
RYOHGO NARITA
DURARARA!!
DRRR!!
11

DURARARA!!

# DRRR!!

## 11



**RYOHGO NARITA**

ILLUSTRATION BY

**SUZUHITO YASUDA**

**Izaya:** I hope Shizu breaks out of jail soon.

**Izaya:** Then he can get shot by the police.

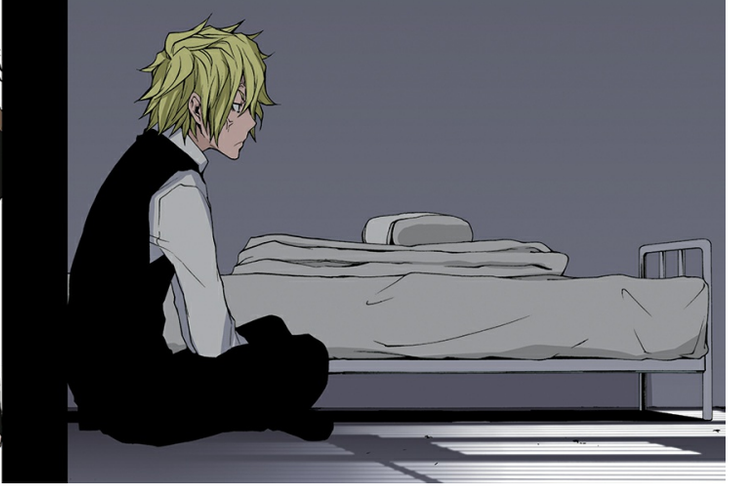
**Izaya:** I don't care if he goes to heaven or hell; I'd just be happy knowing he's not walking the earth anymore.

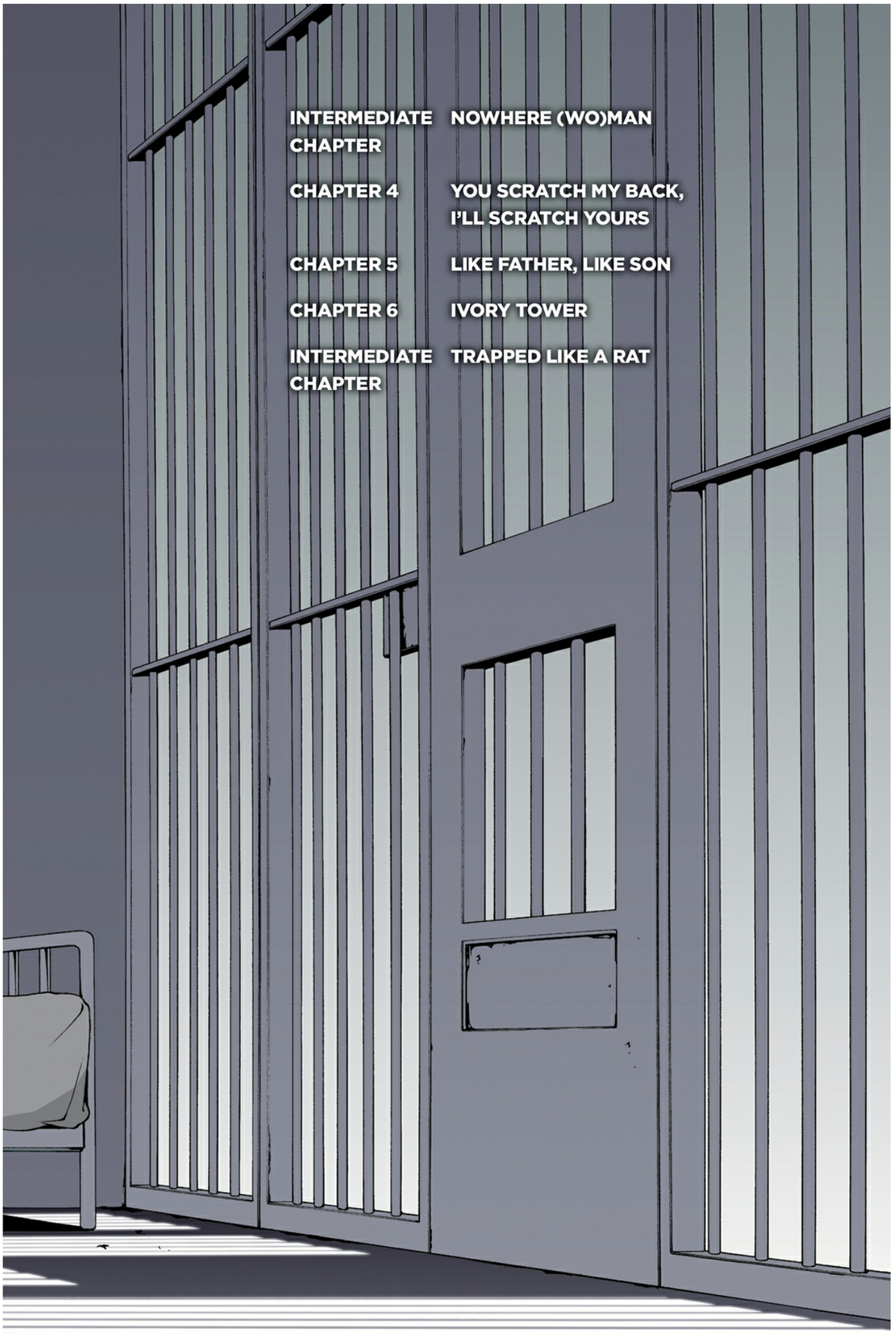


**Shizuo:** Dammit, I just wanna get out of here already...

**Shizuo:** Well then, I can either pay a visit to Tom and Vorona or crush that fleabrain for good... But which one should I do first...?

**Shizuo:** Now I'm getting pissed. If that damn fleabrain would just disappear already, I wouldn't have to pick between the two. I swear to God I'm gonna send that son of a bitch to hell...






| | |
|---|---|
| INTERMEDIATE CHAPTER | NOWHERE (WO)MAN |
| CHAPTER 4 | YOU SCRATCH MY BACK, I'LL SCRATCH YOURS |
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MIKA HARIMA
×
CELTY STURLUSON
SEIJI




## VOLUME 11

**Ryohgo Narita**
ILLUSTRATION BY **Suzuhito Yasuda**

YEN ON
NEW YORK

# Copyright

DURARARA!!, Volume 11

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“You don’t think that the way you’re trying to take over the Dollars for yourself makes you one of those very clingers?” Izaya teased.

Mikado laughed it off. *“Oh, please. This isn’t like you.”*

“You think so?”

*“I mean, I’ve always been a clinger. It’s why I’m destroying all of it,* including *myself. Once everything is back to normal and the Dollars are returned to their original state, I want to start something new. Maybe it would be interesting to properly include Sonohara and Masaomi in the Dollars.”*

*“…”*

*Yes! Fascinating! He’s the best!*

*Mikado Ryuugamine, I must confess I’m a bit surprised and in awe of you.*

*You’re the greatest kind of clown I’ve ever seen. You are humanity itself! I always had a hunch, and it turned out to be bang on!*

“Nice! That’s right, you’re human. If anyone is human, it’s you, Mikado Ryuugamine.”

*“Huh?”*

Izaya was so moved that he didn’t realize he’d spoken that part aloud. “You’re selfish, but you think of others, you commit crimes as a means of penance, you withdraw into your shell in order to change the world. You inhabit so many contradictions, and yet not everything falls under that particular logic—which is what makes you so human, in my opinion. I happen to think that one of humanity’s defining traits is the willingness to switch things up—to step into the crosswalk with your right foot first every single day, then start with your left today, for no particular reason.”

*“I don’t know what it is that you see in me, but I’m obviously not human in some archetypal sense. I’m just indecisive, that’s all.”*

“Oh, I wasn’t paying you a compliment. You’re indecisive, and yet your ability to act is unparalleled. You act slowly and smoothly but in unpredictable ways. Just like a pinwheel firework, spinning very slowly.”

*“You’re suggesting I’m destined to explode and die at the end,”* Mikado noted darkly.

Izaya stifled a chuckle. “That’s not my call to make. You do understand that I’m only assisting you kids in your struggle to move onward, right? It’s up to you to decide which direction you take that. And while we’re on the topic, Mr. Akabayashi being the one to come from the Awakusu-kai side is a huge opportunity for you. He’s not the kind of person who keeps threatening those who walk away from their side of society. You understand what I mean by that?”

*“…You’re saying that if I turn back, it has to be now?”*

“Yeah. As your senior in life, I’m undecided at the moment. I’ve got connections to him and the Awakusu-kai, as you know. I could get shot and killed at any moment. I don’t know whether I should take your hand and show you how to navigate the depths of this treacherous sea, or push you back up to the safety of the beach and the sunlight.”

*“Mr. Akabayashi said the same thing to me. But where I want to be is neither of those places, I think.”*

“Oh?”

*“In your analogy, I guess I want to be right at the breaking point of the waves at the shore. I feel like whether ordinary student or Dollars, if I choose just one, I’ll be destined to get bored with it. I’m not looking for life-risking thrills and chills. But I’m also not enamored with boring peace. That’s what the last six months have taught me.”*

The boy’s true wishes came through the phone, his voice clearly painted in complex and tangled emotions. The fact that there was still a note of uncertainty present spoke to just how truthful he was being about himself.

*“In the end, I just want to keep seeing things that are different from where I am now. So if I could just sit in a boat, right at the breaker, spinning and rocking with the waves…I guess…”*

Izaya did his best to suppress his emotion, eyes sparkling like he was about to open the mail-order box he’d been waiting for. “So this is what you’re saying,”

he teased. “You always want to be the guy gawking just at the barest margin of safety in all those videos capturing shocking events. You want to be the arsonist and the firefighter. You want to be the scientist who creates the giant monster, then the one to call the superhero for help. You want to cause trouble and get the credit for stopping it. You want to hog all the misery and joy, right from a front-row seat. Like you’re some kind of God.”

Mikado’s response to this mockery was quite simple. *“I would think that’s the devil, not God.”* But he didn’t deny any of it. *“It occurs to me—that would be* you, Izaya*.”*

“Is it a coincidence that you just called me Izaya instead of Mr. Orihara? Or by design?”

*“Is it that important? I called you Mr. Orihara earlier because it had been a while and I felt some distance, but it’s a bit of a mouthful.”*

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to call you out,” Izaya said. “It’s just that because my hobby is observation, I’m very sensitive to minor changes. I must say, though, I’m relieved. You haven’t changed at all.”

*“Huh?”*

“To be honest, I was worried. I thought you might’ve changed since the last time we spoke. But no, nothing about you has changed since that very first meeting. I mean, independent of personal growth. You’re moving forward while retaining who you are.”

Despite the fact that he’d just mentioned how it was human nature to switch things up out of nowhere, Izaya was now complimenting Mikado for his nature never changing. But it didn’t seem to fully register with the younger boy, whose voice was uncertain, hesitant.

*“Do you…think so?”*

“Yes. What you’re doing now is so extreme that you’ve been worried about yourself, haven’t you? Worried that you might be going crazy somehow.”

*“…”*

Izaya took his silence as agreement and sang his praises. “Right now, the

people around you are probably thinking things like, *He went crazy*, and *He's acting weird*, and *Someone's fooling him*. Particularly the people who know you well, like Anri Sonohara, Masaomi Kida, Dotach…er, Kyouhei Kadota, and Celty Sturluson."

*"…! I was trying to hide it from them…but I guess…I've been worrying folks like Celty."*

"Yes, I believe you have. She's not human, but she's got a strong image of humanity that she models herself after, based on TV shows and books and the like. In a sense, that's what makes her seem so human for being so inhuman. I guess she can't help but think that you're running wild at the moment. Because from a normal person's perspective, you seem to be going totally out of control."

Izaya followed his preamble with a more forceful answer.

"However, you don't need to worry about this, because I can guarantee that you, Mikado Ryuugamine, have not changed a bit from the moment you formed the Dollars! If you've gone mad, then it happened right at the time you formed your group, not *now*! When you got all those people together and declared war on a huge corporation with a single text message, *that was when you were insane*."

*"…"*

"And yet, you persisted in treading your ordinary daily life, with that air of madness inside of you. I'm quite jealous. I wasn't able to do that when I was in high school," Izaya said wistfully.

Mikado reacted to his mentor's plaudit with a soft snort. *"And…what do you intend to do with the Dollars, Izaya?"* he asked.

"What do you mean, what will I do?"

*"I'd like to think I know a bit about you. Even this very conversation has told me something. You're not just sitting back and quietly watching this unfold. Also, since this started up, I've been doing some research into the past."*

The past.

It was a word Mikado said with great meaning. But he otherwise did not change his tone of voice and didn't beat around the bush in revealing what he knew about then and now.

**"You're trying to do to us what you did to the Yellow Scarves two years ago, aren't you?"**

Silence reigned.

A train passed over the bridge above, and Izaya said nothing until the roar had passed.

Mikado heard the noise through the phone speaker and waited patiently.

After ten seconds of a very noisy silence, Izaya smiled. His eyes sparkled with surprise and delight. "With the distance you put between yourself and Kida, I didn't think you'd figure that out. Who did you hear that from, Tsukumoya?"

*"No…I searched out people who were low on the Yellow Scarves totem pole back then and lead normal lives now. I only got bits and pieces, but when put together from twenty different people's stories, I finally started to see the big picture."*

"Do you despise me?"

*"If anyone would, it'd be Masaomi, wouldn't you think? Oh, but…if Masaomi's big injury back in March had anything to do with you, then I suppose I should despise you… I wonder what the answer is. I guess I'll consider that again once things are back to normal between me and him,"* Mikado reflected, detached.

"I see," Izaya replied. "We'll put that off until later, then. Honestly, I was going to stay quiet about the whole thing, but at this point it doesn't seem like there's any reason to hide it."

He leaned against the wall of the tunnel, free hand in his pocket, looking up at the ceiling.

"It's true, I intend to mess with you two. But I'm not deciding if I'll be your ally or your enemy. Frankly, I think that remaining an observer is the fairest choice and will allow me to observe people in their most natural state, but that might be difficult at this point. You and Kida can't solve your issue anymore just

between you and the people you have doing your dirty work. The fact that Mr. Akabayashi's involved should make that clear, right?"

