
Story by
Midori Sato
Norio Tsuruta
Art by
Yon
HORROR
COLLECTOR
6
The Disappearing Dog

Horror Collector

6 The Disappearing Dog

Midori Sato and Norio Tsuruta

Illustration by
Yon

New York



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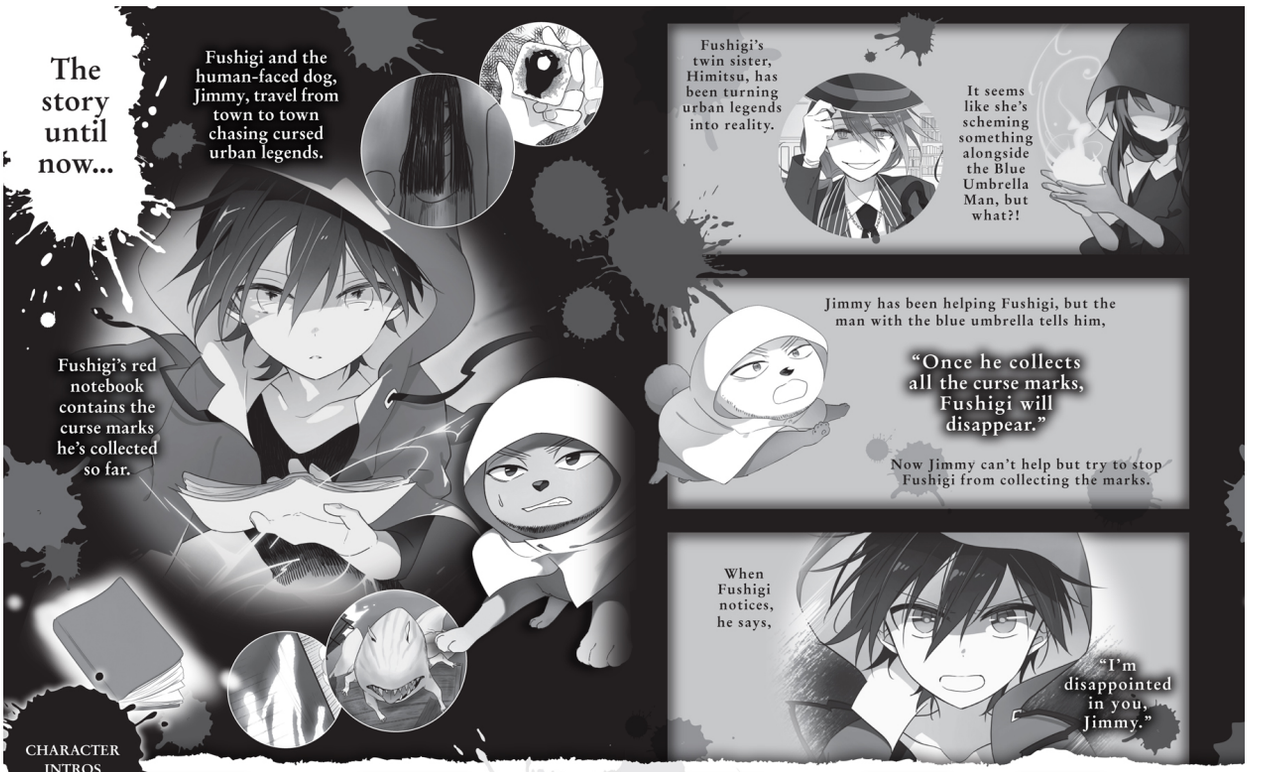
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CHARACTER INTROS



Fushigi Senno — A mysterious boy who travels from town to town chasing after urban legends. He wears a red hood.



Jimmy — A former camera-man for a weekly magazine. He turned into a human-faced dog when Himitsu cursed him.



MOMO — A mobile assistant app that has a mind of its own because of an urban legend brought to life.



Blue Umbrella Man — A strange man who hangs around Himitsu.



Himitsu Senno — Fushigi's younger twin sister. She has the power to make urban legends real. She wears a black hood.

Hirofumi, Kenichirou (3)

Tatsuya

READ 2
4:40 PM

Hey, did it go over there?

Hirofumi

Nah. Not at the station.

4:41 PM

Kenichirou

Wasn't near school either

4:41 PM

Tatsuya

READ 2
4:43 PM

Darn! Where did it go?

Hirofumi

Hey, Tatsuya, you sure you saw it?

4:44 PM

Kenichirou

I don't really believe it either actually

4:45 PM

Hirofumi

It had a kid's yellow raincoat on?

4:45 PM

Kenichirou

Maybe it was just a little kid or something

4:46 PM

Tatsuya

No way. It looked like a dog but had a man's face!

READ 2
4:47 PM

Tatsuya

And it had this creepy bark too.

READ 2
4:48 PM

Hirofumi

That'd be cool if it's true.....

4:50 PM

Kenichirou

Yeah, I wanna see

4:51 PM

Tatsuya

I saw it!

READ 2
4:52 PM

Hirofumi

Really?!

4:52 PM

Kenichirou

Tatsuya, where are you?

4:52 PM

Tatsuya

The river! Hurry and get over here! It's the human-faced dog for real!

READ 2
4:53 PM



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Yen Newsletter

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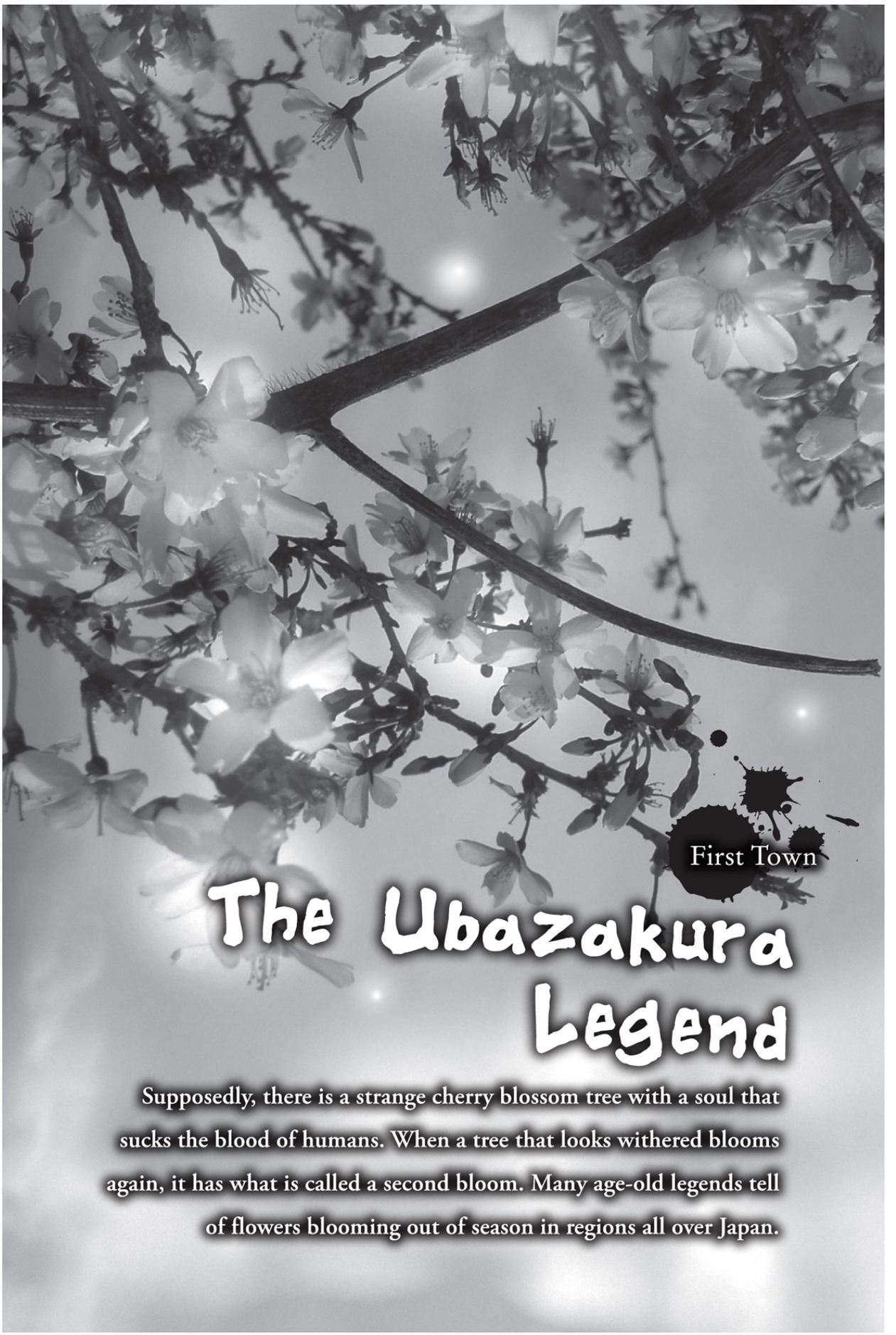
Sixth Town —
The Dog-Killing Bridge

Afterword by Midori Sato

Horror Collector *Dispatch*
by Norio Tsuruta







First Town

The Ubazakura Legend

Supposedly, there is a strange cherry blossom tree with a soul that sucks the blood of humans. When a tree that looks withered blooms again, it has what is called a second bloom. Many age-old legends tell of flowers blooming out of season in regions all over Japan.

“Ahh, what’s a dog to do…?”

A dog was loitering on the bridge of a certain town.

It was early summer, so the hot rays of the sun beat down on him.

He was wearing a child-sized yellow raincoat.

This little canine once was a human being who worked as a cameraman for a publisher of a weekly magazine.

After the faceless kid cursed him, he turned into a human-faced dog.

Since that unfortunate encounter, the dog had chased Himitsu, the faceless kid, alongside a boy who wore a red hood. The boy’s name was Fushigi Senno.

Fushigi had given the human-faced dog the name Jimmy.

“I never thought Fushigi would be that angry at me…”

Not too long ago, Jimmy had interfered with Fushigi collecting a curse mark. When the boy found out, all Fushigi said was that he was disappointed in Jimmy.

But Jimmy had a very good reason for getting in Fushigi’s way. He just couldn’t tell the boy.

They still traveled together, but now Fushigi hardly ever talked to Jimmy. Even after finding another town with a curse mark, they were working separately.

“Is there a problem? Searching for the mark independently is more efficient.”

Something in Jimmy’s raincoat pocket vibrated, and then a pink phone fell out of his jacket. A pink cat wearing glasses appeared on the phone screen. She was the mobile assistant app MOMO.

“Look, MOMO, I’m not workin’ separate from Fushigi ’cause of efficiency or whatever. It’s ’cause it’s hard to be around him. It’s hard to talk to him… Ahh, you wouldn’t get it, since you’re just a machine.”

“Indeed, I do not compute,” MOMO immediately replied. “However, if you do not feel comfortable being with him, you simply need to disappear.”

“You chowderhead, how’s me disappearing gonna help?”

“I can help you.”

“No thanks. Anythin’ you tell me to do isn’t gonna end well.”

Just a few days before, Jimmy had tried to make up with Fushigi using an idea MOMO had suggested. He pretended that a monster from an urban legend had attacked him. Just like MOMO had said, Fushigi was worried about Jimmy and finally talked to him. But Fushigi realized it was a lie right away, and things became more awkward between them.

“Don’t think I’m gonna trust you anymore!”

Even though Jimmy said that, lately MOMO was the only one he could talk to.

“By the way…” MOMO suddenly looked farther down the bridge. “I see a slightly odd girl over there.”

Jimmy looked in the same direction.

He saw a girl in a sailor-style outfit. She wore a winter school uniform even though it was currently summer.



I’ll be able to see Natsukawa soon…

Sakura’s heart raced as she stared at the entrance of a small, old building. Natsukawa’s cram school was held there.

Sakura wanted to invite Natsukawa to look at the cherry blossoms at the nearby park as soon as he was done with his lessons.

I’m sure he’ll say yes.

She hadn’t actually ever talked to Natsukawa before, but she’d had a crush on him ever since she had seen him at the park.

What if we go look at the flowers and get to know each other, then start dating…?

As Sakura’s imagination ran wild, she began to smile.

“So that’s where you were,” someone said.

She turned to where the voice had come from but only saw a dog.

“Where did that pooch come from?” she wondered out loud.

“I’m no pooch. I’m the human-faced dog Jimmy,” he said.

“A-a human-faced dog? That can’t be real!”

“Oh, come on! You’re just like me ’cause—”

At that moment, students started to file out of the building she’d been watching.

Cram school was over.

Sakura spotted a very tall boy in the crowd.

“There’s Natsukawa!” she said.

“Hey, wait for me!” Jimmy yelled, but Sakura ignored him and ran toward Natsukawa.

“Um, Natsukawa, I’m Sakura!” Sakura smiled and bowed to the boy. “Would you be interested in looking at the cherry blossoms in the park with me?”

Sakura looked at Natsukawa expectantly as her heart raced.

But Natsukawa didn’t say anything and just continued walking.

“Why…?”

Sakura chased after Natsukawa and stepped off the sidewalk into the road.

Once Jimmy had caught up with her, he stared at her curiously.

“You don’t know what happened to you, do ya?”

“What do you mean?”

“Take a good look at yourself.”

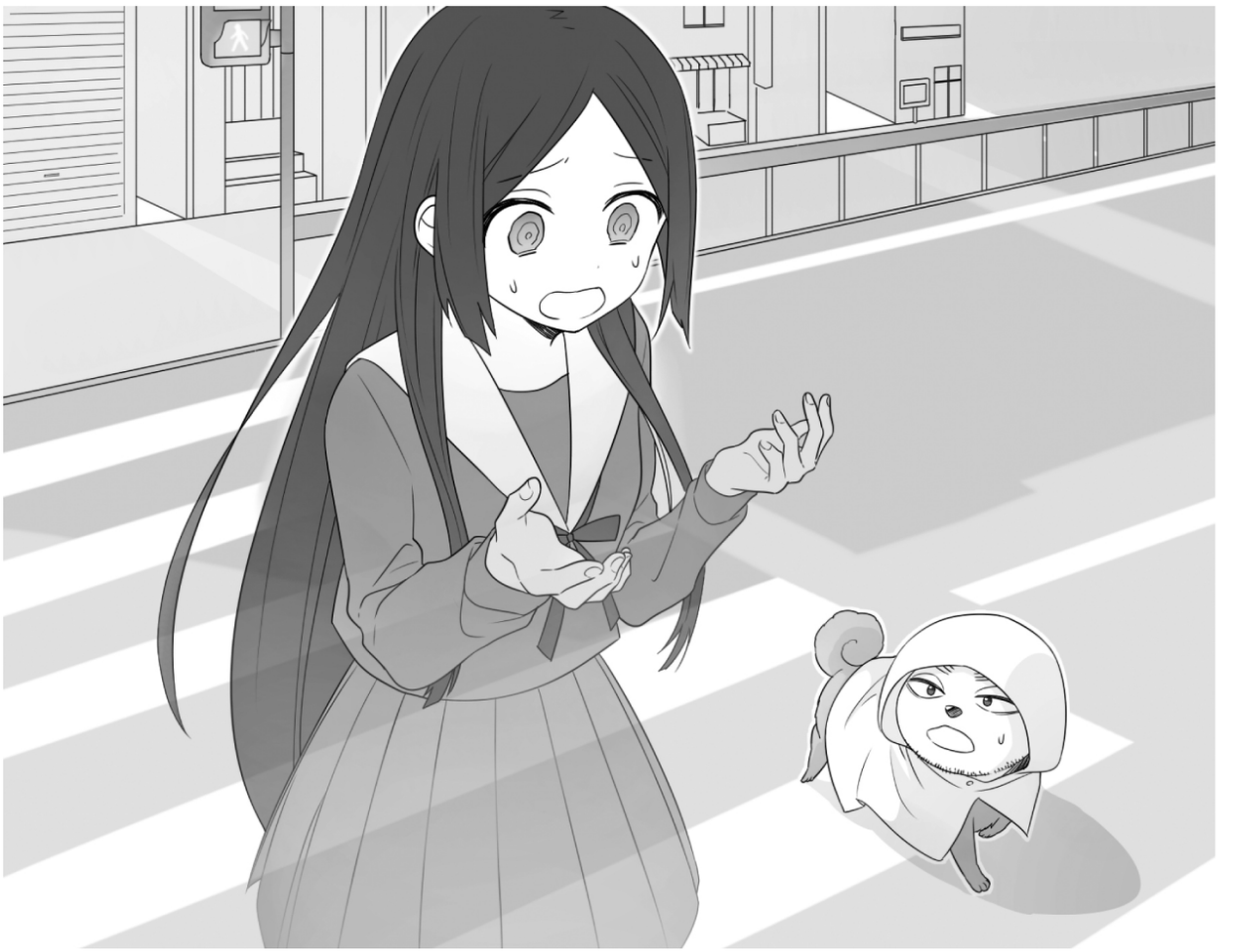
Sakura looked at her own palms.

They were see-through, and it wasn’t just her hands.

Her entire body was transparent.

“What’s happening to me?”

Sakura looked at Jimmy in confusion.



Right at that moment, a car came speeding down the road. It wasn't slowing down, and it rushed right toward Sakura.

"Ah!"

She froze on the spot, but the next moment, the car slipped *through* her and kept going.

"What?"

She hadn't been hurt.

In fact, she hadn't even felt the car hit her.

"Nobody around can see you," Jimmy told her. "Ya can't talk to or touch 'em."

"Wh-what are you even talking about? You can see me."

"That's 'cause I'm like you. Only others who are cursed can see you. And that's 'cause you're not human."

Wait… Does that mean I'm a ghost?

Had she been in an accident?

Or maybe she died from being sick?

"Uh!"

When she tried to remember, pain shot through her head.

"Hey, you doin' okay?" Jimmy asked.

"D-don't get in my way!" Sakura cried out.

I…I just want to go see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa!

Sakura raced off down the road after Natsukawa, and they turned the corner.

"Hey, wait up!"

Jimmy scrambled to follow, but she was already gone by the time he rounded the corner.



What do I do now…?

Sakura was standing in front of a house. The nameplate on the door said NATSUKAWA.

Since I'm a ghost, that means I must be dead.

But she couldn't remember how she had ended up like this. All she knew was that she wanted to see the cherry blossoms with

Natsukawa.

Maybe God decided to fulfill my last wish?

But she felt so bitter that Natsukawa couldn't see her and that she couldn't talk to or touch him.

Suddenly, the window on the second floor opened and she saw him.

Natsukawa…

Apparently, that was his room.

I want to see Natsukawa, even if I am a ghost. I want to go look at the cherry blossoms with him.

She stepped up to the front door and slipped right through it into the building.



After a while, Jimmy also reached Natsukawa's neighborhood.

"Is she really around here?" Jimmy asked MOMO, who was in his pocket.

"She is. She should be at the house of a boy named Natsukawa."

"If we don't catch her quick, things are gonna go sideways," Jimmy said as he kept walking. The phone vibrated as MOMO told him something.

"You have arrived at the destination. You have arrived at the destination."

Jimmy looked at the house in front of him.

"It appears the room at the front of the house on the second floor belongs to Natsukawa."

"The second floor, huh…?"

Jimmy looked up and saw that the window was slightly ajar.

"It appears she is already in Natsukawa's room."

"What?!" Jimmy shouted.

He hurried to try to enter the house, but the door was firmly closed, and he couldn't find a way in.

"What do I do?!"

"I have a brilliant idea."

MOMO vibrated until she was half out of Jimmy's pocket. Then she looked at the house's yard.

“There is a large tree over there,” she said. “If you climb it, you will reach the second floor.”

“*What* now?” Jimmy glanced at his very stubby legs. “Do you think…I could really climb that?” He certainly didn’t think he could. “Looks like my only option is to try…,” he said.

Jimmy made up his mind and walked over to the tree. Then he jumped on it. He gripped the bumps along the trunk and started climbing up and up.

“This is smooth sailing! Is this part of my powers as a human-faced dog?!”

However, the moment he tried to grab a branch with his front paws, his back legs slipped out from under him.

“Waaagh!”

Jimmy dropped a whole six feet to the ground with a resounding *thump*.

“Ouchie ouch…”

“You are rather clumsy,” MOMO said.

“Watch your mouth! You’re the one who said I could get to the second floor by climbing the tree!”

“I certainly did. However, I meant that a cat could do it. It seems dogs are inferior to cats. Please watch. A cat could climb the tree so skillfully, just like this,” MOMO said, then showed on her screen a video of a cat climbing a tree.

“You don’t gotta show me that! Crud!”

Jimmy got up and stared at the tree.

“Don’cha dare underestimate an ex-cameraman. If I were a quitter, I never would’ve gotten any scoops!”

Jimmy ran toward the tree and launched himself up.

Meanwhile, in Natsukawa’s room on the second floor, Sakura stood in a corner and stared at Natsukawa from behind as he sat at his desk.

He was looking at his computer screen.

What do I need to do to ask him out…?

Even though she was in his room, she couldn’t think of any good ideas.

“I want to see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa… I want to see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa…,” Sakura muttered

under her breath, trying to hold back tears.

Then Natsukawa raised his head. He looked around the room.

“That’s weird. I thought I heard a voice…”

He tilted his head in confusion but then went back to his computer.

Did he hear me just now?!

Sakura quickly ran over to his side.

“Natsukawa! Can you hear me? My name is Sakura!”

But Natsukawa didn’t respond at all.

So he didn’t hear me…

“But I just want to see the cherry blossoms with you…,” Sakura murmured, trying to hold back her tears again.

“Whoa!”

Natsukawa clutched his head.

“I heard a v-voice…in my head… Ah! Aaah!”

“Maybe all he can hear is that I want to go see the cherry blossoms with him?”

