



TRIGGER LOCKED

THE MIND CONTROL ASSASSINS

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

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PROLOGUE

There are only a few minutes left before our virtual mock battle begins. Both me and my twin brother, Yuuto are already done with our preparation. This virtual mock battle is important to us. If we don't win, we won't be qualified to become Public Security Intelligence Agency agents. It's known as PSIA for short. We've been training for two years for this day to come. I was trained to become a martial art expert while Yuuto was trained to become a sniper.

In this virtual mock battle, we're going to face Chiaki Squad and Masayoshi Squad. They're the second and the third rank squad in PSIA Special Activities Division. If we're able to beat them, it means that we're worthy enough to become an agent for the top rank squad, Kimizuki Squad. Dad is the leader of this squad. Besides him, dad's colleague and also his friend, Mr. Azuma Sakakibara is in the same squad as well. He has been helping us when dad wasn't around.

I have never known that dad and Mr. Sakakibara are operations officers from PSIA. We only knew about it when we were 13. At that time, a group of people was trying to capture us for the government's top-secret project. It's known as Transhuman Development Project. Not only that, but we were also surprised to find out that mom was one of the key researchers in this top secret project. Mom resigned from this project because she refused to let us become the test subject for this project.

Whenever I hear about this project, I can't help but feel anxious about it. Mom died because the people who pursued us killed her. And they also almost killed dad. Even though dad managed to escape death, it was still a terrifying experience for both of us. We didn't know much about the project other than the project was using gifted children as a test subject. And in our case, they considered us to be the outlier among the children.

Based on what Mr. Sakakibara had told us, these children would have a microchip implant in their body. The microchip implant would be able to increase their intelligence, awareness, strength, and durability. As a result, it would create a transhuman that will help to extend the life of the aging population. Surgery wasn't necessary as they only needed to inject the microchip implant on their neck. And it would travel all the way to the brain stem.

We were lucky at that time that dad taught us the spy techniques. Not only we were able to shake off the pursuers, but we were able to kill them as well. I admit that it was a nerve wrecking when we killed people for the first time. But we were aware of the consequences of our action. We already expected that the police would convict us, but they couldn't. It was because this incident was under PSIA's jurisdiction.

With our ability to kill the pursuers who were a skilled assassin, dad wanted us to work with him. Even though he's the head of Special Activities Division in PSIA, he still needs to seek approval from PSIA director, Yashiro Kagami. We're lucky that he already knew about our ability. And he also thinks that we have the potential to become a PSIA agent even though we're just a middle schooler.

But then again, PSIA never hires agents who are underage. And even with dad endorsing our abilities, it's still not enough to convince him. Because of this, he thinks that letting us participating in the virtual mock battle is the best way to test us. Both Yuuto and I agree to take part in the virtual mock battle if it helps to convince him.

The rule of the game is simple. The only thing we need to do is to be the only people left in the virtual mock battle. But Yuuto and I are the only one who will be taking part in this battle. Dad and Mr. Sakakibara are not allowed to take part. And they can't even tell us what to do. The only person who will help us is Ms. Chiyo Shibasaki. She's the operator for dad's squad.

The virtual mock battle begins when all agents transported to a random place in the virtual world. As the transportation process for all agents is complete, I start to take a look at my surrounding. I realize that I'm at the rooftop of one of the buildings in Shibuya. The virtual mock battle takes place in Shibuya during the night time. Even in the virtual world, the area is still bustling with people.

I wish I can stand here and admire the night time scenery in Shibuya. But it's not okay for me to stand here for a long time. The rooftop is an open area, which makes me an easy target for a sniper. I'd better go inside and come up with a plan to defeat the other squads. I also need to know where Yuuto is right now.

"Touka, Yuuto has already made his move. He already eliminated two people from Masayoshi squad. So, the only one left is the leader, Yamato Masayoshi," Ms. Chiyo says to me through my earpiece. I already expect that Yuuto will be the first person to make a move. After all, it only takes less than 3 seconds for him to shoot his target. "If that's the case, please send me Yuuto's current whereabouts. I'll be heading there," I say to her.

