
Ryou Iwanami
Illustration by TwinBox
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It's time for a kiss. ♪
I'm the Strongest in This Zombie World, but I Can't Beat This Girl!

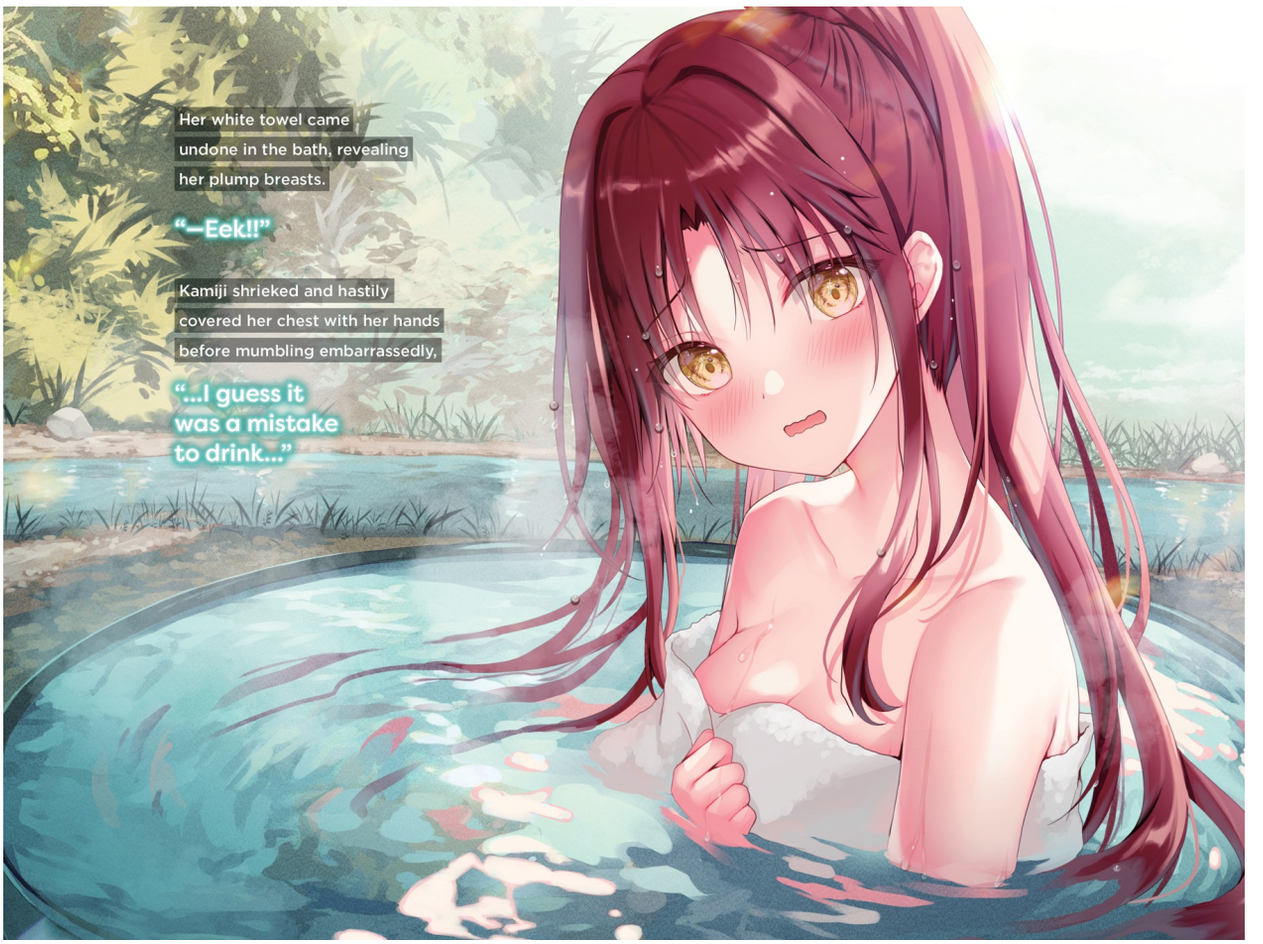
I'm the STRONGEST in This ZOMBIE WORLD, but I Can't Beat This Girl!

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Her white towel came undone in the bath, revealing her plump breasts.
“—Eek!!”
Kamiji shrieked and hastily covered her chest with her hands before mumbling embarrassedly,
“...I guess it was a mistake to drink...”


"...You're allowed to look, Yuuma.
"You're my boyfriend."
Mai's hands were empty, and her face was bright red.
She was right. I told myself to calm down. I was supposed to be her boyfriend, so it would look suspicious if I panicked.


I was wondering what she was going to do
next when, right in front of me, she began
undoing the bikini bottoms she was wearing.
Then she looked up into my eyes, holding out
the strings she'd just undone.
"...Yuuma, will you please tie these for me?"





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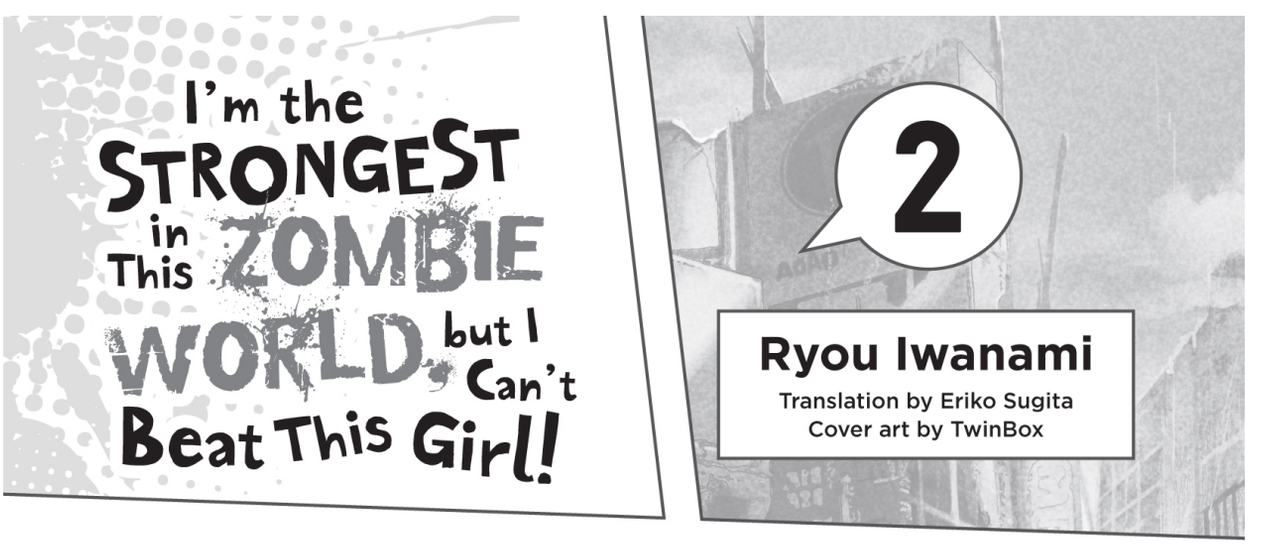
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Ryou Iwanami

Illustration by **TwinBox**

YEN ON
NEW YORK

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I dreamed of a peaceful world.

It was a sunny day in September toward the end of the summer. I was at high school, in the middle of class—when a horde of zombies *didn't* suddenly attack us, and we made it through the day like normal.

I stepped outside the school building and *didn't* see zombies walking around, so I went home on the train that was in service as usual.

I got home and found that my mom and my grandparents *hadn't* turned into zombies. They *didn't* attack me, either, so the four of us had a pleasant chat over tea.

I stepped out of the house and *didn't* accidentally run into Haruka Hyuuga, my friend's younger sister, by the riverbank. She *didn't* let me see her naked breasts—no, nothing wonderful like that happened. All I did was stare out at the river flowing below.

Of course, I *didn't* go to her house where she treated me to a home-cooked meal, nor did I come across Haruka's dad, who'd turned into a zombie.

I *didn't* wander around in search of a safe base protected by a steel fence; meet other survivors named Mai Tsukishiro, Lisa Hoshimiya, and Ayumi Ichinose; and start living with them.

Contaminated water *didn't* come shooting out of the faucet when Lisa was taking a bath.

The entire area *didn't* suffer a power outage, and a horde of zombies *didn't* attack the dorm.

Tsukishiro *didn't* get bitten by a zombie trying to protect me, and I *didn't* need to kiss her once every six hours.

My family was there when I got home. Dinner was served automatically. The lights went on when I flicked a switch, and clean water came out of the faucet…

Everything was calm, peaceful, and convenient—a continuation of my days of boredom in my happy dream.

DAY 5

I was still dreaming when Tsukishiro slipped into my bed, and the movement woke me up. It was before sunrise, but as soon as I was roused in that dark room, it hit me that those peaceful days no longer existed. My chest hurt to think that my friends and family had all turned into zombies.

Still, I forced myself to smile so Tsukishiro wouldn't see that I was depressed.

"…Kousaka, I'm sorry, but it's almost four in the morning…," she said apologetically, her face dimly lit by the indirect lighting next to the bed.

We had kissed and gone to bed at ten the night before, so I had to supply her with more of my saliva right away so she wouldn't turn into a zombie.

I was about to sit up, but she stopped me.

"…I want to be on top this time."

"—Huh?!"

"Hee-hee! I thought we might as well try something different while we're at it," Tsukishiro said with a bewitching smile, and the next moment, she leaned in and pressed her lips against mine. Her tongue entered through the gap between my teeth and licked away the saliva in my mouth.

…Don't get me wrong. This was a type of medical treatment. Yet that didn't change the fact that it was a deep kiss with a beautiful girl who was a year older than me.

"…Kousaka. I feel something hard pressing against me…"

Tsukishiro pulled her lips away from mine and turned her gaze downward.

A part of me that I couldn't control had reacted.

"S-sorry…!!"

“Are you by any chance getting aroused from kissing me?” Tsukishiro whispered in my ear. She put her arms around me and looked into my eyes. “…Kousaka. What do you want to do now…?”

We’d finished the saliva replenishment, but it didn’t look like she was getting out of my bed.

“Wh-what do you mean ‘what do I want to do’…?”

“I don’t mind. You can do anything you want to me…,” Tsukishiro said as she pulled my hips closer to her body. I could feel something soft against the right side of my stomach.

“…U-um, Tsukishiro… I don’t know how to say this, but…I think you’re pushing your chest against me…”

“…That’s fine. It’s intentional.”

“Oh, it’s intentional…”

That meant it was okay for me to focus on the feeling against my side and enjoy it, right…?!

Wait. I’m sure she’d let me squeeze them if I asked.

But I’m supposed to be Haruka’s boyfriend…

“…Do you not find me attractive…?” Tsukishiro murmured when I hesitated, sounding insecure.

“I-it’s not like that…”

“It’s okay. With the way Hyuuga and Hoshimiya are built, I know I can’t compete with them… That’s clear every time we wear our bathing suits.”

“How they’re built…? That has nothing to do with a woman’s appeal.”

“Really? In that case, why does the amount of time you spend looking at Hyuuga and Hoshimiya increase when we go in the bath?”

“……”

“You’re not a very good liar, Kousaka.”

Tsukishiro stared at me, but so much of what she said hit home that I couldn’t come up with a good explanation.

I can’t believe she’s been calculating how long I look at each of them…

“…Uh, still, I’m not stalling because I don’t find you attractive… I may not have told you this before, but Haruka and I are dating.”

“……”

“So I can’t get involved with you…”

“But you said last night that I was the only one you could have sex with.”

“…Yeah, I did.”

That was an irrefutable fact. I had the zombie virus in my body, so I risked giving it to others if I kissed them or did other stuff. As things stood, Tsukishiro, who also had the zombie virus, was the only person I could share saliva or other bodily fluids with.

To be able to have sex with my girlfriend, Haruka, I would have to unravel the mystery of how humans became zombies and eradicate the zombie virus inside me. That said, no one knew when or even if that would be possible. There was a chance that neither Tsukishiro nor I would ever be able even to kiss another member of the opposite sex…

“I’ve been thinking,” Tsukishiro began. “For the sake of repopulation, we’ll have to consider propagating our lineage at some point.”

“P-propagating our lineage…?”

“Our community currently consists of one man and four women. If we can’t find any other survivors, it’ll be a poor use of this gender balance to stay monogamous.”

“I—I see…”

“Furthermore, right now…I’m the only person who can have sex with you. In which case, don’t you think this is no time to be held back by the thinking of our old world?”

“‘Our old world’…”

“…Besides, if I am to have a child, I’d want it to be with you… No one else,” Tsukishiro said, her face bright red.

That was almost a little *too* direct a declaration of love. If we hadn’t been living in this world full of zombies, it would’ve practically been a marriage proposal…

But what Tsukishiro said made sense. I don’t know what the situation was like in other prefectures or countries, but if zombies were invading the world, then we needed to start thinking of ways to prevent humans from going extinct.

And true, if the male-to-female ratio was low, it might be necessary to have sex with multiple women…

My eyes met Tsukishiro's while I was contemplating this, but she quickly looked away. I guess she felt awkward.

…What would it be like to have sex with a pretty girl like her?

"How long are you planning on clinging to each other like that?"

The second I started having those dirty thoughts, Haruka's voice cut in. She was supposed to be asleep in the bed two away from mine. I immediately turned toward the sound and saw her standing next to my bed, looking down at us like the devil itself.

"Tsukishiro. Shouldn't you go back to your bed if you've finished kissing? It's important you get enough sleep."

"…You're right," Tsukishiro replied, her tone clearly pushing back the emotions she was feeling. She got to her feet and returned to her bed next to mine.

Haruka got into my bed in her place and whispered in my ear, "Don't tell me you were thinking of betraying me when I'm right here in the same room."

"Of course not."

"Fine," she replied, although judging from the way she said that, it sounded as if everything was certainly *not* fine. Then she got on top of me.

"…Haruka?"

"As of today, I'm living in your bed. It's cramped, so move over."

"Huh…?"

"I'm occupying seventy percent of the bed, and you can have the rest."

"That's so not fair."

"Do you want me to tell everyone that your real job is being my pet dog?" Haruka asked, grinning like a naughty child.

She was threatening to show the other girls the videos of me answering her command to "shake," sitting when she told me to sit, wearing a collar around my neck, and being put in a cage. And just like that, I was forced to the edge of my bed.

I curled up in a ball and looked at Haruka, who was smiling.

"Thank you. I'm comfortable now."

"That's good. Though now *I'm* cramped."

“Next, stroke my head.”

“…Why?”

“Because I’m your girlfriend,” she declared in a don’t-you-dare-defy-me tone of voice.

“It’s not like you’ve done anything that calls for a reward, is it?”

“Don’t you think it’s just great to have a girlfriend?”

“That’s true.”

Now that I thought about it, she was right. Maybe I was just in a weird sort of mood because it was dawn.

Still lying on my back, I reached out for her head.

“…Hee-hee. That feels good.”

I stroked her head a few times, and she giggled like it tickled.

…She’s so cute…

I wanted her to keep smiling forever if that were possible.

“…Hey, Haruka? I want you to do me a favor and try to get along with Tsukishiro.”

“Huh? You don’t have to tell me that.”

“You were being pretty harsh with her just a minute ago.”

“I was only stating the facts.”

“You told her that sleep was important, but aren’t you stopping me from getting my beauty sleep?”

“I’m your girlfriend.”

“Don’t use that as an excuse for everything.”

“That’s strange. I was taught that when you become someone’s girlfriend, they’ll forgive you for anything.”

“Who told you that?”

“My mom.”

“So your home environment is the reason you’re like this…?”



“She also told me that I had to forgive my boyfriend, no matter what he did to me.”

“Tell me more,” I said, sitting up without realizing it. The moment I did, Haruka stared at me, so I quickly lay back down again.

“Anyway,” she continued, “I want to regularly show everyone that you’re mine.”

“I understand how you feel, but doing something like that might cause friction, which is what worries me…”

“You never say no to a girl approaching you because you don’t want to ruffle anyone’s feathers, like the time you got in that drum bath with Hoshimiya,” Haruka said with a hint of anger in her voice.

I had to be careful how I responded, or I’d be in trouble.

“…Well, yeah, but that’s in the past. I have you, so next time I’ll say no since I don’t want you to be unhappy.”

I meant that. Even if the male-to-female ratio wasn’t balanced, I still thought that people should be monogamous.

I thought I’d die from the stress if this did end up as a polygamous relationship. My stomach hurt just thinking about mediating between Haruka and Tsukishiro and placating them every time they clashed.

“…All right, I’ll believe you’re not lying to me.” Haruka smiled faintly, then added in a murmur, “…But I understand how a guy might get captivated by a pretty girl like Tsukishiro if he had to kiss her several times a day.”

“You do…?”

“And I think you’ll start wanting to go further than that. You have to get rid of your frustrations, or you’ll explode someday, right…? So…”

Haruka moved closer and whispered in my ear.

“…Y-you can…touch my…breasts.”

“…?! S-seriously…?!”

“Well…I *am* your girlfriend… So if you asked nicely…I’d probably let you.”

“For real…?”

I couldn't help but turn my gaze to her voluptuous breasts. I'd be willing to do anything, even get down on my knees and beg, if she let me touch them.

"…Yuuma. You're drooling uncontrollably," she said, and I immediately looked away from her chest. "You're trying to hide it, but you haven't stopped grinning like a fool."

"…I don't think I *can* stop for a while."

"Honestly, Yuuma… You have such a dirty mind…" Haruka heaved a sigh, but then a proud smile spread across her face. "Not that it bothers me. ♪"

"…So tell me, how exactly do you want me to ask?" I said, my heart thumping in my chest.

"Huh…?!"

Haruka was speechless when she saw me get all excited.

The next thing I knew, her expression became troubled.

"Oh, uh… I'm sorry, I was kidding when I said you could touch my breasts…"

"—What?!"

"I assumed you'd play it cool and turn me down…"

"……"

"But it looks like I gave you some weird expectations. I'm really sorry…"

"N-no…I'm the one who's sorry… We're dating, so I thought it would be okay to have more physical contact besides kissing…"

"I—I see…"

"But don't worry. I won't ever do anything you don't want me to do," I promised, and Haruka looked away shyly.

"…I know you really care about me," Haruka said. "…Okay, then. Seeing as you're willing to go so far as to promise that, I don't mind letting you touch my boobs… But I'm not wearing a bra right now…"

"—?!"

"…So I don't know about touching them directly…but oh well… I guess it can't be helped…"

"You're gonna let me…?!"

"…G-go ahead…," Haruka stammered.

Her face bright red, she lay back, and I pulled myself up to kneel formally on the bed. A man had to have the right attitude to take on the sacred act of squeezing boobs, after all.

But as soon as I sat up straight, a shiver ran down my spine. It felt as if someone was staring at me with malicious intent. It was concerning that someone like me, who had no martial arts expertise, could sense danger like that…

Trembling with fear, I slowly shifted my gaze—and met the eyes of Tsukishiro, who was laying in the bed next to mine.

She was staring at me, her cold gaze at absolute zero.

I felt my heart freeze, and the goofy grin on my face evaporated. She'd likely heard Haruka and me talking. Otherwise, she wouldn't look so scary.

I decided to lie down next to Haruka and warm my frozen heart and body.

"…Yuuma…?" Haruka said, sounding perplexed.

"…Haruka," I replied quietly. "Let's not do things like that when other people are around."

It was a close call. I'd been so overcome with my desire to touch her boobs that I'd almost forgotten the bare minimum of manners you'd expect of a human being.

It would've slipped my mind completely if I hadn't met Tsukishiro's eyes.

Still, it definitely would've been weird for us to suddenly step out of the room so I could squeeze Haruka's breasts in the hallway.

And thus, my chance to touch her breasts was put on hold.

★ ★ ★

After that, Haruka returned to her own bed and seemed to fall back asleep.

As for me, I was fully awake and not the least bit tired. I lay in bed frustrated for a while, then gave up on sleep and decided to get up. It was half past four. Lisa would be watching the gate around now.

I went to the front door and saw her wearing a *hakama* and practicing with a bow. Illuminated by the battery-powered lights, Lisa drew the weapon with beautiful form and unleashed arrows at a board propped up against the iron fence. It was about thirty meters to the target, and half the arrows missed it and fell to the gravel below with a rasping sound.

Once she appeared to have finished shooting all her arrows, I opened the door and stepped outside.

“Oh, Yuuma! Morning.”

“Good morning. Did you borrow that bow from Tsukishiro?”

“Yep. She taught me how to use it. I can’t hit anything with it yet, but I can shoot a bit farther than before.”

“Do you practice every day?”

“Yeah, though it’s only been three days. I started practicing the day I avoided turning into a zombie. I don’t care how…but I want to be able to help the others in some way.”

“That’s very noble of you.”

“But don’t you think it would be impossible to fight zombies with a bow and arrow? It’s not like we can blow their heads off with a single blow like we can with a gun.”

“That’s true, but I think a bow also has its uses. For example, we can tie a letter to the tip of an arrow and communicate with someone far away. Seeing as our phones aren’t working, it might be useful when zombies surround us and we have to keep quiet.”

“Ah, that’s true.”

“Maybe we could hide explosives around the dorm, then set them off by shooting them with arrows if zombies come to attack us.”

“Whoa! That’d be awesome! Do you think I should practice shooting arrows with pieces of paper attached to the tips, then?”

“Yeah, that might be a good idea. Shooting arrows without notes could be completely different, so could you talk to Tsukishiro about it? Thanks, that’d be a big help.”

“I’m the one who should be thanking you, Yuuma. We would have just lived without hope until we ran out of food if you hadn’t come along,” Lisa said with a dazzling smile.

She set her bow against the wall.

“I’ll take a little break now. By the way, what are you doing up so early?”

“I couldn’t sleep…”

“Ah… You mean you couldn’t sleep after kissing Tsukishiro?” she asked, looking searchingly into my eyes.

I didn’t know how to respond to that, and Lisa laughed at me.

“Hee-hee! You’re so cute.”

“I can’t help it. I know it’s like a type of medical treatment, but it’s still a *kiss*…”

“That’s the normal way of looking at it. Tsukishiro seems like she might not be getting enough sleep, either.”

“If only there was another way to stop her from turning into a zombie… I think she’d get the same effects by drinking my blood. Maybe I could have her bite me on the arm.”

“Isn’t kissing better? Biting someone’s arm and drinking their blood is something a monster would do.”

“True…”

“You just have to get used to it… Though I can’t say I like the idea of you getting *too* used to kissing.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, I might get bitten by a zombie and have to be saved by you kissing me, too. If that happens, I don’t want to imagine you kissing me mechanically like it’s a routine chore.”

“You say that, but…”

“Tell me, Yuuma. Are you going to try kissing whenever someone gets bitten by a zombie?”

“I guess. I don’t know if I’ll be able to prevent them from turning into a zombie, but I’ll have to try it.”

“It would be tough for you if you had to kiss all of us every six hours.”

“……”

I reflexively recalled the cold looks on Haruka and Tsukishiro’s faces. If they looked at me like that every time I kissed someone…

“Please, Lisa, don’t ever get bitten by a zombie.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? You don’t want to kiss me?”

“…Huh?!”

“—Oh, um, never mind! Forget what I just said.”



Lisa covered her face with her hands and turned her back to me.

…Does she want to kiss me? I wondered. *She did once ask me if I wanted to have sex with her. Don't tell me she has a thing for me…*

"…Yuuma, you wear your heart on your sleeve. I can read you like a book," Lisa said, still covering her face with her hands.

"People often tell me that…"

"That tracks… I asked you to forget what I just said."

"People's brains aren't really designed so we can just forget things whenever we want…"

"I guess not… Okay then, let's drop the subject, and I'll go back to practicing my archery. You don't mind being my target, do you, Yuuma?"

"Please don't take it out on me."

Lisa gave me a half smile and went to pick up the arrows she'd shot earlier.

★ ★ ★

The sky gradually lightened as I was watching Lisa practice, and I returned to my room to get changed.

As I walked down the hall, I heard Haruka and Tsukishiro chatting in the kitchen. It sounded like they were preparing breakfast and talking about how the food in the freezer was starting to melt.

The power outage that had happened two days ago was still ongoing, and power probably wouldn't be restored. Not having a refrigerator considerably shortened the amount of time we could keep food for, so we had to eat the perishables left in the supermarkets while we still could. There were many other things that also needed to be done today, like strengthening our security and securing drinking water, and we also wanted to search for other survivors, though that was a major challenge.

With all these thoughts going through my mind, I opened the door to our room and witnessed an unbelievable sight.

On the bunk bed closest to the door was Ichinose, who was in the process of removing her pajama top. Bit by bit, her skin was revealed. First her navel, then her upper abdomen, and then before I could look away—

Her small breasts were exposed.

She wasn't wearing a bra, and I could see everything, all the way to the tips of her gently curving breasts.

It was only once her top half was completely naked that our eyes met.

"—Aaahh!!"

Her sleepy eyes snapped wide open, and she let out a small shriek as she tried to hide her chest with her pajamas.

"S-sorry!!" I yelled, running out of the room and slamming the door shut.

Now I'd done it… I'd just assumed she was in the dining room and forgotten to knock…

As I stood there in the hallway, stricken with an incredible sense of remorse, Haruka came over to me.

"I heard you yell. What happened?"

…Damn. So she'd heard me all the way in the dining room. Haruka might kill me if I told her I'd gone into our room without knocking and seen Ichinose's naked breasts.

I didn't know how to answer, but just then Ichinose came out of the room dressed in her school uniform. I braced myself, thinking I was doomed if she told Haruka what had just happened, when Ichinose began to speak…

"It's okay now, Kousaka. I let that bug out of the room."



“—Huh?!”

A big question mark popped into my mind, and Ichinose looked at Haruka.

“Kousaka screamed because there was a big bug in the room. So I asked him to stay out in the hallway while I got rid of it… Oh,” she said, turning back to face me. “Should I not have told her that…?”

“I-it’s okay. It’s true—I was trying to get away from that insect.”

“Yeah? I didn’t know you were scared of bugs,” Haruka said with a sly grin before going back to the dining room.

“…Ichinose… Thank you. And I’m really sorry. I don’t know how to apologize…”

“…Please don’t worry about it. I…I was careless, and I know it wasn’t on purpose.”