Still, he didn't bring up the issue of Kasane Kujiragi. He could have gone ahead and revealed that Hiroto Shijima was his own cat's-paw but decided against doing that. He knew that actions he took while elated often had a way of coming back around to bite him.

But usually that happened because he couldn't help himself and did it anyway.

Mikado took Izaya's statement with a grain of salt. *"If possible…I'd appreciate having you on my side. As one of the people who knows what the Dollars were on that first meeting…"*

"Well, that's tricky. Even I can't tell what I'll be doing up ahead. Ultimately, what I want to see is other people, not myself. My biggest pleasure in life is observing what others do when placed in unpredictable circumstances. So yes, I will start all the fires and put them all out to that end."

*"…It wasn't* you *who arranged the stunt with the head, was… Aaah!!"* Mikado yelped. Izaya's eyes narrowed in curiosity at the sudden shift in his voice.

*"Oh! That's right!"* Mikado continued. *"That's what I wanted to call you about!"*

"?"

*"Were you aware of today's news, Izaya?!"*

"No, I just got done with something. I haven't checked the news recently. Did something happen?" Izaya asked, sensing something abnormal in the tone of Mikado's voice.

*"You'd be better off just turning on the TV for the news, rather than hearing it from me! You could even check the news on your phone! In fact, I was calling because I wanted to ask if you had anything to do with it…but based on your reaction, I'm guessing you didn't,"* Mikado said, clearly agitated. Then he claimed he would call back and hung up.

Izaya recalled the police cars he'd seen passing by and decided to just check it

out on his phone. In all honestly, he'd have preferred to bask in the splendidness of humanity, out of respect for young Mikado Ryuugamine, but he felt a note of unease in his chest and pulled out a separate smartphone so that he could launch his own special news-aggregating app.

*Maybe Shizu broke out of the holding cell. Man, it would be awesome if they would just shoot him down…*

He gazed at the screen of the smartphone, holding to that faint hope—and when the headline "Woman's Head in Crowded Ikebukuro" appeared, his mind froze.

It was less than a second, but if Shizuo Heiwajima just so happened to be throwing a vending machine at him in that moment, he would have perished without any means to avoid it.

Once the momentary shock—powerful enough to expose him to fatal threat—had passed, Izaya scanned the details of the article, then launched another online app.

A quick check of the obscure, underground image site brought him what he was looking for very quickly. The instant he saw the face that was identical to Mika Harima's, Izaya understood.

It was not Mika Harima's head. It was the head of Celty Sturluson, which was supposed to be in his possession.

The culprit was likely Manami Mamiya.

And her motive was simple: provocation.

It was for that reason, that extremely personal and petty reason, that she threw the entire city into a panic and totally destroyed a portion of Izaya's plans.

And Izaya's reaction to losing one of the best aces up his sleeve was overwhelming *joy*.

"I see… So that's how you want this!"

He had accepted Manami Mamiya into his team as an irregular element that would interfere with him. His goal was not something experimentally

productive like forcing his operation to tighten up by including an enemy among the ranks. No, it was for the most Izaya of reasons: a desire to observe what a girl who lived on nothing but hatred for him might do.

Naturally, he was under the assumption that she would do *something*.

She'd report their activities to the police, or try to kill him in his sleep, or dump poison into the water tank of the building, knowing full well it would harm other members and innocent residents.

He maintained a minimum of caution, of course, since getting himself killed wasn't the idea—but what she ultimately did far surpassed his expectations. He anticipated that she would steal the head, but his guess was that she would either give it back to Celty, take it to Nebula, or offer it to Kasane Kujiragi.

*I never expected she'd get the entire world involved in it.*

It was as though, by shining the spotlight of the public's attention on the head, she was exposing everyone and everything in this secret state of affairs—Dollars, Jinnai Yodogiri, Awakusu-kai, Izaya, even the dullahan and Saika—to the world at large.

"…Ha-ha!"

He could no longer hold back his laughter.

Gales of it burst forth, echoing off the walls of the tunnel, laughter that threatened to bowl over the entire world.

When a new train passed over, the clatter and roar of it harmonized with the laughter in ugly ways, chilling both any pedestrians in the area and even the Dragon Zombie members who waited a short distance away.

*This is what makes humanity so wonderful!*

*I admit it, Manami Mamiya—I'm taken aback by your actions. In fact, you might even say I've been put on a major mental defensive. And I couldn't be happier!*

*But this isn't the end, is it?*

He considered the current affairs anew, a sign of utmost respect for the girl who'd placed him in great danger.

*I guess this means I should start moving in earnest, then. Shizu's stuck with the police thanks to that thing with Earthworm, so I can move around in safety. And thankfully, Kasane Kujiragi's Saika children will extend his time in captivity.*

*You know…that meeting with Anri Sonohara this morning seemed portentous. After talking with Mikado, I feel like today is marked by fate. In order to turn coincidence into inevitability, I suppose I should work on Kida later tonight, perhaps.*

Malevolent plans swirled in his heart, blissful smile on his lips.

Now, in the moment, when his plans were in danger of being destroyed, he felt the pure opportunity of human observation, a hope that no one else would ever bother to believe in.

*Parking garage, Tokyo*

It was one of Tokyo's uncountable unmanned standing garages, not very far from Ikebukuro. This had once been a hangout for the Blue Squares, but after the past squabble, the Yellow Scarves had used Izaya Orihara's information to root it out and take over the territory.

When the Blue Squares broke up, and after Masaomi left the gang, some local teens occasionally loitered around the area—but now the folks in yellow were back in full force.

Not that they ever bothered the cars that used the garage. They didn't even sit out in the open where people would take notice. They knew that if any of the usual people complained, the police would come down on them at once. Apparently the cops regularly patrolled the area back in the days of the Blue Squares.

Masaomi Kida made use of that information, using the garage less as a base of operations than a clandestine hideout. Even after he left, the practices he had put in place had been followed, so it was extremely rare that an officer ever came around anymore.

On the roof of the garage, Masaomi was holding a meeting with the other

Yellow Scarves.

“Okay, so we’ve got to watch out for this huge guy with the sleepy eyes. If the rumors are accurate, he’s probably a guy from Kushinada High called Houjou.”

The plan to lure out and strike the Blue Squares yesterday had worked up to a point. But when the large youth got out of the van, the entire skirmish ended in a draw and mutual retreat.

“So…I guess they’re serious about this,” said Kouji Yatabe, one of the senior members.

Masaomi nodded gravely. “Same goes for me. I was dead serious about fighting them off. If it weren’t for the Blue Squares, he and I could’ve had a good fistfight and gotten this all over with already.”

“How many times have you said that, Shogun?”

“Yeah, you can’t keep playing the old hits.” His friends chuckled, annoyed. Masaomi laughed, too.

“I’ll say it as many times as I want. Thanks for sticking around through my personal battle, guys.”

“This is so dorky.”

“Ahh, bittersweet youth!” they joked to hide their embarrassment.

Masaomi prepared himself to get serious again so they could discuss their next actions—but he sensed a silhouette moving out of the corner of his eye and glanced that way.

A young man dressed in casual attire emerged from the elevator. Probably just an ordinary person getting his car, Masaomi mused and turned back to his friends.

But then he realized that something struck him as wrong, and he glanced back.

He understood what it was.

The man wasn’t heading for any of the cars parked on the roof. He was walking straight for their group.

“Hey,” Masaomi said, and his friends turned to look.

They got to their feet, sending dangerous warning glances. There were only five or so of them, but this was one man. If he was with the Blue Squares, they could handle him.

Most importantly, their shogun, Masaomi Kida, was here. This wasn’t like when they had sparred with Houjou yesterday.

They stared the man down, putting their full trust in Masaomi’s presence. But for his part, Masaomi was feeling a light layer of sweat break out.

He knew the man approaching them.

*You’ve gotta be kidding me. What’s he doing here…?*

At first, he didn’t recognize the man. After all, the previous time they met had been under drastically different circumstances.

When he’d been *secretly listening to Mikado Ryuugamine talk to this man* on the street, his face had been covered by many bandages. It was only the sight of his distinctive hat that gave him away.

“Chikage…Rokujou…,” he muttered.

The other members turned toward him. “Huh? You know this guy, Shogun?”

“I don’t *know* him… I’ve never talked to him. But that’s the head of a motorcycle gang from Saitama called Toramaru.”

“Saitama?” they repeated, befuddled.

All the while, Chikage Rokujou continued forward, until he was close enough to have a dialogue with.

He stopped there and raised a hand to them. “Yo. You guys are Yellow Scarves, right?” he said breezily.

Yatabe and the others shared an uneasy look, but Masaomi stepped forward. “That’s right… I don’t see your girls with you this time, Chikage Rokujou.”

Chikage looked surprised. He gave the smaller boy an appraising glance. “Yeah. Sounds like something gnarly was happening right outside the train station. I sent them back home. But, um…more importantly, sorry, kid. Have we

met somewhere before?”

“No. This is our first time talking. But you’re pretty famous, you know that?”

Chikage considered the words, then smirked. “Ah, I see. This is just a hunch, but I’m betting you must be the boss of the Yellow Scarves, huh?”

“Technically, yes. Once divorced.” Masaomi snorted.

Rokujou readjusted his hat and said, “Well, I don’t think I need to introduce myself, then, but I’ll do it anyway. I’m Chikage Rokujou. I run a little gang called Toramaru over in the Kawagoe area.”

“Masaomi Kida.”

Chikage cracked his neck and gave Masaomi another once-over. “Hmm. I was imagining more of a burly bandit type. You’re smaller than I expected.”

“If anything, I bet the rest of society would be more surprised to learn that *you* lead a street gang.”

“You think so? Well…it’s true that I kind of stick out against the rest of my boys.”

“So what brings you here today?” Masaomi asked, neither sucking up to nor looking down on his visitor, merely cautious.

“Oh, right, right. My business.” Chikage chuckled. He answered the question with another question. “You guys are at war with another group called the Dollars, right?”

“…Yes, that’s true.”

“Well, I’ve got a complex situation with them. Lots of favors owed back and forth,” the young man said, always breezy and friendly. “So I know this is sudden, but I was hoping you could choose for me.”

“…Choose what?”

“Whether you want your gang taken over or destroyed entirely.”

*Ikebukuro Park*

Anri followed Haruna Niekawa to a park located next to Sunshine Street.

Despite it being midday during summer vacation, it was only sparsely populated. The familiar blue vinyl tarps were visible in the back of the park, but there were no homeless around at the moment, just a few people taking a break from their nearby offices and several students enjoying their vacation. Nobody was even sitting at the stone benches in front of the fountain. Upon close inspection, hardly anyone was actually off their feet.

The only person she could see doing so was an office lady perusing a magazine on a bench under a tree, farther away from the fountain.

"…Shall we sit here?" Haruna asked and lowered herself onto a stone bench at the fountain. Anri was cautious, unsure if she should take a seat with some distance between them.

"Oh, don't be so timid," the other girl said, smiling softly despite the overt hostility. "Given the power of your Saika, it doesn't matter how far apart we sit, does it?"

Anri found the offer creepy but sat down next to her anyway. Right before them was a beautiful water fountain, the liquid cascading down stone steps, but Anri was not in any state to relax and enjoy it.

"Umm…Miss Niekawa…" She was still the first to speak, bobbing her head and avoiding looking at the other girl. "I saw on the Dollars' website…that your father is looking for you…"

"My dad is? Oh, I see. It's been awhile since I left home."

"I think it would be best if you went back to him," Anri suggested.

"No," Haruna replied flatly. "I'm grateful to him for raising me, but I don't revere him as a person. It's more important to me that I look for Takashi than help my dad feel better."

*Takashi.*

Anri recalled the teacher: Takashi Nasujima. He worked at Raira Academy, then disappeared after the street slasher incident. Rumors said that he was

kidnapped by some fellows he owed money—but Anri's memory of him was completely isolated from the rumors and his image as a teacher.

He had singled her out right at the start of school and would do her favors so that he could then take advantage of her in various harassing and inappropriate ways. He had also had a relationship with Haruna Niekawa, and it was at her fanatical, besotted hand that he'd been slashed.

Anri had no interest in him. In fact, despite her lack of negative feelings toward others in general, she had a rare distaste for him personally.

But no matter what he was like, Haruna was madly in love with him. In fact, she started the slashing incident and tried to kill Anri, just so she could monopolize his affections. For his part, Nasujima was terrified of Haruna.

Anri recalled the events of half a year ago and hesitantly asked, "Are you… going to do all that again?"

"'Again'? You mean my love for Takashi? What a strange thing to say, Sonohara." Haruna slowly panned over to look at her, still smiling. "Love might begin at one point, but it does not *resume*. If love ever ends, even temporarily, then it was never love to begin with."

She then put a finger to her cheek in contemplation and continued, "But I'm not selfish enough to claim that a married couple who divorces and gets back together 'wasn't actually in love.' That wasn't love coming to an end. They just changed the way they love each other."

"O…kay…"

"Being together forever is love. Putting distance between you is also love. Even hating is love. There are countless ways to love, and all of them are valid. That's what I've come to believe. And it's because you stabbed me, and I've grown more deeply intertwined with Saika."

Words of gratitude. Yet, Anri could keenly sense that none of the hatred and hostility in the other girl had dimmed. She stayed on guard, prepared to launch Saika from anywhere in her body in case a blade came hurtling toward her.

The idea filled her with self-loathing: She was ready to utilize Saika without a second thought.

No ordinary person would simply play along with Niekawa's invitation. Izaya's words earlier today had jammed themselves deep into her heart. She had completely accepted that she was not human.

*…I thought I gave up already.*

After leaving the hospital, she tried to call Mikado many times and only reached his voice mail. She didn't have any better luck getting in touch with Celty.

Izaya had warned her that her friends might be in trouble, and yet here she was, calmly spending time with Haruna Niekawa. She really wasn't human, she told herself. And despite her self-loathing, she never even considered letting go of Saika, the root of her contradiction.

"So…did you come here to kill me?" she asked.

A woman sat on a bench in the shade of a tree, reading a magazine.

Kasane Kujiragi could sense the presence of other Saikas in the park aside from her own.

