

**THE
GIRL WITH
EIDETIC
MEMORY**

The Girl with Eidetic Memory

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CHAPTER 1

THE restaurant was buzzing with conversation and the aroma of sizzling meat on the grill. Even though we were in a private room, you could smell the cooked meat through the door.

We clinked our beers in celebration of our achievement in bringing justice to the courtroom. It was my first client, and he was being sued by a white family who said he was bothering them when in reality, *they* were harassing *him*. This case was completed earlier than anticipated.

"Congratulations on your first client, Murase-san," one of the colleagues said.

"Thank you," I said calmly, taking a sip from my glass of beer while the others did the same.

"So, Murase-kun. Since you're new to the company, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?" asked the department head.

"What do you want to know?" I asked. I'm not much of a talker, and the introductions aren't my favorite; after all, how am I supposed to introduce myself when I don't fully know much about myself?

"Are you single?"

"I have a fiancé, which is rather shocking," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"I never saw myself in a relationship when I was younger since I had no interest in dating. It still astounds me that I'd fall madly in love with someone."

"Was he your first love?"

"No, before I met my fiancé, I had a crush on Takumi Usui, but he's an anime character, so you could say my fiancé is the first genuine human being I fell for."

And their "awwws" filled the room.

"How did you guys meet?"

"It'll be a long story."

"We don't mind; we have the whole night to listen!"

"All right then," I shrugged, and then everyone settled their chopsticks down, turning their entire attention to me. It felt strange with all of their attention, but because they were interested in my love life, I didn't hesitate to tell them.

"It began in junior high."

[September 17, 2015]

I was standing on the school rooftop, waiting for the owner of the letter I discovered in my locker. It was a well-written letter requesting that I meet the individual on the roof at 12 p.m. during the lunch hour. They must have had something urgent to discuss, I thought.

I wasn't busy and didn't have anything planned at the moment, so here I am, waiting for them.

After a few moments, I heard my name yelled from behind me. I turned to see Daiki, the foreign exchange student from Class 2-A. He approached timidly, staring blankly at the youngster.

"Hello, my name is Nakahara Daiki, and thank you for coming, Noa," he said shyly.

"What did you want to talk about?" I inquired directly.

"Oh, right," he paused as I watched him swallow nervously while playing with his fingers. I was perplexed as to why the purportedly confident dancer of class 2-A behaved timidly in front of me, but it didn't show.

"I like you; please go out with me!" he confessed, closing his eyes and bowing.

It was my first confession, and I had no idea how to react, but I already know how I'm going to answer.

"I'm sorry, but I only like two-dimensional people."

"What—?"

"Excuse me," I said as I bowed and walked away from the rooftop, leaving the child behind.

I had no sympathy for others at the time, and I didn't care what others thought of me. That's why I'm frequently bullied.

After rejecting his confession, word spread across the school about what had occurred. Unfortunately, Nakahara twisted the truth and said that it was I who was rejected.

Even if I didn't care, I hated dishonesty. I hated anyone who would lie and cause pain in order to maintain their pride.

Nakahara was popular, so I understand, but I despised it.

I've been ridiculed in the past for getting straight A's every semester and year. I have a photographic memory, so I don't need to take notes or read books. For some reason, I could recall every single detail from our classes with a single glance.

When they found out, some students were impressed and looked up to me, while many were wary and suspected I was cheating without their knowledge.

It wasn't too horrible until the rumor started. It was like cancer, slowly destroying my self-esteem as a result of all the bullying I

received. People who used to appreciate me avoided talking to me. They were afraid of being caught up in the bullying, and I was alone.

My lockers were crammed, my desk was filthy, hateful messages were taped behind my back and on my bag, and they even thought to lock me in the janitor's closet. The rest were fine, but the last one was too much for me.

The janitors' closet was quite small, and staying in there for an extended period of time caused me to suffocate and panic. This was the first time I discovered I had claustrophobia, a fear of being in tight places. It seemed as if I didn't have any freedom to move, and every time I inhaled, my lungs didn't appear to be getting enough air.

A student opened the door just as I felt my stomach squirm in discomfort. It was a little boy with a bucket and a mop. With my tears blocking my vision, I couldn't see who he was clearly, but seeing the way out, I seized the opportunity and ran out.

"Noa? What were you doing there?" When he saw me on my knees, gasping for oxygen, he asked, concerned. "Are you okay?"

The youngster knelt and placed the bucket and mop stick on the floor. He gazed at me, and I returned his gaze, and my vision gradually improved.

"M-Matsumoto?" My stomach felt nauseous from the stress I had just gone through, and I felt the urge to vomit. When Matsumoto heard me gag, he became concerned and looked around for something to help me.

He took the bucket and handed it to me while I couldn't stop gagging, and as soon as I had the object in my hands, I let it all out.

While looking aside, Matsumoto assisted in holding the bucket. Despite his discomfort, he remained by my side and continued to assist. Seeing someone, especially a male, assist me puzzled me for some reason.

"Why are you helping me?"

"Do you see yourself?" he said in disbelief. "You're as pale as a radish."

"Are you not afraid?"

"Afraid? If there's anything I should be afraid of, it's how unwell you look; we need to get you to the infirmary office as soon as possible."

As I stood up, using the wall in front of me, he placed the bucket and mop inside the closet.

"I can go by myself," I coldly said, but as I rose up, I felt uneasy in my stomach and the urge to vomit again. As a result, I felt dizzy.

Matsumoto gripped me by the waist just as I lost my balance. "Can you, though?" he asked.

I sighed and surrendered. I don't want to show the entire school how sick I am just to have them call me dramatic. He gripped my shoulder and held me against the side of his body to keep me from falling. We continued in this manner until we arrived at the infirmary office, where I was advised to stay and rest.

CHAPTER 2

A FEW WEEKS had gone by, and much had occurred, but I had not informed my parents or siblings of the incident. The principal immediately summoned me to report what had occurred, and of course, I told her everything. It is mostly about bullying.

Then, a few days after my visit to the principal's office, Nakahara apologized and told everyone the truth. He confessed to me; I turned him down, which obviously irritated him; and he attempted to set me up. He never intended for the false story to spread so far; therefore, he didn't think about the consequences.

As a result, everything is back to normal. And by "normal," I meant that the students who admired me weren't hesitant to approach me. Bullying still occurs, although it is not as severe as it once was.

A month later, the school was preparing to celebrate its founding anniversary. That means no classes for the next two weeks! The students were preparing for the event through a number of activities organized by their classes, clubs, and councils.

My classmates decided to create a mini-café. I was one of about four or five of my classmates who worked as waiters, while the rest were cooks and supervisors scouting for new customers.

"Hello, and welcome to the Class 2-D's Mini-Café; what would you like to order?" I asked, a warm grin on my face.

"Hello! Could we please have one Choco-Para Waffle, one Berry Waffle, one Rainbow Crepe, one Oreo Choco Crepe, one Holi-Sunday, one Mango Shake, and one Mango Juice?"

"Certainly! Please wait a moment."

They were astonished when they saw me not writing their orders and had to stop me. They were worried that I might botch up their orders, but when I repeated everything exactly, they were impressed and let me leave.

I returned to the chef's section and gave them the orders for the meal to be prepared. However, when they discovered that there was no record of the order, the chef sighed once again.

"Murase-san, how many times have I instructed you to write the orders down? We don't have a memory like yours."

"Sorry," I apologized as I jotted down the orders, handed the list to the chef, and went out to serve another customer.

This continued on for three hours, until I had to switch with another classmate to take my lunch. I hadn't brought my lunch with me to school, but thankfully, my elder brother arrived for the foundation celebration and brought my bento right in time. We met in the school garden, where both visitors and students were permitted to eat.

When I arrived, I noticed my brother sitting on one of the benches, waiting for me. I approached him, and he soon saw me approaching him. He stood up, smiled, and handed me my bento.

"Thank you; did you prepare this?" I inquired.

"Mom cooked that; remember, I don't know how to cook," he chuckled.

"Of course, that's why I'm asking."

He sulked, pouting at my remark. "That hurt..."

"I'm sorry, but I was just being honest," I defended as I sat down and opened my bento box, which had a simple egg sandwich and karaage sandwich, as well as two little octopus sausages with pickled veggies on the side.

"Will you leave, or do you have other businesses around here?" I asked.

"I came for other reasons as well. I'm going to watch Romeo and Juliet. Later on, the theater club will perform, and I'll scout new actors from them."

I nodded in response. "You know, there are more performances before that."

"Really? What play?"

"Ice 2."

"Are you serious? I have to see that!"

"Both plays will be performed in the gym," I told him, "so go ahead; I'll be fine by myself."

"Thank you, sis; let's meet up later!"

As he rushed away, it was now completely quiet without him. It's remarkable how quiet it can get when the loud individual isn't there, and it's extremely soothing.

The principal approached and sat by me while I ate quietly on the bench a few minutes later. "Do you mind if I eat with you?" she questioned. I wasn't sure why she approached me, but I didn't want to offend her, so I consented with a nod.

"Those sandwiches look great!" she said as she took a seat next to me and opened her bento box.

"Would you like some?" I inquired, moving my bento closer to her.

"I'm good. I've got a lot packed," she remarked, opening the box to reveal the delectable food within. It was a dish of pork balls. One is a rice ball covered in bacon, and the other is pork flesh.

It was awkward dining with the principal since I didn't know what to say and didn't want to communicate at all. I just wanted to eat quietly, but I felt bad thinking that.

"How is your booth?" she inquired.

"Everything is going great, Ms."

"Do the students still pick on you?"

"Yes, but it's not as harsh as before, and it's bearable," I said. "Thank you, Ms."

"Oh, don't thank me; I did nothing; it was all Matsumoto-kun's doing."

"Matsumoto-san? What did he do?"

"He confronted Nakahara and those girls who were going overboard, so you should thank him rather than me."

I was startled to learn that a person I met once had assisted me twice. Well, I knew him before that; he was equally as popular as Nakahara for his sass and personality. He's outgoing, friendly, amusing, and active in school. Almost everyone knows who he is, including the employees and teachers.

From a distance, I could tell he was someone I didn't want to be engaged with. Noisy people aren't what I want around me; it merely implies they're likely to cause trouble. As a result, I've avoided him ever since.

But, as they say, "Even if you wish to avoid something or someone, if it is destined to cross your path, you will encounter it or them somehow." Plus, I may have misjudged him. I used to think that being loud always meant being a jerk, and I guess I wasn't completely wrong.

CHAPTER 3

AFTER a few minutes, I was on my way back to my classroom to resume my waiter duties. But on the way, I ran into Nakahara-san, who seemed concerned, as if something were bothering him. However, when he realized it was me, he had run into, his puzzled face suddenly transformed, and he was overjoyed to see me.

"Noa! You're perfect!" he abruptly exclaimed.

"Excuse me?" My brows furrowed, confused.

"I understand I've caused a lot of discomfort and trauma, and I apologize, but can you please assist me just once?"

Even though I'd already forgiven him, there were still traces of trauma in me, and every time I saw him, those claustrophobic sensations returned, and he could see right through me. Nakahara-san is a decent person in my opinion. enough for me to put my faith back in him.

I nodded and asked, "What do you need help with?"