“I—I appreciate you saying that… I’ll be sure to knock from now on…”

“And I’ll make sure I get dressed in a room where there’s no chance of you coming in…” Ichinose looked down, then continued so softly that I could barely hear. “Come to think of it, we didn’t get a chance to talk about something this simple last night…”

“You’re right… I should have set up some ground rules when we decided that everyone would sleep in the same room…”

“Oh, I’m not blaming you… You have so much to do every day; I don’t think it could be helped… And yesterday, it was more important to set up the lights than to discuss any rules… By the way, you’re going out for supplies again today, aren’t you…?”

“That’s the plan. I want to secure drinking water if I can, but I’m thinking of looking for other stores since the water’s about to run out at the supermarket I usually go to. It isn’t that simple, though, since it seems like a lot of the roads are blocked…”

“Then…how about getting water from the river and filtering it?”

“Filtering water…? Is that something just anyone can do?”

“Water purifiers have come a long way. All we’d have to do is fetch water from the river, pass it through a water purifier, and we’d be able to drink it with no problem. They should have

purifiers at stores that sell outdoors equipment. If you can get us some, I'll take care of the rest."

"You don't say. Okay, I'll see if I can find us some."

"Also…if we're going to store food, I think we'll need to get the refrigerator working again."

"I can't imagine we'll be able to restore the power, though."

"There are several ways to get power. They have portable generators if you go to a big home improvement store. They should have both gasoline and gas canister types, but the latter might be best since gasoline can be tricky to handle. We should also be able to generate solar power if we can get our hands on some solar panels."

"I—I see."

"But it may be too big of a challenge to set up solar panels at our dorm. We need specialized knowledge to do that, and there's no way for us to research it…so I think we need to be on the lookout for a building that already has solar panels and consider moving our base there. Though, of course, we'd have to build barricades around it to keep the zombies out…"

"So you're saying we should look for a building with solar panels on the roof?"

"Yeah. Another option would be to get a camper van and live by a river. It would be tough to fill up on gas, but water would be easier to get, and we could escape quickly when a horde of zombies attacks."

"You're right…!!"

I hadn't talked much with Ichinose before, so I hadn't realized how much she knew or that she had so many different ideas!!

"A water purifier, a generator, a home with solar panels, and a camper van," I said, listing off everything we'd discussed. "I'm vaguely aware of all these things, but I've never really taken a close look at any of them."

"I only learned about them when I was researching disaster prevention, so I've never actually used any of them, either."

"But you came up with the idea of using them. It just goes to show how important it is to know things…"

Until speaking with Ichinose, I'd had no idea where to start. But now I had a plan of sorts to work from.

It showed just how important it is to have all sorts of different people in your community. I decided that from now on, I'd talk to Ichinose whenever I had a problem.

★ ★ ★

"Breakfast's ready!"

Haruka came to fetch us while Ichinose and I were still talking in the hallway.

We followed her to the dining room, where I saw five places set at the table. Laid out in front of them was a sumptuous meal consisting of mixed rice, a miso soup filled with ingredients, bacon and spinach omelets, and dried mackerel. It made me wonder how much longer we'd be able to continue eating fish and meat…

I sipped the miso soup and told the other three about what Ichinose and I had discussed.

"—So that's why I'm planning to expand my search area today. Also, I've been thinking—Ichinose, will you come with us? I wouldn't know what types of water purifiers or generators to look for."

"All right."

"Then the people going out today will be me, Ichinose, and Tsukishiro since there's no guarantee we'll be back in six hours."

"I understand. Um, Kousaka…? I have a favor to ask you…," Tsukishiro said hesitantly. "Would it be at all possible to stop by my house? …I know it's probably hopeless, but I want to see if my family might be safe… I'm sorry to make a personal request at a time like this, but please…"

"Of course we can. I'm sorry I never suggested it… That said, I can't guarantee we'll be able to get there since a lot of the main roads are blocked with crashed cars…"

"Can I come, too?" Lisa asked. "I'm scared to find out what's happened to my family, but I can't stop worrying about them…"

"I understand. Then here's what we'll do: We'll see which roads we can still drive on, and if we can get to them, we'll check on our homes. Ichinose, I'm sure you want to see if your family's safe, too, right?"

“Uh-huh… I’d like to check my house and also my grandmother’s if I can…”

“Of course you can. Okay, let’s get a map, and each of us can mark the places we want to check. Can I ask you to take care of that, Haruka?”

“Sure.”

“And who knows? Maybe we’ll find lots of survivors and come back here as a group of fifty people,” I said optimistically, and Haruka and the others smiled.

But for some reason, Ichinose looked grim.

“Ichinose? What’s the matter?”

“…I think we need to consider what to do if we find survivors in the future… Are you going to tell them you can turn into a zombie at will?”

“…Oh, uh, what should I do…?” I hadn’t expected a question like that and struggled to come up with an answer. “Are you thinking other survivors might be afraid to live with us if they knew that about me?”

“There is that…but I also think it might put you in danger.”

“—Huh?! You do?”

“Yeah. I wasn’t sure if I should say this, since it’s just based on my own speculation, but…,” Ichinose mumbled as she got to her feet.

She started spreading out something on an unused table, and once it was unfurled, I saw it was a map of the area.

“You said you were in math class when the zombie panic first began. That was around nine thirty, right?” Ichinose asked.

“Yeah. I’m not sure exactly what time it was, but it was around then.”

“Thank you. Tsukishiro, I have a question for you now. You said it was around ten AM when that horde of zombies attacked our high school, didn’t you?”

Tsukishiro nodded. She didn’t seem to understand what Ichinose was getting at, either.

Ichinose pointed to my school on the map and began her explanation.

“Our two high schools were attacked at around the same time. Don’t you think there’s something strange about that, though? They’re ten kilometers apart. If a horde of zombies

appeared somewhere and started moving around and attacking people, it's too fast for them to attack our high school only half an hour after Kousaka's."

"Oh…!!!"

She was right. People normally walk at around four kilometers an hour, so if zombies moved at the same rate, it would take them more than two hours to get from my high school to where we are now.

"But the zombies attacked your school half an hour after they took over my school."

"Right. Which means it was probably two different groups of zombies that attacked our schools. The most logical explanation is that the zombies emerged at different locations simultaneously."

"Huh…? Is that even possible? When you think of a zombie virus, you tend to imagine it leaking from a research facility of some sort and spreading from there."

"I also think it's hard to believe the outbreak of the zombie virus was a natural occurrence," Ichinose continued. "For zombies to appear at almost the exact same time in different places, it's highly likely that this was the work of humans. That is to say, I think that some sort of large-scale organization intentionally spread the zombie virus."

"Are you saying it was a terror attack…?"

"I don't know, but maybe someone wanted to ensure that the entire country would be filled with zombies. I mean, if it happened in just one location, the Self-Defense Forces would probably be able to neutralize them. Also, it's been five days since the zombies showed up, yet help still hasn't arrived. I think that must mean their plan was a success."

"I see…"

"So then…I thought about why the culprits might have done this. I think they either wanted to destroy humanity or conduct a large-scale human experiment."

"…Uh, I sort of get what you mean when you say they might want to destroy humanity, but I'm not sure about the other one…"

"The first explanation is fairly straightforward. Someone craving destruction got ahold of the zombie virus and caused a major pandemic. Those zombies go and create more of their kind,

so there's no need for the culprits to do anything else. They might be watching everything from someplace safe or maybe they've become zombies themselves."

"—But what do you think they'll do if they're watching from somewhere and find out about you, Kousaka?"

"…Humanity won't be destroyed as long as I'm alive, and they'd see me as a threat because I might rebuild the world someday…?"

"Precisely. They'd probably try to eliminate you from their zombie world so they can achieve the results they want."

"……"

What Ichinose said gave me goose bumps. The enemies she was talking about might very well be among the survivors we were about to encounter.

"I won't go down easily if my enemy's a zombie. But if they approach me pretending to be an innocent survivor and catch me off guard…"

So that was what Ichinose was talking about when she said I might be in danger…!!

"Now, if the culprits are trying to conduct a large-scale human experiment, there are too many possibilities to guess what their ultimate objective might be. However, the most promising outcome that can be obtained by infecting so many people with the virus at once is to find individuals who react differently from everyone else. In your case, Kousaka, you didn't lose your consciousness when you were infected, and you can become a zombie whenever you wish. Even if your arm gets cut off, you can regenerate it immediately. That's a quantum leap in medical science. The gigantic zombie we saw the other day grew in size after it was infected and was extraordinarily strong. Increasing the size and strength of the human body are technologies people have only been able to dream about until now. If the world wasn't in this state, I bet there would be countries that would consider using it for military purposes."

"You think their goal is to find people like me and that gigantic zombie?"

"We can't deny that possibility. And if my hypothesis is correct, the culprits will try to capture you at any cost. After all, analyzing what's happening inside your body and understanding

the power of zombies would mean they could make people all across the world immortal and able to immediately heal from any injury. No one wants to die or have their loved ones die. Even if all this began with an evil plot to cause a zombie crisis throughout Japan, I imagine it wouldn't have been hard to gather people who wanted to collaborate."

"I see what you're getting at… This all being some sort of massive human experiment does seem more likely than it stemming from a desire to annihilate the human race."

"I believe so. And if there really is an organization that spread the zombie virus so they could experiment on humans, they're likely to be someplace they set up in advance, waiting to see the results. Once they gather the information they want and find out that you exist, I think they'll try to contact you immediately."

"So it doesn't really matter whether the culprits want to exterminate the human race or conduct an experiment, they'll still be after me…"

"Right. Which is why I think we have to be wary of whether people who want to join our community might be enemies. I also think it's best not to spread the word that you can turn into a zombie since it's dangerous."

"……"

After hearing Ichinose's hypothesis, we suddenly realized that it would be harder than we'd thought to survive in this zombie world.

★ ★ ★

After breakfast, the five of us piled into the blue sedan. Haruka was driving, and Ichinose rode shotgun, holding the map. Everyone's homes happened to be north of the dorm, so that was where we were headed first.

Five minutes after leaving, we hit a traffic jam—though, of course, no matter how long we waited, it wouldn't pass. Just as I'd thought, many of the roads were completely blocked off by crashed cars. A huge number of zombies were prowling about, and they came toward us as soon as they heard the sound of the car engine.

We were quick to give up and look for other routes when things looked dangerous, since we didn't want to risk being unable to make a U-turn. Ichinose used a pen to mark the closed-off roads on the map, and it was soon covered in red ink. We would probably be able to pass through if I zombified and moved the cars one at a time, but with so many of them, I had no idea how many days something like that might take. Even with the cars blocking the way, I could continue on foot, so I thought I'd come back another day to scout the area alone.

Oh, wait—I can't go too far since I have to kiss Tsukishiro every six hours…

In the end, we decided that it was impossible to visit everyone's homes today and instead focused on finding water purifiers and other equipment. With that goal in mind, we turned around and began heading for the large home improvement center we'd seen earlier.

"…We've been driving for quite a while, but we haven't seen a single survivor…," Haruka said softly, clutching the steering wheel as the atmosphere in the car became gloomy.

"I thought people would come out when they heard the sound of a car engine," Ichinose said.

"Even if they noticed that we were here, it might be hard for them to come outside. We could go and rescue them if they shouted…"

"But a loud noise would attract zombies…"

"Yeah…"

Going back and forth like that, we eventually reached the home improvement center. The parking lot was full of zombies, most likely because it was along a main road.

Countless white, cloudy eyes set their sights on us, and the zombies began to approach, drooling from their slack-jawed mouths.

I got out of the car and started capturing the zombies one by one. I had a metal bat with me just in case, but I put it on the ground and worked my way through the horde using hemp ropes instead. It was faster to crush their heads if all I wanted to do was reduce their number, but I'd decided not to kill them unless Haruka and the others were in danger.

The zombies in the area gathered together, reacting to the sound of the car engine. There were twenty of them just in my field of vision. With my back to the car, I worked tirelessly, grabbing them and tying them all up.

“—Noooo!!”

Suddenly, I heard the high-pitched scream of a woman coming from the store.

It had to be a survivor. Was she being attacked by zombies?

I wanted to go and check on her right away, but I couldn’t leave Haruka and the others—

“Kousaka!! Go!! We’ll stay clear of the zombies and drive around in the car!!” Haruka called out, and my hesitation evaporated.

I picked up the metal bat and charged for the front entrance of the store; however, the thick automatic glass doors blocked my path. They wouldn’t open because of the power outage.

“No!! Get away from me!!”

“Stopppp!!”

I was trying to pry open the automatic doors, when this time, I heard *two* people’s voices.

I reflexively lifted my bat, smashed the glass, and raced inside the building. Five zombies had cornered two young women against a wall.

There was no time to lose!

“I’m sorry!!” I shouted, slamming the bat into the head of the zombie in the middle. The back of its skull was crushed from the impact, and the zombie fell forward.

The other zombies reacted to the sound of my voice. They stopped in their tracks, turned around, and looked at me. I used that opening to send two more zombies flying and create a path.

“Get out of here!” I shouted, and one of the women—a redhead in jeans—took off running. However, the other—a silver-haired woman wearing a miniskirt—slumped on the spot, unable to move. She must have been frozen in fear.

“Amano!! Hurry!!”

The redhead rushed back and tried to help the other woman to her feet. It didn’t seem to be working, though, so I gave up on

getting them out of here and instead stood in front of the two women with my back to them.

“It’s okay if you can’t run. I won’t let any more zombies come near you.”

Come to think of it, there was no telling how many zombies there were. Maybe it was easier to fight if I kept the girls where I could see them.

The lighting in the store was dim, so I figured it was probably okay to transform into a zombie—and I transformed with my back still turned to the women. I swung the bat with monstrous strength and shooed the zombies away. Others nearby had also gathered around us, and I crushed their heads one after another, resulting in headless corpses lying all over the place.

Eventually, silence fell inside the store. I remained on alert, but no more zombies appeared, so I reverted to my human form and turned to face the two women. They were both motionless, staring at me in amazement. They must have been in shock, especially the silver-haired one called Amano, whose mouth was hanging open and eyes were unfocused.

I wanted to give them a chance to calm down, but I was also worried about Haruka and the others I’d left in the car. I needed these two to quickly come to their senses.

I crouched down until I was eye to eye with Amano.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

It was only then that she focused her gaze on me.

“…You…saved us…?”

She seemed to be in a daze after almost being killed. With a reaction like that, it was impossible to think she could be acting.

I considered the possibility that they might be with the organization that spread the zombie virus and quickly rejected that idea. It didn’t make sense for them to go to the trouble of being attacked by zombies, and they wouldn’t have lived through it if I hadn’t come along.

“For now, I’ve taken care of the zombies that were nearby.”

“Th-thank you…”

“Are you hurt?”

“N-no, I’m fine…”

“Good. And…did either of you get bitten?”

“No…”

“That’s good.”

I checked Amano’s body as I spoke. The woman we’d invited into the dorm the other day had been bitten by a zombie and look what had happened to Tsukishiro. Rather than taking people at their word, I had to check for bite marks myself.

I didn’t find any tears in her clothes, and her legs looked free of scratches beneath her miniskirt—

“—?!”

While examining Amano’s body, I realized something serious: Slumped on the ground as she was, I could see up her skirt…

I’d caught a glimpse of something I shouldn’t have. The moment I realized this, my brain struggled to catch up.

But that’s weird. Shouldn’t she be wearing underwear…?

Time seemed to stop, but then I realized I had to look away, so I quickly stood up and averted my gaze. I stared at the ceiling, finally coming up with an explanation for what I’d seen.

It was the fifth day since the zombie scare had begun. A person who’d been hiding all this time wouldn’t have gotten hold of a change of clothes or been able to do their laundry. It wouldn’t be surprising if, in this zombie-infested world, a woman in a skirt wasn’t wearing underpants.

“—Ah!!” Amano suddenly shouted and closed her legs. Pressing her skirt down, she nervously asked, “…Did you…s-see…?”

“…No, it’s too dark—”

“Of course he saw,” the red-haired woman declared. “He noticed when he was checking to see if those zombies had bitten you, then quickly looked up at the ceiling. It was clearly an unnatural action, so there’s no doubt about it.”

“Whaaa…?” Amano blushed. She looked like she was about to cry.

The red-haired woman had seen through everything—not just that I’d seen up Amano’s skirt, but that I’d been checking for bite marks.

“The way you looked away immediately was so cute, like a virgin.”

She can even tell I’m a virgin…?!

I didn’t know how to react, and the red-haired woman smiled at me.

“Anyway, thanks so much for saving us. I’m Saya Kamiji. This here is Mayu Amano. We go to the same college. We ran inside this store and hid in the staff room until we got so hungry we had to come out, and that’s when the zombies attacked.”

“—Amano, don’t let something like that worry you. This high school kid saved our lives, so consider yourself lucky if all he saw was your you-know-what.”

“C-consider myself *lucky*?!!” Amano almost screamed as she got to her feet, still holding her skirt down.

She turned to me.

“H-hey,” I stammered, “it’s not like I’m a pervert or anything. It couldn’t be helped… I didn’t have a change of underwear, and I haven’t been able to do laundry…”



“That’s kind of what I figured. I was surprised, but don’t worry— I don’t think you’re a pervert. Anyway, my friends are waiting outside. I want to join back up with them, so will you two come with me?”

“Of course.”

“Okay.”

With that settled, I set out at a run for the parking lot.

★ ★ ★

Once I was back outside, I was stunned by the horrific scene in front of me. A huge number or zombie corpses were lying all over the place, seemingly run over by Haruka. Some had their heads crushed while others had broken legs and were unable to move.

I was frozen at the store entrance when Haruka drove the car toward me and rolled down the window.

“…I couldn’t help it. It was impossible to keep running from them,” she explained.

“…I understand. I’m just glad you’re all okay.”

“Those two with you are survivors?”

“Yeah. This is Saya Kamiji and Mayu Amano.”

“Wow. There are four more of you?” Kamiji said, munching on a cured sausage she’d grabbed from inside the store. I wondered how she could eat when there were dead zombies all around us, but I guess it was only natural since it was probably her first meal in days.

After quickly polishing off the sausage, she asked me curiously, “Are the five of you living in this car?”

“No, we live in a dormitory surrounded by a steel fence. We came to the home improvement store here to look for water purifiers and generators.”

“I see. Well, either way, you saved our lives. We would have been turned into zombies for sure if you hadn’t come along.”

“I’m really glad you’re okay,” I told her. “We can’t let our guards down yet, though, so I’m going to clear the area around this store of zombies.”

I picked up my bat and started walking around the parking lot. Thanks to Haruka, there were hardly any zombies left that

could roam around freely, so I went and tied up the ones that were crawling on the ground, then returned to the car.

Next, I went back inside and checked the entirety of the store. A few zombies were scattered about, and I tied them all up. With the place secure, I went back outside and let Haruka and the others know the coast was clear.

“I checked all the aisles, but I may have missed something so be careful and stay as close to me as you can. Amano and Kamiji, what do you two want to do? You can come with us if you like.”

“Yes, please! There’s no way we can survive on our own! Right, Saya?”

“Right. We’ll try to make ourselves as useful as we can, so I hope you’ll let us join your group.”

“In that case, we’d better find a car that can accommodate the seven of us. I’ll look for keys and—”

“Wait a second. There’s something I should tell you first,” Kamiji said, showing me the back of her hand.

It had two cuts on it, which were dripping blood.

“…Just before, a zombie scratched me. So there’s a chance I’ll turn into a zombie in a few minutes.”

“—!!”

Her unexpected confession rendered me speechless.

“Are you still willing to let me come with you? Just take Amano if you’re worried about it, and I’ll stay here.”

“Saya…”

“Don’t worry about me. Kousaka wiped out the zombies here, so things should be peaceful for a while.”

Kamiji smiled at Amano, but her voice was trembling. I could tell she was forcing herself to put on a brave front.

I fell into silent thought. Even if the zombie virus had invaded Kamiji’s body, maybe I could save her by giving her my saliva. There was also the possibility that although she’d been scratched, she might not turn into a zombie. Either way, even after explaining that I could give her my saliva, I could only actually do it once she started transforming.

“We don’t know for sure that you’ll turn into a zombie, so why don’t you come with us?”

“What…?!” Kamiji exclaimed, wide-eyed. “Kousaka, are you serious?”

“Of course… But I’d like you to let me keep watch over you to see if you’ll turn into a zombie. At least for the next couple of hours, let me stay by your side at all times.”

“If I do become a zombie, will you blow my head off for me?”

“…No. I’ll probably tie you up and leave you someplace safe.”

I’d really be kissing her to prevent her from transforming, but it was probably better to explain it like this for the time being.

“Well?”

“…I couldn’t ask for anything more. Thanks, Kousaka. I’ll try my best not to get too far away from you.”

“Kousaka. Thank you so much for letting Saya come,” Amano said, and she and Kamiji bowed in unison.

Feeling guilty for not being completely honest with them, I found it hard to smile back.

★ ★ ★

After that, Tsukishiro suggested they check Amano for zombie bites. She probably felt bad about having invited a woman to our dorm who’d later turned into a zombie and was worried about making the same mistake again.

Since the interior of the store was fairly dark, we decided to examine Amano just inside the entrance, where there was still plenty of light. We set up a wooden partition we found nearby, then Amano took off her clothes while I stood on the other side. I left it up to Tsukishiro and Lisa to check for bites.

I could have gone outside to wait, but we decided to do it this way in case any zombies might still be hiding inside the store. There was a gap of about twelve inches between the partition and the floor, and I could see Amano’s clothes piling up.

I couldn’t help but imagine Amano naked, and the sight inside her skirt flashed through my mind. I hadn’t been able to see properly since it had been dark, but *that* was a woman’s…

Hey! Where the heck is my mind going?! I’m such a lowlife.

I tightened my grip on the bat. I had to focus on staying on the lookout for any remaining zombies and watch over Kamiji in case she started to change.

“Hey, Kousaka. Has anyone ever gotten infected by a zombie scratching them?” Kamiji asked as she chewed on a piece of beef

jerky.

“Not as far as I know.”

“Oh yeah?”

“I can’t be sure, but saliva seems to be the most likely route of infection, so I think we should be okay if you only got scratched.”

“You’re way too optimistic. Maybe the zombie licked its hand right before it scratched me.”

“I…”

“—Sorry. That was mean.”

“It’s okay…”

“Anyway, seeing as this could be my last meal, I’m going to eat whatever I want.”

Before she’d even finished her sentence, Kamiji opened the pull tab on a can of beer. It started to foam vigorously, but she drank it without a care.

“…It’s lukewarm and gross. I wish I could’ve had one before we lost power.”

Despite her complaints, she gulped down the beer and opened a bag of roasted pistachios.

“…She really comes across as an adult,” Haruka murmured, having snuck up right beside me without my realizing it.

True, it *was* the sort of way an adult might behave, but I didn’t think there was really anything to admire about it…

“They’re both twenty-year-old college students,” Haruka told me.

“Ah.”

“Just out of curiosity, which do you like better, a *younger woman* or an older one?”

“…Is it just me, or did you emphasize certain words when you asked that question?”

“Do you prefer *cute girls* or pretty ones?”

“You are. You’re emphasizing some words on purpose, aren’t you? So you consider yourself cute?”

“Huh? Don’t you agree?”

I took a good look at Haruka’s face. “Hmm. I guess if I had to pick between the two…then yeah, I guess you’re more the cute type. Still, I’ve known you since you were in fifth grade, and you’re prettier compared to how you were back then.”

“—What?!” Haruka’s eyes widened. “…So you’re saying that when we reunited, you thought I’d become prettier?”

“…I guess so.”

“Oh… Seeing as I’m younger than you, I just thought I should try to overwhelm you with my cuteness. But what you’re saying is that I can also show you how much I’ve matured…”

“……”

I already knew how much she’d matured from when she let me see her breasts right after we were reunited.

“So which *do* you like better, a cute girl or a pretty one?” she asked me again.

“Hmm…”

“Both? You’re so greedy.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“I guess there’s only one thing for me to do, then. For you, Yuuma, I’ll become a woman who’s both cute *and* pretty.”

“O-okay…”

Just then, as Haruka made her mysterious declaration, Amano and the others appeared from the other side of the partition.

“We’ve finished checking for zombie bites, and we didn’t find any,” Tsukishiro said, and we all sighed with relief.

With that, it was decided that the two college girls would join us.

“Now then, let’s get the water purifiers and generator first. Ichinose, we’ll need you to choose the items we want. Amano and Kamiji, the two of you must be tired, so you can stay here and rest.”

“Huh…?! We can?”

I smiled at Amano, who looked worried.

“Sure you can. Your priority should be to regain your strength.”

“Thanks. In that case, I’m going to help myself to that fine wine I found earlier,” Kamiji said with a grin, and she started opening a bottle of wine. I hadn’t realized until then, but she’d also set herself up with a spread of prosciutto and Camembert cheese.

I started to wonder whether it was really okay to have her join our community…

"…Saya doesn't usually drink during the day," Amano whispered quietly so only I could hear. "Maybe she has to get drunk to overcome the fear that she might turn into a zombie…"

"…Ah."

I glanced at Kamiji and noticed that she looked strangely sad.

"…By the way, Amano, I'm sure you must be hungry, but they have sweat suits over there. Maybe you should get changed before you eat…," I suggested, glancing at her miniskirt. Amano turned bright red.

"…I want to drink until I forget, too…"

"Please don't. It would be bad if we had to deal with *two* drunks."

★ ★ ★

Once Amano had changed into sweats, we decided to start collecting the things we needed. We pushed a shopping cart large enough for an adult to sit in to the camping equipment section, where we chose water purifiers and a generator following Ichinose's directions. While we were there, we also grabbed some polyethylene water tanks to fetch water from the river and gas canisters for the generator.

I was looking around for anything else that might be useful when I noticed Ichinose examining the tents.

"I thought it might be easier to change into our bathing suits if we pitched a tent on the riverbank. We could also use them to store things like firewood or fire starters that we don't want to get wet if it rains."

"Oh, that's a good idea."

I read the instructions for several different types of tents and decided to go for two four-person ones that looked easy enough for beginners to set up.

As soon as I was done with that, Lisa walked up to me, carrying a large cardboard box.

"They have charcoal, so why don't we use it to cook outside? We'll be using a lot of gas canisters from now on, right?"

"We could probably do that."

Ever since the power went out, we'd been using up our gas canisters to cook food. It would be smart to use charcoal instead

since our supply was limited.