Sakura went right up to Natsukawa and started talking to him.

“I want to see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa… I want to see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa…”

“Wh-what’s going on?! Aaaaah!”

“So he *can* hear me!”

A wide smile bloomed on Sakura’s face as she said the same words right into Natsukawa’s ear.

Natsukawa stiffened up more and more. Things started to shake all over his room. His computer screen began to flicker and then shut off.

“I…want…to go see the cherry blossoms…,” Natsukawa said.

Then he slowly stood up from his chair and staggered out of his room.

Meanwhile, Jimmy had fallen out of the tree many times, but he was finally right next to the second-floor window.

"All right, just a little more…"

Jimmy was standing on a branch. He reached his quivering front paw toward the open window.

Kerchak!

The front door opened, and Natsukawa walked right out of the house looking perfectly normal.

"What in the *what*?! Why'd I even do all that?!"

Sakura trailed after Natsukawa.

"H-hey!"

Once they were on the road, they started to walk.

"No! Wait!"

Jimmy tried to pull his front paw back, but he lost his balance, and his back legs slipped off the branch.

"Ahh!"

He instantly grabbed the branch with his front paws, but then he was dangling off the branch in the air.

"If I fall from way up here…things are gonna get messy…"

Jimmy's front paws were getting tired, and he seemed like he was on the verge of falling.

"I'm not gonna let something like this beat me!"

Jimmy used all his strength to stretch his head up. Then he bit down on a branch right in front of him.

"Hraagh!"

He pulled himself up on the branch by the skin of his teeth.

Finally, his back legs felt another branch.

"Hraaaaaagh!"

He latched on to the tree.

Jimmy had just barely managed to keep himself from plummeting to the ground.

"Phew! I—I made it!"

"Oh, Jimmy, what fun games you play," MOMO said.

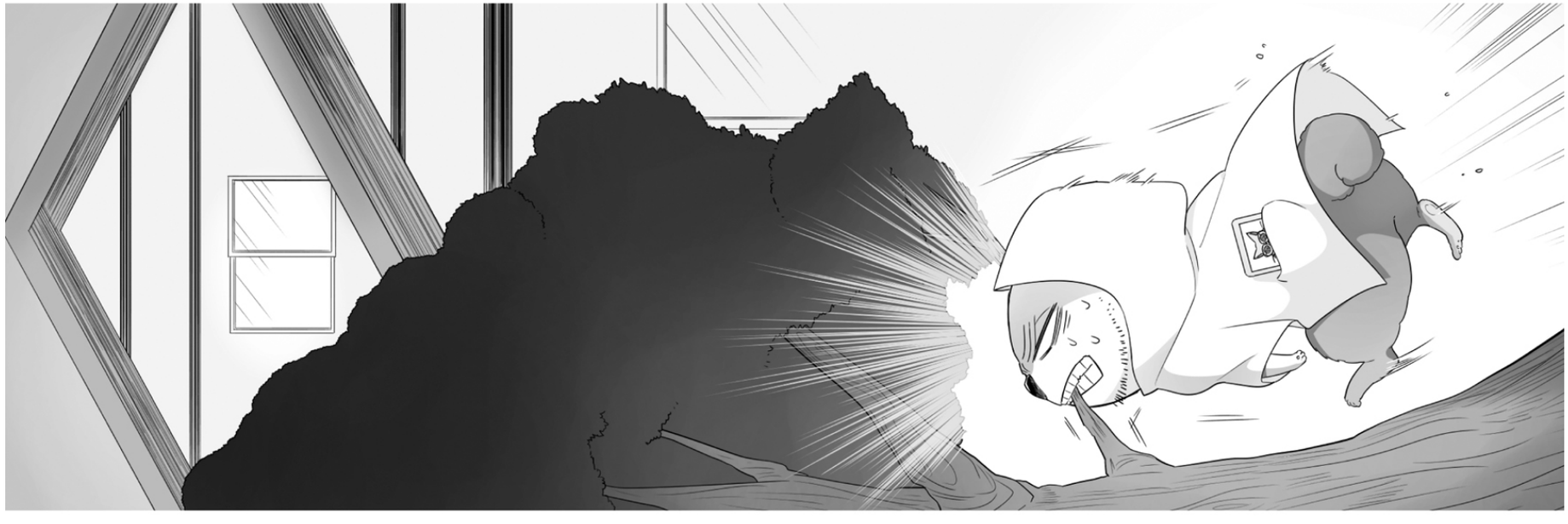
"I wasn't foolin' around!"

"I'd like to give it a try, too."

“Oh, shut your yap! Crud! I don’t have time to argue with you!”

Jimmy scrambled down the tree and after Sakura and Natsukawa.







The large park was on the outskirts of town.

Sakura guided Natsukawa toward a grove of trees in the park. As she beckoned for him to follow, he staggered behind her.

“This way… This way…”

She led Natsukawa deeper and deeper into the trees.

After they walked for some time, they came to a deserted area. Deep in the woods, pine and oak trees grew all around. The air there was damp and heavy.

Sakura walked straight forward until she reached their destination. A cherry blossom tree much larger than the others stood just ahead of her. The tree was in bloom even though it wasn’t spring. And for some reason, the cherry blossoms that normally should have been pink were pure white instead.

There was no wind, but the white blossoms quivered as though a breeze had swept past.

“This is it…,” Sakura said to Natsukawa once she was directly under the branches.

Natsukawa stood next to her and looked up at the bright-white blooms.

His eyes were unfocused, and he didn’t seem to know where he was or what he was looking at.

As Sakura watched Natsukawa, she smiled.

“Finally…I get to see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa. I’m… so happy…”

Sakura smiled and tried to take Natsukawa’s hand.

“Stop right there!”

Sakura looked around and finally spotted the human-faced dog nearby.

“You’re that dog…from earlier…,” she said.

“Don’t get any closer to that boy!”

“Why…?”

“Otherwise he’s doomed!” Jimmy shouted.

“Doomed…? But I just…wanted to see the cherry blossoms with Natsukawa…”

“No! Your goal is to bring boys to the cherry blossom tree to kill them with your curse!”

“Kill…with a curse…?”

At that moment, Sakura felt her head throb.

“Aaagh!”

She remembered everything she had done.

She had brought Natsukawa to this place…

She had whispered to him in his room…

She remembered standing in front of his cram school, waiting for him…

But she couldn’t remember anything before that.

“Why…? But I thought…I was a ghost? I died in an accident or I was sick…and then I turned into a ghost…”

“I knew it. That’s just what you convinced yourself of, though,” Jimmy said.

“But that’s not what you are. You’re part of that cherry blossom tree right in front of you!”

“I’m part…of the tree…?”

Sakura stared at the white cherry blossom tree.

“I thought somethin’ was off from the get-go. You didn’t know that nobody could see you, and you were obsessed with leadin’ that kid away.”

Jimmy walked over to Sakura’s side and glared at the cherry blossom tree.

“That thing’s called a Cursed Ubazakura. It’s a type of cherry blossom tree that has sapped the lifeblood of human beings for one hundred years. I wondered how it was attracting humans to it. Looks like it created you to lure them in.”

“Then…I’m…”

Sakura had seen Natsukawa in the park and fallen in love with him. She had wanted to see the cherry blossoms with him.

“Then…I wasn’t supposed to ever…like Natsukawa…?”

Jimmy nodded. “If he follows you, he’ll just get swallowed by the cherry blossom tree.”

“How could that be…?”

Sakura had only a few memories, and all of them were about Natsukawa. She hadn’t ever spoken to him before, and he didn’t know she existed. But even then, she had been happy that she had fallen in love with him.

“But then…I…I still…”

She started to cry. Then her whole body began to turn white.

“H-hey!” Jimmy rushed over to her, but Sakura glared at him with pure-white eyes.

“Get away!” Sakura yelled and blasted Jimmy with a gust of wind.

“Ahh!”

The gust hit him head-on, and he flew off, slamming into a pine tree about ten yards away.

“Agh!”

Jimmy fell to the ground.

Next, Sakura’s white eyes turned to Natsukawa.

“I’m sorry… I’m sorry…”

It didn’t seem like she knew what she was or who the boy in front of her was, either.

Jimmy wanted to help Natsukawa, but he hurt all over and couldn’t move.

Sakura walked up to the dazed boy and took him by the hand. The cherry blossoms started to shudder. Red blood vessels appeared on the girl’s hand.

She was sucking Natsukawa’s blood.

The red blood vessels spread all over Sakura’s body until even her eyes turned red. Soon, veins showed up on the cherry blossom tree’s trunk, too.

As the blood drained out of Natsukawa, his face became more and more haggard.

“No! You like him, don’t you?! You’ve gotta cut that out!” Jimmy begged Sakura, but she couldn’t hear him anymore.

Sakura and the cherry blossom tree were both bright red. She even squeezed Natsukawa’s hand harder as she tried to take every last drop of his blood.

“That’s enough,” said a boy in a red hood.

He had suddenly appeared right in front of Sakura.

“Fushigi!”

The boy glanced at Jimmy, who was under a nearby pine tree. Then he looked at Sakura and the cursed tree behind her.

“Stoppp!!!”

Sakura immediately attacked Fushigi.

“I never imagined you’d use something like this…,” Fushigi said as he nimbly dodged.

He brushed aside the flurry of cherry blossoms coming down on him and made his way to the roots of the tree.

“It’s over.”

Fushigi pulled out his bright-red notebook and opened to a fresh page, then turned it toward the cherry blossom tree.

* * *



"Illuminate the curse. Transcribe the curse. Project."

Fushigi said a spell.

"Resolve."

In the next moment, a glittering curse mark emerged from the tree. It inverted itself and transferred to the open page.

The petals fell from the cherry blossom tree and flickered white before withering away in the blink of an eye. Sakura also withered, the young girl turning into an old woman.

Natsukawa never saw Sakura, even as she crumbled and drifted off on the wind like flower petals.

Natsukawa fell over. He had lost a lot of blood, but he was somehow still alive.

Jimmy was still by the pine tree, but when he saw that the boy had survived, he was relieved.

But he also felt bad for Sakura.

"Why did this happen…?" Sakura had simply liked Natsukawa. But she had lost herself and almost taken the life of her crush. "That sort of thing is just…"

Suddenly, Jimmy heard someone talk to him from far above his head.

"You'll end up that way, too, someday."

Jimmy remembered that voice.

He looked up into the trees and saw a man holding a blue umbrella standing at the top of one of them.

"What are you doing up there?!"

Fushigi hadn't noticed the man yet.

"Crud! The man with the blue umbrella… What? Did you take a front-row seat to watch us?!"

Jimmy ran over to the tree, hoping to catch the man with the blue umbrella. But then he grimaced. He still hurt all over from being thrown around by the wind.

"Heh-heh-heh. Please don't strain yourself. You'll have that body for a very long time, after all."

“Wh-what do you mean?”

“You’re very close to fully becoming a human-faced dog.”

“What did ya just say?”

The man with the blue umbrella told Jimmy, who was shaken, **“Once you become a real human-faced dog, you’ll also attack people you love without even realizing who they are…just like that girl did. You’ll become a monster from an urban legend.”**

“You—!”

Jimmy struggled to his feet and tried to climb the tree the man with the blue umbrella stood on top of.

However, the man cackled, opened his umbrella, and jumped off the tree.

He floated in the air for a moment.

“Heh…heh-heh-heh…heh-heh-heh!”

Then he started walking in midair with his umbrella still open until he disappeared.

“No…”

“Did something happen?” Fushigi came to Jimmy’s side.

“Just now—!” Jimmy started to tell Fushigi about the man with the blue umbrella, but then he stopped himself for some reason. “I-it wasn’t anything important…”

“……” Fushigi stared at Jimmy but didn’t say anything at all. He put his red notebook in his pocket and started walking off.

Jimmy looked over toward where Sakura had been and muttered to himself, “I…”

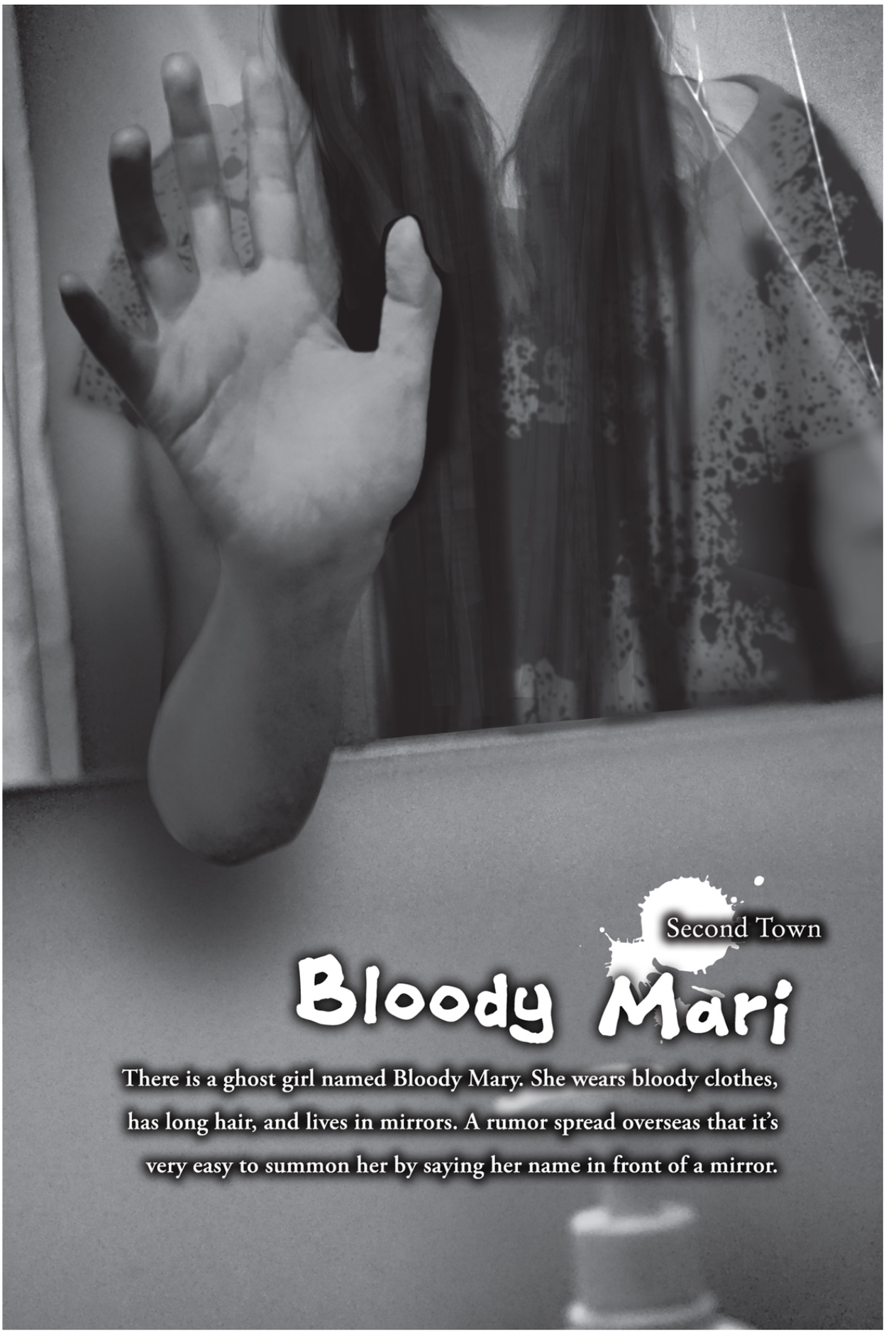
Would he turn into a monster just like Sakura had?

Jimmy stared at Fushigi, who was still strolling away.

“I won’t. I’ll never let myself turn into a monster…”

Jimmy said this as though he was trying to convince himself. Then he followed Fushigi.





Second Town

Bloody Mari

There is a ghost girl named Bloody Mary. She wears bloody clothes, has long hair, and lives in mirrors. A rumor spread overseas that it's very easy to summon her by saying her name in front of a mirror.



“I’m heading out!”

Miku Kiguchi, who was in the sixth grade, left her house and headed to the condo where her friend Rima lived.

Rima is the only one who believes me.

Miku loved urban legends and had read all sorts of books about them. That was how she learned about a new tale.

It was called Bloody Mari.

Mari was a girl who lived in mirrors. Some legends said, **“she was in an accident and was so surprised at seeing the blood on her when she looked into a mirror that she died.”** Or that **“she stared at her reflection in a store window for so long that she didn’t notice a truck coming, so it hit her and she died.”**

Miku had no idea what Mari actually was, but she was very interested in a certain passage in a book.

The night before, Miku had followed the instructions and tried to perform the ritual to summon Mari in her own room. Her mom always got upset at her for believing in urban legends, so she had to do it sneakily. But after saying “Come out, Mari” twelve whole times, she suddenly became frightened and couldn’t say it the last time.

By performing a ritual, you can summon Bloody Mari.

How to Summon Bloody Mari

1. First, find a full-length mirror. (It should show your whole body.)
2. Next, stare at your face in the mirror for thirteen seconds.
3. Finally, say "Come out, Mari" thirteen times.
4. Once you do this, Bloody Mari will appear before you in the mirror!



Mari didn't appear, of course.

But I want to know what would happen…

Miku wanted to try it again.

She was too scared to do it alone, so she asked her classmates if they would join in, but none of them believed in the legend, so they wouldn't help her.

Only one person had said yes. That was Rima.

I'm so glad I have Rima.

Miku had promised to go over to Rima's house right after school that day to do the ritual. But when she got home, she noticed something strange. The book about Bloody Mari had disappeared from the shelf in her room.

She thought her mom might have thrown it away, but her mom said she hadn't even seen it. Her mom didn't like things like that, but she also wasn't the type of person to throw away someone else's book without asking.

I was going to take it over to Rima's house, though.

She had found it a day ago at a small bookstore on the outskirts of town.

Miku hadn't known there was a shop in that spot.

A man was working there, and when Miku told him she liked urban legends, he recommended the book to her. It was called *Himitsu's Urban Legends*.

"It's a very intriguing book. Heh…heh-heh-heh…heh-heh-heh!" the man had commented as he happily handed it to Miku.

But I didn't get to read all of it. I need to go back and get another copy.

As Miku thought that, she spotted the condo where Rima lived.



A boy in a red hood and his partner, a human-faced dog, were walking around town searching for urban legends.

Jimmy was staring at Fushigi, who was walking several yards ahead of him.

Crud. What do I do…?

The man with the blue umbrella had told Jimmy that Fushigi would disappear once all the urban legends were collected. But Jimmy didn't want that to happen to Fushigi.

"I want to prevent it, but if I turn into the actual human-faced dog…"

Would he forget who Fushigi was and become a monster from an urban legend?

"Then who'd protect Fushigi…?" Jimmy asked.

Right at that moment, MOMO started talking to him from his pocket.

"You want to protect Fushigi?"

"Yep, who else could have is back otherwise?"

"You seem to be under a false impression, Jimmy."

"Whaddaya mean?"

"You are not concerned about whether you can protect him. You simply do not want to leave Fushigi's side."

Jimmy suddenly raised his head.

"W-well, I, uh…" He didn't know what to say. "I dunno! Everything'll be fine so long as I never fully turn into a human-faced dog!" Then Jimmy warned MOMO, "Keep quiet for a while," and raced over to catch up with Fushigi.



Miku rode the elevator of Rima's condo to the thirteenth floor where she lived.

"Come on in." When the elevator door opened, Rima was waiting for her in the hallway.

Rima had clear skin and big, lovely eyes. She kept the right side of her face covered with her black hair, which had grown all the way down to her hips, but she was still surprisingly beautiful.

"You live on a really high floor," Miku commented.

This was her first time visiting Rima's house. As Miku took in the view, Rima stood to her right.

"That's not important. Let's hurry and summon Bloody Mari," she said.

"O-okay."

Miku stopped admiring the scenery and headed to Rima's house. Rima lived at the end of the thirteenth floor's hallway.

Once Miku had entered the condo, she saw a long corridor. A door was at the end of it. There was also one door on the right and another door on the left side of the hall.

"The living room is straight ahead," Rima said while walking alongside Miku. She opened the door at the very end of the hall.

The moment Miku saw the living room, her eyes went wide.

There was nothing inside it.

Or to be more precise, there was only one thing in the room. Right in the center of the space was an old-looking full-length mirror.

"Why do you only have a mirror in here?" Miku asked.

Rima laughed and said, "Oh, right. We're cleaning in here, so we had to move everything to another room."

"Even your sofa and table?"

"That's not important. Let's hurry and summon Bloody Mari," Rima said.

As Rima turned the mirror toward her, Miku noticed a crack at the top of it.

"Where did that crack come from?" she asked.

"The mirror fell a little bit ago. It'll still work even if there's a crack in it."

"I guess it will… Wait…"

Miku realized there was something on the crack of the mirror. It appeared to be blood.

"What is *this*?" Miku asked, looking over at Rima.

"Just ignore that."

Rima turned away. It was like she didn't want Miku to see her face.

"What's wrong, Rima?"

"You turned toward me so suddenly that it scared me. I think the blood is from when I cut my finger trying to the fix the mirror after it fell."


Star

“No way. Are you okay?” Miku asked. “Which finger did you cut?”

“Oh, um…I don’t remember.”

How does she not remember…? She said the mirror fell down just a bit ago. Did she really forget something that happened recently?

Miku glanced at Rima’s fingers.

Rima stood beside her, just staring at Miku with her large left eye.

“That’s not important. Let’s hurry and summon Bloody Mari,” she said again.

“Y-yeah…,” Miku replied.

She felt like Rima’s eye could swallow her whole.

She hadn’t come over to Rima’s house to see the view or doubt her friend. They were there to summon Bloody Mari.