Nakahara-san's face lit up when he heard I had agreed to help. "I am a member of the theater club, and for this occasion, my club planned to act and perform Romeo and Juliet for the entire audience; however, the actress who was supposed to portray Juliet became ill and was unable to come, and we only found out about this 2 hour before the performance began."

"Do you want me to play Juliet in the play?"

"If it's possible, yes."

"Why me?"

"*Because!* There's a rumor going around about you having photographic memory, so I thought you'd be able to remember the script in less than an hour."

"Am I going to sing and dance?"

"No, all you'll have to do is act."

He escorted me inside backstage and loaned me the script. Juliet had a lot of lines to play out, but I was up to the task. While getting my make-up and hair done, I read every single line and learned it in an instant. After that, they prepared my clothes, and when everything was complete, the actor who played Romeo entered the room.

"Matsumoto-san?"

"Noa," he snickered, astonished, "so you're the new Juliet."

"And you are Romeo..."

"The one and only," he said as he bowed, and I pouted shyly. He appeared just when I believed I wouldn't be able to talk to him again. I couldn't look him in the eyes because I remembered the chat the principal and I had.

"I heard from Daiki about your psychic ability that got you to where you are now," he said.

"Yeah," I said. Matsumoto diverted his sight from mine with a gentle nod. To me, it appeared that his body language indicated that he did not believe I had such power. "I'm not expecting you to trust me; not everyone does."

"I'm a little skeptical, but again, that explains how you get perfect grades every semester."

"I *could* be deceiving you."

"Yes, you could, but we'll find out later when we do our performance."

After an hour, it was time to perform. Backstage with the other performers, I was waiting for my signal when my hands became chilly. I was aware of my nervousness.

This will be my first performance in a play, and my older brother will be there as well. I'm hoping he doesn't go crazy when he sees me on stage, because if he does, I'll ignore him as I always do.

The play began, and I became much more frightened than before. Seeing the others perform flawlessly on stage while smiling helped me understand that I, too, needed to grin. And it's possible that this is the first time they've seen me grin without my lips pursed, as I usually do.

With the passage of time, it was finally my chance to shine. I stepped onto the stage with a smile and spoke my lines. While performing, I kept my gaze on the crowd at times, and I saw that there were more students than parents or adults. Even from this distance, I could see their surprised expressions when they spotted me smiling up on stage.

Matsumoto couldn't help but smile when he saw how happy I was. It seemed as if he was seeing a completely different person in me, as if he were seeing the genuine Juliet.

Time passes, and it was only the two of us—the classic scene in which Juliet sits atop the tower and Romeo is below. We were flirting on stage, and the ease with which we did it fooled many non-students into thinking we were dating.

Finally, the kiss moment had me worried, and my pulse was hammering. Matsumoto observed my nervousness as I changed my expression as my first kiss was about to be performed.

Everything he did was soft and kind, including his touch and words. And before I realized it, our lips were in contact.

I had to keep my calm because this was all an act. On the outside, I appeared pleased, but on the inside, I was nervous. When our lips separated, his hand was still softly cupped on my cheeks, and his gaze felt so different. Something I hadn't seen from Matsumoto before, and for the first time, I thought he looked handsome and attractive.

CHAPTER 4

IT'S been three years since I performed in Romeo and Juliet. Matsumoto and I have become friends since then, so I now call him by his given name, Takashi. Everyone at our school is aware of how close we are. It's like two distinct sorts of flavors that don't appear to go together at first, but after a while, it doesn't seem that horrible.

I also joined the theater club, and because of my power, I was elected president, with Takashi as vice president.

I closed the locker door after finishing arranging my belongings inside it and flinched at Takashi's unexpected presence.

"Wazzup?"

"Gosh, it's early in the morning; how can you have so much energy?" I inquired.

"As usual, you're not a morning person."

"Just leave me alone," I replied, exhausted, as I carried my sling bag.

Takashi and I were fortunate to be placed in the same classroom this year and semester. It's nothing out of the ordinary; we were classmates last year and the year before.

Takashi and I would not have been this close if it hadn't been for those arrangements. I would have been the one to continue ignoring him, but that wasn't even required to begin with.

We took the stairs to the fourth floor, where our classroom is. We were already in our senior year, and all of the senior students were placed in the building's second-to-highest level.

"Have you packed for the school camp?" said Takashi.

There is an event coming up in the next two days that just a few students were able to attend.

Students from 10 different schools will attend this enjoyable camp at Star Village. Hilo University, a college known for its bright students, owns this community.

The purpose of this camp was to determine which school had the most brilliant pupils after Hilo. That is why only a few pupils were chosen: they are the most "talented" of all.

And then, in the blink of an eye, the departure date arrived. Thank heavens I was able to wake up just in time before the bus left, thanks to that youngster, Takashi. I had to deal with his frequent reminders of the camp via messages and his never-ending discussion about the camp at school. He was like an alarm clock set to go off every minute, and he was an exact replica of my brother, who irritated me every day at school. I'm constantly wondering how I got myself into this mess.

When I pondered every potential thing Takashi might do, I was not looking forward to the bus journey. He will most likely be unable to sit still, but as soon as the bus left, he proved me wrong.

Who knew a movie, some crackers, and a cozy blanket could keep this child occupied? I was skeptical, but it worked, and I am grateful. I decided to take a nap throughout the trip. And it was a really comfortable slumber.

Takashi was so engaged in his movie that he didn't bother me. Instead of waking up to a tragedy, I awoke with a blanket wrapped around my body.

His blanket had been wrapped over both of us, and the youngster was fast asleep beside me.

It was like watching a newborn baby slumber when I saw him fall asleep. His skin was flawless, and his eyelashes were lengthy up close. It was considerably longer than mine. His lips appeared full and coated with cherry juice, rosy and soft.

When I saw him in this vulnerable position, I thought he was adorable. Someone I want to protect.

With these emotions racing through my mind, I lifted my hand and softly touched the boy's smooth, soft cheeks.

The abrupt feeling of his cheeks being caressed led him to gently open his eyes. Seeing him catch what I was doing, I panicked as I took my fingers away. But before I can continue removing it, he softly snatches it from behind the cover and drags it inside.

"Your hands are very cold," he remarked, clasping my other hand and sharing warmth with his palms on mine.

I remember this nostalgic feeling. This happened years ago when Takashi and I separated our lips during the performance. And again, he looked handsome and attractive, but this time it hurt much more.

Why, of all the feelings I have for this boy, am I nervous?

After some time had passed, we arrived in the village. Everyone was sent to the gym for an orientation. Inside were students from several universities dressed in various school uniforms.

Because Hilo University controlled this village, the university's student council was standing on the platform. And because they were on stage, gossip about the student council president circulated among the students below.

The reason? He was the tallest of the group and the only boy. But he wouldn't be the focus of attention if that was all there was to him. He was quite attractive. In terms of looks, he was the ideal man for many women.

And as he took the microphone to welcome the students and staff members, his voice warmed and touched these girls' hearts. "Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Sasaki Ryosuke, and I am the President of the Hilo University Student Council." His voice was deep, and his smile was as lovely as his looks.

We were assigned to our dorms after a brief introduction and orientation. Originally, a room could accommodate up to four students. However, because we were an odd number, Takashi and I were allowed to share a room.

Surprisingly, they had faith in us. Some kids would kill to be in my position, but to be honest, I despised it. I have to spend two weeks in the same room with this energetic, noisy child.

I can't even stand being in the same room as my elder brother, and now I have to be with his replica? *Great*, just *great*.

Because he was so excited, Takashi couldn't stop moving around during the elevator trip. This youngster is difficult to control, even for me. Fortunately, we made it to the 4th floor, where our dorm is.

As I walked through the silent corridors, I noticed our neighbor opening her door with a passcode, and I unintentionally watched her input her passcode.

She drew my attention since she was dressed in the same attire as the popular student council president from earlier on stage. For some reason, the outfit reminded me of him. As this was occurring, Takashi smiled and opened the door.

"Are you ready, Noa?" he asked.

"Open it already," I said coldly. He chuckled as he unlocked the door and welcomed us into our dorm.

"Woah, this is amazing for just the two of us!" said the kid.

I didn't react since I was too occupied appreciating the setup. It was just as my brother had described; even though the dorm was small, it was still lovely. It contained a tiny living room, a small bathroom, and a sleeping area. It was ideal!

"Noa, which side would you want to sleep on?" Takashi inquired when he saw the bed in the bedroom.

"Anywhere will do."

He then continues to claim his territory by jumping on the bed on the right. As I sat on the soft blanket, I placed my belongings on the left side of the bed.

Takashi and I spent an hour unpacking our belongings into the closet, bathroom, and drawer. And as soon as we were through, the bell sounded, signaling that it was time for dinner. Everyone goes down to the cafeteria. Although the path to the cafeteria was crowded, when we got there, it became roomy.

It was like walking into a luxury dining room, complete with a chandelier swinging from the ceiling.

Takashi and I sat at a table for two to take our dinner. I ordered the spicy special with a tiny cake for dessert, while he ordered the seafood special with a rainbow crepe slice for dessert. And apparently someone is going to serve each of us our beverages separately.

The student council president came to our table halfway through supper and offered us two cups of tea.

"How's your dinner?" he inquired, smiling. To be honest, being this close to this gentleman, I can't deny that he is very handsome. But, for some reason, it didn't faze me, and I retained a blank look.

"The dinner is wonderful!" said Takashi.

"And my lady?" Sasaki-san turned to face me, and I glanced up blankly.

"It's excellent," I said quickly. He grinned as he saw us enjoying our dinner.

"That's a relief," he said as he handed us our beverages. He appeared to have been trained. "May I ask which hand you like to drink with?"

"Is that necessary?"

"Yes, it is, and we will place your cups on the side you are most comfortable using so that you have a much more comfortable experience."

"Wow, the services here are fantastic," Takashi happily said.

"We do value our guests!"

"I use my right hand," I said.

"Same here!" Takashi added. Sasaki-san then prepared the glasses on the side we preferred and poured the tea into them.

"Please enjoy," he said before bowing and moving on to the next student.

"Now I see why the girls are crazy over him," Takashi stated. In reaction, I rolled my eyes.

"It simply reveals their true color."

"How?"

"They choose appearances over personality; Sasaki-san is attractive and tall, and that's it."

"Damn, you're still as cold as ever."

"Behind that gorgeous look might lie a devil in disguise, which is why I like to get to know that individual well first."

I didn't realize what I said made Takashi grin. We ate till we were full and then went back to our dorm.

We had 5 hours until the lights went off, and during that time, Takashi and I planned what we would do the next day. In this village, we were

offered a variety of activities to participate in, and I was even enthused about them!

We were given a list of schedules from which to choose until our last day. I was surprised to find so much prepared for us to experience, and I was completely overwhelmed!

Swimming, horseback riding, rock climbing, zip lining, dance practice, singing lessons, gardening, baking, a tea party, camping, a scavenger hunt, board games, an art zone, and jet skiing were among the activities provided.

Finally, for tomorrow, we decided to do three activities:

Horseback riding

Tea party

Dance practice

The first two will be done in the morning, while the last will be done in the afternoon before dinner.

