

Chapter 02: The Princess and Her Four Followers

Magical Girls were not a different kind of lifeform from human beings.

Magical Girls were human beings. Human beings could become Magical Girls.

However, once they became Magical Girls, they were no longer ordinary people. Thanks to the power of magic, their strength surpassed their original limitation..

“Losing the right to be a Magical Girl implies losing the quality of being a living creature. In other words, that would be death~pon.”

“Which is why I said I don’t want that. If we’re going to die, then I’d rather go back to being an ordinary person.”

“Even if you’re not willing, it can’t be helped ~pon.”

“What do you mean, it can’t be helped?”

“What people call Magical Girls are just like warriors who bear the destiny of battle ~pon. When faced with danger, they do not despair, using their wits, their courage and their Magic to overcome difficulty, and take pleasure in their battle with the strong—”

Snow White powered off her Magical Phone, forcibly terminating her conversation with Fav. She had argued with it many times after she had scrolled through the chat logs several days ago and saw its conversation with Clamberry, but they could not come to an understanding.

Snow White had said that she would rather not be a Magical Girl if it meant that she might die. Fav had responded by saying that abandoning her identity as a Magical Girl meant that she would die anyway. She said, why didn’t you tell us about a rule like that before turning us into Magical Girls, and it replied, you were the ones who started playing the game. Their back and forth was like a pair of parallel lines, which would never meet in the middle no matter how long they went on, and it had carried on until just now.

Snow White sighed.

She could not tell anyone about the fact that she was a Magical Girl. That was because if anyone else found out about this, her status as a Magical Girl would be revoked, and she would die. She could not discuss it with her parents or friends. If she told anyone else that she would die if this kept up, then she would die the moment the words left her mouth.

Two days after the previous chat meeting, the obituaries of the newspapers reported the death of a 24 year old woman called Sanjou Nemu. According to the report, her time of death coincided with the end of the meeting, and she had died of a heart attack despite being young and not possessing any chronic diseases. Be it the name, time of death and the manner of death, there was no doubt that it was Nemurin.

—It's true, I really will die.

Snow White sighed again, staring off toward the distant horizon. With her Magical Girl's eyesight, she could clearly see the ocean even from the top of the steel tower. Several fishing boats had already sailed out of the bay. As she saw that scene, an irrational anger burned within her; *why are others so relaxed while I'm so worried?* However, she quickly realised that she was being unreasonable, and she became even more dejected.

Ultimately, she was just worried about herself. Her own matters were more important than Nemurin's death. They had spoken so much during the chat meetings, and she had viewed her as a Magical Girl friend, but after crying, sleeping, and waking up, all that remained was her own worries about herself. She hated herself for that. She was afraid of death. Her stomach was heavy. She wanted to throw up over and over again. But she did not want to die, she did not want to die, she did not want to die, because dying was too scary.

She heard an electronic noise and looked beside her, and Snow White found that La Pucelle was pointing her Magical Phone at her and fiddling with something.

"What are you doing?"

"Mm. Ah, that ought to do it."

An RPG level-up sound effect played.

"Can I check your Magical Phone?"

"Sure... what are you doing?"

She opened her Magical Phone and checked the display: the current time, humidity, temperature, Magical Candy count—

"...Huh?"

If Snow White had not remembered wrongly, she had more Magical Candies than this last night, but now only half the original amount were left.

"Er, what's all this about?"

“Calm down, I’ll give them back right away.”

The RPG level-up music played once more. The display showed that her Magical Candy amount had returned to the number which Snow White remembered.

“What is this...”

“Didn’t Fav tell you already? Our Magical Phone’s firmware just got a version update. It has more functions now. This, ah, is the ability to transfer Magical Candies. You can trade them even if the other party’s Magical Phone isn’t on. Although, it seems transferring Candies takes a bit of time.”

“So that means...?”

“Given the timing of the firmware update, this function is probably to allow everyone to work together to increase their candies.

Snow White stared at the face of the knight sitting beside her.

There was an excited look on that face. Even on this desolate, lonely and gloomy night, there was a gallant beauty to that face atop the steel tower.

“Sou-chan, are you planning to collect Magical Candies?”

“I told you, don’t call me Sou-chan. If what Fav says is true and that we’ll die if we don’t collect Candies, then wouldn’t it be better to do as he says?”

“Aren’t you afraid?”

“Aren’t *you* afraid, Snow White?”

“Of course I’m scared. I don’t want anyone, you or me or anyone else, to die. If I die, I can’t see my parents and friends again, I can’t watch any more Magical Girl anime, I can’t eat delicious food or laugh at interesting things...”

“So you’re scared. Actually, I’m scared too. Why wouldn’t I be?”

La Pucelle’s face tensed up. Snow White was startled by the sudden presence around him and reflexively backed away. La Pucelle’s hand covered hers, and she sucked a breath in, but she did not shake it off.

“Still, if we do nothing because we’re afraid, then we’ll be the next ones to be eliminated. You don’t want that, right? If so, then let’s work hard together, the two of us.”

That expression was the exact same one which Snow White had seen on TV all this time, on the faces of Magical Girls offering their assistance. It was a look which conveyed the determination within their heart to protect the things which were important to them, of Magical Girls willing to challenge a foe far more powerful than themselves. Were the other Magical Girls like this? Had they gathered their resolve like La Pucelle had. *It’s probably me, who’s so scared that she doesn’t know what to do next, who’s the odd one out*, she thought, and Snow White felt like she had been abandoned by her friends.

What would Nemurin say if she were here? As Snow White thought of how she would always smile and listen to others, she unconsciously dabbed at the corners of her eyes with the edges of her sleeves.

“Don’t cry, Snow White.”

La Pucelle drew her sword from her sheath, offered its hilt to Snow White, and then knelt with both knees on the ground. A cold gleam travelled up the edge of the 50 centimeter blade.

“Snow White, my ally, I do hereby swear; even though my body shall be ground to dust, I shall serve you as your sword.”

In contrast to her dramatic nature of her actions and speech, La Pucelle’s eyes were filled with tenderness as she looked upon Snow White. Although La Pucelle had already told her not to cry, Snow White’s eyes still leaked large droplets of tears, which fell lightly upon the ground.

She hugged La Pucelle tightly, and then whispered into her ear:

“Thank you...”

As she felt the warmth of La Pucelle’s body, Snow White’s face suddenly heated up. She accidentally glanced at her, and La Pucelle’s cheeks seemed to have turned red.



Ripple did not know what was it that Top Speed liked about her, only that she kept calling herself her buddy. Top Speed even spoke with the other Magical Girls in the chatroom about “my buddy”; that was something she had heard from Top Speed herself, without even having to ask anybody else.

