

Chapter 1

We are not affiliated with the original creators of the game in any way.

This is a fan translation of the fan game 《Shiina Taki's Decameron》which is currently out on Steam.

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[[https://store.steampowered.com/app/3269960/Shiina_Takis_Decameron/]]

[Mozart! \(Musical\) - Wie wird man seinen Schatten los \(English translation\)](#)

Description from the official page:

"Shiina Taki's Decameron is a doujin interactive fiction based on anime「BanG Dream! It's MyGO!!!!!」. The story concentrates on Shiina Taki, the drummer and song writer of MyGO!!!!! and her fight against fate till the last breath."

CHAPTER 1

Wen soll man fragen, wenn man sich selber nicht versteht

Whom should you ask, if you cannot understand yourself?

Wie kann man frei sein, wenn man seinem eigenen Schatten nie entgeht

How can you be free, if you cannot escape your own shadow?

//Sunset.

Twilight descends, umbra gradually creeps across the streets, swallowing up any shadow that crosses its path..

The silence on the streets, zapped of its vitality, is rather odd when compared to that of a normal workday.

The street's sole occupant has their back turned to the lingering glow, shadow stretching beneath as their owner remains deep in thought. //

Shiina Taki: How tiring...

Shiina Taki: Drumsticks aren't meant to be fooled around with!

Shiina Taki: And kids these days, you raise your voice just a little (get just a little bit strict with them) and they burst into tears, then readily complain to their parents! Tch! Do they want to learn or not?!

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki: ...Man, screw it, of course they aren't taking it seriously.

Shiina Taki: (It's already this late, may as well drop by the usual Izakaya for dinner.)

Shiina Taki: (...huh? It's closed?)

Shiina Taki: "Closed for a few days, due to the owner's sickness"

Shiina Taki: (He's been working like a machine all year-round, and I've never seen the old-timer catch so much as a cold, but even he... Hope he gets well soon)

Scene change

//By the time Taki rounds back to head home, the sky is nearly darkened. The chilliness of the early spring night leads her to pull her coat in a little tighter.

Passing through a dark alleyway, the sound of rustling could be heard from her right. Following the source, a shiny black cat could be seen burying its head into a heap of trash, seemingly searching for something.

As if they had a telepathic connection, the moment Taki laid her eyes on the cat, it turns its head to stare straight at her-

-- A pair of sharp, familiar, purple eyes.

Taki feels a sudden sense of unease.//

Shiina Taki: A str- stray cat?

Shiina Taki: (No, it's fur is shiny and it has a collar on, could it be a house cat? Then why...)

Cat: MREEOOOOOWW-----!!

//With its back arched to its limit, and hairs standing on end, the cat's pupils shrink into slits in terror, as if it had just seen something extremely horrific.//

Shiina Taki: WH?!

//Shocked by the sudden shriek, Taki jerks to look behind her, only to be met with nothing at all.//

Shiina Taki: (...What's with all this all of a sudden?)

//Taki turns back, the black cat had disappeared without a trace.//

Shiina Taki: (How odd... the whole day has been so odd... how tiring...)

//Despite the lingering sense of uneasiness, the chilling encounter had shocked the tiredness of work out of her system.

Too many things are happening today, yet in Taki's eyes, it was all pretty meaningless. She readjusts, and trudges in the direction of home.//

Scene change

//Taki walks up to the slope, stopping midway. Here lies one of her most frequented convenience stores. The neon blue sign emits a familiar light, one similar to home. A friendly face amongst the dark and deserted streets.//

Shiina Taki: (Speaking of which, I've already finished off the beers I bought before, and I'm running out of Nutrition jelly too. Since I'm already here, should I go and stock up?)

[\[\[Conbini\]\]](#)

[\[\[Go home\]\]](#)

CONBINI

Shiina Taki: (I'll buy a few cans of beer, I need to loosen up a bit.)

Scene change

Cashier: Welcome~ Ah! Ms Shiina, long time no see!

Shiina Taki: Hm? Isn't it a weekday? How come you're on shift?

Cashier: Ahh that girl had to take a medical leave today. I'm here to keep this place running.

Shiina Taki: I see, it seems like everyone's falling ill these days... it's not serious is it?

Cashier: She sounded quite chipper when I called her, so she should be okay. It's flu season after all, lots of people are down. Make sure to take care of yourself too, Ms Shiina.

Shiina Taki: I will, thanks. Hand me a basket.

Cashier: Hoho~ Is it a restock day? Ten cans of Asahi and 30 Nutrition jellies coming right up!

Shiina Taki: I'm not buying that much at once.

Cashier: I was just kidding~ I'll leave you to it

//The cashier settles both her elbows on the counter, tilting her head up to watch the wall mounted tv.//

Television: "... Yesterday evening, an attack took place at XX street, with the victim suffering minor injuries. The Police have now increased their patrol efforts, and will be doing night patrols in nearby neighbourhoods..."

Cashier: Whoa, things really haven't been peaceful recently.. and this street is just down the corner too...

Shiina Taki: Just these will do, could I get the bill?

Cashier: Righty-o. Hm? You're not buying cigarette candies today? That's pretty rare of you.

[["I'll just be buying beer today" -> [Buy beer only](#)]]

[["You're right, I should buy some" -> [Buy cigarette candy](#)]]

BEER ONLY

Shiina Taki: Feels like I've been eating a little too much, I have to start holding back.

Cashier: You're talking like you really got addicted.

Shiina Taki: Some people do get addicted to sugar, just like how some cats get addicted to matcha.

Cashier: Haha! What nonsensical comparison is that? Speaking of, Cats can't even eat matcha!

Cashier: And rather than holding back on the candy, shouldn't you be holding back on the alcohol?

Shiina Taki: Alcohol can't lift the spirits and also affects focus. I don't drink if I have work to do.

Cashier: Oh lord, a wild disciplined weirdo has appeared! uu, but Ms Shiina has some aspects that...

Shiina Taki: Ha?

Cashier: Your eyebags are so dark, one look is all I need to know that you don't sleep properly and stay up late consistently.

Shiina Taki: Is it really that obvious?

Shiina Taki: (Even though I cover it up with concealer everyday)

Cashier: It could not be any more obvious! Alright, I'm not going to take up too much of your time, so hurry back and get some proper rest already!

Shiina Taki: ...thanks.

Cashier: Alright then, here's your change. Thank you for your patronage~

Cashier: Ah, there's this too. A free gift for our lucky long standing customer. If you keep sustaining yourself on those jellies, your body is bound to collapse!

Shiina Taki:Oden Miso and Fried Rice bento? This isn't luck, you're just handing me something too bizarre to sell and you don't want to deal with the cleanup!

Cashier: Hey hey, this is pretty tasty you know? It's our last one, and it's going to be discontinued after today! Since you came today let's just call it fate, take it take it~~

Shiina Taki: .. fine, thanks a lot.

//The automatic doors open, and chilly air barrels into the store. The sudden temperature drop causes Taki to shiver.

She doesn't know why, she can feel a sense of uneasiness creeping up her spine. She spares a glance at the cashier, who didn't seem to notice her discomfort.

Taki leaves quickly//

[\[\[leave Conbini\]\]](#)

BUY CANDY ALSO

Shiina Taki:... I'll take a pack of cigarette candy

Cashier: Okay~ while we're on this topic Ms Shiina, I've always been curious why you like this candy so much.

Cashier: I've tried it before, a combo of sugar and flavour essence, it doesn't taste good in the slightest.

Shiina Taki: The taste is pretty bad.. but the way it feels in the hand and vibe feels like the real thing... so...

Cashier: If you really need to, why don't you just smoke a real one?

Shiina Taki: Eugh.. I did smoke in college, but I quit soon after

Scene change, flashback

//“Kaname Raana: Rikki, you stink

Shiina Taki: Ugh

Chihaya Anon: Rikki you snuck out to go smoking again? What~ a~ Delinquent~

Shiina Taki: Ha?

Nagasaki Soyo: Hehe. Then, Tomori-chan, just like we agreed upon. Taki won't be bringing you home today.

Shiina Taki: Hey!

Takamatsu Tomori:un. Sorry, but I really do wish for Taki-chan to be healthy...

Shiina Taki: uu..., Sorry, Tomori..."//

Scene change, present

Shiina Taki: Un, yeah. I quit.

Shiina Taki: (.....)

Cashier: Quitting it is a good thing, you oughta appreciate the ones who made you quit smoking.

Shiina Taki: ...yeah

Cashier: Alright, here's your change. Thank you for your patronage~

Cashier: Ah, there's this too. A free gift for our lucky long standing customer. If you keep sustaining yourself on those jellies, your body is bound to collapse sooner or later!

Shiina Taki:Oden Miso and Fried rice bento? This isn't luck, you're just handing me something too bizarre to sell and you don't want to deal with the cleanup!

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Taki leaves quickly//

[\[\[leave Conbini\]\]](#)

Leave conbini

//Walking out, the sun has already set. The street remains as silent as before. The cool yet humid air, combined with the roughness of the day, makes one wish to return home as quickly as possible

To Taki, home is that room, a chair, table and computer, completely isolated from the outside world with the help of tightly shut curtains.

The convenience store is located on a straight connecting road, with both the north and west path leading back to her rented building. However, the two routes have drastically different scenery and facilities.

If she heads north, she'll be passing by a rowdy residential commercial street, and due to the terrain, the journey takes slightly longer as compared to taking the west path.

That street has a lot of shops, but ever since moving in, Taki has been so busy that she never had the mood to go shopping. She picks the route for safety when returning at nighttime and always walks hastily, so she's actually pretty clueless what kind of shops there are.

If she heads west, the journey is shorter, but she would have to cross a construction site and a desolate park. It's rare to see anyone walking there at night, and that isn't quite a good choice for someone walking home alone.//

Shiina Taki: (Normally I'd take the path through the busy commercial street, but I'm already so tired... which path should I take?)

[Commercial street](#)

[Shortcut](#)

Soyo

Picking the commercial district after conbini

//That cat's shriek remains firm in the back of her mind, and Taki feels that sense of uneasiness continue to grow//

Shiina Taki: (Let's go with the commercial street, it might be a little further, but at least it's safe.....)

//Commercial street. The last of the Sun's rays fade away, yet the night is lit with electricity, and thus the animals have yet to return to their nests.

Unfamiliarity surrounds her, the smell of a hot meal, the gorgeous shine of the street lights.. Yet she runs back to her home single mindedly. Everything she needs is already there, and she feels like a frightened wolf yearning for home.//

Shiina Taki: Damn it.... What the hell was up with that black cat?

//Taki rushes to the side of the road in two steps. Good thing there was no rain, otherwise this story would develop into a classic tale about a wolf soaked to the bone.

The music professor's mind continues to wander as her steps gradually slow, until she ends up standing still with creases on her forehead. Looking up, she's met with a lamppost with its paint flaked off, her restlessness saved her. Shiina Taki pats her face with a bit of force.//

Shiina Taki: You're getting scared because of that kind of nonsense? You really are regressing. (The longer you live the more childish you get)

//It's past six. The lights flash twice, and finally turn on thanks to the electricity that she pays taxes for. Exactly what is there to be scared of? She's a human citizen that's well integrated into today's society, not a wild animal that accidentally wandered into a steel forest. The world still goes on, in a way she's familiar with.

Taki lowers her head, and closes her eyes. Since she's managed to gather her wits, there's no more point to staring at that LED, she should continue moving forward.

Of course there was another reason, the bulb was just a little too dazzling.//

???: What are you doing?

Shiina Taki: Ge, So-

//A voice she couldn't be more familiar with, though it was the business version.

But no matter how familiar that voice was, the unsociable Taki was not quite willing to call out the wrong name in the middle of the street.//

???: How are you spacing out on the street?

Shiina Taki: ... Soyo

//Luckily, this hassle of a woman didn't come out from a strange sign, confused imagery or was a figment of mysterious "intuition". High heels, a woman's blouse, a ridiculously expensive jacket... This person definitely belonged to this normal reality.

Shiina Taki suddenly really wants to be the first to speak.//

Shiina Taki: You're not taking the car today?

//The woman by the name of Soyo creases her brow, before following the conversation.//

Nagasaki Soyo: The car's over there, I just came here to buy some necessities .

//Taki nods her head. Then promptly ran out of things to say.

It's not that she really couldn't think up a topic, but since it was just a meeting of happenstance, Soyo doesn't have time to listen to her lecture on bands.

She doesn't know why, but her face felt a little cold. The topic was successfully diverted, and she hopes Nagasaki Soyo has some intention to let her go.//

Nagasaki Soyo: I thought you'd be eating at the Izakaya, Raana chan said she saw you there 4 days in a row.

//Kaname Raana, and that unfamiliar cat... has her intuition really become this useless?

Taki lifts her hand to touch her face unconsciously. It's cold, yet dry.//

Shiina Taki: When did she... she actually replied to you? In full, coherent sentences?

Nagasaki Soyo: Just send a few more questions to follow up, then piece together the replies. It isn't hard to grasp what she wants to say. We've known each other for so long, so it's a bit easier to understand her actions. Try keeping in contact a bit more, and not just for work.

//Taki doesn't answer. It's only natural to keep in contact with your friends... then again she doesn't have much of a life to talk about.

To be able to dump a load of text into the group chat like Chihaya Anon seven days a week for seven years in a row is also a talent. Also, doesn't Soyo also not reply to those messages often?

The air reverts back into silence. Taki can feel Soyo's gaze turning towards the bag in her hand, so she lifts it slightly, the logo on the bag spinning half a turn at the force.

Rain.

Taki's intuition has yet to fail, it's just that there was no way for the rain to reach the place where Nagasaki Soyo was standing. which was just by the street.

Forced by the wave of people, she was squeezed under the space under the awning.

The only good news is, there's no need to think of a topic anymore.

No animal likes their fur getting wet, even if what covers their body now wasn't the fur they were born with. This is their privilege as human beings, the trade off being they could no longer smell the humidity of the rain

.....Does she(Soyo) still hate the rain?//

Nagasaki Soyo: I have umbrellas in my car, let's go.

Shiina Taki: Right.

The asphalt hides the tracks of the shoes, but not those of high heels. The owner of this fancy vehicle was supposed to rest her eyes in the back seat, as this elegance needs to be maintained somehow- - but today's acquired elegance easily melts away in the rain.

When Shiina Taki reached the side of the car, its owner was still five steps behind her. The professional driver waiting within hears the motions, turns their head, and yet meets with a face, where under the shadow was terribly pale. The young driver immediately leans back into the seat.//

Shiina Taki: (.... am I really that scary?)

Nagasaki Soyo: Front passenger seat, in the glove compartment!

//In just an instant, the rain starts to pour even harder.

Seeing their employer's face, the driver finally starts to relax. The car door beeps open, Shiina Taki leans in, ignoring the panicked gaze of the young employee as she digs into the property belonging to her old friend in the back seat.//

Shiina Taki: White, Grey, Pink, Yellow..... Black.

Shiina Taki: What kind of person would prepare so many umbrellas? Are you preparing to make a man-made rainbow?

//Seemingly unconsciously, Taki takes out the final black umbrella. Her lighthearted mood and need to thank makes her turn her head to Soyo, yet what she bumps into is an empty gaze.

Intuitively, she feels it's probably not the best time to tell her untested, yet honest joke.

It's not hard to understand, she and Soyo both have things they are too embarrassed to admit to. Even if they aren't bad things per se, for example: Caring, caring and well, caring.

But she already opened her mouth, not saying anything now would make her look too silly. Shiina Taki grips the umbrella's handle, spinning it half a turn and finally clamping it at her waist, as if she was sheathing a sword.

This joking mood came quickly and unexpectedly, yet it took its time to leave. In this quiet atmosphere, Taki feels like getting under her skin.

Shiina Taki: The rain is still pretty heavy, mind if I hitch a ride?

Nagasaki Soyo:

Nagasaki Soyo: Apologies, I still have a meeting tonight, it's a bit too..

//The joke fails. Though the downpour was strong enough to drown out the night sky, Shiina Taki really didn't have much of an intention of having someone send her home.

There's a lot of ways to solve this issue, such as taxis, trains, etc. Even just braving the storm. One soaking downpour home isn't much of an issue for a 23 year old.

But an honest yet embarrassed rejection makes her just a little sad.

Cigarette Candy

[//In one's lowest moments, the easiest emotion to make its way out is care. The plastic digs into the skin of her left arm, and Shiina Taki decides to take some weight off herself. There's someone here who probably won't have a full meal tonight.//

Shiina Taki: Candy, it's not a real cigarette. Make do with this if you're hungry.

Nagasaki Soyo:thanks.]

Unfolding and lifting it in a smooth motion, the umbrella's surface is weaved in a way that makes it completely opaque. Taki can't be bothered to figure out how much it cost.

The car starts, and she waves her farewell to that short meeting. The warmth she stole from that small interior is immediately scattered away by a chilly gust. The wind was cold, the rain was wet, and she was an ember that had yet to be smothered.

Shiina Taki: Let's hurry back.

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, she never thought about letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.
This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practised it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

//The exhaustion leads her to lean back into the chair, and slowly, she shuts her eyes. Her mind fights off the shackles of the outside world and slowly gives in to her body's operations. (t/n not too sure about this one)

Shiina Taki: (.....)

Checking the digital clock on the table, two hours have passed. Not long for slumber, but it was enough to shake off the dizziness and weakness that comes from lack of sleep.

Despite some difficulty, Taki manages to stand up, with both her back and waist aching in protest. Having endured the cold sweat that left her in body in an uncomfortable chill, she couldn't help but shudder.//

Shiina Taki: (I haven't caught a cold, have I?)

//She quickly checks her forehead, and feeling nothing off, Taki sighs in relief//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, I should grab a shower and change out of these clothes.)

//Taki stands up in a rush, and feels like she stepped on something, it felt cold, and crunchy.

She looks down, it was a half drunk can of beer she left on the table two days ago, she had no clue when that had rolled to the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (... This day "really" sucks.)

//Letting out a long sigh, she patiently cleaned up the mess with some paper towels. Taki takes off her rain sodden jacket and hangs it on the chair, then heads towards the bath. //

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling onto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning on her equipment as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.//

Nagsaki Soyo: "Did you get back yet? I'm really sorry I wasn't able to send you back... an umbrella definitely isn't strong enough for that type of rain, remember to take a bath when you get back, and remember to dry your hair."

Nagasaki Soyo: "You should drink something hot as well. Ginger tea, cocoa works too. Don't catch a cold. No rush in returning the umbrella, just hand it over the next time we meet."

Nagasaki Soyo: "Also. Coffee isn't on the list."

Shiina Taki: She sure does type a lot.

//Guiltily, the composer reaches for the half drunk beverage on her table. Not only was it cold, it was also coffee.

Feeling terribly exposed, Taki can feel the cold sweat run down her back. and goosebumps starting to form. Caught, she comes up with a more daring idea: How about I don't reply? I'll just expose myself further replying at this time.//

Shiina Taki: Hai

Shiina Taki: "Got it, you too."

//Raging thunderstorm? Settling her debts? That will all be for tomorrow. Answering messages in time is the first priority for the rest of her life.

Taki was seemingly invigorated by her bandmate's message.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

Chapter 1, End.

Picking the shortcut after conbini

Shiina Taki: (It might be a bit late.. but I'm carrying a bag of beer and so damn tired... I'll take the shorter path today.)

//The west side used to have an old commercial district, but less and less people visited, in the end it was supposed to be torn down and rebuilt, but that's been paused due to the economy.

Lined with empty, unfinished houses, not to mention the frequent gathering of vagrants, it was rare to see anyone passing through this late at night.

The beer in the bag lets out rattling from their knocking, worried about disturbing the neighbours, Taki puts extra focus on balancing the bag in her hands.

..but thinking back to the news she happened to overhear in the shop, she silently picks up her pace.//

//Spying her house in the corner of her eye, Taki lets out a small sigh of relief.

Though taking a closer look, she suddenly realises that there seems to "something" nearby, filling her with a sense of confusion.//

Shiina Taki: (... did someone dump their trash here?)

Shiina Taki:(No, could it be a person? Squatting? Who would be here at night- ...eh?)

//Seemingly having heard the footsteps, the other party quickly pulls themselves out, revealing that head of extremely recognizable white hair.//

Shiina Taki: Str... Ra- Raana!? What are you doing here so late!!

//Raana stands up, turning back to look at Taki who came running over, and slightly tilts her head in greeting.

Then she points to the shrubs she was buried in, the hole she made still fully visible.//

Kaname Raana: There was a cat. Probably.

Shiina Taki: Ha..? Lots of strays roam around here, maybe they're being fed by the neighbours... no no no that's not the issue, why are you here so late?? What about school?

//It's not the first time Raana's come to her house at a moment's notice.

However she's been facing a problem known as 'graduating college' and was saddled with work, so she hasn't been over since Taki moved houses.//

Kaname Raana: School's at school.

Shiina Taki: You really.. I'm telling you if you don't get those credits you'll be hel-

Kaname Raana: Conbini? What did you buy? Give me matcha cake.

Shiina Taki: Oi!! Don't dig through so haphazardly, there's nothing for you to eat, I didn't buy any matcha cake today!! The bag's going to rip— !

[If you didn't buy the cigarette candy]

Kaname Raana: Beer, beer, beer, jelly, jelly, ah, bento!

//-- The Oden Miso and Fried rice bento has been found.//

Kaname Raana: (silently shoves it back)

Kaname Raana: There's nothing to eat.

Shiina Taki: I've already said there was nothing, what's the point of you getting disappointed. Well, if you really need to eat something, the jelly..

Kaname Raana: Don't want it.

Shiina Taki: Fine!

[If you did buy the cigarette candy]

Kaname Raana: Beer, beer, beer, jelly, jelly, ah, candy!!

//Raana digs out a box of cigarette candy from the pile aof beer, with Taki having no choice but to allow it, she cracks open the packages and puts a stick of it in her mouth at lightning speed-

Immediately showing an unhappy, extremely bitter face.//

Kaname Raana: Too sweet. Not tasty.

Shiina Taki: I knew it... it's not even matcha why are you in such a rush. Arlight, spit it out if you don't want it.

//Raana shakes her head, crunching it underneath her teeth twice before swallowing it with a frown.

Kaname Raana: It's because Rikki is slow, I got hungry.

Shiina Taki: Ha.. I didn't even know you were coming, if you had told me earlier.. Eh, fine, so why were you looking for me? Did you need something?

Kaname Raana:

//She doesn't know how, but Taki manages to catch a faint uneasiness from Raana.//

Kaname Raana: Rikki, is a drummer.

Shiina Taki: Ah, well... yeah. (What's with this hesitation, could the lack of practice sessions be making this guy uneasy...)

Kaname Raana: Classmate, is learning drums. They watched a MyGO!!!! performance, enjoyed it, wanted the drummer's autograph.

Shiina Taki: My.. Autograph? I'll give it to you, but you really took a trip just for this?

Shiina Taki: I could just pass it to you next practice no?

