**Prologue: The Delinquent Prodigy**

**1 – Delinquent Prodigy**

"Aah~ I finally got the latest Magical Girl Kawaii-chan keychain!"

The mass of people stared awkwardly at the high school student that shouted passionately at the sky. They looked at him like he was a nuisance while some didn’t give him the time of day and minded their own business. The student didn’t seem to care for any of the attention he caught and went his own way.

"Yes! Finally, after a long time of collecting Magical Girl Kawaii-chan collectibles, I can say that I completed it yet again!"

The name of the student who was bragging to himself about his collection was Konjou Ryosei. A 2nd-year high school student with black hair and eyes with the left side of his hair tied in a red string. He grinned elatedly as he safely stored the keychain he just bought in his bag.

As you can tell, he is an otaku. He is a 17-year-old that lives alone and he spends most of his time with his hobbies watching anime, reading manga, collecting figurines, and other things. At first, one would think he was just a nerdy loser with nothing better to do in his life. However, he kept a mind-boggling secret hidden away from the world.

“Oh, h-hi there, Konjou-san. We haven’t really talked at school but I wanted to thank you for yesterday. Also, to apologize since because of me… your leg was…”

Another student with the same uniform as Konjou approached him. He had brown hair and eyes. He seemed to have the same passion in his eyes as Ryosei had earlier but with a hint of guilt as he mentioned the state of his right leg. Noticing that, Ryosei’s elated grin twisted into an awkward smile as he knew exactly what this was about.

“Yesterday? Oh, don’t worry about that one it wasn’t anything major. Look, see? My leg is perfectly fine. I know a thing or two about how to heal these kinds of things quickly, you see…”

Ryosei hopped around on his right leg to show its healthy shape and reassure the student.

“Just don’t talk about it with others.”

“It really does look healed… I got it, I won’t tell anyone but… Konjou-san, I know this is rude for me to ask, but why are you always alone? I-I don’t mean that in a bad way or anything, I just thought that anyone would love to have someone like you around as a friend. You have a great personality and you even helped me with those kidnappers and that… thing from yesterday. I know this is presumptuous of me but… why don’t we become friends and I can—”

“Ah, about that… can we talk about that another time? I actually have something to do. Well then, see you at school.”

“Ah, w-wait a second! Konjou-san!”

The student was silenced as Ryosei cut him off mid-sentence and ran off. He tried to reach out to Ryosei but he was too quick for him and got left behind.

After reaching a good distance between them, Ryosei slowed down and sat down on a nearby bench.

“Wow, my body really took a huge decline. Usually running that much would be nothing for me but here I am sweating…”

Ryosei wasn’t out of breath. Other than the small beads of sweat running down his face there weren’t any signs showing that he was tired.

“Friends, huh… I don’t think someone like me deserves one of those… not someone who ran away from them.”

Ryosei recalled a few years ago when his parents died due to illness. He remembered the sorrow he felt for his parents' death, along with the regret of the emotion-driven decision he chose right after that. He shut himself in his home, never to be seen by anyone after a few weeks, and in that time, he finally came out of the house and set himself a new goal.

*\*Alright!! Time to collect all the Magical Girl Kawaii-chan collectibles!\**

In his time of isolation, he came about a new hobby and became an otaku. He spent his time watching anime and reading manga. He really came falling down after his parent's death. It was something he did to move on from the tragic event, but that came with the cost of the friends he already had.

The moment his relatives got wind of his transformation; they were thrown into a panic. They were thinking "THAT KONJOU RYOSEI... turned into an OTAKU?!" and "I know his parents' death must have been hard for him but for him to turn into this!?" It was chaos. his relatives tried their best to convince him to go back to normal, but that proved to be useless. He was too far in. There was no saving him now.

The reason that his relatives were so worked up about him becoming an otaku is that the Konjou clan is a clan of hunters specialized in the supernatural, and Konjou Ryosei was their prodigy. Before his parents died, they taught him the techniques of their family to pass it down to the next generation.

The first week he started learning their techniques, he had already excelled. He learned and mastered everything at an unbelievable rate, faster than anyone ever before. He even improved the Konjou Style and created new techniques.

Most of the new techniques he made were almost inimitable. Made with such precision that a single mistake in timing could endanger the user. It was something that only the strongest of the hunters dared to learn. But that was not the only thing that made him special. Ryosei had an abnormal ability to completely read people. He could tell what people are actually feeling and tell if they were lying or not. Not a single lie got through his impenetrable defense.

Everyone was in shock. To think someone so young had already mastered techniques and even started creating new ones that surpassed their greatest skills. He was called the "Young Prodigy" and praised by everyone.

But now, after his parents' death, he became an otaku and stopped improving the Konjou Style and started collecting Magical Girl Kawaii-chan collectibles instead. His relatives couldn't do anything about it. Not even the strongest could force him out of his cage. They could only watch as the "Young Prodigy" wasted his time and money on collectibles and anime.

It didn't take long for his title to turn from "Young Prodigy" to "Delinquent Prodigy." Though Ryosei didn't care, most of the family's elders looked down at him in disappointment. And now the "Delinquent Prodigy" is reminiscing his past with an aching feeling of regret.

“‘Delinquent Prodigy,’ huh? Sounds like a perfect fit, to be honest.”

**2 – Little Girl**

As Ryosei ridiculed himself, he saw a little girl walking by with a bag of groceries. From the looks of it, she was no more than 10 years old. It’d make perfect sense for this to be per first-ever grocery run alone, but instead of a face of excitement or anxiety, she possessed a lonely expression. Her mind was taken by something else besides her solo excursion out in town.

*\*I wonder if she had a fight or something with her parents\**

Just as the thought crossed his mind, he let out a pained chuckle as he formed his thoughts into words.

“I’m sure she’d be really pissed if she saw me now.”

Ryosei was close with his parents, even while training they'd sometimes fool around and chase each other. His parents would play along with his stupid antics but they'd be strict when they need to. Ryosei was very fond of them.

“Damn, that guy earlier really threw me off… I think his name was… something-something Ryuuji. Was his last name that confusing? I don’t remember.”

He stopped reminiscing the past and came back to reality. He stood up from the bench and opted to go back home. Suddenly, the little girl he was looking at earlier froze in the middle of the street. But why?

\**HONK! HONK!\**

It seemed like the little girl froze under the loud honks that were quickly approaching her. It was a speeding truck, but why didn’t she just run? The truck may have been speeding but if she picked up the pace and hurried to the other side there wouldn’t be any problem. It looked like she was in total shock.

Then, a better question crossed his mind. Why didn’t the driver just pump the breaks? Ryosei could tell that the truck wouldn’t be able to stop in time to avoid the girl, but he could still give her time by using the breaks.

“CRAP! RUN! GET OUT OF THERE!!”

Ryosei shouted at the girl but it fell on deaf ears as she was too shocked to hear his voice. The girl could have saved herself if she ran or jumped out of the way. Unfortunately, any normal human could freeze under death’s glare and she was just a kid who wouldn’t know what to do if her mind was in a panic.

*\*She's not going to make it!\**

Ryosei thought to himself. He wondered what kind of parents would let a child go out on their own without even knowing what to do in these situations, but the situation had worsened. There was no one else that could save her. Not herself, nor the driver.

“I SAID GET OUT OF THE WAY!!!”

Ryosei shouted as he ran to the girl and pushed her away with incredible speed. Human limits would say such speed was unreachable for the strongest of humans, but he broke those limits as if it were nothing. It was almost as if he teleported to the girl. To top it off, a strong gust of wind blew against the girl as she flew towards the sidewalk, negating the force Ryosei transferred to her and safely placing her away from harm.

\*Good! Now, to just—!?\*

As Ryosei planted his right foot on the ground, a strong pain surged throughout his whole leg, failing him, and sending him to his knees in the middle of the street. He acted with the intention to leave as soon as possible but that didn’t seem to be an option anymore. Although it looked bleak, he outstretched his hand with a serious expression but no trace of worry. The truck approached closer, closer, and closer, until it made contact with his hand, and right at that moment…

“Huh…?”

A small utterance of confusion.

\**CRAAAAAAAASH!!!\**

As such, he didn't get away.

His eyes were slowly losing their light. He looked around to see that the girl he pushed away is safe and was on the other side of the street and with the bystanders panicking to call an ambulance.

*\*H-Huh…? Now… that’s strange. M-My spirit power… didn’t work? Is it because… I haven’t used it in a while? Wait… h-huh? Am I… dying? I… can’t move.\**

Slowly, his vision was turning dark. He can feel the cold coating his body and slowly losing control over his senses. At that moment, death was staring at him and was ready to collect his soul.

*\*Huh... to think it'd turn out like this... I guess my decline hit me harder than I thought. All of that running away and lazing around got me here. How pathetic. There's… no way I'll make it out now, huh? W-Well, at least I saved that girl. Compared to me, she’d probably live a better life worth more than mine.\**

He berated himself for dying so easily. In his mind, the only reason he was dying right now was that he chose to run away. He chose not to direct the blame to anyone else. Then, the girl he saved ran to his side with teary eyes. She held his hand and was shouting something at him but this became inaudible to Ryosei's ears.

Ryosei saw as her purple eyes began to moisten. Then a thought came to mind. He moved the hand the girl was holding and put his hand on her head.

*\*Such... sad eyes... these eyes don't look like they are only sad because the stranger who saved them is dying. The sadness in those eyes... run even deeper... It's like it's been there since long ago. It’s almost like her eyes describe herself.\**

But that didn't make sense. The girl didn't even look like she was in her teens. How can someone so young have such eyes, Ryosei thought.

He scrutinized the girl's face. He looked at the girl as if peering into her soul. He mustered with all the strength he had and smiled at her. His face was beaming. Despite being on the brink of death he smiled at her and gave off a warm feeling that seemed like it was trying to reassure her. If it weren't for all the blood and dirt, it would look like a scene from a manga.

"Looks like… you’re no different from me…"

“Eh…?”

“I think… purple hyacinth… would look good with those eyes…”

Those were his last words before losing all his strength. Once Ryosei's hand let go of her and fell to the ground, the girl started panicking but it was useless and soon all he could see was darkness.

\**I guess this is it for me. I wonder if this means I’ll be able to meet my parents again? If it does… what do I even say? Or… should I even show myself to them. After what I did… Just maybe… I could get a chance. A single chance… to fix everything. To get rid of my regret. Just one, single change to change my decision… I would… \**

After a while, the ambulance would arrive, but only to see that, The Delinquent Prodigy, Konjou Ryosei, had already passed away.

**Chapter 1: 'Accidental' Meeting**

**3 – Morning Battles**

**「**7 Years Later」

It was Monday, a school day, and students are preparing themselves for another week of learning and socializing. The students of Honshou Academy are living their normal everyday lives chatting with each other and fooling around with friends on their way to school. The students continue funneling into the school gates for a while like normal.

The chime was about to ring and there was no one else entering the school, except for one student who was making a mad dash for the school gates. That student was Yukou Senkyo, a 2nd-year high school student. He had brown hair and eyes and has no noticeable features.

He is an otaku, one that has a wide range of hobbies like anime, manga, light novels, visual novels, and various games. Right now, he is using all of his strength to make it to his classroom before the chime rings. The reason he got himself into this situation was that he was up all night reading light novels.

He was not a part of any clubs and goes straight home after school unless something comes up like a newly released game, figurine, or anything at all that involves his hobbies or needs. Though despite being an otaku and having occasional all-nighters, he kept his grades average to make up for it.

"I made it!"

Senkyo shouted as he arrived in the classroom as the chime rang. Despite making his desperate sprint, he didn’t look too tired.

"Yo, Senkyo. you made it on the dot again, huh?"

The person who greeted him in class was his best friend and classmate, Honjou Kinro. They met in middle school where they talked to each other in class and later on became friends when they started talking about light novels. They had surprisingly similar interests despite being completely different.

He had blonde hair with dark blue eyes. He is good-looking and likes to play soccer. He is a member and the ace player of the football club. He would attend club activities and practice on the field while groups of girls cheer for him on the sidelines.

“Yeah... haah... haah… I don't want to get scolded after all.”

“This is basically your exercise though, isn't it? Every time you sleep in you run like your life depends on it. I’ve never seen you be late ever since we met. It’s actually amazing!”

“I never really intended for this to become my exercise...”

“Hahaha! Doing stuff that's good for you when you don't even want to? That's quite the skill!”

Kinro laughed at the irony of Senkyo’s unintentional exercise. He did things that benefited him whether he liked it or not. Senkyo ignored Kinro’s strange comment and headed straight for his seat.

"Good morning, Yukou-san!"

"Ah... Good morning Yutei-san."

The girl that greeted him was Yutei Yukai, she sat on the seat next to Senkyo. She had long light brown hair and eyes with a deep mid-tone of purple. Her hair was fixed in a ponytail that reaches her waist that was tied with a purple hair tie. She is the shortest in her class but that compliments her looks and gives a cute little sister vibe. She has the highest grades in class and she helps other classmates when they ask her to help them out with something. She has a lot of friends, good grades, and is nice to everyone.

Some saw her as a competent little sister of sorts, though a little shy. It wasn’t her beauty that attracted her crowd, but rather the cuteness that made even girls want to watch her from afar. Of course, all of this was unbeknownst to her.

"Sorry for being late! Alright, let's begin class!"

The homeroom teacher arrived and silenced the chattering students and began the class. Senkyo sits by the window where the relaxing breeze was cooling him off and making him sleepy. He hurriedly took countermeasures and bit his lip to focus on the lesson.

*\*Crap... I better not fall asleep. It's a pain to keep up with lessons without someone else explaining them to me, so it's better to just listen... don't fall asleep! Don't fall asleep!!\**

Senkyo's internal battle had begun. Nature was making it hard for him to pay attention to the lesson my making his senses scum to the relaxing sensation of sleep.

Senkyo is a listening type of person, he understood things better when it came to other people talking to him about them. He is insanely good at listening to the point where he only needs a quick skim of Kinro’s notes before a test to refresh his knowledge and ends up with an average result despite almost never studying. He thinks that studying by himself is a pain because he is not used to it, and he would rather battle his desires than study to keep his grades up.

*\* Focus... FOCUS...!\**

He fought his desires throughout the class periods but unfortunately loses the urge to sleep every single time class ends. It was like his brain was playing tricks with him and intentionally trying to make him sleep in class. After multiple mental battles, he finally made it through all the classes and it was time for lunch break.

"Unhhnnn... Why do I always feel like sleeping ONLY when we’re in class? Isn’t that weird? Seriously."

"Don’t go blaming your brain. It’s that irregular sleep schedule of yours that keeps doing it. What? Was last night another all-nighter?"

"Yeah... I got too deep in the light novel I was reading, and the next thing I knew it was three in the morning."

Kinro knew Senkyo was not always this sleepy. He has a proper sleep schedule to avoid sleeping in class and causing painful study sessions. But he has nights where he would get really into something and lose his sense of time and break his sleep schedule. Kinro was already used to this as he had already witnessed this scene multiple times since middle school.

"Okay, time to get up... let’s go eat before lunch break ends. You can talk to me about the light novel you were so into on the way there.”

"AHH! YEAH, IT WAS GREAT! They didn't waste a single word writing and—"

Kinro and Senkyo left the classroom and headed for the cafeteria. They did not have anyone to make lunches for them and they couldn't be bothered to make one for themselves so they always eat in the cafeteria.

**4 – Others’ Perception**

"Waaa~ Honjou-sama is soo~ cool!"

"I know right! I went to see him practice and all his moves were so cool it felt like I was gonna melt just by watching him!"

"And he's so nice too! I saw him help a cat down a tree when I was walking home!"

A talk about Honjou Kinro sparked when they left the classroom. The people talking were Suzuki Himari, Ito Sara, and Sato Aoi, respectively, and all of them are in the same class as Kinro and Senkyo.

"You did?! Nn~ No fair! I would want to see that too...!"

The one who replied is Suzuki Himari. She had flowy light blonde hair that went straight down decorated by a small bunny hairpin and matching eyes. She had a slender figure with a jacket tied around her waist. She's the type that likes to talk about other people. She's not the nicest but also not a bad person.

"Hehehe... Maybe we should walk home together later and hope that we see Honjou-san helping another cat on the way."

The one he made a suggestion of walking home together is Sato Aoi. She had black eyes and short hair at shoulder height. She wore glasses with a red frame. She is the type to join in a conversation but not start one. She's shy but when she gets used to you, she seems almost like Himari.

"Hey! Count me in on that too!"

The one who enthusiastically joined in the fun was Ito Sara. She had brown eyes with matching long hair that was tied into a ponytail that reaches her waist. She had a noticeable antenna-like strand of hair poking up her head. She's the type to make things fun and always fool around. She is very energetic and can feel like a ride when you're with her.

"Hmm... I wonder what Honjou-san's daily routine is..."

"Yeah... I'm a little curious about that too...!"

Aoi and Sara wondered by themselves, completely unaware that they sounded just like stalkers just now.

"Well, what about that otaku? Isn't he always with Honjou-sama?"

Himari asked. She was curious about how such a contradictory pair would be friends with each other.

"Ahh... You mean Yukou-san...?"

"I heard they were friends since middle school."

After hearing Sara’s statement, Himari couldn’t hide her genuine shock.

"Waa~ Since middle school?! They've been friends for that long... I never would've guessed. I guess opposites can be friends, after all. But still, I don't really like him getting too close to Honjou-san. It makes me feel annoyed... I mean, he's such a loser! Way out of Honjou-sama’s league."

"Now, now, Himari-san, calm down."

"Yeah, Aocchi is right! You don't have to be so mean."

"Hmmn... It ticks me off is all."

Aoi and Sara calmed her down. The trio continued to talk about Kinro and Senkyo as they eat their lunch together. Their conversation reached a nearby group of two male students.

"Man! Honjou-kun sure is popular, huh, Touma-kun? It'd be great if I was as popular as he is!"

"I don't care..."

"As cold as always, huh? Even to your childhood friend."

"Just how long are you going to cling to that excuse?"

"Jeez... That's so like you Touma-kun. As shy as always."

"....."

The pair of male classmates heard the talk about Kinro earlier. One of them was envious of him while the other couldn’t care less and turned a cold shoulder towards the envious one.

The envious one was Yamamoto Sora. He had brown hair with a short ponytail and brown eyes. Right now, he is being ignored. Sora is a bit pushy and his friend didn't appreciate that.

The one ignoring him was Saito Touma. He is Sora’s childhood friend but now he seemed to hate that title as Sora always used it as an excuse to annoy him. He had short white hair and sharp, silver eyes to match it. He is as cold as ice to everybody around him but for some reason, Sora chooses to hang out with him despite his snappy attitude.

"Hey, so what do you think about Yukou-kun, Touma-kun?"

"....."

Touma continued to ignore him.

"Oh, come on! Do you hate him? Like him? Think he's interesting? Or maybe..."

Sora kept rambling on about Senkyo and he clearly won't stop until he got an answer

"...shut up..."

Touma looked at him with cold blizzard eyes and responded in his normal uninterested tone.

"Hoho... I made him mad..."

"If I answer, will you shut up...? I want to eat peacefully..."

"Yeah!"

"I don't know much about Yukou and I don't care about him but I think he has it hard with Watanabe."

"Ahh... you're right! It's scary if you're on Watanabe-kun's radar."

"....."

Touma ignored him and continued eating.

**5 – Chaotic Lunch**

Meanwhile, at the cafeteria, Senkyo and Kinro were enjoying their meal and talking to each other. They were talking about the light novel that caused Senkyo to have another all-nighter.

"Hmm... That does sound interesting"

"I know right! I'm planning on buying the other volumes later after school!"

"Well then, once I've finished reading 'The Blade of a Hero' can I borrow that one?"

"Sure! I swear it'll be great! Ah... Whatever you do, don't let your guard down. If you do, you might end up like me."

"Hahaha, sure I'll be careful."

"Would you look at that, it's Shittaku."

"With pretty boy too! Don't get too close or you'll get his germs... oh wait, you probably already have them! HAHAHA!"

Kinro and Senkyo were enjoying their lunch and talking, but unfortunately, a storm came upon them to ruin their peace. A pair of students approached the two of them. They knew that it was going to be trouble.

"What do you guys want, Tanaka-san, Watanabe-san?"

Kinro asked. The pair who approached them were Watanabe Itsuki and Tanaka Riku, The class troublemakers. They are sadly in the same class as Senkyo and Kinro. They pick on other people when they feel like it and they would target the people they especially don't like. And as luck would have it, one of them was Senkyo.

Watanabe Itsuki had a blonde flat top, so he had no bangs to cover his golden eyes. He had a strong build and just from appearances he already looked intimidating.

Tanaka Riku had black hair that was always covered by a blue beany. Unlike Itsuki, he didn't have a spectacular build but possessed sharp black eyes that peered at anyone with his scary face. He would follow Itsuki and cause trouble wherever they go.

"Nothing. Just came by to say hi to our best friend, Shittaku."

"Are you going to leave soon? If not, then we will go on ahead."

Kinro took a passive-aggressive tone as he asked Itsuki and Riku to leave, but they didn't swallow it too well.

"HUH?! WANNA FIGHT PRINCE CHARMING?!"

"YEAH! WE'LL BEAT THE CRAP OUTTA YA!"

"Hey! Let go of him!"

Itsuki and Riku came up to Kinro, and Itsuki grabbed the hem of his blazer. Senkyo tried to help Kinro but was simply pushed away.

"OUTTA THE WAY SHITTAKU! I'M GONNA BEAT THE CRAP OUTTA PRINCE CHARMING HERE BEFORE I GO FOR YOU!"

Itsuki shouted so loud that the whole cafeteria had its eyes on them. But then, someone came running in and pushed Itsuki and Kinro away from each other.

"Stop it, Onii-chan! That's enough!"

"…O-Onii-chan?"

Riku, Kinro, and Senkyo repeated in unison as they heard something they never thought they would ever hear. The one who pushed them away from each other was Itsuki's little sister, Watanabe Ichika, a 1st-year high school student. A year below her brother.

She had blonde hair that was arranged into twin tails with black hair ties. Her eyes were golden like her brother's. It was believable that the two of them were relatives but unlike her brother, she was nice and had a cute face.

“Wha...? Ichika? What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean 'what am I doing here?' This is the cafeteria, you know? What are you doing making another mess?”

Itsuki was weak when it came to his little sister. Before, he didn't have to worry about her and kept causing trouble. But now with his little sister enrolled at the same high school he was, he had to be careful as things like this could happen. He was still not used to having his sister in the same school as he was. He has never slipped up until now. And the consequence of that was a public execution from his sister.

"Stop picking on others already and go back to your class!"

"What?! And gives you the right to—"

"....."

Itsuki tried to bark back but when he saw Ichika scowling at him, he swallowed his words. Her face was saying to do as she says or else. Itsuki was weak when it came to his little sister, that was clear to everyone in the cafeteria that day.

"Tch..."

"Woah...! Itsuki! Wait for me!"

He caught his words and reluctantly went out of the cafeteria with the click of his tongue. He left in a hurry and Riku followed. Kinro and Senkyo were left dumbfounded by what they just witnessed. The biggest and scariest bully in school just stepped down and walked away.

"Are you two okay? Did you two get hurt?"

"Ah...! N-No... we're fine, thank you."

"Y-Yeah, we're not hurt."

Senkyo and Kinro snapped out of it and responded to Ichika.

"I am Watanabe Ichika, Watanabe Itsuki's little sister but you can call me Ichika. I'm sorry about my brother, he can be like that to other people but he's really nice deep inside!"

"Erm... No, it's no problem at all."

Senkyo responded.

"Please tell me when my brother gets into trouble again, I don't want him to hurt himself... Well then, sorry for the trouble but I need to go back to class now, goodbye!"

"Goodbye..."

“See you…”

Senkyo and Kinro were still dumbfounded as they said their farewells. A thought then went through both of their minds and said it aloud.

"Is Watanabe-san… a siscon?."

"Maybe… But let’s not jump the gun here."

Both of them left the cafeteria and headed for the classroom. During their time walking, neither of them talked. When they reached the classroom, they saw Itsuki looking at them intently, almost as if his gaze was saying “*I'll get you for that”*even though he was the one who attacked them. They ignored Itsuki's gaze and headed for their seats and the next period started.

Senkyo lost his sleepiness from the shock and was able to focus on class properly. But in both Senkyo and Kinro's minds, they thought “*Wow... a real siscon... I never thought I'd actually meet one.”*

Afternoon classes passed without a hitch and school ended.

**6 – Remnants of the Past**

"Okay then, I'll head to club practice. See you tomorrow, Senkyo!"

"Yeah, see you tomorrow."

Senkyo left school and headed to a store. This was one of the few times he doesn't go straight home. He went to the store to buy new volumes of 'My Battle Against Demons and the Supernatural', the light novel that made Senkyo break his sleep schedule, and the one that he talked to Kinro about over lunch. Re-On was the author of the book that Senkyo currently had his interests on.

He bought five new volumes and excitedly exited the shop. He began his walk back home with his books in his hand. Everything that the sun touched was painted with a pale tint of orange as the sun disappeared behind the buildings around the town. There were barely any people around. It was about to get dark.

"I didn't really want to take this long, but the line was so long for some reason. I guess that's fine. I can start reading the next volume as soon as I get home!"

Just as he was hyping himself up for his upcoming reading session, a little girl ran past him. It looked like she was out shopping. She had a bag of groceries in her hand.

"Wow... Now kids this little are buying groceries? I'd be home playing games or something if I were them. Then again… if they had someone bad at cooking like my dad, I guess that would make sense."

Senkyo was thinking to himself out loud. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the child drop her money, so she tried to pick them up. But that would soon prove to be fatal as a loud honking sound could be heard immediately after she tried to pick them up. A truck was headed her way and it didn't look like it was going to stop in time.

"KID, GET OUT OF THE WAY!"

Senkyo shouted as he saw the truck heading for the child. The kid didn't move an inch and looked straight at the truck in front of her.

"Damn it...!"

Senkyo dropped his bag and ran to push the child out of the way. But there was no way he was going to make it. He was too far away. The child's demise looked so certain that bystanders shouted for him to stop. Senkyo himself wasn't sure if he was going to make it, but he continued to run for the child regardless.

The winds suddenly blew hard and leaves went flying in the air. The temperature in the area dropped at an alarming rate to the point where it felt like it was winter. Bystanders covered their eyes to avoid getting any dirt in them, but for Senkyo everything was completely different.

The sun disappeared and the sky turned to nighttime. There was no moon in the sky, but everything around him reflected a crystal-like light. It was like the brightest part of a full moon night, or maybe even brighter. It may even be more appropriate to compare it to a crystal cave you would see on the internet. Senkyo looked around and nothing was there. The truck, the girl, the bystanders, all there was left was himself and the buildings around him. Senkyo looked at himself and saw a bright light glowing in the center of his chest.

"WHOA, WHOA, WHOA, WHA... WHAT IS THIS PLACE?! AND WHAT'S WITH THIS LIGHT?!"

Senkyo was completely confused. One second he was running to save a kid, and the next it was night and almost everything around him disappeared. He looked under his shirt to see what was causing the glowing light and to add to his shock, it was coming from directly inside him.

"S-SERIOUSLY, WHAT IT THIS?!!"

Small particles of light began to appear around the space he was in. It was like the snowflakes in winter. The particles sparkled beautifully as they danced through the air. It was a surreal sight. The night was emitting a crystal-like light, accompanied by the fantastical sight of beautiful, shining stars floating around him.

"W-Wha...?! Woah..."

More and more incomprehensible things just kept happening to him and he was left speechless. He was being assailed by a mix of confusion and awe. He didn’t know what to do and stood still. Then he began to feel lightweight as if he was standing on clouds. The particles of light started to collect themselves in Senkyo's chest. His amazement was cut short and started to panic. He then heard a voice he'd never heard before, but he didn't hear it through his ears, it was coming from inside his head.

*"\*Save her...\*"*

"What?!"

"\**and live... without regret.\*"*

The light particles began to pick up their speed and his vision was soon covered in a blinding light as particles collected in his chest. Senkyo closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he saw an unbelievable sight.

The winds ceased their blowing and the temperature returned to its normal state. Leaves were still slowly falling down from the air. The bystander's eyes opened to see the truck had stopped and Senkyo was holding the little girl safely in his arms on the other side of the street from where he previously was.

"H-Huh?!"

Senkyo let his voice out of surprise. He saw as the little girl who was about to get run over was in his arms looking at him with a dumbfounded face. The girl then started crying and reflexively hugged Senkyo, seeking safety. He then patted her back to calm her down.

"T-There, there, you're safe now, see?"

The bystanders then reached for their phones and hurriedly called emergency services. Senkyo continued to comfort the girl to confirm her safety. After some time, emergency services arrived. Senkyo handed over the girl to them to check for injuries and contact her family. At first, the girl was reluctant as she continued to hug Senkyo. It seems she took a liking to him but eventually she let go and was sent back home.

**7 – Lucid Dream**

“Haaaaaaaaaahhh…... That was a tiresome day.”

Senkyo let out a big sigh as he entered his house. He lived alone so he didn’t need to announce himself. His father died a few years ago and he never met his mother.

His father was the one who raised him. He got along and his father and he would teach him things like cooking, cleaning, and the sort. His father was mostly away for work and Senkyo would take care of the house. For some reason, he felt slightly strange as he tried to recollect his past, but that must have been nothing important.

Senkyo headed straight for his room and jumped on his bed. He was still carrying his bag and the books he bought. He stayed like that for a while before he slowly rolled over. He stared blankly at his ceiling, lost in thought.

“Back then…”

He was recalling the incident earlier.

“Yeah… That was incredibly weird.”

He thought back to the time when he was in that night-time space. He remembered that he had a glowing light in the center of his chest. He looked under his uniform where the light in his chest once was. There was nothing there.

“Maybe I was imagining things…”

“…..”

“Then again, there’s also no way I could imagine a place like that.”

He was referring to the breathtaking sight that was the night-time space. He recalled the light particles that were beautifully dancing around him like the far-away stars. It was a place beyond anything he could imagine. Senkyo stood back up and headed for the kitchen.

“Whatever, if anything does happen, it’s not like I can do anything about it. I guess I’ll make a quick dinner and get ready for bed.”

He dismissed his thoughts and started making himself dinner. After a while, Senkyo went to sleep to take his mind off of the earlier events. In the middle of Senkyo’s sleep, something woke him up.

“Hmn….. H-hnnn….. Hmm…. Hm?”

Senkyo opened his eyes. His vision was fuzzy from waking up. When his vision cleared, he wasn’t in his room. He was in a forest. It was night. He couldn’t see much through the darkness. He felt his body moving even though he wasn’t trying to. His body was walking on its own. When he tried to speak, his mouth didn’t move.

*\*What is this…? Is this a dream? A lucid dream? I kind of remember having lucid dreams in the past but it’s never felt this real before. And why can’t I control myself? Well, it’s not like dreams make any sense anyway.\**

Senkyo thought of this as a lucid dream. A dream where you would be conscious and can tell what you were doing. He should have been able to control himself, but that didn’t seem to be the case. Senkyo continued to watch himself walk through the dark forest, out of curiosity about where his body was going.

*\*How the hell is my body not tripping? If this was me walking, I probably would have tripped a hundred times by now. Yep, this is definitely a dream.\**

He continued watching himself. Nothing happened for the next half hour. It was just the darkness and wilderness. But not long after, he finally saw something in front of him that was different from the earlier sights.

*\* An abandoned house?\**

In front of him was a wrecked house that looked like it would come crashing down any minute. It looked like it was an old Japanese-style house. The area around the house was spacious, there weren’t any trees a good distance from the house. Senkyo’s body entered the house and walked around like it knew where it was going.

*\* Even if this is a dream, it’s a bit scary to be here. Where am I going anyway?\**

Senkyo watched as his body maneuvered through the wrecked house. He reached a room with a large space. The holes in the walls let the moonlight illuminate the room. A katana sheathed in a black scabbard with red lines and roses decorating its length was enshrined in the center.

The katana’s red lines and roses began to glow. The closer Senkyo got to the katana, the brighter it glowed. It was like it was reacting to his presence. Senkyo saw the katana in its true beauty. Under the moonlight, the red streaks looked elegant as they covered the scabbard. The subtle glow that shimmered within the darkness, and the roses that looked alive the more Senkyo looked at it.

The katana was a prime example of a legendary item in an RPG game. The fact that it was enshrined and had the moonlight shining on it made it look all the more dramatic. Senkyo’s arms stretched out and grabbed it from its shrine. Right as Senkyo took hold of it, the red streaks stopped glowing and lost their light.

*\*Wait, wait, wait, why am I looking for a katana?! I mean… it looks cool, like really cool! But why am I dreaming about going through a forest to find some kind of legendary katana? Is this my body telling me to get good at my games already?\**

Senkyo didn’t understand why he was having such a dream. He hasn’t been playing too many games lately. Maybe it was his imagination taking over his mind or maybe it was nothing at all, but something kept bothering him. He couldn’t tell what it was.

*\*Agh… whatever, this is just a dream. I shouldn’t worry about it too much.\**

He stopped thinking about the dream and decided it was better to not pay much attention to it. His body started to walk back down the way they came. Back down the dark forest with a legendary katana in hand.

*\*I guess that’s the end of it. My body is walking back down the way it came. Maybe I should try to wake up. I don’t want to watch my body walk in the darkness anymore. Nothing interesting would probably happen.\**

Senkyo tried to wake himself up by furiously trying to move his body and thinking hard to wake up.

*\*Wake up! Wake up! WAKE UP!\**

His body then began to wobble and lose its balance.

*\*Is it working?!\**

His feet were trying their hardest to keep him up but then got caught in a stub on the ground.

*\*Wait! No! No! NOOO—\**

“—OOOOOO!!!”

His body fell to the ground with nothing to stop his fall. Then, audible screaming could be heard. Senkyo was back in his room. He fell from his bed while letting out an ear-piercing scream.

“I-I’m back…”

He checked his surroundings for anything strange. He moved to test if he could move his own body and opened the curtains to check outside. Aside from his legs slightly aching, everything was normal. He was in his bedroom in the same house in the same neighborhood.

“Haahh… I’m back. That was one weird dream. I walked into a forest to find a legendary sword. If I put it like that it really sounds like a game. I’ve never dreamt about something like that before. Maybe that’s what’s bothering me?”

Senkyo fixed himself up and headed for the door. Right as he was about to close it, in the corner of his eye, he saw something that wasn’t supposed to be there. It was a katana sheathed in a black scabbard with red roses decorating its length placed by the door. It was the same one he saw in his dream.

“Wh… WHAAAAATT?!”

He let out yet another ear-piercing scream.

“W-why is this here?! Wasn’t all that just a dream?! Are you telling me I actually walked around in the dark forest and grabbed a legendary katana?!!”

He couldn’t hide his surprise as he examined the katana in front of him.

“What do I do?! Should I just leave a dangerous weapon in my house?”

He was panicking. He was walking around his room and thinking of what to do with the dangerous weapon.

“Ah! Maybe it’s not actually a katana. It’s probably just a toy. Yeah!”

He picked up the katana. It felt heavy to him.

“M-maybe it’s a well-made toy…”

He unsheathed the katana and revealed its sharp and beautiful blade. Much like the scabbard, the katana had the same design with a red streak down the center of its blade. The sunlight from the window bounced on the blade. He touched the blade to feel whether it was real or not and felt the cold sensation of steel on his finger. After a moment of silence, he screamed again.

“ITS REAAAAAAAAAAAAALLLLLL!!!!!”

After some time thinking, he decided to hide the katana in his closet and got ready for school.

**8 – Childhood Friends**

Senkyo was walking on his way to school. He woke up early, so he wasn't going to be late for school. It was only a few minutes away from his house so he usually walked there. His body felt oddly tired and his legs felt like they were killing him.

"Why do I feel like I ran a marathon? My legs hurt so much that they feel like they're gonna fall off…"

Despite his legs hurting, he had to walk. He didn't have a bike or any other means of transportation. The school was so close that he didn't mind that, not until now.

"Yo! Senkyo, good morning!"

"Ah... Good morning, Kinro."

Kinro spotted Senkyo and greeted him. Kinro lived nearby so they both walked together to school more often than not. Having this chance to bring it up, Senkyo struck up a conversation.

"Kinro, have you ever had lucid dreams before?"

"Hm... Yeah, I had some of those before. Why?"

"Well, I had one last night, and it was the strangest dream I've had so far."

"What was it about?"

Senkyo told Kinro about his dream in detail. Kinro listened carefully to Senkyo as he told him about his dream.

"So, you were walking alone in a forest and you see an abandoned house. You went inside it, saw a katana, grabbed it, and then left. The whole time you were dreaming, you couldn't talk or control your body. Is that it?"

"Yeah."

"If you couldn’t control yourself would that even count as a lucid dream? I don't really know what to tell you, but aren't most dreams weird though?"

"Yeah, but this one felt so real!"

"Maybe it's just your imagination."

"Maybe so, but..."

Senkyo wasn't satisfied with leaving it off as “imagination”. He thought if that was the case, then why was the katana he saw in his dream now in his room. But of course, he couldn't say that. He thought it would be trouble if he told him that he had the katana they were talking about was in his room. Senkyo thought Kinro might misunderstand and think the dream was some kind of mental strategy to cover up for Senkyo joining the yakuza or something. Of course, he was overthinking it.

"Maybe you're right. Sorry to trouble you about it."

"Don't worry about it. You never know, the dream might be some kind of prophecy and later you'll find yourself in a forest at night looking for a katana."

"Are you sure you haven’t been reading too many novels, Kinro?"

“Look who’s talking.”

Senkyo and Kinro continued to chat as they headed toward their classroom. Once they reached their destination, Senkyo reached to open the door but before he could, the door opened for him. On the other side of the door, stood Yamamoto Sora and Saito Touma.

"Oh! Yukou-kun, Honjou-kun, good morning!"

Sora greeted them while Touma just stood there beside him.

"Good morning, Yamamoto-san, Saito-san."

"Yeah, good morning."

Kinro and Senkyo returned the greeting.

"Ah! I heard! Yesterday, you two got into some trouble with Watanabe-kun. Then, his little sister came and stopped him. Is that true?!"

Sora questioned them about the incident yesterday. Senkyo thought to himself if it was okay to spread it around.

*\*It looks like the news already got around. Well, it can't be helped, something like that would definitely spread like wildfire.\**

"Yeah, what about it?"

"I mean it's shocking news, isn't it?! *That* Watanabe Itsuki-kun backed down to his sister!"

\**Yeah, that part was a real surprise\**

Senkyo and Kinro internally thought.

In the middle of their conversation, Touma walked past Senkyo and Kinro. As he was walking by, he turned his head and spoke.

"If you're going to fool around, I'm going ahead."

"Ah! Wait for me!"

Sora replied in a bit of a hurry.

"Where are you two going? Class is about to start."

"Ah... something urgent came up so we have to go!"

After answering Senkyo's question, Sora hurried to catch up with Touma. After seeing them in a hurry, Kinro's curiosity was piqued.

"I wonder what was so urgent that they'd skip class."

"Maybe it's a family matter or something?"

"Are Yamamoto-san and Saito-san related?"

"All I know is that they are childhood friends."

Kinro and Senkyo put it in the back of their minds and entered the classroom. But before Senkyo entered, in the corner of his eye, he saw someone peeking from around the corner.

"Hm?"

"Is there something wrong?"

"Ah... No, it was probably nothing."

**9 – Shy Princess**

Senkyo entered the classroom, dismissing what he saw earlier as his imagination. And after a short while, class started.

It was lunch break. Senkyo took the morning classes without problems since he got a good night's sleep. But he felt tired and not at the same time. It was a strange feeling. Kinro then approached Senkyo like usual but not for the same reason of inviting him to lunch.

"Senkyo you can eat without me. I have something to do in my club."

"Oh, sure. Later then."

"See ya!"

Kinro left the classroom and soon, only a few people were left. Just as Senkyo was about to leave the classroom, someone called out to him.

"U-Um! Yukou-san! C-can I bother you for a moment...?"

The person who called out to him was Yutei Yukai. One of the most popular people in his class. Unlike Kinro, she wasn’t renowned for her gorgeous looks, but instead for her personality. She’s shy and clumsy but along with her small figure, she makes everyone around her fawn over her like she was their cute little sister. However, despite being a bit of an awkward person, she earns high grades and helps anyone who comes to her for help. Her kindness and generosity did wonders for her image and everyone began treating her better than anyone else in the class. Some even began to refer to her as the Shy Princess.

It was a bit unexpected. All the times they've ever interacted with each other was with morning greetings and class work as far as he can remember.

"Y-Yeah, what is it?"

"S-Sorry to ask this of you, but could you help me carry the class notebooks? I-I'll buy you something for lunch in exchange!"

"Um... Sure, I'll help you out, but there's no need to treat me to lunch."

"Really? Thank you!"

“…No problem.”

Senkyo and Yukai headed for the faculty. They were walking side by side and carrying the same number of notebooks. It was silent between them until Yukai called out to Senkyo

"Um, Yukou-san, are you tired? Maybe I shouldn't have bothered you after all."

*\*The popular, Yutei Yukai, is talking to me. Why is a popular person talking to me anyways! I'm not good with popular people!\**

Senkyo was nervous, but he wasn't nervous because he was talking to a girl. He was nervous because he was talking to someone popular. He has always been much more distrustful of popular people than normal people. He felt like they might be hiding their true personalities only to get more attention and become more popular. In short, he didn't trust popular people because of fake personalities.

Kinro was an exception to him because they'd been together since middle school. At first, he didn't trust him one bit, even after they talked about light novels. But as time passed by, Kinro and Senkyo kept talking and interacting with one other and came to a point where he determined Kinro isn't a bad person.