The camping goods section really seemed to have everything you could want in a zombie world…

Along with the charcoal, we loaded a stainless steel barbecue stove into the shopping cart. With that, there wasn't room for anything else, so I decided to take what we had out to the car. I headed for the exit, balancing everything in the cart so nothing would fall out.

On the way, I also checked the pockets of the zombies I'd restrained earlier and found several car keys. One of them belonged to a black eight-seater minivan. I started the engine and saw that, fortunately for us, it had a nearly full tank of gas, so I decided to take it.

"…Um, Kousaka," Tsukishiro whispered while I was loading the things into the trunk. "…Sorry to bother you, but it's almost ten o'clock, which makes it six hours since the last time we kissed…"

"Oh! Sorry, I wasn't aware of the time."

We went back into the store together and moved to the car supplies section, where we started to kiss. As usual, Tsukishiro licked up all the saliva in my mouth.

"…It's kind of fun sneaking away in the middle of work to make out…," she said with a bewitching smile.

Was Tsukishiro starting to develop some sort of kink…?

"By the way," she said, changing the subject, "we should probably keep this a secret from Amano and Kamiji, right?"

"Yeah. We may have to tell them about it at some point, but for now, I think it's best we keep quiet. We should at least wait till we've been living together for a while, and they know we aren't a threat…"

In a corner of my mind, I also thought it was probably wise to make sure Kamiji wasn't the type to blab when she got drunk.

★ ★ ★

About an hour later, we'd loaded our sedan and new minivan to the limit. It had certainly been worth it to come to the home improvement store, as we'd also managed to find a folding table to use outdoors and a huge amount of preserved foods.

But just as we were all back in the parking lot and about to split up into the two cars, Amano raised a question.

“It’s a little late to ask you this now, but do you have a driver’s license, Hyuuga…?”

“Of course not.”

“I was afraid of that… How about the rest of you…?”

We all shook our heads, and Amano looked around with a resigned look on her face.

“Okay… I just got my license, so I’ll drive one of the cars.”

“Then you can take the sedan. I want to try driving the minivan,” Haruka said innocently.

“Are you sure?” Amano asked worriedly. “Aren’t you scared, driving a big car like that?”

“There are only zombies out walking around. Even if worse comes to worst and I end up running one over, it’s not a big deal,” Haruka said with a smile.

Even though what she said was frightening, I guess that was the right sort of attitude needed to survive in this zombie world. Driving is something that takes getting used to, so we wouldn’t be able to survive if we worried about whether or not we had a driver’s license.

“…Um, sorry,” Ichinose interjected. “Could we stop by the river to fetch some water? I want to test the water purifiers.”

And so, at Ichinose’s request, we decided we’d take both cars and head for the river.

“So we know who’s driving, but how should we split up…?” I asked, looking around at the six girls.

But surprisingly, Kamiji was the one to reply.

“Kousaka, Tsukishiro, can we go in the same car? I want to talk to you.”

“Huh? Okay.”

I didn’t know what she wanted to talk about, but I readily agreed. We had to be in the same car anyway since Kamiji might turn into a zombie.

I took some hemp ropes and my bat and got into the back seat of the sedan with Kamiji, while Tsukishiro took the passenger seat. The drivers started the engines, and the minivan left the parking lot followed closely by the sedan.

“…So, Kamiji. What did you want to talk about?” I asked.

Kamiji glanced out the window and began speaking a little awkwardly.

“The two of you were kissing in that store, weren’t you?”

“—Huh?!”

I hadn’t expected that.

“I accidentally saw you. Oh—not that I’m blaming you. Zombies may have taken over the world, but you’re still free to fall in love. The two of you just seem so serious, so I was surprised to see you sneaking off in the middle of work to make out. I want to get a feel for the relationships in this little community. Kousaka, are you messing around with multiple girls here?”

“N-no! Tsukishiro’s the only girl I kiss.”

“Hmm, that’s a surprise. I was sure you were dating that girl named Hyuuga.”

…I guess it was only natural for Kamiji to assume that, considering what Haruka and I had been talking about while Amano was being checked for zombie bites.

But in reality, Haruka’s the one I’m dating…

“Does Hyuuga know you’re seeing each other?”

“…Umm, well…”

“Yeah, she does,” Tsukishiro answered for me while I was hesitating to tell Kamiji more lies.

“She’s seen us kiss a number of times.”

“Seriously…? And you *still* went ahead and made a move on Hyuuga while your girlfriend was on the other side of the partition? What an absolute scumbag.”

“……”

Sorry, Haruka. Kamiji has things terribly wrong, but there’s no way I can correct her…

That said, I didn’t want to leave things there.

“Um, Haruka and I have been friends since we were kids, so we’re really close.”

“There’s a limit, though.”

“True…”

Sorry, Haruka. It didn’t work.

“How about the others—Hoshimiya and Ichinose, right? Do those two also know about your relationship?”

“Uh…”

“They do. Everyone’s seen us kissing.”

“My God, *everyone* has seen you kiss?”

“We didn’t do it out of spite…”

“Kamiji, do you think we’re weird?”

“I wouldn’t go that far. It’s just, the two of you look like the quiet type, but you both must have a crazy sex drive.”

Kamiji was still looking out the window as she spoke, but when I saw her reflection in the glass, the tension seemed to have gone from her face.

★ ★ ★

We drove for about twenty minutes and reached the river we’d been visiting on a daily basis.

“You guys even have a drum bath here?” Kamiji almost cried out in joy, seeing the empty oil drum set up on top of the bricks. “This is great! I’ve been wanting to take a bath this whole time.”

“Well, you have been hiding for five days. Since we’re already here, do you want us to heat up some water so you can go in?” I asked, and Amano and Kamiji’s eyes lit up.

“We’d love to, but are you sure it’s okay?”

“Of course. Go ahead—take a soak and relax.”

They had to be physically and mentally drained after five days in hiding, so I wanted to make it a priority today to let them recover.

Tsukishiro quickly began preparing the bath, placing firewood under the drum and lighting it. Haruka and Lisa fetched water using the transparent plastic containers we’d picked up at the home improvement store and filled up the drum bath.

It looked like everything was taken care of, so Ichinose and I decided to test out the generator. We’d picked out one powered by gas canisters, and it was about the size of a shopping basket and weighed around fifteen kilograms.

Ichinose took the generator out of its box, filled it with oil following the instructions, and set the gas canisters in place. I gave the string coming out of the side a strong pull, and the generator started up with a rumbling sound like a car engine.

“It’s pretty loud… It might alert the zombies nearby and draw them to us if we use it at the dorm,” Ichinose said sadly as she

flipped through the instructions. “It also says here that the generator will run for about an hour on a single gas canister, meaning we’d need twenty-four canisters to make the refrigerator work for just one day…”

“We want to be careful about using up all the gas canisters since we also use them for cooking…”

“The generator will stop working once the gas canisters are empty. We can put three canisters in the generator at a time, but that means we’ll have to change them at least every three hours.”

“So they’ll stop working if we go out for longer than three hours.”

“They don’t seem suited for long-term use. Like I thought, we might have to use a building equipped with solar panels as our base instead,” Ichinose concluded, closing the instructions. “…I’m sorry. We wouldn’t have had to waste all this time if I’d known more about generators. It’s my fault for suggesting we use them…”

“It hasn’t been a waste of time,” I said. “I think it’s important to try something for yourself and learn firsthand that it won’t work.”

I really meant that, but Ichinose looked away. I couldn’t blame her, though, since we’d just realized the generator would be useless…

As we were standing there, Haruka approached us.

“How’s the generator?”

“Uh…”

I was reluctant to tell her about it, but she’d have found out anyway, so I decided to tell her the truth.

“It’s too noisy and uses up too much gas, so we’ve decided we won’t be able to use it at the dorm.”

“Oh, really? That’s too bad. But we can still use it here at the river, right? Can I plug a hair dryer into it?” Haruka asked with an expectant smile.

Ichinose quickly reopened the manual.

“…A hair dryer uses a surprisingly large amount of power, so you might not be able to use it on high, but low should be enough.”

“That’s fine! So we’ll be able to use a hair dryer after taking a bath? Amazing!”

It really was. All this time, I'd been drying my hair by the bonfire, so I was pretty excited as well.

"Let's go to the store and pick up a hair dryer later! The most expensive one they have!" Haruka said happily, which brought a smile to Ichinose's face as well.

Kamiji had been watching our exchange a short distance away, and she came over to talk to me.

"Hyuuga's good at lightening the mood, isn't she?"

"Yeah. I think it's just the way she is."

"It's a gift. I thought she was a bad kid who was trying to snatch you away from her dorm mate, but her positive attitude really comes in handy."

"……"

I was starting to think that I should tell Kamiji the truth soon, for Haruka's sake.

★ ★ ★

While waiting for the water in the drum bath to boil, we decided to put up the tents by the river. We connected the folded poles, extended them, and threaded them through the proper spots in the tent to form the framework. Once that was done, we stuck metal pegs into the ground to hold the tent in place.

It was fairly easy to set up our two tents. We'd decided to use one as a dressing room and the other for storing supplies.

I pushed the tent lightly, but it didn't move from where I'd put it up. It seemed like it'd be okay as long as we didn't get hit with a typhoon or something.

I moved the igniters, firewood, towels, and everything else we didn't want to get wet in the rain into the tent. Yet even after I'd done all that, the drum bath still wasn't hot.

Then, I noticed that Ichinose had opened a water purifier. We'd picked up a number of different types of water purifiers, but the one she'd opened was a cylindrical shape that you used by attaching it to a plastic bottle. It was small enough to fit in the palm of your hand, but Ichinose said it had a special filter built in that removed bacteria and viruses from any water you ran through it.

Ichinose filled a plastic bottle with water from the river, attached the water purifier to the mouth, aimed it at a clear cup, and squeezed the bottle. The process didn't take very long as the water was only passing through the filter, and it made a trickling sound as it came out.

We compared the filtered water against a bottle of water taken directly from the river. Although the river water was pretty clear to begin with, it was obvious at a glance when we placed them side by side that the filtered water was more transparent.

The water purifier claimed it would last for years if we cleaned the filter, which meant our issue over drinking water had been solved.

And yet…

"Am I the only one who feels somewhat hesitant about drinking this, even though I know it's safe…?" I asked.

"We also have the option of boiling this water to make it even safer to drink…," Ichinose replied with a troubled expression.

"But that would require a considerable amount of energy."

"Right. We don't have an infinite supply of gas canisters, and it would be tough to go to the trouble of doing all that every day to make enough drinking water for seven people."

"Which means our only option is to trust in these water purifiers…"

I braced myself and took the cup. If someone had to test the safety of the filtered water, it should be me.

But just before I could take a sip, Ichinose reached out with her right hand, took the cup from me, and downed its contents.

"Ichinose!! What are you doing?!"

"Looking at our situation objectively, I'm more suitable as a test subject. If you become ill, we won't be able to cope in case of an emergency."

"No way, that's not true—"

"Besides, I'm not afraid since I trust in science. Considering the possible psychological effects on the body, I should be the one to test the water. So now we'll keep an eye on my condition, and if there aren't any noticeable changes, it means we shouldn't have any problems drinking this water."

"Th-that's pretty gutsy of you…"

Ichinose saw how flustered I was and chuckled. “You’re more of a worrier than I thought. That’s funny, considering how you fought that gigantic zombie the other day.”

“That was because I had to protect our dorm. I didn’t really want to fight it, and I would have run away if I could.”

“…I see. I may have misunderstood you, Kousaka.”

“Are you disappointed in me?”

“No… In fact, I’m impressed. I think it’s noble of you to protect everyone when you’re really a scaredy-cat,” Ichinose said with a shy smile.

★ ★ ★

In the meantime, the water in the drum bath seemed to have heated up. However, it was at that point we realized we had a problem.

“Kamiji, Amano, the two of you don’t have swimsuits, do you…? We always bathe in them…so why don’t we go back to that store, and you can pick one out?”

But Kamiji just laughed it off.

“It’s okay; we’ll wrap ourselves up in towels instead. I want to take a soak right away.”

“But I need to keep an eye on you in case you zombify…,” I said.

“We don’t mind if you look. Right, Amano?”

“Well, uh…,” Amano replied awkwardly, clearly against the idea of taking a bath with only a towel around her body.

“In that case, why don’t you bathe alone, Amano, and I’ll wait in the tent with Kamiji?”

“I’d appreciate that…,” Amano said. “Saya, you can go first if you want.”

“You go first, Amano. I may have the zombie virus in my body, so I don’t want to risk giving it to you through the bathwater.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“Give me a shout if any zombies show up,” I said, and Kamiji and I headed for the tent we were using as our changing room.

I went inside the tent, but Kamiji just stood at the entrance, unmoving.

“Aren’t you coming in?” I asked her.

“We probably shouldn’t crowd together in this small tent. I might give you the zombie virus.”

“Oh, okay…”

Now that I thought about it, Kamiji had maintained a delicate distance from the rest of us. I noticed she’d also been turned away from us in the car, and I realized now that it had been out of consideration for the others.

“By the way, have you experienced any signs that you might turn into a zombie?” I asked.

“I don’t really know. I’m not sure what sort of symptoms are normal.”

“Like…does your body feel heavy? Has your body temperature dropped? Does anything seem abnormal?”

“No, nothing like that. Though I *am* drunk.”

“I’m sure you are.”

“I’m also pretty sleepy.”

“Well, you were drinking beer and wine…”

“Not just that, the whole time we were hiding in the home improvement store, I was sleeping on a piece of cardboard on the hard floor, so I didn’t get much sleep.”

“Then would you like to come inside the tent and lie down? I’ll go outside. That way, we won’t get too close.”

“You say that, but I hope you aren’t thinking of going and taking a peek at Amano while she’s in the bath.”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

“Hmm… No, I’ll stay awake. I may only have a few more minutes left to live, so it would be a shame to waste them falling asleep.”

“I see…”

“Hey, Kousaka… Take care of Amano for me if I turn into a zombie.”

“Okay.”

“We’ve known each other since grade school. She was a clingy crybaby, always following me around. She doesn’t cry anymore, of course, but she can still be pretty absent-minded, so I’m worried about leaving her on her own.”

“You sound like her guardian.”

“And she isn’t used to being around men, so please don’t try any funny business with her. I’ll come back to haunt you if you

make her cry.”

“Please don’t say something scary like that.”

★ ★ ★

“Amano’s out of the bath and drying herself. She should be getting dressed any minute now, so I guess it’s my turn,” Kamiji said happily, standing at the entrance to the tent. “It’s a little late to ask you this now, Kousaka, but aren’t you guys going to take a bath, too?”

“We didn’t bring our bathing suits. We’ll probably come back later.”

“Okay, then I’ll get ready to go in, but…”

For some reason, Kamiji seemed lost for words. When she opened her mouth again, her awkwardness was evident by her voice.

“…I guess you have to keep watching me while I take my clothes off, huh?”

“It should be okay if I take my eyes off you for a minute or so.”

Watching her while she took her clothes off seemed a bit much. Still, it would be bad if she started transforming into a zombie inside the tent and I was slowed down giving her my saliva.

“I’ll wait just outside. Call me immediately if you feel any changes.”

“Okay, thanks. Amano just finished getting dressed, so come outside.”

“Sure.”

I left the tent and walked over next to the drum bath. Amano was nearby, looking extremely sexy with her wet hair.

Kamiji swapped spots with me and went inside the tent, where she began to undress. It was made of thick canvas, so I couldn’t see through it, but it was still incredibly exciting imagining that a woman I’d just met was getting naked on the other side of the fabric.

Less than a minute later, Kamiji stepped out of the tent. All she wore was a white towel around her body and a pair of

sandals. The towel wasn't very wide, so most of her thighs were exposed.

I looked away, but I had to make sure I was always watching her out of the corner of my eye so I could act swiftly if she zombified.

"—Amano? Come here a minute," Kamiji called out, having walked over next to the bath. Then she turned to me and said, "Kousaka, look over there for ten seconds."

"Huh? Okay."

I did as Kamiji asked and turned away.

Exactly ten seconds later, I looked back to see Amano standing there, facing away from me. She had the towel Kamiji had been wearing spread out in front of her. Kamiji was crouched down on the other side of the towel, completely naked, her bare back visible.

Shocked, I immediately turned to look away.

I had to be able to react if something happened, though. Amano was holding up the towel to cover Kamiji…so little by little, I pivoted toward them again. Kamiji reentered my field of vision, and I noticed that her body was covered with suds. It seemed she'd taken off her towel to wash herself before going in the bath.

The towel Amano was holding out didn't hide much, though, since I could see parts of Kamiji's naked figure every time the wind blew. Still, I didn't have the nerve to point that out, and my role *was* to always watch over her…

Kamiji eventually finished soaping up her body and started washing her hair before removing the lather. If her arms stopped moving, would that mean she'd started to turn into a zombie?

Just then, Haruka came and stood in front of me.

"How much can you see from where you're standing?"

"…I don't know. I'm trying not to look as much as possible."

I figured I should be in the clear since, taking a glance, all I could see was Kamiji's head, shoulders, and back… But Haruka came right up beside me and began checking the view from where I was.

"…You're right. You can't see anything important. But be careful; you might be able to get a glimpse of her breasts from the side."

Side boob…?

Kamiji seemed to have finally finished washing her hair, and she rinsed off the bubbles.

“Kousaka, look away for another ten seconds.”

“R-roger.”

It looked like she’d quickly wrapped her towel around her body, and she stepped toward the drum bath. Wearing nothing but a single towel, Kamiji climbed the three-step aluminum ladder. The moment she stepped over the edge of the drum, she lifted the towel along with her legs, exposing her inner thigh in a very revealing manner.

I couldn’t help but stare, although I managed to avert my eyes after sensing a deadly fury emanating from Haruka, who was standing in front of me.

“Ahh… This is heaven… Pure bliss…” Kamiji smiled in satisfaction as she sat in hot water up to her shoulders.

Meanwhile, I stood there shaken, my mind racing with all sorts of naughty thoughts. For the time being, I didn’t have to worry about accidentally seeing her naked. I felt relieved and also disappointed…

“I really feel alive again… This is wonderful,” Kamiji said to no one in particular as she rubbed her arms in the hot water. “I’m so glad to be alive after starving in that small space for such a long time. I thought we were dead so many times…”

It made me happy to see her so happy.

Haruka’s eyes met mine, and we smiled at each other. Setting up the drum bath was tough, and there was a chance zombies would show up while our new members were bathing, but I was really glad we’d done this.

“……”

Kamiji suddenly closed her eyes and went silent.

I thought nothing of it at first, but one minute went by, and then another, and she still didn’t open her eyes.

“…Kamiji?” I called out, walking over to the drum bath. But she didn’t respond. “Kamiji? Are you okay?”

“……”

Still no response. Not so much as a twitch.

Don’t tell me she’s started turning into a zombie…!

Haruka and the others also seemed to have sensed something was wrong, so I asked everyone to leave, then climbed up the stepladder. If Kamiya really *was* on the verge of becoming a zombie, then there was no time to lose. I had to tell her about my situation and give her my saliva before it was too late.

As far as I could see, her skin hadn't turned gray. That said, when it happened to me, my skin had started to change color from where I was bitten. I needed to check and see if the same had happened to Kamiji. I couldn't see her right hand, though, which was underwater, so I started by shaking her by the shoulders.

"Kamiji? Are you okay?"

Suddenly, Kamiji's whole body jerked, and she opened her eyes wide.

"—Damn! I fell asleep!"

"…Please don't do that. We thought you'd turned into a zombie…"

"Sorry. I must have had too much to drink."

"It's your own fault."

I glared at her, and Kamiji laughed and scratched her head.

But then—

Her white towel came undone in the bath, revealing her plump breasts.

I was completely flustered and quickly looked away.

"—Eek!!"

Kamiji shrieked and hastily covered her chest with her hands before mumbling embarrassedly, "…I guess it was a mistake to drink…"

★ ★ ★

By the time Amano and Kamiji finished bathing and we'd driven back to the dorm, it was after two PM. Haruka and Tsukishiro agreed to prepare lunch for everyone.

Meanwhile, I brought in the supplies we'd brought back from the home improvement center, and about twenty minutes later, Haruka called out, saying lunch was ready.

"We're having an extravagant lunch of crab shabu-shabu! The snow crabs we left in the fridge thawed after the power went out,

so we might as well eat them up!”

The seven of us gathered in the dining room, tempted by the mention of this delicacy. I sat at the same table as Haruka and Tsukishiro, and we began taking crab legs from a huge pile on a platter and putting them into a big pot of boiling water. It was the most expensive crab they’d had at the supermarket, and the legs were thicker than my thumb.

The translucent crabmeat turned a light pink after being submerged in the boiling water, and I dipped a piece in ponzu sauce. I was surprised by how light and tender it was. I didn’t know that expensive crabmeat could be both firm and soft.

If zombies hadn’t invaded our world, I might have been limited to eating imitation crab my whole life and never tried snow crabs…

Everyone devoured the crab. They cracked the shells and dug out the tender meat. It was interesting how my dorm mates really did get quiet when they ate crabmeat, as people often say…

Sometime later, when the trash can was full of shells, I asked Tsukishiro something I’d been wondering.

“Don’t you have to write down all the things we brought back from the home improvement center? Weren’t you making a list each time we went out?”

“I stopped doing that a while ago,” she replied awkwardly. “At first, I thought our lives might eventually go back to normal, but that seems impossible now…”

“I see… Sorry, I didn’t mean to remind you of that.”

“No, it’s okay…”

“Hey, something’s been bugging me,” Kamiji suddenly said, seated at the next table. “Kousaka, you and Tsukishiro seem awfully distant considering you’re in a relationship.”

The atmosphere in the cafeteria froze.

I could sense an incredible bloodlust coming from my right. I didn’t dare turn toward Haruka to see what sort of face she was making.

I had been going to explain it to Haruka and the others later, but I hadn’t expected Kamiji to just drop it in the middle of everyone like a bomb…

I had no idea how to answer and glanced at Tsukishiro, who wore a determined expression.

“That’s because we haven’t been together very long,” she said.

“Really? But you were making out so passionately. It makes me wonder whether something’s a little off.”

“Saya…,” Amano cut in.

“What’s wrong with talking about it? Everyone knows about them,” Kamiji blurted out as she sipped her whiskey and soda. She really was such a troublesome drunk…

“…We both just love kissing,” Tsukishiro replied shyly.

It was a dumb answer. Because it was so simple, though, it left no room for doubt, and Kamiji seemed convinced.

This time, it was Amano who asked a question.

“How long have you two known each other?”

“Five days, ever since Kousaka first came to this dorm,” Tsukishiro responded.

“That’s not long at all. You’re saying you started a relationship only days after you met?”

“That’s right. It began on the evening of his third day here.”

“Who started it?”

“I did,” insisted Tsukishiro.

“What did you like about him?”

“Kousaka is always so selfless and generous, and he’s kind and dependable… I didn’t expect to fall in love at a time like this, but it happened before I realized it.”

“……”

The story of our “relationship” was developing more and more despite the awkward air in the room.

Although Tsukishiro was using what had actually happened as the basis of her story, Haruka and the others had to be confused, suddenly hearing it told like this. If I’d been able to use my phone, I would’ve quietly sent them a message to explain…

“Kousaka, why’d you agree to start dating Tsukishiro?” Kamiji suddenly asked.

“…What?!”

The story had moved right along while I’d been distracting myself.

“What do you mean, why…?”

“Well, this dorm is filled with pretty girls, right? So tell us what made you decide to go for Tsukishiro.”

“W-well…”

Six pairs of eyes focused on me as I stalled for an answer. Among them, Haruka, Lisa, and Ichinose all shot me a quiet glare.

Tsukishiro was the only one whose eyes shone expectantly.

"…I was drawn to Tsukishiro's strong sense of responsibility, like the way she sacrifices her sleep to guard the gates so she can help anyone who comes to us for help."

"Huh. I guess you're both serious, so maybe you were attracted as like-minded souls." Kamiji took a sip of her whiskey and soda, then continued. "You sound like strangers, though, the way you call each other Kousaka and Tsukishiro. Why don't you try calling each other by your first names?"

"Kamiji, will you please stop messing with us?" I asked.

"What's wrong with it? It's super fun to tease high school couples," she said merrily. She was pretty drunk…

There was nothing else for it; we had to get Kamiji off our backs. So Tsukishiro and I braced ourselves and looked each other in the eyes.

"…Mai."

"…Yuuma."

Oh, damn. That was actually really nice.

"—Yuuma, can I talk to you for a minute? I'm sure you don't mind. And even if you do, come anyway."

Haruka had been listening silently to our exchange, but it looked like her patience had reached its limit. Without waiting for me to answer, she grabbed me by the neck and dragged me out of the cafeteria. I almost fell but somehow managed to stay on my feet.

Once we'd left the room, Haruka headed for the rooftop without a word, where she slammed me against a wall.

"What's the deal with you being in a relationship with Tsukishiro?!"

"…Kamiji saw us kissing…"

"You mean you kissed her again?!"

"Calm down, Haruka. You know I have to kiss her once every six hours."

"Yeah, but… Aaargh…"

“I couldn’t tell her about the zombification, so I explained that Tsukishiro and I were seeing each other.”

“Urgh…”

“Oh, also, she thinks you’re a home-wrecker who’s trying to steal me away from my girlfriend.”

“You’ve *got* to be kidding me!!”

“Tsukishiro and I are stumped as to what to do about it.”

“…*You* might not have been, but Tsukishiro sure looked like *she* was enjoying it…,” Haruka said, glaring at me. I had no idea what she was talking about.

“Tsukishiro? Of course she wasn’t.”

“Oh, I know I’m right. She looked utterly satisfied, playing boyfriend-girlfriend with you.”

“Boyfriend-girlfriend…?”

“She was on a roll when Kamiji grilled her. Even though that’s what *I* want to do: Tell the whole world about us…!!”

“You really want to tell everyone that badly…?”

“Of course I do!! I want people to ask me how I fell in love with you, then spend about five hours telling them about all the memories we shared when we were in grade school!!”

“Please don’t. Simply put, that would just cause more problems.”

“It’s the story of our bond—”

“Don’t give it an embarrassing title like that.”

“You’re my boyfriend… Who’s more important to you, Yuuma: me or Tsukishiro?”

“Hey, it isn’t like I *chose* Tsukishiro. I had to cover up the fact that she might turn into a zombie…”

“You said you’d protect me forever.”

“Yeah, but I also have to protect the others…,” I explained as Haruka crossed her arms and shot daggers at me.

