Canine Detective Chris



Tomoko Tabe
Illustration by
KeG

FINAL 3

The Shiba Inu Detective Explores a Luxury Cruise Ship!

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3

Tomoko Tabe

Illustration by **KeG**

JY

New York

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Translation by Stephen Paul Cover art by KeG

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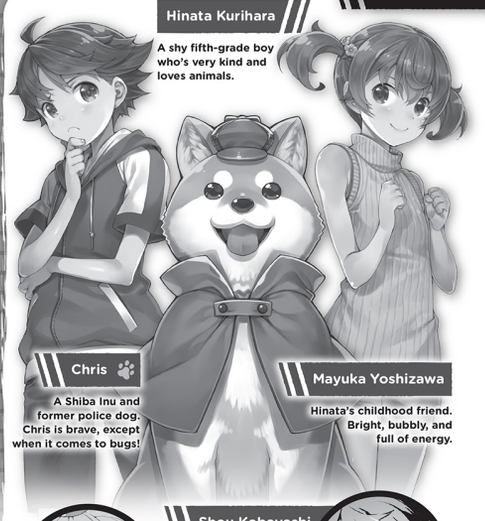
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Characters



Hinata Kurihara
A shy fifth-grade boy who's very kind and loves animals.

Chris
A Shiba Inu and former police dog. Chris is brave, except when it comes to bugs!

Mayuka Yoshizawa
Hinata's childhood friend. Bright, bubbly, and full of energy.



Shou Kobayashi
A detective and Chris's former owner.



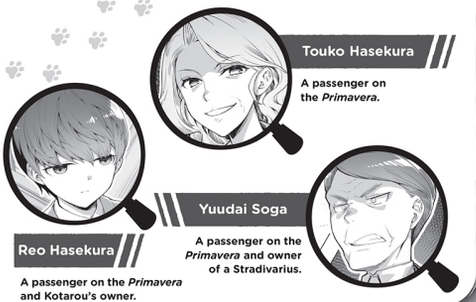
Chihori Kase
A rookie crew member of the *Primavera*.



Mito Sugisaki
Hinata and Mayuka's classmate. A brilliant violinist.

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Touko Hasekura
A passenger on the *Primavera*.

Reo Hasekura
A passenger on the *Primavera* and Kotarou's owner.

Yuudai Soga
A passenger on the *Primavera* and owner of a Stradivarius.

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Yen Newsletter

1

Where Am I?



Was that the sound of a scream somewhere off in the distance…?

It's time to get up…

Hinata Kurihara wriggled his hand, trying to push off his blanket.

Huh? There's no blanket?

He felt a hard surface below him. His back and butt hurt.

Where was I sleeping?

He slowly sat up and shook his head to clear away the mental cobwebs.

"Eeeeek! He's alive!"

This scream sounded much closer. In fact, it seemed to be coming from his immediate vicinity.

He turned toward the voice with alarm and saw a young woman in a navy-blue uniform covering her mouth with both hands and shivering violently.

Umm, who is this…?

Oh, right. The cruise ship's new crew member in training. She was showing us around.

Her name is Chihori, isn't it? Yes, Chihori Kase.

H-hang on! Cruise ship? Hinata put a hand to his forehead.

That's right. It's all coming back to me. Me and Chris and Mayuka and Mr. Kobayashi were all aboard the Primavera, *a*

luxury cruise ship. Mito—a girl in the same class as Mayuka and me—had a violin recital on the ship, and we were all invited.

But…where am I now, and what was I doing…?

"A-are you all right, Hinata?!" wailed Chihori. "I thought you were dead!" She rushed over and began rubbing his shoulder gently.

"I-I'm all right… I feel like I took a long nap…"

With his vision cleared up, Hinata looked to see what he was lying on. Beneath him was a white-and-gray rug covered with geometric shapes…

I was sleeping on the floor?!

He looked up and saw a bed next to him, with someone's leg sticking out over the edge. He recognized the shiny black shoe on the end of it—that was Mayuka's foot.

To his other side, Kobayashi was practically slipping out of his wheelchair, fast asleep.

And sitting atop a desk along the wall was a violin case…

Oh, right! This is a ship cabin. We're in Mito's greenroom.

But something wasn't right.

We boarded the ship in the afternoon. We listened to Mito's violin concert, ate dinner, and were supposed to leave that night.

And yet there was bright sunlight shining in through the glass door.

"Ch-Chihori, d-did we…?"

Hinata brushed off her hand and leaped to his feet, then rushed to the door.

Outside he found the room's balcony. And beyond that… nothing but endless blue sea!

The water's shining surface reflected the sunlight far off into the distance. Nothing interrupted its vast blanket of blue, which stretched all the way to the horizon.

Hinata gazed at it, open-mouthed, then he turned back to see Chihori, pale and awkwardly rooted to the spot. On the twin beds beside her, Mayuka and Mito were snoozing away in silence.

"D-did we…?" Hinata said again, and Chihori's face twisted.

"We're in the middle of the Pacific!" she wailed. "The ship took off late last night. We didn't think any of you were still on board!!"



2

The Violinist Is an Elementary Schooler



It had all started in the lobby of Marron Veterinary Clinic, four days earlier.

Hinata had come home from school and quickly headed back out the door with his partner, the Shiba Inu named Chris. Before they headed off on their walk, he stopped by the veterinary clinic on the ground floor of their home.

“I’m back, Dad!”

“Welcome home, Hinata. What’s that, Chris? Are you going out for a walk? Who’s a lucky boy?”

“*Woof !*” replied Chris happily, pulling against his pink leash.

Yuusuke, the large man waving from the back of the office, was Hinata’s father. He was the clinic’s nurse and groomer, and he took care of everything from helping the doctor with treatment and managing each animal’s health to giving haircuts to dogs.

“You took a while to get home, Hinata,” said Rui Takeuchi, one of Hinata’s classmates. He was seated on the sofa in the lobby, a large tabby cat named Chachamaru resting on his lap.

“Y-yeah… I started looking at an animal picture book in the library,” Hinata admitted awkwardly, “and before I knew it…”

Hinata was shy and felt a little nervous even around his classmates.

“I see. I went home ages ago and brought Chachamaru here. His ears seemed itchy, so I wanted to have Dr. Suzune take a look.” Rui grinned, pushing his slipping glasses back up his nose.

“Hinata, Chris, let’s go for a walk!” came a boisterous voice from over Hinata’s shoulder. “Oh, Rui Takeuchi. You’re always here, aren’t you?”

The voice belonged to Hinata’s childhood friend and classmate, Mayuka Yoshizawa, who’d just walked into the clinic. She was even more energetic than usual, and her pigtails bounced with excitement. She almost always tagged along for Hinata and Chris’s daily walks.

Rui was a little miffed by her comment. She was here even more often than he was!

“Chris,” Mayuka said excitedly, “let’s go practice tracking criminals at Tenso Shrine!” Hinata lifted a finger and shushed her in a panic, but it was too late.

“Mayuka, you promised not to do anything dangerous.” Sure enough, Yuusuke narrowed his eyes at them from behind the counter.

Hinata, Mayuka, and Chris, a former police dog, had already had plenty of adventures, from catching jewel thieves to arresting a gang of burglars. Chris’s ability to track scents and find clues, combined with Mayuka’s boundless energy and Hinata’s logic and intuition, had managed to crack both cases.

But seeing the trio involved in such dangerous incidents worried the adults in their lives.

Helen Mehito, the mastermind behind both incidents, was still on the run. What’s more, Chris had the key to information she wanted, and it was very likely that she was still out there, waiting for a chance to get back at them…

Given all of that, it was no wonder that the adults were concerned.

“That’s right,” Rui whispered to Mayuka. “You two always run headfirst into danger without thinking of the consequences… You *do* remember that *I* was the one who called for help both times, right?”

Mayuka shrugged. “Yeah, yeah! We owe the great Rui Takeuchi a heavy debt. Don’t worry, Mr. Yuusuke. We won’t do anything dangerous.”

“Uh-huh… But don’t you always say that, Mayuka?” admonished Yuusuke. “And you just said you were going to practice tracking criminals…”

The sound of the door opening cut off Yuusuke’s lecture. A tall, slender girl had just entered the waiting room with a man.

The girl had long, straight black hair and wore a loose track jacket and pants. The man wore glasses and a well-fitted suit and was clutching a large object to his chest. It appeared to be a birdcage with a rounded top, covered with a black cloth to hide the interior.

“Oh? Mito?” Mayuka stood up from her seat on the sofa.

The girl came to a startled stop, and her expression hardened.

“Hello. Is this your first visit?” said Yuusuke from behind the counter. “…Do you know her, Mayuka?”

“Y-yes,” Mayuka said hesitantly. “Mito’s our classmate…”

The other girl turned away in a huff and said bluntly, “‘But she barely comes to school, and I’ve never spoken to her’…right?”

Yuusuke looked to Hinata for help. “Does she have complicated circumstances or something?” he asked with his eyes.

Hinata didn’t know what to say, so Rui took the initiative. “Mito Sugisaki is a violinist. She’s busy with lessons and concerts, so she’s often absent from school,” he explained.

“Wow, so you’re learning the violin?!” Yuusuke exclaimed, impressed.

Rui shook his head. “I wouldn’t say she’s ‘learning’ it.” He turned to Mito. “I believe you won a junior competition, right?”

Hinata was stunned. He knew that Mito was often absent from school because she was busy practicing. But he’d had no idea that she was so accomplished.

Mito glared at Rui through narrowed eyes. “And?” she said coldly. “So what if I’ve won things?”

The air in the room turned to ice. Even Chris hid his head behind Hinata’s legs.

“Uh, no… I mean… That’s quite an accomplishment!” Yuusuke hastily interjected. “Aren’t you the same age as these three?” He waved his pointer finger at the other children. “My son, Hinata, can’t even play it cool, much less play the violin, ha-ha-ha…”

The chilly atmosphere was now as frigid as the South Pole.

The man carrying the birdcage said, “Stop that, Mito. We’re here to have Popo examined, remember? My apologies. I’m Mito’s father, and this is our bird…”

Mr. Sugisaki pulled back the black cloth to reveal a yellow parrot standing on a perch. The feathers atop its head were long and pointy, and its cheeks were a brilliant shade of orange.

Chris poked his head out from behind Hinata’s legs as if to ask, “Who’s that?”

“Ah, a cockatiel,” Yuusuke said with the calm tone of an expert, finally on more familiar ground. “Please bring it over.” He beckoned them to the counter.

Mr. Sugisaki strode over and placed the cage down in front of Yuusuke. “It had a bit of a freak-out just a little while ago and hurt its leg. There was blood…”

Yuusuke carefully examined the bird in the cage. The cockatiel stared back at him and peeped.

“It’s a very cute bird. Our vet will take a look at it in just a moment, but given that it’s staying on its perch, I don’t think there’s anything to be alarmed about. It probably just had a cockatiel fright.”

“Cockatiel fright?”

“Yes, cockatiels are easily frightened. Loud noises, earthquakes—many things can set them off and cause them to panic and act out. Episodes like that are called cockatiel frights…”

Mito shoved herself in front of her father and said crossly, “Popo is *not* a coward! It grew up listening to me play the violin, so loud noises are no problem.”

“But, Mito, when you were practicing earlier…,” her father began timidly.

She scrunched her nose up and shouted, “I know, I know it’s my fault! My pizzicato execution wasn’t good enough, and I kicked over the music stand in frustration!”

Oof. Hinata drew his knees up on the sofa. *She kicked over her music stand? Mito seems a bit scary…*

But Mayuka’s eyes widened in wonderment. “Wow, really? I guess violin practice is harder than I realized. I thought it was really cool that you could play the violin, but I guess it’s not so easy, huh…”

This surprised Mito. She hesitated, then swept a strand of hair out of her face and said, “Have you ever even touched a violin? Of course you have no idea what I deal with!”

Mayuka wasn’t intimidated, however. “Yeah, I’m sorry. I don’t know anything about it. I’ve never even seen one in person. But I wish I could someday. I bet it would sound beautiful up close.”

Mito’s expression softened. It seemed that Mayuka’s boundless innocence had won her over. She exhaled slowly, stared Mayuka right in the face, and said, “Then…maybe someday…”

“Wow, really? I can’t wait!” Mayuka bounced up and down and clapped her hands.

At that moment, the sliding door to the examination room opened, and an old man with a dog came out.

“Take care, Dachs!” Suzune called out after them. She took a look around the waiting room and winked at Rui. “I’m guessing it’s Chachamaru’s turn next.”

Suzune was Hinata’s mother and the Marron Clinic’s veterinarian. She was short and had a round face. Her examination style was thorough and careful, but her personality was warm and friendly.

Rui picked up one of Chachamaru’s paws and waved it at her. “Dr. Suzune, you can save us for later. Please take a look at that cockatiel over there first. I think they’re in a hurry.”

“Are you sure?” she asked, and looked over at Mr. Sugisaki, who had his hand on the birdcage.

He bowed to Rui. “Thank you. That’s very kind of you. And your name is…?”

Mr. Sugisaki glanced at Mito. The girl blushed, pursed her lips, and turned to the side.

Mayuka quickly provided a cheerful introduction. “That’s Rui Takeuchi. I’m Mayuka Yoshizawa, and this is Hinata Kurihara. His parents run this clinic. And by complete coincidence, we’re all in the same class at school!”

“Thank you, Mayuka. Doctor, may we?”

“Of course,” said Suzune. “Since it’s your first visit, I need you to fill out a patient form, which you can do in the examination room. Come on in…”

Mr. Sugisaki lifted up the cage and followed Suzune. Mito wordlessly joined them.

The door slid closed, and everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

Their encounter with Mito had been quite nerve-racking. Hinata looked down at his feet and saw that Chris was sprawled on the floor, tuckered out.

After Yuusuke said good-bye to the old man and his dachshund, he exhaled as well. “Mito seems both sharp and sensitive at the same time… A true artist already!” he murmured, then turned to Rui. “You said she won a competition?”

“Yes. It seems she won a junior competition at the national level. When she reaches middle school, she’ll be studying overseas. I heard about it from one of Grandma’s pupils.”

Rui’s grandmother was a tea ceremony master, and he heard all kinds of neighborhood gossip from her students.

“Studying abroad!” Yuusuke said. “That’s remarkable. I’d love to hear her play.” He glanced at the door to the examination room. “Our family doesn’t have much artistic talent.”

Hinata shrugged sheepishly, and Chris whined, for good measure.

Rui looked up at the ceiling, lost in thought. “Mito’s mother is a famous pianist, too,” he said. “I think her name is Keito Sugisaki. Grandma saw her on TV once and got quite excited.”

“Wow! So they’re a whole family of artists,” Yuusuke remarked, thoroughly impressed.

“I used to take piano lessons, you know!” Mayuka said competitively.

“…And you quit after a month, right?” Hinata muttered.

She puffed out her cheeks. “You’re not supposed to bring that up!”

“W-well, it’s the truth.”

“It’s not that I had no talent. I just didn’t get along well with the teacher…”

As everyone was teasing Mayuka and discussing her potential musical talent, Popo’s examination came to an end. Mito looked noticeably more cheerful when she came back through the doorway. Mr. Sugisaki followed and set down the birdcage on a vacant sofa nearby.

“How is Popo?” Mayuka asked.

Mito’s lips rose in a faint smile. “It was only a cut. No damage to the bone.”

“So it’ll heal up soon? That’s good. You must be relieved.”

Mito nodded shyly. She glanced at her father, then said, with some hesitation, “Um, Mayuka… Are you free after school on Friday?”

“This Friday? I don’t think I have anything going on…”

“Would you like to come hear my violin?”

Mayuka’s eyes sparkled. “Huh? Really? Where? At your house?”

“No, no. It’s, um, in Yokohama…and…the boys are invited if they want to come, too…”

She glanced briefly at Hinata and Rui. Hinata’s heart skipped a beat. *Us too? Really?*

Then she scowled and shook her head. “Ugh, I can’t do the rest… Daddy, could you handle it for me?!”

Her father stepped away from the birdcage and looked at his daughter with a bit of surprise. “Are you sure about this, Mito?”

“Of course I am! It was my idea…,” she said, turning away with a huff.

Unexpectedly, Mr. Sugisaki’s face broke into a smile as he stepped forward to address the group. “Then allow me to explain… This Friday evening, Mito is performing a small concert. Are you familiar with the *Primavera*? It’s a passenger ship currently docked in the Port of Yokohama.”

Mayuka nodded. “That’s the famous cruise ship, right? The really big one. I saw it on TV once…” Then her eyes widened as realization sank in. *Wait, really…?*

Mr. Sugisaki nodded and smiled. “Mito will be performing in the lobby of the ship. There will be a dinner party after the concert, and we’d be very happy if you joined us… We will be disembarking before the ship leaves on her next voyage. What do you say?”

“W-wait a moment!” Yuusuke interrupted, rushing out from behind the counter. “The *Primavera* is an ultraluxury cruise ship! You want to take the *kids* there? For a d-d-dinner party?!”

“Mito is also a child, of course. This is something of a special case…,” Mr. Sugisaki said calmly, trying to ease Yuusuke’s agitation. “A well-known violin collector came to us and proposed the concert. He has an expensive Stradivarius violin that he would like Mito to play…”

Mito's brow wrinkled with distaste. "He's a horrible old man! He happens to own a few extremely valuable violins and wants to show them off. He doesn't care about my ability; he just thinks that if a little kid plays it, people will be drawn by the novelty and pay attention to him."

"Now, Mito," her father said placatingly. "You still want to play the Stradivarius, though, don't you? It's not the kind of thing you can easily get your hands on. I think a little experience with such a fine instrument will benefit you in the future."

Mito pulled a sour face but nodded. Hinata just sat by and listened, open-mouthed. Mito was living in a world completely outside his comprehension.

She dropped her eyes to the floor and said, "He treats me like a child. He said to me, 'Young lady, bring your friends along. I extend the invitation to them as well.' I don't have any friends and swore that I wouldn't bring anyone… But maybe it'd be all right to bring you three."

Mr. Sugisaki beamed at his daughter and said to Mayuka, "I'm sorry, I know this is all rather strange. But we would truly appreciate it if you would join us. Won't you come to the concert? This is the first time that Mito has ever invited a friend to listen to her play. Perhaps you could bring along a parent or guardian…"

Mayuka held her breath and looked around, her eyes full of sparkles. Hinata went pale. He knew she would insist on attending.

And she's going to drag me along, too…

"Th-thank you!" she said in a strangled falsetto. "I want to go, I really do! I'd like to hear Mito's violin, and I never dreamed I'd get to see the inside of a cruise ship! May Hinata go with us? And Rui?"

"Of course," Mr. Sugisaki said amiably, but Rui looked downcast.

"…I have to go to a relative's funeral in the countryside on Friday afternoon…"

"Oh… But I'm sure another chance will come around!" Mayuka said. Then she turned to Mr. Sugisaki. "I guess it'll just be Hinata and me, then."

Hinata fretted. "I—I can't go. I have to watch Chris, and take him on his walk, and feed him…"

The cruise ship and dinner party were so far outside Hinata's experience. Just the thought of going there made him freeze up with nerves. It would be so much more fun and relaxing to simply take Chris on a walk.

Chris, meanwhile, was looking from person to person, curiously wondering what was going on.

Mr. Sugisaki, however, had just the thing to get past Hinata's defense. "Actually, that's not a problem," he said. "The *Primavera* is one of the few cruise ships that allows pets on board, with full amenities and services for their guests' animal companions. We'd love for you to bring your puppy along."

What?! Hinata nearly fell off the sofa. *B-but…*

"They'll need an adult escort, I presume?" said Suzune, poking her head out of the examination room. "Unfortunately, we'll be busy, since the clinic closes at seven PM."

Yuusuke lifted a hand. "If Suzu says I can go, I'd be happy to."

"What do you mean?" Suzune shot back. "You know Fridays are busy, and we have dog-grooming appointments that day, too. What about your parents, Mayuka?"

Mayuka looked deflated as she poked the ends of her index fingers together under her nose. "I don't think they can go… Maybe if we'd known about it a little earlier, they could have taken time off…"

Mito looked disappointed, too. She lowered her gaze and kicked at the floor with her toe.

Mr. Sugisaki pursed his lips and bowed. "I'm very sorry to have put you on the spot like this. Once on the ship, I will have to attend to Mito at all times, so there would need to be another adult present. I'm sorry, Mayuka. We'll have to send you another invitation some other time…"

Hinata felt relief flood through him. *Thank goodness. I won't have to go…*

But then Mayuka chuckled menacingly to herself and lifted her head. "I've got an idea! We just need an adult, right? I know just the person, and I'm sure he's got nothing better to do!"



Huh? Hinata looked at her in surprise. Even Chris joined in with a "*Woof?*"

"That's right, Chris. You know who it is, don't you? I mean your former owner, Mr. Kobayashi. He's a private detective with loads of free time."

And that was how, three days later, Hinata, Mayuka, Chris, and Shou Kobayashi, "the detective with nothing better to do," boarded the luxury cruise ship *Primavera*.



Concert on the *Primavera*



A little after three o'clock, the group filed into Mito's father's van outside the veterinary clinic.