He didn't like popular people because he thought they tend to hide their true personalities which would have a bad effect on their reputation if known by the public. But once he determined that they were good people, he'd slowly begin to trust them. Senkyo was like that. As such, this was an awkward situation for him.

"H-Huh? N-No, I'm not tired at all. Why did you ask?"

"You're not? It's just that you just look like you have a hard time walking."

"Well, when I woke up, my legs were hurting for some reason."

"O-Oh no, I shouldn't have bothered you! I-I'm so sorry...!"

Yukai bowed and apologized to Senkyo. She was all flustered and she was shaking. She looked like she was somewhat scared. But that only made Senkyo confused.

"H-Huh... No, no it's fine! You don’t need to apologize. Come on, let’s get to the faculty."

Senkyo tried to move on, but Yukai didn’t let him go.

"No! I shouldn't have bothered you! H-Here! Let me carry the rest of the notebooks! I'll treat you to lunch once I get back!"

*\*Wh-What is this girl saying?! Is she trying to pretend to be nice and finish me off with food? B-but then again, no matter how you look at it, this is overboard! Why is she so insistent?!\**

"No, no! *I'll* carry the notebooks!"

"No, no! I insist! *I'll* carry the notebooks!"

Senkyo was dodging Yukai as she tried to take away the papers from Senkyo's arms. There was no one around to see this. If anyone were, they would look at them like they were watching children fighting over something.

"Hahh.... Hahhh..."

"Gah... Hahhh..."

"I-I insist...Hahh... I'll... Hahh... carry... Hahh... the papers..."

"STOP IT, WILL YOU!!"

Both Senkyo and Yukai were tired from trying to take away notebooks and dodging hands. But even though she was tired, Yukai still insisted on carrying the notebooks. Senkyo finally snapped.

"Kyaa?!"

Yukai let out a surprised squeal as Senkyo shouted at her.

"Why are you insisting so much?! Does it matter who carries it?! And what do you even get from getting me to like you?!"

Senkyo lost it and let out his inner thoughts. Yukai then backed up to the wall. She couldn't stay standing and her legs gave out. She answered Senkyo in a small and trembling voice.

"N...No... Y-you've got it wrong... I... I wasn't... trying to... make you like me...!"

Senkyo calmed down a bit after hearing her trembling voice. Looking at her again, she was cowering in fear. Her voice as well as her body was trembling and shaking. Senkyo was sharp despite his looks, when he looked at Yukai like this, it didn't look fake.

"I... I just! ...I just didn't want to trouble you... i-is all..."

Senkyo felt incredibly bad. It looked like she was forcing her to do his bidding. It was like prey and predator. Senkyo was the predator and Yukai was the prey. If anyone saw this, they'd surely get in the way and protect Yukai.

While trying to speak, under Yukai's hair, you could see a drop of liquid falling off her face. Not long after, a few more came falling down, dampening the floor. She was crying.

"N-No..! I-I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare you! Please don't cry! I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!!"

Senkyo was convinced. She wasn't pretending. Senkyo apologized as hard as he could. He was repeating "I'm sorry!" and "Please, don't cry!" over and over while prostrating himself. He thought he was the worst person in the world.

*\*WHAT THE HELL, ME?! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?? WHY WOULD YOU MAKE A GIRL CRY?! I'M SUCH AN IDIOT!!!\**

Senkyo internally berated himself. He thought, that if he made an innocent girl cry, he would be the worst scum in the world, and here he is. He was forced to accept that the popular girl, Yutei Yukai, was a truly nice person and a scaredy-cat. He learned that the hard way.

While Senkyo was prostrating himself, Yukai spoke.

"N-no... hic... There's no need... hic... to do that... hic..."

"What do— ...What do you mean? I scared you and made you cry, didn't I? There's no way I don't need to prostrate myself...!"

Senkyo was about to raise his voice again, but he learned from his mistakes and immediately lowered his voice to calm the crying Yukai down.

"I-I'm sorry...hic... I've caused you... hic... a lot of trouble... haven't I?"

"N-no...! It was me who was causing you a lot of trouble. You were just being considerate and I took it the wrong way... *I'm* really sorry!"

"Hic... S-sorry! I need to go...!"

Yukai ran away. She left Senkyo and the notebooks. She must have been really frightened. Senkyo was left alone, with notebooks on the ground. No one was around to witness what happened.

"I-I reaaaalllyy messed up now haven't I...?"

Senkyo sat there and worried about what was going to happen to him now. After a while, he picked up the notebooks and brought them to the faculty. Once he was about to grab lunch, the chime rang and he wasn't able to eat anything.

"I guess this is punishment."

Senkyo had a few crackers in his bag but he didn't eat any of them. He thought this is the least he should get after what happened.

**10 – Spirit**

Before afternoon classes began, Yukai left for home early, saying that she wasn't feeling good. After Senkyo heard that, it felt like a truck ran over him and the pain was gripping his heart like a vice.

After classes ended, Senkyo went straight home. While he was walking, he couldn't feel the pain in his legs. The pain gripping his heart hurt a million times more. Once he got back home, the first thing he did was to head to his room and shout into a pillow as he let out his anguish.

"I'm the worst... seriously..."

"I need to make it up for her... but what do I do...? I don't know what she likes..."

Senkyo thought of various ideas to make up for what he did. Time passed by, and he finally thought of something.

"Ah! I'll make her some cookies! I'm good at making them after all."

Senkyo lived alone, so he had to be able to cook for himself to live. When he was young, his father taught him how to cook. It didn’t take long for him to be better at it than his father. And after a lot of learning, making cookies was one of the things he was good at.

"I better make these the best cookies I’ve ever made. This is definitely not enough to make up for what I did, but right now, this is the best I can do!"

After working hard making cookies, he made himself dinner and passed the time by watching anime and reading manga. Just in case he breaks his sleep schedule again he slept earlier than usual and ended the day.

*\*Hmm... Hopefully, Yutei-san likes cookies. It'll be a tragedy if she hated them or something like that.\**

While trying to sleep he thought of the cookies he made and hoped that Yukai would like them. In the middle of his sleep, something woke him up yet again. He heard wood striking wood from a distance. He opened his eyes to see that he was in a forest. It looked like it was midday. The birds could be heard chirping and the shadows of the trees made shade.

"What is this...? Is this another dream...? Oh, I can talk! What is that sound? It's coming from over there..."

"Haah! \**Krt...!\** Haah! \**Krt...!\**"

Senkyo was in another dream. It felt similar to his last dream but in this one, he could talk and move his body freely. Senkyo cautiously approached the sound of the cracking in the air. When he got closer, he could hear a voice of a little boy shouting rhythmically with every strike.

Before Senkyo’s eyes was a large open space with an old Japanese-style house in its center. It was a good distance between the house and the trees enough that even a large group could fit inside.

"This house... Isn't this the same house from my last dream?"

Yes, it was the same Japanese house from his last dream, but unlike his last dream, it was in good condition. It wasn't wrecked, the windows were fine, the walls didn't have any holes in them, and there were other people in this one too.

In the middle of the open space, a man and a boy were sparring together with wooden swords. On the porch of the house, sat a woman looking over the two people training with a happy smile. It looked to Senkyo like they were a family.

Senkyo stood in the shade of a tree watching from afar. He looked at the family with a confused look saying 'who are these people?' in his mind. He had never met these people before, but then why would they be inside his dream. As the father and son sparred, the boy took notice of Senkyo standing by a tree. They stopped sparring and the boy approached him.

"So, you came."

"Huh...? M-Me...?"

"Of course, you. Do you see anyone else standing in front of me?"

Senkyo was confused. Why is he dreaming about a family that lived in the abandoned house in his last dream? Ignoring his confusion, the boy spoke again.

"It looks like we're going to be together for a while, I hope you don't mind me intruding on you. I didn’t expect this either."

"Together for a while...? Intruding? What do you mean?"

"Oh yeah, I haven't introduced myself yet. I am Konjou Ryosei, and I seem to be some kind of spirit. I was once human but then I died in a traffic accident."

"A-A spirit, you say? What... Why is a spirit in my dreams?"

"Calm down, I'll explain what I know from the beginning."

Senkyo felt agitated, as someone in his dreams was claiming they were a spirit. It made no sense to him. Why was he having another lucid dream in a row? And why was he speaking to a boy that claims to be a spirit that died in an accident? Senkyo couldn't comprehend what was happening.

Ryosei led Senkyo to the living room of the house and told him who he was. He told Senkyo all about the fact that his family is a family of hunters of the supernatural, he told him about how he trained at a young age, but he generalized everything and didn't go too much into detail. After that, he told him about how he died, and his theory as to why he is here.

“When I died, I remember having a heavy regret that stuck in my mind to my very last second. I wished to somehow take care of that regret if I was given a chance. That is the reason why I think I became a spirit.”

"So, are you saying the regret you felt caused you to become a spirit?"

"Yes, at least that's what I think."

“Why are you so unsure?”

“That… It’s a bit complicated. But we’ll touch on that matter later. For now, how about you ask something else.”

"Then, why are you in my dream?"

"Well to clarify that, I don’t think that I'm JUST in your dream."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm in your body. And right now, my spirit is talking to you through your dreams."

"W-What?! You're in my body?! A-Are you trying to take my body over or something?!"

"No, why would I do that? I don’t even know how I got here. I was always trapped in *that space* and this is the first time anything like that ever happened."

"That space?"

"The place I met you. In the streets, remember? You tried to save the girl knowing you weren't going to make it, didn't you?"

"That place?! You mean you brought me to that sparkly night-time space?"

"Sparkly? Oh, there wasn’t much to see from my perspective. I had no eyes as a spirit after all"

"Then how did you see me?"

"Well when I was a spirit without a body, I could just sense things around me. Imagine seeing a black space with outlines of everything around me. That's what it felt like."

"Is that so... earlier, you said you wanted to get out of *that space*... Then if you really are some spirit that died in that area, I'm assuming you couldn't escape a certain distance?"

"You catch on quick; I like that! Yes, you're correct there was a certain distance from the place I died that I couldn't get out of. It was about a hundred meters from where I died. It was like an invisible barrier."

"Did you help save that girl?"

"I did, but I don't really know what I did though. When I saw you running for the girl, I couldn't help but try to push you to her. But when I touched you, I suddenly got sucked into your body. The next thing I knew, I could control your body so I used a bit of something to catch up to that girl. I might have strained your legs a bit in the process. Sorry about that."

“No, I don’t mind it that much. But my body pulled you in, is what you said? Is that what happens when you touch humans?"

"No, that was the first time that happened. I've touched a lot of humans of all ages and I've never got sucked into their bodies before. If I had to say, then something about you is special."

"Something about me is special? Hah, don't give me that. I'd rather stay at home watching anime or something rather than become some protagonist."

"Oh? Are you an otaku?"

"Yeah, what about it? Are you going to laugh?"

"Ku... kukuku..."

**11 – Memories and Emotions**

Ryosei started chuckling and reached for his pocket.

"HERE!"

He took two books out of thin air and slammed them down on the table. They were both manga.

"W-what?! I-impossible. T-this is 'Love and Equations!' and this other one is 'Demon King becomes a Hero!' Where did you get these?! Only a handful of people bought this, by the time they became popular they were discontinued! These were discontinued for unknown reasons, but the few who read them said they were godlike!"

"Kukuku... you see, I am an otaku myself!"

"Wh-what?! A kid like you got this?!"

"A kid...? Who are you calling a kid?"

Ryosei snapped his fingers and smoke covered his body. When the smoke disappeared, a young man replaced where he was sitting. He looked like he was the same age as Senkyo. He had black hair and eyes with the left side of his hair wrapped in a red string.

"You see, I can transform my body. This is my real form. I only looked like a child to get the full feeling when I was sparring with my father earlier."

"Y-You... How?!"

"This is a dream remember? I can make anything I want as long as I have a solid vision of it, my parents earlier were the same thing, just a manifestation of my mind."

"T-Then, these manga aren't real either?!"

"Of course not. But the fact that I can manifest these right now proves that I read them before. If you flip open the pages you can see the full content of the manga. Right now, if I wanted to look like an adult, it wouldn't work because I don't have a solid vision of myself as an adult. Meaning, as far as looks go, I can only transform myself up to this age."

"O-Ohh... Wait aren't we getting off-topic here?!"

"Oh, you're right. Excuse me. Do you have something you want to know?"

"If there is anything, I would want to know whether or not something bad will happen if you stay here."

"Hm? I already told you earlier, haven't I? As long as I stay here, I won't do anything bad. Wait no, I won't even do anything bad if I was in your body or not! I'm not an evil spirit after all. In fact, you should be even safer now that I’m here.”

"I-Is that so..."

"If you still don't believe me, then… This might work. Come here for a second."

"What... Hey!"

Ryosei came up to Senkyo and touched his forehead with his own. Senkyo was about to push Ryosei away but he didn’t budge.

“Hold still. I don’t know if this will work, but if our souls connect… just maybe.”

Senkyo was in an awkward position. He felt panicked and didn’t know what to do. But then, he felt something flowing inside him. He saw visions that he had never seen before and felt his chest being assailed by a massive flow of emotions.

"What is this... are these your memories… and emotions?"

"Exactly. I don’t think anything like this happened to anyone else before. But I guess that’s what makes you special."

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"When I got sucked into your body, a flow of memories and emotions flowed into me. After experimenting a bit, I learned that we can access each other’s memories and emotions by simply expressing them. From what I gather, our souls are connected. This is why I gave you access to all my memories and emotions. So that you could trust me."

“…..”

Senkyo couldn’t believe what he was hearing. But he had no choice but to accept it. What was happening in front of him was indeed reality.

After a while, Ryosei explained to Senkyo his memories. It wasn’t like any normal high school life. No, it was a life filled with fantasy and the supernatural. From his time in his dream, Senkyo learned that bodies cannot usually house multiple souls. For reasons beyond Ryosei’s knowledge, Senkyo was an exception to the rule. From what it looked like, souls inside a single body can share their memories and emotions if they permit it and that last night’s dream of Senkyo walking around the forest was Ryosei controlling his body. Which meant that if one soul is unconscious, the other can take over. But since Senkyo could struggle against it, the owner of the body still had complete power.

With talks concerning Senkyo’s body over, Ryosei moved on to his experiences. The world was not as peaceful as Senkyo once thought. Evil spirits, ghosts, demons, yokai, and other imaginative beings truly existed. Ryosei’s family, the Konjou Clan, was a clan of hunters. They hunted the supernatural to keep the peace in the world and hide their existence from everyone uninvolved.

They used spirit power to fight against them. Spirit power is the life force of a person’s soul. Normal people cannot use their spirit power due to their lack of knowledge but hunters like the Konjou Clan used it as their tools and combat style. There are consequences if used unwisely. If a person runs out of spirit power, their soul will perish and cease to exist. In short, it meant death.

One of the uses of spirit power is for recovery. Using spirit power on the body can accelerate and enhance the body's healing properties for a short amount of time. It can even cure someone's exhaustion. Ryosei used his own spirit power to recover Senkyo from walking up and down a mountain.

Ryosei continued to teach Senkyo about the various things he knew and explained certain parts of his memories to Senkyo. After hours of talking, Ryosei said they didn't have any more time and that Senkyo was about to wake up. He told him he could talk to him even if he was awake. Senkyo could talk to him if he thought about what he wanted to say in his mind, but talking aloud was also fine.

**12 – Beginning**

"Hrm... Hmmm..."

And finally, after a long, eventful night, Senkyo had woken up.

"That was another weird dream... No... wait, that definitely happened. A spirit now lives inside my body, and I share memories and emotions with him, and now my life is like a plot for an anime... Hey, Ryosei! Are you there?"

*"\*Of course.\*"*

The voice that echoed in Senkyo's head confirmed his suspicion.

"Just to confirm; your family fights these demons and evil spirits, right?"

*"\*Yes, they do. You should know that by now; we shared memories remember?\*"*

As they talked about in the dream, Senkyo and Ryosei shared each other's memories and emotions. That meant that Senkyo also saw how Ryosei lived, trained, and fought. That includes his personal encounters with demons and evil spirits and the emotions that filled those very moments.

"Still, even though they're just shared memories, these demons look nasty."

Something important then crossed Senkyo’s mind.

"Is there a chance I might get attacked by a demon because you're inside me? It wasn't in your memories, so I don't know."

*"\*Well, that's because I also don't know. This is the first time anything like this happened as far as I know. But don't worry, just bring Kuro Yaiba with you at all times. If something does show up to attack, I’ll take over and protect you.\*"*

"How reassuring..."

Senkyo replied in a sarcastic tone. He didn’t doubt Ryosei’s fighting power or anything like that. It was just that he didn’t like the idea of fighting in general.

Kuro Yaiba, the name of Ryosei's katana, was a legendary weapon that was handed down to him. For generations, the Konjou Clan kept Kuro Yaiba hidden from the world, awaiting the day it chooses its wielder. There was a prophecy where it said the blade will choose its wielder by dropping from its pedestal, in front of the chosen one.

Ryosei's family had a tradition to bring newborn children to its resting place. His father gave it to him when he was twelve and said he was chosen by the blade when he was a baby. But this was already known to Senkyo through Ryosei's memories.

"Wait, wait, wait, that's cool and all, but I have to bring this katana around with me wherever I go?!"

*"\*Yes, it’s necessary. It would be bad if we encounter trouble with nothing to defend ourselves.\*"*

"....."

Ryosei was right. Senkyo couldn't deny the fact that he wouldn't encounter demons or spirits, even if the chances were low. He couldn't say anything back to him. The reason he couldn't deny he was right was because of Ryosei's explanation of demons and evil spirits.

Evil spirits are souls that desire vengeance and destruction. Right before they die, they release an excessive amount of negative emotions that are swallowed by them and become spirits that cause trouble wherever they were.

Demons are living beings from another world called Zerid. Unlike fantasy stories, they don't eat humans for their flesh. Demons eat souls. The demons Ryosei's family encountered were always aiming for the souls. After experimenting, this was proven when demons attacked evil spirits, and in cases where humans and animals that got attacked by demons only had bites where their souls were.

They appear in the world by going through rifts, portals that appear at random. The reason for rifts appearing is written in the history of Ryosei's family. It is said that rifts appear because Earth has a direct connection to Zerid. This means that portals to Zerid occasionally appear at random, and demons cross through them and eat souls.

"…So, you're telling me I've been living my life with a chance to get attacked by soul-eating demons from another world?"

"Yes, you and anything else that has a soul in this world. But our family and other hunters around the world usually take care of them before they make contact with other humans."

"Haahhh.... So, this is what they meant by saying there are things better left unsaid. At any rate, I better be careful with this katana; it'll be a huge mess if I get seen with this in public."

Senkyo gave in and pulled out the katana from his closet and a case from another room that was conveniently long enough to contain the katana. He got ready for school and just as he was about to leave, he ran back to the kitchen to grab the cookies he made for Yukai to apologize for yesterday's incident. He almost forgot about it because of a certain spirit and his big debut in his dream.

"What the hell is going to happen to my life now…."

Senkyo thought out loud as he recalled the recent events. The last few days his life turned into a huge mess. But he thought stressing about it too much would on l make it worse.

"Well, there's nothing I can do anymore. I just need to be careful to not get into any trouble."

*"\*Just so you know, in here you really sound like an anime protagonist. What, ending the episode already?\*"*

"I DON'T NEED YOUR OPINION!"

After shouting at Ryosei, Senkyo hurried to school with much more worries on his back than ever before.

**Chapter 2: A Cute Vampire**

**13 – Just Like Any Other Day**

It was a school day. Wednesday to be precise. It was just another normal day for these normal students of Honshou Academy. But one particular student walked on their way to school with a troubled expression. That student was Yukou Senkyo. The most noticeable thing about him today compared to other days was the fact that he was carrying a shinai bag on his shoulder together with his school bag.

*"\*I know I need to bring this to protect me from demons and stuff, but don't I stand out? I'm not even a part of the kendo club.\*"*

*"\*It'll be fine. Just make up an excuse.\*"*

*"\*Easy for you to say, you're not the one making the excuse!\*"*

Senkyo talked to Ryosei in his mind. He was worried about his current appearance. It felt like he stood out like black paint on a white canvas. As he was internally worrying, his best friend, Honjou Kinro, came to greet him.

"Yo, Senkyo! Good morning."

"Good morning, Kinro."

"Hm? What's that on your back?"

"Oh, this? I-It's... uh... It's for my friend's kendo practice! Yeah, a friend lost his shinai so he asked me if he could borrow mine."

"I see, wait, you do kendo?"

"A-Ahh... yeah, when I was little my dad taught me a bit. I stopped pretty early though."

Senkyo panicked to make up an excuse. He said the first thing that came to his mind, and that caused it to have a lot of holes as a cover-up for his actual purpose. Ryosei pointed it out to him in his mind.

*"\*That excuse won't hold well when we bring this every day.\*"*

*"\*You told me to make an excuse and this is the best I've got! I'll just say that I can't tell him the reason if I can't think of anything else!\*"*

*"\*If you say so.\*"*

Ryosei responded in a doubting tone.

"No way... I can't believe *THAT* Yukou Senkyo did kendo when he was a kid."

*\*No, I really didn't. This is my dad's bag, he always had it with him. He asked me if I wanted to train but I refused. It would be a disaster if Kinro said he wanted to see some moves! I'll get found out immediately!\**

"Y-Yeah, hahaha... surprising, isn't it?"

Senkyo and Kinro proceeded to walk to their classroom. Senkyo had a gruesome time as he tried his hardest to avoid questions about his shinai bag. Thankfully, by the end, he was able to survive his first trial.

When they arrived, Senkyo’s eyes immediately wandered to a particular seat. The person who sat in that seat was Yutei Yukai. Luckily for Senkyo, today Yukai was present. He made a beeline for her and caught her attention.

"Good morning, Yutei-san."

"Ah! G-Good morning, Yukou-san..."

Yukai was nervous. Her voice was stuttering and her eyes kept avoiding Senkyo’s gaze, but soon enough, she furiously shook her head and forced herself to lock eyes with Senkyo. She seemed to be really troubled by his presence.

"U-Um! Yutei-san... I'm sorry for yesterday!"

"E-Eh...?"

Yukai looked at Senkyo with a confused look, but Senkyo ignored that.

"I'm sorry for yesterday. I did something very rude. I know this won't be much, but I hope you can accept this as my apology!"

Senkyo handed Yukai a bag of cookies. Yukai looked at the bag, but she didn't accept them yet. Then, she panicked as she tried to get the words out of her mouth.

"N-no! This is all wrong! *I’M* sorry for yesterday! I made you carry those notebooks even though you were tired, and I even ran away and left you with them in the end! I should be apologizing!"

Yukai didn't accept Senkyo's cookies. She then hurriedly opened her bag and took something out of it. The item she took out was another bag of cookies.

"Huh?"

"I-I made cookies for you as an apology. So, please accept them!"

*\*We made the same thing?!\**

It was a coincidence. Both Senkyo and Yukai made cookies to say sorry but Senkyo knew that this wasn't the time to be amazed by coincidences and insisted Yukai to accept his cookies.

"But I was rude to you! *I’M* the one that needs to apologize! So, please accept *MY* cookies!"

"No, I caused you trouble so *I’M* the one that needs to apologize! So, please accept *MY* cookies!"

Both of them wanted the other to take their cookies. The other students looked at them, some confused, some annoyed, and some who just wanted to watch them. Then, someone came up to the two to resolve the problem. It was Kinro.

"Now, now, calm down. I don't know what happened between the two of you, but how about both of you just accept the other's cookies to get this over with?"

"But!"

Senkyo and Yukai were both opposed to the idea. They wanted to apologize to the other but they were also conflicted about accepting the other’s apology. In their mind, they thought that accepting the other’s apology would reduce the value of their apology. Kinro was slightly annoyed by how difficult they were being. After a long talk, Kinro finally convinced the two. Senkyo and Yukai returned to their seats with the other’s bag of cookies in their hands. No doubt, rumors were made by the students who witnessed the situation.

Morning classes started. Senkyo was listening to the teacher in front. Despite breaking his sleep schedule, he was able to properly listen to class since he asked Ryosei to recover his energy. His right hand was flipping his pen as he listened. Senkyo then heard a voice in his head. It was Ryosei.

*"\*Hey, Senkyo, that girl earlier, her name is Yutei Yukai, right?\*"*

*"\*Yeah. What about her?\*"*

*"\*...Nothing, it might be my imagination.\*"*

Senkyo didn't understand why Ryosei asked about her, but he felt his emotions. He felt a gush of curiosity with a hint of sadness and guilt. That was when he was reminded, that there really was another soul living inside him. After the quick thought, Senkyo returned to listening in class.

**14 – Overprotective Brother**

Classes finally ended; it was lunch break. Senkyo and Kinro headed for the cafeteria like they usually do. They sat together, but they weren’t eating. Kinro was staring at Senkyo with a prying look.

"Well Senkyo, what was earlier all about?"

"Ah... t-that's... Haahhh... I guess it's only fair that you know."

Senkyo thought about making up an excuse, but it would've been unfair to Kinro who resolved the earlier conflict. Having no other choice, Senkyo told Kinro about everything that happened to them yesterday. And as a result…

"S-Senkyo... I never thought you'd be so mean!"

"I told you, didn't I?! I really felt bad afterward! It's not like I wanted to make her cry!"

“But you made her cry nonetheless. You even made her feel like she was in the wrong! How horrible!”

Kinro said in an exaggerated tone. Senkyo knew he was just teasing him, but it didn’t take out the fact that it was the truth. As he was receiving a one-sided attack from Kinro, a familiar voice called out to them.

"Ah! Senpai! Nice seeing you here!"

"Ah, umm… Ichika-san. Great timing! Here, want to sit with us?"

Watanabe Ichika came by with her food in her hands, seizing the opportunity, Senkyo offered her to sit with them and changed the topic completely. Kinro didn’t further pursue the topic and let Senkyo go, but not before he giggled gloatingly. It annoyed Senkyo slightly.

There was another person with Ichika, she didn't speak, but Senkyo and Kinro thought she was a shy type so they waited for her to introduce themselves instead of putting her on the spot. Ichika gladly accepted Senkyo’s offer and sat with them.

"Ah... Thank you! Excuse us."

Ichika sat with them, and her friend followed. Then, something crossed Senkyo's mind.

"Oh yeah! Come to think of it, we haven't properly introduced ourselves yet. I'm Yukou Senkyo, 2nd-year high school. I'm classmates with your brother but I'm sure you already know. I hope we can be good friends."

"And I am Honjou Kinro, 2nd-year high school. I'm in the same class as Senkyo and Watanabe-san. Nice to meet you."

"Ah... then let me reintroduce myself. I'm Watanabe Ichika, 1st-year high school. You can call me whatever you want, no need to hesitate.”

“Oh, ok. Got it.”

It seemed like she caught onto Senkyo’s hesitation on what to call her. Since she had the same last name as Itsuki, it would be confusing to refer to them by the same name.

“It’s nice meeting both of you. This is my friend..."

"I am Hisho Yuu, 1st-year high school. Ichika-chan's classmate. Nice to meet you too."

Ichika's friend, Hisho Yuu, had light crimson hair that reaches past her waist. Her eyes were the same color as her hair. She had a slender figure and was wearing a blue jacket over her uniform.

After the introductions, they chatted as they ate their lunch. One of the things Ichika talked about was his brother, Watanabe Itsuki. To Senkyo and Kinro, it looked like Ichika was as overprotective of her brother. Yuu didn't speak much, but Senkyo did notice that she was staring at him a lot. It made him worry if he said anything rude. They finished eating, said goodbyes, and headed to their respective classrooms.

Upon reaching the classroom, someone confronted both of them. It was Itsuki.

"WHAT DID YOU DO WITH MY SISTER?!"

He gripped the hem of Senkyo's blazer and readied his other fist to punch him. Senkyo was confused about what was happening. Itsuki’s shout was loud enough to catch the attention of all the students in the classroom and the others outside the hallway.

"Wh-What do you mean?!"

"YOU SAT WITH MY SISTER AT LUNCH! I SAW EVERY SECOND BUT I COULDN'T HEAR YOU! I SWEAR IF YOU SAID ANYTHING TO CREEP HER OUT, I'LL BEAT YOU INTO A PULP!!"

It was clear to Senkyo now. Ichika wasn’t the only one overprotective about her sibling, it went both ways. However, Itsuki’s overprotectiveness meant violence. That wasn’t good for Senkyo.

Apparently, when Itsuki went to the cafeteria to eat lunch, he saw Ichika sitting with Senkyo and Kinro. He hid reflexively and spied on them. When they were about to return to class, Itsuki ran to the classroom and waited for Senkyo and Kinro to return and ambush them.

*\*Aren’t you just a plain stalker?!\**

"I-I didn't say anything weird! I swear!"

"LIKE HELL I'D BELIEVE YOU!"

"THEN WHY DID YOU BOTHER ASKING ME ABOUT IT?!"

"SO THAT I CAN BEAT YOU INTO A PULP RIGHT NOW IF YOU CONFESS!!"

*\*WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS GUY?!\**

Senkyo couldn’t help but retort. Itsuki continued to grip Senkyo’s shirt. He wouldn't let it go without being satisfied. Kinro tried to defuse the situation. It wasn’t going to be easy, but he did it without a single thought.

"Stop it, Watanabe-san. Let go of Senkyo!"

"WHY THE HELL SHOULD I?!"

"Because if you don't, your sister would know about it! If you beat him up now, and learn that Senkyo did nothing wrong, your sister wouldn’t be so happy with you. You don't want, would you?"

"WHY YOU... TCH...! You got lucky punk."

Itsuki finally let go of Senkyo, but he still wasn't satisfied. He took a stand in front of the classroom and stared at the whole class. He slammed the desk and said the following words with conviction.

"LISTEN HERE, YOU FOOLS! IF I EVER SEE OR GET WORD THAT YOU HURT OR DID ANYTHING WEIRD TO MY SISTER, I SWEAR, I WILL COME AFTER YOU AND BEAT YOU TO A PULP OR EVEN WORSE!"

With that, Itsuki went back to his seat and pretended as if nothing happened. The whole class was completely frightened and avoided eye contact with Itsuki. Friends chatted with each other right after the Itsuki’s huge threat.

"W-Wow... What the hell was that about."

"I think Yukou-san did something again and got Itsuki angry."

"That thing about his little sister, right? I heard something like that happen in the cafeteria the other day!"

"Yukou-san was there too, wasn't he?!"

"Whoa! So, this is Yukou-san's fault after all!"

“I guess he’s just a filthy womanizer going for anyone.”

“Yeah, earlier before class, he had some kind of fight with Yutei-san.”

“Seriously? That’s so messed up!”

Rumors started to spread like wildfire. And almost immediately, Senkyo's social status plummet to the depths. No one wanted to be on Itsuki's hit list. Because of that, the other students wanted to pin the earlier threat on someone, and unfortunately for Senkyo, he was the perfect candidate. But there were a select few who interpreted the message better than others did.

One of them was a small group of three girls. It was the group of Suzuki Himari, Ito Sara, and Sato Aoi.

"Uwaa~ I knew that otaku was just trouble! He’s a womanizer and a creep!"

“I don’t know about that, Himacchi. It sounded like an overprotective brother to me.”

"What? But it was clear earlier wasn't it? And what makes you say that otaku didn't do anything wrong?"

Sara was the first one to voice her doubts about how most people interpreted it. But she didn't prove to be enough, so Aoi followed up with Sara.

"I think Sara-san is right, Himari-san. I saw Yukou-san and Honjou-san talking to two girls. The one with the blonde hair must've been her sister. I heard a bit of their conversation, but it was normal to me. And do you really think Honjou-san would go along hitting anyone out there?"

"U-Unnnn~... So, that otaku isn't doing anything wrong?"

"I think so..."

"Yeah!"

“And that gorilla was mad about nothing because he’s overprotective? This is confusing…”

With Aoi and Sara giving their own opinions, they were able to convince Himari. They straightened out her misunderstanding. Seeing as Himari was easily convinced, she must've really trusted Aoi and Sara.

But they weren't the only ones to properly interpret the message. A group of two male students heard the earlier group's discussion and praised them for not following the other assumptions.

"Oh? So, not everyone in this class is close-minded after all. You heard that didn't you Touma-kun?"

The two students were Yamamoto Sora and Saito Touma. They watched as Itsuki and Senkyo’s conflict unfolded before them.

"I don't care."

"The same as usual, huh? Still, it looks like Yukou-kun is going to have it hard from now on."

A large number of rumors were already made and spread before the afternoon classes finally started. While in class, Senkyo noticed a few glares from other classmates while he was listening, but he ignored those and focused on the lesson.

**15 – Crimson Bat**

After class, Kinro made a beeline to Senkyo and talked to him.

"Senkyo, rumors about you are spreading like wildfire!"

"Yeah, I noticed. The glares and constant chattering made it obvious."

"But it’s strange. I’ve heard a bunch of rumors about you, but nothing about me."

Senkyo was well aware of the rumors about him. But when he heard that Kinro didn't have any rumors about him, he immediately knew the reason.

*"\*That’s unfair! He has a popularity barrier!\*"*

"Yeah… Well, it's probably better to keep it that way. I'll be heading home now so nothing big will probably happen until tomorrow."

"I suppose you're right, but still, be careful."

"Sure, sure."

Senkyo took his bag and headed for home. But before he could get out of school, he saw someone waving at him in front of the school gate. The person waving was Watanabe Ichika, and the person standing next to her was her friend that was with them at lunch, Hisho Yuu.

"Oh, Ichika-san, do you want something from me?"

"Yukou-senpai, I'm so sorry about my brother! I’ll be sure to do something about this! If there is any way I can apologize, I’ll do it!"

Ichika suddenly apologized and repeatedly bowed at Senkyo. But it was so sudden. He didn't expect to have someone apologizing to him on his way home.

"What are you apologizing for?"

"Earlier, I heard that my brother did something suuupper embarrassing, and it's causing you a lot of trouble! I'm really, really sorry about him!"

"It's already spread that far?!"

*\*Didn’t school JUST end!?\**

"I heard it from Yuu-chan. She said that my brother caused a ruckus about me. Because of it, bad rumors about you spread. I'm really sorry!"

The rumors already spread to other year levels. Almost everyone knew about what happened earlier, including Ichika. When she first heard of it from Yuu, she went mad. Her brother made another mess.

She immediately decided to wait in front of the school gate once classes ended. She didn't know if Senkyo was a part of a club or if he went straight home after class. She thought to be safe, she would wait at the front gate right after class. And so that she wouldn't wait alone, Yuu came with her to wait.

"There's no need to apologize, you didn't do anything wrong."

"No, I'm supposed to take care of my brother! If he does something stupid, I have to fix it so nothing bad happens! I know he can be troublesome and a loose cannon, but he’s a really nice person when it matters!"

*\*I'm starting to think she's more like a mother than a little sister...\**

"Please, if there's anything I can do for you to make up for it, tell me!"

"No need to go that far. Nothing bad happened to me, alright? If anything happens, I'll call you for help."

"But I don't think you'll do that!"

"Huh? What makes you say so?"

"You just seem so nice! You aren't getting angry at me even though I was somewhat involved in what happened. It's easy to see you not calling for my help if you're in trouble!"

"W-Well..."

"See! You stuttered!"

*\*She's sharp! Of course, I won't! My pride will be broken into pieces if I asked my underclassman to protect me from bad rumors!\**

"Well, I guess I can't really make you. But, please remember that you can ask me for anything. I'll try to have this problem solved as fast as I can."

Ichika ran off into the distance. It seems she was hurrying home to talk to her brother. But in front of Senkyo, there was still someone staring at him. It was Yuu. She was staring at Senkyo as if observing him. She bowed to Senkyo and quietly walked away. Senkyo still stood there, staring at her slowly walking away.

"Hmm... I never really talked to Hisho-chan that much. I guess she's just a quiet person."

After another long day, Senkyo finally headed home. Later that day, Itsuki would be sitting in a seiza, while being thoroughly lectured by his little sister. Utterly powerless to do anything.

**…………**

"Whoa! I knew this was an interesting light novel!"

Senkyo was in his room reading a light novel. It was 'My Battle Against Demons and the Supernatural.' He was relaxing in his room after a long day.

"Hahh... nothing beats relaxing."

Ryosei talked to Senkyo as he had nothing to do. In his life, he had only watched anime and read manga. He heard about light novels, but he didn't check them out. So, he was somewhat curious.

*"\*Light novels huh? I'm more of a manga person myself.\*"*

"You said you were an otaku when you were alive right? What kind of otaku were you?"

*"\*Your typical. I watch anime and read manga, but I never tried reading novels.\*"*

"Is that so... Would you like to read some?"

*"\*No, not today anyway. Ahh! That reminds me! Is Magical Girl Kawaii-chan still running?!\*"*

"Magical Girl Kawaii-chan...? That one finished three years ago..."

*"\*T-THREE YEARS AGO?! NNNOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!\*"*

"JEEZ, CALM DOWN! You're hurting my head!"

*"\*I promised her I'll stay with her until the end but I died too early!!\*"*

The topic of anime reminded Ryosei of what he left behind when he died. But when he heard the unfortunate news that his favorite anime already finished without him seeing it through to the end, he despaired.

His voice was echoing through Senkyo's brain. So much that he almost got knocked out by it. It looked like his soul was leaving through his mouth. A few minutes later, Ryosei's cries came to a stop and his voice turned serious.

*"\*Senkyo, did you hear that?\*"*

"All I heard were cries of pain... and my soul being broken by it…"

*"\*Be serious now. I heard something from the closet.\*"*

"From the closet...? The only things in there are my clothes and stuff."

*"\*Just grab Kuro Yaiba and check it!\*"*

"Fine, fine, I'll go and check."

Ryosei sounded incredibly serious. He sent Senkyo to investigate his closet. As a result, Senkyo also turned serious. He knew what demons and evil spirits looked like from Ryosei's memories, creatures with hell-red skin for demons and creatures that come in all shapes in sizes but are generally dark in color for evil spirits. He took out Kuro Yaiba from its bag beside him and slowly approached the closet. Senkyo opened the closet with the tip of its blade but before Senkyo could even react, something came flying out of it.

"AAH!!"

Senkyo let out a scream as what came flying out freaked him out. He took a few steps back and tried to catch whatever came out of his closet with his eyes and saw the most unexpected thing he could've imagined. It was a bat.

A small bat was flying inside Senkyo's room. It had strange light crimson fur and black wings. It was wildly flying around the room. It was trying to escape. This bat looked like it knew what it was doing.

The bat went near the windows and tried to get past the blinds. Ryosei immediately took notice of this and ordered Senkyo.

*"\*Senkyo! Don't let that bat escape capture it!\*"*

"C-Capture it?! Why?! I don't want to go near it! It might bite me!"

*"\*Stop complaining and do it!\*"*

"But...!"

*"\*Fine! I'll do it myself!\*"*

Senkyo lost control of his body and it started moving on its own. Ryosei took over his body. He immediately blocked the windows and kept the bat away from it. He then chased the bat around and tried to catch it with his bare hands, but the bat kept dodging Ryosei's hands and flew around the room.

After a long game of cat and mouse, or more appropriately human and bat, Ryosei finally caught the bat. Once he got his hands on it, he ran straight to the kitchen to look for something to trap the bat in, but all he could find was a big jar.

**16 – Talismans**

"Okay, what's so special about this bat that you wanted it trapped?"

Senkyo regained control of his body. He was currently sitting in the living room. He was sitting on the sofa with a bat sealed in a jar on top of the coffee table. Ryosei put small breathing holes in the cap so that the bat could breathe. The holes were big enough to sustain oxygen for the bat but small enough to keep it from escaping.

*"\*You should've seen it in one of my memories, this bat right here is a vampire.\*"*

"What?! Th-This bat right here? It's true I saw it in one of your memories, but weren’t those only a myth?"

*“\*That’s what my father told me, but this bat fits a vampire’s description perfectly. Besides, do you really think any bat from earth would have this kind of fur? This is all just a hunch, but if I’m correct, then we can interrogate it for some answers.\*”*

"Ah... you're right, my bad."

Vampires were said to be beings that live in Zerid, where demons come from. However, they are not considered demons. They live off the blood of other beings, meaning they don't have to drink human blood to survive. They were beings that were in stories that were told to kids while they were young. They had incredible skill and the ability to mask their presence. It was said that they could hide in a crowd of humans without getting detected by the best hunters in the clan.

"But what is a vampire doing in my closet? Was it going to suck my blood in my sleep?!"

*"\*That would be the likely assumption... Let me borrow your body for a bit.\*"*

Ryosei scrutinized the bat. The bat was just staring at Ryosei. It had its wings covering its body, and it didn't move an inch.

"You, why were you in the closet?"

The bat didn't speak or move.

"We know you're a vampire. There's no need to hide it now."

The bat's ears twitched at Ryosei's words, but it still refused to speak.

"Are you trying to hide your presence again? I told you it's useless! You let your presence leek out for too long."

Of course, it was a bluff. Like other hunters, Ryosei didn’t have the skill to sense the presences of beings he wasn’t familiar with. Maybe knowing that not a word or movement came from the bat. It was set on staying silent.

"Senkyo, we're going to have to keep this bat here until we know what it wants."

*"\*What?! But why?! I don't want a vampire in my house! What if it somehow gets out of that jar and attacks us in our sleep?!\*"*

"Don't worry, I'll put up a barrier around it so it won't escape."

*"\*Oh yeah, you can make those.\*"*

Barriers Talismans are tools made by Ryosei's family. A common tool that is widely used for defense and confinement. The one who cast the barrier can freely choose who can and cannot enter the barrier.

Talismans are vessels with an applied property. Vessels are objects that have spirit power applied to them. Symbols are then written onto the vessel as a basic order to the object. There are nine basic symbols used that pronounce connection, discord, direction, interaction, domination, inferiority, equality, repetition, and spirit.

