

Friday February 22nd

'What kind of manga development bullshit is this?' Ben thought, having somehow accepted his friend's request despite how ridiculous and insane the whole thing was, considering there was still a murderer out there.

Unlike yesterday, there wouldn't be an assembly for fear of another surprise, as the video did. So all the classes would be notified of Rikka's passing during homeroom... which was right about now.

Ichikawa-sensei sobbed as she shared the news, as expected of her, being one of the most empathetic people he knew. As for the rest, there were some concerned feelings in the air... too many recent deaths and surprises were very much on some people's minds.

The most surprising one, Ryujin, looked down at his desk with a complex expression while clenching his fist.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the spectrum was one Ryusei Smith, who continued to sleep at his desk as if nothing had happened, keeping up with his claim not to care about most people. *'Is it just me... or is he slacking off more than usual?'*

He stared for a moment, thinking back to Ryusei's attitude in the auditorium and what he said yesterday... if it were for him, he would have accused the fake blonde just for that, but it was all just speculation, nothing else.

He sighed, his mind running in background mode as he tried to think about what to do regarding Sakura's request. Of course, he had wanted to reject such a notion of probably risking his life for this... but her tears and broken voice were enough to kill any good reasoning to say no.

The first point to look at would be the late Rikka, trying to backtrack her steps to the beginning of the year when she started to change; it was funny how the mind worked, as he had spent days without noticing anything until the events of yesterday... now, there were memories of his interactions with her in which her behavior was odd... starting with the break up with her boyfriend.

He had only met the guy by chance in their first year of high school, and it turned out they were childhood friends who recently made it official... Looking back, her behavior was far more tolerable than in her last months.

Then, her attitude suddenly changed during the second half of January, and it was later that he learned from Sakura that they had broken up. He didn't ask for details, but even back then, the whole thing felt sudden. So, his first course of action would be to contact the guy?

Why? Because the person who killed Sakuraba and the person who might have killed Rikka might not be the same, the encounter in the hall yesterday and Rikka's threats were all he needed to think that.

There were only a few issues with his current plan... just like Sakuraba, Rikka's phone was missing; her parents didn't find it in her room either, according to Sakura.

Besides that, there wasn't much he could do.

He had considered searching for the girls in the videos, but body and hair alone were not enough for him to identify anyone. As for the boys... that was a completely different issue; they had been suspended, and subsequently interrogated by the police... everyone in their position, kids no less, would piss their pants if they were in that situation... but not a single one of them was willing to talk, an opinion that his parents seemed to encourage.

'They are already fucked, it makes no sense to stay quiet to save some dignity.'

And he was sure the other sports teams wouldn't talk either... so, in other words, he had no more leaks.

'I sure would love a helping hand with this.'

LINEBREAK

He would be regretting such thoughts now.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" he asked, seeing Sakura pinching the bridge between her eyes as she sat on the edge of her table... next to a certain blonde with blue eyes who awkwardly laughed.

"Funny, I asked myself the same thing a few minutes ago," Sakura said with a voice of annoyance as she eyed Ryujin.

Ben and Sakura sat next to each other as they ate their lunch, while Ryujin tried to get a bite.

"Your family has enough money to fund the whole school, stop trying to steal our food and buy a damn lunch," Ben commented, slapping the blonde's hand away as if he were some sort of parasite.

"Stop being stingy; sharing is caring."

"And so is our patience," Sakura commented, putting her chopsticks down for a moment. "What do you want, Tenno-san?"

He looked at her, sighing after a moment, then looked at Ben.

"My mother is thinking of stopping donations to this school and pulling me out in the process."

Sakura's eyes widened, and so did Ben's. "Can't she just do the latter and continue the funding?" His friend gave him a slight slap on the shoulder before the blonde continued.

"This whole thing with a killer on the loose and a 'sex club operating in the school is giving it a bad rep, along with her by extension."

"Sex club?" Ben asked, looking back at Sakura.

"That is how the news is calling the whole thing with the video."

'*Somehow fitting*,' he thought, already knowing where the blonde was going. "Ok, you don't want her to do that, and you want to keep attending here."

"Yeah, making friends just like that is not easy, dude. It cost me a little getting some when I transferred here."

Ben's eye twitched, knowing full well that was an absolute fucking lie.

Tenno Ryujin transferred at the beginning of the year, in January, not wasting his time making friends, or rather, acquiring fan girls and becoming the school's most popular guy... of course, his name also helped a little, as the son of a CEO of a well-known company.

"That still doesn't explain why you are here." The president stated, seeing how he had been addressing Ben more than her. "And why are you interested in Ben regarding all of this?"

Ben blinked, failing to notice that little observation. "The headmistress shared with my mother what you said about Smith... about him being the killer?"

"I didn't say that," Ben objected calmly. "I said he was the one acting the most out of place during the assembly after the video played."

Ryujin waved his hand, dismissing his words. "Same thing, different wording." He leaned forward. "My point is, I also believe that a psychopath had something to do with this, so I would like to request your help in investigating."

Ben deadpanned. "Do you know how far-fetched you sound right now? I dislike that guy as much as I dislike you--"

"Oh," the blonde looked hurt by that comment.

"-but that is not enough to accuse someone, let alone convict him."

"Spoken like a true **lawyer**-" Ryujin's words left his mouth with a thumbs up, trying to draw something positive out of it... he did the opposite.

SNAP

Sakura's eyes widened, instantly sending the blonde signals to shut up as Ben broke his chopsticks.

"Did I say something wrong?"

Ben prepared to open his mouth and chew him a new one, while the blonde looked nervous. In the end, Sakura had to interject. “We are already investigating on our side, though.” She gripped Ben’s hand softly from under the table, trying to calm him down as she continued. “Even if Smith isn’t related to this, we can still be the ones responsible for both Sakuraba and Rikka.”

Ryujin blinked. “Wait, she didn’t kill herself?”

She shook her head. “I am sure of it... However, we are not certain if the person who killed her is the same person who put Sakuraba in the grave.” Her eyes landed on Ben, who had managed to calm down a little.

