Gundam didn’t appreciate being volunteered to look after the sick, he sulked over to the buffet table, turning his back on everyone.

“Let’s go.” Hajime grabbed Chiaki loosely by the wrist and steered her out of the restaurant, wanting
to leave before he dug his own grave any further. He had no idea what was going on in his head, but he didn’t like it.

They said nothing until they were a safe distance from the hotel grounds. Even then, they had to be cautious. Nekomaru, Nagito, and Souda were all missing from breakfast, they could be anywhere on the island listening in.

“Chiaki, something’s wrong.” Hajime said, though he was pretty sure she’d figured it out for herself. “Whenever someone asks me something, I can’t seem to stay quiet. It’s like the truth just wants to come flooding out of me.”

Chiaki walked beside him, quiet in thought. “Like, you have no choice but to tell the truth?”

“Yes!” Hajime exclaimed. “That’s it exactly.”

“Maybe...you have despair disease?” Chiaki suggested, strolling along the bridge, close to the edge.

“Despair disease? No, that’s impossible.” Hajime shook his head. “I’ve got a headache, but nothing like a fever.”

“Puhuhu...you should listen to Chiaki more often.” a sinister presence crept up from behind them. Monokuma danced his way in front of the duo, seemingly smug with himself. “Didn’t I tell you I’d make this a challenge?”

“But...but I can’t have despair disease.” Hajime protested.

“Since you’re aware of the...’situation’...your despair disease is mild in comparison to the others. But even you, Hajime, aren’t invincible.” Monokuma smirked, grinding to a halt, forcing Hajime and Chiaki to stop too. “The bigger question at hand, is what could your despairing symptoms be?”

“The symptoms are shaped around the opposite of your personality, right?” Hajime said.

“Correcttt!” Monokuma cheered, behaving obnoxiously over the top. “When I think about Hajime, what do I see? Hmmm. I see a total fraud who is lying to his friends about his talent, and everything he knows. And the opposite of a liar...”

“Is someone that tells the truth.” Hajime finished off his sentence. “So I have...truth disease?”

“DING DING!” Monokuma yelled. “Want a gold star?”

Being called a liar...Hajime didn’t realise how much it hurt. He was lying to his friends about a lot of things, but it was for the sake of their own good. Even so, he felt like the word was tainting his skin, as if it had been branded on his forehead.

“Since you have truth disease, you’ll have no choice but to honestly answer every question you’re presented.” Monokuma explained. “Lying simply won’t work. Puhuhu, try it out if you like. Let me ask you a simple question, what’s your name?”

Hajime didn’t want to play along with Monokuma’s stupid games, but he had to know for his own sanity if Monokuma was really telling the truth. Before speaking, he repeated the ‘answer’ in his head several times.

*My name is Gundam Tanaka.*
My name is Gundam Tanaka.

My name is Gundam Tanaka.

My name is Gundam Tanaka.

Taking a deep breath, Hajime attempted his lie. “My name is Gu-Gu-Hajime Hinata.” the words practically spluttered out of his mouth. Lying was no good, only the truth wanted to prevail. It seemed that Monokuma’s words held value after all - Hajime couldn’t lie.

Chiaki let out a gentle gasp, while Monokuma proceeded to laugh further. “Hey Hajime,” the bear said. “Do you think Future Foundation has anything to do with your arrival on Jabberwock Island?”

“We were put here by a member of Future Foundation, but he wasn’t following orders. Future Foundation wanted us dead, and he tried to save us. The Neo World Program was designed for good use...until the virus got in.” Hajime clutched at his mouth, shocked at what he’d just said. In a matter of seconds he’d revealed everything, and all it took was one simple question. Thankfully, his words were safe around Chiaki and Monokuma, but it wasn’t the same story for the other students.

“This is too funny!” Monokuma cackled. “You either let another one of your classmates die, and the despair disease is cured. Or you try and last until the end with this unfortunate truth disease. Either way, you’re going to end up losing.”

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Hajime’s shoulders drooped as he walked into the hospital, the thought of Ibuki’s condition upset him greatly. Whether it was in the rewrite, or back on the real Jabberwock Island, the hospital was a depressing place to be. On top of that, he had his despair disease to worry about. Monokuma was right, he’d end up the loser whatever the outcome.

“Do you think Peko and Ibuki have despair disease?” Chiaki asked.

Hajime paused, he hadn’t had the time to think about it. “I hope not. I’m sure they would’ve come over to the restaurant if they had. I don’t think Monokuma would take it that far…” He froze in the waiting room, not getting any closer to the stairs. “I think I’ll wait here. I don’t think it’s a good idea for me to go up. I might reveal something.”

Chiaki tilted her head. “I’m sure it would mean a lot to Ibuki if you went to see her.” she smiled, trying to lighten the mood.

Hajime was torn, he really wanted to see Ibuki, but he couldn't help feeling paranoid about letting something slip. No...he wasn't going to let the fear win. Hiding away from the world wouldn't help anyone, it would just give Monokuma the satisfaction he didn't deserve. Hajime decided to take a risk, Ibuki was more important than his own insecurities.

"Okay, I'll come." he smiled back at Chiaki, leading her up the stairs to the patient rooms.

Chiaki knocked gently on the door, just in case Ibuki was sleeping. The door swung open, and out stepped Peko. Her hair was freshly washed and she looked well put together - no signs of having despair disease.
“Is this a bad time?” Hajime asked.

Peko shook her head, closing the door behind her. “No, you’re fine. Ibuki is already up.”

“How’s she doing?” Chiaki said.

“The condition of her hands is much the same, there won’t be any progress for a long while now.” Peko explained. “As for Ibuki herself...I don’t think she’s handling the news very well.”

“In what way?” Hajime didn’t want to be pushy, but he had to find out if Ibuki was suffering from despair disease or shock.

“See for yourself.” Peko stepped aside, making room by the doorway.

Ibuki was tucked up in bed, her hands wrapped in bandages sitting above the cover. She gazed out the window, making the most of her island view. With her incredible hearing, she must have heard the door open, but she didn’t turn her head to look.

“Good morning, Ibuki.” Chiaki said gently, stepping into the room.

“Hey.” Hajime echoed, wanting to let her know that he was there too.

Peko followed them into the room, but she kept her distance, standing towards the door.

Ibuki turned her head slowly, smiling faintly at her guests. Her eyes looked hollow and heavy, red from obvious crying, the bags beneath them indicating she hadn’t slept much.

Hajime wasn’t sure what to say next. He couldn’t ask her how she was doing, it was an insensitive question. Chiaki took charge, pulling a chair to Ibuki’s bedside. “Monokuma’s new motive is here.”

A distraction tactic, of course! Talking about Ibuki’s injury would only make her feel worse, it was better to take her mind off it entirely.

“What is it?” Ibuki croaked, trying her best to sound happy, though she wasn’t fooling anybody.

“Despair disease.” Chiaki replied. “It’s an illness which causes people to act against their personalities, filling them with symptoms of despair.”

“So far, Sonia, Akane, and Fuyuhiko all have the disease.” Hajime, or rather the truth disease, said. “But we didn’t see everyone at breakfast, so it’s likely that Nekomaru, Nagito, or Souda could have it too.”

After hearing further details of the disease, Peko suggested vacating the hospital to make room for the sick. Ibuki still had to rest, but she didn’t require hospital attention any further. Hajime suggested for Ibuki to rest at the motel, it was best for her to stay out of the way so she didn’t risk catching despair disease. Peko offered to escort her, while Hajime and Chiaki returned to the restaurant.

The restaurant was far more chaotic than when they’d left, it seemed that Mahiru and Gundam weren’t able to maintain control. It probably didn't help that more of the students had arrived.

“There you are!” Mahiru sighed, laying eyes on the duo. “I was starting to think you’d fallen into the ocean.”

“S-sorry…” Hajime apologised, his face reddening. He scanned the room, looking to see if any of the new arrivals had acquired the disease.
“Hey, everyone. Watch this!” Souda called out at the top of his voice. In his hands he held three sharp kitchen knives, he threw them up into the air and began to juggle.

“Someone stop him!” Mahiru screeched, already sensing that things weren’t going to end well.

“ON IT!” Nekomaru charged at Souda, snatching the knives from his hands before anything terrible happened.

“As you can probably tell, he’s suffering from the daredevil disease.” Mahiru glared at Souda, motioning with her eyes. “Monokuma came while you were gone, he explained everything. He says Sonia has slob disease, it’s so unlike her.”

Sonia was at the buffet table, stuffing her face with food, her table manners worse than Akane's. Her dress was covered in sauce, it wasn't at all graceful for a princess.

“Monokuma says Akane has the coward disease.” Mahiru explained, though she didn’t need to. “And finally, there's Fuyuhiko.” Mahiru sighed, seemingly exhausted. “His disease is strange, Monokuma called it nurturing disease. I’m not really sure how that’s despairing, but Monokuma says over nurturing can be a problem too.”

Hajime looked around for Fuyuhiko. The Yakuza was cooking up a fresh batch of cookies (without the nuts), he met Hajime’s gaze with a smile. “Did you have a safe journey to the hospital? I hope you didn't encounter anything troublesome. The outside world can be scary, would you like a nice hug to make yourself feel better?”

“No...you’re good.” Hajime backed away slowly, he could see how nurturing Fuyuhiko was going to be a problem. “What about Nagito?” he asked, since there had been no mention of his liars disease.

“What about me?” Nagito raised his eyebrows, busy resting against a table. He didn’t look flustered, he was speaking normally, and he showed no attempts of lying - he hadn’t been infected at all.

Thanks to his own truth disease, Hajime found his mouth opening before he had a chance to stop it. “I was wondering if you’d been infected by the despair disease.”

“No...I’m fine?” Nagito responded, confused as if Hajime was suggesting something. “Though Monokuma warned us the disease is contagious, I don’t think it’s a good idea for you ultimates to be hanging around the sick.”

“I refuse to catch such a disease.” Gundam sneered.

“We need to find a cure before everyone catches it.” Nekomaru said.

“Did Monokuma mention anything about the cure?” Hajime asked, trying to figure out how much the others knew.

Nagito shook his head. “No, he didn’t. But I think it’s pretty obvious what the cure is going to be. When a murder occurs, Monokuma will get rid of the despair disease.”

“Do you have to be so pessimistic?” Mahiru pursed her lips. “I’m sure there’s something on this island that will cure them.”

“Perhaps a blood sacrifice will do the job.” Gundam said.

“Puhuhu I’m sure Monomi’s blood will do the job!” following the sound of his evil laugh,
Monokuma appeared at the top of the staircase.

“Someone go fetch her!” Gundam instructed.

“Uh, I think we’re getting a little carried away.” Nagito said, clinging to nervous laughter.

Monokuma sighed. “Though I’d love to watch you drain all the blood from Monomi’s stupid body, it won’t cure the despair disease.”

“Then how do we treat it?” Mahiru asked, staring impatiently at the bear.

“Why do you need to treat it?” Monokuma said. “The despair disease will cure your soft hearts towards killing! You’ll finally take the plunge and commit murder.”

“SHIT!” Nekomaru yelled, causing everyone to jump. “Souda's playing with knives again.”

Souda had a new set of knives, which he was busy throwing around. Nekomaru snatched them straight from his hands, using more force than necessary.

“Aww, you ruined my fun!” Souda pouted, reaching for the knives.

Fuyuhiko rushed to Souda’s side. “You shouldn’t play with knives, they’re dangerous. Are you okay? Did you get cut? Let me look at you, I need to make sure you’re okay.” he grabbed ahold of Souda’s arm and began to inspect for cuts.

“W-what’s going on?” Akane wailed, her crying dominating everyone’s attention. “I j-just want to go home. Why c-can’t I go home?”

“Burrrppppppp!” Sonia let out another burp, the loudest yet. She burst into laughter. “Hahaha, that was the best one yet.”

Hajime shook his head in frustration. “We can’t just stay here, we need to do something.”

It was going to be a long day ahead of him...

Chapter End Notes

Ending it here because this chapter is getting long and I don't want the next one to fall short. The murder for chapter three will be coming very soon! ;))

Thank you for your patience over the last month! I really hope you enjoyed this chapter, and all that's to come (like more nurturing Fuyuhiko haha). Back to a regular posting schedule now, so you won't have to wait long! ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ
Chapter Three - Part Four

Chapter Notes

I've spent the entire week binge playing Zero Time Dilemma, and now I'm really sad that it's over :( It was an absolutely incredible game though! Has anyone here played it? If not, you totally need to :D lmao anyway I'm going to stop rambling about ZTD because we'll be here forever! A lot is going down in this chapter, I hope you enjoy ;)

Also I just wanted to say a huge thank you to everyone reading, since this story has hit 4000+ hits. Thank you for taking the time to read this, it really means a lot! ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And what do you suppose we do?” Mahiru frowned. “There isn’t a cure, and it seems Monokuma has run off somewhere.”

Mahiru was right, Monokuma had completely vanished. It seemed he used the outbreak of mayhem as a distraction to escape.

“The despair disease is contagious too, I don’t wanna catch anything.” Nekomaru said, scratching at his ear.

“AHHHHHHHHHHH!” Akane let out another wail, though this one held better resemblance to a scream.

“Akane?!” Hajime steered his attention in Akane’s direction, from her scream, things weren’t sounding good.

“S-Sonia!” Akane wept, barely able to speak through all the crying. She stuck out her arm and pointed to the floor, motioning for everyone to look.

Sonia had collapsed to the ground, caught up in a mess of plates and spilled food. She was clearly breathing, but out cold.

“Aw crap, she’s fainted.” Hajime cursed. "We need to take her over to the hospital, the others too.”

Hajime sincerely wished Mikan was still with them, she would have known exactly what to do. He knew taking them to the hospital was the right thing to do, but he wasn’t quite sure what he was going to do after that.

“I’ll carry Sonia.” Nekomaru picked up Sonia and flung her over his shoulder, similar to a fireman’s lift.

“How are we going to get the others over to the hospital?” Mahiru asked. “We won’t be able to carry them.”

“Fuyuhiko,” Chiaki said gently, speaking to the sick. “Do you think you could follow us over to the hospital? It would be incredibly helpful.”

“Of course.” Fuyuhiko beamed. “Anything to help. Do you need me to do anything else? Shall I
fetch Sonia some ice? Should I go to the pharmacy? Do you want -"

Nagito cut him short, unable to listen to him droning on. “That’ll be all, Fuyuhiko. Akane, you can follow too.”

“D-don’t leave without me.” Akane cried, hurrying after Nekomaru.

“What about, Souda?” Mahiru frowned. “There’s no way he’ll just follow us.”

“I have an idea.” Hajime said, he waved his arms in the mechanic’s direction. “Hey Souda, I dare you to get to the hospital before we do.”

“Hahaha easy!” Souda stuck his tongue out at Hajime and bolted towards the exit, off in a flash.

“That worked.” Hajime smiled, pleased his plan was successful. “Let’s just hope he doesn’t try and throw himself into the sea…”

They made their way to the hospital, all that could be heard was the sound of Akane’s crying from in front of them. Nekomaru took Sonia straight to one of the patient rooms, tucking her into bed. Hajime instructed Akane, Fuyuhiko, and Souda to take residence in the other rooms for some rest. With the sick safely resting in their rooms, the others met in the hospital lobby to discuss their next steps.

“Let’s get back to the hotel.” Nekomaru said.

“We can’t just leave them here!” Hajime protested. “They need looking after, they’re really ill.”

“But we might catch something if we stay around them for too long.” Mahiru reminded him. “We can’t risk everyone becoming infected.”

“They might die if we leave them alone.” Hajime said. “I guess if no one else is willing to do it, then I’ll stay behind to look after them.” he had no medical experience, so he wasn't sure how helpful he'd be, but he couldn't stand the idea of leaving the sick by themselves.

“Thank you, Hajime.” Mahiru smiled appreciatively. “I’d like to help, but it's important that the rest of us stay healthy.”

“W-wait, no one else is going to join me?” Hajime hadn't expected to be working alone, he presumed more people would volunteer when he did.

“You’ve got this!” Nekomaru said enthusiastically, but Hajime wasn’t entirely sure he did.

“But there are four of them!” Hajime protested, refusing to drop the matter.

“Which means there’s a high risk that the rest of us will catch despair disease if we stay here.” Mahiru said. “I’m sorry we’re leaving you alone with them, but man up, Hajime!”

“It’s important we quarantine everyone who’s infected.” Chiaki said. “This motive seems very dangerous, it would get out of hand if everyone were to come down sick.”

“If that disease is airborne, the hotel on the first island might already be unsafe.” Gundam said. “We must be vigilant about protection! I have those who I must protect.”

Hajime decided not to question Gundam’s overprotective behaviour towards his hamsters, it would only result in a nasty fight.
“That shouldn’t be a problem, we can use the motel over on this island.” Nagito said. “There are plenty of rooms, and it shouldn’t be infected.”

Their conversation was interrupted as the door to the hospital squeaked opened, Peko pushed her way through the frame, nodding to greet her fellow classmates. She appeared to have left Ibuki behind at the motel.

“I apologise for taking so long.” Peko said, standing herself among the others.

“It’s okay.” Mahiru smiled. “You haven’t missed much. Souda, Fuyuhiko, Akane, and Sonia are resting upstairs. Hajime is going to remain here to look after them, while the rest of us keep out of the way at the motel. It’s not safe to go back to the hotel right now.”

“You’re leaving Hajime on his own?” Peko said, continuing on without waiting for an answer. "In that case, I’ll stay behind too.”

“Peko, are you sure?” Mahiru frowned. “What if you catch despair disease?” though she didn't seem to care if the same happened to Hajime.

“We can’t expect Hajime to look after four people alone, especially given the condition they’re in.” Peko shook her head. “It's only fair that someone else assists him. How have you organised communication?”

“Huh?” Nekomaru’s face was blank.

“If we’re setting up in two different locations, we’ll need a way to communicate with each other. If we’re mixing with the sick, then it’s a bad idea for us to come and visit you at the motel.” Peko pointed out.

“Oh, I didn’t think of that.” Mahiru paused in thought, resting her weight on her hip.

Hajime wasn’t sure if he had any suggestions of his own. The last time, Souda had been able to fix up some communication devices between the two groups, but it was impossible for him to do that while infected with despair disease.

“I have an idea!” Nagito smiled. Everyone greeted him with sceptical glances, being Nagito, it was hard not to.

“Hmm, go on…” Gundam said, granting him permission to speak.

“I can be a messenger!” Nagito said. “I'll make trips between the hospital and the motel twice a day.”

“Doesn’t that defeat the objective of what we’re trying to solve?” Gundam crossed his arms in frustration. "You'll catch the disease and bring it back to the motel. It's a foolish plan!"

“I can meet with Hajime and Peko outside the hospital, so I’ll be nowhere near the sick.” Nagito reasoned. “And if I do happen to get sick, I can just stay at the hospital.”

“You don’t mind getting sick?...” Chiaki said uncertainly.

“Someone as worthless as myself?!” Nagito laughed. “I deserve to get sick. Besides, it would be an honour to help ultimates like yourselves.”

“That might be helpful, it’s better than nothing, I guess.” Hajime sighed. It wasn't his ideal choice for
a plan, and it was nowhere near as convenient as the communication devices he'd had before, but it
didn't seem like there were any other cards on the table. “Come by the hospital twice a day, half an
hour after each of the Monokuma announcements. We’ll meet you outside.”

“Well, if there's nothing left to discuss, we should get going.” Mahiru said, seemingly keen to get
away. "We've been in the hospital long enough, I don't think it's wise to stay here any longer."

"I've settled Ibuki in at the motel.” Peko said, speaking to those who were about to leave. "Make sure
you check in on her, she has no use of her hands at all."

"Of course.” Mahiru gave a firm nod, showing Peko she could be trusted. "We'll all do our best to
look after her."

Goodbyes were exchanged, although they were brief. Left alone, Hajime and Peko found themselves
standing in silence - a heavy weight resting on their shoulders.

“I guess we should go and check on them.” Hajime said, determined to remain strong.

Peko made her way towards staircase. “I’ll check in on Akane and Fuyuhiko, if you could look out
for Sonia and Souda.”

Hajime nodded, following after her. It made sense that Peko volunteered to help, she'd want to keep
watch on Fuyuhiko, especially in his condition. Though Hajime was thankful for Peko's help, he was
glad to have her out the way, it gave him less chance of letting something slip due to his ‘truth
disease’.

Hajime continued upstairs to the top floor, in search of supplies. He was able to track down some
water bottles and flannels in the staff room, he snatched them up before visiting his sick friends.

His first stop was room number one. Entering without knocking, Hajime discovered Souda sitting up
in bed.

“Wassup!” Souda grinned in Hajime’s direction, he seemed pleasant enough, but there was a look of
mania in his eyes.

“Hey.” Hajime smiled, moving to his bedside. He reached out his hand and touched Souda’s
forehead, as suspected, his temperature was still extremely high. “I’m going to give you a cold
flannel, it should help cool you down.”

“Nah, I’m fine!” Souda protested, flinching away from Hajime. “I’m not a wuss, I don’t need that.”

“This probably isn’t helping.” Hajime snatched Souda’s hat straight from his head, it was retaining
the heat. Souda’s hair was all over the place, not that it really mattered, he was too caught up with the
despair disease to care.

Hajime unscrewed the water bottle, emptying its contents onto a clean flannel. He folded the damp
flannel in two, placing it gently on Souda’s forehead. “Keep this on your head, okay? I’m going to
visit the others, but I'll be back soon.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Souda brushed Hajime aside, unphased.

Hajime peered through the glass panel on door number two, Peko was busy consoling Akane. She
seemed to be handling things well, so Hajime decided to leave them alone, his interruption could
upset Akane further. Instead, he moved on to see Sonia in room number three.
The Princess was lying back in bed - her posture anything but supportive. She greeted Hajime with a lazy wave. “How’s it going?” though speaking casually, she sounded nothing like the Sonia he knew.

“Hey, Sonia.” Hajime said, trying his best not to judge. He produced another wet flannel, ready to give the Princess. “I’m going to put this on your head. It will help lower your temperature.”

“Uh that’s so fucking cold!” Sonia flinched as the material touched her forehead.

“It has to be in order to help you.” Hajime explained, brushing over the fact Sonia swore straight to his face. “Can I get you anything else, a drink or something to eat?”

“Some pizza would be good, and maybe a soda.” Sonia requested.

“Uh, I don’t think that’s the best thing to have when you’re sick.” Hajime frowned. Mikan had always warned him against junk food, so she probably wouldn’t approve of him feeding pizza to the sick. “Water is best for now. I’ll be right back and get you some.”

“Whatever.” Sonia muttered, turning over in bed, tugging the sheets with her.

On his way to fetch Sonia’s water, Hajime stopped in on Fuyuhiko. Fuyuhiko was fast asleep in bed, Peko at his side watching over him.

“Everything okay with him?” Hajime asked, loitering in the doorway.

Peko nodded. “He’s just sleeping, although his temperature is still very high. I told Akane to get some rest too, but she won’t stop crying.”

“Maybe we could give her something to eat as a distraction?” Hajime suggested. "You know, like comfort food.”

Peko shook her head, moving away from Fuyuhiko so she didn’t wake him. “I already tried, she’s completely off her food.”

“Wow! Akane must be sick…” Hajime raised his eyebrows, things had to be bad if Akane was rejecting food. She’d have to eat at some point or she’d starve, but he wasn’t going to force food down her throat.

"She is pretty unwell.” Peko reminded him, missing out on the fact that Hajime was telling a joke.

“I’m going to run over to the pharmacy to get see what medicines I can find, I figure there must be something useful…even if I have to read every single box.” Hajime laughed, trying to lighten the moment. “Are you going to be alright over here alone?”

“I shall be fine.” Peko said, ready for Hajime to leave.

“I’ll be as quick as I can.” Hajime said. Even with Peko’s reassurance, he didn’t want to leave her alone for too long, it wouldn't be fair. He hurried down the stairs, unaware there was a guest waiting for him…

“Nagito?!” Hajime stopped in his tracks, staring at the Luckster who was hovering around by the front desk. “What are you doing here? We aren’t meeting again until this evening.” Hajime didn’t like the idea of Nagito lurking around the hospital, it increased his chances of catching despair disease, it also came across as awfully suspicious.
“Ah, my apologies, Hajime.” Nagito raised his hands, an awkward smile on his face. “Am I bothering you?”

“Yes.” Hajime blurted out, the truth disease taking hold of him. More words came pouring out of his mouth before he could stop. “I don’t want to be around you, it’s bad enough you’ve set yourself as messenger. All you do is stir and cause trouble.” Hajime winced at the brutality of his own words, though they were true.

“I understand.” Nagito smiled, apparently taking no offence to Hajime’s harsh words. “I know it must be frustrating for the ultimate hope to put up with the likes of me.”

“Why are you here, Nagito?” Hajime spoke through gritted teeth.

“There’s something I thought I ought to tell you, but I can leave if you’d like me to.” Nagito offered, backing up slowly.

Hajime had a feeling Nagito was up to something, after all, it was Nagito. He didn’t have time for silly games, but curiosity won him over. “Fine, tell me. Just be quick about it.” blunt Hajime came to the surface once again.

“Well, I’m not sure if you’re aware, but Souda is standing on the hospital roof.” Nagito replied casually. “I think he’s planning to jump, he’s right on the edge.”

“W-what?!” Hajime spluttered. “Why the hell didn’t you tell me right away?!”

“I didn’t think you were interested.” Nagito laughed.

Just to be sure Nagito was telling the truth, Hajime sprinted out of the hospital. He stood outside, looking up the building, shielding his eyes from the burning sun. Sure enough, there was someone standing on the edge, their bright pink hair making them easy to identify.

“Shit!” Hajime swore. “He’s really gonna jump.” he hurried back into the hospital, dragging Nagito with him by the wrist. “Come on, we need to go and stop him.”

Nagito didn’t seem particularly interested, but he ran along anyway. Hajime's grip too intense to pull free. Hajime yelled instructions at him as they ran. “I’m gonna get Peko, you stay with Souda…” on second thoughts, sending Nagito to look after Souda wasn’t the best idea, he’d probably convince him to jump in the name of hope. “No, you go get Peko, I’ll go to the roof.”

Nagito nodded, stopping off on the second floor, whilst Hajime continued up the stairs. Many thoughts travelled through Hajime’s mind as he ran, taking two stairs at a time. How had Souda made it to the roof unseen? Why was Souda on the roof in the first place? Was he feeling guilty for what happened to Ibuki, or was it part of his despair disease? And the most important question of all, how was Hajime going to get him down?...

The door to the roof was shut, but it wasn’t locked. Hajime slammed against the ‘emergency exit’ bar with all his force, staggering onto the rooftop as the door shot open unexpectedly. He was hit by a gentle breeze, the result of being up so high.

Souda was walking along the edge of the rooftop, on a beam no wider than a meter. He paced back and forth, staring out to the island.

Hajime spoke gently, not wanting to scare Souda - in case he fell. “Hey, Souda. It’s a little high up here, don’t you think?”
Souda spun around, staring to face Hajime. “Aha, but that’s the entire point!” he flashed a toothy grin.

Hajime heard the sound of heavy footsteps from behind him, Peko and Nagito bursting onto the rooftop.

“Souda.” Peko called out, her voice calm. “You need to get down from there.”

Souda ignored her, placing one foot over the edge entirely. "Ha...ha...hahaha!" he threw back his head and laughed, but the laughter didn't sound human.

"This isn't looking good..." Nagito muttered to himself, stating the obvious.

"Souda, please!" Hajime wasn't sure why he was begging, it clearly wouldn't work. The Souda infected with despair disease would feel no sympathy towards Hajime's cries. Everything was happening so fast, Hajime wasn't sure if he had the time to be thinking up a plan B.

"Souda." Peko called once again, repeating his name. "Move away from the edge, or you're going to die."

Souda refused to face her, but he shouted over his shoulder. "Ha...ha...I'm going to fly. Watch me, I can really do it!"

"He's delusional!!" Hajime clutched the nape of his neck, a tidal wave of fear and distress washing over him. It was one thing to think ahead and stop the murders, but it was an entirely different story trying to convince someone not to jump off a roof.

"Are...are you guys ready to watch me fly? Ha.." Souda's laughter was empty, making it all the more terrifying.

Souda raised his other leg, ready to jump, causing seconds to turn into hours. As he did so, Hajime kicked into action, a true sense of urgency showing him the path he had to take. He charged at Souda with all his might, sprinting faster than he'd ever done before. Skidding, just as he reached the edge, Hajime grabbed the collar of Souda's jumpsuit, pulling him away with all the strength he had. Souda fell backwards as Hajime let go, collapsing onto the floor. Meanwhile, Hajime stayed frozen in his tracks, inches away from the edge himself.

Seizing the opportunity, Peko rushed to Souda's side, grabbing his arms whilst he was too vulnerable to resist. It was game over for him, there was no way Peko would let him go.

"Hajime, let me help you." wanting to make himself useful, Nagito came to Hajime's rescue - in the loosest sense possible. He held out his arm to assist Hajime in backing up. Hajime knew he was safe, but it was still terrifying being that close to the edge. For once, he was pretty grateful for Nagito's help. "T-thanks."

"Are you alright?" Nagito asked, letting go now that Hajime was safe.

Hajime found himself short of breath. "I'm...shaken." he replied honestly, but that was only to be expected.

Peko called over to the boys, interrupting their conversation to talk about the important matter at hand. "I think Souda's fainted, we should take him back to his room before he gets the chance to do something like this again."

Between the three of them, they were able to put Souda back in his bed. It felt wrong sending him to
sleep in his ordinary clothes, but had it not been for his jumpsuit, Hajime wouldn't have been able to pull him back to safety.

Peko pushed her weight firmly against the closed door, just in case Souda woke up and tried to make a dash for it - although it seemed unlikely. “We can’t leave him unattended, it’s too dangerous.”

“I can stay here and watch him.” Nagito offered, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Hajime shook his head. “Peko and I are already putting ourselves at risk of catching the disease, we can’t have you here too. It increases the chance of it spreading.”

Nagito shrugged his shoulders. "But I'm already here. Isn't it dangerous for me to go back to the motel? I could be contracting the virus as we speak."

"That's why you need to leave." Hajime said. "Besides, I thought you'd be against the idea of catching a disease which fills you with despair."

“Oh, I am.” Nagito nodded. “I hate everything the despair disease stands for. But if the ultimate hope is brave enough to confront the despair disease, then I should be too.”

“I’m not confronting anything.” Hajime sighed. “I’m looking after these four so they don’t die.”

Peko cleared her throat. “We’re going off topic. We still haven’t decided what we’re going to do with Souda. Having someone else at the hospital is a bad idea, we need another plan.”

“Oh, well that’s easy.” Nagito smiled, a solution already formed in his mind. “We’ll just do a Mikan.”

"Do a Mikan’?” Hajime repeated, trying to interpret Nagito’s words as best he could.

“What did Mikan do to Hajime before she murdered Byakuya?” Nagito asked, answering his own question. “She sedated him.”

“Y-you’re not being serious?!” Hajime raised his voice, he didn’t want to relive the memory. “We can’t sedate Souda.”

“Why not?” Nagito shrugged. “It’s not dangerous, providing you keep the dosage small. He’ll be fast asleep, so you won’t have to worry about him.”

“But how will we feed him? Or let him go to the toilet?” Hajime protested.

“We wouldn’t have to worry about that.” Peko said, answering Hajime’s questions. “A small dose would only keep him out for a few hours. He’ll have the chance to eat and...go to the toilet...whenever he wakes.”

Peko seemed to be on board with Nagito’s suggestion, and she was someone Hajime could trust the opinion of. “I guess this is our best option.” it was better than dragging Souda off the roof again.

Nagito strolled towards the door. “I’ll go over to the pharmacy and find some sedatives for you..”

“Whatever he gives us, I’m reading the box first.” Hajime mumbled under his breath, Nagito was being helpful, too helpful...
Peko read through the instructions thoroughly, ensuring Hajime the sedatives were safe. According to the box, it would keep Souda out for anywhere between an hour and five. Anything was better than having him fall to his death. So long as Hajime and Peko checked on him regularly, everything would be alright.

With Souda safe and sound, Hajime and Peko turned their attention back to the other sick patients. Fuyuhiko and Akane were much the same, but it was Sonia’s condition that had worsened. Sonia's temperature was highest of all, showing no signs of backing down.

“Here.” Hajime poured a bottle of ice cold water into a plastic cup, passing it over to Sonia. “Drink it slowly, it should help.”

Sonia turned her nose up at the cup. “I want something fizzy.” she complained, pouting at Hajime.

“Sorry, but there isn’t anything fizzy here.” Hajime said sternly, even if there was, he wouldn't be giving it to Sonia. “We’re at a hospital, so your only choice is water.”

“I don’t want that garbage.” Sonia complained, trying to swat Hajime’s hand away from her face.

“Sonia, please.” Hajime sighed, his frustration growing. “You need to drink. You’ve sweated out a lot of fluid.”

Sonia shook her head. “Get me some soda, I’ll drink that - cherry flavour, if we're talking about specifics.”

Hajime placed the cup on the floor, reaching for the half empty water bottle instead. Unscrewing the lid, he approached Sonia. Catching her off guard, he shoved the water bottle into her mouth, causing Sonia to choke and for water to go everywhere. Hajime quickly retracted the bottle when he realised what was happening.

“Fucking hell, what are you doing?!” Sonia spluttered, cursing loudly.

“I’m sorry, but you need to drink something or you won’t get better.” Hajime sighed and placed the water down. Guilt began to creep over him, the last thing he wanted was to hurt Sonia.

“I already told you, I ain’t drinking that horse shite.” Sonia spat, turning her head away from Hajime out of anger.

Hajime knew he wasn’t going to get any results from forcing Sonia, it was best to leave her be. He headed towards the door. “I’m going to step out for a bit, okay? There’s water on the side, and crackers too - if you’re hungry.”

“Whatever.” Sonia rolled her eyes, trying to block out Hajime’s existence altogether.

Hajime rested out in the hallway, pressing his forehead against the wall. He took a deep sigh, doing his best not to yell out in frustration. Sonia’s condition was only worsening, and she wasn’t helping herself. Her noncompliant attitude was something he wasn’t used to, it was making everything so difficult.

Unable to take the stress, he decided to check in on the others. Peko was in Akane’s room, trying desperately to calm her down, it seemed that her crying hadn't stopped. Hajime wasn’t sure how she
still had tears left to cry. He did his best to help, but his attempts weren't working.

“We should look in on Souda soon.” Peko said, talking loudly to be heard over Akane’s wailing. “He could wake up anytime now.”

“What should we do when he wakes?” Hajime replied, pulling a chair to Akane’s bedside, his weary legs struggling to support him.

“Nagito has given us enough sedatives for several doses. I think we should feed him, give him an hour or so of rest, and then put him back under.” Peko said, it seemed that she’d thought about it.

It wasn’t Hajime’s preferred plan of action, but it sounded safe. Things had certainly been a lot easier with Souda out of the way. “You can go and check on Souda if you want.” he offered, it seemed only fair since Peko had spent so long looking after Akane, she deserved a break.

Peko left the room gracefully, accepting Hajime's offer. However, her departure only made things worse for Akane.

“W-why is Peko leaving?!” Akane cried, her hands trembling. “W-what did I do to make her leave? T-this is a-all my fault...t-tell her I’m sorry.”

“She’s just gone to check up on Souda.” Hajime reassured her with a smile. “He’s not very well either, just like you.”

“I-I need to tell you something.” Akane said, crying so hard she began to hiccup.

“What is it?” Hajime asked, though he presumed it was going to be nonsense.

“I have a bad feeling.” Akane said, speaking slowly out of fear. “I have a bad feeling t-that someone is g-going to die.”

“No, it’s okay.” Hajime said, taking Akane’s hand and squeezing it gently. “Peko and I are looking after you all, the despair disease isn’t going to kill any of you. We won’t let it.”

“N-no, I d-don’t m-mean the despair disease.” Akane corrected him, gripping his hand firmly. “I t-think...I t-think someone is going to be m-murdered.”

Though it was most likely the disease talking, Akane’s words sent a shiver down Hajime’s spine.

“D-do you t-think someone...is going to d-die?” Akane asked, pressing the matter when Hajime didn't reply.

It was a question Hajime couldn’t avoid - as much as he wanted to. The truth disease captured his tongue, spilling out far more than he would have liked. “It's impossible for the same murder to happen again! Mikan is already dead, so she won't be able to catch the remembering disease.”

Akane looked at Hajime, her crying stopped. Like a newborn baby first brought into the world, Akane took in a deep breath, before screaming bloody murder once again. “I-I don’t u-understand w-what you’re saying. Why....why i-is everything s-so scary and c-confusing.”

His words only confused Akane further, leading her no closer to the truth. Hajime felt his body relax, his slip up didn’t have that bad a consequence. Had Peko been the one he told, things would have been very different.
Hajime knew it was a bad idea to stay around any longer, it was best to leave Akane alone. He also found her constant crying very draining, it was starting to give him a headache. He had a newfound respect for Mikan, looking after the sick was exhausting.

The evening soon crept up on them. Souda woke roughly three hours after they sedated him, Peko sat guard while Hajime fetched him something to eat. They allowed Souda to stay awake for an hour and a half before knocking him out again. Hajime wasn’t so against the idea anymore, it was doing the job.

When enough time had passed to clear the air, Hajime forced himself back into Sonia's room. The Princess seemed to have fallen asleep, or at the very least, she was pretending. Hajime couldn't help but smile when he spotted the empty water bottle and half eaten crackers on the floor. He leaned over Sonia, straightening the covers that she’d thrown all over the place. "I'm sorry about earlier." he whispered, speaking with true sincerity. Receiving no reply, he decided to leave Sonia be, turning off the lights on his way out.

Out of everyone, Fuyuhiko’s condition was the easiest to work with. He was a rather compliant patient, though he kept insisting on old herbal remedies whenever Hajime tried to medicate him. He also had a habit of leaving his bed to try and offer his assistance. It was frustrating, but Hajime didn’t want to sedate anymore than one patient at a time. At least it was better than Akane's constant snivelling, or Sonia's absence of manners.

The time soon came for Hajime to meet with Nagito outside the hospital, the Monokuma announcement acting as a reminder. Hajime kept his recap brief, feeling guilty for leaving Peko upstairs on her own.

Nagito paused, taking in everything he'd been told. “So it seems like no one’s making progress?”

“Fuyuhiko’s temperature is calming down, and so is Akane's. But there’s no sign of the despair disease going away, if that’s what you mean.” Hajime replied, appreciating the fresh air.

“The others spent all day in the library trying to find a cure, but I told them they were wasting their time.” Nagito sighed. “Monokuma has already made it clear what the cure is, there has to be another murder. I tried telling them, but they wouldn’t listen to me.”

Nagito was right, though Hajime didn’t like to admit it. "I wouldn't spend so much time with the others, you were around Souda far too long earlier. What if you caught something?"

"If I had despair disease, I think the symptoms would have shown themselves by now." Nagito said, logic his main defense. "From what we've seen, the disease spreads quickly, so I don't think there's anything to worry about."

Nagito's reasoning made sense, Hajime had no rebuttal. It seemed pointless to circle over the same matter, so he changed the subject. "How is Ibuki doing?"

“No one's really seen her.” Nagito replied. "Mahiru has been checking in on her, but she's not leaving her room. I guess the shock is still getting to her."

Hajime's shoulders hunched, it wasn't the news he'd been hoping to hear. Fingers crossed, things would ease up for Ibuki over the next few days. The bad news only drained Hajime further. He rounded things up with Nagito, wanting to have some time alone.

The night was long, Hajime got no sleep for himself. He didn’t dare leave Sonia or Souda alone in case their conditions worsened. He'd never forgive himself if they died in the night because he was
too busy napping. Peko visited occasionally to see if everything was okay, she reported that Fuyuhiko and Akane were in stable conditions.

Before Hajime knew it, it was morning again. The Monokuma alarm startled him, though it didn’t wake Sonia. Peko appeared in the room, holding a cup of coffee for Hajime. He took the coffee in appreciation, he needed to wake himself up.

“We need to meet with Nagito soon. Are you going to go, or shall I?” Peko asked.

“You can go, I’m too tired to deal with him.” Hajime said, he wasn’t even if sure if was the truth disease speaking anymore.

The hours passed, but nothing changed. Progress seemed near impossible, it was going to be without Monokuma’s aid. Hajime did his best to keep Sonia’s temperature down by pumping her full of medicine. Meanwhile, keeping Souda under sedation and nursing him when he woke. Pulling an all-nighter was beginning to take its toll on Hajime, he constantly felt his eyes closing, it was a battle just to keep them open.

Hajime knew he needed some sleep. If he could barely stay awake, how was he meant to look after the others? Even just an hour's rest would help. Peko agreed to look after the others while he rested, the bed in the on-call room would be perfect. He felt guilty sleeping on the job, but he feared passing out if he stayed awake much longer. He needed to be alert.

Hajime fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. Darkness had fallen by the time he woke, the clock on the wall indicating he’d been asleep for almost five hours. He wanted to stay under the covers, but it wasn’t fair on Peko, he hadn’t expected to be asleep for so long in the first place. Clearing the sleep from his eyes, he forced himself out of bed.

Hajime found Peko in room number three, watching over a sleeping Sonia. The room was peaceful, the atmosphere calm.

"Sorry for taking so long." Hajime yawned. "I only planned on sleeping for an hour, you should have woken me."

"You needed the rest." Peko said. "I didn't mind. You can go back to bed if you want, I'm doing fine."

"Has anything happened?" Hajime asked, though he had a feeling Peko would have woken him if something big went down.

"No, everything is much the same." Peko replied. "I believe we have everything under control now. So long as we maintain regular medication, everyone should be alright."

"That's good to hear." Hajime smiled, relief washing over him.

"I met with Nagito too." Peko informed him. "The Monokuma announcement sounded while you were sleeping."

"Oh!" Hajime exclaimed. "I thought I would have heard it. Did he have anything to report?"

"He did mention something about Ibuki." Peko said. "Apparently, she's stopped answering her door, she won't let anyone in to see her."

"That's awful." Hajime sighed, he couldn't think of anything worse than Ibuki being sad and all by herself. If he wasn't carrying the disease, he would have gone to visit her himself. "If you want to go
and take your nap, I'll be okay here." Hajime said to Peko, changing the subject.

"I don't need to sleep." Peko said, rejecting his offer. "It's important that I stay here."

"It's important that you rest too." Hajime reminded her, Peko looked just as exhausted as he'd done.

"Perhaps an hour wouldn't hurt." Peko said, reasoning with herself. "But please, come and get me if you need anything."

"I will." Hajime said, laughing nervously. "I just hope you don't mind sleeping in the same bed I did."

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“Hajime...” it was three o’clock in the morning when he next saw Peko, she appeared refreshed from her nap.

“How’d you sleep?” Hajime asked her.

“Very well, thank you.” Peko replied. “I’m going over to the store to get some more supplies since we’re running low on food. Do you need anything?”

“No, I’m good thanks.” Hajime shook his head. “But are you sure you should go right now? It’s pitch black out there.” Hajime knew the ultimate swordswoman could defend herself, but it would be very easy for someone to sneak up on Peko and take her by surprise.

“I will be fine.” Peko said. “I won’t be long.”

“Come and see me when you’re back, so I know you’re safe.” Hajime instructed, already feeling anxious.

“I will.” and with that, Peko left.

With Peko gone, Hajime began to clock watch, worried something might have happened to her. The past two murders taught him that the unpredictable could always happen. He didn’t want to be paranoid, but time was getting on and Peko still wasn’t back. When forty-five minutes passed and Peko hadn’t returned, Hajime began to feel sick. She was only making one quick trip to the store. It was a possibility that she’d gotten caught up, carried away browsing all the items the market had to offer - but that didn’t sound like Peko. Hajime was not in the mood to look at things optimistically, he had to be realistic about the situation.

When the clock struck four, Hajime knew for certain that something was wrong. He had no choice but to go searching, he would never forgive himself if something had happened to Peko. He left Sonia’s room quietly, the girl didn’t stir. It was risky leaving all of the hospital patients alone, but it was for the sake of Peko’s safety. If only Hajime had a key to lock the hospital...

The island was cold at night, the wind hit against Hajime's bare arms as he hurried over to the market. He fumbled through the darkness, the moonlight his only means of sight. Feelings heightened, he blocked out everything around him, the shadows not phasing him like they usually
would. The sickness continued to rise in Hajime's chest, he couldn't lose Peko.

As Hajime approached Rocketpunch Market, he spied something in the doorway. A broom was wedged between the door handles, locking the door from the outside, making it impossible for anyone to get out. Hajime ran closer, he could hear something... it sounded like banging.

"Peko?!" a smile lit up on Hajime's face as soon as he saw her, relief surging through him.

Peko was on the other side of the door, attempting to smash the glass with her fist.

"I'm trapped in here." Peko called out, her breath fogging up the glass. "I've tried using my sword, but the glass won't break. It's stronger than it looks."

"Hang on." Hajime shouted back. He tugged the broom free, opening the doors for Peko.

Peko hurried outside, eager to escape. "Thank you, Hajime."

"What happened?" Hajime asked, it was by no accident that the broom was there.

"I don't know. Someone must have put the broom there while I was shopping." Peko explained. "I didn't see anyone."

"This doesn't make any sense." Hajime mumbled. "The door was locked from the outside, which means whoever did it couldn't have been in the store with you."

Peko shared her thoughts with him. "I think someone was trying to stop me from getting out, rather than preventing anyone from getting in."

"Y...you don't think something’s happened, do you?" Hajime hesitated. It did seem suspicious. Had it all been a decoy to take him away from the hospital? Trapping Peko so Hajime would go searching for her, leaving the hospital unattended. "We should head back to the hospital, right now. I think they're in danger!"

They ran back to the hospital as fast as their legs would carry them, everything around them a blur. Hajime could feel the sweat travelling down his neck, his palms clammy. He didn't stop running, even when he reached the hospital. He threw himself into Souda's room, whilst Peko continued down the ward to check the others. Souda was fast asleep, tucked up in bed - but Hajime wasn't satisfied. Hajime tore back the covers, for all he knew, Souda could be bleeding underneath them. Hajime only allowed himself to relax when he saw movement from Souda's chest.

Peko put her head around the door, in the process of catching her breath. "I've checked in on the others, everyone is fine."

It was the good news Hajime had been hoping to hear, but he couldn't help feeling even more puzzled than before. "This still doesn't feel right..." he said, admitting his true feelings. "There's a reason someone locked you in at the market, we need to find out what it is."

"We should go to the motel." Peko said. "Just because everyone over here is safe, we can't say the same for the others."

In that moment, Hajime didn't care about spreading the despair disease or disturbing everyone from their sleep. He needed a peace of mind, something wasn't sitting right with him.

"Do you think one of us should remain here to guard the patients?" Peko said, stopping Hajime from running off before he got too carried away.
"No, because that means one of us would have to go outside alone." Hajime pointed out. "I know the motel's close, but, anyone could be waiting out there."

Hajime didn't intend to be gone long, a quick trip to the motel and back. He took off with Peko, leaving the patients unattended once more. The motel was only on the other side of the music venue, so it wasn't like they had a long journey ahead of them. Hajime peered into the venue's car park as he hurried by, curiosity taking the better of him. During his sideways glance, something caught his eye.

"Hajime?" Peko called after him, watching in confusion as Hajime made his way through the carpark.

"The door...it's open." the door to the music venue was open by a fraction, but the light shining through the gap made it easy to spot. Hajime approached the door with caution, there was no reason for it to be open at such a late hour. He pushed the door lightly, using only the tips of his fingers. He already knew what he was going to find...

The smashed guitar...the blood...the body...it was all there.

"Nekomaru!" Hajime found himself shouting, though he barely recognised the voice as his own.

That man was lying lifelessly on the floor, his stomach to the ground. He was surrounded by his own blood, which oozed from his head. There was no saving him.

How can this be happening again?

Hajime had to look away, unable to face the horror in front of him. Another murder meant another killer - two more of his friends destined to die. Providing, of course, he was able to solve the case in the first place. How could anyone bring themselves to hurt someone as kind as Nekomaru? It made no sense.

Peko wasn't as vocal as Hajime, but she did lower her head out of respect. "We need to find the others. It seems like we're the first ones to find him, there hasn't been a body discovery announcement."

"So I guess that rules out an accomplice." Hajime said, already making note of clues.

"Can you go to the hospital and gather all of the patients? It's only fair they investigate too." Peko requested. "I'll fetch everyone from the motel."

Hajime didn't stick around to discuss theories with Peko, he took towards the hospital. His adrenaline was running high, so Nekomaru’s death hadn’t properly hit him yet. He knew Nekomaru was dead, but his brain was struggling to accept it.

Hajime was so taken away by his thoughts, he’d reached the hospital landing without realising it. His first stop was Souda’s room. He wasn’t exactly sure how he was going to wake the sedated Souda, it wasn’t like he could just throw a bucket of ice cold water over him - and there was no way in hell he was going to carry him. However, waking up Souda was to be the least of Hajime’s concerns. Not when he realised what was waiting for him…

Once Hajime stepped into the room, everything happened so quickly. The moonlight shone straight through the window, casting a haunting shadow on the musician in the center of the room. She was leaning over the bed, using all her force to smother a pillow over someone's face. Though the victim's identity was concealed beneath the cotton case, tufts of pink hair crept out from underneath. The victim wasn't going die without putting up a fight, they wrestled furiously, arms and legs kicking like mad. The musician ignored their cries for help, pushing the pillow further over their face,
trying to drain every inch of life from them. The attacker didn't back down, her blistered hands, described as unusable, showing no weakness at all...

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUN!!

Whoool could the killer be?? ;) There's more to this case than it may seem... I've not just spoiled everything so don't worry. Although, no one is ruled out!

Next up is the investigation, where a lot more shall be revealed! :D
“IBUKI! STOP!” Hajime shouted so loudly, he practically shook the room. His voice echoing off the walls. He was seconds away from tackling Ibuki to the ground, but such actions weren't needed.

“Yes, sir!” Ibuki threw the pillow to the ground, turning to face Hajime with complete obedience.

Hajime’s jaw practically smacked the floor, he hadn’t expected it to be that easy. He stayed frozen in the doorway, unsure what to do with himself. He didn’t think Ibuki would stop so willingly - then again, he didn’t think she’d attempt to kill Souda in the first place.

Speaking of Souda, he was blue in the face. He sat up in bed, gasping for air, like a fish out of water. He spluttered and choked, his eyes streaming - Hajime wasn’t sure if they were tears of fear or pain.

“Gah!” Hajime grabbed a tuft of his own hair in a panic. He had a potential murderer on his left, and a victim inches away from death on his right. When he said he was going to stop the murders, he didn’t mean literally.

Thankfully, his screams didn’t go unheard. Upon hearing the chaos, a nearby friend came to his aid.

“Hajime, is everything alright?” Monomi crept around the doorframe, her intentions innocent.

For once, Hajime was exceptionally glad to see her. He didn’t want to be on his own, not right now. “Monomi, you need to help me! Souda nearly died, and I’m not sure if he’s going to be okay.”

Souda was alive and conscious, but with his lack of medical knowledge, Hajime wasn’t sure if Souda’s life was still in the balance.

“Oh no!” Monomi grabbed hold of her ears, afraid for the safety of her student. “What can we do?”

“Well...I don’t know, that's why I'm asking you!” Hajime said, he was the student after all.

“Did I hear Monomi screaming? Please tell me someone's giving her the beating she deserves.” callous and cool, Monokuma strutted into the room. A look of disappointment falling over his face when he spotted a seemingly unbeaten Monomi. He let out a deep sigh. “So you weren’t beating up my little sister after all.”

“Monokuma, you have to help.” Monomi begged, turning to her ‘brother’ out of desperation. “Souda is in big trouble. He might die!”

“What’s it to me if he dies?” Monokuma remarked. “A double murder sounds pretty interesting to me.”

Hajime shook his head furiously, he wasn’t going to let Souda die. Losing Teruteru, Hiyoko, Mikan, Byakuya, Nekomaru...that was hard enough. But Souda...he meant something more. He’d been with Hajime until the end, by his side when they woke from the game. All the highs, the lows - they experienced them together.

Hajime challenged Monokuma, he was going to fight for his friend, even if it meant putting himself in the firing line. “You owe us this. You played dirty and started the fire, nearly killing Ibuki. You burnt her, and now this has happened. You have to make it up to us.”
“Jeez!” Monokuma rolled his eyes, placing his paw on his hip to give a bad impression of Mahiru. “You’re never going to drop the fire thing, are you?! Fine! I’ll give Souda the once over, but I’m not making any promises to save him if he starts slipping away.”

Souda could barely speak, still gasping for air, even now. Monokuma grabbed the end of his bed, which was thankfully on wheels, and steered him out towards the door.

“Go with him, Monomi.” Hajime instructed. The rabbit didn’t have much influence, but he felt reassured knowing Monomi was there too. Last time Hajime trusted Doctor Monokuma, Mechamaru was born.

“Okway!” Monomi agreed, following ‘Doctor Monokuma’ and his patient. Leaving Hajime all alone with Ibuki. Before Hajime had a chance to think about his next set of actions, the monitor on the wall came to life.

*Ding dong, dong ding*

“A body has been discovered! Now then, after a certain amount of time has passed, the class trial will begin!”

The body discovery announcement indicated to Hajime that the others were now at the crime scene. He had to hurry up and join them, but there was something he needed to deal with first.

Ibuki hadn’t moved since Hajime screamed at her to stop. She hadn’t tried to hurt Hajime, or flee for the exit, she wasn’t even trying to defend herself. Something didn’t seem right.

“Ibuki, you know that would have killed him…” Hajime said. Though it was completely obvious, he couldn’t process the idea that Ibuki would harm someone.

“Ah, I see.” Ibuki nodded, soaking in the information. “So that's what would have happened.”

Her behaviour and speech pattern seemed ‘off’, yet oh so familiar. Could it be...despair disease? But that was impossible, Ibuki had been hiding in her room the entire time, there was no way she could have caught the airborne virus. That being said, there weren't any other conclusions Hajime could draw.

Hajime had the perfect test to pry further, but he needed to be cured of his truth disease for it to work. Monokuma had promised to free him of the truth disease when the next killing occurred...

“Did you know, Fuyuhiko is really an alien sent from space?” Hajime said. The lie swept straight off his tongue, it appeared he was free from the truth disease after all. He couldn't help but feel victorious, even at such a dark time.

“Mr Kuzuryuu, an alien? I understand now. No wonder he’s so small.” she responded with complete seriousness, confirming what Hajime feared to be true. Though his own despair disease had been lifted, it didn't seem to be the case for Ibuki. Perhaps some diseases wore off quicker than others.

“Can I feel your forehead?” Hajime asked, raising his hand ready.

“Of course, Mr Hajime.” Ibuki replied, pushing her fringe to the side to keep it out of the way.

Hajime pressed his hand to her brow. Just like he thought, she was running a fever. Somehow, Ibuki had acquired the despair disease. And from her behaviour, it was the gullible disease once again. He had many questions for Ibuki, but now wasn’t the time to be asking them. The others had, most likely, started the investigation. Hajime needed to be there too. He’d already missed most of the
previous investigation due to the sedatives, he didn't want history to repeat itself.

“Ibuki, I need you to follow me to the music venue. Is that alright?” Hajime asked. He didn’t like the idea of leaving her alone in the hospital. She could still be very dangerous.

“Affirmative.” Ibuki said, following Hajime’s footsteps to the door.

With almost perfect timing, they stepped into the corridor and met a familiar face. Mahiru pushed her way through the door, almost smacking into Hajime. “I was beginning to think you weren’t coming!” she sighed. “And Ibuki, it’s so good to see you.”

The madness in Ibuki’s eyes, and sweat across Hajime’s brow, quickly indicated something was wrong. Mahiru changed her tone entirely. “Has something happened?” there was a sense of urgency in the way she spoke.

Hajime gulped, there was no point hiding the news. “When I came in to get Souda, Ibuki was standing over his bed trying to smother him with a pillow.”

Mahiru gasped, her face whitening. “Souda’s dead too?”

“No.” Hajime shook his head, cutting in quickly. “I got here just in time. Monokuma has taken him to make sure he’s okay, but if I’d have arrived here thirty seconds later...well...” he couldn’t bring himself to finish the sentence, and the truth disease no longer forced him.

“Ibuki, how could you do this?” Mahiru asked, her voice raw with emotion.

Hajime interjected before Ibuki could answer. “Ibuki has despair disease.” he knew it was risky to talk about Ibuki’s despair disease, since he shouldn’t know anything about it, but it was unfair to pin the blame on her entirely. “I believe she’s suffering from the gullible disease.”

“But how? She’s been over at the motel the entire time.” Mahiru frowned, raising the same issue as Hajime. She shook her head, silencing herself. “No, this isn’t the time for that, the trial is for speculation. Listen, you go over to the music venue and start investigating. I’ll take on the task of bringing the patients.”

“What about Ibuki?” Hajime said, speaking as if she weren’t there. Though Ibuki no longer seemed to be a danger, he didn’t want to put Mahiru’s safety at risk.

“Here.” Mahiru reached into the pocket of her dress, pulling forth a bronze key. “Take her to my motel room and lock her in. Mine is the one on the very left.”

“Wait, you want to keep her out of the investigation?” Hajime said. Was it really a good idea to keep someone from investigating?

“I don’t want to, but I think it’s a bad idea having her at the crime scene.” Mahiru explained. “And it’s not fair that someone else should miss out on their investigation just to watch her. I wish there was another way, but there isn’t. This will be best for Ibuki.”

“Okay.” Hajime agreed, it sounded like a fair plan. It wasn’t like Ibuki was going to miss out on anything, with despair disease, she’d lose her memories anyway. “Follow me, Ibuki.”

“Affirmative, Mr Hajime!” Ibuki said, following in toe.

Hajime said very little on his way to the motel, there was something playing deeply on his mind - besides the murder, of course. When he walked in on Ibuki smothering Souda, she’d been using her
hands to hold the pillow over his face. The very hands Peko said she’d be unable to use for months. Something wasn’t working out. Was Ibuki miraculously cured? Or was Peko a liar?

He found Mahiru’s room with ease, unlocking the door to let Ibuki inside. “I want you to have a nap, okay?” he said. “Someone will come back for you before the trial. Don’t go anywhere until then.” saying goodbye, he closed the door, locking it after him.

Depositing the key safely into his pocket, he turned back in the direction he’d just come from, heading for Titty Typhoon. In such a dark time, he no longer found himself smirking at the name.

The car park was deserted, so Hajime walked straight inside the venue. Laying eyes on Nekomaru’s body again, a shiver travelled up his spine. The adrenaline was beginning to wear off, the truth smacking Hajime straight in the face. Nekomaru was dead.

“Ah, hello Hajime.” Nagito waved at him from across the room. He was crouching over by the bar stools, inspecting something on the floor.

Peko called to him from across the stage. “Where’s everyone from the hospital? I thought you were bringing them.”

“I was…” Hajime said. “But, something happened.” as quickly as he could, he explained the story of Ibuki and Souda to the others. “I’ve locked Ibuki in Mahiru’s motel room for now, just until the investigation is over.”

“Is there even a purpose in this ghastly investigation?” Gundam frowned. “Clearly, we already have our killer. Ibuki was caught in the act.”

“No, we must investigate.” Chiaki objected. “How many times in the class trials have we falsely accused someone, only to realise they’re not the killer? If we don’t investigate, we could neglect something really important and sentence ourselves to death.”

“Chiaki’s right.” Hajime agreed. “We owe it to Nekomaru to do this properly. It’s not fair if his killer gets away with this, just because we were feeling confident.”

“This isn’t just mere confidence.” Gundam elaborated. “When you gaze upon some of the evidence around here, you’ll quickly realise who the killer is. It’s obvious.”

Even so, Hajime refused to back down. A serious investigation was crucial if they wanted a successful class trial. Hajime was determined to make the most of his time and investigate properly. “What’s everyone found so far?”

“We haven’t inspected his body yet since we’re waiting for the Monokuma file.” Nagito said. “Though I think, just from looking at him, it’s pretty obvious what the cause of death is.”

Nagito was right, the blood oozing from Nekomaru’s skull made it pretty obvious how he’d died.

He’d taken something to the head, and from the evidence surrounding him, it appeared to be the smashed guitar.

Nagito followed Hajime’s gaze, staring at the broken instrument. “Seems like you’ve found our murder weapon. Things really aren’t looking good for Ibuki, are they?”

Hajime chewed down on his bottom lip, his mind was a mess. The smashed guitar was bad enough, but catching Ibuki in the act made pretty compelling evidence. Hajime knew he had to try his best to lead an investigation as unbiased as possible. If he looked for evidence with Ibuki in mind, he could wrongly convince himself of the blackened’s identity.
“I’ll start with Nekomaru’s body.” Hajime informed the group. He’d stepped in as Mikan playing nurse, so he might as well take over on the autopsy too. He didn’t particularly like the idea of inspecting a corpse, but he knew he had to it.

“Are you sure you don’t want to wait for the Monokuma file?” Chiaki asked.

Hajime shook his head. “Monokuma’s busy with Souda, so I think we could be waiting a while.”

As Hajime had already seen, there was a large gash at the top of Nekomaru’s head. It was no longer bleeding, but the dried blood had started to stick clumps of hair together. It was truly disgusting. Up close, the wound didn’t look as big as Hajime imagined. There was so much blood swimming around Nekomaru’s neck, Hajime wasn’t sure how all of it could have come from one minor wound.

Next, Hajime observed the position of Nekomaru’s body. He was lying flat on his stomach, face pressed to the floor. From the looks of it, he’d taken a stumble forward and face planted the ground. Hajime accepted the possibility that someone could have come from behind and taken Nekomaru by surprise. After all, how else would someone be able to take on the powerhouse Nekomaru?

Finally, he finished up by searching the contents of Nekomaru’s clothes. He hated to breach Nekomaru’s privacy, but was he was desperate to find some sort of clue. Maybe a note, or a letter, indicating why Nekomaru was at the music at such a late hour. Unfortunately, Hajime found nothing. Concluding his autopsy on a disappointing note.

The autopsy leading to disappointing conclusions, Hajime moved on. Since it was close by, and an obvious factor at the crime scene, he took his time to inspect the smashed up guitar. Neck snapped, body broken in two, strings everywhere - in its own way, it was like another body. Hajime looked at the guitar, piece by piece. Exploring every inch, every gap, every string. As he searched, something quickly came to his attention. There was something missing from the guitar...blood.

Usually, it would be a good thing to find and object not covered in blood. However, Hajime’s findings only made him all the more suspicious. The guitar looked completely new - besides from its smashed up condition. If the guitar was, indeed, the murder weapon, and responsible for creating the wound on Nekomaru’s head, there should be blood - even just a small trace of it.

Of course, there was the possibility that the killer had cleaned any traces of blood from the murder weapon. But, if that were the case, they might as well have disposed of the weapon altogether. Was it a decoy? Hajime wasn’t sure.

“Aha, so the Blood Demon was trying to take another sacrifice!”

Hajime caught Gundam muttering to himself from behind the bar. Hajime usually made the effort to ignore Gundam’s strange sayings, but the mention of blood caught his attention. Sitting down on one of the circular stools, he peered over the top to see Gundam behind the bar.

“What’s going on?” Hajime asked, straining his neck for a better view.

Gundam looked up, making eye contact with Hajime. “The Blood Demons tried to trick me into making another sacrifice. But I am smarter than that, my psychic senses provided me with a warning.”

“Uh…” it was times like these, Hajime wished Gundam came with his own translation book. “That means…”

“The glass!” Gundam exclaimed. “Thousands of tiny pieces, trying to trick me into shedding my
precious blood.”

With a vague idea of what Gundam meant, Hajime peered further over the edge. Looking down at the floor, he realised something was catching the light. No...not just ‘something’, many things. Surrounding Gundam’s feet, were many shards of broken glass.

“Oh, you nearly trod on it?” Hajime asked, finally understanding.

Gundam nodded. “It must be the vampires that live here, they’re working with the Blood Demons.”

“R-right..” Hajime said, he jumped down from the bar stool so he could get a closer look. Moving round to the back of the bar, he knelt down, inspecting the tiny pieces of glass. Though most of the pieces were too small to even pick up, there were several shards of a bigger length. Ensuring he was careful, Hajime picked up the larger pieces. Casting them aside, he began to put the pieces together, in order to determine what the glass had originally been. It was like a puzzle, and Hajime actually had a lot of fun doing it.

Gundam continued to watch over his shoulder. “Mmm.” he nodded to himself as the shape began to come together.

“You see it too?” Hajime asked. From what Hajime could see, the glass pieces formed the shape of a beer bottle - or some other type of drink. Even with dozens of tiny pieces of glass still on the floor, Hajime had a feeling he was missing the final ‘puzzle piece’. He hunted around on the floor, just in case he’d missed it, but there was nothing.

Gundam peered closer at the pieces. “Oh, tragic. It appears you let the Blood Demons take you.”

“What?” Hajime was growing tired listening to Gundam’s rambling.

Using his bandaged hand, Gundam motioned to some of the glass pieces, pointing out specs of blood. “You appear to have cut yourself.”

“Oh.” Hajime hadn’t felt any cuts, in fact, he’d been exceptionally careful when handling the glass. He flipped his hands over, looking for wounds, but he didn’t find any. His hands weren’t cut or even scratched. “The blood on the glass, it’s not mine.”

“Missing glass, and blood on the rest of the pieces…” Gundam said, smirking. “I wonder what that could mean.” before Hajime could quiz him any further, Gundam pushed himself out of the way, heading in another direction, muttering to himself about battling the Blood Demons.

Before Hajime could decide what to inspect next, another distraction provided itself. The door to the music venue opened, a series of people swimming through. Mahiru stood at the front of the group, the patients behind her.

“What the fuck?!” Fuyuhiko cried, laying eyes on Nekomaru’s body.

“Oh my, this is terrible.” Sonia gasped, cupping her hands over her mouth.

“What’s going on?” a voice from the back of the group cried. Hoping for a better view, Akane pushed her way to the front, coming face to face with Nekomaru’s body. “C-coach.” Akane stopped in her tracks, her voice softening.

Those around her felt the tension, everyone knew how close Akane was to Nekomaru. Out of everyone, his death would hurt her the most. She dropped to her knees in a moment of weakness,
reaching out and taking Nekomaru’s limp hand. “W-why...why did this have to happen?”

A single tear rolled down her cheek, before the waterworks came on entirely. Though Akane had been constantly crying over the past few days, because of her despair disease, Hajime knew these tears were sincere. Watching the behaviour of Fuyuhiko, Sonia, and Akane, Hajime had a feeling the despair disease had truly gone away. It was a relief knowing he’d never have to experience the vile disease again.

“W-we...w-we never finished our training sessions.” Akane wept, tightening her grip on Nekomaru’s hand. “I-I never got to thank you for making me stronger.”

Hajime felt himself choking up, it was difficult watching someone lose the person they cared about most. Nekomaru - the person Hajime promised Akane he was going to protect. He’d let her down, he’d failed her.

Sonia knelt beside Akane, wrapping her arms around her friend’s shoulders. “This...this is horrible.”

Fuyuhiko stayed in the doorway, he shed no tears, but even he seemed shocked. “Why Nekomaru?” he muttered to himself.

Taking a deep breath, Akane forced herself off the floor, freeing herself from Sonia’s hug. “W-who...who did this?” her voice was cold, full of accusation and anger. “They’re going to pay for what they did!”

Hajime didn’t know who the killer was, but he didn’t want to be in their shoes right now. He could see the passion in Akane's eyes. She was going to get justice for Nekomaru, even if it killed her.

“Hey! Why didn’t I get an invite to the reunion?” making a nuisance of himself, like always, Monokuma strutted into the music venue. “Oh...maybe this is a funeral.”

“You-” Akane hissed, projecting all of her hatred onto the bear.

“Where’s Souda?” Hajime interjected, he needed reassurance that his friend was going to survive.

“Oh, he’s right here.” Monokuma took a step backwards, dragging someone through the door.

Souda stood in the doorway, dumbstruck, a face full of confusion. He appeared dazed, as if he’d been hypnotised. “W-wha…” he could barely speak.

“What’s wrong with him?” Hajime demanded, raising his voice. “What did you do?!”

“Rude, Hajime!” Monokuma tilted his head back and laughed. “I’ve spent the time saving your friend, and now you’re talking down to me. You should show more respect for your Principle. Souda’s fine, he’s just confused. He almost died, and now the despair disease is wearing off. Did you expect him to be bouncing off the walls?”

“So, this isn’t permanent?” Hajime asked.

“No.” Monokuma said. “Give it a little bit of time, and he’ll be back to his irritating cowardly self.”

Hajime finally allowed himself to breathe, taking a deep sigh of relief. He rushed to Souda’s side, freeing him from Monokuma’s grasp. “Come with me.” he said, wanting to keep his friend as far away from the bear as possible. Monokuma might have saved Souda's life, but it still didn't give Hajime reason to trust him.
“Did you say the despair disease is wearing off?” Peko asked.

“Yeah, it got boring! Ugh, sick people are sooooooooo dull.” Monokuma groaned.

“This was all because you felt bored?” Gundam raised his voice.

“Now another killing has happened, I don’t need the motive anymore.” Monokuma laughed.

“So everyone is going to be okay now?” Chiaki asked.

“There might be some lingering side effects, but besides that, yes.” Monokuma said. “That reminds me, I’m here to give you this. The Monokumaaaa fiiiile!”

Mahiru, the closest to him, took the file. She read it out loud for everyone to hear. “The victim is Nekomaru Nidai. The cause of death is extreme blood loss. The victim has a few visible external injuries, with no detections of chemicals, such as poison. The time of death is estimated to be around 3:50am.”

3:50am…ten minutes before Hajime went in search of Peko. He made a mental note of the time, it had to be an important clue.

“How could someone do something so evil?” Akane was trembling, overcome by anger and heartache.

“Hang on,” Hajime raised his hand, looking to Mahiru. “Did you say Nekomaru has multiple injuries?”

“That’s what the file says.” Mahiru replied. “Looking at the picture, there’s a wound on his head, and one on the back of his neck.”

“His neck…” Hajime muttered, one of the few places he hadn’t thought to check. If Nekomaru had an injury on his neck, it would make sense why there was so much blood around his head. Hajime made a mental note to return to the body. It would be his priority after catching up with the despair patients.

“By the by, you should take some time to explain to the others what’s been happening over the past couple of days,” Monokuma said. “The despair disease will have erased all memories from the time they were ill.”

Hajime was fortunate enough to hold on to his memories. As Monokuma said before, the despair disease would not affect him as strongly as it did the others.

“You guys don’t remember anything?” Nagito asked them, curiously interested.

Sonia shook her head. “Everything is one gigantic blur!”

It was a shame that everyone had lost their memories, but Hajime couldn’t deny he was glad. If Akane's memories were truly gone, then she’d have no recollection of the things he told her about the Neo World Program.

“We have no time to lose!” Akane exclaimed. “We need to get on with the investigation, I want justice for Coach Nekomaru.”

Hajime wanted to revisit Nekomaru’s body, but there was something he had to do first. He guided Souda to the bar stools, sitting him down carefully. “How are you feeling?”
“I…” Souda’s voice was hoarse, probably the result of having the life smothered out of him. “I don’t remember much. My head hurts a lot.”

Hajime reached behind the bar, pulling free a bottle of water for Souda. “You...uh, were nearly killed tonight. So, take things slow, okay?”

Souda didn’t appear overly shocked, most likely, because Monokuma had already told him the news. “Yeah, will do.”

Satisfied Souda was okay, Hajime took himself back to the body. According to the Monokuma file, there was an injury on Nekomaru’s neck. Peeling back his collar for a better view, Hajime began to analyse. Just like the file said, there was a large slit across the back of his neck - similar to the cut across Byakuya’s throat in the last case. It seemed to have contributed to the pool of blood.

Staring at the wound, Hajime realised something very clearly. It was impossible for the broken guitar to have done such damage - the cut was too precise. He couldn’t rule the guitar as completely innocent, perhaps it had been used to shock Nekomaru to the ground, and the glass finished off the job. Either way, Hajime was certain of one thing, the guitar hadn’t done the killing.

The additional injury had provided Hajime with more insight on the case, but there wasn’t anymore he could deduce from it. He pushed himself off the floor, there were other areas he had to investigate.

He noticed the door to the 'staff only' room half open. He decided to go inside in search for further clues. Sonia was already in there, busy with her own investigation.

“Hello, Hajime.” Sonia tried to smile, despite the circumstance. "Hey." Hajime returned the greeting. "How are you feeling?” he wanted to make sure all of the despair disease patients were okay.

"I feel very confused." Sonia admitted, honest with her feelings. "All of my memories from the past few days have completely disappeared. I am not even sure if the days truly passed. Going to sleep in my cottage feels like only yesterday.”

"It must feel strange," Hajime agreed, thankful he'd been able to keep his own memories. "But I promise you it's the truth. I'm the one who's been looking after you the past few days."

"Thank you, Hajime." Sonia beamed. "That is very noble of you. When we leave this island, I will have my family reward you greatly for your kind service."

Hajime felt himself blushing. He quickly changed the subject before his cheeks could turn any redder. "Uh...so, did Mahiru fill you in on what's been happening?"

"She did. I cannot believe this has happened again…” Sonia sighed. “Poor Nekomaru, he was so kind. I do not understand why someone would want to hurt him.”

“All we can do now is get justice for Nekomaru.” Hajime said solemnly.

“I have been searching in here, but I do not think the killer used this room. It appears untouched.” Sonia stated. “Although, there is a guitar missing from the shelf.”

“That must be the broken one out there.” Hajime said, putting two and two together.

“Hey, you two.” Chiaki stuck her head around the door, Nagito loitering behind her. “Have you found anything important?”
“Afraid not.” Hajime replied, trying not to sound too defeated. “All we can tell from in here, is this is where the killer obtained the guitar they smashed. But I guess that was kind of obvious anyway.”

“Nagito and I are going over to the hospital to investigate, would you like to join us?” Chiaki asked, fiddling with the sleeves of her hoodie.

“You want to go to the hospital?” Sonia repeated, not understanding their need to.

Overhearing her question, Nagito made his entrance, leaning over Chiaki’s shoulder to speak. “The despair disease has played a pretty big role over the past few days, so I think it’s wise we search the hospital too.”

“I highly doubt someone with despair disease would commit murder.” Sonia objected, horrified at the mere thought. “Maybe...this is Monokuma’s doing.”

Hajime knew better than to accuse Monokuma. Though the bear enjoyed killing, he was never the one to commit the crimes. He used his twisted motives to get the students to do his dirty work for him. “I don’t think it’s Monokuma.” he said gently.

“I just want the killings to stop.” Sonia faced down at the ground. “No one else needs to die…”

“So, are you coming to the hospital or not?” Nagito asked, pushing for an answer. Completely insensitive to Sonia’s pain.

“I’ll come.” Hajime agreed. He hadn’t noticed any suspicious activity during his stay at the hospital, but he had spent most of his time rushing between patients, so it was possible something had happened behind his back. Either way, Hajime knew the music venue no longer served a purpose.

“I think I will stay here.” Sonia said, declining the offer. “I only recently arrived, so there is much more for me to investigate.”

“Okay. We’ll see you later then.” Chiaki gave a friendly wave goodbye, while Nagito headed straight to the exit. Hajime knew he’d better hurry up, or they’d leave without him.

“See ya, Sonia.” Hajime called over his shoulder, running after the others.

No one seemed particularly fussed, or interested, that the three of them were leaving. Everyone was busy conducting their own investigations, no one had the time to be watching the actions of others.

Chiaki walked in the middle, Nagito and Hajime on either side. The hospital wasn’t far, so they made the most of their time by speculating about the murder. With the moon watching down on them, it was almost like they were telling spooky ghost stories at a sleepover. Hajime told them his findings of the glass behind the bar. Nagito remarked he’d seen it too, but had nothing else to offer Hajime that he didn’t already know.

“So, how are we going to do this?” Hajime asked, hit by the air con as soon as he entered hospital. With three floors, and many rooms, Hajime didn’t have the time to explore each room in excruciating detail.

“There are three floors, so why don’t we take one each?” Nagito suggested. “I’ll take the waiting room, Chiaki the patient rooms, and Hajime the top floor.”

Hajime noticed that Nagito had kept the smallest task for himself. He wasn’t in the mood to argue, so agreed to take the top floor. Chiaki was just as on board with the plan, allowing the three of them to go off in separate directions.
The hospital hallways seemed particularly daunting, like something out of a bad horror movie. Hajime had the image of Ibuki smothering Souda ingrained in his brain. He’d witnessed something terrible. He was beginning to feel guilty about locking Ibuki at the motel, if her despair disease had worn off, she’d have no idea why she was in there. He hoped she wasn’t too scared on her own. As soon as he finished his search at the hospital, he was going to go straight back and rescue her.

Given the top floor to investigate, there were two rooms for Hajime to explore. Though the third floor also led to the roof, Hajime didn’t plan on going up there. The idea of climbing onto the roof so late at night seemed rather creepy.

Hajime started with the staff room, since it was the closest to him. Only a few hours ago, he’d been in there having a nap. Dreaming peacefully, unaware of the horror he’d find himself in later.

The condition of the room hadn’t changed much since he’d left. The bed appeared neater, Peko seemed to have made it after her departure. Hajime peered under the sheets in search for clues. He wasn’t doing anything wrong, but for some reason, he felt dirty exploring Peko’s sheets. He’d probably receive a punch off Fuyuhiko if he told him what he was up to.

Hajime peered into boxes, behind curtains, under lamps - but he found nothing helpful. Everything was in its rightful place, no clues standing out. Satisfied he’d done all the searching possible, Hajime moved on to the conference room.

The curtains were drawn, drowning the room in darkness. Hajime flicked the switch, attempting to bring some light to the room.

The staff room might have been lacking in evidence, but the same could not be said for the conference room. As soon as Hajime could see, a dozen clues hit him at once.

In the middle of the room there was a large sleeping bag, scruffy where someone had been sleeping in it. A few pillows were discarded on top, there for the purpose of comfort. Surrounding the sleeping bags were discarded food items - apple cores, empty plates, tins of food, and plastic bottles.

Hajime hadn’t visited the conference room during his time at the hospital, but he knew for a fact, that the sleeping bag wasn’t part of the furniture. Someone had been living there, right under his nose. Peering around the uneaten food, there were no signs of flies or mould - indicating the food was fresh, and someone had been eating there in the recent hours.

Hajime couldn’t quite believe it. Someone had really been living there without him realising. The question was...who?

It wasn’t long before Nagito joined him, since his own search had been so brief. He rested his weight against the doorframe, eagerly eyeing up Hajime’s findings. “What’s this?”

“I...I don’t know.” Hajime said, he knew as much as Nagito. “From a guess, it looks like someone’s been sleeping up here.”

Nagito nodded in agreement. “A sleeping bag and plates of food, you must be right. This is kind of gross...”

Hajime shook his head in disbelief. “I just don’t understand how someone’s been living in here without me knowing. I thought I would have heard something.”

“Maybe it’s Peko’s stuff?” Nagito suggested.
“No, it can’t be.” Hajime said. “When Peko slept, she rested in the staff room. And neither of us would come up here to hide and eat food. We’ve been fitting in meals while the patients were sleeping.”

“So the mystery grows bigger…” Nagito remarked. “Interesting.”

“What about you?” Hajime asked, curious about Nagito’s investigation - though he wasn’t sure if there would be many clues in the waiting room. “Did you find anything?”

“There wasn’t much.” Nagito admitted. “Although, I thought you’d like to see this.” from underneath his jacket, he pulled a book. For a second, Hajime’s heart began to race, presuming it was the book of student profiles. However, rationality kicked in, and Hajime saw the word ‘guest book’ engraved on the front in gold lettering.

“Oh, a hospital guest book?” Hajime said, inspecting the lettering. He took the book from Nagito, unsure as to why he was being given it in the first place. “What am I looking for?”

“You’ll know it when you see it.” Nagito replied, his words useless.

“Can’t you just tell me?!” Hajime complained, rolling his eyes.

Nagito simply laughed, giving no hints whatsoever. “I’m going to the motel. I want to investigate Nekomaru’s room, and I have a feeling Monokuma will call for the trial at any minute.”

"What do you want in there?" Hajime asked.

"When I searched his body, there was no sign of his motel key. It makes me wonder why he left his room unlocked, and if there are any clues," Nagito said, explaining his reasoning.

"Oh yeah, he didn't have his key!" Hajime exclaimed. He hadn't noticed at all, too busy searching for other things. Why would Nekomaru leave his room unlocked in the middle of the night?

"You should stop by if you have the time." Nagito said.

Hajime had many questions, but he knew Nagito wouldn’t stand around to answer them. “I’ll...see you later then.”

“Bye, Hajime!” Nagito said cheerily, disregarding the fact they were in the middle of a murder investigation. “Oh, and you should stop in on Chiaki before you leave. She has something you might find interesting,” offering a final wave, Nagito turned on his heels and headed off down the staircase.

Hajime turned his attention to the book in his hand. The guest book was filled with many pages, but Hajime had a feeling most of them were going to be blank. They’d only been given access to the hospital a few days ago, so it wasn’t like there were many patients to have filled it up.

Hajime flicked to the front page, Monokuma had signed his name several times. The bear hadn’t stated his purpose for visiting the hospital, most likely writing in the book because he loved the sight of his own name so much.

The next entry, which was actually human, came from Ibuki. It was signed four days previous, the day they’d first been given access to the third island. It was a much happier time, that was for sure…

Mahiru, Chiaki, and Nagito also signed their names that day, but no one else seemed to have bothered. It certainly hadn’t crossed Hajime’s mind.
The next entries came from two days ago, the day the despair disease first struck. Hajime was surprised to see any names in there at all. He thought people were too busy worrying about the despair disease to bother signing some lousy guest book. This time, only Chiaki and Nagito were the ones to bother signing their names. Hajime glanced down at the final entry...

*Ibuki Mioda*

“Huh?” Hajime muttered to himself, staring closer at the name.

Sure enough, dated yesterday morning, sat Ibuki’s name. There were two things that stuck out to Hajime most. The first, Ibuki’s name had been spelt incorrectly, an extra I positioned in her name, reading ‘Ibiuki’ not ‘Ibuki’. The second, was the style of the writing. The name had been printed in block capitals, making it difficult to decipher the owner of the writing. Common sense would indicate Ibuki wrote her own name, what purpose would someone else reap from such an action? But deeper knowledge reminded Hajime that Ibuki had no use of her hands. The writing was nothing glamorous, but it was legible. Could Ibuki really have written her name like that with her hands in their current condition? If she’d been able to hold down a pillow, did the same thing go for a pen? The main issue with that theory that irritated Hajime, was the incorrect spelling of her name. It only pointed further towards the idea that someone was framing Ibuki.

He had three potential theories. Either Ibuki was living in the hospital, someone else was living in the hospital and trying to frame Ibuki, or no one had been living in the hospital and it was all a set up to frame Ibuki further.

The monitor on the wall kicked into action, forcing Hajime to take a break from speculating.

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Okay, kiddos! That’s all the time you’re gonna get. It’s time for the long awaited class trial! You already know the meeting place, so hurry up and get your butts down here. Last one to arrive is a rotting corpse!”

The announcement cut. Hajime hurriedly took off towards the stairs, he still had to speak to Chiaki. Hopefully, if she was still in the hospital, they could discuss whatever she’d found on their way to Monokuma rock.

As Hajime walked down the stairs, Chiaki walked up them. In search of each other, they were able to quickly reunite. Hajime made the decision to hold onto the guest book, it could prove important in the trial. He pushed the book to his chest, arms crossed - it was the easiest way to carry it.

“So,” Hajime said, talking as he walked. “Nagito told me you found something.”

“Yeah, that’s right.” Chiaki nodded. In her hand, she held a white piece of paper. She waved it in front of Hajime’s face so that he could see.

Upon closer inspection, Hajime realised it wasn’t paper, but instead, an envelope. The envelope was torn open on the back, no trace of the letter inside. However, there was something on the front.

*Mahiru*

The photographer’s name had been scribbled on in ink, written with little care. “Oh, I guess Mahiru dropped this when she came by earlier.” Hajime remarked. “Which room did you find it in?”

“It was in Sonia’s.” Chiaki replied. “I didn’t find anything else with it, though.”
“I wonder who sent it.” Hajime said, unable to identify the writing. “Maybe it’s just me, but, this seems kinda strange. If someone wanted to talk to Mahiru, they didn’t need to go to the effort of writing her a letter.”

“Every time there have been letters in the past, it’s always been blackmail, or some kind of trap.” Chiaki pointed out, referencing other cases.

“Maybe someone’s been blackmailing Mahiru, although I don’t know what they’d have over her.” Hajime had destroyed the arcade machine before anyone had been able to play it. Therefore, it was impossible for anyone to know about the Twilight Syndrome Murder Case story.

“Or maybe, it isn’t blackmail at all.” Chiaki said. “Something important could have been written in the letter. A plan, of sorts, that they couldn’t afford anyone else to overhear.”

A plan? It was definitely a possibility, though not one Hajime wanted to believe. If Mahiru was discussing secret plans with another student, it could point towards her as the killer.

Approaching the central island, Chiaki brought the topic of the note to its conclusion. “What about you, Hajime? What did you find?”

Hajime proceeded to explain the mysterious guest book, and items in the conference room. Chiaki hesitated in a moment of silence, taking in what she’d just been told.

“The name in the guest book, does it match the one on the envelope?” she said finally, looking to Hajime for answers.

“Uh, let me have a look.” Hajime couldn’t remember off by heart. He flipped open the guest book, a difficult task to complete while walking, skimming the pages until he found the entry he was looking for.

Chiaki held her envelope next to the name, for a side by side comparison. There wasn’t much to go on, as there weren’t very many letters, but it was easy to draw a conclusion.

“No, they don’t match.” Hajime said, closing the guest book. It was a small lead that went nowhere. The writing looked nothing alike, if it was the same person, then they’d thoroughly disguised their writing.

“Hajime, would you like to put the guest book in my backpack?” Chiaki offered, she could tell the book was weighing him down.

Hajime was growing tired of the book, but he felt too guilty to palm the heavy item off on Chiaki. He politely declined, it was the right thing to do.

As they approached Monokuma rock, Hajime spotted most of the students, all of them in waiting.

Akane seemed to have calmed down, feeding off an energy of anger instead of tears. Fuyuhiko was kicking sand, muttering to himself - all signs of nurturing Fuyuhiko were out the window. As for Souda, he appeared to be back to his normal self. He was busy rabbiting on to the Princess, Sonia was smiling pleasantly, but there was a pain in her eyes screaming ‘please free me’.

“Who is it we’re waiting for?” Hajime asked, merging in among the crowd.

Nagito glanced around the group. “Just Ibuki now.”

“Can she hurry the hell up?” Fuyuhiko remarked. “It’s damn cold out here at night.”
“Wait…” Hajime paused, hit by a horrible realisation. “I know why Ibuki isn’t here. She’s still locked up in the motel…” he’d totally forgotten his promise to go and free her. Hajime felt overwhelmed with guilt.

“She’s still in there?!” Mahiru exclaimed. “Jeez Hajime, I thought you were responsible. This is why you should never trust boys! Give me my key.” she presented him the palm of her hand in waiting.

Hajime knew better than to argue with Mahiru. He hurriedly reached into his pocket, fingers sliding over the key. He handed it over to Mahiru, still trying to support the weight of the heavy guest book with one hand.

“How you dare.” Mahiru snapped, turning on her heels. “I’ll be right back.” she stormed off towards the third island, clearly irritated with Hajime.

The students waited in silence, saving their evidence and speculation for the trial. Monokuma never showed. He was, most likely, already sitting on his throne - with Monomi by his side. Hajime took the time to appreciate the moment, for it could be his last. The moon, the stars, the sand...things he’d always taken for granted. When he went to sleep, he always presumed the next day would ready and waiting for him. If the trial went wrong, and the blackened went unidentified, he may never see the stars again.

Of course, there was the possibility he’d still wake up. Aware of his position in the Neo World Program, his brain might understand that he hadn’t really died. But Hajime refused to adopt such a confident attitude, for he didn’t know for certain.

He gazed at the faces of his fellow students. In a matter of hours, if all was successful, he’d never see one of them ever again. Souda’s goofy smile, Gundam’s hilarious sayings, Peko’s logic, Sonia’s kindness...he couldn’t imagine life without any of them.

Mahiru arrived back at the rock, arm linked with Ibuki’s. The look of mania from the musician's eyes had disappeared, she looked like the Ibuki he knew.

Ibuki greeted them with a broad smile, putting everything else behind her. “Did you miss Ibuki?” she laughed, like her normal, lovable, self.

Had Ibuki really been the one to kill Nekomaru? Or was it all some kind of trap? In a matter of hours, Hajime would learn the truth. Whatever the outcome, it was going to hurt.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that's all the clues you'll be getting before the trial. I wonder if anyone has figured it out yet :) More evidence will come to light during the trial too. The trials are always my favourite to write, so I hope you'll enjoy. ^_^

Also, has anyone here watched the first episode of the DR3 Future Arc? Ahh it was so good!! I'm even more excited for the Despair Arc on Thursday. I can't wait to see all the sdr2 cast :')

And as always, thank you for taking the time to read. I appreciate it so much! ≧◡≦
Chapter Summary

It's time for another class trial. Will they discover Nekomaru's killer?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hajime marched straight to his podium, exchanging no words with the others - as if he were walking into a serious exam. Mikan’s podium stared him straight in the face, two bandages lapped over one another to form an X.

As the others found their places, Hajime glanced around - though he wasn't admiring the newly decorated courtroom. It caught his attention how badly the numbers were thinning out. Sixteen had already wound down to eleven. A number that would, most likely, fall down to ten after the trial.

"Now then, let’s begin with a simple explanation of the class trials.” Monokuma launched into his usual spiel. Hajime used the time to compose himself, it was vital he remained calm and logical if he wanted to succeed.

“...and that person will earn the right to leave this island.” Monokuma concluded his speech. “Before you begin, I have an announcement to make. If you’re able to identify the blackened correctly, you'll receive a special prize at the end of the trial."

“Prize?” Hajime muttered to himself. He had no idea what it could be, since Monokuma had never offered such a thing before. His gut feeling told him not to get his hopes up, being Monokuma, it was most likely a trap.

Nagito cut in first, stealing the chance for anyone else to speak. “Is there really any point going through all this? Or should we just start with the obvious culprit?” evident from his tone, he was clearly bored.

“Please wait!” Sonia pleaded, interjecting. “I am afraid my memories are hazy, I am unsure what has been going on over the past few days. I do not have a grasp on what happened.”

“My memory’s just like Miss Sonia’s!” Souda added, smiling because they had something in common. “It’s not fair to start the trial, we don’t know what’s been happening.”

"I thought Mahiru explained everything to you?” Nagito said.

"I told them a little about the despair disease, but there wasn't time to explain everything." Mahiru said, justifying herself.

“It’s only fair that everyone has the same understanding.” Hajime said. It wouldn't take long to catch the others up to date.

“I wanna know everything that happened.” Akane demanded, her voice fierce. “Coach Nekomaru deserves justice, whoever did this is gonna pay!”
"If Mahiru was telling me the truth earlier, then I'm right to say that everyone was separated these past few days." Fuyuhiko said, trying to fill in the gaps in his memory.

"What do you mean if?!" Mahiru snapped. "Of course I told you the truth."

"That's right." Peko said. "Because of the despair disease, we were forced to separate into two groups. I was at the hospital with Hajime, Sonia, Akane, Fuyuhiko, and Souda."

"Everyone else was at the motel, we were staying out the way to avoid the despair disease." Chiaki said. "As well as myself, there was Gundam, Ibuki, Mahiru, Nagito, and Nekomaru."

"What happened at the motel, isn't important." Nagito said. "Everything that plays a part in this crime happened at the hospital. Why don’t you explain it Hajime, since you were there?"

"Right, well Peko and I both volunteered to look after those with the despair disease." Hajime began, launching into his explanation. "The despair disease patients were really sick, we didn't want to leave them alone. Since we weren't just guests, we were allowed to stay at the hospital. Our first problem occurred only minutes after everyone had left. It might be unrelated to the incident, but it’s important to mention. Souda tried to throw himself off of the hospital roof."

"I-I did what?!" Souda's voice rose several pitches. "Are you insane? I'd never do something like that!

"It wasn’t you, it was your despair disease." Hajime reminded him. "You became a daredevil, so you lost all sense of fear. It’s only that Nagito walked past and saw you that were able to save you in time."

"A daredevil, huh?" Souda straightened his posture, suddenly pleased with himself. "Miss Sonia, don't you think I'm brave?"

"If you wanted to be brave, you should have jumped." Sonia remarked, displaying little interest.

"But...but that could've killed me!" Souda objected, insulted by her response.

"It was my idea to sedate you." Nagito smirked. "You wouldn’t be able to harm yourself if you were knocked out."

"What the hell? You guys didn’t want to look after me, so you drugged me?!" Souda cried, apparently hurt. "You could’ve killed me."

"But we didn’t.” Nagito said, matter-of-factly.

"That doesn't make it okay! I mean-" Souda continued to rant, but he was cut short.

"Please stop complaining." Sonia criticized Souda. "You are ruining the story."

"S-sorry, Miss Sonia." biting his pride, Souda went silent.

Hajime returned to his explanation. "Besides from the Souda incident, it was pretty quiet down at the hospital. Peko and I took turns getting the supplies, but most of our time was spent looking after the sick. It's only a few hours ago that all of that changed."

"Is that when the murder begins?" Ibuki asked.

Hajime nodded. "It all began around three in the morning. Peko left the hospital to make a supply
"Hajime, you allowed a lady to go out by herself in the middle of the night?" Mahiru frowned disapprovingly. "As the male, it was your responsibility to go."

"I tried to stop Peko, but she insisted she’d be fine!" Hajime protested, straightening out the facts. "Besides, she's the one with the sword!"

Mahiru tutted. "Even Nagito shows more responsibility than you do..."

"Scum like me...responsible?" Nagito's face lit up. "That's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me!"

Hajime forced himself not to pursue the argument any further, continuing on with his story instead. "I was really starting to worry about Peko. An hour had passed by, and she hadn't returned. I didn't want to leave the hospital unattended, but I could tell something was wrong. So, I made the decision to leave and search for Peko. I found her trapped in Rocketpunch Market."

"Someone placed a broom through the door handles, preventing me from exiting the building." Peko added, mentioning what Hajime hadn’t. "There store has no other exits, including windows. So I couldn't leave."

"We figured it was a trap. Locking Peko in the store, so I'd come searching for her, would leave the despair disease patients as open targets. We ran straight back to the hospital, but everyone was there, fast asleep and alive." Hajime said. "That's when we presumed something had happened at the motel instead. We were on our way over, when I saw the door to the music venue cracked open. You know the rest from there..."

"Hold up, I wanna know more on this despair disease." Fuyuhiko said, uninterested in the last part of Hajime's story. "You say Souda’s disease turned him into a daredevil, what happened to the rest of us? What diseases did we get?"

"Akane had coward's disease." Chiaki said, listing it off her fingers. "Sonia had the slob disease, and you had nurturing disease."

"Nurturing disease?" Fuyuhiko raised his eyebrows. "What sorta bullshit is that?"

"You were really caring." Hajime said. "And you kept baking cookies..."

A look of horror fell across Fuyuhiko's face, hot under the collar. "That's...that's some kind of bullshit. Damn bastard, lying to me."

"Hajime isn't lying." Nagito said. "I saw you with my own two eyes, you had the nurturing disease. You were stroking my hair."

"And you wanted to cuddle me underneath blankets!" Mahiru joined in.

"I...I...I...don't care about some stupid despair disease." Fuyuhiko raised his voice. "I still could've killed you all."

"We're in the middle of the class trial for murder, and you think it's a good idea to threaten everyone?" Mahiru exclaimed. "You realise how suspicious you sound, right?"

A mischievous glint twinkled from Fuyuhiko’s eyes. “Maybe I am the killer. Even with despair disease, I could take on any of you.”
Mahiru began to laugh - at Fuyuhiko, not with him. “There’s no way you could have killed Nekomaru.” she scoffed. “All you’ve done over the past few days is offer everyone hugs and warm glasses of milk. There’s a bigger chance of Monomi being the killer.”

Monomi squealed, calling down from her usual position of the ceiling. “Eek! No, it wasn’t me. I would never hurt anyone.”

“You’ve already done it once.” Monomi cried, referencing the incident in Jabberwock Park. "Please not again!

Fuyuhiko was too busy blushing to respond. It was Nagito who cut in, taking over from Monomi. Narrowing his eyes at Mahiru, he gave his own opinion. “Mahiru, you’re also pretty suspicious yourself. Care to share your defence?”

“Me?!” Mahiru yelped, caught off guard. “I don’t even know what you’re accusing me of.”

“Silly me, I’m getting ahead of myself.” Nagito laughed, though it wasn’t sincere. “Think back to the first day of the despair disease, when we were all gathered at the hospital. Weren’t you pretty keen to leave Hajime alone? You were against the idea of helping the patients, which seems pretty unusual for someone like yourself.”

Hajime could remember Mahiru's exact words. 'I'm sorry we're leaving you alone with them, but man up, Hajime!' He hadn’t thought much of it at the time, but upon further reflection, it did seem pretty suspicious. Mahiru seemed rather eager to get away from the hospital. Her argument for leaving the hospital was valid, it was understandable that no one wanted to catch the despair disease, but was it something really to be expected from Mahiru?

“It’s true that I didn’t want to stay at the hospital, but that’s only because I didn’t want the despair disease spreading any further.” Mahiru said, offering up her defence.

“And yet you were willing to leave Hajime in charge of four very sick people?” Nagito continued to challenge her. "At this point, you had no idea that Peko would come along and help."

“Why am I getting all of the blame?” Mahiru complained. “Chiaki didn’t offer to stay, or Gundam, or Nekomaru, or you. Yet none of them are in questioning!”

“I don’t think Nagito's purposely targeting you.” Hajime said, stepping in. “It’s just...usually, you’re so willing to help. But this time, you showed no interest.”

“I was putting the needs of the many ahead of the needs of the few.” Mahiru said, still not backing down.

Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes. “What bullshit philosophy book did you steal that from?”

"Is Mahiru hiding something?" Ibuki gasped.

Mahiru dropped her gaze to the ground. Letting out a deep sigh, she gave in. “F-fine...there’s another reason why I didn’t want to help.”

“Aha! I knew it!” Souda laughed, though he’d had no involvement in the previous conversation.

“What is it, Mahiru?” Sonia asked, all ears.
“I received a note when I woke up that morning…” Mahiru reached into the pocket of her dress, pulling forth a sheet of card. She held it up for everyone to see, before reading it out loud. “‘Ibuki appears to be pulling through her critical condition. Wouldn’t it be a shame if she were to lose her battle with life at the last minute? I suggest, if you want to keep her safe, you stay away from the hospital.’”

"Wh-what?!” Ibuki exclaimed, her jaw dropping. "Someone's threatening Ibuki?"

Mahiru folded the note, putting it back from where it came from. “It was in my mailbox the morning of the despair disease. It made no sense at first, I thought I was just being warned not to visit Ibuki. But then everything with the despair disease happened, and I realised what it was talking about. If I helped with the despair disease patients, someone was going to kill Ibuki."

"So that explains the envelope we found..." Hajime said, a flashback to the envelope Chiaki had shown him.

"I require silence." Gundam said, speaking up. "Mahiru, you claim the letter was presented in your mailbox that morning. You mean to say you received it before breakfast?"

"That's right." Mahiru said. "I saw it as soon as I left my cottage."

"Impossible!" Gundam declared. "The despair disease wasn't uncovered until everyone gathered for breakfast. That letter arrived in your mailbox before any of us knew the despair disease existed."

"I don't understand it either." Mahiru said. "But I'm telling you, that's what happened."

"The stupid bitch probably wrote it herself." Fuyuhiko ranted. "Why would someone just threaten Mahiru not to go to the hospital?"

Someone who knew about the despair disease before the students went to breakfast. Someone who had reason to keep Mahiru from the hospital. Hajime suddenly had an idea. "Mahiru, can I have that letter?"

"If you'd like..." Mahiru replied, uncertain why he'd need it. She passed the note around the circle until it reached Hajime.

Hajime rested the note on his podium, alongside the hospital guest book that was already sitting there. Hajime recognised the writing on the letter right away, he'd seen it before. Hajime flipped open the guest book to the first page, catching the perpetrator then and there. "The writing...it matches."

Monokuma laughed from the comfort of his throne. “I’m glad to see you got my note.”

"Y-you, wrote this?" Mahiru hesitated, unexpecting the perpetrator to come forward so easily. "But...why?"

“I have a lot of data on you guys, more than you might think.” Monokuma said. “I know exactly how you behave and think. As the despair disease unleashed, I knew Mahiru and Hajime were the only ones stupid enough to offer themselves as nurses.”

“And the rest of us?” Gundam pressed.

“I know you’re too self-centered to focus on anyone but yourself and those hamsters of yours. You’d never put yourself in such a risky position.” Monokuma elaborated. “So I had to do something to stop Mahiru from getting her big nose involved.”
"Big nose? Ibuki's is muchhhh bigger!" Ibuki laughed, her nose sticking out like usual.

"So why didn't Hajime receive a note too?" Mahiru asked.

"Because I was punishing him!" Monokuma laughed. "He said something very upsetting towards me, and he had to pay for it. What’s tougher than trying to look after four despair disease patients all by yourself?"

Hajime knew exactly why Monokuma had done it. It was all part of the ‘challenge’ he’d been trying to set. His threats of harming Ibuki were empty, nothing more than a scare tactic to keep Mahiru away from the hospital. Monokuma’s plan had fallen short when Peko stepped in, failing to predict that she'd offer her services, despite the knowledge Fuyuhiko was suffering from the despair disease.

“So...I guess this letter won’t provide us with any leads.” Chiaki said. “It was just one of Monokuma’s tricks.”

“So you believe I’m innocent?” Mahiru demanded, waiting for an apology.

“Well, we can’t rule anyone as innocent.” Hajime reminded her. “But, yeah, your absence at the hospital has nothing to do with this murder.”

"I really wanted to help." Mahiru said, dropping the attitude for a second. "Leaving the despair disease patients alone terrified me as much as it did you. But I believed Ibuki's life was in danger, and I couldn't risk that. I really am sorry."

“Why are we still speculating? We're wastin' time!” Fuyuhiko remarked, bringing everyone back to focus. “Ibuki is clearly the killer. She was caught in the act trying to suffocate Souda, for fuck's sake! Do you need it spelt out for you? Do you people have brains?"

“Why does everyone keep saying that?” Ibuki pouted. “Ibuki did not hurt Souda. She would never do something like that.”

“You’re trying to deny it, even though you were caught?” Fuyuhiko snarled. "You dumb asses are usually bad at this, but this is an all time low."

Ibuki’s face held an expression of confusion. "Is Ibuki dreaming? This is getting weird..."

“Souda, do you remember anything?” Akane asked, turning to the mechanic for his side of the story.

Souda shrugged his shoulders. “Sorry...no. My last memories are from a few days ago, back at Ibuki’s concert.”

“Well...this is interesting.” Nagito said, a glimpse of a smirk on his lips. “How do we know what Hajime told us is the truth?"

“Huh-” Hajime gasped.

“Hajime claims that he walked in on Ibuki attempting to murder Souda. But isn’t it funny that neither the victim, nor the attacker, remember anything? This is certainly very suspicious.”

“But-”

Nagito persisted, allowing Hajime no time to interrupt. "It was also Hajime that found Peko locked in at the store."

“I wasn’t lying about that, Peko can tell you herself.” Hajime insisted.
“I believe Peko was locked in the store, that’s not a lie. What I’m saying is, you’re probably the person who locked her in.” Nagito continued. “Peko tells you she’s leaving the hospital, and suddenly she gets locked in at the store? Hmm…”

“Hajime is the only one I told…” Peko muttered, reflecting on the situation.

“It’s plausible that you locked Peko in the store, killed Nekomaru, and then lied about Ibuki so you could frame her.” Nagito said, constructing together a chain of events.

"Maybe Peko locked herself in the store.” Hajime suggested, trying to move the spotlight on someone else. He knew he was innocent.

"Dumbass." Fuyuhiko barked, narrowing his eyes at Hajime. "We've already established the market has no other entrances. No doors, no windows. Peko couldn't have locked herself in."

"Oh, right..." Hajime had to room to argue. Fuyuhiko was right, there was only one entrance to the market - the door which had been trapped shut from the outside. Unless Peko dug her way underground, she wasn't the one who placed the broom.

“I understand why Souda might not remember what happened…” Sonia said. “He had despair disease, just like me. So, I am sure he lost all of his memories like I did.”

Hajime nodded in agreement, it was the perfect explanation for why Souda couldn’t remember anything. The despair disease had stolen his memories.

“But what I do not understand...is why Ibuki’s memories are missing too.” Sonia continued. “She did not have the despair disease, therefore, she should remember everything.”

“No, that’s wrong!” Hajime exclaimed. “Ibuki did have the despair disease. Trust me!”

"Trust me?"” Souda repeated. “Yeah, I think we’re gonna need a little more than that…”

“When I found Ibuki at the hospital smothering Souda, I screamed at her to stop, and she did so right away. I quickly came to realise that she was following every instruction I gave her, like some sort of gullible disease.” Hajime said. “Her forehead was burning up too. Monomi came in straight after...she can back me up.”

“…” Monomi stepped in. “I did find Hajime with Ibuki and Souda, but the incident had already happened by that point. So...I don’t think I’m much help.”

“Useless fuckin’ mole rat.” Fuyuhiko hissed, spitting insults.

“Once again, Hajime, you could still be lying.” Nagito taunted.

“But why would I lie?” Hajime complained. It was seriously frustrating to be wrongly accused.

“So you can blame Ibuki, of course.” Nagito said. “And then escape this island, sentencing all of us to our deaths. Really Hajime, I don't mind. But I wish you would have consulted me. It would have been an honour escorting the Ultimate Hope in his escape.”

“YOU DID KILL COACH NEKOMARU!” Akane cried, yelling out in rage.

“I’m having a hard time trying to believe that Ibuki had despair disease.” Gundam said. “She never came in contact with anyone infected, and she stayed in her room for most of the time.”

“Oh Hajime.” Nagito shook his head with a sigh. “If you’re going to lie, you should check it’s
believable."

“I’m not lying!” Hajime insisted, growing all the more frustrated by the minute. “I actually have reason to believe that Ibuki caught despair disease and was near the infected.”

“What it is you found?” Sonia asked.

“Nagito, Chiaki, you guys know what I’m on about…right?” Hajime said, turning to his friends. Even if Nagito was trying to blame him, Chiaki had his back.

“Oh…you mean what you found in the conference room?” Chiaki cocked her head.

“Yes! That’s it!” Hajime exclaimed, hoping the others would be willing to believe him if the truth came from Chiaki’s mouth.

“When Hajime and I investigated the hospital, we found some items in the conference room.” Nagito recalled, stating the truth. “From what I remember, there was some tinned food and a sleeping bag.”

“Bottles of water too.” Hajime added, not wanting to spare any of the details.

“It sounds like someone was living there…” Souda scratched his head from underneath his hat.

Ibuki let out a loud gasp. "There is someone else? The ultimate homeless student?!!"

“Are you sure those items didn't belong to you or Peko?” Mahiru quizzed Hajime.

Peko answered on his behalf. “No, Hajime and I ate in the patient rooms while we were keeping watch. As for the sleeping bag, we only took one nap during our stay at the hospital. We shared the bed in the staff room.”

“You...you two slept together!?” Souda smirked, all sorts of dirty thoughts running through his mind. "Wow, Hajime. You were busy…"

“N-no! It wasn’t like that.” Hajime spluttered, sensing death glares from Fuyuhiko’s direction.

"You're sick!" Fuyuhiko spat, shaking his fist. "You pretended you cared about the hospital patients just so you could sleep near Peko! People like you are the scum of the earth."

“Peko and I shared the bed, but at different times. She took her nap once I woke from mine. Nothing happened!” Hajime said, trying to straighten out the facts.

"That better be the fucking truth!" Fuyuhiko hissed, his tone threatening.

"What if the sleeping bag belonged to one of the patients?" Akane said.

“Impossible.” Peko said. “We would have noticed if they left their beds.”

“So...if it was not you or Hajime...and it was not any of the patients…” Sonia said, in the attempt to put together a theory.

“It must have been Ibuki.” Hajime said, focusing everyone to his original point. “I remember Peko telling me something, she said that Nagito said that no one had seen Ibuki all of yesterday.”

“That’s right.” Mahiru nodded. “She wouldn’t answer her door, or talk to anyone. I left some food outside her room, but it went untouched.”
“Maybe, that’s because she wasn’t in there.” Hajime said. “Someone has been living up at the hospital, and Ibuki was missing all day. Put that together and…”

“I refuse to believe this.” Gundam protested. “Even mortals, as stupid as yourselves, would have noticed someone else living in the hospital.”

“Well, we didn’t.” Hajime shrugged his shoulders, trying not to take the insult to heart. “We didn’t go in the conference room, and Peko and I were always at someone’s bedside. It would have been possible for someone to sneak in the hospital…”

“Hmm...I suppose that makes sense.” Gundam frowned, struggling to admit he was wrong. "But it's still pathetic."

"Ibuki was really missing all day?" Sonia said in disbelief. "Did no one begin to worry when she was not answering her door?"

"She'd been through a lot, so I thought she wasn't very talkative." Mahiru said. "I thought maybe, if she wasn't seeing me, she was talking to someone else over at the motel. She could have been with Nekomaru all day."

"Wait, there's something I need to show you!” Hajime exclaimed, hit by a sudden rush of excitement - his evidence could provide many answers. He flicked through the pages of the hospital guest book, searching for one name in particular. He came to a halt when he found what he was specifically looking for. With the book too heavy to hold above his head, and the writing too small to see, Hajime passed the guest book around the circle - starting with Mahiru.

The book travelled around the courtroom, each student taking the time to analyse what Hajime was showing them. Once the book was returned to Hajime, they were able to begin their discussion.

"You all know what I'm trying to show you?" Hajime asked.

"Yesterday morning, Ibuki checked into the hospital." Chiaki said, showing her understanding of the situation. "Her name's in the guest book."

"We gotta be on the same page here. No one really believes Ibuki wrote that, right?” Souda looked around for feedback. "For starters, Ibuki can't even hold a pen in her condition. But also, her name's spelt wrong."

Like Souda said, the name in the guest book read 'Ibiuki' not 'Ibuki'.

"Ibuki has always spelt her name right, ever since birth!" Ibuki stuck out her chest, boasting proudly.

"I'm not trying to say Ibuki wrote this." Hajime explained. "I don't think she can write, she wouldn't spell her name wrong, and signing the guest book would defeat all objectives of hiding."

"Then what are you trying to say?" Nagito pressed.

"Oh..." Hajime hesitated. Put on the spot, he found himself lost for words. He'd wanted to show everyone Ibuki's misspelt name in the guestbook, but he hadn't thought about it long enough to consider the potential leads. Had someone written it to frame Ibuki? Did Ibuki have someone write it for her? There were many potentail situations, too many to discuss. They'd barely mentioned any evidence from the crime scene, but it was important to deal with the Ibuki situation first. After all, she was currently the number one suspect.

Akane hit the group with a different question. “Okay, so Ibuki had despair disease and was living at
the hospital. But...did she get the despair disease first and then move in? Or move in and then catch the despair disease?"

"That’s easy!" Hajime replied. "The despair disease takes your memories, so if Ibuki remembers going to the hospital, that’ll answer your question."

Ibuki’s face was blank, she shrugged her shoulders. "Ibuki remembers leaving her cottage, but that’s all."

"So she was infected when she went to the hospital!" Akane exclaimed.

"Which makes this even more confusing…" Chiaki said. "Now we really don’t know why Ibuki went to the hospital."

"Or, how she contracted the disease." Gundam added.

"No, wait!” Ibuki called. "Ibuki remembers something, but it’s blurred and fuzzy. My mind feels like a soda can that’s been shaken alllll over the place."

Everyone listened eagerly, waiting to see what it was Ibuki remembered.

"Ibuki was in her motel room, when there was someone at the door.” Ibuki recalled. "...Nagito...yeah, it was Nagito! He asked about my hands, and I told them they were really hurting...then we were outside. And I think...we walked into the hospital together?"

Struggling to compile her memories, there was a strong sense of uncertainty in Ibuki’s voice. Nonetheless, all eyes turned on Nagito.

“Oh, that’s right. It was me who took Ibuki to the hospital.” Nagito admitted, acting like he'd almost forgotten.

“You...didn’t think to mention that earlier?” Hajime said weakly.

“What were you doing with Ibuki?!" Mahiru demanded.

“It was early in the morning, I’d just checked in with Peko and she reminded me to come and see Ibuki. When I did, Ibuki seemed to be in a lot of pain with her hands. So, I suggested we go over to the hospital so Peko could reapply her bandages.” Nagito said, explaining his side of the story.

Peko narrowed her eyes. “You never came to me with Ibuki.”

Nagito’s intentions seemed caring, but clearly, things never went the way he claimed. There was more to the story…

“I left Ibuki with Akane while I was trying to find Peko, but I guess I didn’t look hard enough.” Nagito said, his angelic expression lying. “When I came back for Ibuki, she was acting strange. I quickly realised she’d contracted the despair disease...so I sent her upstairs to the conference room where she wouldn’t be any bother to anyone.”

"So, you're the one who added her name to the guest book?” Hajime asked.

"That's right." Nagito confessed, though he hadn't been willing to do so earlier. "I can't believe I spelt her name wrong, trust someone useless like me to make such a mistake."

"Peko and Hajime were at the hospital for two days, and caught nothing. Yet Ibuki was there for five minutes and got despair disease?" Souda disagreed.
Monokuma chimed in. "Like I already told you, despair disease affects people in different ways."

"So Nagito, you're the one that provided Ibuki with the sleeping bag and food?" Hajime asked, wanting to confirm his understanding.

Nagito nodded. "That's right. It would have been unfortunate to bring Ibuki back to the motel, everyone could have caught the disease."

Hajime rested his head in his hands. Nagito was obviously up to something, it was by no accident that he'd left Ibuki with Akane, he clearly wanted her to become infected. And the fact he'd kept it a secret from everyone made it all the more suspicious.

“I can vouch that Ibuki had despair disease.” Nagito said. “Therefore, it's plausible that she lost her memories of what she did to Souda. I guess Hajime is innocent after all.”

“W-what?” Hajime exclaimed. “But you just spent the past ten minutes accusing me! What's wrong with you??”

“So we've just wasted a massive amount of time?” Fuyuhiko moaned, kicking the foot of his podium. “Brilliant. Fuckin’ brilliant.”

“We shouldn't have started the case by blaming someone, it sent us down a confusing path.” Chiaki said. “Let’s focus on some of the evidence instead.”

“Alright, sounds like a plan.” Akane agreed. “It's the perfect way to catch Coach Nekomaru’s killer!”

“Starting with the Monokuma file, Nekomaru died at the 3:50am.” Souda reported. "Hajime, what time did you leave the hospital to find Peko in the store?"

"I left at 4am." Hajime said. "When I went looking for Peko, Nekomaru was already dead. I guess I never noticed the door to the music venue was open, because I was focused on something bigger."

“Stop, fiends.” Gundam raised his hand, motioning for silence. “There is something I want to mention first, for I deem it of high importance.”

“Go on, Gundam.” Sonia smiled supportively.

“It was around 3:45am, when I heard the most terrible ruckus outside my motel door. It woke me from my deep slumber!” Gundam described. “I presumed it to be a demon of the night, coming to steal my soul. So of course, I looked out the window, in case I needed to seal an invisible barrier to protect myself.”

“Ah, of course. That’s what every normal person does when they hear a noise in the night.” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes, mocking Gundam.

“When I looked outside, I saw Ibuki. She was standing in Nekomaru’s doorway, the two of them engaging in conversation.” Gundam said.

"Ibuki doesn't remember anything." Ibuki sighed, frustrated that she couldn't contribute.

"Five minutes before the murder...that could explain why Nekomaru went to the music venue." Chiaki suggested. "We found no evidence of a note, and I doubt he was kidnapped. Ibuki might have led him there."
"I stopped by Nekomaru's motel room during the investigation. His door was still unlocked." Nagito stated. "If Ibuki fetched Nekomaru at 3:45am, and he was murdered at 3:50am, it's safe to say everything happened very quickly. That's why he never locked his motel door, he left in a hurry."

"I wonder how Ibuki got him to leave." Mahiru pondered.

"There's no point speculating about it." Hajime said. "With Nekomaru dead, and Ibuki's memories missing, there's nothing we can do. Besides, I don't think the specific reason Ibuki gave is very important."

"We're still barely getting anywhere." Fuyuhiko groaned. "So here, let me help you idiots and kick this off. I wanna talk about the most obvious piece of evidence, the smashed up guitar in the music venue. That's clearly the murder weapon."

"Well, first-" Chiaki began to talk, but she wasn't given the chance to finish.

"Oh come on, you don't need to break this down into detail." Fuyuhiko snapped. "It was a guitar...gee, I wonder who used that." the sarcasm dripped off his tongue. "Oh wow, the same person who was caught attempting to smother someone?"

"Not so fast." Sonia interrupted. "We cannot presume those incidents are connected."

"You expect me to believe two crimes were going down at the same time?" Fuyuhiko challenged her.

"Yeah...that's way too much of a coincidence." Souda agreed. "But don't worry Miss Sonia, it's still the best idea we've heard all night!"

"The murder weapon is clearly the guitar." Fuyuhiko pressed. "The killer must have hit Nekomaru on the head with it. It would explain the bleeding."

"No, you've got that wrong!" Hajime objected. "I have reason to believe, the guitar is nothing more than a decoy."

"So you noticed it too, huh." Nagito grinned to himself.

"I searched every piece of that broken up guitar, and I didn't find a single drop of blood." Hajime remarked. "If someone used it to crack open Nekomaru's head, we'd definitely find something."

"That's true." Peko nodded in agreement. "Although, the killer could have cleaned the guitar."

"If they went to the effort to clean the guitar, they might as well have disposed of it all together," Hajime said. "The guitar is too obvious to be the murder weapon. It was right there in the center of the room, purposely positioned there."

"Maybe...someone put it there to frame Ibuki." Chiaki suggested.

"Ibuki would never damage an instrument! It would be like Gundam hurting his hamsters." Ibuki cried.

"They're not hamsters!" Gundam yelled, deeply insulted. "And your pathetic instrument cannot be compared to my worthy dark devas of destruction!"

"That leaves us to figure out the real murder weapon." Souda said, pausing in thought. "Any ideas?"

"Yeah, actually." Hajime nodded. "Gundam discovered it."
“I...did?” Gundam’s expression was blank. “Ah, the psychic powers of the Blood Demons must have resonated within me.”

"I'm not sure about Blood Demons, but you're not wrong.” Hajime said. "Gundam found heaps of broken glass behind the bar. Like a puzzle, I put all the pieces together. It formed the shape of a glass bottle, which probably came from the bar to begin with. A large piece of glass was missing, but I found hints of blood on the other shards."

“A glass bottle as the murder weapon…” Souda reflected. “That makes sense. I see it doing more damage than a guitar.”

"My guess? The killer smashed the glass bottle on the back of Nekomaru's head. Then, they took a shard of broken glass and stabbed him so he’d bleed to death." Hajime explained.

“Hmph, guess that Nekomaru wasn’t so strong after all.” Fuyuhiko mocked. “All it took was one little bottle to kill him…”

“DON’T YOU DARE TALK ABOUT COACH LIKE THAT!” Akane yelled, lunging for Fuyuhiko from across her podium. “HE’S STRONGER THAN YOU’LL EVER BE!”

"I wonder how the killer was able to attack Nekomaru. He was really strong." Souda shared his curiosities with the group. "Did they randomly attack him mid-conversation? Or try and take him on face to face?"

"That's a pretty easy mystery to solve." Nagito said, already knowing the answer. "Looking at the position of Nekomaru's body, and the location of his injuries, should tell you everything you need to know."

"He was on his stomach, right?" Souda said.

"Yeah, he was." Hajime agreed. "It looked like he'd fallen forward onto his face. So, he took it from behind?"

Souda sniggered at Hajime's comment, which could be taken one of two ways. "I didn't know Nekomaru liked that kind of thing."

"Boys are so repulsive." Mahiru projected her disgust onto the group. "Nekomaru's injury came from the back of his head, it's a difficult spot to reach if you're fighting him head on."

Hajime presented his conclusion. "The killer must have sneak up on Nekomaru and smashed the bottle over his head. Taken by surprise, Nekomaru fell to the floor. That's when the killer finished off the job. Since their attack on Nekomaru was a surprise, they had to have been hiding somewhere in the music venue. My guess is behind the bar."

"If the killer jumped out from behind the bar and smashed the bottle, wouldn't the glass pieces be in the center of the room?" Ibuki asked. "You said they were all behind the bar."

"The killer must have moved them there to confuse us, taking a dustpan and brush from the staff only room." Hajime said. "They either naively thought it would go unnoticed, or they didn't have time to do anything else."

“Thinking back to the Monokuma file…” Chiaki began. “The cut on Nekomaru’s head wasn’t his only injury.”

“That’s right.” Peko agreed. “I read something regarding an injury to his neck. Did anyone look?”
“I did.” Hajime said. “There was a deep slit, similar to Byakuya’s injury last time…”

“The killer could’ve used a shard of glass to cut Nekomaru’s neck.” Souda remarked. “And then they disposed of it somewhere, so no one could find it.”

“The injury was hidden under his collar, so I don’t think any of us would have realised if it weren’t for the Monokuma file.” Hajime said.

“This really does rule out the guitar.” Souda said. “Guess it was a decoy after all.”

“That solves the mystery of the murder weapon, but it doesn’t lead us any closer to the truth.” Mahiru lowered her head. “We don't even know why the guitar was there.”

"To make Ibuki look innocent of course!” Akane exclaimed.

"Uh, don't you mean 'to make Ibuki look guilty?'" Nagito corrected her.

"I know what I mean." Akane gritted her teeth. "You all just said the guitar is too obvious to be the murder weapon, and that Ibuki is probably being framed. So, she planted the guitar so we'd accuse her and then call her innocent."

"My head is starting to hurt..." Souda complained, tugging at his hat for comfort.

"I'm sayin' Ibuki made herself look obviously guilty, so we wouldn't believe she killed Nekomaru.” Akane persisted. "I know Ibuki had despair disease, but that's not enough to rule her innocent!"

“Actually, it is…” Hajime spoke up, an idea hitting him like a bullet train. “Ibuki didn’t have just any despair disease, she had the gullible disease. Meaning she did, and believed, whatever she was told. There’s no way she’d kill someone off her own free will.”

“You’re saying...Ibuki was tricked?” Ibuki said, her jaw lowering.

“You have to have been!” Hajime said. “If someone told you to do something, you’d do it. You weren’t acting off your own free will.”

“Someone could tell Ibuki to kill, and she'd do it?” Souda raised his eyebrows.

Mahiru shook her head. “Ibuki can’t be the killer, I’m sure of it.” it seemed she had new evidence on top of what Hajime had said. “Her hands are seriously injured, how would she have able to smash the bottle over Nekomaru’s head?”

“Oh…” Sonia paused for thought. “So, you are saying Ibuki is not the blackened because her hands are unusable?”

“But if that’s true, it means Hajime lied about Ibuki smothering Souda with a pillow.” Gundam said. “Can she use her hands or not?!”

“Not this again.” Hajime sighed. “I know what I saw, Ibuki was using all of her force to smother Souda. It was like her hands weren’t a problem at all.”

“This leaves us with two conclusions.” Souda said. “Either Peko lied, and Ibuki’s hands are actually usable. Or, Hajime lied, and Ibuki didn’t smother me.”

“What about the third option?” Nagito smiled.
“There isn’t one.” Mahiru said, speaking through gritted teeth. “Jeez! Do you even listen?”

“I believe there’s an option where both Hajime and Peko are telling the truth.” Nagito said.

“That doesn’t work…” Akane frowned.

Nagito elaborated. “When Peko said Ibuki couldn’t use her hands, she was referring to the condition they’re in. After putting your hands in a fire… well, I imagine that’s going to hurt to touch anything. But, it doesn’t mean you can’t use them, it just means you probably wouldn’t want to.”

“Oh, like rollercoasters at theme parks!” Ibuki exclaimed, her face lighting up in excitement. "If you've got a heart condition you shouldn't ride them. Not because you can't, but because your heart will start having its own disco if you do!"

Chiaki worked with what they were saying. “Ibuki was infected with despair disease, so she wouldn’t have been focusing on the pain of her hands…I think.”

“Meaning Ibuki could still be the killer, despite the condition her hands are in.” Souda said, bring the point to a close.

“You still don’t get it, huh?” Nagito sighed. “You think someone told Ibuki to kill Nekomaru? Taking advantage of her gullible behaviour.”

“That is what it seems like.” Sonia said.

“But what’s the point in that?” Nagito said. “Let’s say Fuyuhiko wanted to escape, and decided to hire gullible Ibuki as his accomplice.”

“Hey! Don’t use me as an example.” Fuyuhiko hissed, though Nagito carried on anyway.

“Fuyuhiko convinces Ibuki to murder Nekomaru, and attempts for her to kill Souda - all the while keeping his hands clean.” Nagito said. “If Fuyuhiko is successful, and Ibuki gets away with the crime, he’ll be executed just like everyone else. It would serve him no purpose. Unless he really had a grudge against Nekomaru, I guess.”

“No one could have a grudge against Coach Nekomaru!” Akane protested. “He was the kindest person here.”

“Fuck you for using my name.” Fuyuhiko swore.

"The point you're making, it's actually a good one." Souda said, surprised to hear something so useful come from Nagito's mouth. "The blackened has to be the one who commits the crime, so sending Ibuki on behalf of someone doesn't work.”

"What if Ibuki is considered as the murder weapon?" Peko raised her opinion. "If Monokuma deems Ibuki as the weapon, and the blackened as the one who instructed her to kill - your theory falls flat."

Hajime had been in a similar situation before. When Peko killed Mahiru, she attempted to get away with the crime by considering herself the murder weapon. Thankfully, Monokuma hadn't listened to her.

"That blackened is the one who does the killing, that's what Monokuma always says!" Souda insisted, panic rising within him. "I don't think anyone would pull off a risk that big. If Monokuma didn't agree with their plan, they'd die!"
"Then to progress, we must presume Ibuki was not used as a murder weapon." Sonia spoke.