Shiina Taki: (But next practice... when would that be?)

Kaname Raana: Next time, don't know when. So, give it now.

//Raana reaches her hand out to Taki.//

Shiina Taki: ... You're saying all that, but where am I going to sign? I can't sign your hand, you know?

Kaname Raana: ?

Shiina Taki: I give... just wait here a moment, I'll take some paper for you

Kaname Raana: Can't you give it now?

Shiina Taki: With what?! If you're looking to grab a signature you should prepare something.

Kaname Raana: Then leave it.

Shiina Taki: Ah, no it's, just wait for a minute or so and it'll be done, you're just gonna leave?

Shiina Taki: Then your classmate... hey! Wait, it's getting late so I'll walk you back-

Kaname Raana: Next time.

//Raana heads towards the station without so much as a glance back.//

Shiina Taki: Next time is... pe, make sure to tell me when you get home! Make sure you remember!! Do you hear me!

//Raana gives Taki a small wave, quickly disappearing down a street corner.//

Shiina Taki:she left.

Shiina Taki: Hu, really, what did she even come here for...

Shiina Taki: (Autograph for a friend, she said... thinking about it I feel like she's mentioned this before?)(Mm, I can't quite remember.)

//For a moment, Taki suspects that Raana was just using that as an excuse.//

Shiina Taki: (That kid... she wouldn't have something weighing on her mind, right?)

/"Flashback

Kaname Raana: Conbini? What did you buy? Give me matcha cake.

Return to present"//

Shiina Taki: (.... like the stray cat could have any concerns, I'm overthinking it,)

//Taki regrips the heavy plastic bag in her hands, prepared to walk towards the front door-

A shadow suddenly pops out from the hole Raana had just made, tunnelling towards her. Startled, she drops the bag in her hands, the cans of beer rolling out to the ground.//

Shiina Taki: Wah! Wh- What was that!?

//--Before her eyes, is a cat. Its fur black, its eyes purple.

The same cat Taki saw not too long ago.//

/The black cat stands, unmoving. Staring straight at her, Taki can feel a chill going down her spine from the intensity.//

Shiina Taki: (Too familiar, this pair of eyes, it is way too familiar, what exactly is it--)

//Then, the black cat, smiles.

Perhaps it revealed its fang because it felt threatened, or it simply opened its mouth to yawn. Even Taki doesn't know how she managed to read the expression of this cat from its eyes, when its body had blended in with the darkness of the night.

But she's certain. That this cat looked at her, and smiled.//

Shiina Taki: You.....

//Just as her words were coming out, she suddenly felt coldness at the tip of her nose. Taki reaches up to wipe her face, then the cold starts repeatedly hitting her palm, her hair..

A sudden rain. When Taki looked back, the black cat had left without a trace.

The rain was harsh, hitting the ground at fast speeds, rippling on the ground. The rain of early spring was frighteningly cold, shocking her systems awake, Taki desperately picks up the cans, and rushes towards the door.//

//Inserting the key, twisting, then removing it.

She pulls the handle, entering sideways, using the gap to check her surroundings and only after making sure no one followed her, Taki gently shuts the door.

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, and she's never thought of letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.

This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practiced it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Overcome by her exhaustion, she leans back, her eyelids fluttering shut. Her brain immediately throws off the shackles of the outside world, focusing only on operating her body.//

Shiina Taki: ...

.....

//Two hours of sleep wasn't long, but it was enough to shake off the dizziness and weakness that comes from lack of sleep.

Despite some difficulty, Taki manages to stand up, with both her back and waist aching in protest. Having endured the cold sweat that left her in body in an uncomfortable chill, she couldn't help but shudder.//

Shiina Taki: (I haven't caught a cold, have I?)

//She quickly checks her forehead, and feeling nothing off, Taki sighs in relief//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, I should grab a shower and change out of these clothes.)

//Taki stands up in a rush, and feels like she stepped on something, it felt cold, and crunchy.

She looks down, it was a half drunk can of beer she left on the table two days ago, she had no clue when that had rolled to the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (... This day "really" sucks.)

//Letting out a long sigh, she patiently cleaned up the mess with some paper towels. Taki takes off her rain sodden jacket and hangs it on the chair, then heads towards the bath. //

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling onto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning her equipment on as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.//

"Check Raana's message"

Kaname Raana: "1"

Shiina Taki: This guy.. She's already home, why can't she just report that she made it home safely?

Shiina Taki: Whatever, it's still an improvement.

//After some thought, Taki uses a Panda sticker to reply with, "OK'./

Shiina Taki: (Stray cat always has her phone on silent, so this shouldn't disturb her sleep.)

//Taki was seemingly invigorated by her bandmate's message.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -
the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

Chapter 1 end

GO HOME

Shiina Taki: (It's fine... I don't quite feel like buying anything today.)

Shiina Taki: (I'll come back another day.)

//Walking onwards, the sun has already set. The street remains as silent as before. The cool yet humid air, combined with the roughness of the day, makes one wish to return home as quickly as possible

To Taki, home is that room, a chair, table and computer, completely (shut) from the outside world with the help of closed curtains.

The convenience store is located on a straight connecting road, with both the north and west path leading back to her rented building. However, the two routes have drastically different scenery and facilities.

If she heads north, she'll be passing by a rowdy residential commercial street, and due to the terrain, the journey takes slightly longer as compared to taking the North path.

That street has a lot of shops, but ever since moving in, Taki has been so busy that she never had the mood to go shopping. She picks the route for safety when returning at nighttime and always walks hastily, so she's actually pretty clueless what kind of shops there are.

If she heads west, the journey is shorter, but she would have to cross a construction site and a desolate park. It's rare to see anyone walking there at night, and that isn't quite a good choice for someone walking home alone.//

Shiina Taki: (Normally I'd take the path through the busy commercial street, but I'm already so tired... which path should I take?)

Commercial street Shortcut

Picking the commercial district without going conbini

//That cat's shriek remains firm in the back of her mind, and Taki feels that sense of uneasiness continue to grow//

Shiina Taki: (Let's go with the commercial street, it might be a little further, but at least it's safe.....)

Scene change, running through street

//The moon gradually peeks out from behind the clouds..

The overcast skies slowly sink towards the ground, and the surroundings begin to leech an earthy smell.

Taki picks up her pace.

As she nears the end on the long commercial street, rain begins to fall mercilessly.

The rain was harsh, hitting the ground at fast speeds, rippling on the ground.

Even if she left the street, there were still ways to go before she would reach her home, it wouldn't be realistic to run home in one breath.

Without any choice, Taki quickly ducks into a nearby tea house-//

Shiina Taki & Passerby: Oof-

//Taki bumps into a passerby rushing out from the restaurant, landing both of them on the floor.//

Shiina Taki: Tch, the doors open pretty wide, can't you watch where you're going?

Passerby: Hey YOU were the one that rushed in okay?! Aaah, my precious upright nose... that hurt like hell!

Shiina Taki: (This annoying voice... sounds so familiar.)

//The roaring downpour muffled the voice just enough, and Taki wasn't going to ask for confirmation.

The person grumbled as she bent down to collect the items that dropped from their sling.

Well, Taki "was" at fault too. So she too squatted down to help.//

Passerby: Keys, lipstick, selfie stick, membership card..... one of my eyelashes also fell-- Argh--!

//With her vision probably obscured by the sunglasses she wore, this passerby did not notice the sign right behind her. The moment she tried to get up from her half squat position, her bent back slams straight into the bottom of the sign. This passerby who had just got up from a fall just moments ago, is back to falling on their ass again.//

Shiina Taki: Hey, you okay?

//Taki rushes towards her, reaching a hand out.

This is the first time she takes a proper look at the person, and she realises-

-- Under those cap and glasses, was a head of annoyingly pink hair.//

Shiina Taki: Ha ?!

Shiina Taki: Chihaya Anon?!?

//She strengthens her grip, pulling the passerby up in one go.

Now that they were both up, Taki was even more certain

The other party stares at the familiar face, blinking twice behind her sunglasses with only one fake lash on, then--//

Chihaya Anon: ---AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!

//Like a dog that just got its tail stepped on, Anon jerks away to hide.//

Shiina Taki: You're way too loud! Hey, be careful!!

//Taki rushes, wrapping her arm around the other's waist, preventing a third fall.//

Shiina Taki: Take a closer look at who I am..

Chihaya Anon: Ahhhh!!!!

Chihaya Anon: It's Rikki ---- !!!!!

Shiina Taki: You are SO loud!!!!

//Other passersby who also went under the same roof to hide from the rain glanced at them with puzzled expressions.

In an awkward panic, Taki whispers apologies to the other pedestrians while dragging Anon into the shop.//

Chihaya Anon: Hey hey hey, Rikki be gentle

Chihaya Anon: My clothes are going to be crumpled because of you.

Shiina Taki: I thought I said to lower your voice.

Shiina Taki: Seriously, what's with you all of a sudden!

Chihaya Anon: Running into Rikki without any mental preparation this late at night is as scary as encountering one of the ten urban legends, no, it's more like the fear that runs down your spine when you end up bumping into your teacher anywhere outside of school ahhhhhhh---

Shiina Taki: If you have a problem with me just tell me.

Shiina Taki: Ha... so what are you doing here so late?

Shiina Taki: Isn't it almost time for your str-

Shiina Taki: ugh, no its too late.

Chihaya Anon: This tea restaurant is a recently opened chain. I've eaten this in London before, so I thought I'd do a stream reminiscing my old memories of England~~

Shiina Taki: That'd just be throwing cold water on the topic.

Chihaya Anon: Well... wait! Stream! Rikki, what time is it now?? I think my phone shut off when I dropped it just now--

//Taki turns her phone on once more with a click, lifting and flashing those numbers in Chihaya Anon's face.//

Chihaya Anon: Ahhhhh!

//Taki instinctively covers her ears.//

Chihaya Anon: Rikki I'm almost out of time!! We'll catch up next time!

Chihaya Anon: If I keep running and don't look back - - alright, there should be--

//Without waiting for Taki to reply, the pink thing that appeared with the wind, also disappeared like the wind, running into the dampened streets, taking away with her that boisterous nature and annoying voice, leaving Taki in the remaining silence. ([[T/n note:noise -> tn noise]])//

Chihaya Anon: I'll see you at practice----Rikki--!

//Taki turns, walking to where she last saw Anon. She gazes at the, now blurry, night sky.//

Shiina Taki: (Next practice huh... when will that be)

//The rain has almost stopped, but Taki feels colder than ever.

Her mind wanders, Taki no longer in touch with the mortal realm, just as she was about to sink into depression, the screen that had been slumbering suddenly lights up, followed by a special ringtone and vibration, bringing its owner back from the dark.

Lifting up her phone, the notification was from a video streaming platform.//

【You have notifications from Anon Tokyo's stream, which will start in 30 minutes, please be prepared before it starts.】

//Taki looks back at the restaurant.

The restaurant that was filled with people was now filled with empty seats instead.

The rain has stopped, and people have left this temporary shelter to return home.//

Shiina Taki: It's time for me to head home.

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

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Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

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Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practiced it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

//The exhaustion leads her to lean back into the chair, and slowly, she shuts her eyes. Her mind fights off the shackles of the outside world and slowly gives in to her body's operations. (t/n not too sure about this one)

Shiina Taki: (.....)

[[Wake up]]

NORTH WAKE UP

//Waking up, it was neither day nor night, and her only sense of time came from the clock hanging on the wall. Two hours of sleep wasn't long, but it was enough to shake off the dizziness and weakness that comes from lack of sleep.

Despite some difficulty, Taki manages to stand up, with both her back and waist aching in protest. Having endured the cold sweat that left her in body in an uncomfortable chill, she couldn't help but shudder.//

Shiina Taki: (I haven't caught a cold, have I?)

//She quickly checks her forehead, and feeling nothing off, Taki sighs in relief//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, I should grab a shower and change out of these clothes.)

//Taki stands up in a rush, and feels like she stepped on something, it felt cold, and crunchy.

She looks down, it was a half drunk can of beer she left on the table two days ago, she had no clue when that had rolled to the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (... This day "really" sucks.)

//Letting out a long sigh, she patiently cleaned up the mess with some paper towels. Taki takes off her rain sodden jacket and hangs it on the chair, then heads towards the bath. //

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling unto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

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During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.//

"Check Anon's message"

Chihaya Anon: It's so rare to run into Rikki... too bad it was such bad timing! Otherwise I'd love to stay with Rikki a little longer! When will we meet again? Can't wait for our next practice (\geq $\omega \leq$)/

Chihaya Anon: Just to mention but that restaurant's new item is suuuuper good! Do you think we could go there after our next practice session ends? Looking forward to it
($> y <$)

Chihaya Anon: PS: Halfway back it started raining again, don't know if Rikki got wet or not-- You had better get caught in the rain! Otherwise I'd be the only one soaked and that's way too pitiful. I almost didn't make it for the stream!

Chihaya Anon: PS:PS: Remember to take a warm bath, don't get lazy just because you live alone

Shiina Taki: This guy... talks way too much.

Shiina Taki: Eug,why is there a selfie- NOBODY WANTS TO SEE YOUR POST BATH PICS!

Shiina Taki: I knew bumping into her wouldn't be anything good

//Grumbling, Taki stares at the wall of text on her screen for a while, finally choosing to reply with a stern Panda emoticon, with the caption "Don't be late to our next practice'//

Shiina Taki: (Though I really want to tease her, but I think I should keep it a secret I watched that stream of hers, where she had messed up make-up while soaked to the bone.

//Taki was seemingly invigorated by her bandmate's message.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

Chapter 1 end

Picking the shortcut without going conbini

Shiina Taki: (I'm already so tired, I'll take the shorter path this time. There will be no issue if I I rush back...)

//Gradually, the dusk paints over the sky as hasty footsteps from the abandoned commercial district currently undergoing redevelopment fade into nothing. Her yearning for a hot shower and her bed makes the already short distance seem even shorter, and as such, Shiina Taki walks even faster towards her home.

Shiina Taki: After this small park, I'll almost be home.

//She is relieved at this fact.

The warm glow of the evening is slowly fading, reaching that fleeting moment where the lamps on either side of the road remain unlit while the night begins its descent.//

Shiina Taki: (If those few hours before dusk are when people encounter spirits and deities, then this period of time is definitely when people encounter weirdos.)

//Taki remains on guard while eyeing her surroundings. Even though she's already left the abandoned commercial district littered with vagrants, the approaching park is desolate, and isn't exactly safe to walk past at night.

Suddenly, the memory of speaking to a police officer in the middle of investigating a case resurfaces in her mind.

As she has to ensure that every child has been picked up by their guardian, Taki gets off work later than most. After running the entire way home, more often than not, the sun has already set.

Every household has already had dinner, those who have to rest are in bed, those who go for late night walks have already set off, leaving not even a shadow of a person in these streets. However, today is different.//

Shiina Taki: (Who's that standing under the streetlamp...)

Shiina Taki: (The police? At this hour?)

Shiina Taki: (...I'll just walk around them.)

Officer: Excuse me, Miss. Please wait a second.

//The officer was dressed in a black raincoat, his build large enough to almost entirely obstruct the light of the streetlamp.//

Officer: Do you live in this area?

Shiina Taki: Ah, I do.

Officer: Were you at home around 8 last night?

Shiina Taki: I was...

Officer: At that time, was there any unusual activity outside?

Shiina Taki: (I was preparing a lesson at the table the entire night, and i had Masatoshi Mashima's 《Hito ni wa Sorezore Jigou ga Aru》on loop the entire time.)

Shiina Taki: I apologize, I was wearing headphones then, so I was completely oblivious to any activity outside.

Officer: In that case...

Shiina Taki: Did anything happen?

Officer: There was an attack in this area recently.

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki: The victim... Are they fine?

//The officer makes way for Taki to pass.//

Officer: It was just a small arm injury. But, I heard that it was a musician, so it can't really be considered as 'fortunate' in this case.

Shiina Taki: (A musician? Can someone really be that unlucky?)

//Likely to ease the worries of the unhappy residents, the officer begins to ramble on about their measures to resolve the situation.//

Officer: To put it simply, we will be increasing the frequency of patrols in the area for the time being, as well as installing surveillance cameras on various roads.

Officer: Oh, the rain's getting heavier.

Officer: Damn... life is really unpredictable... Regardless, we will ensure the safety of the residents diligently. Thank you for your cooperation, please head home now.

//His words concluded with a firm, uplifting tone. Taki lets out a sigh for no reason in particular, turning around to drag her fatigued legs back home.//

Shiina Taki: Life is... unpredictable?

//People don't find comfort in the fragility encompassed by that saying. "Life can be destroyed by unexpected, unavoidable incidents", just like how no one could have expected that drunkard to pop out of the bushes by the road and attack someone.

Returning to reality, she had unknowingly walked to the entrance of the park while pondering on this matter. The shadows cast by the trees dance on the floor, the neglected shrubs on the

roadside are a mess of overgrowth, having grown past an average person's waist, enough for someone to hide behind.

The ominous darkness breeds imagination, but luckily enough, she is met with the bright glow of a flashlight from the bushes after turning the corner.//

Shiina Taki: ?!

Shiina Taki: (It seems like the person holding the flashlight hasn't noticed me, if i just bolt in the opposite direction now...)

//Just as she turns to leave, the person has seemingly found what they were looking for. The beam of light emitting from their flashlight moved from the treetops to the floor in a flash, yet the brief appearance of a head of hair with a familiar colour makes her stop in her tracks.

Suspicion and an untimely curiosity got the best of her, losing all desire to flee. Closing the distance between them, a dark green scarf peeking out from the shadows further strengthened her resolve.//

Shiina Taki: Tomori!

//The woman in question responded to her name being called by turning her attention and her flashlight in the same direction, the sudden beam of light causing Taki to instinctively shield her eyes with her hands. It was also at that moment, in her bewildered state, that her unasked question was spoken by the other party first.//

Takamatsu Tomori: Taki-chan...? How come you're here?

Shiina Taki: Work ended a little late, so I took a shorter route home through the park.

Shiina Taki: More like, why are you at such a dangerous place alone at this hour, Tomori?

Recently, there was a ...

Shiina Taki: Some stuff happened in the area, it's not too safe. If you wanted to come here, you should've at least told me first, so I can accompany you.

//She hesitated for a moment, not further elaborating on the details of the incident.

The lingering fear from the false alarm beforehand coupled with worry for Tomori made her concerned tone unintentionally panicked as she hurried to Tomori's side.//

Shiina Taki: Tomori, what are you looking for? I'll help search with you, that way we can leave quickly.

Takamatsu Tomori: Ah..... I was looking for this, I found it earlier.

//Tomori unfurls her fist to reveal two light yellow bugs, peacefully lying on their backs on the palm of her hand.

Though she's gotten used to Tomori's peculiar interests, Taki can't help but quiver when suddenly faced with two insects at this distance.//

Shiina Taki: This is a... cicada?

Takamatsu Tomori: Mhm. The publishing house is making a childrens' fairytale series focused on insects. I wanted one for cicadas.

Takamatsu Tomori: I could only come up with a rough idea after thinking for a really long time. The specific plot is still hard to pin down.

//Tomori flips over the two insects on her palm, revealing cracks on their backs.//

Shiina Taki: (Are those just cicada shells...?)

Takamatsu Tomori: Cicadas are summer animals, they emerge in the summer, breed in the summer, die in the summer. Their lives belong to the summer.

Takamatsu Tomori: Then, are they curious about the seasons that they will never see? If they witnessed the winter, what would they have thought?

Shiina Taki: Well, it's a very Tomori-like story.

Takamatsu Tomori: I'm struggling to carry on from there, though. Just today, I was at the table for the entire afternoon, yet I could only write a few lines.

Takamatsu Tomori: I thought that maybe looking at actual cicadas would give me some inspiration, but summer passed a long time ago. There may be some in the trees still, and probably only in the park. Besides, there are officials patrolling the area near the city park, and digging in such an area would probably just invite disturbance...

Takamatsu Tomori: When I considered other areas that I was familiar with, I only had the park near Taki-chan's house...

Shiina Taki: Is that so...

//Taki had a strong urge to sigh. Tomori has become much more daring as compared to when they had first met, so much that it can be difficult to deal with at times.//

Shiina Taki: Did you set off right after that?

Takamatsu Tomori: If I couldn't find any here, I would have tried searching that patch of forest in the south.....

Shiina Taki: What I'm trying to say is that the weather's been abnormal lately, even if you were eager to come, you should have brought an umbrella.

//As if to confirm Taki's words, the leaves began rustling above their heads.// [rain]

Shiina Taki: Shit...

//Taki fishes out her phone and begins hastily tapping the screen.//

Shiina Taki: Speak of the devil... At least there's a taxi available nearby. Tomori, follow closely.

Takamatsu Tomori: Mm.

//The streetlamps begin to light up one after the other, and the rain is getting heavier. The raindrops drum mercilessly on the hood of the taxi, the deafening noise reflecting the depressing weather.

The two of them left the shelter provided by the tree and walked to the road. Taki holds the car door open for Tomori, who shyly retreats into the recesses of the backseat, watching Taki as she closes the door.//

Takamatsu Tomori: Thank you, Taki-chan.

Driver: Can you confirm that this is the address?

Shiina Taki: Mhm. Sorry to trouble you, but please walk her to the door.

//Taki nods towards the driver, who promptly locks the door as the car revs to life. //

Shiina Taki: Remember to text me once you're home!

Takamatsu Tomori: Okay!

//As the taxi roars to life, Tomori pokes her head out the window partially to wave goodbye to Taki, who stays rooted in the same spot, waving back until the greyish-purple becomes nothing more than a small dot, disappearing past the corner that's been darkened by water damage.//

Shiina Taki: A strange encounter, for sure.

//Though she was still in deep thought, the downpour didn't allow for her to stand around so leisurely.//

Shiina Taki: I should head home first.

WEST REACH HOME

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, and she's never thought of letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.

This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practiced it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

Shiina Taki: Speaking of Tomori...I don't know if those cicadas will actually help with her writing...

Shiina Taki: Inspiration is something I struggle to find myself, let alone help Tomori find hers.

//Coincidentally, her phone vibrates once, Tomori's message received.//

Takamatsu Tomori:「Taki-chan, are you home yet? The rain got worse out of nowhere, did you manage to get home before then?」

Takamatsu Tomori:「 At Taki-chan's request, the driver walked the entire way to my doorstep with me. Both the cicadas and I didn't even get wet, thankfully.」

Takamatsu Tomori: 「On the way home, I was still worried about what I would do if the cicadas got wet. If I had to dry them, I might rip their fragile wings by accident, but if I left them to dry on its own, they might become flimsy and soggy. When I think about how they could just flap their wings lightly to shake off the water when they were still alive, I can't help but think life is so intriguing. 」

Takamatsu Tomori: 「Remember to take care of yourself too, Taki-chan. If you got caught in the rain, remember to take a shower, and thoroughly dry yourself.」

Shiina Taki: (Alright. My head wouldn't break into pieces like a cicada's wings when rubbed with a towel, after all.)