He knew that look, forcing him to calm himself as he continued. “We have hints to believe so. Sadly, we are severely limited on evidence at the moment; the only lead we may have lies with her ex, whose number we don’t even have.”

Something shifted in Ryujin, who placed his hand under his chin for a moment before looking at both. “Have you tried seeing Rikka’s social media? The guy’s account might be linked in some old posts; you could try contacting him through there.”

Sakura’s eyes widened as she let go of Ben’s hands and went through her phone, leaving him feeling a little empty inside. *‘Of course I didn’t think of that; I don’t have social media.’* He thought with a deadpan.

“And what about the members of the soccer club? I haven’t heard anything from them in the news.”

“They are keeping quiet for some reason, so I don’t see any doors opening on that side.” The secretary replied without thinking, seeing as Sakura was now glued to her phone.

“Then, let’s ask Sasakibe-sensei; Mom mentioned the school was also doing their own school investigation, she might know something.”

Ben blinked, figuring out it was a good idea. *‘Especially since she’s the most likely to break under pressure.’*

“That’s a good idea,” His friend said, standing from her seat before walking to her desk. “You two do that, I will try to contact Mr.Ex.”

He blinked, and blinked... "Ex-fucking-cuse m-"

Ryujin suddenly grabbed his shoulder, getting around the table without Ben noticing. "Let her be; she's in her zone or something; let's just go do our thing."

"There's no our thing," Ben replied, getting a little uncomfortable about how easily the blonde was invading his personal space.

"It will be neat; you will be Sherlock, and I will be your Watson during this whole thing!"

"Watson was an army medic with very knowledgeable combat skills; you are a social parasite."

"See, you are even correcting me now; this will go without a hitch."

'Not happening, there's no way in hell I am gonna willingly work with this piece of this.'

LINEBREAK

"Stop scowling, your face is gonna wrinkle at this early age."

Ben clapped his tongue as he and Ryujin walked through the school's halls, looking for Sasakibe-sensei.

"Also, sorry about earlier... even though I still don't know what I said to piss you off so much." His eye twitched, trying not to answer back... not knowing if it was even a provocation or not. "While we are on this, mind if I ask you something? It's about Kaze-san."

Ben stopped dead in his tracks, turning around with a dumbfounded look. "Are you a masochist?" For context, yesterday's slap was not the first time the ace of the track team had physically harmed the blonde; the first one being a knee to the crotch on his first day in school.

"It is not like I am trying to hit on her after the first time," Ryujin defended himself. "Apparently, my very being is just that punchable for her." he shook his head. "But it is not that I want to hit on her... this time."

'Shameless piece of shit.'

"I made a background check on Smith," Ben blinked, gaining focus on the subject as Ryujin handed his phone to the secretary.

His eyes narrowed as he saw a PDF file containing an official report on Ryusei. *'This is what money gets you, huh?'*

His eyes widened a little, seeing the information about Smith's father.

Jonathan Smith, a decorated U.S. soldier who was deployed three times to Afghanistan, retired from service after the last tour, apparently choosing Japan for being a peaceful country.

"Damn," he commented, seeing many redacted pages about the most specific part of his military career. But there was something even more concerning... "Make sure to ask for a refund; there isn't a single thing about his mother."

"Because there isn't anything about her," Ryujin commented with a somber look. "It is as if she never existed; even Ryusei's birth certificate is blank when it comes to his mother."

'That isn't spooky at all...' his eyes narrowed, reading a report Ryusei had been forced into the ICU on his fifth birthday... but there were no records as to why either. "I take it there wasn't anything on this either."

"None, there's a lot of secrets hiding behind that guy, which is why I wanted to ask Kaze--"

"Don't," Ben replied, planting the phone on the blonde's chest before resuming his walk. "Whatever it is those two say about their relationship, it doesn't matter; they are as close as thieves since they were kids, apparently." He continued retelling a few of the things he had witnessed from the two before Ryujin entered school.

Like the time someone had maliciously damaged Kaze's uniform, the captain and the senpais that had supposedly done it had mysterious accidents during that week; one got her hair burned in brought daylight out of nowhere-

"Fucking how?"

Ben shrugged, guessing something flammable had been put on it; the sunlight probably did the rest.

“Another one fell from the stairs after the heels of her heels broke; she had to retire from the club after that. And of course, the one that got indigestion in the middle of class and pretty much shat herself on her way to the restroom... she retired from school after that.”

The blonde laughed nervously. “That is a lot of coincidences.” He flinched at Ben's glare over his shoulder.

“Once is by chance, twice is a coincidence, thrice is a pattern, four... I don't think I have to explain it.” He looked up front, ignoring the blonde's face. “As for Kaze... she is less subtle than you might have noticed; everyone who badmouths Ryusei received a dental treatment or a face massage.” And there was also the fact that she would gatekeep him from any girl who was interested in him. *‘That would be a woman with shitty taste in men.’*

He sighed. “My point is, the moment you try to ask her about him because you think he's the one responsible-”

“She will castrate me,” the blonde gulped, finally deciding to drop the subject.

LINEBREAK

“Break is meant to go have lunch and gossip about who cheated on who, not to come and bother me in my R&R,” Sasakibe-sensei commented, sitting in the teacher's lounge with a really bored expression at the two students looking for her. “For what reason would you come here to fuck that up?”

‘So much for being an exemplary adult.’ Ben thought, noticing the bags under her eyes; it was natural she was in a bad mood.

“I just wanted to say your breasts look magnificent today.” He looked at the blonde to his side with a mix of perplexity and disgust, failing to see the tanned woman launch an uppercut on Ryujin's stomach.

‘Definitely a masochist,’ Ben thought, seeing the boy fall on his knees as the teacher zoomed in on him.

“Goshi, what the hell do you two want? Better yet, why are you with this deadbeat?” she asked, showing no respect to who was pretty much the spawn of the goose that lays the golden eggs.