“Oh, so it’s like that, huh? Well, it looks like I’ll need to physically teach you a lesson about our relationship.”

“Wh-what…?!”

All the unreasonable things Haruka had said and done to date whirled around in my mind… The time she forced me sit and told me to “shake.” When she made me wear a collar and put me in a cage.

Just what in the world is it going to be this time…?

I trembled in fear, but for some reason, Haruka looked bashful.

“…Yuuta, I’ll let you fondle my boobs.”

“—For real?”

I couldn’t believe it.

Well, I guess she had told me that she would physically (mainly through my hands) teach me about our relationship (as boyfriend and girlfriend), but still…!!

“Aren’t you getting kind of desperate?” I asked.

“Of course not… Didn’t we talk about this sort of thing just this morning?”

“Yeah, but…”

“You’re so indecisive. Don’t you want to fondle my boobs?”

“Of course I do.”

Having admitted how I felt, I lowered my gaze to her alluring breasts hidden beneath her blouse. We had slept in the same bed and been in close contact when we shared the drum bath, but I’d only ever touched them once with both hands. After we had to postpone this morning, I never imagined she’d let me touch her boobs at a time like this…!!

Seeing me drooling, Haruka blushed and gave a word of warning:

“I’ll kill you if you touch Tsukishiro’s breasts.”

“I swear I won’t lay a finger on any woman’s breasts except yours,” I declared. It was a reflexive response that came from the very marrow of my bones, and Haruka nodded in satisfaction.

“All right, I believe you.”

The moment her words reached my eardrums, I couldn’t help but clench my fists.

“By the way…you’ll let me see them again, right?” I asked. Without realizing, I’d started breathing heavily through my nose.

But Haruka’s reply wasn’t what I expected.

“Of course not.”

“—Huh? You won’t?”

“No way… It’s deathly embarrassing for a girl to have someone look at her breasts.”

“…Uh, so let me get this straight. It’s okay for me to touch them, but you won’t let me see them? What sort of weird logic is that…?”

“That’s just the way it is… You don’t look happy about it.”

“Oh, I’m perfectly fine. It’s enough you’re letting me touch them.”

It was a bit of a lie. Sure, I was content she was letting me rub her boobs, but I would’ve been even happier to feast my eyes on them.

Haruka seemed to have read my mind. She clammed up for a moment, then turned bright red.

“…How’s this, then? I’ll let you put your hand inside my shirt.”

“—?!”

“But not inside my bra… Can you promise you won’t do that?”

“S-sure…!!”

“O-okay, then… Go ahead…”

“……”

Crouching down, I pulled out the hem of her shirt as gently as I could.

I swallowed a lump in my throat.

“…You’re sure?”

“If you’re going to do it, could you hurry up?”

Haruka glared at me. I remembered her saying once that she also felt embarrassed waiting for me to do something…

Excited with anticipation, I slipped my hands inside her shirt. My fingertips touched the smooth skin of her stomach and exposed her adorable belly button. I couldn’t imagine a more tantalizing sight.

My hands slowly moved up along her skin—and the tip of my middle finger came across a strangely textured fabric.

So this is how a bra feels…!!

Moved beyond words, I wrapped my hands around the entirety of the cups. My index finger was in direct contact with Haruka’s skin, but I figured it was okay since it wasn’t inside the cup.

Thus, I settled on a position for my hands—then moved them around.

“—Ahh! Mm…!”

Letting out a small cry, Haruka suddenly grabbed my shoulders. She had lost her balance.

“A-are you all right?”

“S-sorry… I can’t stay on my feet…,” she said softly.

After repositioning herself, she looked me in the face.

“…I’m…so happy you’re touching me like this…”

“—?!”

She was…?!

So it wasn’t just me but Haruka as well who was happy I was fondling her breasts…?!

I was so delighted that I moved my fingers around, and Haruka let out a moan, a sexy look on her face. She was so unbelievably cute that I… I…

“—What do you two think you’re doing?”

Kamiji’s voice cut through the air like a knife.

My whole body stiffened up, and I looked fearfully toward the door. There she was, standing in the doorway with a disgusted look on her face.

I quickly pulled my hands out of Haruka’s shirt and got to my feet.

“…Um, Haruka said her stomach was itchy, so I was scratching it for her.”

“Yeah, there’s no way I’m gonna believe that. You might scratch someone else’s back for them, but you were clearly touching her breasts.”

“You’ve got me there…”

There was no denying it. Kamiji had seen me sticking my hands up Haruka’s shirt and rubbing her boobs over her bra.

I was stunned into silence.

“So you’re cheating on Tsukishiro?” murmured Kamiji.

“……”

Haruka would feel bad if I said I was cheating with her, but at this point, I had to go along with the story Kamiji believed…

“—Let me handle this,” Haruka said in a low voice that only I could hear. Then she walked up to Kamiji and loudly declared, “That’s right! He was cheating on Tsukishiro behind her back!”

She put everything into admitting it…!!

“Be careful, Kamiji. Yuuma’s a scumbag who’s quick to cheat on his girlfriend! He’s kind and dependable, and you may end up falling for him, but I suggest you find someone else!”

“……”

Both Kamiji and I were rendered speechless.

Wasn't it weird for the girl you were two-timing with to issue a warning like that…?

"*You*, the girl he's been cheating with, are telling *me* that?"

Kamiji seemed to feel the same way—but that didn't bother Haruka.

"Let me tell you how it all began between us. We first met when I was in fifth grade. Back then, we often used to play hide-and-seek and other games together—"

"Huh? Hey, wait a minute. What kind of story is this you're about to tell me?"

"It's the story of the bond between me and Yuuma."

"The 'story of your bond'…?"

"Haruka, stop. Don't get into it."

"Why not? I want to tell her about our history."

"Don't you see the look on Kamiji's face? You've gotten her all confused."

"Of course I'm confused. I've just come across a high school kid I met today cheating on his girlfriend, and now the girl he's cheating with says she wants to tell me about your history."

"S-sorry…"

I was sure by now that Kamiji must think I'm a piece of shit. Just how had it come to this…?

It was impossible to talk my way out of it, so instead I changed the subject.

"By the way, what are you doing here on the rooftop?" I asked Kamiji.

"What am I doing here…? Don't tell me you've forgotten that I might turn into a zombie."

"—Oh!"

"So you did forget."

Kamiji stared at us with contempt in her eyes.

My mind had been occupied with calming Haruka down and rubbing her breasts…

"You have to restrain me if I become a zombie, so you can't go missing for too long."

"I know. Again, I'm sorry…"

"Anyway, are you finished cheating on your girlfriend?"

“Of course I am. I’ll head back to the dining room right away… And I’d appreciate it if you didn’t tell Tsukishiro about this…”

“…All right. I won’t,” Kamiji said with a bitter look on her face as she left.

★ ★ ★

Once we’d finished eating all the crab and cleaning up the dishes, we decided to take our bathing suits and go to the riverbank again. It was already past three in the afternoon, so it would get dark if we didn’t leave now.

We took both cars again, since we wanted to load up on supplies on our way back. Considering the possibility of Kamiji turning into a zombie, she, Amano, and I got in the sedan, while Haruka and the other three girls hopped in the minivan.

The moment we pulled out of the dorm, Amano spoke up from the driver’s seat.

“…Hey, Kousaka, can I ask you about something?” she said, making eye contact with me in the rearview mirror. “Saya told me you’re having an affair with Hyuuga.”

“Hey, why are you spreading the word?” I protested to Kamiji sitting next to me, but she just continued to look out the window, her expression unchanged.

“You asked me not to tell Tsukishiro, but you didn’t mention anything about talking to Amano about it,” Kamiji countered.

“Well, no, but…”

“Kousaka, I think it’s wrong to cheat!” Amano said, raising her voice and clutching the steering wheel tightly.

She was absolutely right…

“Think of poor Tsukishiro. You should break up with Hyuuga right away.”

“……”

What was going on here…? The situation was getting more and more complicated…

Naturally, it would be easy to declare right here and now that I’d stop cheating on Tsukishiro with Haruka. But if Haruka let me touch her breasts in the dorm again, someone might see us.

Could I resist the temptation to touch her boobs?

—No. It was impossible.

I wanted to play with them. Several times a day if I could.

That left me with only one option: I had to make Amano tolerate my cheating…!!

"…Don't you think our old ideas of right and wrong may not apply in the zombie world we're living in now?"

"Huh…?!" Amano blinked in surprise, but I ignored her and went on.

"The same can be said about Haruka driving the minivan. We wouldn't have been able to survive if we'd been worrying about her driving without a license. Me dating two women is the same thing."

"Kousaka, what are you saying?"

"Come on—that's a huge stretch."

"It really isn't." I decided to try repeating Tsukishiro's theory from this morning. "We don't know what the situation is like in other countries or regions, but it's clear that zombies have greatly reduced the number of human beings. Sooner or later, we have to consider population recovery and propagating our lineage. However, our current community consists of one guy—me—and six women. If we can't find any other survivors, then monogamy would be a poor use of the gender balance we have, so we may have no other choice but to consider polygamy."

A complicated expression crossed Amano's face.

"…Population recovery, huh…? Maybe you have a point…"

She seemed to be giving serious thought to the issue.

That was easy.

But Kamiji narrowed her eyes and turned to look at me.

"Wait a minute. Kousaka, are you saying you'll eventually try to form that sort of a relationship with Amano and me, too?"

I wished she wouldn't jump to a conclusion like that. Honestly, I didn't even agree with polygamy in the first place…

But I had to respond accordingly or I'd be contradicting myself.

"…That's completely up to you. Let me put it this way: I'll respond if someone wants me…"

What a thing to say.

"Hmm… Okay then, maybe I'll throw my hat into the ring," Amano said, casting a meaningful glance at me through the rearview mirror.

“…Huh?!”

“Ha-ha-ha. Just kidding.”

“Amano, don’t joke around about something like that. That’s about the only thing high school guys think about.”

“That’s a bit harsh,” I said.

“But, Kousaka,” continued Amano, “you were supercool when you fought off those zombies to save us.”

“…Thanks.”

“Amano, you’ve always been obsessed with love. But I thought you only ever got crushes on movie heroes.”

“What can I say? They’re cool.”

“Come to think of it, Kousaka might be the first real guy you’ve fallen for.”

“Oh, you’re right.” Amano’s reflection in the rearview mirror smiled dangerously. “So maybe polygamy is actually a good opportunity for me.”

She didn’t seem to mind the idea.

Could it be that Amano really did have a thing for me…?

No, wait. She was biased. I saved her life, right? So it wouldn’t be surprising if she believed she’d fallen in love with me. What could bring on a suspension bridge effect more than having a guy rescue you in the nick of time before zombies attacked you…?

More importantly, though, as things stood, being able to fight off zombies was everything in this new world. It didn’t matter how old, how educated you were, or how much money you had—the most important factor to consider in a potential partner was strength.

Of course, Amano would despise me right away if she found out that I had the zombie virus in my body…

“I don’t think polygamy is a very good idea,” Kamiji said with a scowl while I was lost in thought. “The more wives a guy has, the less time he could spend with each of them. And Kousaka already doesn’t seem to act as if he cares for Tsukishiro very much. The impression I get is that they’re involved and they kiss. That’s all.”

“Oh, I don’t mean to…”

I tried to come up with an excuse but couldn’t because Kamiji had hit the nail on the head. Tsukishiro and I kissed, and that’s all there was between us.

I knew it was bad she'd seen me fondling Haruka's breasts, so next time we fooled around, I'd make sure we did it in a room that others couldn't enter…

★ ★ ★

I spent the rest of the drive on tenterhooks, but I was finally set free when we arrived at the riverbank. It was still too early to be relieved, though. At the rate those two were going, there was no telling when Tsukishiro would hear I'd been touching Haruka's breasts.

It would probably be better to tell her directly.

…But I mean…

I was hesitant to do it, but while we were getting the drum bath ready, Tsukishiro approached me.

"…Kousaka, it's coming up to six hours."

"Oh, right…"

After exchanging those few whispered words, the two of us went inside the tent we used as our dressing room, quickly kissed, then came out again.

"…Um, Kousaka. About what happened earlier…," Tsukishiro said when I'd taken one step out of the tent.

My heart almost stopped beating. Had she found out I'd been fondling Haruka's breasts…?

I turned around to face her, practically trembling with fear.

"…Uh, what do you mean 'earlier'?"

"Back in the cafeteria, when Kamiji asked us how we started dating."

"—Oh! *That.*"

"What else?"

"No, nothing. You were saying?"

Tsukishiro continued in a voice low enough that Kamiji, who was standing a short distance away, wouldn't hear her.

"I just thought I owed you an apology for making up that story about us without asking."

"Oh no, there's nothing to apologize for. I froze up, so you actually helped us out coming up with something like that off the top of your head."

"Did I? I'm glad to hear you say that."

“You’re a really good actor, Tsukishiro.”

“Hee-hee! It was fun talking about how we met in front of everyone. It felt like we really are dating,” Tsukishiro said with an innocent smile, and I furrowed my brow. “—Oh, don’t worry. I’m perfectly aware of your relationship with Hyuuga, so please don’t look at me like that.”

“…Sorry.”

As I apologized, I made up my mind.

Now was my chance to tell her what happened…!!

“…Tsukishiro, I don’t know how to put this, but I have something to tell you…”

“Oh? What is it?”

“Um…well… Kamiji saw me touching Haruka’s breasts—”

“Huh…?!”

Tsukishiro’s mouth hung open, but I continued anyway.

“So now Amano and Kamiji think I’m cheating on you. I lied and told them we were considering introducing polygamy into our community to help population recovery…but I’m really sorry.”

“…Please, you don’t have to apologize.” Tsukishiro quickly regained her composure and told me matter-of-factly, “The two of you are in a relationship, so it’s only natural you would do things like that…”

“That’s true. I start to wonder why I’m apologizing and who I’m apologizing to…”

“I can imagine. So please, don’t worry about me. Maybe we should tell Kamiji and Amano that I’m in favor of polygamy and that I approve of you messing around with other girls.”

“…Maybe we shouldn’t do that. They might start doubting that we actually are in a relationship…”

“Huh?”

“Kamiji told me a minute ago that the impression she gets of our relationship is that you and I are involved, we kiss, and that’s it. I think it’s probably a good idea to avoid telling them anything else that you wouldn’t expect of a normal couple.”

“Okay… I suppose you’re right. We do act like strangers when we aren’t kissing… In that case, why don’t we try acting more like a regular couple? We can show them you’re more lovey-dovey with me than when you’re cheating with Hyuuga.”

“Oh, right. That might be a good idea. Then how could we make ourselves look more like a regular couple?”

“Well…shouldn’t you know all about that, considering you were fooling around with Hyuuga?” Tsukishiro asked, narrowing her eyes. Maybe it was just my imagination, but her words seemed barbed.

“Not really… All I did was fondle her breasts…”

“…Then do you want to fondle my breasts, too, where Kamiji can see us?” Tsukishiro suggested shyly. Her idea was so full of holes, I didn’t know how to react.

“That might be going a bit overboard…”

“I don’t mind…considering everything you do for me on a daily basis.”

“I’m not sure women should let guys touch their breasts as a show of gratitude… And besides, wouldn’t they get suspicious if we started doing things like that where other people could see us? It was by chance that Kamiji happened to see Haruka and me.”

“…You have a point.”

“So instead, we could go a bit tamer and do something that doesn’t stand out, even if we do it in public.”

“Hmm, in that case… What about if we say how much we love each other when they’re watching?”

“Oh, that’s a good idea. At the very least, that should make them think we’re doing more than just kissing.”

“Also, let’s start calling each other by our given names. Yeah, we should definitely do that. Shall we practice?”

“You seem to be really enjoying this…”

Tsukishiro clasped her hands together and smiled.

“Even if it’s only temporary, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me to act like your lover.”

“Only moments ago, you looked all dejected after hearing what I did with Haruka…”

“It was certainly a shock, but I’ve known for a while that you’re obsessed with Hyuuga’s breasts.”

“……”

“Anyway, let’s practice saying ‘I love you’ to each other. Please address me by my given name from now on.”

“…Okay…Mai.”

“Tee-hee! I knew I’d enjoy hearing you call me that. ♪ … Yuuma, I love you.”

“—!!”

“Now it’s your turn, Yuuma.”

“…Mai… I love you.”

“——!!!”

Tsukishiro—or rather, Mai—looked ecstatic as she wiggled her whole body in delight.

“This is amazing… Can I record it later so I can remember it for the rest of my life?”

“No, please don’t… Haruka would kill me if she heard it.”

“Aww… That’s too bad…,” Mai said, her shoulders drooping.

But then she looked up at me through her lashes.

“…Yuuma, I love you so much that I want to marry you right now.”

“—?!”

“Did I make your heart skip a beat, even though you know it’s just an act?” Her face was bright red, and she had a satisfied smile on her face. “I have a suggestion. How about we say, ‘I love you,’ whenever we kiss so they can see us do it anytime?”

“…That might be a good idea.”

Mai gave me a big smile when I agreed.

“Yay… I can’t wait for the next time we have to kiss… ♪”

…Damn. She’s adorable.



It was cute enough seeing her get all excited when she was usually so calm and composed, but I got a supreme sense of joy learning how much she was looking forward to kissing me.

★ ★ ★

It took a while, but eventually, the drum bath was ready. Mai and I were going in first, so we took turns getting changed into our bathing suits in the tent. I had to hand it to Ichinose; it was much easier changing in the tent compared to undressing in the car.

I poured water over my body and started washing myself before soaking in the tub. But just as I was lathering up the soap, Mai grabbed the sponge off me.

"I'll wash your back for you, Yuuma…as your girlfriend."

…I guess she wanted to use this time to show Kamiji we were a real couple.

"Okay, thanks."

I turned my back to her, and she began gently washing my back. How long had it been since I last had someone do this to me? It felt really good.

"—Now I'll wash your front," Mai whispered, wrapping her body around me from behind. She pushed her soft breasts against my back as she sponged my shoulders and stomach.

…Was this really going to prove to Kamiji that we were a loving couple…? I was starting to feel like I was receiving some sort of sexual service…

Once she'd finished washing my top half, I felt her body move away from mine. Luckily, for the sake of my health, she didn't move on to my lower half.

But the next second, she passed me the sponge, stepped around in front of me, and crouched down.

"Now it's your turn to wash my back."

No sooner had Mai said that than she reached around behind her back and undid her bikini straps.

"Mai?! What are you doing…?!"

"Something occurred to me while I was watching Kamiji wash herself in the nude earlier. We probably aren't cleaning ourselves very well if we're wearing our bathing suits while we take a bath," Mai explained as she removed her bikini top.

She had her back turned to me and was covering her breasts with her hands, but it was still far too exciting a sight to behold.

Sure, she had a point. I hadn't properly washed myself inside my swimming trunks since we'd begun taking drum baths here.

But this was taking it too far…!!

"Um, what about if I waited in the tent while you—?"

But before I could finish my question, Mai stood up and slowly turned to face me.

"…You're allowed to look, Yuuma. You're my boyfriend." Mai's hands were empty, and her face was bright red.

She was right; backing down here wouldn't look natural if we were a couple.

Hiding my agitation, I focused on Mai's breasts—and noticed something incredible. She probably thought she was covering them, but I could see the pink tips between her fingers.

I told myself to calm down. I was supposed to be her boyfriend, so it would look suspicious if I panicked.

I had to take the offensive.

"…Okay, I'll start washing your body from the front," I said, pressing the sponge against Mai's body and quickly creating a huge amount of lather to hide her skin. After completely covering the upper half of her body with bubbles, I washed it clean with the sponge, feeling the soft sensation of her skin the whole time. It was incredible.

Still, I couldn't keep enjoying myself forever…

"Will that do?" I asked, forcing myself to put down the sponge.

But Mai replied shyly, covering her breasts with her hands.

"…What about…the bottom half?"

"Huh…?!"

Was she telling me to wash her down there as well? Don't tell me she was going to take off her bikini bottom…!!

"I—I don't know if we should go *that* far…"

But if doing that would remove any doubts Kamiji had about our relationship…

I glanced over at Kamiji to see how she was taking all of this—and noticed her frowning suspiciously.

"Hey…Kousaka. What kind of a show are you trying to put on for us?"

…I guess we'd gone overboard.

★ ★ ★

With that, our attempt to make Kamiji think we were a couple forcibly came to an end, and Mai put her bathing suit back on and got into the drum bath with me.

We were finished in about five minutes, and I headed to the tent to get changed. But as I did, Haruka followed me in her bathing suit, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. She dragged me to an area a little way away from Kamiji and the others and started cross-examining me.

"You and Tsukishiro washing each other's bodies… Were you trying to declare war against me?"

Haruka had seen it all. Naturally, she was furious.

"No, you've got it all wrong. That was an act so Kamiji wouldn't suspect us…"

"Can you at least warn me next time? I was beginning to worry you'd both gone out of your minds. I thought you were about to start having sex in front of everyone."

"Was it that bad?"

"It *really* was. It was so unbelievable I kept thinking I must be dreaming."

"Seriously…?"

"Didn't I tell you earlier that I'd kill you if you ever touched Tsukishiro's breasts?"

"I didn't touch them. I just washed them."

"You told me you wouldn't lay so much as a finger on them."

"I didn't. I washed her with a sponge."

"Stop splitting hairs…!! There's no way you didn't enjoy it…!!" Haruka protested in a hushed tone. I assumed she was trying not to have Kamiji hear her, but there was venom in her words and she sounded incredibly scary.

Still, I couldn't really come up with much of an argument since it was true that I'd enjoyed it.

"I mean, do you really need to go to such lengths to keep the zombification thing a secret?" Haruka asked. "Amano and Kamiji both seem like nice people, so why don't you just tell them the truth?"

“They do, but Kamiji seems like she’s got a pretty loose tongue… I’m afraid she might let it slip when she drinks.”

“Hnnnngh…”

“So give it up and just let me and Mai act like a couple, okay?”

“…Fine. I’ll be super generous and put up with it,” Haruka said through clenched teeth. “As your punishment, I want you to wash my body now.”

“As a punishment…? Isn’t that more like a reward…?”

“After that, let me wash your body. I want to do what you did with Tsukishiro.”

“Believe me, I couldn’t be more sorry, but we can’t do it today. Kamiji will definitely get suspicious if she sees us getting all touchy-feely.”

“Then we’ll do it tomorrow. We’ll come here as early as possible and wash each other’s bodies.”

“…All right.”

Satisfied once I agreed to do as she said, Haruka walked away toward the drum bath.

…I wasn’t entirely sure what had just happened, but I seemed to have made an incredible promise. I’d thought it was tough to hide my relationship with Tsukishiro, but I’d never expected it to turn out like this…

★ ★ ★

After everyone had bathed, we all went to the supermarket for supplies, then returned to the dorm. By then, it was six PM—meaning it had been about eight hours since Kamiji had been scratched by a zombie.

“I haven’t turned into a zombie as yet, so does that mean I’m okay?” Kamiji asked in the cafeteria. But I didn’t exactly know the answer.

“Probably…?”

I had no idea about the incubation period for the zombie virus. It had taken just under an hour for me to turn into a zombie the first time around, but for Mai, it had happened almost right after she was bitten…

“If you’re okay so far, I think the chances are pretty good you’ll be fine. But just to be on the safe side, I think I should

watch you for at least another four hours."

"So until ten… Twelve hours after I was scratched."

"Uh-huh."

"I might already be asleep by then."

"I want you to tell me as soon as you notice any changes happening to you, so I'd appreciate it if you made an effort to stay awake."

"Yeah, makes sense…," Kamiji said, roughly scratching her head. "Tell me, is there anything to do here at night?"

"Not really… As things stand, we don't have power or internet."

"There aren't any jobs to do inside the building?"

"Let's see… We just cleaned yesterday, and we can't do anything at night…"

"I'll be so bored. I don't think I'll be able to stay awake."

"Why don't we have a welcome party for you and Amano?" Haruka suggested suddenly. "If we're partying and having a good time, four hours will fly by in no time."

"Oh, that's a great idea. In that case, I'm gonna drink tonight!"

"Huh…?! Again…?"

I frowned, but Kamiji replied casually, "Oh, come on. I'll get serious starting tomorrow."

"Well…I don't mind since all we're doing after this is going to bed."

And just like that, our impromptu welcome party began.

First, we got the drinks ready. Kamiji nonchalantly poured a can of shochu and soda into a cup, then suggested that Amano join her.

"I'll just have a soft drink…"

"Aw, come on. Have a drink with me."

"Okay… Just one."

"Yes! Hey, Kousaka, everyone—let's all get drunk. I found whiskey bonbons at the supermarket."

"Whiskey bonbons?"

"They're a type of candy made of hardened sugar with whiskey inside and coated with chocolate."

"They're alcoholic? None of us can drink."

"What are you talking about, Kousaka? The law only prohibits minors from consuming drinks containing an alcohol percentage

of one percent or more. That means food items are okay."

"How do you know so much about the law?"

"Looking for loopholes in the law is my favorite pastime."

"That's a weird hobby."

"You'll have some of these, too, won't you, Kousaka?"

"No thanks. I won't be able to fight if I'm drunk and zombies come to attack us."

"Always so serious, huh? What about you, Tsukishiro?"

"I'll refrain as well."

"Two peas in a pod. No wonder you're together."

"I'll have some," Haruka said, giving me the evil eye. "I can't put up with this if I'm not drunk."

With the preparations complete, we all clinked our glasses together.

It was all well and good that we'd gotten worked up and were having a welcome party, but what did people even do at these sorts of events?

"Um, excuse me. Before we forget, can we decide on our sleeping arrangements for the night?" Mai asked after the toast. "In the dorm, we have one room with a single bunk bed and another with three. We're all sleeping in the same room right now because we feel uneasy without Yuuma there with us."

"So essentially, you have one room for two and another for six, and we'd be short one bed if Amano and I slept in the same room as the rest of you?"

"Well, no. Since one person always keeps watch over the front gate at night, everyone else can sleep in the same room. The only thing is that we'd have to use the beds in rotation, so it might be a little tough if you don't want to sleep in a bed someone else has used."

"I see… Either way is fine with me… Amano? What do you want to do?"

"Mmm…," Amano responded sluggishly. "Let's see… What should we do?"

I hadn't noticed how droopy Amano's eyes looked until now. Our eyes met, and she bashfully turned away, then suddenly let out a strange shriek.

