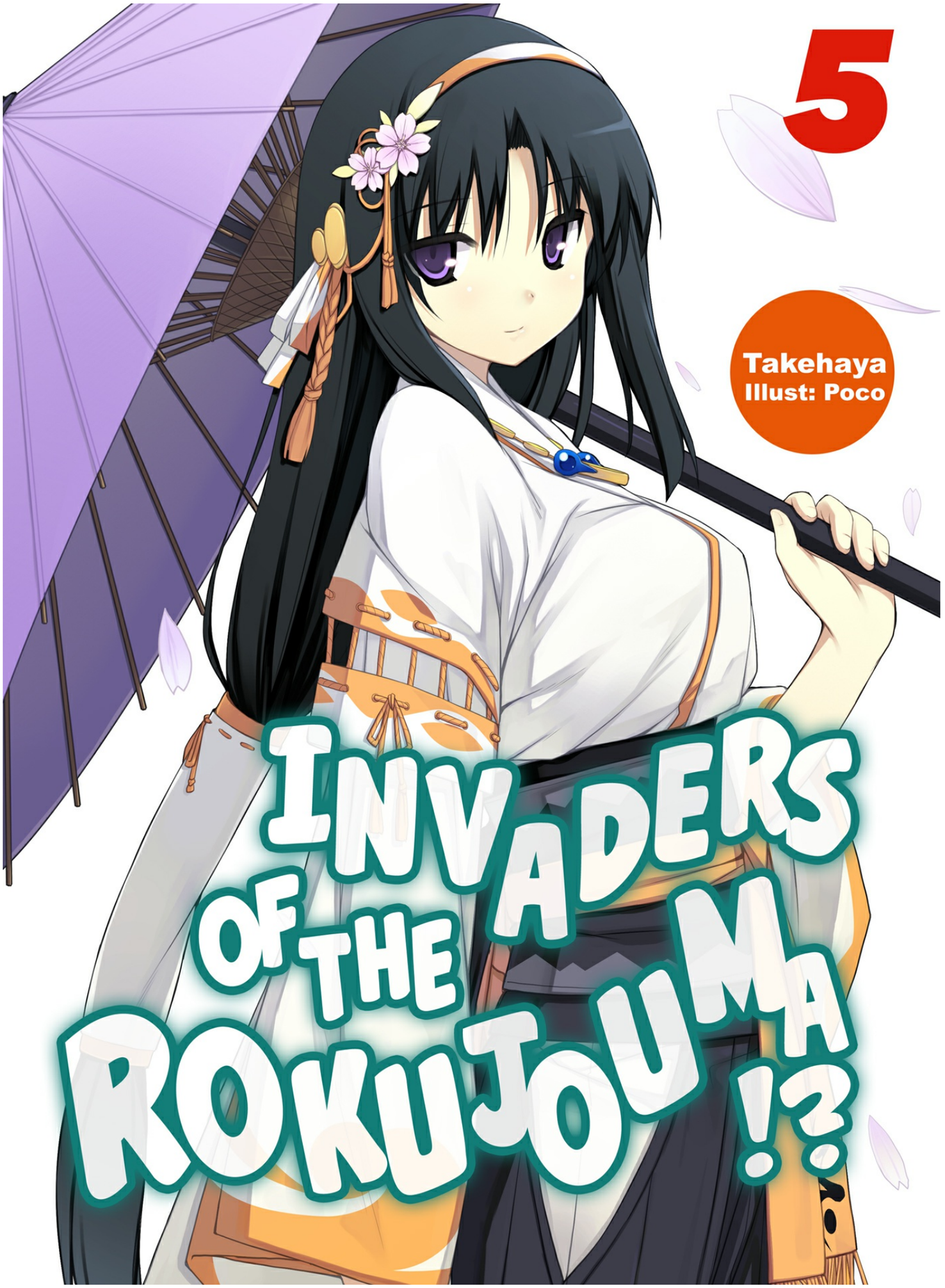

5
Takehaya
Illust: Poco
INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUMA!?


INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUMA!? 5
KAMAKI
M-MAKI-CHAN?!


AFTER DARK DAYS OF MISFORTUNE,
MAGICAL GIRL YURIKA'S
TIME TO SHINE HAS FINALLY COME!


"DO YOU THINK YOU CAN STILL FIGHT ME WHILE PROTECTING THIS GIRL?!"
MAKI THRUST HER STAFF AT HARUMI.



Table of Contents

Monday, November 16th

Yurika's Grand Plan

Tuesday, November 17th

Yurika's Enemy Has Come!

Tuesday, November 17th

Misunderstanding and Being Misunderstood

Wednesday, November 18th

Yurika vs. Maki

Wednesday, November 18th

Sunshine and Rainbows

Wednesday, November 18th

Fighting and Magic

Sunday, November 29th

Magical Girl Rainbow Yurika

Afterword

THE CORONA HOUSE CREW

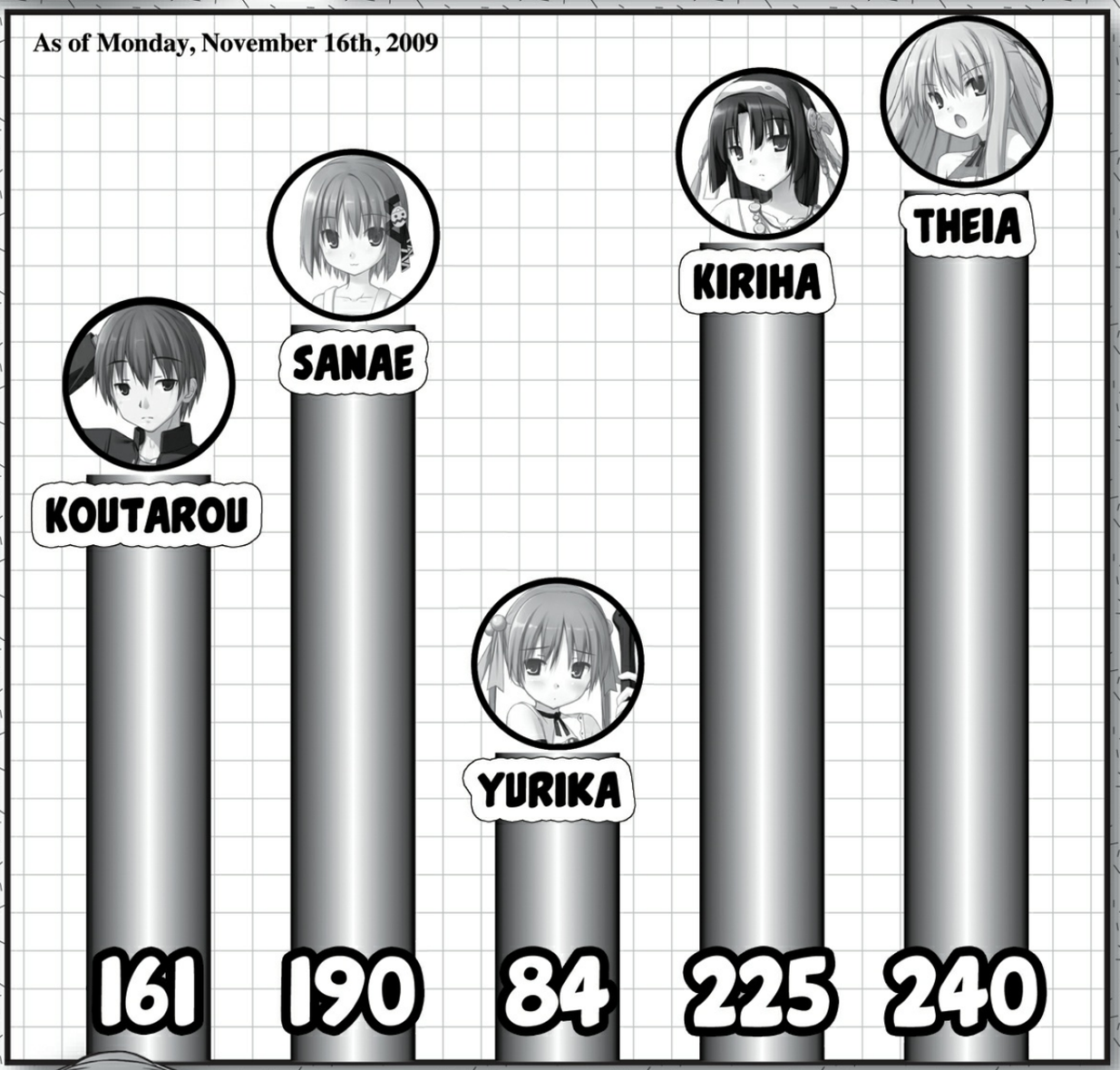



HIGASHIHONGAN SANAE
A ghost with an attachment to Corona House room 106. She's planning on monopolizing it for herself.
Ghost
KURANO KIRIHA
An underground dweller seeking control of room 106 so she can use it as a base for a surface invasion.
Underground Dweller
THEIAMILLIS GRE FORTHORTHE
An alien princess trying to take over 106 as part of a test to succeed the throne.
Aliens
RUTHKANIA NYE PARDOMSHIHA
Theia's retainer and assistant.
NIJINO YURIKA
A self-proclaimed magical girl who believes room 106 is in danger.
Cosplayer?

At a glance

Room 106 Power Distribution Graph

As of Monday, November 16th, 2009





HOW TO READ THE GRAPH!

One point equals one centimeter of tatami.
Each player starts with 180 points,
one tatami mat's worth.
Altogether, there is a total of 900 available points
(or five whole tatami mats).
One tatami is reserved for furniture.

The first person to collect all 900 points gains control of room 106.

Yurika's Grand Plan

Monday, November 16th

"Nijino-san, u-um..." Harumi mustered all of her courage to say.

"What is it?" Yurika asked, oblivious to how Harumi was feeling. She simply looked back at her across the table with her usual carefree expression, all while sipping on her orange juice through a straw.

"A-Actually, there's something I want to ask you..."

Quite some time passed before Harumi could bring herself to say those words. Long enough, in fact, that the coffee in front of her had gotten cold. Even though it was in one of the coffee shop's paper cups designed to make it cool quicker, a considerable amount of time had passed.

"Please, ask me anything! I'd do anything for you, Sakuraba-senpai!" Yurika accepted with a smile before she even heard the request.

The two girls became fast friends after they ran together during the sports festival. To Yurika, Harumi was an upperclassman she respected and one of her few friends. Because of that, the thought of refusing her never even entered her mind.

Seeing Yurika like that, Harumi let out a sigh of relief and said, "Thank you, Nijino-san."

"So what is it that you want to ask me?"

"Th-That's..."

But when Yurika asked about the heart of the matter, Harumi began hesitating. Her cheeks turned red and she looked down.

Keep it together, Harumi! If you back down now, nothing will change!

After scolding herself, Harumi looked back up. Her face was still red, but her determination shone through.

“What I want to ask you... is about... Satomi-kun...”

Satomi-kun. The moment she spoke his name, Harumi’s heart began pounding. It was always like that, and it was growing harder and harder to keep it to herself. That’s why she’d come to Yurika.

“Satomi-san? What, did he say something mean to you?!”

The moment Yurika heard Koutarou’s name, the first thing that popped into her mind was his everyday behavior. He wasn’t a bad person, but he had a rough side. And no matter how much she tried, she couldn’t get him to believe in magic. Yurika figured Koutarou had hurt Harumi’s feelings by saying something careless.

“He can be pretty coarse sometimes!”

“N-No, it’s not like that!”

“But you know, Sakuraba-senpai, even though he’s like that, he still has a gentle side to him. So just—”

“That’s not it. I know that Satomi-kun is a good person. That’s why I’m so troubled!”

“...Huh?” Yurika was so astounded at Harumi’s tone of voice that she completely forgot what she was about to say.

“Satomi-kun is good person. He understands the struggles of others. He’s diligent, earnest, and just a bit reckless. But that’s the problem.”

Harumi’s voice returned to its normal, peaceful tone. Hearing that, Yurika took a sip of her orange juice now diluted by melted ice and straightened up in her chair to listen to what Harumi had to say.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Th-That’s... I... I want to get along with Satomi-kun...”

“Get along? But you already get along so well. You’re knitting together every day in the knitting society and everything.”

In Yurika’s eyes, Koutarou and Harumi already got along quite well. Aside from their daily club activities in the knitting society, their performances in

perfect sync with each other during the play at the culture festival had made their connection obvious. To her, the two of them were in a wonderful senior/junior relationship.

“I don’t mean it in that way. I mean it, um, differently...”

Harumi’s cheeks turned even redder and her gaze plummeted down towards the table. She was too embarrassed to look Yurika in the eye. Her clenched hands resting on her knees were trembling. It was a small miracle she’d barely managed to squeeze out those last few words.

“S-So you meant it like that?”

Finally catching on to what Harumi meant based on her behavior, Yurika’s cheeks began turning red as well. The two girls both stared at the table, blushing in silence for a while. However, this time, the silence didn’t last nearly as long as it had the first time around.

I need to keep it together... This won’t do!

Harumi scolded herself again and pushed forward.

“But Satomi-kun is... I’m precious to him, but because of that, he doesn’t want to go any further...”

“Ah, I see... That’s probably true.” Yurika understood what Harumi was saying. “Satomi-san can be mindful of the strangest of things.”

“That’s why I... I want Satomi-kun to treat me more roughly... like he does with you or, um, Theiamillis-san...”

“Like me and Theia-chan?”

Those were perhaps the most unexpected words of all. Yurika would much rather Koutarou treat her the way he did Harumi. She wanted him to be nice to her and respect what she had to say. Really, she just wanted him to believe that she was a magical girl. And yet, despite all that, here Harumi was saying that she wanted to be treated like Yurika. Yurika didn’t get it.

“Y-Yes. So please tell me... What do I have to do to get Satomi-kun to treat me like he treats you or Theiamillis-san?”

At that moment, Harumi was remembering the way Koutarou practiced his

acting with Theia.

If Satomi-kun treated me the same way he treats Theiamillis-san...

Koutarou definitely wasn't gentle with Theia. He had no problems voicing complaints, and at times the two of them would even end up in fist fights. But Harumi knew that Koutarou was only complaining to her or fighting with her because he trusted Theia. Compared to that, Harumi felt like she was being treated like a customer or even a princess. Koutarou was just too careful around her.

"...Maybe I should start by changing my appearance. Theiamillis always looks so energetic, and Nijino-san, you have... cosplay, was it? You're good at that..." Harumi mumbled as she began playing with her long hair. If it came down to it, she was ready to cut it. She was that serious.

"Y-You shouldn't do that! Nothing good will come from being treated like us! Satomi-san is mean and has no problems hitting me on the head!"

"But Satomi-kun has never hit me or been mean to me..."

"And he's never been gentle with me or said I was precious—"

Ah...

Yurika realized something and had to stop herself mid-sentence.

Maybe that's not true... Satomi-san has *been nice to me...*

He still wouldn't relent on the magical girl thing, but he had helped her with the Hercules beetle. And when their manuscripts were rejected, they ate instant noodles together to drown their sorrows. Sure, Yurika had been bullied and done things stupid enough to warrant a bop on the head before. But Koutarou had also been kind to her in his own way. She'd experienced both sides of the coin.

The same is probably true for Theia-chan. In that case...

And with that, Yurika finally realized what Harumi was really getting it.

"I understand, Sakuraba-senpai! I might not be of much use, but you can count on me to help!"

“Th-Thank you, Nijino-san!”

Tears formed in the corners of Harumi’s eyes as Yurika smiled and accepted. Harumi smiled back at her, but Harumi’s smile was so beautiful that Yurika lost her breath.

If Satomi-san saw this, it would probably be a one hit KO...

Yurika couldn’t help feeling like that beautiful smile had been wasted on her.

“Now that I think about it, Satomi-san does tend to tease us when we’re talking or doing something together.”

“I see...”

Harumi was taking notes as she listened to Yurika. She had been lecturing her on Koutarou’s behavior for a while now.

That’s right. Satomi-san isn’t usually the one to start things, is he...?

As she was explaining all this to Harumi, Yurika was also starting to think she was getting a better feel for the kind of person Koutarou was.

“But when it goes too far, he’ll hit me on reflex. Since he’s quick to get into fights, it seems like things often end up that way.”

“He often get into fights with Matsudaira-san as well.”

“I think Mackenzie-san is a special case. Even though it looks like they’re always fighting, they’re still friends. Maybe that’s just how boys are.”

“Maybe something happened between them a long time ago that makes their daily fights pale in comparison.”

“Maybe... But let’s get back to Satomi-san,” Yurika said, returning them to their original topic. What was important right now was figuring out how to help Harumi. “Simply put, I think you should be more selfish, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Selfish?” Harumi asked, blinking repeatedly as if she couldn’t comprehend the word.

“Yes. Compared to me and Theia-chan, you hardly say anything at all to Satomi-san.”

“Hardly say anything? That’s not what I’ve been trying to do...”

“Well, let’s say you’re feeling thirsty.”

Since Harumi wasn’t following, Yurika tried explaining using an example. The ice in the orange juice she was holding crackled as she waited for Harumi to reply.

“All right.”

“What would you normally do, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“Um... I think I’d pour some tea for myself and ask if Satomi-kun would like some too.”

“If it were me or Theia-chan, we wouldn’t serve any tea.”

“Is that so?”

Yurika nodded at the dumbfounded Harumi.

“I’m broke, so I mooch off of Satomi-san. And Theia-chan is a princess... I mean, she’s a high-class lady, so she would tell Satomi-san to pour some tea for her instead.”

“Y-You don’t say?!” Harumi’s eyes shot wide open, revealing her surprise.

“Yeah, so then he’d yell at us to quit messing around.”

“I-I see... That’s good to know.”

Impressed, Harumi continued taking notes. Mooching off of Koutarou or demanding that he pour tea for her were things that had never crossed her mind.

“In my case, I usually start complaining and Satomi-san eventually gives in and shares something to drink with me. In Theia-chan’s case, it turns into a fist fight.”

“I can’t even imagine...” Harumi was shocked at Yurika’s example.

But I can’t be so caught off guard. I need to do the same thing!

She did her best to give herself a pep talk and press on.

“Even if I should be more selfish, Nijino-san, I don’t know how...”

“It’s okay. I’ve read shoujo manga for over ten years. I have already thoroughly researched the topic!”

“Heehee, that’s our Nijino-san!”

A true cosplayer at heart! She really came through for me...

Harumi took a moment to appreciate Yurika in a way she wouldn’t have been too pleased about.

“To start, I think you should invite him on a date,” Yurika suggested.

“A d-date?!” Harumi was practically speechless at the thought.

“Yes! You can be just a little selfish by saying that you want to go somewhere with him. Then you’ll get to go out and do something fun together, and you’ll have a chance to grow even closer! It’s like killing two birds with one stone!” Yurika declared, emphatically planting her hands on the table as she leaned over towards Harumi.

“I-I understand what you mean, but... isn’t it a bit too soon for a d-date?”

Harumi was shy and modest. Receiving the sudden command to ask a boy on a date, she didn’t know what she would do.

“It’s okay. In this case, even a group date will do. We’ll use that as an entry point and gradually turn it into a date for just the two of you!”

At first they could start off with a group date. And as the date went on, the others would wander off or go do something else until it was just the two of them. It was a typical setup in the shoujo manga Yurika adored so much.

“Th-Then, will you come with us, Nijino-san?”

“Of course! Allow me to accompany you, Sakuraba-senpai!”

Yurika agreed to help Harumi with eager confidence and enthusiasm. She’d failed to notice a critical error in her plan.

“Ah, stop spilling it! And don’t make any noise with them!”

“Don’t be unreasonable!”

Koutarou and Theia roared from across the table at each other. It was a

common scene during dinner in room 106. But today was slightly different. Koutarou wasn't holding chopsticks in his hands, but rather several strange metallic tools.

"It's not unreasonable! You were supposed to think of this as an aristocrat's dinner party! How many times do I have to remind you?"

"I don't care what you want to pretend it is; there's no way I can eat properly with dental tools for silverware!

"W-R-O-N-G! That one's exclusively for salad! Why are you trying to use it to eat rice?!"

Koutarou was holding traditional Forthorthian silverware. They were probably Forthorthe's equivalent of a knife and fork, or possibly chopsticks, but the number of utensils and the variation among them confused Koutarou.

"There are so many! There's no way I could remember what each one is for right off the bat!"

"I showed you examples several times over just a moment ago! I'll do it one more time, so make sure you watch! You do it like this! Shee?! Yhou chan eaht jhust fine! Dho you get iht nhow?"

"As if I could get it after just watching you do it, idiot! It's not a one hundred colored pencil set!"

"Who ahre yhou calling ahn idiot?! Thaht'sh noht the prohper whay to tahlk to your masther!"

"Your Highness, it's poor manners to speak with food in your mouth."

Although the cultural festival was over, Koutarou's knight training had continued. He could have refused it, but he agreed when he was told it would help his acting for the second half of "The Silver Princess and the Blue Knight" that would be put on next year. He wanted to get his acting to a level where he wouldn't hold Harumi back.

"Heh, you're getting scolded now."

"Hom nom nom..."

As Koutarou made fun of Theia, she hurriedly chewed up what was left in her

mouth. And as she swallowed it all down, she brought her face closer to Koutarou's.

"It sounds like you really have a death wish, Koutarou."

"Hardly. I'm all set for a long life."

Protruding veins became visible on Theia's forehead, but Koutarou just continued to grin. Neither of them showed any sign of backing down.

"If you want, I could change the script and have you standing on stage buck naked."

"You wouldn't dare do that to your beloved Blue Knight. You might do it if it was just me, but your precious Blue Knight being involved changes everything, doesn't it?"

"Tch, why choose now of all times to be insightful? Curse youuu!"



“Your praise honors me, Princess Theiamillis!”

“Aaaaargh! Why don’t you just try showing me some respect for once?!”

“Hmm... Maybe because it’s my hobby?”

“Don’t ask like I’d know the answer!”

Koutarou and Theia’s argument began heating up. It was common for the two of them to fight, but lately it had started getting more intense.

“What does it matter? Just hurry up and eat, jeez!” Sanae finally interjected.

By clinging on to Koutarou and “possessing” him, Sanae could taste whatever he did. But since Koutarou and Theia were fighting, Sanae had to wait for her dinner. She was anxiously pouting as she waited for the two of them to finish fighting.

“Besides, what’s with this drill? What am I supposed to eat with this?!”

“That’s for breaking the hard shell of a nut from northern Mastir! It’s a tool used for traditional dinners!”

“They’re not even listening... Call me when you’re done, okay?”

Still pouting, Sanae let go of Koutarou and floated away. However, her eyes remained fixed on the food on the table.

“Jeez, I can never really tell if they get along or not...” Sanae continued to complain.

“...”

What Sanae said was enough to make Yurika, who was ignoring the commotion and focusing on the food lined up on the table, look up. Since Koutarou was supposed to be learning how to eat like a noble tonight, Yurika had been invited as a guest. And since she was broke, she ate whenever she got the chance. She was happily gorging herself as Koutarou and Theia argued, but her hands stopped moving when she heard what Sanae had muttered.

“Can’t tell, huh...?”

Pausing from stuffing her face, Yurika stared at Koutarou and Theia, who were still bickering.

“Then bring me this stupid nut! This’ll be a piece of cake!”

“You said it! In that case, I’ll bring it out. Ruth!”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

As the situation developed, Yurika saw no opportunity to intervene.

What I can say, for better or worse, is that there’s no room for me to join in. I can kinda understand how Sakuraba-senpai must feel...

Ever since her discussion with Harumi, Yurika had been taking a closer look at Koutarou and Theia’s relationship. At this point in time, she could clearly understand what had Harumi so worried.

“Something must have happened while we weren’t around that changed their relationship.”

“Kiriha-san?”

When Yurika turned around to look at Kiriha, she found her pouring tea after finishing her dinner.

“What makes you say that?”

“If they really hated each other, they wouldn’t be that stubborn with each other.” Kiriha put down the kettle and smiled wryly. “I might not be able to stand idly by for much longer either. If I’m going to seduce Koutarou, I should hurry.”

“...There might be some truth to that.”

Yurika chose to ignore whether or not Kiriha was being serious, but she understood the sentiment. She felt that it would be for the better if Harumi jumped into action sooner rather than later. If the two of them could just stop being so stubborn, there was no mistaking that they would instantly be much closer. That was all she could think about as she watched on.

“Just how hard is this thing? This nut must be at least as hard as your head.”

“Hmph, you’re all talk. That’s why I said you need to practice.”

Theia carefully reached her hand across the tea table in defiance of the

hostile atmosphere.

Today's game was Jenga. Players pulled out pieces from the bottom of a tower of blocks and placed them back on the very top. If the tower fell over, it counted as a loss. Although the rules were simple, it required a lot more concentration and precision than one might think. That also meant that there was a good deal of strategy involved. Players could intentionally place blocks in a way that made the tower less stable, putting pressure on the next player. That was really why Koutarou had been teasing Theia. He was trying to ruin her focus in the middle of her turn to get her to screw up.

"Theia is probably so thickheaded because she grew up eating these nuts."

"I don't have any problems using this thick head of mine to split your skull, you know— Uwah?!"

In her excitement, Theia had shaken the tower as she pulled out a piece, but luckily it only shook and didn't collapse.

"Phew... That was close."

As Theia wiped the cold sweat off her brow, she set her piece on top of the tower. Because of the way she placed it, the whole thing began leaning.

"Tch..." she sneered.

"Ha, as if I'd just let you have your way," Koutarou jeered.

"All right, then I'm next, Koutarou," said Sanae.

"Yeah."

After Theia's turn was Sanae's. However, Sanae wasn't good at doing complex or precise moves with her Poltergeist powers, so she possessed Koutarou and used his hands instead. She clung to his back with her arms around his neck and began controlling his arm.

"This still feels strange, no matter how many times you do it," he commented.

"This is the power of the mysterious girl, Sanae-chan!"

Koutarou's hands—normally boyish and rough in their movements—were now moving in a delicate and gentle fashion. It was a remarkable difference just

from a different person controlling them. His hands now appeared oddly feminine.

“Hah!”

Sanae swiftly brought Koutarou’s hands towards the tower. Although they seemed feminine now, their motion was dexterous and brisk, fitting of a girl Sanae’s age.

“I’ve been wondering about this for a while, but isn’t getting possessed like that bad for your body?”

“Yurika, don’t just casually say such terrifying things!”

Yurika’s comment disturbed Koutarou, but since Sanae was in control of his body, his hands didn’t so much as tremble.

“But in anime, people always scream when they get possessed by ghosts,” Yurika continued.

“Oh, it’s fine. I have no intention of cursing Koutarou to death,” Sanae said, pulling out her piece and humming to herself.

“Sanae-sama gets along quite well with Satomi-sama, after all,” Ruth added.

“Yeah.”

Sanae smiled at Ruth’s comment. She then made her piece float in the air. It flew up to the top and landed with a clack.

“All right!”

“Sanae, if you can do that, you can do the rest without me, can’t you?” Koutarou asked.

“I can place the pieces just fine, but the problem is pulling them out,” she responded.

“You don’t say...”

“...Yeah, it’s pretty obvious that the two of you get along well enough,” muttered Yurika.

If Sanae-chan wasn’t a ghost, Sakuraba-senpai would probably have one more problem to worry about...

Yurika continued to think about Harumi's dilemma as she watched Koutarou and Sanae.

"There's no need to worry, Yurika."

Seeing Yurika staring at them, Kiriha assumed that she was worried about Koutarou.

"Sanae is showing no sign of doing anything that might harm Koutarou's soul."

"Really?"

It was true that Yurika was worried, but not how Kiriha imagined.

"Karama, Korama."

"Yes! Ho!"

"Reporting! Ho!"

Responding to Kiriha's call, the two haniwas appeared from underneath the tea table.

"Sanae-chan's current form is so stable that she hardly needs to absorb any of Koutarou's energy, ho!"

"Our spiritual energy sensors don't detect any evil spiritual power either, ho!"

"In fact, by doing that, Koutarou is using his mind and body in ways he normally doesn't, so it should even be good for his circulation, ho!"

"I see. Then it's all right."

A normal girl wouldn't have understood what Karama and Korama were saying, but Yurika was a magical girl. She simply nodded and patiently listened to their explanation.

"Koutarou, they're saying you're getting healthier thanks to me."

"Whatever. I was healthy from the start, so I don't really feel it."

"God, you're always like that! Why can't you just be more honest with yourself and say, 'Thanks, Sanae-chan! You're as cute at ever,' huh?!" Sanae demanded, pouting and squeezing Koutarou's neck.

“Ugh, y-you’re hurting more than just my soul now!”

“Hmph, you really aren’t cute at all, Koutarou.”

Koutarou hit a sore spot, causing Sanae to frown and loosen her grip on his neck.

“That was hardly enough to hurt you.”

“Sounds like he’s okay to me.”

“You’re all so mean! I’m gonna prank you in the middle of the night!” Sanae threatened, sticking her tongue out at Kiriha and Yurika for laughing at her.

“Next up is Satomi-sama.”

“Oh, right. I almost forgot.”

Koutarou had been blankly staring at the girls, but he finally remembered that it was his turn when Ruth reminded him.

“I hate slowpokes,” Theia scoffed.

“Frankly, I don’t really care if you hate me or not,” Koutarou replied nonchalantly.

“What?! You’re telling me you don’t need a princess’s love?!”

“That’s right.”

Koutarou dismissively waved his hand at Theia and reached out for the Jenga tower.

“Then who *do* you want to be loved by, Satomi-san?” Yurika asked without warning.

“Whoa!”

Yurika’s question couldn’t have come at a worse time. Koutarou nearly pushed the tower right over. Fortunately, he was able to stop his hand just in time.

“Th-That was close...” Koutarou put his hand on his chest and let out a huge sigh of relief.

“Tch...” Theia unhappily clicked her tongue.

“Who does he want to be loved by? The adorable Sanae-chan, obviously! Right, Koutarou?” Sanae asked, still clinging to his back.