“Okay, then I guess we should start,” Miku said.

Miku and Rima stood in front of the mirror positioned right in the center of the living room.

“So first we stare into the mirror at our own faces for thirteen seconds?” Rima asked.

“Y-yeah, that’s right.”

But Miku couldn’t bring herself to look into the mirror at her own face.

“What’s wrong, Miku?”

“I’m kind of scared…”

Miku was very interested in urban legends, and she really wanted to summon Bloody Mari. But then she remembered how she couldn’t get herself to call Mari a thirteenth time, and she got spooked all over again.

“Aww… But I went out of my way to help you, Miku.”

“Rima…”

Just the year before, Miku had asked her classmates to play the Charlie-Charlie Challenge with her when she found it in another book. This was before she knew Rima. But back then, just like now, none of her classmates had believed in urban legends, and nobody would agree to play with her. In the end, she never tried it.

“Yeah, you really are the only one who does. You’re the only one who understands…”

Normally, she got along with her classmates just fine. But when she talked about urban legends, everyone told her they weren’t real or that the books she had were lying or even that she was weird.

Miku couldn’t help but feel frustrated.

Rima was Miku’s very first friend to believe in urban legends.

“I’m sorry for almost chickening out. I’ll do it right this time!”

As soon as Miku said that, Rima smiled and said, “Yes, let’s do it, then.”

Miku looked into the mirror again. Rima did, too.

“First, stare into it for thirteen seconds.”

“Right.”

They both stared at their own faces in the mirror as they counted.

“One, two, three, four, five, six…”

“Seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve…”

They both called out “Thirteen!” at the same time.

“Next, say ‘Come out, Mari’ thirteen times.”

“Yeah, I know. Okay, let’s do it, Miku.”

Miku stared right into the mirror and slowly started to speak.

Their voices echoed in the empty living room.

“Come out, Mari.”

“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.”

“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.”

“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.
“Come out, Mari.

“Come out, Mari—”

But on the twelfth time, Miku stopped without even realizing it. Just like the day before, she was too scared to go on.

“What’s wrong, Miku? It’s just one more time,” Rima said.

“Y-yeah, I know…” Miku looked at the living room door. “Could I use your bathroom real quick? I’ve been holding it for a while.”

“What?”

“I’ll be right back,” Miku said as she scrambled out of the room.

Haah… I ran away.

She let out a long sigh and leaned back against the bathroom door. She hadn’t actually needed to use it.

If she had stayed in the living room, she would have had to say *it* a thirteenth time.

I hope Rima isn’t mad.

She knew Rima must have figured out she ran away because she was scared.

And I finally found a friend to share urban legends with…

She felt pathetic for getting frightened.

“Huh?”

She realized the door she was facing was slightly ajar.

It was one of the doors other than the living room’s.

Is this Rima’s room?

Miku was so curious that she decided to take a peek even though she knew better.

“What?”

There was nothing inside the room.

It’s like no one is even using it. Where do they put their things?

“What are you doing?”

She turned to see that Rima was right next to her.

“Ah!”

“I asked you what you’re doing.”

Rima stared with her large left eye.
“Oh, um… What happened to the stuff that was in this roo—?”
“That’s not important! Let’s hurry and summon Bloody Mari!”
Rima tried to drag Miku by the hand to the living room.

“No!”

Miku shook off her friend’s hand.
“You’re acting weird, Rima!”
She couldn’t trust what the other girl said. That was what Miku had realized.
Then Rima started to snicker.
“Have you heard of this story?

“There once was a girl who was all on her own. Her parents were busy at work and always late coming home. One day, they promised to return a little early. It was the girl’s birthday, and she was ever so merry. So, back from school, she wanted to dress up. She headed to the living room mirror for a little spruce-up.”

“In front of a mirror…,” Miku said as she felt a chill go down her spine.

“But what terrible timing she had. In the floor-length mirror, she saw something bad. She’d thought she was alone, but she was wrong to assume. She turned to see a thief in the room. She had seen his face, so he attacked her. With a knife, stab! stab! stab! He went and hacked her…”

Miku let out a small shriek.

“The thief was out the door, the girl on the floor. Oh, she ached, but still, she was alive. Her parents wouldn’t flake, so she knew she would survive. The ambulance, though

belated, would come once her parents phoned. So she waited, waited, waited, only for Mommy and Daddy's return to be postponed. Turns out their bloodstained sweetie pie wasn't worth kissing their careers good-bye."

"No way…"

"That was how she met her demise…in the mirror before her eyes. Her bloody image so vivid……is what made her livid."

"Does that mean…?"

As Miku listened to the tale, she thought of someone.

Bloody Mari.

"But that doesn't match any of the stories about Mari that I know…"

Himitsu's Urban Legends had said that **Mari "was in an accident and was so surprised at seeing the blood on her when she looked into a mirror that she died,"** or that **"she stared at her reflection in a store window for so long that she didn't notice a truck coming, so it hit her and she died."**

Rima snickered.

"She doesn't care where the urban legends came from. All she cares about is spreading them…"

"She? Spreading urban legends?"

Miku had no idea what Rima meant. When she tried to take a step closer, Rima became upset.

"Stay away!"

Rima pushed her into the wall.

"Ahh! Wh-what did you do that for?"

Rima's hip-length hair was tangled, and Miku could now see the right half of her face, which had been hidden.

"Agh!"

The right side of Rima's face was full of cracks.

"This is your fault," Rima said.

“How? What happened?”

“Yesterday, you stopped saying my name after the twelfth time.”

That was when Miku’s mind cleared, and she realized she never had a classmate named Rima. Then she also noticed that something was flowing down and dripping off Rima.

It was blood. Rima was bleeding everywhere.

“You can’t be…”

The girl right in front of Miku was Bloody Mari herself.

“Because you stopped at the twelfth time, I appeared in this world incomplete…

“I did all that work pretending to be your friend so I could fix my face…

“But you need to say my name one more time.”

“Ahhhh!”

Miku scrambled out of the room.



No! No!

After running out of the condo, Miku bolted down the hallway of the building.

She felt horrible for summoning something so frightening out of curiosity.

If she catches me, she’ll kill me with a curse!

She reached the elevator.

It was already stopped on the thirteenth floor, so Miku rushed inside.

“Name, name.”

Mari was running toward her, her black hair sticking up in all directions as she left a trail of blood behind her.

“Get away!”

Miku hit the button for the first floor and then pressed the CLOSE button repeatedly.

“Name, my name. The thirteenth time.”

Mari was right in front of her and about to get into the elevator, too.

"Ahhh!"

But the door shut right before she could.

Whirrr.

The elevator started going down.

"A-am I okay…?"

Miku let out a big sigh of relief now that she was alone in the elevator.

I can't believe Rima was Bloody Mari all along…

She shuddered just thinking about how they had been in the same room together.

But she had gotten away now.

"One more time."

She heard a voice from somewhere.

Miku looked around inside the elevator, but she didn't see Mari anywhere.

"A-am I just imagining it…?"

As she thought that, Miku suddenly turned to look behind her.

Inside the elevator was a big full-length mirror. And from the depths of the mirror, she saw Mari running toward her.

"My name."

"Ahhhh!"

Once she was up close, Mari started to reach out with a bloody arm.

She was trying to grab Miku *through* the mirror.

"My name. One more time."

The eyes in her half-cracked face stared creepily at Miku.

Miku backed away from the mirror and tried to run, but the elevator was so small that she had nowhere to go.

"My name. The thirteenth time."

Her bloodstained hand grasped Miku's clothes.

Thunk.

The elevator stopped on the fifth floor.

“Get out!”

The moment the doors opened, someone grabbed Miku’s hand.

It was Fushigi.

Jimmy was standing outside the elevator, too.

“Wh-who are you?” Miku asked.

“That doesn’t matter. If you want to live, then get out now.”

“B-but…”

“Name.”

Mari’s hand quickly shot out toward Fushigi from the mirror.

“Hurry and get out!” he yelled.

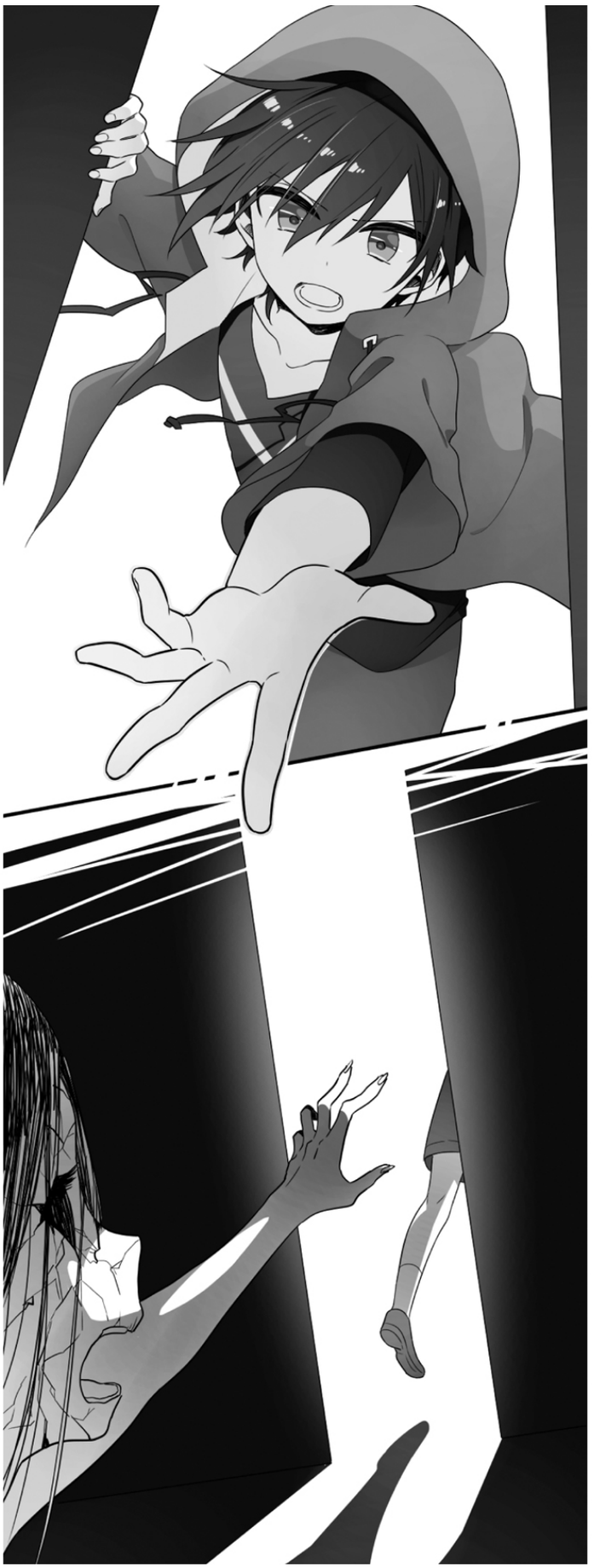
“O-okay!”

Fushigi pulled out his bright-red notebook.

But Miku panicked right at that moment and jumped out of the elevator, crashing straight into him.

“Urgh!”

The notebook went flying and landed in front of the mirror.





Miku was already running down the stairs and had left Fushigi behind.

“Name! My name!”

Furious, Mari prepared to strike Fushigi.

He couldn’t run away, so he braced for her attack.

“Fushigi! Careful!”

Jimmy leaped into the elevator and hurled himself at the mirror.

An earsplitting crash rang out as it cracked.

At the same time, Mari disappeared.

“Mari’s gone!”

Fushigi went into the elevator and looked around for her, but she was nowhere to be found.

“She got away…,” he said.

Fushigi glared at Jimmy.

“How could you, Jimmy?”

“Uh, I was just tryin’ to help you, Fushigi…”

“Help me? I could have collected the mark all on my own.”

“But…”

“Bloody Mari probably gave up on that girl, but she’ll try to make someone else say her name thirteen times instead.”

“I—I was just…”

“I’m even more disappointed in you than before.”

Fushigi picked up his notebook and stepped out of the elevator.

“Fushigi…”

The phone in Jimmy’s pocket vibrated in that moment.

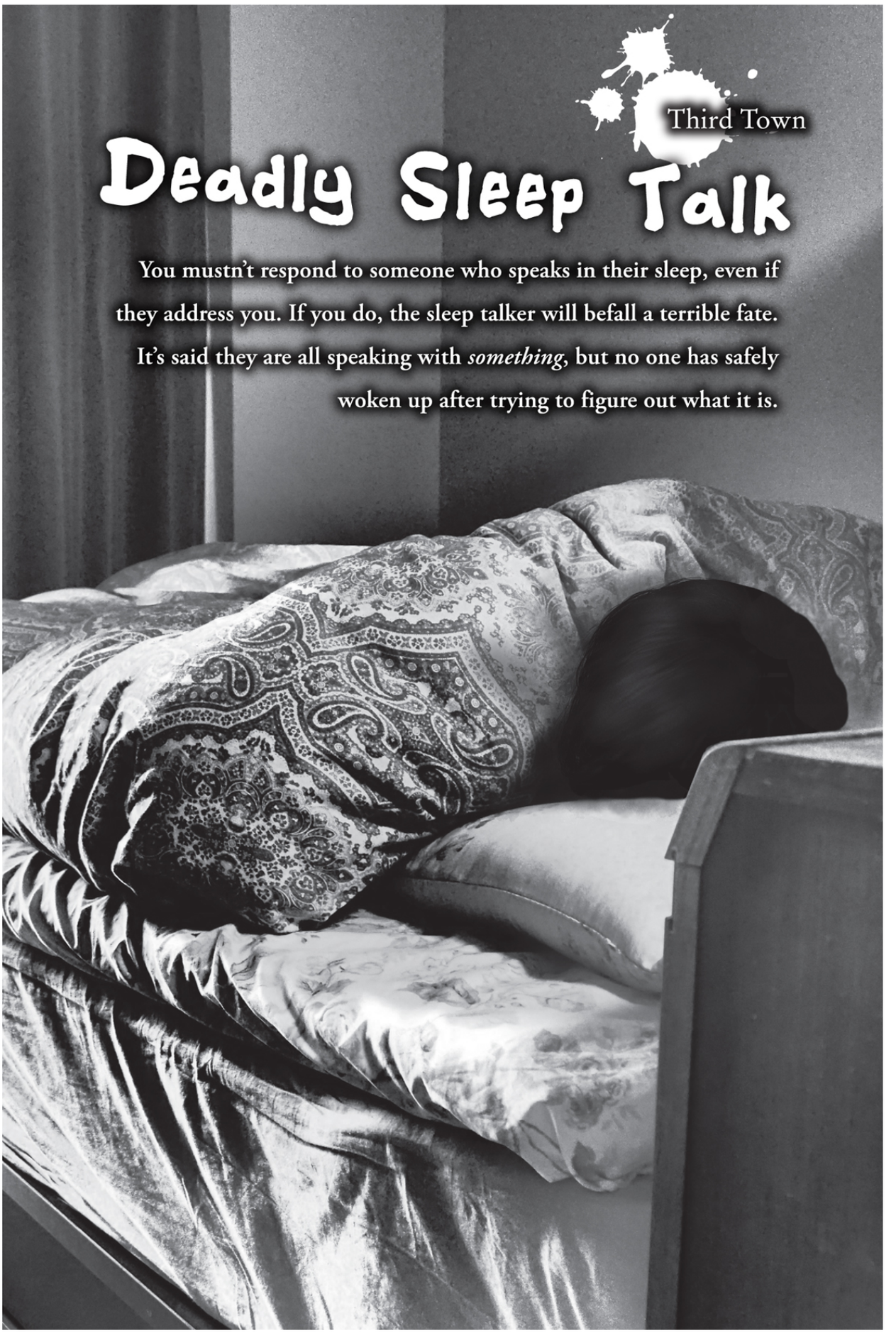
MOMO forced her way half out of his pocket so she could see him.

“Would you like me to speak to Fushigi for you? I can inform him that he will die if he keeps this up.”

“Shut your yap…”

“Well, you cannot tell him yourself, can you?”

“I said shut your yapper!” Jimmy forced MOMO back into his pocket. “Fushigi has to hear it from me…,” he said. Jimmy looked at his own face in the broken mirror. “Everything’s okay. I’m okay…” As he stared into his own eyes, he gave a slight nod of reassurance.


Third Town
Deadly Sleep Talk
You mustn't respond to someone who speaks in their sleep, even if they address you. If you do, the sleep talker will befall a terrible fate. It's said they are all speaking with *something*, but no one has safely woken up after trying to figure out what it is.



A young boy had gotten a question wrong on his language test by writing *chocking* instead of *choking*.

"You can't still be making these kinds of mistakes as a fifth grader."

When he showed his mom his graded test, she started to scold him.

On top of that, his older brother, Taiki, was laughing at him.

"Taiki, don't you dare." Their mom told off his older brother, who was a first-year in middle school, but Kaito still felt upset.

I know someone who's "chock"-full of himself, though.

Kaito Sugisaki sat on the ground and leaned on his bed as he thought about what had happened.

He felt a little less tired sitting that way. The room was slightly dark, so he thought he might fall asleep if he wasn't careful.

The alarm clock by his bed ticked past midnight.

Just last week, he had turned on his light and been playing video games when his mom barged in.

"We thought you were ready for a second-floor room like Taiki, since you're almost done with elementary school, but it looks like we were too hasty," she had told him.

Then she'd taken all his games and moved them to the living room on the first floor.

But Taiki played my game and lost my progress!

That game was popular at his school, and he'd been so close to beating it, too.

Then Taiki had played it when no one was around, and he had lost the game *and* all of Kaito's progress was deleted.

"You're the worst, Taiki!" Kaito had said when he found out.

"Well, you had your games taken away. So why am I not allowed to play them?"

Kaito had started to cry.

“You’re mean! So mean!”

“It’s your own fault for getting them taken away!”

If their mom hadn’t yelled at them to cut it out, they probably would have actually gotten into a fight.

“And you stop that, too, Taiki! I didn’t take Kaito’s games away. There’s just a new rule that he has to play them in the living room where everyone can see. I already explained that to you, didn’t I?”

That had put an end to the discussion, but Kaito was still frustrated even afterward.

And now, back to today…

“If you answer a person talking in their sleep, something terrible will happen to the sleeper?”

Kaito had doubted his ears when a friend at school told him that urban legend.

“Yeah, for example, if they say ‘Hello’ and you say ‘Hello’ back. That’s bad luck for the person who’s asleep.”

“Is it really that easy?”

“Yeah.”

When his friend nodded, it gave Kaito a brilliant idea.

I’ll do it to my brother and give him bad luck!

Taiki always talked in his sleep. He also spoke very clearly when he did.

A gust of wind from outside made the flowers on the small veranda rustle.

As Kaito leaned against the side of his bed, he went over his plan for revenge on Taiki.

The time was slowly approaching half past midnight.

Mom and Dad should be asleep by now.

He put his ear to the floor to listen in on them.

It was quiet.

Once I hear him start to talk, then I’ll put my plan into motion.

“Wow, really…?”

He heard a voice from the other room.

Kaito put his ear to the wall.

“Huh? For real…? Ha-ha-ha-ha…”

Taiki was talking in his sleep, just like usual.

This is it!

Kaito celebrated in his head.

He opened the door to his room right away and went into the hallway.

Since they lived in a small house, only his room and his brother’s were on the second floor.

He held on to the handrail that divided the hall from the stairs as he tiptoed to the next room.

The little window at the top of the stairs let in moonlight that made the hallway look blue.

A breeze rushed by and made something on the first floor clatter slightly. Kaito looked down the stairs, which had a turn partway down. Because of that, all he could see was the white wall. He couldn’t see the first floor’s hallway.

He heard his brother talking again.

“Yeah, you’re right…”

Kaito reached for the doorknob of Taiki’s room, then slowly opened it.

Taiki was facing his closed curtains as he slept.

Kaito sneaked up to him and leaned in toward his brother’s ear as Taiki kept muttering in his sleep.

“Wow… So it’s true, huh? Ha-ha-ha…”

If you answer a person talking in their sleep, something terrible will happen to the sleeper.

But Kaito would be satisfied with just that. He wanted to be mean to his brother.

“Taiki, that’s not true,” Kaito said.

Then Taiki went quiet.

“Taiki, it’s definitely not true.”

His brother sniffled.

Kaito's heart skipped a beat, but he decided to say it one more time.

"Taiki, it's not true."

Then Taiki replied, *"…It's not?"*

Kaito almost laughed.

"That's right. It's not true."

"Oh… So it's not."

Kaito wanted to roll on the ground laughing, but if he did, he would wake the whole family up. He held his mouth so he couldn't make a sound, but his face started turning red.

"Oh… So the thing we talked about…was wrong…"

Kaito wanted to confuse his brother even more.

"It wasn't wrong," he said.

"…It wasn't?"

"Yeah. That wasn't wrong."

Taiki groaned in his sleep.

Then he muttered, *"So it's not wrong… Right…it's not wrong."*

"That's right. It's not wrong."

He was sure he was ruining his brother's dream.

Just like how you messed up my game. Serves you right.



“Ahh, no… No…”

Kaito tried his best to stop himself from laughing.

“No… No…,” Taiki kept repeating.

“This is so funny my stomach hurts,” Kaito murmured.

“…It’s mad. Ahhh… It’s mad.”

As he chuckled, Kaito whispered in Taiki’s ear, “It’s not mad.”

“It’s angry… It’s angry…”

“Nobody’s angry!”

“It’s…at the foot…bridge…

“Huh? The what? The footbridge?” Kaito was gleefully enjoying this. He thought his brother’s dream was just getting more messed up. “There isn’t a footbridge anywhere.”

“The station… In front of the station…the footbridge.”