It made her mad. It made her click her tongue. However, she did not deny or reject her, and she certainly did not scold or strike Top Speed, simply did as Top Speed said without saying

anything. Top Speed probably took her silence as consent, and so she went to look for Ripple every day and the two of them would move around together.

There was a reason why Ripple did not reject Top Speed. Without that reason, they could not have sustained a relationship like this.

Ripple's Magic was "100% accuracy with thrown shuriken", which meant that it could only be used when people were in danger. However, situations like these were not a common occurrence, so Ripple could only rely on her physical abilities, and not her Magic. However, all the other Magical Girls could do the same thing as well, so she had no particular advantage there.

In contrast, Top Speed used a magic broom—the flying broom Rapid Swallow—to fly through the sky. Compared to Ripple's Magic that could only throw things, Top Speed's Magic was far more useful. Ripple was not simply helping Top Speed; she felt that it would be much easier to find people to help if she had a bird's eye view.

When Nemurin died, Top Speed had been angry and sad, even crying and wailing from time to time. Ripple watched her coolly as she silently pondered what she should do after this. Being suddenly shrouded by the shadow of death, with no explanation or forewarning, filled her with anger. It was not just once or twice, but every time she imagined her own death, her heart would ache as though pricked by needles, and it made her want to grab at it. But even so, she tried her best to remain calm.

Just as Fav said, she would have to literally collect Candies like her life depended on it. If she did not collect them, then all that awaited her was death. She had to use everything she could find. Top Speed was useful, even if she was annoying, and so Ripple bit back her anger and accompanied her.

Ripple usually rode on the back seat of Rapid Swallow—her designated place—and she kept an eye on the district to farm up Candies. Top Speed seemed to have an obsession with survival that bordered on the superhuman. In contrast to her usual attitude, she looked at Ripple with a stern face and said, "I can't die." When she heard this, Ripple's response was silence, and in the end, Top Speed quietly added, "At least, I need to survive for another half a year." When asked why it was half a year in particular, Top Speed simply answered with an absent-minded, bitter smile. *She probably didn't mean anything by that*, Ripple thought.

"Now then, we'll take a look around the National Highway, okay~?"

"Roger..."

"It would be nice if we could find a place to earn more Candies~"

Ripple suggested the entertainment districts, but the biggest entertainment district was the Jonan area, which was squarely within Calamity Mary's territory, so Top Speed vigorously opposed it. Ripple countered by saying that they could not be so leisurely about matters of life and death, to which Top Speed replied by saying that it was self-defeating to put themselves in danger for the sake of living, and no matter what Ripple said, she could not be persuaded to agree. In the end, they came to a consensus; they would earn Candies within the areas which they were responsible for. Nakayado and Kitayado were quite heavily populated, but the warlike spirit of old was long gone, and the atmosphere there was quite relaxed. This was hardly a bad thing; it was a good one, even, but to the Magical Girls, it meant that there were fewer problems which they had to solve.

The two of them ran all over the place in search of problems to solve, even going so far as to forsake food and rest. Then again, human beings no longer needed to sleep or eat after becoming Magical Girls. They had no time to worry about such fine details, because neither of them wanted to die, no matter what.

As mentioned above, Ripple thought of Top Speed as "an incredibly annoying yet useful idiot, so I'll stick with her for now", While she could never let Top Speed hear that, given that they were landing on the roof of No. 7 Sankou Building together, Ripple had no choice but to revise her opinion of the other woman upwards.

Since every Magical Girl had a different Magic, then in order to collect Candies more efficiently, the best solution was to group up with others. However, finding friends was no small task for Ripple, who was antisocial and avoided contact with Magical Girls other than Top Speed.

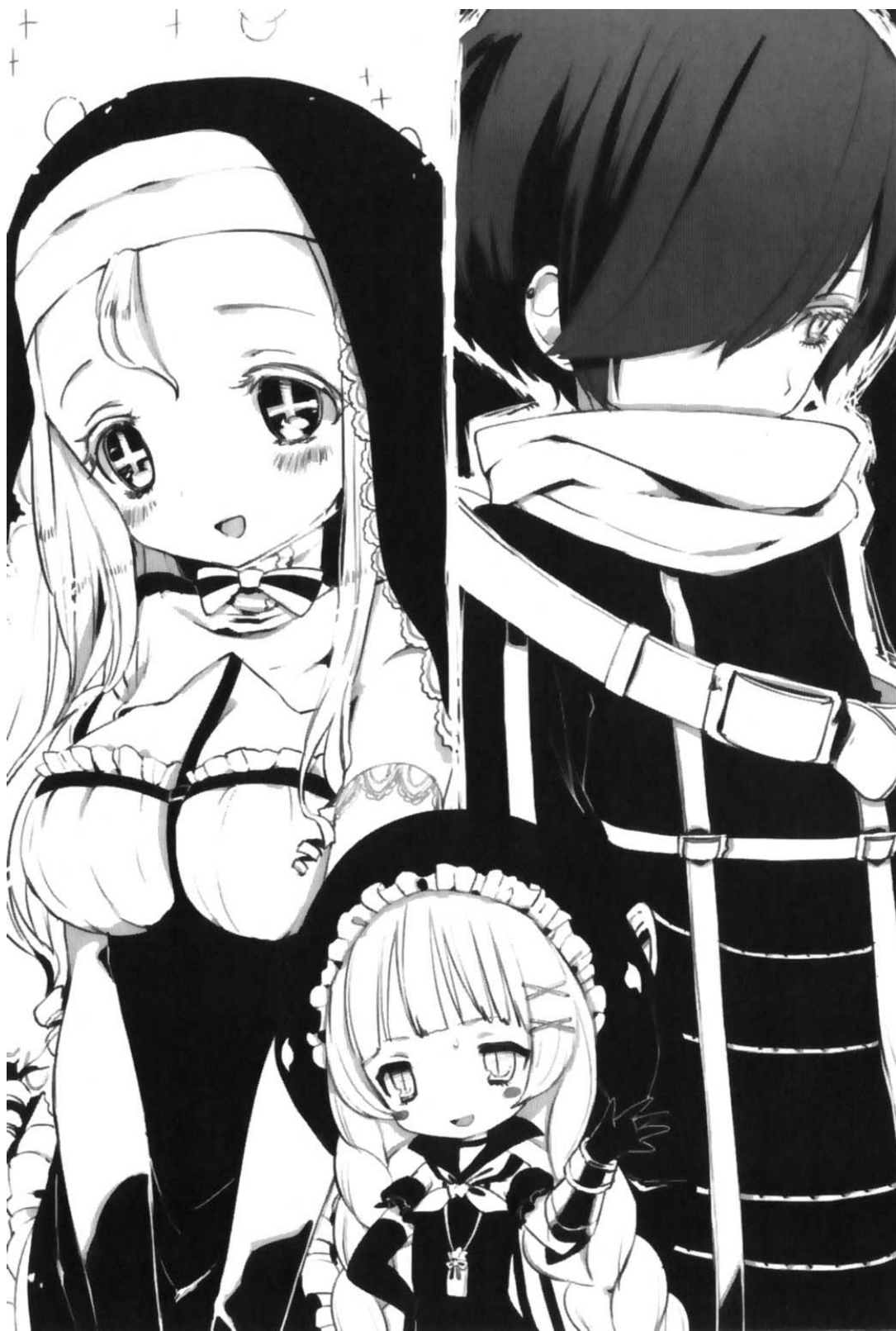
On that note, Top Speed brought two Magical Girls along. If it was Top Speed, who frequently attended the chat meetings and ought to have good relations with the other Magical Girls, then it was only natural that she would know reliable Magical Girls who would not cook up plots and schemes.