//Anyone would feel happy to have someone care for them, and even her brain had formulated a rare, uncharacteristic joke. Though of course, she couldn't reply to Tomori with that, so she typed an honest reply.

Shiina Taki:「 Okay, I reached home a while ago, I'm about to shower now. 」

//Taki has completed her obligatory messages with Tomori. Despite wanting to wait for a response, the damp sensation of her skin, and Tomori's request convinces her otherwise.

She hangs her rain sodden coat on the chair, and heads for the bath.//

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling onto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning on her equipment as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.

It's the last reply from Tomori.//

Takamatsu Tomori:「 Right, you also paid for the taxi today, and I don't even know how much you spent... I'm grateful for your help today. Next time we have rehearsal , I'll give you something to repay you for this.」

Shiina Taki: Next rehearsal...

Shiina Taki: (...I'll respond in the morning, wouldn't want to disturb her sleep.)

//Taki was seemingly invigorated by receiving a message from her.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

Chapter 2

CHAPTER 2

不朽于我毫无价值, 所求无非向死而生

Immortality holds no value to me, I ask nothing more than the death of life

陵墓的腐蟲之气, 将不再诱我沉迷

May the corruption of the tomb, cease with its temptations.

Shiina Taki: Enough, stop.

//The final note lands, the sound of the drums is the first to scatter, and the other instruments follow that lead to disperse.

Taki puts down her drumsticks, and lets out a long sigh.//

Shiina Taki: (It's just not coming together, the score... I've already tweaked it, so why are we still....)

Chihaya Anon: Uuuuh, my hands are so tired...

Shiina Taki: You're tired already?

Chihaya Anon: The guitar portion this time feels pretty high level... You think so too, right?
Raana-chan?

Chihaya Anon: Ah! Raana-chan fell asleep standing up!

Shiina Taki: Ha? How did that happen, it hasn't even been an hour since we started practice?

Takamatsu Tomori:It's probably because.. Raana's been busy with her thesis.

Takamatsu Tomori: She asked me to proofread and correct it last night...

Shiina Taki: So that's how it is...

Shiina Taki: Sorry, I'm the one who suddenly asked to hold practice.

Takamatsu Tomori: That's not... It's been a long time since we've gathered. Thank you,
Taki-chan, for organising this.

Nagasaki Soyo: So what now, are we taking a break?

Shiina Taki: No, if the Stray cat needs to sleep then let her sleep. We'll continue.

Shiina Taki: Anon, could you play the lead portion?

Chihaya Anon: Ah.. sorry Rikki! When you sent the score two days ago I had an event... so...
Chihaya Anon: Aah, but I did take a good look at my own part though!