"Eek!! Kousaka, you're so good-looking!!"

Huh…?! Was she already drunk…?

“Amano can’t hold her liquor,” Kamiji explained, looking pleased for some reason. “Oh, and be careful. When she’s drunk, she starts fawning over anyone who’s near her.”

“Why did you make her drink, then?”

“Why else? Because it’s funny.”

I felt a headache coming on.

I knew it. Kamiji really isn’t cut out for communal living…

But just as that thought went through my mind, Amano pulled her chair toward me and closed the distance between us.

“Hey, Kousaka. Are you interested in older women?”

“Huh…?! Well, uh… Sure.”

I had to answer in the affirmative because Mai, who I was supposed to be in a relationship with, was older than me.

“Then how much older can a girl be for you to be interested in her?”

She was being awfully straightforward.

Was she trying to make a move on me…?! But Haruka (my real girlfriend) and Mai (my pretend girlfriend) were both right here with us…!!

“Um, I’ve never really thought about it…”

“Then think about it now.”

“I’m already dating Mai…”

“But you said you were turning this into a polygamous dorm.”

“—!!”

Amano’s shocking statement made everyone freeze, and the room became quiet.

A few seconds later, Amano seemed to realize she’d said something she shouldn’t have and turned red, flustered.

“Ah! Was that something I shouldn’t have said in front of Tsukishiro?”

Mai, on the other hand, was as cool as a cucumber.

“…No, don’t worry. I’m aware of the relationship between Yuuma and Hyuuga.”

Apparently, she’d decided to play the role of girl who knows her boyfriend’s two-timing her.

Still, it didn’t change the fact that the atmosphere in the cafeteria was ruined.

“—Well then, I guess there’s no avoiding it. Let’s all talk about who we like,” Kamiji said, looking around. It was a hell of a

suggestion. “First of all, let me ask you guys something. Does everyone here know about the situation between Kousaka, Hyuuga, and Tsukishiro?”

Lisa and Ichinose both shook their heads.

“Okay. Kousaka, why don’t you tell them?”

“Why me…?”

“Well, it’d be weird if *I* did it, right?” Kamiji said.

“It seems kind of weird for *anyone* to explain…”

But I couldn’t bluff my way out of it at this point.

I explained to everyone that I was in a relationship with both Haruka and Mai and was thinking about polygamy as the way to go. Of course, it was a lie, but Lisa and Ichinose had to be confused since they were completely in the dark.

Even I didn’t really understand how things had gotten so complicated. If there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s that if you act on the spur of the moment, things will eventually come back to haunt you.

“Thanks for laying it all out, Kousaka,” Kamiji said. “So now that everyone has a grasp of what’s what, I have a question for Tsukishiro. You’re in love with Kousaka, right?”

“Of course I’m in love with him.”

“And you have no complaints about him fooling around with other girls?”

“…He’s a popular guy, so I think it’s only natural.”

“Wouldn’t you normally want him all to yourself?”

“I’d be lying if I said I didn’t feel that way…but considering the world we now live in, I know I can’t keep him all to myself.”

It was my fault that Mai had to come up with a flimsy excuse like that.

I’m so sorry…

“So does that mean I can make a move on him, too?”

It was Amano again, speaking without reading the room and staring at me with those droopy eyes of hers.

“…I don’t think I have the right to stop you,” Mai said, sounding confused. She gave me a concerned look.

I probably should have said something, but if we were going to keep up this facade of thinking about polygamy, my only option was to accept Amano. She was pretty, and I had no reason to complain…



“Are you serious, Amano?” Haruka asked as I sat there, not knowing how to react.

“Of course I’m serious.”

“You should reconsider. He’s a beast who’s taking advantage of this zombie world to have his way with multiple girls.”

“You say that, but you’re still in love with him. Doesn’t that go to show just how attractive he is as a male?”

“…That’s true… Even if he cheats on me, he’s so amazing I can’t make myself hate him…” As she praised me, Haruka frustratedly clenched her right hand into a fist.

She seemed to be acting funny, so I looked around and saw the empty box of whiskey bonbons next to her.

Had Haruka eaten all of them? If she had, that meant she must’ve been pretty drunk…!

I was worried about her, but Haruka just kept talking.

“He’s so cool… I can’t imagine my life without him…”

“Haruka? Do you realize what you’re saying?”

“You just keep your mouth shut. I love you.”

“O-okay…”

I wish she wouldn’t just suddenly declare her feelings for me in front of everyone. I really don’t know how to react to that. Though I have to admit, it made me really happy.

Does Haruka start praising people when she gets drunk…?

I was still puzzling over that, when Haruka turned to face Amano.

“All right. If you’re serious, then as wife number one, I can’t just ignore you. I’ll interview you.”

…Wife number one? Haruka was interviewing Amano? What the hell was going on?

“First, tell me what you like about him.”

“He’s strong. He risked his life to save us earlier. It’s cool how he fights those zombies without being scared of them.”

“So you’re after his strength?”

“You’re brutally frank, but I do think that strength is the most important asset in this zombie world.”

“Does that mean if someone else shows up who’s stronger than Yuuma, you’ll want to be with them instead?”

“I wouldn’t do something insensitive like that. Besides, I don’t think the average person can fight a zombie, can they?”

“Well, you’re not wrong there. My Yuuma is the strongest, after all.”

“He’s also good-looking and clean-cut.”

“I know. He’s like a breath of fresh air, huh?”

“And he’s tall.”

“He has the perfect physique. Someone too tall or too muscular would make you feel overwhelmed.”

“What about you, Hyuuga? What do you like about Kousaka?” Amano asked, and Haruka’s eyes lit up.

“I’m so glad you asked. I first met him when I was in fifth grade, but even then, he was really nice to me. He listened to all my complaints and did anything I said without a sour look, and he was always on my side, no matter what. He really spoiled me back then, and I couldn’t live without him… But one day, he suddenly stopped coming to see me… Then just the other day, I saw him for the first time in five years. He’d gotten super good-looking, and he was still the nice guy I knew as a child. It was better than I ever could’ve imagined. It’s probably because he’s grown up a bit now that he’s always thinking about naughty things, but I still think it’s cute how fascinated he is with my boobs.”

“……”

Haruka went on and on about our relationship without showing any hesitation. Both the lovey-dovey part at the beginning and the bit at the end about how our relationship had been revealed were so embarrassing I could’ve sworn my face was on fire…

“So from where you stand, Kousaka is a guy you’d recommend to any girl, huh?” Amano said, causing Haruka to let out a gasp.

“…I meant to turn this into a smear campaign against Yuuma, but before I knew it, I ended up praising him…”

“Nah. Pretty much right from the start, you’ve been going on about how much you love him,” Kamiji chimed in. “But, Kousaka, you sure are popular. You’ve been two-timing these girls, and one of them talks about you like you’re the guy of her dreams.”

“…It’s just the suspension bridge effect. They would’ve just seen me as an incredibly normal guy if it hadn’t been for this zombie world.”

“But you really were cool, fighting off all those zombies. Anyone would fall for you if you rescued them like that.”

“What?!” Haruka exclaimed. “Kamiji, don’t tell me you have a crush on him, too?”

“Take it easy. I’m not interested in messing around with someone else’s man,” Kamiji said decisively.

Hearing that, Amano let out a sigh of relief. “I’m glad I’m not competing with Saya! I guess that means I’ll have to make an effort to win out against Hyuuga and Tsukishiro from now on. Or is there no need for that since we’re in a polygamous relationship?”

Amano directed the question at me, but how was I supposed to know the answer to that?

Yet Haruka and Mai were also staring expectantly at me. I got the feeling I’d be in serious trouble if I said the wrong thing.

“Uh…it isn’t like we’ve properly decided we’re going to be in a polygamous relationship yet…”

“You have wives one and two now, right? So should I try to talk myself up to you? When will I know whether I’ve passed?”

“…Since we’re on the subject, how does a polygamous relationship even work?” I asked.

Of course, it wasn’t my intention to start something like that, but I couldn’t help but be a little curious. After all, in this zombie world, there was no limit to the number of spouses a man could have if he called for volunteers.

In the old world, that had been restricted by factors like the cost of living and the size of living quarters, but here, we all lived together regardless of whether or not we were in a relationship, and I provided food for everyone.

So should I accept it if someone said they wanted to be my wife?

No. That was way too immoral. Yet it also seemed kind of awkward to reject someone when there was no limit to the number of women I could marry…right?

The more I thought about it, the more difficult a polygamous relationship seemed. Why had I lied and said I wanted to introduce something like that…?

Still, I couldn’t give Amano my saliva, and I couldn’t tell her why. I had to find a way to get out of this naturally. What excuse

could I give her? Should I say it was because we'd only just met? But the premise for my relationship with Mai was that we'd become lovers in just three days…

"…For now, Amano, I think you and I should get to know each other better," I told her. "You might be disappointed once you find out what I'm really like."

"Yeah, that's always a possibility."

"So why don't we go through the usual routine that guys and girls normally go through when they start dating? Like going out together and learning about each other…"

For some reason, Amano looked puzzled by my suggestion.

"I think that's a reasonable suggestion, Kousaka, but how are we supposed to go out on a date in this zombie world…?"

"Right…"

Now that she mentioned it, I realized there wasn't a single place in this world where you could take someone out on a date. For that matter, we couldn't even step outside of the dorm to go for a casual stroll.

"I wonder how men and women get to know each other in this new world…"

"Well, they probably go on dates at their homes," Amano said. "But without power, they couldn't play games or watch movies, so the only thing that they could do would be…"

She stopped there, her face going an even darker shade of red. Just what was she imagining?

"A-anyway, Kousaka, I'm going to start showing you what I can do," Amano said enthusiastically.

That meant I'd have to look for some kind of flaw to use as an excuse not to make her my wife…!!

"Why don't I start right away and tell you about my special skills? I'm pretty good at giving people massages."

★ ★ ★

I accepted Amano's invitation, and we all moved to the bedroom.

Haruka, Mai, and Kamiji watched as I stripped down to a T-shirt and slacks and lay face down on the bed.

"Okay, here we go!"

Amano had also changed into sweats, and she got on top of me, kneeling with her legs on either side of my hips. She bent forward and began pressing her fingers into the area around my shoulder blades. Every time the tips of her thumbs dug into my skin, a pleasant pain ran through my body.

"How's that? Does it feel good?"

"Uh-huh. Really good."

"I'm glad to hear that. How's the pressure?"

"I wouldn't mind if you went a little harder."

"You got it!" Amano said happily as she widened the distance between her knees and crouched down lower. She could probably put more force into her massage this way.

—Just then I realized something.

Amano spreading her legs wider had resulted in the most important part of a woman's body pushing closely against my back. She seemed to be unaware of it, but every time she applied her weight to the acupressure, her private area pressed up hard against me.

I felt Amano's womanhood through our clothes. It was soft yet slightly firm…

All of a sudden, the image I'd seen that morning up her skirt flashed through my mind.

"…Yuuma, you're smiling like an idiot. Does it really feel that good?" Haruka asked, looking me in the face.

Damn. I had to cover it up fast.

"Y-yeah. I've never had someone give me a massage, but it feels great."

"Hmmm…" Haruka seemed suspicious, but she let it go with a poker face. "Then can I try massaging you, too?"

"Huh…?"

"What? Don't you want me to?"

"N-no, it's not that," I said, trying to smooth things over.

But my conscience pained me. Would the same thing happen if Haruka straddled me like Amano was doing…?

Haruka meant well. She was offering to make me feel better, so shouldn't I tell her the truth?

…Oh, well.

I decided to stay silent, and before long, Haruka and Amano switched places.

Haruka was wearing a skirt as she got on the bed, straddled me, and began massaging my shoulders. She had her knees set wide apart from the very start, and every time she bent forward, her womanhood pressed firmly against my back.

The sensation seemed more vivid than it had been with Amano…

Amano had been wearing sweatpants, so the fabric of Haruka's skirt was probably thinner. That meant she probably wasn't wearing leggings or anything underneath…

Haruka's massage went from my shoulders down to my back, and she finished while I was still lying there preoccupied by my indecent thoughts.

Haruka got off the bed and asked, "Whose massage did you like better?"

"…Uh…"

To be honest, I had no recollection whatsoever of either massage, since the whole time I'd been completely focused on the parts of our bodies that had been in contact…

"Th-they were both great."

That was the only answer I could manage.

For certain unexplained reasons, I couldn't get off the bed for a while, which made everyone suspicious.

★ ★ ★

Once the massage was over, we went back to the cafeteria to continue the welcome party.

The suggestion was made to have some foods that suited the occasion, so we used a frying pan to cook pizza and sausages.

Even after our bellies were full, we kept talking for a long time with soft drinks in hand. No one verbalized it, but an unspoken understanding had somehow been established that we wouldn't talk about anything depressing. Although the atmosphere was cheerful, an air of caution prevailed, and we were somewhat wary of one another.

Ten PM had come and gone, but nothing unusual had happened to Kamiji. It was probably safe to assume by now that she wasn't going to turn into a zombie.

“Okay, now I can sleep with peace of mind,” Kamiji said. Her eyelids drooped as she stood up to head to bed. Her legs were shaky, and I quickly supported her with my body.

“Which bed should I use?”

“Whichever one you want. Do you have a preference?”

“The one closest to the door, I guess. I drank quite a lot, so I’ll probably have to go to the bathroom.”

“Sure. In that case, Amano can sleep in the bunk above you. Lisa is on guard duty tonight, so how about…?”

Haruka—Me
Ichinose—Mai
Amano—Kamiji

“What do you think about an arrangement like this?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. You guys are going to bed now, too, right?”

“Uh-huh, that’s the plan.”

I thought about Mai as I spoke. I had to kiss her before going to bed. Would it be suspicious if I took her away for no reason? Could we sneak out, pretending to go to the bathroom? Or maybe when we changed into our pajamas—

“Hey, Yuuma. Aren’t you going to kiss me good night?” Mai suddenly asked, tugging the hem of my shirt.

Damn. That was supercute.

An arrow almost went right through my heart, but I calmed down, remembering I was only doing it to give her more of my saliva. I was blown away by her quick thinking. A good night kiss was perfectly natural, and it would help show Kamiji and Amano that we were really in a relationship.

“R-right. Let’s go somewhere else, then…”

We walked out of the cafeteria and went to the hallway on the second floor.

“That was brilliant thinking, Mai. Thanks.”

“…It took me a lot of courage to say that in front of everyone, but we looked like a couple, didn’t we?”

“Yeah, definitely.”

“I’m glad… By the way, Yuuma, do you remember what we said we’d do when we kissed?”

“Um… Say how much we loved each other, right? I don’t think we have to do that now, though, since no one’s watching…”

“I think it’s important to practice regularly and be prepared. It doesn’t matter if people are watching us.”

“O-okay, then.”

“So whisper something romantic to me and hold me in your arms.”

Mai giggled like a mischievous child and opened her arms wide.

“…Mai. I love you.”

Mai looked up at me as I held her body close to mine.

“Yuuma,” she said softly. “Have your way with me.”

“…G-gladly.”

I put my hands around Mai’s waist and sucked on her lips, while her tongue crawled around inside my mouth and snatched up my saliva. I moved my tongue around a little, and it ran into Mai’s. Both of us seemed a little hesitant, but we slowly intertwined our tongues. This was the ultimate form of communication, normally only possible between lovers.

“Tee-hee… I love kissing you, Yuuma…,” Mai murmured in ecstasy after our lips had parted.

“S-so do I…”

“Really? I’m glad to hear it… I wish we could hug like this forever…”

Mai put her arms around me and squeezed tighter.

This was dangerous. I was so aroused I might go overboard if I wasn’t careful.

Whispering our love for each other as we kissed might have been crossing a line…

★ ★ ★

After kissing, we returned to the bedroom, where Haruka stood waiting at the entrance and head-butted me.

“You have to give me a good night kiss, too.”

“Huh…?!”

I froze. She should’ve known that we couldn’t kiss.

“Come on—let’s do it, Yuuma.”

But Haruka just put both hands against my chest and pushed me out into the hallway. The next thing I knew, she scolded me in a whisper.

“How dense can you be? If you kiss Tsukishiro, wife number two, then don’t you think it’s unnatural not to kiss me, wife number one?”

“O-oh…”

I couldn’t help being convinced. I’d never even considered balancing things out that way.

Keeping up the ruse of the “good night kiss,” I led Haruka to the place where I’d kissed Mai just moments ago.

“So all we have to do now is kill a little time here.”

“……”

For some reason, Haruka didn’t respond. She looked unhappy.

“…What’s wrong?”

“Is this where you kissed Tsukishiro?”

“Huh? Yeah… So?”

“Is it normal for a guy to bring his girlfriend to a place like that? Even if all we’re doing is killing time, let’s do it somewhere else.”

—!!

“S-sorry. I didn’t think of that. Now that you mention it, you’re absolutely right.”

I was quick to apologize, but Haruka still looked upset.

Haruka had watched me kiss Mai several times, yet here she was, furious that I’d brought her to the spot where I’d just kissed Mai…

Haruka pouted and fixed me with a glare.

“…It’s kind of frustrating to go back to our bedroom without doing anything. It feels like Tsukishiro’s one-upped me.”

“What other choice is there…?”

“Think of something intimate you can do with me.”

“How about I fondle your breasts again?”

That was the first thing that came to mind when she said, “something intimate.”

“…My breasts are all you think about, aren’t they?”

She narrowed her eyes at me, but I could only nod in agreement since it was true.

“You’re so honest, Yuuma. But I won’t let you do that.”

“Wh-why not?”

“Because it’ll get too hot and heavy, and we won’t be able to sleep.”

“Th-that’s okay. I don’t have any trouble falling asleep.”

She looked away shyly. “…I mean, if you touch me, *I* won’t be able to get to sleep.”

“…Oh! *That’s* what you mean…”

“So no touching my boobs.”

“O-okay…”

“Hee-hee! You looked really cute just now. Like a dog who’s been told to wait before he can have a treat.”

“Hrnn…”

“I want to reward you for being able to ‘stay’ as you were told. What would you like?”

“Woof.”

“Not my breasts.”

“Hrnn…”

“We…promised to wash each other’s bodies tomorrow, right?”

“Woof!”

“You’re getting good at playing my dog. Maybe I have talent as a dog trainer,” Haruka said, puffing out her chest.

I thought it was pretty amazing she could have a normal conversation with me when I was talking like a dog.

“By the way, about that good night kiss… We can’t have your saliva enter my mouth, but that’s all, right? Shouldn’t it be okay for me to kiss you?”

“Huh…?”

I hadn’t expected her to suggest something like that.

But come to think of it, Haruka and I had touched each other’s bodies countless times. If she could contract the zombie virus through my skin, then she would’ve turned into one ages ago.

“I think that should probably be okay…”

“Then I’ll give you a good night kiss on the cheek. Squat down a little. ‘Sit.’”

“S-sure…”

When I bent my legs a little and leaned forward, Haruka took me by the elbows and slowly brought her face closer to mine.

It was a nerve-racking few seconds…but just as she was about to touch my cheek, she pulled away.

“This…is really embarrassing. Yuuma, close your eyes.”

“O-okay.”

I closed my eyes as I was told and sensed Haruka moving toward me again. She had a nice, sweet scent, and I could feel her breath on my cheek. And then—

Just for a moment, her soft lips pressed against my cheek.

I opened my eyes, and they met Haruka’s as she looked at me shyly. The awkwardness in her expression was indescribably cute.

“…It’s going to be just as hard to sleep after this…”

“Then let me touch your breasts while we’re at it…”

Haruka raised her index finger angrily.

“Yuuma! Down!”



DAY 6

The next day, I was awakened before dawn by the vibrations Mai made as she slipped into my bed. I guess it was time for a kiss.

We looked at each other silently so we wouldn't wake the others and then began kissing. Yet the person sleeping on the bottom bunk nearest the hallway woke up. Who was it that was sleeping there? …Oh, that's right.

I stiffened involuntarily as Kamiji looked around, then quietly left the room. I wondered if she was going to the bathroom.

"That was…kind of thrilling," Mai said, laughing after our kiss was interrupted.

"Yeah, though it isn't like we were doing anything wrong."

"We weren't…? I think kissing in a room full of people is fairly indecent."

"…Now that you mention it, I guess you're right. We've been kissing in front of the others so many times that my senses have gone numb."

"I see… So is that why you tried to fondle Hyuuga's breasts here last night?"

"Huh…?!"

"Even if you're whispering, the person in the next bed can hear you rather well."

"…I'm sorry…"

"I know that the two of you are lovers, but I don't think it's right to do something like that in the same room as everyone else."

"I'm really sorry…"

…Huh? Hadn't Mai tried to come on to me in this same bed yesterday…?

“…For the record, please forget what I suggested yesterday. Just consider it me talking in my sleep.”

In the dark of the room, Mai hung her head. I guess that had been weighing on her.

“Does that mean we should also have our early morning kiss outside this room? I thought it would be a nuisance to the others if we made noise going outside and woke them up.”

“I wonder what we should do about that… We can’t exactly ask everyone for their opinion…”

She had a point.

“Anyway, let’s talk about this some other time,” I said. “It would be a bother if Haruka came to warn us again like she did yesterday…”

“All right… But I haven’t taken in enough of your saliva yet…”

Mai started sucking on my lips again and, after licking up the saliva in my mouth, returned to her bed, grinning from ear to ear.

★ ★ ★

It was almost six AM by the time we assembled in the cafeteria and started breakfast. Since the blackout, I’d started basing my day around the movement of the sun, which had made me an early riser.

We were having breakfast Japanese-style again. It was an elaborate meal consisting of rice, natto, miso soup, fried eggs, grilled salmon, and spinach with sesame seeds. Haruka and Mai, who were in charge of the cooking, worked hard to keep everyone healthy.

Just then, I remembered something important.

“Hey, Ichinose. It’s been a while since you drank that filtered water. How are you feeling?”

Ichinose stopped stirring her natto.

“I haven’t noticed any unusual symptoms so far. Maybe it depends on the person’s constitution, but I think I’ve proven that, at least in my case, it’s fine to drink the filtered river water.”

“Good. I’m glad you didn’t get sick. Thank you for putting your body on the line.”

Grateful from the bottom of my heart, I bowed my head.

In that case, it seemed like our worries over drinking water were gone.

“Okay, then as for our next objective…I want to build a room that’s strong like a fortress on the fourth floor,” I told my six dorm mates. “I’ve been thinking there’s a possibility that zombies might raid this place while I’m out, so I think it’d be best for us to have a room where everyone can hole up.”

Mai was the first to agree with my plan.

“That’s a good idea… If we decide on a hiding spot ahead of time, then we could all meet up smoothly in the event of an emergency.”

Ichinose was the next to raise her hand, and her words came out in a bit of a rush.

“I also agree. First, I think we’d need to reinforce the door. It would be ideal if we could replace it with a steel one, but even hammering a steel plate on the outside of the existing door should be effective. And we should leave all the windows on the fourth floor unlocked so we can run out to the hallway from any room. Also, we could install wireless speakers in the hallway and play music or sounds remotely to lure zombies to where we want them to go. And we could set up a sturdy rope so we can quickly move to the veranda of the floor below. We can have drills when we have time…”

“Right… Ichinose, have you been thinking about the need for us to hole up for a while?”

“Yeah. When I couldn’t sleep at night.”

“It’s a big help. Is there anything else we should have in our safe room?”

“Weapons, in case we have to force our way through zombie-infested hallways. Our goal isn’t to kill zombies; we just want to clear our way, so something like a long pole might be good.”

“A long pole? You mean like one of those big two-pronged ones they have in schools for catching intruders?”

“That works. If you have a chance, I’d like you to get us a few of those. I also considered Molotov cocktails as a weapon to take down zombies from a distance, but it’s probably better not to use them in the dorm.”

“Molotov cocktails…?”

“You fill a glass bottle with gasoline or kerosene, light it, and throw. When the bottle breaks, it starts a fire.”

“Okay… That sounds great, but you’re right; it’s probably best not to use it here.”

“Yeah. We can still make some, since we can throw them at zombies that come near the dorm. I found some kerosene left over from last year in the storage room.”

“Can we let you take care of that?”

“Sure. And if possible…we should get ahold of handguns.”

“Can you even get a handgun in Japan?”

“The police should have some.”

“Oh, right.”

Why hadn’t I realized something so simple…? I should have taken them when I saw zombies wearing police uniforms…

“So if you see a zombie in a police uniform, check and see if they’re carrying. I think the holster should be around their waist. The problem is that we aren’t likely to find spare bullets, so once we run out, that’s it. It’s not impossible to make bullets of our own, but they use gunpowder, and it would be quite a challenge.”

“Ichinose, you sure know a lot.”

“It’s just things I’ve picked up. I’ve only read about guns in mystery novels, so I could have some things wrong. By the way, we might be able to learn how to make bullets if we can go to a library.”

“There’s so much to do, I’m getting lost… For starters, we should look for steel plates for reinforcing the safe room door, wireless speakers, sturdy ropes, forked poles, and guns, right?”

“Yeah, that’s about all I can think of at the moment. The other thing we need to do is stockpile some preserved food and water in the safe room we build on the fourth floor so we can hole up there for a while.”

“Okay, got it. What’s it like on the fourth floor now, anyway?”

Ichinose looked confused, and Mai answered for her.

“The previous occupants’ belongings are still there. We should clean it up when we have a chance.”

“We’ll do it today if you like,” Amano offered. “Right, Saya?”

“Yeah. We’re pretty strong, so you guys can leave it to us.”

Kamiji pulled a pose showing off her muscles, so I let her and Amano take care of it.

★ ★ ★

After breakfast, I was going to do the best chore imaginable before going out to pick up supplies:

Haruka and I were going to wash each other's bodies.

It was such an inexcusably personal act, I felt guilty when I thought about the others who were cleaning up around the dorm. But I worked hard securing supplies day in and day out, so I hoped they wouldn't mind if I enjoyed a little R & R.

The time was six fifty. I'd be back in plenty of time for my next kiss with Tsukishiro at ten. I loaded plastic containers into the sedan, told the others we were going to the river to fetch water, then left the dorm with Haruka at the wheel.

"…By the way, Haruka, are you feeling under the weather today?" I asked as soon as we left the dorm. She'd eaten a massive amount of whiskey bonbons last night, so I was worried she might be hungover.

But Haruka just tilted her head curiously.

"Me? I'm perfectly fine."

"Oh. I guess I was wrong."

"About what? Why did you think I wasn't feeling well?"

