

Pitiful Existence

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Pitiful Existence

by [linguisticnightmare](#)

Summary

Shuichi chooses a...different path.

Would you like to save?

Yes No

[Yes] No

Ending X/3.

Alternate Ending(s) of Final Punishment.

Or, in other words, Shuichi dies a lot, in many “what if” scenarios.

Chapter One: Through Icy Lakes

His dorm seemed welcoming, this time he returned. It wasn't like last night. He wasn't plagued by his thoughts, he wasn't stuck in an endless loop of questions, and no answers. He didn't need Keiji to help him this time. He had the confidence that..everything would be okay. At least, for now, right? What was going to happen? Nobody would die. Nobody died the previous night. Nobody was going to die. Everyone understood that..their lives mean more than some memories that they could always make up later.

He slid his keys back into his pocket, twisting open the knob before he entered. Tomorrow will be..a good day. They'd make it a good day. Maybe they could figure out, get out before anyone dies? He really didn't know what else to do. For tonight, though? Tonight was a night of rest. A night of peace.

He was about to close the door when he saw a pair of shoes standing before his door. Confusion filled him, and as he looked up to see who had arrived, his vision went dark, a sharp pain bursting through his temple and all he could really feel before completely crumbling was...pain?

It was cold. His skin felt prickly against the frigid temperature. He seemed to be... growing accustomed to the cold. How long had he been here? Actually, where was he? He shifted, skin sticking to the floor around him, and everything was burning. "Ah. It took you a while to wake up, hm?"

He looked up, eyes turning towards the individual talking to him. Levi Uta. He seemed... sadistic, in the dull light above them. His fingers twitched, forcing himself up until he was kneeling before the other. What was even going on? "What...why did you bring me here, Levi?"

"There's no use in crying, Shuichi. I know who you are. I know what you are. You want us to die. You want us to give up our hope! You have your memories. You have your thoughts. The rest of us are suffering, and you won't tell us what you know. You won't tell us how to escape. It's all your fault, Shuichi. Why are you so special?" Levi moved closer, his footfalls heavy as he approached. He scooted back, trying to put more space between them.

Levi held something, he couldn't make it out, but what he did know was that Levi had every intention of hurting him. He wouldn't doubt that Levi wanted to kill him. If..if Levi thought it was his fault that they were here, there was nothing he could say to solve it. He wasn't the reason, but...it was true. He knew more than the rest of them. He could remember his family, his friends, what his life was like before they arrived here. Maybe...Maybe it was his fault.

The strike was quick, almost practiced even. Pain blossomed in his skull as though his brain was rattling around. He assumed it was some type of pan, or even a tenderizer. The pain didn't stop. The pain never stopped. It kept going, *Levi* kept going. Blood began to fill his vision, even with his hands trying to protect his head. It grew worse and worse before he just...slowly lost his consciousness.

The cold grew worse. The air became colder, drier. He attempted to move, despite the way his body ached in pain. Blood stained his uniform, and he was glad that his uniform was black. Maybe...maybe *Levi* wasn't going to kill him. Only...only torture him? He'd live through that. He could live. Maybe this wasn't his end? He would hope not...he didn't want to die, not here. He wanted to save them, he wanted to get everyone out of this game.

Why? Why did *Levi* assume he was the reason behind this? He knew *Monokuma* told him not to tell anyone about the Sacrificial Perk. Was that the reason why *Levi* was targeting him? The door opened once more, and a rush of heat flooded the room. He felt like he could breathe again, even if it was only for a few seconds.

He shifted back, a poor attempt to avoid *Levi* as he drew nearer, only to realize he was bound to one of the shelves. His hope slowly drained, fear filling his bones and giving the slight amount of warmth he was desperate for. "This is it, *Saihara*. It's your fault we're here, and once you're gone? We'll be free. So. I'm going to kill you."

"You're going to die. If you kill me, they're going to execute you! You're going to die! Please, please, *Levi*. I don't want everyone to die. Please, Save them. Save them!" His voice cracked, it was raw with the amount of strength it needed. With the amount of emotion in it. This was it. This...this was his time, wasn't it?

A burning pain erupted in his ribs and *Levi* didn't bother waiting for the other to catch his breath before kicking him again. Again and again, *Levi* struck and struck, refusing to give up. It felt like he was accepting *Levi's* fit of anger, his rage. A sickening crack sounded and *Levi* stepped away. His anger seemed settled after that, but he knew deep down...it wasn't the end.

His nose gushed blood, painting his chin and seeping into his checkered scarf. The heat had flooded his skin, and he felt somehow warmer than when the door had opened. *Levi* stepped back, disappearing outside for a moment and he felt like this would be his only chance to breathe.

His head laid against the rack behind him, panting aloud as he tried to catch his breath. His lungs hurt, burned. His stomach churned before he realized that...he couldn't escape. *Levi* wanted to kill him. He was going to kill him. How could he stop that? How could he stop someone who had complete control over him?

The door swung open before him, and his fear spiked. It felt like instincts had kicked in, but he couldn't listen to them. He was trapped, no matter how much he fought. He could fight for days and nothing would change. Levi stood before him, emotionless above him. He wanted to kick and scream. But..he couldn't.

Fingers twisted up in his hair, forcing his head back and a gasp left his mouth. Pain sprouted in his scalp, but he knew. He knew it wouldn't last long. It wouldn't last forever. Levi forced a towel into his mouth, shoving it far enough back that he could feel himself gagging. Tears sprung in his eyes, and he was afraid once again. He was mortified. "Goodbye, Shuichi."

He watched Levi walk off, disappearing out of what he finally figured out was the freezer. The kitchen's walk-in freezer. The towel had soaked up every bit of saliva in his mouth, and he really didn't know how this was going to end. Was he going to suffocate? Freeze to death? His nose bled and bled, dyeing the towels pristine white fabric. This was it. No matter how he went, he was going to be left here, alone. He would die, alone.

He didn't realize his eyes had closed until he forced them open. He was tired. And so, so cold. He was freezing, but he..couldn't do anything. He was stuck. Tied up, tangled up. Silenced. He hated knowing that he couldn't even attempt calling out for help. Levi wanted him to die, without anyone knowing. Levi wanted him to perish while he went and slept in his room. Give himself an alibi. He knew it, but he couldn't do much to stop it. Change it. It was just him.

He blinked, staring blankly. He wanted to go home. Return home. Be somewhere asfe. He could feel the cold nipping and biting at his skin. He felt the burning all over. He couldn't do anything to change it. Fingers trailed over his wrist, slowly unknitting the rope that left him stuck. He must've been dreaming. He must've fallen asleep again. Nobody would untie him. He was meant to die.

Those same fingers gently fished the towel out of his mouth, and in that moment, he realized how achy his jaw had grown. How long had he been stuck here? He blinked, trying to ignore the way his brain wished to give up, lay down and die. He sniffled, wiping his nose on his sleeve, and that's when he realized that there was no blood? None wiped off onto the dark sleeve, at least, not from what he could tell.

Hands helped him up, keeping him from falling back down. He felt dizzy, confused. He didn't understand what was even going on. His vision slowly began to clear. Soft, purple hair came into his view, fingers trailing over his face to settle him down silently. He was so very confused. His fingers twinged as he gripped the person before him. "It's okay, Shumai. Don't be scared. It's over now."

"What's...What's over?" His voice was..uneasy. His confusion bled into his tone, and he went to look around when hands prevented him from looking. He was nervous. What

was..going on? His eyes met the purple haired individual's and suddenly recognition flashed through his mind. "Kokichi...? What's going on? I thought..I thought you were dead."

"Of course not, Shumai! I can't die, I'm invincible!" Kokichi grinned, smiling brightly despite his own confusion. He couldn't believe it. His fingers gripped at Kokichi's arms, staring at his lover. God, it'd been so long since he'd seen him. "Well, that's a lie. Anyway~! Let me take you home?"

Keiji slowly sat up, exhaustion coursing through his veins as he tried to force himself to get moving. Today would be a good day. The buddy system idea that Shuichi helped him to think of would save them. Keep everyone from dying. Keep them from losing to self preservation. They could make it.

He got up, dressing himself in his new uniform. A uniform he didn't really want, but one they were all forced to wear. It's okay. They were special here. They were supposed to survive this. To overcome this killing game. It'd be okay.

They met in the dining hall again. He counted. Recounted. Kept counting until he felt like he was going nuts. Someone was missing. Everyone had come the day before, why would someone decide to stop coming? Has the game already started? Who...

Shuichi. Shuichi was gone. No matter how many times he counted, the only one missing was Shuichi. They split up. Determined. They couldn't let the game start. They couldn't afford to lose someone. Not now. Not ever!

Keiji raced to the dorms. He didn't ever remember moving this fast, but he couldn't believe it. Shuichi wasn't the person who wouldn't show up. He wanted this to end, right? He didn't...Keiji forced the thoughts out of his head as he reached the dorms, his fingers gripping Shuichi's door knob. It was unlocked. Open. Not something Shuichi would do. He'd seen it previously. Shuichi was scared, he would never leave his door unlocked.

As he looked inside, he realized that something was...extremely wrong. Blood. Blood on the floor, right behind the door. Somewhere deep inside, he knew the game had begun. He knew what had happened. Now? Now he just had to disprove it. Shuichi couldn't die. Not now.

Screams echoed through the ship, a continuous echo seemingly deafening him. No. No this couldn't be happening. His feet started carrying him out, and heading back for the dining hall. Everyone had to know. Someone..someone...

No one was in the dining hall, but he could see someone rushing into the kitchen and he quickly followed behind. What else could he do? What else was he supposed to do? Everyone seemed to be frozen, just beside the walk-in freezer. Keiji forced himself through the crowd of students, Aiko and Haya standing at the front. It seemed as though Aiko had

been the one to scream. His eyes turned ahead, finally...finally understanding why she screamed.

Shuichi. He laid still, sitting in the far corner of the freezer. His hands bound to the shelf before him. Tied firmly enough his skin had been rubbed raw. Yet...his skin had lost all of its color. The only bit of color on his body was his lips, colored by a soft blue hue. A towel was shoved in his mouth, dyed the color of his blood. Blood...So much of it.

His eyelashes held frost, even his hair had begun to freeze. Keiji glanced up, making eye contact with..what little remained of Shuichi. His eyes had glazed over, left wide open in his seemingly undisturbed rest. No matter the amount of blood coating him, he seemed...at ease. "Shuichi..."

The game had begun.

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Two: Fight or Flight

As he was closing the door, Sora forced his foot inside, preventing him from completely shutting out the world. His eyes narrowed, and despite his normally avoidant behavior, he was feeling pretty...confrontational today. "I came to check on you, Shuichi. I'm worried. And I brought some food, since you didn't eat yesterday."

"I'm fine, thank you. I don't need any food. Now please, I'd like to be alone." He didn't mean to bite at Sora, but right now, he just wanted to return to his bed. He just needed to last a couple more hours, and then he wouldn't have to think about the embarrassment of his secret being leaked.

"Come on. I'm not letting you give in. I have something I want to show you in the greenhouse! I've been working on it since you visited me a couple days ago. You can eat it while I show it to you." Sora seemed...restless. Despite being unwilling to join, Shuichi found himself being dragged out of his room.

The ship always had this sort of draft, and with the majority of his neck and collarbones out on display, he found himself growing cold, and fast. Sora kept pulling him along though. He caught the eyes of the others around. They passed Kuni, and Tora. Hell, even Keiji.

Keiji smiled when their eyes met. It felt deceiving, yet at the same time, he knew Keiji meant it in a kind way. It put him at ease. And that's what truly scared him. How one smile made him falter. Sora kept pulling him, refusing to give him just a second to even think.

The heat flooded out of the greenhouse as soon as Sora opened the door. As soon as he was exposed to the heat, he could feel himself growing instantly warmer. More relaxed. The greenhouse felt like..home.

The flowers were beautiful. It seemed like just a few days with Sora's care made them flourish. His fingers trailed over the table, walking further into the room as Sora disappeared into the storage room. It looked...alive. As if a little bit of care had taken them from despair to liveliness.

Regardless, he wished he could've stayed hidden away in his room. Their time limit was almost up, and he didn't want to risk anyone harassing him about his secret anyway. He could spend just a little bit of time on his own.

Shuichi heard the door to the storage room close, and he turned back, only to see Sora holding something out to him. It seemed like pottery, but he really wasn't sure. "Did you make it?"

“Nah, I found it, but I think it’d look nice with a *Dichelostemma capitatum*. A Hyacinth would look beautiful in it.” Sora grinned, and Shuichi took a step closer, trying to get a closer look. He agreed, a hyacinth would be perfect. It would match the line art in the pot.

“I think it’d look nice...but the better question is, would it fit?” Shuichi hummed, smiling slightly as he studied the small pot. It was quite..petite, especially for a pot meant to hold some type of plant. “It’ll be fine. Can you grab me the hyacinth seeds from the back wall?”

He nodded slightly, turning away from Sora as he headed to the back. He’d seen the packs of seeds earlier during his exploration, but he didn’t think much of them. It would be beautiful to see everything in full bloom.

The image on the pack was small, but cute. It made him smile, knowing that just a simple seed could create something so beautiful. When he turns back to give them to Sora, he realizes that he’s..alone? Hadn’t Sora been right behind him?

Shaking his head, he went to the small pot that had been filled with soil. He didn’t even hear Sora walk away. Maybe he was just super distracted? He tore open the pack, placing just a few seeds into the soil before burying them.

They would be pretty, when they grew. Now he just needed to get some water for them, right? He smiled to himself, picking up the small pot as he headed back towards the storage room. There was a sink in there, and maybe Sora was in there getting stuff for the little plant. He didn’t know.

When he opens the door, he finds that his hypothesis was true. Sora was inside, but it seemed like...something was wrong. His shoulders shook, and his face was hidden by the shadows in the room. He didn’t even turn when the light from the greenhouse flooded in. “Sora..?”

Shuichi approached him slowly, unsure of how he should go about this situation. Maybe Sora was concerned or..plain upset about the whole killing game? Or afraid of their time limit ending? “Are you okay?”

Sora turned, and the second Shuichi saw the tears in his eyes, he knew that Sora needed help. He stepped closer, but in seconds, pain burst across his face, his skin burning as he jerked back. Confusion filled him and he reached up, his hand coming up to touch the bleeding cut on his cheek. Sora..cut him?

“Sora? What the hell?” He pressed at the cut, taking steps backwards, but Sora was quick to follow. His eyes trailed the knife in Sora’s hand, realizing it was trembling just as he was. He needed to run. Now.

His eyes darted around, searching for an exit and found none. The only way out was the main entrance of the greenhouse. Could he make it? He didn't know, and he wasn't sure he'd have the opportunity to find out. Before he could move to run, Sora was swinging at him.

Shuichi stumbled back, his arm guarding his face as he tried to protect himself from Sora. Pain bloomed in his forearm, but he couldn't stop to look at the new wound, and there was no way he could defend himself from Sora without some type of a weapon.