CHAPTER 5

AFTER Takashi and I finished our meal, we headed directly to the field to begin our first activity, horseback riding. Instead of strolling, this child gleefully skipped towards the stable, where we would select our horse to ride on.

When I entered the barn, there were several horses relaxing in their stables. It was thrilling to witness, and as we were watching the animals nearby, we were approached and greeted.

"Welcome!"

We turned to see Sasaki Ryosuke, the president of Hilo University's student council.

"Student council president."

"What are you doing here?" I inquired.

"We student councils are permitted to assist in at least two activities, so here I am!"

"I see," I replied with a soft nod.

Our conversation continued on, with Sasaki-san teaching us how to tame our own horses. When we finally decided on our horses, we made sure they had everything they needed for us to ride securely.

We saddled our horses and led them outside to the field before we mounted. Takashi was the first to mount his selected horse, and he rode it around the field with the assistance of Sasaki-san, of course.

I stood there watching him have fun while trying to figure out how to climb on this animal. A man's voice spoke from behind me while I struggled.

"Do you need any help, Ms.?"

When I turned around, a man dressed casually and wearing a school ID appeared. He was tall and had a keen look. He might be the same height as the student council president.

"I'll be alright, thank you," I said as I got on the horse, but suddenly, I slipped due to the animal's height and size. But before my ribs struck the wooden steps, the man grabbed me and carried me, bridal style.

"T-thank you," I murmured nervously. As dramatic as it may sound, I **truly** believed that would be the end of me. Takashi's theatrical demeanor may have snagged me. How frightening that boy's energy is.

"No problem," he said as he lowered me. Just as I got down, Takashi approached me with his horse and Sasaki-san behind them.

"Are you okay, Noa?" he said, alarmed.

"Yes, this man saved me just in time; I'm alright," I said reassuringly.

"It's no problem; I'm glad I came here to help," the man remarked, smiling at me. I returned the glance with a soft grin and bowed lightly.

Takashi instantly cut us off, as we seemed to be flirting from his perspective.

"Thank you for your assistance, um..."

"Inoue, Minoru Inoue."

"Thank you for your assistance, Inoue-san; you may now leave."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to participate in this activity."

"Yes, we do mind—"

"—No, no, we don't." I shut Takashi up, my eyes telling him to behave.

"Excellent! I'll go grab my horse."

"I'll assist you; please wait here, Matsumoto-san, Murase-san." The student council president said before entering the barn with Inoue. I looked at Takashi in surprise as he stepped off the horse.

"Are you okay?" the lad asked as he checked my body from head to toe for injuries, and as he did so, I felt irritated.

"I'm ok, Takashi!" I shouted as I pushed his arms away from me.

"Jeez, I'm just concerned!" He defended, "Plus, that Inoue guy seemed dangerous; we shouldn't approach him."

"And *how* is he dangerous?"

He suddenly began stuttering, trying to figure out what to say. "I just sensed it," he answered, and my eyes rolled away in response.

I knew he was lying, and the actual reason was hidden from me. Knowing this, I stayed silent, said nothing, and went about my business as I got on the back of my horse. But this time it worked.

Takashi, Inoue-san, and I were taught how to ride horses during our activity. However, as time went on, more students came to join us and watch.

Students wearing the same uniform as Inoue were cheering him on. He must be well-liked at his school. These ladies aren't going away but instead have increased as minutes have passed by.

I was minding my own business and concentrated on riding my horse around the field, but seeing those girls, Takashi regarded it as a challenge.

This child commanded his horse to run, but things didn't go as planned. Instead of fleeing, the horse halted when he commanded it with his foot. As a result, Takashi fell in front of him and onto the ground.

Seeing that, Inoue rushed to him and lifted him off the ground. I was able to jump off seconds later.

"What were you thinking, Takashi?" I rushed up to him as Inoue helped him up.

"Sorry. I thought I could control him."

"Are you okay, Matsumoto-san?" The student council president inquired worriedly, rushing towards us.

"Yes, I am; I'm sorry about that."

"Please avoid directing the horse to do anything other than walk," Sasaki-san urged, adding, "Inoue-san here is a professional; therefore, he is an exception."

"A professional?" I asked, a bit taken aback.

"I've been riding horses since I was a youngster," Inoue stated.

"That explains why."

Takashi was ashamed of the uproar he had created. I noticed and considered ending this session and moving on to the next. I bowed, apologized, and excused us. We left to return the horses to the stable.

Inside the barn, when it was the two of us returning the horses, Takashi felt the need to speak up. But he was too nervous to say anything, so he continued glancing back and forth between me and his horse.

Even still, his little acts drew my attention as I sighed.

"I see you staring. What is it?" I spoke.

Takashi hesitated to respond, staring at the horse's fleece and patting it. He turned back at me and noticed that I was gazing at him, which surprised him.

"Umm..." he stutters, "It's nothing."

"Are you sure?" I asked, and he nodded.

"I'm certain." Although he smiled a bit, his façade to cover up his gloom was ineffective, and I could see right through him. But I didn't want to make him say or do something he didn't want to and reasoned that he may have his reasons why he was keeping his thoughts in. This

youngster can be unpredictable at times, but that's fine. I decided for him to speak up about it whenever he was ready; I was in no rush.

"All right, let's go to our next activity while there's still time before it starts," I suggested, and he nodded once again.

CHAPTER 6

WE were on our way to our next activity, which was within a small home near the cabins. It was a peaceful spot, and it sounded like heaven to me. Birds chirping, the sound of a waterfall from a nearby mini-pond, and nature surrounding the house.

The foods were already prepared inside when we arrived. Inside the cupboard, several sizes of cups were stacked, and three students were already preparing the plates. When we walked in, one of the girls smiled and welcomed us.

"Welcome! Will you two join the tea party?" she inquired.

"Yes, we will."

"Perfect! My name is Ichikawa Yuka, and the girl with the apron is Kazunari Miu, and the one at the table is Isobe Sayuri." The other girls bowed in greeting as we bowed back.

"Is this everyone?" Takashi asked.

"I'm not sure yet. This is an open activity; anyone is welcome to come and go as they please."

"Since it is time, we'll just start now, and if there are any guests who want to join later, they may." Kazunari said.

We all settled in the middle and sat down. The theme for this tea party is English tea, and our appetizers are cakes and cookies that we can obtain here in Tokyo.

Kazunari-san took some teacups from the cupboard and began to make the tea. Isobe-san arranged the meal on the fountain-like plate and set it in the center while Ichikawa-san prepared the cutlery.

Takashi and I sat there and watched the three prepare everything. We were too embarrassed and timid to even offer assistance when the girls were done in the blink of an eye, just sitting and doing nothing to help.

"Please enjoy!" Ichikawa exclaimed, and everyone began digging in as Kazunari-san poured tea into our individual cups. The aroma of the tea's sweet yet bitter scent was really calming, especially given the ambiance of the room we're in; everything in here simply fits together perfectly.

I noticed Kazunari-san was wearing a jacket when we were eating. It was heated inside, so I was perplexed as to why she was wearing it. I mustered the guts to ask, and she responded:

"I'm very conscious of how my body looks; concealing my body is a source of security for me."

After that, I didn't say anything further, thinking it may be rude to do so, and put my focus elsewhere, nodding before concentrating on the dish in front of me.

Lunchtime arrived, and Takashi and I weren't starving after all of the cakes and cookies we had just consumed. But since we didn't have anywhere else to go, we went to the cafeteria to get some Boba beverages before returning to our room to prepare for the final activity.

Dance practice.

We packed additional clothes in case we became sweaty, as well as a water bottle to stay hydrated.

We had finished packing and had a few hours before the activities began. So, we decided to go early and have a walk in the garden before

it got too late. I took a piss before leaving, and on the way to the lobby, we ran into the president of the student council, who was carrying two sacks of what seemed to be horse food.

"Oh, hello there!" said Sasaki-san.

"Hello," I returned his greeting.

"What's with the horse food, president?" Takashi inquired.

"These are for a student who resides in this dorm, and they specifically purchased two bags of horse food for their horses."

"Those horses must mean a lot to them," I thought out loud.

"Indeed," he said. "Well, I'll see you around, and best of luck with your activities!"

We exchanged bows before going past each other. Sasaki-san seemed to be a kind person with a lot of responsibilities as president of the student council. It must be an exhausting job.

[Next Morning]

This breakfast's options featured a nice presentation, and everything looked incredibly delicious! Takashi chose the pancake set, while I chose the waffle set.

We were planning to take a seat for two as usual, but that changed when we were invited to lunch with the girls from the tea party activities the day before. We approached Ichikawa-san after seeing her wave her hand to get our attention.

"Come dine with us!" she said.

"Thank you," I said as we sat next to them, opposite of each other.

"Where is Kazunari-san?" asked Takashi.

"She's always a few minutes late for breakfast; let's get started," Isobe-san suggested, and we did just that.

Every bite was overflowing with the delicious honey syrup, strawberry jam's exquisite sweetness, and the saltiness of the butter. It tasted like nirvana with each crunch; Heaven!

Though, after a few minutes have passed, Kazunari-san has still yet to arrive. Which, for Ichikawa and Isobe, was strange, and they began worrying about her. I offered to fetch her from her room because I had finished dining before them and to, at the very least, help ease their worries. Plus, I know where she lived.

Once I arrived, I knocked three times in front of her dorm room. There was no response. This time, I rang her doorbell. But there has been no response. My brows furrowed as I began to overthink. Was she away? Or was she just as deep sleeper?

I rang the doorbell again. "Kazunari-san, it's me, Murase Noa!" I exclaimed, "Ichikawa-san and Isobe-san were anxious since you hadn't come down yet, so I came to pick you up."

Once again, I knocked three times and rang her doorbell one last time, but she was still not responding.

I reasoned that she might have already left. So, I went downstairs to the lobby and asked the receptionist whether Kazunari-san had left her room.

"She hasn't gone out since yesterday afternoon," she explained, and this concerned me.

I thanked the lady and returned to her room. Takashi and I shared a dorm room beside Kazunari-san. Call me an eavesdropper, but I happened to observe her typing in her password before. "Kazunari-san, I'm coming in!" I shouted as I knocked on the door one final time.

I entered the password, which unlocked the door and allowed me to enter. However, no one was inside the room. I was intrigued by the notion that I was in another person's dorm room, and without realizing, I left the door open behind me.

The room was brightly colored, with various tones of brown and orange. Her bed, like the rest of the room, was neat. She had three things pinned to her bulletin board: a photo of her family and beloved dog, her schedule, and a key with a wooden attachment with the number 7 engraved on it. But other than that, Kazunari-san was nowhere to be seen.

Seeing no trace of the person I was looking for, I heard my merry way out when all of a sudden, I heard an alarm clock go off. It sounded like it came from the bathroom. I know I shouldn't be entering the bathroom, knowing she could be inside taking a bath. Though the sound of the alarm clock continuously ringing, echoing eerily throughout the room, I couldn't help but feel that something was not right. Reluctantly, I knocked on the door to let her know I was coming in.

Anticipating the door to be locked, yet with a twist of the knob, it opened effortlessly. I took a quick peek inside to see if Kazunari-san was there, expecting her to be butt naked; however, I was completely wrong.