“It’s about the separate investigation the school is doing; we would like to ask if there has been any progress on it.”

“Scram,” she mildly scowled. “Do you really expect me to tell that to two ki-”

“My mother might just stop donating without warning,” Ruyjin commented, still on his knees as he groaned. “Not to mention there might also be something about assaulting a student.”

Ben blinked for a second. *‘Clever bastard.’*

Sasakibe-sensei clenched her fist, sighing in defeat as she lay back on her seat. “We don’t have shit.”

‘... huh?’

“You probably already know this, but none of the boys involved is willing to say shit. We cannot question any of the possible girls we think might be involved because their parents threatened to sue after seeing the video; they don’t want to risk their daughters being involved.”

“So, shit.” Ryujin stood up, barely. “Are adults really this useless?”

She gritted his teeth, while Ben hated to admit the blonde was partially right.

“It’s not my fault the damn third years don’t want to collaborate in the damn investigation! They all even have the same fucking lawyers!”

Ben narrowed his eyes as the bell rang.

“Go back to class, and stop asking about this; the less you get involved, the better.” Sensei sighed, leaving the room as they did... but they weren’t heading to class.

“What now?” he asked, seeing as Ryujin was dragging her somewhere.

“Sensei mentioned they suspected the third years were the girls in the video... and they just happen to have PE right now-”

“No.” Ben slapped Ryujin’s hand away, already knowing where this was going. “I am not skipping class to sneak into the girls’ locker room; what would we even be looking for?”

“Anything,” the blonde replied. “A few phones should suffice to see if there’s something that serves as a clue; we might get some luck with one.”

“I already said no, and what if the phones are locked?”

Ryujin placed his hand on Ben’s shoulder with an all-knowing smile. “Dude, most girls don’t put passwords on their shit, believe me, I know.” The smile faded. “Do you really wanna go back to Sakura empty-handed?”

The secretary froze, staying in place for a moment before he responded.

LINEBREAK

“I never noticed just how tidy and clean the girls’ locker room is compared to ours.”

“Either complain to the janitor, or your messy ass,” Ben commented, carefully looking through some lockers to not touch anything he shouldn’t. “We have at least twenty minutes before this period ends. Did you find anything?”

“Most of the phones I checked didn’t seem to have anything incriminatory, not even a naught selfie, you?”

“Not even that,” he groaned. “I knew this was a bad idea. Let’s just get out-”

Their eyes widened as they heard hurried footsteps approaching the room. He looked back at Ryujin, who had already snuck inside one of the locker rooms in panic. ‘*Son of-*’ he did the same, entering the closest locker before closing it.

The door of the room was slammed open as at least two people entered, breathing heavily.

"I have been looking for this the whole day." A female voice whispered as rustling filled the room before something hit the floor. His eyes looked down from the locker, seeing clothes spread on the ground... among them, a very familiar black jersey.

His attention soon got taken, hearing rather explicit sounds of slurping as the woman moaned.

'This shit cannot be happening.'

"Things are getting difficult... we might have to stop-~"

"Shut up, you stupid sow." This time, it was the man who spoke, but he also couldn't make up his voice at all. "I don't care if the police or the school's investigating, I will keep fucking whoever the fuck I want."

'Entitled much,' the slurping stopped as the lockers next to him were suddenly slammed before the woman shouted in delight, soon followed by the rather distinct sound of hitting flesh. *'They are so close,'* he gulped, trying to see to his side through the grid, but he still couldn't make out who was having sex in the locker room.

The only thing he could tell was that the woman was tanned, and the man seemed to be rather muscular... and blonde.

"Hurry~ Class is about to end~."

"Quit fucking ordering me, you bitch."

Their rhythm increased, their groans becoming louder as they suddenly stood still. Their breathing was erratic, but it seemed they didn't have the luxury of rest, as they both picked up their clothes.

'Wait...' His eyes narrowed as he saw the woman who had passed the locker he was in wearing a familiar red sports hoodie.

There were a few exchanges between the two, but Ben couldn't tell any of them as they finally left.

“Did you see him? Please tell me you saw him.” Ryujin stated as he got out of the locker, and Ben did the same. “It was-”

Both froze, turning towards the door as it opened... revealing the third-year girls.

LINEBREAK

“I expected this from Tenno... but not from you, Goshi-san,”

Both students stood in front of the headmistress along with Ichikawa-sensei.

“We got lost on the way to class.”

“Shut up already,” Ben growled, making the blonde flinch for a moment before the former looked at the teacher. “We were following a lead that the third years were the ones in the video. We were hoping to find something on their phone.”

“Did you?” The headmistress scowled slightly, clenching her hand in anticipation.

“I am afraid not,” Ben said with a slight scowl, his eyes looking to the side as Ryujin was about to open his mouth. “We don’t have anything to report.”

The blonde’s eyes widened, meeting the secretary’s eyes, whose glare made it clear he couldn’t say anything.

“Ben-kun,” Ichikawa-sensei approached him, giving him a look that translated to ‘I am not mad, I am disappointed.’ “I know you want to help in these hard times... but please, trust us, the teachers, to handle this.”

His eye twitched, and he forced himself to stay quiet as she placed her hand on his shoulder. “Have a little more trust in adults.”

He didn’t react, just hearing the headmistress speak before she gave her verdict. “The school is already in a hard enough position as it is... adding this as another scandal that might leak out to the public would just be adding more fuel to the fire.” She sighed. “We will speak with the third years as well... but know there will be a punishment ready for both of you.”

He nodded, seeing this as his signal to retire.

“Hey, wait!” he ignored Ryujin, calmly opening the door and leaving. “Why didn’t you say anything? We could have-” the blonde stopped, mostly because Ben had also done the same; frozen in place as another teacher approached them.

“Are you skipping class?” a tanned teacher asked, wearing a red sports hoodie as she approached them with an amused smile. “I didn’t think you had it in you, Goshi.”

Ben gritted his teeth, forcing himself not to do or say anything inappropriate... but his patience was wearing thin. “Sasakibe-sensei,” he walked past her, not humoring her in answering... his eyes lingering on the pubic hair near her lips. “Your breath smells like rotten fish.”