Shiina Taki: Tch. It's fine then, one more time.

~~~~~

Shiina Taki: No, that's not, it's still off..

Shiina Taki: And Anon, you got the riff at the interlude wrong!

Shiina Taki: And Soyo, you're lagging at the intro and rushing at the outro, you're not familiar with the score at all. Didn't I send it out early?

Chihaya Anon: I did look at it... but...

Nagasaki Soyo: Sending it on a weekday with two days notice then holding practice on a weekend, that's a pretty scarce amount of time.

Shiina Taki: I've already adjusted the difficulty, it should be pretty easy to get the hang of.

Chihaya Anon: That.. Rikki, you don't need to adjust it so many times. If you're done just send it to us...

Shiina Taki: Sending half assed work is meaningless no?The version I'm giving to you all now, is the most 'friendly' version.

Shiina Taki: If you can't get in any practice for something as easy as this, what's the point of sending it out early?

Nagasaki Soyo: Haa..

Shiina Taki: What? If you have something to say, spit it out.

Takamatsu Tomori: That.. Taki-chan, Soyo-chan...

Chihaya Anon: Aahaha! Of course there isn't anything, ain't that right Soyorin? Well it's the first time we're practising the new song anyway, we'll just get it right next time...

Shiina Taki: Next time? Then tell me, when will that be?

Chihaya Anon: Eh.... Time is like a sponge, if you just squeeze a little you... I, I can do next week! Tomorin?

Takamatsu Tomori: I... I need to attend a few offline book clubs, sorry... Anochan, and Taki-chan..

Chihaya Anon: It's fine, it's fine! Everyone has their own things to attend to... then, what about next next week?

Nagasaki Soyo: Apologies, but I'll be in Hokkaido for a business trip for those two weeks.

Chihaya Anon: That's par for the course now, we'll just do it the week after! Let me check the calendar.. wow it coincides with a seasonal holiday, isn't that perfect?

Chihaya Anon: Ack! I forgot my agent set that date for my 24 hour livestream challenge... haha.

Shiina Taki:.....

Nagasaki Soyo: Since we can't find time, and also don't have plans to hold a live, let's just practice in our own free time.

Shiina Taki: We can't even practice our coordination, what do you mean by Live? With this performance? You're really planning on facing our fans like this?

Chihaya Anon: Maybe we should plan a Live so everyone has a goal to practice for...

Shiina Taki: Then tell me, when do you think we can hold that live?

//The room falls into silence.

No one knows the answer to that question.

None of them wants to be the one to make a promise, then break it, thus no one dared to bring it up.//

Shiina Taki: If none of you know, then let's get back to prac-

Shiina Taki: !

//A wave of nausea hits her with no warning, preventing those harsh words from spilling out of Taki's mouth.

Bringing with it a rapidly increasing heart rate, and she could feel her muscles start twitching uncontrollably.

Seeing Taki suddenly freeze in place, and her paling face, the other members rush over in worry.//



Takamatsu Tomori: Taki-chan... what's wrong?

Chihaya Anon: Rikki you look terrible... I'll practice properly, so don't be angry...

Nagasaki Soyo: You didn't.. you stayed up late again?

//Realising her mistake, Taki quickly gathers herself.//

Shiina Taki: Ah.. oh, sorry, I got distracted is all, nothing to worry about.

Nagasaki Soyo: How about we stop here for the day. Raana-chan ran off some time ago, and it always feels a bit off with one person missing.

Shiina Taki: Ha? Who let you deci-

//--The aching pulse of her chest cuts her off once again.

Seeing the anger hidden behind those worried eyes, Taki can't help but feel slightly ashamed.//

Nagasaki Soyo: It'd be great if our time off overlapped, but even if it doesn't we can simply wait, after all...

--We're not professionals. [[t/n:wording ]]

//Taki knows what she means, even if the words never left her mouth.//

Shiina Taki: Then I guess we'll delay practice a few more months? According to that, we'll practice once a year and hold a Live every two? We don't have a clear goal in mind after all.

Nagasaki Soyo: I don't want to argue with you.

Shiina Taki: Who's arguing? I just-

Nagasaki Soyo: And you think paying with your health is the only way to keep the band going?

Takamatsu Tomori: ...I agree with Soyo-chan.

Takamatsu Tomori: Taki-chan, I don't want you to sacrifice yourself just to continue MyGO's activities.

Takamatsu Tomori: It's great, to have practice, to perform Live.

Takamatsu Tomori: But even if fate doesn't allow us time for one another, this temporary separation won't affect the bond between us.

Takamatsu Tomori: We're still walking down this road, together, after so many years, after all..

Shiina Taki:.....

Takamatsu Tomori:.....

Chihaya Anon: Y-Yeah! Hanging out with everyone once in a while is already suuuper joyous!

Chihaya Anon: Aah, I heard there was a newly opened Sushi restaurant nearby, how about we all go there and give it a taste~~

Nagasaki Soyo: I have a dinner event tonight, so I'm not going.

Takamatsu Tomori: My parents are coming over..

Chihaya Anon: It's fine it's fine, then Ri... uh, we'll go together next time! When Raana has the energy .

Shiina Taki:.....

[[Scene change: Train]]

-----

//The once in a blue moon practice session ends on a terribly awkward note.

Taking a seat on the train, Taki has never felt worse.

She can't help but feel she was the reason behind that terrible parting.

-- She wasn't in top notch condition, she didn't prepare an appropriate score, and she was so unreasonable..

She knows they were just worried for her, yet she, in the heat of the moment, still spouted out those words..

There's no one else on this train but her, and that suited Taki just fine.

She doesn't want her awful expression to be seen by anyone else.

It was still sunny out, despite being far past noon. The rays of sunshine still carried warm as it pierced through those light fluffy clouds, not quite a weather that fit her current mood.

The warmth of the sun paws at Taki's arm, yet it elicits no reaction from her.

She plasters herself to the window and ceases to move an inch.

A million thoughts plague her mind, these emotions wrap around her heart, tightly binding her.//

Shiina Taki: (I know that everyone has their own life, I know that the band is no longer the top priority.)

Shiina Taki: (But how, but why do they seem to not care in the slightest?)

Shiina Taki: (Even though it was our long awaited reunion... why did it turn out this way...)

//The train pulls to a stop, the sound of the announcer over the speakers seemingly chasing her to leave.//

"Scene change: Home"

//Opening the front door, the temperature difference causes her to pause.

Maybe it was all in her mind, or perhaps there really was an issue, but she feels the earlier discomfort starting to return.

Her breaths get shorter, faster, her heart rate spikes, she feels herself panic, and pain running through her body.

Shiina Taki: (Could it be a cold...)

//With extreme difficulty, Taki makes her way to the dining table one step at a time. The moment both her arms grasp the back of the chair, Taki stopped being able to hold herself up.

With heavy breaths, her knees hit the floor. Hard. It's the first time her senses are screaming at her, and they are screaming at her that she can't fall asleep here.//

Shiina Taki: (Shit... phone, where's my phone...)

//She desperately fights to pull out her phone, but she can't stop the trembling of her hand, failing to even get the screen to turn on.

Her phone slips from her grasp, her body too succumbs to gravity and lands on the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (Why... I still....)

//Her eyelids finally succumb to the weight upon them, Taki's already blurred vision soon disappears, her consciousness sinking into an unending abyss.//

[[Darkness]]

-----

//It feels like a long, long, dream.

She sees her life flashing by, yet it isn't viewed through her eyes. Familiar pasts, unknown future, all cycling before her.

Yet Taki remembers none of these scenes, everything feels so "familiar", yet exceedingly "unfamiliar".//

Shiina Taki: Ugh.... un.....

???:.....

//She feels like her body was set on fire and tearing apart, scenes of her life flashing before her eyes, the melding into a dead sea of nothingness.

On the faraway horizon, she watches as a ship blows out a mist of smoke.

Yet she floats, alone, in the storm.//

"????: ..... time....."

//She floats, and floats, and floats... slowly closing in with the horizon. Then she sees something flashing in the corner of her eye--

It's a fleeting scene, one she yearned for as a child.

She turned in a rush, but it had already vanished. In place of it, was a black cat.//

"????: ..... time....."

//Its mouth is moving, yet nothing could be heard.

Taki finally understand what it said.//

-- Time, is running out."

//The pain faded, and with it, "its" life.//

.....

.....

.....

Shiina Taki: Uu... nn...

Shiina Taki: Hrfh...

//Her body remains weak. Moving slightly, she can feel the stickiness of sweat all around.

But the pain had wholly dissipated.//

Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: (How long... did I sleep?)

//Pushing herself up, she hears all her bones creak in protest.

The digital clock on her desk shows that it's almost 8.

-- 8 on a 24 hour clock.//

Shiina Taki: (I've slept for.. almost a whole day?!)

//Taki turns her phone on, the numbers on the screen declaring this as a fact.//

Shiina Taki: (All that time.. wasted...)

//The sky was dark, and it seemed to be raining heavily outside. Despite this, it was completely silent.

Maintaining her position, Taki sinks deep into depression.

But the coldness on her nose doesn't let her stay there for long, on the floor, appear a few small, but strikingly red dots.//

Shiina Taki: ! ! !

//Taki stands up in a panic, pinching her nose and rushing into the bathroom.

Taki hunches over the sink. Twisting the knob and letting the water run at max flow, the cold water splashes on her face, lowering its temperature.// [[tn]]  
//

The diluted blood scatters among the clear water, before disappearing into the pitch black drain.//

Shiina Taki: .....ha.

//A feeling of helplessness grips her.//

Shiina Taki: (No time... I don't have time to waste on sleep. or sickness...)  
Shiina Taki: (I'm out of time.... why?)

//She doesn't know why, she feels as if something is rushing her, as if something was chasing her, or perhaps she was just about to fall off a cliff. She's being pushed to her limit. She can't sit still, and her mind is unsettled.//

Shiina Taki: (I feel like... I saw something, in that dream.... what was it...)

//Taki frantically searches for the memories of her unconsciousness.//

Shiina Taki: (Just a little more... it was.. something related to time...)

"-- Time, is running out."

//In a moment, she remembers.

She looks up.

Unused for a long time, the mirror had a thin coating of water stains and soot. Despite the blurriness, there seemed to be something written on the mirror.

Taki gathers some water in her cupped hands, and throws it on the mirror. Wiping the droplets away haphazardly as the mirror lets out a piercing squeak at her actions.

Then, she sees it---//

-----

//Taki leans forward, and promptly, throws up.//

**Chapter 2 End**

# Chapter 3



## CHAPTER 3

恐惧扼住咽喉，如枷锁禁锢我的双臂

Fear catches in my throat, locking my arms as if they were shackled

我向沉默发问，沉默却愈发震耳欲聋

I direct my questions to the silence, yet the silence deafened me

//She bolts through the station.

The sound of shoes against the floor reverberates throughout the vast and empty station, arousing a certain creature concealed by the dark.

The sudden visualisation makes her tremble in fear. She hastily pulls off her leather shoes, stepping barefoot on the cold concrete. The shoes left behind were quickly consumed by the shadows.

???: She reaches a stop— one she is very familiar with. Directory signs, vending machines, convenience stores, everything was exactly where it should be, everything looked identical to when she last saw it.

???: Except that there was no one but her at the station.

??? A clock with an unmoving face is suspended in the air on the platform, its needle nearing “0”. She knows that is the little time she has left.

???: That wretched thing— only leaving behind those emotionless words before disappearing— she can either stay here and cling to eternal life and solitude, or return to reality to meet her inevitable end.

???: only because she doesn't want those who care about her to witness her fate, she will flee from the hospital to reach this cursed station.

???: she loathes her fated end, so even though she knows her fate will not change, she wishes to bear witness to an alternate ending.

???: the pitch black tunnel carries again an ominous noise, whatever creature that is lurking in its depths makes an advance on her.

???: The ominous noise gradually shapes into a deafening roar. Her heart stopped, as if she was dead.

???: Is it really right? To be like this now?

???: Accompanied by a dizzying light, a train arrives through a hole, almost consciously stopping in front of her.

???: This is the last chance to change her mind, to go home. She must make a decision.

???: Regardless, she remains rooted to the ground, lacking the strength to move.

// The train door slowly opens with a hiss, and the one to greet her is none other than that thing— that wretched black cat.

**An incarnate nightmare I had no power to shake off.**

Finally, at that moment, she realises exactly where she's going.

She was doomed to be here.//

---

ANONTOKYO LIVE

Chihaya Anon:: ...Ah, the story ends there.

Chihaya Anon: It's also my first time reading this novel in full, I didn't know it had an ambiguous ending.

Comments: 【The vibes were pretty scary initially, but I don't know why it sounds comical when she reads it.】【Can we read something by the same author next time?】【She pulled out her old fashioned London accent out of nowhere at the end lmfao】

Chihaya Anon: Why are all of you just roasting me! Don't you have anything to say regarding the story!

Comments: 【I just feel like the black cat in the story was more of a guide, rather than an ominous creature.】【If we're talking about the horror aspect, apart from the black cat and the confusing hints at her lifespan, there weren't really any paranormal phenomena. In the end, it's more of a psychological horror.】【I think the protagonist is just insane. 】

Chihaya Anon: Ah, everyone was listening so closely... Anyway, the popular horror novel, [The Cat and Kisaragi Station], is currently on sale, any viewers who enjoyed it can go grab a copy for yourselves, it'll definitely be a different experience than reading it with a streamer! Use the link in the comments to get a coupon—

---

Shiina Taki: .....

//She closes the stream tab, lets out a sigh, and sinks into the back of her chair.

The curtains are tightly shut, making the room pitch-black. The glowing laptop screen is covered in tabs searching about “black cats” and “countdowns”, The sheer quantity of tabs caused their labels to be cut off, forming a singular mass of web pages.//

Shiina Taki: (What the hell was that countdown...)

//Taki doesn't remember what happened after seeing that scene in the bathroom. When her thoughts drift back to reality, she's seated at the table, searching for relevant information like a madman.

Regardless, it was Anon's stream that pulled her out of that chaos.

After all, even though she was ridiculed by her viewers for it, her ability to read a horror novel and give it the same comicality as a regular bedtime story could give the person currently threatened by the supernatural the same amount of comfort as a sedative.

Despite this, Taki's thoughts are still in a mess, the aftertaste of vomit and fear lingering by her like a shadow.

Comparing the words of the black cat from her dreams with the story Anon had just read, the similarities became strikingly apparent.

The same black cat, the same thick layers of mystery, the same sense of being lost and the same accord with life and death.

Though it is a little absurd to use a story to explain reality, it's impossible to find a reliable answer to her predicament, so for the time being, she can only rely on this weak hypothesis.//

Shiina Taki: (A full ten days. Is there some sort of meaning to this number? Now that I think of it, there's also a movie called <10 Years of Life Remaining>, could there be any correlation...)

Shiina Taki: (No... there isn't any proof to justify that this countdown is related to death, it just coincidentally appears when i'm not feeling well, leading to these associations...)

Shiina Taki: (Well, sitting here at a loss is a waste of time. What can be done now... I'll request a day off first.)

//She draws the curtains open, instantly filling the room with the light of the early morning sun. For a night owl like herself, she's unaccustomed to this light, squinting her eyes in response.

She pushes the window open, enjoying the feel of the refreshing breeze that came after a bout of rain, as well as the fragrant scent that wafted into the room.

The chirping of the birds and the noise of the busy street brought some life back into the dismal room, somewhat healing Taki, who had been tormented all night. She breathes in the fresh air, enjoying the tranquil atmosphere.

Right then, a sound came from the window.

From her position, she saw a group of high school students with instruments laughing as they dashed across the street.

It's past 9am, first period has already started.

Taki rarely has the chance to observe her neighbourhood at this hour. If she wasn't already heading to work, she was in her bed, catching up on sleep. Naturally, she wouldn't know that this group of high schoolers would pass by almost every day.//

Shiina Taki: (Turns out there's a high school nearby...)

//The commotion gradually fades at the end of the street. Taki dazedly recalls gathering at Anon's house a long, long time ago.

Their pre-performance prep was always done in a rush. Even their costumes were hastily made during an all-nighter, causing them to oversleep the next day, creating that memory of them rushing to get to their respective schools.

The realisation that things are no longer the same is an aggressive, unwelcome thought that penetrates her currently extremely fragile consciousness.

They've been through too much, lots of things have changed, some are in the process of dying out, yet some remain exactly the same.//

Shiina Taki: (.....?)

// Some strange feeling washed over her. Despite the serenity of her surroundings, her heart couldn't seem to calm down.

She continued taking in deep breaths, in a futile attempt to calm herself down. It then dawned on her that this panic she felt wasn't from her mental state, but her physical one.

She pressed her hand to her chest. The vibrations within her rib cage were pronounced and intense, and she could almost feel her heart pumping out of her body.

Cold sweat trickled down her face, and a wave of anxiety enveloped her.//

Shiina Taki: (I would have understood if this was happening after a live, but I haven't done anything to cause this, so why.....)

//She clenched her fist tightly and closed her eyes, trying to get her heart to calm down.

However, the more she tried to do so, the more futile her efforts became.//

Shiina Taki: (...Perhaps it's because of that novel earlier.)

//She recalled the strangeness that its words emitted, using it to reason with herself.//

Shiina Taki: ...

//—There may be more to this countdown than she previously realised.

This thought emerged all of a sudden. Taki found that the fear and anxiety in her heart was diluted by a more profound sense of emptiness.

By her reflection in the window, a string of numbers is slowly counting down.

Clicking her tongue, Taki drew the curtains, leaving the windows open, before turning away.//

---

## TOMORI'S ROOM

//The weather today was perfect, the temperature signifying the end of winter, with the sunshine providing even more warmth.

Inside this room, Takamatsu Tomori sits at her desk, in front of a notebook containing more cancellations than actual words.

—snap! (t/n onomatopoeia i don't know what sound this makes)

The sharp tip of her pencil broke.

She reached for her pencil case in front of the window.

Suddenly, a frail-looking butterfly fluttered in through the window, landing on her knuckles.//

Takamatsu Tomori: (.....?)

//The butterfly covered in black markings waved its feelers around, feebly collapsing onto her hand.

Tomori hastily cupped it with both hands, but the butterfly stopped moving after weakly flapping its wings twice.//

Takamatsu Tomori: (.....!)

//Perhaps it was the recent rise in temperature from the approaching spring that took this fragile life, but ultimately, the death of these creatures is just a part of nature.

Tomori gently wrapped it up using the fallen leaves from the plants by her window, planning to place it in the soil of the plants on her windowsill when she left.

She stares at the life wrapped up in dead leaves. For no particular reason, another person comes to mind.//

Takamatsu Tomori: (Taki-chan, is she feeling any better...)

---

## TAKI'S HOUSE

//After requesting for a day off, an unfamiliar freedom left Taki at a loss of what to do.

Not wanting to let her mind stray back into that mess, Taki uses this free time to clear the beer cans on the table, before cleaning the entire house.

As she hadn't cleaned properly in ages, what she thought would be finished soon wasn't completed until afternoon descended.//

Shiina Taki: All that's left is to clear the trash tomorrow...

//The moment she relaxed, nausea and fatigue took over her mind and body. Overcome by the wave of dizziness, Taki nearly lost her balance, barely avoiding the floor by supporting herself with a chair.//

Shiina Taki: —?!

//Strong misgivings resurfaced in her mind. She couldn't help but associate this physical state with the supernatural phenomenon threatening her, but..

Unlike the strange and elusive manner of the mysterious countdown, there were logical explanations for her body's responses. //

Shiina Taki: Ah.....

Shiina Taki: (Now that I think about it, it's been almost 24 hours since I've eaten anything...)

Shiina Taki: (So, that was just due to low blood sugar.)

//Indeed, without food, people will die. That was an obvious answer.

Until right now, Taki completely forgot about the more realistic and imminent threat before her in favour of her supernatural situation

Compared to those inexplicable numbers of the countdown, the human requirements for life is a much more realistic matter that needed to be attended to.

Shiina Taki: (I have to quickly eat something...)

//Taki experiences temporary relief from the nausea, supporting herself with the wall as she makes her way to the refrigerator to make something to eat.

> if went conbini

The refrigerator is as empty as her house.

A few cans of beer, a half open can of tomato, ice cubes and...

— Oden miso and fried rice bento.

Shiina Taki: Ugh..... this thing.

Shiina Taki: (Whatever, I can't be picky at this time.)

> if went home straight

The refrigerator is as empty as her house.

A few cans of beer, a half open can of tomato, ice cubes, and a bento from the convenience store that she doesn't recall even buying.//

Shiina Taki: Ugh..... this thing.

Shiina Taki: The production date is..... Well, the packaging is sealed, there isn't any strange odour and there isn't any mold. Alright, it's edible.

————— cont. (went home/conbini)

//Taki placed the bento into the microwave. In her ravenous state, it was difficult not to devour it there and then. To avoid burning herself, she takes the bento out when it is still warm.

She sits at the currently almost spotless table, thanks to her cleanup beforehand.

Her right hand trembled uncontrollably with the chopsticks due to the lack of sugar in her blood, shakily bringing the first bite of the long awaited food into her mouth.//

Shiina Taki: ... ..

Shiina Taki: ... ..

//Perhaps it was because of the spike in carbohydrates and sodium in her body, but Taki, unexpectedly, did not gorge herself on food instantly.

In fact, she slowly chewed and swallowed, savouring the subtle tastes of seasonings and ingredients that she otherwise would not have noticed.

The nutrients of the food appeared to be gradually replenishing her deficiencies, producing instant and tangible results.

It's been too long since she's had a meal like this.

It's not that Taki's bad at cooking, but when she's alone, she's rarely in the mood to cook, nor does she want to waste time on cooking and eating.

Over the years, she can't help but wonder: if her nutritional jelly, protein bars and vitamin supplements can fulfil a person's dietary needs, what's the point of wasting time on preparing and eating meals?

Of course, it's just a myth(thought?) that comes to mind occasionally, Taki's not that kind of strange ascetic.

She does have food that she enjoys, her handiwork isn't particularly bad, and when everyone in MyGO!!!! goes out for dinner, regardless if it's hotpot or barbecue, the person in charge of cooking always seems to be her...

The food from those times was always delicious.

The meat she snatches away from Anon was delicious, The food Tomori adds to her plate was delicious, Raana's leftovers after she runs off that always has to be cleared by herself were delicious, even the vegetables that Soyo insists they must order were... //

Shiina Taki: ... It tastes good.

---

//Eating has put her mind to rest, her replenished energy supporting another bout of chores and cleaning.

She can't remember the last time she went to bed before 12, but this is definitely the first time this year.

When showering, she deliberately keeps her gaze away from the mirror. When her eyes drift to her reflection on the glass, she pays it no mind.

Last night's sleep was far from restful, fatigue and low energy can cause hallucinations. Have a good meal and rest well, everything will be fine again.

Holding on to this mindset, she lies on the bed, her eyes much more tired than she believed. When her eyelids fell, there was a prickling sensation of dryness. Nevertheless, once her eyes were closed, she never wanted to open them again. //

Shiina Taki: I'll think about the rest tomorrow...



Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: ...

Shiina Taki: !?

//She abruptly sits upright.

She's unable to fall asleep.

Taki realises that she's unable to fall asleep at all.

Although she was so tired that her eyelids were practically glued shut, Taki found it difficult to fall asleep.

How could it be? She was so tired that even her mind was unable to conjure any unwanted thoughts.

It was so hot, has this room always been that warm?//

Shiina Taki: (How could this be? Nothing is going as it should...)

//The same unease and anxiety from before returned, crushing her heart. She subconsciously gripped at the cloth on her chest, panting uncontrollably.

Only then did she become aware of the persistent throbbing from deep in her chest.//

Shiina Taki: (My heartbeat... was it always this fast?)

//Driven by fear, she leapt off her bed and stumbled to her computer, almost hitting her leg in the process.

She all but threw herself onto the table, sending the pens in her pencil case flying across the desk. Two pens just so happened to be facing downwards, falling on the instep of her feet, leaving two ink marks that resembled wounds, one black and one red.

Without thinking, she pulled open the desk drawer, rummaging through trinkets to find a sports watch on the very bottom of her cluttered drawer.

She hastily slipped it onto her wrist, but the display remained unlit, even after pressing it twice. Only then did she remember that she hasn't worn it in ages, it's always been out of battery.//

Shiina Taki: Tch.

//Frustrated, she sat on the edge of her bed, charging the watch.

Still connected to the charger, Taki put the band through her wrist, staring intently at the flashing red light on its side, recalling that this watch was probably a birthday gift from some year— She hasn't used since she realised that there was a certain someone who could deduce her daily routine through the sleep data.

"Isn't it fine to just not look?" Taki, however, had a sense of guilt towards this.

The watch display would remind her of her sleep health every single day— it wasn't very welcome, like a well-meaning doctor, but also like a grim reaper with a morbid sense of humour.

While waiting for the watch to charge, she took in a deep breath, a need to retreat gradually building up inside her.//

Shiina Taki: What if...

di—

//Not giving her the chance to regret her actions, the watch display lit up, a logo flashing across the screen before revealing the watch interface, including the time — 23:58.//

Shiina Taki: (It's almost midnight.)

//She opens the heart rate monitor on the watch— Even without the help of equipment, drummers are especially aware of rhythm, allowing Taki to estimate her heart rate accurately.

So, why was she not able to notice until now?

After a moment, an unexpectedly low number appeared next to the red heart icon.//

Shiina Taki: —100?

//100 beats per minute is within the limits of what is considered normal for an adult.

When working out or playing the drums, Taki's heart rate easily surpasses this limit, but in her day to day life, her heart rate is usually much lower, not to mention when she's exhausted and in bed.

Nevertheless, this number isn't a cause for concern. Presently, it, at most, only affects her sleep. Taki's tense heart relaxes a little.//

Shiina Taki: (Perhaps I've been too on edge these past two days.)

Shiina Taki: (Whatever, I'll just sleep first.)

//She turns the lights off and glances at the time on the watch, just as the number changes from 23:59 to 0:00. It's already the next day.

Then—

The number next to the red heart icon changes along with it, from 100 to 90.//

Shiina Taki: ... ..

Shiina Taki: ... ..

//Taki waits for a moment, then for another.

The time now is 0:06, but the number next to the red heart remains at 90.

She doesn't breathe, quickly getting lightheaded.

The time now is 0:08, but the number next to the red heart remains at 90.

She sprints out of the room, putting on a pair of sneakers on the porch, running a hundred metres down the deserted street.

It's a deathly silent, moonless night.//

Shiina Taki: Huff, huff.....

//Leaning against a telephone pole, her eyes returned to her wrist. The time now is 0:014—

The number next to the red heart remains at 90.//

|| 9 DAYS REMAINING.

Shiina Taki: Huff, huff.....

//Thud, thud, thud.

The manic drumming reverberated throughout the room.

The snare drum, the bass drum, the cymbals, sounds that should be following a rhythm sounded out wildly, quickly absorbed by the soundproof panels lining the walls, like a strong punch against this soft material. All the misery, rage and aggression was futile.

The strength from your wrist and upper arm should control the drumsticks. That's how a certain drum teacher from a music organisation teaches her students.

However, this teacher is currently utilising the strength from every inch of her body to hit the musical fortress in front of her.

Despite the darkness, Taki could feel her vision getting blurry. her ears were ringing so much that she couldn't hear her own breathing. Cold air scraped through her throat and rapidly contracting lungs, yet even this pain was insufficient to drown out the steady beats of her heart, which seemed to vibrate through her bones.

90.

Why, why, why.

Her current heart rate shouldn't be enough to support such strenuous activity, but it's as if her heart is contained within another dimension. No matter how much she hysterically exerts herself, her heart rate remains constant.

It seemed to be mocking her efforts.//

Shiina Taki: Ha, ha, haaaaaaa—!

The sound of a small 'click' was lost in the beat of the drums.

The drumstick had snapped in half.

The second stick.

The third stick

.....

When she snaps the fourth stick, Taki can barely lift her hands anymore.

Blood drips on the newly replaced drum skin, once, twice, thrice, forming a crying face.

— it's futile.

That was what the face was telling her.//

Shiina Taki: —!!

//The bloodied fist instantly broke through the drum skin, revealing the interior. The inside was cold, dark and completely empty.

—You *know* it's futile.

—Haven't you done this before?

Taki crumples to the floor.

She curls up underneath the broken drum kit.

Her drum room is spacious, and the drum kit in the corner looked small in the vast space.

There's enough room to fit the whole band— Four mic stands, two speakers, three effectors, even the sheet music stands, all of it could fit.

But now, there's only a drum set.

Below which, a drummer laid curled up, crushed by fatigue, hunger, cold and despair.//

Shiina Taki: This really is... the worst.

|| 8 DAYS REMAINING

.....

.....

Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: ...It's already morning.

//It's already the morning of the third day.

The sun rises as per usual, the sparrows already disturbing the residents at 5 o'clock in the morning.

— This means that she's spent a full day and a full night in this room.

Out of decency and consideration for the whole neighbourhood, as soon as she moved in, Taki thoroughly soundproofed the drum room, installing double-layered blackout curtains to improve her concentration.

Thanks to this, Taki could break four drumsticks in her manic state in the middle of the night without angry neighbours or the police knocking on her door.

— Well, she wouldn't have been able to hear them knocking regardless.

Even in this room that was completely isolated from the outside world, Taki sensed the dawn of a new day, (and mumbles under her breath all the grievances someone who pulled an all-nighter would.) 并下意识呢喃出那句通宵者兴奋与内疚掺杂的话语 (t/n👤I'll come back 2 ths)

She has spent countless nights feeling the earth rotate below her feet, as well as the subsequent dawn slowly emerging beside her. The pressure, atmosphere, and gravity of the planet shift profoundly, as if it was performing for the unfortunate souls still awake.

Regardless, in that moment, Taki despises her ability to perceive the passage of time.

It was only because she wanted to avoid anything related to time that she hid into this room, curling up under the shelter of her drums after her violent display of emotion, seeking for a meaningless sense of security in the emptiness.

After yet another period of time, a small light illuminated at her feet, Taki tilting her head upwards at the sight of it.

It came from the watch she brought in to track her heart rate the previous night. Unbeknownst to her, it must've automatically connected to her phone, replacing it in reminding her of her SNS notifications.//

Shiina Taki: (Is it Anon again...)

//She prepares to bury her head once again, but her eyes drift to the small screen, now covered in a few words.

[...Kaname Raana has uploaded a new post: <image>]//

Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: .....Ha?

//Due to the screen lighting up, she involuntarily catches a glimpse of the time: 6:15.

Raana actually woke up this early?

Right then, Taki's world only remained with confusion.

Originally, Raana's SNS was as quiet as someone who had gone missing. For someone who wasn't that insomniac, Chihaya Anon, who got up early anyway and still wanted to show off on SNS to wake up early and post something on Insta...

Curiosity got the best of her, and Taki picked up the watch, but couldn't open the notification. After all, it was just a watch, and it could only relay notifications. To look at the details, Taki would have to return to her bedroom to retrieve her phone.//

Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: Hu....

//That's just how cats are, surprising people at the strangest times.

Though, she's still thankful to Raana for helping her realise that she was still able to feel curiosity.

Watch in hand, Taki stands up, finding her way out even in the pitch-black room.

However, she still kicks a broken drumstick on her way out by accident, the awfully painful splinters pricking her feet.//

Shiina Taki: How dangerous... I'll have to come back and clean it up.

---

//Raana's new post is just a picture, though if she had written a caption, it would've been nothing short of a miracle. Even a post from her was rare.