The cruise ship had a dress code, which meant you had to wear the right clothes for the occasion. For a formal dinner, guests were required to wear dresses and tuxedos and the like.

"But this is a more informal sail-away party, so merely wearing your nice going-out clothes is good enough," Mr. Sugisaki said.

Suzune put Hinata in a suit anyway, however. He felt like he was going to suffocate. And since Chris was with him, he also had the usual bag he took on their walks slung over his shoulder.

As for Mayuka, she was in a frilly lilac dress. Her shoes were shiny and black with straps over the top, and her pigtails were tied with little flower decorations made of the same fabric as her clothes.

"I wore this dress to a relative's wedding. Isn't it nice?"

Hinata thought her usual clothes suited her better, but he was smart enough not to say that out loud.

The young man in the wheelchair, Kobayashi, was dressed in a suit he'd pulled out of the back of his dresser. "It's been a long time since I wore this. The necktie's as uncomfortable as ever," he said, sticking his finger down the front and pulling again and again. He'd done everything he could to smooth down his usually scruffy hair.

Chris had no way of dressing up, of course, so he looked the same as ever.

"Maybe we should have bought a collar with a little bow tie on it," Mayuka said, dissatisfied. Hinata ignored her.

Mito sat in the passenger seat, holding her violin case. She was wearing a simple black dress. Apparently, the famous Stradivarius was inside the case.

Hinata, Chris, and Mayuka were piled into the back seat. And, with Yuusuke's help, Kobayashi joined them. His cool, state-of-the-art powered wheelchair went into the very back with Mito's things.

"We'll be on our way, then," Mr. Sugisaki said to Yuusuke. "I should be bringing them back at around nine o'clock." And then they drove off.

There was an awkward, prickly mood around Mito, who didn't say a word the whole trip. Before the others got into the car, her father had told them, "I'm sorry, she's usually very tense before a performance, so I wouldn't expect much conversation." Hinata and Mayuka made sure not to bother her.

"It's in Yokohama, right?" Kobayashi said quietly to the others in the back. "The incident that separated me from Chris happened at the Port of Yokohama. That was the first and last case that Christie the police dog ever tackled. I'm a bit nervous about going back…"

That's right… That's where the bad guys captured Mr. Kobayashi before locking him up for all that time, separating him from Chris. And it made him unable to walk, too…

Hinata merely nodded, choosing not to interrupt.

"Before that, we went to the coast guard headquarters in Yokohama. There was a training program to spot drug smuggling. They said you were very good at it, Chris… Do you remember?" Kobayashi said, smiling at the Shiba Inu.

Chris whined gently at Hinata's feet. He might have been saying, "Of course I remember."



The international passenger ship terminal was located at a gigantic pier in the Port of Yokohama.

They stopped the car in the parking lot, got out, and checked in at the reception counter on the second floor. It was a fairly simple process.

"We are registered as 'special passengers' because we'll only be there temporarily," Mr. Sugisaki explained, handing a suitcase to the attendant. The group made their way toward the boarding ramp for large passenger ships. "We should be able to board the ship directly from the terminal, putting us on the third-deck lobby."

Mito clutched her violin case and walked alongside her father. Mayuka skipped close behind them. Hinata, Chris, and Kobayashi took their time bringing up the rear.

The attendant guided them to the boarding bridge. It was like a tunnel that connected the terminal building with the *Primavera*.

And once they had made their way through the tunnel…the ship's interior was like another world!

Hinata was full of regret.

Ack! I feel so out of place. I really should have stayed at home…

Already, the blinding lobby lights and the vast amount of space were overwhelming him.

Up above, set into the vaulted ceiling, was a colorful profusion of stained glass. Under his feet, the carpet was thick and soft.

The couch and chairs, the reception desk, the various decorations and fixtures—everything looked so expensive and luxurious.

At the other end of the huge room was an impressive model sailboat on display, flanked by large staircases leading to the floor above. They were beautifully curved, and it seemed like Cinderella herself might come running down them at any moment. Had they wandered into some grand palace's ballroom?

"Mito and I will retire to her greenroom to prepare for the concert. Please enjoy the ship in the meantime. I believe this woman here will act as your guide," Mr. Sugisaki said, before heading toward the elevator at the back of the lobby with his daughter.

The person he had indicated was a young woman dressed in a navy-blue uniform with her black hair tied into a fancy bun. She folded her hands across her midriff and stooped in a very crisp thirty-degree bow.

“My name is Chihori Kase, and I am a member of the crew. Though I am new and still in training, it would be my pleasure to assisht—…!”

She turned bright red and covered her mouth with her hand.

Mayuka chuckled. “Don’t worry, Chihori. We’re still trainee passengers, too. So what does the crew do?”

“Well, um… We do everything necessary to keep the ship operational.”

“Oooh, I see! That’s really cool. My name’s Mayuka, and this is Hinata,” she said, bowing. Hinata followed her lead.

“And my name is Kobayashi,” said the young man. “It’s nice to meet you. Please tell us all about the ship.”

Chihori gazed at him briefly, then bowed again. “I’m afraid there’s much I still don’t know… But I can tell you that this is the third-deck lobby. There’s a shop and casino farther in…”

Hinata listened to her explanation and stared up at the ceiling again. The ship was incredible. The word *luxury* was surely meant to describe places like this. He felt as though it would crush him under its weight.

Many other guests dressed in fine clothes were moving about the ship. There seemed to be more foreigners around than usual, and Hinata could hear conversations in languages he didn’t recognize.

He swallowed. He was extremely nervous, and his joints felt stiff…

Looking concerned, Chihori leaned down and asked, “Um, would you like to go out on the deck and get some fresh air, Hinata? You don’t look well…”

The group headed out onto a side deck located next to the gangway. Hinata grabbed the railing, leaned out, and sucked in a deep breath. *Ahh, this is more like it!*

Right in front of him was the terminal he’d just walked through to get here. Mayuka leaned her back against the railing and looked up in the opposite direction.

“It’s like a gigantic apartment building…,” she said.

Indeed, the ship was like a huge building towering over them. The rows of windows and balconies above expanded in all directions, beyond the bounds of their vision. There were twelve decks on the ship, accommodating more than two thousand passengers.

I can’t believe this is a boat!

“It’s less of an apartment building and more of a luxury hotel. It’s amazing!” Kobayashi exclaimed. “As a broke detective, I never thought I’d get a chance to visit a place like this. Are you feeling out of your element, too, Chris?”

At Hinata’s feet, Chris whined in response.

“How are you, Hinata? Feeling a bit better?” Mayuka asked, eyeing him carefully.

He managed a nod. “Y-yeah…”

“I’m glad! Now, stop worrying, relax, and enjoy yourself. Make the most of this opportunity.” She patted him on the shoulder, and he smiled.

She was right. They’d come all this way to have a good time. His mom and dad were probably waiting at home, excited to hear all about it. He needed to pay attention so he could report back to them about everything he saw… Plus, if he was nervous, it would make Chris nervous, too. And that wouldn’t be fair.

Seeing that Hinata’s mood had recovered, Mayuka said, “Shall we go back, then? Mito’s concert is about to begin!”

Hinata and Chris started off alongside her, and Kobayashi tilted the control lever on the arm of his wheelchair, making it roll.

After moving through the café and returning to the lobby, Hinata gasped once again.

The fancy chairs had been arranged in semicircular rows, and guests were already seated in them. This had been the entrance to the ship not long ago, but now it had been transformed into a concert hall.

People were gathering on the large staircases, too, leaning against the railings and looking down at the space below. The lobby was full of eager whispers and laughter.

“Didn’t Mr. Sugisaki say this would be a *small* concert?” Kobayashi muttered under his breath. “What about this is

‘small’?”

Chihori guided the group to a row of seats at the very front. Just then, the lights dimmed. Hinata ducked and put his arms around Chris’s neck so the dog wouldn’t be alarmed.

The model of the sailboat seemed to glow as a spotlight was cast on someone standing in front of it—a tall, well-built foreign man wearing a grand white uniform. The four golden lines on his sleeves gleamed in the light.

“It’s the captain!” Mayuka whispered excitedly into Hinata’s ear. There was a round of applause, and he began to give a speech.

“Good evening, everyone!” he began in English. *“Welcome aboard. I’m the captain of this ship…”*

“Mayuka, you take English lessons, right?” Hinata asked. “Can you understand what he’s saying?”

“Yep, every word!” she said promptly. Hinata wasn’t sure she was being entirely honest, however.

After a little while, the man switched to Japanese. It seemed the captain was quite fluent in both languages.

“I offer a warm welcome to all our passengers from Japan as well. Welcome to the *Primavera*. We’ve invited a fresh young guest to help liven up our sail-away party tonight. She’s a violinist who is certain to achieve great things in the future—Miss Mito Sugisaki!”

Mayuka started to clap rapturously, then realized that nobody else was doing it and quickly put her hands down.

“She will be performing on a Stradivarius this evening. As I’m sure you know, a Stradivarius is one of the most famous types of violin in the world, crafted by the master himself, Stradivari. One of our guests, Mr. Yuudai Soga, has generously allowed us to use the instrument for our party. He assures us that it is the finest violin in his collection. A round of applause for Mr. Soga, if you will!”

The spotlight swung to the middle of the front row. A small, thin elderly man stood up and waved to the audience behind him. The crowd exploded with thunderous applause.

“Why are they cheering for him and not Mito?!” Mayuka demanded.

The captain raised a hand. “I’ve kept you waiting long enough. And now, I present to you…the Stradivarius. Do enjoy.”

“You mean *Mito*!” Mayuka said angrily, but her words were swallowed up by another round of applause.

First, a pianist appeared and sat at the grand piano located to the left of the model sailboat.

Then the bright-red fabric of someone’s dress passed in front of Hinata and Mayuka.

Mito? Hinata’s mouth fell open.

Their classmate strode confidently across the floor in a long gown of red tulle, the violin in her hands. Her long hair was tied into a ponytail, and the subtle makeup she wore made her seem much more grown-up than usual. The simple dress suited her slender silhouette.

She seemed like an entirely different person from the Mito they’d rode with in the car. She walked to a spot in front of the model sailboat, then faced forward and gave a formal bow.

“My name is Mito Sugisaki. Thank you for having me.” A quiet round of applause rippled through the crowd like a wave on the shore. “The name of this ship, *Primavera*, means ‘spring’ in Italian. Therefore, I will begin with a piece that shares its name: the first movement of Beethoven’s fifth violin sonata, entitled *Spring*.”

She tucked the violin under her chin, looked up slightly, and raised the bow.

After making eye contact with the pianist and nodding, she moved her arm.

All at once, music began to flow out of the smooth brown violin.

The piece opened with a high note and moved gracefully down the scale before rising again.

A nimble rhythm and carefree quality seemed to make the melody at the heart of the music dance. The tinkling sound of the piano joined in, weaving itself around the notes of the violin. It was as though the two were playing a game of tag in a sunny meadow, calling out to each other and frolicking.



The tune branched out and progressed, mixing major and minor and guiding the listener onward.

Was that thunder in the distance? No, the sun's come out again. I can see the warm, bright light of spring… What a wonderful feeling!

Hinata and Mayuka, who hardly ever heard classical music, were completely astonished. The music seeped through their skin directly into their core.

Mito is so amazing!

The next thing they knew, the piece was over, and the audience had burst into soaring applause.

Mito bowed again. "Thank you very much. For my next piece, I will perform Monti's 'Czardas'…"



After the thirty-minute concert, Hinata, still buzzing with excitement, took Chris into the elevator.

"We'll hold your puppy in the ship's kennel during the dinner party," Chihori had said. "Unfortunately, the owner must take their pet to the kennel in person, so I can't do it for you." She was now showing him the way.

Here on the ship, they had a kennel—a facility to hold passengers' pets and take care of them. The elevator took them silently up to the twelfth deck, the highest on the ship. They exited the elevator and walked through the glass doors at the end of the hall, emerging onto an open-air deck. Unlike the bustling lobby, this area was deserted. The sun had gone down, and the air was cold. The wind whistled in Hinata's ears.

"Here we are," said Chihori.

She indicated a door to their left, which featured a cute little emblem that looked like a doghouse. She knocked on it, and it opened at once.

"*Welcome to our home!*" a cheerful woman called out in English from inside. She was a foreigner, heavyset, and probably in her forties. She wore a green uniform, and her thick hair was tied tightly behind her head.

"Hi, Liz. We have a visitor," Chihori said.

Liz's sharp features formed a grin. "So I've heard. These must be two of our special passengers, Hinata and Chris, correct?"

Hinata nodded, and Liz opened the door so he could walk inside.

"Come on back to the counter."

Unlike the chilly outside deck, this room was warm and full of light. There were pictures of dogs and cats on the wall and a selection of pet magazines and books in foreign languages on the bookshelf. A number of comfortable-looking sofas were arranged around the room.

Hinata could detect a faint animal smell in the air, and some barking and whining could be heard from the back. Another guest was already standing at the counter—a boy with a large golden retriever. He was speaking with another female staff member.

Chris growled softly.

"What's the matter, Chris?" Hinata asked.

He moved his hands farther up the leash to keep him closer, just in case Chris leaped. Maybe he had a problem with the other dog. Chris was usually friendly when they met other dogs on their walks, though.

Both the retriever and the boy reacted to Chris's growl. The dog's ears pricked up. Its eyes sagged, and its tongue lolled out of its mouth. Although it seemed large, it might've still been a puppy. It appeared excited just to see another dog.

The boy, on the other hand, looked momentarily startled. He was dressed in a slim black suit with a turquoise necktie. His face was delicate, pale, and framed by short hair. His straight black bangs covered half of his eyes, but the irises were a deep blue that seemed almost to glow.

Hinata figured he was probably in middle school and bowed politely, just in case. The boy ignored him and said to the staff member, "Please take care of him," before handing over the golden retriever's leash.

"Understood," said the staff member with a smile. "When you come back to pick him up, be sure to bring this with you," she added, handing him a small card in exchange for the leash. "Have a good evening, Mr. Hasekura…"

The boy patted the retriever on the head one last time, then hurried out of the room, not sparing so much as a glance at Hinata. The staff member pulled on the leash and took the dog back behind the counter and to the right.

“Over here, Hinata, Chris!” Liz said cheerfully.

Hinata stepped up to the counter and glanced at the form that had been left on top of it. Underneath some English sentences were the handwritten names *Reo Hasekura* and *Kotarou*.

Oh, so the dog’s name is Kotarou. That’s kind of cute…

Liz brought out a new card and form and placed them on the counter. “Please write your name and your dog’s name on this card and piece of paper,” she said.

Once Hinata had done so, Liz entered the time and date and signed the form herself, then handed over the card. “Here you are. You’ll need this when you come back, so don’t lose it,” she said.

Hinata was putting the card into his bag when the leash suddenly slipped out of his left hand.

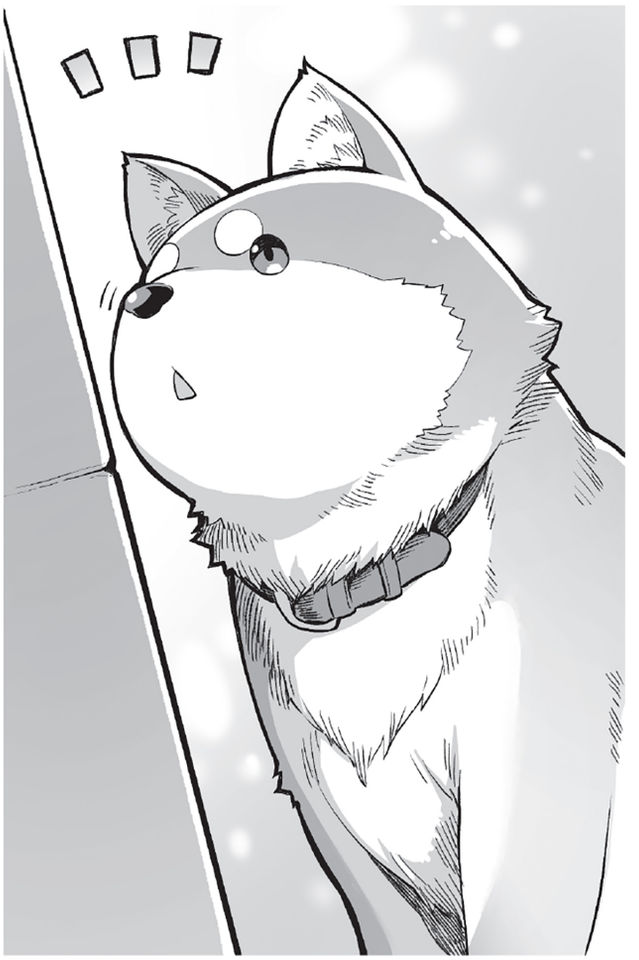
Huh? He looked over at Chris and was shocked to see the dog trotting around the left side of the counter.

“Ch-Chris, what are you doing? Come back!” Chris stopped and turned to look at Hinata. His expression was tense—he was in work mode. He then continued walking toward the back. “No, Chris! You can’t just go back there!”

Hinata hurried after his dog, followed by Chihori and Liz.

The space to the left behind the counter was a storage room. There were many kinds of pet food, sanitary products, and toys stored neatly on the shelves.

Chris was sniffing around at a stack of cardboard boxes all the way at the back. Then he barked happily. He seemed to be saying, “How’s that? I did a good job, right?!”



“Aww, are you hungry?” said Liz, laughing heartily. “Those boxes contain special food for one of our dogs. It’s very fancy and expensive. You’re a greedy boy, aren’t you?”

Hinata turned red and scooped up Chris’s leash. “S-stop that, Chris! That food belongs to another dog. I have yours right here.” He tugged the leash and smacked his shoulder bag.

“Wuff?” Chris tilted his head as if to say, “Did I make a mistake?”

Liz, still chuckling, held out her hand. “Here, give that food to me, and I’ll make sure Chris is fed. You go to the party, Hinata. It’s about to start, isn’t it?”

Hinata pulled the package of dog food out of his walking bag and placed it in her hand. “Th-thank you very much. Um, Chris isn’t usually such a glutton,” he added, trying to salvage his dog’s reputation. He felt his cheeks flushing.

Chihori noticed and reassured him, “Don’t worry; just leave it all to Liz. Maybe Chris was just a little nervous from all the excitement, and now that he’s out of the hustle and bustle, he’s relaxed and realized how hungry he was.”

Liz grinned and said, “That must be it. Now, may I have the leash, too?”

Hinata handed it to her, patted Chris on the head, and left the kennel area.



By the time Hinata got back to the lobby and was shown to the restaurant on the other side, the party was already in full swing.

There were lots of people milling around, holding food and glasses in their hands, chatting and laughing. Hinata had begun to get used to the luxurious decor around the ship, but this was on a whole other level.

To one side of the restaurant, an array of colorful and delicious-looking dishes had been set out, and everyone was gathering around them.

“This is a buffet, so you can take whatever food you like and eat as much as you want,” Chihori explained. She grabbed a glass

of orange juice from a nearby waiter's platter. "I bet you're thirsty. Try some of this."

"Hinata, over here!" called out Mayuka from across the room.

Hinata took the juice and made his way toward her voice, where he found a table with six chairs tucked into one corner. The rest of his group were there, already eating.

Even Mito was with them, still in her red dress and silently munching on a salad. Hinata put his juice down on the table and addressed her.

"M-Mito, I thought your violin playing was incredible! I was really amazed. It sounded beautiful."

She wiped her mouth with a napkin and, without changing her expression, replied, "Thank you. I thought it was pretty good, by my standards."

"Oh, you did?" said her father happily. "Mito, I'm so glad to hear that! You're usually so hard on yourself."

She lifted her nose in the air huffily and added, "But the venue was horrendous. The acoustics were terrible. Still, I was able to get a good tone from the violin."

"I guess that's the Str…Stra…Straburry…," Mayuka said, stumbling over the name.

"Stradivarius!" snapped Mito. "It is *not* a strawberry!"

Kobayashi had been taking a sip of wine and nearly spit it out. Everyone at the table laughed. Even Mito's mouth seemed like it might be curling into a smile.

"Well, sorry!" Mayuka shot back. "It's the first time in my life I've ever even seen a violin. How can you expect me to remember such a complicated name?!" The group laughed even harder at that.

"Hmph! Fine! I'm going to get more roast beef!" Mayuka said, sliding out of her chair. She pointed at Hinata. "Listen up, Hinata! Don't stick to food you can have any old day, like pizza. You need to pick the fancy food, or it's not worth it!"

She stormed off to the buffet. Chihori, holding back her laughter, said that she would bring Hinata his portion and went to follow Mayuka.

That sounds like exactly the sort of thing Mom would say if she were here, Hinata thought wryly.

“Mayuka’s quite right, you know,” said Kobayashi. “I’ve never eaten anything like this before. This black stuff is caviar, right? It’s delicious.” He lifted the triangular glass in front of him. Inside it were tiny shrimp with little black dots sprinkled on top.

“Please, do eat as much as you like,” Mr. Sugisaki said with a smile.

Kobayashi leaned forward and pointed a thumb somewhere behind Mito. “By the way, is Mito really supposed to be eating over here with us, considering she’s the star of the show?”