*Two of them.*

Based on the auras, she suspected that one of them was a Saika she branched off twenty years ago, and the other had been an offshoot of that one.

She had assumed at first that they'd tamed Saika's voices enough to sense her presence here and were coming to her for some reason—but when she glanced over at them, she saw that they were sitting on a distant bench instead, having a conversation. They didn't seem to sense her.

*Anri Sonohara.*

Kasane knew that much. The sight of the girl with the glasses gave her pause. Apparently, it was a simple coincidence that brought them to this park with her.

So what now?

A magazine full of information and mother-and-daughter Saikas.

Which would be easier, defeating them both and presenting them to Seitarou

Yagiri or handing over her own Saika (or a newly branched one)? The latter would be far easier.

So Kujiragi turned the pages of her magazine, pretending not to notice anything.

…Except for the occasional cries of stray cats, which prompted her to glance around dispassionately.

“Did you come here to kill me?” Anri asked.

Haruna never lost her smile as she answered, “Yes, I did…or I wish I did. But no. I forgive you.”

“…?”

“The old me would never have forgiven you—or any woman that Takashi loved. But after you controlled me, I matured a little. So as the older, more worldly woman, I can make a special exception for you.”

Anri wasn’t sure what to make of this. There shouldn’t have been any question of forgiveness—Anri had never done anything to Haruna—but even setting that aside, there was something wrong with what she was saying.

For one thing, none of the hostility emanating toward Anri had abated in the least. It made no sense that she was talking about forgiving, when the fires in her eyes suggested murder.

It wasn’t even a matter of holding back anger. She didn’t look like she was doing her best to stifle hatred. She was simply smiling.

Unsure of how to process all this, Anri waited for her to continue.

“I still hate you. Enough to torture you to death if I had the chance. You stole Takashi’s heart from me and left. *And* you had the gall to reject him. I swore… what you did was unforgivable…”

She glanced away, seemingly out of shame. “But then I was exposed to Saika’s voice…the real voice you’ve been hearing all this time, and you conquered me…”

“Uh-huh…”

“I’m all screwed up now. I just wanted to slice Takashi, have him slice me, and mix us together in one sticky mess. I wanted us to be one in our endless love… but your mind defiled my body first. It ran rampant over me. But then I remembered: No matter how dirty I might be, no matter how much Takashi despises me, my love for him will never change. I can even turn my hatred for *you* into love.”

“? ??”

*Umm…what exactly is she saying?*

Anri wasn’t following. The more she talked, the more the confusion mounted.

It would’ve been easier if she’d just decided that it was pointless trying to understand someone with a few screws loose, but Anri considered Haruna Niekawa to be firmly within the range of “normal human beings.” In fact, she even respected her for her proactivity when it came to romance.

But respect and understanding were completely distinct concepts, so ultimately Anri was at a loss for how to respond to any of this.

“I overcame the power of your Saika all on my own, Anri Sonohara. But I only overpowered it. I might be maintaining my human self by a thread, but your Saika is still within me. It should have been separate from my Saika, but they’ve begun mixing within me.”

“Th-they have?”

Anri was the host of Saika, but she had never been sliced and turned into a “child.” It was possible to imprint one’s will and orders on any child of Saika’s blade edge, but the child’s thoughts did not get back to her unless by the child’s own mouth.

“Why are you acting like this is someone else’s problem? I want you to *take responsibility*. And then *I* can take responsibility for *being stabbed by you*.”

“…Huh?”

“I’m saying, let’s work together.”

Anri was not expecting this suggestion at all. She still had no idea how to

process any of this.

“Mikado Ryuugamine and Masaomi Kida,” Haruna continued. “You’re interested in both of them, but you’re not cheating on one with the other.”

“…!”

The mention of her friends’ names brought a flash of color to Anri’s eyes. Not figuratively—literally. Her eyes flashed red.

“Don’t…don’t you dare mess with them!” she snapped.

Haruna chuckled mockingly. “Oh, I’m not going to do anything. Because the people important to you are also important to me.”

“What…do you mean by that?”

“I’m not like the people who got cut when Saika ran berserk. You cut me of your own conscious will, with the intent of controlling me.” Haruna leaned over, drawing her shoulder close to Anri’s, close enough to breathe on her, hot and trickling against the back of her neck, the voice almost sensual next to her ear. “Did you think…that it was only Saika’s voice that came flooding into me?”

“?!”

“I didn’t realize it at first, either. Not until I could overpower Saika’s voice. But…once I was able to regain control, I noticed that there was another emotion inside of me. For Mikado Ryuugamine and Masaomi Kida. Two boys I’ve barely even met, much less talked to.”

“No!” Anri turned to face Haruna directly at last.

The other girl’s face, nearly close enough for their noses to touch, was brimming with madness, but curiously, this imbued her with a kind of beauty. “It’s a good thing you felt hesitation about it. And it’s a very good thing your feelings for either of them hadn’t reached the level of love. There is no definition of love, but at the very least, I was relieved that your emotion was a far cry from what I felt for Takashi. If you had feelings for them that were the same as my love for Takashi, I might have had to split my body into three parts.”

“My…feelings?”

“Yes. It might not have been love or romance, but I could tell that you cared about them. Now those emotions have permeated me, along with Saika’s power. All I want is for you to take responsibility for doing that.”

Haruna took Anri’s hand and ran her fingers over the back of it. In her own way, she seemed to be testing Anri, using whatever methods came to her.

“I was forced to peer into your heart, you see. While it may have been inevitable, my attempt to kill you *was* the start of all of it, so I will take a step back from there.”

“But…how do you want me to do that?”

“What have I been saying this whole time? I’m a part of you now, and you’re a part of me.”

“!”

Something in those words brought back Saika’s voice to Anri’s mind.

*“I’ve become just a little bit you, and you’re just a little bit me.”*

Had she and Haruna Niekawa become connected at some point in their hearts, the way she and Saika had? As a test, she thought about Nasujima, but no affection of any kind surfaced.

Secretly relieved about that, she said, “I don’t think that’s true…”

“Regardless of what you think, that’s just how important human emotions are to me. So while I really, really loathe you, I’m willing to classify that as self-loathing instead.”

Haruna squeezed Anri’s hand, and pressed her forehead with her own. It was the act of two close friends, but that hatred never disappeared from the act.

“So I want your help in making my love for Takashi bloom.”

“Ohhh… Wait, what?!” Anri yelped.

“And in exchange, I’ll help you with your own romance,” Haruna continued, watching Anri’s expression for any changes as she trod further and further into the other girl’s heart. “How much do you know about what’s happening with Ryuugamine right now?”

“…!”

That question was a terrible blow to Anri’s mind, coming so soon after Izaya’s unsettling metaphor earlier in the day.

“Do you…know something about that?”

“Why, yes, of course. When you work *running errands for Izaya*, you hear those two names so often it gets obnoxious.”

“For Izaya Orihara?!”

“Ooh, I felt the anger there. Did something happen between you and him? And yet you were still polite enough to refer to him by his full name. I guess that does seem like you. Oh…I guess I’ve just been calling you Anri this whole time. Is that all right, just calling you by your first name? I mean, we’re friends already.”

It was a brazen thing to drop the term *friends* when she wasn’t even bothering to hide the murder in her voice. “If we get closer than we are now, I might even come up with a nickname for you. Oh, and you can call me Haruna, too. I know you’re younger than I am, but since we’re such good friends…”

“Haruna, please just tell me about Ryuugamine! What is Izaya Orihara going to do to him?! What’s he going to do to Ryuugamine and Kida?!” Anri demanded. It was telling of her personality that despite her panic, she immediately followed the other girl’s suggestion about her name.

Haruna’s eyes crinkled with delight at the mention of her name, but this did nothing to her malice. “How should I know what that sadist plans to do? It’s bound to be whatever the other person wants least at the moment he does it. And if you want to know what those boys are doing…it’s probably better to use Saika’s power and hear it from them yourself, rather than asking me.”

“But…”

“I still have plenty of children from Saika around the city. Some clever control of them should help you find who you’re looking for very quickly.”

“…”

Despite the concrete suggestion, Anri was unable to reply. It wasn’t that she’d

never considered the idea. But even she couldn't tell anymore if her hesitation was because she didn't want to use Saika's powers, or if she just didn't want to intrude on the problem between Mikado and Masaomi.

This was why Haruna's incredible ability to act and think positively made her so envious.

Haruna watched the other girl hang her head and said, "You know…you've changed a bit."

"Huh…?"

"When you cut me, you said, 'Saika gets lonely, so please love her back. It hurts to hear you talk about suppressing her or using her.' And yet, I've just been talking about overpowering and using Saika, and you haven't called me out for it… In fact, it's just like *you've* been trying to hold back Saika."

"…!"

She was right.

Anri always told herself that she was a parasite. That depending on Saika, depending on the rest of the world, was just how she survived and made her way through life.

But since the slasher incident, she'd had more and more interaction with Mikado, Masaomi, Celty, Shinra, even Aoba, and all of this had effected a clear change in her surroundings.

The influence of that created instability in her heart. Anri was aware of the change, but she had gone out of her way not to acknowledge it, afraid that the moment she did so, she would lose everything that made her who she was.

"…Hmm. You seem serious. That's ironic. The moment I suggest that we should leech off each other, now you're the one who's trying to control and use Saika. Maybe I rubbed off on you…? No, that's not true. Even as friends, that would never happen."

It was strange that Haruna was harping on the word *friends* so often, but Anri was in such an extreme mental state she didn't notice.

Haruna sighed and continued, "Well…how about this? How about *I take your*

*Saika for you*?”

“M…my Saika?” Anri replied. For an instant, she wondered if that was even possible, then shut the idea completely out of her mind.

At the current moment, the only way she could help the boys was to use Saika, regardless of how she felt about that. And if the conversation with Izaya had taught her anything, it was that this was not the moment for her to lessen her options for action.

And a more fundamental question would be why she should ever hand over her original Saika to the woman who willfully engaged in a campaign of indiscriminate violence.

“…I don’t think I will.” Anri squeezed her fist, eyes gleaming.

“You won’t? I thought it was a good offer,” Haruna replied, playing the part of an innocent schoolgirl. She smoothly got to her feet, took a few steps toward the fountain, then turned back around.

Anri’s level of caution instantly shot up to maximum.

“!”

Haruna was merely smiling with her eyes closed—but suddenly there was a large knife in her hands.

“At the very least, I’m sure I could use it better than you can now,” she said, still smiling, eyes wide open. “Thank you for turning me down. Now I have a reason to fight you.”

Her eyes were bloodred and shining. She brandished her blade at Anri without a second thought.

“Even between friends, you sometimes have a fight to the death… It just happens!”

*Seconds earlier*

"…Meow," Kujiragi murmured, her expression blank.

Her eyes were focused on a cat that had wandered up to her bench. Now others were poking their heads out of the nearby bushes in interest.

"…Meow. Meow-meow."

Not only was she doing it without expression, she wasn't even mimicking the wheedling tones of an actual cat, just saying the word *meow* in a deadpan monotone. It was like one of those computer-generated voices programmed to read your e-mail out loud.

No one aside from her could possibly know what was going through her mind as she did this, but it did suggest that she viewed cats with some fondness. She began rifling through her pockets for some kind of food to offer them.

She didn't find anything and eventually realized that it probably wasn't good to give food to stray cats anyway, so she gave up. But the one especially friendly kitten came forward anyway and rubbed its side against her ankles.

*"Mrow?"* The kitten pressed its tiny pad against her heel.

She crouched down and held out her hand to the cat, nearly at ground level.

*If you want to pet a cat, slowly approach under its chin…*

Just when she was about to make contact…

A sharp metallic clash rang through the park.

The cats, who had sharper hearing than humans and even dogs, flinched and turned to the source of the noise, then scattered into the bushes like a nest of baby spiders.

"…"

Kasane was left with her hand in the air and nothing to pet. She turned her head to observe, her expression unchanging.

And there she saw the owner of the original Saika, stopping one of two knives with a blade growing from her palm, while the other knife was pressed to her throat.



“That’s checkmate, Sonohara.”

“…”

“Consider the fact that I’m not stabbing a hole in your throat to be evidence that my offer wasn’t a lie.”

Haruna grinned devilishly, her eyes burning red. The bloodshot color was deeper than the usual “children”—perhaps an effect of being slashed by the original Saika twice—and it was focused around her pupils. In the light of day, it was almost impossible to distinguish from Anri’s original red eyes.

“You’re so nice. If you’d just attacked me without any warning at the start, it never would have reached this point,” Haruna continued.

“…I might have a reason to cut you but not to kill you.”

“Don’t glare at me that way.” Haruna chuckled. Like before, she tapped her forehead against Anri’s. “Why, it doesn’t even sound like you’re bluffing. As if you would kill me, even *if* you had a reason.”

“…!”

Anri felt her entire body tense. What had she been thinking that caused her to say what she did?

*I don’t have a reason to kill you.*

It was the sort of thing that a hit man or a trained killer bent on revenge would say to someone who wasn’t their ultimate target in an action-thriller movie.

If she did have a reason to kill, would she have actually done it? Would she have swung at the other girl’s throat from a distance with her Saika and cut it open? Would she have impaled her through the heart?

*“You don’t* still *think you’re human, do you?”* Izaya’s words repeated in her mind, stabbing at her heart once more.

Was he right? Was she no longer human? She couldn’t be certain.

A true nonhuman like Celty would probably hear out Haruna's quip and boldly state, "You're just playing with words." Masaomi would joke something like, "Sure, I've got a reason to kill. How about my parents being murdered?"

But Anri Sonohara only wanted an answer that came from within herself.

*Am I…am I really mixing…with Saika…?*

If Saika's words were true, was this a phenomenon she ought to accept? She couldn't even answer that question. She had nothing but confusion.

Even sharper than the blade Haruna had pressed to her throat were the girl's words, which tore at Anri's heartstrings without any resistance—but it helped that *Izaya* had already scoured the places that were cut, to make it all the easier.

"…What's wrong? It's like the old you who cut me was an entirely different person," Haruna said, realizing what was wrong at last. Her anticipatory smile vanished. "So what now? Will you beg for your life? Or will you briefly withdraw your blade and emit it from a different place to pierce my chest? Shall we have a contest to see which of us can slice the other faster?"