"You seemed to be eating less at breakfast today."

"Oh, that…," she said vaguely, sounding awkward. "You've got sharper eyes than I thought… I *was* eating a bit less this morning."

"Huh? Why?"

"Because…I knew I'd be exposing my tummy right after breakfast," she explained shyly, though I didn't really follow.

"What does exposing your tummy have to do with eating less?"

"It'd be embarrassing if I ate a lot and got a big belly."

"Okay…? But you don't have a big belly. You're skinny."

"Girls want to look as pretty as they can in front of the man they love… Hey, don't make me say something like that," she complained. "Come to think of it, Yuuma, do you check how much I eat at every meal?"

"It's not like I really check or anything, but I do kind of watch over you. I like watching you eat a lot."

“Y-you do…?” Haruka said, blushing. “Then next time, I’ll be sure to eat mountains of food so you can enjoy watching me. ♪”

★ ★ ★

We built a fire as soon as we got to the river and started filling the drum with water. The objective here was to wash each other’s bodies, not soak around for a long time, so we only filled it up halfway.

The water eventually began getting warm, and Haruka went into the tent to get changed. I waited excitedly, and about five minutes later, Haruka came back out—wearing only a towel.

“…You seemed awfully happy yesterday when you saw Kamiji in nothing but a towel, so I decided to do the same thing,” Haruka murmured. Looking at her, I felt my heart beating faster and faster. Hot blood coursed throughout my body.

“W-well? What do you think…?”

“I’m not sure I know how to describe the feelings raging through my heart right now.”

“O-okay…”

“For one thing, you look super sexy…”

“I’m glad you like it… Oh, and by the way, I’m not wearing anything underneath.”

“……”

“Please say something.”

“Sorry. My mind stopped functioning.”

“Then…why don’t you go and get changed now?”

“Uh…should I change into my bathing suit?”

“I’ll leave that up to you…but I think I’d prefer it if we were matching.”

“G-got it…!!”

I went into the tent, quickly stripped out of my school uniform, and stepped outside wearing nothing but a towel around my waist.

I stood there facing Haruka, who was also in only a single towel.

…If someone saw us, it would look like we were about to do the deed.

Haruka seemed to be having similar thoughts. She was glancing over my body, smiling shyly.

“…Okay, then. Let’s start washing each other,” she said.

“Y-yeah.”

“Do you want to go first, or should I?”

“Let me wash you first. I don’t think I can wait much longer.”

“Okay… Then…go ahead,” she said nervously.

Turning her back to me, Haruka spread her towel, lowered it to her waist, and secured it in place, revealing the pale skin of her petite back. She had fully exposed the upper half of her body, but from my angle, I could only see her back. Yet since her arms were hanging at her sides, all it would take was a big step to the left or right and I’d be able to see her naked breasts.

“…Okay. I’m ready when you are.”

Haruka was trembling. She must have been pretty nervous.

“…Oh, um, can I look at your front…?”

“…If you want. You’ve already seen it once…”

“Why the change of heart? Yesterday, you said you’d kill me if I looked.”

“A sense of rivalry. What else? I have to do something more intense than Tsukishiro to prove I’m your girlfriend when she’s only pretending.”

“Okay…”

“So…it’s really embarrassing, but…”

She took a deep breath and slowly turned around. There was nothing covering her breasts. Everything was exposed, all the way to her rose-colored nipples.

It was the most beautiful sight I’d ever seen.

I found myself thanking God that I’d been born into this world as a man.

“…I have to ask, but can I see you from the waist d—?”

“I’ll kill you if you try that.”

“Got it,” I said without taking my eyes off her breasts. I had to do everything in my power to burn the sight into my memory.

Freed from the constraints of her clothes, her boobs swayed a little every time Haruka said something, which was unbelievably exciting.

“…Yuuma, you’re staring too hard.”

No longer able to hide her embarrassment, Haruka covered her breasts with her hands.

“Hurry up and start washing me.”

“R-right…”

I put body soap on the sponge and hurriedly started lathering it up, then pressed it against her breasts.

“—Ahn!” She let out a small cry, but there was no way I could stop now.

I moved the sponge around her boobs.

“Eep…! *Ah*…” Haruka let out a sexy sigh every time I worked the sponge up and down her body. All I was doing was washing her, yet every little thing was just too incredible. It made me think I’d lose my mind. What was going on?!



“Haruka… Thank you so much…”

“…I’m glad you’re happy… I’ve developed this much as a woman just for you…”

“You have…?!”

I was beyond moved to think she loved me so much…!!

“I’m convinced now that I was born into this world so I could wash your breasts.”

“Hee-hee-hee… Thanks… Oh? Do you want to do something naughtier while we’re at it?”

“That might be an idea… Huh? Wasn’t there a reason why we couldn’t sleep together…?”

Just for a moment, I forgot why we couldn’t have sex.

“—Oh, right. Because I might give you the zombie virus.”

“Yuuma, did you forget something that important?”

“I can’t believe I forgot that. I think I’ve been washing your breasts for so long that my intelligence has gone down.”

The sight in front of me was too alluring to think of anything else.

“Yuuma, aren’t you going to wash any other part of me besides my boobs?” Haruka asked shyly, her breasts covered by soapsuds.

“Sorry. I was distracted.”

I hastily began working the sponge along her stomach and arms, but my gaze was still drawn to her breasts. It didn’t seem like I would ever get tired of staring at those two mounds.

But when I moved over next to Haruka so I could wash her back, I realized something incredible: So far, I’d only been looking at her boobs from the front. They looked more three-dimensional and had a completely different appeal from the side.

…So this *is what they mean by side boob…!!*

Having experienced that divine revelation, I began to make my way in a circle around Haruka on the pretext that I was washing her entire body—and used that opportunity to closely observe her beautiful breasts from every angle.

The result: They looked fantastic from everywhere.

That was close! I may never have realized if she hadn’t told me to wash the rest of her.

As I continued staring at Haruka’s breasts, a new desire gradually began to kindle inside me.

“…Hey, Haruka? I want to ask you the biggest favor of my life.”

“The answer’s no.”

“I haven’t told you what it is yet.”

“A big favor you want to ask at a time like this can’t be anything decent, right?”

“Th-that’s not true.”

“Okay, then. Tell me what it is.”

“I want to take a photo.”

“No *way*.”

She said that with absolute finality, covering her breasts protectively with her hands.

“Y-you misunderstand me. I didn’t mean it in a lewd way… I want to capture images of your breasts from the top, bottom, and sides—three hundred and sixty degrees from various angles and heights.”

“You’re just a big perv!”

“No, you’ve got it all wrong. This is art… I’m so moved by the beauty of the female form that I want to create a work of art to commemorate it.”

“Hmm… Art, huh…?” she said skeptically.

“It’s true. I used to look at nude photos before with nothing but an erotic eye, but now I realize that a woman’s breasts are the most beautiful things in the world with unlimited potential.”

“…You know something? You aren’t convincing at all in the state you’re in down below,” she said shyly, lowering her gaze.

That was when I finally realized what was happening to my body.

My lower half was making a very clear statement. I couldn’t believe it, but I’d been so focused on her boobs that I hadn’t noticed.

Panicking, I tried to press it down with my towel, but I was unable to control it at all. Never before in my life had my you-know-what become this impressive… But well, maybe that was to be expected.

“Are you saying that change to your body is what happens when you’re exposed to art?” Haruka asked, narrowing her eyes.

“M-maybe it is.”

“Then is it okay if I take pictures from various angles, too? With the towel off, of course.”

“N-no, I don’t think that’s…”

“See? Then you can’t take photos of me, either,” she said sharply.

Haruka spun around, undid her towel, and quickly wrapped it around her body. When she turned back to face me, her breasts were covered once more.

“Things seemed to be getting a little dangerous, so the show’s over.”

“…What can I say? I’m sorry for acting like a fool.”

“You can say that again. I hope you learn from this.”

“I truly am sorry. I’ll make sure I take this lesson to heart… For that reason, I have a favor to ask… It made me sad how quickly you hid your breasts, so could you let me see them just one more time?”

“What happened to being sorry?”

★ ★ ★

After that, we finished washing each other’s bodies. Once we’d gotten rid of all the suds and put our clothes back on, we filled our plastic containers with water from the river and put them in the trunk, then left.

It was almost ten by the time we returned to the dorm. I called Mai over right away and kissed her in the hallway. I didn’t think I could ever get used to the idea of intensely kissing Mai right after I’d been fooling around with Haruka.

When we’d finished kissing, we went to the cafeteria, where all our other dorm mates were gathered (excluding Lisa, who’d been on night watch and was now sleeping), and we discussed what we’d do that day. We decided that Haruka would watch the gate and that Ichinose, Amano, and Kamiji would continue cleaning the fourth floor.

“Mai and I will work on clearing the blocked roads. It’ll be better if we can drive farther out in the future.”

From a safety point of view, it was smarter to go alone. Still, something unforeseeable might happen on roads I’d never been on before, so I decided to take Mai with me in case I was held up.

I thought Haruka would want to go with us, but she only looked annoyed and didn't say anything. I guessed she was trying not to ruin the mood.

"I want to ask you guys something. There are blocked roads everywhere, so we'll need to figure out the order we want to clear them in. How do you think we should decide which to work on first?"

Again, it was Ichinose who spoke up before anyone else. "The first thing we should do is determine where we want to go."

When we first met, she seemed withdrawn, but I guess she'd gotten used to me. It really helped that she'd started to be more assertive expressing her opinions.

"We should consider what we need most at this point in time—whether we need a new supermarket to get food, a Self-Defense Forces base or police station to find tools to protect ourselves, or a library or large bookstore to gather information…"

"I see… Well, we still have plenty of food, and we can filter water from the river to drink… Information is important, but first, I think we need to protect ourselves. That said, it seems like we'd have to go a long way to find a Self-Defense Forces base."

"True. From here, it's probably better if we aim for a police station."

Ichinose pulled out a map and drew a red mark on it to indicate the location of the police station.

"We should be able to find a lot of guns if we go there. Maybe even riot shields."

"Riot shields…?"

"Large shields the police use to cover their entire bodies. We should be able to use them if we ever need to break through a crowd of zombies."

"I think I've seen them in movies."

If they had guns and shields, then maybe even Haruka and everyone else here would be able to fight back against the zombies.

So with that, we decided to start clearing the roads that led to the nearest police station.

★ ★ ★

Mai and I got into the sedan, and I drove us to the main road. After tying up every zombie around us, I began clearing the road.

I showed Mai how to start the car and asked her to wait inside, while I moved the obstacles piled up on the road to create an opening for a car to pass through. Most of those obstacles were undamaged cars, but some had been charred by fire. The intact cars had probably been abandoned by their owners, who'd been stuck in traffic and run off to escape from the zombies. I didn't find the car keys in most of them, so the only way to move them was to zombify and push the vehicles to the side of the road using my superstrength.

I left the large cars that I couldn't move even with my zombie strength. When I was leaving the dorm, Ichinose had suggested that for anything too big, I could use a hydraulic jack to tilt it and shove it out of the way, so I decided to come back later and do that.

The line of abandoned cars went on for miles. I also had to capture any zombies that wandered too close, and it felt like the job would never end…

About half an hour later, I ran out of ropes to tie up zombies and went back to the car where Mai was waiting. I figured I might as well take a break.

"…I'm sorry, Yuuma. This is all my fault," she said from the passenger seat when I got into the car. "I was thinking while I was sitting here, waiting for you, and I realized you wouldn't need to do this if you didn't have to kiss me every six hours… You could've just walked where cars can't pass, found another one up ahead, and continued like that. You probably would've been able to bring the guns back by the end of the day."

"Well, maybe I can gather supplies on foot, but there's a limit to how much I can carry, so it's better to clear the roads so any one of us can drive. Considering all the things that can happen, it isn't good if I'm the only one who can get around."

"I guess…"

"So don't feel guilty and rest up. Though, of course, zombies might attack the car, so you have to stay awake."

"I'm so sorry that I can't do anything to help while I sit here waiting for you… If only there were something I could do in the

car. I've been wondering, is it really a problem for me to get bitten by a zombie? I want to help clear the roads if I can."

"I think we should avoid any more of the zombie virus getting into your body. Right now, we're holding off your zombification with my saliva, but it might get seriously dangerous if the zombie virus begins to outweigh it. Besides, I think it would be tough for someone with human strength to move a car. I appreciate the thought, though."

"All right… But if there's anything I can help out with or anything you want me to do for you, please don't hesitate to say so. If you'd like, when we return to the dorm, I can give you a massage like Amano did yesterday…!!" Mai said to motivate me as she held my hands in hers.

She really is such a nice person…

Energized, I went back to work and moved the cars out of the way one at a time. As I was working, I suddenly noticed a brand-new house along the road. It even had solar panels installed on the roof. We'd probably have power if we used this place as our base.

I quickly approached it and pressed the bell, but there was no response. I tried opening the door, but it was locked, so I went around the building and found that all the windows were closed.

…I didn't want to act like a burglar, though I didn't really have much of a choice…

I went around the back of the house and broke a window with my metal bat, opening a hole the size of my fist. I stuck my hand inside the window and unlocked it.

It was a Western-style room, slightly larger than average. The doors and curtains were all closed, and it was dimly lit.

I took off my shoes, pressed the switch at the entrance to the room, and suddenly the light came on. I was tremendously impressed by the technology behind solar panels. If only I could install these at our dormitory, then we wouldn't have any more inconveniences in our daily lives. Though, of course, it was hard to imagine average high school students like us managing to pull off any sort of large-scale construction…

Nevertheless, finding a house with electricity, even during the current power outage, was a big step forward.

After unlocking the front door and going outside, I tied up every zombie around me and secured the area. Then I brought Mai, who was waiting in the car.

She let out a small cheer when she saw the light go on.

“It’s way different from the tiny battery-powered lights we use.”

“Uh-huh. The power generated by the solar panels seems to be stored somewhere, so we can use electrical appliances. You can even check to see how much power there is left.”

My heart racing, I pointed to a monitor screen embedded in a wall of the living room. The screen indicated the amount of power generated and used up, and the figures seemed to change in real time.

“The amount of power generated seems to vary considerably between sunny days and cloudy days,” I said, looking through the past data. “But as long as we’re careful, I don’t think we’d have power outages due to overuse.”

“Are you thinking of using this place as our second base?”

“Yes, ma’am. For example, if we bring a lot of refrigerators here and get them working, we could store food for a long time. And if we built a fence or something around the house before next summer, we could use the air conditioners.”

The more I talked, the bigger my dreams seemed to get.

After that, we started exploring the house. It looked fairly new, and the kitchen and bathrooms were spotless. Next, we decided to go upstairs and see the house from end to end. It almost felt like we’d come to visit a model home.

But the happy mood was blown away when we opened the first door.

Inside, we found a weird-looking zombie waiting for us.

★ ★ ★

I could tell the zombie had been a young man, even though his hair and fingernails were unusually long. His arms had become enlarged, and his fingernails, which looked at least fifteen centimeters long, were razor-sharp like weapons.

“—Mai!! Run!!”

As soon as I cried out to her, the clawed zombie jumped at me, its long black hair in disarray. It was so agile I could hardly believe it was a zombie.

I reflexively closed the door, and it suddenly dawned on me. Like that giant zombie I'd seen the other day, this was another example of a special kind of zombie.

I'd managed to shut the door just in the nick of time—but the zombie roared, and its claws sunk into it. The sharp tips of its fingernails pierced all the way through to our side and moved toward us in the hallway. I stood there stunned as the zombie pulled its claws out of the door. I could see the room inside through a small hole.

My eyes met those of the clawed zombie. I feared for my life.

"Mai! Get back to the car!"

We quickly turned around and ran down the stairs, and a split second later, I heard the door being torn apart and the sound of footsteps approaching. I guess it had no intention of letting intruders into its house.

This was entirely my fault. I'd been so distracted by the solar panels that I neglected to check the house for zombies. And to make matters worse, I'd left the bat near the front door.

In a panic, I put on my shoes and grabbed the bat, then transformed, leaving the door wide open.

"Yuuma?! You're going to fight it?!"

"I want us to use this house as our base. We can't do that in peace if that thing is here."

As I'd been speaking, the clawed zombie had come downstairs.

"Mai, can you make it to the car on your own?"

"Yes," she answered curtly and started running in the direction of the car. I was worried that zombies might attack her, but I wasn't in a position where I could go and help her. I'd restrained all the zombies I'd seen in the area, so I had to believe she'd be okay.

The clawed zombie's gaze met mine, and it started toward me.

We faced off on the cobblestones just outside the front door. The clawed zombie closed the distance between us and swung its

right arm toward me—but his speed and range were nothing compared to the giant zombie I'd fought the other day.

I stepped back to avoid my opponent's first attack and swung my bat as hard as I could at the right arm reached out toward me. With an unpleasant metallic sound, the four claws from its index finger to the pinkie were snapped at once.

That didn't seem to bother the clawed zombie, though, and it followed up with an attack with its left hand. Judging my timing, I swung and slammed the bat into its left hand, smashing it against the stone pavement. Next, I aimed for the zombie as it bent forward, took a proper batting stance, and unleashed a full swing, delivering a powerful blow to its head and sending everything from its nose up flying.

Now in a horribly disfigured state, the clawed zombie collapsed to the ground face-first. I put down the bat, clasped my hands, and said a silent prayer for him, then examined the zombie's hands.

Its fingernails had changed to look like the claws of a ravenous beast. This had to be another mutation brought about by the zombie virus…

This was the second case of a special-type zombie. Or would it be the third, including me?

Haruka had ordered me to figure out how people turned into zombies. So did that mean I should collect samples of these unusual zombies in case some research institute analyzes the virus in the future…?

Regardless, I had no way to take blood samples here. Maybe I could take the corpse back to the dorm. I was reluctant, especially with the foul smell, but I could wrap it in a big piece of plastic so the car wouldn't get dirty…

As I was thinking, the clawed zombie suddenly got back up.

The entire part of its head from the nose up was missing. A normal zombie wouldn't be able to move in this state. And yet…

While I was puzzling over this, something even more incredible happened: The area above its nose began to regenerate. First, its gray brain was restored; then the skull

reappeared around it, which was eventually covered by similarly gray skin. I couldn't comprehend what I was seeing.

As I stood there, stunned, the empty eye sockets and even the whitewashed eyeballs reappeared. The clawed zombie turned its newly regenerated eyes in my direction, locked its sights onto me, and raised its right arm. Even its claws had reappeared.

Oh shit, this guy's dangerous!! Who would've thought there'd be a zombie that could regenerate its head…?!

I was dumbfounded but desperately dodged his attack and picked up the bat. I swung hard, aiming for its head again—but the clawed zombie jumped back without giving any indication of what it was doing, and my bat flew through the air.

This zombie hadn't considered self-defense before, yet immediately after regenerating, it started making evasive moves… Did that mean it was evolving? Was it using the experience of getting hit the last time around to learn?

If that were the case, things were getting too nasty. It was bad enough to begin with since I didn't know how to defeat it.

The best idea seemed to be to withdraw for now, so I turned my back to the clawed zombie and ran as fast as I could. Caught off guard for a moment, the clawed zombie chased after me, but with a ten-meter head start, I managed to get away.

I soon saw our car, where Mai was waiting for me. She was in the passenger seat, and the engine was turned off so as not to attract attention from other zombies.

I jumped into the driver's seat and gunned the engine.

"—Yuuma, were you unable to defeat that zombie?"

"I'll explain later. Let's get out of here."

I put the car in reverse and stepped on the gas.

By now, the clawed zombie was right in front us. If it jumped onto the car, we'd be done for. I briefly considered running it over, thinking that even if it was immortal, we might be able to stop its movements if we pinned it under the car. That said, I had no idea how strong this zombie was. If it had the strength to move the car off itself, then running it over would be pointless.

If we lost our car here, we'd have to walk back to the dorm, which was too risky considering that Tsukishiro was with me. Checking the side mirror, I started trying to escape by backing up, something I wasn't used to doing. The road was barely wide

enough for a car to pass in many places, and I couldn't go very fast—

The clawed zombie immediately caught up with us and slashed the hood. At this rate, it wouldn't be long before it destroyed the car.

"Mai! Switch places with me and drive! That zombie can't be killed by crushing its head, so we have no choice but to run!"

I shifted gears into park and opened the driver's side door as I continued shouting instructions to her.

"Keep going back till you get to a wide-open area, then make a U-turn!" I yelled as I grabbed the bat and jumped out of the car.

The clawed zombie was right there, staring straight at me, its hands at the ready. It almost seemed to have a mind of its own.

"…Can you understand what I'm saying? Who are you?" I called out, but it didn't make any sort of human response. It just turned hostile and came slashing at me.

I swung the bat and continued to repel the clawed zombie's swipes. Its attacks seemed to be becoming more precise. Was it learning to move more efficiently?

If I could keep defending myself and jump in the car when Mai was ready to take off, then we might get away in one piece. But was it okay to leave this monster on the loose? Wasn't it possible that it would be more powerful the next time I encountered it?

"—Yuuma! I'm ready!" Mai shouted before I could organize my thoughts, and I instantly ran toward the car.

Needless to say, the clawed zombie was right on my tail.

I didn't have time to go around to the passenger seat, so instead I jumped on top of the trunk.

"Go!"

The car immediately started moving forward, but because Mai had never driven before, we were going quite slowly.

Meanwhile, the clawed zombie didn't stop coming after us. There were no limits to its physical strength since it was a zombie, so at this rate, it would follow us to the dorm.

Once we were finally off the densely congested road and out in the open, I jumped off the car and shouted to Mai.

"Let's split up here! I'll make my own way back to the dorm!"

I didn’t know if that was enough to tell her what my plan was, but I couldn’t think of any other way.

I was facing the clawed zombie again. I’d keep it occupied until the car was a good distance away, then find a way to escape myself.

But the car came right back. Had Mai thought she’d shaken me off?

No—after driving in a wide circle around us, Mai got behind the clawed zombie. Then she stepped on the gas, and the car came charging toward us with a rumbling noise.

I jumped back, and Mai hit the clawed zombie from behind, then drove off with it slumped against the hood. The car showed no signs of stopping, so I quickly went after it.

Mai kept driving for a short while, then finally stopped in the middle of a large bridge. As for the clawed zombie—it quickly got up and tried to attack Mai through the front windshield. Getting run over didn’t seem to have done much damage to it.

I ran as fast as I could and, once I’d caught up, leaped onto the car. I ran over the roof and kicked the zombie off the vehicle.

“Mai! Run over it one more time!”

As soon as I shouted that, the car sped forward. It ran right over the zombie lying on its side and crushed its head. Still, chances were high that it would revive again, just like it had before. Wasn’t there any way to stop that from happening?

“Yuuma! Let’s push it off the bridge!”

I finally realized what Mai had been trying to do: She hadn’t been trying to run over it but move it onto the bridge. I quickly picked up its body, walked to the railing, and threw the zombie into the river far below.

I looked down at the river for a while, but the clawed zombie didn’t resurface. I wasn’t sure whether it couldn’t regenerate in the water or if it had just been swept downstream, but even if that were the case, it would have ended up a long way away from here.

Mai and I went back to the house we’d found earlier and carefully checked it for other zombies. We looked around every inch of the house and confirmed that it was safe. All we had to do was put up a fence around it, and we could turn it into a second base.

As I was thinking about what we'd need to do, I realized it was already past two in the afternoon, so I decided to call it a day.

★ ★ ★

Once Mai and I returned to the dorm, we had a late lunch and told the others about the clawed zombie we'd run into. We explained how it had come after us at a normal human running speed, regenerated even after its head was crushed, and that we had no idea what had happened to it after we pushed it off the bridge. We also described what it looked like, since there was also the possibility that it might resurrect itself and one of us would run into it at some time and place…

After lunch, the seven of us got into the black van and headed to a clothing store where Amano and Kamiji could get bathing suits.

I tied up the zombies inside the store, and we went inside.

This was a store that not only sold bathing suits but also offered a variety of clothes and accessories. It would be boring to just wait around while Amano and Kamiji picked out their swimsuits, so the rest of us would choose whatever clothes we wanted.

I picked up a black backpack and stuffed it with every piece of men's underwear I could find. We couldn't use the washing machine now, and we had to wash everything by hand. Haruka and Mai had offered to do my laundry, but while T-shirts and other clothes might be okay, it was a bit hard to ask them to wash my underwear…

That was why I'd come up with the idea of having a huge stock of undies that I could wash all at once when I had the chance.

After stuffing my backpack and leaving the underwear section, I happened to see Haruka and the others choosing new bathing suits. I waited a short distance away since I felt a little awkward approaching them.

Looking around the store with nothing to do, I ran into Amano, who was wearing a blue bikini.

"—Oh! Hey, Kousaka, what do you think of this one?" she asked, beaming.

Her breasts were bigger than Haruka's and even on par with Lisa's. Of course, not that size mattered, but it was still nice to see a large pair of boobs…

"I think you look great," I said with a goofy look on my face. As soon as I spoke, I noticed Haruka in her school uniform staring at me with her eyes narrowed.

I was sure she would complain, but instead, she took the bathing suit she was holding into the fitting room without a word.

Had she forgiven me for my behavior just now…?

The curtain outside the fitting room eventually opened, and Haruka emerged. For some reason, she ran toward me, holding her swimsuit top against her chest.

Then she spun around to face away from me. I couldn't believe it—the hooks of her bikini top weren't fastened, and the neck strings were hanging loose.

"Yuuma, could you do these up for me?"

"…Is this really happening?"

Haruka hadn't complained because instead she was competing, using an extreme method.

I was the luckiest man alive.

Fastening the hooks of a girl's bikini was an all-new experience for me. Haruka had let me enjoy her breasts to my heart's content that morning, but this was a different kind of excitement.

"Hee-hee… Thanks," she said with a smile—but I was the one who should be thanking her.

As that thought crossed my mind, Mai came walking toward me. She was trying on a white bikini, holding it to her chest the same way Haruka had.

She shyly turned her back to me.

"Yuuma…will you also do mine…please?"

"O-okay…"

She must have seen what Haruka had done and figured that, as my girlfriend, she had to do the same thing.

Was I grateful or what?

Touching Mai's smooth back, I firmly fastened the hooks in place.

Meanwhile, Haruka watched me, her cheeks puffed out and her dissatisfaction evident. She seemed to feel the need to compete with her rival.