His thumb was pointed at Soga, the owner of the Stradivarius, who was speaking loudly to a whole crowd of people. Nearby was a dais covered with a red velvet cloth, upon which the Stradivarius was displayed. Two burly security guards stood watch over the violin, which was attracting as much attention as Soga was.

“I suppose it would go for about three hundred million yen at auction in today’s market,” Soga’s voice boomed. The crowd around him marveled at the amount. “And that number will only go up with time. Simply insuring it costs a fortune.”

Mito glanced over her shoulder and said coldly, “It’s fine. All those people care about is the expensive violin. They couldn’t care less who used it to play what.”

Unsure of how to respond, Kobayashi flashed her a strained grin.

“…Mito, shall I bring you some chicken? Would you like that?” her father asked, hoping to improve her mood.

“Yes, please. I’m feeling hungry now that the recital is over. Also, another glass of juice and a bread roll.”

Kobayashi shot Hinata a look that said, “Sounds like she has it pretty rough, too.”

“Yeah,” Hinata returned with his eyes. Out loud, he said, “M-Mito, what does Mr. Soga mean by insurance?”

She looked up as she scooped a spoonful of soup into her mouth and said, “He took out an insurance policy in case the violin gets damaged, destroyed, or stolen. If anything happens to it, the insurance company will pay him the value of the policy. But because it’s such an expensive instrument, the premium he has to pay is also very high. Not that any of that has anything to do with me…”

Just then, an older man with a dignified air passed by the table and glanced at Mito. “Ah, Mito Sugisaki,” he said. “You were simply marvelous tonight! Thank you for that wonderful performance. May I shake your hand?”

Mito stood up and accepted the gesture. “Thank you very much for saying that. I appreciate it.”

Soga caught sight of the interaction out of the corner of his eye and boomed, “Ah! Young lady! There you are. Come over here. Please, tell the people what you thought of playing my Stradivarius!”

Mito crumpled up her napkin, placed it on the table, and made an ugly face that only the others around her could see before walking toward Soga.

“She’s so mature… But I’m kind of glad I didn’t become a violinist,” said Kobayashi with a sigh.

“Yeah, you’d need talent for that.” Hinata laughed, and the grown-up elbowed him playfully.

Meanwhile, Soga was introducing Mito to an elderly woman with purple hair. The woman had gold-rimmed glasses and stood, a little hunched over, with the help of a cane. Next to her stood the boy Hinata had met at the kennel. Based on the way he was speaking with the elderly woman, they were either acquaintances or family.

For a moment, Hinata and the boy’s eyes met. But once again, the boy quickly looked away. Hinata felt his heart jump. *Did I do something wrong? But what could I have done…?*

It was then that Mr. Sugisaki rushed back, his smartphone in hand. He was not carrying either chicken or a glass of juice.

“Er, where’s Mito?”

“Mr. Soga dragged her over there,” said Kobayashi with a shrug.

Mr. Sugisaki looked over at the crowd and touched a hand to his forehead. “Oh, dear… Well, there’s been some trouble…”

“What’s the matter?”

“It’s Keito, my wife… She’s attending a rehearsal at a different venue, but she just called to tell me she has a headache.”

“She’s a pianist, right?” Kobayashi asked. “That doesn’t sound good. Is she sick?”

Mr. Sugisaki shook his head. “No, I think it’s likely a migraine. She gets them a lot. But when they’re especially bad, she can be out of commission for several days. I need to go pick her up so she can rest… Oh, dear…”

“Please go to her. We’ll get a taxi and take Mito with us. You can call for one in the lobby, right? It shouldn’t be too hard, since we’re just going home.”

Mr. Sugisaki put his hands together in a pose of gratitude. “Would you do that for us? Thank you so much. I’ll stop by the lobby and ask them to arrange it. We’re supposed to be borrowing the Stradivarius for the whole week, so keep that in mind. There are other belongings to take home, too, so I’ll make sure to hire a van taxi.”

With that, he hurried over to Mito. After exchanging a few words, Mito seemed to give his plan her blessing. She looked back at the table and nodded.

“Thank you again. Enjoy the party!” Mr. Sugisaki shouted, cupping his hands around his mouth like a megaphone. He then rushed out of the restaurant.

“A violinist, a pianist, and their manager,” said Kobayashi. “Sounds like a lot of trouble… Oh, and I nearly forgot! We have to take that three-hundred-million-yen violin home in the taxi. I guess they’re not the only ones who have it rough…”

Kobayashi stared at the wine left in his glass. He seemed to be debating whether to finish it. Hinata smiled; as long as they’d be able to go home, that was enough for him.

“Why would anyone expect us to be carrying something so valuable, anyway? It’s a good thing you’re just a broke detective, Mr. Kobayashi,” he teased. Kobayashi pretended to give him a clonk on the head.



“Stuff this into the suitcase!”

A red dress hurtled through the crack in the bathroom door.

They were in a passenger cabin on the *Primavera* that had been set aside as Mito’s greenroom. It was on the fourth deck, one level above the lobby.

The dinner party was over, and everyone had come up so Mito could change into her regular clothes.

“Fine, fine. Talk about bossy,” Mayuka grumbled, picking up the dress and shoving it into the open suitcase on the floor.

“And these shoes!”

Now it was a pair of red pumps. Hinata picked them up and put them in their shoebox.

“Be careful with the violin! I’m supposed to play it again in a week, when the ship comes back to port. I’ll be borrowing it until then.”

“We know, Miss Mito. Your father told us all about it…,” Kobayashi teased. He brushed his fingers over the violin case resting on the desk by the wall. “I’m touching an instrument worth three hundred million yen…”

“I know, it’s unbelievable!” Mayuka said, frowning as she took the shoebox from Hinata and shoved it in the suitcase, too.

Hinata looked around the room. The rug on the floor was white and gray with geometric patterns on it. There were two beds, a sofa, a table, a large glass door, and a balcony.

He pushed the curtains open to get a better look outside. He could see the terminal building, all lit up.

Mayuka walked over and gazed out over his shoulder. “Once the ship leaves, the only thing you can see from here is ocean. I wish I could go. Chihori said they’re leaving port late tonight. The ship’s going north across the Pacific, then through the Tsugaru Strait into the Sea of Japan, and two days later, it’ll be in Vladivostok!”

“I wonder what it’s like to travel by ship…”

Hinata got the feeling that staying in a place like this would just frazzle his nerves and exhaust him.

There was a loud thump, and Mito emerged from the bathroom. She was dressed in the same black dress she’d worn on the trip there. She pulled the rubber tie out of her hair and shook the strands loose.

“Oh, I’m so thirsty! May I drink this?” she asked, reaching for a red beverage sitting on the round table.

Mayuka nodded. “Chihori brought it for us earlier. I was going to wait for you to finish changing before trying it. She said it’s the

Primavera's special pomegranate juice and that it was a gift from someone… I wonder who."

Mito lifted a glass of translucent red juice and held it out. "Then…a final toast to our time on this ship!" Now finished with her work, Mito wore a satisfied smile.

The others quickly grabbed glasses, too, and clinked them against Mito's.

"Cheers!"

Mayuka downed hers at once. Her eyes widened, and she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "Oooh, this is really good!"

"I can tell it's a luxury cruise's special blend," Kobayashi agreed, impressed. He stared at the ice left in his now-empty glass.

Finished, Mito clunked hers back onto the table, sending droplets of water flying.

"Let's go, then," she said. "We'll close up the suitcase, grab the violin, call for Chihori, and have her take us back to the lobby. Daddy called the taxi for us already." She started to shove the top of the suitcase down in an attempt to close it.

"I-I'll go and pick up Chris," said Hinata. "Can I meet you in the lobby?"

"All right. Just don't get lost," she said, yanking the suitcase up into a standing position. Then, all of a sudden, she put a hand to her forehead and sat down on the bed.

"What's wrong, Mito?" Kobayashi asked, concerned.

Hinata, who had yet to reach the door, turned back. Mayuka quickly went to sit down next to Mito.

"Are you feeling tired?" she asked. "You had a busy day."

"No, this is nothing… But for some reason, I feel…sleepy…"

She flopped onto the bed.

"M-Mito…" Mayuka moved to get a closer look at her. But before she could, she fell down right next to her on the bed and was still.

Huh? Hinata tried to go see what was wrong with them, but his legs wouldn't work.

What's going on? His back prickled.

He turned to look at Kobayashi. The young man's eyelids were twitching as he desperately tried to keep them open.

Wh-what's happening to everyone…?

That was the last thought to run through his mind before he fell headlong into darkness.

We Weren’t Supposed to Set Sail



The whole night had passed while the four of them slept…

Hinata looked at the vast open sea through the glass door, then turned to Chihori. He was petrified.

We were supposed to get off the ship last night, but we’re still here.

The sun was already high in the sky, and the ship was out in the Pacific, cruising toward Russia…

“Wh-why…?” He looked pleadingly to Chihori for help, trying desperately to make sense of it all.

She looked lost for an explanation as well and simply stared back at him.

“I—I came up here last night to take you all off the ship, but no matter how many times I pressed the button, there was no response. I went back down to look in the lobby, and one of the crew members told me that you had already left…”

“B-but we’re still here…”

“Y-yes, I can see that. How did this happen?!” she wailed.

Behind her, a woman in a black apron asked in English, “*Chihori, are you okay? What happened?*”

“W-wait a minute, Hinata. Just stay here for now. I’ll go and check with the front desk!”

She quickly pushed the other woman back out of the room and left with her. Their loud, arguing voices moved down the hallway and out of earshot.

Hinata took a deep breath, then lunged toward the wheelchair. “Mr. Kobayashi, Mr. Kobayashi! Wake up! We’re in trouble!”

Kobayashi groaned and lolled his head. His eyes opened very slowly.

“H-Hinata…?”

“That’s right! Wake up!”

Kobayashi put a hand to his head. Hinata moved to the bed and shook both Mayuka and Mito.

“Mayuka! Mito! Wake up! Open your eyes!!”

Both girls murmured quietly and eventually woke up.

“Are you all right?” he asked. “How do you feel?”

Hinata reached into the little refrigerator next to the desk and pulled out three bottles of mineral water. He shoved them at the others, who were still struggling to regain consciousness.

“Drink some water and wake yourselves up! We’re in big trouble. The boat’s in the middle of the ocean!”

Kobayashi was the first to recover. He quickly gulped down the water and slapped his cheeks. “Hmm, what happened? I feel like I got a good night’s rest…”

“We all slept a little too well. We’re out in the Pacific. We never got off the boat!”

“Huh?!” He rolled his wheelchair to the glass door, where his mouth fell open.

Mayuka sat up in bed and stared at the glass, her eyes wide. “Wh-what on earth…?”

“How did this happen? All I remember is feeling sleepy, and then…” Mito took a gulp of water, ran a hand through her hair, and stood up.

Mayuka was pressing the plastic bottle to her forehead to cool herself down.

“The pomegranate juice…,” Kobayashi murmured, glancing at the table. “We all drank it together, didn’t we?”

He was right. They’d had one last toast and shared the strikingly red juice. But there was nothing on the table now—not a single drop of liquid.

“D-does that mean what I think it does?” asked Hinata.

He held his breath. He knew what Kobayashi was thinking. Had the juice contained some kind of drug that put them to sleep? Was that why everyone had passed out so quickly?

Ah, Chris!

"That's right! I need to go get Chris…"

He was rushing for the door when Mito's scream split the air.

"The Stradivarius is gone!!"

Huh?

Mito was staring dumbfounded at the open violin case on the desk. Hinata and Mayuka hurried over. The case was empty. There was nothing inside!



“?!”

Kobayashi peeked over their shoulders and fell silent, too.

They looked around the room, but it was nowhere to be found!

Mito rushed into the bathroom. Mayuka threw open the closet door. Kobayashi checked diligently around the desk. Hinata pulled open the glass door, looked behind the curtains, and examined the balcony.

“It’s not here!” Mito shrieked.

“It’s gone!” said Kobayashi. He was pulling all the desk drawers open, despite knowing a violin couldn’t possibly fit in any of them.

Mayuka even opened every last drawer in the closet.

Hinata checked under the pillows on the beds and under the mattresses, and even yanked the covers off the top.

“It’s gone!” “It’s gone!” “It’s gone!” “It’s gone!!”

All four of them looked at one another vacantly.

The three-hundred-million-yen Stradivarius was gone!

Ding-dong!

The sound of the room’s intercom made them all jump. Mayuka was closest to the door, and she turned to the others for direction.

“Let’s find out who it is before we open the door, Mayuka,” Kobayashi whispered, right as a loud voice called out, “It’s Chihori! Please open up. I’ve brought the captain!”

Mayuka opened the door. The captain brushed past Chihori and strode into the room.

“Mito!” he said, walking up to the girl and taking her little hand in his large ones. “There’s been a mistake. It seems we forgot to ensure that you were off the boat before leaving. It was… Chihori’s mistake.”

Chihori shook her head in protest. “No, it wasn’t! I mean, yes, I made a mistake by not checking the room. But opening a door locked by a guest should only be done under emergency circumstances. And when I checked with the front desk, the staff told me that Mito and her group had already disembarked. There was also a record of their checking out in the system. Either someone made a major mistake, or it was done on purpose…”

“Who was on duty at the desk?” the captain demanded.

Chihori waved a hand in front of her face. “I—I don’t know. There are thousands of people on staff. I haven’t had the time to remember all their names yet…”

“Just a minute,” Kobayashi interrupted. “You said that there’s a record of us leaving in the computer system?”

Chihori nodded.

“And, Captain, you confirmed this?”

“Yes, the computer said you had already disembarked, but Chihori has an obligation to properly check the room…”

“Then, Hinata, you should go to the kennel and make sure Chris is okay,” said Kobayashi. “Find out what their records say about Chris.”

Hinata agreed. He needed to go get Chris; the uproar over the violin had merely delayed him…

“I’ll go with you,” Chihori said firmly.

When they reached the kennel, Liz was startled to see them.

“Oh, Hinata! Didn’t you leave the ship last night? I was shocked when I heard, since Chris was still in his cage. What happened?”

“There was a mix-up, and their group didn’t get off the ship,” said Chihori. “Liz, what do the kennel records say?”

Liz seemed a bit befuddled by the situation and led the others to the counter. “First, I’ll bring Chris out. I’m sure he’ll be very happy to see Hinata again.”

She went back behind the counter and to the right and returned after a moment with Chris.

When the dog saw Hinata, he barked happily and leaped into the boy’s arms.

“I’m sorry, Chris. Did you miss me?”

I’m so glad he’s all right.

Hinata hugged Chris tight, rubbing his back again and again.

Liz put her hands on her hips and said, “A dog’s owner is always number one in its heart. Well, Chris has already eaten breakfast. He was a very hungry boy. Now, as for our records…”

She went back to the reception counter, where she showed the laptop screen to Chihori.

“Here it is. See how it says his owner took him back? Hinata didn’t show up while I was on my shift last night, so I just assumed the party ran late. When I got here this morning and

checked the system, it said he was returned to his owner, so I thought, 'Great!' But then I looked at his cage, and there he was!"

Chihori frowned. "Who was on the night shift?"

"Dan. Maybe he accidentally input it wrong… Do you have your card, Hinata?"

Hinata took his kennel pass out from his bag and showed it to her.

Liz shrugged. "What in the world could have happened? Still, I can't believe he didn't double-check that the records matched the animals in the kennel. I'll have to have a talk with Dan about this…"

Hinata and Chihori returned to the fourth deck, where the uproar was only growing. Now Soga had barged his way into Mito's room.

"The Stradivarius is gone?! You must be joking!" he roared, his voice audible all the way out into the hallway. "That violin is worth three hundred million yen. Things like that don't just disappear!"

Chihori looked at Hinata with alarm. "The violin is gone?!"

Oh, right. We didn't tell Chihori about that…

"Y-yeah… When we came to, the violin case on the desk was empty."

"O-oh, dear…" She put a hand to her forehead.

In the hallway, several large men in suits were standing around menacingly.

"Those are Mr. Soga's bodyguards. He always has them with him," Chihori said, looking annoyed.

Hinata tugged Chris's leash a little closer. One of the men glared at the dog.

"Wh-who *is* Mr. Soga, anyway?" Hinata asked. "He collects fancy violins, right? Is he rich?"

"He's the president of a major restaurant chain," Chihori answered. "He also owns a number of other companies. He must be ultrarich. He's a regular on this ship."

"Excuse me," came a voice from behind them. Chris jumped up in surprise.

A pudgy man wearing glasses was eyeing the bodyguards with concern. His small jacket looked rather tight and uncomfortable

on him.

“Did something happen?” he asked.

Chihori panicked and held up her arms, waving them back and forth in front of her chest. “I-I’m so sorry, sir. This will be resolved soon. Please return to your room for now…”

But the man didn’t budge. He continued staring down the hallway, curiously taking in the situation. Chihori gave Hinata a little push on the back, encouraging him to keep going. He slipped between the bodyguards and peered into the open door of Mito’s room.

“It is not my fault!” said Mito, her voice loud and clear. “We were fast asleep and have no idea what happened!”

“How utterly irresponsible. You were in possession of my precious violin, and you simply went to sleep without protecting it?”

Even from behind, it was clear that Soga’s small frame was trembling with rage. Mayuka was standing by the glass door, looking ready to cry. She clutched Kobayashi and his wheelchair.

“Regarding this matter, there’s something I’d like to confirm. Miss Chihori?” Kobayashi said, calling her into the room.

“Y-yes?” She straightened up. The captain and Soga turned around with a start.

“You brought juice to our room last night, correct?”

“Yes. It was a room service order of four glasses of pomegranate juice, paid for by Mr. Soga.”

“What? I didn’t place any such order!” Soga said, scowling.

Chihori shook her head. “That was what I was told. So I went to the restaurant to pick up the juice and brought it here.”

“When it arrived, we drank it,” Kobayashi said. “And immediately after that—”

“I suddenly got very sleepy!” Mito cut in, insistently waving her fists. “I passed out almost immediately, and the next thing I knew, I was waking up just a few minutes ago.”

“I think something must have been mixed into those drinks,” said Kobayashi. “Probably a drug that put us to sleep.”

Chihori gasped and covered her mouth with a hand. “O-oh no… I had no idea…”

“And where is this pomegranate juice, hmm?” Soga snapped. “Let’s see some evidence of your claim!”

Kobayashi looked troubled. “When we woke up, the glasses were gone. Did you clean them up, Chihori?”

“No!” she said, shocked. “The cleaning staff tidy up the rooms in the mornings. My shift was only until nine last night, so I didn’t enter the room after bringing up the juice.”

“Then who took the glasses away? The cleaning staff?”

“I don’t think so. They said that they opened the door and saw people passed out inside and were too frightened to go in. When I heard that and came to see, they were standing around in the hall, all shaken up.”

“That means that sometime after we fell asleep, someone entered this room and removed all evidence of the glasses. I think it’s highly likely that whoever it was is also responsible for stealing the Stradivarius.”

“That’s all mere conjecture! Juice laced with drugs? It’s nonsense!” Soga shouted. “And surely you don’t think that claiming ignorance because you were asleep is a valid excuse!”

“Well, what else can we say? It’s the truth,” Mayuka wailed, on the verge of tears.

Soga thrust a finger at Mito. “Did your father steal it? He was the first one off the ship!”

Her cheeks flushed with anger. “No! The violin was still in the case when Daddy left!”

Kobayashi wheeled his chair in front of Mito. “Last night, someone put down that we disembarked the ship,” he explained. “They entered false information into the computer system at the desk. What did they say about Chris, Hinata?”

Hinata looked down into his dog’s eyes. “Th-their system said that I had already retrieved him…”

“All of that suggests that someone intentionally put us to sleep, then falsified records to make it look like we had left the ship, trapping us here.”

The captain’s thick eyebrows shot upward. “For what purpose?!”

“That’s the real question. I have no idea. If they just wanted to steal the violin, they wouldn’t need to go to such lengths…” He stopped and thought, his face a mask of concentration.

“None of that matters!” exclaimed Soga. “I just want my violin back… Did you help them steal it?!” He turned to Chihori.

“I—I don’t know anything about this…”

She looked flustered as she turned to the captain for help. But he just shook his head, looking out of his depth.

“To think that such a scandal would happen on *my* ship… I’ll have my whole security team comb every deck for the violin. For the time being, Mr. Soga, if you could keep quiet about the theft…”

“Are you trying to shut me up?!” Soga demanded, in a state of extreme agitation.

The captain held out both hands to keep the man at bay and bowed apologetically. “Our guests are here to enjoy themselves. I can’t upset them with some huge public manhunt. We’ll do everything we can; I just ask that you allow us to do so quietly…”

Soga was breathing heavily, but he held his tongue for now. The captain exhaled, then turned to Mito and Hinata.

“You were only supposed to be on board for a few hours, well before the ship left port. I assume you aren’t carrying passports?”

They all shook their heads. The captain sighed. “You shouldn’t be here, and yet we’re already out in the Pacific…”

“Maybe if you stopped at a port somewhere and let us off,” Mayuka suggested hopefully.

Kobayashi rubbed her arm. “Mayuka, this isn’t a taxi. They can’t just make a stop whenever you want.”