Taiki sounded different. He seemed scared.

“Taiki, which footbridge in front of which station?”

Kaito started to feel a bit bad, so he was serious when he asked the question.

“Ah! Now it’s in the park… It’s past the park…!”

Kaito’s heart skipped a beat. This didn’t sound like how his brother usually talked in his sleep.

Taiki’s forehead was wrinkled.

“It crossed the footbridge at the station and went through the park?”

But when Kaito asked that, Taiki didn’t reply. All he heard was his brother’s ragged breathing.

Going over the footbridge and through the park was the fastest way to get to their house from the closest station.

Kaito started to feel slightly uncomfortable.

The misfortune is that the sleeper just has bad dreams, right?

That was enough for his revenge, so he decided to end it there.

“Okay, Taiki, I’m going to bed. ’Night,” Kaito whispered, then left the room. He heard a groan. When he turned around, he realized it was his brother. He started to worry and went back to Taiki’s side. “Are you okay, Taiki?”

“It’s here… The mailbox…in front of the mailbox…”

“Huh? The mailbox?”

Chills went down Kaito’s spine.

He looked at the shut curtains.

“Taxi… A taxi…”

Taiki kept talking in his sleep.

Right then, Kaito heard a car drive by.

He had to check right away.

He walked over and pulled back the curtains, then opened the window and leaned out. He saw a taxi speed by.

It’s just a coincidence. That’s all.

But he also saw a postbox at the corner of the quiet street.

Kaito stared outside. He didn’t see anything.



No way there's anything there…

As he thought that, he closed the window and locked it, then shut the curtains, too.

When he turned around, he looked at the door on the other side of his brother's bed.

Anyway, time to go to sleep.

Kerchak!

At that moment, there was a sound from the hallway.

It sounded almost like the lock to the front door turning.

But why this late at night?

"Taiki, it sounds like Mom or Dad opened the front door."

He was too scared to even whisper to not wake his brother now.

Taiki groaned and murmured, *"N-no… I-it…it's inside…the house…"*

"Huh? It's inside?"

In that moment, Kaito understood what it meant for his hair to stand on end.

He listened carefully and heard something moving around on the first floor.

Is that Mom's or Dad's footsteps?

Skrrrt! Skkrrrskrrrt!

They're not footsteps!

It reminded him of the sound he'd once heard of an alligator at a zoo as it dragged itself into the water.

Why would his mom or dad crawl on the ground?

"It's here…to take…a soul!"

Kaito, who had been listening for whatever was on the first floor, almost shrieked when his brother's voice took him by surprise.

"It's here for your soul?"

Is the 'something terrible' that the sleeper dies?

“Taiki, get up.”

Kaito went to the bed and shook his brother’s shoulder.

“Wake up! You have to wake up! It’s coming for your soul, isn’t it?!”

Kaito kept shaking his brother’s shoulder.

“Taiki! Open your eyes!”

Kaito slapped Taiki on the face.

“Wake up! Taiki!”

But Taiki stayed asleep.

If his brother died…

But he’d only been upset because of a game!

Dad! Mom! Kaito called out for his parents in his mind as he headed for the door.

Once he left Taiki’s room, he gingerly went down the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs, the hallway stretched to the right and left. He wasn’t sure if the thing would come out of nowhere.

Kaito shivered from fear as he took one step, then another down the stairs. Eventually, he was on the last step.

Kaito walked through the hallway to the living room. As he held his breath, he peeked into the dark room.

He spied something in the darkness. It looked like a big dog crawling on the ground.

Wait, that’s no dog!

It was something squirming around that was wearing ragged white clothes.

A woman…?

But something was wrong with her. She was creeping across the floor.

She’s…upside down?!

She was holding herself up on her hands and feet, but her stomach was facing the ceiling, like she was making a bridge with her body. Her long hair dragged on the ground, and her unnaturally angled head and neck were both facing him.

“Uuurrrgh.”

It was like she was looking for something as she groaned.



She must be here for Taiki!

Kaito panicked.

He tiptoed back up the stairs, trying not to make any noise.

He went into his brother's room.

Kaito tried to shake Taiki and even hit him again, but he wouldn't get up.

"Wake up! It's going to steal your soul!"

But all Taiki would do was reply in his sleep.

"No, not mine… It's here…for your soul… It's here for Kaito's soul…"

"Huh? What are you talking about? It's here for my soul?"

"Because…you interrupted…our conversation…"

"I what? B-but it's the sleeper who ends up with misfortune."

At that moment, he heard a sound from below.

Skrrt. Thump. Skrrt. Thump.

Something was coming up the stairs.

Kaito held his breath.

Skrrt. Thump. Skrrt. Thump.
"Urrrgh."

He heard it groan.

Kaito looked at the door.

"Heh-heh…heh-heh-heh."

Next, he heard laughter from right next to him.

When he turned around, he realized Taiki was still asleep but laughing at him.

"Taiki!"

"Heh-heh-heh-heh… Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh."

Taiki's eyes were still closed, and he was just…laughing.

"Taiki! Stop!"

Kaito couldn’t stand it anymore.

He opened the door and ran into the hallway. He leaned over the handrail to look down below.

From around the corner at the base of the stairs, he saw the underside of a bluish-white arm as it reached around.

Skrrt. Thump.
“Urrrrgh.”

Kaito didn’t have time to scream.

He ran to his own room, closed the door, and locked it.

He shivered.

Skrrrrt. Thump.
SkrrRRRRRT THUMP.
“URRRRGHH.”

He could hear it just beyond the door.

“No! Stop! Stay away!”

The sounds got louder.

SkrRRT.
SKKKKRT.
SkrRRT.
SKKKRRRRRRT.

It was on the same floor as him.

“No! Stop! You can’t have my soul!”

He heard it crawling closer and closer.

Kaito covered his ears and crouched down.

SKKKKRT.
SKRRT.
SKRT—.

It stopped right in front of his door.

It was suddenly quiet.

Kaito listened closely and took his hands off his ears. From inside his dark room, he heard the wind whooshing outside.

As he stared at the locked door, he thought, *Did it disappear? Did it go away?*

Then where had the crawling sounds and the groans come from?

He couldn't hear Taiki laughing anymore, either.

Maybe it had just been a dream all along?

The moment Kaito thought that…

Kerchak!

The door unlocked.

Kaito whipped his head up to look at the door.

FWING!

The door flung open.

Kaito held his breath.

He looked through the doorway.

There, he saw an upside-down face.

Its bloodshot eyes were staring straight at him.

Aaaah!!

Kaito scrambled to the window, where the small veranda was.

He opened the curtains and unlocked the window, then jumped outside.

"Uraaagh!"

The lady screeched and bounded after Kaito, her legs and arms thumping as she went.

"Get away!"

Kaito tried to jump from the second floor.

"Wait!"

But then before he could, a boy in a red hood and a dog wearing a yellow raincoat jumped down from the roof.

It was Fushigi and Jimmy.

Fushigi held the red notebook up to the woman in white.

“Uraaagh!”

She shrieked and tried to hurl herself at Fushigi.

Fushigi dropped his notebook.

“Leave her to me!”

Jimmy rammed himself into the bluish-white creature that had once been a woman.

He howled like a dog and attacked.

As she flinched back, Jimmy picked up the notebook in his mouth and threw it to Fushigi, who caught it and recited an incantation.



A strange mark appeared on the bluish-white thing and started glittering. Then it inverted and appeared in the notebook.

And then the creature disappeared.

“Who are you guys? And how is that dog talking?”

Kaito was in a daze as he asked questions while crouching on the veranda.

“Sometimes when people talk in their sleep, they’re speaking with something that’s not from this world. If you interrupt their conversation, whatever that thing is will try to bring misfortune on the sleeper.”

Fushigi carefully closed his notebook and put it in his pocket.

Kaito said, “B-but…it tried to take my soul, not my brother’s…”

Fushigi let out a small laugh.

Jimmy replied for him. “Don’t ya get it? The worst misfortune that could happen to him is losing his little brother.”

“Huh? That’s the worst thing that could happen to him…?” Kaito murmured and hung his head.

Jimmy was curious about that reaction. He glanced at Fushigi.

Fushigi’s eyes were closed like he was remembering something.

“Kaito! Are you okay?” Taiki said from the other room.

Kaito suddenly stood up.

“I’m okay! I’m sorry, Taiki! I’m sorry!”

Kaito ran out of his room.

Jimmy looked up at Fushigi once they were alone.

“Let’s go.”

As they both walked away from the house, they heard the two boys’ parents shouting in worry, “Kaito! Taiki!”

The boy and dog walked down the residential street at night.

“That was pretty close. But I’m glad you’re okay, Fushigi.”

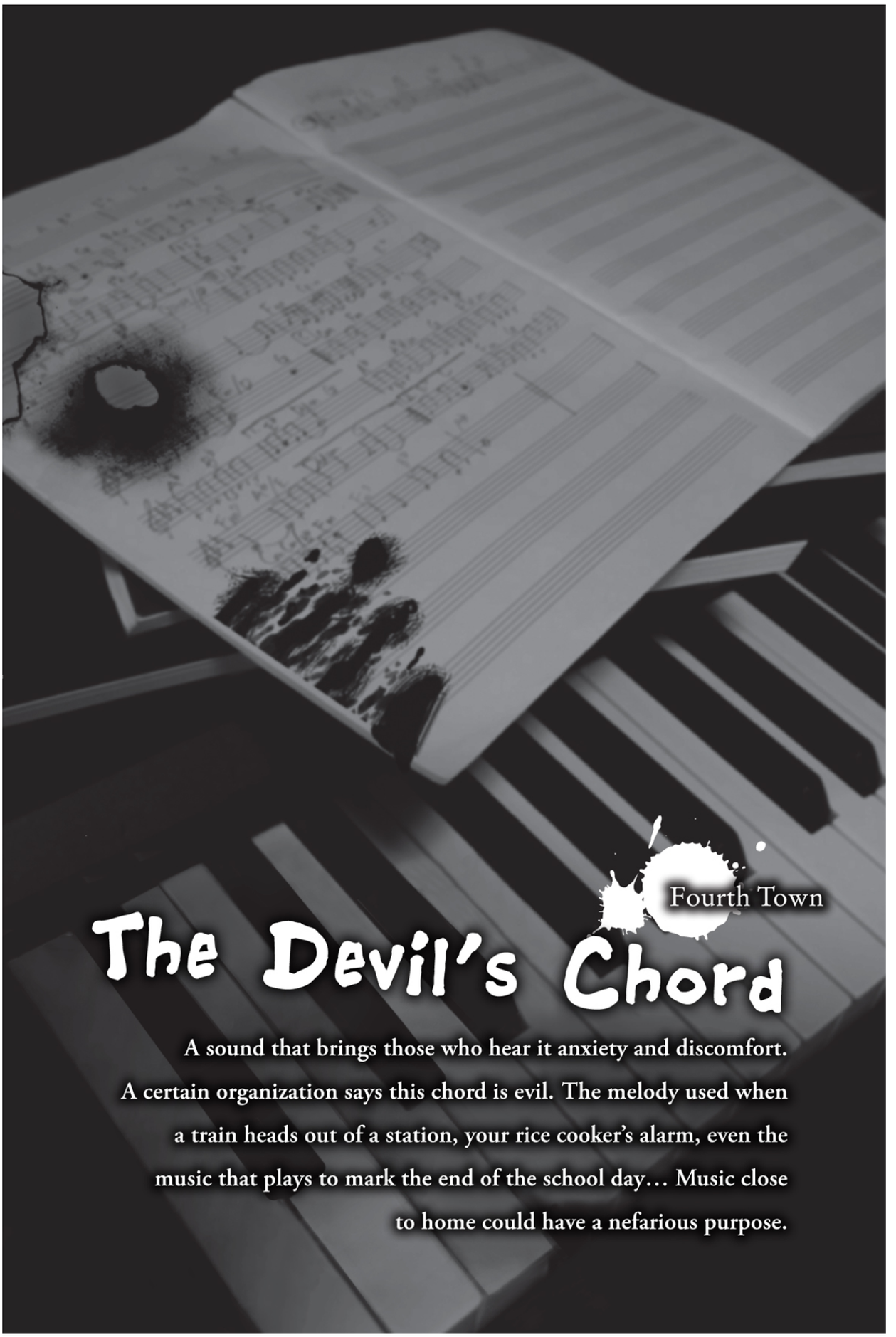
Fushigi stared at Jimmy.

“I could have collected the mark even without you,” Fushigi said, then picked up his pace.

“You’re always so cold,” Jimmy muttered with a smile, but then an incredibly lonely look came over his face.






Fourth Town
The Devil's Chord
A sound that brings those who hear it anxiety and discomfort.
A certain organization says this chord is evil. The melody used when
a train heads out of a station, your rice cooker's alarm, even the
music that plays to mark the end of the school day… Music close
to home could have a nefarious purpose.



“Okay, go!”

Takumi Seta, a fifth grader, dribbled past a defender and kicked the ball toward the goal.

It flew in, only stopping when it got caught in the net.

“Goaaaal! You did it, Takumi!”

Kouta Aihara ran over to Takumi and gave him a high five.

They were both fifth graders in Class 1 and were best friends who had known each other forever.

It was after school, and Takumi and Kouta were playing soccer in their school field, just like usual. They had gathered with boys from the other classes to play a game together.

“That was your tenth goal this month.”

“Yeah, I might even beat your thirteen-goal record, Kouta!”

Kouta was the best soccer player in their grade. Takumi wanted to be just as good, so he secretly practiced every day when he went home.

It seemed he was finally seeing results.

Traaah-lalah-laaahlalah-laaahlahlaaalahlaaah… ♪

Music started to play over the speakers.

That meant it was five PM.

“Okay, looks like we’ve got to wrap this up soon.”

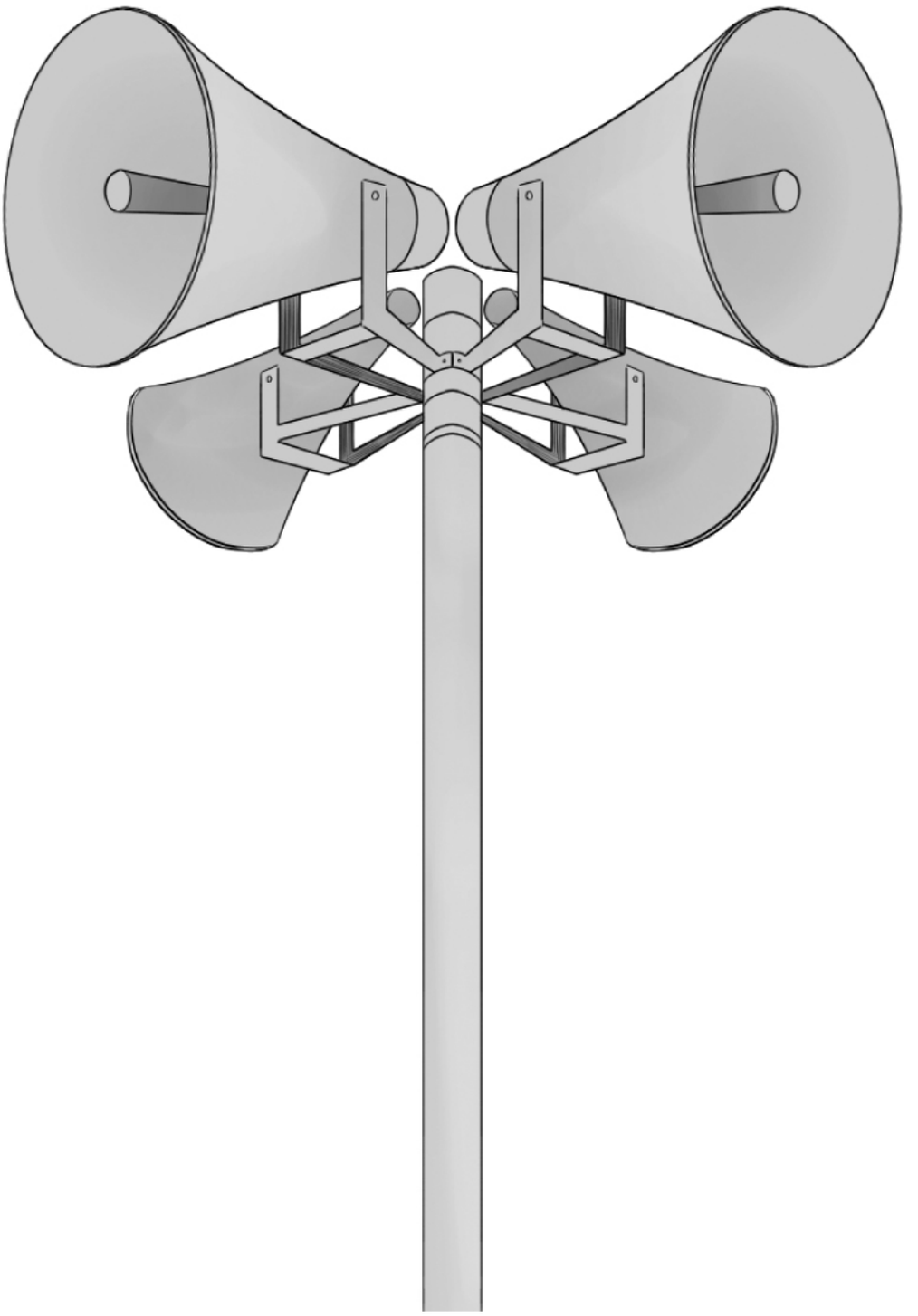
“Yeah.”

Once the music played, they had to go home. That was the rule the teachers had made.

“I hate the going-home music. It’s so gloomy and sounds so lonely. What song do you think it is?”

“Apparently, it’s called ‘Goin’ Home.’”

Takumi was part of the broadcasting club and had once tried to play the tune during lunch.



But one of the club members had told him that everyone would feel like they needed to go home if he played it, so he never ended up using it. That was why he knew the name of the song.

"I think it's a good song, personally," Takumi said as he cleaned up to leave for the day.

I'll practice in the yard at home before I eat.

Takumi kept thinking about soccer even on his way home.

It was close to the end of July. That meant it was still light out even at five PM.

He could use a wall that was about as tall as he was in the garden to keep practicing how to kick the ball.

"I'm back!"

Once he got home, he left his backpack in his room and headed out to the yard with his soccer ball.

His mom came out of the kitchen to see him.

"Stop right there! You're not going to practice with your soccer ball in the garden, are you? What are you thinking?! You'll ruin the grass! And you'll also ruin the wall! You can't do that at home!"

"B-but…"

Normally, his mom would cheer him on and say she hoped he would get even better at soccer when he practiced. So why was she scolding him for it now…?

"Are you not going to listen to your own mother…? Well?"

Takumi didn't know why she'd changed her mind, but since his mom was upset, he replied, "Okay, I understand."

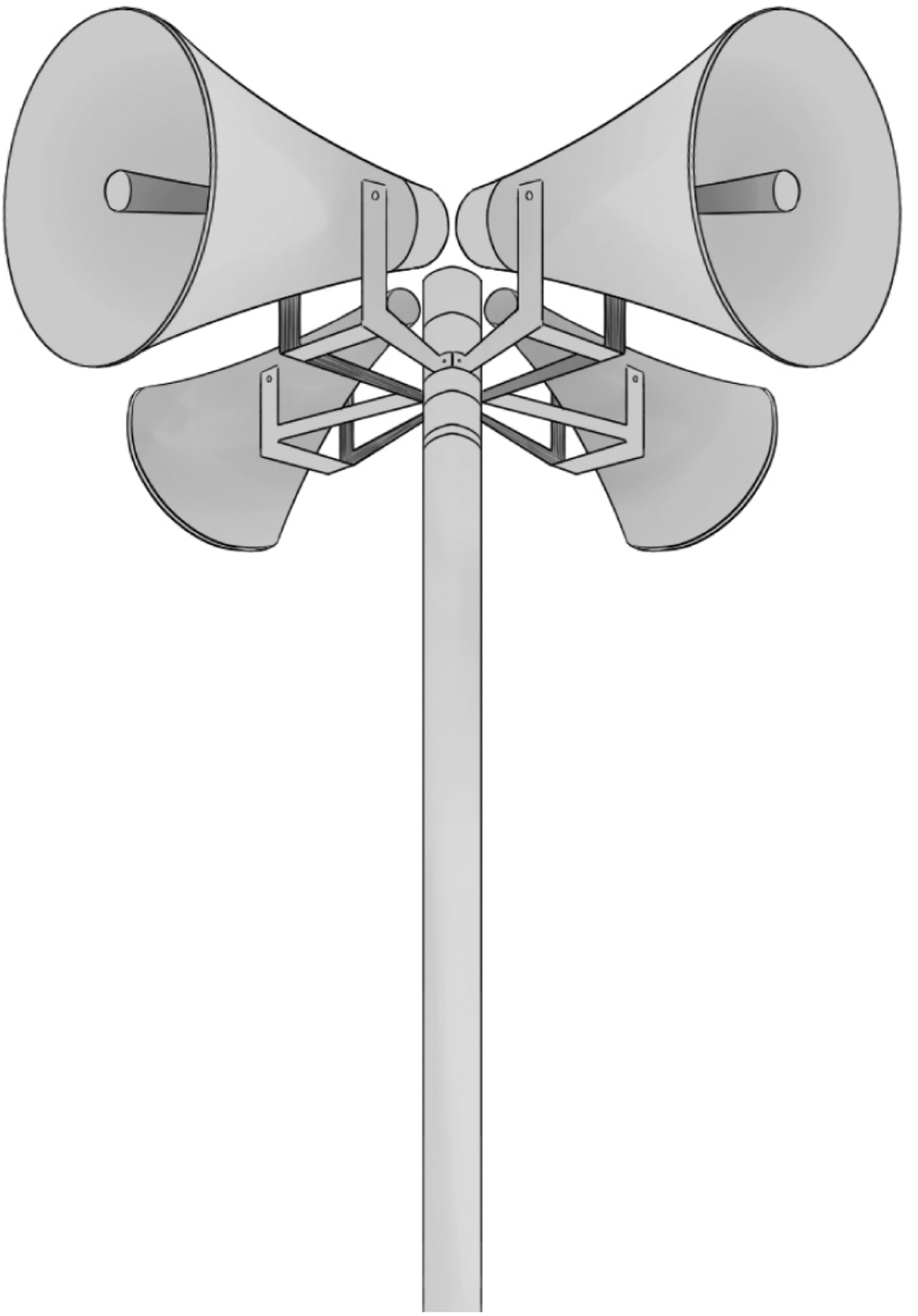
It was Friday after school the next day.