"Meaning, if anything, Ibuki was an accomplice to the case. But she's definitely not the killer."
Souda said, straightening things out. "The blackened got Ibuki to do all of their dirty work, like bringing Nekomaru to the music venue. Then, all they had to do, was murder him."

"Ibuki must have left the scene before Nekomaru was killed, or the body discovery announcement would have played when Peko and Hajime first found him." Chiaki suggested. "After leading Nekomaru there, Ibuki returned to the hospital conference room, so she wasn’t there to witness the crime. At least, I think..."

"Ah, that’s gotta be it!" Hajime smiled at Chiaki, the answer clear. "When Peko and I left the market, we headed straight to the hospital to make sure everyone was okay. Souda was unharmed at that point, so I’m guessing it’s when we left again that the killer came back and told Ibuki to smother him."

"Pardon me, but I am a little confused." Sonia spoke forward. "What purpose did the killer have for suffocating Souda?"

"Miss Sonia, are you worried about me?" Souda asked, his face lighting up in delight.

"No." Sonia replied, making no attempt to soften the blow. "I am searching for an understanding. I do not understand the point. Was one murder not enough?"

"Now that you mention it, what would have happened if Ibuki was successful?" Mahiru poised. "The blackened murdered Nekomaru. So if Hajime hadn't walked in on Ibuki, and stopped her from killing Souda, there would be two class trials."

"Maybe the blackened didn't intend for Souda to die." Hajime mused, compiling a theory in his head.

"You're suggesting they had me suffocated for the fun of it!?" Souda wailed.

"When Peko and I came back to the hospital, and everything was okay, it was clear that our next steps would be searching the motel. With the music venue on our route, and its door open, it was almost obvious we’d go inside and find Nekomaru. With no body discovery announcement, what do we do next?" Hajime asked, waiting for a response.

"You get everyone else and bring them to the crime scene." Fuyuhiko replied.

"Exactly!" Hajime nodded. "The killer probably figured that either Peko or I would be coming back to the hospital pretty soon after we left, so we could get the patients. I think they timed things with Ibuki so she’d purposely be caught in the act. All the more evidence to frame her."

"So they wanted me to survive after all." Souda remarked, scratching at his head.

"While we're on the topic of what happened to you, I think I've worked out why you were the victim." Hajime said, speaking directly to Souda. "It's the one thing that separated you from the other patients."

"I got this!" Akane called, claiming the answer for herself. "Didn't ya say that Souda was under sedation?"

"Yeah, that's it." Hajime replied, pleased someone was following along. "With Souda regularly sedated, he was an easy target. The blackened must have know this, so they chose him because he wouldn't put up a fight."
"Wow, Hajime!" Nagito cheered, truly inspired. "You figured that out so quickly. The Ultimate Hope never fails to impress!"

"That seems possible." Peko agreed. "The blackened could have instructed Ibuki to smother Souda once Hajime and I left in search of the others. That way, the killer could stay in hiding at the motel and go unseen."

"Hold it." Gundam demanded. "Can we be so sure that the killer is someone from the motel?"

"You’re suggesting Fuyuhiko did it? Or Akane? Or Sonia?" Mahiru folded her arms. "They had despair disease, there’s no way they could kill someone. It would help if you used your brain."

Though it wasn’t necessarily true that a despair disease patient could be innocent of killing, with the symptoms provided, it was unlikely that any of those three were the killer. Charming, nurturing Fuyuhiko couldn’t have done it. Akane was too busy sobbing, and she wouldn’t kill her best friend. And Sonia was too busy burping the alphabet to even consider planning a murder. No, it was impossible.

“AHA! GOT YOU!” Souda yelled, jumping onto the balls of his feet out of excitement. “I knew Gundam was the killer, and you’ve just confirmed it.”

“G-gundam, the killer?” Sonia said, the smile fading from her face. “No, that cannot be.”

“Pathetic.” Gundam sneered. “What is this supposed evidence you have on me?”

Surprisingly, Souda had a lot to say. “First of all, you claim you saw Ibuki outside the motel late at night. This could easily be a lie. But if it’s not, then why didn’t you go and see what was going on?”

“Because I did not care to see such a pathetic exchange of conversation.” Gundam replied.

“Two people meeting at such an early hour? You knew that something was wrong, yet you totally ignored it.” Souda attacked.

He made a fair point. If Hajime had been the one to see their conversation, he would have run over right away. No one disturbs someone at three in the morning just to have a chat. If Gundam was telling the truth, then there had to have been a problem. It was highly suspicious that he hadn’t investigated.

“You’ve also been insisting that Ibuki’s the killer.” Souda said. “And now, you’re claiming that someone with despair disease could be the murderer - taking the blame away from yourself.”

“And what motive would I have for killing Nekomaru, hm?” Gundam crossed his arms, waiting for an answer. “I could easily go to the hospital and murder someone weak in their sleep. Yet you’re accusing me of murdering the biggest, and strongest, person on the island. I see flaws in your logic!”

“No one has reason to kill Coach Nekomaru!” Akane protested. “He was loved by everyone. Whoever did this is a monster!”

“I’m not sure what I think about all of this.” Mahiru mused. "But if someone could answer my question, it might make up my mind."

“We’ll try our best to answer you.” Chiaki smiled.

“Let’s say it is Gundam who killed Nekomaru, and he used Ibuki as his accomplice because of her despair disease.” Mahiru said, hitting them with a hypothetical situation. "At which point did
Gundam learn about Ibuki’s despair disease? He went nowhere the hospital, and I don’t recall Ibuki ever coming back to the motel after she became infected. It’s the only part that doesn’t work out.”

“Nagito told Gundam!” Souza shouted, getting carried away with himself. “He’s on a permanent suicide mission!”

Nagito just laughed. “Maybe I did, and maybe I didn’t. Who knows?” there was a glisten in his eye.

“Nonsense!” Gundam snapped. “This is barbaric! Foolish! I did not speak to Nagito at all.”

“Maybe one of your ghost friends told you.” Fuyuhiko remarked dryly.

“Well, Mahiru?” Chiaki asked. “Did that make up your mind?”

“I think so…” Mahiru said, though she didn’t sound certain. “Let’s run through the timeline of the events one more time, if everything adds up, we know we have our killer.”

Hajime gulped, out of everyone around him, Gundam was his number one suspect at that point. He didn’t want to see anyone die, or disbelieve his friends, but he couldn’t deny the fact that Gundam had killed Nekomaru once before. History could be repeating itself.

“We don’t need to recap anything regarding the despair disease.” Mahiru said. “Let's begin with the events that happened a few hours ago, on the second day of the despair disease. Thanks to Nagito’s stupidity, Ibuki contracted the gullible disease and had been hiding in the conference room of the hospital.”

“Nagito told this information to Gundam. Maybe he even confided in him.” Souza said, confident with the words he spoke. “Gundam realised he could use Ibuki’s gullible behaviour to his advantage, and planned on doing so.”

Hajime took over, speaking from his own experience. "Peko and I were leaving the hospital from time to time to get medicine and snacks. So maybe, Gundam caught on to this and realised we were leaving the hospital with its guard down. He must have been watching us, so he’d know the perfect time to sneak in and get Ibuki. Distracted by the patients, we wouldn't have heard him come in.”

“I guess it would have been too risky during the day.” Chiaki said. "With so many people from the motel walking around, Gundam had to wait until everyone was asleep to commit his crime.”

“Under Gundam’s instruction, Ibuki must have followed Peko over to the market, and that’s when she locked her in.” Hajime said. “There were plenty of brooms over at the hospital, so she had access to them.”

“Meanwhile, Gundam was preparing for his crime, hiding out at the music venue.” Souza said. “He hid behind the bar, helping himself to a glass bottle. Ibuki was set following her next set of instructions, fetching Nekomaru over to the music venue.”

“Gundam must have jumped out from the bar, taking Nekomaru by surprise and smashing the bottle over his head. It was at this point he told Ibuki to go back to the hospital, so she wouldn’t count as a witness.” Mahiru said. “Already weak from the surprise attack, Nekomaru fell to the floor. Gundam finished off the job and stabbed Nekomaru using a shard of the broken glass.”

“He then moved all of the glass behind the bar, and disposed of the massive shard he used as the murder weapon.” Fuyuhiko said. “I don’t think we’re gonna find it.”

“He could’ve easily grabbed a guitar and smashed it up, so it looked like Ibuki did it.” Akane
contributed.

“Crime complete, he probably returned to his motel room. All of this happening before I even left to go searching for Peko.” Hajime responded. “So of course, everything seemed to be in order when Peko and I returned to the hospital.”

“When Hajime and I left again, Ibuki followed her instructions - earlier given by Gundam - to suffocate Souda. It was timed perfectly, so Hajime or I would walk in on it.” Peko said.

Hajime hung his head, that was all they needed, the case had been painted perfectly. It was so clearly Gundam that had murdered Nekomaru.

“How dare you question me!” Gundam yelled, his voice full of rage. “Your entire argument is constructed of ‘maybes’ and ‘butts’. You have no real evidence to convict me.”

“Argue all you want!” Souda snapped. “We’re calling the vote. Monokuma -”

“No! Please wait.” Sonia raised her voice, after staying silent for the past five minutes. “Do not call the vote yet.”

“Miss Sonia…” Souda sighed, before reluctantly giving in. “Fine, Monokuma hold on.”

“Hear me out, I can prove that Gundam is innocent.” Sonia pleaded, speaking straight from her heart.

Hajime wasn’t sure if she was telling the truth, or just doing everything in her power not to have Gundam killed. Either way, he was willing to listen to what she had to say.

“The argument you just constructed, rests on one important factor.” Sonia said, her eyes welling up with tears. “You said that the crime was too risky to be committed during the day, so Gundam had to wait until the middle of the night for Peko or Hajime to leave the hospital.”

“That’s right.” Mahiru nodded.

“Peko, Hajime…” Sonia asked, glancing between the two of them. “During your first night at the hospital, did either of you leave the building at any point?”

“During the night? No.” Hajime shook his head. “Neither of us did. We spent all night looking after the patients.”

“My point exactly.” Sonia said. “Gundam’s entire plan would be resting on the chance that either Hajime or Peko would leave the hospital during the night. And they had never done such a thing before.”

Hajime hesitated, finding himself swung by Sonia. She made a fairly strong point. If Peko hadn’t left for snacks, then the case wouldn’t have gone through at all. With both Peko and Hajime at the hospital, it was too risky trying to sneak Ibuki out. So the killer couldn't have framed Ibuki, which was a key part of their plan. Could Gundam really afford to wait day after day just to see if someone would leave during the night hours? He’d have a much easier chance killing one of the despair disease patients and blaming it on Peko or Hajime. The lengths, he’d supposedly gone to, seemed so extreme in comparison.

“What I am saying is, the only people who had any influence over Peko or Hajime leaving the hospital, were those at the hospital.” Sonia said.
“You realise what you’re saying, right?” Fuyuhiko said. “You’re implying that I could be the killer, or you could be the killer, or Hajime, or Akane, or Peko…”

Sonia nodded, solemnly. “I understand. But we are the only ones who could convince Peko to leave the hospital at such a later hour.”

Sonia was right. It was a situation no one at the motel had any influence over, but those at the hospital did.

“So we’re back to the original theory that Hajime is a massive liar and a killer?” Nagito said, observing those around him.

“I thought you believed me.” Hajime gritted his teeth, he refused to go around in circles again.

“Now that you mention it, Hajime has been acting pretty...weird the past few days.” Mahiru said. “You kept saying the strangest things, you weren’t talking like yourself.”

Hajime knew Mahiru was referring to his truth disease, but he couldn’t come clean. If he told the others what he’d been suffering from, they’d quickly calculate that he was lying to them about something, and pry with further questions.

“So all along it was Hajime’s plan to blame Gundam to blame Ibuki…” Souda said, barely understanding his own words.

“Uh, this is hurting my head.” Akane whined. “Let’s just call the vote so Hajime can be punished for what he did!”

“Stop!” Hajime raised his hand, urging them to be quiet before they did something they’d regret. “I know none of you trust me right now, but you’re not considering everything. We already jumped the gun, and nearly executed Gundam because of it.”

“Hajime’s right.” Chiaki nodded. “We can’t afford to mess this up, let’s go through everything slowly.”

“What more is there to say?” Mahiru sighed. “We know it’s someone at the hospital. And Hajime is far more suspicious than Peko. If you want to discuss the entire thing over again, we can, but there’s only so many times we can repeat it.”

"It can't be Peko." Fuyuhiko insisted. "She was trapped in the store, and there are no other entrances or windows."

"Maybe she teleported..." Ibuki said.

“Mahiru, you’re wrong!” Hajime exclaimed. “Remember what Fuyuhiko just said? If we narrow it down to everyone at the hospital, then the patients are suspects too.”

“Hajime, I think he was joking.” Mahiru said. “I saw the condition they were in, there is no way they committed a murder.”

Fuyuhiko shook his head. “I wasn’t joking. I mean, Ibuki had despair disease and she was an accomplice. I don’t think despair disease rules you out as the blackened…”

And suddenly...everything began to form together in Hajime’s mind.

*I don’t think despair disease rules you out as the blackened...*
I don’t think despair disease rules you out as the blackened...

I don’t think despair disease rules you out as the blackened...

Fuyuhiko’s words made everything crystal clear. Someone who knew about Ibuki’s gullible disease, someone who over heard every time Souda was sedated, someone who had the power to send Peko off to the store.

“Peko, I’ve got something important to ask…” Hajime said, looking straight at the swordswoman. It was the one question that would make, or break, his theory. “A few hours ago, when you went to get more supplies, why exactly did you go?”

“I checked in on Akane, and she told me she was hungry. Since she hadn’t been eating until that point, I thought it was sensible to stock up on food before she changed her mind.” Peko replied.

“And Nagito…” Hajime said. “When you left Ibuki at the hospital, and she caught the despair disease, who’s room was she in?”

“That would be Akane’s.” Nagito said.

“And Gundam, you said you saw Ibuki collecting Nekomaru in the middle of the night. It had to be something important, right?” Hajime said. “For Nekomaru to run off like that...maybe...maybe he was told someone needed his help.”

“I suppose the exchange looked frantic.” Gundam said.

“And Ibuki, who would you say was Nekomaru’s closest friend?” Hajime asked. “The one person he’d go running to, even in the middle of the night.”

“Ibuki thinks Akane.” Ibuki replied.

“I dunno whatcha getting at, Hajime!” Akane clenched her fists. “But I don’t like it.”

“You’re not seriously saying Akane did it, are you?” Mahiru asked.

“Coach Nekomaru was my best friend, I would never hurt him. Ever!” Akane cried. “Say another word and I’ll beat you so hard.”

Hajime knew he was fighting in a losing a battle, trying to convince everyone that Akane was Nekomaru’s killer was no easy feat. But he was certain, it was the only argument that made sense. There had to be another way around it...

“Uh, Hajime.” Souda said, seemingly concerned for his soul friend. “I know you’re trying to prove your innocence, but I don’t think you should have picked Akane. Not only is her best friend Nekomaru, but she had coward’s disease. What sort of a coward kills someone?”

“Akane could barely speak without crying, there’s no way she did this.” Mahiru said.

“Um…” Chiaki piped up. “Being a coward doesn’t just mean you cry all of the time. In fact, crying doesn’t mean you’re cowardly at all. You can still be a strong person and cry, it’s only natural. But...what is pretty cowardly - murdering your best friend and framing someone else for it.”

The students stood there in a unison of silence. Chiaki’s point hitting them hard, she made a lot of sense.

“Think about this one more time, okay?” Hajime said. “Akane knew Ibuki had the gullible disease,
and was living upstairs in the hospital - providing her the perfect accomplice.”

From there, he laid out the rest of the details.

- Sonia, Souda, Fuyuhiko, and Akane all caught the despair disease and were living at the hospital
- After trying to throw himself off of the roof, Souda was put under regular sedation
- Nagito brought Ibuki to the hospital in search of Peko, and left her in Akane's room. By doing this, Ibuki contracted the gullible disease
- Nagito then made the decision to hide Ibuki in the hospital conference room, so no one would find out. Akane knew all of this as she was a witness
- With Ibuki as her prepared accomplice, Akane's plan begun. She waited until the middle of the night and asked Peko to go to the store
- Akane then instructed Ibuki to follow Peko and lock her inside
- Hajime was so busy looking after Sonia, both girls left unseen
- After trapping Peko, Ibuki fetched Nekomaru from his motel room. Most likely telling him that Akane needed him over at the music venue
- Meanwhile, Akane was waiting behind the bar. As soon as Nekomaru arrived, she jumped out of hiding and smashed a glass bottle over his head
- Instructing Ibuki to leave, Akane finished off the job with the glass shards - cutting Nekomaru's neck so he'd bleed to death
- Akane moved the glass behind the bar, hid the piece she'd used as the direct murder weapon, and smashed a guitar in the middle of the room. All of this before returning to the hospital
- At this point in time, Hajime was helping Peko out at the store. Akane climbed back into bed, pretending to be asleep
- She waited for Hajime and Peko to leave for the motel. Once they'd gone, she visited Ibuki in the conference room - convincing her to suffocate a sedated Souda

“No!” Akane protested. “I wouldn’t do any of that. I’m telling ya, I wouldn’t hurt Coach Nekomaru.”

Mahiru spoke gently, her voice softened. “I have to admit, it sounds plausible.”

“Akane could control everything from the hospital, while convincing us she was too fragile with the despair disease.” Gundam added.

“Akane…” Ibuki said. “Did you really try to frame me?” she sounded hurt, upset that one of her closest friends would betray her.

“Alright, that’s enough.” Monokuma clapped his hands together. “We’re calling the vote.”

“Already?” Souda exclaimed.

“You’ve already asked for it twice and changed your minds, I’m not waiting any longer.” Monokuma huffed.

“But we aren’t ready.” Souda objected.

“Too bad!” Monokuma said, showing little to no sympathy.

“What are we going to vote?” Fuyuhiko asked. “We can’t get this wrong.”

“We’re out of time, so we need to go with our gut feeling.” Hajime said. “Out of all the arguments we’ve put together, this one seems the most accurate. This isn’t ideal, but we have no other choice.”
“If you’re wrong, I’m going to fucking to kill you.” Fuyuhiko swore.

“Not if I do first.” Monokuma laughed.

“You’re making a mistake!” Akane pleaded. “I’m not the killer, Hajime has to be lying.”

“We need to make a decision, and we need to make it now!” Mahiru raised her voice. "If we don't vote for anyone, we're going to die."

"It's not me!" Akane persisted. "You're making a huge mistake."

"Out of all the theories we've looked at, this one seems the most likely." Souda scratched his head. "I'm sorry Akane, but I think I have to vote for you."

One by one, the students registered their votes. There was a sense of uncertainty in the air, struggling to convict Nekomaru's closest friend. Hajime knew it was Akane, it had to be - there were no other suspects. It was just difficult pressing the button with Akane standing in front of him. With her memories gone, she would truly see herself as innocent.

The voting was tough, but they forced themselves through it - their lives hanging in the balance. Monokuma jumped up in his seat, cheering as the result came through.

**Guilty.**

“That’s correctttt!” Monokuma whistled. “Akane Owari, the ultimate gymnast, is the blackened in this case. She murdered the helpless team manager, Nekomaru Nidai.”

“No...” Akane fell to her knees, clutching her head in her hands. “This...this is wrong. I wouldn't do something like that. The voting must be fixed.”

“Now, do you remember what I offered you at the start of the trial?” Monokuma teased.

“You said there would be a special prize if we guessed the blackened.” Nagito said.

“That’s right!” Monokuma smirked. “Gold star for you Nagito.”

“Well, what’s the prize?” Nagito pressed.

“I’m giving you back your memories!” Monokuma exclaimed.

“Our...memories?” Hajime gasped, it couldn’t be. They couldn’t get their memories back, it would ruin everything.

“Not your memories.” Monokuma rolled his eyes. “You’re mistaken if you think I’m giving back your school memories, those are gone for good because of Monomi. No, no, the memories I’m giving back are those lost to the despair disease.”

“You have the power to do that?” Chiaki asked.

“Of course I do!” Monokuma said. “They don’t call me Omnipotent Monokuma for nothin ya know.”

“I don’t think anyone calls you that.” Hajime remarked.
From behind his throne, Monokuma pulled a stick. Painted pink, and with a heart shaped statue resting on top, Hajime quickly recognised the item as Monomi's magic stick. Although it was a lot shorter than he remembered, probably because Monokuma had snapped it in two, days previous.

"My stick!" Monomi released a loud gasp, fighting against her restraints, though she didn’t stand a chance.

Monokuma pointed his stick at the five despair disease patients, calling out a loud chant. "Va-Va-Valuse."

"Isn't that the spell that opens the door?" Nagito remarked, disregarding Monokuma's illusion. "You could have at least chosen something more original."

"Gaaaaaaaahhhhh!" Souda clutched at his head, almost losing balance, so many memories hitting him at once. “Woah, look at me juggling those knives. I’m-I’m so cool, Miss Sonia look!” a grin spread across his face. “Huh...am I on the ROOF?! OH SHIT OH SHIT. I’M GONNA DIE. OH FUCK. No...no wait I’m down. Fuck. Thanks, Hajime, I owe you one. Wha...aaaa....mmmaa....” Souda let out a muffled scream.

"What's wrong with him?" Fuyuhiko raised his eyebrows.

"This must be the part where he was smothered with the pillow." Nagito replied.

"Ugh!" Souda let out a deep sigh of relief, holding onto the podium with all his strength. The memories that had flushed back overwhelmed him. It was only going to get worse.

Next up, was Fuyuhiko. Just like Souda, he reached for his head, crying out in pain. His face grew redder by the second. “Wh-what am I doing with that apron? No...no I didn’t bake those. Fuck off am I giving you a hug!” he glared at those around him. ”You bastards! I swear to god, if any of you ask for cookies, I will poison them."

Sonia interrupted, stumbling backwards. She wrapped her arms around her body, pulling herself into a hug for comfort. ”This...this cannot be. I will never become Queen now!"

What captured their attention next, was Ibuki piercing scream. "Blood, there’s blood everywhere. So much blood."

“She must be remembering the murder." Hajime said, it was difficult to watch.

Ibuki let out another scream. “Oh my god, he’s going to die! He’s going to die!”

"Ibuki, tell us what you can see." Mahiru remained calm.

“Nekomaru has been murdered, I-I-.” Ibuki’s voice shook, sending chills up Hajime’s spine. “It’s all my fault. I-I was the one to bring him to the music venue.”

“Tell us everything in which you remember.” Gundam instructed.

“I-I was told to lock Peko in the store. And...and then I had to visit Nekomaru. I had to tell him that Akane was having an emergency over at the music venue and that he had to go right away.” Ibuki explained, her voice shaking. “Then I had to leave...I had to hide out in the conference room until Hajime and Peko returned. Then...oh god...Souda...what am I doing to Souda?”

It was distressing to watch. Realising her own actions, Ibuki continued to scream. Hot tears travelling down her cheeks.
“Akane…” Chiaki said softly. “Do you remember anything?”

The blood drained from Akane's face. She stood there gormlessly, like a ghost, back from the dead. “I...I killed him.” her words were nothing more than a whisper. Akane’s voice cracked, unable to keep herself together. “I...I killed my best friend.” she said it again, but this time it was screamed. “I killed my best friend!”

Curled up into a ball, Akane wept and wept. Clutching fistfuls of her hair, she balled her eyes out.

Hajime wanted to run to her aid and help, but he knew that Akane needed her space. Watching someone fall apart was horrific to watch.

Monokuma cackled. "That’s the best thing about the despair disease, your memories take a little while to return, but when they do - boy do you know it!"

“Jesus man.” Fuyuhiko slammed his fist down on the podium. “Everything about this game is twisted!”

“You cannot punish Akane!” Sonia cried, wanting to protect her friend. “This wasn’t her fault, she was taken over by the despair disease.”

Monokuma shrugged. “She killed Nekomaru, and that’s that. I don't care what influenced her.”

“But it’s not fair, she only did it because you made her.” Mahiru yelled, fighting Akane's corner.

Slowly raising her head, Akane faced Monokuma. "No, I need to be punished. I said whoever killed Coach Nekomaru deserves to be executed. I have to avenge him. Nekomaru needs his justice."

"Akane, don't do this!" Hajime abandoned his podium, hurrying to Akane's side. He knelt beside his friend, reaching for her hand. As a fellow survivor, and close friend, he wasn't going to let Akane die without a fight.

Akane gripped Hajime's hands with all the strength she could muster, as if her life depended on it. "I have to do this, Hajime." though her eyes were filled with tears, they showed a new sense of determination. "If I do this, I can see Coach Nekomaru again. I can apologise."

"He already forgives you, I know it." Hajime reassured her. "You had the despair disease, this isn't your fault. You're a fighter, Akane. We can get through this, persuade Monokuma."

With a shake of her head, Akane cut him short. "I'm getting Coach Nekomaru his justice."

“I don’t know why you’re acting so noble, it’s not like I’ve given you a choice. You’re taking this punishment whether you want to or not.” Monokuma smirked, enjoying every minute of their despair.

"Hajime...before I go...can I ask you something?" Akane blocked out the world around her, looking only at Hajime.

"Of course." Hajime tried his best to speak, despite the heavy lump sitting in his throat.

"Cuz all my memories are back, I remember something you said to me at the hospital." Akane explained, clutching Hajime's hands tighter than ever. "You said something about the remembering disease. How Mikan couldn't catch it again and commit another murder. I didn't get it then, and I still don't get it now."
"I..." even in her final moments, Hajime couldn't bring himself to tell Akane the truth. He owed it to her, he knew that. But it would sabotage everything he'd worked so hard to keep a secret.

Monomi wept from the ceiling. "This is so sad!"

“Ugh I can’t stand it when Monomi cries, she’s even more annoying than usual." Monokuma rolled his eyes. "Enough of the crying, you're giving me a headache! Let's go." Snatching Akane by the collar, Monokuma dragged her away before she could get her answer. "Right, let’s move on. I’ve prepared something veryyyyyy special for the ultimate gymnast. Is everybody ready? It’s punishmenttttt timeeeeee!”

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Race to the finish

Akane waits at the beach, the sand between her toes, the smell of the sea air up her nose. Waiting for her at the other end of the sand, rests a finish line. Monokuma stands beside it, wearing a whistle and holding a flag. Akane already knows what she has to do, make it to the end as quickly as possible. Though it's not quite as simple as a race, many obstacles stand before her.

Monokuma isn't the only one past the finish line, her classmates wait for her too. Akane knows she'll reunite with them if she makes it to the end, she'll be safe. All of them are eating ice cream, treats provided by Monokuma himself. Strawberry, mango, vanilla, and chocolate. They're spoilt for choice.

Akane crouches on the ground, positioning herself to run. She waits at the starting line on bent knees, listening out for Monokuma's cue. An excited sense of adrenaline rushes through her. Akane is about to do what Akane does best.

Monokuma waves his flag, blowing the whistle at the same time. The race has begun. Akane leaps from the floor, breaking into a sprint. Blocking out the distractions around her, she charges for the finish line, preparing herself for the first obstacle.

Her first challenge is a series of hurdles. With spikes bolted to the top, Akane knows it's crucial that she doesn't fall. The spikes have the ability to tear her legs to pieces, one wrong move, and she might never run again. Akane charges at the hurdles, raising her legs at just the right time. One after the other, she makes her way over them - obtaining not so much as a scratch.

The first obstacles are over, but it doesn't stop there. What waits for Akane next, is a rope net. Dropping to her hands and knees, Akane crawls underneath the net, using her elbows to drag her weight. The sand scratches at her skin, but she fights against pain, refusing to stop until she's on the other side of the rope.

Standing to her feet, the onlooking students cheer. Watching the Ultimate Gymnast in her element is a truly special experience. Tires, rope ladders, balance beams. Akane crosses each item with ease, taking it all in her stride. She won't let anything phase her, facing each station like an enemy in battle.
Akane finds herself at the last obstacle, the final challenge between her and her freedom. Compared to what else she's faced, it's rather simple in comparison. All that waits between Akane and the finish line, is a simple, rope bridge. A single stretch of rope for Akane to walk across, with two of planks of wood at the side for her to use as support.

Akane climbs onto the rope, it shakes underneath her weight. Placing one foot in front of the other, Akane crosses the bridge. It's similar to tightrope. She refuses to hold on to the wood, the Ultimate Gymnast doesn't need help. In fifteen seconds, perhaps even less, Akane reaches the other side. She jumps down onto the sand with a victorious smile, the finish line is just in sight, it's all hers.

The students let out the loudest round of applause, pleased for their friend. They chant out her name as Akane sprints to the finish line, enjoying their icy treats. Monokuma watches on with a smirk upon his face. Throwing his own ice cream to the floor, he plays his final card.

With Akane seconds away from the finish line, Monokuma pulls forth a bazooka. Aiming the gun at Akane's heart, he releases the trigger. For good luck, the bear fires the weapon twice - robbing Akane from any chance of survival.

Smoke fills the air, while blood taints the sand. The body of the Ultimate Gymnasts lies on the floor, inches away from the finish line.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah...no one is safe anymore! ;)

I hope you enjoyed the trial! It took me so long to get proof read because I get distracted so easily aha! We say goodbye to Nekomaru and Akane, and bring chapter 3 to a close. We're about half way through the story now, maybe just over, that's scary stuff :o I hope this trial wasn't too confusing, I wanted to up the difficulty in comparison to the other two trials.

For Akane's punishment, I thought I'd reference the scene earlier on in the chapter when they're eating ice cream and playing sports. Also, the bazooka that Monokuma uses on Nekomaru in the original game.

As for chapter 4...
In one of the earlier chapters, I promised that something would be making its return later in this story. Here's a clue about what you can expect throughout chapter 4 www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzLJwzHI14s&index=7&list=D And for anyone watching Zetsubou-hen, you'll know what good timing this is!!

I'm going on holiday next week, so the next part will be out a little later than usual (but only by a few days). Chapter 4 is going to see the last of the murder cases, so you can expect some new content for chapters 5 and 6. A lot is about to go down! ;)

Thanks for sticking around during chapter 3, especially with the month's hiatus. You're all super awesome! ^ω^
P.s. did anyone pick up on the hint I gave in the previous chapter? ;)
'He could see the passion in Akane's eyes. She was going to get justice for Nekomaru, even if it killed her.'
Chapter Four - Part One

Chapter Notes

Hitting off chapter four with a somewhat cheesy chapter, but I feel like Hajime deserves a break! He's getting a nice rest before he faces the twilight ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Using his wrist as a tissue, Hajime wiped the tears from his eyes. Akane’s death was hurting everyone, but he felt it on another level. Akane was a survivor from the original Neo World Program. Through thick and thin, she’d stuck by Hajime’s side. Cheering him up when he needed it the most. She had willingly entered herself back into the program, even though she knew the risks. She’d trusted her life in Hajime's hands, and he’d failed her. Akane Owari was no longer a survivor.

The return journey from Monokuma rock was long and painful, everything a hurtful reminder. Wherever Hajime looked, he felt a memory. Akane was everywhere. He saw her face in the stars, he heard her voice in the wind.

“Hajime?”

A softly spoken voice called his name, followed by the sound of heels smacking against the pavement. Before Hajime had the time to turn around, a hand reached out and grabbed his shoulder. Stopped in his tracks, Hajime glanced behind.

“Sonia…” Hajime whispered, lacking the energy to properly greet the princess.

Eyes puffy and red, it was clear that Hajime had been crying, but Sonia didn’t say anything. Most likely afraid that she’d cause further upset, Sonia looked past his tears. “I am here to apologise!”

“Apologise?” Hajime narrowed his brow.

Sonia stood proudly. “As my memories came back, I realised how terribly I treated you at the hospital. I am truly sorry, Hajime.”

Hajime smiled, it meant a lot getting an apology from Sonia. “It was the despair disease talking, not you. Besides, I’m the one that shoved a water bottle down your throat…” he shuffled about awkwardly, cringing at the memory.

“I sincerely appreciate you looking after me.” Sonia beamed. “You saved my life.”

Hajime felt himself blushing. “Oh, I wouldn’t go that far…” he didn’t consider his services life saving, he was nothing special. Still, Sonia’s words meant a lot. He hadn’t been able to save Nekomaru or Akane, but in Sonia's eyes, he’d saved her.

***
Taking place in the class trial throughout the night had drained Hajime. Wanting to catch up on as much sleep as possible, he refused to get out of bed at the sound of the Monokuma alarm. It was noon by the time he woke.

Following his usual morning routine, Hajime made his first stop the restaurant. He was later than usual, but he still had to eat. Unlike his usual visits, it was surprisingly quiet. Nothing to be heard but the buzzing of the refrigerator, all the tables completely deserted. With the day already in full swing, it was likely that the others were off doing their own thing, presuming they were awake in the first place.

Hajime took a plate, helping himself to large servings of food for his late breakfast. With no one around to judge him, he took slightly bigger portions than usual. A salute to Akane.

Satisfied he had enough to eat, Hajime scoured the room in search of somewhere to sit. As he did so, something came to his attention. He could hear a noise - and it wasn't the humming from the fridge. Cocking his head to the side, Hajime strained his ears, trying to establish what it was he could hear.

Paying close attention, Hajime soon realised it was none other than the gentle sound of snoring. Focused on his food, he’d totally missed her, but Chiaki was lying fast asleep at one of the breakfast tables - a plate of half eaten food resting beside her.

Hajime grinned to himself, settling down opposite Chiaki. Outstretching his arm, he gently poked her on the cheek. “You might wanna wake up, or you’re going to give yourself a toast facial…” her hair was already resting in crumbs.

“Huh?” very slowly, Chiaki raised her head. Wide-eyed, she blinked at Hajime, in a state of confusion after her nap. “Are we at breakfast?”

Hajime shook his head, tucking into his food. “Nah, it’s almost lunch.” if Chiaki thought they were still at breakfast, she must have been sitting in the restaurant for a while. “I only just woke up.”

“How are you feeling?” Chiaki asked, trying to sense his mood. She stretched as she spoke to him, recovering from her sleep.

Hajime groaned in frustration, suddenly losing his appetite to eat. Chiaki’s question triggered the thoughts he’d been trying to distract himself from. “Akane was one of the original survivors, and now she’s in a permanent coma thanks to me.” he knew it was safe to talk about the rewrite in Chiaki’s company, none of the others were anywhere close by.

“Akane’s death isn’t your fault, or Nekomaru’s.” Chiaki said kindly. “This happened because of the despair disease.”

“I was so busy watching Sonia, that I never saw Akane and Ibuki leave the hospital. If I’d paid more attention, I would’ve noticed something.” Hajime vented his frustration. “I could’ve stopped this!” if only he could turn back the clock once again.

Chiaki gently placed her hand on Hajime's arm, trying to calm him down “You weren’t just watching Sonia, you were keeping her alive. If you’d been off doing other things, then she might not be here right now. I know it’s hard that we’ve lost Akane and Nekomaru, but you saved someone else’s life too.”

Hajime shot Chiaki a grateful smile, he wasn’t sure what he’d do without her. She was his rock, someone he could always fall back on. If Chiaki wasn’t in the rewrite with him, he’d have lost his mind many nights ago. Sometimes, he felt guilty for constantly moaning to her, but he knew he’d
explode if he didn’t talk about his feelings.

“By the way…” Chiaki yawned, leaning back in her seat. “I’ve been keeping track of the rewrite, and we’re thirteen days in.”

“Day thirteen already?” Hajime nearly choked on his food in surprise. Time was flying by. “That means there are only nine days left…”

Chiaki smiled supportively. “You’re over halfway, and look how many people are still alive.”

She was only trying to help, but her choice of words stung. ‘You’re’ not ‘we’re’. It was a nasty reminder, a slap in the face. No matter how successful the rest of the rewrite turned out to be, Chiaki would not be waking up in a pod with everyone else. She wouldn’t be waking up at all, there was no body for her to go to.

Nine days to keep the rest of the students alive. Nine days to deal with Monokuma and his motives. Nine days for Hajime to keep his identity a secret. Nine days until he had to say goodbye to Chiaki.

Realising he’d gotten lost in his own thoughts, Hajime forced himself back into the conversation. Trying to remain positive, he listed names off on his fingers. “Ibuki, Peko, Mahiru, Gundam, and Nagito are all still alive, and they never made it the last time. I guess that’s progress.”

Chiaki opened her backpack, retrieving their faithful timeline. She placed it on the table for both of them to see. Bullet points such as Ibuki’s concert, and the despair disease, were already crossed out.

“Do we have access to the fourth island yet?” Hajime asked. Thanks to his lie in, he was behind on everything.

Chiaki cocked her head, her voice carrying little certainty. “I don’t think so. I haven’t seen anyone today…” she lowered her head in sadness. “Everyone seems really down. Even Monomi can sense this is a bad time. I don't think we'll be seeing the fourth island today. But maybe that's a good thing? We won't have to face the funhouse.”

“Whatever happens, we can’t go in there.” Hajime said sternly. “We either starve to death, or someone gets murdered. If we ride that train, we’ll already have blood on our hands. Not to mention, there’s the final dead room. That’s where Nagito found out the truth the last time. If he gets his hands on that information, we're done for.”

Chiaki nodded in agreement. “Don’t forget, Monokuma won’t let anyone in the fun house unless everyone agrees to ride the train. If we both refuse, we’ll be okay.”

It sounded easy...too easy. Was Monokuma really going to give up without a fight? Hajime couldn’t see the bear giving up his funhouse. Knowing Monokuma, he’d twist the rules, and somehow get them inside. Hajime couldn’t bring himself to relax, not yet.

“I don’t think it’s going to be that easy.” Hajime admitted. “But there’s nothing else we can do until the moment comes.” Monokuma could have anything up his sleeve, only a psychic would know what he had in store for them. With nothing to offer but mindless predictions and speculation, Hajime saw it wise to change the subject. “So, you really haven’t seen anyone today?”

“Just you…and Monomi.” Chiaki said, staring off into the distance. “No one walks to talk.” she sounded deflated, a look of sadness in her eyes.

Hajime understood why everyone was keeping their distance, but it was depressing all the same. The class trial had been draining, and very brutal. As much as everyone needed their space, he wasn’t
sure if isolation was the best idea. He could already tell from Chiaki’s tone that she’d been lonely.

“It’s really quiet without Nekomaru and Akane around…” Hajime sighed. It was strange being in the restaurant without Akane drooling over the dishes, or Nekomaru yelling about protein. The sound of silence was a painful one.

“...Here.” leaning across the table, Chiaki presented Hajime with her handheld gaming console. She gave it to him with a warm smile upon her face. “You look sad, and whenever I’m sad, I like to play my games.”

Hajime returned the smile graciously, but he refused to take her console. Though he was touched by the gesture, he couldn’t bring himself to part Chiaki from her beloved games. “You seem like you could use it as much as me.”

Chiaki let out a loud gasp, edging forward in her seat, just inches away from Hajime’s face. Carried away with excitement, she shared her idea. “Why don’t we play a game together? Because...games are more fun with friends.”

The look on Chiaki’s face made it impossible for Hajime to say no. It would be like rejecting a puppy, or an innocent child. He always enjoyed Chiaki’s company, and playing games with her seemed like a perfect way to cheer himself up. After all, his time with Chiaki was precious, he couldn’t afford to take her for granted.

“That sounds like a lot of fun.” Hajime found himself grinning.

“Great!” Chiaki leapt from her seat. “I’ve got so many multiplayer games in my collection, but I’ve never had anyone to play them with.”

Grabbing some food ‘for the road’, Hajime followed Chiaki to her cottage. The gaming console was already up and running, a single beanbag on the floor. Chiaki sat down, allowing herself to fall into the beans, she pointed at the space next to her for Hajime to join.

“I’m okay.” Hajime laughed, sitting on the wooden floor instead. He could already see there wasn’t enough room for two. If his legs started going numb, he could take some cushions from Chiaki’s bed.

Chiaki routed around on the floor, searching among all the game cartridges she owned. As she found the ones she wanted, she tossed them onto Hajime’s lap. A large pile soon amounted.

Chiaki handed Hajime another game. “Which one do you want to play first?”

There were at least twenty-five games resting on Hajime’s knees, he wasn’t sure he had the time to look at them all. Choosing a game at random, he handed a cartridge to Chiaki. “Let’s try this one.”

As soon as Chiaki laid eyes on the title, her eyes widened in excitement and anticipation. “This is one of my favourites. I’ve only ever been able to play the single-player before, but now -”

Chiaki chatted away as she set up their game, inserting it into the console. Hajime had never heard her talk so much, games truly did bring her to life.

Chiaki won the first round, and the second, and the third. Her winning streak continued across the other games they played, her score always significantly higher than Hajime’s. At one point, during a racing game, Hajime believed himself to be the winner - but his victory was short lived. Thanks to a mix up with the split screen, he saw himself as the bottom screen champion, when he was actually the loser controlling the car on top.
Despite losing at every game, Hajime still had the best afternoon he could have asked for. It wasn’t about coming on top, it was about spending time with Chiaki. After all, no one agrees to play against the Ultimate Gamer with the idea they’re going to win.

They played together long into the evening. Every time Hajime was ready to put down his controller, Chiaki presented him with something else to play. Though his fingers were beginning to tire, and his eyes were strained, Hajime refused to stop. As his fingers jammed the keys, he felt himself letting go. Not letting go from the deaths of his friends - that was something that would take time - but letting go of a sadness he’d been holding deep in his chest. The sadness that Chiaki wasn’t going to be around forever. Thanks to the rewrite, he’d been able to make twice as many memories than before. It was something he’d be forever grateful for.

When Hajime felt his stomach rumbling, he knew it was finally time to stop. It was almost six, and he hadn’t even thought about dinner. Turning off the console, he suggested to Chiaki they go to the restaurant for something to eat. There was always time to play more games after dinner.

Nearly everyone had purposely avoided breakfast and lunch, but they couldn’t skip dinner too. Hajime just wanted to make sure that everyone was okay, since the trial had left a heavy weight on their shoulders. He was especially concerned for Ibuki, she’d been involved in the murder case.

The two of them cut through the lobby, discussing the games they’d played. As Hajime chatted away, he couldn't help but notice how quiet his surroundings were.

Hurrying up the stairs, Hajime soon realised why things were so quiet. There wasn't a single person sitting in the restaurant, plates of food the only means of company. The food hadn't been touched, there wasn't a dirty dish in sight. No one was at the restaurant, and no one had been to the restaurant.

Hajime and Chiaki looked at each other, sharing a feeling of dread. Things were worse than they thought.

"This isn’t good.” Hajime mumbled. Staring at the empty room, he felt his appetite fading away.

“Huh…?” Chiaki raised her index finger to her lips, motioning for silence. “I hear something...I think.”

Hajime heard it too, it was the familiar sound of footsteps up the staircase.

It was Nagito who appeared, strolling into the restaurant like he didn't have a care in the world. Helping himself to a plate, he mused around the buffet tables, searching for something to eat. He picked up some serving tongs, and piled helpings of a healthy garden salad onto his plate, talking to his friends over his shoulder. "Good evening you two! What brilliant luck this is. Finding myself alone with two of my favourite ultimates."

"Yeah, hey Nagito." Hajime brushed him aside, not in the mood for over the top introductions. He couldn't understand why Nagito had turned up for dinner so cheerily, when no one else was showing their face. Something didn't seem right. "You haven't seen the others, have you?"

"I have." Nagito nodded, eyeing up the dessert table.

"Are they coming to dinner?" Chiaki asked, watching Nagito with the same curiosity as Hajime.

Nagito shrugged his shoulders, turning to face his friends. "I don't think so. No one's really in the mood for eating. Well, besides me."

Hajime's shoulders drooped. "No one came for breakfast or lunch, and now everyone's missing
dinner too. This is bad." even if the other students were eating in their own time, group meals were a vital part of the day, they kept everyone united.

"Sometimes, I get carried away playing my games and I forget to eat." Chiaki opened up. "I usually get a really bad headache, and I feel extra sleepy."

"Maybe we should go looking for the others." Hajime suggested. "I know everyone's upset after the trial, but isolating ourselves isn't the answer.

"Do you have a plan?" Chiaki asked.

"...Not really." Hajime admitted, he hadn't the time to think of one. "I'm just going to hunt down the others and see if I can persuade them to join us for dinner."

"It won't work." Nagito remarked, in a 'know-it-all' sort of way. He returned to filling his plate with food.

"Oh, and why's that?" Hajime challenged him, insulted that Nagito would criticise his idea so quickly.

Nagito put down his plate, focusing solely on Hajime. “Your plan isn’t hopeful enough.”

Hajime rolled his eyes, Nagito’s criticism was essentially useless. “I need more than that.”

Nagito barely elaborated. “It’s best you see for yourself. Peko’s in her cottage. Why don’t you try asking her to dinner, following your plan?...” he sounded close to patronising.

“I will.” Hajime retorted, heading towards the exit. He wasn’t going to let Nagito undermine him. He marched down the stairs in the direction of Peko’s cottage.

“Peko?” Hajime rapped on the door with three loud knocks. He could see a lamp shining from the window, Peko was most definitely in.

They didn’t have to wait long, the door opened as soon as Hajime finished touching it. Pulling it open, just ajar, Peko waited in the doorway. She gazed across as her guests, keeping her greeting brief. “Yes?”

“Uh, hey, Peko!” Hajime replied, wishing he’d at least have gotten a simple ‘hello’. “Chiaki and I were just wondering if you’re coming to dinner? No one’s been at the restaurant all day and -”

Peko cut him short. “No, sorry. I’m not hungry.” refusing him the chance to speak another word, she shut the door in his face. Peko wasn’t being rude, but removing herself from the situation.

“Uh…” Hajime backed away from that the door, at a loss for words. “I guess she’s not coming?”

Nagito rested against the wall, ‘I told you so’ planted across his face. He shook his head in disappointment. “I expected more from the Ultimate Hope. Even scum like myself can do a better job than that.”

Hajime bit his tongue, though it was easier said than done, the tension in his voice was apparent. “Care to enlighten me?”

Nagito did exactly that. "Right now, everyone is feeling nothing but overwhelming despair. Two of our classmates have just died, and the killer didn't even realise they'd betrayed their best friend. To overcome any despair, you need hope. Hajime, you may be the Ultimate Hope, but the plan you
suggested shows no hope at all. You need something bigger to remind everyone why life is worth living, what it truly means to feel the hope inside of you."

As per usual, Nagito's speech was over the top, but Hajime couldn't deny his point was fair. Simply asking the students to come to dinner wasn't enough, he needed something to unite them.

Nagito continued, doing his best to help Hajime. "After the second class trial, you seemed especially down and in despair. What was it that cheered you up? What helped you to feel something again?"

Hajime knew the answer right away. He was rather surprised to hear Nagito mention the event, since he hadn't been invited. "We all had ice cream for breakfast at the beach, and played sports too." the memory brought an instant smile to his face.

"Right!" Nagito smiled, pleased Hajime was following along. "If you want to show everyone true hope, you need to unite all the ultimates once again. Though after Akane's execution, ice cream on the beach doesn't seem like a very good idea...

Hajime paused in thought, attempting to muster up a good idea. A way to bring everyone together, to get over the events of the class trial.... "I've got it!" Hajime cheered, struck by the perfect idea. "What about a picnic?...Well, a feast. It could be a tribute to Akane and Nekomaru. They both loved their food."

"Much better!" Nagito said in delight. "That's the answer I expect to hear from the Ultimate Hope."

"Let’s go back to the drawing board.” Hajime said, pacing around on the spot. “We need a way to make everyone feel included, to show that everyone plays a part here.” feeling rather creepy lurking outside Peko’s cottage, Hajime led his friends towards his own.

Chiaki and Hajime planted themselves on the sofa, whilst Nagito sat cross-legged on the floor. Hajime snatched some paper off the side, presenting everyone with a marker pen of a different colour.

Nagito took charge, using his green marker to jot down everything they’d discussed so far. “Excuse my pathetic writing.” he laughed. “As you’ve already seen, I lack true talent."

“It’s okay.” Hajime brushed his comment aside, his own writing wasn’t any better. Taking his purple marker, he added some comments of his own.

Chiaki chewed the end of her pen, the lid in her hand. “Where should we have the feast? I think Jabberwock Park would be nice.”

Hajime nodded in agreement, it was his preferred location too. The beaches were usually the best spots for group events, but it was too soon after Akane’s execution. “The park works great!”

“I’m happy to clean the park.” Nagito offered. “I can set up all the picnic blankets. After all, cleaning is the only thing I’m good at.”

The last time Nagito had cleaned, he’d planted everything in place to kill Byakuya in the original game. Hajime wanted to trust Nagito, but every day it was becoming harder. It was thanks to Nagito that Ibuki caught the despair disease. Hajime looked at Nagito sceptically. “Okay...maybe we could get someone to help you. I’m sure Monomi would be up for it.” he didn’t want to force the job on Monomi, but he knew he’d feel safer with her keeping guard.

“What about food?” Chiaki asked, approaching the next topic.
“I saw Fuyuhiko over at the diner, so maybe he can bring the food.” Nagito said. “I know there's plenty of food at Rocketpunch Market, but since this is a feast, burgers and milkshakes seem more appropriate.”

Hajime made a note on the paper. “I’m sure we can convince him, the food over there always tastes amazing.” if Fuyuhiko refused, which seemed likely, Hajime would just bring it himself.

With the location and food sorted, all that remained were the guests. Since Nagito was going to be busy setting up the event, it was up to Hajime and Chiaki to collect everyone. Though no one seemed particularly talkative, Hajime hoped news of the feast would encourage them to come.

A knock at the door interrupted their conversation. Nagito, the closest to it, offered to go. Hajime wasn’t quite sure who wanted to stop by and visit him. Perhaps it was Peko, changing her mind about what she’d said earlier.

“Oh, it’s you.” Nagito let out a disappointed sigh, staring down at the guest. He spoke over his shoulder to Hajime and Chiaki. “It’s Monomi.”

“Oh…” Hajime felt just as disappointed. Even when Monomi was trying her best to help, he found her presence irritating. “Come in, I guess.”

“Thank you!” Monomi beamed, waddling into the room. “I was watching you on the monitors, and saw you wanted my help to clean up the park.”

“That’s a little creepy.” Nagito scrunched his nose. “Don’t you have better things to do with your time than stalking us?”

“But--but I’m here to help you.” Monomi protested, her bottom lip trembling.

“Thanks, Monomi.” Chiaki smiled. “Would you be able to help Nagito set up the feast?”

“Of course!” Monomi cheered. “As your teacher, I’d love to help you.”

“Great.” Hajime stood to his feet. With Monomi involved, their plan could begin. “Chiaki and I can go and look for the others now.”

“You’re looking for the others?” Monomi asked.

“Well, yeah. That’s what I just said.” Hajime retorted, he didn’t have the time to be repeating himself.

“I can save you time. I know exactly where everyone is!” Monomi said, looking pleased she could be of aid. “I’ve been watching all of you on my monitors.”

“I wouldn’t brag about that…” Hajime muttered under his breath.

“Would you mind telling us?” Chiaki asked, marker in hand, ready to take notes.

Monomi nodded, listing from her memory. “Peko and Mahiru are in their cottages, Gundam is at the ranch, Sonia is at the beach on the 1st island, Fuyuhiko is at the diner, Souda is at electric avenue, and Ibuki is at the music venue.”

“You really are watching everyone.” Hajime raised his brow. “Let’s go and get started on the feast preparations. Monomi, Nagito, we’ll catch up with you later.”
Hajime and Chiaki began their task at the cottages. Chiaki suggested, to save time, that she knock for Peko, while Hajime went to Mahiru. Hajime had another reason for visiting Mahiru, there was something he needed to ask her.

He knocked on her door, calling out his name. “Hey, Mahiru. It’s Hajime.”

“You can come in.” a voice replied.

Hajime let himself in, opening the already unlocked door. Mahiru was lying on her bed, her legs dangling over the edge. She was busy looking at her camera, focusing on the small display screen. As Hajime moved into the room, Mahiru forced herself to sit up, knowing it was only polite.

“What are you looking at?” Hajime asked, motioning his head in the direction of her camera.

“I was looking through some old photos.” Mahiru said. She turned the camera to face Hajime, letting him see too.

Hajime moved in for a closer look. Staring back at him was a picture of Mikan. She was standing under a beautiful cherry tree in the park, a nervous smile across her face.

“That’s a great photo.” Hajime admired, beginning to reminisce in memories of Mikan. There was something amazing about a photograph, how a single picture could hold on to a lifetime of memories. “You know, speaking of photos, I was wondering if there’s something I could ask you…”

“You’re asking me something already.” Mahiru pointed out.

“Oh, right.” Hajime laughed, somewhat awkwardly. “Chiaki, Nagito, and I are throwing a feast in honour of Nekomaru and Akane. We want it to be a final goodbye. So, I was wondering if you could print out some of your photos and bring them to the feast.”

A smile lit up Mahiru’s face. “That’s a really great idea, Hajime!” she beamed, her cheeks flushing red. “Give me fifteen minutes, and I can get you all the pictures you need.”

“Thanks.” Hajime said. “Whenever you’re ready, the feast is going to be at Jabberwock Park, okay?”

Hajime met with Chiaki back outside the cottages, they reported back to each other. According to Chiaki, Peko was on board with the feast idea. She was simply freshening up, and then she’d make her way to the park.

Their next destination was the ranch, where Monomi said Gundam would be waiting for them. True to her word, they found Gundam resting on the grass, feeding sunflower seeds to his furry friends.

Chiaki planted herself next to him, while Hajime rested against the gate. He greeted Gundam with a smile, though it wasn’t returned. “What are you doing out here?”

Gundam didn’t take his eyes off his hamsters as he continued to feed them. “I cannot share that information with mortals like yourselves. Unless you reveal your true form, it shall remain classified.”

“True form?” Hajime muttered. Was Gundam expecting him to morph into a werewolf or something? He tried asking Gundam another question, hoping this one wasn’t ‘classified’ too. “Are you coming to dinner?”
Gundam shook his head. “Is your vision betraying you? Can’t you see, the Four Dark Devas of Destruction are already eating!”

“You’ve got to eat too.” Hajime pointed out, he couldn’t exactly see Gundam eating the sunflower seeds. “That’s why we’re here to invite you to a feast.”

“A feast, you say?” Gundam finally looked at Hajime, showing sudden interest.

“It’s in honour of Nekomaru and Akane.” Chiaki chipped in. “It’s going to be at Jabberwock Park.”

“Hmph, I have attended many banquets in my time, most of which took place in the afterworld. This sounds nowhere near impressive, but I might stop by.” Gundam said, as casually as he could.

With Gundam somewhat on board, they left in search of Sonia, who they found at the beach. She was walking along the sand, the very spot where Akane was executed mere hours ago. Thankfully, all traces of blood had long disappeared. When Chiaki described the feast, Sonia agreed to attend right away. She saw it as a great idea, a way to celebrate Nekomaru and Akane’s memory.

Their next challenge was Fuyuhiko, who they knew would take a lot of convincing. They found him drowning his sorrows in coffee at the diner. He kept his head down, staring at the mug in front of his him. It was as if there were a grey cloud hanging over him.

Hajime joined Fuyuhiko at his booth, sliding into the seat opposite him - though he knew it was a risky move.

As expected, he was told to go away within seconds. “Can you fuck off somewhere else?” Fuyuhiko glared at Hajime, the grasp around his coffee tightening.

“S-sorry.” Hajime found himself apologising, though he had nothing to be sorry about. “I just wanted to invite you t-” he was cut short.

“I’m not interested.” Fuyuhiko shot him down straight away. “Go and bother someone who gives a shit.”

“It’s for Nekomaru and Akane…” Chiaki butted in, seeing that their conversation was going nowhere.

“Huh?” Fuyuhiko responded.

As quickly as he could, Hajime explained the concept of the feast to Fuyuhiko. He knew if he took any longer than two minutes, he’d be shot down again. Hajime wasn’t sure if he was pushing for too much, but he also mentioned he’d like Fuyuhiko to bring the food.

“Tsk.” Fuyuhiko rocked back in his seat. “I’m not your damn slave.”

“If you don’t want to come, I’m sure Chiaki and I can bring all the food.” Hajime said, he already sensed Fuyuhiko’s answer.

“Don’t put words in my mouth, I never said I ain’t coming.” Fuyuhiko snapped.

“So...you are coming?” a confused Hajime replied.

Fuyuhiko shrugged his shoulders, acting as if he wasn't phased. “I'll come, but only cuz I’ve got nothing better to do.” Though Fuyuhiko was acting like he couldn’t care less, Hajime had a sneaking suspicion that he wanted to come along and pay tribute.
Ibuki and Souda were the final two students that needed tracking down. Both of them happened to be on the third island, which was convenient. More than anyone, Hajime knew how important it was to get Ibuki to attend the feast. Not only had she been through extreme trauma with her hands, but she’d also played a part in Nekomaru’s murder. If they weren’t careful, Ibuki was at high risk of falling into despair.

Hajime decided to visit Souda first, since he needed as much time as possible to think up a persuasive speech for Ibuki. Chiaki offered to split up and get Ibuki for them, but Hajime wanted to keep her by his side. Instead, they left for electric avenue together. They found exactly who they were looking for sitting by a stand of televisions.

Focused on his work, Souda barely acknowledged their presence. He gave them a half-assed nod, refusing to take his eyes away from his screwdriver. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, he was surrounded by mechanical parts, his jumpsuit dirty with oil.

"Chiaki and I were wondering if you're coming to dinner." Hajime stated, though he knew he didn't have Souda's attention in the slightest.

"Sorry, busy." Souda mumbled.

"Sometimes I forget to eat when I get carried away with my games." Chiaki said. "It's a good idea to take a break."

Souda shook his head, mumbling once again. "Important."

Hajime squinted at the metal in Souda's hands, but he hadn't the slightest clue what it was. "What's that you're making?"

Given the opportunity to talk about something he was interested in, Souda perked up. "It's for Ibuki."

"Uh, that's not some kind of bear trap...right?" Hajime asked, paranoid Souda might be seeking revenge for the pillow smothering incident.

"No! Jesus, Hajime. What do you take me for?" Souda barked, clearly offended.

Hajime backed up, careful not to step on the parts surrounding his feet. "So...what are you making?"

Souda pulled the item to his chest, sulking like an overprotective child. "I'm not showing you until it's ready."

Hajime knew it was useless pressing Souda for answers, he was busily caught up in his work. "Well, I guess we should get go-"

Souda jumped in, giving Hajime the answer he desired before it was too late. "It's...it's for her hands." pushing himself from the ground, Souda caught up with Hajime, presenting him with what he'd been trying to hide. He held two gloves, both made from strong metal.

Souda elaborated, pointing to elements of his creation. "They're mechanical hands, if you can't tell. I've collected all the parts from the old technology around this place. They'll fit over Ibuki's hands like gloves, and the insides are covered with padding so they won't hurt her burns. They're electronic, and can do anything a normal hand can do. I guess they're kinda like robot hands."

"That's amazing, Souda!" Hajime exclaimed, thrilled with the invention. "So Ibuki can use her hands again? And play her music?"
Souda gave a satisfied nod. “Yup! She can do anything, there are no restrictions. They work just like human hands, and she won’t feel any pain.”

Hajime looked at Souda’s work with pure admiration, it was clear how much effort he’d put into it. “Ibuki’s going to love them.”

“I hope so.” Souda laughed. “They took a lotta work.”

It was a moment full of promise and joy, but there was still something bothering Hajime. He had to get it off his chest, or it would irritate him all evening and ruin the feast. “There’s just something I don’t get. I know Ibuki was infected with despair disease, but she still tried to kill you. I can’t see why you’re now making her a present.”

Souda scratched his head with his screwdriver, letting out a sigh. “I’m not even sure if I get it myself. It’s just...after I was treated in the hospital by Monokuma, I’ve been feeling...no...seeing things.”

“Seeing things?!” Hajime raised his voice in alarm, was Souda hallucinating?

“I guess that’s the wrong word too.” Souda frowned, frustrated he couldn’t execute what he was trying to say. “It’s like, I’ve been remembering things that never happened. Like, I remember being at Ibuki’s concert, but this time it was in the music venue, and Hiyoko and Mikan were there too.”

His words were like a slap in the face, opening Hajime’s eyes. Hajime knew exactly what Souda was talking about. It wasn’t a hallucination or a misplaced dream. He’d remembered Ibuki’s concert from the original game, the life before the rewrite.

“Have you seen anything else?” Hajime pressed, desperate to know what else Souda had remembered.

“Most of it’s really hazy, so I’m not sure.” Souda explained. “But there’s this one vision I keep seeing. I’m sitting in the diner, and a really upset Hiyoko rushes by the window. But that’s impossible, Hiyoko died before we even got access to the second island.”

Hajime tried to ignore the knot that was tightening in his stomach. Souda said his memories were hazy, but what if they started to get clearer as time went on? If he began to remember elements of islands they hadn’t discovered yet, many questions would present themselves. Not to mention, if Souda remembered anything about the ultimate despairs.

“I know I sound crazy, but give me something!” Souda wailed, panicked that he’d been greeted with silence.

Chiaki stepped in. “I’m sure Monokuma put you under lots of drugs when he looked after you, they must have messed with your head.”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking.” Souda nodded in agreement. “Still, it seems weird. It all feels so real. And since these weird visions started, I’ve been seeing myself having all these new conversations with Ibuki. It makes me feel even guiltier about the fire.”

“I know you set the stage, but it’s not your fault, Souda.” Hajime reassured his friend, trying to ease him of his guilt. “Monokuma’s admitted to it.”

“Yeah, I know.” Souda replied. “But I still feel like I could’ve helped or something. I just want to make things up to her.”
“You could give your present to her at the feast.” Chiaki suggested.

“That’s a great idea!” Hajime exclaimed. It was the persuasion he needed to get Ibuki to come along.

Hajime found Ibuki at the music venue, just like Monomi said. She wasn’t at the forefront of the venue, but instead, hiding out in the staff room - eyeing up the instruments with complete admiration.

“Hey, Ibuki.” Hajime spoke gently, making Ibuki aware of his presence. “What are you doing stuffed up in here?” though he already knew the answer to his question.

“Ibuki...just wanted to be alone.” Ibuki turned her back on the instruments. "Instruments make me feel happy and safe, I like this room."

Was it really a good idea for Ibuki to surround herself with instruments? It would just remind her of her situation, and how she wasn't able to play them. "I haven't seen you around today. Have you been in here all this time?"

Ibuki shook her head. "I've been in my cottage trying to write a song about Nekomaru, but without my instruments, I can't find the right tune. I'm in here for inspiration!"

“How are your hands?” Hajime asked. From what Ibuki had said, it seemed like she'd been coping on her own.

“They still feel like strawberries that have been through a blender!” Ibuki exclaimed with widened eyes. “But I know someday I’ll play my instruments again, and I can still sing. Hajimeee, you can play the guitar at my next concert!”

Hajime didn’t want there to be a ‘next concert’, and he certainly wasn’t going to play the guitar. Still, he found himself smiling. Ibuki’s optimistic nature was uplifting and infectious.

“Some artists do their artwork with their feet. I can use my toes to strum the guitar!” Ibuki cheered, genuinely excited with the idea.

Thankfully, it wouldn’t have to come to that. If Souda’s gift to Ibuki truly worked, she'd be playing her own music again in no time. Hajime did his best not to spoil the surprise, but he was desperate to tell her. It served him great joy to tell Ibuki news of the feast.

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Gundam passed around a plate of burgers, the option of both meat and vegetarian. Peko offered the vanilla milkshakes, while Mahiru took strawberry. Sonia was in charge of handing out different dips and sauces to go alongside the fries.

The feast was in full swing, and proving to be a success. With a good eye for cleaning, Nagito had done a brilliant job setting up. Everything they needed, from plates to serving tongs, were ready and waiting for them on the multicoloured picnic blankets. Nagito had also made the sensible decision to bring plenty of napkins, given the greasy nature of the food. Hajime was only on his first burger, and his hands already felt a mess.

More fries were offered in Hajime's direction, but he politely refused. He knew how much his
stomach was already suffering. "How did Akane eat so much of this stuff?" Hajime panted, struggling to finish the few mouthfuls of food he had left.

"Tell me about it." Souda winced, clutching at his sides. "I'm starting to feel sick..."

"Please don't be sick on the blankets!" Nagito panicked, hurriedly presenting Souda with a brown paper bag. "Keep hold of this, just to be safe."

"Excuse me, can everyone listen up?" clearing her voice, Mahiru captured the attention of those around her. Until that point, she'd been rather quiet. Between the occasional sip from her milkshake, she'd been fiddling with a brown satchel she'd brought with her. Mahiru hadn't shown anyone what was inside the satchel, but it seemed to be important from the rate she kept looking at it. "Hajime inspired me with something he said earlier, so I've made presents for everyone."

Nagito marveled in Mahiru's words. "That's the power of the Ultimate Hope for you!"

"It better not be like those shitty Usami straps." Fuyuhiko muttered under his breath.

"Don't be so ungrateful!" Mahiru criticised, reaching for her satchel. "It took a lot of effort to make these. You better appreciate them, or I'm taking everything back." she narrowed her eyes specifically at the boys.

"What did Mahiru bring?" Ibuki grinned, trying to peer into the bag.

"Stop dragging it out." Fuyuhiko complained. "Give out the damn presents already."

Ignoring his ignorant comment, Mahiru reached into the bag. One by one, she pulled out ten identical presents. Hajime couldn't see very well, but from his position, they looked similar to books. He had a feeling he was wrong, he couldn't imagine Mahiru writing them all a novel.

Mahiru distributed the presents between the students, making sure she kept one back for herself. Hajime took the gift with open arms, quickly coming to realize what it was he'd been given. Mahiru's presents were photo albums. Looking around, Hajime saw the cover of each photo album was personalised. His showed a picture of a palm tree, while Sonia's was the hotel pool, and Peko's the ancient ruin. To make each album even more unique, Mahiru had inscribed names on the front - making it truly personal.

Hajime turned the cover, eager to see what the album contained. It wasn't large in size, but that was only to be expected since Mahiru hadn't be given long to prepare. Each page had room for two photos. The first photo, Hajime recognised instantly. It was a picture from his photoshoot with Chiaki from many nights ago. Both of them were grinning at the camera, lost and carefree.

The pictures that followed were just as special. Akane wolfing down an entire cooked chicken. Gundam communicating with a dove that had flown onto the island. Souda losing to Nekomaru in an arm wrestle. Teruteru holding a plate of food he'd proudly cooked. Sonia braiding flowers in Mikan's hair. A view of Peko from behind as she stood in front of the sunset. Byakuya delivering an important speech in the restaurant. Hiyoko dancing for the camera, while probably squishing ants beneath her feet.

The air felt light, everyone reminiscing in memories that had begun to feel distant. Hajime wasn't sure how to describe it, but his heart felt warm looking at all of the photos, like a hole within him had been filled. He brought the album to his chest, taking a minute to lose himself in the moment. "Thank you, Mahiru. These are amazing."

"They took a lot of work, you know." Mahiru brushed his compliment aside, attempting to conceal
"Hey! That reminds me..." Souda jumped in. "I've got a present too, it's for Ibuki."

Ibuki fist bumped the air. "Ibuki is superrrr stoked!"

Souda presented Ibuki with a gift box that he'd obtained from the store, a purple ribbon tied around the top. Since Ibuki’s hands were too delicate to open it, Sonia stepped in, pulling at the ribbon. The box fell open as she did so, revealing the present.

Ibuki looked at the robotic gloves in anticipation. "These are for Ibuki?"

"To show there are no hard feelings, ‘kay?" Souda said, almost bashful. "Miss Sonia can help you put them on.” He took a minute to explain the purpose of his invention.

"Are you sure you want to do that?” Nagito challenged, raising his eyebrows. "Souda, you could be lying. We don’t know what’s in those gloves. It could be a trap. What if they're lined with blades?"

"Souda wouldn’t do that.” Hajime insisted, though he couldn’t know for sure.

"Yeah!” Souda spat, his face flushing under pressure. “You might be a psychopath, but I’m not.”

"Let’s not ruin the mood of the feast.” Chiaki lowered her head.

Nagito simply shrugged his shoulders. “Take the risk, we'll soon see.”

Nagito’s tone made Hajime uncomfortable, it was making him paranoid. Souda had his faults, but he wouldn’t make Ibuki a present just to hurt her. Hajime knew Souda, they survived the Neo World Program together, they were soul friends. That being said, Hajime had to remember that survivor Souda and Rewrite Souda were two different people.

"Ibuki, if you don’t feel safe, I’ll try the gloves on first.” Mahiru offered, feeling over-protective towards her friend.

Ibuki shook her head. “Ibuki trusts Souda.” she outstretched her arms in directions of the gloves, hinting for Sonia’s assistance.

Sonia helped Ibuki slide her hands into the gloves, being careful not to hurt her. They were the perfect fit, sitting comfortably on Ibuki’s hands, the padding gentle on her burns.

Ibuki inspected her hands, admiring her new accessories. As she moved her fingers, the gloves moved too - working just like human hands. Already excited, Ibuki reached for her milkshake, picking up the glass with ease.

“These are amazing!” Ibuki gasped, marvelling at what she’d just done. “Ibuki...Ibuki can use her hands again.”

“Does this mean you can play your music again?” Mahiru smiled.

“She should be able to.” Souda said, replying on Ibuki’s behalf. “You should test it out.”

Mahiru climbed to her feet. “Ibuki, why don’t we go to the music venue and get your guitar?” she offered her hand to help Ibuki up.

Ibuki took Mahiru’s hand, pulling herself from the floor. “Woooh! Let’s go,” dragging Mahiru by the
hand, she charged off towards the central island. Mahiru skidded behind her, clinging onto her
camera for dear life.

Sonia giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. “It is wonderful to see Ibuki so happy. That is a
marvelous present, Souda.”

“T-thanks, Miss Sonia!” Souda drooled, blushing intensely. “But don’t think I’ve forgotten about
you. I made you something too.” from the pocket of his jumpsuit, he pulled forth a small present,
handing it to Sonia.

Sonia looked down at the gift in her hands. It was a rose, made from scraps of metal. Souda had even
gone to the effort to spray paint it red. It looked stunning, the sort of piece you’d pay a lot of money
for.

“Gundam, would you like this for the Four Dark Devas? They can climb over it!” Sonia beamed,
turning to Gundam.

“T-that’s not a hamster toy!” Souda cried, a look of horror falling across his face.

Gundam rejected the offer. “The Four Dark Devas of Destruction are too worthy to go near such
garbage. Give it to me, and I shall curse it away to hell.”

“Garbage?” Souda echoed, his voice cracking. “I spent three hours on that!”

“Hmph, you appear to have wasted your time.” Gundam quipped, turning his back on Souda in
favour of his dinner.

Sonia lay the flower to rest on the picnic blanket, never to pick it up again. Souda snatched the
flower back, trying to blink away the tears that were forming in his eyes, his pride greatly damaged.

“Uh, take this…” Hajime offered Souda a napkin, uncomfortable with the entire situation.

Souda said nothing, taking the napkin to wipe his eyes. He turned his back on everyone to disguise
what he was doing, though it didn’t work. With slightly redder eyes, he turned back to Sonia. “If
roses aren’t your thing, I’ll make you something else. A castle, or sunflowers, or a heart, or-”

Fuyuhiko cut him short, cringing on Souda’s behalf. “You need to learn when to quit.”

Before Souda had the chance to embarrass himself further, or completely fall apart, a wonderful
distraction provided itself. From the clearing of the park, came the sound of an acoustic guitar.

Ibuki burst through the trees, strumming her guitar like she was playing a concert sold out to millions.
Mahiru followed behind, smiling from ear to ear.

“Ibuki Mioda is back!” Ibuki cheered, a look of pure joy upon her face.

Souda admired his creation, pleased it was so well received. Hajime found himself smiling too,
seeing Ibuki happy made him happy. Additionally, her new hands looked pretty damn cool.

They finished their food with warm hearts and laughter, accompanied by Ibuki’s background music.
The students looked through their photo books, commenting on the pictures. As the evening drew to
a close, Sonia gave the group a final surprise.

From a plastic bag, Sonia retrieved six paper lanterns, each of which a different colour. “I saw these
in the market the other day, and it gave me an idea. I thought we could light one for all the classmates
“we have lost.”

“Miss Sonia, that’s a beautiful idea.” Souda clapped his hands together.

Sonia reached in the bag again, this time retrieving a lighter. “I got this too, so we can light the lanterns.”

“I’ll do it!” Nagito offered, reaching for the lighter. “Trash like me doesn’t deserve to send off a lantern for an ultimate, it would be an honour just to light them.”

Hajime didn’t trust Nagito around fire, but he’d already taken the lighter from Sonia's hands.

The six lanterns were distributed between the ten surviving students. Those who didn’t have one to hold, simply watched. Nagito went along the line, lighting each lantern. Peko took the lighter from him as soon as the job was done, much to Hajime's relief.

Souda went first, holding a red lantern above his head. “This is for Teruteru. We didn’t know him very long, and he was kind of a creep, and -”

Sonia narrowed her eyes at him. “Please show some respect!”

“R-right, Miss Sonia!” Souda quickly changed his tune. “But Teruteru made really good food, so it’s a shame we didn’t get to try much of it. He seemed passionate about what he did, and I think that’s pretty cool.”

After a short and sharp speech from Souda, Mahiru stepped in, holding an orange lantern. “I’m dedicating this lantern to Hiyoko. I didn’t get to spend much time with her, but from the time we did spend together, I grew exceptionally fond of her. She was a sweet girl.”

Hajime wasn’t sure if the word ‘sweet’ best suited Hiyoko, but Mahiru’s sentiment was touching all the same.

Next came Ibuki, holding a white lantern towards the sky. She spoke kind words for Byakuya, calling him both bossy and adorable in the same sentence. The end of her speech turned into a song, though it was a lot softer than some of her other material. Sonia spoke for Mikan, a lilac lantern in hand. It was Gundam who followed, his lantern blue for Nekomaru. Most of his speech was too difficult to understand, making several references to the third eye and the underworld. Gundam praised Nekomaru for his strength, claiming even the most powerful of demons would have a hard time trying to fight him.

Finally, it was Hajime’s turn. He held a silver lantern, running with a speech he’d made up on the spot. “This lantern is for Akane. She’s one of the bravest people I’ve had the privilege of meeting, a true fighter. She didn’t deserve any of this, and I hope she knows we forgive her for what happened. I’m really going to miss her.” Hajime stopped himself, before he could get choked up.

It was agreed by Mahiru that they’d let go of their lanterns on the count of three. She took charge of the group, leading the count.

"One."

"Two."

"Three."

Like golden rays of light, the lanterns floated into the night sky. A final goodbye to fallen friends.
P.s you might have noticed that Ibuki said very little about her involvement in the murder case. I didn't want to dwell on it very much in this chapter, because it's kind of heavy, and I didn't want to write anything too depressing. It hasn't been forgotten, it will just be explored at a later point in the chapter :D The same goes for what Akane said to Hajime at the end of the trial.

Thanks for reading!!! ^_^
Chapter Summary

Hajime faces the Twilight, but in a very different way.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry it's been a while. I explained this better in a comment on my last chapter, but basically, I was getting really tired with proof-reading. Life has been busy sorting out things for university, and proof-reading isn't something I always look forward to, so I've been putting it off. But taking a break from it has done me some good, I've really missed updating, so I'm back again and determined to get some more chapters out. I can't believe this is chapter twenty, I never thought I'd make it this far into the story. Thank you for all of your support so far!! ^_^  

Also, I wanted to give a huge shoutout to RandomMunchkin, who's drawn this amazing picture from the lantern scene of the previous chapter.  
http://dailydanganronpadoodles.tumblr.com/post/149779601674/this-fic-so-far-is-great-and-something-in-me-told  
I love it so much, and I legit want to cry.  

So, time to resume. Let's greet the Twilight, and say hello to the motives...  

((And I promise the next chapter won't take so long to come out haha!!))

When Hajime turned up to breakfast the next morning, he knew his plan of 'uniting the ultimates' had been a success. The once empty restaurant, was back to its old self, bustling with life once again. Hajime felt the rewarding feeling of satisfaction, he'd done something right. He was starting to feel in control of his situation.

The smell of burnt toast dominated the restaurant, and the lobby too. Gundam didn't like to eat his food until it was in its 'final true form', hence the overcooked breakfast. Mahiru had opened all of the windows in an attempt to help, but it was impossible to ignore the smell of the chargrilled bread.

Monomi turned up to interrupt their breakfast, and went straight into a coughing fit due to the smell. She masked her nose with her paw, trying to control her spluttering. "Did Monokuma light a fire in here?"

"You'd think so, but no." Mahiru replied, her eyes watering from the smell. "That's just Gundam's breakfast."

Choking aside, Monomi still seemed to be smiling. The rabbit was practically bursting with excitement. "Well, good morning everyone! I hope you all had a magical night's sleep."

“Get out of here.” Fuyuhiko snapped, spraying crumbs everywhere. “I don't want fleas in my food.”
“Yeah, leave us alone. We’re busy.” Ibuki scowled. She was busy feeding herself cereal, using her new robotic hands to operate the spoon.

A clearly heartbroken Monomi persisted. “But I came here to give you some good news-”

Nagito cut her short, he had no time for boring antics. “Let me guess, you’ve defeated another Monobeast.”

“That’s right!” Monomi cheered, her sadness lasting no longer than a minute. “You now have access to the fourth island. I wanted to tell you yesterday, but no one seemed in the mood for talking. Thanks to Hajime, everyone is happy again!”

“What’s the point?” Peko remarked. "Exploring the fourth island will only waste time and energy, we aren't going to find an escape route.”

“Y-you shouldn’t be looking for an escape!” Monomi exclaimed, in a sudden panic. “You should go there to strengthen your friendships.”

“That’s so lame.” Souda rolled his eyes, poking at his food with his screwdriver.

“Jeez Monomi! You’re crap at this.” Monokuma appeared at the top of the staircase, shaking his head.

“Ahhh! Where did you come from?” Monomi screeched, nearly toppling over out of fear.

“If you wanna get them to do something, you have to entice them.” Monokuma explained. He perked up to address the students. “There are some treats waiting for you on the fourth island.”

“Treats?!” Ibuki threw down her spoon in excitement, splashing milk everywhere.

“Parts to create a boat, your student profiles...information about a certain enemy organisation.” Monokuma teased. “But you won’t get any of that by sitting around here.”

“I guess we could go and explore the new island, we have nothing better to do.” Souda said, feeling the temptation from Monokuma’s offer.

There was something about the fourth island which gave Hajime the creeps, it was like sticking Disneyland in a horror movie. The cheery music, rides, and food stands were all for show - a temporary paradise to take their minds away from the killing school trip.

Mahiru weighed up the decision. "I would like to learn more about the Future Foundation. If they're the ones that put us here, we need as much information as possible."

"Monokuma said there are ship parts, we've gotta go! Once I build the ship, we can escape this hell hole." Souda exclaimed, tools in hand.

"I agree with Mahiru. We should learn everything we can about the Future Foundation." Nagito said. "Although...I don't understand the purpose of the student profiles. They aren't much of a treat."

"I believe, the student profiles will expose the traitor." Peko suggested. "Out of everyone on this island, only fifteen of us attended Hope's Peak Academy. Meaning, there should only be fifteen student profiles waiting for us on the fourth island. The person missing a profile is clearly the traitor."
"Ah, what great thinking!" Nagito gasped, taken away by Peko. "Our student profiles will reveal the traitor, this is more important than I thought. We have to expose them, they don't deserve to disguise themselves as someone as worthy as an ultimate."

The student profiles wouldn't expose the traitor, but that wasn't what Hajime was worried about. The student profiles would expose him, it would expose the Remnants of Despair. If the students learnt the truth, if they discovered Hajime's lies, the rewrite would fall to pieces. All trust in Hajime would be destroyed, it would only breed further fear and paranoia.

"So it's agreed?" Gundam mused. "We shall explore the new island, and see which demons await us."

Hajime decided to join in on the conversation. If he didn't show some enthusiasm, the others would start growing suspicious. "Yeah, it's not like we've got anything better to do."

"Then it is settled!" Sonia declared, like a true ruler. "We shall travel to the fourth island."

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Hajime was one of the first to leave the restaurant, the smell of burnt toast was a trigger to his stomach. It seemed that Mahiru was on the same page, as she hurried after Hajime the minute he left his table.

With the Monobeast defeated, the path to the fourth island was open and waiting for Hajime and Mahiru. They stood in front of the bridge, the gate looming above their heads.

"You ready?" Hajime asking, staring at the island ahead of him.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Mahiru replied, offering a smile with her response. Sticking out her leg, she placed one foot onto the bridge. "There's no going back now." she turned around and snatched Hajime by the wrist. "Come on, you're the man. Why am I the one risking my life by going first?" her words sounded serious, but the laughter in her voice suggested otherwise.

"Well, there goes my plan to use you as a human shield. I guess Monomi will have to do." Hajime returned the joke. He smiled brightly as Mahiru laughed her way across the bridge.

As the island came into focus, Mahiru reached for her camera. "This is...an amusement park?"

"Looks like it." Hajime murmured. The bright colours of the amusement park hurt his eyes, while the sickly sweet smell of candy floss drifted up his nose. "Why don't we check it out? You can lead the way."

"Alright!" Mahiru had barely taken three steps off of the bridge, when they were approached by a furry nemesis.

"Hold up, hold up. Where'd you think you're going?" Monokuma blocked their path, narrowing his eyes at the duo.

"We're coming to explore the island, like we always do..." Hajime said, confused as to what Monokuma was playing at.

"I don't think so!" Monokuma shook his fist in their direction.
Mahiru whipped out her student handbook, shoving it in Monokuma's face. "I think you'll find, we have every right to be here. Check the rules."

"Take another step without my permission, and these claws are going where the sun doesn't shine." Monokuma snapped, resorting to petty threats. "We're on a tight schedule here, and because you punks spent yesterday attending your own pity parties, we're running behind. So, you're going to follow me."

Hajime had his senses about him, he knew better than to disobey. As much as he hated being bossed around, it was better than coming into contact with Monokuma's razor sharp claws. He had no choice but to bite his tongue, and follow after the bear, as he was escorted across the island. First, they passed the haunted mansion, and then Nezumi Castle. Hajime soon figured out where Monokuma was taking them. Their 'tour' came to an end at Monokuma's roller coaster.

"All this, for a ride?" Mahiru looked around in confusion, unsure as to why she'd been dragged there so urgently.

Before she could be provided with the answers she so desired, Monokuma stormed off in the direction he'd just come from - probably to gather more students.

"You too, huh?" resting against one of the roller coaster carts was Nagito, the only other student to have left the restaurant before Hajime. "I presume you've haven't heard the rules. We can't ride this thing unless all of us consent."

Hajime did know, but he didn't let on. "Oh, that's kinda odd."

"I take it Monokuma dragged you here too." Mahiru said, talking to Nagito.

"Oh, no. I came here by choice." Nagito said. "I've had a chance to explore the entire island. Monokuma found me here alone, and grew irritated that you guys weren't hurrying up."

Mahiru picked Nagito's brain, getting all the information she could out of him. "I've seen a horror house, and there appears to be a castle. Did you find much else?"

Nagito shook his head. "Not really, just a train. I'm not sure where it leads, as it disappears through a tunnel, but Monokuma said it's not ready to ride yet."

Even thinking about the train sent a chill up Hajime's spine. What was he going to do if he couldn't convince enough people to avoid it? What if Monokuma forced him to ride? They were questions only the future held the answer to.

Nagito seemed fairly calm in his composure. He didn't babble on about hope, or glorify the ultimates. Hajime found it rather pleasant talking to him, this was the Nagito he liked most. Along with Mahiru, the three of them passed the time with idle conversation. They spoke of their new surroundings, as well as their speculations for Monokuma's motive. Just like Hajime, Mahiru had a bad feeling about the fourth island.

Monokuma stopped by occasionally, bringing another student to wait by the ride. Some were keener than others, noticeable Souda, who Monokuma had to drag by the ear.

"Get off me, this is assault!!" Souda wailed, being dragged along the floor like a disobedient dog. Monokuma finally freed the mechanic, dropping him just in front of Hajime's feet. Souda cried out in a pain as his mouth smacked the ground, it was a miracle he hadn't lost any teeth.
"Now that everyone's here, we can finally begin!" Monokuma exclaimed, dusting his paws clean. "Rawr! Welcome!" dropping the sulky tone, Monokuma greeted everyone at his ride. “Welcome to the main attraction of this amusement park, the Great Ultra-delicious Coaster!"

"W-wait, you want us to ride this thing?" Souda hurriedly got up from the floor. "Hell no! I get crazy car sick."

"But didn't you hear? We can't ride this roller coaster unless everyone agrees." Nagito said, filling Souda in.

"Can't he make an exception?" Souda complained, he was already clutching his stomach.

"No exceptions!" Monokuma snapped. "And if you want the treats to begin, you better ride this coaster."

"Treats, you say?" Gundam echoed, his interests peaked.

"Ding ding, that's right." Monokuma smiled, his positivity so clearly fake.

“What do we get? Because I ain’t doing this for something shit. It better be those boat parts you mentioned earlier.” Fuyuhiko swore, eyeing up the coaster in front of him.

Monokuma withheld the information. "It's the best kind of prize...a surprise!"

Hajime already knew. The prize was a file, containing information on the killing school life. The information served no risk to Hajime or his plan, so there was nothing to worry about.

“D-do we really have to ride this together?” a look of uneasiness washed over Souda.

“Are you deaf? I’ve told you that already.” Monokuma said, his frustration apparent.

“No! I’m not gonna do it.” Souda protested. "There’s no way in hell I’m riding that death trap!" he backed up several steps, attempting to stay as far away from the ride as possible.

“Jeez!” Mahiru rolled her eyes. “Man up. I expected better from you.”

“Thrill rides are awesomееее!” Ibuki snorted, charging towards the coaster.

“I’m not doing it.” Souda insisted, hiding behind Hajime for safety.

“I believe this in our best interest.” Peko said. "The prize could be those ship parts."

"Are those ship parts worth my life?!" Souda shrieked, getting far more hysterical than he needed to be.

The students ignored Souda's wailing, using their time to organise who was sitting where on the coaster. Thrill seeking Ibuki demanded the front cart right away. Gundam was Ibuki's chosen companion for the ride, but he didn't share her excitement. Hajime climbed into the cart behind them, Sonia by his side.

"Have you ever been on a roller coaster before?" Hajime asked. He knew his question would spark conversation, since he was already aware of the answer.

"I have not." Sonia replied. "But I am most excited."

“You’re going to love it.” Hajime smiled at her.
Taking a quick glance behind, Hajime looked to see what his friends were up to. In the row behind, Chiaki had fallen asleep on Peko's shoulder. Fuyuhiko had scooted over to the very edge of his seat, trying to keep a distance between himself and Nagito. Mahiru was by herself, bringing up the rear. Everyone but Souda had boarded the ride, he was still shaking on the platform.

Hajime waved in his friend's direction, calling from across the cart. “Come on, I promise it'll be over in no time.”

“Hell no.” Souda shook his head violently.

“This is pathetic.” Mahiru climbed off the ride, marching straight towards Souda. She grabbed him by the arm, using all of her strength to drag him onto the roller coaster. Souda tried to fight back, but Mahiru was surprisingly strong. Before Souda knew it, he'd been thrown onto the ride. Mahiru sat down next to him, blocking off his only means of escape. Hajime hoped Monokuma started the ride before Souda did something drastic, like jumping onto the track.

Hajime shot Souda a supportive smile. The boy was clinging so tightly to the handlebar, that his knuckles were white.

“All aboard the Great Ultra-Delicious Coaster!” Monokuma called. Before he'd even finished his sentence, he smacked a button on the control panel, launching the roller coaster at maximum speed. Within seconds, the screams began.

“Thisss isssss theeee besttttt thingggg everrrrr!” Ibuki yelled in delight. Her hair was flying back into Hajime's face, nearly blinding him.

“Getttt meeceee offffff. I’mmmm gonnnnnnnaa diieee!” Souda screamed at the top of his lungs, his hysteria only getting worse.

“You were right Hajime, this is amazing!” Sonia was smiling from ear to ear. Over the noise of the ride, Hajime could barely hear her.

Hajime found himself laughing as the ride whizzed around the track. As much as he was having fun, he felt rather relieved when the ride pulled back in at the station. He wasn't sure how much more his heart could take.

“Alright, we’ve arrived! Wasn’t that fun?” Monokuma greeted the students as he brought the ride to a close.

Souda staggered out of the coaster, throwing himself to the ground in a dramatic fashion. “That was the worst moment of my entire life.”

"That was freaking awesome!" Ibuki yelled, carried away with herself. "When can we go again?"

"I too, would love to ride again." Sonia beamed. "What an amazing experience!"

Gundam steadied himself against the wall, his face green. "That...that is not a good idea."

"Where’s our treat?” Fuyuhiko interrupted, cutting to the chase.

“Oh yeah, here you go. The treat is a file!” Monokuma handed over a file, giving it to Peko at random. Everyone gathered around the swordswoman for a closer look.

Nagito eyed up the front cover, wrinkles appearing across his forehead. “That symbol…it’s the same
symbol that’s on the door of the ancient ruin. This file must be from the Future Foundation. We should look inside.”

Peko pulled back the cover, revealing the file's contents. She flicked through the pages slowly, giving everyone the chance to have a good look. There were photos of the killing school life, as well as informative paragraphs. Peko read everything she came across for the benefit of the group. Thankfully, the information was exactly the same as before, Monokuma didn't have any tricks up his sleeve. There was a summary of the event, as well as information on the six survivors.

Hajime stared at the portraits of Kyoko, Makoto and Byakuya. He knew they were watching him at that very minute, spectating his every move. He wondered what they were thinking. Were they disappointed in him for letting six people die? Or were they proud of him for keeping everyone else alive? He wished he could speak to them, to ask them what to do, how to stop anyone else from losing their life. He was surprised he hadn't heard from them, especially since the murders had started up again. He understood it was difficult for them to get in touch in secret, but even a short email would lift his spirits. Did he have reason to be concerned?

Hajime forced himself to look away, before his face gave something away. He also stayed out of the conversation as everyone speculated about the Future Foundation, the killing school life, and Byakuya’s relationship to it. Thankfully, none of the students came anywhere near the truth.

Once Monokuma had grown bored of listening to them talk, he escorted everyone over to the funhouse train - giving them no choice whether they wanted to follow or not. No one particularly seemed to mind. After the last prize, the students were keen to get more treats. Everyone but Hajime, of course. It was explained to the students, once again, they could only ride if everyone agreed to go.

“Come on, let’s get on the train!” Ibuki yelled, jumping aboard. She claimed the front seat once again.

The important moment had arrived. No matter what the punishment, Hajime couldn't ride the train. If he rode to the funhouse, everything would spin out of control. It wasn't like he could sneak everyone out, or dig an underground tunnel. There would be no going back. “I’m not getting on that thing.” instead of creating an elaborate lie, like claiming he had a train phobia, Hajime decided to be honest. It was the best approach.

“Ugh, not you too.” Mahiru frowned. "I thought Souda was the only wuss around here.”

“This seems like a trap.” Hajime chewed on his bottom lip out of nerves. “We can’t see where this thing goes, and we’re only allowed to ride if everyone agrees. That’s weird, don’t you think?”

"Yeah, but it was the same for the roller coaster. And that was loaddsss of fun." Ibuki objected, eager to get everyone aboard the train.

"Not quite." Hajime remarked. "The roller coaster had an open track, we could see we'd end up right where we started. This is different."

“I’m with Hajime on this one.” Chiaki said, acting as his defence. “Something about this train doesn't feel right.”

"Now that you mention it, the design is rather unsettling." Sonia was fixated on the giant Monokuma head at the front of the train.

Nagito didn't agree. "Come on you guys, we're just making ourselves paranoid. If we want the
student profiles and the boat parts, we need to ride the train.” he seemed rather persistent.

“You really believe Monokuma is going to give us everything we need to build a boat and escape?” Hajime said, thinking back to the tiny model parts he’d been given before. “Monokuma never specified. Knowing him, we'll get pieces from a stupid toy.”

“Huh...I didn't think of that.” Ibuki hesitated, her enthusiasm dying down.

"Since the beginning of this trip, Monokuma hasn't shut up about the rules for leaving this place. He's even said we'll grow old here if we don't kill.” Hajime said, his tone stern. "Why would he suddenly give us a free pass home? This isn't going to be what we think."

“If this is anything like that last ride, then I ain't getting on it.” Souda was still trembling.

“But what about our student profiles?” Nagito asked, he looked disappointed that people were beginning to back out. "They could help us figure out the traitor."

“Do we really need them?” Mahiru hesitated. “I don’t think they’re something worth risking our lives for.”

“So, we’re not riding this train now?” Ibuki said, jumping back to the safety of the ground.

“My gut feeling is telling me we shouldn’t do this.” Hajime said.

"It does kinda scream 'I'm a trap'!” Ibuki exclaimed, deepening her voice for comical effect.

"I sense a dark aura from this contraption.” Gundam remarked, eyeing up the vehicle. "We must protect ourselves and stay away.”

“It’s not my place to doubt you...so, if this is what you think is best…” Nagito sighed deeply. "But I wish you'd reconsider. The answers we've been looking for are just a train ride away."

“Gee, are you guys getting cold feet?” Monokuma pushed his way through the crowd. “Hurry up and get on the train.”

“Nuh uh!” Souda waved his arms in protest.

"We've come to a group decision.” Mahiru said sternly.

“You guys are no fun!” Monokuma pouted. “You won’t get your treat…”

“That doesn’t matter.” Hajime shrugged his shoulders. He felt a confidence growing within him. He’d been worrying himself sick that the others wouldn't listen, but that wasn't the case at all. His friends trusted him, they listened to his advice and took it. Hajime was coming to realise he should have more faith in himself.

“Ah...well...I…” Monokuma tried to argue back, but he couldn't. “Fine, don't ride. But it's your loss!” like a spluttering mess, he stormed off.

"He has given up so soon?” Sonia watched in disbelief. "Being Monokuma, I thought he would continue to pester.”

"Yeah, so did I.” Hajime said. It was kind of strange how quickly Monokuma had stormed off. Had he realised it was impossible to force the students onto his train? Or was there another plan waiting in the wings? Time would only tell.
With Monokuma out of sight, the students had been granted their freedom. Most of them stuck around to explore the fourth island, since they’d been robbed of the opportunity earlier, but Hajime didn’t bother. He knew everything he needed to know about the island, and the bright lights were starting to give him a headache. It had been a tense morning, from riding a roller coaster at maximum speed, to confronting Monokuma. It wasn’t often he liked to pull himself away from the group, but in that moment, a nap in his cottage was all that he wanted.

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*Ding dong big bong*

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make…”

With eyes half shut, and dribble still falling from his mouth, Hajime bolted upright in bed - as if he were waking from a nightmare. He’d been napping ever since he returned to his cottage, dreaming blissfully. If it weren’t for the interruption, he’d have slept for a while longer. Some mornings, he’d sleep through the Monokuma alarm, or fall straight back to sleep after waking. Except, it wasn’t the morning - that announcement had already sounded. And it was far too early for the night time announcement, Hajime had been asleep no longer than two hours.

An alarm in the middle of the day meant one of two things; either Monokuma needed something, or a body had been discovered. Hajime prayed it wasn’t the latter.

The yellow monitor came to life, Monokuma’s face the centre focus. He sipped away at his cocktail, while a message played over the top. “To stimulate your senses, I am providing an afternoon of the fine arts. Let’s embrace the culture of Jabberwock Island! Everyone come to the theatre, immediately.”

In that moment, all Hajime felt was relief. Anything was better than hearing the body discovery announcement. Anything. That being said, Hajime couldn’t help but feel suspicious about Monokuma’s sudden interest in the ‘fine arts’. It sounded like a trap, or some sort of motive. Despite his suspicions, Hajime knew he’d no choice but to go. Whether he wanted to or not, attendance was mandatory when it came to Monokuma.

Straightening up the bedsheets, Hajime said goodbye to his cottage. He had a feeling things wouldn’t be so peaceful when he returned.

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When Hajime arrived at the third island, the theatre was already in chaos. Monokuma was up on the counter, eating straight out of the popcorn machine. Souda watched on in dismay, while Mahiru tried not to retch.

Ibuki scrunched her nose in disgust. “Is he a bear, or a pig?”

“Do you guys have any idea why we’re here?” Hajime asked. Monokuma hadn’t bothered to acknowledge his presence, so he tried talking to his friends instead.
Nagito didn't hold the answers. “We know as much as you do. Monokuma’s been stuffing his face ever since we arrived.”

Souda hunched his shoulders. “Awww man, I wanted some of that popcorn.”

“It is not too late.” Sonia smiled. “Just ask Monokuma to share. There is plenty for everyone.”

“After he’s been rubbing his face in it? Uh…” Souda pulled a face. “Excellent suggestion, Miss Sonia, but...I’m not so hungry anymore.”

Ibuki was fidgeting around on the spot, unable to contain her excitement. “Ibuki wants to know what’s going on! Are we seeing a film?”

“Please, no.” Hajime whispered, suffering a horrible flashback to the Wizard of Monomi.

No sooner had he spoken, the door to his right swung open. Hajime recognised it from his time at the theatre before, it led to the screening room. From behind the door, crept Monomi. There was a new addition to her fur...

“Hey, Monomi.” Chiaki waved. “Is that a badge?”

Attached to Monomi, was a Monokuma shaped badge. The word ‘Monomi’ had been engraved to the pin in clear lettering. Upon closer inspection, Hajime realised the badge was attached through Monomi’s fur. He couldn’t help but shiver, that had to hurt.

“Monokuma is making me wear it.” Monomi lowered her head, her shoulders drooping. “It’s not pretty at all.”

Monokuma stuck his head out of the popcorn machine, coming up for air. “Monomi works here now. Hajime suggested it to me a few days ago. Such a good idea!”

“Oh...my bad.” Hajime suddenly remembered the comment he'd made to Monokuma during his last visit to the theatre. He never expected Monokuma to take him seriously.

“If everyone could follow me to the scweening room.” Monomi said, pushing her weight against the door to keep it open.

“We're going to seeing a film, I take it?” Nagito asked.

“Not exactly.” Monokuma smirked. “Allow Monomi to get you settled, I'll be through in a minute. If my little sister treats you badly, let me know. Customer feedback is very important. I'll get on the phone to HR and give her some more training.” he bared his teeth. It was pretty clear that 'training' was just a code word for 'beating'.

“Eek!” Monomi squealed. She hurriedly escorted the students through the door to escape from her evil older brother.

Once inside the theatre itself, Monomi led the students towards the stage, passing all of the seating. As soon as Hajime laid eyes on the stage, he realised what was going on. The cinema style screen had vanished, hinting that they weren’t going to watch a film after all. Instead, the stage was lined with props. Lockers, benches, it was set out just like a high school.

“What the hell is all this?” Fuyuhiko murmured, taking in his surroundings.

“From the stage, props, and Monokuma’s mention of the fine arts, it’s likely this is some sort of
play.” Peko replied, answering his question. She’d drawn the same conclusion as Hajime.

“A one-man play from Monokuma is the last thing I need.” Souda whined, eyeing up the emergency exit.

“You're wrong, but I’m still insulted.” Monokuma snapped, overhearing Souda's comment upon his arrival. The bear was already standing on the stage, appearing through a side door. He turned up his nose at the students, enjoying the power the additional height of the stage provided him. “Since none of you punks accepted my offer to the funhouse, I need something else to entertain me. Sooo, I decided to write a play, and have you perform it.” in his paws, he held a stack of scripts.

“You wrote a play in that amount of time?” Mahiru narrowed her eyes. "It's been two hours!"

“I work fast.” Monokuma shrugged, attempting to maintain his innocence.

Gundam crossed his arms, suspicious like Mahiru. “Is this a motive?”

Monokuma snickered. “And why would you think that?”

“This is bad. This is bad.” Souda mumbled, pacing around on the spot.

“Unfortunately, I couldn’t have my dream cast, since some of you went and died.” Monokuma sighed, it was such an inconvenience. “So, I’ve had to make some last-minute casting decisions.”

Hajime had no idea what Monokuma was talking about. The bear was waffling nonsense, as per usual.

Monokuma moved towards the edge of the stage, so he was in reaching distance of the students. He handed out his scripts, announcing parts as he did so. “Hajime, you’re Girl A.”

Hajime took his script from Monokuma, it was fairly lengthy. ‘Girl A…’ it sounded so familiar, yet Hajime couldn’t remember where he’d heard it before. He listened out to see who else had been cast.

“Nagito…” Monokuma called, passing out another script. “You’re Girl B.”

Nagito looked at the script with an intrigued smile. "Interesting..."

Monokuma continued. “Ibuki Girl C, Mahiru Girl D, Chiaki Girl E, Sonia the little sister, Fuyuhiko guy F, and I’m the narrator.”

Girls A-E...little sister...Guy F...

...like a ton of bricks, the truth came crashing down on Hajime. He had heard those names before, and now he remembered why. They were the names of the characters in Twilight Syndrome Murder Case, something Hajime thought he'd seen the last of. When he smashed the arcade machine to pieces, he thought it was the end.

It wasn't any old play, it held close connections to his classmates. It was the story of Fuyuhiko's sister's murder, and how Fuyuhiko himself took a life when he discovered the truth. The murderer was not with them on the island. She was a girl named Sato, who'd been killed by Fuyuhiko as an act of revenge. Mahiru, however, had discovered Sato's crime and offered to keep it a secret.

“What about those of us who don’t have a part?” Monomi asked, speaking up for her students.

“ Shut up, Monomi. Do you really think I’d cast you in my masterpiece?” Monokuma spat. “You
work here now, so it’s your job to clean the toilets. Any students who haven’t been given a role, are
now the audience. If you’ve got a problem with that, you can have a part as my personal punching
bag.”

Peko, Gundam, and Souda were the only ones who weren’t taking part. None of them complained,
they all seemed pretty relieved not to be involved. They sat down in the front row of the theatre,
waiting for the production to begin.

“This is bullshit.” Fuyuhiko scoffed. “I’m not taking part in your poncey play.”

“This isn’t optional.” Monokuma glared daggers at him. “Defy me, and I’ll go fetch my
Monobeasts.”

Fuyuhiko opened his mouth to respond, but quickly closed it again, he knew better than to backchat.

“Actors, backstage!” Monokuma called. He pointed to a small staircase at the front of the stage.
Hajime knew he had no choice but to walk up them, whether he liked it or not, the play was going to
happen.

Monokuma drew shut the curtain at the front of the stage, granting privacy to the actors, and
preventing the ‘audience’ from seeing any of the backstage magic. From there, Monokuma led the
actors to the wings, where they could rest at the side of the stage. The majority of space was taken up
by props, but there was still enough room for the students to comfortably move about.

“Isn’t this exciting? I can’t believe I got cast, seeing as how worthless I am!” Nagito smiled, opening
his script. He looked over the lines Monokuma had highlighted for him. “Oh, it seems my character
is a little feisty.”

If the characters names remained the same as the arcade machine, Nagito was playing Hiyoko.
Meaning, Hajime had the role of Mikan. Hajime reluctantly opened his script, unlike Ibuki, who was
already going over her lines.

Suddenly, Hajime heard a voice. Monokuma was at the front of the stage, standing in front of the
curtain so he could talk to the audience. Hajime peered his head from the wings to watch
Monokuma.

“Ladies, gentlemen, and Monomi. Welcome to ‘Twilight Syndrome Murder Case: The Stage’. This is
a one-time performance, which I’m sure, will go down in history. Before we start, a few ground
rules. All mobile phones must be switched off during the performance -”

Hajime rolled his eyes, none of them had access to mobile phones. Monokuma was waffling for the
sake of it. Hajime tuned out the rest of Monokuma’s speech, which seemed to drag on forever. He
only paid attention again when he heard it coming to a close.

“And don’t forget, merchandise and programs are available to purchase after the performance. Now
relax, kick back, kick Monomi, and enjoy the show.” Monokuma left the stage, marching into the
wings. He hissed at the actors. “Get ready.”

“We’re starting already?” Hajime hissed back, he hadn’t any time to read over his script.

Ignoring him completely, Monokuma opened the curtains - revealing the stage to the audience.
Acting as narrator, he picked up a microphone and spoke from the wings. “We open with a specific
murder case. A tragic killing that occurred within the grounds of a successful academy. The police
ruled that the incident was the work of a pervert who snuck into the school grounds. However, there
was a secret behind that incident. Even before the janitor first discovered that body, there were students who witnessed the crime itself. The students were five high school girls. They didn’t want to get involved with the incident, so they tried to hide the fact that they were the first to discover it. However, tragedy befell those girls. Several days after the incident, Girl E, is murdered by someone. What in the world happened at this once peaceful academy? Let’s start where it all began…”

Everyone else seemed to be following their scripts, so Nagito, Ibuki, and Mahiru headed for the stage. It took a few seconds of silence for Hajime to realise he was up too. Trying to read his lines and walk at the same time, he clumsily made his way to the stage.

Hajime read his first line. “I-I’m sorry…! I’m really sorry for keeping you all waiting,” he tried to add some expression to his voice, but he only found himself cringing. He could not do Mikan justice.

“Jeez, we’re gonna go home late because we had to wait for a slowpoke like Girl A.” Nagito was up next. He’d gotten into character surprisingly well, Hajime found him slightly intimidating.

“Come on Girl B, you don’t have to be mad.” Mahiru said. She was playing herself, though she didn’t know it, so she didn’t have to put much effort into her performance. Reading the stage directions, Mahiru took the camera from around her neck and snapped a picture of her friends.

“Don’t take my photo without permission!” Nagito snapped, reacting in character. He was putting everything into his performance. “People might mistake us for friends!”

It was Hajime’s turn again. This time, he spoke without putting any expression into his voice. He didn’t want to embarrass himself any further. “We aren’t friends?” the line sound flat, and kind of funny.

“What?” Nagito made the most of his space, moving around the stage. “I’d never be friends with nasty, trashy pig shit like you.”

Hajime started snickering, it amused him hearing Nagito speak like that.

“Woooah, that was harsh Girl B!” Ibuki gasped, reading her line with a little too much enthusiasm.

Hajime was still laughing as he read on. “W-where’s Girl E?”

“She said that she’d forgotten something!” Ibuki yelled, causing everyone, on and off stage, to wince. “She’ll catch up with us later.”

“She’s lost her school swimsuit.” Mahiru said.

“Girl E can be so careless!” Nagito remarked. “It was probably stolen.”

“Stolen?” Hajime said. He spoke from behind his script, using the paper to shield his face.

“You don’t know?” Nagito said. “A pervert has been spotted in the area recently. You should be careful, Girl A. A chubby weakling like yourself makes the perfect pray.” he tried his best to keep in character, but it was clear Nagito wanted to comment.

“Stop it, you’re scaring Girl A.” Mahiru snapped, the line seemed extremely out of place since Hajime was smirking.

“Hahaha!” Nagito laughed. “It’s fun to bully Girl A.”

There was a loud crash from backstage, causing all of the actors to jump. They had no idea what the
noise was, but it was written in the script.

“What was that noiseee?” Ibuki screamed, taking her character way too far.

“I think it came from the second floor.” Hajime recited, his voice flat. “It sounded like glass breaking.”

“Then let’s go!” Nagito said.

The script instructed the actors to exit to the wings, so that’s exactly what they did. As they ran off, the lights went out, leaving the stage in darkness. At first, Hajime presumed it was a technical difficulty, but he quickly realised it was Monokuma’s way of granting a set change.

Hajime waited about in the wings while Monokuma moved props around on stage.

“Ooh, this is my cue!” Sonia whispered excitedly, keeping quiet so the audience wouldn’t hear her. Leaving her script behind, she hurried on stage, fumbling her way through the darkness.

Looking at his script, Hajime realised the next set of lines were meant to be said off stage. Upon his return to the wings, Monokuma thrust a microphone at Mahiru, everyone gathered around her so they could speak into it too.

Ibuki started, by puffing into the microphone. “Phewwww! Those stairs were exhausting.” though she sounded anything but exhausted.

“Girl E!” Mahiru exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“I...don’t know.” Chiaki said, yawning her very first line. “I was walking past the music venue, when I heard the sound of smashed glass.”

“Could someone be inside?” Hajime said, finding himself wedged between Nagito and Ibuki just to speak into the microphone.

“I think so…” Chiaki said, delivering her lines a lot slower than the others. “But...the door is locked.”

“I’ll get the key from the teacher’s lounge.” Mahiru said. “Wait here.”

A few seconds passed, and then the lights went back up. The stage had been transformed into a music room. The lockers had been replaced with real guitars, as well as a broken fish tank. A broken window frame had been added to the scenery, acting as the killer's fake escape route. Sonia was lying on the floor, perfectly still, playing dead.

Monokuma snatched the microphone from Mahiru, shoving her in the back to push her on stage. The other actors quickly followed, not wanting to fall victim to Monokuma’s violence too.

“Oh no!” Hajime said, pointing at Sonia. “Why is she sleeping like that?”

“She isn’t sleeping you idiot!” Nagito spat. “She’s dead.”

“Dead?” Hajime read. It sounded comical in his tone.

Mahiru squatted next to Sonia to feel her pulse. “She’s...she's really dead.”

Hajime glanced into the audience. He noticed the way Souda was staring at Sonia, it made him
uncomfortable.

“That’s...impossible.” Chiaki read, her delivery still slow.

Hajime read his script, it said he had to let out an ear piercing scream. Since he didn’t feel like straining his vocal cords, Hajime let out the smallest noise he possibly could. “Ah!”

“Shhh lower your voice!” Ibuki said, making no sense after Hajime’s pathetic excuse of a scream. “What if the killer’s still nearby?”

“The killer smashed the window over there and escaped, probably taking the murder weapon with them.” Nagito said.

“You really think the killer left through the window?” Mahiru said.

“They have to have done, it’s why we heard smashing glass.” Nagito said. “They must have left in a hurry, so that’s why the fish tank is all over the place.”

“I suppose...it’s possible for them to jump, we’re only on the second floor.” Chiaki said.

“The only other way out of the building is the entrance hall, so we would have seen them if they tried to leave.” Hajime said.

“It’s probably that pervert.” Chiaki read. “The one who stole my school swimsuit. I hear he’s been sneaking around the school grounds.”

“Then we have to call the cops.” Hajime recited, neglecting every stage direction telling him to stutter.

“Are you stupid? The cops always suspect the people who found the body as the murderer. We can’t tell anyone about this.” Nagito said, his performance still the most genuine out of everyone.

“But...but we shouldn’t stay here much longer. The pervert might come back for my swimsuit.” Hajime said, he heard Souda sniggering from the crowd.

“We should get out of here, or we’ll look suspicious.” Chiaki said.

“Come on, let’s run!” Ibuki charged towards the wings.

Nagito and Mahiru jogged after her, while Chiaki and Hajime stayed at their normal pace. As they reached the wings, the lights went down again - giving Sonia the chance to run off stage.

“Is this not the most exciting thing you have ever done?!?” Sonia clapped her hands together in joy, even though she hadn’t done anything but lie there.

As more props were moved around on stage, Hajime took the opportunity to glance over his script. The others actors were doing the same. Though the main lights were turned off, there was a dim lamp backstage, making it easy enough for him to see.

It took him by surprise to see the next scene went straight on to day three, apparently day two wasn’t important enough to cover. From what Hajime remembered, day two mainly discussed the incident of the murder. Since they were watching the play in order, unlike the arcade game, it made sense.

Hajime was pleased to see he didn’t have any more lines, he was tired of acting. He watched from the wings as Chiaki and Mahiru took to the stage. Neither of them looked like they wanted to
particularly be there.

Chiaki read first. “You asked me to meet you here. What’s the matter?”

“It’s about the incident.” Mahiru replied. “I know the sound we heard from the entrance hall wasn’t the window breaking.”

Chiaki shook her head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about…”

“Before I went home that day, I looked around the classrooms next door and took some photos. Here…” Mahiru mimed pulling a photo from her pocket. “I found a broken flower vase in the classroom next door.”

Chiaki let the mime die, as she didn’t pretend to take the picture. “I don’t know anything about that.”

“This means the killer didn’t escape from the window, and since we were in the entrance hall they couldn’t have passed us.” Mahiru said. “But don’t worry, I cleaned up the vase. You’d be in trouble if someone found that, right Girl E?”

“Are you blackmailing me?” Chiaki said.

“Of course not.” Mahiru reassured her. “We’re friends, I wouldn’t do that to you.”

“That girl who got killed…she was tormenting you. She was seriously bullying you back in your photography club in middle school.” Chiaki fidgeted with her hoodie, her mind elsewhere. “It wasn’t fair that that bitch could do whatever she pleased because of her family’s influence.”

Hajime found it strange hearing Chiaki swear so casually.

“You...you killed her for me?” Mahiru said, the emotion in her voice almost sounded real.

“I only wanted to talk, but somehow, I ended up choking her. When she passed out, I knew I’d be in trouble if I didn’t end things.” Chiaki said.

“That’s…” Mahiru paused.

“It’s not my fault, or yours.” Chiaki said. “It’s all her fault!” following the stage directions, Chiaki ran off stage.

“Girl E, wait!” Mahiru called, running after her.

Another scene down, the stage returned to darkness. Hajime spotted Fuyuhiko waiting in the wings, while the props were being moved around the stage. ”You’re on stage now.” Hajime reminded him.

“Don’t tell me what to do.” Fuyuhiko snapped, reluctantly leaving the wings all the same. A metal bat waited on stage, it was the final scene.

“This is fucking stupid.” Fuyuhiko swore. He stood at the front of the stage, embarrassed being there by himself. He said his lines as quickly as possible to get them over with. “That fucking bitch, it was her wasn’t it? She killed my sister! She’s gonna fucking pay for it.”

Hajime looked at Fuyuhiko’s lines in the script, he’d added in a lot of the swearing.

Chiaki headed back on stage for the final scene. “Guy F…”
“You killed my sister, didn’t you? Bitch!” Fuyuhiko snapped.

“No I-” Chiaki protested.

“You’re going to fucking pay for what you’ve done.” Fuyuhiko picked up the metal bat, and pretended to hit Chiaki around the head. Chiaki fell to the floor - trying her best to hold down her skirt. Fuyuhiko threw the bat to the floor, storming off stage. The play was over.

The audience clapped awkwardly, it was clear they hadn’t enjoyed the performance, the entire thing was a mess.

Hajime left the wings, reuniting with his friends in the audience. The play had been slightly different to Twilight Syndrome Murder Case the game, Monokuma had cut out days two and four for starters. However, the main storyline was still simple enough to follow.

Souda scratched his head. “I’m really confused.”

Peko spoke up. “The story was obvious. Girl E killed Sonia’s character because she’d been bullying Girl D. Guy F was the brother of Sonia’s character and found out about the murder, he then killed Girl E as revenge.”

“You actually understood it?” Souda looked at her in surprise. “But...that does make more sense now that you’ve said it.”

Sonia joined them in the crowd, she had a giant smile on her face. “That was so much fun!”

“But you didn’t have any lines...” Hajime pointed out.

“Shut up, Miss Sonia gave the best performance out of all of you!” Souda snapped.

“I’m glad you enjoyed the performance.” Monokuma said. “May I interest you in some merchandise? It’s all in the lobby.”

As Monokuma had promised, the lobby desk was covered in merchandise. Ranging from programs, to t-shirts which read ‘I killed Girl E’.

“I would rather burn in the fires of hell than buy one of those.” Gundam scoffed.

Nagito approached the table and picked up a program. “Huh, it says here that this play was based off real events.” Nagito read, he quoted the program word for word. “Since the play was inspired by the real crime of Hope’s Peak Academy, all credit must go to Tsumiki, Koizumi, Hiyoko, Mioda, Sato, Kuzuryu and Kuzuryu...” Nagito looked at Hajime. “Why is Kuzuryu written in here twice?”

“Are you fucking talking about me?” Fuyuhiko barked, overhearing his name.

Nagito handed him the program. “Look, you’re mentioned in here.”

“HEY!” Monokuma yelled. “You can’t go reading those unless you buy one.”

“With what money?” Nagito raised his eyebrows.

“You can pay me if you get off this island.” Monokuma replied.

Nagito shrugged his shoulders. “Fine.”
Hajime picked up a program for himself. It was pretty thick, so he wanted to see what else was in there, besides the cast list. There were pictures of all the actors, with a little paragraph about them underneath. Hajime panicked and read it as quickly as possible, paranoid Monokuma might write something about the reserve course.

‘Hajime Hinata shows off his brilliant acting skills in this performance. The usually confident boy, takes on the role of the timid Girl A. In his spare time, Hinata enjoys being sceptical about everything, and ruining everyone’s fun by refusing to go to the fun house.’

“Hey!” Hajime whined. “What the hell is this?” he felt insulted, but he was extremely relieved that Monokuma had mentioned nothing about his lack of ultimate talent.

“I had to write something about you.” Monokuma replied. “Although I do regret calling your performance brilliant, because it was awful. I’ve had more fun at a funeral.”

Hajime ignored him and continued searching through the program. Once he'd passed five whole pages about Monokuma, he found more pictures...the pictures from the ending prize. The picture of a dead girl in the music room, the photo of the girls Mahiru had taken, a girl with her head dented in by a baseball bat, and the smashed vase.

Hajime stared over at Fuyuhiko, he was staring at the photos in his own program - his gaze fixated on the girl in the music room. The blood had drained from Fuyuhiko’s face, he obviously recognised the dead girl as his sister, all the pieces of the puzzle were fitting together for him.

“Before everyone leaves, I have one more announcement to make.” Monokuma called for everyone's attention. "I'm going to reveal the next motive."

Hajime was confused, surely the play was the motive. Monokuma couldn’t keep throwing things at them.

“Since Hajime wouldn’t let anyone else ride to the funhouse, I’ve had to provide a new motive.” Monokuma explained.

“Wait, if the funhouse was the motive, that means it was a trap.” Nagito said.

“Ugh, dammit.” Monokuma realised he’d been caught out. “Okay fine, it was a trap.”

“What the hell!” Souda cried.

“I knew it was a trap, I could detect the dark spirits from miles away.” Gundam said.

“Oh really? Because you didn’t say anything!” Souda glared daggers at him.

“Thank you, Hajime, I’m glad we listened to you.” Sonia said.

“I was talking!” Monokuma snapped. “Like I was saying, it’s time for your motive.”

Hajime wasn't just going to stand by and let Monokuma throw endless motives at him, it wasn't fair. "No, you can't do this. You've already given us the motive with your stupid play."

Monokuma chuckled. "The play isn't the motive. Like I already told, I wanted to appreciate the fine arts. I feel like trying something a little different. It's the carrot on the stick method. Instead of taking your cottages from you, or giving you life-threatening diseases, I’m offering something you might be interested in.”
Hajime watched Fuyuhiko, expecting him to have told Monokuma to hurry up by now. The boy stood there in silence, looking like he was going to collapse.

“If the blackened is successful, and gets away with a killing, they will be allowed to pick another student to graduate with them. The best part? That person doesn’t even have to be an accomplice.” Monokuma laughed. “I guess you could say, it's 'buy one get one free'. Plan your murder well enough, and two of you might get to leave this island together.”

It was a fix. The entire thing was a fix. It was Monokuma's way of punishing Hajime for convincing everyone to avoid the funhouse. Twilight Syndrome Murder Case, the promise of two students graduating...it was aimed at one person in particular...Fuyuhiko. Monokuma was trying to take down another survivor.
Chapter Four - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Hajime tries to deal with the aftermath of Monokuma's brutal motive.

Chapter Notes

A quick shout out before the chapter begins. I wanna say a big thank you to Fantaman who introduced me to the King's Game, a game Hajime & co play later on in this chapter. I had a lot of fun writing it!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Monokuma was bored with the students once he’d delivered his incredibly bias motive. He dismissed everyone from the theatre, allowing them to do as they pleased for the afternoon. Monomi was the one forced to stay behind and clean up after the production, mopping toilets was next on the list.

As expected, the motives had affected some more than others. Peko, Fuyuhiko, and Mahiru had disappeared the minute they were granted their freedom. For the others, like Gundam and Ibuki, things weren’t so intense. Though the motives would be playing in the back of their minds, they could still enjoy an afternoon of sunbathing and tropical fun.

Hajime was doing everything he could to try and stay calm, but it was proving difficult. Fuyuhiko was a wild card, there was no knowing what he’d do. With knowledge of his sister’s death, and the new motive of an additional graduate, it was impossible for him to have anything else on the brain but murder. Hajime had to do something before it was too late.

Chiaki sensed Hajime’s nerves and tried her best to help. She suggested they ‘hang out’ in her cottage as soon as they were given permission to leave. It was clear from her tone that they weren’t going to spend the afternoon playing games like the day previous.

Hajime paced around her cottage, hands ruffling through his hair. “We need to think of something, and fast. There’s no way Fuyuhiko will just let this pass. He’s going to kill Mahiru, or at least attempt to.”

“We...we don’t know that.” Chiaki tried to reason, in an attempt to stay calm.

“Ugh, you’re right.” Hajime winced. “If he doesn’t, then it might be Peko that steps in. She did it before, and she’ll do it again. I was watching Fuyuhiko, his behaviour totally changed when he read the program. Without a doubt, he figured out the meaning behind the play. He knows, thanks to Mahiru, his sister’s dead. He can get his revenge, and leave the island with Peko. He’s getting his cake and eating it.”

“Fuyuhiko would get revenge for his sister’s death.” Chiaki agreed. “But everyone else would die too. Could he live with himself?”
“Fuyuhiko and Peko are loyal to no one but themselves. If we all died, I doubt he’d so much as flinch.” Hajime ranted. “It’s just so...frustrating. Because the Fuyuhiko I know, the Fuyuhiko who survived the first game, he wouldn’t want any of this. But this Fuyuhiko, he’s a stranger.”

Hajime knew he’d pay the price of Fuyuhiko’s friendship by keeping Peko alive. At the time, it seemed manageable, but now, he wasn’t so sure. Of course, he was glad he’d saved Peko’s life. He was just struggling with Fuyuhiko’s behaviour. There were moments where he’d noticed Fuyuhiko softening, but he was nowhere near the Fuyuhiko Hajime had once called his friend.

“This is going to be tough, but we can’t give up.” Chiaki was determined to stay strong for the both of them.

“Maybe we could constantly guard them. I’ll keep an eye on Fuyuhiko, while you watch Peko.” Hajime shook his head only seconds after making his suggestion. “What am I saying? That would never work, it’s just creepy,” he couldn’t exactly insist on following Fuyuhiko if we wanted to go to the toilet, or needed a shower.

Chiaki was too busy yawning to respond, Hajime took the opportunity to continue talking. “No one else here knows the connection between Peko and Fuyuhiko, but if we tell anyone, it risks blowing our cover. It’s not like we can even warn the others.”

“Maybe you could try and talk to Fuyuhiko.” Chiaki said, offering her advice. “Even if you can’t mention Peko, you can still talk about Twilight Syndrome Murder Case. You might be able to calm him down and rationalise his thinking.”

“I think for now, that’s the only option we have.” Hajime nodded in agreement. The Fuyuhiko Hajime knew had to be in there somewhere, if only he could find him.

Hajime left Chiaki’s cottage with his heart racing, he wasn’t even sure that Fuyuhiko would let him in. Taking a deep breath, he knocked on the door, thinking about what he was going to say.

“Buzz off!” within seconds, Hajime received abuse. He hadn’t expected anything less. Still, he refused to give up. He knocked on the door again.

“Are you deaf?” Fuyuhiko yelled, his voice so loud, it was as if he were standing next to Hajime. “I said fuck off.”

Hajime was aware he’d probably get punched if he didn’t stop soon, but he had to speak to Fuyuhiko before it was too late. “I just want to talk.”

“The feeling ain’t mutual.” Fuyuhiko hissed, smashing his fist against the door from the inside.

“Just give me five minutes, and then I promise to leave you alone.” Hajime tried his best to reason.

Silence fell from behind the door, followed by the sound of footsteps, and then the door unlocking. Fuyuhiko opened his door by a few inches, just enough to see Hajime's face. “What do you want?”

“I need to speak to you.” Hajime replied.

“Five minutes, that’s all you’re getting.” Fuyuhiko widened his grasp on the door, allowing Hajime to enter his cottage. “Get to it.”

Hajime stepped inside, staying close to the door in case he needed to make an emergency exit. “I...I know that you know.”
“What are you speaking so damn cryptic for?” Fuyuhiko narrowed his eyes. “Stop wasting my time. If you’ve got something to say, spit it out.”

Without holding back, Hajime decided to go for it. “I know Monokuma’s play was about you and your sister. And I know that you know it too.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Fuyuhiko turned his back on Hajime, attempting to brush him aside. “You’re speaking bullshit.”

“Yes you do, otherwise, you wouldn’t be reacting like this.” Hajime persisted. “I saw the look on your face the minute you saw the pictures in the program.”

Realising he’d been caught out, Fuyuhiko didn’t pursue the lie. “Yeah, well. So what if it’s about my sister? That’s none of your damn business.”

“If that girl was your little sister, and you’re Guy F, it means you’re the one who killed Girl E.” Hajime said. “That’s pretty damn important, Fuyuhiko.”

“Oh, you’re scared?” Fuyuhiko suddenly smirked. “Yeah, maybe I did kill that bitch. You better watch what you’re saying, or I’ll do the same to you.”

“It’s not me I’m worried about, it’s-” he decided not to finish his sentence, just in case he put anymore ideas in Fuyuhiko’s head. It was already clear what he was implying. “I know you’re upset about your sister, but you can’t fall victim to Monokuma’s offer.”

“I’ll do whatever the fuck I want to.” Fuyuhiko glared at him.

Hajime made one last plea. “I know you want revenge, and I know you’re hurting. But taking someone else’s life won’t help anyone. It won’t bring your sister back, that’s for sure. Enough people have died already, please don’t make the death count any higher. Revenge might feel good at first, but soon enough, you’ll feel nothing but guilt. No one else has to die.”

“You don’t know anything!” Fuyuhiko yelled, it was clear Hajime had struck a nerve. “You don’t know anything about me or my family. So keep yourself out of my business, you bastard! Who the fuck do you think you are?”

“I was just saying-” Hajime tried to speak.

“You’ve said enough, and your five minutes are up.” Fuyuhiko hissed. “Get the hell out of here before I make you.”

Hajime knew he had no choice but to go. Fuyuhiko was obviously very upset, and it would take more than a simple speech to change his mind. Hajime felt disappointed in himself, but at least he’d tried. It would’ve been a miracle if his chat with Fuyuhiko solved everything. Deep down, Hajime already knew he was setting himself up for disappointment. He’d have to think of something else before it was too late.