“A massive cruise ship like this one cannot change destinations on a whim,” the captain agreed. “And it would be very difficult to dock at a port that wasn’t expecting us. As captain, I permit you to stay on board, but I cannot allow you to leave the ship when we dock. You must not act independently, and you must stay with Chihori at all times. I want you all to behave yourselves until we return to Yokohama in six days.”

“Six days? What about school…?” Mayuka asked, her voice tiny. No one could answer her. “Wh-what about my mom and dad…?” she wailed.

“We’ll inform them of the situation, but I forbid you from contacting anyone outside the ship.”

“What about the cost of the cabin?” Kobayashi asked, his face pale. With a start, Hinata realized that traveling on a cruise ship for that many days would probably be *very* expensive.

The captain cleared his throat and said, “We will waive the cost for now. But if it turns out you are in any way responsible for this

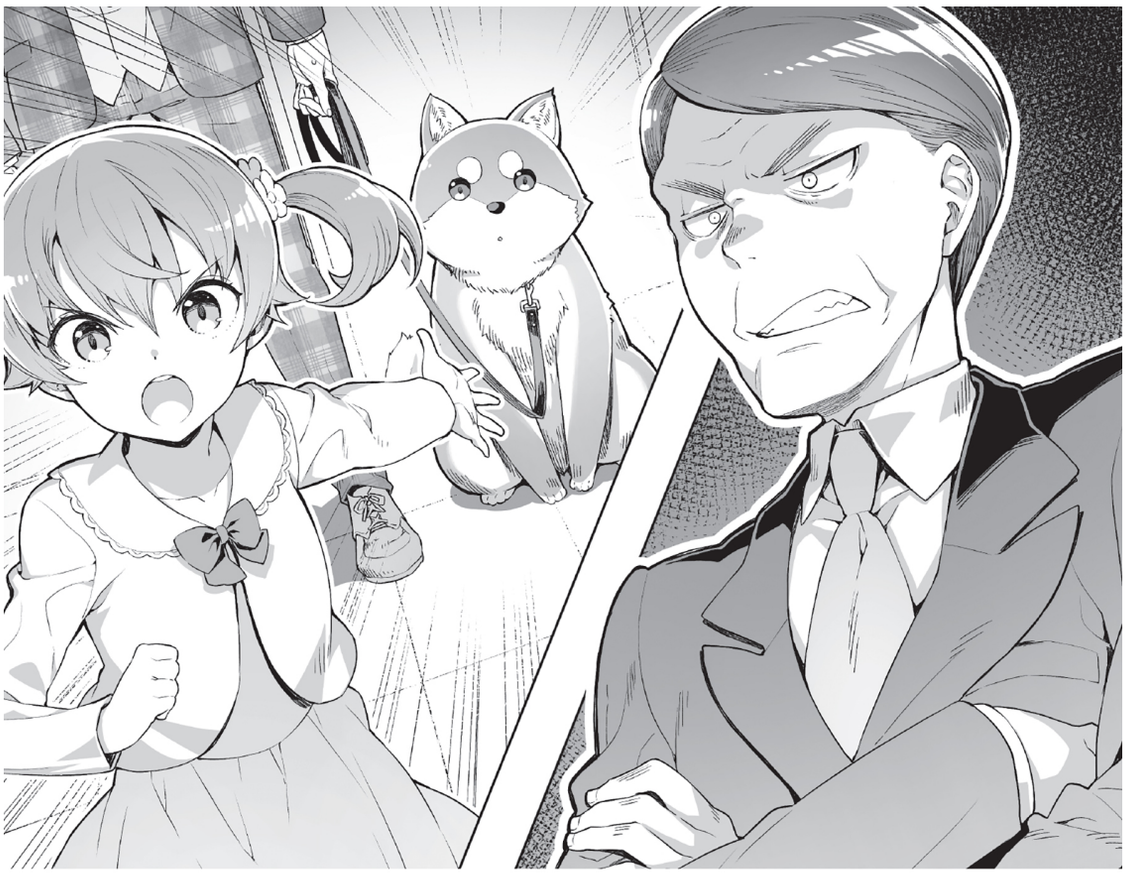
turn of events, you will be receiving a bill at a later date."

"We're definitely not responsible!" Mito shouted.

"Then *who* took my Stradivarius, young lady?" Soga snapped. "If you bear no responsibility, then show it to me so that I may have it back!"

"Chris…," Mayuka muttered. She pointed at the dog standing in front of the door. "Chris will search for it! I know he'll find it! Chris is a very talented detective!!"

"Chris?" Soga turned around to look at the Shiba Inu, then laughed humorlessly. "You're saying this mutt is a *detective*? I don't have time for children's fantasies."



Chris let out a loud "*Woof !*" from the vicinity of Hinata's feet.

"See?" said Mayuka. "Chris says he'll find it! Right, Hinata?"

Hinata looked at Chris in surprise. His furry partner was staring back at him, eyes sparkling with anticipation.

"Uh, yeah…," Hinata replied before he knew what he was saying.

Soga scrunched up his face and let out a strange laugh.

"Let's see him try, then. I expect you to return my Stradivarius by the time we arrive in Vladivostok tomorrow afternoon."

5

Bedlam on Board



“I’m so hungry…”

Mayuka slumped onto the sofa. Chihori paused as she was tidying up the beds and glanced at her wristwatch with alarm.

“Oh, it’s already past noon… And you haven’t eaten anything since last night! Leave this to me and go enjoy some lunch at the restaurant.”

After the big to-do that morning, Soga had his bodyguards perform a thorough search of the room. Once he was sure the violin wasn’t there, he left the wrecked room behind and returned to his own cabin in a huff.

Chihori had been left to clean up the mess…but Hinata and the others helped out.

Mito tapped the empty violin case with a grumpy frown. “I need my instrument. Every day I don’t practice requires an entire week to recover.”

Mayuka and Hinata shared a look. *She’s really something—more worried about a violin than eating!*

“Do you think the captain will pay for our meals, too?” Kobayashi wondered aloud, his mind on more practical questions.

Chihori laughed. “It’s fine. As long as you’re on our ship, we can’t leave you to starve! While you’re eating, I’ll arrange for

another two beds for you. Just leave Chris with me, since he can't go into the restaurant. I'll make sure you get a walk, Chris."

The dog barked once to indicate that he understood.

They walked into the buffet restaurant where the dinner party had been held the previous night.

No one felt much like talking, so they got their food and ate together in silence until Mayuka finally spoke up.

"Oh, Hinata, you had pizza yesterday, too," she complained. "Didn't I tell you to get something fancy while you have the chance?" She was eating wine-braised beef.

"Sh-shut up. Why do you care? I like pizza. And this is a hundred times better than the stuff I usually eat."

Mito was munching on a grilled chicken salad, looking unbothered, and Kobayashi was lost in thought, his fork left jabbed into his serving of fries.

"Oh…" Hinata met the gaze of someone who'd just walked into the restaurant. His hand froze, a slice of pizza lifted halfway to his mouth.

It was the boy he'd seen at the kennel the night before—Reo Hasekura, owner of Kotarou, the friendly golden retriever.

Reo looked away at once, then turned to whisper something to the purple-haired elderly woman beside him. The woman lifted her glasses and looked in Hinata's direction, squinting a little. Then she leaned onto her cane and approached their table.

"Pardon me for interrupting your meal," she said, speaking to Mito.

The girl put her fork down and wiped her mouth with a napkin.

"Thank you again for last night," the woman continued. "It was a truly wonderful performance." Her voice was a bit thick and muffled.

Mito stood up and gave her a very polite bow. "No, thank *you*, Ms. Hasekura."

"Although I couldn't say so in front of Mr. Soga, even the finest of violins is useless without the right player. That Stradivarius would be weeping."

"I'm honored by your praise," Mito said, blushing.

The woman, whose name was apparently Touko Hasekura, lifted her chin and remarked, “He kept boasting about all the nice violins he’s brought onto the ship, but they’re worthless rotting away in a collection. They should be singing in a musician’s hands. Would you play for us again?”

“I don’t think I’ll be getting another chance,” Mito said, the blush fading as her face paled.

“Oh, that’s too bad… I’ll tell Mr. Soga.”

Touko gave the group the faintest of nods, then leisurely walked away. In her wake, all that remained was the strong smell of perfume.

“Ewww!” Mayuka waved her hand around, trying to eliminate the smell. “I can’t even taste the food with that stuff in the air! Why does she have so much perfume on?”

“Perfume? More like per-*phew*!” Kobayashi said, his nose wrinkling.

Mito exhaled, sat down again, and spread out her napkin across her lap. “She wasn’t wearing such strong perfume last night. So…Mr. Soga has other violins. But I suppose he won’t lend me another one.”

“There’s no way, after how he was talking to us this morning…” Mayuka downed her glass of water angrily, thinking back to earlier that day. “Let’s find that violin quickly, Hinata. After we’ve eaten, it’s time to get down to business!”

I guess I’ll have to tell her, Hinata realized. “Mayuka,” he began. “Chris finds clues by following a scent. And since the thief who took the violin didn’t leave anything behind, there’s no scent for him to follow…”

“Oh…” A piece of beef slipped off Mayuka’s fork. “But, Hinata, you told Mr. Soga that Chris would find the violin!”

Hinata screwed up his face. “I just got caught up in the moment. I don’t think Chris can find it, and I don’t think I can, either. But aren’t you frustrated? The violin was right in front of our faces when it was stolen, and now everyone thinks we did it. We have to fix this…”

“You’re right. I want to get to the bottom of this,” said Kobayashi, finally emerging from his thoughts. “But it’s clear we don’t have enough clues to go on. Where should we start on such

a massive cruise ship? There are over two thousand passengers. Who are our suspects?"

"…Who put the false information in the computer…and who ordered the pomegranate juice and drugged it…?" Hinata added quietly. "Are those our only leads? I guess we'll have to ask Chihori for help."

"That's why you're Hinata Kurihara, president of the Kids' Detective Club! We'll start there," said Kobayashi, clapping his hands.

"Why does he get to be president?" Mayuka grumbled.

"Let's eat quickly and ask Chihori what she can tell us," said Kobayashi, stuffing a burger into his mouth. The other three returned to their meals as well.

Just then, two sharp-eyed security guards entered the restaurant and began looking around. They circled the room, checking all the nooks and crannies and murmuring to each other. *Maybe they're searching for the violin*, Hinata thought, shooting Kobayashi a look. The young man nodded back.

At that point, Mito glanced up from her salad. "I think I should go ask Mr. Soga if I can borrow a violin…"

The others all choked on their food.

That's a pro for you! What a one-track mind!!



They were just leaving the restaurant when Chihori showed up with Chris.

"Oh, good timing," she said. "Shall I show you around this deck as I walk the dog?" She crossed the lobby with Chris and proceeded out the door. Chris already seemed completely comfortable with her.

As they walked, they saw a fashionable café, a theater for plays and another for movies, a casino, and all kinds of shops…

At each luxurious facility, Hinata's jaw dropped even lower.

"I thought this was like a giant floating apartment building, but it's more like a whole city!" marveled Mayuka.

Chihori nodded. "We have just about everything. See that little art gallery over there? On the deck above it, we have a salon, a

clinic, a library, a pool, and a gym. And these aren't the only restaurants…"

"Do you ever get lost, Chihori?"

"I do! All the time," she said, laughing. A passing security guard shot her a disapproving look.

She cleared her throat and said, "Why don't we go up to the twelfth deck, where the kennel is? It'll be nice to escape the crowd."

Once they had packed into the elevator, Kobayashi peppered Chihori with questions.

"Who operates the computer at the front desk, and how?"

"I'm still new here, so I don't know for sure, but I believe they unlock the terminal with a face scanner. Each facility has its own system, though, so only the employee at the front desk can unlock that computer, while those in the restaurant can only unlock the restaurant computers, and so on…"

"That means that only the kennel employees can use the kennel computer, right?" Hinata asked.

Chihori nodded. "I think so. But there has to be someone with access to all of them in order to ensure the whole ship is running smoothly, right? So I assume someone higher up can see and access every system."

"That makes sense," said Kobayashi. "Probably chief officers like the captain, the navigator, and the head of each sector…" He put a hand to his chin. "Then how do they handle room service orders?"

"Customers place an order using the phones in their rooms. Then Customer Service sends the message to the relevant department, and ultimately the guest room associate will carry the order to the room. On my end…" She pulled a smartphone out of her uniform jacket pocket. "The order shows up here, so I know what the customer needs right away. Sometimes it's drinks or food, and sometimes it's extra pillows, towels, medicine, and so on."

"So last night, your phone indicated a delivery of four glasses of pomegranate juice intended for our room?"

"Yes, as well as the name of the guest who ordered it. It said 'Soga' right on the order…" She swiped through the phone one-

handed, then yelped with alarm. “Huh? There’s no history of it! The order’s vanished!”

Hinata and Kobayashi looked at each other.

“Whoever did this keeps erasing and overwriting all the important details!” Mayuka said in a huff. “What a pain.”

Hinata sighed. *Who could be doing all of this…?*

They’d just lost yet another lead.

When the elevator reached the twelfth deck and they headed outside, the entire group gasped.

They could see nothing but blue sea and sky in every direction, 360 degrees! There wasn’t a single cloud in sight, and the waves were calm. It was like they had been tossed into a massive dome of blue.

Hinata, Mayuka, and even Mito ran to the railing and leaned over it.

“Amazing! I’ve never seen anything like it!” Mayuka shouted, the hem of her dress flapping in the wind. “All I can see is the ocean!”

“All I can see is sky!” Hinata shouted back.

Chris barked and ran in circles, going as far as the leash would allow him.

“You’ve never been anywhere like this, either, have you, Chris?” Mayuka said. She flagged Chris down and gave him a big hug.

Meanwhile, Mito closed her eyes and let the wind envelop her. “The sky, the sea, the wind… It’s all amazing…”

She lifted her face and turned around, then held out her left hand as though holding a violin and mimicked holding a bow with her right. The fingers of her left hand moved through the air quickly and delicately, playing an invisible instrument as the wind whipped her hair.

The only sound was the rush of wind in their ears. But as they watched her graceful motions, they could almost hear the music.

At last, her hands stopped moving, and she let them dangle at her sides. Everyone applauded.

“Bravo!” Kobayashi shouted.

Chihori grinned and asked, “What song was that?”

“It’s called ‘Beautiful Rosemary.’ It’s as bright and pretty as the sky,” Mito answered with satisfaction. However, her face quickly clouded over.

“I really want to play… I think I should ask Mr. Soga after all…”

Moved by the other girl’s expression, Mayuka said, “All right, Mito. I’ll join you, and we can ask him together!”

Hinata, too, was struck by the strength of Mito’s desire. He was about to say, “I’ll go, too,” but Chris chose that exact moment to jump up on his hind legs.

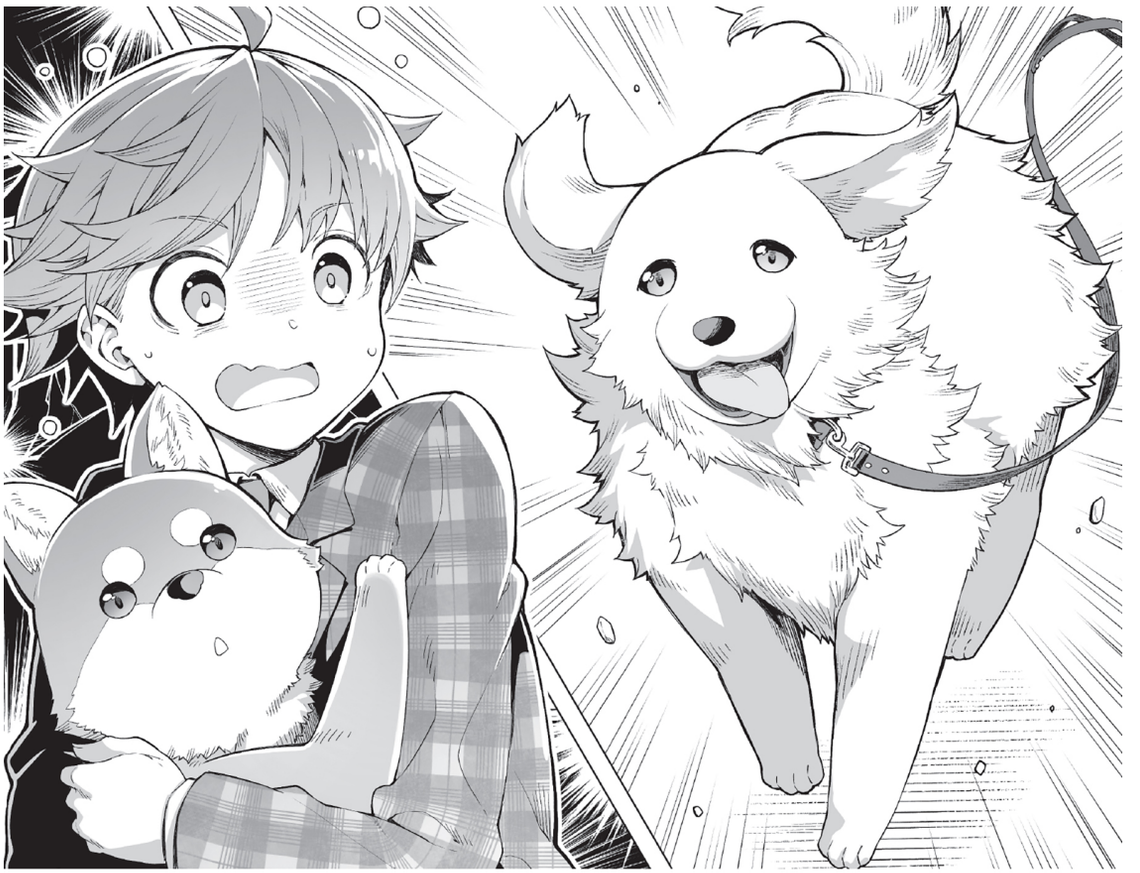
Huh? What is it?

Hinata followed Chris’s gaze and was stunned to see a large dog racing toward them!

The animal’s long, wavy golden fur shook in the breeze. It was Kotarou.

“Woof! Woof!”

Hinata hunched down and hugged Chris to protect him. Moments later, Kotarou leaped on top of them.



“Aaaah!” Everyone screamed.

Kotarou seemed to have no understanding of restraint. He bit Hinata’s clothes, then pulled him away and jumped on him. He wasn’t attacking Hinata; he was just *that* eager to play.

Hinata did his best to endure. He felt that resisting or shouting would only excite the golden retriever puppy even further.

“K-Kotarou, s-s-stop…”

After Hinata had been thoroughly jumped on and covered with slobber, Chris wriggled out from under them and shook himself off. Kotarou faltered for a moment, giving Chris an opening to bark at him.

“Woof!!”

Kotarou flinched and hopped away. He put his front paws together, lowered his head, and whined sadly. It was like he was saying, “Aww, please don’t yell at me. I’m sorry…”

He then looked to the side as if searching for an escape route, but Kobayashi managed to get a grip on his collar. “There, there, be a good boy. Calm down… Hinata, do you have any dog food?”

Hinata got to his feet, reached into his walking bag, and pulled out a container of dog treats. He then took one out and held it in front of Kotarou’s nose.

“There you go. Now, behave yourself, Kotarou. Go on—eat up…”

Kotarou sat down impatiently and chomped on the treat. Hinata then scooped up the dog’s leash so Kobayashi could let go of the collar.

“That’s better, Kotarou. Now, stay calm and don’t thrash around,” Hinata said, petting the puppy’s head. He fed him some more treats. *Crunch, crunch, crunch…*

Kotarou finished and looked up at Hinata curiously. “Are there any more?” he seemed to ask.

“That’s all for now. But if you’re a good boy, I might give you another one.” Hinata held out his index finger for Kotarou to sniff, then glanced over at Chris. “Are you all right, Chris?”

Chris shook himself again and barked as if to say, “I’m fine!” Then he turned to Kotarou and growled softly, warning him, “You better not do anything like that again!” Kotarou whimpered back.

“Good job, Chris. You’re a lot smaller, but you know how to take control,” Mayuka remarked, her eyes wide as she stepped

forward and grabbed Chris's leash.

Kobayashi scratched his head. "This golden retriever's still a puppy, despite its size… Sorry, Hinata. I still can't move very well in this wheelchair, or I would have done more to help. The way you stayed calm was very smart, though. Getting excited would only have made the dog more agitated."

"You still grabbed his collar, Mr. Kobayashi—exactly what a dog trainer would do."

From behind Hinata, a low voice said, "Kotarou…"

It was Reo Hasekura.

He took a few unsteady steps forward and held out a hand to Hinata. His blue eyes flashed through the gap in his bangs.

Hinata handed over Kotarou's leash, and Reo grabbed it and pulled.

"Come," he said, and turned to walk away.

Kotarou trotted over to Reo's left side and walked obediently next to him. Chris growled softly.

"You there!" Kobayashi called out. "Your dog's still young and rambunctious. Don't let go of that leash!"

Reo didn't respond. He and Kotarou soon vanished into the elevator lobby.

"What was his problem? Not even a 'sorry'!" fumed Mayuka once they were gone. "Ugh! This ship is beautiful, but there are so many aggravating things about it. That's the boy we met at the restaurant, right? The one whose grandma had that horrid perfume."