“I’m interested in your answer as well. It will be good to know for future reference,” Kiriha added, curiously turning towards Koutarou.

“Go on then. If it’s not me, then who is it?” Theia demanded.

“...”

Theia was in a somewhat sour mood after Koutarou telling her that he didn’t care if she hated him. But on the other side of the table, Ruth was looking at him with hopeful eyes. Their expectations differed, but all of the girls in room 106 were now staring at Koutarou. Who was he going to choose?

“That’s obvious,” he said. Unlike the girls who were waiting for an answer with rapt anticipation, Koutarou didn’t hesitate for even a moment. “It’s Sakuraba-senpai. If a wonderful and beautiful girl like that said she hated me, I wouldn’t be able to go on living.”

“Whaaaaaaaat?! It’s not me?!” Sanae was devastated.

“...Of course that’s who you’d go for,” Kiriha observed, casually sipping on her tea.

“That woman again?! I won’t stand for you choosing her over me! Take it back immediately!” Theia shouted.

“Of course. He’d even choose a beetle over me...” Ruth said, sulking.

Each of the four girls was disappointed in their own way.

“...Sakuraba-senpai, huh?”

Only Yurika reacted differently.

“How should I put it...? I want her to remember me as a good underclassman.”

“Can’t you just pick me?!”

“I guess that means that a frontal attack is my only recourse...”

“Take it back! I’m more charming than she is!”

“Of course, I knew this would happen...”

This could be a problem. Koutarou wants Sakuraba-senpai to like him, but he’s fine with the current distance between them... I need to do something to get them closer or else this is going to end in heartbreak, just like in my mangas!

While everyone else was getting worked up, Yurika was worrying about Harumi. Koutarou liked Harumi the most, but he didn’t have any intention of furthering their relationship. That was because the extent of his feelings for her was deep respect and gratitude. He didn’t think of himself as a man suitable for Harumi, even though Harumi did.

If something wasn’t done about this misunderstanding, there was a high chance that Koutarou would end up getting together with another girl. That wasn’t unique to shoujo manga. It happened in real life too.

As I thought, a date is the only way! If I go with them and manage to leave the two of them on their own...

Yurika was ready to get Koutarou and Harumi together...

“Just think about it! Take Yurika for example! How could I ever see someone so obsessed with cosplay as a romantic interest? It’s the same way with you guys!”

At least, she was until Koutarou said that.

“Who says I’m obsessed with cosplay?! Jeez, just when I was worrying about you!”

Instead, Yurika now began scheming how to get in the way of Koutarou and Harumi.

Yurika's Enemy Has Come!

Tuesday, November 17th

"I won't allow it! It can't happen! Sakuraba-senpai definitely can't be in a relationship with Satomi-san!"

Even after getting to class the next day, Yurika was still furious. She couldn't forgive Koutarou for making fun of her just as she was trying to figure out a way to help him out.

"He has no problem trampling on other people's feelings!"

Since she had been planning on hooking up Koutarou and Harumi, she didn't particularly care that Koutarou didn't see her as a romantic interest. But she couldn't forgive him for being mean to her when she was trying to do him a favor. What if he treated Harumi that way? What if he didn't believe her when she desperately tried to tell him things? As those thoughts ran through her mind, Yurika could no longer accept the idea of wonderful Harumi going out with stupid Koutarou.

"I can't let such a terrible person date Sakuraba-senpai. I need to come up with a way to get her to give up on him..."

Just yesterday she was determined to do everything in her power to help Harumi with Koutarou, but right now she was dead set on keeping the two of them apart. She'd been scheming ever since she woke up this morning.

"I could bring Sakuraba-senpai with me and show her how mean Koutarou really is with other girls... Or I could set a trap to make him look like a fool..."

This was the magical girl of love and courage, Rainbow Yurika, now meddling in the love affairs of other people. It was the complete opposite of what she was supposed to do, but as she was blinded by rage, she didn't mind whatsoever right now.

“What’s up with Yurika? She’s been like that all morning.”

“Who knows? It’s Yurika we’re talking about...”

Koutarou scratched his head as he watched Yurika from his desk. Sanae, who was floating nearby, was also staring at the overly serious Yurika with a confused look.

Kiriha, Theia, Ruth, and Shizuka also sat in the back of the class near Koutarou. After hearing Koutarou and Sanae’s exchange, they all looked over at Yurika too.

“Koutarou, it’s late November. Winter Comiha must be close,” said Kiriha.

The Comic Heart Network, or Comiha for short, was a massive comic event held twice a year. Not only did cosplayers gather there, it was the biggest cosplay event in the entire country.

“Oh! She must be deciding what to cosplay,” said Koutarou.

“Is that the cosplay festival thing?” asked Theia.

“Yeah. If she’s that serious about it, Yurika-chan must be really into it...” said Shizuka.

“I see. Now that you mention it, I can feel her intensity all the way over here,” added Ruth.

They all nodded in agreement. Kiriha must be on to something. In their minds, Yurika was a hardcore cosplayer. Not to mention her poor grades made it seem unlikely that she was concentrating so hard on studying.

“Is that really it? I can kind of sense something else in her aura...”

However, Sanae had a slightly different opinion. As a ghost, she had the power to read auras, and Yurika’s seemed to be somewhat different from normal.

“Well, she was strange from the start, I guess.”

But Sanae didn’t spend too much time worrying about it. In the end, Yurika was just a cosplayer to her too.

“Kou, what are you talking about?” asked Kenji.

Kenji happened to be walking by with the daily report journal for the class. Since he was on day duty, he had just come back from the faculty office.

“Take a look at that.”

“Is there something wrong with Nijino-san?”

“She’s been making that strained face since this morning, so we were wondering what for.”

“Yeah, now that you mention it...” Kenji nodded after Koutarou explained the situation to him. “She does kinda look like she’s about to pull a knife on someone.”

“Mackenzie, are you speaking from experience?”

“...N-No.” Kenji shook his head vigorously, regretting what he’d just said.

“Liar! You definitely are!”

“I wasn’t! Really!”

As Kenji was shaking his head, Shizuka offered up the going theory.

“Mackenzie-kun’s experiences aside, we suspect that Yurika might be thinking about her next cosplay.”

“No, she’s definitely about to cut someone!”

It didn’t even occur to Koutarou that he might be the intended victim.

“Shut it, Kou! Kasagi-san might be on to something.” Kenji nodded emphatically.

Seeing that, Koutarou was willing to stop teasing Kenji for the moment and get back to the matter at hand.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Well, I’m on day duty today, right? So when I went to the faculty office to get the class journal, there was a girl I’d never seen before with the teacher.”

“A girl? You hit on her, didn’t you? Nothing’s off limits for you, is it, Mackenzie? I’m impressed.”

Koutarou feigned surprise while Kenji’s eyes narrowed behind his glasses.

“Of course not! Why would I do that?”

“Hard to believe those words coming from Mackenzie-kun, the master of love who’s had a girl pull a knife on him before.”

“Let me finish! You just shut up.”

“Yeah, yeah. You keep going. I’m just gonna keep thinking about the girl with the knife.”

Kenji’s angry look had no effect on Koutarou, who shut up but continued to smirk.

“Ugh, I really shouldn’t have let that slip...”

“Come on, Mackenzie. What is it?”

“R-Right. Well, it seems the girl I saw is a transfer student coming to this class.”

“A transfer student?!” everyone gasped in surprise.

“And apparently she knows Nijino-san.”

It seemed the chill November wind was bringing change with it. For the students of class 1-A, that meant a late transfer student.

After being called into the classroom by the teacher, a girl with indigo eyes entered. After hearing she ran in Yurika’s circle, Koutarou had imagined someone loud and unbalanced like Yurika. But in reality, the new transfer student was quiet and looked like she had a good head on her shoulders.

“For a friend of hers, she sure seems different from Yurika.”

“Maybe Yurika has normal friends?”

“I guess that’s possible.”

Koutarou and Sanae could barely believe this girl was a friend of Yurika’s. They just seemed too different. They continued to whisper rude comments to each other, but they stopped to listen when the transfer student bowed to the class.

“Hello, everybody. My name is Aika Maki. It’s nice to meet you all.”

“Maki-san transferred to this school because of family matters. Please welcome her, everyone,” the teacher explained.

After the transfer student—Maki—introduced herself, the classroom was immediately abuzz. To high schoolers, a transfer students was that big of a deal. Naturally, everyone was excited at this unexpected development.

“M-Maki-chan?!”

However, Yurika was the most shaken up of all. Her eyes shot open wide and she stood up so fast her chair went flying backward.

“Wh-Why are you here, Maki-chan?!”

“Long time no see, Yurika-san.”

Maki had a calm smile on her face in stark contrast to Yurika’s surprised expression. The two girls almost looked like complete opposites.

“Right, I almost forgot. You know Yurika-san, don’t you, Maki-san? Can I ask you to look after her, Yurika-san?” asked the teacher.

But Yurika didn’t hear a word of it. Her head was somewhere else. Not only were her eyes wide open, but her jaw was practically on her desk.

You’re surprised, aren’t you, Nijino Yurika? Well, it’s not like I can’t understand how you must feel...

On the outside, Maki was smiling, but on the inside, she was calmly observing Yurika. She was somewhat satisfied that Yurika had reacted just as she had anticipated, but that was as far as things would go according to her plan.

“Maki-chan! Maki-chaaaaan!”

Yurika’s expression utterly transformed. She called Maki’s name as tears filled her eyes and she smiled brightly.

“H-Huh?”

While this new reaction caught Maki off guard, Yurika ran up to the front of the classroom and grabbed her hand.

“Thank you for coming, Maki-chaaaaan!”

“Excuse me?!”

This time, it was Maki's eyes that opened wide in surprise. Yurika clasped Maki's hand and shook it up and down. This wasn't at all what Maki had expected.

"I've been waiting for you! I've been waiting so long for you and the others to come!"

"Waiting for me?! Wh-Why?!"

Maki thought Yurika would be shocked. Appalled, even. Maybe she might even tremble in fear at her arrival. But this... This was bizarre. Yurika was rejoicing and welcoming her with open arms.

"What took you so long? I've suffered through so much waiting for you to get here!"

"Suffered...?"

J-Just what is this girl saying?!

Now Maki was really stumped. Yurika's suffering was supposed to start when she arrived, but instead, Yurika was making it sound like she'd done her some favor. Maki had no idea what was going on. In the midst of Maki's confusion, Yurika turned to the class.

"Satomi-san, Satomi-san! Look! Please look!" Yurika shouted to a boy in the class, waving Maki's hand in the air.

Satomi? It's that boy...

Maki knew who he was. Satomi Koutarou. The boy that lived in room 106.

"What is it, Yurika?" Koutarou calmly responded to the overly excited Yurika.

"They came! They finally came!"

"Who did?"

"The enemy! The evil magical girls are finally here!"

"Wha?!"

In that moment, Maki's heart almost stopped. But it was as Yurika said. Aika Maki was indeed an evil magical girl known as Dark Navy who wielded the power of indigo magic. She was part of the magic organization called Darkness

Rainbow. However, good or evil, it was taboo for a magical girl to reveal her identity. That was because the public discovery of magic's existence wouldn't help either faction. It was the fate of magical girls to fight throughout the ages while hiding in the shadows.

"See? It wasn't a lie, Satomi-san! I told you the enemy would really come!"

S-Stop it, Yurika! If you say any more, we'll—

While Maki was starting to panic, Yurika didn't seem to have any trouble revealing both of them. It was enough to drive any magical girl to despair, not just Maki.

"Good for you, Yurika. Reuniting with an old classmate must feel great."

"So that girl will be wearing an evil magical girl costume?"

"Be nice to her, okay? There aren't that many people who would play along like that with your cosplay hobby."

"Kurano-san, what kind of outfit will Maki-san wear?"

"Since Yurika's is pink-ish, she probably wears something dark. When they stand together, that would contrast nicely."

Even now, the truth betrayed Maki's expectations. Theia, Ruth, Sanae, Shizuka, and Kiriha... Not one of them showed any sign of catching on to either Maki or Yurika's true identity.

"Wh-What is...?"

Maki was slack-jawed at this development. Normally she kept herself composed, but this time she was thoroughly taken aback. Granted, that was a perfectly normal reaction considering the situation. With her identity exposed, she had fully expected to lose everything right then and there. But that wasn't even remotely the case. Yurika had boldly announced her as a magical girl, but nothing whatsoever had changed.

"Oh, she seems pretty proper, but she's a cosplayer too..."

"So there are multiple types of cosplayers, huh?"

"But wouldn't chic colors suit her better?"

“Maybe. She would look better if coordinated with her eye color.”

After Yurika’s outburst, the class began evaluating Maki for themselves. But even as they did, no one said anything about her being a magical girl.

Cosplayer...?

Instead, what they kept saying over and over was “cosplayer.” After straightening out her uniform which had become disheveled in her panic, Maki looked over the class.

“Wait, no, she’s not! You’re all wrong!” Yurika insisted, trying to correct everyone as the discussion was getting away from her.

“Hey, Yurika, is that girl going to join the cosplay society with you?” Koutarou asked casually. He didn’t look or sound like anyone who was aware of the fighting that went down between magical girls.

“No! We’re on the verge of doing battle with each other!”

“I see. They do call Comiha a battlefield, after all...”

Comiha was a massive, three day event with over 300,000 participants. It was so incredibly crowded that it wasn’t uncommon for attendees to liken it to a battlefield. Koutarou, who was still on good terms with the cosplay society, had heard all about it countless times.

“You’re wrong! Wrooong!”

“Cosplay...? Cosplayer...?”

Could it be that Nijino Yurika is recognized as a cosplayer by her classmates? And as her friend, do they just assume I am too?

Maki finally began to process the situation she’d gotten dragged into. At school, Yurika was well known as a cosplayer. It then followed that her friends might be into cosplay too. That was really why no one batted an eye when Yurika declared herself a magical girl, and Maki was protected by the same layer of disbelief.

“She won’t join! Maki-chan isn’t that kind of girl!”

“So you’re forcing her to cosplay with you even though she wouldn’t want to

join the cosclub?”

“No! I keep telling you that’s not it!”

Tears started forming in the corners of Yurika’s eyes as she desperately pleaded with Koutarou. This time, she was dead set on convincing him that she was a magical girl.

“Maki-san,” Koutarou called out to Maki, who was currently lost in thought.

“Y-Yes?!”

As she hadn’t expected anyone would try talking to her, her voice faltered in the moment. Her surprised expression was quite humorous.

“If Yurika causes you any problems, let me know right away.”

“You’re wrong! If anyone’s going to be causing problems, it’s Maki-chan!”

“Yurika, even if you’re old acquaintances, you shouldn’t talk about your friends like that.”

“It’s not like that!”

Ignoring Yurika who was fiercely protesting the matter, Koutarou looked at Maki with an apologetic expression.

“I’m sorry, Maki-san. We’ll make sure to scold her.”

“Waaaaaaah! Nobody is even trying to listen to me!”

In the end, Yurika confessed both of their identities, but nobody was even really listening.

“This is...”

After watching the whole ordeal, Maki reached a conclusion.

I see. So that’s how it is...

Realizing the situation, Maki gritted her teeth, mortified.

I thought she was just a stupid coward, but what a master actor!

By cleverly claiming to be a cosplayer, Yurika was able to hide the truth. That was what Maki concluded. With a reputation as a cosplayer, even if someone saw her transformed, they would just assume it was her in costume. On top of

that, even if she told everyone the truth, it wouldn't be an issue. They would just think it was the background story for her cosplay. She might even be able to get people to help her that way. For example, if Yurika asked people to "find the evil magical girl," they would help look for Maki without suspecting a thing.

What a splendid tactic, Nijino Yurika... If I don't reevaluate you, I might be the one who gets tripped up! To think you were hiding this kind of brilliance... Or maybe she has a mastermind working with her?!

Yurika's apparently flawless plan struck fear into Maki's heart. She never would have imagined that revealing the truth could have the opposite effect.

However, making a fool out of me was a big mistake, Nijino Yurika! I'll make you regret that, no matter what!

Maki grit her teeth even harder. She was under the impression that Yurika was making fun of her. Maki felt a sudden sense of rivalry flare up. She had never felt that way about Yurika before, but this changed everything.

If Yurika was just hiding her identity, there was no need for her to tell the class that Maki was a magical girl too. Yet she had chosen to tell them anyway. The only reason for that would be to torment Maki. Yurika had used the one thing all magical girls should have in common—their secret identities—to mess with Maki. At least, that's how Maki interpreted the situation.

Knowing what I do now, I can't just let her toy with me!

Now with a grasp on the situation(?), Maki regained her composure and smiled.

"No, there's no need to worry. I actually wanted to take up cosplay properly. If there's a cosclub, I would love to join."

"Maki-chan! Wh-What are you...?"

"I'm looking forward to working with you, Yurika-san."

You've gotten good at acting this past half a year or so, Nijino Yurika! But I'll show you soon enough that acting is the only thing you've gotten better at!

Aika Maki, the indigo magical girl Dark Navy. Despite her overwhelming magic prowess and intelligence, she had fallen prey to a simple misunderstanding and

was now more determined to defeat Yurika than ever before.

As the calendar entered the latter half of November, the wind blowing on the rooftop after school grew colder. Just being there was enough to chill you to the bone. However, as she faced off against Maki, Yurika felt that Maki's stare was colder than the autumn wind. Worse still, with just the two of them on the vast roof, it felt even colder.

"What did you want to talk about, Nijino Yurika?"

"Maki-chan, j-just what are you trying to do?" Yurika began, restraining her own unrest.

There was a lot she wanted to ask Maki. Her reason for transferring to Kisshouharukaze High School. Why she said she was going to join the cosclub. And most of all, what any of that had to do with room 106. Yurika had brought Maki to the rooftop because she wanted answers to those questions.

"Do you mean why I transferred to this school? Or something else?"

"Everything."

Maki smiled confidently. However, despite her self-assured smirk, she was analyzing Yurika carefully.

Just by looking at her, she doesn't seem to have changed any during the last half a year, but I feel like something's off. And then there's the cosplaying... Maybe I should investigate a bit more.

"My reason for transferring to this school is obvious, don't you think? You're here, and the boy living in that room with all that mana just happens to go to this school too. Of course I'd try to make contact."

Maki's capital reason for coming to Kisshouharukaze High School was to secure access to room 106. It would be easier for her to enter Koutarou's apartment as his classmate than as a total stranger.

But her second reason was Yurika. Maki wanted to investigate her. The only information she had regarding Yurika was from when she was just a normal middle schooler, plus a short period of time after Yurika had replaced the

previous magical girl in her position. Really, Maki had next to no information regarding the magical girl Rainbow Yurika at all.

“So why didn’t you attack for over half a year?”

“You remember it as well, don’t you? That fight in March? The one where your predecessor Rainbow Nana’s desperate attack incapacitated five of our seven magical girls. It’s taken time for us to recover and train successors. That’s all.”

“Because of Nana-san’s spell back then...”

Rainbow Nana was the magical girl who called herself Rainbow before Yurika. Eight months ago, Nana focused all of her power into a single attack against the evil magical girls during an all-out battle. That spell incapacitated several of the evil magical girls, but in return, Nana was no longer able to fight. And so Nana passed on her duties and her powers to Yurika, who then became Magical Girl Rainbow Yurika.

“Well, it was a big blow for all of us, both our Darkness Rainbow and your Rainbow Heart.”

Rainbow Heart and Darkness Rainbow were the names of the organizations the two girls belonged to. Rainbow Heart was a special taskforce of the magical kingdom’s army. Although everyone in the army was some kind of magic user, their centerpiece was a group of seven magical girls, the strongest of magic users, given the title of Rainbow. Rainbow Nana was one of those seven.

Rainbow Heart was tasked with working for peace and ensuring the proper use of magic across the land. Practically speaking, their mission involved things like fighting demons and capturing people who used magic for selfish means. In contrast, Darkness Rainbow was a secret society that was active behind the scenes of the magical kingdom. Similar to Rainbow Heart, Darkness Rainbow was a group of seven powerful magical girls. However, unlike the girls of Rainbow Heart who mastered all types of magic, the girls of Darkness Rainbow each focused on a single type of magic. Even though it could be a hindrance at times, it was ultimately in service to Darkness Rainbow’s true goal. Really, that goal was nothing more than using magic as they pleased to create a future for themselves through force. And that was why none of them bothered to study

magic that they wouldn't need. Naturally, that put them at odds with Rainbow Heart.

"No, I guess your side might have suffered more. After all, you lost Rainbow Nana who had the power to fend off all seven of us on her own. Even worse, her successor is a complete failure."

"That's not true! I'll carry on Nana-san's mission for her!"

"Maybe you will. At the very least, you've far surpassed your predecessor in terms of craftiness," Maki said, narrowing her eyes. Despite what she said, she didn't really see Yurika as a failure.

"Craftiness?"

However, Yurika didn't know what Maki was talking about. Maki smiled at her, but it was a cold-hearted grin that sent chills down Yurika's spine. Yet the words that left Maki's mouth next made Yurika forget all about that.

"I never thought you'd call yourself a cosplayer to hide your identity..."

"Huh?"

"My hat's off to you. With this method, even if your secret were to be revealed, nobody would believe it. It blows my mind."

Maki wasn't joking or exaggerating. When the two girls were reunited during homeroom, she felt like she was going through some kind of shell shock.

"Y-You're wrong! Th-That's not what I'm trying to do!"

"Don't try to hide it! There's no other reason for you to be in the cosplay society!"

But this was all part of Maki's misunderstanding. She was under the impression Yurika had devised this situation on purpose. The thought that nobody would ever dare to believe Yurika was magical girl in the first place or that Yurika had forcibly been recruited into the cosplay society didn't occur to Maki.

"I've never called myself a cosplayer even—"

"Of course. With that character acting, you've built up an absolute defense.

Even if you transformed at school, nobody would think anything of it. Moreover, by mobilizing the student body, you can make up for your lack of ability. You've really thought this through..."

To Maki, Yurika had turned Kisshouharukaze High School into a well defended fortress. Not only had she come up with a clever way to hide her identity, but by doing so, she had access to peers that could help make up for her lack of skills otherwise. For example, if she used her magic to enhance the abilities of members from a martial arts club, they would turn into frighteningly powerful battle machines. After that, all she had to do was pull the wool over their eyes and send them to do her dirty work.

It's a truly terrifying plan. It's a good thing I saw through it so early...

It was thanks to Yurika making a fool of her in homeroom that Maki had caught on to Yurika's plan(?). If she hadn't uncovered Yurika's cosplay tactics, Maki might have fallen straight into her trap.

"Like I said, that's not what I'm—"

But Yurika was frantically trying to convince Maki otherwise. If she didn't resolve this misunderstanding now, she knew it would only get worse.

"I won't let you have your way that easily."

"I keep telling you that you're wrong! Please, Maki-chan, just listen to what I have to say!"

"I'm also joining the cosclub. Doing that will level the playing field again!"

However, Maki believed she'd noticed a critical flaw in Yurika's seemingly perfect plan(?). If Maki joined the cosplay society, any benefits Yurika received from being a member would also apply to Maki. That would put them on even footing.

"You miscalculated, Rainbow Yurika! Trying to make a fool of me and revealing that you were in the cosclub was a mistake!"

Maki lost her cool, and the fervor she kept hidden deep inside surfaced. She glared at Yurika with fire burning in her eyes.

"You're wrong, Maki-chan! It's just a misunderstanding! I wasn't making fun

of you! And I'm not the one who brought up the cosclub!"

Yurika hadn't laid any plans. She had never called herself a cosplayer, and she certainly hadn't joined the cosplay society of her own free will. The people around her just didn't believe her. And to top it all off, she had no recollection of making fun of Maki. She'd just been happy that Maki had finally arrived. In her head, that gave her proof of her identity as a magical girl.

"Shut up, Yurika! I won't be fooled anymore!"

"Aaaaahhh! Not even Maki-chan believes in me! Why does it always turn out like this?!"

Yurika was at her wit's end. She couldn't help the tears.

Aww, this is just like with Satomi-san!

But despite Yurika's protest, Maki's assumption was perfectly reasonable. No matter the perspective, it looked like Yurika could only have gotten herself into her current situation by her own doing. No one would believe that it had all started with Koutarou and Sanae refusing to believe in magic, and that it had only gotten worse from there.

"But it's not over! I've seen through your plans, haven't I, Nijino Yurika?!"

"It *is* over! I never had any plans to begin with!"

"Of course not. No idiot would just reveal their plans. But there's one thing that's bothering me..."

Maki regained her composure. Although Aika Maki usually appeared calm and collected, she hid intense passion underneath that facade.

"Let me guess! It has nothing to do with what I'm talking about, does it?!" Yurika shouted with fat tears now streaming down her cheeks.

"Did you come up with this plan? Or was it someone else?"

That was important information for Maki. If there was someone devising plans for Yurika, it could make a deadly difference in an otherwise normal battle between magical girls.

"I didn't come up with any plans!"

But to Yurika, that was all nonsense. She didn't have any plans in the first place, so how could anyone have come up with them? Yurika desperately wanted Maki to understand that.

"I see. So you really are working with a mastermind..."

"There's no one like that! Nobody has been thinking up any plans!"

"Heh, don't you worry, Yurika. I won't ask you to reveal your accomplice's identity. That's for me to find out for myself!"

So they're my real opponent... If possible, I'd like to flush them out before I fight it out with Yurika.

Maki's sense of rivalry was stirred up yet again, this time towards someone she had never met. Little did she know that this person didn't even exist.

"That's it... I give up... You don't need to listen to what I have to say..."

Yurika finally broke. It was pointless trying to persuade Maki now. Experience told her that once it had gotten this bad, it was nearly impossible to resolve a misunderstanding like this.

"Indeed. Our talk ends here."

But as Maki finished her sentence, the door to the stairwell leading to the rooftop opened. Someone was approaching.

"Ah, so this is where you were, Nijino-san!"

A lone schoolgirl stepped onto the roof.

"Sakuraba-senpai?!"

It was indeed Harumi who had appeared, and once she spotted Yurika, she smiled and waved as she ran over to her. A twisted grin crept across Maki's lips as she watched this.

"Heed my words, Yurika. Darkness Rainbow is coming to claim the pool of mana in that room."

"Maki-chan!"

Even though Yurika called out to her, Maki turned her back on her and started to walk away. With the arrival of Harumi, she knew they'd be unable to

continue their talk.

“However, you’re at a disadvantage in this match. You have so much to protect. Will you be able to protect it all, I wonder?”

“Wait, Maki-chan!”

“Heh heh...”

Ignoring Yurika, Maki kept walking. She passed by Harumi and vanished through the door leading back inside.

“Hahh... Ahh, hahh... I-I’m sorry, Nijino-san... hahh... D-Did I... hahh... interrupt you and your friend?” Harumi asked, completely out of breath.

“No, you didn’t...”

But even as Yurika shook her head, she was still thinking about Maki. Imagining what was ahead of her, her expression grew dark. But it wasn’t her upcoming battle with Maki she was worried about.

How can I explain it to Maki-chan in a way that she’ll understand...?

Yurika’s chief concern right now was trying to figure out how she could properly explain this complex situation to Maki.

Misunderstanding and Being Misunderstood

Tuesday, November 17th

“...Maki-chan, huh?”

After parting ways with Harumi who wanted to talk about the date, Yurika’s expression once again turned dark as she walked home. Her steps were heavy and she had a gloomy aura about her. Now that she was alone, the reality of the situation finally began sinking in. She’d been able to put it out of her mind while she was so dead set on trying to convince Maki that the whole thing was a giant misunderstanding, but the truth was that Maki’s appearance meant only one thing. Yurika was going to have to fight.

“Fighting, huh...? Can I even do it?”

Not since coming to room 106— No, not since becoming a magical girl had Yurika ever experienced a real battle. Even as a novice magical girl, Yurika simply used her staff and her spells to get away from her opponents, avoiding combat altogether.

And since no enemy with the power to use magic had appeared since she’d come to room 106, she still hadn’t experienced anything worth calling a battle. At most, she’d just used her magic in emergencies. And so although Yurika was a powerful magician, she was still a beginner when it came to fighting.

“But I have to do it! I owe Nana-san for saving my life!”

Yurika raised her head as she made up her mind. Her greatest wish was to repay her savior, and it was that that suppressed her urge to run away.

“Yurika, fight! Yurika, fight!”

Yurika curled her fingers into a fist and pumped it into the air to cheer herself on.

“All right!”

She then slapped her cheeks with both hands, and her expression completely transformed. There was now a brightness in her eyes that hadn't been there moments ago, and she began taking strong, willful steps.

"I can do it! It's my duty as a magical girl to protect room 106!"

Yurika's enemy had finally appeared. Fighting Maki was not only her duty, but her way of repaying the magical girl who'd saved her. She also held a faint hope that Koutarou and the others might come to believe that she could use magic this way. And that was enough. She was overflowing with determination now.

"...Huh?"

As Yurika got close to Corona House, she could hear something.

"Third up, Matsudaira Kenji! I'll be singing! The song is 'Brightness Edge'!"

"As expected, Matsudaira-kun knows all the hit songs."

"Ah, yes, Mackenzie! An excellent choice from a man who's stared down the edge of a knife!"

"Shut it, Kou! Damn, I chose the wrong song..."

They were loud, familiar voices.

"What's going on?"

She could hear Kenji, Shizuka, and Koutarou using a microphone, as well as the voices of several other people in the background. And the closer Yurika got to Corona House, the louder the voices got.

I wonder if everyone from our class has come to room 106?

Based on the number of voices, there were far more people there than usual. It almost sounded like they were having a party.

"Wha?! Are they having a party without me?! Th-That's just unfair!"

A party meant there was free food to be had. And with that thought, Yurika made a mad dash for room 106.

Lured in by the hope of food, Yurika threw open the door to the apartment. She could now clearly hear the lively commotion inside.

“Sixth up, Satomi Koutarou! I’ll be knitting!”

“Beat it, Satomi! What kind of boring skill is that?”