The restaurant was quiet at dinner time, with neither Fuyuhiko or Mahiru showing their faces. Fuyuhiko was likely hiding because of rage, and Mahiru because of fear.

Tension was the night’s dinner, with a side serving of angst, and depression for flavouring. The happiness Hajime had fought so hard to bring back, was nothing more than a distant memory. No one wanted to talk, it was a matter of ‘scoff your food and go’.

Hajime didn’t like being bitter, but he couldn’t help it. Throwing the feast and setting off the lanterns
had been exactly what the students needed to put them on the right path again. Then Monokuma came along, performed his stupid play, and ruined everything. Hajime knew it was going to take a lot more than some milkshakes to solve the problem this time.

Regarding the other students, Hajime wasn’t sure how many of them had figured out the true meaning behind Twilight Syndrome Murder Case. If anyone had, they weren’t letting on. Perhaps the students were worried about getting their noses involved, especially with Fuyuhiko being in such a bad way.

Joining Hajime for dinner that night were Nagito and Souda. Both of them sat across the table, Nagito seemed fairly calm, while Souda barely said anything.

“Hey, Souda…” Hajime said, finishing his mouthful to talk. “Are you feeling alright?”

“H-huh?” Souda broke free from his daydream, staring at Hajime with a blank expression.

“You seem kinda outta things tonight.” Hajime said. He’d been watching the mechanic’s behaviour ever since he sat down for dinner.

“You haven’t eaten much of your food either.” Nagito remarked, motioning to his plate full of food.

“Oh…yeah, I’m not very hungry.” Souda muttered, uncomfortable that Nagito had noticed.

“If you’re feeling unwell, I can go to the pharmacy to try and find you something to help.” Nagito offered. “I’m no Mikan, but I will do everything I can to help an ultimate.”

“I’m not ill.” Souda protested, shaking his head. “It’s just...been a long day. It’s nothing.”

Hajime narrowed his eyes at Souda, something was wrong, it was obvious. Was it to do with his returning memories? Had Twilight Syndrome Murder Case brought something back? Hajime wanted to ask, but he couldn’t do so with Nagito nearby. He wasn’t even sure if it was a good idea to talk to Souda in the first place.

“You should take a nap.” Nagito suggested.

“Yes, I think I will.” Souda said, standing up from the table. “I’ll see you guys later.” without saying another word, he left for his cottage.

“Something’s wrong with him.” Nagito said, waiting until Souda was out of earshot.

“I know, it’s unlike him to leave his food, even if he’s tired.” Hajime replied. Unless it was the ride on the rollercoaster that had dampened Souda’s spirits.

“That’s not what I meant.” Nagito said. “Didn’t you watch him just now? He left the restaurant without so much as speaking to Sonia. He didn’t even say goodbye.”

“Oh, you’re right.” Hajime said. Souda had walked straight by the Princess, not even giving her a second glance. To a neglect a chance to speak with Sonia, something had to be wrong.

“Let’s see how he behaves tomorrow.” Nagito suggested. “If he still seems weird, maybe we could talk to him.”

Hajime doubted Souda would ever spill his feelings to Nagito, but he might trust Hajime enough to tell him the truth. Hajime knew he had to keep an eye on Souda over the next few days - it was vital.
True to his word, Hajime kept an eye on Souda. At breakfast the next morning, Hajime made sure he sat close by, allowing himself to see Souda's every move. The mechanic seemed to be in better spirits, he even greeted Sonia by presenting her with fresh pancakes. That being said, something still felt off. More now than ever, Hajime was certain Souda remembered something else. The question was, what?

The last thing Hajime wanted was to trigger more of Souda’s memories by discussing the subject. However, if he wasn’t careful, and avoided it altogether, Souda could remember everything on his own, and not have Hajime there to guide him through the difficulties.

That’s why Hajime made the decision to track Souda down after breakfast. He waited until the food had been cleared away, and everyone had quietened down. According to Sonia, Souda had gone to Jabberwock Park, which is exactly where Hajime found him.

The mechanic was resting on the grass, tinkering with an alarm clock he’d taken from the market - pulling it apart just to put it together again. He seemed fairly taken with his work, though it was a mundane task compared to the cars he was so used to fixing.

“Hey there.” Hajime waved at Souda from a distance, walking through the trees. “Sonia told me you were here, I hope you don’t mind me joining you.”

“Miss Sonia did?” Souda’s face lit up like a child on Christmas morning. “Is she coming too?”

“I...don’t think so.” Hajime said, doing his best to soften the blow. “I wouldn’t raise your hopes, that’s all I’m saying. But actually, I’m glad I got you alone.”

“Y-you are?” with a look of terror on his face, Souda slowly edged away from Hajime. “Look, you’re a very good friend. But...but...I don’t think we’d work as a couple. You’re-”

Hajime hastily interrupted. “I’m not here to ask you out, what do you think this is?! I wanted to ask you about those...'visions' you were having. Thought it’d be best to do it in private.”

“Oh...yeah, I knew that. I was just messing around.” Souda tried to play it cool, but his flushed cheeks clearly exposed his lie. “I’m kinda glad you’ve asked, I’ve been having more.”

“What have you seen?” Hajime asked, perching on the grass.

“A few things...” Souda admitted. “Like when Monokuma admitted his train was a trap, I had visions of arriving at some brightly coloured funhouse. Mahiru, Peko, and Ibuki were missing, but Nekomaru and Akane were there. And Nekomaru was a robot...” he laughed sheepishly. “It sounds ridiculous, I know.”

From the way Souda was describing his memories, it seemed that they weren’t coming back to him in any order. He had memories of the funhouse, but no recollection of the class trials. It seemed that some memories were easier to trigger than others.

“There’s something else I feel like I remember,” Souda said, before hesitating. “But it’s kinda dark...”
“What is it?” Hajime asked.

“Just remember this is something I feel like has happened. I’m not wishing it to happen or anything, so don’t get the wrong idea.” Souda looked at Hajime sternly, showing he was completely serious. “I had this vision that Mahiru had been murdered. We found her at the beach house, her head had been caved in with a metal bat.”


“I figure it’s something to do with that play Monokuma put on. One of the characters was killed with a bat, although it wasn’t Mahiru’s. I guess that’s stuck in my mind somehow.” Souda shrugged his shoulders, it seemed he hadn’t any further suspicions about the matter.

“Yeah, that’s gotta be it.” Hajime agreed, steering Souda away from the truth. “Is that all you remember?”

“Pretty much.” Souda nodded. “There was so much blood, even thinking about it makes me feel sick.” he covered his mouth with his greasy hands. “I didn’t know I was capable of thinking up shit like that!”

“The island can do weird things to you.” Hajime said. “We have been through a lot.”

“I hope it stops.” Souda shuddered. “I’ve been repairing stuff just to keep my mind off it.” he pointed to his clock.

“I’ll let you get back to fixing that thing then.” Hajime said, standing up from the grass. He had all the information he needed.

“Yeah, thanks.” Souda nodded, reaching for his screwdriver. “Uh, Hajime…” before Hajime completely vanished through the clearing, Souda called his name.

“Yeah?” Hajime gave Souda once last glance.

“Thanks…for asking about this.” Souda said, offering half a smile. “It’s cool that I’ve got someone to talk to. I feel like the others would probably just judge me. But uh, this doesn’t mean I want you to ask me out or anything, ‘kay?”

“You’re leaving me heartbroken, Souda.” Hajime’s sarcasm rang throughout the clearing, his laughter following.

“Maybe we could have dinner tonight at the diner?” Souda suggested suddenly. “Like, it’s not a d-date or anything. I’m getting bored of the restaurant food, and I could kill for a burger.” realising his poor choice of words, he began to stutter. “I-I mean, I’m not gonna murder anyone. I-I-”

“Relax, it was a figure of speech.” Hajime grinned, it was somewhat entertaining to watch. “But sure, that sounds fun.”

“Great!” Souda smiled enthusiastically. “Actually, there’s something I wanted to talk to you about. But it’s kinda a long story, so it can wait until later.”

“Are you sure?” Hajime said. "I've got some time now."

“I’m sure.” Souda clarified. “I’ll knock for you at six thirty, ‘kay? We can talk about it then.”

“Okay.” Hajime agreed. “I’ll see you later then.”
He walked off without giving the Mechanic a second glance, not quite understanding the seriousness of what Souda wanted to say. If only he'd stuck around and gotten the truth from the Souda, his future self might have thanked him for it.

With the whole day ahead of him, Hajime planned on making the most of his time to do some good. He knew his talk with Fuyuhiko had been an incredible fail, but that didn’t mean he was going to give up. Just because Fuyuhiko wasn’t willing to co-operate, it didn’t mean things were over. There was someone else he could speak to, someone who was far more likely to listen, after all, it was in their best interest to. That person was Mahiru.

It was later in the day, nearing noon, when Hajime took the time to sit with the photographer. Unlike Fuyuhiko, she’d been rather welcoming when it came to letting Hajime in her cottage. Hajime had a feeling she didn’t want to be left alone, so she was rather thankful for the company and protection.

Whether it was a distraction or not, Mahiru was busy sorting out her collection of camera lenses. “You can sit down if you want. But I’m not going to be the best company right now, I’ve been meaning to sort these out for a little while.”

Hajime planted himself on the edge of Mahiru’s bed, not wanting to make himself a nuisance. “I can help if you want.”

“Are you sure you want to help me sort through all of these? You looked bored already.” Mahiru raised her eyebrows at him.

“No, no I’m not bored at all.” Hajime protested, his acting hadn’t improved at all since Monokuma’s play.

“If you’re sure…” Mahiru said. She handed him some spare lenses, as well as the boxes they belonged to. “Hajime, can I talk to you about something? But you have to promise me you won’t act weird.” she narrowed her eyes to show she was serious.

“Sure.” Hajime nodded. It would be nice to have something to talk about while he did the strenuous work of sorting lenses.

“I usually wouldn’t come to a boy for advice, but you're pretty sensible, so I trust you.” Mahiru said. Hajime wasn’t sure if it was a compliment or not. “What’s up?”

“The play we performed yesterday...Twilight Syndrome Murder Case. What do you think the story was about?” from Mahiru’s tone, it appeared she was checking for his opinion, rather than asking out of curiosity.

Since Hajime had a feeling Mahiru already knew the answer, he decided to be honest with his explanation. “Peko explained it pretty well. But I think it’s about a group of high school students who find a dead body, the little sister of Guy F. The sister was murdered by Girl E. Guy F found out, and sought his revenge by murdering Girl E.”

“And the school girls in the play,” Mahiru continued. “What did you think of them? How would you describe their personalities?”

“Uh, well my character was pretty timid. Nagito’s Girl B, was pretty mean. The way Girl-” Hajime was only midway through his explanation when he was cut short.

Mahiru interrupted, too much playing on her mind. “I...I’m Girl D, aren’t I?”
“Um…” Hajime considered lying to protect her feelings, but it was probably best for Mahiru to know the truth. “If that really was based on real life events, then yeah, I think you are. She was a photographer just like you, and she really stuck up for her friends.”

Mahiru let out a deep sigh, her worst fears proving true. “I thought so, no wonder Monokuma had me play that part.” she hesitated, hands fumbling over the camera lenses. “That…that means I helped kill someone.”

“You can’t think like that.” Hajime insisted. He wanted to do everything in his power to reassure Mahiru, the poor girl looked like she was on the verge of a breakdown. “Girl E and Guy F are the ones with blood on their hands.”

“But I helped, Hajime,” Mahiru said, her voice shaking. “I hid those pictures, I-”

Hajime cut her short before she worked herself into hysterics. “This obviously happened from the time where our memories have been taken. You don’t know the full story of what happened, Monokuma might be twisting things.”

“I keep trying to tell myself that, but if someone died and I said nothing to the police, then I’m to blame.” Mahiru gripped the hem of her dress, trying to calm herself down.

“As horrible as all of this is, what’s happened has happened.” Hajime said, speaking sensibly. “There are certain things that time will never change, and this is one of them. You’ve got to do your best to stay strong, Monokuma has done this to try and hurt you.”

“I…I guess you’re right.” Mahiru lowered her head, steadying her breathing.

“Just be careful, alright.” Hajime said sternly. “Things could be a little dangerous for you right now. Don’t go out at night alone, or accept any mysterious notes that turn up in your letter box.”

“Jeez, I don’t need protecting by like someone like you.” Mahiru smiled, trying to lighten the mood. “But thank you, Hajime. I’m glad I can count on you.”

“If you need some company, don’t hesitate to come and see me, okay?” Hajime returned her smile.

“I had a feeling you’d make a good father, and I think you just proved me right.” she paid the compliment almost sheepishly. "I feel a lot safer with you by my side."

Mahiru was putting on a smile of bravery, but Hajime could see through it. Behind the eyes of the smiling photographer, was a terrified young girl.

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After spending the afternoon, and most of the early evening, with Mahiru, Hajime returned to his cottage. He watched from his window as most of the students headed to the restaurant, none of them actually walking together. Though his own stomach was rumbling, he’d promised to wait and eat with Souda in the diner. As always, Souda was late. Turning up a good fifteen minutes after the agreed meeting time. If Hajime wasn’t aware of Souda’s tardiness trait, he would’ve already ditched him in favour of the restaurant.

“You’re here, finally…” Hajime muttered, talking to Souda while he locked the door.
“Yeah sorry, man.” Souda apologised, though he clearly didn’t mean it. “I was busy with stuff.”

“Run into Sonia by any chance?” Hajime asked, pocketing his cottage key.

Souda didn’t respond to Hajime’s joke, instead, he froze. Hajime opened his mouth to speak, but Souda frantically waved his arms, motioning him to be quiet. “Do you hear...shouting?”

Hajime focused his listening too, turning his head towards the direction of the restaurant. It was only faint, but he could certainly hear something. The sound of raised voices. “I hear it too. We should get over there!”

“R-really?” Souda squawked. “I mean, it’s probably nothing. And I’m sure you’re hungry because I made you wait, so really we should get going and -”

“Souda, I’m going to the restaurant.” Hajime said sternly, he couldn’t just ignore the shouting when it could be something serious. “Stay here if you like, but I’m going.” without waiting, Hajime marched towards the main building.

“Don’t leave me!” Souda cried. “I-I’ll come with you, but if I get killed, I’m gonna murder you.”

“I think I can handle that.” Hajime muttered, giving Souda a second to catch up.

They entered from the inside, climbing the lobby stairs. Hajime carefully watched his footing. Since they were rushing, it would be easy for him to fall and greatly injure himself. The sound of shouting only got louder as Hajime appeared in the restaurant.

He stopped suddenly at the top of the stairs, Souda smacking into his back. “Oof!”

Hajime was too busy watching the sight in front of him to pay attention to Souda’s pain. The conflict was between Mahiru and Fuyuhiko, which was to no surprise at all.

Fuyuhiko’s suit was covered in some form of sauce. Hajime wasn’t sure what, but it looked creamy and thick.

“I keep telling you, it was an accident!” Mahiru shouted, seeming desperate to prove her case.

As they were arguing, Ibuki snuck out from her seat, moving along the wall until she was standing next to Hajime. “You should get out of here before it’s too late.” exaggerating, as per usual.

“What’s happened?” Hajime whispered, not wanting the fighting couple to hear him. Unfortunately, he wasn’t quiet enough.

“You don’t have to whisper.” Fuyuhiko hissed, his voice filled with malice. “I’ll explain. This bitch thought it would be funny to throw her dinner over me.” he jabbed a finger in Mahiru’s direction.

Mahiru turned to Hajime, a look of desperation in her eyes. “I-it was an accident, I swear. I was carrying my plate, when I tripped. My food went all over Fuyuhiko.”

“You...tripped?” Hajime repeated. Mahiru had always been fairly cautious, she was no Mikan.

“It’s my fault really.” Nagito joined in, seemingly serious. “I was getting up for a second helping of dinner, when I hit into Mahiru.”

“Bullshit!” Fuyuhiko swore, still throwing threatening glances at Mahiru. “You timed it on purpose so you could do this to me. You fuck with my family, and now this?! What are you up to you
The comment about family struck Mahiru. Her bottom lip started to tremble as she tried to defend herself further. "I-I-

Hajime rushed in, positioning himself between the two of them. He stood with his back facing Mahiru to protect her. “Everyone needs to calm down, this is getting out of hand.”

While Hajime tried his best to play mediator, Peko rushed in from up the stairs. She instantly demanded to know what was going on, so Ibuki did her best to explain.

“Fuyuhiko, I think you should go to your cottage and calm down.” Peko suggested, though it was more of an instruction than an invite.

“No, don’t go.” Hajime called, stopping Fuyuhiko before he even tried to move. “We can’t leave things like this. Ever since Monokuma’s motive, there’s been a horrible atmosphere around this place. It’s only going to get worse if we leave it.”

“What do you expect, Hajime?!” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes. “We’re trapped on a deserted island where it’s kill, or be killed. If you think we’re all gonna get along and be friends, you’re more deluded than I thought. Friends don’t exist in a place like this, they’ll stab you in the back the second they get a chance.”

Fuyuhiko’s words rang heavy around the room. It was obvious the others were paying attention to what he was saying. Fuyuhiko continued. “You can throw feasts and play games, but it doesn’t change anything!”

Hajime wasn’t going to stand for it. "I know how isolating this game feels, like you can't trust anyone besides yourself. But it doesn't have to be that way. We aren't enemies, we're allies. We're all in this together, fighting on the same side against Monokuma. These motives, they're all one big scam to get us to turn on each other. Why? Because Monokuma knows we wouldn't without them. The beach sports day, our feast, it's times like these we forget the situation we're in. That's because we're just normal high school kids, and in any other scenario, we'd been friends. Before our memories were taken, we probably were. Things seem scary right now, but that's only because we're making enemies with everyone. If we were to unite, work together, it could be us against Monokuma. We could get out of here, no one else has to die." Hajime brought his speech to a close, it hadn't been his intention to get so carried away.

"Wow..." Nagito stood back in awe. "You truly are the Ultimate Hope..." he was smiling from ear to ear.

Sonia seemed full of life, the enthusiasm gleaming in her eyes. "I feel hella stoked! We can do this, escape the island as one!"

"Yes, what Miss Sonia said." Souda grinned, seeming just as excited. "We're gonna make it out together."

Fuyuhiko simply shook his head. “Your naivety’s gonna get ya killed sooner or later.” he still wasn’t in agreement, but he didn’t seem so aggressive.

“We should do something!” Ibuki declared. “Like the feast. We could get a bouncy castle, or play paintball, or…” her imagination ran wild with ideas.

“I think it’s little late for those sort of activities…” Mahiru said, gaining her composure after her fight with Fuyuhiko. “...But, it would be nice to do something,” it seemed that she didn’t want to end the
evening in a nasty fashion either.

“I have an idea!” Hajime said. He thought back to the time he’d last been happiest, it was playing games with Chiaki. The simple experience had brought the two of them together. “Chiaki, maybe there’s a game we could play? Like you said, games are more fun with friends.”

“That’s...a great idea!” Chiaki took a sharp intake of breath, excited at the possibility of playing games. “Although, I don’t have any consoles that hold ten players.”

“I can make one!” Souda volunteered. “There are so many old parts around this place, it’d be easy.”

“Actually, I wasn’t thinking about that sort of game.” Hajime said. “It’ll take way too long to build something like that. I kinda meant a game you can...just sort of...play.” saying it out loud, Hajime realised how daft it sounded. Had he gotten carried away with himself?

“I’ve got it!” Chiaki exclaimed. “We can play the King’s Game. It’s not a video game, but it’s still fun.”

“Okay.” Hajime smiled. He’d never heard of the game before, but if Chiaki was suggesting it, it had to be good.

“What are the rules to this game?” Sonia asked. “I have never heard of it.”

“Neither have I.” Gundam said.

“I’ll explain the rules when we’re ready. But first, we need some pen and paper.” Chiaki said. “Is there any around here?”

“Just napkins,” Peko replied. “Will they suffice?”

“They’ll do...” Chiaki said, though she didn’t seem very enthusiastic.

“I’ll go to the market and get some.” Nagito offered. “It’s not far from here, and I want to do everything I can to help.”

“I’m getting outta here as well.” Fuyuhiko announced, marching towards the exit. “I need to change, and I don’t wanna stick around to play some daft game.”

“Don’t go!” Hajime called after him. It would pointless trying to bring everyone together if Fuyuhiko wasn’t there. “The food’s only on your jacket, so you can just take it off.”

“I’m still not staying to play your shitty game.” Fuyuhiko scowled. “You can’t force me.”

“That’s true...” Hajime sighed. “But come on, we’re doing this as a group. I want to prove to Monokuma that his motives aren’t enough to ruin us. Even if you stay for just a little while, it would mean a lot.”

Fuyuhiko hesitated at the top of the stairwell. “Ugh, if I stay, will you stop with this preachy bullshit?” he narrowed his eyes at Hajime. “I think your plan is a load of crap, this ain’t gonna stop anyone. But, if it’s enough to shut you up, I’ll stay.”

Hajime wasn’t sure how he’d convinced Fuyuhiko to stay, and his reasoning wasn’t all that enthusiastic, but he was going to take it. “Great, come take a seat then.”

While Nagito went for the supplies, Chiaki gathered everyone around the center table - bring spare
chairs so there was enough room for all. Fuyuhiko reluctantly joined them, his stained jacket resting on the back of his chair.

Souda turned to Chiaki, eyeing up his competition. "You're obviously going to win, this is so unfair." he didn't like the sound of playing against the Ultimate Gamer.

“It’s not that kind of game.” Chiaki explained. “There’s not really a winner.”

“Aww, but what’s the fun in games where you can’t win?” Ibuki pouted, she’d obviously had the intentions to thrash everyone.

Ibuki and Souda playfully argued their views on competitive gaming until Nagito returned. He was armed with a brown paper bag, enough pen and paper to last them months.

"Did you bring an entire tree with you?" Hajime remarked, slightly horrified at the extent Nagito had gone to.

Taking a sheet of paper, Chiaki tore it into ten equal pieces. She took her newly made cards, numbering them from one to nine with the marker she’d been given. On the final card, she did something different. Instead of writing '10', she drew a small crown, adding the word 'King' underneath in block capitals.

“These are the cards. We just need something to put them in.” Chiaki explained, scanning the room for something at hand.

“Like a bowl?” Nagito suggested.

“Or Souda’s hat!” Ibuki exclaimed, tearing the beanie from the mechanic’s head. “Throw the cards in here.”

“Hey! Give that back!” Souda clutched at his, now bare, head, trying to control his terrible hat hair. “M-Miss Sonia, don’t look.”

"Rest assure, I have no intention of doing so.” Sonia replied, avoiding eye contact completely.

For convenience, Chiaki took the hat and placed the ten cards inside. She shuffled them around to mix up the order.

“I really wouldn’t use that hat.” Mahiru turned up her nose. “Think of all the grease that’s inside…”

“My hair isn’t greasy, I wash it at least once a week.” Souda hissed, though the paranoia in his voice showed very little confidence.

“You’re a mechanic, it’s natural for you to be covered in grease.” Mahiru said, showing she meant no offence by her comment.

“Yeah, when I’m actually making stuff. Have you seen me working on any cars?!” Souda exclaimed.

“Oh, you’re right.” Mahiru said. “I guess you’re naturally greasy.”

“Uh, let’s get back to the game…” Hajime interrupted. “Chiaki, do you want to explain the rules?”

“Inside this hat, there are ten cards. You’ll find the numbers one to nine, and then a King card. Everyone draws a card, and the person who gets the King card, is allowed to instruct anything they
want for that round. They choose people to complete this instruction depending upon their numbers.” Chiaki elaborated. “If I were to be King, I could say ‘number three must give number eight a ride on their back.’”

“And I’m guessing we don’t reveal our numbers until the King has given their instruction?” Nagito said, following along with the rules.

“That’s right, otherwise, it wouldn’t be much fun.” Chiaki smiled. “And remember, the King’s orders are final.”

“If they’re final...that means...the King can ask for....anything?” a look of pure delight lit up Souda’s face.

“Mmhm.” Chiaki nodded.

“Within reason, I presume.” Mahiru added. “We can’t ask for anything too dangerous, or that’ll get us into trouble with Monokuma.”

 Ibuki snatched the hat from Chiaki. “Come on, come on let’s start. Ibuki is getting bored!” without looking, she reached into the hat and took a card for herself. She passed it to Peko on her left, and the process continued, everyone taking one card and keeping it hidden.

As Hajime waited for the hat to reach the end of the circle, he peeked at his own card. Sadly, he wasn’t the King. He’d chosen card number three.

Chiaki looked around the group. “Has everyone got a card?” following a series of nods, Chiaki instructed everyone to read their cards. “Remember, only show your card if you’re the King. Everyone else needs to keep theirs a secret.”

Disappointment fell across many faces, those who’d been hoping to be something more than an ordinary citizen. Next came the inspection, everyone looking around to see who their leader was.

Nagito let out a sheepish giggle, turning around his card. “It looks like I’m the king!” true to his word, Nagito’s card showed a crown.

“Are you kidding me?!” Souda complained, holding his own card close to his chest. “He only won because of that luck of his.”

“Luck or not, he is still the King.” Sonia pointed out.

“Well, Nagito…” Chiaki said. “As the King, what’s your order?”

Nagito hesitated, unsure if he wanted to boss around the ultimates. “Could number eight get me a soda?”

“That’s it?” Souda said. “You can have anyone do anything, and you ask for a soda?” he let out a frustrated groan. Obviously, it wasn’t what his desired instruction would be.

Mahiru got up from the table, flashing her number eight card at the group. “You know there are never any sodas at the restaurant, just juice.”

“Looks like you better head over to Rocketpunch Market then.” Hajime grinned, having some fun by winding Mahiru up further.

Mahiru didn’t try to fight it, but she obviously wasn’t pleased. “Is there a specific flavour you want?”
she asked, hands on hip, talking to Nagito.

“I’m not fussy.” Nagito insisted. “But Dr Hopper’s my favourite…”

Without saying another word, Mahiru left for the market - putting the game on a temporary pause. She must have walked surprisingly fast, as she was back at the restaurant within ten minutes.

“Here.” she thrust a green can into Nagito’s hand.

“Watch out, Nagito!” Ibuki laughed. “She probably shook it up on the way here.”

“Thank you, Mahiru.” Nagito smiled, placing the can on the table in front of him.

While Mahiru was gone, Chiaki had taken the opportunity to prepare for the second round. She'd collected the cards, and placed all of them back in the hat. She offered the beanie around again, everyone taking a new card.

Still not the King, Hajime found himself holding card number one. He looked around the group as he waited, trying to see if anyone’s dreadful poker face was giving them away.

“King, reveal yourself!” Gundam demanded.

Nagito laughed again, holding his card in the air. “That would be me.” sure enough, there was the crown.

“You’re the King, again?” Fuyuhiko exclaimed.

“What dark magic do you posses to put such odds in your favour?” Gundam challenged Nagito, completely skeptical.

“This isn’t fair!” Souda wailed. “He’s got ultimate luck, he’s gonna win every round. We could play for hours, and I wouldn’t even get a look in.”

“You’re right.” Peko agreed. “His good luck has obviously come into play.”

The game would get boring very quickly if every round turned out the same. Thankfully, Hajime had a suggestion. “Maybe Nagito could be a referee instead? Otherwise, he’s just going to win every round. He could hand out the cards, and make sure no one’s cheating.”

“That’s a great idea, Hajime.” Nagito said, he hadn’t seemed very enthusiastic about playing the game in the first place. “The Ultimate Hope always knows how to -”

“You’re right…” Nagito paused, thinking up an instruction. “Number five, can I have another soda please?”

A disgruntled Fuyuhiko raised his voice. “If you think I’m going all the way to that damn market to get your dumb soda, you’re -”

“It’s okay, you can get it after the game.” Nagito shut him down, not wanting things to turn into an argument. “Someone like myself deserves to wait.”

Acting as referee, Nagito kicked off round three by offering everyone the hat. With Nagito not playing, Chiaki had removed the number one card from the bunch at random. The remaining players
took their cards, eager to see who was King - now that luck wasn’t involved.

Upon instruction for the King to reveal themselves, Ibuki let out a triumphant cheer. “Say hello to your new King!” she jumped up onto her chair, basking in the power. “For my order, I want number...two and number...six to switch outfits.”

Nagito walked around the circle, peering over everyone’s shoulders to read their cards - hunting down the chosen two.

“Ibuki, I don’t think you can ask something like that…” Mahiru said, already disapproving. "Asking someone to swap their clothes is a little much."

“The King’s words are final!” Ibuki reminded her, standing proudly.

“Here we are. Number two, and number six.” Nagito pointed to the chosen two, highlighting them in the group. “Peko and Gundam.”

“Oooh!” Ibuki watched on in excitement. “This should be good.”

Gundam’s face was scarlet. “You cannot expect...”

“Rules are rules.” Souda said, enjoying every second of the moment. “You need to go and change with Peko.”

“You can’t make them change in front of each other. Are you sick?” Fuyuhiko interrupted, his voice full of rage. “They’re both underage, it’s wrong.”

“They can get ready at their cottages then. Get undressed in private, put on a robe, and switch outfits.” Souda shrugged, a ‘plan B’ already formed.

“How long must they wear each other’s clothes?” Sonia asked.

“Hmmmm…” Ibuki paused to think up her answer. “Until the end of the day seems good.”

“But you never said-” Gundam tried to protest further, though he was quickly shot down.

“King’s rules.” Ibuki reminded him, jumping down from her chair. “Go on, get ready!”

“Peko, are you alright with this?” Hajime asked. The swordswoman hadn’t said a word since the order had been given.

“I have no choice.” Peko said, rather dramatically. With that, she left towards the staircase - a protesting Gundam following after her.

“When you said we were playing a game, I wasn’t expecting this…” Mahiru remarked.

Souda kept watch of the window while they waited for Peko and Gundam to return. Hajime took the time to appreciate that his card was neither two or six.

“They’re coming, they’re coming!” Souda rushed back to his seat, a gigantic smirk spread across his face. He obviously enjoyed what he’d seen.

Peko walked up the stairs first, she kept her head down, focusing solely on the ground. Gundam’s coat swamped her, and she nearly tripped over the scarf trailing at her feet. His boats were clearly too big, as she was struggling to walk, and she’d tightened the belt on the trousers as much as possible.
Gundam followed behind, his look different altogether. Peko’s skirt showed off most of his thighs, and he hadn’t bothered with the tights - they probably would’ve torn in the process. Her top just about fit him, leaving most of his midriff on show. He’d squeezed his feet into her shoes as best as possible, the sword resting on his shoulder.

It was mean to laugh, but Hajime, Souda, and Ibuki fell about right away. The uncomfortable looks on their faces only made the situation more entertaining. Even Mahiru was trying to hide the smile on her face. Fuyuhiko seemed to be the only one not on board with the prank.

“Let’s...let’s not say anything.” Peko said, returning to her seat. She was using the scarf to cover her face, wishing the ground could swallow her up in that very moment.

“Time for another round.” Nagito said, offering the hat of cards around the circle.

Bad luck was Hajime’s fate once again, finding himself with a number four card that time.

“Aw dammit!” Souda voiced his frustration to the group, making it clear that he wasn’t the King either. He narrowed his eyes at Nagito. “Are you using your luck to work against me?!”

“You’re so paranoid.” Ibuki laughed, still basking in the power the previous round had given her.

“So, who is it this time?” reluctantly, Souda looked around the group. There was little enthusiasm in his voice.

“That would be me.” Sonia spoke forward, showing her card. “I am the King, or perhaps, in this case, Queen.”

“How fitting for a Princess!” Souda gasped, showing sudden interest. “Miss Sonia, what are you going to choose? You can instruct us to do anything. Maybe we should turn things up a little and...”

Souda was going to get a nosebleed if he wasn’t careful, he was showing a little too much of Teruteru’s spirit. “This is Sonia’s go, don’t try and influence her.” Nagito said.

“Fool.” Gundam muttered, loud enough so only Souda would hear.

Sonia stared at her card, thinking up her instructions. Once decided, she announced her verdict. “I demand number four to write and perform a poem for Monomi.”

Number four….

Hajime knew he wasn’t going to get away with doing nothing every round. With his poetry skills barely up to scratch, Hajime was beginning to wish he’d been called up for the last round instead. Before he knew it, Nagito was leaning over his shoulder, taking Hajime’s card for himself.

“Looks like Hajime’s going to become the Wordsworth of Jabberwock Island.” Nagito grinned, revealing him to the group.

“You want me to write a poem...now?” Hajime said weakly. He’d need at least an hour for it sound somewhat acceptable.

“It does not have to be lengthy. A single verse will suffice.” Sonia smiled. “And since you are reading it to Monomi, I suggest it should be about her too.” she was enjoying every second of it.

“Fine.” Hajime spoke through gritted teeth, but it was all in good humour. “Can I have some of that paper?” he was presented with some of the leftover paper and a marker.
“I’ll go and look for Monomi.” Mahiru said. “Hajime, you should go to the lobby and start working on your poem. You get ten minutes.”

Mahiru wasn’t even the King, but Hajime found himself listening to her all the same. He headed down stairs and towards the sofas. Pen in hand, he scribbled down some ideas. To no surprise, he couldn’t find a single word that rhymed with Monomi.

It felt like the longest ten minutes of his life. He soon gave up on the idea of writing a perfect poem. Instead, substituting similar words that somewhat rhymed. The entire thing was questionable.

When the time was up, Ibuki came to summon him. Monomi was waiting for Hajime in the restaurant, Mahiru obviously had no trouble tracking her down.

“Hajime, I hear you’re going to read me something.” Monomi said, a sense of hope in her eyes.

“Uh, right...here goes.” Hajime took a deep breath, before launching into his poem. “I once played a game of Monopoly, with my pet rabbit named Monomi. Short and sweet, she’s a pleasure to meet. And her favourite food is broccoli.”

“Hajime, you do realise Monopoly, Monomi, and broccoli doesn’t rhyme?” Mahiru said, questioning his poetry skills.

Hajime scratched his head. “Yeah, well, you try thinking of something.”

“Wow, Hajime!” Monomi stood there with tears in her eyes. “That was beautiful. I can’t believe one of my students has written me something so lovely. Let me hug you as a thank you.”

“N-no, it’s okay.” Hajime said, hurriedly rejecting the offer. "Let's get on with the next round..."

Nagito sat down again as everyone opened their cards. “Who’s the King this time?” he waited patiently for an answer.

“I am!” Souda yelled excitedly, as if the smirk on his face didn’t already say enough. He flashed his card in everyone’s faces. “Look, I’m the King!”

“We can see, you can calm down.” Hajime said, not enjoying the piece of card being shoved in his face. “So, what are your orders?”

“Hm...” Souda took a minute to look around the room, busy in thought.

Hajime quickly clocked on to what Souda was doing. The mechanic was staring at his Princess, she seemed to have forgotten about the privacy of her card, and was holding it in front of her so that everyone could see.

“I know!” Souda said, full of confidence. “Miss Sonia has to come and kiss me.”

“This isn’t how the game works.” Mahiru objected. “You can’t just name people. It's numbers only.”

“Fine.” a smug Souda retorted. “Number nine has to come and kiss me.” Souda waited for Sonia to get up, but she did nothing of the sort. “Miss Sonia, I called your number.”

“You did not.” Sonia replied. “You asked for a nine, and my card is a six.” she held her card up for proof. There was a line drawn underneath, confirming that it was indeed a six. It seemed Souda had read her card upside down.
“W-what?” Souda’s jaw dropped, coming to the horrible realisation that he was wrong. “Then who the hell is number nine?”

“That would be Fuyuhiko.” Nagito announced, he’d already scanned the room.

“Pucker up, Fuyuhiko.” Ibuki laughed.

“N-no, it doesn’t count.” Souda cried, attempting some desperate backtracking. “I said Sonia, and the King’s orders are final. I-I change to number six.”

“You said it yourself, the King’s words are final.” Hajime said, joining in on the fun. “You’ve got a receive a kiss from number nine.”

“Come on, Fuyuhiko.” Mahiru teased.

“I ain’t playing this stupid game.” Fuyuhiko snapped, standing up from his seat.

“But Souda’s waiting for his kiss…” Ibuki said.

“Who do you lot think you are, mocking me?!” in a matter of seconds, Fuyuhiko raised his voice, changing the atmosphere in the room entirely. “Don’t you know who I am? My family could have all of you killed in your sleep. Don’t talk to me like that.”

Fuyuhiko narrowed his eyes at Chiaki. “I dunno why you thought playing this would bring us all together. Like I said, friendship changes nothing in this place. It’s a shitty game, thanks for wasting my time.”

“It is not Chiaki’s fault.” Sonia said, defending her friend. “We all thought it would be some fun.”

“Oh, you can shut it too.” Fuyuhiko snapped, kicking his chair over. “Always acting like you’re perfect. Just cuz you're a Princess, you aren’t any better than the rest of us.”

Peko stood to her feet, speaking calmly but sternly. “You need to get out of here and calm down.”

“Don’t tell me what to do.” Fuyuhiko hissed, though he listened to Peko all the same. Kicking more chairs on his way out, he stormed off down the stairs, leaving a bitter atmosphere in his wake.

Hajime sat there in the silence, unsure what to say himself. He hadn’t expected Fuyuhiko to lose it so badly, and he couldn’t understand why he’d gone off on one at Sonia...had she done something to upset him?

Souda slammed his fist on the table. “Who does he think he is? He can’t speak to Miss Sonia like that, I’m gonna give him a piece of my mind!”

“But you will not!” Sonia raised her own voice. She seemed shaken up from Fuyuhiko’s brutal words, looking on the verge of tears. “All you do is talk, but never follow through with anything that you say. You are nothing more than a coward, spilling empty words onto fallen ears.” with as much grace as possible, Sonia rose from her seat, hurrying towards the exit.

“M-Miss Sonia, wait!” Souda tried to run after her, but Hajime grabbed him by the arm, stopping him from leaving.

“Don’t.” Hajime said gently. “Give her some space.”

“But...but…” Souda continued to protest, but he didn’t try and follow after her. He too, seemed to be in shock.
“...It’s best I leave also.” Peko excused herself, taking care not to tread on the scarf or coat. She turned to Gundam. “I think we should leave together, we need to get our clothes back.”

Gundam nodded in agreement, he seemed more than eager to get back to his boots and coat. He left with Peko, following behind her down the stairs.

It was clear, the game was over. Fuyuhiko’s outburst had killed the mood. Everyone was keen to leave, and no one wanted to play anymore. Mahiru was next to leave, making her excuses and hurrying away. Ibuki caught on, and followed after her. The tense atmosphere was enough to turn everyone away.

The remaining four players were left to face the uncomfortable silence. Souda had turned his back on everyone, suffering from the shame.

“Don’t let it get to you.” Hajime said, resting his hand on Souda’s shoulder. “It’s...it’s been a long day.” he wanted to say something along the lines of ‘Sonia didn’t mean it’, but Hajime wasn’t sure if that was exactly true. Sonia seemed like she’d been bottling up her feelings for a long time.

“I’m gonna go to bed.” shaking himself free from Hajime’s grip, Souda moved away from the table. Something was hanging over his head, whether it was the guilt of ruining everything, or Sonia’s cruel words, Hajime didn’t know. Souda hurried down the stairs, taking two at a time. He clearly wanted to be alone.

Chapter End Notes

A lesson to be learnt from this chapter? Playing games in a large group is never a good idea. I’m sure if they’d been playing Cluedo or Twister, things would have ended just as badly! ;)

With such a nasty atmosphere in the air, I’d say a murder is on the cards pretty soon. Perhaps even the next chapter? ;)

As always, thanks for reading. You're all amazing!!
"Ding dong, bing bong"

"Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Gooooood morning, everyone! Looks like today is gonna be another perfect tropical day! Now then, let’s show some enthusiasm and make sure to give it our all today!"

Hearing Monokuma’s voice in the morning had quickly become a foundation in Hajime’s morning routine. He wasn’t sure how he’d feel if he didn’t hear it. Sometimes, Hajime would mime along, just for the fun of it.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t one of those mornings. Hajime dived further under the covers, hoping the cotton fabric would shield him from all of his problems. If his calculations were correct, he’d woken up on day sixteen on the rewrite. His goal was in sight, less than a week and he’d be free. Sadly, his goal seemed so far away. The finish line was a mere blip.

Fuyuhiko was picking fights with everyone, Mahiru was paranoid, Souda was gaining memories at a rapid speed, and Nagito had gone quiet. All of these factors worried Hajime. They were all obstacles in the way of his goal, bombs that could go off at any given time.

As much as Hajime wanted to stay in bed and pretend the outside world didn’t exist, he had no choice but to get up. After the explosive finale of the King’s Game, Hajime saw it important that he turned up to breakfast. He wanted to keep an eye on everyone. To see who showed to breakfast, who didn’t, if anyone was acting out of character. Reluctantly, he crawled towards the shower.

Freshly washed and ready for the day ahead, Hajime made his way to the restaurant, unsure what kind of atmosphere he would find himself in. Had one night’s rest really been enough to cure the quarrels of the King’s Game? Or would a night of thinking over bad feelings only make things worse? The answer to that question…

...there was no atmosphere at all.

The restaurant was like a ghost town. No petty squabbles, no sharing smiles over cereal. There was nothing, no reaction at all. Ten people were left on the island, and only two of them had bothered showing their faces.

“Good morning, Hajime.” Nagito waved cheerily from his seat, as if he hadn’t noticed the problem at all. Chiaki was sitting opposite him, her head resting on the table.

“Hey, guys…” Hajime replied, though he was pretty certain Chiaki was asleep. “Uh, it sure is quiet in here.” he approached the buffet table, helping himself to a bowl. He wasn't sure why he was eyeing up the food, since he didn't have much of an appetite to eat, he was just eating for the sake of it. He returned the bowl to its rightful place, heading straight for the table instead.

“Aren’t you hungry?” Nagito commented, watching as Hajime sat next to Chiaki.

“Not really.” Hajime shrugged, it wasn’t a topic of conversation he wanted to get into. “Um, so like I was saying, do you know where everyone is?” being Nagito, he expected him to hold all of the answers.
“Mmhmm.” Nagito nodded, totally confident. He’d obviously done his research before breakfast. “I saw Gundam earlier.” Nagito replied, reaching across the table for butter. “He’s taken the Four Dark Devas for a morning walk along the sand, Sonia’s with him.”

“And the others?” Hajime asked. ”Mahiru? Ibuki? Fuyuhiko? Peko?”

“Ibuki is keeping Mahiru company, I saw her at the market getting some breakfast.” Nagito explained. “I think they agreed to take some time away from the restaurant after what happened with the King’s Game. As for Fuyuhiko, I think it’s pretty obvious why he’s not here. That just leaves Peko.”

Of course, Nagito had no idea of Fuyuhiko and Peko’s relationship. Hajime couldn’t let Nagito discover the truth, so he played it down. “Peko does her own thing, I guess she wants to avoid all the conflict.”

“I suppose we’re the only ones stupid enough to show up.” Nagito laughed, putting down the butter knife. “Things have been tense before, but never this bad.”

“This motive is the scariest yet.” Hajime said, speaking his true feelings. “For the first time, Monokuma is encouraging accomplices. Any two people could gang up together.” he knew that Ibuki and Mahiru, and Sonia and Gundam weren’t up to anything suspicious, but just knowing people were branching into pairs put him on edge.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you about the motive, actually.” Nagito said casually. “Is there anyone who you think might take it?”

‘Fuyuhiko and Peko’, that was the answer Hajime wanted to give. Though obviously, it was the very answer he couldn’t. To Nagito’s knowledge, Fuyuhiko and Peko had no connection. Besides, Hajime wasn’t trusting of Nagito’s intentions. Was he asking about potential murderers so he could go and assist them?

Hajime shrugged. “I dunno, I guess anyone could really. It doesn’t seem fair to speculate about this, we’d be pinning blame on innocent people.”

“You’re right, anyone could take the motive if they wanted to leave badly enough.” Nagito pondered, acknowledging what Hajime had said. “And the second motive-”

“There is no second motive.” Hajime butted in, hoping to steer Nagito from the topic.

“Not technically, but we all Monokuma’s play wasn’t for nothing.” Nagito replied, determined to finish the conversation. “Twilight Syndrome Murder Case, a story based on real life events at Hope’s Peak.”

“We don’t know that.” Hajime objected. “Monokuma could’ve made the entire thing up. Or even if it is true, messed with the details.”

“I know you look for the hope in every situation, but you shouldn’t be so naive about this.” Nagito said. It wasn’t a criticism, but more of a warning.

“That’s what I don’t understand,” Hajime took a second to vocalise his thoughts. “We’re both looking for hope, yet I’m trying to find the innocence in this situation, while you decide on culprits. How is that hopeful?” by questioning hope, Hajime was attempting to stop Nagito’s scheming.

“Hope comes from more place than one, Hajime.” Nagito replied. “You look for hope by believing
the best in people, I look for hope by believing the worst. Your ideal hope, is everyone leaving this island together. Mine, is the tragedies of this island creating one strong hope.”

“How is that hopeful? You want nine people dead!” Hajime was seriously questioning Nagito’s morals.

“True hope does not shine through unless you face the most ultimate of despair.” Nagito commented. “Though we have been through a lot, it’s not nearly enough for true hope to arise. Until we have dealt with the worst of despair, we will not truly appreciate hope.”

“That doesn’t make sense at all.” Hajime scowled.

“Let me put it to you like this. There’s a man who lives an ordinary life, working a good job, he has a lovely wife, and three beautiful children. One day, his boss tells him the company he works for might be shutting down, and that he’ll lose his job.” Nagito launched into his example. “The man spends the night in fear, worrying about how he’ll support his family. However, the next day, his boss tells him that everything’s going to be okay, and the company aren’t shutting down after all.”

“The man is hopeful, right?” Hajime said.

“Right.” Nagito agreed. “But for no more than that day. By the next week, he’s already forgotten about it, and is carrying on with his life as normal.”

“What point are you trying to make?” Hajime asked, unsure where things were going.

“But let’s say something worse happens to the man. While he’s working late one night, an armed robber breaks into his family home. They steal everything, and brutally murder his entire family. With nothing left to live for, the man becomes dedicated to his job. It’s the only meaning in his life.” Nagito continued. “Then one day, his boss warns him that the company might be shutting down. The man sinks into the worst of despair, without his job, he’s nothing. So of course, the next day, when the man is told his job is safe, he feels the most hope he has ever felt. His purpose continues, and he feels forever grateful for his job. Not once forgetting what it means to feel that fear.”

“That…that’s so stupid.” Hajime scoffed, unimpressed with everything he’d just been told. “You’re saying we can’t appreciate anything in life unless everything has been stolen from us? No one is truly living, unless their whole family has been slaughtered?!”

“You misunderstood the story, Hajime.” Nagito shook his head. “What I’m saying is, hope is around us everywhere. But only true hope can be sought from the worst of despair.”

“Everyone on this island has been thrown into a mutual killing game, we’ve watched six of our friends die. You can’t tell me that we haven’t been through enough despair.” Hajime continued to disagree.

“And it’s thanks to the despair that you’ve experienced here, that you’re becoming stronger each day.” Nagito said, staring at Hajime like some sort of proud parent. “The class trials continue to grow your hope. Please know, Hajime, if you ever decide you want to leave here, use me as your pawn, make me your accomplice, murder me - it would be an honour. I want to see all the hope inside of you grow.”

It was at that point, Chiaki woke up. Probably a good thing too, or Hajime might have lost things a little with Nagito. It was clear they had two very different ways of thinking, a way of thinking Hajime would never understand.

“Oh, did I fall asleep?...Sorry.” Chiaki raised her head from the table.
“You did, but it doesn’t matter.” Nagito smiled. “It gave Hajime and I some time to discuss something important. He’s the only other person who’s bothered showing up to breakfast. This is rather depressing.”

“We should do something today.” Chiaki suggested, speaking up. "We need to lift this depressing mood that's hanging over the island."

“After the last group event?” Hajime frowned. “I don’t think that’s such a good idea.” there were only so many times he could force everyone to hang out together. If he kept pushing Fuyuhiko to join in with the group activities, he really would snap.

“I didn’t mean as a group.” Chiaki explained. “We could do something as just the three of us.”

“You’d like me to join too?” Nagito smiled in appreciation. “It would be an honour to be in your company. You are t-”

“Two of your favourite ultimates? Yeah, you’ve said before.” Hajime said in an irritated fashion. “But that does sound like a good idea. It beats sitting around doing nothing all day.”

“The only problem is, I don’t have any ideas.” Chiaki admitted. “Unless you want to play games again?”

“I think we should take a break from all types of games.” Nagito said, the King's Game in mind. “We haven’t spent much time on the fourth island…”

“If this is your way of getting us to ride Monokuma’s train, give up now.” Hajime said sternly, he wasn’t about to let himself be manipulated by Nagito Komaeda.

“That isn’t my intention at all.” Nagito gasped, hurt that Hajime would jump to such conclusions. “I was going to suggest paying a visit to the haunted house.”

“That’s Monomi’s house, isn’t it?” Chiaki said. “I tried to go in there, but she stopped me.”

“She stopped me too.” Nagito said. “But I figure that she’ll cave in sooner or later if we keep trying.”

Hajime was pretty sure that was considered bullying, but he didn’t care enough about Monomi’s feelings to protest. “Hopefully we can get inside before Monomi shows up.”

“We should get going.” Nagito announced, abandoning his half eaten breakfast. “I’m sure Monomi listens in to our conversations. We need to get to the house before she realises what we're doing, and tries to stop us.”

They left the restaurant in a hurry, not wanting Monomi to outsmart them. Hajime felt the slightest kick of adrenaline. It was as if he was going to break into a bank and rob it, though in reality, he was only sneaking into Monomi’s house - that sounded nowhere near as exciting.

They arrived at the fourth island undetected, having done their best not to draw attention. Hajime approached the door, his goal in sight. He got as far as wrapping his fingers around the door handle, when he heard an irritating voice from behind.

“Where do you think you’re going?!”

Letting go, Hajime turned around to face his teacher. “Monomi…”

Nagito sighed. “Can’t you see we’re busy?” he never had any time for Monomi.
“This is my house, and I’ve already told you it’s inappropriate for students to be here. I’m your
teacher!” Monomi was horrified that they’d tried to cross the boundaries.

Nagito wasn’t one to simply give up. “It says under the island rules, that we’re allowed to explore at
our discretion. Therefore, you have absolutely no power to stop us.”

Chiaki backed him up. “Nagito’s right. Under the school rules, we can come here.”

“Puhuhuhu!” Monokuma’s laughter rang around them. He turned up out of the blue, probably
excited at the chance to gang up on Monomi. “Little sister, no one has any respect for you. Ahaha!”

“Please, Monokuma. Stop them from going in there.” Monomi pleaded. She had to be desperate if
she was turning to him.

Monokuma just laughed louder. “And why would I do that?”

“Because I deserve my privacy.” Monomi cried.

“Be quiet, Monomi. You’re so annoying.” Monokuma snapped. “Nagito, Hajime, Chiaki you’re free
to explore the haunted house as much as you’d like. Knock yourselves out.”

Ignoring Monomi’s sobs, Nagito opened the door to the haunted house. He scrunched up his nose as
soon as he walked inside. “This is...disappointing.”

Hajime had forgotten how much he despised Monomi’s house. The heart shaped furniture was
embarrassing, the sort of thing he’d expect in the bedroom of a five-year-old. The ghastly pink
curtains were so toxic, gouging his eyes out seemed more appealing. All the monitors above
Monomi’s bed sent a shiver down his spine, a reminder that he was always being watched. And the
rail of Monomi clones was downright weird. Why he’d agreed to visit off his own free will, Hajime
didn’t know.

The three of them didn't stick around at the ‘Haunted House’ for very long. They gave it no more
than three minutes, leaving with disappointment slapped across their faces.

“Well, that’s the worst haunted house I’ve ever been to.” Nagito sighed, shoulders drooping. “I don’t
think even I could find hope in that place.”

“I’ve played games scarier than that.” Chiaki agreed, feeling just as miserable.

“Yes, it was most unsatisfying.” Nagito frowned.

“That’s my house you’re talking about.” Monomi objected in upset, still hanging around the front
garden.

Hajime ignored her. “Why don’t we go and do something else that’s a little more fun?”

“Anything has to be more fun than that.” Nagito agreed.

“You’re all so mean.” Monomi wept, her pride in pieces.

“It’s almost lunch time.” Chiaki stated. “Why don’t we eat outside? Maybe Chandler Beach?”

“That sounds fun.” Hajime smiled, he always loved a picnic. He might as well take advantage of the
tropical weather.
“Would you ultimates mind me joining you?” Nagito asked, unsure as to whether they'd want him around.

“Of course you’re welcome.” Chiaki said. "I presumed you'd be coming anyway."

“Thank you!” Nagito was genuinely thrilled.

"But if you start waffling on about how we're your favourite ultimates or whatever, I'm revoking the invite.” Hajime said sternly. There was only so much of Nagito he could handle in one day.

“Can I come?” Monomi piped up.

“No, we don’t want animals near our food.” Nagito snapped, which caused Monomi to cry further. He turned his attention away from the rabbit, focusing on his friends instead. “You two should head to the beach, I'll go the market and get the food.”

“Don’t you want a hand with that?” Hajime asked, even carrying one large bottle of drink would weigh Nagito down.

Nagito shook his head, insistent. “I'll be fine. You've been more than generous to let me come with you, so it’s the least I can do.”

“If you’re sure then.” Hajime said, he wasn’t going to ask twice. “We’ll meet you over at the beach, okay?”

“Maybe you could get some blankets for us to sit on too.” Chiaki suggested.

They went their separate ways, Nagito to the first island, and Hajime and Chiaki to the second. Chandler Beach was deserted, granting them exclusive access.

Chiaki let out a yawn, curling up on the sand, not bothering to wait for the picnic blankets to keep her clean.

“Are you going to sleep?” Hajime grinned at her.

Chiaki didn’t reply, she just nodded.

Hajime couldn’t understand why anyone would want to sleep on the beach, imagine trying to get every grain of sand out of your hair. It wasn’t his idea of fun. He leant back on the sand instead, resting on his elbows. He looked up at the cloudless sky, it was like something from a painting. An ever so slight breeze hit against Hajime’s skin, the sound of gentle waves in the distance. A moment of peace, a second to relax.

SLAM.

The loud noise disturbed Hajime from his daydream, Chiaki sat up instantly. The noise was the result of the beach hut door being shut with powerful force. The perpetrator was Fuyuhiko, Peko following behind him.

A look of horror fell across Fuyuhiko's face as he stepped onto the sand, realising he wasn't alone. “W-what the fuck are you guys doing here?”

“We’re just relaxing.” Hajime said, he felt uneasy. Fuyuhiko was clearly tense about something, Peko looked bothered too.
“Why’d you fucking sneak up on us like that?” Fuyuhiko hissed, completely overacting.

“We didn’t…” Hajime retorted. “We didn’t know you were in there. Chiaki and I have better things to do than stalk you.”

“Come on, let’s go.” Peko said sternly.

“Spy on me again, and you’ll be sorry!” Fuyuhiko couldn’t resist throwing one last comment before storming off. He followed Peko, marching behind the beach house, and out of sight.

The second they’d gone, Hajime and Chiaki exchanged looks of panic.

“Those two shouldn’t have been together.” Hajime said, speaking rapidly out of fear. "They do everything to keep their relationship a secret."

"The look on Fuyuhiko's face...he seemed...on edge." Chiaki observed.

“You don’t...you don’t think…” Hajime started to fear the worst. He thought back to the previous game, when Fuyuhiko had learnt the story of Twilight Syndrome Murder Case. Mahiru had been lured to the beach house, and never given the chance to leave.

Chiaki seemed to be on the same wavelength, thinking similarly to Hajime. “We should check the beach house, we need to make sure everything's okay.”

The pair of them jumped up from the sand, sprinting towards the beach house as fast as their legs would take them. Hajime rammed open the door, his heart in his mouth.

Relief surged through him when the body discovery announcement never sounded. No blood, no corpse, no murder weapon. Just to be sure, they checked every inch of the beach house. No room went unturned, not even the shower or the closet. Thankfully, they could give the entire place the all clear. Whatever Fuyuhiko and Peko had been up to, it wasn’t murdering anyone.

Satisfied there wasn't a corpse nearby, Hajime and Chiaki returned to the beach. Hajime's memories of the beach house gave him an instant disliking to the place. It reminded him of the sleepover, the night Byakuya died.

When they stepped back out onto the sand, Nagito was already waiting for them, setting out picnic blankets, and organising the food. “Ah, there you are. I was beginning to wonder if the two of you had left, since you didn’t want me around.”

“Sorry.” Hajime apologised. “Fuyuhiko and Peko were being weird in the beach house, we just wanted to make sure everything was okay.”

“Fuyuhiko and Peko were here?” Nagito cocked his head. “They should have stayed for some food.”

“I don’t think they were in the mood…” Chiaki said.

“Did Sonia not want to stay either?” Nagito asked.

“Sonia?” Hajime repeated in confusion.

“Yes, I saw her on my way over. She was on the other side of the beach house, passing through the tunnel. I presumed you saw her too.” Nagito explained, unwrapping some paper plates.
Hajime shrugged his shoulders “We never saw Sonia. I guess she didn't come around this side of the beach house.” Hajime didn’t understand what business Sonia, Fuyuhiko, and Peko would all have together. It was a mystery.

“Wow, Nagito.” Chiaki smiled, admiring the food in front of her eyes. “You’ve picked some really great stuff.”

Hajime looked at the spread Nagito had set out for them, he’d really gone for it. Sandwiches, crisps, sausage rolls, pastries, cakes, fresh fruit, and lemonade. It was like a feast for Kings and Queens. “This looks great. I bet you’re an amazing cook.”

Nagito blushed, trying to hide behind his hair. “I’m not Teruteru, in fact, I’m not really a good cook at all. My bad luck seems to make an appearance when I’m cooking. I always burn the food, or myself. It’s a disaster.”

“I wondered why you’d been gone for so long.” Hajime remarked. “I guess this explains it. Looks like you’ve bought up half the market.”

“There was so much choice, it was time consuming.” Nagito replied, though something about his smile seemed disingenuous.

They tucked into the food, eating until they couldn’t possibly eat any more. There was laughter and smiles all round, just three friends hanging out doing what friends do best. Hajime almost found himself laughing when he realised he was having fun with an A.I and a boy in a coma. It sounded crazy when he thought about it.

They stayed out on the sand until the sun began to set, the air getting cooler. Full on sandwiches and sausage rolls, there was no need to go to dinner. A peaceful evening in their cottages awaited them instead.

“What’s this?” as Hajime approached his cottage, he noticed a flyer pinned to his front door. He yanked the paper free, causing it to rip at the edges.

“‘Monokuma’s Night of Horror’.” Nagito read out loud, holding an identical flyer he’d pulled from his own door.

Chiaki had taken her flyer and joined the boys. “A grand reopening of the Usami horror house with live entertainment, music, and more.”

Hajime squinted at the leaflet, the excessive use of fonts hurt his eyes. “What the hell is this?”

“Ah, I see some excited faces!” it was to no surprise that Monokuma appeared, he had to get involved with everything.

Hajime wasn’t quite sure what the bear was talking about, since the three of them looked anything but excited. “What is this?” he thrust the leaflet in Monokuma’s face.

“I’m all about customer satisfaction.” Monokuma bragged. “I really took your comments on board about the haunted house. You were totally right, it’s not scary at all. So, I’ve decided to relaunch it to give it more of a BANG!”

“Right…” Hajime said, he didn't care at all. “So, when’s the opening?”

“It’s on the leaflet.” Monokuma said. “Don’t you own eyes?”
“No it’s not.” Hajime turned over the leaflet just to be sure, but he was right. The leaflet was covered in cartoon pictures of spiders and skeletons, but there was no real information.

“Are you kidding me?” Monokuma snatched the flyer from his hand to inspect it for himself. “Monomi you ruined everything!”

As if on cue, Monomi appeared from behind one of the cottages, she was shaking. “W-what did I do wrong now?”

“You ruined my flyers, you didn’t put the time or date of the event!” Monokuma snapped, scrunching the flyer into a ball and hurling it at his sister.

“But I had nothing to do with those, I’d never make something so vile.” Monomi insisted, she seemed terrified just looking at it.

“Yeah, they don’t look like something Monomi would make.” Hajime commented, looking at the amount of fake blood and skeletons on the flyer.

“I made them, but somehow it’s Monomi’s fault.” Monokuma said. “She probably distracted me or something. She’s such a pain.”

“You can’t blame everything on me!” Monomi cried.

“So when is the event?” Hajime asked, stepping in before Monokuma tormented the rabbit any further.

“Tomorrow at eight thirty.” Monokuma said. “I expect everyone to be there, it’s going to be very impressive.”

“I doubt it.” Nagito frowned. “Although, I am intrigued about this live entertainment.”

“You’ll have to wait and see!” Monokuma teased.

Hajime wasn’t particularly excited, since it was Monokuma’s doing. It was probably going to be a night filled with jump scares and cheap tricks. Looking on the bright side, it made him feel somewhat safe that everyone would be together at once, it gave less chance for a murder to happen.

Though, perhaps, Hajime should have listened to Nagito's earlier advice. Like he'd warned, naivety would be Hajime's downfall...

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Monokuma’s Night of Horrors was the talk of the table at breakfast the next morning. Everyone had their own opinion, doubts, and suspicions. With more than just three students turning up to breakfast, it was a little easier to get the conversation flowing. With the exception of Mahiru and Fuyuhiko, everyone had made the effort to appear. It made for a much better atmosphere.

“I am most excited!” Sonia gushed, gazing at the leaflet while she picked at a punnet of strawberries. “I wonder which serial killers Monokuma has taken inspiration from for the design.”

“Let’s hope none of them.” Souda’s face quickly grew pale.
“Foolish mortals. Once you’ve been through the gates of hell, you will understand how pathetic your idea of horror is.” Gundam rolled his eyes, he was incredibly underwhelmed.

“This live entertainment isn’t you Ibuki, is it?” Hajime asked. He knew live performers were often common at horror events, hired actors would jump out on unsuspecting audience members. That being said, there weren’t nearly enough people on the island for that to work. It had to mean something else.

Ibuki shook her head. “No, it’s not Ibuki. I wonder why Monokuma hasn’t asked me to perform.”

“Yeah, I wonder...” Hajime said, knowing the exact reason why Ibuki hadn’t been asked. Even Monokuma had taste.

“Is everyone going to attend?” Peko asked.

“We don’t have a choice, this is Monokuma we’re talking about.” Hajime replied. “I don’t feel like taking any chances.”

“Actually, we’ve not be told that we have to go.” Souda pointed out. “It doesn’t say it once on the flyer.”

“True might that be, are you foolish enough to disobey?” Gundam turned up his nose at the mechanic.

“Gundam’s right.” Hajime agreed. “Everything Monokuma does is mandatory, I wouldn’t see this as any exception.”

“The whole thing gives me the creeps.” Souda shuddered.

“It is okay to be afraid.” Sonia reassured him. “Some people develop courage later than others, your time will come.”

“You, you think I’m under developed?!” Souda's face fell. “M-Miss Sonia, just because I don’t like horror, it doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with me.”

“Questionable…” Hajime muttered, hoping that no one heard.

Monokuma’s horror night wasn’t until eight thirty, meaning Hajime had the whole day ahead of him. What he wanted to do, he wasn’t entirely sure. As much as he enjoyed the sandy beaches, he was beginning to grow tired of doing nothing much else. Sure, sunbathing could be fun. But perhaps in a situation where his life wasn’t in danger, and he wasn’t trapped on the tropical island.

He reminisced to the previous game, thinking of the ways he liked to spend his time. As he daydreamed, a particular event came to mind. Mahiru had been hosting a baking event so that all the girls could get to know each other better. Since Hajime had a recipe book in his possession, she’d allowed him to tag along too. Though he’d been rather the odd one out, it still provided an entertaining morning. He knew what he was going to do.

As much as he wanted everyone involved, Hajime knew it wouldn’t be a good idea to have a group baking session. Everyone was still cooling off after the King’s Game, so he didn’t want to trigger things again by forcing Mahiru and Fuyuhiko to bake with each other. So, like before, Hajime decided to limit the event to just the girls. How he was going to explain that to them without sounding like a pervert, he wasn’t quite sure.

Feeling satisfied and full, he left the restaurant in search of baking supplies. True, he probably should
have checked everyone was up for it before collecting equipment. But, his plan wasn’t very well thought through. Rocketpunch Market was already calling his name.

The return journey to the restaurant was a difficult one. Pots, pans, flour, all weighing down his arms. Hajime wasn’t sure what recipes they’d be making, so he just grabbed everything related to cooking. He knew he’d have to return a lot of it to the store later, he was way too over prepared.

Since he’d taken so long, the restaurant had completely cleared out by the time he returned. He was beginning to regret not asking his guests first, now he’d have to trek around the entire island in search of them.

“Hello, Hajime!” as Hajime set out the equipment on the counter, a friendly rabbit came along. “What’s that you’ve got?”

“Oh, hey Monomi.” Hajime replied, giving her only half of his attention. “I was thinking of doing some baking today.”

“I didn’t know you like to bake.” Monomi said, enjoying the new information she’d gathered on her student.

“Yeah, well…” Hajime said. “It’s time to do something different, I guess. I saw recipe magazines in the market, it gave me an idea. I was thinking of asking some of the girls.”

“What a great idea. I’d love to!” Monomi gasped, including herself as ‘one of the girls’.

In that moment, Hajime realised he could use Monomi to his advantage. “Maybe if you could help me with something, you could stick around and do some baking too.”

“What is it? I’m more than happy to help.” Monomi offered.

“I haven’t actually invited anyone yet, and I’m not really sure where anyone is. By the time I’ve tracked everyone down, the morning will be over.” Hajime was exaggerating for Monomi’s sympathy. “If you could get everyone for me, that’d be great.”

“Of course, Hajime!” Monomi smiled.

Hajime gave Monomi a list of names for her track down. At the last minute, he decided to invite everyone to his baking session. He knew there was no possible way to only invite girls and not seem like a creep. Most likely, Fuyuhiko would turn down the invitation, so Hajime didn’t feel like there was much to worry about. It wasn’t the end of the world whether the other boys showed up or not.

While Monomi was off doing his dirty work, Hajime flicked through the recipe magazines, pulling out pages for the cakes that looked the tastiest. He took no time to consider the difficulty levels, a silly move, considering none of them possessed ultimate baking abilities.

In surprisingly fast time, Monomi had rounded up all of the students she could. “I couldn’t get everyone. Fuyuhiko and Souda weren’t interested, Gundam claimed he was busy walking his hamsters, Nagito said he had too much on his hands, and Mahiru didn’t feel up to it.”

“Mahiru’s not coming?” Hajime sighed. He hoped bringing her out and hanging with the other girls would raise her spirits, she only seemed to be sinking further into a depression. As much as he wanted the photographer to join, there was no way to force her company.

“Wow, Hajime!” Ibuki exclaimed, looking at the baking equipment in front of her eyes. “You really are taking this seriously. I thought you just wanted an excuse to watch us girls get covered in flour!”
“This is indeed impressive.” Sonia beamed. “You have certainly gone to a lot of effort.”

“I didn’t know you were a baker, Hajime.” Peko said.

“I’m not,” Hajime admitted. “But I thought this might be fun. I invited everyone to join, but it looks like we’re the only ones to show up.”

“That is not a problem.” Sonia reassured him. “Remember what they say, too many crooks spoil the broth.”

“Uh, I think it’s cooks…” Chiaki corrected her.

Wasting no time, Hajime presented the girls with the recipes he’d selected, waiting for their opinion on which they should try first.

“Baked Alaska?” Peko looked at Hajime sceptically. “Are you sure it’s a good idea to attempt this?”

“What’s wrong with Baked Alaska?” Hajime objected, it look perfectly fine in the photo.

“Baked Alaska?” Hajime objected, it look perfectly fine in the photo.

“It’s one of the toughest cakes to make, not to mention it involves setting your creation on fire.” Peko replied, acting responsibly. “Considering your lack of baking skills, I feel like we should have chosen the recipes based on the skills they require.”

With a rethink of his plan, Hajime settled for some of the easier bakes. Chiaki was left in charge of cookies, Sonia was creating the icing for a red velvet cake, Ibuki was making iced figurines of all the students to top her sponge cake, Monomi was assisting Peko in making a pie, and Hajime was working with a good old fashioned chocolate cake.

Flour was everywhere, the tabletops were ruined, their aprons tarnished, cakes over spilling into the ovens. Despite the gigantic mess, the baking session turned out rather successful. From appearance alone, their creations looked magnificent, not far off the images in the magazine.

“Ibuki, look at your cake!” Hajime admired, staring at the iced figurines of him and his friends. Ibuki had included everyone, even those that had passed away.

“I got your hair exactly right!” Ibuki laughed, pointing to the ahoge she’d made for Hajime.

“I cannot wait to eat these.” Sonia said, basking in the smell of the delicious treats. She headed towards the draws in search of a kitchen knife. “Which shall we cut first?”

“None, not yet.” Peko replied. “They’re only just out of the ovens, we should give them time to cool down.”

Another ‘guest’ arrived, butting into their conversation. “Are you ladies looking for something to do while your cakes cool?” Monokuma asked, resting against the counter.

“Ladies? Hajime is here too.” Sonia pointed out.

“Like I said, are you ladies looking for something to do?” Monokuma persisted.

“It sounds like you’re about to offer something…” Hajime frowned, he had no trust at all when it came to Monokuma.

“Great guess! It’s actually your lucky day, because I’ve got the perfect way for you to kill some time.” hearing Monokuma say kill so casually put Hajime on edge. “As you know, tonight is the
opening for my ‘Night of Horrors’. I’ve decided, it’s now going to be a costume event. You can use
the time to get something ready.”

“Right, let me just head over to the Jabberwock Island costume store.” Hajime remarked, his voice
oozing with sarcasm.

“You have a market, it’s where you get everything else.” Monokuma retorted. “If you can find a
barbecue in there, you’ll find the materials to make costumes.”

Peko didn’t seem very enthusiastic about dressing up. “Is the costume part mandatory?”

“Yup!” Monokuma nodded. “If you come underdressed, I’ll put you in a costume myself. The dress
code is simple, you’ve got to come as something scary.”

Hajime wasn’t into fancy dress much, nor did he like the scary theme. Mixing horror with a killing
game just didn’t seem like a good idea. That being said, he’d rather choose his own costume than
leave his fate in Monokuma’s paws.

Rocketpunch Market didn’t have its own costume department, but there were enough supplies
around the place to make something semi decent. Hajime and the others had listened to Monokuma’s
suggestion, heading to the market for costumes while they gave their cakes some time to cool.

Once at the market, everyone split off to find exactly what they needed. All of them had different
costumes in mind. At first, Hajime considered going as a werewolf. But that turned into nothing
more than a consideration, coming to the realisation he’d have to cover his body in itchy fake fur. His
new idea was a lot simpler.

Costumes arranged, the group met at the entrance of the market, all of them clutching brown paper
bags. Ibuki looked especially pleased, as did Sonia.

“I cannot wait for you all to see my costume!” Sonia smiled. “But I am going to keep it a secret until
tonight. I have always dreamed of attending a fancy dress party, but those are not custom in my
kingdom.”

“Let’s check on the cakes.” Peko replied. “It’s noon, so we can serve them for lunch.”

“Is everyone ready to go?” Chiaki asked.

“Monomi’s missing.” Ibuki said. “I think I saw her down the potato aisle…”

“Let’s get going then.” Hajime said, hoping to ditch Monomi if they left quickly enough.

They left their costumes in the hotel lobby, not wanting them to get covered in flour, despite the
protection of the paper bags. Caught up in conversation, the five of them headed upstairs, their
mouths watering at the smell of the baked goods.

“What do you think you will try first, Hajime?” Sonia asked.

“That’s tough.” Hajime laughed. “I was thinking the pi-” he stopped mid-conversation, something
else capturing his attention entirely.

Mahiru was in the kitchen, her back to the stairwell. She was rifling around in a frantic fashion.

“Mahiru…” Hajime called out her name, unsure as to what the photographer was up to.
Mahiru jumped, she’d obviously been distracted in her own world. She turned around quickly, realising she’d been caught out. “I...I...I really like your cakes. They look lovely.” her eyes were darting all over the place.

“T-thanks…” Hajime replied, unsure what to say given the situation. “Are you okay?” he stopped with the small talk, cutting straight to the chase.

“I’m fine.” Mahiru tried to laugh it off, but it didn’t sound natural. “I, um, need to get going. I have to fix my costume for the horror house tonight.” she hurried towards the stairs. “Once again, these look amazing.” she was out of sight before anyone could reply.

“Well, that was weird!” Ibuki frowned. “What’s gotten into her pants?”

“So I’m not the only one who thought that was strange, huh?” Hajime said. “Maybe we should check on her.”

“I do not think that is necessary.” Sonia replied. “I think I know what that was about. Mahiru has been exceptionally down since the King’s Game, so she refused your invite to bake with us. I think she probably changed her mind and came to join us, but soon realised we were all done. She must have been embarrassed, so she hurried off.”

“So that’s why was she prying through the draws?” Peko questioned.

Sonia’s theory made sense, but was it right? If so, why was Mahiru hunting through the kitchen cupboards and draws? Was she trying to destroy the cakes in a moment of upset? No, that didn’t sound like something Mahiru would do.

“Oh wait, I think I’ve got it.” Hajime replied, struck with a sudden idea. “She probably felt awkward that she’d turned up to the restaurant just to leave again, it was kinda like rejection. So, she took something from the kitchen to make it look like she’d been here for a reason.”

“We should save her an extra large slice of cake.” Chiaki suggested.

That was a plan Hajime could get behind, he hated seeing Mahiru so down.

At lunch time, the cakes went down a storm. Hajime was rather impressed that his own cake hadn’t killed anyone, or given them food poisoning - it was truly a miracle. Ibuki’s cake was by far the favourite, everyone enjoyed seeing themselves as a figure made from icing. All the effort was completely worth it, just to see the smiles on the students’ faces.

Hajime had no plans for the afternoon, since all of his friends were busy working on their costumes. His own would take no longer than five minutes to put together, and that was providing he worked slowly.

After a packed morning, a relaxing afternoon of his own company didn’t seem like the worst thing in the world. Hajime was pretty sure he could find ways to the pass the time until the evening.

As Hajime sat in his cottage, waiting for the time to pass by, he was hit with a flashback from two days previous, something that had totally slipped his mind. He’d been on his way to the diner, since there was something important Souda had wanted to talk about. Their dinner plans never happened, and the pair ended up involved in the King’s Game instead.

Spending all morning with the girls, and Nagito and Chiaki the day previous, it had completely slipped Hajime’s mind that Souda had been wanting to talk about something. Not only did it make Hajime feel like a pretty terrible friend, but it peaked his curiosity even further.
There were still a few hours to go until the horror event, enough time to fit in an important conversation. Hajime didn’t see Souda as the sort to spend all day working on a costume, so he decided to take a chance, and pay the mechanic a visit.

Hajime didn’t have far to go, he could see Souda’s silhouette through his cottage window. He rapped on the door a few times, waiting patiently to be let in - after all, he had time to kill. After a minute or two had passed, the mechanic finally came to greet him. He stepped outside of his cottage, hurriedly slamming the door shut behind him, not allowing Hajime a chance to go inside.

“Uh, hey, man…” Souda’s attention was elsewhere, as if the last thing he wanted was to talk to Hajime.

“Hey…” Hajime already sensed the awkward atmosphere. “Is this a bad time?” perhaps Souda was spending more time on his costume that Hajime had predicted.

“Depends on why you’re here.” Souda replied, though he seemed to be itching to get back inside.

“I just remembered that we never got to have dinner together.” Hajime replied. “Wasn’t there something you wanted to talk about?”

“Oh, that!” Souda seemed to have forgotten too. “Nah, it’s okay. I sort of just needed an opinion. It's doesn't really matter, I'll be fine.”

“Are you sure?” Hajime offered. “I thought it was important.”

“Tonight’s no good for me, ya know, there’s a lot going on. Um, but if you really did wanna talk about it, maybe we could rearrange dinner for tomorrow night?” Souda suggested.

“Tomorrow sounds good.” Hajime smiled, he had no plans. “I guess we can wait another day then.”

“Great, man.” Souda did his best to return the smile. “I don’t wanna be rude, but I’ve got a lot to do right now. So, I’m gonna head back inside. I’ll see you later though.”

“Bye, se-” before Hajime even had the chance to finish his goodbye, Souda had disappeared back into his cottage. Hajime knew Souda’s behaviour was weird, but perhaps their conversation tomorrow would straighten things out.

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It was quarter past eight when Hajime finally decided to get ready. He retrieved the only item he’d taken from the market, a bottle of tomato ketchup. Staining his white shirt with ketchup didn’t seem like the smartest of ideas, but Hajime figured it would wash out.

He temporarily removed his shirt, squirting ketchup down the front to mimic fake blood. It was a lazy costume, granted, but it was all Hajime could be bothered to create. He didn’t see the point in spending two or three hours making a costume that he would never wear again.

Costume complete, he left in search of the fourth island, it had taken no time at all to get ready. He was pretty pleased, since the ketchup looked fairly realistic. It was as if he’d been stabbed in the chest, perhaps a costume of poor taste given the circumstances. He sincerely hoped he didn't smell too much like a tomato.
Monomi’s house, or rather, the Haunted House, had been roped off. A large velvet ribbon had been tied around the place to stop anyone from entering. Gundam was the only one already there, hanging outside as a loner.

He too, had gone for a simple costume - though his was far more effective. Attached to his teeth were two fake vampire fangs - Hajime hoped he’d taken them from the market, and not Souda’s mouth. To finish off the look, he’d applied some ketchup to his mouth. Given Gundam’s already pale complexion, dark makeup, and gothic outfit, he made the perfect vampire.

Gundam greeted Hajime with a knowing smile. “I see you are not one for costumes either.”

“You could say that.” Hajime laughed.

Unfortunately for Hajime and Gundam, no one else had put such little effort into their costumes. Ibuki was the next to arrive, broom in hand, and dressed as a witch. She’d kept her dark skirt, but substituted her brightly coloured socks for black stockings. Using cardboard and ribbon from the market, she’d made her own witch’s hat, it sat perfectly on top of her head. Her vibrant hair complimented the look, matching the eye shadow she’d applied.

Chiaki and Nagito hadn’t bothered with actual costumes, they’d taken the face painting route instead. Chiaki had transformed herself into Monomi. Arguably, it wasn't a scary costume, but it was more impressive than Hajime's. To the left side of her face, Chiaki had applied pink facepaint, and white to the right. From somewhere, Chiaki had acquired coloured contacts, allowing her to turn her eyes red and black. She had even fashioned a small bow into her hair. Chiaki hadn't bothered with Monomi’s diaper, but that would be taking things too far.

Nagito's efforts were by far the best, it was as if his luck had aided him. Taking advantage of his pale skin, Nagito had opted for a skeleton. Though he was wearing his usual clothes, his face was completely transformed. Using just three colours of face paint, white, black, and grey, he had achieved the perfect look. He’d hollowed out his cheekbones, and added deathly looking bags underneath his eyes. His nose had been painted black, and he’d drawn a line of teeth across his mouth. It looked highly professional, and like he’d taken a lot of time to get his desired look. His wild, curly hair added to the costume. Hajime knew his ketchup job was embarrassing in comparison.

“Where’s everyone else?” Hajime murmured, no one had shown up since Nagito's arrival. “This is starting any minute.”

“I...I think it should have started two minutes ago.” Chiaki said, using the clock on her handheld console to tell the time. “Monokuma must be running late too.”

“Peko and Sonia are definitely coming, we saw them buy their costumes earlier.” Ibuki recalled. “I saw what Sonia bought, she was going as an evil fairy.”

“Maybe...their costumes are taking a while to put on?” Chiaki suggested, showing little confidence in herself.

“Who are we missing?” Nagito asked, not bothering to take a headcount.

“Peko, Fuyuhiko, Sonia, Mahiru, and Souda.” Hajime replied. At a stretch, he could see why Fuyuhiko and Mahiru hadn’t turned up, but it didn’t make sense for any of the others.

“I can go and look for them, if you’d like.” Nagito offered. “Like Chiaki said, they might be having problems with their costumes.”
Hajime didn’t have the opportunity to accept or decline Nagito’s offer, since Monokuma finally showed up. He looked no different to usual, having not bothered with a costume. The same couldn’t be said for Monomi.

The poor rabbit was being dragged behind her older brother, pulled by the ears. The left side of her body had been spray painted black, so she was now a black and white rabbit. It was a patchy job, her pink fur still visible in places. She’d been forcibly dressed as Monokuma.

“Doesn’t Monomi look brilliant?” Monokuma smirked. “She's just like her big brother!”

“Please, let me wash it off.” Monomi begged, fresh tears in her eyes. “It’s stinging my fur, I think I’m allergic to the body paint.”

“You can’t be, it’s not body paint.” Monokuma replied.

“Then what is it?” Monomi asked.

“Bike paint.” Monokuma said casually.

“Gahhhhh!” Monomi shrieked. “No wonder it’s hurting! Please -”

“Shut up, Monomi. You’re dressed like me to tonight, and that means you have a reputation to uphold. Unlike you, I’m not pathetic, so I never cry.” Monokuma snapped, his tone hostile.

“Where’s your costume?” Nagito pressed Monokuma. “You made it clear we all had to dress up.”

“My party, my island, my killing game, my rules.” Monokuma brushed him aside with a lame excuse. “I’ll do whatever the hell I want.”

“Can we go inside already?” Ibuki complained. “We’ve been standing out here for ten minutes! Your invite said eight thirty.”

“Yeah well, it’s eight thirty-four, so don’t be so miserable. It’s not my fault you all came so early.” Monokuma retorted, finally approaching the ribbon. “Right, let’s do the honours.” from apparently nowhere, Monokuma presented a large, oversized, pair of scissors. “Holding these really remind me of someone.”

"Be careful with those!” Monomi warned him. "It's dangerous having scissors so large."

"If you don't shut your stupid mouth, I'll use these to chop your ears off.” Monokuma hissed, puffing up his body to appear more threatening. "Okay, here we go. The big reveal..." with a single snip, the ribbon fell to the floor.

Hajime didn’t take his eyes off the scissors Monokuma was holding, he didn’t trust the bear.

Monokuma opened the door to the horror house, standing back to let his students pass through first. Hajime could see flashing lights inside. He wasn’t even in the house yet, and they were hurting his eyes. A dry ice machine caused smoke to drift outside. It was a little excessive, but it did seem impressive.

“Go inside, I’m right behind you.” Monokuma instructed, whispering like he were telling a ghost story.

The students poured into the house, keeping together in a tight group. There was so much to look at, but Hajime had no time to take it in. Before he’d so much as glanced at the buffet table, all the lights
in the room cut out. Seconds later, the door slammed shut from behind him. With no light, and no obvious exits, Hajime found himself trapped in total darkness.

“Ahhhhh! The darkness is eating me alive.” Ibuki wailed. “Someone save Ibuki!”

At the same time, Hajime felt someone grab his hand - probably Ibuki, though he didn’t doubt it could be Nagito.

“What is the meaning of this?” Gundam demanded. “Is this some sort of trap?” Hajime couldn’t see him, but his voice was loud and clear.

“Let’s…let’s not panic.” Chiaki attempted to stay calm for the benefit of the group, but her own voice was shaking too.

“Is everyone okay?” Monomi called out, trying to confirm the safety of her students.

“Puhuhuhu!” Monokuma’s laughter rang throughout the room, he had total control of the situation. “Welcome to my night of horrors. You should keep an extra eye out, for you never know what’s waiting in the dark, crawling up to stab you in the back.”

The moment he finished speaking, the lights kicked back into action - coming on so quickly, the students felt blinded. It wasn’t the lights themselves that were doing the damage, they were pretty dark, the low lighting contributing to the haunted atmosphere. It was the strobe lights that Monokuma had installed all over the place. They flashed so brightly, so quickly, it made their stomachs turn. Hajime sincerely hoped no one was prone to seizures.

“What’s going on?” Chiaki asked, trying to adjust to the light.

“These lights, they’re a warning that we await a terrible fate.” Gundam gasped, almost stumbling backwards in fear. For once, he didn’t seem to be spouting for the sake of it, he seemed genuinely afraid.

“Don’t say stuff like that, you’re gonna jinx us all.” Ibuki complained. “You’re like that guy in a horror movie, who says ‘I’ll be back’, except they never come back because they jinx it and the killer gets them.”

“You’re all so paranoid.” Monokuma was practically rolling around on the floor with laughter. “One tiny blackout, and you all start freaking out. This is a horror house, what else were you expecting?”

It was nothing more than one of Monokuma’s devilish pranks. Still, Hajime couldn’t bring himself to relax.

With the lights back in action, Hajime could finally take in the haunted house’s makeover. No more were the brightly coloured walls, Monomi clones, or monitoring screens. The furniture had been completely removed, and the entire place had received a gothic makeover.

It looked like your ordinary haunted house; cobwebs, fake spiders, skeletons, pumpkins, that kind of thing. Though there were a few exceptions, Hajime noticed several large dummies attached to the walls.

The dummies reminded Hajime of shop mannequins, though the outfits they wore were awfully familiar. The first wore a basic white shirt, with jeans and a green tie. The dummy beside it wore a black trench coat and a large scarf. It took Hajime mere seconds to figure out, the dummies were meant to represent the students.
Hajime took another look at the dummies, they had all ‘died’ in dramatic fashion. Peko’s had a knife through the heart, Sonia’s was crucified, Gundam’s was bleeding from his throat, Chiaki’s was slashed into pieces, Hajime’s was strangling itself. Hajime broke gaze, not wanting to look at them for any longer than he had to.

“Impressive, isn’t it?” Monokuma smirked, basking in his own glory. “I told you I’d make things scarier.”

“Those dummies are so creepy.” Ibuki shuddered. “They look...so real.”

“Everyone gather round.” Monokuma said, instructing the students to sit on the floor in a circle. “To begin my night of horrors, I’m going to tell you some ghost stories. While I do, Monomi is going to hand out the spooky treats.”

“Like sweets and stuff?” Ibuki asked.

“I have smoothies made from insect legs, and sweets made from fish skin.” Monokuma replied, an evil smirk spreading across his face.

Hajime wasn’t the only one who started to wretch. It seemed that Monokuma had a very skewed perspective when it came to ‘treats’. Neglecting the chance to eat some of Monokuma’s disgusting food, the students skipped straight to the ghost stories.

Monokuma had turned off the strobe lights, wanting the room dark as possible. From underneath his chin, he shone a torch, occasionally shining it in Hajime’s eyes when he felt like being annoying.

“Is everyone sitting comfortably?” Monokuma asked. “Well I don’t give a shit either way, I’m going to begin. This first story, is called ‘The Monomi under the stairs’.”

Clearing his throat, Monokuma launched into the story. “There was once a young couple, Mr Teruteru, and his wife, Hiyoko Saionji…” it was in poor taste, using the victims of the first case as names for his story…

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**The Monomi Under The Stairs**

*There was once a young couple, Mr Teruteru, and his wife, Hiyoko Saionji. Due to a high rise in the property market, the couple were forced to look for a home out of the city. One day, their realtor presented them with a house in the middle of the countryside. Situated on an old farm, it offered exactly what the couple were looking for, for a price way below their budget.*

‘That house? For this little?’ Mrs Hiyoko had questioned, unsure how she could ever afford such luxury. The realtor informed her that the house had gone up for sale that very morning. An elderly couple had lived there before, desperate to move away, they'd dropped the pricing.

*Mrs Hiyoko had a bad feeling, certain it was some form of trick, but her dumb husband had been won over by the number of large rooms, and snatched up the offer before anyone else had the chance.*

They moved in later that week. The drive to their new home was a long one, they quickly came to see how far into the countryside their house was. There was no one around for miles, not even an occasional dog walker, or some kids on bikes. Even a trip to their local greengrocers would be thirty minutes by car.
True to the photographs, the farm was a beautiful location to be admired. The old house was surrounded by miles of beautiful fields, though they no longer homed animals, they looked freshly mowed, and well kept. The interior was just as stunning on the eyes, mahogany doorframes, freshly carpeted floors. A house true to its time.

Mr Teruteru marvelled in his purchase, he couldn’t wait to brag to all the friends he didn’t have. Despite the beauty, his wife wasn’t as joyful, it made no sense why a house as marvellous as theirs had been sold for such a price. There was more than what met the eye, and she knew it.

The first signs of trouble began to present themselves within days of their move. While preparing lunch in the kitchen, Mr Teruteru swore he heard the sound of movement from the basement underneath their house. He told himself it was a rat, ignoring the problem in favour of flavouring his garden salad.

His wife was next to encounter trouble. Her favourite kimono had disappeared from her wardrobe, she found it curled up in a heap down in the basement. Had a wild fox made its way into the house and done such damage?

As the weeks passed by, so did the strange encounters. Scratching from underneath the house, the sound of footsteps when they believed to be alone, items going missing, the feeling of being watched.

Mrs Hiyoko found herself being driven to paranoia, a permanent chill up her spine, never being able to relax. Many a time, she told her husband there was something wrong with her house. The entire place gave her a terrible feeling, especially the basement. Her husband neglected to listen, simply putting it down to her imagination.

It was a dark winter’s evening, Mrs Hiyoko had driven into town for a night with her friends. The invitation had extended to her husband, but he’d been rather insistent on staying at home, too lazy to bother himself with company he didn’t particular enjoy.

It had been refreshing taking a trip back to the city. The variety of stores, the constant presence of people, the dazzling streetlights. These were all the home comforts that Mrs Hiyoko missed most. She walked up the path to her house, her breath fogging up the night. She headed straight to the front door, no need to find her keys. Her husband was home, all the lights on inside.

She called out upon her return, though she was met with no greeting. It was a big house, but with no one there but themselves, it shouldn’t have been hard for him to hear her. She called once again, but silence was all that met her.

Frustrated that her husband would choose to ignore her, Mrs Hiyoko marched around the house, searching the places he spent most of his time. He was not curled up on the sofa, his head in a recipe book. He was not standing in the kitchen, dicing peppers and chopping onions. Nor was he relaxing the bath, or fast asleep in bed. He wasn’t anywhere.

Had he gone out? No, that couldn’t be. It was almost midnight, there wouldn’t be anywhere for miles that would be open at such an hour. Mrs Hiyoko stood in her hallway, ranting and raving, when suddenly, a noise caught her attention.

It came from the basement, the place where all the mysterious noises were located. It was the familiar scratching sensation, like someone dragging their nails along a chalk board. Could it be?

With nothing else but dead ends left, Mrs Hiyoko had no choice but to go down there. She approached the stairs with caution, the place gave her the creeps, she always tried to avoid it when possible.
The basement was in darkness, the light switch at the bottom of the stairs. Mrs Hiyoko took one step at a time, taking the smallest of steps, as if she was expecting something to jump out and grab at her ankles. The sounds of terror only grew louder the deeper into the basement she went. Whether it was her husband, or just a lonesome mouse, there was something waiting for her.

She felt along the wall until her fingers graced the light switch. Her fingers hovered over the switch, did she really want to free herself from the darkness? Before she had the chance to convince herself otherwise, she slammed her fingers on the switch, forcing herself to face whatever was waiting for her.

In a tangled heap, lay her husband’s corpse. The man had been torn limb from limb, every bone exposed. His hear-

“Dammit, that’s enough!” Hajime raised his voice, interrupting the story. The last thing he needed to hear was a graphic description of Teruteru’s dead body.

“Hajime, you’re always such a spoil sport.” Monokuma sulked. “We didn’t even get to the end of the story.”

“Let me guess, Monomi was eating his body or some crap.” Hajime rolled his eyes, Monokuma was so predictable.

“That wasn’t scary at all.” Ibuki huffed. “You spent way too long describing unnecessary details.”

“Isn’t there something better we can do?” Hajime asked, if this was the itinerary for the rest of the night, he wanted out. He didn’t see why there should be any problem with him leaving, five of the others hadn’t bothered to show.

Hajime waited for an answer, but he didn’t get one. The bear had suddenly gone silent.

“Uh, Monokuma…” Hajime repeated the bear’s name again. “I asked you something. Are you even listening?”

The bear was paying no attention at all, his body had totally frozen too. It was as if he’d stopped working altogether.

“You don’t think he’s broken, do you?” Hajime asked, looking to his classmates for their opinions.

“Let’s kick him and find out!” Ibuki suggested, preparing her foot.

“I wouldn’t do that.” Chiaki stopped her. “It’s against the school rules to harm the principal. Don’t take the risk.”

“His soul appears to have left his body.” Gundam said. “He is nothing more than an empty shell.”

“Monokuma?” Nagito tapped the bear lightly on the shoulder.

Suddenly, Monokuma sprung back into action, a gigantic grin spreading across his face. “I’m sorry, I was just...watching something. Guess what boys and girls? An exciting new exhibition has opened itself.”

“What?” Hajime couldn’t make any sense of Monokuma’s words.

“Consider it a…‘live’ piece of entertainment for the Haunted House.” Monokuma smirked. “But before we go, I’m afraid you all need to have a little sleep.” without warning, Monokuma slammed
his fist against the wall, apparently triggering some sort of button.

As soon as his paw moved away, a hazy smoke began to fill the room. The smoke was white like snow, though it was nowhere near as pleasant. It poured in at an alarming rate, choking Hajime as it blocked his nose and clouded his vision. He could feel his consciousness slipping away.

“T-this...is...” Hajime tried to speak, but his words were stolen from him.

“S-sleeping….gas.” Chiaki finished the sentence, collapsing to the floor almost instantly.

Gundam went next, followed by Ibuki. Though they were already sitting down, there was still an impact as their bodies smacked against the wooden floor.

“This...this is...wrong.” Hajime heard Nagito cry. “Not...yet...”

Hajime watched as Nagito doubled over, out cold. He had no time to process what was going on, as seconds later, his own body came into contact with the ground. As his eyes forced themselves shut, the world around him faded into darkness.

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Hajime's mind woke first, before his body had even been given the chance to move. He was struck by a single thought, already knowing that something was wrong.

*I don’t know where I am.*

The realisation caused Hajime to panic, he felt like he couldn’t breathe. He needed to gather his thoughts and calm down, the last thing he wanted was a full blown panic attack. He was Hajime Hinata, he could handle this.

With enough energy, Hajime finally opened his eyes. The sleeping gas had lingering effects, his whole body was aching. Just like he’d thought, he hadn’t woken up where he’d fallen asleep. He was too delirious to properly identify his new surroundings, but it wasn’t the Haunted House, that much he knew.

The natural lighting of the moon's reflection was Hajime's only guide. All lights had been switched off, and he was too tired to try and find the switches.

“H-Hajime?” a weary voice called out his name, only recently having regained consciousness. They were sitting up, hugging their knees. “Are you awake?”

“Y-yeah, I am.” Hajime forced himself to sit up, doing so carefully, in case he smacked his head on anything. “Ibuki, is that you?” he thought he recognised the voice.

“It’s me.” Ibuki replied, sounding seriously drained from the gas. It was taking her a lot of effort just to talk.

“Do you know what’s going on?” Hajime asked. There was no reason for Ibuki to know any more than him, but it was worth asking.

“Everyone is sleeping.” Ibuki replied. “I...I think we’re in the hotel lobby. I can see some stairs over there.”
“You can?” Hajime couldn’t see anything in the darkness.

“Ibuki’s ears aren’t the only things immune to the darkness.” the musician replied. “They’re over there, with the manikins resting on them.”

“Ugh, don’t tell me Monokuma brought those stupid mannequins over here.” Hajime shuddered, he didn’t want to stare at his own ‘corpse’ again.

Gundam woke next, his heavy coughing announcing his awakening. “What...what is the meaning of this?! What demons have possessed my body?”

“Demons? I think you mean Monoku-” Hajime began, though quickly interrupted.

*Ding dong, dong ding*

“A body has been discovered! Now then, after a certain amount of time has passed, the class trial will begin!”

“The...the body discovery announcement?” Ibuki’s voice shook, her entire body trembling.

“This cannot be…” Gundam uttered, his voice barely a whisper.

Hajime felt his stomach churn, as if he was going to suddenly throw up. His heart rate picked up in seconds, a sweat breaking out across his brow. The body discovery announcement always meant serious business, it was never a joke. Monokuma wasn’t just pulling his leg. Hajime, Ibuki, and Gundam had woken...the three people needed to trigger the announcement.

In the darkness, Hajime could just about make out the bodies surrounding him. Nagito and Chiaki both lay fast asleep because of the gas, but, that couldn’t be it. The announcement never would have sounded if they were simply sleeping. One of them, or maybe even both, were dead.

“N-Nagito?! C-Chiaki!” Hajime cried out in a panic, his eyes scanning between them frequently, searching for any sign of movement.

“D-did, d-did someone call my name?” Nagito whispered, slowly opening his eyes.

“It’s the BDA!” Ibuki explained. “It’s just sounded. Someone’s died…”

“W-what?” hearing the news, Nagito sat up instantly. There was a genuine look of shock on his face. “Who is it?”

“Chiaki…!” Hajime called her name again, shaking her body this time. He didn’t want to her hurt, but he needed her to wake up. “Please, wake up. Why aren’t you waking up?”

Hajime felt someone grab hold of his arms. It was Gundam, pulling him away from Chiaki. “Control yourself!”

“But...but I need to wake her up.” Hajime protested, a lump forming in his throat. He was denying the truth, refusing to accept it. He tried to pull free, but Gundam wouldn’t let him go. “Chiaki, please! You can’t...can’t…”

“Aaawh…” stretching her arms to the side, Chiaki let out the loudest yawn, her eyes opening slowly. “What’s going on?”
“You’re...you’re awake!” Hajime wasn’t sure how he held together, almost crying with relief. “You’re alive. You’re really alive. But, if you’re not dead, and we’re not dead. That means…”

“Uh, Hajime…” Ibuki called for his attention, sounding different to usual, it was clear that something was wrong. “R-remember those mannequins from earlier?”

“Yes?” Hajime replied, he already knew what she was going to say.

“I-Ibuki’s isn’t so sure they’re mannequins…” Ibuki was hugging herself for comfort, every hair on her body standing on edge.

Mannequins resting on the stairs, that’s what Ibuki had said. Now that Hajime had been awake longer than a minute, his vision was beginning to come into focus. The oversized windows at the side of the room provided just enough light for him to see.

Hajime forced himself up, using all the strength in his body to push off the floor. Grabbing onto furniture as he walked, he approached the stairwell. He could see a figure insight.

Her body was sprawled out on the stairs, her limbs bending in weird directions, as if every bone in her body had been snapped. A broken camera hung from her neck, the lens shattered into pieces.

M-Mahiru!” Hajime cried out her name, though he knew he wasn't going to get a response.

“W-who’s the other one?” Ibuki asked, afraid of hearing the answer.

“Other one?” Hajime muttered to himself. Of course, every time Ibuki had mentioned the mannequins, she’d used a plural. There were two.

Another body lay at the bottom of the stairs, almost consumed by the shadows. Arms and legs in different directions, a knife through their heart. There was no mistaking the yellow jumpsuit, or crazy pink hair. Hajime knew exactly who he was looking at. There lay Kazuichi Souda, bloody, stiff, and limp.

Chapter End Notes

It's time to play the investigation music.

Edit:: It's been brought to my attention that the BDA only sounded once. This isn't a clue or anything. I haven't played the game in a little while, so I just went with the idea that 1 announcement would cover both of them - my bad. But yeah, just so you know, both of them are dead. My mistake!! :o
Chapter Four - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Hajime begins his next investigation, hoping he can gather up enough clues for the looming class trial.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Whether it was shock, or lingering effects of the smoke, Hajime found himself on his knees. Resting at the bottom of the staircase, he reached out his hands, taking Mahiru's in one, and Souda's in the other. Both hands were limp, stone cold too, but Hajime wouldn't let them go.

Mahiru Koizumi, the girl Hajime had desperately been trying to protect. Kazuichi Souda, his best friend, fellow survivor. Under his watch, another two people had died. He'd failed those he cared about most, and for that, he felt terrible.

“What is going on?” Sonia burst into the lobby, shrieking in horror when her question was quickly answered. Someone had gone to the liberty of switching on the lights, making the bodies easier to see. Having been away from Monokuma's Night of Horrors, Sonia hadn't been part of the sleeping gas experience.

Fuyuhiko and Peko followed suit, arriving at separate times, they hadn't been affected by the gas either. The body discovery announcement was their only sign that something was wrong. Fuyuhiko and Peko said nothing, though they both grimaced at the sight. Hajime wasn’t going to buy a single second of their acting, he knew what they’d done.

He didn't want to let bias opinions get the better of him, but he was struggling to see any other possibilities. Peko and Fuyuhiko had both been missing from the group, and now two people had turned up dead. It was more than just a coincidence.

The initial shock was beginning to wear off, but Hajime didn’t feel any easier. He forced himself to move off the floor, though it was a challenge. As much as he wanted to sit there holding their hands all night, he knew it wasn’t healthy. Mahiru and Souda were dead, he had to accept that. He tried his best to keep the tears away, masking how truly terrible he felt in that moment. The others wouldn't understand. Sure, everyone had lost their friends, but to Hajime, it meant so much more. Mahiru felt like a responsible older sister, Souda like a goofy brother. Perhaps it was dramatic to say it felt like losing family, but there was no other way for Hajime to describe the pain.

Everyone had gathered at the bottom of the staircase in a semi-circle formation. Everyone's eyes were glued to the bodies, meaning fortunately, no one was paying attention to Hajime.

“Two bodies...how could the killer be so greedy?” Ibuki was first to speak, breaking the ominous silence.

Hajime realised his current position was blocking the view of others. He took a step backwards, merging into the circle between Nagito and Sonia.
“H-Hajime, you are bleeding!” staring at Hajime’s shirt, Sonia cried out in fear, further distressed than she already was.

"H-huh?!” Hajime responded with the same level of panic, had the blackened come after him too? However, a quick glance at his shirt cured all his worries. “Oh, no, this isn't blood. Uh, it's ketchup. It was for my costume...” it sounded embarrassing saying it out loud.

"That is a big relief!” Sonia gasped, steadying herself.

Peko was quick to get to the point, reminding the students of their responsibilities. “We should hurry and begin the investigation.”

Hajime looked at her as if she was insane, upset at the suggestion. “You want to investigate already?” it hadn't even been five minutes since they'd discovered both of the bodies.

“Monokuma could call us for the class trial at any given moment. We need to gather as much information while we can.” Peko's reasoning was sound, but Hajime still saw it as insensitive.

Hajime had a deep understanding of how important the investigations were, but he wanted a few minutes to mourn his friends. Why was Peko so keen to get on with the investigation? Could it be, the faster they got through the trial, the closer she'd be to her freedom with Fuyuhiko?

“We can’t investigate like this.” Hajime protested, looking down at his ‘blood’ stained shirt. Those that had attended the horror night were still in their costumes, it felt wrong. “We need to get out of these clothes.”

“There isn’t time.” Peko insisted. “Wait until after the investigation is complete. If you find yourself with nothing to do, wash up then. But for now, we must focus.”

As much as Hajime didn’t like the idea, he knew Peko was right. He just felt horrified wearing a shirt of fake blood, when two of his friends had actually been murdered. That being said, he wasn’t willing to do the investigation shirtless, so it would have to do. The others had made attempts to abandon their costumes too. Ibuki had ditched her props, Gundam had removed the fangs from his mouth, and Chiaki had taken the coloured contacts out of her eyes.

“W-wahhhhhhh!” upon arrival at the scene, Monomi let out an ear piercing shriek. “T-two more killings? N-no, this can’t be happening.”

“Will you stop wailing?!” Fuyuhiko hissed, venting his frustration at Monomi. “We’re never gonna be able to investigate if you’re acting like this.”

“Give her a break, Fuyuhiko!” Hajime found himself raising his own voice. It wasn’t often he cared for Monomi's feelings, but even he understood what a painful time it was for everyone. “Two people have died!”

“Two people…” Chiaki uttered, a look of sadness on her face.

“Gee, there are so many glum faces around here.” strutting onto the crime scene, came Monokuma. “I know what’ll cheer you up, a good joke!”

“Jokes?” Gundam spat in disgust. “Don’t bother us with your foolish antics.”

“Why did the chicken cross the road?” Monokuma asked, ignoring Gundam. “Because Mahiru and Souda’s dead bodies were in his way! Hahaha!” the sound of his cruel laughter filled the room. “Okay, but I have something that actually will cheer you up.”
“You expect us to trust you after that?” Nagito narrowed his eyes at the bear.

Monokuma graced them with his ‘Monokuma File’, making a far bigger ordeal out of the entire thing than there needed to be. He didn’t hang around much longer, disappearing to prepare the courtroom, or perhaps, writing more terrible jokes. Either way, he was out of sight, giving the students a chance to lead their investigation in peace.

As the investigation kicked into action, Hajime blocked out the world around him. If he wanted to succeed, he had to focus. His first step, was to read the Monokuma file that he’d been given. A better understanding of the bodies would serve him well.

*There are two victims this time: Mahiru Koizumi and Kazuichi Souda. Mahiru Koizumi’s cause of death is a snapped neck. She has two broken ribs, a sprained ankle, and severe damage to her spine. Kazuichi Souda died from a puncture to a vital organ, the result of a sharp weapon. It was an instant death. Several bones in his body are damaged/sprained, though only his left leg is broken.*

The file confirmed what Hajime already knew. Mahiru and Souda were lying at the bottom of the staircase, their bodies twisted at horrible angles. It was clear, they’d been pushed down the stairs. Or perhaps, they’d fallen, though for a murder case, it didn’t seem so likely.

What struck Hajime as interesting, was the difference in their deaths. Mahiru had died from a broken neck, while Souda had been stabbed in the heart, resulting in instant death. The blackened seemed to have taken an extra step to kill Souda, why would that be?

“You stopped reading.” Nagito remarked, watching Hajime’s tablet from over his shoulder. “Don’t get rid of the Monokuma file yet, you missed something.”

Hajime tried not to jump, he wasn't aware that Nagito was watching him. “H-huh?” he touched the Monokuma file again, as he did so, another page revealed itself. Like Nagito suggested, there was more information.

*The time of deaths are as followed: Mahiru Koizumi passed away at 8:36pm. Kazuichi Souda passed away at 8:49pm*

“The time of deaths, they’re so...far apart.” Hajime took in the new information, completely shocked at what he was reading.

Their murders weren’t close together at all. Mahiru had been killed a good thirteen minutes before Souda. Though it might not sound like a lot of time, it ruled out the theory that Mahiru and Souda had been killed in one go. The mystery was growing more and more mysterious by the second.

"Actually, what time is it now?" Hajime asked, he had no idea how long the sleeping gas had knocked him out for. It could be several hours later for all he knew.

"It's around quarter past ten." Nagito replied, filling in the gap in Hajime's knowledge.

"So it seems like we were out for just over an hour and a half." Hajime commented. "I guess we should keep that in mind during the investigation."

“Well, Hajime, where are you going to start?” Nagito asked, a challenging smirk upon his face. “I think you can tell, this case holds quite a few mysteries. Where do you even begin…”

Nagito’s mind games were the last thing Hajime wanted. He’d had enough of Nagito’s company over the past few days, he couldn’t be around the luckster for much longer, not with the way he was behaving.
“I’m starting with the bodies.” Hajime announced. He wanted to search the bodies before anyone had time to tamper with them. If Fuyuhiko and Peko were working together, they could do anything while Hajime’s back was turned. “Can you go away? I want to do this alone.”

“As you wish.” Nagito smiled, apparently not offended that he’d been asked to leave. “I have something else to sort out. Where’s Monokuma…” muttering to himself, Nagito wandered off.

Taking a deep breath, Hajime knelt on the staircase, in the perfect position to reach both bodies. He started with Mahiru’s, since she’d been the first to die. It felt wrong to search a girl’s body, but it wasn’t like he’d been blessed with choices. If Hajime wanted the job done properly, he’d have to do it himself. His intentions were anything but wrong, and that’s all that mattered.

A quick search of the photographer’s body revealed nothing new, the important details were given in Monokuma’s file. The only thing Hajime found on her badly bruised body, was her cottage key. The same went for Souda. Besides a red pen stuffed in the pocket of his jumpsuit, and the keys to his cottage, he offered no new clues either.

Hajime watched over his friend. The look upon Souda’s face appeared troubled, not like the smiling Souda that Hajime knew best. Why hadn’t he and Mahiru attended Monokuma’s horror house? If they had, they might still be alive.

No, it wasn’t the time for ‘what ifs’. Hajime had a job to do. He couldn’t let his emotions get the better of him, it was crucial that he focused. With the bodies themselves providing no clues, Hajime moved onto his next point of interest...the murder weapon.

Like the Monokuma File said, Souda’s heart had been punctured. That was the result of the large knife sticking through the mechanic’s heart. Hajime recognised it instantly, it belonged to the restaurant. It didn’t come as much of a surprise considering the lobby was located right below the restaurant. Hajime wasted no time looking for fingerprints, even if there were some, he hadn’t the right technology to analyse them.

Confident there was nothing else left to find, Hajime backed away from the bodies, taking their cottage keys for himself. He saw it important to inspect the victims’ cottages, there could be anything waiting inside. The fact Mahiru and Souda had possession of their keys had to mean something. It suggested the two of them had left their cottages of their own free will.

“Where did you find those keys?” Sonia had been on her way to talk to Hajime, when she noticed him staring at the two metallic items. “Are they a clue?”

“They’re the keys to Mahiru and Souda’s cottages.” Hajime explained, pocketing the keys for safekeeping. He felt safe sharing the information with Sonia, he knew she was someone with pure intentions. “What about you, have you found anything?”

Sonia shook her head. “Truth be told, I have not had much of a chance to look. I was just reading the Monokuma File.”

“You can come to the cottages with me, if you want.” Hajime offered. He saw it as a good idea to bring someone with him as a witness, otherwise, he could get accused of manipulating evidence.

“If you do not mind, I would like to join you.” Sonia accepted the offer. Hajime had a feeling she didn’t want to be on her own, given the circumstances. Despite the indoor lighting, it was still dark outside of the hotel. The haunting atmosphere was only adding to everyone's paranoia.

“We might as well go now.” Hajime suggested, eyeing up the exit. “Once we’ve investigated their
cottages, we can give the others a chance to look.”

Hajime led Sonia towards the exit, making sure not to get in the way of the others. Leaving the bodies behind, he stepped outside. There was a slight breeze in the air, it was extremely welcoming. Hajime hadn’t even realised how much he’d been sweating.

While they headed in the direction of Mahiru’s cottage, Sonia launched into conversation. “Might I ask, since I was not present, what happened at Monokuma’s Night Of Horrors?”

“No much.” Hajime replied, nothing that he considered important anyway. “Monokuma triggered a blackout to scare us when we arrived, offered us gross fish drinks, and then told an awful ghost story.”

“If I may interrupt,” Sonia said, doing so anyway. “A blackout? So that was Monokuma’s doing…”

Hajime stopped in his tracks, giving Sonia his full attention. The conversation was proving more important than he initially thought. “D’you know something about it?”

“I do! I spent my evening in the library,” Sonia informed him. “I was reading by the light of a lamp. It was a wonderful manga about a serial killer name-”

“Sonia, could you maybe stick to the point?” Hajime had no time for getting off topic, though he didn't want to be rude to the Princess.

“I was reading my manga, when suddenly, all of the power dissipated. I was left in total darkness.” Sonia revealed. “I presumed the blackout went no further than the library, as it lasted for less than a minute.”

Multitasking, Hajime unlocked Mahiru’s cottage as he continued the conversation. “How long ago was this?”

“Around two hours ago, if my memory serves me well.” Sonia replied.

From the details Sonia had given him, Hajime was pretty certain they’d experienced the same blackout. It was just like the one he’d dealt with at the haunted house. Had Monokuma just turned off the power for the haunted house? Or had he done something more?

“Here we go…” pulling free the key, Hajime let himself into Mahiru’s cottage. He knew Mahiru would disapprove of inviting himself in without asking, but it wasn't like he could seek her permission. “Let’s get looking.”

No sooner had Hajime approached Mahiru’s desk, the front door opened behind him. Letting himself into the cottage, came Nagito. Standing in the doorway, he seemed rather intimidating, his face painted like a skeleton. He looked more ghostly than usual.

“I thought I saw you two coming in here.” Nagito said, allowing the door to slam shut. “This is very useful, I planned on investigating their cottages. I thought I'd have to get Monokuma to open them again, but it looks like you've saved me a job.”

“It’s a little crowded in here, don’t you think?” Hajime frowned, irritated that Nagito had decided to follow them. Hajime knew Nagito had every right to be there, so he had no authority to send him away, there wasn't much he could do besides complain. “Look, just don’t get in our way.”

“Nagito, have you found many clues?” Sonia asked, she was busy hunting underneath Mahiru’s pillows.
“Not really.” Nagito admitted. “I’ve been talking with Monokuma.”

“About what?” Hajime challenged him. There was no reason for him to be talking with the bear.

“It’s not important. Perhaps I’ll tell you later.” Nagito replied casually, heading straight to Mahiru’s dustbin. “What about you two?”

“Nothing really.” Hajime replied. “I searched the bodies, but I found nothing new. Sonia mentioned something pretty interesting, though.”

“She did?” Nagito replied.

“Apparently, when Monokuma triggered the blackout at the haunted house, it affected the library too.” Hajime informed him, he saw it only fair to share the information.

“Sonia, you were in the library?” totally ignoring the point Hajime had made, Nagito asked another question.

Hajime couldn’t help but feel irritated, he’d shared information with Nagito, and received not so much as a response. “What does it matter where she was?” he asked through gritted teeth.

Nagito stopped what he was doing, wanting to interrogate Sonia straight to her face. “Sonia, I was just wondering, why were you in the library instead of Monokuma’s Night of Horrors?”

“Oh…” Hajime backed down sheepishly. Nagito wasn’t asking weird questions for the sake of it, he actually made a fair point. “Yeah, thinking about it, it’s kinda weird you were missing. You were so excited about dressing up. I mean, we even bought our costumes together.”

Sonia let out a disappointed sigh. “It is most unfortunate that I did not go. But I have my reasoning.”

“Care to share?” Hajime asked, hoping to clear Sonia’s name before any suspicions began to form.

“I was getting ready in my cottage, when Fuyuhiko paid me a visit.” Sonia said, telling them her story. “It was most strange. He seemed on edge, and gave me a strict warning, telling me not to go to Monokuma’s Night Of Horrors.”

Fuyuhiko had personally paid Sonia a visit, something Hajime couldn’t understand. “What did he warn you about exactly?”

“He told me that he had a bad feeling about the event, that it was most likely a trap. He warned me not to go, and that my life could be in danger if I did.” Sonia said. “After hearing that, I did not feel like going anymore. I wanted to cheer myself up, since I was missing out on my first costume party, so I went to the library in search of manga.”

Her story sounded serious. Hajime saw no reason for Sonia to compulsively lie, and if she was, it would be silly of her to mention another student that Hajime could just go and ask. Fuyuhiko had warned Sonia to avoid Monokuma’s Night Of Horrors, what could it mean?

With the new information in mind, Hajime continued his search of Mahiru’s cottage. Since Nagito and Sonia were taking up most of the space, he focused solely on the desk. He riffled through Mahiru’s photos, doing his best not to properly focus on them. The last thing he needed was a trip down memory lane.

It didn’t take long before a clue presented itself. In the top draw of Mahiru’s desk, Hajime found an
envelope. Written in red, was Mahiru’s name. Hajime didn’t recognise the writing, though it was unlikely that he would. The only writing he was familiar with besides his own, was Chiaki’s and Nagito’s. He flipped over the envelope, studying the back. It had been torn open, meaning Mahiru had already read whatever was inside. It seemed she’d stuffed the letter back inside for safe keeping. Hajime carefully removed the contents of the envelope. Whatever was inside, he needed to see.

What he found, was an unaddressed, and unsigned, letter written in black ink.

*I know your secret. We need to talk.*

*I want the truth.*

*Meet me in the restaurant. Tonight at 8:30pm.*

*Come alone.*

Hajime had no idea what the letter was referencing, but he didn’t like it. It was so clearly threatening, the tone alone was horrible. Wanting second opinions, he showed the letter to the others near him.

“I wonder when this was sent.” Sonia said, deep in thought. “It says ‘tonight’, but that means nothing at all.”

“I think Mahiru received the letter this morning, meaning tonight is tonight.” Nagito said, offering his own opinion. “You’ll notice, the meeting time given is the same as Monokuma’s haunted house. Mahiru never showed up, so I’m guessing this is where she went.”

“Gahhh, why did she listen to this?” Hajime vented his frustration. If it wasn’t for the important of the evidence, he would’ve torn the letter to shreds. “I specifically warned her not to follow any mysterious letters. Why didn’t she listen to me?”

There was only one possible explanation Hajime could think of, the letter was from Fuyuhiko. Perhaps Mahiru felt such guilt, that she saw it as only right to meet with him. Mahiru’s morals were always strong. It could also explain why the letter wasn’t signed, Fuyuhiko had given it to her in person.

“We should keep ahold of this.” Nagito said, pointing to the letter. “I can keep it if you’d like, my pockets are big enough.”

“Uh, it’s okay.” Hajime declined his offer, he didn’t trust Nagito at all. It was like a stranger asking to borrow a large sum of money. The letter did fit in Hajime’s back pocket, though it was a tight squeeze, he'd rather that than Nagito have it.

Once the three of them were certain that Mahiru’s cottage had nothing else to offer, they moved on elsewhere. Hajime left the cottage unlocked for anyone else that wanted to investigate, though there was nothing left for them to find.

Souda’s cottage was their next destination, Hajime already had the key in hand. Sonia and Nagito followed along, they seemed to have formed their own investigation group. Splitting the task between the three of them, they tackled Souda’s cottage, hunting amongst all the spare machine parts for any hints they could get their hands on.

Since it had proved lucky in Mahiru’s cottage, Hajime decided to look through all draws first. Souda didn’t have a desk, but he did have a red filing cabinet in the middle of the room. Hajime had a feeling he’d find nothing but spare parts and tools, but it was worth a look.
In the third draw down, buried under a box of screws in an attempt to stay hidden, Hajime found a clue. From underneath the box, Hajime found a small black leatherback notebook. No, not a notebook, a diary. He pulled it free, being careful not to scuff it against the gears. Hajime held the diary close to his chest, not wanting the others to see it until he was sure of what it was he was reading.

Most of the diary was blank, the crisp white pages waiting to be written on. Occasionally, Hajime would catch a glimpse of ink. No two pages next to each other had been written on, the entries paced entirely at random. No one had any actual idea of the month, yet alone the dates, so it appeared Souda had chosen to write on whatever pages he felt like. He was using it more as a notepad than a diary.

Having given the diary the once over, Hajime turned back to the very beginning, hunting for the very first sign of life. It didn’t take him long, the first entry appeared on January 30th. Scribbled messily in black ink, there was a message.

Everyone is starving. Trapped in the funhouse. We can’t escape unless we kill??

As soon as Hajime read the first line, he knew exactly what it was he was holding in his hand. It was a book of Souda’s memories, everything he’d remembered from the original game. The diary was a mess, nothing in any real order, scribbles everywhere. The entries were in different colours, hinting that perhaps they hadn’t been written in one sitting.

Hajime read on, taking in everything that he saw, it was important to see what exactly Souda had remembered. Seeing as nothing had been written in order, it was a little difficult to follow along the first time.

February 12th - Twilight Syndrome, but a game??

February 24th - Ibuki’s indoor concert. Hiyoko and Mikan are there?? Peko and Mahiru aren’t??

April 5th - Fuyuhiko has an eye patch. His eye was ruined during Peko’s execution.

May 19th - Hajime Hinata...no memories of his talent??

May 23rd - Nekomaru’s a robot. Got blasted by a bazooka.

June 2nd - Byakuya murdered by Teruteru. Nagito still tries to trigger the case. Class trial, Teruteru executed.

June 14th - Arrive on Jabberwock Island - Nothing changed, though Hajime has lost memories of his talent.

June 30th - Peko kills Mahiru for Fuyuhiko. Peko is executed. Fuyuhiko loses his eye.

July 13th - Despair disease victims: Ibuki, Nagito, Akane...Mikan??

July 28th - Final island. The only one’s left are Sonia, me, Hajime, Chiaki, Fuyuhiko, Akane, and Nagito. Everyone else must be dead?

August 8th - Gundam kills Robo Nekomaru in sacrifice. We get to eat and leave the funhouse.

There were other anecdotes Souda had written that Hajime skimmed over, obvious information about the class trials and such. It appeared Souda hadn’t gotten memories any further than exploring the final island. There was nothing about Nagito’s death, Chiaki’s execution, or exploring Hope’s Peak.
Hajime thought he was done with the diary, but that wasn’t the case. Written on the page wedged open between his finger and his thumb, there was one final entry. There was no proof that it was the latest entry, but it was the very last thing written in the diary.

_December 16th - Nagito exposes Hajime. He has no talent, he’s not Ultimate Hope. He’s a reserve course student, he paid his way into the school. ...How can this be?_

It had been written in red ink, a serious number of exclamation marks decorating the page. It wasn’t something he’d written in passing, the intense style of writing proved that Souda had given this ‘memory’ some thought. Hajime couldn’t help but wonder, had this been what Souda had been wanting to talk about?

"Hmm, looks like there's nothing under his bed." Nagito sighed, commenting on his findings - or lack of.

Hearing Nagito's voice quickly snapped Hajime back into reality. He hurriedly pocketed the diary, doing so before anyone noticed. He'd have to destroy it later, perhaps throw it in the sea, or burn it on a bonfire. Whether it was important evidence or not, he couldn’t share it with the others. It was a subject too close to home. Hajime was not going to risk anything that would threaten exposure of the rewrite. If they were in the trial, and their lives depended on the information, then of course, Hajime would show it. But unless that very moment came, Hajime was not going to share.

After five minutes of solid searching, the trio gave up, there was nothing in Souda’s cottage that they needed.

“We shouldn’t waste any more time here.” Nagito said. “Let’s get back to the main building.”

“Good idea.” Sonia agreed. “I would like a chance to look at the bodies myself.”

Stepping into the night, they returned to the main hotel building. Since they all wanted to explore different things, the investigation trio went their own ways. Sonia went to search the bodies, while Nagito headed upstairs to the restaurant. Hajime made the effort of tracking down Chiaki, there was something he wanted to give her.

“Would you mind looking after this?” Hajime asked, presenting Chiaki with Mahiru’s letter. “Nagito offered to look after it, but I don’t trust him.”

“Okay.” Chiaki took the letter from him, taking a minute to read it for herself. When she was done, she put it into her backpack. “I wonder who sent this, it’s not signed.”

“My guess, Fuyuhiko.” Hajime said, making sure the Yakuza was out of sight. For once, he could rule out Nagito. He’d seen Nagito’s writing in many cases now, he recognised it well.

“Whoever it is, they seem angry.” Chiaki observed. “It makes me wonder, are these murders out of rage?”

“Like revenge?” Hajime asked, not sure if he was following.

“I can’t understand why there are two murders. The more murders, the more evidence you have to hide.” Chiaki said, explaining her way of thinking. “If the blackened decided to kill two people, there had to be a reason for it. Were they lashing out of anger? Was it an accident? Were they caught out?...”
Hajime knew exactly what Chiaki was implying from her last sentence. In the previous killing game, there had been a double murder too. Though Mikan only intended on killing Ibuki, Hiyoko lost her life too. It was the result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Walking in on the crime had cost Hiyoko her life. Had the same happened here? If so, what was with the thirteen minute delay in the killings?

“How have things been in here?” Hajime asked, wondering what had happened while he’d been gone.

“Okay…sort of,” Chiaki replied. “I tried talking to Fuyuhiko about something, but he’s really on edge. Ooh, but I found something in the restaurant that I wanted to show you.”

Hajime allowed himself to be led upstairs by Chiaki. Though he’d found the occasional clue, Hajime wasn’t sure if he’d found enough to paint a strong picture of the case.

It was the first time Hajime had been in the restaurant since the murders. If Mahiru and Souda had fallen down the stairs, the restaurant was the very place they would have fallen from. Would it be part of the crime scene too?

To Hajime’s surprise, there was nothing unusual about the room. The smell of dinner was still lingering in the air, flour on the tabletops from the earlier baking session. Hajime couldn’t understand why Chiaki had brought him, there was nothing out the ordinary at all.

Sensing Hajime’s confusion, Chiaki led Hajime to one of the tables. Resting on top, were sheets of paper and markers.

“Is that the leftover stationary from the King’s Game?” Hajime asked, unsure what it was still doing out.

Chiaki nodded. “When we left the King’s Game, no one took it back to the market, so I put on the floor, resting against the plant pot.” Chiaki pointed to where she meant, though Hajime had to admit, he couldn’t remember seeing it there, he obviously hadn’t been paying enough attention.

“So, someone’s moved it since then?” Hajime said, making sure he understood what Chiaki was implying.

“Yes...or, so I think…” Chiaki replied. “When were baking this morning, I remember the paper still in its original place.”

“That means someone’s used this between the time we left here, and the murders.” Hajime pondered. “Could it mean anything? I mean, someone could’ve just needed some paper.”

“Look at this,” Chiaki snatched the piece of paper at the top of the pile, holding it up towards the light.

As Hajime stared at the paper, he noticed something shining through. It was barely visible, but he could see indents of text, where someone had obviously written on a piece of paper on top. He moved in closer for a better look, but it was impossible to read.

“Looks like someone was leaning on this when they wrote something,” Hajime said. “I wonder what they were writing…”

“They seem to have been pressing harder in places than others, so we can’t take a reading.” Chiaki sighed. “But it makes you wonder, why was someone writing like that? Were they in a rush?”
“How are we even seeing this? I mean, markers aren’t the sort of pens that leave indents.” Hajime eyed up the marker pens, it wasn’t adding up.

“They must have used a different pen,” Chiaki said. “But I don’t think it’s important which pen they were writing with.”

While in the kitchen, Hajime made the effort to search through all of the draws too. If the killer had used a kitchen knife for their crime, they could have left some sort of clue behind. Though Hajime gave it his best efforts, there was nothing to find.

"I guess the only place left now, is the haunted house." Hajime said, he wanted to know more about the sleeping gas.

"We can't go there." Chiaki shook her head. "Gundam tried to go, but he was sent back. Monokuma isn't letting anyone inside."