Mito nodded. "He's her grandson. I believe his name is Reo…"

"How'd you know the dog's name, Hinata?" Mayuka asked.

"I met them at the kennel last night when I dropped Chris off," he said.

Hinata wasn't sure what to do. For some unknown reason, ever since they'd first met, Reo had shown an obvious dislike for him. The odd thing was that Kotarou seemed to absolutely love him and Chris.

I guess there's nothing I can do about it. Hinata took a towel out of his bag and wiped the dog slobber off his sleeve. Chris looked up at him and woofed with apparent sympathy.

“Well, I’m going to see Mr. Soga,” said Mito. Her voice was strong and full of purpose. She would not be talked out of her plan.

“I…I guess I’ll go with you, too…,” said Mayuka weakly, despite her earlier confidence.

“No, that’s all right,” Mito said firmly. “If you get angry at him, he might not lend me a violin. I think it’s better if I go alone.”

Mayuka wilted on the spot.

“Miss Chihori, please arrange an appointment with Mr. Soga. Tell him I’ll be right there.”

Chihori hesitated, then put her smartphone to her ear and began to speak in English. *“Hello, this is Chihori speaking…”*

She turned her back to them as she made the call. When she was done, she turned back around and addressed Mito.

“All right, they’re ready, as long as you go right now. I’ll take you there.”

“Don’t you have to keep an eye on us, Chihori?” Mayuka asked with concern. “Won’t the captain be angry with you?”

Chihori looked around at the sea and made a funny face. “Well, there’s not really anywhere you can go out here, is there? And we weren’t together while you had lunch, either…”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. Good luck, Mito!” Mayuka cheered as the other girl went with Chihori to the elevators.



“All right, let’s do some investigating of our own,” said Kobayashi, his face serious as he placed a hand on the operating lever of his wheelchair.

“Where should we go?” asked Hinata.

“First, the kennel, to see if we can find out who’s able to rewrite the records there. Where is it?”

Hinata pointed to the door with the doghouse symbol on it, then hurried over with Chris. He pushed it open and called out, “Hello…”

Liz looked up and smiled. “Hi, Hinata! Hi, Chris! Did you come to hang out?”

“Actually, I wanted to ask you something… Is it all right if my friends come in, too?”

Kobayashi and Mayuka peered around the side of the doorway. Liz held out her hands in a welcoming gesture.

“Of course it’s all right! I can tell from their faces that they love dogs, too.”

Kobayashi wheeled his chair inside and held out his hand for Liz to shake. “Hello. My name is Kobayashi. You can tell a dog lover from their face, huh? Well, I’m a former trainer. I was helping to raise police dogs.”

Liz took his hand and gave it a hearty shake, saying that he was more than welcome. She flashed Mayuka a smile, too. “I wonder how they train police dogs in Japan. I’d love to hear more!”

Hinata stood to the side. Suddenly, there was a tug at his wrist, and he nearly stumbled. Just like the night before, Chris was straining toward the area to the left behind the counter.

Whoa! Hinata held his ground and pulled on the leash. Chris turned back and whined, then glanced at Kobayashi, who was speaking with Liz, and whined again. He seemed determined to make his way into the storage area.

A thought occurred to Hinata: Was Chris trying to tell him something?

As Liz and Kobayashi passionately discussed the topic of police dogs, Hinata loosened his grip on Chris’s leash.

“Where are you going, Hinata?” Mayuka asked. He turned and shushed her with a finger to his lips, then followed Chris’s lead.

Chris headed into the storage room again, sniffed at the cardboard boxes along the wall, and barked. Once again, he looked very pleased with himself.

“Aren’t these just boxes of dog food? Are you hungry, Chris?” Mayuka asked, baffled by the dog’s satisfied expression.

I guess she’s right, Hinata thought, disappointed. *It seems like he’s just been lured here by the smell of fancy dog food.*

“So what next…?” Kobayashi asked once they’d left.

Two security guards had entered the kennel to search it, and the four of them had been politely kicked out.

In the end, they hadn’t found out who’d changed the kennel’s records. Dan, who worked the night shift, was fast asleep in his

cabin and couldn't be reached.

Liz was furious. "That kid's got a real lazy streak, I swear. I'm always having to scold him!" But she was able to tell them that records entered into the kennel's computer could be manipulated by the core computer system. "On a ship this large, for better or worse, the central computer controls everything," she added, with a look somewhere between apology and resignation.

Hinata walked toward the elevator lobby, deep in thought. "Come to think of it, there's another thing we need to look into. We still don't know who drugged the pomegranate juice…"

"You're right!" Kobayashi said, slamming a fist against his palm. His wheelchair came to a stop. His was the kind that required you to keep pushing the control stick forward in order to move. "Someone must have slipped drugs into the juice while Chihori was taking it from the restaurant to our room. If we can just find out who…"

"…You don't think it was Chihori, do you?" Mayuka said out of nowhere.

Hinata considered this. "I…don't think so… Chihori would have had more than enough time to do it, but she's also the first person you would suspect. Both the captain and Mr. Soga blamed her immediately, remember?"

"I agree with you there," said Kobayashi. "And she has no motive. Unless she's being threatened or blackmailed by someone…"

The trio stared at one another for a minute, until Mayuka finally said, "And I like her, too!"

Hinata and Kobayashi agreed. Even Chris barked to show his support.



They stopped at the restaurant on their way back to the cabin.

If they could just find out who had handed the pomegranate juice to Chihori the night before… But the attendant standing in front of the restaurant made it clear that would not be happening.

“We were in a terrible rush last night, between cleaning up the dinner party and preparing dishes for our regular orders. Also, there are over a hundred staff members working here. It’s simply not possible to know exactly who took each individual order and who prepared it.”

The trio (plus dog) plodded back to their room.

“Once Chihori comes back with Mito, we’ll have to ask her for more details again.”

Outside of the elevators on the fourth deck, there were three large decorative plants in big pots. When the group got off the elevator, they noticed someone moving around behind the plants, muttering.

What are they up to…? Hinata peered through the leaves.

It was a pudgy man with glasses and a jacket that was too small for him. Hinata thought he’d seen him somewhere before.

He was crouched down at the base of one of the tall plants, examining it very closely. He was also wearing cotton gloves and carrying a small plastic box.

“Mary? Mary…?” he was muttering. Suddenly, his gaze rose to meet Hinata’s.

The man leaped to his feet as if he’d been struck and quickly scurried back down the hallway.

“What was that all about? Such a strange man…,” Mayuka said, puzzled. “And who’s ‘Mary’?”

At that point, Hinata remembered where he’d seen the man before. He was the guest who had looked at Soga’s bodyguards with concern in the hallway that morning.

“I think he’s a guest staying on this deck…,” he said. “But that’s a good question: Who *is* Mary?”

Warily, the group continued down the hall until they reached Mito’s room. Kobayashi was taking the key card out of his pocket when Chris suddenly huffed.

“What’s the matter?”

Chris was staring at the underside of a rolling tray that had been left to one side of their door. It was a supply cart piled with towels and sheets. A black shape moved in the shadows beneath it.

“Uh-oh…”

Before Hinata could get a better grip on his leash, Chris belted out a screech.

“Yiiiipe!!”

The leash slipped from Hinata’s fingers, and in a split second, Chris was racing back to the elevators.

“Chris?!” Hinata turned to run after him but was interrupted by a pair of earsplitting screams.

“Eeyaaaaah!!”

“Aaaaah!!”

It was Mayuka and Kobayashi. Mayuka was clinging to the young man and burying her face in his chest, while Kobayashi had squeezed his eyes shut and was holding on to Mayuka for all he was worth.



“No! No! Nooooo!”

“Eughhh!!”

What’s going on? Hinata was torn. Help Chris, or help the others? In the end, he decided to find out the cause of all the panic and ducked down to look under the cart.

“!!”

A chill shot up his spine. Hinata was so alarmed, he couldn’t even scream. He fell onto his bottom and slid backward, trying to get away from what he’d just seen.

Is that…is that a tarantula?!

He’d seen them in a book about animals but never in real life. It was about the size of his palm, with fat, hairy legs and a squat, hairy torso. Its body was a blackish color, but there were parts of its legs and abdomen that were a beautiful shade of orange.

It was crawling around, so this one had to be the real thing! Chris was terrified of all creepy-crawlies, but even someone who wasn’t would freak out over one of these guys.

Hinata swallowed hard and tried to remember the spider facts from his book. Then he got to his feet.

“M-Mayuka, tarantulas aren’t nearly as poisonous as everyone thinks… Almost no one has ever died from a tarantula bite. S-so it’s fine…”

“E-e-even if it wasn’t poisonous at all, it’s s-still a huge, s-s-scary spider!!” she replied, keeping her face pressed against Kobayashi’s chest.

“Y-yeah, she’s got a point… I don’t think I can handle this one, either,” said Kobayashi, eyes squeezed shut and voice trembling.

But what about Chris? Hinata fretted.

“Th-they’re quite docile, so it won’t jump on you. I—I need to go find Chris,” Hinata said. When he turned around, however, he found the man with the glasses standing in his way.

“Mary?” he said.

Huh? Hinata froze as the man dropped to the floor and peered under the cart. Then he reached into the little gap with his gloved hand. When he pulled it out, there was a very large spider calmly sitting on his palm.

He sat down and, with one hand, deftly opened the plastic box he’d placed on the floor. Once he had guided the tarantula inside and closed the lid, he heaved a long, relieved sigh.

“I’m so glad she’s fine…”

He stood up with a big smile. Then, without sparing so much as a glance at Hinata or the others, he went farther down the hall, opened the door to a cabin, and headed inside.

The door slammed shut, and the hallway fell silent for about thirty seconds.

Wh-what’s with that guy?

“Hinata…?” Mayuka pulled her stricken face away from Kobayashi’s chest at last.

“Wh-what happened to the spider?” Kobayashi opened his eyes fully, and Hinata finally began breathing again.

He exhaled and said, “It’s all right now. A man put it in a box and took it away. And now, I’m going to find Chris.”

He turned and ran back to the elevators. Where had Chris gone?

While he was peering around, a voice called out, “Hinata!” It was Chihori, exiting the elevator with Mito. “If you’re looking for Chris, he’s over there.”

She pointed to the row of decorative plants. Chris had stuck his head behind one of the large pots and was shivering with fright. Hinata scooped up the leash, relieved that the dog was okay, and gave Chris a firm hug.

“I know, it was scary. Everyone wanted to run away from that thing…”

Chris whined and whined, rubbing his head against Hinata for comfort.

“What’s wrong, Chris? Are you all right?” asked Chihori, bending down to look at him.

As Hinata relaxed, his eyes teared up. “Ch-Chihori,” he said. “There was a tarantula in the hallway!”

“A t-tarantula? What do you mean?” she asked, taken aback.

Mito said calmly, “I think he means the large variety of spider.”

“O-oh, I know what a tarantula is. I just meant, why would one be on the *Primavera*?”

Hinata shook his head, rubbing Chris’s back. “I don’t know. But it was there. A man caught it and took it back to his room…”

“Wh-where? Which room?” Chihori asked, suddenly glancing around.

Hinata lifted his hand and pointed. “I—I think it was Room 4156. It was the man who was wandering around in the hallway when Mr. Soga barged into our cabin this morning.”

Chihori straightened up and clenched her fists.

“Understood. You all go back to your room. I’ll get to the bottom of this…”

The Looming Grasp of Evil



“He said it was just a pet!” said Chihori when she returned to Mito’s room. “Apparently, there was a mistake, and the spider ran away.” She shook her head sadly. “He said it shouldn’t be a problem, since pets were allowed on the cruise, and I wasn’t able to say anything back… I’m not sure what it says in the contract, exactly. So I contacted the captain and told him.”

“If people are allowed to bring pets like *that* on board, how can anyone relax?!” Mayuka cried, rubbing her eyes. Kobayashi heartily agreed.

“This voyage has just been one thing after another,” Chihori wailed.

“O-oh, how did your request go, Mito?” Hinata asked. Mito was gazing at the sea from the balcony. “What did Mr. Soga say?”

At that, Mito came back into the room in a huff and exploded into anger. “He completely refused. I’ve never met such a horrible, cruel person!”

She gave the side of the bed a powerful kick. Everyone else ducked their heads.

“He has another fine violin called a Guarneri *and* another Stradivarius on board,” she continued. “He was bragging that he’d have a Russian violinist use them. He pulled them out of a large storage case and showed them off to me…but said that if I want to play one of them, I have to bring back the stolen

Stradivarius. But if I still had that one, I wouldn't need to borrow another…"

"That's it!" Chihori said, her face brightening. "I was so focused on Mr. Soga that I forgot. This ship has its own musicians on staff. They play at theater shows and fancy dinners. We should ask them if they'll let you borrow a violin."

Mito's face clouded over. "But they're professionals. If they lend me an instrument, it will affect their own work and practice."

"I see… You wanted to borrow one of Mr. Soga's instruments because no one's using them…" Chihori's shoulders drooped.

Then Hinata stood up from petting Chris. "I-in that case, we just have to find the missing Stradivarius. I wanted to ask you something, Chihori… If someone really did put a sleeping drug in the pomegranate juice last night, who do you think would've had the opportunity to do it?"

She blinked, then looked at the others in turn.

"It wasn't me," she said. "Will you believe me?"

Everyone nodded firmly. Kobayashi crossed his arms and said, "If we can't trust you, Chihori, then all hope is lost…"

"Th-thank you… I took the order on my smartphone and headed to the restaurant. By the time I arrived, the juice had already been placed on the counter. Thinking back, the kitchen was very busy, so anyone could have walked up to the juice without suspicion. I didn't suspect a thing; I checked the receipt, grabbed the juice, and came straight to this room. It was only one deck away, so I took the stairs. I didn't see anyone…"

She stopped short and mulled this over.

"Actually, now that I think of it, I believe I passed that man—the tarantula owner—on the stairs…"

The rest all looked up and gasped.

"But I don't think we were close enough for him to slip anything into the drinks. Also, I believe Ms. Hasekura flagged me down when I was leaving the restaurant. She was full of praise for your performance, Mito. But she uses that cane for support, so I don't think she could have tampered with anything."

"Indeed," Kobayashi said, folding his arms and tilting his head in thought. "Then it was probably added while the drinks were still on the counter…"

On a whim, Hinata asked, “Chihori, when Miss Touko stopped you last night, did she smell like perfume?”

Chihori looked at him, mystified. “You know, I didn’t notice. That probably means she didn’t, right?”

“Isn’t that what I said before?” Mito snapped.

The intercom rang, and a voice said, “This is the captain.”

Chihori opened the door. The captain, who was very tall, ducked down so he could fit into the cabin.

“Pardon me… Chihori, I visited the room of Mr. Numata, the tarantula’s owner. We agreed that the spider should be kept at the kennel with Liz. If left with Mr. Numata, it might escape again. I’m sorry that you all had to endure such a fright. You have my apologies.”

“And…and Liz is fine with the…uh…spider?” Chihori asked, her eyes wide.

“She rushed over excitedly and said the word ‘cute’ at least a dozen times.”

“I see, I see,” Kobayashi said, nodding to himself. Hinata agreed that it sounded like the sort of thing Liz would say.

The captain continued, “I also noted that Mr. Numata’s room is kept *quite* warm. Hot air spilled out of it when I opened the door. He claims he gets chilly easily, but…”

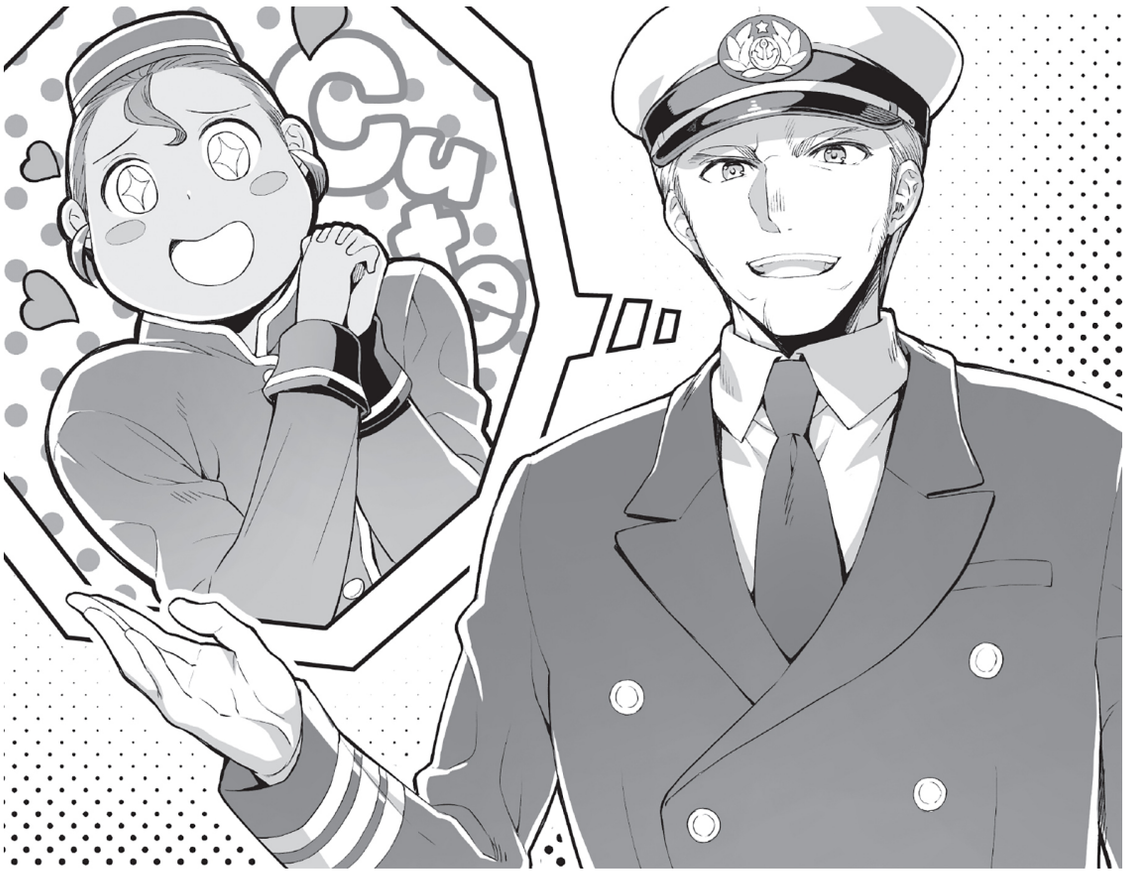
“Oh, that’s right!” said Chihori. “When I went to talk to him, I thought it seemed stuffy inside. But I was so preoccupied with the tarantula that I didn’t take much notice of it…”

“We can’t have a guest overusing the AC or the heater, and it could cause health issues for him, as well. Please check in on him later.”

“I will,” Chihori agreed.

With that out of the way, the captain turned to Mito next. “Now, excuse me, Mito, but I have a different matter to discuss with you…”

“What is it?” she asked, looking him right in the eyes.


Cute

He bowed politely. “We have a request. Would you be willing to play the violin again tonight? Just two pieces, in the same place as yesterday, before dinner…”

Mito’s narrowed eyes flared with anger, and she sucked in a sharp breath. “I have no instrument.”

The captain shook his head. “Mr. Soga says he will lend one to you.”

“What? That’s not true! I just asked him, and he refused. He told me that if I wanted to borrow an instrument, I needed to bring back the stolen Stradivarius.”

“It seems that Ms. Hasekura convinced him to change his mind. She said that she wanted to hear another of his violins and to have the girl prodigy play it, if possible.”

Hinata recalled the elderly woman saying something along those lines back at the restaurant.

Mito pursed her lips and clenched her fists. “W-well, if that’s true…”

“Are you willing to do it?”

“I can’t simply pick up an instrument and play. I’ll need to test it out and practice with it.”

The captain nodded. “That was part of the deal. But if you are to play it, you must do so in Mr. Soga’s room…”

“Because he doesn’t want *it* stolen, too, I suppose?” A corner of her mouth curled upward. “Very well. I’ll head over right now.”

“Thank you. Please come with me…,” the captain said, bowing again.



Time passed without any progress in the search for the missing violin, and sunset drew nearer.

Chihori was called off to do some other work, so Hinata, Mayuka, Kobayashi, and Chris wandered aimlessly around the ship.

Out on the foredeck on the seventh level, they mimicked the famous scene from *Titanic*. Then they went to see the big pool on the same deck as the kennel. The air was chilly, so hardly anyone

was swimming in it, but the hot tub nearby was buzzing with activity.

Here and there, they spotted security guards looking for the violin. But the other guests didn't seem to notice and continued enjoying their cruise.

When the four of them returned to the third deck, the captain and several staff members were holding a meeting in the lobby about Mito's concert. They were deciding the location of the piano, the seating arrangement, and other such details.

Once again, security guards were standing in the corners, keeping a close eye on the guests and looking around.

"I wish those guards would just find the stupid violin already," Mayuka said with a sigh. "Any brilliant ideas, Hinata?"

"Nope… It's hard enough just to find our way around this gigantic ship. It would take a miracle to locate that tiny violin. Plus, if someone's hidden it in their cabin, we'll never find it."

"Agreed. We're completely powerless here…," Kobayashi said, hanging his head.