Ryujin just followed, keeping his smartass mouth shut as the PE teacher remained frozen, her eyes twitched a little as she took her hand to her mouth... taking a taste of her own breath; she almost threw up.

LINEBREAK

“I heard you two were caught in the girls' locker rooms. What happened?” Sakura asked, her voice laced with worry... but Ben just walked past her as he went for the book stand. “Ben?”

Ryujin rubbed the back of his head. “He didn’t say anything after leaving the headmistress’s office.” Even during classes, he just sat quietly and took notes as usual... not even when the rumor had spread did he react in any way... but the look on his face was clear; he wanted to murder someone.

“This will do,” Ben said, picking up a rather large book with both of his hands.

“Wait, what are you-” Ryujin’s eyes widened as Ben approached him with a furious look before swinging the book across his face.

“My hands are not that strong, so I won’t waste them on you.” He placed the book on the table, leaving Ryujin on the floor. “Thanks to you and your stupid idea, I am gonna have to bear the judgmental glares of everyone in this shithole.”

"You didn't have to hit me for that!" he coughed, spitting some blood on the ground. "My family can-"

"And there it is again," Ben interrupted sardonically. Yes, the situation was partially his fault for agreeing in the first place... but he had reached his limit in how much the blonde bastard in front of him avoided accountability.

"How fucking useless do you have to be to always go running back to mommy's name, huh?" Ryusei flinched, seeing the pure look of absolute hate in the secretary's eyes. "That is the only value you have in this school; that is the only reason you have managed to get scott free with every bullshit you pull." He took a deep breath. "I can't fucking wait for it to be your turn to take over; you are so gullible people will either take advantage of you, or you will bring the company your family took years to build to the fucking ground in the span of a few years."

He didn't even care if the blonde reported this to the teacher; that was how pissed he was.

The blonde scowled, standing up as he walked towards him. "Do you think I-" His words died away as he flinched at the sight of Ben grabbing the massive book again. "I-"

"Enough," Sakura stood between them, her eyes facing Ryujin as she spoke. "Leave; you have already done enough."

The blonde's eyes softened as he turned around and left the room. "I am sorry." He said before leaving the room.

"Tell me what happened?" Sakura asked, turning towards him with a mixture of worry and anger.

LINEBREAK

"Sasakibe-sensei, are you sure?" Sakura asked in horror.

He nodded, explaining the events in the locker room in detail, and then met her with the proof of her illicit acts stuck on her face... literally.

"I see why you didn't want to share this with the staff... if a teacher is involved, then who knows else from the staff has been compromised."

He nodded, appreciating someone had actually caught up on that, unlike a certain useless blonde.

“And you said the man in the act might have been-”

“I am not sure,” he didn’t want to pin it on Smith, at least not yet. “The jersey was the same, and he had blonde hair... but I didn’t see his face... and his voice also seemed off, so I don’t want to jump the gun on this one.”

Sakura nodded, sighing as she took out her phone. “I didn’t have much success on my side either. Rikka’s ex hung up on me the moment I told him who I was... I couldn’t even tell him she had passed away.”

“I guess Rikka must have left a pretty impactful impression on the guy,”

“He’s already a university student in Tokyo... I managed to figure out where he works at, I am gonna see if I can ambush him during work.”

“Not happening,” he took her phone, looking at the information of the ex. “Remember, you still have to study for your exams. I will go and pay him a visit.”

She smiled kindly, placing her hand on his. “Thank you, Ben, truly.”

He didn’t react, keeping his cool as he simply hummed, his red ears betraying him.

LINEBREAK

Saturday 23th - Afternoon

Sakura: Are you already on the train?

Ben: Yes, I will notify you if I find anything.

Sakura: Thx, take care.

Ben put his phone away with a heavy sigh, recalling yesterday's events.

Something just didn't add up with what happened in the locker room, not to mention the involvement of a teacher in this whole mess.

And then, there was the issue with Ryujin... did he regret it? Not one bit. But the consequences might come to bite him in the ass if he goes to cry to his mother. The biggest issue would be his parents intervening, and he did not want to do that if possible.

He arrived in Tokyo an hour later. Looking at the pictures Rikka's ex posted of the place, it took him another hour just to get there.

"Welcome, how many would be-"

"Saonji-san?" Ben asked, putting on a neutral expression as he noticed the waitress's forced smile.

"Yes?"

"I come on behalf of Ayatsumi Rikka, I-"

"Please leave," the waiter said suddenly, narrowing the distance between them. "I already told that bitch I didn't want any contact with that whore; so either take a seat or scram."

The forced smile was still there, but the hate in his eyes was clear.

The waiter turned around, ready to leave, only to stop as Ben grabbed his hand. "I said-"

"She's dead," Ben commented, seeing the anger in his eyes replaced by honest confusion and surprise. He knew that Saonji didn't know about her death, because Sakura didn't even get to tell him.

LINEBREAK

Both stood in the alley behind the restaurant, resting against the walls and facing each other... well, at least Ben was, as Saonji just looked at the ground with crossed arms after hearing about the events of the last few days.

"Honestly, I don't know whether to feel vindicated or sad." He sighed. "She was too forward, rough, but she was still a good person as we grew up."

"I know this is hard, but I would like to ask you about that, specifically your breakup."

He nodded. "You don't think she killed herself, do you?" Ben shook his head, making Saonyi sigh. "We used to be close, managing to find time to meet each other despite our schedules and studying in different schools, and it stayed the same up until near the end of January."

Ben narrowed his eyes.

"She suddenly started canceling on our plans, and overall not responding to my messages." He frowned. "She even sounded distant during our calls... agitated," he scowled. "I found out later why... one day, she suddenly sent me a video message, telling me she was 'dumping my ass' while she was being fucked from behind."

The look of disgust was clear on his face. "I didn't recognize the person in the video; she started calling me names and demeaning me in ways that hurt my self-esteem."