There is no technical skill displayed in the picture, the camera is focused on a telephone pole, and the background is divided between a car park and an apartment building.

Taki recognises this location, it's around her high school. Not that she visited often, but she still has some recollection of it.//

Shiina Taki: This kid... Why is she posting this at this hour....?

//Taki types a few words in the comments, but deletes them in the same breath.//

Shiina Taki: Ah... forget it.

//Refreshing the page a second time, a new comment pops up.//

Shiina Taki: Eh.

//Anon's comment: Wow!!! Raana-chan posting at this time?!!! Where is this?? Who are you with !!! Photo looks great the sunrise is beautiful 💕💕 //

//She had no intention to, she was definitely not curious, it was definitely just out of boredom, but Taki tapped on the pink profile picture.//

//Anon's post captions: Good Morning!! I didn't sleep well last night 🥱🥱 But when I woke up I realised that the weather was great !! I even managed to watch the sunrise !! This is my compensation hahaha 😊😊 I hope everyone's good today !! 💕💕 //

Shiina Taki:...

//Aimlessly scrolling around for a bit, she softly presses the small red heart.

She thinks for a moment.

Taki unlikes the post.

She continues to scroll.//

Shiina Taki: Ah... Tomori posted something yesterday too.

//Tomori's post captions: Her beauty is hidden within the wilted plant //

//Anon reposted Tomori's post.

Tomori's posts are often of small animals or pebbles, there are also many novel shots from unique angles that are always detailed and natural, creating a sense of comfort in people.

Tomori posted a picture of her potted plants on the windowsill yesterday, with the sunlight glowing on the brown soil and shriveled up leaves. There seemed to be something that was covered by the withered plant, something darkly coloured in the corner. //

Shiina Taki: That's Tomori for you...

//Taki enters Tomori's profile after not being on SNS for a few days. Tomori doesn't post very frequently, there's only two new posts, the previous one, and another of a mountain squirrel.

Probably on an outing with her family, she's mentioned this before.

Scrolling even further down, there are pictures of some of her in-person events. Taki has been to her autograph sessions before, but she hasn't been keeping up with her recent schedule.//

Shiina Taki: .....

//Taki begins to aimlessly browse through everyone's profiles one by one. She let go of the troubles in her mind, mindlessly looking at what everyone was up to recently. While she had seen some of the content before, strangely enough, it felt like her first time looking at it.

Tomori's profile would update whenever she publishes a new poem or artwork, every gift sent to her by her fans, as well as a response to every letter received.

Entering Soyo's profile, the first post she comes across is a picture of the airport entrance. Was this when she was departing or returning?

Continuing to scroll, she sees some foreign cuisine and foreign landmarks— Ah, so it was during her return.

Practically every post of everyone had a comment from Anon, which she can't help but look at.

There are some familiar faces on her feed, Misumi Uika, as well as her band members.

As a result, she finds Umiri's profile again. Her latest post was taken in the early morning, at a live house. Even outside of Mujica, Umiri still has a habit of supporting other bands.

From Umiri's profile, she finds a few acquaintances from high school, and even found out that she's known someone from her University for much longer than previously thought.....



She jumps aimlessly between profiles, surprised that she knew so many people, surprised to know that these people knew each other, forming a large, intricate social circle.

She's never noticed that before.

She's never even been interested in such matters before.//

Shiina Taki: .....

//Without even realizing it, the afternoon was gone.

If this was a normal day, wasting an afternoon scrolling on her bed would've made Taki go insane, but today, she didn't have the motivation to do anything else.

If her end is already fated, what was the point of everything she has done?

She was so tired. After stopping, all the fatigue that she had pushed aside had caught up to her, dragging her into an empty void.

However, she continues to scroll through her friend's social media accounts.

Such things that never used to interest her, was it a certain kind of vitality that attracted her dying self?

Or was it because she had never made the effort to learn more about the lives of her peers, and now she was regretting it?

These thoughts flowed through the rapids of her mind. Aside from her mechanical movements and a faint flicker of curiosity, she didn't have the energy to contemplate anything on a deeper level.

...

"She loathes her fated end, so even though she knows her fate will not change, she wishes to bear witness to an alternate ending..."

Subconsciously, she clicks open Anon's stream.

At the side, a list of recommended videos appear, particularly similar videos of studies or theories found by the algorithm linking to death.

There's one video that catches her attention.

From the thumbnail, it's clear that the video is of an old interview. The title is straightforward, stating that the interviewee had fourteen weeks left to live.

The similar situation leads Taki to click away from the familiar face, clicking on the video from a distant time.//

—

//Due to the low video resolution, Taki initially couldn't distinguish between the host and the dying guest.

This famous professor, who is said to suffer from a terminal illness, was dressed well in a suit, calmly seated in a chair, talking to the host about love, death, and life.

The audio quality was awful, and Taki could only get the gist of the interview. Throughout, Taki just felt that their conversation was too casual and out of place, as if they were just chatting after a meal.

The host compliments the professor's vitality, to which he only laughs.//

Professor: Emily, you know, I've been told that by many people... But I'm aware of my own physical state. I even need someone to wipe my ass for me. (T/n maybe less crude lol)

Professor: But because I've put on makeup, and dressed well before appearing on television, everyone in New York will go, Ha, he looks so full of life, the only dying person I've seen with so much vitality!

//The audience erupts into laughter.//

Host: That's very humorous, professor.

Host: This next question may be a little personal. It's about your...

Professor: Spit it out, Emily. If I minded, I wouldn't have come here in the first place.

Host: Thank you for your understanding. I believe that there isn't a small number of people in the world who face similar situations, but most of them won't have such a smile on their face. How on earth do you maintain such a positive mentality?

Professor: Everyone knows that they will eventually die, but nobody is willing to accept this fact. They will always believe that death is still far, so far that it isn't even something they can imagine.

Professor: I also know that I'm going to die, only that I had no choice but to accept it. But seriously, if I didn't believe the words of the young men of Weill Cornell Medical College, I'd just be regarded as a stubborn old man.

//The audience laughs yet again.//

Professor: On the day I was forced to accept that, I only had one thought: shall I just waste the rest of my time waiting to go to heaven, to see my dear Sophia?

Professor: But afterwards, I thought: I also have Kruger's lifetime achievement award in my pocket— If I was short of even two days, it wouldn't be considered a 'lifetime' anymore.

Professor: Since I'm a professor, why can't I take death as my last lesson? So, I began teaching students from home.

Professor: I got to reconnect with many former students. I talked to them about death, fear, desire, self-pity, forgiveness, life... Then I realised that even at 70, I never learnt how to live.

Professor: But now that I have learnt how to die, in my last moments, I can go peacefully, quietly and with dignity.

Professor: I want to keep teaching until my last breath, and then leave my studies on death as my legacy. I still have to design my epitaph, choose what songs I'd like at the funeral, and place the graduation cap on my last batch of students.

Professor: You see, once you learn how to die, only then will you learn how to live.

Professor: Therefore, I am a busy man now. Even more than from before I retired, even more than any period of time in my life.

Professor: To tell you the truth, Emily, next time you wish to see me, you'll have to talk to my secretary.

//The host laughs along with the audience.

However, there is no second part to the interview. At the end of the video, it states that two weeks later, this entertaining professor has passed away. //

---

//Returning back to reality, Taki is already seated at the table, searching for works or a biography from this professor on her laptop.

But, what use is there? After all, this is someone else.

The browser holding dozens of open tabs closes.

Only then did Taki stop in a daze, collapsing into her chair.

Suddenly, she realised that she was in a familiar posture, at a familiar desk, in a familiar mood.

She was depressed and alone in this square inch of space for too many nights, persisting towards her goals.

The mess of thoughts in her mind accumulated over time, a distant memory gradually resurfacing.

—

FLASHBACK

??? ... .. When did you learn how to use DTM (composition software)?

Shiina Taki: ...

Shiina Taki: Junior high.

Shiina Taki: I thought I might need it someday.

—

//Someday.

She has used it every day since then.

Including today.

Including tomorrow.

Even the day after tomorrow. //

Shiina Taki: Ha.....

//Her heavy breath warmed the surrounding chilly air. Like someone who had just regained all of their senses, she realises that the temperature has plummeted as night came.//

Shiina Taki: (If I were to leave behind anything...)

//She sits up, hunched over her laptop, opens the composition software and creates a new project.

This time, she doesn't have any lyrics, she'll have to create her own music from scratch.

Then—//

Shiina Taki: —Achoo!

Shiina Taki: ... ..

//The rather aggressive sneeze interrupted her increasing determination.//

Shiina Taki: (It's freezing... Is this how cold it always was at night...)

Shiina Taki: (Tough luck, Last night ... Ah, I really didn't sleep last night...)

Shiina Taki: (Now that I think of it, even if I wanted to write a new song now, I have no inspiration or material to work off.)

Shiina Taki: Ngh.....

// — In my last moments, I can go peacefully, quietly, and with dignity.

— Once you learn how to die, only then will you learn how to live.//

Shiina Taki: (... I'll stop here for now.)

//Taki closes the laptop, and walks out of the room.

She quietly eats something, showers, and returns to lie on the bed after half an hour.

Once she closes her eyes, countless things she can still do rushes into her mind. While most of them are only fleeting thoughts, there's a few that remain lingering in her mind.

Besides,

For the sake of dying only after those eight days have passed, she should probably sleep now.//

**Chapter 3, End.**

# Mastersheet

We are not affiliated with the original creators of the game in any way.

This is a fan translation of the fan game 《Shiina Taki's Decameron》which is currently out on Steam.

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[[[https://store.steampowered.com/app/3269960/Shiina\\_Takis\\_Decameron/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/3269960/Shiina_Takis_Decameron/)]]

[Mozart! \(Musical\) - Wie wird man seinen Schatten los \(English translation\)](#)

Description from the official page:

"Shiina Taki's Decameron is a doujin interactive fiction based on anime「BanG Dream! It's MyGO!!!!!」. The story concentrates on Shiina Taki, the drummer and song writer of MyGO!!!!! and her fight against fate till the last breath."

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## CHAPTER 1

Wen soll man fragen, wenn man sich selber nicht versteht

Whom should you ask, if you cannot understand yourself?

Wie kann man frei sein, wenn man seinem eigenen Schatten nie entgeht

How can you be free, if you cannot escape your own shadow?

//Sunset.

Twilight descends, umbra gradually creeps across the streets, swallowing up any shadow that crosses its path..

The silence on the streets, zapped of its vitality, is rather odd when compared to that of a normal workday.

The street's sole occupant has their back turned to the lingering glow, shadow stretching beneath as their owner remains deep in thought. //

Shiina Taki: How tiring...

Shiina Taki: Drumsticks aren't meant to be fooled around with!

Shiina Taki: And kids these days, you raise your voice just a little(get just a little bit strict with them) and they burst into tears, then readily complain to their parents! Tch! Do they want to learn or not?!

Shiina Taki: .....

Shiina Taki: ...Man, screw it, of course they aren't taking it seriously.

Shiina Taki: (It's already this late, may as well drop by the usual Izakaya for dinner.)

Shiina Taki: (...huh? It's closed?)

Shiina Taki: "Closed for a few days, due to the owner's sickness"

Shiina Taki: (He's been working all year-round, and I've never seen the old-timer catch so much as a cold, even he... Hope he gets well soon) (

t/n note there is a comparison to a machine that I can't slide in)

Scene change

//By the time Taki rounds back to head home, the sky is nearly darkened. The chilliness of the early spring nights leads her to pull her coat in a little tighter.

Passing through a dark alleyway, the sound of rustling could be heard from her right. Following the source, a shiny black cat could be seen burying its head into a heap of trash, seemingly searching for something.

As if they had a telepathic connection, the moment Taki laid her eyes on the cat, it turns its head to stare straight at her-

-- A pair of sharp, familiar, purple eyes.

Taki feels a sudden sense of unease.//

Shiina Taki: A str- stray cat?

Shiina Taki: (No, it's fur is shiny and it has a collar on, could it be a house cat? Then why...)

Cat: MREEOOOOOWW-----!!

//With its back arched to its limit, and hairs standing on end, the cat's pupils shrink into slits in terror, as if it had just seen something extremely horrific.//

Shiina Taki: WH?!

//Shocked by the sudden shriek, Taki jerks to look behind her, only to be met with nothing at all.//



Shiina Taki: (...What's with all this all of a sudden?)

//Taki turns back, the black cat had disappeared without a trace.//

Shiina Taki: (How odd... the whole day has been so odd... how tiring...)

//Despite the lingering sense of uneasiness, the chilling encounter had shocked the tiredness of work out of her system.

Too many things are happening today, yet in Taki's eyes, it was all pretty meaningless. She readjusts, and trudges in the direction of home.//

Scene change

//Taki walks up to the slope, stopping midway. Here lies one of her most frequented convenience stores. The neon blue sign emits a familiar light, one similar to home. A friendly face amongst the dark and deserted streets.//

Shiina Taki: (Speaking of which, I've already finished off the beers I bought before, and I'm running out of Nutrition jelly too. Since I'm already here, should I go and stock up?)

[[ "Go to the Conbini" -> [Conbini](#) ]]

[[ "Go Home" -> [Go home](#) ]]

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## CONBINI

Shiina Taki: (I'll buy a few cans of beer, I need to loosen up a bit.)

Scene change

Cashier: Welcome~ Ah! Ms Shiina, long time no see!

Shiina Taki: Hm? Isn't it a weekday? How come you're on shift?

Cashier: Ahh that girl had to take a medical leave today, I'm here to keep this place running.

Shiina Taki: I see, it seems like everyone's falling ill these days... it's not serious is it?

Cashier: She sounded quite chipper when I called her, so she should be okay. It's flu season after all, lots of people are down. Make sure to take care of yourself too, Ms Shiina.

Shiina Taki: I will, thanks. Hand me a basket.

Cashier: Hoho~ Is it a restock day? Ten cans of Asahi and 30 Nutrition jellies coming right up!

Shiina Taki: I'm not buying that much at once.

Cashier: I was just kidding~ I'll leave you to it

//The cashier settles both her elbows on the counter, tilting her head up to watch the wall mounted tv.//

Television: "... Yesterday evening, an attack took place at XX street, with the victim suffering minor injuries. The Police have now increased their patrol efforts, and will be doing night patrols in nearby neighbourhoods..."

Cashier: Whoa, things really haven't been peaceful recently.. and this street is just down the corner too...

Shiina Taki: Just these will do, could I get the bill?

Cashier: Righty-o. Hm? You're not buying cigarette candies today? That's pretty rare of you.

[[["I'll just be buying beer today" -> [Buy beer only](#)]]

[[["You're right, I should buy some" -> [Buy cigarette candy](#)]]

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BEER ONLY

Shiina Taki: Feels like I've been eating a little too much, I have to start holding back.

Cashier: You're talking like you really got addicted.

Shiina Taki: Some people do get addicted to sugar, just like how some cats get addicted to matcha.

Cashier: Haha! What nonsensical comparison is that? Speaking of, Cats can't even eat matcha!

Cashier: And rather than holding back on the candy, shouldn't you be holding back on the alcohol?

Shiina Taki: Alcohol can't lift the spirits and also affects focus. I don't drink if I have work to do.

Cashier: Oh lord, a wild disciplined weirdo has appeared! uu, but Ms Shiina has some aspects that...

Shiina Taki: Ha?

Cashier: Your eyebags are so dark, one look is all I need to know that you don't sleep properly, and stay up late consistently.

Shiina Taki: Is it really that obvious?

Shiina Taki: (Even though I cover it up with concealer everyday)

Cashier: It could not be any more obvious! Alright, I'm not going to take up too much of your time, so hurry back and get some proper rest already!

Shiina Taki: ...thanks.

Cashier: Alright then, here's your change. Thank you for your patronage~

Cashier: Ah, there's this too. A free gift for our lucky long standing customer. If you keep sustaining yourself on those jellies, your body is bound to collapse!

Shiina Taki: ....Oden Miso and Fried Rice bento? This isn't luck, you're just handing me something too bizarre to sell and you don't want to deal with the cleanup!

Cashier: Hey hey, this is pretty tasty you know? It's our last one, and it's going to be discontinued after today! Since you came today let's just call it fate, take it take it~~

Shiina Taki: .. fine, thanks a lot.

//The automatic doors open, and chilly air barrels into the store. The sudden temperature drop causes Taki to shiver.

She doesn't know why, she can feel a sense of uneasiness creeping up her spine. She spares a glance at the cashier, who didn't seem to notice her discomfort.

Taki leaves quickly//

[[["Leave Conbini"-> [leave Conbini](#)]]

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## BUY CANDY ALSO

Shiina Taki:... I'll take a pack of cigarette candy

Cashier: Okay~ while we're on this topic Ms Shiina, I've always been curious why you like this candy so much.

Cashier: I've tried it before, a combo of sugar and flavour essence, it doesn't taste good in the slightest.

Shiina Taki: The taste is pretty bad.. but the way it feels in the hand and vibe is pretty similar... so...

Cashier: If you really need to, why don't you just smoke a real one?

Shiina Taki: Eugh.. I did smoke in college, but I quit soon after

Scene change, flashback

//“Kaname Raana: Rikki, you stink

Shiina Taki: Ugh

Chihaya Anon: Rikki you snuck out to go smoking again? What~ a~ Delinquent~

Shiina Taki: Ha?

Nagasaki Soyo: Hehe. Then, Tomori-chan, just like we agreed upon. Taki won't be bringing you home today.

Shiina Taki: Hey!

Takamatsu Tomori: ....un. Sorry, but I really do wish for Taki-chan to be healthy...

Shiina Taki: uu..., Sorry, Tomori..."//

Scene change, present

Shiina Taki: Un, yeah. I quit.

Shiina Taki: (.....)

Cashier: Quitting it is a good thing, you oughta appreciate the ones who made you quit smoking.

Shiina Taki: ...yeah

Cashier: Alright, here's your change. Thank you for your patronage~

Cashier: Ah, there's this too. A free gift for our lucky longstanding customer. If you keep sustaining yourself on those jellies, your body is bound to collapse sooner or later!

Shiina Taki: ....Oden Miso and Fried rice bento? This isn't luck, you're just handing me something too bizarre to sell and you don't want to deal with the cleanup!

Cashier: Aiya this is pretty tasty you know? It's our last one, and it's going to be discontinued after today! Since you came today let's just call it fate, take it take it~~

Shiina Taki: .. fine, thanks a lot.

//The automatic doors open, and the chilly air barrels into the store. The sudden temperature difference causes Taki to shiver.

She doesn't know why, she can feel a sense of uneasiness creeping up her spine. She spares a glance at the cashier, who didn't seem to notice her unease.

Taki leaves quickly//

[[["Leave Conbini"-> [leave Conbini](#)]]

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### **Leave conbini**

//Walking out, the sun has already set. The street remains as silent as before. The cool yet humid air, combined with the roughness of the day, makes one wish to return home as quickly as possible

To Taki, home is that room, a chair, table and computer, completely isolated from the outside world with the help of tightly shut curtains.

The convenience store is located on a straight connecting road, with both the north and west path leading back to her rented building. However, the two routes have drastically different sceneries and facilities.

If she heads north, she'll be passing by a rowdy residential commercial street, and due to the terrain, the journey takes slightly longer as compared to taking the west path.

That street has a lot of shops, but ever since moving in, Taki has been so busy that she never had the mood to go shopping. She picks the route for safety when returning at nighttime and always walks hastily, so she's actually pretty clueless what kind of shops there are.

If she heads west, the journey is shorter, but she would have to cross a construction site and a desolate park. It's rare to see anyone walking there at night, and that isn't quite a good choice for someone walking home alone.//

Shiina Taki: (Normally I'd take the path through the busy commercial street, but I'm already so tired... which path should I take?)

~~Take the [North](#) path ~~

[[ "Take the West path" -> [West Path](#) ]]

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## WEST PATH (Conbini)

Shiina Taki: (It might be a bit late.. but I'm carrying a bag of beer and so damn tired... I'll take the shorter path today.)

//The west side used to have an old commercial district, but less and less people visited, in the end it was supposed to be torn down and rebuilt, but that's been paused due to the economy.

Lined with empty, unfinished houses, not to mention the frequent gathering of vagrants, it was rare to see anyone passing through this late at night.

The beer in the bag lets out rattling from their knocking, worried about disturbing the neighbours, Taki puts extra focus on balancing the bag in her hands.

..but thinking back to the news she happened to overhear in the shop, she silently picks up her pace.//

//Spying her house in the corner of her eye, Taki lets out a small sigh of relief.

Though taking a closer look, she suddenly realises that there seems to "something" nearby, filling her with a sense of confusion.//

Shiina Taki: (... did someone dump their trash here?)

Shiina Taki:(No, could it be a person? Squatting? Who would be here at night- ...eh?)

//Seemingly having heard the footsteps, the other party quickly pulls themselves out, revealing that head of extremely recognizable white hair.//

Shiina Taki: Str... Ra- Raana!? What are you doing here so late!!

//Raana stands up, turning back to look at Taki who came running over, and slightly tilts her head in greeting.

Then she points to the shrubs she was buried in, the hole she made still fully visible.//

Kaname Raana: There was a cat. Probably.

Shiina Taki: Ha..? Lots of strays roam around here, maybe they're being fed by the neighbours... no no no that's not the issue, why are you here so late?? What about school?

//It's not the first time Raana's come to her house at a moment's notice.

However she's been facing a problem known as 'graduating college' and was saddled with work, so she hasn't been over since Taki moved houses.//

Kaname Raana: School's at school.

Shiina Taki: You really.. I'm telling you if you don't get those credits you'll be hel-

Kaname Raana: Conbini? What did you buy? Give me matcha cake.

Shiina Taki: Oi!! Don't dig through so haphazardly, there's nothing for you to eat, I didn't buy any matcha cake today!! The bag's going to rip— !

**[If you didn't buy the cigarette candy]**

Kaname Raana: Beer, beer, beer, jelly, jelly, ah, bento!

//-- The Oden Miso and Fried rice bento has been found.//

Kaname Raana: ..... (silently shoves it back in)

Kaname Raana: There's nothing to eat.

Shiina Taki: I've already said there was nothing, what's the point of you getting disappointed. Well, if you really need to eat something, the jelly..

Kaname Raana: Don't want it.

Shiina Taki: Fine!

**[If you did buy the cigarette candy]**

Kaname Raana: Beer, beer, beer, jelly, jelly, ah, candy!!

//Raana digs out a box of cigarette candy from the pile aof beer, with Taki having no choice but to allow it, she cracks open the packages and puts a stick of it in her mouth at lightning speed-

Immediately showing an unhappy, extremely bitter face.//

Kaname Raana: Too sweet. Not tasty.

Shiina Taki: I knew it... it's not even matcha why are you in such a rush. Arlight, spit it out if you don't want it.

//Raana shakes her head, crunching it underneath her teeth twice before swallowing it with a frown.

-----

Kaname Raana: It's because Rikki is slow, I got hungry.

Shiina Taki: Ha.. I didn't even know you were coming, if you had told me earlier.. Eh, fine, so why were you looking for me? Did you need something?

Kaname Raana: .....

//She doesn't know how, but Taki manages to catch a faint uneasiness from Raana.//

Kaname Raana: Rikki, is a drummer.



Shiina Taki: Ah, well... yeah. (What's with this hesitation, could the lack of practice sessions be making this guy uneasy...)

Kaname Raana: Classmate, is learning drums. They watched a MyGO!!!!! performance, enjoyed it, wanted the drummer's autograph.

Shiina Taki: My.. Autograph? I'll give it to you, but you really took a trip just for this?

Shiina Taki: I could just pass it to you next practice no?

Shiina Taki: (But next practice... when would that be?)

Kaname Raana: Next time, don't know when. So, give it now.

//Raana reaches her hand out to Taki.//

Shiina Taki: ... You're saying all that, but where am I going to sign? I can't sign your hand, you know?

Kaname Raana: ?

Shiina Taki: I give... just wait here a moment, I'll take some paper for you

Kaname Raana: Can't you give it now?

Shiina Taki: With what?! If you're looking to grab a signature you should prepare something.

Kaname Raana: Then leave it.

Shiina Taki: Ah, no it's, just wait for a minute or so and it'll be done, you're just gonna leave?

Shiina Taki: Then your classmate... hey! Wait, it's getting late so I'll walk you back-

Kaname Raana: Next time.

//Raana heads towards the station without so much as a glance back.//

Shiina Taki: Next time is... pe, make sure to tell me when you get home! Make sure you remember!! Do you hear me!

//Raana gives Taki a small wave, quickly disappearing down a street corner.//

Shiina Taki: ....she left.

Shiina Taki: Hu, really, what did she even come here for...

Shiina Taki: (Autograph for a friend, she said... thinking about it I feel like she's mentioned this before?)(Mm, I can't quite remember.)

//For a moment, Taki suspects that Raana was just using that as an excuse.//

Shiina Taki: (That kid... she wouldn't have something weighing on her mind, right?)

//Flashback

Kaname Raana: Conbini? What did you buy? Give me matcha cake.

Return to present"//

Shiina Taki: (.... like the stray cat could have any concerns, I'm overthinking it,)

//Taki regrips the heavy plastic bag in her hands, prepared to walk towards the front door-

A shadow suddenly pops out from the hole Raana had just made, tunnelling towards her. Startled, she drops the bag in her hands, the cans of beer rolling out to the ground.//

Shiina Taki: Wah! Wh- What was that!?

//--Before her eyes, is a cat. Its fur black, its eyes purple.

The same cat Taki saw not too long ago.//

/The black cat stands, unmoving. Staring straight at her, Taki can feel a chill going down her spine from the intensity.//

Shiina Taki: (Too familiar, this pair of eyes, it is way too familiar, what exactly is it--)

//Then, the black cat, smiles.

Perhaps it revealed its fang because it felt threatened, or it simply opened its mouth to yawn. Even Taki doesn't know how she managed to read the expression of this cat from its eyes, when its body had blended in with the darkness of the night.

But she's certain. That this cat looked at her, and smiled.//

Shiina Taki: ..... You.....

//Just as her words were coming out, she suddenly felt coldness at the tip of her nose. Taki reaches up to wipe her face, then the cold starts repeatedly hitting her palm, her hair..

A sudden rain. When Taki looked back, the black cat had left without a trace.

The rain was harsh, hitting the ground at fast speeds, rippling on the ground. The rain of early spring was frighteningly cold, shocking her systems awake, Taki desperately picks up the cans, and rushes towards the door.//

//Inserting the key, twisting, then removing it.

She pulls the handle, entering sideways, using the gap to check her surroundings and only after making sure no one followed her, Taki gently shuts the door.

-----

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, and she's never thought of letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.

This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practiced it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Overcome by her exhaustion, she leans back, her eyelids fluttering shut. Her brain immediately throws off the shackles of the outside world, focusing only on operating her body.//

Shiina Taki: ...

.....

//Two hours of sleep wasn't long, but it was enough to shake off the dizziness and weakness that comes from lack of sleep.

Despite some difficulty, Taki manages to stand up, with both her back and waist aching in protest. Having endured the cold sweat that left her in body in an uncomfortable chill, she couldn't help but shudder.//

Shiina Taki: (I haven't caught a cold, have I?)

//She quickly checks her forehead, and feeling nothing off, Taki sighs in relief//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, I should grab a shower and change out of these clothes.)

//Taki stands up in a rush, and feels like she stepped on something, it felt cold, and crunchy.

She looks down, it was a half drunk can of beer she left on the table two days ago, she had no clue when that had rolled to the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (... This day "really" sucks.)

//Letting out a long sigh, she patiently cleaned up the mess with some paper towels. Taki takes off her rain sodden jacket and hangs it on the chair, then heads towards the bath. //

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling onto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning her equipment on as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.//

"Check Raana's message"

Kaname Raana: "1"

Shiina Taki: This guy.. She's already home, why can't she just report that she made it home safely?

Shiina Taki: Whatever, it's still an improvement.

//After some thought, Taki uses a Panda sticker to reply with, "OK'./

Shiina Taki: (Stray cat always has her phone on silent, so this shouldn't disturb her sleep.)

//Taki was seemingly invigorated by her bandmate's message.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

## **Chapter 1 end**

-----

## GO HOME

Shiina Taki: (It's fine... I don't quite feel like buying anything today.)  
Shiina Taki: (I'll come back another day.)

//Walking onwards, the sun has already set. The street remains as silent as before. The cool yet humid air, combined with the roughness of the day, makes one wish to return home as quickly as possible

To Taki, home is that room, a chair, table and computer, completely (shut) from the outside world with the help of closed curtains.

The convenience store is located on a straight connecting road, with both the north and west path leading back to her rented building. However, the two routes have drastically different scenery and facilities.

If she heads north, she'll be passing by a rowdy residential commercial street, and due to the terrain, the journey takes slightly longer as compared to taking the North path.

That street has a lot of shops, but ever since moving in, Taki has been so busy that she never had the mood to go shopping. She picks the route for safety when returning at nighttime and always walks hastily, so she's actually pretty clueless what kind of shops there are.

If she heads west, the journey is shorter, but she would have to cross a construction site and a desolate park. It's rare to see anyone walking there at night, and that isn't quite a good choice for someone walking home alone.//

Shiina Taki: (Normally I'd take the path through the busy commercial street, but I'm already so tired... which path should I take?)

[[ "Take the North path" -> [North Path](#) ]]  
~~Take the [West path](#) ~~

-----

## NORTH PATH

//That cat's shriek remains firm in the back of her mind, and Taki feels that sense of uneasiness continue to grow//

Shiina Taki: (Let's go with the commercial street, it might be a little further, but at least it's safe.....)

Scene change, running through street

//The moon gradually peeks out from behind the clouds..

The overcast skies slowly sink towards the ground, and the surroundings begin to leech an earthy smell.

Taki picks up her pace.

As she nears the end on the long commercial street, rain begins to fall mercilessly.

The rain was harsh, hitting the ground at fast speeds, rippling on the ground.

Even if she left the street, there were still ways to go before she would reach her home, it wouldn't be realistic to run home in one breath.

Without any choice, Taki quickly ducks into a nearby tea house-//

Shiina Taki & Passerby: Oof-

//Taki bumps into a passerby rushing out from the restaurant, landing both of them on the floor.//

Shiina Taki: Tch, the doors open pretty wide, can't you watch where you're going?



Passerby: Hey YOU were the one that rushed in okay?! Aaah, my precious upright nose... that hurt like hell!

Shiina Taki: (This annoying voice... sounds so familiar.)

//The roaring downpour muffled the voice just enough, and Taki wasn't going to ask for confirmation.

The person grumbled as she bent down to collect the items that dropped from their sling.

Well, Taki "was" at fault too. So she too squatted down to help.//

Passerby: Keys, lipstick, selfie stick, membership card..... one of my eyelashes also fell-- Argh--!

//With her vision probably obscured by the sunglasses she wore, this passerby did not notice the sign right behind her. The moment she tried to get up from her half squat position, her bent back slams straight into the bottom of the sign. This passerby who had just got up from a fall just moments ago, is back to falling on their ass again.//

Shiina Taki: Hey, you okay?

//Taki rushes towards her, reaching a hand out.

This is the first time she takes a proper look at the person, and she realises-

-- Under those cap and glasses, was a head of annoyingly pink hair.//

Shiina Taki: Ha ?!

Shiina Taki: Chihaya Anon?!?

//She strengthens her grip, pulling the passerby up in one go.

Now that they were both up, Taki was even more certain

The other party stares at the familiar face, blinking twice behind her sunglasses with only one fake lash on, then--//