After our conversation is over, Ms. Chiyo then sends me Yuuto's current location. Based on his current location, it looks like Yuuto isn't that far from where I am. I think that he must have noticed me because of my initial location. As I'm about to leave the building, I begin to have a look at the data about them.

Mr. Masayoshi, Tsunayoshi Chiaki and Midori Akiyama. They're also a martial art expert like me. But I bet that Mr. Masayoshi and Mr. Chiaki are

superior since both of them are the squad leader. That means a close combat is a possible way to get rid of them. But I also need to pay attention to Akira Moritaka, the sniper from Chiaki squad. He may attack me when there's an opening.

Once I reach the exit, Ms. Chiyo contacts me. "Midori isn't that far from your location. She must be after you. What's your plan, Touka?" To be honest, I don't like anyone who comes after me. It somehow reminds me of the same situation I've experienced in the past, but there's nothing much I can do. At the same time, it saves my time from trying to look for them. Maybe it's not a bad idea to have someone pursuing me. Though, I don't enjoy that experience much.

"Is there any place that isn't far from here, within Yuuto's shooting range and isolated? I think it's better for me to engage a fight with Ms. Akiyama in an isolated place. With a crowd this big, it won't be a problem for me to shoot her. I already equip my gun with a silencer. I think that should do it," I tell Ms. Chiyo. I begin to check my bullet while waiting for Ms. Chiyo to reply back.

Ms. Chiyo replies back to me a few minutes later. "Well, there's a back alley not far from where you are. The place itself is isolated. So, no one will realize something is happening there." After I cut my communication with Ms. Chiyo, I then contact Yuuto. "Yuuto, Ms. Akiyama is currently tailing me. I'd like you to switch your location to somewhere near the back alley. I'm pretty sure that Mr. Moritaka is also looking for an opportunity to shoot me there as well."

Yuuto replies to me after that. "Sis, I've already switched my location. You can head to the back alley at any time you want. I don't see Mr. Moritaka anywhere. But I'm pretty sure that he's also somewhere nearby where he can shoot you." After our conversation is over, I leave the building and begin to lure Ms. Akiyama to the back alley.

Even if I know that Ms. Akiyama is nearby, it's hard to identify where she is. I don't think she'll be approaching me without disguising herself. It's true that we don't need to disguise ourselves if we want to pursue someone. But then again, it will be much easier if we disguise ourselves and blend in with the crowd. I'm pretty sure this is what she will do in this kind of situation. Dad even told me before that she was good with disguising herself.

Without wasting time, I just keep walking, heading towards the back alley. It's not that hard to identify which one is Ms. Akiyama. Among the crowd, there's only one person who is trying to match my pace. And that person is most likely Ms. Akiyama. In a typical situation, no one will ever try to match their pace with our pace. That is unless they're following someone. This is what Ms. Akiyama is doing right now.

I finally reach the back alley a few minutes later. The back alley is a lot narrower than I thought. Not only that, it's dark too. Although no one is using the back alley as a shortcut, there is someone else who is coming here besides me. I stop walking and turn around to face her. "I know that you've been following me all along, Ms. Akiyama. And that's the reason why I'm bringing you here. It's much easier to fight if no one sees us," I say to her.

She only chuckles when I face her. "As expected from Minoru's daughter. It seems that you do understand the fundamental about being a spy. And you're also brave enough to face me all by yourself. But too bad, you've made a huge mistake for bringing me here." She then takes off her cap and starts to pull off the mask, revealing a guy's face. It's not Ms. Akiyama who has been following me all along, but it's Mr. Masayoshi instead.