As such, a simple barrier talisman can be made by writing the symbol for connection and spirit on any vessel. If someone wanted it to be stronger, the caster can pour more spirit power into the talisman. Some talismans can be strengthened if connected with other talismans. Barrier talismans are one of those. However, if even a single talisman is severed from the connection, the entire barrier dissipates.

*"\*If that's the case, then can I make barriers too?\*"*

"Normal humans cannot channel their spirit power. Our family has a special type of training to control spirit power. But since you have my memories, there's no harm in trying. There's a faster and easier way to do it but that needs practice so for now, we'll do it by hand."

Ryosei went off to get a pen and four pieces of paper. He returned to his seat and gave Senkyo's body to him and instructed him.

"Should I just look back to one of your memories to do this?"

*"\*No, it would be better if I instructed you as you do it. You might get confused trying to look through my memories and creating them for the first time. For now, just use it for reference.\*"*

Senkyo knew how to do it from Ryosei's memories. But Ryosei thought it would be better to instruct him to avoid confusion.

*"\*First, we start off by creating a vessel. Pick up a piece of paper and hold it firmly.\*"*

Senkyo did as he was instructed.

*"\*Now, close your eyes and focus your senses on the piece of paper.\*"*

It was a weird sensation. He felt like he was some kind of chuunibyou but he ignored that.

*"\*Good, relax your heart and imagine the paper as an extension of your body. Imagine your spirit power flowing into the paper.\*"*

He felt as if needles poked his fingers. It didn’t hurt, but it was enough for Senkyo to notice it. At the same time, Ryosei spoke to inform him that it was finished.

*"\*Okay, it's done now.\*"*

Senkyo slowly opened his eyes and looked at the paper, but nothing changed.

"I guess it wouldn’t be that easy, huh..."

Senkyo said in a slightly depressed tone. Senkyo failed… or at least that's what he thought.

*"\*No, look closer.\*"*

Senkyo peered at the paper. It was then that he saw small light blue ripples flowing through the paper. It was so thin that it could barely be detected by the naked eye. Since blue ripples didn’t usually appear on paper, it only meant one thing.

"I-I did it...!"

Senkyo succeeded. His eyes widened as he stared at the piece of paper with overwhelming joy. But then he was cut off by Ryosei.

*“\*Not yet, you’ve only made a vessel. Now, move on to writing the symbol for a barrier on the vessel.\*”*

“Oh yeah, you’re right.”

Senkyo took the pen and drew a symbol. The symbol for connection: a circle, and the symbol for spirit: a half-moon arc with a diamond in the center, was placed in the middle of the circle. It was only then that he successfully made a barrier talisman. As an advance lesson, Ryosei told Senkyo to strengthen the talisman. He picked up the talisman and poured his spirit power into it, and surprisingly, the talisman was reinforced with ease. It was much easier than creating a talisman and he was able to do it in no time at all.

He was then able to create a barrier talisman with enhanced strength. Senkyo was elated, but something was a bit strange to him, so voiced it out.

"Wait, didn't you say you need special training to do that?"

*"\*Usually you do, but since you knew how to do it from my memories, I just needed to connect your spirit power to your mind. Since I’m another spirit inside of you, I was able to do that. Normally something like this is impossible.\*"*

"Oh, so you helped me..."

Senkyo was a little disappointed when he heard that. He thought he was able to do something amazing by himself on the first try. Ryosei noticed this and cheered him up.

*"\*Don't worry if we practice on this, I'm sure you'll be able to do it by yourself in no time. You'll have me instructing you so you'll be fine!\*"*

With the help of Ryosei, Senkyo successfully created four barrier talismans. Senkyo wasn’t as happy as he would have been if he did it alone, but he was happy that he made the talismans nonetheless.

"With this, the bat can't get out of this area even if it gets out of the jar, right?"

*"\*That's right.\*"*

**17 – Visitor**

Senkyo placed the four barrier talismans around the jar where the bat was. Looking at it from a normal person's perspective, it looks like a kid just captured a bat and played with it by pretending it was some kind of sealed beast. Senkyo sat back on the sofa as if just finishing a hard day of work.

"Man, I'm probably going to have crazier experiences than sealing a vampire, huh? Thinking about that makes my brain hurt. I mean, I think sealing a vampire is crazy enough."

Senkyo voiced his thoughts and Ryosei asked him a question.

*\*"Well... do you hate this?\*"*

Senkyo stopped and thought about it for a bit. And after some silence he replied.

"I... can't really say I hate this. While it has been trouble since I met you, even if I tell myself that I'll probably die sooner if I stay with you, I still can't say I hate it."

Senkyo voiced his own perspective of their situation. Ryosei was a bit surprised at his response. He thought normal people wouldn't want to come close to danger, but he knew Senkyo was telling the truth. Their souls were connected so they couldn't lie to each other. After a time of silence, Ryosei let out a hearty laugh.

*"\*Hahahahaha! What are you? Some anime protagonist? Hahahaha!\*"*

Senkyo thought about what he said and cringed a bit. He quickly tried to deny Ryosei.

"N-no! It's not like that! I just answered your question! You were the one who was being all emotional and asking 'Do you hate this?'"

*"\*No! I'm not the one being emotional! In the first place, you were the one who was complaining about crazy experiences!\*"*

For a while, their fight would continue. The other trying to win against the other. But as they were fighting, the bat suddenly went crazy and was trying to get out of the jar. Ryosei and Senkyo noticed this and they immediately stopped their fight. Senkyo was the first to speak.

"Why is it suddenly going crazy?"

*"\*I don't know either...\*"*

"Maybe it realized it couldn't get out or something?"

*"\*I don't think that's it.\*"*

The bat looked incredibly panicked. It moved all around the jar flapping its wings and scratching the jar. Realizing it was futile, the bat spoke.

"Get me out of here right now!"

"A girl's voice?!"

*"\*A girl's voice?!\*"*

It was a female voice. It had a panicked tone when it said that. Both Senkyo and Ryosei were surprised about it because some outside factor affected their judgment and passed the bat off as a guy.

"What about it?! Just hurry up and get me out of here already! *One of them*is coming straight for us!"

The bat's words caused them to put their surprise in the back of their head and Senkyo questioned the bat.

"Who's *them?*"

"That's not important right now! I need to get away from here! And you should too!"

The bat was referring to someone who even Ryosei didn't know. Senkyo immediately analyzed what the bat said and came to a conclusion.

"Is something dangerous coming for you? Are you being hunted?"

"Yes! Now just let me out of here before it catches both of us!"

Senkyo didn't know what to do. He turned to ask Ryosei but before they could even prepare themselves, everything around them emitted crystal-like lights. The windows showed that the blue, sunny sky turned into a cold night. Small particles of light were floating in the air. The only ones that had the same appearance as before were Senkyo and the bat.

"Th-This is... that night-time space!"

"It's already here..."

A recent memory that had the same environment as this flashed itself in Senkyo's mind. It was the space where Ryosei got sucked into Senkyo's body. As Senkyo was being reminded of that time, the bat prepared itself as whatever was coming for it was already here.

The door to Senkyo's house exploded inwards. Pieces of wood could be seen from inside the living room and the sound of the door getting destroyed was as audible as if it were right in front of them.

Everyone in the living room stayed silent. Senkyo had already switched with Ryosei since they knew it was going to be trouble for Ryosei if they tried to switch at the last second. He unsheathed Kuro Yaiba and assumed a battle stance.

Loud footsteps resounded throughout the quiet room and only got louder as the source of the footsteps got closer. And finally, from the living room could be seen a wolf-like humanoid. It was standing on two feet, had tattered clothes, brown and black fur, and a beastly face.

"A-A werewolf?!!"

*"\*Wh-What?! Those things exist?!\*"*

"N-No... This is the first time I've ever seen one. I also never heard of a werewolf appearing from my family's stories."

Ryosei and Senkyo were confused, especially Ryosei. He had never heard of other beasts or supernatural beings besides demons and evil spirits in his whole life. Senkyo was at the point where he can somewhat accept things like this now. But no matter how much he could accept that fact, it did not stop both of them from feeling the fear run down their spine.

The werewolf came closer to where Ryosei and the bat were. The werewolf noticed him and spoke like a hungry beast.

"You...rrragh! What are you doing here...ggrrraawh...!?"

It pointed its razor-sharp claws at Ryosei. He cautiously observed the beast and returned its question with another one.

"I can say the same thing. What are you?"

"Grrr... I don't need to answer a question of a foolish human! Raagh!"

The werewolf's eyes wandered away from Ryosei and saw the trapped bat on the table.

"Awoooo!! I finally found you!"

The werewolf howled as if celebrating. It quickly leaped to grab the bat in the jar but was interrupted. A blade swung towards it and was forced to back off. When the werewolf turned to see what it was, it saw Ryosei standing firm with his blade out.

"GRRRAGH!! Don't get in my way human! I'm not interested in you!"

"I won't let you. My instincts are telling me to keep that bat away from you."

"GRAHAHAHAHAHAHA!! FINE! IF YOU WANT TO DIE THAT BADLY THEN I'LL KILL YOU FIRST!"

**18 – First Battle**

The werewolf took another leap, but this time it was aiming for Ryosei. Despite his fear and confusion, he killed those emotions, calmly dodged its attack, and slashed its back. However, the wound Ryosei inflicted on it disappeared like it never got the wound in the first place.

"What the?!"

Ryosei shouted in surprise, but the werewolf had already leaped for him again. The werewolf stopped in front of Ryosei and swung at him with a series of claw attacks. Ryosei was on the defensive. All he could do was block the werewolf's attacks. Ryosei backed up and collected himself.

"GRAHAHAHA! You can keep up with my attacks? Good, it wouldn't be fun if you died so easily! GRRRAAAHH!"

The living room was turned into a mess. The sofas and other furniture were all over the place. Ryosei kicked the nearby sofa away from him to create some space.

Ryosei didn't move from his spot. He sheathed his blade and fixed his form. The werewolf leaped at him again. Before the werewolf got within reach of his blade, Ryosei already swung it. The werewolf thought it was all over for Ryosei, but a sharp gust of wind cut off one of the werewolf's arms.

The werewolf was thrown into a panic and lost its balance. Ryosei took advantage of this and slashed its other arm off. The werewolf used its remaining two legs to get away from Ryosei.

"RRAAAGGH!! THAT MOVE...! A HUNTER OF THE KONJOU CLAN!!"

The werewolf's eyes turned even more beastly as it stared at Ryosei. It was filled with bloodlust. Ryosei didn't want to lose this chance, so he moved to strike the werewolf while it was still weakened.

"HAAA!!"

But when he swung, it was gone. His blade struck the air. He hurried to turn around, but it was too late. The werewolf was behind him. It jumped so fast that Ryosei's eyes couldn't follow it.

The werewolf used its remaining limbs and kicked Ryosei to the wall. He bounced off it and the werewolf followed it up with another kick. It kept kicking Ryosei off the walls and into other walls or furniture until its arms regenerated. It kicked Ryosei to the middle of the room, to the table the bat was placed on. The table got destroyed and so did the barrier.

The jar fell to the ground and broke, releasing the caged bat. Ryosei was lying on the ground trying to get back to stance. He was beaten up really badly from the combo attack the werewolf did. His clothes were a mess and he had blood and bruises throughout his whole body. Senkyo's voice resounded in his head and got his attention.

*"\*Ryosei...! Look over there! The bat!\*"*

Ryosei got back up and looked over in the direction where the bat was. When he looked over, he saw the werewolf gripping the bat tightly and the bat was struggling to get out.

"AWOOOO!! FINALLY, I CAN RETURN YOU TO THE BOSS, AND HE'LL PRAISE ME SO MUCH... THAT I'LL BECOME HIS RIGHT-HAND MAN WHEN HE TAKES OVER THE THREE WORLDS! GRAHAHAHAHA!!"

"N-No...! Let me go...! Get... away from me...!"

"GRRR... YOU'RE A SO ANNOYING! STAY STILL!"

"I said let me go...!"

"GRRAAH! I'LL JUST SUCK OUT YOUR MANA THEN!"

The werewolf opened its jaw wide, and blue waves of light were coming out of the bat and into the werewolf's mouth. Once it was done, it threw the bat to the corner of the room and looked over to Ryosei.

"THAT SHOULD KEEP HER STILL FOR A WHILE... NOW...! LET'S CONTINUE WHERE WE LEFT OFF! GRAWW!!"

"Tch...!"

The werewolf resumed its attacks. Its sharp claws were clashing with Ryosei's blade. The werewolf's attacks were grazing Ryosei and leaving shallow wounds. Ryosei would counter-attack when the werewolf left openings, but it would just regenerate its wounds like they were never inflicted on it.

It was an intense battle. The werewolf fought with brute force, with no care for the small wounds it was receiving, knowing that it would regenerate the next second. Its bloodlust eyes would stare at Ryosei as they fought, increasing its pressure and raising alarms to Ryosei's danger senses.

But Ryosei wouldn't fall short. He blocked and dodge its strikes until he had gotten used to them with Senkyo’s body. And taking advantage of the beastly attacks of the werewolf, counter-attacking every opening he saw, while keeping his own defenses tight.

"GAHAHAHA!! THIS IS EXCITING BOY! YOU'RE ACTUALLY KEEPING UP WITH ME! COME ON SHOW ME MORE OF YOUR SKILLS!!"

"This is so annoying...!"

*"\*Ryosei! Something was shining on the back of its neck! I think it might be its weak point!\*"*

Senkyo pointed out that he saw a weak spot while Ryosei was focusing on fighting. He covered for Ryosei who didn't notice it. Senkyo wasn't fighting, so he helped by paying attention and looking for ways to beat it. But Ryosei wanted to make sure it wasn't Senkyo's imagination that led him to see a false weak spot.

*"\*Are you sure there was something there?\*"*

*"\*Yeah! I'm sure of it!\*"*

*"I guess it's better than going off nothing! I'm trusting you!"*

Ryosei never noticed a weak spot when they were fighting, but he passed it on as his own incompetence from being rusty and trusted Senkyo.

Ryosei assumed a different stance than he was taking in the last other clashes. The werewolf prepared to leap again, but this time Ryosei had a target; the back of his neck. Ryosei quickly turned away from the werewolf and ran.

"YOU'RE RUNNING AWAY?! GRAHAHAHAHA! COWER IN FEAR!! I'LL BE SURE TO RIP YOUR BODY TO PIECES ONCE I'M DONE WITH YOU!"

The werewolf leaped at Ryosei for the finishing move. Ryosei reached a wall, but he didn't stop. He jumped on the wall, twisted his body, and jumped over the leaping werewolf.

"WHAT?!!"

It let its guard down. It thought Ryosei had given up and ran to save his own life. When it saw him run away, it clicked its predatory senses and went for an all-out attack, leaping at Ryosei. This course of action would lead to its defeat. The werewolf was in midair, and it didn’t matter how fast it actually was, it couldn't move while it was airborne. It relied on good footing to do anything.

The werewolf was a sitting duck. It knew that it messed up, and there was no going back. It was going to die.

It was there. Ryosei saw a green gem embedded in its nape. He took a stance that allowed him to attack in midair. He saw his target and slashed it with his blade. He slid through the floor as he landed.

When he returned his gaze to the werewolf, it had its head cut off from the rest of its body, and the green gem that shined on its nape was broken to bits. The werewolf didn't show any signs of recovering.

Ryosei slowly approached the werewolf. He had his blade ready to attack just in case the werewolf regenerated or if its body moved without its head. Right now, Ryosei didn't want to take any chances and closed in with a defensive stance.

The werewolf's body and its head slowly disintegrated into ash and disappeared into the air. With that, Ryosei sheathed back Kuro Yaiba, and slumped to the ground, all burned-out. He had wounds, scratches, blood, and bruises throughout his whole body. His indoor clothes were all torn apart and ragged. There were small drops of blood on the floor.

**19 – Body Compatibility**

"HAAAAAHHHH...! I'm... hahh... done... hahh... for the day... hahh..."

Ryosei was breathing heavily. In the whole fight, he was terribly rusty. He hadn't fought for seven years, and now he was in a different body that wasn't in shape for his fighting style. He did his best to adapt to the current build of Senkyo's body. But doing so limited his attacks and reaction speed.

"S-Senkyo... hahh... sorry to ask you of this... but, could you... train your body a bit..."

*"\*I can see what you mean. My body isn't really suited for battle...\*"*

"H-hey, can we switch now...? I think you can recover faster if you're not the one controlling the body."

Ryosei thought of this from the previous times he switched with Senkyo. When Ryosei wasn't controlling his body, he felt less tired and recovered spirit power faster.

*"\*Sure.\*"*

Senkyo regained control of his body, and as he did...

"AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!"

The damage taken by his body kicked in all at once, and he felt the pain Ryosei was feeling when he was in control of the body. It was excruciating pain.

"AGHH! AHH...! IT HURTS! IT REAAAALLYY HURTS...! AHH!! MY ARM...!"

Cries of pain echoed throughout the nighttime living room. Ryosei used as much spirit power as he could to heal Senkyo’s body. Although his body wasn’t fully restored, all the wounds were closed and stopped any further bleeding. After a few cries later, Senkyo finally calmed down enough that he could bear the pain.

"Ouch... even standing up hurts..."

Senkyo grimaced at the tingling pain going through his body. But he put that at the back of his mind and asked Ryosei about the environment that had yet to change.

"Do you know anything about this night-time space, Ryosei?"

*"\*No, I don't know anything about this either.\*"*

"I see..."

*"\*Well, maybe that werewolf put this up using some kind of vessel. Let's go check outside.\*"*

"Okay."

Senkyo walked through the broken front door leading outside. Senkyo scanned the outside with an awestruck face. Everything around him, just like the time he met Ryosei, was covered with the veil of night. Small particles of light floated throughout the whole outside.

In their surroundings, there was one thing that stood out the most. It was a lantern with a floating ball of flame inside it. It produced an unusually dark flame that wasn’t like any other. It set off a dark aura.

*"\*Is that... an evil spirit...?\*"*

Ryosei's memories reminded him of the evil spirits that he fought with. Dark and seeping with negative emotions. It knew nothing but to destroy without a sane conscious.

"I think so."

Senkyo scrutinized the lantern and noticed the openable cover.

"Hmm... if I let this spirit out maybe something will happen..."

*“\*Maybe, but be careful. If it attacks you step back and I’ll take care of it.\*”*

Senkyo wildly guessed and opened the cover that was on top of the lantern. He immediately took a step back. The evil spirit floated upwards and disintegrated into small light particles, like the ones that were already floating around them.

Not long after, the night-time space then began to slowly dissipate. The night's sky was turning back to the orange tint of sunset. The surrounding buildings, plants, and objects returned to their normal color. After a short while, it was sunset. They were back to their normal world.

"Huh... was that some kind of magical barrier or something...?"

*"\*I don't even care that I don't understand what happened anymore...\*"*

Both Senkyo and Ryosei couldn't get much of what happened. Senkyo recalled today's events and something occurred to him.

"Oh yeah! The bat!"

Senkyo remembered where this all started from, it was the bat. Since it knew the werewolf was coming for her, the only thing that can answer their questions is the bat.

Senkyo immediately turned around to dash toward where the bat was but came to a sudden stop. Something was blocking his way. It was something that was made to block other uninvited guests in a household. It was the door to his house, and it was fully intact.

"Huh...?"

*"\*What the...?\*"*

Senkyo and Ryosei saw what became of the door on their way outside. It was destroyed to bits and the wood from it was scattered everywhere. Yet it was still right in front of them, fully intact, with no broken pieces, no damage, and not even a scratch.

Senkyo hurriedly opened the door and dashed towards the living room. He knew even if it was unexplainable right now, it will all be explained if they asked the bat.

When he saw the living room, it was as he expected. Not a single sign that a life-or-death fight happened in there. The broken furniture, the table, the sofa, and the jar, were all in their rightful place in one piece.

The only thing that was different from before the night-time space appeared what that the bat was no longer in the jar and the barrier that was surrounding it was gone. Senkyo let his voice leak as the one thing that could answer their questions was gone.

"Th-The bat... it's gone..."

*"\*Wait, no! Senkyo! In the corner!\*"*

Senkyo turned his attention to one of the corners of the room, as Ryosei pointed out. Senkyo came closer to the corner. The sight in front of him left both Senkyo and Ryosei bewildered. They were completely speechless.

That was because, in front of them, lay a familiar-looking girl. She had light crimson hair. She looked young, not far from Senkyo’s age. And the most noticeable feature of her at this moment was that she was completely naked. Her slender body lay boldly on the cold floor. The light from the living room reflected on her smooth, pale skin, revealing everything to them. Of course, that included her modest chest that was in full view.

Senkyo and Ryosei were completely and utterly flushed. Ryosei might not have his own body, but it was clear in his voice that was also flushed. They couldn't say a thing. They had never seen anything like it in person after all. But once they realized who the girl was, they shouted her name in surprise.

"Hisho-chan?!"

*"\*Hisho-chan?!\*"*

She was the 1st year student in their school who they met earlier that day, Hisho Yuu.

**Chapter 3: Abrupt Reunion**

**20 – Vampire… Caretaking?**

The houses and the streets were covered in darkness, with only the street lights and the bright moon illuminating the road. The night sky was decorated with the infinite number of stars that lay beyond it. You could not see a single person in the neighborhood streets. Though it looked like it was night, it was technically morning, very, very early in the morning. It was roughly about 3:00 am. The Yukou residence, specifically in the room of the only resident that lives there, had something unusual in it... or more specifically someone.

Senkyo was sitting on a chair facing his bed. He had already broken his sleep schedule, and from the looks of it, something was preventing him to sleep. That was because on his bed, lay a cute young girl covered by the same sheets he used every night. It was only the two of them in the room. The girl sleeping on Senkyo's bed was none other than Hisho Yuu, a 1st-year high school student of Honshou Academy, Senkyo's underclassman, a year below him. Other than Ryosei, another soul living inside Senkyo’s body, Senkyo and Yuu were the only ones present in the room.

Senkyo was sitting on a chair with a stern face and cold sweat was pouring down his face. His feet were tapping perpetually. He looked similar to a fanboy that was about to shake the hand of his biggest idol. He stared at Yuu nervously for two main reasons.

First, he had recently just known that Yuu was a vampire. A creature that was said to be fantasy to both normal people and the supernatural hunters of the Konjou Clan. They had no idea what she would do if she woke up hungry. The second, was because he was alone with a defenseless girl in a single room. Although a vampire, she was very much still a girl. Senkyo’s recent memories were proof of that.

Senkyo is an otaku, so he has seen scenes like this in anime, manga, or anywhere else that his hobby covers. But he never would've thought that one day something like this would actually happen to him.

Like our nervous protagonist here, Ryosei was in the same situation as Senkyo. He may be a soul borrowing a room in Senkyo's body, but he was a male spirit nonetheless. He too was an otaku with no experience with women whatsoever. He shared the same feelings as Senkyo.

These mutual feelings that both of them were feeling were enhanced by the fact that they share emotions. Both of their nervousness were multiplied by two. But they were not nervous because they thought of doing something immoral to her in her sleep, they were nervous because they were not used to being inside the same room alone together with a really cute girl. Ryosei knew Yuu was a vampire, and that he shouldn't let his guard down around her. Kuro Yaiba was even beside him, but that didn't stop Yuu from looking cute in her sleep and that didn't stop Ryosei from feeling flustered about the situation, but he didn't let that show.

As Senkyo was forcing himself to not be nervous and cause a misunderstanding, the sheets rustled. Yuu was waking up. Her eyes opened and blinked a few times to fix her sleepy, fuzzy vision. She slowly sat up on the bed, let out a long yawn, instinctively placed her hand in front of her mouth to cover her yawn, and used the other to rub her eye.

It looked like she was just waking up from a good night's rest. She looked around her surroundings to confirm where she was. She saw a completely unfamiliar room and saw her upperclassman sitting on a chair beside the bed.

"S-Senpai...?"

She muttered in a low voice, still half asleep but finally stopped to think and recollect what she last did before losing consciousness, and it finally struck her. She froze and looked at her body. She had an unfamiliar set of pajamas. The pajamas she wore were bigger than her usual size. Under her clothes, she felt quite breezy, almost as if she had no undergarments. That was because she didn't. From the baggy clothes, she could easily see and feel that she had no undergarments. She looked at Senkyo and saw his face was a bit flushed as he looked at her. He had to say something very, VERY important to say.

"I'M SORRY!"

"KYAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!"

A loud ear-piercing scream could be heard early in the morning. Senkyo thought he chose the correct words to say. He thought about interrogating her at first but realized he should apologize for doing something to Yuu without her permission.

Let's rewind the clock and take a look at the earlier events. The battle with the werewolf was over and Senkyo was back in the real world. Yuu was lying naked on the floor and Senkyo’s face was bright red.

"R-R-R-RYOSEI! WHAT DO WE DO?!"

*"\*WH-WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN ‘WHAT DO WE DO?!’ P-PUT SOME CLOTHES ON HER AND LAY HER ON A BED!\*"*

It was like both of them forgot the fact that the reason they hurried to her was to find out more information. They first had to sort out the completely defenseless Yuu. They thought to get some of Senkyo's clothes and lay her on a bed first. It was the right course of action, but there was a problem.

"W-W-Wait! *YOU* are going to put the clothes on her right?"

*"\*No way! YOU'RE doing it! I feel too uncomfortable to do that!\*"*

"But we're in this together, aren't we? Come on, help me out over here!"

*"\*Yeah, you're right! We're in this* together*! SO DO YOUR PART AND PUT SOME CLOTHES ON HER ALREADY! I'M ALREADY TIRED FROM THE BATTLE!\*"*

"Kuu..."

Ryosei turned Senkyo's words against him. Senkyo could've thought of ways to childishly counter Ryosei, but he knew he was right. He also didn't want to prolong the fact that Yuu didn't have any clothes on. So, he killed his emotions and carried Yuu to his room.

*\*She’s asleep and this is necessary so there’s nothing to worry about! She’s asleep and this is necessary so there’s nothing to worry about! She’s asleep and this is necessary so there’s nothing to worry about!\**

Senkyo kept repeating to himself as he kept a poker face while carrying Yuu. He thought to pick clothes that were the least revealing and what he ended up with are his pajamas. He thought of what to use in exchange for her undergarments but then realized that was too creepy and threw the idea out the window, Ryosei agreed with him. But then that's when they both realized they were going to have to put her pajamas on.

"Th-This is going to be harder than I thought..."

*"\*Don't you dare turn to me; I had my fair share of troubles!\*"*

"I wasn't thinking about it!"

And so, after a few more minutes of Yuu being covered by the bed's blankets. Senkyo thought of a great way to put on the pajamas for her. He immediately regretted it.

Senkyo sat behind the naked Yuu and had the pair of pajamas ready. He took the shirt and dressed her from behind, and slowly buttoned the shirt up. Next was the pants, he did the same strategy and dressed her from behind, but this one was harder since it needed to be worn from the bottom. He rolled up the pajamas beforehand, placed both Yuu's feet into the openings of the pajamas, and slowly rolled the pajamas up.

It was perfect… almost perfect. Senkyo didn’t see anything Yuu didn’t want him to see. Now it would be easier to face her later on, but there was only one problem.

"That… was dangerous..."

Senkyo said with an even brighter shade of red than before.

*"\*Wow! You actually did it!\*"*

"Shut up! You probably wouldn't have been able to do that!"

*"\*But why were you so nervous? You carried her all the way over here with your bare hands. What's the point of trying to act like you didn't already see her body and doing weird positions just to dress her up?\*"*

"That and this are two different things! Don't act like you could've done this without being nervous!"

The whole time Senkyo was dressing Yuu up, he was focused just like Ryosei was when he was fighting earlier, but that served to be counterproductive. While he was dressing her up from behind, he was forced to breathe in the scent of her hair. He did his best to ignore the alluring scent and focused on the task at hand. In the end, all went well and Yuu was dressed up and slept on Senkyo's bed. Although that didn’t change that the same scent lingered in Senkyo’s nostrils. He was worried he had a weird scent fetish or something like that but he shook his head furiously before he got too much into the subject.

After Senkyo's lust-provoking battle, Ryosei and Senkyo decided to look after Yuu as she slept. It was dangerous to leave a vampire loose in your own house, even though she looks cute. So, Ryosei decided to restore Senkyo's energy and body with spirit power in the morning to avoid being tired and sleeping in classes.

**21 – Probing**

And here we are in the present. Senkyo was sitting on the floor in a seiza, in front of Yuu. While Yuu was sitting on Senkyo's bed with the same shade of red Senkyo had earlier.

"And that's what happened..."

Senkyo just finished explaining to Yuu what happened when she was knocked out. After an awkward silence, Yuu spoke a single word that hit Senkyo like a truck.

"Pervert-senpai..."

"I told you I'm sorry!"

"You saw everything didn't you?!"

"W-Well..."

Senkyo couldn't argue as he did see her naked when he first saw her. He even had to carry her while she was naked. Senkyo was guilty.

"So, you *DID* see everything...!"

"But I couldn't just leave you there! You could've caught a cold or something! Not to mention… you know?"

Senkyo hinted at the fact that she was completely naked on the ground.

"W-Well... thanks for that... B-But you still saw...!"

"I'm really sorry about that!"

Senkyo continued to apologize until Yuu calmed down. They finally got back on topic. Yuu's face turned serious and so did Senkyo.

"I-I guess there’s nothing I can do about this now… Yukou-senpai, what are you?"

"What am I? What do you mean?"

"I'm asking if you're human or not."

"Then, of course, I'm human! What else would I be?"

"I don't believe you!"

"Why do I feel like I had this conversation before?"

Senkyo felt a chill of déjà vu run down his spine. As if everyone around him was compelled to ask him a question only to immediately reject his answer… Well, he set aside the fact that he felt like no one trusted him and continued.

"Why won't you believe that I'm human, then?"

"Well... You don't feel like a human to me."

"I don't feel like a human? You mean your senses are telling you I'm not human?"

"Yes."

*"\*Vampires have enhanced senses, right Ryosei?\*"*

*"\*They do, all of their five senses are superior to humans. We assume that means their senses to feel other species or presences are enhanced as well.\*"*

*"\*But still, do I not feel like a human?\*"*

*"\*I wouldn't be able to tell. After all, this is the first time I've been sucked into someone else's body. That might affect my senses, but as far as I can tell, you're human.\*"*

"Senpai?"

Senkyo stayed silent as he was conversating with Ryosei. Yuu was confused by the sudden silence and called out to Senkyo.

“O-Oh! It's nothing, don't mind it.”

“Hmm… Now that I think about it, you were talking to yourself quite a lot when you had me trapped in that jar, weren’t you?”

“Ah!”

Senkyo didn’t realize it as he was talking to Ryosei in his mind, but the whole time the Yuu was in her bat form, he was making conversation with seemingly no one. Thinking on his feet, he tried to make the best excuse he could come up with.

“Wait, no, that’s… I…”

Absolutely nothing.

“…”

*“\*Senkyo?\*”*

*“\*Just trust me.\*”*

“……”

*“\*Hey, I reaaally think we should make an excuse now!\*”*

“………”

*“\*HEEEEY!!!\*”*

“…Ah! I got it! You’re THAT kind of person. I heard when humans are lonely they make conversation with themselves. Sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.”

“…N-No, it’s… it’s alright…”

Yuu ended her probing with a satisfied nod. Ryosei sighed in relief as she created a convenient misunderstanding for them. However, he wasn’t pleased with Senkyo’s actions, as the enemy could have found out about the connection between him and Ryosei.

*“\*Why didn’t you say anything back there!?\*”*

*“\*What are you talking about? That was the best choice to make, wasn’t it?\*”*

*“\*And what part led you to believe that!?\*”*

*“\*Well, think about it. Ryosei, did Hisho-chan truly believe it was only me talking to myself?\*”*

*“\*She did, what about it?\*”*

*“\*Well, now I can confirm a lot of things. Going by what you said about two souls housing a single body being a nonoccurrence before, Hisho-chan shouldn’t know about it, and being something considered impossible, she shouldn’t have any reason to suspect that. On the other hand, if she suspects us, then there should be a reason for suspicion, that being knowledge that our situation isn’t as impossible as you first thought. If she suspected us, then we could lead an interrogation in that direction, if not, then there’s no need to risk exposing our connection with strange questions. It works, don’t you think?\*”*

*“\*I… huh? Y-You thought THAT far ahead?\*”*

Ryosei couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He didn’t know much about psychology, but it did make sense. By throwing false confusion upon being suspected and staying silent, he made Yuu fill in the blanks to explain his voicelessness using her own knowledge. Normally, if she suspected his feigning ignorance, then she would just do the same. However, with Ryosei’s ability to see through lies, he would be able to catch onto that. He knew Senkyo was only a normal human who lead a perfectly normal life before through his memories, but he didn’t expect him to be so quick-witted and cunning. As he was thinking that, he arrived at a realization. He could not read Senkyo’s thoughts. Although his memories and emotions were connected to him, at the moment when he was crafting his cleaver answer, he couldn’t get a single read on him.

“U-Um… Senpai, did I offend you, after all?”

Pressured by the long silence, Yuu spoke out to Senkyo.

“O-Oh, no, sorry. I was just thinking about a lot of things.”

“Well, if you say so. Then, do you have any questions for me? That’s why you kept watching on me, right?”

“Ah, yes. Could you tell me when you felt that I wasn't human?”

"When I first saw you, on the first day of school. Everyone else had the same atmosphere. But when I saw you, I felt like you were a different being than the other students… somehow."

"The first day of school... that was way before the accident..."

"I thought that you might be who I'm looking for, so I decided to follow you everywhere you went. But if you defeated a werewolf, then that might explain it…"

Yuu looked disheartened as she said so.

"You're looking for someone? And you thought it was me because I had a different atmosphere?"

"Yes… I had no other leads, and you were the only one that stuck out to me."

“Then, why are you looking for this person?”

“..…”

Yuu stayed silent and averted her eyes.

"Hisho-chan?"

"S-Sorry, I'm not supposed to tell anybody the reason."

"Is that so? That should be fine, for now."

Senkyo had no use for information about some random person he didn't know. Although it could be him she was looking for, she still wasn’t certain. Right now, what he wanted to know is about what happened yesterday.

**22 – Her Backstory**

"What want to know is what happened back there. What was that werewolf, why was it chasing you, and what was that night-time space all about?"

"W-Well..."

Yuu took her time to collect her thoughts. She needed to be sure that it was fine to tell Senkyo everything about what happened. She thought about what she could tell and what she couldn't. And finally, she arranged everything in her head.

"A werewolf is one of the races in our world, Zerid. They feed on meat and hunt in packs, like normal wolves. Like the werewolf you fought yesterday, most of the werewolves have joined a group that calls themselves END, a group of Zerians that joined together to rule the three worlds."

"An evil organization, huh? What the hell...?"

"Their organization first appeared seventeen years ago. They are a well-structured group that even has researchers of their own. The cause of the one you call 'the night-time zone' is one of their inventions, a spirit lantern. It is a lantern with a spirit inside it. When the lantern is activated, it releases a sealing glass surrounding the soul and makes it so the spirit zone it makes is spread and covers a certain area."

"Wait a second, are evil spirits and spirits any different? And what’s a spirit zone?"

*"\*You've never heard of this before, right, Ryosei?\*"*

*"\*No, I've heard of evil spirits. As far as we were told, spirits that have no regrets are reincarnated.\*"*

Senkyo and Ryosei were both in the dark about what Yuu was saying. It was strange to them that even the Konjou Clan, a group that fends off the supernatural, would not know more about the subject. Something felt odd.

"Yukou-senpai, I thought humans like you already knew about the three worlds? Weren’t you the one who defeated the werewolf earlier, or was I mistaken?"

"As far as I know, only evil spirits and demons disrupt this world. And I don’t know any other worlds besides Zerid and Earth. I would like to ask you to fill me in on anything I’m missing."

"I see, then I'll explain. But first of all, do you know how this Earth was created?"

“Well there are a lot of theories out there but the most famous one is the Big Bang Theory, right?”

“No, that is wrong.”

Senkyo somewhat expected that to be Yuu’s response. If mysteries like this were hidden from the world, then there was no surefire way for a theory to be true. He and Ryosei stayed silent and listened carefully to Yuu.

“At this moment, three worlds exist Earth, Zerid, and the Spirit Realm. Home to humans, zerians, and spirits. But before, these worlds were once a part of a single planet called, Primo. It was a chaotic world ruled by the gods named Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. All their creations for their desired worlds were created on a single planet and turned into a mosh pit of destruction. Their creations fought and killed each other for survival and made it so that most of the creatures died before they could ever evolve. That was when they finally decided to separate Primo into three different worlds that each one of them could rule over. With the use of their combined godly powers, they forcefully separated Primo into three, smaller interconnected worlds. Zeus ruled over Zerid, Poseidon ruled over Earth, and Hades ruled over the Spirit Realm. Each god ruled as they wished and created peace for the three worlds that were once known as Primo.”

Senkyo and Ryosei were speechless. Three interconnected worlds are ruled by three gods. A world that was born in destruction was separated to make peace. They couldn’t believe it, but they were forced to. Living proof of a species of one of those worlds was right in front of them. No one could oppose her claim. Senkyo could use his known knowledge and logic to fight her claim, but that would be useless because it was factual that demons, vampires, werewolves, and spirits existed, meanwhile his logic and arguments lay where those species were a myth. His experiences up to this point and his aching body were enough proof that his accumulated knowledge about the world was shallow at best.

“As for your questions earlier, I don’t know the details myself, but evil spirits and spirits are different. A spirit zone is a small replication of the spirit realm that is produced whenever a spirit in a world other than the Spirit Realm appears… I believe. In a spirit zone, only other spirits can enter and they can only do so after the zone completed its creation. However, with END’s spirit lanterns, spirits and mana wielders within the vicinity of the zone are forcefully sucked inside it. The only way out is to release the spirit from the lantern.”

“Is it just me or did you seem kind of uncertain there?”

“That’s because I’ve never actually been to the spirit realm before. I’m only telling you second-hand information given to me. Although I cannot guarantee the legitimacy of my information about the spirit realm, as someone who lives in Zerid, I can guarantee everything else.”

“I-I see…”

It was a huge amount of information to process all at once, but Senkyo was barely able to understand everything that she told him. There was no possible way Yuu was able to come with all of that on the spot. Even if there was, Ryosei could tell whether someone was lying or not. Senkyo put faith in that ability and it turned out she was speaking the truth.

“If there’s anything else you would like to ask, as long as it is within my power, I will answer it.”

“N-No, I think that’s enough for one day. Thank you for your cooperation.”

END traps spirits inside lanterns to use them as tools. When Senkyo heard that, he couldn't help but think about the spirit that was trapped inside it. Meanwhile, something else stuck out to Ryosei.

*"\*Only spirits and mana wielders are forcefully sucked in...? Wait, didn't you enter the spirit zone, Senkyo?\*"*

*"\*I did... Maybe it’s because you were inside me?\*"*

*“\*That could be possible. But with two options, the only way to be certain is if one option is eliminated.\*”*

*“\*Then are you telling me that I could have mana inside me…?\*”*

*“\*It’s only a hunch, but yes.\*”*

*“\*Okay then.\*”*

"Hisho-chan, do you think it’s possible that I have mana inside me?"

Senkyo called out to Yuu once again.

“O-Oh, yes. Recently, I have seen humans that were able to use mana as well but they were artificial.”

“Artificial?”

“I don’t know much about them myself. Wait, shouldn’t you know about them, Yukou-senpai? You’re one of them, right? The hunters of this town.”

“O-Oh, that one is a bit complicated… A-Anyway, Hisho-chan, can you check me if I have mana?”

Upon hearing Senkyo's words, Yuu froze in place and her face suddenly went pale. Something seemed to be troubling her. She then spoke with an agitated voice and stuttered her words.

“M-Me? Check you for mana? Right now?! W-Wait, wait, wait, right now is a bit…”

“Why? Is there a problem?”

“U-Uhm… Y-Y-You see, ah… umm… S-SENPAIII!!!!”

"Whoa!"

Yuu grabbed Senkyo on his shoulders and started shouting agitatedly at his face. She kept shaking him as she spoke. Her face was like a ghost’s and her eyes looked like spirals. Something about what Senkyo said must've really worked her up.

"W-W-W-What are you saying Yukou-senpai?! Ch-Ch-Check if you have mana?! N-N-N-NO! I can't do that! I-I mean, it's not that I don't like you or anything, b-b-b-b-but isn't that a bit too fast?! I never really talked to you or anything and..."

Yuu kept rambling on about something, but Senkyo didn't understand what she was going on about. Her face looked like it was about to overheat.

"Whoa, calm down, calm down, Hisho-chan! I can’t understand what you're talking about!"

**23 – Judge of Character**

Yuu snapped out of it and stopped shaking Senkyo. She didn't realize when was so flustered, but her face was right in front of Senkyo. She hurriedly took her hands off his shoulders and retreated to the bed. But this time, she sat facing the wall.

"Uh-umm... Hisho-chan... did I say something to upset you...?"

"I-It's not that you did something to upset me... It's just that..."

Yuu didn't change the direction she was facing, but she cutely turned her face around and met Senkyo's eyes. Her face was different from its earlier pale. It was now bright red.

"I-It's just that... in our culture... we vampires... if two vampires love each other... they suck their partner's blood as a sign of their love... In this world... it's like a kiss... B-but... to check one's mana... we vampires have to suck their blood....... That’s why..."

When Senkyo heard her explanation, his face turned bright red just like Yuu’s face. He realized what he just said to Yuu. “Can you check me if I have mana?” From Yuu’s perspective, he basically asked Yuu to kiss him. Senkyo then responded to Yuu in the same manner she had earlier.