"I am sorry to press on this, but did you see who the person with her was in the video?"

Saonyi frowned for a moment before shaking his head. "She didn't say his name in it. All I could see was that he was blonde, and maybe a little muscular."

'*God dammit,*' Ben cursed, recalling the events in the locker room again. "And the video... do you still have it?"

He snorted. "Fuck no, why would I keep a video that was meant to mentally torture me?" his mocking smile faded for a moment. "I did keep it for a while though... while my mind was a mess..."

It turned out that he and Rikka had met online, in a forum with people with communication issues. Somehow, that fit Rikka, given how direct she was... and Saonji was a little introverted. '*Opposites attract one another, I guess,*' Ben thought as he continued listening.

Their relationship had started in middle school, so it was natural for the relationship to turn into something serious... but Saonji was far more than that... so it was only natural he would suffer a mental breakdown after such a display of hate from Rikka.

“How did you recover then? Because you don’t look like an introverted type at all.”

The waiter’s face gained a complex expression. “It was... a weird interaction, creepy even.”

Ben raised an eyebrow.

“I was sitting on a bench at night, a little after the first week of this month... thinking about what to do... I felt empty inside, with no will of my own, as the one person that I felt understood me just discarded me like used goods.” He snorted. “And then... the most bizarre thing happened... someone was sitting next to me, wearing all black and a hockey mask.”

“You are shitting me.” Ben raised an eyebrow.

“I am not,” Saonyi found the whole thing hilarious, looking back at it. “He didn’t look at me, not even once. He suddenly just started talking about letting things go, discarding them, cutting off all affection I had for whatever it was hurting me... that I lacked the hate to move forward from Rikka. It was so damn bizarre, because he clearly knew about my situation.”

“You didn’t say anything to him.”

He shook his head. “Not a single thing. I was too deep in thought about what he said that I never noticed he had left... after that, I just tried to improve myself, throwing away everything that reminded me of Rikka... including the video.”

“I see,” Ben sighed, a little disappointed he’d missed another lead. “Thank you, I won’t be taking much of your time, sorry to bother you.” He stopped resting against the wall, ready to walk out of the alley.

“You are the secretary in the student council, aren’t you?”

He stopped, looking over his shoulder to see Saonyi giving him a warning glare. “Yes, how did you-”

“Rikka spoke about you from time to time,” he chose his words carefully.

Ben placed a neutral expression. "I take it it wasn't in a good light."

Saonyi shook his head. "She called you naïve, gullible, easily exploitable... she even said she felt sorry for you for being so blind. And she felt that sometimes her friend was just too much, even for her."

Ben nodded, getting on his way, deep in thought.

LINEBREAK

The sun was already setting by the time he boarded the train, thinking back at what Saonyi had said.

He had thought of Rikka as a friend, but it seemed she never truly saw him that way.

'But... it is not like she took advantage of me though,' he tried to recall times when she would force him to do something... none came to mind. *'Weird'*

BRRR

He blinked, checking on his phone to see if it was Sakura.

Sakura: How did it go? You heading back now?

Ben: Feel like talking? Would be less tiring than typing.

Sakura: Fair enough, I am mentally exhausted.

It didn't take long for her to call him.

"Hey..."

He blinked, instantly noticing the exhaustion in her voice. "Damn, those books certainly made you work for it, huh?"

She snorted. *"You could say that... I don't feel like seeing another equation for the rest of the weekend. What about you? Did you-KYA"*

His eyes widened. "Is everything ok?" he asked, alarmed.

"A fucking roach managed to sneak into my room." Hurried steps could be heard on the other line. *"Done, locked in the bathroom."* There was a long sigh. *"So, tell me everything."*

One long conversation later.

"So, you think it is the same person who had sex with Professor Sasakibe in the locker room?"

He hummed. "But I still can't tell if it was Smith or not."

She snorted. *"That guy is the tallest in the school after Ubou, and I am sure he has got to have some muscles under that oversized jersey. You should know."*

"As a matter of fact, I don't. Or have you forgotten the special permissions he gets in school?"

"Ah, right."

Apparently, Ryusei Smith had a special room in which he could change alone for PE, and it even came with a shower, which was a must considering he did PE with a full set of sports clothes that would kill everyone else with heatstroke. He also had special permission not to assist any swimming classes.

"What is that about anyway?"

Sakura shrugged. *"All I was told was that he had some special skin condition on most of his body; it is also the same reason he always wears a glove on his left hand... huh."*

"What?"

"The guy in the locker- did you manage to see his body? If there was a burn or something, then that would mean it was him."

He remained silent for a second, groaning at not noticing anything of that sort.

"That answers that then... And I don't think either of us will get into a similar situation again."

"Agreed, so we have hit a dead end, unless you feel like questioning every blonde in the school."

She groaned. *"Let's just sleep on it for today. We will talk about it on Monday; take care."*

"Same."

LINEBREAK

Ben had walked these streets at night for the last year, and although it was common sense not to go on walks at night, these streets were known for being safe... or so he thought.

It didn't take long for an ominous feeling to invade him after leaving the train station; it only grew worse as he heard two sets of footsteps following him for a while now.

He was close to his place, but there was a chance they might catch up to him if he suddenly started running; he knew for a fact he couldn't outrun them.

And if he just walked back to his place, they would manage to break in before he could close the door.

'*Damn it,*' he thought, keeping his phone in his pocket, ready to dial 119... he sprinted, taking a different route as he dialed the number. His fears were confirmed as he heard the same steps rushing behind him.

"119, what is your emer-"

"I am being chased on the street!" he shouted, not leaving the operator to finish speaking. "I am at-!" he was suddenly tackled out of nowhere.

Everything happened too fast after that; he was dragged to an alley before they started hitting, three people in total, saying things he couldn't make up as he tried to cover his face and head.

"Get fucked, nerd!"

He could make up that much, and then came the blurred vision... and the distinctive sound of bones breaking.

CRACK

But it didn't come from him.