I was wondering what she was going to do next when, right in front of me, she began undoing the bikini bottoms she was wearing.

Then she looked up into my eyes, holding out the strings she'd just undone.

"…Yuuma, will you please tie these for me?" she said nervously, offering me the strings.

I couldn't see the part that counted, but her half-undone bikini bottoms were incredibly sexy.

Maybe even sexier than not wearing anything in the first place…

Stunned, I took the strings in hand and carefully tied a butterfly knot.

"I can't believe how dopey you look, Yuuma."

"I can't help it. It's hard to imagine anything in the world that's more fun than this."

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself." Haruka laughed in pure delight when I finished tying the strings.

I was starting to get my hopes up a little that Mai might do the same thing, but she didn't make a move. I guess undoing the strings that held her bikini bottoms in place was too embarrassing for her. Haruka watched on, appearing satisfied that she'd defeated her competition, then went back into the fitting room.

I stared at my hands and thought about how it felt to touch Haruka's back and hips. It was genuinely an amazing experience…

After relishing in those moments for a little while, I lowered my gaze—and noticed something serious.

The curtain to the fitting room that Haruka had just gone into wasn't fully closed. She was standing there with her upper body bare, having taken off her bikini top. I could see everything from where I was.

The second after I realized that, Haruka also removed the last remaining piece of fabric covering her. The secret part of her

body that I couldn’t see no matter how much I craved it was now exposed.

Completely naked, Haruka was as beautiful as a goddess.

I knew I shouldn’t look, but it was so incredible I couldn’t take my eyes off her. Next, she turned her back toward me, and I could see her bottom. It was the cutest thing you could imagine.

And that was when I finally came to my senses and looked away. I may be her boyfriend, but it was too low for a guy to peek while a girl was getting changed.

I went to the men’s section, thinking that I’d keep watching her if I stayed where I was. However, the images I’d just seen were so shocking that it was impossible to get them out of my head…

“—Yuuma? Are you picking out clothes for yourself?”

I was wandering around the men’s clothes when Haruka seemed to appear from nowhere, having changed back into her school uniform. Unaware of what had transpired, she had a smile of pure innocence on her face…

“Y-yeah,” I replied.

“Can I choose something for you, then?”

“Uh, sure…”

Hearing my absent-minded response, Haruka seemed to sense something was off.

“What’s the matter?”

“H-huh? Nothing. Why?”

“You’re clearly acting strange. Did something happen that you can’t tell me?” she said, narrowing her eyes. Her tone sounded like she suspected me of cheating on her.

How should I explain this? Should I try to bluff? Or should I be honest and admit what happened and apologize…?

“We’re in a relationship, so you can’t hide things from me.”

“……”

It was an unforeseen accident. Surely, she wouldn’t kill me over it…

“…Calm down and listen to me. Just a minute ago, when you went into the fitting room? …Well, the curtain wasn’t closed properly…”

“—What?”

Having been suspicious of me cheating on her, Haruka looked stunned by my unexpected reply, but it didn't take long for the gravity of the situation to sink in.

"D-don't tell me…you s-saw me…changing from that swimsuit into my uniform…?"

I nodded silently.

"H-how much did you see…?"

"…Everything…"

"Huh…?!"

Haruka looked like it was the end of the world.

"When you say 'everything'…you mean…?"

"…Sorry…"

That one word appeared to confirm her worst fears, and Haruka's already red face turned a bright shade of crimson all the way to her ears.

"Y-you're the worst!! You think I'll forgive you for something like that?!"

"I couldn't help it. It was an accident."

"I'll kill you, then kill myself!!"

"Calm down. That didn't sound like a joke."

"I'm serious!!"

Distraught, Haruka reached for my neck and attempted to strangle me. I grabbed her hands and tried to get her to stop. I had to find a way to calm her down.

"…Haruka, I'm really sorry. It was an accident, but I know I've committed a terrible crime. Maybe I do deserve the death penalty."

"Exactly. Good-bye."

Her grip around my neck became tighter.

Wasn't she being too quick to judge?

"Um, don't you feel sorry for me, getting killed all of a sudden?"

"*I'm* the one I feel sorry for, having a Peeping Tom watch me undress!!"

"R-right… But are you sure you should just kill a guy who committed a horrible crime like that? What about if you kept him alive and made him atone for his sins?"

"…Like how, for example…?"

"Well…I can't come up with an example right off the bat."

“That means you aren’t really trying to atone…!!”

Teary-eyed, Haruka glared at me with all her might.

I had to do something quickly…

“B-but hey, we’ll see each other naked every day if we get married…!!”

Backed into a corner, I hadn’t expected to say what suddenly came out of my mouth.

Maybe it was the word *married* that worked, but Haruka’s hands went limp.

Now’s my chance!

“Don’t you want to marry me, Haruka?”

“I…I wouldn’t go that far…”

Haruka stared at me, looking like she wanted to say something.

“…You saw every part of my body, so take responsibility and make me your bride, okay? I won’t forgive you if you ditch me for someone else.”

“I know.”

“I only want a monogamous relationship.”

“Of course.”

Thus, Haruka and I ended up promising to get married, and my life was safe for the time being.

★ ★ ★

Our other five dorm mates appeared to have finished choosing their clothes while Haruka and I had been arguing, and from there, we went to the same river we always did. We filled the drum bath and waited for the water to heat up, and it was only then that I realized it was almost four in the afternoon.

Mai and I exchanged a glance and went inside the tent, where we looked into each other’s eyes and said our words of love that came before kissing.

“Yuuma…I love you…”

“I love you, too… I can’t wait any longer…,” I said, internally mocking myself. I mean, honestly—I’d just been talking with Haruka about getting married, and here I was, setting out to kiss Mai.

But this was necessary to save Mai's life, so I had to do my duty.

"Mai, you always look so beautiful…"

"Hee-hee…! It makes me happy to hear you say that… I want to kiss you so badly…"

I put my arms around her slender body. We leaned in and were about to kiss—but just then, Kamiji suddenly barged in.

"Are you two going to start making out again?" she said bluntly, giving us a suspicious look, and I reflexively pulled away from Mai.

"…We don't have anything better to do now, so surely it can't hurt for us to fool around a little, right?"

As I came up with that excuse, I told myself we were in the clear. Kamiji must have overheard our little exchange just a moment ago.

Surely now, she wouldn't think we were just kissing and that there was nothing else going on—

"Hey, I have a question for you. Why do you two kiss every six hours on the dot?"

I'd never expected her to point that out.

Mai and I were clearly rattled, but Kamiji continued talking.

"I saw you kissing at four this morning, and at first, I thought, *Boy, those lovebirds really can't get enough of each other*. But soon after, I noticed something strange. Yesterday, you guys kissed three times: at ten AM, four PM, and ten PM. Today, it was at four in the morning, then in the hallway at ten, and you're about to do it again now at four in the afternoon. You didn't kiss once at any other time. That can't be a coincidence."

"……"

We hadn't expected Kamiji to pressure us with her incredible observational skills, and neither Mai nor I could speak for a few moments.

Now that she mentioned it, I realized how careless we'd been. A kiss every six hours meant we were kissing at the same time each day. I thought that made it nice and easy to remember, but there was also a high risk of having other people notice what we were doing. We should have started kissing at random intervals

once we realized Kamiji was suspicious of whether or not we were really a couple… Though normally, nobody would have noticed something like that…

It probably wouldn't have happened if we'd been kissing once after five hours, then a second time seven hours later. Cursing my bad luck, I tried to rebut Kamiji's arguments.

"Hey, don't be ridiculous. Once every six hours? That's just a coincidence. Why would we do something like that?"

"I don't know, but maybe there's a reason the two of you have to kiss regularly. It would certainly explain why you're usually so distant from each other. Maybe you aren't kissing because you're a couple but just pretending to be a couple because people saw you kissing."

"…It's all in your head. You don't have anything to prove that, do you?"

"No, I don't. But there's also no proof that I'm wrong about this."

"Then we aren't going to get anywhere with this discussion."

"Not necessarily. There's a simple way to prove your claim. All you have to do is refrain from kissing each other for a while. It's almost four PM, the time you have to kiss each other, right? Then if you want to prove me wrong, all you have to do is *not* kiss."

"……"

Mai and I looked at each other. Kamiji was smart, suggesting that as a way to prove her wrong. We were left with no room to argue.

We had no choice but to fess up, so we decided to tell her the truth.

The three of us left the tent and asked Amano to join us. Then I told them that I could turn into a zombie at will, that Tsukishiro had the zombie virus in her body, and that I was giving her my saliva to stop her from zombifying.

"…I see. That also explains the weird feeling I've had about how unafraid of zombies you are, Kousaka," Kamiji said as she stood with her arms crossed.

"You think I'm unafraid of zombies…?"

"Yeah. You go out there to face those zombies with almost no battle gear when a single bite from them could kill you. I'd think

that normally, you'd wear a full-face helmet and thick gloves to make sure your skin isn't exposed. You could also get spattered by their blood and get infected."

"When you put it like that…"

"But putting that aside for now, let's get to the important question. I want you to answer me honestly, Kousaka. Will a person turn into a zombie if they're infected with the zombie virus you have inside your body?"

"I don't know…"

"Then what about the conditions for infection? Will someone be okay as long as you don't bite them, or will they be infected if your virus enters their body in any way?"

"I don't know that, either…"

"Okay… So even if you don't bite us, there's a possibility we could still get infected and become zombies if we're with you. Like catching a cold."

"I guess…"

"Then it's too risky living in the same building. There's a chance we could get infected from a droplet of saliva or something while speaking to you."

"……"

I hadn't thought of that, but she was right. You *could* catch a cold from someone without kissing them. So far, I'd been occupying the same space as everyone else—eating, talking, and even taking drum baths with them. I'd been too careless.

Kamiji, on the other hand, had maintained a certain distance from everyone else yesterday. She'd been considering the possibility that she might give them the zombie virus if she had it in her body…

I'd started to regret my actions, but then Haruka spoke up.

"I've been living with Yuuma for six days now, and I haven't gotten infected."

"Maybe you've just been lucky. Even if you've been okay so far, there's no guarantee you'll stay that way," Kamiji countered.

She was right. It was over for someone if the zombie virus entered their body. I should have been more careful.

"As you say, I should be quarantined immediately. I'll leave the dorm and live somewhere on my own."

"Huh?! Yuuma, are you serious?!"

“Of course. I’d never be able to live with myself if someone got infected because they’d been living with me.”

“But we can’t go on without you!”

“I’ll make regular deliveries of food and water, and I’ll live close enough to be able to rush over if something happens.”

“That’s not the issue!”

“Please understand, Haruka. This is to protect you and everyone else.”

“…Yuuma…” She hung her head sadly.

“Besides, it isn’t like we’ll never see each other again. It’ll be okay for us to talk if we keep a certain distance.”

“…But…”

“…Uh, can I interrupt for a minute?” Mai interjected. “Am I right in assuming that I’ll be going with Yuuma?”

…Huh?

“There’s no risk of me being infected from a droplet of his saliva. And besides, we have to kiss every six hours, so it wouldn’t be convenient if we weren’t living together. I’d be in trouble if one of us were fast asleep late at night or early in the morning, and seeing as we can’t use our phones, we couldn’t wake each other up, either.”

“That’s true…,” I conceded. “But there’s the risk of zombies coming to attack us if we live somewhere that doesn’t have a steel fence around it like we do here.”

“Then I’ll try to stay as close to you as possible. I’ll be safe that way, won’t I?”

“……”

“And anyway, I have the zombie virus in my body, so wouldn’t it be pointless if we weren’t quarantined together?”

“You’re right… Shall we live together, then?”

“Yes, please. ♪”

“Wait just a minute!!” Haruka shouted at the top of her lungs. “Then I’m going to live with Yuuma, too!! I have to keep watch over the two of you!!”

“We wouldn’t really be quarantined, then.”

“It’s okay. I don’t feel like I need to quarantine from you anyway.”

“Haruka, it’s not about whether you feel like you need to or not. There’s a risk of you being infected by a droplet of Yuuma’s

saliva.”

“I can’t prove it, but I’ll probably be fine.”

“Where do you get that confidence of yours…?”

“About that,” Ichinose said, having so far remained quiet. “Isn’t the risk of infection considerably lower living with Kousaka? A huge number of zombies attacked our dorm the other day, and their blood splattered all over the place after Kousaka destroyed their heads. We cleaned it up and got rid of the bodies, but no one got infected, and we’re all living as we were before. In other words, I think the zombie virus may be less infectious if it doesn’t enter your body directly.”

“Come to think of it, even when I came out of the shower drenched in zombies’ bodily fluids, I didn’t turn into one of them,” Lisa added.

“But there’s no proof that Ichinose’s hypothesis is correct,” I cut in. “Aren’t you scared?”

“You ask us that, but there’s also the possibility of us getting wiped out after you left us to be quarantined. A horde of zombies could suddenly come attacking in the middle of the night and kill us before we have a chance to come and get you.”

“…True…”

There were risks involved either way…

“—Okay, then I’ll leave the dorm. That should solve things, right?” Kamiji said offhandedly after watching our exchange.

“But…that’s dangerous. *I’m* the one who needs to be quarantined.”

“There are more people here who want to live with you, so it’s only natural that I move out. Besides, I know how to kill zombies now… I hate to trouble you, but I’ll be able to manage if you bring me food supplies every now and then.”

“I can do that…but won’t you reconsider? Zombies break windows and enter through them…”

“They attack at the sound of noise, so I should be okay if I live quietly. Amano and I weren’t attacked while we hid in that home improvement store, remember?”

“That may be so…but what if we separated our living spaces in the dorm? Like, I could limit myself to using only certain areas on the first floor.”

“That would be inconvenient for both of us. Besides, I feel like the whole dorm is already covered in the zombie virus. We don’t know how to disinfect it, either, so I can’t exactly relax living here.”

“…I see…”

Kamiji’s logic made perfect sense, and I had no way to stop her from leaving the dorm. It was probably better for us to continue living together for a little while longer to prove there was no risk of infection and then ask her to come back.

“So, Amano, what do you want to do? Stay in the dorm or come with me?”

Amano’s eyes darted around at Kamiji’s sudden question. After hesitating for a while, she looked down at her feet and gave her answer.

“…I’m sorry. I’m staying in the dorm. I don’t want to keep living in fear of zombies that could come and attack us at any moment.”

★ ★ ★

That settled it. Kamiji would leave us to live on her own.

We quickly finished bathing and went straight back to the dorm, where I walked around the area looking for a building that seemed as safe and close as possible. I found a house that was about a minute away on foot. It was surrounded by other houses on three sides as well as a fence about a meter tall—enough that the average zombie wouldn’t be able to get inside. For the side facing the road, we could park the sedan we’d been using there to make it even more difficult for zombies to get through.

The door was locked, so I broke a window and slipped inside. I checked all the corners and made sure no one was inside the house.

Once I’d finished with the preparations, I showed it to Kamiji and made sure she was happy with the interior.

“Thanks. I couldn’t have asked for anything more.”

“I know you don’t need me to tell you this, but please don’t take unnecessary risks. Let us know if you encounter a zombie. Don’t try to deal with it on your own. We’ll take turns watching your front gate, so as long as you make it to the dorm, we should

have no problem noticing you. And don't hesitate to let me know if you need anything."

"Thanks for everything. I won't accept one-sided charity, so I want you to tell me if there's ever anything I can do for you," Kamiji said in a rather businesslike tone, then went inside the house.

I had already taken her a week's worth of food and water, as well as battery-operated lamps and other necessities. On top of that, I'd also restrained all the zombies in the area, so she should be fine as long as nothing out of the ordinary happened.

After returning to the dorm, I took Amano upstairs to the third floor so I could show her where Kamiji's new home was.

"…I really hope Saya will be okay by herself…," Amano whispered uncertainly as she looked down.

"I'm sorry you had to split up with your friend because of me."

"It's not your fault, Kousaka. We would have turned into zombies if you hadn't rescued us. Saya's acting all cautious now, but I'm sure she'll be back after I live here for a while and show her I haven't turned into a zombie."

"……"

Amano seemed convinced that she'd be okay living here, but no one knew whether or not I might infect them. The only thing I could do at this point was not get too close when I spoke to my dorm mates and pray that nothing would happen.

DAY 7

First thing the next morning, I decided to look for the one thing I most wanted to give Kamiji: a gun. Even the women could kill zombies if they were armed.

That said, it was still going to take a lot more time to clear the roads leading to the police station. As an alternative, I thought I'd go to the police box by the train station. I'd seen a zombie wearing a police uniform in that area when the outbreak first began.

I got into the pickup truck by myself and left the dorm before seven AM. There was a horrendous number of zombies lurking around the train station, and they all reacted to the sound of the engine and approached the truck. I backed up the way I'd come and got out of the truck a short distance away.

While fending off the zombies that came to attack me, I looked for the one in the police uniform, but he was nowhere to be found. Where on earth had he gone?

Dealing with the relentless attacks of the zombies was draining my stamina, so I decided it would be tough to continue my search for an extended period of time and returned to the truck. I gave up on trying to get guns today and headed to the home improvement center, where I picked up the forked pole, wireless speakers, and steel plates, as well as a drum bath. As we'd been infected with the zombie virus, I figured it was better for Mai and me to use a different tub from the others.

After returning to the dorm and kissing Mai, I loaded up the back of the truck with plastic containers and decided to go to the river to fetch water. It was easier to get drinking water now, thanks to the water purifier, but we still had to go to the river

once a day. It hammered into me what a wonderful water system we'd had in our civilized world.

We decided to bathe while we were at it, so we split up into the pickup truck and the minivan and headed out. We asked Kamiji to join us, but she said she didn't need to take a bath every day, so it was just the six of us.

…I was a little worried she might be trying to keep her distance from me.

Once we got to the river, we heated the water in the drum bath, then set up the second one. To conserve gas canisters, we decided to start a fire to heat up the water as much as possible, and it was almost one PM by the time everyone was finished. I really wished there was some way we could shorten the time it took us to bathe…

Still mulling over the issue, I climbed into the pickup truck with Mai, while Haruka and the others got in the minivan, and we all headed back to the dorm.

On the way, we passed the house where Kamiji was living—and noticed something strange. The sedan I'd parked out front to impede zombies was now in a hideous state.

★ ★ ★

Having noticed the sight while driving, I immediately stopped the truck and jumped out. I had Mai move to the minivan with everyone else, then went to see what was going on. The sedan's windows were broken, and the body of the car was covered with scratches. It looked almost like someone had slashed at it with a knife, and the damage was particularly bad around the driver's seat.

Don't tell me a zombie attacked it?

But I didn't think the car would look this bad if your average zombie had gone at it…

It was then that I noticed the living room window had a big hole in it. A zombie must have entered the house, after all…

I dashed to the broken window to look inside, when—

—I locked eyes with the clawed zombie, standing inside the room.

I couldn't believe it, but sure enough, there it was. This was, without question, the same zombie I'd tossed into the river.

Even before my brain could catch up, I started running back the way I came. I opened the door to the minivan and jumped in.

"Get out of here!"

Haruka didn't ask any questions; she just stepped on the gas.

Not a moment later, the clawed zombie came out onto the road, chasing after me. But thanks to Haruka's quick reaction, we were already speeding away from it.

"…Yuuma… Was that…?" Mai asked in a trembling voice, and I nodded slowly.

"Yeah… The clawed zombie we ran into yesterday."

"A clawed zombie? The immortal one you said you pushed into the river…?" Haruka said.

"Yeah. It looks like it followed us."

It was so persistent. Had it run all the way here after climbing out of the river?

"But even if it came after us, how did it get here…? We're at least ten kilometers away from that bridge, and it's hard to imagine it just randomly ended up here…," I muttered.

"…This is just me thinking out loud," Ichinose said, sitting behind me, "but that car that clawed zombie wrecked was the one you ran over it with, right? Maybe its bodily fluids got stuck to the car somewhere, and it used that to find you…"

"Huh?! Is that even possible…?"

But that was the only explanation that made any sense. It also explained why the car had been attacked. It knew we'd been in there.

"If my hypothesis is correct…then that clawed zombie has a certain level of intelligence."

"An intelligent zombie…"

Hearing Ichinose's speculation, I remembered that the zombie's fighting methods had gradually become more and more sophisticated.

"Special-type zombies are capable of thinking."

The clawed zombie had vindictively tracked us down and destroyed the car, then broken into the house where Kamiji was staying so it could find us…?

Then it was my fault Kamiji had been attacked…!!

“…Uh, Kousaka, was Saya in the house?” Amano asked anxiously, sitting in the third row of seats in the minivan.

“I don’t know. I could barely make out what was going on inside.”

The only way to check and see if she was safe was to go back into the house, but there was also the issue of what to do with Haruka and the others. The sedan had several holes in it, so considering that the clawed zombie would be able to tear through the steel fence, it was too risky having them wait at the dorm. Yet on the other hand, having them park somewhere would make them vulnerable to other zombies.

Besides, the clawed zombie had seen this car, so if it was intelligent, it would probably come after the minivan…

“Is there even a way to defeat that clawed zombie…?” I mumbled to no one in particular. It had regenerated after I pushed it off a bridge. Maybe our best option was to give up on going back to the dorm, find Kamiji, then keep running from it…

“—Your bodily fluids inhibit the movement of the zombie virus, right?” Ichinose suddenly asked. “You said the giant zombie you fought before began squirming in pain as soon as it swallowed your arm. What if you tried making that clawed zombie drink your blood? If you crush its head after that, there’s a chance it won’t be able to regenerate.”

“I see… It’s definitely worth trying.”

I hadn’t intentionally made that giant zombie swallow my blood, though. Could I do the same thing to this clawed zombie? It seemed hard just to get close to it…

I wasn’t sure, but Kamiji’s life was in danger.

“I can’t think of anything else we could try. We have to give it a shot.”

My mind made up, I asked Haruka to take a different route back to Kamiji’s house. We pulled up next to the destroyed sedan and I looked around, but there was no sign of the clawed zombie.

I grabbed my metal bat and small knife and got out of the car. I always carried a knife with me to cut hemp rope, but this time it was for cutting myself. My plan was to cut my hand as soon as I saw the clawed zombie and shove it in its mouth.

“First, I’m going to look for Kamiji, so you guys wait here. Haruka, don’t turn off the engine, and take off if you see that clawed zombie.”

And with that, I entered Kamiji’s house.

Had the clawed zombie had a tantrum here? The living room was in terrible shape, but there was no sign of Kamiji or any traces of blood.

“Kamiji! Answer me if you’re here!” I shouted. There was no response, so I immediately went up to the second floor.

I noticed a stepladder had been stretched out horizontally on the balcony on the side of the house facing away from the road. It was about three meters long, and on the other side, I saw the roof of the house next door.

I opened the unlocked door to the balcony, and when I stepped out, my eyes met Kamiji’s; she was crouching on the neighbor’s roof.

“Kamiji! You’re safe!”

“Yeah. I heard the sound of the car being destroyed and made a run for it. It’s a good thing I moved the stepladder I found in the yard to the second floor. What happened to that crazy zombie?”

“I think it went somewhere. Our car is still out front, so I figure it hasn’t come back yet. Now’s our chance to get away in one piece.”

“Okay. I’ll go with you if you’ll hold up the stepladder.”

I lifted the stepladder and fixed it in place against the railing, then Kamiji carefully climbed across. Once she was on the veranda with me, we quickly walked through the house and out onto the road.

The moment Kamiji stepped outside, Haruka and the others cheered from the car.

But I could see the clawed zombie from out of the corner of my eye. It was back, and it was coming after us.

“Kamiji, get in the car and get away from here.”

“What about you?”

“I’m going to destroy it.”

I zombified, turned my back to the car, and held up my bat. I was going to protect Haruka and the others if it was the last thing I did.

The clawed zombie glared at me with its cloudy eyes and pounced. It delivered blow after blow in rapid succession, attacking me with blinding speed. Somehow, it seemed faster than when I'd fought it the day before.

I was going to make it drink my blood, but I couldn't rush it. First, I had to break its claws so I could get in closer.

Our car had taken off, so I didn't have a specific time limit. I gradually backed away, dodged its strikes, and carefully observed its attack patterns to see if it had any quirks I could use to my advantage.

After a little while, I realized that it stopped for a fraction of a second when it reached out to move from one strike to the next. As my eyes gradually adjusted to the speed of its onslaught, I swung the bat and smashed its claws from the side.

With a grating metallic sound, four claws on the left hand were sheared off. My hunch had been right: It seemed vulnerable to impacts from the side.

Okay, I'll do the same to his right hand… Or so I thought when the clawed zombie suddenly closed in on me and raised its right arm.

With no time to readjust my hold on the bat, I instantly raised my left arm to cover my head, and the zombie slashed at me. My left hand disappeared from the wrist down and blood dripped from where it had been severed.

Those claws are so sharp! I should have avoided fighting the monster head-on…!!

Regretting my decision, I turned around and run.

Naturally, the clawed zombie came right after me, but that wasn't a problem. I ran into the yard of a house and hopped up onto the meter-tall fence. Then timing it just right, I jumped off the fence and swung the bat as hard as I could at the zombie's head as it came toward me.

Bull's-eye! I made contact with the front part of its head. I pushed it down and stepped on its right arm and, at the same time, thrust my left arm toward its mouth, which hung open.

"You saved me the trouble of cutting myself by slicing off my arm!" I yelled triumphantly.

But just then, my world began to tilt.

My body was slanting to the right. I tried to steady myself, but for some reason, I couldn't stop my fall. It took me a moment to understand what was happening, but when I fell on the asphalt, I realized the zombie had severed my right leg around my calf.

A second later, I saw the claws I'd broken earlier back on its left hand. It had already regenerated and attacked my right leg.

I sensed the clawed zombie trying to do further damage and jumped out of the way with my one remaining leg.

This…was pretty bad.

Now that it had cut off my right leg, I could no longer attack quickly. I was also able to regenerate, but I needed to attach the severed body parts to where they'd been cut off, and I couldn't afford to do that while dealing with the clawed zombie. What's more, I'd distanced myself from my severed right leg when I jumped away, and to grab it, I'd have to get past this guy.

I tried to think quickly as I stood there on one leg, but right before my eyes, the zombie raised both of its arms. I had no way of stopping a simultaneous attack from the left and right.

Am I really going to die here and leave Haruka and the others behind…?!

Mai would become a zombie if I died, and the other five would have no way to survive when the food ran out.

I can't let myself die here…!!