He clutched the pot tightly, his brain making up a not so solid plan, but one that would definitely work in the nick of time. He dug his fingers into the pot, getting a decent handful of the soil as he backed away, discarding the pot afterward. He needed the perfect timing for this to even work.

Sora swung again, and Shuichi barely managed to evade the blade as he kept a tight grip on the soil. He caught Sora's wrist as it was down, giving himself ample time to perform his plan. His wrist snapped as he threw the soil, a small cloud of dirt sprayed into Sora's face.

Sora stumbled back out of his grip, hand coming up to rub the dirt from his eyes. Perfect. Shuichi turned, rushing to the door and attempting to escape but...it was locked? No. How was that possible?

Okay. New game plan. He needed to get out, get away from Sora. He could pick the lock? No, that would take too long. He couldn't guarantee his safety. He could evade, maybe find something to defend himself in the storage room? But he'd be cornered there...what options did he have?

His eyes darted around, searching, praying that he could find something to help him. Anything would do. His eyes met Sora's and he knew he was completely running out of time. Sora darted towards him and he rushed through the rows of plants, trying to put space between them.

What was in here that he could use? Something to defend himself? Something to disarm Sora? Anything really, anything would work. He looked as he ran, trying to keep space between them, and he suddenly found something. Something that could work.

One of the boards that held up the potting table was loose. He could probably pull it off, and one swing could easily take Sora down. At least...for a little while. He could escape.

Shuichi rushed, hands outstretched as he reached for the board and pulled. Putting his entire body weight into it, the board popped off, the nails that previously had held it in were barely attached. Finally, He had a weapon.

By the time he turned around, Sora was almost to him and he had a minuscule amount of time to react. The board wasn't light by any means, but he knew that he had to get out of here. Shuichi swung, just as Sora got close enough for him to see the whites in his eyes.

The board cut his skin, and Sora hit the floor almost immediately. Shuichi dropped the board, hands trembling as he took a couple steps away before he was off, running towards the door. He couldn't worry about Sora. He had to get out. Get help.

He twisted the knob, and it didn't move more than a centimeter. How was it locked? How could it be locked? No. No this is bad, really bad. Shuichi looked around, searching for other options, for something to do. If he was stuck in here, with Sora, how could he protect himself?

He went towards the storage room, checking if the door had a lock. None. But...he could probably hide the knife somewhere inside and then just defend himself from Sora. He could manage hand to hand, but the real question was...why did Sora want to kill him?

Sora must've planned it, that's the truth. It was premeditated. He had a knife, something that he would've needed from the kitchen. That's the truth. It's just as bad as Haru's murder. This was planned.

That was the truth, wasn't it? He had to admit it. Shuichi forced himself away from the door, slowly approaching where Sora once laid. His breath caught in his throat when he realized that Sora was no longer there.

He looked around, eyes darting about trying to see a hint of where he would've gone. There were a few droplets of blood on the floor, probably from his forehead, or maybe the board even, but he didn't know. All he did know was that Sora wasn't out cold anymore.

Shuichi's first instinct was to run. But there was nowhere to run to. He was locked in a room with someone who wanted to kill him. The storage room was there, but for all he knew, Sora was waiting for him there. What could he do?

Shuichi knew Sora was hiding in the storage room. For what reason? He really didn't know. Though, he had managed to cover up the cut on his arm. It stung, burned. He knew that if they were going to be stuck here for a while, it could become infected. With how deep it seemed, it could be lethal. But then again, he wasn't an expert.

He should've expected this. Kokichi taught him better. Showed him to always be second guessing. And now he's stuck here, awaiting help, or awaiting death. Which would it be?

Shuichi was too deep in his own thoughts to hear the door open, and by the time he realized it, it was already too late. Something akin to a cord wrapped around his neck, and he reached up to pull it off only to be kicked down to the floor.

A foot dug into his back, and the cord only grew tighter. He thrashed, attempting to force Sora off, and his hands clawed at the cord, to no avail. The corners of his vision were beginning to darken, and his attempts of escape became more rapid, fearful.

This was how he was going to die. Strangled to death by a cord. Wow. And all he could do was take it. It didn't take long for his vision to fade to black.

His consciousness was finally coming to, yet his body felt heavy. Heavier than before, and he noticed the weight on his hands. The cord. His head throbbed with pain, and his throat ached. How was he still alive? Sora had the opportunity to kill him. Why didn't he take it?

"I need an alibi, that's why, Shuichi. And because you hit me, I need to make an excuse for this cut." Sora's voice was unforgiving. And..he was kept alive only to be murder in a slow, and potentially extremely painful death?

"You shouldn't notice it. It doesn't take long, a few hours maybe. It'll feel like gut rot, basically. You'll probably lose control over your muscles before falling asleep. Then, you'll die," Sora's voice held no remorse as he listed off what would occur to him. Sora twisted the cap off a small bottle, and took Shuichi's jaw in hand, prying it open.

Shuichi had two options. Swallow the poison, or potentially choke on it as he attempts to breathe. He had to give in, didn't he? It took Sora blocking both his mouth and nose to force him into swallowing. He was...going to die. How long until then? He really didn't know.

Sora left a while ago. Without a clock in the room, he hadn't really known the exact time of when he left. But he knew that it was the second block of free time. That much he knew. But he did know that he was definitely starting to feel some of the symptoms.

His hands trembled, more than they had been prior at least. It wasn't out of adrenaline anymore. He felt like he was constantly swallowing his saliva, but that could've been the anxiety, rather than a symptom of poisoning. The muscle pain came just...minutes after Sora had left.

It felt wrong, and despite his ability to function otherwise, he felt more fatigued the more he moved. He didn't even know a poison like this existed. He knew there were thousands of options, lengthy ones at that too, but...he didn't know how much it would hurt. And that's what truly scared him.

Kokichi was in this same situation. Stuck in a room, no escape. Poisoned. Kaito was there to comfort him, but...Shuichi was alone. Alone with his thoughts, as his body shut down. "God, fuck."

He could feel the tears welling up, but he made no move to wipe them away. Kokichi begged Kaito to put him out of his misery. But...Shuichi really didn't feel any pain. More just...uncomfortable rather than pain.

Kokichi deserved better. He deserved this. He was supposed to get everyone out alive. Kokichi just pissed off the wrong people. Shuichi failed everyone, everyone that was relying on him to make it out of here.

Shuichi huffed, trying to get the thought out of his head. He could feel his heart beating, pounding as if he'd just run a marathon, but...he knew he couldn't stop something like this. It was a waiting game. A game where he would lose every ounce of control, before succumbing to the poison.

The convulsions came soon after his heart rate had finally slowed to what felt like a normal speed. Sora was right, though. It felt like his stomach was aflame, burning from the inside out. He didn't know if that was truly the case, but he definitely knew that he wasn't surviving this, not even with treatment.

He hadn't heard anyone passing in the hallway, he couldn't hear anything for that matter. It was just him and the plants. Left here to die. If...Sora is executed for his murder, these plants would die too. He hated for it to be that way, but he couldn't do much to prevent that outcome anymore.

He attempted to relax, but with the aching of his muscles, he knew he wouldn't get very far. Maybe...Maybe he could get into the hallway. Getting out would help him in general. Someone could find him. Someone...he hoped someone would find him, but he didn't know if that would ever happen now.

Shuichi, despite the way his arms screamed at him to stop moving, forced himself onto his knees and then to his feet. It took a lot more effort than he thought, but he managed it. His legs shook under the pressure, and the wall became his new best friend, but he was going to make it out of this greenhouse.

Even if it was the last thing he did, he knew he didn't want to die here, knowing that his death would cause the death of the plants inside. He was already at fault for Haru's death. For Levi's. He couldn't put even more guilt on his shoulders.

It was easy to get the cord off, with it barely being tied, but just enough to make it difficult to get off with the pain. Shuichi knew the next target was to get to the door. Get outside. Find someone. Or..wait for someone to find him.

He wouldn't say that he walked to the door, but more like threw himself at it and prayed he'd make it. Luck was on his side for once, and his hand caught the knob before he could completely collapse to the floor. The quick movements triggered the convulsions again, but he just clung to the door as he attempted to ride them out.

It hurt more. Worse than that time where Mai made him start training, to up some of his strength after a mission gone wrong. He remembered feeling like his muscles were burning

with every movement. But this? This felt like...he felt as though he was being burned alive, while his body writhed in an attempt to escape the nonexistent fire.

The knob barely budged. If he felt feverish before, he definitely felt like a bucket of ice water had been dumped on him. He was locked in. Again. Locked in a room, left to die.

His forehead pressed against the door, the cool surface giving him a second refresher. He kept trying, twisting and pushing, pulling on the knob regardless of his weak status. "Please.."

His voice was hoarse, and he felt like he had to force the word out. He really was dying, wasn't he? How long had he sat there, trying to make sense of the inevitable?

Stuck. Alone. He was going to die alone, and nobody would know. Sora was the only one to ever use the greenhouse anyway, and he'd...he'd probably avoid it, knowing that he was inside.

He kept trying, despite his legs already giving up on him. Jiggling the door knob, praying that someone would hear it, or see it. Something. Anything. If...if he was going to die, he didn't want to die alone.

Everything hurts. If it wasn't his stomach, it was his muscles. Everything seemed like it was working against him. At least his heart wasn't racing anymore..

He didn't know if he was losing consciousness or if he had just grown weak enough to lose grip of the door, but suddenly, it was open. The knob twisted, and the door creaked open. Finally..free.

"Oh my god, Shuichi?" Hands were on his shoulders, holding his torso up from the wall. Their hands felt cool against his skin, and he immediately felt his fear melting away. At least he wouldn't die alone.

He blinked, trying to clear his eyes of the tears that had gathered, to see Shimizu before him. Thank god. Someone came for him. Someone found him. Even if they couldn't save him, he was glad to know that he wasn't going to perish alone, stuck in a locked room.

"What's wrong? What happened to you? Oh god. You're bleeding...I need to get help, I'll be right back." Shimizu went to get up, about to get help from others, but Shuichi gripped her sleeve, trying to keep her from leaving. He didn't want to be here alone, not again. Not when he knew he could die at any moment.

"What? Shuichi, you need help. Please, let me be like Haya or someone, someone who can help." His grip was weak, regardless of how hard he held onto her sleeve. Shimizu pulled her sleeve away, swearing that she would be back before he could even realize she was gone.

Shuichi watched her disappear, and he chose to close his eyes and pretend like her words were true. She would come back. They would try to help him, right? No...No, what if they brought Sora? And Sora realized that he could completely...finish him off?

He tried to keep himself awake. He was afraid to fall unconscious. He knew that...there was the possibility that if he fell asleep, he'd never wake up again. That's what scared him the most. He didn't want to die. Not yet. Not yet..

“Oh shit. He looks pretty bad...” He hadn't heard anyone approaching, but then again, he felt like he was way too consumed by his thoughts to really hear anything else. He blinked, forcing his eyes to open despite the blariness in them. Yumiko. Of course...she wasn't alone.

Kuro appeared in his line of sight, and within seconds, Shuichi could feel Kuro's hands on his skin. He was cold, and compared to his flushed skin, it felt like a wave crashing over him. Relief. It soothed the ache in his muscles. It made him feel less..scared. “His eyes are dilated. Bad. Yumi, look.”

Yumiko's hands cupped his face, forcing him to stare directly at her as she studied his eyes. He hadn't noticed it, at least. He didn't feel sensitive to the light, but then again, he spent most of the time with his eyes closed if he could manage it.

“Maybe he ate something that made him sick?” Shimizu offered, and Shuichi huffed out a sigh, regardless of how it made his lungs ache. He hadn't even eaten today, but he definitely felt like vomiting. Maybe...it'd make him feel better.

No. He already knew that the poison had caused enough damage. He was going to die, no matter what he did. “No. It's gotta be a poison or something. His eyes shouldn't be dilated from just eating something. And he has muscle paralysis, if you look.”

He could see that Kuro and Shimizu had moved closer, touching his hands, yet he hadn't felt a thing. He could feel the way his muscles twinged, when they tried to move his hands. He tried to speak, but nothing really came out. His jaw felt weak, and his throat felt torn apart. It burned.

He's losing everything. His ability to control his body. His ability to speak. How much more would he lose before he'd pass? “We should get him to the chemicals room. Maybe we can find what he was given, and pray we get the antidote in time. Kuro, can you carry him?”

Shuichi stared while Kuro nodded, and soon enough Kuro's arms were wrapped around him, pulling his body off the floor. The motion jerked him, and the convulsions struck again, yet he was helpless to stop them. Yet, all Kuro could do was hold him up, and try to keep him from collapsing back down.

“Okay...that’s definitely not good either. We should hurry. I don’t know how much time he has.” Yumiko hushed before she was off, Shimizu on her tail. Shuichi couldn’t even feel his legs anymore, and he knew that he wasn’t able to hold himself up. At least he didn’t weigh too much..

Kuro lifted him, easily, and it seemed like he was trying not to jerk Shuichi around too much. And he was thankful for it, at least he wouldn’t get tousled around and have to deal with the convulsions. They made him feel like his heart was going to give up. It scared him.

The Chemicals room was quiet. The only noise that drifted in was Yumiko searching through the bottles. Hell, he didn’t even know what poison he’d been given. Kuro was quick to lay him on the cool counter, and he felt like he could finally breathe again. He wasn’t alone. He wasn’t going to die, locked in a room.

“Kuro, see if you can get him to talk. Maybe he can tell us what he took, or who did this.” Yumiko uttered, and Kuro was immediately in his face again. Shuichi sighed, trying to get his voice to work again. He could tell them. He could tell them that Sora was trying to kill him. That Sora *was* killing him.

This was going to be it, wasn’t it? He wasn’t going to be able to tell them. He couldn’t tell them that Sora was his killer. That...that was depressing. He just...had to sit there, and wait. Wait until he fell asleep, and never woke up again. He was going to die, and not even help the people he was supposed to save.

“Uh...Bad news, Yumi. He can’t talk. Looks like he’s trying to and it just isn’t working.” Kuro rubbed his arm, and despite knowing that Kuro was touching him, Shuichi couldn’t feel it. It was...scary. He was scared. He was dying, how else was he supposed to feel?

He closed his eyes, no longer wanting to watch as the two rushed around, searching for an answer. Searching for something to save him. It was a waste, but he was glad to know that they cared enough to try. That they wanted to save him.

The door opened, and it sounded like more people had come in. He could hear the footsteps, but with everyone moving at once, he couldn’t tell how many. He just knew that they were there. Kuro’s warmth had left him, and he was sure that he went to approach the others that had come in, probably to explain the situation.

“Uh oh...bad news, guys,” Yumiko started, and Shuichi had a feeling it was even worse than just bad news. The worst knees he could receive right now was that everyone was leaving him. Leaving him to die alone. He knew he was going to die. He couldn’t stop it.

“What? What is it?” Oh...so Shimizu must’ve left to get the others. Everyone else, he supposed. That was Akira’s voice, right? Or maybe Aiko’s? He wasn’t really sure. His fingers

tingled as he tried to use his hand for once. He needed to get up. He needed to know what was going on.