"I…I wish you would stop this."

"What? Wait, are you actually going to beg?"

"No…I'm just not sure…what I should actually do now…"

Despite having a blade at her throat with utmost malice, Anri showed no sign of actual fear. But she wasn't exactly implacable, either. From her side of the picture frame to the other, she asked weakly, "Do you…think I'm human? Or… do you think I'm a monster…?"

Haruna's brows knitted. "You're not human *or* monster. You're a parasite… That's what you said to me ages ago."

"Oh… You're right. I did say that. I'm sorry…," Anri said, with a forlorn smile. Then she closed her eyes and withdrew the sword back into her body. "That's right… In any case, I'm not human."

"…?"

Haruna seemed to find Anri withdrawing all her defenses eerie and didn't

press her advantage.

"Then I choose to *latch myself onto you*, Haruna *the human*."

"Oh? What's with the change of heart? The way you're acting so nice and obedient all of a sudden is frightening me."

"I think that I'm not capable of processing things the way that a normal human would anymore. I can't even tell if what I want to do is actually going to help Ryuugamine or Kida."

So in that case, would it actually work out better if she just followed all of Haruna's suggestions? Would Haruna even be misled by Saika's words?

*That's wrong*, Anri thought. *If I let her call all the shots, things will go very bad, fast. The street-slashing incident will come back but all over the city, in a much more vicious way.*

"Please…just tell me one thing."

It was a decision made by the logical mind of no one else but Anri Sonohara, but after being consecutively shaken by Saika, Izaya, and Haruna over the course of a single day, it was nearly impossible for her to trust her own judgment.

"Would you be able to save Ryuugamine and Kida…?"

"…"

Haruna didn't expect that question. She fell silent.

In fact, she found Anri's sudden hesitation and timidity to be creepy. Wouldn't it be better just to kill her and take Saika away? Or was this some kind of tactic?

She pulled her second knife away from Anri's neck and pointed it at her face instead, hoping to find out Anri's intentions. The tip stuck in her cheek, nearly ready to slice— "The cats are running away."

A third party's voice entered the scene.

Apparently, it had been directed at Anri, whose mental grip was getting tenuous.

Somehow, there was a woman standing right next to them. She glanced at Haruna, then at Anri, and said, “It’s the first time I’ve ever seen a *mother and child* in a battle to the death, but you’re really just being a bother. Could you please do that somewhere else?”

The new woman was unafraid to scold the two Saikas. While she and Anri were both quiet and wore glasses, the resemblance stopped there. She looked plain at first glance, but on closer examination, her skin was so smooth it was practically clear, perfect as porcelain.

The one black glove on just her right hand was a bit eccentric, but aside from that, she looked like some pretty secretary enjoying a lunch break on her workday.

“…Who are you?” Haruna glared, suspicious of the sudden interloper. “Can’t you tell we’re in the middle of something important?”

Without a moment’s hesitation, she thrust the knife that was not pointed at Anri’s face toward the new woman—not as a threat but an actual attack.

Anri held her breath, and then she realized what it was that struck her about the woman’s words.

*Mother and child.*

Why had she used that description to refer to two girls wearing school uniforms?

She came to the answer at the same moment that a dull metallic impact rang throughout the park.

“…Huh?”

It was Haruna Niekawa who gaped. The look on her face was much like the time that Anri first showed her the full form of Saika. She glanced back and forth from the woman to the *thing*.

“What…is that…? Who are you…?”

Something like metal fingernails had promptly jutted from the fingers of the woman’s left hand, catching Haruna’s knife blade. While it was not at all like a katana, each and every one of her nails was its own sharp little edge.

With her eyes *blazing red*, the woman answered, “Forgive my late introduction. I am Kasane Kujiragi. This is an original Saika blade.”

“”!””

Both Anri and Haruna reacted to the woman’s simple revelation with shock.

*Saika.* She had definitely said it.

Before Anri could ask a follow-up question, Haruna leaped into action.

With her one knife still tangled with the woman’s nails, she used the other to swing at the target’s neck—but it was forced to a stop partway.

A silver wirelike cord shot from Kujiragi’s ankle and locked up Haruna’s body.

“Rrgh…aaah…!” She winced, gritting her teeth against the pain of the silver rope digging into her skin, but never stopped trying to swing her arm.

“I have no problem with resisting your mother. There are many reasons one might do so: rebellious phases, becoming independent. But I draw the line when it comes to open physical hostility,” Kujiragi said with clinical dispassion and grabbed part of the silver rope with her gloved hand.

Then she deftly wriggled the tip of the rope and caused it to press a switch hidden on her arm.

“~~~~!”

Haruna let out a silent shriek, her body jolting. After a few seconds of convulsing, Kujiragi instantly undid the rope, retracting it into her body. Her finger blades were gone, too. All that was left was Kujiragi, standing normally, and Haruna falling to her knees.

As a helpless bystander, Anri could only demand, “Wh-what did you do to Haruna?!”

“Merely an electric current through my glove. It is not a fatal flow, but I did run it through her entire body, so she won’t be able to control her muscles for a little while.”

“Aaa…au…”

Haruna writhed on the ground, just barely clinging to consciousness. She

looked up at Kujiragi with eyes full of hatred and suspicion.

“Haruna, are you all right?!”

Anri crouched down and tried to lift Haruna’s body, but it was still trembling and twitching, and the process was too difficult.

“You should just let her lie there. She will recover soon.”

Anri looked up at the woman named Kujiragi again.

*Who is she?*

*Why does she have Saika?*

*One of the “children” I don’t know…?*

*No. That can’t be right.*

*A normal “child” can’t do what she just did.*

*Is she…a magician?*

*…It can’t be.*

Thoughts came and went in a wave.

Anri swallowed hard and tried to catch one of the countless questions swirling around in her mind to ask the woman. The best she could come up with was, “Um…why didn’t that electricity paralyze you, too?”

With no affect whatsoever, the woman said, “Oh, it did. My right arm and left leg are temporarily immobilized, but it is not a problem.”

But her right arm and left ankle, the places where she was connected to the silver rope, did not actually seem to be trembling.

There was clearly something wrong with this woman. She was not an ordinary human. That much was apparent.

“When you say Saika…what do you mean? Saika is inside me. Plus…what you just did didn’t look like Saika to me…”

Fingernail blades and steel ropes—it just didn’t seem to add up to Saika when the woman said that name.

But instead of answering Anri’s question, the woman said, “On the other

hand, you don't seem to be making full use of Saika at all."

"Huh…?"

Kujiragi glanced down at her feet, where Haruna was still moaning. "Before I stepped in, you could have produced *two Saikas* and easily overcome this woman, it seemed to me."

"Two…Saikas?"

"…Don't tell me that you think Saika can only take the form of a single katana," Kujiragi exclaimed without emotion. It put Anri in mind of something Saika said to her at the hospital this morning.

*"It's how your mother was able to use me better. She could do a number of things that you cannot."*

She had forced Saika's voice down to where it didn't bother her, but now she was curious about this.

*Something I can't do? Use two Saikas…? Dual wield…?*

*Were her nails and that rope…a different form of Saika?*

*But Saika is inside me… How does she have that?*

She also noticed something else that bothered her: Just as had happened when she encountered Izaya, Saika's endless chanting of love had vanished from her mind.

As if afraid of this Kujiragi woman or disgusted.

*Kujiragi.*

*Who…is she?*

*And what was that about cats?*

The more she thought, the more questions she had to answer, filling her head and dragging her deeper into confusion.

After watching Anri for a while, Kujiragi opened her mouth and said, "It was coincidence that I was in this park. I did not follow you here."

"?"

“But I’m uncertain now. Perhaps meeting you so soon after gaining my own freedom is an act of fate,” Kujiragi said, unaware that it was the same cat-ear headband that had brought both of them to the same area. “And since you do not know how to utilize Saika, I have a question for you…”

She paused there to recollect her thoughts and finally asked Anri, “Do you have any interest in giving your Saika to me?”

Again, Anri was left nonplussed.

She wanted Saika. The request sounded just like Haruna’s a moment ago.

But this woman already had her own Saika. Anri had only seen it in her nails and rope, but the truth started to dawn on her as confusion faded.

*There isn’t just one Saika.*

Based on the remarkable nature of a cursed sword with a will of its own, Anri had always assumed that the “original” Saika she held was a one-of-a-kind thing.

But it might have been a mistake to apply her own common sense to something like a cursed sword in the first place. On the other hand, if her opponent’s weapon had been in the form of a katana, she might not have believed that was Saika at all.

It was the property that surpassed the laws of physics, the fact that she saw the fingernail blades appearing directly from the woman’s body that had convinced her it was Saika.

The problem was, this understanding broke the logic of the woman’s last statement.

“Why would you want it…? You already have your Saika, Miss Kujiragi.”

“Yes. I already have my own Saika.”

The next instant, a long blade grew from her left hand, until it fit in her palm in the form of a katana. It shone for an instant, then vanished back into her body.

There was no longer any room for doubt. Anri asked, “Then why…?”

“My home vehicle and my products are different things.”

“Products?” Anri repeated. Her eyes widened, but on the inside, this didn’t surprise her that much. The truth was, she already knew. Saika was an item that had ended up at her parents’ antiques shop as a product.

“Is Saika even something that can be bought and sold among different people?” she had to ask.

Kujiragi nodded. “That was my business.”

“?”

The past form of the statement confused Anri.

Kujiragi realized what she’d done and looked away for a moment. “Pardon me. I’m trying to decide if I should continue that business at all. But the last product for which I am under contract is Saika.”

“?!”

*Saika, a product to be sold. So somebody actually…wants this thing?*

“At worst, I will deliver my own Saika as a product, so I am not forced to buy or take your Saika from you, but…”

The blithe way she mentioned taking it away was alarming. Kujiragi looked into Anri’s eyes and continued, “Based on my observation, you do not control Saika the way I do, but you also haven’t been controlled by it, like past owners. Coexistence is a very rare case, but if you do not need that Saika, I am willing to buy it from you.”

At last, Haruna began to rise unsteadily. She glared at Kujiragi with pure hatred, her smile completely gone. “What kind…of nonsense are you talking…?”

“Are you all right? I wouldn’t force yourself to get up just yet.”

“You’ve got a lot of nerve, talking that way…for an assailant… But whatever. More importantly, if anyone gets Anri’s Saika, it’ll be me. Who do you even think you are? You just show up in the middle of our conversation, then say you want Saika. You little cat burglar.”

“Cat burglar…” Kujiragi seemed to think this over and, without changing

expression, said, “I like that.”

“You like what?”

Haruna was suspicious of her, and Anri was paralyzed with uncertainty.

The grown woman thought for a bit, came to her own conclusion, and told the girls, “Well, let’s see… In order to make this a proper business deal, there are many things I will have to explain in detail. On the other hand, stealing it creates quite a hassle for me, so I want to avoid that option.”

Then she reached down to pick up the magazine she’d dropped in the earlier bout with Haruna and flipped through its pages. “I’d like to tell you about Saika at a nearby café. Do you think I could borrow some more of your time?”

Anri and Haruna looked at each other. Based on what had already happened, they expected the scene to head into a sword fight, resolution or no, but this suggestion had thrown them for a loop.

In contrast, Kujiragi never broke her expression or made one in the first place.

“Even setting business aside… Don’t you want to know more about Saika?”

At that point, there was no way Anri could reject the offer.

*Tokyo—parking garage*

“Did I hear that wrong? Did you just ask if I preferred getting taken over or crushed?” Masaomi Kida asked.

Chikage Rokujou answered, “Yeah, I did.”

A sudden surge of tension and hostility charged through the five or so Yellow Scarves present.

Chikage recognized that the situation had changed between them but detected that their leader still wanted to hear him out, so he shrugged and said, “Hang on. Masaomi Kida, right? Listen, I understand I’m being unreasonable, too. When a guy walks up and says to choose between getting destroyed and getting taken over, the obvious conclusion is that he’s picking a fight with you.”

“…Is there any other conclusion I’m supposed to draw from this?”

“Hey, it could be a friendly buyout, right? What do they call that in stocks? A… white something?”

“You mean a white knight?”

“Yeah, that’s it.” Chikage nodded. “I’ll just be straight up with you: Wanna work for me? That’s the deal.”

“Well, that patronizing offer certainly fits the suspicion that you’re picking a fight.”

“Yeah, that’s right. I’m not a white knight. I came here to pick a fight,” he announced, hiding nothing.

Anger flooded the faces of the Yellow Scarves. They sensed they were being mocked.

“Hey, ease up, guys,” Chikage responded. “You know Kadota, by the way? From the Dollars.”

“…Well, yeah.”

The mention of Kadota’s name turned Masaomi’s anger into bewilderment. He had seen Mikado and Chikage talking, but he didn’t see the fight between Kadota and Chikage or how it ended.

*So they fought one-on-one, I guess? Whatever happened with that…?*

He didn’t need to ask, because Chikage promptly said, “See, Kadota really whooped my ass. I said I’d withdraw from Ikebukuro for now, and that settled the matter. But now I hear he’s been in an accident. So I got curious and decided to do some research of my own.”

Strictly speaking, he had seen the news about a dead body at the train station, sent the girls back home just to be safe, then found himself with lots of extra time to wander the town.

“I got in touch with a recent friend from around here, and whaddaya know? Turns out the Yellow Scarves and Dollars are in the midst of high tensions.”

He leaned against a nearby light pole and adopted a very annoyed expression. “You guys got a bad rep. From what I hear, you had the run of the area before we showed up. Hittin’ people up for money, making everyone miserable.”

He was probably talking about the period up to half a year ago, when Horada's group had been calling the shots.

"I heard that Kadota and his folks knocked you out then. So I was wondering if you ran over him outta revenge. I asked around and learned about this place."

"It's not what you think!" one of the members protested. "It wasn't Shogun's fault things were bad back then!"

"Stop it," Masaomi commanded. Then he said quietly, "So you're gonna destroy us, because we look suspicious? Why would you stick up for Kadota like that?"