“Wait, that’s unexpected! Satomi-kun, you’re actually knitting. Amazing!”

“Hmph, that’s because I have a good teacher.”

“There’s no reason to try and act so cool about it...”

Just as Yurika had imagined, there was a party going on in room 106. The apartment was small enough as it was, but with this many people inside, there was hardly any room to move. There were also plenty of treats, snacks, and drinks set out. It was everything Yurika could have hoped.

“Oooh, that looks delicious...”

“Hey, you’re finally here, Yurika.”

Koutarou noticed Yurika as she entered the inner room, but she was already reaching out for the fried chicken.

“Hom nom! I’m bhack, Shatomi-shan!” Yurika called, greeting Koutarou as she stuffed her face.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full.”

“Thish chicken ish delishous.”

“That’s not for you, so don’t go eating all of it.”

“Huh?”

Hearing Sanae’s voice, Yurika looked up from the platter of chicken she was feasting on. When she did, she could see Sanae floating over to her from where Koutarou was. There were a lot of people in the way, but that didn’t impede Sanae.

“This many people wouldn’t get together like this for no reason. Look over there.”

Sanae stopped in front of Yurika and pointed at the far wall. There hung a large banner with the words: “Welcome, Aika Maki-san! Class 1-A’s welcome party at Satomi’s place.”

“Oh, you came as well, Yurika-san?”

“Wha?!”

Maki herself was standing right below the banner. She was surrounded by several classmates, but called out to Yurika with a smile.

“M-Maki-chan?!”

“You’re quite late. Did you have some business to attend to?”

Maki had seen Harumi approach as she parted ways with Yurika, so she knew exactly what Yurika was doing. But even so, she was confidently smirking. “Look what I’ve managed while you were out playing.” That was what Maki was really implying, taunting Yurika. The proof was in her superficial smile, not to mention her steely eyes—locked on to Yurika—that said she was anything but happy to see her.

“Wh-What?! Why is Maki-chan here?!”

Yurika was beside herself.

Her mouth hung so agape that the chicken she was eating dropped onto the tea table. Even though she might be scatterbrained, Yurika knew exactly what it meant that Maki was in room 106. She was there to investigate the pool of mana. While it might be hard to do any serious investigating in the middle of a party, some basic snooping would be easy.

“Well, it’s only polite to hold a welcome party for a transfer student.”

“Guests are to be properly welcomed indeed. Koutarou, I’m glad you’re at least picking up a noble’s attitude.”

“Class has nothing to do with this.”

“Ohohoho, there’s no need to be defensive!”

Yurika knew this was the first step to something bad. Nothing said Maki had to finish her investigation tonight. If she got closer to Koutarou, she would have plenty of opportunities.

I let my guard down! This is what she meant when she said it was easy to get in!

Of course, that wasn't Maki's only goal. She was also trying to gather info on Koutarou's relationships and the other residents of room 106. From just this party, Maki could collect all the intelligence she needed to properly invade the apartment. She'd moved more effectively and swiftly than Yurika had anticipated.

"Yurika-chan, I left your favorite for you. Just ask Ruth-san for it later."

"Not good! At this rate, something terrible will happen."

"Yurika-sama?"

But neither Shizuka or Ruth's words reached Yurika's ears as she began to panic. The longer she let Maki stay in room 106, the worse the situation would get. She needed to get Maki out of there as quickly as possible.

"S-Satomi-san! Of course! To Satomi-san!"

Yurika looked around for Koutarou, who was the one who had organized the party. He was also the one who'd suggested the location. The fastest way to chase Maki out of the apartment was to get Koutarou's help. Even if he still refused to believe in magic, he was the only one Yurika could count on.

"Hey, Furuta! Don't strip!"

"But Satomi, if I don't strip, I can't dance naked."

"That's the point! Are you seriously planning on dancing in this packed room and rubbing your dirty junk on people?!"

Koutarou was in the middle of arguing with a classmate who had begun stripping.

"Satomi-san, Satomi-san!"

Because of that, he didn't notice Yurika calling for him. Without any other choice, Yurika moved through the crowd of her classmates and made her way to Koutarou.

"That's rude! It's not dirty! I took a bath just a while ago! Everyone knows you fix yourself up before getting on stage!"

"You've still missed the point!"

“Satomi-san! Please listen to me!” Having gotten closer, Yurika shook Koutarou’s arm, finally getting his attention.

“Hmm? What’s wrong, Yurika?”

“Satomi-san, at this rate, room 106 will be stolen away!”

“Stolen?”

At the moment, Koutarou’s relationship with the invaders wasn’t all that bad. He’d begun understanding that they each had their own legitimate reasons for invading and that they weren’t exactly bad people for what they were trying to do. More honestly, he was building bonds of trust with each of them. That being the case, Koutarou didn’t really feel any immediate sense of danger in regard to his apartment being snatched away.

“But who would steal it? Well, you certainly have lost a good deal of points. You’re at seventy-something now, aren’t you?” Koutarou said, whispering the second half.

Being bad at games, it was true that Yurika had lost a lot of points. She had less than eighty centimeters of space left. Really, Yurika was the one about to have the room stolen from her.

“Y-You’re wrong! I’m not talking about us! A new invader has appeared!”

“A new invader?!”

Hearing that, Koutarou froze.

“That’s right! Maki-chan is after the mana gathered in this room!”

“You’re saying that Maki-san is after this room?”

“That’s right, so you need to chase her out of this room as soon as possible or something terrible will happen!”

“What are you saying—”

Koutarou was about to tell her to stop saying stupid things. But before he could, he realized how serious the expression on her face was. Seeing her desperation, he swallowed his doubts and decided to at least hear her out.

“Okay, Yurika, explain yourself properly. Don’t just suddenly accuse Maki-san

of being an—”

“Now’s my chance!”

With Koutarou not paying attention to his surroundings, his classmate began stripping. He was absolutely determined to dance naked. Naturally, the girls in the room began screaming.

“Number eight, Furuta! I will be dancing!”

“Kyaaaaah!”

“Idiot! Pervert!”

“Whoa, knock it off, Furuta! Don’t strip!” Koutarou barked, breaking his attention away from Yurika again.

“Satomi-san, I’m not done talking yet!”

“S-Sorry, Yurika. H-Hang on... Stop it, Furuta! Don’t take anything else off! There are girls here, you know?”

Koutarou had his hands so full trying to keep his classmate from getting naked that he didn’t have time to listen to Yurika.

“Did something happen?” Shizuka asked.

“What’s wrong, Yurika? Why are you shouting like that?” Sanae inquired too.

“We’ll listen to you instead of Koutarou,” Theia offered.

As if to replace the busy Koutarou, the three girls approached Yurika. Everyone else was distracted by their classmate’s mostly-naked dancing, but the Corona House girls were all too often around Koutarou and weren’t really affected by the sight of a boy in his underwear.

“A-Actually, Maki-chan is an evil magical girl that’s after the mana in this room!”

“Now that I think about it, you said something about that when you first came to this room,” Sanae commented.

Floating up in the air with her arms crossed, she recalled how they met. Yurika had barged into the room by smashing through the window. Then she’d gone on a rant similar to what she was saying now.

“Yes! So you can’t have a welcome party for her! Getting into the room like this is just what she wants!”

Yurika tried her best to explain the situation to the other three girls, but there was no time to spare. If they didn’t do something about Maki right away, there was no way of telling what could happen.

But that won’t work, Nijino Yurika.

Maki watched Yurika with an icy glare, but there was still a fake smile plastered on her face.

That’s because I’m using the same method as you are to protect myself!

She was convinced that all of Yurika’s efforts would be in vain.

“I see. So that’s the setup you’re going with...”

Sanae, who had been turning the matter over in her head, suddenly clapped her hands together and smiled. She was genuinely impressed by Yurika’s ability to create a story and stick to it.

“Huh?!”

“Cosplay is the only thing you’re that dedicated to, isn’t it?”

Sanae nodded repeatedly in apparent approval at the confused Yurika. She was actually offering up rare praise for Yurika.

“Wait a minute! You’re wrong, Sanae-chan!”

“I get it now, Yurika-chan. I’m pretty impressed you’ve been preparing for this for over half a year...”

Next to Sanae, Shizuka was also nodding. She was astounded that Yurika had taken Maki’s transfer into account months ago and had been using it to hype up winter Comiha.

“You’re wrong, both of you! Theia-chan, please say something to Sanae-chan and Shizuka-san!”

Yurika began panicking as both Sanae and Shizuka still somehow managed to completely misunderstand her. Having decided that she couldn’t resolve this on her own, she turned to Theia for help.

“I got it, I got it. You want to keep it at that, right?”

However, fate was cruel. Her remaining lifeline snapped in an instant.

“Th-Theia-chan?”

“But Yurika... We can’t just chase her out of her own welcome party because of your background story.”

“Yeah. Just let it go for today. People will take offense, you know?”

“That’s true. I understand that you’re panicking because Comiha is close, but can’t you just be yourself and celebrate your reunion for now?”

In the end, not a single one of them listened to her.

“This is too much... The three of you are too cruel...” Yurika’s eyes began tearing up. “I’m telling the truth! If we don’t chase Maki-chan out, something terrible really will happen!”

“Come on. She just transferred in...”

“Yurika, can you just let it go for now?”

“It won’t hurt to put cosplaying on the back burner for a bit.”

No matter how much she pleaded, nobody took Yurika seriously. Even though an evil magical girl had finally appeared, nobody recognized her as an enemy. And yet to Yurika, this was an upset serious enough that it threatened her standing as a magical girl.

“Heehee...”

Maki secretly gloated as she watched the tears stream down Yurika’s cheeks.

Serves you right, Yurika. That’s your punishment for making a fool of me.

She wasn’t Yurika’s enemy, but a fellow cosplayer. That difference in perception gave Maki an overwhelming advantage. Her classmates, unaware of the truth, simply treated her as a transfer student and a cosplay friend of Yurika’s. They even held a welcome party for her. And since Koutarou was the only one in their class that lived on his own, room 106 was the ideal party location so that no one had to worry about their family getting in the way.

But really, the straw that broke the camel’s back was that nobody believed

what Yurika said. Since they both appeared to be cosplayers, Yurika trying to kick Maki out just seemed mean. Regardless of what Yurika thought, the real reason she hadn't been pegged for the immature magical girl she was was because everyone was convinced that she was just a cosplayer. If that hadn't been the case, she probably would have been found out long ago. And right now, Maki could say the same. She was protected from the world by the very word "cosplay."

"Why won't you believe me?! I've never told a lie even once!"

Yurika turned away from Theia and the others, tears scattering as she turned.

"Hey!"

"Yurika-chan, where are you going?!"

"Yurika, the party isn't over yet!"

This is just too cruel!

Someday they would believe her. Once the enemy appeared, they would surely understand. Up until now, that was what Yurika had believed. But heartless fate had other things in store. The tears Yurika was shedding now were different than normal. They were real tears, heavy with the weight of bitterness of despair.

"I don't care anymore! I don't care what happens! Even if you're in trouble later, I won't come save you!"

"...Yurika?"

Hearing Yurika's sorrowful voice, Koutarou stopped what he was doing and looked behind him. However, by that point, Yurika had already left the room.

"Ruth-san, what happened with Yurika?"

Clueless as to what he'd missed, Koutarou turned to Ruth. In response, she shook her head and began explaining.

"I don't really understand. Everyone was telling her to go easy on the cosplaying like always, but she suddenly dashed out of the room..."

Concerned, Ruth looked towards the door. Following her gaze, Koutarou did

the same.

Should I really just let her go...?

Getting the sense that something was up, Koutarou wondered if he should follow her.

“I’m free!”

“Whoa! Kou, you idiot! Don’t let go of Furuta!”

“S-Sorry!”

“Kyaaaaaaaah!”

“Noooooooo!”

But because of the continuing commotion in room 106, Koutarou couldn’t go after her.

Harumi and Kiriha met outside the front gate of the hospital.

“Oh? You’re Satomi-kun’s friend... Kurano-san, was it?”

“Yes, my name is Kurano Kiriha. Hello, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Hello, Kurano-san.”

After her regular checkup, Harumi was leaving the hospital at the same time Kiriha was leaving from a different ward. They didn’t bump into each other until they reached the front entrance.

“Were you in for an examination, Sakuraba-senpai?”

Kiriha hid her true colors from everyone but the other invaders and Koutarou, and this was no exception. She greeted Harumi like a proper underclassman.

“Oh, yes, that’s right. It was a routine checkup.”

Harumi flashed a smile, but only for a moment. It soon vanished as she looked back towards the hospital.

“Um... Could it be that you’re sick too, Kurano-san?”

It was worry that something might be wrong with Kiriha that had stolen the smile from her face.

“No.”

However, Kiriha shook her head. Seeing that, Harumi’s expression brightened up again.

“Actually, an acquaintance of mine is hospitalized here.”

“I see...”

Harumi had been relieved to hear that Kiriha wasn’t sick, but now she was worried for Kiriha’s acquaintance instead.

“Heehee... Sakuraba-senpai, it’s just a few bruises from a traffic accident. There’s no need to worry so much.”

“Oh, s-sorry...”

Harumi’s cheeks turned red with embarrassment, but she was relieved to hear it wasn’t anything too serious.

“You’re quite kind, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Th-That’s not... I mean, I have experience with being hospitalized, so I was just a bit anxious...”

Kiriha was smiling and Harumi was blushing. Just looking at them, it was hard to tell who was older.

Several cars passed by Harumi and Kiriha as they walked together down the sidewalk. The road from the hospital to the station was one of the busiest in town.

“Do you get along well with Satomi-kun, Kurano-san?”

“Well, we do get along, but you could also say that we fight a lot.”

They chatted as they walked along, but they ended up speaking in much louder voices than usual because of all the traffic. Mostly, they talked about Koutarou. Since they didn’t have that much in common, the conversation naturally drifted to him.

“Hearing that makes me a little envious.”

“Envious, you say?”

“Yes. I’ve never had a fight with Satomi-kun,” Harumi said with a somewhat sad expression.

Kiriha was amazed.

“Really? It’s been quite a while since Satomi-kun joined the knitting society, so I figured you must have clashed once or twice by now.”

“That’s just it. We haven’t. Satomi-kun respects me and treasures me, but that’s all. He’s never shown me any strong emotions...”

“I see. To think he...”

It seems Koutarou treasures the person he loves the most too much. Unexpectedly, the rest of us might be the ones who get along with him better. No, I suppose that’s not it... Is he just trying to keep Sakuraba Harumi out of our fight?

The other day, Koutarou had stated his interest in Harumi, but apparently he hadn’t revealed the same to her yet. He clearly treated her differently from how he treated the invaders and Kenji. Kiriha figured that was his way of keeping her out of their battle for room 106.

“Would you like to have a fight with Koutarou-kun, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“I don’t mean that I want to fight, but I do wish he would hold back less.”

“I understand how you feel. I wouldn’t want the man I love to hold back either.”

And Sakuraba Harumi isn’t satisfied with their current relationship. This is getting quite complicated, Satomi Koutarou...

“L-Love?! Th-That’s... I don’t really...!”

“It’s okay, Sakuraba-senpai. I won’t tell a soul.”

“I-I... Oh goodness...”

“You do love him, right?”

“Y-Yes...”

Harumi began nodding slowly as if in resignation. Her face was beet red.

“I knew it. I thought that might be the case ever since I saw your acting for the play.”

“Oh...”

When Kiriha mentioned the play, Harumi’s face turned even redder. She was practically speechless now, but just as Harumi turned her eyes away as if to escape the embarrassment, she saw a familiar face.

“...Is that Nijino-san?”

“Oh?”

Harumi instinctively stopped walking and Kiriha followed suit. Kiriha looked around for Yurika, but didn’t see her right away.

“Heehee... Look over there,” Harumi said with a giggle, pointing out Yurika to Kiriha.

“Ah, you’re right. But they’re holding a welcome party for the transfer student, so what is she doing over there?”

They were walking by a small park. And in the corner of the playground there, the two girls could see a familiar set of pigtails.

In the park cloaked by dusk, the sound of a lone swing could be heard squeaking. With the sun about to set, there were no children around. Given how much the temperature had dropped with the approach of winter, a child would either have to really love playing or have some special reason to still be in the park at this hour “Hmph. I don’t care anymore... I hope you all suffer by Maki-chan’s hand.”

It was Yurika on the swing, and she did indeed have a special reason for being there.

“I definitely won’t come to save you! Not Theia-chan, Sanae-chan, Shizuka-san, or even Satomi-san! Satomi-san was a little more understanding this time, but... he never believed me anyway, so I won’t save him either!”

Yurika shed tears of frustration as she swung back and forth on the swing. She was more devastated by the fact that the people closest to her didn’t believe

her than she was at being outdone by Maki. After spending half a year together, even if the others didn't believe in magic, she at least wanted them to believe in her when she said that Maki was dangerous.

"They're all so mean."

It was enough that Yurika had abandoned her responsibilities. Fleeing from the room in that situation was the same as giving up on her duty as a magical girl. Normally, she would have stayed and kept an eye on Maki. If she tried to use magic to investigate, she could have interrupted her. She could have also gotten in the way if she tried to gather other information. Doing that while keeping anyone from realizing that she was a magical girl was what she should have done. It was what would be expected of a magical girl.

However, Yurika couldn't bring herself to do it. And that was largely because the residents of room 106—people she had grown to know and trust—had no faith in her.

What was she even fighting for? Before she knew it, her enemies-turned-friends had become her reason to fight. But when even they denied her, she lost her will to fight altogether. When Yurika had first come to room 106, she probably wouldn't have cared. But right now, she just couldn't stand it. She was so mortified, she couldn't stop her own tears.

"Nijino-san, Nijino-san!"

That's why she didn't notice Harumi until she had called out to her several times.

"Nijino-san, what happened?"

"Huh? S-Sakuraba-senpai?!"

Since Yurika hadn't been paying any attention to her surroundings, she was extremely surprised by Harumi showing up.

"Kyaaah!" she shrieked.

"Nijino-san!"

Yurika was so startled that she almost fell off the swing, but she managed to hang on by frantically grabbing the chain.

“Are you okay, Nijino-san?”

“I-I’m fine. I was just a little surprised.”

Yurika still held on to the chain as she caught her breath. It had been enough of a shock for her to forget all about crying.

“I see. That’s good...”

“Sakuraba-senpai, what are you doing here?”

“Heehee, well, this is right next to the hospital.”

Harumi sighed with relief once she confirmed that Yurika was okay, but then she smiled broadly at Yurika’s question.

“Ah, r-right...”

Yurika finally took stock of where she was and realized she was indeed in the park right next to the hospital. She didn’t remember much after running out of room 106. Driven by raw emotion, she’d run at random, and this just happened to be where she ended up. It wasn’t all that strange for Harumi to be passing by here. Yurika blushed realizing she’d asked such a dumb question.

“So what happened, Yurika-san?”

“Kiriha-san too?”

Yurika was surprised again when she saw Kiriha step out from behind Harumi. Not only had she never imagined that she would see the two of them together, she had no idea why Kiriha would be at the park too.

“Actually, that’s... My friends and I... We couldn’t see eye to eye about something... No matter how many times I told them the truth, they wouldn’t believe me, so I...”

As Yurika explained, the feelings of sadness and frustration she’d felt came flooding back to her. It wasn’t long before the tears returned too.

“So that’s what happened...”

After listening to Yurika, Harumi looked sad too. She sympathized with Yurika so much that she almost felt like she’d been hurt too.

“...”

It seems something happened at the welcome party. It looks like I should leave this part to Sakuraba-senpai.

With a handle on the situation, Kiriha chose not to say anything. Since she didn't believe in magic either, she knew that contributing would make things unnecessarily complicated.

"So that's why you're crying here?"

"...Yes..." Yurika nodded her head and looked down. She'd really gotten her feelings hurt.

"I see..."

"..."

Harumi looked at Yurika softly. Since Yurika was helping her with Koutarou, she wanted to help Yurika in return.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"...Yes..." Yurika replied in a whisper, still looking at the ground.

"What made you sad, Nijino-san? That the truth didn't reach a lot of your friends? Or that your special friends didn't believe you?"

Was she sad because most of the people at the party didn't listen to her? Or was she sad because her closest friends didn't believe in her? If she didn't make that clear, Harumi wouldn't be able to comfort her.

"That's..."

Yurika fumbled for an answer. She assumed that it would be the first option, but the truth was that most of her classmates were total strangers. That meant the other option was that she was upset because a small group of people had hurt her feelings. But most of them used to be her enemies, so of course they wouldn't believe what she had to say...

"That's... My best friends not believing me was more painful."

Yurika's answer confused herself. She was admitting that her enemies had become her closest friends.

I see. So that's why I'm always so frustrated and mortified...

At first, she'd just been trying to persuade Koutarou and the others to escape from the unsuspected danger, but as she spent more time with them, her desire for them to truly believe in her grew. That was because she'd come to care for them. And that was why today, when they were faced with real danger and no one trusted her, Yurika was utterly disheartened.

"I see. In that case, you already have your answer, Nijino-san," Harumi said, nodding at Yurika's response to her question.

"...Huh?"

Confused by Harumi's words, Yurika finally looked up from the ground, and she was greeted with the sight of Harumi smiling at her gently.

"Nijino-san, you still think of them as precious to you. That's why you're so sad. That's why you need to make them believe you. Right?"

Because she thought of them as friends, she was sad that they hadn't believed her. Her options were to either stop thinking of them as friends, or to get them to believe her. Anything else would still leave her feeling empty.

"Yes, that's true... but how can I..."

"Take action. I don't know exactly what you need them to believe in, Nijino-san, but you just need to keep doing whatever it is you need them to believe in. Do it so they can believe in you."

"Keep doing what I need them to believe in...?"

In Yurika's case, that was doing her job as a magical girl. If Maki was targeting room 106, her duty was to protect it.

"You can only earn trust through action. Just trying to convince them with words won't get you the true trust that you desire, Nijino-san."

"I see, then..."

In that moment, Yurika realized something.

Over this past half a year, have I ever really acted like a proper magical girl? Even though I explained it to them with words, I never followed through with my actions...

Today, her enemy by the name of Maki had finally appeared. Wasn't this the chance she had been waiting for to really earn the trust of Koutarou and the others?

"All right!"



Yurika slapped her cheeks with all of her might. As she did, the tears that had welled in her eyes scattered all over, sparkling in the evening sun as they fell through the air.

“I understand, Sakuraba-senpai! I’ll do my best!”

By the time her tears had sunk into the ground, Yurika was overcome with an indomitable spirit and a smile blossomed on her face again.

“Give it your all, Nijino-san.”

“Right! Sorry for making you worry, Sakuraba-senpai! But I, the humble Nijino Yurika, will give it my all!”

Yurika saluted Harumi in a comical fashion. It was like her sad expression from mere moments ago was just a dream now.

“So this is Sakuraba Harumi...”

Kiriha, who had silently been watching over the two of them, let praise slip her lips.

This selflessness is why Satomi Koutarou doesn’t see her as a romantic interest right now.

Seeing firsthand Harumi’s thoughtfulness, her gentleness, and her normally hidden strong will, Kiriha could easily predict that Sakuraba Harumi would eventually become a powerful rival.

Maki’s welcome party ended at roughly eight o’clock. Continuing the party after that would trouble the neighbors, so landlord Shizuka put an end to it. That said, the party had been in full swing since four, so everyone had been able to enjoy themselves to the fullest.

“In the end, Yurika never came back...” Maki muttered to herself as she returned to her own home.

Her words echoed through her dark, empty, lonely room that barely had any furniture in it. It was a sad excuse for what should be the room of a sixteen year old girl.

“That magic barrier that appeared at six o’clock was most likely hers. She acted like she’d gotten into a fight with her friends so she could go outside and cast spells without anyone knowing... The mastermind behind her plans must be exceptional. How irritating...”

Maki faced the center of the room and held out her hand.

“Come, Twilight Wing!”

With those words, a staff suddenly appeared in her extended hand. Her staff, just like Yurika’s, had plenty of decorations and didn’t look like it was designed for any practical use. The biggest difference between their staffs was the color. Unlike Yurika’s fantastical pink one, Maki’s was of a more austere indigo color.

Maki raised the staff above her head and muttered something. It was the spell required to activate a magical tool she had set up.

“Magic Communication Gem: Activate. Open Channel.”

Responding to Maki’s incantation, the indigo gem embedded in the ceiling began to glow. And almost as if resonating with it, six more gems embedded into the walls surrounding Maki began glowing as well. The colors of the gems were red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Including Maki’s indigo gem in the ceiling, there were all seven colors of the rainbow. However, even their glow somehow seemed dark. It was almost as if they were emitting darkness instead of light. Eventually, the dim lights coming from the six gems gradually began to take the shape of people.

“Oh, that school uniform suits you, Maki.”

As the shifting lights stabilized, six girls appeared, each standing next to the gem that corresponded with the color of their outfit. But they were just images. Holograms, to be exact. The item Maki had used was a magical tool that allowed communication over great distances.

“Don’t make fun of me. You told me to report, so I went to all this trouble to contact you.”

“My bad. Don’t get so upset.” The girl in red shrugged her shoulders and smiled wryly at Maki’s reply.

“Really now, you’re so...”

Despite being surrounded by six girls, Maki showed no sign of submission. Maki and the other girls were all equals, and she knew that. These girls were her allies. The seven of them present, including Maki, were the leaders of Yurika’s sworn enemy, Darkness Rainbow.

“So how were they? The new Rainbow and that mana pool?”

Seeing that Maki and the girl in red had finished talking, the girl in purple spoke up. Out of the seven, she was the most mature and most often held the role of chairman.

“First of all, regarding Rainbow Yurika, I’m unsure.”

“And by that, you mean...?”

“Her abilities aren’t all that, but it seems like she has someone highly intelligent working with her.”

Maki explained the situation. She shared with the others how Yurika could manipulate the truth under the guise of cosplay, and how she’d gotten in the way of Maki’s investigation of room 106 from the outside during the welcome party.

“So I can’t see the full extent of it all. All I know is that she is most likely inferior to her predecessor, Rainbow Nana.”

“That sure is a handful,” the girl in purple said, furrowing her brow as she listened to Maki’s report.

“If we were to fight, who knows what kind of trick she may pull...”

“Maki, it might be that this accomplice of hers is the real problem. In the end, magic is just power. It’s how it’s used that’s important.”

“I think so too.”

The girl in purple and Maki were in agreement. They nodded to one another with serious expressions on their faces.

“You should just crush the coward right away,” the girl in red let out in a displeased voice. She was simple and straightforward, so all this discussion was

irritating her.

“It’s not that easy. Right now, Yurika’s mental state is strangely stable. She’s completely different from eight months ago.”

Eight months ago, right after she had succeeded Rainbow Nana, the pressure of her duty and constantly appearing enemies was almost enough to destroy Yurika. It was her MO just to swing her staff around and use her magic without regard for the consequences. But now Yurika was different. It was true that she was still a coward, but she wasn’t as overly frightened as she was back then.

“That might be the influence of her accomplice.”

“That’s very possible. The existence of an ally she can trust must have stabilized her mental state.”

Maki and the girl in purple nodded to each other once more. But Maki was somewhat irritated.

To think she would put her trust in someone like that... She really is a fool. People will betray you the first chance they get. The only thing you can really believe in is power—overwhelming power!

Maki was irritated that Yurika had found allies she could trust and that those allies had in turn helped stabilize her mentally.

“And we can’t ignore the possibility that they have another plan ready. It’s too dangerous to rely on pure force.”

“Jeez, what a pain...” The girl in red frowned and scratched her head.

The next one to speak was the girl in orange. She had short hair and big eyes, and she looked rather lively.

“That’s enough about Rainbow. So how about that pool of mana?” she asked.

“I got up close and gave it a rough examination,” replied Maki.

“That’s our Navy-chan. You’re always quick to the punch.”

Maki furrowed her brow slightly, as she disliked being called “Navy-chan” by the girl in orange.

“...The mana in that room is significant. That much power could normally only

be found in artifact-level magical items.”

Out of all magical items, artifacts were said to be the stuff of legends. They had unfathomable powers, but the methods of producing them had mostly been lost, meaning it was next to impossible to create them nowadays. The only known means of doing so were highly impractical because of the time and resources required. Essentially, artifacts were the ultimate magical items, powerful enough that they were said to have been created by the gods.

“Wow, that much?!”

The girl in orange’s surprise was somewhat exaggerated, but Maki ignored her and continued talking.

“If we can control it completely, we’ll have the upper hand against Rainbow Heart. Moreover, we might even be able to upset the power balance in Folsaria.”

“Then we need to get on this!”

The girl in orange’s eyes were sparkling. The girls of Darkness Rainbow were trying to overthrow the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria for their own reasons. That’s why they were always on the lookout for artifacts or anything with equivalent power.

“But Maki, would we be able to control something that powerful?”

“I was trying to figure that out when Yurika got in my way.”

Maki shrugged her shoulders. She had tried to use her magic to investigate the mana pool at the party, but it was difficult to use any powerful spells as the guest of honor. The best she could do was pretend like she was showing off her cosplay, but she didn’t get that many chances. On top of that, Yurika faked a fight(?) and dashed out of the room to intervene with her own magic, thwarting Maki from investigating properly. Yurika had the ability to use more powerful spells than Maki could since she’d been outside and didn’t need to disguise them.

“So even then, that accomplice of hers was a problem...”

“It must be someone incredibly clever. They’re always one step ahead.”

“Which means... just how much of a welcome party was that welcome party really supposed to be?” the girl in purple asked.

“What do you mean?” Maki replied with a confused expression.

“If they held a welcome party in that apartment, you would definitely come for reconnaissance. And while you were there, you would definitely use your magic. Maki, you may have been the one being investigated.”

Maki was so taken aback at the thought that she appeared not to react at all.

“It couldn’t be... I was the one being had?”

Maki couldn’t accept it right away. But if what the girl in purple said was true, it would mean that Maki had lost to Yurika.

“That is most likely the case. In reality, you didn’t get any important information regarding the mana, right? You were lured to that room, made to use magic, and essentially spied on.”