"I-I-I-I'M SORRY...! I should've been more careful about my words! You're a vampire and all, but I was careless and I probably offended you...!"

"N-No! It's not your fault. Other vampires don't really get this flustered over something like this, it's just me so... I'm sorry if I made you feel bad!"

Yuu turned back to the wall and looked like she had something on her mind. Senkyo noticed that she said the last part with a sad tone and thought that there was a problem. He couldn't stop himself from trying to cheer her up.

"I... I'd hate it if someone I don't know suddenly asked to kiss me. I don’t think you’re in the wrong…"

"Eh...?"

But Senkyo was an awkward person in this type of situation. After saying that one line, he turned to the side to avoid Yuu's eyes. His face was still as flushed as it was earlier, maybe even a little brighter.

Yuu turned to Senkyo in surprise as she heard that. Senkyo is trying to cheer her up, in his own awkward way and it didn't seem like Yuu minded that awkwardness. She stopped facing the wall and faced Senkyo properly.

"Yukou-senpai..."

Senkyo turned to Yuu with the same flushed face. They met eye to eye. Both of them had bright red faces. The atmosphere turned into something that came straight out of a shoujo manga panel. Yuu gave Senkyo a smile and said…

"Thank you!"

The way she thanked him wasn't that grand. It was the same ‘thank you’ you would hear every day. It was supposed to be your normal, nice thank you. But something about Yuu turned it into something else in Senkyo's eyes.

Yuu's eyes met with his and gave him a smile. Nothing too special, but the way she smiled at him and kept their gazes connected made it special. After a moment of thought, Senkyo finally found the word that made that moment special to him.

"C-Cute..."

Senkyo muttered in a small voice that no human from that distance should've ever heard. But Yuu was a vampire. Her enhanced hearing caught Senkyo's mutter as if he was saying it normally to her. Yuu's face became redder than it was, and she turned back to the wall and put her face in the palms of her hands.

After that, they couldn't continue any further questioning and decided to get ready for school. But when they looked at the time, it was only 5:36am. Only two hours and a half had passed since Yuu first woke up. But they didn't feel sleepy anymore. Something about earlier prevented their sleepiness from kicking back in.

So, they decided to pass the time with the only pass time present in Senkyo's room. They played some two-player games and read and talked about manga. It seems like Yuu had a small interest in manga.

After they passed the time, Senkyo had enough time to make breakfast for two and made lunches for both himself and Yuu. It seemed like she flew home to fetch her uniform while Senkyo was cooking because she came back in her uniform. Then, they made their way together to school.

"Yukou-senpai, thank you for cooking me breakfast and making me a lunch box. But you didn't need to do all of that."

"No, it's my way of saying sorry for yesterday."

"Ah... ahaha..."

As Senkyo and Yuu were walking their way to school, he brought up yesterday's incident. Yuu awkwardly laughed as she remembered what happened when she got knocked out.

"Ah... sorry, I didn't mean to bring that up again!"

"No, no, it's fine... Yukou-senpai... why are you so nice to me? I'm a vampire... Aren't you afraid that I'll attack you?"

Yuu asked Senkyo a serious question. Her face was devoid of jokes. Something was on her mind. Was she concerned about Senkyo being too trusting? Or maybe something else entirely. Either way, Senkyo gave out a vague answer as he faced Yuu.

"To be honest, at first, I was afraid. Vampires are known for attacking humans and sucking out their blood. When I heard that the bat was a vampire, I was a bit scared. But when I saw the vampire was someone I know. I stopped to think a bit, then I found myself carrying you to my bed and dressing you up. Weird, isn't it?"

"...I don't get you at all, Yukou-senpai... and that doesn't even answer my question properly!"

"Then I'll tell you clearly this time, why I'm nice to you."

"....."

Yuu silently waited for Senkyo's answer.

"Because you're not a bad person. So, you would have just about the same levels of danger as a normal human. I told myself to be on guard when you woke up, but when I talked to you, you didn't seem like a bad person at all. Then we played games together and talked about manga, wasn't that fun? That's how I knew you weren't bad. That's why I'm nice. That's why I'm not afraid. Does that answer your question?"

"You judged me through a few hours of playing games and talking...? Isn't that a bit too ridiculous?"

"Don't underestimate a man and his hobbies, Hisho-chan."

Senkyo's life has been revolving around his hobbies for as far as he could remember. His father supported him with his hobbies ever since he first got them. His father was probably the type to spoil his child with everything he could, but that didn't look that way. After all, Senkyo turned out to be reasonable, sharp, and open-minded. If he was spoiled all the time, this personality would be a pipe dream.

Yuu sighed, unsatisfied with the answer her senior gave her but she gave up on trying to get a satisfactory answer.

"Here I thought you were actually going to give me a serious answer... Aren't you just laid back, Yukou-senpai?"

"Hahaha, maybe."

"I knew it. You know, Senpai, you shouldn't be so trusting. I'm a vampire you know, I can attack you anytime I want!"

"Then why aren't you?"

"Why would I do that? I'm not some out-of-control vampire!"

"I know, that's why I'm not afraid. You're just like another human that's stronger than me."

"But if I get hungry, I might suck your blood, you know?"

"That's just a little increase in danger. 'If they can be reasoned with, they aren't that dangerous!' That's what my stupid laid-back father used to tell me. I never thought I'd actually be using that saying."

"Your father seems to be happy-go-lucky, huh...?"

"Incredibly. He'd be in a dangerous situation and then laugh about it afterward. Making stupid quotes that don't even make sense when you first say them. I'd sometimes wonder how he even got through his life."

Senkyo reminisced about the past. On the outside, he looked like he was completely dissing his father. But on the inside, he really respected his father. It also seems like he enjoyed his father's presence.

"Then why did you use his quote just now?"

"...Well, that stupid father of mine proved it to be right so far. I must've been infected with his danger germs."

"The apple never goes far from the tree, huh?"

"Don't say that! I'm at least smarter than him!"

"You and your father seemed to be really close..."

Yuu looked back to the road, a little down when she said that last line. Her hair was covering her face, making it difficult to see her expression. She stayed silent as she seemed to have her mind on something else.

"Hisho-chan? Is something wrong?"

"Ah...! It's nothing, Yukou-senpai!"

"If you say so..."

Senkyo knew something was bothering her. He didn't say anything about it because he thought it was a personal matter. He didn't want to be rude and pry into someone else's life. So, he stayed quiet about it, and finally, they reached the school gate.

"Well then, Yukou-senpai, see you later. Oh, thanks for the lunch too!"

"No problem. See you later."

**24 – Kinro’s Interrogation**

Senkyo said his goodbyes as Yuu ran off to her classroom. He was about to head to his classroom as well when he felt a heavy force suddenly weighing on his back. It was accompanied by a loud shout as the force spread through his body. The shout had a familiar voice and recognized the owner of the voice immediately.

"K-Kinro?! What's this all of the sudden?!"

"That's my line! Who would've thought YOU would be walking to school side by side with Hisho-chan! WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN YOU TWO?!"

"You’ve got it wrong! It's not like that!"

"What part did I get wrong? 'Well then, Yukou-senpai, see you later. Oh, thanks for the lunch too!', 'No problem. See you later,' you said as you saw her off with a smile. Tell me, Senkyo, what did I misunderstand? You made her lunch, didn’t you!?"

"You were eavesdropping?!"

"N-No! I was going to say hi, but then I saw you happily talking with Hisho-chan. When I saw that, I thought I shouldn't interrupt and walked a few meters away. I couldn't help but hear some parts of your conversation. Like, 'The apple never goes far from the tree, huh?' 'Don't say that! I'm at least smarter than him!' 'You and your father seemed to be really close...’'"

"THEN YOU *WERE* EAVESDROPPING!!"

Kinro witnessed all of Senkyo and Yuu's interactions on their way to school. From different angles, Kinro could be seen hiding behind poles, trees, bushes, and every other hiding spot as he followed the two. He was incredibly interested. If curiosity levels can be physically seen, Kinro's would be a pole reaching up to the moon.

He jumped Senkyo the moment Yuu headed for her classroom. He was like a little kid who saw a magic trick for the first time. His face was beaming with curiosity. He quoted the lines he heard from eavesdropping while trying to imitate them with low- and high-pitched voices.

Senkyo couldn’t keep up and calmed Kinro down first, Senkyo thought of excuses he could use. He obviously couldn't tell Kinro that he met her when she suddenly appeared out of his closet, nor could he say Yuu is a vampire and he had a fight to the death with a werewolf yesterday. Kinro asked Senkyo with his usual calm demeanor while Senkyo hid most of the truth to avoid trouble.

"So? What's happened between you two?"

"We just happened to meet on the way to school—"

"Lies."

"What?! How could you deny that so readily?!"

"You MADE HER lunch and ‘just happened’ to MEET HER on the way to school?"

"Grk..."

Senkyo already made a mistake. If he had time to think about it, he could usually make barely passable excuses and get away with it. The sudden appearance of Kinro made him make floppy excuses with a lot of contradictions. He couldn't think of good excuses and messed up.

*“\*Senkyo, I can’t tell if you’re really smart or really dumb, please make up your mind. What happened to the one that could do psychological calculations in less than a second!\*”*

*“\*Shut up I’m just really bad when it comes to Kinro!\*”*

"So, why did you make her lunch?"

"W-Well, h-her parents were away for a bit so—"

"That's another lie."

"What?! You've never even met her parents!"

"*YOU* have?"

"U-Uhmm..."

"Thought so."

Kinro cut Senkyo off every excuse he's thought of before letting him finish. He could somehow tell if he was lying or not. They have been friends since middle school, and that made it easy for Kinro to detect lies from Senkyo when he is caught off guard.

Kinro sighed and thought of asking Senkyo directly.

"Do you plan on telling me the truth?"

"If something happens that requires me to tell the truth... then maybe..."

Senkyo was already found out. He didn't try to struggle when he already knew he had no way out of Kinro's interrogation.

"Kuuu...! Fine, then just answer this one honestly!"

Kinro held back his overflowing curiosity. He was curious, but he didn't lose control of himself. He didn't want to be rude to his friend so he held back, but at the very least he wanted to know one thing that he could not hold back.

"Is Hisho-chan your girlfriend—"

"No."

Senkyo calmly denied Kinro the moment the words left his mouth. It looks like he was at least prepared for this one. Senkyo said it so suddenly that Kinro knew he wasn't lying this time. Kinro not so quietly accepted that Senkyo didn't want to tell him what was between Yuu and him.

"Well, I guess I can just hope that something happens that makes you tell me the truth then."

"...I hope that doesn't happen..."

Something that happens that makes Senkyo tell Kinro the truth; that something is when Kinro gets mixed up in the trouble with evil spirits and demons. Senkyo didn't want Kinro to get into the dangerous mess he was already in. But since Kinro doesn't know anything about it, Senkyo can't blame him for wanting something like that to happen to him.

As Senkyo was thinking of the possibility that Kinro gets involved with him. Kinro noticed something that Senkyo didn't normally bring. He saw it yesterday, but Senkyo said someone else needed it, so he assumed that he meant that he was giving it away. And that thing is...

"Senkyo, I thought you were going to give your shinai to your friend."

"Ah... yeah."

Kinro noticed the shinai bag that Senkyo brought yesterday but what he said to Kinro was that he was going to let a friend borrow it. His words and actions were contradictory. However, this time, Senkyo had an excuse ready to counter any possible counter. He wasn't going to mess up this time.

"That's because my friend has special circumstances with his family, so I just have it around with me and bring it to my friend when he has practices."

A vague answer that prevents a considerate person to pry any further. Senkyo's excuse had a lot of possibilities, and he said it in a way that didn't require him to explain it in detail. Kinro wouldn’t pry into a stranger’s personal life. It was perfect.

"Oh, I see..."

*\*Yes! He bought it!\**

Senkyo internally cheered as he managed to hide at least one thing correctly. Kinro thought of various circumstances in his mind since all he could think of were personal troubles, he didn't say anything else. And so, they arrived at the classroom with some time to spare before the first period.

**25 – Troublesome Rumors**

When they entered the classroom, everyone's attention was on Senkyo. They looked at him like trash. Groups of students openly talked to each other. Loud enough that Senkyo could hear it.

"U~wa~ there he is. I heard he's a womanizer that picks up every girl he sees."

"Gross. He tried to pick up Watanabe-san's little sister and got us all in trouble!"

"I know right! He even tried to go for Yutei-san! That otaku probably thinks it'll turn out as it does in his anime. Disgusting."

The students verbally attacked Senkyo. His rumors finally spread and the students used them to attack him. The majority of the students talked and scowled at Senkyo with disgusted eyes. It looks like his social status is at rock bottom.

While Senkyo was walking to his seat, a student took out his leg and made Senkyo trip. Senkyo caught himself with his other leg and stood back up. It looks like his reaction time and speed got better, most likely from the long mountain climb and yesterday's fight. The reason for Senkyo’s inhuman physical improvement was because of Ryosei’s spirit power which regenerated his body and strengthened his muscles much faster than any normal human. The student didn't like that he caught himself and clicked his tongue.

Kinro saw what happened and wasn’t about to let that slide.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?"

"Ha? What the hell does it matter to you?"

"That's my friend right there. You think I'll just stand around as you do that?"

There was friction between Kinro and the student. It looked like a fight might break out any second. Senkyo wanted to avoid that, so he came in between them to stop them before things got out of hand.

"No, Kinro. It's fine, you don't need to make a big fuss about it."

"Senkyo…!"

"It's fine."

Senkyo said as Kinro made an annoyed look. He didn't want any bullying happening to his friend, but he couldn't do anything. If he made a big fuss about it, it might have the opposite effect. Kinro was well aware of this fact, so he backed off with an annoyed face.

The student that made Senkyo trip grinned with a smug look on his face. Kinro saw this, he got incredibly annoyed but he had to keep it in, so he bit his lip, balled his hands into a fist, and walked back to his seat. Senkyo returned to his seat with a troubled face and tiredly buried his face in his arms on the table and thought about its cause.

*"\*Oh yeah... I forgot this happened. Watanabe-san made a big threat yesterday about his sister. I completely forgot... Well, I did have a fight to the death with a werewolf and had a fun time with Hisho-chan, it couldn't be helped that I forgot.\*"*

*"\*You know Senkyo, the way you pronounced that the last line sounded a bit inappropriate.\*"*

*"\*What...?\*"*

*"\*'Had a fun time with Hisho-chan.' That's what you said.\*"*

*"\*D-Don't point weird things out when I'm being bullied in school!\*"*

Senkyo's face flushed a bit when Ryosei pointed that out, but no one could see it since he had it buried in his arms.

*"\*But why not? It'll lighten the mood a bit!\*"*

*"\*Don't give me that! Couldn't you try to cheer me up or something instead?\*"*

*"\*Well, to be perfectly honest. For a different reason, I kind of want to smack you myself.\*"*

*"\*Wh-What?! Whose side are you on?!\*"*

*"\*I can't help myself! Seeing you flirt openly with a cute girl makes me a bit frustrated! I mean, you carried her naked, dressed her up, had a 'fun time' with her, and cooked her breakfast and lunch. OF COURSE, I'D BE SOMEWHAT ANNOYED WHEN I SEE THAT. I'M A GUY TOO! I WANT SOMETHING LIKE THAT TOO!!\*"*

*"\*Traitor!\*"*

Ryosei voiced his opinions about Senkyo's activities with Yuu. Even though they're friends, Ryosei couldn't help but feel jealous after all that happened. He wanted something like that too. Ryosei didn't like that Senkyo is being bullied, but he also wanted Senkyo to have a quick smack on the head for all that happened.

The tense atmosphere from his classmates was no more. Even though his classmates are still staring daggers at him, in his mind, it was something else entirely. Whether this was something that Ryosei wanted to cheer Senkyo up or if he just wanted to voice his opinions or maybe both at the same time, no one could tell.

Even though he only met Ryosei for a grand total of two days, it felt like he was one of his closest friends from long ago. Senkyo chalked it up to their memories and emotions being connected to each other. Not to mention fighting alongside him in a life-or-death battle. It seemed like suffering together through hard and painful experiences truly did nurture camaraderie.

Away from the joking atmosphere of Senkyo's mind, other classmates can be seen staring at him, most of them were stares of death, but the others were a different story.

Yukai was staring at Senkyo as he sat with a buried face. She had a face of concern from what happened to him earlier. She knew the class didn't like Senkyo because of Itsuki's threat. Her eyes were filled with worry for a fellow classmate, unaware of the conversation going on inside his head.

First period finally began and Senkyo listened to the lessons like normal. Thanks to the spirit power Ryosei used to help Senkyo recover from a fight to the death and an all-nighter, Senkyo could study normally. There were no visible wounds and no hint of being tired.

It was finally lunch break. Surprisingly no one bothered to bully Senkyo while they were having class but that didn't apply when he was eating lunch. Since Senkyo had time to make himself a bento, he decided to eat separately from Kinro. When he first informed Kinro of it, he had a small bit of teasing come his way.

"Oh? Hisho-chan made that for you, didn't she?"

"No! I made it myself!"

After that, Senkyo wandered the school trying to find a secluded spot to eat lunch. Fortunately for Senkyo, he remembered a good spot: on the school's rooftop. Students weren't allowed there, but they always keep it unlocked for other reasons. If he were to be found there, he would be in trouble, but students and even teachers don't go up there, so it was the perfect spot to have a secret lunch.

Senkyo sat beside the rooftop entrance where there was shade. There was only him on the big, spacious rooftop. The vast blue sky stretched outwards into the distance. He could see the other buildings that looked like small squares on the horizon. It was peaceful, no one was bothering him.

"Hahh... I wonder if I'm going to have to eat lunch here every day now. That would be a pain, I'll have to wake up extra early to make my lunch..."

Senkyo thought of his upcoming school days. He knew he'd get bullied if he ate somewhere in public, whether it was the classroom or the cafeteria, he'd definitely get bullied. He wanted to avoid as much trouble as possible, so he thought of waking up early and making himself a bento, but in his mind, it was still a pain.

"I guess the view here isn't so bad, it's relaxing too... Maybe eating with Kinro, Hisho-chan and Ichika-san wouldn't be so bad."

He daydreamed of eating together with friends on a peaceful rooftop. It might be worth the trouble, is what Senkyo thought. He ate the bento he made as he admired the view.

*\*Creak! Thud!\**

"Huh?"

Senkyo heard the door to the rooftop entrance open and close.

**26 – Others’ Concern**

*"\*Ah, shit. Is it a teacher?\*"*

He immediately thought of the worst. He stopped eating and stared at the corner of the wall, in hopes that whoever entered the rooftop wouldn't turn that corner and find him. Footsteps could be heard getting louder and louder. Whoever it was, they were getting closer. Senkyo kept staring at the corner as the sound got louder. He then saw someone turn the corner.

*"\*I'm done for…\*"*

Senkyo accepted his fate and closed his eyes. He was hoping to avoid trouble but it didn't look like he was going to be given that wish. The person got more visible until finally.

"There you are, gross otaku."

Senkyo immediately reopened his eyes and turned to the source of the voice. He was expecting an old man's voice, but instead, he got a young girl's voice. When Senkyo got a proper look at the person, it was someone he recognized.

"Suzuki-san...?"

It was Suzuki Himari. He never talked to her, but she was always in Kinro's football practices. Senkyo would see Himari at the side cheering for Kinro at times he stayed back in school. The only contact he had with her was when he'd catch her staring at him from time to time.

She approached Senkyo and entered the shade. She pointed at Senkyo with her right hand and said the following words:

"Stay away from Honjou-sama!"

"Ha?"

Senkyo's face was painted with confusion. Himari made a rude order out of the blue. His peaceful lunch had been ruined in less than a minute. He analyzed what Himari meant by what she said to make sure he didn't misunderstand anything and ended up with a reason for her to say something like that.

"Is this because Kinro's getting into trouble because of me?"

"Oh? You're not as dumb as you look. Then that makes things easier for me, if you're his friend, then stay away from Honjou-sama!"

Senkyo got it right. The commotion earlier in the classroom caused Himari to approach him like that. Senkyo understood why she did this. Himari was just concerned for Kinro. If Himari wasn't rude to him earlier, Senkyo might've thought of her as a good girl.

Himari turned her back to Senkyo as if to end the conversation and headed to the exit. Before Himari could get out of Senkyo's sight, he responded to her.

"I refuse."

"Ha?"

Himari immediately turned back to face Senkyo. Her face was painted with the same confusion Senkyo had earlier. It seems the tables have turned. Himari walked back to Senkyo and shouted at him.

"What do you mean 'I refuse?!' I thought you were his friend!"

"Exactly, that's why I refuse."

"What the hell... That doesn't make any sense at all! Aren't you just being selfish?!"

"No, I'm not. I think you are the one who's being selfish."

"Why would *I*be the selfish one, huh?! Explain, gross otaku!"

Himari was fuming. She was shouting at Senkyo at the top of her lungs. Himari's voice covered the silent, peaceful air, replacing it with her loud voice. Senkyo calmly put his chopsticks and lunch down and stood up. He properly faced Himari. He stared at her with a serious expression and answered her question.

"What do you want to happen?"

"Huh? I just said so didn’t I—"

"Just answer the question!"

Senkyo raised a question to Himari in exchange for an answer. She was about to retort, but she was cut off by Senkyo's loud voice. He looked at her with a serious gaze. She was taken aback by Senkyo's sudden change in attitude. She took a step back and answered his question.

"I want you to stay away from Honjou-sama so that he doesn't get mixed up in your trouble!"

"And how do you think Kinro would feel about that?"

"Eh...? I-I think... he'd feel relaxed that you—"

"Wrong!"

"Wha?!"

"Kinro won't feel relaxed! Why would you even think that? He'd feel worried and get pissed off! He couldn't just stand there when his friend is in trouble! That's the kind of personality that anime protagonist-like idiot has!"

Senkyo made his stand as Kinro's friend. They knew each other since they were in middle school, and after their time hanging out together, Senkyo got a good idea of how Kinro would act. That's why he could say these things with confidence. He knew Kinro would get pissed at him if he decided to act like the tragic anime protagonist and shove Kinro away.

He cut off Himari again before she could even finish her last line. She let out a surprised shriek when Senkyo suddenly shouted in the middle of her speech. She was getting overwhelmed by Senkyo that she slowly backed away, but he didn't let her go.

"That's why you're the selfish one! Your first thought about what would be good for Kinro, but you didn't consider how he would feel! You don't have the right to decide who can and can't stay close to Kinro, so don't go out telling other people to stay away from someone without that person's permission!"

Senkyo went off on lecturing Himari while he was at it. Even though Himari backed up, Senkyo approached her as he was talking, not letting her get away from him. Himari took a wrong step and fell on her bottom. She was backed up to the rooftop fence. She couldn't go anywhere.

She looked like prey cornered by a predator. The situation completely changed compared to earlier. Himari was ordering Senkyo to stay away, but now, Himari was backed up and Senkyo was fiercely lecturing her. Himari's earlier anger could no longer be seen, it was replaced by fear and shock. She never knew Senkyo could be so overpowering, she thought he was just some lame otaku.

Everything came to a pause. Himari was backed up to the rooftop fence, while Senkyo was standing in front of her, observing her movements, but that's when he realized.

*"\*Wait... am I going too far?\*"*

*"\*Cornering a girl alone on an empty rooftop? Obviously!\*"*

Ryosei answered the question that no one else could answer. Senkyo rid of his overwhelming presence and loosened his face, but it was too late. Himari had an annoyed face with a few drops of liquid coming out of her eyes and sliding down her face. He was crying, but she was trying hard to keep it in. She had a twisted face and teary eyes.

"Uh-Uhm... I-I didn't mean to—"

"Don't get so cocky!"

Himari ran for it. Senkyo tried to apologize to Himari, but she cut him off before he could finish. She shouted *"Don't get so cocky!"*in a shaken voice. The Himari that first approached Senkyo with a rude tone was no more. She ran away and left Senkyo alone on the school rooftop.

Senkyo was left there, all by himself. He stood there for a while in a frozen state, then suddenly dropped to the ground and leaned to the rooftop fence. He looked at the peaceful blue sky and said in a regretful tone.

"I... did it again..."

*"\*Damn right you did! Why don't you know how to be more careful with girls?!\*"*

This was the second time Senkyo made a girl cry for getting too worked up. Knowing that made him feel worse. Ryosei even told him to be more careful. The saying he was always keeping with him 'The person that makes an innocent girl cry is the worst scum in the world,' was backfiring at him. Himari wasn't a bad person, she just thought what was best for Kinro, but Senkyo got too into it and went all the way to lecturing her.

"I... really have to learn to control myself better..."

*"\*You got that right, even you're making me feel like you're a bad person.\*"*

He messed up again.

**27 – A Friend**

After that, Senkyo finished his lunch and went back to the classroom. Nothing happened in the classroom, because when he got back the chime already rang and so one could bully him but that didn't stop him from feeling bad about Himari. Yet again, Yukou Senkyo made a girl cry.

Afternoon classes were the same as usual and no one tried to bully him in class. As usual, Senkyo parted with Kinro, left the school, and headed home.

"Man... I guess I have to apologize again... another batch of cookies, huh? I can't keep doing this!!"

Senkyo shouted at the sky on his way home. His somewhat pained voice flowed through the air and into nothing. As Senkyo was walking, he heard a familiar voice call him out.

"Um...! Yukou-san...!"

Senkyo turned to the source of the voice. It was a small and nervous voice. It was Yutei Yukai.

"Yutei-san...?"

Yet another unexpected person approached Senkyo. He stared at Yukai who was a little way away from him. Yukai carefully approached Senkyo while he stood there to wait for her. When they were within the proper speaking distance, Yukai spoke.

"Um... Y-Yukou-san..."

"Hm...?"

"Uh... um..."

"Let's go to a better place to talk."

Yukai was fidgeting and couldn't speak out what she wanted to say. Senkyo noticed it, so he suggested moving to a more suitable place to talk.

Senkyo and Yukai were now sitting on the swings. They were in a public playground, right now, and no one else was around. It was only Senkyo and Yukai in the playground. They had a place to sit which made talking better.

"So? Do you want to ask me something?"

"O-Oh, yes... Yukou-san, are you alright?"

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"It's just that... at school, everyone was picking on you... but, I don't think you deserve to be picked on! Y-You did nothing wrong!"

"Yutei-san... thank you."

Senkyo faced Yukai sitting on the other swing beside him. His eyes widened as he heard what he called him out for. Yukai was worried about Senkyo. So he tried to reassure her as soon as he realized he made her worry.

"No, I'm fine! I only get sharp gazes but nothing too bad!"

"But they were making you trip and spreading bad rumors about you!"

"That's fine. I don't even get hurt—"

"No, it's not!"

"....."

Yukai cut off Senkyo before he finished. She rejected his loose attitude. Her voice was as loud as they were fighting over notebooks the other day. The sudden rise in her voice made Senkyo shut up. He stared at her as she spoke her mind.

"It's not fine! You were getting bullied and bad rumors are spreading about you! At this rate, the whole school might pick on you as well! I... don't want that..."

"....."

Senkyo was still stunned by her. Still unable to speak, Senkyo just stared at her with a surprised look. Yukai realized she raised her voice and apologized for it.

"S-Sorry! I didn't mean to raise my voice..."

"I-It's fine, I was just a bit surprised. But... Yutei-san, why are you so worried about me?"

"Ah... you're right. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to poke my nose into your life..."

"No, that's not what I meant! It's just... the only other person that would worry about me is Kinro, so this is the first time a girl was worried about me."

"O-Oh... That's what you meant... Then it's fine if I worry about you?"

"Haha... That's an odd question, but I'd be happy if someone else was worrying about me... Ah...! Not that I'd want to purposefully make them worry!"

"Haha, I know."

Senkyo and Yukai shared a short laugh. Senkyo doesn't have any more parents, didn't have any relatives, and his only friend was Kinro. Although he did have his father’s friend provide him a monthly allowance. Senkyo was happy when he heard that someone else other than Kinro was worrying about him. Since Senkyo could trust Yukai, he knew her worry was genuine, and that's why he was happy. He wouldn't be happy just by having a random person worry about him.

"Then, the reason I'm worried is that... Well... we gave each other cookies."

"...Cookies...?"

"That's all?"

"Yes!"

*\*So, it was all obligation?!\**

Senkyo's face did a whole 180. Senkyo thought she was worried about him because she cared about him. Senkyo was in despair at the thought, until Yukai followed it up.

"It's because when we shared cookies, and when I ate them, I thought 'Don't friends do this?' For a moment I felt like I finally made a friend! I was so happy... so when you were being bullied, before I even realized it, I was following you after school."

"Don't you have a lot of friends, Yutei-san?"

"No... I never really had anyone I could call a friend."

"Th-Then what about our other classmates that they ask you for help?"

"Oh, they were just asking me for help, they don't really talk much to me other than when they want something... I know this might be rude... but, I don't really feel like they were talking to me like friends, so I never got anyone to call a friend..."

"So, you were alone all that time..."

Senkyo always thought Yukai had a lot of friends. His other classmates would always approach her and talk to her, both girls and boys alike. He always assumed she thought of them as friends. But he was wrong, she kept her distance from them even when talking because she didn't feel like they were friends. She valued the quality of her friends more than the quantity.

It was the same when Senkyo first met Kinro. He kept his distance and didn't treat him like a friend and at that time, Senkyo was also alone. He knew what it felt like to be alone with no one to talk to. He empathized with Yukai. But unlike him, Yukai hasn't thought of anyone else as a friend.

"Ah... it was probably rude of me to call you a friend all of the sudden. The cookies were an apology, after all. We never really talked much, I shouldn't call you a friend out of the blue—"

"It's fine."

"Eh...?"

Senkyo interrupted Yukai. He responded with a bright smile on his face. The despair from earlier was gone, that was because he knew the reason Yukai was worried about him. It was because she thought of him as a friend.

Senkyo smiled at Yukai with a warm, welcoming one. Yukai stared at his face when she heard him say 'It's fine.' Her eyes widened bigger than he'd ever seen them. She had a surprised face and eyes that looked like she'd seen the light out of a long, dark tunnel.

"I'm saying let's be friends! If you don't see me as a friend yet, then let's be friends now! It's better to have friends, right?"

"....."

She still didn't speak. She didn't move. When you look at her, she looks like she was still stunned by Senkyo's words… but that wasn't the case. Yukai's eyes slowly closed and her body lost its strength. She looked limp and was going to fall from the swing she was sitting on.

"Yutei-san!"

Senkyo immediately stood up and caught Yutei from falling to the ground. He was holding Yutei in a princess carry. Her small, weak-looking figure spread throughout Senkyo's arms. He worriedly scrutinized her because of her sudden loss of strength.

"Yutei-san! Are you okay?! Yutei-san!"

**28 – Friend or Foe**

This was incredibly unusual. Yukai didn't show any signs of sleep deprivation or exhaustion the whole time they were talking. Then, Senkyo understood the cause when his surroundings turned to nighttime.

*"\*Ryosei!\*"*

*"\*Yeah!\*"*

Senkyo switched with Ryosei as soon as their surroundings changed. It was a spirit zone, and everything around them was painted in shining crystals and light particles floated around them.

Ryosei gently placed Yukai's unconscious body in the nearby shelter and picked up Kuro Yaiba. He was on full alert and scanned the area. In the corner of his eye, he saw the bushes rustling.

"Whoever is in the bushes, come out right now! I know you're there!"

"...!"

The bushes rustled again. Whoever was in the bushes heard Ryosei's call. After a few seconds, a figure slowly came out of the bushes with their hands up. He got into a stance and was ready to strike. When the figure completely got out of the bushes, his stance loosened and his face showed surprise.

The figure that got out of the bushes was Hisho Yuu. She had her school uniform on and up along with her hands. Ryosei was confused for a second.

"Was this you're doing?!"

"Ah...! No! You've got it wrong!"

"Then why are you here?!"

"Well... Ah!!"

Yuu looked reluctant as she was speaking. Before she could begin explaining herself, something caught her attention, she suddenly thrust her hand forward, and a ball of fire cut through the air. The direction the fireball was going to was where Ryosei placed Yukai.

"Yukai-chan! Ah!"

When Ryosei took a look at where Yukai was, he saw a dark shadow that was about to grab her. The fireball hit the shadow and burnt it to a crisp. Ryosei immediately ran to Yukai and checked her for any external wounds, thankfully there weren't any.

"Yukou-senpai!"

Yuu called out for Senkyo, but Ryosei, who was in Senkyo's body, responds instead. She did not know that Senkyo had another soul in his body, and neither did anyone else. So Ryosei had gotten used to being called Senkyo from living inside his body.

Ryosei turned around and saw Yuu running toward him, but Ryosei was still skeptical. He wasn't convinced that Yuu wasn't an enemy. The last time they talked they never got to why Yuu was in Senkyo's house in the first place, that's why Ryosei was still a little doubtful.

"Stop right there, Hisho-chan!"

"...!"

"Are you the one who did this?"

"N-No! I wouldn't do something like this!"

Ryosei stared into Yuu's eyes. He scrutinized her every movement. He was trying to determine whether she was telling the truth or not. Yuu stood there with firm eyes as if they were saying 'I'm not lying!' From birth, Ryosei had the ability to tell whether or not someone was lying, and Ryosei always trusted his senses. He wasted no time and asked if Yuu was an enemy or not. From this, he was able to determine.

"Fine."

Ryosei determined Yuu was not lying. He loosened his stance and looked around the area but one was around. It was just him, Yukai, and Yuu. Since he couldn't see anyone else, he asked the only person that would be knowledgeable about these things.

"Hisho-chan, do you know what that shadow from earlier was?"

"That shadow from earlier was a Rgler. When they touch someone, they show that person's worst fear. They're beings that are created by an Ieroask. In Japanese, it would be best to describe the shadow as a Nightmare and the summoner as a Sleep Demon."

*"\*Yet another demon I don't know...\*"*

"So, there should be a sleep demon somewhere in the zone, right?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where it might be hiding?"

"...Unfortunately, it is most likely in that girl's body. As long as it's there, if it wants to, it can make the girl sleep forever."

"What?!"

Yuu pointed at Yukai's body. Ryosei looked worriedly at Yukai. They got an innocent girl caught up in their troubles.

*"\*Damn it! I got Yutei-san into trouble...\*"*

Senkyo cursed.

*"\*It was my fault. If I had known what sleep demons were, I might've been able to sense them...\*"*

*"\*...Damn! Snap out of it! Regretting the past isn't going to bring her back! Ryosei, let's get her out of this mess!\*"*

*"\*That’s what I’m planning on doing!\*"*

Ryosei and Senkyo resolved themselves to save their new friend. She was still lying on the shelter's table. Ryosei snapped out of it and asked Yuu for any clues on how to save Yukai.

"Hisho-chan, how can we get the demon out of there?"

Yuu stayed silent and looked despaired. She clenched her fists and slowly shook her head.

"...I'm sorry to say, but right now that's impossible."

"Why?!"

"That's because the only way to get a sleep demon out of a body. Is either for the soul in that body to fight off the demon by themselves, or exorcise it out of her body."

"Are you... serious?"

Yuu slowly nodded her head. Ryosei looked like he'd seen a ghost. His pale face said everything. If there was no way to save her, then she was doomed.

"Sleep demons are beings with the power to take the form of their soul and possess their victims by forcibly breaking into their dreams. A body cannot house two souls at once for a long time, so in 24 hours, one of those souls... will perish."

"DAMN IT!"

Ryosei cursed at his inability to do anything. If they didn't get the demon out of there within a day, it is likely that Yukai will die. But instead of despairing, Senkyo thoroughly analyzed Yuu's words, and something in her words stuck out in Senkyo's mind.

*"\*Ryosei! We might be able to save Yutei-san!\*"*

"What?! How?!"

*"\*Hisho-chan said that the demon broke inside her body, right?! Then what if...*YOU *break into Yutei-san's body and defeat the demon inside?\*"*

"Is that even possible?!"

*"\*I think it's worth the try.\*"*

"...?"

Senkyo thought of a brilliant idea but when he shared it with Ryosei, out of panic, Ryosei didn't use his inside voice and spoke out loud. Yuu could only see Senkyo talking to himself as if he was delusional.

“Senpai, you don’t have to talk to yourself. I’m here, you know?”

Although reluctant, Ryosei had prepared to take on the possibility. It was no time to keep secrets as Yukai’s life was on the line. Ryosei stood beside Yukai and closed his eyes. He returned Senkyo's body to him and focused on getting out of Senkyo's body. After a few quiet seconds, a small ball of flame appeared out of Senkyo's body.

"What?! Is that... a spirit?!"

Yuu let out a surprised yell. She hadn't seen anything like this before. A spirit came out of Senkyo and disappeared into Yukai's body. She looked at the scene with a dumbfounded face as it went on.

The spirit disappeared and Senkyo opened his eyes. Senkyo stared at Yukai's body with cheering eyes.

"You can do it, Ryosei. Bring Yutei-san back."

He smiled and let out words of encouragement for his bodiless friend. He entrusted Ryosei to bring back Yukai but there was one person in the area who wanted answers.

"Y-Yukou-senpai!! What was that?!"

Yuu was hungry for an explanation. She had her mouth open wide like she had never seen anything like it before, which in fact she hasn't.

"Hahaha... What should I do...?"

Senkyo let out an awkward laugh as he realized Yuu saw all that happened. Yuu was basically right in front of Senkyo's face as she pressed for answers and that would begin Hisho Yuu's interrogation of Yukou Senkyo.

**29 – Dream World**

Ryosei regained his senses and opened his eyes. In front of him, he saw the sight that he had been used to ever since regaining his consciousness in Senkyo’s mind. The place he was at was like the border between the clear blue sky and the endless sheet of space, it was like what people would call the Karman Line. He had the same appearance as he did when he was a high schooler.

He saw shards of crystals that floated around the place as he walked forward. The crystals had images playing on their surface like videos. He walked over the glass-like floor and observed what was around him. As he was walking, there was one shard that was covered in gold. The image playing on the shard showed someone dying in front of Yukai.

“I knew it… seeing that it's gold, it means she kept that as an unforgettable memory of her.”

Ryosei moved on and proceeded to walk forward. Everything looked fairly normal to him until he got to a certain point. The glass was tainted in red, and the black sky above him turned to blood red. The crystal shards from earlier were painted with the same blood red and the memories inside them blurred.

He hurried and ran straight forward. Black liquid began to cover the floor the further he ran and eerie laughs could be heard from the distance. Suddenly, Ryosei leaped back because of his senses, and from where he once stood, dark arms that resembled shadows sprouted out from the ground.

Ryosei scanned his surroundings and dark shadows were sprouting everywhere around him. It was one of the beings that sleep demons could create: nightmares. Nightmares surrounded Ryosei and closed in on him. Ryosei had nothing to defend himself with and clicked his tongue as the nightmares came closer.

In another location, Yukai was ensnared in dark shadows. She was suspended in the air with arms locking all four of her limbs. Her eyes shuttered, and after a few blinks, opened to see the blood-red surroundings and someone with a purple cloak standing in the middle of large crystals.

The crystals displayed images of the outside where Senkyo and Yuu stood, and two others that displayed an area with a huge amount of dark shadows that covered the screen. Yukai looked at the back of the purple cloak and before she could call out for it, it spoke in a distorted voice.

"This is a first. Is that a spirit? Hahaha! It's not like it matters anymore that boy won't survive my nightmares!"

"N-Nightmares?"

"Oh?"

Yukai spoke instinctively. The purple cloak noticed her and slowly approached her.

"Well, well, you're finally awake! Hahaha! Too bad you won't stay for long!"

"Wh-What? Wh-Who are you?! And... Where... Where am I?!"

Yukai's voice trembled in fear. Her voice was stuttering again. One second, she was talking with Senkyo, and the next she saw she was there. She was incredibly confused.

"Ohohoho! Your voice is trembling! I like it! Let me introduce myself! I am Vara, the Ieroask! I'm here to take over your body! Fear not, it won't hurt, your soul will simply shatter into a thousand pieces."

"Sh-Shatter?! B-But...!"

"WHAT?! DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?!"

"...!"

Yukai was struck with fear. Vara's voice raised so loud that it echoed around the whole room. His voice turned more distorted than earlier. Yukai shut her eyes as hard as she could to try and wake up from what she thought was a nightmare. Small drops of liquid spilled through the gaps in her eyes and poured down her face.

"...H-Hic..! N-no...! Hic... I-I don't want... hic... that..."

"HAHAHA! Bawling in tears won't stop me! HAHAHA!! I'll enjoy my time ripping you to shreds! After all, I have a day before I have to completely destroy you. There's no need to rush! This will teach that boy for messing with us!"

"N-NO...!"

Vara came closer to Yukai. She struggled while suspended in the air, but the shadows locking her were too strong. She couldn't get out. Long dark shadows that took shape of claws appeared behind Vara's purple cloak. It came closer to Yukai as every step resounded through the whole room.

*\*N-no...! Please! Stay away! Stop!\**

Yukai looked at Vara in despair. She closed her eyes tight and clenched her fists. She was getting ready for the claws that were going to slice her.

*\*No...! Hic... someone... hic... help...!\**

The footsteps stopped. Vara was readying its claws to slice through Yukai. No one was there to help her. Her life flashed before her eyes and let out her trembling voice.

"Mom...!"

*\*Slash! Slash! Slash!\**

"E-Eh...?"

Yukai heard the sharp slashing sounds she thought that was her end, the slashing sounds that would end her life, but she didn't feel anything. Her body and insides still felt intact. She didn't feel any kind of pain. She slowly opened her eyes to see what the slashing sounds that didn't spell her death were. When she opened them, she saw the blood-red sky and a man in a jet-black coat with blue lines. She raised her head slightly upwards to see his face. A man about her age, wearing the common black hair but with a red string to decorate it.