"Hey, I didn't say for sure I was gonna destroy you. That's why I keep throwing out the option of working for me, too. Besides, I'm not doing this out of loyalty to the guy or anything. But I do owe those folks for saving my girl Non. I figured I'd help them search for the ones who did it."

Then Chikage sighed, and the lackadaisical lilt to his expression vanished. "And now it's gotten me wrapped up in a buncha nonsense, too."

"?"

"You know about this faction within the Dollars that's carrying out an internal purge or whatever?"

"…!"

*Mikado.*

Masaomi didn't even need to ask. He was talking about the boy who was the very reason Masaomi was here. Mikado Ryuugamine was the one standing atop the faction Chikage was describing.

"From what I hear, they're *exactly like* a group of folks back in the spring who kicked my boys' asses and lit their bikes on fire. All the details match."

A chill ran down Masaomi's back.

He was acting as leader of the Yellow Scarves and preparing for the possibility of war with Mikado, and possibly the Dollars, as a means of stopping his friend.

But now the possibility of a separate group displaying antagonism toward

Mikado made him indescribably worried. This man and Toramaru were on a different level from the kind of thugs who might swear vengeance after a group purge or stragglers like Horada's circle.

Masaomi hid that unease beneath his exterior and said, "I see. And you want to use the Yellow Scarves to light a fire under those people."

"I'm glad you're so quick on the uptake," Chikage said, followed by something that gouged at Masaomi's heart even further. "The part where it gets complicated is they're apparently leftovers from some gang called the Blue Squares, but from what I hear, most of the holdovers from the Blue Squares went to the Yellow Scarves. And the Yellow Scarves apparently destroyed the Blue Squares back in the day… The twists and turns just keep coming."

"…"

It was all true. Masaomi had no response.

He hadn't even been able to tell that a number of old Blue Squares had infiltrated his gang, yet he had to accept that complication and forge on as the leader of the group.

But Chikage had no idea about any of that. He stared up at the sky and continued, "I just don't get all the complicated details. I wanted to make things simple."

"?"

"This is a place where I should be making things right with the entire Toramaru team, but I'm just here by myself now. I haven't told the boys a thing, and I don't intend to until I've caught these guys by the tail. Do you know what this means?"

The question had been posed. Masaomi had a general idea of what he meant, but he chose to wait rather than answer.

Chikage didn't seem to expect one, either. After a few seconds, he continued, "It means this. If you decide to gang up on me now and beat the shit outta me, you won't be advertising your hostility to Toramaru as a group."

In a sense, this action was practically suicide.

Given that he came to pick a fight with them, the only possibility that he might walk away unscathed was if he impressed upon his opponents the retribution they might face from the fearsome Toramaru gang. And Chikage had just abandoned that weapon.

On the other hand, Masaomi and his friends were neither scummy nor stupid enough to decide to kick the crap out of him.

Even before the matter of if he deserved it or not, none of them was going to take his statements at face value. If he was lying, then the moment they attacked him, he could use that as a pretext to bring his entire organization here for "justified payback," and strike back.

*But from what I saw when he was talking to Mikado, he doesn't seem like the sort to pull bullshit like that*, Masaomi suspected.

"Look, this is just one of those things," Chikage continued. "I wish I could act like some cool manga character and say, 'Hey, let's be like brothers.' But honestly, I'm not reckless enough to do that with some guys I don't really know that well. So I figured, since you guys have a bad reputation already, I could try to force you to hear me out."

And as for things that Masaomi didn't know about the other man, Toramaru had actually started with Chikage beating up a motorcycle gang member who tried to mess with his girlfriend. As a matter of fact, he had double-digit girlfriends, so between all the girls, family members, and friends who might get into trouble and need help, he was constantly destroying small-time gangs of ruffians in his vicinity.

Finally, for the dirt-simple reason of "If I'm going to let them go afterward, why don't I just keep them all in check?" he formed the gang called Toramaru.

And because he cared for the people he associated with, he attracted not just street punks who followed the might makes right of hierarchy but others drawn to his charismatic personality.

So for Chikage's part, he was considering simply absorbing the Yellow Scarves in the way he understood best. It was just that, without the justification of getting revenge for a girlfriend, he had only his own selfish reasons to motivate him and thus felt a bit apologetic about it.

“The thing is, I’m planning to use you guys for my own ends, but I have no intention of helping you out in return. So if I came to you and said, ‘Let’s be blood brothers,’ I could never face my honeys again for as long as I live. Can we just make this a simple fight and get on with it?”

“…Then what are we supposed to get out of this?”

“Oh, there’s something in it for you,” Chikage said, flashing them a confident smile. “If I lose, *I’ll be your muscle*.”

“…Pardon?”

“I’ll be your shock trooper, helping you out with the fight against this weird group within the Dollars. I mean, win or lose, I’m gonna be fighting the Dollars in the end, alongside you Yellow Scarves.”

The officers of the group reacted to Chikage’s plan by sharing a look. Masaomi’s face pulled into a tired, annoyed grin. “Um…are you stupid, man?”

“I get that question a lot.”

“Why would we fight, then? Why don’t you just help us out?”

“I would’ve considered that if you had a better reputation,” he admitted and started doing squats to loosen up his knees.

“Oh, man, this guy’s rarin’ to fight.”

“Listen, if none of you want to get hurt, that’s fine. Just give me whatever info you have on the Dollars. Then I’ll just go over there myself.”

“Sounds perfect. So you’re going to annihilate them for us and let us keep our hands clean?” Masaomi quipped, looking up at the sky with a grin. Then he turned back to the other boys behind him. “Sorry, guys. Don’t get involved with this.”

“Uh…Shogun, what’s up?” wondered his friends. Masaomi faced Chikage again.

*Man… How did it come to this anyway?*

*Well, I guess it’s my fault*, he thought, reflecting on his past.

As he rolled and loosened his neck, Masaomi made his offer to Chikage. “I’ll

take you up on that fight. And no, we're not gonna do five or six against one."

"Sh-Shogun!" one of his friends exclaimed.

"You don't have a problem with that, do you? I'd appreciate it—fewer people injured to worry about." He took a step closer to Chikage.

"…Ha! I like you. You don't look that serious, but you're actually pretty old-school, huh?"

"Look who's talking," Masaomi shot back.

Chikage winced and rearranged his hat. "See, maybe relying on the rumor around town ain't the way to go, after all. I think I *do* like you. Want me to help you for free?"

"No. I'm gonna win and force you to be our muscle." Masaomi steadied his breathing. "I don't want you going overboard and wiping them all out, either. Once you're our muscle, you'll have to listen to what I tell you and obey."

For being ready for an imminent fight, Masaomi's face betrayed no worry or panic. He was as calm as if having a nice little chat as he stared into the face he was about to smash.

Then he swore under his breath, "If only you'd knocked out Mikado back then…"

*Back then* being the moment that Mikado declared he was the leader of the Dollars. If Chikage had just settled his score with Mikado then, it might never have come to this.

Just one simple punch. If this man had taken Mikado at his word, things wouldn't have gotten so screwed up. The three of them with Anri could have been friends again, laughing together like old times.

*No. Stop thinking about that.*

He let his hatred from watching that entire scene start to finish dissipate into thin air. Chikage had done nothing wrong then. If anyone was worthy of blame, it was himself for not reaching out to Mikado when he was crumbling.

"Huh? You say something?"

“No. Just misplaced anger.”

“What?” Chikage wondered, his brow darkening.

“I’ll tell you the whole story once we’ve settled all this,” Masaomi said blithely.

“Okay. Guess I better make sure not to break your jaw, so you can still talk after this.”

“And I’ll guarantee that I don’t rupture your eardrums.”

They laughed at their little joke. Then, as Masaomi approached, Chikage lifted his foot to close the gap—and his opponent leaped into motion.

“!”

Caught in the midst of his action, Chikage had to reorient himself from movement to defense. Directly in front of him, Masaomi leaped again, pushing himself to the side. His foot landed on, then pushed off a parked car bumper and into the air.

“Ooh…”

Chikage marveled at his feline, predatorial movement. In the span of less than a second, while he was caught between the options of defending and evading, the toe of Masaomi’s shoe slammed into Chikage’s face.

*Got him!*

It was a solid hit. Masaomi hadn’t expected it to work so smoothly, but catching him off-balance with that surprise charge had paid off.

He was certain of victory. It was almost too easy.

*Snag.*

And then a hand grabbed his ankle where it still hung in the air.

*Huh?*

No sooner did the surprise run through his mind than he realized it was the reeling Chikage who had grabbed him. And despite the slight dent in the bridge of his nose, Chikage’s mouth was twisted into a smile.

*That didn't knock him out…*

He felt a tug on his captured ankle and a terrifying chill that ran through his entire being.

The next moment, Masaomi's body swung forcefully toward a pillar, to the sound of the Yellow Scarves' exclamations.


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But before he hit the surface, Masaomi recovered his balance and “landed” on the side of the pillar. Then he turned his body ninety degrees so it wasn’t parallel with the floor anymore and hit the ground.

“Man, if *that* wasn’t enough to knock you out, how tough are… *Whoa!*”

In the process of raising his head, he had to dart to the side—because the soles of both of Chikage’s feet were rushing toward him.

Masaomi instantly slid away, and Chikage’s feet passed through the space where he’d just been, smashing into the pillar. It shook with the impact, knocking dust loose from the light overhead.

“Holy crap, man. I’d have *died* if I took that.” Masaomi yelped, even as he rushed back toward Chikage.

He launched a high kick at his opponent’s temple as the older man spun, but Chikage just barely dodged it, swinging a fist in return—only to take a second reverse kick, with full rotation, right into his solar plexus.

“Hrgh…”

Chikage’s grunt told Masaomi he had gained the advantage for sure this time—but a grunt was all he got. His opponent continued to attack, his fist bearing down on Masaomi’s back.

But Masaomi reacted quickly, launching another kick as a counter to the other guy’s punch.

There was a loud smack—and the Yellow Scarves who had been watching the scene dumbfounded finally caught up to what was happening.

The heads of the Yellow Scarves and Toramaru had only initiated the opening stage of a devastating fight.

*Raira General Hospital—interior café*

“…And that is the reason that you and I have the same Saika. Do you have any questions?”

It was a sight that would give vastly different impressions to those who

understood the context and those who didn't.

An intellectual-looking woman was giving two high school students a lecture, using a tablet PC. If one didn't know better, it would look like she was trying to sign them up for some kind of insurance.

But with full context, it was not only eerie but downright ghastly.

After all, this was two different women with full Saikas infused into them, and a child Saika transferred through a cut, who later broke free and regained control—all sitting at the same table.

"No…I'm fine. I get the gist of it."

"…"

Despite her consternation, Anri accepted the explanation of "branching" and the revelation that Kujiragi's employer had once sold the very Saika that was inside of Anri now. Haruna said nothing, wearing her murderous smile the whole time. Her wrath was fixated on both Anri and Kujiragi now.

The fact that Haruna might erupt into violence at any time kept Anri's nerves taut, but Kujiragi went ahead and gave them her speech on Saika, her tone all business.

Kujiragi did not touch upon the identity of Jinnai Yodogiri at all. She only gave them information about Saika and her own business handling it. It wasn't that she felt any need to hide this; she simply judged there was no need to point it out.

"Branching, huh…?" Haruna muttered, wearing that sick smile of hers. "If you can do that, could you give one to me, too?" she asked Kujiragi.

"Based on previous transactions, a single Saika would command 6.25 million yen. And because of the nature of the product, I will only sell it to trusted customers." It was the line that Jinnai Yodogiri had taught her to say whenever she had to explain these things.

Haruna couldn't tell if 6.25 million yen was expensive or cheap.

For a supernatural sword outside of the bounds of all common knowledge about the world, it seemed so pedestrian as to be nearly free, but the hurdle to

becoming a “trusted customer” was probably exorbitantly high.

In any case, it wasn’t the kind of money any teenage girl could command. But if money was all it took, Haruna could just use her Saika to cut some rich person and get them to pay for it.

“At present, a client who meets those two conditions desires to have Saika. I wish to avoid branching, because as more and more Saikas spread throughout the world, their price as a product goes down.”

With that out of the way, Kujiragi asked, “Anri Sonohara, I wish to confer with you again. Are you certain you’re not willing to part with your item?”

“…Is that even possible? Can you…take Saika out of my body…?”

“If you want to let go of it…if you really want to be rid of it, you could just throw it away somewhere. But if you do give it to me, I am prepared to offer you some amount of money as part of the deal. Please consider the offer.”

She made it sound so easy. Anri had to think.

Give up Saika.

She’d never considered the idea. Could she even live without Saika at this point? Kujiragi’s offer filled her with anxiety and uncertainty.

Then Haruna stepped in. “If you’re going to sell it to this woman, give it to me. I could find a better use for it. And I’ll also cut Ryuugamine and Kida with it and make them fall in love with you.”

“Stop that!” Anri pleaded, not a shout but forceful all the same. “I still think it’s just…*wrong* to use Saika that way.”

“Oh? How is it wrong?”

“Once you’ve cut a person with Saika…they’re not the same as before. Once Saika’s power has made them a slave, they’re not the person you like anymore, they’re something *else*…in my opinion.”

“So it’s a difference of values,” Haruna said, neither agreeing or disagreeing. Then she turned her darkening, murderous smile to Kujiragi. “And what’s your opinion, Miss Kujiragi?”

Kujiragi sipped her cooling coffee and spoke honestly. “It’s case by case. Saika’s control allows for the user to manipulate the subject. For example…if you cut someone and made them do something, then never activated that control again, that victim would most likely live out the entire rest of their life without ever realizing that Saika’s curse was within them. It might be an extreme step to label such a person as someone else entirely.”

“But—” Anri protested.

Kujiragi cut her off with an explanation that was much more fluid than the previous. “If you want something to happen, consider that using Saika’s power is one available method. The same way that men and women utilize looks, finances, intelligence, and courage in matters of romance. You ought to view Saika as one of your valuable assets.”

“My…assets?”

“If you think it’s unfair to use something others don’t have, that would mean that anyone who has used considerable good looks, smarts, or winning personality as a means to capture the affection of another is also cheating. I think you should view Saika’s power in that light. It may be trite to say, but it is up to the wielder of a power to decide how they should use it,” Kujiragi finished, her affect completely flat the whole time.