I guess there's nothing we can do…, Hinata thought. He looked down at Chris, who seemed say, "Don't I get to do anything?"

"Okay, Chris, you're up," he said. "Follow the scent of that violin!"

"*Wuff?*" Chris tilted his head in a questioning manner before lifting his snout and sniffing the air. He looked at Hinata and Kobayashi in turn, then barked.

"Hmm? Did you find something?" Kobayashi asked, leaning forward. Chris started trotting away, eyes sharp and full of purpose.

The rest of them followed skeptically as Chris crossed the lobby with absolute confidence and approached a magnificent desk with leather chairs placed in front. On the other side of the desk was a female employee typing on a computer keyboard.

"It's the concierge's desk," Kobayashi murmured.

"What's a concierge?" asked Mayuka.

"It's the staff member who handles guest inquiries. If you have any requests or problems, they'll help you with them."

Chris circled around the desk and started sniffing a leather clutch bag resting on a seat next to the woman. He proudly

announced his presence with a loud "*Woof!*"

The woman had been so absorbed in her work that she jumped at the sound.

"Oh!" She laughed and picked up the bag. "This is very important. I'm watching it for someone. No touching!"

As Hinata pulled on Chris's leash in a panic, the captain came running over from across the room.

"*Thank you, Catherine!*" said the captain in English, taking the clutch bag from the staff member. "Pardon me, that's my bag," he added, nodding at the others. Then he tucked it under his arm and returned to the meeting.

The four of them awkwardly moved away from the concierge's desk and regrouped outside the elevator.

"So the captain left his bag there during the meeting," said Mayuka, summarizing. "What's up, Chris? Why did you go to the captain's bag?"

Chris's white, round eyebrows drew together, as if he was saying, "I did my best…"

Hinata had seen Chris act like this several times since the day before. He took a moment to consider what it meant. Chris had looked so confident, so certain that he would be praised for doing a good job.

But I still don't understand. I'm sorry, Chris. I just can't figure out what it is you're trying to tell me…



An announcement in both English and Japanese played in the lobby, informing the guests of Mito's upcoming violin performance. Those around them began to gather near the model sailboat.

The staff had apparently decided not to set out a bunch of chairs this time. There were only a few near the front, for those who needed them. Touko Hasekura and Yuudai Soga were seated right in the middle.

Hinata's group decided to hang near the back so as not to draw attention.

Soon, Mito took her position in front of the model ship. She was wearing the same dress as the day before, her hair tied into a ponytail. A round of applause welcomed her. The tulle dress was a bit wrinkled from being stuffed into her suitcase, and she was holding only her bow.

She bowed and addressed the crowd. “My name is Mito Sugisaki. Mr. Soga has generously provided two violins for me to perform with today, so you can compare their sound. One violin was made by a master luthier named Guarneri, while the other is a Stradivarius—a different one from yesterday. Please enjoy the unique sounds of these master instruments.”

One of Soga’s bodyguards walked up with a violin. Mito took it, tucked it under her chin, and glanced at the audience, careful to maintain her pose.

“My first song will use the Guarneri. It is Kreisler’s ‘Beautiful Rosemary.’”

She raised her bow, took a deep breath, and began to play.

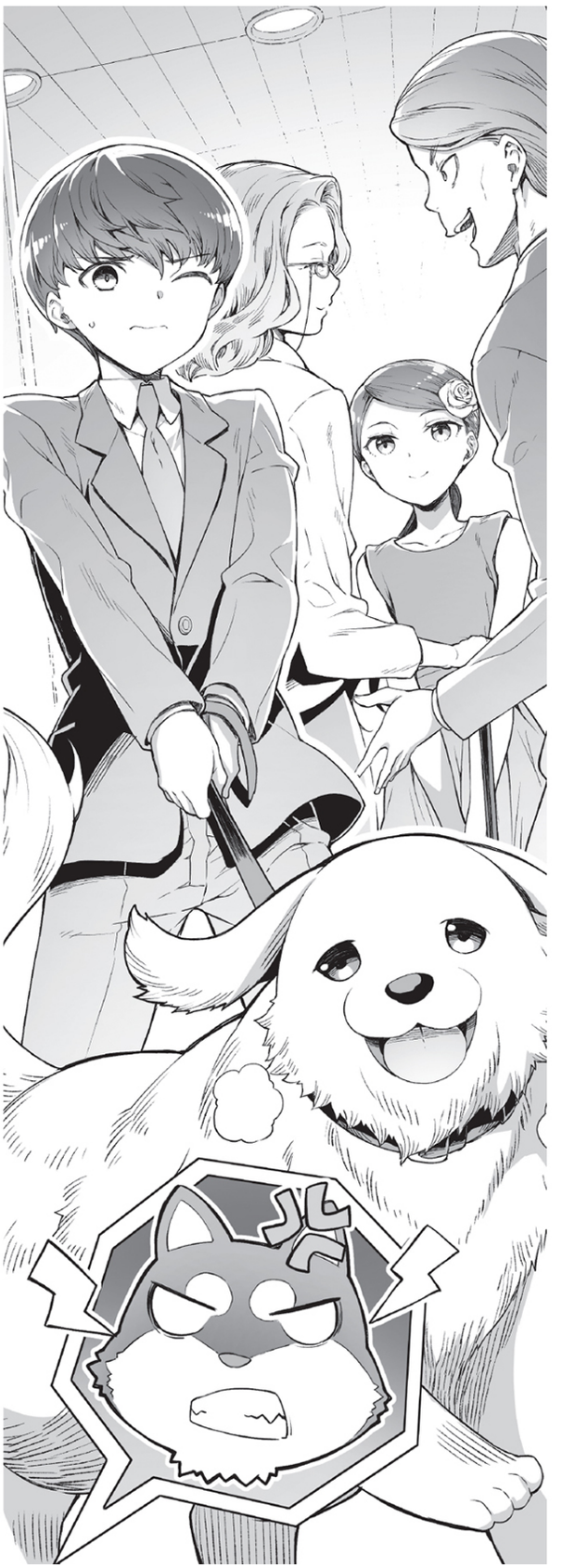
After her second piece was finished, the audience streamed out of the lobby in waves. Mayuka looked at Hinata and asked, “Could you tell the two apart?”

“Y-yeah. I don’t know how to explain it, but I could tell that they were different.”

“I had the same thought,” Kobayashi said, stroking his chin.

“Really?” Mayuka asked him skeptically.

“I’m glad that we got to hear ‘Beautiful Rosemary,’” said Hinata. “It’s a really bright and pretty song.” He recalled the sad expression on Mito’s face after her silent performance on the deck.



I'm glad you got to play it, Mito. I can tell you really love the violin and its music with all your heart…

Soga and Touko caught up with Mito at the model ship and spoke intently with her. It appeared the bodyguard had already taken both violins back to the room.

Reo stood next to Touko, desperately trying to hold back Kotarou, who was getting excited at the sight of Chris. Chris, meanwhile, shot Kotarou a sidelong glance and growled.

At last, Mito broke free from Soga and Touko and rejoined the group.

"Ahh, it's over! Those were very nice violins… I wish I could've played them longer…"

She smiled with great satisfaction. Mayuka was happy to see her in such a good mood.

"Great job, Mito," she said. "That was an amazing performance. I couldn't tell the difference between the violins…but thanks for playing 'Rosemary' for us."

"Yes, I suppose you wouldn't know what sort of song it is without hearing it," Mito said, pulling out her ponytail and letting her hair down. "I have to say, though, Miss Touko's perfume is horrible!"

After they left Chris at the kennel and ate dinner at the restaurant, Mayuka and Mito split off, deciding to go see the musical being performed on board.

"Since you're here on this fancy cruise ship," Touko had advised Mito, "you might as well enjoy the entertainment." She'd offered to take her along, and Mito had extended the invitation to the others.

Hinata and Kobayashi chose to refrain, however.

"I need some quiet time to think…," Kobayashi said with a smile. "Us boring boys have had enough excitement." Hinata felt the same.

Mayuka suggested they bring bathroom towels to counteract Touko's perfume, which made Mito cackle. Kobayashi watched them go and remarked, "You wouldn't think so watching Mito perform, but those two really are the same age…"

So am I, thought Hinata ruefully as he sipped at a glass of mango juice.

“Everything’s so fuzzy in my head,” he admitted to Kobayashi. “There are so many things that don’t quite add up. It’s obvious why someone would steal the violin, right? For money, or the desire to own a famous instrument… But why would they want to trap us on the ship? I’m curious about the Hasekuras, too, and I don’t understand Chris’s recent behavior…”

“What’s he been doing?”

“The way he acted around the captain’s bag earlier, for example. Plus, there’s something I haven’t mentioned to you yet…”

But just then, Hinata was interrupted by a man plopping himself down in Mayuka’s former seat. It was so startling that he nearly spilled his juice.

“Sorry about earlier,” he said. It was Numata, the owner of the tarantula. He removed his glasses and used a handkerchief to wipe them off before putting them back on. “I’ve come to realize that it was you all who found Mary for me.”

Oh, right. Mary is the tarantula’s name, Hinata realized belatedly.

“O-oh, no, that was just an accident…”

“People don’t understand why I would have a pet like that. But she’s so cute and fluffy.”

I don’t know that I’d call her “fluffy.” Maybe hairy? Or bristly?

“But the lady at the dog kennel understood. She really knows her stuff.”

Ah yes. Liz seemed to love all living creatures.

“And she doesn’t have that much venom. Just enough to hurt if she bites you.”

Kobayashi, sitting across the table in his wheelchair, leaned away from Numata, though he was able to manage a polite smile. “Oh, so do you like weird, uh…I mean, *rare* pets?” he asked. “Do you have any others?”

“Yes! I like reptiles and amphibians, too, but spiders are my favorite. Did you know they aren’t bugs? Arachnids are a type of arthropod, technically speaking. Mary is a Mexican redleg—a fairly common type of tarantula. It’s nice, though, right? You look at her and say, ‘Now *that’s* a tarantula.’ But the type that’s really popular among enthusiasts right now is a species called the Gooty

sapphire ornamental. They have a brilliant blue coloration that enchants everyone who sees it."

Kobayashi's smile froze. The blue spider that had just popped into his mind was even more horrifying than he'd anticipated.

Numata continued, "You'd be surprised how easy they are to take care of. They're quite docile, and they don't need to eat every day. That's why the number of collectors keeps growing. The thing is, the Washington Convention makes some rare species very hard to come by. That means the competition is fierce, and the industry is under quite a lot of strain…"

He stopped briefly to wipe the sweat he'd built up in his excitement. This gave Kobayashi the chance to ask, "S-so is that what you do for a living?"

"Huh? Oh, no, I wouldn't call it a 'job' or anything…"



“But you must have certain challenges outsiders wouldn’t understand.”

“Well, of course. All rare animals necessarily have a limited habitat, not just spiders. It’s quite difficult to acquire them.”

“But it must be lucrative. I mean, you’re here enjoying a vacation on a cruise ship…”

“Oh, not at all!” Numata protested, waving his hands in front of his face. “There’s another reason I’m on this ship. Spiders are hardly a gold mine. Anything I make gets poured right back into my hobby…” Wiping away more sweat, he muttered, “It’s never enough, either…”

“I see. So the rare animal business is no picnic…” Kobayashi gave Numata a searching look. The other man turned away nervously, then stood up just as abruptly as he’d sat down.

“I—I suppose I’ve said too much. Please pardon me,” Numata said, and scampered out of the restaurant. Hinata was flabbergasted.

“Talk about fishy!” Kobayashi remarked, jabbing a thumb behind him and gesturing toward the door. “What could he have meant when he said he was on the ship for ‘another reason’?”

“Well, we’re here for a pretty unique reason, too…,” Hinata said.

Kobayashi laughed. “I guess you’ve got a point!”

“But he seemed like he was in need of money, didn’t he? And what if he found out there was a very valuable violin nearby…?”

Kobayashi put his elbow on the table and rested his cheek on his hand. “I couldn’t help but notice that he seemed quite energetic. Remember how the captain was concerned that his cabin was too hot and that he might make himself sick?”

“If anything, it seems more like he’s easily overheated. He was wiping off a whole lot of sweat,” Hinata remarked, finishing up his mango juice. Then he stood and said, “I’m going to go see Chris before I go to bed for the night. What about you, Mr. Kobayashi?”

“I’ll go with you, of course!”



“You ate your dinner, right, Chris? Is your tummy full?”

Hinata hugged Chris and rubbed his cheek against the dog. Chris whined happily.

In the open air on the twelfth deck, the bright-blue sea and sky they’d seen in the daytime had been replaced by the black of night, like someone had spilled ink over the world. The only gaps in the darkness were a brilliant full moon and the countless shining stars above.

“You can’t see skies like this back home,” said Hinata. “The city’s too bright.”

“My house is close to the river,” said Kobayashi. “If you go down by the water, it’s pretty dark. But it’s still nothing like this.” He gazed up at the stars in wonder.

“Like I was saying earlier, I think Chris is trying to tell us something…” Hinata wandered closer to the prow, watching Chris at his side.

“About the captain’s bag, you mean?”

“Yes. And the stack of fancy dog food boxes in the kennel’s storeroom. He took me there and looked so proud about it.”

The motor of Kobayashi’s wheelchair hummed as he rolled across the deck. “You were joking earlier, right? When you said, ‘Follow the scent of that violin,’ and all that. But Chris knew you were asking him to search for something. And to answer your request, he led you to the captain’s bag…”

“Why?” they both said in unison, then burst into laughter.

“If only Chris could speak human language,” Hinata said wistfully. Chris looked back and forth between them, mystified.

Ahead of them, a rectangular pool was set into the deck. The air was chillier at night, so no one was in it now. The lights had been turned down, so the surface of the water merely flickered in the darkness.

“Oh! You can see the moon reflected in the pool!” Hinata exclaimed, weaving around the deck chairs with Chris until they were at the water’s edge. “Aww, it disappeared when I got closer.”

Kobayashi followed them. “It’s because of the angle. As the moon moves higher in the sky, it’ll probably show up right in the middle of the pool.”

As Kobayashi peered into the water—his wheelchair started moving! The front wheels slipped over the edge, causing the

entire chair to tilt.

“Whoa!!”

Kobayashi was dumped into the water, followed by the wheelchair itself.

Kablooooosh!!

There was a huge splash, drenching Hinata, Chris, and the area beside the pool.

Huh? Mr. Kobayashi?

Hinata was momentarily unable to understand what had happened. He simply stood there in shock.

He could hear the rattling of deck chairs falling over behind him, followed by a series of frantic footsteps scampering away.

Who was that? W-wait, that’s not important right now!

Hinata let go of Chris’s leash as the dog busily shook himself off, then he jumped feetfirst into the pool. It was just shallow enough that his face was above water if he stood on his tiptoes.

But because Kobayashi couldn’t use his legs, he was in a dangerous situation. Hinata could see him struggling in the water. He took a deep breath and dove below the surface. Then he grabbed Kobayashi’s arm and pulled at it until he could fit his head underneath, allowing him to prop Kobayashi’s body over his shoulder. Then he put everything he had into lifting the young man upward.

From underwater, Hinata could tell that Kobayashi’s head had broken the surface and that he was gasping in fresh air. Hinata held his breath and pushed hard until Kobayashi’s hands reached the edge of the pool.

Then he rose to the surface in a rush and took in great gulps of air. “…M-Mr. Kobayashi, are you all right?”

Kobayashi was hacking and coughing, clinging to the side of the pool. “I…I’m all right. Thank you, Hinata…*koff !*”

Hinata managed to pull himself up out of the pool, then concentrated on getting his breathing under control. His heart was racing, and his body kept trembling. Chris whined and licked at Hinata’s wet cheek with his warm tongue.

But they weren’t out of danger yet. Beside him, Kobayashi was clinging for dear life to the edge of the pool. If he stayed in the chilly water, things would only get worse.

“H-here, grab my hands…”

Hinata rose unsteadily to his feet and reached down with both hands to pull Kobayashi up. But the grown adult's body was heavier than he'd anticipated—especially since his clothes were now soaked.

Kobayashi was trying his hardest to get out of the water, but his body was freezing, and he wasn't having much success.

"I-I'm sorry, Hinata… I don't have enough strength…"

"Y-you can do it, Mr. K-Kobayashi…"

Chris barked loudly and ran off toward the stern of the ship.

"Chris?! Where are you going?!" Hinata shouted, panicking. *Stop, Chris! I can't chase after you right now!*

He gritted his teeth and redoubled his efforts to haul Kobayashi out of the water. As he did so, he heard Chris bark again.

"Woof, woof! Woof, woof!!"

"What is it, Chris? What happened?" came a woman's voice. Hinata gasped—it was Liz!

That's it! He was calling for Liz!

Relief flooded Hinata's mind, and his eyes grew hot with tears. *Thank you, Chris…*

Fortunately, Liz was able to call for help immediately, and they quickly rescued Kobayashi from the pool. He was taken to his room, seen to by the ship's doctor, and given a hot shower.

As soon as he was tucked in, he murmured, "It's been so long since I slept in a bed," and immediately dropped off to sleep.

"You get some rest, too, Hinata. That was quite an ordeal," said Chihori, who had been carefully attending to Kobayashi's needs. She gave Hinata a light pat on the shoulder. "I sent your wet clothes to the cleaner's, so they should be washed and dried by morning. Get some sleep, and don't wait up for Mayuka and Mito."

Hinata could feel the strength ebbing out of his body. He got right into bed, still wearing his puffy bathrobe, and was soon off to dreamland.

The Clue to Solving the Mystery



The next morning, the group sat at a table in the restaurant, eating breakfast.

“So while we were enjoying the musical, you guys were having a terrible time, huh?” Mayuka said fretfully, poking at her French toast.

Kobayashi didn’t seem to have much of an appetite, either. He was tearing off little bits of his own toast, with a whole omelet sitting untouched on his plate.

“A hand shot forth out of nowhere and pushed the control lever forward. A second later, I was in the water. If you hadn’t saved me when you did, Hinata…”

“Who would do such a horrible thing?” Mayuka fumed.

Hinata shook his head. “I heard someone running away, but I couldn’t leave to chase after them. I have no idea who it was. Now we have even more mysteries on our hands. On top of that, we’re supposed to arrive in Vladivostok this afternoon. We told Mr. Soga we’d find his violin by then…”

“Remember, Hinata,” said Kobayashi. “We’re not under any such obligation. If anything, we’re the victims here.”

“I agree,” said Mito smugly. She cut off a big piece of her pancake and popped it into her mouth. “But if you let that depress you, it will only make things worse. The first thing to do

is eat and build up your energy. I wouldn't want to be too hungry to play the violin when it matters most."

Mayuka looked up at the ceiling, shook her head, and gripped her fork. "I respect you so much, Mito," she said. "C'mon, gang, let's eat!" She then shoved as much French toast into her mouth as she could fit.

Feeling deeply ashamed, Hinata and Kobayashi silently joined them and began to eat.

"I might sound confident, but the truth is, I've been feeling very down since last night," admitted Mito, putting a bit of bacon she'd raised to her mouth back onto her plate. "I wasn't able to detect the difference between the Stradivarius I played yesterday and the one that was stolen. They even felt the same in my hands… Instruments, even those from the same maker, all sound slightly different from one another—why couldn't I tell them apart?!"

Her expression soured with frustration.

"Of course, the Guarneri was completely different. But the fact that I couldn't tell one Stradivarius from another is just proof that I'm an amateur. I checked the labels, too, and they were completely different instruments."

Hinata and Kobayashi were mystified.

"Labels?" the older man asked.

"Inside the body of a violin is a label that contains the maker's name and the date it was finished. You know how there are two *f*-shaped holes on the body of the violin? You can see the label through them. The instrument that was stolen was from 1703, while the one I played yesterday was made in 1727. That puts them over two decades apart. And yet…"

To the others, who assumed all violins had the same shape and sound, Mito's problem was way beyond their understanding. They were dumbfounded.

"I'm sorry… That's all way over my head," Mayuka said truthfully. "I don't know what to say to make you feel better."

Mito bit her lip, nodded, and picked up her bacon again. "Yeah, I know. It's my problem to figure out. I'm sorry for worrying you. Forget I brought it up."

"Well," said Kobayashi. "Since we each have our own problems to solve, let's fuel up so we can tackle them!" Everyone resumed eating.

All of a sudden, Hinata felt a burst of motivation.

Mito was his age, and she was already an accomplished violinist. Hinata could see she had the determination of a pro.

I'm going to do everything in my power, too! It's not like we can get off this ship until it returns to Yokohama, anyway…

Kobayashi's cool electric wheelchair had gotten waterlogged when it fell into the pool, and it no longer worked. Chihori had brought him a replacement from the ship's stock, but the wheels were small; it was a transport wheelchair that the occupant couldn't move independently.

"Unfortunately, all of our chairs are meant for emergencies and have to be pushed by someone else. I'm sorry…"

Since Mr. Kobayashi's range of movement is limited, I'll have to do my best to make up for it. Hinata thought of Chris, still in the kennel, where he'd stayed overnight. *But first, I need to get Chris. Then we can get started!*

At the elevator, Hinata ran into Numata again.

"G-good morning," he said to the man, bowing.