He laughs when he sees my reaction. "I bet that you don't expect me to be here. I thought that Chiyo would debunk my real identity. But it seems like she's also making this grave mistake as well. You may have a high intelligence, but it won't help you if you don't know much about the people you're going to fight. If Minoru is taking part, I'm pretty sure that he'll tell you in advance that I'm not Midori."

I feel frustrated when I find out that Mr. Masayoshi has been toying with me all along. "Touka, I'm sorry. It's my fault that I fail to realize that Yamato is disguising himself as Midori," Ms. Chiyo says to me. I understand that Mr. Masayoshi can disguise himself as Ms. Akiyama. I just don't get how come Ms. Chiyo is confident enough that Ms. Akiyama is nearby. Is there a way for Mr. Masayoshi to layer his identity with Ms. Akiyama's identity?

“It’s alright. You don’t have to blame yourself. It’s my fault too for not checking things through,” I say to her. Mr. Masayoshi chuckles when he sees how calm I am. To be honest, I don’t like if things don’t go according to my plan. But I have to be realistic that things will rarely follow according to what I envision. So there’s no reason for me to be angry about that because I still have to fight him eventually.

“Wow, you’re so calm when you’re responding to something that is beyond your control. I thought that you would yell at Chiyo for her mistake. I guess you’re not just smart, but you also have a high emotional intelligence. Maybe this is another thing that classifies you as an outlier,” he says to me. I’m not sure if I should be proud of the fact that both Yuuto and I are an outlier. But, I’m just going to take this as a compliment.

“Is it possible for you to fake your identity in the virtual world?” I ask him. It’s better for me to divert the conversation elsewhere. Besides, I don’t feel like listening to his blabbering about us being an outlier. “To be honest, it’s impossible,” he says, “But I can do this with the help of our operator, Misaki. We just want to see how good you are with our disguise. It looks like our effort is paying off.”

“What happened to Ms. Akiyama?” I ask him again. “I already get rid of her. By the time your twin brother eliminated my comrades, I was fighting her. I should have prioritized my comrades over my fight with her. But there’s nothing I can do for now other than to win this match,” he says to me.

Just like him, I don’t feel like being critical over my mistake. What I need to do now is to prepare myself for a fight with Mr. Masayoshi. Mr. Masayoshi smiles at me when he sees that I don’t even back away. “That’s great to know that you wish to fight back. Now I understand why Director Kagami has a high expectation on both of you. You may only be 15, but you do have some similarities with us as a PSIA officer. I feel honored to fight someone like you.”

Our fight begins after that. Just like dad, he’s also skillful in close combat. In fact, his strength and speed are at the same par as dad. While dad has been training me all this time, he’s not the only one who trains me in the close combat.

Besides dad, Mr. Sakakibara and Hayato also help me with my training. But for the most part, I spend most of my time training with Hayato.

Just like Yuuto and I, Hayato is also one of the test subjects for Transhuman Development Project. He's also an outlier like us. But his stats are way above than us, making him an ideal benchmark for the project. Hayato stayed with us ever since the day he escaped from the research facility unscathed. He almost got me killed as well when we met for the first time. But somehow, I was fast enough to put the past behind me.

Yuuto and I are hoping that Hayato will become a PSIA agent too. But he declined our invitation politely. It's understandable that someone like him will never let anyone know about his existence. Despite the refusal, he's willing to help us behind the scene. This is to show his gratitude for looking after him and treating him like he's a part of our family. It's unfortunate for us, but we respect his decision.

As a result of training with Hayato all along, I become so used to his strength. Now, fighting Mr. Masayoshi feels like a tip of the iceberg to me. After our intense fight, he moves back a little. He's still smiling, and he doesn't even look exhausted at all. "I love it when I'm in a fight where I have a zero chance to win. I wonder what the outcome will be if I'm fighting someone like Hayato. I bet that it's going to be different," he says to me.