The girl in purple sadly shook her head. At this point, Maki realized her defeat.

“Feh, I’ve been had! And not just by Yurika, but by some normal person!”

The very thought was sheer disgrace to Maki. If her opponent was a magical girl, that was one thing, but she had been bested by a normal human with no magical power. And if the girl in purple hadn’t pointed it out, she never would have even realized it. She’d been read like an open book and had no idea. She hated being toyed with.

“I never dreamed our indigo magician would be the one getting manipulated!”

The indigo magic that Maki specialized in was used to manipulate people. So to Maki, the mind was hers to play with as she saw fit. Being manipulated herself, however, was completely unacceptable.

“I get that you’re frustrated you lost, but calm down a little.”

“Shut up!” Maki growled angrily and glared at the girl in red for her criticism.

“Oh, scary. But that’s what you’re always telling me, Maki.”

However, after hearing those words, Maki started to regain her calm.

“...Sorry for getting loud.”

“Doesn’t it feel good to let loose every once in a while?”

“Let’s just leave it at that.”

After taking several deep breaths, Maki was composed again and smiled.

“So what will you do, Navy-chan? Wait for us to group up?”

“About that... I was thinking about infiltrating that room again.”

“That’s dangerous. With this mystery accomplice, I can’t recommend rushing things.”

After what Maki said, the girl in purple looked a little concerned.

“That’s exactly the point.”

However, Maki looked dead serious. This was a cool, calm, and collected decision on her part.

“The enemy is a brilliant strategist. That means their advantage will only grow with time. Besides, I’d like to flush out this accomplice before the seven of us attack at once. If I don’t get rid of them first, we could be making the same mistake again.”

Maki didn’t want to repeat the mistake they had made when fighting against Rainbow Nana. It had devastated Darkness Rainbow, forcing them to cease operations for over half a year.

“I see. So your goal is that accomplice, not the pool of mana...”

“If I get the chance to seize control of it, I would love to. But since there would be trouble afterward, I have no intention of rushing that part.”

Even if Maki gained control of room 106, she would have to protect the room from Yurika all by herself until the other six arrived. With that in mind, seizing control of the room just yet was an unwise plan.

“There are also the others in that room we know nothing about yet.”

“You said that apart from that boy, there are two foreign girls and a girl with black hair?”

“Yes. Other than the black-haired girl, they were all at the welcoming party.”

“Hey, Navy-chan, you said something about there being a ghost too. Is it really a good idea to just ignore her?”

“I observed her while pretending I couldn’t see her. She seemed to be communicating with the residents, however it’s still unclear if she’s employed by them or not.”

“But Maki, if you try to do something in that room, won’t they all get in the way?”

“That’s what I’m worried about too, so if I’m going to do it, it would be better to do it during the day while they’re at school.”

Maki and the others were aware of Sanae, Theia, Ruth, and Kiriha, but none of them believed Yurika’s story, so Darkness Rainbow didn’t consider any of them to be much of a threat.

One of them is probably Yurika’s accomplice...

Maki figured that either Theia, Ruth, or Kiriha had to be Yurika’s accomplice. She had gone to the welcome party in hopes of finding out which one. But now if she attacked the room while no one was there, it should only be Yurika and her accomplice that would take action.

“I understand. In that case, I have no objections.”

“I agree as well.”

“Me too!”

The girls voiced their opinions one after another. In the end, all six agreed to Maki’s plan. But first off, they would gather more information. After the majority of their members were incapacitated in the fight with Rainbow Nana, they were extra cautious these days.

“Thank you, everybody.”

Satisfied that her plan was unanimously approved, Maki’s stoic expression eased some, revealing a small smile.

Just you wait, Rainbow Yurika! And your cursed accomplice too! I’ll unmask

you soon enough!

And just like that, the massive misunderstanding regarding Yurika spread throughout Darkness Rainbow courtesy of Maki.

Yurika vs. Maki

Wednesday, November 18th

With winter fast approaching, the number of layers Koutarou wore to school was increasing. Up until now, he had been wearing his uniform and a coat, but today marked the addition of a special undershirt to the ensemble. It was an old garment of Kiriha's that she had modified for him.

"Wow, it's warm. But it's not too warm. It's just right."

"I'm glad. I hope you can endure it being a hand-me-down."

After putting his uniform on overtop of it, Koutarou was delighted. The undergarment Kiriha had made was soft, warm, and wasn't restrictive when he tried to move. The breathability of the fabric also kept it from being too warm, so it was perfect for someone active like Koutarou.

"Endure it? I love it. It's great, Kiriha-san. Thank you."

"Well, I was planning on throwing it out anyway. I'm glad you could wear it instead."

"...Or so you say, Kiriha. You had no intention of getting rid of it, did you?" Theia piped up as Ruth was drying her hair.

That piqued Sanae's interest and she couldn't help asking, "What is that supposed to mean?"

"The fabric of that undergarment is probably worth more than all of Koutarou's belongings put together."

"Seriously? *That* is?! Show me, Koutarou!"

"H-Hey..."

Curious, Sanae pressed her face up against Koutarou's chest. Since she was a ghost, she was able to pass through his uniform and look directly at the undergarment.

“Based on the appearance and feel, it’s clearly made from expensive materials. And based on the quality, it must have been made by a master craftsman.”

“Now that you mention, it does feel like it. It’s pretty comfortable too.”

When she clung onto Koutarou, Sanae shared his senses, so she could clearly feel how comfortable the undergarment was.

“Throwing it away would be unthinkable. That’s the kind of heirloom that would be passed down to a daughter or granddaughter. Modifying it into an undergarment and giving it to Koutarou is flat out insane.”

“I-Is that true, Kiriha-san?”

After what Theia said, Koutarou anxiously turned to Kiriha. As he did, he was met with her gentle smile.

“As expected from an interstellar princess. You have a well-trained eye.”

Kiriha affirmed Theia’s suspicions in a roundabout way. Hearing that, Koutarou’s face turned blue.

“I-I’ll give it back! I-I can’t accept something that amazing!”

Having learned the truth, Koutarou hurriedly unbuttoned his uniform. However, Kiriha’s porcelain hands stopped his.

“Koutarou, even if you give it back now, it won’t be the same garment it once was.”

“B-But...”

“You using it as it is now will make me happy,” Kiriha whispered into Koutarou’s ear with a grin.

“Even so, I can’t just casually wear something worth more than everything I own!”

“Then get used to it.”

“As if I could!”

As Koutarou continued resisting, Kiriha buttoned his uniform back up.



“...That’s how you’re overcoming his defenses one at a time,” Sanae murmured.

She watched the two of them with a frosty stare. Sanae had realized Kiriha’s game.

“I’ll make sure to scold Koutarou later...” she grumbled.

Sanae kept glaring at Kiriha, contemplating her duty to protect Koutarou from her.

“Ruth, we can’t be careless either, or she’ll pull the rug out from under our feet.”

Theia was in a bad mood because she knew Kiriha’s ultimate goal. She was also feeling antsy that she still hadn’t publicly given her present, the treasured sword Saguratin, to Koutarou yet.

“Heehee, oh Your Highness!”

Since Ruth knew that, she smiled as she watched Theia pout. She couldn’t help imagining what would happen when Theia’s impatience reached critical mass.

After buttoning his uniform, Kiriha pushed Koutarou’s coat on him.

“Koutarou, your coat. If we don’t leave soon, we’ll be late.”

“Ugh...”

Koutarou desperately wanted to say something back to her, but after being told they were about to be late, he found himself unable to say anything.

As Koutarou and the others left for school, something began moving in the empty apartment.

There was a screeching sound as the sliding door to the wardrobe slowly opened a little. When Koutarou first moved in, the door opened without any sound, but now that someone was leaning on it as they slept from time to time, it made a painful noise.

“Did Satomi-san and the others leave...?”

Yurika poked her face through the small gap that had been made. As she peeked through, she looked around the room and listened attentively.

“...It looks like the coast is clear.”

After observing the room, Yurika fully opened the sliding door. Yet for some reason, she was in her magical girl costume rather than her school uniform.

“If they see me in this outfit, things would just get confusing again...”

Yurika slowly climbed out from the upper half of the wardrobe. Since she wasn’t in particularly good shape, scaling the wardrobe was hard work.

“Hup!”

But right now, she didn’t care how exposed she was as she climbed out of the wardrobe in her revealing outfit.

“All right.”

After successfully getting out of the wardrobe, Yurika reached back in and pulled out a long staff she called “Angel Halo.” It was what she used to cast her spells.

“Now that Maki-chan is here, I don’t have time to go to school!”

Yurika slapped her cheeks and pumped herself up.

“Yurika, fight! Yurika, fight!”

I’m a bit sad I can’t go to school, but I already gave up on going once before, so it’s fine!

Her enemy had finally appeared. The time had come for her to fulfill her duty. Because of that, Yurika chose to ignore her responsibilities as a student and skipped school to say home and fend off Maki instead. If possible, at the end of all this, she wanted Koutarou and the others to understand that she was a magical girl who fought for love and courage.

“Bring it on, Maki-chan! The magical girl of love and courage, Rainbow Yurika, will be your opponent!”

Up until now, Yurika had constantly been telling Koutarou and the others that she was a magical girl, but it was only now that she finally became one in the

truest sense.

The bell rang, signaling lunchtime throughout the school. As it did, the English teacher in front of the blackboard put down the chalk.

“All right, that’s all for now. The rest will be your homework. Someone please let Nijino-san and... um... Aika-san know since they were absent today.”

“Stand up. Bow.”

The student on day duty gave instructions for the class to respectfully say goodbye and thank you to their English teacher as she left the room. And with the teacher gone, the strict atmosphere in the room lightened up.

“Lunchtime! Food!”

“Kana, did you bring your lunch, or are you heading for the cafeteria?”

“I’m going to the cafeteria.”

“If you’re passing by the vending machines, buy some juice for me!”

“Only if you’ll pay for mine too!”

Lunchtime. The time of the school day when all the students loosened up. They spent their time eating their meals and refreshing themselves.

“So Yurika never showed up, huh?”

But out of all the students in class 1-A, only Koutarou was staring at Yurika’s empty seat.

“Normally she comes running in before second period.”

Sanae was also staring at it, somewhat confused.

Yurika was often late because she had trouble waking up, so Koutarou and the others didn’t think much of her missing first period. During second period, they just assumed she’d really overslept this time. During third period, they all thought she must have stayed up really late. It wasn’t until they reached fourth period that something really seemed odd.

“If she keeps coming in late like this, she’ll have to repeat a grade.”

“Her grades aren’t all that good either...”

While Koutarou and Sanae were worrying, Theia approached with Ruth in tow.

“If you’re talking about Yurika, she was up making a fuss until late last night. She probably just overslept.”

“She must be excited now that Maki-san is here.”

Koutarou was imagining Yurika staying up all night working on an outfit for Maki inside the wardrobe.

“And that Aika Maki hasn’t shown up today either,” Kiriha added, joining the conversation.

“In Maki-sama’s case, isn’t it probably because she just moved and has a lot of things to do?” postulated Ruth.

“Is that really it? I’m a little suspicious that they’re both absent,” said Sanae skeptically.

“It couldn’t be...”

Listening to Ruth and Sanae, a theory popped into Koutarou’s head. It went something like this: having worked throughout the night on Maki’s outfit, Yurika called her over in the morning and was now forcing her to cosplay.

Then there’s what happened yesterday...

Koutarou remembered how Yurika had acted during Maki’s welcome party the day before. She’d desperately pleaded with Koutarou, trying to tell him that Maki was dangerous. Even if he ignored the magical girl part, it was still possible that Yurika could have had some trouble with Maki in the past. Whatever it was, it was bad enough to make her cry and run out of the party.

“I guess I don’t have a choice...”

Koutarou kicked his chair away and stood up, getting the attention of the people around him.

“What’s wrong, Koutarou?”

“I’m going to go check on Yurika.”

“But if you go now, it’ll take up the entire lunch hour.”

“Maki-san not being here either is bothering me. I just hope Yurika isn’t causing her any trouble...”

Koutarou was almost certain it was cosplay related, but he couldn’t discount the possibility there was real trouble. She could also be out cold with a fever.

No matter what it is, I should go check it out.

Koutarou, the type to leap before looking, didn’t like anxiously sitting on a worry.

“Satomi-sama, I’ll come with you.”

“That’s okay, Ruth-san. I’ll call you if something happens.”

“But...”

“Besides, it’ll be faster if I go on my own.”

Koutarou was grateful for Ruth’s offer, but he would be able to run home on his own rather quickly. He would probably even make it back to school in time for the next period.

“Koutarou, your coat.”

“Thank you, Kiriha-san.”

Foreseeing Koutarou’s next move, Kiriha brought him his coat. She even helped him put it on.

“By the way, Theia...” said Sanae.

“What?” Theia replied.

“How did you know Yurika was doing something in the middle of the night? Didn’t you go back to your spaceship?”

“Ack!”

Theia’s face scrunched up at Sanae’s question. She had been caught completely off guard.

“Th-Th-Th-Th-That’s... I-I forgot something! Yes, I forgot something in the room and I came back to get it!”

She couldn’t possibly admit that she had come back to see Koutarou’s sleeping face.

“Hmm... Good thing you were able to get it before Koutarou crushed it.”

But fortunately, Sanae took Theia at her word and didn’t ask for details.

“Th-That’s true. Haha... Hahahahaha!”

As Theia was laughing to hide the truth, Koutarou finished buttoning up his coat.

“Okay, I’m off.”

“Wait, I’ll come too!”

As Koutarou headed for the door, Sanae hurriedly chased after him.

“Mackenzie, I’m heading back home for a minute!”

“Hmm? What’s up?”

“I forgot something!”

“Idiot.”

After letting Kenji know, Koutarou rushed out of the classroom with Sanae in hot pursuit.

“Hmph...”

Seeing Koutarou and Sanae off, Theia appeared to be in a bad mood.

“Why didn’t you tell her you went to see Satomi-sama’s sleeping face?”

“A-As if I could say something like that!”

Theia blushed, turning and looking out the window as if to deny it.

“And right now, you actually wanted to go with Satomi-sama, didn’t you?”

In reality, Ruth had suggested accompanying Koutarou for Theia’s sake since she didn’t have the courage to ask herself.

“...”

“If you’re too stubborn, you’ll lose out.”

“As if a princess could beg her vassal for something!” Theia shouted.

But Ruth just smiled.

“If Satomi-sama was just a vassal, that might be true.”

“He is just a vassal! Nothing more!”

Through the window, Theia watched Koutarou exit the school building. Sanae was with him.

Why didn’t he ask me to come with him?! Why did he only take Sanae?!

Theia internally berated him as she watched him go, all the way until he went through the school gate and she couldn’t see him anymore.

Just as Koutarou left school, Yurika was standing in the middle of the inner room of his apartment. She had her eyes closed and was holding her staff above her head, almost as if she was focusing and trying to listen to something. Really, she was in the middle of using a detection spell to determine if Maki was approaching or not.

“...It doesn’t look like Maki-chan is anywhere near here.”

After concentrating on her spell for a while, Yurika opened her eyes again and took a deep breath. Even though she had prepared herself for the coming fight, she couldn’t help being tense. She didn’t know if it would be today, tomorrow, or next month. The thought of losing everything if Maki defeated her made her incredibly nervous.

But those dark thoughts were interrupted by what sounded like a small but hard impact. Yurika imagined it was a small stone hitting the window.

“What is... Ack!”

When she looked towards the window, Yurika saw a single bat. It hung upside down from the window frame and looked down at Yurika.

“Could that bat be Maki-chan’s...”

It was still midafternoon, much too early for bats to be flying around. And the way it looked down at Yurika was different from normal bats, almost as if it possessed intelligence. Yurika figured it had to be a bat sent by Maki.

“You are correct, Nijino Yurika.”

“Maki-chan!”

It was just as Yurika had thought. When the bat’s eyes shone red, Maki’s voice reached Yurika. The bat was a familiar Maki had sent in order to talk to her.

“What do you want?” Yurika asked the bat nervously.

“You know what I want, don’t you?” In contrast, Maki spoke in more of a teasing tone of voice. “I want to finish things with you once and for all, but I can’t just burst into the room and fall right into your trap, now can I? That’s why I sent this little one instead.”

“Finish things with me? ...Is fighting really all we do?”

“A foolish question. That kind of discussion ended several hundred years ago.”

Rainbow Heart and Darkness Rainbow had a long history. The divide between them was deep, and their battle had been ongoing for centuries.

“Then you leave me no choice. I have a job to do as a magical girl.”

“I’m glad you’re straight to the point. With that in mind, I have a request. Would you mind coming out from there?”

“Come out?”

“Yes, that’s right. I don’t think it’s that bad of a deal for either of us.”

“That’s...”

Maki was wary of traps in room 106, so she was hesitant to enter. And Yurika didn’t want to have a fight in the middle of where she lived. So if they were going to fight, both of them wanted to do it away from room 106.

“But if I leave this room, your friends might come,” Yurika said.

She couldn’t agree to it right away. She knew Maki had six allies. If she left the apartment undefended, those six girls might move in to take it. She couldn’t just ignore that risk.

“They won’t come.”

“Do you have any guarantees?”

“I don’t. You only have my word to go on. But think about it. Have I ever lied to you?”

“That’s...”

Yurika was hesitant. It was true that up until now Maki had never told a lie. The other dark magical girls were deceptive, but Maki was strangely honest. But even then, Yurika couldn’t make up her mind.

“Besides, I want to create as big of a ward as possible to keep people away,” said Maki.

And that sealed the deal for Yurika. Wards were one of the traditional techniques used to keep the existence of magical girls a secret. Since neither side wanted to be discovered, they cast spells like wards to prevent being noticed during battle.

“...Okay.”

Yurika finally nodded her head. She also wanted to cast a large ward. And since she was aware of her own inexperience, she didn’t want to fight in a small area where a mistake could really cost her. Factoring in that risk and the fact that Maki was probably telling the truth, Yurika agreed to leave the room.

“Then follow the bat. It’ll guide you to me. And don’t worry. There are no traps.”

“Okay, I got it.”

Yurika left the tiny apartment and headed for her battlefield.

“Are you sure it’s this way? It looks like we’re headed somewhere no one really goes...”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m sure. I can smell Yurika’s aura.”

Koutarou was guided by Sanae, whose nose twitched as she led him into a residential district. When they had arrived at room 106, they couldn’t find Yurika, so Koutarou had Sanae try and track her down. As a ghost, she could sense Yurika psychically.

“What does it smell like?”

“I guess it’s... sort of an artificial smell? It’s like instant noodles.”

“Instant noodles, huh? I still don’t get it...”

“Okay, then let’s do it like this.”

Sanae had an idea. She stopped flying in front of Koutarou and clung to his back instead.

“What are you doing?”

“Well, when I do this, I can feel what you feel, right? So I figured we might be able to do it the other way around too.”

Sanae wrapped her arms around Koutarou’s neck like always and rested her chin on his shoulder. When she did, Koutarou’s senses began picking up something different from normal.

“Oh, I can see something strange!”

“Eeheehee, behold Sanae-chan’s maiden power!”

She’d functionally granted Koutarou the power to see spiritual energy in the form of people’s auras. It appeared as a white light, although it was a stronger form of vision than normal sight. The result was that Koutarou could hazily see people through the wall.

But something similar was happening with his hearing. He could hear everything like normal, but on top of that he could also hear the wavelengths of auras emanating from people and other creatures with strong spiritual energy. He was even able to distinguish people based on that sound. And then there was his sense of smell. Just like his eyes and ears, his nose became able to detect auras. But this was more subtle than the other senses. He could pick up traces of auras in the air.

“Do you always sense stuff like this...?”

“Amazing, isn’t it?” Sanae laughed with pride.

Seeing her smile, a large amount of Sanae’s feelings began flowing into him. Mostly he could read her pride in her powers and her desire to be praised, but

there was also deep trust and affection for Koutarou.

“Amazing. Just amazing.”

“Teeheehee!”

As I thought, she really is lonely without her parents...

Koutarou patted Sanae on the head.

“So can you smell it too, Koutarou? The scent of instant noodles?”

“Let’s see...”

Koutarou pointed his nose into the air and began sniffing. And out of all the smells he was picking up, there was indeed the scent of instant noodles.

“Oooh, yeah! I can totally smell it!”

“Yeah. That’s what Yurika’s aura smells like.”

“Is it different depending on the person?”

“Yeah. Theia’s has the scent of flowers, and Kiriha’s smells like a forest in the morning.”

“Hmm... And what about me?”

Koutarou smelled his shirt. But just like his normal scent, he wasn’t able to discern the smell of his own aura.

“Koutarou’s is... a secret! Heehee!”

Koutarou’s smells fatherly.

Sanae hid the truth behind a smile.

Maki’s bat led Yurika to a construction site. Once there, she approached carefully.

“So construction is paused for the day...”

There was no sign of people anywhere nearby. The industrial heavy machinery was all powered down and the area was cloaked in silence.

“Welcome, Nijino Yurika.”

“Maki-chan...”

Maki stood in the center of the construction site, waiting for Yurika. Yurika moved within a dozen meters or so and stopped.

Just like Yurika, Maki was wearing her own magical girl outfit. The design was somewhat similar to Yurika’s, but the color was quite different. Maki’s dress was a deep indigo. Her dark outfit made her look much more like a magician than Yurika did. And to top it all off, she was holding her staff, Twilight Wing. This was Maki’s battle garb, and the true appearance of Magical Girl Dark Navy.

There was a reason for the girls transforming into these outfits. Their clothes and staffs functioned as amplifiers for the casting speed and power of their spells, meaning that they were several times more powerful while transformed than while wearing regular clothes. Koutarou probably wouldn’t be able to accept it, but it’s not like they wore their costumes because they wanted to.

“My, my, you look so bold. You were so timid to wear it in the spring.”

“I haven’t spent these past eight months just playing around.”

Yurika gulped and readied her staff. Normally she let the people around her bring her down, but she’d spent the last eight months learning to do her best on her own. And that hard work had prepared her for this fight.

“Of course you have.”

In response, Maki readied her staff as well.

She seems to have gained some experience outside of just combat magic...

Maki conjured up memories of Yurika in the past when all she would do was swing her staff, wildly casting spells as she retreated from her enemies. Now that she was stepping onto the battlefield of her own accord, Maki recognized how far she’d come.

“You really won’t step down, will you?”

“I told you that discussion was over.”

Maki’s expression grew a little darker as she pointed her staff at Yurika. Both girls began chanting at the same time.

“Sanctuary! Modifier: Effective Area, Colossal!”

“Sanctuary! Modifier: Effective Area, Colossal!”

Their voices overlapped like a chorus and a single spell extended across the construction site. They were casting a ward to keep people away from their chosen battleground.

“Here I come, Rainbow Yurika!”

“I won’t lose!”

But that spell signaled the start of their showdown. Once it was finished casting, the girls faced off.

“First...” As expected, the more experienced Maki made the first move. “Energy Bolt! Target Option: Sidewinder!”

As Maki called out, a shining arrow came flying out from her indigo staff. It snaked across the construction site, avoiding obstacles in its path to Yurika.

“Quick Cast Energy Bolts! Target Option: Spread!”



In return, Yurika swung her staff and incanted a spell. And just like with Maki's staff, arrows of light came flying out of Yurika's. Even though Yurika had been slower on the draw, she finished her spell faster than Maki had and was able to create a larger amount of arrows. Yurika's barrage rained down on Maki's arrow. It manage to wind its way through several of Yurika's bolts before finally being struck down.

There was a small explosion as the two arrows collided mid-air, but it was still powerful enough to have caused some serious injuries to anyone who might've been unlucky enough to get caught in it. The explosion created a loud sound and a shockwave that rattled the empty construction site.

"You've gotten stronger, Rainbow Yurika!" Maki called out to Yurika and made a dash for her. As she did, her soft hair and indigo outfit fluttered in the wind.

"You too, Maki-chan!"

"But this is where the real battle starts, Rainbow Yurika!"

As I suspected, aside from mind manipulation magic, Yurika has outclassed me! She really is Nana's successor!

Maki was making a brave front, but she was cursing Yurika internally. Yurika had a general mastery of all types of magic, and her outfit and staff had been designed with that in mind. Maki, on the other hand, had specialized in indigo magic—mind manipulation—and her outfit and staff were catered to that. It made her extremely powerful with her chosen type of magic, but much less effective with all the others. It meant she'd be forced to rely on her specialty in order to defeat an opponent that matched her in strength otherwise.

"In that case...!"

Maki swung her staff and pointed it at Yurika as she ran. Seeing that, Yurika began moving her staff as well. The tension in the construction site spiked.

"I-Is she coming?!"

In terms of fitness and reflexes, Yurika was vastly inferior to Maki, meaning Maki often got the drop on her. That held true even now.

“Got you! Flaaash!”

Just before entering her effective spell range, Maki quickly began casting.

“Oh n—”

Before Yurika could react, Maki had already gotten off her spell, which released a blinding flash of light from her staff. Although it was a basic spell, its use could prove very effective under certain circumstances. And Maki made good use of it. Yurika was expecting an attack and was prepared to defend herself, leaving her totally unprepared for the flash.

“My eyes! I can’t see!”

Since Maki had cast the spell at a considerable distance, Yurika was only blinded for two or three seconds. But Maki used that time to line up her next attack.

“Tiny Memory Flash! Modifier: Extend Length!”

“Anti-Magic Shield!”

“You’re too late!”

Yurika desperately tried to cast a defensive spell in time, but she was still shaking off her blindness and Maki was able to cast her spell first. The indigo ball of light discharged from the top of Maki’s staff flew towards Yurika.

“Kyaah!”

When the ball hit Yurika, her entire body was enveloped in its indigo light. Next, Yurika did something strange.

“Anti-Magic Shield!”

She repeated the incantation for the spell she had just used.

“Wait, what?”

But since Maki hadn’t attacked again, Yurika’s defensive spell wreathed her body with a protective yellow light in vain.

“Wh-Where’s Maki-chan?!”

But Yurika continued to behave strangely. Even though she had regained her

vision, she had completely lost sight of Maki. Really, she was simply looking in the wrong direction.

“Right here.”

In her disorientated state, Yurika didn’t realize where Maki was until she was struck with her glowing red fist.

“Kyaaaaah!”

It was a clean hit powerful enough to knock Yurika back and send her tumbling along the ground. If it weren’t for the magic shield she had just cast, that blow would have been enough to knock her out.

“Wh-What is...”

As her head slowly tilted from one direction to another in a daze, Yurika desperately tried to force herself up. She didn’t know what was going on. Maki had released a flash of light and was about to cast another spell, so Yurika had cast a defensive spell on herself. But the next thing she knew, Maki blindsided her with a punch, even though she was supposed to be casting a spell right in front of her.

“Have you forgotten my specialty?”

Maki stood still and watched Yurika as she lifted herself off the ground. Yurika realized what had happened when she saw the tension in Maki’s face.

“Th-That’s right! Maki-chan’s specialty is indigo magic!”

The spell Maki used right after the flash erased the memories of its target. The downside to any serious mind-altering magic was that it drained a lot of mana, so Maki limited the effect to only a few seconds. That reduced the mana required to cast it and made it usable in a fight. At first glance, just losing a few seconds of memory didn’t seem like a big deal, but those few second could make a deadly difference in the heat of battle. At the very least, getting hit with it could make it seem like your opponent had vanished.

And because Maki knew what her opponent would do next, she was able to use that time to her advantage and get in a good, solid blow. Since Maki was physically strong, the damage from one hit packed quite a punch. A flash, a little

amnesia, and then a magic-infused physical attack. That was Maki's favorite combo attack.

"Yurika, just stay down. It's impossible for someone like you who relies on others to keep on fighting on your own. You'll die."

"You really are strong, Maki-chan, but—!"

Yurika used her staff to support herself as she stood up. Even after Maki's warning, she hadn't given up. She was covered in dirt after being knocked into a part of the construction site with exposed earth, but there was a beautiful light shining in her eyes.

"But if I give up because of something like this, I can't call myself a resident of room 106! Theia-chan and Kiriha-chan are much, much stronger!"

"You'd still get back up? It seems you've at least got guts."

Seeing Yurika in this condition, Maki was complimentary of her grit.

As I thought, she is far more mentally stable than before...

Eight months ago, after she had just become a magical girl, Yurika would have fled in the blink of an eye if she'd been hit with one of Maki's attacks.

Just who is it that's making Yurika this stable? I'm getting more and more interested. Hurry up and show yourself, accomplice!

Maki grew excited at the thought of meeting her as yet unknown rival. But something about the situation also irritated her. She couldn't trust anyone. People were made to be subdued by power. That was how Maki lived, and the mere thought that Yurika had a trusted ally infuriated her.

"Maki-chan, the fight's not over yet!"

"Well said, Rainbow Yurika!"

Yurika readied herself, and Maki did the same with a fearless smile on her lips. The fight between the two magical girls had only just begun.

"Is this the place?"

"Yeah. The smell of instant noodles is coming from here."

Sanae and Koutarou finally arrived at a construction site on the outskirts of the town. The grounds were surrounded by massive steel walls. Based on the size of the site for the apartment building going up, some of the units would probably be several hundred square meters big.

“But something’s strange,” Sanae said, standing before the construction site and tilting her head to the side.

“What is it?”

“The smell ends there.”

Sanae pointed at the door leading into the construction site proper. Apparently the trail of Yurika’s scent abruptly went cold there.

“Since it’s a door, isn’t it normal for the smell to stop here?”

“It’s not a real smell, so a door shouldn’t make a difference.”

“Well, that’s true...”

Koutarou recalled how he’d been able to sense things through walls when Sanae shared her powers with him.

“If it ends right there, could it mean... Yurika dropped dead right on the other side?”

“Don’t say scary things like that.”

Sanae let loose a flurry of punches at Koutarou, but since there was no hostility in the blows, Koutarou didn’t feel any pain from them.

“For starters, let’s just go take a look. If we don’t even check it out, we’ll have come all this way for nothing.”