Numata mumbled something and tried to move past, but at that moment, a thought occurred to Hinata. *Hang on, maybe…*

On a sudden whim, he called the man back. "Mr. Numata, w-would you like to go to the kennel with me? I'm going to get Chris, my dog. I assume you want to know how Mary's doing, right?"

With no reason to refuse, Numata got into the elevator with Hinata.

When they reached the kennel, Liz welcomed Hinata with outstretched arms.

"Oh, Hinata! I'm glad you're all right. Chris is such a smart cookie, isn't he? How is Mr. Kobayashi doing? Is he resting well?"

He found her hug very reassuring. "Thanks to you, Mr. Kobayashi is fine. He says hello."

Liz let go of Hinata and turned to Numata, who was looking rather dazed. "And who do we have here…? Oh, you're the owner of that cute li'l tarantula, right?"

He nodded eagerly, and she flashed him a grin.

"Due to the captain's orders, I can't give her back to you just yet. But don't worry—she's doing fine. Hang on, Hinata… I'll bring

Chris out right now."

"I can't even see her…?" Numata grumbled and thumped himself down onto the sofa along the wall.

Chris, meanwhile, leaped onto Hinata as soon as he saw him. Hinata crouched down to give the dog a good hug. *Thanks for yesterday, Chris! You were such a good boy…*

"He ate his breakfast just fine. Nothing to worry about," Liz said, shooting Hinata a thumbs-up.

"Thanks," he replied. "So, Liz, you know a lot about all kinds of animals, huh? Is it hard taking care of a tarantula? Do they need to be kept warm?"

Liz held out her hands with the palms up. "It's not that hard to raise tarantulas. In temperatures like these, there's no need to keep the heater on."

"Really? They said that Mr. Numata's room was extremely warm. He gets hot easily, so I assumed he was putting up with it for the sake of his spider."

Numata sat upright on the sofa, pulling his back away from the cushions.

Hinata watched him out of the corner of his eye and said, as innocently as possible, "Or maybe he's got some other pets with him? Maybe some animal that comes from a hot climate… Mr. Numata loves rare animals, and I hear his job involves buying and selling exotic species."

He didn't miss the glint in Liz's eye. Behind the two of them, Numata started to rise from the sofa, looking pale.

"Ooh, what a lovely job to have… I love rare animals, too! Just a moment, now," Liz said, circling back behind the kennel's reception counter. Hinata felt his heart begin to race; there was probably an emergency alert button behind the counter somewhere.

Instead, however, Liz came back with a smile and handed Numata a book. "Mr. Numata, what's your favorite animal? I happen to have a soft spot for reptiles. Would you like to look at this photo collection of exotic turtles and tortoises?"

Numata backed away, shaking his head. "M-maybe some other time… I just remembered something I need to—"

There was a sharp knock at the door, and then it swung open.

“*Liz! What happened?*” said two security guards as they entered the room. Numata tensed, and Liz jabbed an accusatory finger at him.

“This is Mr. Numata, the owner of the tarantula. Contact the captain at once and have him search this man’s cabin! I suspect he’s smuggling endangered animals.”



“Wh-wh-what p-proof do you have of that?!”

Despite Numata’s protests, his nervous stammering was all but an admission of guilt. Beads of sweat appeared on his forehead, and his knees began to knock.

One of the guards used his phone to make a call, while the other raised his baton to keep Numata from trying anything funny.

“Hinata,” Liz said, her eyes glued to Numata, “take Chris and leave. This is dangerous, and I want you to head back to your group. I’d appreciate it if you notified Chihori.”

Hinata nodded and said quietly, “At the restaurant last night, he told me and Mr. Kobayashi all about his job. Shortly after that, Kobayashi was attacked. I think maybe…”

She tapped him on the arm to indicate that she understood. “Now, go on…”

Hinata pulled Chris’s leash, slipped past the security guards, and hastily left the kennel.



An hour and a half later, Chihori came back from meeting the captain and sat in Mito’s room, cradling her head in her hands.

“Smuggling! H-how did I not see it…? His fishy attitude, the tarantula, the extreme temperature in his room… All the circumstantial evidence was there!”

“It’s not your fault,” said Mayuka comfortingly. “You’re just a member of the crew, not a detective… And believe it or not, Hinata is the president of a kids’ detective club. He’s solved a number of cases before—with Chris’s help, of course.”

“But…the crew has a duty to prevent crime and ensure the safety of our guests…,” Chihori wailed, even more distraught.

“What was he smuggling?” Kobayashi asked.

Chihori lifted her head and said, “Twenty tortoises of an endangered species called the Indian star. Liz was able to confirm it. They live in the tropics, so they require very warm temperatures or they’ll die.”

“Twenty?!”

“They were just hatchlings. They fetch high prices because of the beautiful patterns on their shells. He said he was going to hand them over to a local seller in Vladivostok.”

“And did he push Mr. Kobayashi into the pool?” Hinata asked urgently.

“He strongly denied it, even though the captain really pressed him on it. Then Mr. Soga heard what was going on and came to see…”

Mito’s eyes shot open. “Mr. Soga? What did he say?”

“He was yelling at the captain, saying that this broke smuggler must have stolen the Stradivarius.”

“Huh? So that Numata guy stole the violin?”

“No. He said he didn’t know anything about it, wasn’t interested in violins, and knew nothing about their value. It didn’t turn up in a search of his room, either…”

That made sense to Hinata.

“I’m so glad…,” Mito said, sighing in relief. “If it were left in such a hot room, the Stradivarius would have been ruined.”

“You’re happy he didn’t have it?” Mayuka grumbled. “Wouldn’t it be better to have found the violin?”

“No one would be happy to find some dried-out Stradivarius jerky!” Mito shot back.

The others all looked at one another, then burst into laughter. *Stradivarius jerky!*

A moment later, Mito joined in the laughter. “Still…I wonder where it’s disappeared to,” she muttered.

Hinata sat on the floor and rubbed Chris’s back. He thought everything over carefully, recalling all the strange events that had happened since they boarded the ship. He felt that if he could just get a hold on *one* of them and figure it out, all the other mysteries would follow, as if connected by a common thread. But which one should he focus on…?

“Mito,” he asked, “at the dinner party after the first concert, the Stradivarius was on display in the restaurant, right? Who handed it to you afterward?”

“I was very busy with all the people coming up to speak to me… I remember Chihori stopping by to say that it was time to leave, and then I was finally free…” She tilted her head, thinking

hard. “Oh, that’s right, it was Mr. Soga himself! He’d had the bodyguards pack it up, and he gave me the whole case to carry.”

I see…

Hinata got to his feet. Chris gave him a look that said, “What’s up?”

“I’m going to take Chris for a walk…”

“But it’s almost noon. Don’t you want to have lunch at the café in the lobby?” Mayuka asked, reaching out to stop him.

“Yeah. I’ll be back by then,” he said, then led Chris out of the room.



He went to the stairs and down to the third deck, thinking hard as he made his way to the lobby.

So close… I’m so close to figuring something out…

As soon as he set foot in the lobby, Hinata sensed that the atmosphere was different. He could hear concerned voices and the high-pitched whine of a dog.

What was going on? He followed the voices to the center of the room and was stunned by what he saw.

About halfway up the grand staircase on the left, Kotarou’s traumatized face was visible through the outer railing. His head and both front legs were sticking out between two pillars, and he couldn’t get loose! The whining must have been coming from Kotarou.

“He’s stuck!”

Hinata hurried up the staircase with Chris. There were a number of guests and crew members standing around the dog, but none of them seemed to know what to do.

“S-sorry,” he said, pushing his way between them until he was right in front of Kotarou—or rather, Kotarou’s butt. Reo was pulling on the leash hesitantly, but the dog’s front legs showed no signs of slipping back through the gap.

“Let me see the leash,” Hinata said, taking it from Reo and handing him Chris’s leash instead. “Wait here, Chris. Sit!”

Chris briefly grumbled, but he obeyed Hinata’s command and sat down on the spot.

First, Hinata tied Kotarou's leash tightly to the pillar so the dog wouldn't fall through. Then he held Kotarou's collar tightly in his left hand. He ran his right hand through the pillars and pressed his palm to Kotarou's right shoulder. Slowly, carefully, he began to pull.

Trying to yank both legs through at once wasn't going to work. But as long as one of his shoulders was freed, it should be easy for him to get his head loose…

Careful not to hurt Kotarou's shoulder, Hinata gingerly eased it back. In time, the dog's right shoulder slipped through the bars, followed immediately by his head and left shoulder.

"Ohhh!"

"He did it!"

"Bravo!"

The crowd immediately burst into cheers and claps. Relieved, Hinata untied Kotarou's leash and took a little bit of food out of his walking bag.

"There you go, Kotarou. Good boy. Sit!" he commanded.

Kotarou managed to sit down despite his wildly wagging tail. His eyes narrowed with excitement. Once the kibble was within range, he chomped it down.

"Now, don't go sticking your head into tight spaces again, all right?" Hinata warned.

"Woof!" Kotarou replied eagerly. His eyes shone with delight. "You gave me a treat before, didn't you?" he seemed to say.

Hinata hugged Kotarou around the neck, patted him on the back, then stood up.



The guests and crew all murmured with relief, then trickled away with smiles on their faces.

The entire time, Reo had stood in place, holding Chris's leash.

"Here…" Hinata offered him Kotarou's leash back, and Reo exchanged it for Chris's.

His expression was flat, he didn't say a word, and he refused to meet Hinata's eyes.

"Um…" Hinata tried to say something but was interrupted by another voice.

"Did something happen, Hinata?"

He turned around to see Mayuka standing behind him with a scowl on her face.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

She poked his arm. "You were acting strange, so I followed you. I've known you for long enough to tell when something's off! So Kotarou got into trouble again?"

Before Hinata could reply, however, Reo cut him off.

"Want to come to my room?"

Huh? Hinata's and Mayuka's mouths fell open.

A Pointless Solution



Reo’s cabin was on the ninth deck, at the stern of the ship.

He stuck his card into the lock, then silently entered the room with Kotarou. Hinata and Mayuka weren’t sure if they should follow him, so they waited out in the hallway.

Before the door could close, Reo held it open from the inside and gestured with his head for them to enter. Hinata and Mayuka shared a brief look, then went inside.

The smell of Touko’s overpowering perfume filled the room. Chris promptly sneezed.

The inside was stunningly spacious. Mito’s room had seemed quite luxurious, but it was nothing compared to this.

There were multiple sofas in the living room, and on the left side was a dining area with a big round table. Outside the large glass door in the back was a massive balcony. The biggest surprise of all, however, was the spiral staircase just ahead of it. There were no beds anywhere in sight, so the bedroom had to be above them. A two-story cabin!

“Oh my! Isn’t it a little early?” said Touko with surprise. She was inside, seated on a sofa chair. “I said you could invite them after lunch.”

“There was a bit of trouble,” replied Reo, clearing his throat awkwardly.

He was supposed to invite us? Hinata wondered. *So this was planned…?*

Touko grimaced and gestured at Kotarou with her chin. “Let me guess: Kotarou got himself in trouble again? I told you not to get such a large dog… Go and take him to the kennel already.”

Reo hung his head silently. Hinata felt like he’d seen this same interaction once before. Why was that?

“Did you bring the Stradivarius?” said a man’s gruff voice, taking Hinata by surprise. “You were boasting about how you’d find it before we arrived in Vladivostok.”

Soga walked out from the room’s back right corner, which had been hidden from view. He had a glass in one hand. There was a bar counter to the right side of the room with a long line of alcohol bottles.

“Mr. Soga!” Mayuka said with alarm. The man grinned and sat down on another, larger sofa.

“My cabin happens to be right next door, and this woman has proven a good conversation partner to while away the tedium of the long voyage… Touko, the captain told me to keep it a secret, but I’ll tell you. My Stradivarius has been stolen…”

Touko gasped and put a hand to her chest. “When? Which one?”

“The first one that the girl played. She claimed some nonsense about the instrument simply *disappearing* from its case. Then they followed it up by insisting that the *dog* was going to find it! Speaking of which, have you had any success?” Soga asked, tilting his glass toward them.

Hinata hesitated. He couldn’t rise to Soga’s bait…

“Well, I’m not surprised,” Soga continued. “And I can’t waste any more time playing along with children’s games. I think the girl’s father is particularly suspicious. I mean, we’re talking about someone who makes money off his daughter’s violin playing,” the man said, laughing.

Mayuka stood off to the side, clenching her teeth. There was no reason for Soga to talk that way.

We know just how pure and true Mito’s and her father’s love for the violin is…, thought Hinata.

He couldn’t take it anymore. He sucked in a deep breath and glared at Soga, looking him right in the eye.

“Mr. Soga, I already know where the Stradivarius is.”

The man took the glass away from his mouth. “Oh? Where?”

“In the room next door.”

His lips puckered. “You mean my room? Well, of course there’s a Stradivarius there. But it’s not the one that was stolen. You already knew that!”

“No. That *is* the stolen instrument. There was never a second Stradivarius.”

Clink! Soga loudly set his wineglass on the table. Chris twitched with alertness at Hinata’s feet.

“What do you mean there’s no second Stradivarius?” Soga asked.

“After the party two nights ago, you placed the instrument on display into a violin case. But then you hid it and gave Mito a different case, which was empty. I’m sure you adjusted the weight to ensure it felt right to her.”

Hinata took another breath, then forced himself to continue.

“The next time Mito opened the case and found the violin missing, all you had to do was scream about it being stolen. Meanwhile, the Stradivarius you’d hidden was safe and sound in your cabin. You then placed a fake label over the one on the inside and put it back in the display case, claiming it was a completely different instrument…”

Soga slapped his knee and laughed. “Nonsense! Why would I steal my own property? That’s preposterous.”

“You took out a large insurance policy on that violin, didn’t you? I recall hearing you talk about how expensive the payments were. But if it was stolen, you could get the insurance payout, and you’d still have the Stradivarius. And if anyone suspected you, you could sell the supposedly stolen instrument on the black market in secret, then buy a replacement. Am I wrong?”

“Hinata, that’s amazing…,” Mayuka murmured, almost on the verge of tears. Chris looked up and whined.

Soga was no longer smiling. “What evidence do you have…?”

“Mito could tell that the first and second Stradivarius both had the same sound. The feeling she got playing them was identical. You underestimate her ability, Mr. Soga. You gave her the same instrument, assuming she would be none the wiser—you were mocking her.”

“Th-that’s all circumstantial…”

“Mito is a performer, not an appraiser. She doesn’t have the ability to tell a fake label from a real one. But if we take the Stradivarius currently in the case to an expert, they’ll be able to tell us if the label is real or not…”

The room was utterly silent.

Then Touko began to applaud.

“I think you’ve lost, Mr. Soga. You may have underestimated Mito, too—but you most certainly underestimated this boy. He’s quite something. And that dog, too…”

Hinata gasped. Touko’s comment was the last piece in the puzzle. He now knew the solutions to all the mysteries that had been plaguing them.

But it seemed he was a little too late…



“Well…that was certainly an entertaining show. The perfect thing to stave off my boredom,” Touko said, her voice suddenly significantly more youthful. “I had all the information about the violin theft. All I had to do was give that girl a little push… She’s very talented, and at such a young age.”

Soga bolted upright from the sofa in shock. Hinata tensed in alarm, too. Even Chris lowered his body, ready to attack if need be.

Touko held out a hand to calm Soga. “Please be seated. That dog is surprisingly vicious. Make any sudden moves, and it’ll bite you.”

“Th-that’s not true!” Mayuka protested. “Chris isn’t vicious! You don’t know him at all…”

But Hinata shook his head. “Actually, Mayuka, Touko knows him quite well. She knows that when the time comes, Chris can be extremely brave…”

“Huh…?”

“But I should clarify that her name is *Helen*, not Touko.”

Mayuka gaped at him in shock. “N-no way… Y-you mean the same Helen who…? But Touko’s so old!”

Helen smiled widely from under her disguise. “That’s right, I had you completely fooled, didn’t I? Mayuka, I believe? It’s nice to see you again… You didn’t recognize Akane, either, did you?”

Mayuka spun around to look at Reo and yelped, “Whaaat?! Akane?”

Reo, who had been standing so quietly that his presence practically vanished, cleared his throat and nodded sheepishly. At his feet, Kotarou was fast asleep. The fuss earlier had tuckered him out.

The poor pup, Hinata thought, feeling even worse about the situation.

“Reo had been avoiding me since our very first meeting,” he explained. “Most of the time, dog owners open up to each other when their pets become friends. But despite Kotarou being clearly enamored with Chris and me, Reo only acted even colder toward us. He must have been afraid we’d discover his real identity…”



“Did you know from the start, Hinata?” Mayuka asked.

“No. I only figured it all out a moment ago. I was always suspicious of Touko, but I certainly didn’t expect she would be Helen in disguise. I guess you started wearing that powerful perfume from the second day on to keep Chris from smelling you, huh?”

Helen put a hand to her neck and stretched it from side to side to loosen it up.

“It’s quite difficult to act like an elderly person. If that dog starts chasing me, I can’t simply toss my cane aside and run, can I? I had to take precautions. When I saw you two nights ago, I could barely believe my eyes! We were just here to enjoy a cruise, and then you all show up, trying to ruin our fun again. What a letdown…”

“Liar!” Hinata shouted. Chris joined in with a loud bark. “You were the one who stopped us from leaving! We would have gone home that very first night if you’d left us alone, but you drugged that juice to keep us here. You ordered it using Mr. Soga’s name, and while Chihori was carrying it to the room, you stopped her, and Akane sneaked up from behind…”

“Oh, you figured that part out, too?” Helen chuckled like a naughty child whose mischief has been uncovered. “I used twice the amount of my favorite sleep aid. Did you feel well rested?”

Mayuka balled her fists and swung them back and forth. “No, no, no! It can’t be! That was all Helen and Akane’s doing?”

“What was the point? To mess with us? Or are you after Chris?” Hinata demanded.

Helen stretched her arms above her head. “Both! And it was fun. Plus, there was this guy…” She pointed a finger at Soga, who was shrinking back into the couch. “And that weirdo animal collector, adding nicely to the chaos. If I could just get that dog now, everything would be perfect. I’m so glad I took this little trip on the *Primavera*.”

“But you weren’t just taking a cruise, were you?” Hinata said, glaring at Helen. “I noticed a lot of fishy details after Mr. Numata’s smuggling came to light. You’re transporting something on this ship, too, aren’t you? And that’s why you made Akane take care of Kotarou, despite your hatred of dogs.”

There was a gasp from behind them. It had come from Akane. Helen leaned forward with great interest.

“So tell me, then. What is it that I’m transporting?”

Hinata crouched and rubbed Chris on the head. He was such a smart dog.

“Chris once took part in a training exercise at the coast guard headquarters in Yokohama to teach dogs to identify smuggled drugs. That’s where he learned their scent. Chris found that same scent in the kennel on this ship. He guided me to the boxes of dog food and gave me a look that said, ‘Look, I found it. Didn’t I do a good job?’ I didn’t understand what he was trying to tell me—but now I do. Chris found drugs on the ship. He was doing his job!”

“Oh, Chris…you’re such a smart boy. You’re a real canine detective!” Mayuka blubbered and hugged the Shiba Inu.

“You left your drugs at the kennel, claiming they were Kotarou’s dog food, didn’t you?” Hinata continued.

Helen leaned back against the sofa and crossed her legs. “Yes, I suppose I *did* underestimate you. I never thought you and the dog would get that far. But you’re a bit too late. We’ll be getting off this ship with our luggage soon. And you made one fatal mistake—you chose to reveal your sleuthing to *us*! So what should I do with all of you? I doubt anyone will notice if I toss you three off my balcony into the water.”

Mayuka clutched Chris and froze. Hinata realized that she was right. They could speak the truth all they wanted in this room, but no one was going to arrest the criminals or put them on trial. *No one is coming to save us.*

He clenched his jaw. What could he do…?

Just then, the intercom rang.

“It’s the captain,” said a calm, deep voice.



“Captain!” Mayuka cried. “It’s the captain. Oh, we’re saved…”

Helen sighed and motioned toward Akane. The girl put Kotarou’s leash on the floor and headed for the door.

“Ms. Hasekura, we’ll be arriving at Vladivostok soon, so please prepare to disembark…”

The moment the captain stepped inside the cabin, Mayuka leaped toward him and said, “C-Captain, arrest them now! Mr. Soga was the one who stole the violin, and this woman is smuggling drugs…”

Hinata approached her from behind and squeezed her shoulder tightly. “Don’t bother, Mayuka. It’s no use telling him anything…”

“Why not?! He’s the captain! He’s the most powerful person on this ship!”

“Who do you think put down the record of us leaving? Who erased the drink order from the system? Why do you think Chris looked so proud about finding the captain’s bag?”

Oh… Mayuka slumped to the floor, defeated. Hinata crouched next to her, put his hands around her and Chris, and looked up at the captain.

“You were working with Helen from the very start. And you had your own private stash of drugs in your bag, didn’t you? When you thought we’d found you out, you pushed Mr. Kobayashi’s wheelchair into the pool, hoping to silence him, or at the very least send a message…”

The captain’s thick brows knitted together as he stared down at them. Then he looked toward Helen. She shrugged and spread her hands.