CHAPTER 7

I ANTICIPATED the door to be locked, yet with a twist of the knob, it opened effortlessly. I took a quick peek inside to see if Kazunari-san was there, butt naked, but I was completely wrong.

In front of me was her body, swimming in crimson, bloody water in the bathtub, with her eyes closed and body relaxed, with her left arm lying over the water. Seeing that brought a rush of panic; disregarding her naked body, I rushed into the room. Placed two fingers on her neck, nervously searching for a pulse, but felt none.

Despite this, I was still in denial. I didn't want to accept that the girl in front of me had died. So, with hopeful prayers, I placed my index finger in front of her nose to feel for any wind caused by her breathing. Yet, there was still no sign of her living.

My heart dropped as anxiety kicked in. Was she really dead?

I now felt uneasy; my stomach was uneasy; my entire body was uneasy. Looking around as I controlled my breathing, I discovered not one or two, but seven slashes on her right arm. It explains the crimson water because her arm was buried in it.

My stomach couldn't take the sight of something so real and gory—a real dead body in front of me. The urge to vomit came back after years,

and I hurried to the toilet bowl, vomiting all over. The delicious waffles were all a waste.

I heard a knock on the front door just as I finished barfing up my breakfast.

"Noa? It's me, Takashi! Are you in there?" I stepped out slowly, still feeling quite apprehensive, and seeing how pale I looked made him concerned.

"Are you okay? What happened?"

"Call 110," I barely said throughout my grunts of nauseousness, as I took a brief pause to wipe the vomit from my lips. While Takashi had his brows furrowing in confusion.

"Why? Where's Kazunari-san?"

"She is dead."

"What do you—?"

I gagged, cutting him off, and dashed back inside to the bathroom. The sudden reaction took him aback, and he became even worried about the situation. But how could your stomach not react to something as horrible as that? In addition, being the first witness to discover a deceased corpse was not what I expected from this camp. It horrifies me.

Takashi, still perplexed by what I had said and believing I was kidding, followed me into the bathroom and instantly discovered Kazunari's body in the bathtub.

It terrified him just as much as it terrified me, and without hesitating, he dialed 110 with quivering hands and a shaking voice.

The cops arrived an hour later. We alerted the school administration of the tragedy, and they instructed us to remain in our rooms while the police investigated what had occurred.

We were inside our dorm room, sitting on my bed, and I sighed heavily. This power of mine can be quite frustrating and pointless at times. I'm doing everything I can to forget, but it won't let me. Every time I

close my eyes to relax, it comes back to torment me in every detail. It makes me want to vomit again.

Takashi could tell I wasn't feeling well since my movements had become rigid. He sat next to me, caressed my back, and took my hand in his. I raise my head to look at him, and he offers me the most comforting grin in return, which helps me relax a little. Another thought entered my head at this moment, and I can't stop thinking about how fortunate I am to have him by my side.

After a few moments, one of the police officers in charge of the investigation entered. We rose and bowed in response to the officer's bow.

I was then asked to describe what I saw at the crime scene as well as my reason for visiting Kazunari Miu. Because I was the sole suspect here, I had to prove my innocence, even though I knew I was innocent.

"Have you discovered what killed Kazunari-san, officer?" I questioned hesitantly.

"It might be suicide, but it could also be murder by the suspects."

"Suspects?" I asked again, confused.

"That would be *you*, for now."

Again, I was aware of it. Because *I* was the founder of the *body*, there was a possibility that I could be a suspect. But despite my calmness, Takashi couldn't accept the accusations.

"That's absurd!" he yelled. "Noa can't be the suspect; she's completely innocent!"

"Every killer says that." The officer coldly retorted, which enraged Takashi.

But before he could say anything further that could get us into trouble, I held him back, holding his arm, and helped calm him down. It wasn't easy, but I somehow managed to convince him to sit quietly.

Seconds later, I heard a voice coming from the front door, and in came Minoru Inoue. Why was the guy I met at the horseback riding activity yesterday here?

The officer I was speaking with saluted at him as he removed his headgear.

"Inoue-san, you've arrived."

"I was one of the students elected to this camp," he said, then his gaze shifted to us. He snickered in astonishment when he realized who we were. "We've met before."

"Why is he here, officer? I thought students were not allowed to approach crime scenes," Takashi wondered, a hint of anger visible in his voice, and I agreed.

Inoue then pulled an ID from his pocket with no protestations or verbal explanations. The reason why *he* was a part of the police inquiry was because *he* was the chief detective, according to his ID.

"A detective?" I questioned aloud, "Students can be detectives?"

"Of course. 'I'm the evidence,'" Inoue said as he reinserted his ID into his wallet. I was nervous for some reason. These cops are after me because they believe I am the one who murdered Kazunari.

Inoue saw my trepidation and snickered.

"There's no need to be afraid, Murase-san. I know you're not the murderer." Our faces lit up with relief, while the officer seemed perplexed.

"However, sir, there is still a chance she could be the murderer."

"I doubt that," Inoue said, "since there were vomit marks in the toilet, and there are stains on her shirt collar, which means she vomited when she saw the body. No murderer would not get rid of any evidence. Plus, I viewed the CCTV film, and her actions seemed clean."

"But what about the employee lobby testimony? She stated, 'Murase Noa was inquiring where the victim was'."

"I was asking because Kazunari-san was more than five minutes late for breakfast; I came only to pick her up. However, when I didn't hear from her the first time I checked on her, I asked the staff in the lobby where she was, and she said Kazunari-san hadn't left her room since yesterday afternoon," I quickly defended.

"Isobe-san, Ichikawa-san, and I can back up her testimony because we were there for breakfast with her," Takashi added, making Isobe nod his head in response.

"I'll look into it more, but for now, there's something on my mind: where or how did you acquire the passcode for the victim's dorm room?"

As they all stared at me, the room fell quiet. As much as I wanted to tell them the truth, I could already predict that these two would never believe me. But I couldn't just lie, since it would make them mistrust me even more, and I'm exhausted from being in this position.

"I happened to observe Kazunari-san outside typing in her passcode as Takashi and I were walking to our assigned dorm room." I confidently told them without stuttering, but of course, they doubted.

"How could you remember that in such a short amount of time?"

"Please speak the truth," the cop said, and I huffed, expecting this reaction from the beginning.

"I'm not expecting you to believe me, but I have a photographic memory."

"That's ridiculous—"

Inoue shuts the policeman up with his index finger in front of his lips.

"I want to trust you, but you have to present evidence for us to know you're speaking the truth." He says.

"She's the top of her class—the whole school, rather—and she's received several prizes thanks to her power," Takashi argued, but their blank expressions revealed that that wasn't enough evidence to prove anything.

Takashi huffs in frustration as he thinks of other ways to help, and an idea clicks. He grabs a whiteboard and pen and gives it to Inoue and says, "Write as many items as you can fit on the board, and have Noa perform an exam."

They both decided it would be a good idea to test her honesty. Inoue drew not only numbers but also letters and doodles on the whiteboard. "I'll give you 10 seconds to learn everything," he said, "beginning... now!" He then spun the whiteboard around to face me, and it was a complete mess! An ordinary person would struggle to remember all of this in a matter of seconds, but I believe in my abilities, in myself, and in my ability to succeed.

"Time is up!" Inoue quickly flipped the board as the officer spoke. I felt nervous despite having everything in my head. Everyone was looking at me, waiting for my response.

"4...5...1..." I replied slowly. However, because of this, they assumed I was having difficulty memorizing.

"It was a lie after all."

"Shush, let her finish!" Takashi silenced the cop. He then gave me that reassuring look he had shown me a while ago. And again, it helped calm me.

I huffed the nervousness away with a deep breath. I restarted, but this time at a faster rate.

"45117829083654671973836f6hkahu8ypq5289gajslq61hr;42!@"-*+gaulwp619374)(a dog, the emo S, a cross, a happy face" The expression on their faces made me proud of the power I beheld, but I wasn't finished. "And four of the corners seemed to be colored as well."

"No, it isn't," the officer objected.

"Not the whiteboard corners, but the four corners of the black tape on the whiteboard."

"How do you know?" Inoue questioned. He was surprised; he was certain I wouldn't realize.

"The shade of black utilized by both of them is distinct from each other, easy peasy!" I said it cheerfully, shrugging proudly at myself as Takashi applauded my accomplishments.

CHAPTER 8

FOLLOWING the test, my testimony was accepted, and Takashi and I were released from the scene. We weren't allowed near the crime site, so we went to see Ichikawa-san and Isobe in the tea house, where we found them sitting in silence, grieving.

"Ichikawa-san, Isobe-san," I quietly called. They gave us a forlorn expression as we walked in.

"Noa." Her voice weakly called out, "I heard you were the first to discover Miu's body. That must have been traumatic," Ichikawa said shakily, her nose and eyes red from crying, as were Isobe's. Her eyeliner was sagging and smudged from her tears.

"Yeah," I responded dejectedly.

"I apologize for your loss," Takashi remarked, then everything went silent. I didn't know what else to say, and knowing myself, I become awkward in situations like these. But it was much different when you're the finder of their deceased friend's body. The image of the body kept returning, and these images came to torment me in full detail, which caused my lack of sleep.

Isobe-san sniffed and wiped her tears away with a tissue, removing the smudged makeup.

"Please, call me by name. From now on, we're friends." She said.

"I understand, Iso...Sayuri." Noa corrected.

"Come sit; I'll make some tea to help us relax," Sayuri added.

"I'll assist with the tea," I replied, walking straight to the cabinet. But as I opened it, I noticed a teacup was missing.

It had the Sakura tree design, which was quite gorgeous, and the last time I saw it, Kazunari-san was using it yesterday. I'm not sure if she stole it, but if she did, I'm pretty sure I'd have seen it inside her dorm room. I wonder where it could be.

"Noa, do you need help?" Takashi asked when noticing me taking a little long.

"Don't worry, I've got this," I said, then proceeded to use the adorable stroller to set four teacups alongside the plates and cutlery so I wouldn't have to travel back and forth for it.

We started with our wonderful tea after a few minutes of preparation. The tea put into my cup had nearly overflowed, and I needed to drink it quickly before the liquid spilled. With my left hand, I took and carried the tea, then lowered my head to take a sip.

"Oh, I didn't realize you were a leftie," Sayuri said in surprise.

"No, I'm right-handed; I only had to quickly reduce the liquid before it dripped off."

Suddenly, gloom washes over Yuka's body, reminiscing about the past. "A leftie reminds me of Miu; she's the only leftie in this room," she said.

"If it's okay to ask, what kind of person was she?" Takashi wondered.

"She was a very talented woman." Sayuri replied proudly.

"Although she was really calm and gentle, you wouldn't want to irritate her because she was very scary when she was furious," Yuka explained.

"Wasn't she previously dating someone?" Sayuri inquired.

"She used to be in a relationship with Ryosuke-kun."

"Hilo University's Student Council President?" I inquired, surprised.

"Yes! They were together for three years, but they split up just last year; I still don't know why, and I didn't want to hurt Miu's feelings, so I avoided asking," Yuka explained.

"They also had several interests, such as cooking and horseback riding, and they both liked the number seven."

Instantly, I recalled the key with the wooden attachment in Miu's room. It had the number 7.