“Fair enough.”

Quick to action, Koutarou opened the door to the construction site and peeked through.

“Well, there aren’t any dead bodies.”

“Jeez, you’re terrible.”

“Sorry, sorry.”

Koutarou apologized to Sanae and entered the construction site without making another sound. He didn't want to be caught by anyone working there.

"Seems like they're still working on the foundation."

Looking around the area, Koutarou spotted several pieces of heavy machinery, and further in he could see a large pit dug for the foundation to be put into place.

"We're in luck. Looks like the crew had the day off."

Indeed, there were no employees to be seen. Koutarou sighed with relief. At least they had that going for them.

But then he heard Sanae pitifully beg, "Wait, Koutarou!"

"What are you doing?" he asked.

He turned around to see what the hold up was, but Sanae was doing something on the other side of the door.

"It's almost like there's a wall here," she said.

"A wall?"

Koutarou returned to the door, and just like Sanae had said, it was almost as if she was pressed up against an invisible glass wall.

"Ahahahahaha, you look hilarious!"

Trying to get in, Sanae was pushing herself up against the invisible wall, making her face look like a pig's.

"Hey, don't laugh! Do something!"

"Easier said than done."

Koutarou approached Sanae while stifling his laughter. Sanae continued her fight with the cursed invisible wall.

"It's unfair that only you can get in!"

Koutarou and Sanae stood face to face on either side of the doorframe. From what Sanae said and how she was acting, there really was some kind of barrier there.

“What should I do?”

“Anything!”

“All right, then I’ll just try pulling you in.”

“Sure.”

Koutarou reached his hand out for Sanae, but it seemed to pass through the invisible wall without trouble.

“That’s unfair. Only you’re unaffected.”

“There, there. I’m gonna pull now.”

“Okay.”

Koutarou grabbed Sanae’s hand and pulled her towards him.

“Ah!”

When he did, Sanae easily passed through the doorframe this time. Just a few moments ago she’d been trying in vain with all her might to get through, but now it was a piece of cake.



“H-How?! I couldn’t get through just a second ago!”

“I don’t really understand how the rules of this work, but the cause was probably that,” Koutarou said, pointing to a small shrine nearby.

“What’s that?”

“It’s for purification. They put it there before construction so, um... What was it again?”

“Oh, I’ve seen that on TV! If they don’t put it there, they’ll be cursed and bad things happen like cranes falling over and stuff.”

“Yeah, that.”

The shrine was installed at the groundbreaking ceremony to pray for the safe construction of the building. Koutarou figured it was what had kept Sanae from entering the site.

“I don’t bring curses.”

But Sanae wasn’t satisfied with that answer. She didn’t like being treated like an evil spirit and pouted accordingly.

“And you were able to get in exactly because you don’t, right?”

“I see. I got in because I get along with you.”

But after Koutarou’s explanation, Sanae regained her cheer and began looking around the construction site with great interest.

“Ah, I can smell Yurika’s aura again!”

“Really?”

“Yeah. It smells like she’s over there.”

Sanae was able to pick up Yurika’s scent once more. She then pointed in the direction of the big pit that had been dug for the foundation.

“All right, let’s get a move on.”

“Yeah. Fifth period is about to start right about now.”

“Jeez, what is that idiot doing in a place like this?”

Koutarou and Sanae began walking towards the pit, victims of their own misunderstanding. What kept Sanae out of the construction site had nothing to do with the shrine.

“What is this?!”

“Someone’s coming!”

Maki and Yurika both lowered their staffs. Their fight was still ongoing, but they had sensed a disturbance and temporarily put their arms aside.

“There’s someone that can pass through wards?!”

“How?!”

The disturbance they had sensed was someone passing through their ward. Maki and Yurika had both cast it, meaning there was a double-layered ward around the construction site. It would be practically impossible for a normal person to get through. And yet someone had slipped through anyway. It was enough cause for concern that they paused their attacks for the time being.

“There she is!” a girl shouted.

“Yurika, what are you doing over there?!” a boy followed suit.

Both Yurika and Maki turned to look in the direction the voices had come from.

“S-Satomi-san?!”

“That’s the resident of room 106! Satomi Koutarou, was it?”

Both Koutarou and Sanae were approaching from a distance. Yurika and Maki had been fighting at the bottom of the shallow pit for the foundation. Koutarou and Sanae stood at the edge of the hole when they arrived and looked down at the two surprised girls.

“Satomi-san, Sanae-chan, why are you here?!”

“Yurika, how long are you planning on playing around here? Show some restraint, will you?!”

“Yeah! Try thinking about the problems you’re causing us for once!”

Having found Yurika, the two of them laid into her. It was now half past one o'clock and they'd all be late for fifth period.

"I see. So that's how it is... It seems I've misunderstood the situation!"

Yurika was surprised, but Maki was floored.

"That man, Satomi Koutarou, has learned magic on his own! He's the one controlling that ghost! He's Nijino Yurika's accomplice!"

That was how Maki interpreted Koutarou's appearance. Of course, that wasn't actually the case. She was still quite seriously mistaken on the matter.

"Being able to pass through our wards without destroying them means you can either use alteration or enhancement magic! And since you're controlling a ghost with so much spiritual energy, your necromancy must be at quite a high level as well! You can at the very least use two colors of magic, and you're more powerful than Yurika, too!"

Since he could easily pass through the ward, there was no way that Koutarou was just a normal person. And since the ghost had passed through with him, it was hard to believe she was a typical ghost. Since she had arrived at Koutarou's side, Maki was under the impression that he was controlling her.

I was far too naive. He's much more than just the mastermind behind this all! I never guessed she had this kind of trump card hidden up her sleeve...

If Koutarou really had the kinds of powers Maki was imagining, then even if all seven magical girls of Darkness Rainbow went in together on an all-out attack, they would be no match for him. Just the thought sent a chill down Maki's spine.

"Thank god I found him before all seven of us gathered. To think he's a master of necromancy and either enhancement or alteration! I don't even want to think what would happen if I hadn't found him."

A necromancer was a real threat. Ghosts or walking corpses strengthened with enhancement magic... Changing the toxicity of ghouls or departed souls through the use of alteration... The already troublesome undead could be made even more powerful via magic and sent to attack Darkness Rainbow. If they suffered a surprise attack like that while they were busy with Yurika, even the

leaders of Darkness Rainbow would be in danger. At the moment, Maki was grateful that she'd gone scouting alone. Even in the worst case scenario, she would be the only casualty.

"In that case, I'll at least take you with me, Yurika!"

Maki was convinced that the true enemy was no longer Yurika, but Koutarou, the mysterious man who possessed both cunning and great magical power. Considering the odds against her, Maki figured it was impossible to take them both down right now. Instead, she was planning on defeating Yurika to reduce some of Koutarou's power. Maki's decision was precise and swift, even if it was all based on a gross misunderstanding.

"Come on. Get over here, Yurika. We're going home."

"No, Satomi-san! It's time for you to face facts already!"

"That's my line!"

Maki sprinted towards Yurika and Koutarou as they talked.

Now that they're preoccupied, this is my best chance!

Maki readied her staff with both hands and started reciting an incantation without slowing down. If she used her familiar indigo magic, she could focus on casting it even though she was running.

"Bind Person! Modifier—"

Koutarou noticed what Maki was doing and tried to stop her in the middle of her incantation.

"Huh? Maki-san, it's already over!" he shouted.

Don't make a fool of me! It's not over yet!

But it didn't stop Maki. Worse, she was incensed at what she perceived as provocation.

"Maki-chan?! Oh no!"

"Modifier: Double Effect!"

"Quick Cast Anti-Magic Shield!"

Speeding up her incantation, Yurika finished casting her spell first. Before the indigo-colored bullet could reach Yurika, a yellow light enveloped her body.

“I win!”

However, Maki didn’t seem disappointed. In fact, she felt certain of her victory and closed in on Yurika. The next moment, the indigo bullet hit her dead on.

“Kyaaaaah!”

Despite her defensive spell protecting her, Yurika let out a scream. Maki had activated her spell twice, so even though it was a single spell, it had twice the power. Yurika’s defensive spell only protected her from the first effect and wasn’t able to block the second.

“M-My body can’t...”

The spell implanted a deep suggestion into its target’s mind, depriving them of their freedom of movement. After she was hit, Yurika couldn’t even lift a finger.

“Oooh, for someone who skipped school to practice, well done!” Koutarou cheered.

“Koutarou, Koutarou, a beam just shot out of the tip of her staff! A beam!” Sanae eagerly pointed out.

Watching what went down between Maki and Yurika, Koutarou and Sanae began clapping. They were surprised by the bullet of indigo light that came flying from Maki’s staff, but for all the wrong reasons.

“It seems like they’re pretending that being hit by that makes you unable to move.”

“Light effects, huh? Cosplayers these days sure go all out with the details. I wonder how they’re doing that...”

“Who knows? Technology advances so fast these days that it’s hard to keep up with.”

“Koutarou, you sound like some old man.”

“Leave me alone.”

Despite what had happened, it only looked like cosplay to the two of them. They were thoroughly amused, oblivious to what Yurika was going through.

“Jeez, way to kill the tension... Oh right, I need to hurry up and do something!”

Yurika tried her best to escape from the binding spell, but she was mostly annoyed by Koutarou and Sanae’s reactions.

“You’re too late, Yurika! I win!”

Before Yurika could move again, Maki closed the distance between them. Maki’s leg was glowing red this time. She was planning on finishing off the immobilized Yurika with a deadly, magic-infused kick.

“Sorry for getting in the way of your fun, but...”

“Tch!”

However, just before Maki’s blow connected with Yurika, she stopped short and jumped back.

“I figured you wouldn’t stay out of this, Satomi Koutarou!”

Maki had only relented because Koutarou had come down to the bottom of the pit.

“Of course I wouldn’t.” Koutarou smiled wryly at Maki as he walked over to the unmoving Yurika. “Come on. Stop playing around, Yurika. We’re going back to school.”

“S-Satomi-san, it’s dangerous! Please hurry and hide somewhere!”

“The only one in danger is you. You’re going to have to repeat a grade if you keep this up.”

Koutarou leaned over and put his hand on Yurika’s shoulder.

Jeez, all you do is play...

Koutarou sighed in amazement.

“Look, let’s just hurry up and go.”

“I would if I could! I can’t move right now! So please just run away on your own, Satomi-san!”

Yurika was still under the influence of Maki’s binding spell, and the only thing she could move was her head. It was almost like the rest of her body had turned to lead.

“I said let’s go. If you don’t cut it out, I’m gonna get angry.”

“Huh?!”

However, the moment Koutarou pulled on Yurika, something unexpected happened.

“I-I can move? I can move again!”

Yurika inexplicably regained her mobility. Surprised by the sudden change, she touched her body to confirm that she was back to normal.

“Of course you can. Jeez...”

Why on earth wouldn’t she be able to?

Genuinely amazed, Koutarou began rubbing his temples.

“Wh-What was that—”

However, Maki’s surprise far surpassed Yurika’s. She couldn’t believe what had just happened.

“He dispelled it? Without a staff or any incantations?!”

The moment Koutarou had pulled on Yurika, his palm had let out a white glow for just an instant. At that point, the magic binding Yurika was still very strong, but as soon as the white light touched her, the magic holding Yurika prisoner dispersed, freeing her.

“Impossible. I’ve never even heard of white magic... More importantly, just how much mana would it take to dispel my magic without the use of a staff or incantation?”

In truth, it was the same white light that had saved Koutarou and the others from danger several times in the past. But the only one who had noticed it this time was Maki, who considered Koutarou a threat. The doubts brewing inside

of her stirred more and more.

“Even if he’s making up for the lack of a staff and outfit with some other magic tool, I can’t underestimate his ability to use spells without incantations or gestures. It looks like I’ll need to use *that...*”

No matter what kind of magic Satomi Koutarou uses, that *will at the very least...*

Maki’s eyes narrowed and a grin crept across her lips.

“Let’s go, Yurika. This is over.”

“Yeah. I can understand why you would practice something this intense in secret, but even then there are limits.”

“I’m not practicing! I’m really fighting!”

While Koutarou and Sanae argued with Yurika, Maki appeared to turn and shout to a storage shed nearby.

“Come out, Sakuraba Harumi!”

“Huh?!”

“Sakuraba-senpai?!”

Hearing such an unexpected name from Maki’s lips, Koutarou and the others hurriedly turned around.

“S-Satomi-kun, Nijino-san...”

Harumi in her school uniform appeared from behind the storage shed, but she was acting strangely. Her expression was pale and her movements were awkward. Seeing that, Koutarou worriedly called out to her.

“What’s wrong, Sakuraba-senpai?!”

“I don’t know either. M-My body is moving on its own! I can’t help it!”

Harumi was frightened by her limbs moving like they had a will of their own. It was a haunting feeling to have your body stop listening to you. It would scare anyone.

“Sakuraba-senpai!”

“I’ll save you right away!”

“Why is Harumi even here...?”

Recognizing Harumi’s distress, Koutarou and the others rushed towards her. Koutarou couldn’t imagine her joking around about something like this.

“Oh, that won’t do...”

“S-Satomi-kun!”

However, Maki was much faster. She reached Harumi long before the other three, who then stopped dead in their tracks.

“What’s the meaning of this, Maki-san?!”

“Well, that’s obvious.”

Maki thrust her staff at Harumi.

“So this is all your doing, Maki-chan?!”

“That’s right, Yurika. No matter how strong you and that man are, do you think you can still fight me while protecting this girl?!”

“Don’t be unreasonable, you guys! Unlike you, Sakuraba-senpai has a weak constitution! Don’t involve her in this!” Koutarou scolded them.

“I wouldn’t do anything like that! I didn’t even know Sakuraba-senpai was here!” Yurika pleaded.

“What wonderful expressions, Yurika, Satomi Koutarou. I’ve been waiting to see that kind of look on your faces.”

Seeing Koutarou and Yurika panic, Maki was satisfied that she had read the situation correctly.

As I thought, this girl is important to Yurika...

Ever since seeing Harumi on the rooftop at school, Maki thought she might make a good pawn.

“S-Satomi-kun!”

“Now, what will you do, Rainbow Yurika, Satomi Koutarou?! Will you attack me and risk hitting this girl?!”

“Hey, Maki-chan, that’s unfair!”

Harumi couldn’t move on her own because of Maki’s magic. Maki was basically holding her hostage and planning on using her as a shield from Yurika’s and Koutarou’s attacks.

“Koutarou, something’s wrong here.”

“I know!”

Koutarou and Sanae nodded at each other and then glared at Maki.

“Maki-san, enough already! Sakuraba-senpai is off limits! Don’t involve her in this!”

“I bet she is. That’s why I chose her!”

Koutarou didn’t understand the situation Harumi was in, but he knew that Maki had gotten her involved.

Just what is going on? Is this something more than a cosplay routine?

For the past half a year, Koutarou never had a single doubt that Yurika was only cosplaying. That was slowly starting to change.

Koutarou had grown suspicious when Harumi first appeared to them at the construction site. When he thought the whole thing through, he couldn’t believe that Yurika would involve Harumi like this. The two of them were close enough to call best friends, and Yurika was aware of Harumi’s weak constitution. There was no way Yurika would drag her into some cosplay skit straight out of an action movie. But the biggest give away of all was that Harumi was scared. Even Koutarou could tell that she wasn’t acting.

“Satomi-kun, Nijino-san! What’s happening?”

“Just hang on, Sakuraba-senpai! I’ll be right there!”

“Maki-chan, let Sakuraba-senpai go!”

“This discussion is over. Protect me, Sakuraba Harumi!”

“Kyaaaaah! Wh-What is—?!”

Maki ignored Koutarou and Yurika and ordered Harumi around. As she did, Harumi began moving against her own will.

“Yurika, what is happening?!”

“I told you! I’m fighting with Maki-chan!”

Yurika stepped out in front of Koutarou as if to protect him, brandishing her large staff.

“Koutarou, what’s happening? I know Yurika’s a cosplayer, but is this Maki girl a real magician?”

“Based on what’s happening, that seems to be—”

“Stone Rain! Mode: Effective Time, Twice!”

“Satomi-san, here she comes! Don’t just sit there!”

“Waaaaah!”

“Kyaaaaah!”

Koutarou abandoned his train of thought in favor of screaming. Stones lying around the construction site floated up into the air and rained down on them. That was the power of Maki’s spell.

But as the stones began falling, Yurika readied her staff and shouted, “Quick Cast Force Field!”

“Ow, owowow! Wait, what?”

The stone rain that was pouring down on Koutarou suddenly stopped. As he cautiously looked up, he could see a barrier of yellow light deflecting the rocks.

“What is going on?”

“I don’t get it either...”

Koutarou looked around for answers, but what caught his eye was Yurika holding her staff over her head. A yellow light was flowing out from her staff. It spread out over them like an umbrella, creating the yellow barrier.

“Yurika, you...”

“Are you okay, Satomi-san?”

Yurika had also been hit by rocks on her head and exposed limbs. A few of her wounds were bad enough to be bleeding, but Yurika showed no concern for

own well-being as she smiled at Koutarou.

“C-Can you really... use magic?”

Even Koutarou could see the truth as Yurika used a strange power to protect them from the falling rocks.

“That’s what I’ve been telling you from the very start!” Yurika retorted with tears welling in her eyes.

Which means that the things I saw when we first met weren’t just some tools or tricks. It was all real...

The moment that Yurika had been waiting months for had finally come. Koutarou finally realized the truth.

“Got you!”

But just then, Maki appeared under Yurika’s umbrella of light after making her own way through the stone rain. The spell hadn’t just been an attack. It also served to conceal her next move as she enveloped her limbs in a red light. They were energy bolts set to activate when they came in contact with something. Maki was planning to strike Yurika down with a physical attack with the power of an energy bolt behind it.

“Oh no!”

The appearance of Harumi, the stone rain, and Koutarou. Yurika was too distracted by those three things to react to Maki in time.

“It’s okay! Don’t worry, Yurika!”

“Tch! Satomi Koutarou?!”

Maki was thrown for a loop. Her punch didn’t connect with Yurika like she’d expected. Before it reached her, Koutarou got in between them and grabbed Maki’s arm, stopping her attack. Although he didn’t know what to do in a fight with a magic user, fist fights were his forte.

“Satomi-san!”

“Don’t worry!”

Koutarou grabbed Maki’s wrists and pulled her away from Yurika with all of

his might.

“This man again?!”

When he did, the red light vanished from Maki’s hands. The mysterious white light Koutarou emitted had dispelled it.

“In that case...!”

With both of her wrists grappled, Maki threw out a kick with her right leg. In such close quarters, it would be impossible to avoid. The red light around her legs was also still there.

“Special Move: Sanae-chan Shield!”

However, even Maki’s deadly kick was blocked.

“Are you okay, Koutarou?!”

“You saved me!”

Sanae had diffused the attack by using her Poltergeist powers to throw Maki’s leg back. Colliding with Sanae’s psychic powers, the energy bolt was depleted and the red light around Maki’s right leg vanished.

“Tch, pesky ghost!”

Maki used the momentum from her redirected kick to free herself from Koutarou. As a parting gift, she spun around and kicked at him with her left leg.

“Whoa!”

Having lost his balance when Maki broke free, Koutarou had no way of avoiding Maki’s kick this time. Just as it looked like he was about to suffer a direct hit...

“Snare Trap!”

The soil around Maki’s feet suddenly began rising up, throwing her off balance. It was the quick work of a spell that Yurika had cast in the heat of the moment. It was a basic spell, but it had more than enough power to stop the rotation of Maki’s roundhouse kick.

“Good job, Yurika!”

“Tch, I knew three on one would be impossible! Energy Release!”

Maki released the magical red light still surrounding her left leg in the form of a small explosion and a smokescreen.

“Uwah?!”

“As if I’d let you catch me that easily!”

While the explosion had hurt Maki some, it was intended to make Koutarou lose sight of her. Reaching out to capture her again, he only grabbed smoke.

“Sanae-chan Psychogun!”

Coming up with an idea after watching the stone rain earlier, Sanae used her Poltergeist powers to wield a stone and aimed for Maki. Once launched, it chased after Maki with the speed of a bullet.

“Nice teamwork, but too bad!”

Maki was fleeing back towards Harumi, and she reached her in time to put the innocent Harumi between her and the speeding rock.

“Kyaaaaah!” Harumi shrieked as the stone closed in.

“Sanae-chan!”

“Whoooooaaa!”

Sanae changed the stone’s trajectory as quickly as she could. It grazed Harumi’s bangs, then flew straight up into the sky and disappeared.

“Hey, using Harumi as a shield is unfair!”

“Say what you will. I’ll do whatever it takes to win against three people ganging up on me.”

“That’s rude! Teaming up is a privilege for heroes of justice!”

“Sanae-chan, stop saying such stupid things.”

“S-Sorry...”

Koutarou scolded Sanae while locking eyes with Maki. She stepped out from behind Harumi once more.

On top of the fact that Yurika really can use magic, it seems like the part about

Maki-san being an enemy is true too. Anyone who would use Sakuraba-senpai as a human shield definitely can't be a good guy. I see. So Yurika's enemy really came after all... The evil magical girls.

If Yurika wasn't a cosplayer, but really a magical girl, it would mean that Koutarou and the others had ignored this threat for months now.

"S-Satomi-kun, Nijino-san, j-just what is happening?" Harumi asked, terrified and confused by the events spiraling out of control.

"What's wrong? Aren't you going to attack?" taunted Maki.

She was relentlessly provoking Koutarou and the others, but they couldn't do anything. They knew she would just use Harumi as a shield if they did. Koutarou spent a long minute glaring at Maki before he called out to Yurika.

"Yurika."

"Yes?"

"You're a magical girl, right?"

Yurika was ecstatic when she heard Koutarou say those words. She couldn't help rejoicing that she had finally been able to convey the truth, but she suppressed those feelings and responded with a nod.

"Yes. I'm the magical girl of love and courage, Rainbow Yurika."

"Then back me up."

"Satomi-san, what are you planning on doing?!" Yurika gasped.

"I'm charging in."

"That's too reckless!"

"If Maki-san is going to use Sakuraba-senpai as a shield, our only option is to close in and turn it into a brawl. You might be a magical girl, but you're no good in fist fights. Besides..." Koutarou was in the middle of saying something, but didn't finish the thought.

"Besides what?"

"...While I'm in there, can you do something about Sakuraba-senpai?"

Koutarou answered her, but not with what he had originally intended to say: “Besides, you couldn’t punch Sakuraba-senpai.” In the worst case scenario, they might need to knock Harumi out in order to take her back. The timid and incredibly gentle Magical Girl Rainbow Yurika would never let him do that.

“I got it. I’ll give it a shot.”

“I’m counting on you.” Koutarou nodded at Yurika and turned back towards Maki. “Maki-san, could you give Sakuraba-senpai back to us?”

“A foolish question, but I’ll release this girl once I’ve beaten all of you.”

Is he aiming for a hand-to-hand fight, or is he going to try to save Sakuraba Harumi first? In that case, should I use her to threaten them? But if I lose my hostage, this’ll turn into three on one again. In that case...

Maki readied her staff and began chanting a spell.

“Blast Fireball!”

A huge fireball about a meter in diameter appeared over the tip of Maki’s staff.

“Koutarou, this is bad!”

“Let’s go, Yurika!”

“Right!”

Before Maki finished her incantation, Koutarou began sprinting towards her. Sanae followed at a slight distance. Against someone with ranged attacks, all three of them standing clumped together would just make them easy targets. They needed to keep some space between the two of them and Yurika, who was going to use her magic to cover them.

“Modifier: High Concentration!”

Once Maki finished chanting her spell, the fireball began shrinking. In exchange, the temperature of the flames grew rapidly. The flames turned from red to white as the orb shrunk down to the size of a baseball.

“Satomi-san, watch out for that fireball! I can’t block a direct hit from that, even with my magic!”

“I got it!”

After Yurika called out her warning, Koutarou and Sanae’s bodies were enveloped in a yellow light. It was another defensive spell from Yurika.

“Oh, that’s quite all right.”

Maki smiled at Koutarou and the others, but it was only a smile in name. There wasn’t so much as a hint of kindness in it.

“I have no intention of shooting it at you.”

“What?!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?!”

Leering at her confused opponents, Maki pointed her staff at her target.

“...Huh?”

Her real target was just over her shoulder—Sakuraba Harumi. Once she lined up the shot, the fireball flew from Maki’s staff straight for Harumi.

“Wait, you’re aiming for Sakuraba-senpai?!”

“Koutarou, Harumi is going to be killed!”

The fireball had already been launched, so there was nothing Koutarou and Sanae could do. Even if they defeated Maki now, it wouldn’t save Harumi.

“Kyaaaaah!” Harumi screamed as she watched the fireball come for her.

Clueless as to why this was happening and unable to move her body, there was nothing she could do either. She had no way of defending herself from the searing ball of flame flying towards her.

Sakuraba-senpai!

“Cancel!”

In the face of Harumi’s crisis, the only one who had the power to do anything was Yurika. She canceled the spell she was casting and started a different incantation.

“Recall Precast Teleport!”

Teleportation magic normally required a long time to prepare and cast, so

Yurika whipped out an incantation she had prepared beforehand. It was a one-time-use ace in the hole. The moment she finished her incantation, she vanished from where she stood and reappeared in front of Harumi.

“Koutarou, Yurika just...!”

“Yurika! What are you doing?!”

Sanae was amazed that Yurika had teleported, but Koutarou was more worried about why she’d appeared where she did. Yurika brandished her staff and started another incantation.

“As long as it’s not a direct hit, this should be able to protect you...” Yurika said, smiling.

Next, her spell activated and a yellow light enveloped Harumi.

“Nijino-san, what are you—”

“I’ll leave the rest to you, Satomi-san.”

Then the fireball crashed into Yurika.

Yurika was well aware that this was Maki’s plan. She wouldn’t do something crazy like kill her own hostage—her trump card. And even though she knew she was walking into a trap, Yurika had to protect Harumi. If not, the unthinkable might have happened.

“Yurikaaaaaaa!”

“Nijino-san!”

“Yurika, why would you—?!”

The moment the fireball hit Yurika, the energy inside of it was released all at once. It burned through the defensive barrier protecting Yurika and scorched her. In the sea of flame, Yurika’s lifeless body collapsed to the ground.

But thanks to her actions, Harumi was unharmed. Some of the flames that burned Yurika reached Harumi too, but they had no effect because of the defensive spell Yurika had put on her.

“I figured this would be the simplest method,” Maki said, coldly staring at

Yurika, who laid collapsed on the soil.

That's right. This is Rainbow Heart's weakness. You have too much to protect. Because of that, you end up not being able to protect anything at all...

However, for a moment there was also pity in her glance.

"Satomi-kun! Nijino-san... Nijino-san is...!"

Still unable to move the rest of her body, all Harumi could do was scream. She was horrified at watching Yurika's sacrifice to protect her.

"Yurika! Hey, Yurika!"

Koutarou ran over to Yurika and held her up. Her defensive spell had kept Maki's fireball from being fatal, but Yurika was still badly wounded and unconscious.

"She's okay... right?"

Sanae timidly looked at Yurika. Sanae could see Yurika's spiritual energy, but it had weakened to the point where even Sanae was worried.

"As if something like this would kill her."

Koutarou trembled with anger as he held Yurika. However, that anger wasn't aimed at Maki so much as it was himself.

Why did I take so long to listen to her?! This wouldn't have happened if I had just believed in her!

Because he hadn't taken her seriously, he had ignored the impending threat of evil magical girls for over half a year. If only he'd listened to Yurika, they could have at least come up with some sort of plan. Then Yurika might not have been hurt like this. Koutarou just couldn't forgive himself. He now realized with perfect clarity that he should have given Yurika some credit, even if it was only just a little bit. That realization boiled into an intense rage deep inside of him.

"Satomi-kun..."

At this point, Harumi began to faintly understand the situation she was in. Yurika obviously wasn't just a cosplayer. There was something else to it. She didn't know if what she had seen was magic or not, but she understood that

Yurika was fighting a battle with lives at stake.

“Don’t blame yourself, Satomi-kun.”

“But if I had believed her, this wouldn’t have happened!”

That said, almost no one would believe a total stranger going on about magic, magical girls, and approaching enemies. It was somewhat unfortunate that Koutarou and Yurika’s first meeting had been under mostly normal circumstances.

“There’s no need to worry. You will soon all meet the same fate as Yurika,” Maki coldly declared.

“Maki-san!”

Brandishing her staff, she approached Koutarou and the others.

So she’s planning on finishing off Yurika...

Realizing Maki’s intentions, Koutarou laid Yurika down on the ground and stepped forward to protect her and Harumi.

“I won’t let you lay a finger on Yurika.”

“If you win, that is.”

There’s no need to go all out as long as I can get a grasp of this man’s true strength.

Maki was just planning on assessing Koutarou’s abilities. She had no intention of going into a real fight with an opponent she knew nothing about right away.

“Then I’ll just have to win!”

And if I can’t protect Yurika now, I really will be an idiot!

The moment Koutarou shouted, a loud, shrill sound similar to hitting two light metal pieces together rang out as a pure white light lit up the area.

“What?!”

“You’re finally going all out, are you?!”

An orb of white light appeared between Koutarou and Harumi, right where Yurika was lying. It was roughly a meter in diameter and floated above Yurika.

As it illuminated her face, her pained expression seemed to relax some. Just like the white light that had healed Harumi during the sports festival, this white orb was healing the critically wounded Yurika.

“What’s going on?!”

“Koutarou, this is that light!”

This light... It’s protecting us again?!

Koutarou was surprised by the appearance of the light, but it was Sanae who recognized it. In the past, it lit up a sword and protected Theia. It had also lit up charms and protected Sanae too. Having experienced it firsthand, Sanae was quite sure this was the same light from before.

While Koutarou and Sanae were taken aback by the sudden appearance of the light, Harumi called out to Koutarou.

“Koutarou-sama...”

“Sakuraba-senpai?!”