Among the two Magical Girls, one was called Sister Nana, while the other was Weiss Winterprison.

Sister Nana's appearance was immediately recognizable as that of a nun. Besides her headscarf and long dress, which corresponded to a nun's habit, another reason was because the look on her face always looked warm and genial. However, a proper nun's habit would probably not be slit so high and have white thigh-high stockings and garterbelts underneath it. Ripple wondered if using these parts of the costume, which should not have existed in the first place, to arouse lust was part of a Magical Girl's allure.

At a glance, Weiss Winterprison looked like a man, with neatly cut short brown hair and standing a head taller than Ripple. Her body was wrapped in a straitjacket-like coat that was festooned with belts, and she had a scarf around her neck which was long enough to touch the ground. Her mouth was also firmly concealed by the scarf. It might be better to describe her as a prince of some country, given that the base colors of her outfit were a very drab-looking black and brown, her face was androgynously beautiful in a way only Magical Girls could be, and her coat concealed her feminine curves.

“Hello, Ripple-san, my name is Sister Nana, and I hope we will get along... this is Weiss Winterprison.”



“Hi.”

Sister Nana’s tone was placid. To Ripple, she was slow. Weiss Winterprison’s voice was deep and her attitude was brusque. Ripple thought she was looking down on her. Neither of them left a good impression on Ripple, but since hardly anyone could make a good impression on her upon first contact, it was not worth worrying about.

However, more importantly, the look on Top Speed’s face concerned Ripple more. After the two of them landed, Top Speed’s expression seemed very troubled.

After their brief greeting, Sister Nana suddenly exclaimed:

“I think what’s happening now is not right.”

“Not right? What do you mean?”

“What’s happening now. Things between us should not be like this. We, who have been given power to protect the peace of this world, now look at each other with hatred in our eyes and ostracize each other. What good is there in that?”

Sister Nana grabbed Ripple’s hand and leaned in close, and Ripple could not keep herself from furrowing her brow. Sister Nana paid it no heed whatsoever and simply continued as she wished.

“I believe, that in an emergency like this, we need to be united now, more than ever.”

“You say we should unite, but what exactly are we supposed to do?”

Top Speed asked that question on Ripple’s behalf. Still holding Ripple’s hand, Sister Nana turned and smiled serenely at Top Speed.

“In any case, let us think about it together. If we brainstorm together, I’m sure we’ll come up with a good idea.”

Top Speed smiled bitterly, while Ripple clicked her tongue, and Weiss Winterprison coughed deliberately. Perhaps that was to reprove Ripple for her tongue-click. However, Sister Nana was not affected, and continued speaking without a pause:

“Right now, we can only rely on our abilities and wits as Magical Girls to solve the problem. We have protested to the administration through Fav, but we have been ignored.”

“Ah, so you tried submitting a report too.”

“Mm, we did, but it did no good at all. Fav said that this was how things were, so it would be better to just give up, but is a problem which we cannot just give up on. There has already been a casualty. Nemurin-san... her loss is a truly painful and depressing thing. What a pity.”

A single tear fell from Sister Nana's eye, and Ripple clicked her tongue again.

She was just like her class rep in her second year of elementary school, who thought that she could make everyone her friend with a grand speech, and also like her class rep from her second year of middle school, who thought pitying others made her a good person. As for the fact that she could cry so shamelessly... well, women like that were everywhere, but the first person who came to Ripple's mind was her own mother.

By the look of things, it would seem she had no intention of helping them collect Candies..

Ripple shrugged off Sister Nana's hand, who stumbled backward before Winterprison caught her. Her shoulders trembled as she said:

“Ahhh... how pitiful...”

Winterprison looked over Sister Nana's head and glared at Ripple. It was a gesture of rebuke for shaking off Sister Nana's hand. The flames of anger burned in her brown pupils, a shade lighter than her own hair. Ripple would not back down either, and glared right back at her with murder in her eyes. Winterprison narrowed her eyes and Ripple's lips moistened. Just as Winterprison took a step forward to shield Sister Nana, Ripple's right hand went for the hilt of the sword on her back.

“Alright, we get what you wanted to say!”

Top Speed was probably trying to clear the tense mood in the air, and so she clapped and loudly said:

“We need to discuss this, so can we call it a day for now? Okay?”

“In order to prevent any further sacrifices, we must move swiftly...”

“Mm, got it. Understood. We'd like to discuss this matter before we reach a conclusion. It's because we know it's very important that we want to carefully consider our reply to you, OK?”

At great length, Top Speed managed to get a nod out of an unwilling Sister Nana, and then she hurriedly packed them onto her broom and sent them off. After that, she came back just as quickly and put her hands together before Ripple in apology.

“I'm sorry~”

“Drop dead.”

“Aw, don’t be like, that, I’m sorry. She said she had something to discuss with us; I’m sure you would want to listen too, right? I didn’t think you would be so unhappy with it. If they have a good idea, it won’t hurt for us to follow it, right? I certainly don’t want to die, at least not for another half a year.”

So why half a year, anyway? As Ripple thought that, she clicked her tongue again. How many times had she done that today?

“What a pain...”

“I doubt they have any ill intent. I don’t know if their personalities just don’t mesh with you or something. But if you want to fight, please let me off. I can’t die, I don’t want to be drawn into a battle with you and Winterprison.”

Ripple had the feeling that what Top Speed said about “I can’t die” was different from a simple fear of death. Half a year... what would happen after half a year?

Ripple pointed at Top Speed and said:

“You...”

“Hm?”

“To think you even have ‘Who Cares What You Think’ written on your back...”

“Ah...”

“And at the crucial moment you actually backed down...”

“Aren’t you harsh as always... Still, I’m serious about warning you not to pick a fight with Winterprison. I told you before that Sister Nana almost got gunned down by Calamity Mary after walking into her territory, right? The one who helped Sister Nana escape the confrontation with Calamity Mary was apparently Winterprison. Sister Nana told me that while she was blushing.”