Takumi was playing soccer with Kouta and his friends on the school grounds, as usual.

While they were playing, Takumi felt like he could almost forget how upset he had been by his mom telling him off the day before.

Traaah-lalah-laaahlalah-laaahlahlaaalahlaaah… ♪

Then it was five PM, and the going-home music started to play.



“I guess that’s it for today.”

“Yeah, let’s go home.”

Everyone started to clean up.

Takumi and Kouta also began moving the soccer goal to the corner of the field.

“So something really annoying happened yesterday,” Kouta said as they moved the goal. “When I tried to take a bath, my mom got mad at me for trying to go in first. I don’t get it. I’ve always gone first.”

Then one of the boys nearby, who was carrying the ball, said, “I got in trouble, too!” He explained, “I was watching TV during dinner like usual, and I got scolded by my parents!”

“Same here!”

“And me!”

“Huh? What’s going on?”

“Does that mean *everybody* got yelled at?”

After they left the other kids, Takumi and Kouta headed home together. The two of them had asked their other friends about the day before, too.

“The only ones who didn’t get in trouble had parents who both work.”

“That’s right. Someone even said they got home late but didn’t get lectured.”

Takumi still had no idea why some of them had gotten scolded.

After he parted ways with Kouta, Takumi got home.

He cautiously opened the front door.

“I’m home…”

He saw his dad’s shoes at the front door. He must have come home early.

“Oh, Takumi, welcome home.”

His dad came out of the bathroom and looked over at him.

Phew… Dad isn’t mad at me. Well, right, he wouldn’t be.

Takumi hadn’t done anything bad.

“Yeah, thanks, Dad!”

Takumi took off his shoes and stepped farther into the house.

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing?! Keep your shoes tidy when you take them off! They’d better be perfectly in the right place and not even a fraction of an inch off!”

“E-even a fraction of an inch?”

Takumi was shocked when his dad shouted at him.

Then his mom came in. He looked to her for help, but she was also angry.

“Takumi! You’re one minute later than usual!”

“But it’s just one minute!” he said.

“Are you talking back to your mother?!”

It looked like his mom had been cooking dinner. She had come out of the kitchen with a knife in her hand.

“Mom, that’s dangerous!”

“You better not try to change the subject!” she yelled at him.

“That’s right, buster! Don’t you know you’re in trouble?!”

They glowered at him as they both started to corner Takumi.

“I’ll scold you all night until the sun rises!”

“That sounds like a great idea! Takumi, you’re a terrible boy!”

They closed in on Takumi and tried to grab him.

“Ahh!”

He was so scared that he slipped his shoes back on and bolted right out of the house.



What happened to them?

Takumi ran down the road, feeling anxious.

His parents had never yelled at him like that before.

“Takumi!”

He heard someone call out to him up ahead.

Takumi saw Kouta running toward him.

“Did you get in trouble with your parents, too?” Kouta asked.

“You too, Kouta?”

“Yeah! Even my dad shouted at me this time!”

“What the heck?!”

Kouta’s dad had come home early, too.

His dad had been on the sofa, so Kouta had sat down right next to him like he normally did.

But then his dad yelled, “Who said you could sit there?!” at him.

“Then my mom joined in, giving me an earful,” Kouta said.

“That’s what happened to me, too! They tried to catch me so they could lecture me all night.”

“I’m scared to go home…”

“Me too…”

Right then, Kouta thought of something.

“I know! Let’s ask Mr. Hamamura for help!”

Mr. Hamamura was their homeroom teacher. He really cared about the students. Once, when one of the boys in their class had a fight with his parents and wouldn’t go home, Mr. Hamamura had gone with him to help him make up with his parents.

Takumi and Kouta both loved Mr. Hamamura, so they always went to him for advice.

“Right. Mr. Hamamura will be able to talk to our parents!”

“Yeah. We didn’t do anything bad. I’m sure he’ll scold them right back!”

The two of them started walking to their school.

They arrived at the elementary school.

It was now past six PM.

Since it was already getting dark, none of the students were around and the grounds were quiet.

Takumi and Kouta headed to the staff office.

“Excuse us.”

They opened the door to the staff office and went inside, but they didn’t see anyone there.

“Did they all go home?”

“But I see a light on, and their bags are still at their desks.”

“Where’d they go?”

Takumi and Kouta tilted their heads in confusion as they left the office.

Clap, clap, clap, clap.

They heard applause.

It was coming from the room next to the office.

That was the teachers' meeting room.

"What's going on?"

"Uh, yeah, I wonder."

Takumi and Kouta made their way over and opened the door just slightly to peek inside.

"Hey! What are you doing here?!" someone said from behind them.

They spun around and saw the tracksuit-clad Mr. Hamamura at the end of the hall.

"Mr. Hamamura!"

The boys ran up to him.

But the teacher just glared at them.

"We always tell you to leave when the going-home song plays! Why are you still here an hour later?!"

"Th-that's because…"

"That's not the point! It's our parents!"

"Are you back-talking me? Well then, you know what? Get over here!"

Mr. Hamamura pushed them into the meeting room. A bunch of teachers were inside, including the principal. They were all sitting in a line of folding chairs.

"Oh? Who are these two, Mr. Hamamura?"

"I'm sorry, Principal. This is Seta and Aihara from my class."

"Perfect timing. I was hoping to ask the fifth-grade teachers to speak next. What about these students gets on your nerves, Mr. Hamamura?"

"O-on your nerves?" Takumi said, which earned both him and Kouta a glare from Mr. Hamamura.

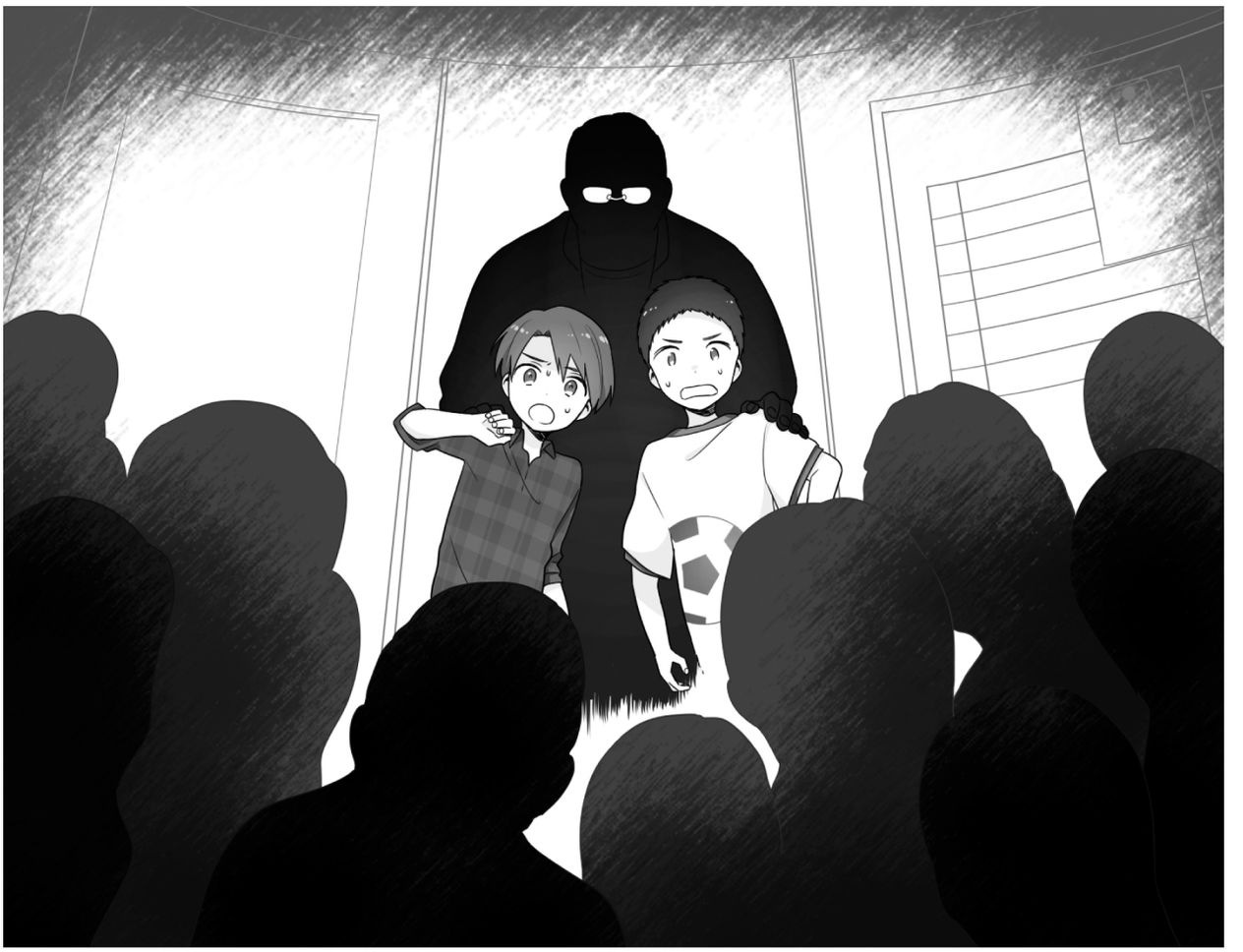
"As you can see, my students won't listen to me at all, so I plan to bring in their parents to reprimand them."

"But we didn't do anything!"

"Why, Mr. Hamamura?!"

"Shut it! It's because you did something worth a scolding!"

"Right! That's right!"



Clap, clap, clap, clap. Clap, clap, clap, clap.

The teachers started to cheer and applaud.

Even the principal joined in.

Takumi and Kouta had no idea what to say. They were just frightened by how their teachers were acting.



It was now Saturday.

"Think about what you've done for the rest of today!" Takumi's mom said before she sent him to his room first thing in the morning.

The day before, Mr. Hamamura had called his and Kouta's parents, then insisted they go home.

Takumi's parents yelled at him until he went to bed, and today he couldn't even take a step outside.

Why are they so angry?

It wasn't just his parents. Mr. Hamamura and even the other teachers had been upset, which was strange.

It made him feel sick to his stomach. Takumi had never felt this way about his parents or his teachers.

Noon passed, and evening started to come around.

Takumi only left his room to go to the bathroom, but he started to get more and more frightened of doing even that.

Mom and Dad might get mad at me again…

Whenever he would leave his room, his parents would yell, "You're going to use the bathroom again?! Do you even intend to reflect on what you've done?!"

I can't stand it anymore!

Takumi decided to sneak out.

His room was on the second floor, and his parents were in the first-floor living room.

I need to make sure they don't catch me leaving!

Takumi stealthily opened his door and tiptoed down the stairs.

Don't come this way… Don't come this way…

If they found out he was trying to escape, he would get in more trouble than he ever had before.

He gulped.

As he took one step, then another, he cautiously made his way down the stairs. He hugged the wall with his hands and kept his balance, trying to not make a single sound.

Then he tried to take that last step.

Crash!

A very loud sound rang out. A picture frame on the wall had fallen.

Takumi had accidentally touched it with his hand.

"What was that noise?!" he heard his mom say from the living room.

They'll catch me!

Takumi made a break for the front door, then dashed outside.

What do I do? What do I do?!

He was outside, but he had no idea where to go now.

I know! I'll go see Kouta!

He could always rely on his friend. He was sure Kouta would know what to do.

Kouta's house was just five minutes away.

Once Takumi got to Kouta's house, he peeked in from over the wall.

"Oh!"

Kouta was in the living room.

But his hands and feet were tied so he couldn't move.

"Kouta!" Takumi called out to him. Kouta looked over.

Then Kouta's parents both appeared.

"What do you think you're doing here?!"

"You must be the one who turned Kouta into such a bad boy!"

"Wh-what are you talking about, ma'am?" Takumi said.

“Takumi, run!” Kouta yelled, so Takumi did just that.

What’s going on…? Why did they tie Kouta up?

Takumi ran as fast as he could. He was panicking.

What do I do? What do I do?! What do I do?!

He was close to tears as he raced through an alleyway and right into a large intersection.

Thump!

As soon as he reached the crosswalk, he collided with another boy and fell on his backside.

“You okay?”

A dog in a yellow hood who was next to the boy came up to Takumi.

“Ah! The dog just—”

“Oh, you don’t have to finish that sentence,” the dog said.

The dog was Jimmy.

Takumi had run into Fushigi Senno.

“Looks like your parents didn’t catch you,” Fushigi said.

“What do you mean?” Takumi asked.

“Just take a look around town,” Fushigi told him.

Takumi raised his head and looked. Then he realized something.

No one was walking around.

“But today’s Saturday. Where is everybody?”

Normally, the intersection would have been bustling with people.

“So this town got cursed with an urban legend by a man with a blue umbrella and a girl named Himitsu,” Jimmy told him.

“An urban legend? Wait, are you…?”

Takumi realized the dog in front of him must have been the human-faced dog.

“Urban legends can’t be real…,” Takumi said.

He had never even considered the possibility before. He just thought they were stories people made up.

“You can believe them or not, but that don’t change nothing. This town’s been cursed with the Devil’s Chord.”

“The Devil’s Chord?”

“Yep. That’s a sound that makes adults go cuckoo. First, they get mad at their kids for no good reason. That’s why nobody’s around

town. ’Cause they’re too busy punishing their kids.”

Takumi understood now why his parents and Mr. Hamamura had gotten angry so suddenly. That was probably why Kouta’s parents had tied him up, too.

“My friend is in trouble! His mom and dad have him captured at home.”

“At this rate, they won’t just *catch* all the kids,” Fushigi said.

“I think if they hear the chord one more time, the adults will start attacking. If that happens, there’s no saving any of the kids in this town.”

Takumi shuddered.

“But how did it get everyone?”

Takumi’s parents, Kouta’s parents, and even the teachers and probably all the parents of the kids he’d played soccer with the other day were cursed.

He doubted they all could have heard the chord in the same place.

“But then how did it happen to everyone at once?”

“I’m not sure,” Fushigi said. “I’m trying to find the sound that caused it, but I haven’t been able to. At this rate, I won’t be able to collect the curse.”

“You want to collect the curse…?”

Takumi didn’t understand what Fushigi was talking about.

But he was sure Fushigi could help him.

“A sound everyone hears…at the same time…”

Takumi thought carefully.

A way to curse all the adults only in that town…

At the same time…that everyone would hear…

“Oh! It must be the going-home song!”

That was “Goin’ Home.” It would always play at five PM, and practically everyone in town could hear it.

Takumi’s dad hadn’t been mad at him a day ago because he had been at work out of town. But he’d come home early the day before and had heard the chord and gotten angry.

“I see,” Fushigi said. “A lot of people would hear that sound all at the same time.”

“Then we’ve got a huge problem! Today’s Saturday. Most of the adults are gonna be home today. If they hear the devil’s chord…” Jimmy trailed off.

“Where is that song played from?” Fushigi asked.

“My elementary school!”

Fushigi looked at a clock on the wall of a store near them.

It was 4:40 PM.

“We only have twenty minutes.”

They took off running.



“The broadcasting room is on the second floor!”

It was 4:50 PM. After going through the front gate of the elementary school, Takumi guided Fushigi and Jimmy toward the building.

Takumi knew that the going-home music was set to automatically play in the broadcasting room.

If they switched off the machine, the sound wouldn’t play.

Eventually, they entered the building and headed for the stairs.

But then some people appeared in front of them.

“What do you think you’re doing?!”

It was Mr. Hamamura. Behind him were the principal and the other teachers.

“Seta, today is Saturday! You think you can just walk into the school whenever you want?!”

“B-but, sir!” Takumi cried out.

“We’ll give you a good talking-to once we catch you!”

The teachers closed in on Takumi, Fushigi, and Jimmy.

Right at that moment, Jimmy stepped forward in front of them.

“Leave this to me! Fushigi, get him to the broadcasting room! Quick!”

Jimmy stared down Mr. Hamamura and the other teachers, then started to growl at them.

“I’ll protect you, Fushigi! Don’t think you can underestimate Big Jimmy!”

Jimmy charged and threw himself right at Mr. Hamamura.

Mr. Hamamura fell and knocked down the principal and the other teachers behind him, too.

“Now!” Fushigi said. Takumi took off running.

The two of them ran up the stairs.

“The broadcasting room is in the very back!”

Takumi pointed ahead as he raced down the hallway of the second floor.

It was 4:55 PM.

As he ran, Takumi glimpsed a clock in a classroom.

“Good! We’re going to make it!”

He reached out to turn the doorknob.

Snatch!

Someone suddenly grabbed his hand.

“You’re such a terrible boy!”

At some point, his mom had caught up to him.

“Mom!” he cried out.

“Takumi! It’s time for a lecture!”

His dad was there, too.

“Dad!”

His dad tried to catch Fushigi, who was next to Takumi.

“And you’ll get a scolding along with my son!!”

But Fushigi dodged Takumi’s dad and threw himself at Takumi’s mom.

“Ah!”

The impact forced her to let go.

“Hurry and open the door!” Fushigi told him.



“Okay!”

Takumi pulled the door open and dashed inside.

Fushigi followed.

Takumi quickly tried to close the door behind them, but someone stuck their hand through the gap before he could.

“Takumiii!”

His mom glared at him from the gap.

Another hand worked its way around the door, and next he saw his dad peer into the room.

“I don’t remember raising you this way!”

Takumi did the very best he could to keep them from prying open the door.

It was 4:59 PM.

“H-hurry, the switch!” Takumi tugged on the door as he shouted at Fushigi. However, Fushigi wasn’t looking at the switch on the broadcasting equipment. “Do you not know where it is?”

Takumi knew, since he was part of the broadcasting club, but Fushigi probably wouldn’t.

“Then I’ll do it!”

He let go of the doorknob and ran over to the machine.

It was 4:59:30 PM.

As soon as Takumi got there, he tried to turn it off, but at that exact moment, he lost his balance.

“Takumiii!”

His mom and dad had grabbed his legs.

Takumi fell over.

He wasn’t going to make it.

He started screaming and crying.

“It’ll be all right.”

Fushigi pulled out his bright-red notebook. He opened it to a page and chanted a spell.

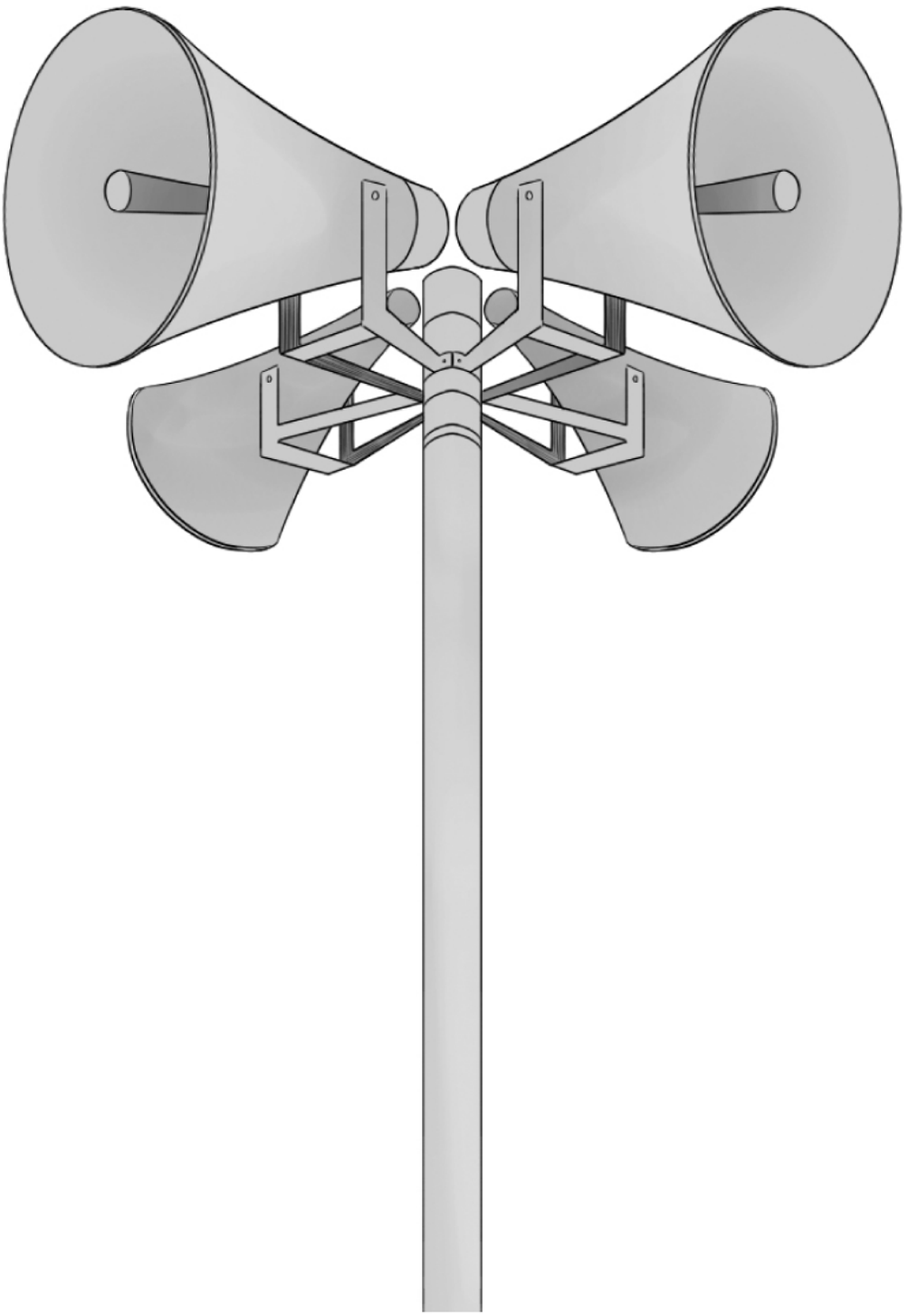
“Resolve.”