When Koutarou looked to Harumi, he was met with an unusual sight. Her hair was glowing in a silver light, and there was a crest resembling a sword on her forehead. Her appearance seemed almost divine, like she was the very embodiment of a shrine maiden or a holy woman.

“S-Sakuraba-senpai, what happened to you...?!”

“There’s no time to explain,” Harumi said.

There was a gentle look in her eyes as she shook her head. It was as if she was having some nostalgic reunion. Like she had found someone she had been searching for for a long time.

“If I use this power that healed Yurika and call out your sword...”

As she spoke, Harumi reached for the glowing orb. She held her palms out towards it and closed her eyes.

Sakuraba Harumi escaped the effects of my magic?! She dispelled it?! No, of course she could with that much mana...

Maki couldn’t hide her surprise when she saw that Harumi could move freely

now.

But since when could Sakuraba Harumi use magic? Is she trying to control the light that Satomi Koutarou summoned?!

The most surprising thing out of all this was that Harumi began manipulating the white light that had appeared.

“Sakuraba-senpai, just what are you...”

“It’s okay. Your fate is not to die here.”

With Harumi holding her hands out, the orb of white light started to contract. It was similar to how Maki had shrunk her fireball, but when Harumi did it, the orb began to take the shape of a sword instead.

“Koutarou-sama, please use this. I couldn’t summon the real one, but this is without a doubt your sword.”

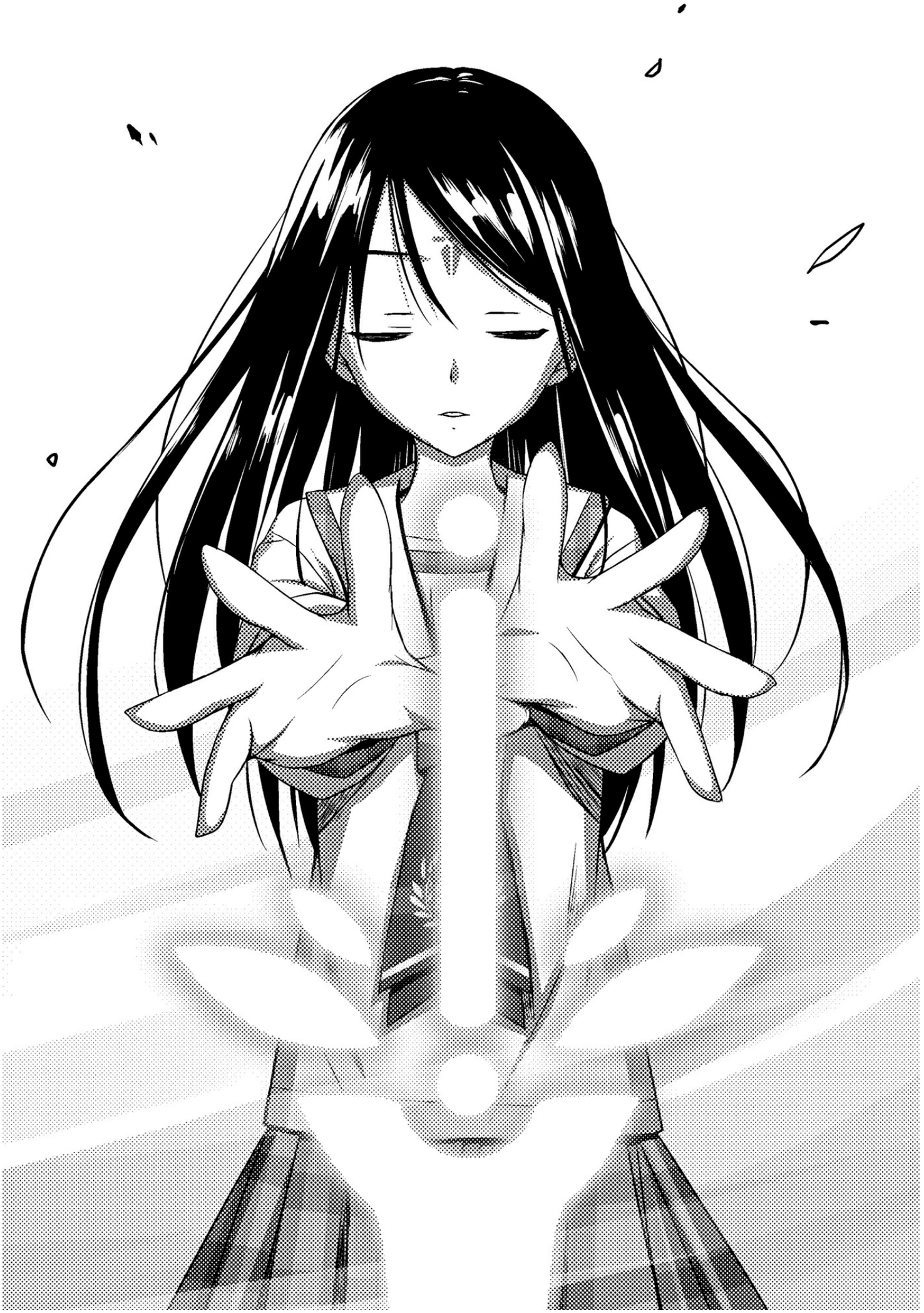
“Koutarou, that sword has amazing powers! What’s going on? It’s overflowing with so much power that I can barely see!” shouted Sanae.

Sanae could sense the power the sword was emitting. Almost like blowing wind, white light was flowing out from the sword. It was strong enough that Sanae—a ghost—could feel it spraying against her skin. It was so strong, in fact, that she couldn’t see the outline of the sword clearly.

“I understand!”

I don’t get what’s going on, but there’s no time to hesitate!

Koutarou took the sword of light without another thought. It was simply a mass of light, but once in his hands, it felt the same as the sword he had borrowed from Theia. Even knowing it had tremendous power, Koutarou felt no fear in wielding it. Instead, there was only gentleness and warmth.



“Koutarou-sama...”

The warm feeling from the sword was very similar to the warmth he felt from Harumi’s smile. And watching Koutarou with the sword in his hands, there seemed to be a smile in Harumi’s eyes even now.

“May fortune be with you...”

“Sakuraba-senpai?!”

After getting a handle on the sword, Koutarou looked back at Harumi only to see her falling slowly towards the ground. As she did, her hair returned to its normal color and the sword crest on her forehead vanished.

“It’s okay. It seems like she’s only sleeping.”

Sanae approached Harumi to check her breathing and get a closer read on her aura. Neither indicated any real cause for concern.

“I see...”

Relieved, Koutarou grasped his sword and turned towards Maki. He was still worried about Harumi, but he couldn’t afford to forget about his enemy.

“Color me surprised. So that’s your true power...”

Maki appeared to have no intention of attacking as she stared at Koutarou’s sword. Just like she said, she appeared to be quite surprised.

“I’m surprised too.”

Koutarou didn’t fully understand what was really going on. Between Yurika actually turning out to be a magical girl, the arrival of her enemy, and the showdown between them, it had been a wild chain of surprises. And then there was Yurika sacrificing herself to save Harumi, the mysterious white light, and Harumi summoning a sword out of it. This year had been chaotic for Koutarou, but today was the worst by far.

“What are you, some kind of monster...?”

Maki tensed when she saw the weapon Koutarou had in his hands. As a magic user herself, she could tell how strong the sword was. It was literally overflowing with power—enough to shake the whole construction site.

I'll give it a try...

Maki braced herself and pointed her staff at Koutarou.

"Here I come, Satomi Koutarou!"

"Sanae, I'll leave Yurika and Sakuraba-senpai to you!"

"Got it!"

Koutarou readied his sword and took a Forthorthian-style stance. It was the old school sword fighting style that Theia had beaten into Koutarou on a daily basis as part of his training.

"Double Cast: Force Field, Lightning Lance!"

As expected, the one who made the first move was Maki with her ranged attacks. She incanted spells in rapid succession, creating a shield to protect her and a powerful lightning spear.

"Take this!"

Maki hurled the electric javelin at Koutarou who was currently closing in on her. She specifically targeted his sword in hopes it would act like a lightning rod.

"Haaaaaaaa!"

Seeing the oncoming attack, Koutarou roared to pump himself up. As if in response to his battle cry, light began overflowing from the sword. And as the lightning spear came in contact with the light, it vanished as if it were just an illusion.

"What?!"

"Hyaaaaaaaaaaah!"

In Maki's momentary stupor at the outcome of the situation, Koutarou closed the distance between them and swung his sword down towards her.

"Tch!"

Maki twisted and leaned, barely managing to dodge the sword. As its edge grazed her, the protective spell she'd cast on herself vanished.

"What is this?!"

I had no idea he was this strong! At this rate, I don't stand a chance! This is an unfortunate match for my specialty!

Just the light being emitted from Koutarou's sword was enough to negate Maki's lightning spear, and his sword simply skimming by her had ripped through her magical shield. It was the perfect weapon for fighting a magician.

"In that case...!"

Maki used her momentum from dodging the sword to do a backflip. The moment she landed, she cast her next spell.

"Quick Cast Fog Cloud! Modifier: Effective Area, Colossal!"

"What?!"

As its name implied, Maki used a spell that created a cloud of fog. She'd cast it so that it would cover a wide area, more than enough to fill the pit at construction site.

"What is this?! I can't see anything!"

The thick, magical fog completely obscured Koutarou's vision. And because it was magical, not even Sanae could see through it.

"Sanae, you stay there and protect Yurika and Sakuraba-senpai!"

"Got it!"

But Koutarou's sword had the power to cut through the fog, and so little by little, he cleared the air around him. As soon as he could, he looked around and readied his sword again.

Why isn't she attacking?

But no matter how hard he looked, he couldn't find Maki. There was no surprise attack. He stayed on his guard until the fog scattered on the wind. But once the fog had completely lifted, Maki was nowhere to be seen.

Sunshine and Rainbows

Wednesday, November 18th

Theia stared at Koutarou's desk while listening to the sound of their math teacher's chalk scribbling across the blackboard.

He hasn't come back yet...

Fifth period had started, but there was no sign of Koutarou.

That's right, the cellphone!

Theia pulled her cellphone out from her pocket. Since she'd already registered Koutarou's number, she could call him with the simple press of a button.

But...

But she restrained herself. Her expression clouded over.

Fifth period only just started... and I'm in the middle of class... That's right, I'm in the middle of class, so there's nothing I can do about it now!

Theia made excuses to herself and put her cellphone back in her pocket. In reality, there were several ways for her to contact him. For example, she could say she was feeling ill and go to the nurse's office to call him from there. But Theia wouldn't do it. If she called Koutarou herself, she wouldn't know what to say.

All right, back to work!

After putting her phone away, she turned back to the notebook on her desk. It was filled with messy scribbles, all ideas for her next play. She'd prepared a notebook for a new manuscript, but she had only just started on it. There weren't even proper sentences in it, just notes and partial thoughts.

If I can't get this scene right, the rest just won't do...

The scene in question was the very last scene of the story, the Blue Knight and the Silver Princess's farewell. At that point in the play, the fighting has drawn to a close and the Silver Princess is now empress. After seeing his mission through, the Blue Knight departs of his own accord, even though he knows that the Silver Princess loves him.

According to historians, it was said that the Blue Knight returned to his homeland because his family was waiting for him, or perhaps that he left the Silver Princess because he feared that his existence could trigger an internal power struggle. There was also a theory that he might have been assassinated. The Blue Knight's name never again appeared in the annals of history, and so the truth was buried two thousand years in the past. So while the truth of the parting scene was a mystery, it was also the climax of a grand love story adored by the people of Forthorthe, both past and present.

It was a well known fact that the Silver Princess loved the Blue Knight... but what about the Blue Knight?

Of course, Theia was like any other Forthorthian in that sense. She loved both the story and its characters. And because of her particular affection for the Blue Knight, she was making this important scene her starting point. Everything else needed to lead up to that moment—the final scene. Pen in hand, Theia considered all kinds of ideas.

If he loved her, they would at least kiss...

Kiss. That word conjured images in Theia's mind of a man and woman kissing. But the couple she imagined now wasn't the Blue Knight and the Silver Princess. It was a somewhat dimwitted young boy and a girl with beautiful golden hair.

A kiss, huh?

Theia played the fantasy out in her head. Her heart was beating faster than the furious scribbling of the chalk on the blackboard.

Ah!

After a few dreamy moments, Theia returned to her senses. Her beautiful hair bobbed from side to side as she shook her head and her face turned bright red.

No, no! The Blue Knight and the Silver Princess are the ones who are supposed

to kiss! Wh-Why would I k-kiss that ill-mannered boy?!

Thoroughly embarrassed, Theia went to cross the “kiss” idea off of her list, but she stayed her hand after drawing the first line.

B-But since I’m his acting instructor, we... we’d k-kiss... like lovers do. A kiss that takes your breath away... A d-deep kiss... Practicing... Practicing it over and over...

“A-Aahhh...”

“Your Highness?”

Theia collapsed onto her desk. Her face was beet red and her eyes rolled back. Her brain had overheated.

“Your Highness, what’s wrong?”

“Hah... Ahh... Be... more gentle with your kisses...”

Ruth was worried now. Since she sat next to Theia, she leaned over and shook her, but she had no reaction and just kept mumbling nonsense.

“Ruth-chan, it’s okay, ho! According to my observations, she just fainted after overworking her head, ho!”

“If you wait a moment, she’ll recover, ho! So don’t worry, ho!”

Both Karama and Korama reported to Ruth while camouflaged.

“I see... Thank goodness...” Ruth let out a sigh of relief.

“But what was she thinking so hard about, ho?”

“I’d like to know, ho! We need to investigate and prevent it from happening again, ho!”

The two haniwas started climbing up Theia’s desk. The way they looked as they shimmied up the legs of her desk was rather adorable, but since they were hidden from sight, no one got to see it.

“There seem to be a lot of scribbles here, ho!”

“The notebook is completely filled, ho!”

“Her Highness has been very busy working on a manuscript for the new play.”

“Ho! This is serious, ho!”

“Ho, ho! We can’t do anything to prevent that, ho! Good luck, Theia-chan!”

The haniwas looked at Theia with admiration. Their empty eye sockets almost looked gentle.

“T-Training... That’s right, this is training... so one more time...”

“Karama, Korama, just leave her be.”

“Ho! Got it, Nee-san! Ho!”

“Goodnight, ho! Rest well, Theia-chan! Ho!”

Scolded by Kiriha, Karama and Korama obediently returned to her desk. They adorably skipped along the floor back to their master, but still, no one saw them. That included Kiriha. In her case, however, it was because she was looking out the window and not because the haniwas were invisible to the naked eye.

“But what really happened to Koutarou and Yurika? At this rate, they’ll miss fifth period altogether...”

Kiriha had been watching the front gate for a while now. But the clock kept ticking away and neither Koutarou nor Yurika had appeared.

“I just hope something strange hasn’t happened...”

Kiriha was planning on calling Koutarou once class ended. Unlike the flustered Theia, it wasn’t a big deal for Kiriha.

Around the time Theia fainted in the classroom, Koutarou was still at the construction site with the other girls. Even after Maki had vanished, Koutarou and Sanae were unable to leave since both Yurika and Harumi were unconscious. The only thing Koutarou could do was carry them to a prefab shed on the site.

“How’d the call go?”

“No good. I’m not getting a signal.”

Koutarou wanted to get in contact with Theia and the others for Yurika’s sake.

When it came to medical treatment, the Blue Knight's facilities were superior to a hospital's. He also wanted to tell them what had happened with Maki. Both Theia and Kiriha would want to know that they had a new enemy on their hands. Yet for some reason, Koutarou wasn't getting any cellphone service.

"In that case, should I go back to school and bring them here?"

Since Sanae was a ghost, she was able to fly straight to the school. With the phone out of the question, that would be the fastest way.

"Could you? I can't leave them here."

Since Koutarou refused to leave Yurika and Harumi on their own, he was glad to accept Sanae's proposal.

"You bet. Just you wait, Koutarou. I'll be right back with the others."

"I'm counting on you, Sanae."

"You got it!"

At Koutarou's request, Sanae cheerfully nodded and went on her way, flying up and passing through the roof.

"Huh?"

As Sanae began flying towards the school, she noticed that her body felt oddly heavy.

"That's weird. I wonder what's up..."

It felt like she had a rubber string attached to her that was pulling her back. And the farther she traveled from the shed where Koutarou was, the stronger it tried to pull her back.

"Jeez, what is this? I don't know what's going on, but I don't have time for this. I'm in a hurry."

Sanae couldn't let it stop her. Right now she was on an important mission from Koutarou. If she completed it, he was sure to praise her. Determined to complete her job and get her reward, Sanae increased her speed to combat whatever was pulling on her.

"Let me go! Koutarou is waiting for me! Wait... Huh? It disappeared?!"

Just as the unknown force restraining her was about to become a real problem, it vanished. It was almost like an elastic cord being stretched to its limit and snapping. Accordingly, it sent Sanae spiraling through the sky.

“Whoa! What was that?”

After stopping her rotation, she cocked her head to the side as she flew upside down. Sanae had never experienced anything like that before.

“Well, I’m back to normal now, so who cares?”

With her full freedom restored, she didn’t dwell on it too long. She wasn’t really the thinking type to begin with, and she was focused on helping Koutarou now. And so she set her course once more for the school.

“I gotta hurry!”

But unbeknownst to her, what had been restraining her was her own feelings. Initially she was bound to room 106, but as time passed and things changed, she became bound to Koutarou instead. Specifically, what bound her to him were her feelings of wanting to be by his side. And it was her feelings yet again that released her from that bond. Her feelings of wanting to help Koutarou had overpowered her feelings of wanting to stay by his side.

“All right, let’s do this!”

But as she was now bound to Koutarou instead of room 106, there was no denying her attachment to him.

Harumi opened her eyes shortly after Sanae had left.

“H-Huh...? I...”

“Sakuraba-senpai, are you okay?”

“...Koutarou-sama...?”

And the person she’d longed to see for the past two thousand years— “Ah... Um, I...”

Harumi suddenly snapped out of her dazed state and recalled what had happened before she fainted.

“Th-That’s right, Nijino-san! Is Nijino-san okay?!”

Harumi sprang up in search of Yurika, but she didn’t have to look far. The wounded Yurika was lying next to her.

“Nijino-san, Nijino-san!”

Tears welled in Harumi’s eyes as she shook Yurika. She was frantic. The thought of Yurika putting her life in danger for her was just too much “Please calm down, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“But Satomi-kun, Nijino-san is... Nijino-san is...!”

“She’s okay. She’s just unconscious.”

Koutarou hugged Harumi to get her to stop shaking Yurika.

“Let go! Let me go!”

But Harumi resisted and tried to break free. Yurika was all she cared about right now.

“I’ve already sent for help. Yurika will be fine.”

“...Really?”

After several attempts, Koutarou was finally able to persuade Harumi. She finally relented and slowly turned towards him.

“Yes, really. She’ll get the help she needs soon.”

“Th-Thank goodness...”

Harumi let out a heavy sigh of relief and relaxed. Still leaning on Koutarou, she put her hand on her chest and took several deep breaths.

I’m sorry, Sakuraba-senpai...

The truth was that Koutarou didn’t know the extent of Yurika’s injuries. But if he admitted that, Harumi would be the one to suffer for it.

“I was so worried about Nijino-san... Thank god...”

Harumi wiped her tears away and looked up at Koutarou. There was a childish smile shining through her tears—one that indicated both reassurance and joy.

“So what about you? Are you okay, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“Me...?”

Only at Koutarou’s question did Harumi fully appreciate the situation she was in.

“Ah, I-I...”

She was leaning on Koutarou, whose face was alarming close to hers. Harumi lost her cool again, but this time for a very different reason.

“Ah, I-I-I’m fine! I-I-It’s nothing!”

“Are you sure? Your face is red though.”

Realizing something was amiss with Harumi, he was worried that she might have a fever and put his hand on her forehead.

“Hmm... Doesn’t feel like a fever.”

“I-I-I’m fine!”

Harumi thrust Koutarou away and escaped from his arms.

Ah, right...

Seeing Harumi like that, Koutarou realized that she was just embarrassed.

“I’m sorry, Sakuraba-senpai,” Koutarou apologized, starting to blush as well.

“N-No...”

Harumi shook her head as she stared down at the ground, but there was no hiding the bright red color of her cheeks.

Thank goodness Satomi-san let go... Any longer like that and I might have said something outrageous...

Harumi wouldn’t have been so shaken if it had happened with a boy she didn’t like, but this was Koutarou.

“So about before, Sakuraba-senpai...”

“Ah, th-that’s right. What happened next?”

Koutarou purposefully changed the topic. Harumi followed his lead and the awkward tension in the atmosphere dissipated.

“I can’t really remember what happened after Nijino-san collapsed...”

“What?! You don’t remember?!”

“No... Did something happen?”

Harumi could only remember Yurika protecting her from the fireball and Koutarou helping her up afterward. She wasn’t sure why Koutarou was so surprised.

“N-No, if you don’t remember, then that’s...”

Sakuraba-senpai doesn’t remember anything? Then what was...

Harumi had no memory of handing over the glowing sword to Koutarou. It was almost as if it had never happened in the first place.

Now that I think about it, that sword vanished after Maki-san disappeared... Just what is going on?

Koutarou didn’t know what to make of the strange, surreal things happening around him.

“M-Mmm...”

It was around that time that Yurika woke up.

“Yurika!”

“Nijino-san!”

When Yurika opened her eyes, she saw Koutarou and Harumi.

“Shatomi-shan... Shakuraba-shenpai...”

“Are you okay, Yurika?!”

“Thank goodness! I’m so glad...”

They were both smiling, but there were tears in their eyes.

“Why are you crying...?”

“I’m not crying, you idiot!”

“It’s because you woke up, Nijino-san.”

Koutarou shouted and Harumi cried. Hearing their voices, Yurika remembered what had happened before she collapsed. Her fight with Maki, Koutarou and Harumi appearing in the middle of it, and taking a fireball for Harumi... Her mind gradually cleared and she tried to get up.

“Yurika, don’t push yourself! Stay down!”

“I can’t... do that...”

Koutarou tried to lay Yurika back down, but she shook her head. With no other option, Koutarou supported her body as she stood up.

“Satomi-san, what about Maki-chan? What happened with Maki-chan?”

“After you passed out, we had a small skirmish with Maki-san and she vanished.”

“What about Sanae-chan? I don’t see her anywhere...”

“I’m not getting any reception, so I sent her for help.”

“I see... That must be because of our spells.”

“Really?”

Yurika was able to stand with Koutarou’s help, and she took a deep breath once upright. As expected, she had burns and bruises all over her body.

“Hahh... Ahh... Before we started fighting, we set up a ward to keep people away. Within that ward, all communication is jammed.”

The ward that Yurika and Maki had set up before the battle not only kept people away, but also prevented people inside of it from reporting what was going on to the outside. The ward blocked sound, visual information, and electromagnetic waves. That was why Koutarou couldn’t get any service on his phone.

“I don’t know anything about magic, but is your body okay, Nijino-san?”

To Harumi, Yurika’s health was more important than enemies or magic. She grabbed Yurika’s hand with both of hers and gave her a concerned look.

“I’m all right. I’m the magical girl of love and courage, after all.”

“I suppose that’s good enough for now...”

Yurika nodded with a smile, but Harumi just couldn't relax. Yurika was visibly covered in wounds.

"So what are you going to do now, Yurika?"

But even wounded, she had gotten up. Koutarou knew that was because she had a job to do.

"I'm going after Maki-chan."

"You can't go after her in that state!" Harumi shook her head and objected. She didn't want Yurika to move with her injuries.

"Even so, I have to go. There's no time to spare."

"Regardless, do you even know where Maki-san is?"

"Yes. She's in room 106. I'm sure of it."

"At our place? Why would... Ah, that's right, you said—"

"Yes. Maki-chan is after the mana in room 106."

Yurika had been saying the same thing since the day they met. One day the evil magical girls would appear and they would target the magical energy in room 106.

"That's why I need to go now or something terrible will happen," Yurika said, finally standing on her own.

"Hngh..." Her face twisted in pain and she broke out into a cold sweat at the physical effort.

This is the real Yurika... No, this is a real magical girl...

Koutarou understood the weight on Yurika's shoulders. She was more worried about her duty than her body or her own life.

In that case...

Koutarou made up his mind.

"Yurika, I'll take you home."

Koutarou turned his back towards Yurika and kneeled down. He was planning on carrying Yurika all the way to room 106.

“Is that really okay, Satomi-san?”

Yurika’s eyes opened wide in surprise. Taking into account everything that had happened up until today, she could hardly believe his offer.

“What does it matter? This is the only way to protect room 106, right?”

“Th-That’s true, but...”

But Koutarou wasn’t just offering help out of goodwill. Contrary to what Yurika thought, it was exactly because of everything that had happened up until today. He felt that he had an obligation to help Yurika now since he hadn’t believed her for so long. He also wanted to help his roommate of over half a year.

“That’s absurd! If Nijino-san keeps fighting in that state, something bad really will happen to her!”

But Harumi was still set on stopping them. She wanted to stop her best friend from going down this reckless path no matter what.

“Sakuraba-senpai, if I don’t stop Maki-chan, something terrible will happen to this city or the magical kingdom.”

But Yurika had something she had to protect at any cost. She’d made a promise with her predecessor, Rainbow Nana. And then there was this city she’d called home for over half a year. With those things in her heart, Yurika couldn’t just stand down.

“Get on, Yurika.”

“Okay.”

Yurika’s face was still contorted in pain, but she didn’t hesitate to push herself to climb onto Koutarou’s back. When she did, Koutarou stood up.

“Satomi-kun, Nijino-san, you really can’t go!”

“This is dangerous, so please go back to school, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Satomi-kun!”

Harumi was normally withdrawn and didn’t assert herself, but she couldn’t back down on this either.

“No, I won’t go back!”

“Sakuraba-senpai?”

“If you won’t stop fighting, I definitely won’t go back!”

It was the first time Harumi had ever said something selfish to Koutarou.

Meanwhile, Sanae had reached Kisshouharukaze High School. She passed through the window straight into class 1-A’s classroom and headed straight for Kiriha and the others.

“He’s not picking up for me either. So either he’s turned his phone off or he has no signal.”

“I can’t get through to Yurika either. Well, in her case, it might be because she lapsed on her cellphone bill.”

“Hmm... Just what are the two of them doing...”

“I just hope nothing happened...”

Fifth period was over and they were currently on their break between classes. Kiriha and the other girls were all sitting in a circle with their cellphones out. That is, except for Theia who was lying down on her desk.

That was how Sanae found them all when she arrived.

“Everyone, there’s trouble! Come with me! And fast!”

“Sanae? Is it just you?”

“What about Satomi-sama and Yurika-sama?”

There was a big difference in excitement between Sanae and the others as she came flying over to them. They had just assumed that Yurika had overslept or was playing around.

“That’s just it,” Sanae said, pointing at Ruth. “Koutarou and Yurika are in trouble!”

Sanae was the only one there who knew what happened, and she was determined to take everyone back to Koutarou as soon as possible.

“That doesn’t sound very peaceful.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“It’s a pain to explain, so just hurry up and follow me! It was just like Yurika said. A new enemy after our room really did show up!”

“What?!”

Hearing that Koutarou was in danger, Theia, who had been slumped over her desk, suddenly kicked her chair away and stood up.

“Is Koutarou okay?! Well?!”

Theia rushed up to Sanae and questioned her. Sanae had called room 106 theirs, and after hearing that an enemy had appeared, Theia was first and foremost worried about Koutarou’s safety. At that point, the two of them felt the same way.

“Koutarou is okay, but Yurika is hurt! So hurry up! We have to go!”

Sanae grabbed Theia’s arm and forcibly pulled her towards the door.

“All right, lead the way.”

But Theia didn’t need to be dragged far. She couldn’t admit that she wanted to go with Koutarou in the first place, but it was different if he was in trouble. It was a noble’s duty to save their vassals.

“I will accompany you, Your Highness,” said Ruth.

“I understand the situation. I can’t ignore an enemy that’s after room 106. I will come too,” said Kiriha.

“I have a bad feeling about this, so I’ll come too. I don’t want my residents getting into any trouble,” said Shizuka.

They followed after Sanae and Theia, and the five of them bumped into Kenji as he was returning to the classroom.

“Oh? Where might you ladies be off to in a hurry?”

“Just some unfinished business. Let the teacher know I’m leaving early,” Theia replied.

“I don’t mind, but... is everything okay?”

Maki and Yurika were absent, then Koutarou went home to get something and never came back. Now Theia, Ruth, Kiriha, and Shizuka were all leaving early. Even a fool could tell something was going on.

“Mackenzie-kun, according to Yurika-chan’s explanation, an evil magical girl has appeared and she’s in trouble.”

“If you say so. Have fun.”

After Shizuka’s short explanation, Kenji smiled and stepped aside. The five girls barreled out of the classroom and ran down the stairs leading to the school entrance.

“...I’ve been thinking.”

“About what?”

“Normally no one would believe that, right?”

“Probably not.”

“I mean, a magical girl...”

“Common sense has to kick in at some point.”

And so they left school and headed to Koutarou’s rescue.

It’s warm...

That thought ran through Yurika’s mind as Koutarou carried her. Her body bounced along with him as he ran. His shoulders were broad, and when she pressed her cheek against his back, she could feel his warmth.

I can understand why Sanae-chan always does this...

Ever since Yurika had become a magical girl, she had, strictly speaking, always been alone. She had no allies to fight alongside her, and there was really no one who knew her identity. While she’d spent time with Koutarou and the others, they didn’t truly understand her. At least, not until today. Koutarou had earnestly held his hand out to her today, and suddenly Yurika was no longer alone. She had found someone she could rely on.

I’m a bit jealous that Sanae-chan gets to do this all the time...

Yurika held on to Koutarou even tighter. They were still a ways off from Corona House and she didn’t want to be a burden.



“Yurika.”

“Yes?”