Chihaya Anon: ---AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!

//Like a dog that just got its tail stepped on, Anon jerks away to hide.//

Shiina Taki: You're way too loud! Hey, be careful!!

//Taki rushes, wrapping her arm around the other's waist, preventing a third fall.//

Shiina Taki: Take a closer look at who I am..

Chihaya Anon: Ahhhh!!!!

Chihaya Anon: It's Rikki ---- !!!!!

Shiina Taki: You are SO loud!!!!

//Other passersby who also went under the same roof to hide from the rain glanced at them with puzzled expressions.

In an awkward panic, Taki whispers apologies to the other pedestrians while dragging Anon into the shop.//

Chihaya Anon: Hey hey hey, Rikki be gentle

Chihaya Anon: My clothes are going to be crumpled because of you.

Shiina Taki: I thought I said to lower your voice.

Shiina Taki: Seriously, what's with you all of a sudden!

Chihaya Anon: Running into Rikki without any mental preparation this late at night is as scary as encountering one of the ten urban legends, no, it's more like the fear that runs down your spine when you end up bumping into your teacher anywhere outside of school ahhhhhhh---

Shiina Taki: If you have a problem with me just tell me.

Shiina Taki: Ha... so what are you doing here so late?

Shiina Taki: Isn't it almost time for your str-

Shiina Taki: ugh, no its too late.

Chihaya Anon: This tea restaurant is a recently opened chain. I've eaten this in London before, so I thought I'd do a stream reminiscing my old memories of England~~

Shiina Taki: That'd just be throwing cold water on the topic.

Chihaya Anon: Well... wait! Stream! Rikki, what time is it now?? I think my phone shut off when I dropped it just now--

//Taki turns her phone on once more with a click, lifting and flashing those numbers in Chihaya Anon's face.//

Chihaya Anon: Ahhhhh!

//Taki instinctively covers her ears.//

Chihaya Anon: Rikki I'm almost out of time!! We'll catch up next time!

Chihaya Anon: If I keep running and don't look back - - alright, there should be--

//Without waiting for Taki to reply, the pink thing that appeared with the wind, also disappeared like the wind, running into the dampened streets, taking away with her that boisterous nature and annoying voice, leaving Taki in the remaining silence. ([[T/n note:noise -> tn noise]])//

Chihaya Anon: I'll see you at practice----Rikki--!

//Taki turns, walking to where she last saw Anon. She gazes at the, now blurry, night sky.//

Shiina Taki: (Next practice huh... when will that be)

//The rain has almost stopped, but Taki feels colder than ever.

Her mind wanders, Taki no longer in touch with the mortal realm, just as she was about to sink into depression, the screen that had been slumbering suddenly lights up, followed by a special ringtone and vibration, bringing its owner back from the dark.

Lifting up her phone, the notification was from a video streaming platform.//

【You have notifications from Anon Tokyo's stream, which will start in 30 minutes, please be prepared before it starts.】

//Taki looks back at the restaurant.

The restaurant that was filled with people was now filled with empty seats instead.

The rain has stopped, and people have left this temporary shelter to return home.//

Shiina Taki: It's time for me to head home.

-----

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, and she's never thought of letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.

This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practiced it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

//The exhaustion leads her to lean back into the chair, and slowly, she shuts her eyes. Her mind fights off the shackles of the outside world and slowly gives in to her body's operations. (t/n not too sure about this one)

Shiina Taki: (.....)

[[Wake up]]

-----

NORTH WAKE UP

//Waking up, it was neither day nor night, and her only sense of time came from the clock hanging on the wall. Two hours of sleep wasn't long, but it was enough to shake off the dizziness and weakness that comes from lack of sleep.

Despite some difficulty, Taki manages to stand up, with both her back and waist aching in protest. Having endured the cold sweat that left her in body in an uncomfortable chill, she couldn't help but shudder.//

Shiina Taki: (I haven't caught a cold, have I?)

//She quickly checks her forehead, and feeling nothing off, Taki sighs in relief//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, I should grab a shower and change out of these clothes.)

//Taki stands up in a rush, and feels like she stepped on something, it felt cold, and crunchy.

She looks down, it was a half drunk can of beer she left on the table two days ago, she had no clue when that had rolled to the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (... This day "really" sucks.)

//Letting out a long sigh, she patiently cleaned up the mess with some paper towels. Taki takes off her rain sodden jacket and hangs it on the chair, then heads towards the bath. //

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling unto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning on her equipment as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.//

"Check Anon's message"

Chihaya Anon: It's so rare to run into Rikki... too bad it was such bad timing! Otherwise I'd love to stay with Rikki a little longer! When will we meet again? Can't wait for our next practice ( $\geq \omega \leq$ )/

Chihaya Anon: Just to mention but that restaurant's new item is suuuuper good! Do you think we could go there after our next practice session ends? Looking forward to it ( $> y <$ )

Chihaya Anon: PS: Halfway back it started raining again, don't know if Rikki got wet or not-- You had better get caught in the rain! Otherwise I'd be the only one soaked and that's way too pitiful. I almost didn't make it for the stream!

Chihaya Anon: PS:PS: Remember to take a warm bath, don't get lazy just because you live alone

Shiina Taki: This guy... talks way too much.

Shiina Taki: Eug,why is there a selfie- NOBODY WANTS TO SEE YOUR POST BATH PICS!

Shiina Taki: I knew bumping into her wouldn't be anything good

//Grumbling, Taki stares at the wall of text on her screen for a while, finally choosing to reply with a stern Panda emoticon, with the caption "Don't be late to our next practice'//

Shiina Taki: (Though I really want to tease her, but I think I should keep it a secret I watched that stream of hers, where she had messed up make-up while soaked to the bone.

//Taki was seemingly invigorated by her bandmate's message.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

## **Chapter 1 end**

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Picking the shortcut without going conbini

Shiina Taki: (I'm already so tired, I'll take the shorter path this time. There will be no issue if I I rush back...)

//Gradually, the dusk paints over the sky as hasty footsteps from the abandoned commercial district currently undergoing redevelopment fade into nothing. Her yearning for a hot shower and her bed makes the already short distance seem even shorter, and as such, Shiina Taki walks even faster towards her home.

Shiina Taki: After this small park, I'll almost be home.

//She is relieved at this fact.

The warm glow of the evening is slowly fading, reaching that fleeting moment where the lamps on either side of the road remain unlit while the night begins its descent.//

Shiina Taki: (If those few hours before dusk are when people encounter spirits and deities, then this period of time is definitely when people encounter weirdos.)



//Taki remains on guard while eyeing her surroundings. Even though she's already left the abandoned commercial district littered with vagrants, the approaching park is desolate, and isn't exactly safe to walk past at night.

Suddenly, the memory of speaking to a police officer in the middle of investigating a case resurfaces in her mind.

As she has to ensure that every child has been picked up by their guardian, Taki gets off work later than most. After running the entire way home, more often than not, the sun has already set.

Every household has already had dinner, those who have to rest are in bed, those who go for late night walks have already set off, leaving not even a shadow of a person in these streets. However, today is different.//

Shiina Taki: (Who's that standing under the streetlamp...)

Shiina Taki: (The police? At this hour?)

Shiina Taki: (...I'll just walk around them.)

Officer: Excuse me, Miss. Please wait a second.

//The officer was dressed in a black raincoat, his build large enough to almost entirely obstruct the light of the streetlamp.//

Officer: Do you live in this area?

Shiina Taki: Ah, I do.

Officer: Were you at home around 8 last night?

Shiina Taki: I was...

Officer: At that time, was there any unusual activity outside?

Shiina Taki: (I was preparing a lesson at the table the entire night, and i had Masatoshi Mashima's 《Hito ni wa Sorezore Jigou ga Aru》on loop the entire time.)

Shiina Taki: I apologize, I was wearing headphones then, so I was completely oblivious to any activity outside.

Officer: In that case...

Shiina Taki: Did anything happen?

Officer: There was an attack in this area recently.

Shiina Taki: ... ..

Shiina Taki: The victim... Are they fine?

//The officer makes way for Taki to pass.//

Officer: It was just a small arm injury. But, I heard that it was a musician, so it can't really be considered as 'fortunate' in this case.

Shiina Taki: (A musician? Can someone really be that unlucky?)

//Likely to ease the worries of the unhappy residents, the officer begins to ramble on about their measures to resolve the situation.//

Officer: To put it simply, we will be increasing the frequency of patrols in the area for the time being, as well as installing surveillance cameras on various roads.

Officer: Oh, the rain's getting heavier.

Officer: Damn... life is really unpredictable... Regardless, we will ensure the safety of the residents diligently. Thank you for your cooperation, please head home now.

//His words concluded with a firm, uplifting tone. Taki lets out a sigh for no reason in particular, turning around to drag her fatigued legs back home.//

Shiina Taki: Life is... unpredictable?

//People don't find comfort in the fragility encompassed by that saying. "Life can be destroyed by unexpected, unavoidable incidents", just like how no one could have expected that drunkard to pop out of the bushes by the road and attack someone.

Returning to reality, she had unknowingly walked to the entrance of the park while pondering on this matter. The shadows cast by the trees dance on the floor, the neglected shrubs on the roadside are a mess of overgrowth, having grown past an average person's waist, enough for someone to hide behind.

The ominous darkness breeds imagination, but luckily enough, she is met with the bright glow of a flashlight from the bushes after turning the corner.//

Shiina Taki: ?!

Shiina Taki: (It seems like the person holding the flashlight hasn't noticed me, if i just bolt in the opposite direction now...)

//Just as she turns to leave, the person has seemingly found what they were looking for. The beam of light emitting from their flashlight moved from the treetops to the floor in a flash, yet the brief appearance of a head of hair with a familiar colour makes her stop in her tracks.

Suspicion and an untimely curiosity got the best of her, losing all desire to flee. Closing the distance between them, a dark green scarf peeking out from the shadows further strengthened her resolve.//

Shiina Taki: Tomori!

//The woman in question responded to her name being called by turning her attention and her flashlight in the same direction, the sudden beam of light causing Taki to instinctively shield her eyes with her hands. It was also at that moment, in her bewildered state, that her unasked question was spoken by the other party first.//

Takamatsu Tomori: Taki-chan...? How come you're here?

Shiina Taki: Work ended a little late, so I took a shorter route home through the park.

Shiina Taki: More like, why are you at such a dangerous place alone at this hour, Tomori?

Recently, there was a ...

Shiina Taki: Some stuff happened in the area, it's not too safe. If you wanted to come here, you should've at least told me first, so I can accompany you.

//She hesitated for a moment, not further elaborating on the details of the incident.

The lingering fear from the false alarm beforehand coupled with worry for Tomori made her concerned tone unintentionally panicked as she hurried to Tomori's side.//

Shiina Taki: Tomori, what are you looking for? I'll help search with you, that way we can leave quickly.

Takamatsu Tomori: Ah..... I was looking for this, I found it earlier.

//Tomori unfurls her fist to reveal two light yellow bugs, peacefully lying on their backs on the palm of her hand.

Though she's gotten used to Tomori's peculiar interests, Taki can't help but quiver when suddenly faced with two insects at this distance.//

Shiina Taki: This is a... cicada?

Takamatsu Tomori: Mhm. The publishing house is making a childrens' fairytale series focused on insects. I wanted one for cicadas.

Takamatsu Tomori: I could only come up with a rough idea after thinking for a really long time. The specific plot is still hard to pin down.

//Tomori flips over the two insects on her palm, revealing cracks on their backs.//

Shiina Taki: (Are those just cicada shells...?)

Takamatsu Tomori: Cicadas are summer animals, they emerge in the summer, breed in the summer, die in the summer. Their lives belong to the summer.

Takamatsu Tomori: Then, are they curious about the seasons that they will never see? If they witnessed the winter, what would they have thought?

Shiina Taki: Well, it's a very Tomori-like story.

Takamatsu Tomori: I'm struggling to carry on from there, though. Just today, I was at the table for the entire afternoon, yet I could only write a few lines.

Takamatsu Tomori: I thought that maybe looking at actual cicadas would give me some inspiration, but summer passed a long time ago. There may be some in the trees still, and probably only in the park. Besides, there are officials patrolling the area near the city park, and digging in such an area would probably just invite disturbance...

Takamatsu Tomori: When I considered other areas that I was familiar with, I only had the park near Taki-chan's house...

Shiina Taki: Is that so...

//Taki had a strong urge to sigh. Tomori has become much more daring as compared to when they had first met, so much that it can be difficult to deal with at times.//

Shiina Taki: Did you set off right after that?

Takamatsu Tomori: If I couldn't find any here, I would have tried searching that patch of forest in the south.....

Shiina Taki: What I'm trying to say is that the weather's been abnormal lately, even if you were eager to come, you should have brought an umbrella.

//As if to confirm Taki's words, the leaves began rustling above their heads.// [rain]

Shiina Taki: Shit...

//Taki fishes out her phone and begins hastily tapping the screen.//

Shiina Taki: Speak of the devil... At least there's a taxi available nearby. Tomori, follow closely.

Takamatsu Tomori: Mm.

//The streetlamps begin to light up one after the other, and the rain is getting heavier. The raindrops drum mercilessly on the hood of the taxi, the deafening noise reflecting the depressing weather.

The two of them left the shelter provided by the tree and walked to the road. Taki holds the car door open for Tomori, who shyly retreats into the recesses of the backseat, watching Taki as she closes the door.//

Takamatsu Tomori: Thank you, Taki-chan.

Driver: Can you confirm that this is the address?

Shiina Taki: Mhm. Sorry to trouble you, but please walk her to the door.

//Taki nods towards the driver, who promptly locks the door as the car revs to life. //

Shiina Taki: Remember to text me once you're home!

Takamatsu Tomori: Okay!

//As the taxi roars to life, Tomori pokes her head out the window partially to wave goodbye to Taki, who stays rooted in the same spot, waving back until the greyish-purple becomes nothing more than a small dot, disappearing past the corner that's been darkened by water damage.//

Shiina Taki: A strange encounter, for sure.

//Though she was still in deep thought, the downpour didn't allow for her to stand around so leisurely.//

Shiina Taki: I should head home first.

WEST REACH HOME

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, and she's never thought of letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.  
This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practiced it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

Shiina Taki: Speaking of Tomori...I don't know if those cicadas will actually help with her writing...

Shiina Taki: Inspiration is something I struggle to find myself, let alone help Tomori find hers.

//Coincidentally, her phone vibrates once, Tomori's message received.//

Takamatsu Tomori:「Taki-chan, are you home yet? The rain got worse out of nowhere, did you manage to get home before then?」

Takamatsu Tomori:「At Taki-chan's request, the driver walked the entire way to my doorstep with me. Both the cicadas and I didn't even get wet, thankfully.」

Takamatsu Tomori:「On the way home, I was still worried about what I would do if the cicadas got wet. If I had to dry them, I might rip their fragile wings by accident, but if I left them to dry on its own, they might become flimsy and soggy. When I think about how they could just flap their

wings lightly to shake off the water when they were still alive, I can't help but think life is so intriguing. 」

Takamatsu Tomori: 「Remember to take care of yourself too, Taki-chan. If you got caught in the rain, remember to take a shower, and thoroughly dry yourself.」

Shiina Taki: (Alright. My head wouldn't break into pieces like a cicada's wings when rubbed with a towel, after all.)

//Anyone would feel happy to have someone care for them, and even her brain had formulated a rare, uncharacteristic joke. Though of course, she couldn't reply to Tomori with that, so she typed an honest reply.

Shiina Taki:「 Okay, I reached home a while ago, I'm about to shower now. 」

//Taki has completed her obligatory messages with Tomori. Despite wanting to wait for a response, the damp sensation of her skin, and Tomori's request convinces her otherwise.

She hangs her rain sodden coat on the chair, and heads for the bath.//

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling onto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning on her equipment as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.

It's the last reply from Tomori.//

Takamatsu Tomori:「 Right, you also paid for the taxi today, and I don't even know how much you spent... I'm grateful for your help today. Next time we have rehearsal , I'll give you something to repay you for this.」

Shiina Taki: Next rehearsal...

Shiina Taki: (...I'll respond in the morning, wouldn't want to disturb her sleep.)



//Taki was seemingly invigorated by receiving a message from her.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

### **Soyo**

Picking the commercial district after conbini

//That cat's shriek remains firm in the back of her mind, and Taki feels that sense of uneasiness continue to grow//

Shiina Taki: (Let's go with the commercial street, it might be a little further, but at least it's safe.....)

-----

//Commercial street. The last of the Sun's rays fade away, yet the night is lit with electricity, and thus the animals have yet to return to their nests.

Unfamiliarity surrounds her, the smell of a hot meal, the gorgeous shine of the street lights.. Yet she runs back to her home single mindedly. Everything she needs is already there, and she feels like a frightened wolf yearning for home.//

Shiina Taki: Damn it.... What the hell was up with that black cat?

//Taki rushes to the side of the road in two steps. Good thing there was no rain, otherwise this story would develop into a classic tale about a wolf soaked to the bone.

The music professor's mind continues to wander as her steps gradually slow, until she ends up standing still with creases on her forehead. Looking up, she's met with a lamppost with its paint flaked off, her restlessness saved her. Shiina Taki pats her face with a bit of force.//

Shiina Taki: You're getting scared because of that kind of nonsense? You really are regressing. (The longer you live the more childish you get)

//It's past six. The lights flash twice, and finally turn on thanks to the electricity that she pays taxes for. Exactly what is there to be scared of? She's a human citizen that's well integrated into today's society, not a wild animal that accidentally wandered into a steel forest. The world still goes on, in a way she's familiar with.

Taki lowers her head, and closes her eyes. Since she's managed to gather her wits, there's no more point to staring at that LED, she should continue moving forward.

Of course there was another reason, the bulb was just a little too dazzling.//

???: What are you doing?

Shiina Taki: Ge, So-

//A voice she couldn't be more familiar with, though it was the business version.

But no matter how familiar that voice was, the unsociable Taki was not quite willing to call out the wrong name in the middle of the street.//

???: How are you spacing out on the street?

Shiina Taki: ... Soyo

//Luckily, this hassle of a woman didn't come out from a strange sign, confused imagery or was a figment of mysterious "intuition". High heels, a woman's blouse, a ridiculously expensive jacket... This person definitely belonged to this normal reality.

Shiina Taki suddenly really wants to be the first to speak.//

Shiina Taki: You're not taking the car today?

//The woman by the name of Soyo creases her brow, before following the conversation.//

Nagasaki Soyo: The car's over there, I just came here to buy some necessities .

//Taki nods her head. Then promptly ran out of things to say.

It's not that she really couldn't think up a topic, but since it was just a meeting of happenstance, Soyo doesn't have time to listen to her lecture on bands.

She doesn't know why, but her face felt a little cold. The topic was successfully diverted, and she hopes Nagasaki Soyo has some intention to let her go.//

Nagasaki Soyo: I thought you'd be eating at the Izakaya, Raana chan said she saw you there 4 days in a row.

//Kaname Raana, and that unfamiliar cat... has her intuition really become this useless?

Taki lifts her hand to touch her face unconsciously. It's cold, yet dry.//

Shiina Taki: When did she... she actually replied to you? In full, coherent sentences?

Nagasaki Soyo: Just send a few more questions to follow up, then piece together the replies. It isn't hard to grasp what she wants to say. We've known each other for so long, so it's a bit easier to understand her actions. Try keeping in contact a bit more, and not just for work.

//Taki doesn't answer. It's only natural to keep in contact with your friends... then again she doesn't have much of a life to talk about.

To be able to dump a load of text into the group chat like Chihaya Anon seven days a week for seven years in a row is also a talent. Also, doesn't Soyo also not reply to these messages often?

The air reverts back into silence. Taki can feel Soyo's gaze turning towards the bag in her hand, so she lifts it slightly, the logo on the bag spinning half a turn at the force.

Rain.

Taki's intuition has yet to fail, it's just that there was no way for the rain to reach the place where Nagasaki Soyo was standing. which was just by the street.

Forced by the wave of people, she was squeezed under the space under the cavity, even if she herself didn't always give permission.

The only good news is, there's no need to think of a topic anymore.

No animal likes their fur getting wet, even if what covers their body now wasn't the fur they were born with. This is their privilege as human beings, the trade off being they could no longer smell the humidity of the rain

.....Does she(Soyo) still hate the rain?//

Nagasaki Soyo: I have umbrellas in my car, let's go.

Shiina Taki: Right.

The asphalt hides the tracks of the shoes, but not those of high heels. The owner of this fancy vehicle was supposed to rest her eyes in the back seat, as this elegance needs to be maintained somehow- - but today's acquired elegance easily melts away in the rain.

When Shiina Taki reached the side of the car, its owner was still five steps behind her. The professional driver waiting within hears the motions, turns their head, and yet meets with a face, where under the shadow was terribly pale. The young driver immediately leans back into the seat.//

Shiina Taki: (.... am I really that scary?)

Nagasaki Soyo: Front passenger seat, in the glove compartment!

//In just an instant, the rain starts to pour even harder.

Seeing their employer's face, the driver finally starts to relax. The car door beeps open, Shiina Taki leans in, ignoring the panicked gaze of the young employee as she digs into the property belonging to her old friend in the back seat.//

Shiina Taki: White, Grey, Pink, Yellow..... Black.

Shiina Taki: What kind of person would prepare so many umbrellas? Are you preparing to make a man-made rainbow?

//Seemingly unconsciously, Taki takes out the final black umbrella. Her lighthearted mood and need to thank makes her turn her head to Soyo, yet what she bumps into is an empty gaze.

Intuitively, she feels it's probably not the best time to tell her untested, yet honest joke.

It's not hard to understand, she and Soyo both have things they are too embarrassed to admit to. Even if they aren't bad things per se, for example: Caring, caring and well, caring.

But she already opened her mouth, not saying anything now would make her look too silly. Shiina Taki grips the umbrella's handle, spinning it half a turn and finally clamping it at her waist, as if she was sheathing a sword.

This joking mood came quickly and unexpectedly, yet it took its time to leave. In this quiet atmosphere, Taki feels like getting under her skin.

Shiina Taki: The rain is still pretty heavy, mind if I hitch a ride?

Nagasaki Soyo: .....

Nagasaki Soyo: Apologies, I still have a meeting tonight, it's a bit too..

//The joke fails. Though the downpour was strong enough to drown out the night sky, Shiina Taki really didn't have much of an intention of having someone send her home.

There's a lot of ways to solve this issue, such as taxis, trains, etc. Even just braving the storm. One soaking downpour home isn't much of an issue for a 23 year old.

But an honest yet embarrassed rejection makes her just a little sad.

Cigarette Candy

[//In one's lowest moments, the easiest emotion to make its way out is care. The plastic digs into the skin of her left arm, and Shiina Taki decides to take some weight off herself. There's someone here who probably won't have a full meal tonight.//

Shiina Taki: Candy, it's not a real cigarette. Make do with this if you're hungry.

Nagasaki Soyo: .....thanks. ]

Unfolding and lifting it in a smooth motion, the umbrella's surface is weaved in a way that makes it completely opaque. Taki can't be bothered to figure out how much it cost.

The car starts, and she waves her farewell to that short meeting. The warmth she stole from that small interior is immediately scattered away by a chilly gust. The wind was cold, the rain was wet, and she was an ember that had yet to be smothered.

Shiina Taki: Let's hurry back.

She brushes off the raindrops that landed on her. Standing at the entrance and looking at the darkness inside the house, Taki finally feels that sense of long awaited relief.

The neverending series of weird events led her to stay out for what felt like an eternity, that returning home, despite the darkness, makes her feel calm.

Taki makes her way to the living room via the dark hallway, feeling for and switching on the light switch on the wall.

A sickly yellow immediately envelopes her.

It had been a long time since she last met with a member of MyGO!!!!!, and that rounded Taki's thoughts back to her band.

Ever since everyone entered the workforce, they all had new lives to live. Even though they kept up with their practices, that had become few and far between.

If it wasn't Soyo with her business trips, then it was Anon with her new livestreaming activities, or Raana having difficulties with her studies, and sometimes even Tomori needed to stay home to put her whole heart and soul into writing.

It became harder and harder to find a time where everyone could meet up, but there was no point to practice if they were missing a member. This conflict led to less chances for practices, and along with that the chance of holding a Live.

In the beginning, if the members couldn't make it they would be apologetic, but after a while, it slowly became the norm.//

Shiina Taki: (I guess this is just what adulthood is like)

Shiina Taki: (Since we never planned to walk the path of professionals, it can't be helped that this was the result.)

//This lifetime bond won't turn to ash just because of some leaves of absence.

Taki remains diligent in her responsibilities to the band: Practising drums, composing songs, organising Lives.

Half of the reason is because of her dedicated nature, the other reason is that throughout these years, they've managed to garner quite a number of fans. Even without debuting, they still have a responsibility to these fans to maintain some level of activity.

These years, minus the band, Taki hasn't been too happy with work life. After facing repeated setbacks, she couldn't help turning to her passion to make a living.

Now, she works at a music tutoring institution as a drum teacher, a boring, but not yet meaningless job.

There were people who saw Taki's skill in composing, ones who wanted to hire her as a composer and ones who wanted to buy the rights to her songs, but in the end she rejected all of them -

She had no will to do so, she never thought about letting her compositions go to anyone other than MyGO!!!!.

In all these years, all the passion she had for music she had dedicated to this unknown band, seemingly creating a deeply rooted habit.

Clock out, return home, compose songs, clock in.

This has become her daily routine after returning, or rather, her only purpose.

Sometimes she'll make too many meaningless tracks, then she'd go back to polishing the songs they already made, doing her best to adjust it to the members' habits, so that it would be easier for them to adjust during their once in a blue moon practice sessions.

Everyone's time is precious after all.//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, it feels like the time we have together has shortened to an odd degree.)

Shiina Taki: (I've already made three versions for the lyrics Tomori sent last time... and we haven't practised it even once... there are still some adjustments I have to make.)

//Settling her thoughts, Taki decides that she'll plan a practice soon, no matter what.//

//The exhaustion leads her to lean back into the chair, and slowly, she shuts her eyes. Her mind fights off the shackles of the outside world and slowly gives in to her body's operations. (t/n not too sure about this one)

Shiina Taki: (.....)

Checking the digital clock on the table, two hours have passed. Not long for slumber, but it was enough to shake off the dizziness and weakness that comes from lack of sleep.

Despite some difficulty, Taki manages to stand up, with both her back and waist aching in protest. Having endured the cold sweat that left her in body in an uncomfortable chill, she couldn't help but shudder.//

Shiina Taki: (I haven't caught a cold, have I?)

//She quickly checks her forehead, and feeling nothing off, Taki sighs in relief//

Shiina Taki: (Even so, I should grab a shower and change out of these clothes.)

//Taki stands up in a rush, and feels like she stepped on something, it felt cold, and crunchy.

She looks down, it was a half drunk can of beer she left on the table two days ago, she had no clue when that had rolled to the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (... This day "really" sucks.)

//Letting out a long sigh, she patiently cleaned up the mess with some paper towels. Taki takes off her rain sodden jacket and hangs it on the chair, then heads towards the bath. //

//After her bath, Taki finally returns to her usual workspace, settling onto her work chair. Even though she had already moved out and was living on her own, she furnished her bedroom to be the exact same as the one at her old home.

It's not because she was worried about getting homesick, or that she felt she couldn't assimilate to the new environment. It's just that she felt that her old bedroom had the most optimal set up for her to put full focus on her work.

The plans for practice haven't been confirmed, but Taki will prepare for it anyway. Nighttime is where she can be the most focused, she doesn't want to let go of this time. Thus she puts on her headphone, turning on her equipment as she waits for her computer to turn on--

During this waiting period, she swipes on her phone, an unread message greets her under the 3:00 on display.//

Nagsaki Soyo: "Did you get back yet? I'm really sorry I wasn't able to send you back... an umbrella definitely isn't strong enough for that type of rain, remember to take a bath when you get back, and remember to dry your hair."

Nagsaki Soyo: "You should drink something hot as well. Ginger tea, cocoa works too. Don't catch a cold. No rush in returning the umbrella, just hand it over the next time we meet."

Nagsaki Soyo: "Also. Coffee isn't on the list."

Shiina Taki: She sure does type a lot.

//Guiltily, the composer reaches for the half drunk beverage on her table. Not only was it cold, it was also coffee.



Feeling terribly exposed, Taki can feel the cold sweat run down her back. and goosebumps starting to form. Caught, she comes up with a more daring idea: How about I don't reply? I'll just expose myself further replying at this time.//

Shiina Taki: Hai

Shiina Taki: "Got it, you too."

//Raging thunderstorm? Settling her debts? That will all be for tomorrow. Answering messages in time is the first priority for the rest of her life.

Taki was seemingly invigorated by her bandmate's message.

Opening the track file, listening to those familiar beats, her mind and soul quickly melds with those notes, and she starts to weave a melody between the lines on the bars.//

Shiina Taki: (Tonight, I definitely-)

.....

//When Taki returns to her senses and takes off her headphones -- She's greeted by an old friend, the morning light cast upon her curtains.

She can hear both the wind and birds singing, and also -

the inescapable cries of her aching lower back.//

[[Chapter 1, End. ]]

[[Go to Chapter 2 -> Intro 2]]

[[What if you chose to go home? -> Go home]]

[[Return to start -> Introduction]]

## CHAPTER 2

不朽于我毫无价值, 所求无非向死而生

Immortality holds no value to me, I ask nothing more than the death of life

陵墓的腐蟲之气, 将不再诱我沉迷

May the corruption of the tomb, cease with its temptations.

Shiina Taki: Enough, stop.

//The final note lands, the sound of the drums is the first to scatter, and the other instruments follow that lead to disperse.

Taki puts down her drumsticks, and lets out a long sigh.//

Shiina Taki: (It's just not coming together, the score... I've already tweaked it, so why are we still....)

Chihaya Anon: Uuuuh, my hands are so tired...

Shiina Taki: You're tired already?

Chihaya Anon: The guitar portion this time feels pretty high level... You think so too, right?  
Raana-chan?

Chihaya Anon: Ah! Raana-chan fell asleep standing up!

Shiina Taki: Ha? How did that happen, it hasn't even been an hour since we started practice?

Takamatsu Tomori: ....It's probably because.. Raana's been busy with her thesis.

Takamatsu Tomori: She asked me to proofread and correct it last night...

Shiina Taki: So that's how it is...

Shiina Taki: Sorry, I'm the one who suddenly asked to hold practice.

Takamatsu Tomori: That's not... It's been a long time since we've gathered. Thank you, Taki-chan, for organising this.

Nagasaki Soyo: So what now, are we taking a break?

Shiina Taki: No, if the Stray cat needs to sleep then let her sleep. We'll continue.

Shiina Taki: Anon, could you play the lead portion?

Chihaya Anon: Ah.. sorry Rikki! When you sent the score two days ago I had an event... so...

Chihaya Anon: Aah, but I did take a good look at my own part though!

Shiina Taki: Tch. It's fine then, one more time.