Shuichi opened his eyes, trying to force himself up when he realized that all eyes had turned to him. His breath caught in his throat and all he could do was look around. Everyone had gathered. Literally. But he...he couldn't see Sora. Despite Kuro being at his side, and helping him to sit up, he still couldn't manage his own weight.

In an instant, Keiji was at his side, holding his weight up. It was the first time he could feel someone touching him. Keiji gripped his hand, tightly, as if letting go meant that Shuichi would float away like a balloon. He could feel himself smiling, and he knew. He knew Keiji would make his death as painless as possible.

"It's poison hemlock. That's what he was given.." Yumiko mumbled, holding the empty bottle of poison. Hemlock. It took hours to kill an individual. He knew that much, but he didn't know if there was an antidote. Or if the antidote would even help at this point. "Okay. Where's the antidote for it? It has one, right? It needs to have one."

Kuni spoke first, probably asking the question that was running through all of their minds. They couldn't save him. That's the truth. Yumiko shook her head, and Shuichi could see the tears forming in her eyes. "No. Poison Hemlock has no antidote. It's painful, and...It kills slowly."

Knowing that he was going to die, from a poison with no cure, everyone left, probably to start investigating earlier. They could find what started this. Who caused it...before he died. But Keiji, Keiji stayed by his side. Holding his hand and continually telling him that they'd figure it out. They'd find who did this.

"I know you're in there thinking, and you just can't quite voice it. It's okay to be scared, Shuichi. Really. I promise, I swear I'm not going anywhere. I won't leave you, not when I know you're scared to be alone." Keiji muttered, and Shuichi was glad to know that someone understood what was going through his head. He couldn't not be scared.

Shuichi closed his eyes, making sure he kept his grip tight on Keiji. He knew it wasn't that tight anyway, but he was glad to just feel that Keiji was next to him. He could hear his even breaths, and it made him feel less...frantic.

He didn't need to look for answers anymore. He didn't need to escape anything. He couldn't run from death. He knew that. He just...had to wait it out. In the arms of his best friend. His friend that promised he wouldn't leave.

The door creaked open, and he immediately assumed it was Yumiko or Kuro, coming to check in. He was..so wrong. He never thought he would appear again. "Hey. Hikaru told me what happened, how is he?"

“Sora? He’s...doing okay. Tired, mostly.” Keiji answered, and Shuichi could feel his heart beating faster. Sora. No. No, no he wouldn’t come back. Shuichi knew he would avoid him, to avoid the blame. “Hey, how did you get that cut anyway? I missed out when Riko told everyone.”

“Oh, I fell down the stairs and hit the edge. Nothing too bad anyway, just hurt a little bit. Don’t worry about it. How long ago was he found?” Sora uttered, and Shuichi could hear him walking towards them. His grip tightened on Keiji’s hand, and he wanted to run. If he could, that is. He still couldn’t feel the majority of his body, but...what if Sora decided to end him, right then and there?

“Not sure. Shimizu could tell you. She should be in the greenhouse. You should probably ask her about it.” Keiji’s voice seemed more stern than before, and Sora’s footsteps immediately stopped. Rather, they sounded as if they were growing further away, and when the door clicked shut again, Shuichi dared to open his eyes.

He looked up at Keiji, only to find him staring at him. He must’ve realized how Shuichi was acting, or maybe just the straight fear in his soul. “Sora. Ito did this, didn’t he? Poisoned you, I mean.”

Shuichi did his best to nod, but the movement made him more tired than before. He was afraid to fall asleep. If he didn’t fall asleep, he couldn’t...No. The truth was that he couldn’t avoid his death. He knew that. “I promise I’ll catch him. You can sleep, Shuichi. I’ll be here when you wake up, okay?”

He...they both knew that if he fell asleep, he wouldn’t wake up. He knew, yet Keiji made it seem like that wasn’t even true. Keiji was comforting him, and he knew it. It was only a matter of time, wasn’t it? He couldn’t fight it forever.

It only took an hour after finding Shuichi for him to fall asleep. Keiji promised he’d stay by his side. Keiji promised to catch Sora. He didn’t feel...he didn’t know how to describe what he felt. He was angry. He was so pissed off that Sora had the audacity to show his face after what he’d done.

But at the same time, he was..hurt. He was losing one of the people he’d grown close to. He was losing his best friend, and he couldn’t do anything. What truly killed Keiji was...was feeling Shuichi’s body go completely limp against his own.

Keiji didn’t panic, but rather teared up. Shuichi’s weak grip on his hand faded soon after that, but...Keiji could hear the pained breaths he took. It hurt Shuichi more to hang on. It hurt him more, trying to stay alive, and there was nothing anyone could do. It was only a matter of time. “It’s okay, Shuichi...Everything will be okay. I promise.”

Keiji held him tighter, although he had already heard Shuichi take his last breath. He'd only been sitting there a few minutes before Yumiko and Kuro had returned, the same question circling their brains. "How is he?"

As soon as they were both in the room, the monitor came to life. Keiji held his breath, his grip on Shuichi tightened. He really didn't want to think about it, but the truth was... Three people found a body... Shuichi's body. "A body has been discovered!"

It didn't matter how long it was going to take. Keiji was going to make Sora pay for his crimes.

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Three: Beast of Prey

Kuro stood up, and helped Shuichi up as well. There was something off. Really off. He didn't know what was wrong, but he knew it wasn't quite right. He let Kuro lead him out and he stood in the hall for a moment, taking a deep breath before making any sort of attempt to speak. Why was he so nervous anyway?

"Well, I'm going back to the gym, maybe find the girls on the way. Good luck with Keiji." Kuro nodded towards him, before disappearing towards the gym again. Shuichi watched him leave, taking a deep breath and deciding that he needed to get back to Keiji as soon as he could.

The kitchen was quiet when he first arrived inside. He picked up a glass, and went to fill it with water when he heard something crash down. He picked his head around the counters, looking around to see if he could see what was going on. Nothing. Wasn't Aiko here? Maybe she just dropped something.

Shuichi shook his head, deciding that he could check on it in a moment. He knew Keiji hadn't eaten anything in the past few days really, and Keiji couldn't afford to lose more weight in their current situation. Hunger was painful. Hunger with vomiting was even worse.

Maybe Aiko finished the pastries? He could take one for Keiji if she had. He took the glass, heading towards the back of the kitchen and he stopped just before turning the corner. His heart was pounding against his chest, and he couldn't explain why. What was wrong with him? It was only Aiko, right?

He rounded the corner and froze in place. Haya was leaning against one of the counters, blood coated knife sitting beside her, and the more he looked, the more he realized that he should've ran when he felt that anxiety.

It took seconds, but the shock had gotten to him before he could stop it. The glass slid from his grasp and crashed to the floor, shattering to pieces and swiftly alerting Haya to his appearance. "Shuichi."

Shuichi took a step forward, peeking around the table to see Aiko. Her body was slumped against the wall, flour coating her and beginning to absorb the blood that was seeping out of her. The wall was stained, and the floor was no better, collecting pools of blood as it poured out of her.

Her skin was growing pale, and her eyes had already lost their color, but they still held the look of shock and fear. A soundless scream was still clinging to her lips. He took a step towards her, but fell back when Haya approached. "No. No, what have you done? What the hell is wrong with you?"

Shuichi stepped back, hand grabbing at the counter to stabilize himself when he realized his entire body was shaking. He was quaking, whether it was from fear, or the amount of adrenaline in his system, he really didn't know. He needed to make a run for it. Now.

His eyes darted back towards the arcway, and then to Haya again. She'd picked up the knife again, and was swiftly approaching, a look of pure malice in her eyes. Shuichi held his breath, and turned as fast as he could, only to book it towards the entrance of the kitchen. He needed to get help. Get someone else to show what Haya had done.

Haya was hot on his tail, yet he kept going, rounding the corner to make it through the entrance and still...he wasn't fast enough. He wasn't able to outrun a hunter, didn't he realize that? *He* was the prey. Haya was the hunter, and he was that of a gazelle outrunning a lion. Impossible.

Haya's body slammed into his, taking both of them to the floor and completely wound Shuichi. Pain sprouted in his shoulder, which had not only taken his impact, but was then pinned by Haya's weight above him. "Now, where do you think you're going?"

Haya sat up on her knees, pinning his hip to the floor as her hand held him down by the collarbone. The second tapped the bloodied knife against his throat, the tip pressing in just enough for him to feel it, but not to cut him. He swallowed hard, trying to force away the tears that had begun to form.

"Well, *mouse* ? Cat got your tongue?" Haya taunted, pressing the blade further and almost completely inhibiting his breathing. His lip trembled as he tried to form words, and all he could do was watch her, eyes darting from her eyes to his only escape. "Haya, this isn't you. Please, please don't.."

She huffed, as if bored by his response, she forced herself up, and immediately dragged him up like he weighed nothing more than a feather. "Walk. Girl's bathroom, now. If you run, I won't make this easy on you. Final chance to cooperate."

Shuichi's first steps were wavering, but at least he could breathe again. He knew better than to run again, but still his brain came up with thousands of ideas and plans to escape. The knife pressed into his spin and he closed his eyes for a second and tried to convince himself that he wasn't about to die.

The girls bathroom wasn't too far away, but he felt like it took an eternity to reach it. He felt like he was walking the plank, a death march, but only for himself. As soon as they rounded the corner, Haya shoved him to his knees before the bench and when he was about to look up, Haya smashed his head into the metal. He blacked out before he could even feel the pain.

His head was pounding when he finally regained consciousness. His limbs tingle, pins and needles stabbing at his skin with their lack of use. His fingers twitched as he tried to use them, but he received no control. His hands trembled slightly as he shifted and quickly realized that there *was* no room to move.

His arms were locked in place, not only from the small space, but also from the zipties that held his hands together and a cold pipe or something of the sort was pressing against his wrists. He was restrained. Why would Haya restrain him, when she already had full control over his every movement?

Steps drew his attention, and he looked over only to see Haya approaching an open locker with some type of bowl in her hands. He stared silently, watching over her as if she were nuts. She dipped her fingers in the bowl, and as she retracted them he realized that the bowl was filled with blood. Probably Aiko's, but blood nonetheless.

"Don't worry. Yours will join it soon, but I need to draw the sigils first." Haya hummed, giving him a slight side eye before she returned to the task at hand. He really was going to die here, wasn't he? He was going to be murdered, then have his blood painted on a locker. Definitely how he thought he was going to go out.

Would Keiji even realize he's gone? Or would they die from the poison first? *Were* they going to die from the poison? Haya *had* become the blackened, so...they would receive the antidote once Aiko's body was found. And he hadn't heard an announcement, but then again, he didn't even know how long he was unconscious for.

He had offered to sacrifice himself for the group, but...he didn't think he'd go out this way. He thought it'd be by his own hand, or someone who didn't want to torture him. He never thought it'd be someone who he considered a friend.

Haya's steps were swift, yet light and she appeared in his range of view in seconds. Blood was splattered across her face, more than it had been before. Her hands were covered, and trails had made their way down her forearms until soaking into her half sleeved shirt. She was..coated.

Shuichi pulled his knees to his chest, cringing as the muscles in his arms tensed and ached. The position was not even close to comfortable. His fingers twitched, the more he shifted. "Haya, please—"

"Yeah, yeah, you already know how this is gonna go. Stop giving me that 'please' bs. I don't want to hear it. Aiko didn't have to die, that was an accident. But I can't leave any loose ends. Plus, with you gone, Keiji won't be able to run the class trials by himself. I'll get away with it."

He shook his head, trying not to think about it. Keiji would figure it out. He wouldn't let Aiko die and not find the culprit. Shuichi...Shuichi would just have to leave the right clues. He could do that, right?

Haya shifted, kneeling before him, and placing the bowl of blood at his feet. He stared silently, challenging her to make the first move. Even if he was restrained, that wouldn't mean he wouldn't fight back.

She took the discarded knife, and tapped it against her knee, watching him intently. Hunter and prey. He wouldn't make this an easy hunt. He wanted to make it difficult, and if that meant fighting back, he wouldn't hold back.

His heart pounded when she suddenly shifted backward, and pulled off her belt. His eyes snapped wide, and he could feel the breathlessness as it crept in. No. No, no, Haya wasn't like that. She didn't want *him*. She wanted to *kill* him. "Calm down, idiot. I don't want you passing out from blood loss *that* fast."

She sprawled the belt out on the floor, and made a small indent in the leather before stabbing the knife directly into it. Shuichi gasped, fear coursing through him as he stared at the knife that now stood, impaled on the leather. He didn't want to die. He didn't want to die *here* !

Haya was unforgiving in her actions. She was silent, focused. It was unnerving, and he could feel himself tearing up as she reached towards him. He was stunned, sure, but he could still function. He could feel her warmth radiating off of her, and in seconds, he kicked his foot out towards her. He cringed when he heard her jaw pop, and gagged when he *felt* it.

It fell silent, except for his heavy breaths and the creak of the bench that supported most of his weight. He thought he'd be okay with fighting back. He thought he could survive fighting back. That maybe, if he proved that he was stronger than she thought, that she would let him off easy. That she would spare him the pain. She wouldn't.

Rubbing her jaw, her eyes never met his, but he could see the fire burning behind her irises. The anger. The rage. The calm, before the storm. It was coming. His end was nigh. Haya grabbed his ankle, and pulled, forcing his knees apart and giving her access to the entirety of his body.

Shuichi thrashed, kicking and struggling when he could but Haya's weight prevented the movement, and kept him from even trying to escape. She slid the leather beneath his thigh and reached for the belt that sat on his own waist. The earlier fear grew, and the intensity of the adrenaline skyrocketed, his limbs twitching with fear and a need to flee. Fight and scream and run and cry.

With his belt off, she reenacted her same process as before. Indent, cut and stab. He was frozen, so even if he could move with Haya on him, he didn't think he'd be able to. His fingers curled, digging his jagged nails into his palms as he tried to figure out a plan of action. What was he even supposed to do in this situation?

Haya did the same with the second belt. Slipped beneath his thigh, and then it grew silent again. Haya's eyes finally met his, and he could feel the seething anger in her gaze. She wanted to kill him. She was *going to* kill him. There was no avoiding it.

"Now. Don't move. I don't want to hit an artery." Her hand forced his knee down, and pushed it out to give her free range of the inside of his thigh. He held his breath, closing his eyes and praying. Praying that he wasn't going to experience the pain. Praying that shock would set in before he could feel more pain than necessary.

The knife dragged against his pants, and he could hear the soft scratching of the knife against the fabric before it disappeared from his skin. He couldn't watch. He couldn't see this. This was too much for him.

Her fingers dragged against his leg next and he couldn't stop the whimper that crawled from his throat. Haya chuckled softly at the noise, like she was *amused* at his pain. He never thought it would be like this. He never thought *she* would be like this.

It burned before it hurt. It felt like magma had dribbled into his veins, and was burning him from the inside out. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't feel anything but the heat.