Anri considered this for a time, then shook her head. “But…I still think…Saika’s power is not the same as a human one. It’s not the kind of thing you can achieve by working for it…”

“Because it’s not a human power, it shouldn’t be used for love?”

“…Someone recently told me that I wasn’t human. And I’ve been uncertain since then. Maybe I’m really not human anymore. And if so, maybe I don’t have the right to fall in love like a normal person and enjoy normal happiness…,” Anri murmured ruefully.

She knew the Headless Rider, who was very much not human and yet loved a human man. But she also knew that Celty, while inhuman, had the most human heart she’d ever seen. By comparison, Anri looked human, but her heart only got further and further from the mark. This was the rationale behind her statement.

“Does that also apply to me?” Kujiragi asked, without emotion.

“Huh…? Oh!” Anri gasped.

As she’d just explained, Kujiragi owned a Saika, and everything Anri said about herself could be construed as referring to her, too.

“I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that…,” she stammered, bowing.

Kujiragi’s eyes briefly dipped toward the floor. “Miss Sonohara, even if you are not human, as you claim, the simple act of giving up Saika would make your body human again. I’m not certain what standard you are using to judge a ‘proper’ human heart, but at the very least, Saika would no longer complicate your thoughts.”

“I—I see.”

Anri felt very awkward. She wanted to look away, but she couldn’t.

*Huh? That’s strange…*

*This whole time, I thought she never showed any emotion…*

Yes, her face hadn’t changed in the least.

But something deeper than the surface—in her glances, actions, breathing—gave Anri just the slightest hint of some mental shifting.

For a moment, Anri wondered if it was anger at being treated like a monster—but while it was indistinct, it struck her as something more like *sadness*.

“You can go back to being human just by giving up Saika. But…”

At that moment, time stopped for Anri and Haruna.

An abnormal aura was exuding from the woman sitting across the table from them.

“You cannot give up your *flesh and blood*.”

“…!” “?!”

The two girls froze, trying to ascertain the source of the feeling.

There was no change in any of the other people in the room.

Why was it just them?

The reason became imminently clear.

The words of Saika's curse had stopped inside of them—and then the rustling began.

Haruna's roiling curses, as the child, were nowhere near as intense as Anri's. But even still, she trembled at how the quiet curse began to wail in disgust.

*What is this…?*

Anri's inner voice was dozens of times more intense than Haruna's. It made her a bit dizzy.

Not only did Saika's curse spill into her eyes and turn them a vivid red, it even began to add a pinkish film to her vision. Against that filter of red light, the woman across from her appeared as a black shadow—from which she could see countless tiny black wings extending and writhing.

"…Could you see anything?" Kujiragi asked, and the palpitations of Saika that had racked the girls vanished entirely.

Their vision, the room, and Kujiragi across from them were all completely normal, as though nothing had just happened.

Anri and Haruna each glanced toward the other, just far enough to notice the sweat dripping from their faces.

Kujiragi ignored their reaction and continued, "Are you saying that, regardless of Saika, someone born as *not exactly* human does not have even the right to live like a human, to love like a human, to enjoy life like a human? Is that your point?"

"What…what *are* you…?" Anri gulped.

The answer was, as usual, emotionless. "I cannot answer that question, biologically speaking. But from a social standpoint, I can give you a very precise response."

"…?"

"I'm what is commonly known as a *villain*."

It was so abrupt, so simple, so forceful.

An objective answer, delivered with no guilt or mocking delight, just fact.

“Human or monster, if my past actions were ever revealed to the world in full detail, a good eighty percent of Japan would find me to be a sinner deserving of judgment.”

“…Where did you get that number?” Haruna snarked, but Kujiragi gave her a serious answer.

“From intuition based on experience. But whether it is a hundred percent or ten does not matter to me. I’ve broken a number of laws, and if it is proven and I am arrested, I will break out of captivity. If that does not define me as a villain, this country would have long ago become either a lawless land or the Garden of Eden.”

“Break out…?”

“Even without Saika, I have enough innate strength that I could reliably escape on my own. I will not tell you more concrete details than that, but suffice it to say that I am *that sort of person*,” Kujiragi said, as dispassionately as though reading a form letter aloud. “One day, my life will likely come to a miserable and hideous end at the hands of some entity proclaiming itself an arbiter of justice, or a person seeking vengeance for my past deeds. I deserve to be harmed, defiled, and tortured with my pleas unheard. I am prepared to suffer this, but I do my utmost to delay that eventual day as long as I can and, ignoring the feelings of any of my victims, to enjoy the present.”

With her black coffee half-gone, Kujiragi added milk and sugar. She stirred it with her teaspoon, the lukewarm liquid not dissolving the grains of sugar entirely. All the while, she kept her eyes directly on Anri.

“Miss Sonohara, you might not be an arbiter of justice, but at the very least, you have a sense of kindness toward others. That makes you different from me. You ought to be in the sunlight at all times, not staying here and speaking with villains like me. As for Miss Niekawa, I suppose it would depend on the outcome of the love you speak of,” she murmured, completing the report of her observations.

Stunned, Anri tried to protest. “I…I’m not that special. I can’t live on my own… so I have no choice but to leech off others and Saika… I’m just a parasite. If I

seem like I'm considerate of others…it's only because I'm ultimately concerned about myself and how I might be affected."

"That is fine. The majority of humanity is a parasite that feeds off something else. And if someone is allowing you to live off them for a long period of time, it likely means that they are receiving something from you in return," Kujiragi said, which was certainly one way to respond to a girl resignedly calling herself a parasite. "That is no longer parasitism. It is symbiosis. There is no need for you to feel guilty about this."

They were kind words meant to make Anri feel better, but she said them in the monotone of someone reading another person's words out of a book.

"No matter how pure Saika's love for humanity is, it is still a sword that corrupts the world of man. That is a fact, and I do not intend to deny it."

"…"

"In the same way, by your ethical standards, I would undoubtedly fall under the category of evil."

Anri wondered what she was trying to say.

The answer: "Gentle souls like yours are not meant to possess Saika. In conclusion, I feel that it would be in the best interest of both sides for you to transfer the sword to me."

"!"

"There are two ways to handle Saika in a form other than a katana. Either control it entirely, like me, and use it as a slave, or do the opposite and open your entirety to Saika. In the former case, you can reshape the blade into any shape, but Saika will no longer tell you *how* to fight. In the latter case, you can transform, but your fighting style will be entirely determined by Saika."

It seemed as though she might continue at greater and greater length explaining the finer details of Saika. Instead, she gazed at Anri and described the girl's inner nature as she saw it.

"You are not capable of either, I suspect. You are kind. And because you are kind, you hold Saika in, so as not to hurt others. Meanwhile, you are also kind to

Saika. So you cannot master it completely and use it as a slave. You are indeed traveling the path of symbiosis."

"…"

"Ultimately, this will put you in a corner. You will have all this power and continually sacrifice yourself not to use it."

She closed her mouth for just a moment, giving Anri a piercing gaze.

"Saints like you are not meant to have Saika."

Anri clenched her fists, preparing to say something in return.

But Haruna suddenly chuckled.

"…Haruna?"

The other girl smiled with great delight. "She's stupid, isn't she, Sonohara?"

"Huh?"

Haruna favored Anri and Kujiragi with a nasty, sticky smile.

"You're going to be killed by someone out for revenge? If that's any moment, don't you think it would be now?"

"…"

Kujiragi was silent. She understood what Haruna meant.

Anri did not, however, and was going to ask—when the other girl went on.

"Miss Kujiragi…don't you know that *the Saika you sold is the reason that Anri's parents are dead?*"

For a brief moment, Anri felt that her personal sense of time had stopped.

Then, after several seconds, she detected that her knees had begun trembling.

But that did not matter to her now.

She was under a vast shock and incapable of processing such phenomena further.

One of the people responsible for her parents' death was right before her.

If Kujiragi had never unleashed Saika upon the world, she might be leading a very different life right now.

But that was not what shocked her. It was that, until Haruna pointed it out, the issue of her parents had never even occurred to her.

Were they nothing but a relic of the past in her mind by now?

And in the process of trying to reclaim and reshape her stunned psyche, Anri came to a conclusion. But the past that it caused her to remember made her eyes brim with even greater sadness.

“No…”

“Huh?”

“You’re wrong, Haruna. I think…it’s thanks to Saika that I’m here right now.”

“…What…are you saying?” Haruna asked, smiling and perplexed.

“If there had been no Saika…my father would have killed me.”

She had dredged up her awful memories of what happened five years ago.

The sensation of her own father strangling her, as fresh as if it happened yesterday. If her mother hadn’t cut off his head with Saika…

She shook her head to dispel the horrid recollection and said to Kujiragi, “I’m sorry…I still can’t let Saika go yet.”

“…I see.”

“I still…haven’t made it up to Saika in any way… So I can’t just run away from it all on my own,” Anri said, piecing together the strength of her will as she spoke. In some way, putting the idea into words was helping her reach this determination.

“Plus…I have a promise to fulfill, to tell some people I care for very much about Saika. So until then, I want to remain who I was last year.”

Kujiragi took this in impassively, staring into Anri’s face, then exhaled. “Very well. Please contact me if you change your mind.”

Then she took a blank business card and a pen from her shirt pocket, wrote down a phone number, and gave it to Anri.

“What, you’re not going to give *me* your card?”

“I have no reason to do business with you at the moment, Miss Niekawa,” she declared.

Haruna cackled to herself, getting to her feet. “I might not be able to do business with you, but I *can* rob you. Wouldn’t it be fun if I ripped that Saika you’ve got right out of you?”

“Do you wish to be electrocuted again?”

“If you think that’s going to work on me twice, you’re much less capable than you seem.”

An ugly, sludgy haze hung in the air between Haruna and Kujiragi. Since Kujiragi never showed any emotion of any kind, that meant it was entirely coming from Haruna.

“P-please stop this, Haruna…,” Anri protested, but the other girl’s eyes were already filling with blood.

People at other tables noticed something was happening and started glancing over at the trio. Neither Haruna nor Kujiragi paid them any mind.

Kujiragi finished her coffee and quietly set the cup down.

“I’m ready whenever you are.”

Without changing her expression, the aura around her started getting darker, denser. And then— “Oh, there she is. Anri! Anri! Big, big news!”

A voice tore through the café and the unfolding scene within.

“Karisawa?”

“Hey, I saw your message. Sold out, huh? Too bad.”

Before she came here, Anri had texted Karisawa to tell her the cat-ear headbands were sold out and that she would be meeting with some people here for a bit before she returned to the others.

“So these are your friends, huh? Wait. Huh? I thought you said it was sold out?”

She was reaching for the bag from the cosplay store. Since the furry cat-

themed paraphernalia was slightly visible through the familiar bag, Karisawa assumed it was Anri's and reached for it.

Another hand shot in and stopped her. "I'm sorry. That belongs to me."

"Huh? Oh! I'm so sorry!" Karisawa said, blushing. But when she saw Kujiragi's face, she exclaimed, "Wow! You're so beautiful! Er, sorry to shout. Do you mind if I ask…do you cosplay?"

Karisawa had a way with asking extremely forward questions to complete strangers. Surely, when she saw the pretty woman with flawless skin in possession of a cat-ear headband, she must have assumed Kujiragi was a kindred spirit.

"…Cosplay? I am interested, but I have no experience," Kujiragi admitted. With the way she never showed any emotion, it came off as a polite but firm rejection, but the only words Karisawa registered were *I am interested*.

"If you're interested, why don't you join our club? We'd be happy to welcome any friends of Anri's!"

"No, I…"

"We've got about 270 highly customizable costumes, and we can size them for you, too! We can get you everything from miko priestesses to slutty fallen angel maids!"

With no one around to put the brakes on her, Karisawa's excited pitch went on and on. "Oooh! And *she* looks like she could do a mean cosplay, too! Geez, Anri, you should have introduced me to these cuties earlier! I could totally see you in a themed trio with them!"

She was agitated enough that if Yumasaki were there, he'd say, "Karisawa, if they're normies, you're going to make them give poor Anri the most exasperated reaction!" The other customers around them figured it was just a conversation about manga or something, put the incident with the original trio out of their minds, and returned to their food and chat.

Haruna had been taken aback by the sudden entrance at first, then turned back to the table, ready to ignore the rest of it and attack Kujiragi. But…

“Do you have Gothic Lolita outfits, too?”

“Of course! We can get you over a dozen adult Goth outfits to try on!”

“And idol costumes?”

“I’ve got a number of handmade pieces based on Ruri Hijiribe outfits!” Karisawa reassured her, with a hearty thumbs-up.

“…Here is my contact information. Please tell me the number for your club. I will contact you within the next few days.”

Like she did with Anri, Kujiragi jotted down her number on a blank business card.

*““What?!””*

Both Anri and Haruna were shocked by this. They stared at her, wide-eyed. But as usual, Kujiragi had no expression, making it impossible to detect what she was up to.

The only giveaway was that Anri’s faint detection of her mental state, when she’d gotten a whiff of sadness earlier, was now indicating what might have been a tinge of delight.

Haruna just stared at the exchange, dumbfounded, and sighed at the end.

“…I’ve lost interest. I’m going home. Maybe something’s finally changed by now.” Then she grabbed Anri’s phone and pulled out her own, and with a device in each hand, she performed a few operations. “There. Now we have each other as a contact. I’ll get in touch tomorrow, and we can meet up again.”

She never let go of her murderous hatred of Anri, but she was smiling as she left.

As though there was nothing in her future but bright, bright hope.

“Umm… So was that girl just, like, not interested in anime at all? I guess it was mean of me to invite her, too… I’m sorry if she acts weird around you after this, Anri,” said Karisawa sadly, much more under control now that she’d exchanged information with Kujiragi and the group was smaller.

“Oh, uhm, actually…thank you. You saved me.”

“?”

This threw Karisawa for a loop, who wasn’t expecting to be thanked. Then Anri asked, “Um, what brought you here…?”

“Oh, right! I got so excited I completely forgot!” the other girl exclaimed, her face breaking into a huge smile. Perhaps her earlier moment of excitement had been buoyed by whatever had her in a good mood already.

“Listen, listen. Dotachin’s awake again, and they say we can see him in person tomorrow!”