As she recalled how Sister Nana wept into Winterprison’s chest, Ripple frowned. Top Speed had said that this situation was because Ripple and Sister Nana’s personalities clashed, but Ripple felt that this was not the case. The true reason was because her proposition was utterly useless.

“She’s actually not a bad person.”

“Blindly faithful morons like that make me throw up...”

“Calling her a moron isn’t quite right... or maybe she’s just stubborn. Well, it’s one of them, so I guess she’s just telling us to work hard and collect Candies.”

“Even when collecting Candies, you need to be able to defend yourself.”

“All I need to do is run, you know? You do know I’m the speed queen of the city, right? The name of Top Speed isn’t for show. There’s an empty seat on the back of my broom, and once I pick you up and flee, nobody can catch up with me. That’s why I’ve been living my life correctly, keeping watch from above and descending when I see something happen. Collecting Candies like that ought to be okay, right?”

If I keep arguing with her, it won’t solve anything, Ripple thought. After mounting up silently behind Top Speed, she reached out and put her arms around her waist.



True to its name, N-City’s Nishimonzen-chou was filled with temples.

(TL Note: West Temple District)

From grand, majestic temples to small, unobtrusive shrines, there were many temples here, lined up in neat rows.

Of Nishimonzen-chou’s many temples, Ouketsuji could be said to have the longest history... or rather, it was the oldest of them all. In truth, this temple had no noteworthy history about it, and nobody to clean it up. It was simply left to rot and decay by itself. While it was in the city, it was not a bad hiding place for Magical Girls. Currently, there were five Magical Girls in residence here.

The Magical Girl Ruler adjusted the position of the tiara on her head, sitting on her cape, which she used as a cushion.

“The Magical Phones’ firmware has been updated.”

As Ruler said so, she turned to look at a headless Buddha statue. A Magical Girl in a swimsuit sat there in the seiza position. If one said that her white school swimsuit and the goggles around her neck were simply swimwear, then her drill hair and the earphones on her head were the accessories which reflected her nature as a Magical Girl. The way her voluptuous body was encased by a child-oriented garment like a school swimsuit gave her an air of lewdness and immorality.

“After the firmware update, Magical Candies can be transferred between Magical Phones.”

A Magical Girl with dog-like ears on her head poked her head out of a pit that was roughly one meter across. It looked like she could calm down best when she was hiding in a hole she had dug. She wore a short cape, over her shirt, which had a hood attached. Said hood had dog ears protruding from holes in it. She had paw gloves on her hand and a collar around her neck. The fluff on her clothes and the tights she wore underneath were white with black speckles, and a dog's tail stuck out from a hole in the back of her shorts.

"Do you know what this means?"

A crow wearing a ruby necklace sat on one of the rafter beams. And then, in the blink of an eye, it transformed into a black cat in long boots, and then in another blink, the black cat became two Magical Girls sitting side by side. They had white, swan-like wings on their backs and halos of light atop their heads. This was the true form of these angels with ever-changing appearances, and they looked to be around ten years old. Their one piece dresses and hair bands were a dark green color, which combined with their white blouses and bloomers to produce a neat and tidy effect, like a pair of choir singers. The only way to tell the difference between the two of them was whether their pageboy haircuts curled inwards or outwards, and whether they wore their leg-ribbon on their left or right leg.

"So the people with more Candies can share a few with the people that have fewer Candies?"

The dog-eared Magical Girl Tama tilted her head as she spoke. Ruler heard it, then coldly tossed off the words "zero points" before ignoring her.

"Is it so we can coordinate the distribution of Magical Candies within our teams?"

"Ahh, that makes a lot of sense! Onee-chan, you're magi-cool!"

The twin angels Yunael and Minael who were pointing at each other were known as the Peaky Angels. Ruler gave their answer "30 points".

"Swim Swim, what do you think?"

Faced with that question, the swimsuited Magical Girl shook her head silently, and her very apparent bosom jiggled left and right with the movement of her head. Ruler spat within her heart. She had never had such a curvaceous body both before and after becoming a Magical Girl, and it made her feel inferior.

"I'm surrounded by *idiots*."

She glared at them out of the corner of her eyes.

"Idiots, every last one of them."

The Peaky Angels looked away and hung their heads as if in apology. Swim Swim looked at Ruler without moving.

The idiots which Ruler was speaking of did not just refer to them. The Magical Girls who were desperately struggling to help others because they did not want to die like Nemurin were also idiots.

“This is a message from the developers, and it means: go take each others’ Candies!”

“What? We can steal them?”

“We can?”

“The experiment has shown that even without the other party’s consent, you can take Candies from a stolen Magical Phone and transfer it to yourself.”

“Really?”

“That’s awesome.”

“If all you can do is take turns to chime in with meaningless comments, than shut up. You two twits are annoying me.”

The twin angels looked away again. Ruler sneered, and then continued:

“From now on, you will all work as I direct. If you don’t want to follow in Nemurin’s footsteps, then work hard!”

“Work for you?”

“What do you want us to do?”

If echoing is all you can do, then shut up. Ruler dearly wanted to shout that at them, but rather than put them in their place, she chose to finish what she had to say.

“It’s simple. We attack the person with the most Candies, Snow White.”

After becoming a Magical Girl, Mokuo Sanae was overjoyed at finally being able to possess a body which she rightfully deserved. Every step of her academic journey had been spent in a highly-ranked institute, from elementary school, to middle school, to high school, to university, and then she had managed to obtain a job in a top-class industry, and through it all, she had always looked down on the people around her.

Sanae had always lamented: *why am I always stuck with a bunch of idiots who don't know my true value?* In addition, she freely shared that opinion of hers, and so she had nobody close to her. Be it in school or at work, she was always alone.

In order to relieve her stress, she began playing Magical Girl Raising Project, and then she became a Magical Girl. At that time, she felt that the question which had plagued her all these years—"Why am I always surrounded by idiots who don't know my true worth?"—had finally been answered. The fact was that she was an ugly duckling, and even if there was a swan among ducks, the ducks would not be able to appreciate its beauty. On the day Sanae became a Magical Girl, she had quit her job.

She stood in front of the mirror, and was very pleased by the image of herself she saw there.

Her lustrous satin cape was bespeckled with gemstones and it was long enough to drag on the ground; her ivory scepter was one meter long and tipped with a carving of an eagle clutching a gemstone, and then there were the long dinner gloves and her tiara. The tiara was small and simple in design, but the diamond socketed in the center was extraordinary in both size and clarity. Her light purple hair radiated an air of nobility and was bound up by hair ornaments, and on her feet were a pair of glass slippers. Her eyelashes looked like they would make a sound whenever she blinked. She did not need foundation or makeup; she felt that she finally did not need to worry about the things which would annoy normal people, and it felt liberating.