His eyes snapped open when the pain finally set in, solely from Haya dragging the blade down his thigh to widen the wound. He could feel himself growing lightheaded at the sight. He hated blood.

Haya's fingers dug into the cut, easily ripping more of the skin before slipping the bowl under the wound. He wanted to vomit. He closed his eyes, trying not to freak out and make the entire situation worse. It hurt like hell, and it was slowly beginning to kill him. He wanted to run. He wanted to escape, but he knew he couldn't. There was no way out.

The pain never eased. Haya's fingers left the cut, only to reach up and fasten the belt above the wound. The hole she previously made held the leather band tight, compressed to his skin. She wasn't going to let him off easy. "I'm going to finish with the altar. Then, I'll be back."

Shuichi opened his eyes, only to watch Haya get up and walk away. Despite the makeshift tourniquet, blood was still escaping him and yet it was only mildly slowed. His fingers were going numb. He didn't know if it was from the adrenaline, or from how tightly he had clenched his fists. Nothing changed.

He let his head hang, tears gathered in his eyes that slipped out without him attempting to stop them. This was it. He didn't know death *could* be so painful. He assumed deaths like Levi's and Sora's were meant to be long lasting and painful, but what had he done?

He hadn't killed anyone. He was trying to save them. He was trying to keep everyone alive. And this was his reward? His punishment? He couldn't understand it. He didn't understand any of it. He didn't deserve this. By any means.

"You saw something you weren't supposed to. It's your punishment for snooping. We're almost done here anyway, it won't take that long to complete your markings, mouse." Haya hummed, approaching the scene. His blood was coating the tile, slowly creeping towards the drain to be flushed away. Forgotten. Alone.

"Leave me...alone." His voice was rough. Harsh. Raspy, like he'd ruined it just by sitting there. He didn't scream, did he? He didn't remember. It hurt, yeah, but did he scream because of it? What had he done? Aiko had died, about to scream. What if Haya killed him in the same way?

Haya chuckled, yet still kneeled down before him again. He was shaking. Shock wasn't setting in. Why wasn't it setting in? Why couldn't he just be left alone, damn it? He could live, even with the cut right? From what he knew, his artery hadn't been hit. He would be fine.

Her fingers rubbed over his right thigh and he held his breath again. He opened his eyes, watching as her fingers pressed into the flesh and then retreated. He felt sick. He wanted to vomit. He wanted to pass out, and he wanted to disappear if he could.

He felt the knife enter this time. He couldn't stop the noise that forced its way from his throat, and he squeezed his eyes shut. He prayed that it would be over. He wanted it all to stop. He just wanted it to be over already.

Shuichi felt his stomach churning and his head swirled with thoughts. How would Keiji look at him, when he was found? Keiji said he never wanted to investigate his death. Shuichi didn't want to see Keiji dead either. But...when Keiji found him. How would he react?

The belt tightened around his thigh again, yet he couldn't find it in him to react. The tension on his wrists cleared, and the burning sensation from the zipties disappeared. He opened his eyes, just a crack, to find the zip ties, cut, in Haya's hand.

He shifted, thinking that maybe he could put space between them, and Haya stopped it almost instantly. Her hand shoved into his shoulder, shoving his back against the bench again.

"Stay still." She hissed, and he let her take control over his body. He wouldn't escape anyway. He could never escape. Haya's fingers dug into the new wound, knee jerking as she pressed into the muscle and he made a noise that...wasn't quite as quiet as he wished it was.

Shock was beginning to set in, but not fast enough for his liking. For his ability. Haya grabbed his jaw, forcing him to stare her in the eyes and he swallowed hard. He wanted it to be over. Why couldn't she just go for the kill already?

Her eyes were softer, or at least softer than before. Her grip loosened on his jaw and he relaxed, mildly. She moved slowly, tracing lines over his face and he shuddered. His blood was warm, but as it dried across his face, it gave him the slightest chill. "Sorry. Gotta do this. Aiko was an accident, but you're intentional. You'll be perfect, Shuichi."

Shuichi blinked, tired, lazily trying to focus on what she was talking about. He didn't know what she was even talking about, but he knew that he wasn't making it out. Noise filled the room, those bells ringing and pulling him from his stupor.

"A body has been discovered!"

Aiko...they found her. They found her, thank god. That meant...someone was functioning. Everyone would be okay. Monokuma would give them all the antidote, right?

Haya froze at the noise, her eyes staring up at the monitor above them. A sudden look of fear overtook her eyes and she stopped her ministrations. Aiko..oh. She had to hurry. Keiji would notice his lack of appearance.

Keiji would come soon, after investigating Aiko's body. He was going to die, and soon. Haya looked back to him, then her hand, and then to the knife she left on the floor. "Shit."

Shuichi huffed, relaxing as much as he could against the bench. It was a rush from there. Haya abandoned her work with him and rushed back to the locker with the bowl. He didn't bother to watch.

He could hear her fingers dragging across the metal and he knew. She was drawing more inscriptions to join the altar or whatever. He didn't know exactly what it was, or why she wanted to do it, but at least...at least it wasn't a punishment.

The locker slammed shut, and he looked up, watching as Haya walked back over. He felt his stomach twist as she popped her fingers into her mouth to clean them. She crouched in front of him again, taking his wrist into her hand and forcing him to jab and prod into his own wounds. He winced, more so at the pressure than the pain.

"Okay...Okay. Shuichi, take this." Haya held the knife out, handle facing towards him. He didn't make a single move. He kept her gaze, standing his ground. Well...keeping his ground, since there was no way he was standing.

"Fine, be that way." She snatched his hand, forcing him to take hold of the handle, before gripping the hand that held it. She was trying to frame him for not only his own death, but for Aiko's. He knew she would.

Haya's eyes left his, and looked down to the knife. He was about to follow her gaze when she twisted the knife in his grasp, and shoved it towards him. His body reacted before he could, but it did nothing against her.

She forced the blade into his stomach, regardless of him clawing at her wrist. He choked, trying to summon some amount of strength to fight her off, but it was hopeless. She twisted the blade, serving him an absolute death sentence and backing away. "Sorry. Hope it goes easy."

Her steps were quiet, yet rushed as she left the bathroom. Leaving him to die. He didn't want to die alone, but he knew this was for the better. It would be better than being forced to live with the pain he was in. At least..it wouldn't last forever, right?

Exhaustion was setting in. He couldn't feel the pain anymore, and he could barely keep his eyes open. How long could he last like this? He forced his body to move, despite how it made his muscles jerk from the adrenaline. Shuichi grasped the handle of the knife and took a deep breath.

He gritted his teeth as he pulled it out, letting it clatter on the floor. It would help this moment along, right? He needed it to stop. He needed it all to stop. Keiji would find him, he knew it. He didn't want to live to see Keiji's reaction.

Wait...Keiji. Keiji, he would investigate this, right? He would investigate his body. Maybe...maybe he could help. He could help Keiji. He needed to, even if he died doing it. He dipped his fingers into the blood that had pooled beneath him, and looked around for just a moment.

He didn't know how safe a confession would be on a blood covered floor. He shifted, cringing as he used muscles that were deprived of necessary oxygen. Shuichi huffed as he managed to turn until his shoulder rested against the bench. He forced his body to work with him as he reached underneath the metal.

Shuichi huffed, and panted, struggling against his own weakening body. He imagined the letters in his brain as he wrote, spelling out such a simple name. He prayed. He wished, and he hoped, and he wanted it to all just stop. Keiji would figure it all out for him, right?

Keiji would help him escape, right? Let him leave this place in peace. Keiji didn't want to investigate his death, but that didn't mean that it wouldn't happen. Keiji would save him from dying for nothing. Dying in vain.

He let his body slump over, feeling his energy beginning to fade away and he wanted to scream. He wanted to fall asleep. He wanted to give up, and he wanted to fight and he wanted to prove that he was innocent. But there wasn't time for that. There was time for him to linger, and slowly dissipate, like dye and water.

"Where in the hell is Shuichi?" Keiji glanced around once more, having already investigated everything he could find in the kitchen. He hadn't seen Shuichi since he disappeared to get him ice or something. He didn't really remember.

Kuro shrugged slightly, and no one else piped up. Who was missing anyway? He knew Shuichi, Yumiko, Haya and Akira were all missing. He could only see Shuichi going to Haya, but even then, didn't he swear to be back within minutes? Something just didn't feel right.

"Hey, Shimizu? Could you go look for the girls? I'm going to look for Shuichi." Shimizu nodded to him, and they both headed out of the kitchen. Something wasn't sitting quite right. He couldn't place it, but his heart was pounding. Shuichi had never missed a body discovery announcement. He would've been there. So...where was he?

He didn't know how long he'd been walking around. He'd searched all the floors at least twice. He couldn't find Shuichi anywhere, not even in his own dorm. His body froze when he

heard the bells ringing, signaling some kind of announcement. They hadn't already run out of time, had they? No way.

"A body has been discovered! Now then, after a certain amount of time has passed, the class trial will begin! You may use this time however you like! Until then, please make your way to the girls bathroom!"

No. Oh fuck. Another body? So close to Aiko's? No way. Keiji took off running, regardless of how his ankle screamed at him. Who died? They had all basically split up! He kept running, rounding a corner and immediately slamming into someone.

He stumbled back, trying to regain his step, but stopping when he saw it had been Haya. She stared at him silently, eyes dark, unmoving. She was walking in the opposite direction of the bathroom. Weird. "Haya, aren't you going to the girls bathroom? Did you hear the body discovery announcement?"

Haya's face paled, and he watched as she looked around the hall, as if she didn't want to meet his gaze. Something wasn't right. Keiji pressed again, taking a step towards her and lowering his voice the best he could. "Haya, where are you going?"

"Nowhere. I don't feel like crowding around *another* dead body. Is that such a crime?" Haya sneered, and soon enough she was taking off down the hall, fast paced, but not quite running. Keiji stared as she disappeared, and slowly he began his track again towards the bathroom.

It seemed like everyone had gathered. Well...except Haya. Something about her didn't feel right. He approached slowly, unsure if he truly wanted to investigate another murder. Someone killed Aiko for personal gain. What did they gain from this death? Keiji rounded the corner, and immediately felt sick to his stomach.

Shuichi. God, he should've known. There was enough blood that it had begun flowing down the drains. His body was slumped over, blood smeared across the top of the bench. Despite the blood painted on his skin, he was colorless. Pale. Pain was etched into his skin, his nose still scrunched like it usually was, especially when he was confused.

Familiarity flared in his chest, and he stumbled forward. The single step revealed even more than he wished to see. Keiji took a moment to thank whatever gods were out there, solely for making his uniform a dark color. The leather belts were barely visible, if not for the chrome that reflected the lighting. The cuts were...more obvious. They stood out, but yet held a darker color due to the blood. He felt sick.

"I...didn't want to investigate your death, Shuichi."

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Four: Safety Net

“Oh my god...I just figured out the code. 1, 10, 3, 7. 11037. Now..where do we use it? Have we even unlocked that yet?” He murmured softly, fingers swiftly shutting the graphic novel and heading towards the door. Finally, finally they had an answer in the sea of questions.

Shuichi rushed out the door, and almost immediately walked into Kuni. She looked super surprised that it *was* him too, odd. He uttered an apology and turned on his heel to leave, but she grabbed his uniform before he could get far.

“Hey. Can we meet later? After the second free time? In the target room, preferably. I wanna learn more about that wayfinding thing.” Shuichi furrowed his brows but nodded slightly at her request. He taught her the basics but...not much else. Maybe she truly was interested in it?

“Sure. We’ll have to go outside for part of it if you want hands on stuff, though. I’ll see you tonight, I gotta run,” Shuichi quickly explained before he was off again. It only took a run down the stairs to find Tora in the dining hall, and now, it was time to tell her the good news.

They had begun burning the letters after he gave the announcement of his latest discovery. He was beginning to lose track of time when Tora mumbled about how close it was to night time. Close to the end of their second free time.

Everyone seemed a bit more than comfortable in the dining hall, and he expected that they’d all be breaking curfew that night to enjoy themselves. Like the pool day, but a little different. They could celebrate their safety. For once.

Shuichi excused himself, before finding that he was aimlessly wandering the halls as he avoided the target room, rather than entering it. He had an odd feeling, but not one he could describe. Something had left a bitter taste in his mouth, but he couldn’t place it.

Oh well. He’d figure it out sooner or later. Maybe he was just confusing his anxiety for his instincts, nothing truly bad could happen with the motive gone, right? Shuichi let himself into the target room and the first thing he did was loom around.

Empty, aside from the targets, bows, arrows, and rifles. It reminded him of when they discovered the room. Haya, and her amazing precision. Her dedication to a craft, the art of the hunt. She truly did just want to teach him.

His fingers trailed over the rifle that he'd been handed that day. He couldn't remember what caliber, or really...anything about it. He wasn't a huge gun person, but he knew how dangerous they were. DICE was against guns in any capacity. They had a strict *No Murder* policy.

"Hey, what are you looking at?" Kuni's voice grabbed his attention and he forced himself to look away from the weapons v before him. "Ah, just..remembering when Haya tried to teach me how to shoot one. That's all. You said you wanted to learn more about wayfinding?"

Shuichi stepped away from the rack, approaching Kuni, yet she walked past him and immediately towards the rack. Her back faced him as she stared at the wall in front of her, and Shuichi tilted his head at the motion. That was weird.

"Yeah, well..I sorta lied about that. I just wanted to talk to you. About the letters." Kuni hummed, her eyes trailing over the rifles in front of her. Shuichi nodded slightly, confused on *why* she lied, but he didn't ask. Maybe she felt more comfortable doing it this way.

"Well..what about them? We were burning them just a little while ago. We should be safe." Shuichi swiftly explained, taking a step towards Kuni and attempting to forget the warning bells going off in his brain. She wouldn't hurt him. He should know what by now, they all wanted to survive.

Shuichi turned away for a moment as he tried to compose himself, and hopefully, turn off the warning sirens in his head, and pay attention before this entire conversation went awry. They would have all the time in the world, right? There wasn't much more that they could do, than try to keep each other safe. "Hikaru told me what his letter said. Or rather, what *your* letter said."

So...Hikaru had *his* letter. So what? *He* didn't even know what was in his letter! Or who it was from! "Okay...? I don't know anything about it, Kuni. I don't even know who it's from. What does it matter?"

Shuichi turned his gaze back to Kuni only to find himself staring down the barrel of a rifle. The one she'd been looking at previously. His heart sank, and he could feel his body tensing at the sudden adrenaline rush. Not good. This was *not good* . "It matters because you're dangerous."

"Dangerous? How? If I don't even know what it's about, how could I be dangerous? Kuni, think rationally here." Shuichi held his hands in plain sight, stepping away from her despite Kuni stepping forward. "You put us all here. You're the mastermind, I know it. I had my suspicions, but Hikaru proved it."

"Proved what? I've done nothing, why would I ever do this, to anyone? All I want is for everyone to get out safely." Kuni raised the rifle higher and Shuichi quickly ate his words as he tried to make an escape plan. The door was right behind him, so...all he had to do was get out before she shot.