"It looks like I made it just in time again."

It was Ryosei, and he was holding Kuro Yaiba. Yukai stared at him from a low angle. That was because she was currently being princess carried by him. She looked to her side to see that the dark shadows that once bound her were cut to little pieces and were disappearing in midair. Vara had a long, deep cut in the middle of his chest area.

Vara held his wound and slumped on his knees. Dark liquid could be seen pouring out of his body and onto the ground. It resembled the dark liquid that once surrounded Ryosei on his way here. Vara was screaming in pain and his voice started stuttering.

"B-Bastard, ho-how a-a-a-are you alive-ve-ve-ve?!"

Vara took over Yukai's body through her dreams. That meant that Ryosei was in the dream world. In the dream world, as long as Ryosei has a good image of something, he can make it appear out of nowhere. Ryosei summoned a dream version of Kuro Yaiba and slashed his way through the army of shadows.

The cloak that clad Vara's body dropped to the ground. It was like Vara's body never existed. The only thing that was left was a pool of dark liquid and the purple cloth. And soon, the room was filled with silence.

"Y-You're...!"

Yukai yelped as she took a look at Ryosei's face, but before she could continue, the space they were in began shaking. It was like an earthquake was happening, but that was impossible since they were inside Yukai's body.

**30 – Reunion**

Soon, the space they were in was broken like glass shards and their surroundings turned to night. The moon and stars covered the night sky. The puddle of dark liquid where Vara once was had a large number of arms sticking out of it. The arms were stacked and stacked until it was at least thirty feet tall.

The dark arms merged together and made a horrid figure, one straight out of a nightmare. It had numerous arms sticking out of its body with four long ones acting as its main arms. It had no eyes but had a massive mouth. It looked like it was covered with tar as fluids were dripping from it. The monster swiped at Ryosei with its four long arms. Ryosei jumped in the air to dodge the first arm, but since he was in midair, he couldn't move to dodge again. He was about to get hit.

"Ah...!"

Yukai held on tighter to Ryosei out of fear, but Ryosei didn't show signs of annoyance or worry, he kept a cool face and focused on dodging the arms. Before Ryosei got hit, a transparent platform appeared under Ryosei's feet and allowed him to dodge the second arm. He did the same with the following arms and safely landed on the ground.

"I-IMpOSsIBLE!! ThERE's nO WaY AnYONe CAn MANIpuLAte DREAmS LiKe THat!!!"

"What? Bending the dream world to your liking isn't possible? Don't make me laugh! You call yourself a sleep demon and can't even make things like that happen in a dream?"

The monster's voice was broken as it spoke. It sounded like what it looked like. Hideous and ghastly. It let out a screeching scream that could destroy ears if heard directly. But Ryosei and Yukai didn't need to move. An intangible barrier appeared in front of them and stopped the sound before it could reach them. The monster went mad as he saw what he couldn't believe. It screeched even louder and the tar-like liquid oozing out from its body shot out like cannonballs.

"IMpOSSibLE! IMpOSSibLE! IMpOSSibLE! IMpOSSibLE! IMpOSSibLE!!"

All of the sudden, trees began sprouting from the ground and covered the flat, moonlit area. Their surroundings turned from a blank plane to a thick forest. The tar that the monster shot out hit the surrounding trees, but the thickness of the leaves prevented them from spreading to the ground.

Ryosei was nowhere to be seen. The forest hid them like a needle in a haystack. The monster couldn't do anything but shoot out tar balls and destroy trees within reach of its arms.

"Pathetic."

Ryosei jumped out of the trees and attacked the monster's blind spot. He was still carrying Yukai, but she didn't seem to hinder Ryosei's movements. She now had a black hoodie covering her. Ryosei held Yukai with his left arm and used his right arm to slash his blade. Yukai was held tight and stuck to Ryosei's chest so she wouldn't fall off.

Ryosei ran just above the monster's tarry body. He had transparent platforms appear at his every step and slashed its body as he ran. The tar shooting out the monster was blocked by the platforms he was stepping on, avoiding getting hit.

Kuro Yaiba was suddenly covered in flames. In a single second, the monster's body had a huge portion in its middle section slashed off. The fire spread throughout the monster’s whole center part, but it severed its own body with its arms to prevent it from spreading all around.

The upper portion of its body came falling down on its lower portion and splashed its tar-like goo on the surrounding trees on impact. Ryosei was once again nowhere to be seen. The monster merged together again but it was noticeably smaller than it once was.

"I'vE HaD ENOUGH! DiE! DiE! DiE! DiE! DiE! DiE!!!"

The monster shot out spikes from its body instead of cannonballs. But even though it was smaller, it was still somewhere around 14 feet tall. It shot out spikes that pierced and destroyed the surrounding trees. Roughly around 50 meters of the trees were all gone and Ryosei couldn't hide from the monster anymore.

Ryosei was now face to face with the monster. He still had Yukai in his arm and her hoodie was tainted with a few drops of tar. But this time, he put Yukai down a good distance away from the monster, but enough that he'd be able to get back if he needed to.

"Stay here and don't move, okay?"

"O-Okay..."

Yukai watched Ryosei as he slowly approached the monster. Ryosei got into a stance and prepared to strike. The monster retracted the tar that was on the trees and ground. Black tar flew through the air and collected in the monster's body. The monster then changed into a humanoid form, its edges were smooth and had a dark aura flowing around it.

In a blink of an eye, Ryosei reignited Kuro Yaiba in flames and slashed the monster but this time, it wouldn't get down as easily. The slashed part regenerated like liquid filling up an empty part of a bottle. It changed its arms to spikes and attacked Ryosei.

Ryosei made contact with the spikes like they were solid spikes but parried them and slashed the monster's body a few times before backing up. Ryosei had a different fighting style compared to when he was fighting using Senkyo's body. That was because Senkyo's body couldn't handle Ryosei's fighting style. But since he was in a dream, he wasn’t limited have the same power as his original body, he could strengthen it and make it much stronger.

The monster continued to receive strikes that slashed through its whole body but it cut off its own body parts faster than the fire could spread. Its tar was all over the vicinity where they were fighting. The monster had its arms and legs cut off but it only reattached themselves, so Ryosei backed and the monster took that chance to gather the tar on the ground to its body again.

Ryosei took a different form and readied to strike. The monster glared at Ryosei with killing intent. It laughed at Ryosei as it was still alive and regenerating.

"HAHAHAHA!! YOu CaN'T DEFeaT ME!! I'LL JUsT KeEp REGenErATING!!"

Yukai looked over at Ryosei with a worried look. He seemed to have stopped completely. Did Ryosei give up? No.

"WHA-WHAT IS THIS??!"

The monster took a look around him and he saw not one Ryosei, but a dozen. They surrounded the monster in a circle with the same stance. The blades they were holding were all clad in fire.

"IMpOSSibLE! IMpOSSibLE! IMpOSSibLE! JuST WhO Are YOu??!!!"

Ryosei didn't bother to respond and began to strike. One Ryosei dashed up to the monster and slashed it with a blade of fire.

"Time to burn!"

"GAHAHGAGHAGAAGAGAAAAAA!!!!!!!!"

The monster screamed in pain. The fire was effective on him. The attacks continued and a slash of fire came in every half a second and almost all the tar from the monster was fully burnt to a crisp. On the 11th strike, only one Ryosei remained, and it looked like his blade had more fire covering it than the previous blades. Ryosei dashed and struck the monster, but not once, he followed it up with eight more strikes and completely obliterated the monster.

Ryosei checked his surroundings for any remaining tars, but there were none. The fire that covered the blade was snuffed out and she sheathed Kuro Yaiba. He walked back to Yukai and kneeled down with one leg to level their faces.

"I'm sorry! I got you dragged into this mess. I hope you can accept my apology!"

"....."

Yukai stayed silent. Ryosei bowed his head, so he couldn't see the look on Yukai's face. Time slowly passed as Yukai stood in front of Ryosei who was kneeling and bowing down to her.

Ryosei then felt a smooth, warm hand touch his face. Yukai stared at Ryosei and slowly raised his face to face hers. When Ryosei faced her, he saw teary eyes and drops of tears dripping down her face. Ryosei was about to say 'sorry' again until Yukai spoke out in a trembling voice.

"Hic... is that you... Ryosei... onii-san?"

Ryosei smiled brightly, expecting her to recognize him.

"That's you, isn't it?! Konjou Ryosei-onii-san!"

Yukai wanted an answer.

"Yeah... it's me. Nice to meet you again, Yutei Yukai-chan."

Yukai's eyes were filled with tears and embraced Ryosei as she cried her heart out. Ryosei gave out a warm smile and patted her back. Her tears glistened from the moonlight. Yukai embraced Ryosei in the middle of a destroyed forest, under the shining light of the moon. They stayed there for a few minutes which felt like a lifetime.

Meanwhile, outside of Yukai's body, a short distance away from Yuu giving Senkyo a mental shakedown. A black blob that looked similar to tar lay on a leaf, in the bushes. It slowly crawled away from where Yuu, Senkyo, and Yukai were and retreated to where it came from.

**............**

Far, far away from Senkyo and the others, the blob reached an abandoned building and entered it. The atmosphere was like what any abandoned buildings in horror movies would be. The blob slowly slid its way to a certain room with a broken-down door and slid through it.

"Ah! Then it's really her?! Yes! If I capture her Nii-sama will be ecstatic!"

A humanoid figure sat on a soft cushion. It had four small balls floating around him. He stared at the black blob that was in front of him.

"You did well, Slime-kun! But... I don't need any broken toys!"

One of the balls that floated around him came close to the blob and electrocuted it. The blob was turned to nothing but a crisp and the ball returned to its original position.

"This will be fun! I'll be sure to play with them a lot!"

**Chapter 4: The Calm Before The Storm**

**31 – Revelations**

That moment I saw her in Senkyo's memories, I recognized her right away. There was no way I could forget who she was. It was impossible, after all, she was the last thing I saw... before I died.

She had the same purple eyes and light brown hair as before. Parts of her may have grown, but I couldn't mistake her. Her teary face that I saw the day I died. Her sheepish and trembling voice always made her seem nervous. Her sad, apologetic eyes that were filled with melancholy looked like they only worsened since I last saw her.

**............**

There's no mistake! That's him! The moment I saw him that time, he looked like he didn't age a single bit. He had the same jet-black hair decorated by a single strand of red string. Those sharp yet gentle eyes that stared at death for me... There was no way I could forget him. It's impossible. After all, he saved my life... and used his own in exchange.

His name was Konjou Ryosei. He saved me from a traffic accident at the cost of his life. Back then, I was just about 11 years old something kept me from moving but he was there and pushed me away from the speeding truck. He was so fast that it felt like the wind pushed me out of the way. When I looked back, he was bleeding on the ground all beaten up.

I went beside him to help him in any way I could, but it felt like I was helped instead. Even though he was dying, even though he was all beaten up and couldn't get up, he smiled at me like he was comforting me. The warm smile that felt like it knew all of my life's worries. I couldn't help but tear up, but most of all, he was the first person that noticed my true feelings. The very ones I kept hidden behind a mask.

*"\*Looks like you’re no different from me… I think… Purple hyacinth would look good with those eyes…\*”*

Those very words reverberated in my mind. He noticed the regret I deeply felt. He mentioned to me a specific flower. The purple hyacinth that translates to the language of flowers as—I am sorry, please forgive me.

After he died, I wanted to know more about him, but all I could find out was his name. Strangely enough, the person who told me that single bit of information was my mother. Despite her condition, she was still able to recognize him from the way I described him. She seemed to know him personally but I couldn’t ask her anything other than that. She was troubled every time I brought it up. In the end, I gave up.

**............**

The sun had begun to set. Senkyo and the others headed to his house to rest from the earlier encounter with a dream demon. Senkyo, Yuu, Yukai, and Ryosei, who was back inside Senkyo’s body, were all present around the dining table but their real reason wasn't just to rest. Yuu stared intently at Senkyo as if saying “You have some explaining to do!” while Yukai was nervously looking around the room.

The earlier encounter reminded Yuu, Senkyo, and Ryosei that there was still a lot they needed to know. While Yukai was unintentionally dragged into their problems, she didn't seem to mind. Senkyo served Yuu and Yukai tea and sat with them. Yuu drank a sip of her tea before beginning the conversation.

"So, Yukou-senpai has another soul living inside of his body and that soul can interact with Yukou-senpai such as sharing memories and emotions, and controlling the same body, is that correct?"

"Yeah..."

Yuu slammed the table with both her hands which got the attention of everyone in the room. She then pointed her finger accusingly at Senkyo and shouted as loud as she could.

"NOW THAT'S JUST IMPOSSIBLE!!"

"Now, now, Hisho-chan, calm down..."

"How can I calm down if what you're saying doesn't make sense?! Humans cannot have more than one soul living inside their bodies! No, even if you weren’t human it’d be impossible! If two souls are inside a single body for more than a day, one of the souls would be forcefully shattered!"

"W-Well... we don't understand why either... It just kinda happened..."

"Yukou-senpai, there goes your laid-back attitude again!"

"But we really don't know! Even Ryosei doesn't know what or why it happened."

"Hahh..."

Yuu let out a heavy sigh and sat back down in her seat. She was clearly worked up. She wanted to know how and why an exception had appeared to the rule that she always knew was true: Only one soul can live inside one body. As far as she knew, that had been true on both beings on Earth and Zerid. So, she was taken aback when Senkyo told her another soul was living inside his body without leaving for more than a day.

"It really is hard to believe, but I can't really deny what's right in front of me..."

"U-umm... I'm sorry, but... I don't get what you guys are talking about..."

Yukai wasn't explained what had happened. When she woke back up, she looked tired, so they headed to Senkyo's house. They didn't explain anything to her on their way, so she was still completely clueless.

"I... I want to know what's happening! About demons and spirits... and about Ryosei-onii-san!"

She spoke out with a determined tone. She wanted to know more about Ryosei. After seven years of wanting to know more, finally, she had the person she wanted to know about right in front of him. But before anyone else could speak, Ryosei took over Senkyo's body and responded to Yukai.

"No."

"B-But why, Yukou-san?!"

Ryosei was now in control of Senkyo’s body. However, there was no distinct difference when they switch. There was no way to tell if Senkyo was speaking or Ryosei.

"Right now, it's Ryosei talking. I can't allow an innocent girl to get caught in our mess. Even Senkyo agrees, you almost died earlier. I can't just keep saving you all the time."

"But...!"

"I agree with Konjou-san, Yutei-senpai. What we're caught up in is no place for a normal human. It's too dangerous."

"....."

Yukai went silent. Everyone else was against letting her get mixed up with demons and spirits. They didn't want another incident like earlier. Yukai couldn't do anything. She couldn't force them to tell her, even if she persisted, nothing would change, she knew that.

She sat there in silence thinking about what she should do. Then, with seeping annoyance, she got up and picked up her bag.

"I see... Then I'll be going. Thank you for the tea."

**32 – …Fairness?**

Yukai left Senkyo's house. Leaving only Senkyo, Ryosei, and Yuu. They stared silently at the door as she left.

*"\*You always joke around but you can be strict when you have to, huh?\*"*

*"\*Naturally. Living a life of fighting demons and evil spirits wasn't a walk in the park. I have to put my foot down when it comes to these things to avoid hurting anyone else. But I don't think I need to tell you that, do I?\*"*

*"\*No, you don't. I was just surprised by this side of you. I mean, you're worried about her like your actual little sister.\*"*

*"\*And where did that come from?\*"*

*"\*A hunch you could say.\*"*

Ryosei brushed Senkyo's comments away and looked back at Yuu.

"Well then, Hisho-chan, I have a question for you too."

"What is it?"

"Why were you in the playground? And I won't take anything like 'I was just passing by' as an answer."

"Ah...! That... umm... well..."

Yuu moved around agitatedly. She scratched her cheek, looked around the room, and scratched her head. All the while Ryosei was observing her like a hawk. She seemed to be thinking of an excuse, but that wouldn't work. Yuu looked straight into Ryosei's eyes and that was all she needed to let her know that there was no getting out of this one.

She stopped moving around and fixed herself. She let out a sigh as a sign of defeat, looked at the ground to avoid Ryosei's eyes, and spoke in a low voice.

"I... ing... you..."

"Excuse me?"

"I... st... king... you..."

"Come again?"

"....."

She went silent and took a deep breath. It looks like whatever the reason was, she really didn't want to tell but forced herself to.

"I WAS STAL—OBSERVING YOU!"

"YOU WERE DEFINITELY GOING TO SAY STALKING!"

With the change of attitude, Senkyo took control of his body and made a quick quip. It looks like he was putting together the puzzle pieces in his mind while Yuu was mumbling incomplete words.

"WHY WERE YOU STALKING ME?!"

"We-well... I told you last time, right? Something about you interested me so I observed you!"

"SINCE WHEN?!"

"From... the first time I saw you... no, a few days after actually!"

"FOR HOW LONG?"

"Tw-twenty-four hours, seven days a week... with exceptions like classes, eating, and sleeping..."

"TW-TWENTY-FOUR SEVEN?! DO YOU EVEN GO HOME?!"

“O-Of course I do! When I change for school or take a bath.”

Senkyo was mentally shocked when he heard her say she had been stalking him 24/7. It looked like his soul was going out of his body.

"I-I was being stalked for that long... and I didn't even notice..."

*"\*Senkyo... seriously, how can you be so sharp yet ignorant at the same time?\*"*

*"\*It's not my fault! How could I expect that my junior is stalking me?!\*"*

Ryosei's voice sounded that of a disappointed father. After that retort, Senkyo realized something.

"Wait... when you say 24/7 then that time in the closet..."

"Yes..."

Senkyo was referring to the time when a bat came flying out of the closet. The day that Senkyo fought a werewolf and carried a naked girl to his room. Yuu would turn herself into a bat and hide in his closet every night and observe him until he slept.

"Then the shadows I've been seeing near my classroom..."

"Most likely..."

He thought back to the multiple times he would see a shadow in the corner of his eye every time he was entering the classroom. Yuu was hiding behind corners, observing his movements and listening in to conversations every time Senkyo was going to school.

"The reason Ichika got the incident with Itsuki so quick..."

"I informed her when I saw..."

When Itsuki made that big threat in front of everyone in the class, at that time Senkyo's social status hit rock bottom, Yuu was watching it happen on the sidelines.

Senkyo then stopped and took a deep breath. He mentally steeled himself. His whole body was trembling and his face went beet red.

"Th-then... every time... I had to *get off*... were you... were you watching...?"

"....."

Yuu didn't respond. Her face blushed at the realization of what Senkyo meant. Senkyo reluctantly thought back to the times he had to relieve himself of all the pent-up urges. Yes, he was thinking back to the inevitable times he had to masturbate. Yuu slowly nodded her head, but still did not make eye contact with Senkyo.

Senkyo's eyes filled with despair. It was like he'd seen hell itself. He was broken by Yuu's gesture of confirming his suspicion.

"N-NOOOOOOOO!!!"

Senkyo let out a pained scream, one that showed how much he broke. It was a scream like no other. It was like his whole world was falling apart.

One would think that someone could only make that scream when they were on the brink of death. But inside, Senkyo had already died from the simple fact of knowing his junior saw him get off. After a few minutes of pained cries, Senkyo had calmed down enough that he wasn't screaming at the top of his lungs, but he still hasn't gotten over the fact he'd been seen. He had tears in his eyes and bit his lip while letting a 'kuuu...' sound out his mouth.

"I'm really sorry!!"

Yuu prostrated herself in front of Senkyo.

"Degenerate-chan..."

Senkyo gave a nickname that he thought would be fitting for his peeking junior. He stared at her with a cold look as he said her new nickname.

"But I really am sorry! I didn't mean to peek!"

"But you peeked, didn't you!?"

"Yes..."

"See!"

*"\*Now, now, calm down Senkyo. I know you've been through a lot, but I can't have this end like last time.\*"*

"Tsk... Fine. I’m letting Ryosei take over."

Yuu responded to him with a nod and returned to her seat to properly face Senkyo. Senkyo switched with Ryosei and picked up where they left off.

"Now then, Hisho-chan, there's something I want to know."

"What is it?"

"Why are you being chased down?"

"...You don't need to know that."

"Seeing that a werewolf and a sleep demon already attacked us, there's probably going to be more. We've already butted in quite a few times so it's likely that whoever is chasing you is already planning on getting rid of us. That's why we want to know what we're up against."

"....."

The room stayed silent as Yuu thought hard about what she should do. You couldn't see her face, but you could tell that she was thinking hard.

"...Fine. However! I need you to agree to three conditions. If you don't agree to them, I won't tell you why I'm being chased."

"What are the conditions?"

"First, you will keep everything I tell you secret no exceptions. Second, if anything happens to me, save yourselves. And third...”

Yuu took a quick pause with a barely noticeable blush on her face.

"I... I want to check if you have mana."

"If I have mana? Didn't you refuse Senkyo when he asked you to?"

"We-well... That was because it was Yukou-senpai's fault! He suddenly brought it up like that and I wasn't mentally prepared yet!"

*"\*Don't give me that!\*"*

Senkyo couldn't help but retort, even if he knew she wouldn't hear it.

"Could you tell us why you want to check Senkyo for mana?"

"That's because... He might be who I'm looking for."

Ryosei stared at Yuu with a questioning face. He didn't bother speaking and just used gestures. Yuu picked up on that and answered him. She declined to answer that question the last time, but it was clear to her that she wasn’t going to get what she wanted if she didn’t answer Ryosei.

"... A true human mana wielder."

“True? Do you mean a human with a natural mana pool?”

"I believe so. It is a prophecy in our world, but in short, to save all three worlds from destruction, a human mana wielder will appear and save us. That's why I need to check Yukou-senpai if he has mana."

"And if he does...?"

"Well... I don't know... At first, I planned to take that person to Zerid immediately but if Yukou-senpai is the mana wielder... I... I'm not sure..."

"I see... Senkyo, do you agree to her conditions?"

*"\*Yeah. I’m fine with that.\*"*

"Then it's settled. Yuu, Senkyo and I agree to your conditions."

"Very well..."

**33 – Agreement**

Her divine soul. That was what Yuu told them the demons were after. A divine soul is a soul that has incredible power that matches the gods. Unlike Senkyo and Ryosei’s two spirits, one body situation, divine souls are a part of one soul.

Beings with a divine soul are called Angels, and they receive the divine soul from birth. They have a crest-like birthmark on them that shows that they have a divine soul and it usually specifies what kind. Every mark is unique, there are no two souls with the same kind of divine soul. They can draw the power of their divine soul and use it to do anything within the soul's limit.

But an Angel can't just draw power from their soul. Their soul must first recognize them as a wielder worthy of their power. Imagine a guarded gate, unless the keeper of the gate recognizes you and lets you through the gate, you won't be able to use the power within the divine soul. Because every divine soul is unique, there is no definite way of being recognized.

However, even given their incredible power, the souls have limits. Those are dependent on what kind of divine soul you have. Yuu has the 'Divine Soul of Flame,' her fire magic is enhanced, and if she gets recognized by the gatekeeper, she will be able to draw out incredible power that can scorch the world in a sea of burning flame.

Yuu had no intention of hurting anybody with her soul, that's why she didn't bother to get recognized by her soul. But the people who are chasing Yuu down want their hands on her soul and use it for whatever evil schemes they had in mind.

The reason Yuu didn't want to tell this to anybody else is that she was worried that the number of people that want her soul would increase. If the words “incredible power that matches even the gods” got into their heads, they might join up with groups that are already after her and her enemies would only increase. It seemed like Yuu trusted Senkyo and Ryosei enough that she would be willing to tell them.

"Divine Souls, huh? If anyone with bad intentions got their hands on such power, it would cause a lot of trouble."

"Yes, that's why I won't let them catch me."

After Yuu's explanation, Ryosei gave his thoughts about it. They stayed quiet for a bit, thinking about what other troublesome mess people will get into if they knew such power exists.

"Hisho-chan, I'm assuming beings with divine souls only come from your world and no one in this world knows about them. Is that correct?"

"Not quite, there have been cases where humans associate with Zerians to get hold of the souls, but as far as I know, only a handful of people know about it. So, as much as I can, I want to prevent that information to spread to any more humans."

"Well, don't worry. You can trust us to keep your secret."

"I see, that's good."

"Then, let's go."

"Konjou-san? Go where?"

Ryosei stood up and headed to Senkyo's room. Yuu followed behind albeit confused. When Ryosei entered the room, he sat on the bed and unbuttoned his uniform.

"Uwawawa!! K-Konjou-san?! Wha-What are you doing?!"

*"\*R-Ryosei?! What are you doing to my body?!\*"*

Yuu got a beet-red face as soon as she saw Senkyo unbuttoning his uniform, but inside, Ryosei was still the one in control. He had his front bare to Yuu as she was lousily covering her face with her hands. There were holes through her hand that her eyes could still see everything.

"This is in one of your conditions, right? You know, 'check for mana.' If I remember correctly, Senkyo agreed to that as well. Kukuku..."

*"\*I REMEMBER AGREEING TO IT, BUT NOT TAKING OFF CLOTHES!!\*"*

"But I'm just unbuttoning your shirt. It would be easier if Hisho-chan sucked you without clothing in the way, right?"

*"\*Don't phrase it in a way people will misunderstand!!\*"*

As Senkyo and Ryosei were having a conversation, Yuu had her eyes going around in circles from Ryosei's last line. After all, that line could easily be misunderstood if no one knew the context.

"Uwawawawawa~~"

Yuu was making weird noises that indicated she was panicking. After Ryosei got everything ready, he gave Senkyo a 'good luck!' before switching places with him and abandoning Senkyo.

"D-Damn you, Ryosei!! "

"I have to do this! I'm the one who requested it so I need to go through with it!"

Yuu's self-encouraging could be heard where Senkyo was sitting. She slowly approached Senkyo trembling step by trembling step. She climbed up Senkyo's lap to properly reach his neck. Soon, their faces were beet red like never before and were inches apart.

*"\*C-C-Calm down, Senkyo! She's just here to check if you have mana, nothing else...!\*"*

*"\*Y-Yukou-senpai is so close... I have to check if he has mana... which means... Uwawawa~!\*"*

Each person had their fair share of mental battles. Yuu finally closed on Senkyo's bare neck and prepared to suck his blood. She bared her fangs at him.

Senkyo then felt fangs as cold as steel make contact with his skin. The cold sensation made Senkyo let out a sharp yelp and jolted slightly in surprise. Yuu went through with it and pierced his bare neck with her cold fangs and proceeded to suck Senkyo's blood.

The whole time Yuu was sucking Senkyo's blood, he would squirm a few times over the unique sensation of having his blood sucked, but for some reason, Yuu also had a few twitches from time to time. The way she sucked on his neck made it look somewhat erotic with her cute face and sucking. Though Senkyo couldn't see it, that didn't stop his imagination from thinking of such things.

After a few seconds, Yuu still wasn't finished. She was taking a while so Senkyo called her out.

"H-Hisho-chan...?"

Hearing Senkyo call out, Yuu took her fangs off Senkyo's neck. But when she faced Senkyo, Senkyo saw a face that looked like she was in the heat.

"Hisho-chan?! What happened?!"

Senkyo was showing his worry for his junior. Suddenly, Yuu pushed Senkyo down the bed with both her hands and stared at him with wanting eyes.

Yuu was panting heavily and there was a small amount of drool showing in her mouth. Her eyes looked like they were overflowing with desire. She looked every bit erotic with her cuteness amplifying it tenfold.

"Hisho… chan...?"

All Senkyo could do was call her name out to try and knock her out of her sudden fit, albeit meekly. He tried to push her off but her strengthened vampire hold was too heavy.

"S-Senkyo-senpai... I... hahh...! can't control myself...!"

"...!"

*"\*S-She used my given name?! Why does that sound so hot?! And what did she mean she can't control herself? Did I do something wrong?! Is this that one thing that happens in anime!? THAT THING!?\*"*

Yuu slowly closed her face into Senkyo's face. Senkyo reflexively closed his eyes and awaited what was going to happen next. Then, he felt a warm, soft sensation on his lips. When he opened his eyes, Yuu's soft, rosy lips were making contact with his.

After a few seconds of trying to confirm his situation, Senkyo realized Yuu was kissing him. His eyes widened and reflexively pushed her away and sat back up. This time, Senkyo didn't feel any weight in Yuu's arms and successfully pushed her away. He was inches away from her and she was still sitting on his lap. He looked at her and saw she was sleeping. Her face was still a bit red and she had a bit rise in temperature.

"O-Oh, ok. That wasn’t a kiss, right? If she’s asleep then we were just touching lips, that’s it… hahh... What was that...?"

Senkyo laid Yuu on his bed and tucked her into the sheets. He grabbed a cold towel and placed it on Yuu's forehead to lower her slightly high temperature. When he placed it, he realized that her temperature spiked up quite a bit. He wasn’t sure what to do since he was treating a vampire instead of a human, so he thought this might have been a normal occurrence for them. For now, he decided to watch over her as if she was a normal human with a high fever. He grabbed a chair and watched over her, just like the last time.

"Seriously… what was… that...?"

As Senkyo looked over Yuu, he felt a bit tired but tried to fight off his sleepiness to watch over his patient, but for some reason, he felt unusually drowsy and nodded off himself.

**34 – Trust**

When Senkyo woke up, he didn't see Yuu lying in the bed anymore. He looked around the room to look for her, but she wasn't anywhere in the room. He stood up and a familiar blanket fell off his body. It was his blanket, but the last time he saw it, it was covering Yuu on the bed.

The blinds were down, but he could see sun rays coming out from the gaps in the blinds. His room looked tidier than when he last saw it.

*"\*She's downstairs.\*"*

*"\*Ryosei? What happened?\*"*

*"\*You fell asleep and Hisho-chan woke up. She covered you with a blanket and went downstairs. I don't think she left because I can hear noises in the kitchen. I can only guess what that was all about, Mr. dating sim protagonist.\*"*

*"\*What?\*"*

*"\*.....\*"*

*"\*Well, whatever I better go check on her. She didn't look pretty good when she fell asleep.\*"*

Ryosei didn't respond back to Senkyo, so he headed for the kitchen. As he got closer, he could smell a nice aroma of bacon and eggs. He heard movement and rhythmic humming with a nice melody coming from the kitchen. Once he entered, he saw a calming sight of a high school girl in an apron cooking breakfast.

She was humming while she was frying eggs and bacon. She was wearing a blue apron over her school uniform, matching her blue jacket. The aroma of fried food filled the room as Senkyo entered. From where Senkyo was standing, she looked like a newlywed wife cooking up the morning breakfast.

"Hisho-chan?"

"Ah! Yukou-senpai, you're up. I hope you don't mind; I'm cooking us breakfast and lunch for school."

"S-Sure, I don't mind. But, are you alright?"

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Well, it's just that last night you had a really high fever. Is that normal for you vampires?”

Yuu stared at Senkyo with a confused look on her face.

“…No, I don’t think so, but I seem to be fine now. See, when I woke up it was already morning, so I thought that I'd make us breakfast and lunch as an apology for last night... I hope you don’t mind."

"O-Oh..."

The scene from last night crossed Senkyo's mind. He could still remember Yuu’s erotic face, it was a sight he'd never forget. That wasn't all, he remembered the moment Yuu fell unconscious, he received his first kiss. He was a little embarrassed about it and a slight blush appeared on his face but that didn't stop him from asking what that was all about. His face showed a mixture of worry and curiosity. Because it was so sudden that he thought he might've done something wrong.

"I don’t mind, but, um... Hisho-chan, about last night... are you okay? You suddenly got too heated up..."

"O-Oh... I'm sorry about that. I went out of control."

"Went out of control?"

"Y-You see, we vampires, don't need to suck human blood to survive. Other food humans eat can also work. It’s just that blood is the most effective, as long as it's the red kind of blood, that is. Although human blood is still the best tasting for us. So..."

"I-I see..."

"B-But don't think that I couldn't control myself just because I drank human blood! My parents gave me a taste of human blood when I was little to avoid having a frenzy of sucking human blood when we grow up. But your blood... tasted much, much better than any I'd tasted before..."

"Thank you...? Is that what I should be saying?"

"Ah! Don't worry I won't be out for your blood just because it tastes good! I-I was just saying that you had different blood from all the others that I tasted so far... It even got me worked up. Sorry, I’ll stop talking now. Please take a seat, breakfast is almost done."

*"\*So, I don't need to worry about anything?\*"*

Despite having a vampire tell him his blood was delicious, Senkyo didn't falter and took a seat by the dining table. He seemed to still trust Yuu with all his heart. Even Ryosei didn't seem worried. Something must have happened last night when Senkyo was asleep that lead Ryosei to trust Yuu.

A few hours earlier, her surroundings were familiar to her, she felt something on her forehead and grabbed it to see what it was. It was a slightly wet cloth that served to lower her body heat. She looked around the room and saw her senior sleeping on a chair by the bedside.

"Yukou-senpai..."

Yuu tried to recall what happened before she fell asleep and remembered the embarrassing things she did to Senkyo. Her face went a little red.

"Seriously, senpai... You can't be this trusting..."

She remembered the conversation they had the other day. Senkyo showed Yuu his full trust. He had a laid-back attitude around her and even told her that she wasn't bad. She got off the bed and put the blanket around Senkyo. She looked at him while he was sleeping and let her thoughts spill out of her head.

"You... really are something else, hehe..."

Yuu gave a bright smile and a light giggle as she looked at Senkyo. It was as if there was more than just happiness behind that smile. If Senkyo was awake, he'd probably give a compliment about Yuu's smile.

She then tidied up the room with a smile on her face and went downstairs to make breakfast and lunch. But little did she know, someone was watching her the whole time.

*"\*Senkyo, you sure did a number on that girl... I may not trust her as much as you do, but that smile wasn't fake.\*"*

Ryosei saw everything. Yuu had no way of knowing. After all, even if Senkyo's eyes were closed, as long as he wasn't controlling Senkyo's body, as a spirit in standby mode, he could see the outlines of his surroundings without the need to open his eyes.

Ryosei had the ability to completely read people, so no one could lie to him and get away with it, may it be human or any other species. He had full trust in his ability, and when he saw Yuu just now, he knew she wasn't a bad person.

**35 – Future Plans**

Now, Senkyo is having breakfast with Yuu. Like the last time they ate together, they didn't speak much because both of them weren't used to this kind of thing. They just ate without a word, but that didn't stop their thoughts.

*"\*This is the second time I'll be eating with Hisho-chan... How do these things keep happening? Yesterday was a fight with a werewolf that caused Yuu to stay the night…. and now it's vampire hormones? It's not like I don't like it, no, I definitely like it! This is the only time I'm alone with a cute girl, after all. This never happens normally. But every time she's stayed, it's only because something bad happened to her. I don't want her to think this house is like a death trap or something...\*"*

*"\*I'm eating with Yukou-senpai again! But maybe I'm being rude now... I stayed here for two nights already, maybe I'm being a nuisance... I don't want that... Later, I better not get into something that'll trouble senpai.\*"*

Both of them had their own thoughts on the situation. If only the other person knew what the other was thinking, they'd probably laugh about it. Just as Senkyo finished eating, he was reminded of something.

"Ah, Hisho-chan, I forgot to ask."

"Hm? What is it?"

"From what happened yesterday, did you find out if I have mana or not?"

"Oh, sorry I forgot to tell you... Yukou-senpai, you..."

"....."

"...don't have any mana in you."

"I see... thanks for checking."

Senkyo didn't look disappointed, after all the only reason he wanted to know if he had mana or not was because he wanted to know why he is able to enter spirit zones. He didn't look disappointed, but confused.

"Then, why can I enter spirit zones?"

"...Hm... Now that I think about it..."

Yuu put her finger to her chin and thought of the reason.

"Do you have a *spectral*?"

"Spectral? What's that?"

"Ah, I haven't mentioned that yet. A spectral is an object that can store mana in it. It can be anything at all, as long as it's physical and can be touched by humans. People who know of Zerid found a way to use mana. I'm not sure of how they do it, but they make it so that an object can store mana, and humans without mana can use it like how we do."

"So, you're saying if I have a spectral then I'll be able to throw fireballs like you did?"

"Basically, yes."

"Oh... That sounds cool, but I don’t think… Ah, wait, I do have one. Kuro Yaiba is a spectral. He can use it to use magic and stuff. But from what I know, wasn’t it the only weapon that could do that? Does that mean it got mass-produced…?"

*“\*…A lot of things seemed to have really changed these past seven years. Looks like we’ll have to visit the Konjou Clan sometime.\*”*

*“\*Uuu… Seriously…?\*”*

From Ryosei’s memories, Kuro Yaiba was the only weapon that allowed access to mana and magic, but now, it seems like there were more weapons with that ability.

"I don’t know much about those, but that explains how you can enter spirit zones."

"It does?"

"Yes. You see, there is another exception in entering the spirit zone I forgot to tell you. When the spectral or the person with mana enters a spirit zone everything touching them will go with them."

"Oh, good to know."

As they were finishing up the conversation, Yuu just finished washing the dishes. She took off the apron she was wearing and faced Senkyo.

"Yukou-senpai, you should get ready for school. I'm going home to change clothes, there's still some time before school starts so I'll make it."

Yuu's uniform was a bit dirty, most likely from the time she hid in the bushes. So she said goodbye to Senkyo and headed home.

"Well, I guess I should get ready too."

Senkyo prepared his bag and headed for school. On the way, Ryosei brought something up.

*"\*Senkyo, tomorrow is the weekend, right?\*"*

*"\*Yeah, do you want to do something?\*"*

*"\*Well, something like that. I want you to train your body for battle.\*"*

*"\*Huh...? Oh...\*"*

Senkyo was a bit confused at first, but then realized what he meant. He had to train his body so that Ryosei could fight better. They had already gone through two battles and one of them was a close call because Senkyo's body couldn't let out Ryosei's true strength. He realized this, so he knew he couldn't object. Because he didn't want to die, and because he didn't want anyone else to get mixed up with them.

*"\*How long are we training for?\*"*

*"Depends on how much your body can take. I'm planning on training in the mountains where I trained. I'll make good training just going up and down the mountain so it'll be perfect."*

*"\*U-Up and down... a mountain...?\*"*

Senkyo trembled at the thought of going up and down a mountain. Senkyo exercises because of his father, but he only did normal exercise, he couldn't imagine going up a mountain to exercise and going down again.

*"\*R-Ryosei... are you serious?\*"*

*"\*Yes. We'll start training tomorrow so I won't let you slack off.\*"*

*"\*B-But... my weekend! I need to catch up with my anime and stuff!\*"*

*"\*It'll be fine! If you're really worried about them, just watch anime and read when you're dreaming or when I'm controlling your body. That's what I do.\*"*

*"\*You do those things?!\*"*

*"\*Obviously, I told you before I'm an otaku too.\*"*

*"\*S-So when I was studying my ass out, you were enjoying your life inside me?!\*"*

*"\*Who can say?\*"*

Senkyo didn't stare at any place in particular, but his eyes were painted with envy. Ryosei could do anything he wanted inside Senkyo, while he still had studies and other things to deal with.

*"\*I guess that's just a perk of being dead, hahaha!\*"*

"You wouldn't have that perk if it wasn't for my body!"

Senkyo let out his voice from the pure annoyance he was feeling. If anyone were around, they'd definitely hear it even if they were a bit far away. And there was one person who did and came up to Senkyo.

**36 – Missing Students**

"Yo! Senkyo, good morning. Are you feeling good? You're talking to yourself."

It was his best friend Kinro.

"A-Ahaha... You heard that... It was nothing important, really."

"If you say so..."

"Ah, Kinro, have you finished the light novel I was..."

Senkyo and Kinro walked to school talking about light novels. This was one of the moments where Senkyo can talk about his hobbies again. Since he's been busy, the time he could use on his hobbies was reduced, so he enjoyed something like this every now and again. When they arrived at the school gates, there were noticeably fewer students going through. They walked the hallways and into their classroom.

They looked around and almost half of the class wasn't present. It was like the class during lunch break, but the only difference is that even the students' desks were empty. There were no signs that their other classmates arrived. They didn't have their bags by their desks. It was only a few minutes before the chime rang, so this was incredibly unusual.

Senkyo and Kinro walked to their desks. As they were, they could hear the other students chatting, but unlike yesterday, they were talking about something else.

"This is scary, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I don't want to be the next one gone!"

"Ah! Why is this happening anyway!"

The students had fear on their faces first thing in the morning. They were talking about something, but Senkyo couldn't make up what it was all about. He ignored them and sat on his seat. He looked around the room where there were empty seats and recalled the ones that stuck out to him the most.

"Watanabe-san, Suzuki-san, Yamamoto-san, and even Saito-san aren't here..."

As his eyes were wandering around looking at empty seats, he didn't notice someone beside him until they called out.

"Um... Yukou-san?"

"Hm? Oh, Yutei-san, sorry I didn't notice you."

"Ah, it's fine, but... Yukou-san, did you hear about the missing students?"

"Missing students?"

"Earlier this morning, I heard that families of the students of Honshou Academy found their children missing when they came to check for them. I heard rumors that it was some kind of big kidnapping against the school, but do you think it might be another demon?"

Yukai said, excitedly. She still had her bag on her. When Senkyo came into the classroom, Yukai wasn't there yet. That meant that Yukai went to talk to Senkyo the moment she arrived. She must've wanted to convey this to them as quickly as possible.

"Hm... What do you think, Ryosei?"

*"\*It is possible. But even if it were, why would it kidnap students?\*"*

"Hm..."

The chime rang as they were having their conversation. The homeroom teacher came in, but he didn't come to start class.