"They were absolutely obsessed with being perfect, and they also believed the number 7 would bring you luck since the number 7 is the sign for luck in numerology," Sayuri explained further, capturing back my attention. Silence struck the room, though my mind was noisy with all its thoughts, asking questions and with too many what-ifs. I hesitated, but in the end, I couldn't keep my curiosity in and began opening my mouth.

"When I was looking for her, she had a key with a wooden attachment with the number 7 on it inside her room."

"They used to have a cabin together, where they would sleep and go on dates on occasion," Yuka explained.

"Miu adored nature, so when Ryosuke-san found out she wanted to live in a home surrounded by nature, he instantly leased cabin room number 7," Sayuri added.

"I had no idea Sasaki-san was romantic," Takashi commented, praising the student council president's efforts.

"They were absolutely head over heels for each other!" Yuka said with exaggeration in her tone.

"We weren't the only ones who were surprised when Miu informed me they broke up last year; I had assumed they would marry in the future," Sayuri added.

In that moment, I didn't know what got into me. But after hearing the romantic story of the former couple, a burning sensation in my chest fueled up, and I suddenly felt the desire to avenge Kazunari-san's death.

I don't know much about her, but I know she didn't commit suicide. Those incisions were far from her veins. Died from losing lots of blood? *Possible*. But can you die from blood loss caused by slashing your arm? *Not sure*.

These were the only clues I knew of, and it wasn't enough. The passion started blooming, and I wanted more. And in order to hunt for more, first and foremost, returning to the scene was my only choice. I have no other clue to solve this mystery.

There is just one way. The best time to go is at night. When the clock struck twelve o'clock, I crept outside my dorm room to make sure Takashi didn't wake up. I gently closed the door and entered Kazunari's room, but as I approached, someone behind me questioned, "And where do you think you're going?"

I instantly froze; his deep voice echoing at the nape of my neck sent shivers down my spine. And at that point, I understood I had to be honest with my intentions. Inoue was standing behind me, his hands tucked into his jacket pockets.

"Inoue-san, why are you awake?" I questioned, acting innocently.

"If you've forgotten, I'm a detective, and I should be asking you that," he continued as I huffed, because by the looks of it, he wasn't going to believe any excuses. "Speak up." He groggily whispered intimidatingly. Gazing back at him, he was serious. Silence engulfed the hallway; it's as if you could hear how fast and loud the beating of my heart is. I've never felt this uncomfortable in his presence. I knew by then that lying won't get me anywhere, especially being in the position that I am in right now.

"I only wanted to help with the investigation because I know Kazunari-san didn't commit suicide; she was killed," I explained truthfully, but saw no change in his poker-face expression.

"How do you know she didn't kill herself? She visibly slashed her wrist."

"Technically, it was her arm she slit. If she slit her wrist, then that would've been fatal. Although there is a possibility that she would die from blood loss, and yet again, that also depends on the length of time from when she cut herself until the moment she died. And when I first found her, I remembered vividly that those cuts were still fresh. In other words, she couldn't have died as a result of that."

I was afraid of being accused again, so I told him what I knew without realizing it. The words just kept going and going, desperate for wanting to be heard, to give justice to my name, to Miu.

There was a little pause before he snickered at my response. I wasn't sure if he was impressed or not, but whatever reply he gave, I was terrified. I can't continue to be a suspect.

"Not bad," he remarked, nodding his head in amazement.

"Does that imply I can join the investigation?" I inquired, hoping for a positive response.

He then took out his wallet and pulled out a card. I didn't want to make any assumptions, but it appeared to be the detective's ID card he presented to us this morning. He handed me the card and showed me the information, and I was correct. What he handed me was my very own detective identification card!

"B-but how? And why?" I was taken aback.

"After witnessing your power, I felt it might be beneficial, so I made you my assistant with the power I earned."

I was pleased and ecstatic! I still can't believe my plan came true and that I was able to avenge Kazunari's death whilst removing my name

from the bad light. "I sometimes do my investigations at night, when there aren't as many distractions, so I'm expecting you to join me," he said, and I nodded. "All right, let's go." I smiled as I followed him inside.

CHAPTER 9

INSIDE, we were permitted to conduct our own investigation, and I was instructed to put on gloves before beginning. He then handed me Kazunari-san's autopsy report.

According to what is mentioned above, Kazunari Miu died around 5 a.m. She had seven slits in her arms, but they weren't what killed her. Surprisingly, it was caused by thallium poisoning.

According to what I understand, thallium powder is used to exterminate rats in the home. It's rather unusual to have one at home. But how did she consume it? It couldn't have happened during our tea party yesterday since the rest of us would have perished as well.

"Did you come across any thallium powder in Kazunari-san's room?" I inquired.

"No, there was no poison or anything that might be used as poison in her dorm, although this village supposedly uses thallium powder to kill rats on occasion."

"Then the staff members are suspects? Which leads us to more suspects."

"That is why we need to do more investigations in order to decrease our suspects into the one main point."

With that, I began my investigation where the victim died: in the bathtub. Her body was no longer present, so it was much simpler to investigate without having to puke every minute.

Her bathroom appeared conventional, but the only thing out of place was the clock facing the bathtub. If this were a camera, you'd be able to see every move the victim makes.

Then it hit me. A *camera*?

My mind knew that would be foolish, but something in me prompted me to double-check. After all, it wasn't impossible for there to be one. I shut the door, turned off the lights, and activated my phone's flashlight. And just as I thought. Disturbingly, the number 7 had a red dot shining beneath it. There was actually a hidden camera.

"Inoue-san, I've discovered something!" I called for his attention, and he dashed over.

"What is it?"

"There's a camera in this clock," I said as I removed it, being careful not to touch the glass. I then placed the clock into a zip bag for Inoue's team to further examine.

"What a coincidence; the victim has the exact same clock in the living room, set in a location where you can see everything."

"I understand the purpose of a camera in the living room, but a camera in the bathroom?" I questioned it; it was all too suspicious.

"Someone has clearly been watching this girl." He thought aloud with his fingers gripping his chin. "I'll check if my team can find the owner or the content of this camera."

Inoue left early, leaving me to finish the investigation. Several things have remained with me as a result of this investigation.

One, the key with the wooden attachment; I know that key is important for this inquiry, therefore I must save it.

Second, I heard an alarm clock. Why was there an alarm on her phone? Is she meant to wake up? I took her phone as well as the key to look into it further.

I had lunch with the same people the next day. Yuka and Sayuri were still grieving, their eyes swollen. I chose the same meal I had yesterday, and this time it will stay within my stomach.

As I ate, I noticed Takashi gazing at me as if he wanted to say something. It bothered me so much that instead of glancing away, I fixed my gaze on him. He caught a glimpse of me while drinking water and spotted me staring at him, which took him aback and caused him to choke on his drink.

The other girls witnessed what had occurred and assisted the lad in relaxing. Minutes later, Yuka and Sayuri had plans for today and needed to return to the tea house as soon as possible to prepare for the event, leaving Takashi and me alone.

As I set my utensils down, I took advantage of the chance to speak.

"What is it?" I inquired, exhausted.

"What?" he replied as he shrugged like a child trying to hide a secret from his mother, afraid of being scolded.

"Don't play dumb, Takashi; I can feel your gaze; spill it," I urged.

The child groaned and hesitated to speak out, but he eventually did.

"Where were you at midnight?" He queried directly, and I was astounded to see him like this. He was always going in different directions, but I'd never heard him be so forthright. As a result, it caused me to stammer in surprise.

"I-I was... I was with Inoue-san," I said. His eyes widened with surprise. "But it was nothing special; we went to investigate the crime scene."

"And since when were non-police officers permitted to approach a crime scene?" One of his brows raised in suspicion.

"After observing my powers, he appointed me as his assistant investigator, saying the power I possess may be beneficial," I stated as I pulled out my ID card and placed it in front of him as proof. He was touched when he realized I wasn't lying, but he was also a bit envious.

"It must be wonderful investigating crimes with someone handsome," he added, fiddling with his meal. I came to realize quickly enough that the sulking attitude of his was caused not because he wanted to join in but instead because he was afraid of being left out.

I sighed softly, placing my utensils down. "I decided to become his assistant not because he was attractive but because I wanted to avenge Kazunari-san's death. I know this isn't a suicide, and I'm going to bring her justice."

"Why would you do anything like that for someone you just met?"

"If you were in the victim's position, wouldn't you want someone you know to deliver you justice? I know I would!" I explained, which convinced him to agree.

"Will you continue your investigation with that Inoue guy?" he inquired, his face flushed with envy.

"We agreed to conduct our investigations independently throughout the day and meet at night to discuss what we discovered in order to make this slightly easier to solve."

"I see," he said quickly, returning his attention to his food. Again, when he feels left out, this youngster loves sulking. It's charming and obnoxious all at the same time. You just want to laugh at how cute he looked but at the same time want to slap him for how ridiculous he's acting.

However, all kidding aside, Takashi can do something for me that I cannot. So, without alerting him, as soon as we arrived at our dorm room,

I threw him a pair of gloves to put on, and he caught them in astonishment.

"What is this for?" he inquired.

"Put it on; I need you to do something."

"Are gloves required?"

"Do you want to be a part of this investigation or not?" I said, and he immediately slid them on.

"What exactly do you want me to do?"

I placed Kazunari-san's phone in a zip bag for him to handle.

"Do you know how to hack?"

"*Excuse me?*"

"I need you to unlock Kazunari-san's phone so that we may examine her data for further information about what she did before she was murdered."

Without any further questions asked, the child completed his task swiftly. Not even a minute has passed, and he has already unlocked the lock on the phone.

"Wow, that was quick."

"I remembered Sayuri and Yuka talking about Sasaki-san and Kazunari-san's favorite number, so I simply utilized that and put in four sevens, and it shockingly unlocked," he snickered in disbelief. Even *he* couldn't believe it was that easy to guess the passcode to someone else's phone with little to no clues.

I was speechless but very impressed.

I understand now why the teachers adore him a lot. He wasn't just this diva social butterfly goofball who gets along well with anybody, but he was also an intelligent young man when he had to be. Just as the teacher says, *"Don't let this kid's loud and airheaded personality fool you."*

CHAPTER 10

WE began exploring each app on her phone. Fortunately, her phone didn't have a lot of applications installed. We reviewed her Instagram, YouTube, Google, and a calculator, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

We looked through her photo album, and there weren't many images as we thought. The majority of the 107 photos were of culinary recipes, meals, Sayuri and Yuka, her dogs, and their relatives.

We then looked through her Google, Instagram, and YouTube accounts but found nothing noteworthy. And her phone appears to be clean. There were no new hints.

"I guess we should look elsewhere," I remarked, quickly losing hope.

"You haven't yet checked the calculator."

"It's nothing more than a calculator app; there's nothing wrong with it."

"*O/*, something's wrong with that, all right; why would she download another calculator app when her phone already has one?"

Takashi made a point, and he was unusually attentive to these things. When I gave him back her phone, he was able to open a private journal from that calculator app. I was blown away. After all, who knew the calculator was a forgery?

We scanned every single page of this journal, and there were a lot of them! It was like going back in time to her relationship with Sasaki Ryosuke. Everything was fine and dandy until we came to page 57.