Noticing that Yurika was moving, he adjusted her position on his back and took the opportunity to ask about something that had been bothering him.

“Why are you a magical girl? It’s not like you were born that way, right?”

Koutarou had sort of heard her reason before. Yurika on several occasions had said that someone once saved her life, but he’d never bothered to listen to the details. This seemed like a good time to give it another shot.

Yurika hesitated for a moment before opening her mouth.

“...I was born to a normal family and lived as a normal girl.”

She would have been happy to tell him this story to get him to believe her, but now that he already did, she was hesitating for some reason.

I see. I wasn’t being myself...

And in that moment, Yurika finally realized how little weight her words actually carried.

“But it seemed like I had potential for magic, and one day a demon attacked.”

That was over a year ago. Yurika, who was a middle schooler at the time, had stayed after class for remedial lessons. It was in the empty schoolhouse that a large black beast attacked her. It was an absurd creature that looked like a lion had grown bat wings, but it had come to feast on her mana.

“The one who saved me back then was Nana-san. She was in charge of defending the area.”

“Nana... That’s the name of your savior, right?”

“Yes. If Nana-san hadn’t shown up, I think that beast would have eaten me alive.”

“I see.”

“So that’s what happened...”

Harumi, who was running next to Koutarou, mumbled deep in thought. If

Koutarou had been running at full speed, Harumi probably wouldn't have been able to keep up. But he was taking it easy and going slower out of concern for Yurika's injuries. At that speed, Harumi was doing her best to stay with them.

"Back then, Nana-san's duty was to teach me how to control my mana. If I learned how to control my leaking mana, then demons wouldn't come attack me."

"So she taught you how to use magic too?"

"Yes. It was all basic magic though..."

Yurika smiled nostalgically. Nana had transferred into her middle school to protect her. Then she'd taught Yurika basic magic to get her to learn how to control her mana.

"After I learned how to use magic, I began helping Nana-san. She said that she only saved me because it was her job, but to me, she was my savior. So if saving people was her job, then I wanted to help her as much as I could.

"What did you do to help?"

"Since I only knew basic magic, she never let me help with fighting."

Nana had strongly objected when Yurika first proposed helping her. She knew that Yurika had real potential for magic and that she would surely be able to use advanced spells, but Nana was worried about Yurika's personality. She didn't want someone gentle at heart like Yurika to have to fight.

"I was sort of like an assistant."

But since Yurika was so stubborn about helping, Nana allowed her to chip in under the condition that she not do anything dangerous.

"I would make food or help in investigations. Nana-san is from Folsaria. She had no papers here, so there was a lot I could help out with."

Yurika spoke in a bright tone. Koutarou couldn't see her face, but he imagined that she was smiling.

"Folsaria? What's that?"

"Folsaria is the name of the magical girls' homeland. The Magical Kingdom of

Folsaria. I hear it's a kingdom without a king."

Folsaria existed on a different world. Of course, they had no diplomatic relations with Japan. So strictly speaking, Nana was an illegal immigrant. In that sense, having a helper like Yurika was a blessing.

"So that's where Nana's from?"

"Yes. Nana-san was one of the archwizards of Rainbow Heart, part of Folsaria's army. She was a genius magical girl and the youngest to ever obtain the title of Rainbow."

"Then why are you fighting, Nijino-san?" Harumi spoke up.

And it was a good question. Nana didn't want Yurika to fight, but despite that, Yurika was fighting all alone now.

"That's..."

That was where Yurika hesitated again. As she had been energetically sharing her story until that point, even Koutarou noticed the change.

"That's because Nana-san lost her magic because of me," Yurika said in a cold, bitter voice. "I'll never forget that day eight months ago. Just like Sakuraba-senpai today, I was taken hostage by Darkness Rainbow."

"Like me? Then..."

"Yes. Nana-san was seriously injured while protecting me. So in order to defeat Maki-chan and the others, she released all of the mana in her body."

The injuries Nana had received when protecting Yurika were far worse than what Yurika had suffered today. Nana had been fighting against all of Darkness Rainbow at once. Not even a genius magical girl could defend herself from the spells of the seven leaders from Darkness Rainbow at the same time. Gravely injured and backed into a corner, Nana used her last resort. She released all of her mana to attack Darkness Rainbow.

"Once you do that, you can never use magic again. But Nana-san did it to protect me."

It was something like a gas tank exploding. If the mana container inside a magic user's body was detonated, they'd be left without a way to store mana.

But in order to fulfill her duties and protect Yurika, Nana gave up her life as a magician.

“I see... So that’s why you succeeded her role?”

“Yes. This outfit and the staff I use originally belonged to Nana-san. I have to perform her duties in her place now.”

It wasn’t like Yurika wanted to become a magical girl. She just wanted to become like Nana.

“Nijino-san...”

Harumi respected Yurika’s strong will. Her decision to protect Harumi now seemed like a very meaningful one. Realizing that, Harumi felt even more gratitude for Yurika and what she had done. But it was a little different now. Now she wanted to do anything she could to help her.

“I understand, Nijino-san.”

“...Sakuraba-senpai?”

“I won’t tell you not to fight anymore. Instead, you just have to win. I’ll help too!”

“Sakuraba-senpai! That’s dang— I mean, thank you very much.”

Yurika could feel Harumi’s determination. It was the same as hers that fateful day. Because of that, there was no way Yurika could refuse her offer.

“I see... You really are a magical girl...”

Finally understanding everything, Koutarou looked sad for some reason. Harumi was the first to notice.

“What’s wrong, Satomi-kun?”

“Oh, nothing. It’s a bit selfish, but it’s just that realizing Yurika is a magical girl, I can’t help but feel that it’s a shame.”

“A shame?”

“What do you mean, Satomi-san?”

Normally, Yurika would cry after hearing something like that. But based on

Koutarou's tone of voice, this felt completely different. It was strange.

"Hey, Yurika, there's all kinds of people around me, right?"

"Yes."

Sanae, Theia, and Kiriha. Koutarou was surrounded by special people.

"But I always thought you were normal. Normal, just like me. You'd play around with your classmates and have fun. Even if the others went back to their homes, I always thought that you'd spend the next three years living a normal life."

"Ah..."

That was something that Yurika hadn't thought of. For several months after meeting Koutarou, she had lived like a normal girl. But today had brought an end to that. The moment Koutarou admitted that she was a magical girl, she'd no longer be living a normal life.

"It's selfish, right? I guess I just wanted you to stay a normal classmate. Y'know, a normal classmate with an odd hobby."

As Koutarou said that, Yurika was glad that she was being carried. It was one thing for her to cry, but she knew that she was making a pitiful expression.

"Satomi-san..."

Then what about me? What did I want to be? A normal girl or a magical girl?

Despite asking herself that, she couldn't come up with an answer right away.

"Yurika, fighting doesn't suit you."

Koutarou looked up overhead. The sun was shining in the early winter sky painted with a rainbow.

Nana-san, you felt the same thing, right?

"Yeah, sunshine and rainbows suit you much better."

Not swinging a staff and casting spells in battle, but basking in the sunshine and looking up at the sky for rainbows. That was much more like her.

Fighting and Magic

Wednesday, November 18th

Maki stood in the center of the inner room of Koutarou's otherwise empty apartment, focusing intensely on something. She was using her magic to investigate the mana pool in the room. After several minutes, she opened her eyes and wiped the sweat off her brow.

"I see. So the sword Satomi Koutarou used was created by controlling a portion of the mana concentrated here."

From her investigation, Maki realized that there wasn't just an excess of mana in room 106, but it was also particularly potent. It was just like the power flowing from the sword Koutarou had used.

"Only Rainbow Heart would ignore the chance to take advantage of this mana."

The reason Yurika herself hadn't used the mana concentrated in the room was because Rainbow Heart forbade the abuse of magic. That included personal uses of it, which is why she couldn't use magic to prove her identity as a magical girl. But that restriction didn't matter to someone like Koutarou who wasn't part of Rainbow Heart. Maki thought it was only obvious that Koutarou would be dipping into the power in his apartment.

"But I never dreamed controlling only a portion of it would have that much power. If I could steal control of it for myself, I might be able to level the playing field in terms of power."

Maki clutched her staff and closed her eyes again.

If I reused the spell Satomi Koutarou used... No, Sakuraba Harumi was the one who managed the spell, so I should be able to do the same.

"Analyze Magic. Modifier: High Precision. End: Casting Time, Four Times."

Maki increased the precision of her spell and proceeded with her

investigation. Her original goals were to check out the concentration of mana in room 106 and to flush out Yurika's accomplice, but depending on the outcome of her investigation, she might be able to do much more than that. She unconsciously gripped her staff harder.

Just you wait, Satomi Koutarou! I'll destroy that confidence of yours!

After the afternoon's events, Maki now felt more hostility towards Koutarou than Yurika.

"Satomi-san, it seems like Maki-chan is investigating the mana pool in room 106."

"Sure does. Maki-san is doing something suspicious in the middle of the room all right."

"Satomi-kun, you must have good eyes to be able to tell that from this far. I can't see anything at all."

The three of them were spying on room 106. Yurika was using her magic, and Koutarou was just using the keen eyesight he'd been born with. But no matter how hard poor Harumi strained her eyes, she couldn't see a thing inside the room.

"What's the situation?"

"She's probably investigating. I can sense green magic, the kind used for divination. There's also some orange magic, used for alteration. That one is probably because she's trying to take control of the mana."

"What else?"

"I can't see anything else from this distance using passive magic."

Koutarou, Yurika, and Harumi were doing their spying from the roof of a five-story apartment building. But since they'd picked a building far away in order to avoid detection, Yurika had a hard time getting a grasp of the situation.

"Should I investigate some more on the premises even though it might get us caught?"

"No, we'll need to rush in either way, so I'd rather get the drop on her than

find out what she's doing."

Whatever she was doing wasn't good, so exactly what she was doing didn't matter so much as stopping her from doing it. Koutarou had decided that meant a surprise attack gave them the highest chance of success.

"I understand."

Yurika quickly agreed. Since she wasn't much good when it came to a fight, she left the tactical decisions to Koutarou, who had a knack for that kind of thing.

"So what are we going to do now?" Harumi asked her companions.

"It doesn't look like we have a lot of time, so we'll need to attack," Yurika replied.

"In that case, I'll charge in," Koutarou said, following up on Yurika's answer.

"Satomi-kun, you'll *what?!*" Harumi asked in shock.

"We can't let Yurika go in in her current state. She'll keep her distance and support me."

"Th-That's true, but..."

Harumi was still worried. Maki used mysterious techniques. She'd experienced that firsthand. She couldn't help being concerned about Koutarou confronting her.

"In that case, I'll cast lots of spells on you ahead of time. If I wait to do it when you get close, Maki-chan might notice."

Yurika pulled out her staff and pointed it at Koutarou.

Now that I think about it, she said her staff and outfit used to belong to that Nana girl...

Koutarou thought about Yurika's story as he observed her now. It also made him realize he hadn't properly apologized to her yet.

"Yurika."

"Yes?"

“I’m sorry for not believing you all this time.”

“Satomi-san...” Yurika smiled and shook her head at Koutarou’s apology. “Life as a cosplayer this past half a year wasn’t all that bad.”

“Yurika...” Koutarou smiled wryly. It was all he could do in this situation.

“Besides, having you help me like this is more than enough.”

“All right. Then I’m counting on you and your magic.”

That part was essential in order for Koutarou to continue helping Yurika.

“Right.”

With a smile, Yurika began her incantations.

“Yes! I did it!” Maki cheered.

The girl who rarely showed emotion threw her staff up into the air with joy.

“It’s such an ancient magic that it takes a while to operate, but I should eventually be able to gain complete control of it!”

Maki had succeeded in starting to take over the room’s mana. That being said, it was a slow process. The part she’d managed to hijack was only a mere fraction of the total power pooled in the room, but it was all she could do in the short amount of time she had.

“For the time being, I’ve managed to stop the energy supply flowing into Satomi Koutarou.”

However, figuring out how to control the mana was a big deal. That was what had allowed her to halt the power flowing into Koutarou.

“All right, at least now I don’t have to worry about that ridiculous sword for a while.”

With the limited control that Maki had gained, she was only able to temporarily stop the mana flow, but that alone would produce significant results. If she could cut off the flow during battle and rob Koutarou of his sword, her victory would be all but assured.

“But to think I’d see a spell using the ancient Folsarian language here of all

places...”

The magic language being used in present-day Folsaria was modernized after the old language had become obsolete. They analyzed and unified the magics being used, restructuring incantations so that they all shared the same alphabet and grammar, which, overall, made magic easier to use.

Magic using the ancient Folsarian language was said to have been the hardest to restructure. The language was not only outdated, but phonetic and ideographic characters had been mixed in, creating a very unique alphabet. It had very little in common with other magic languages, making it the hardest magic language to use.

“Just who is this Satomi Koutarou?”

If he was related to Yurika or Rainbow Heart, the magic language he used should be the modern version. But since he was using an archaic one, that indicated he was using ancient magic that had been passed down from a previous era and a different faction altogether.

“He has the brains to create master plans, he can use enhancement or alteration magic without a staff, and he’s a master necromancer. He also has considerable skills in close combat. On top of everything, there’s this mana supply system based on ancient magic. There aren’t that many people even in Folsaria that could pull this off.”

Finally realizing the full extent of Koutarou’s powers(?), Maki was taken aback.

“But I won’t lose next time. Now that I have control of this place, victory will be mine!”

Her sense of rivalry with him flared up once again. Right now, Maki’s enemy wasn’t Yurika, but Koutarou. And as those feelings stewed, a bell tinkled among the decorations on her staff.

“So you’re finally here, Satomi Koutarou!”

It was the alarm closest to room 106 out of the five that Maki had set up inside her ward to keep people away. The first four had been set in places easy to find, but the last one was cleverly hidden. It was an old trick, but Koutarou

and the others were amateurs and had easily fallen for it.

“You’re too late, Satomi Koutarou! You too, Nijino Yurika!”

Which was why when they opened the door, Maki wasn’t surprised to see them.

As Koutarou opened the door and jumped into room 106, Maki was watching them in relative calm, certainly without any sign of surprise.

“You’re too late, Satomi Koutarou! You too, Nijino Yurika!”

“She noticed us?!”

“Maki-san! We’ll be taking back this room!”

“You’re welcome to. If you can defeat me, that is.”

“Then that’s just what I’ll do!”

However, Koutarou didn’t seem to care and dashed in anyway. It was normal to withdraw when a surprise attack failed, but there was no room for retreat now. If Maki kept control of the room, something terrible would happen.

“Satomi-san! R-Right, here we go! Angel Halo!”

Yurika quickly realized his intentions and pointed her staff at Koutarou’s back.

“Effect Release!”

With those two words, Koutarou’s body began glowing various colors. It was almost as if he was wearing a rainbow. Koutarou had been magically strengthened to the fullest of his potential, but in order to avoid detection by Maki as they approached, the effects had been sealed. Yurika’s incantation was simply to release the seal and activate the effects.

“I see! You’ve taken the size of this room into account and you’re trying to make this into a close quarters fight. In that case...”

Seeing the spells covering Koutarou, Maki saw through his plan and stepped back.

“Ah!”

With a loud crash, Maki broke the window and jumped outside. If Koutarou was going for a brawl, Maki had no reason to stay in the room and give him what he wanted. Her best option was to get somewhere out in the open where she could use ranged attacks.

“Wait!”

Koutarou dashed through the inner room and jumped out of the window after her. Yurika, however, slowly walked to the center of the room and stopped.

“Maki-chan left the room? But why?”

Yurika frowned, but it wasn’t because her wounds hurt. Maki was supposed to be trying to take the room, yet she was quick to abandon it and retreat. Yurika couldn’t understand why she had done that.

“Analyze Magic!”

But she figured it out soon enough.

The spell has been encrypted?! I see! So that’s what she’s after!

Once her magic told her what Maki was really up to, Yurika quickly chased after Koutarou. She didn’t have the time to undo the encryption. Maki’s first goal was defeating Koutarou and Yurika.

“You’re pretty good, Koutarou!”

“You too, Maki-san!”

By the time Yurika got outside, Koutarou and Maki were in the middle of their fight. They were battling it out on the street next to Corona House. It was normally a well trafficked area, but there was no one nearby thanks to the ward.

“Satomi-san, watch out! Maki-chan is after us!”

Yurika called out to Koutarou, but he didn’t respond. He was too busy dealing with Maki for that.

“Mind Flare!”

“That’s nothing! How about this?!”

Koutarou dodged Maki's spell and unleashed a kick as he got close.

"Quick Cast Force Field!"

His aim was dead on, but his foot crashed into Maki's shield of light. Koutarou's body had been strengthened by Yurika's magic, and on top of that, his limbs were covered with attack spells. It made his kicks far more powerful than normal, so when he made contact with Maki's shield, there was an intense flash of light.

"Damn it, this doesn't work either!"

The red light enveloping Koutarou's right leg vanished. The attack spell cast on it had been used up.

"This man is better than I thought!"

Since she'd used magic to defend herself, Maki was able to react fast enough to be prepared for his attack. She then jumped far back and put some distance between her and Koutarou.

"I can't use any big spells with him this close!"

"Not so fast!"

Koutarou quickly chased after Maki. He knew if she maintained range, she would have the advantage.

"Sonic Impact! Modifier: Touch Trigger!"

Koutarou's right leg began glowing red once more. Yurika had used her magic from the sidelines to rearm him.

"The injured Yurika is supporting him from behind. She's casting all of her spells on Satomi Koutarou to keep this a close quarters fight, which should put a magician like me at a disadvantage. A solid plan."

If I wasn't good at melee combat, I'd really be in trouble!

Maki readjusted her grip on her staff and quickly started on an incantation.

"Quick Double Cast: Acceleration, Tiny Memory Flash! Modifier: Touch Trigger!"

Maki's body began glowing yellow and her staff indigo. She'd enhanced her

reflexes and prepared her staff with an offensive spell that erased a few seconds of the target's memory.

"Satomi-san, make sure you dodge that! That's the memory erasing spell!"

Before the fighting had started, Yurika told Koutarou what she knew about Maki's spells. That included the one currently cast on her staff.

"Correct!"

Koutarou and Maki closed in on each other, and the fight began anew. Koutarou was already in good shape, but with his physical abilities enhanced, he certainly had the upper hand in terms of physical prowess. But Maki used the long reach of her staff to make up for it. That included the troublesome spell she had cast on it now. Since it activated through touch, it worked for both offense and defense.

"Haaaaa!"

"Whoa, not good! She's not going to let me close in!"

Koutarou was functionally unable to attack. Maki's staff attacks weren't too serious. Thanks to Yurika's cooperation, Koutarou was able to dodge them. But because of the spell on Maki's staff, just getting hit with it was far more dangerous than normal. Losing a few seconds of time in this situation would spell defeat. Because of that, Koutarou's attacks were thwarted by the range of the staff. He couldn't get in close enough to use his fists.

"Satomi-san, back away for a moment!"

"Yurika?"

Hearing Yurika's instructions, Koutarou didn't hesitate to lay off of Maki and fall back. As he moved to put some distance between himself and the evil magical girl, her staff swept through the air in front of him. He felt like the indigo light coming from the staff looked more ominous than it had before.

"Control Plants! Modifier: Extend Length Four Times!"

When those words left Yurika's lips, the trees by the road suddenly began moving. She was using her magic to control them, making their branches reach out for Maki.

“Curse you, Yurika!”

Annoyed by Yurika’s intervention, Maki used her staff to smack away the branches. As she did, the indigo light covering her staff vanished. After touching the branches, the magic that had been charged in the staff was consumed.

“Satomi-san!”

“Leave it to me!”

By the time Yurika yelled out, Koutarou was already charging in. This was his chance, and there was no way he was going to miss it.

“Got you!”

Koutarou used all of his might to throw his right fist at Maki. She readied her staff to protect herself, but it looked like he just might be about to destroy them both.

“You leave me no choice but to use this.”

However, before Koutarou’s fist could reach Maki, a black disk appeared and blocked it.

“What?!”

And as he made contact with it, almost all of the spells cast on Koutarou dispersed. The few that remained were the ones on his body furthest away from his right fist—the one that had touched the black disk.

“Satomi-san, run away!”

The black disk moved at the same time Yurika shouted. It was absorbed by Maki’s staff, and the staff itself turned black.

“Surprised? This is your power, you know. Of course, I can only use a portion of it right now.”

“My power?”

Koutarou paused after hearing what Maki said.

“Maki-chan is controlling the power in room 106! So hurry up and run away!”

“So that’s—”

“It’s too late to run now!”

Maki grinned as she pointed her staff at Koutarou. It was the expression of someone convinced of their victory.

I’ve gotten control of access to that mana pool! Satomi Koutarou can’t use that ridiculous power anymore! It’s all mine now! In other words, I win!

In Maki’s eyes, up until now, Koutarou had been the cause of endless suffering for her. He made fun of her when she first transferred, and he duped her at the welcome party in order to gather intel on her. And worse, he interfered in the fight at the construction site where she’d experienced the bitter taste of defeat at his hands.

She was victim to several one-sided misunderstandings about Koutarou, and they were the primary reason she was so exalted by her grasp on victory over him now.

“Die and return to the soil of your homeland, Satomi Koutarou!”

That was a frequently used phrase in Folsaria, where it was said that the dead returned to the now lost lands of their ancient origins. But saying those words under such circumstances was the equivalent of handing out a death sentence.

“Lightning Lance! Modifier: Change Element, Darkness! High Concentration!”

Like she had done at the construction site, Maki created a lightning spear. However, unlike before, the spear was black this time and was becoming slimmer. As it shrunk, it got darker. Once it finally stabilized, it was like staring at a black hole.

“Satomi-san!”

“Not good!”

Koutarou tried to run away, but since the majority of the spells cast on him had been neutralized, he was now much slower than he had been before.

“Taaake thiiis, Satomi Koutaroooooou!”

Maki unleashed the black spear against Koutarou, who was trying his best to get out of the way.

Satomi Koutarou, there's no way you can dodge this spear the way you are now!

The spear discharged several black sparks and closed in on Koutarou.

"Quick Cast Anti-Magic Shield! Modifier: Maximize!"

Yurika used almost all of her remaining mana to cast a defensive spell on Koutarou, but she was too late. Maki's spear reached Koutarou before Yurika's spell could activate.

"Uwaaaaah!"

"Satomi-saaaaaaaan!"

When hit by the spear, Koutarou didn't just feel an intense shock. He could actually feel his strength leave him. His limbs went numb and his body grew cold. Maki's dark energy spear had stolen his life force.

"Ugh... D-Damn it!"

Koutarou fell to his knees. The spear hadn't actually injured him, but with his life force stolen, he was weakened and unable to move.

"My, to think you'd survive a blow like that. As expected from Satomi Koutarou, perhaps?"

I knew a single blow wasn't enough... But with this, the remnants of the white magic inside his body should be used up. The next one will finish him off for sure!

"Satomi-san, you can't stop now! Run!"

"I can't... My body won't move..."

On top of her severe injuries, Yurika had now used up all of her mana. And after Koutarou had his life force stolen by the black spear, he wasn't in much better shape. The two of them were helpless.

I-I at least need to get Yurika out of here...

Koutarou poured all of his remaining strength into moving his body.

She's not the kind of girl that should have to fight!

But the best he could do was move the fingertips on his right hand. The rest

of his body was unresponsive.

“Maki-chan, don’t do anything else to Satomi-san!”

“Surely you’re joking, Yurika. You should know just how dangerous this man is to us.”

Maki sighed as she created two more black spears. She was going to use them to finish off both Koutarou and Yurika.

I wasn’t able to control very much of that room’s mana, but it seems that it was more than enough...

As Maki pointed her staff at them, she was once again impressed by the power of the mana concentrated in room 106. If she could seize that power for Darkness Rainbow, they really would be able to shake things up in Folsaria.

“Well then, this is goodbye.”

“I-It’s no use...”

No matter how hard he tried, his body wouldn’t budge. Even Koutarou realized his defeat.

“Satomi-san.”

Yurika used her staff as support and hobbled over to Koutarou. Having used up all of her mana, there was nothing more she could do. Even so, she was determined to protect Koutarou. But it was a sad sight. She moved slowly due to the pain from her injuries. She wasn’t going to make it to Koutarou before Maki unleashed her spears.

“Farewell, Nijino Yurika and Satomi Koutarou.”

Maki hurled her spears at Koutarou and Yurika. Each one roared as it tore through the sky. But just when all seemed lost...

“Karama, Korama, spiritual energy field at maximum output! Focus everything you have forwards!” a familiar voice called out.

“Understood, ho!”

“Leave it to us, ho!”

Then two haniwas appeared in front of Koutarou and Yurika. They were none

other than Kiriha's servants, Karama and Korama.

"What?!"

As Maki's eyes shot wide open in surprise, the two haniwas created a shield made of yellow light in front of them.

"A barrier?! But you won't be able to block my spears with a single spell!"

"I suppose it's a good thing this isn't a spell then."

As the spears of darkness collided with the shield, their trajectories changed dramatically and they flew up into the sky. While the spears had a great amount of power behind them, Karama and Korama deflected them with their shield. But Maki had barely been paying any attention to that. She was too distracted by Kiriha, who had appeared from an alley.

"Kurano Kiriha? There's a ward in place, so how did you get in? And what's with those clay figures?"

Maki was caught off guard both by the sudden appearance of Kiriha and by the power of the two haniwas that were able to deflect her attack.

"Sanae came to get us, and with Harumi waiting here for us, it was easy to get in."

"Satomi-kun, Nijino-san. I brought everyone here as you asked."

"Koutarou, are you okay?!"

When Kiriha mentioned Harumi and Sanae, they appeared from behind her. Harumi had brought everyone into the ward. Before the fighting started, Yurika had opened up a hole in it, and they'd had Harumi wait there to show Kiriha and the others the way in.

"Karama and Korama were able to deflect the spears because they're used to that type of attack."

The black spears stole the life force of a human. That was very similar to stealing spiritual energy, and Karama and Korama were skilled at controlling spiritual energy. While they might not have been able to defend against a normal spell, the black spears were right up their alley.

“But you won’t be able to defeat me by staying on the defensive!”

Mysterious allies of theirs have arrived. I’ve taken too long. What to do now...?

Although Maki had spoken with confidence, she was cautiously plotting her next move. But she didn’t have long to think.

“Agreed. You can’t win a battle without attacking.”

“Your Highness, communication through electromagnetic waves may be jammed, but it seems we can still use hyperspace communication.”

“...And attacking is my specialty!”

Theia and Ruth were the next to arrive, and Theia was quick to begin her offensive.

“Blue Knight! High convergence laser bombardment! Annihilate the enemy that stands before me!”

Theia used her bracelet to order her battleship in orbit, the Blue Knight, to start the attack.

“Your Highness, that’s too much!”

“That’s not true! Torturing my knight is punishable by death!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Theia was furious. Burning with rage, she glared at Maki. Koutarou was her vassal, and lately he was becoming something more. Theia simply couldn’t find it in her to forgive someone that had hurt him.

“Quick Cast Force Field! Modifier: Maximize!”

With the way Theia was acting, Maki sensed something bad was coming and used all of her remaining mana to cast a defensive spell. Theia had chosen a laser weapon. Normally there wouldn’t be enough time to block something like that, but since the attack was coming from orbit, there was a slight time delay. Because of that, Maki was able to complete her spell just seconds before it hit.

The lasers punched through the atmosphere and rained down on Maki. Plowing through the atmosphere actually dispersed a great deal of their power,

but they were quite a force to be reckoned with. Maki's fully powered defensive spell easily began giving away.

At this rate, they'll break through my shield! Hmph, let's see what they think of this!

Maki used the remaining power she had gotten from room 106 and poured it into her defenses. As she did, her magical shield recovered and turned black. It was still faltering, but it held up against the Blue Knight's onslaught.

"Wow. I know the lasers were weakened by the atmosphere, but I'm impressed you could withstand a bombardment like that."

"R-Ridiculous! This kind of attack power...!"

Maki had now used up all of the power she had stolen from room 106 in addition to depleting her own mana. It was the price of maintaining her shield against the Blue Knight's bombardment.

"But this is over! Blue Knight, fire a limited Genesis Buster!"

"Your Highness! Stop it or I'll get angry!"

But once Theia tried to bring out the antimatter cannon, Ruth put her foot down. That cannon had far too much power to be used on a single person.

"Koutarou has to stand on the stage with me! We're going to shout at each other, laugh together, and create a play together! And yet someone dared to harm Koutarou! I cannot forgive that!"

"But do you want to annihilate Satomi-sama along with this entire planet?!"

"Ugh..."

"Don't worry. Leave the rest to me, Theia-san."

Shizuka was the last one to make her presence known. She approached Maki without making a sound and casually swung her fist.

"I have no intention of forgiving someone who broke my window."

Maki was skilled at martial arts, but she was exhausted after her fight with Koutarou and Yurika, and she had used up all of her mana that she would normally combine with her fighting techniques. In this state, Maki had no way

of avoiding Shizuka's attack.

"Kyaaaaah!"

Several consecutive blows from Shizuka ended with Maki slamming into the asphalt. Just a minute ago, she'd had an overwhelming advantage, but now she was battered and bruised.

I was too obsessed with defeating Satomi Koutarou and failed because of my greed...

After taking this much damage, even Maki had to admit defeat. She should have stayed true to her original objective of gathering information.

But this wasn't all in vain. I was able to learn the power of the people around Satomi Koutarou. If I withdraw now, this will end in a draw!

But even in her current state, Maki was still trying to think of a way to escape Koutarou and the others.

"Which means..."

Maki quickly got back to her feet and raised her staff above her head.

"You still want to go at it?!"

Shizuka reacted by taking a stance, but no one saw what was coming next.

"...Thank you for everything up until now, Twilight Wing."

Maki ripped off one of the ornaments on her staff. Seeing that, Yurika realized what Maki was doing and tried to warn the others.

"This is bad, everyone! Brace yourselves for an incoming attack! Maki-chan is about to use a spell!"