He could make it to the dining hall right? Everyone should still be there. “It proved that you’re the reason behind our suffering. You’re the reason we’re here, and you’re the reason my friends are dead. Just thought I should return the favor.”

Shuichi heard the noise before he felt the pain. His ears were screaming, white noise making his head hurt before the muffled noise of Kuni stepping towards him sounded. Shuichi could feel the burning in his shoulder, but he ignored it as he watched Kuni reload the rifle and took his chance.

His body slammed into the door and it crashed open with his body in tow. He made a mad dash for it, and running towards the stairs was his best hope. His shoulder hurt, probably worse than any other pain he’d ever experienced. Sure, the fire was bad, but this? It felt like his veins were filled with literal lava.

It was aching everywhere, a numbing, but searing pain flashing with each step as he jostled around, attempting to escape the heavy footsteps behind him. He needed to be faster than Kuni, and he knew he could be, but everything in his brain was rattled and disoriented, and overall, disorganized. Fear had consumed everything he knew and broken down all the walls he was sure that he could overcome.

The worst bit was when he was on the stairs to the lower levels. In his panicked state, he stumbled on the fourth stair, and inevitably, tripped and tumbled down them. His eyes carded up the flight, cringing at the splattered bits of his own blood, and he took a moment to stare at the wound on his shoulder.

It didn’t look...too bad. He’d seen enough entry and exit wounds from firearms, but he had always hoped he’d never be on the receiving end of one. He stifled a moan as he prodded at the wound, feeling for an exit, but there were none. Great. A bullet was literally lodged in his shoulder. That probably didn’t help the pain any.

His head jerked back up when he heard racing footsteps, and he was quickly back on his feet, lurching slightly as he gripped onto his shoulder. *Apply Pressure. Don’t let it bleed out.* Mai had taught him how to care for fatal injuries, he could manage this. He’d be *fine*. He just needed to find the others. Kuni wouldn’t kill him in front of others.

She wouldn’t be able to escape the punishment, she’d know that. She’d have to hide his death, she couldn’t do that in public. The dining hall. He had one more flight of stairs, than just a few hallways. He could do it, he’d make it. He had a good distance between himself and Kuni anyway.

The worst bit was when he hit the stairs. In his panic-filled state, he stumbled on the stairs and immediately went tumbling down them, rather than the better, safer way. Shuichi couldn’t help but groan when he hit the final stair, his body was aching before, but this was ten times worse...the pain in his shoulder was only amplified, and it got worse and worse after that.

But Shuichi couldn’t wallow in his agony long, as he could hear Kuni’s footsteps from the floor above. He still had more stairs to face, and he prayed he wouldn’t take the quick and

painful way again. He needed to get to the dining hall, and fast. She wouldn't...kill him in front of everyone, right?

Dining hall. He'd made it. He made it. Thank god. His hand trembled as he pushed open the door, but he couldn't discern if it was from the relief he felt after escaping Kuni, or if the shock was finally setting in. What was he most grateful for? Tora's decision to make it a group escapade to burn the letters. To ruin the motive. The motive that was being used against him.

The second he stumbled in, he could feel all the eyes on him. Everyone stared at him, studying until a collective gasp rounded around him. They must've noticed the blood on his uniform. Or maybe the blood that had covered his knuckles as he pressed his fingers against the wound. He felt slightly relieved, being surrounded by his friends.

"Shuichi? Are you okay?" Tora's hands pushed him toward the table, and he easily gave in, sitting beside Keiji as he withdrew his bloodied hand. It was disgusting, seeing the blood dripping down his fingers. The pain was still there, but...less now. It didn't feel the same as when the bullet entered his shoulder.

"I..." He tried to begin, but the shock was definitely setting in by now. He wouldn't die now, right? He was with his friends, he'd be fine. He'd be okay. His fingers trailed over the wound again, shuddering at the contact yet he remained as still as possible. They'd fix him up, that's the truth. He'd be fine. "Shuichi?"

"I know what it feels like to be shot, now. Never thought I would..." He was growing dizzy, maybe from the adrenaline rush that was slowly fading out? He wasn't sure, really. His head hurt, and his vision was all wonky, and he couldn't really find the words to describe how he felt. Fingers that weren't his own trailed over his shoulder, before pressing against his shoulder blade and Shuichi cringed at the twinge of pain. "No exit wound. It's still there, Shuichi, this may hurt."

He accepted the limited warning, but it was immediately followed by the searing sensation that reminded him of when the bullet first lodged into his body. The mind numbing pain that left him winded and breathless, and confused to the very core.

He felt himself hold his breath, trembling in his boots as Keiji's fingers prodded into the gunshot wound. It felt like his muscles were tearing slowly, inch by inch, while his veins blew up with mgama, crawling across his body until he was left with tears stinging at his eyes. Then, it disappeared, Keiji's fingers retracting from his shoulder, and in its wake, the aching, burning sensation returned.

The bit of metal cladded against the table, falling into a napkin that quickly absorbed the blood that had clung to it. It didn't seem like there was any tissue clinging to it, so that had to

be a good sign in the least. That thing was in his body. The whole bullet. The whole thing was in his body. *His body* . Kuni really *was* trying to kill him...

“That. was literally in your body, Shuichi. How are you sitting here so calmly?” Kuro stood behind Keiji, leaning over the other to study the wound in his shoulder, and Shuichi looked up at him before his gaze fell back to Keiji. The skater was staring at the blood that had begun to stain his fingers, the only sign of shock he could see from Keiji.

Shuichi shrugged at Kuro’s question, accepting the sting of pain and trying to keep himself calm in the moment. Shock could kill him, he knew that. He knew it could kill him if he wasn’t careful. “I’m going into shock. Or, maybe, the shock has already hit, and I really can’t feel much of the pain anymore.”

Kuni really tried to kill him, didn’t she? She wouldn’t kill him in front of everyone, right? It’d be an automatic death sentence, there’s absolutely no way. He’d be fine, right? His body lurched forward as the door swung open, his eyes peeled open and studied the door as it revealed... Yumiko.

Not Kuni. Just... Yumiko. Not Kuni, okay. He was fine. Yumiko quickly rushed to the table with a makeshift first aid kit, probably from the supplies of the chemicals room. That was the closest thing they had to medicines and stuff. Stuff put together in a room full of killing methods. Poison, elements... everything that could kill him.

He didn’t want to die here. He really didn’t want to die. Not like this... His shoulder really was going numb, and he feared what would happen if they couldn’t keep him from dying... Keiji had deftly worked after Yumiko provided the first aid kit, and he forced himself to forget the fears he had.

There wasn’t time to worry about such things, of course, he hated every second that he had to sit shirtless in the dining hall, but he understood the reasoning. Keiji couldn’t patch him up through his clothing, and he had to bite back the embarrassment. He could’ve *died* here. Keiji was keeping him as safe as he could.

Tora was talking to him, probing him about what had occurred, but there was little he could say. His brain was askew, messed up and flustered, and he couldn’t even bring himself to utter a word. His head hurt, and the dizziness was building slowly as the minutes passed. He couldn’t get the words to come out, and... he just hoped that Tora understood why he wasn’t functioning right.

"He... shouldn’t be left alone tonight. Keiji, do you mind staying with him?" Tora piped, leaning over the table to study his now wrapped shoulder, her fingers grazing over the bandages that covered his shoulder and chest and uttering about how it looked good enough to sustain him for a bit.

“Yeah. I got him. I’ll take him back to his dorm.” Keiji murmured before he stood up and proceeded to help Shuichi put on his undershirt to cover him before they were on their way towards the dorms. This would be fine, he’d be fine. Keiji would keep him safe. The dizziness was still prevalent... and he hated every second of it.

Keiji muttered about checking his pockets as they arrived at his dorm, and Shuichi shook his head, limply twisting the knob and shoving the door open. He must've forgotten to lock the door after his excitement this morning. Keiji held the door open as Shuichi made his way inside, glancing around at the mess of a room. "Keiji?"

"Hm?" Keiji hummed as he slid the door closed, swiftly entering Shuichi's bathroom but he knew Keiji was listening regardless. He'd never just walk away like that, Keiji had always listened to him, knew that. "Kuni...she said that my letter proved I was guilty."

"What does your letter have to do with anything? It was just a piece of paper, right?" Keiji called back to him, and his words were followed by the sound of the sink running. Shuichi chose not to question it, maybe Keiji really was going to stay the night? "You don't have to."

"Do what? Stay? Of course I do. It'll make me feel better, plus then I'll know if you're okay when we wake up. Again, about the letter thing. That letter doesn't define who you are. So, I wouldn't worry about it." His voice was muffled, and he quickly assumed that Keiji was brushing his teeth. And when the skater reappeared, he'd stripped out of his uniform and was wearing his undershirt and his shorts.

For a moment, Shuichi remembered that moment in the library. He smiled slightly, looking back at Keiji as he made up Shuichi's bed to make it a little bit more comfortable for him to lay down on. "I'm not sick, you don't have to take care of me."

"I do, because it'll make it easier to handle, especially since we don't exactly have pain killers, so. Get comfy." Keiji hummed and sat next to him, like they usually did. "Talk to me about the night in the library, with the stars?"

"uh...Sure. If you want me to." Keiji turned the lights off and settled down beside Shuichi. Oddly, Shuichi could see how his eyes seemed to glow in the dark, or rather...they reflected that little light was left in the room. Keiji got comfortable and gave him a small grin, which he barely saw in the dark.

"I made something for us, so we holed up in the library for me to show it to you. We were alone in my room before, but I ended up dragging you there. You were hesitant, but I know you truly wanted to know what I had for us. So, you didn't question me when I pushed the table in front of the door."

Shuichi smiled slightly and nodded, remembering the proceeds of the night. It had been such a nice night, and they still felt...innocent. They weren't even worried about the poison yet. "Yeah, I knew you just wanted privacy, nothing more, nothing less."

"Yeah. And I told you to get comfortable on the floor as I set up the lamp. I'd spent so long working on it, too! I was just super excited to show you, and maybe get a full night's

sleep. It was amazing, seeing your reaction. I couldn't help laughing when you called me an ass, plus I got to beat you up a little."

Keiji nudged his side, and he laughed softly. As odd as it sounds, he enjoyed remembering, reminiscing on the idea of their tiny escape before they could see the stars. He was glad that they had an escape when they couldn't go outside. That they had a way to hope, and cope with what they were going through.

"I was actually hoping to tell—" The door knob twisted and Keiji immediately shut up as he stared at the door. Someone was trying to get in. He jumped out of the bed, pulling Shuichi up as well before he pushed him towards the bathroom, to which Shuichi quickly followed his lead. As soon as the door shut, he could hear Keiji fumbling around in his room, and he swiftly covered his mouth as he attempted to control his breathing. Kuni was looking for him.

Keiji's voice was muffled through the door, but he could clearly hear Kuni's as she hissed at the skater. He prayed that Kuni wouldn't attack him, Keiji wasn't her target, and he didn't deserve to die because he kept Kuni from her true target. He couldn't let Keiji take such a fall. "He's in my room. Please, Kuni, don't do this."

"He's a liar. I don't know how you could *ever* trust him! He deserves what he has coming." Kuni's voice was stark, unnerving, and as soon as she finished, he could hear retreating footsteps.

It took a couple moments before Keiji opened the bathroom door, staring down at him as he trembled. His hands still covered his mouth, staring at the other who quickly gathered him back up and they were forced out of his dorm. He didn't know where they were going. He wasn't sure if he wanted to know.

Immediately, Keiji dragged him towards Tora's dorm, pounding on the door until it swung open and Keiji was forcing Tora out of the way and shoving Shuichi inside. The leader didn't even bother asking, allowing them inside and quickly ushering him into another bathroom where he immediately crumbled next to the shower and watched the two fumble back out of the room.

Their voices were hushed, but quick, as they made a quick game plan, and soon enough, Tora was joining him in the bathroom, and settling down across from him. She kept quiet, but he knew that Keiji was going to protect him. Protect them. He had to trust them. He had to calm down.

"Keiji's going to get some supplies in case Kuni comes back. Do you want me to stay here with you? I don't know how you feel about us being stuck here together." Tora explained quietly, and Shuichi swiftly shook his head. He wanted to be alone, really, really alone. He couldn't let someone see him so vulnerable. So scared.

Tora nodded and quickly stood up, exiting the bathroom and closing the door behind her. This is...horrifying. He wanted to go home. Really bad. He wanted to return to Mai, and sit with DICE and just...exist. "Keiji will...keep us safe. He has to. He..."

Shuichi forced himself to relax against the tub wall, closing his eyes and letting out a breath. Keiji would be back soon, and he was tired. He was so, so tired. His fingers trembled, running his hands through his hair, trying to settle himself down before he completely sagged against the tub wall. He would be fine. Keiji would keep him safe.

He hadn't realized he'd fallen asleep until he was forced awake by noise. It sounded like a struggle behind the bathroom door, and Shuichi forced himself to sit up and slowly make his way toward the door. Just as he reached out to the door, it swung open, and he was met with the barrel of a gun for a second time that day.

He trembled, staring up the barrel, and looking past the gun to see who it was. Kuni. Kuni, and behind her was Keiji, who had blood staining his undershirt as it poured down to his shorts. He couldn't find Tora in the room whatsoever. His hands trembled, staring past Kuni at Keiji, he could see the pain in his scrunched face, and the wide eyes that....encaptivated him.

"Shuichi!" He smiled slightly as Keiji reached out for him, and he immediately knew that his end was near. Kuni stepped forward, the gun pressing against his forehead, but he chose not to look at her. Keiji...Keiji was going to be okay. His eyes met Keiji's, and he smiled, genuinely, before everything went dark.

The noise was louder than he ever would've imagined it. No amount of western movies prepared him for such a loud noise. His ears began to ring, matching with the pain in his side as he trembled slightly, staring as Shuichi's form tumbled over. Tora called out, scrambling up from her purchase on the other side of the room. Keiji ignored Tora's calls of his name and crawled toward the bathroom, Kuni's body standing still and staring at Shuichi's disheveled body. No. No, this wasn't happening.

Keiji shoved past her, crawling toward Shuichi and lifting the limp form into his lap, brushing the now bloodied hair from his face and attempting to feel for a pulse, but he knew he'd find nothing. The blood was pouring from his forehead, a clean shot through and through. "How could you do this, Kuni?!"

"It's...over now. Good." She mumbled, and Keiji watched in silent horror as she grinned and slowly lifted the rifle once more. He trembled, holding Shuichi's body close as he watched the crazed look cross Kuni's features. He didn't know what she was planning, but he really didn't want to see it.

She lifted the rifle, and pressed it to her chin before she pulled the trigger. Keiji gasped, the noise overcame him again, but it was soon blocked out as a thump sounded, and blood splattered around the bathroom and...covered Keiji. He sat in silence, looking up to Tora as she stood in the doorway, staring down upon them. What..were they going to do?