*Tokyo—parking garage*

A bit earlier in time, when it still wasn’t clear if Kadota would regain consciousness, Masaomi and Chikage were fighting on the roof of the parking garage.

Based on the present arrangement, it would seem that Masaomi had the advantage. He had landed several clean hits and continually avoided Chikage’s attacks by razor-thin margins.

But their expressions told a story just the opposite.

Despite blasting his opponent with many devastating blows, Masaomi didn’t seem to be doing any lasting damage. And each time the man’s strikes rushed past his head, Masaomi felt like his very life was being whittled away.

*Holy crap. I’m not hurting him at all, and I feel like even a scratch from him is going to make me woozy.*

Masaomi wasn’t blessed with stature. He wasn’t born tall, and he didn’t have a muscular frame.

But he’d been used to scrapping since he was a kid, throwing knees and elbows in unpredictable ways on the road to beating opponents who were much larger than he was.

None of the Yellow Scarves could beat him in a fight, and outside of complete freaks of nature like Shizuo Heiwajima, he was definitely one of the tougher

guys around.

But Chikage Rokujou was so strong that it almost made Masaomi wonder if he *was* in the same category as Shizuo. There were multiple points in the fight where he felt a chill run down his back.

Still, as long as his fellow Yellow Scarves stood around cheering for him, he couldn't let himself falter now.

*I guess blows won't do the trick.*

Masaomi gathered his breathing and calmly switched tactics.

After just barely dodging one of his opponent's attacks, he chose to swing around behind him rather than strike back. Since he moved into the blind spot of the attack, it would've looked to Chikage like Masaomi had simply vanished.

"Wha—? …Oofh!"

He launched himself onto the back of his opponent, working his arms around the man's neck.

It was a standing sleeper choke hold. Masaomi leaned backward, trying to force his taller foe into submission. He dug his arm deeper under the chin, hanging onto Chikage's back with sublime balance.

The Yellow Scarves were certain he'd just won. The more you struggled in that position, the worse it got. A professional fighter might know the trick to escape it, but an amateur brawler would be at a loss. They knew how Masaomi's original sleeper hold worked and the effect it had.

However, Chikage Rokujou withstanding four punches from Shizuo Heiwajima was not a fluke. When he realized that he was soon going to lose consciousness, he did something that no ordinary human being would ever do.

With his neck in a choke hold, Chikage ran up the bumper of a parked car and onto its roof, then leaped for the fence surrounding the structure.

*Huh?*

Masaomi's mind briefly went blank, and then he remembered that including the roof the garage had three levels.

They were going to fall from the roof of a three-story building.

Every cell in his body screamed out, and Masaomi instantly let go of the man's neck. Right before he was about to pass over the fence, he grabbed the light pole fixed there.

For his part, Chikage simply fell straight downward without further acrobatics.

"Crazy asshole!" Masaomi screamed, clinging to the pole.

It was high enough to be fatal. He felt a cold sweat break out at first—and several seconds later, another one but for a different reason.

Chikage fell directly onto his back. And after a few coughs, he simply got to his feet, as simple as that.

"Hey, if you're gonna grab me, don't chicken out and jump off, yeah?"

Chikage laughed up at him from the ground. Yet another trickle of sweat ran down Masaomi's back.

*Well, damn. We haven't even fought with the Blue Squares yet. Why am I throwing down with the ultimate secret boss first?*

Masaomi climbed up the pole so that he could swing back over the fence. But the moment he reached the top of it, he met an abnormal sight.

His vantage point up high made the scene below quite easy to follow. And yet upon first glance, it made no sense to him. It was as though crossing the fence had warped him to a completely new location.

He should've been able to dispel the sight as an absurd hallucination as soon as he saw the other Yellow Scarves—but the problem was that they, too, were looking in that direction…

Toward the ramp leading down to the second floor of the garage…

Where a gang of a few dozen figures stood, clearly not affiliated with the Scarves.

Standing at the head of the rabble of thugs and mobsters was a man who cackled up at him. He held a hammer of hardened rubber in one hand, and his face featured a very visible burn scar.

At first, Masaomi didn't know who he was or the rest of the group trailing behind him. It could've been reinforcements from Toramaru, but that was hard to imagine, given Chikage's personality.

It could have been the Dollars, too, but he didn't see any of the youth who looked like Blue Squares. If anything, these were more like the street thugs who were getting purged from the Dollars.

The burned man spoke up. "Heh-hya…I guess it's true that idiots and smoke like to gather in high places, huh?"

*Brrh.*

The instant he heard that voice, the hair all over Masaomi's body rippled.

He recognized it.

Before his brain could even recall the name, the other cells of his body surged with anger, terror, hostility, and anxiety.

"Hang on! I'm gonna climb back up now! Wait for me!"

Chikage was down on the ground. He didn't realize what was happening on the roof.

But Masaomi didn't hear him.

Then the burned man spoke again.

"*Here's your question!* When I broke Saki Mikajima's leg…who was the pussy who abandoned her and ran away?! Kee-hee-hya-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

And something in Masaomi burst.

The fear, anxiety, and regret in him all transformed into rage that surged up and out of his throat in the form of a name.

*"Izumiiiiiii!"*

Fury controlled all of Masaomi's being. He leaped down from the fence and began charging toward the group of dozens without a second thought.

As though willing all the strength of his legs that he hadn't used on that fateful night into this very moment instead.

Such was his possessed manner that the ruffians of the group subconsciously leaned away from him.

Ran Izumii leered through his sunglasses and lifted his hand with the hammer in it.

And then…

# INTERMEDIATE CHAPTER
# Trapped Like a Rat

DRRR!! X

Ryohgo Narita



# Intermediate Chapter: Trapped Like a Rat

After this day, a subset of residents of the city found themselves rolling down a hill toward chaos, unable to know where they were headed.

An incident that began with stare downs between the Dollars and Yellow Scarves, that should have ended in mutual confusion between teenagers, suddenly cast the profiles of a completely different group against its shadow. Thanks to Izaya Orihara's little spark, they were all exposed to the darkness.

That wasn't all.

As though whipped up by some unsettling wind through the city, others aside from Izaya cast their own sparks into the fray, steadily increasing the power of the open flames.

But the biggest spark of all, which Izaya had tucked away and Kujiragi had nearly extinguished altogether, still smoldered to itself, lighting nothing around it.

Practically waiting for someone to pour the gas over it.

*Holding cells, police station—night Shizuo Heiwajima lay on the floor of the cell, still dressed in his bartender outfit.*

He'd been held at the Ikebukuro Police Station next to the train station many times as a student, but the interior before him now was completely different from back then.

Apparently, this wasn't the Ikebukuro Police Station he'd met in his errant youth but a different branch nearby. Shizuo didn't particularly care which station he was in, however.

He just needed to stay calm and maintain his composure until they let him

out. So he decided he should just sleep the whole time, in order to avoid seeing or hearing anything that might set him off.

“Hey, I’ve seen you before, man! You’re the guy who was swingin’ the electric pole around, yeah?”

“…”

But there was a man in the adjacent cell. A thuggish fellow who’d been put in there not long ago.

“Hey, you know what? I bet you could totally break these bars, huh?!”

“…Got the wrong guy,” Shizuo claimed, trying to keep the man off his back.

“Don’t lie! I’d never forget a blond guy in a bartender’s vest!”

Shizuo was still wearing the work outfit he’d had on when they’d arrested him. Only the bow tie was confiscated, because anything with a string or cord might be used to commit suicide. The rest was still there.

“But actually, now that I think about it, today’s not a good day for it. Media’s goin’ freakin’ crazy outside this station right now.”

“Did something happen?”

“You bet. They found a woman’s head outside of the train station or something. They’re saying the rest of the body’s being brought here from the Ikebukuro headquarters.”

Shizuo grimaced at this grisly news. But something stuck out to him.

“…? What are they doing with the body? Whether they do an autopsy or not, doesn’t that get handled at the hospital?”

“That’s why the media’s all here. There’s a whole lot of strange stuff going on with this one. Like, when it originally got announced, it was ‘the head of what seems to be a dead woman.’ But by the evening, they were calling it ‘what seems like a woman’s head.’ Don’t that seem weird to you? The pictures people put online make it super-obvious that it’s a head.”

“Pictures of a body? Those people have no class,” Shizuo murmured, furrowing his brow. But he decided not to think too deeply into it.

He knew that if he thought about it, his rage would only intensify. Instead, he steadied his breathing and stared at the ceiling.

The man in the other cell kept babbling. “Of course, some reporter asked them about that. All they said was, ‘I can’t answer that question right now,’ so the press started getting the inkling that something was wrong here. Then some weird anonymous information leaked online from the Raira University Medical Hospital that did the legal autopsy.”

“Weird information?”

“The head is *alive*, they said.”

“…”

He couldn’t laugh it off as a stupid story or even get irritated.

A living head.

And Shizuo knew what might fit that description.

“Online, people are sayin’ it might be the Headless Rider’s head. From what I hear, they’re keeping it in this station right now. Wonder if they’re having a meeting about it. ‘Can we even declare a criminal case if the head’s still living?’ or something.”

“I see…” Shizuo considered this for a moment, then asked, “So *are you under the control of that monster sword, too*? Or is this something else?”

“…What do you mean? You’re not makin’ sense.” The man chuckled.

Shizuo’s temple visibly twitched. “Don’t play dumb with me. You really think I’m stupid enough not to think somethin’s up when a guy with all the info wanders into the clink and starts blabbing every last detail to me, knowing who I am? Do you?”

He got to his feet and took a step toward the man. There were steel bars between them, of course, but they might as well have been twigs to Shizuo.

Well aware of that fact, the man held up his hands and pleaded—his eyes eerily bloodshot.

“Sorry, sorry. My bad. You’re right. Mother told me to come here.”

"…So assuming you're *not* trying to piss me off, why would you tell me this story about the head?"

"You're smarter than I thought, so you probably know already, huh? You know what that head really is."

"…"

The man didn't wait for Shizuo to answer. "Celty Sturluson. The head that's got the whole city buzzing today is a part of your friend that she's been looking for, for years and years."

"…Okay. And?"

"It's simple. This is a deal. Next time they take you away for questioning, you just have to *rage a little*. Sure, it'll add a few charges to your sheet, but as long as you don't hurt anybody, you might just get parole or even put on bail. While that's happening, I'll sneak out with the head."

"…I don't see the point. Are you guys on Celty's side? Or are you just trying to use her?" Shizuo demanded, his voice quiet but pregnant with the peril of imminent explosion.

"Neither, actually… But I bet we agree with this Celty person about not wanting the head to be turned into a public spectacle. Anyway, if you get good and rough, they'll probably lock you up for that instead, and we can make sure the charges of beating a woman go away. It looks better for you that they questioned you for something you didn't do, and then you snapped on them, rather than coming out with a proper record of having crushed a woman's hand, right?"

"Why can't you just use those hypnosis powers or whatever they are to steal the head? Should be easy."

"…Mother doesn't want us to create too many new children. Plus, if there isn't at least a good distraction that would explain how the head got stolen, it'll only look more suspicious."

Shizuo considered this suggestion. Normally, he would have already snapped by now, but he was just barely succeeding at keeping his cool by envisioning his brother's face and Celty's helmet.

But there was no guarantee that this man would keep his word. And before Shizuo could come to a decision about what to do, his train of thought was derailed by an officer showing up.

Based on the way the man in the other cell immediately clammed up, he could guess that this officer wasn't under the demon sword's control.

"Shizuo Heiwajima? You're being released."

"What?!" screamed the man in the other cell.

"Shut it, you!"

"Oh, er…"

The other man began to sweat, clearly in a panic. He returned to the corner of the cell, muttering under his breath, "What does this mean…? Did Izaya Orihara do something to…?"

Izaya Orihara.

Shizuo had made it safely through questioning while resisting the urge to explode. The instant he heard that name was the biggest test of his self-control all day.

*One hour later—Tokyo*

"What the hell's going on…?"

Shizuo left the back door of the police station, his outgoing procedures finished.

Apparently, the victimized girl claimed that she was "mistaken" and that it wasn't Shizuo. Assault wasn't a crime that required a complaint from a victim to prosecute, so just retracting the claim didn't make his charges disappear, but since the victim said he didn't do it, and there was no clear evidence that Shizuo had ever used violence against the woman, they dropped the charges and released him.

Under normal circumstances, Shizuo would be unable to contain his fury, but right now he was simply happy that he'd protected his brother's reputation.

*But…Celty's head, huh? Is that fleabrain up to something again? In any case, I'd better report back to the boss…*

He pulled out the cigarettes they'd given back to him. As he walked, he glanced around for a good spot to smoke.

Some kind of police van passed him, heading down the road in a quieter direction. Shizuo watched it go as he checked his lighter for remaining oil. He hit the striker of the Zippo.

It produced a spark.

And a roaring explosion went off, right next to the police vehicle.

"?!"

Shizuo's eyes bulged. The van that had just passed him rolled onto its side in the street, and a motorcycle raced up toward it.

When an officer opened the rear door of the van, the motorcyclist knocked him out with practiced ease, then stole a large box case right from the back of the vehicle.

Then the figure hopped back on the bike and took off in Shizuo's direction. When the rider saw him, the bike came to an exaggerated, panicked stop, then went into a U-turn.

A full helmet and a clearly feminine figure. But unlike Celty, this rider wore a white-based suit that looked familiar to him.

"Hey, is that…*Vorona*?"

Vorona.

As soon as he said the name of his new coworker, the rider blasted the acceleration—as though trying to drown out the sound of his voice.

This, of course, was all the confirmation Shizuo needed. The rider turned down a side street and vanished into the night within moments.

He wasn't sure what that was all about, but he was sure of one thing—the box she'd just stolen from the police vehicle contained the head in question.

He didn't know *why* Vorona would be stealing something like that, but the

incident succeeded in finally flipping a switch in Shizuo that had been off this whole time.

Considering the situation, he arrived at one other certainty.

“Izaya… Is that you?”

After what the man under the sword’s control muttered earlier, and other circumstances leading up to this, he had enough of a reason to suspect, even if it was largely a hunch.

“You’re up to some bullshit again. Aren’t you, Izaya…?