"But that's not fair!" Hajime protested. "That's part of our investigation, we need to see it."

"Apparently there's nothing there that we need, or so Monokuma says," Chiaki replied. "I know he's not the best, but I don't think he'd lie to us about something like this."

It made Hajime uncomfortable that he wouldn't get the chance to explore the haunted house, what if there was an important clue? Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about it, Monokuma's word was always final.

Hajime felt like he’d searched all places of importance, but that didn’t mean his investigation was over. There were still two people he wanted to talk to, the two people that didn’t have alibis. Five people had been missing from the horror house, two were dead, and one had given him an alibi. Hajime wasn’t sure if Sonia’s words were true, but at least she hadn’t shied away from the question, that had to be a good sign.

Fuyuhiko was resting on the steps outside the hotel's entrance, elbows on knees, head in hands. He was drumming his foot on the floor at a rapid pace, taking deep breaths to regulate his breathing. Hajime approached Fuyuhiko cautiously, perching next to him, making sure to keep a safe distance between them.

“Are you feeling alright?” Hajime asked, curious as to why Fuyuhiko seemed to be having trouble breathing.

Fuyuhiko didn’t bother to raise his head, he barked his insult while still staring at the ground. “Are you the Ultimate Busybody or some shit? Because you’re always sticking your damn nose where it ain’t wanted.”

Hajime was tired of being spoken to like a piece of dirt. His temper had worn too thin to try and hold his tongue, he found himself snapping back. “You’re stuck outside, looking like you’re on the verge of hyperventilating. Sorry I asked!” he didn’t mean for it to come out so bitter, but he was really getting bored of Fuyuhiko’s attitude.

Fuyuhiko seemed to have sensed Hajime’s annoyance, as he didn’t respond with quite as much aggression. “I feel sick, okay?” he finally removed his head from his hands, facing Hajime. “Seeing two bodies like that, it ain’t right.”

“You’re a Yakuza, I thought bodies would be second nature,” Hajime said, softening his voice also.
“They are, but in that business, the people deserve it. You rat someone out, you get killed. It’s common knowledge, the sorta thing you know for as long as you can remember.” Fuyuhiko replied, slowly opening up. “Souda….the guy was an idiot, but what did he do to deserve that?”

Hajime noticed that Fuyuhiko never mentioned Mahiru.

“Come on, say something!” Fuyuhiko demanded, uncomfortable that Hajime had responded with silence.

“It’s just...the whole game, you’ve been bragging how easy it would be for you to kill someone. And now, you feel sick about it?” Hajime narrowed his eyes, Fuyuhiko wasn’t making much sense. Hajime was aware that most of Fuyuhiko's threats were nothing more than talk, but he couldn’t understand why Fuyuhiko was now essentially admitting it.

“Ugh..stop analysing everything I say.” Fuyuhiko scowled, he wasn’t impressed at what Hajime had uncovered. He quickly tried to undo everything he’d just said. “I mean, of course I could kill anyone here.”

Was it a glimpse of the Fuyuhiko Hajime knew shining through? Perhaps his friend wasn’t so lost after all. But if that was the case, Fuyuhiko wouldn’t have killed Mahiru. Had Fuyuhiko killed Mahiru? There were too many questions to count.

“Look, there’s something I need to ask you,” Hajime said, finally getting to the point. “Five people went to Monokuma’s haunted house, five people didn’t. Why didn’t you go?”

“Because I didn’t want to.” Fuyuhiko replied, as if the answer was obvious. “Unlike you, I ain’t that bear’s bitch.”

Would it hurt Fuyuhiko to answer one question without turning it into an insult? “So where were you?” Hajime persisted.

“Huh?” Fuyuhiko said, half-assed.

“Since you weren’t with Monokuma, where were you?” Hajime asked the question again, hoping for a stronger answer the second time around.

“There you go again, sticking that fucking nose of yours where it ain’t wanted.” Fuyuhiko pushed himself off the ground, wanting to make an exit. “If you care that much, ask me in the trial. You ain’t some sorta cop, I don’t have to talk to you.” he stormed off back towards the main building, muttering swear words under his breath.

Hajime got up to follow after him, not to hound Fuyuhiko with further questions - as he couldn’t see that ending well - but to look for someone who was likely in the same location. There was only one person Hajime had left to speak with, or at least, he saw it important enough to do so before the trial. Peko Pekoyama.

Reaching for the door handle, Hajime stopped in his tracks, catching a glance of his own reflection in the glass surface. His costume looked more realistic than he’d ever believed it to have done, it was as if he’d actually been stabbed. Hajime backed away from the door, his hands trembling, he felt like he was staring at his own corpse.

“No…” desperate to escape the reflection, he continued backing away.

He tripped down the tiny staircase, the result of not watching where he was going. His wrists scuffed
against the ground, supporting most of his weight as he took the fall. Now sitting on the floor, Hajime looked at his wrists to inspect the damage.

“G-gah!” he cried out in horror as real blood oozed from his body. It wasn’t much, but it was enough to send his eyes bulging. Hajime furiously wiped his wrists on his shirt, hoping for the bleeding to stop. It only made the problem worse, and now he had real blood on his shirt too.

He forced himself to his feet, the swimming pool was just behind him. He could cleanse his hands in the water. Hajime moved towards the pool, wiping the sweat from his brow, out of nowhere, his shirt was suddenly clinging to his back.

He dropped to his knees, hanging over the water’s edge. He leant forward, wanting to splash the cooling water onto his face before he did anything else. However, he got more than he’d bargained for. The pool had transformed into a mirror, the moon’s reflection illuminating the water. Hajime was forced to stare at his crystal clear reflection.

What Hajime saw was not himself, but a mess. His forehead stained with blood and sweat, hands scuffed and grazed, his shirt a bloody mess. What Hajime saw, was a boy falling apart. Someone weak and worthless, someone who stood no chance of saving his friends.

“G-go away!” Hajime threw his hands into the water, thrashing his arms around in a desperate attempt to make the stranger disappear. It didn’t work. The ripples only broke up his reflection for a second or two. Not to mention, the pool’s chlorine had seeped into his cuts, only worsening the pain.

What had he become? He was nothing like the person who’d been trusted to perform the rewrite. The light in his eyes had faded, the smile on his face long gone.

As Hajime sat there, tears clouding up his vision, he thought back. He thought back to the time just before the rewrite, life on Jabberwock Island with just the survivors. Things had become distant between them, as they were always doing their own things. Fuyuhiko with Peko, Sonia with Gundam, Akane with Nekomaru. Hajime made the effort to spend time with all of the students, but that’s only because guilt was weighing him down. The idea of someone receiving no visitors was incredibly depressing.

Souda had been rather the same, there was no one for him to stick by either. He struggled to fit in. If Ibuki was awake, she would not want his company, but that of Akane or Hajime. Teruteru would most likely have preferred a visit from Sonia, rather than the mechanic. The same went for all the comatose students.

Hajime always put it down to Souda’s lack of friendships. It was almost ironic, Souda knew everything about spare parts, always finding them a home in the end, but he could never find a place to home himself. However, as Hajime sat reflecting on the past, it suddenly clicked into place why there was never anyone Souda spent his time with.

Souda did have somebody he wanted to stick by, it just wasn’t one of the lost students. Wherever Hajime went, Souda would turn up, offering hot coffees and some sort of snack from the vending machine to keep them well fed. When Hajime was at the hospital until unearthly hours of the morning, he’d be wrapped up in one of the blankets Souda had given him. At the time, Hajime had pushed Souda away. When he visited his friends, he wanted to do so in peace. He felt uncomfortable with someone else sat there watching him.

He’d suggested to Souda they make their hospital visits separate, thus wedging a distance between the two survivors. Even though they spent more time apart, Souda was still there for him. Leaving
the hot drinks outside the door, instead of bothering his friend by coming inside.

Hajime Hinata was the truest friend Souda had ever had, the one person he could truly depend on. He wanted to serve loyally by Hajime’s side, so they could work through their hard time together. Souda never had anywhere to go because his closest friend was still alive, yet Hajime had pushed him away like a bad smell. Why hadn't he realised sooner?

“W-what did I do?” Hajime crawled backwards, unsure if he could control himself from falling in the water otherwise. He didn't feel strong enough to stop himself.

Souda had been gaining more memories, the diary proved it. What if Souda remembered their time at the hospital? Would he remember how Hajime constantly rejected him, declining all chances of friendship just for some time alone? Did Kazuichi Souda die thinking the one he looked to most hated him?

Hajime rested his arms on his knees, his fingers balled into fists. It was a poor attempt to control his shaking hands. He was choking on his own pain. Trying to swallow back the tears that were desperate to fall.

“Ha-Hajime?”

He heard the pitter-pattering of tiny feet, the feeling of a furry paw being placed on his shoulder.

“I have something for you…”

Hajime turned to face Monomi, doing so out of politeness. In her paws, the rabbit held a freshly washed white shirt.

“I took this from Monokuma’s dummy. It's perfectly clean, and I think it's your size.” Monomi explained, holding the shirt for him to take. “Give me the shirt you're wearing, and I'll wash that for you too.”

"But, but I have to go to the trial..." Hajime said, speaking in a zombie-like fashion. He was completely obeying Monokuma.

"You have time for a shower, Hajime," Monomi promised him. "I'll go and distract Monokuma to buy you some time."

"You will?" Hajime looked at her in surprise. "But if you do that, he'll probably hurt you." Hajime knew that Monokuma took all the opportunities he could get his hands on to abuse Monomi.

"You're my student, Hajime. I want to look out for you." Monomi said. "You aren't doing well, and I know things are getting hard. You're going to fall apart."

Hajime found himself confiding in Monomi, something he'd never expected to do. Monomi knew as much as Chiaki, she had memories of the rewrite too, yet until that moment, Hajime had never felt truly comfortable talking to her. "Monomi, did I make a huge mistake?"

"What are you talking about?" Monomi replied.

"Doing the rewrite. It was designed to save everyone, and I've ruined it. Maybe I shoulda just waited for everyone to wake up, or get someone like Fuyuhuiko to have done it instead." Hajime sighed. "This...this is such a mistake."

"Hajime! Listen to me very carefully," Monomi said sternly, attempting to show some authority. "If
you can be strong, then you need to hold on! This is a risk worth taking, to have a life worth living."

"A life worth living?" Hajime repeated.

"You entered the rewrite for a chance to save your friends. You took on a massive risk for a better life. You can't give up now!" Monomi encouraged him. "I believe in you, I know you can get through this."

Even coming from Monomi, the words meant a lot. She was right, he'd taken on the risk for a bigger cause, it was something he needed to see through until the end. Giving up would mean everyone who had died so far would have done so in vain.

He was Hajime Hinata, and he was not giving up.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I'm moving to University on Saturday. I still plan on updating this story, but as you'll probably guess, there could be some distance between updates. I don't like the idea of posting the investigation, and not being around to post the trial for a while. So I'm working hard to get that up on time next week. However, if it is a little delayed (which I hope it's not) then that's why.

Also, bonus points to anyone who noticed the Twin Atlantic lyrics I snuck and reworked into this chapter ;)

The trial is coming up next!! All questions should be answered then, anything not covered in this investigation will be sure to come up. As always, thank you for reading!! I hope you're all having an awesome day ^_^
Chapter Four - Part Six

Chapter Summary

It's time for the next class trial to begin.

Chapter Notes

I apologise that it took me so long to get the chapter out-reply to comments, university has been really hectic. I don't think I'll be able to post every week now, which I apologise for. However, trials take longer anyway, and this has been my longest chapter to date, so it shouldn't be like this all the time - hopefully!

Anyway, let's get into the trial. Have you figured out who's done it? ;)

Monomi kept her promise, allowing Hajime enough time to freshen up and collect himself before the trial. As he showered, Hajime kept his eyes away from the drain, knowing that the blood, still oozing from his cuts, would be there to face him. He'd barely been able to collect himself, he couldn’t risk falling so soon.

Feeling fresh made all the difference, the scent of shampoo in the air helped him compose himself, like he was ready for the fight. It wasn’t going to be an easy trial, perhaps the toughest yet. Two murders, a clear lack of evidence, the mystery of Souda’s missing memories, three classmates he hadn’t the chance to speak to regarding their alibis...it was going to be challenging.

Peko, Fuyuhiko, Ibuki, Nagito, Gundam, or Sonia...one of them had to be the killer. Hajime could vouch for his own innocence, and Chiaki’s. The likelier perpetrators were Fuyuhiko and Peko, but Hajime was trying his best to keep bias opinions out of the way - though it was proving to be tough.

Certain that he was ready, or at least, as ready as he felt he could be, Hajime left for Monokuma Rock. He’d lost track of time, but had a feeling it was nearing midnight. The entire island felt quieter than usual. For a moment, Hajime wasn’t sure if he could even hear himself breathing. The crickets weren’t as loud as they often were, and the sea sounded surprisingly calm, it was as if the entire island was paying respect to the two lives that had just been lost. Even the trees were in mourning.

“Hajime, you have freshened up.” Sonia was the first to comment on his change of appearance, noticing that all the fake blood had disappeared.

“Yeah, Monomi gave me a clean shirt.” Hajime explained, blending in among everyone.

As he spoke, he noticed Nagito staring down at his hands. “You hurt yourself.” Nagito remarked, stating the obvious. Thankfully, he'd gone to the effort of uwashing off his facepaint. Hajime didn't want to spend the entire trial staring at a skeleton.

Though Hajime’s wrists were no longer bleeding, the grazes were still there. “I tripped.” Hajime
mumbled, not wanting to spare any more details than necessary. What happened was to stay between him and Monomi only.

“Do you require first aid?” Sonia asked, looking concerned.

“I’ll be alright.” Hajime shook his head, he’d already gotten used to the pain. “Besides, I think we’re going to begin the trial at any moment.”

Hajime was right, no sooner had he spoken, down came the escalator - waiting to lead the students to their fate.

"And so it begins, our destiny awaits us.” Gundam remarked, looking at the daunting escalator in front of his eyes.

"...Let's go.” Chiaki suggested, knowing it was a bad idea to keep Monokuma waiting.

The elevator jolted around as it took them underground, resulting in a rocky ride. It plunged further and further into the depths below, a journey that felt never ending. It was more spacious than usual, though the students couldn't bring themselves to enjoy the additional room, all of them knowing the real reason why they had so much space in the first place.

In silence, they found their podiums, the time for conversation was over. Hajime eyed up the latest changes in the courtroom, Monokuma's questionable interior design skills capturing his attention. The theme of the room was fitting with the play they'd performed earlier in the week, loose props scattered around the place, and red stage curtains decorating the walls. Memorial portraits stood in place of Souda and Mahiru, a bloodied cross through the middle. The same had been set in place for Akane, two trophies forming her X.

Hajime waited anxiously for Monokuma, they hadn’t even begun yet, and the sweat was already dripping off his brow. There were only eight of them left, and that number was about to fall to seven, or two - depending on which way the trial went.

The hardest part would be keeping the bias opinions out of his head. Everything added up perfectly: Twilight Syndrome, the new motive, the guests absent from the horror house. Fuyuhiko or Peko were already proving to be the likeliest culprits, they had all the motives they needed to be pushed. There was still a possibility that someone else could have done it, but it made nowhere near as much sense.

“Now then, let’s begin with a simple explanation of the class trials…”

Monokuma’s speech kicked everything into action, like a gun being fired at the start of a race. The next couple of hours were going to be crucial, the time Hajime had been given to fight for his life, while trying to bring justice to his fallen friends.

Unlike usual, it was Monokuma who started them off with their opening topic. "First, let's discuss the motive! I'm sure you're all eager to get talking.”

“I must admit,” Sonia sighed, vocalising her concern. “I find this mildly confusing, as there are two motives.”

“Wrong!” Monokuma called his response before anyone else had the chance. “There’s only one motive to this case, the promise of two students getting to graduate. Anything else is simply a coincidence.”

“Coincidence, my ass.” Fuyuhiko scoffed, not falling for any of Monokuma’s tricks.
“Don’t be so foolish, it’s obvious that Twilight Syndrome Murder Case plays a key part in this murder.” Gundam wasn’t having any of it either.

“I don’t see why anyone would kill, just so they can escape with someone else.” Ibuki scratched her head. “We’re all friends here, but no one is that close. It’s not the kinda thing you risk your life for.”

“Hey, maybe we should slow down.” Hajime stepped in before they got carried away. “In the last trial, we wrongly accused two people of murder because we didn’t think things through properly. Before we get carried away with theories and motives, we should look at the facts.” looking at the motive would only steer them towards a biased trial.

"Hajime, what do you think you're doing?" Monokuma looked down his nose. "This is my courtroom, and I've told you to begin with the motive."

"I don't know what you're up to, but I think you're trying to steer us down the wrong path." Hajime narrowed his eyes at the bear. "This is our trial."

"Geez Hajime, if you're going to throw your toys out of the pram, you can talk about whatever the hell you want." Monokuma didn't put up much of a fight, he just wanted to sit back on his throne and observe.

"R-right," Hajime attempted to steady himself, not expecting Monokuma to have given up so soon. "Like I was saying, we should start off with what we know."

“Solid facts make the best evidence.” Nagito agreed. “In that case, we should start with the Monokuma file. We can return to the motives later.”

“Stating the obvious, there are two victims in this case,” Peko said. “Kazuichi Souda and Mahiru Koizumi.”

"I'd like to start with the time of deaths, since I noticed something interesting, and I'm sure you did too." Nagito worked from his memory, describing the information he’d read in Monokuma’s file. “Mahiru and Souda didn’t die at the same time. Mahiru died at 8:36pm, while Souda died at 8:49pm. That means there’s a thirteen-minute difference between their deaths.”

“We can count, ya know.” Fuyuhiko grunted.

"Oh, trust someone as unworthy as me to underestimate the ability of an ultimate." Nagito attempted to apologise to Fuyuhiko, though really, he'd done nothing wrong.

“Thirteen minutes…” Sonia repeated.

“It might not seem like much,” Hajime began. “But for two murders, that’s quite a time difference. It’s not like Mahiru was killed, and Souda right after. Something happened in those thirteen minutes...something important.”

“The time difference isn’t the only interesting information we were given.” Nagito continued, resorting back to his knowledge of the Monokuma file. “Mahiru and Souda were killed in different ways, though I’m sure you all noticed that from looking at their bodies. It’s not my place to doubt you ultimates.”

“Are you kidding me?! You just presumed we couldn’t do simple addition.” Fuyuhiko remarked, still unimpressed that Nagito had questioned his intelligence.

“Different ways...were they not both pushed down the stairs?” Sonia inquired.
“Ibuki agrees!” Ibuki exclaimed. “Didn’t you see the way their bones were twisted all over the place? And both of them were lying at the bottom of the staircase.”

“The snapped neck and twisted limbs indicate that Mahiru, indeed, died from a fall down the stairs.” Nagito nodded his head. “However, the same can’t be said for Souda.”

Chiaki seemed to be on the same wavelength. “The file says Souda had broken, or at least sprained, one of his legs. But...he died from a puncture to a vital organ.”

“He had been penetrated through the heart with a sharp object.” Gundam said, sharing what he knew. “You use the same method when killing vampires, a single stake through their heart. Perhaps Souda was hiding a deep, dark secret.”

"Let's...let's not get onto that." Hajime didn't want to spend the next ten minutes arguing whether Souda was a vampire or not. "Souda's heart is the organ that took the hit, and the sharp object has to be the knife he'd been stabbed with."

"I searched his body, there were no other signs of harm," Peko said. "Meaning, his heart has to be the organ the file is referring to. As for the weapon, the knife had been firmly pressed into his body, indicating it's the real murder weapon, and not a decoy."

"The knife reminds me of the ones we have in the restaurant." Hajime said, knowing he'd seen them in there many a time before. "Considering Souda died right below the restaurant, I wouldn’t say my idea is too far fetched."

"If the blackened needed a murder weapon, a knife from the restaurant seems like the most convenient choice." Nagito agreed, on board with what Hajime had said.

"Yet the killer stayed away from Mahiru's body," Gundam said. "She received no wounds at all."

"The killer didn't stab Mahiru because...I don't think it was necessary." Chiaki tried to answer his question. "She snapped her neck, which is likely the result of falling down the stairs."

Collecting her thoughts, Sonia repeated everything they’d just discussed. “Mahiru and Souda both experienced broken bones and bruising, but that was only enough to kill Mahiru. Souda was stabbed to death instead.”

“Obvious, is it not?” Gundam remarked, his brain working furiously. “Mahiru and Souda were both pushed down the stairs, but it was only Mahiru that died. Realising Souda was still alive, the killer retrieved a knife from the restaurant, and stabbed him to death.”

It was a stronger suggestion than ‘Souda might be a vampire’.

“I dunno…” Ibuki frowned. "By the time the killer got the knife, Souda could have run away. Unless that’s the kinda thing he’s into…”

“Run away? No, he couldn’t!” Hajime shot through her statement. “According to the file, Souda had broken one of his legs. It would’ve been impossible for him to run, even if he wanted to. He had no choice but to lie there helplessly.”

Saying it out loud didn't make Hajime feel much better, the idea of Souda lying there helplessly, knowing he was about to die, was a horrible thought.

“That explains the different methods of murder,” Nagito gave a satisfied nod, though it wasn’t long lived. “But it doesn’t explain why Souda died thirteen minutes after Mahiru. Even if the killer had to
attack him, it wouldn’t take thirteen minutes to fetch a knife.”

“What about this?!” Ibuki waved her arms about, wanting their attention. “Souda was tied up and held hostage! The killer kept him there the entire time.”

The idea of it turned Hajime's stomach. If Souda had been held hostage, he would have watched Mahiru's murder, knowing full well, he was about to die too. Hajime couldn’t see any of the students being that cruel, not even Fuyuhiko.

"It's a possibility, but how Souda came to be a hostage is the confusing part.” Hajime sighed, sincerely hoping the theory wasn't true.

“Maybe…Souda walked in by accident, and discovered the blackened.” Chiaki suggested. “They killed him too, so he wouldn’t say anything.”

Hajime understood why Chiaki had suggested it. In the first game, Hiyoko lost her life when she’d walked in on Mikan covering up Ibuki’s murder. Wrong place, wrong time.

“Does this really matter?” Nagito asked, his tone suggesting it didn't. “Whether he was held hostage, or walked in on things by mistake, it won't give us answers. Not yet, anyway…”

“Since you’re such a know-it-all, what should we be talking about?” Fuyuhiko challenged Nagito. He hadn’t offered much to the trial himself, but it seemed Nagito’s arrogance was bothering him.

“I wouldn’t take the advice of someone as lowly as myself,” Nagito laughed sheepishly. “But if I had to suggest something, I’d focus on why Mahiru was killed. She died first, so if we understand her death a little better, it could explain Souda’s.”

“Good idea.” Hajime agreed. Knowing why the first victim was targeted could prove useful. "It's possible that Souda only died because Mahiru did, so it might be easier if we understand her murder first.”

Nagito went ahead. “I don’t think this needs too much thought, as it’s pretty obvious why Mahiru became the victim here.” he was going to reference the play, everyone in the room knew it. “I think Twilight Syndrome Murder Case plays a pretty big role in this case.”

“It is Monokuma’s second motive.” Chiaki agreed.

“Why don’t we take a moment to recap the storyline?” Nagito suggested. “I would do it myself, but I don’t want to talk about that piece of trash if I can avoid it. Hajime, could you?” he glanced across to Hajime, a look of expectation in his eyes.

“Uh, sure?” Hajime replied uncertainly, unsure why it was him that had been asked.

Hajime took a second to prepare himself. The Twilight Syndrome he’d experienced the first time around, took place over four days. Whereas, the latest version only covered two of the days. He had to be careful not to land himself in a deep mess, if he said too much, he could give away everything.

“It’s the story of five high school girls,” Hajime launched into his recap. “They discover a girl's been killed at their school. It turns out, that their friend, Girl E, killed this girl. She did it because the girl was bullying her best friend, Girl D. Guy F is the older brother of the girl who was murdered, he finds out the truth, and kills Girl E in revenge.”

“Thank you, Hajime.” Nagito smiled, satisfied with what had been covered. “I’m sure anyone who got their hands on a copy of the program, realised this play is based off real life events.”
“It claims to mimic real life events of Hope’s Peak Academy.” Gundam said.

"Meaning, Twilight Syndrome Murder Case is a non-fiction story." Nagito concluded his point.

“And, if I am not mistaken,” Sonia added. “The characters in the play are meant to represent us. At least, that is what the credits implied.”

From nowhere, Ibuki was holding one of the programs. Hajime had no idea where she’d been storing it, as it wasn’t like she had deep pockets. It would forever remain a mystery. “Ibuki kept one! I thought it might make good toilet paper if we ran out.” she flicked through the program until she found the cast list. “It says here, the original cast were Tsumiki, Koizumi, Hiyoko, Mioda, Sato, Kuzuryu, and Kuzuryu.”

“Hajime, you were playing Girl A.” Nagito said. “Do you know which character you were really playing?”

“Mikan Tsumiki.” Hajime replied, knowing full well that he was right.

“With all the stuttering written into your lines, not that you performed it, I think you’re right.” Nagito agreed. “Next up, we have my character, Girl B.”

“You were playing Hiyoko...I think.” Chiaki said. “We only knew Hiyoko for a brief period of time, but I remember her offending everyone...just like Nagito’s character.”

"Girl C and Girl D are fairly obvious too." Nagito said, waiting for someone to answer.

"Monokuma said he'd replaced the actors for anyone that had died, hence why Hajime and Nagito were given the parts of Mikan and Hiyoko." Peko said, offering her opinion. "It's to my understanding, that Ibuki and Mahiru were playing themselves, as they were both alive to do so."

"Girl C was hella awesome, so Ibuki agrees!" Ibuki fist pumped the air, pleased with her casting choice.

"Girl D had a camera with her, as she took pictures during the play." Chiaki recapped. "Girl D has to be Mahiru...one of the victims in this case."

“Working with Peko’s logic, Guy F is Fuyuhiko.” Hajime said. “Does everyone agree?”

“I do.” Sonia confirmed. “Like Peko said, the characters were only replaced if the original actor had died.”

"Doesn't mean it's gotta be me." Fuyuhiko objected. "Guy F coulda been Teruteru or Nekomaru."

"But their personalities don't match at all." Hajime was straight back at him with a counter argument. "Guy F was aggressive, and he swore a lot. Neither of those traits fit Teruteru or Nekomaru. There are no doubts about it! Fuyuhiko, you're Guy F."

"Tsk, whatever." Fuyuhiko barely acknowledged Hajime.

"That leaves us with a mysterious being named Sato." Gundam said.

"You forgot the other Kuzuryu." Nagito butted in, correcting Gundam of his mistake.

"Dumbass, we mentioned it two seconds ago." Fuyuhiko snapped, in a judgemental fashion. "Don't you remember? Hajime's pinned the blame on me."
"Perhaps you misheard Ibuki earlier, but there are two Kuzuryus in this production." Nagito replied, certain that he was right. "Check the program again if you don't believe me."

Ibuki ran through the list again. "He may be creepy, but he's right. Kuzuryu's in here twice."

"Are you sure there is not a misprint somewhere? Two Kuzuryus?" Sonia’s face held a look of confusion. "Fuyuhiko had only one role."

Gundam was there to answer her question. "There are two Kuzuryus because they are bonded by a spell deeply powerful, they are blood siblings!"

"They're brother and sister." Chiaki translated.

"In the play, Guy F mentions his little sister, and that's the name of her character." Hajime contributed.

"So, it was I that played the part of the second Kuzuryu?" Sonia asked, pointing to herself.

Hajime nodded.

"That solves that mystery." Ibuki grinned, though the trial was far from over.

"By the process of elimination, that makes Girl E Sato." Peko said. "That is the character Chiaki played."

"Hey, wait! Isn’t this a nonfiction production?" Ibuki asked. "Cuz if so, doesn’t that mean Fuyuhiko’s little sister is de-"

Fuyuhiko cut in before she had a chance to finish the sentence. "I don’t have a little sister! I think I’d fucking know."

Hajime groaned, with Fuyuhiko lying, they were going to go around in circles. "Don’t start this again! When I came to visit you in your cottage, you even admitted you’ve got a little sister."

Fuyuhiko had been caught off guard, most likely forgetting he’d already told Hajime the truth. It made him seem all the more suspicious. "Yeah...well, maybe I do have a little sister. But it doesn’t mean she’s dead. It’s just some stupid play that Monokuma pulled outta his ass."

"If you don’t believe what happened to be true, then why did you lie about your sister?" Nagito raised his eyebrows.

Fuyuhiko spat at Nagito, his temper rising. "That’s none of your fucking business. Get lost."

Nagito sighed. "While Fuyuhiko comes to terms with reality, let’s look further at Mahiru’s role in all of this. What exactly did Girl D get up to during the production?"

"Girl D wasn’t the killer," Hajime stated. "But she did help Girl E to cover up the murder by destroying evidence."

"An accomplice then." Gundam said, using the proper term.

"For anyone seeking revenge, or justice, Mahiru makes the perfect target." Nagito said. "She may not literally have bloodied her hands, but she never went to the police, making her just as guilty."

"If all this Twilight stuff is true, Mahiru helped cover the murder of Fuyuhiko’s little sister? Ouch, that’s rough." Ibuki squirmed, realising the awkwardness of the situation.
“This could possibly be why Mahiru was murdered, an act of revenge or justice.” Sonia said. “However, Souda was not involved in the production. He was nothing more than an audience member. Therefore, I do not see why he had to die.”

“That’s what makes this so strange.” Hajime mused. Souda couldn’t have been killed as an act of revenge, as he wasn't involved at all. Hajime could understand why Fuyuhiko would go after Mahiru, but not Souda. Was he simply collateral damage?

“Hold it!” Fuyuhiko broke free from his silence, challenging those around him. “Watch the way you’re speaking, you’re making it sound like I’m the damn killer.”

“Well...you are directly connected to the motive.” Ibuki pointed out. “Your little sister was killed, and Mahiru helped cover it. No one else would wanna get revenge besides you.”

“And, if this play is of truth, it was you that brutally murdered Girl E.” Gundam added, putting an even bigger case against Fuyuhiko.

“I want to believe that you are innocent, but there is so much stacked up against you.” Sonia frowned, clearly suspicious of Fuyuhiko too.

“Maybe...you have an alibi?” Chiaki said. “That’s...that’s the only way you can try and clear your name.”

“Yeah, I do!” Fuyuhiko exclaimed, suddenly appearing hopeful - or at least, as hopeful as Fuyuhiko could be. “I've been avoiding the restaurant since the King’s Game, so I was eating at the diner. Peko happened to be there too. I didn't wanna go to Monokuma's Horror House, so I stayed there until late.”

“Peko, is this true?” Nagito asked.

Peko nodded. “I can vouch for Fuyuhiko, he was at the diner for most of the evening.”

Peko was so clearly lying. Fuyuhiko had done everything to keep his connections with her a secret, so why would he suddenly be seen with her in public? They’d barely stand next to each other, let alone eat dinner in each other's company. Even if they claimed to be eating alone, it didn't seem like them to be in the same location at once. Since the others didn’t know about their relationship, they wouldn’t pick up on Peko’s fabrication of the truth.

“I...I do not want to be rude, but we cannot trust Peko’s alibi.” Sonia said gently.

"Why not?” Hajime asked. "Do you know something?"

"The other day, I overheard a conversation of theirs, they appear to have a connection to one another." Sonia revealed, sharing what she knew.


“I did not hear much, so I do not know exactly how they are connected,” Sonia began. “But from what I heard, they were already acquainted when we arrived at Jabberwock Island. I believe they have known each other for quite some time too.”

"When did you hear this?" Chiaki asked.

"Yesterday, at the beach house." Sonia explained. "I was going to go inside, but I stopped myself once hearing voices. I did not mean to listen in, for I know that is terrible etiquette."
Sonia was a blessing in disguise. When at the beach, Nagito had mentioned seeing Sonia outside the beach house that Fuyuhiko and Peko had been inside. Hajime had presumed that Sonia, Fuyuhiko, and Peko were up to something together, but it appeared Sonia was doing nothing more than eavesdropping. Sonia had been able to out Fuyuhiko and Peko, making things a lot easier for Hajime.

“Is this true?” Ibuki gasped. She turned to Fuyuhiko, who was standing at the podium directly next to her. “The scandal! The horror!”

“Of course not!” Fuyuhiko snapped, his temper rising. “You actually believe that shit? She’s clearly trying to frame me. Why the fuck would I know Peko?”

“This is nonsense, I agree.” Peko said, remaining calm. “I first met Fuyuhiko during our induction at Hope’s Peak, just like everyone else.”

Hajime couldn’t handle the constant lying. It was so irritating, so frustrating. He knew all the answers, yet there was nothing he could do to reveal them.

“I am not lying.” Sonia persisted. “I have no reason to, and I know what I heard.”

It was Sonia’s word against theirs. With Fuyuhiko and Peko both denying it, it was going to be a lot tougher for Sonia to be believed.

“Actually, you have a pretty good reason to be lying.” Nagito objected, raising the tension. “There’s something different about this case compared to all the rest. For once, we have a few solid alibis.”

“We do?” Sonia said.

“Tell me this, what is the time and date of the murders?” Nagito asked.

“They both happened today.” Hajime replied, unsure what Nagito was getting at. “Mahiru died at 8:36pm, and Souda 8:49pm.”

“That’s right. Now Hajime, do you know what else was happening at that exact time?” Nagito teased, the answer sitting on the tip of his tongue.

“Oh, that’s right!” Hajime exclaimed, now understanding. “The launch of Monokuma’s Haunted House.”

An insulted Monomi interrupted. “That is not Monokuma’s house! It’s mine, and he ruined it.”

Fuyuhiko quickly shut her up. “Fuck off, you irritating mole rat. We’re busy here. No one gives a shit about your ugly old house anyway.”

“S-so mean…” Monomi wept.

“Monokuma’s Haunted House took place at the same time, 8:30pm tonight.” Hajime said. “So...everyone who attended is innocent?”

“We don’t know that!” Fuyuhiko disagreed. “Someone at the house could’ve ditched and committed the murders.”

“Don’t be so foolish.” Gundam flattened him. “You truly believe the blackened was able to escape and murder within the space of six minutes? Nonsense.”
“Gundam’s right.” Chiaki agreed. “Besides, there were so few of us at the house, we would have noticed if someone went missing...I think.”

Ibuki listed off those that had shown. “The people who went to the house were Nagito, Hajime, Chiaki, Gundam, and Ibuki! No one else was there, besides Monokuma and Monomi, but they don't get to count.”

“That leaves Souda, Mahiru, Fuyuhiko, Peko, and Sonia.” Hajime said. “They were all missing from the haunted house, meaning they don't have alibis.”

“Essentially, this has narrowed down the suspects to Sonia, Fuyuhiko, and Peko. Unless you plan on counting the murder victims too.” Nagito said. “Now Sonia, do you understand why it would be beneficial for you to lie? The rest of us have airtight alibis, meaning things aren't looking so good for the three of you.”

“I...I understand.” Sonia said solemnly, realising the difficulty of her position. “Though I swear it, I am not lying.”

“Wait, there’s something I’d like to understand.” Hajime said. “When it comes to Monokuma, you’re kind of an idiot if you don’t listen to him when he says something is mandatory. Having five people avoid his haunted house, that’s a pretty big deal. I wanna know why only five of us turned up. Sonia, you said something earlier, about Fuyuhiko warning you not to go.”

“Why I did not show? That is simple to explain.” Sonia replied, relieved there was something she could do to try and clear her name. “Fuyuhiko warned me not to. He said he believed it to be a trap, and that it was in my best interest to stay away.”

“Fuyuhiko, care to explain?” Hajime said, expecting the Yakuza to deny it right away.

“What?” Fuyuhiko snapped, acting as if he’d misheard.

“Well, is it true?” Hajime had a feeling Fuyuhiko was stalling for time.

“Maybe, but so what?” Fuyuhiko growled, getting more aggressive by the second. “That place gave me a bad feeling, so when I bumped into Sonia and Peko, I told ‘em not to go.”

“You didn’t warn Ibuki!” Ibuki huffed.

“What about Souda and Mahiru? Is that why they didn’t show?” Chiaki asked.


"Something isn't right." Hajime shook his head, unimpressed with all the information he'd just been given. "Fuyuhiko, when I spoke to Sonia earlier, she said you visited her at her cottage. Yet, you're saying you happened to bump into her somewhere."

"I bumped into her at her cottage, it's the same thing." Fuyuhiko scowled, irritated that Hajime was picking apart his words.

"You knocked at my door." Sonia said, insistent with the truth. Hajime knew she had no reason to be lying.

"Since when did you care about keeping other people safe?" Nagito taunted Fuyuhiko. “I thought you were all about yourself.”
“It's obvious why he did it.” Gundam said, a theory in mind. “By keeping Sonia away from the party, he stole her chance of an alibi, making it easier to pin the murder on someone else.”

It made perfect sense. Hajime understood why Fuyuhiko warned Peko, but there was no reason for him to warn Sonia too, he served no loyalty towards her. It was all part of his plan to frame Sonia. It had to be.

"T-that’s not it!” Fuyuhiko exclaimed, caught in a fluster. “I...I..."

"Well?” Hajime looked at him with judging eyes, Fuyuhiko was doing a terrible job of defending himself.

"I...I..." Fuyuhiko lowered his head, unable to face his classmates. "I was trying to keep her safe.”

“As you would say, 'that's bullshit'.” Ibuki gave her best Fuyuhiko impression.

"Ibuki's right, you’ve not cared about anyone else until now.” Hajime added. He didn't believe Fuyuhiko, it appeared to be a desperate last attempt to maintain his innocence.

“Yeah, b-but…” Fuyuhiko couldn’t find the words he needed. "I'm not lyin'."

"You’ve been treating Sonia pretty weirdly these past few days.” Hajime said, having a flashback to the days that had passed. “When we played the King’s Game, you flipped out at Sonia over nothing. Now suddenly, you’re trying to save her?” something was going on with Fuyuhiko and Sonia...but what?

“Gahh, fine!” admitting defeat, Fuyuhiko slammed his fist on the podium. “I’ll...I’ll tell you the truth. But you gotta trust me, I’m not the blackened.” Fuyuhiko took a deep breath, straightening out his suit jacket. His facial expression had softened. The anger from his voice had disappeared too, he spoke gently, without all the swearing. "Yeah, I know Peko, and I also warned Sonia. But I can explain it, all of it.”

“Stop-” Peko tried to silence him, but Fuyuhiko wouldn’t listen.

"No, I need to tell them." Fuyuhiko shook his head, refusing to keep quiet. "If this is what it'll take for you to believe me as innocent, then so be it. Peko and I grew up together, so yeah, I knew her before we came to the island."

"Are you childhood friends?” Sonia asked.

"It's not like that.” Fuyuhiko replied. "Peko was abandoned by her parents, so my clan took her in. She was hired as my hitman, to work directly under me."

“If my Young Master is attacked, then I must defend him as his shield. I am his sword, his tool. That is my only reason for existing.” realising the topic was going to be talked about, Peko opened up.

"Peko, what are you talking about?” Sonia was bewildered, struggling to understand what was being said. "Why must you call yourself a tool?"

"Because I am a tool, my Young Master's tool. I'm his property, I must do whatever he tells me.” Peko said, her expression blank.

"That is not true! Peko, you are your own person.” Sonia couldn't accept what she was being told.

"I exist solely for my Young Master, I am his property.” Peko repeated her original point.
"If you do whatever he tells you, does that mean you're the one that killed Mahiru and Souda?" Ibuki asked, her eyes wide in fear.

"No, that wasn't me." Peko shook her head.

"I'm really confused." Ibuki sighed. "You just admitted to being his personal hitman, but you're saying you didn't kill Mahiru and Souda? That makes zero sense."

"I didn't kill them, because I wasn't instructed to by my Young Master." Peko elaborated.

"Wait...Fuyuhiko didn't tell you to do it?" Hajime frowned.

Fuyuhiko let out a harsh breath. "At first...I was gonna do it." it was obvious what he was implying. "The play, followed by the motive, it all just fell into place. I’d never been interested in leaving the island before, cuz I’d have to leave Peko behind. But with the motive, I could get my revenge, and Peko and I could leave together. I was gonna do it."

There was silence, no one wanting to interrupt Fuyuhiko during his confession.

"But, thanks to Hajime, I didn't do it." Fuyuhiko admitted, looking at Hajime, almost smiling. "He came and spoke to me, warning me not to do anything stupid. I wasn’t thinking straight, I was consumed by the idea of revenge."

"You can’t be serious." Hajime folded his arms, not buying any of it. "When I came to your cottage, you flipped out at me, there’s no way I changed your mind. I didn’t convince you not to kill her, you can’t try and play that."

"I know it doesn’t seem like it," Fuyuhiko sighed, realising how unbelievable it seemed. "Hell, at first, I was even more determined to kill her. But your words stuck with me all day. Killing Mahiru wouldn’t bring back Natsumi."

"Natsumi?" Nagito asked, seeking clarification.

"Yeah, that’s my sister’s name." Fuyuhiko shared, speaking fondly as he spoke of his sister. "It was that Sato bitch who took my sister’s life, and she’s already paid for what she did - I will never be sorry about that. But Mahiru, I mean...I don’t even know if she really did have anything to do with Natsumi’s death. That’s something Monokuma coulda made up on his own."

The way Fuyuhiko was speaking...it seemed real. No lying, no false arrogant persona. He was speaking deep from within, or so Hajime liked to believe.

Fuyuhiko continued. "I started doubting myself after Hajime’s warning, I wasn’t sure I could do it anymore. So I met with Peko at the beach house. Hajime, Chiaki...you remember seeing us, right? And Sonia, I'm guessing that's when you overheard our conversation."

How could they forget? Peko and Fuyuhiko’s suspicious behaviour had worried Hajime and Chiaki that another murder might’ve taken place.

"Yeah, I remember." Hajime nodded.

"Well, that's what we were talking about. When I told Peko I was having doubts, she offered to do it for me, without even flinching. I couldn’t have that. If we didn’t get away with it, and something happened to Peko-" Fuyuhiko stopped himself, not wanting to dwell on the thought. "That’s when I knew, taking Mahiru’s life wasn’t worth it."
“Hajime, you truly are the Ultimate Hope.” Nagito beamed, basking in the moment. "With your talent, you were able to convince Fuyuhiko not to seek revenge. That's truly inspiring."

"Can you just be quiet?!" Hajime narrowed his eyes at Nagito, unimpressed with his waffling. He turned his attention back to Fuyuhiko. "But what does all of this have to do with your behaviour towards Sonia?"

“I was getting to that.” Fuyuhiko snapped, doing so by accident. “Sonia...Sonia reminds of Natsumi. Not literally, I mean they’re nothing alike when it comes to their personalities. But after Sonia played the part of my sister in the play, I kinda began seeing them as the same person. The blonde hair didn’t help. Knowing my sister might be dead, I guess I started seeing Sonia as a replacement.”

It made sense, if Fuyuhiko was hurting, it was only natural he’d latch onto someone else for comfort.

"I found it really hard being around her.” Fuyuhiko confessed. “Sonia was a walking reminder that my sister was dead. It’s why I got so angry with her in the King’s Game. I didn’t mean it personally, I was just struggling to see her.”

There was a look of genuine sadness on Fuyuhiko’s face, Hajime didn’t doubt that he was telling the truth for one minute.

“Then I got a warning letter about Monokuma’s Haunted House, so I knew something was off.” Fuyuhiko said. “Obviously, I warned Peko not to go. And I felt like it was my duty to warn Sonia too. She reminds me of my sister, there’s nothing more to it.”

“‘You expect us to believe all that?’” Gundam frowned, he wasn’t convinced.

“It’s the truth, I swear.” Fuyuhiko insisted. “Believe me, I’m not your blackened.”

“As heartwarming as that all sounds, are we going to ignore what he just said?” Nagito crossed his arms. “You received a warning letter?”

Hajime stared at Nagito, there was a look of determination on the boy’s face, it wasn’t right. Nagito helping them. He wasn’t playing games or stirring the truth, he was asking all the right questions and making genuine points. Was he feeling alright? Nagito's aid should be a good thing, but it made Hajime feel uneasy.

“Oh...right, guess I never said.” from the pocket of his suit, Fuyuhiko presented an envelope. “This showed up in my mailbox this mornin’. You guys can look at it if you want.”

Passed around the circle, Hajime waited patiently for his turn. When the time came, he made the effort to inspect it thoroughly, as he knew he wouldn’t get the chance to look twice - time wasn’t on his side. It was a standard envelope, as expected. Fuyuhiko’s name had been scribbled on the front in black ink. Inside, there was a note. The message took up no more than a third of the paper, written in red, it read as follows:

‘Your life is in danger. There are people after you, and they’ll take advantage of the motive to kill you. If you’re not careful, you WILL die. I can’t tell you how I know this, but I swear it's the truth. Stay safe. Don’t trust anyone. Don’t fall for anything.’

A warning note for Fuyuhiko. It wasn't signed, whoever had written it had chosen to keep their anonymity. Hajime didn’t recognise the writing, per se, but he had seen it before.
“This note, it’s practically identical to Mahiru’s.” Hajime revealed, making an instant connection. “The messages are different, but the handwriting is identical.”

"Do we have Mahiru's letter to hand?" Peko asked. "I'd like to make a comparison."

“I brought it with me.” Chiaki replied, reaching into her always faithful backpack. She pulled free Mahiru's envelope, the letter inside. It was passed around the courtroom, everyone wanting a second look so it would be fresh in their minds. Fuyuhiko’s letter accompanied it, making it easier to compare.

'I know your secret. We need to talk. I want the truth. Meet me in the restaurant. Tonight at 8:30pm. Come alone.'

"I take it everyone's had enough time to spot the differences between the two notes?" Nagito asked, in search of answers.

"The notes hold two very different meanings." Sonia replied. "Fuyuhiko's is a warning, whilst the letter for Mahiru is more of a threatening invitation."

"Ibuki noticed something too!" Ibuki exclaimed. "They're written in different colours. Mahiru has a black letter with a red envelope, while Fuyuhiko has a red letter and black envelope."

“I wondered how many people were going to spot that, you have an excellent eye.” Nagito grinned, looking pleased he wasn’t the only one to pick up on it. “Strange, don’t you think?”

“Maybe the blackened is really into stationary and design?” Ibuki suggested.

“Unless…” Chiaki had her own idea. “Unless, the letters got mixed up. Everything written in black should have gone to Fuyuhiko, and everything written in red should’ve gone to Mahiru.”

“Someone mixing the letters? That’s definitely a possibility.” Hajime nodded eagerly. It made far more sense for Mahiru to have gotten the warning, and Fuyuhiko the threat. After all, the threatening letter claimed to know a dark secret. What secrets did Mahiru have to hide?

“You think Monokuma did it?” Fuyuhiko asked.

“I’ve never met a group of people so bad at accepting blame!” Monokuma complained, sulking from his throne. “Whenever something goes wrong, and you can’t be bothered to figure out the culprit, you point your grubby fingers straight at me.”

“You’re always up to stuff, so obviously, we’re gonna consider you.” Fuyuhiko fought back.

“I hate to burst your bubbles, but I didn’t touch any letters. Think something happened with those letters? Well, it’s your damn fault, so figure it out yourselves.” Monokuma huffed.

“Maybe, it’s him…” Fuyuhiko pointed to Nagito with untrusting eyes. “You’re always up to no good.”

It was true, Nagito didn’t have the best track record. He’d tried to murder Teruteru, encouraged Mikan to kill, and given Ibuki the despair disease. There was no reason to believe him as innocent, especially since he’d been acting so helpful in the trial so far, that usually meant he was up to no good.

“I assure you, it wasn’t me.” Nagito laughed, poorly showing his innocence by making a mockery of the situation. “If I was going to mess with the case, I’d do something far more creative than a simple
"But if you didn't switch them, then who did?" Fuyuhiko frowned, unsure there was anyone else in the courtroom with enough malice as Nagito.

"Perhaps it was the author of the letters that caused the switch up." Sonia suggested. "The letters appear to have been written rather frantically, as you may see from the handwriting. If they were anxious, or simply in a rush, it would be easy for them to make such a mistake."

“That...that’s a pretty good point.” Hajime nodded, Sonia’s idea the best of all. “They wrote a warning letter and a threatening note. I can’t imagine that being the most relaxing experience. I guess messing it up on their own is something we should consider.”

“If the letters were mixed up, Mahiru was meant to get the warning...and Fuyuhiko was supposed to have the invitation.” Chiaki said.

“You mean to say, the blackened planned on killing Fuyuhiko instead?” Gundam asked.

"Maybe they were trying to help Mahiru." Ibuki suggested. "They knew Fuyuhiko was after her, cuz of the whole Twilight Syndrome thing. They sent her a warning to keep her safe, and wanted to kill Fuyuhiko before he could get to Mahiru first."

“Not necessarily,” Peko disagreed. “Their intentions could have involved taking advantage of the motive instead. They could convince Fuyuhiko to kill Mahiru as an act of revenge, and escape with him as the additional graduate.”

Peko was right, it made for the perfect plan. The blackened could have persuaded Fuyuhiko to kill Mahiru, with the idea that the two of them could escape together if he were to be successful. If Fuyuhiko failed to get away with it, he’d be executed, but not the blackened. It was a win-win situation.

“But if I was gonna take anyone with me, it’d be Peko.” Fuyuhiko said, finding a hole in the plan.

“But did the blackened know that? If they didn’t know about you and Peko, they probably presumed you had no loyalty to anyone on the island. That’s something they could take advantage of.” Hajime said, trying to put the story together. “Sonia, when you found out about Fuyuhiko and Peko’s connection, did you tell anyone else?”

The Princess replied instantly, needing no time to think. “Only Souda. I saw him on my journey back to the hotel, he was curious as to why I looked so troubled.”

“You told him everything?” Hajime asked, wanting to be sure.

“I...I believe so.” Sonia confirmed, though she didn’t sound certain, it wasn't the strongest of her memories. “I was rather confused at the time, so in the moment, I believe I told him everything.”

“Even if you did tell him, this don’t lead us anywhere.” Fuyuhiko sighed. “It can’t be Souda, the guy’s dead.”

“Wait, I’m not ready to move on just yet.” Hajime shook his head, still addressing Sonia. “When you told Souda, how did he react?” would the mention of Fuyuhiko and Peko’s relationship be enough to trigger another one of his memories?

“I suppose you could call his behaviour unusual,” Sonia replied. “As soon as I told him, he appeared to go off into a daydream-like state, it was as if he had disappeared from his body.”
“He was probably having some sick fantasy about you.” Fuyuhiko insulted Souda under his breath.

Hajime was certain that Sonia’s comment had triggered more of Souda memories, after all, they’d been written in his diary. To completely ignore Sonia, he had to have remembered something, he would never do such a thing otherwise.

“Is it just Ibuki, or has Souda been acting weird recently?” Ibuki pondered. “He hasn’t been acting like himself very much.”

“I’ve noticed it too.” Nagito agreed. “Like at breakfast the other day, he wasn’t eating anything.”

Hajime knew it was Souda’s returning memories messing with his head, but he couldn’t exactly say that to the group. He hoped it didn’t play a big role in the case, otherwise, things were about to get very difficult.

“Let us not waste time discussing the ill behaviour of the dead.” Gundam broke in. “It’s not important.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Hajime agreed, eager to change the subject. “We can’t afford to get distracted. But what we’ve learnt, Mahiru was never meant to go to the restaurant. Whether they were going to kill him or not, the killer was expecting Fuyuhiko.”

“With that logic, we’re only left with one real suspect.” Nagito announced, contributing to the tension in the room.

“Who?” Ibuki asked curiously.

“Narrow it down yourselves, it’s rather easy.” Nagito said, practically boasting that he’d figured it out so quickly. “Ibuki, Hajime, Chiaki, Gundam, and I all have alibis. Mahiru and Souda are victims. Fuyuhiko was the one meant to be summoned to the restaurant, and Peko is essentially his accomplice.”

“...Sonia.” Hajime whispered her name. Running with Nagito’s theory, she was the only one it could be. Five had alibis, two were dead, and two were already working together. Sonia was the only piece that didn’t fit the puzzle.

“Yes, Hajime?” Sonia looked at Hajime with wide eyes, unsure as to what he was implying.

“Could...could this be your doing?” Hajime asked, talking more to himself than he was to the Princess.

“I-I understand that I am the only one without an alibi, but that does not make me guilty.” Sonia declared, trying her best to stay strong, despite the pressure being forced upon her.

“Wait, you’re right. Do our alibis at the haunted house really hold any weight?” Hajime frowned, trying to consider all of his options before he truly pointed the finger. “I mean, it’s impossible for any of us to have snuck away while we were all awake, it would have been noticed. However, we don’t really have alibis for the time the sleeping gas stole…”

“What are you suggesting?” Gundam asked. “You mean, someone was not affected by the gas, and they used that time to murder?”

“It’s a possibility.” Hajime nodded.

“It’s not.” Fuyuhiko shot him down, though he didn’t mean so maliciously. “You said you were
knocked out by sleeping gas, right? How the hell is someone not affected by that? Unless someone was wearing a gas mask, but I think you’d notice, they ain’t exactly discrete.”

“Oh, yeah…” Hajime sighed, Fuyuhiko was right. In front of his own two eyes, he'd seen all of his friends collapse to the floor. The sleeping gas had taken them all by surprise. There was no time for suddenly slipping on a gas mask, and it wasn’t like there was a magical pill that could be taken to prevent being affected. “No, you’re right, it’s pretty impossible for that to have worked.”

"What about someone waking up early from the gas?” Ibuki suggested, not allowing the theory to die. "They could’ve killed Mahiru and Souda before everyone else woke up.”

"There's too much chance involved in that.” Hajime had already moved on. "It's pot luck they'd have woken up early, and even if they did, how did they pull off a crime like that on the spot?” mentioning luck brought Nagito to mind, but Hajime knew that wasn’t what had happened. There was too much chance involved.

Hajime didn’t want to accept the reality, but he had to. The only reason he was avoiding it, was because it led to the conclusion that Sonia was guilty. He wasn’t ready to say goodbye to another friend, another survivor.

As Hajime stared at Sonia, looking for the right words to say, something caught his eye. How he hadn’t noticed it earlier, he wasn’t sure. Along the hem of Sonia’s dress, was a deep red stain. It was a colour Hajime recognised only too well.

“B-blood, there’s blood on your dress…” without even realising, he was pointing to the stain, capturing the attention of all his classmates with his outcry.

Hajime knew Sonia didn’t have the warmest feelings towards Souda, and that he often overstepped the line, but that was no reason to kill him. And Mahiru too? It couldn’t be…

“OH MY GOD!! YOU’RE WEARING THEIR BLOOD AS A FASHION STATEMENT!” Ibuki let out a terrible scream, horrified at what she was seeing. “DON’T TELL ME YOU TOOK THEIR TEETH TOO FOR TROPHIES TOO?”

“P-pardon me?” in confusion, Sonia looked down, studying the spot where everyone was staring. “Oh, oh my! N-no, you do not understand…”

“How could you do this?” Fuyuhiko hissed, narrowing his eyes at Sonia. “I thought you were one of the good ones.”

“Everyone, please, listen!” Sonia tried to call for their attention, but no one cared enough to do so. They continued to drown her out with their shouting.

"Hey, maybe we should be quiet. Sonia is trying to tell us something.” it was Chiaki who got them to settle down.

“T-this is not blood.” Sonia stressed. “When I was inspecting Souda’s body, I encountered a red pen. I picked it up for a closer look, and it leaked all over me. I washed my hands clean, but I never realised it went on my dress too.”

“A red pen…” Hajime muttered, he recalled finding it too - that part of her story couldn’t be a lie. “That would make sense.”

Wanting to be sure, Peko went in for a closer look. Only two podiums away from the suspect in question, it was the obvious choice for her to go. She knelt in front of Sonia, taking the time to study
“It’s pen.” Peko confirmed, standing to her feet. “There are no doubts about it, I apologise for the misunderstanding.”

“It is okay, but please, do not suspect me like that again.” Sonia seemed shaken up, upset that her friends would doubt her. “I assure you, I am not the blackened. Mahiru and Souda were my friends, I would never do such a thing.”

Sonia hadn’t been so careless as to leave a bloody stain on her dress, but it didn’t mean she was in the clear. Sonia was the only one without a solid alibi. Though Hajime was trying to focus on Sonia’s situation, he couldn’t get something out of his head...the red pen. A red pen had been used to write the letters, and a red pen of a similar shade had been found on Souda’s body. What was Souda doing with the pen? Did that mean he’d been the one to write the letters?

Hajime shared his thoughts with the group. “We need to talk about the pen Sonia found on Souda. It was red, just like the letter Mahiru received. It could mean something.”

“Well ‘course it means something, it proves Souda wrote the notes.” Fuyuhiko said, making a clear statement.

"Can we be sure he wrote both of them?” Peko asked, unsure. "No one found the black pen that was used for Fuyuhiko's letter."

"We don't need both pens to know that it's Souda." Hajime insisted. "The handwriting is an exact match, there are no doubts about it."

"Perhaps the ink ran out, or he was trying to be creative. Who knows? Such minor details aren't important enough to pursue." Nagito said, reassuring them it wasn't something they needed to focus on.

Souda's conversation with Sonia seemed to have triggered more of his rewrite memories. He knew how Twilight Syndrome Murder Case ended the first time around. Presuming history repeated itself, Souda would have feared that Fuyuhiko and Peko were after Mahiru. It would make sense for Souda to write Mahiru a warning letter, informing her that she was in a position of risk.

Of course, this provided a major issue. That being, the memories themselves. At the beginning, Souda had described them as nothing more than visions. If he was truly the one to send out warnings, he had to see his returning memories as a little more than just daydreams. If so, what changed his mind? How did he suddenly decide that these events had happened before? Perhaps it was the rate of his returning memories, how everything would've fallen into place, not a single continuity error. Or maybe, he didn't believe them, but he was trying to stay on the safe side - just to be sure.

"What if the pen was planted on him?” Ibuki suggested, offering all opinions. "Someone could've written the letters, and left the pen with Souda."

"No, that's not it. He definitely wrote those himself." Hajime was certain. The writing in Souda's diary was an exact match for the writing of the letters, he hadn't seen it until now, but since everything was beginning to fit into place, he was sure. How he was going to explain it to the rest of the group was the difficult part.

"Do you think you could tell us why you think this?” Nagito pushed him for further answers.

"I've seen his writing before, it's a match." Hajime replied, keeping his explanation as vague as
"If you recognised his writing, why didn't you say something earlier?" Fuyuhiko questioned.

"Well, I don't recognise it that much, I've only seen his writing in passing before." Hajime attempted to justify himself, at least that part was true. "But now that you've put Souda's name to it, I know for sure that it's his."

"That isn't very helpful, Hajime." Nagito wouldn't let it suffice. "Are you sure there's something you aren't telling us?"

Hajime realised he'd been backed into a corner. They weren't going to move on until he gave them more information, but there was no more information that he could give them. There was one idea he had left, but it was very risky. "I...I lied to you. I recognised Souda's writing instantly." that in itself was a lie, Hajime truly hadn't made the connection, he wasn't familiar enough with Souda's penmanship. "But I never said anything, because I wanted to see if you guys could figure it out too. These class trials involve all of us, so I think it's best we come to these conclusions together, instead of one single person dictating."

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"That is a fair point that you make." Sonia smiled affectionately. "Our argument will be stronger if we solve this case as one."

"I thought...we'd have a better chance at succeeding if we're all in agreement, and we figure it out properly." Hajime threw himself deeper into the lie. "I didn't wanna lie to you guys, but I knew, in the end, it would give us the better result."

"Hajime, I can't believe we doubted you." Nagito lowered his head, ashamed of his behaviour. "Of course the Ultimate Hope had an even better plan waiting for us."

"At least this clears up one thing, it was definitely Souda who wrote the letters." Chiaki said.

Hajime allowed himself to breathe, relieved that his lying had paid off. It had been a close call.

“I understand why Souda would write a letter to Mahiru,” Sonia began. “We all knew that her life was in danger after watching Monokuma’s play. But why would he want to meet with Fuyuhiko? Souda was a coward, I cannot see him having the confidence to challenge someone like that.”

Coward…

The brutal, yet honest, word Sonia had used before. It wasn’t the first time she’d chosen it to describe Souda, and to make matters worse, it had been to his face. It had to hurt, being called a coward by the person you care about most.

“Wait...wait...” Hajime felt himself getting fired up, a new idea in mind.

“It seems like you’re onto something, Hajime.” Nagito smirked.

“Sonia, you know how highly Souda thought of you, right?” Hajime said. “What you loved, he loved. What you hated, he hated. At the King’s Game, you called him a coward. That had to have
hurt. I mean, from you of all people. You must’ve left his pride in ruins. I bet he wanted to meet with Fuyuhiko to change that, to win back your faith and respect.”

“True might that be, there is a flaw to your suggestion.” Gundam remarked. He seemed as if he wanted to believe Hajime, but couldn’t. “In Souda’s letter, he mentions that he knows Fuyuhiko’s secret. This obviously implies the connection between Fuyuhiko and Peko. How would Souda know such information?”

“Easy!” Hajime replied instantly. “Don’t you remember? Sonia overheard a conversation between Fuyuhiko and Peko, and told Souda. I’m guessing he figured out the rest for himself.” Hajime knew exactly why, what Sonia had told him triggered a flashback.

“Hmph, even I can agree, that is of a plausible nature.” Gundam nodded, acknowledging what Hajime told him to be true.

“Think about it, Souda has the perfect way to show Sonia he isn’t a coward. He can confront Fuyuhiko about his relationship with Peko, and save Mahiru’s life by warning her to stay away.” Hajime explained. “Except, the idea of confronting Fuyuhiko terrifies Souda, and that shows in his mistakes.”

"How so?" Sonia asked.

Hajime elaborated. “He didn’t sign the letters in case he changed his mind and backed out at the last minute. And he was so anxious, he mixed up the envelopes so that Fuyuhiko and Mahiru didn’t receive the correct letters.”

“It also explains why he was never at Monokuma’s Night of Horrors.” Chiaki added.

“Then where did it all go wrong?” Fuyuhiko asked. “The person Souda was trying to warn shows up, not me, and then both of them end up dead. What the hell happened there?”

“Perhaps Souda and Mahiru were talking, when someone else came into the restaurant and murdered them.” Peko suggested. “If Souda wrote a letter trying to warn Mahiru regarding her well-being, he wanted to keep her safe. I can’t see any reason why things would turn sour between them.”

“I don’t think Mahiru and Souda ever got the chance to talk.” Nagito replied, deep in thought.

"Why's that?" Hajime asked.

“Mahiru was pushed down the stairs, meaning she had to be somewhere near the top of the staircase for her murder to be effective.” Nagito explained. "If Mahiru and Souda were in mid conversation, they would have sat down at one of the tables. My guess, she wasn’t in the restaurant for very long.”

“How do we know she wasn’t dragged from her seat and thrown down the stairs?” Fuyuhiko asked, wanting to explore all possibilities.

“It’s simple, the method of murder answers that question.” Nagito said. “They were in the restaurant, meaning knives were at the killer’s disposal. Dragging Mahiru to the top of the staircase, and then pushing her, seems like a lot of effort if you ask me. I feel that Mahiru was only pushed down the stairs, because it was the method most convenient to the killer at that time.”

“What are you suggesting?” Hajime asked, in search of the truth. “That she was pushed as soon as she arrived?”

“Yes, that’s what I believe.” Nagito nodded. “The letter instructed Mahiru to be at the restaurant for
8:30, and she died at 8:36. I'm pretty confident to say that they didn't have much time for conversation."

"True might that be, six minutes still offered them some time to talk." Gundam pointed out, suggesting that even if it wasn't for long, Souda and Mahiru could have started to talk in that time.

"Who’s to say Mahiru turned up at the given time?" Nagito shrugged, hitting everyone with a new idea. "A stranger sends you an anonymous threatening note, do you really plan on showing up bright and early?"

"I suppose Mahiru might have been hesitant about turning up." Hajime said. "Maybe she felt like backing out at the last second, and took longer than she needed to."

"We are merely speculating," Gundam frowned, irritated with the time wasting. "There is no proof for which time Mahiru showed her face."

"Actually, I wouldn’t be so sure." Hajime was quick to fight back. "There is something that might give us a clue as to whether Mahiru was late or not, and that’s Monokuma’s blackout."

He’d been wanting to discuss the blackout since the beginning of the trial, but he’d been holding out for the right opportunity. Finally, he'd found it.

"Everyone who went to the Night of Horrors, knows that Monokuma triggered a blackout. He arrived late, let us inside, closed the door, and cut all the power." Hajime said, remembering the events of the past. "Except, he didn’t just cut the power for the haunted house. According to Sonia, all power in the library cut too."

"That is correct, it did." Sonia nodded, backing up his statement. "It lasted no longer than a minute, but everything was in utter darkness."

"Fuyuhiko, Peko...did either of you experience anything like this?" Hajime asked the duo.

"The blackout...oh, yeah! I forgot about that with everything that'd happened." a look of surprise washed over Fuyuhiko's face. "I was in the diner by myself. The fridges cut out and switched to the emergency generators."

Hajime took in the information. "And Peko, what about you?"

"I was on the beach, practising with my sword. As you can imagine, there was no direct power supply near me." Peko replied. She didn't have the right information to aid their class trial further.

"My guess, when Monokuma turned off power for the haunted house, he switched it off for the entire island." Hajime revealed. "I don’t know whether it was on purpose, or not, but it seemed like we all experienced the blackout together."

Monokuma butted in, answering Hajime’s question. "Of course it was on purpose!! Since so many people had decided not to show up to my haunted house, I thought I’d bring the horror to them."

"Hajime," Gundam returned to the original topic at hand. "What does the blackout have to do with the time of Mahiru’s arrival?"

"Before I explain, I just wanna make sure of something. Can anyone remember what time the blackout triggered?" Hajime asked. He knew the answer in his mind, but he wanted to make sure that the others agreed with him.
“Monokuma showed up at 8:34, I remember him commenting on the time.” Ibuki said, thinking back. She was intensely poking her fingers against her head, as if that would help develop further memories. “By the time we got inside...Ibuki thinks it was 8:35pm!”

“Good, that’s what I was thinking too.” Hajime smiled, pleased to have someone in agreement. “If Mahiru arrived at the given time, 8:30, she would have been at the restaurant for a good five minutes by the time the blackout triggered. However, if Mahiru was late, it’s likely she was heading to the restaurant when the blackout occurred.”

Greeted by blank faces, Hajime realised his classmates weren’t following along with what he had to say. He attempted to make his explanation clearer.

“The blackout triggers, and one minute later, Mahiru dies.” Hajime was doing his best to break it down. “If Mahiru had shown up on time, it’s likely that her and Souda would be in the middle of a conversation when the blackout happened. He’d probably be explaining the note mix up to her. If Mahiru showed up late, she would have been entering the restaurant when the lights cut.”

“That’s...that’s a good point.” Chiaki agreed. “Seeing that Mahiru died one minute after the blackout, it makes more sense that she was on her way to the restaurant at that time.”

“Think about things from Mahiru’s perspective, she’s meeting up with someone anonymously, when she knows someone out there is trying to kill her, or at least, wants to. As she’s heading upstairs, all the lights cut out. She’s obviously going to think it’s a trap.” Hajime said, trying to understand the situation in Mahiru’s shoes.

“So, she fell?” Gundam asked. “Attempting to retreat, she misjudges her footing and falls to her death.”

“That seems possible.” Ibuki nodded, liking Gundam’s idea. “She was trying to run away like a mouse being chased by a cat. Or how Sonia would run away from Souda when he was being creepy.”

“Well trained cats do not chase mice.” Gundam rolled his eyes, as if Ibuki had made an obvious mistake.

It was too early to judge yet, but it was a possible theory. “Mahiru was probably terrified as it was, the blackout would have made things even worse for her. If she wasn’t thinking straight, she could have tried to walk back down the stairs, but fallen.” Hajime expanded on Gundam's theory.

“I wouldn’t be so sure.” Nagito shook his head. “Following your logic, Mahiru believes that she is being targeted as a result of Twilight Syndrome - most likely, by Fuyuhiko. She also knows that accomplices are being encouraged in this case. If Mahiru thinks it’s a personal attack against her, wouldn’t she fear that two people were working together? One waiting for her at the top of the stairs, and one waiting at the bottom.”

Nagito made a fair point. Provided Mahiru had been thinking rationally enough, she could have seen it as a further part of the trap.

"Aren't we getting ahead of ourselves?” Fuyuhiko interrupted, bringing them back into reality. "We've just started assuming that Mahiru was on the staircase. Sure, I think she was late, but we don't know her exact location."

"You're right, we don't know exactly where she was, but that doesn't mean we should just give up.” Hajime insisted, trying to get Fuyuhiko on his side.
"Go on..." Fuyuhiko said, still unsure.

"Six minutes after the given meeting time, Mahiru died. So we know that she had to be somewhere close by restaurant." Hajime explained. "Like we said earlier, Mahiru's method of murder was the result of the killer's convenience. She needed to be by that staircase for it to have worked, she never could have obtained such injuries otherwise."

"What Hajime's trying to say, for Mahiru to have died the way she did, she needed to be on that staircase by 8:36." Nagito stepped in.

“We’ve got to remember things from everyone’s perspective here. At this point, Souda still believes he’s meeting up with Fuyuhiko at the restaurant. So if the lights black out, Souda’s gonna think that Fuyuhiko is tricking him. He probably panicked too, especially since he knows Fuyuhiko has Peko.” Hajime pointed out, reminding everyone there were two murder victims at hand.

“They both fell down the stairs in panic?” Sonia said, though it was a weak suggestion.

Nagito took over Hajime’s explanation. “When humans face danger, we do one of two things. We fight, or we flight. I think everyone can agree here, Souda is still a coward. Upon believing he's caught in a trap, he would never fight. He flighted, hence running towards the nearest exit. He wanted out of the situation.”

“The nearest exit being the staircase Mahiru was on…” Hajime muttered to himself.

"Once again, you're presuming." Fuyuhiko frowned, crossing his arms. "We don't know that Souda tried to run. Maybe he was paralysed outta fear, or he tried hiding under one of the tables."

Fuyuhiko was questioning everything, but it was good to look at things from all sorts of angles. "Sometimes, you've gotta presume these things, or the case just doesn't work." Hajime tried to explain his own mindset, speaking from experience of the previous class trials. "We don't know for sure what happened at 8:36pm this evening, but there's so much we do know. We know that five of us were at the Haunted House during this time, we know that you, Peko, and Sonia were staying away because you believed the Haunted House to be a trap. We know that a blackout occurred one minute before Mahiru died. Sure, it might seem like guesswork now, but if we can put together a theory that works, we might be onto something."

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"What would be the point if it were too easy?" Nagito smirked.

Reflecting on his own comment, Hajime began to think, trying to break down exactly what had happened. At 8:36pm, Mahiru had been murdered. Hajime, Ibuki, Chiaki, Gundam, and Nagito were instantly ruled as innocent, they'd all be in each other's company at the given time, making it impossible for any of them to be the killer. Though neither Fuyuhiko or Peko had alibis, it was clear from Fuyuhiko's speech, that he was long over the idea of seeking revenge. The raw emotion in his voice had confirmed he was telling the truth, no one was that good a liar, especially not Fuyuhiko. Sonia didn't have an alibi, but suggesting her as the killer was a barbaric idea. It wasn't in
her nature, the trial had made Hajime sure of it.

Following that thought path, with the addition of Nagito's logic, Hajime knew that he had it.

“I...I know who killed Mahiru!” Hajime exclaimed, the answer so clear to him now. “It was…” he pointed to the podium of who he was talking about. “Kazuichi Souda!”

“Souda?” Fuyuhiko scoffed. “Uh, right…”

“I’m being serious.” Hajime pressed. “Like Nagito said, when the blackout happened, Souda panicked and ran for the nearest exit, the staircase Mahiru was waiting on. The two must have bumped into each other, both believing they were being tricked.”

“This still doesn’t explain how Souda could be a killer.” Fuyuhiko frowned.

"Ooh, so you're saying Souda smacked into Mahiru and sent her flying down the stairs?" Ibuki gasped, putting together the pieces she'd been given to work with.

"I don't think that's it." Chiaki disagreed. "Souda might have been desperate to leave, and I doubt he had a very logical plan in mind, but he's not totally stupid. Even he knows better than to run down the stairs in the pitch black."

"I wouldn't be so sure..." Gundam said. "In a panic, I believe he'd do anything."

Chiaki made a fair point. Was Hajime simply reaching too far? Running down the stairs during a power cut would be a pretty stupid move, even for Souda. Granted, natural lighting would've been enough to guide him to the stairwell, but the stairs themselves would've been in darkness.

Speaking of stupidity, it was still irritating Hajime why Mahiru had showed up. She knew it wasn't safe after Monokuma's play, and Hajime had even gone to the efforts of warning her. In the end, it was probably the guilt of potentially aiding a murder that had changed her mind. Perhaps she thought Fuyuhiko wanted to straighten things out. Either way, it was still a terrible move. Would Mahiru really make such a risky decision? Unless...

"Hold on...I think I might have it." Hajime wasn't ready to give up. "I still think Souda killed Mahiru, but I think something else happened between them. It's all to do with Mahiru's behaviour. She isn’t stupid, and I already warned her not to go meeting up with strangers. I think the guilt of the letter persuaded her to go. Except Mahiru isn’t stupid, so she wouldn’t go without protection."

“I can’t imagine Mahiru hurting anyone.” Ibuki frowned.

“She didn’t plan to, it was for in case of an emergency.” Hajime replied. “Chiaki, Peko, Sonia, when we were baking this morning, don’t you remember Mahiru’s strange behaviour?”

“Ah, that is right.” Sonia said. “She was hurrying around the kitchen in a frenzy.”

“It’s because she was looking for her weapon.” Hajime replied. “She took a kitchen knife for protection. It’s why she seemed so worried, her mind was running over the possibility of the situations she could find herself in.”

"You should never go into battle without your weapon." Peko remarked.

“Mahiru is walking upstairs, and a blackout triggers...what’s she going to do?” Hajime asked, putting the situation to the group.
“Prepare her weapon.” Peko said, speaking from experience.

“Exactly!” Hajime replied. “She pulled the knife close to her, preparing it for anyone who might hurt her. Now, at the same time, Souda is running towards that very exit. Even in the darkness, the moonlight would give him some lighting.”

“He would have seen Mahiru holding a knife!” Ibuki exclaimed.

“So what does Souda do? He panics. He pushes her, shoves her, kicks her, I don’t know which…” Hajime said. “Though the details aren’t really important. Souda panics, and acts in self-defence. By doing so, Mahiru goes flying down the stairs. She snaps her neck during her fall, and she dies.”

There were satisfied nods from around the courtroom, it was a theory everyone could get behind.

“That explains Mahiru’s death, but not Souda’s.” Fuyuhiko sighed, feeling like he was practically back at square one again.

"He died thirteen minutes later, at 8:49pm." Chiaki repeated the information they'd discussed earlier. "Does anyone remember what was happening at the time?"

"Thirteen minutes...we were probably still in the haunted house." Hajime replied. It was likely around the time that Monokuma had been sharing his ghost story. "I guess that means our alibis still stand."

"Are you sure?" Ibuki asked. "It would make more sense if the gas had gone off by then, that way, none of us would have alibis."

"The gas hadn't triggered by then, we'd just finished listening to Monokuma's story." there was a strong sense of confidence in Nagito's voice. "Perhaps this will refresh your memories, it was around the time Monokuma started staring off into space. Don't you remember?"

Of course Hajime remembered. It was such a strange occurrence, that it was impossible for him to forget. The bear was in the middle of answering Hajime's question, when suddenly, he went completely silent. It was as if he'd left his body. Then, seconds later, he came back to life, with a new sense of mischief about him.

"I strongly believe, that Monokuma became possessed by the evil spirits of the horror house."

"And I strongly believe, that you've inhaled some kinda glue!" Ibuki exclaimed, bewildered by what Gundam had to say.

"He wasn't possessed." Hajime shook his head, certain of that fact. "But there was clearly something that made him react the way that he did."

"Do you think...he witnessed one of the murders?" Chiaki tilted her head.

"Then it appears, Monokuma has been blessed with the power of the all-seeing eye." Gundam narrowed his eyes at the bear.

"I'm not sure about an all-seeing eye...but I think he's connected to the security cameras." Chiaki let Gundam down gently. "Which means, he can see whatever's happening at any given time."

"You're not wrong with that one!" Monokuma interrupted at the mention of his own name. "It's one of my bear-illiant features. I'm directly connected to the security feed, which means, I
see **everything** you get up to."

"Surely, you do not mean **everything**?" Sonia looked slightly pale.

"Haha, you betcha!" Monokuma smirked. "So if you kids wanna get up to anything...'interesting', just know that your faithful headmaster, Monokuma, is watching."

Though Monokuma's disturbing comment made Hajime shudder, it was still incredibly helpful. "Monokuma claims that he sees everything through the security feed, and after he zoned out, he got really excited. There's only one thing that makes Monokuma that happy, and it's murder. I think he witnessed a murder, just like Chiaki said."

"That is the logical conclusion we can draw, however, don't the timings seem a little...off to you?" Nagito sighed, his hand resting on his hip. "The first murder happened seconds after the blackout, but Monokuma didn't zone out until well after his ghost story."

"Perhaps, there is a delay in the security footage?" Sonia suggested.

"Nuh uh, you're wrong!" Monokuma practically shouted at her, enjoying his power a little too much. "We have the latest technology here on Jabberwock Island, everything comes to me live. There isn't even a second in delay."

"In that case, Monokuma must have zoned out during Souda's murder." Hajime said. "I'm not sure what the time was, but it's certainly believable that it was 8:49pm."

"That's exactly what I was thinking!" Nagito smiled. "I'm glad to see you caught up."

"Huh?" a confused Hajime replied. "But you just said the timings seemed off, and that you didn't understand it."

"I was testing you." Nagito shrugged. "You said it yourself, Hajime, a single person shouldn't dictate the trial."

"Yeah...but you could at least help." Hajime was trying not to let himself get irritated, but it wasn't working. "Is there any other information you're choosing to keep to yourself?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it information, but there is something that I've been thinking about." Nagito replied, willing to share more this time around. "Monokuma reacted to Souda's death, but he didn't so much as flinch when it came to Mahiru's. She died just as we were entering the horror house, but he displayed no strange behavior at all. A little strange, wouldn't you agree?"

Nagito was right, it was strange. If Monokuma was keeping an eye on the security footage, he would've witnessed both murders. Yet, he only seemed interested in Souda's. There had to be more to it.

"I think Monokuma reacted so strangely because he wanted to take us to the crime scene." Sonia offered an explanation.

"Yeah, that's true...but it doesn't totally add up." Hajime frowned. "Souda died thirteen minutes after Mahiru. How did Monokuma know something else was going to happen? Why didn't he take us to the crime scene as soon as Mahiru died?"

"Maybe...it wasn't Souda's death that Monokuma was reacting to. Instead, it was the first murder...Mahiru's." Chiaki hit them with a new idea.
"Uhh, did you fall asleep, Chiaki?" Ibuki asked. "We just talked about this. Monokuma never reacted around the time Mahiru died."

"Did Mahiru really die at 8:36pm? Maybe...she died at 8:49pm, and Souda died sometime after that." Chiaki replied, questioning their information.

"When you think about it...we only think they died at those times, cuz Monokuma said so."

"Ugh, you're giving me a headache!" Monokuma cried, his head resting on his paws. "You've hit a brick wall, so once again, you're blaming me. Everything you read in the Monokuma file is the truth."

"But...how are we supposed to know that?" Chiaki wouldn't back down.

Hajime looked across at Chiaki, his glance skeptical. Why was she questioning Monokuma's behavior so much? Was she up to something? It wasn't like her...

"Fine, fine!" the bear practically squawked in response. "I'll show you the security footage. Will that shut you up?"

"I...think so." Chiaki smiled, appearing satisfied.

From the look on Chiaki's face, it seemed like she'd gotten exactly what she wanted. Monokuma was eating out of the palm of her hand, he'd been manipulated without realising it. Witnessing the security footage would prove a great use, allowing the students to pick on something they could never have known about otherwise.

"Ahem! Monokuma coughed loudly, calling for their attention. "If everyone could please focus on the screen, I will now play the security footage."

The giant monitor, that hung proudly above the exit, came to life. The footage appeared right away, though it was on pause. It was somewhat grainy, but still easy enough to watch, it was in colour too - something Hajime hadn't expected. The camera was pointing to the staircase inside the hotel lobby, however, the top quarter had been cut off. The camera obviously didn't go high enough and film into the restaurant. In the bottom left corner, there was a timestamp.

20:25.

Just eleven minutes before Mahiru's supposed death.

"That timestamp," Fuyuhiko began, pointing to the screen. "Can we be sure you haven't forged that?"

"How paranoid can you get?!" Monokuma exclaimed, looking inches away from despair himself. "You really think I'd waste my time on something like that?"

"I think we can trust it." Hajime said. He'd have to put some faith in Monokuma, or they'd never get through the class trial.

Not having the patience to wait any longer, Monokuma cued the footage. It had been sped up, as it would take far too long if it was going to be played in real time.

"There's no noise!" Ibuki complained.
"Well obviously I cut the audio, that'd give everything away." if Monokuma had real eyes, he definitely would've been rolling them.

From 8:25 - 8:34, there was nothing. Hajime found it interesting that at the given meet time of 8:30, no one showed up. His theory was right, for whatever reason, Mahiru was late. Towards the end of 8:34, bordering on 8:35, there was finally some activity. The camera didn't cover much, so she wasn't visible until she was actually on the staircase.

The students identified her in seconds, it would've been impossible not to. Camera swinging around her neck, and vibrant hair standing out, it was so clearly Mahiru. Interestingly, her camera wasn't the only thing she'd brought to the meeting. She was holding onto it for dear life, her fingers pressed so tightly, they were practically turning blue. Behind her back, Mahiru was holding a sharp kitchen knife, big enough to do serious damage.

Hajime watched so intensely, he stopped himself from blinking - just to be sure he didn't miss a thing.

As Mahiru reached the top of the staircase, everything went black. At first, Hajime presumed the footage had cut because Mahiru was out of shot. However, a quick glance at the timestamp told him otherwise.

20:35.

It was the blackout. Hajime watched on in fear, he knew what was going to be there when the lights went back up.

The lights sprung back into action around 20:36, but it was too late. Mahiru was sprawled out on the staircase, exactly how they'd found her body to begin with. There were no lies, or manipulation, the Monokuma File had been telling the truth. Mahiru died at 8:36pm in the lobby. It was unfortunate that the audio had been removed, it likely would have provided a lot of missing answers.

"Happy now?" Monokuma looked like he was desperate to scream 'I told you so'.

"May we continue watching?" Sonia asked.

"I don't think so, Missy." Monokuma shook his head, pausing the footage by simply clapping his paws. It was a horrible moment to have paused on, Mahiru's lifeless body facing the camera.

"That was very interesting indeed." Nagito appeared amused, satisfied with what he'd seen. "It confirms a lot about Mahiru's death. Though we never saw what actually happened to her, it's rather obvious if you read between the lines. One minute, she's walking up the stairs with a knife in hand, the next, she's dead at the bottom of the staircase."

"We know that Souda is responsible for Mahiru's death, but who is responsible for Souda's?" Peko asked, repeating the main question at hand. "And how did he come to die?"

"How about this..." Fuyuhiko laid out his own idea. "Someone walked in on Souda, and decided to punish him for his crimes!"

"Wrong." Nagito dismissed his suggestion instantly.

"You don't know that!" an irritated Fuyuhiko fought back.

"You're overlooking something obvious." Nagito stared off into the distance. "Think a little harder, and the answer's obvious."
"You're suggesting you know who the blackened is?" Gundam put the question to him.

"Yes, I do." Nagito confirmed.

"That's kinda the cue for you to tell us who it is." Ibuki was losing patience.

"You actually think he's going to tell us?!" Fuyuhiko vented. "Were you even here for the past class trials?"

"I'm afraid I'm not going to tell you. It would be like cheating, skipping straight to the end of a murder mystery novel." Nagito shook his head. "However, I will be here to guide you."

"Stop feeding us your bullshit." Fuyuhiko hissed, he didn't have time for games.

"Just get onto it." Hajime demanded, speaking to Nagito through gritted teeth. He despised the game playing just as much, but it was better than having nothing to work with.

"Think about it like this," Nagito began, talking with his hands. "When Souda killed Mahiru, how many choices was he faced with?"

"Choices? What's that even mean?" Fuyuhiko mumbled, totally confused.

"Two." Peko interrupted. "There were two choices. Choice one, successfully murdering Mahiru, escaping the island, leaving us for dead. Choice two, failing to get away with his crime, and facing execution as a consequence."

"You're wrong. I said choices." Nagito sighed in disappointment. "The answer is four. Souda faced four choices. Choice one: he lies, gets away with his crime, and all of us become bear meat. Choice two: Souda lies, doesn't get away with the murder, and faces a brutal execution himself."

"That's what Peko just said!" Fuyuhiko protested.

"She only answered half the question." Nagito replied. "I won't give credit where credit isn't due."

"How can there be any more choices?" Fuyuhiko huffed, impatiently resting his weight against his podium. "That's all there is to the class trials. You win or you lose, end of story."

"Choice three: seeing as it's an accident, Souda confesses his crime, so we'll convict him right away at the class trial. Once again, he faces Monokuma's brutal execution." Nagito continued. "What we're forgetting, is that Souda didn't kill Mahiru on purpose. He's the blackened, but only by accident. That's a rather difficult situation he's found himself in."

"Whatever the outcome...someone has to lose," Chiaki wrapped up what Nagito was trying to say, it was a depressing reality. "He has to lose his life, or we lose ours. Either way, someone will die."

"That brings us on to Souda's fourth choice..." Nagito returned to his speech, hesitating towards the end, waiting to see if anyone had figured out the answer ahead of time.

"He kills himself." Hajime said bluntly, filling in the blank Nagito was waiting for.

"Hajime, do not say such terrible things!" Sonia gasped, horrified that he'd even suggest it.

"N-no, that's choice number four." Hajime said, attempting to straighten things out. "It's the only situation where we don't die, and Souda doesn't have to face one of Monokuma's terrible executions. To make the problem go away, he took himself out of the equation."
“But why? What he did was an accident!” Ibuki protested, standing by Souda's rights.

“Accident or not, he still became the blackened.” Hajime said. “If he didn’t mean to kill Mahiru, I doubt he wanted our blood on his hands either. That left him in a rather difficult position, because the idea of Monokuma’s execution probably terrified him. I mean, we can’t blame Souda. What have we seen of the executions so far? Students being burned alive, removing their own hearts, being shot by a bazooka.”

"At last, someone else understands, and Hajime of all people." Nagito looked on with an approving smile. "You always bring hope to the courtroom, it's a real honour that trash like me can help aid you with these conclusions."

"Can someone get him a muzzle?" Ibuki shot Nagito a filthy look.

"Perhaps it slipped your minds, but don't forget the rules. There can only be one blackened at a time. If Souda killed Mahiru, he had to have killed himself too." Nagito returned to a previous point. "Granted, that might not be strictly true with the current motive, but even so, it was a big clue."

It was hard for Hajime not to admire Nagito, even with all his faults. The boy was incredibly smart, though he always insisted that he was worthless. Nagito was always ten steps ahead of the game. It was both terrifying, and incredible.

"So, tell me, Hajime," there was a mischievous gleam in Nagito's eye. "How did the rest of this case play out? Surely you have all the information you need by now."

"Souda realises what he's done, and decide his only choice is to take his own life." Hajime took his time to speak, not wanting to slip up, or contradict himself. "With the idea of committing suicide, Souda throws himself down the stairs - hoping he can snap his neck too."

"But he was stabbe-" Fuyuhiko tried to butt in.

"Have some patience." Nagito snapped, like a loyal dog protective of his owner. "I'm sure Hajime was getting to that."

"I was." Hajime nodded, though he didn't feel the need to get so aggressive. "Obviously, the fall isn’t what killed Souda. My guess, the fall wasn't strong enough to do serious damage. Mahiru was pushed at full force, whereas, Souda threw himself. He fell hard enough that he broke his leg, but he didn't snap his neck."

"That sounds so painful, poor Souda." Monomi shuddered, her eyes filled with tears.

"We must discover how he ended up with the knife through his heart, for that is the method that truly killed him." Gundam was deep in thought.

"I wanna say that he took a knife from the restaurant upstairs," Fuyuhiko mused. "But come on, that's gotta be impossible. The guy broke his leg, there's no way he made it back upstairs."

"Souda didn't go back upstairs after he'd fallen." Hajime said, almost certain of the fact. "But...maybe, he didn't need to go back upstairs if he wanted a knife."

"What are you thinking, Hajime?" Chiaki looked at him for answers.

"Mahiru took a kitchen knife to the meeting, so it was probably still with her when she fell down the stairs." Hajime rested his hand on his chin. "If the knife fell with Mahiru, and landed near her body, it would've been in Souda's reaching distance. Realising it's his last chance, Souda takes the knife
and stabs himself in the heart.”

“An accidental murder and a suicide, I never would have expected that…” Fuyuhiko scratched his head, uncomfortable thinking of what to say.

“Before we vote, are we certain that Souda’s the killer?” Gundam was searching for confirmation.
“Wecan’t afford to make mistakes, it’s a matter of life or death.”

“Perhaps we should run through the entire case again?” Sonia suggested, in the attempt to be helpful.
“Hajime, can we leave it to you?” it seemed apparent that Nagito and Hajime were the two in the courtroom with the strongest understanding of the case, but it was understandable why Sonia didn’t trust leaving it up to Nagito.

“I wanna go from beginning to end to make sure we’ve covered everything.” there was a look of passion in Hajime’s eyes, he was ready to crack the case. “Here’s everything that happened in this case.”

It was time for the closing argument to begin. With all eyes in the room focusing on him, Hajime told the tale of Souda and Mahiru’s murder.

“The key to this case, is everything that happened during the days leading up to the murder. It’s these events that play a crucial role. Through Twilight Syndrome Murder Case, a play written by Monokuma, we learnt of a crime that took place at Hope’s Peak Academy before our arrival on this island. Fuyuhiko’s little sister was murdered, and Mahiru played a role by concealing evidence. As expected, the atmosphere on the island became very awkward.”

“In the attempt to bring everyone together again, we played the King’s Game. However, it backfired pretty badly. An argument broke out, and Sonia went as far as to call Souda a coward right to his face. This messed with him rather badly.”

“Meanwhile, Fuyuhiko and Peko were in turmoil over Monokuma’s true motive - the promise of two students graduating if the blackened is successful with their crime. They’ve grown up together, and Peko is Fuyuhiko’s personal hitman. Tied with Fuyuhiko’s thirst for revenge, it makes the perfect plan for their escape. However, at the last minute, Fuyuhiko pulls out and decides it’s not worth risking their lives. This entire conversation is overheard by Sonia, who tells her findings to Souda in a moment of confusion.”

“Souda realises he can use this to his advantage, a chance to win back Sonia’s trust and belief in him. It’s his one shot to prove he’s not a coward, and he has a plan. In preparation, he writes two letters. A warning to Mahiru, instructing her to be careful, and a threatening invite to Fuyuhiko, asking him to meet at eight thirty in the restaurant. However, in a moment of panic, Souda makes a mix up, and the letters end up in the wrong envelopes.”

“This fatal mistake leads Fuyuhiko into thinking someone is after him, and causes Mahiru to believe someone wants to meet with her. Since the letters aren’t signed, Mahiru probably presumes it’s Fuyuhiko, wanting to talk about the incident with his sister. Out of guilt, Mahiru decides she has to go to the meeting, but she won’t do so unprepared. Mahiru takes a knife from the restaurant, although she’s nearly caught in the act by everyone who’s baking. She doesn’t intend on using it, but she feels a lot safer knowing she has protection.”

“Soon enough, it’s time for Monokuma’s Night of Horrors, but also the agreed time for Mahiru and Souda’s meeting. Skeptical about what’s in store for her, Mahiru shows up later than the given time, but only by a few minutes or so.”
“Meanwhile, Monokuma is launching his haunted house. For dramatic effect, he causes a power cut, leaving everyone in darkness. However, his power cut goes a little further than the haunted house. In fact, he blacks out the entire island, robbing everyone of their power.”

“This is when things turn sour in the restaurant. Souda is left paranoid, waiting for Fuyuhiko, thinking he’s gotten himself caught in a trap. And Mahiru is approaching via the staircase, believing that she too, has just walked into a trap. In a moment of panic, Souda runs for the nearest exit, which happens to be the staircase Mahiru is waiting on - for she’s too scared to move, worried people might be waiting for her at either end.”

“Thanks to the moonlight, Souda comes across Mahiru’s shadow, though he isn’t given enough time to process it. Instead, he sees a silhouette holding a knife near his face. In a panic, Souda shoves the figure, desperate to get them away. Mahiru goes flying down the stairs, snapping her neck as a result.”

“As the lights come back on, Souda quickly realises what he’s done, and how he’s now a blackened. He either fights for his life, and leaves everyone else for dead, or confesses to his crimes, but faces execution himself. Either way, someone has to die.”

“It seems that Souda didn’t want any further blood on his hand, and chose to take his own life, before it was stolen from him by Monokuma. Attempting to die the same way as Mahiru, he throws himself down the stairs too, though it isn’t as successful. He breaks his own leg, but he’s still alive. That’s when he finds Mahiru’s knife, it fell with her as she went down the stairs. It was probably within reaching distance of Souda.”

“There are no doubts about it! Souda accidentally killed Mahiru, and then killed himself. He’s the only blackened in this case.” Hajime rounded up his final argument, everything fitted into place. He had no further doubts.

“That would explain why Souda died thirteen minutes after Mahiru.” Gundam said, on board with Hajime. “He must have spent the time making a decision of what to do.”

“What a horrible decision to make.” a sadness clung to Sonia’s voice.

“Well then, well then, it’s time to take a vote!” Monokuma perked up again, interested now that he could get involved. “Can I persuade you to change your minds at the last minute? You are a bunch of pushovers.”

“No way.” Fuyuhiko shook his fist, standing up on behalf of his classmates. “Just do the damn vote so we can get this over with.”

“I’m the one who calls the shots around here, thank you very much!” Monokuma scorned. “Now then, pull the lever in front of you and cast your vote. Who will be chosen as the blackened? Will you make the right choice, or the dreadfully wrong one? Let’s go!”

With as much confidence as he could muster, Hajime pulled the lever, voting one of his best friends as the blackened. It wasn’t easy, but he was certain of his choice. Those around him did much the same.

Guilty.

“Ding ding, looks like you bunch of smart asses got it right again.” Monokuma was smirking, having known the answer all along. "The blackened responsible for killing Mahiru Koizumi and Kazuichi Souda….is none other than Kazuichi Souda!”
“It is so sad.” Sonia shook her head, almost in disbelief.

“Ya know, you guys did pretty well with this one, especially since I shortchanged you..” Monokuma said, on the verge of making some sort of confession.

“Shortchanged us how?” Monokuma’s words hadn’t gone unnoticed by Hajime, he picked him up straight away.

“Wellll, that bumbling idiot mechanic did kinda leave you a note…” Monokuma teased, sparing all of the important details.

“Do not torment us with such pathetic answers!” Gundam glared at the bear. “Explain yourself.”

“After Souda killed Mahiru, he wrote you guys a note, explaining everything that he’d done.” Monokuma said, finally telling them the truth. “Obviously, I wasn’t just gonna leave that for you to find. Gah, the trial would’ve been over in five minutes. How anti-climatic! That would bring no excitement at all.”

"How could you do that?!” Hajime was deeply insulted, it was as if something had been stolen from him. "If Souda left us a note, it's our right to read it. You stole evidence from the crime scene."

"Evidence so powerful, you wouldn't have needed to investigate the crime scene in the first place." Monokuma wasn't backing down, standing by the decision he'd made. "You'd only find something that easy in tutorial mode. You're over half way through this game, I won't allow it."

"Don't call this a game, it's our lives you're messing with." Fuyuhiko hissed, anger rising from inside him.

"Did...did you say Souda left a note in the restaurant?" Chiaki asked, slowly catching up. "Hajime, the explains the paper we found."

"Of course!" Hajime gasped. "We found paper in the restaurant, I guess that’s what Souda used to write his note."

“Since you were successful enough to identify the blackened, I feel like it’s only fair I let you see the note.” Monokuma said, acting as if he was some sort of saint. “I was going to read it to you, but my voice feels a little stiff today - rather like Mahiru’s corpse. So, I got you some photocopies made instead. Monomi, hand them out.”

“I can’t!” Monomi whimpered. “I’m stuck up here.” she'd given up trying to wriggle free.

“Oh, so you are. Looks like I have to do everything around here myself.” Monokuma huffed, climbing down from his throne. From underneath the cushion he’d been resting against, he presented a stack of paper - flipping through the pages before he gave them to the students. “Whoops, what’s that one doing in there? I can’t let you get your eyes on that, too many spoilers!”

Spoilers...what did Monokuma mean?

The bear paraded around the circle, handing each of the students a copy. They received one sheet of paper each, Souda’s note taking up both sides. Hajime recognised the writing instantly.

I don’t have much time...something’s happened, and it’s all my fault. I’ve just killed Mahiru. It was an accident, I swear. I was meant to be meeting with Fuyuhiko in the restaurant, but then there was a blackout. I thought it was a trap, so I tried to escape. But I ran into someone at the top of the stairs, and they were holding a knife. I panicked, so I think I pushed them, and now Mahiru is dead.
I checked her pulse, and I tried resuscitating her, but nothing’s working. Her body is all over the place, I think she snapped her neck. I tried to save her, I wanted to save her, but it's impossible. There's nothing I can do.

I realise that I’m now that blackened. I don't want anyone else to die. I was trying to save everyone, I wanted to straighten things out with Fuyuhiko, I warned Mahiru. I know there’s not much choice for me now. Someone else has to die, either me, or all of you. I know I’m not the strongest person, and like Miss Sonia said, I’m a pretty big coward. But I can’t let nine people die just so I can escape.

There's only one choice left for me, and that's to take my own life. I know it might seem like I’m running away from my problems, but it’s the only option I have. I don’t want to go through another class trial, I don’t want to face one of Monokuma’s execution. I don’t want any of this, but if I’m going to die, then it’s going to be on my terms.

I know that I’m useless, all I do is mess up and cause problems. I'm a burden, and I'm always in the way. We promised to keep the death count down, and now I’ve messed it all up and taken another life. Perhaps I deserve to die.

My time is short, I need to do this before Monokuma finds me. In the class trial, you need to vote me as the blackened. This was me, all me. I want all of you to survive, to find a way off this island together. I was never much use alive, so I hope, that in death, I can be something more than a stupid mechanic.

You probably think I’m a coward for doing this, and I’ll admit it, I am. I’m terrified of what’s about to happen, because...I don’t...I don’t want to die. There’s so much I haven’t done, parts of the world I haven’t seen, girls I haven’t met, and I never got the chance to fulfil my dream. I’m terrified, but for once in my life, I’m going to do something right.

For all the wrong that I’ve done, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for things to end like this.

...I’m so sorry.

Your friend,

Kazuichi Souda.

The letter ended there, the last trace of Souda being his signature. It was difficult to read in parts, the writing got messier the further down the page they read. His illegibility the result of a shaking hand. It wouldn't have been much of a pleasant experience.

Hajime read through the note again, needing a second viewing to take everything in. His vision began to blur as his eyes glanced over the words, each paragraph was like a punch to his stomach. Souda died believing himself alone and useless. He died viewing himself as a coward. No one deserved to die in such a way...no one.

“I guess he really did kill himself…” Fuyuhiko lowered his head, attempting to show some respect.

"No..." Hajime corrected him, raising his voice. "Souda didn't kill himself, he sacrificed himself. He ended his own life so that we could carry on living." Souda held no loyalties to the group, there was no reason for him to do such a thing. He had every chance, and right, to try and deceive his classmates, to get away with the crime.

"Hajime is right," Sonia was in agreement. "What Souda did for us is truly remarkable, something that many would not. I take back what I said, Kazuichi Souda is not a coward. A coward would
never make such a sacrifice."

As Sonia spoke, there was a hint of a smile on her face. She appeared to speak of Souda fondly, how an older sister might talk of their little brother. If Souda had been in the room, he'd be smiling from ear to ear. Unfortunately, it had taken something as dramatic as his own death for her to finally appreciate him.

“You guys might all think you’re a team of Sherlocks, but you’re really not that great.” Monokuma belittled them. “There was something pretty important to this case, and you didn’t even mention it.”

“Something important that we didn’t mention?” Hajime mumbled to himself. “But that’s impossible. If it was so crucial, we wouldn’t have solved the murder.”

“Since the trial’s over, can you tell us what it is?” Fuyuhiko asked, the curiosity obviously gnawing away at him.

“I don’t see why not.” Monokuma shrugged. “You never looked into my Night of Horrors. Sure, you mentioned the gas, and alibis. But you never actually questioned the event itself.”

“Why would we?” Ibuki replied. “It’s just another one of your weird island excursions.”

“You think I went to all of that effort for the fun of it?” Monokuma looked down on her as if she were lacking a brain. “I had no interest in transforming the Haunted House. Well, not until I was given reason to.”

It was in this moment, Hajime caught onto Nagito’s behaviour. The Luckster was resting all of his weight on his podium, staring at the palm of his hand, a horrified look of disappointment on his face.

“Nagito...Nagito, what did you do?” Hajime knew he didn’t have to second-guess his predictions, it was obvious that Nagito was responsible.

Nagito could barely face Hajime, he seemed embarrassed. He wouldn't take his eyes off his hand, speaking so quietly that it was practically a whisper. “It was all to save you…”

“To save me?” Hajime repeated, growing more and more confused by the second, concerned too.

“But I couldn’t do it. I’m so useless that I couldn’t save the Ultimate Hope.” Nagito angrily shook his head.

Nagito seemed genuinely upset, Hajime attempted to reassure him. "What are you talking about? We worthed and solved the class trial together. It's okay."

“You shouldn’t be here.” Nagito sighed, his shoulders drooping. “You and I should be getting out of here, off the island, towards our freedom.”

“H-hang on…” Hajime froze, his entire body tensing up. “Off the island? You don’t mean…”

“I was going to kill someone? Yes.” Nagito replied bluntly, making no attempts to soften the confession. “Why do you think Monokuma created the Night of Horrors?”

“You had something to do with that! I should’ve known.” Fuyuhiko spat, lurching forward at Nagito.

“What did you do?” Hajime spoke through gritted teeth, though he wasn’t entirely sure he wanted to learn the answer.
“Before we played the King’s Game, you made a speech about sticking together, and it truly inspired me. You, the Ultimate Hope, have enough power to overcome any means of despair.” Nagito spoke about Hajime with true adoration. “Someone with a talent like yours, they can’t hide away on a deserted island forever, especially since your life is in constant danger. I would have been willing to sacrifice my own life to get you out of here, but I knew you’d never allow it.”

“Of course I wouldn’t allow it! I’m not going to murder you just so I can escape.” Hajime spluttered. “The entire point of that speech was to encourage everyone to stick together, to prevent anyone else from trying to kill. Why the hell would I want to escape?”

“My point exactly.” Nagito sighed, though he didn’t stay down for long. “That’s when I thought about Monokuma’s new motive, the chance of an additional graduate. I could kill someone and take you with me. Admittedly, it wasn’t ideal. I’d rather two ultimates escape, than you and myself. Honestly, I don’t deserve to leave. But in situations like this, sacrifices have to be made. At least this way, if I wasn’t successful, only I had to lose my life.”

Hajime couldn’t believe what he was hearing, then again, he could - it was Nagito he was listening to. When he learnt of the motive, Peko and Fuyuhiko came straight into mind. He’d never considered the fact that Nagito would be interested too. Why had he been so quick to overlook Nagito? He should have paid more attention.

“My plan began when I suggested you, Chiaki, and I take a trip to Monomi’s Haunted House.” Nagito revealed. “I said I’d never been there before, but that was a lie. The day of the rollercoaster ride, I was the first one to arrive at the fourth island, allowing me the chance to explore everything. I knew that place was a dump, hence why it proved important to my plan.”

"Plan...what plan?" Ibuki looked on in horror.

“I vocalised my disgust loudly enough, to ensure Monokuma heard.” Nagito continued. “Then, I sent you and Chiaki to the beach so I could have some time to myself. I tracked down Monokuma and told him of my plan, I intended to kill someone, and that I required his assistance.”

“That was when you went to get food for the picnic.” Hajime gasped, coming to the realisation. “I thought you’d been gone a long amount of time, but I never thought any more of it.” Hajime’s suspicions were correct, Nagito had been gone for a very long time, and it wasn't just because he'd been deliberating over snacks.

“I was more than willing to help Nagito.” Monokuma grinned, contributing to the story also. “Anything that will result in murder is worthy of my time.”

“The plan was simple. We fixed the smoke machines around the Haunted House, and they were due to trigger at 9pm, sharp. Just before the time limit, I’d sneak out so the smoke wouldn’t affect me. Once it was safe, and you were all unconscious, I’d go inside, kill someone, and then pretend to sleep myself.” Nagito elaborated, he spoke confidently of his plan, as if he’d gone over it a dozen times before. “It was simple, but effective. With ten people unconscious at a party, no one would have alibis. And with Monokuma’s assistance, it would’ve been easy for me to get away with it. I was going to use Twilight Syndrome to my advantage. Killing Mahiru, and framing Fuyuhiko. It would’ve been easy. Though, when only five of us showed up, I knew I had to make a few adaptions. Hajime's freedom was so close…”

“But that never happened.” Chiaki pointed out. “Something in your plan went wrong.”

“Unfortunately, yes.” Nagito sighed, disappointment returning to his face once again. “I was too late.
Souda had already killed Mahiru, and Monokuma doesn’t allow more than one murder at a time, so he triggered the smoke early.”

"Monokuma turning against you, now there's a surprise." Fuyuhiko remarked.

"Wait...I remember now." Hajime hesitated, a memory in his mind coming to surface. "When the smoke triggered, you made a comment. You said...'No, this is wrong. Not yet...' and then you collapsed."

"You knew that Monokuma had betrayed you." Peko said, analysing Nagito's behaviour.

"Exactly, I did. Though really, it's my fault. If only I'd have started earlier, I would've beaten Souda to it." Nagito was willing to accept his own failure, not shifting the blame onto anyone else. "I'm sorry, Hajime. I let you down. I failed the Ultimate Hope."

"You had no right to attempt something like that!" Hajime cried, genuinely horrified at all that Nagito had done. "This is all your fault! If you hadn't organised the stupid horror house, none of this would've happened. We were doing fine, just fine, and now, thanks to you, Mahiru and Souda are dead."

"I can see that you're upset, but even their deaths haven't gone to waste." Nagito remained positive. "Another class trial, another chance for our hope to develop and grow. All of this leading to one, greater hope."

"If it is not a problem, may I change the subject for a moment?" Sonia sought permission, turning to her classmates.

"Go for it, anything's better than listening to him drone on." Fuyuhiko answered on behalf of everyone, referencing Nagito in his comment.

"Monokuma, I have a question. Since we have identified the blackened, are we free to leave now?" Sonia seemed desperate to escape the courtroom, the horrible atmosphere proving too much for her.

"Nope, not yet. It's like reading a manga and skipping the final chapter." Monokuma looked at her disapprovingly. "We've still got my favourite part to cover, punishment time!"

"But how are you meant to punish anyone?" Chiaki asked the question that everyone was thinking. "The blackened is already dead, it would be impossible to punish him."

"I know that, jeez!" Monokuma scoffed. "My brain is bigger than all of yours combined. But just because Souda's already dead, it doesn't mean we're skipping my favourite part of the trial. It's the only thing that gets me through listening to all you lot drone on."

"Let me guess, you're going to execute Monomi again." Fuyuhiko predicted, the answer obvious in his mind.

"Wrong! I wouldn't be so cocky, ya know, it's pretty embarrassing." Monokuma smirked. "There's one person in this room I'm going to execute, and that's....a surprise! Puhuhuhu."

Hajime did not like the sound of where things were going. When it came to Monokuma, surprises were never a good thing.

"I'm getting restless, I can't wait any longer." Monokuma was practically rolling around in excitement. "If everyone could please cast their attention to the monitor, there's something I want to show you. It's a very big secret that I've been keeping for a long time, I can't wait to get it off of my
Tonight’s News

The monitor kicks into action, fading straight into a news jingle. Monokuma stands facing the camera, dressed smartly in a suit and tie.

“Hey there! The name’s Monokuma, and you’re watching the Jabberwock News.” the bear shows off his Hollywood Smile, though it's so obviously fake. “Bringing you the latest news, from the DEADLIEST island in the world.” Monokuma drops the smile in an instant, roaring at the screen - causing everyone in the courtroom to jump. “Here’s Monomi with today’s top stories.”

The camera pans to a different side of the studio, where Monomi is standing in front of a greenscreen. A background hasn’t been added in, thanks to a lack of post production. By the looks of things, it's a low budget news program. The rabbit appears nervous in front of the camera, unsure as to what she’s meant to be doing.

“Am I on air yet?” Monomi squeaks, looking around for some assistance. “Oh...it’s Monomi here with the latest stories.” hands on hips, she stands proudly, pleased that she can further educate her students.

The rabbit looks straight ahead, taking all her lines from the autocue machine. “Kazuichi Souda has won a Monokuma award. So exciting! He wins the award for being...” Monomi begins her announcement, fist pumping the air at such joyful news. “‘The worst blackened in all of history’...ahhh!” the smile disappears from the rabbit’s face, she wails in terror, horrified at the news she’s sharing.

“Monokuma, what is this horrible news story?” Monomi strays away from the camera, breaking the illusion of the new studio. She turns to her older brother, demanding answers.

As Monomi wails, the screen flickers, her speech muffled, image going out of focus. The limelight quickly returns to Monokuma, things looking beautifully crisp his end.

Through poorly disguised laughter, the bear tries to explain what’s going on. “We’re having some ‘technical difficulties’, so Monomi's gone. But I was gonna cut her anyway, cuz there’s some...BREAKING NEWS!” he raises his fists at the camera, eager to share the terrible news.

“This just in, there’s a liar on the island.” Monokuma reports. “You may know him as the Ultimate Hope, but Ultimate Reserve Course Student seems better fitting...”

Monokuma’s disappears off the screen, replaced by a full sized photo of Hajime. It isn't just any ordinary photo, but a picture of Hajime in a very familiar uniform. Cloaked in a black suit, there's an empty glaze in his eyes. He gazes into the distance, the picture capturing a moment he clearly doesn't want to remember. It seems like a forced school portrait more than anything.

As the camera focuses in on Hajime's photograph, Monokuma narrates over the top.
"The reserve course department are known for being ultimately useless. Lacking in talent, these students forced their way into school with their large sums of cash. They're fame hungry fangirls, desperate for a slice of the Hope's Peak Academy pie. Essentially, they're vermin. Used by the academy to raise additional funds, they're really not worth anything at all. Uck! I'm feeling ill just talking about them. I'm gonna pass back to Monokuma live in the courtroom!"

With that, the monitor cuts. Leaving nothing but silence, and close to half a dozen confused students staring at the person they thought to be their friend.

“Well,” Monokuma brushed his paws together. “I think that’s everything you need to know. But in case you didn’t quite get it, I’ll sum it up one last time. Hajime is a gigantic fraud. He doesn’t have a talent, and he’s certainly not the Ultimate Hope. He paid his way into Hope’s Peak Academy, end of story.”

“H-Hajime...is this true?” Sonia turned to Hajime, a look of horror upon her face. She already knew the answer to her question.

“It’s...” there was a part of Hajime that wanted to salvage it, to try and pursue the lie, to convince the others that Monokuma was playing games. However, that part of Hajime was quickly flattened by his conscience. He couldn’t bring himself to flat out lie to their faces, besides, he knew it was too late, they’d already made up their minds. “I wish I could explain.”

“You wish you could explain?” Fuyuhiko pulled apart his words. “What the hell is that supposed to mean? You owe us the truth.”

“I...I can’t tell you.” Hajime’s lips were sealed. it was risky enough that they’d learnt of his position on the reserve course. Perhaps his friends would understand better if he told them even more of the truth, but he refused to risk anything that’d put the rewrite in jeopardy.

“That’s bullshit!” Fuyuhiko kicked the stand of his podium, the class trial having sent his emotions all over the place.

“Right, that’s it, I want you out of my courtroom before Fuyuhiko destroys everything.” Monokuma shook his fist at the students, turfing them out.

“But we are not finished.” Sonia insisted, her mind filled with questions she needed to ask Hajime.

“The purpose of the class trials is to figure out the blackened, which is exactly what you’ve done.” Monokuma shrugged his shoulders. “If you’ve got any other problems, deal with them outside. I don’t care about your stupid teen drama.”

“But-” it was Ibuki who tried to protest this time, but Monokuma wasn’t having any of it.

“I can’t figure out if you’re not understanding me, or you like the idea of me fetching my Monobeasts.” Monokuma pretended to be stuck in thought. “Cuz, if you don’t leave in the next minute, I’m summoning all of them down here.”

Hajime knew Monokuma was making empty threats again, not only was it physically impossible for the Monobeasts to fit inside the elevator, but four out of the five of them had vanished thanks to Monomi.
Whether the others believed in Monokuma or not, they could tell he was losing his patience. Having almost lost their lives in the class trial, they didn’t want to take any further risks when it came to their safety. It was Chiaki who took the lead.

“Why don’t we get out of here?” abandoning her podium, Chiaki headed in the direction of the elevator, the others followed behind her, like a game of follow the leader.

Hajime tried to keep up with friends, but he somehow found himself at the back of the line. Nagito pushed straight past him, practically ramming into Hajime with his shoulder. Intentional or not, it hurt.

As soon as everyone was inside, the elevator doors slammed shut. Monomi was left hanging, while Monokuma smirked at them through the iron bars. No...he wasn’t smirking at them, he was smirking at Hajime. The bear was extremely satisfied, the look on his face saying ‘I told you I could do this’.

Hajime attempted to speak while still in the elevator, but he hadn’t gotten any further than opening his mouth.

“Don’t do this, not now.” Peko spoke sternly, understanding a tightly packed elevator wasn’t the best place for conflict.

The awkward atmosphere in the elevator was practically eating Hajime alive, but he was sensible, and listened to Peko. He’d have the chance to defend himself when he rose to the surface, there wasn’t much of their journey left to go.

Back to safety, and out of Monokuma’s clutches, the students gathered in a circle at Monokuma Rock. The escalator had disappeared, Hajime hoped he’d never have to see it again, though at this point, he was struggling to muster any optimism. Everything was about to fall apart.

Chapter End Notes

So, it looks like they're leaving the trial without losing another student. Though Hajime has probably just lost the trust and respect of all of his friends.

That was the last murder/investigation/trial, but it doesn't mean things are going to be sunshine and rainbows from now on. A lot is about to go down!! ;)

Thank you all for your patience and support ^_^
Chapter Five - Part One

Chapter Summary

After the fourth class trial, Hajime tries to deal with Monokuma's latest 'reveal'.

Chapter Notes

Hellooo!! It's been so long, I'm really sorry. Uni has taken up so much time. But I'm home for Christmas for a whole month, so it's my goal to update this story as much as I can. I've really missed writing, as a lot is about to go down!!!

For anyone that's decided to stick around, thank you so much!! <3 And hello to anyone new ^_^ Either way, thank you for reading my work - I appreciate it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I suggest you speak now.” Peko turned to Hajime, waiting for him to offer up his side of the story.

During their time in the courtroom, the night had grown even darker, the air colder too. Standing on the spot wasn't helping, the tips of Hajime's fingers were beginning to turn numb. As much as he wanted to return to the warmth of his cottage to sleep, he couldn't - not yet. He refused to explain the entire truth to his friends, but he wasn't going to leave things as painfully unresolved as they were in that moment.

"What Monokuma told you...it's true. Unlike you guys, I don't have an ultimate talent." telling the truth should have felt like a weight off of his shoulders, but with piercing glares from all directions, Hajime was only made to feel worse. “I belonged to Hope’s Peak's reserve course department.”

“Tsk, so we worked our asses off to get a place at that school, and you just strutted in ‘cause you could.” Fuyuhiko’s temper was rising, the calm personality he’d adopted during the trial was quickly disappearing.

“It’s not that simple,” Hajime protested. “I had to sit an entrance exam, and pay a large sum of money to get in.”

“Oh, so you bought your way in!” Ibuki was scowling furiously at him. “Ibuki thought you had more respect than that.”

“Let us not speak of such pathetic matters as money, that is not the problem here.” Gundam intervened, wanting to change the topic. “Though I am curious to know how you ended up on this school trip, there’s something I care to know more. Why did you take the dark path of forgery and lying?”

The truth was something Hajime couldn’t share. He lied because he needed their respect for the rewrite, he thought it would be a way to keep Nagito under control. It wasn't about image, he wasn't that desperate to be seen as talented. Life on Jabberwock Island the first time around had shown him
that he didn't need to be talented to be someone special. Of course, he couldn't confess this to his friends.

“All of you guys have amazing talents, I couldn’t turn up admitting that I was a member of the reserve course. You would never have accepted me.” Hajime hoped his lies were somewhat convincing.

“Nonsense.” Sonia shook her head in disbelief. “Hajime, I am not upset that you do not have a talent. Talented or not, you are my friend, that is all that I care about. I am upset because you lied to us.”

“Why weren’t you honest?” Ibuki looked at him like a damaged puppy. “We’re your friends, why didn’t you tell us?”

The guilt was overpowering, Hajime felt like his heart was being torn from his chest. The expressions on their faces, it was something he’d never truly seen before...betrayal.

“But we weren’t friends when we arrived on this island, you wouldn't have given me a chance.” Hajime was aware he was fighting a losing battle.

“Enough of your damn sob story, I want some answers.” Fuyuhiko lashed out in anger. Though he hadn't been particularly close to Hajime, this time around anyway, he seemed to be taking things rather badly. "What are you doing with the Future Foundation? What do you know?"

"N-no, I’m not working with the Future Foundation.” Hajime raised his arms in defence. Technically, he was. However, Fuyuhiko was referring to the traitor Monokuma had mentioned early on - meaning Chiaki.

“It’s insulting that you persist with your lies.” Gundam faced away from Hajime, refusing to even look at him.

“I do not want to believe any of this.” Sonia’s voice was trembling, her hands shaking. “Please, Hajime, do not lie to us any further. We need to know the truth.”

Hajime shook his head, as painful as it was, he couldn’t say anything. “I’m sorry...but I really don’t have the answers you’re looking for. I'm not working with the Future Foundation.”

“I don’t know why you’re wasting your time talking to him.” Nagito finally spoke up, he hadn’t said anything since the ‘execution’. His voice was cold, distant too. “He’s nothing more than a traitor, a student from the reserve course. As well as lacking in talent, he has no loyalty either. He isn’t your friend, he won’t help you.”

Nagito’s choice of words stung, the use of ‘your’ and ‘you’ instead of ‘ours’ and ‘us’. He was already implying that he’d cut connections with Hajime, that he no longer saw him as a friend.

“Nagito, let me-” Hajime fought for the chance to defend himself, but it wasn't enough.

“I’m going to bed. I’m tired after the trial, and I’d rather not force myself to stay awake talking to people like you.” Nagito turned on his heels, not offering Hajime so much as a second glance. Saying goodnight to the other ultimates, he left on his way.

Nagito’s departure had a ripple effect on the remaining students. Chiaki covered her mouth as she yawned, excusing herself to leave. “I...I think I’m going to go to bed too.”

Chiaki hadn’t made a single comment on the matter, but Hajime knew that was to protect him. Obviously, Chiaki wouldn’t feel betrayed, as she knew the entire truth. However, if she’d tried
defending Hajime to the others, it would be death by association, and she’d quickly be branded a traitor too. Even if Hajime had lost the respect of his friends, at least Chiaki would still be able to help them. It was something Hajime couldn’t risk losing.

“Wait for me, Chiaki!” Ibuki exclaimed, running after the gamer. “I wanna come too, don’t leave me here.”

The girls took off, leaving the circle to grow smaller.

Fuyuhiko was the next to go, doing so without warning - he had nothing more to say to Hajime. As a result, Peko followed straight behind him. Though unlike the rest, she gave some parting words.

“It’s getting late, I suggest you all go to bed yourselves. It’s not a good idea to stay out here.”

Whether the advice was aimed at Hajime himself, or Sonia and Gundam, no one was sure.

“Hajime, let me ask you one more time,” not wanting to give up on her friend, Sonia was persistent with her question. “What are you hiding from us?”

Instead of palming her off with further lies, Hajime simply ignored the question. He turned his head to the side, suggesting he wouldn’t be willing to answer. With Sonia’s disappointed sigh filling the air, Hajime knew that he’d pushed her away.

“Gundam, could you please accompany me back to my cottage?” after everything that had happened, it seemed that Sonia didn’t want to be walking alone - especially so late at night.

Gundam nodded. “Under my protection, I will keep you safe from all demons of the night.”

“Thank you, .” Sonia smiled appreciatively. She offered Hajime one last glance. “I bid you goodnight.” she sounded extremely formal, more so than usual - not the way one speaks to a close friend. She was only wishing him goodnight because she felt like she had to.

“G-goodnight.” Hajime returned the response, though he knew it was meaningless, Sonia and Gundam left right away.

Hajime was exhausted himself, the trial had taken everything out of him, and he was well overdue some sleep. There was no reason for him to be hanging around on Monokuma Rock, but he couldn’t exactly leave - not yet, anyway. Gundam and Sonia had only just left, Hajime would be stuck behind them the entire way home if he followed suit. It would seem like he was stalking them, a thought which made him rather uncomfortable. He’d rather hang around for an extra five minutes or so, just to be sure that they’d gone.

“Are you still out here?”

Hajime wasn’t left alone for long, company quickly presented itself. An irritating presence as always, Monokuma approached Hajime.

“I...I just wanted some air.” Hajime lied, not wanting to give Monokuma the satisfaction of the truth.

Monokuma saw straight through it. “Having no friends isn’t so bad, you can spend some quality time with Monomi.”

Chatting with Monokuma was even more painful than closely following Sonia and Gundam. “I’m going back to my cottage.” Hajime announced, attempting to leave the bear behind.
“I come to see you, and you run away. Kids these days, they have no manners.” Monokuma shook his head, arms folded.

“You didn’t come to see me, you came to torment me.” Hajime snapped. Deep down, he knew everything that happened was his own fault. The lies had come straight from his mouth. However, he still felt the need to blame Monokuma.

“Everyone gets what they deserve in the end, liars included.” Monokuma shrugged, sparing no sympathy. “But actually, I thought you’d be interested in seeing me - since I’ve got something to give you.”

“What are you talking about?” Hajime sighed, he was too tired for games.

“Before Souda killed himself, he didn’t just write one suicide note...he wrote two. One for you specifically.” Monokuma explained. “However, he said far too much, so I couldn’t let you read it in the courtroom.”

“Far too much? You didn’t have a problem telling everyone about the reserve course.” Hajime objected.

“I want to keep some cards close to my chest. That’s a secret all good gamblers know!” Monokuma replied, as if he was well educated in the art of gambling. “Anyway, do you want it or not? I’ll feed it to my Monobeasts if you really don’t care.”

“No! I want it.” Hajime practically shouted, desperate to take the letter before Monokuma changed his mind. If Souda had more to say, Hajime had to hear it.

“Take it then!” Monokuma barked, hurling paper at Hajime.

The letter was folded up inside another sheet of a paper - a make-do envelope of sorts. Hajime’s name was scrawled on top. Whatever had been written, was for Hajime’s eyes only.

This letter is meant for Hajime, and no one else. Please, stop reading if you aren’t him.

Hajime, by now, I’m sure you’re aware of what’s happened. But that’s not what I want to talk about. I know it’s risky writing this by letter, as anyone could find it, but I’m out of time so it’s my last chance.

When Monokuma saved my life, he did something to my head. I started having these...visions, events on Jabberwock Island that felt like they’d happened before. Seeing dead classmates in places they couldn’t be, having visions of class trials that never happened. I thought it was my mind playing tricks on me, but everything fitted into place so well. It was like a consistent storyline.

Yesterday, Sonia told me of Peko and Fuyuhiko’s connection, and so much came rushing to me. Twilight Syndrome the game, Mahiru’s death, Sparkling Justice. I guess it sort of confirmed it for me, that I wasn’t just imagining things. Everything made too much sense, it had to be real. I just didn’t understand how.

If it all somehow had happened before, then Mahiru was in danger. I wanted to warn her, keep her safe, just to be sure. But I guess you already know how that one turned out.

Though everything has been slowly falling into place, today confirmed it. When I killed Mahiru...everything came back to me. And I mean EVERYTHING. I know about the Rewrite, I know that this all happened before, that the world is in a crisis, that we’re Ultimate Despair.
I know that you sacrificed your life to come back into the Neo World Program to save everyone. You’re amazing Hajime, I don’t think I’d ever be able to do something so brave. You came back to save everyone, and I’ve only made the death count worse, I’m so sorry.

I don’t have much time, so it sucks this is all I can say. But Hajime, I want you to know that I believe in you. You saved us all before, and I know that you'll do it again. I may not be here, but know that I’ll always be by your side.

Oh, and about your talent...that came back to me a few days ago. I wanted to talk to you about it, but we never got the chance. I don’t care about the stupid reserve course. What you’re doing is amazing, you’ll always be the Ultimate Hope to me.

Your friend,

Souda.

Hajime’s eyes reached the edge of the page, not a single word left to read. He stood there trembling, questioning whether he even had the strength to stand. The situation was growing more complex by the second. Souda hadn’t regained some of his memories, he’d regained all of his memories. He knew everything, from Hajime’s position on the reserve course, to the truth about the rewrite. What surprised Hajime most, was Souda’s positive attitude. He hadn’t accused Hajime of being a liar, or written furious insults accusing him as the traitor. Souda knew the truth and accepted it, he even referred to Hajime as brave.

"Gimme!" without warning, Monokuma snatched the note straight from Hajime's grasp. Scrunching it into a ball, he put it in his mouth, swallowing it hole like it was candy.

"Hey, that was mine!" Hajime cried out in protest. "I wanted to read it again."

"Everything on this island is my property, it's the rules." Monokuma cleared his throat with a burp. "You think I'm gonna leave something like that lying around?"

"I don't understand, I thought you'd enjoy everyone finding out about the rewrite." Hajime looked on in confusion.