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Five: Hive Mind

Saihara. I would like to meet tonight in the electrical room. It's about time that we discuss the Captain's room. I'll be waiting, see you during Night time. Tora.

Tora wanted to meet him? What did she really have to discuss with him? No, no this couldn't be happening. She wasn't seriously wanting to talk about the motive, there's no way. She would just tell him to stay away, maybe she left this for him because Keiji mentioned him? Tora wasn't one to act irrationally.

Should he respond? Did it really matter? He had to make a decision, and quickly. She wouldn't hurt him, right? She wasn't the violent type, and...he knew that her trust had been broken during the discovery of the Captain's room, so maybe she would keep her distance from him during this discussion?

No. He couldn't avoid her. If he could convince her that he was trying to do what was best for everyone, maybe she'd let him return? Without a problem? No, he was being too optimistic. There were too many variables, too much going on to even guarantee that she wouldn't flip on him.

He couldn't say no. Keiji may hate him for it, but he was sure that Keiji would forgive him at some point. He just had to wait until night time, and he'd confront Tora. He'd make it work, this whole thing. He hated his past self, but...maybe they had a better chance at surviving, now that he knew of his past?

The electrical room was...scary. Not that he hadn't been there before, but it seemed so eerie, when it was just himself. It didn't take much, sneaking around anymore, but...the electrical room had this aura to it. An aura that scared him, deep down inside. "Hello?"

He stepped inside, slowly following the shelving to the back of the room where the breaker box sat. It was lonely, on the wall. It reminded him of the singular picture at home, in his room. The picture of Kokichi, grinning madly, a picture that reminded him how much he'd grow to become smaller.

Keiji reminded him so much of Kokichi in more ways than one. They were both intelligent, both seeking out the best in Shuichi, and forcing him to face the truths he wanted to hide from. It was important to him, seeing how Kokichi and Keiji both pushed him to be the best person he could be.

He didn't realize how long he'd stared at the breaker box until Tora's voice grabbed his attention. She seemed to be just entering the room, so he called back over the shelves and

remained in place. There wasn't much room to maneuver around in the room, even if he wanted to.

"Shuichi. I wanted to talk to you about the captain's room..." Yes, just as her note stated. Hse wanted to talk about the results, about the connotations and how they'd affect him in the long run. Did it really matter either way?

"Yeah...I wanted to talk about it too. Actually, I wanted to talk to you about the group, and how they felt about the whole thing. I know the feelings of betrayal are still fresh, but I think it'd be a better idea to stick together rather than spread apart and fight each other the entire way."

"What are you talking about?" Her voice was stern, yet hesitant. Shuichi could feel the anxiety bubbling in his stomach and he attempted to self-soothe as he explained. "Well...I remembered some things about my life before this game, and I think it may be helpful. It could save us."

"Or get us killed, Saihara. What in the hell did you even remember? Why is it so big that you think it'd allow us to see past your...sins?" Tora's face paled, then as she spoke, it regained enough color for him to understand that she wasn't very pleased to be having this conversation.

"I remembered the people, *my friends*, and...I didn't kill them, Tora. I didn't kill anyone, please. You must realize that it's completely wild to believe that I'm the reason they're all dead, right?" Shuichi was desperate for her to understand how wild of a request she was making.

"It's not wild. Fuck, Shuichi, how the hell are we supposed to trust you when you can't even trust yourself? Do you see what is wrong with that?! What's wrong with you?"

Tora stepped closer, her fingers pointing at him as she gave him this scowling snarl, staring straight through him. His hands trembled, but he stilled his resolve and forced himself to put up a brave face. Tora couldn't stop him, regardless of what she did.

"I'm going to talk to everyone, whether you like it or not. It's not your decision to make, Tora! How would Aiko and Akira feel about you acting like a dictator!" Shuichi bit back, deciding he'd had enough of Tora's lackluster argument.

Her gaze hardened on him, and for a moment his heart skipped, almost stopping in his chest as he stared at the leader. They were supposed to keep this group together, to keep everyone safe, but here they were. At each other's throats, trying to promote their own ideals.

"Don't you dare. You have no idea what they'd think, you didnt fucking know them. They'd support me, what I'm trying to do. It's for the better, Shuichi, and I won't let you hurt them. I won't give you the chance to."

"Tora, it's not your decision to make. It's theirs, they should be the ones to decide who they want to interact with! If they push me away, fine. I'll stay away, but if they don't, then

you have to accept it!”

Tora fell silent, her gaze never leaving him, and her eyes were unmoving as he spoke. She didn't care. She'd never care. His chest heaved, panting slightly as he tried to settle his raging nerves. He looked her over once, then twice, until he noticed her hands trembling?

They were visibly shaking, as if she was holding herself back. They were shaking with what seemed to be... *anger*? What was there for her specifically to be angry about? He was trying to make up with her, make up with the group! He wanted her to realize that he was trying to be better. To *do* better, for everyone.

“I'll never allow you around them again. Are you seriously that off your rocker? You think I'd trust *you* after all this? You killed fifteen people. *Fifteen!* I'd rather die than allow you to face the group again! Absolutely fucking not. You're...dangerous.”

Dangerous? He...he wasn't dangerous. He was trying to help everyone, and he was doing it whether or not Tora liked it, she had no say in the matter. He couldn't hide away forever. He had to know how the group felt, and if they wanted him gone, then...he'd make sure he'd abide by their wishes.

But he couldn't, not without knowing what they wanted. Not without trying to reason with them. He wouldn't give up like that. He wouldn't just...give in because Tora wanted him to. Keiji wouldn't be happy with that. “I'm going to meet with them tomorrow, whether you like it or not. If they want me gone, I'll go, but that's their decision, not yours.”

Shuichi stepped forward, planning to push past Tora, but something in her expression changed, and he forced himself to stop. Her gaze dropped to the floor, before darting around the room until it found him again.

Apprehension to something more malicious. She looked like she was ready to attack. Shuichi took a step back, attempting to create some distance between them, but in seconds his back was pressed against the breaker box. Tora stalked closer, and he forced himself to take a breath. Tora wouldn't hurt him. “Tora?”

“I'm sorry, Shuichi, but you have to understand. It's my job to protect them, you must understand that and I won't give you the opportunity to hurt them. I won't let you hurt them.” Her voice was barely above a whisper but it held such conviction that Shuichi could feel his chest tightening as he stared into her.

What...she was giving him this *look*. She was watching him, like a press story stalking their prey, staring with such intent. He'd known Tora had grown protective of the ground, but they'd made promises to do everything in their power to stop the killing game. How would his death solve any of this?

His fingers trembled and he pressed further into the breaker box behind him. There was a rage behind her gaze, and he could see the malice slowly dripping through her body language. She...she was *angry*. “Tora? What are you doing?”

“My *job* .” Tora hissed, and the next seconds felt like slow motion. It felt like time had completely disappeared and he was left stuck in a timeless abyss. Tora stalked closer, her steps even, methodical and he instantly knew she wasn’t going to let him get out of here unscathed.

He wasn’t dangerous. His past didn’t change anything! He was still the same damn Shuichi he was before, but now he just knew his past was a little more complicated than he remembered. He didn’t know if it was his fault that all his friends had died, and he probably wouldn’t ever, but from what he could remember? It wasn’t his fault.

He didn’t kill anyone! He was afraid that the same damn thing would happen again and again here! He woke up every morning, afraid that he was going to wake up alone. That he’d wake up and realize that *he’d* killed everyone he ever cared about.

He couldn’t lose anyone else. He didn’t want to lose anyone else! Nobody else deserved to die because of his mistakes. Maybe that idea of diving into the sea and never resurfacing really was a good idea...

“Tora, I think I should go now.” Tora stood before him, her chest puffed out as she stared him down. He remained still as she looked him over again and again, and he swallowed his tongue quickly. There was no talking his way from her.

The door was behind her. He needed to get out, now before this could take a turn for the worse. Could he distract her long enough to overpower her? *Could* he overpower her? No. He didn’t have that much muscle on him, and it wasn’t like he could use his height against her.

Tora’s eyes held intent, a long last fear that Shuichi knew he’d be unable to escape from. He weighed his options for a moment, what *could* he do? His eyes darted around until he noticed the tool bag sitting on the shelf beside them. If he could reach it and strike before she could attack, he’d have the opportunity to run.

So he could run. He didn’t want to hurt her, but...she was on a mission and that mission was to kill him. Shuichi shuddered, and held his resolve. He needed to act. He couldn’t think about it any more than he already had.

Tora’s eyes followed his arm as he reached out for the tool bag, and she managed to reach it before him, shoving it off the shelf and sending it and its contents clanging to the floor. He gasped at the noise, but let his flight instinct kick in, and immediately slammed his body into Tora’s as he fled for the door.

Tora, winded by the sudden weight, stumbled back but recovered faster than he expected. Shuichi fumbled, and scurried out of her grasp, heading for the door. He could hear scrambling behind him, but didn’t pay it much mind until pain burst through his head, traveling from the back to his forehead in milliseconds.

His vision went black as he fell, barely catching himself on his hands and knees. A noise escaped him, something akin to a whimper as a tool clattered on the ground beside him.

“I’m sorry, Shuichi. But I can’t allow you to leave, now. You’re dangerous, and I can’t allow you to hurt them.” A foot roughly kicked into his ribs and he hit the floor, rolled onto his side as he blinked the darkness out of his vision. His eyes met Tora’s and that fear was no longer there. Just rage.

His fingers grazed over the back of his head, and when he drew back his hand, he saw blood coating almost the entirety of his palm. He looked to the door and suddenly Tora’s weight was on him, forcing his shoulders against the floor, effectively pinning him down.

Shuichi scrambled, arms reaching out and throwing elbows back and thrashing and bucking, doing everything in his power to dislodge Tora. The knot that held his checkered scarf loosened, and more panic filled his system. “Tora, Tora stop!”

“Silence.” The ends suddenly drew tight, and Shuichi sucked in a quick breath, as the scarf drew taut against his throat. It continues tightening, squeezing and constricting his windpipe. He continued struggling, even when he grew breathless and his vision began to tunnel and hone into the open door.

He clawed at the tile below, his blood slicked hand smearing across the pure tile as he tried forcing himself closer to the tool that he’d been struck with. If he could get some leverage, maybe he wouldn’t die here? Hopefully.

Tora’s hand fisted into his blood matted hair and slammed his head into the tile, once, twice, thrice and if his vision hadn’t been going before, it was definitely gone now. His scarf was pulled tighter, and his head was shoved down again, his willingness to fight back slowly dripping away.

His lungs were screaming. Burning, as if every breath he managed to suck in were flames, and his throat was reaping the not so good consequences. His hands trembled as he forced himself to continue fighting, but even he could feel the way the lack of oxygen was affecting his strength.

“Good bye, Shuichi.” The colors around him were fading and the black was slowly taking over what he could see. Shuichi could feel the energy leaving his body as he reached for the door for a final time. A door he never reached.

It’s been two days since Shuichi never showed up to the morning meeting. Two days where he hadn’t heard a *word* from him. Hadn’t even *seen* him. No sun rises, no sunsets, no late night reading! *Nothing!*

Keiji was getting worried, but...what else could he do? He didn’t have a key to Shuichi’s dorm, and if Shuichi never came out, he had no way of contacting him. He...he was afraid that something had happened. And he was going to find out.

There were tools in the boiler room, the last time he checked. Maybe he could use them to break open Shuichi's door? Or find a screwdriver so he can take off the door knob and let himself in? Anything would be fine.

Either way, the boiler room was completely empty when he arrived inside. It seemed like nobody had touched it since they discovered it. He didn't blame anyone for not even looking inside, hell he wanted nothing to do with it anyway. Keiji ran a hand through his hair as he scrounged around the room, searching for the tool bag that he'd believed had been inside.

It only took about five minutes for him to grow frustrated at the disappearance of the tool kit. There were much better things he could be doing, especially now that he was actively trying to find ways to break into Shuichi's dorm. He stormed out of the boiler room, and in his frustration, he walked directly into Hikaru who barely budged at the force.

"Uh. You good, Keiji?" He jerked, and Keiji stared at him silently for a moment before jumping the gun. He was getting desperate, okay? Would anyone blame him? "Have you seen the tool bag, the one that was in the boiler room? I can't find it, and I sorta need it asap."

"Yeah, I think someone took it up to the electrical room a couple days ago. I think a breaker flipped and they were trying to fix it? Not sure though. I'd check there first, if not, I have no idea where it would be." Hikaru hummed, stepping out of Keiji's way as the skater almost took off running anyway.

Keiji would never admit to it, but he was almost completely out of breath by the time he reached the top of the stairs. Or rather, the last flight of stairs he could take before finding himself walking towards the electrical room. Huh. That's weird.

He was almost 100% sure that they never closed that door, especially since it was an airlock like the boiler room. It was a silent agreement between the group, but it was a way for them to guarantee nobody would be locked inside. So...why was it closed? And locked for that matter?

Keiji shrugged, brushing it off as he approached the door in silence, allowing himself to turn the handwheel and push the door open. Immediately, he froze as he stared at the bloody mess on the floor.

Hand prints, smeared and clawed through, almost black in color. His eyes followed the tracks and he thought he was going to be sick on the spot. Shuichi, laying face down with a literal indent in his head that was covered in dried blood that matted up his hair.

His scarf had stress lines, but it was barely noticeable after all the blood had seeped into the fabric. Shuichi took a step backward, a dizzy feeling filling his head as he stared longer, and longer. "Shuichi..."

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Five: Mastermind's Trap

Tora fell silent, her gaze never leaving him, and her eyes were unmoving as he spoke. She didn't care. She'd never care. His chest heaved, panting slightly as he tried to settle his raging nerves. He looked her over once, then twice, until he noticed her hands trembling?

His brows furrowed and he stepped toward her, the anger draining from him as she seemed to just...stare mindlessly through him. "Tora..? Are you okay?"

He reached out to her hesitantly, and he watched in shock as she reached for the tool bag that rested upon the shelf beside them. He was frozen, he couldn't react fast enough, or even attempt to protect himself as she pulled out the first tool she could find and swung for him.

The pain didn't even register as he hit the floor, the hard metal against his skull causing another burst of pain that he didn't quite realize before the world was plunged into utter darkness.

Fingers trailed over his chin, slowly drawing him from his state of unconsciousness and the hand fell to rest over his throat comfortingly. He blinked, dazed, as he tried to clear his vision and all he could feel was this sharp throbbing in his skull, not only from the strike, but also from the collision with the floor. "Shuichi?"

His eyes dragged as he tried to focus them on whoever had awoken him, but the pain was just too much for him to bear. Their hand left his throat, trailing up to his hair and brushing it off his forehead. "I see that you met with Tora. Thank you for not resisting...It seemed that the motive didn't work as I intended it to."

Huh? He didn't really even recognize the voice...maybe it was just because of how scrambled his brain was? He hoped so....He had a feeling that he didn't really want to know who was in front of him because.....Because he knew they were the mastermind. "Hnnng.."