I began swinging the bat around and retreated, crawling. The clawed zombie wasn't the least bit affected by my feeble attempts to hurt it. It swatted the bat away with its left arm, then raised its right high into the sky.

I'm done for—

"—Hyaaaaaah!!"

Haruka's shout echoed around me. Instead of fleeing in the car, she'd come running toward us. The next moment, she struck out with the forked pole, catching the zombie in the back of the head and staggering it.

Then someone else hit the zombie from behind and forced it down to the ground.

"Kamiji?!"

What were they doing here? A second later, the zombie sent Kamiji flying, pushed back Haruka's pole, and got back up.

I made my next attack faster than I could think, swinging my bat at the zombie's legs. I hit it where I'd aimed, but because my footing wasn't stable, the strike wasn't powerful enough to knock it down.

Once again, the clawed zombie raised both arms high in the air. I hadn't been able to take advantage of the opportunity that Haruka and Kamiji had created for me to defeat it—

"Graaahh…!!"

—but just as I was about to give up, the clawed zombie began roaring in agony.

It stopped attacking me and furiously scratched at its own body. I didn't know what was going on, but I couldn't let this opportunity pass me by. I leaped off my one remaining leg and plunged my left wrist into the zombie's mouth.

The clawed zombie glared at me with a pained look, then flailed with all its might, trying to shake me loose. There was no way was I going to let go. I wrapped my right arm around it and poured as much of my blood into its mouth as I could.

The zombie's pain seemed to worsen, and I felt its power start to weaken.

I put everything I had into knocking it down, pulled my left arm back out of its mouth, and swung the bat at its head.

★ ★ ★

I had smashed the clawed zombie's head to pieces, but I couldn't let my guard down just yet. The first thing I had to do was crush the claws on both its hands.

"—Here, Yuuma."

Haruka offered me my left arm and right leg. It was nice of her to pick them up and bring them over to me, except her hands were getting covered in my blood.

"Thanks, Haruka, but be careful you don't get infected."

I took my arm and leg and firmly pushed them back where they belonged, and they reattached to my body. Those regenerative abilities were as amazing as always.

I quickly stood up, grabbed my bat, and began pulverizing the zombie's claws. Then I tied up the monster's hands and feet. Now even if its head was restored, it wouldn't be able to fight back.

“We can leave the zombie tied up and keep watch over it to make sure nothing happens. Man, the two of you really took a huge risk—”

“Yuuma!! I’m so glad you’re okay!!” Haruka jumped me mid-sentence. I guess she’d been holding back her emotions until we were safe.

“It’s all thanks to the two of you. I don’t know what would have happened to me if you guys hadn’t come when you did.”

“Kamiji’s the one who came up with that great idea to knock out the zombie.”

“What’d you do?”

“Look, over there.” Haruka pointed to something transparent on the ground.

I picked it up. It was a tiny syringe that fit in the palm of my hand. The syringe itself was see-through, and I could see a small amount of red liquid still left inside it.

“As soon as she got in the car, I told her you were going to make that zombie drink your blood. Then she said it was quicker to use a syringe if you wanted to get your blood into its system.”

“Ah…!!”

I was impressed by Kamiji’s quick thinking, and then I realized something.

“You injected it with my blood when you slammed into it?”

Kamiji, who was sitting on the ground with her back turned to us, gave a small nod.

“Yeah. I had Hyuuga distract it; then I gave it about twenty milliliters of your blood.”

“So that’s why it suddenly started moaning in pain. But how did you get my blood?”

Haruka pointed to my left arm.

“From your arm. I saw it on the ground, and I got it from there. You’d lost an arm, so I didn’t think you’d have time for us to give you the syringe.”

“That’s amazingly gutsy… I think anyone would hesitate to pick up someone’s fallen arm…”

Haruka smiled proudly.

“It’s *your* arm, Yuuma. What is there to hesitate over?”

“I’m surprised you were carrying around a syringe,” I said.

“Actually, it’s a cosmetic syringe for transferring makeup and perfume into another container. Since yesterday, I’ve been killing time by snooping around that new house I was living in. I came across it and went back to get it as soon as I came up with this idea.”

“You really saved me…”

I was about to thank her again when I noticed something.

Kamiji still had her back to us, and for some reason, she was covering her stomach with both hands.

“…Kamiji? Is something wrong…?” I asked carefully, and she slowly turned around.

“—?!”

Haruka and I swallowed.

Kamiji’s stomach was covered in blood.

“That thing stabbed me when it pushed me away.”

“This is serious! We have to tend to that wound right away!”

“Forget it. The cut’s deep…probably all the way to my organs.”

“Huh…?!”

“There are no doctors in this world, so I won’t last much longer,” Kamiji said matter-of-factly, her face contorted in pain.

It didn’t seem real. I couldn’t believe Kamiji was about to die…

Even more blood was pouring out of her body and drenching the asphalt beneath her, and I just stood there in dismay.

“…I’m sorry… If you hadn’t tried to save me…”

“Don’t apologize. I’m grateful to you, Kousaka.”

“You are…?”

“Yeah. When this zombie showed up, I knew right away that it was the immortal one you mentioned. You got out of the minivan but then got back in and drove off when it chased after you, and I thought you were abandoning me. But if I made a sound, that zombie would have found me, and I had no way of telling you that I was on top of the roof… But you came back for me.”

“I only did what anyone would have done…”

“Which is also what I did. If you die, then we’re done for. My luck…just ran out.”

“K-Kamiji…”

I was at a loss for words. Kamiji shifted and lay on her back, and I realized it must be hard for her to remain sitting. She’d die if we left her like this. But what could we do when the world no longer had any hospitals?

The only thing I could do was kill zombies. And even then, I hadn’t been able to defeat that clawed zombie. If only I’d thought of feeding it my blood sooner, or restrained it yesterday, or never come across it in the first place…

Kamiji was about to die because of me. That was an indisputable fact.

…But wait. Was it really too late? Wasn’t it too soon to give up…?

“…Kamiji, there’s a slim chance I might be able to save you.”

“…Don’t tell me you’re going to operate on me? I was stabbed in the guts. An amateur could never stitch up my organs.”

“No… It’s not that…”

I sat up straight, looked her in the eye, and made my suggestion.

“—You can become a zombie, too.”

“…Huh?”

“Since I became a zombie, I’ve found that any wounds I get heal quickly. So if you become a zombie, too, then you might not die.”

“What the hell are you saying…? Even if do survive, there’s no point in living if I turn into a monster without a will of my own.”

“You’re right. That’s why *I’ll* turn you into a zombie. That way, you might become a zombie without losing your consciousness, just like I did. Of course, I’ve never done this before, so I don’t know what will happen. Maybe you’ll lose your senses like those other zombies out there, or you might not even become a zombie. But you’ll die for sure if we don’t do anything, so—”

“—It’s worth a try?”

“Yeah.”

“Hah…” Kamiji sighed and looked up into the air.

“Besides, even if you become a zombie and lose your senses, you’ll still be alive,” I told her. “We could find a way to turn

zombies back into humans someday, and then you'd be able to go back to living your life."

"…Right. So I have a chance of surviving either way? …Okay, I'll take that bet."

"Thank you."

"I don't know why you're thanking me."

"This means you believe me."

Kamiji smiled weakly.

"So how are you going to turn me into a zombie? Bite me?"

"Either that…or I can give you my saliva or blood to drink…"

"Of all those, giving me your saliva mouth-to-mouth seems like the best option."

"Then that's what we'll do. That said, I have no idea how much we'll need or how long it might take for you to turn into a zombie, so we can start with a little at a time and—"

"Forget the details and get on with it. It'd be stupid if I bled out before I could turn into a zombie," she said, interrupting me mid-sentence.

Perhaps she was getting pretty close to her limit.

"…All right. Here goes…"

As Kamiji lay there on the ground, I moved closer and pressed my lips against hers.

First, I gave her about the same amount of saliva I usually gave Mai and watched how she reacted.

Less than a minute later, Kamiji jumped up with a surprised look on her face and rolled up her bloody T-shirt.

"…I don't believe it… I'm really healed…"

Her exposed belly was stained with blood, but the bleeding had stopped completely and there wasn't a scratch on her.

"Kousaka, your saliva is incredible…"

"Don't let your guard down, though. You're the first person I've turned into a zombie this way, and there's still a lot we don't understand… I think your zombie strength repaired your stomach wound, but we don't know what kind of side effects there may be, so we'll need to monitor you for a while."

"Okay… But at least I'm not going to die straight away. This is the second time you've saved my life," she said, her expression softening.

It was only then, seeing Kamiji smile, that I realized the battle had come to an end.

★ ★ ★

After that, we met back up with Mai and the others, who were waiting for us in the minivan, then safely returned to the dorm.

I couldn’t afford to take my eyes off the clawed zombie, so I carried its corpse when we moved it. About twenty minutes had passed since I’d crushed its head, and it hadn’t shown any signs of reviving so far. Still, it was too soon to relax. There was always the possibility it would regenerate in a few hours and cut its way loose.



I placed the corpse in the courtyard, set up a wooden table, two chairs, and a large number of battery-operated lights next to it, deciding I'd keep an eye on it at least until the morning. I also needed Kamiji to stay there with me so I could monitor her progress and see if she turned into a zombie. We had no choice but to eat dinner right next to the corpse.

Once Kamiji and I were alone in the courtyard, I asked her a question that had been on my mind.

"…So can we assume that as of today you're living here at the dorm again?"

She nodded awkwardly.

"I already have the zombie virus in my body, so it doesn't make sense to live someplace else. I've only been away for a little while, but I'd appreciate it if you'd let me live here with you guys again."

"I'm glad to hear that. I look forward to being dorm mates with you again."

"Sorry for all the trouble I've caused you."

"Not at all… It's my fault for lying to you in the first place. And hey, I couldn't have beaten the clawed zombie if you hadn't found that syringe in the house you moved into."

"That was a good move if I do say so myself. Maybe a syringe is the most powerful weapon in this world," she said and laughed out loud.

Although our lives had been in danger, we'd learned a lot in this recent battle—especially the fact that I now knew an injection of my blood could make special-type zombies powerless.

I decided I'd look for some different types of syringes the following day.

"I wonder what would happen if we injected your blood into a normal zombie? If it can kill them, we might be able to use it as a weapon."

"Oh yeah…"

I picked up the syringe to experiment.

After I'd put the clawed zombie corpse on a blue tarp, I dragged it out of the dorm grounds. A short distance away, I had a female high school student zombie tied up against a telegraph pole. Even with its neck fixed to the pole, it tried to bite me when I approached it.

The female zombie had been there for more than five days, but it was still ferocious. I slipped behind it, stuck the syringe into the back of its neck, and injected it with my blood. It immediately calmed down before my very eyes. The zombie's expression became docile; then it closed its eyes and stopped moving.

"This…is what happened with Haruka's dad…"

It was only then that I remembered. When I'd tried to soothe Haruka's dad, I had intentionally made him bite my right arm, causing blood to spurt out.

He must have drunk my blood. Was that why he'd lost consciousness…?

With my blood, we could make zombies immobile. Injecting them with blood was easier than tying them up with ropes, and we didn't have to worry about them getting loose. Maybe we could attach syringes to the tips of arrows and shoot them at zombies. That way, even Mai and the others could defeat them…!

The question was how long they'd stay unconscious. To find out, I decided to go to Haruka's house the next day and see how her dad was doing.

DAY 8

Kamiji and I spent the night in the courtyard and watched the headless, clawed zombie until six AM the next morning, but there was no change.

About seventeen hours had passed since our battle, so I figured it probably wouldn't revive. To make sure nothing happened, I wrapped a rope around and around its body, dug a hole in the ground, and buried it. I also put a steel plate over the grave to reduce the risk of it crawling out as best I could.

After putting away the tools I'd used to bury it, I decided to go to the cafeteria and have breakfast. I was feeling dizzy because I hadn't slept a wink, but I couldn't afford to collapse now…

I sat at a table and watched in a daze as Haruka and the others prepared breakfast.

But suddenly, I noticed Kamiji seemed to be acting a little strange.

"…Kamiji, are you feeling okay?"

"Actually, I've been having chills for a while now," Kamiji resignedly told me.

"What?!"

"I guess it's probably not because I caught a cold staying outside all night… Am I turning into a zombie?"

At that moment, all my drowsiness left me. I immediately got up and touched her hand. Her temperature had dropped below what was normal for a human.

"Why didn't you say something earlier?!"

"I thought I might have been imagining it…"

"Of course you weren't imagining it. Listen, I'm going to kiss you, okay?"

"Okay…"

Kamiji nodded shyly, and I pressed my lips against hers, giving her my saliva. After I'd finished, I continued to hold her hand and felt her body temperature gradually rise. She seemed to have avoided turning into a zombie.

"From now on, you have to tell me right away if you feel any changes to your body. Otherwise, it might be too late."

"Okay. I'm sorry. It's my first time almost becoming a zombie, so I didn't know what to expect," she mumbled as she averted her gaze. Was she really so embarrassed about kissing me?

…Come to think of it, I guess it *was* pretty uncomfortable French-kissing in front of everyone. I'd done it with Mai too many times to count that I'd become numb to it.

But one wrong move and Kamiji could've turned into a zombie. This certainly wasn't the time for her to be shy.

"It's been about seventeen hours since I last kissed you. Even though I'm the one who made you a zombie with my saliva, it seems that needs to be replenished periodically."

I'd thought that I could even save people who were fatally wounded with my kiss, but it wasn't all good, after all.

Then Ichinose, who was sitting at the next table, came up to me.

"This is only a hypothesis, but I'm wondering if you might have two types of viruses in you: the zombie virus and an anti-zombie virus. The two viruses continue to multiply in your body, and by kissing Kamiji, you've given her both. Like that, she can become invincible, healing any injury she may sustain, while also maintaining her usual state of mind.

"However, the zombie virus alone may be continuing to multiply inside her. Kousaka, if the antivirus can only replicate in your body…then maybe once the amount of zombie virus in her body exceeds the antivirus, Kamiji starts to zombify."

"So you're saying that if I don't kiss Kousaka regularly and take the antivirus into my body, I'll end up just like the rest of them?" Kamiji asked.

"Uh-huh. I assume the same logic is behind Tsukishiro's need for replenishment every six hours, although the zombie virus may multiply at different speeds depending on the individual."

Hearing Ichinose's hypothesis, Kamiji silently stared at me.

In short, I was going to have to kiss her regularly, too.

Which meant Haruka would get more and more annoyed…

“Hnnngh… Can’t you kill the zombie virus in Tsukishiro and Kamiji’s bodies…?” Haruka asked Ichinose through clenched teeth.

“…This is also just a hypothesis, but if we could somehow extract just the antivirus from Kousaka’s body, culture it, and administer it to Tsukishiro and Kamiji, it may be possible to eradicate the zombie virus.”

“Exactly how would we do that?!”

“We’d need, at the very least, a research facility to study the virus and people who have the know-how to do something like that. But I don’t know if either of those still exist in this world…”

“But, Ichinose, you said before that you thought a large-scale human experiment may have created the zombies. If that’s the case, then wouldn’t the organization that spread the virus have a lab and researchers working on it?”

“Of course, that is a possibility. However, if such researchers exist, they thought nothing of sacrificing a huge number of people to achieve their goals. I think it’s unlikely they would be friendly, and I can’t imagine they’d listen to our request…”

“True…,” Haruka said dejectedly.

But Kamiji, who’d been listening quietly, tilted her head quizzically.

“What’s this about a large-scale human experiment?”

Ichinose spread a map on the table and started explaining it from the beginning.

“Amano and Kamiji, can you tell me what time and where you first encountered the zombies?”

“Well, it was around ten in the morning. I was in a class at college,” Kamiji said, pointing to the location of her school on the map.

Ichinose put a ruler on the map and began measuring the distance.

Having finished her calculations, she said excitedly, “Your university is quite a long way away from both our high school and Kousaka’s. Yet zombies appeared there at around the same time. That doesn’t make sense. I left this out the last time I explained it, but it would make sense that our two high schools were attacked at about the same time if a mass outbreak of

zombies occurred somewhere in between them. But now looking at the location of these *three* schools on the map, the only assumption we can make is that the zombie attacks occurred simultaneously, which increases the likelihood that some nefarious organization intentionally caused the zombie panic."

After quickly explaining what she believed must have happened, Ichinose continued her theory: that this was a large-scale human experiment to turn everyone in Japan into zombies and find individuals among them who reacted differently from the rest—namely, me.

"…I see. I find your hypothesis quite plausible," Kamiji said, nodding repeatedly. "So our ultimate goal is to find those bastards and beat them up, huh?"

"—Come again?"

Kamiji's conclusion wasn't what we'd expected.

"Uh, I don't think that's exactly what we have in mind at the moment…"

"Why not? Wouldn't you hate them if they really did turn the world upside down like this?"

"Yeah, but our priority is to get supplies and secure the safety of our base…"

"But if some organization went and spread this zombie virus, then they would've set up a secure base of operations for themselves in advance, don't you think? They'd have a huge supply of food and fuel. If we went there and took it all, then we wouldn't have to live hand to mouth like we are now."

"…That's true."

I hadn't even considered that until Kamiji pointed it out.

"But which would be easier, trying to do something like that or building a secure base ourselves…? The enemy's base would probably have defenses installed, so I don't know if we'd be able to take it over…"

"We won't know until we find out for ourselves. Besides, they may come after you, Kousaka. Even if we go to the trouble of building a base, they might destroy it, so we have to go on the offensive, too."

…She had a point.

Attack is the best defense.

“I wonder if there’s any way for us to find out where the enemy’s base is or if they even exist in the first place… Doesn’t it seem impossible for us to find them unless they make contact with us first…?”

“About that, I’m wondering how the enemy generated the zombie panic in the first place. Did they go around stabbing pedestrians with shots of the zombie virus? Or fill a truck with a huge number of zombies and let them loose?”

Kamiji’s questions made me realize something.

“Whatever method they used, there’s a chance someone saw them.”

“Yeah. Those witnesses probably turned into zombies, but there’s a chance one of them might have shot a video of the zombies on their phone.”

“Are you saying that by checking the data on zombies’ cell phones, there’s a chance we could find the person who spread the virus…?”

My mind was swimming, but we were going to reach the truth—I could feel it.

Still, it was going to be incredibly difficult to collect all that information. Did fingerprint and facial recognition work with zombies…?

I brought my phone over to see if it would respond when I was in a zombified state and found that I couldn’t unlock it.

“Most people have their phones locked, and it’s probably tough to trace zombies’ phones to the people who started this… We might have been able to spread their images on social media or something if we still had internet, but that’s not really an option right now…”

“…Maybe whoever is behind this made sure our phones wouldn’t be connected,” Ichinose murmured.

“Huh?! Is that possible?”

“They could have prepared a massive number of devices to disrupt communications, caused system failures through hacking, or destroyed cell towers… Anything’s possible, depending on the number of people working for them.”

“I see… If our hypothesis is correct, it means the killers were very well prepared.”

“But I had an idea while listening to Kamiji,” Ichinose continued. “The zombies’ smartphones probably aren’t the only way for us to obtain images of the culprits. If we collected and analyzed footage from dashcams and security cameras installed in shops, there’s a chance we could find out where those zombies came from.”

“Yeah, you’re right…!!”

If we figured out who the enemy is, found their base of operations, and took over their research facilities, then everything might be resolved. We were finally starting to see a ray of hope in all this mess.

Thus, our next goal was decided.

★ ★ ★

After breakfast, Haruka and I headed to her house. I hadn’t gotten any sleep the night before and was dying to get some rest, but first I wanted to know what my blood was capable of.

We parked in front of her house and carefully opened the front door. I listened closely, but no sounds could be heard from inside. I crept cautiously through the house and entered the bedroom on the first floor.

Haruka’s dad lay on the bed, his eyes closed. The sheets looked exactly the same as when I’d last seen him, so it didn’t seem like he’d stirred.

Six days had already gone by since Haruka’s dad had drunk my blood. Was he going to stay asleep like this forever…?

“It looks like we can immobilize a normal zombie for at least a few days by injecting it with your blood…,” Haruka said.

The mixed emotions going through her mind were evident on her face as she sat up straight at her dad’s bedside. She must be worried that her dad may never wake up again.

“…I’m sure he’ll be fine. If we can take over the bad guys’ research facility, extract the antivirus from my body, and give it to him, he should wake up.”

“Thank you…for saying that…,” Haruka mumbled and stood up.

“Haruka, are you okay…?” I asked.

“Of course. I have faith in you. I’m sure you’ll fix this somehow… It’s just…”

“Just what?”

“No, never mind… By the way, Yuuma, there’s something I want to bring from my room. Will you come upstairs with me?”

“Oh, sure.”

We’d locked the house, but that didn’t mean there weren’t any zombies inside. I took the lead to make sure the coast was clear.

“Thank you. Will you close your eyes a minute so I can get changed?”

“I can wait in the hallway.”

“That’s okay. I trust you.”

No sooner had she said that than Haruka started unbuttoning her shirt.

I quickly turned around and closed my eyes. After hearing the rustling of clothes for a little while, the sound suddenly stopped. Haruka had come around to stand in front of me, but she hadn’t said I could open my eyes yet.

As I wondered what she was up to, she suddenly hugged me. And the next moment—

Something soft pressed against my lips.

I reflexively opened my eyes and saw Haruka before me, her eyes closed.

It took me a second to realize she’d kissed me.

“—Wh-what are you doing?!”

Stunned, I pulled back and saw that Haruka was in her underwear—a cute pink bra and matching panties.

“Sorry, but I couldn’t control myself,” she said shyly, covering her body with her hands.

“You couldn’t *control yourself*…?! You’ll turn into a zombie if my saliva gets in your body…!!”

“But I’ll be okay if you kiss me regularly like you do Tsukishiro and Kamiji.”

“We don’t know that—it works differently for everyone. What if you completely turn into a zombie?”

“Oh, that’s true… But it’s too late now. We’ve already kissed,” she said and smiled mischievously.

“…Haruka, why would you do something so reckless? One wrong step and you could die.”

“…But *you’re* immortal, right, Yuuma?” she said accusingly. “You’ll die like those other zombies if you get your head crushed, won’t you?”

“Y-yeah, but what does that have to do with kissing you?”

“I watched as you almost died fighting that clawed zombie yesterday, and I thought, *No one knows what’ll happen at any moment*. There’s no guarantee that we’ll be alive tomorrow. So I’d regret it if I kept holding back from kissing you.”

“…Haruka…”

“Besides, we’re going to start looking for the base the organization that spread the zombie virus works out of, right? The idea that we have to deal not only with zombies but with humans…is kind of terrifying.”

“Haruka, are you against the idea of taking over the enemy’s base?”

“That’s not it… I think it’s necessary to find out the truth of this world… But it just scares me to think about what will happen if we fail.”

“Even if we find them, it isn’t as if we’re going to attack them without thinking. First, we’ll get an idea of their fighting capabilities, and then we’ll come up with a plan.”

“But what if the enemy makes the first move? Maybe they have the latest equipment, and we won’t stand a chance against them.”

“There *is* that possibility…”

“Every time I watch you leave the dorm, I always think that it might be the last time I’ll ever see you. I’m anxious and scared every moment of the day…and I don’t want to have any regrets…”

Haruka unhooked her bra and revealed her breasts.

Then she continued speaking as she hugged me.

“—Why don’t we make a baby?”

…What an incredible thing to say.

“I’m hopelessly in love with you, Yuuma. I want to be your one and only…”

Seeing Haruka cling to me, I sensed there wasn’t any particular reason for her feelings for me. She just loved me. Period.



She knew she might become a zombie if she ingested my saliva, but even so, she wanted an intimate relationship with me.

I felt the same way about her.

I couldn't push her away and was at a loss for a response when she forced me down on the bed.

Naked from the waist up, she got on top of me.

"…You can have your way with me. If you want, you can remove the last piece of clothing I'm wearing…"

She looked away, her face bright red, as she seduced me.

We can't do this. We have to stop doing something dangerous like this that might infect her with the zombie virus—

But I wrapped my arms around her body.

Maybe it was because I'd been up all night and felt dazed, but I thought I'd take her up on her offer.

To be honest, I didn't want to die a virgin, either…

Swept up in the mood, I stopped thinking and tightly hugged Haruka's slim body.

AFTERWORD

I couldn't mention this in the afterword for Volume 1, since too much had been undecided, but a promotional video was created for *I'm the Strongest in This Zombie World, but I Can't Beat This Girl!* I'm touched beyond words that Kaede Hondo, my favorite voice actress, appears in the video. The scenes where zombies attack her are super scary, the cute lines are all fantastic, and I love the really cool way the title is read at the end. But that's not all. Afterward, Kaede Hondo talked about recording the PV during a radio show and having my favorite celebrity talk about me on-air was such an incredible experience. I'm so glad I've worked hard and made it here…!!

Getting back on track, you can watch the PV on YouTube. Just search, *I'm the Strongest in This Zombie World, but I Can't Beat This Girl!* to check it out.

Anyway, hi, I'm Ryou Iwanami, the author. Thanks to the strong sales we achieved for the first volume, we were able to publish this second volume. Thank you all so much.

Incidentally, I started working at a game company the year before last, but it's been way too hard to have a day job and also write light novels, and I've decided it's something nobody should do. I didn't have a specific deadline for Volume 1, so it was fine then, but Volume 2 has been a bit of a nightmare, since we wanted to deliver it to all you readers as soon as possible.

During those tough times, the great feedback I received from everyone on social media was what kept me going. I received a lot of comments that said things like, "The heroine was cute" and "It's a great blend of zombies and romcom," which did wonders motivating me to write.

I'll continue ego surfing and would be very happy if you could tweet me your impressions. It would help if you could include the book title somewhere so I can find them easily. Oh, and by the way, I quit the game company last month.

Now for some acknowledgments. Once again, I would like to thank TwinBox for the beautiful illustrations. Each and every picture is truly amazing, and I can't thank them enough.

In addition, they have created three color illustrations for B2-size wall hangings, which are available to purchase. These are:

- Hyuuga covering her body with a towel for Melonbooks.
- Tsukishiro while she's getting changed for Toranoana.
- Hoshimiya in a research facility wearing nothing but a white lab coat for Gamers.

These wall hangings may already be sold out, but I really hope you look them up to check out the fantastic illustrations. They're really sexy and awesome.

Finally, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to all you readers who've read this far. Thank you very much!!

Ryou Iwanami
April 2023

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