"Of course I would! But a truth revelation via a suicide note is so old hat, that lost all effectiveness after the class trial." Monokuma huffed. "When your classmates find out about the rewrite, it's going to be far more despair-inducing than this. I like to keep you on your toes, Hajime. You never know when they're going to find out."

Monokuma had left Hajime a window to come clean with the truth. If he told his friends of the rewrite, it might help them understand, to realise that all the lying was for their benefit. It would certainly be better for them to hear it from his mouth than Monokuma's. Still, even then, Hajime wasn't sure if he could do it.

Would his classmates even believe his story after everything that’d happened? They’d probably accuse him of lying further, simply trying to save his skin. Or, even worse, learning of their true identities could send his friends into despair. It had been hard enough to learn the truth the first time around, things weren’t going to be any easier the second.

Whatever his decision, Hajime knew it was pointless standing around and thinking about it now. His friends had already retired to bed, something that was beginning to sound especially appealing.

“I need to sleep.” Hajime murmured, alerting Monokuma of his plans. “Unless you’ve got anything else to say, I’m leaving.”
“There’s no need to be so hostile, Hajime.” Monokuma teased. “You had to rip the band-aid off sometime, I simply sped up the process. Really, it’s your own fault for lying.”

Monokuma was attempting to unleash a whole new can of worms, but Hajime saw right through it. He just wanted to sleep, even if it meant leaving without defending himself. It wasn’t worth it, Monokuma was only trying to bait him.

With as much dignity as he could muster, Hajime walked away from the situation, turning his back to the bear that was taunting him. Monokuma made one last attempt, hurling abusive comments in Hajime’s direction, but Hajime simply tuned him out. By the time he reached the first island’s bridge, he couldn’t hear anything at all.

Hajime decided he’d take the long route to the hotel, wanting to be certain that Gundam and Sonia had made it back. Hajime was beyond exhausted, he had no more confrontation left in him, he just needed peace. If it meant going the entire way around the island to be sure everyone had gone, so be it.

Unfortunately for Hajime, it wasn’t his strongest plan. In fact, by taking the longer route, he actually landed himself in bigger trouble. He merely glanced at the beach as he passed it, but something quickly caught his attention.

The boy who had supposedly left for bed, wasn’t sleeping at all. He stood by the water’s edge, the sea lapping at his feet as he skimmed stones into the ocean. He seemed unaware of the world around him, strictly focused on his aim instead.

The sensible decision was to leave him alone, Hajime knew that. However, he was too intrigued to simply ignore the boy. He didn’t want to get into another fight, but hopefully, a conversation between the two of them might be able to resolve some issues. More importantly, why was the Luckster out alone at such a late hour?

“Nagito…” Hajime approached Nagito gently, not wanting to startle him. “You’re still here. I thought you were going to sleep.”

Nagito didn’t even flinch, it was as if he’d known all along that Hajime was there. He picked up another stone to skim into the sea, his back still turned. “I guess you could say, I had a change of heart.”

Nagito hadn’t been tired at all, it was just an excuse to leave. When he mentioned his ‘change of heart’, Hajime had a feeling he wasn’t referring to sleep.

Hajime moved alongside Nagito, hoping that would force him into making eye contact. “Look, I know you must think I’m the traitor-”

“I don’t think you’re the traitor.” Nagito interrupted, doing so bluntly.

“Y-you don’t?” his reaction took Hajime by surprise.

“You’re a nobody. An ordinary, average, unimpressionable high school student.” Nagito explained, his words scornful. “There’s no way the Future Foundation would ever work with someone like you. It would taint their entire reputation.”

It was a blessing that Nagito didn’t consider Hajime the traitor, but his thoughts on the matter weren’t exactly comforting.

“Tell me, Hajime…” Nagito said, finally facing his ‘friend’. “Why did you choose hope?”
“What are you talking about?” Hajime frowned, unsure of what he was being asked.

“In the attempt to fit in, you lied about your lack of ultimate talent.” Nagito elaborated. He stared intensely at Hajime, as if he was trying to hack into his mind. “You could have chosen anything, but you decided to call yourself the Ultimate Hope. Why?”

“I…” it was a question Hajime couldn’t answer - at least, honestly.

Nagito’s shoulders sunk, disappointed his question hadn’t been answered instantly. “It’s just as I thought, you’re obsessed with Hope’s Peak Academy. You desired over the name, and paid to become a part of it all. You called yourself the Ultimate Hope, so we’d think that you’re worthy.”

“It’s not just money-” Hajime wasn’t sure why he was so desperate to defend the reserve course.

“You sat an entrance exam too, yes, I know.” Nagito’s tone was colder than ice, like he was speaking to a convicted criminal. “Monokuma paid me a visit, answering my questions. But sitting an entry exam doesn’t justify the fact you don’t have a talent.”

“Why should having a talent be so important?” Hajime demanded, beginning to feel irritated himself. There was so much that he’d accomplished, all of which he’d done without talent. He didn’t enjoy being made to feel like a nobody.

“The only people worthy of becoming hope, are those with amazing talents and strong will.” Nagito spoke sternly. “You’re either born into this world talented, or you’re born into this world useless. No many how many entrance exams you sit, or how much money you pay, you will never be talented.”

Nagito’s words were like a punch to the stomach, everything he said, making Hajime feel worse and worse. In his own mind, Hajime was certain that there was more to life than talent, but it was difficult hearing Nagito say it.

“You shouldn’t be so quick to ju-” once again, Hajime attempted to defend himself, but he was quickly shot down.

“Do you think you could stop speaking? You’re giving me a headache.” Nagito turned away, resuming the task of skimming stones.

“How can you be acting like this?” Hajime hissed, unable to hold it in any longer. “Nothing has changed, I’m still the same person. You’ve been more than happy believing in me until now. If all it takes is a title for you to change your mind, I wouldn’t call that real hope in the first place.”

“Why are talentless people like yourself always so ignorant?” Nagito shook his head, tutting to himself. “And to think, I was willing to sacrifice the lives of true ultimates to let you escape. Perhaps I’m the biggest fool of all. Though don’t worry, it’s not all hopeless from here. Try hard enough, and you might even be able to live on as a stepping stone, your talentless body might be good for something.”

His comment was the last straw, Hajime couldn’t take it anymore. His head felt like it was going to explode, like a never ending drumbeat hitting against his brain. Arguing with Nagito just wasn’t worth it, Hajime needed his sleep.

Hajime stormed off without saying goodbye, he knew his words would be wasted. His hopes had been too high, and he knew it. Changing Nagito’s mind on the reserve course was never going to be that easy, it wasn’t the kind of thing that could be fixed in five minutes.
Nagito’s words hurt, but Hajime was still attempting to count his blessings. After all, things could be worse. Last time, Nagito hadn’t just learnt the truth of the reserve course, but he found out about the Ultimate Despairs too. It was this information that caused him to go over the edge, resulting in both his death, and Chiaki’s. So long as that information stayed secret, Hajime still had a fighting chance.

The hotel grounds were in darkness by the time Hajime arrived, not a single cottage light was on. Even if some of the students were still awake, they clearly didn’t want to be disturbed.

Hajime felt an intense feeling of relief once he stepped inside his cottage, it was like his own sanctuary. Locking the door behind him, he headed straight for his bed. Feeling both physically, and emotionally, exhausted, he didn’t possess the energy to bother getting undressed. With the exception of kicking off his shoes, he climbed into bed exactly as he was - after all, he’d had a shower just moments before the trial. It wasn’t exactly disgusting.

With all that had happened, it was rather surprising that Hajime got off to sleep as quickly as he did. He fell asleep within minutes of his head hitting the pillow. At least sleeping would grant him peace, he wouldn’t have to lie awake all night worrying about what was to come. He deserved to rest.

***

*Ding dong, bing bong*

“Ahem...Hope’s Peak Academy’s School Trip Executive Committee has an announcement to make. Gooooood morning, everyone! Looks like today is gonna be another perfect tropical day! Now then, let’s show some enthusiasm and make sure to give it our all today!”

It came back to him the second he woke.

*Reserve course.*

*Traitor.*

Hajime wasn’t even granted an additional five minutes of peace. As soon as his eyes opened, he remembered everything. It made his stomach sink, his heart plummet. All he did was wake up, and he instantly remembered everyone hated him.

Breakfast was going to be both awkward and intimidating, and Hajime knew it. All eyes would be on him when he walked up those stairs. The voice in his head was screaming for him to get back into bed, but Hajime refused to acknowledge it. Isolating himself at such a crucial time would be a critical mistake - it would only make the problem worse.

As soon as he stepped outside, he was greeted by nausea. His cottage was safe, he could hide away from the world. Outside, he was completely exposed. It wasn’t like he suspected everyone would try and kill him the second he walked into the restaurant - that would never happen. It was facing his friends that intimidated him so much. Their words had been so harsh.

Hajime opted for the stairs on the outside of the restaurant. He didn’t feel like taking a walk through the lobby, given what had happened there just a few hours previous. The bodies had been cleared away, but that didn’t make things any easier. The crime scene might look spotless, but it would take a lot more than bleach to erase the image from Hajime’s mind.
Entering the restaurant was going to be uncomfortable, but Hajime hadn’t quite anticipated how badly. All eyes were on him from the minute he came into sight. Accompanying their glares, was the death of conversation. Everyone fell silent. They weren’t necessarily talking about Hajime, but whatever they were saying, they clearly didn’t want him to hear.

Hajime decided against a morning greeting, heading straight to the buffet table instead. He hadn’t the slightest appetite, but it would look strange if he didn’t take anything. Seeing it as the least filling option on the table, Hajime helped himself to a bowl of fresh fruit salad. The fruit looked refreshing enough, so he skipped on a drink.

Bowl in hand, he briefly scanned the room. All of his classmates had gathered around a single table. At first, Hajime presumed they were in the middle of a meeting, but he quickly realised otherwise. The conversation had started up again, and it was nothing out the ordinary, they were just making the effort to speak to each other. For the first time in forever, they seemed like a community, even Fuyuhiko was joining in.

The table was completely full. If Hajime wanted to join them, he’d have to pull up an extra chair - an encounter which seemed entirely awkward in itself. That being said, isolating himself to a solitary table seemed just as bad. If he sat alone, it would appear as if he was purposely isolating himself. Both situations were awkward, he had to choose.

There was the slightest gap between Sonia and Peko, just enough room for Hajime to place his bowl on the table. With both hands now free, Hajime reached for a chair from a nearby table, all eyes on him the entire time.

“M-morning…” Hajime sat down slowly, feeling extremely out of place. Just twenty-four hours ago, the atmosphere had been completely different.

In unity, the students ignored him, returning to their original conversation instead. It was as if Hajime hadn’t joined them at all.

“Like I was saying,” Fuyuhiko resumed the conversation. “What’s our plan for when Monomi arrives? Think it’s worth exploring the fifth island?”

“It’s the final island, right?” Ibuki asked, attempting to wipe honey off her robotic hands.

“Indeed, it is.” Gundam nodded. “The final island, filled with many phantoms and mysteries.”

“Since it is the final island, I think we should go.” Sonia said, offering her own opinion. “Monokuma might have something waiting for us.”

“Or, just another motive.” Peko warned them.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Hajime stepped in, deciding to get involved too. “The motives never come this early.”

“Wow, for a reserve course student, you’re rather observant.” Nagito stared at Hajime, turning up his nose like he were a bad smell. “But yes, he’s correct, we won’t get the motive yet.”

“I...I wouldn’t be so sure.” Chiaki frowned. “Have you seen how many days are left on the timer in Jabberwock Park? It isn’t long, just...four.”

Of course, it was day eighteen of the rewrite.

“Oh, you are right, it is not!” Sonia let out a loud gasp.
“Time is passing quicker than Ibuki though!” Ibuki wailed. “My entire life is flashing before my eyes.”

“Since this is the final island, and time is running out, Monokuma might do something even bigger for this motive.” Hajime suggested, once again giving his own perspective.

“Two in a row, this is remarkable.” Nagito’s comment was dripping with sarcasm.

“You don’t need to be so rude.” Hajime objected, fighting back. He understood Nagito was upset, but he wasn’t going to spend the next few days accepting constant scorn.

“You think I’m the rude one? Notice, that I’m the only one at this table that’s bothered to acknowledge your presence.” Nagito remarked, passing blame onto those around him. “Then again, I don’t blame the others. Ultimates shouldn’t have to waste their time talking to someone as worthless as you. I’m only forcing myself because I’m not truly talented.”

“Please, can we not fight?” Sonia lowered her head. “We do not need any more anguish after last night.”

“The mortal bearing royal blood is right.” Gundam nodded in agreement. “I forbid all arguing from this table.”

Nagito pursed his lips, he seemed to only be staying silent because the ultimates had asked. Hajime said nothing either, he didn’t want to make himself even more hated. However, with a nasty tension still high in the air, things didn't feel any easier.

It was at this point, Monomi interrupted - probably a good thing too, they needed something to disturb the unnerving atmosphere. Blissfully unaware of what she was about to walk into, the rabbit swanned into the room, a victorious smile painting her face. "You're all here! It's great to see you."

"The feeling ain't mutual." Fuyuhiko murmured, looking wearily into his black coffee.

"I just defeated the final Monobeast! It was very strong..." Monomi leant against the leg of the table, catching her breath.

"Is that why there is blood on your back?" Sonia asked curiously.

"B-blood?!” Monomi shrieked.

"Eww, it's matting all your fur." Ibuki turned up her nose, disgusted at what she saw.

"You're going to be fine," Peko said calmly, attempting to reassure the rabbit. "The wound is practically non-existent."

"P-please, you could show a little more sympathy." the rabbit lowered her head.

"You didn't even know you were bleeding until we pointed it out." Fuyuhiko objected. "If you couldn't feel it, you don't deserve any attention at all."

"Maybe...you should go and clean up." Chiaki suggested. "You're dripping blood onto the floor."

"So gross!" Ibuki shuddered.

"I'll clean up after, this won't take long." Monomi promised, showing no signs of leaving at all.

"I should hope so. If you leave too much blood behind, you will attract many unnatural demons to
this island." Gundam shook his head in frustration. "I will have no choice but to offer you up in sacrifice."

"A-as I was saying, I have conquered the final Monobeast that was threatening you and this island!" Monomi cheered. "This means, it's finally possible for you to explore the fifth, and final, island! Hooray!"

"Oh, okay." Chiaki smiled politely.

"That...that's all you have to say?" Monomi appeared devastated. "Don't tell me, it's like the last time, you don't want to explore the island because you think there's no escape."

"Well obviously, there won't be an escape." Nagito rolled his eyes. "That would be far too easy. But you shouldn't question the actions of the ultimates based on their pasts."

"Nagito is right, it is rude to presume." Sonia was disappointed with Monomi's lack of manners.

"It's the final island, why wouldn't we not go?" Ibuki shrugged, while all those around her shuddered at the use of her double negative.

"I have a feeling Monokuma will reveal more than usual, considering this is our final island." Peko said.

"We need all the information we can get, and maybe we'll escape this place." Fuyuhiko spoke with more optimism than usual.

"Why don't we go after breakfast?" Chiaki suggested.

"That sounds like a great plan, Chiaki." Sonia smiled. "It will be a nice way to spend the morning. I am almost intrigued to see what the final island holds."

"Then it's settled, we shall go after breakfast." Gundam announced, leaning back in his chair.

Realising he'd been silent for way too long, Hajime attempted to speak up, paranoid he'd be forgotten if he didn’t make his voice heard. "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. We could find something important." essentially, he'd just repeated everything the others had said, but he couldn't think what else to say.

His comment was greeted by silence, no one following on with what he'd just said. His words died then and there, no one wanting to respond to him.

Everyone tried to eat their breakfast in silence, but Fuyuhiko couldn’t handle it for more than a minute. "I can’t do this, I’ve gotta say something." standing up from his seat, he looked straight at Hajime. "When you convinced me not to kill Mahiru, you saved my life. For that, I’m pretty grateful, and it means I owe you one."

"You don’t owe me anything." Hajime insisted, cutting in when Fuyuhiko paused for breath.

“I hadn’t finished! I don’t like owing anyone anything, especially to traitors like you.” his words were just as brutal as Nagito’s. “So, I’m gonna give you some advice like you gave me, and then we’re quits.”

Hajime barely had time to respond.

“What are you doing in here, Hajime?” Fuyuhiko looked down at him, almost pityingly. “I don’t
know what you are anymore, whether you’re just a liar, or a traitor too. Either way, it’s too
dangerous for you to be here. If anyone else is gonna die, then it’ll be you. Gah, just by sitting here
you’re irritating everyone enough to make us wanna kill you. If all that crap was true, how you
wanna keep the death count down, then stay away from the restaurant, stay away from us.”

Hajime wasn’t sure if he could speak anymore, lost for words.

Fuyuhiko continued. “Get yourself a mini fridge, stock up on food, eat when no one else is around -
I dunno. But what I do know, you’re putting your life at risk sticking around here. Keep yourself to
yourself, and you might have a chance of making it out alive. But c’mon, you need to stay away
from us.”

Hajime wasn’t sure what to make of it. A part of Fuyuhiko seemed to be speaking out of concern,
the ‘eye for an eye’ part was just an excuse to help. But the cold look in his eyes, the brutality of his
words, it was clear he wanted nothing more to do with Hajime. The warning had to be taken
seriously.

“I...I think I should go.” not needing to be told twice, Hajime excused himself from the table,
avoiding all eye contact as he went. It was clear they didn’t want him around, he’d only be making a
further nuisance of himself if he decided to stay. Everything was still so heated, he needed to keep
well away if he wanted even the slightest chance to fix things.

Retreating to his cottage, Hajime sought refuge. Just because he had time alone, it didn’t mean he
was going to let it go to waste. Even if his friends didn’t trust him, it was still his job to protect them.
He would focus his efforts on keeping everyone safe, and work on fixing the rewrite. Chiaki had the
trusty timeline in her possession, but it wasn’t like he could go straight to the restaurant and ask for it.
Hajime would have to work from memory, which wasn’t that much of a setback.

As Hajime sat down on his bed, markers in hand, he heard noise from outside his window. It seemed
to be travelling, as the noise grew louder as seconds passed. Totally curious, he jumped from his bed,
and hurried straight to the window, being careful not to be spotted.

Hajime watched on as his friends walked away, there was laughter among them. They were too
immersed in each other's company to even notice his absence. Standing side by side, they walked
united, together as one. Hajime was bitterly disappointed that he couldn’t be there to share in their
moment, but it wasn't all such despair. Like Nagito said, he needed to find the hope in the situation.
At least they weren't fighting with each other anymore, even Fuyuhiko was a part of them. The
paranoia that once swamped them was long gone, lifelong friendships had been formed, the weight
of the killing game losing its power.

Even so, feeling safe would be Hajime's biggest mistake, the clock is always ticking...

Chapter End Notes

You might notice that this chapter is a little shorter than usual, but that's because I didn't
want it to become too long, as it'll just feel a bit heavy. Usually, I like to make part one's
'happy pick up' chapters, but that wouldn't really work right now haha. A lot is about to
go down, but I kinda have to set the scene for it all to make sense.

It'll soon be time for Monokuma's final motive!!

I've gotten a lot of chapter five written, so there won't be any 2 months hiatuses for a little while aha. In the meantime, I'm going to be hyping myself up for ndrv3 - not sure how I'm going to hang on waiting for the game! Kinda fallen in love with Tenko. Who is everyone else loving? :D
Chapter Summary

Monokuma reveals his final motive, while Hajime tries to deal with island life now that things have changed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Over the course of the morning, Hajime’s classmates returned from the fifth island. They came back in smaller groups of twos or threes. Their voices drifted through Hajime’s open window, alerting him of their presence. The temptation was there to go out and see them, but Hajime knew he’d only be met by rejection.

At a guess, nothing too important had happened over on the fifth island, otherwise, the others wouldn’t have returned to calmly. If Monokuma revealed his new motive, he’d want everyone to be there - Hajime included.

In the time that they’d been gone, Hajime hadn’t done much himself - besides constructing together a polished version of the timeline. It was harder without the original to work with, but it wasn’t an impossible task. Two major factors that were yet to happen in the rewrite, were the deaths of Nagito and Chiaki. Chiaki’s death would not occur without Nagito’s, and Nagito’s would not occur unless he learnt the truth of the Ultimate Despairs. The two factors were resting on each other. Hopefully, if Hajime could prevent one, he’d prevent both.

Of course, this didn’t mean Hajime was in the home run. New problems could present themselves at any given time. He had to keep his guard up. With only four days left to go, Monokuma could throw anything his way.

His daydreams of the timeline were quickly disrupted, a gentle knock at the door breaking his train of thought. Soft knocking hinted that the visitor didn’t want to disturb him. At this point, thankful for any company, Hajime scrambled towards the door.

“Come in!” he called, despite already pulling on the handle himself.

Chiaki was waiting patiently for him on the other side of the door, eyes glazed over - clearly living in her own world.

Hajime held the door, waiting for Chiaki to step inside, but the gamer didn’t move. “Um, hi…”

“Oh! Hey, Hajime!” a smiled warmed up Chiaki’s face, as if she’d been blissfully unaware he was there. Finally paying attention, she moved inside.

Hajime hurriedly closed the door behind her, it wouldn’t do them any favours if the other ultimates saw them together. “Is everything okay?” he asked, hoping to understand the meaning of her visit.

“Nothing’s wrong.” Chiaki reassured him. “I just wanted to talk to you...in private.”

Remembering he hadn't actually spoken to her since the trial, Chiaki’s visit made sense. "Sit down, if
you like.”

Chiaki headed straight for Hajime's bed, slinging her backpack on the floor. She pulled up her legs in order to get comfortable. Hajime perched at the other end of the bed, turning to face his friend.

“How’d things go on the final island?” Hajime asked, Chiaki was a direct source for information.

“It was...okay.” Chiaki nodded, hugging her legs close to her chest. “We split off into groups, but...I did try and speak to everyone.”

“Anything important happen?” Hajime persisted, wanting all the details possible.

“I...I don’t think so.” Chiaki took a pause, before confirming her answer. “Nothing has changed on that island since the last time.”

“That’s...something.” Hajime said, trying to remain positive. At least Monokuma hadn’t attempted anything different, taking advantage of Hajime’s absence. “The others, did they...talk about me?”

“A little, yeah.” Chiaki was honest, refusing to hide the truth. “They’re mainly surprised that you’d do something like this. Fuyuhiko is still insisting that you’re working with the Future Foundation, and Gundam thinks you might be under control of an extraterrestrial organisation.”

“I’m not surprised.” Hajime sighed, he couldn’t see Fuyuhiko dropping the conspiracy anytime soon, and Gundam was just as bad.

“They’re struggling to trust you...but what Fuyuhiko said before makes sense. I think if you stay away, we should be okay.” Chiaki spoke optimistically.

“By ‘okay’ you mean...no more murders?” Hajime queried.

Chiaki gave an affirmative nod. “Yes...I think so. Everyone seemed like a real team, like...a family. I can’t see anyone turning to murder now.”

“That’s brilliant!” Hajime gasped, sincerely hoping Chiaki was right. “Whatever Monokuma throws our way, if we’re a team, we can handle it.” Hajime knew he wasn’t counted as part of that team, but he was happy to cheer on from the sidelines.

“I’m really sorry, Hajime...what happened to you in the trial.” Chiaki sighed, dampening the tone. “Everyone now thinks you’re the traitor, when really, it’s me. Maybe...we should tell them the truth.”

“We can’t.” Hajime responded instantly. “It’s better everyone hates me, than everyone hating both of us. At least if the others trust you, we stand a better chance of getting through this until the end. You can tell me everything from the inside, and get through to them too.”

“... Are you sure?” Chiaki didn’t seem convinced, the frown on her face saying so. “I don’t want you getting all the blame, what you’re doing is for everyone’s good.”

“I know, and hopefully when this is all over, the others will understand. We just have to get through the final four days.” Hajime was speaking with as much optimism as he could muster.

“What are you going to do?” Chiaki tilted her head. “Are you hiding out here like Fuyuhiko said?”

“I wouldn’t say ‘hiding’ exactly,” Hajime found the word almost shameful. “But I think it’s best. I want the least amount of drama possible, and if it means keeping myself away, then so be it.”

“Will you be eating?” Chiaki asked, her tone worried.
“I’ll be fine,” Hajime smiled, appreciating her concern. “It’s not like we’re short of food here. I can stock up from the market, maybe even visit the diner if no one’s around.” It did seem rather depressing saying it aloud, but it was better than going hungry.

“I can bring you food from the restaurant, if you like…” Chiaki offered.

“Thanks, but I better not accept it. Actually…” Hajime took a deep breath, it wasn’t something he wanted to mention, but it had to be addressed. “I think we need to avoid each other.”

“Avoid each other?” Chiaki repeated, not quite following.

“Everyone hates me because they think I’m a traitor, so really you should hate me too. If you’re hanging around me like everything’s fine, the others will start asking questions.” Hajime explained himself. “You need to stay away, pretend you’re just as mad as the others. It’s too risky.”

“But, Hajime…” Chiaki objected, her face falling. “How am I meant to help you?”

“I don’t know.” Hajime attempted to think on the spot. “You could write to me in my mailbox…” His suggestion was weak, and Chiaki knew it.

“These...these are our last four days together. I don’t want to spend them ignoring you.” Chiaki’s voice softened.

Hajime winced, she said exactly what he didn’t want to think about. “I...I know...but we have to put the rewrite first.” He was willing to forsake his own feelings. “I don’t want this either, but please, stay away from me.”

“Then...I think I better go.” Chiaki pushed herself from his bed, reaching for her bag. Sliding her arms into the straps, she looked at Hajime with a fond smile. “I hope we can properly say goodbye before all of this is over.”

“It’s a promise!” Hajime declared, he was not leaving without his goodbye. “I hate that we have to do this, but you’ll come under suspicious if we don’t. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologise...this is for the sake of everyone else. I understand.” Chiaki said. “In the end, it will be for the best.”

Turning on her heels, Chiaki headed for the door - first checking the coast was clear. She snuck outside, gently closing the door behind her. Hajime watched on through the window, finding himself all alone once again.

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Neglecting breakfast was beginning to prove its own problems, two mouthfuls of fruit salad weren’t enough to get Hajime through the day. It was barely past noon, and Hajime felt like his stomach was going to cave in. Sitting around doing nothing wasn’t helping either, it only made the hunger more prominent.

It crossed his mind to nap away the pain, but his time in the funhouse previously taught him that it wasn’t much of a solution. The longing for food would likely keep him awake.
“This is ridiculous…” Hajime muttered to himself, confused as to why he was letting himself starve for the sake of avoiding the others. Just because he was steering clear of them, it didn’t mean he had to stay a prisoner in his room. He was in danger of going stir-crazy if he didn't get some fresh air soon.

Hajime already had the perfect place to eat in mind, both peaceful and nutritious: Vendor Street. The others had already explored the fifth island, and since it didn’t have the most welcoming of atmospheres, he couldn’t imagine them sticking around. It would also give Hajime an opportunity to explore the fifth island too. He knew exactly what was waiting for him, but he wanted to give the place a once over for himself.

Briefly glancing out the window, to be certain the coast was clear, Hajime headed out the door - appreciating the fresh air that hit him. It had only been a couple of hours since he’d last been outside, but sitting around doing nothing had caused the time to drag by.

The journey to the fifth island went smoothly, as Hajime hoped it would. He did happen to pass Sonia, who was returning from the central island. She greeted Hajime with a smile, but there was no emotion behind it, just a passing exchange. Still, it was better than running into someone like Nagito - he wasn’t in the mood for conflict.

As for the final island itself, it was deserted. Like Hajime predicted, no one liked it well enough to stay. Everyone had bigger, and better, plans than hanging around on the industrial-style island. Compared to the bright colours of the fourth island, with its sickly sweet smell of candy floss, it really didn't compete.

As much as Hajime wanted to give everything the once over, it would have to wait, as food was calling his name. He needed energy if he wanted to do things properly.

It didn’t take long for him to reach his destination, Vendor Street closest to the bridge. Before he even arrived, the smell of cooked noodles and spices drifted up his nose. It caused Hajime’s stomach to rumble in an instance, his mouth watering.

Vendor Street was made up of several different food stalls, but Hajime stopped at the first one he saw - from what he’d seen, the quality was more than up to his standards. Yakisoba, Takoyaki, Okonomiyaki - the stall had it all. Hajime vouched coming up for seconds and thirds, but it was his hungriest self-talking - Hajime with a stomach full of food wouldn’t share the same opinion.

In the end, Hajime steered away from the first stand, his stomach calling him in the direction of the ramen stall. Opting for a seafood ramen, he rested on the seating provided, stools opposite the hot plates. Reaching for the complimentary chopsticks, he tucked straight in, doing his best to savour the flavour while gulping down the dish.

Hajime might have predicted a peaceful meal, but it couldn't have been further from the truth. Spotting black and white fur out the corner of his eye, Hajime felt his entire body tense up, the bear’s presence was enough to set him on edge. Peace and Monokuma do not work together.

“What are you eating there? Deep fried Monomi? Monomi curry?” Monokuma jumped onto a stool beside Hajime, almost losing his footing in the process. “Rice, with a sticky sauce and Monomi grated on to-”

The joke quickly ran its course. “Like you care.” Hajime rolled his eyes, knowing Monokuma had no real interest in his diet.

“Of course I care!! I’m not letting you finish Monomi’s delicious fried body without me.”
Monokuma laughed, making a smooth recovery after almost falling off the stool.

“Well, it’s not Monomi, so you can go.” Hajime replied coldly, trying to shake himself free.

“But I’m worried about you, Hajime.” Monokuma shook his head. His tone sounded sincere, but it was all an act. Monokuma cared about no one but himself. “I wanted to make sure that you’re eating properly. I heard your conversation earlier, seems you’ve been banished from the restaurant.”

“I’ve not been ‘banished’ from anywhere.” Hajime snapped, trying to defend his pride. “We just think it’s better I stay away from the restaurant.”

“You say ‘we’, but it’s obvious you weren’t part of that decision. The others don’t want you there.” Monokuma scorned. “It’s why I’m watching out for you, don’t want you starving to death. If you’re going to die on this island, at least let yourself get murdered. That’s so much more interesting than wasting away into dog bones.”

“I’m not starving myself.” Hajime insisted, trying to get Monokuma off of his back. “I’m eating now!”

Monokuma reached across the counter, taking food for himself. He ignored the chopsticks, putting the bowl straight to his mouth, downing the dish in a single gulp. Hajime couldn’t help but feel sick as he heard the food glugging down Monokuma’s throat.

“Okay, okay, enough of the small talk.” Monokuma wafted his paw around, using it to clear the food from around his mouth. “I came here to make you an offer,”

“An offer….what kind of offer?” Hajime narrowed his eyes.

“Let me finish!” Monokuma barked. “You’ve really gotta learn to stop cutting people off, it’s irritating.”

“Fine, carry on…” Hajime spoke through gritted teeth, the bear handled everything with such aggression.

“I’m sure you already know this, but the timer is soon running out, your time on this island is almost over.” Monokuma said. “Just four days to go! The hours are getting shorter by the second.”

“That timer means nothing, you know that I know.” Hajime rolled his eyes. It had simply been a test from AI Junko, her way of speeding up the killing game.

“You know what I mean!” Monokuma snapped. “But let me tell you, it’s within your best interest to make it out of here before these twenty-two days are up.”

“And why’s that?” Hajime sighed.

“Like I’m going to tell you,” Monokuma scoffed. “But if you're sensible, you’ll escape from the island before your time is up.”

Hajime didn’t have much care for Monokuma’s ‘warning’. “You have to be kidding me if you think I’m falling for that. I’m not killing anyone to save my own skin.”

“I’ve been warning you all this time, Hajime. The Future Foundation aren’t on your side. Day twenty two…they have something planned.” Monokuma lowered his voice, seeming completely serious.
“I trust the Future Foundation more than I will ever trust you.” Hajime proclaimed.

“So naive, so naive!” Monokuma shook his head. “You’ll regret it.”

“What does any of this have to do with your offer?” Hajime pressed for the original point at hand.

“My offer is to help you out.” Monokuma explained. “I’ll play an important role in butchering one of your classmates!”

“W-wha?!” Hajime spluttered, choking on his ramen.

“I’ll do whatever you ask! Manipulate evidence, drug the others, help put someone else in the firing line.” Monokuma elaborated. “Heck, I’ll do all the work, you’ve just gotta do the actual killing. Name me a victim, and we’re good to go! How about Gundam? That spiritual rubbish he talks about is really beginning to irritate me.”

Hajime put down his chopsticks, he couldn’t truly enjoy his food with the bear around. “I...I’m not going to kill anyone, and I won’t let you help me!!"

“This is a privileged offer, Hajime, I wouldn’t turn it down.” Monokuma replied. “I won’t be offering it to any of the others.”

“This is probably a trap anyway.” Hajime shook his head. “You’d find a way to execute me in the end.”

“This isn’t a trap, and that’s a Monokuma guarantee.” the bear waffled on as if he were making some sort of sales pitch. “I’m willing to bend the rules, just for you.”

That, in itself, was something Hajime couldn’t understand. Why was Monokuma so desperate for him to kill someone? Was it so Hajime would be the only graduate? If Hajime escaped the island alone, the rewrite would be a gigantic fail. It made sense for Monokuma to manipulate Hajime while he was feeling vulnerable, with everyone on the island against him, it would be easier for him to turn. The threat of the Future Foundation was likely just another one of Monokuma’s tricks.

“No way.” Hajime fought back. “I came here to save my friends, not to kill them.”

“But they hate you, Hajime.” Monokuma sighed. “If it weren't for the fear of execution, I’m sure they’d think nothing of killing you.”

“I...I don’t care.” Hajime cleared his throat. Tired of making excuses, he knew he had to admit to his own mistakes. “They hate me because I lied to them, they have no reason to trust me now. I’m not going to turn on my friends just because they caught me out for my lie. You’re too selfish to ever understand.”

“Ugh, stop with the preaching.” Monokuma complained. “I can see you’re not going to change your mind right now, but give it time. Watch as your ‘friends’ turn on you further. You’ll come crawling to me in no time.”

Hinting at his approaching absence, Monokuma climbed down from the stall - making the effort not to fall this time. “My offer stands open for the next three days, until the twenty-second day, you still have time to change your mind.”

“I won’t.” Hajime pursed his lips.

“Never say never.” Monokuma smirked. “Just call if you need me...”
Hajime watched as the bear plodded off into the distance, he kept an eye on Monokuma until he turned a corner, and could no longer be seen. Killing to save himself was something he would never do, no matter how much the others despised him. Monokuma’s attempt would go wasted, he wouldn’t allow himself to be manipulated.

Half a bowl of ramen stood in front of Hajime, waiting to be eaten. However, after his encounter with Monokuma, he’d lost his appetite. In order not to break the littering rule, Hajime collected his dish and Monokuma’s leftovers, throwing them both in a nearby trashcan.

Satisfied he wanted nothing more to eat, it was time for Hajime to begin his inspection of the final island. A once over would do, just to be satisfied he’d covered everything himself - it would also keep him out of his room, providing Hajime with something to do.

He had already checked vendor street off of his list, meaning he could move straight on to his next stop...the factory and warehouse. It didn’t matter how much time had passed, he would never be able to see the factory in the same way. Staring at the warehouse took him back to a time he didn’t want to remember…Nagito’s death.

Everything came rushing back to Hajime as soon as he stepped inside, the door to the warehouse its own time portal. The smell of gas up his nose, the scorching flames that attacked, the smoke that choked him. All of it felt so familiar, as if no time had passed at all.

It wasn't a memory Hajime enjoyed reflecting upon, but he had to face the past. The quicker he investigated the warehouse, the quicker he could leave. With this logic in mind, he fully committed himself, even making the effort to properly close the door behind him. Hajime pried around, searching for any signs of Nagito's mischief, but there was nothing to be found. He was surrounded by normality. Granted a peace of mind, and confident it was safe, Hajime left for the factory next door.

Watching palm trees turn into Monokuma plushies was about as much fun as watching grass grow. Hajime didn’t plan on sticking around. He gave the room the once over, before moving on to the break room. Hajime helped himself to the fire grenades, discarding them into the green recycling bins. He highly doubted they were recyclable, but he wasn't particularly concerned about the state of a virtual environment. Hajime had a feeling Monokuma would probably replace them anyway, but it gave him extra security knowing the fire grenades were gone. If somehow Nagito's plan did go ahead, he would now be stumped, for they played a key role.

The Military Base and Sea King Industries offered Hajime no grief either, which made for a nice change. They appeared untouched; nothing odd, suspicious, or out of place. Exploring the final island proved nothing new, but that wasn't a bad thing. Like they say, 'no news is good news'.

Exploration complete, Hajime was almost ready to return to his cottage, there was just one stop left. He detoured via the market, picking up what he needed for dinner. He wasn't very hungry, having just consumed the ramen, but he knew his stomach would begin rumbling again in no time. It didn’t take long for him to get what he needed, in and out the store within five minutes. A bottle of flavoured water in one hand, and a packaged sandwich in the other, he was done.

The pathway from the market to the hotel was exceptionally quiet. Hajime couldn’t put his finger on why things were so desolate. Even with the number of survivors growing thin, there were always people travelling to and from the cottages. It made a change to see things dead so early in the evening. However, as Hajime walked through the gates of the hotel itself, his question was quickly answered.

As Hajime approached his cottage, he stopped in his tracks, taking a moment to admire the hotel
ahead of him. The lights were on in the restaurant, illuminating every window. He couldn't make out anything, besides silhouettes, since he was too far away. Though from what he could see, there was lots of movement going on.

Curiosity getting the better of him, Hajime inched further - edging closer and closer until he was past the cottages and the swimming pool. He stopped outside the hotel's main entrance, temporarily resting his dinner on the ground. The sound of laughter drifted out the open window, only intriguing Hajime further. Before he knew it, he was climbing up the steps that led directly from the outside world into the restaurant. Not wanting to be spotted, Hajime was careful with his footing, ducking down to keep out of sight.

He stopped halfway up, now a good enough distance to see without being seen himself. Pressing his face to the glass, he looked inside to discover what was going on.

Like at breakfast, the students had gathered around a single table - pulling up extra chairs to make room. The tables surrounding them were laden with food, the buffet looking delicious as always. As they tucked in, Fuyuhiko stood up from his seat.

"I...I, uh, just wanna thank you for coming to dinner with me." Fuyuhiko looked incredibly awkward, his face flushing red. "I know I've never made the effort with you guys before, so...it's good of you to come."

"I could never reject such an invitation!" Sonia beamed, holding up a sheet of card.

Invitation? Hajime had received nothing of the sort.

"I wanted to do something as an apology to you guys, like make dinner or something." Fuyuhiko shuffled about on the spot. "But Peko can tell you, I ain't much of a cook. I hope my company is enough. I don't mean that arrogantly, I just want us all to get along."

"Does that mean...you're waiting for Hajime to show up?" Chiaki asked, suddenly eager.

"Hajime? Ugh, no." Fuyuhiko shook his head. "Everyone but him. Some people are just beyond hope." he loosely shrugged his shoulders.

Nagito smirked from across the table. "How ironic of you to say, people losing faith in someone who claimed to be the Ultimate Hope."

"Let's not talk about this," Fuyuhiko attempted to change the subject. "I wanted us to eat together so I can spend more time getting to know you, not to talk about serious shit."

"Ibuki votes we leave all the serious stuff behind, it's so yucky!" Ibuki squirmed.

"For a single night, I don't see that proving troublesome." Gundam nodded in agreement.

Hajime realised he'd been listening for way too long, and quickly pulled away from the window. If the others caught him spying, things would only get worse. He hurriedly dashed down the stairs, getting away without being noticed. Swallowing his pride, he reached for his dinner, and retreated to his cottage - the only company waiting for him, a prepackaged sandwich.

With nothing better to do, he took an early night for himself. He was out cold by nine, sleeping through the night time alarm completely. That being said, it wasn't a peaceful night waiting ahead for Hajime...
The siren came from nowhere. Disturbing Hajime, from what had been, a peaceful dream. It was similar to the usual Monokuma alarm, however the pitch was higher, and it was bleating at a much faster rate. There was something different about this noise, like it was screaming ‘urgency’.

“W-what…” Hajime bolted up in bed, his heart racing. He felt as if he’d been violently shaken, the alarm a terrible way to wake up. Clearing the sleep from his eyes, he forced himself to face reality.

Persisting, the unfamiliar siren didn’t stop - forcing its way into Hajime’s head. Unable to stand the noise for much longer, its irritating presence too much to handle, Hajime started to pay attention to what was going on. Jumping to conclusions would have led him to believe it was the body discovery announcement, but it was noticeably different. Suddenly, something caught his eye, on the yellow monitor there read a message.

**Jabberwock Park. Now.**

It may have been lacking in words, but the instructions were clear. He was wanted at Jabberwock Park, and at the very moment. Unless it was an extremely elaborate trap, Monokuma was likely the one behind the message.

Desperate to escape the noise, Hajime headed straight for the door. He grabbed his shoes upon exit, still fixing his laces as he locked the door behind him. As he stood outside, the sound of the siren only became more powerful, a whole chorus of them now. It quickly became apparent that his cottage wasn’t the only one receiving the treatment.

“Oi, Hajime!” from his own doorway, called Fuyuhiko. “This happening to you too?”

“Y-yeah, it is!” Hajime shouted back, yelling over the noise. “There was a message on my monitor, telling me to go to Jabberwock Park.”

“Same here.” Fuyuhiko nodded, approaching Hajime so they didn’t have to shout. “We should get going, it’s clear we’re wanted there right now.”

Given the current fragility of their friendship, Hajime expected Fuyuhiko to walk straight ahead, but he didn’t. Fuyuhiko waited for Hajime to finish his laces, before walking directly by his side. It was as if he’d temporarily forgotten all the tension between them.

“Should we wait for the others?” Hajime suggested, unsure if Fuyuhiko wanted Peko to join them first.

“No point.” Fuyuhiko shook his head. “We have no idea who’s already left. Let’s just get there ourselves.”

Hajime kept his eyes out for the others as they walked, but came across no one. Fuyuhiko was busy ranting away in his ear, spouting off about Monokuma - the one that had likely brought them there.
“What does he think he’s doing!?” Fuyuhiko went on. “It’s fucking three in the morning.”

“Three?” Hajime raised his eyebrows, he hadn’t bothered studying the time. “Then this better be pretty important.”

“I doubt it.” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes. “The bear’s a dick, stirring trouble just cuz he can. Bet this is all for nothing.”

Annoying as ‘nothing’ would be, it was better than more bad news.

With their pace faster than usual, they arrived at the park in good time. Ibuki, Nagito, and Gundam were already there, all of them supporting under eye bags and bed hair. The siren was still wailing, playing from every monitor in range. It didn’t take long for the others to follow suit, Chiaki bringing up the rear as the last to arrive.

Despite all the students turning up on time, the sirens were still crying out, and there was no sign of their headmaster. Even Monomi had shown her face.

“Will those things give it a rest! Ibuki’s ears are bleeding.” Ibuki complained, cupping her ears with her hands. Rather ironic, since her music had the same effect on others.

“That damn bear needs to hurry up.” Fuyuhiko’s patience was growing thinner by the second. "Mole rat, can't you do something?" he narrowed his eyes in Monomi's direction.

"M-me?" Monomi replied. "I'm afraid I don't have the power, not without my magic stick."

"Useless as always." Gundam sighed.

"I do not mean to interrupt," Sonia began, cutting into their conversation. "But is no one going to mention those..." extending a delicate finger, she pointed to Jabberwock Park's latest decorative addition.

Positioned in a perfect circle, were thirteen grave stones. Each one had a candle resting on top, and a bouquet of dead flowers at the bottom. Shadows had disguised them at first, but the flickering flames soon gave their location away.

“Grave stones…” Nagito muttered, observing what they all could see.

“That damn bear is up to something!” Fuyuhiko shook his fist.

“There are sixteen, we all know what that means….” Gundam shuddered. “One representing each of us.”

“Sixteen? No, I don’t think there are…” Chiaki corrected him hesitantly. “I make thirteen.”

“So do I.” Sonia nodded.

Gundam took a moment to count again. “My eyes must’ve deceived me, there are only thirteen.”

“These aren’t for us.” Peko shook her head, crouching by one of the graves.

“How can you be sure?” Sonia asked.

“These graves are inscribed, and I don’t recognise any of the names.” Peko replied, studying the graves once again. She repeated one of the names, her fingers tracing the inscription. “Karen Kisaragi.”
Peko turned to the others, but she was met with a series of shrugs. She looked across to the grave at her right. “This one reads, Kiriko Nishizawa.”

Once again, greeted with nothing.

Ibuki took to the other end of the circle, inspecting the graves for herself. “Ibuki sees Taro Kurosaki.”

Hajime shrugged. ”I can't say I've ever heard those before.”

“What the hell do these even mean?” Fuyuhiko narrowed his brow. “No one recognises these names?”

“Tsk, tsk, how disappointing.” pushing his way into the circle came Monokuma, shaking his head at his pupils. “You don’t recognise the names of your ex-student council, that’s soooo disrespectful.”

“Our 'student council’…” Sonia repeated. “You mean, these are also students from Hope’s Peak?”

“Mmh!” Monokuma confirmed, nodding his head.

“No wonder we don’t recognise them, you took our memories.” Nagito pointed out, arms folded.

“Aha, how silly of me to forget!” Monokuma rocked back his head and laughed, though it was clear he hadn’t forgotten at all.

“Repeat your sentence!” Gundam rose his voice, tone demanding. “What do you mean when you say ‘ex’ student council?”

“Come on Gundam, you’re smart.” Monokuma smirked. “I name them the ‘ex’ student council, and you find yourself standing in front of thirteen gravestones.”

Peko grimaced. “They…dead.”

“You killed them?” Sonia gasped, her complexion quickly turning pale.

“What? No! What do you take me for?” Monokuma grinned. “I had no part to play in this at all.”

"Can we really believe that?” Nagito frowned.

"It's my Monokuma guarantee!” Monokuma smiled, it was the second time that day he'd offered it.

"M-Monokuma is a monster, but no, this isn't his doing." Monomi spoke up, defending her brother by sharing the truth.

“Then...what happened?” Fuyuhiko asked, though he didn’t seem keen on learning the answer.

Hajime winced, for he knew what was coming. The story of the student council massacre had been explained to him before, and in further detail by the Future Foundation trio, upon escaping the Neo World Program. He feared what Monokuma was going to say next.

"That's what I'm getting to, as it plays a part of your motive.” Monokuma began to pace the circle. "Everyone gather round, I have a story to tell you.”

“Then I'm not another one of your Halloween stories, is it?” Nagito looked on skeptically.

“As you have already learnt, this is not the first mutual killing game.” Monokuma said, beginning his
“That’s right,” Nagito said. “There was the killing school life that happened at Hope’s Peak Academy itself.”

“Correct!” Monokuma nodded. “But it might interest you to know, that the killing school life wasn’t the first mutual killing game either. Before that, there was actually the incident of the student council massacre.”

A deathly atmosphere washed over the students, for they all knew what was coming.

“The key members of Hope’s Peak’s student council were taken to the old school building, and forced to kill each other in order to survive. They had everything they needed for the perfect killing game; weapons, money, motives.” Monokuma seemed to be receiving pleasure from retelling the story, his voice coming to life. “The pacing was a little faster than the game you’re experiencing now, the whole thing was over within an hour - just one council member making it out alive.”

“You...you monster!” Gundam cursed with his fist. “How could you create such a bloodbath?”

“As much as I would love to take credit, I’m afraid it’s not me that’s behind this massacre. No, no, it was none other than Izuru Kamukura!” Monokuma shouted the name, emphasising its power.

Hajime felt his blood turn cold, every hair on his body standing on edge. Monokuma couldn’t….he just couldn’t. If Hajime was exposed as Izuru, there would be no turning back. His head would be on a spike by morning, the others would never forgive him. They’d see him as nothing more than a monster, the picture Monokuma had painted wouldn’t help.

“Izuru Kamukura…Izuru Kamukura…” Nagito muttered the name over and over, appearing deep in thought.

Ibuki picked up on his behavior. “Nagito knows something?”

“....Of course!” Nagito gasped, a look of sudden realisation across his face. “I know why that name seems so familiar.”

“Tell us what you know.” Peko said.

“I was in the library earlier today. As I was looking for a book, something fell off one of the shelves, landing right at my feet!” Nagito recalled. “It was a document regarding Hope’s Peak, and spoke of the one you name ‘Izuru Kamukura’.”

“Do you have the file on you?” Sonia asked, wanting to see it for herself.

“No, I’m afraid not.” Nagito sighed. “But I remember well enough what was said.”

“Go on Nagito, why don’t you share it with the group?” Monokuma teased.

There was only one possible explanation for how a file on Izuru Kamukura had ended up in the library. In preparation for the motive, Monokuma must have planted it there. With Nagito’s luck, it was practically expected for him to randomly stumble upon it.

“Izuru Kamukura was never a real person, he was a project created by the executive board at Hope’s Peak.” Nagito began.

“So, he was like a robot?” Ibuki asked, staring at her own robotic hands.
“Not a robot, no.” Nagito replied. “He was a creation. A normal, average, human brain that was experimented on.”

“Human experimentation?” Sonia gulped, eyes wide.

“Exactly that.” Nagito nodded. “According to the file, they chose someone from the reserve course as the subject. A worthless no-body, so desperate to be talented they allowed themselves to become a guinea pig,” he glared at Hajime as he said it, projecting his hatred for the reserve course.

“Reserve course? Hajime, maybe you knew him…” Ibuki gasped, hands clutching her face.

“It’s impossible to say, since Izuru Kamukura isn’t even his real name.” Nagito sighed. “No one knows who was experimented on, that was covered up by the school board. Izuru gained his name after the founder of Hope’s Peak himself.”

“Why would they name an experiment after the school’s founder?” Fuyuhiko was stumped.

“Because the purpose of the lab rat, was to create the ultimate hope.” Nagito continued. “They wanted him to possess every talent possible, so they could further their research.”

“But you can’t just create talent!” Ibuki protested.

“Exactly,” Monokuma butted in, taking control. “And that’s why everything went wrong. Poor old Izuru lost it, and butchered everyone in the student council. It’s a tragic tale.”

"He...he really killed the members of the student council?” Sonia lowered her head, as if she were mourning. "That is so sad."

"How did he die then?" Fuyuhiko asked, looking for details. "Someone turn against him at the last minute?"

"Izuru didn't die." Monokuma replied.

"But you said, only one member of the student council made it out alive." Fuyuhiko challenged the bear. "And Izuru weren't on no council!"

"I...I think you just answered your own question." Chiaki spoke to Fuyuhiko. "One member of the council made it out alive, but Monokuma never mentioned Izuru."

"Ding, ding! On the money!" Monokuma laughed. "Two people graduated that killing game. But the poor kid on the council, he didn't last long. He was seriously injured, and even then, he didn't make it..."

"Please, stop it. We don't need to hear anymore." Chiaki shot Monokuma a serious glare, wanting to hear no more.

Sonia hugged herself for comfort. “I cannot believe something like this could happen.”

Thankfully, it seemed that no-one had made the connection of Hajime and Izuru being the same person, since the students weren’t aware they were in a virtual reality.

“Why are you telling us all this?” Fuyuhiko snapped. “I thought there was some kinda emergency!”

“Emergency?” Monokuma’s face was blank.

“The never-ending siren, the message on the monitors.” Fuyuhiko elaborated.
“Ahahaha!” Monokuma was roaring with uncontrollable laughter, barely able to contain himself. “The looks on your faces, it really is a picture. All of this? It’s nothing more than dramatic effect.”

“You took us out of bed at three in the morning for ‘dramatic effect’?” a vein in Fuyuhiko’s forehead was beginning to throb.

“Well, it’s not all a waste. Like I said, you’re actually here to learn about the fifth, and final, motive!” Monokuma said.

“Oh, yes, that’s why you told us that awful story.” Gundam remembered.

“Sure is!” Monokuma nodded. “So…that’s why I’m offering you…BONUS NIGHT!” Monokuma cheered the name, though he was the only one.

“Bonus Night?” Chiaki repeated.

“Bonus Night, free for all. Use whichever name you fancy!” Monokuma grinned. “Inspired by the student council massacre, this motive encourages you to kill as many of your classmates as possible!”

“Isn’t there rules against that?” Hajime frowned.

“Rules are so boring, we’re nearing the end now anyway!” Monokuma brushed him aside. “From now on, that rule doesn’t exist. POOF! It’s gone.”

“N-no,” Monomi gasped. “That is one of the only good things you’ve created.”

On queue, Hajime’s electronic handbook vibrated from his pocket - the obvious sound of a rule change.

“Kill as many people as you like, knock yourselves out.” Monokuma enticed them. “If you kill everyone, there will be a special treat waiting for you…”

“But that’s impossible.” Fuyuhiko shook his head. “If we kill everyone, there’s no class trial. We can’t graduate.”

“You don’t need each other to graduate, just my permission. And if there’s no one to catch you out as guilty, then there’s no need for a trial.” Monokuma replied.

Peko lowered her head. “That is the special treat, isn’t it? If we kill everyone but ourselves, we instantly graduate.”

“I’m glad to see someone is following with the program.” Monokuma praised. “Exactly, kill everyone, and you leave instantly. No trial, no covering your back, no fear of execution. You’re free, and without any of the hassle the others had to go through.”

That was Monokuma’s final motive, the chance of an easy escape. The fear of execution was a daunting one, something that loomed over their heads, made them think twice before deciding to kill. With that gone, they could be ruthless. Killing everyone took away all need to plan and prepare. It didn’t matter if you were caught, or left evidence behind. So long as you were successful in taking every life besides your own, you’d be a victor, allowed to leave.

“Now we wait for the bloodbath to unfold.” Monokuma dusted his paws down, as if all the work was done.

“There will be no bloodbath!” Sonia declared, her tone hostile. “No one else is going to die. We are
“As an ultimate, you are truly inspiring, but I wouldn’t be so sure.” Nagito sighed. “Can we really trust everyone?” he glanced in Hajime’s direction.

“M-me?” Hajime gulped.

“Nagito’s right.” Fuyuhiko agreed. “This Izuru fella was on the reserve course, these people can’t be trusted.”

“Woah, hang on!” Hajime tried not to crack, though all eyes were on him. “I’m not going for Monokuma’s motive. I’ve been trying to stop the killings from the start.”

“But how do we know?” Ibuki frowned. “It could just be another one of your lies.”

”And come on, you can’t blame Izuru just because he was on the reserve course previously. They were forced into a killing game, just like us!” Hajime protested, not quieting down.

”Typical, you would defend him.” disappointment rang throughout Nagito’s voice.

“I think we should just calm down, and get some sleep.” Hajime proposed. It didn’t help that Monokuma had woken them all suddenly, their emotions were on edge. It was only causing further hysteries and arguments.

”You have somewhere to be?” Nagito eyed him up.

”Yes, my bed.” Hajime replied, growing tired of the constant interrogation.

”He’s off to plan all of our murders!” Ibuki cried hysterically.

”I’m really not!” Hajime insisted. “It’s three in the morning, and I’d like some sleep.” standing round being accused as a murderer was wearing Hajime down. He just wanted to take himself out of the situation. Not in the mood for taking their abuse, he turned his back, and began to walk away.

”Peko, stop him!” Fuyuhiko yelled, seriously raising his voice.

”Yes, Young Master.”

Before Hajime even had the time to process what was going on, he felt a sharp tugging on his shoulder. Peko grabbed him from behind, snatching both his arms. She wrist locked him within a second, both his hands were behind his back, and she had full control.

”Ahh!” Hajime cried out in pain, Peko showing little mercy. “Get off me, I’m not gonna kill you.” shouting back did no good, Peko only grabbed him harder. Hajime couldn’t see a thing from behind, but he heard perfectly.

”Maybe this will help?”

”N-Nagito, what are you doing with that…?”

”It was Mikan’s, I somehow have it.”

”Yeah, we can see that…”

”Just give it to Peko!”
"Are we sure this is right?"

"Just do it!"

"Okay, okay…"

All that came next, was the sharp pain as the needle pierced his skin. From there, things began to blur, the conversation around him fading until everything went black.

***

The process of regaining consciousness was a slow one. It took a long while for Hajime to properly come to, and even then, he could barely collect himself.

“H-hm…” Hajime sat up slowly, still feeling drowsy. His surroundings were instantly confusing, though there was one thing he was certain of, he was lying on the floor.

The lights were on, but Hajime's eyes needed adjusting. He waited for things to come into focus before standing up, not wanting to fall over. It took a lot of strength to push himself off of the floor, his body fragile and weak.

The dust, cobwebs, and piles of old boxes soon gave away Hajime's location. He was at the site of Byakuya's murder, where Mikan had become a blackened...the dinning room in the old building. What he was doing there, Hajime wasn't sure. He tried sifting through his memories, but they seemed blurry, as if cloaked in a cloud of black smoke. Monokuma had revealed his new motive, there had be arguing, Peko grabbed Hajime, and then everything went black.

Had Peko knocked him unconscious? No, that didn't seem right. She was a swords woman, not a ninja. She couldn't make Hajime pass out on cue, and both her hands were tied keeping Hajime prisoner. Desperately trying to focus, Hajime did his best to think back. He remembered being unable to see much, but hearing everything. There was talk of Nagito, he offered to assist...but how? Mikan...her name definitely came into play too.

"Hang on..." Hajime muttered to himself, suddenly struck by an idea. His fingers clambered up his neck, reaching just above his collar bone. It was only small, but his fingers stopped upon a delicate hole - tender to touch.

"So I was injected!" Hajime was able to draw to a conclusion, memories beginning to slot into place.

With approval of the others, Nagito drugged him, and now he found himself in the dinning hall of the old building. He wanted more answers. In search of the truth, Hajime headed straight for the double doors, ready to challenge those who had put him there. However, as Hajime tugged at the handles, nothing happened. The door attempted to fight its hinges, but Hajime wasn't strong enough. He pulled and pulled, but the door would not open, it just rattled. Someone had clearly locked it.

"Hey, open up!" Hajime pounded his fist on the door, hoping to capture someone's attention.

There was no reply, and the door showed no signs of life either.

All alone, he'd been locked in the old building.
Happy Birthday to Hajime Hinata for yesterday!!

So for Monokuma's new motive, he's encouraging a giant bloodbath inspired by the student council massacre. The others clearly don't trust Hajime, and could slowly begin to make the connection of Izuru. In the next chapter, something is going to happen that changes everything!! ;)

I hope you're all having a great 2017 so far, thanks for reading! :D
Chapter Five - Part Three

Chapter Notes

It's been a while, I'm super sorry!

When NDRV3 released back in January I got really paranoid for spoilers. So I abandoned all sites where I have access to Danganronpa (coming off tumblr has been REALLY hard. Oh and it's also why it took a while for me to reply to comments, since I was totally avoiding AO3). But then it got announced that NDRV3 isn't coming out until the end of September ;_; I can't go that long without writing, so I'm just going to do my best to stay out of the tags. Uni work is a lot, so I won't be back to posting weekly chapters or anything. But I also won't be taking a break from writing either, so I'll be trying my hardest to get content out.

Pretty pretty pretty please don't leave any comments with spoilers, or hinting at spoilers for the new game. I really appreciate it, thank youuu!! ^_^

Oh, and this story hit its year anniversary at the beginning of the month. Can't believe it's been over a year since I first posted this. SOOOO weird!! Thanks to all of you for sticking around for the journey!!

To make up for my absence, this chapter is longer than usual. But it's worth sticking around until the end, something exciting may be happening ;)

If you're coming back to read this, even after my 3 month break, then thank you so much for returning and all your support! And if you're new to the story, then hi & thanks for checking out my work!!!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being locked in the old building left Hajime feeling like a caged rat. He tried everything to escape at the beginning, but his efforts proved useless. He’d been following the same routine: Hammering at the door, calling out at the top of his voice, pacing the room in frustration, and temporarily giving up when greeted with silence.

Busting down the door was an option Hajime had long given up on. He’d tried several times, but the only result was a bruised shoulder. The wood was stronger than he'd anticipated, and the lock was holding up despite the pressure. No amount of kicking or shoving was going to work, the only thing that would free Hajime was a key.

It had crossed his mind to pick the lock, as it was something Hajime had seen before in movies. However, it soon hit him why he'd only ever seen it in movies and not the real world. Not only did he lack the knowledge of how to pick the lock, he lacked all tools needed in order to successfully escape. With not so much as a paperclip, Hajime didn't stand a chance. Monokuma’s claws would likely do the trick, or his magical 'va-va-valuse’ spell, but that was truly a last resort. Hajime didn’t want to face the humiliation and torment the bear would provide. Waiting it out seemed like the best option.

Left with nothing to do but sulk against the wall, Hajime let the minutes pass by. Surrounded by the
sound of silence, his ears picked up on the slightest of noises. It proved somewhat useful in the end, as he was granted forewarning when someone entered the old building.

Hajime heard the main door creaking to life, the hinges crying out. Then came the sound of footsteps along the corridor. Hajime had already positioned his back to the wall, directly opposite the locked door, so whoever came in would have to face him.

As the footsteps grew louder, Hajime felt his heart beginning to race. He was surprised at himself for feeling anxious, but the unknown nature of what was to come put him on edge.

Wide-eyed, Hajime watched as the door opened, thankful that someone was finally showing their face. With no idea what was going on, he felt extremely isolated. He hated it.

“Hajime!” Sonia, his visitor, called his name in surprise, as if she’d been expecting him to still be unconscious.

Out of everyone on the island, Hajime was rather relieved to see the Princess. “Sonia, what’s going on?” Hajime tried to approach her, but the Princess gestured for him to stay back.

“I ask for you to keep some distance,” Sonia asked politely, closing the door behind her. “If you get too close to the door, Fuyuhiko will insist on tying you up again.”

“Fuyuhiko wanted to tie me up?!” Hajime exclaimed.

“Do not worry, it did not happen.” Sonia hurriedly explained. “He was just trying to be cautious.”

“Yeah, a little too much if you ask me…” Hajime mumbled, shaking his head.

It was in that moment, Hajime noticed the tray Sonia was carrying in her hands. She placed it carefully on the floor, moving it towards Hajime with her shoe.

“You should eat.” Sonia said.

Hajime took a minute to study the tray and what it had to offer. A bottle of water, a plate of toast, a yoghurt (with spoon accompanying), and a packet of crackers.

“I’m not hungry, but thanks.” Hajime shook his head, the drowsiness was affecting his appetite.

“I shall leave it with you,” Sonia stated. “You might change your mind later.”

“How much longer are you keeping me here?” Hajime pressed. From Sonia’s comment, it was clear she hadn’t shown up to free him.

Ignoring his question entirely, Sonia attempted to tactfully change the subject. “It is my duty to tell you what has happened. Gundam said you were still unconscious during his visit.”

Hajime was intrigued for Sonia’s explanation. “Did you wanna sit down?” there was an uncomfortable tension lingering in the air with Sonia just standing by the door.

Nodding, Sonia lowered herself to the ground - though keeping a safe distance away from Hajime. She curled her legs up to the side, making sure to maintain her decency.

“What is the last thing you remember?” the princess asked.

Hajime took a second to reflect. “Uh, Monokuma announced the motive. Then Peko grabbed me, and I think I was injected.”
“That is right.” Sonia nodded. “That was around nine hours ago now, this is the third shift since it happened.”

“Shift?” Hajime wasn’t following.

“We are taking it in turns to check up on you,” Sonia elaborated. “Every three hours, someone will come by. We can keep your food and water supply replenished, and we let you out if you need the toilet.”

“You guys really are keeping me prisoner!” Hajime exclaimed, he couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“It was a group decision.” Sonia replied, avoiding naming names. “This is horrible for all of us, but we see it as the safest way.”

“Horrible for all of us?” Hajime repeated. “No, I’m the only one that’s going through horror. And your plan doesn’t even make sense. If I’m such a danger, then why aren’t I tied up? I mean, if you think I’m some sort of potential killer, why are you even here alone?”

“If someone were to come along in three hours time and find my body, it is obvious that you are the killer. You would be executed instantly.” Sonia explained. “There is no benefit of you killing me, thus it is safe for visiting you alone.”

“This isn’t necessary.” Hajime disputed. “I was staying out of the way, keeping to my cottage.”

“That was before the motive, Hajime.” Sonia sighed.

“That shouldn’t change anything.” Hajime huffed.

“You are talking to the wrong person about this,” Sonia lowered her head. “I do not believe in capturing anyone, but the group came to a decision, and I was outvoted.”

“Oh...well, thanks for sticking up for me...I guess.” Hajime recoiled his anger, feeling bad for snapping at the princess when she was on his side.

“Do not be mad at anyone, Hajime.” Sonia attempted to reason with him. “We are all scared.”

“What about me? Don’t you think I’m scared too?” Hajime complained, his tone hurt.

“Please, do not make me any guiltier than I already feel.” Sonia looked away, her shoulders lowering.

“What even is your plan? I’m going to stay a prisoner here in the old building until we’re in our sixties?!” Hajime couldn’t understand what they were doing.

Everything would be over in three days, but the others didn’t know that. To their belief, the killing game was still running. Last time, Monokuma had announced the graduation ceremony to the students. But his new motive would become pointless if they knew this now. There couldn’t be any promise of an escape yet.

“Please Hajime, I must remind you, I am not the one who decided this.” Sonia shook her head. “Save these questions for Nagito and Fuyuhiko.”

Hajime knew it was pointless to persist any further, Sonia clearly didn’t have the answers, and she was getting upset too. “Look, I know this wasn’t your decision…” Hajime lowered his tone. “But
Nagito and Fuyuhiko don’t rule this island. If you want to take a stand—"

“I am sorry, Hajime, but I think it is time I leave.” Sonia pushed herself off the ground, doing so daintily. “I have told you everything I can. I cannot do anything else to help you, besides offering food and water.”

“No, I’m sorry…” Hajime sighed, he was being manipulative without realising it, he shouldn’t preach. “You’ve been more than enough help talking to me.”

“This is a terrible situation, I hope we can resolve things.” Sonia chewed down on her bottom lip, as if fighting back tears.

“I hope so too, Sonia…” Hajime sighed.

“I must go now.” Sonia excused herself, already in the doorway. “I believe Ibuki is the next to visit, she will be here in three hours.”

With no clock in the room, Sonia’s words meant nothing, but Hajime appreciated being told all the same. It was nice to be in the know, Hajime felt less isolated.

Left alone in peace, Hajime tucked into the food. He made sure he chewed slowly, appreciating every mouthful. Not because he was enjoying the flavour, but because there was nothing else to do for the next three hours.

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Ibuki was the next to arrive, just like Sonia said. Hajime had no idea whether she was late or not, since he had no way of timekeeping, but he wanted to have some faith in the musician.

Ibuki burst into the room, head banging at a furious rate, singing loudly as she played the air guitar. Whether it was her own material or not, Hajime couldn’t tell, but whatever the song was, Hajime didn’t like it.

“Ibuki, hey…” Hajime attempted to greet her normally, but his words came out awkward. He waited for a response, but there was nothing. Ibuki continued singing.

“Ibuki!” Hajime called her name this time. If the purpose of her visit was to check up on him, it wouldn’t hurt for her to at least acknowledge his presence.

Hajime was on the verge of screaming her name, when he noticed the headphones disguised in Ibuki’s brightly coloured hair. She was singing along to the iPod in her hand, the source of the terrible song.

“IBUKI!” Hajime didn’t want to resort to yelling, but he couldn’t think of any other way to capture her attention.

At the price of torn vocal cords, the scream seemed to have worked. Ibuki finally stopped singing, and removed the headphones.

“Ibuki was listening to her music.” Ibuki pouted, irritated as if Hajime had interrupted. The headphones were temporarily resting around her neck.
“Yeah, I can see that…” Hajime replied, unsure what else to say. “So uh, what were you listening to?” it was a pathetic question, but he was thinking on the spot.

“Ibuki isn’t talking to you, it’s what the music is for.” Ibuki huffed, ignoring Hajime’s question. She cupped the headphones back over her ears, and resumed rocking out.

“Oh for fu-” Hajime cut himself short before he went into Fuyuhiko mode. “Can we at least talk?!”

Hajime waved his arms about, since talking didn’t seem to be working. He’d rather have no visitor than Ibuki purposely ignoring him.

The musician wasn’t being very careful. She was still lingering at the dining hall entrance, door swung wide open. Completely distracted, it would take nothing for Hajime to barge past her and escape. Thankfully for Ibuki, Hajime wasn’t in the mood for drama, and didn’t feel like making an escape either, but it was humorous to think about all the same.

Additionally, Hajime noticed that Ibuki hadn’t brought a tray of food with her like Sonia had done. It seemed that food was only being offered at meal times, and wasn’t a complimentary service with all visits.

“La la la, Ibuki still isn’t speaking to you!” like a disobedient child, Ibuki voiced her rebellion.

“Can you at least sit down?!” having Ibuki in the doorway made Hajime uncomfortable.

Once again, Ibuki took off her headphones. “Ibuki is busy listening to her music.”

Hajime decided to make the most of Ibuki’s attention. “I know you’re being forced to see me, but please just sit down. We don’t even have to talk.”

It seemed that his words got through to her, as Ibuki finally closed the door. Manually lowering the volume of her iPod, she sat cross-legged on the floor. She was still listening to her music, but in a much calmer fashion. With less head banging, she wasn’t trying to make a statement anymore.

“Can I ask you something?” Hajime said, that a question in itself. He no longer had to shout since Ibuki had turned the music down.

Ibuki didn’t reply, but she didn’t protest either.

Hajime took this as a sign to continue, and went on to ask his question. “Would you maybe be willing to hear me out?”

Ibuki didn’t answer right away, needing a few minutes to make up her mind. Showing that she finally had an answer, Ibuki took off her headphones and lay them to rest around her neck. “Ibuki will listen…”

“Thank you!” Hajime smiled, appreciative of her co-operation. “I know you’re ignoring me because you think I’m some sort of traitor-”

Ibuki jumped in. “No, that’s not the reason.”

“It’s not?” Hajime frowned.

“No.” Ibuki shook her head.

It was strange to hear Ibuki so quiet, Hajime couldn’t understand why she wasn’t saying more on the matter. “Then...why?”
“I was ignoring you because Ibuki is tired of the serious stuff.” Ibuki sighed. “We just lost Mahiru and Souda. Mahiru was so kind, she always happy to watch Ibuki’s concerts and take pictures. And Souda, he made Ibuki these amazing hands.”

Hajime looked to Ibuki’s robotic hands. “They are pretty amazing.”

“Without them, Ibuki would never be able to play music again.” Ibuki continued. “But now they’re both dead. And Monokuma has released a horrible motive, and you’re locked up in here. Ibuki hates it. I...I just want everyone to be friends again. I miss that.”

“Oh…” Hajime was so wrapped up in his own problems, he hadn’t stopped to think that the others were probably hurting too. Ibuki wasn’t personally mad at him, it was the weight of the world on her shoulders bringing her down. “We don’t have to talk about serious stuff.”

A smile instantly found its way to the musician’s face. “Then what can we talk about?”

“Anything you want.” Hajime shrugged, he had the time to spare.

“Music!” Ibuki exclaimed, excitedly untangling the headphones from around her neck, and holding them out to Hajime. “Listen to this!”

Hajime really wasn’t interested, but with the amount of excitement on her face, rejecting Ibuki’s offer would be downright cruel. Somewhat reluctantly, Hajime placed the headphones over his ears. Meanwhile, Ibuki began flicking through the iPod’s library.

Without warning, Ibuki pressed play; the music blared into Hajime’s ears. Instinctively, Hajime snatched the iPod from Ibuki’s hand, his fingers diving straight for the volume button. Ibuki didn’t seem to mind, too busy singing along to the words.

“What does Hajime think?” Ibuki stopped singing just to talk.

“Um, yeah…” Hajime wracked his brain for something positive to say. The heavy shredding of the guitars hurt his brain, and the vocals seemed incredibly aggressive. “The guitars are really powerful in this…”

“Ibuki will tour the world with this song one day!” Ibuki exclaimed.

“This is your stuff?” Hajime raised his eyebrows. He’d only heard Ibuki’s live material before. The song wasn’t to his taste, but thanks to the recording studio, it sounded polished.

Ibuki nodded. “Monomi gave me this iPod. She said she wanted to learn as much about her students as possible. She’s pretty annoying, but I thought this was cool of her.”

Now aware it really was Ibuki’s work, Hajime saw the song in a different light. He couldn’t enjoy it, but he was beginning to appreciate the amount of hard work that had gone into it. The guitars were like a powerhouse.

“The guitars are amazing.” Hajime found himself smiling, enjoying sharing in someone else’s talent.

“Ibuki can teach Hajime!” Ibuki offered, her voice loaded with enthusiasm.

"Oh, I dunno..." Hajime shrugged. "I've never even held a guitar."

"Everyone starts that way!" Ibuki insisted. "You'll never learn if you think like that."

She made a fair point. "Well, it might be fun." Hajime found himself warming to the idea.
"It will be sooo much fun jamming together." Ibuki cheered. "We could even form a band. I'm sure everyone would love Hajime again. No one can resist a musician."

Strumming on a guitar didn’t seem like the solution to winning his friends back, but Ibuki seemed happy, and Hajime didn’t want to be the one to take that away.

"Ibuki can get her guitar right now!" Ibuki stood to her feet, heading for the door.

"No! Don’t worry..." Hajime insisted, attempting to stop her before she ran off. "You can bring it for me next time you visit, then I have something to look forward to."

"Bring it for Hajime?" Ibuki frowned. "No, the guitar is Ibuki’s!"

"But you just said you were gonna teach me..." Hajime was baffled.

"Ibuki will teach you an instrument, but if we become a serious band, you can't have the guitar." Ibuki narrowed her eyes at him.

"Okay, okay!" Hajime wasn't going to fight it, he didn't really care in the first place. "Then, surprise me. I'll take whatever instrument you think I should play." at least there was less chance of him offending her by leaving the option open.

"Woo, a surprise for Hajime." Ibuki stood in the doorway, swinging on the open door. "Ibuki will be back in a few hours with something for you to play!"

"Do you know who's coming to visit next?" Hajime asked, crossing his fingers it was Chiaki.

"Hmmm, Peko!" Ibuki answered, sounding confident in what she said. "Catch ya later, Hajime!"

"Wait, you need your iPod back." Hajime removed the headphones from around his neck, offering them to Ibuki.

Ibuki shook her head, refusing to take them. "It's Ibuki's present to Hajime. Listen to the music on there, you can be inspired for our session."

Hajime wasn’t sure how he was meant to be inspired when he didn't even know the instrument he'd be playing. However, the iPod could prove entertaining. "Thanks, Ibuki."

As Ibuki skipped away, Hajime took the time to reflect. The musician had entered the room ignoring him, but left with a smile on her face. He was beginning to build bridges with his classmates again, and it felt wonderful.

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With another three hours to kill, Hajime was grateful that Ibuki had left behind the iPod. He didn’t plan on listening to her music - that was worse than staring at the blanks walls - but the device had more on offer. Ibuki mentioned in passing that it was originally Monomi’s iPod, a way of getting to know her students. Could there be more on there for him to find?

It was Hajime’s first time properly inspecting the iPod, since Ibuki had operated everything before. As Hajime analysed the musical device, it became very apparent that it was Monomi’s property.
The iPod had no passcode, allowing Hajime straight in. He was greeted with a sickly sweet, pink, cupcake background, set by the iPod's original owner.

An internet application caught Hajime’s eye right away, but it crashed whenever he tried to load it - Monokuma had clearly disabled it. Internet access would be far too much of a luxury for the killing school trip.

Thankfully, there were other applications on offer. They included: a camera, a photo gallery, the music library, a calculator, a calendar, and a weather app. One by one, Hajime browsed through them - only skipping the calculator for he knew what to expect.

The calendar opened up at a new year, beginning January 1st. It seemed that Monokuma didn’t want the students knowing the real date, or even the month. Hajime couldn’t help but grin, January 1st just so happened to be his birthday. He began to daydream about his other classmate’s birthdays, at least those he could remember. Would they ever get to celebrate them again?

He scrolled through the entire year, using his thumb to do so, but nothing was marked on the calendar. All in all, the app was useless, and simply wasting memory. Someone might as well delete it.

Next up, Hajime viewed the camera application. When it finally loaded, it went instantly to the front facing camera. Hajime squirmed, not expecting to see himself at such an unflattering angle.

“Gross…” he muttered.

The lens was nowhere near as impressive as the camera Mahiru had owned, but it made for a make-do mirror. Since Hajime hadn’t used the bathroom yet, he hadn’t been able to see himself since waking up in the old building. His face looked greasier than he would have liked, but it was to be expected with no sink around. As for his hair, it surprisingly wasn’t looking too bad. He gave it the once over, running his hand through it, and it looked as good as usual.

In the spur of the moment, Hajime raised the camera above his head, angling it as best he could. With the camera already on him, he couldn’t resist the opportunity to take a photo. He felt as if he was making a mark on the virtual world, documenting his time as a prisoner. He smiled at the camera, it seemed rather odd given the circumstance, but he couldn’t take a photo looking miserable. He reasoned with himself that it was okay to smile, for he had something to be happy about; the rewrite would be over in three days!

One picture was more than enough, since Hajime didn’t want to start a photo shoot. He closed the app, not ready for the job as a full-blown photographer. Instead, he moved on to the photo gallery - curious to see his picture, as well as what other photos might be on there.

The newest of the bunch, his selfie, was the first picture to load. Hajime didn’t linger on it for too long, as he knew he’d start picking out imperfections. However, considering he’d been unconscious all morning, it didn’t make for a bad picture. Somewhat satisfied, he swiped left, curious to see what else was in store.

It quickly became apparent that Hajime wasn’t the only one who decided to use the iPod as a selfie device. The next twenty or so pictures were all of Ibuki, the musician clearly enjoying her time in front of the camera. She’d gone to the effort of changing up her pose in every photo, from sticking out her tongue, to making a peace sign, to covering her hand with her mouth - she’d thought of it all.

Continuing to swipe left, Hajime came across more photos. There were pictures of beach sunsets, waves lapping in the distance. With no one in the photos, Hajime couldn’t tell who had taken them, but they looked stunning - the kind of pictures Mahiru’s creative eye would pick out. Hajime
couldn’t understand why Mahiru would use an iPod for pictures, when she had her camera, but there were many possible explanations.

Perhaps Mahiru had left her camera in her room, and only had the iPod to hand. Maybe Mahiru was teaching someone, her subject following her lead with the iPod. Someone could have been at the beach listening to music, and snapped a photo in the moment. Hajime knew he would never learn the truth about the photos, but he bet there was a great story behind them.

After that, there was only one photo left. Hajime recognised what was going on as soon as he saw it. The picture was from the sports day they’d held many days ago. Mid action, the photo had captured the students during their relay race. Hajime spotted himself at the sideline, cheering on his team. Reflecting on the memory brought an instant smile to his face, he felt as if he could stare at it forever. It was one of their strongest moments on the island, the picture had captivated true friendship. He loved it so much, he made it the iPod’s new background.

At first, Hajime believed Nagito to be the photographer behind the sports day picture, as he was the only one who hadn’t joined in. However, looking closely, he was able to make out a shadow. The one taking the picture was none other than Monomi!

Out of pure boredom, Hajime looked at the weather app. Despite having no internet, it was somehow running. Perhaps Monokuma had programmed it so say what he wanted. To no surprise, the app showed sunshine and scorching temperatures every day, there was nothing less to be expected of Jabberwock Island.

Day 19: Sunshine.
Day 20: Sunshine.
Day 21: Sunshine.
Day 22:...

What Hajime said next was unexpected, it broke the pattern.


Storms on Jabberwock Island? That didn’t sound right. The students hadn't seen a single drop of rain, besides from the freak storm brought on by Monokuma’s arrival. Day twenty-two would be their last day in the program. Was Monokuma going to ruin their final hours with violent weather just to be spiteful? Hajime couldn’t tell, but it seemed to be the likely explanation.

With the iPod, came a clock displayed at the top of the screen. It allowed Hajime to watch the time pass until Peko’s visit. He occupied himself by listening to all the music the iPod had to offer. Thankfully, there were songs that hadn’t been performed by Ibuki. In fact, there was practically every genre of music on the device. It was Monomi’s way of keeping all her students happy.

As the iPod marked six pm, Hajime heard the main door creak open. As quick as a flash, Hajime switched off the iPod and pocketed the device. Peko didn’t have the authority to take it away, but Hajime wasn’t in the mood to test her.

“Hajime.” Peko greeted Hajime with a firm nod. She used one hand to let herself into the room, the other supporting a tray. “I have your dinner.”

Feeling eager, Hajime peered at the tray. A bottle of water, a plate of pasta, and a bowl of jelly for afters. Despite being a prisoner, Hajime wasn’t being rationed. It was a healthy and well put together
meal.

Peko passed the tray down as she finished locking up.

His appetite getting the better of him, Hajime dived straight in with a fork. “Thanks!”

Peko knelt beside Hajime on the floor. “Has everything been okay here?”

“Well, as okay as things can be when you’re locked up against your will.” Hajime couldn’t help but comment. “But I’m not dead if that’s what you mean.”

“Clearly.” Peko remarked, aware she wasn’t talking to a corpse. With her ‘responsibility’ out of the way, she let Hajime eat his food in peace, enjoying the silence herself.

Hajime, however, wasn’t so keen on the quiet atmosphere. With company only being offered to him every three hours, he wanted to make the most of his time. Since it seemed that Peko had nothing to say, he knew it was up to him to get the conversation rolling.

“So, you haven’t been tempted by the motive?” Hajime raised his eyebrows in a challenging fashion. “If you kill everyone besides Fuyuhiko, you could get him out of here.”

“That is against my young master’s wishes.” Peko replied.

“You actually spoke to him about it?” Hajime raised his voice in surprise, spitting food by accident. “He consulted me before I even mentioned it,” Peko said. “It is now my duty to protect everyone on this island.”

“What are you talking about?” Hajime frowned.

“My young master has explained to me that we are all allies here, and I must protect my allies. He insists I must look out for the others like I do for him.” Peko explained.

“Ah, I’d been wondering about that.” Hajime remarked. Since Peko’s identity reveal, her behaviour hadn’t changed at all. She was still treating the others like her friends. It seemed that Fuyuhiko wanted her to be part of the team, and Peko was happy to follow orders. Though Hajime couldn’t help but wonder if deep down Peko had grown fond of the others. “So I guess you’ve poisoned my pasta then?”

“Excuse me?” Peko wasn’t following.

“It was a joke,” Hajime tried to explain, though it didn’t seem so funny now that he was explaining it. “Since you’re allied with everyone else, you have no reason to protect me.”

“You’re an ally too, my young master said so.” Peko said, completely serious.

“Oh come on!” Hajime scoffed. “There’s more chance of Monokuma gaining a conscience than there is Fuyuhiko considering me an ally.”

“If he didn’t, I wouldn’t be here right now giving you food,” Peko said sternly. “If you don’t believe me, then I suggest you speak to him later.”

Her answer was short; Peko didn’t appear to have much to say about the matter.

“And Hajime,” Peko looked to him, something clearly on her mind. “I don’t blame you for what you did, I just wanted you to know that.”
“Huh?” her serious comment caught Hajime off guard. “You mean lying about the reserve course?”

“No, the student council massacre.” Peko clarified.

“I...I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Hajime clammed up, afraid that Peko was getting dangerously close to the truth.

“You don’t have to lie to me,” Peko said. “I know the truth...Izuru.”

Hajime didn’t see the point in lying further, for his face was giving everything away. However, he didn’t want to tell Peko too much either. He simply sat there with a gormless look on his face, able to utter one word. “H-how…”

“Monokuma said enough, it was obvious,” Peko replied. “Though I don’t think anyone else understood.”

“Are...are you going to tell them?” Hajime asked weakly.

“No.” Peko said bluntly.

“No?” repeated Hajime.

“Hajime, while serving my young master, I have done many things that are deemed morally unacceptable,” Peko said. “I understand what it’s like to take drastic action in order to survive.”

“You really mean that?”

“I do.” Peko nodded. “You did what you had to do to save yourself, I would do the same for my Young Master if he asked me. You were cornered, and I will not hold that against you.”

Hajime shot her an appreciative smile. “T-thank you, Peko.”

“There is something that leaves me curious, though it isn’t my place to ask.” Peko frowned, appearing deep in thought. “Izuru Kamukura is meant to possess many talents, and if that’s true, it would have been easy for you to disguise your reserve course nature.”

“I-” Hajime opened his mouth to speak, but Peko wouldn’t let him finish.

“I do.” Peko nodded. “You did what you had to do to save yourself, I would do the same for my Young Master if he asked me. You were cornered, and I will not hold that against you.”

Hajime shot her an appreciative smile. “T-thank you, Peko.”

“Let’s leave the past behind us.”

Hajime didn’t fight it; he was more than happy to drop the subject. It seemed that Peko had his back. It was a little surprising that she wasn’t going to tell Fuyuhiko, but perhaps it was all for Fuyuhiko’s good in the long run; he could fly off the handle if he learnt the truth.

"My young master's protection will always be my first priority," Peko warned him. "If you show any signs of repeating what you did before, I will not hesitate to kill you. However, we've been stuck in this killing game nearly twenty days, and you've shown no signs of plotting a murder. I believe what you did before was truly self-defense. So long as you give me reason to keep trusting you, your secret is safe. Step one foot out of line, and it isn't."

Peko's words were stern and scary, but Hajime saw where she was coming from. "I understand. You don't have to worry, I'm not gonna kill anyone."

“I think it’s time for me to go,” Peko stood to her feet. “Before I leave, do you need to use the
“Uh…” Hajime sat there awkwardly.

“You won’t be able to go for another three hours.” Peko reminded him, hinting that it was probably a good idea.

“Yeah, if it’s okay. I’d like to go.” it was humiliating enough being a prisoner, things would get feel even worse if Hajime was a prisoner who’d peed himself.

“I’ll escort you.” Peko waited in the doorway. “I doubt you will, but don’t try and make a run for it.”

With a bamboo sword resting against her back, Hajime had no plans of the sort. Peko was putting her trust in Hajime by keeping his Izuru secret quiet, he couldn’t risk breaking that by trying to escape.

It felt nice to leave the dining hall and stretch his legs down the corridor, the minor change of scenery made a difference. Peko walked slightly behind Hajime, as if to guard him. Their journey was carried out in silence, neither of them having anything else to say.

“I’ll wait here.” Peko announced, standing beside the toilet door.

“Right…” Hajime stepped inside the cubicle, sincerely hoping the walls weren’t thin.

Once Hajime finished up in the bathroom, Peko marched him straight back to the dining hall. She didn’t bother coming inside again, she had other places to be. Saying her goodbyes to Hajime, she went on her way, his secret sealed on her lips.

“Looks like it’s just you and me, my friend…” Hajime muttered, looking down at the jelly on his tray. Resting in a comfortable position, Hajime helped himself to the dessert. He continued talking to the food, but really it was just a way to vocalise his thoughts. “Don’t worry, this place isn’t all bad. At least we have this…”

From his back pocket, he presented the iPod he’d hidden earlier. Coast clear, he was safe to play music again. Hajime flicked through the different tracks until he found one that took his fancy. Out of boredom, he wobbled the jelly in time to the beat - this fun lasted no more than two minutes.

“Well, I guess this is goodbye.” snatching up the spoon, Hajime dug into the jelly, savouring the raspberry flavour that graced his tongue. In six mouthfuls, it was gone. With his wobbly friend digesting in his stomach, Hajime was once again alone.

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Hajime kept an eye on the iPod’s clock, ensuring he switched off the device a few minutes before nine. The music player was all that was keeping him sane, stopping him from overthinking in a dusty old room, he was not going to risk losing it.

Come nine, the door to the main entrance opened; the next visitor on their way. It took them no more than a minute to reach Hajime, keys clattering as they unlocked the door.

“Nagito!” Hajime called out his name in surprise, it was the last person he had expected to see. How
anyone had convinced Nagito to visit Hajime was a mystery in itself.

“You remember my name, how talented of you.” Nagito quipped, locking the door behind him. “If you can quote the names of everyone on this island, perhaps the school board will offer you a place on the main course.”

So this is how it’s going to be… Hajime thought to himself, gritting his teeth so he didn’t snap. Nagito had barely walked through the door, and he was already playing unfairly.

“You don’t have to stay,” Hajime said coldly. “You’ve come to check on me, and as you can see, I’m fine.”

“There’s no need to be so hostile, Hajime.” Nagito shook his head, showing no signs of leaving. “I want to talk to you.”

“Don’t you mean ridicule?” Hajime challenged him.

“Come now Hajime, no one likes those that whine.” pocketing the keys, Nagito sat down beside Hajime, not worried about keeping any distance between them. “I’m here to talk.”

Something about Nagito seemed truthful, so Hajime was willing to give him a chance. “I guess if there’s something specific you want to talk about…”

“That’s right, there is.” Nagito nodded, finally able to speak without the sarcasm. “If you wouldn’t mind, I’m interested in discussing Monokuma’s latest motive.”

“R-right…” Hajime said, of course, it was going to be something serious. “Yeah, that’s fine.” he had nothing better to do.

“That motive would have been perfect for you,” Nagito sighed, sounding disappointed. “Had you been who you said you were.”

“Perfect?” Hajime gasped, it wasn’t the word he’d have used.

“We could have gotten you off the island, the ultimate hope could live on.” Nagito explained himself.

“I’m surprised you’re not busy encouraging one of the others to take the bait.” Hajime rolled his eyes. He regretted the comment seconds after he said it, fearing he might be putting ideas in Nagito’s head.

“The circumstances are wrong.” Nagito didn’t agree. “It doesn’t work with the others.”

“And why’s that?” Hajime frowned.

“The Ultimate Hope - Sacrificing other ultimates so he can be free of despair. Sacrificing the other ultimates so he can return home and bring hope. That would be inspiring.” Nagito’s eyes shone as he spoke. “But talented students on the same level killing one another isn’t a hopeful sacrifice, it’s a despairing bloodbath; a cowardly way to freedom.”

“I’m surprised.” Hajime scratched his head, at least he didn’t have to worry about Nagito manipulating anyone.

“Being more specific, I wanted to talk to you about being the ‘Ultimate Hope’.” Nagito used air quotations.
“I’m not the Ultimate Hope, remember?!” Hajime wasn’t in the mood for their conversation to go around in circles.

“I know Hajime, my memory isn’t that fragile.” Nagito folded his arms. “But I want to ask you more about this lie. Something has been bothering me since the motive reveal.”

“And what’s that?” Hajime asked, though he already knew what was coming.

“Izuru Kamukura: Ultimate Hope.” Nagito stated. “Isn’t it a funny coincidence? The reserve course guinea pig, and the reserve course student in disguise, both share the same talent. Though I say ‘share’ in the loosest term possible. Izuru had the title forced upon him, and you chose it for yourself. Still, it’s something to think about.”

“If you’re trying to imply something, just say it.” Hajime narrowed his eyes. “I’m not playing your manipulative games, or answering your fixed questions.”

“I’m just interested in the truth,” Nagito replied reasonably. “It’s impossible that you knew Izuru; not only were our memories erased, but his identity was kept top secret by the board. Did you call yourself the Ultimate Hope too by coincidence, or is there more to the story?”

“I called myself the Ultimate Hope, because it was my best chance of staying under cover.” Hajime shrugged, trying to remain calm. “I didn’t want to get caught up in a massive web of lies.” though that was exactly what he’d done.

“I’m not done investigating yet.” Nagito announced.

“You’re investigating this?!” Hajime exclaimed.

“Perhaps investigating is a little harsh, but I’m looking into Izuru Kamukura and your connection to the Ultimate Hope.” Nagito replied.

“Why did you come and ask me if you don’t believe me?” Hajime was annoyed at having his time wasted and coming under the third degree for absolutely nothing.

Nagito avoided Hajime’s question, standing to his feet. “Pass me that, and I’ll take it for you.” he pointed to Hajime’s empty dinner tray, changing the subject entirely.

Hajime didn’t fight the change of their conversation, as he was relieved to be off the matter. It bothered him that Nagito was looking into Izuru Kamukura, as he was coming dangerously close to the truth, but there was nothing Hajime could do to stop it.

“Here.” Hajime passed the tray, glad to see it go. “And before you ask, I don’t need the bathroom.”

“I’ll be on my way then.” Nagito announced, fishing around for the keys. “Perhaps by the next time I see you, you’ll have remembered more to tell me.”

Unlikely.

“Bye, Nagito.” Hajime dismissed the luckster, giving him the cue to leave.

Nagito’s visit hadn’t gone as terribly as Hajime feared. Focused on asking questions, he’d dropped a lot of the aggression. Hajime couldn’t help but wonder, was Nagito really there because he wanted to learn about Izuru, or did a part of him want to see Hajime?
The hours that followed came and went, time ticking away on the music player. The Monokuma announcement sounded at ten, the time most students went to sleep. Hajime thought about getting some shut-eye, but decided to stay awake for his midnight visitor. He didn’t feel like sleeping, only to be disturbed to shortly afterwards.

Listening to the same few songs on loop was beginning to lose its novelty, and Hajime had stared at the pictures in the gallery over and over. There was nothing to eat, and he was starting to need the bathroom again. To keep himself occupied, and to provide a distraction for his nagging bladder, Hajime took to pacing around the room.

He counted how many steps it took him to walk from one end of the room to the other. He took large strides, seeing how few steps as possible it could take. He walked in a straight line, one foot crossing the other, pretending he were on a tightrope - at least there were no consequences when he lost his footing and tripped to the side. He kept himself active to stop his mind from giving up.

Luckily, Hajime’s midnight visitor arrived before he could reach full breaking point. Nagito hadn’t told him who was coming, but Hajime was glad for the surprise. A smile lit up his face when he saw the pink haired girl walk into the room.

“Chiaki!” Hajime gasped. “I didn’t think you were coming. I did kinda tell you to stay away…”

“Sorry...I wanted to come sooner,” Chiaki apologised. “But Fuyuhiko arranged everything, and I couldn’t really object.”

“No, it’s fine. I’m just happy to see you.” Hajime smiled, happy to see a friendly face. The others hadn’t exactly been horrible to him, but Chiaki was truly on Hajime’s side.

Chiaki closed the dining room door for privacy. Unlike the others, she went straight to Hajime’s side, sitting herself down next to him happily. “Do you need the bathroom? The door is open if you want to go…”

“Yeah, if that’s okay.” Hajime jumped to his feet, heading straight to the door. He wanted to make the most of not being guarded while using the bathroom. After his awkward toilet encounter with Peko, it would be nice to go in private.

Making the most of his new-found freedom, Hajime took a casual stroll to the toilet; he was under no pressure to hurry.

Despite thinking he was alone, there was a guest waiting for Hajime as he emerged from the cubicle. Chiaki was standing by the door, her back resting against the wall, distracted by a handheld gaming console.

“Oh…” her presence caught Hajime by surprise. “I thought you were waiting inside…”

“Sorry, I wasn’t spying on you.” Chiaki apologised. “Since everyone is in bed, I thought I could let you outside. It might be nice to get some air.”

It would be more than nice. “Are you sure everyone else is asleep? What about the people on night shifts?” Hajime wanted to be sure before committing.

“They took alarms to their rooms.” Chiaki claimed. “So long as you’re quiet, we should be fine. At
least...I hope so.”

“I…” Hajime was on the verge of agreeing but changed his mind at the last minute. “I can’t, it’s too risky. Someone could be looking out their cottage window, or taking a walk to the hotel for a midnight snack.”

“I can keep guard.” Chiaki offered, wanting to be as helpful as possible.

“If we get caught, they'll tie me up with an apple in my mouth,” Hajime knew he was being dramatic, but he wanted to get his point across. “I’ve broken everyone’s trust enough already. I should stay inside.”

“If you’re sure…” Chiaki said, not seeming certain herself.

“I am.” Hajime nodded, heading in the direction of the dining hall. “Besides, there’s nothing stopping us if I change my mind tomorrow.”

“That’s true.” Chiaki smiled. “We can go back inside.”

Following Chiaki’s lead, they returned to the dining hall. Unlike Hajime’s other ‘guards’, she didn’t bother locking the double doors, or even shutting them. Hajime enjoyed seeing out into the hallway, it made him feel less like a prisoner.

“I brought some stuff…” Chiaki murmured, busy delving into her backpack. One by one, she pulled items free, scattering them on the floor.

Hajime peered curiously at the items as he watched her unpack, it was giving him something to look forward to.

“I know you ate earlier, but I figured you might be hungry.” Chiaki motioned to the snacks she’d brought, ranging from chocolate to nuts, to crackers. “And there’s water too.”

Hajime dived in for one of the water bottles, extremely grateful to Chiaki. Unscrewing the lid, he looked on to see what else she had to bring.

“It must be really boring stuck in here, so I brought this!” with an excited smile on her face, Chiaki presented her handheld gaming console. “There are so many games on here, so there are lots of genres for you to try.”

“You want me to take this?” Hajime asked in surprise, he knew how much Chiaki loved the console.

Chiaki nodded.

“But...won’t you be bored without it?” Hajime questioned, feeling guilty to deprive her.

“I’m not the one locked in an old building…” Chiaki managed half a smile. “I’ll be fine, you need it more.”

“Thanks, Chiaki!” Hajime showed her a warm smile. “I’ll give it back as soon as I’m out of here.” would he be able to keep that promise? Would the others let him out before the rewrite finished?

“There’s something else too.” Chiaki delved back into her bag. Rolled up, as tightly as it would go, there was a sleeping bag. Chiaki unclipped the buckles, allowing the sleeping bag to unroll into its full form. “The floor doesn’t look very comfortable.”

Hajime stared at the sleeping bag in delight; he hadn’t been looking forward to sleeping on the floor.
“I don’t know how much sleep you’ll get…” Chiaki frowned. “Gundam will be here at three, and Fuyuhiko at six.”

“Yeah, middle of the night checks up don’t seem like the best idea.” Hajime sighed, though he knew he’d be grateful if he suddenly needed the bathroom during the night. “Maybe I’ll sleep through it.” he said hopefully, though he knew he was too much of a light sleeper for that.

Chiaki stayed with Hajime for as long as she could. She helped him set up the games console, and talked him through all the different kind of games she had on there - some instantly caught Hajime’s eye. As much as she wanted to stay, and actually play the games with him, she knew it would look suspicious if she left the old building late. Her visit had already lasted close to an hour, longer than anyone else that had come to see him.

Chiaki turned the lights off as she left, meaning Hajime didn’t have to leave the comfort of the sleeping bag to do so. Hajime was more than happy to go to sleep. He’d decided to leave the gaming console until morning, so it gave him something to look forward to. Gundam would be visiting soon, but there was time to sleep for at least two hours.

Gundam’s arrival stirred Hajime from his sleep. Hajime stared up at the dark ceiling as Gundam’s heavy footsteps echoed along the hall, his boots stomping. As Gundam got closer and closer, Hajime realised he really wasn’t in the mood for talking. He’d gotten barely any sleep, so was already feeling grumpy. As a last minute decision, Hajime closed his eyes. When Gundam walked into the room, Hajime appeared fast asleep. Gundam seemed to believe it, as he didn’t turn on the lights. Hajime could tell because their bright nature would have blinded him - even with his eyes closed.

Within five minutes, Gundam left. The sound of the key in the door told Hajime that he’d gone, not bothering to stick around with Hajime ‘asleep’. Left alone in peace, Hajime was able to drift straight back off to sleep. He didn’t wake again until six, the time of Fuyuhiko’s visit.

Caught in a deep sleep, Hajime didn’t wake up until Fuyuhiko was already in the room. Fuyuhiko wasn’t considerate enough to quietly close the dining hall door, maybe even slamming it on purpose to wake Hajime.

“F-Fuyuhiko…” Hajime sat up with a start. Having opened his eyes, he couldn’t fall back to sleep again like he had with Gundam.

“Yeah?” Fuyuhiko narrowed his eyes, instantly defensive.

“I wasn’t asking anything.” Hajime yawned.

“Oh.” Fuyuhiko frowned. “I didn’t bring you breakfast. Figured it was too early.”

It was too early, Hajime planned on going back to sleep once Fuyuhiko left. He’d rather wait until later, and properly enjoy the food. “Good decision.”

“I know it’s a good decision, that’s why I made it.” Fuyuhiko said, short of patience. “Do you need the bathroom?!”

“I’m okay.” Hajime shook his head, it was obvious from Fuyuhiko’s hostile tone that he didn’t want to escort him. Hajime also couldn’t be bothered to move from the warm, cosy, sleeping bag.

“Alright…” Fuyuhiko seemed unsure of what to say next. “Well, I think I’m gonna go. Just came to check on you, and you’re obviously fine.”
“You got up at six in the morning to see me for one minute.” Hajime couldn’t help but laugh. “I bet tying me up doesn’t seem like the best idea now.”

“Don’t question what we did.” Fuyuhiko scowled. “In the moment, it felt like the right thing to do. We were scared.”

Hajime picked up on the use of past tense. “Does that mean...it doesn’t feel like the right thing anymore? It’s okay to change your mind. I won’t judge.” he was trying to lighten the mood with gentle teasing, but it wasn’t well received.

“Don’t, Hajime.” Fuyuhiko shut him down. “I don’t like keeping you here, but right now, it’s what we’ve gotta do.”

“Because you feel in control? It takes away the guilt of Mahiru?” Hajime challenged him.

“What did you say?” Fuyuhiko was taken back.

“You feel guilty about Mahiru.” Hajime repeated, knowing that he was right. “If you’d just spoken to her about Twilight Syndrome...she never would have gone to the restaurant where she and Souda died. You feel guilty.”

“You don’t know how I feel.” Fuyuhiko raised his voice. “No one knows how I feel.”

“Guilt is written all over your face!” Hajime exclaimed. “It’s why you’re trying so hard to be nice to the others, and it’s why you’ve tied me up. You’re trying to set things right.”

“Don’t analyse me.” Fuyuhiko crossed his arms. “You’re in here cuz you’re a threat.”

“I’m not a threat,” Hajime argued back. “Nagito is a threat! Everyone who has died so far, died because he meddled. He manipulated and played people, his luck took control. Nagito is a threat. Yeah, I lied to you. But never once have I even attempted a murder.”

“We have Nagito under control.” Fuyuhiko replied, though Hajime didn’t believe him. Letting out a sigh, Fuyuhiko softened his tone. “I don’t wanna fight, Hajime.”

“Nor do I!” Hajime said. “But it’s kinda hard not to when you’re being treated like a prisoner.”

“It’s not like you’re gonna be in here for forever…” Fuyuhiko admitted. “Just give it another day, okay?”

“You’ll let me go tomorrow?” Hajime was surprised.

“Yeah...maybe.” Fuyuhiko couldn’t give a straight answer. “Obviously we’re not gonna keep you in here forever, that’s just cruel. Give it a couple days for everything to pass over, don’t do anything dangerous, and you can go.”

"That would be good." Hajime managed to smile.

"....Anyway," Fuyuhiko changed the subject, outstretching his arms. "I've got stuff to do, so I'm gonna leave.”

Hajime had a strong suspicion that this was an excuse, but he didn't really care. If Fuyuhiko wanted to leave, then he should do so.

"Sonia will stop by in three hours with your breakfast." Fuyuhiko announced, heading towards the exit.
"I'll be counting down the minutes..." Hajime muttered.

As Fuyuhiko lingered in the doorway, he had one last thing to say. "Just hang on Hajime." there was less hatred in his eyes than before, it made a nice change. Hajime felt as if it was the old Fuyuhiko shining through.

Knowing he only had one day left as a prisoner filled Hajime with hope. Even if he was restricted to just his cottage, it was better than his current situation. Well...anything was better than his current situation. He felt like an idiot for moaning about being cooped up in his cottage the other day, it seemed like paradise in comparison.

With dreams of freedom, Hajime fell back off into the world of the unconscious. Sonia arrived with his breakfast tray at nine, Hajime’s appetite having fully developed by this point. She kept him company while he ate, there to keep an eye just in case he choked. There was less tension between them than the day previous, likely due to the fact neither of them addressed Hajime’s situation. Sonia found other topics of conversation. It was close to small talk, but anything was better than fighting. The rest of Hajime’s day seemed to follow the same pattern, sessions of small talk. It was neither exhilarating nor life changing, but it was better than being accused of as a traitor. Hajime wasn’t sure why his classmates were ignoring the subject. Were they tired of fighting? Were they beginning to regret being so hasty in their actions? Or maybe they’d made some sort of pact not to trigger Hajime any further. Whatever it was, Hajime was just relieved not to be under constant interrogation.

Of course, not everyone was willing to be so overlooking. Though Ibuki and Peko had been pleasant in their visits (Ibuki's chosen instrument for Hajime was a triangle), Nagito wasn’t so quick in letting Hajime forget what he’d done. He was still heavily sarcastic, and spoke in such a patronising fashion. Nagito had tried to ask more about Izuru, but soon gave up when Hajime wouldn't speak.

Chiaki’s visits were, by far, Hajime’s favourite. He could truly be himself around her, and she treated him least like a prisoner. Right on time, he heard the front door unlock. Hajime followed the sound of Chiaki’s footsteps along the corridor, they were soft and gentle.

Hajime stared at the door handle, waiting for it to move. Any second now, the door would creak on its hinges, allowing a Chiaki into his ‘cell’. He'd been waiting for her all day. However, that wasn’t what happened.

“Ahh!”

Chiaki’s scream came first, followed by the sound of her body smacking against the floor. Accompanying her fall was the noise of breaking glass, a drink that was never going to make it to Hajime.

“Chiaki!” Hajime shouted her name, knowing instantly that something was wrong.

Hajime bolted to the door, reaching straight for the handle, but it wouldn’t open. Chiaki hadn’t put the key in yet, meaning they were separated...two worlds apart.

“Chiaki?!” Hajime called her name again, but there was no response. “Is anyone there?” The silence filled him with anxiety and dread. Had she been knocked unconscious? Or worse…

Hajime hammered his fist against the door, but it was no use. If someone was on the other side, they weren’t willing to help. This was a battle Hajime had to fight alone.

He needed to get out, but he wasn’t sure how. During his first attempted escape, he’d learnt that door
ramming and lock picking weren’t viable options. He could wait for someone else to show up, but that wouldn’t be for another three hours.

Of course, that was presuming the others were still alive. If someone attacked Chiaki, did that mean they were playing up to Monokuma’s motive? Taking every life so they could escape. If so, why hadn’t they killed Hajime? Suddenly, a grizzly thought crossed Hajime’s mind. They were saving him for last because he had nowhere to run.

“Fuck this.” Hajime swore, he wasn’t going to just stand around while his friends were in danger.

There were piles and piles of old boxes stacked up in the corner of the room. Some of them were resting on an old dining chair, similar to those that had been at the original party. Hajime had ignored the chair until now, as he didn’t feel like moving all the junk to reach it; it wasn’t much of a prize. However, with Chiaki’s life hanging in the balance, he was willing to do anything.

The boxes weighed a tonne. Hajime wasn’t sure what was in them, but it felt like bricks. He had no choice but to move the boxes one at a time, each one requiring all of his strength. It was heavy work; Hajime could feel the strain in his arms.

“Don’t worry, I’m coming!” Hajime called out. Even if Chiaki couldn’t speak, she might still be listening.

He worked as quickly as he could. Given the difficult nature of the task, his timing wasn’t bad. With a new tower of boxes formed, Hajime was able to free the chair. Success!

His next step was to use the chair as a battering ram. His body hadn’t done the trick before, but Hajime had faith with his weight acting as the driving force behind the object. “Chiaki, if you can hear me, I’m going to bust the door down. I don’t want to hurt you, so please, move if you can…”

The last thing Hajime wanted was to hurt Chiaki further, but if she was in front of the door, Hajime would have no choice. He couldn’t think of another way out, at least not in that moment. Picking up the chair, which practically felt like a feather after the boxes, Hajime positioned himself in the middle of the dining room, directly opposite the door. He pointed the chair legs towards the door, the angle he wanted to ‘fire’ at.

“One...two...three…” on the count of three, he sent off into a sprint; similar to the relay race he’d run before. “Gahhhh!” there was no turning back, Hajime charged at the door, ready to win. Once in reach, he shoved the chair at the door, its metal legs breaking into the wood.

Wiping the sweat from his brow, Hajime revoked the chair, ready for round two. He didn’t run this time, he could work with the cracks the chair had already made. The door’s hinges were strong, but the wood itself wasn’t. He began to smash it away with the chair legs, splinters breaking off everywhere. As holes began to appear, he could make out Chiaki through the door, but it was impossible to see whether she was alive or not.

“I’m…nearly there.” Hajime panted. Chiaki was definitely out cold; she couldn’t hear him.

After a short while, a hole big enough for Hajime to fit through presented itself. It was still a tight squeeze, and Hajime scratched his arms on jagged pieces of wood, but he didn’t care so long as he escaped. He’d left the door in ruins, Monokuma wouldn’t be impressed.

Chiaki was sprawled out on the floor. A broken glass by her side, whatever was inside had soaked into her clothes. There were no visible injuries or signs of blood, but that didn’t mean she was okay.

Hajime crouched down beside her, gently shaking her shoulders. “Chiaki...Chiaki, can you hear
As Hajime waited for a reply, he noticed something...Chiaki’s body was moving. Not because he was shaking her, no...she appeared to be twitching. Hajime let go of her in an instant, he didn’t want to make things worse. Chiaki’s entire body was trembling, as if she were having a seizure.

“H-Hajime…” Chiaki weakly called his name, her eyes remaining shut. At least she was able to talk.

“What’s wrong? What happened to you?” Hajime didn’t mean to overwhelm her with questions, but he was panicking.

“H-H-H-Ha-jim--ji-” Chiaki tried to say his name again, but her words were one giant jumble. It seemed as if Chiaki was glitching, unable to speak properly.

“I can’t understand you.” Hajime said softly, not wanting to cause further distress.

“F-Fut-” it was as if someone had stolen her voice, the twitching of her body was only getting worse.

“U-ture.”

“Future?” Hajime repeated, able to piece together what Chiaki had said.

“Fu-fu-utre.” Chiaki was growing weaker by the second, it was taking everything in her just to talk. “Found….found…”

“Future foundation?” on his knees, Hajime was doing the best he could to translate.

As if she’d suddenly taken control of her body again, Chiaki bolted upright, crying out in fear. “They tricked you...the...the...Future Foundation tricked you!”

“W-what?!?” Hajime wasn’t sure to respond. Two seconds ago Chiaki was practically lifeless on the ground, now she was sitting up and talking faster than she ever usually would. “What are you talking about?!”

Speaking solemnly, and with a look of genuine terror upon her face, Chiaki answered his question. “The Future Foundation...they’re trying to kill you.”

*Ding Dong, Bing Bong*

The monitors sprung to life, giving Hajime no time to react.

Hajime was forced to return to the dining room, as nowhere else in the old building had a yellow screen. Not in the mood for splinters, he picked up the keys Chiaki had dropped, allowing himself into the room the normal way. Before stepping inside, he offered his hand to Chiaki, helping her up from the floor. The pair hurried into the room, standing directly before the monitor.

A silhouette appeared on screen, but it wasn’t Monokuma that graced them with his presence. It was an unknown stranger, who certainly didn’t have the outline of a bear. As the silhouette came into focus, Hajime realised he didn’t recognise them at all.

The camera showed the upper torso of a man, the top of his head cut out the frame. He appeared to be sitting at a large wooden desk, resting in an oversized leather chair. His hair was as pale as his face, not a single strand out of place. He looked perfectly perfect, and terrifying at the same time.

“Hajime Hinata, let me introduce myself, for I assume that you do not know who I am.” the man spoke directly to Hajime, his voice as deep as Hajime expected it to be. “My name is Kyosuke
Munakata, vice leader of the Future Foundation.”

Kyosuke Munakata…

...Hajime had heard the name in passing before, but that’s all he knew about the vice leader. If he was being spoken to by one of the Future Foundation’s higher ups, things had to be serious.

“Before we begin, I must inform you, this message is pre-recorded. Therefore, any questions you ask, I cannot answer. I shall try my best to cover everything that may concern you, but I make no promises that I will cover all grounds. I can only apologise.” he spoke in such a formal manner, as if Hajime was part of the Future Foundation too.

“What’s going on….?” Hajime whispered to himself, waiting for the message to continue.

“Hajime, as you are aware, you were once, and possibly still, a remnant of despair. Because of you and your classmates, the world went into chaos - changing the course of history. Your arrests were quickly made, and you were given to the Future Foundation with executions awaiting you all. However, Makoto Naegi, of the fourteen branch, decided to take matters into his own hands. He kidnapped the remnants of despair, and escorted you all to Jabberwock Island to enter the Neo World Program.” Kyosuke explained, recapping everything that happened so far. “This is unforgivable.”

His tone was seriously disapproving, Hajime was beginning to realise what pressure Makoto had been under.

“You are a danger to society, and I cannot allow your existence to continue. We are trying to recover the world from despair, and with you alive, I do not believe we can achieve hope again. Until the remnants of despair are gone, the world is still at risk.” there was a hint of rage in Kyosuke's voice.

“We were able to track down Makoto Naegi, and I asked for him to hand you over, but he allowed no exchange. Our original plan was to attack, for we found your location of Jabberwock Island. However, a greater plan was made.”

“I oversaw the creation of the rewrite, a project designed to kill all remaining remnants of despair.” Kyosuke revealed. “The sole purpose of the rewrite was for you all to die. It was designed specifically for your downfall, Hajime. Tailored to trick you in every way possible.”

Did Kyosuke mean him personally?

“The first step was presenting you with the rewrite so suddenly. As you’ll recall, you were given less than an hour to make your decision, and then entered the rewrite minutes after. It was important to throw you in so suddenly, to strip you of the opportunity to plot and ploy. Entering without any real game plan automatically set you with a disadvantage, you were nowhere near prepared.” Kyosuke said.

Thinking back, Hajime realised how true it was. He charged into the program with no real strategy, besides from the idea he was going to save his friends. Had he looked at things properly, he would have considered all possibilities, and maybe even saved more lives.

Kyosuke continued, leaving no time for Hajime to think. “The next part of the plan was Chiaki. As an AI, we had the choice to wipe her memory, or not. It was my decision to keep Chiaki’s memory alive, so you would reunite with the Chiaki you once knew. A new Chiaki would mean a new set of eyes, someone to point out your flaws and mistakes. It was highly important you spend time with someone you already knew. The reunion was also there to distract you.”

“When tailoring the memories of your classmates, we did our best not to erase them completely.
Subconsciously, we left hints of what happened before in everyone’s minds. Not enough to remember the rewrite, but enough to make a difference. Perhaps you noticed, some of your classmates flew off the handle rather quickly. Killers killing again. That’s because they had two mutual killing games subconsciously in their minds.”

“Mikan!” Hajime cried. “No wonder she fell into despair so quickly! If all this is true, then memories of the despair disease were still in her head. And Nagito!! No wonder he seemed so brutal.”

“Of course, if you’re watching this message, Hajime, then I presume you’re still very much alive.” Kyosuke shook his head. “That’s why I prepared a Plan B, and I suppose even a Plan C.”

“How does he know I’m alive?!” Hajime frowned.

“You’re probably wondering how I know you’re still alive,” Kyosuke said, as if reading Hajime’s mind. “When coding the Rewrite, I may have asked my technicians to cheat. They connected your life to everyone else’s. Meaning if you died, everyone else would die with you. If anyone is still on the island, then you have to be a part of them.”

“Now, to explain the final part of the plan. Or Plan C, if you will.” Kyosuke continued. “Though I was confident Plans A and B would take care of everything, I wasn't going to take any risks. Therefore, Plan C was born. It was designed that on the twentieth day of the rewrite, Jabberwock Island will begin to self-destruct. This ensures the deaths of all currently surviving subjects. I’m sorry, Hajime, but there’s no escaping now. The islands will destroy themselves, and by day twenty-two, everything will be under water. It's impossible to save anyone now.”

“I’m afraid that’s all I have time for. There’s an important meeting I must attend, so our time together has drawn to a close. I do hope I’ve answered all of your questions. And if I haven’t, I wouldn’t worry, for there are bigger matters on your plate now.” Kyosuke said, drawing his speech to a close. “As we speak, our most powerful Future Foundation employees are travelling to Jabberwock Island to arrest Makoto Naegi, Kyoko Kirigiri, and Byakuya Togami for their betrayal. Whilst there, they will dispose of all your bodies. If by some miracle you wake from the program, know that is the fate waiting for you. Don’t fight this Hajime. Do the right thing, let yourself die peacefully.”

With one last ominous stare, Kyosuke muttered his final sentence. “Sakakura, turn off the camera.”

With that, the screen went black. Leaving Hajime in a state of despair.

Chapter End Notes

Dun Dun Dun…..Plot twist reveal!!!!!

The Rewrite has been a pretty big shitshow for Hajime, and now things only get worse. Not only has he been failing at the Rewrite. But the Rewrite was actually designed to kill him...woo!!

I actually planned the twist at the very beginning, way before the DR3 anime even existed. Originally it was just going to be Makoto explaining to Hajime he’d been tricked by the Future Foundation. But then the DR3 anime was released, and I thought Kyosuke might be the perfect character to bring into the story. He was willing to send
ships to destroy Jabberwock Island, so I can totally imagine him being responsible for the scam! If any of you haven't seen the anime (though pretty certain nearly everyone has) you don't have to worry, this won't change the nature of the story. Kyosuke simply helped change the way in which the twist was revealed.

The game is about to change ;)

**

Oh, and one last thing! I just wanted to thank tounge1992, as well as everyone who's contributed, for making this awesome Tv Tropes page for the fic! http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/ProjectRewrite

* EDIT * I promise I'll get around to replying to all of the comments, it might just not be in one go as I like to take time replying. You guys overwhelm me with your nice words :')) <3
Chapter Five - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Having learnt the shocking truth of the rewrite, Hajime has to come to terms with the horror that follows.

Chapter Notes

Heyyy everyone!!

It's been like another 3 months again, I'm so sorry. Not too long ago I left a comment on my last updated chapter explaining my absence, but I'm not sure how many people saw it. I've spent my time away drowning in uni exams and essays, but thankfully, I've now finished for the year. And on a lighter note, I had my 19th birthday last week - woo. I've broken up for summer now, so that means more time for writing, although, not quite as much as I'd like because I have a job. It's my goal to get this story totally finished before I return to uni in late September, but who knows. As always, I apologise for such a long absence. This chapter is one of my favourites, so I'm very excited (and a little nervous) to share it with you. As always, I'm so grateful for your patience!

I hope you enjoy, and happy reading! ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Don't fight this, Hajime. Do the right thing, let yourself die peacefully.”

With Kyosuke's words ringing in his ears, Hajime dropped to his knees. He felt weak trying to process what had just happened, it was too much. "W-what the hell...?"

The Rewrite was a lie, a trap designed to kill the Remnants of Despair for good. Monokuma had warned Hajime countless times that the Future Foundation were his enemy, but he hadn't listened. Why would he?! How was he to know the Future Foundation's every move involved betrayal?

Speaking of betrayal, were Makoto, Kyoko, and Byakuya involved too? The suited man claimed he was on his way to arrest the trio, but was that the truth?

Hajime felt like he was drowning in questions, a sea of never ending mysteries. Thankfully, before he could sink to the bottom, Chiaki placed a calming hand on his shoulder. Speaking softly, she gave him strength. “You’ve come so far Hajime, don’t let him defeat you. This game was rigged from the start, but think of all the lives you’ve still managed to save.”

Her words weren’t enough to entirely cure his fear; there was still a terrible feeling in the pit of Hajime’s stomach...the feeling of hopelessness. However, it was what he needed to hear to get back
on his feet. Hajime pushed himself off the floor, thankful to have his friend by his side.

“How are you doing? Are you okay now?” the questions about the rewrite could wait, Chiaki’s safety came first. “Why were you glitching like that?”

“I…” Chiaki hesitated, slightly overwhelmed with questions. “I think the signal of the broadcast interrupted my system. You don’t have to worry.”

There was something about Chiaki’s answer that Hajime didn’t like; she wouldn’t meet his gaze. Unfortunately, Hajime didn’t get the chance to express this, for something much bigger interrupted them.

The wall monitor began to crackle violently, fighting for signal. A video was trying to come into focus, but it was struggling against the poor reception; a bunch of jumbled pixels instead.

“How are you…? Are….”

Hajime could make out the occasional word, including his own name, but it wasn’t enough.

“Are you…?…”

“…Hajime?”

On its own, the video began to straighten out. Everything came into focus. Staring at Hajime through the screen were three familiar faces: Makoto Naegi, Kyoko Kirigiri, and Byakuya Togami. They were sitting at a control panel, talking into a laptop webcam. The expressions on their faces were bleak.

“Hajime, are you receiving us?” Makoto spoke into the camera.

Hajime was finally able to understand. “Y-yes…” feeling overwhelmed by the situation, he struggled to speak.

“Good, we’re through!” Makoto exclaimed. Though he appeared to be talking to his companions, not Hajime.

“How…how is this possible?” Hajime scratched his head. To his knowledge, the monitors weren’t communication devices, they just played recorded videos.

Kyoko instantly provided an explanation. “We’re broadcasting directly to the monitors through a webcam. We can see you via the security cameras, so we’re able to hear your responses.”

“Right.” Hajime nodded.

“Hajime, what you just saw…” Makoto shook his head in disbelief. “We have nothing to do with that. We had no idea what the rest of the Future Foundation were up to. If we’d have known, we never would have put you through the rewrite.”

“It’s okay, I know that.” Hajime reassured them, he trusted Makoto’s word.

“They hid their intentions so well.” Kyoko frowned, venting her frustration. “We were given pages and pages of documents outlining the rewrite. It seemed foolproof, and legitimate too. We even conducted our own research, and everything seemed safe. It’s only when we launched the program, and our communication to you cut, that we knew something was wrong.”
“You’ve known all this time?” Hajime asked, wide eyed. "Since the start of the rewrite?!”

“There was a feeling something was wrong, yes.” Byakuya replied. “We lost communication to you as soon as the rewrite launched, meaning we couldn't contact you.”

"We should have been administrators to the program, meaning we could control everything and contact you if needed." Kyoko said. "But when the rewrite launched, we lost that title and became spectators only. We couldn't change anything and we couldn't contact you. Someone took away our power to help."

"Since Kyosuke's message, we've become administrators again." Makoto added. "It's how we can finally talk to you."

"So, that means, you-" Hajime tried to ask another question, but he wasn't allowed.

"Though I'm sure you're confused, now isn't the time for this." Byakuya interrupted. "You can be filled in later. Right now, you have bigger problems to deal with."

“You mean the fact the islands are going to self-destruct? That hadn’t crossed my mind at all.” talking was calming Hajime down, enough to even bring back his sarcasm.

“We’re trying our best to help you from this side, but the technology the Future Foundation uses is really strong.” Makoto explained. “We have Alter Ego on our side, so that's a start.”

“What about Chiaki?” Hajime asked eagerly, turning to his friend. “Maybe you can help do something from this side?”

“Given Chiaki’s current state, I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Makoto disagreed.

“Current state?” Hajime repeated, he wasn’t following.

“Oh…um...” Makoto nervously tugged at his collar, realising he’d said too much.

“What aren’t you telling me?” Hajime looked between the monitor and his friend. They were hiding a secret.

“Hajime…” Makoto hesitated, confirming Hajime’s suspicions that something was wrong.

“Please! Just tell me.” Hajime snapped, wanting to be taken seriously.

Byakuya intervened, holding nothing back as he answered. “The bug the Future Foundation have released is destroying her system.”

“What does that mean?” Hajime frowned.

“It...it…” Chiaki piped up before Byakuya could reveal any more on her behalf. “It’s deleting my data, piece by piece. I’m no use to the Future Foundation now the truth is out, so they’re shutting me down. They don’t want me to help you.”

“Shutting you down…? That doesn’t mean…?” Hajime couldn’t bring himself to say it. He stared nervously at Chiaki, hoping she’d deny it without him having to say any more.

“Don’t….worry.” Chiaki took a deep breath, trying her best to smile. “I’m still here, aren't I?”

Byakuya fed Hajime more information through the monitor. “It’s a slow process, deleting an A.I. isn’t easy.”
Kyoko took over. “They’re sending large attacks to her system in waves to try and overwork her internal defence. What you just saw was Chiaki being attacked by the bugs in her system. She has it in her to recover, but every time they attack they will target more of her data.”

“If I can fight it...I’ll still be with you until the end of the rewrite.” there was a sense of determination in Chiaki's eyes. “I want to help you.”

“Why...why are they doing this?!” Hajime questioned angrily. It hurt him to know how much pain Chiaki would be in. “They’re already doing enough to punish us!”

“They have no use for me anymore…” Chiaki said. “But...but don’t worry. I’m going to keep fighting.” her voice already sounded stronger.

“What do we do?” Hajime asked the monitor, seeking advice from his mentors. “I mean, what can we do?” if the islands were going to self-destruct, did he even stand a chance of surviving?

“Firstly,” Kyoko’s calm tone was helping to set Hajime at ease. “You need to explain everything to the others, and I mean everything.”

“I dunno. I don’t think they even wanna listen to me!” Hajime exclaimed, unsure if it was a wise decision.

“Kyosuke's message played on every single monitor on this island. The others will have heard everything, so there’s no doubt they’ll want answers.” Kyoko insisted. “This isn’t about beating Monokuma’s game anymore, it’s bigger than that now.”

“She’s right Hajime, we want answers…”

Hajime had been so fixed on the screen, he hadn’t heard the others arrive. When he turned around, he saw six very familiar faces: Peko, Fuyuhiko, Nagito, Sonia, Ibuki, and Gundam. All of his friends had gone to the effort of finding him, their faces painted with concern.

“R-right, I guess you do…” Hajime gulped, it was overwhelming to see everyone at once.

“Hajime, explain everything to the others.” Makoto said, calling Hajime's attention back to the monitor.

"You...you're Makoto Naegi!" Nagito barged forward, shoving Hajime so he could reach the screen. "And you're Kyoko Kirigiri, and...you're Byakuya Togami!"

"Yes, well observed," Byakuya said dryly.

"Who are they?" Sonia whispered to Fuyuhiko, but she was greeted with a shrug.

"You three are survivors of the Killing School Life, you were in the seventy-eighth class!” Nagito exclaimed, gaining sudden enthusiasm. "I read about you in a file Monokuma gave us."

Had there been any doubt, the other students quickly caught on and realised who they were dealing with.