Even among the swans, there were those who stood out. But after meeting her mentor, Calamity Mary, Ruler's delight vanished like mist in sunlight.

She exhaled clouds of cigar smoke, then dispersed them by blowing on them, and in between she would take the occasional swig of liquor. As she saw the other woman's nonchalant attitude, Ruler made to stand up, but in that moment she heard a gunshot, and at the same time there was the sound of an explosion from behind her. She looked behind, and saw that there was a three meter-wide hole in the wall behind her.

"Don't defy Calamity Mary, don't annoy me, and don't piss me off. Okay?"

Sanae froze where she was, still stuck in her half-rising posture.

"Okay?"

At some point, Calamity Mary had raised her pistol. There was no doubt that the bullets of that gun had done that damage to the wall. The power of that pistol's bullets was incredible.

"Is that... your Magic?"

“Since when was it your turn to speak? I’m asking the questions here, so all you have to do is nod like a good little idiot. Okay?”

After a long time, Sanae finally nodded deeply.

“Okay, okay. That’s a good answer.”

Hers was a fearsome quickdraw. Sanae had not even seen her aim and fire, let alone draw her pistol. Everything had ended in the moment the wall had a huge hole blasted into it.

Calamity Mary blew away the smoke wafting from the barrel of the gun, then twirled it several times before slotting it back into its holster. Sanae watched as the gunwoman before her easily completed that movement, and then downed a bottle of liquor in one gulp. Amber fluid, leaked from the corner of her mouth, flowing down to her breasts.

Sanae bit her lip against the sense of humiliation which boiled her blood.

In the face of violence, she could do nothing but stay silent. Sanae was very familiar with her Magic and she was very happy with it, but if she tried to have a showdown with Calamity Mary and her overwhelming speed advantage, she might end up like that wall before even being able to use her Magic. While she was not as fragile as the wall, given Sanae’s endurance, she would be very badly wounded if she was lucky, and if she was unlucky she would die on the spot. Simply put, it was just like a normal human being facing a pistol’s bullets.

Just as Sanae thought she had become a swan, her head had been forcibly dragged back into the water, and the rest of her had sunk with it.

As she mulled on this insult, she realised that she needed protectors. In order to take revenge on Calamity Mary, she needed meatshields to let her last until she could use her Magic.

From then on, every time a new Magical Girl joined, she fought to be their mentor in order to rope impressionable people into a group. In the end, the dimwitted Tama, the blindly-obedient Peaky Angels and the silent Swim Swim became her minions.

Tama was a dog. She was a stupid creature who obeyed a strong master. There was no need to kick or scold her; so long as her master did not abandon her, she would gladly wag her tail for her master. When she had given her a collar, she had even run around the temple in joy.

The Peaky Angels were cowards. They would not dare talk back to her if she took a forceful tone with them. Sanae had not yet figured out who was Yunael and who was Minael, and they had no complaints

Swim Swim was silent because she did not know enough. Once, Sanae had found her staring at one of Nishimonzen-chou's tourism bulletin boards, and she had asked her what she was looking at. Surprisingly enough, she pointed at the romaji for NISHIMONZEN and asked Sanae "What does this mean?" Since she could remember everything she had told her, her memory ought to be good, but apparently she did not know how to read romaji and many simple kanji. Truly, she lived up to the stereotype of the big-breasted, brainless bimbo.

These people were all idiots, unable to act on their own judgement. Only under Sanae's banner could they function as Magical Girls. They would be better off dying for Sanae.

The Peaky Angels said "That ought to be easy" and "Super cool!" as they agreed to join the Candy-stealing operation. Swim Swim nodded silently in agreement. Only Tama quibbled due to a question of morality—"Is it really okay for Magical Girls to steal other people's things?"—but after Swim Swim chided her with, "Do you really intend to disobey our leader?" she eventually nodded obediently.

Ruler had grasped Snow White's movement patterns to some extent, but she did not know if her knowledge was accurate. In order to make sure, she sent the Peaky Angels and Tama out to scout, leaving herself and Swim Swim behind in Ouketsuji.

Swim Swim remained in her seiza position, as though she would never move no matter how much time passed. Ruler looked at her for a while, and then asked:

"Why are you sitting in the seiza position?"

"Tis is the appropriate posture to show my respect to the great leader."

"...Did I say that?"

"Yes, you did."

Anytime something happened, Swim Swim would repeat something Ruler had said before in the past. This included things which Ruler herself did not even remember saying before, meaningless things she had simply said to satisfy her need to show off, and things she had said to cut others down. Ruler felt that this showed Swim Swim's loyalty, but at the same time, she found it annoying.

"Magical Girls must not let their true identities be known by regular people, and they cannot tell their true identities to other Magical Girls."

“The leader must be admired. Only when everyone imitates the leader will the organization be invigorated.”

“The strongest enemy must be defeated first.”

“Even after becoming a Magical Girl and gaining mysterious powers, you cannot be careless. That is because the enemies who stand in the way of a Magical Girl have mysterious powers too.”

A lot of those were things she had said on the spur of the moment, but Swim Swim had nevertheless managed to memorize all these carelessly spoken words. Ruler approached Swim Swim, then bent down to pat her head.

“As long as your head is full of valuable things... even an idiot can grow.”

“What are valuable things?”

Ruler laughed, and then coldly replied,

“The things I’ve said.”

The battle plan Ruler came up with was very simple. That was because if it were not simple, her stupid subordinates might not be able to keep up with it and make stupid mistakes, leading to a collapse of the entire plan.

Her plan was to attack Snow White and La Pucelle’s meeting place before they met up—at the Kube Beach steel tower.

As for why Ruler knew where they were meeting, that was because they had mentioned it before during their chat meetings, and Ruler had just happened to see the chat logs for that period of time. When she had found those logs, Ruler had laughed, *so there were actually other idiots among the Magical Girls besides the ones around me.*

It was their meeting place, but the two of them could not possibly reach it simultaneously, and there was sure to be a delay between their arrivals. If La Pucelle was the first one there, then the Peaky Angels and Tama would stall her. Meanwhile, Swim Swim and Ruler would ambush the late-coming Snow White and steal her Candies. If Snow White was first, then they would reverse the order of operations.

Until now, Ruler had not yet fought with any Magical Girls.

Nor did she have any information on what sort of Magic the opposition could use.

While that worried her, the same applied to the other side as well. Snow White and La Pucelle should not have fought with other Magical Girls before, and they did not know the Magics which Ruler and the others used.

Tama could dig holes in an instant, and she was best for ambushes. The Peaky Angels could fly and transform, making them ideal for feint attacks. Ruler's Magic was incredibly powerful as long as she had a meatshield. And Swim Swim, who could nullify physical attacks, was the best choice for a meatshield.

—As long as those idiots don't make idiotic mistakes...