~~~~~

Shiina Taki: No, that's not, it's still off..

Shiina Taki: And Anon, you got the riff at the interlude wrong!

Shiina Taki: And Soyo, you're lagging at the intro and rushing at the outro, you're not familiar with the score at all. Didn't I send it out early?

Chihaya Anon: I did look at it... but...

Nagasaki Soyo: Sending it on a weekday with two days notice then holding practice on a weekend, that's a pretty scarce amount of time.

Shiina Taki: I've already adjusted the difficulty, it should be pretty easy to get the hang of.

Chihaya Anon: That.. Rikki, you don't need to adjust it so many times. If you're done just send it to us...

Shiina Taki: Sending half assed work is meaningless no?The version I'm giving to you all now, is the most 'friendly' version.

Shiina Taki: If you can't get in any practice for something as easy as this, what's the point of sending it out early?

Nagasaki Soyo: Haa..

Shiina Taki: What? If you have something to say, spit it out.

Takamatsu Tomori: That.. Taki-chan, Soyo-chan...

Chihaya Anon: Aaahaha! Of course there isn't anything, ain't that right Soyorin? Well it's the first time we're practising the new song anyway, we'll just get it right next time...

Shiina Taki: Next time? Then tell me, when will that be?

Chihaya Anon: Eh.... Time is like a sponge, if you just squeeze a little you... I, I can do next week! Tomorin?

Takamatsu Tomori: I... I need to attend a few offline book clubs, sorry... Anochan, and Taki-chan..

Chihaya Anon: It's fine, it's fine! Everyone has their own things to attend to... then, what about next next week?

Nagasaki Soyo: Apologies, but I'll be in Hokkaido for a business trip for those two weeks.

Chihaya Anon: That's par for the course now, we'll just do it the week after! Let me check the calendar.. wow it coincides with a seasonal holiday, isn't that perfect?

Chihaya Anon: Ack! I forgot my agent set that date for my 24 hour livestream challenge... haha.

Shiina Taki:.....

Nagasaki Soyo: Since we can't find time, and also don't have plans to hold a live, let's just practice in our own free time.

Shiina Taki: We can't even practice our coordination, what do you mean by Live? With this performance? You're really planning on facing our fans like this?

Chihaya Anon: Maybe we should plan a Live so everyone has a goal to practice for...

Shiina Taki: Then tell me, when do you think we can hold that live?

//The room falls into silence.

No one knows the answer to that question.

None of them wants to be the one to make a promise, then break it, thus no one dared to bring it up.//

Shiina Taki: If none of you know, then let's get back to prac-

Shiina Taki: !

//A wave of nausea hits her with no warning, preventing those harsh words from spilling out of Taki's mouth.

Bringing with it a rapidly increasing heart rate, and she could feel her muscles start twitching uncontrollably.

Seeing Taki suddenly freeze in place, and her paling face, the other members rush over in worry.//

Takamatsu Tomori: Taki-chan... what's wrong?

Chihaya Anon: Rikki you look terrible... I'll practice properly, so don't be angry...

Nagasaki Soyo: You didn't.. you stayed up late again?

//Realising her mistake, Taki quickly gathers herself.//

Shiina Taki: Ah.. oh, sorry, I got distracted is all, nothing to worry about.

Nagasaki Soyo: How about we stop here for the day. Raana-chan ran off some time ago, and it always feels a bit off with one person missing.

Shiina Taki: Ha? Who let you deci-

//--The aching pulse of her chest cuts her off once again.

Seeing the anger hidden behind those worried eyes, Taki can't help but feel slightly ashamed.//

Nagasaki Soyo: It'd be great if our time off overlapped, but even if it doesn't we can simply wait, after all...

--We're not professionals. [[t/n:wording]]

//Taki knows what she means, even if the words never left her mouth.//

Shiina Taki: Then I guess we'll delay practice a few more months? According to that, we'll practice once a year and hold a Live every two? We don't have a clear goal in mind after all.

Nagasaki Soyo: I don't want to argue with you.

Shiina Taki: Who's arguing? I just-

Nagasaki Soyo: And you think paying with your health is the only way to keep the band going?

Takamatsu Tomori: ...I agree with Soyo-chan.

Takamatsu Tomori: Taki-chan, I don't want you to sacrifice yourself just to continue MyGO's activities.

Takamatsu Tomori: It's great, to have practice, to perform Live.

Takamatsu Tomori: But even if fate doesn't allow us time for one another, this temporary separation won't affect the bond between us.

Takamatsu Tomori: We're still walking down this road, together, after so many years, after all..

Shiina Taki:.....

Takamatsu Tomori:.....

Chihaya Anon: Y-Yeah! Hanging out with everyone once in a while is already suuuper joyous!

Chihaya Anon: Aah, I heard there was a newly opened Sushi restaurant nearby, how about we all go there and give it a taste~~

Nagasaki Soyo: I have a dinner event tonight, so I'm not going.

Takamatsu Tomori: My parents are coming over..

Chihaya Anon: It's fine it's fine, then Ri... uh, we'll go together next time! When Raana has the energy .

Shiina Taki:.....

[[Scene change: Train]]

//The once in a blue moon practice session ends on a terribly awkward note.

Taking a seat on the train, Taki has never felt worse.

She can't help but feel she was the reason behind that terrible parting.

-- She wasn't in top notch condition, she didn't prepare an appropriate score, and she was so unreasonable..

She knows they were just worried for her, yet she, in the heat of the moment, still spouted out those words..

There's no one else on this train but her, and that suited Taki just fine.

She doesn't want her awful expression to be seen by anyone else.

It was still sunny out, despite being far past noon. The rays of sunshine still carried warm as it pierced through those light fluffy clouds, not quite a weather that fit her current mood.

The warmth of the sun paws at Taki's arm, yet it elicits no reaction from her.

She plasters herself to the window and ceases to move an inch.

A million thoughts plague her mind, these emotions wrap around her heart, tightly binding her.//

Shiina Taki: (I know that everyone has their own life, I know that the band is no longer the top priority.)

Shiina Taki: (But how, but why do they seem to not care in the slightest?)

Shiina Taki: (Even though it was our long awaited reunion... why did it turn out this way...)

//The train pulls to a stop, the sound of the announcer over the speakers seemingly chasing her to leave.//

"Scene change: Home"

//Opening the front door, the temperature difference causes her to pause.

Maybe it was all in her mind, or perhaps there really was an issue, but she feels the earlier discomfort starting to return.

Her breaths get shorter, faster, her heart rate spikes, she feels herself panic, and pain running through her body.

Shiina Taki: (Could it be a cold...)

//With extreme difficulty, Taki makes her way to the dining table one step at a time. The moment both her arms grasp the back of the chair, Taki stopped being able to hold herself up.

With heavy breaths, her knees hit the floor. Hard. It's the first time her senses are screaming at her, and they are screaming at her that she can't fall asleep here.//

Shiina Taki: (Shit... phone, where's my phone...)

//She desperately fights to pull out her phone, but she can't stop the trembling of her hand, failing to even get the screen to turn on.

Her phone slips from her grasp, her body too succumbs to gravity and lands on the floor.//

Shiina Taki: (Why... I still....)

//Her eyelids finally succumb to the weight upon them, Taki's already blurred vision soon disappears, her consciousness sinking into an unending abyss.//

[[Darkness]]

//It feels like a long, long, dream.

She sees her life flashing by, yet it isn't viewed through her eyes. Familiar pasts, unknown future, all cycling before her.

Yet Taki remembers none of these scenes, everything feels so "familiar", yet exceedingly "unfamiliar".//

Shiina Taki: Ugh.... un.....

???:.....

//She feels like her body was set on fire and tearing apart, scenes of her life flashing before her eyes, the melding into a dead sea of nothingness.

On the faraway horizon, she watches as a ship blows out a mist of smoke.

Yet she floats, alone, in the storm.//

"????: time....."

//She floats, and floats, and floats... slowly closing in with the horizon. Then she sees something flashing in the corner of her eye--

It's a fleeting scene, one she yearned for as a child.

She turned in a rush, but it had already vanished. In place of it, was a black cat.//

"????: time....."

//Its mouth is moving, yet nothing could be heard.

Taki finally understand what it said.//

"-- Time, is running out."

//The pain faded, and with it, "its" life.//

.....

.....

.....

Shiina Taki: Uu... nn...

Shiina Taki: Hrfh...

//Her body remains weak. Moving slightly, she can feel the stickiness of sweat all around.

But the pain had wholly dissipated.//

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki: (How long... did I sleep?)

//Pushing herself up, she hears all her bones creak in protest.

The digital clock on her desk shows that it's almost 8.

-- 8 on a 24 hour clock..//

Shiina Taki: (I've slept for.. almost a whole day?!)

//Taki turns her phone on, the numbers on the screen declaring this as a fact.//

Shiina Taki: (All that time.. wasted...)

//The sky was dark, and it seemed to be raining heavily outside. Despite this, it was completely silent.

Maintaining her position, Taki sinks deep into depression.

But the coldness on her nose doesn't let her stay there for long, on the floor, appear a few small, but strikingly red dots.//

Shiina Taki: !!!

//Taki stands up in a panic, pinching her nose and rushing into the bathroom.

Taki hunches over the sink. Twisting the knob and letting the water run at max flow, the cold water splashes on her face, lowering its temperature.// [[tn]]

//

The diluted blood scatters among the clear water, before disappearing into the pitch black drain.//

Shiina Taki:ha.

//A feeling of helplessness grips her.//

Shiina Taki: (No time... I don't have time to waste on sleep. or sickness...)

Shiina Taki: (I'm out of time.... why?)

//She doesn't know why, she feels as if something is rushing her, as if something was chasing her, or perhaps she was just about to fall off a cliff. She's being pushed to her limit. She can't sit still, and her mind is unsettled.//

Shiina Taki: (I feel like... I saw something, in that dream.... what was it...)

//Taki frantically searches for the memories of her unconsciousness.//

Shiina Taki: (Just a little more... it was.. something related to time...)

"-- Time, is running out."

//In a moment, she remembers.

She looks up.

Unused for a long time, the mirror had a thin coating of water stains and soot. Despite the blurriness, there seemed to be something written on the mirror.

Taki gathers some water in her cupped hands, and throws it on the mirror. Wiping the droplets away haphazardly as the mirror lets out a piercing squeak at her actions.

Then, she sees it---//

//Taki leans forward, and promptly, throws up.//

Chapter 2 End

chapter 3

恐惧扼住咽喉，如枷锁禁锢我的双臂
Fear catches in my throat, locking my arms as if they were shackled
我向沉默发问，沉默却愈发震耳欲聋
I direct my questions to the silence, yet the silence deafened me

//She bolts through the station.

The sound of shoes against the floor reverberates throughout the vast and empty station, arousing a certain creature concealed by the dark.

The sudden visualisation makes her tremble in fear. She hastily pulls off her leather shoes, stepping barefoot on the cold concrete. The shoes left behind were quickly consumed by the shadows.

???: She reaches a stop— one she is very familiar with. Directory signs, vending machines, convenience stores, everything was exactly where it should be, everything looked identical to when she last saw it.

???: Except that there was no one but her at the station.

??? A clock with an unmoving face is suspended in the air on the platform, its needle nearing “0”. She knows that is the little time she has left.

???: That wretched thing— only leaving behind those emotionless words before disappearing— she can either stay here and cling to eternal life and solitude, or return to reality to meet her inevitable end.

???: only because she doesn't want those who care about her to witness her fate, she will flee from the hospital to reach this cursed station.

???: she loathes her fated end, so even though she knows her fate will not change, she wishes to bear witness to an alternate ending.

???: the pitch black tunnel carries again an ominous noise, whatever creature that is lurking in its depths makes an advance on her.

???: The ominous noise gradually shapes into a deafening roar. Her heart stopped, as if she was dead.

???: Is it really right? To be like this now?

???: Accompanied by a dizzying light, a train arrives through a hole, almost consciously stopping in front of her.

???: This is the last chance to change her mind, to go home. She must make a decision.

???: Regardless, she remains rooted to the ground, lacking the strength to move.

// The train door slowly opens with a hiss, and the one to greet her is none other than that thing— that wretched black cat.

An incarnate nightmare I had no power to shake off.

Finally, at that moment, she realises exactly where she's going.

She was doomed to be here.//

ANONTOKYO LIVE

Chihaya Anon:: ...Ah, the story ends there.

Chihaya Anon: It's also my first time reading this novel in full, I didn't know it had an ambiguous ending.

Comments: 【The vibes were pretty scary initially, but I don't know why it sounds comical when she reads it.】【Can we read something by the same author next time?】【She pulled out her old fashioned London accent out of nowhere at the end lmfaol】

Chihaya Anon: Why are all of you just roasting me! Don't you have anything to say regarding the story!

Comments: 【I just feel like the black cat in the story was more of a guide, rather than an ominous creature.】【If we're talking about the horror aspect, apart from the black cat and the confusing hints at her lifespan, there weren't really any paranormal phenomena. In the end, it's more of a psychological horror.】【I think the protagonist is just insane. 】

Chihaya Anon: Ah, everyone was listening so closely... Anyway, the popular horror novel, [The Cat and Kisaragi Station], is currently on sale, any viewers who enjoyed it can go grab a copy for yourselves, it'll definitely be a different experience than reading it with a streamer! Use the link in the comments to get a coupon—

Shiina Taki:

//She closes the stream tab, lets out a sigh, and sinks into the back of her chair.

The curtains are tightly shut, making the room pitch-black. The glowing laptop screen is covered in tabs searching about "black cats" and "countdowns", The sheer quantity of tabs caused their labels to be cut off, forming a singular mass of web pages.//

Shiina Taki: (What the hell was that countdown...)

//Taki doesn't remember what happened after seeing that scene in the bathroom. When her thoughts drift back to reality, she's seated at the table, searching for relevant information like a madman.

Regardless, it was Anon's stream that pulled her out of that chaos.

After all, even though she was ridiculed by her viewers for it, her ability to read a horror novel and give it the same comicality as a regular bedtime story could give the person currently threatened by the supernatural the same amount of comfort as a sedative.

Despite this, Taki's thoughts are still in a mess, the aftertaste of vomit and fear lingering by her like a shadow.

Comparing the words of the black cat from her dreams with the story Anon had just read, the similarities became strikingly apparent.

The same black cat, the same thick layers of mystery, the same sense of being lost and the same accord with life and death.

Though it is a little absurd to use a story to explain reality, it's impossible to find a reliable answer to her predicament, so for the time being, she can only rely on this weak hypothesis.//

Shiina Taki: (A full ten days. Is there some sort of meaning to this number? Now that I think of it, there's also a movie called <10 Years of Life Remaining>, could there be any correlation...)

Shiina Taki: (No... there isn't any proof to justify that this countdown is related to death, it just coincidentally appears when i'm not feeling well, leading to these associations...)

Shiina Taki: (Well, sitting here at a loss is a waste of time. What can be done now... I'll request a day off first.)

//She draws the curtains open, instantly filling the room with the light of the early morning sun. For a night owl like herself, she's unaccustomed to this light, squinting her eyes in response.

She pushes the window open, enjoying the feel of the refreshing breeze that came after a bout of rain, as well as the fragrant scent that wafted into the room.

The chirping of the birds and the noise of the busy street brought some life back into the dismal room, somewhat healing Taki, who had been tormented all night. She breathes in the fresh air, enjoying the tranquil atmosphere.

Right then, a sound came from the window.

From her position, she saw a group of high school students with instruments laughing as they dashed across the street.

It's past 9am, first period has already started.

Taki rarely has the chance to observe her neighbourhood at this hour. If she wasn't already heading to work, she was in her bed, catching up on sleep. Naturally, she wouldn't know that this group of high schoolers would pass by almost every day.//

Shiina Taki: (Turns out there's a high school nearby...)

//The commotion gradually fades at the end of the street. Taki dazedly recalls gathering at Anon's house a long, long time ago.

Their pre-performance prep was always done in a rush. Even their costumes were hastily made during an all-nighter, causing them to oversleep the next day, creating that memory of them rushing to get to their respective schools.

The realisation that things are no longer the same is an aggressive, unwelcome thought that penetrates her currently extremely fragile consciousness.

They've been through too much, lots of things have changed, some are in the process of dying out, yet some remain exactly the same.//

Shiina Taki: (.....?)

// Some strange feeling washed over her. Despite the serenity of her surroundings, her heart couldn't seem to calm down.

She continued taking in deep breaths, in a futile attempt to calm herself down. It then dawned on her that this panic she felt wasn't from her mental state, but her physical one.

She pressed her hand to her chest. The vibrations within her rib cage were pronounced and intense, and she could almost feel her heart pumping out of her body.

Cold sweat trickled down her face, and a wave of anxiety enveloped her.//

Shiina Taki: (I would have understood if this was happening after a live, but I haven't done anything to cause this, so why.....)

//She clenched her fist tightly and closed her eyes, trying to get her heart to calm down.

However, the more she tried to do so, the more futile her efforts became.//

Shiina Taki: (...Perhaps it's because of that novel earlier.)

//She recalled the strangeness that its words emitted, using it to reason with herself.//

Shiina Taki: ...

//—There may be more to this countdown than she previously realised.

This thought emerged all of a sudden. Taki found that the fear and anxiety in her heart was diluted by a more profound sense of emptiness.

By her reflection in the window, a string of numbers is slowly counting down.

Clicking her tongue, Taki drew the curtains, leaving the windows open, before turning away.//

TOMORI'S ROOM

//The weather today was perfect, the temperature signifying the end of winter, with the sunshine providing even more warmth.

Inside this room, Takamatsu Tomori sits at her desk, in front of a notebook containing more cancellations than actual words.

—snap! (t/n onomatopoeia i don't know what sound this makes)

The sharp tip of her pencil broke.