"Ahem. Attention everybody, due to the missing students of Honshou Academy, for the safety of the students, all classes, club activities, and anything else are canceled. All of you are to go straight home and no loitering! That is all. I hope you return safely."

After the teacher's announcement, he left the classroom, and the students went straight into conversation.

Senkyo looked like he was still thinking of something. He had his hand grabbing his chin and looking seriously at nothing in particular. Yukai was about to call out to him, until...

"AH! Could it be...?!"

Senkyo jumped out of his seat at the realization of something. He grabbed both his bags and ran for the exit of the classroom. He dashed outside the classroom but came to a stop as he bumped into someone as he turned the corner.

"Aw..."

"Ouch..."

"I'm sorry! I—Ah!"

"N-No, It's my—Ah!"

"Hisho-chan!"

"Yukou-senpai!"

*"\*Hahh... Thank god, she's alright...\*"*

"Hm?"

Senkyo and Yuu fell to the ground upon their impact. He stood up and gave her a hand. He was in a hurry earlier, but now he is calm again. The reason for Senkyo's sudden jump was that he thought that Yuu was missing like the other students. If this were the work of demons, then their target is most likely Yuu. Senkyo was worried about her. From the classroom, Yukai and Kinro came running out.

"Senkyo, what was that all about?"

"Is there a problem, Yukou-san?"

"Nothing, I just wanted to check on something, that's all."

Kinro noticed Yuu was with Senkyo, and out of curiosity...

"Hm? Oh, Hisho-chan, what are you doing here?"

"H-Honjou-senpai..."

Yuu didn't answer Kinro. For some reason, she avoided eye contact with him.

"...!"

"Wha—Hisho-chan?!"

Yuu grabbed Senkyo's hand and dragged him away. Kinro saw them off with a huge grin on his face. *“Ohoho… good luck, my friend.”* On the other hand, Yukai didn’t follow them since she thought it was something about the demons. After arriving at an isolated location, Yuu let go of Senkyo's hand. She took a deep breath before confronting Senkyo.

**37 – Frantic Search**

"Hisho-chan, what was that all about?"

"Sorry Yukou-senpai, I couldn't talk there."

"You couldn't...? Is this about demons, after all?"

"Yes, I can sense traces of mana being used around the area. On my way home and to school, I sensed traces of mana inside houses around the area. I suspect END is the cause for the missing students."

"Then, do you know where they could be?"

"Unfortunately, I don't."

"Is there a way for us to locate it?"

"I believe there is, but we don't have the tools to help us."

"I see... Then there's no use waiting in here! Let's go outside and look for anything that could lead us to them!"

"Yes, let's go."

Yuu and Senkyo already had their belongings with them, so they didn't need to go back to their classrooms. They headed straight for the school gate.

On their way there, there were barely any students left. It seems while they were talking, the other students were already headed home. But that was only to be expected, after all, no one wanted to be the next one on the missing students list.

As they ran through the barren halls and arrived outside, something peculiar caught their eye. But seeing as who it was and what he was doing, it didn't look like they could avoid him even if they didn't notice him. They saw Watanabe Itsuki in front of the school gates. He was grabbing, shouting, and letting go of students that exited the school.

When Senkyo and Yuu inevitably got close enough, Itsuki turned his attention to Senkyo and grabbed his shirt. Immediately giving off his menacing aura and shouting at full volume.

"SHITTAKU! DID YOU SEE WHAT THOSE DAMN BASTARDS LOOKED LIKE?!"

"Wh-What are you talking about all of the sudden?!"

"YOU KNOW WHO I'M TALKING ABOUT! THE DAMN BASTARDS THAT KIDNAPPED ICHIKA!!"

"Even Ichika-chan...?!"

Yuu shouted reflexively. Watanabe Ichika, Yuu's friend and Senkyo's junior was supposedly kidnapped earlier that morning. The reason why Itsuki wasn't in class earlier and why he's at the school gates asking about kidnappers, is that he was looking for his sister.

"THAT'S WHY I'M LOOKING FOR INFORMATION! NOW TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW!"

"I... don't know anything."

"Yukou-senpai..."

Senkyo looked regretful that he couldn't tell Itsuki that his sister is most likely kidnapped by a demon. Yuu could only stare at Senkyo with mutual feelings, because she knew they couldn't tell normal people about demons, or else they might get into trouble with them.

"Tch! As useless as always! Get out here already before you get kidnapped yourself! Same goes for the girl with you. You’re… Ichika’s friend, right? Get out of here before something happens to you too."

"Huh...?"

Senkyo stared at Itsuki in surprise.

"Don't 'huh?' me! Go home already!"

Senkyo and Yuu continued to walk and exited the school. Something about the earlier conversation rang through Senkyo's head.

*\*Get out here already before you get kidnapped yourself! Same goes for the girl with you.\**

*"\*Could it be... he's concerned?! ...No, maybe it's just the way he phrased it?\*"*

Senkyo shook his head and dismissed the thought.

"Is there something wrong, Yukou-senpai?"

"Ah, no, it's nothing."

They continued to walk and thought of places to look that might lead to the demon that did this. But before they could get far from the school gate, they heard a loud scream from behind them.

"WHAT THE—GET THE FUCK OFF ME!! WHAT ARE THESE THINGS?!"

Senkyo and Yuu immediately turned around and saw Itsuki flailing against dark arms trying to drag him down. They were pitch black with ripples of purple all around them. They were coming from a similar-looking dark circle directly beneath Itsuki.

"Watanabe-san!"

"Sh-Shittaku?!"

Senkyo switched with Ryosei and dashed towards Itsuki. Yuu followed suit. Ryosei didn't have time to get Kuro Yaiba out of its bag, so he punched and kicked the arms instead. Each punch and kick hit an arm and made it disappear, but with every one disappearing, only more came to replace them.

"This is annoying...!"

"Yukou-senpai!"

Yuu reached both of them and helped Itsuki by firing fireballs and hitting the roots of the dark arms beneath them. The fireballs burned a good amount, but they still regenerated. There was no stop to them and there wasn't anything around them that would indicate the arms' weakness.

"What is happening?!"

"Tch...!"

"Ah?!"

Suddenly, the dark circle's radius got bigger and covered even Ryosei and Yuu. More arms came from the ground and pulled Ryosei and Yuu with Itsuki. They couldn't get out of the sheer number of arms, there were too many. Before they knew it, they were engulfed in the dark abyss. No one in the barren front gates was left.

**Chapter 5: The Other Side**

**38 – Spirit Realm**

*\*Krrt! Krrt! Krrt!\**

Itsuki was lying on the ground. It looks like he fell unconscious from something. He slowly opened his eyes; he could see the ground covering up half his vision. From where he was, he could see small dots of light floating around the area and he could hear faint sounds of metal clashing on metal.

"H-Huh...? What is this...? The school?"

Itsuki slowly got up and sat on his bottom. The first thing he did was scan his surroundings. He recognized where he is, he was just outside the school gate, but there was a small difference, it was night and everything looked similar to a crystal cave. The clashes he heard got louder and the sounds of a wild dog could now be heard, it was coming from just beyond the gate.

*\*GRRR! KRRRT!! SHAAK! SHAAK!\**

Itsuki slowly and cautiously approached the gates. Step by step, wary of the unknown sounds of what seemed to be fighting, he took a peek through the gate.

"Wh-wh-what?!"

He saw two people surrounded by what looked to be a pack of wolves, but looking at them more carefully, those weren't wolves. They could stand on two feet and their arms and legs looked similar to a human's, not an animal's.

"Werewolves?!"

Itsuki's shout was so loud that it attracted the attention of the werewolves. Their beastly eyes glared at Itsuki and charged at him. Despite this, Itsuki didn't run, he came out of the corner and faced the werewolves.

"F-FUCK! WANNA GO?! COME AT ME YOU STUPID MUTTS!!"

Itsuki didn't run in fear, he stood firm and took out his fists, ready to brawl. His readied fists were slightly trembling. He didn't run in fear but that didn't mean that he wasn't afraid. The werewolves were closing the distance in a matter of seconds. Itsuki steeled himself, he bit his lip and pulled back his right fist, and charged at them.

But before they could make contact, the three werewolves in front of him were suddenly beheaded. Blood spilled from their necks and small pieces of stone came falling from each of the werewolves.

"WHAT?!"

Itsuki came to a sudden stop and stared in shock at the monsters’ sudden execution. He pulled up his arms to his side at the realization that there were more enemies. However, before they got to him, the werewolves were engulfed in balls of flames. The werewolves growled and flailed around in pain. In a few seconds, the bodies dropped to the ground and stopped growling, later disintegrating into ashes indicating their death.

"Wha...."

Itsuki was in complete awe. The wild beasts that were coming for him were killed in a blink of an eye. He looked in front of him and saw two familiar people approach him.

"Shittaku... and that girl...?"

He saw Senkyo holding a katana and sheathing it in a black scabbard. Beside him, was a light crimson-haired girl that he saw not long before he lost consciousness.

"Are you alright, Watanabe-san?"

"Sh-shittaku! What the hell was that all about?!"

"Okay, okay! I'll explain, just let me go!"

Itsuki grabbed Senkyo in his rush for answers. He wanted to know why beings from a fantasy were in front of his eyes. His panic was understandable. Senkyo calmed him down and carefully explained the situation.

"You're telling me… We've been sent into some kind of ghost world…? DON’T GIVE ME THAT BULLSHIT!!"

"Calm down, Watanabe-san just hear us out—"

“I DON’T HAVE TIME FOR YOUR GAMES! I HAVE TO FIND MY SISTER!”

Itsuki grabbed Senkyo’s blazer and pushed him against the nearby wall.

“C-Calm down, Watanabe-senpai!”

Yuu’s scream was unheard. Itsuki wasn’t stopping to listen.

“I SWEAR, SHITTAKU… IF YOU DON’T GET ME OUT OF HERE THIS INSTANT, I’LL—”

“WE MIGHT KNOW WHERE ICHIKA-SAN IS!!”

“What…?”

Senkyo cut Itsuki off. The second Itsuki heard about his beloved sister, he came back to his senses. He let go of Senkyo and took a step back.

“You better start talking.”

After fixing himself up, Senkyo left the explanation to Yuu.

"Mana and spirit power interact in strange ways. Because of the chemistry between the two, being close to each other makes mana much more apparent and allows us to detect it clearly in a larger area than normal. I can sense mana being used in town. A spirit zone shouldn't be able to be large enough to reach all the way there. The only explanation for this is that we are in the Spirit Realm. Another world where spirits and other ghostly beings live. If we go to the origin of this mana, it should lead us to where everyone who got kidnapped is. Assuming that the person using mana is the one who kidnapped the students, that is."

Itsuki stared at Yuu as if she spoke in a different language. He didn't understand much. But despite being utterly confused, Itsuki still understood some parts.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about... But basically, you know where the scums that kidnapped Ichika are."

"Generally speaking, yes."

"OKAY!! Tell me where they are, Shorty!"

"I'm not that short! And I can't even tell you even if I wanted to!"

"Then I'll just follow you."

"No!"

Itsuki came closer and threateningly looked at Yuu.

"Huh?! Got a problem with that?!"

"Eek...!"

Yuu shrieked and backed up from Itsuki's gaze. Senkyo immediately got between them and stopped Itsuki.

"Stop it, Watanabe-san."

"Huh?! You wanna fight?!"

"N-No, I don't want to fight."

"Then what is it?!"

"I-I was already thinking of taking you with us."

"Yukou-senpai?!"

"Hmph, good. Then, I'll be around that corner, come to me when you two are ready."

"Sure."

Itsuki left the two and went behind a corner. Yuu then tugged Senkyo's shirt to catch his attention.

"Why are you letting him go with us, Yukou-senpai? It’ll be very dangerous."

"It's because we’re in the Spirit Realm, right? We don’t even know how to get out of here. The werewolves might come for him when we’re gone. I already talked it out with Ryosei and he said that he agrees with me, it's safer if Watanabe-san is with us than not."

"That’s… you’re right."

Senkyo's argument made sense, they never know when and where enemies will come. If they leave Itsuki, the other enemies will just attack him that's why the safest place for Itsuki is with Senkyo and Yuu.

"Oh yeah, I've been meaning to ask. How can you sense mana traces in the air without doing anything but you can't sense mana inside people unless you suck their blood?"

"That's because nothing is obstructing my senses. Unlike sensing whether someone has mana or not, sensing flows or traces of mana in the air is like seeing ripples in the air. But when mana is inside something like a person or an object, we need to do something else to sense them because their body is obstructing the mana flow. Like I said before, only some species in our world can even sense mana, and because mana mixes with the blood, we can sense mana flows in them."

"Ah, okay, I get it."

While Yuu was explaining how she senses mana traces. From around the corner, Itsuki took a deep breath before he bit his lip and balled his hands into fists.

"…Ichika. I hope you’re alright.”

The trouble-making bully was nowhere to be seen. All that was there was a worried older brother. Hidden from the sight of Senkyo and Yuu, Itsuki gazed at the two.

"I don’t know what’s up with those two and what this place is, but as long as I find Ichika, I don’t care... I promised her."

**39 – Rough Training**

Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki walked through the town of crystal-like buildings clad in a veil of night and floating lights. Yuu was in the lead and the other two followed. Itsuki and Senkyo talked in the back informing Itsuki more about what was happening, he was told about demons, spirits, and magic but nothing unnecessary.

"Demons, spirits, and another world... those things exist?"

"Yeah."

"And this shorty is some magic person?"

"Yeah."

"That's... A LOAD OF BULLCRAP! LIKE HELL I'D BELIEVE YOU!"

"Seriously?! You're still not convinced?! But everything is right in front of you!"

"Yeah, but I don't care. If I haven't fought those magic demon bastards then they still don't exist!"

"Fight them? Didn't you just see werewolves coming for your life?"

"Yeah, but I didn't fight them."

Senkyo was left in surprise. Itsuki was the first person he knew that actually thought with his fists rather than his brain. Senkyo couldn't help but be stunned by him.

*"\*This guy is insane!\*"*

Meanwhile, Itsuki was thinking to himself, relating Senkyo’s words to his experiences in the past.

*\*Fantasy monsters, huh? Bullshit… then again, I guess that* THING *would count as one. How many years has it been since then? Bah, it doesn’t matter now.\**

A certain memory made it easier for him to digest the nonsensical information Senkyo was feeding him, but still, he remained stubborn and refused to openly acknowledge it due to his pride. He thought of reluctantly agreeing with them to move on, but Senkyo’s next words ticked him off.

"You can't fight them, Watanabe-san. They're not human, you'll just get killed if you try!"

"Oh? You two can fight them, but I can't? Shittaku, are you underestimating me?"

"That's not what I—"

"Then fight me right here! Come on! Draw your sword!"

"Watanabe-san, stop it!"

"You really are underestimating me! I'll show you...!"

Itsuki sent a punch headed straight for Senkyo's face. He dodged it but Itsuki sent more coming at him. Senkyo dodged every single one and leaped backward to gain some distance between them, but Itsuki didn't let that happen. Itsuki charged at Senkyo with his whole body.

*"\*Ryosei, can you help me out here?!\*"*

*“\*……\*”*

*“\*Ryosei!?\*”*

*"\*I don't want to. He's your friend, deal with him yourself.\*"*

*"\*But we're not even friends!\*"*

*"\*I don't care. Deal with this one yourself.\*"*

Ryosei ignored Senkyo's call for help. If Ryosei was to fight Itsuki, he could just use his skills to knock him out. After all, Senkyo himself wasn't that powerful. Ryosei would do all the fighting while he stayed back. Senkyo never fought by himself.

They only shared bodies, but for some reason, they don’t know what the other was currently thinking, making it impossible for Senkyo to match Ryosei’s skill with the blade. Because of that, Senkyo had an idea of what he was trying to do. He was trying to make him gain experience in fighting. Senkyo knew how to properly execute Ryosei’s techniques from his memories.

*“\*Damn you, Ryosei!!\*”*

"HAAAAA!!"

"Gah...!"

"Yukou-senpai!"

Senkyo got hit by Itsuki and he got knocked to the ground, but he didn't stop there. Itsuki lifted his leg to stomp on Senkyo, but he rolled over and got back up before he got hit.

"S-Stop it!"

"What? Where did the guy that slashed three werewolves in a second go? Are you scared?"

"Are you actually this egotistical? Do you really think beating me will prove you can fight demons?!"

"Yeah, I do! Raw strength is all I need!"

"What an idiot..."

"Watanabe-senpai, stop it already!"

"No, Hisho-chan, this guy can't be reasoned with."

"But...!"

"It's fine!"

"You two done talking?"

Senkyo turned his head and Itsuki was already in front of him and he was about to punch him. Senkyo managed to put his arms up and blocked his punch and took a step back.

"Are you just gonna run?"

"....."

Senkyo knew he was going to lose at this rate. He thought of everything he could to resolve this, but all that came to mind was if he knocked him out somehow. Talking was no good.

"Raaaahhhh!"

Itsuki charged at Senkyo again but he managed to dodge at the last second. Itsuki had more stamina than Senkyo, so tiring him out was out of the question. All Senkyo could do was dodge and buy time until he thought of something.

Senkyo scrutinized Itsuki's every movement as he dodged his attacks, and he noticed a small opening. When Itsuki charges at him, he leaves his neck open, but Senkyo wasn't fast enough to hit him in the neck while he was charging. If he tried, Itsuki will just grab his arm and punch him. Senkyo wanted to avoid as much damage as possible. However, that was the best chance he had. All the other openings were too small and Senkyo didn't have that kind of strength and precision, so he continued to dodge and think of a way to beat Itsuki. He needed to hurry, he wasn’t going to last too long.

*\*Why is Yukou-senpai losing? Is Konjou-san not helping him out? If that's the case, why?! At this rate, Yukou-senpai will just get badly hurt!\**

Yuu couldn't help but worry. If Itsuki didn't stop now, Senkyo will just get unnecessary injuries. She mainly focused on offensive magic, but using a barrier spell would be enough to stop both of them. As she was about to cast the spell, for a second, she saw a small grin on Senkyo's face and hesitated.

*"\*Fine, I don't need your help for this one, I'll do this on my own!\*"*

Senkyo kept avoiding Itsuki's attacks. But this time, when Itsuki charged at him, he charged back. Before they made contact, Senkyo dodged to the side and avoided getting hit.

"What the hell was that?! Are you mocking me?!"

Senkyo repeated the same thing a few times after that, Senkyo was reaching his limit.

"Haha! Tired already? Time to finish this!"

Itsuki charged one last time, this one had all his power in it.

*"\*Hahh… calm down! Control my breathing... focus on my target... concentrate my power...\*"*

This time, Senkyo stood still for a second and took the same form he did every other time he dashed, and finally...

"Ha...!"

"Wha—"

Senkyo disappeared from Itsuki’s vision. He became muddled. Senkyo, who was right in front of him, disappeared without a trace. Not a second less after Senkyo's disappearance, Itsuki felt a powerful strike hit the side of his neck and fell unconscious to the ground.

"Haaahh...! Haaahh...! Haaahh...!"

Senkyo was panting heavily as he stood victorious. Senkyo used one of Ryosei's techniques, the Flash Strike. A strike that allowed the user to dash in a blink of an eye and release a powerful strike stronger than the user's usual strength.

"Y-Yukou-senpai! Are you alright?!"

Yuu shouted as she hurriedly ran towards Senkyo.

"Hahh...! I-I'm fine... hahh...!"

"How did you do that?! Did Konjou-san help you in the end?"

"Surprisingly... hahh... I did it by myself... hahh..."

"That’s amazing!"

At the time of the battle, Senkyo thought, *"\*I can win this if I can just be faster and stronger for just a second... This is going to be one hell of a push, but I'll have to use Ryosei's Flash Strike!\*"*

In the middle of the battle, Senkyo practiced Flash Strike as they fought by doing test runs and dashing at Itsuki every time he charged at him. He thought about the time Ryosei was training Flash Strike and copied him. He used one of his memories that contained a lecture to learn how to properly use the move. By simply having a reference and a lecture to go with it, Senkyo was able to use Flash Strike in the middle of the battle.

*\*Yukou-senpai... just who are you...?\**

Yuu couldn't help but be amazed. Meanwhile, Ryosei was congratulating Senkyo in his mind.

*"\*You did good.\*"*

*"\*Don't 'you did good' me! You abandoned me!\*"*

*"\*At least you know what a fight feels like now. You even managed to use Flash Strike!\*"*

*"\*Yeah, but was that really necessary?!\*"*

*"\*Well, let's say its precautionary.\*"*

*"\*Geez...\*"*

Ryosei used his spirit power to recover Senkyo's scratches and slightly healed his fatigue. After a short while, Itsuki regained consciousness.

**40 – Welcoming Party**

"Hrm... Hm...?"

"Are you alright, Watanabe-san?"

Itsuki looked in front of him and saw Senkyo offering his hand to him. He was then reminded of what happened before he got knocked out.

"...Damn it, I lost...!"

Although Itsuki didn't see how Senkyo knock him out, he had a good guess because of the time he slashed three werewolves. If Senkyo was able to reach the werewolves before they reached Itsuki, then it meant that he was faster than them. He might use brawn over brain but that didn't mean that he couldn't figure that much out.

"Get away from me, Shittaku!"

Itsuki slapped Senkyo's hand away and stood up by himself. He quietly walked away from Senkyo, but before he did, Senkyo called out to him.

"Watanabe-san, I just want you to know that raw power isn't the peak of anyone's strength. Everyone has their own, and if you polish it, you'll grow stronger. And if you fight for someone else, you'll get even stronger. At least, that's what I believe in."

"...Where the hell did the lecture come from, Shittaku?"

Itsuki stopped at Senkyo's words but continued to walk away after giving his response. After a short break, the three continued to follow the traces of mana in the air that led to what could be the enemy’s base. At the end of the mana traces, was an old abandoned building that was a few stories high.

"This is it."

"How many enemies do you think are in there, Hisho-chan?"

"Unfortunately, I can’t tell."

"That’s alright. There's no other way around it, let's go."

With Senkyo in the lead, the trio slowly opened the decrepit door. Senkyo switched with Ryosei and drew his sword. Yuu had her hands out, ready to cast a spell at the first sign of danger. Itsuki was as wary as they were and was ready to pull his fists out any time.

When the door fully opened, their eyes were in surprise because, unlike the old decrepit building, the inside looked like a fancy rich people's party. The inside was bright and was covered in fancy tiles and decorative walls. Their surroundings didn’t look like crystals, there were no floating lights in the room, and the big windows showed the bright sun shining down on a beautiful outside garden, completely contradictory to the sight Senkyo saw before they entered. It was almost as if they were in the real world.

The room was filled with people in fancy clothing and they were chatting like they would be at a party. There were tables with silky white sheets covering them, chandeliers that decorated the ceiling and lit up the room, and a buffet with different variants of food. There was a stage in the front of the room covered with a red curtain.

"What... is this?"

"Looks like some rich bastard's party to me."

"It's an illusion... but to think someone can cast something this big..."

"Hey, those people... don't they look familiar?"

Itsuki pointed out to the people in fancy clothes.

"Yukou-senpai, isn't that a classmate of yours over there?"

"Hm? What?! Isn't that Suzuki-san?!"

Yuu pointed at Senkyo's classmate, Suzuki Himari. She had fancy clothing like all the others, a light purple dress with the same bunny hair pin on her hair. The question that was in Senkyo's mind was, 'why is she here?' Normal people shouldn't be able to enter a spirit zone, much less the Spirit Realm. She wasn’t in class earlier, so her being a victim of the demon’s kidnapping was also a possibility. Even so, would a kidnapped person simply enjoy a high-class party in a completely different world from their own? Himari wasn't the only one Senkyo noticed.

"Hey guys, aren't the other people in this party students of Honshou Academy...?"

"You're right, Yukou-senpai. Those girls over there are a part of my class!"

"Hisho-chan, are these people an illusion too?"

"I'm not too sure... If they were, they shouldn't have a presence but I'm sensing a presence in every single person here. It is also possible that they used magic to mimic their presence, if so then they have a powerful mage in their team..."

"...I'll try talking to one of them."

"Be careful, Yukou-senpai don't let your guard down."

"Yeah, I won't."

Senkyo separated from the two and approached Himari. On the other hand, something caught the attention of Itsuki's wandering eyes. A girl with blonde hair fixed into twin tails, wearing a blue dress wandered in the corner of his eye.

"I-Ichika!!"

Itsuki recognized her immediately, the person he'd been looking for, his little sister, Watanabe Ichika. He ran over to her immediately and pushed away people blocking his path as he ran.

"Wait, Watanabe-senpai, no!"

Yuu called out for Itsuki but fell on deaf ears as Itsuki continued running and ignoring Yuu's call. The three of them were now separated. Yuu thought of staying where she was to keep an eye on both Senkyo and Itsuki. From where she was, she had a good vision of both their locations. If trouble occurred with either of them, she would be able to do something.

"Suzuki-san, is that you...?"

"Oh? If it isn't that lame otaku. What are you doing here? And why are you in our school uniform?"

"Don't mind my school uniform! Why are you guys in the Spirit Realm?"

"Spirit Realm? What are you talking about? Is your geekiness leaking out now? Hahaha!"

*"\*So, she doesn't know...?\*"*

"Then, what's this party all about?"

"You came here not knowing what this is all about? How ignorant."

*"\*I could say the same to you!\*"*

"Fine, I'll tell you. This party is our welcoming party!"

"Welcoming... party?"

"Yes, One of the ten leaders of END, Fulgur-sama's welcoming party!!"

"A-A leader of END?!"

Himari pointed to the stage in front of them signaling to Senkyo to look at the stage. Meanwhile, over at another conversation, Itsuki made it to where his little sister was. He was shouting her name over and over as he pushed through the crowd.

"Ichika! Ichika!!"

"Ah! Onii-chan, you're here!"

Once Itsuki reached Ichika he immediately wrapped her in his embrace. Ichika was surprised but she hugged her back. At that moment, Itsuki was silent but it didn't seem like he was happy. After a few seconds, Itsuki pushed Ichika back in anger.

"Who the fuck are you, bitch?!"

"O-Onii-chan?!"

Itsuki had a face contradictory to the one earlier. He looked at Ichika like he was about to beat her up. Ichika was teary-eyed and weeping on the floor. Other people tried to help her out but Itsuki didn't make that possible.

"DON'T TOUCH HER!"

The other guests stepped away from her and just surrounded Ichika and Itsuki. Yuu, who saw this ran over to them.

"Watanabe-senpai, what’s happening?!"

Yuu pushed away the crowd and headed for Itsuki.

"Watanabe-senpai, what—"

"Don't get close to her, Shorty."

"Huh..."

**41 – Fulgur’s Welcome**

Itsuki had a face she had never seen before. One that was serious and terrifying and looked like he was out to kill. Yuu reflexively backed off, she wanted to know what this was all about but Itsuki explained before she had the time to ask.

"That isn't my little sister."

"How did you know?"

"When I hugged her, she didn't feel like the usual Ichika, her presence was off. Her usual warmth and the expression in her eyes in completely different. But all of that could just be passed on as some kind of side effect for entering this world so that would just be half the reason... What tipped me off was... ICHIKA WOULD NEVER HUG ME BACK!! SHE'D BE TOO EMBARRASSED TO DO THAT!!"

*"\*What? H-He figured out she was a fake because he hugged her?! And this guy can sense presences?! I know some humans can do that but Watanabe-senpai is an idiot who talks with his fists! He's an idiot but he can sense presences?! No, maybe he is just being a pervert…\*"*

Yuu was in utter shock. Itsuki was a literal brute that was just a normal human and sensing presences was more of an abnormal ability, yet he still sensed her. He figured it out with minor details such as expressions, body heat, and actions it was completely unlike him. But with all that said, she still couldn’t throw out the possibility that this was just him being a creep.

"Answer me! Who are you and where is my little sister?!"

"....."

"IF YOU DON'T ANSWER, I'LL BEAT YOU TO A PULP FOR COPYING ICHIKA'S FACE!!"

"....."

The person that looked like Ichika didn't respond but she pointed her finger up to the stage without making any eye contact with Itsuki or Yuu. In a meek voice, she muttered.

"Fulgur-sama..."

"HA?! WHAT WAS THAT?! I CAN'T HEAR YOU!"

"Watanabe-senpai, look!"

Yuu directed Itsuki's attention to the stage. The curtains that covered the stage were pulled up and showed their contents. There was a man with a tattered cloak that stood on the stage. His face was covered with worn-out bandages but still wore a white mask with an eye hole in the middle of the mask.

"I'm sorry, but I will be welcoming you in place of Fulgur-sama."

"What?! We were promised to meet Fulgur-sama!!"

Himari shouted in anger. She, Ichika, and the other guests looked like they were betrayed. All of the people in the room looked at the masked man in front and listened to him.

"All of you are mere puppets. Fulgur-sama had decided that he does not need to show himself. So, instead, he will graciously reward the one who can capture the crimson-haired girl with an audience with him personally!!"

"Seriously?!"

"Hell yeah!"

"Where is that girl?!"

"Over there!"

The people in the room made an immediate fuss and looked for a crimson-haired girl. Unfortunately, there was only one crimson-haired girl in the room and that was Yuu.

Senkyo realized this and immediately looked around for Yuu, and that proved to be easy. He saw a huge crowd circling something and a furious amount of shouting and screaming. There was no mistake, Yuu was in the middle of all of those people.

"Damn, there's too many of them!"

In the middle of the crowd, Yuu was casting a barrier on both herself and Itsuki. The transparent magical wall kept the crowd at bay. Their punches and kicks weren't strong enough to break the barrier, so as long as Yuu can hold up, they were fine.

"Shittaku wasn't lying when he said you were a magic person..."

"Of course not! What would be the point of lying?!"

"Guess so... But what are we going to do with these idiots? I need to pay back that monster for copying Ichika's face!"

"Of course you are..."

Yuu and Itsuki were in a pinch. They were trapped by a mountain of people. Senkyo was outside trying to think of a way to bust through the crowd. In the middle of the commotion, the masked man got everyone's attention.

"Hahahahaha! This should do for the welcoming party! Now, Hisho Yuu-sama and company, Master Fulgur will be waiting for your arrival. We will meet again but before that, I do hope that you will become a good entertainment for Master Fulgur."

A pitch-black portal appeared behind the masked man and he entered it without looking back. The masked man went past it and the portal disappeared with him. The guests that were present in the room began twitching uncontrollably. Black foam was coming out of their mouth and eyes.

"Wha...?!"

"Eek!"

"The hell?!"

The guests' bodies turned into black liquid and morphed into different-looking demons. All of them had small pieces of armor to protect their body made out of bones, skulls, and some rags. They had hell-red skin and shining yellow eyes and different weapons like spears, bows, short swords, and shields.

They covered not only the ground but even the sky. There were three different kinds of demons. Those with wings and tails were armed with bows, those with small horns and buffed arms were armed with short swords and shields, and those with goat legs were armed with spears.

"Lesser demons!!"

**42 – Swarm**

Yuu shouted as she recognized their form. Senkyo switched with Ryosei and started slashing the demons. While Yuu readied an area of effect spell to temporarily get rid of the lesser demons just outside the barrier.

"Watanabe-senpai, you stay here!"

"What?! No, I'll whack these bastards too!"

"No! Listen to us! Yukou-senpai beat you right?! Then in your own words, you won't be able to beat these demons! Just stay put or you might get yourself killed!"

"Tch...!"

Itsuki clenched his hand and ground his teeth. He was infuriated at the fact that he felt useless, that he felt weak and he couldn't do anything about it. Yuu was right, and Itsuki knew that which is why all he could do was get mad at himself for not being strong enough.

*"\*Damn it!\*"*

Yuu took one last look at Itsuki and determined that he'll stay put and listen to her. Yuu placed her hands on the ground and prepared to cast a spell.

"O Earth, heed my call, bend to my will, let the power that runs through my veins crystallize my desire, trample the earth beneath me, and create thorns of protection. Crown Spikes!"

The ground turned itself into sharp piercing spikes and skewered the surrounding lesser demons. The barrier was dead center inside the circle of spikes. Yuu walked outside the barrier leaving Itsuki inside. She cast fireballs at the flying lesser demons with bows, covering Ryosei and assuring him that no arrows come flying his way.

Ryosei weaved through the enemy numbers and slashed each lesser demon he came across. He reached Yuu and protected her from any incoming ground units. Yuu, who was standing on top of one of the spikes, supported Ryosei with attacks coming from his blind spot and any remaining bow demons.

Those who tried to climb the spikes of earth were beheaded before they knew it. The few that made it up the spikes were met with a fireball, making them fall off and burn to a crisp. Ryosei and Yuu's teamwork kept all the lesser demons at bay and thinned out their numbers just by defending.

*\*I'll really just be in the way, won't I? And why is that Shittaku fighting way better than earlier?! He held back on me again! Damn it! …I gotta get stronger or else...!\**

Itsuki watched Ryosei and Yuu's amazing teamwork. He felt powerless as he watched, but for some reason, he looked determined. Something about watching them fight made him worked up.

As Senkyo and Yuu's fight continued, over half of the lesser demons were already gone but they needed to finish this quick because Senkyo's body didn't have enough stamina to last another half and Ryosei wanted to save his spirit power to recover Senkyo for a more important situation.

"Hisho-chan, I need some time! Cover me for a bit!"

"Got it!"

Ryosei sheathed Kuro Yaiba, closed his eyes, and focused. Yuu covered Ryosei with a barrage of fireballs while simultaneously defending herself. Looking closely, Ryosei's hair began to flutter ever so slightly and the dust on the ground circled around Ryosei as if being caught in a weak tornado with Ryosei at the center.

"Sheath my blade with the wind. Your power is the face of elegance. Flow as I show you the path, the line to a dashing ending. Konjou Style, Gale Fan!"

Ryosei opened his eyes and slashed Kuro Yaiba horizontally. A strong and sharp gust of wind traced Ryosei's slash, and all of the sudden, in a fan shape, all the lesser demons in front of Ryosei were slashed, beheaded, and killed. Even the back wall in range of Ryosei’s slash was cut through.

Konjou Style, Gale Fan. A technique that uses the user's focus and mana, of course, since it used mana it could only be used if the user wielded a spectral or had mana. Everyone in the room was stunned, in under a second, the number of demons was cut down to ten percent.

"Whoa!"

"W-What... the..."

Everyone was in complete shock. Yuu and Itsuki witnessed the carnage Ryosei's slash laid. Yuu realized she was just standing around and snapped out of it, with her remaining magic, she cast fireballs on all of the remaining lesser demons.

Yuu cast her last fireball and burned the last lesser demon. Ryosei was exhausted, especially since Senkyo's body didn't have the usual stamina of his old body. He laid his back against the ground looking like he had just run a marathon without rest.

"Hahh... hahh... That... hahh... was new..."

Ryosei returned control to Senkyo.

"Good work, Yukou-senpai!"

"Well... hahh... it wasn’t me who fought so..."

"Then both of you did great!"

"I didn’t really do anything though..."

"Still, that was amazing! You took out so many lesser demons in one hit!"

"You heard that?"

*"\*Yes, tell her thanks\*"*

"He says 'Thank you.'"

While they were chatting, Itsuki approached them.

"Shittaku..."

*"\*Oh god... what is it this time?\*"*

Senkyo looked at Itsuki with worried eyes. He thought he might do something crazy again like another fight, but that was not the case.

"...That wasn't so bad."

"!?"

Senkyo, this time was the one who was shocked. It was basically Itsuki's way of saying 'you did great!' but he had never seen Itsuki praise anyone or even say thanks ever in his whole life. All he could do was stare back at Itsuki until he finally got the words out of his mouth.

"...T-Thanks?"

"Why are you saying it like a question?!"

"No, I'm thankful, I'm thankful!"

\**Creeeeeek!\**

As Senkyo and Itsuki were talking, in front of the stage, a set of huge double doors appeared out of nowhere.

"I guess it's telling us to go forward... Yukou-senpai?"

"We go through after we rest, you're tired too, aren't you Hisho-chan? You used a lot of mana back there, didn't you?"

"I did, but I’ll be fine. Thanks for worrying about me."

Itsuki left the two alone and rested by one of the walls.

"Call me when we're going."

"Okay!"

After a bit of rest, Senkyo got enough energy to last another fight, and the trio headed for the double doors on the stage. When they opened it, they saw greenery as far as the eye can see. There were plants and trees everywhere. It looked like it was midday. They could hear the sounds of bugs and flowing water from outside the door.

Cautiously, they went past the door and entered that forest. When all of them got through, the door closed by itself and disappeared like it was never there.

"No going back huh? Well, it's not like we intend to anyways."

**43 – Hunting Pack**

Senkyo and the others continued walking. For about ten minutes they didn't find anything interesting.

"Are these bastards afraid to show up or something?"

"Calm down, Watanabe-san. They might be planning a surprise attack."

"Surprise attack? Just come at me like a man!"

"Shh! Quiet! I hear something!"

At Yuu's call, Senkyo and Itsuki shut up and listened for sounds. With Yuu's enhanced senses she could faintly hear, a familiar monstrous growl coming from behind them.

"Werewolves are coming from behind!"

"Hurry! Let's find an open area! We'll be at a disadvantage if we fight here!"

Senkyo and others started running. The forest was thick, the trees were tall with vines growing off them, logs on the ground, and bushes that were five feet tall. Senkyo and the others raced through the natural obstacle course jumping and dashing through.

They knew they had to get to a suitable place to fight before the werewolves caught them. Itsuki could only imagine the danger but Senkyo knew of it. When Senkyo and Ryosei battled a werewolf in Senkyo's living room, he was combo-ed by the werewolf in midair with its insane speed.

If multiple werewolves were to use the same move as him, there would be attacks coming out of nowhere. They would use the trees and bounce off them to do surprise attacks and not just to their sides but also from above. The close proximity of the trees would affect Ryosei's slashes, not to mention their vision. They have a low to no chance of winning if that happened.

"Guys, over there! An opening!"

Itsuki pointed at the wide glade slightly to the left of them. They quickly changed their direction towards the glade. They safely reached it and headed for the center of it. Senkyo assessed the situation and barked out orders.

"Hisho-chan, create a barrier and prepare to cast area magic when the werewolves show up, and don't use fire magic you might burn the forest down."

"Sure!"

"Watanabe-san, if the barrier breaks I want you to take Hisho-chan away from the enemies while she uses magic to cover your escape. Once you get away, have Hisho-chan set up another barrier and support me with magic."

"Sure, sure, at least I can finally get some action."

"I'll be ready to counter any werewolves that leap at us. If we get separated, focus on defending yourselves, and don't worry about us*.*"

*\*Us?\**

Itsuki noticed something odd in Senkyo's last sentence. He said to 'not worry about *us*' but as far as Itsuki knows, it was only him, Yuu, and Senkyo.

*\*Whatever, I'll mind the minor details later!\**

He put it on the back of his head and prepared for the enemy. A few seconds later, a werewolf came jumping from behind them. *Slash! Slash!*Senkyo, who was now being controlled by Ryosei, countered the werewolf by dashing under it and slicing it at its center, destroying the weak spot that it had behind its neck.

After that, they were at a stand-still, there was no movement whatsoever. They were watching Senkyo and the others. They felt their beastly eyes glaring at them from within the thick forest and their movement rustling the leaves. After a moment of silence, they struck.

From all sides of the forest, the werewolves came in all at once, some leaped at them and some ran at them but either way they were met by Yuu's wind slashes similar to Ryosei's earlier technique but with significantly less power and range.

Yuu was able to intercept werewolves coming from her side by Senkyo's orders. Ryosei fought on the frontlines battling all the werewolves on his side, compared to his first fight with a werewolf, he got used to fighting in Senkyo's body and since he knew the werewolves' weakness, it was way easier.

The werewolves that were attacking the barrier were either met with Yuu's wind slashes or Ryosei's blade. Cracks in the barrier were simply repaired by Yuu. Itsuki, as always watched on the sidelines as the two fought but he already accepted the fact that he'd just be in the way instead, a different resolve burned within him.

*"\*After this ends, I'll be sure to get stronger! I can't let that otaku be stronger than me!\*"*

Ryosei and Yuu fought without anything wrong happening until a beastly howl came from within the forest. The werewolves that were fighting immediately retreated into the forest. Ryosei retreated back inside the barrier and readied his blade.

*"\*Ryosei, tell Hisho-chan to switch to a single target spell. That howl was probably their boss.\*"*

*"Yeah, I agree."*

"Hisho-chan, switch your attacks to a single target one that'll pack a punch!"

"Okay!"

Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki watched as the birds of the forest flew away in fear. Whatever was coming for them, it was going to be a strong opponent. A strong growling noise could be heard just inside the grove of trees and suddenly...

*\*...Crack!\**

The barrier that Yuu created was destroyed.

"Ah?!"

"The hell?!"

In front of Yuu and Itsuki, Ryosei was clashing his blade with a werewolf's claws. The werewolf was unlike any other they'd seen. It had a part of its left ear bitten out and ear piercings on its right. Its face was filled with scars and its eyes glowed blood red. Its body and strength were bigger and more powerful than any of the other werewolves. Ryosei managed to keep the werewolf at bay and fended it off. It stood with an intimidating aura that of a beast.

"Watanabe-san!"

"Doing it!"

Itsuki carried Yuu with his right arm and ran away from the beast. She was simply hanging on his arm.

*\*I know this is in case they attack us from behind but I definitely feel like luggage right now!\**

Yuu didn't let her thoughts leak out and guarded their rear. She set up another barrier away from Senkyo and the beast but not far enough that they could get ambushed from within the forest. Over where Senkyo was, the beast spoke.

"I! AM ONE OF THE GREAT LEADERS OF FULGUR-SAMA'S SUBORDINATES! I AM HERE TO EVALUATE YOUR SKILL!"