The Magical Candy theft ought to be a success.

In addition, this operation was both a skirmish and an experiment. If it succeeded, they could proceed to the next step: attack Calamity Mary and take her Magical Candies.

The shame in Ruler's heart had not abated. Until she made Calamity Mary kneel before her, the humiliation within her chest would burn forever.

"She's here!"

"I see La Pucelle!"

The Peaky Angels' report appeared on her Magical Phone. They were currently looking down from above, so it would seem La Pucelle had entered their line of sight.

"She's running towards the steel tower!"

"She's fast! Even though she's wearing armor!"

"Then proceed as planned."

Swim Swim and Ruler crept out from the trees beneath the steel tower, and swiftly climbed it.



Upon seeing the angels descend from the heavens, La Pucelle stopped in her tracks.

They were Yunael and Minael, and together they were the Peaky Angels. While she had met them during the chat meetings, this was the first time she had seen them in person. La Pucelle was baffled as to why they had appeared here, but after seeing the wicked smiles on their faces, she had a pretty good idea, and when she saw what they did after that—a flanking maneuver from front and back—she fully understood what they intended. She immediately leapt off the

gravel road, rolling into a crouch atop a patch of grass and drawing her sword, pointing it at the two angels. The 70-centimeter blade was just the right length for use in one hand.

“What are you up to?!”

“She’s asking us what we’re doing.”

“Shouldn’t the answer be obvious?”

“How about giving us your Candies?”

Her blood surged within her. She was furious at these Magical Girls whose weak wills led them to covet the Magical Candies of others, but there was a secret joy as well: it was finally time to show her abilities to their full extent. Ever since she had obtained the power of a Magical Girl, La Pucelle had always dreamed of defeating a powerful foe.

The twin angels flapped their wings—which were about as tall as they were—as they orbited in the skies above, seemingly waiting for the right opportunity. If she stood up now, she would probably be attacked right now. La Pucelle slowly moved her left hand, but then she suddenly stopped, because she felt a faint tremor.

—*From below!*

As the two angels circling overhead dove to attack, a one meter-wide hole appeared beneath La Pucelle’s legs. If she did not jump away, she would be swallowed by the hole. If she jumped, she would be unable to move in mid-air and the angels would attack her. No matter which path she chose, they both led to hell. However, La Pucelle did not choose either path; she did not jump, and neither did she fall into the hole. Instead, she stuck her sword underneath her feet and stepped on it. The sword—its width, length and thickness were now five times what they were before—supported La Pucelle, saving her from falling into the hole.

This was La Pucelle’s Magic, “the ability to freely change the size of her sword”. She could change the size of her sword to the ideal size for the current situation. The sound of scratching came from the hole, but no matter what she did, she could not damage this magic sword.

The twin angels’ unease was written on their faces.

Although they tried to stop their rapid descent, it was not a simple task. They lost their balance in mid-air. La Pucelle did not miss this chance; using her sword as a platform, she jumped up, and then swung her sheath at one of the angels.

The angel almost evaded the heavy hit from the sheath. She had actually gotten clear, but then the sheath had suddenly expanded several times, rendering the angel’s hard work moot. It was not just the sword whose size could be changed, but the sheath surrounding the sword which

could be freely changed as well. After taking a savage blow to the side of the face from the sheath, the angel fell to earth.

La Pucelle landed on the ground and immediately ran toward the hole. At the same time, the sword shrunk to a length of 50 centimeters. Without the sword in the way, someone poked their head out of the hole.

“Hey, what’s going on—”

Tama had stuck her head out because she had sensed something happening aboveground, and La Pucelle mercilessly attacked her. Tama took a solid kick to the side of the head and scrambled back into the hole with a garbled wail.

This way, two people had been removed from the battle. La Pucelle picked up her sword and pointed it at the only person remaining.

“What are you up to?”

She asked the same question from when they had attacked her. However, the angel before her was no longer there, just a crow tilting its neck. La Pucelle turned to the angel that had just fallen to the earth, and she had vanished into thin air, leaving only a rubber ball behind. Seeing La Pucelle was about to figure out the situation before her, the crow flew down to pick up the ball before flying toward the steel tower. Its body lengthened folded, bent and changed color, and what had originally been a crow and a rubber ball became the two angels.

—*Transforming? Was that their Magic?*

“Onee-chan! We’ve stalled long enough, right?”

“That’s enough! It’s fine!”

—*Stalling?*

La Pucelle looked to the peak of the tower. There were one, two, three people up there. Clearly, Snow White was not alone. La Pucelle’s face blanched in an instant.

“Shit!”

After cursing in a way which did not quite match the dignified image of a knight, she pursued the two angels towards the steel tower.



Everything had gone well for Ruler and Swim Swim.

They climbed the steel tower, encountering the Magical Girl who was already there. She wore a white costume which looked like a school uniform and appeared frequently on the aggregator site discussions; there was no doubt that she was Snow White.

The white Magical Girl's face twisted in shock. Her gaze swept over Ruler and Swim Swim, and in a trembling voice she asked:

"W...What is it?"

Her tone and expression made it clear that rather than a fighter, she was more of a commoner; rather than a perpetrator, she was a victim. How foolish; could it be she *still* did not know their aim at this juncture? Or could it be that she knew but had no intention to fight? Both options were foolish. As Ruler cursed her in her heart, she raised her scepter and used her Magic.

"I command you in the name of Ruler. Snow White, I forbid you to move."

Snow White's face was filled with shock as she froze in place, still in her posture of running away. Swim Swim took out her Magical Phone and pointed it at Snow White, then began transferring the Magical Candies.

This was Ruler's Magic, the ability to make her opposition obey her orders.

There were four restrictions to this Magic: her scepter had to be pointed at her opponent, she had to maintain her posture while sustaining the Magic on her opponent, she had to invoke the Magic in the name of Ruler, and she could not be more than five meters away from her opponent. However, it was as powerful as the restrictions were severe; once she used it on her opponent, it was over for them.

Ruler had only told the Peaky Angels, Tama and Swim Swim that her Magic could command people, but she had never told them about these limitations. She was not stupid enough to tell others about her weaknesses. She needed to project the image of a strong leader when she was in front of these people.

It was more troublesome to order Snow White "not to move" than telling her to "hand over the Candies", but she had considered that it might be troublesome if she handed over the Candies and then immediately launched an attack after that. Thus, for safety's sake, Ruler had decided to issue such an order. Ruler was wise, and wise people were careful.

"Swim Swim, aren't you done yet?"

"Soon."

“Cheh, holding this pose is really tiring.”

“Just a little more...”

Swim Swim stopped halfway. As Ruler followed her line of sight down, she saw the two angels flying rapidly towards the tower. Behind the angels, a knight was throwing up a trail of dust as she ran along the gravel road.