She reached for her pencil case in front of the window.

Suddenly, a frail-looking butterfly fluttered in through the window, landing on her knuckles.//

Takamatsu Tomori: (.....?)

//The butterfly covered in black markings waved its feelers around, feebly collapsing onto her hand.

Tomori hastily cupped it with both hands, but the butterfly stopped moving after weakly flapping its wings twice.//

Takamatsu Tomori: (.....!)

//Perhaps it was the recent rise in temperature from the approaching spring that took this fragile life, but ultimately, the death of these creatures is just a part of nature.

Tomori gently wrapped it up using the fallen leaves from the plants by her window, planning to place it in the soil of the plants on her windowsill when she left.

She stares at the life wrapped up in dead leaves. For no particular reason, another person comes to mind.//

Takamatsu Tomori: (Taki-chan, is she feeling any better...)

TAKI'S HOUSE

//After requesting for a day off, an unfamiliar freedom left Taki at a loss of what to do.

Not wanting to let her mind stray back into that mess, Taki uses this free time to clear the beer cans on the table, before cleaning the entire house.

As she hadn't cleaned properly in ages, what she thought would be finished soon wasn't completed until afternoon descended.//

Shiina Taki: All that's left is to clear the trash tomorrow...

//The moment she relaxed, nausea and fatigue took over her mind and body. Overcome by the wave of dizziness, Taki nearly lost her balance, barely avoiding the floor by supporting herself with a chair.//

Shiina Taki: —?!

//Strong misgivings resurfaced in her mind. She couldn't help but associate this physical state with the supernatural phenomenon threatening her, but..

Unlike the strange and elusive manner of the mysterious countdown, there were logical explanations for her body's responses. //

Shiina Taki: Ah.....

Shiina Taki: (Now that I think about it, it's been almost 24 hours since I've eaten anything...)

Shiina Taki: (So, that was just due to low blood sugar.)

//Indeed, without food, people will die. That was an obvious answer.

Until right now, Taki completely forgot about the more realistic and imminent threat before her in favour of her supernatural situation

Compared to those inexplicable numbers of the countdown, the human requirements for life is a much more realistic matter that needed to be attended to.

Shiina Taki: (I have to quickly eat something...)

//Taki experiences temporary relief from the nausea, supporting herself with the wall as she makes her way to the refrigerator to make something to eat.

> if went conbini

The refrigerator is as empty as her house.

A few cans of beer, a half open can of tomato, ice cubes and...

— Oden miso and fried rice bento.

Shiina Taki: Ugh..... this thing.

Shiina Taki: (Whatever, I can't be picky at this time.)

> if went home straight

The refrigerator is as empty as her house.

A few cans of beer, a half open can of tomato, ice cubes, and a bento from the convenience store that she doesn't recall even buying.//

Shiina Taki: Ugh..... this thing.

Shiina Taki: The production date is..... Well, the packaging is sealed, there isn't any strange odour and there isn't any mold. Alright, it's edible.

————— cont. (went home/conbini)

//Taki placed the bento into the microwave. In her ravenous state, it was difficult not to devour it there and then. To avoid burning herself, she takes the bento out when it is still warm.

She sits at the currently almost spotless table, thanks to her cleanup beforehand.

Her right hand trembled uncontrollably with the chopsticks due to the lack of sugar in her blood, shakily bringing the first bite of the long awaited food into her mouth.//

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki:

//Perhaps it was because of the spike in carbohydrates and sodium in her body, but Taki, unexpectedly, did not gorge herself on food instantly.

In fact, she slowly chewed and swallowed, savouring the subtle tastes of seasonings and ingredients that she otherwise would not have noticed.

The nutrients of the food appeared to be gradually replenishing her deficiencies, producing instant and tangible results.

It's been too long since she's had a meal like this.

It's not that Taki's bad at cooking, but when she's alone, she's rarely in the mood to cook, nor does she want to waste time on cooking and eating.

Over the years, she can't help but wonder: if her nutritional jelly, protein bars and vitamin supplements can fulfil a person's dietary needs, what's the point of wasting time on preparing and eating meals?

Of course, it's just a myth(thought?) that comes to mind occasionally, Taki's not that kind of strange ascetic.

She does have food that she enjoys, her handiwork isn't particularly bad, and when everyone in MyGO!!!! goes out for dinner, regardless if it's hotpot or barbecue, the person in charge of cooking always seems to be her...

The food from those times was always delicious.

The meat she snatches away from Anon was delicious, The food Tomori adds to her plate was delicious, Raana's leftovers after she runs off that always has to be cleared by herself were delicious, even the vegetables that Soyo insists they must order were... //

Shiina Taki: ... It tastes good.

//Eating has put her mind to rest, her replenished energy supporting another bout of chores and cleaning.

She can't remember the last time she went to bed before 12, but this is definitely the first time this year.

When showering, she deliberately keeps her gaze away from the mirror. When her eyes drift to her reflection on the glass, she pays it no mind.

Last night's sleep was far from restful, fatigue and low energy can cause hallucinations. Have a good meal and rest well, everything will be fine again.

Holding on to this mindset, she lies on the bed, her eyes much more tired than she believed. When her eyelids fell, there was a prickling sensation of dryness. Nevertheless, once her eyes were closed, she never wanted to open them again. //

Shiina Taki: I'll think about the rest tomorrow...

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki: ...

Shiina Taki: !?

//She abruptly sits upright.

She's unable to fall asleep.

Taki realises that she's unable to fall asleep at all.

Although she was so tired that her eyelids were practically glued shut, Taki found it difficult to fall asleep.

How could it be? She was so tired that even her mind was unable to conjure any unwanted thoughts.

It was so hot, has this room always been that warm?//

Shiina Taki: (How could this be? Nothing is going as it should...)

//The same unease and anxiety from before returned, crushing her heart. She subconsciously gripped at the cloth on her chest, panting uncontrollably.

Only then did she become aware of the persistent throbbing from deep in her chest.//

Shiina Taki: (My heartbeat... was it always this fast?)

//Driven by fear, she leapt off her bed and stumbled to her computer, almost hitting her leg in the process.

She all but threw herself onto the table, sending the pens in her pencil case flying across the desk. Two pens just so happened to be facing downwards, falling on the instep of her feet, leaving two ink marks that resembled wounds, one black and one red.

Without thinking, she pulled open the desk drawer, rummaging through trinkets to find a sports watch on the very bottom of her cluttered drawer.

She hastily slipped it onto her wrist, but the display remained unlit, even after pressing it twice. Only then did she remember that she hasn't worn it in ages, it's always been out of battery.//

Shiina Taki: Tch.

//Frustrated, she sat on the edge of her bed, charging the watch.

Still connected to the charger, Taki put the band through her wrist, staring intently at the flashing red light on its side, recalling that this watch was probably a birthday gift from some year— She hasn't used since she realised that there was a certain someone who could deduce her daily routine through the sleep data.

"Isn't it fine to just not look?" Taki, however, had a sense of guilt towards this.

The watch display would remind her of her sleep health every single day— it wasn't very welcome, like a well-meaning doctor, but also like a grim reaper with a morbid sense of humour.

While waiting for the watch to charge, she took in a deep breath, a need to retreat gradually building up inside her.//

Shiina Taki: What if...

di—

//Not giving her the chance to regret her actions, the watch display lit up, a logo flashing across the screen before revealing the watch interface, including the time — 23:58.//

Shiina Taki: (It's almost midnight.)

//She opens the heart rate monitor on the watch— Even without the help of equipment, drummers are especially aware of rhythm, allowing Taki to estimate her heart rate accurately.

So, why was she not able to notice until now?

After a moment, an unexpectedly low number appeared next to the red heart icon.//

Shiina Taki: —100?

//100 beats per minute is within the limits of what is considered normal for an adult.

When working out or playing the drums, Taki's heart rate easily surpasses this limit, but in her day to day life, her heart rate is usually much lower, not to mention when she's exhausted and in bed.

Nevertheless, this number isn't a cause for concern. Presently, it, at most, only affects her sleep. Taki's tense heart relaxes a little.//

Shiina Taki: (Perhaps I've been too on edge these past two days.)

Shiina Taki: (Whatever, I'll just sleep first.)

//She turns the lights off and glances at the time on the watch, just as the number changes from 23:59 to 0:00. It's already the next day.

Then—

The number next to the red heart icon changes along with it, from 100 to 90.//

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki:

//Taki waits for a moment, then for another.

The time now is 0:06, but the number next to the red heart remains at 90.

She doesn't breathe, quickly getting lightheaded.

The time now is 0:08, but the number next to the red heart remains at 90.

She sprints out of the room, putting on a pair of sneakers on the porch, running a hundred metres down the deserted street.

It's a deathly silent, moonless night.//

Shiina Taki: Huff, huff.....

//Leaning against a telephone pole, her eyes returned to her wrist. The time now is 0:014–

The number next to the red heart remains at 90.//

|| 9 DAYS REMAINING.

Shiina Taki: Huff, huff.....

//Thud, thud, thud.

The manic drumming reverberated throughout the room.

The snare drum, the bass drum, the cymbals, sounds that should be following a rhythm sounded out wildly, quickly absorbed by the soundproof panels lining the walls, like a strong punch against this soft material. All the misery, rage and aggression was futile.

The strength from your wrist and upper arm should control the drumsticks. That's how a certain drum teacher from a music organisation teaches her students.

However, this teacher is currently utilising the strength from every inch of her body to hit the musical fortress in front of her.

Despite the darkness, Taki could feel her vision getting blurry. her ears were ringing so much that she couldn't hear her own breathing. Cold air scraped through her throat and rapidly contracting lungs, yet even this pain was insufficient to drown out the steady beats of her heart, which seemed to vibrate through her bones.

90.

Why, why, why.

Her current heart rate shouldn't be enough to support such strenuous activity, but it's as if her heart is contained within another dimension. No matter how much she hysterically exerts herself, her heart rate remains constant.

It seemed to be mocking her efforts.//

Shiina Taki: Ha, ha, haaaaaaa—!

The sound of a small 'click' was lost in the beat of the drums.

The drumstick had snapped in half.

The second stick.

The third stick

.....

When she snaps the fourth stick, Taki can barely lift her hands anymore.

Blood drips on the newly replaced drum skin, once, twice, thrice, forming a crying face.

— it's futile.

That was what the face was telling her.//

Shiina Taki: —!!

//The bloodied fist instantly broke through the drum skin, revealing the interior. The inside was cold, dark and completely empty.

—You *know* it's futile.

—Haven't you done this before?

Taki crumples to the floor.

She curls up underneath the broken drum kit.

Her drum room is spacious, and the drum kit in the corner looked small in the vast space.

There's enough room to fit the whole band— Four mic stands, two speakers, three effectors, even the sheet music stands, all of it could fit.

But now, there's only a drum set.

Below which, a drummer laid curled up, crushed by fatigue, hunger, cold and despair.//

Shiina Taki: This really is... the worst.

|| 8 DAYS REMAINING

.....

.....

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki: ...It's already morning.

//It's already the morning of the third day.

The sun rises as per usual, the sparrows already disturbing the residents at 5 o'clock in the morning.

— This means that she's spent a full day and a full night in this room.

Out of decency and consideration for the whole neighbourhood, as soon as she moved in, Taki thoroughly soundproofed the drum room, installing double-layered blackout curtains to improve her concentration.

Thanks to this, Taki could break four drumsticks in her manic state in the middle of the night without angry neighbours or the police knocking on her door.

— Well, she wouldn't have been able to hear them knocking regardless.

Even in this room that was completely isolated from the outside world, Taki sensed the dawn of a new day, (and mumbles under her breath all the grievances someone who pulled an all-nighter would.) 并下意识呢喃出那句通宵者兴奋与内疚掺杂的话语 (t/n 🤖 I'll come back 2 ths)

She has spent countless nights feeling the earth rotate below her feet, as well as the subsequent dawn slowly emerging beside her. The pressure, atmosphere, and gravity of the planet shift profoundly, as if it was performing for the unfortunate souls still awake.

Regardless, in that moment, Taki despises her ability to perceive the passage of time.

It was only because she wanted to avoid anything related to time that she hid into this room, curling up under the shelter of her drums after her violent display of emotion, seeking for a meaningless sense of security in the emptiness.

After yet another period of time, a small light illuminated at her feet, Taki tilting her head upwards at the sight of it.

It came from the watch she brought in to track her heart rate the previous night. Unbeknownst to her, it must've automatically connected to her phone, replacing it in reminding her of her SNS notifications.//

Shiina Taki: (Is it Anon again...)

//She prepares to bury her head once again, but her eyes drift to the small screen, now covered in a few words.

[...Kaname Raana has uploaded a new post: <image>]//

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki:Ha?

//Due to the screen lighting up, she involuntarily catches a glimpse of the time: 6:15.

Raana actually woke up this early?

Right then, Taki's world only remained with confusion.

Originally, Raana's SNS was as quiet as someone who had gone missing. For someone who wasn't that insomniac, Chihaya Anon, who got up early anyway and still wanted to show off on SNS to wake up early and post something on Insta...

Curiosity got the best of her, and Taki picked up the watch, but couldn't open the notification. After all, it was just a watch, and it could only relay notifications. To look at the details, Taki would have to return to her bedroom to retrieve her phone.//

Shiina Taki:

Shiina Taki: Hu....

//That's just how cats are, surprising people at the strangest times.

Though, she's still thankful to Raana for helping her realise that she was still able to feel curiosity.

Watch in hand, Taki stands up, finding her way out even in the pitch-black room.

However, she still kicks a broken drumstick on her way out by accident, the awfully painful splinters pricking her feet.//

Shiina Taki: How dangerous... I'll have to come back and clean it up.

—

//Raana's new post is just a picture, though if she had written a caption, it would've been nothing short of a miracle. Even a post from her was rare.

There is no technical skill displayed in the picture, the camera is focused on a telephone pole, and the background is divided between a car park and an apartment building.

Taki recognises this location, it's around her high school. Not that she visited often, but she still has some recollection of it.//

Shiina Taki: This kid... Why is she posting this at this hour....?

//Taki types a few words in the comments, but deletes them in the same breath.//

Shiina Taki: Ah... forget it.

//Refreshing the page a second time, a new comment pops up.//

Shiina Taki: Eh.

//Anon's comment: Wow!!! Raana-chan posting at this time?!!! Where is this?? Who are you with
!!! Photo looks great the sunrise is beautiful 💕💕 //

//She had no intention to, she was definitely not curious, it was definitely just out of boredom,
but Taki tapped on the pink profile picture.//

//Anon's post captions: Good Morning!! I didn't sleep well last night 🥱🥱 But when I woke up I
realised that the weather was great !! I even managed to watch the sunrise !! This is my
compensation hahaha 😊😊 I hope everyone's good today !! 💕💕 //

Shiina Taki:...

//Aimlessly scrolling around for a bit, she softly presses the small red heart.

She thinks for a moment.

Taki unlikes the post.

She continues to scroll.//

Shiina Taki: Ah... Tomori posted something yesterday too.

//Tomori's post captions: Her beauty is hidden within the wilted plant //

//Anon reposted Tomori's post.

Tomori's posts are often of small animals or pebbles, there are also many novel shots from
unique angles that are always detailed and natural, creating a sense of comfort in people.

Tomori posted a picture of her potted plants on the windowsill yesterday, with the sunlight
glowing on the brown soil and shriveled up leaves. There seemed to be something that was
covered by the withered plant, something darkly coloured in the corner. //

Shiina Taki: That's Tomori for you...

//Taki enters Tomori's profile after not being on SNS for a few days. Tomori doesn't post very
frequently, there's only two new posts, the previous one, and another of a mountain squirrel.

Probably on an outing with her family, she's mentioned this before.

Scrolling even further down, there are pictures of some of her in-person events. Taki has been to her autograph sessions before, but she hasn't been keeping up with her recent schedule.//

Shiina Taki:

//Taki begins to aimlessly browse through everyone's profiles one by one. She let go of the troubles in her mind, mindlessly looking at what everyone was up to recently. While she had seen some of the content before, strangely enough, it felt like her first time looking at it.

Tomori's profile would update whenever she publishes a new poem or artwork, every gift sent to her by her fans, as well as a response to every letter received.

Entering Soyo's profile, the first post she comes across is a picture of the airport entrance. Was this when she was departing or returning?

Continuing to scroll, she sees some foreign cuisine and foreign landmarks— Ah, so it was during her return.

Practically every post of everyone had a comment from Anon, which she can't help but look at.

There are some familiar faces on her feed, Misumi Uika, as well as her band members.

As a result, she finds Umiri's profile again. Her latest post was taken in the early morning, at a live house. Even outside of Mujica, Umiri still has a habit of supporting other bands.

From Umiri's profile, she finds a few acquaintances from high school, and even found out that she's known someone from her University for much longer than previously thought.....

She jumps aimlessly between profiles, surprised that she knew so many people, surprised to know that these people knew each other, forming a large, intricate social circle.

She's never noticed that before.

She's never even been interested in such matters before.//

Shiina Taki:

//Without even realizing it, the afternoon was gone.

If this was a normal day, wasting an afternoon scrolling on her bed would've made Taki go insane, but today, she didn't have the motivation to do anything else.

If her end is already fated, what was the point of everything she has done?

She was so tired. After stopping, all the fatigue that she had pushed aside had caught up to her, dragging her into an empty void.

However, she continues to scroll through her friend's social media accounts.

Such things that never used to interest her, was it a certain kind of vitality that attracted her dying self?

Or was it because she had never made the effort to learn more about the lives of her peers, and now she was regretting it?

These thoughts flowed through the rapids of her mind. Aside from her mechanical movements and a faint flicker of curiosity, she didn't have the energy to contemplate anything on a deeper level.

...

"She loathes her fated end, so even though she knows her fate will not change, she wishes to bear witness to an alternate ending..."

Subconsciously, she clicks open Anon's stream.

At the side, a list of recommended videos appear, particularly similar videos of studies or theories found by the algorithm linking to death.

There's one video that catches her attention.

From the thumbnail, it's clear that the video is of an old interview. The title is straightforward, stating that the interviewee had fourteen weeks left to live.

The similar situation leads Taki to click away from the familiar face, clicking on the video from a distant time.//

—

//Due to the low video resolution, Taki initially couldn't distinguish between the host and the dying guest.

This famous professor, who is said to suffer from a terminal illness, was dressed well in a suit, calmly seated in a chair, talking to the host about love, death, and life.

The audio quality was awful, and Taki could only get the gist of the interview. Throughout, Taki just felt that their conversation was too casual and out of place, as if they were just chatting after a meal.

The host compliments the professor's vitality, to which he only laughs.//

Professor: Emily, you know, I've been told that by many people... But I'm aware of my own physical state. I even need someone to wipe my ass for me. (T/n maybe less crude lol)

Professor: But because I've put on makeup, and dressed well before appearing on television, everyone in New York will go, Ha, he looks so full of life, the only dying person I've seen with so much vitality!

//The audience erupts into laughter.//

Host: That's very humorous, professor.

Host: This next question may be a little personal. It's about your...

Professor: Spit it out, Emily. If I minded, I wouldn't have come here in the first place.

Host: Thank you for your understanding. I believe that there isn't a small number of people in the world who face similar situations, but most of them won't have such a smile on their face. How on earth do you maintain such a positive mentality?

Professor: Everyone knows that they will eventually die, but nobody is willing to accept this fact. They will always believe that death is still far, so far that it isn't even something they can imagine.

Professor: I also know that I'm going to die, only that I had no choice but to accept it. But seriously, if I don't believe the words of the young men of Weill Cornell Medical College, I'd just be regarded as a stubborn old man.

//The audience laughs yet again.//

Professor: On the day I was forced to accept that, I only had one thought: shall I just waste the rest of my time waiting to go to heaven, to see my dear Sophia?

Professor: But afterwards, I thought: I also have Kruger's lifetime achievement award in my pocket— If I was short of even two days, it wouldn't be considered a 'lifetime' anymore.

Professor: Since I'm a professor, why can't I take death as my last lesson? So, I began teaching students from home.

Professor: I got to reconnect with many former students. I talked to them about death, fear, desire, self-pity, forgiveness, life... Then I realised that even at 70, I never learnt how to live.

Professor: But now that I have learnt how to die, in my last moments, I can go peacefully, quietly and with dignity.

Professor: I want to keep teaching until my last breath, and then leave my studies on death as my legacy. I still have to design my epitaph, choose what songs I'd like at the funeral, and place the graduation cap on my last batch of students.

Professor: You see, once you learn how to die, only then will you learn how to live.

Professor: Therefore, I am a busy man now. Even more than from before I retired, even more than any period of time in my life.

Professor: To tell you the truth, Emily, next time you wish to see me, you'll have to talk to my secretary.

//The host laughs along with the audience.

However, there is no second part to the interview. At the end of the video, it states that two weeks later, this entertaining professor has passed away. //

//Returning back to reality, Taki is already seated at the table, searching for works or a biography from this professor on her laptop.

But, what use is there? After all, this is someone else.

The browser holding dozens of open tabs closes.

Only then did Taki stop in a daze, collapsing into her chair.

Suddenly, she realised that she was in a familiar posture, at a familiar desk, in a familiar mood.

She was depressed and alone in this square inch of space for too many nights, persisting towards her goals.

The mess of thoughts in her mind accumulated over time, a distant memory gradually resurfacing.

FLASHBACK

??? When did you learn how to use DTM (composition software)?

Shiina Taki: ...

Shiina Taki: Junior high.

Shiina Taki: I thought I might need it someday.

//Someday.

She has used it every day since then.

Including today.

Including tomorrow.

Even the day after tomorrow. //

Shiina Taki: Ha.....

//Her heavy breath warmed the surrounding chilly air. Like someone who had just regained all of their senses, she realises that the temperature has plummeted as night came.//

Shiina Taki: (If I were to leave behind anything...)

//She sits up, hunched over her laptop, opens the composition software and creates a new project.

This time, she doesn't have any lyrics, she'll have to create her own music from scratch.

Then—//

Shiina Taki: ——Achoo!

Shiina Taki:

//The rather aggressive sneeze interrupted her increasing determination.//

Shiina Taki: (It's freezing... Is this how cold it always was at night...)

Shiina Taki: (Tough luck, Last night ... Ah, I really didn't sleep last night...)

Shiina Taki: (Now that I think of it, even if I wanted to write a new song now, I have no inspiration or material to work off.)

Shiina Taki: Ngh.....

// — In my last moments, I can go peacefully, quietly, and with dignity.

— Once you learn how to die, only then will you learn how to live.//

Shiina Taki: (... I'll stop here for now.)

//Taki closes the laptop, and walks out of the room.

She quietly eats something, showers, and returns to lie on the bed after half an hour.

Once she closes her eyes, countless things she can still do rushes into her mind. While most of them are only fleeting thoughts, there's a few that remain lingering in her mind.

Besides,

For the sake of dying only after those eight days have passed, she should probably sleep now.//