It read,

"[March 29]

Dear diary, I'm terrified of Ryosuke. Today, I was planning on preparing a surprise date for him in the cabin, but I noticed something that gave me the shivers. I uncovered a secret chamber in the cabin, and within were a number of computers with my images all over the wall.

I now see why the males I dated before him transferred schools or even perished in an accident. It was entirely Ryosuke's fault. I thought I was the unlucky one; I assumed people would perish if they stayed with me, but it wasn't my fault after all. Sasaki Ryosuke has done all of this, ruining my life.

He had always been the cause. And now I can't believe I'm dating him after believing he was the one. I considered him to be a miracle who came into my life since he was not soaked in misfortune. Not realizing *he* was the brains behind all the disasters,"

"[April 1]

Dear diary, it is almost Ryosuke's birthday, and he won't stop talking about it. I was planning to leave him before the 7th, but I'm scared to break up with him. Will he kill me if I do that? Just like his other victims, will I be next? I regret even giving him a chance and regret falling for him. I should have ignored him. But then again, would he kill me if I

rejected his confession? If I knew he was a yandere, would I have still followed the path I went through to meet him? Cause right now, I wish I never even met him."

"[April 4]

Dear diary, I did it. I managed to break up with him. His reaction wasn't terribly weird. It was like how a normal teenager would react, he wept, begged me to stay, and was left in sadness. Am I that heartless? *No*. I won't doubt myself. Ryosuke is a psychopath. a yandere in disguise. It's better to keep my distance from him."

"[July 9]

Dear Diary, it's been 3 months since my breakup with Ryosuke. I haven't heard from him, but I don't feel any guilt, sadness, or regrets at all. I feel great and relaxed. Tomorrow is my birthday, and to be honest, I'm expecting to receive his messages, but after what I've witnessed, I'm too scared to even talk to him on the phone."

"[August 23]

Dear Diary, Ryosuke was elected as the Student Council President at my university. I didn't enter this election when I heard Ryosuke was joining because I didn't want to see or talk to him. Every time I see him, all I think about is his secret room and his secret yandere personality. However, Yuka-chan was elected as the secretary. She is my best friend. Even though I'm terrified of Ryosuke, I'm even more terrified of Yuka-chan becoming a victim of that sickening man."

"[December 5]

Dear diary, Christmas is approaching, and I've never felt more excited! Previously, I would spend the holidays with Ryosuke, but now I'm able

to spend more time with my family and friends! And to be honest, it's much more fun with them than Ryosuke. I prefer singing and laughing at Christmas rather than making out and watching the same thing over and over again. I still can't believe I kissed that man without realizing his true personality. Just thinking about it gives me the chills."

"[January 1]

Dear Diary, Happy New Year! I am hoping for a great year! I went out with Yuka-chan and Sayuri and decided to get our fortunes told. I don't really believe in that stuff, but it wouldn't be fun if you bitched about what's real and what's not, right? And guess what the fortune teller told me?

I got the grim reaper card, and for some reason, it frightens me. The good news is that I'll be meeting a lot of new people soon. The bad news is that I should be cautious of the individuals around me since it will bring me terrible luck. They tell me I'll meet new people, but they also warn me to be cautious of the individuals I'm with. Make a decision!"

"[February 2]

Dear Diary, I was sent to therapy to have my mental health checked. Although you see me smiling and having fun, to be honest, I'm not feeling very well with my mental state. Ever since the discovery of Ryosuke, I have become very anxious and depressed. I couldn't sleep very well and thought slitting my wrist would help.

Although I didn't want to die, I slit my arm instead. Sayuri found out about what I did, which is why I'm here right now, despite the girls' pestering and complaining. They were really concerned, which I appreciated. I don't want them to be concerned, so I've been lying and haven't informed them about Ryosuke. Because I have a feeling that if I do tell, nothing good will come of it."

"[February 17]

Dear diary, I've been chosen as one of the lucky students who will go to the camp in Star Village. All students from the student council will be going, so no matter how hard I try, I will definitely bump into Ryosuke from time to time. It's been a year since I broke up with Ryosuke in Cabin 7. I don't even want to remember what lies inside that thing. I really didn't want to go, but the girls insisted I go. I couldn't say no to them. Plus, if they're going, I'm sure everything will be just fine and will be fun!"

"[March 3]

Dear diary, I'm back at Star Village, and can you believe it—there are students from ten different schools gathered here? I hope I make new friends and that they aren't psycho ones. I'm also staying in my old room, which hasn't changed since the day I left. The next-door neighbors are of mixed gender.

I don't know their names yet, but their personalities were very memorable! It was like eating soy sauce and vanilla ice cream together; they have different flavors but still go well together. The man was very loud and energetic, while the woman was silent and had a blank expression. I wonder if she was forced to join the camp too."

"[March 4]

Dear Diary, remember those unmatched personality neighbors? Well, I became friends with them! Their names are Murase Noa and Matsumoto Takashi. Even their names match their personalities! They joined us for the tea party before lunch, and I had a blast. Although, for some reason, my stomach hurts. I haven't eaten since the party. I hope everyone's okay and that I didn't give them a stomach ache. It's so weird; I was fine this morning. I'll check on them tomorrow morning.

A while ago, at 2 in the afternoon, Ryosuke came to visit. My internet purchase for my horses arrived, and since he was the president, he had to give us our orders. He was courteous and friendly. But all I see is a lunatic yandere dressed up as an angel. I didn't want to see him, but I also didn't want him to notice how uneasy I felt in his presence. So, I smiled and retrieved my order from him. He departed right away, which was a relief. I'm hoping this is my final contact with him."

And that's the last one Kazunari-san penned before she died. *No*. She was killed, and I have a clue who it might be.

Student council president, Sasaki Ryosuke... What the heck have you gotten yourself into?

CHAPTER 11

WE ate lunch after discovering a fresh suspect. Who would have guessed that kind, attractive ladies' man was a psychotic yandere who may have murdered Kazunari-san?

I then checked the clock application after checking the hidden journal. Before discovering her body, I recall hearing an alarm going off inside the bathroom, and knowing what time it had rung could be significant to the investigation.

Opening it, then scanning it. 6:45 am was the original time it was set up. However, the time I found her body was an hour later, therefore concluding that the sound I heard was indeed a snooze alarm the entire time. She originally planned on waking up 45 minutes before dining for breakfast but unfortunately passed away during her shower.

We decided to return to the lobby of our dorm building when we suddenly observed a small crowd gathered at the bulletin board. As we came closer, we found a sign advising us to dispose of our garbage. I always thought there would be a service janitor who would do the job, but it looks like we'll have to do it ourselves.

"If you don't want to, I'll toss it away," Takashi volunteered.

"Have you seen our trash? One person isn't enough to throw it away." I sarcastically said as I walked away. Even though we've only been here four days, who knew the two of us would be so unruly?

We went outside to the garbage disposal once everything was clean. I expected the garbage can to be filthy, but I didn't anticipate so many dead rats and birds to visit this filthy pit.

"Poor birds, why would someone do such a thing?" Takashi wondered, his tone pitched in gloom as his brows arched downwards, feeling a little sad for the animal. However, while he was feeling sorry for them, I couldn't shake off the feeling of how suspicious that was.

"Normal smoke will not be able to achieve this; has something been added to it for it to muzzle in the smoke and kill these creatures?"

"Something like what?"

As I approached the incinerator beside the garbage disposal, Takashi questioned me. When I got closer to it, the interior smelled terrible. It smelled toxic, and I despise it; it's quite suffocating.

"Noa, there's some glass poking out of this dead rat," Takashi yelled, observing the rodent carefully as I dashed up to him. And, indeed, there was some kind of shard protruding from its body. What struck me the most was that the shard was printed with a Sakura blossom pattern. It was the same design as Kazunari-san's lost teacup!

Without thinking, I yanked the glass from the corpse and took my gloves from my hand to serve as a protective bag.

"Another hint?"

"Indeed," I said, nodding, "someone must've attempted to melt the teacup." Things were going well, and with a clue this significant, my heart pumped in excitement as we were getting closer to the main point.

Midnight has arrived, and we've chosen to talk about what we discovered inside my dorm room. Inoue was perplexed as to why Takashi was with us when he came.

"I'm her dorm mate; of course I'm here," Takashi remarked sarcastically.

"He has also assisted with the investigation. Takashi is very skilled at hacking," I explained to try to keep the man in. And somehow, the persuasion tactic managed to talk him down to agree to Takashi's invitation.

"I expect you to keep this investigative talk confidential. Are we clear?" Inoue said sternly, and Takashi nodded with the same vibe in response. The man had never looked so solemn to him before, and it frightened Takashi a bit as he unknowingly straightened his back and behaved.

"All right, I'll go first." He then takes out his laptop, which has a USB stick stuck on to the side, and starts playing the CCTV footage.

"My team was successful in obtaining the video file from the CCTV camera inside the victim's bathroom and bedroom."

Every movement of Kazunari-san was captured on film. Inoue had learned from the video that the victim would cut her arm once a month, and in order to prevent spreading the blood, she would do it in the bathtub while washing in her pool of blood.

The reason for the alarm clock on her phone was because she would relax in her bathtub, and sometimes she would sleep. The alarm clock is necessary to wake her and get her ready before starting her morning activities.

Inoue had been questioning close classmates and friends, as well as anyone who had seen her before her death, to record what she was doing and who she was with last, including Sasaki-san.

"We should keep a watch on Sasaki Ryosuke; he's my top suspect," I said.

"And why is that?"

"With that said, I'll go next with what we found." I then pulled out three pieces of evidence: the key, cellphone, and glass shard.

"The calculator app on this phone is a secret diary containing stories about the victim's life from when Sasaki-san and she were dating. My suspect is Sasaki Ryosuke; we discovered from the diary that he is a psychotic yandere disguised as an angel who has a hidden room inside the cabin where the former couple used to hang out.

This brings me to the key—the next piece of evidence. The victim still had the cabin key, which we might check later to locate the hidden room. I'm sure there will be plenty of evidence in the concealed room of the victims whom he had murdered or scared away.

Next, this shard of glass, which we discovered inside a dead mouse near the incinerator. When we returned to the tea house after discovering the victim's body, I realized that the teacup that the victim had used had vanished. This shard has the exact design of the lost teacup.

The killer must have returned to the tea house to remove and destroy the weapon from the room. However, burning glass is difficult. Before it melts, it will first shatter into bits and pieces. Some of those fragments may have flown into a rodent's body, killing it."

"How about the other deceased rats and birds?" Takashi inquired.

"There must have been something poisonous in that teacup, and it blended into the smoke, killing many animals near it."

"The thallium poison had to be within the cup," Inoue speculated.

"That's impossible, because I glanced inside the cup before the victim poured tea into it, and there was no powder inside," Takashi added.

"However, the victim managed to consume the poison in the cup," I explained.

"Perhaps it's in the drink?" Inoue speculated.

"The rest of us drank the same thing; it can't be the drink," I said.

"The poison is in the ice, then?" Inoue speculates once more.

"*Bro*, it's a tea party," Takashi objected sarcastically, which received an eye roll from the detective as he sighed after in defeat.