“Idiots, fools, morons, every last one of them... they couldn’t even delay her for long enough!”

“Just a little more.”

“Shut up, you idiot!”



Snow White had been attacked. La Pucelle thought of Snow White crying, she thought of Snow White in fear, and then she thought of Himekawa Koyuki as a human being. It hurt so much it felt like her heart was going to be torn apart, and as a result, blood surged throughout her entire body.

To La Pucelle... to Kishibe Souta, Magical Girls were heroines who would bravely plunge into battle. Magical Girls who solved problems around themselves were good too, but La Pucelle was a warrior who would not despair in the face of a powerful foe, who would never give up on protecting the things that were precious to her.

Snow White was pleading for help on top of the tower. But if she rushed up right now, the two angels would attack her. It would be one thing if the Peaky Angels had no desire to fight, but given the way they kept glancing back, they were not fleeing because they were afraid of being beaten. Footing on the steel tower was poor, and if she were attacked up there, she would be forced to fight two enemies who could fly.

And even if she won, her opponents—whose objective was stalling for time—would have gotten things their way. Given that she did not have the advantage in numbers or terrain, it was impossible for her to close the distance in one fell swoop. While La Pucelle had been in high spirits over finally being able to demonstrate her power, at the same time, she was fully aware of the limitations to her power. *So I was a born warrior after all*, she sighed as she lost herself in brief delight, but then she immediately pulled herself together. There were very few options left to her if she wanted to save Snow White.

In the few seconds before reaching the tower, La Pucelle thought and observed, reached a conclusion, and promptly put it into action. She sprinted towards the steel tower with lightning

speed, and with the momentum of her run, her body weight, and all her strength, she shoulder-tackled the tower's base.



One could see the body of the tower shaking from below. It was not such a simple matter for the people standing on top of it. The bundled power lines were snapped by brute force. The tower shook so violently that it felt like one could touch the ground just by reaching out. Both Ruler—who was holding her scepter in her pose and could not move—and Snow White—who was immobilized—could not endure the shaking, and they were tossed off. Swim Swim, who had also been thrown off, grabbed Ruler in mid-air and threw her upwards, where the twin angels caught her just in time.

Snow White was caught by La Pucelle, who had swiftly sprinted over to her landing site, and the two of them rolled to a grass patch 10 meters away before grinding to a halt.

Ruler glared angrily at Snow White and La Pucelle. Both her armpits were being held by the Peaky Angels, and she was dangling in mid-air. While she had been spared a fall, she was still a pathetic sight. To her, this was adding insult to injury.

Nobody was helping Swim Swim, so she should have fallen straight to the ground. However, her Magic should have kept her from harm. If they combined forces, it would be a four on two battle. At this point, Ruler suddenly thought of Tama:

“What happened to Tama?”

“La Pucelle kicked her and then she vanished.”

“Don’t know if she’s dead or alive.”

If La Pucelle could make such a massive steel tower shake like it was going to break in half or collapse, then it was understandable that Tama would lose the will to fight after one hit.

Tama and the Peaky Angels were not only unable to deal with La Pucelle three-on-one, but they had been soundly defeated and fled. When she thought about that point, Ruler made up her mind.

“Alright, we’re falling back!”

“Eh?”

“Seriously?”

“Tactical retreat! Shut up and go!”

They left behind Snow White and La Pucelle as they were about to rise to their feet, and the two angels and Ruler ran away.

While a tactical retreat implied weakness, in truth it was the right choice.

Tama had returned to Ouketsuji by herself. Her memories were a little unclear, but since her head was always foggy, it was not a big problem.

Swim Swim returned, and she had neatly accomplished her task. In other words, she had successfully stolen Snow White's Magical Candies and returned with her head held high.

Swim Swim originally had 862 Candies. After the battle, that number had become 2914, for an increase in 2088. This amount was twice as much as Ruler, who had the most Candies among them.

"She actually collected over 2000 of them."

"How did she get so many, anyway?"

"She's a true bourgeoisie."

"Then that would make us modern-day revolutionaries."

"Onee-chan, you're magi-cool."

"Then, how should we divide these candies?"

"We got 2088 Magical Candies!"

"2088 divided by 5 is 417 with 3 left over. We can't divide them evenly."

"Yuna-chan, Mina-chan, you calculated that so fast!"

"No, it divides evenly."

Ruler corrected them. The math itself was correct, but the formula was wrong.

"2944 minus 826 is 2088, there's no problem until this part."

"Is there a problem after that?"

"Is there?"

"Why do we have to divide it into five equal shares? Divide 2088 into two equal shares. One of them is 1044. That's mine as the leader. The remaining 1044 will be divided in two, with one share being 522. That goes to Swim Swim. The remaining 522 will be divided into three shares, with Yunael, Minael and Tama each getting 174. It's evenly divided that way."

Silence reigned inside the broken-down temple. Abandoned temples already had a bone-chilling silence of their own, and then Ruler, who had brought that silence upon them, broke it once more.

“Any complaints?”

She glared at them.

“There are idiots who couldn’t even do their job properly, an idiot who finished her mission perfectly, and the leader who planned the operation and took the most important role during the actual execution. Why do they have to receive the same amount? Are you all idiots? Ahhh, indeed you are, I knew that long ago. You’re incompetent idiots who couldn’t hold back La Pucelle despite it being a three-on-one fight and nearly ruined the plan, but as a good-natured person, I’ve forgotten that already.”



Ruler pointed and glared angrily at each of them.

The twin angels looked away, while Tama's ears drooped, and Swim Swim sat and listened to Ruler's lecture. Ruler snorted, and then used her scepter to rap on the temple's floorboards.

"Consider yourselves, you idiots, and be glad that I didn't punish you."

Chat Meeting 2

Fav: Now then, let's begin this week's chat meeting~

Fav: But why does it feel like there's so few people ~pon?

Fav: Could it be everyone thinks it'll be fine if they read the chat logs afterwards ~pon?

Fav: Why is nobody present speaking?

Fav: Cheer up a little ~pon.

Fav: You're only a Magical Girl when you're carefree and happy ~pon☆.

Fav: Alright, enough chitchat.

Fav: Now, let's talk about something more relaxing ~pon.

Fav: We have a new girl joining us this week~ Applause, everyone~

Fav: Er, however, she doesn't seem to be here.

Fav: She must be feeling shy ~pon.

Fav; Still, you should start taking part from next week onwards.

Fav: That's a promise with Fav~pon☆.

Fav: Now then, next up is what everyone has been waiting for...

Fav: We will announce the person with the fewest Candies this week ~pon.

Fav: And the lowest-ranked person for this week is...

Fav: Ruler.

Fav: Mm, what a shame ~pon.

Fav: You worked so hard and did so much, but it really is a shame ~pon.

Fav: That said, I'm in quite a spot myself ~pon.