"The fuck!?" one of the thugs said, seeing one of his peers standing... with a bat full of nails cleaved into its head.

"Ugh... Ugh," the thug fell on his knees, with the bat still on its head as his eyes rolled back; blood spilling from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears before his head hit the ground.

The two thugs looked in the opposite direction from where Ben was, their eyes widening at what they saw.

As for Ben... his mind went back to what Saonyi had said earlier in the afternoon: how a tall man wearing all black and a white hockey mask had sat next to him to talk... that man was now standing at the entrance of the alley.

"Fucking freak! You killed him!" The thug, to whom the murderer just flipped him off with one hand and made a mocking talking gesture with the other.

Both growled as they charged. The killer raised his left leg, delivering a front kick to one of the thugs-

CRACK

-breaking his ribcage in an instant as he flew past the wounded Ben.

"What the fu-" the last remaining one looked back in shock, staring at the assailant, too slow to react in time to avoid the Jason look-alike, who grabbed his head with both hands. "Wait-" he tried to speak, but the pressure on his head as he was lifted into the air with ease was too much for him. "I will... talk, I'll tell who sent-"

CRACK

His skill was cracked, leaving him unresponsive before Jason dropped his body.

Ben, for his part, looked at the whole thing numbly, feeling his consciousness fade as Jason approached him slowly.

‘Dad... Mom... sis... go fuck yourselves...’ he muttered to himself, pushing away the sour memories of the past... and then came the good ones. ‘Sakura... thank you.’

His eyes closed, just as Jason knelt in front of him... his mask looking down on him.

“Fuck.”

LINEBREAK

Sunday 24th

His eyes snapped open, sitting on his bed out of instinct... only to instantly regret it the moment he felt pain run through his shit.

“Motherfucker!” he fell back on his bed, recoiling, holding his chest in pain for a moment.

He breathed in and out, trying to calm himself as he looked around... his eyes widening when he realized he was in his room despite what had happened yesterday. His gaze remained fixed on his night table, where he saw a bottle of water, some pills... and a note.

“... holy shit, I am alive,” he blinked, finally acknowledging he was somehow still breathing despite yesterday’s encounter.

He moved his hand toward the note, only to stop when he noticed it was bandaged. He paused for a moment, seeing he was shirtless, though covered in bandages, still wearing his pants.

Realization hit him as he recalled that the Jason look-alike had been the last person he saw... which meant the psycho had dragged him into his apartment and bandaged him.

‘... ha ha... so nice of him,’ he thought nervously, going for the note as he tried to calm down.

I figured you didn't want to go to the hospital, so take one of these every eight hours until you don't feel any more pain.

He looked at the pills, noticing their indications were in English. His eyes ran through the rest of the note... his eyes widened at what he saw.

'What the-'

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

He snapped, looking directly at his apartment door in worry; his mind was still on high alert after yesterday's events.

"Ben! Are you ok!? It's me!" His panic didn't disappear, even if Sakura was the one knocking on his door.

He looked around, instantly hiding the pills and the note deep in his closet, but not before swallowing one with water. He finally opened the door.

Her eyes widened as she took him from top to bottom before stepping into the apartment, carefully placing her hand on his cheek.

"Are you ok? What happened to you?" Her concern was immediately noticeable, as she was careful about where to touch him, for fear she might hurt him.

"I am fine." he took her hand in his, speaking softly to her with a smile. "But what are you doing here?"

"You didn't check the news?" he raised an eyebrow as she reached for her phone. "Three men were found near here early this morning; they are alive... but they might never be able to do anything again."

His mind flashed back to the three thugs from yesterday as he read the news; two had brain damage, and the other had a broken back and ribcage... he didn't feel the slightest bit sorry for them.

"I tried calling you earlier today after seeing this. I feared the worst when you didn't answer." She said, guiding him to bed before calmly sitting him down.

“Tell me everything that happened.”

He blinked, vividly remembering everything that happened last night. “I don’t remember.” That lie came way too easily to his liking. “I was getting home before someone tackled me on the floor... next thing I knew was waking up five minutes ago, bandaged like this.”

Her eyes widened. “For real? Does it hurt that much?” he numbly nodded, despite feeling the pill he had taken earlier taking effect almost instantly. “Let’s go to the hospital then.”

He softly groaned, shaking his head. “And have my parents be ‘worried’? Hard pass”

She sighed at his stubbornness. “Fine, lie on your bed; I will try to cook something for you.”

Ben snorted. “Now I know you are trying to kill me.”

She slightly flinched at that. “My cooking has gotten better, thank you very much.” She huffed, going to the fridge to see that there was barely anything in it.

“Ah, right... I was planning on doing groceries last night.” He said, looking at the ceiling.

“I will go and buy you something then, do not move from-”

“Don’t,” he interrupted her, tiredly. “I really don’t feel like eating anything at the moment. If anything, I feel like sleeping a little more.” He felt her gaze on him.

“Ben, I just can’t leave you after you were assaulted yesterday.” She looked around. “It’s even weirder that you woke up in your room with no memory of it. What if the person who brought you here stole something?”

“My phone is here -cracked, but still functional-, so is my wallet and my papers,” Ben replied calmly as he started to close his eyes. “I just don’t feel like thinking at the moment.” He closed his eyes, falling into a steady breath.

Sakura sighed, calmly walking to his bed before sitting next to him. She took his wrist, feeling his pulse for a moment, concluding he was really just tired from whatever had happened to me yesterday.

She went for her purse, taking out a note to write on before leaving it on his nightstand. "Rest," she gave him a kiss on his cheek before she headed out, closing his door as silently as she could.

Ben slightly opened his eyes, peering to see if she was truly gone. He heard her outside, talking with someone, most likely on a call, as her voice grew fainter and fainter.

He slowly stood up and went to the door before locking it.

He went to the closet, retrieving the note he had been reading before Sakura arrived.

I figured you didn't want to go to the hospital, so take one of these every eight hours until you don't feel any more pain.

I would also suggest stopping the investigation, but you are already too deep for that... and the people around you are not much help either.