"Let's leave the discussion here; I'll scan this shard, but please continue your investigation in the meantime," he stated, and we both nodded. After witnessing him, it seems like Inoue has given Takashi the approval to become part of this investigation. And having my close friend get the recognition he deserved made the whole investigation much more exciting!

CHAPTER 12

THE NEXT DAY, we went to the tea house, which was unexpectedly crowded. Despite the fact that the room was filled, the students maintained a calm atmosphere, keeping the quiet vibe whilst enjoying the sound and beauty of nature, which I much appreciated.

Yuka noticed us and smiled as she approached us.

"Hey, Yuka, it's packed," I remarked softly in amazement.

"It is; *man*, if Miu had seen this, she would have been overjoyed!" she said, as she softly watched the guests enjoy their tea party. "Would you guys like to dine in?"

"Can we still squeeze in?" I inquired.

"Of course, follow me!" She directed us to our seats while Sayuri poured us some hot tea. We thanked her and drank some; it warmed us up and made me feel extremely calm.

When I set my drink down to glance around, I saw a teacup with the same Sakura pattern being used by another guest. Is it back? But I thought it was destroyed in a fire.

Takashi noticed me glancing ahead of him, and it piqued his curiosity as he looked back in confusion. "What exactly are you looking at?"

"The Sakura-design tea cup reappeared, and it is now in use," I whispered. Then Takashi took another glance behind him and noticed the tea cup I was referring to.

"Wasn't that teacup destroyed? How did it reappear?"

"I'm sure it got destroyed, and I'm going to investigate it more; you stay here," I responded as I rose from my seat and approached the lady with the teacup.

"Hi! How are you?" I asked, smiling.

"I'm good; thanks for asking. How about you?"

"I'm great! I apologize if I disturbed your conversation, but my companion and I couldn't help but notice how lovely this teacup was; may I have a closer look?"

"Go ahead; I've already finished my drink."

I thanked her, then carefully took the cup and studied it from all sides. It looked just like the teacup, but with one close look, I could already tell it was only a replica.

"That design has definitely piqued your interest, huh?" the lady asked.

"My friend here adores Sakura design, but he's too nervous to approach."

"Is that so?" the lady asked, turning her gaze to Takashi, who was sipping on his tea as he turned around and bowed when he caught the lady looking at him.

"May I take a picture?"

"Sure, no problem."

I took out my phone and photographed the cup from only one angle. I thanked her and sat back down, unwilling to engage in more conversation.

"What was it?" Takashi inquired once I came back.

"It's a replica." I whispered.

"Why would the murderer replace it?"

"It had to be to conceal their actions, because *that* cup had to be the most important weapon in killing Kazunari-san."

He gasped in realization at what I theorized, because it might be correct. "We should look into it more," he suggested, but I stopped him by gripping his hand before he dashed up from his seat.

"First, finish your drink."

He looked down; his drink was still filled in. "Oh, right," he remarked as he sat back down and carefully sipped his tea.

"By the way, why was the lady you were talking to staring at me? You didn't mention anything strange about me, did you?"

"No," I then answered gently, "maybe?"

Takashi gave me a disapproving shake in disbelief but was used to my secretive behavior because he knew it had something to do with the investigation. Therefore, it didn't bother him even the slightest bit.

I was sipping my tea when I received a message from Inoue. "We have been authorized to conduct a search warrant at Cabin 7. Bring the key with you and come here," it said.

And as was written, we were known to be heading to Cabin 7, which is where I handed Inoue the key. But seeing that we were around shocked the cop. His crinkled expression showed that he didn't like us one bit.

"Why is this child here again?" he inquired.

"They're on my side," Inoue said.

"If that's the case, please don't touch anything and notify us right away if you find anything."

"Understood," we replied in unison as we entered the cabin. It was simply a standard cabin, but it was a nice one.

"Have you spotted anything unusual in the camp staff's CCTV footage?" I inquired.

"Nope, not even one."

"How about the shard's autopsy report?" Takashi inquired.

"The results aren't out yet," he sighed, hearing no progress. "Do you have any progress?"

"In fact, I do!" I proudly said as I took out the photo of the teacup design, I took a while ago, "On the day of the victim's death, the Sakura-designed teacup vanished from the cabinet; it reappeared, but it was a replica of the cup."

"How do you know it's a forgery?"

"There are seven leaves in the replica, when the original had only six. To be honest, I wouldn't have noticed the differences if it weren't for my power."

"So, to put it simply, someone constructed a copy and replaced it with the lost teacup," Inoue puzzled together.

"*Exactly!* Which leads me to conclude that the teacup is crucial to the investigation, as it *was* the weapon used by the perpetrator to kill the victim, along with the poison."

"But how?" Takashi questioned, still frustrated. "Let's leave these questions be for now; let's search for the secret room you've spoken of." We nodded and went our separate ways.

I searched around the area for any hints and got interested in a bookcase in the living room. The other members of the squad were not looking near the bookcase. Is it because books aren't evidence?

The books they got appeared to be of interest; they were about physicians' notes and mathematics. It made them appear quite sophisticated. The irony *is* that they even have novels titled Seven!

I took out the book, intending to read it. But when I pulled it out, it came to a halt halfway, and I heard a lock unlock. I followed my intuition and pulled out the entire bookcase, which opened. All this time, the least valuable thing here in this cabin was the key to the room we were looking for.

"Inoue-san, Takashi, come down! I think I found the entrance to the secret room!" A choir of footsteps rushed down the staircase, and now being face-to-face with the said entrance took them aback, filling their body with adrenaline.

They were taken aback when they saw the bookshelves fully open!

"First of all, I instructed you not to touch anything, and second, nice work, detective," the officer remarked, amazed.

We proceeded inside, down the stairs, and into a corridor before arriving in a dark room. When it detects our presence, the lights turn on, exposing a couch, table, CCTV TVs, a PC with four screens, and the entire room coated with pictures of Kazunari-san.

The photographs on one side of the room were probably of Kazunari-san's ex-boyfriends. And those who have been marked out are either deceased or have transferred schools. It was exactly as indicated in the secret diary.

"Search the whole room." Inoue commanded, and the three of us split up.

I started with the trash can, where I found pictures of Kazunari-san and him, hundreds of tissues, and a single cotton bud. The trash bin reeked of chemicals, and I quickly covered my nose and closed the bin.

I began investigating in my head with the use of my abilities. Both the bud and the tissues were clean, and I could tell they hadn't been used to clean his ear. It was instead *powdery*, with the aftermath of wet tissues.

Then it struck me. Everything suddenly makes sense to me! Sasaki-san is unquestionably the murderer, and I know how he did it. I only need to figure out how he avoided the cameras around this village that was said to be heavily secured with these CCTVs. Yet, even so, how could he have entered the teahouse if there was no evidence of him doing so?

The sound of a door opening could be heard as I placed the bud into a zip bag, and I quickly turned to the sound. It was Takashi, and he had discovered yet another hidden doorway.

I dashed up to the door and rushed inside without thinking. I made it to the other side despite the darkness. I leapt on the wall and opened it with my might and my weak upper arm. This hidden path took me straight to the tea house. The alternative entrance that had always been concealed behind the written scroll. That was it! All the clues and tactics used are now all gathered, and it now all makes sense to me.

With an excited smile, I turned to them and said, "I finally figured it all out!"

CHAPTER 13

IT was 7 p.m., and I was having a cup of tea while waiting for a buddy to arrive. I sent a message requesting that they come to the tea house at this hour. He eventually came after a few minutes.

"Sasaki-san, you have arrived!"

"Your message seemed serious, so I couldn't say no," he remarked as he sat down in front of me. "What did you want to talk about?"

"*First*, have some tea!" I exclaimed as I poured some into the Sakura-designed tea cup in front of him.

The youngster looked at me blankly, as if he were having flashbacks.

"Enjoy!" I said with a smile as I shifted the cup's handle to the left. He smiled and thanked me, then took the cup handle with his right hand, drinking using his non-dominant hand.

"Oh, I thought you were a lefty; I didn't realize you were right-handed," I said.

"I drink with my right hand on occasion," he stated as he took a sip. I grinned quietly and snickered. "What's funny?" he asked, nervously chuckling.

"You just reminded me of Kazunari-san." My words made his gaze freeze when he heard her name. "After all, she was a lefty, and I heard you two dated previously."

"Yeah, we did," he answered dejectedly, and I realized he was getting quite uncomfortable.

"Are you okay?" I inquired, alarmed, but he still kept cool and responded with a nervous smile.

"I just don't enjoy talking about my history; plus, she died, and I want to respect the deceased."

"Really?"

"It's unfortunate that she died by suicide; she must have felt terrible."

I then went silent, which he had noticed.

"Murase-san?" He softly called out, his heart beating nervously but confused with how I was acting as the silence engulfed the room for a few seconds before I spoke up.

"How did you know she committed suicide?" I inquired, and he seemed terrified. But despite this, he stayed calm.

"Remember, I dated her, and she had mental issues."

"But her mental condition began after you two split up; Yuka and Sayuri were the only people who knew about her sickness," I remarked, startling him. "Would you mind explaining?"

These sudden questions being thrown at him were making him very uncomfortable. Call me a sadist, but I loved every part of him being this uncomfortable. "Stop it, Murase-san. I catch a glimpse of her now and then, the cuts on her arm showing out a bit." He explained, his head bowed, and then took a sip of tea to help wash away the tension that was now growing between us two.

"That's impossible, though; Kazunari-san has *always* avoided you, but you hated that, didn't you?" Sasaki began gulping frantically as he averted my gaze by looking down. But I didn't care if he was uneasy. *He* is the reason Kazunari Miu died, and I won't ever forgive someone like him for doing that.

"You were still madly in love with her, but she didn't feel the same way, and you knew it; I just don't see why you would murder her."

Sasaki's stare suddenly shifted, as if he were about to stab me, and his entire aura shifted with the snap of a finger.

"You have no evidence that I am the murderer."

It looks like I've hit a spot that managed to change his aura and bring forth his true personality. I straightened my back, took a deep breath, and without avoiding his gaze, I began, "The teacup was the murder weapon you used along with the thallium powder. The day the camp began was the day *your* plan began.

You used your student council president card and offered *every single student* a cup of tea or coffee just to find out what hand the majority of the students, including Kazunari-san, use when drinking.

When you got your result, you swabbed all teacups with the powder on the top of the cups at every left angle with a single cotton bud, most likely at night when everyone was sleeping.

But, in order to avoid being seen by the campus CCTV cameras, you had *another* route that could lead you to the tea house without being seen.

And *that* was in Cabin 7's hidden room. The cabin where *you* used to hang out with Kazunari-san when you were *still dating*."

His eyes flinched softly, surprised that I even knew of his secret room, which he had thought he had managed to keep hidden.

I continued, "The next day, Takashi and I attended the tea party activities. Everyone was using their right hand *except* for Kazunari-san. *She* used her *left* hand, and the poor woman drank the poison without realizing it.

Thallium powder has no odor, no color change when immersed in water, and no taste. It also makes no difference what cup you use since they are all poisoned. You might as well die with her if you're a leftie.

Thallium is sometimes known as the "*slow killer*" since it takes hours to work.