Fav: Ah, the top-ranking person this week is still Snow White ~pon.

Fav: Top place for two weeks in a row, congratulations~

Fav: Everyone, remember to collect more Magical Candies in order to become first ~pon.

Fav: Then, let's meet again at next week's chat meeting ~pon.

Fav: Bye bye~

The amount of participants had decreased dramatically. The chat meeting had ended with only Tama, Swim Swim, the Peak Angels, and Ruler in attendance, besides Clamberry and Fav. Everyone else was probably on their guard, having realised that every Magical Girl other than themselves might be an enemy.

“My my, that really went well.”

“It was magi-cool.”

A dim light shone within Ouketsuji of Nishimonzen-chou.

The Peaky Angels made no attempt to hide their delight, high-fiving and shaking hands and hugging each other. They tried to do the same with Swim Swim and Tama, but Tama looked like she was in pain while there was no expression on Swim Swim’s face.

“That hateful bitch is gone!”

“She really was a egotistical bitch!”

“That bitch didn’t share Candies with us!”

“That bitch always badmouthed us and called us idiots and fools!”

“I really hated that bitch!”

The Peaky Angels hated Ruler. She was arrogant, greedy, and spouted insults and abuse. Did Ruler know that? Did she know how Minael and Yunael spoke ill of her when she was not around?

Tama was afraid of Ruler, for the same reasons as the twins.

Swim Swim knew that while the exact degree varied between them, Ruler was a highly unpleasant person for the three of them. She was so distasteful that if Swim Swim were to make a proposal to eliminate her, they would surely approve.

“Still, speaking of which, how do we deal with this?”

“Bury her in the mountains?”

“That should be simple with Tama’s Magic.”

“She can dig a hole in an instant.”

Minael, Yunael and Swim Swim stood at even intervals around someone who was slumped on the ground. The person on the ground looked like a young woman who was in her late twenties. She wore a cardigan over her pajamas and a pair of sandals on her feet.

“Still ,we don’t have to go to all that trouble, do we?”

“Ah, that’s right.”

“While it’s still dark, we can just find a place and dump her there, and someone will find her in the morning.”

“Let’s do that.”

Before Ruler died, she was still breathing, “Why, What happened?” Now that she was on the ground in the form of a normal person, her hands were still in a grasping posture.

Swim Swim stood up and walked over to Tama, who was hugging her knees, her ears drooping, and shivering all over. She knelt down until their eyes were at the same level, and caressed her head in a comforting fashion. Tears leaked from Tama's eyes. Swim Swim softened her facial muscles and slowly raised the corners of her lips. "It's fine," she said and patted her head again.

"Let me take care of the corpse."

Saying so, Swim Swim picked up Ruler's body.

"Swim-chan, you don't have to do that."

"Yeah, you're the new leader."

"That's it for today. Everyone can go back now."

Swim Swim did not pay any attention to the Peaky Angels, whose conversation was getting more and more heated behind her. She pushed open the temple gate, and they creaked, just like it had every time she had opened it in the past. Swim Swim remembered that Ruler had once said, "It would be good to oil the gate."

Swim Swim came to an alley in Nishimonzen-chou. It was a dark, moonless night. The residents here were unhappy with how few streetlamps there were in Nishimonzen-chou compared to other districts, but their voices had not reached the ears of the municipal department, and so the alley was dark tonight as well.

She did not sense anyone following behind her. She had copied Ruler when she felt annoyed when she had told the others they were dismissed. The two angels and Tama seemed to have obeyed.

Swim Swim admired Ruler.

When she had just become a Magical Girl, when she had no idea what to do, Ruler had told her how to live as a Magical Girl. Ruler's majestic form back then had superimposed itself over the princess in Swim Swim's dreams. Swim Swim had faithfully obeyed Ruler's words ever since.

"The leader must be admired. Only when everyone imitates the leader will the organization be invigorated."

Swim Swim admired Ruler. Ruler was a princess, and princesses represented justice. Ruler was mighty, Ruler was wise, beautiful and overflowed with leadership. Swim Swim set Ruler as her goal, but Ruler herself was the biggest obstacle in becoming someone like Ruler. If there were two Rulers, then Ruler would not be enough of a Ruler. Only the person who stood on top was the Ruler in her heart.

Swim Swim admired and respected Ruler, and because of that, she had to kill Ruler. On the night she realised that, Swim Swim had a high fever, threw up everything she ate, and then she took two days sick leave and did not go to school. Even so, she had to do it, all because she admired Ruler so much.

However, Ruler's Magic was powerful, and eliminating her would require a great deal of effort. Even if she wanted to play on the dissatisfaction which the Peaky Angels and Tama held for her, she had to think of a way to deal with her "order" Magic. At this point, Swim Swim decided to wait for a chance.

Soon, that chance arrived: the Candy-stealing operation targeting Snow White.

Snow White had around 50000 Magical Candies, and Swim Swim had taken 37000 of those. She grabbed Tama, who was still in a daze under the steel tower, given her 35000 or so Candies, and then told Ruler there were only 2000. She then used the 35000 Candies stocked with Tama and then distributed them evenly to everyone except Ruler, Snow White and La Pucelle. There were those who were doubtful of them, those who were wary of them, those who harbored hostility towards them, and those who fired on them without saying a word. While nobody replied with thanks to the message notifying them of the gift of Magical Candies, nobody rejected it either.

During this process, Swim Swim used Fav as a communication tool with the other Magical Girls. Fav had met all the other Magical Girls, and even a Magical Girl trying to hide her location would need to have spoken with Fav. Ruler had once told Swim Swim that if she ran into a situation which was not adequately explained or where the language was not sufficiently clear, if she asked Fav for help, then he would respond to the best of his ability.

Dividing 35000 Candies among 11 people meant that each of them would receive around 3180 Candies. Snow White still had over 10000 Candies, and even if she split the amount evenly with La Pucelle they would still have over 5000. In this way, Ruler, who had been so uppity and comfortable with the 1044 Candies she had received, had actually become the one with the fewest Magical Candies.

The Peaky Angels were overjoyed, while Tama took part in the operation with guilt written all over her face. They all accepted Swim Swim's status as leader.

Swim Swim had successfully assassinated Ruler before she realized she had been betrayed. She had not even had the chance to use her Magic.

Swim Swim brought Ruler's corpse to the end of the main road. Even without a Magical Girl's arm-strength, this cold body was not heavy.

“Farewell. Thank you very much for all you’ve done.”

Swim Swim bowed deeply, then turned her back on Ruler’s body and left, vanishing into the darkness of the alley.

Ruler was no longer around, but the lessons she had taught her still remained. From now on, no matter what happened, she had to obey her teachings. Swim Swim wiped away the tears from the corner of her eyes with her fingertip, and ran through the darkness.