"An attack? In her condition?"

"Jeez, she's so stubborn!"

"Karama, Korama, deploy the spiritual energy field. Protect everyone."

"Got it, ho!"

While everyone was bracing themselves, Maki began her incantation.

"Sacrifice: Twilight Wing. Release Precast Spell."

By destroying her staff, Maki released the mana inside of it in the form of a spell. A magical girl's staff was her life. It was a tool required to cast advanced spells. If it were ever lost, it would take a considerable amount of time to recreate. So no matter how much power was stored inside of it, no magical girl would sacrifice her staff without a good reason. After being backed into a corner, this was Maki's last resort.

"Next time will be different, Nijino Yurika and Satomi Koutarou!"

The spell Maki released erased several hours from the memories of anyone nearby.

“And that’s how I managed to escape. Today was a rough day, really,” said Maki.

Her voice echoed in her empty room. She was surrounded, but only by holograms. They were of the same six girls as before.

“That really does sound rough, Maki.”

“It might have been rough for Maki personally, but to us, this was a great success.”

“That’s true, Purple-nee-sama. I think so too. If Navy-chan hadn’t investigated this thoroughly, we would have been going in blind against whatshisface and a bunch of other girls we knew nothing about.”

Maki was in the middle of reporting the results of her fight with Koutarou and Yurika to her allies.

“So you mentioned controlling a portion of that mana, but how was it, Maki?”

“Hmm, I would say it was about as much as ten shots of your Inferno Fire.”

“That many?!”

Hearing Maki’s report, the eyes of the girl in red began sparkling. Her only true aim was to strengthen herself. Maki’s claim gave her high hopes for what controlling room 106 might mean. She couldn’t hide her excitement at the prospect.

“If a small portion has that much power, the entirety of that power must be massive,” said the girl in purple.

“Yes,” Maki confirmed.

“Even if all seven of us used it, it would still be enough to give each one of us the equivalent power of an artifact, if not more. It looks like it will take a lot of time to analyze though.”

As she reached that point of her report, Maki’s expression turned dark.

“But our biggest obstacle is taking care of the people who live there.”

“You mean that blonde girl whose attack took all of the mana you had to

block?”

“I’m more interested in the girl using those two haniwas. Haniwas are cute, right?”

“There was also mention of a master of martial arts in their group, right? I can’t wait to face her.”

“You can’t forget about Nijino Yurika. And most of all, that man I despise... Satomi Koutarou.”

When Koutarou’s name slipped her lips, Maki’s otherwise calm expression distorted into a grimace of rage and she gritted her teeth.

“That man is a serious threat with his necromancy and the control he has over the mana in room 106. And what’s more, he’s smart. Who knows what trap he will have waiting next time...”

“Heh, what? Did you fall for him?” The girl in red teased Maki about her obsession with Koutarou.

“Could you not casually say something so ghastly? I don’t want anything to do with a smart man that manipulates others!”

Maki specialized in magic that manipulated the minds of others because she didn’t want to be betrayed. That was the life she’d known until now.

It started almost as soon as she was born in Folsaria. Her parents sold her off as a slave. Then as a slave, a group of other slaves she had been planning on running away with informed their master of the plan just before it was put into action. Her life felt like one betrayal after another. It was a vicious cycle she’d only been able to escape when Darkness Rainbow took her in because of the magical potential she had.

And because the ideal of betrayal was so abhorrent to her, Maki was fiercely loyal. But she was still afraid that others would betray her if she didn’t make them obey her through force. She had no faith in people. All she sought was power. That way, she could control people however she liked. When Maki saw Yurika’s trust in Koutarou, she felt nothing but disgust.

That man is the worst! He plays with others’ feelings. He uses them and then

betrays them. I'll definitely straighten him out with my magic!

If Maki was ever to fall in love, it would have be with an honest man that would never betray anyone. And what she felt for Koutarou was nothing of the sort. His despicable existence enraged her.

"Anyways..."

Maki, lost in thought, snapped back to reality when the girl in purple began muttering. She chased Koutarou from her mind. And as she collected her thoughts, the girl in purple continued.

"It would probably be for the best if we proceeded with caution in the future."

The other six girls nodded their heads in agreement. After listening to Maki's report, they all understood the seriousness of the situation.

"Maki, you should hurry and remake your staff. Gather as much information as possible while maintaining their trust. Since you erased their memories, we should make sure to use that," recommended the girl in purple.

"Understood."

Maki had no objections. Either way, she had no way of fighting until she completed a new staff.

"The remaining members should hurry up with their preparations as well. Granted, we can't exactly rush the recovery of the wounded..."

The leaders of Darkness Rainbow, excluding the girl in purple and Maki, were all unable to act. They were either healing from their wounds from eight months ago, in the middle of rehabilitation, or training their successors. They still hadn't recuperated from their battle with Rainbow Nana.

"I have some things to do on my end, so you'll have to carry the burden on your own for a while longer, Maki," said the girl in purple.

"Don't worry. Having that man as my opponent is just what I want."

"Don't go too crazy, Maki."

And with that as a parting warning, the girls surrounding Maki disappeared.

The meeting was over and Maki was left all alone in her room.

Satomi Koutarou, at the very least, I'll take you down before the others arrive!

Maki's hatred for Koutarou boiled inside her. She had no intention of heeding her allies' warnings.

Magical Girl Rainbow Yurika

Sunday, November 29th

Koutarou pulled a sea creature out of the tank and put it in Harumi's hand as she held her eyes tightly closed.

"Kyaaah! S-Satomi-kun, what is that?!"

"It's a sea urchin."

Surprised by the prickly sensation, Harumi opened her eyes. There was indeed a sea urchin in her hands, but it was much smaller than what she had imagined.

"Wahaha, don't look so surprised."

"Satomi-kun, please don't laugh that much."

"Not a chance."

"Satomi-kun!"

Koutarou continued to laugh at the flustered, pouting Harumi. They were both acting a little different from normal.

"Satomi-san really is a bully."

"In Kou's case, it's more just that he's childish."

Koutarou and the others were at an aquarium in the section where they could touch some of the sea creatures. It was an exhibit where harmless creatures had been gathered in a small water tank for visitors to enjoy. Koutarou had discovered it and brought an unsuspecting Harumi with him to play a prank on her. Yurika and Kenji sighed as they watched it play out.

But everything seems to be working out well. Good thing you mustered up the courage to invite Satomi-san, Sakuraba-senpai.

Yurika was surprised, but she looked at Koutarou and Harumi with a smile. It was true that they were behaving a little differently than usual, but that was

exactly the development Yurika had hoped for. Koutarou was less reserved around Harumi, and Harumi was more open with Koutarou. The refreshing environment was working wonders.

The four of them were here with tickets Harumi had been given to visit the aquarium. It was Koutarou and Harumi, and Yurika and Kenji, of course, in pairs Yurika had planned out beforehand.

“If you’re gonna be like that, I’ll unleash every kid’s nightmare on you.”

“Crabs?”

“Yes! Go, crab army! Defeat Mackenzie!”

Koutarou’s next target was Kenji. He handed off four crabs to Kenji and began poking their shells.

“Hey— Owowowow!”

Sensing danger, the crabs used their claws to counterattack. But Koutarou knew better and stepped back in time so that they latched on to Kenji instead. In a literal pinch, Kenji wanted nothing more than to quickly shake off the crabs, but he knew he couldn’t do that since they belonged to the aquarium. With multiple fingers in the vise grip of their small pincers, he ran back and forth in a panic by the water tank.

“Heh heh heh. Learn your lesson, Mackenzie?”

“Satomi-san, isn’t that too much?”

“Then I’ll give one to you too.”

“What?”

Koutarou put a crab in Yurika’s hand as well, and she immediately began running back and forth around the water tank like Kenji before she was even pinched.

“Kyaaah! Kyaaah! Kyaaaaah!”

The threat of its powerful pincers alone was enough for the cowardly Yurika to be frightened.

“There you go. Now run around together like good friends.”

With his hands on his hips, Koutarou watched Kenji and Yurika's frantic scrambling with a satisfied expression. That was when Harumi tugged on his sleeve.

"Satomi-kun."

"Hmm? What is it, Sakuraba-senpai?"

"This is for you."

When Koutarou turned around, Harumi put a hermit crab in his hand.

"Whoa!"

And before he realized what was going on, Harumi poked the hermit crab with her slender finger. It then brandished its large claw in response.

"Yeowch, owowowow!"

The hermit crab had pinched Koutarou's finger with all of its might. It wasn't long before Koutarou was running around the water tank alongside Kenji and Yurika.

"Wh-What did you do, Sakuraba-senpai?!"

"Heeheehee..."

Harumi happily looked on as the three of them ran in circles.

Thank you, Nijino-san. You made all of this possible.

Harumi was extremely grateful. She'd become a bit bolder for coming out to play with Koutarou. The refreshing environment of the aquarium had given her a small push forward. In the end, she felt like she'd gotten a little closer with Koutarou.

But I wonder why Nijino-san seems somewhat unhappy.

Yurika was being her usual loud self, but Harumi could see the hints of sadness in her face.

I just hope nothing has happened...

Harumi looked at Yurika running around and began wondering how she might be able to help her.

“Yurika is depressed?”

“Yes. That’s what it looks like to me. Have you noticed anything, Satomi-kun?”

Harumi shared her worries with Koutarou and watched Yurika from a distance. She was walking with Kenji and talking to him as she looked around the aquarium with sparkling eyes.

“Hmm...”

Koutarou stared at Yurika and reflected on the past few days.

Now that I think about it, she has seemed a little down since that day she skipped school...

He hadn’t noticed anything specific, but he could tell that her overall cheerfulness had diminished.

“You might be on to something Sakuraba-senpai.”

“I thought so... I want to get Nijino-san back to her normal cheerful self.”

“Sakuraba-senpai...”

Koutarou understood what Harumi meant. Yurika should always be cheerful.

“I’ll try to cheer up Nijino-san, so I want you to be nice to her too, Satomi-kun.”

“I understand. I’ll talk to her when I get the chance.”

Koutarou had no objections.

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

A smile appeared on Harumi’s face. It was a beautiful smile filled with trust and gentleness.

She really is beautiful...

But it wasn’t about the way she looked. Koutarou was admiring her inner beauty.

“Are you seriously asking me to go buy juice with my hands like this, Kou?”

Kenji opened his hands and showed them to Koutarou, who flinched a little at the sight. His palms and fingers were covered in battle scars from his encounter with Koutarou's crab army.

"Ugh, fine. I guess I'll go instead."

"You better."

Since Koutarou was the one responsible for unleashing the crab attack, he reluctantly took on the job of going to get everyone something to drink.

"Satomi-kun, should I come too?" Harumi asked.

But Koutarou shook his head.

"Sakuraba-senpai, just rest here."

After enjoying the aquarium, Koutarou and the others had decided on taking a short rest before going home. And the one who needed it the most was of course Harumi, who had a weak constitution. Koutarou wanted her to rest as long as possible.

"But..." Harumi persisted. She understood Koutarou's intentions, but she was sorry for it.

"It's okay, Sakuraba-senpai."

However, when Koutarou shifted his gaze to Yurika for a second, Harumi's expression changed to one of realization. On top of letting Harumi rest, he was planning on taking Yurika with him to talk to her.

"Okay," Harumi relented. Now fully understanding his plan, Harumi nodded and smiled at Koutarou.

I'm counting on you, Satomi-kun. Heehee, you really are...

The big smile on her face showed her complete confidence in Koutarou.

"All right, Yuri—"

"I'm coming too, Satomi-san!"

Before Koutarou could ask her to come, Yurika volunteered to go with him.

"If I leave you to your own devices, you'll definitely buy something strange for

me, Satomi-san!”

“Nijino-san, make sure he doesn’t buy something weird for me either.”

“Leave it to me, Mackenzie-san!”

Both Yurika and Kenji were used to Koutarou’s pranks.

Leaving Harumi and Kenji behind at the sitting area by the entrance, Koutarou and Yurika headed towards the stand together. Although there was a vending machine in the sitting area, the stand carried a lot more options. The short walk there was also the ideal opportunity for a little talk.

She does seem kind of down...

Once Harumi and Kenji were out of sight, Yurika’s shoulders drooped and she looked at the ground. Yurika had been putting on a brave face in front of them, but once it was just her and Koutarou, she let her guard down a little.

“Yurika, has something happened recently? You seem a little blue.”

“Satomi-san...”

Yurika looked up in surprise, but once she caught a glimpse of Koutarou’s face, she looked down again.

“Sakuraba-senpai is worried too.”

“...I see...”

Still looking down, Yurika sighed.

“I’m just... having some relationship problems...”

Yurika was depressed because Koutarou and the others were treating her as a cosplayer again.

Maki’s last attack erased several hours’ worth of memory from Koutarou and the others, meaning they’d completely forgotten about their fight with Maki and the fact that Yurika was a magical girl. And without knowing the truth, everyone went back to treating Yurika like they had before—as a cosplayer. She’d been so happy that her friends finally believed her that this setback was particularly devastating.

If it was going to be like this, I wish my memories had been erased too...

Maki's spell didn't have any effect on Yurika thanks to the resistance her outfit and staff provided. But right now, Yurika wasn't happy about it. Her short-lived joy was now overshadowed by bitter depression.

And knowing the effect her spell had on everyone, Maki was still going to Kisshouharukaze High School while feigning innocence. Normally Yurika would be focusing on that, but she didn't have the energy for it now.

"Relationship issues?"

"Actually, some of my friends have the wrong idea about me. But just when the misunderstanding was finally about to be all cleared up, something happened and we're right back where we started..."

"I see... I'm sorry to hear that."

Yurika's story was a little vague, but Koutarou understood that it was about magical girls and cosplaying.

Maybe she got the third degree from a teacher for playing hooky that day.

Thanks to their amnesia, Koutarou and the others just remembered it as the day Yurika forced Maki to skip school with her.

"It sucks..."

But Koutarou acting like he had no idea what she was talking about felt like rubbing salt in the wound, even though it wasn't his fault.

"What should I do? For example—"

She suddenly looked straight at Koutarou with a serious expression.

"For example, how would I get you to understand that I'm a magical girl, Satomi-san?"

Harumi had told her that she had to keep going. And Yurika's perseverance had finally paid off. Koutarou and the others finally believed that she was a magical girl. But it was short and sweet. Everything was back to normal now and it felt like all her efforts had been in vain. It was only natural for her to be

depressed about that.

“I don’t know what’s really troubling you, but...”

The truth was that Koutarou did know what was bothering her. But since Yurika was talking about cosplay like that wasn’t the real problem, he played along.

“If, for example, you want me to believe that you’re a magical girl, then... Let’s see...”

“Well?!” Yurika asked in anticipation. She leaned in, eagerly awaiting Koutarou’s answer.

“Then I don’t think you need to do anything.”

“...Huh?”

But his answer was completely unexpected.

I don’t have to do anything?

At first she thought that she had misheard him. She stopped walking and raised her voice.

“H-Hang on, what are you saying? Do nothing? But you’ve never believed me even once!”

“That’s true, but...”

Koutarou stopped too, smiling wryly as he scratched his head.

“I’ve started to think that it doesn’t really matter if you’re a cosplayer or a magical girl.”

“It... doesn’t matter?”

This answer confused Yurika even more. This was of dire importance to her. How could it not matter?

“How could you say that?! It’s very important!”

Yurika pressed Koutarou in an agitated tone, but he looked back at her calmly.

“Is it really? I don’t think so.”

“What?! Are you saying you’ll never believe me?!”

“No, I believe you.”

“Then what do you mean?!”

“It’s *because* I believe you, Yurika,” Koutarou said in a gentle tone to the agitated Yurika. “I don’t know when... but I remember you protecting Sakuraba-senpai and ending up engulfed in flames.”

“Huh...?”

Koutarou shouldn’t remember any of that. Yurika was surprised to hear it, but it instantly calmed her down.

“When was it...? Hmm... It’s weird. I really can’t remember. Do you, Yurika?”

Koutarou looked puzzled. He distinctly remembered Yurika protecting Harumi, but he couldn’t remember when it had happened or why.

“Satomi-san... Could it be...?”

Satomi-san was under the effects of my defensive spell, so his memories weren’t completely erased! I’m sure that’s it!

Before Maki could cast her final spell, Yurika cast a spell on Koutarou to protect him. He’d lost most of his memory, but he hadn’t forgotten the things that left a deep impression on him. Granted, if Yurika tried to explain that, it would only confuse him. Instead, she shook her head and decided to deceive him.

“I’m sorry, I can’t remember either. So much happens every day, you know?”

“Really? Well, I guess doesn’t matter. Anyways, after I saw that, I felt like it didn’t matter if you could really use magic or not.”

“Why...?”

Yurika looked up at Koutarou with great expectation. It very well may have been a sign of how much she relied on him.

“No matter who you are, you’re a good person. There aren’t that many people who would put their life on the line to protect someone else. Magical girl, cosplayer, or otherwise.”

What was important to Koutarou wasn’t whether or not Yurika could use

magic. It was her character.

“So even if you call yourself a magical girl when you don’t have any magic powers, I don’t really mind. You still do things worthy of a magical girl.”

“Satomi-san...”

Given someone who could use magic but used it selfishly and someone who didn’t have magic but did what they could to help people, Koutarou was far more inclined to think of the latter as a magical girl of love and courage. To him, the part about magic didn’t matter.

“Heeheehee...”

The antagonizing feelings inside Yurika melted away like snow bathed in the warmth of spring sunshine. The emotional meltwater poured out of her eyes as tears.

That’s right. That’s why I look up to Sakuraba-senpai so much...

Harumi couldn’t use magic, but ever since the day she’d met her, Yurika wanted to become a magical girl like Harumi. Even if she couldn’t become a magical genius like Nana, she could become a good person like Harumi. Yurika had her answer from the start.

“However, I’d still be worried about having a careless girl like you using magic, so I’m hoping you’ll stay a cosplayer,” Koutarou said with a shrug and a smirk.

Hearing his wry comment, Yurika recalled what Koutarou had told her before.

“Sunshine and rainbows suit you much better.”

Knowing what Koutarou had said in the past, Yurika understood the true meaning behind his words.

“With that in mind, I have something I’d like to ask you, Yurika.”

“...Yes?”

Without even wiping away her tears, Yurika looked straight at Koutarou. She already knew what he was about to say. And as she looked at him, her remaining tears streamed down her face and tumbled to the ground, sparkling in the air as they fell.

“How should I think of you?”

And just as she had suspected, Koutarou asked exactly what she was expecting him to.

“Hee... Heehee... Heeheehee...”

A warm feeling bubbled up inside Yurika. This time, her tears were a sign of happier feelings. Yurika wiped them away and smiled brightly.

“I’m Nijino Yurika...”

Even if he didn’t remember it, when Yurika’s identity was revealed to Koutarou, he’d said that he wanted to graduate high school with Yurika.

“I’m your classmate and your freeloading roommate.”

Right now, Yurika didn’t think that would be a bad way to spend the next three years with Koutarou.

I wonder why... I always wanted him to believe I was a magical girl, but now...

As if seizing those warm feelings, Yurika firmly grabbed at her chest. Even now, Koutarou thought of her as a normal girl. But Yurika was okay with that. In fact, she started to hope this would last. Yurika contemplated that change, but she was also very happy.

“I see.”

“So... So let’s cosplay together next time, Satomi-san...”

That was most likely the only pitfall in the group date plan Yurika had come up with.

“I refuse.”

“Waaah haa haa! Jeez, you’re always so mean, Satomi-san. There’s no need to be embarrassed about it...”

In shoujo manga, the girl that planned the group date usually ended up falling in love with the boy she was trying to set her best friend up with.



A small office in a certain place.

The dull room was outfitted with five desks and other furnishings like lockers and a dirty old TV. It was about as equally dull as Maki's room. However, the key difference was that this office had plenty of signs of someone living in it.

Leftover instant noodle cups, candy wrappers, and various other trash was scattered about. The residents used to make an effort to clean up, but they had lost the drive to do so. In that sense, the office also had a similar atmosphere to Yurika's wardrobe.

In short, it was a room that combined the worst of both Yurika and Maki's dwellings. But inside this office were five people. The room's sorry state was their fault. The lazy residents spent their time lounging around and doing as they pleased. This afternoon was no different.

"...We really were demoted, weren't we?" a short-haired young man muttered.

Since the only other noise in the room was the muffled electronic sounds of a mobile game, his voice seemed awfully loud.

"Don't say that! We're all trying not to think about it," the only woman out of the five responded in a hysterical voice. Her eyes were burning with resoluteness, and her prominent eyebrows only served to strengthen that impression.

"S-Sorry," the young man quickly apologized.

Seeing him like that, the boy playing games on his phone laughed.

"What does it matter, really? It's the truth after all. I think it's great that I get paid for playing around."

The music from the boy's game continued playing as he spoke. The melody was full of suspense and tension. It seemed absurd as the incidental background music to such a dull room.

"I thought this was a wonderful post when I was first assigned here too..."

"Are you stupid? You think invaders really exist? The government just sold us some story about taking preemptive measures and we fell for it."

The last two people to speak up were a man eating curry rice and a man wearing shades. Like the others, they also appeared quite apathetic. All five of them were faced with the same reality. These troublemakers had been assigned here on a demotion.

“But life goes on. It’s just leaving the five of us out of it.”

As the man in shades slumped his shoulders, an alarm noisily rang out through the room.

“Uwah! Wh-What?!”

“Nii-chan, fire! It’s a fire!”

“You know, pizzerias in other countries use an alarm like that to let you when the pizza’s done.”

“You’re both way off! That’s the mobilization signal!”

“So this is it...”

Over a year had passed since the five of them had been assigned here. During that time, the alarm hadn’t gone off even once. Really, they’d forgotten all about it.

“Gentlemen, it’s the enemy!”

Suddenly the old TV turned on by itself and an elderly man with a white beard and lab coat appeared on the screen.

“The time has finally come to show off our powers!”

“Professor, what do you mean by ‘the enemy’?!”

“The underground dwellers! They’re invading the surface to steal the sun from us!”

Following the elderly man’s tense declaration, the screen on the TV changed. It now showed a man in strange clothes stepping into a kindergarten and a woman in Japanese-style clothing giving orders.

“We got a report from one of the children onsite! Hurry up! They’re targeting the kindergarten!”

“What?!”

Hearing the elderly man's report, the five people in the dingy office hurriedly got to their feet. They were a secret organization ridiculed as being a waste of money, but now they finally had their chance to prove their worth.

"All riiiiight! It's time to show off my karate!"

"Yes! Finally! Let the games begin!"

"At long last, my romance with a beautiful enemy commander begins! Thank god! I thought I'd be single forever!"

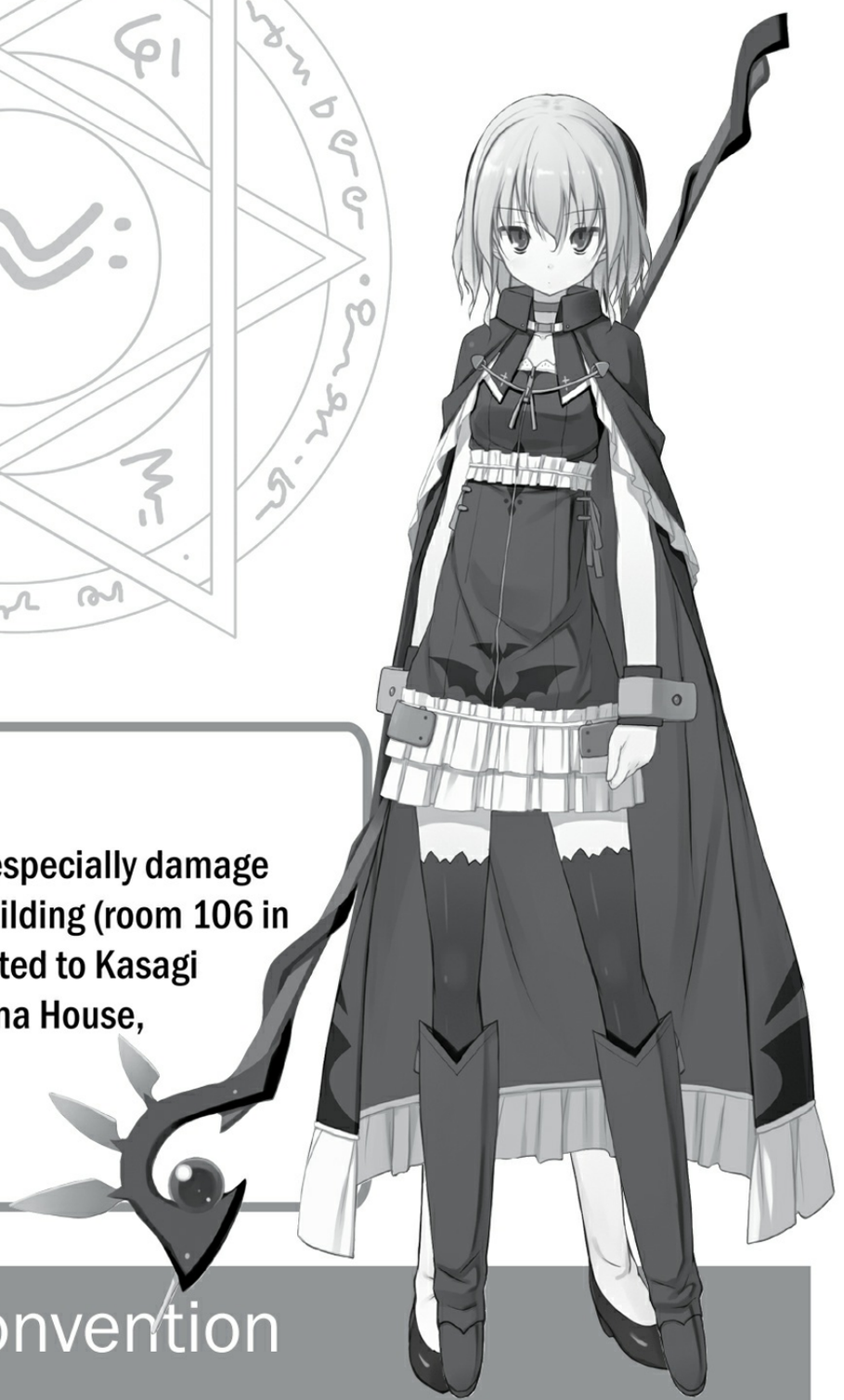
"Underground dwellers, huh? I hope they have delicious food."

"Hmph. You're too naive, kids. You might as well give up on those fantasies now. Hardboiled, rough days are ahead of us."

These were the Sun Rangers of the Sun Squad. And their first enemy would be the evil underground dwellers that had crawled up from the depths of hell.



Article 3 Postscript
Violations of this article, especially damage to or destruction of the building (room 106 in particular), must be reported to Kasagi Shizuka (landlord of Corona House, residing in room 206) immediately.



Corona Convention

New! November 20th, 2009

Afterword

Long time no see everybody, it's the author, Takehaya.

This time I have safely delivered volume 5. The story this time around is about the appearance of Yurika's long-awaited enemy. The time to shine for the unfortunate girl who was forced into the position of a cosplayer has finally come... or has it? It would be nice if it did. Please watch over her kindly, everyone.

Oh, that's right. I actually wrote this volume from my new home. I finished moving at the start of March. My new home is very quiet and I'll be able to focus on writing here. However, there are still cardboard boxes I haven't taken care of spread out here and there. It's been almost two months, but I still haven't cleaned up. In the end, I keep focusing on my job and don't get around to it. But the editorial department keeps telling me to work with a cold stare. What can I do? (Ha!) There's some movement in that editorial department regarding *Invaders of the Rokujouma!?* It should all be in place by the time this volume goes on sale, so for those interested, please visit the *Rokujouma* page on Hobby Japan's website. I said the same thing in the afterword of volume 4, but this time I'm serious. Regarding the contents of the page, as revenge for not being able to clean up, I've pressed them really hard and it seems that they're planning on doing something else on top of what they're doing with the page. I wonder what it is? I want to know.

By the time of writing this afterword at the start of May, all you can see on the page is a short anime of Koutarou eating ramen. Although it's short, I'm moved seeing my own work being animated. It's become a source of power alongside the handwritten letter I received earlier. No matter what happens in the future, I'll be able to look back on these and do my best.

Since I have some room left for this afterword, I'm going to talk a little more about my life.

I got to go to a concert the other day. The artist was Fukuyama Yoshiki-san. He did Basara's singing voice in *Macross 7.* Now that I think about it, *Macross 7* came out when I was in university. Looking back on it gets me a little down when I think about how much time has passed. Fifteen years or so. That university student is now in his thirties. But Fukuyama-san's voice is just the same as it was back then. I got a feel for what it really means to be a star. Either way, I had a lot of fun. I was especially happy to hear "Try Again" live.

And I finally got my hands on a Blu-ray player for my own home. I also bought that movie *Avatar* that I've heard so much about. I watched it right away. I might be a little late to the party, but Blu-ray is on a completely different level from DVD. I was so surprised. Although it might be more beautiful, the director, Cameron, is the same as always. The shuttles and aircrafts moved just the same as in *Alien 2.* They're very unique movements. It might have been on purpose since *Alien 2*'s star, Sigourney Weaver, also appeared in the film. If I'm not mistaken, *Alien 2* was made over twenty years ago. Yet another old tale... (Ha!)

That should about do it. I'm almost out of room now, so I'd like to end this afterword here.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone at the editorial department who's working so hard; my illustrator Poco-san who gets the work done properly every time; my friends who always give me advice; and everyone who bought this novel.

Let us meet again in the afterword of the sixth volume.

May, 2010

Takehaya

Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

Yurika’s Grand Plan

Yurika’s Enemy Has Come!

Misunderstanding and Being Misunderstood

Yurika vs. Maki

Sunshine and Rainbows

Fighting and Magic

Magical Girl Rainbow Yurika

Afterword

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Invaders of the Rokujouma!? Volume 5

by Takehaya

Translated by Warnis Edited by Morgan Dreher

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