Next, because of your awful obsession with the girl, you maintained *two concealed cameras* in her room, but *who knew* it was simply part of your plot to thoroughly study her and pick the right moment to murder her?

That's when you learn she cuts her arm in the bathtub once a month. You took advantage of the situation and made it appear as though she committed suicide.

Fortunately, Kazunari-san set an alarm clock to wake her up before breakfast in case she fell asleep, and as a result, I was able to locate her."

"You're ridiculous—" His anger was boiling slowly.

"But *wait*, there's more," I interrupted him. "You were smart with your plan to kill Kazunari-san but *incredibly stupid* with hiding the evidence; if you had studied your weapons a little more, maybe I wouldn't have been able to solve the case.

The night she was poisoned, you came out to the teahouse and washed every single cup there was and wiped it with tissues; you didn't want to risk others dying when you'd already killed your target."

Sasaki was even more surprised that I knew his every gesture as if I had watched him from the past reliving the process of his attempted murder.

"Your bin was stuffed with tissues, and a cotton bud gave it away, and it also explains how *I* am still alive after accidentally drinking with my left hand the next day of Kazunari-san's murder. I wouldn't have suspected this if we hadn't discovered that hidden room of yours."

I then added, "But *you* made a mistake—a mistake you didn't plan. One of the teacups you were cleaning fell and shattered, and that cup happened to be the one you used to poison her.

You believed that burning it was the best way to dispose of the evidence and that no one would notice one cup missing.

Another terrible error is using the incinerator to dispose of the weapon. You had no clue that two events would expose your deceit.

One, the smoke and poison combined and killed the adjacent animals.

Second, glass does not just melt.

If it were large enough, it would shatter into small pieces and potentially explode before totally melting. And it did so, killing a rodent in the process.

The last error is the items and potential evidence you placed in her room: the two concealed cameras in clocks, the cabin key, and her smartphone.

You didn't even think about that evidence, *vital evidence* that *may* have greatly aided me in this investigation."

Sasaki lowered his head, no longer looking up at me. Watching his now cowardly self-brought rage in me. At this point, I *couldn't* care less about what my mouth would blabber about and kept it that way as the rage boiled even more in me.

"Do you honestly believe you could get away with such a crime? Kazunari-san did not deserve to die after everything she had done for you in the past. If you love someone—"

"If I *love* someone... I won't let go," his voice booming, like a threat.

His entire demeanor had shifted at this point. His grin, eyes, attitude, and manner all turned evil.

"If I *love* someone, they belong to ME and NOBODY ELSE!" He began shouting.

The Sasaki Ryosuke I previously knew has vanished, and I'm now dealing with someone else. Someone I never thought I'd see from him.

"NO ONE gets in the way of my relationship with Miu! Only I get to love her—*ME*."

I was scared. I had no idea his psychotic yandere personality was so terrifying, and I had never been more terrified in my life.

"S-sasaki-san..."

"And if I don't get her, *nobody* does."

Everything happened in the blink of an eye. I was sitting on the comfortable cushion when all of a sudden, I was lying down, being suffocated by Sasaki's enormous hands, and he wasn't showing any mercy.

His grip was tight, and I was losing oxygen and vision at a rapid pace. I maintained eye contact with Sasaki, who was enraged, envious, and malicious.

As he squeezed tighter, he let out a wicked laugh, as if he was gaining pleasure in what he was doing. It terrified me that he was enjoying my agony.

"T-tak...ka...shi," I managed to say with what little power I had left. Hoping he would come save me. However, I remember. I did all this secretly without the others knowing; I guess it wasn't a good idea. Realizing I really was alone, I accepted defeat as my eyes closed slowly.

CHAPTER 14

HIS grip was tight, and I was losing oxygen and vision at a rapid pace. I maintained eye contact with Sasaki, who was filled with rage, envy, and malicious intent to murder me.

As he squeezed tighter, he let out a wicked laugh, as if he was gaining pleasure. It terrified me that he was enjoying my agony.

"T-tak...ka...shi," I managed to say with what little power I had left. My eyes closed, slowly accepting my fate, when suddenly, I heard a kettle being abruptly thrown, followed by Sasaki grunting in pain.

Women's voices could be heard, followed by several men yelling; one was to assert dominance from afar, and the other wailed just beside me. It seemed familiar, and I could hear him shouting out my name in distress, his voice cracking slightly. Was he crying?

Ba-dump

I could hear my heartbeat.

Ba-dump

It's becoming louder by the minute. Until I completely awakened to Takashi, Yuka, and Sayuri in front of me, with Inoue on top of Sasaki, cuffing his hand with the girls' help.

I returned my attention to Takashi and felt his tears fall on my cheek. As I caressed his cheek to wipe away his tears, I snickered at how he looked.

"You look awful," I remarked, causing him to chuckle, still sobbing.

"It's not the time to joke, Noa," he said, chuckling. "I was afraid I'd lose you."

"You would've been dead by now if it hadn't been for these girls, Murase; we told you to rest, and we'll deal with this tomorrow," Inoue stated, annoyed by my reckless actions.

Yes, you read that correctly. We had intended to arrest Sasaki-san the next morning, but I couldn't wait. Stupidly, I figured I could handle him on my own, so I crept out of my dorm room and caught up with the murderer. I wasn't expecting something like this to happen, and now looking back, it really was stupid of me to do so without any backup.

"We've already lost Miu; don't let us lose you too, stupid!" Yuka wailed out, wiping her tears away. I had no idea I was important to her or close to these girls. It's amazing how quickly my bond with them blossomed.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't stop thinking about avenging Kazunari-san's murder, and I couldn't wait to obtain the justice she deserves," I groggily said, which made Yuka weep even more as she approached me with wide arms. I reciprocated her embrace, and Sayuri joined in.

To keep things short, Sasaki Ryosuke was sentenced to life in prison. He is being held in a rigorous and heavily guarded prison for psychotic yanderes like him, and *I* was sent to the hospital for treatment.

It's been a week, and I've been informed that I'll be in the hospital for nearly a month. Sasaki severely injured me, particularly in the neck and throat. I couldn't speak and had to rely on a computer to act as my voice.

Inoue came to see me when I was in the hospital. He wanted to discuss my decision to continue working as a detective or not. Of course,

I declined. For the time being, I'd prefer to relax and enjoy my high school experience with a friend.

"I see," he says dejectedly. He was desperate for me to take the offer.

"I'm sorry."

"It's all right; I had a good time investigating with you, Noa."

I grinned, "Me too." As we were conversing, I saw a sudden movement behind the front door. I immediately knew who it was from the shadows and actions of the boy.

"Takashi, I know that's you; please come in," I typed.

The boy flinched in surprise, obeyed, and entered with a hesitant chuckle. When seeing one of his arms buried behind his back, Inoue could tell he was going to be in the way of something special. So, he excused himself and walked out, patting Takashi on the shoulder to give his support on the way.

"What are you hiding?" I inquired. He had no choice but to unveil what was hidden behind him, and he brought out a small bouquet of lilacs. His cheeks flushed shyly, and his heart beat nervously.

"I thought it could cheer you up a little because you like the color purple," he explained as he approached me and set the flowers on the desk next to my bed.

"I love it; thank you."

"No problem!" the youngster snickered, blushing slightly as he looked down, flustered by my sudden compliment. It made him happy; the flowers he brought made *me* happy, which placed contentment in his heart.

"By the way, Inoue-san told me you saved my life."

"He did?" he questioned, and I nodded. Hearing me mention Inoue caused him to overthink again.

"Are you fond of him?"

"He *is* a good friend."

"No, I meant to ask if you like...*like* him."

I didn't understand what he was implying, and my confusion was visible through my arched brows as I stared at him. "Just get straight to the point."

"Do you have a crush on him? A—are you attracted to him?"

"No!" I immediately exclaimed, taken aback. "Of course not; I just consider him as a buddy," I hastily typed. "What makes you think that?"

"It's just that when I saw you two together, you both seemed like a great fit, and you never smiled at anybody but me, so I thought he was special."

"So... you're not special?" I questioned, which perplexed him. "You claimed he was special because I smiled at him; don't you realize you're as, if not, *more* special than him?"

He was having doubts, and he thought about it. "No," he bowed his head, "I never considered that."

I sighed softly, typing away my thoughts, "You're the first person I've ever been friends with, the first person I've ever smiled and laughed with, the first person I've ever been helped by when I was bullied, the first friend who has slept over at my house, the first friend I've introduced to my family, the first person I've ever been kissed by, and the first guy..." My fingers hung over the keyboard, reluctant to type the rest: "I've ever been attracted to."

As he stared at me, his eyebrows rose along with his head. "You basically took all of mine first. *You* are *special* to me, Takashi."

"Wait...you were...attracted to me?" He paused, trying to take in what I had typed since he was completely taken aback. He had the slightest clue that I actually think he is attractive.

Me? Attractive? He kept thinking.

"*I was attractive* to you?"

I sighed, "Takashi, you're handsome."

"*Bro*, you're the only person who has ever described me as *handsome* without referring to me as Anpanman or Thomas the Train."

I rolled my eyes playfully. "Why do you always fool around at times like this?" I snickered, blushing.

It was strange because that same uneasy feeling had returned, and it was difficult to maintain eye contact with him again. That's when I realized this nervous feeling was something else, something not at all negative but something positive. And that was love. I was *head over heels* in love with this man all along. And realizing this brought a soft ease through my chest, and I hope to be by his side forever.

[Back in the present]

"A month later, my fiancé and I began dating, which lasted until he proposed and we got engaged," I continued, the sizzling of the pork and chatters of other customers heard in the background.

"What happened to Sasaki?" inquired one of my coworkers.

"I heard he died." I explained nonchalantly.

"Do you despise him?"

"*Of course*, he murdered an innocent woman." Nonchalantly, I replied, but slowly my look softened, "But if it hadn't been for Sasaki-san, I wouldn't have chosen this profession for myself."

"And what a terrific lawyer you are! Your first-ever client won owing to you!" said the leader, making me flush at the remark.

"And I intend to bring more justice into the courtroom, with everyone's assistance, of course." I grinned brightly, which made everyone else smile eagerly, bringing positive vibes into the restaurant.

One of the co-workers clutched the beer holder and raised it up as he yelled cheerfully, "Another cheer for justice!"

We all clutched onto our drinks and raised them while we all together cheered, "Cheers!" and the sound of our glasses together echoed through the lively restaurant.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, Teresa, also known as Rosequarts C., was born in 2001. Although she graduated with a degree in studio art, her love for storytelling began early. During her junior high years, she decided she wanted to write her own stories, starting with lighthearted fanfictions created just for fun, most of which remained unfinished. It wasn't until the end of her junior high years that she began her first serious fanfiction project.

Inspired by stories she discovered on YouTube, Teresa eventually created her own channel dedicated to sharing her written works. She continues to create and post her stories, not minding the size of her audience but rather hoping to reach the right readers who will appreciate her imagination. Her goal is to bring joy and inspiration to her readers, the same joy she feels when bringing her characters to life.

Writing isn't her only passion. Teresa also enjoys gaming, cooking, dancing, singing, and crafting jewelry with clay and resin, creative outlets that help her unwind and fill her life with happiness.