“You’re too soft, Captain. If you wanted to silence anyone, you should’ve gone for the boy and his dog, not the young man. Let this be a lesson to you and Mr. Soga on what happens when you coddle children. Of course, we’ve stopped them here, so all’s well that ends well. Tie them up. I’ll let you decide how to deal with them. Oh, and…don’t forget about the young man named Kobayashi.”

Minutes later, the children’s hands and feet were bound, and they’d been left in the upstairs bathroom of Helen’s cabin.

“What’ll we do, Hinata?” Mayuka asked, wiping her tearstained face on Hinata’s shoulder. “Nobody’s going to hear us now, no matter how loud we shout.” At least the captain had forgotten to turn the lights off.

Hinata’s mind was racing. How could they get out of this?

Kobayashi would be worried when they didn't come back after lunch (assuming he hadn't been captured by the captain). Chihori was probably looking all over the ship for them right now.

But this was a private cabin, and they were in the upstairs bathroom, way at the back. *Even if Chihori was right outside the cabin door, there's no way she would hear us shouting.*

They'd been separated from Chris, too. Hinata blinked back tears.

"Akane, put that dog to sleep with a sedative," Helen had commanded. "We'll be taking it off the ship with us in Vladivostok." Apparently, the two of them were planning to get off in Russia without returning to the ship.

During their last encounter, Helen had learned that the ID number in Chris's microchip was the password for the information she was after. She was going to take Chris to have his ID read in Russia. And once she'd gotten what she wanted, she'd have no more use for him…

Hinata shook his head, feeling a shiver run down his spine.

Why did I follow Akane to this room, anyway? And why did I blab to Helen about all the things I'd discovered?

Before leaving, Helen had told Soga, "Why don't you enjoy a little Russian vacation, too? I'm not in any position to reveal your criminal activities. If anything, it might suit us to start working together."

Soga looked so happy that, if he were a dog, his tail would be wagging.

He'd probably imagined offering his expensive violin to a Russian performer and being showered with adoring cheers from the audience. Plus, he'd get his insurance payout, too…

The captain would continue commanding his ship, as if nothing had ever happened.

And in the meantime, Hinata and Mayuka would be at the bottom of the sea. With Kobayashi, too, probably…

Hinata shook his head again. *It's not over yet! I told myself that I'd do everything in my power! I'm not giving up, not until the bitter end! Chris's life is in danger, and he's depending on me!!*

"Mayuka, turn around. I want to see if I can chew through the ropes around your wrists."

"It's not a rope—it's Helen's scarf."

“Whatever it is, I want to try something, so turn around!”

Mayuka slid her butt along the bathroom floor. Once Hinata was at the right angle to get his teeth around the silk scarf, he bit down hard.

They look so soft, but scarves are really tough, Hinata thought desperately. He’d tried pulling it, tugging it this way and that, and biting it, but it simply refused to loosen up. *This posture is agonizing, too. My front teeth are really starting to hurt…*

“I wonder what time it is,” Hinata said with a sigh.

“…I have no idea. When were we arriving in Vladivostok again?”

“I heard it would be after lunch…”

What time is “after lunch”? Hinata wondered, then bit down on the scarf again.

“Ow! You’re biting my hand, Hinata!”

“S-sorry…”

“Oh! I can move my wrists!”

Did it loosen up?! Hinata pulled hard with his teeth on the fabric, and the knot came undone.

“I’m free!” Mayuka cried, waving her hands and dropping the tangled scarf to the floor. “Okay, Hinata, turn around! I’ll untie you, too!”

Hinata and Mayuka got to their feet, rubbing their wrists and ankles, and were finally able to open the bathroom door. The bedroom was neat and tidy. There was no one in sight.

From the top of the spiral stairs, Hinata carefully peered at the floor below. Then he tiptoed down the steps to get a look at the living room. It, too, was empty.

“There’s no one here, Mayuka. Did we already arrive at the port?”

Hinata rushed to the glass door and looked through the lace curtains at the sight beyond the balcony. It was the view from the stern of the ship.

He could see a majestic, beautiful suspension bridge that seemed to be moving farther and farther away. Land was visible on both sides of the ship. Perhaps they were making their way into the bay.

We must be almost to the port!

Hinata leaped onto the door and tried to turn the knob.

It won't budge! Why not?!

"What's wrong, Hinata? Let's get out of here…"

Mayuka tried the knob, too. "Isn't this a little weird? I understand a door not opening from the outside, but we're inside."

Hinata rattled the knob some more. Then they heard a tense voice from out in the hall.

"Is someone in there?"

It was Chihori! Hinata and Mayuka looked at each other hopefully and shouted for all they were worth.

"Chihori? It's us! It's Hinata and Mayuka!"

"Chihoriiii!!"

"Kids! I've been looking all over for you! I came by here several times but didn't get any response, so I was worried. Open the door right now!"

"I-it won't open…"

"It won't open?" Chihori paused, thinking. "Is it locked remotely…?"

Huh? What does that mean? Hinata and Mayuka were mystified.

"In special circumstances, it's possible to keep a guest's door from being opened," Chihori explained. "That's what we've done with Mr. Numata's cabin. But why would this door be locked, too…?"

"Have we reached Vladivostok already?" Hinata fretted. If the ship docked, they would take Chris away!

"We're preparing to dock. People should be able to disembark in another half hour."



Hinata smacked the door with the palm of his hand. “They took Chris away, Chihori! Helen…I mean Touko is smuggling drugs! And the captain’s working with her!”

“Wait a minute! What did you say, Hinata?”

“The boxes of dog food in the kennel—they have drugs inside! And it was Mr. Soga himself who stole the Stradivarius! Please, you have to arrest them! And more importantly, we have to get Chris back!!”

There was silence from beyond the door.

Hinata was starting to panic. Maybe Chihori wouldn’t believe him, no matter how sincerely he pleaded his case. And every moment that passed, Chris was being taken farther away…

“Chihori! Please, Chihori!!” Hinata shouted, slamming the door.

Mayuka was sobbing. “Chris…Chris…”

After what seemed like minutes, they finally heard Chihori’s voice again.

“Hinata, Mayuka, listen to me!”

“Chihori…”

“I’ve just put in a call. It’ll be close, but they’ll do what they can. You need to go out onto the balcony. I’ll see if I can rescue you from the deck above…”

Hinata and Mayuka looked at each other, then raced out onto the balcony; the wind buffeted their faces. They rushed to the railing, then looked upward. There was a balcony two decks above them. This was the ninth deck, so that one must have been the eleventh.

Chihori’s face popped over the railing above, and she waved them over to the side. They split up and moved to the left and right edges of the balcony. Without warning, a rope ladder hurtled over the edge toward them. The rungs were aluminum rods that made a sharp clattering sound as they slid over the edge of the upper balcony.

“W-w-we have to climb…?” Mayuka said, her face paling.

Oh, right. Mayuka’s afraid of heights!

“If you want to get out, Mayuka, you have to climb,” said Hinata. “You can do it!”

“It’s all right, Mayuka!” said Chihori, who had already climbed down to them. “I’ll tie a safety rope around you, and I’ll be here to help.”

Reassured by her comforting presence, Mayuka nodded. Her lip only trembled a little.

9

A New Title



With Chihori's help, Hinata somehow managed to get over the railing of the eleventh deck. Ahead of him he saw Mayuka, weeping on the ground, and Mito hugging her tightly.

Hinata undid the carabiner on the safety rope around his waist and stepped down, then rushed over to Kobayashi.

"Mr. Kobayashi…"

"I'm so glad you're all right, Hinata! I was worried sick…"

Hinata clung to him. Kobayashi's hand felt warm and reassuring as it rubbed his back. It was at this point that Hinata finally felt safe. They weren't going to be sleeping with the fishes after all!

"Oh, that's a relief," exhaled Chihori, the last one up the ladder. "We looked all over for you when you didn't come back after lunch. One of the guests who saw you save Kotarou noticed you head into the elevator with Reo… But when I didn't hear anything from the cabin, I was ready to give up. Now where's Chris?"

Oh no, it's too early to be relieved! Hinata dashed away from Kobayashi's side and grabbed Chihori's arm.

"Chihori, you have to arrest them! Chris…they're taking Chris away!!"

She looked at him earnestly and rubbed his arm. "He's with them, huh? I've made what arrangements I can. I don't know how

much they'll be able to do, but it's all I could think of… For now, let's hurry down to the lobby!"

It seemed to take forever for the elevator to reach the third deck. The door had barely opened when Hinata shot through the crack and ran toward the gangway.

The lobby was full of people waiting to get off the ship to sightsee in Vladivostok.

"Chris!" he yelled, pushing through all the passengers, trying to get to the front of the crowd. The door to the outside was already open, and he could see the large silhouette of the captain in front of it.

The big man heard Hinata's voice and glared in the boy's direction, then gave some instructions to a crew member standing off to the side. The crewman hurried over to Hinata and grabbed his arm.

"Sorry, but you're not allowed off the ship," he said. "You're a special passenger without a passport."

Hinata struggled to free his arm and shouted, "Let me go! I have to speak to the captain! Give back my dog…!"

"The captain is about to disembark to help guide the passengers. You'll need to wait here until he returns."

"If I wait, they'll take Chris away!"

Next to the captain stood Helen, disguised as Touko. Akane was there, too. Soga was at their side. When he noticed Hinata, he anxiously urged the captain to do something. The captain just smiled and shook his head, as if to say, "No need to worry; it'll be fine…"

"Argh!" Hinata shouted.

There was a signal from off the ship, and the captain raised his hand in a merry gesture, then began to walk arm in arm with Touko. Akane and Soga followed them down the gangway. Behind them was a crew member with a heavy-looking dog carrier awkwardly slung over his shoulder.

Is Chris in there?

"Chriiiis!"

"Come on, calm down," said the crew member holding Hinata's arm. His grip tightened.

But then Chihori's hand shot out and grabbed the man's.

“I’m sorry, but that passenger is under my care,” she said. “I’ll handle this.”

The crew member looked skeptical. “The captain was very clear that I’m supposed to stop him from leaving the ship…”

“Don’t worry; I’ll take responsibility for him,” she stated firmly, then whispered into Hinata’s ear, “Come this way!”

She dragged him down the gangway, but then pushed him onto a narrow deck to one side of the gate. This was where he’d stepped out to get some fresh air when they first boarded and he got overwhelmed.

“Hinata, look there!” said Mayuka, who was already waiting on the side deck. She pointed over the railing. Mito and Kobayashi were there, too, silently watching. Hinata grabbed the railing and stared down at the wharf.



A gangway connected the ship to the terminal below, and the guests were streaming down it toward the dock. However, the captain, who'd been at the head of the group, was now surrounded by people in black protective clothing. He was desperately gesticulating and shouting something at them, but they just shook their heads and grabbed him by the arms, dragging him down the gangway toward the terminal.

After him, Helen and Soga were likewise surrounded and trapped by people in body armor. Akane, however, had been walking much slower than the others. When she noticed that something was wrong, she abruptly turned on her heel and pushed the man with the dog carrier up the gangway.

"Back to the ship! Hurry!" they could hear her shouting above the rest of the noise. "This dog has nothing to do with us. Give him back to Hinata! Hurry!!"

The crew member awkwardly turned and hustled back toward the ship.

"Akane!" Hinata shouted down at her. She heard him and looked up toward the balcony.

"Sorry! Please take care of Kotarou for me!!" she called out.

Kotarou? Hinata had a sudden realization. *Oh! Kotarou isn't with them!*

He recalled what Helen had said earlier: *"Go and take him to the kennel already."*

So Akane had taken Kotarou to the kennel, then headed off the ship with Chris instead.

Hinata felt a sudden pang of sympathy. "All right!" he shouted. "Don't worry; we'll take care of him!!"

Akane nodded, put her hands over her face, and crouched down where she stood. She was soon surrounded by more people in black body armor and disappeared from sight.



Hinata ran toward the gangway.

“Chris…”

The guests leaving the ship had all gone, and the lobby was quiet.

“Chriiiiis!”

The silhouette of the crew member with the dog carrier appeared at the gate. Hinata practically tumbled across the floor toward him and wrenched the case away from the winded man.

The carrier was very heavy, and he carefully set it down on the carpet, then opened the top. Inside the carrier, Chris was lying on his side.

“Ch-Chris…?”

Hinata reached in, fearing the worst, and touched the dog’s fur.

Oh… He’s warm…

Tears flooded Hinata’s eyes.

I’m so glad… He’s alive. Chris’s white tummy was slowly rising and falling.

“Chris…?” said Kobayashi from above Hinata’s head. Hinata looked up with a start and saw that Kobayashi was crying, too. “Thank goodness. Thank goodness…”

Hinata clung to Kobayashi’s legs and wailed.



“Yes, he’s fine,” Liz said, removing the stethoscope from her ears. “His heartbeat is strong. The sedative’s still working, but it looks to me like it’s starting to wear off.”

Chris was asleep on one of the beds in Mito’s cabin. His front paws were twitching.

“I think it was probably a dog sedative. They’re used fairly often when traveling or when treating illness or injury. Not that I’d recommend it…”

“Thanks, Liz. I feel much better now,” Hinata said, giving her a big hug. “Are you a vet, too? My mom is a vet, and my dad’s a pet groomer.”

“Oh, my goodness. Well, it’s no wonder you love animals, then, Hinata! I’m not a veterinarian, but I’d love to meet your parents and chat with them one day,” Liz said with a big grin. She stuck

the stethoscope in her pocket. “Now, I’ve got to get back to the kennel. You’ll be coming by tonight to drop off Chris, won’t you? Kotarou’s waiting for him.”

She waved good-bye to them and left the cabin. Everyone sighed with relief.

“I’m so glad Chris is okay…” Mayuka sat down on the bed and softly rubbed the dog’s tummy.

“Well?” Kobayashi said to Chihori, who was standing nearby. “Will you tell us what kind of trick you used to set all this up…?”

She looked alarmed at the question. “What do you mean? I didn’t do anything… It was all Hinata. He solved the violin theft, discovered Touko’s drug smuggling—he figured it all out. I couldn’t have done any of that. I’m just a crew member in training who kept messing up…”

“Yes, I’ll admit that Hinata did some fantastic work here. He looks shy, but he’s got a very logical mind and knows how to take bold actions. I knew that, of course—he’s the leader of my kids’ detective club,” Kobayashi said, giving Hinata a thumbs-up. “What I meant was, on whose authority were the captain, Helen, her daughter, and Mr. Soga arrested at the port? You can’t tell me you had nothing to do with it, Chihori!”

She pursed her lips and considered what to say. Eventually, Kobayashi continued a little hesitantly. “I think…this isn’t the first time I’ve seen you. Have we met somewhere before?”

Her eyes widened. “You remember me? I don’t believe it! You didn’t show any signs of recognizing me before!”

“Neither did you!” Kobayashi laughed. “It was at the coast guard headquarters in Yokohama, wasn’t it? When I took Chris there for training.”

Chihori nodded. “But we weren’t properly introduced. We just nodded at each other by the door, right? I’d just been assigned there, and I only remembered you because it was rare to see a trainer bringing in a dog… I was surprised to see you in a wheelchair, since you were walking back then.”

“Wait, wait! I’m getting confused,” said Mayuka, raising her hand. “Does that mean that before you were on this crew, you had a job with the coast guard?”

Chihori laughed awkwardly. “No. As a matter of fact, I’m still in the coast guard. I’m actually here for reconnaissance. There have

been multiple top-secret reports lately that suggested there were crimes occurring on this ship…"

"Reconnaissance?" Mayuka repeated.

"She was secretly investigating them…," Mito explained quietly.

"That's right. So the sleuthing Hinata did was originally my job. And that includes the matter of Mr. Numata's turtle-smuggling!" Chihori said, lightly wrapping her knuckles against her head in embarrassment.

"Oh, dear," Mayuka said sympathetically.

Chihori sighed theatrically and pulled a smartphone out of her pocket to show them. "Well, I figured I could at least put on the finishing touches and called in everybody I could think of! The coast guard, the *Primavera*'s parent company, the drug enforcement team in Vladivostok, and so on… Believe it or not, I can actually speak a bit of Russian. Though we mostly have their impressive speed to thank."

Now it all made sense. That was why Chihori had so readily accepted the connection between the captain and Helen and the presence of the drugs. What a stroke of luck…

"I got a call from headquarters saying they'd already seized the drugs placed in dog food boxes. It's a major bust, all things considered. That and the turtles."

"What about Mr. Soga?" Mito asked. "Will he be charged with a crime?"

"Hmmm. I'm not sure… He didn't seem to have any connection to the drugs," Kobayashi murmured. "He did lie about the Stradivarius being stolen and called Mito and Chihori the culprits, which counts as defamation. His lies also caused the ship to waste plenty of time and resources searching for the violin. That could be fraudulent obstruction of business. But he hadn't made any false insurance claims yet, so we can't charge him with that…"

"How irritating," Mito said, her slender eyes narrowing with anger. "His crimes sound so insignificant… But the god of music will never forgive him for his sins against art. He's committed blasphemy against music itself!"

"What's 'blasphemy'?" asked Mayuka.

"It means dirtying something sacred!"

The others all nodded in agreement. Chihori looked at each of them in turn, then grinned.

"Well, everyone, it's going to take another five days to get back to Yokohama. Let's all relax and enjoy the voyage! As a staff member in training, I intend to make your stay as pleasant as possible. Would you like a larger, fancier cabin? I hear there's a very nice suite on the ninth deck that's recently opened up…"

Mayuka went pale. "Absolutely not! Why would we go back to the place they locked us up in? That would be the pits!"

Hinata smiled awkwardly. *She has a point…*

Plus, climbing that rope ladder was something Mayuka probably wanted to forget as soon as possible.

"Well, putting all that aside…Mito!" Chihori grabbed the girl's hand with both of hers. "Would you play the violin for us again? Perhaps on the theater stage this time…"

Mito yanked her hand away in anger. "I don't have a violin, and now there's no one to lend me one!"

"But you do!" Chihori said, her eyes sparkling, as she grabbed Mito's hand again. "Before Hinata and Mayuka went missing, I asked the ship's musicians for help. It turns out that one of them has a spare violin! He said that he would gladly lend it to you, though he was a bit ashamed of how cheap it is. It's no Stradivarius…"

Mito's mouth fell open, and her eyes grew as big as saucers. Then they crumpled in a pleasant smile.

"Any violin will become a master instrument in my hands. Of course I'll play it!"

Ooooh! The rest of the room applauded.

"Hooray! We'll get to hear Mito play again!" cheered Mayuka.

"*Woof!*" came a loud bark, very close by.

Chris was standing on the bed, wagging his tail happily!

"Chris!" Hinata leaped onto the dog and rolled around on top of the bed with him.

"Woof, woof!"

They tumbled and played together on the mattress.

Chris… It's so good to see you healthy and safe. You'll always be my partner!

"We're giving you a new title today, Chris," said Mayuka, pointing a finger at him. "You're a canine detective *and* a drug

buster. Got that?”

“*Woof!*” Chris barked loudly in reply.

Kobayashi chuckled to himself. “They’re called drug-detection dogs, actually.”

“*Woof!*” Chris barked again, as if to say, “Either is fine with me.”

Either is fine with me, too, Hinata thought. *As long as I can be with Chris forever!*

The dark curtain of night had already fallen over the port of Vladivostok. Somewhere in the distance a train whistle blew.

—The End—



Afterword

Spending Time with Chris Once More!



Hello, readers! We've reached the third volume of *Canine Detective Chris*.

In this volume, I switched things up significantly from the first and second book. The action is now taking place at sea. Hinata and Chris and their friends are on a luxury cruise ship!

Hinata's classmate Mito is a celebrated violinist, despite only being in elementary school. One day, at her invitation, Hinata, Mayuka, and Chris board a cruise ship called the *Primavera* while it's docked at port in order to hear her play.

However! What was supposed to be just a few hours on the ship turns into a much longer journey when they miss their chance to disembark and wind up in the Pacific, heading for Russia.

Even worse, the gang is accused of stealing an expensive violin. In order to prove their innocence, they'll need to find the missing violin *and* the real thief.

Between the passengers and the ship's crew, there are over two thousand suspects. This means that Chris's trusty nose and Hinata's logical mind can't function as well as they have before. Where did the violin go? And who's the real culprit…?

Have you ever been on a cruise ship? What? You took a trip on one over summer vacation? That's really great. As for me, of course I've…never been on one! (LOL.)

But I did so much research in books and online for this story that I now feel as though I've taken several cruises. At some point in my life, I'd like to go on a real voyage around the world.

When you sail to a bunch of ports in all sorts of countries, you get to spend time with people from many different cultures. You'll probably also spend time with passengers of all different skin, eye, and hair colors, all speaking different languages and observing different cultural practices and customs. Even the crew, as you'll no doubt notice, come from a variety of backgrounds.

I hope you enjoy this cruise with Hinata, Mayuka, and Chris, packed with international flavor. Of course, I hope you'll also enjoy the thrill of adventure and try your hand at solving the mystery, too.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our illustrator, KeG, for the dynamic front cover and all the illustrations that liven up the story. And thanks as well to my editor, Maho Yamaguchi, for suggesting we set the next story on a cruise ship! Thank you for all your help!

Tomoko Tabe

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