"I'm afraid we can't stay around and chat," Kyoko apologised to Nagito, though she didn't sound very sincere. "We need to launch a thorough investigation regarding what's happened, to see if there's anything we can do to help. Like I said, Hajime can explain everything to you.”

On screen, Makoto turned to Kyoko. "Why don't you and Byakuya go, and I'll catch up with you
soon? I can stay online and help Hajime explain everything. If that's what you want, Hajime?"

Hajime nodded eagerly, things would be a lot easier with Makoto helping him. "Yeah, that'd be good."

"If you must." Byakuya let out a deep sigh. "Just don't be too long. We need as many heads working on this as possible."

"I know." Makoto said, offering a friendly smile to Hajime, faced away from Byakuya.

"Well then," Kyoko said. "Hajime, explain everything to the others. We will get back to you when we have more news." she stood up from her chair, straightening her skirt. "Makoto, you know where to find us when you're ready."

"I'll see you later." Makoto said.

Hajime thought about saying goodbye too, but the appropriate moment passed, so he held his tongue. He watched as Kyoko and Byakuya got up from their seats and left the room. He had no idea where they were going, but it had to be somewhere on the real Jabberwock Island. The library, perhaps?

“Hajime, you need to start talkin’!” Fuyuhiko raised his voice, though it appeared to be out of fear rather than anger.

“Ibuki’s ears are ready!” Ibuki exclaimed.

“I want to hear more of this mysterious rewrite.” Gundam demanded.

Hajime could understand their frantic efforts to learn the truth, they would have heard Kyosuke’s message without any context.

“Where do I even begin…” Hajime muttered. There was so much to cover, and it wouldn't be the happiest story to tell. It certainly wasn't a fairytale.

“Begin at the beginning.” Nagito prompted him logically.

“You guys might wanna sit down, this is gonna take a while." Hajime advised.

The students sat in a semi-circle on the ground. Hajime chose to stay standing, placing himself next to the monitor so it would be easier to include Makoto in conversation. It looked like a class presentation, Hajime at the front about to give a lecture.

"I'll leave this up to you, Hajime." Makoto said, now the only one on the screen. "But I'll help you out anytime you need me."

"Thanks." Hajime smiled. He felt his confidence grow having Makoto there with him. "Uh, well like Nagito said, this is Makoto Naegi. He survived the Killing School Life, and he's a big part of what we're all doing here." it felt rude not to give Makoto a proper introduction.

"The other Ultimate Lucky Student..." Nagito remarked.

“If this is going to make any sense, for you to even understand what Project Rewrite is, I have to tell you something really important,” Hajime said solemnly. “This...the killing school trip, this isn’t the first time it’s happened.”

“You mean the other killing games?” Fuyuhiko asked. “Like the killing school life and student council massacre, right?”
“There have been other killing games in the past, but I'm not talking about those.” Hajime shook his head. “This exact killing game took place two months ago.”

“I cannot follow…” Sonia frowned, though desperately trying to understand.

“You were part of another island killing game?” Peko asked.

“Not just me, all of us.” Hajime stated. “The killing school trip started, and concluded, two months ago.”

“Wow, who knew Hajime was so bad at math?!” Ibuki scoffed. “There’s no way we’ve been here two months. And the killing game hasn’t concluded yet.”

It was frustrating that they didn’t understand, but Hajime had to be patient. “That’s because there were two separate killing games.”

“Two separate killing games that involved the same people?” Peko mused.

Hajime offered his own perspective of what happened in an attempt to make them understand. “I guess I should start with my story. Two months ago, I woke up on an island with no idea what was going on. All I could remember was my name, and that it was meant to be my first day at Hope’s Peak Academy. Why I’d been chosen for Hope’s Peak? I couldn't remember. I met fifteen other ultimates that day, but had lost all memory of my own talent.”

“You did not claim to be the Ultimate Hope?” Sonia whispered.

"We were all just as confused as each other. One minute we're in a classroom, then Monomi shows up, and we somehow move to an island." Hajime continued, thinking back on the past.

"That...that sounds just like what happened to us!" Ibuki gasped, interrupting the story.

"That's because...it is what happened to us. Like I said, this all happened before," Hajime replied. "Maybe I should tell you the names of the Ultimates I met that day: Byakuya Togami, Teruteru Hanamura, Mahiru Koizumi, Peko Pekoyama, Ibuki Mioda, Hiyoko Saionji, Mikan Tsumiki, Nekomaru Nidai, Gundam Tanaka, Nagito Komaeda, Chiaki Nanami, Fuyuhiko Kuzuryu, Sonia Nevermind, Akane Owari, and Kazuichi Souda."

"Those...those are our names!" Ibuki cried, appearing even more horrified than she had done before. "People are trying to steal our identities?!

"No, there were no imposters," Hajime went on. Well, besides the actual Ultimate Imposter, but his story would have to wait for another day. "As you may remember, we were told it was a school trip. Once we got to know each other better, and collected enough hope fragments, we'd be allowed to return home. Except...that never happened."

"Because Monokuma arrived?" Gundam put forward.

Hajime nodded solemnly. "Monokuma showed up and changed everything. He told us the only way to escape the island, was to take the life of another and get away with the crime.”

“Over the next twenty-two days, I witnessed some of the most horrific things I've ever seen.” Hajime shuddered, reflecting on some of his darkest memories. “Teruteru killed Byakuya, Peko murdered Mahiru. Infected with despair disease, Mikan killed Hiyoko and Ibuki. Gundam killed Nekomaru as a sacrifice, and Chiaki was tricked into murdering Nagito.”
“I...I died?!” Ibuki’s lip trembled. “But that’s impossible!” she began pinching her skin. “Ibuki isn’t a ghost.” she then leant over and pinched Nagito’s cheek. “Nagito isn’t a ghost either.”

“O-Ow!” Nagito wailed, hastily pulling away from Ibuki’s fingers.

“When all the killing was done, just five of us remained.” Hajime continued his story, the questions could wait. “Myself, Souda, Fuyuhiko, Sonia, and Akane. We were the five survivors of Monokuma’s sick game.”

“I...I wanna believe ya Hajime…” Fuyuhiko spoke up. “But this story, it makes no sense. You’re saying Peko’s dead? Gundam’s dead? Ibuki’s dead? Nagito and Chiaki are dead? Souda and Akane should be here instead?!”

“No, it shouldn’t be like that all. They’re two separate killing games.” Hajime responded, aware he was probably confusing Fuyuhiko more.

“What you’re saying is…” Nagito uttered, finally speaking. “The killing school trip has taken place twice, each game with a different outcome. Am I right?”

“Yes, that’s it!” Hajime exclaimed, pleased Nagito had understood. “This game and the last game are entirely different.”

“I do not mean to doubt you, but surely it is impossible to play a killing game twice?” Sonia tilted her head.

“I won’t deny it, spirits are a possibility,” Gundam voiced his opinion. “But for mortals like yourselves, it is out of the question! No one here but me possesses the power to come back from the dead.”

“That’s because no one here really died,” Hajime stated, slowly breaking the crucial news. “The thing about this killing game is that-”

Nagito cut him short. “None of this is real. It’s a simulation, isn’t it?” his tone was direct, in no mood for playing games.

“T-that’s right.” Hajime hadn’t expected Nagito to burst out with the answer. “How did you know?”

“Kyosuke spoke of something called the Neo World Program in his message. Alongside everything else he said, I figured this had to be some sort of computer program.” Nagito explained, one step ahead as always.

“Hold up, hold up!” Fuyuhiko raised his voice. “What do you mean this is a simulation?”

“Since the beginning of the school trip, we haven’t been in the real world.” Hajime said. “Right now, we’re in a virtual reality. Makoto is speaking to us from the real world.”

“It’s...like a game.” Chiaki added, trying to be helpful. “Your bodies are asleep, and your minds have been sent to a virtual reality.”

“No way, just no way.” Fuyuhiko shook his head in disbelief. “I know I’m in the real world right now. On this island, I can feel my feet in the sand, the sun on my back, the sweat on my neck. It’s all fucking real.”

Hajime attempted to be tactful, he remembered how hard it was learning the truth the first time around. “I know it seems real, but that’s how advanced the Neo World Program is. Think about all
the strange things here that just don’t add up.”

“You mean….like how there’s always a buffet waiting for us in the restaurant?” Ibuki asked.

“Exactly.” Hajime nodded. “Like how the fresh fruit and veg in the market never goes rotten. Or
Monomi’s magic stick.”

“A simulation would explain the creatures that are the Monobeasts,” Gundam muttered, deep in
thought.

"Okay but...there's gotta be explanations for those things. Monomi gives us food, the Monobeasts are
animatronics." Fuyuhiko was clinging to desperate suggestions, unable to accept the truth.

"Maybe I can change your mind." Makoto called out from the screen. "I can show you proof of the
previous game, though it's not going to be pretty..."

"Proof?" Fuyuhiko repeated. "You mean...the murders?"

"I have all the security footage from the last game," Makoto responded. "If you really want to see it, I
can show you."

Visiting the previous murders was the last thing Hajime wanted, but it had to be done. If that was the
proof Fuyuhiko needed to believe the truth, then so be it.

"I think you should show it." Hajime said. He looked at his friends, wondering who would be
affected most. Ibuki and Nagito would have to witness their own corpses, Gundam his own
execution. But Fuyuhiko would have to see Peko's death, so perhaps that would be the hardest to
accept of all. "No matter how disturbing you find this, just remember it didn't really happen."

"Just give me a moment," Makoto began to type away on the laptop he was communicating from, his
tongue sticking out slightly from concentrating. "Okay, here goes..."

Makoto disappeared from the screen as soon as he pressed enter, instead replaced with old security
footage. One by one played the significant events of the previous game, starting with footage of the
party they'd thrown at the very beginning.

"A party!" Ibuki exclaimed, stating what she saw. "But didn't we have one of those?"

"Look at the location," Nagito corrected her. "Our party was outside, this one seems to be inside. It
looks like the old building, just tidier."

"That's because you tidied it." Hajime informed Nagito. "Though your intentions weren't just to
make the place clean..."

The footage then went on to play the scenes of what else happened that night. It showed Nagito
taping a knife underneath the table, Nagito talking to Teruteru, Teruteru preparing his murder
weapon, the blackout, and then Byakuya's death.

"That...that's..." Ibuki was lost for words.

"That was the first murder from the original game." Hajime stated, though it was rather obvious.

Even Fuyuhiko didn't have an argument for what he saw. No amount of complex technology and
costumes could offer an explanation for what he'd just witnessed.

The security footage didn't stop there, though it didn't focus on other events in such detail.
Additionally, the footage was no longer playing in order. What they saw came at random.

It wasn't easy to sit through. Even as events of the past, Hajime found it a struggle. Ibuki's lifeless corpse hanging from the ceiling, Nagito mutating himself in the factory warehouse, Fuyuhiko collapsing in the restaurant after his stomach split open, Nekomaru's transformation into a robot, the endless number of class trials - it was all there. However, it was only when Peko's execution appeared on screen that someone demanded it stop.

"We've seen enough!" Fuyuhiko snapped, desperate for it to end. "Turn it off, turn the damn thing off."

In an instant, the footage stopped playing and Makoto appeared back on screen, appearing somewhat apologetic. "Sorry if that was a bit much."

"That...that's all real?" Fuyuhiko turned to Hajime, most of the blood drained from his face. "Those deaths, those executions...my missing eye?!"

Even Nagito appeared somewhat shaken, having witnessed his own 'murder'. "...It has to be real."

"Now that I think about it, it was kinda strange how we jumped right from a classroom to this island," Fuyuhiko admitted, finally coming to terms with the truth. "It makes sense. Two killing games would be possible if they weren't really happening. We could die time and time again."

"Is that why we are here?" Sonia grew pale. "Trapped in a simulation so we can take part in a horrific killing game time and time again, all for the mastermind’s sick pleasure?"

"No, that’s not it at all." Hajime shook his head. "The mastermind intended for us to play the game only once. It's for other reasons I got a second shot."

"Hajime, it seems that you are the only one here who has retained their memories from the original game." Peko stated. "I must ask why that is."

"Can't that wait? Ibuki wants to know why we're in a video game!" Ibuki complained, desperate for answers.

"Don't worry, I'll cover everything sooner or later." Hajime reassured them both. "I will explain why I'm the only one who remembers everything, but first, you're going to need some back story. For this to make sense, I need to divert my explanation for a bit."

His friends needed to learn more about the Hope Restoration Project.

“Do what you have to.” Fuyuhiko nodded.

"Life has changed. The real world is in a state of despair." Hajime said sorrowfully. "Thanks to the true evil of Junko Enoshima, life as we know it is over."

"Junko Enoshima…” Gundam frowned. "That name seems familiar."

"She was another member of the seventh-eighth class at Hope's Peak Academy." Nagito piped up, with more information he'd learnt from the file. "But she died early on in the process."

“I remember!” Gundam nodded. "But how can the world's downfall be at the hands of Junko Enoshima if she was one of the victims?"

"Makoto, maybe you could explain this part?" Hajime asked, turning to the monitor. "You know it
"Of course." Makoto smiled, willing to lend a hand. "Junko Enoshima faked her death. She was the mastermind behind our killing game all along! She was part of the Ultimate Despair, and thrived off crushing hope."

"Ultimate Despair?" Nagito gasped.

"Junko Enoshima is responsible for creating the Biggest, Most Awful, Most Tragic Event in Human History." Makoto shuddered at the name. "This tragedy changed everything, and set the world on the path of despair."

"That is why we are in a simulation?" Sonia asked. "To be protected from Junko Enoshima?"

"Not exactly..." Makoto replied. "You're in the simulation to be protected from yourselves. You won't remember, since Monomi took your school memories, but all of you have interacted with Junko before."

"Interacted...how?" Gundam asked.

"Junko Enoshima had a lot of power behind her. She brainwashed and manipulated every single one of you, turning you all into her puppets." Makoto said. "She took advantage of your talents, and used you all to spread chaos and destruction. You became the Remnants of Despair."

"Remnants of despair?" Nagito appeared weak.

"We burnt down cities, took lives, tortured...you name it." Hajime cut himself short when he realised he was likely scaring them. "At the hands of Junko Enoshima, we became monsters."

"How can this be?" Sonia whispered.

Makoto continued to tell his story. "To try and fight against despair, an organisation named the Future Foundation had been formed - created by the alumni of Hope's Peak. My fellow surviving classmates and I were recruited by the Future Foundation once our killing game was over. It was our mission to arrest the Remnants of Despair. I thought they were just going to keep you locked up, but I soon learnt the Future Foundation wanted you all executed."

"I remember hearing something similar in that video message," Fuyuhiko said, thinking back to what he'd heard.

"I couldn't let them just kill you!" Makoto exclaimed. "So behind the backs of the Future Foundation, and with the help of Kyoko and Byakuya, I abducted all of you and brought you to Jabberwock Island. The real Jabberwock Island."

Makoto continued. "We also stole a very important piece of technology, which had been developed by several of the most talented psychologists and computer programmers. As you might have already heard, this technology is called the Neo World Program. It's the virtual reality you're currently in."

"I think I am beginning to understand." Sonia nodded.

"It was a simple plan," Makoto said. "You'd enter the Neo World Program without your school memories or memories of Junko. You'd collect all the Hope Fragments to return to your original selves. You'd graduate the program free of despair, and all the damage would have been undone."

To give Makoto a break, Hajime began to speak again. "But as you know, everything went wrong.
A virus was released into the Neo World Program, allowing an A.I. of Junko to arrive in the form of Monokuma. A.I. Junko hijacked the program, and triggered the killing game.

"How did a virus get into the program in the first place?" Nagito narrowed his eyes, suspicious there was more to the story.

Hajime didn't want to tell him, especially since his friends had only just started to trust him again, but concealing the truth could do just as much damage. Monokuma had a habit of revealing Hajime's secrets without consent. At least if Hajime admitted the truth up front, he could answer any questions - instead of his friends building up their own ideas behind his back.

"The mastermind, the one who released the virus, was none other than Izuru Kamakura," Hajime stated, taking a deep breath before he continued. "And Izuru Kamakura is none other than myself."

A chorus of surprised gasps swept the room.

Hajime hurriedly continued before any accusations could be thrown his way. "I became Izuru during my time at Hope's Peak Academy. Since those memories were taken from me, I arrived on this island as Hajime Hinata. I don't know why I did what I did, but I can only apologise for the damage I've done."

"No, we shall not hold you responsible!" Sonia declared, her voice filled with passion. "From what you have said, it seems we are all to blame for these awful crimes. We cannot hold you at fault for spreading the virus when we have done things equally as terrible."

Hajime looked across to Nagito to see if he had an opinion to share, but the luckster simply sat there with his lips pursed.

"If you guys can now understand why we're in a simulation, I can tell you more about Project Rewrite," Hajime stated. "Is everyone following?"

He was greeted by a series of nods.

"Well, as you know, only five of us survived the original killing game." Hajime continued, upon their approval. "We woke up on the real Jabberwock Island, our bodies slightly different, and we'd aged some. Everyone who'd died was in a coma. We made it our mission to wake them, but we never anticipated how hard it would be. We were becoming pretty hopeless, in fact."

"I can only imagine." Sonia sympathised.

"Then one day, out of nowhere, Makoto, Kyoko, and Byakuya flew onto the island." Hajime said. "They had something to offer us on behalf of the Future Foundation...Project Rewrite."

"Project Rewrite..." Gundam repeated the name, the words leaving a bitter taste on his tongue.

"It was a backup of the Neo World Program, an exact playthrough of everything that had happened before." Hajime described. "They said if we could make it through the twenty-two days again, whoever was still alive at the end would get to wake up. It was a second chance to save everyone."

"Unfortunately, only one of us could enter the rewrite as an administrator. Meaning everyone else would have to be entered into the program with their memories wiped." now that Hajime was thinking about it, it seemed like another one of Kyosuke's traps to destroy him. It probably would have been possible for all five survivors to keep their memories. "I was the one chosen to implement this. Souda, Fuyuhiko, Sonia, and Akane all agreed to have their memories wiped, since it was a chance to bring back our friends."
For the past nineteen days, I’ve been trying to save everyone - to stop the murders happening again. But as you can see…” Hajime wiped his brow, the stress causing him to sweat. “I failed. By preventing the original murders, I triggered others. By counteracting Monokuma’s motives, I let him create new ones. This was harder than I ever anticipated.”

"I cannot believe it, all this time we had no idea." Sonia gasped, shocked at what she'd missed.

"In the video message, the man said the Future Foundation used the rewrite to trick you." Gundam stated. "What did he mean?"

Makoto jumped in to answer. "The man you saw is Kyosuke Munakata, vice leader of the Future Foundation. He's the one who wanted you all arrested and executed in the first place."

"Damn bastard!" Fuyuhuiko swore.

"Kyosuke doesn’t believe that you've changed, he thinks having the Remnants of Despair alive is a liability," Makoto explained, attempting to offer up both sides of the story. "You have to understand, Kyosuke has watched the world fall apart at your hands. We're trying to convince him there's hope for anyone who was brainwashed by despair, but he doesn't seem to be listening."

"According to Kyosuke, he created Project Rewrite as a trap to kill us all." Hajime informed them. "Instead of the Future Foundation having to personally come and execute us, he hoped we'd all begin killing ourselves again if we got a second chance at the killing game. We'd all end up in comas, and the Future Foundation could keep their hands clean."

"What an awful thing to do." Sonia remarked. "But there is something I do not understand. Why would Kyosuke offer you a second chance to save everyone when he is trying to get us killed?"

"Because he designed the Rewrite to trick me." Hajime said. "He wanted to throw me off so that more murders would occur."

"I remember him mentioning these traps," Peko said. "Such as entering you into the rewrite without time to plan."

"Since I was able to save some of you from dying, we're now in the stage of Kyosuke's backup plan." Hajime said. "I don't know anything about it myself, but he said the islands are going to start self-destructing - leaving us all to drown."

"There's gotta be something we can do!" Fuyuhiko exclaimed. "Can't you end the rewrite early or somethin'?"

"That wouldn't work." Makoto sighed from on screen. "For the Rewrite to complete, you have to overwrite the twenty-two days you lived the first time around. If we close the program before the time is up, we have no idea what will happen. It could be very dangerous and leave you all for dead."

"I'm sorry I had to keep this from you guys," Hajime apologised. "I wanted to tell you, but you probably wouldn't have believed me. Or if you did, it could've sent you into despair. I lied about my talent because I wanted you to respect me enough to make this easy. Even when Monokuma exposed me, it didn't feel right to just tell you everything. I didn't wanna distress you guys."

"You're right there," Fuyuhiko smirked. "If you told me all this on the first day, I’d have written you off as a nutjob."

"You sacrificed your freedom and became a captive in the old building just to protect us?" Sonia
appeared in awe.

"Wow, man..." Fuyuhiko looked sheepish, no longer laughing after hearing what Sonia had to say. "You didn't have to do that for us, ya know..."

"If I ever did anything that seemed weird, it's because I was trying to protect you from something that had happened before," Hajime admitted, it felt good to speak the truth. "It's why I didn't want the party to happen in the old building, it's why I smashed up Monokuma's arcade machine."

"So that was you who smashed it." Peko said, putting the pieces together.

"I didn't mean for it all to spin out of control, I really thought I could save everyone." Hajime sighed, feeling the guilt creep in.

"You shouldn't blame yourself," Peko said seriously. "You may have known what happened in the previous game, but you're not a psychic Hajime. You could only stop what you knew was coming."

"It is the butterfly effect," Sonia spoke up. "I read about it in a book once. It is the idea that even the smallest decision can change the whole of history."

"Sonia's right," Gundam nodded in agreement. "By changing one thing, you create an entirely new history. A new history where you had no idea what would happen."

Hajime found the words of his friends comforting. They didn't blame him for the lives he failed to save, and were supportive of the choices he'd made. And they did make a good point, he wasn't some kind of benevolent god, it was practically impossible to save everyone. "Thanks for understanding. I didn't really-"

He never got the opportunity to finish his speech, thanks to an interruption which would change everything. From nowhere, the room began to shake. It was so powerful, so violent, that everyone lost their balance. The students already sitting down collapsed in one giant heap on their backs, and Hajime fell over entirely - caught off guard. The boxes in the old building also suffered a fall. No longer in neat piles, they scattered all over the place where their towers had collapsed. The ground felt as if it were vibrating. Hajime didn't want to move out of fear of falling over again.

"What the fuck is happening now?" Fuyuhiko cried.

It didn't take long for the shaking to stop, and it was only then that the students risked standing up. They slowly rose to their feet, all of them sceptical whether it was safe yet. Everyone was trying to make sense of what had just happened.

"Is everyone alright?" Hajime shouted, needing to know if anyone was wounded.

No one called out any immediate injuries, but they would all later find themselves with deep bruises.

"What the fuck was that?!" Fuyuhiko swore. "But yeah, I'm okay."

"I don't think we should hang around here to find out." Hajime gulped. Whatever it was, it seemed urgent.

As if thinking in unison, the students bolted to the door. Even Chiaki followed suit, though having only just recovered, she walked at a slower pace. Totally forgetting about Makoto, Hajime turned his back on the monitors as he escaped the old building.

Hajime hadn't left the old building in two days, so it almost came as a shock stepping outside. He
raised his right hand above his brow to shield his eyes from the sun in preparation, but this wasn't necessary. Having lost track of time, it caught him by surprise to find the outside world in darkness. Of course, Chiaki's visit was at 9pm! No more than two hours had passed since then. It wasn't the middle of the day at all, but close to midnight.

Hajime took a moment to stare up at the night's sky, a sight he'd forgotten how much he enjoyed. It would've been nice having the real Jabberwock sun on his skin, but he wasn't going to complain. The evening air was cool, but not freezing, and he was just glad to be free from the stuffy old building. Sadly, his moment of reuniting with the island didn’t last long. No sooner had Hajime stepped outside, the ground began to tremble again.

“Earthquake! Earthquake!” Ibuki shrieked like a broken alarm.

It certainly felt like an earthquake, but it didn’t look like one. The ground was vibrating, but everything else was completely stationary. Not so much as a palm tree or cottage had crumbled to the ground. Hajime had a feeling that the first island wasn’t the problem.

“Let’s go to the central island,” Hajime suggested. “We need to see the other islands. Whatever the problem is, it isn't coming from here.”

"I...I think I need to stay here." Chiaki winced. Despite getting her energy back, she wasn't strong enough to trek across the island.

"Chiaki, is something wrong?" Sonia turned her attention to the gamer, unaware of what had happened.

"It's...nothing." Chiaki protested, not wanting to cause any hassle. "I'll be okay."

"I..." Hajime opened his mouth in an attempt to explain, but soon realised he'd forgotten to mention Chiaki's role as an A.I. in the program. Despite Kyosuke even stating it himself during his broadcast, it seemed to have glossed over their heads.

"If something is the matter, I can stay here with Chiaki." Sonia offered, not having believed the gamer's lie.

"Would you mind?" Hajime asked, he hated the idea of leaving Chiaki alone in a vulnerable state. "I can explain everything later."

"It is not a problem." Sonia insisted with a smile.

"T-thanks, Sonia." Chiaki smiled, heading back inside the old building.

Gesturing the others to follow, Hajime took off. The vibrations made it uncomfortable to walk, but it wasn't an impossible task. Occasionally, Hajime felt as if he was going to lose balance, but sticking out his arms easily kept him grounded. Walking around in the dark didn't seem as scary as it had done in the past. Now everyone was on one team, and they weren't all trying to kill each other, a lot of the threats were gone. Hajime kept an eye out to ensure everyone was keeping up. As he did so, something came to his attention - Nagito hadn't joined them after all. He must've remained at the old building with Chiaki and Sonia.

“This isn’t an earthquake.” Peko said confidently, catching up so she could stand next to Hajime.

“That’s what I was thinking.” Hajime replied. “If this was an earthquake, shouldn’t the cottages be falling apart, and the ground ripping open?”
“What else could this be?” Fuyuhiko asked, unable to draw any further conclusions. “That jackass in the video said the islands would start self-destructing. What else could he mean besides an earthquake?”

“The power of dark magic, that is what I sense!” Gundam roared, pointing furiously towards the sky.

“Maybe someone is just drumming really really loudly?” Ibuki suggested weakly.

Both of their suggestions were wrong; no one was drumming offensively loud, and dark magic wasn’t involved either. It was only when the five friends reached the central island, that they found their explanation for the horrifying shaking.

Where the third island had once stood, was now nothing but a crumbling pile of decay and rubble. The island was sinking further and further underwater, the buildings it had once homed caving in on themselves. The hospital, motel, theatre...they were unrecognisable, all caught up in one massive heap. It was too late to salvage anything. The third island had been destroyed.

“Fuck…” Hajime could only manage one word, traumatised by the sight in front of him.

“This...this isn’t fucking real.” Fuyuhiko’s jaw hit the floor, just as shocked as Hajime.

“This...this is a beast!” Gundam proclaimed.

“When the message said the islands would be destroyed, I wasn’t expecting this.” Peko cleared her throat, trying to conceal her emotions.

“We’re doomed!” Ibuki wailed. “If that used to be the music venue, what’s gonna happen to us?!” she pointed a devastated finger in the direction of the third island. “Think of all the broken guitars, they’ll be like our broken bones.”

Hajime didn’t care for the broken guitars, but he understood what Ibuki was saying. The island was submerging completely underwater, in no time it would disappear for good. There were another couple of days left of the rewrite, it wasn’t like they could just swim around underwater to pass the time. Hajime didn’t enjoy picturing the most despairing outcome, but there was no hope to this situation. He was well and truly screwed.

“Let’s go back to the others.” Peko put forward. “They’re going to wonder what’s going on.”

“G-good idea…” Hajime began to back up, but he couldn’t turn his head, too fixated on the crumbling island. “Chiaki, Sonia, and Nagito are waiting.”

The five friends took their walk in silence. With the island falling apart behind them, they were all too caught up in their own heads to know what to say. It wasn’t until they got back to base that they spoke again. Returning to the old building, their presence was heavy. In the time Hajime had gone, it seemed that Makoto had disconnected from the screen.

“What is it?” Sonia gulped, reading the looks on their faces as soon as her friends entered the room.

“We...we found the problem.” Hajime said quietly.

“It’s...bad.” Fuyuhiko forewarned her, shaking his head.

“It’s the third island,” Hajime described the issue. “The entire thing is sinking, it’s falling into the sea.”
“Come with me, Fair Maiden.” Gundam offered his hand to Sonia. “I shall escort you to see the horrific beast for yourself, if you wish.”

Curiosity getting the better of her, Sonia accepted Gundam’s offer. Chiaki was also invited, but she didn’t accept. Still recovering, the word of the others would have to do.

“And Nagito?” Gundam asked, inviting the third and final person yet to witness the horror.

“I thought Nagito went with you.” Sonia frowned. “He is not here.”

“What? No.” Hajime shook his head. “There were five of us. I thought Nagito stayed here with you.”

“It was just Chiaki and I.” Sonia informed him.

“Maybe I’m going crazy.” Hajime muttered to himself, before turning to Fuyuhiko. “You didn’t see Nagito either, right?”

“Naa, there’s no way he came with us.” Fuyuhiko was certain.

“He must have wandered off when we left to investigate.” Peko concluded.

“It would’ve been the perfect opportunity,” Hajime sighed, only now coming to the realisation. “Splitting up gave him the chance to slip away unnoticed. Not to mention it's dark, that makes it even easier for Nagito to go undetected.”

“Now we have to deal with the bigger question at hand,” Gundam folded his arms. “Where did Nagito go?”

“Take Sonia to the central island to show her what’s happened, we can think about Nagito while you’re gone.” Hajime said to Gundam.

“We shall look out for him on our way.” Sonia promised, turning her back on the others as she followed Gundam’s lead.

Unfortunately, Hajime couldn’t see things being that easy. At such a serious time, Hajime couldn’t imagine Nagito walking off because he wanted to relax on the beach, or grab some snacks from the market. To disappear so soon after being told the truth, it was no coincidence.

“Jesus, Nagito!” Hajime ranted. “Now really isn’t the time to go solo.”

“Well least we know he’s not on the third island.” Fuyuhiko remarked, rolling his eyes as he did so.

“There’s so much to think about, where should we even start?!” Hajime thought aloud. Though he had Nagito’s disappearance to worry about, there was also the issue of the crumbling islands looming over his head.

As if hearing his worries, the Future Foundation trio came to Hajime’s rescue. No sooner had Hajime spoken, they forced the monitors back into action, and spoke through the screen. In the time they’d been seperated, Kyoko and Byakuya had returned to the call.

“Hajime, can you hear me?” Makoto asked, speaking solely to Hajime despite the presence of the others.

Hajime moved closer to the monitor. “Yeah, I can!” he was relieved to see Makoto again.
“That’s good.” Makoto nodded. “We’ve managed to stabilise the signal, so we shouldn’t have any issues again.”

“Are you guys seeing this?!” Hajime exclaimed, referencing the third island.

“We are.” Makoto replied solemnly. “It seems that the other islands will follow the same pattern.”

“That’s what Kyosuke meant by self-destructing, huh?!” Hajime sighed, his shoulders drooping.

“Do you know which island will go next?” Ibuki leant over Hajime’s shoulder to get into view.

“Unfortunately, we don’t.” Kyoko replied. “All we know, is the bug in the system is causing the islands to sink.”

“Is there anything you can do to stop it?” Hajime asked, the desperation in his voice clear.

“We’re still trying.” Makoto promised. “But this bug is really powerful. The Future Foundation have access to the best technology.”

“We’re so doomed!” Ibuki screamed, mainly for the dramatic effect.

“Stop with the screaming.” Byakuya snapped, putting Ibuki in her place. “Just because we’re unable to save the islands, it doesn’t mean you’re out of options.”

“Oh come on!” Fuyuhiko exclaimed. “You gonna tell us to get some fucking scuba diving equipment from the market?”

“I don’t appreciate the tone.” Byakuya pursed his lips.

“As you might have noticed, you’re still on the nineteenth day of the rewrite.” Kyoko informed them.

“Oh, that’s right.” Hajime nodded. According to the schedule, the students were visiting Hajime every three hours. Chiaki’s visit had been at 9pm, and that’s when Kyosuke’s message had played. Though time had passed since then, and Hajime had even explained the entire truth, it still hadn't turned midnight.

“That doesn’t make sense.” Chiaki spoke up. “Kyosuke said the islands wouldn’t destruct until the twentieth day.”

“It seems like the fall of the third island is a warning.” Makoto replied. “They’re showing you what’s to come.”

“You should all get some rest, we can talk about this tomorrow.” Kyoko said. "You'll be safe tonight.”

“What if there isn’t a tomorrow?” Hajime challenged her, he wasn’t sure how long he had left.

“The islands won’t start sinking again until tomorrow.” Kyoko reassured him. “You need to rest.”

“Maybe you’ve forgotten, but as soon as it strikes midnight, it’s ‘tomorrow’.” Fuyuhiko snapped.

“In the message...Kyosuke said everything will be under water by the twenty-second day,” Chiaki reminded everyone. “So...I can’t see everything sinking by the morning.”

“Is that a risk we really want to take?” Fuyuhiko raised his eyebrows. “We don’t know that for sure.”
“And what are you going to do if you stay awake?” Byakuya pressed. “Unless you have the acquired skills and materials to build a submarine in a couple of hours, you’re as much use asleep as you are awake.”

“I don’t wanna sit around doing nothing.” Ibuki pouted. “Ibuki wants to fight.”

“You’ve had a lot happen to you today, get some rest.” Makoto insisted. “The three of us are going to stay up all night, okay? Fighting the system, trying to help you. We’ll do whatever we can.”

Hajime saw the look in Makoto’s eyes, he wasn’t exaggerating just to get them to oblige. He really cared, he was really trying. Deep down, Hajime knew the Future Foundation trio were right. As much as Hajime hated going to sleep at such a crucial time, there was nothing he could do. At least by resting, he could recharge for the morning.

“Come on guys, let’s go to our cottages.” Hajime said. He couldn’t wait to sleep in a bed again.

“We’ll speak to you tomorrow morning, as soon as you’re all awake.” Makoto promised. “We really will try everything we can.”

The screen cut, just as Sonia and Gundam re-entered the room. Sonia looked a lot paler than when she’d left. “It...it really has gone.”

“We were just chatting to Makoto and the others.” Hajime explained, wanting to fill them in on what they’d missed.

“We heard.” Gundam replied. “It was playing through the monitors. We only heard their half of the conversation, but we easily filled in the gaps.”

“We’re going to sleep and then speaking again in the morning.” Hajime explained.

“So we heard.” Gundam repeated.

“Any signs of Nagito?” Ibuki interrupted.

“None at all.” Sonia replied sadly.

Hajime had expected this to be the case. “He’s gonna need to sleep too. Hopefully, he’ll sort himself out, and we can go to his cottage tomorrow. He needs-”

*Ding Dong, Bing Bong*

Hajime was cut short by the alarm, his words interrupted for the third time that evening. He felt his blood turn cold as he hurriedly looked to the monitor. Surely Kyosuke didn’t have more bad news to share. What else was there?

"Ahem! May I have your attention please," Monokuma’s face turned up on the screen, much to Hajime’s relief - as strange as it was to say. "An unexpected broadcast earlier this evening interrupted my usual alarm schedule. As such, the night time announcement didn't sound at 10pm. It's now well into nighttime. Don't hang around too long, you never know what's waiting for you...unless that's what you want, of course. Don't forget my motive. Puhuhuhu!"

Caught up in everything, it had slipped past Hajime's attention that the usual nighttime announcement hadn't sounded. At least it wasn't Kyosuke, like Hajime had feared.

“We should get going.” Hajime suggested, the announcement having encouraged him to get a move
on.

They walked to the cottages as a group, though no one was talking. There wasn’t far to go, so at least it wasn’t awkward. Hajime was still getting used to his freedom. It was strange how just two days cooped up had affected him.

Bidding each other goodnight, the students went their separate ways. They would regroup in the morning, with a long day ahead of them.

Hajime felt a strange sensation as he stepped into his cottage. The sight of his messy bed, the television that was gathering dust, the smell of the room. On an island scary and unfamiliar, it was the closest thing Hajime had to home. He hadn’t realised how much he’d actually missed the room until it had been taken from him.

Hajime headed straight for his bed, only making the effort of taking off his shoes. He dived under the covers, thankful for a mattress again. Despite the day he’d had, he drifted off to sleep in no time. It would be his last moment of rest for the next two days to come.

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These were the noises Hajime woke to the following morning. Truth be told, he was surprised he’d woken up at all. Part of him had expected to drown half way through the night.


Accompanying the sounds, were the familiar vibrations. It felt like the same earthquake he’d experienced the night before. Hajime knew exactly what was happening.

He jumped out of bed, hurriedly put on his shoes, and bolted out the door. Everyone seemed to have the same idea; the others came running from their cottages too, all of them looking startled, while still half asleep.

Ibuki was the first to speak. “It’s happening again, isn’t it?!”

“There’s only one way to know for sure.” Hajime sighed.

Without the need of saying another word, the seven of them ran to the central island to see which island had been taken from them now. Nagito was nowhere to be seen, though it didn’t come as much of a surprise. Hajime hoped the luckster had simply chosen to stay inside his cottage, but he was wishful thinking.

Surprisingly, what was falling into the ocean wasn’t too much of a loss. Crumbling apart were the four Monokuma heads known for making up Monokuma Rock. It was Hajime’s least favourite place on the whole of Jabberwock Island; the home of the class trials. It was still a sign of the Future Foundation’s wrath, but things could be worse. Hajime never planned to step foot on the stupid rock again, he was glad to see it submerged under water.
“Is it bad I feel happy to see it go?” this was usually the kind of thought Hajime would keep quiet, but since revealing the truth, he was trying to be more honest with his friends.

“Never been so glad to watch something crash and fucking burn.” Fuyuhiko remarked.

Hajime had lost many of his friends in that courtroom, both in the rewrite and the original game. Seeing it disappear, he felt as if he was washing his hands of the killing game once and for all.

“Gee, what’s this commotion so early in the morning? My alarm hasn’t even sounded yet.”

Monokuma appeared, stifling a yawn.

It occurred to Hajime he hadn’t seen the bear in nearly three days, it had been a blissful escape, albeit temporary.

“If you hadn’t noticed, the fucking island are destroying themselves!” Fuyuhiko snarled.

“Oh yeah, *that.*” Monokuma replied, he didn’t seem the slightest bit bothered.

“Don’t you care?!” Hajime exclaimed. “That’s your courtroom right there.”

Monokuma shrugged. “That place has seen better days, and I was running outta ways to redecorate it.”

“Aren’t you going to do something about all of this?” Chiaki asked the bear.

“Why should I?” Monokuma retorted.

Fuyuhiko took over. “Oh, I dunno...maybe because we’re gonna fucking die if you don’t.”

“This *is* the killing school trip.” Monokuma reminded him.

“The purpose of the killing school trip is to watch us brutally murder one another, not to have us wiped out by a monstrous organisation.” Gundam objected.

“Yeah, I thought you hated the Future Foundation.” Hajime folded his arms.

“I do, I do. As much as I hate Monomi, in fact!” Monokuma insisted. “But haven’t you ever heard the saying? The enemy of your enemy is your friend.”

“Wait, we’re your enemy?” Ibuki looked offended.

“I don’t really care what the Future Foundation are doing if it gets rid of you guys.” Monokuma laughed, carefree in his attitude. “They’re like pest control, and you’re a bunch of pesky fleas.”

“But if all the islands get destroyed, then you’ll go down with them.” Chiaki pointed out.

“I’m Monokuma, I can’t be destroyed.” the bear said casually.

“You’ll be electrocuted if you go under water.” Peko said.

“Monokuma, you have to do something!” Monomi burst onto the scene, panting and out of breath.

“I don’t have to do anything.” Monokuma snarled.

There was something strange about Monokuma’s behaviour. His plan had been stolen and taken over by the Future Foundation, but he showed no signs of caring at all. Didn’t it bother him that he was
losing control? Wasn't he upset that a greater mastermind had come along? Monokuma's careless
behaviour made Hajime uncomfortable, he didn't trust it.

“I wish I could help, but without my magic stick I’m useless.” Monomi wailed. “But don’t worry, as
your teacher I will protect you.”

“What good can you do?!?” Fuyuhiko glared at her.

“Monomi, have you seen Nagito?” Hajime changed the subject. He had bigger things to worry about
than Fuyuhiko starting arguments.

Monomi shook her head. “I’m afraid not, I haven’t seen him since yesterday.”

“Dammit.” Hajime kicked the ground. He didn’t even know if Nagito was alive.

Chiaki placed a calming hand on Hajime’s arm. “It’s okay, we can go and look for him.”

"Yeah, we don't have to give up yet." Fuyuhiko tried to offer some support too. "This is an island,
yeah? Nagito has to be somewhere."

The words of Hajime's friends were encouraging. "Yeah, you're right. It's not like he's swam away
from us."

"We should probably communicate with Makoto too." Sonia suggested.

"Yeah, you're right." Hajime turned his back on Chiaki, listening to what Sonia had to say. "He said
whenever we're awake, so now seems as good a time as any."

"We could go to the restaurant?" Sonia said, it seemed she had grown tired of visiting the old
building.

"That's good with me." Hajime agreed, he never wanted to visit the old building again.

“Uh guys…” Ibuki cut in awkwardly. “Chiaki is sounding like an untuned guitar.”

Hajime had no idea what Ibuki was talking about until he turned around. Just like yesterday, Chiaki
was malfunctioning. So caught up in his conversation with Sonia, Hajime hadn't noticed.

“I...I...I...I...I...I.” Chiaki hadn’t collapsed this time, but her body was still trembling. She was
repeating the same sound over and over, exactly like a broken record.

“Her system is weakening again, shit!” Hajime didn’t mean to swear, but with Chiaki glitching, it
meant he could lose her at any moment.

"Her system?” Peko repeated, lost at what Hajime had just said. "What are you talking about?"

"Is she having a stroke or something?” Fuyuhiko asked, looking deeply concerned.

It then occurred to Hajime that he still hadn't addressed the issue of Chiaki being an A.I. The
obvious clues were there by that point, but the others clearly weren't picking them up. Now was a
horrible time to explain, but it wasn't fair to keep everyone out of the loop. That being said, could
Hajime really offer a good explanation with Chiaki in a bad state?

"There's something you guys need to know about Chiaki.” Hajime attempted to explain, though he
was badly distracted. "I should've mentioned it yesterday, but I forgot. Kyousuke did say in his
message, but I'm guessing none of you remembered.”
"No, wait....!" Fuyuhiko let out a loud gasp, his memories resurfing. "Chiaki...she's....an A.I."

"Oh, yes I remember hearing that too." Sonia added. "But at the time I did not pay attention, for it made no sense."

"I'll tell you guys more about it later," Hajime promised. "Right now, I need to look after Chiaki. But I wanted you to know, so this actually makes sense. Kyosuke's bug is trying to kill her, so she keeps glitching like this."

"Let’s get her back to the restaurant, she can rest there.” Gundam said, remaining calm. “Shall I carry her?”

“I’ll do it.” Peko stepped forward, volunteering herself. She scooped Chiaki into her arms, showing no signs at all of a struggle.

“Do you need any help Peko?” Sonia asked, afraid the swordswoman might drop her friend.

Peko shook her head. “I’ve carried weight much heavier than this before, I’ll be fine.”

Peko had no choice but to place Chiaki on the ground. Unconscious, the gamer wouldn't be able to support her own weight if forced into a chair. After doing this, Peko left immediately to gather pillows from the cottages for Chiaki's comfort. She left Hajime in charge of watching her, promising to return soon.

Hajime sat beside Chiaki on the restaurant floor, his legs tucked underneath him. He placed a hand over Chiaki's forehead, curious to see if she had a temperature. No sooner had he done so, he retracted his hand in an instant. Chiaki felt stone cold, it was like touching a dead body - making it feel too close to home. If anything, he'd expected her to have a high temperature. When his old laptop started having problems, it would always overheat and burn his legs. Though of course, Chiaki wasn't a laptop, and he felt slightly guilty for making the comparison. Unable to touch her, he spoke words of encouragement instead. "You can't give up on me now, okay? I need you to get through this because we're in it together. I need you."

He waited with his friend until Peko returned. The swordswoman was struggling to walk up the stairs, blinded by the number of pillows she was carrying. She seemed relieved to have finally arrived at her destination.

“How is she?” Peko asked, placing a soft pillow under Chiaki’s head for support.

“She seems to have lost all her energy.” Hajime replied. “But the twitching has calmed down, it’s only happening every so often.”

Hajime noticed one of his own pillows in the pile, though obviously, he wasn't going to complain. It seemed Peko had raided all of the cottages that had been left unlocked.

“We should leave her to rest.” Peko advised.
Hajime knew Peko was right, there was nothing more they could do for Chiaki in that moment.

The others had gathered around one of the dining tables, though none of them were eating breakfast. It had just gone eight, though Monokuma’s morning alarm hadn’t sounded. It seemed that he had no use for it anymore.

As soon as Hajime pulled out a chair and sat down, the monitor on the wall came to life. It was as if Makoto had been waiting for him to finish with Chiaki. Like before, the Future Foundation trio were gathered around a laptop's webcam.

“Good morning,” Makoto smiled, attempting to lighten the mood. “Is now a good time to talk?”

“Yeah, it’s fine.” Hajime nodded, desperately hoping Makoto had some good news to share.

“How’s everything going over there?” Makoto asked.

“Well, as you’ve probably seen, Monokuma Rock went under,” Hajime said.

“We saw that.” Makoto replied. “We tried to see if there was a correlation between the timings of the destructions, but there’s nothing we could find. It seems like the islands are being destroyed at random.”

“Great….” Hajime sighed, that wasn't any help at all. "Oh, and Monokuma is encouraging the downfall of Jabberwock Island too.”

"That isn't surprising," Byakuya remarked. "That bear is a waste of existence."

"We were up all night looking for a solution," Makoto said. "But this is much harder than we anticipated. We've never come across a bug so powerful before. What the Future Foundation are using to destroy the islands is highly encrypted, it's so powerful."

“Don’t let Makoto bother you with his unhelpful comments.” Byakuya interrupted, bored of listening in. "Our night of investigating wasn't as useless as he's making it out to be."

"H-hey!" Makoto objected. "I wasn't finished yet, it was leading somewhere."

"I take it you’re familiar with the ancient ruin on the second island?” Kyoko spoke up, ignoring the boys beside her.

“The replica of Hope’s Peak?” Hajime asked.

“Yes, that’s it.” Kyoko clarified.

“What about it?” Hajime asked, since Kyoko didn’t have any more to say. “Wait…” before she even had time to reply, Hajime had connected the dots.

“What is it?” Gundam asked.

“It’s an exact replica of Hope’s Peak Academy from the school killing life!” Hajime gasped. “That means...it was designed to keep everything from the outside...outside. If we get inside, we might be alright. I don't think any water can get in.”

“We can’t confirm it’s airtight, but it’s the best shot you have at survival if the islands are sinking.” Kyoko said. “You need to take shelter there, immediately. The building is sturdy, it shouldn't collapse, even under the pressure of an earthquake. If you sit tight in there you, we believe you can make it through to the end of the twenty-second day without dying.”
Hajime nodded enthusiastically, it actually sounded like a plan. He was beginning to feel hopeful again. “Okay...we can do that!”

Hajime’s enthusiasm had passed on to Ibuki. “We can go right now!”

“I can’t go, not yet.” a small voice piped up from across the room. It was Chiaki. She’d woken, and gained enough strength to speak.

“If you’re too weak, I shall carry you.” Peko offered, readying her arms.

“It’s...not that.” Chiaki said, though grateful all the same. She attempted to stand up, using the pillows to push herself off the ground. “Nagito is out there somewhere, we can’t just leave him behind and go to the ruin. Even if it means I find you all later…”

“No!” Hajime raised his voice. He was so caught up in hope, he’d forgotten about Nagito - it was somewhat ironic. “Once we lock ourselves inside the ancient ruin, there’s no going back. We can’t risk opening it for anyone. We all go in together, or we don’t go in at all. I’m not leaving you behind Chiaki, Nagito either.”

“We shall find him!” Sonia said, a sense of determination filling her voice.

Hajime turned back to the monitor. “I know you guys are probably against this, but we’re not leaving anyone behind.”

“It’s risky, but brave.” Makoto smiled at the camera. “That’s what the true Ultimate Hope would do, Hajime.”

“Since you’re not going to the ruin just yet, I have a suggestion,” Kyoko replied. “The ruin may be a replica of Hope’s Peak, but none of us know how detailed it is inside. The majority of rooms could be empty.”

“Yeah, when we went in there before, the entire thing glitched out.” Hajime scratched his head.

“That only happened because the Neo World Program was corrupting, this bug is different.” Kyoko said. “I suggest collecting emergency supplies before locking yourselves inside. Two days without food or water isn’t going to be fun, and we don’t know for sure if there are supplies inside.”

“We can get everything we need from the market.” Hajime said, he’d relied on the store enough times before.

“What about weapons?” Peko put forward. “We could gather some from the military base.”

“There is no need for weapons.” Sonia insisted, strongly against the idea. “The islands are hurting themselves, not us.”

“Sonia’s right, we don’t need weapons.” Hajime agreed. “If we split into pairs, we can have two search parties for Nagito, while one pair gets supplies from the store.”

Ibuki took a headcount. “But there’s an odd number. You really are bad at math!”

“Chiaki,” Hajime began, turning to his friend. “If you don’t mind me saying, I think you should stay here. You need recover and save your energy, not hike across the island.”

The frown on Chiaki’s face suggested she didn’t want to stay at the restaurant doing nothing, but even she knew her own strength. “I’ll stay here. Then...if Nagito comes back, I’ll be waiting for
“Great.” Hajime smiled enthusiastically. “Gundam, Ibuki, would you two be okay getting our supplies?”

“Leave it to Ibuki!” Ibuki saluted like Hajime were an army sergeant.

“That is something I can accomplish.” Gundam nodded.

“Fuyuhiko, Peko, I’d like you to search islands four and five for Nagito.” Hajime delegated. “Sonia and I can take this island and the second. If that’s okay?” he hurriedly sought consent from the princess.

“Of course.” Sonia beamed.

“I suggest we create a time limit.” Peko put forward her idea. “If not, we could be searching all day. And unfortunately, we don’t have that time. We’re already putting ourselves in danger by delaying our arrival to the ruin.”

Hajime didn’t want to set a limit, it would put them under pressure. Unfortunately, he knew Peko was right. As much as he wanted to find Nagito, he couldn’t spend the entire day doing so. “Okay, let’s see…” he glanced at the clock on the wall. “An hour and a half should be more than enough time.”

“Sounds about right.” Fuyuhiko gave his approval. “If we don’t find Nagito in that time, we ain’t ever gonna find him.”

“What should we do if the time runs out and your mission for Nagito is unsuccessful?” Gundam asked, preparing for the worst.

“Then we meet at the ruin.” Hajime said, planning accordingly - though if it came to it, would things really be so straightforward? Leaving Nagito behind to drown would be an incredible weight on Hajime's shoulders, one he wasn’t sure if he could live with.

“Wait...let me help!”

A tiny voice butted into their conversation. Waddling into the room came Monomi. The rabbit was waving her arms about, desperate for their attention. “I want to help too!”

Beggars can’t be choosers, and at that point, Hajime really wasn’t in the position to turn down help. Still, Monomi could often be a bigger nuisance than she was a use, so he didn’t feel like sending her out on the missing person’s mission.

“Why don’t you wait for us at the ruin?” Hajime suggested. “You can keep everyone in order, and make sure we all arrive okay.”

“I would love to do that!” Monomi cheered.

“Great!” Hajime smiled, doing his best to be nice since Monomi seemed so excited. “If you guard the ruin, you can help us get in when we all arrive.”

“I can do that!” Monomi promised, giving him her word.

“Okay great, the plan is sorted.” Hajime clapped his hands together. Time was ticking, they needed to get a move on. “We get supplies, we look for Nagito, and we meet at the ruin in an hour and a
half."

“Good luck everybody.” Sonia offered moral support.

Peko and Fuyuhiko took off first, since they had the furthest distance to go. Their responsibility was to investigate the fourth and fifth islands, and hopefully find Nagito hiding somewhere.

As Ibuki left with Gundam, she vocalised a list of items she wanted to collect for their supply stash. Gundam was already having to put Ibuki in her place, pointing out that ice cream and hot sauce weren’t the highest priorities.

In a change of plan, it was decided that Chiaki would wait at the ruin with Monomi. This made Chiaki feel even more useless, but it was the best decision for her. If they suddenly had to evacuate and get to the ruin, Chiaki might not have the strength in her to run across the island. It was better she waited at their destination, so she wouldn’t have to worry about getting there. Monomi walked away with Chiaki, hand in hand, it was actually rather sweet.

It was Hajime and Sonia’s turn to leave last, both of them ready for the adventure. They had two islands to search, hopefully finding Nagito if Peko and Fuyuhiko didn’t.

“Shall we start with the first island?” Sonia looked to Hajime. “Since we are already here.”

“Makes sense to me.” Hajime agreed. “I was thinking we could start with the cottages. Maybe Nagito somehow got inside one of the...unused ones.” he couldn’t bring himself to say it properly, maybe Nagito had broken into the cottages of their dead friends….

They started with the obvious, visiting Nagito’s cottage first. Just because he hadn’t shown up that morning, didn’t rule out the fact he could still be in bed. In fact, it was a brilliant hiding location. He had all his home comforts, and a locked door to stop anyone from bothering him.

Hajime stood by Sonia’s side as she rapped on the door. As soon as Sonia’s knuckles came in contact with the wood, the door swung open. The pair waited for Nagito to step outside, but no one appeared.

“That’s weird.” Hajime remarked, shooting Sonia a strange glance.

The door had opened on its own accord. It seemed whoever left the room last hadn’t gone to the efforts of shutting it properly. Were they in a hurry, or simply careless?

“Let us have a look.” Sonia stepped forward into the room since there was no one to invite her inside.

Hajime followed her lead, walking in second.

During the rewrite, Hajime hadn’t been given the opportunity to visit Nagito’s cottage. Though looking back, he only really went in there in the original game for part of Nagito’s murder investigation. The room was the same as before, minus the fridge. Hajime was pleased to see it missing, it meant Nagito wasn’t storing poison in his room. Then again, how could he? That was something gained at the Funhouse.

They spent a couple of minutes looking around for any possible clues, but their search was unsuccessful. The bed was perfectly made, the blinds wide open, no item out of place. It was just a normal bedroom, nothing to find.

“Onto the other rooms then.” Hajime sighed, disappointed he was none the wiser.
To save time, Sonia and Hajime split the cottage searching between them. Sonia would take the girls side, and Hajime the boys. They didn’t need to waste time in the cottages of any living students, so the task wasn’t as overwhelming. Sonia had the cottages of Hiyoko, Mikan, Akane, and Mahiru. While Hajime had Teruteru, Byakuya, Nekomaru, and Souda. They weren’t actually allowed inside the cottages, the doors had been locked, but they could do their best to peer through the windows. If Nagito was hiding inside, it wouldn’t be hard to spot him.

Though Hajime didn’t find Nagito, something surprising did come from spying. The cottages of the dead students were completely empty. No beds, no TVs, no personal touches such as Teruteru’s crude magazines, or Akane’s stash of snacks. It was as if no one had lived there at all, the rooms had been wiped clean.

“Why did Monokuma have to empty their cottages so soon?” Sonia addressed what she saw, a hint of sadness in her voice.

“I’m not totally sure this was Monokuma’s doing.” Hajime replied honestly. “I think...when someone dies in the Neo World Program, they’re kinda erased in a way. I guess when they go, their possessions go with them.”

It was sad losing the personal touches of the students, but it did make searching for Nagito easier. It prevented him from hiding under the bed or burying himself in pillows.

“We know for certain, Nagito is not here.” Sonia confirmed. Their search of the cottages was definitely over.

“Guess we better broaden our search to the rest of the island then.” Hajime said, leaving the hotel resort with Sonia.

“Where to?” Sonia asked, waiting for Hajime to lead.

“I don’t mind.” Hajime shrugged, they’d have to cover it all either way. “I guess we can leave Rocket Punch Market alone. If he’s there, Gundam and Ibuki will see him.”

“Good thinking!” Sonia smiled. “Then, in that case, shall we go to the airport?”

“Yeah, sounds good.” Hajime nodded, happy with Sonia’s suggestion.

With nothing left to discuss, the pair headed for the airport. Hajime took a passing glance at the market as they walked by, hoping Gundam and Ibuki were getting on okay.

“It is strange to think,” Sonia began, making conversation as they went. “This is likely the final time we will ever visit these locations.”

“Oh, I hadn’t thought of that!” Hajime exclaimed. Sonia was right. After searching the first and second islands, they would lock themselves away in the ancient ruin and stay there until the end of the rewrite. “Though, I’m pretty glad to be seeing the back of this place.”

“You are?” Sonia looked at him curiously. “I am not quite sure how I feel, some of the spots on this island are very beautiful.”

Hajime shrugged, he didn’t feel the same. “They kinda lose their beauty when you’re stuck watching your friends die over and over. When you’re at the hospital all night hoping your friends are gonna wake from their comas, you don’t think about the palm trees and the blue sea.”

“Oh...Hajime, I am sorry.” Sonia apologised instantly, realising the insensitivity of her comment. “I
“No, don’t be sorry.” Hajime interrupted, it wasn’t his intention to guilt trip Sonia. “I mean, you went through it too. You just don’t remember.”

It was a serious conversation which needed to be had, but there was no time to focus on the past. The pair soon arrived at the airport, they had to focus on Nagito again.

It didn’t take long to cover the airport grounds, unlike the cottages. Unless Nagito was secretly a contortionist, bending his body to hide in one of the suitcases on the conveyor belt, he wasn’t there.

“On we go.” Hajime sighed, giving the airport one last glance. Memories of the sleepover came to mind, the night Byakuya had died. Perhaps it wasn’t such a bad thing to let it go.

They continued in the direction they’d been heading, ignoring the bridge for now, as there was still one spot left on the first island. Nagito Komaeda hiding at the ranch seemed a very unlikely possibility, but it was still Hajime’s responsibility to check.

Sonia hurried into the barn, while Hajime checked the grounds surrounding. They weren’t supposed to split up, but Hajime saw it reasonable since they were still in a safe distance of each other. If the slightest thing went wrong, all they’d have to do is shout.

As suspected, Nagito wasn’t there. Hajime took the time to say goodbye to the ranch instead. Usami Coral wasn’t one of his favourite locations, but it was iconic to the island nonetheless. As he waited for Sonia, Hajime looked on at one of the cows grazing in the field.

“Don’t suppose you wanna follow us to the ruin?” half jokingly, Hajime spoke to the cow. He knew it was a computer simulated animal, but a part of him felt guilty leaving the creature behind to drown. “Maybe if Gundam finishes in time, he could come and get you.” if anyone could rescue the animals, it would be the Ultimate Breeder.

“No Nagito, I am afraid.” Sonia appeared from the barn, wearing an expression of disappointment. “I hope we find him, Hajime.”

“We’ve still got the second island to search, and Jabberwock Park!” Hajime was trying his best to remain optimistic. “And Peko and Fuyuhiko are covering the other islands. He has to be somewhere, I mean people don’t just vanish.” though this wasn’t just any old ‘person’, it was Nagito.

They stopped off at Jabberwock Park before continuing their journey to the second island. Nagito wasn’t there either, though this was hardly surprising. Jabberwock Park offered nowhere to hide, it would’ve been a poor choice on Nagito’s part. However, their trip to the park wasn’t a total waste. The pair made an interesting discovery upon their arrival.

“Hajime, look…” Sonia pointed in the distance, shock striking her expression. “Look at the timer.”

Hajime followed Sonia’s gaze, very much surprised by what he saw. The timer had changed its display. Where it should have said ‘two days’ with a list of minutes and seconds, were three red X’s instead. They were flashing violently, in need of their own epilepsy warning.

“What do you think it means?” Sonia picked Hajime’s brain for ideas.

“I…” Hajime hesitated before giving his answer. “I think it’s a sign that the game has changed. It’s not a matter of counting down the days anymore, we could die at any time.” it was disturbing to say, but Hajime wanted to be truthful. There was no point in sugarcoating things.
With heavy hearts, they went on their way. It was time to complete their search for Nagito. If they
didn’t find him on the second island, then the situation was out of their control.

As with the first island, they wanted to work in a clockwise direction. It meant the first location they
passed was the ancient ruin, but there was no time for stopping. Monomi and Chiaki were
somewhere in the distance, but Hajime wasn’t close enough to make them out.

“We’ll be back soon.” Hajime whispered, making a promise to himself. It was the encouragement he
needed to keep going.

The library was next door, and a location the pair actually stopped at. Hajime felt somewhat hopeful
approaching the library, as he knew Nagito had spent a lot of time in there before. Perhaps Nagito
wasn’t hiding, but had instead escaped to the library for some solace. Hajime creaked open the
double doors, knowing the answer as soon as he peered inside. It was disappointing not to find
Nagito at one of the many desks with his nose buried in a book.

“He isn’t here either.” Hajime let out a deep sigh, their list of places to look was getting shorter and
shorter.

“I might take a book with me to the ruin,” Sonia muttered to herself, admiring all the titles.

“Yeah, sure.” Hajime didn’t see the harm, it was going to be a long two days. “Just, would you mind
being quick?” he didn’t want to offend the Princess, but Nagito’s life was the bigger priority than
Sonia’s book preferences. Besides, Hope's Peak Academy had its own library. It just felt wrong to
say no to a Princess.

“Of course, Hajime.” Sonia nodded. “I shall need no longer than a minute.”

To no surprise, Sonia headed straight to the horror section of the library. In these dark times, maybe it
would do her some good to choose something of a lighter nature.

Hajime waited with his back pressed against one of the shelves. He didn’t waste his time choosing a
book too, he knew he wouldn’t read it. As he watched Sonia hurriedly looking through titles,
something caught his attention. The ground felt as if it were moving underneath Hajime’s feet, he
could feel the vibrations.

“Sonia...do you feel that?” Hajime addressed it instantly. “I think the ground’s shaking again.”

“Oh...yes, I feel it too!” Sonia gasped, turning away from the books.

It felt different to before, the shakes were less violent. “This feels different to the other earthquakes.”
Hajime frowned.

“Perhaps this is the impact of one of the other islands collapsing?” Sonia suggested. “Or we are
experiencing early warning of this island’s destruction.”

Hajime wanted neither of her theories to be true, but the latter was especially bad. If the second
island was collapsing, the others would have to get to them immediately so they could vacate inside
the ruin. They’d have minutes, if that, to try and spread the message across Jabberwock island.

“We should see.” giving no time for Sonia to reply, Hajime bolted out of the library. He flung open
the giant doors, letting the daylight pour in. Squinting at the blinding sun, he tried his best to look for
any signs of danger.

Sonia was seconds behind Hajime, giving up on her book search. “Can you see anything?”
“Not really.” Hajime replied. “I can’t think why else the ground is kinda shaking, but it doesn’t feel anywhere near as powerful as the other earthquakes.”

Sonia scanned around, looking for the solution too. “Oh…” her voice fell flat.

“Oh?” Hajime repeated, turning to Sonia for an explanation.

“I found the source of our problem…it is not an earthquake.” it should’ve been good news, but the terrified look on Sonia’s face said otherwise. “Hajime, look over there…”

Sonia gently placed her hand on the back of Hajime’s head, steering it in the direction she wanted him to look. He was not prepared for what he saw.

Crossing the bridge to the second island, and fast approaching, came an army of Monokumas. Each one presumably a clone, they walked in rows of four, tightly packed in like a tin of sardines. They walked in perfect rhythm...left, right, left, right, left, right. Their collective footsteps created the vibrations that Hajime and Sonia had experienced.

As if this wasn’t a despairing sight on its own, things were only going to get worse. Bringing up the rear was the actual Monokuma. He was charging along the bridge in a tank, riding on top with a machine gun in hand - sporting an army helmet for the finishing touch.

*Ding Dong, Bing Bong*

As if on cue, the monitors around Hajime chimed. Hajime didn’t want to take his eyes off the Monokumas, but if he was going to hear the message, he needed to be back inside the library to see a monitor. Left with no choice, he ran back in, making sure Sonia was with him. They turned their attention to the library's screen, waiting in fear to hear the message.

Monokuma appeared on the screen, though it wasn’t his usual filming location. The footage appeared to be live. Hajime could easily tell. The background was the bridge of the second island, Monokuma was wearing his army helmet, and there was additional background noise picked up by the microphone. It seemed that Monokuma had taped a camera to his tank so he could film himself.

“Ahahahahaha!” before the bear even said anything, he let out a thunderous evil laugh. “You guys are beary stupid.”

Hajime didn’t appreciate the pun. Just seeing the bear’s smug smile made him want to punch the screen.

“I’m broadcasting this message so you guys can hear my super evil, super nasty, master plan!” he seemed to be mocking Kyosuke’s message, lowering his voice to impersonate the Future Foundation’s vice leader. “I was willing to leave you guys alone and let the Future Foundation kill you, but it seems you’ve figured out a way to stay alive. Ya know, when discussing your top secret safety plans, you should probably ‘bear’ in mind, that I can hear every word you’re saying.”

There was a continuation of the bear puns.

“There’s no way I’m gonna let you hide in the ruin for two days, that’s soooooo boring.” Monokuma growled. “This mutual killing game needs to go out in style, so I’m here to help. None of you took my motive of a free for all killing game, so I decided to take it upon myself. Since Jaberwock Island is crumbling, I can do whatever I want to you now! There are no rules anymore. Me and my clones are going to kill each and every one of you! We’ve already gotten Nagito. One down.”

“Nagito!” Sonia cried. She clutched her stomach, feeling sick at the news.
"Kill, kill, kill!" Monokuma cheered. He sounded way too happy, it wasn’t right. "After this filthy bloodbath, no one here but me will graduate! Run and hide if you want, but it's pointless in the end."

Finishing on a threatening note, his message ended, and the screen went black.

“This is bad, really bad.” Hajime began to pace the library, stating the obvious.

“I cannot believe they got Nagito.” Sonia lowered her head.

Monokuma claimed he’d killed Nagito, but something about it didn’t seem right. If Monokuma really had killed Nagito, wouldn’t he want to spread despair? Broadcast photos of Nagito’s body on the monitors, or tie his corpse to the tank like a sick trophy. His word seemed like an understatement. At such a vulnerable time, Hajime expected more. However, now wasn’t the time for sharing conspiracy theories.

“We need to get to the ruin.” Hajime ranted, his pacing of the room getting faster. “If everyone else saw that message, I’m sure they’ll head there too.”

“There is no time to waste,” Sonia was in agreement with the plan. “We must leave immediately.”

Sonia was right. If they stayed in the library much longer, they were at risk of getting cornered in by the Monokumas. Hajime was nervous to see how much distance the clones had gained in the time they’d been inside. As much as he didn't want to go outside and face the music, he had to act fast.

Surprisingly, the Monokumas weren’t as close as Hajime had expected - which he learnt by stepping outside. It seemed that they’d remained stationary during Monokuma’s broadcast.

“Do you think we can make it?” Sonia gulped, staring into the distance. The ruin was just to their left, but that, unfortunately, happened to be the direction from which the Monokumas were approaching.

“I...I...don’t know.” Hajime wanted to be hopeful, but there was a big difference between being an optimist and being an idiot. “Maybe...maybe we could make it. But we’ll be throwing ourselves at an army of Monokumas.”

“I think it is too dangerous.” Sonia agreed, her face sceptical. “We cannot enter the ruin without the others, and the Monokumas will attack us.”

If it was just Hajime and Sonia that needed to get inside the ruin, then perhaps they could have made it. But since they had to wait for their friends, they’d be sitting targets if they went that way.

"It's not gonna work." Hajime stated. "It's a suicide mission."

“But Hajime,” Sonia frowned. “If we do not go to the ruin, where can we go?”

“We can still go to the ruin,” Hajime reassured her. “We’ve just gotta go the long way round.”

“Oh!” Sonia caught on quickly. “Of course.”

If they went right, instead of left, they could still reach the ruin, it would just take longer. In that time, Hajime hoped all of his other friends would be able to make it to the ruin.

"We should get going." Hajime pressed. The longer they stood around, the more distance the clones would gain on them.

The task ahead wasn't going to be easy; there were already a bunch of uncertainties. Were there
clones following Hajime and Sonia, or were they going to guard the ancient ruin? Were these the only clones, or were there more waiting up ahead? Was Monokuma actually going to kill them with his machine gun? With no way to predict the answers, there was nothing they could do but take risks.

With the journey mapped in mind, the pair took off in a flash. There was too much risk at hand to walk. They were running the most important race of their lives. Hajime could hear the sound of marching Monokumas gaining distance behind them, but he didn’t dare look to see how close they were. If he turned his head, he’d slow down, and that could be the difference between life and death. Gaining speed, they flew past the pharmacy, the adrenaline within keeping them going. Sonia was doing an impressive job of running in heels, focusing on her goal rather than the pain.

Once they’d passed the pharmacy, Hajime knew they were getting closer to the ruin. Though concerningly, the Monokumas sounded closer too. However, Hajime wasn’t sure if that was just his imagination acting paranoid. He could barely think straight as it was, his ears ringing, mind going into overdrive. He hadn’t had much time to analyse the clones, but he knew there were too many of them that he didn’t stand a chance if they caught up. Not to mention Monokuma’s tank and gun, that could take anyone out.

They were almost back at the bridge, just the diner in their way, with Chandler Beach behind it. Hajime wanted to shout words of encouragement to Sonia, but his mouth was too dry to speak. Though hopefully, the sheer thought of surviving was enough motivation for her to keep going.

Maybe Sonia didn’t need motivating at all, for she was the one to call out to Hajime. “We are nearly at the bridge!”

Hajime didn’t have it in him to talk back, but he appreciated Sonia’s effort all the same. Unfortunately, her motivating words made him a little too comfortable. Caught up in the excitement of the bridge, something missed Hajime’s eye entirely. As they approached the diner, something jumped out in front of Hajime, completely blocking his path. The Monokuma clone appeared from nowhere, concealed by a lampost and bushes. It lunged straight for Hajime, claws extended as far as they would go.

“Shing!” the clone yelled at Hajime as it attacked, its claws piercing the skin on his shoulder.

“Gah!” Hajime cried out as the bear attacked. It was clear the creature had done serious damage. The sudden pain roared through his arm, slowing down his reactions. Hajime tried to run past the clone, but it was already one step ahead.

The bear went in for round two, but luckily never got its chance. Before Hajime knew what was happening, Sonia came to his rescue.

“No you don’t!” using one of her heels as a weapon, Sonia began to attack the creature. Using the sharp heel, she smashed it against the clone’s skull. Hajime wasn’t sure if it was Sonia’s strength or the clone’s poor construction, but it instantly began to malfunction.

“D-D-D-D-despair.” like Chiaki had done earlier, the clone began to glitch. It retracted its arm from Hajime’s face, unable to do anything but stand there paralysed.

“That should do the trick!” Sonia smiled triumphantly, returning the shoe to her foot. “Are you okay, Hajime?” the smile didn’t last long, the concern for her friend taking over.

“Yeah, because of you.” Hajime couldn’t thank her enough, Sonia had just saved his life. As much as he wanted to stand there and offer her a speech of gratitude, now wasn’t the time. One quick
glance over his shoulder told him that the clones were fast approaching. They seemed to be appearing from the other direction too, unless the one that attacked Hajime was just a one off. “Come on, we’ve gotta keep going.” he winced as he spoke, the pain extremely noticeable.

“Are you sure?” Sonia frowned. “Your arm, it is-”

Hajime cut her short, he didn’t want to focus on his arm. “There’s no time to worry about my arm. Come on, we’ve gotta go.”

Sonia didn’t need telling twice, she had her senses about her. They could deal with Hajime’s arm once they reached their destination. Attempting to put what had just happened behind them, the pair broke into a sprint for the second time. They were on the lookout for Monokumas ahead, but they didn’t encounter any more. It really did seem that Hajime’s attacker was a stray.

Hajime could feel the sensation of blood running down his arm. The clone had done damage, but he didn’t dare look at it. He wasn’t afraid of blood, but it wasn’t something he wanted to see.

It felt like a miracle, but Hajime and Sonia made it to the ancient ruin unharmed. Taking the long way around had been a risk, but it was a risk that paid off. Once they’d passed the bridge, it was practically guaranteed they’d make it back safely. Their sprint died down when they reached the door of the ruin. To their disappointment, only Monomi was there; none of the others had turned up. Would the others even make it to them in time?

Hajime doubled over, weak of breath. While Sonia leant up against the wall, trying to regulate her breathing.

“Are you two okway?!” Monomi was there to greet them, appearing concerned when she noticed Hajime’s arm. “You’re bleeding!”

Hajime brushed past the comment, there were more important topics at hand. Mouth drier than ever, he was struggling to speak, but he was determined to push past the difficulties. “Where….are….the others?”

“I’m so sworry…” Monomi seemed close to tears, apologising over and over. “I’m so sworry, I tried to make her stay.”

“…Huh?” Hajime panted. “Make who stay?” Monomi had lost him entirely.

“Chiaki…” Monomi replied, her voice shaking as she said the name.

“Chikai…?” Hajime repeated. Blinded by the pain in his arm, he hadn’t realised that Chiaki was no longer there. It made him feel like a terrible friend. “Oh god, Chiaki! She’s missing?” Hajime had completely forgotten that Chiaki was meant to be waiting with Monomi in the first place.

“She ran off when Monokuma’s announcement played.” Monomi explained. “I tried to stop her, but she just wouldn’t listen.”

Knowing Chiaki was out there somewhere was another problem for Hajime to worry about. He was scared enough for his other friends on the island, but at least he knew they weren’t at risk of glitching.

“Monomi, where did Chiaki go?” Hajime asked, praying the rabbit had the answer.

“I…I don’t know.” Monomi shook her head, disappointed in herself. “I think that maybe she went to look for you on the first island, but I’m not sure.”
“It is okay, Monomi.” Sonia said kindly. “None of this is your fault.”

“But it’s all my fault.” Monomi’s voice began to crack, she was going to cry. “I should’ve stopped her. I should have followed her.”

“You’re not her babysitter, you did everything you could.” Hajime insisted, he couldn’t afford for Monomi to crumble at such a crucial time. “Chiaki made her own decision to run off.”

“Exactly!” Sonia nodded in agreement.

“Look, we need to go find Chiaki.” Hajime turned to Sonia, hoping for her help.

“You...want to leave?” Sonia gulped. “Hajime that is not a good idea. We just got here. We should not start running off again.”

“But what if Chiaki needs us?” Hajime protested. “She could be out there somewhere.”

“Gundam and Ibuki are out there somewhere. Fuyuhiko and Peko are out there somewhere.” Sonia reminded him, stern with her tone. “What if we leave just as someone else arrives? It will be one wild pigeon chase.”

"It's goose chase." Monomi piped up, correcting her student.

Sonia made a fair point, the logical decision would be to have everyone wait at the ruin. However, Hajime wasn’t in the mood to act logically. The blood trickling down his arm was a visual reminder of the damage the clones could do. With Chiaki in a weak state, she could glitch out somewhere and get attacked.

“Hajime!” Sonia called, trying to get his attention since he’d zoned out. “Chiaki is an A.I, is she not?”

"Yeah, so?" Hajime replied.

"I do not know the details, but as an A.I., does it not mean Chiaki has no physical being in the real world?" Sonia asked.

"That's right, Chiaki only exists in the Neo World Program." Hajime answered her question.

"But the rest of us do exist outside of this?" Sonia continued.

"Yeah." Hajime nodded.

"I see." mused Sonia, before making a bold statement. "Hajime, I do not wish to leave anyone behind. However, considering your...condition, I do not think Chiaki's life is your priority right now."

“My arm?!” Hajime raised his eyebrows. “That won’t stop me.”

“Not your arm.” Sonia frowned. “Do you not remember what Kyosuke said, Hajime? Your life has been connected to all of ours. If you die, then we die too.”

“Oh...” Hajime gasped. He realised what Sonia was saying. He was willing to risk the lives of all of his friends for someone who wouldn't even get the chance to graduate the program. It was a tough moral decision. Chiaki didn't deserve to be left behind and suffer, but she also didn't stand any real chance of surviving, whereas, the others did. “Sonia, what do we do?”
“I cannot stop you from rescuing Chiaki or the others, but if you go, I ask you to be careful. I do not want to die, Hajime.” Sonia stared him straight in the eyes, truly speaking from her heart. “Whatever decision you make, just please don’t come to regret it.”

“I...I think I need to find the others.” Hajime insisted. “I’m not going inside until everyone’s here. Once that door closes, we can’t open it again. Especially with Monokuma after us.”

“I understand.” Sonia accepted his answer. “If you do not mind, I will stay here with Monomi. I do not see it wise to have more of us running off. That way, if the others arrive, I can tell them what is going on.”

“Hajime,” Monomi piped up. “Are you sure you can run with your arm like that?”

“I’ll be fine.” Hajime promised, he could already feel the blood beginning to dry. “It’s just a cut, I’ll survive.” perhaps now wasn’t the moment to joke about surviving.

“Hajime, can you promise me something?” Sonia grabbed Hajime’s hand. “You may not have the time to save everyone. Please do not play the hero and die in the process.”

If Sonia’s kingdom had been involved in wars, then it was likely she knew a lot about sacrifice. Sometimes you have to think about the greater good. It’s hard and it’s horrible to do, but it’s the way life works.

“I need to go.” Hajime said, gearing himself up for another run. “I’ll see you guys soon, okay?” it was his way of promising to return.

Hajime skipped the sincere goodbyes, taking off before he started doubting himself. He knew his decision was questionable, but it wasn’t just Chiaki he was looking for. He was searching for his other friends too. He had no plan in mind, but he’d gotten it in his head to begin at the central island.

As Hajime ran, he noticed something. The army of Monokuma clones had disbanded. He was no longer being stalked by one intimidating group, the bears had run solo. It seemed that Monokuma and his tank were missing too, something which concerned Hajime deeply. Why had the army fallen apart? And where was Monokuma hiding?

Thankfully, Hajime was close enough to the bridge that making it to the central island wasn’t too much of an impossible task. With the clones scattered everywhere, he had to keep a watchful eye, making sure they didn’t spring out on him. Their claws were sharp, but they were lacking in speed. So long as Hajime kept a good distance, he could easily run past them before they had the chance to attack. His prayers answered, he made it to the central island unharmed. It was all about taking things one step at a time. He was just lucky to still be alive.

According to Monomi, Chiaki might have gone to the first island to look for Hajime and Sonia. However, this was only a guess, as the rabbit didn't know for sure. Upon crossing the bridge, Hajime planned to turn return to the first island, but this is not what happened. From the opposite direction, he could hear voices. The voices were faint, the words unintelligible. Hajime found himself stumped in a dilemma. Did he go left to the first island, where Monomi had suggested? Or turn to his right, where he could faint voices? It was like the classic puzzle; reaching a fork in the road with two signs. The left path looks sunny and safe, but there’s a sign out front claiming no entry. The right path looks dark and dangerous, but the sign is telling you to go that way.

Hajime had to make a decision, and he had to make it fast. Going with his gut, he chose to turn right. Monomi said Chiaki might be on the first island, but there was no knowing for sure. At least if Hajime followed the voices, he was guaranteed to find something.
Still on the watch for clones, Hajime ran with his decision and kept walking right. Continuing on his path, he noticed two figures standing outside the entrance to Jabberwock Park between the second and third islands. They were too tall to be clones.

“Hajime!”

Someone called his name at the top of their lungs. It seemed they’d spotted him, just as he’d spotted them.

“Ibuki?” Hajime shouted back, instantly recognising the voice. He was able to make out Gundam beside her.

Hajime ran to them as fast as he could, truly happy to see them alive. They were standing just outside the entrance to Jabberwock Park, the park behind them concealed by trees.

“I’m so glad to see you guys!” Hajime admitted. "But what are you doing out here?"

Gundam and Ibuki were supposed to be collecting supplies, but they had no bags and were hanging out near the park.

"Monokuma's announcement played and all these demonic beasts came at us from nowhere!" Gundam recalled. "We were attacked in the store. And it looks like you were too.” he gestured to Hajime’s wound.

"One jumped out on me." Hajime explained, still avoiding staring at his injury. "Look, you guys need to get to the ruin. Sonia and Monomi are waiting there.”

“Is Sonia okay?” Gundam asked, showing no care for Monomi’s safety.

“She’s fine.” Hajime reassured him. “There was an army of clones following us, and Monokuma in a tank, but they disappeared.”

“The clones are everywhere, like a bad case of head lice.” Ibuki complained. “We got chased all the way out here.”

“Did you outrun them?” Hajime asked, confused how Gundam and Ibuki hadn’t endured so much as a scratch.

“Nope, we just used these!” with a glimmer in her eye, Ibuki presented something from behind her back. It was none other than a gun.

"A gun?!" Hajime raised his voice without meaning to. "What? Where? How?" Rocketpunch market stocked a lot of things, but Hajime had never recalled a gun aisle.

"It's not an actual gun, just a taser." Ibuki replied. "There was a whole load of them in the market. It was with all the camping and survival stuff."

"Oh." Hajime calmed down, taser guns made a lot more sense.

“We tried it on one of the clones, and it totally froze up.” Ibuki continued, spinning the taser around on her index finger.

"Maybe you should be careful with that.” Hajime squirmed. He didn't feel like accidentally getting an electric shock because of Ibuki's careless behaviour.

“The taser wasn't enough to destroy the clones,” Gundam elaborated. “But it seemed to paralyse
them. How long for, I don’t know. But it gave us enough time to escape.”

“Hajime, take this!”

Before Hajime knew what was happening, Ibuki hurled something in his direction. Making quick judgement on where it was going to land, Hajime lurched forward. He was able to catch the item before it fell to the floor in a million pieces.

“I can’t take this!” Hajime declined the taser as soon as it landed in his hands. “It’s yours, you need this to fight the clones.”

“You kidding?” Ibuki grinned. “We’ve got plenty!”

Without asking permission, Ibuki grabbed a handful of fabric from Gundam’s coat, and pulled. This exposed Gundam, and gave Hajime the explanation he needed. Inside the lining of Gundam’s jacket, were several pockets. On a daily basis, Hajime presumed their use was storing snacks for the Dark Devas, but currently they were home to a stash of tasers. There was one gun per pocket.

“There was a whole load of them in the store,” Ibuki provided Hajime with more information, taking another taser for herself. “We got enough for everyone, just in case.”

“It is the least we can do…” Gundam spoke rather solemnly, pulling his coat away from Ibuki’s grasp. “We failed to collect supplies. When we were suddenly attacked by Monokumas, we were forced to drop everything and run. We could risk going back, but I don't think it's a good idea.”

“Don’t beat yourself up about it, everyone will understand.” Hajime smiled, offering his support. “Your lives are more important. We’ve only gotta spend two days in the ruin. If there isn’t any food inside, we can still survive.”

“I suppose…that is true.” Gundam found himself smiling too, moved by Hajime’s words of reassurance.

“These are far more valuable anyway.” Hajime motioned to the tasers. “Now we actually stand a fighting chance against these things. I just hope the others are okay…”

“Chiaki’s fine.” Ibuki spoke confidently, arms folded.

“I hope so,” Hajime said. “That’s kinda why I’m here, I really need to go and find her.”

“But you don’t need to, she’s fine.” Ibuki replied, matter-of-factly.

“We don’t know that for sure…” Hajime objected, Ibuki’s word wasn’t enough.

“No, Hajime….look!” rather forcefully, Ibuki shoved Hajime in the back, forcing him to turn around.

Hajime was about to snap at Ibuki for the unnecessary violence, but he soon shut his mouth. The musician’s confidence in Chiaki’s well being suddenly made sense. From the direction of the first island, there came a person. Tracing the steps Hajime had just walked was Chiaki.

“Chiaki, you’re okay!” Hajime exclaimed, close enough to be heard.

Chiaki smiled warmly at her friends, relieved to see them alive and well. She was slightly out of breath, but not as badly as Hajime had been earlier. “I...I went to the first island. I thought you and Sonia might be trapped there.”
“We were on the second island.” Hajime shook his head. "But why did you come for us? It's dangerous to be alone."

"I remembered what Kyosuke said." Chiaki replied. "If you die, everyone else on this island dies too. We have to keep you safe, Hajime."

"Well don't worry, I'm fine." Hajime said, grateful to the effort she'd made. "But what about you? Are you hurt at all?"

"I'm okay too." Chiaki said. "I snuck past most of the Monokumas, and my system hasn't started malfunctioning again."

“Here, take this.” Hajime handed Chiaki his taser, he could soon take another one from Gundam. “It will help you fight off the clones. It's a taser gun.” though he had a feeling Chiaki knew that anyway.

“Did you see Fuyuhiko or Peko?” Gundam intruded on their conversation.

“No...I didn’t.” Chiaki replied, aware this was the answer he didn't want to hear.

“What about Nagito?” Hajime asked.

“You...you don't remember the message?” Ibuki turned to Hajime. “Monokuma’s killed him. Nagito was pretty strange, but he didn’t deserve that.”

“I heard, I just don’t believe it.” Hajime argued. “The reveal of his death was so...underwhelming. Monokuma is all about games. He tells us he doesn’t care what’s happening now the islands are self-destructing, and then sets clones on us. If he really killed Nagito, I think he would’ve shown us some proof.”

“You could be right. Afterall, Monokuma does enjoy basking in despair.” Gundam could see Hajime’s point. “To show us no evidence at all, that is very unlike him.”

“Puhuhuhuhu!”

A demonic laugh rang through the ears of the four friends.

“Is this some kinda curse?” Ibuki whispered in a panic. “You say Monokuma’s name three times fast and he haunts you?”

“No such curse exists!” Gundam insisted.

"That's because...it's the real thing." Hajime gulped, his eyes catching sight of something he didn't want to see.

Emerging from the clearance of Jabberwock Park was Monokuma and his tank. It seemed he'd been hiding there all along, concealed by the trees. He must have heard every word of what the students had been saying, lurking to surprise them.

“Roll up, roll up one and all! It’s time for a game of Monokuma’s shoot ‘em up. Which target will he hit first?” like a twisted carnival leader, Monokuma shouted through a megaphone. The tank was travelling slowly, but this didn't matter since he was literally right behind them. “Bonus points for Hajime, one strike at him kills all!”

“We need to get out of here, now!” Hajime shouted. If Monokuma wasn't so busy showing off, he could have already killed them all - he was that close.
However, before the students could escape Monokuma’s grasp, a series of clones appeared from behind the tank. They must have also been lurking in the park, lying undetected until further instruction from their leader. The clones ran at the foursome, their eyes bloodthirsty. It seemed that Monokuma had sent them to capture the four as prisoners.

In a blind panic, the four friends each took their nearest escape route, running in whichever safe direction seemed closest. What they didn’t realise, is that this led to a separation. Ibuki and Hajime ran right, while Chiaki and Gundam went left.

It wasn’t until Hajime took a quick glance over his shoulder that he realised what had happened. “Chiaki! Gundam!” he could see his friends over a sea of clones. There was no way to reach them without coming under severe attack. Hajime was forced to run with the path he'd chosen. “Meet us back at the ruin! Okay?”

“We will.” Gundam shouted back on their behalf, his eye on Chiaki.

The split had cut them in two. Gundam and Chiaki had gone left, towards the second island. While Hajime and Ibuki were right, sending them in the direction of islands three, four, and five. If Hajime and Ibuki wanted to reach the ancient ruin, they would have to go the long way around. There were already too many clones piled up behind them, it would be a tougher fight if they chose to take the shortcut. Chiaki and Gundam had the quicker route, but more of the Monokuma clones were chasing them. Additionally, Monokuma and his tank had chosen to take their path too. If Hajime wanted to survive, he couldn't follow his friends.

"We need to go the whole way around to the ruin!" Hajime shouted, making it clear to Ibuki in case she hadn't already realised. He was beginning to tire of taking long routes just to reach his destination.

"Got it!" Ibuki shouted back, she was pumped.

With their destination in mind, Hajime and Ibuki ran side by side. Both of them knew their journey wouldn’t be so straight forward, with a number of clones already blocking their path.

“Use your taser, Hajime!” Ibuki cried, tasing a clone that jumped straight out in front of her.

It was the first time Hajime had seen the taser in action. It was as if someone had removed the bear's batteries; it stopped moving instantly - just a shell with no life inside.

“I gave it to Chiaki.” Hajime replied. It wasn’t easy talking and running at the same time, though his mouth was no longer dry.

“You what?!” Ibuki didn’t sound happy. “But she’s with Gundam, he has all the tasers.”

“I didn’t expect us to get split like this, I’m not psychic!” Hajime protested, though somewhat regretful he’d given away his weapon.

“Guess Ibuki is fighting for the both of us.” Ibuki commented. “Just stay close.”

Hajime wasn’t planning to run off, he didn't need a reminder.

They passed, what had once been, the third island. Not so much as a piece of rubble remained. The bridge had been destroyed too, leaving a blank space on the central island. It was as if the third island had never existed at all.

It was upon approaching the fourth island that their next problem occurred. Though Ibuki was doing
her best to fight off the clones, their wish of heading straight to the second island was too good to be true.

“Aw shit!” Hajime swore, the stressful situation getting the better of him.

In the far distance, Hajime could make out Monokuma’s tank. Had the bear successfully taken out Chiaki and Gundam? Or were the duo able to outrun him? Hajime could only hope it was the latter. Monokuma was shouting profanities through his megaphone, but Hajime wasn't quite close enough to hear exactly what. It was thanks to this distance he and Ibuki were still alive. They were just out of sight from the bear.

“It’s Monokuma, he’s coming our way.” Hajime explained, unsure whether Ibuki had seen.

“Dammit!” Ibuki scowled.

The clones that had been following them were all wiped out by Ibuki; she had a talent for the taser. This allowed the pair to stop by the fourth island's bridge, catch their breath, and evaluate their situation. Monokuma was coming their way, but he still had some distance to go.

“What do we do?” Hajime asked, wanting a second opinion. "There's no way we're gonna be able to run past Monokuma unseen. Looks like our path has been blocked off."

“Ibuki thinks we should go back.” Ibuki said, wiping the sweat from her brow. "We could turn around."

Not only did that involve retracing all their previous steps, but it meant following the path Gundam and Chiaki had taken. Who knew how many clones were waiting for them? Hajime explained this to Ibuki, suggesting it wasn't a good idea.

"Then..." Ibuki looked up and down the bridge they were standing by. "Why don't we hide out on the fourth island until he passes by?"

"Ibuki, that's brilliant!" Hajime exclaimed. "Monokuma thinks we're going to the second island. He wouldn't expect us to come here. He'll probably keep searching the central island for us. We can hide on the fourth island, wait for enough time to pass so he will have to have moved on, and then we continue where we were going."

Their new plan set in place, they actually crossed the bridge onto the fourth island. Luckily, Monokuma hadn't spotted them. His tank moved rather slowly, he just seemed to be enjoying the power trip.

Now they'd diverted out of Monokuma's path, there was no need to run. Hajime and Ibuki walked at a comfortable pace, trying to ignore the sweat pouring down their backs.

"Which way should we go?" Ibuki asked, turning to Hajime once they'd crossed the bridge. They could go left towards the funhouse, or right towards the horror house.

"We need to stay near the bridge," Hajime thought aloud. "Otherwise, we're not going to see when Monokuma passes by. But we don't wanna be too close that he'll see us."

Nezumi Castle would have been a great location, since Monokuma would be too scared of the mice to go inside. Unfortunately, it was too far away from the bridge, so Hajime and Ibuki would have no idea when it would be safe to leave.

"So we could hide at the funhouse train or the horror house?" Ibuki asked.
“Yeah.” Hajime nodded, those were the options.

“Ibuki chooses the funhouse. Monokuma made the horror house too creepy.” Ibuki shuddered, reflecting on the night Mahiru and Souda died.

“The funhouse it is.” Hajime agreed.

The funhouse train was parked at the station, though Hajime had no intentions of riding it. Instead, Hajime suggested he and Ibuki hide in one of the tunnels the train would usually travel through. The position was perfect for watching the bridge, and the darkness of the tunnel would keep them out of sight. The pair sat cross-legged on the tunnel’s floor, just relieved to have a rest. Hajime somewhat regretted not picking up a cold soda from the confectionery stand, he was desperate for a drink.

“We've got a pretty good view.” Hajime remarked. The tunnel was directly opposite the bridge, they would definitely see Monokuma when he passed by. "It seems like Monokuma’s gone to the fifth island, or we’d have heard his tank.”

“There might be more clones, but Ibuki doesn’t think they’ll be a problem.” Ibuki replied, confidence filling her voice.

“So long as you’ve got that taser, and we don’t get trapped with a large number of clones, we should be fine.” Hajime agreed. “If we-”

“Shhhhhh-!” Ibuki suddenly interrupted him, violently pressing her index finger to Hajime’s lips.

“I-” Hajime tried to protest, but the look in Ibuki’s eyes told him otherwise. Whatever was going on, Ibuki was serious.

“Can’t you hear that?” Ibuki narrowed her eyes at Hajime, surprised he was still trying to talk.

Hajime pushed Ibuki’s finger away from his mouth. “Uh, hear what? Monokuma?”

“No, not Monokuma!” Ibuki exclaimed. “Souda. It’s Souda calling my name.”

“Souda?” a very confused Hajime replied. “H-how can Souda be calling your name?”

“I don’t know, but Ibuki can hear him!” Ibuki was insistent.

“Well, I can’t hear him…” Hajime didn’t want to crush Ibuki’s spirit, but he had to be honest.

“That’s because your hearing is rubbish compared to Ibuki!” Ibuki growled, her comment coming out more malicious than she intended.

“This doesn’t make any sense,” Hajime shook his head in disbelief. “Souda died.”

“But...but this is all a simulation, right?” Ibuki said. “What if, Kyosuke’s message did something to wake Souda up?”

Hajime was about to disregard her theory, when something very important happened.

“H-Hajime…?”

“That voice, I-” Hajime was lost for words.

“I-I’m sorry, I’m s-so sorry….” the voice whimpered.
Hajime and Ibuki turned to each other, exchanging the same word at once. “Mikan!”

“You can hear her too?” Ibuki looked at him excitedly.

“Y-yeah, yeah I can.” Hajime admitted, though somewhat reluctantly. There were no doubts about it though, the voice belonged to Mikan.

“We’ve gotta go find them, they might need our help!” Ibuki shouted.

Without warning, Ibuki jumped up from their hiding place and bolted out of the tunnel. She turned right, as if towards the fun house train. She was gone before Hajime even had the chance to stop her, out of sight from the minute she left him.

“Ibuki, no!” Hajime shouted after her, but the musician had already gone. Sure, he heard Mikan, but something didn’t seem right. Why would the Future Foundation’s bug bring back the dead students? The Future Foundation wanted to up the death count, not lower it.

Hajime got up to follow his friend. There was no point trying to conceal their hiding spot, the musician had already revealed it. However, Hajime didn’t even get the chance to leave the tunnel. No sooner had he risen to his feet, Ibuki returned. It should have been a moment of relief, but everything was wrong.

Ibuki staggered back into the tunnel, the usual bounce in her step gone. Blood was gushing from her throat like a twisted waterfall. She was desperately clutching her neck to make it stop, but it didn’t. The source of the bleeding came from one sharp, deep claw mark across her throat. Her blouse was stained crimson, and it had dyed her hands too.

“I-Ibuki!” Hajime felt as if he’d been paralysed, horrified by what he saw.

“…” Ibuki opened her mouth to speak, but she couldn’t. Instead, she was violently trying to gasp for air, but this impossible task led to severe coughing. The more she coughed, the more she was trying to breathe but couldn’t. It was insufferable to watch, Hajime could see how much pain she was in. Taking one last panicked breath, the musician collapsed to the floor. Her brain deprived of oxygen, she was no longer able to stand. Her body had lost consciousness, and within seconds, she’d be dead.

“Ibuki!” Hajime screamed her name, running to the tunnel’s entrance. He dropped to his knees by Ibuki’s side. Blood was still oozing from her throat, despite her lifeless body. Hajime snatched for Ibuki’s wrist, urgently wanting to take her pulse. His fingers fumbled where her pulse should’ve been, but there was nothing. “You-you can’t…”

“Ahahahahaha!”

The malicious laugh was like a punch to the gut. Looking up, Hajime saw Monokuma towering above him. A gleeful smile plastered across Monokuma's face, his bloody claws instantly pinning him responsible for Ibuki’s murder. The bear had ditched the tank, he’d moved on to a new toy. In his hand, he held something small and black.

“Like it?” Monokuma teased, having noticed Hajime staring. “It’s a recording device like they used in old fashion journalism. Wonder if you kids even know what that means these days.”

“The voices...the voices we heard. That was...you?” Hajime hissed, his own voice having shrunk to a whisper. He wanted to stand up and face Monokuma, but he couldn’t leave Ibuki lying there on the ground. As if to protect her from Monokuma, he gently pulled Ibuki into his arms, cradling her body.

“Ding, ding, ding, we have a winner!” Monokuma shouted, the excitement getting to him. “I
imported some of the audio from the security cameras onto here. Wanna hear some more? I know you do!"

Before Hajime had the chance to protest, Monokuma hit ‘play’ on his recording device.

“Hajime, Hajime are you there?”

This time, the voice was Mahiru’s. It was calm and soothing, not as panicked as Mikan’s had been.

“Wanna hear a fun fact?” Monokuma grinned, though he wasn’t really offering Hajime the choice. “This is from a few days before Mahiru’s murder! She was knocking at your cottage, desperate for a friendly face to talk to. But to poor Mahiru’s dismay, you were too busy playing with your friends to see her.”

“Don’t.” Hajime snapped. He didn’t need Monokuma piling on more guilt.

Hajime looked down at Ibuki, unable to face her killer. As he did so, something caught his attention. Sticking out Ibuki’s skirt was her taser. Despite collapsing to the floor with Ibuki, it didn’t seem to have suffered any damage. Not stopping to think twice, Hajime reached for the taser. He shoved it in Monokuma’s face, pulling hard on the trigger.

“Ahhhh! Ahhhh, stop it!” Monokuma cried. “I’m melting, I’m melting. I’m meltin-”

“Melting?” Hajime repeated. No, that didn’t sound right.

“Aahahahaha!” Monokuma let out another thunderous roar of laughter, showing no signs of suffering. “You really thought that could defeat me: the all powerful Monokuma?!!” he scoffed at the device.

Hajime tried to protest. “But…”

“But it works on the clones?” Monokuma mocked Hajime’s voice, predicting what he was going to argue. “Of course it does! I’m made of much thicker stuff than those idiots.”

"How are you even here?" Hajime snapped. "We were watching you, you were by the fifth island. We've been opposite the bridge the whole time."

"Guess you're not as observant as you think you are!" Monokuma smirked. "Does it hurt you to know that, Hajime?"

"But it's impossible!" Hajime objected, unaccepting of his answer.

"Well clearly not, or I wouldn't be here." Monokuma laughed, enjoying every second of Hajime's weakness. "But enough of interrogating me. Don't you think you should get to the ruin? Your friends are waiting for you. Well,...the ones that are still alive."

"Stop it with the games!" Hajime snapped, his temper rising. “You make all these promises and go back on your word. Why the hell would you just let me outta here? What’s in it for you?”

“I can't believe it! One of my students knows me so well. If my eyes weren't made of black beans, I might even shed a tear.” Monokuma pretended to wipe his eye. "Of course I always have ulterior motives. This time, it's in the name of despair!"

"What?" Monokuma had lost him.

“Thanks to Kyosuke’s message, I got to learn a little fact about you. Your life is connected to everyone else’s on the island.” Monokuma began to pace around. “You die, they die.”
It seemed that Monokuma had been unaware of this until now.

“If I kill you right now, what fun am I going to have? Hmm?” Monokuma looked deep in thought. “Sure, all your little friends would die too, but you wouldn’t get to witness that. No, no, that’s not fun at all!” he began to shout. “What I want, is for you to try and make it to that ruin alive. And just as you think you’re going to escape inside, I’m going to kill you. And when I do, your friends will die with you. With your dying breaths, you’ll watch the life drain out of them, knowing it’s all your fault. That is the despair I want to feel! That is why I’m letting you get out of here.”

“I...I…” Hajime was lost for words. How evil could one person be?

“See, Hajime, I want to prove to you that you’re your own biggest downfall.” Monokuma continued. “You’re so busy playing the hero, you’re willing to let others die. You don’t realise it, but it’s what happened this entire game.”

“That’s not true!” Hajime protested.

“Oh, it isn’t?” Monokuma smirked. “If you hadn’t rushed into the rewrite, you could have planned things properly, and I’m sure less of your friends would be dead. Instead of waiting with Sonia at the ruin, you rushed after Chiaki, despite the fact she has zero chance of surviving...because she’s a computer program! If you hadn’t been so selfish, Ibuki could still be alive.”

Hajime wanted to scream at Monokuma to stop lying….but he couldn’t. Deep down, Hajime knew there was some truth in what Monokuma was saying. Having failed so many of his friends, Hajime was desperate to make amends. He wanted to help as many people as possible, but by doing so, he’d cost others their lives. Even if it wasn’t directly his fault, he could still find reason to blame himself.

“I know what you’re like, Hajime!” Monokuma teased. “You won’t go inside that ruin until they’re all there; Fuyuhiko, Peko, Nagito, Gundam, Chiaki...”

Nagito? Did that mean...

“You’ll wait and wait, and that’s when I’ll come along and kill you!” Monokuma laughed. “Playing the hero will cost you your life!”

"Not this time." Hajime vowed. "I won't let you harm another one of my friends ever again."

"So fierce!" Monokuma pretended to cower, but he wasn't scared in the slightest. "Well go on then, prove yourself to me. But mark my words, you're going to fail."

“No, not this time.” Hajime vowed, determined to show Monokuma otherwise.

"Then be my guest, Hajime.” Monokuma taunted, motioning for him to leave. “I'll be waiting.”

If Hajime wanted to get going, he’d have to move Ibuki from his lap. He didn’t want to let his friend go, but he couldn’t take her with him. Not only would she weigh him down, but he saw it as disrespectful to carry her body around like some sort of toy. As gently as he could, Hajime lowered her body to the ground. As painful as it was, he had to let go.

“Goodbye, Ibuki.” Hajime whispered, unable to say much else with Monokuma lingering.

With that, Hajime forced himself from the floor. He took his time, for strength wasn’t something he had much of in that moment. Turning his back on the evil Monokuma, as well as one of his best friends, Hajime headed towards the bridge. The time had come to leave for the ruin. Who would he find there? Was anyone even still alive? Would Monokuma really try and kill him once he
arrived at the doors? There was only one way to find out...

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!!!!

Sorry if I can't reply to comments straight away, I like to take my time to reply to each one. But I promise to reply to each one no matter how long it takes!

The support from all of you means the world. That sounds supppper cheesy, but it's true.

Until next time!!! ^_^

((P.S. please let me know if I haven’t replied to one of your comments. I never ignore any of them, but sometimes I accidentally skip past one. So yeah, let me know if you’re waiting for a reply!!))
Hey everyone!

Long time, very no see. I think in my last chapter, I promised to get Rewrite finished over summer. That never happened.

I explained this to some of you guys in the comments on my previous chapter, but for those who didn't see, here is the long story short. I felt very bored with the ending of my story and had writer's block. There were some key scenes that I knew I wanted to include, but some of these scenes surrounding them felt so meh. I was busy with uni work and other things, so I kind of just put this Project to the side, as I couldn't write anything that I liked. However, I really did want to get the story finished, as I've always known what I've wanted its ending to be. Without making a pun here, I chose to rewrite my own story ending and did the entire thing again. This has given me an ending I'm proud of and happy with, so I really can't wait to share the remaining chapters with you all!

So..... I have a surprise, sort of. Because I've kept you guys waiting for so long, I decided that I was going to finish this story and upload all of the chapters at once. It's taken a little while because I had to finish writing and proofreading all of the remaining chapters, but Rewrite is totally finished.

Including this one, there are 4 chapters to go. They're quite long, but I didn't want to split them into smaller chapters. Prepare yourselves for the action ;)

I'm really excited to share the rest of the story with you. There will be a special message waiting at the end of the very last chapter. Thank you so much for your patience and for sticking around. I can't wait to share the rest of the story with you. You guys keep me so motivated and your comments mean the world to me. As I always, I will reply to every single one - it just might take me a little bit of time to get around to doing so.

I hope you enjoy what's to come. You're all amazing!!

Sophie.

Death was becoming something of a familiarity to Hajime, the Grim Reaper a regular resident of Jabberwock Island. Hajime thought he would have become numb to it by now, but the pain was still gut-wrenching every single time. Losing someone you care about hurts, but witnessing them pass in
front of your own two eyes is an entirely different level of heartache.

Ibuki Mioda…

… The sprightly musician and larger than life best friend. The girl who rocked multiple colours in her hair, bringing smiles to faces whenever she entered a room. Ibuki Mioda was dead; there was nothing Hajime could do to save her.

Usually, Hajime would feel his mind suffocating under voices of guilt. He would spend agonising hours punishing himself for not trying hard enough, for failing to save another innocent life. Except, this time, things felt slightly different. Having spoken with his friends previously, Hajime had finally begun to accept the truth. He wasn’t psychic, he wasn’t magical, and he certainly wasn’t a hero. He was a human being, just like Ibuki, and there was nothing he could have done to predict Monokuma’s actions.

With a fresh perspective, Hajime could see how questioning hundreds of possible ‘what ifs’ was an unhealthy way of thinking. He could ask himself these questions all day long, but it wouldn’t get him anywhere. What’s done is done and sadly, there’s no way to change that. If Hajime questioned the possibilities of every other outcome, he would drive himself to madness. Ibuki’s death was a tragedy, an innocent life that didn’t deserve to be lost, but her blood was on no one but Monokuma.

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Hajime’s journey to the ancient ruin was surprisingly blissful, this was especially noticeable after the very recent battle. It seemed that Monokuma had passed his message onto his minions to leave Hajime alone. Many of the clones had been defeated, but some were still alive, their beady black eyes staring at Hajime, heads turning as he walked their way. Despite their menacing stares, they kept their distance; no longer trying to kill him. The war was far from over, so Hajime couldn’t drop his guard entirely, but until he reached the ancient ruin, he knew that he was guaranteed safety.

Bodies of the defeated clones were everywhere, despite the lack of blood to show for it. Hajime had been keeping count at first, but he soon lost track, since there were far too many. Whenever he saw a body on the ground, Hajime couldn’t help but wince, fearfully paranoid that he was stumbling upon one of his own friends instead.

The gentle walk should have been good for clearing Hajime’s mind, but overwhelming anxiety was stopping him from thinking straight. It was only when the second island’s bridge came into sight that Hajime was able to start thinking rationally. It was his job to get everyone inside the ruin and he had to act fast. If he made any kind of delay, Monokuma was going to kill everyone. Of course, this led to a very depressing reality… those who were missing were going to get left behind.

Hajime squinted into the distance. Crossing the bridge, the ruin was now in focus. There were people waiting outside, of that he was certain. However, he couldn’t make out who. He blamed his weak eyesight, but it was the tears in his eyes that were really stopping him from seeing properly.

“You...you need to open the door.” Hajime shouted as loudly as he could, in an attempt to be heard from his current distance. His voice cracked as he spoke. Despite this, he was still heard by the others.

“Well behold, Hajime survived after all.” a strong, deep voice bellowed back. There was no
mistaking it, Gundam was still alive.

“You need to open the door!” Hajime shouted even louder since no one had followed his request.

It was Gundam who responded to him again. “We cannot do that, Ibuki is missing.”

“Ibuki...Ibuki isn’t coming.” Hajime cried, the lump in his throat feeling more apparent. “Monokuma killed her, and he’s going to kill the rest of us too if we don’t get inside.”

Hajime hated breaking the news so bluntly, but he had to get to the point. Fortunately, Hajime had walked far enough that there was no longer any distance between him and his friends. With everyone clear in front of him, there was no longer any need to shout.

Monomi was clinging to Chiaki’s leg for dear life, Sonia was taking deep breaths, Fuyuhiko was drumming his foot like crazy, and Gundam was carrying Peko on his back...a Peko who looked scarily still.

“Is she....?” Hajime stopped speaking, his chapped lips unable to make another sound.

“Just unconscious.” Gundam quickly reassured him. He had a firm grasp of Peko, holding her as if it were a piggyback ride.

Fuyuhiko was keeping a watchful eye on Peko. Hajime couldn’t help but wonder why he wasn’t the one holding her. Perhaps it was down to Gundam’s taller and steadier build.

Sonia interrupted, her bottom lip trembling. “W-what did you say about Ibuki? Please tell me that I am mistaken.”

Hajime shook his head, wishing that it was just a misunderstanding too. “We don’t have the time to talk about it right now, we need to get inside. Just know that Monokuma murdered her and he’ll do the same to us if we don’t open that door.”

“Hajime, are you sure you want to open it?” Sonia frowned, her concern showing. “Like you said before, once we close the ruin door, it will not open again.”

“We...didn’t find Nagito.” Chiaki sighed.

It was the outcome Hajime had been fearing most, but also the one he had been preparing himself for. “Maybe…maybe Monokuma was telling the truth, maybe he did kill Nagito.” this wasn't Hajime's true belief, but he was willing to lie if it meant getting his friends to safety. He didn’t want to leave Nagito stranded on the island, but it was clear that he wasn’t coming.

“What...what do we do?” Chiaki kept her eyes fixed on Hajime, awaiting instructions. “I’ll unlock the door if you want me to.” she remembered the passcode from the original game.

“I...” Hajime could already feel his strong mindset fading away, caving in favour of saving his friend. It was one thing to act tough, but now that the time had actually come, could he really do it? Was he strong enough to leave Nagito outside? Did he really want to feel responsible for sentencing him to death? He almost wanted to believe that Nagito was dead, but something in his gut was telling him that it wasn’t true.

“Hajime,” Sonia took a deep breath, attempting to stay calm. “You have led us this far, so I think this decision should be yours. But please remember what I said to you earlier; make a decision that you will not come to regret.”
Sonia’s words of wisdom gave Hajime the strength he needed to make up his mind. “I...I know this is going to be hard,” Hajime cleared his throat. “But what if Nagito is already dead? Monokuma killed Ibuki, he isn’t playing games anymore. I know this is horrible, all I want is to find our friend. But we have no choice. If we don’t go inside now, then we’re going to die. I...I...can’t save everyone.”

This was the confirmation Chiaki needed. Without saying another word, she pulled free from Monomi’s grasp, reaching straight for the control panel. Typing as quickly as she could, she pressed the buttons ‘11037’. The correct five digits entered, the door came to life, ready to welcome the students inside.

“It’s going to take a couple of minutes to properly open,” Chiaki announced, stepping away from the door. "We can't go inside until it's opened fully."

“Puhuhu, that’s all the time I need.” a menacing voice interrupted them, like a bad smell polluting the air.

“Shit.” Hajime cursed, recognising the voice instantly. His entire body filled with dread, eyes darting around as he tried to locate his enemy. His emotions getting the better of him, Hajime snapped. “Don’t just hide, it makes you nothing more than the coward that I already know you are!”

“Me, a coward?” Monokuma repeated, still out of sight. “Insulting your headmaster is such childish behaviour! Watch your mouth, or I’ll rise it out with bleach.”

“But you can’t deny it.” Hajime pressed, feeling more courageous himself. “You’re so scared that we’ve outsmarted the Future Foundation, you’ve resorted to breaking the rules.”

“What do I care for rules?” Monokuma scoffed. “It doesn’t matter how the job is done, so long as it’s finished. Besides, the rules don’t work anymore. The Future Foundation’s bug made sure of that.”

Hajime shot a glance at the ruin’s door, which was taking its time to open. In the few seconds Hajime had turned his back, Monokuma presented himself. The bear was ready and waiting, positioned on the pathway leading up to the ruin. He’d left his clones behind, the machine gun too. Besides his menacing smile, Monokuma had nothing else to offer.

“S-stay back!” Monomi shouted, though her voice was quivering. “Come one step closer to my students, and I’ll...I’ll...”

“You’ll what?” Monokuma smirked, fully aware that Monomi’s threats were empty. “Give me a timeout out? Send me to the naughty step? I’m sooooo scared, Monomi. Gah, you’re making me even more afraid than bad boy Hajime over there!”

Hajime straightened his posture in an attempt to appear more composed, he didn’t want Monokuma seeing through him. Still, it was hard not to feel fearful when he had no idea what Monokuma was up to. As it currently stood, the surviving students easily outnumbered Monokuma. How was the bear going to fight them?

“I have to say Hajime, I’m impressed.” Monokuma smiled. “I didn’t expect to see that door opening with Nagito missing.”

“I have no choice.” Hajime declared, standing by his decision.

“Seems like you listened to me after all.” Monokuma nodded approvingly. “But I hope you realise, this doesn’t change anything between us. Now, if you don’t mind, I want everyone down on their knees,” he spoke in a casual fashion, but it was clear that he wasn’t willing to be disobeyed.
Hajime ignored Monokuma's wishes, his classmates doing the same. “We had a deal.”

“We had no deal.” Monokuma corrected him.

“You said-” Hajime raised his voice in protest.

“I said, I was going to kill you at the ruin. That is exactly the promise I'm fulfilling.” Monokuma retorted.

“You said that you wouldn’t hurt us if I didn’t play the hero!” Hajime objected.

“You’ve misunderstood, or maybe you’re just twisting my words.” Monokuma frowned. “Either way, you’re an idiot. I’m going to kill you regardless.”

Hajime snuck another glance at the door, it was practically open. Did he try and run for it, or would that be a suicide mission?

Monokuma cleared his throat for their attention. “Once again, everyone on their knees. I want you all on the ground.”

“Do we listen to him?” Sonia whispered, seeking Hajime’s advice.

“Do we fuck!” Fuyuhiko jumped in. “I’m not doing anything that damn bear wants.”

“No, not yet.” Hajime replied. Until Monokuma backed him into enough of a corner, he wasn’t going to submit.

Monokuma let out a deep sigh. “I see, you bastards are in the mood to disappoint me. Well then, it seems I have no choice. You wanna do this the difficult way, huh?!?” the tension rose in his voice. No longer was he calm, but madly furious.

The bear clapped his paws together. On his command, something horrific happened. Marching over the bridge, came five of his clones - they seemed to have been waiting in the wings. The clones were carrying something above their heads, distributing the weight between them. They were carrying Ibuki.

“Ibuki!” Sonia cried, instantly running forward.

“Sonia, no!” Hajime shouted. “Don’t let him trick you, Ibuki’s dead.”

“Are you so sure?” Monokuma smirked, attempting to mess with their heads.

From the distance they were standing, it was difficult to tell. Ibuki’s body didn’t seem as lifeless as a corpse should. If anything, she looked asleep. However, there was the possibility that the clones had just carefully positioned her.

Hajime shook his head, irritated with himself for feeling doubtful. “This is crazy, I know Ibuki's dead.”

Monokuma shrugged. “If that’s what you believe…”

“It’s not what I believe, it's what I know.” Hajime insisted. “Her throat was shredded open. I...I couldn’t feel her pulse. She wouldn’t move in my arms!”

“The human mind can play tricks on you in moments of distress,” Monokuma said, offering a possible explanation.
“What are you doing with Ibuki?” Gundam called out, interrupting the both of them. He still had Peko on his back.

“Ibuki is here to play a game.” Monokuma smiled, baring his teeth. He briefly directed his attention to his clones, pointing to the ground in front of him. “Dump her there.”

Doing as their leader said, the five clones lowered Ibuki onto the floor in front of Monokuma. As they did so, Sonia let out a blood-curdling scream.

“What...what have you done to her?!” Sonia cried, traumatised at what she saw. Chiaki winced, Fuyuhiko swore, whilst Gundam turned away.

Now that Ibuki was in full view for all to see, her injury was clearly visible.

“I knew it, I knew she was dead.” Hajime raised his voice, ashamed that he nearly fell for Monokuma’s lie.

“Good for you, I never said she wasn’t.” Monokuma brushed him off. “Want a cookie or something?”

Ibuki hadn’t changed much since Hajime had left her. There were no additional injuries to her body, but the blood around her wound was beginning to dry.

“Let me tell you some more about this game we’re going to play.” Monokuma smirked. “Clones, would you please take your positions...”

The five clones passed Monokuma, approaching the students. Hajime thought about grabbing his taser, but knew it would be a wasted effort. Monokuma was right in front of them, he’d call for more clones, if necessary. There were five clones and five students (Peko made it six, but unconscious on Gundam's back, they’d merged into one). Each clone marked a different student, standing beside them with their claws ready.

"What are you doing?!” Monomi cried. "Step away from my students this instant!"

"Shut up, Monomi." Monokuma hissed. "If you don't watch that ugly mouth of yours, I'll arrange a clone for you too.”

Realising she had no choice, Monomi stepped aside, watching on helplessly.

“I call this game, Vodobuki.” Monokuma announced, over dramatising the pronunciation.

“Vodobuki?” Fuyuhiko repeated, the word anything but smooth as it left his tongue.

“Never have I heard a word so horrible to say.” Gundam rejected the name also.

“The name is in development, I only just invented this game.” Monokuma snapped, irritated at the criticism. “It’s a mixture of the words voodoo and Ibuki.”

Hajime rolled his eyes. He didn’t need spoon feeding, that was obvious enough on its own.

“It’s a very simple game, so even dummies, like yourselves, should understand.” Monokuma patronised them. “Ibuki is my voodoo doll, and as her friends, you’re all bound to her. Whatever I do to Ibuki, my clones will do to you.”

“W-what?!” Hajime gasped.
“Since I’m a good headmaster and all, I’ll give you an example for all those slow coaches out there.” Monokuma said. With that, he grabbed Ibuki’s lifeless corpse from the ground, brutally punching her on the arm.

As instructed, the clones mimicked Monokuma’s action. Ensuring they tucked their claws away first, each clone punched their victim’s arm with heavy impact.

“Oww!” Hajime wailed.

“Don’t fuckin’ touch me!” Fuyuhiko spat.

Sonia glared at her clone, massaging her arm. “Learn some manners.”

“Ahaahaha!” Monokuma laughed, amused at what he saw. “That was just a tame round to explain the rules. From now on, things are about to get serious. Perhaps I feel like removing some of Ibuki’s fingers, so she never plays her awful music again.”

Hajime could feel his heart rate increasing. Simulation or not, he didn’t want to experience the pain of losing a finger. “W-what’s the point in all of this?” in an attempt to distract Monokuma, he tried to get him talking.

“The point of Vodobuki? It’s to have you killed.” Monokuma replied. “I was willing to do this the easy way, but you wouldn’t get on your knees.”

By this point, Hajime was well aware that the ancient ruin was unlocked. However, surrounded by five clones, he didn’t feel like he could make a break for it and run inside. It was terribly frustrating. Their means of escape was right behind them, but they weren’t able to take it. That being said, Hajime wasn’t about to give up. If he did that, he was going to die.

“To honour this wonderful killing game, let’s replicate some of the amazing deaths that we’ve seen.” Monokuma proposed. “We can’t forget dear old Teruteru.”

In memory of the first victim, Monokuma grabbed his claw and lightly traced it over Ibuki’s heart. He made the slightest snag on her blouse, but didn’t dig deep enough to pierce her skin. He was replicating Teruteru’s death.

As they’d been instructed, the clones did exactly the same thing, accurately mimicking Monokuma. Hajime’s heart raced faster and faster, as the clone came dangerously close to it. Thankfully, the clones had been paying attention, so they didn’t cut through anyone’s skin either. Monokuma was tormenting the students, taking it slowly to increase the fear.

“Now, who was murdered next?” the bear pretended to think. “Ah, that’s right! Faithful, old Byakuya.”

Hajime knew exactly what Monokuma was doing when he dragged his claw towards Ibuki’s mouth. He was going to recreate the terrifying Chelsea smile that Mikan had engraved into Byakuya’s face. Beads of sweat were collecting on Hajime’s forehead, for he knew what was coming next. Round one was just a warm-up. Round two, was serious. If Hajime didn’t get out of Monokuma’s grasp, he was about to have his mouth slit open.

What happened next, felt as if time stood still. Taking one elongated claw, Monokuma dug his way into Ibuki’s cheek, dragging his nail to the outer corner of her lip. Hajime knew he was awaiting the same fate, any second now…

Filled with adrenaline, Hajime’s brain was thinking faster and smarter than usual. This gave him
more time to calculate all of the possible exits. The most obvious choice was to make a break and run for it. However, without being able to communicate this to his friends, they were unlikely going to follow Hajime's lead, and be killed by the clones by the time they caught on. Fighting the clones was another option, though once again, Hajime couldn’t communicate this to his classmates.

The more Hajime began to think, the more he began to panic. All of his possible plans were incredibly weak, offering low survival rates for his friends. He wasn’t ready to give up, but he wasn’t willing to make any reckless decisions either.

Just when all felt hopeless, a miracle came to Hajime’s rescue. A miracle that went by the name of the Future Foundation Trio. Unleashed from every single monitor on the island, came a horrific wailing siren. It mimicked that of a fire alarm, though slightly higher in pitch. It put Hajime’s teeth on edge and made his skin crawl, but he was getting off lightly. The noise was irritating, but it wasn’t meant for him. The siren had a greater effect on the clones.

Triggered by the noise, the clones began to glitch uncontrollably. It was similar to what the tasers did to them, only far more detrimental. Their bodies were twitching all over the place, their mouths spouting words of nonsense. Hajime realised that the clones were powerless. It was his window to escape.

“We need to go!” Hajime shouted. Although, the others didn’t need telling twice. Bulldozing the clone aside with his elbow, Hajime bolted for the ruin.

Hajime’s friends did exactly the same, pulling free also. Hajime took a moment to ensure Chiaki was safe, paranoid the siren might interfere with her system. Thankfully, it wasn’t hurting her at all.

“What do you think you’re going?!” Monokuma screamed, unfortunately not affected by the siren either. “This game isn’t over.”

There were many smart-ass comebacks that Hajime wanted to shout at the bear, but he wasn’t going to waste his energy on being bitter. Refusing to give Monokuma his attention, Hajime sprinted up the path, the door just in sight. The sound of gunfire unleashed behind him. Monokuma must have been hiding a gun after all. Bullets flew past Hajime’s face, one narrowly missing his shoulder. Thankfully, Monokuma’s aim was off, so Hajime remained unharmed. The bear seemed to be leaving the other students alone, for he knew it was a one shot kills all situation.

Monokuma was in the process of reloading the gun, but it was unnecessary, for the students were already at the ruin. Gundam was the first inside, beginning to struggle from the strain of Peko. Chiaki was second, bringing Monomi with her. Sonia came in third, holding out her hand to pull Hajime and Fuyuhiko through too. With the seven of them safely inside, Hajime pulled the door to a close.

Hajime threw his back against the iron door. His heart felt like it was going to burst out of his chest. “We did it!” he gasped, surprised things had actually worked out. He was finally safe, it wasn’t like Monokuma could get inside…

“Shit!” Hajime swore, his mood dropping instantly.

“What’s the matter?” Fuyuhiko inquired, gasping for breath.

“The...the passcode to the door! We need to change it, or Monokuma’s gonna follow us inside.” Hajime said, speaking rapidly. Until now, the passcode had been kept secret inside the castle. However, Monokuma had an eager eye. He definitely would have seen Chiaki input the digits just seconds ago.
“That had not occurred to me.” a wide-eyed Gundam gulped.

“It’s okay, we can fix it!” Monomi butted in. “All of the technology can be tampered with from inside the Data Processing Room on the fourth floor.” she was actually offering some useful advice for once.

“You know a lot about this place, huh?” Hajime was impressed, though there wasn’t time to admire Monomi for long. “We need to get moving, or he’ll get inside.”

“The lock on the door has to reset itself.” Monomi continued. “It will be at least five minutes or so before Monokuma can try the passcode again.”

With time so precious, five minutes was more than enough. Hajime felt blessed.

“Leave it to me!” Chiaki insisted. “I can change it...I think.” without waiting for the others, Chiaki darted off, heading in the direction of the staircase.

“Monomi, go with her.” Hajime instructed, leaving his manners behind. He refused to let Chiaki go alone. If she glitched again, at least Monomi would be with her.

Monomi did as Hajime asked, hurrying after her student.

With the situation now out of his hands, Hajime allowed himself a moment to catch his breath. The immediate danger was gone. Monomi seemed confident in her word, and there was no way Monokuma could break down the door. Hajime couldn’t hear the wails of the siren anymore, but it occurred to him that the building was likely soundproof. Hajime wasn’t certain the siren was from the Future Foundation trio, but he couldn’t think of anyone else that would want to help.

“I think we should move further inside.” Hajime suggested, feeling uncomfortable so close to the entrance. It made him feel closer to Monokuma, despite the gigantic iron door between them. There were plenty of other rooms inside the school for them to seek shelter.

“I agree.” Sonia nodded, seemingly grateful that Hajime had mentioned it.

“We need somewhere to put Peko down.” Gundam winced. Running around with someone on his back was beginning to affect him.

The friends found their way to a nearby classroom, the walls a horrific shade of yellow. They pushed a couple of desks together, discarding the chairs out of the way. This created a makeshift bed for Peko, where Gundam was able to lower her. It wasn’t going to be comfortable, but it was the best that they could manage for now.

“What exactly happened whilst I was gone?” Hajime asked, motioning to Peko.

Fuyuhiko sighed, afraid that Hajime would ask. “It’s all my fault…”

“You...you did this to her?” Hajime raised his eyebrows.

“What?! No!” Fuyuhiko scowled, irritated that Hajime would even suggest such a thing. “It’s just...I couldn’t defend myself against the clones. Peko had to do all of the work with her sword.”

“Oh,” Hajime let out a gentle gasp. “Of course, you two were never given the tasers.”

“All I could do was run,” Fuyuhiko’s shoulders sank. “Peko was fighting off the clones with her sword, but there were so many of them.”
Hajime couldn’t even begin to imagine how difficult it must have been. He had struggled to get himself to the ruin unharmed, and he had been fortunate enough to have a taser.

“Peko was fighting for the both of us. I was pretty much useless; there was nothin’ I could do.” Fuyuhiko admitted, somewhat sheepishly. “Then, all of a sudden, we got ambushed by clones. Peko and I got separated.”

“Whereabouts were you?” Hajime asked, trying to piece the story together.

“We were still on the fifth island, not far from the vendor stands.” Fuyuhiko replied. “That’s where Peko and I got split. We had to go different ways. I couldn’t fight them on my own, but I could run. A couple of clones nearly got me, but I’m okay.”