In the next moment, a mark glittered, inverted, and appeared on the open page of the notebook.

Traaah-lalah-laaahlalah-laaahlahlaaalahlaaah… ♪

It was five PM. The going-home music started to play.
Takumi cautiously looked at his parents.
They seemed like their old, kind selves.
“Are you back to normal?”
“To normal…?” his mom repeated. “What are we doing here, Takumi?”
“Dad! Mom!”
Takumi hugged the two of them.

Meanwhile, Fushigi left the school building.
Jimmy was waiting for him.
“Looks like you collected the curse mark, huh?”
Jimmy was bleeding from his mouth just slightly.
“What happened to you?” Fushigi asked.

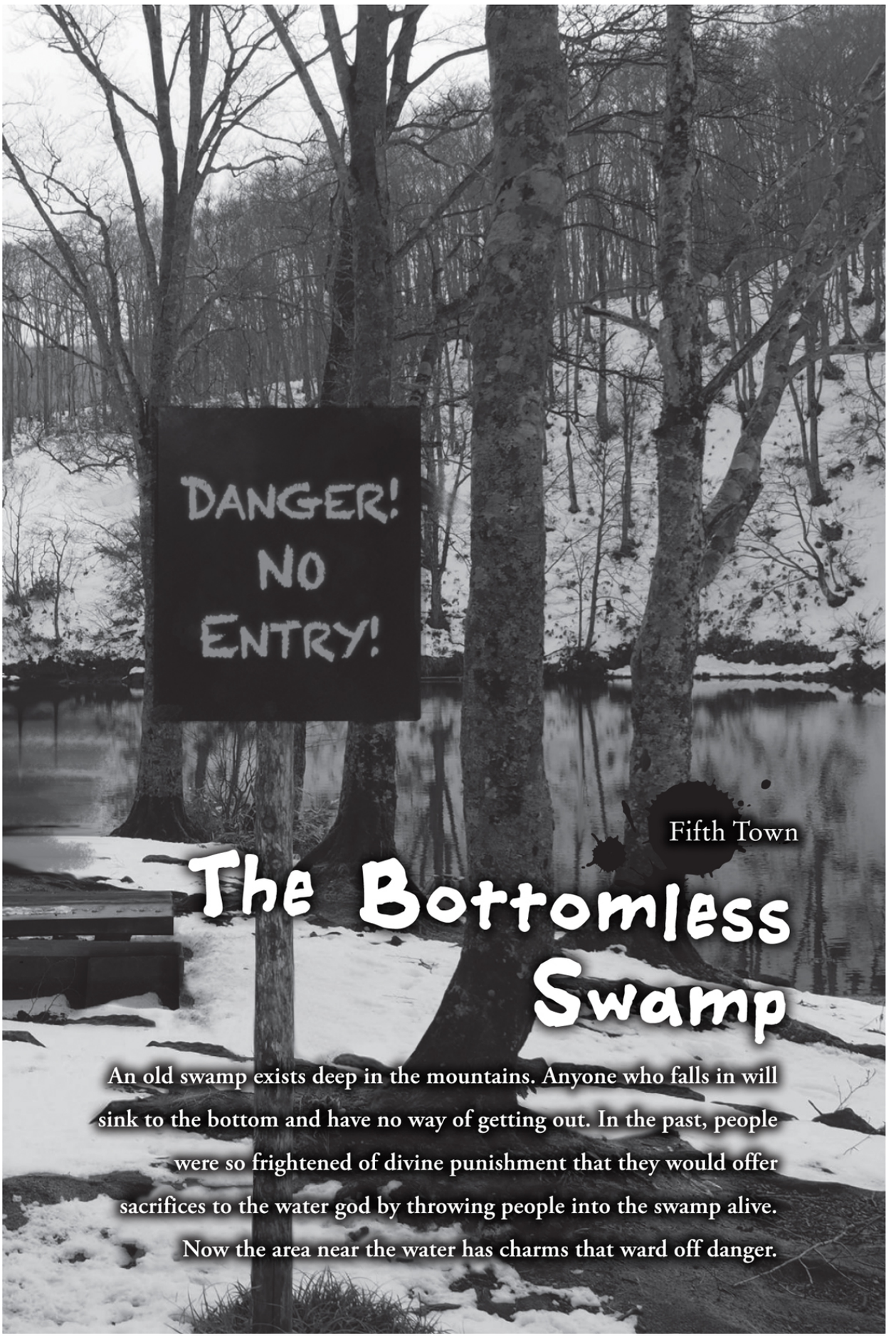


“Oh, just got smacked around a little by the teachers,” Jimmy said with a smile.

Fushigi only stared at Jimmy. Eventually, he said nothing as he walked away.

Jimmy followed him.

“These cuts are nothin’. I’m completely fine,” Jimmy said as he trailed behind Fushigi.



Fifth Town

The Bottomless Swamp

An old swamp exists deep in the mountains. Anyone who falls in will sink to the bottom and have no way of getting out. In the past, people were so frightened of divine punishment that they would offer sacrifices to the water god by throwing people into the swamp alive. Now the area near the water has charms that ward off danger.



“I’m not gonna lose today!” declared Umi Kamijyou, a sixth grader, to her sister Nanaka, who was three years younger.

They were on their way home.

Lately, they’d been playing cards together.

After finishing dinner, they would play Sevens.

Nanaka had won for the twentieth time, but Umi had won only four times even though she was older.

“You’re no good at this, Umi.”

“You’re just *too* good at this, Nanaka.”

Umi thought over what she needed to do to win as she absentmindedly walked.

Right then, Nanaka pointed ahead and asked, “Hey, who are they?”

She was pointing at the edge of the road, where there was a path leading to the mountains. Five men were heading toward the path.

For some reason, all of them were wearing *kimono*—a type of traditional Japanese clothing—in muted colors, and they had cloths tied around their heads.

They climbed up the path like something was drawing them in.

Umi and Nanaka hadn’t ever seen anyone like them before.

“What do you think they’re going to do in the mountains?”

Nanaka was more inquisitive than the average person, and she was very interested in what the men were up to.

“How about we go, too?” she suggested.

“What?”

Unlike her younger sister, Umi was much more timid than the average person.

“C’mon, let’s hurry home. It’s going to get dark soon.”

Umi tried to grab hold of Nanaka’s hand, but her younger sister was faster and ran over to the path up the mountain.

“Nanaka!”

“Umi, hurry up!”

Nanaka was trying to follow the men.

“Seriously?”

Umi couldn't just leave her younger sister while she went home, of course, so she started going up the path, too.

The plants on the path grew thick, as not many people traveled this way. It was also narrow, so only one person could walk up the path at a time.

Umi followed behind Nanaka, repeating over and over again, "Let's hurry and go home."

But Nanaka showed no signs of stopping.

Ten minutes had passed since they started walking.

"Where did they go?"

Nanaka was moving fast, so they thought they'd catch up with the men soon. She kept her eyes peeled, but she didn't see them.

"They were probably just going on a hike," Umi said.

"In those clothes? Up this mountain?"

"Yeah, that part was a little weird…"

But Umi just wanted to go home. That was what she really thought.

Eventually, they saw a clearing open up ahead.

Umi's eyes stopped on a sign in the clearing.

DANGER! NO ENTRY!

A reservoir lay beyond the sign.

"I think this place was called the Dragon's Bottomless Swamp…?"

All the kids in the area were taught since they were small that they weren't allowed to play there. Before it had been turned into a reservoir, it had been a deep swamp. And supposedly **a dragon once lived in that swamp and would drag people under**.

Umi didn't believe in dragons or anything of the sort. However, very few people came to the reservoir, so it was still dangerous to get stuck there. Most people didn't go near it.

"Nanaka, this is dangerous. We need to go home."

Umi wanted to give up the search and go back down.

"Oh! Over there!" Nanaka yelled.

Umi looked, too, and saw some people not far off.

They were the same men from earlier. Umi estimated there were about five of them.

They stood in front of the reservoir and were muttering something, but Umi and Nanaka couldn't hear them.

"What do you think they're doing?"

"Umi, let's get closer."

Nanaka hid in the tall grass and approached the men.

Umi immediately tried to stop her sister and whispered, "No, it's too dangerous…"

"It'll be fine."

Nanaka laughed and got even closer.

Then the man leading the group slowly started to walk forward.

He murmured something as he headed for the reservoir.

"Huh?!"

Umi's and Nanaka's eyes went wide.

The man didn't even hesitate as he stepped right into the water.

He sank in until he was hip deep. But then he kept going until his whole body was submerged with only his head barely above the surface.

The four other men standing in front of the reservoir didn't even try to help him. Instead, they mumbled and watched.

The man walked even farther in until he was fully underwater.

Ten seconds went by, then twenty, then thirty…

The man didn't come back up.

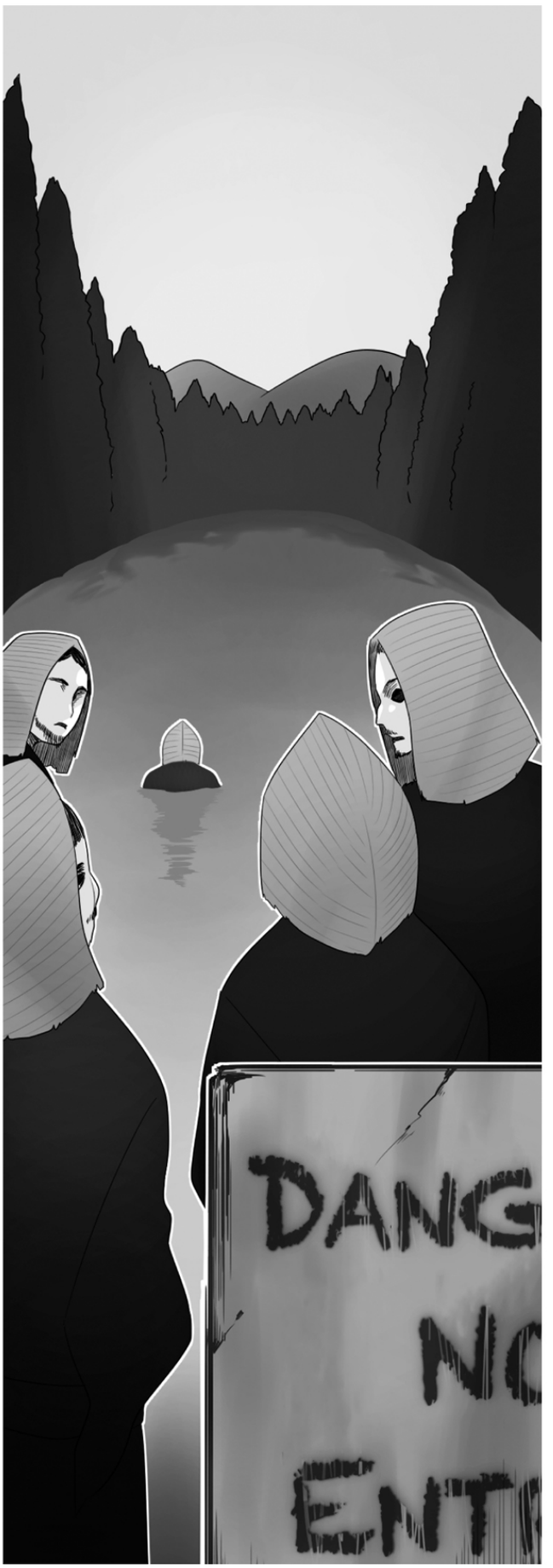
A minute, two minutes, three minutes…

Umi and Nanaka became frightened.

At that moment, they saw bubbles rising to the water's surface. In the next, the water surged up and spouted into the sky.

FWOOM!

The water roared as it took on the shape of a dragon.


DANG
NO
ENT



“Ahhhh!” Nanaka was screaming before she even realized she was doing it.

The four men reacted by glaring in Nanaka’s direction.

“““You. Saw.”””

Then all the men dashed toward Nanaka.

Their eyes were bloodshot, and they looked like they were out of their minds.

“Nanaka!”

Umi grabbed her sister’s hand and started to run.

“““Catch! Them!”””

They heard the men yelling behind them.

“I’m scared, Umi!”

“Just keep going!”

Umi led her sister off the mountain as quickly as possible.

Once they got back onto the road, they ran as fast as they could home.



“Oh dear. What happened to the two of you?”

Umi and Nanaka dashed into their house, which surprised their mother so much that she came to the front door.

“Something awful happened! A man drowned in the Dragon’s Bottomless Swamp!”

“What now?”

Umi and Nanaka started frantically telling their mother what had happened.

“Someone was in the reservoir? That’s terrible! We need to call the police!”

“Yeah! Otherwise the man will be eaten by the dragon!”

“What dragon?”

Their mother, who had picked up the phone, looked over at Umi and tilted her head in confusion.

Umi and Nanaka told her about the dragon that had come out of the reservoir.

“Hold on.”

Their mom set down the phone and sighed.

“That’s impossible,” she said.

She thought Umi and Nanaka were joking.

“It’s true!”

“And then the other men with him had these scary looks on their faces when they chased us awa—”

Right at that moment, the front door opened.

“Aah!”

Umi and Nanaka thought it was the men at first and clung to their mom.

“What’s wrong?”

Instead, their dad was standing in the doorway. He had just come home from work.

“D-Dad!”

“Ugh! Don’t scare us like that!”

Both of the sisters were relieved as they looked at their dad.

But behind him were four men.

“Aah!”

Umi and Nanaka both fell over backward.

“What’s wrong?”

“Hey, are you okay?”

Their mom and dad went to help Umi and Nanaka.

“D-Dad, behind you!”

Umi and Nanaka hugged each other as they pointed at the front door.

“Behind me?”

Their parents looked outside.

“Nobody’s there.”

“What?”

The two girls raised their faces and looked over at the front door.

They didn’t see the men, either.

“But they were right there…”

“Yeah…”

Maybe they were seeing things?

They both just stared outside in a daze.

“You two need to stop fooling around,” their dad said later after sinking into the sofa in the living room and seeing that Umi and Nanaka were still trembling.

“I don’t like these kinds of pranks,” he told them as he got comfortable.

“I don’t, either. Do you see any strange men here?” their mom said as she made dinner.

Their parents had just searched the house, but they hadn’t found the men in kimono anywhere.

“And if there were four men in kimono around, they’d attract attention.”

Just in case, their parents had also asked the neighbors, but none of them had seen a group of men.

“And, Umi, you’re the older one, so you should know better than to take Nanaka to the reservoir.”

“But…”

“It’s dangerous for kids to play there all on their own. That’s why there’s a sign warning people from going there.”

“I know, but…”

Their shoes had been dirty from trekking up the mountain path.

Their parents seemed to think they had made up the men to get out of trouble for going to the reservoir.

“Oh no,” their mom said as she looked into the refrigerator while making dinner. “We’re out of eggs. Umi, Nanaka, could you run out and buy some?”

“But…”

“Outside there’s…”

“What? Are you going to lie to get out of helping now?”

“I-I’m not…”

“Then hurry and go get the eggs,” their mom said.

“Okay…”

“We will…”

Their parents would think they were lying no matter what they said.

They had no choice, so Umi and Nanaka left for the store.

"Umi, I'm scared…"

As they went down the road, Nanaka clutched Umi's sleeve as her older sister walked ahead of her. Even Nanaka, who was normally more curious, was just frightened.

"I'm scared, too…"

What had happened to the man who had sunk into the reservoir? And had that really been a dragon?

"Umi…"

Nanaka suddenly stopped walking.

"What's wrong?"

"It's that…"

She was looking ahead down the road.

At the corner, they saw the long shadows of four figures.

"Do you think it's those men?"

"No way."

Umi was on guard as the people appeared from around the corner.

"Ah!"

"Oh, is that you, Umi?"

"You're out for a walk this late at night?"

All four of the people were just aunties from the neighborhood. They were carrying grocery bags in their hands. Apparently, they were on their way home from shopping.

"Oh, geez…" Umi let out a sigh. "It's okay, Nanaka. Let's go to the grocery store!"

Umi laughed and turned around.

"Huh?"

Nanaka was nowhere to be seen.

"Nanaka!"

When she looked where Nanaka had been standing, she saw something on the ground.

She ran over and found the shoes Nanaka had been wearing.

Suddenly, she heard someone call out…

"Help!"

It was coming from a narrow alley off the road.

“Nanaka!”

Umi quickly ran to the alley.

She found her sister there.

“Umi!”

She also saw the four men standing in the alley.

One of them was holding Nanaka in his arms.

“Nanaka!” Umi yelled, but the man ran off still holding her sister. “Wait!”

Umi chased the men down the alley.

“Help me, Umi!”

“Nanaka!”

The men turned the corner.

As Umi watched them go, she said quietly, “But isn’t that…?”

It was a dead end.

“Give Nanaka back!” Umi yelled as she rounded the corner, but no one was there.

“How…?”

The road ended in a tall wall, so there was nowhere else to run.

“But…where did they go?”

The four men had disappeared with Nanaka.

“We were too late.”

Someone was standing next to Umi.

“Ah!”

Umi backed away.

The person next to her was a boy wearing a red hood. She didn’t recognize him.

Next to him was a dog wearing a yellow hood.

They were Fushigi and Jimmy.

“Wh-who are you?!”

“Don’t worry. I know we look pretty suspicious, too, but we’re not with those guys.”

Umi almost screamed when she heard the dog talk, but Fushigi started to explain before she could.

“If you don’t do something, your sister will become a *sacrifice*.”

“What does that mean?”

“They’re going to kill her. Those men are the ghosts of the sacrifices to the dragon that once lived in that swamp.”

“They’re ghosts? No way…”

“Those men turned into ghosts and have sacrificed themselves thousands and tens of thousands of times over and over again. But you two witnessed it.”

“And then those guys spotted you. But they probably only saw your sister.”

“A-actually…”

The men really had only seen Nanaka.

“Those men want to sacrifice your sister instead of themselves to the dragon and turn her into a wandering ghost.”

“Then they took Nanaka to the reservoir?”

As soon as Fushigi nodded, Umi took off running.

“Hey! It’s dangerous to go alone!”

Jimmy looked over at Fushigi.

“I know…,” Fushigi said.

Fushigi and Jimmy both ran after Umi.



The sun had set, and it was dark.

Fushigi and Jimmy caught up with Umi, and the three of them headed to the reservoir together.

“If we don’t hurry, they’ll hurt Nanaka!”

“Don’t worry. We’re here to help you guys!”

Jimmy smiled to put Umi at ease.

“Hmm?”

Suddenly, Jimmy felt strange. For a moment, it didn’t feel like his body was his own.

What’s going on…?

Jimmy tried to say it out loud.

“Ruff, ruff!”

But all he could do was bark like a dog.

What's happening?

Jimmy was confused, and he looked at Fushigi.

In a panic, he tried saying, "Ah, ah, ah." After he made sure he could still talk like a person, he felt relief wash over him. "I-it's nothing."

Fushigi seemed puzzled by Jimmy's behavior, but then he looked ahead again and kept walking.

"It's nothing at all…," Jimmy said as though he was trying to convince himself.

Eventually, Fushigi and the two others ran up the mountain path and were finally near the reservoir.

"Over there!"

Umi scanned the water's edge.

The reservoir was lit by the moonlight, so they could see the four men and Nanaka.

One of the men still held the girl under his arm. She was unconscious.

"Nanaka!"

Frantic, Umi tried to reach her sister.

FWOOM!

The reservoir roared as a stream of water in the shape of a dragon writhed out from the surface into the air.

Then it attacked Umi.

"Ah!"

"Watch out!"

Jimmy ran and pushed Umi out of the way.

SPLOOSH!

The water crashed into the ground.

Jimmy dodged.

Umi was safe thanks to Jimmy, but then the water rose into the air and turned into a dragon again.

“Fushigi, I’ll lead it away! You hurry and get that curse mark collected!”

Fushigi nodded and ran toward the men.

“You keep hidden!” he said to Umi.

“But what about Nanaka?!”

“She’ll be fine!” Jimmy yelled. “Fushigi’ll save her for sure!”

Umi nodded and hid in the trees.

“Good,” Jimmy said and smiled.

Then the water attacked Jimmy again.

SPLOOOOSH!

“Whoa!”

Jimmy quickly rolled along the ground.

Once he got back up, he glared at the water.

It attacked him again.

SPLOOOSH! SPLOOOSH!

As Jimmy was completely occupied with avoiding the water, he started to growl.

“Rrgh!



“Guuurrrr!
“GRRRR!”
He was acting just like a wild animal.

Meanwhile, the four men were about to carry Nanaka with them into the reservoir.
They were muttering as they went.