"Evaluate my skill? Just what are you talking about?"

*“\*Senkyo, get ready to cast it!\*”*

*“\*Gotcha!\*”*

"HUMAN! SINCE YOU SURVIVED THE EARLIER ATTACK, IT IS TIME FOR ME TO PERSONALLY TEST YOU!"

"Test me for what?!"

"IF A FILTHY HUMAN LIKE YOU IS WORTHY OF SEEING THE GREATNESS THAT IS FULGUR-SAMA!"

"Who is this Fulgur-sama?"

"ENOUGH TALKING!! PREPARE YOURSELF, HUMAN!!"

*"\*Damn, I thought I could get more information...\*"*

The werewolf crouched on all four of its legs and readied to pounce. Ryosei noticed this and prepared himself. A second later, it was on the other side of Ryosei and left a shockwave in the air that went straight past where Ryosei was.

When the werewolf turned back around, it saw Ryosei looking at it in the same stance as he was before the werewolf pounced.

"YOU DODGED IT?!"

Ryosei showed no sign of responding he was completely focused.

"IS THAT SO?! THEN TAKE THIS!!"

The werewolf pounced again and left another shockwave. This time, it clearly pounced straight through where Ryosei was. The werewolf had a grin on its mouth, but a second later, its head came falling down its body.

"No way!"

Itsuki shouted as he saw what happened. Ryosei stood still and the werewolf pounced through him, but in that same second, Ryosei disappeared from where he stood and was already beside the werewolf and slashed its head off. Yuu, however, had an amazed face but was not surprised.

But it wasn't over yet. The head that was separated from the werewolf's body reattached itself to the body. Ryosei hurriedly took a step back and readied his sword.

"Didn't I cut off its head?!"

Ryosei cut the werewolf's head clean off but it was still alive. The weak spot that usually killed a werewolf in one hit didn't work. Ryosei didn’t notice it, but Senkyo did. This werewolf had one huge difference from the other werewolves—There wasn’t anything engraved on its nape.

"Damn it!"

The werewolf fully regenerated and faced Ryosei.

"Hahaha... HAHAHAHAHAHA!!!"

The werewolf faced the sky and laughed uncontrollably.

"AMAZING, SIMPLY AMAZING!! HUMAN, YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF WORTHY OF A PROPER BATTLE! I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU IN THE FINAL STAGE I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO OUR FATEFUL REMATCH! HAHAHA!!"

A pitch-black portal appeared under the werewolf and it sunk into it. Like the masked man from earlier, it just left them.

"What was that all about...?"

**44 – Beyond the Doors**

Yuu dispelled her barrier when she determined there were no further threats. Itsuki stared at Senkyo with the usual wonder in his eyes. Yuu came up from behind him and gave Itsuki an explanation of what happened.

"He used Illusion Magic, Void Magic, and Scent Magic. But in such a short amount of time… is this also the effect of having two souls? Chantless casting… There’s one possibility but that’s…"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

Just as Yuu was about to go off on a tangent, Itsuki brought him back to reality and snapped her out of it. Realizing that, she fixed herself and continued her explanation.

"Magic created from light, dark, and control elements. Light for Illusion Magic, Dark for Void Magic, and Control for Scent Magic. He used them to trick the werewolf before it attacked."

“Huh? Aren’t two of those supposed to be dark types? That’s what they do in games and stuff…”

“Not quite. Illusion magic distorts the light of something, making them appear like something else to others. Contrary to that, dark magic’s void magic is what erases illusions because it can erase false light in a certain area. Well, it’s mostly used to make you invisible, which is what he used to sneak up on the werewolf. Then he erased his scent and put it on his illusion using scent magic to prevent its nose from picking them up, quite the skilled magic user.”

As Yuu explained, before the werewolf pounced on him, he cast a copy of himself where he stood using illusion magic, turned himself invisible using void magic, and moved out of the way. While doing that, he disguised his scent and replaced it with the illusion to seal the deal. When the werewolf pounced, it went through thin air and the copy vanished.

He was able to execute the last strike by making a copy of himself and predicting where the werewolf would end up after its attack.

"...Magic just sounds like cheats."

"For normal humans, it is."

Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki gathered and another big pair of double doors appeared in front of them.

"Should we go in now, Yukou-senpai?"

"Yeah, my stamina already recovered."

"Is it me or is your stamina increasing a bit too quick?"

"Maybe it's a side effect of having your energy forcefully recovered every single time..."

"...?"

Itsuki overheard their conversation. Something was making Senkyo forcefully recover his strength. Though it popped in Itsuki's head, at this point he didn't care much about that anymore. He'd already seen a whole army of lesser demons get cleaned off in one slash. He put it in the back of his mind and passed it off as magic.

Senkyo pushed open the double doors. The doors connected to a long castle-like hallway lit by purple torches on the walls. They entered the hallway and just like last time the doors behind them disappeared. Senkyo and the others were on high alert as they walked.

After a few minutes of walking through the hallway, they reached another set of double doors but this one was bigger and fancier. Senkyo and the others knew danger was the only thing that would lie behind those doors. It was like the door for the boss room in an MMORPG. Senkyo switched with Ryosei and readied his sword, Yuu was prepared to cast barriers or attack magic depending on the situation, Itsuki knew he wouldn't do much but he still readied his fists. Slowly, Senkyo pushed open the double doors.

The room in front of the three was a familiar setting in fantasy adventures with relation to royalty. The room had a seat in the middle of it where the person with the most power sat and gave out orders. It was a throne room.

Everything around them was made out of shiny marble with gold decorations all around. The middle of the room had a red carpet that reached all the way in front of the throne.

On the throne sat a kid with pure white skin with yellow lightning shapes on the side of his cheek. He had hair as white as his skin with occasional strands of yellow hair and blue eyes that shined as bright as lightning. He wore a Gi and had four white balls floating around him.

On each side of the throne stood a cloaked man with a mask and a werewolf. The two enemies that showed themselves to Senkyo and the others before reaching this room.

"Yay! You're finally here!"

The kid on the throne spoke like his friends that came to play finally arrived.

"Let me introduce myself, I am Fulgur, one of the ten leaders of END. I only needed to retrieve the crimson-haired girl, but I thought it'd be fun if I sent all of you here and we'll all play together first!"

"Shut up! I don't care about you! Where is Ichika?!"

"Watanabe-san, no! Calm down for a second!"

Itsuki shouted in rage. The cautious Ryosei forcefully held Itsuki back to stop him from doing anything else that might provoke the kid.

If the fact that the kid was a leader of END was true, then he had to have been dangerous. Ryosei considered what Itsuki hadn't and acted on it, but Itsuki struggled to get out. He didn't calm down, so Ryosei whispered to Itsuki something that proved effective in the past.

"Watanabe-san, if you don't calm down, you might never be able to see Ichika-san ever again."

"…?!"

Itsuki slowly stopped struggling. He put his arms down and went silent. The thought of not being able to see his sister must've knocked him out of it.

"Tsk! Damn it..."

Itsuki could only curse as he stepped down and stayed silent.

"Good, if you didn't calm him down, I would've had to get rid of him. I don't want crybabies in my games after all."

"Please don't misunderstand him. He just wanted to know what amazing magic the great Fulgur-sama used to send us to different places and brought us here!"

"Ooh, is that so?! You recognize my greatness! You have a good eye! Very well, since I'm feeling a bit generous, I'll tell you!"

*"\*Wow! Talk about easy!\*"*

Ryosei easily manipulated Fulgur by simply praising him. He thought tricking him was worth a try, and he was right. Fulgur looked like a kid, acted like a kid, and was a kid. Conceited with a loose mouth every time someone sings their praises. Which led Ryosei to squeeze out a bit more information about how powerful the enemy they were facing was.

"You'll be surprised to know that the magic used to bring you here wasn't because of me. It was because of my loyal toy, Magic Man, that did all of this! Unfortunately, he can't be here since he's holding this space together and gathering more batteries."

"What does the great Fulgur-sama mean by batteries?"

"Show them, Magic Man!"

"As you wish..."

Fulgur stood up from his throne and cast his arms to the air above him, and a mysterious voice echoed around the room. A rectangular screen suddenly appeared in the air with an image of a dark room with a pit of glowing purple. A closer look into the pit, it was a horrendous sight.

"That's...!"

"\**Gasp!\**"

"Aren't they...?!"

People were wrapped in cocoons of purple slime. It was a huge pit at that. As far as the eye could see, it was only humans. Noticeably most of them were students that wore the same uniforms as Senkyo did.

"Honshou Academy students?!"

The screen kept changing view. Itsuki saw a familiar face, it was the face of the one he was looking for.

"Ichika! Damn it, I swear I'll fucking kill you, bastard!"

"Get a grip, Watanabe-san!"

"Like hell I'll get a grip! I just saw Ichika in one of those things!"

"We'll save her, Watanabe-san! But we can't do that if you keep letting your emotions lose!"

"S-Shit...!"

Itsuki ground his teeth and clenched his fists, trying his hardest to keep his emotions from running wild. Surprisingly, Itsuki had a lot more control over his emotions than Senkyo thought.

*"\*Ryosei, that Fulgur kid said that they were batteries, weren't they? Then does that mean all the energy they used for those areas was from all those people?\*"*

*"\*I think so. If we don't stop this quick, those people will have all their spirit power sapped from them. Worst case scenario, they might die.\*"*

*"\*Damn it...\*"*

The situation was dire. Senkyo and the others had a time limit they couldn't see. They needed to finish this as fast as they could or people might die.

"Okay! Enough looking at my greatness, let's start the game! Magic Man!"

"Yes, my lord."

The mysterious voice echoed again. A flash of light covered everyone's vision and swallowed the whole room in it. When they opened their eyes...

"Where are we?!"

**45 – Duel**

Ryosei looked around. The throne room that they previously were in was now gone. It was a completely different location. He was in the middle of an open field with seats surrounding it. He was in a kind of battle arena. While looking around, he realized that Yuu and Itsuki were gone. He was separated from them after that light blinded him.

"Hisho-chan! Watanabe-san! Where are you?!"

"IT'S USELESS, HUMAN!!"

A beastly voice caught his attention and faced the source of it. In front of him stood a familiar furry beast that emitted the very definition of terror. The same one that he faced earlier in the forest.

"MASTER FULGUR-SAMA'S GAME IS THAT WE FIGHT TO THE DEATH!! A PERFECT REMATCH FOR MY EARLIER LOSS! I MAY HAVE UNDERESTIMATED YOU EARLIER, BUT THIS TIME I’M NOT HOLDING BACK! HAHAHA!!"

"Damn... This is going to be annoying..."

Ryosei recalled the last time they fought caught them in surprise. This particular werewolf didn't have a stone embedded in its nape, which usually indicated its weak spot. Without it having a weak spot, it'll be impossible for Ryosei to defeat something that doesn't die.

*"\*Well, I think this is better than having Hisho-chan or Watanabe-san fight this thing.\*"*

*"\*Oh? You're ready to pick the short end of the stick for your companions?\*"*

*"\*Why are you so surprised?!\*"*

*"\*Well I thought any normal person, especially an otaku like you would be screaming by now, saying things like 'Why am I in this situation?!' or 'I don't want to die!!\*'"*

*"\*Do I look that pathetic?\*"*

*"\*No, I just thought it was the normal reaction.\*"*

*"\*So, you're saying I'm not normal?\*"*

*"\*Hahaha, you’re incredibly strange. I mean, no one can just accept these things so quickly. From the start, I thought it was weird that you weren't more confused and you were more accepting.\*"*

*"\*Are you insulting me?\*"*

*"\*No, at least I don't think so. I think it's great that the person I possessed is a good person.\*"*

*"\*The hell...?\*"*

"HUMAN! STOP SPACING OUT AND FIGHT ME!!"

Ryosei was distracted by the internal conversation he had with Senkyo, but the werewolf caught back his attention. He then readied his sword.

"That was rather kind. You waited for me to get into form."

"OF COURSE! I WOULD NOT THINK OF SULLYING THE NAME THAT MASTER FULGUR GAVE ME BY SNEAKING ATTACKS IN A PROPER DUEL!!"

*"\*Why the hell does a beast have a knight’s honor? Also wasn’t it just trying to assassinate us earlier in the forest…?\*"*

"I, DOG MAN, WILL DEFEAT YOU IN THIS DUEL!!"

*\*D-Dog man…? Ahh, whatever.\**

Senkyo dismissed the beast’s strange name. The werewolf stood still. Ryosei was wary of it doing something unexpected so kept his distance and was ready to act at any time.

*"\*Ryosei, look! Under the werewolf!\*"*

Dark lines began forming below where the werewolf stood. They stretched out from it and were forming more lines as it expanded. But it didn't end there, even the werewolf itself began emitting a field of darkness. The werewolf growled as the darkness formed around him. Senkyo and Ryosei were on high alert. This was the first time they've seen anything like it.

Suddenly, the werewolf released a howl, unlike anything they'd ever heard. It felt distorted and it struck fear into the hearts that heard this. Ryosei was no exception, for a second, his form faltered and left a huge opening.

The darkness that wrapped the werewolf exploded and covered everything. The ground, the arena, the sky, and everything else was nowhere to be seen. All that remained were Senkyo, Ryosei, the werewolf, and the eternal darkness that covered their surroundings.

"Wh-What is this?!"

The howl and the sudden change in surroundings left Ryosei unguarded. The werewolf wasted no time and leaped at Ryosei. He was about to dodge out of the way but...

"What?!"

The werewolf's claws turned blood red and covered Ryosei's entire vision. He reflexively went from dodging to blocking but by then it was too late.

"Gaahh...!"

The werewolf managed to leave a deep wound on Ryosei's left shoulder. Blood spilled from the wound, he fell to the ground, and dropped Kuro Yaiba.

*"\*Ryosei! What happened?!\*"*

Senkyo asked in a shaken tone.

*"\*I don't know... I'm pretty sure I still had time to dodge that, but its claws suddenly got bigger and it struck me from there.\*"*

*"\*What are you talking about?\*"*

*"\*Didn't you see it, Senkyo?!\*"*

Before they could figure out what was going on, the werewolf rushed at Ryosei. he tried to dodge but it was like something was keeping him in place. He looked at how far the werewolf was from him and he knew he had enough time to dodge this one. The werewolf's bloodlust glare kept Ryosei in place. It was as if Ryosei was seeing something Senkyo couldn’t. The werewolf leaped, and just like earlier, Ryosei chose to block instead of dodging. Before the werewolf was about to reach Ryosei, Senkyo shouted at Ryosei as loud as he could.

*"\*RYOSEI! ROLL TO YOUR RIGHT AS FAR AS YOU CAN! ROLL! RIGHT NOW!!\*"*

Ryosei reflexively rolled to his right as Senkyo told him to. The werewolf that was about to bite Ryosei's head off hit nothing but air. Ryosei successfully got away from the werewolf's attack.

"WHAT?!"

**46 – Impatience**

The werewolf shouted in surprise.

*"\*Senkyo?! What was that?!\*"*

*"\*Ryosei, I think this place is messing with your senses.\*"*

*"\*My... senses?\*"*

*"\*What did you see when the werewolf was coming at you?\*"*

*"\*It looked like it was closer than it should've and it looked more intimidating...\*"*

*"\*This space must be enhancing your sense of fear.\*"*

*"\*Fear? Not my vision or anything else?\*"*

*"\*No, if that was the case, then I would've been seeing the things you've been seeing. From my perspective, the werewolf was just leaping and dashing at us like it normally did.\*"*

*"\*So that's why...\*"*

The reason Ryosei got hit by the werewolf's first attack wasn't that its claws became bigger, it was because Ryosei didn't dodge. The space affecting Ryosei's senses made it look like it was closer and bigger than it should have been. If Ryosei continued to dodge, he would not have gotten hit.

The reason Senkyo wasn't being affected by this, was because right now, is a spirit. He was only using his body's five senses but he wasn't using his brain because Ryosei was the one occupying it. As a spirit on standby in Senkyo's body, things like memories and feelings are shared, which includes fear, but the one taking the brunt of the fear was the one who was currently controlling the body, Ryosei. That means Senkyo was not having delusions like the werewolf's claws being closer than they should be.

"HAHAHA! I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT OUT OF THAT ONE BUT I'LL BE SURE NOT TO MISS THIS TIME!!"

The werewolf dashed at Ryosei again. It had its claws out and was ready to slice Ryosei. From Ryosei's perspective, its claws were bigger and glowed red. Since he knew it was fear affecting him, he bit his lip as hard as he could to snap out of it. He mentally steeled himself and imagined the werewolf a bit farther than it should've been.

Ryosei knew he wasn't going to win like this, but it helped him dodge attacks like this one. He successfully dodged and ran to pick Kuro Yaiba back up. He took his form and readied his blade.

*"\*Senkyo, I'm going to close my eyes. You tell me what you see and I'll move according to what you say.\*"*

*"\*Heh heh... indeed this is the correct move to avoid its effects. But it's not going to be that easy.\*"*

*"\*I know that but I trust you, so trust in me to slice this mutt up the moment it comes close!\*"*

*"\*You got it!\*"*

Ryosei closed his eyes, and Senkyo watched an outline of the werewolf. The reason for this was that Senkyo wasn't controlling his body. He was a spirit on standby mode. And just like Ryosei, when his spirit is on standby mode, he doesn't need to have Senkyo's eyes open. He could see the outlines of his surroundings just like when before Ryosei met Senkyo. Ryosei had vision even without having his eyes open.

"WHY YOU...! I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU'RE GETTING AWAY, BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR GAMES! IT'S TIME TO FINISH THIS!"

The werewolf got on all fours and made a rush for Ryosei. He readied his blade for the moment he gets instructions from Senkyo. The werewolf ran at Ryosei as fast as it could, and Senkyo saw the outline of the werewolf coming directly at them.

*"\*It's going to pounce right in front of you! Right now, it's about 10 meters away!\*"*

"...!"

Ryosei gripped his sword and focused. His hair began to flutter and traces of wind could be seen circling around Ryosei. Senkyo didn't have to ask what Ryosei was going to do. So, he waited until his timing was perfect. Finally, the werewolf pounced on Ryosei.

*"\*It's 35 degrees above you!!\*"*

"HA!!"

Ryosei slashed his sword at the indicated location and a sharp gust of wind traced the blade angling 35 degrees upwards.

"WHAT?!"

The werewolf couldn't dodge in midair and got cut clean in half. The dark space Senkyo and Ryosei were in began to disappear and the arena that they were once in reappeared in front of them. Ryosei reopened his eyes and the effects of the space were gone.

*"\*Good work, Senkyo! I knew I could count on you!\*"*

*"\*I could say the same to you.\*"*

Ryosei looked at the pieces of the werewolf in front of them. Ryosei readied his blade and expected the werewolf to revive. The two pieces of the werewolf began to move.

"Tch... it's not over yet!"

*"\*I don't know about that one.\*"*

"Huh?"

Ryosei questioned Senkyo's last statement. But he knew he had to focus on the enemy in front of him. The werewolf's pieces were slowly merging together until they came to a sudden stop.

"What...?"

The werewolf's body stopped merging mid-revival and a few seconds later, the werewolf's body turned to ashes.

*"\*Just as I thought.\*"*

"Senkyo, what happened?!"

*"\*Mana.\*"*

"Huh?"

*"\*The werewolf used mana to keep regenerating. But since it ran out of mana, it couldn't fully revive and died right there.\*"*

"I see… you really are amazing. But how did you find out?"

*"\*Well, I wasn't sure at all, but after seeing what happened, now I'm definitely sure! Impatience!\*"*

*“\*It was Impatient?\*”*

Senkyo explained. Part of how Senkyo discovered the werewolf's secret was because the werewolf showed its trump card right off the bat. It didn't bother wearing them down or trying to cripple them before it used it. If it wanted to get a definite victory it would've tried doing that to Ryosei before using its ace. So, there must've been a reason for that.

It was because it couldn't afford a battle of attrition; it had limited resources. And the only resource he had was mana. Knowing it wouldn't win a prolonged battle, it tried to finish it right off the bat, and from the werewolf's words:

*\*I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU'RE GETTING AWAY, BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR GAMES! IT'S TIME TO FINISH THIS!\**

It didn't expect to have the battle last that long. The space must've been using up its mana as time passed. Before the werewolf could even regenerate itself, it ran out of mana and died.

"Wow, you really have a knack for this sort of thing!"

*"\*I don't know if I should be proud of that or not...\*"*

As Senkyo and Ryosei were in the middle of their conversation, a blinding light covered their vision.

"Whoa?!"

*"\*This is...!\*"*

With that, the arena was left empty with Senkyo and Ryosei nowhere to be seen.

**47 – Yuu’s Support**

Meanwhile, Yuu and Itsuki were together in a similar location. They were in an arena that looked identical to the arena Senkyo and Ryosei were battling.

"Where are we...? Where's Yukou-senpai?"

"Don't know, but more importantly, look over there."

Itsuki pointed in front of him. There stood the man covered in bandages and wearing a tattered cloak with a mask on. The one they met at the party when they first entered the building.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, I am Puppet Man, a puppeteer of Fulgur-sama. The game Fulgur-sama has chosen is a fight to the death, and I, Puppet Man, humbly requested I go against two of you."

"Don't give me your formal talk! Give me back Ichika!"

"My, my we have a rather impolite guest here... perfect!"

The puppeteer cast its arm towards Itsuki. A black hole suddenly appeared above Itsuki. Multiple strings descended from the hole and clung to him.

"GAH! GET THESE THINGS OFF ME!!"

"No! Watanabe-senpai!"

Yuu cast a fireball to the strings but it suddenly went off course and turned left. The strings wrapped Itsuki in a dark aura and turned Itsuki completely silent. Yuu worriedly called out to Itsuki.

"Watanabe-senpai...?"

Itsuki slowly approached Yuu. He was walking weirdly and he wasn't saying anything.

"A-Are you alright?"

Itsuki finally reached Yuu, but he still didn't say anything. He slowly pulled his fist and launched it toward Yuu. She avoided his punch and created distance between them.

"Just as I thought... Watanabe-senpai is being controlled!"

Yuu was wary of Itsuki from the moment he was wrapped in a dark aura. She backed off and kept her distance from him. She summoned multiple fireballs around her and shot all of them at once, aiming for the strings above Itsuki. But not a single one of the shots hit. All the fireballs curved away from their target as if voluntarily avoiding them.

"What happened?!"

"Child, I believe I already introduced myself. I am a PUPPETEER! Do not think my skill is so low that I can only control living beings!"

Yuu analyzed everything he said. Her face had a serious look on it.

"Don't tell me... you can control my magic?!"

The puppeteer responded with a mocking laugh. Itsuki began running towards Yuu at full speed. He had his fist ready to punch her when she was within his reach. Yuu stepped to the side, dodging Itsuki's punch. Itsuki was set off balance as Yuu swept his legs making him fall to the ground.

"Aw... I guess in the end he was just human after all... a weakling."

The puppeteer said. It flung its arm across the air while looking at Itsuki. Then, he went flying from where he lay to the farthest wall where the puppeteer's arm ended his fling.

"Watanabe-senpai!"

"Oh, don't worry about him. I made sure he was still alive. After all, that boy will make a good toy for Fulgur-sama."

"You monster..."

"How delightful… Don't worry, I won't kill you. Fulgur-sama still has uses for your soul."

The puppeteer chucked. If he didn't have anything obstructing his face, he would probably be smirking. He raised his arm up to the sky and multiple black holes opened from the ground.

"Come, my puppets!"

Lesser demons began popping out of every black hole. They were the same demons that Ryosei and Yuu fought at the party. They came out of the holes like rats. And covered both the land and the sky.

"If only Yukou-senpai and Konjou-san were here, this would be a lot easier."

Yuu thought back to the time Ryosei killed almost half the enemies' numbers in a single strike. But that made her realize something.

*"\*Wait, Isn't Yukou-senpai pushing himself?\*"*

Yuu thought back to the whole time they were sent to the Spirit Realm. The whole time, Senkyo and Ryosei have done nothing but fight.

Before they even got to the party, Senkyo had a fight with Itsuki and Ryosei didn't help him that time. Senkyo fought for himself, and in the end, he won but was also exhausted. That time at the party too, Senkyo and Ryosei killed the most enemies. That time in the forest, Senkyo and Ryosei defeated the werewolf boss. And now, somewhere away from her, he was fighting again.

Yuu felt bad about Senkyo and Ryosei always doing most of the work, even though it was her problem. All the force recovery Senkyo's body has been receiving must've been taking a toll on it one way or another.

*"\*I have to lighten Yukou-senpai and Konjou-san's burden! I'll defeat this puppet and bring Watanabe-senpai back!\*"*

Yuu was now determined to help Senkyo and Ryosei. Her way of doing that was by defeating the puppeteer for them. She placed her hand on the ground and cast a barrier around her. The lesser demons were striking the barrier with their sharp blades and arrows. But the barrier was strong enough to withstand it… for the time being.

"This should be good enough."

Yuu stood back up and stretched her arms out in front of her, hands facing the ground. She entered a state of focus and began a series of chants.

"O Fire, become my sword, become my shield. Let me wield your burning flame to cut down my adversaries. Knight Spell: Fire Magic!"

Yuu was suddenly covered in fire. The flame that wrapped around her didn't seem to hurt and she didn't scream in pain. The fire slowly dissipated but left a blade of fire that wrapped around Yuu's right arm.

"O Wind, coat my legs, aid my every step. Bless me with your flight that will create my path. Enhanced Speed!"

Yuu's legs were covered with a burst of wind. Like the fire, it slowly dissipated but this time, it left no trace.

"O Fire, protect me with your flare, become my mantle. Cloak me like the heavenly sun. Sun's Protection!"

Another burst of fire surrounded Yuu and quickly dissipated.

While Yuu was chanting, her barrier was slowly opening up cracks and they became larger and larger as time passed. After she finished her last chant, the barrier around Yuu broke into pieces and a horde of lesser demons entered the barrier.

"My, my I hope she isn't—"

The puppeteer was interrupted by a burst of flame from where Yuu stood. Lesser demons in that area were knocked back and were slowly burning. Another burst of fire appeared in the middle of the army of lesser demons and had the same effect as the first burst of fire. Then, more and more bursts of fire appeared in the middle of the army. Noticeably, the bursts of fire were coming toward where the puppeteer was. And from within the army of lesser demons, Yuu came dashing out of it. She was going at high speeds towards the puppeteer.

"What?!"

"Burn!"

Yuu dashed next to the puppeteer and slashed him with her right arm which was covered in a blade of fire. The puppeteer barely dodged the slash but still burnt his tattered cloak slightly.

"Why you—"

Before the puppeteer could finish, a burst of fire came from around Yuu and knocked the puppeteer back.

But the puppeteer wasn't the only enemy, lesser demons came to strike Yuu from all directions right after the burst of fire. Unfortunately for them, fire appeared in midair and blocked all the attacks that would have hit Yuu.

"Good thing I got to cast all my spells!"

**48 – Glimpse of Hell**

Yuu puffed her chest out boastingly. The magics that Yuu cast helped her tremendously.

Knight Spell is a magic that creates a temporary blade to cover one of the user's limbs and a temporary invisible shield that blocked any attack that it could. In Yuu's situation, she used fire magic so the blade that covered her right arm and the temporary shield used fire.

Enhanced Speed, as self-explanatory as the name, enhances the target's speed depending on the power the user put into it.

Sun's Protection is continuous magic that lets out a burst of flame in a five-second interval for as long as the user wants to, as long as the user has mana to sustain it. It busted flame around the user like the flaming sun and protected it from any nearby enemies.

If Yuu hadn't cast these she wouldn't have been able to quickly reach the puppeteer and attack him as she did. The puppeteer slowly got back up from the ground. He was groaning as he stood. He obviously didn't take Yuu's attack too well.

"Brat... You actually got a hit off me... haha... HAHAHA!!"

The puppeteer started laughing maniacally and he stood. His mask slowly started to break. Cracks covered the mask.

"I pray that this brat won't die after I'm done teaching you a lesson... Forgive me, Fulgur-sama if I do!"

The puppeteer's mask broke to pieces and took off the bandage that covered his face. From behind the bandages, was a black hole. The hole expanded and floated into the sky. A rumbling came from the hole and all the lesser demons were sucked up. Then, a wooden mannequin doll that stretched over 300 feet dropped from the hole. It took up almost half the arena.

"You have to be kidding me..."

Yuu sounded a bit disheartened. It was only natural. A gigantic enemy just appeared from out of nowhere. But she didn't keep herself like that for long. She renewed her resolve and started running to the mannequin's leg.

"Take this!"

She summoned multiple fireballs around her as she ran to the mannequin. She shot all of them at once in a single area and followed it up with a slash from her fire blade. The spot that she hit looked burned from her attacks. But it was only a small portion of it. At the rate she was going, she'll never be able to finish the battle.

"Hahaha! How cute!"

The mannequin spoke, but it didn't have a mouth. The sound of its voice resounded throughout the whole arena.

"I won't forgive you for earlier!!"

Strings came out from the mannequin's fingertips and went straight for Yuu. She immediately moved to dodge the incoming strings. She ran as fast as she could to avoid being caught by the strings that were whipping the ground behind her.

Yuu could only run. She didn't have a way to defeat the colossal wooden mannequin. She racked her brain as she ran with her enhanced speed. She already dropped Sun's Protection to preserve her mana and the blade covering her right arm started to fade.

She didn't stop making up possibilities and crossing them out in her head. She thought of ideas like her life depended on it, which it did. Her face looked serious focusing on thinking while running to dodge the strings. And finally, her face lit up and a grin showed up on her mouth.

"This might just work!"

"Stay still, you little brat!!"

Yuu began running faster now that she could fully focus on running and dodging. She was running in circles around the mannequin. The strings that kept whipping at her couldn't land a hit. Yuu clasped her hands in front of her as she ran and began chanting a spell.

"O Fire, lend me your power, from the pits of hell come to mine aid..."

The mannequin belittled Yuu as it saw her chanting.

"No measly fire magic can take me down!! Can't you see I'm over 300 feet tall?! You'll never be able to take me down, IT'S USELESS!! HAHAHA!!"

"...Set the first point of my retribution!"

Yuu chanted as she ran. After her first chant, nothing happened.

"HAHAHA!! DID YOU CHANT YOUR SPELL WRONG? POOR GIRL, HAHAHA!!"

She continued running and dodging. The land was covered in ruptures from the attacks of the mannequin. Yuu maneuvered through the fragmented arena and started chanting again.

"O Fire, lend me your power, from the pits of hell come to mine aid..."

She chanted the same chant she did earlier but slightly changed in the end.

"...Set the second point of my retribution!"

She didn't stop running because she knew she'll die if she did. She was completely defenseless. She didn't have any protection magic and the strings were so strong that they left fissures on the ground.

She continued as she ran in a circle. Neither stopping to catch her breath nor rest in any kind of way. Finally, she ran a whole lap around the mannequin.

"O Fire, lend me your power, from the pits of hell come to mine aid..."

"I TOLD YOU THIS IS USELESS!!"

"...Set the fifth point of my retribution!"

"YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME!"

"With the five keys set, open the gates of hell and begin my reckoning! Hell's Pillar!"

At Yuu's words, a crimson light shined beneath the mannequin.

"WHAT?! THIS IS—"

A magic circle appeared beneath the mannequin and shaped a star in the middle. It shined in bright crimson as ashes and cinders floated in the air inside it.

"A HIGH-TIER SPELL?!"

The mannequin stopped its attack in confusion as it looked beneath it. If the mannequin had a face, it surely would be one of utter despair. Yuu backed up all the way to the wall, far from the mannequin. She was panting uncontrollably, trying to catch her breath. Sweat covered her whole body. But she still managed to grin as the mannequin looked at its demise. Not even a second later, a pillar of blazing inferno appeared inside the area of the magic circle that reached all the way up the sky. It was like hell itself appeared through the ground.

"GAAAAAAAAA!!!"

The colossal wooden mannequin was completely engulfed in flames. The hell inside the magic circle burnt its wooden body to a crisp. Slowly, the silhouette inside the burning inferno became smaller, and in time, disappeared.

A few seconds after the shadow inside the pillar of flame disappeared, Yuu dispelled her magic. The pillar of flame and the magic circle beneath it was nowhere to be seen. All that was left on the battlefield were Yuu and Itsuki. Even the mannequin's ashes didn't remain. It was completely obliterated.

"H...Huh? What..."

Itsuki was released from the puppeteer's spell. He just regained consciousness. He looked around and saw Yuu in the distance.

"Shorty!"

He ran as over to Yuu as fast as he could. When he reached her, Yuu was about to fall over but Itsuki caught her before she did.

"Hey, Shorty! What happened?!"

Yuu couldn't answer properly. She was too tired to. Itsuki noticed that and stopped the questioning. She exhausted herself quite a bit. Her mana was almost all gone and all that running made her tired. She was in no shape to walk, much less another battle. All of the sudden, without even letting Yuu take a break, another flash of light covered their vision.

**Chapter 6: The Child Leader**

**49 – Anomaly**

A blinding light covered their vision.

"We're back?!"

"H-Huh? I'm not tired anymore...?"

Itsuki and Yuu were back in the throne room they left in. The same kid sat on the same throne atop the stairs. The only difference was, that the two that were beside the kid, the puppeteer and the werewolf, were gone.

Yuu wondered why she didn't feel tired anymore. Just a second ago, she was sweating and panting heavily trying to catch her breath. Even her mana pool was replenished.

"I recovered you, that's why!"

Fulgur who was sitting leisurely on the throne answered Yuu's question. Fulgur, a leader of END, the enemy, recovered Yuu's mana and energy. That boggled Yuu and Itsuki's minds. Why did he do that?

"B-But why?"

"Ah, wait, they're coming!"

A ball of light appeared beside Yuu and Itsuki, and from it appeared Senkyo.

"Yukou-senpai!"

"Shittaku!"

Yuu and Itsuki shouted when they saw Senkyo suddenly appear before them. They were happy to see that the one who separated from them was okay.

"Hisho-chan! Watanabe-san! What happened to you guys?!"

"We were sent to an arena and fought the guy with the tattered cloak with a mask. We’re fine. How about you, Senpai?"

“Good thing you guys are okay. I think I fought in a different arena. My enemy was the werewolf."

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I have a few... wait, my arm is healed?"

"I told them already, it's because I healed you all!"

"*Y-YOU*did? But why?"

Senkyo wore the same confused expression. Fulgur showed a grin before answering their question.

"Well, to fight you of course! I don't want to fight broken toys!"

*"\*What the hell is wrong with this kid...?\*"* Senkyo thought.

Fulgur disappeared from his throne. In a blink of a second, he was right in front of Senkyo and was staring at him.

"What?!"

Senkyo reflexively backed up. Fulgur looked like a kid, but just because he did, that did not mean Senkyo could let his guard down. Yuu and Itsuki did the same. They were wary of the major threat right in front of them.

"Hey, you!"

Fulgur pointed his finger at Senkyo.

"M-Me?"

Senkyo quizzically pointed to himself, confirming he was who Fulgur was talking to.

"Yeah. Who are you right now? Yukou or Konjou?”

"What?!"

Senkyo took another step back. He was taken by surprise when Fulgur not only mentioned Senkyo's name but Ryosei's as well. Yuu looked as surprised as Senkyo did while Itsuki was confused about the question Fulgur asked. He didn't know who Konjou was, so he naturally didn't catch up to what was happening.

"H-How do you know about Ry—no, Konjou?"

Senkyo was about to say Ryosei's given name but immediately cut himself. Fulgur already knew about Ryosei, so to be safe, Senkyo didn't want more information about them to get out. So Senkyo used Ryosei's last name instead.

"Because you were all mentioning each other’s names. How else would I know?"

Fulgur looked at them as if it was common sense. He listened to them the whole time they were there but that wasn't what Senkyo was asking. He wanted to know how Fulgur knew about Ryosei's existence.

"No, not the names! How did you know about Konjou? Calling out another name isn't immediately going to point to having another spirit!"

Senkyo pressed Fulgur for answers. Fulgur turned his back on Senkyo and slowly walked up the stairs to his throne. When he reached its apex, he turned back around and faced him again, but this time something was different about him.

His left eye was covered in a dark purple flame. His whole aura from earlier changed as well. Now, you could feel a dark aura of anger and regret seeping out of him. Everyone's skin crawled as he faced them. They could all feel it, his animosity. Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki reflexively took a fighting stance. Fulgur's new presence put them all on high alert. The whole room was filled with tension as Fulgur stared at the three below him.

"Hahaha! Can you guess what I am?"

Fulgur emitted a frightening aura but his childish attitude didn't seem to change. He asked as he looked at Senkyo and the others. His eyes encouraged them to try and guess, but to Senkyo, it looked like he was forcing them to.

"Could you be... an evil spirit?"

Senkyo answered in a cautious voice.

"Correct!"

Fulgur threw his hands in the air as he said that.

"I am an evil spirit! Did I surprise you?"

"I-Impossible! Isn’t that a physical body?! What are you?!"

This wasn't supposed to be possible. Although they only recently discovered that the Spirit Realm even existed. They were certain that spirits didn’t have physical bodies. Their confusion was understandable. Evil spirits are supposed to be the souls of the people that emitted a large amount of negative emotion before they died. They cause terror in the world of the living with instinct and without consciousness, but this particular one had enough intelligence to play around with his enemies.

"Hmm... fine! Since you are one of the first people to interest me, I'll make an exception for you! Let your great Fulgur-nii-sama open your eyes!"

Fulgur grinned and stuck his chest out. It looked like he was boasting to Senkyo, but something seemed strange from his words. Fulgur addressed himself as an elder brother to Senkyo.

"You and I are one of the same."

Fulgur teleported upside down floating in front of Senkyo with his face directly in front of his.

“Huh?”

After a light giggle, he disappeared once more and his voice echoed throughout the room. Everyone in the room looked around for him but with no luck. His voice simply reverberated without a physical body to call its origin.

“Yukou Senkyo, you don’t know who you are. As an older brother, I feel bad. An anomaly like you shouldn’t exist, and neither should I. Given great power but with an even greater consequence. Honestly, the god of death should just have our heads and end our suffering. That’ll be easier for us.”

"What are you talking about?!"

“Oh? I was just answering your question.”

Fulgur suddenly appeared in front of Senkyo. Standing still and staring him straight in the eye. He quoted Senkyo

“‘What are you?’ you asked me. Then my answer is… something like you, an anomaly! You see, Otou-sama, the one who saved me, made me like this!"

Senkyo was confused, but he tried his hardest to comprehend what he was saying. He didn’t say a word and listened quietly.

"Let me tell you a story! —

**50 – The Lightning Leader, Fulgur**

Long, long ago there was a sickly child who just wanted to play. But his body was too weak to go outside the house. He was always in his bed, doing absolutely nothing. Waiting for something to happen.

A few years later, he overheard his mother and father talking about their financial situation. They said they couldn't keep living like this. They needed more money, so what did they do? They leave their sickly child who was sucking up all their money in the streets to die!

They didn't even bother to send their child to an orphanage. They left him on the streets like trash. They left him and fled the town. The child spent his time in the dark alleys. People simply walked by like he never existed. He was thinking things like 'Why did they do this?', 'Why is everybody ignoring me?', 'Someone... please help...' After his time in the dark alleys, his mind broke and all that was left in him was hatred, and eventually, the child met his death.

Next thing he knew he was wreaking havoc in the village he died in as an evil spirit. Suddenly, a man approached him like it was a normal thing to do. Despite being an intangible spirit, the man saw him and approached him. Naturally, the evil spirit attacked him, but for some reason, it didn't work for him. He put his hand on the spirit and somehow managed to touch it. The spirit was confused as to what the man was doing.

The man asked the evil spirit 'Do you want to play?' The evil spirit immediately answered 'Yes! I want to!' Then, the man took the spirit away and completely transformed him. The man blessed the spirit with incredible power and a physical body.

From a frail little boy to a powerful evil spirit. The spirit soon became one of the leaders of the man's group and gave him a title and a new name. He became one of the ten leaders of END, The Lightning Leader, Fulgur.

—end of story!"

The room stayed silent after hearing about Fulgur's past. He experienced pain as a small child and was given the chance to redo life. That would usually be a satisfying result if only his new life didn't involve destroying three worlds and ruling over them.

"That's why I'm an anomaly! An evil spirit with a mana source! How amazing is that? And you, something about you is different. Otou-sama told me about you! You have two souls inside your body, don't you? That isn't normal, you know..."

Senkyo stood still. Fulgur was basically saying that Senkyo wasn't human and he caught on to that. He looked confused he didn't know how to take Fulgur's words, whether he should believe him, or ignore him. Fulgur smirked as if aiming for this reaction from him. It looked like he planned this all along. He extended his hand to Senkyo, and Senkyo looked at him quizzically.

"Senkyo-chan, do you want to join me and find out the truth?"

"Yukou-senpai, no!"

"What are you doing, you idiot!"

"BOTH OF YOU SHUT UP!"

Fulgur knocked Yuu and Itsuki back to the wall behind them. He faced back to Senkyo and urged him to take his hand. Senkyo slowly raised his hand. It was going towards Fulgur's hand, slowly but surely. Until suddenly...

*\*Smack!\**

Senkyo smacked Fulgur's hand away with his. He looked at Fulgur with a smile and said...

"Don't think I'll take the hand of someone who wants to destroy the world and all its treasures with it!!"

"What?"

"If I join you, and destroy the world, who do you think will continue to make great entertainment? Anime, manga, visual novels, light novels, everything, they'll all disappear! I am a man of my hobbies and I am not letting a selfish kid like you destroy them!"

Yuu and Itsuki smiled as they heard Senkyo's speech. Their looks said that they should've expected that coming.

"Yukou-senpai... you really are straightforward."

"That loser needs to get better at his speeches."