Come to the school tonight; there's a secret passage on the back that connects to the sports auditorium... You will see how bad this really is.

Also, do not trust anyone, nor talk to anyone about this. The thugs from last night were waiting for you and knew where you were, so keep this to yourself.

He looked at the letter for a moment, trying to recall anything that the thugs had said.

They weren't there to mug him; they were clearly targeting him and calling him slurs.

Someone had targeted him... and the only reason someone would do that is because of the separate investigation he was doing; The only ones who knew about it were Sakura, Sasakibe-sensei, headmistress Serisawa, Ichikawa-sensei... and Tenno Ryujin.

He gritted his teeth at the thought of the blonde.

His thoughts returned to Sakura as he walked to his nightstand to see her note.

Don't strain yourself. Call me if you need anything.

He sighed; his suspicions of her vanished instantly as he subconsciously touched the cheek she had kissed.

His faith in the staff was already on the ground, and Ryujin was even lower.

'Either way... I will find the truth tonight.'

LINEBREAK

Black sports pants and a black hoodie; clothes he had bought under the excuse of going for runs after school... the idea died after the first run around his neighborhood.

He sneaked around the school, looking around the side where the sports building was.

'Secret entrance, dumbass'

His eye twitched at the note on the wall, seeing a moderate-sized opening in the wall that covered the school. *'If I remember correctly, there's usually some construction boxes here for renovations... just who moved them?'*

He walked through it, seeing a few red arrows stuck on the ground to guide him.

'Please... let this not be an elaborate setup... this might have been a mistake,' he had walked behind the sports building, only to find another sign that read 'Go up' next to a rather large ladder leading to the rooftop.

"Is this thing even secured... it is." He groaned after checking it, looking up as he contemplated his life choices. "I mean... it is not that late to leave..." he sighed, softly slamming his head against the building. His eyes widened, and he managed to hear voices inside despite the strong winds outside. "Fuck."

He stopped thinking and kept climbing the ladder as he reached the ceiling... only to see the same arrows pointing him toward a window in the ceiling, with a rope tied to it.

His ears caught it: the screams coming from below.

He took the rope, carefully using it to move down and land on the stands on the second floor, since the lights were on and someone might see him.

He let his chest hit the floor, moving slowly as he looked down... his eyes widened as he saw several people below, engaging in the same debauchery as in the video he had seen.

Women being railed from behind or riding someone; some were even taken by more than one man at the same time.

'Not surprised,' he thought, seeing Sasakibe-sensei take on five students at once, scolding them for not trying hard enough.

He would try to take a video of this... but the screen of his phone wasn't the only thing that cracked; his camera did, too.

Besides her, there were also the people he had been suspected of, the sports clubs, and some third years; among them, some of the girls who had caught him in the locker rooms.

But his eyes kept searching, yet he failed to spot any blonde among those below. 'Could he be somewhere else?' he gritted his teeth, hoping to find the person in charge of this mess. But besides that, all he saw were other teachers and even the security guard who greeted him every morning.

"What a waste," Sasakibe-sensei shouted, standing up and looking over her shoulder at five students lying exhausted on the ground, completely drained, with all their fluids on the teacher, some leaking out of her. "You'd better be ready when I return!"

Ben crawled back a little, not wanting to risk being seen as she walked out of the place, perhaps thinking it was time to go.

He crawled backward towards the rope, mentally preparing himself to climb up with the rope... and then the lights went out.

The moans and groans of joy from below stopped, replaced by confused murmurs, while Ben wondered the same thing: what had happened?

THUD

His eyes widened in horror as he heard something drop from the ceiling behind him. He looked back, and his heart skipped a beat as he saw an imposing figure standing behind him... wearing a familiar hockey mask.

LINEBREAK

Sasakibe let the cold water cleanse her body, groaning in frustration as she failed to reach climax. 'Boys nowadays have no stamina... except for him,' she sighed, turning off the shower before grabbing a towel... and then the light went out.

"The fuck-"

"KYAAAA!"

Her eyes widened, and she dropped her towel as she rushed out of the bathroom.

"What is going on!?" she asked, seeing other naked female students and teachers running past her. She gritted her teeth and ran toward the sports hall where the meeting had taken place.

"HEL-"

SMACK

A sense of dread invaded her as she finally reached the room, eyes widening as she saw several twitching bodies on the ground; from both male and female, staff and students alike.

"Please, I have a-" The security guard was hit in the head with a nail bat before falling to the ground.

Sasakibe looked around, seeing other students trying to get out through the doors leading outside, but all of them seemed to be locked.

"YOU."

She froze, focusing on the psychopath with a hockey mask coming at her; his voice filled with nothing but hate and disgust towards her.

“Fuck this,” she said, turning around and dashing back to the locker rooms where her stuff was. She glanced over her shoulder and saw the assassin walking calmly behind her. ‘Does he think this is a horror movie or something!?’

She didn’t waste time getting to the locker room, quickly changing into her clothes before picking up her phone to dial 119. “You have got to be shitting me!” she shouted when she saw her phone had no signal.

“WAI-!”

SMACK

She panicked, running out of the room the moment she heard someone shout, only to be silenced by a strong hit.

She didn’t look back, focusing only on getting out of the building. ‘What now!?’ She reached a corner, hearing a chorus of screams before seeing a large group of naked students and staff members who had run out of the hall, banging on a door that didn’t open.

“It won’t open!?” Sasakibe thought out loud. She gritted her teeth as she turned around, only to see Jason walking toward her. ‘*There has to be another exit,*’ she thought, running in a random direction and trying to open every possible door; all of them were locked.

“YOU DONE?”

She panted, looking back to see the psycho standing a few feet from her, with her between him and a locked door.

“What’s your fucking problem!? What’s your obsession with me!?” It was clear he had something against her, because there were plenty of other people still locked in the building, yet his focus was solely on her.

He didn’t reply, opting to just set the bat against a wall before approaching her, his fist loaded and ready.