"Hush. Tora really did a number on you...It won't be hard to play this one off. Thank you for willingly participating in the killing game, Shuichi. It made our lives so much easier, and I find it quite...pleasing, that I finally get to end your life. I've been waiting for this moment for way too long."

Shuichi fumbled, his vision beginning to clear as he sat up, only to have the hand shove him back against the metal with a thump. He groaned as the movement made his head spin, and he swatted at the mastermind, but never landed a single hit. "Good bye, Shuichi."

He heard footsteps, and he clambered, attempting to get to his feet to give chase, but he could barely get to his knees, let alone his feet. The steps carried on, regardless of his struggle, and the sound of the slamming door was deafening. Shuichi let himself collapse back down onto the metal hull, exhaustion filling him as he closed his eyes. He was stuck.

He didn't know how long he was out for, but...his chest was screaming, as if someone had been sitting atop of him the entire time he was unconscious. He rubbed at his eyes, relieved that they finally cleared as he sat up. He met the mastermind. He met the *Mastermind*! And...and the mastermind was *happy* to be his killer. His hands shook as he forced himself to his feet.

He couldn't just sit there and wait to die. Maybe he could get out? Was that even possible in an airlock? He had no idea, but he wasn't going to sit around and do nothing. He would try, and try, even if that meant he'd be disappointed in the end.

Every attempt to break the glass of the airlock was useless. He flicked the breakers on and off, as if that would alert anyone. He was sure it was the middle of the night...the only person awake was probably Keiji, and even then, that wasn't a guarantee. He was...trapped.

He sat against the door, his head pressed against the metal slab as he tried to take even breaths. He was running out of air. He knew that. He knew that he wasn't going to escape... The mastermind knew this would be the perfect end for him.

It was torture, feeling the tiredness, the fatigue slowly setting into his body, but being unable to fight it. He knew the moment he fell asleep, he wouldn't wake again. He tried, doing everything he possibly could to stay awake, but it was fruitless. The second he allowed himself to relax against the door, he was out.

Keiji stretched as he tousled himself out of bed. Today was the day. Shuichi would be up soon, to go meet up with the others. He just needed to distract Tora long enough that Shuichi would have the opportunity to make his case.

Tiredly, he pulled on his uniform and washed his face, noticing that the...lights were off? Odd. Maybe he could check that out later. Maybe they just didn't want to turn on, y'know, they were stuck on a ship after all.

The second he stepped into the hall, Tora was at his door, almost squaring him up as he exited the room. He gave her a glance, but she was quick to ignore him and begin dragging him down the hall. "Hey- What the hell!"

"We're going to go fix the light situation, before everyone else wakes up, unless you have a problem with that, Keiji?" Her voice practically dripped venom, and he unwillingly gave in and allowed her to drag him up the many flights of stairs. Maybe this would buy Shuichi enough time to talk to the rest of them? He sure hoped so.

Tora whipped the door open, and a thump sounded out. Tora immediately jumped back into him and they both tumbled to the ground with a loud thud. Keiji gasped as Tora's body sank into his until she rolled off him to stare at what had fallen out of the room.

Keiji's eyes turned over, staring shocked at the sight. Shuichi. Paler than ever with a bloodied eyebrow, but...he looked like he was asleep. Keiji's fingers darted out, tracing over his cheek and the cold he was met with only further cemented the truth. *Ding dong, dong ding!* "Oh, god."

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Six: Spider's Web

Chapter Notes

Okay this one was just me being self-indulgent, so it's not really all that long, sorry. 'Twas sorta just a lil idea I wanted to drabble with.

“I only know one person who has cufflinks on this ship.” Shuichi fell silent and he stood up from the floor, slowly pushing the table back into the cooler and shutting the door. His gaze met Kuro’s and he watched the climber’s jaw harden before they both looked back to the door.

It was time to investigate. And he wasn’t letting *him* get away with murdering Keiji.

It was after they’d separated after searching the garbage room that Shuichi took his opportunity. He guessed, if he was being honest, where he’d find Hikaru. Luckily, he’d been a detective in his previous life. And the library seemed like the best place to go, when their lives seemed to be this mindless, endless cycle of agony.

“Hikaru.” The name sounded so smooth coming from his lips, but it didn’t present any of the anger he held inside, and he couldn’t be more thankful for it. Hikaru’s head turned up from the book in his lap—the graphic novel he was quick to note. Of course.

The mastermind was entertaining himself with the suffering, day by day. Every time he looked back, in every situation, it always seemed like Hikaru was *fine*. Like, when they were all poisoned, the only people who really weren’t affected were Kuro and *him*. Because he was the mastermind.

Because Hikaru was the one who caused all this pain, caused him to doubt himself, to hate himself, to torture himself. He’d never forgive the mastermind. “Shuichi? Do you need something?”

“Yeah. Yeah I do, actually. I want to know *why*.”

“Why what?” Hikaru’s brows furrowed as he closed the book, setting it off to the side. He shifted in his seat, leaning over the table toward Shuichi and he could feel fury boiling beneath his skin.

“*Why* you decided to put us all here? Why you want us all dead, why you *ever* thought it was a good idea to fuck with the people I love, and think you could get away with it!” Shuichi just about lost it, jumping over the table and shoving Hikaru to the floor.

He landed over top of Hikaru, his knees digging into his chest as he continued yelling, demanding answers. Hikaru shielded his face, but it didn't matter with the rage running through Shuichi's system. Blind rage, at that.

By the time Shuichi could finally breathe again, the red disappearing from his gaze, all he could see was blood. Blood on his hands, his pants, everywhere. He rubbed at his eyes, ignoring the sting before he looked down. Hikaru was unmoving, unbreathing beneath him. “Oh God...”

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Six: Hope Ending

Shuichi stared down at the screen in front of him, looking at the gray images before him, and somehow he couldn't find it in himself to feel sad. No matter the outcome...he'd just be relieved to be free of this game. He didn't await the result, unsure if he even cared for the results anyway.

"Looks like voting is over, let's hurry and announce the results." Shuichi gripped tightly onto the podium, a chill flying up his spine as he looked up at the screen. He hated the sight. He knew somewhere deep down that he shouldn't have believed it would go any other way...

"Ahem! Your attention, please! The loser of this trial—The official decision has been made! It appears that the Ultimate Tattoo Artist, Hikaru Taiyo has lost! Oh so sad!" Monokuma seemed to giggle regardless. His eyes darted over to Kuro, a guilt forming in his chest as he stared at the climber.

He knew what it was like, to doubt his memories, to doubt himself, to hate himself because of his past...he didn't want anyone to experience that, but Kuro would. Because...because it would save Shimizu and Yumiko.

"I'm...so sorry, Kuro." Shuichi whispered, stepping down from his podium and waiting for Kuro to do the same before enveloping him in a hug. "I'm so sorry it had to be this way..."

"It's cool. I'm sorry I couldn't do more, actually." Kuro only let go as Yumiko's hands ran over his arm, pulling him away. Shuichi took a step back, his eyes darting to SHimizu, who looked just as sad as Yumiko before he looked toward Hikaru. He seemed...amused.

Shuichi pulled Shimizu off to the side, passing her the Sacrificial Perk and pressing it against her chest. She gave him a confused look before she went to speak, and Shuichi quickly stopped her. "These people, they'll help you and Yumiko. I hope...I hope that you'll feel safe with them, because I did at the end of my game."

"Shuichi..." She murmured, her hand gripping onto his wrist before he shook his head. "No, it's okay. I stand by your decision, and I want you guys to survive. Same with Kuro, but..I can't save him now. I'd say your goodbyes, before it's too late."

He stepped back, silently watching as the three spoke softly to one another. He couldn't help but feel fond of their dynamic. Despite barely knowing each other, they'd...become close friends. It was nice to see. A hand pressed against his shoulder, and he turned slightly to look at Hikaru before looking back at the group.

"They needed you, truthfully. Hopefully, Kuro can do the same with the next group, I believe he'd fit in perfectly as the next Ultimate Survivor." Hikaru hummed, removing his hand at Shuichi's scornful look.

“Let it end, after his game. Please. This cannot go on forever.” He uttered, tears slowly building in his eyes, but he forced them away. “I didn’t intend for it to continue past this game, but it seems the players had a different idea.”

Shuichi nodded slightly, rubbing his face with his hands before dragging them through his hair. He couldn’t fight it, no matter what he wanted to do. “Are you ready, Shuichi?”

“For my punishment? Sure.” He whispered, and in moments, he could hear Monokuma’s cackling voice begin his spiel. It was time. “Now let’s give it everything we’ve got! It’s Punishment Time!”

Hikaru took his arm, slowly leading him toward the double doors, and Shuichi willingly left, stopping just before he crossed the threshold to look back at his friends. He gave them a sad smile, and a small wave, before turning to fall back into step with Hikaru. It would be the last time he’d have to suffer...

The first thing he noticed was...how warm it was. He’d grown accustomed to the natural chill of the ship, despite the nice weather outside. It felt like...home. He wasn’t exactly sure *what* home was to him, but this place definitely felt like it.

The walls were blank, a soft gray that blended with the darker tones of the tiles beneath his feet. He was sure that he stuck out against the color scheme, with it being so light. He ran his fingers across the wall as he walked, taking stock of the area.

As he reached the end of the path, he realized it only led to more halls and he was quick to assume it was a maze. Well...there was only one thing to do when in a maze: find the way out.

He’d only wandered for a short few minutes when he’d found something. Small, pink. He lifted the item off a pedestal in the middle of a dead end, staring at it silently. A hair clip? Weird...He was quick to pocket it, though, before continuing.

After some more mindless wandering, he’d stumbled upon a small table, with slots and labels in the middle of an empty room, with five pathways leading in or out. Weird...He leaned over the table to read the label, and it was like cold water cascaded down him.

The slots were labeled *Class Trial 1-5*. These...were the items he collected between the trials. He...was supposed to find and collect them? Return them here? What was the point of this? Shuichi picked himself up slowly before glancing down the halls. Well...might as well play their game if that was what Hikaru and Monokuma wanted.

He’d managed to find the items within a short period of time, but what he couldn’t find was *what* he’d gathered after Tora’s trial. He hadn’t kept anything, deeming it to be a little

too...hurtful to him. He'd tried leaving the note Keiji left for him in the slot, but nothing occurred.

He wasn't even sure if something was supposed to occur. Shuichi sat by the table idly, thinking, searching his memories for *what* he'd kept. All he could think of was...Keiji's bracelet. He glanced up, looked around for cameras before he looked back down to his wrist. He...he promised.

Still...maybe it was the only way to end this. Keiji would forgive him, right? Shuichi slowly slid the bracelet off, setting it inside the slot only for the room to be illuminated with a deep red. Alarms began blaring, and Shuichi glanced up only to see flames peeking over the edge of a hall.

Shuichi heard the slots sliding shut and he was quick to dig his hand back into the final slot to take back Keiji's bracelet before he was up, racing down a hall. He barely got halfway toward one of the pedestals before running into a wall of fire. He hissed as the flames lapped at him, almost catching his clothing before he darted backward.

They were setting him on fire? What?! Shuichi raced down the halls, praying to find somewhere that wasn't completely encapsulated, but he was running out of luck. His lungs burned with each breath, and before he knew it, the fire had corralled him back to the table.

He coughed, clutching at Keiji's bracelet like a rosary, and he let out a pitiful sob. He didn't think *this* was how he'd go, but...maybe he'd finally get the peace he craved? He had no idea...but he just hoped that he'd get to see Kokichi and Keiji again..

Shimizu clutched the Sacrificial Perk tightly as she stared at the screen, her arm linked with Yumiko's. They'd be free, after all of this. And Kuro...Kuro would be forced to play again. Hopefully, he could live, for Yumiko's sake. Once the screen blanked out in front of them, Hikaru stepped in from behind them. "Shimizu, Yumiko, if you'd come with me."

Shimizu gave Yumiko a look, and the acrobat was quick to nod before they set off, following Hikaru without a word. Shimizu did have to pause for a moment, when Yumiko looked back at Kuro, but they moved without a hitch otherwise.

They were led to the pool, where a lifeboat was dangling from the side of the ship. Hikaru assisted them inside before gesturing to the Sacrificial Perk. "The Future Foundation is tracking you through this device. Do not lose it. There is water and rations for two days, though I doubt they will take that long to find you. Thank you for participating."

Without another word, the lifeboat was slowly lowered into the water before being released. Shimizu stared at the ship as they floated away, tears forming in her eyes as she thought aloud. "God...I wish we could've saved them.."

It was an odd feeling, a familiar feeling in the back of his head. Something similar to deja vu, if he had to describe it. He rubbed at his eyes, scratching at his neck once the black spots cleared from his vision.

It was warm. There was dirt beneath him, and as he shifted, he realized that he was mere feet away from a fence. It looked to be electric, if he was seeing correctly. His fingers trailed over the dirt as he tried to collect his thoughts. Where in the hell was he? “Ah! Kuro! You weren’t supposed to wake up yet!”

He jerked, head snapping to the side at the sound of his name and he crawled backward, shifting away from this...monochrome bear that was bounding toward him. Wait. A monochrome bear? What kind of fucking acid trip was this?

“Puhuhuhuhu! I forgot you don’t remember me. Anyway, this is yours. It’s a present! But don’t let anyone know about it. That’s for your eyes only!” Kuro tilted his head, but the bear thrust an object into his hand and gave him a wide grin.

Before he could utter a question, the bear was off again, fading slowly from his sight. His brows furrowed as he looked at the item before staring off at the space the bear had disappeared toward.

The game had already begun.

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

Chapter Six: Despair Ending

Shuichi stared down at the screen in front of him, looking at the gray images before him, and somehow he couldn't find it in himself to feel sad. No matter the outcome...he'd just be relieved to be free of this game. He didn't await the result, unsure if he even cared for the results anyway.

"Looks like voting is over, let's hurry and announce the results."

Shuichi felt his hands trembling as he lifted his gaze, only to find that none of them were watching him—at least, everyone except Hikaru. Hikaru's eyes were burning into him, and for some reason...he already had a feeling he knew where this was going.

"Ahem! Your attention, please! The loser of this trial—The official decision has been made! The Ultimate Sacrifice, Shuichi Saihara, has lost!" He felt the little bit of hope that had remained within dissipate, and he closed his eyes as he let his head fall back. He willed away any tears that formed.

He could hear the others stepping down from the podiums, but he couldn't move his feet. He knew this was coming, somewhere deep down inside. He'd blamed himself for all the death, but...The others had convinced him it wasn't his fault. Maybe Hikaru had just...turned that confidence, but he wouldn't know. He'd never know.

He didn't look up from his feet, even as he descended from his podium, his fingers trailing over the wood before he released it. Something that just seemed so... *natural*. "Shuichi, I—"

He shrugged his hand off, knowing Yumiko only meant the best. They were doing what they had to, to survive. He understood that. He wouldn't fight that, when he knew he'd done the same in a previous life.

"Don't say anything. I understand, and I stand with your decision. I'd just...rather get this over with than force it to drag on. Hikaru, Monokuma? If you're ready, I am too." He whispered, fingers dragging up his sleeve to twist into the bracelet on his wrist. Keiji would be...so disappointed in him. He didn't know if he *wanted* to face Keiji, especially knowing how he'd react.