Senkyo may have been thrown into confusion, but that didn't mean he lost his sense of reasoning. He knew that was what Fulgur was after all along. Unfortunately for Fulgur, Senkyo wasn't so easy to control.

Fulgur dropped his head and went silent. It didn't look like he was too happy about being rejected. The aura around Fulgur became heavier. The temperature in the room suddenly dropped. Fulgur mumbled quietly.

"...vable... gi... ble..."

He kept mumbling over and over. He was repeating the same words but no one could make it out. Gradually, his voice started to get louder and more comprehensible. Until he finally shouted it out loud.

"UNFORGIVABLE! UNFORGIVABLE! UNFORGIVABLE!!"

The aura around Fulgur burst with animosity. Everyone in the room got back on their feet and prepared themselves for an incoming storm.

"YOU CAN'T SAY 'NO' TO ME! I’M YOUR OLDER BROTHER! ONE OF THE LEADERS OF END! YOU SHOULD FOLLOW EVERYTHING I SAY WITHOUT QUESTION! THAT'S WHAT TOYS LIKE YOU SHOULD DO!"

Fulgur wailed. He was a child throwing a tantrum. It looked like he was spoiled a lot after meeting his 'Otou-sama.' He was referring to people as his toys and he only cared about his own entertainment. The rejection he took earlier was probably his first in a long time.

The four balls floating around Fulgur began quivering and lightning slowly coiled them. Shortly after, the whole throne room started shaking like an earthquake was happening.

"Kya?!"

"An earthquake?!"

"What's happening?!"

"IF YOU DON'T WANT TO JOIN ME, I'LL JUST FORCE YOU! I'LL BRING YOU TO OTOU-SAMA ALONG WITH THAT VAMPIRE!! SURELY, HE WOULD HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTROL YOU! MAGIC MAN, TO THE PLAYGROUND!"

"Yes, my lord."

A mysterious voice resounded in the room, then another blinding light covered their vision.

"Not this again...!"

*\*Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash!\**

Loud deafening crashes could be heard from beyond the light. It was a familiar crash that could be heard in bad weather. The light slowly dissipated from everyone's vision.

"This place..."

"Senpai is this..."

"Isn’t this a fucking lightning field?!"

**51 – Immense Power**

Numerous metal poles stretched throughout the whole landscape. The sky was covered with dark gloomy clouds. Claps of thunder could be heard coming from both far away and right next to them but that wasn't the most eye-catching of the whole sight.

Lightning struck the poles left and right but not just any lightning. Red, blue, green, purple, yellow, white, and other various colors of lightning struck the metal poles around them. A surreal sight that could never be possible in the real world. Sparks of lighting ranging in all sorts of colors spread throughout the field. Truly a sight that could only be seen in a fantasy, but Senkyo was seeing them with his own two eyes.

"I've never seen anything like this..."

Yuu and Itsuki ran over to where Senkyo was. Back in the throne room, they were thrown to a wall so they had to return to Senkyo’s side.

"Yukou-senpai, are you alright?"

"Yeah, nothing happened yet."

"Oi, Shittaku, do you know where we are?"

"It's probably another field Fulgur made."

"HAHAHAHA!! WELCOME TO MY PLAYGROUND!"

Fulgur floated in the sky in front of Senkyo and the others. His hands were coiled with white lightning while the four floating balls around him were coiled with red, blue, purple, and yellow lightning. He looked like a true god of lighting as he floated in the air.

"SINCE YOU WERE RUDE ENOUGH TO DECLINE MY INVITATION, I'LL HAVE TO PUNISH YOU BEFORE I HAND YOU TO OTOU-SAMA! AND WHILE I'M AT IT, I'LL TEST YOUR POWER MYSELF!"

The lightning around the field began striking more frequently. Every strike shook the ground and pierced the ears. Senkyo switched with Ryosei and readied for battle. Yuu and Itsuki did the same. Ryosei began to command them but...

"Hisho-chan, create a bar—?!"

"BLITZ!"

A white ray of light bounced off the metal poles and hit Ryosei, Yuu, and Itsuki. It kept bouncing all over the place and hit them left and right. Without letting them have time to catch their breath, the ray of light relentlessly beat them up. That light was none other than Fulgur himself.

"GAH?!"

"AHH...!"

"UGH!"

Ryosei and the others didn't have enough time to react. The light was too fast. They couldn't dodge it. They took every single hit it threw at them. The ray of light stopped and Fulgur reappeared on the ground beside them.

Ryosei, Yuu, and Itsuki all fell to the ground. They had bruises, scratches, and even burns all over their body. Ryosei, the fastest person out of the three of them, couldn't even react. That inhuman speed beat them up hard.

"Hahaha!! That was just a warm-up! Don't tell me you guys can't handle it anymore. Stand up! I haven't even had my fun yet!"

Ryosei was the first to act. He used Flash Strike and got behind Fulgur.

"Too slow!"

One of the balls floating around Fulgur blocked Ryosei's blade. The ball discharged red lightning, crawled through Kuro Yaiba, and electrocuted Ryosei.

"GAAAH!!!"

Ryosei couldn't get away. The beat-down he received earlier slightly crippled him so he couldn't get away in time. The electricity that ran through Ryosei stunned him and brought him to his knees.

"I'm powerful, aren't I? Otou-sama made me like this. If you join me, you could be like this too. Come on, leave behind everything and join me already! You’ve done nothing but waste your whole life! Your talent! THIS IS THE TIME TO MAKE USE OF IT! TO FINALLY MAKE USE OF YOUR PATHETIC LIFE!!"

Fulgur still acted like a kid and persisted to convert Senkyo. Ryosei slowly got back up and created distance between them. But Ryosei knew that distance was meaningless, because of Fulgur's speed, he could close that gap in under half a second.

"Still struggling? I know you know this is useless."

Ryosei grit his teeth in frustration. He got back up and readied his sword. He used Flash Strike again and attacked Fulgur. Fulgur looked at Ryosei like an annoying bug. He used the balls floating around him to block his strike, but this time he didn't discharge any lightning.

Ryosei continued to attack Fulgur, but his attacks were always blocked by the balls protecting him. A barrage of fireballs then came flying at Fulgur from all directions. Yuu cast the fireballs to support Senkyo as he attacked.

"It's useless..."

Fulgur himself discharged a field of lightning and dispelled every single fireball and knocked Ryosei back in the process. Kuro Yaiba got knocked off his hand. Itsuki caught Ryosei before he hit the ground and Yuu caught Kuro Yaiba.

"Thanks..."

"Don't need it."

"Yukou-senpai, here."

Yuu handed back Kuro Yaiba to Ryosei. However, when he tried to retrieve his sword, his arm didn't move. Ryosei's right arm, the one he used to wield Kuro Yaiba, felt numb and it didn't follow his orders. It was paralyzed.

"You have to be kidding me..."

"Yukou-senpai, are you alright?"

"I... I can't move my arm..."

"What...?!"

"What do you mean, Shittaku?!"

Yuu and Itsuki looked at Ryosei in disbelief. Their companion just took a major hit. Their swordsman's arm, the one he used to wield his sword, was paralyzed. He was basically useless now.

"Hahaha!! Did you get paralyzed? I didn't even mean to!"

Fulgur walked towards Senkyo. Yuu created a barrier and began shooting fireballs from inside it. She shot, and shot, and shot but every single one of her fireballs was blocked before they reached Fulgur. Despite this, Yuu still continued shooting.

*"\*Senkyo, I don't think we can beat this guy.\*"*

*"\*I don't think so too...\*"*

Senkyo and Ryosei were losing hope. They looked at the situation strategically and nothing they thought of led to victory. Ryosei was already accepting the fact that he lost. Everything looked for the worse, but...

*"\*But I'm still not giving up.\*"*

*"\*What? Didn't you just say you agreed with me?\*"*

*"\*I did. I don't think there's a single way we can win.\*"*

*"\*Then you want to fight meaninglessly?\*"*

*"\*Of course not!\*"*

*"\*Then what do you mean?!\*"*

Ryosei was already panicked. Fulgur easily beat him like it was nothing. His attacks didn't hit him once. His right arm was paralyzed. He couldn't do anything anymore. He despaired in the face of this frightening enemy. Despite him looking like a kid, he was still a leader of a terrifying organization that planned to rule three worlds. His panic was understandable.

But Senkyo, despite knowing the enemy's power, despite sharing the despair that Ryosei felt, despite the odds clearly being absolutely against them, still said with conviction, 'I'm still not giving up.' And the reason for that is...

*"\*Hey, Ryosei you're an otaku, right?\*"*

*"\*Yeah, but what does that matter now?!\*"*

*"\*Then you must've seen at least a few anime that tortured the protagonist's friends and even killed some of them off...\*"*

*"\*What...?\*"*

*"\*Ryosei, what do you think will happen to Hisho-chan and Watanabe-san when we lose?\*"*

*"\*That's...\*"*

*"\*Hisho-chan will be sent to the enemy's hands and have her divine soul be used for their evil schemes. If her divine soul is her actual soul, then it's most likely that they'll kill her.\*"*

*"\*.....\*"*

Ryosei couldn't talk back. Senkyo spoke what he had in mind. He wasn't wrong. The enemy's target is Yuu's divine soul, which is part of her soul. That means, killing her and collecting her soul is the only way to get her soul.

*"\*And what about Watanabe-san? The enemy has no use for him. They might use him as a lab rat and experiment on him. If they don't, Fulgur will just kill him. And what about the people that they're using as power for this space? No one will save them, you know?\*"*

Senkyo was thinking about all the possibilities this whole time. He has been thinking about his companions and the people who were trapped. He thought of the worst possible scenarios.

*"\*But why... why are you thinking about the worst things that could happen?\*"*

Senkyo took a quick pause.

*"\*That's because this is real life. This isn't any anime or anything. It isn't certain that someone will just come to save us before we die. Thinking about the worst possible scenarios early makes it easier to prepare when it comes. I've seen enough anime where a lot of characters die... I am not about to let that happen in real life!\*"*

**52 – He Who Challenges Impossibility**

*"....."*

Ryosei was in awe. He never thought that Senkyo would be like this.

*"\*As long as I'm around, I'll do everything to keep that from happening! I'll think of every possible scenario, I'll simulate every possible scenario, and I'll choose the one that has the best ending! Like a player with a copy of all the visual novel's endings!\*"*

Ryosei couldn't say another word. This was completely unexpected of him. Ryosei and Senkyo shared emotions, memories, and bodies, but they didn't share thoughts or personalities. Senkyo's mindset was completely different.

Senkyo didn't sound the least bit despaired. In fact, it sounded like he was determined. Who knew there was a person like him out in the world? He had an incredible talent and he used it for the better of the people around him, his companions. If he weren't an otaku, if he hadn't witnessed the despair and happiness that happened in fiction, if he didn't feel the fictional character's emotions, would he have ended up as he had? Most certainly not.

Ryosei looked back at himself. He despaired at the enemy's power. He already thought of giving up because he thought there was no use. He didn't consider what would happen to his other companions when they lost like Senkyo did.

But considering all the possibilities and simulating them wasn't as easy as it sounded. You had to have a strong enough heart to swallow the despair that the bad endings would bring and Senkyo had just that. A strong heart that would lead them to victory.

He felt ashamed. He was a hunter of the Konjou clan. He fought other kinds of demons and spirits before. He was used to battle. He knew the dangers. Yet why is the person who suddenly got dragged into the world of demons and spirits the one holding his head up instead of him? That's what he thought.

*"\*Damn it! I’m such an idiot... Senkyo, I'm sorry!\*"*

He rebuked himself.

*"\*It's fine, at the end of the day, we're different people. You can't expect the other person to do all the things the other person can. I'm the one who thinks of these things, while you're the one who battles in my place. So, I'll ask you, would you lend me your power for my plan?\*"*

*"\*Yeah, I'm with you all the way!\*"*

Ryosei found himself a new resolve. Senkyo opened up a new way of thinking for him, and he wanted to support that.

*"\*Then, let me handle it for now.\*"*

*"\*Sure.\*"*

Senkyo took back control of his body. Fulgur already broke through Yuu's barrier. She was casting ice magic to slow Fulgur down. She froze his feet to the ground, but that was useless. Fulgur easily broke Yuu's magic. One of Fulgur's balls came close to Yuu. It looked like Fulgur was about to electrocute Yuu and knock her out. Itsuki was about to tackle Fulgur, but two other balls awaited him. Everything was falling down, until...

"Hey, Fulgur-nii-sama!"

Senkyo called out to Fulgur while addressing him as an older brother. This immediately grabbed the attention of Fulgur. But not only him, Itsuki and Yuu were surprised at what that was all about. Everyone stopped where they were and faced Senkyo. He stood up and approached Fulgur.

"Whoa! Whoa! Did you finally decide to join me?!"

"Well, I came to give you a chance."

"A chance? What are you talking about?"

Senkyo gave Fulgur a bright smile.

"Let's play a game!"

Everyone looked at Senkyo in surprise. To think that Senkyo would propose a game at a time like this.

"Yukou-senpai, what are you—"

"Hahaha! You finally get me! Let's do it! What do you want to play?!"

Senkyo grabbed his chin in a thinking manner and looked at the sky.

"Let's see... how about an endurance game!"

"An endurance game?"

"Yeah! The rules are, you attack me as much as you want in three seconds. If I don't fall down and am still conscious within three seconds, I win and you have to do as I say. But if I fall or get knocked out, you win and I have to do what you say. How does that sound?"

"Oh! That sounds great! Let's play!"

Fulgur looked happy and jumped around in joy, but Yuu and Itsuki weren't so happy. They knew what that game entailed.

"Then, let's talk about what happens when one of us wins."

"Huh...? Can't we just think about that after someone wins?"

"No, that's not allowed. It's a part of the rules. You have to decide on what happens before the game starts."

"Eehhh...?"

"It's more fun this way!"

"Is it...?"

"It is, it is!"

"Hrm... fine. Older brothers spoil their little brothers so I’ll give you this one."

Senkyo was able to set Fulgur up, but now comes the hard part. The one he needed to pull off the most.

"Okay! Then how about... If I win, you let go of all the people you're using as batteries and all three of us here, but if you win, you'll let go of all the people you're using as batteries along with Hisho-chan and Watanabe-san and I'll join you in END and play games with you all the time!"

Everyone was in surprise yet again. The outcome was basically all the same either way. Senkyo and the others had the benefit of whether they lost or not. It was completely unfair.

"No! That doesn't sound fair at all!"

Fulgur shouted.

*"\*...here goes everything!\*"*

"Huh? But it's more fun this way!"

Senkyo took the personality of a spoiled little brother.

"What do you mean?! If I don't bring that vampire back, Otou-sama will scold me!"

"But think about it this way, If I win, you get to look for me again, and we'll be able to have more fun! And since you're looking for me, it'll be a game of hide-and-seek! Isn't that fun?"

"Hmm... yeah but what if I lose! How is that going to be fun?"

"Oh? Then I'll help you find Hisho-chan again! I'll be 'it' with you! And the two of us will find Hisho-chan together!"

"Ooh!! That does sound fun! Wait... but Otou-sama will still scold me..."

"No, he won't, because I'll talk to him about our little game! I won't let him scold you! I'm sure he'll forgive us he's a nice person, after all, right?"

"Really?!"

"Yeah, really!"

"Then let's do it! Let's play the game!!"

Senkyo and Fulgur were smiling at each other. Fulgur was like an excited kid who just entered a theme park. Both of them were set to play the game, but...

“I’ll play the game. But only if you increase the time to five seconds!”

Senkyo bit his lip as he heard that.

“W-Wait, come on. I think three seconds is long enough, right? Five is a bit…”

“NO!”

Fulgur shouted

“I’m spoiling you as much as I can, you know? I think the game should at least be ten seconds long, but I’m willing to compensate for five. Any lower wouldn’t be any fun!”

“F… Fine. I’ll try and last five seconds.”

“Yay! Then let’s hurry up and start!”

Fulgur prepared himself and waited for Senkyo to come to him. Senkyo tried to control Fulgur as much as he could and hit the limit. He was afraid that if he tried to force his rules, he’ll back out. So he reluctantly accepted the five seconds and began walking to him until something else got in his way.

"I won't let you, Yukou-senpai! It's too dangerous! You might die!"

Yuu shouted at Senkyo, she wanted to stop him. She fully understood what Senkyo wanted to happen. Senkyo created a situation where in the end, Yuu and the others will be saved. He tricked Fulgur into thinking that those conditions were the best for him by adding in the element of fun and using himself as a prize for Fulgur. Although logic didn’t see it as fair, his personality did and that was all that mattered.

Yuu and the others will be saved, but what about Senkyo? Senkyo was the one in the most danger. Not only did he have to take a large number of attacks from Fulgur, but he also had to win to get temporary freedom from Fulgur and if he lost, he'll be forced to join END. Senkyo was sacrificing himself. Yuu didn't want that.

"Come on, Yukou-senpai, you don't need to do this! We'll just have to beat him now or escape! You don't have to sacrifice yourself!"

Senkyo slowly approached Yuu and pet her head.

"Hisho-chan, thank you... But I have to do this, sorry."

**53 – Gamble for Power**

Senkyo took off his hand and left Yuu. But just before he left, he looked at Itsuki, who didn't say anything to him. He was grinding his teeth and clenching his hand into a fist. He was trembling as he stood. Itsuki noticed Senkyo's gaze and looked at him back. Senkyo's eyes pointed to Yuu and looked back to Itsuki.

Itsuki got the message. Senkyo wanted him to take care of Yuu and keep her out of what was about to happen. Itsuki ground his teeth even harder but eventually responded with a nod.

Yuu screamed for Senkyo to stop. Then, Itsuki put his arm in front of her, getting in the way between her and Senkyo. Itsuki was telling her to let him do it. Yuu began to tremble, she ground her teeth and clenched her hands as hard as she could. Tears started falling. Senkyo saw this but he continued to walk toward Fulgur.

*"\*That's the third one, Senkyo.\*"*

*"\*sigh... so it is...\*"*

Ryosei was referring to the fact that Yuu was the third girl that he made cry. Finally, Senkyo and Fulgur were ready.

"Are we starting now?!"

"Yeah, let's start the game."

Senkyo looked serious. He braced himself for the wave of attacks he was going to receive. He had to last five seconds if he could.

*"\*Senkyo, I'll be using my recovery on you. Though it'll be like throwing a glass of water at a building covered in fire. Try your best to hang in there.\*"*

*"\*Yeah, I will. After all, I have no intention of losing this game. I have to apologize to another girl now, so I have to come back and take responsibility.\*"*

*"\*Sounding cocky, are we?\*"*

*"\*It's a sort of encouragement.\*"*

The four balls that floated around Fulgur moved to surround Senkyo. Fulgur showed both his palms to Senkyo and began to count down.

"3... 2... 1... 0!"

A field of lighting surrounded Senkyo. White bolts of lightning went through Senkyo's body and electrocuted him.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!"

White lightning bolts are the most dangerous of all the different colors of lightning. Senkyo had to be surrounded for an excruciating five seconds in this. This was about to be Senkyo's longest five seconds but definitely not his last. That was because… Senkyo’s plan involved a gamble with the god of chance.

Time slowed down for Senkyo immensely. Every second felt like a lifetime. Bolts of lightning were running up and down his body. His skin was turning black from the incredible heat that ran over it. His clothes were tattered and his shirt started to catch fire.

Yuu and Itsuki watched in horror. They couldn't do anything about what was happening. Senkyo didn't let them interfere. They stood there and watched as Senkyo suffered from a thousand bolts of lightning.

Fulgur didn't look satisfied that Senkyo was still standing and screaming. He clasped his hands and white bolts of lightning came down on Senkyo from the dark clouds. Balls of lightning appeared around Senkyo and closed in on him.

A barrage of lightning strikes of all kinds stuck Senkyo. If any normal person was to get hit with this, they would've died by now, but something was different about Senkyo and that was what he was gambling on.

Senkyo screamed out in pain as he bared through the devastating attacks. Even if Senkyo survives this, there was no way he would be able to live normally anymore, but he ignored the future side effects.

*"\*Bear with it...! Bear with it...! Bear with it...!\*"*

Senkyo not only had to physically bear the pain but also mentally. His mind began to get fuzzy. The lightning must've been getting to him.

*"\*What's... this...?\*"*

A vision appeared in Senkyo's mind.

"Senkyo... snap out of it... Senkyo!"

*"\*What?!\*"*

A man appeared before Senkyo. He was shaking his shoulder, hard.

*"\*Dad...? Dad?! What the...?! Where am I?!\*"*

Fulgur, Yuu, Itsuki, and the lightning that was frying Senkyo alive were gone. He couldn't feel the pain anymore. It was almost as if he was completely sent away from the battlefield.

*"\*Ah... am I dead?\*"*

Senkyo's deceased father was right in front of him as if he were alive. Senkyo thought he died from the massive amounts of lightning bolts and he was now on his way to the afterlife with his father.

"Get a grip! I know there are a lot of enemies but Leo and I will take care of it!"

*"\*What...?\*"*

Senkyo looked over his father's shoulder and saw a whole army of monsters. There were running, flying, and dashing toward them. They looked like they ranged from half Senkyo's height to ones as tall as buildings.

*"\*Wh-wh-what the hell?! I thought I was dead! Why are there still demons coming after us all the way in the afterlife?!\*"*

Senkyo freaked out at the sudden appearance of more demons. Right when he thought he was on his way to somewhere peaceful; he saw more demons.

"Senkyo!"

His father shouted at him. The loud voice made him snap out of it. Senkyo took a better look at his father and the surroundings, but something was clearly off. Aside from the hordes of demons coming after them, the sky was painted in a peculiar color.

The sky was colored blood red. There wasn't any kind of weather or phenomenon that happened on earth that made the sky color this shade of red. The land they were at looked nothing like any place on earth that he knew. Grasslands stretched out into the horizon. The grass was colored blue like it was frozen in thin ice. Yet it still flowed smoothly as the strong winds went by.

His father looked different too. He looked younger and he had a tattered cloak wrapped around his back. Over to the far left was a person holding a spear. It was his father’s colleague and the person who was currently giving him his monthly allowance to financially support his life alone. His father was holding a katana in his hand. Something about the katana looked awfully familiar. The blade was sheathed in a white scabbard with a blue design on its tip.

*"\*Isn't that... Kuro Yaiba's scabbard? It has a different color scheme but it's definitely it!\*"*

"Listen to me."

Senkyo faced his father. His father had a stern face on.

"Somewhere in the future, you'll probably have to face the same scary monsters over there or maybe even worse. I promise you; you'll be able to face them head-on; I know it! But before that future comes, I want you to live a normal life. One that you’ll love with all your heart that you’d want to live for it."

His father smiled at him. It was a warm smile that was somewhat reassuring. He put his hand on Senkyo's head.

"So, after this incident, you'll forget everything about the other worlds like that. You'll be able to live normally. Don't worry I'll still be with you after this. You won’t be seeing Shiro for a while, but she says she can handle it."

*"\*Eh...? Forget...? About other worlds?\*"*

"But I won't be able to stay by your side your whole life. Something will probably happen to me and you'll have to fend for yourself. If... if you're seeing this memory now, that means something really bad is happening to you. But don't worry you'll be fine soon enough, just chant with these words..."

Senkyo listened intently to his father's words. Every word was carved into his head. It was like a mysterious force was forcing him to remember.

"Alright, I gotta go! Leo, let's clean up here and go home!"

Senkyo's vision became fuzzy, and the sound that reached his ears slowly hushed. When Senkyo came to, he was back in the lightning field and he was being fried to death by the lightning around him.

**54 – Divine Soul**

*"\*I'm back—gaaaahhh!!!\*"*

The pain that temporarily nulled came back as Senkyo returned from the mysterious vision.

*"\*Senko! Hang in there!!\*"*

Ryosei was shouting in his head. The pain and Ryosei's voice woke him up from his dream. Senkyo didn't know what anything was happening anymore. More incomprehensible things just kept happening. But for some reason, Senkyo still remembered what happened in that dream he had.

*"\*Well, I have nothing to lose!\*"*

*"\*Senkyo? What do you mean?\*"*

Senkyo gritted his teeth and used his strength to move his mouth properly under the pain of lightning bolts running through his body. He used the adrenaline to his advantage and forcefully screamed the words...

"RELEASE...! 8TH LEVEL SEAL...!!"

"Hm...?"

The air around Senkyo changed. Fulgur looked puzzled as to what Senkyo just shouted. Senkyo's scream also got the attention of Yuu and Itsuki.

"SUMMON FAMILIAR: ... SHIRO!!"

Ripples of blue light surrounded Senkyo. His wounds began to heal, his skin changed back to its normal color, and the small fire that started in Senkyo's clothes went out. It was as if something was protecting him.

"Eh...?"

Senkyo stopped feeling the pain of the lightning that was still surrounding him. Fulgur noticed something was wrong. His face turned serious and barraged Senkyo with more lightning bolts. His face started to look panicked. It was already long past five seconds.

"Stop! It's past five seconds! Stop hurting Yukou-senpai!!"

"Shorty! Look! That otaku's body!!"

Itsuki pointed at Senkyo. He noticed that his wounds slowly disappeared and his face didn't seem in pain anymore, he stopped screaming too.

"Eh...?"

Yuu and Itsuki silently watched Senkyo.

*"\*Senkyo?! What's happening?!\*"*

Ryosei was as surprised as Yuu and Itsuki. The pain suddenly stopped and Fulgur began to panic.

*"\*I don't know either, but you can leave it to me!\*"*

*"\*What's with that...?\*"*

Senkyo said it in a cheerful voice that Ryosei felt a little bit reassured. Senkyo always surprised Ryosei every single time. For some reason, something inside Ryosei just felt like he could leave it to him.

"I am a master worthy of my soul. Unleash my power to the world of the living and show them the wrath of the dead and the non-existent. Open the gates and heed my call, soul that resides within me, Divine Soul of Spirits!"

*"\*What?!\*"*

"What?!"

Senkyo chanted a sort of magic spell. Yuu and Ryosei were both taken aback. Senkyo, a human with no mana, chanted a spell. Senkyo couldn't stop surprising them, but that didn't stop there. A light-gray crest lit up on the back of Senkyo's right hand.

"An angel's crest?!"

A crest-like birthmark that indicated an Angel, one who bears a divine soul, suddenly appeared. Senkyo didn't have any crests or birthmarks like that his whole life. No one would think that Senkyo was an Angel. But this crest suddenly appeared, and Yuu was utterly confused at what was happening.

"Impossible...! I changed my mind! I’m ending this game!"

Fulgur turned into a bolt of lightning and charged Senkyo. He tried to grab Senkyo’s head but his hand was blocked by his right hand.

"Wh-What?! I thought your arm was paralyzed!"

Fulgur took a look at Senkyo's face, he was surprised to see that Senkyo's eyes were closed.

"Are you underestimating me?!"

Fulgur felt insulted that Senkyo didn't have his eyes open. He thought that Senkyo didn't think he would break through his defenses. Fulgur let out a flurry of punches. His punches were so fast that Yuu and Itsuki could only see afterimages as if short lightning bolts were hitting Senkyo from close range. But to Fulgur's surprise, his punches weren't even reaching Senkyo. They were blocked by the ripples of blue light that surrounded Senkyo. Fulgur made some distance between them.

"YOU’RE NOTHING LIKE OTOU-SAMA DESCRIBED!!"

Fulgur shouted and raised his arms to the sky. The dark clouds circled above Fulgur and the thunder started to get louder. The balls that surrounded Senkyo returned to Fulgur. The lightning field around Senkyo stopped. The balls created a line that connected Fulgur's palm to the circling dark clouds. Lightning of all sorts of colors came down from the clouds straight to Fulgur's palm and collected itself there.

"TASTE MY POWERFUL LIGHTNING!! LIGHTNING GOD'S RE—"

"Spirit bind."

"—AH?!"

Fulgur suddenly stopped moving. The lightning that collected in his palms stopped striking and dissipated. The balls that connected Fulgur and the clouds fell to the ground as if they lost their batteries. Fulgur looked like he was struggling. Something was keeping him from moving.

"IMPOSSIBLE!! WHY CAN'T I MOVE?! WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

Everyone stared at Senkyo. Their eyes all hungered for answers.

"My lord, we must go!"

A mysterious voice resounded in the air. It was the one that Fulgur called 'Magic Man.' A dark portal opened up behind Fulgur and it moved forward, slowly sucking Fulgur in.

"HAHAHA! As expected of Magic Man. I'll be going now; this little game was fun but I have to leave. Mark my words, I'll come back for you! Haha—Eh...?"

"Like I'll let you. Spirit bind."

Just before the portal fully swallowed Fulgur, it stopped at Senkyo's words. But for some reason, Senkyo didn't sound like himself. His voice didn’t change but his tone and speech pattern did.

"What? M-Magic Man... what's happening?! Get me out of here!"

"M-My lord... I cannot move...!"

"What?!"

Fulgur looked incredibly paled. He and his subordinate, who wasn't even in the same place, couldn't move just because of Senkyo.

"You, from the other side of the portal, get in here."

The portal shifted to the left and someone wearing a cloak appeared out of the portal. When the cloaked man was in line with Fulgur, the portal disappeared.

"What?! Impossible! Something's controlling me and my magic!"

Senkyo, who stayed still all this time, faced Fulgur and everyone else. Everyone was shocked to see that Senkyo was making a face he never made before. His eyes looked cold; they were as cold as the darkest side of the moon. Everyone was intimidated by his look.

"Yukou... senpai?"

"What the..."

Senkyo looked at Yuu and Itsuki who were right behind him, but then looked back at Fulgur and the cloaked man.

"I am the Divine Soul of Spirits. The owner of this body is my master. I am currently controlling my master's body because he is not yet ready to receive my power. So, for threatening the life of my master, you will pay with your life."

"D-Divine Soul of Spirits...?!"

Yuu let out in a surprised voice.

"What?! Impossible! Absolutely impossible! The Divine Soul of the Spirits was obliterated long ago! There shouldn't be another one popping out of nowhere!"

"Hmph... You said it yourself, didn’t you? That my master is an anomaly."

Senkyo, or rather, the Divine Soul of Spirits raised his arm and directed his palm to Fulgur.

"Summon Soul: Grim Reaper.”

**55 – First Step Into The Mystery**

An area of the ground in front of Fulgur and the cloaked man began gathering waves of dark mana. It made a circle in the ground and something slowly came out of it.

"What?! No! Stop!"

"My lord! I will try to use my magic to get you out...!"

"It's useless. You won't be able to move, use magic, or anything else if you're in my binds."

The cloaked man struggled but to no avail. He couldn't move one bit. The dark figure that came out of the ground came into full vision. It had curly hair that reached its shoulders. It wore a skull mask over its face. It had a black jacket, boots decorated with skulls, chains that hung on his waistband, and a large scythe that he carried on his back.

"NO!! IMPOSSIBLE! IT'S ACTUALLY YOU!"

"You're getting really annoying. Grim reaper, purify the two in front of you."

"Ah~ The nostalgic feeling of being summoned. So you're back, soul of spirits!"

"Shut up and do your work you damn god."

"Aw! How mean! Fine... I'll make this quick. First is..."

The Grim Reaper and the soul talked like they were longtime friends. It was incredibly weird to Yuu and Itsuki to see the so-called 'Grim Reaper' talk in a laid-back manner. Then again, none of this made sense to them from the start.

The Grim Reaper walked in front of the cloaked man who struggled and struggled but to no avail.

"You have a bad sense of fashion. No one wears such a worn-out cloak anymore! I'll put you out of your misery first!"

"Hah! I am an Ieroask! You can't kill me just because you behead me! My body is made out of tar!"

"Oh~? Is that so? Want to test it out?"

"Fool! The Grim Reaper's scythe is absolute! It'll kill anything as long as he cuts off their head!"

"What?!"

Fulgur shouted at the dream demon despite it being a useless effort. The Grim Reaper raised his scythe and beheaded the cloaked man. His head dropped to the ground and splattered black tar. The body lost its bind and dropped with its head. The dream demon didn't regenerate and didn't move. Just like Fulgur said, the dream demon died.

"Make it clean, kids are watching!"

The soul looked over to Yuu and Itsuki as he said that to the Grim Reaper.

"Fine, fine."

The Grim Reaper stretched his hand out to the dream demon's remains. Its body turned into particles and floated into the sky. The Grim Reaper then faced Fulgur. He was met with eyes that were filled with despair and terror.

"No! Stop! I'll give you anything! Please! I'm a spirit too so—"

"So, what? You'll become my subordinate? You'll swear allegiance to me? I don't need a kid like you."

The Grim Reaper raised his scythe again.

"Goodbye ~!"

"NOOO—!!"

Fulgur's head was cut off. The Grim Reaper did the same thing to Fulgur's body as he did to the cloaked man's. His body turned to particles and dissipated. Fulgur, one of the leaders of END, The Lightning Leader, died.

"No way... They defeated that Fulgur guy... so easily..."

"So, this is the power... of the Grim Reaper..."

Itsuki and Yuu watched as the Grim Reaper mercilessly and one-sidedly defeated Fulgur. When they fought Fulgur, they couldn't do a single thing. They were beaten up and got backed up in a corner but the Grim Reaper did that exact thing to Fulgur. In fact, much worse. The Grim Reaper put down his scythe and faced Senkyo while slowly sinking into a dark hole.

"How cold~! You're already returning me?"

"I don't need you anymore. Get lost."

"Ugh... Fine, see you soon, I guess."

The Grim Reaper got fully sucked into the hole and disappeared. The soul that's controlling Senkyo faced Yuu and Itsuki. The two noticed and were wary of it. Then, Senkyo sighed.

"Take care of my master for me. Seriously, what a reckless plan. And to think it worked… he really is like his father."

Senkyo’s plan was to rely on the power that Fulgur incorporated him with. It was clear to Senkyo that Yuu wasn’t Fulgur’s only goal. He was also a part of it. In the way Fulgur was talking, Senkyo was not human and he was somehow an “anomaly.” He bet his life on that mysterious power and took a reckless gamble with no guaranteed chance of success. With the threats gone. Senkyo’s eyes slowly closed and his body limped and dropped to the ground.

"Yukou-senpai!"

Yuu and Itsuki hurriedly ran to where Senkyo was. Senkyo's eyes were closed. It looked like he was unconscious.

"Yukou-senpai! Yukou-senpai!"

Yuu repeatedly called out to Senkyo. Her eyes were a bit teary and she wore a worried look. Itsuki watched from behind as Yuu called out to Senkyo. For some reason, he felt like he shouldn't be there. Slowly, Senkyo's eyes opened and blinked a few times to clear his vision. He fully opened his eyes and saw a teary-eyed Yuu in front of him.

"E-Eh...?"

"Yukou senpai...!"

Yuu hugged Senkyo like it was the end of the world and started crying. Senkyo was confused as to what was happening. Senkyo looked over Yuu’s shoulder and saw Itsuki standing silently. He asked him what happened but Itsuki responded with a sigh and said...

"Figure that out later!"

Itsuki now understood why he felt out of place. Yuu was hugging Senkyo affectionately. That was all Itsuki needed to know what was happening. Though he was a bit dumb, apparently sometimes he could be sharp.

Itsuki was a bit disappointed when Senkyo asked what happened first. A cute girl is weeping on his chest and he first asked about the situation! At that moment Itsuki thought of Senkyo as a disappointment to all males in the world. A little bit later, their surroundings slowly began to disappear, and a new room came into view.

"Wh-Where are we...?"

Itsuki asked out loud. They were in a room that shined beautifully. Small particles of light floated around them. It was like the whole room was lit up by shiny crystals. Despite the room illuminating beautifully, the other things around them didn't complement that. The walls looked a bit old with cracks and worn-out paint. There were a few holes in the room and wooden planks blocked the broken windows.

"Did the magic get dispelled?"

"I think so..."

Yuu, who still didn't release Senkyo from her grip, agreed with him.

"I think this is the abandoned building we entered earlier,"

Itsuki commented.

"...I see, that would make sense. We did enter one in the first place,"

Senkyo replied. Senkyo looked back at Yuu, but something seemed to be bothering her.

"Is there something wrong, Hi—"

"Shh! I hear footsteps, two of them, coming this way."

Senkyo and Itsuki both went silent. Sweat dripped through their tense faces. As far as they knew, they were in no shape for another fight. Senkyo was tired, but maybe Yuu could fire some magic as cover for an escape.

Senkyo was tired, but he still got up and picked his sword up. Yuu prepared to cast fireballs at the entrance. Itsuki readied his fist, he thought if it was something he could fight, he'll gladly punch its lights out.

The three of them kept an eye on the entrance of the room. The footsteps became loud enough for Senkyo and Itsuki to hear, but with that was the sound of someone talking.

"Maaan! There were a lot of people back there. Good thing no one looked like they got too drained."

"Shut up. You're too loud. The enemy might hear you."

*"\*Wait... aren't those voices familiar...?\*"*

Senkyo listened carefully to the voices that came down the hall.

"It's fine! They probably already know we're here. I mean, it's unusual that we haven't seen a single enemy running around. It was just the people in that massive pit. They stopped casting their field illusion too—"

The person talking was suddenly cut off. The sound of the footsteps and the conversation stopped just outside the entrance of the room. The room was filled with tense silence, and suddenly...

"Don't move!"

Two people came out of the edge of the entrance. The one that shouted held kunai in both of his hands while the other readied to draw a sword from its scabbard. They wore the same strange clothing. Both of them looked awfully familiar.

"...Yamamoto-san and Saito-san...?"

Senkyo recognized them.

"H-Huh...? Yukou-kun... Watanabe-kun... and a girl...? What are you guys doing here...?"

"That's what we were about to ask you..."

The five of them had a silent staring contest at each other as the time passed by, surprised at the unexpected appearance of the other party.

**Epilogue: Connections**

**55.5 – Hero’s Business Trip**

"Hell yeah! I finished another volume's manuscript!"

A man that looked like he was around his thirties jumped out of his seat and pumped his fist in the air. He was in a dark room with only the monitor from his screen lighting up the room. He was wearing plain normal indoor clothes that you would see in a normal household.

He had blonde short hair and two long intersecting scars on his right cheek. He had crimson eyes with a vibrant look to them.

*\*Knock! Knock! Knock!\**

The knock on the door caught his attention.

"Oh, Come in!"

"Excuse me."

The door opened and the person who opened it was a butler. He was an old man with white slicked-back hair and a respectable aura around him. He had the proper butler suit on and white gloves to go with it.

"Akira-sama, it's time for dinner."

"Okay, I'll be there in a minute! Ah! Could you turn on the lights for me, I didn't notice it got so dark. Guess I was too into it this time..."

"Yes, sir."

The butler reached for the light switch and flipped it open. The lights illuminated the dark room and revealed what hid in the darkness. It was a large room with a huge, expensive-looking bed, a big flat-screen TV that was hung on the wall in front of the bed, a huge fancy-looking bookshelf that was filled with light novels and manga, and all the other essentials of a room needed. The room was as luxurious as it could be.

The room was so luxurious that the man who the butler referred to as Akira, looked incredibly out of place. He was only wearing plain clothes. He was like a black dot on a white canvas.

"Well then, if you'll excuse me."

The butler bowed and left the room, closing the door behind him as he did.

"Hmm... I wonder if Ren is home."

Akira left the room with his PC still on. The monitor showed the manuscript that Akira just finished working on. The title of the manuscript was displayed at the top of the screen. It showed “My Battle Against Demons and the Supernatural Volume 7.”

Akira went down a huge and fancy flight of stairs that lead to a lobby and headed straight for the dining room. When he got there, the dining room looked as luxurious as the other rooms. It was spacious and there were even chandeliers hanging on the ceiling. The dining table was huge with a lot of chairs surrounding it. In one of the chairs, someone was already eating there.

“He” had short black hair and black colored eyes to match it. “He” wearing a male high school uniform.

"Ah... Ren, you're back. How was school?"

"It was normal, nothing interesting happened."

"I see you're still wearing a boy's uniform... I swear you look so cute in a girl's uniform! Really, really cute!"

"Shut up, old man."

Akira let out a long sigh after being told to shut up by Ren, who was his daughter. Ren wore a boy's uniform but was in fact a girl. She has a complex about wearing male clothes for some reason. She sat down on the chair at the end of the table and had her dinner served. As they were eating, Akira struck up a conversation.

"Oh yeah, I finished my 7th volume's manuscript. Now I can take a break again and spend some more time with you!"

"You mean the one written based on your time as a Hero? And don’t you have something better to do?"

"That's the only one I write. And don't call me a 'Hero' it sounds too cringy."

"Fine, fine."

Akira took a sip from his cup before continuing.

“And unfortunately, I do have something to do. Why is it that my free time got taken away? Oh, how saddening!”

He pretended to cry in an exaggerated manner, but Ren didn’t seem to bat an eye at his behavior.

“How unusual. What are you planning on doing?”

“A hunter group from America wants my help. Apparently the Zerians over there were acting up. They didn’t have enough manpower so they asked me to come.”

“Are you in any shape to even fight? You’ve done nothing but writing for a long time now.”

“Don’t underestimate your old man, Ren. This is nothing a bit of warming up won’t fix.”

“Hah… if you say so. Then good luck out there.”

“I’ll take care of them and come back in no time! …Oh yeah, that reminds me. Ren, if something does happen just call Ryuuji. He can take care of the house while you’re gone.”

“Yeah, I know. No need to worry.”

“Well, that’s good.”

Akira finished eating and slumped to his chair as he let out a tired sigh. He looked out at the large window to his right where he could see the moon shine beautifully in the night sky. His eyes looked at the moon like he was reminiscing a distant past and let out another sigh.

“‘You’ll know when the time comes,’ huh? Leave it to you to make these vague prophecies, Yukou Yuuto.”