Sasakibe snorted, seeing that she had gained an advantage the moment he dropped her weapon. She raised her fist, waiting for him to close the distance. "I will have you know, I am a former boxing cham-"

Her eyes widened, barely reacting in time as she moved her left to the side to avoid a quick left aimed at her head.

BANG

She sidestepped, managing to go around him and onto his back... but she didn't attack, watching in shock as the door that had been blocking her now had a hole in it.

She trembled, taking a few steps back as she turned around to pick up his bat in panic, knowing full well she wasn't gonna be able to beat him in a fair fight.

But she never got to grab it, as a strong black-gloved hand grabbed her wrist, lifted her into the air, and then slammed her to the ground.

CRACK

The floor broke with ease the moment she made contact with it.

"UGH!" she spat blood, feeling more than one bone break as she found herself unable to move.

"YOU HELPED TAKE SOMETHING FROM ME," he said, getting a hold of his bat before standing above her, seeing the sheer horror on her face as he waved the bat slightly.

He swung his bat without warning, first striking her legs until they were unrecognizable, the nails scarring her skin as her screams echoed throughout the whole building.

He ignored her pleas and the cries of the people frozen in fear, who had followed the sounds of her screams; he didn't care.

Her hands were next, receiving the same treatment as her legs before he tossed the weapon aside. He strangled her, moving his fist in perfect sync, accompanied by the sound of her bones breaking.

Soon, even her shouts ceased, leaving only an empty husk that had stopped thinking. Even as he moved toward her face, raising both intertwined fists, she did not react... as it fell down on her face.

Everyone watched in horror as her body twitched after the final strike.

He stood up, took his bat, calmly looked at the rest of the naked pigs who had fallen into the pool of debauchery, and then walked toward them.

LINEBREAK

Monday 25th

Ben would have liked to think it was a Monday like any other... but it wasn't.

His movements were more robotic than usual... until he began preparing lunch.

"Leave."

His mind instantly went back to the events of last night... recalling how the masked man said those words before jumping casually from the second floor to where the rest were.

At first, everyone looked confused, mocking him for trying to pull a Friday the 13th cosplay.

Of course, one of the third-years was the first to approach him, poking him in the chest a few times while the others laughed... and then hell broke loose from that moment on as the bat found its target.

Ben watched it all from above, seeing how the 'strongest' students tried to deal with him first. After that, it was a mess as everyone tried to scatter in fear, with no way out.

He thought back to the incident during the school assembly; someone had remotely turned off the lights and forced the screen to come down to show Rikka's video. The locks in the school were electronic, so whoever it was seemingly had total control of the school system.

The scariest part of the whole thing... was that Ben didn't feel bad about what he was witnessing, not one bit. People were being easily mutilated... but to him, it just seemed so natural.

'... could they be considered humans, though?' That was the scariest thought he had come up with; at least three times between yesterday and now. They didn't act like humans; it was more like they acted like animals... maybe there was something wrong with him.

In that moment as a spectator, the masked man had looked at him from below... as if telling him to leave already... and this time, he obeyed. His walk had been automatic, and he felt dull about everything as he went to bed... and, putting some thought to it now... he could say he didn't have any appetite at all.

He enjoyed the silence of his walk to school, taking a deep breath as his legs moved... because he knew what was awaiting him at the school's entrance. No, the man who usually greeted him wasn't there... instead, he was met with cars and ambulances once more, while reporters seemed to be spread all around the entrance.

He sighed, wondering whether to go around and use the secret entrance, but he didn't feel like it. So he walked through it all, ignoring the reports that bombarded him with questions.

LINEBREAK

Funnily enough, this whole thing had made the troublemakers in his class docile.

Ubou and Karen were the most obvious; the latter was a nervous wreck, looking from right to left as if the killer would jump at her at any moment. As for the former... Ubou just growled, clenching his fist... not in anger, but in frustration, as if he were weak for no reason.

Then there was good old Ryujin, who didn't even dare to look at him, frowning. It was clear he wanted to 'fix' things between them... but there was nothing to fix, since there was no bond between them.

As for Smith and Kaze... neither of them had arrived yet, giving him a little more peace before Ubou or Karen tried to pick a fight with either.

He had tried to meet Sakura in the student council earlier... but she said she didn't feel like talking.

He couldn't blame her... another video had been shared with the school and the media, one that showed all those involved in the events of the previous days.

That had been the initial reason the reporters had come, since early that morning to bother the school... since there wasn't a security guard watching the gate, they had sneaked in as if they owned the place... it was later that they found all of the wounded people in the sports building; it was then that the ambulances were called.

There were no casualties... but that didn't mean they came out unscathed; some were turned into vegetables due to head trauma, while others were too scared or catatonic to do or say anything.

But the one who got it the worst was none other than Sasakibe-sensei, whose whole body was left unrecognizable, including her face... it was clear this had been personal. Not because she sustained the worst damage... but because her brain had been left intact.

'As if someone wanted her to suffer and still have the ability to think to relieve it.'

In the end, Sakura didn't feel like talking as she went to meet with the headmistress and the remaining staff alone; she didn't want any of the council members to go with her, most likely because of what had happened in the locker room on Friday.

However, there was something that worried him. He was sure this would be broadcast nationally, just as before. The first time wasn't an issue, since the person he feared clearly didn't see it as a big deal if Ben wasn't involved... but this was already the third time the news had gotten involved. It was only a matter of time before-

BRRR

He took a deep breath, already knowing who was calling him.

He stood up, walking out of the classroom as he watched the words 'DAD' on his broken screen.

“Tell me the truth... did you do it?” He stopped dead in his tracks, hearing a familiar voice from the stairs leading to the first floor.

He walked closer, ignoring his father’s call as he peered around the corner to see Ryusei and Kaze talking on the intermediate floor; the latter with a scowl on her face.

“Were you the one who did that to Sasakibe-sensei?”

Ryusei sighed, raising his hands to her shoulders to look her straight in the eyes. “No, I didn’t.”

He stated calmly, as naturally as he breathed.