There were no physical signs of injury on Fuyuhiko.

“That’s when Gundam and Chiaki found me.” Fuyuhiko continued. “They were looking for you, I think, but came across me instead. We went and found Peko together, she was unconscious, surrounded by clones.”

“I think we got there just in time.” Gundam contributed. “We used our tasers to fight them off.”

“I don’t even wanna think about what would’ve happened if Chiaki and Gundam hadn’t shown up.” Fuyuhiko shuddered.

“Does Peko have any injuries?” Hajime asked.

“Not that we can see.” Gundam replied. “She isn’t bleeding, if that’s what you mean.”

“That is a good sign.” Sonia smiled, attempting to remain optimistic.

“I’m sure she’s going to wake up soon.” Hajime encouraged. “Maybe we should take her to the dorms soon? It can’t be comfy lying on a table.”

“Perhaps when Chiaki returns.” Sonia agreed.

Waiting for Chiaki to return, the friends spoke amongst themselves. There was one topic on their minds.

“We never did find Nagito…” Fuyuhiko sighed. “It’s just strange, I don’t get how someone can just disappear like that.” he scratched his head in confusion.

“Well…Sonia and I didn’t get to finish our search of the second island.” Hajime admitted. “What if Nagito was hiding at the motel or in the diner?”

“Not to sound like a dick, but for his sake, I hope Nagito isn’t alive.” Fuyuhiko commented.

Sonia agreed with what was being said. “I cannot think of any worse fate.”

“Maybe you’re right.” Hajime sighed. “Although, I saw what Monokuma did to Ibuki. I don’t like the idea of Nagito suffering through that either. No one deserves a death so cruel and painful.”

Before their conversation could grow any more morbid, the door to the classroom swung open. Chiaki came walking in, with Monomi at her side. Beads of sweat were travelling down the gamer’s face, but the triumphant smile she wore said it all.

“We changed the passcode.” Chiaki announced, happy to share the news. “Monokuma won’t be
able to follow us inside now. Well, unless he guesses the new passcode. But...the chances of that are very unlikely...I think.”

Hajime wished Chiaki had kept out the last part, she was taking away the confidence that she’d only just given him. That being said, it did seem very unlikely that Monokuma would get into the building. If he guessed the wrong passcode, he’d be obliterated by the machine gun attached to the door.

“Thank you, Chiaki!” Sonia beamed. “We can finally feel safe in here.”

Hajime felt himself relax, he could finally breathe. The past few hours had been traumatic, but at least they were safe now. They had the entirety of Hope’s Peak Academy at their fingertips, with no threat present. This could be bliss.

“What now, Hajime?” Fuyuhiko turned to Hajime, looking for guidance.

“We just make it through the next two days, I guess.” Hajime replied, somewhat unsure himself. “I guess we should make the most of being inside Hope’s Peak, a place we don’t even remember anymore.”

“That sounds like fun.” Sonia smiled. “It will be nice to see the building we should have studied in, if it were not for this killing game.”

“Well technically, we did study in it.” Hajime corrected her. “We just don’t remember because our memories were taken. Or, at least, you guys studied here. I would’ve been in the reserve course building.”

“Oh, of course!” Sonia exclaimed. “The idea of losing our memories is going to take some getting used to.”

"Hajime, did you explore the ruin during the previous game?” Gundam asked.

"Not exactly," Hajime replied. "By the time we got inside, the program had started glitching. We saw some of the rooms, but my head was a mess. Besides, most of the doors were locked."

"I'm still trying to understand," Gundam was deep in thought. "Why did the program glitch before, but we aren't experiencing that now?"

"It's pretty complicated." Chiaki chimed in. "But, essentially, the bug the Future Foundation released has overwritten that element.”

Gundam still remained confused. "Why would they overwrite that if they want us dead anyway?..."

"It's so they could replace the original ending." Chiaki continued. "In the very first island killing game, the survivors were offered a graduation program at the end.” Chiaki had not been alive for this part, but it seemed to have been programmed into her memory.

"Oh right, yeah!” Hajime took over. "I touched on it a bit earlier, but A.I. Junko gave us different ways to leave the simulation. Both of her options just weren't fair, so we found a way to overwrite the graduation program. It was an exit clause.”

"Well," Chiaki resumed. “The Future Foundation couldn't allow the graduation program to happen again.”

"Why ever not?" Sonia asked, attempting to keep up.
"Because it gives Monokuma and A.I. Junko too much power." Chiaki replied. "Monokuma could bribe us...that kinda thing. He could offer to save from this failing simulation in return for the bodies of our friends."

"We would never do that!" Gundam was outraged.

"I know," Chiaki said. "But the Future Foundation didn't. They had to take every precaution possible. If we bargained with Monokuma, their entire plan would be ruined."

“So, how does our ending work?” Fuyuhiko asked. “Ya know, if we don’t get that graduation thingy.”

"It's simple...kind of." Chiaki said. "We just have to complete the rewrite process. It's nothing difficult. We just have to remain in the Neo World Program for the same amount of time as we did in the original game. Once we’ve done that, the file overwrites itself for good.”

"That's it?" Fuyuhiko quizzed. "We just sit here?!

"That's it." Chiaki nodded. "Monokuma's graduation program has been erased."

It gave Hajime one less thing to worry about. If Monokuma couldn’t plug his graduation program, it gave no reason for A.I. Junko to show up. Hajime knew he’d be able to sleep well with this thought in mind.

“Well, with all of that covered, I think we’re okay to go and explore the school now.” Hajime concluded.

“We need to take Peko to the dorms first.” Fuyuhiko reminded them. It was a very high priority for him. “Giving her a proper bed should help her recover, we can’t leave her on some desks.”

“Let’s do that first.” Hajime nodded in agreement.

To relieve Gundam’s back, Hajime took it upon himself to carry Peko to the dormitories. Unlike Gundam, he carried her in his arms, rather than lift her over his back. It was similar to the position Peko had carried Chiaki in, just hours previous.

Hajime already knew a lot about Hope’s Peak Academy, having done his research after the Killing School Trip. The dormitories were very familiar to him, for it was the location of Sayaka Maizono’s death. He had learnt all about the School Killing Life and its first murder. Hajime knew so much about the dormitories, he felt as if he’d stepped foot in them before. There were fifteen dormitories in total, as well as a laundry room and a sauna.

When they arrived at the dormitories, the students were greeted by a surprise. The nameplates from the Killing School Life had remained on the doors, showing who each room had once belonged to. Pacing up and down the corridor, the students took in the names of their lower classmen.

“Junko Enoshima…” Hajime muttered to himself, eyeing up one nameplate in particular.

“This is where she slept…” Sonia remarked, standing by Hajime.

The room would have actually been occupied by Mukuro Ikusaba, an impostor of Junko in the first killing game. She was Junko's twin sister.

“There’s no way I’m putting Peko in there.” Hajime shuddered.
“The room is clearly cursed.” Gundam remarked.

“Stop fussin’ over the names!” Fuyuhiko complained. “Just pick a room and let Peko rest.”

“Oh, yeah…” Hajime felt a little sheepish. He was really interested in studying the dormitories, to see the bedrooms of the 78th class. Now just wasn’t the right time. Once Hajime had put Peko to rest, he was free to do what he wanted.

Making a snap decision, Hajime opted for a dormitory that had once belonged to Kyoko Kirigiri. Her name was beyond familiar to Hajime, a person that he had always respected. Her dormitory was also the closest to the canteen, keeping Peko in reach.

With a team effort, the friends worked together to pull back the sheets and carefully place Peko into bed. Seeing the gentle movements of her chest rising and falling comforted Hajime; Peko was still very much alive.

“She will be much happier here.” Sonia smiled. “No one can recover on a table!”

“I think this is the best thing for her.” Chiaki agreed. “But I don’t want to overcrowd her, so it’s probably best for us to go exploring soon.”

“I’m gonna stay here, if that’s cool.” Fuyuhiko spoke up. “I don’t wanna leave her, ya know, in case she wakes up all confused.”

It was very much understandable. If Fuyuhiko left Peko’s side and her condition worsened, he would never forgive himself.

“Okay, we can leave you two be.” Hajime nodded. “You and Peko can have your own tour when she wakes up.” he was remaining very much optimistic. Everything was so much calmer now, it was no longer a battle of survival.

“I guess Monomi isn’t joining us?” Gundam asked, realising that the rabbit wasn’t with them.

“Oh yeah…” Hajime hadn’t realised the rabbit was missing either.

“I…think she might be scoping the school out for herself.” Chiaki suggested.

“Guess we’ll catch up with her later then.” Hajime accepted.

Their exploration of the school began on the bottom floor. There were two nearly identical classrooms, one of which the students had already been in. There was a nurse’s office, filled with supplies. The A/V room offered an endless number of screens to watch movies, although there were no disks around to be played. The school store peaked Sonia’s interest. She was excited by the number of small treasures that she could see. It looked like a load of useless tat to Hajime, but he wasn’t going to ruin things for her. Finally, there was the gymnasium: the biggest room of all.

“Woah, this place is huge.” Hajime gasped, his voice echoing in the empty space.

Gundam rested his foot on one of the basketballs lying on the floor. “This is impressive.”

“Imagine all of the school events that would have happened here,” Sonia reflected. “The assemblies, the sports matches, the school productions…”

Hajime found himself smiling, though deep down, he knew he wouldn’t have been involved in any of these events. As a member of the reserve course, he would have been kept as far away as possible.
from the ultimate students.

Their exploration continued onto the second floor, where the students discovered more classrooms, a library, and a swimming pool.

Hajime found himself standing by the edge of the pool, peering over the edge; mindful not to fall in. His own reflection blinked back at him from the water, a sight which took Hajime by surprise. He hadn’t seen his own reflection in a few days, so he noticed some striking differences in his appearance. Two heavy, dark circles had stolen the space underneath his eyes - making him look tired and worn out. He could no longer take pride in his once clean shirt; the dried blood a revolting sight. His hair was greasy, in need of a good wash. The image of survival wasn’t a pretty one.

Hajime wanted nothing more than to throw himself into the pool. He could picture his worries and bad hygiene drifting away underneath the surface. That being said, Hajime knew it wouldn’t really make a difference. The chlorine would do nothing for the mess that was his hair.

The rec room was discovered upon visiting the third floor, which strongly brought up Hajime’s spirits. The room had plenty on offer to keep the students occupied: from magazines to a pool table.

“This is going to be okay.” Hajime nodded to himself, already feeling happier.

The physics lab didn’t bring much excitement to Hajime’s face, but the air purifier captured his attention. How would it work underwater?

As well as more classrooms, there was also an art studio. Creative therapy wasn’t Hajime’s preferred way to unwind, but perhaps some of the others would enjoy showing off their artistic side.

“Hope’s Peak really didn’t stop short on supplies…” Hajime muttered, admiring a nearby paintbrush.

“Think of all the talented students that must have once created masterpieces in this very room.” Sonia was in awe, taking in the blank canvases around her.

Those talented students were now, most likely, dead. Hajime didn’t want to break it to Sonia, but barely any of the school’s pupils had survived the tragedy. Not wanting to kill the mood, Hajime swallowed his thoughts and moved on to the fourth floor.

“Wait until you see what’s in here!” Chiaki had a sudden sense of excitement about her, standing outside the Data Processing Room.

“The Data Processing Room…” Gundam muttered, reading the door’s label out loud.

“This is the control room.” Chiaki explained, opening the door and leading everyone into the room. “It’s where I changed the passcode earlier.”

The room was full of technology; computers and monitors faced Hajime wherever he turned. It was like a secret headquarters. A Monokuma painted door was lurking in the corner. This somewhat concerned Hajime, though he knew the real Monokuma wasn’t inside.

Along the far side of the room, covering the entirety of the left wall, were a series of screens; each one displayed the footage from a different security camera in the school. Hajime could see every room in Hope’s Peak Academy, which was a lot to take in.

“Wait there.” Chiaki approached the control panel to the right of the screen. Without even looking, she smacked the palm of her hand against one of the buttons. This caused a change in the security footage. No longer could Hajime see the classrooms inside Hope’s Peak Academy, but instead, the
security footage of Jabberwock Island. The restaurant, the beaches...there was no mistaking it. Several of the screens appeared black; this was the security footage from the cameras that had fallen victim to the ocean.

“This is really useful!” Hajime exclaimed. “It's going to show us when the other islands go underwater. We can keep an eye on things.”

“Oh, we will be able to track Monokuma too!” Sonia added.

Speaking of Monokuma, the camera had picked him up outside of the ruin still. He was desperately trying to fight his way inside. An army of clones had gathered by his side, also attempting to gain entry.

"Hey, the clones are functioning again!” Hajime noted. "The siren must've stopped!"

"We can have a listen and find out," Chiaki replied. "I just need to turn on the audio." she pressed another button on the control panel, and as if by magic, Monokuma's voice filled the room.

“Damn bastards, let me in!” Monokuma yelled furiously. “I’m going to kill you. I’m going to kill all of you!”

"You're not exactly encouraging us to let you in." Hajime muttered, under his breath. He couldn't help but feel grateful for the giant iron door wedged between his safety and Monokuma. Though this seriously meant that no one would be able to leave the ruin anymore; they'd be killed within seconds of stepping outside.

"He hasn't given up." Chiaki remarked. “Now, about that siren…”

“Oh, I can still hear it!” Sonia gasped, her ears picking up the noise. “Yes, that is definitely the siren from earlier.”

“I hear it too.” Gundam agreed.

“But...but how?” Hajime didn’t understand. He could hear the siren too, but it didn’t make sense. The siren had been able to stun all of the clones, but now something had changed.

“I...I think they must have somehow built up a defence against it.” Chiaki pondered. “The bug is so powerful, it begins building its own immunity as soon as it’s attacked.”

“Well, that’s just great…” Hajime sighed. It wasn’t like he planned on going outside, but it was unsettling to know that Monokuma and his clones were doing everything in their power to get inside. The students didn’t have a siren to help them anymore.

“Can anyone see Nagito?” Sonia asked, scanning the screens. “We did not finish our search of the second island, so if he is hiding there, we should be able to see him.”

“Oh, that’s clever!” Hajime praised. He looked at the screens himself, but found nothing. The diner, the motel…they were empty. Nagito wasn’t on the second island at all.

“I can’t see him anywhere.” Gundam frowned.

Hajime made the effort of checking every single screen, but his search proved useless. Ibuki’s body was still outside the ruin, which wasn’t nice to see. However, there were no signs of Nagito at all, not even a corpse.
“This is weird.” Hajime shook his head. “He can’t have just vanished into thin air. Chiaki, are there cameras for every single location on this island?”

“Yes.” Chiaki nodded. “Well, besides from the funhouse.”

“Nagito wouldn’t be in there.” Hajime discarded the idea. ”Monokuma wouldn’t let him ride the train by himself. Besides, Nagito had no reason to go there.”

“Then…then, maybe he’s out of sight of the cameras.” Chiaki suggested. “There is one in every location, but they don’t cover the whole space.”

“Oh, I think I understand.” Hajime replied. “So, if Nagito was behind one of the security cameras, it wouldn’t pick him up, right?”

“That’s right.” Chiaki nodded.

This didn’t give any indication as to whether Nagito was just hiding or if his body had been planted there. Either way, it made a little more sense as to why he couldn’t be seen anywhere on the island.

Changing the subject, Gundam pointed to the Monokuma door. “What’s in there?” it had caught his attention, just as it had done Hajime’s.

“Oh, Monomi explained that to me.” Chiaki replied. “She said it’s where Junko Enoshima controlled Monokuma throughout the school killing game.”

“Oh yeah, of course!” things began clicking into place in Hajime’s mind. He remembered reading about such a room, upon leaving his own killing game. “There’s a secret hatch in the floor that she’d hide in too. Apparently, the seventy-eighth class were really close to catching her once.”

“I can tell that room holds a dark energy.” Gundam admitted.

“I don’t think we should go in there.” Hajime said. “If that’s the room that controls Monokuma, I don’t want to accidentally press something and summon him in here.” Hajime wasn’t even sure if that was possible, but he wasn’t taking any chances.

“I agree,” Sonia said. “This entire room is making me shiver, I would like to move on.”

“Yeah, let’s get out of here.” Hajime nodded. “Lead the way, Sonia.”

Sonia marched ahead, leading everyone in a new direction. She brought the group to the school’s music room. It was a grand performance hall, with a piano situated on stage.

“A music room,” Hajime admired, taking in the sights around him. “Ibuki would’ve loved this…”

“A music room, you say...” Gundam appeared deep in thought. “Is this not the very music room from Twilight Syndrome Murder Case?”

“It must be!” Sonia was taken back. “The very room Fuyuhiko’s little sister was murdered in...”

Hajime shuddered, reflecting on the story of Twilight Syndrome Murder Case. At least Fuyuhiko wasn’t with them experiencing it too. Hajime should probably warn him to stay away.

“There’s nothing for us in here.” Hajime declared, ready to move on. “We should see what else is on this floor.”

All in agreement that it was time to go, the friends exited the music room. Their next stop was the
staff room, although they spent little time in there too; nothing of interest caught their eyes. Since
Monokuma hadn’t covered the building in clues, unlike before, there was little to see in some of the
rooms.

“This still feels so strange,” Sonia commented. “Imagining this building once filled with school life.”

“I know.” Hajime agreed. “It’s tragic thinking about what happened.”

“I think-” Chiaki began to speak, but her voice suddenly froze. “I think...think...think...think.” like a
broken record, she began repeating the same word over and over. Before Chiaki had the chance to
finish her sentence, her eyes rolled to the back of her head, as she lost control of her body entirely.

Hajime acted immediately, reaching out and catching Chiaki before she had the chance to smack her
head against the ground. With Chiaki in his arms, he lowered them both to the floor, making it easier
to support Chiaki’s weight.

“Not again!” Hajime cried. It felt too similar to holding Ibuki in his arms. Hajime didn’t like it, but he
couldn’t exactly let go.

Chiaki was jerking around in his arms, her body frantic in movement. It was disturbing to watch.

“We must fetch Monomi immediately!” Gundam declared.

Hajime shook his head. “There’s nothing she can do to help. The Future Foundation’s bug is doing
this to Chiaki, the problem runs too deep for any of us to help.”

“But we cannot give up!” Sonia exclaimed.

“We aren’t giving up.” Hajime insisted. “We’re going to help Chiaki as much as we can, but...we
can’t prevent this either.”

He could feel Chiaki twitching within his arms; she must have been in so much pain. “I’m so sorry.”
he whispered. “I’m so sorry you’re going through this.” if he could, he would have taken away all of
the pain and given it to himself. He felt guilty that it was his mess, but Chiaki was the one who was
suffering.

Since there was nothing they could do, the three friends had no choice but to watch. They hated
feeling so helpless, but they were out of their depth. Hajime reminded them all that Chiaki had been
through this before; it would come to an end. They just had to keep waiting.

“I...I think it’s slowing down.” Hajime reported. The sudden movements of Chiaki’s body had
become less frequent.

“Really?!?” Sonia gasped, her voice filled with hope. “What a good sign!”

“Yeah, she’s definitely getting better.” Hajime nodded. It was such a relief to see Chiaki calming
down.

Soon enough, the gamer opened her eyes. She blinked up at Hajime in confusion, unsure how she’d
ended up on the floor in his lap. “Did I?...”

“You glitched again.” Hajime answered. “Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m...okay.” Chiaki said. “I just feel a little...sleepy.” she yawned away.

Hajime wasn’t surprised, the glitching must drain her.
“Maybe you should go and rest.” Hajime suggested. Slowly and carefully, he helped Chiaki get up from the floor. Hajime stood with her. “We could go to the dorms and check on Peko too, if you want.”

“That...sounds...good.” Chiaki replied. She was incredibly weak.

However, their plans were about to be altered.

“Coming through, coming through!” a high pitched voice interrupted their conversation, as Monomi burst into the room. She was holding a large wooden spoon. “Love, love!”

“Please do not wave that thing in our faces, Monomi.” Sonia frowned, somewhat paranoid that she was going to get smacked by accident.

“What are you doing with that?” Hajime asked. It was the last thing Chiaki needed right now.

“I’ve been cooking for all of you.” Monomi smiled, excited to share her news.

“Cooking?” Hajime raised his brow. Since when had Monomi morphed into Teruteru? At least that explained where Monomi had been.

“We’re stocked up with food in here, but it won’t cook itself anymore.” Monomi replied. “As your teacher, it’s down to me to keep you fed.”

“I shall pass.” Gundam dismissed her. “I’m not hungry.”

“We’re taking Chiaki to the dorms because she collapsed again.” Hajime explained.

“But this is exactly what you all need,” Monomi protested. “A good, hearty meal will keep all of your strength up.”

“No offence Monomi, but this isn’t happening to Chiaki because she’s got an iron deficiency or something…” Hajime narrowed his eyes, somewhat irritated at such a petty solution.

“It might not fix that issue, but the rest of you still need to eat.” Monomi insisted, taking no offence to Hajime’s sharp tone. “None of you have eaten all day, you must be starving.”

“Not really.” Hajime shrugged. It was no surprise that his appetite had escaped him after all the trauma he’d experienced that day.

“You might not feel hungry, but you still need to eat.” Monomi said, speaking sound words of advice.

Upon reflection, Hajime realised he hadn’t eaten since 6pm the night previous. “Maybe I could manage something small…”

“I don’t need to rest just yet.” Chiaki smiled. “We can eat first and go the dormitories later.”

"Are you sure?" Hajime asked. He couldn't tell if Chiaki was just being polite.

"Honestly, I'll be fine." Chiaki promised.

Comfortable that Chiaki was okay to wait a little longer, Hajime found it within himself to agree to Monomi’s request.

“Fine…” Hajime sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. “Let's go.”
“Follow me!” Monomi instructed.

Not that Hajime needed to follow Monomi; he knew where he was going.

Chiaki was still a little weak, so they walked to the canteen at a slower pace. Hajime hoped the journey would allow him some time to work up more of an appetite. He was aware that he hadn’t eaten in a long time, but the thought of food was still a struggle.

When Hajime set foot in the canteen, he realised eating Monomi’s dinner was going to be an even bigger struggle than anticipated. The dinner Monomi had set out for them didn’t exactly look appetising. It wasn’t that the food looked undercooked or horrifically made - in fact, it was neat and to a standard Teruteru would be pleased with. It was just the food looked so boring compared to the feast the students were used to. A basic, healthy meal was not something Hajime was in the mood for.

“It’s chicken and vegetables!” Monomi smiled, pleased with her work. “A perfectly healthy meal for you all.”

Gundam instantly turned up his nose. “I will not let an animal touch my mouth.” his morals were strong; he was not about to eat meat.

“And for Gundam, it's just vegetables.” Hajime muttered dryly, under his breath, mocking Monomi’s tone.

“Monomi, I am going to leave my dinner,” Sonia began. “I want to give it to Fuyuhiko. He needs food a lot more than me.”

Hajime couldn’t help but smirk, it seemed that Sonia wanted out of the meal too. She was just being polite about it.

“There’s no need for that.” Monomi replied. “I’ve made enough for Fuyuhiko and Peko too! They’re in the kitchen.”

“Peko’s awake?!” Hajime exclaimed.

“Yes.” Monomi said. “She woke up not too long ago. She’s okay.”

“That’s good to hear!” Hajime took a sigh of relief, extremely happy that Peko was well. “We were going to visit Peko and Fuyuhiko after dinner, there’s no need now, I guess.”

“Did I hear my name?” in a light-hearted tone, Fuyuhiko peered his head from around the kitchen door frame. He already seemed in a much lighter mood.

“Monomi just told us that Peko’s awake.” Hajime smiled.

“Yes.” Monomi said. “She woke up not too long ago. She’s okay.”

“That’s good to hear!” Hajime took a sigh of relief, extremely happy that Peko was well. “We were going to visit Peko and Fuyuhiko after dinner, there’s no need now, I guess.”

“Did I hear my name?” in a light-hearted tone, Fuyuhiko peered his head from around the kitchen door frame. He already seemed in a much lighter mood.

“Monomi just told us that Peko’s awake.” Hajime said.

“Yeah she is.” Fuyuhiko nodded. “She’ll be out in a sec, we’ve just been helping Monomi with the dinner. We kinda got roped into it.” he pulled a face, showing he wasn't too thrilled about it.

“Is Peko not a little tired for that?” Sonia frowned, disapprovingly. “She should be resting.”

“That’s what I said,” Fuyuhiko sighed. “But Peko insisted. I think she just wanted to get out of bed.”

Peko emerged from the kitchen, drying her hands with a tea towel. “I’m fine, I’m back on my feet now.”

“It’s really good to see you awake.” Hajime smiled.
“I’m just thankful to still be here.” Peko replied. Turning to Gundam, she offered him a gracious nod. “I hear that you carried me back to the ruin. Thank you for that.”

“It was nothing.” Gundam brushed her off, but Hajime could see him blushing underneath his collar.

“Come on everyone, let’s sit down to eat!” Monomi cheered.

Everyone sat together at the table, but the atmosphere was as dry as the food. Everyone ate their dinner in silence; all that could be heard was the occasional sound of the cutlery scraping against the china. Although the students were happy to see Peko awake, it had only brightened the mood for a short while. Everyone was exhausted and they were still feeling weighed down from losing two of their friends that day.

To make matters worse, Hajime hadn’t heard a word from Makoto, Kyoko, or Byakuya. Hajime was beginning to wonder if they could even contact him inside the ruin, because they hadn’t made an attempt to do so. Perhaps it was an issue of bad signal.

“I’m done.” Fuyuhiko abandoned the rest of his food; it was too plain to enjoy. Discarding his knife and fork, he excused himself from eating any more.

“Me too.” Gundam gave up on his meal as well, pushing his plate away from him.

“I wanna get some sleep, I’m gonna go.” Fuyuhiko was about to stand up, but Hajime jumped in. “No, wait!” calling out in protest, Hajime got Fuyuhiko to stop. “You can’t go yet. Not whilst everything is like this.”

“Huh?” Fuyuhiko didn’t understand.

“This atmosphere, it’s so depressing.” Hajime sighed. “We’ve got less than two days to go until we get out of here. I don’t want us ending things like this.”

“What do you expect? Two people died today, Hajime.” Fuyuhiko complained, irritated that Hajime was trying to reinforce some Monomi style positivity.

“I know, but that’s what I’m talking about.” Hajime said. “Would Ibuki want us sitting around, utterly depressed? No, she wouldn’t. She’d want us to celebrate her life, to be smiling and laughing. I’m sure Nagito would want the same too.”

“I have an idea, something that might lighten the mood.” Sonia spoke up. “Hajime, if it is not too much trouble, could you please share something with us?”


Sonia giggled. “No, not that. I was wondering if you would share a memory or two.”

“A memory?” Hajime repeated. It was a strange request compared to what he’d been expecting.

“The previous killing game, what was it like?” Sonia asked, filled with curiosity.

“Oh, well, uh…” Hajime wasn’t quite sure where to begin, as there was so much to share. “I guess Chiaki could tell you…”

Chiaki shook her head. “No, this is your story to tell. Besides, I’m too sleepy…”

“Well, a lot of stuff remained the same, I guess.” Hajime began. “Like, no one’s personality was that
different. But we did go through some different experiences, like the funhouse.”

“Is that all?” Sonia frowned. “Surely you have more memories to share than just that.”

“I mean...yeah, there’s still a lot I haven’t told you. But they aren’t exactly happy memories.” Hajime admitted.

Did Sonia really want to hear about the previous deaths? She enjoyed stories of the occult, but even for her, hearing of her own classmates’ murders seemed a bit much.

“Then let us not focus on the unhappy memories,” Sonia brushed Hajime’s comment aside. “If everything happened differently in the previous game, then surely you have different stories to tell. Even the mundane activities of life must have been different, like getting breakfast or walking along the beach.”

Just because Sonia was asking about the previous killing game, it didn’t mean she wanted to know about the bad things.

“Oh, well when you say it like that, yeah there was lots of stuff.” Hajime replied. “Like, this one time, Ibuki, Chiaki, and Hiyoko put on a show together. It was...different, but it was pretty fun. Oh! And another time, we all got together on the beach and enjoyed some fireworks we’d found in the market. It was pretty great.”

Once Hajime began talking, he couldn’t stop. Filled with love and old memories, he shared stories from his previous time in the killing game. He spoke of conversations he’d had, meals he’d eaten, and days spent under the sun enjoying the waves. The tales kept coming and coming; it was a blast from the past that he actually enjoyed.

By the time Hajime had finished talking, there was a significantly happier mood in the room. Everyone had a smile on their face, as the atmosphere had changed. It was a good note for everyone to sleep on.

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When it came to choosing a dormitory to sleep in, Hajime opted for Makoto’s room. It felt fitting since Makoto had done so much to help Hajime. Sonia chose the room next door, which happened to be Sayaka’s. Chiaki took the dormitory opposite Hajime’s, which had belonged to Mondo. Fuyuhiko went in Ishimaru’s room, since it was opposite Peko. Gundam chose last, settling for Byakuya’s room.

Although the dormitory nameplates were still in place, there were no traces of the old students in the rooms themselves. It was a little disappointing. The rooms were basic, with no personal belongings in sight. It was just like sleeping in a hotel room.

Before they went to bed, the six friends gathered in the hallway for one final chat that evening.

“I guess we don’t need to worry about locking our doors anymore.” Hajime pointed out. Monokuma was their only enemy now, who was safely locked outside of the ruin. The students were no longer fighting each other. The killing game was over.

“This will be a nice change.” Sonia smiled.
"Yeah, going to sleep without the fear that someone's gonna come and kill ya." Fuyuhiko remarked.

"In fact, I think it's probably best if we sleep with our doors open." Hajime suggested. "The dormitories are soundproof and I don't like the idea that we won't hear anything if any kind of commotion happens."

"Will there really be any commotion?" Peko didn't agree.

"Well, you've been unconscious today and Chiaki keeps glitching. What if something happens to one of you two and no one realises until it's too late?" Hajime argued.

"I shall be fine, Hajime." Peko reassured him.

"Chiaki, you can sleep in with me, if you would like?" Sonia asked. "I'm sure that we can both fit in my bed."

"Hmm..." Chiaki paused, thinking things over. "I guess that's probably for the best."

"Wonderful!" Sonia clapped her hands together. "It will be like a slumber party."

With the arrangements agreed, the friends said their goodbyes.

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As Hajime climbed into bed, he couldn’t help but think of Nagito. There were still no signs of the Luckster; nothing had shown up on the monitors. Monokuma claimed to have killed him, but Hajime just wasn't buying it. There was no evidence. Why would Monokuma play Vodobuki without Nagito's body too? Although, if Nagito was still alive, then how was he surviving? Was he cold, scared and alone? Or was he smugly laughing at the downfall of the once Remnants of Despair? Hajime had so many questions, but no way of knowing the answers. Wherever Nagito was, alive or not, Hajime just hoped that he was okay.

Chapter End Notes

Lol I just realised in the time that I hadn't posted, V3 was released. I'll keep this spoiler free, but the game blew my mind omg. I really loved Tenko, Schuichi, Miu and Kokichi. Which characters were you guys loving?? Did you prefer V3 to the previous games? Also, can we all agree that Scrum Debates are the best thing EVER!

Alsoo.... a piece of trivia for you! Fuyuhiko was actually never going to make it into the ancient ruin. I had written an entirely different ending for him, including quite a dramatic death. However, it felt too soon after Ibuki's death and I decided I wanted to use Fuyuhiko for another plot later on in the story... who knows what that could be ;) So
yeah, a big part of rewriting my ending included Fuyuhiko's story. It was really hard deleting his death scene, as it was something I spent a lot of time on and its aftermath had a lot of influence on the characters. I have a copy of that scene on my computer though, so I could always upload that as a bonus chapter if anyone’s interested.

I'm going to post the other 3 chapters shortly. I just want to leave a tiny bit of time between each one to ensure that they go up okay. See you guys soon ^_^
"Hajime, are you awake?"

A gentle voice disturbed Hajime from dreaming, as he hadn’t been in much of a deep sleep. Hajime sat up slowly, clearing his eyes as he adjusted to the morning. With one eye open, he peeked to see who had woken him.

Sonia was standing at the end of his bed, her hair fixed into a neat bun. Her usual attire had been replaced with a pale blue satin robe. It was a nice change from being woken by Monokuma and his ear bleeding alarm.

"Where’d you get that?" Hajime gestured to Sonia’s robe, bypassing the formalities of greeting her good morning. To his knowledge, Hope’s Peak Academy didn’t come with its own boutique.

"Good morning, Hajime." Sonia smiled. She wasn’t one to forget her manners, unlike Hajime. "I got this from the storeroom, it is amazing what you can find in there!"

"Sounds a lot like Rocketpunch market." Hajime remarked. "Were there other clothes in the storeroom?"

"Allsorts!" Sonia exclaimed, her tone filled with optimism and excitement.

"Thank god!" Hajime let out a sigh of relief. "I don’t think I can stomach another day in my shirt, it’s beyond the point of being gross and disgusting."

"Well then, this is perfect timing." Sonia replied. "The storeroom is where everyone is meeting right now, I came here to get you."

"N-now?" Hajime asked. It all felt a bit sudden, he’d only just woken up.

"Yes, right away." Sonia nodded.

"But...can’t I at least shower first?" Hajime frowned. "I haven’t even brushed my teeth."

"Worry not, Hajime. We are all in the same submarine." Sonia reassured him.

"Submarine?" Hajime repeated. It took a few seconds for him to understand. "Oh! You mean we’re
“Ah, that must be it.” Sonia said. “So do come along, there is no need to make yourself presentable.” She showed no signs of moving, she wasn’t leaving unless Hajime accompanied her.

Realising that he had no other choice, Hajime climbed out of bed. He was embarrassed to still be wearing yesterday’s clothes. He seemed to have missed the storeroom during his tour of the academy. If he had known, he could have slept in some proper pyjamas.

“Why is everyone in the storeroom anyway?” Hajime asked, following Sonia out of the dorm. “It seems like a strange place for a meeting.”

“Most of us had woken up and gone there to gather breakfast supplies.” Sonia explained. “I saw all of the clothes on offer and thought of you. I thought you could do with some new clothes. Unless you would like to walk around with a tear in your shirt.” using a delicate finger, she pointed to the bloodstain on Hajime's shirt.

“Oh, that.” Hajime had forgotten about the mark, but the Princess clearly hadn’t. He was even dirtier than he’d thought. “Yeah, it would be nice to have some fresh clothes for after my shower.”

“There is a laundry room here,” Sonia stated, as they walked side by side. “Monomi has taken our clothes to be washed.” it explained why she hadn’t gotten dressed yet.

“She didn’t come for mine.” Hajime frowned, somewhat insulted that Monomi had forgotten him.

“Is there any point in washing a torn shirt?” Sonia raised her eyebrows.

“Yeah, I guess not…” Hajime sighed. “But some clean trousers would’ve been nice.”

“If you find something temporary to wear, Monomi can wash your clothes too...well, the clothes that are still wearable, at least.” Sonia suggested, taking Hajime’s battered outfit into consideration.

Hajime was led to a large, brown door, which was just around the corner from where he’d been sleeping. Sonia announced they were at their destination. Acting as a gentleman would, Hajime held open the door for Sonia, allowing her to enter the room first.

There was a lot to take in, but Hajime did his best. As the door closed behind him, he cast his eyes around the gigantic room. It was filled from floor to ceiling with supplies. Tins were piled on top of each other in humongous stacks, and Hajime discovered that long life milk existed.

All of Hajime’s friends were already there, it seemed that they had gotten the memo first.

“How are you feeling?” she had made it through the night, that was a good sign.

“I’m...I’m okay.” Chiaki replied, doing her best to smile.

“Have you glitched since last night?” Hajime asked, resting his elbow on one of the shelves.

“A little,” Chiaki admitted, not sheltering him from the truth. “But Sonia was there to look out for me.”
Having heard her name, Sonia joined in their conversation. “It lasted no longer than twenty minutes.”

“Twenty minutes?” Hajime repeated. Though Sonia made it sound like a good thing, twenty minutes was Chiaki’s longest episode yet. “Just keep an eye on yourself today, Chiaki. Let me know if things start getting bad again.” he didn’t want to dampen the atmosphere by nagging, but Sonia’s comment had alarmed him.

“Hajime, I have something for you,” Gundam interrupted Hajime, his arms outstretched with something to offer. “Since your shirt is ruined, I thought you might want this.” he presented Hajime with a blue tracksuit jacket. “I found fifteen, all different sizes, so trade it if it doesn’t fit.”

Fifteen...they must have belonged to the old students. Even though they were in a simulation, Hajime couldn’t help wondering who this jacket had been made for; had they survived the killing game?

“Thanks!” Hajime took the jacket appreciatively. The jacket would have concealed Hajime’s ruined shirt, but he didn’t want to put it on yet, not until he was clean. Instead, Hajime folded the jacket over his arm.

“This place really has everything, huh.” Hajime remarked, still shocked by what he saw.

“We will definitely not go hungry.” Sonia giggled.

The friends spoke among themselves, the storage room having given them the energy boost that they needed to raise their spirits. It was only when Monomi burst into the room that the chatter died out.

“Good morning, everyone!” Monomi was grinning from ear to ear, looking exceptionally pleased with herself. It was as if being locked away from Monokuma had distracted her from all of her troubles.

“Why are you so happy?” Gundam frowned, suspicious of Monomi’s motives.

“I just feel so hopeful!” Monomi beamed. “Everyone is safe.”

Everyone except Ibuki and Nagito, Hajime thought to himself.

“Since it’s such a hopeful day, I’ve decided to cook breakfast for everyone!” Monomi cheered. “I can’t make a big spread like you’re used to, but with all the ingredients here, I can make everyone a different breakfast of their choosing.”

Monomi really was going all out. She was probably just overjoyed at not being turned away by the students.

“If everyone could give me their orders, I’ll write them down and get cooking.” Monomi said, holding a notepad and pen.

“Uh, Monomi…” Hajime paused. “I thought you couldn’t write?”

Monomi flushed red, embarrassed that Hajime had addressed it in front of the group. “Well...I…”

“Here, Monomi…” Chiaki reached down, taking the paper from the rabbit. “I’ll write it for you. If everyone could give me their orders instead, please.”

Peko kept it simple, asking for plain porridge. Gundam requested waffles. Sonia asked for oatmeal and a fresh fruit salad. Hajime and Fuyuhiko gave Chiaki the order of eggs and bacon.

“Everyone go to your rooms and get dressed for the day.” Monomi instructed. “I’ll call you all when
breakfast is ready. Oh, and your fresh laundry is waiting for you on your beds.”

Hajime couldn’t help feeling a little disappointed that there were no freshly washed clothes waiting for him. Oh well, it was too late to complain. As Monomi instructed, he returned to his room. It was time to shower and prepare for the day ahead.

Hajime had chosen the dormitory which had once belonged to Makoto Naegi. From what he had learnt of the killing school life, this is where the murder of Sayaka Maizono had taken place - in the bathroom, to be exact. Hajime had to shower before breakfast, but he worried that it seemed almost disrespectful to Sayaka.

“Don’t be stupid.” Hajime muttered to himself, dragging the palm of his hand across his forehead. Sayaka had been the first victim of the killing game; it was unlikely that Makoto had avoided showering the entire time. Besides, it was just a simulation of Makoto’s room. The Future Foundation trio weren’t going to judge Hajime through the cameras for showering.

As Hajime enjoyed his time under the hot water, so many different thoughts were running through his mind. Waking up in the dormitories of Hope’s Peak Academy had left Hajime with a strange feeling. It almost felt real, as if today was Hajime’s first day of school. Sadly, reality quickly set in. Even if it was Hajime's first day at Hope’s Peak Academy, he would be over in the reserve course building.

Hajime was mid-shower, scrubbing his back clean with the soap provided, when there was a horrible interruption. Before Hajime knew what was going on, the bathroom door flung wide open; someone was lingering in the doorway.

“Monomi!” Hajime screeched, aware that he was stark naked in front of the rabbit. He dropped the soap in an instant, using his free hands to try and cover himself as best he could. “Haven’t you heard of knocking?!?”

“I tried!” Monomi insisted, not so much as shielding her eyes. “But you didn’t answer.”

“Probably because I didn’t hear you over the running water.” Hajime objected, his voice exceptionally high. “Cuz if you haven’t noticed, I’M IN THE SHOWER.”

“I know, I’m sorry.” Monomi apologised. “But you need to come to the canteen, it’s an emergency.”

“Is it Chiaki?” Hajime asked, feeling his chest tighten.

“No, she’s fine. But I really think you need to see this,” Monomi insisted. “Please, Hajime, come right away.”

“Uh look, just gimme five minutes to get dressed.” Hajime could see that Monomi needed him, but he wasn’t about to run around the school naked.

“Can’t you just take a towel?” Monomi asked, doing her best to hurry him.

“What’s wrong with you?!” Hajime snapped. It didn’t matter how important things were, if the issue wasn’t related to Chiaki, then Hajime was getting dressed first.

“Fine…” Monomi sighed, though she showed no signs of leaving.

“Can...can you leave?!” Hajime cried, Monomi had already overstayed her welcome. “I’ll meet you in the canteen, okay?” he was feeling especially impatient.
With that, Monomi scampered off. Hajime waited until he heard the door shut before turning off the water. He gingerly climbed out of the shower, paranoid that Monomi would burst in again at any moment. Feeling somewhat violated, he hurriedly got changed.

Hajime ditched the disgusting shirt, along with his tie. He slid into his new jacket, zipping it over his bare chest. Feeling much cleaner, Hajime wore it with pride. It was nice to wear something different.

With cheeks still flushed red from the humiliation, Hajime left for the canteen, curious to see what Monomi had been flapping about. If it was something stupid, like Monomi burning his eggs, he was not going to be impressed.

“Well, Monomi?” Hajime burst into the canteen. “What is i-” Hajime practically choked on his own words, gobsmacked by what he saw.

“Ah, good morning, Hajime.” the white haired boy addressed him from across the table, the corners of his mouth turning up into a smile.

“N-Nagito?” Hajime stammered, he could barely believe what he was seeing.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost or something.” Nagito laughed, tucking into a plate of pancakes placed in front of him.

“What the hell, Nagito?!” Hajime spluttered. The situation wasn't something to make light of; Hajime wasn't impressed. Feeling his temper beginning to rise, Hajime stormed forward to face Nagito. “I thought you were dead!”

“You thought wrong then, Hajime.” Nagito replied, gracefully chewing on his food.

“How the hell…?” infuriated with rage, Hajime was struggling to speak. “How the hell can you just sit there laughing and eating shitty pancakes after everything that's happened?!?” it wasn’t like Hajime to swear, but his anger was taking hold of him. Seeing Nagito behave so casually, it pissed him off even more.

“Oh, that…” Nagito recalled, as if it had escaped his memory. “I had business to attend to. Sorry, I’m so late.”

“Business?!” Hajime narrowed his eyebrows. He drummed his foot on the ground, impatiently awaiting an explanation.

Whether Nagito was aware or not, he ignored Hajime’s question. Instead, he changed the topic to the plate of food in front of him. “I found so many different ingredients in the kitchen, I thought I’d give it a try making breakfast. Sadly, I’m still useless when it comes to cooking. I think I used too many eggs…”

“I don’t care about pancakes, Nagito.” Hajime gritted his teeth. “Where have you been?”

Once again, Nagito avoided his question, though this time it was clearly on purpose. “Or maybe I used too much flour. Does flour even go into pancakes? We don’t have any recipe books, so I had to guess.”

“Stop it, just stop it!” in a blind rage, Hajime took Nagito’s plate of food and threw it to the floor. The china smashed everywhere, creating a loud crash as it came into contact with the ground. The pancakes just made more of a mess, since the syrup would be a pain to clear up.

“Hajime,” Nagito chewed on his lip, looking uncomfortably awkward. “I think you ought to calm
down. Although,” Nagito paused before continuing on with a smirk. “Perhaps you’re just expressing
how bad you think my cooking is.”

“What’s wrong with you?!” Hajime ranted. “Don’t you realise how serious things are? Jabberwock
Island is self-destructing; we could die at any given moment. Monokuma sent his army after us, and
he killed Ibuki. No one can set foot outside, or we're dead. This isn’t funny, Nagito. Don’t sit here
laughing and smiling like this is just another normal morning on the island! Speak to me, please…”

Hajime’s voice softened; he was aware that smashing the plate had taken things a bit too far. He
hadn’t intended on acting so out of line, but Nagito was pushing all of his buttons. Attempting to
amend for his aggressive behaviour, he tried speaking to Nagito in a calmer tone. All of this
happened before the Luckster had even been given the opportunity to respond.

“You’re still mad at me, aren’t you?” Hajime sighed. He couldn’t think why else Nagito was
ignoring his questions. “Just tell me if you are, I don’t wanna hear about your breakfast.”

“I’m not mad, Hajime.” Nagito replied, surprisingly calm after everything that had just happened.

“I don’t understand.” Hajime frowned. “You know the truth about everything. You know that we
were all in despair and that I belonged to the reserve course.”

Nagito stared across at Hajime. “You sound like you want me to be mad at you.”

Hajime could see where Nagito was coming from. He was offering Nagito a list of reasons to hate
him. “No-I...I’m not trying to turn you against me. I just...I just don’t get you. This could all be some
elaborate trap.” he was struggling to find his words.

“Okay, okay…” Nagito raised his arms in surrender. “I see that my ideals confuse you. If it’ll make
you believe that I’m on your side, I’ll explain everything.”

“Thank you.” Hajime said, feeling himself loosen up slightly. Aware that this could take some time,
he sat down across from Nagito, making sure he avoided the mess that he’d created on the floor.

“I want you to know, when I say I don’t hate you, I mean it.” Nagito looked Hajime straight in the
eyes, a sign he was telling the truth. “That being said, when Monokuma first exposed your lies, I was
pretty disgusted with you - I’ll be honest. In my eyes, there was no redeeming what you’d done. It
was unforgivable. I thought you were some desperate, talentless reserve course wanna-be, clinging to
a title that you didn’t deserve. But I see now, I was wrong. I still think you’re a worthless reserve
course student, but that doesn’t mean I hate you.”

Hajime frowned, it wasn’t a compliment. He decided to interrupt Nagito, since he was taking too
long to get his words out. “Look...I’m going to be blunt, Nagito. The last time around, when you
learnt the truth of the Neo World Program, you tried to kill all of us - and you nearly succeeded. I
guess, what I’m asking is, are you here to do the same thing?”

Nagito shook his head. “No, I’m not. As you know Hajime, I will always side with hope. Though
everyone here may have once been Ultimate Despairs, it’s clear that the real despair here comes from
The Future Foundation.”

“You don’t agree with them?” Hajime was curious to see where Nagito stood. A part of him had
expected Nagito to side with Kyosuke. “I mean, they wanna kill the once Ultimates Despairs so hope
can live on.”

“It’s not that simple.” Nagito snapped, causing Hajime to back up in his seat. “Hope comes from
using despair, not destroying it. Wiping out despair won’t do anything. You must use despair as a
“So, what the Future Foundation is doing is wrong, but you were happy for me to go crazy and kill everyone when you thought I was the Ultimate Hope?” Hajime challenged. He was pleased that Nagito wasn’t siding with the Future Foundation, but he still felt hesitant towards the Luckster’s ideals and motives.

“What I wanted you to do would have been a much-needed sacrifice in a despairing situation.” Nagito defended himself. “The Future Foundation don’t need to make sacrifices, they’re using their power to try and create a false sense of hope. It won’t work. Killing you won’t do anything at all progressive.”

Nagito spoke passionately, even rising from his seat at one point. Nagito’s true feelings were now clear to Hajime. They were on the same side; there was nothing to worry about anymore.

“I think I’m beginning to understand.” Hajime nodded. “When you wanted me to kill everyone else before, it’s because we were running out of options. I could’ve progressed forward as the Ultimate Hope. My classmates’ lives would have been sacrificed in order for me to escape and save everything.”

“That’s right.” Nagito nodded. “You've risked your life, and all of ours, to re-enter the Neo World Program. You’re facing despair in the name of hope. That is something that I respect, Hajime. But what Kyosuke and the Future Foundation have done, is unforgivable. They used the name of hope to trick you.”

“That was pretty unnecessary of him.” Hajime sighed. “We aren’t hurting anyone, but he chose to attack us out of his own paranoia and fear. That isn’t hopeful at all.”

“You’ve understood completely.” Nagito exchanged a small smile with Hajime, pleased that he was being treated seriously. “You’re using this despairing situation to save everyone, to fight the Future Foundation.”

“I see which side you’re on now,” Hajime began to steer the topic in another direction. “But, here’s what I still don’t get. You claim to be in agreement with me, but you ran away as soon as I told you the truth about everything. That doesn’t make sense.”

“I wasn’t running away from you,” Nagito shook his head. “There was just something I needed to take care of.” he seemed a lot calmer now that they weren’t discussing the Future Foundation.

“Which was?!” Hajime pressed. “You didn’t even stick around to give your opinion or tell us where you were going. Whatever you were up to, it must’ve been pretty damn important.”

“I didn’t know how long we had until the islands would start collapsing.” Nagito explained. “I felt pressured against a time limit, so I had to leave right away.”

“Where did you go, Nagito?” Hajime was growing tired of asking questions, but getting the truth from Nagito was like drawing blood from a stone.

“The fourth island, to the funhouse.” Nagito answered, finally addressing the question. “I wanted to solve its mystery.”

“That’s what you were doing?!” Hajime cried, shocked at what he’d just been told. “We were in the middle of a crisis, yet you chose to run off to the funhouse?!”

Nagito shrugged.
“No, there’s gotta be more to it than that.” Hajime shook his head in denial.

“Why do you want to know so badly, Hajime?” Nagito replied, almost smirking.

“Because you don’t make any sense!” Hajime barked. “You learnt that everything we’ve been going through is a simulation, so why would the mystery of some stupid funhouse be so important to you?!”

“Monokuma had tried to persuade me before,” Nagito began. “When you were so set against keeping everyone from the funhouse, he came to me hoping I could persuade you all to go inside. In a desperate attempt, he told me more than he should have done. I learnt about the Octagon and its ultimate weapon, something I’m sure you’re aware of from the previous game.”

He was right, Hajime was very much aware.

“Yeah,” Hajime nodded along, his memory served him well. “I’ve never actually been inside it myself, but last time, you told us all about it throughout the class trial.”

The very trial that saw Gundam Tanaka come to his end. The very Gundam Tanaka Hajime had managed to keep alive a second time around.

“I wanted the ultimate weapon from the Octagon.” Nagito cut straight to the point, no longer leading Hajime astray with his nonsense chatter. “That’s the reason I went to the funhouse.”

“Why?” Hajime asked. He was going to keep interrogating Nagito until he got the whole truth.

“I thought that we might be able to use it to save ourselves from the Future Foundation.” Nagito said, sighing as he carried on. “But as you’re probably aware, the ultimate weapon would be useless to us at war with the Future Foundation.”

“The ultimate weapon was the secret of the funhouse, right?” Hajime reflected. “So yeah, it would’ve been pretty useless.”

“When Monokuma told me about it before, I think it was part of his plan to try and coax us into his trap.” Nagito claimed.

"Was Monokuma happy to let you in the funhouse by yourself?" Hajime asked. Monokuma had been very strict that the students had to go into the funhouse together, or not at all.

"He was." Nagito nodded. "I called for him at the funhouse and asked to go inside. He said he'd let me, since the island was going to fall apart anyway."

"Monokuma knew that you were walking into a trap," Hajime remarked. "At a time where the fourth island could’ve collapsed at any minute.”

“So, really, I went to the funhouse in search of a weapon that only hindered me. I got myself trapped in the funhouse instead.” Nagito shook his head in disappointment.

“No wonder none of us could find you if you were in the funhouse.” Hajime said. It was a rather gutting realisation, for it was the search for Nagito that had cost Ibuki her life. A search they were never going to succeed on killed one of his best friends.

“I understand now why you were so insistent on keeping us away from the funhouse; you knew that it was a trap.” Nagito shuddered. ”We would have starved to death in there.”
"That's exactly what happened before." Hajime shared. "We were told that a murder had to take place if we wanted to escape. Otherwise, we would starve to death."

"It's a little disappointing that I've been starving and all I could make were those disgusting pancakes..." Nagito pointed to his smashed up floor breakfast, courtesy of Hajime.

“You can have my breakfast, Monomi’s making it later.” Hajime offered, still suffering from a weak appetite. “But look, there’s still so much I don’t understand. How did you even escape that place? Last time, we had to solve a class trial. A murder had to occur to leave.”

“Well obviously, that wasn’t possible,” Nagito said, somewhat patronising. “To tell you the truth Hajime, I found an exit.”

“An exit?” Hajime repeated. “No, that’s not possible. I spent time in that funhouse before, we searched everywhere.”

“But if there wasn’t an exit, we wouldn’t have gotten inside in the first place.” Nagito pointed out. “The exit was underneath the giant statue in Grape House.”

“No way!” Hajime gasped. All that time there had been an exit. If they had noticed it before, Gundam and Nekomaru could have survived.

“The exit led me back onto the fourth island.” Nagito concluded his story of the funhouse.

“Woah, hold on a second.” Hajime interrupted. “You’re missing out key information here. How did you know there was an exit? How did you manage to move the statue?”

“There was a small button on the right foot of the statue.” Nagito recalled. “I pressed it and the entire statue moved. It was rather by chance that I even noticed the button in the first place, it was practically microscopic.”

It wasn’t chance, it was luck. Nagito Komaeda found himself trapped and starving in a funhouse, yet he still miraculously managed to find the exit.

“When I left the funhouse, I was contacted by Makoto on a monitor. He told me you’d come to the ruin.” Nagito explained. “Apparently they can’t reach you in here, the signal cuts out.”

“Oh, I thought that might be the case!” Hajime exclaimed. It meant that he wouldn’t be able to speak to Makoto until the rewrite was over. It was a scary thought, but also somewhat motivational. The next time he would speak to Makoto, he would be free.

"He says you’re doing really well.” Nagito passed on the message.

“I can’t believe you made it to the ruin unharmed.” Hajime shook his head in disbelief. “Monokuma and his clones are everywhere, they’re out in full force. How the hell did you get in here alive?”

Could things really be put down to Nagito’s luck again?

“Huh?” Nagito frowned.

"Well, Monokuma had a gun. Surely, he tried to use it on you?” Hajime said.

"Hajime, what are you talking about?” Nagito appeared clueless.

“I’m talking about all the clones outside. You know, Monokuma's Army?” Hajime elaborated. “You can't have missed them, they were everywhere.”
“There were bodies of clones scattered around the island, but I didn’t see anything like an army. Nor Monokuma for that fact, either.” Nagito said, his serious expression showed that he was telling the truth.

“B-but-” Hajime stuttered, entirely lost. “Monokuma’s been at the door, terrorising it the entire time.”

“He wasn’t there.” Nagito insisted.

"Are you sure?" Hajime pressed.

"Hajime, I was outside the ruin about twenty minutes ago. I know what I saw, and it wasn't Monokuma." Nagito insisted, baffled by what Hajime had told him.

If this was true, then Hajime had to see for himself. Only yesterday had he looked at the security footage and it had been swarming with clones.

“Nagito, can you walk with me?” Hajime asked. There was something that he needed to see, but he wasn’t done talking to Nagito yet.

“Sure.” Nagito agreed, getting up from the table. “Where are we going?”

“The Data Processing Room.” Hajime said. “I’m going to keep an eye on Monokuma.” He wanted to check the security footage. If Monokuma wasn’t outside the ruin, then where had he gone?

Hajime led Nagito out of the canteen, apologetic that the Luckster would have to wait even longer for a proper meal; Nagito must have been starving. That being said, Hajime wasn’t sure if Monomi’s breakfast was even on the cards anymore. She had disappeared after intruding on Hajime in the shower. Perhaps she was too traumatised by what she had witnessed…

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Hajime was beginning to come to grips with the technology in the Data Processing Room, having watched Chiaki a number of times. He typed away at the controls, making sure the security footage displayed the island, not Hope’s Peak.

The once beautiful Jabberwock Island was in ruins; it was a tragic sight to see. Things had gotten progressively worse since Hajime had last seen the footage. Even the islands that weren't underwater yet were suffering too, falling apart because of the shaking. As he glanced at the screen, Hajime realised there was more footage missing. "The fifth island, it's gone!"

The fifth island must have sunk during the night. All of the cameras had turned to black, meaning it had been destroyed. They were still continuing to lose islands. Soon enough, it would be their turn to take a dip in the water.

“We’ve lost islands three and five, as well as Monokuma rock.” Hajime mumbled to himself. “That leaves us with islands one, two, and four.”

Since time was running out, Hajime didn’t expect it to be long until those islands disappeared too. It
was devastating to think about, but there was nothing Hajime could do to save them.

Feeling sorrowful for the fifth island, Hajime turned his attention to the security footage of the second island. Specifically, the footage for the outside of the ancient ruin. Just like Nagito had said, the area was deserted. No Monokuma. No clone army. No one. Even Ibuki’s body was gone.

“It’s so strange, I don’t understand.” Hajime muttered. “Why would he just give up like that? That’s not like Monokuma.”

“Did he get inside the ruin?” Nagito asked.

“I mean, that could be possible…” Hajime weighed up the idea. “After all, you managed to do it. Hey, hang on, how did you get inside?!”

“I’ll explain later.” Nagito brushed it aside. “You should probably make sure Monokuma isn’t inside the school first.”

“Right!” Hajime focused on the task ahead. “I doubt Monokuma somehow got inside, as things have been too quiet. But it’ll be good to have a peace of mind.”

Hajime switched back to the security feeds from inside Hope's Peak. He worked together with Nagito, checking every single feed from inside the school. To save some time, Nagito studied the left side of the screens, whilst Hajime took the right. As he analysed the footage, Hajime spotted his classmates all together in the ugly, yellow classroom. Monomi was chatting away to them. Was she telling them about Nagito? Or was she distracting them, so that Hajime would have time to get his answers in peace?

“Hope’s Peak Academy is huge.” Nagito gasped in admiration.

This was very true, so it took a while for the boys to check all of the footage. They did accomplish their task though, coming to the conclusion that Monokuma wasn’t lurking somewhere within the academy.

“Maybe he’s up to something.” Nagito suggested.

“That seems about fitting for Monokuma.” Hajime agreed. “But we can’t see him anywhere on the island either.”

Every single monitor had been checked.

“What if the fifth island didn’t go underwater?” Nagito pitched. “What if Monokuma just messed with the security footage? So that’s where he and his army are hiding out.”

“Oh, I didn’t think of that.” Hajime was taken aback. It was a scary reality that he hadn’t considered. “When you left the fourth island this morning, did anything catch your attention on the fifth island?”

“Not really, no.” Nagito shrugged. “It was still kinda dark, and I was more focused on coming to the ruin.”

Hajime backed away from the control panel. “There’s nothing else to see here. Monokuma has either found an undetected hiding spot, or he’s over on the fifth island.”

“At least he isn’t bothering you anymore.” Nagito pointed out.

“The pressure’s off a little, but I can’t relax.” Hajime admitted, voicing his concerns. “It would be out
of character for Monokuma to just give up. I doubt he’s hanging around sunbathing for the last two
days of the rewrite.”

Hajime was on high alert, believing that Monokuma was up to something. Unfortunately, with no
location on the bear, Hajime couldn’t do anything besides speculating.

Glancing back at the monitors, something caught Hajime's eye. It was one of the screens that Nagito
had been in charge of checking, so Hajime hadn't noticed it until now. “What’s that?” mumbling
away to himself, he paid closer attention. There was something in the gymnasium. It appeared to be a
huge amount of clutter spread across the floor. Hajime couldn't properly make out what it was, but it
definitely hadn't been there earlier.

“Hmm?” Nagito looked in closer. “Oh, that! Those are some weapons I brought back from the
octagon.”

“Wait, what?” Hajime spluttered. “You brought weapons?! What kind of weapons?”

Nagito began listing them off of his fingers in a casual fashion. “Guns, bombs, knives…”

Hajime interrupted before Nagito could get any further. “Why the hell did you bring those here?
What kind of killing game are you planning?!” Fear began to rise in his chest, perhaps Nagito had
been lying about making peace.

“Oh, no. You’ve misunderstood.” Nagito laughed, feeling embarrassed. “I brought those weapons
for all of us, in case we had to fight Monokuma. I thought they might come in handy.”

Hajime felt his fear slowly fading away. Nagito looked very genuine and it was the kind of stunt he
would pull.

"We should go and look at the weapons.” Hajime stated. “I wanna see them for myself.”

“Sure thing, Hajime. But, maybe first, we should rescue the others…” Nagito pointed to the yellow
classroom, where things were beginning to get heated.

Hajime followed Nagito's finger to the screen. Monomi was now standing in the classroom's
doorway, blocking the exit so no one could leave. The audio wasn't turned on, but it from clear from
his friends' facial expression that there was tension in the room. Fuyuhiko appeared to be shouting.

“Oh god, this can’t be good.” Hajime gulped. Monomi keeping everyone cooped up was not going
to go down well. “You’re right, we better stop there first.”

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“I wonder if Monomi has told the others that you’re here yet.” Hajime said, making idle conversation
as they travelled down the stairs.

“I guess we’ll find out.” Nagito replied.
“Maybe it’s best if we split off for a bit, just in case Monomi hasn’t told them.” Hajime said. If the others didn’t know, it would be a huge shock to the system just bringing Nagito into the classroom. “When we get to the first floor, I think you should go straight to the gym. I’ll get the others and we can meet you in there.”

“Okay.” Nagito nodded.

He didn’t give Hajime much conversation to go on, which discouraged Hajime from speaking again himself. Was Nagito still being distant with Hajime? Or was he just too exhausted to go to the effort of making conversation? There wasn’t any kind of awkward tension between them, so Hajime decided to put it down to the latter.

Not talking to Nagito, Hajime was left alone with his thoughts. He couldn’t help but wonder how the other students were going to react when they found out about Nagito. If Monomi had already broken the news to them, things might be slightly easier, but Hajime couldn’t tell for certain. Learning of Nagito’s hiding location could upset a lot of people; it’s what brought Ibuki to her death. Not literally, of course. But if they hadn’t gone on the search for Nagito, they could have remained as a group, heading to the ruin together.

“I guess this is where we part ways.” Hajime stopped walking, freezing outside of the classroom.

“Oh, I’ll see you soon.” Nagito said.

“I’m just warning you,” Hajime said. “This might not go down very well.”

Nagito shrugged his shoulders. “What’s the worst they can do? Smash a plate at me…”

Hajime felt his cheeks flushing red, embarrassed that Nagito had referenced his recent spur of hot-headed behaviour.

“Just go to the gym.” Hajime snapped, somewhat jokingly, practically shoving Nagito down the corridor.

When Hajime entered the classroom, he walked straight into the conflict. Raised voices fought against Monomi as she desperately tried to defuse the situation.

“Monomi, just tell us what is going on.” Sonia spoke sternly. “You are confusing everyone!”

“I bet she’s fucking working for Monokuma.” Fuyuhiko hissed. “She’s a traitor, I always knew it! She’s keeping us in here to kill us.”

“But then where is Hajime?” Peko asked, reasonably.

“Perhaps she’s killed him already.” Gundam theorised.

“Woah guys, I’ve not been murdered by Monomi!” Hajime hurriedly made himself present, as things were clearly out of hand.

“Hajime, where have you been?” Fuyuhiko asked. “Monomi brought all of us here and won’t let us go.”

“Hajime!” a flustered Monomi cried. “I’ve been keeping everyone out of the way to give you some time, but they won’t listen to me. They think I’m working with Monokuma.”

“She isn’t working with Monokuma, guys.” Hajime shook his head.
“What do you mean ‘giving you time’?” Sonia had picked up on Monomi’s throwaway remark.

“Uh, look, there’s no easy way to say this…” Hajime wasn’t quite sure how to begin, since he was fearful of their reactions. Everyone had been sad thinking that Nagito had died, but would they hate him for coming back from the dead?

“C’mon Hajime, spit it out.” Fuyuhiko pressured him.

“It’s Nagito, he’s still alive.” taking Fuyuhiko’s advice, Hajime cut straight to the point. “Monomi found him in the canteen this morning, so she came and got me.”

“I was keeping you all here to give Hajime some time with Nagito.” Monomi jumped in, defending herself. “I didn’t want Nagito feeling overwhelmed by everyone.”

“Oh…” Fuyuhiko softened. “Well, you coulda just said.”

"I wanted to wait for Hajime." Monomi said.

“How is Nagito here? I do not understand.” Sonia frowned. “It is impossible to enter the ruin.”

“I changed the passcode.” Chiaki added.

“I think it’s best Nagito explains all of this to you himself.” Hajime said, feeling too exhausted to retell the story. “He’s waiting for us in the gym because he’s kinda brought us a present.”

“A present?” Sonia was excited.

“Once again, I think it’s best he tells you.” Hajime felt the urge to laugh; they were going to be shocked when they saw.

On that note, he led everyone from the classroom to the gym. Fuyuhiko seemed especially relieved to be freed from Monomi’s captivity.

Before opening the door to the gymnasium, Hajime hesitated. “Look, I know that Nagito can be pretty annoying. Just…don’t give him a hard time, okay? He’s on our side, we can trust him.”

“I don’t trust him as far as I can throw him.” Fuyuhiko scoffed. “But I won’t give him any shit if that’s what you want.”

“Just hear out his story, things will make a lot more sense.” Hajime encouraged.

With that, Hajime opened the door, allowing everyone to file into the gymnasium. Although no one had doubted Hajime, everyone still seemed completely shocked to see Nagito standing there. Gundam’s jaw practically smacked the floor.

“Hello everyone.” Nagito smiled, acting as if nothing had happened.

"N-Nagito..." Chiaki spoke gently. She really thought she was never going to see him again.

“It's really him.” Peko said.

“What the fuck are those?!” Fuyuhiko cried, eyeing up the mound of weapons.

Hajime had only seen the weapons through the monitor, but they definitely looked scarier in person. There was a huge selection of lethal tools, just as Nagito had described. How Nagito had managed to bring back so much, Hajime didn't know. “Uh, it’s not what you think. We’ll get to that shortly.”
"Not what I think?!" Fuyuhiko exclaimed. "Nagito turns up with a shit load of weapons, and we're not supposed to be worried?"

"If I thought we were in any danger, I wouldn't have brought you here." Hajime reassured his friend. "If we sit down, Nagito can tell you his story. But, if you aren't comfortable, I won't force you to stay."

"Naa, I'll hear him out." Fuyuhiko wasn't going to leave. "But he better not betray us."

With the initial shock out of the way, the students seemed ready to talk to Nagito properly. There were a lot of questions that they had to get through. Since they were going to be there for some time, the students sat in the bleachers. When Monomi joined them, Hajime realised that he was never going to get breakfast.

Nagito retold his tale of the funhouse to everyone in the room. Occasionally, Hajime would chip in with additional details that Nagito had accidentally missed out. They covered things a lot quicker now that Nagito wasn't being purposely difficult.

“Tell me,” Gundam cleared his throat, addressing Nagito halfway through his story. “How did you gain entry to the ancient ruin? Chiaki changed the passcode so that Monokuma couldn’t get in.”

“Yeah, that’s true!” Hajime scratched his head, still waiting for an answer. “You had one shot at getting the code right, or you’d have been turned into swiss cheese by that gun.”

“I took a gamble, I suppose.” Nagito replied. “I just had a feeling and pressed the buttons that felt right.”

“You used your luck again, seriously?!” Hajime couldn’t believe it. “You could’ve died!”

“I would’ve died had I stayed outside.” Nagito pointed out. “33333.”

“What?” Hajime frowned.

“What’s the new passcode.” Chiaki chimed in.

“How the hell did you guess a number as random as that!” Hajime exclaimed. It didn’t seem real.

“Oh...no, it’s not entirely random.” Chiaki shook her head. “Three is the digital route of the old password. I just repeated it five times, as that's the minimum number of digits required.”

Hajime paused for a moment. “Oh, that's clever.”

Chiaki nodded with a smile. “It may seem simple, but even a number like that will be difficult for Monokuma to guess.”

Hajime couldn’t help but grin. “Definitely, especially if he's only got one shot.”

“How did you figure it out, Nagito?” Chiaki asked.

Nagito shook his head. “I didn't, but that's clever Chiaki. I expect nothing less of a Ultimate! I really did just guess though, I entered the numbers that felt right.”

“You never fail to amaze me…” Hajime muttered to himself. It wasn’t clear whether he meant it as a compliment or not.

Nagito continued on with his story, even going into detail about Hajime smashing the plate. In a
desperate attempt to steer away from that subject, Hajime butted in, revealing to the students that Monokuma had gone missing.

Once all was said and done about Nagito’s vanishing act and funhouse experience, it was time to move on to the rather pressing topic at hand: a gymnasium filled with weapons.

Hajime stood up from the bleachers, approaching the weapons with ease. He was aware there were bombs in the pile and didn’t want to accidentally set anything off. A giant sack lay beside the pile, which explained how Nagito was able to carry so much.

“This is creeping me out.” Hajime admitted, eyeing up a shotgun. “If the wrong person got their hands on these…”

“They would be very handy for fighting Monokuma though.” Fuyuhiko spoke up. He seemed unfazed by the weapons, as they likely surrounded him in his daily life.

“Well, luckily for us, we don’t need to fight Monokuma anymore,” Hajime said, exhaling a sigh of relief. “I guess for now, we can just leave the weapons in here. I know that we can all trust each other not to use them."

"I will make the effort to keep returning and checking the pile.” Peko offered. “That way I’ll know if anything has been taken.”

“Thanks, Peko.” Hajime said. “That would be pretty helpful.”

“Well, if that’s all sorted, I think I’m gonna get going,” Fuyuhiko stood up, excusing himself. “I wanna look around the school today, since Peko and I never got a chance yesterday.”

“Oh, could I come with you?” Nagito piped up. “I haven’t seen it either.”

“Uh…” Fuyuhiko looked extremely unimpressed, it was clear that he didn’t want Nagito tagging along. “Ugh, fine, whatever. Just shut up and stay behind us.”

“Thank you so much!” Nagito beamed, appearing genuinely thrilled. Hajime would have taken it as an insult.

“I think I am going to go to the library.” Sonia announced. “I found a study with all these amazing case studies. Stories of murder that have never been released to the public before!"

“I’m going to the gardens.” Gundam said. “I encountered some beautiful creatures in there that need my care and protection.” he was referring to the chickens.

“Chiaki, did you wanna do something together?” Hajime asked, turning to his friend. He wasn’t really sure how he wanted to pass the time, so he would rather have company.

“Oh, I would like to, but...but there’s something I have to sort out.” Chiaki rejected him, though something seemed off.

“What’s that?” Hajime asked.

“Oh, um...some technical stuff in the Data Processing Room.” Chiaki answered, hesitating between words. “It’s really for the best that I do it alone. Maybe we can do something together later?”

“...Yeah, sure.” Hajime replied, somewhat distantly. He wasn’t trying to be rude, but something about Chiaki had unsettled him. She was behaving strangely and he didn’t like it. Chiaki had always
been someone that he could trust, so why was she acting so secretly? He wanted to ask her more on the matter, but Chiaki shot up out of her seat and left the gymnasium before anyone could stop her.

This queued everyone to go their separate ways, leaving Hajime and Monomi as the only two people left in the gymnasium (if you can count a rabbit as a person).

“What are you going to do now, Hajime?” Monomi asked.

“I...I dunno.” Hajime scratched his head. The school had plenty on offer, but Hajime felt overwhelmed by the choice. “What are you thinking of doing?”

“I’m going to start working on lunch!” Monomi smiled. “I feel bad that I didn’t have time to make breakfast for anyone, so I’m going to put out a lunch buffet selection instead.”

“That actually sounds really good.” Hajime said, his stomach had started to rumble. His appetite was returning.

“You can help me if you’d like.” Monomi offered, sensing Hajime was a little lonely. “I need help carrying things from the storeroom to the canteen. And you can also help me make the food!”

Quality time with Monomi wasn’t high on Hajime’s list, but he found himself accepting her offer. He had nothing better to do and he didn’t want to sit around by himself. Helping out would hopefully pass the time a little quicker, as well as allowing him to snack whilst cooking.

Hajime followed Monomi to the storeroom, where he helped himself to as much food as what seemed appropriate. Monomi guided him on some of the ingredients, but a lot of it was just guesswork. He tried thinking back to some of the lunches he’d enjoyed on Jabberwock Island.

From there, Monomi and Hajime began working in the kitchen together. The rabbit instructed Hajime on which vegetables to chop and how to do so safely. Hajime put some of his own touches into the spread, such as pouring giant bags of crisps into bowls and serving up fresh jelly and ice cream. He hoped, with his input, the food would be slightly more exciting than it had been the night previous.

Once everything was prepared, Hajime and Monomi presented all of the food on the dining tables. Taking a step back, Hajime admired his work. The buffet looked extremely appetising, even if it was just down to his growing hunger pains.

“I guess we better hurry and find everyone.” Hajime said, aware that the ice cream was starting to melt.

“You could just make an announcement over the speakers, it’ll be a lot easier.” Monomi suggested. “You can do that via the Data Processing room.”

Hajime liked that idea because it meant he could catch up with Chiaki too. Following Monomi’s advice, Hajime travelled up the four flights of stairs, which killed his legs a little. Stopping outside the Data Processing Room, Hajime reached for the handle. However, to his surprise, the door was locked. Hajime tried again, just to be sure, but it was definitely locked.

“Huh, that’s weird…” Hajime murmured to himself. He hadn’t been aware that it was even possible to lock the door. Why would Chiaki feel the need to do that?

Trying to get himself inside, Hajime knocked loudly on the door. When there was no answer, he began to call out. “Chiaki, it’s me. Can you let me in? I need to make an announcement on the
speakers.” though still, no one came.

A mixture of frustration and concern grew within Hajime as he was kept waiting. He tried knocking even louder, attempting to kick the door a little. “Chiaki, if you don’t answer I’m going to get some tools and I’m taking this door off of its hinges. You’re scaring me.”

Hajime didn’t mean to sound intimidating, but what if Chiaki had fainted inside the room? What if something was wrong?

Fortunately, such drastic measures weren’t needed, as Hajime heard the sound of footsteps from inside the room, followed by an unlocking door.

“Hey, Hajime.” Chiaki smiled innocently, as if she hadn’t kept him waiting for five minutes.

“What took you so long?” Hajime frowned, feeling extremely suspicious.

“Oh, I fell asleep.” Chiaki replied. “Sorry about that. I only just heard you knocking.”

Hajime felt like he was being fed a lie, but he didn’t want to push her. “How have things been going in here? Have you sorted all your technical stuff?”

“Yeah, I have.” Chiaki nodded, proudly. “I just finished.”

“I thought you’d just been sleeping…” Hajime retorted, noticing the contradictory statement instantly.

Chiaki brushed over it. “Did you need something?”

Hajime wasn’t going to challenge her again. “I wanted to make an announcement through the speakers. Monomi and I made lunch for everyone.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” Chiaki smiled. “I’ll show you how to make an announcement.” she was pretty certain that Hajime wouldn’t know how.

Chiaki allowed Hajime into the room, leading him to one of the control panels. Hajime scanned around for anything that looked suspicious, but nothing caught his eye. Perhaps Chiaki really had just been sleeping…

Chiaki showed Hajime a microphone, instructing him to speak into it. She explained that he could send a video of his face through the monitors too, but that required more effort. Wanting to keep it simple, Hajime quickly delivered his message that a buffet was available in the canteen for those who were hungry.

“Are you coming for food?” Hajime asked Chiaki, unsure whether she had more ‘business’ to attend to.

“I think so.” Chiaki replied. “I’m all done in here, but I kinda wanna nap. I feel really sleepy.”

Once again, this bothered Hajime. Hadn’t Chiaki just been sleeping? At least it was a good sign that Chiaki was willing to leave the Data Processing Room.

As the two friends travelled to the canteen, Chiaki began making conversation. “By the way, the fourth island is underwater now.”

“Oh, really?” Hajime responded. He hadn’t paid enough attention to the monitors to have realised. “It’s lucky Nagito made it out of the funhouse when he did…”
“I know.” Chiaki agreed. “That leaves us with just islands one and two now.”

“That’s scary to think about.” Hajime shuddered.

Upon their arrival at the canteen, Hajime found that all of his friends were already there. He was pleased to see a full house. It was nice to have a lot of company after spending the morning with Monomi. Then again, he wasn’t surprised to see everyone there; no one had eaten any breakfast.

“Hajime, Monomi tells us that you made a lot of these dishes!” Sonia praised. “They look wonderful.”

“Oh, thanks.” Hajime blushed, though squirming at the attention. “I just cut things up and stuff…Monomi did most of it.”

Fuyuhiko was already sat down, scoffing his face. Hajime approached the seat next to him, grinning as he did so. “You must be hungry.”

“I’m comfort eating.” Fuyuhiko retorted. “You spend the morning giving Nagito a tour of the whole damn school, you’ll feel the same.”

Hajime wondered what kind of things Nagito had done, but he didn’t want to pry and stress Fuyuhiko out further. He was likely just being his annoying self.

Nagito seemed extra glowing, beyond excited to be spending time at Hope’s Peak Academy. As he ate his lunch, he praised every single aspect of the school, from the facilities to the architecture.

Since they were all together, Hajime took the opportunity to tell everyone that the fourth island was no more. This didn’t come as much of a surprise since the islands were falling like dominoes. Between them, the students speculated about when the final two islands would collapse.

By the end of the meal, there was a high pile of plates collected on the table. Everyone had gone up for many helpings of the buffet, consuming nearly all of the food.

“What does everyone want for dinner?” Monomi asked eagerly.

“Uh, I dunno.” Fuyuhiko shrugged. He was too full to offer up any suggestions. “Cook whatever you feel like making.” he hoped he wouldn’t come to regret that comment.

“I am going back to the library.” Sonia announced. “There were so many interesting files to read and I barely got through any.”

The rest of the students began announcing their plans: Peko and Fuyuhiko were going to the rec room; Gundam was returning to his chickens; and Nagito was off to the library too, although he had more of an interest in the book collections, rather than the top secret files Sonia was after.

“What are you doing, Chiaki?” Hajime asked. He didn’t feel like getting rejected again, especially in a room filled with their friends.

“I might go for a nap.” Chiaki yawned.

“Actually, that sounds like a good idea. I think I’ll join you!” Hajime enthused, though quickly realising how he sounded. “I mean, I wanna have a nap too. I’m not actually coming into bed with you…”

Fuyuhiko started snickering, whilst Hajime’s buried his head.
“It’s still creeping me out that we don’t know where Monokuma is.” Hajime admitted, confiding in Chiaki as they stood outside of the dormitories.

“Whatever happens, you’re going to be okay.” Chiaki smiled, offering reassurance.

“We’re going to be okay.” Hajime corrected her. “I guess I’m just kinda paranoid, especially when I think about how the second island could sink at any moment.”

“This building is so sturdy, I don’t even think we’ll notice.” Chiaki said. “And even when it does sink, you’re going to be safe.”

“You mean we.” Hajime corrected her once again.

“Um, Hajime…” Chiaki hesitated. “Maybe later tonight, can I talk to you about something? It’s what I was doing earlier.”

“You can tell me now if you want.” Hajime was eager to hear. “Sleeping isn’t important to me.”

“I’m really, really tired.” Chiaki yawned. “I’m sure it can wait a couple of hours. If that’s okay?”

Hajime really wanted to know, but he wasn’t going to force Chiaki into talking if she was exhausted. Like Chiaki had said, he could easily wait a couple of hours.

“Well, come and knock for me when you wake up. Or I’ll knock for you when I’m awake.” Hajime said. “We can talk about it later.”

“That sounds good.” Chiaki agreed. “I’ll see you later, Hajime.”

“See you later.” giving a friendly wave, Hajime disappeared into his room.

Hajime decided to close his dormitory door, just to ensure that he wouldn’t be woken up by any noise. He left the door unlocked, so anyone who wanted to get in could. He had no means of setting an alarm, but he didn't really care. Napping wasn’t something he often did, but he was beginning to grow bored of being trapped in the ruin. There was only one more full day to go, but time did feel like it was dragging. Hopefully, a few hours of rest would move time a little faster.

Crawling into bed, Hajime laid back and closed his eyes. He fell to sleep quite quickly, the boredom sending him off into a world of dreams.
Screaming.

Hajime Hinata woke to the sound of screaming.

It was so violent and abrupt, that he woke with his head in a blur. Was he having a nightmare? No, unfortunately for Hajime, this was reality.

Before he could take note of what was going on, Hajime realised that someone had entered his bedroom. Having slept with his door unlocked, anyone was free to enter. Whoever it was, seemed to have no regard for knocking. For a split second, Hajime feared murder, but he reminded himself that things were different now. It was purely a game of survival; no one was going to kill him.

It was Sonia who was at Hajime’s bedside, for the second time that day. She was about to grab him by the shoulders. “Hajime! Hajime wake up!”

Hajime sat up properly to prove that he was already awake, narrowly missing being shaken. “What the hell is going on?!” he felt grumpy having been woken up so suddenly.

Sonia folded her arms. “You were not waking up, this it is important!”

“What’s important?” Hajime demanded. What could be so important that he had to be woken up and screamed at?! And that’s when it hit him…

“The weapons, oh god did Nagito use them?” Hajime gasped. Why else would Sonia have been screaming?

“P-pardon? Oh, no.” Sonia appeared rather taken back by his suggestion, as if it were something that would never cross her mind. “Hajime, it is Chiaki.”

“Chiaki!” Hajime cried, flying out of bed in an instant. “What’s going on?”

“She has taken a turn for the worst.” Sonia confessed. “Peko and Fuyuhiko found her in the Data Processing Room.”

“W-what?” Hajime didn’t understand. “She said she was going to sleep. I saw her go to her room.” that’s when Hajime realised, he had gone into his own room before he’d seen Chiaki do anything.

“I do not know, none of us do.” Sonia replied. “But that is not important right now. You must come with me immediately. I have never seen her this bad before, Hajime.”

Together, Hajime and Sonia ran up four of the school’s floors. Hajime didn’t stop for a single second, not even when he was struggling to breathe. The floor was cold against his bare feet, but he pushed the irritation to the back of his mind, as it wasn’t a priority.

When Hajime reached the fourth floor, he saw the door to the Data Processing Room had been wedged open with a shoe, which he recognised as Peko’s. Hajime burst into the room, his eyes darting everywhere.

Chiaki was waiting for him, her weak body supported by the desk she was resting up against. Peko was by Chiaki’s side, but she stood up to make room for Hajime when she saw him. Her expression was solemn. “I’m glad you’re here.”

Fuyuhiko had taken a step back also, not wanting to get in the way. “I think I better go find Nagito
and Gundam. They don’t know yet.”

“Fuyuhiko,” Hajime grabbed Fuyuhiko’s wrist without thinking, desperate for him to stay. “Please, tell me what’s going on?”

Fuyuhiko lowered his voice, whispering so that Chiaki wouldn’t hear. “Peko and I came in here to see if there was any news on the islands. That’s when we found Chiaki. She’d collapsed and was having some kinda seizure. It’s been going on for nearly thirty-five minutes.”

“T-thirty five minutes?” Hajime cried. “Why didn’t you come and get me?!”

“Because there was nothing you could have done, and you would have started panicking.” Fuyuhiko said, matter-of-factly.

“You don’t know that!” Hajime snapped. “You don’t get to predict how I’m gonna behave.”

Having overheard their conversation, Peko joined in. “Hajime, take a look at yourself.” Peko pointed out, remarkably calm herself. “We didn’t get you earlier, and that’s that. We were hoping Chiaki would calm down, but that hasn’t happened. Just make the most of your time together.”

Hajime didn’t like Peko’s phrasing. “What’s that supposed to mean?!”

“I don’t think she has long left Hajime, look at her.” Peko shook her head. “Sonia, Fuyuhiko and I can go and find the others. You two should spend some time alone.”

It didn’t require three people to find two others, so it seemed that Peko had summoned everyone from the room to give Hajime some time alone with Chiaki. It’s likely what she would have wanted if it were Fuyuhiko in Chiaki’s place.

Hajime lowered himself onto the ground next to Chiaki, watching the others leave. Peko was convinced that Chiaki’s time was nearly up, but Hajime wondered why. A thirty-five-minute episode wasn’t good, but her last one was twenty minutes. How did they know it was the end?

This was a question answered for Hajime when he actually paid attention to Chiaki. She looked unbelievably weak; he’d never seen her like it before, even during the other seizures. Though it seemed that her seizure had come to an end, she looked awful. So fragile, like she was going to snap if you touched her.

Chiaki’s eyes locked onto Hajime’s. “H-Hajime, you came…”

“Of course I came.” Hajime said. It was a good sign to see that Chiaki was talking. “Chiaki, what’s going on?

“M-my...s-system.” Chiaki replied. It took all of her energy just to speak. “I-it’s almost completely destroyed. I-I won’t be around much longer.”

“N-no, that’s wrong! You said you were fighting it.” Hajime protested. “You promised you’d make it until the end. Y-you said…” the lump in his throat had stolen his voice.

“I-I know. B-but there was s-something I had to do.” Chiaki replied, her entire body was twitching, though she was trying her best to control it. “I-it’s to s-save everyone. I-I hope it works.”

“Wait…” Hajime paused. There was something that Chiaki had to do. Could this explain her strange behaviour? “Chiaki, is this why you’ve been in the Data Processing Room all day?”
Chiaki nodded feebly. “If it works, e-everyone, they might be able to wake up from the rewrite. It’s shortened my time in here, but if it works, then it will have been worth i—” she cut herself short, crying out in pain.

“Are they hurting you?” Hajime asked, taking Chiaki’s hand to comfort her. He wanted to learn more about what exactly could save everyone, but Chiaki’s wellbeing came first. “What is the Future Foundation doing to you?”

“T-they’re destroying my system i-inside out. B-but because I was designed to feel pain, it...i—it’s like...” Chiaki didn’t need to finish her sentence. Hajime knew exactly what she was implying, it was as if someone had stuck a knife into her chest and were repeatedly stabbing her. “What I did earlier...it...it’s drained me, so I’m even weaker, I can’t withstand this anymore.”

“Chiaki, tell me what you did.” Hajime insisted, wanting a better understanding.

"I...I uploaded all of my data into the Neo World Program via the computers." Chiaki said. "I uploaded my memories from this game and the previous killing game too. I did it b-because-" Chiaki screamed out in pain, once again.

Hajime knew that he had to do something. He wanted to hear more of the story, but it was clear Chiaki was struggling. He wasn’t going to waste her last moments forcing her to talk.

“Chiaki, I-I need you to look at me okay?” Hajime said, doing his best to put on a brave face. “But I need to tell you about this, it’s to save everyone-” Chiaki tried to stop him.

“Enough of that. We’re not talking about the Future Foundation or the rewrite. Let’s focus on something better, something brighter.” Hajime said. He was not going to spend his final few minutes with Chiaki talking about the godforsaken rewrite, which had cost nearly everyone their lives.

Protesting no further, for she lacked the strength, Chiaki looked Hajime straight in the eyes. Her body was still trembling, but she smiled through the pain. She was chewing hard on her bottom lip, trying to ignore what was hurting her.

“I-I want to thank you, thank you for everything that you’ve done.” Hajime said, making the most of his time to say everything that he had always wanted to. “You’ve believed in me, even when no one else did. You’ve always had my back, in the first game and the second one. When I’ve been feeling low, or unsure what to do, you’ve always been there to support me. Chiaki, if it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t be here right now.”

“H-hajime-”

“I know my words aren’t much. I’m just a reserve course student, nothing really, I know.” Hajime admitted, sheepishly. “But I want you to know how much you mean to me, how much you mean to all of us. You’re our hope, Chiaki.”

Tears travelled down Chiaki’s face, spilling onto her blouse. Hajime hadn’t expected her to cry, she had been so strong during her original execution, but things were different this time. Her death was slow and drawn out, she was in a lot of pain because of the Future Foundation. She was suffering, and it hurt to watch. At that precise moment, Hajime lost it too, unable to hold back tears. Not only was he about to lose Chiaki for good, but he had to witness her screams and suffering. Although he felt like his world was falling apart, he was not going to ruin Chiaki’s final moments.

“Hajime, you are not just a reserve course student.” Chiaki insisted. “Y-you risked your life, entering the Neo World Program again to save your friends. A...a title means nothing. I didn’t make you or
save you…it’s always been you all along. I… I was just there to guide you when you needed me. I—“

Hajime knew what it meant, her final moments were upon them. She had thirty seconds left, if that.

“Chiaki, I want you to know that… that we’re never going to forget you.” Hajime placed his hands on Chiaki’s shoulders, pulling her into a hug. “Never.”

“N—nor will I…” Chiaki lay her head to rest on his shoulder.

Their time together was getting even shorter now. Ten seconds, no more.

“You c—can do this, H—Hajime.” Chiaki whispered. “I b—believe in you. W—wherever you are… I—I will always be beside you.”

Last words said and done, her body fell limp, no more pain left to feel. Hajime clutched her tighter than ever, holding onto something that was already gone. He cried into her hair, violent sobs, his body shaking.

“G—goodbye, Chiaki…”

He knew Chiaki wasn’t real, but her death still hurt him. He had already seen her die once before, so he just wanted her to see things through until the end. It was as if the Future Foundation had won. Chiaki Nanami had gone for good and she was never coming back.

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“Chiaki would have loved this, Hajime.” Sonia smiled, scattering cherry blossom petals.

Hajime gave her a small nod, pleased to see that the others approved of his idea. They’d brought Chiaki to the Dojo on the fifth floor, where her body was being covered in the beautiful cherry blossom petals that grew there. Hajime refused to just leave her lying there in the Data Processing Room. This was the closest he could get to giving her a proper, meaningful goodbye.

When Chiaki had passed away, it was already too late by the time the others arrived. Gundam and Nagito didn’t need an explanation of what had happened; they could see Chiaki in Hajime’s arms. The students had comforted each other, sharing in the pain of losing another classmate. As they sat together, Hajime had thought up the idea of moving Chiaki to the Dojo. Everyone agreed to the beautiful suggestion.

Once Chiaki’s body was completely covered with petals, the students left her be. The door to the Dojo was closed and the students came to an agreement that no one was to open it again. Although it might have been nice to visit Chiaki, the friends wanted her to have peace.

Monomi had prepared dinner for everyone, but Hajime didn’t go. Despite Monomi’s kindness, Hajime had no interest in socialising with his friends. The thought of eating made him feel nauseous, as his appetite had gone completely. All he wanted was to be alone and to process the shock of what
had happened. The past few days had been exhausting, this being the worst way to finish it off.

Instead, Hajime took himself off to bed. He briefly lingered outside of his dorm room, remembering the conversation he and Chiaki had engaged in just a couple of hours ago. Not a lot of time had passed, but so much had changed between now and then. Chaki had wanted to talk to Hajime about something, which he suspected to be the news of her uploading her data. Hajime wished he could have learnt more.

Hajime crawled under the covers, burying his head under his pillow in an attempt to escape from the world. He wanted out of the Neo World Program. He was bored and restless, feeling cooped up and claustrophobic. As time was passing, Hajime's hatred for the Future Foundation was only growing stronger. He loathed Kyosuke Munakata and truly hoped that one day he endured loss like Hajime had experienced.
Chapter Six - Part Two

Chapter Notes

Just in case it gets a bit confusing, I'm posting 4 new chapters at once: 29, 30, 31, & 32. Make sure you haven't missed chapters 29 & 30 first!

We're nearing the end now. This is the second to last chapter. I'm very excited for you to read this chapter! It's something that I've had planned from pretty much the beginning of the story.

It's quite long and a lot is about to happen. I thought about splitting this into two separate chapters but felt like it flowed better as one.

I just wanted to point out that there's some medical stuff happening in this chapter. I have no medical knowledge at all lol. But I did spend a lot of time researching the topic, but please don't kill me if what I've written is totally off hahaha. My ultimate talent definitely wouldn't be Mikan's...

Enjoy ^_^

When Hajime awoke the next morning, he was calm. He felt at peace with the world now that a good night's rest had put everything into perspective. From the beginning, Hajime had always known that Chiaki was never going to make it out of the Neo World Program. The shock of her brutal and sudden death is what had upset him. Now that the hysteric was over and Hajime could return to normal life in the ruin again, he felt like himself. Hajime was still sad to have lost Chiaki, but he didn't feel consumed by overwhelming grief anymore.

No one had woken Hajime that morning, so he wasn’t quite sure of the time. Not that he was complaining, it was nice to wake up naturally. Hajime took his time getting ready, casually strolling into the shower. As the warm water surrounded him, a positive thought struck Hajime: it was the last day of the rewrite! In a matter of hours, he would be free. Everything would be over.

Hajime couldn’t wait to leave, he wanted out of the ruin since he was feeling cooped up. He was glad to be safe and knew it was something he shouldn’t take for granted, but it still felt like his freedom had been stolen from him. He just wanted to go outside and see the sun again. Being trapped reminded him of his time inside the old building.

Once he had dried himself off from the shower and gotten dressed, Hajime was ready for the day ahead. He made his way to the canteen, hoping to bump into one of his classmates. Even if no one was around, he was still excited to get his hands on some food. Having skipped dinner the night previous, he was feeling pretty hungry.

To Hajime’s surprise, the canteen was bustling. Well, as bustling as it possibly could have been with only six people in the entire building. Everyone was gathered around the table, sharing cereal and stories.

“Hey everyone.” Hajime waved over at his friends, pleased to see their smiling faces.
“Hajime!” Fuyuhiko exclaimed, surprised to see his friend up and about. “It’s good to see ya. Have a seat!”

Hajime sat down at the table, claiming the empty chair next to Fuyuhiko. “What time is it?” he asked.

“It has just gone eleven.” Sonia replied. “We all woke up late, so we are enjoying a late breakfast. Nagito told me it is called brunch.”

“Do you want some food, Hajime?” Peko asked. “Monomi is in the kitchen, I can ask her to make you something.”

“Uh, just some toast would be great. Thanks.” Hajime said, giving his order to Peko.

"I'll be right back." Peko nodded.

As Peko hurried off to find Monomi, Hajime did some quick calculations in his head. “So, if it’s eleven o’clock now, we’ve just gotta kill time for thirteen more hours and then we're out of the rewrite!” his voice was filled with excitement.


“The time should go quickly.” Gundam agreed.

“Has anyone been to the Data Processing Room today?” Hajime asked, curious to know if any of the other islands had collapsed.

“Not yet,” Fuyuhiko replied. “We were gonna head up there after breakfast.”

“I’ll come with you.” Hajime offered.

It didn’t take long for Monomi to prepare Hajime’s toast. He scoffed it down, spraying crumbs everywhere. He ate the food so quickly, there wasn’t much time to enjoy the taste.

“How you want seconds?” Peko raised her eyebrows, surprised at how quickly Hajime had wolfed down the food.

“I'll pass, thanks.” Hajime shook his head. It would be time for lunch, soon enough. He was also very eager to check out the status of the islands; eating another plate of toast would just keep Hajime longer.

It was agreed that everyone would visit the Data Processing Room together, besides Monomi who had been tasked with clearing up breakfast. Returning to the Data Processing Room felt sore, since it held memories of Chiaki’s death. Unfortunately, there wasn’t anything that Hajime could do. If Makoto Naegi survived his entire killing game knowing that his bathroom was Sayaka's crime scene, then Hajime could deal with this. Besides, he wasn't alone; all of Hajime's friends were by his side.

The six friends gathered around the security monitors, in search of any new information. To Hajime’s relief, the monitors were already displaying the Jabberwock Island footage, not Hope’s Peak. If Hajime saw what was going on inside the school, he would also see Chiaki’s body in the dojo - something that he wasn’t ready to face.

Scanning the security footage, there was a big change that they all spotted straight away.

“Another one of the islands has gone!” Nagito exclaimed. This was apparent from the additional
number of blacked out screens.

It took them the next ten seconds or so to figure out which island it was that had been destroyed.

“I believe it’s the first island,” Peko put forward. “I can’t see the airport or the market anywhere.”

“Me either.” Sonia agreed. “The ranch is missing too.”

“That’s definitely it.” Hajime nodded. All traces of the first island were gone.

“Thank god we didn’t stay in our cottages.” Fuyuhiko remarked.

Hajime couldn’t help but shudder at the thought, they’d all be underwater by now.

“That means our island is the only one still standing…” Gundam whispered, hauntingly.

“That’s if the fifth island really has sunk.” Nagito reminded them. “There’s still no sign of Monokuma.”

“It’s so strange!” Hajime scratched the back of his neck. “I don’t understand why he’s suddenly vanished.”

“For now, I think we’re best to assume that he’s over on the fifth island.” Nagito said. “So really, there are actually two islands left.”

“I guess it’s not really that important.” Hajime said. “At least we’re safe in here.”

“Thirteen more hours and we’re out of here.” Fuyuhiko clicked his knuckles, feeling so close to the end. “I think I’m starting to get cabin fever in this place.”

“You and me both.” Hajime related. “I might go and hang in the garden today, just to trick my brain into thinking I’m getting some sunlight.”

“That’s not a bad idea.” Fuyuhiko agreed. “This building is starting to depress me out, it’s so dark.”

“Surely, things must’ve been different when we were students here.” Peko pondered. “The lighting is so harsh, no pupil could concentrate in those conditions.”

“The garden is my favourite room in this school,” Gundam spoke up. “I have become very close with the beautiful creatures that reside in there.”

“Oh yes, you were telling me all about your chickens!” Sonia beamed. “I really want to meet them!”

“Let’s all go together, then?” Hajime suggested. After spending the majority of yesterday by himself, he wasn’t going to let the same thing happen again. “Nagito, do you wanna come too?”

“Sure.” Nagito agreed, since he didn’t have any better offers on the table.

Smiling and laughing, the group walked up to the fifth floor. With their morale on a high, Hajime felt excited to see the day through.

Gundam was the one to open the door, he wanted to be the first into the room so that he could see his chickens. “Everyone follow behind me, the creatures that belong here need to sense my presence first, or they might feel threatened.”

Hajime wanted to roll his eyes but stopped himself. The chickens really wouldn’t care in the
slightest, but he didn’t feel the need to argue about it. He waited for his turn, following after Gundam and then Sonia. As Hajime emerged into the garden, he became distracted. Not by the gigantic flower, or the tool shed, or the beautiful blue sky. Hajime was distracted by the figure who was humming to herself and picking flowers from the ground. For the second time in two days, Hajime was witnessing someone rise from the dead. First Nagito and now…

“C-Chiaki?” Hajime gasped, practically lost for words.

“Oh my goodness!” Sonia cried, her face filled with delight.

There was no mistaking it. Even though Hajime could only see the person’s back, he knew it was Chiaki. It was her hair, her build, her outfit, her posture. There stood Chiaki Nanami.

“Hmm?” hearing her name, Chiaki turned around, facing her friends. She had collected a beautiful bouquet of flowers in her hand.

“Chiaki, it really is you!” Sonia was smiling from ear to ear. Her day couldn’t have gotten any better. Hajime wanted to cheer, but the smile very quickly dropped from his face. Something was wrong. It was Chiaki alright, but now that he had seen her from the front, he could tell that something was different. Chiaki’s already short hair had been tied up into pigtails; her skirt hitched up so high that she risked flashing the entire room her underwear. She had ditched her favourite hoodie, and a few of the buttons on her blouse were undone - so that she was exposing her cleavage.

“No, this isn’t right.” Hajime mumbled to himself, staring Chiaki up and down. “Chiaki, what’s wrong with you?!”

“Guess again!” Chiaki replied, smirking tauntingly. “That isn’t my name.”

Hajime froze; the voice he heard sent violent shivers down his spine. It still sounded like Chiaki, but there was an evil presence in her tone.

“Dear me, you peasants are slow.” Chiaki sighed, sauntering over to the students. As she did so, she threw her bouquet of flowers to the floor, trampling on them with her foot. “Do you know why I love picking flowers? Because from the moment they leave the ground, they start to die.” she began to laugh.

“It can’t be.” Hajime cried. There was only one other person who’d ever spoken to him like that before. “Junko!”

“So you fucking guessed it!” Chiaki laughed, her eyes suddenly manic. “Want a medal or something? Well, you ain’t getting shit!”

"This can't be." Hajime was in disbelief.

As if from nowhere, Chiaki's personality shifted. Her voice became monotone, as if all her emotions had fled from her body. “Oh, of course, I forgot Hajime is the only here who would recognise me. You all got your memories wiped. That really sucks. I offer my sincerest apologies.”

“Junko, as in Junko Enoshima?” Nagito turned to Hajime, eyes wide. “The Ultimate Despair?”

“N’awww you’re going to make me all shy!” Chiaki blushed, speaking like an innocent child. “You’re such a cutie, Nagito, bigging me up like that.”

“This has to be another one of the Future Foundation’s traps!” Hajime declared, the anger rising in
his voice. “They’ve added some of Junko’s mannerisms into Chiaki’s data.”

“Actually, that would be incorrect.” Chiaki stated, wearing a pair of glasses that she’d tucked between her cleavage previously.

“Then why are you acting like Junko Enoshima!” Hajime exclaimed. He could not think of any other explanation.

“Because I am Junko Enoshima.” Chiaki stated, her personality yet to switch again. “Well, not exactly. We all know the real Junko Enoshima died in the name of despair. A more suitable title for me is A.I. Junko.”

“That’s impossible,” Hajime shook his head. “A.I. Junko is inside Monokuma. The Monokuma trapped outside these walls!”

“Um, Hajime…” Sonia piped up. “You mean the Monokuma no one has been able to find?”

Gundam interrupted. “We agreed that he was hiding on the fifth island.”

“But we never had any real proof of that.” Peko objected.

“Wow, you guys are smart!” the babyish voice made its return. “But that’s exactly right. The fifth island hasn’t actually sunk yet, I just turned off all of the cameras. Monokuma is stuck over there. Although, even if you did see him, he’d just look like another clone.”

“Oh…” Hajime gasped. He had been right all along.

When Chiaki spoke, her personality changed again. She was playing with the ends of her hair, looking downcast at the floor; there was sorrow in her voice. “I saw the opportunity to take over Chiaki’s lifeless body, so I took it. How hopelessly sad. I could tell that she was getting weaker and weaker, so I kept out of the way to prepare myself for the takeover.”

“I don’t understand.” Hajime frowned. “You need our consent to put yourself in the body of any...dead student.” he found it difficult to say.

The regal voice was back, along with Chiaki’s haughty attitude. “Students, yes. But Chiaki wasn’t a Hope’s Peak peasant like the rest of you. She was a far greater being like myself: an A.I. With her data deleted, she was really just an empty shell waiting to be conquered.”

“I will perform an exorcism to banish you from her body!” Gundam declared.

Chiaki giggled. “Gee, you sure are stupid. I’m not some ghost you can just curse away. I’m an A.I, making me more powerful than all of you put together. Eek!”

“What do you want?” Nagito snapped, he looked furious from just being in the presence of Junko Enoshima.

“I’m here with a proposition.” Chiaki stated.

“Well?!” Hajime pressed.

Chiaki minced the room, her voice lifeless. “The first island, the third island, the fourth island, and Monokuma Rock are all gone. Dusted. History. This island will be under water too in no time, along with the fifth island.”

“Spit it out, what is it?” Hajime glared at her.
“You’ve got thirteen hours left until this all goes away and you get to wake up. Sounds pretty easy, right? Well, I’m willing to help you. I want to help all of you survive the next thirteen hours, but I don’t work for free. In return for your safety, I want you to sign over the bodies of your dead friends to me.” Chiaki said.

“So that your automatic intelligence can take over them?” Peko challenged.

Chiaki nodded. “Exactly. It’s not like they’re going to wake up, Hajime can vouch for that.”

“They didn’t wake up before, but we barely gave it enough time.” Hajime snapped, passion bringing his voice to life. “I refuse to sign anyone over to a monster like you!”

Chiaki sighed, depressed once again. “Really, Hajime? You say there was barely any time, but you jumped into the rewrite so quickly. It seems like you were desperate...”

“I don’t care.” Hajime argued. “I’ll wait longer this time. I’ll stay on Jabberwock Island for the rest of my life if that’s how long it takes to wake up my friends.”

“You’re so fucking sappy and boring!” Chiaki laughed straight in his face, so close that she accidentally spat all over him. “Things aren’t gonna be so easy this time. The Future Foundation wanna kill all of you fuckers! Think you’re gonna be able to run away from them lugging around comatose bodies and a virtual reality program?”

Chiaki made a fair point, it was going to be especially difficult returning to normal life with the Future Foundation after them. However, this was not enough of a reason to make Hajime sway. He would rather die trying than give into despair.

“Nothing that you say is going to change my mind, Junko!” Hajime squared up to Junko, refusing to call her Chiaki any longer. He was not going to taint the name of his best friend. "Your manipulation won’t work on me. I’ve been through this hell twice now.”

“Oh, you think you’ve been through hell, do you?” Queen Junko scoffed. “Well, someone here must be feeling confident then. I guess it’s up to me to show you, peasants, what hell really feels like.”

Junko took off Chiaki’s backpack, holding it in front of her so she could reach inside with ease. When Junko’s hand emerged from the bag, she was holding onto something that Hajime recognised from the canteen: a large kitchen knife. She glanced around at the students in front of her, before focusing on Nagito. Her smile widened, whilst her eyes grew bigger, as Junko took two steps forward and rammed the knife into Nagito’s stomach.

Hajime felt his own stomach lurch as he watched the encounter, feeling as if he was going to throw up.

Junko pulled away, leaving the knife behind in Nagito. Nagito staggered backwards as the blood began to pour from his stomach, instantly staining his shirt. He had turned incredibly pale and was in a deep amount of shock. Unable to cope with the situation, he looked like he was ready to collapse any second.

Gundam, who was standing the closest to Nagito, hurriedly reached out to support him. He put his arm around Nagito, just in case the Luckster fell.

“You...you...stabbed him?!” Hajime could barely speak, traumatized by what he’d just witnessed. He almost felt like he was going to faint himself; everything was becoming too much.

Nagito said nothing, staring down at his stomach and the knife that rested in it.
“Well observed, Hajime.” the educated Junko was back; she spoke very matter-of-factly about the incident.

“He doesn’t deserve to die!” Hajime roared, feeling protective of his friend.

“He won’t die,” Junko reassured him. “At least, not if you tend to his injury properly. It's not a fatal stabbing, the sort that kills on impact, but he will need treating. I hope you have the right medical knowledge, or then yes, his life will come to an end.”

Before anyone had time to respond, Junko’s personality switched again and she had something new to say.

“Do you really want to spend the next thirteen hours stuck in here with a pissed off Junko Enoshima?” she teased, eyeing up Nagito’s wound in delight. “I suggest you reconsider my offer, unless you want something else like this to happen. And next time, I’ll start hitting the hearts.” with that, she pushed past the students and walked out of the garden.

Everyone looked at each other in horror, unsure about what to do next. Nagito was only still standing thanks to Gundam’s support.

"Where is Mikan when we need her..." Hajime wasn't sure how to deal with the situation.

"We have to do something, or he will die!" Sonia exclaimed, eyeing up Nagito in concern.

"But what?” Fuyuhiko replied. "I don't think the ambulance service exists in the Neo World Program..."

"The task rests on our shoulders." Gundam remarked.

"Where is Monomi?" Sonia asked. "Maybe she can help. She is trained as our teacher, after all."

"She's still cleaning up I think," Hajime answered. "But I don't think this is the kind of situation Monomi has been trained for..."

"Hey, Peko..." Fuyuhiko turned to the Swordswoman, suddenly struck with an idea. "Didn't my family pay for you to go on some intense first aid training?"

"Yes, they did," Peko replied. "To prepare me for your protection."

"Can't you do somethin' then?" Fuyuhiko suggested.

"I..." Peko hesitated. "Those courses gave me some medical knowledge, but I don't think it will be to the degree that Nagito is going to require."

"Right now, you're our only hope." Hajime reminded her. "Whatever you know is better than nothing."

"I can try and help Nagito, but I don't know if I can save him." Peko said, sternly.

"Do whatever you can, Peko." Sonia encouraged her friend.

"Our first step is taking Nagito to the Nurse's office. We will need medical supplies if I'm going to try and help." Peko stepped up, taking charge of the situation. "No one, under any circumstances, remove that knife from Nagito. You all saw what happened to Teruteru when Hiyoko did."

It was somewhat ironic. Nagito had stabbed Teruteru all those days ago. In an attempt to save him,
Hiyoko became the actual murderer and was punished for it. Now the tables had turned, Nagito was the one with a knife in him.

“Is he even conscious?” Hajime asked. He couldn’t tell, but Nagito’s eyes had closed.

“I think so,” Sonia nodded. “But, barely.”

“Should we not try and keep on eye on Chiaki?” Gundam interrupted, changing the subject briefly.

“Don’t call her that.” Fuyuhiko snapped. “That’s Junko fucking Enoshima. We aren’t ruining Chiaki’s name.”

Hajime was pleased to see how passionate Fuyuhiko felt.

“Whoever that is, they are dangerous.” Sonia shuddered.

“How are we going to survive the next thirteen hours with her?” Gundam frowned. “Maybe we’ll be forced into accepting her offer.”

“You...can’t even consider that as an option.” Nagito spoke up, his voice was raw and weak, but he was still conscious. “That would be giving into despair, I will never allow that to happen.”

“What if she comes back to kill?” Gundam challenged.

“We outnumber her.” Nagito retorted.

“That’s true, but don’t for a second underestimate her.” Hajime said sternly. “She was able to destroy the world, she’s not to be messed with.”

“Please, let’s discuss her later.” Peko turned to her friends. “Right now, our priority is helping Nagito.”

“We must be careful though,” Sonia reminded her. “Running into Junko is the last thing that we need.”

“I think we should be okay for now.” Hajime said, offering some reassurance. “Junko knows that we have zero medical knowledge, the kind of medical knowledge that will save Nagito’s live. She wants to watch us struggle as we try to help him. She’s not going to bother us for now.”

“If we do run into her, I will do my best to protect you all.” Peko promised, her trusty bamboo sword still on her back.

“Gundam, I’ll give you a hand supporting Nagito. I don’t think he’s gonna be able to walk by himself.” Hajime said. “It’ll be easier with two of us.”

Gundam nodded.

“Sonia and Fuyuhiko, you guys better come with us too.” Hajime said. “We don’t wanna split up into smaller groups, cuz it’ll give Junko the advantage.”

Listening to Hajime’s instructions, Nagito gave a weak nod to show that he was still with them. Nagito seemed especially wobbly on his feet, most likely due to the lack of blood. Hajime put his arm around Nagito’s other shoulder to help steady him.

“If you feel like you’re going to faint, tell us.” Hajime instructed.
Nagito nodded, choosing not to speak.

Peko and Sonia walked up front, whilst the boys followed behind. Peko had her sword at the ready, just in case she needed to defend them at any given time. Nagito was walking very slowly, which put Hajime on edge. However, he couldn't exactly force Nagito into speed walking. If only Nekomaru was there, he could have carried Nagito on his back with ease.

The amount of blood Nagito was losing was rather alarming, it dripped all over the floor, staining the carpet with a bloody trail.

Thankfully, Junko left them alone. However, everyone felt completely paranoid on their way to the Nurse's office. Once inside, Peko grabbed a chair and positioned it underneath the door handle. This would stop the door from opening if anyone tried to get in.

Gundam and Hajime lay Nagito to rest on one of the medical beds, putting him down gently, so not to injure him further. Meanwhile, Peko was at the sink sanitising her hands.

"I need you to get his clothes off." Peko called from across the room.

"H-huh?!" Hajime's eyebrows shot up.

"Not all of them." Peko said. "But his top and jacket need to come off."

"How are we supposed to get his top off? There aren’t any buttons or anything." Hajime frowned. Nagito's top was trapped underneath the knife.

"Here!" thinking on her feet, Sonia presented Hajime with a pair of scissors that she'd spotted on the side. "Cut it open."

"Ah, good thinking. Thanks." Hajime gratefully took the scissors, cutting through the fabric of Nagito’s t-shirt, whilst Gundam worked on removing his jacket.

With her sleeves rolled up high, and sporting a pair of medical gloves, Peko joined the others at the bed. Hajime had done as good a job as possible at removing the t-shirt, but some of the fabric remained trapped.

"Nagito, are you still with us?" Hajime asked, terrified he was going to lose another friend. Things were certainly looking worse now that he could see the damage up close.

Once again, Nagito said nothing, but nodded feebly. It was his only way of communicating, given his weakness.

"That’s good," Hajime exhaled a sigh of relief. "Keep breathing, it’s going to be okay, Peko’s going to help you."

"I...I…" Peko hesitated.

"Is something wrong?" Hajime asked.

"It’s just, I’ve performed first aid before on my Young Master, but I’ve never had to do something this extreme." Peko admitted. "I have been trained for this kind of situation before, but that was a long time ago. I just hope that I get it right."

"You’re the only hope we have." Hajime encouraged her. "Whatever happens, at least you’re trying. It’s better than just giving up and throwing in the towel."
Peko took a deep breath. “Could everyone please go and wash your hands? I might need your help and I can’t risk anyone infecting the wound.”

Everyone was extremely compliant, heading over to the sink.

“I think we’re very lucky,” Peko announced, “The knife hasn’t been inserted too deeply, so there won’t be as much damage as there could have been.”

“How are you going to remove the knife?” the first to have washed his hands, Hajime returned to Peko’s side.

“I’m going to have to take it out very carefully.” Peko admitted, talking slowly to walk herself through it. “If this was a hospital, we’d have all the right equipment, but we will have to make do.”

“Won’t that be dangerous?” Hajime’s eyes widened. “You told none of us to remove the knife. I mean look at what happened to Teruteru.”

“I said that so no one did anything in a state of panic, which is what Hiyoko did.” Peko said calmly. “If you’re panicked and remove the knife out of sheer human instinct, you’re likely going to mess up. I’m going to be as careful as I possibly can.”

“I understand.” Hajime nodded. There was a lot of pressure resting on Peko’s shoulders; he wasn’t envious of her.

Sonia, Fuyuhiko, and Gundam gathered at the medical bed once they had finished washing their hands too. Everyone was at the ready to help.

“Nagito, are you still with us?” Peko asked. She was greeted with silence, providing her with an answer. Peko quickly checked for his pulse, just to ensure that Nagito was still alive. “He’s unconscious.”

“That’s probably for the best.” Hajime remarked.

“We need to get the bleeding under control,” Peko stated. “That’s the most important thing right now. Too much blood loss is what will kill Nagito.”

Hajime wasn’t quite sure how to respond. It seemed that Peko was talking to them to talk herself through the process. It probably made her feel like she wasn’t alone.

“This type of bleeding, I believe, is venous bleeding.” Peko came to a medical conclusion.

“What’s that?” Fuyuhiko queried.

"It means the blood is coming from a vein." Peko replied. "Thankfully, it's not as dangerous as arterial bleeding. Arterial bleeding is bleeding from the arteries."

"It's impressive that you know that." Hajime couldn't help but comment. "I thought you'd only been on some basic first aid courses."

“I have.” Peko clarified.

If Peko had been taught first aid in order to look out for Fuyuhiko, her courses were probably a lot more in-depth than the industry standard. Fuyuhiko's family had gone to extreme lengths to protect him.
“Hajime, find me a cloth.” Peko instructed. She was too focused on Nagito to even make eye contact.

Hajime quickly located a cloth from inside one of the cupboards. He tried handing it to Peko, but she rejected him.

“I need you to keep ahold of it.” Peko said. “As soon as I remove the knife, you need to apply pressure to the wound. You’re going to need both hands, so be ready.”

Hajime gulped, his nerves rising. His task wasn't too difficult compared to what Peko would be facing, but he was still terrified that he would somehow mess up.

Moving in slowly, Peko reached for the knife. Her fingers wrapped around the handle, which luckily wasn't inside Nagito's stomach at all. He had only been affected by the blade, making the knife easier to reach.

"Are you ready, Hajime?" Peko asked. She turned her head to Hajime, who gave an affirming nod. Having received all the confirmation that she needed, Peko slowly began to pull the knife from Nagito’s stomach. It relieved Hajime to know that Nagito was unconscious; the pain would be unbearable.

There was silence throughout the nurse’s office. No one dared even breath, worried that any sudden noise would disturb Peko. The atmosphere was incredibly tense.

Peko continued to free the knife, her steady hand something to be admired. Hajime knew that his own hands would shake far too much to take on a task like that. As Peko continued to work, Hajime began to see the head of the knife emerge. It was saturated with blood, its metallic surface barely recognisable.

“Someone take this!” Peko called for assistance; the knife was completely free from Nagito. It was remarkable, but Peko still sounded as calm as she had done before the procedure. Her voice didn’t even so much as shake.

Sonia took the knife from Peko, placing it on the side so it wouldn’t be in the way. Meanwhile, Hajime jumped in with his cloth. Using both hands, he pressed down on Nagito’s wound. It was his job to try and stop the bleeding. Blood began to soak through the cloth in an instant. Hajime had to try his best not to be squeamish.

“Keep that on Hajime, don’t let go.” Peko said sternly. “Once the bleeding calms down, we can sterilize the wound. It’s really important that we do it properly, or it could get infected.”

“How do we do that?” Hajime asked.

“We need saline solution.” Peko replied. “Can someone look for some? There should be a bottle somewhere in this room.”

Gundam and Fuyuhiko both accepted the task, splitting the search between them. It was Gundam who came across the small, white bottle first. “I have it.”

“Okay, that’s good.” Peko nodded. “Now we just need some dressing.”

“Oh, I saw that just a second ago.” Fuyuhiko recalled. He dived back into one of the cupboards, retrieving the dressing.

“Nagito is also going to need antibiotic ointment. Have either of you seen any?” Peko asked.
The boys began hunting again until Fuyuhiko found it within a draw. He handed over the supplies to Peko, along with the saline solution that Gundam had found.

Peko waited until the bleeding had calmed down some, keeping a close eye over Hajime’s shoulder. When she felt like the time was right, she told Hajime to remove himself from the scene. Hajime headed straight for the sink, desperate to wash his hands.

Peko continued working by herself. Firstly, she applied the saline solution into the wound. Hajime could only imagine how much that would sting. Next, she applied the antibiotic ointment, explaining that it would help stop infections and also stop the dressing from sticking to the wound.

“I’m going to close the wound now.” Peko resumed her explanations, attempting to keep everyone in the loop. Working with the dressing, Peko did her best to close the wound, aware this was very much a last resort. Things would have been so much easier with Mikan around.

When Peko felt like she was finally done, she took a step back. It was as if all the shock hit her at once. “I...I think it actually worked.” she had checked Nagito’s pulse again; he was still with them.

“Peko, you did it!” Hajime gave her a huge pat on the back. Luckily, his hands were clean.

“This isn't over yet,” Peko warned them. “If Nagito's wound gets infected, we're in for a lot more trouble. However, I've cleaned and sealed the wound, so hopefully, that will be enough.”

"You pulled it off!” Fuyuhiko was in awe. "I thought we were fucked."

“You saved his life, Peko.” Gundam admired.

"I'm just relieved that Nagito is unconscious." Hajime shared. "I don't even wanna think about the pain he would've felt."

"Imagine the screaming..." Sonia wrapped her arms around herself.

“I’m not sure how he’s going to react once he wakes up.” Peko confessed. “He will likely be in a lot of pain, so it’s best we leave him to rest.”

“In here?” Hajime asked.

“It’s the best place for him.” Peko vowed.

“I...I just don’t know if that’s a good idea.” Hajime hesitated. He didn’t want to bring negativity to the group, but a horrible thought had just crossed his mind.

“All of the medicine Nagito could need is in here.” Sonia pointed out. “What is the problem, Hajime?”

“Well, it’s Junko.” Hajime sighed. “She wanted Nagito to die, for us not to be able to save him. She’s gonna be pretty pissed that he’s pulled through. I’m just worried she’s gonna come back here for more trouble.”

“She’ll find us wherever we go; we can’t hide forever.” Gundam gave an exasperated sigh.

“She can find us, but what if she can’t reach us?” Hajime proposed. “There are quite a few lockable rooms within the school. If we barricaded ourselves in somewhere, we can just wait it out until the end. It might be a little boring, but it’s better than being terrorised by Junko.”

“Hmm, that is quite a good idea.” Sonia agreed. “We do not want to be sitting pigeons.”
“Ducks.” Fuyuhiko corrected her.

“How long do we have left?” Gundam asked, having lost track of time.

“About twelve hours.” Hajime replied. Not as much time had passed as he would have liked. “She’s definitely not going to just leave us alone for that long.”

“All of the dormitories are lockable.” Peko contributed. “If we get Nagito there safely, he would be able to rest.”

“I think that’s our best option,” Hajime nodded in agreement. The dormitories were big enough to fit everyone inside, so it wouldn’t be cramped. The dormitories would also give them access to a toilet, something Hajime didn't want to be without for twelve hours.

“I won’t lie to you, it’s a risky idea.” Peko pressed. “Nagito really shouldn’t be moved around right now. He definitely won’t be able to walk.”

“It’s something we have to weigh up,” Hajime scratched his head. “In the long run, where are we going to be safer?”

“Not here.” Sonia spoke up. “Junko will come back sooner or later.”

“Yeah I hate to say it, but I think we’ve gotta move.” Fuyuhiko agreed. “If we can lock ourselves away, she can’t do any more harm.”

“Then the question is, how are we going to move Nagito?” Peko asked. “He’s not awake, and if you’re too violent moving him, you’re at risk of tearing his wound.”

“I swear I saw a wheelchair folded up earlier when I was looking for stuff.” Fuyuhiko muttered. “Oh, I see it!” it didn’t take him long to spot the item that he was referencing.

Fuyuhiko took it upon himself to retrieve the wheelchair and open it up properly. He returned to the medical bed, looking over at Nagito, when he made an observation. “Hey, I think he’s waking up!”

Nagito’s eyelids slowly fluttered open; he was hazy and weak. “W-what...what’s going on?”

“That bitch, Junko Enoshima, stabbed you.” Fuyuhiko replied, spitting as he spoke Junko’s name.

Hajime jumped in, wanting to behave a little more sensitively. “You were stabbed. Peko removed the knife and cleaned the wound for you.”

“It hurts…” Nagito groaned, reaching for his stomach.

“Don’t touch it!” Hajime barked. “You’ll probably make it worse.”

“Here,” Peko approached Nagito with a glass of water and some pills. “Take these, they should help numb the pain a little.”

Nagito sat up very, very slowly. He took the glass from Peko, swallowing down the pills in one.

“Nagito, do you think you can get into the wheelchair?” Hajime asked. He didn’t want to overwhelm Nagito with questions, since he had only just woken up, but time really wasn’t on their side. “We want to get out of here and to the dormitories. We need to lock ourselves away from Junko.”

“I...I think I can,” Nagito nodded, handing the empty glass back to Peko. “But I might need a hand.”
Hajime did his best, helping Nagito move from the medical bed to the wheelchair. Hajime had to support him, but it didn’t take as long as he thought it would. With Nagito safely in the wheelchair, he took it upon himself to push it.

“Is everyone ready?” Hajime asked. “Who knows what we might encounter on the way…”

The walk to the dormitories was extremely tense. Every time they turned a corner, Hajime was terrified that he was going to come face to face with the devil. Pushing the wheelchair made life a lot easier for the group, as Nagito had walked extremely slowly before. The dormitories were straight down a corridor leading off of the first floor, so thankfully, no stairs were involved. Hajime wasn’t quite sure how they would have coped if they had to get to the fifth floor.

Nagito was clearly in a lot of pain. He would let out loud groans from time to time, as the medicine hadn’t kicked in yet. He was suffering, but at least he was no longer losing blood.

The students made it to the dormitories unharmed, something that surprised Hajime a little. It almost felt as if things were too easy, which was exactly the truth.

“Oh, this isn’t good…” it was Nagito who noticed first. Despite his weaker state, his observation was still very strong.

“What is it?” Hajime frowned, unsure what Nagito was complaining about.

“Look at the door handles…” Nagito exhaled a deep sigh.

Hajime stared at the dorm room door handles, quickly discovering the issue. On all the doors that he could see, the handles had been bashed and broken - barely hanging on by a thread. It would be completely impossible to shut the doors, let alone lock them.

Determined not to give up, Hajime abandoned the wheelchair and ran further down the corridor, hoping for a better result. Unfortunately, it was no different.

“No!” Hajime cried out in frustration. He ran up and down the corridor, desperately trying to find a door that hadn’t been broken. Hajime’s frustration only grew as he kept looking. “They’re all the goddamn same!”

“Junko, it must’ve been her!” Gundam shook his head, sharing in Hajime’s annoyance.

“Obviously, it was me!” having heard her own name, Junko saw it as the perfect opportunity to involve herself in the conversation. She stepped out from one of the dormitories, having been hiding behind the door. “Did you really think I’d let you hide away like a bunch of mole people?”

Hajime still hadn’t properly adjusted to seeing Chiaki as Junko, and he wasn’t sure that he ever would. The woman in front of him was evil, a monster of society. Yet still, she had Chiaki’s warm face and bright eyes.

As quick as a flash, Junko switched to her informative and knowledgeable persona. “Whilst you were nursing Nagito back to health, I made my way around this school destroying every single lock.” Junko said. “I didn’t miss a single one. I even remembered the lock in the art cupboard.”

“Dammit!” Hajime hissed, clenching his fist.

“How did you break them all?” Sonia frowned, confused at the state of the locks.

“With this,” it had slipped past everyone’s attention that Junko was swinging around a giant wooden
hammer. “You might recognise it from the art room.”

Hajime winced as Junko swung the hammer, terrified she was going to use it as a weapon against them. “You’ve had your fun, now leave us alone.”

“And why the fuck would I do that?!” Junko roared with laughter. “Besides, all of this isn’t for fun. I want something outta you punks and you’re not giving it to me!”

“I haven’t changed my mind, if that’s what you’re here to ask.” Hajime folded his arms. He was scared, terrified even, but he wasn’t backing down. He refused to betray his friends.

Junko sighed, her depressed persona emerging. “I knew you were going to say that. Why would you want to help me? You all hate me.”

Was Junko finally taking the hint? No, that would be too simple.

“I know you guys hate me, but I don’t want things to be that way.” Junko sighed. “I guess that’s why I didn’t destroy all the locks.”

“What are you talking about?” Fuyuhiko pressed.

“I didn’t destroy all of the locks.” Junko replied, switching to her straight-talking, intelligent personality.

“That can’t be true.” Hajime frowned. “We just checked all of the dormitories.”

“Maybe I’m not on about the dormitories.” Junko shrugged. “I was lying about the art cupboard, it’s the one door I didn’t destroy.”