"Got it, got it. Now let's give it everything we've got! It's Punishment Time!" Shuichi took a step forward, but fell still when he heard the rattling of chains. His head turned up, only to suddenly wish he hadn't. The execution leash. He didn't fight it, even when it wrapped around his throat and dragged him to the floor. This was...his punishment, for everything.

It was...dark. Musty, if he had to describe it. It smelled *old* . Like a basement, or a wine cellar. All he could see was a door, and when he approached, he'd realized the scent was coming from what laid beyond the door. This was his execution.

Despite knowing it was his punishment, his steps were light, unsure even. His fingers gripped the doorknob, twisting it slowly before he paused. He deserved this. He killed everyone. Rantaro, Kaede, Ryoma, Kirumi, Angie, Tenko, Korekiyo, Miu, Gonta, Kokichi, Kaito, Kiibo, Himiko, Maki.

Even worse, he killed Haru, Levi, Daisuke, Sora, Aiko, Akira, Haya, Riko, Kuni, Keiji *and* Tora. Their deaths were *his* fault. He caused them, every single one of them. If he hadn't just...refused, maybe they'd still be alive. He had no idea, but knowing that it was his failures that led to this just...hurt even more.

He forced the knob open, his eyes slowly gliding across the room. It seemed like the library, but it was...more disorganized, books stacked up on the floor, moss and plants growing through the concrete...He stepped inside, and that's when it finally struck him.

The library from his first game. Monokuma wouldn't...would he? He didn't know. He wasn't sure he *wanted* to know. Shuichi almost rushed to look behind that bookcase, and he was...saddened to see he was correct.

Blood. Splattered on the wall, the floor, Rantaro himself. When he looked up again, the room had gone blank, the walls black with only a single door before him. That was the theme now, wasn't it? Him, searching again and again? For answers he'd never receive?

Shuichi let his hand trail over the collar of the execution leash, and for a moment he pondered *why* . He knew he wouldn't get the answer until it slapped him in the face. So, he forced himself to continue, only to be met with the next horrific sight.

The piano, with Kaede's body hanging lifelessly above it. Before he could react—hell, before he even had time to *falter* , the case was slamming closed and crushing her body. An iron maiden, with even more blood to show.

He hadn't even released the door, and when he chose to pull it closed and turn around, he was in the gym, with even more plants and ferns about. He paused before he looked up, quickly realizing that...Monokuma was not only forcing *him* to re-experience all of the death he caused, but also Monokuma was forcing Yumiko, Shimizu and Kuro to witness it all too...

He looked up, facing the timer and he cringed as the water splashed out of the tank, shielding himself as it cascaded down to reveal the piranhas and Ryoma. He reached out, in an attempt to stop it all, but it was futile. The piranhas tore Ryoma to shreds before Shuichi could ever reach him.

Shuichi could feel the pain in his chest, in his heart, as tears stung at his eyes. He wanted to save them. He wished he *could* save them, but the truth was...they were all destined to die right before his very eyes.

The leash suddenly tugged him, making him stumble back and he barely caught himself on the door before he was falling through it. Landing on the concrete with a thump, Shuichi managed to lift himself to his elbows as he saw Kirumi running. Running for her life, before she reached the vine. “No! Kirumi, DON’T!”

Her false sun. Her hope. And it wasn’t even real? Shuichi gasped as the sickening crunch resounded, Kirumi’s body hitting the floor and splattering more blood. Why? Why! Why did *this* have to be his punishment? Hadn’t he suffered enough?! He watched them all die once before! He didn’t need to see it all over again, he *never* wanted to see them all perish again...

Shuichi pulled himself off the ground right as the lights went, plunging him into darkness. He took a couple steps, his fingers dragging across the wall; the texture changed so rapidly, he hadn’t noticed it for a moment. First, it was bricks and rock, and then...it was like wallpaper? Curious.

Within moments, he found the door. It was...messy. Covered in paint. The sickening feeling only grew as he forced the door open, the rattling of the execution leash distracting him for a moment before he saw her, curled up on the floor.

He’d forgotten about the effigies, if he was being honest—and they scared the shit out of him for a moment before his eyes darted back toward Angie’s body. Her blood was staining the floor below her, though the puddle was fairly small. She didn’t deserve this. She had just wanted to keep everyone safe, and it led to this...

He could’ve killed himself, to save everyone from this pain. Maybe not the participants of the previous game, but...If he would’ve killed himself before this game? Maybe...maybe it wouldn’t have been held at all. Maybe that would’ve been the better option...

Shuichi shook his head before heading for the door on the other side of the art lab. He... wasn’t sure if he wanted to see the other deaths, but it was the only way for him to get closer to his own execution. He wanted to get this over with as soon as he could, if that was a possibility.

He shoved the next door open, only for the candle light to be blown out as it swung open. He grumbled softly, feeling his way toward the candles to maybe relight them, but as soon as he reached on, they were alight again. His eyes darted to the magic circle in the middle of the room, and he sucked in a quick breath at Tenko’s crumbled form.

He looked away as quickly as he could, squeezing his eyes shut as he tried to take a deep breath. Tenko...she honestly reached Himiko, only after her death. It was a sad sight, knowing how much Tenko loved her, and yet...this was her end. She saved Himiko...

He headed for the door again, trying to keep it all in, but he knew he’d break eventually. He’d always break. The moment the door opened, all he could feel was heat. He blinked, squinting slightly as he protected his eyes from the sudden warmth as he stared at the melting pot. Korekiyo...

His spirit would’ve been floating now, right? Maybe he’d be at peace...he hoped so, at least. Sliding the door closed, he laid his forehead against the wood as he took a breath. Miu

was next. He cringed at the sight, a once beautiful and innovative inventor, left to die.

Her hands were clutching at her throat, and he couldn't help but think that it was...his fault she died. If he would've stepped in, stopped Kokichi from masterminding such a stupid plan, maybe she would've survived...or maybe she would've killed Kokichi. He had no idea.

Then there was Gonta, and he couldn't help the guilty feeling that struck him. He sent Gonta to his death, no matter what anyone says. Gonta never deserved to die, and that was the truth. Even though he may have been guilty, it...it truly wasn't his fault. Shuichi should've done *more* .

The large wasp, and then the fire. Nobody deserves such a painful end. None of them deserved this. He hated watching it. He hated *knowing* that he'd been the only one to make it out alive. Why did he have to survive, when all his friends died?

He paused at this door, trying to remember who was next, but...nothing. He feared the connotations. Shuichi steadied himself before slowly pushing the door open. The first thing he noticed were the exisals, and then there was a rumbling, and his head whipped up at the noise. It was... *too familiar*.

He rushed ahead, making it past the stairs to the control panel when he finally caught sight of *him*. Ouma Kokichi. No, not him. Not him. NOT HIM! Shuichi pushed forward, reaching out for Kokichi, and all he could see was the weak rise and fall of Kokichi's chest. He pushed, and as soon as he was within feet of the press, the execution leash tightened and he was trapped, just mere seconds away. "KOKICHI! Kokichi, please! MOVE!"

He screamed, crying out and pleading, and yet, he was too late. Always too late. The noise was deafening, the crunch and cracking followed by a slam. Blood coated the press, and the floor, and himself and all Shuichi could do was scream.

He'd forgotten how much he hated himself, how easily Kokichi made him forget. How easily Kokichi made him feel *safe* . And yet...he failed again. He always failed. Shuichi curled in on himself, staring at the blood on his hands as he cried. Why *him*? "Not him, Monokuma. Not him..."

Shuichi didn't even fight the execution leash as it dragged him up, forcing him to get to his feet or else he'd be dragged across the bloodied floor. He didn't need any more blood on him...

His eyes were distant as Kaito died before him, blood mixing with his beard and dribbling down his face, his chest. The failed execution...Kaito's biggest *Fuck You* to the killing game. He didn't even struggle as he was forced outside the trial grounds, only to watch as Kiibo began blowing up the dome, and destroying the school.

It was warm, and bright. Shuichi remained still as he watched the rubble topple over Himiko, mutely aware as Maki fell soon after. He saw everyone...and yet he was still too late. Too helpless. Too *pathetic* .

The shock had begun to set in when he was shown Haru's body. Mutilated. Still bleeding against the shelves of the freezer. And then it was Levi's body, and his screaming as the acid melted him alive. Shuichi didn't quite... *feel* like he was there.

He'd noticed how Kokichi's blood had begun to dry on his face. The doors still opened for him, and he stepped through them willingly, albeit slowly. It was his fault they all died.... He killed them all, he knew that, he knew. So... why did he have to go through it all over again?

Daisuke, head still in the filled sink. Unmoving. What kind of execution was this? If he was being punished... why did he have to be punished through the death of his friends? Why..?

The grumbling, grinding noise forced him out of his thoughts, long enough to watch as the bits that remained sprayed over the plants. He could feel his stomach churning, but his mind was so distant, he wasn't sure he could. He... desperately wanted to finish this punishment. His death would save them.

Shuichi forced himself to move, regardless of how he knew the next deaths would be even worse. His hand pressed the next door open, holding his body weight up with the frame as he silently watched Haya lose herself in the motions, dragging the blade through Aiko's abdomen repeatedly, and mere moments later, Akira appeared and the chase began all over again.

And then it was Akira, being strung up and seeing her kick out, trying to get leverage. All while clawing at her throat to free herself from the rope holding her up. Haya watched silently from afar. He felt like he wasn't the only witness, anymore...

Then it was Haya's run for freedom, which only led to her being clawed and devoured. Shuichi couldn't bring himself to feel anything but *numb*. He'd seen this all once before, and... he'd already watched Kokichi die again. And he knew that he'd have to see Keiji die too, and he knew he was already breaking, and *that* would be his final straw.

Then Riko, and her screaming as she fought back against Kuni. And then Kuni's decision, which turned out not being hers anyway... Shuichi hesitated in front of the door, standing at the oh so familiar handwheel, his fingers hovering over the wheel before he took a breath and pushed it open.

As he entered, he saw Keiji's shoes, sticking out just slightly behind the shelf, and he forced himself to come around the corner. Only... Only to see Keiji's eyes open, unblinking, as his chest stuttered and barely lifted with a breath. Blood was slowly beginning to dry on his temple, and Shuichi rushed over, almost collapsing onto his knees as he watched, horrified.

"Keiji?" Just as he uttered his name, Keiji's eyes slid closed, and his stuttering breaths ended, his chest falling flat and remaining stationary. Shuichi could feel his chest tightening as tears stung at his eyes, and he clenched his hands into fists as he tried to keep it together.

The execution leash dragged him off the floor, pulling him back through the doorway and into the maze with Tora. it was like the chains had merged, but he knew it wasn't like that...

he knew this was all just a ploy, to hurt him until he couldn't fight back. And...he was letting Monokuma and Hikaru win.

He just didn't have the energy to fight anymore...

Shuichi stood in the doorway, watching apathetically as Tora was struck by the vehicle. He squeezed his eyes shut at the sickening *crunch*, but refrained from moving otherwise. Whatever came next...was his punishment. Was *his* end, and he couldn't help but feel *relieved*.

Relieved that it was finally over for him. Relieved that he didn't need to be strong anymore. Relieved that he could just..give up. Because giving up was his only option. He slowly collapsed, falling to his knees in the pitch black as he waited. It will be over soon, right..?

A sudden chill overtook him, and he glanced around for a moment, but found nothing. What was Monokuma's devious plan to kill him? How would he go out? He was unsure how long he'd had to await such an end, but...he'd wait.

It must've been...an hour before he even heard a noise. He thought he was beginning to lose his mind, in the sea of darkness, if he was being honest. It was a creak, a soft metal creaking and as he shifted to seek out the noise, only to hear a loud bang.

He jerked at the sound, but in moments he realized that it wasn't *just* because of the noise. A burning sensation ran through his chest, between his ribs and it only took a few seconds before he could feel it getting difficult to *breathe*.

His fingers touched the spot, quickly realizing that it was in fact a gunshot wound. He'd been shot. Not very creative, if he could admit, but he was...glad. Glad it was simple. He let himself completely collapse as he tried to catch his fading breaths. Odd.

The bullet must've perforated a lung. Oh well. It'd be soon, anyway. He was just glad that it was over. All of the pain was over, for him at least. He hoped the others wouldn't suffer for long either, but in truth, he had no idea. He didn't know Hikaru's plans for them, and he wasn't sure he wanted to.

Shuichi huffed, trying to keep his mind in place as he grew dizzy, his fingers clutching at the wound despite it being a useless attempt. He wanted this...he was just thankful that he could see Kokichi and Keiji again...

Two hours. Two *hours*. Shuichi sat in the dark, unmoving for a whole two hours. Shimizu only took a few moments to realize that Hikaru had already disappeared when the television showing Shuichi's body clicked off. She looked back to the others for a moment, and silently wondered if they'd made the *right* decision.

Shuichi had been executed six days ago. And the morning after, Monokuma had announced a new motive. One of those, ‘everyone dies if no murder is committed’ and of course, they all agreed that it was a pointless move to even attempt fighting back.

Rather, they spent the last five days of their lives fucking around, finding out and overall, just being...alive. Shimizu had to admit, they were probably some of the best days they’d ever had here, at least, in her opinion. She felt like...maybe executing Shuichi was a good idea, but in the end, it left them quite cornered.

They had fifteen minutes before their deaths. They’d agreed to spend the last few hours of their lives outside staring up at the sky when Shimizu suddenly uttered. “What if we kill ourselves, before Hikaru and Monokuma even get the chance?”

Yumiko glanced over at her, a small scowl on her face, but otherwise she didn’t disagree. “Well...it’d probably be a better option than allowing them to kill us. It’d probably hurt a lot more, if we didn’t end up taking our own lives.”

“I’ve been thinking about it since Shuichi’s death. I don’t know, I’ve just felt...guilty, for doing that to him, and maybe...this is the punishment for it. So, why not? It’s gotta be better than playing into Hikaru’s hand anyway.”

“Well...that leaves the question of *how*.” Yumiko hummed, leaning against Kuro’s side, and Shimizu couldn’t help but feel slightly...put off. “There’s a whole ocean, right there. And then, technically, we wouldn’t die in this hellhole.”

It sounded like a good enough idea...Not that they really had time to think up another. Shimizu stood up slowly, stretching her arms above her head before she glanced at the other two. “Well. Are you ready then, lovebirds?”

The two were up within moments and Shimizu slowly climbed over the railing, clinging to it as she awaited the others. “There’s no going back after this.”

“We know.” Kuro hummed, assisting Yumiko before climbing over himself. Shimizu was quick to take his hand once he offered it, and she was vaguely aware of Yumiko clutching onto him tightly. “On three?”

Kuro nodded, squeezing her hand before sharing a look. This may not have been the best option, but at least it was by their own *choice*. “Three...two...”

“One.”

Game Over.

Try Again?

Yes *No*

Yes *[No]*

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