“I. Don’t. Want. To. Die.”
The men murmured as they took one step, then another into the water.
The man at the front was already submerged. The next man went in, then the third. Finally, even the man carrying Nanaka sank into the water.
“I. Don’t. Want. To. Die.”
The men were going in along with Nanaka.
But someone grabbed Nanaka’s arm and pulled.
It was Fushigi.
He tugged Nanaka to himself and out of the reservoir.
“Aaaaagh!”
The last man stared at Fushigi as he went under.
Fushigi brought out his bright-red notebook, opened it to a page, and recited a spell.

“.ƎvlosəЯ”

In the next moment, a strange mark emerged from the reservoir, glittered, inverted, and appeared on the open page of the notebook.
The water in the shape of a dragon collapsed and splashed to the ground.
“Nanaka!” Umi yelled, and Nanaka opened her eyes.
“Ahhh… U-Umi!”
Nanaka ran over to Umi.
“I was so scared!”
“I’m so glad you’re okay!”
Umi gave Nanaka a big hug.
But then Nanaka caught sight of Jimmy right at that moment.

“Ah! What is that?!”

“That dog saved us.”

“It’s scary! That’s a monster! Get away from us!”

Nanaka grabbed a pebble and threw it at Jimmy.

Meanwhile, Fushigi wasn’t aware of what was happening with the girls and Jimmy as he stared at the reservoir that was illuminated by the full moon.

“Human sacrifices…”

Fushigi’s mind was strangely occupied with thoughts about the men from earlier.

In that moment, Fushigi felt his head throb.

A scene flashed through his mind.



It was somewhere in a mountain. The full moon was in the sky, and a large lake spread before him. Fushigi walked into that lake alone.

He started to sink into the water, and as he did, he mumbled something. With each word, he sank deeper.

The moment his face was fully submerged, he said slightly louder, “Himitsu!”



“What was that…?”

Fushigi was bewildered by what he had seen in his head.

But he had no idea where the vision had come from.

“Uh, um…” Umi and Nanaka came to stand beside him. “Your dog is gone.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nanaka thought he was a monster and threw a rock at him. And then your dog howled and ran away…”

Umi had explained to Nanaka that Jimmy had saved them, so she said to Fushigi, “I’m sorry.”

Fushigi looked up at the mountain path.

“Jimmy…”

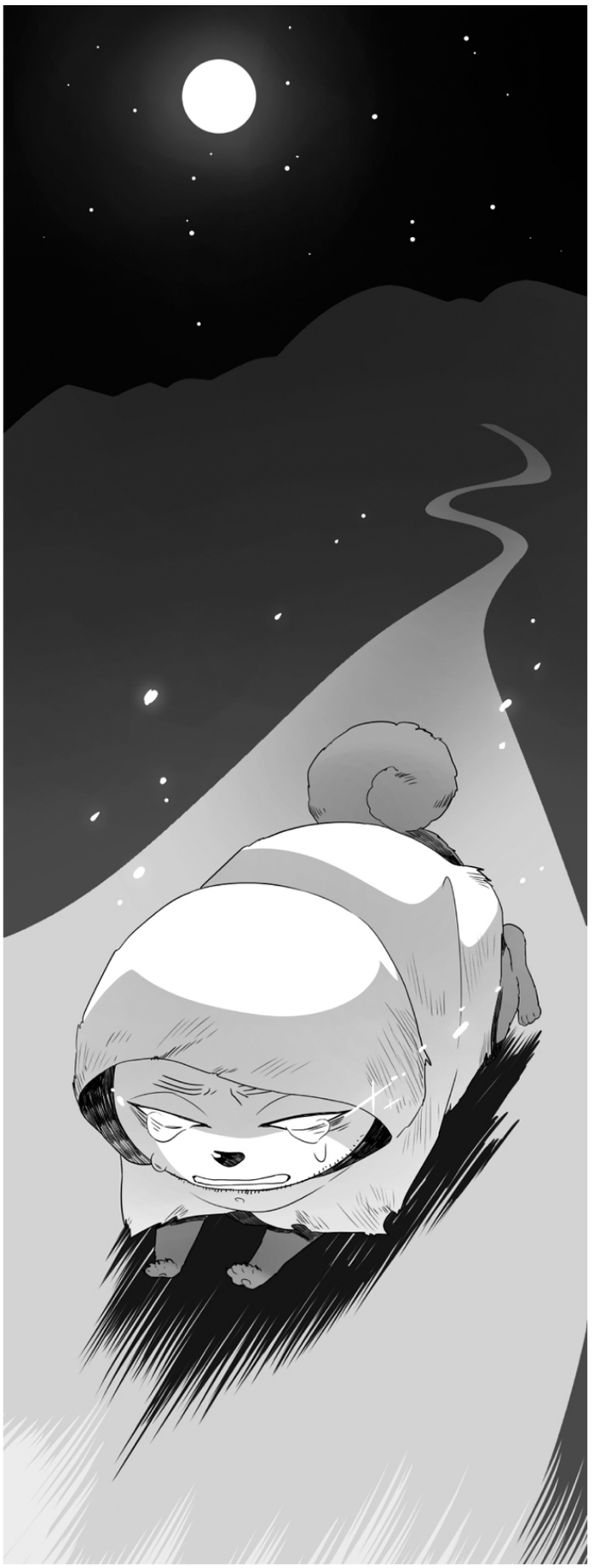
Around that time, Jimmy was going down the mountain and ran into the road.

“Wuff, wuff! Wuff, wuff!”

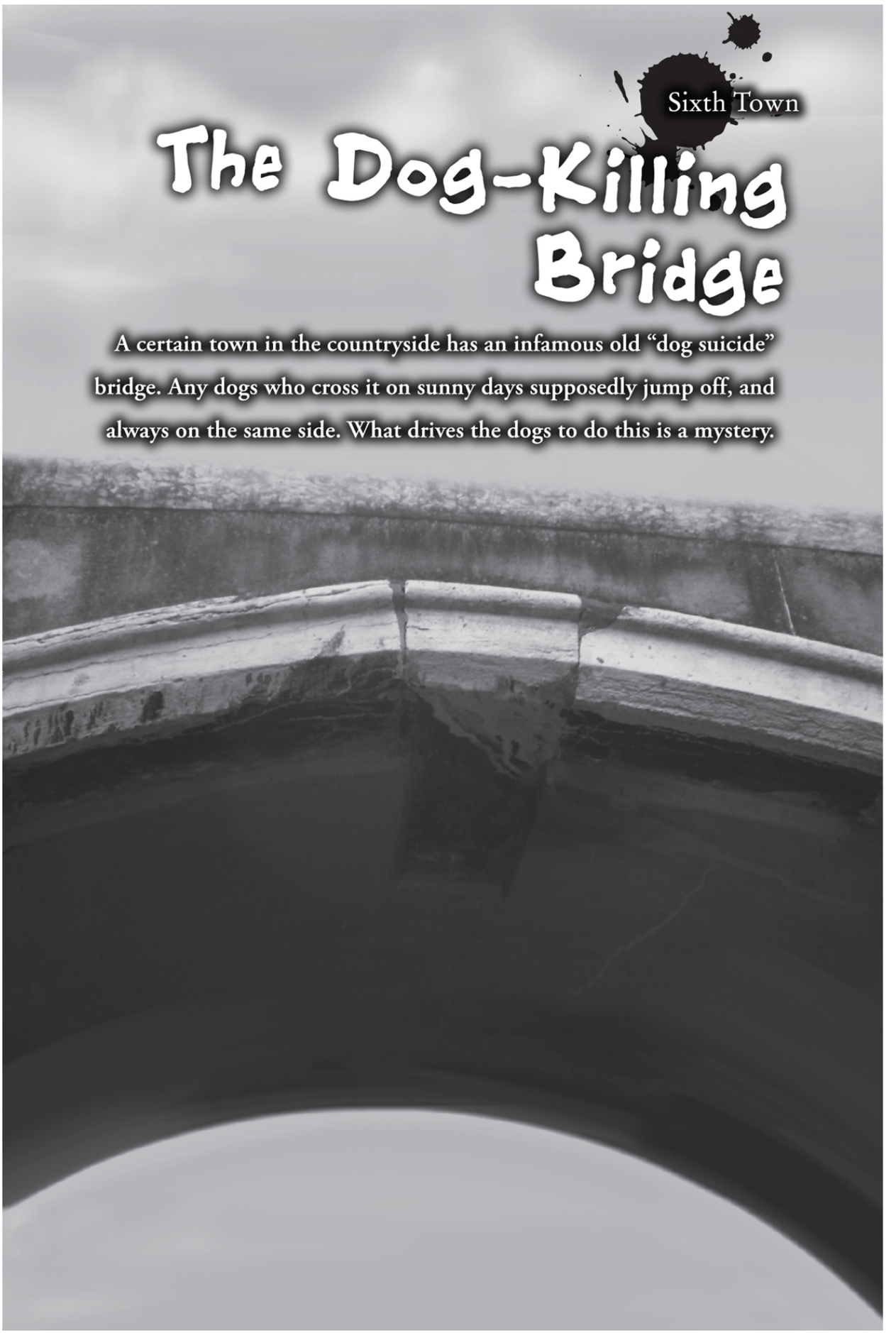
It seemed Jimmy didn’t know who he was anymore.

“Wuff, wuff! Wuff, wuff!”

All he did was run—somewhere, anywhere, as fast as he could.






Sixth Town
The Dog-Killing Bridge
A certain town in the countryside has an infamous old "dog suicide" bridge. Any dogs who cross it on sunny days supposedly jump off, and always on the same side. What drives the dogs to do this is a mystery.

“Wait! Don’t run!”

Some kids were chasing something along the bank of a river.

“Get him!”

“If we catch him, we’ll be famous!”

The kids were holding tree branches, rocks, and all kinds of things.

“Wuff, wuff! Wuff, wuff!”

They were chasing after a dog, but it was no normal canine. This dog wore a yellow raincoat and had the face of a human man.

He was the human-faced dog, which was a well-known urban legend in that town.

The pebbles they threw landed right next to him.

“Rrgh! Grrr!”

The dog stopped and growled at the kids.

“It’s real!”

“Scary!”

“It gives me the creeps!”

The kids all started to chatter as they picked up more things to throw.

“Yap! Yap!”

The dog tried to avoid the stones, but there were too many, so he scurried off in a panic.

“Hey! Don’t let it get away!”

One of the kids threw a big rock and hit the dog right in the head.

“Arf!”

The dog lost his balance and rolled down the riverbank. He plunged into the water, which was flowing faster than usual because of torrential rain from the day before.

The kids ran down the bank, but they couldn’t see where the dog had gone.



“Urgh… Why’m I sleeping by a river? *Achoo!* ”

He was soaking wet.

“Ouchie ouch… It’s like I rammed my noggin into a rock or something.”

He tried to bring his hands up to hold his head, but he couldn’t reach his forehead.

“What the? Agh! My arms are stubby and I’ve got paws! Agh!”

When he saw the short dog legs coming out of the beat-up yellow raincoat he was wearing, Jimmy remembered he was a human-faced dog.

“Good morning, Jimmy. It seems you have finally come back to your senses.”

Something in his raincoat pocket vibrated, and a pink phone fell out of his jacket. MOMO, the secretary app, was on the screen.

“You have wandered the town, wreaking havoc as the human-faced dog, these past few days.”

“What?!” Jimmy shouted.

Now that she told him that, Jimmy realized he had some blanks in his memory.

“I think I was tryin’ to save a girl who got captured by ghosts…”

But then he remembered the girl had called him a monster and thrown a rock at him.

“Did I really lose all my memories and turn into a monster then…?”

Jimmy’s shoulders slumped.

Then he recalled what the man with the blue umbrella had said. A shudder ran through him.

“You’re very close to becoming an actual human-faced dog.”

“Some children chased after you on a ‘human-faced dog hunt,’ and you fell into the river.” MOMO’s avatar shuddered on the screen. “Please do be more careful with me. While I am a cutting-edge piece of technology with water resistance, I do not enjoy being submerged in water.”

“Who cares about that?! Where’s Fushigi? Where’d he go off to?!”

“I am unsure. Perhaps you were so useless to him that he abandoned you and moved on to the next town?”

“He wouldn’t…”

But actually, Fushigi didn’t need a partner who had fully turned into a human-faced dog.

Jimmy wouldn’t be able to help Fushigi at all and might even get in his way.

“You might have a point…” Jimmy looked over his now-ragged yellow raincoat. “Fushigi was…my one and only friend…”

“Friend? You think Fushigi was your friend?”

A question mark appeared above MOMO’s avatar.

“That’s right…,” Jimmy quietly said. “I used to think I didn’t need anybody. I used to take sensational photos for my scoops without even thinkin’ about how that’d hurt the person I was photographing. I was a half-baked man…at least until I turned into the human-faced dog and met Fushigi. I think I only started becoming a good guy after I became Jimmy. I finally made a friend I really wanted to help from the bottom of my heart.”

At first, Jimmy had asked to travel with Fushigi so he could apologize to the faceless kid. But at some point, Jimmy started to enjoy his travels with Fushigi.

“I guess in the end, I ended up being a half-baked human-faced dog. Why am I turning into a real human-faced dog? If I turn into a monster, I can’t keep traveling with Fushigi. I’d just get in his way.”

Tears welled up in Jimmy’s eyes.

“If I could only stop myself from turning into a monster…”

MOMO stared at Jimmy. Then she pushed up her glasses with her front paw and said, “There is a way to accomplish that.”



A group of boys was walking down a road.

“Where do you think it went?”

“We almost got it.”

“But no one believes us. There really was a human-faced dog.”

They were the same boys who had been chasing Jimmy earlier.

“You think it was real?”

“It had to be!”

“Yeah! I’ve never seen a monster like it!”

The boys were getting amped up as they talked about the human-faced dog and started to step into a crosswalk.

But then they realized someone was standing right in front of them.

“Could you tell me more about that?”

It was a boy wearing a red hood.



“Continue about five yards ahead and take a left.”

Jimmy was going through town following MOMO’s instructions.

He had no idea what her idea was, but he didn’t care as long as he wasn’t going to become a monster.

Jimmy sniffed around as he walked down the road.

A *yakitori* restaurant was up ahead. The delicious smell wafted toward him.

Jimmy stopped listening to MOMO’s directions and headed straight for the restaurant.

“Wuff, wuff!”

He wagged his tail and begged by waving his front paws up and down. But no one would open the door for him. Jimmy kept barking anyway as he looked at the door. The next moment, Jimmy came back to his senses.

“What was I doing again…?”

He’d lost several minutes of his memories.

“You wagged your tail and begged for food. Dogs do such things quite often. You likely hoped someone inside would open the door and feed you. You have left your route. I am recalculating,” MOMO said without batting an eye.

Jimmy shuddered when he realized he had lost his wits again.

This time, he had gone back to normal immediately by luck, but he had no idea if he would revert the next time.

“MOMO, hurry up and tell me what your big idea is! Things are gonna get real bad if I stay this way!”

“Then continue fifty yards ahead and turn left.”

“Okay,” Jimmy said as he took off running.

Thirty minutes passed by. The sun had set, and everything around him was dark. Jimmy made his way to a river on the outskirts of town.

“Another river?”

“Please look ahead.”

Jimmy did just that and saw an old bridge made of stone up ahead.

“You mean that bridge?”

“That is your destination.”

“What?!” Jimmy shouted.

He had no idea what was going on.

“This is the location of an urban legend called The Dog-Killing Bridge. It is said that for reasons unknown, **any dog who crosses that bridge feels the urge to kill itself and will jump off.**”

“Huh? What kinda urban legend izzat? I’m not scared of no bridge.”

The bridge was barely three yards higher than the water, which looked like it was moving very slowly. Jimmy doubted anyone would die from jumping off.

He took a step toward the bridge.

The wind gusted from the direction of the river, tugging off Jimmy’s hood to reveal his face. His features barely looked human. Jimmy gazed at his reflection in the water.

“I’m a monster…”

At that moment, the water's surface rippled and showed him something else. It was himself without a raincoat, fully revealing his dog's body. His face looked even more monstrous than it already was as he attacked someone.

That someone was a boy wearing a red hood.

"Fushigi!" Jimmy yelled as he watched the scene play across the water's surface.

The Jimmy in the water latched on to Fushigi's neck and bit him again and again. Blood gushed and spurted everywhere.

"It seems this is showing you in the near future," MOMO commented.

"How could that be…?" Jimmy pushed down his inner turmoil as he glared at MOMO. "Why did you bring me here? Are you tryin' to mess with me?"

The phone vibrated to pull itself partway out of Jimmy's pocket. MOMO stared at him.

"You said you wanted this. That you would like to stop your transformation into a monster."

"Right."

"Then the best way to do so would be to disappear.

"If you disappear here by dying, you will not turn into a full human-faced dog."

"If I disappear…"

Jimmy wanted to shout at MOMO for even suggesting it, but if he didn't want to cause problems for Fushigi, the fastest way would be by dying.

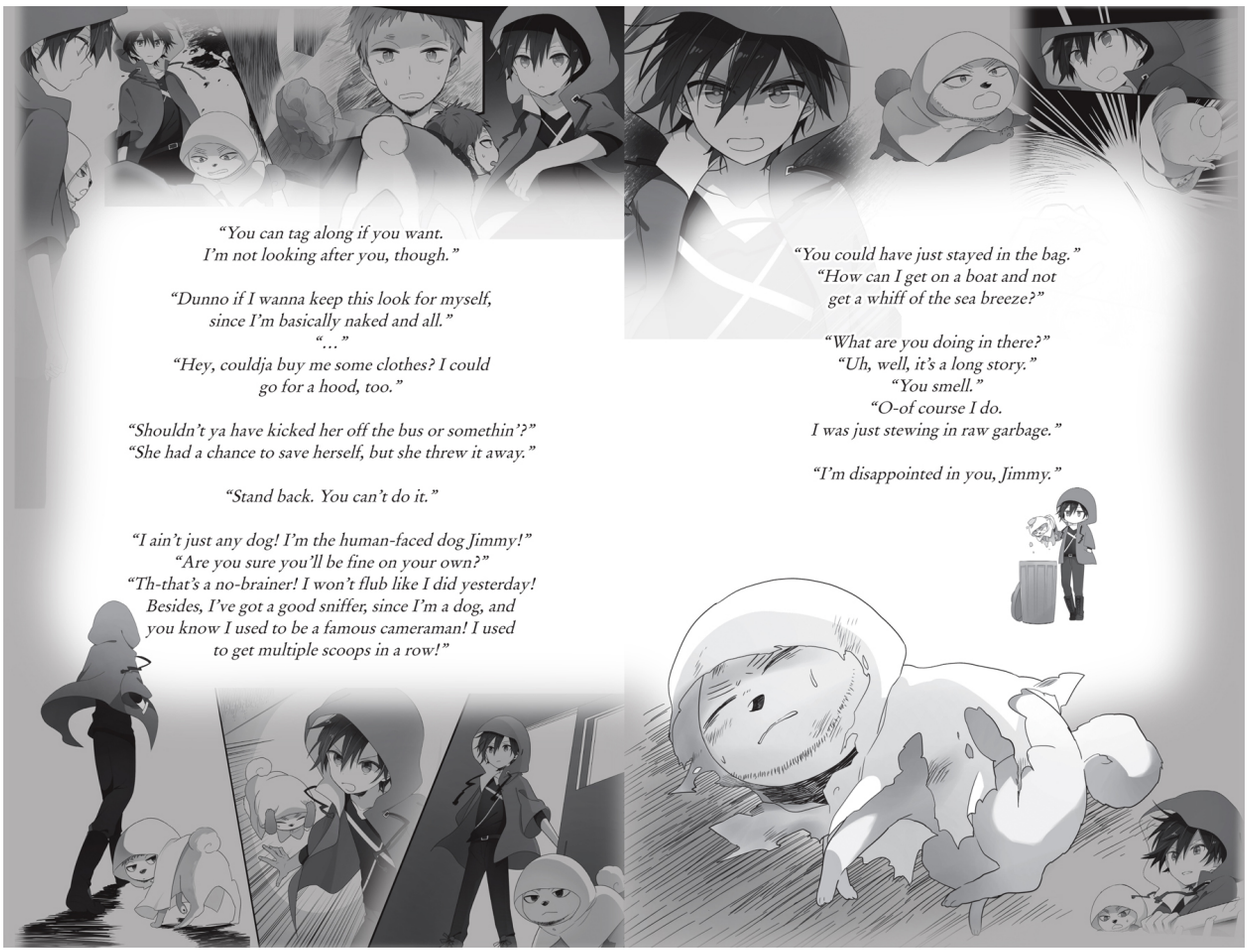
"If I die, huh…?"