“Why are you telling us this?” Fuyuhiko argued.

“Because it’s the truth.” Junko replied. “I had a feeling that I wouldn’t be able to convince you to sign over your friends, and it seems that I’m right. There’s no point fighting this anymore.”

Hajime couldn’t believe his ears. There was no way that Junko was just going to give in, not when she’d been willing to stab Nagito to get what she wanted. There was much more damage she could do. Something about her behaviour was off.

It seemed that Fuyuhiko was still a little suspicious too. “I want some damn proof.” he demanded.

“Fine, take this…” Junko removed Chiaki’s backpack from her back, offering it to Fuyuhiko. “Inside, you’ll find the key to the art room. I want you to see that I’m not armed.”

“Fuyuhiko, no!” Hajime raised his voice. Whatever was going on, something was suspicious about the bag. “The art room doesn’t have a key! It locks from the inside, she’s lying!”

However, Hajime’s warning came too late. Fuyuhiko already had the bag in his hand and Junko had let go. Fuyuhiko turned to Hajime with a very concerned expression on his face. “W-what?!!”

“Wow Hajime, you’re one smart cookie!” Junko praised, sounding like a child. “Fuyuhiko, you sure are silly.”

“What’s going on?” there was an element of panic in Fuyuhiko’s voice. He extended out his arm as if he were going to drop the bag to the floor.

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that if I were you!” cute Junko teased. “If you drop that bag, you’ll fry to a
Junko’s comment hit Fuyuhiko like a tonne of bricks. He had a horrible feeling that he knew what she was talking about. Wanting to be definite, Fuyuhiko very slowly untied the head of the bag, allowing himself to peer inside. Turning incredibly pale in a matter of seconds, Fuyuhiko mumbled one, singular word. “Bomb…”

“Hmm?” Gundam couldn’t hear him, nor could anyone else.

Clearing his throat, Fuyuhiko attempted to speak louder. “B-bomb, there’s a fucking bomb in here. One of those ones Nagito brought back.”

“W-what?” Sonia gasped, horrified at what she heard.

Junko delved into the pocket of her skirt, retrieving a small remote, giggling as she did so. “Oh, how did that get in there?”

Hajime’s eyes shot straight to the remote-controlled device in Junko’s hand. “What’s that?!” fearfully, he had a feeling he already knew the answer.

“That’s one of the detonators that came with the bombs I brought.” Nagito answered on Junko’s behalf.

“Young Master!” Peko cried, hurrying to Fuyuhiko’s side. She reached out, ready to snatch the backpack from him.

“Be careful, Peko.” Junko threatened. “One wrong move and I’ll push this button. Don’t even think of taking that bag from him, or I’ll blow your precious Fuyuhiko to pieces.” she could see what Peko was about to do.

“It’s okay. I’m gonna be okay.” Fuyuhiko reassured everyone, though it seemed like he was really reassuring himself. “Can I at least put this bag on my back? Or does the bomb go off if it moves at all?” he looked at Junko for guidance.

“No, it isn’t that sensitive.” the intellectual Junko replied. “If the bomb was triggered by movement, I wouldn’t have been able to give you the bag. The bomb is controlled by this detonator.”

“Let me guess,” Hajime narrowed his eyebrows. “If we don’t sign over the bodies of our classmates, you’re going to trigger the detonator.”

“That’s a gold star for you!” cute Junko responded. “How do you know me so well?”

“I don’t know you at all.” Hajime glared. “I just know it’s the kinda twisted stunt someone as evil as you would pull off.”

“I’m getting the impression I’m not very welcome here.” Junko pouted. The next time she spoke, she sounded western. It was an entirely different personality switch. “Lemme leave y’all alone to make your decision! I’ll come and find y’all later.”

“That’s...that’s a good idea.” Hajime nodded, trying his best to encourage her to leave.

Junko had just informed them that the bomb wasn’t triggered by movement. If she left the room, all they had to do was take the bag from Fuyuhiko and hide it somewhere deep within the school. It actually surprised Hajime that Junko had overlooked something so obvious.
Junko turned on her heels and walked away, not that anyone wanted to stop her. She headed in the direction of the school, detonator still clearly in hand. It wasn’t until she reached the end of the corridor that she stopped and turned around, a terrifying grin on her face.

“Oh, you really think I’m that stupid?” as if she had read Hajime’s mind, Junko began to laugh. “Why would I leave you unattended with the bomb that you could just hide as soon as I’m gone?” exhalining a rather large sigh, Junko continued. “I don’t wanna spend the rest of my day clinging onto you idiots, so I guess I’m left with no choice.” without warning, Junko pressed down on the detonator, triggering the button.

“Junko, no!” Hajime cried. It was too late, his words came after her actions. Hajime prepared himself for impact, jumping to the floor and shielding his eyes. Except...except, nothing happened. Everything was exactly as it was.

Junko began to laugh. “You thought that set off the bomb? Haha, how stupid. Pressing the button triggers the bomb's timer. It's due to detonate in an hour's time. If I press the button a second time, the timer stops and the bomb won't go off. I guess whether I press that button or not depends on the answer that you give me.”

"You can't do this!” Peko faced up to Junko.

"Well, sign over your classmates to me and I won't." Junko retorted. Almost ready to make her exit, she returned to her regal voice. "Anywho, I suggest you peasants discuss what you are going to do. The timer is ticking."

With nothing more to say, Junko left for good. Now that the students were alone, they could make their decision in peace without Junko's tauntings. Fuyuhiko's fate rested in their hands.

“I...I don’t know what to say.” it was a genuine, and very humbling, reaction from Hajime. He was truly lost for words.

Hajime had vowed that he was never going to sign over his friends. Not only would it be the ultimate betrayal, but it would result in pure chaos. The world did not need any more Junko Enoshimas. Yet now, something so much bigger was at stake. If Hajime didn’t sign over his friends, Fuyuhiko was going to die.

“Young Master,” Peko said gently. “Give me the bag.”

“No.” Fuyuhiko refused, shutting her down instantly. “Now that Junko has triggered the bomb, we can’t risk moving it. Giving you the bag could kill everyone standing here. And even if it didn’t, I’m not letting you take this from me.”

“But it’s my duty to protect you.” Peko insisted.

“I don’t care.” Fuyuhiko disagreed. “I’m the one stuck in this situation, not you.”

“But Young Master, I was trained to protect you.” Peko wasn't giving up. “It is my one job in life to keep you safe.”

“It’s your job to be Peko Pekoyama,” Fuyuhiko said sternly. “It’s your job to be your own person, to live your life freely. I don’t care what my family have taught you, you’re not dying for me.”

Hajime could see that Peko had a lot more fight left in her, so he cut in before she could continue. Things were only going to get more painful to watch. “We need to think rationally. Fuyuhiko, I know this is scary, but this decision...it could change everything.”
“I understand.” Fuyuhiko took no offence. “We already know what happens if Junko takes over the bodies of our friends, it’s not gonna be a pretty sight.”

“If I am correct, the Future Foundation are with our bodies right now. Yes?” Sonia turned to Hajime.

"Our bodies are with Makoto, Kyoko, and Byakuya." Hajime replied. "I dunno if we can call them the Future Foundation anymore."

“That is not important.” Sonia shook her head. “My point is, could they not lock away the bodies that Junko would take over? That way, they would not be a danger to society.”

“I mean, that’s a possibility, yeah…” Hajime said. However, he wasn't on board with Sonia’s idea. “But it’s too risky. Think about how many Junkos that would be, they’d easily outnumber three people. They’d be so manipulative and conniving.”

“Not to mention, it’s inhumane,” Gundam added, reminding them of their morals. “We would lose our friends too.”

“That’s also true.” Hajime sighed. “If Junko takes over their bodies, we would never see our friends again. All hope of them returning would be gone.”

“But what about Fuyuhiko?” Peko challenged them. “If we don’t sign over the others, then we lose him.”

“It’s not about me.” Fuyuhiko tried to take the attention off of himself.

“It’s just such a big risk. Think about how many Junkos there would be.” Hajime argued. He wasn’t trying to steer the debate one way or another, he just wanted the others to realise the reality of the situation.

“Hajime’s right, we can’t sign over our friends.” Fuyuhiko insisted. “Think of everyone that we’ve lost: Teruteru, Hiyoko, Byakuya, Mikan, Nekomaru, Akane, Mahiru, Kazuichi, and Ibuki. All of those people would become Junko.”

“We would be sparing one life for nine.” Nagito mused. “It’s not worth it.”

Hajime didn’t appreciate Nagito putting things so bluntly, but the point that he made was fair. They would be saving one life in exchange for nine others.

“Hajime, I need to ask you something.” Fuyuhiko said, remaining calm.

“Whatever it is, ask away.” Hajime replied.

“You were telling us this earlier, but I need you to clarify something for me.” Fuyuhiko said, his tone stern. “When someone dies in the Neo World Program, why doesn’t their brain wake them up?”

“Because their brain thinks they’re really dead.” Hajime explained. “If you don’t know you’re in a simulation, your brain believes everything is real - even death.”

“That’s what I thought.” Fuyuhiko nodded, deep in thought. “Hajime, look...I don’t wanna get all on soppy on ya...but I never got the chance to thank you.”

“Why are you thanking me?” Hajime asked.

“For what you did, throwing yourself back into the killing game.” Fuyuhiko elaborated. “You didn’t
have to do that, but you did. You’re a genuine person, and I’ve been such an asshole to you.”

“You’re to thank too.” Hajime insisted. “You were willing to wipe your memories and leave your life in my hands.”

“I know, I know.” Fuyuhiko brushed Hajime's comment aside. “But that’s pathetic compared to what you’ve done. I wiped my memory and took a backseat role from the beginning. You’re the real hero here.”

Hajime felt his face turning red. “I’m anything but a hero.”

“A hero makes sacrifices, Hajime.” Fuyuhiko said, offering words of wisdom. “I just want you to know how grateful I am. You’ve kept Peko alive for so long.”

“Fuyuhiko...” Hajime took a deep breath. Fuyuhiko was sharing his feelings, but his speech sounded scarily too much like a goodbye. “You’re not giving up, are you?”

Fuyuhiko shrugged. “I’m out of options, Hajime. There isn’t much left that I can do. I’m not letting Junko get what she wants.”

“You can’t say we’re out of options yet.” Hajime objected, though his argument was weak. He didn’t want to sign over his friends, but he wasn’t ready to give up either. “Maybe we can try sneaking the detonator off Junko, or-”

Fuyuhiko stopped him from talking. “What’s the point in lying to yourself? I’m out of options, we both know it.”

“How are you so calm?” Hajime couldn’t believe it.

“Because...I have hope. Hope that I’m going to survive.” Fuyuhiko admitted. “You said it yourself, you only die in the Neo World Program because your brain doesn’t know any better. Well, I’m gonna fight that.”

“What do you mean?” Hajime wasn’t following.

“Just before that timer runs out, I’m going to tell myself the same thing over and over,” Fuyuhiko confessed. “That none of this is real, that I’m just in a simulation. If I tell myself that this is just a fictional video game world, I stand a chance at waking up on the other side of this.”

“I…” Hajime didn’t know what to say. “I mean I don’t know if that’s gonna work, but it’s a pretty genius idea.” he was surprised he hadn’t thought of something similar before. If Fuyuhiko died knowing that he was going to wake up, everything might just be okay.

“Are you really okay with this?” Sonia asked. She looked sorrowfully at Fuyuhiko.

“It’s the only option I have left.” Fuyuhiko reminded her.

“You can’t do this.” Peko shook her head, she wasn’t accepting of Fuyuhiko’s choice.

“Peko, I’m not signing over our friends.” Fuyuhiko wouldn't back down.

“That’s not what I’m asking you to do.” Peko argued. “Give me the bag instead.”

“I’ve already told you, it’s too risky.” Fuyuhiko wished that she would stop asking for the bag, over
his dead body was he going to give it to her.

“We can go away in private, away from the others.” Peko suggested, desperate for an alternative. “We can try giving me the bag. We’ll be away from everyone else, so they won’t get hurt.”

“And what if the bomb goes off because we move it?” Fuyuhiko narrowed his eyebrows. “Junko has left us alone with a ticking bomb. She wouldn’t leave us unattended if the bomb could be moved around.”

“We don’t know that, she could be lying.” Peko refused to back down, but her side was becoming more difficult to argue. “At least you wouldn’t be giving up!”

“Peko,” Fuyuhiko’s voice softened, as he reached out for Peko’s hand. “I’m not giving up. Don’t you see? This is my choice that I’m making.”

Peko didn’t pull away and she didn’t speak, she just continued looking at Fuyuhiko.

“If I die in this stupid killing game, then I want it to be on my own terms. Just like Souda said.” Fuyuhiko reasoned. “I could take the risk and try getting rid of the bomb, but I won't take it. I'm not going to let anyone else die because of me.”

“There’s nothing I can say that will stop you. Is there, Young Master?” Peko realised that she was fighting a losing battle.

“There isn’t.” Fuyuhiko shook his head, he’d made up his mind.

“Then, we have no choice but to accept your decision.” Hajime sighed. It wasn’t Hajime’s choice to make. He was hopeful that Fuyuhiko’s plan would work, that he could convince his brain into waking up.

“If that has been decided,” Sonia began. “Then we should create a plan. What do we do now?”

“Well, you guys need to get as far away from me as possible. That's for sure.” Fuyuhiko remarked. “I dunno how powerful this bomb is, but you guys aren’t getting hurt.”

“If you remained here, we could go to the fifth floor.” Gundam suggested.

"We need to think this through, as we don’t know if the ruin is underwater yet." Peko reminded them. "What if the bomb affects the ruin? If we blow open a hole in the building, we'll be exposing ourselves to the elements."

Peko made a fair point. The security footage hadn’t been checked in a couple of hours, so no one knew what had changed. If Fuyuhiko did affect the structure of the building, things weren’t going to end well. If they were underwater, they would drown. If they were still above the surface, their time of suffering would come when the island collapsed.

“Why does this have to be so difficult?!” Hajime complained, feeling so frustrated that he could explode. “Whatever we try to do, Junko just keeps screwing us over!”

“How is she always one step ahead…” Sonia sighed, her shoulders drooping.

"I dunno what to do." Fuyuhiko admitted. "If this bomb goes off and exposes you guys to the outside world, I'd never forgive myself."

"It would all be for nothing." Gundam added.
“We don’t stand a chance against her.” Hajime continued to rant. “We’ve got twelve hours left in this place with that...that monster. She isn’t going to give up.”

“Surely, she cannot hurt us anymore after this!” Sonia exclaimed.

“This is Junko Enoshima we’re talking about, the very person that brought the world to an end.” Hajime shook his head. “Once we leave the Neo World Program, A.I. Junko can never reach us again. This is Junko’s last hope at getting herself back into reality. She’s going to stop at nothing. These twelve hours, she’s going to make the most of every single minute. She’s going to torture us, hurt us, persist until we break.”

The more Hajime spoke, the more he was depressing himself out. He didn’t mean to make things so heavy, but he couldn’t ignore the truth. Junko Enoshima was going to stop at nothing, since there wasn’t anything for her to lose.

"If Fuyuhiko dies, why would Junko stop there? She will just keep taking lives until no one is left." Hajime had to be honest with himself.

“What are you suggesting, Hajime?” Nagito couldn’t see where Hajime was going. “Are you telling us to give up?”

Hajime began to think, having come to the realisation that Junko was not going to give up torturing the students. Allowing Fuyuhiko to die would be stupid. It would be a waste of his life because Junko would just come after someone else next. It seemed like their only option was to sign over the bodies, but Hajime wasn't willing to settle for that either. There had to be something else that he could do. His world was not black and white; surely he had more than two options.

“No…” Hajime paused, an idea brewing in his mind. “I...I just think we’re going about this the wrong way.”

"You think we should sign over the bodies instead?" Nagito raised his eyebrows.

"No, no, that's not what I mean." Hajime quickly corrected Nagito. "We're looking at this in such a black or white way. We've given ourselves two choices: Fuyuhiko has to die or we have to sign over the bodies."

"We're not the ones who have given ourselves those choices, that was Junko." Fuyuhiko objected.

"Junko has given us two choices, but who says we have to follow them?" Hajime pitched. "In the previous game, she gave us two different ways to end our story. We could stay in the game forever, or leave, but sign over our friends. Both options sucked and we knew it. That's when Makoto told us about a third option, an exit clause. We found a different way out and we escaped."

"I mean that's inspiring and everythin', but we don't have an exit clause." Fuyuhiko wasn't feeling very motivated by Hajime's speech.

"I believe that there's a grey area out there, something we can do that doesn't follow Junko's rules." Hajime wasn't giving up, even if his friends didn't believe in him.

“That’s more like it.” there was a hint of a smile on Nagito’s face.

“Well if you’ve got a better option, I’m all ears.” Fuyuhiko said.

“I might have an idea, but I can’t tell you guys.” Hajime replied, slightly apologetic.
“Helpful…” Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes.

“Junko might be listening. What if she’s watching us in the Data Processing Room?” Hajime reminded them. He couldn’t risk Junko overhearing his plan, it was Hajime’s only chance at being one step ahead of her.

“That’s fair enough.” Fuyuhiko understood why Hajime was being tight-lipped. “Well, whatever this plan of yours might be, you think it’s gonna be within the next forty-five minutes?! I’m on a time limit…”

“That...depends,” Hajime replied, honest with his answer. He wasn’t going to shelter Fuyuhiko from the truth. "If everything works out, then I think so. But we need to act fast, so I’m going to need all of your help. You guys will really have to trust me, okay?”

“You have led us this far, Hajime. I trust you.” Sonia offered her support.

“We need to split up.” Hajime said, putting his plan into action. “Fuyuhiko, I don’t think you should move right now. Nagito, I don’t think you can move right now. Peko, can you stay here to look out for them, in case Junko comes back?”

“Of course.” Peko replied. She was happy to stay by Fuyuhiko’s side.

“What about Sonia and I?” Gundam asked.

"I want you two to come with me.” Hajime went on. "If we're going to separate, then I want to keep the numbers fairly even. I need to go to the Data Processing Room and I don't fancy my chances of going alone."

"Are we going to confront Junko in there?" Sonia was curious.

"No, we're not." Hajime shook his head. "I don't even know if Junko is in the Data Processing Room. I'm just being cautious with what I tell you in case she is."

"Can you tell us anything?" Fuyuhiko quizzed.

"I can tell you that I'm going to be back, really soon.” Hajime promised. "That's all I can say for now."

With the instructions delegated, Hajime left three of his friends behind. Fuyuhiko’s life was ticking away, there wasn’t time to be hanging around. Hajime marched out of the dormitories, with Sonia and Gundam following behind. They were heading towards the main staircase in the school building, which would lead them to the fourth floor. Wherever Junko was, she wasn’t hanging around on the staircases. They didn’t come into contact with her at all. She was likely remaining out of the way until the timer on Fuyuhiko’s bomb got closer to exploding.

“Hajime, can I at least ask why we are going to the Data Processing Room?” Sonia asked, calling after Hajime as she followed him.

"We're going to look at the islands." Hajime shared.

"Why is that?” Sonia persisted.

"I can't say just yet." Hajime hated being so secretive, but it was for the best.

When they reached their destination, Hajime burst straight into the room - ready to confront Junko if
she were there. Thankfully, Junko was nowhere to be seen. This meant Hajime could get on with his
task in peace, and it also gave him a little more freedom to talk.

Hajime charged towards the screens, his eyes darting across the security footage. “What’s the status
of the islands? Can you guys see?”

Sonia and Gundam looked along with Hajime. However, it took them mere seconds to notice; every
single screen was black.

“Our island, it has sunk.” Sonia whispered.

"But we felt nothing..." Gundam was surprised by this revelation. "The previous earthquakes felt like
a demonic force."

“Ha yes, it's sunk!” in a moment of glee, Hajime punched the air, cheering and celebrating. “We’re
underwater!”

“You’re happy about that?” Gundam frowned at Hajime, suspicious of his behaviour. “We are under
the depths of Jabberwock Island, submerged in the murky waters.”

“Trust me, this is exactly what we need to get home.” Hajime smiled at them both encouragingly.
“You know, everything might just be okay.”

"This is part of your plan?" Sonia asked.

"This is." Hajime nodded. "But this is why I said you guys really have to trust me, I know it seems
weird."

“If this is part of the plan, what happens now?” Gundam was in search for more information.

“We need to go to the gym.” Hajime explained. “But first, I think we should probably keep an eye
on where Junko is. It’ll only take a second.”

He darted over to the computers, playing with the controls until he got what he wanted. “Here we
are!” with the security footage displaying Hope’s Peak again, they could look for Junko.

“There she is!” Sonia was the first to spot her. “She is in the garden.”

Junko was spotted in the garden, tearing out more plants and trampling the life out of them.

“What a waste of beautiful flowers.” Sonia sighed. “I hope your chickens are safe, Gundam.”

“If she dares lay a finger on them, I will curse her into eternity!” Gundam vowed.

“I’m sure they’ll be okay.” Hajime reassured him. “At least if Junko is upstairs on the fifth floor, we
won’t run into her on our way to the gym.”

Monomi could also be seen on the monitors. She was in the kitchen cleaning up, blissfully unaware
that Junko was even in the building.

Feeling a lot safer, the three friends left the Data Processing Room, for what would be for the very
last time. More questions were asked along the way. Hajime knew that Junko was a safe distance
away from them, and not spying on the monitors, so he felt like he had a little more freedom to talk.

“Hajime, why are we going to the gym?” Sonia persisted. “There is nothing in there besides from
footballs and Nagito's weapons.”
“That’s exactly what we’re going there for.” Hajime answered.

"For footballs?” Sonia titled her head.

"For weapons." Hajime corrected her.

“Are we going to fight Junko?!?” Gundam exclaimed.

“Not exactly.” Hajime shook his head. “This isn’t becoming a bloodbath.” he had a better plan. “We’re getting ourselves out of this hellhole.”

"How are we doing that?” Sonia looked at him for answers.

"I don't wanna tell you that, just yet." Hajime admitted. "Some of this plan is still based on trust."

Once inside the gymnasium, Hajime gave a new set of instructions. Despite Junko having stolen one of the bombs, the rest of the weapons were still there; they hadn’t been looted. It was a relief to know that Junko wasn't walking around with guns and dangerous knives.

“I want a bomb.” Hajime cut straight to the point. “Then, once we find one, I need to set the timer.”

“A bomb?!” Sonia squeaked. “Hajime, is this really a good idea?”

“You can’t fight fire with fire.” Gundam reminded him.

“I’m not fighting Junko, this isn’t what this is about.” Hajime reassured him. “Please, just help me look. We’re running out of time.”

“I did say that I trusted you. That does not change, even now.” sticking to her word, Sonia began to walk amongst the pile. “Promise me Hajime, these bombs will not explode by my touch.”

“I promise.” Hajime said seriously. “I wouldn’t ask you to help me if this put your life in any danger. Nagito brought the bombs from the funhouse, they won’t be triggered unless you detonate them.”

As Hajime looked at the pile, he noticed something. "It seems like these bombs have their times pre-set."

Each bomb had a clock, with red flashing digits indicating how long it would take the bomb to detonate once triggered. Hajime had seen a variety of clocks with different times, indicating that it wouldn't be up to him to set the timer. Hajime had a feeling that the timers could be changed, but he didn't have the right skills or knowledge to be messing around with bombs.

"I want the bomb with the shortest time possible." Hajime explained.

“So, we’re looking at the timers, you say?” Gundam asked.

“Look at the clocks.” Hajime instructed, taking the lead. “Like, this one says three hours. That’s too long.” he gave an example, pointing at one of the bombs by his feet.

“Forty-five minutes?” Gundam called back, having spotted one.

“Too long.” Hajime shook his head. “We need shorter, much shorter.”

“Twenty?” Sonia shouted. The gymnasium was spacious, they needed to raise their voices.

“Getting better.” Hajime said, approvingly. “But ideally, we need shorter.”
The students kept looking, numbers being called out at random. It wasn’t until Sonia gave one last cry, that Hajime knew he’d found his bomb.

“Thirty seconds!” the Princess called for Hajime’s attention, knowing she’d found the kind of bomb he’d been looking for.

“That’s it, that’s the one.” Hajime rushed to Sonia’s side, scooping up the bomb and its detonator. “This is good, but it’s not over yet. We’ve gotta keep moving.”

“What are you doing with that bomb, Hajime?” Gundam narrowed his eyes.

“You trust me, right?” Hajime had already begun walking towards the exit.

"I trust you." Gundam gave his word.

"Then I need you to do one last thing for me." Hajime beckoned for his friends. "Follow me to the entrance hall."

The bond between the friends was strong, so they listened to Hajime. The trio hurried towards the entrance hall, the final part of Hajime’s plan coming into action. The entrance hall was home to the gigantic iron door, the one that had been keeping them safe from Monokuma. Working quickly, Hajime planted the bomb right in front of the door.

“What are you doing with that?” Sonia really wanted answers now.

“I’m saving us all.” Hajime replied. “We’re getting out of here.”

With a firm hold of the detonator, Hajime's finger hovered over the button.

“Hajime, stop!” Sonia cried. “I trust you, but this has gone too far. You are going to get us all killed.”

“No, staying in this place for another twelve hours is going to get us killed.” Hajime declared. “I’m getting us out of here.”

“But there’s nowhere to go!” Gundam argued.

“You saw it for yourself, we are under water now.” Sonia backed up Gundam’s argument.

"I know that, it's part of the plan." Hajime said. "In order for us to leave the Neo World Program, we have to die."

"What has gotten into you?" Sonia seemed almost scared of him.

"It was Fuyuhiko who gave me the idea." Hajime explained. "We can trick our brains into surviving! We just have to remind ourselves that death in the Neo World Program isn't real. This is nothing more than a simulation. It's like we've been dreaming, now we just have to wake up."

“You really think that could work?” Gundam was doubtful.

"Honestly, I don't know." Hajime shrugged his shoulders. "But we aren't going to find out unless we try."

"Can we really afford to take a risk so big?" Gundam asked.

"The risk would be staying in here with Junko." Hajime insisted. "She'd kill us long before the Rewrite finishes."
“So we are blowing ourselves up instead?” Sonia whispered.

“No, that isn't what the bomb is for.” Hajime shook his head. “The death can’t be sudden. If it’s too quick, our brains might not have the chance to register what’s happening. I’m blowing open the door so we can let the building flood with water.”

“You want us to drown?” Sonia gulped. Her eyes were filled with fear.

"Unfortunately, yes." Hajime grimaced. "It's not going to be pretty, but it'll give us a lot more time to process what's going on."

"Why can’t we just open the door from the inside?” Gundam had discovered a flaw in Hajime’s plan.

"Because I'm worried that Junko could override the system, she's an A.I. after all." Hajime shared. "We can't risk her ruining this."

“...I see…” Gundam was still taking everything in.

Before Sonia and Gundam could hit him with any more questions, Hajime gave out his next instruction.

“We need to go back upstairs to the others.” Hajime said.

The three friends travelled once more, returning to the dormitories where the others were waiting for them. The bomb had been left behind; Hajime was taking his plan very seriously.

Fuyuhiko looked at Hajime expectantly, surprised to see him back so soon. “How’s this plan of yours coming along?”

“It’s ready.” Hajime nodded.

"Already?” Fuyuhiko was surprised. "That was fast."

"It had to be, for your sake." Hajime reminded him.

"Can you tell us what your plan is yet?” Nagito spoke up, curiously. He was engaging with the group more, which was a good sign, it showed his energy was slowly coming back to him.

“When I tell you, you have to hear me out.” Hajime began. "It's going to sound crazy, but this is why I said before that you have to trust me."

"Go on..." Peko was waiting.

"Sonia and Gundam already know and they've accepted it." Hajime continued. "So I hope all of you will as well."

“Well?” Fuyuhiko was getting impatient.

"As you know, A.I. Junko desperately wants to get herself into reality. This is her last shot. Once we leave the Neo World Program, all traces of the original Junko Enoshima are gone for good." Hajime was taking his time; he wanted to explain things properly. "Junko is going to stop at nothing to get what she wants. I mean, why would she stop? She has nothing to lose. She's going to keep trying and trying."

"Tell me about it." Fuyuhiko huffed.
"In a single hour, she fatally stabbed Nagito and planted a bomb on Fuyuhiko. What damage do you think she'll do in the remaining twelve hours?!" Hajime ranted. "We can't stay here with Junko if we want to survive, but we can't agree to her terms either, unless we want the world to fall apart even more."

"That leaves us in a pretty shit situation." Fuyuhiko remarked.

"I know." Hajime sighed. "So, this is where my plan comes into things. I've created us our own escape clause."

"Which is?" Peko pressed.

"The second island is underwater now, so I'm blowing open the door to the ruin." Hajime announced, bringing the detonator into view. "The bomb is waiting by the door, I'm going to trigger it any second now."

"W-what?!" Fuyuhiko spluttered.

Nagito looked just as shocked. "Hajime?"

"I know, I know, it sounds terrible." Hajime quickly jumped to his own defence. "But I have to do this if we want to survive. Fuyuhiko, you're the one who opened my eyes."

"Well close them again, because you've lost the fucking plot." Fuyuhiko shook his head in disbelief.

"If we stay inside for another twelve hours, Junko's torture won't stop. But like Fuyuhiko said, if we choose our own fates then we stand a real chance at waking up." Hajime promised his friends. "All we have to do is tell ourselves over and over that this isn't real."

"I mean, yeah I suggested that...but I dunno if it's gonna work!" Fuyuhiko exclaimed. He seemed anxious at the thought of Hajime using his idea. "I don't want all of you getting killed cuz of some dumb thought I had."

"It's the best option that we've got." Hajime insisted. "It's kinda like how some people can control their dreams because they know that they're dreaming."

"I've heard about that." Nagito spoke up. "Isn't it called lucid dreaming?"

"That sounds about right." Hajime replied. "If our brains know that this is just a simulation, they won't shut down on us."

"So, you want us to drown?" Peko said, bluntly.

"Yes, I do." Hajime clarified. "I know that sounds brutal, but it kind of has to be for this to work. As I explained to Sonia and Gundam, we must die slowly so we can remind ourselves over and over that this isn't real. If we died quickly, like in an explosion, we wouldn't have time to think about anything."

"Hajime, are we in danger if we leave the simulation early?" Sonia knew of Hajime's plan, but she still had questions. "I thought we had to stay in here until midnight."

"If we stay in here until midnight, then the rewrite officially runs its course," Hajime explained. "This guarantees that our data from this game replaces the past. However, if we break free and make our own way out of here, the Neo World Program should accept us and our current memories."
Hajime's plan rested on a lot of uncertainties.

“This is beautiful to watch,” Nagito admired. “You’re going to endure a state of despair for the chance of survival and hope.”

“Before this goes any further, I want to make sure that everyone is okay with this?” Hajime asked, glancing at his friends one by one. “I’m not cruel, I won’t make anyone die against their own will.”

“So you’d call all of this off if just one of us said no?” Fuyuhiko raised his eyebrows.

“Yes,” Hajime said, honest with his answer. “This plan is about choosing our own fates. We need to make this choice together. If someone doesn’t want to drown, then we’re no longer choosing our own paths. It would make me some kind of dictator, no better than Junko herself.”

“That’s a brave thing to say.” Fuyuhiko was respectful of Hajime. “If your plan falls through, we’re pretty much out of options again.”

“I know.” Hajime sighed. “That’s why I need to know right now, does everyone want to go through with this?”

“I consent.” Peko nodded.

“Me too!” Sonia agreed. “I believe in you, Hajime. If you think this will save us, then I do too.”

“I have always believed in the power of resurrection,” Gundam said. “I give my consent.”

“I’m either getting blown up, or I drown.” Fuyuhiko shrugged. “I’ll side with your plan since it has the higher survival rate.”

“Nagito?” Hajime turned to the Luckster, the only one yet to answer.

“I trust you, Hajime.” Nagito offered Hajime a smile. “You might have lied about being the Ultimate Hope, but this is something I would expect from someone of that talent.”

“Then it’s decided.” Hajime nodded. He was immensely relieved that everyone was on board with his decision. It also showed the level of trust that his friends had in him, which made Hajime very happy. “Thank you, all of you.”

“Why are you thanking us?” Sonia asked.

“For trusting in me.” Hajime replied. “All I want is for us to get out of here together.”

It should have been a heartwarming moment, a moment of togetherness, but the atmosphere quickly changed. As Hajime obtained consent from his closest friends, the devil herself burst onto the scene. Lingering in the doorway to the dormitories like a bad smell, Junko emerged, smirking as maliciously as ever.

“What’s all this gushy shit about?” Junko rolled her eyes. She seemed to have picked up on the last bit of their conversation, but had heard nothing of Hajime’s plan.

“Leave us alone.” Hajime glared at Junko, he didn’t want to waste any more time arguing with her.

“People can be so cruel…” Junko lowered her head. She appeared incredibly depressed, as if Hajime had sucked all the happiness from her. “I just wanted to come and warn you…”

“Warn us about what?” Fuyuhiko demanded.
“That your timer runs out in twenty minutes.” Junko answered. “Have you come to a decision yet? It will be so hopefully sad if I don’t turn off the bomb.”

“We have come to a decision.” Hajime answered, incredibly confident in his way. As he spoke to Junko, he realised that he was ahead of her for once. He had a plan that would get them out of the Rewrite. He was going to defeat Junko Enoshima.

“Well? Hurry up and tell me, Peasant!” Junko drummed her foot impatiently.

“We’re getting out of the Rewrite.” Hajime replied, dropping the bombshell on Junko. “I’m blowing open the ruin and we’re getting out of here.”

“Are you insane?” Junko barked. “You blow that open, and we’re all gonna drown Titanic style!”

“What does it matter if you drown?” Hajime challenged her, his eyes narrowed. “You’re not real, you’re an A.I.”

“That is true…” Junko’s monotone personality came forward. “I’m not real. I can’t feel pain or experience emotions. It does not affect me if the ruin is blown up and we are underwater. But it isn't me that I'm thinking about.”

“No, I don’t wanna hear it!” Hajime raised his voice. “You’re the one who ruined everything. You’re the one that’s taken over my friend’s body. You’re the one who stabbed Nagito. You’re the one who planted a bomb on Fuyuhiko. I’m sick and tired of your games, Junko! Don’t act like you suddenly care about us.”

“Woahhhh!” Junko roared. “Hajime’s all fired up like a firecracker. He’d gonna fucking lose it!!”

“Ignore her.” Hajime instructed his friends, he didn’t have the time to argue with Junko.

“Well that’s not very nice!” the childish Junko pouted. “You should be careful how you talk to others! I have Fuyuhiko’s detonator, remember?”

“You can’t threaten us with that.” Hajime remained calm. Having seen the bombs for himself, he knew exactly how they worked. “The detonator only controls the bomb’s timer. It doesn’t have the power to instantly make it explode.”

“Ignore her, Hajime.” Peko advised. “If we’re going to blow open the door, then we should do it now. Fuyuhiko is still on a timer, after all.”

“It’s time.” Hajime nodded, accepting the mighty task ahead of him. All that was left to do now was detonate the bomb. “Once I press this trigger, the bomb has thirty seconds and then it explodes. Once the door is blown open, it won’t take long for the building to start to flood. The water will reach us in no time. We just have to remember, that we aren’t going to die.”

“Press the button, Hajime. You can do it.” Nagito offered words of encouragement. He was pleased to see a plan so hopeful having come together.

“I got us into this mess and I’m getting us out of it.” with a fire roaring in his stomach, and a new sense of determination, Hajime pressed down on the button, triggering the bomb. There was no way to tell if the bomb had actually been set off or not, but they would shortly find out.

“Well, I guess this is a waitin' game...” Fuyuhiko remarked.

“It’s not too late.” Junko butted in. “Sign over your friends and I’ll save your lives. We can hide
underneath the hatch in the Monokuma control room. You’ll be safe.”

“We do not want to be saved.” Sonia snapped. Junko had made her last desperate attempt to bargain with the students, but it wasn’t working.

Hajime was too busy counting in his head to even listen to what Junko had to say. He was keeping a mental countdown, wanting to know for sure when the timer reached zero.

30...29...28...27...

“Don’t you realise how powerful that bomb is?!” Junko taunted them. “It won’t just blow through the door, it’ll blow through the whole school. You’ll all be grilled like chicken, and then your stupid plan won’t work.”

Dying in the explosion would not accomplish the same goal as Hajime's plan to drown. As horrible as it was, Hajime needed everyone to die a slow, drawn-out death. They needed time to reflect on what was happening, to process that they weren't really dying. An explosion was too risky, everything would be over before anyone had time to think. Hajime had a feeling that Junko was exaggerating in order to scare him, he just hoped that his gut feeling was right.

26...25...24...23...

“Stop lying to us.” Nagito rolled his eyes, fighting back against Junko. “You’re just scaremongering us in the hope we’ll come crawling to you for protection.”

22...21...20...19...

“You cannot hurt us anymore!” Sonia declared.

18...17...16...15...

“You've been outsmarted, just accept it.” Peko glared Junko down.

14...13...12...11...

Time was passing so quickly; Hajime could feel his heart racing. As he continued to count, he tried offering his friends some words of advice and encouragement. “No matter how hard this gets, you can't let yourself get distracted. Tell your brain over and over that this isn't real. We will wake up.”

10...9...8...7...6...

“Get ready!” Hajime cried. “There might be some impact!”

5...4...3...2...1...

...0.

Hajime's counting skills were incredibly accurate. The second he counted zero, he heard an incredible bang from inside the building; it was the sound of the bomb exploding. The noise was so loud, that it could be heard from the dormitories. This horrific noise caused the building to shake from its foundations. As the walls around him trembled, Hajime knew that his time had come.

Hajime was aware that the water would already be inside the building. It would have started pouring in as soon as the door exploded. He predicted that it wouldn't take long for the water to reach the dormitories, and he was right. Within minutes, the water began gushing in, making the most of its new space to explore. The water was up to the students' ankles, soaking their shoes.
“It won’t be long until we’re totally submerged.” Hajime said, finding himself shouting to be heard above the noise of the rushing water. “Once we go under, it’s going to feel like we’re drowning - but I promise you, we aren’t. In order to survive this, we have to know what’s real. We can’t forget the truth. This is a game and we’re going to be okay.”

“You’re crazier than me!” Junko spat.

The water was already at Hajime’s knees; it was flooding in fast. "This isn’t going to be easy, but it’s going to be worth it. We’re going to wake up on Jabberwock Island...alive. We’re going to be there for those that didn’t make it. For Hiyoko, Teruteru, Byakuya, Mikan, Nekomaru, Akane, Mahiru, Souda, and Ibuki” he spoke each name with strong affection.

“We are doing this for them!” Sonia agreed. “And Chiaki, even though she will not be with us.”

“This is our chance to repay them, we just have to be strong.” Hajime insisted, the water now as high as his waist.

“You’re stupid if you think this is going to save you.” Junko cried, trying to distract everyone.

As the water rose above Hajime’s chest, he looked Junko straight in the eyes. Though of course, it wasn’t Junko that he was facing, it was his dearest friend Chiaki. Staring her down, he uttered his final words. “I doubt that you’re in there Chiaki, but even if the tiniest bit of your data survived, know that I am doing this for you.”

Junko began to wretch, on the verge of a bitter comment, but it was too late for her unkind words. The water had reached Junko’s chin, she had to quickly close her mouth in fear of swallowing it.

Hajime managed to take one last gasp of air before the water reached his mouth; there was no more time for talking. Hajime sincerely hoped that he’d said enough to keep his friends in the right mindset, otherwise, they were going to be in trouble.

It hadn’t taken long for the water to rise above every single person in the room. There wasn’t a single dry head in sight, even the taller students were completely under. The water had come for them all.

For the first few seconds, it was easy. Hajime felt his limbs relax and his body loosen up in the water. It felt no different to snorkelling or diving down to the bottom of the pool to collect coins. However, as time began to tick by, and Hajime didn’t have the comfort of coming up for air, the consequences of his actions hit him.

Hajime’s intention was to drown, but that didn’t stop his natural instinct kicking in. He fought against breathing in, refusing to let the water fill his lungs. He was only prolonging the inevitable, but Hajime was desperately clinging onto life.

This isn’t real. This isn’t real.

He repeated the statement in his head twice over, but his brain wasn’t in the mood to be rational. Hajime knew that it wasn’t real, but it felt real. The agony in his chest was too unbearable to ignore.

Hajime fought back against the water for as long as he could. Deprived of oxygen, he soon began to lose consciousness. The carbon dioxide having filled his blood, Hajime’s body forced him to breathe. Unfortunately for Hajime, he was not completely unconscious yet and had to endure the horrific sensation of breathing in water.

The fight was already over; Hajime was inhaling water. Even if there was air for him to breathe, he
would have been too weak to fight his way to the surface. Starved of oxygen, the world around him began to blur. In an attempt to block out the impending thoughts of death, Hajime looked to those around him.

Sonia was already dead, or at least unconscious. Her hair was floating all around her, transforming her into a beautiful, blonde mermaid. She looked so peaceful, now that her suffering was over.

Peko had yet to go, but she appeared close. Her eyes were slowly drifting shut.

Fuyuhiko was frantically kicking around. He was clearly struggling, Hajime could see. Hajime wanted to cry out to him, but it would have been near impossible and he didn’t have the strength.

As for Nagito and Gundam, Hajime could not see. They were out of his line of vision and Hajime couldn’t move his head. Hajime hoped they had passed out unconsciously too. Drowning was torture. No one deserved to endure it any longer than they had to. Hajime also couldn’t account for A.I. Junko, she was the only person that he would wish the pain on. That being said, he wasn’t sure if it was possible for an A.I. to drown.

As the darkness began to swallow him, Hajime knew that the end was near. He could not let his brain believe that he was dying, he had to wake up on the other side.

This isn’t real. This isn’t real. This isn’t real.

Hajime felt himself drift away, as the world around him fell black.

Chapter End Notes

From the very early days of planning this story, I always knew this is how I wanted Project Rewrite to end. I've had it in my head for a very long time and created lots of different drafts of how exactly the ending would go. I had so much fun writing this chapter. I blasted intense instrumental music through my headphones and just rolled with it.

I guess the big question is, what happens next?...
Chapter Six - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Hajime's story comes to an end.

Chapter Notes

Just in case it gets a bit confusing, I'm posting 4 new chapters at once: 29, 30, 31, & 32. Make sure you haven't missed chapters 29, 30 & 31 first!

There's some dr3 content in this chapter, but it doesn't necessarily stay true to the anime. This is because I consider the story an AU in some ways, just giving myself some freedom to take things in a bit of a different direction. So yeah, if something doesn't fit into place with the dr3 anime's canon, that's why!

Here we go, the final chapter...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Hajime Hinata finally opened his eyes, he was not where he expected to be. Instead of waking up in his Neo World Program pod, he found himself standing in a room with a checkered floor and red walls. Hajime's vision was blurry, making it difficult to determine where he was, but his surroundings seemed familiar. There were people close to Hajime, he could feel their presence. The people were gathered around in a circle, which Hajime was a part of. From what he could see, everyone was standing behind some kind of wooden podium. Hajime looked down, realising that he was standing behind in too. Feeling dizzy, he rested his arms on the podium to steady himself.

"Hellllllloo, earth to Hajime?!” from across the room, a girl with vibrant colours in her hair waved her hand in an overstated fashion towards Hajime, attempting to capture his attention.

"Why’s he bein’ so weird?!” another voice muttered.

Hajime took a deep breath, trying to process what was going on. His last memory was drowning, escaping the clutches of Junko Enoshima. He could remember nothing else since then, leading him to believe that this was his first time waking up.

“Maybe he’s hungry?” a loud-mouthed girl suggested. “I can’t concentrate on anything when my stomach’s empty.”

“That voice…” Hajime whispered, recognising it instantly as Akane Owari's. He didn’t know anyone else with such a passion for eating.

Identifying the voice helped Hajime to focus, which slowly brought back his vision. As Hajime’s eyesight cleared up, he knew exactly where he was. “T-this is the…the courtroom in Monokuma Rock!”
What Hajime could see didn’t seem real, but his eyes told him everything. Monokuma was sitting proudly on his throne, watching over fifteen students as he forced them to participate in his cruel class trial.

Monokuma scoffed at Hajime from his throne. “I know where we are and I didn’t ask for a tour guide. Get back to the trial!”

“M-Monokuma?!” Hajime didn’t understand. How was he seeing Monokuma? This was reality, where the bear didn’t exist. To make matters stranger, Hajime was surrounded by fourteen of his classmates. Had they woken up from their comas already?

“Hajime, just answer the question!” Mahiru looked at him sternly. “You can’t drag this out any longer.”

“W-what question?” Hajime struggled to speak. Nothing made any sense. Why was he in a room that didn’t exist, with classmates that had died? Why was he in a class trial? This couldn’t be reality, surely…

“Why did you commit murder?” still dressed as Byakuya Togami, the Ultimate Imposter repeated the question.

“M-murder?” Hajime felt his chest tighten. That meant someone had died. Hajime scanned the room to see who was missing. He very quickly noticed who wasn’t there. He had only counted fourteen other faces, when there should have been fifteen…

“The murder of Chiaki Nanami.” Nagito reminded him. “Don’t play games, Hajime. We’ve been discussing this case for at least an hour.”

Chiaki was nowhere to be seen. Her space had been replaced with a framed memorial of her face. She was the victim.

“What are you talking about?” Hajime cried, confused by the entire situation. “I didn’t kill her! Chiaki died from the Future Foundation’s bug.” Besides, Chiaki didn’t exist in reality.

“What’s the Future Foundation?” Souda scratched his head. “I don’t remember that part.”

“That’s because we haven’t discussed it.” Peko said. “It seems Hajime is making things up because he’s getting desperate.”

“We all know that you killed her!” Hiyoko accused.

“It was the bug from the Future Foundation!” Hajime insisted, his frustration growing.

“T-that’s n-not what the Monokuma f-file said.” Mikan spoke up timidly. “S-she wasn’t ill. C-Chiaki suffered b-blunt force trauma. I s-saw the wounds for m-myself.”

When Hajime mentioned the bug, Mikan presumed that he was talking about illness. It seemed that no one in the room knew that Chiaki was an A.I.

“I didn’t do anything like that to Chiaki!” Hajime objected. “And what wounds? I was with her when she died in the Data Processing Room; there wasn’t any blood.”

“Ha! So you confess to being at the murder scene.” Gundam narrowed his gaze at Hajime.

“But didn’t Chiaki die in the music venue?” Teruteru frowned. “That’s not what Hajime just said.”
“Hajime is making up lies again.” Nagito shook his head. “There’s no such thing as a Data Processing Room.”

“All the guilt has gone to his head!” Nekomaru raised his voice.

“I’m not guilty!” Hajime’s frustration had turned into anger. “Chiaki was my best friend, I would never do anything to hurt her. All I’ve been trying to do is save everyone, not kill them.”

“All of the evidence points to you.” the Imposter stated.

“This really has gone to his head…” Hiyoko pulled a sour face. “He’s freakier than Mikan! And that’s saying something…”

“Monokuma, we want to vote!” Nagito spoke on behalf of the group. “We know who the culprit is.”

“As you wish! I can be a real people pleaser when I wanna be.” Monokuma waffled on. “Well then, it looks like it’s time for the vote! Who will it be? Who are you going to convict? Have you chosen the right person, or the dreadfully wrong one? Now then, please pull the lever in front of you and cast your vote.”

“I’m voting for Hajime!” Nekomaru yelled, announcing his decision to the room.

“I’m voting for Hajime.” Akane agreed.

“Hajime!” Teruteru called his name.

“Hajime!” Hiyoko said.

“Hajime!” Mahiru shared their opinion.

“Hajime!” Nagito condemned.

“Hajime!” Sonia said his name also, but what she said next differed from the rest. “Wake up, Hajime!”

“You can pull through, wake up!” Peko cried out.

“Wake up, Hajime! Wake up!” Ibuki shouted.

As they called his name, Hajime’s vision began to blur again, setting a distance between Hajime and the courtroom. Ibuki’s voice pulled Hajime into reality, guiding him to wake up. The courtroom was not real and Hajime was not about to be executed for a crime that he did not commit. None of it was a part of reality.

The faces around Hajime faded away as he left the dream world behind. The shouting and accusations fizzled into nothingness, along with Monokuma. Before Hajime could open his eyes again, everything briefly turned to black. Finally entering reality, Hajime slowly opened his eyes to find himself surrounded by familiar faces.

“Hajime, wake up!”

Makoto Naegi was leaning over Hajime, calling out desperately for him to wake up. When he noticed Hajime’s eyes opening, he took a step back to give him some space. “Hajime?”

“I think that did the trick.” Kyoko Kirigiri exhaled a sigh of relief. She was by Makoto’s side, closely observing the situation. “Hajime, can you see us?”
“I…” Hajime struggled to find his voice, feeling incredibly overwhelmed. He blinked back at the Future Foundation representative, his heart racing. “Is...is this real?”

“Yes, it is.” Makoto reassured him, offering a friendly smile. “You’re awake now.”

“You’re no longer connected to the Neo World Program, but you are still plugged into the pod. Don’t make any sudden movements.” Kyoko advised. She didn’t want Hajime pulling out all of his wires.

“I...I don’t understand.” Hajime spoke slowly. “I...I was in a courtroom and...and…”

“You were glitching, Hajime!” jumping into their conversation was Sonia Nevermind. Makoto moved out of the way, allowing the Princess to be at Hajime’s side.

“S-Sonia?!” Hajime gasped. “You’re awake!” he wasn’t sure how much more confusion his mind could take.

“I am!” Sonia beamed. “And so is Peko.” she gestured across the room to where Peko was standing; Hajime hadn’t noticed the swordswomen.

“Hello.” Peko gave a small wave from where she was standing, aware that it wouldn’t be a good idea to overcrowd Hajime.

“W-what…” Hajime went to speak, but he was interrupted by Byakuya Togami.

“What you just experienced, was a glitch in the Neo World Program.” the real Byakuya explained.

“We saw what happened,” Kyoko revealed. “You were in a class trial, accused of committing Chiaki Nanami’s murder.”

“Was this part of the Future Foundation’s plan?” Hajime asked, wide-eyed. He wouldn’t put it past the Future Foundation to have messed with him, everything they did screamed betrayal.

“On the contrary,” Byakuya replied. “This was part of your plan.”

“M-mine?” Hajime stammered. He really couldn’t face being accused of more crimes that he knew he was innocent of. “No! I would never do something like that.”

“We know. It wasn’t something that you did on purpose.” Kyoko shot Byakuya a disapproving look, since his comment had caused Hajime more stress. “Because you left the Neo World Program early, you caused the system to corrupt.”

“Did I ruin the Rewrite?” Hajime had an awful feeling in the pit of his stomach. “I messed everything up, didn’t I?” he knew that he wasn’t supposed to leave the program early, but he had been out of options.

“That...that’s a complicated question to answer.” Makoto seemed hesitant to speak.

“I did, I ruined it, didn’t I?” Hajime began to panic. What if his actions within the game had ruined everyone else's chance of waking up.

“We can explain everything to you, don’t panic yourself.” Kyoko said calmly. “You don’t want to get yourself into a state.”
“Peko and I are fine,” Sonia reassured Hajime. “You saved our lives.”

“I’m really happy to see you guys,” it did put Hajime’s mind at ease to see two of his classmates, as it proved that his plan wasn’t a giant fail. “Are you two the only ones that have woken up so far?”

“Nagito is awake too,” Peko answered. “But as you can probably tell, he isn’t here right now. He’s having his vitals checked.”

“Yes, that reminds me, you better get yours done as well.” Kyoko interrupted their conversation. “Hajime, I know that you have many questions, but it’s important that we take you for your medical check-up.”

“It’s just a quick examination to ensure you’re okay.” Makoto added.

“I feel fine.” Hajime brushed them off, not wanting to waste time on medical exams.

“That doesn’t matter, you still need to do it.” Byakuya wasn’t going to let him get out of it.

“Don’t worry, Hajime, Peko and I have already had ours,” Sonia reassured him. “It was over in no time at all.”

“But…but there’s so much that I need to know first!” Hajime protested. “What corruption did I do? Are the others going to wake up? What happens now?”

“I know you want answers, but I can’t give them to you until I’ve taken your vitals.” Kyoko said sternly.


“You’ve been in the Neo World Program for twenty-two days, and your body was transported in that time. I need to take your vitals to ensure your health is in check.” Kyoko wasn’t going to budge. “Once I know you’re well, we can talk.”

“Transported?” Hajime repeated a very specific word that Kyoko had used. Was she implying that he’d been moved somewhere?

“That question can be answered once your medical checkup is complete, along with all the other questions that you have.” Kyoko said.

Hajime knew that it would be pointless arguing any further. The sooner he got his health checked, the quicker he would get his answers. Hajime didn’t know Kyoko too well, but from what he’d already learnt, she was not the type of person to back down.

“We still need to get you out of your pod safely, so we can talk for a little bit whilst we do that.” Makoto offered, wanting to clear up some of Hajime’s concerns. “Starting with the basics, it’s been two hours since you were officially in the Rewrite.”

“Oh, that’s not long at all!” Hajime exclaimed. It relieved him to know that months hadn’t passed.

“It seems that you and the other survivors are waking up in the order that you died.” Makoto continued. “For example, Sonia drowned first, so she was the first one to wake up.”

“I have been awake for two hours now.” Sonia shared. “Peko was next.”

“Ah, so you died second then.” Hajime commented, turning to Peko. “I’m guessing Nagito was next?”
"That's correct." Byakuya answered.

"And so, I must've been fourth." Hajime was putting the pieces of the puzzle together. "Who was next?"

"If you remember, Hajime, the Future Foundation connected your life to everyone else's." Makoto reminded him. "When you died, Gundam and Fuyuhiko did as well."

"Oh, of course." Hajime recalled.

Hajime remembered seeing Fuyuhiko struggling the most underwater, fighting against death. It seemed that he had kept up his fight the longest. Perhaps it was for the best that he died when Hajime had done.

Kyoko knelt next to Hajime’s pod, beginning to disconnect him from his wires. “We’ve been timing it, and so far there’s been a thirty-minute gap between survivors waking up. Hopefully, within an hour, all six survivors will be awake.”

“What about the others?” Hajime pressed. "Those who died during the killing game itself."

“Time will only tell.” Byakuya replied, not wanting to shelter Hajime from the truth. “There’s no guarantee that they will wake up at all, but you knew that already.”

“That’s true.” Hajime sighed. “But Gundam and Fuyuhiko will definitely be okay, right?”

“Your plan was clever, Hajime. I see no reason as to why it wouldn't work.” Makoto attempted to offer a positive outlook on the situation. “But we have no way of knowing if the others were able to prevent death with their thoughts.”

“I see…” Hajime sighed. If the others had done what he had told them to, they should wake up. He just hoped everyone had stuck to the plan.

“Things have been difficult.” Makoto sighed, sharing his concerns. “It’s all because of the glitching that you experienced.”

“Is it dangerous?” Hajime raised his eyebrows, wondering why Makoto looked so worried.

“Very.” Byakuya answered on Makoto’s behalf. “Essentially, the system went into shock, which messed with your brain because it couldn’t process what was happening. You hadn’t completed the Rewrite, so the system had data from two games and didn't know which one to consider real. It scrambled a mixture of your memories, creating a false sense of reality.”

“Oh, so that’s why I experienced a fake class trial!” Hajime gasped, beginning to understand. “But how is this dangerous? I mean it wasn’t nice to experience, but it was basically just a nightmare.”

“You got lucky.” Kyoko admitted. “If you didn’t wake up, your brain would have remained in that reality for the rest of your life.”

“But in that reality, I was going to be executed…” Hajime said.

“Exactly.” Kyoko said solemnly. “That’s why we were so desperate to wake you up, because you were running out of time.”

"So, if I hadn't have woken up, I'd just be in a coma with everyone else? But that's exactly what I've been fighting against!" Hajime complained, feeling gutted that his plan had such a fatal flaw.
“When all of you left the Neo World Program early, you reminded yourselves over and over how none of it was real. I think this is what gave you the strength to wake up.” Makoto explained. “I think the others will be okay, as four of you have managed to wake up so far. But had you not told them the truth of the Rewrite, they definitely wouldn’t have woken.”

“That’s so scary to think about.” Hajime shuddered. Being honest had saved his friends’ lives. "What about those who died before we left the Rewrite early? Will they be affected? Because they don't know the truth."

“It won’t affect them, as they already believe they're dead.” Kyoko answered.

“Peko, Nagito, and I experienced something similar to you, Hajime.” Sonia shared.

“What happened?!” Hajime asked.

“My experience was very similar to yours.” Peko said. “I was also about to be executed in a class trial, for the murder of my Young Master.”

“That sounds like what I went through.” Hajime listened. “What about you, Sonia?”

“Mine experience was different.” Sonia opened up. “I was on Jabberwock Island, like you two, but instead of taking the role of the blackened, I was the victim. Someone was trying to murder me…”

“Woah, that’s dark.” Hajime gulped. He couldn’t begin to imagine what that must have been like for Sonia. “Who was trying to kill you?”

“Um, well…” Sonia hesitated. “It was you, Hajime.”

“Oh…” Hajime wasn’t sure what to say. “I…I’m sorry, I guess?” he didn’t know if the situation really required an apology.

“No, do not apologise, Hajime.” Sonia shook her head. “I know you would never really do something like that.”

“Right, that’s enough talk for now.” Kyoko stood up, having completed the task of freeing Hajime. “You can get out of the pod now.”

Hajime carefully stepped out of his pod, aware that his legs were going to be pretty shaky having not walked in twenty-two days. He had been through this before, after all.

“Do you need some assistance?” Kyoko could see that Hajime was wobbling.

“I’ll be fine.” Hajime was determined to get back on his feet.

When Hajime stood up, he was able to properly take in his surroundings. Straight away, Hajime's beady eye picked up a noticeable difference. "We've moved!” Hajime claimed.

"Hm?” Makoto didn't follow.

"This...this isn't the same pod room.” Hajime commented.

The room he found himself in was considerably smaller than the one that he remembered. Not to mention, there were only six pods in the room, instead of fifteen.

"Where are the others?” Hajime was instantly struck with fear, terrified that something had happened to his friends.
"We separated the survivors and those who had died." Kyoko explained. "They're in another wing within the building."

"Don't worry, they're being well looked after." Makoto smiled.

"Another wing?" Hajime frowned. He was completely baffled by Kyoko's comment. Surely, they could not be on about the same building. The one that Hajime knew didn't have another wing. That's when Hajime remembered that Kyoko had mentioned something about being moved. "Earlier, you said my body had been transported somewhere...did you mean off of Jabberwock Island?"

"What I said, is that all of your questions will be answered after you medical check." Kyoko reminded him. She began delegating tasks to her associates. "I'll take Hajime for his checkup, since Hina is still with Nagito. Makoto and Byakuya, I need you two to remain here in case the others wake up."

"Who's Hina?" Hajime couldn't stop himself from asking more questions.

Kyoko ignored Hajime's latest question. "Follow me." She walked past Hajime and out of the door, leaving him to quickly hurry after her.

When Hajime stepped into the hallway, his theory of being moved to a new location only developed further. He didn't know where he was, but this definitely wasn't the control room on Jabberwock Island. The building Hajime found himself in was far grander than the one he knew. The paint job was different, the floor was linoleum not carpeted, and there were a series of doors coming off of the corridor that he had never seen before. Hajime couldn't recall any buildings that looked like this on the island, leaving him to speculate whether he was still on the island at all.

"W-where am I?" Hajime felt a little uneasy, not knowing where he was. "This isn’t Jabberwock Island, is it?"

"No, it’s not." Kyoko replied. "Like I said, I’ll tell you everything once we’re done with your vitals." Kyoko wouldn't shed any light on the situation.

Kyoko had begun walking, so Hajime had no choice but to follow after her. She led him down a long corridor, and down two flights of stairs. On their way, they passed a woman in a black suit. Kyoko and the woman exchange a nod, although no words were spoken.

"Who was that?" Hajime asked, as soon as the woman was out of earshot. "I don’t recognise her."

"You wouldn’t." Kyoko said, avoiding the question.

Their walk would have been the perfect opportunity to ask questions, but Hajime wasn’t going to push it. Since their silence was a comfortable one, he decided to hold off.

Kyoko finally came to a stop outside a door with a plaque that read 'Meeting Room B'.

"After you," Kyoko insisted, placing a gloved hand on the door’s handle, opening it for Hajime.

“Thanks." Hajime stepped past her, walking into the meeting room.

Kyoko followed Hajime, closing the door behind her. She gave him a moment to adapt to his surroundings, aware that everything was new.

Hajime took a quick glance around the room. The iconography was familiar to him: a gigantic table with a number of chairs surrounding it. It was no different to any other meeting room that Hajime
had seen in his life.

“I apologise that this is such a big space.” Kyoko said. “However, none of the smaller meeting rooms were free.”

“What is this place?” Hajime did not recognise it at all. He wasn’t sure what to think. “I thought we were doing medical stuff, anyway?”

Kyoko sat down at the table, indicating for Hajime to do the same. A box was waiting for them on the table, which seemed to have been placed there in advance. Kyoko brought the box towards her, opening the lid to reveal a single file and some medical supplies. She retrieved the file from the box, allowing Hajime to peek at the name.

Hajime Hinata / Izuru Kamakura

It caused Hajime to wince seeing Izuru's name on the file.

"There are plenty of medical rooms here, including a whole hospital facility." Kyoko began. "It's where Hina has taken Nagito for his checkup. However, I think that it's especially important right now, for you and I to have some time alone. I don't want anyone listening in or getting in the way. I retrieved your file and the appropriate medical supplies earlier, to prepare for this moment. This isn't an in-depth procedure, as I'm sure you remember, so it doesn't matter that we're in a meeting room."

“I remember, yeah.” Hajime nodded. He had to go through the exact same procedure the last time he'd left the program. However, he'd been able to do it with his friends. This time, it seemed that everyone was being checked separately.

“This won’t take long.” Kyoko promised. “I just need to ensure that you’re not experiencing anything out of the ordinary. It will also give us a good chance to talk. But first, if you wouldn’t mind, we’re going to take your temperature.”

From within the box, Kyoko retrieved a thermometer. “Can you put this in your mouth, please? I assure you it’s clean.”

Hajime did as Kyoko asked, letting the thermometer rest in his mouth. After twenty seconds or so, the device began to beep as it had completed its reading.

Kyoko took the device straight from Hajime’s mouth, peering at the result and writing it down.

“Good, that’s perfectly normal.” she was approving of the reading. “You don’t feel like you’re experiencing anything differently, do you?”

“No, I feel the same.” Hajime replied, watching as Kyoko took notes.

“It’s good to see that you haven’t suffered any additional trauma.” Kyoko nodded. “I just have a few other questions to ask you. Does your eyesight feel the same?”

“Yeah.” Hajime replied.

“And your hearing?” Kyoko continued.

“Mmhmm.” Hajime said, quickly growing bored.

“Do you feel dizzy or lightheaded?” Kyoko asked.

“Nope.” Hajime shook his head. Unable to contain himself any longer, Hajime asked a question of
his own. “Can I ask you something? Even just one question. I’m so confused right now, it’s almost like I’m dreaming.”

“Fine,” Kyoko replied, looking up from her notes. “I will explain everything to you shortly, but since you’re restless, I have time for one question.”

One question. Hajime knew he had to make it a good one. “We’re not on Jabberwock Island anymore, I know that for certain. The building here is totally different and I’ve seen someone that I don’t recognise. Where are we?”

“I can’t tell you that yet.” Kyoko refused to answer. “Is there something else that you would like to ask instead?”

Hajime sighed, frustrated that he was still being sheltered from the truth. “I dunno. What are you allowed to tell me?!”

“I can tell you why we left Jabberwock Island.” Kyoko offered.

“That’ll do.” Hajime nodded. He just wanted to know something.

“As you know, when the Rewrite launched, we were cut as administrators. This meant we had no way of intervening within the Neo World Program, which prevented us from contacting you.” Kyoko shared. “When this happened, I had my suspicions straight away that something was wrong. I couldn’t tell what was going on, but I knew the Future Foundation’s intentions were sinister. So, we sent for some of our most trusted co-workers to come to the island for assistance.”

While Hajime had been sunbathing and solving murders, Kyoko had been doing everything in her power to learn the truth about the Rewrite.

“T-they work for the Future Foundation too?” Hajime asked. If that was true, could he really trust them?

“They do, but you don’t need to worry. They’re the other three survivors of the school killing life. You’ll have the opportunity to meet them later.” Kyoko said, continuing with her story. “Soon enough, I had a general idea of what the Future Foundation were up to, so I knew that it was no longer safe to stay on Jabberwock Island. We had to launch an emergency evacuation.”

“That sounds intense.” Hajime remarked.

“The six of us worked together, transferring the Neo World Program and its participants onto a large ship. You probably won’t remember it, but it was the ship that we used to bring you to the island originally.” Kyoko attempted to jog Hajime’s memory.

“Oh yeah!” Hajime exclaimed. He could vaguely remember being onboard a boat before arriving at Jabberwock Island for the first time.

“When I've visited the island, it's always been by a smaller boat or helicopter, so the boat you were on was still waiting for us.” Kyoko said.

“But how did you move us?” Hajime asked. He had asked a lot more than his promised one question. "I mean, you can't have carried the entire Neo World Program onto a ship. And surely, we would have died if you'd disconnected us.”

“The Neo World Program was designed to be portable. Taking you a pod at a time, it was manageable.” Kyoko said, playing with her pen against the table. “Our ship set sail long before
Kyosuke broadcast his message.”

“That’s crazy!” Hajime couldn’t believe it; he’d been so unaware of everything. “The Future Foundation would’ve turned up to the island to find no one there. So, where has the ship taken us?”

“Enough questions.” Kyoko stopped him. “I need to concentrate, so please wait a moment.”

Kyoko turned her attention to Hajime’s file, writing down some brief notes. “Your health is perfectly fine, so you’ll be pleased to know that we can talk properly now.”

“Oh, that didn’t take long at all.” Hajime felt bad for complaining in the first place.

“We’re going to finish our conversation in here.” Kyoko announced, placing Hajime’s file back in the box. “What I’m telling you, the others don’t know yet, hence why this is in private.”

“Should we go and get them?” Hajime asked.

“No.” Kyoko shook her head. “A meeting has been scheduled for later on today, where everything will be explained to those who have woken. However, since you led the operation of the Rewrite, I think that it’s only fair you learn the truth first. Additionally, there is someone who wants to meet with you, so you need to know everything as soon as possible.”

“Okay, I understand.” Hajime was relieved that he was finally going to get some answers. However, he did feel guilty that his friends couldn’t be there with him. “So, can you finally tell me where the boat took us?”

“Before I tell you that, Hajime you must understand that returning to normal civilisation was a massive risk for you and your classmates.” Kyoko gave her warning. “Nearly every member of the Future Foundation wanted you dead because they didn’t trust you.”

“I figured that much.” Hajime sighed. “So, I’m guessing that this is a hideout. Are we in the mountains, maybe?”

“No, Hajime…” Kyoko couldn’t tell if he was joking. “We’re in the Future Foundation’s headquarters.”

“W-what?!” Hajime spluttered, his body freezing entirely. “Is that supposed to be funny?”

“I’m entirely serious, Hajime.” Kyoko wasn’t laughing.

“I-I thought I could trust you.” Hajime jumped up from his chair, ready to make a run for it if he had to. “Why would you betray us like that?”

“Hajime, calm down and return to your seat.” Kyoko frowned, disapproving of his sudden outburst. “Of course you can still trust us.”

“Then why have you sent us straight into the Lion’s Den?! Hajime snapped, in disbelief of what he was hearing. “Kyosuke bugged the Rewrite because he wanted all of us dead. He’s a murderer. What’s showing up on his front door going to change?!”

“Hajime-” Kyoko tried to calm him down, but Hajime wasn’t ready to listen yet.

“Kyosuke probably wanted you guys dead too…” Hajime ranted. “Did your lives get spared for turning us in? Is that why you betrayed us?”

“Not at all.” Kyoko kept her cool, but she wasn’t happy with Hajime’s accusations. “If you were
here as Kyosuke’s prisoner, you would behind bars, not chatting freely with me in a meeting room.”

“T-that’s true…” Hajime said.

“Please sit down, so I can talk to you properly.” Kyoko requested, once again.

Beginning to calm down, Hajime returned to his seat. He wasn't completely trusting of Kyoko, but he was willing to hear her out.

“Our original plan was send to you into hiding. It wasn’t what we wanted to do, but we had no choice.” Kyoko revealed. “Myself and the other school survivors would have been forced into hiding too.”

“But that clearly didn’t work out…” Hajime muttered.

“I don’t wish for you to spend your entire life in hiding, Hajime.” Kyoko said. “The Future Foundation are smart, so it wouldn’t take long for them to find you. You shouldn’t have to spend your entire life on the run.”

“It’s better than spending the rest of my life in a grave.” Hajime retorted.

“Trust me, it isn’t.” Kyoko stared Hajime down. “However, such drastic measures were not needed. Makoto and Kyosuke came to a compromise.”

“What kind of compromise?” Hajime frowned, still untrusting.

“In return for your safety and freedom, Makoto would give Kyosuke something that he desperately wanted.” Kyoko said. “Additionally, myself, Makoto, and Byakuya will not be arrested or punished by the Future Foundation.”

“That doesn’t sound like much of a compromise,” Hajime folded his arms in annoyance. “It just sounds like Makoto giving in to Kyosuke to save his own skin. Let me guess, the thing Kyosuke wants so desperately is one of our heads on a spike.”

“Makoto would never do something so selfish.” Kyoko scorned, irritated at Hajime for judging so quickly. “I already told you, the compromise included keeping you safe.”

“Pfft.” Hajime scoffed. “As if Kyosuke’s going to keep to his word. He’ll probably outnumber us with his security, and then have us all killed.”

“I understand that you’re paranoid. Byakuya and I felt the same way too, at first.” Kyoko agreed. "But Makoto managed to convince us otherwise. He had a plan which he talked through with Kyosuke. We have something that Kyosuke wants...the Neo World Program.”

“I’m not following.” Hajime shook his head. “Kyosuke had the Neo World Program, and he infected it with his stupid bug. It seems like Kyosuke can’t have nice things...”

“Kyosuke never had access to the Neo World Program once we had stolen it, just your data from the original game, which was left with his programmers.” Kyoko clarified. “And besides, until recently, Kyosuke’s never had a reason for wanting the Neo World Program in his hands.”

“Has something changed, or…?” Hajime trailed off his sentence.

“It has.” Kyoko replied. “As you know, Kyosuke's original plan was to implement his virus into the Neo World Program and send Future Foundation officers to Jabberwock Island to kill you all.
However, the second part of Kyosuke's plan never went ahead, as everything changed. Whilst you were inside the Rewrite, another killing game was orchestrated."

"W-what?!” Hajime raised his voice in shock.

"Twelve very important leaders within the Future Foundation were forced into a killing game of their own.” Kyoko elaborated. “Myself and some of the other killing school survivors were intended to be part of this game, but we narrowly avoided it, since we were over on Jabberwock Island, dealing with Kyosuke’s mess. We were considered too much effort to hunt down, so the game went on without us.”

“B-but, but if you weren’t with us, you would’ve been a part of that killing game too?” Hajime gasped, coming to the shocking realisation.

Kyoko nodded solemnly. “They wanted us to participate, but there was no way to reach us. The killing game had to commence without us, or it wouldn’t commence at all.”

“I can’t believe it.” Hajime took a deep breath, leaning his back against his chair for support.

“The new killing game happened during day three of the Rewrite. It was very sudden, but merely a coincidence.” Kyoko explained. “The game lasted nine days, concluding ten days ago.”

“That’s so short…” Hajime whispered.

“The game was brutal, shortening its length.” Kyoko shared. “It also lacked class trials.”

“Even so, nine days…” Hajime couldn’t imagine his own game being so short.

“The killing game actually took place in the Future Foundation’s headquarters. Right now, we are in their reserve building.” Kyoko gave Hajime more information. “The game wasn’t broadcast to the public, but it was to other Future Foundation members. We witnessed everything first hand. I think they were expecting us to show up since we were watching it.”

“Why didn’t you?” Hajime asked.

“Because it would’ve been walking into a death trap.” Kyoko said. “Your lives were our priority; we couldn’t abandon you in the Neo World Program.”

“So...what happened in this killing game?” Hajime asked. “Who was the mastermind? Did...did anyone survive?” he was fearful that he’d hear the name Junko Enoshima.

“Kyosuke Munakata is the sole survivor.” Kyoko lowered her head, saddened by the high death count. “The game was cleverly designed, convincing players to commit suicide using brainwashing. The entire thing was overseen by someone highly trusted, which is a shock to us all.”

“Who’s that?” Hajime pried.

“The very founder of the Future Foundation and the chairman himself: Kazuo Tengan.” Kyoko shared the mastermind’s name with Hajime.

Hajime had never met Kazuo before, but the name was familiar to him. He was highly regarded within the Future Foundation. “Their own leader murdered everyone?!“

“He was brainwashed himself.” Kyoko explained. “Due to the circumstances, Kyosuke has taken over as leader of the Future Foundation.”
“What a great leader he’ll make.” Hajime rolled his eyes, with a comment full of sarcasm.

“I know you feel bitterly towards Kyosuke, and I don’t blame you, but you should hear him out and speak to him.” Kyoko suggested. “He wants to meet with you.”

“I don’t want to meet with him.” Hajime turned away, uninterested.

“Hajime, you’ll only make life harder for yourself.” Kyoko insisted. “Kyosuke doesn’t want any trouble. If anything, he wants your help. Being involved in a killing game has changed him; he is not the man who called for your deaths.”

“Maybe I’ll go and hear him out…” Hajime said, reluctantly. “But if I don’t like what he has to say, I’m gone.”

“That’s fine.” Kyoko agreed. “Just show him that you’re trying.”

“Can we go there now, then? I wanna get this over with so I can be with the others when they wake up.” the idea of meeting Kyosuke bored Hajime, but it seemed that Kyoko was keen. Besides, if Kyosuke really had turned over a new leaf, then Hajime shouldn’t act too rebelliously around him, or Kyosuke could begin distrusting him again.

“The sooner the better,” Kyoko said. "Let's go."

On her way out, Kyoko collected the box containing Hajime's file, as she needed to return it to the medical room. She took the lead, escorting Hajime to Kyosuke's office, since he didn't have a clue where he was going.

As they walked through the hallways, Hajime couldn't help but comment on the size of the building. "This place is huge! I thought this was their reserve building..." it was surprising how many different rooms they had passed.

"This building was designed as a backup, in case anything were to ever happen to the main headquarters. It's practically a duplicate of the original building, as it has to offer the same facilities." Kyoko explained. "I'll find you a map later. It will help you navigate your way around if you choose to stay here."

Hajime decided not to reply to that comment.

After several corridors, a couple flights of stairs, and a few quick interactions with random Future Foundation employees, Hajime and Kyoko had arrived at their destination. Kyosuke's name had been sign posted on the door in front of Hajime.

“I’m going to wait outside to give you two some time alone to talk,” Kyoko prepped Hajime. “But don’t hesitate to come and get me if things become heated.”

Kyoko wanted to give Hajime his space, but it was clear that she was concerned about how quickly Hajime might fly off the handle if triggered by Kyosuke.

Kyoko knocked on the door, opening it by the handle as she did so. “I have Hajime here to see you.” she announced, calling from the doorway.

“Come in.” a voice called.

Hajime recognised the voice as Kyosuke's, but he could not see the man.
"In you go." Kyoko instructed. "Remember, I'll be right outside if you need me." she wanted to assure Hajime that everything was going to be okay.

Hajime walked into the room, unsure whether he was ready to face the man who had tried to kill him. What upset Hajime the most about the situation, was Kyosuke’s betrayal. He had offered Hajime hope at a time where Hajime was the most desperate, but it was all part of an evil scheme.

Kyosuke’s office was spacious. A large wooden desk took up the centre of the room, with an oversized leather chair resting behind it. To the side of the desk, there were two comfy looking armchairs.

A man was sat in one of the armchairs. He appeared bruised and broken, the shell of the person he ever once was. He bowed his head in respect to Hajime, apologetic in his manner. This was a man that Hajime recognised, a man he had seen in a threatening videotape during his time on Jabberwock Island. The man sitting before him was none other than Kyosuke Munakata.

“Hajime, please take a seat.” Kyosuke pointed to the chair positioned adjacent to the one he was sitting in.

Hajime reluctantly sat down, positioning himself as far away as he possibly could from Kyosuke. Kyosuke noticed Hajime’s hesitancy.

“Don’t be afraid,” Kyosuke reassured him. “You aren’t in any danger.”

“Not anymore I’m not.” Hajime retorted. He couldn’t help his comment; Kyosuke had caused chaos in Hajime’s world.

“Hajime, I—” Kyosuke ran his hands through his hair. “I want to ask for your forgiveness. I was blind sighted by power, doing what I thought was right. I see now, that I made a grave mistake.”

“You did.” Hajime said sourly. He wasn’t going to let Kyosuke off easily, the man had caused Hajime a lot of pain. “So why the sudden change of heart? You wanted us dead pretty badly, enough to bug the Rewrite and trick us.”

“I didn’t think that you could be trusted.” Kyosuke admitted, reflecting upon his own behaviour. “I thought that no matter what you went through, a piece of Junko Enoshima would always lie within you, just waiting to be woken. You have to understand Hajime, that you don’t remember what life was like when the world was in despair. You lost your memories of those times.”

“The time when we were Remnant of Despairs, you mean?” Hajime said.

“Yes.” Kyosuke nodded slowly. “The Remnants of Despair were cruel and merciless. You and your friends caused the end of many innocent lives and cast misery upon society.”

It pained Hajime to hear that. It was a time that he did not want to think about. “I see…”

“When Makoto took you all, I was furious.” Kyosuke confessed. “We had worked so hard to capture you all. It was the ultimate betrayal, Hajime. We had finally caught you and Makoto stole you away from us.”

“You wanna talk about ultimate betrayals?” Hajime narrowed his eyebrows, referencing the Rewrite.

Kyosuke sighed but continued with his story. “Makoto claimed that he was going to cure you within the Neo World Program. As you are probably aware, the Neo World Program was developed by the Future Foundation, but I did not believe in it.”
“Don’t you trust your co-workers?” Hajime asked.

“Of course, but the Neo World Program was still in its early stages and had not properly been tested.” Kyosuke explained. “I did not believe that any form of technology could undo the damage that Junko Enoshima had created. After all, she had brought the world to its knees.”

Hajime was beginning to see where Kyosuke was coming from. Kyosuke didn’t remember the friendly faces of the seventy-seventh class, he remembered the monsters that Junko Enoshima had made.

“Even if the Neo World Program would work, that was not Makoto’s decision to make.” Kyosuke said sternly. “His decision was extremely risky.”

“But it paid off…” Hajime sided with Makoto.

“And what if it hadn’t?” Kyosuke argued, though not aggressively. “He could have ruined everything that we had been working for.”

“Yeah, I get that.” Hajime reasoned. He didn't like Kyosuke, but he was mature enough to not turn their entire conversation into a fight.

“When the original island killing game had concluded, Makoto reported to me what had happened. There were five survivors, but all the rest were ‘dead’.” Kyosuke said, using air quotations. “Eleven people had turned against each other, opting for murder when entered into the killing game. In my eyes, nothing had changed. Those people were still Junko’s monsters. The survivors might have woken from the killing game with their memories of Junko missing, but I did not believe that those memories were erased forever.”

“But those who died, they didn’t kill each other because of Junko.” Hajime began, defending his classmates. “They killed each other because they were scared, because Monokuma gave us motives. He manipulated us, even forced us to starve until a killing occurred.”

“I know, I see that now…” Kyosuke admitted to his mistake. “I’m sure you’ve already been told, but these past couple of weeks, I lost everyone.” He winced as he said it. “Myself and my colleagues were entered into a merciless killing game. I am the only survivor.”

“Yeah, I heard…” Hajime said. He could see how upset Kyosuke looked, as everything was still raw for him. “You don’t have to talk about it if it’s too hard.”

During the Rewrite, Hajime had wished pain upon Kyosuke. However, now that this had become a reality, Hajime felt nothing but guilt for his dark thoughts. He didn't enjoy watching anyone suffer, not even the man who had caused him the most pain.

“I see now Hajime,” Kyosuke began. “I see what you went through. The pain of a killing game, it is like no other.”

Hajime knew exactly what it was like; he had been through it twice. “I’m sorry you had to go through it too. Kyoko said it was kind of different to the previous killing games, though.”

“The game was hosted by Monokuma, but yes, besides from that it was entirely different.” Kyosuke said. “There were no class trials or executions. We had to try and weed out a traitor. Except, there was no traitor. Everyone was committing suicide because of a brainwashing video.”

“How did you find out?” Hajime asked. It must have been a shocking revelation for Kyosuke.
“When I won the game, Monokuma told me everything.” Kyosuke revealed. “The Monokuma in my game wasn't actually real, but a pre-recorded message had been prepared for the survivor. When I left the game, I was shown video footage of the suicides by my colleagues, to prove that it was true.

“That’s rough.” Hajime sympathised.

“The guilt that I felt when I found out the truth… I can’t describe it.” Kyosuke looked like he was struggling to swallow. “During the killing game, I lost myself. I had an idea in my head, which couldn’t have been further from the truth…”

“Which was?” Hajime prompted.

“I believed that the killing game had been orchestrated by the Remnants of Despair.” Kyosuke shared. “More specifically, you and your classmates. It seemed too convenient to me that Makoto and the others had escaped the game, which they were supposed to have been a part of. Furthermore, this game overlapped with the Rewrite. I believed that somehow the Rewrite hadn't gone ahead and my game was created instead. I believed that you had converted Makoto and the others into despair, and they played a part in helping you.”

“Woah, that sure is something…” eyes wide, Hajime didn’t know what to say. Hajime could see why Kyosuke would create such a theory, but it wasn’t the truth.

“I became so paranoid, that I began distrusting everyone.” Kyosuke continued to share his story with Hajime. “During the game, I discovered that Chisa, someone I cared for dearly, was a Remnant of Despair. Hearing of this news broke me.”

“I’m... I’m sorry to hear that.” Hajime lowered his voice.

"This caused me to loathe despair more than I already did. I blamed despair for what it did to Chisa.” Kyosuke went on. "As the game progressed, the number of survivors began to thin and we still hadn't identified anyone as the traitor. I soon found myself suspecting everyone, due to my own sense of inner despair. Before the game concluded, there were just two of us left: me and a dear friend of mine: Juzo Sakakura."

Hajime remembered hearing that name during the threatening videotape.

“I killed him, Hajime.” Kyosuke confessed. “I thought he was to blame for everything, because it seemed to be the only logical answer. However, I was wrong. Juzo wasn’t the traitor and he wasn’t in despair. I murdered a close friend of mine, who was innocent, because my judgement was clouded.”

"I can see why you suspected him if there were only two of you left.” Hajime said. "I'm sure Juzo must've been suspecting you.”

"No, he didn't suspect me at all.” Kyosuke replied, bluntly. "Juzo had almost discovered the secret of the brainwashing, and had a very strong theory based on the idea. He shared that theory with me, but I thought of him as nothing more than a liar.”

Listening to Kyosuke's story was heartbreaking. Hajime hadn't expected to feel sorry for Kyosuke, but the man had been through a great ordeal. No wonder Kyosuke seemed so broken.

"When I graduated from the killing game, so to speak, Makoto contacted me. Despite knowing that I was after his arrest, he still made the effort to speak to me. He wanted to help me, having experienced a killing game of his own.” Kyosuke said. "After this exchange, I decided to call off the attack on Jabberwock Island and invited everyone here."
"That was brave of Makoto to trust you." Hajime remarked.

"I'm grateful that he chose to believe in me," Kyosuke admitted. "I realise now that I was too quick in making judgements. Anyone can be led astray by Junko Enoshima; you were just innocent high school students enjoying your time at Hope's Peak Academy. The Neo World Program offers innocent people a second chance at getting their life back."

"I didn't think that you saw us as innocent." Hajime confessed.

"The seventy-seventh class of Hope's Peak Academy are innocent, whereas, the Remnants of Despair are not." Kyosuke explained. "However, I now understand that they are two different sets of people."

"So, you believe in the Neo World Program now?" Hajime asked.

"I lost Chisa to despair. She must have been manipulated or brainwashed, as she was always on the side of hope. If she could have regained her memories from before all of the disaster, I know that she could have been saved." Kyosuke spoke with passion. "However, it is too late to try now, as I was too quick to turn my back on the Neo World Program. Life doesn't offer me many second chances; I lost both Chisa and Juzo. However, the Neo World Program has the possibility of offering second chances to others out there."

"Life isn't fair," Hajime sighed. He wished he could help Chisa, who Kyosuke spoke fondly of. "But let me tell you, I'm the first person to vouch for the Neo World Program. I lost my memories of despair, so when I discovered the truth of who I really am, it just didn't seem real. I have no temptation to go back to that way of life; the Neo World Program really did change me."

"Hajime, it is not too late to save other people who are out there." Kyosuke continued. "If we can bring others, who are in despair, into the Neo World Program, we can save them. I know we can. I want to use the Neo World Program to cure innocent people from despair."

"I mean, that's a nice idea...but it's really complicated." Hajime scratched the back of his head. "People aren't gonna turn themselves in if they're filled with despair. And even if a loved one reported them or something, there are still more hurdles. We would need to construct avatars from their previous memories and stuff. That's going to be pretty difficult for people that we know nothing about."

"It's not going to be easy, I know," Kyosuke said. "But with hard work, we can make it happen. Recruiters who can take to the streets, on the hunt for those in despair. Researchers, who can look into backgrounds, helping to build the profiles of those we find."

"Well, putting it like that does seem a lot more promising." Hajime agreed. "Would there be enough staff for this project?"

"Yes, more than enough." Kyosuke replied. "We may have lost some of our leaders, but the force of the Future Foundation still remains strong. And..." Kyosuke hesitated.

"And?" Hajime waited.

Kyosuke reached into his pocket, retrieving a sheet of folded paper, which he handed to Hajime. "There is a job waiting for you, and for your friends when they wake up."

"Three of them are awake," Hajime revealed. "Hopefully the other two survivors will wake up soon. But, I don't know what's going to happen to those who died in the game. It seems like they'll be stuck in comas again."
"Well, if they do wake up, jobs will be waiting for them." Kyosuke promised. "I spoke with Makoto, and he helped me delegate jobs related to your skillsets. Take a look at the sheet."

Instructed by Kyosuke, Hajime unfolded the piece of paper that he'd been given. Hajime read out loud what he could see. "Recruiters: Nekomaru Nidai, Peko Pekoyama, Akane Owari, and Gundam Tanaka."

"Recruiters will be in charge of tracking down those in despair." Kyosuke explained. "They will have to capture the subject, bringing them here to be entered into the Neo World Program. I chose students who exhibit good physical skills and would not be in trouble if met with some force."

Akane and Nekomaru would be fine with their strength alone, Peko had her sword, and Gundam could use his spells and animal companions to keep himself safe.

Hajime read on. "Researchers: Mahiru Koizumi, the Imposter, Sonia Nevermind, Fuyuhiko Kuzuryu, and Nagito Komaeda."

"Researchers are tasked with learning the backgrounds of the subjects." Kyosuke said, giving Hajime all of the details. "They must work together and create a profile of who that person once was before they were targeted with despair."

"That sounds like an important job." Hajime nodded. "Hmm, what's next? The Rehabilitation and Aftermath Recovery Team, consisting of Mikan Tsumiki, Ibuki Mioda, and Hiyoko Saionji."

"As you are aware yourself, learning the truth of the Neo World Program is very overwhelming and confusing." Kyosuke said. "The recovery team will help explain everything to those who have successfully graduated from the Neo World Program. They will look after them until those people are ready to return to society again."

Hajime knew that Mikan would be perfect for the job, since she had such a caring nature. Ibuki would be a friendly face to help cheer people up. However, he wasn't sure about Hiyoko...

Almost done with the list, Hajime read off another two job roles. "Catering Team: Teruteru. Well, that's self-explanatory." Hajime grinned. "And Souda's been put under Machinery Operations. He'd love that!"

"Yes, he does." Kyosuke nodded.

"Huh?" Hajime questioned Kyosuke's odd choice of phrasing, however, he became too distracted by the bottom of the list to seek an answer. Changing the subject, Hajime pointed to what had caught his attention.

**Head of Operations: Hajime Hinata.**

“M-me? Head of operations?” Hajime gasped. Was Kyosuke really going to put him in charge of everything?

“Yes, Hajime.” Kyosuke nodded. “How you behaved, willingly entering yourself into the Rewrite for the sake of your friends, that is the kind of leader I want taking charge of this operation. If you’re willing to accept the position, of course. I feel that you have a great amount of passion, which would give this project its best potential.”

“Y-yeah, I’d love to.” Hajime was a little shocked. He was going to oversee a rehabilitation program, a program which could rescue others from despair. It was a brilliant idea, something that Hajime wanted to be behind.
“Wonderful news.” Kyosuke said, smiling for the first time. “Since you’ll be working for the Future Foundation, you’ll be provided with full accommodation.”

Life was going to be so much better than what Hajime had expected. He wasn’t forced to leave the Neo World Program and then spend the rest of his life on the run.

“Well, Hajime,” Kyosuke concluded. “We will have more meetings on this later, but for now, I just want you to focus on recovering. I know what I put you through has been very difficult, and once again, I am sorry.”

“How about you?” Hajime asked. “Are you going to be okay? You’ve been through a lot yourself…” he found himself caring about Kyosuke.

“Perhaps will be here to support each other.” Kyosuke remarked. “My door is always open, Hajime.”

“Okay, thanks.” Hajime wasn’t sure if he would take Kyosuke up on this offer or not, but he no longer loathed the man he had called a monster. Kyosuke was only human, and like all humans do, he had made a mistake.

“Kyoko should still be waiting outside for you.” Kyosuke said. “Go and see her, find out an update on your friends.”

“Thank you, I will.” Hajime stood up. He was enjoying his conversation with Kyosuke, but it was eating away at him that he hadn’t seen his friends properly yet.

“It was nice to meet you, Hajime.” Kyosuke bid Hajime farewell.

Giving Kyosuke one final glance, Hajime left the office. He felt so much better leaving the room than he had done entering it. He was thankful that Kyoko had encouraged him to attend the meeting, since it had changed his perspective. Hajime still didn't agree with Kyosuke's actions, but he could see why Kyosuke had behaved in the way that he did. Now that Hajime had a job within the Future Foundation, things already seemed brighter.

Kyoko greeted Hajime outside; she even gave him a smile. "You were in there much longer than I expected you to be! I'm pleased to see that there hasn't been any trouble. How did it go?"

"Yeah, it went okay." Hajime nodded. It was nice to know that he hadn't let Kyoko down. He couldn't be bothered to recap the entire conversation he'd just had, but he wanted Kyoko to know that there weren't any issues. "Kyosuke...he's not as bad as I thought."

"He can be reasonable, especially now." Kyoko commented. "So, I take it he told you then? You're going to be Head of Operations for the project he's been working on."

"Yeah, that's right!" Hajime couldn't help but grin as he spoke about it. "I'm so excited that we're going to be able to help people."

"It's what the Future Foundation is really about." Kyoko said. "That's the reason I joined."

"Maybe you'll be my boss." Hajime laughed. That being said, he wasn't sure if he'd like to work under Kyoko. Perhaps their friendship would develop best during out of work activities... "Anyway, are Fuyuhiko and Gundam awake yet?"

“I’m not sure, I haven’t heard anything from Makoto or Byakuya.” Kyoko replied. “But we can go and find out soon.”
“Can we go and see them now?” Hajime asked.

“Soon,” Kyoko promised. “But for now, there is someone I’d like you to meet.”

“Someone else?” Hajime sighed. He was growing tired of the meet and greets. He really didn't have the energy to discuss the Rewrite with more Future Foundation employees.

“Don’t sound so disappointed!” Kyoko scorned. “This is for your own benefit.”

"Who is it then?" Hajime couldn't think of anyone.

"That information is on a need to know basis, and you don't need to know yet." Kyoko was keeping her lips sealed once again.

"Aww come on!" Hajime whined.

Kyoko ignored Hajime's comment, glancing at her wristwatch instead. "Hmm, what time is it? Just gone one. So they'll probably be on their lunch break by now." she was mumbling away to herself.

Kyoko wasn’t giving anything away about the person’s identity, which only made Hajime's curiosity grow. “Where will we find them?”

“The staff canteen.” Kyoko answered. “I’m sure we can arrange a tour of the building for you later, but it will be good for you to know where the canteen is. Since you have accepted Kyosuke's offer, I'm sure that you will frequent there often.”

“I should probably learn to cook for myself soon enough.” Hajime laughed. “I can’t afford to live every day like I’m on Jabberwock Island.”

"All of the food is included under your living cost." Kyoko informed Hajime.

"Oh, so it's free?!" Hajime exclaimed. "In that case, show me where it is!"

Familiar with the route, Kyoko confidently walked Hajime to the staff canteen, which wasn’t far from their current location. Kyosuke had mentioned that if Teruteru woke up, he would be offered a role on the catering team, which Hajime presumed to be part of the staff canteen. Hajime really hoped to see him in there soon.

As Hajime walked along, he suddenly had an idea of who he might be meeting. "Oh, we're going to see your friends from Hope's Peak right? The ones who helped bring us here! I think one's called Hina..."

Kyoko expressed a small smile, but shook her head. “No, they’re elsewhere doing other things. Although, you will get to meet them later.”

“Then who am I meeting?!" Hajime pressed.

Kyoko ignored Hajime's nagging, for he would have his answer soon enough. They had arrived at the staff canteen, which didn't have a door, but an archway, which invited them inside.

The canteen was of a generous size. It was filled with large, circular, white tables, each one surrounded by ten chairs or so. Food was available towards the back of the canteen, where employees were serving up all kinds of hot and cold dishes, as well as snacks. Vending machines were also scattered throughout the room. The canteen was bustling with Future Foundation employees, who were all dressed in black suits. Through the sea of people, Hajime wasn't sure who
he was supposed to be visiting.

Scanning the room, it didn’t take Kyoko long to find who she was looking for. Presuming that Hajime was still following, the detective took off towards the left of the canteen, near a set of vending machines.

A man was sat at a table by himself, his back to Kyoko and Hajime. On the table in front of him was a dirty plate, along with two empty cans of soda from the vending machine. The man was dressed in all black, just like the other Future Foundation employees, but his outfit differed slightly from what Hajime had seen. Instead of a suit, the man wore black, long-sleeved overalls. As well as a baseball cap, which he wore backwards to keep his hair out of his face.

Kyoko tapped the man on the shoulder, aware that he hadn’t noticed her. “Now isn’t a bad time, is it?”

“Hmm?” the man turned around, curious to see who had called for him. When he looked up, he had the biggest grin on his face, exposing his shark-like teeth. Strands of his pink hair had fallen around his face from underneath the hat.

“S-Souda…?” Hajime let out the loudest gasp. He was seeing a ghost, he had to be.

“H-hey, man!” Souda was trying to play it cool, but his flushed cheeks said otherwise. He was in a fluster, thrilled at the chance of seeing his soul friend again. Souda stood up from the table to speak to them properly.

In that moment, Hajime didn’t need answers, all he wanted was a hug. He threw himself at the mechanic, almost sending him flying. Physical affection wasn’t something Hajime thrived off, but it was the reaction that seemed appropriate.

“You’re awake! You’re awake!” Hajime was almost shouting in his ear, but he couldn’t believe it. The best friend he presumed to be in a coma, was alive and well.

“H-Hajime, you’re...crushing...my...ribs…” Souda winced, pulling away from the hug so that he could breathe. “But it’s really good to see you!” he gave Hajime a slap on the back.

“How...how is this possible?” Hajime turned straight to Kyoko for answers. “I thought everyone who died during the game was still in a coma.”

"When Kazuichi died, he remembered everything about the Rewrite. With this knowledge, his brain realised that he wasn't truly dead." Kyoko explained, addressing Souda by his full name. "He woke up shortly after his in-game death, similarly to your plan."

Souda let out a sigh, the smile on his face disappearing. “I got to watch the class trial, and...I’m so sorry man. I didn’t think Monokuma was gonna hide my note. It was supposed to be easy for you guys.”

"Don't apologise, you weren't to know." Hajime insisted.

"But I'm sorry for all of it," Souda went on. "I didn't mean to kill Mahiru."

"You don't need to ask for my forgiveness, I know that everything was an accident." Hajime said supportively. "I'm...I'm just so glad that you've woken up."

Souda began grinning again. “It’s so good to see you, I’ve been waiting for this moment!”
“W-wait!” Hajime exclaimed, hit by a sudden realisation. “If Souda woke up because he remembered everything, does that mean Ibuki will too? She knew the truth of the Rewrite!”

“Uh…” Souda lowered his head. “Things aren’t as simple with Ibuki.”

“What do you mean?” Hajime frowned. “She knows about the Rewrite, so her brain can wake her up.”

“Yeah, she did…” Souda was trying to break the news gently. “But Ibuki’s death was so sudden, she didn’t have time to think about what was going on. Her brain told her she was dying. Remember in the ruin you told everyone that you couldn’t die from an explosion because it would be too quick? It's the same for Ibuki.”

“Ibuki hasn’t woken up, Hajime.” Kyoko clarified. “She’s still in her coma, like the others.”

“Oh…” the disappointment in Hajime’s voice was clear.

“But it doesn’t mean we give up hoping.” Souda reminded Hajime. “She stands a chance at waking up, just like the others.”

"I...I wanna believe that...but...this is no different than before." Hajime frowned, aware that he was being very negative. "Everyone thinks they're dead. We waited for two months last time and nobody woke up. How long is it going to take?"

"Wait...you don't know, do you?” Souda looked at Hajime.

"Know what?" Hajime replied.

"Have you told him?” Souda spoke cryptically to Kyoko.

"Not yet, there hasn't been time." Kyoko shook her head.

"Have the others not told him?" Souda tilted his head. "I heard Miss Sonia, Peko, and Nagito are awake."

"I haven't spoken to anyone, really." Hajime admitted. "I had to go and have my medical check, so we couldn't talk for long. I haven't seen Nagito at all yet."

"Haha, oh man, that means we get to tell him!" Souda seemed overly excited.

"Can someone just fill me in, please?” Hajime didn't like being out of the loop.

"Go on." Kyoko gestured to Souda, as she could see that he desperately wanted to be the one to tell Hajime.

"Chiaki restored all of the data from both games into the Neo World Program!" Souda exclaimed, practically shouting it from the rooftops. He received a few disapproving looks from other Future Foundation members within the canteen.

"H-huh?” for what felt like the fiftieth time that day, Hajime was lost.

"Perhaps I should explain," Kyoko cut in, as she could see that Souda was only confusing Hajime further, due to his excitement. "When you were with Chiaki, just before she passed, do you remember her mentioning something to you?"

"Oh, that's right!" Hajime recalled. "She told me that she'd uploaded her data into the Neo World
Program. But I never got to hear any more than that, because she was in so much pain."

"Chiaki uploaded all of her data and memories from both killing games," Kyoko said. "Since the Neo World Program was crumbling, due to Kyosuke's bug, it was easy enough for her to hack the system and do this. However, it did drain her greatly."

"It's what killed her." Hajime sighed.

"I know and it sucks," Souda said. "It was hard to watch. But Chiaki did something amazing, Hajime!"

"I'm still not following..." Hajime said.

"Hopefully, this is gonna wake everyone from their comas!" Souda said, smiling from ear to ear. "Cuz if their brains remember two killing games, they're gonna be confused right? Which should trick them into waking up."

"That's clever." Hajime admired Chiaki's plan. "I can see why Chiaki sacrificed her life for this..."

"We've gotta hold out hope, Hajime!" Souda seemed positive.

"There is something else I should tell you both," Kyoko said, with news to reveal. "Chiaki's actions have also had another effect. Sonia, Peko, and Nagito all have their memories back from the original game."

"I don't understand." Hajime frowned. "Their original memories were taken from them when they entered the Rewrite."

"Chiaki changed that." Kyoko said.

"Woah, that's crazy!" Souda gasped. "I already have my memories back cuz of Monokuma's fluke, so I had no idea."

"They really have all of their memories back?" Hajime thought it was too good to be true.

"Really." Kyoko promised. "Each of them told us as soon as they woke up."

"This is amazing!" Hajime grinned.

Hajime was excited for everyone to have their memories back, but he couldn't help feeling most excited about the original survivors. The five of them had been through a great ordeal, having survived the first killing game together. Although life after the game had been very depressing, a bond had been created between them, which was very special to Hajime. He felt like he was truly getting his friends back.

"This is just...it's...so much to take in." Hajime felt like he needed to sit down. "Souda, I still can't believe you've been alive this whole time."

“It’s been really tense watching everything.” Souda confessed. “Sometimes I’d be addicted to watching the monitors, but other times, I couldn’t look at all. I saw everyone tie you up and lock you in the old building.” Souda shook his head in disappointment. “It wasn’t fair what they did to you.”

“It’s in the past now, I have to let it go.” Hajime wasn’t going to hold a grudge; Monokuma had manipulated his friends.

"I get that." Souda nodded.
“If you’ve been alive all this time, why am I only just finding out?” Hajime had another question for Kyoko. “Couldn’t you have said something when you were communicating with me through the monitors?”

“We didn’t want to distract you.” Kyoko replied. “If you were overjoyed about Kazuichi, your decisions might have become more reckless. Additionally, we didn’t want you copying in his footsteps if you heard that dying in the Neo World Program, whilst being aware that you aren’t really experiencing death, will free you.”

“But that’s exactly what I did…” Hajime scratched his head.

“You discovered that solution through your own thinking and determination. If you didn’t put much thought into it, many things could have gone wrong.” Kyoko continued. “If you thought dying would free you, who knows which quick ditch attempt you might have made?”

“I see, that does make sense.” Hajime understood why the truth had been kept from him.

“I was always cheering you on from the sides!” Souda exclaimed, thrilled to be with his friend again.

“I see the Future Foundation has converted you into wearing black.” Hajime laughed. “I never thought I’d see the day that Souda would be parted from his beloved beanie and yellow jumpsuit.”

“Yeah, they make me wear a uniform around here, it’s kinda crap.” Souda sighed, fiddling with his baseball cap. “Only when I’m workin’ though.”

"Ah yeah, Kyosuke said something about that." Hajime said, reflecting on Kyosuke's strange comment about Souda.

“Yeah, they’ve hired me in the mechanical department.” Souda explained. “I work on the Future Foundation’s limos and helicopters and stuff. Usually, I’m just repairing them, but I get to add upgrades sometimes!”

“It sounds like you’re living the dream.” Hajime smiled, pleased to see Souda so happy. “Kyosuke hasn’t tried killing you in your sleep then?”

“Hajime…” Kyoko sighed.

“What?!” Hajime shrugged. “It was just a joke.”

“Nah, Kyosuke’s an alright guy.” Souda shared. “He mainly keeps himself to himself, but he’s created jobs for all of us here. The guy’s really making an effort.”

It reassured Hajime to know that Souda was getting on with Kyosuke, it gave Hajime more reason to trust the Future Foundation leader.

"I thought meeting with Kazuichi might help develop your trust in Kyosuke." Kyoko explained. "Kazuichi woke up on the ship I was telling you about, so he’s been through everything."

“I was the ship’s captain for a while.” Souda boasted.

“I bet you loved that.” Hajime grinned.

As they were talking, a bell sounded in the canteen, which interrupted their conversation.

"Ugh." Souda sighed, his shoulders drooping. "That means I've gotta get back to work."
"Aw, that's a shame." Hajime was enjoying his time with Souda.

"I'm sure you two will catch up later." Kyoko said. "Since Hajime is staying here now, you'll likely be in the same accommodation."

“Oh yeah, I remember hearing something about free accommodation.” Hajime recalled.

“Everyone who works here gets put up for free.” Souda elaborated. “There’s a building just around the corner from this one, where all of the accommodation is.”

“That sounds pretty great.” Hajime nodded.

"We can go there shortly," Kyoko promised. "Once we've returned to check on the others, we can go on a tour."

"You're going to see everyone?" Souda pouted. "I wanna come and see Miss Sonia!"

“Does she want to see you?!" Kyoko frowned.

“Hey, of course she does!” Souda protested.

“Kazuichi, you just said it yourself that you need to get back to work.” Kyoko reminded him. “There will be time to see Sonia later.”

Souda was working for a professional company, he couldn’t slack off.

“Awww man.” Kazuichi pouted, genuinely gutted. “Can’t I come along for just five minutes?”

Kyoko paused for a moment, caught up in her thoughts. "...I'm not your manager, but I suppose I can give you permission to miss work for a short while, since this is a rather important circumstance."

"Exactly! Thank you, Kyoko!" Souda attempted to high five Kyoko, but she didn't return the exchange.

"Let's go!" Hajime couldn’t wait to take Souda back to the others. He was really excited to see his friends knowing that all of their memories had returned.

Returning to the pod room, Hajime was greeted by a group of people that he didn't recognise. Sonia, Peko, Makoto, and Byakuya had all disappeared, and there was no sign of Nagito either. Instead, Hajime was faced with three people that he didn't know: a man and two women.

The man seemed especially laid back; his dreadlocks pinned back into a ponytail and his trousers rolled high up his legs. He wore flip-flops and his glasses rested halfway down his nose.

The first woman was dressed a little more formally than the man. Her hair exceptionally long hair had been tied back into a plait, which fell close to her ankles. She wore a smart blazer and suit, with a striking purple tie.

The other woman was smiling a lot more than the woman she stood beside. From her appearance alone, Hajime could see that she was an approachable person. She wore a blazer, but dressed down her suit with a pair of shorts.

“Kyoko, Souda nice to see ya! Ah, you must be Hajime.” the man approached Hajime with a friendly grin. He held out his hand and pulled Hajime in for a rough handshake, before Hajime had the chance to object.
“D-don’t be so rough with him!” the formal woman snapped, staring disapprovingly.

“Hi, Hajime!” the other woman smiled.

“Um, nice to meet you all.” Hajime said, despite being unsure of who he was talking to.

“W-why are you looking at me like that?!” the woman stammered.

“Oh, I wasn’t doing anything.” Hajime protested. "Sorry if I offended you..." 

Kyoko cut in before things escalated. “Hajime, meet Yasuhiro Hagakure, Toko Fukawa, and Aoi Asahina. They’re survivors of the killing school life, and trusted members of the Future Foundation.”

“Ah, I see.” Hajime nodded. Their names did sound familiar from files that he had read. “I’m Hajime Hinata.”

“We know all about you.” Hina said. “We watched the entire game.”

“Y-you really made life hard for yourself.” Toko commented.

“It’s not like I did it on purpose.” Hajime frowned.

“I think you did a great job, Hajime!” Yasuhiro praised. “I predicted from the start that there was going to be seven survivors, which includes Souda.”

“Hiro is the Ultimate Clairvoyant.” Hina explained, giving Hajime some background.

“Oh right, well congrats. That’s impressive.” Hajime said, although he wasn’t one to believe in fortune telling.

“I predicted something else about your game too,” Yasuhiro said.

“S-shut u-p, you’re b-boring him.” Toko glared.

“No, it’s fine.” Hajime spoke out of politeness. “What did you predict?”

“I predicted that everyone is going to wake up.” Yasuhiro said. “So just wait and see, Hajime!”

“I will.” Hajime replied, though he wasn’t particularly confident.

As nice as it was meeting the other school survivors, Hajime really didn’t want to stand around talking about the Rewrite. He wanted to know where his friends had gone, and if there was an update on Gundam and Fuyuhiko's situation.

“What’s going on in here? Has anyone woken up yet?” Hajime cut straight to the point.

"Yeah, man." Yasuhiro nodded.

“Who’s woken up?” Hajime pressed. He wanted names.

“T-the small one.” Toko gave a poor description. "And the c-creepy looking goth one."

"Fuyuhiko and Gundam both woke up?!” Hajime exclaimed.

"That would make sense," Kyoko pondered. "They died at the same time as Hajime."

"I can't believe it, everyone's awake!" Hajime grinned.
Knowing that all of the survivors had woken up, filled Hajime with a sense of joy. His plan in the ruin was an incredibly risky one, which could have gone very wrong. Yet somehow, all of his friends had managed to pull through. Hajime took a huge risk, but it paid off. He finally felt like he'd done something right.

"Where's Miss Sonia?" Souda interrupted them.

"Everyone is in a meeting right now with Makoto and Byakuya." Yasuhiro explained.

"When I brought Nagito back from his checkup, Gundam and Fuyuhiko were already awake." Hina said. "Apparently we just missed you, Hajime."

"Aw, that's annoying." Hajime felt a little gutted that he'd missed seeing his friends by a few minutes.

"You'll see them soon!" Hina smiled. "The meeting shouldn't last too much longer."

"I-I think it will." Toko objected. "N-Nagito wouldn't shut up asking questions." she didn't seem very fond of the Luckster.

Hajime wondered how his friends were going to react to the truth, which they would learn in the meeting. Would they react as badly as Hajime had initially done? If his friends were struggling to accept the news, Hajime hoped that he could calm them down himself.

“I hope they’re getting on okay.” Hajime said. “I know first hand how much of a shock this all is…”

“Even if they are in shock, I’m sure that they’ll come round.” Kyoko reassured Hajime. “If you can do it, they definitely can.”

“Let me message Makoto!” Hina offered. “I’ll tell him that you and Souda are here, so we can go and join the others once the meeting is over.”

“Thanks, that would be great.” Hajime smiled.

“I can’t wait to see everyone!” Souda was pumped.

Hina retrieved her cell phone from her shorts, sending a quick message to Makoto as promised. “I’ll let you know when he replies.”

With time to spare, Hajime chose to stay in the pod room. He still had so much to talk about, so he didn’t mind being made to wait.

“Oh, I’ve been meaning to ask,” Hajime said, speaking to all of the Future Foundation representatives. “When Monokuma held us hostage, to play Vodobuki, I really thought we were gonna die. Then this siren came from nowhere and messed with all of the clones. You guys had something to do with that, right?”

“Ha, yes, that was my idea.” Souda smirked, looking exceptionally pleased with himself.

“T-there’s no n-need to brag.” Toko scowled.

“You’re just jealous because you never have any good ideas!” Souda retorted. “Anyway Hajime, it was my idea to send out a high-frequency noise, as I had a strong idea that it would mess with the clones.”

“It didn’t mess with Monokuma though.” Hajime said.
“Naa, with Junko’s A.I. inside of him, he was a lot stronger.” Souda explained. “It would’ve been too difficult trying to take him down as well.”

“We didn’t expect Junko’s A.I. to take over Chiaki’s body.” Hina reflected. “We didn’t know it had happened until we saw Chiaki moving in the Dojo.”

“It was pretty sad, because we thought she was still alive.” Souda sighed. “We pretty much discovered the truth when you did.”

“I guess there was no way we could’ve prepared for that one.” Hajime said. “But I’m glad I escaped the Rewrite when I did. Who knows what Junko would have done next.”

“If you stayed in the Rewrite, I believe your chances of survival would have been slim.” Kyoko admitted.

“I feel bad for you guys,” Hajime said, gesturing to the school survivors. “You actually met Junko in person.”

“D-don’t remind m-me.” Toko shuddered.

“Hey!” Hina interrupted their conversation, calling out, holding her phone in the air. “Makoto just replied! Their meeting is over, so we can head down now.”

Hajime felt a rush of excitement; he was going to see his friends.

“Hell yeah!” Souda roared.

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Hajime stood outside Meeting Room B for the second time that day. His heart was racing with excitement, knowing that his friends were waiting for him inside. Souda seemed just as happy, grinning like a fool as he waited with Hajime.

Hina knocked on the door, asking whether she could come in. Hina had chosen to accompany Kyoko and the boys, since she seemed fond of the seventy-seventh class and enjoyed being around them. Toko and Yasuhiro had not joined the group. Yasuhiro had to get back to work, and Toko made her excuses since she didn’t seem very keen on being around Nagito again.

“Come in!” Makoto called out cheerily from inside the meeting room.

Hajime didn’t need telling twice; he reached for the handle and opened the door. Stepping into the meeting room, Hajime was delighted by what he saw.

The five survivors of the Second Killing School Trip were gathered around the gigantic table, seated in the oversized, comfy swivel chairs. They were laughing and talking amongst themselves, sipping away at cups of tea and water that had been provided for them. Makoto and Byakuya stood at the head of the table, looking pleased with themselves.

As soon as Hajime entered the room, all eyes were on him. Overcome with emotion at seeing all of his friends together again, Hajime didn’t know what to say. However, Hajime never got the chance to make an introduction anyway, as Souda had barged past him.
"M-Miss Sonia!" Souda beamed. "I’ve been waiting for this moment for so long!"

Sonia looked straight past Souda, turning to Hajime. “Hajime! Please sit down, we have so much to talk about.” her previous conversation with Hajime had been brief.

“M-Miss Sonia…” Souda looked crestfallen that he had been ignored.

“C’mon, let’s sit down.” Hajime gestured to Souda, attempting to keep his spirits high.

There were no free seats next to Sonia, so Souda sat by Fuyuhiko, allowing him to be opposite his Princess. Hajime sat next to Nagito, who smiled at him as he sat down. Even though Nagito had his original game memories back, he still seemed fond of Hajime.

Kyoko and Hina chose not to sit down, standing with their colleagues instead, involved in their own private conversation. They were leaving the survivors alone to have their own catch-up.

“Would you like some tea, Hajime?” Sonia asked, reaching for the teapot that had been placed on the table.

“We have water too.” Peko offered, pointing to a jug.

“Tea sounds good, please.” Hajime nodded, accepting Sonia’s offer.

“I’ll have one too!” Souda requested, despite not being asked.

Sonia politely poured two cups of tea, though Hajime had half expected for Sonia to tell Souda to do it himself.

Souda took the tea gratefully, as if it were the best present he had ever been given. Hajime also gratefully received his drink, wrapping his hands around the warm beverage.

“This doesn’t seem real, all of us being here.” Hajime remarked, looking at each of his friends one by one in delight.

“It’s good to see ya, Hajime.” Fuyuhiko smiled at his friend. “Thank again for what you did. I really didn’t fancy bein’ blown up.”

“Yes, thank you. You saved my Young Master.” Peko was just as grateful.

“Hey, I told you to drop that title!” Fuyuhiko insisted. “I have a name.”

“Sorry…Fuyuhiko.” Peko still found it strange to say.

“Indeed, I owe my life to you, Hajime.” Gundam said.

“How did you two find waking up?” Hajime asked. “I guess you went through the glitching like the rest of us.”

“That part was pretty shit.” Fuyuhiko admitted. “It felt so real; I was on trial for Peko’s murder.”

“It seems that the glitching picks on our darkest fears.” Sonia theorised.

"I do not have the words to describe how it felt; hell is not strong enough." Gundam remarked. “Thankfully, Fuyuhiko and I both woke up from that nightmare.”

“Yeah, apparently you died before us, Hajime.” Fuyuhiko said. “And cuz of that whole ‘our life is
connected to yours’ thing, Gundam and I died when you did. So we both woke up at the same time, shortly after you.”

"You guys all did so well." Hajime praised. "I know how difficult the drowning was, it was basically torture. But you all managed to think your way out of the program."

"I’ve never felt anything like it." Fuyuhiko confessed his struggles. "I never want to experience that again."

"I was desperate for the pain to be over.” Sonia shared.

"It was worth it though.” Nagito spoke up, smiling at Hajime. “It’s nice to finally see you.”

“You too.” Hajime nodded.

"Hajime, there is something that we should tell you…” Sonia said, hesitating to see if the others wanted to speak first.

However, Hajime already had an idea of what she was going to say. “I know already… I think? You guys have your memories back, right?”

“Yes, that is right!” Sonia was smiling from ear to ear. “I remember everything now from before the Rewrite, and I cannot believe what you did for us.”

“Remembering the other game, it’s like a whole other world.” Fuyuhiko said. “Thanks for saving Peko this time, I couldn’t imagine life without her.”

“It was a team effort, really.” Hajime insisted. “You placed your lives in my hands and let me enter the Rewrite. Not to mention, you trusted me when I asked you all to drown.”

“My memories from the previous game are rather short, because I died so early.” Peko said. “It feels entirely different being one of the survivors.”

"I agree.” Gundam was in the same position as Peko.

Nagito began chuckling away to himself.

"What's so funny?” Hajime asked, feeling as if he'd missed the joke.

"I was just thinking back." Nagito replied. "With my memories returned to me, I understand now why you were so terrified when I brought the weapons into the ruin. You probably thought I was going to pull another stunt again."

"That's exactly what I thought!” Hajime exclaimed. "So, anyway, you guys have finished the meeting?” Hajime was desperate to know how his classmates felt about the truth. They seemed very calm, which was a good sign.

“We know everything.” Sonia nodded. “We are in the Future Foundation’s reserve headquarters, as Kyosuke has made peace with us.”

“Apparently, he was part of another killing game.” Peko said. "As the only survivor, he feels differently now about despair."

“How do you guys feel about being here?” Hajime asked, wanting to make sure his friends were okay.
“We were all very scared at first,” Sonia confessed. “But Makoto told us the full story very quickly, and I know that we can trust in him.”

“I met with Kyosuke earlier,” Hajime informed them. “He’s okay. I loathed him until now, but his killing game has really changed him. He’s got a plan to save the world.”

“So we were told.” Gundam replied. “We have all been allocated jobs within the Future Foundation.”

"I cannot wait to get working!” Sonia clapped her hands together.

“Yeah check you out Hajime, Mr Head of Operations!” Fuyuhiko grinned, pleased with Hajime’s success.

“Nagito, how do you feel about all of this?” Hajime asked.

Nagito loathed the Future Foundation just as much as Hajime had done, if not more. Would Nagito need more persuading than Hajime that things were going to be okay?

“I…” Nagito hesitated, carefully choosing the right words. “I will never agree with what Kyosuke did, but with his new plan, he seems to have finally found hope. I want to be a part of something that will restore society from its despair.”

“I hear Kyosuke has arranged jobs for the others too, if they wake up.” Peko said. “It was nice of him to do that.”

“I’ve got a really good feeling about their chances of waking up.” Souda joined in. “I know we waited such a long time before, but things are different this time. Chiaki gave her life to save everyone.”

“Ah yes, we found out what truly killed Chiaki.” Sonia lowered her head out of respect. “I knew that she was behaving strangely, but I did not know why.”

“Yeah, she was uploading all of her data.” Fuyuhiko discussed.

“Their chances seem strong.” Fuyuhiko spoke positively. "I'm sure we'll be seein' the others in no time."

Hajime didn't know what their chances were, for there was no way of knowing. However, Chiaki had given her life in an attempt to save their friends, which had to mean something. No matter how long it took, Hajime refused to give up hope; he was going to visit them every day. Even if Hajime's friends were to remain in their comas for a very long time, Hajime had no regrets for entering the Rewrite. Not only had he managed to save seven people, including himself, but Hajime had learnt so much about himself. The first killing game had changed him, but the second one had truly opened his eyes. Hajime had entered the Rewrite so naively, convinced that he could breeze through the game and stop any murders from happening. Things had not gone to plan, but Hajime never gave up. Even when thrown into the old building and locked up by his classmates, Hajime fought for them. The powerful A.I. Junko confronted Hajime, but he still stood strong and concocted a plan to save his friends.

As Hajime drank his tea, he zoned out of the conversation. His friends were busy discussing their plans to tour the headquarters once they had finished their drinks. Hajime was too busy smiling, taking in his friends’ happiness, appreciating that they were alive. For Hajime, the future was uncertain, but he wasn’t in the dark. Although he had no idea what was going to happen to the others, he was going to believe. Hajime had a bright future ahead of him. He was going to work for
the Future Foundation, on a mission to save the world from despair. The best way to describe Hajime's mood was hopeful. For the first time, in a very long time, Hajime Hinata felt safe.

The sun beamed down on Jabberwock Island, its warm rays reflecting on the beautiful, blue ocean. A close group of friends were sat on the sand, sipping away at fruit cocktails served in coconuts, and basking in the heat.

“GREAT JOB TERUTERU!” Nekomaru roared, downing his drink in one. “These cocktails are AMAZING!”

“Thank you!” Teruteru beamed, pleased that his work was being admired. “All of the fresh fruits that I used were found on the island.”

“Mikan, gimme yours, I want more.” Hiyoko reached out, attempting to snatch Mikan’s drink.

“Y-you’re spilling it e-everywhere!” Mikan protested, desperately trying to keep hold of her coconut.

“Hey, no fighting. There’s plenty to go around.” Teruteru calmly poured Hiyoko another serving from the jug that he was holding.

“Ibuki wants more too!” Ibuki called for Teruteru’s attention.

“Days like this are my favourite.” Akane sighed blissfully, lounging on the sand. "I wish they could go on forever."

“It really is beautiful.” Mahiru agreed.

“Do you think Chiaki is okay?” the Imposter asked, changing the subject. “She’s been staring out to sea for an awfully long time now.”

Chiaki had walked further down the beach to dip her feet in the water. She was staring out ahead, taking in the beautiful view as a gentle breeze touched her face.

“Hey, Chiaki!” Ibuki yelled from across the beach. “Are you gonna finish your drink, or can I have it?”

“Does Chiaki not like it!” Teruteru exclaimed, paranoid that someone was not enjoying his creation.

“I d-don’t think s-she heard y-you.” Mikan spoke up, since Chiaki had not replied.

“Well obviously, Pig Barf.” Hiyoko rolled her eyes.

“Chiaki?” Ibuki called for the Gamer again, even louder this time.

“Hm?” Chiaki turned around, finally having heard her name. “Sorry...did you say something?”

“You're off with the fairies again!” Ibuki laughed.

“Sorry, I was thinking about something…” Chiaki stepped out of the water, walking back towards her friends.
“What were you thinkin’ about?” Akane quizzed her.

“Us.” Chiaki said, solemnly. “It’s time for you to wake up now.”


“This isn't Jabberwock Island, not even the one in the Neo World Program.” Chiaki reminded them. The Jabberwock Island in the program had been destroyed by Kyosuke and his bug. “When I uploaded my data into the system, I created a new file within the Neo World Program. So to speak, it's a bubble where all of you and your memories are safe. We're in that bubble now, but it isn't real and we can’t stay here.”

“At least let me whip up another round of drinks.” Teruteru offered.

“Chiaki is right though, we can’t stay inside the Neo World Program forever…” Mahiru reasoned.

“But waking up is going to be such a chore.” Hiyoko pouted, siding with Akane. “When we wake up, we have to deal with getting our memories back. It's too much to think about.”

"W-we should j-just be thankful that w-we got them back a-at all." Mikan said, positively.

“And what about you, Chiaki?” the Imposter asked. “Once we leave, what happens to you?”

“I’m already gone…I’m nothing but a message that I left behind.” Chiaki said, softly. “But it isn’t too late for you. It’s time to wake up now; Hajime is waiting.”

Chapter End Notes

I can’t quite believe it, but that's it, we're done. Two years and thirty-two chapters later, Hajime's story has been told.

I’m usually pretty bad at finishing projects, but I’ve never felt so passionately before about something than I have this story. It definitely took a while to write; lots of hurdles got in the way. That being said, I’m glad I got to take my time with it and not rush anything because all of you are so lovely and so patient.

I want to give a huge thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone that has taken the time to read this story, give kudos, and write comments. I can’t explain how much I appreciate your words and time. I would feel in a bit of a writing funk, but then get such a lovely comment which would motivate me to get back into writing. I feel like I sound so cheesy and annoying, but honestly, I can't say thank you enough.

I’m not always the quickest at replying to comments, but I do promise to reply to all of them. You guys make the effort to write to me, so I will too! I love talking to you all. I like taking my time to reply properly, but this is why it can be slow sometimes. And like if you’ve left a comment but I never replied, do let me know, because they get buried sometimes, especially on older chapters. Also, omg if you notice that your comment gets edited like 300 times, it's because ao3 does this really annoying thing where I write a comment, but it decides to chop off half of my message.
So yeah even though this story is over, I will still be around to chat in the comments. If you have any questions, ask away and I will do my best to answer them. Though lol I'll be straight up honest, if your question is about a plot hole or me saying I’m going to write something but then it never appears in the story, just put that down to the story going for 2 years. I tweak the story all the time as I go, but don’t read back all the previous chapters, maybe just a chapter or two before. I’m sure there’s probably a lot of plot holes within the story. So we can blame that on Sophie from two years ago hahaha.

Someday I would like to go back and improve the quality of some of the earlier chapters. My writing has gotten so much better over the past 2 years, so some of the writing earlier on in the story makes me cringe hahaha.

As for future plans, a V3 fic is in development. It’s going to be an alternative killing story, although it won’t follow the same premise as rewrite (i.e. going back in time to stop the murders). This will be totally new motives and murders, just because I adore writing class trials. This is still very much in its early stages, as I wanted to finish rewrite first, but the story plan has been fleshed out. Once I start writing, I will start posting. I don’t think I could wait for the story to be finished considering this one took two years lol.

I realise this is getting long ahhh, but just a couple more things that I wanted to say!

Thank you again for the TV Tropes page that has been set up for this fic. I can't even begin to explain to you how happy this makes me, like I don't have the words. I proper geek out everytime that I see it's been updated hahaha. It's so awesome, so a huge thank you to everyone who spends their time updating and editing it!!!
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/ProjectRewrite

I also wanted to give a big shoutout to my lovely friend, Alice. She has made so many cool drawings for this fic. I have linked it before, but I'm just so in love with this drawing.
https://78.media.tumblr.com/9146641b5eda40ead4959aef8ade106/tumblr_oct699IItL1vag30so1_500.png
Alice makes great Danganronpa art & you can find her work on dailydanganronpadoodles.tumblr.com as well as iamlclearlyyouroverlord.tumblr.com.

My own tumblr is everything-goes-dark.tumblr.com. Sadly, I don't post any cool DR artwork on my blog, but I do reblog lots of Dangan content. I don't check it toooooo often, so I'm sometimes a bit poo at replying to my messages on there, but I try!

One final note before I wrap this up.... I have some chapters for this story that I never published. There are some murders, class trials, death scenes etc that never got posted. This is because I would take the story in a different direction and had to make the cut. So maybe I'll post those some day if you're interested.

I’m going to stop waffling now, I don’t even know if people are still reading? Once again, I would just like to say a huge thank you. Thank you to everyone here for coming along on this journey with me. It’s been so much fun and I hope to see you sometime in the future with my new story.

Much love,

Sophie Enoshima x
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!