“And you’ve got Kasuka…and Celty…and even my new coworker involved…?”

Anger.

Anyone looking at Shizuo at this moment might have hallucinated that the very air around him was warping.

Sheer rage powerful enough to control the air around him was being compressed within his being. Shizuo clenched his fists. He even held his voice inside.

All his anger concentrated in those fists, so that he could use them to smash the source of all the irritation he’d been feeling for days.

Anyone who knew Shizuo well would arrive at the same thought upon witnessing him now.

Whether it was Izaya or someone else pulling the strings behind this—the source of evil would undoubtedly be obliterated off the face of the earth.

And so, with the greatest rage he’d ever felt compressed within his being, the beast quietly ventured forth into Ikebukuro.



The fires across the city formed a chain.

All connected, as though arranged ahead of time; all violent at once.

Like a bundle of firecrackers bursting together.

*Tokyo—night*

“Haruna!”

She was just leaving to get some dinner from the convenience store and turned around at the sound of her name. A very familiar face awaited her.

“…Oh, Dad. You seem well.”

“You know that’s not what I want to hear… What have you been doing all this time?!”

“I’m surprised you knew where to find me. Or was it a coincidence?” asked the runaway daughter, without a trace of shame or hostility.

Her father, Shuuji Niekawa, sighed. “The Dollars. They had an eyewitness report that you were at the Raira Hospital café. And they followed you the whole way after that. So I’ve been staking out this apartment the entire time since.”

“Oh, I didn’t know I had a stalker. If you’re relying on a street gang like the Dollars, you’ve really fallen a long way, Dad.”

“Don’t be frivolous! Do you have any idea how worried I was when I heard that you’d joined the Dollars…?”

For the moment, he was showing more relief than anger—and Haruna just sighed and turned her eyes Saika red.

*“…Be quiet, Dad.”*

It was a statement of power, infused with Saika’s curse.

Shuuji had been pierced by her blade before. He was already Saika’s puppet.

Without a second thought, Haruna used her own father as her child—Saika's grandchild.

By her measuring stick, anyone outside of Nasujima, even her own family, might as well have been a stranger.

"Ah yeah, I get it." Shuuji nodded, his eyes red, too.

In the past, when Saika's will took control, he had spoken more effeminately, but now that he was taking orders from Haruna's will, he was more like a pure automaton puppet.

A smile plastered itself on Haruna's face. She felt not the slightest bit of guilt about controlling her father. "The Dollars' information network is impressive. I wonder if I could use that to find Takashi. Anyway, you can go home for today."

"…"

Her father said nothing. So she chatted to him all on her own. "Oh, that reminds me, Dad. I made my *very first friend ever* today! Her name is Anri! I'll introduce her to you sometime. Maybe when it's not so busy."

And then, her quota of family time fulfilled, she walked right past her stock-still father toward the store…

Until something pricked the back of her neck.

"Huh…?"

She felt more surprise than pain and craned her neck to the side.

There was her father, eyes still bloodshot—holding a syringe.

"D…ad…?"

A million questions burst into her head, then vanished into darkness.

"Well done. I mean it, very nice work."

A man emerged from the shadows, clapping his hands. He wore a beanie and sunglasses, a combination that screamed "disguise."

As he peeled off his fake beard, he rolled the unconscious Haruna over. When she was facing upward, he gave her "sleeping" face a very close inspection.

“Oh! Your daughter’s still very pretty, as long as her mouth is shut.”

“…”

Shuuji did not answer the man. He appeared to be in a daze, not entirely present.

The man ignored him and focused on his daughter, gloating over the comatose young woman.

“When two of Saika’s children cut each other’s children—in other words, the grandchildren of the original—control doesn’t pass based on level of strength, or seniority, or dumb luck. Whoever does it latest overwrites the control, that’s all. You didn’t know that, did you? You probably thought you were the only one who ever overcame the original Saika and became an independent child,” he mocked, trying to lift her skirt with his shoe. “But what happens if a child slashes another child? I haven’t tested that out yet.”

He tried a number of times without success and eventually withdrew his foot out of boredom, pressing it lightly against Haruna’s stomach instead.

“If I could use you however I wanted with Saika… Well, you don’t have to worry. I’ve got plenty of love for you, Haruna,” the man gloated with a disgusting leer. He took off his hat and sunglasses.

“Oh yes. I will love you…I will love your body,” he murmured, licking his lips.

Shuuji Niekawa could do nothing as the man beside him fantasized about defiling his daughter. The curse of Saika filled his brain, and he had no functional thinking power.

All he could do was stand there.

Haruna’s onetime homeroom teacher, *Takashi Nasujima*, plotted and cackled over her body.

And all her father could do was stand there.

*At that moment—Ikebukuro When Anri finally headed home, she was still feeling depressed.*

A number of pathways had been indicated to her over the course of the day.

In a way, they were each potential futures being displayed for her through the picture frame. She just didn't have the bravery to choose which picture to paint.

*I'm the same.*

*Nothing about me has changed since before I met Ryuugamine and Kida…and even Mika.*

It was this mood of self-loathing that consumed her when she reached her apartment. Then she saw a feminine figure leaning against her door.

*Who is that…? Is it…Niekawa?*

She tensed up until she approached close enough to clearly make out the figure—at which point she realized it was a girl she'd never seen before.

"Hello. It's nice to meet you for the first time. Right?"

Her smile was gentle but strong at the core, the exact opposite of how Anri felt at the moment. She gave Anri a piercing look, then held out her hand for a shake, and introduced herself in a firm voice.

"I'm Saki Mikajima. Hi!"

In the darkness, a voice called for her.

It was strongly familiar, but for some reason, she couldn't place who it belonged to.

She was drawn forward, walking through the dark, until she sensed something hitting her chest.

*"…am Celty."*

When she realized the thing, which was smaller than a soccer ball, was what had called her name, Celty remembered that the voice of the head in her hands was none other than her own.

Then the head that was supposed to belong to her repeated what it had been muttering, louder and clearer this time.

*“I am Celty.”*

*No, no, no, no, no! Wait! I mean, yes, it’s true, but hang on a second!*

“…ty! Celtyyy!”

She burst up with a start, stammering to herself, and found that she was in her usual bedroom, right next to Shinra in his wheelchair, who was looking at her with great concern.

“Are you all right? You were really moaning to yourself.”

Celty hurriedly cast her vision around the area and snatched up the PDA resting next to her bed.

*“Th-the head! What happened to my head?!”*

“Don’t worry. The police report was a little fishy. The rumors on the Net are saying that the head might’ve been a fake. The rumors that me and Yumasaki started, I mean.”

*“…Oh. But we’ve got to do something! If that gets cremated, I’ll…I’ll…!”*

“Calm down. I’ll do something about that head.”

Shinra leaned over in his chair and held her until she finally felt herself calming down.

*“…Thank you. I’m better now. Sorry for getting out of hand like that.”*

“I’m glad. If anything, it was Seiji who was even more worked up. He said he was going to charge the police station, so I knocked him out with a tranquilizer for the night… Then Namie got mad at me for giving Seiji a tranquilizer. So I had to knock her out, too. Compared to them, Mika was very relaxed. And when Namie lost her cool, Dad ran off somewhere,” he explained, as if it was all some funny story.

Just then, the doorbell rang over by the entrance.

“Hmm, I wonder who that is. Did Dad come back?”

Several moments later, the sliding door of the bedroom opened, and Emilia popped her head inside.

“Shinra, a glasses girl child has arrived for judgment of a visit?”

“Glasses? Oh, would that be Anri? Please send her in.”

*“Anri…I wonder if we should tell her about Mikado,”* Celty showed Shinra on her PDA, but she figured there wouldn’t be time for that sort of conversation. Then the door to the bedroom slid open again, and a woman wearing glasses entered.

“…Umm…? I’m sorry, you are?”

*Huh? Who’s this?*

Neither Shinra nor Celty could hide their surprise. The woman walked up to Shinra and took his hand without expression, staring into his face.

As he waited, baffled, she said, “It’s a pleasure to meet you. My name is Kasane Kujiragi.”

But a second before they could decipher the meaning of that name, Kujiragi drew closer to Shinra’s face and whispered, “I have an interest in you.”

Instantly, *without batting an eye, the woman placed her lips over Shinra’s*—and extended steel nails from her fingers, *sinking them into his shoulder*.

For a brief moment, everything in the room, time included, seemed to freeze solid.

When blood seeped from Shinra’s shoulder and his eyes began turning bloodshot like Saika’s, it was not Celty’s consciousness that abandoned her this time but her sense of reason.

Then chaotic shadows ravaged the room.

It tumbled.

And tumbled.

After this day, a subset of residents of the city found themselves plunging into chaos, without knowing where they were headed.

There was no one mastermind behind it, no one single cause—just different people tangling up one another’s feet, falling and falling…

Into the deep darkness that existed on the underside of the city, where those like the Awakusu-kai lived and breathed.

Inside the sack that was the city, both wide and cramped at once, the rodents struggled and struggled.

Would they fight back like cornered rats? Or simply drown in the sack?

Nobody could guess at this point in time.

Only one thing was certain.

As long as they continued to plunge within the city of Ikebukuro, they would ultimately be headed to the same place, the deepest place of all.

As such, fate worked its ways as they fell.

Without a hint at even the nature of its eventual product, whether rope leading up to safety or shackles dragging to the bottom of the earth…

The city offered a glimpse into its impenetrable darkness, to saints and villains alike.

There was no way to tell if hope awaited at the bottom of that obsidian dark.

And yet, without stopping a single one of them, the city swallowed all within itself—and began to tumble.

Author
Ryohgo Narita



*Durarara!!* x11–End

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## CAST

Celty Sturluson
Shinra Kishitani

Izaya Orihara

Anri Sonohara
Erika Karisawa

Mikado Ryuugamine
Masaomi Kida

Shizuo Heiwajima
Kyouhei Kadota

Walker Yumasaki
Saburo Togusa
Mika Harima
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## AFTERWORD

Hello, I'm Ryohgo Narita.

Well, *Durarara!!* has passed the ten-volume mark and reached number eleven safely. You might find a few scattered references throughout this book that will make you grin if you've read Volumes 4–5 of my *Vamp!* series of novels… (Blatant cross-marketing.)

I pushed the story forward quite a bit in the latter half of this book and ended it with a number of lit fuses all over the place. I'm expecting that the next book will start with a number of consecutive explosions, so please whittle away the time as you wait, imagining that you're just staring at those fuses…

So, as I had announced before, I was planning to cap the story in a way at Volume 12…but considering what it would take to wrap up some of the stories of the Awakusu-kai characters who didn't appear in this book at all, I'm currently stuck between extending it to a thirteenth volume or making the next one very, very long. I'm still not sure what my final decision will be at this point, but I'm hoping to deliver the news through the usual marketing avenues.

My hope is that once I'm done with this story movement, I'll move it to a fresh series set a year or two later, focusing more on new characters, Aoba and Kuru-Mai and the adults.

Now, if I were to rebrand the title like Mr. Kamachi's *A Certain Magical Index: New Testament*, I could go with…*New Durarara!!* Or…*True Durarara!!* Or…*Durararara!!* Or…*Durarara!!! New World Arc*, or…*Durarara!! Turbo Edition*, or…*Durarara: Sunshine City at Dawn*, or…*Durarara: The Gunman of Ikebukuro*, or…*Durarara Ultimate Battle, Darkness Demon Izaya vs. Ultra-Mecha Shizuo*… The possibilities are just beginning! And now they have ended.

But whatever form it takes, I think that this story set in Ikebukuro will continue for some time longer. I hope you look forward to more!

And now some announcements.

Just as I was praying that there would be more things I could tell you about *Durarara!!*, they have arrived. First of all, the *Durarara!!* Blu-ray box set comes out on the twenty-third of this month!

In addition to all twenty-six episodes of the series, you'll get the *Dengeki Bunko Akifuyu no Jin de Durarara Lovers in Nakano* special event footage. Not only does it include three original audio drama CDs, you get the deluxe box art drawn by Suzuhito Yasuda himself, so if you're interested in that or the *Durarara Rapping!!* character song collection CD that comes out on the same day, I highly recommend looking into buying them!

As for items that are available already for purchase, there's the new edition of the PSP game called *Durarara!! 3way Standoff—Alley—*, which you can check out with its own original opening theme by the band ROOKiEZ is PUNK'D!

On top of that, Ms. Satorigi's manga adaptation is heading into the Saika arc with a volume out already! I'm betting that the combination of the manga format and her fantastic artwork and arrangement will make this even more enjoyable than the original novel!

And now, though it pains me to advertise for a different company than the one printing this book for me…

I have been given the opportunity to write a novel for Tite Kubo's manga series *Bleach*, which is running in Shueisha's *Weekly Shonen Jump* magazine. If all goes to plan, it should be hitting stores within a month or two of the book you hold in your hands!

When I saw my name in the pages of *Shonen Jump* (even if just for publicity purposes), which I've been reading since I was a boy, I got unstoppable chills of joy.

I'm turning that excitement into energy, trying to synergize both fan bases so that readers of *Durarara!!* might find an interest in *Bleach*, and vice versa. I'm doing my best to make everyone happy, so I hope you will check that out!

I've also had more chances to do work in various other fields and places this year, such as participating in the *Red Dragon* role-playing-game fiction series from Seikaisha, and there are others that have yet to be announced coming up.

Of course, the reason I've had all of these opportunities at all is because of the Dengeki Bunko series of *Baccano!* and *Durarara!!*, and the incredible bedrock of support that you readers give me. I will continue to give my all to the series that got me here, to ensure that your support doesn't go to waste!

*The following is the usual list of acknowledgments.

To my editor, Mr. Papio, and the rest of the editorial office. To the proofreaders, whom I give a hard time by being so late with submissions. To all the folks at ASCII Media Works.

To my family, who do so much for me in so many ways, my friends, fellow authors, and illustrators.

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To Suzuhito Yasuda, who took time out of his busy schedule with *Yozakura Quartet* and his video game character designs to provide his wonderful illustrations and even some live streams of the process.

And to all the readers who checked out this book.

To all of the above, the greatest of appreciation!

*March 2012—Ryohgo Narita*

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