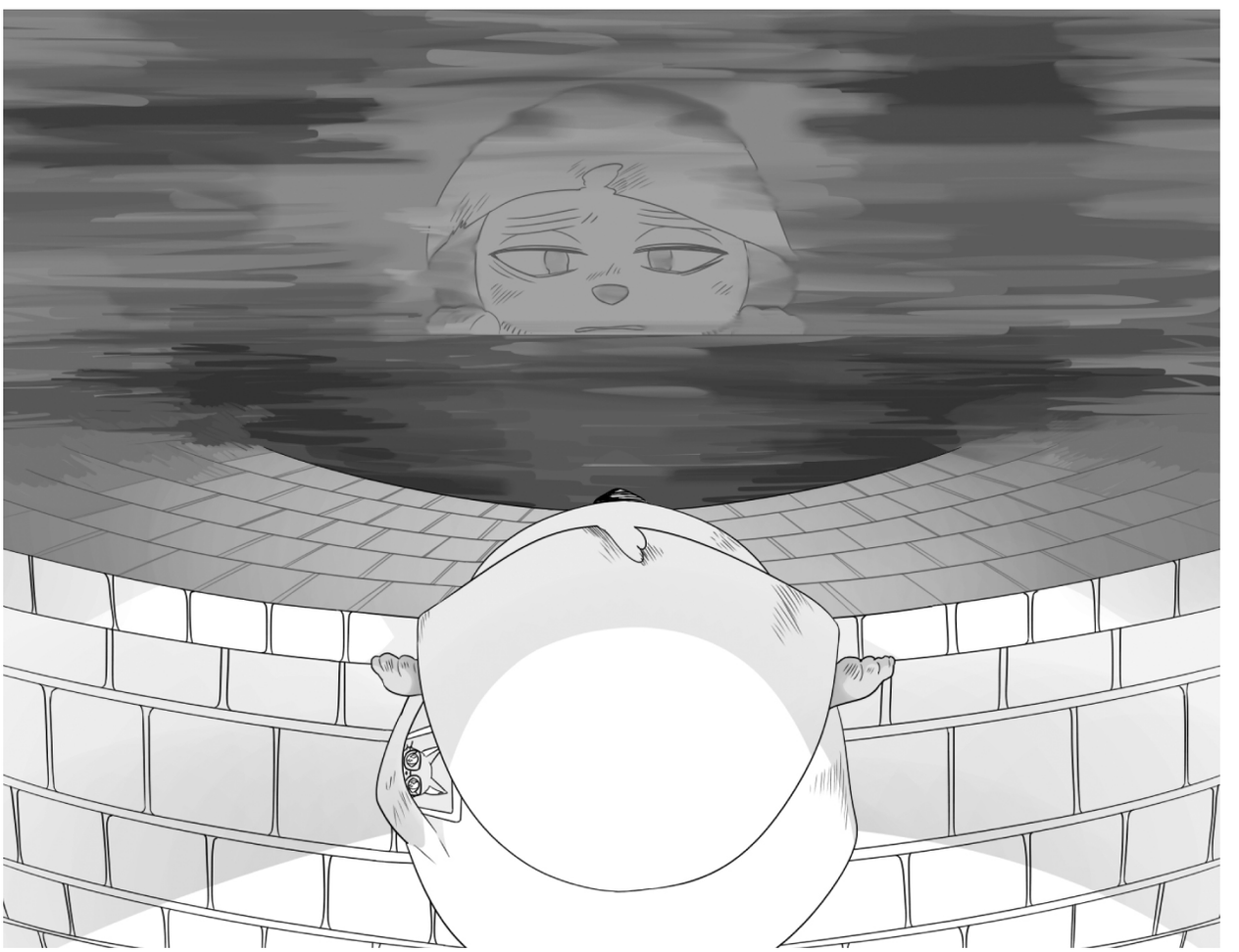
Jimmy stared into the water's surface. The image of his future self disappeared, and he saw only his own monstrous face.

He was still in his right mind at the moment. Maybe it would be better to decide this before he turned into a monster again.

"Fushigi…"

Jimmy remembered everything that had happened since he had met Fushigi until now.


"You can tag along if you want.
I'm not looking after you, though."
"Dunno if I wanna keep this look for myself,
since I'm basically naked and all."
"…"
"Hey, couldja buy me some clothes? I could
go for a hood, too."
"Shouldn't ya have kicked her off the bus or somethin'?"
"She had a chance to save herself, but she threw it away."
"Stand back. You can't do it."
"I ain't just any dog! I'm the human-faced dog Jimmy!"
"Are you sure you'll be fine on your own?"
"Th-that's a no-brainer! I won't flub like I did yesterday!
Besides, I've got a good sniffer, since I'm a dog, and
you know I used to be a famous cameraman! I used
to get multiple scoops in a row!"
"You could have just stayed in the bag."
"How can I get on a boat and not
get a whiff of the sea breeze?"
"What are you doing in there?"
"Uh, well, it's a long story."
"You smell."
"O-of course I do.
I was just stewing in raw garbage."
"I'm disappointed in you, Jimmy."



“Jimmy, is something the matter?”

Jimmy made his way to the center of the bridge and stood on its edge.

Fwooo, fwooo.

The surface of the river eddied, and a giant hole opened up in the center of it. As Jimmy looked into the water, he didn’t seem to see the hole.

“I…I’m…”

Jimmy slowly leaned forward.

“I’m better off dead.”

Jimmy looked like he had given up on everything.

Then he jumped toward the gaping hole in the water.

But something caught his hind legs.

Jimmy dangled in midair.

He turned to see someone holding on to him.

Jimmy’s gaze followed the arms up to see a human being.

It was a boy wearing a red hood.

It was Fushigi.

But Jimmy didn’t recognize him.

“Do you know who I am, Jimmy?”

“Y-you…? Who are you? Who am I? Ah…ahhh!”

Jimmy shook his head back and forth as it throbbed in pain.

Fushigi set him back down on the bridge in a panic.

“Get it together, Jimmy!”

Fushigi reached a hand toward him.

“Grrrr!”

That was when Jimmy bared his fangs at Fushigi.

“Guh!”

When Jimmy saw blood drip from a cut on Fushigi’s skin, he instinctively flinched. It was like he knew he had done something wrong. Jimmy backed away from Fushigi and ran off like a scared wild animal.

“Jimmy!”

Jimmy ignored Fushigi and fled.

As the dog left, something fell out of his raincoat pocket.

Fushigi ran after him and picked it up.

“A pink phone… But Jimmy said it fell into the river.”

On the screen, Fushigi saw a cat wearing glasses.

“Nice to meet you. My name is MOMO.”

“I don’t care about your name. You must be the one who tricked Jimmy.”

Fushigi looked at the bridge.

“The dog-killing bridge. I can’t believe it was in a place like this.”

Fushigi pulled out his bright-red notebook, opened it to a blank page, and recited a spell.

“.ƨvlosƨЯ”

A mark appeared on the wall of the bridge and glittered, then inverted and appeared on the open page of the notebook.

Fushigi also turned the notebook to the phone.

“You’re next.”

But MOMO spoke up.

“Please wait. Are you sure you want to do this? In the meantime, Jimmy will turn into an actual human-faced dog. Once that happens, he will not be able to return to being a human.”

Fushigi stopped.

Once a human became a true urban legend, they couldn’t change back. If he was too late, Jimmy would disappear when the curse mark was collected.

MOMO pushed up her glasses with her front paw and stared right at Fushigi.

“I will lead you to him. I can help you.”

“You’ll lead me?”

“I am familiar with this location.”

Fushigi raised his head and took a good look at the streets.

“This is that town…,” Fushigi muttered, then put away his notebook.



Wh-what's happening?

Jimmy hid in a shed and trembled all over.

It was night and completely dark now. He had no idea who he was. He didn't know where he was, either, but he couldn't help but think about the boy who had saved him earlier.

I've…met him before.

He tried his best to remember the boy.

"Jimmy."

The boy was calling him.

"Jimmy."

That was what the boy would say when he looked at Jimmy.

"He's…he's…"

He remembered the boy picking up a child-sized yellow raincoat.

Then he remembered something the boy had said at some point.

"Then how about this?"

"What? That ratty thing?"

"It's got a hood on it."

The boy had draped the raincoat over Jimmy.

"He's…he's…he's…he's…he's…"

"All right! Say, you never told me your name."

That was the moment the stony-faced boy had smiled just slightly for the first time.

"Fushigi. My name's Fushigi Senno."

Jimmy suddenly lifted his head.

“He’s Fushigi! He’s my partner, Fushigi Senno!”

He finally remembered the boy’s name. At the same time, he also vaguely recalled that he’d bitten Fushigi and run away.

“I forgot who Fushigi was and bit him… It’s over for me now…”

Jimmy felt hopeless.

“I thought you’d be here.”

Jimmy turned toward the sound of the voice and saw someone standing in front of the shed.

Fushigi stared at Jimmy.

“Do you remember this place?”

Jimmy crawled out of the shadows and looked around.

The trees in the area were kind of familiar.

“Wait, is this…?”

“That’s right. It’s where we first met.”

They were by some trees on the outskirts of town.

Jimmy had been looking for the faceless kid in this town when he met Fushigi.

“Fushigi…”

Jimmy almost took a step toward Fushigi.

But then he felt his head throb painfully in that moment.

His memories of Fushigi were disappearing.

“Aaagh! C-crud! No! I don’t want this!”

Jimmy shook his head and tried to fight it, but his memories disappeared one by one.

Fushigi ran over to Jimmy and crouched next to him.

“No, you can’t get near me! Just leave me! What if I bite you again?!”

“I don’t mind,” Fushigi said.

“Huh?”

Fushigi showed Jimmy his hand.

“Ah! No! **Grr! Grrrr!**”

Jimmy bit Fushigi reflexively.

But Fushigi just hugged Jimmy like nothing was wrong.

“I finally caught up to you.”

Fushigi stood up while still holding Jimmy.

“I couldn’t abandon my partner.”

“I…ugh, ah… Fushigi, don’t help me. It’s no use. Urgh…”

Jimmy’s eyes started to water, and he tried desperately to hold on to his memories as he said:

“Fushigi…before I forget…I need to tell you. I learned…from the man with the blue umbrella… Once you collect all the marks… you’ll die…”

“I know that already.” Fushigi shook his head gently. “That’s okay. I’m still going to collect the curse marks even if that happens.”

“Wh-what do you mean?”

“You see, Jimmy, I don’t even remember who I used to be.”

Fushigi pulled out his red notebook and opened it to a page, then showed it to Jimmy.

An old black-and-white photograph was stuck in its pages. Fushigi and a young girl were smiling in it.

“All I remember is that I need to catch my sister, who’s spreading cursed urban legends. And once I do that and catch Himitsu, I’ll disappear.”

“Y-you’re doing that even though you know…?”

“That’s because collecting the urban legends is the only purpose I live for.”

When Jimmy realized how serious Fushigi was about his goal, Jimmy’s face suddenly twisted.

“**Uugah!** It hurts! It hurts…! **Aaaagh!**”

His face was morphing, and he looked less and less like himself.

“Jimmy!”

Fushigi bit his lip and held the notebook over Jimmy.

“You can still turn back into a human.”

“N-no! I don’t want to be human again!”

Fushigi froze.

“Wh-when I turned into the human-faced dog, that was the first time I found a real friend! My one and only friend is Fushigi Senno! I’m fine… I won’t turn into a real human-faced dog. So please just stay with me like this. I wanna keep traveling, just the two of us, like we have been. I…I wanna be with you, Fushigi!”

Tears streamed down Jimmy’s face as he begged the boy.

“You’ll always be with me. On the inside. I’ll…never forget you,” Fushigi said. Each word was heartfelt.

Then he stared right at his partner.

“Fushigi…”



Jimmy stopped fighting and relaxed.

Fushigi turned his bright-red notebook toward Jimmy's forehead.

"Illuminate the curse. Transcribe the curse. Project."

Fushigi said a spell.

"Resolve."

A glittering mark appeared on Jimmy's head and transferred to the notebook.

Jimmy watched Fushigi even as he slowly lost consciousness.

"I'll…never forget you…either… I'll never…forget you… Fushigi…"

Jimmy glowed in Fushigi's arms.



Some time passed, and a man opened his eyes.

"Where…am I?"

He saw trees in front of him.

A piece of fabric was covering his naked body.

He had no idea what he was doing in a place like this.

"I feel like I was havin' this wild dream…"

He couldn't remember much of it, but it seemed exciting.

Suddenly, he looked down at the ground and found something there.

It seemed to be a ragged yellow child-sized raincoat.

For some reason, it felt very familiar to him.

He picked it up.



Fushigi was walking down a road.

He was speaking to a pink phone in his hand.

“He was useful at times, but you still turned your partner back into a human in the end?” MOMO asked.

Fushigi glanced at the phone. “What do you even know, dark app? I’ll collect your curse mark now, too.”

Fushigi started to pull out his bright-red notebook.

“I see. But if you collect me now, you will regret it. Because you will meet her soon. Oh… Turn right at the next corner.”

Fushigi, who had just arrived at an intersection, turned to the right and opened his eyes wide.

A girl just like the one from the black-and-white photo in his notebook was standing right in front of him.

Both Fushigi and the weekly magazine had been looking all over for her. She was the faceless kid.

“Himitsu…”

“Fushigi.”

Himitsu took a step toward Fushigi.

Fushigi was speechless when he saw the face under the hood.

The faceless kid had a nose, a mouth, and eyes.

“I’d like to tell you a very special secret, Fushigi,” Himitsu said.

She snickered.





Afterword

Thank you for reading the sixth volume of *Horror Collector*. We had another six towns and six legends in this collection.

First Town — The Ubazakura Legend

Many urban legends exist about cherry blossoms. This one was slightly sad.

Second Town — Bloody Mari

A creepy girl appears from within a full-length mirror… You might become a bit frightened of looking in the mirror at night.

Third Town — Deadly Sleep Talk

This urban legend is unpleasant, isn't it? Make sure not to answer people who speak in their sleep.



Fourth Town — The Devil's Chord

This is a secret about sounds you hear on a regular basis and can't get away from… The devil's chord may be playing somewhere near you…

Fifth Town — The Bottomless Swamp

Swamps are already scary enough without being cursed. Make sure you don't go to a swamp on your own.

Sixth Town — The Dog-Killing Bridge

Jimmy is the main character in this story. Writing about Jimmy like this…might make me cry.



This volume ended up being all about Jimmy. Fushigi's journey will continue. He'll solve an even bigger mystery. I hope you'll keep reading the series.

July 2017
Midori Sato





Tsuruta: Midori Sato has joined us for this issue of "*Horror Collector* Dispatch."

Sato: Hello, everyone. We're so happy to have received lots of letters from you all.

In a certain convenience store, if you photocopy your face, a particular copy machine will print the image of your dying face.

Sato: Saying that it's a particular copy machine in a special convenience store really makes this sound like an urban legend.

Tsuruta: I agree.

While alone at school, a girl you do not know gives you a vintage-style Mary doll without any limbs. If you don't find the hidden limbs of the doll in the school within a week, Mary will steal your limbs to use for her own.

Sato: I don't think I've heard a story about a Mary doll without legs or having to find her limbs within a week at school.

Tsuruta: It feels like you could make an *Ao Oni* game off this premise.

Sato: Actually, it might be fun to make a Himitsu and Fushigi game, don't you think?

There is a single shoe cubby in disrepair at a certain middle school. If you insert a letter into it, you'll receive a reply the next day. But if you ask in a letter who is responding, the person who put the letter in will disappear the next day.

Sato: In middle school, one of my friends put a love letter in a girl's shoe cubby, but I hid it.

Tsuruta: That's mean!

Sato: I'm sorry. But they still went out after that, which was a relief.

Tsuruta: Oh, good. Ha-ha. Oh, we also got questions.

So, is Little Nanoka's curse actually undone if you're not captured by any mirrors or cameras for seven days?



Tsuruta: Well, you're the one who wrote about Little Nanoka in the first volume.

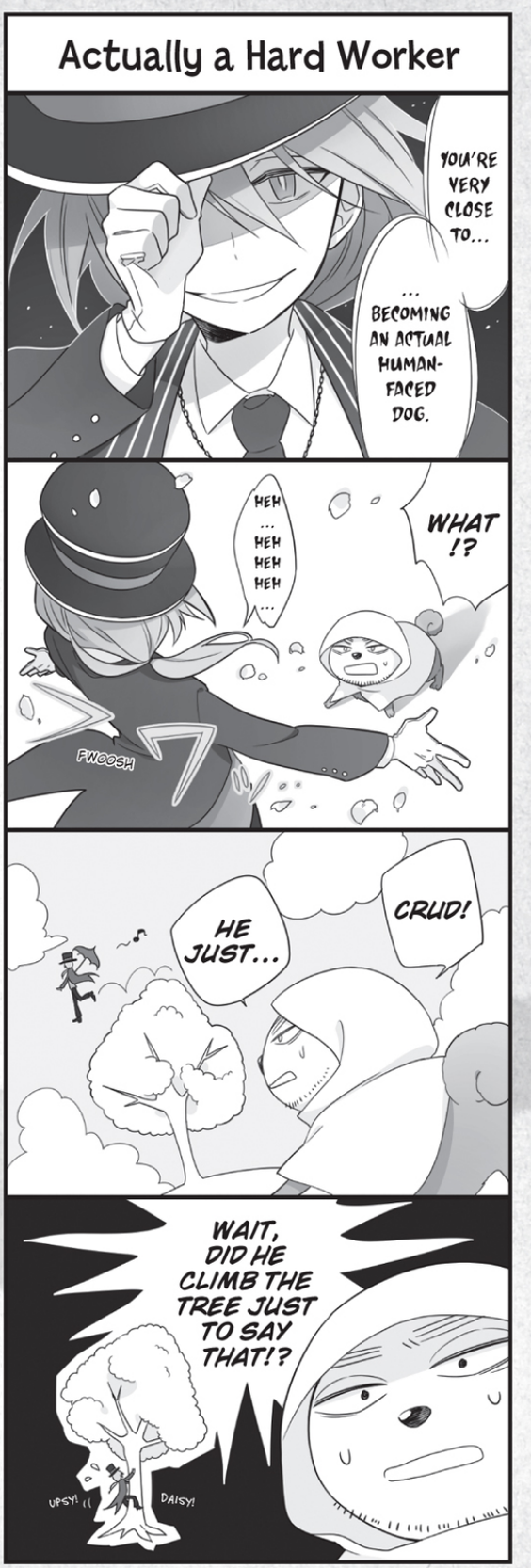
Sato: Yes.

Tsuruta: Does that get rid of the curse?

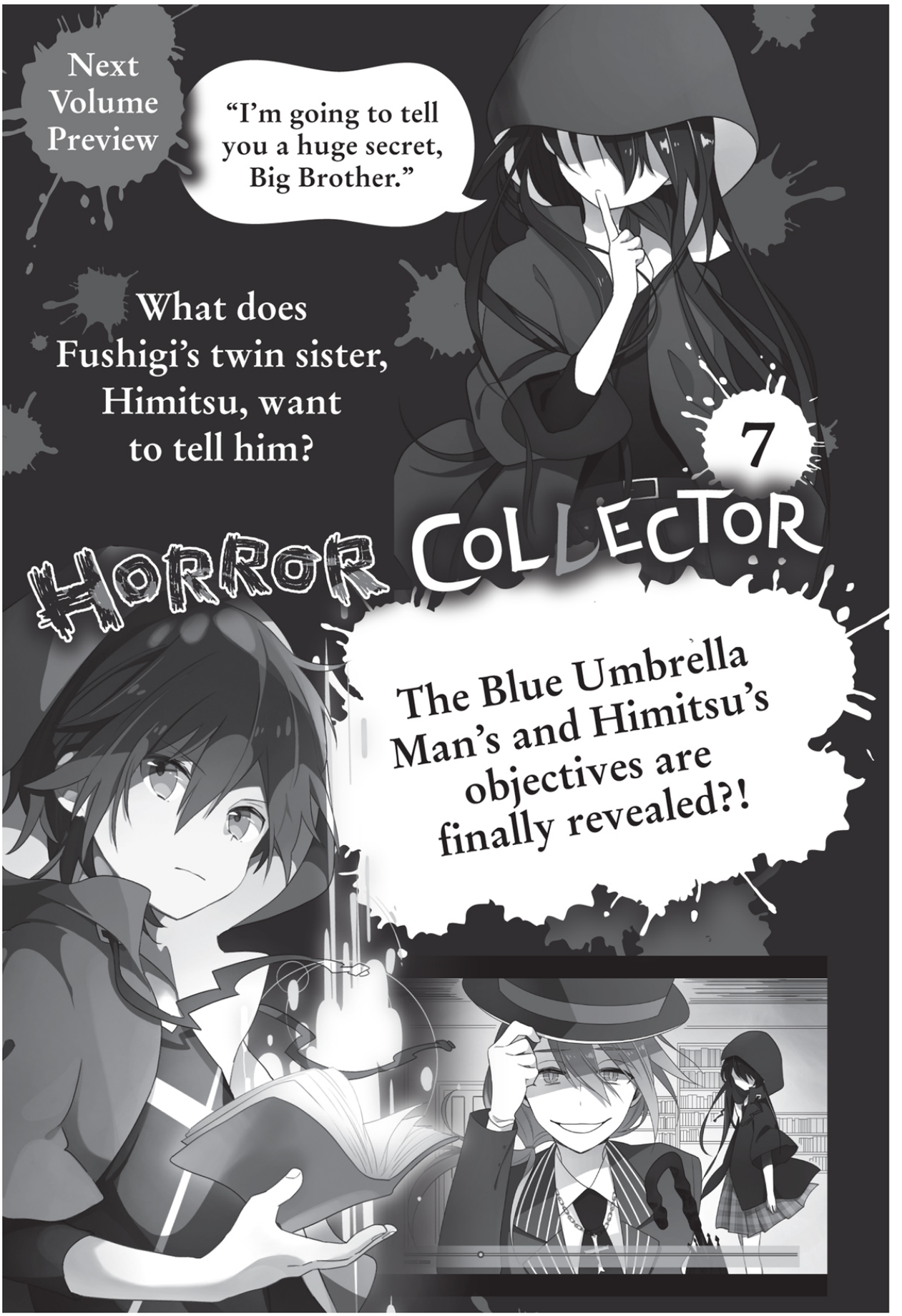
Sato: …

Tsuruta: Well, we were only able to introduce a few letters, but please keep them coming.

July 2017
Norio Tsuruta






Next Volume Preview
"I'm going to tell you a huge secret, Big Brother."
What does Fushigi's twin sister, Himitsu, want to tell him?
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HORROR COLLECTOR
The Blue Umbrella Man's and Himitsu's objectives are finally revealed?!



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