Mr. Masayoshi grins at me. From the look of it, he doesn't even look threatened at all when he's fighting me. I guess that he's just like a typical martial art expert. He enjoys fighting someone who is stronger than him. As much as I enjoy the fight with him as well, I don't think I can prolong the battle much longer. I have to end this fight as soon as possible because we still need to get rid of Mr. Chiaki and Mr. Moritaka.

When I'm about to move ahead to finish off Mr. Masayoshi, I realize that there's a bullet coming at my direction. As I turn around, I notice that Mr. Moritaka is the one who shoots me. I'm pretty sure that he's been waiting for this opportunity all this time. But this will expose his exact location and gives us a chance to get rid of him. "Yuuto, shoot him now," I yell at him. In a split second,

Yuuto shoots Mr. Moritaka. With this, Mr. Moritaka is gone, and Yuuto is the only sniper left.

Mr. Masayoshi looks impressed after witnessing everything. “Wow, your reaction is as fast as Minoru. Besides that, I love seeing how cooperative you are with your brother. Now I understand why Minoru wants you to be in his squad so badly. With this kind of teamwork, you’ll be just fine in his squad.”

I smile when I hear his compliment. Nothing makes me feel happier than having someone like him to acknowledge us. “Thanks for the compliment. But then again, I’m sorry, Mr. Masayoshi. I wish I can prolong the fight, but Mr. Chiaki is waiting for me,” I say to him as I begin my counterattack.

Thanks to the narrow back alley, I manage to make a quick jump and attack him from behind. The fight ends with me drawing a gun and shoots him after that. Mr. Masayoshi doesn’t look surprised when he loses the fight. In fact, he looks satisfied instead. “You’re maybe young, but you’re as good as an experienced PSIA officer. I’m looking forward to working together with you someday,” he says to me. He then transported out of the virtual environment.

After the fight is over, I suddenly feel a murderous intent coming near me. Without hesitating, I quickly draw my gun and realize that Mr. Chiaki is here, pointing his gun at me. “I thought that I’m going to shoot you when you’re off-guard. But it looks like you’re still aware enough of your surroundings. I’m impressed with how fast your reaction is,” he says to me.

None of us are pulling the trigger at that moment. The atmosphere feels intense right now as none of us are making a move at all. As I’m about to pull the trigger, Mr. Chiaki is quick enough to kick my hand, making my gun falls off from my hand. He then kicks me, making me to lose my balance. “Not bad,” he says to me, “So, the fact that you’re the outlier among the gifted children is true after all. I bet that your brother is the same as you.”

I only smile at him as I regain my balance. While I’m happy to be labeled as an outlier, I’m not going to let the word sink deeper into my thought. The last thing I want is to be overconfident only because I’m an outlier. Without hesitating, I begin to launch my counterattack and hit him nonstop.

He's still able to evade my attack even with my quick attack, but my attacks hit him most of the time. As he begins to distant himself from me, Yuuto then takes this opportunity to shoot him. Yuuto's shot becomes even more accurate in a pinch situation like this, so his shot hits Mr. Chiaki. I can tell that Mr. Chiaki looks frustrated as he's about to leave the virtual mock battle after he lost to me.

I barely stand after the fight between Mr. Chiaki and me is over. I feel exhausted because of the intense fight. I'm glad that the battle is over. I've never imagined that the fight can be this exhausting even if it's only a virtual battle. I do hope that the real life battle isn't as intense as this. Both Yuuto and I are back into the real world after the virtual mock battle is over.

As we exit the virtual battle room, Director Kagami is already here, waiting for us. "Congratulations on your winning, kids. You have proved to me with what you're capable of. We never had someone as young as you to join us, but we're glad to have you onboard. From now onward, you're officially a PSIA agent," Director Kagami says to us.

Both Yuuto and I smile as we give each other a high five. Director Kagami clears his throat when he sees that we're ignoring him. It looks like he's not done yet with us. "There's something important I need to tell you," he says to us. Both of us remain silent as he begins to talk to us. I have a feeling that there must be conditions attached to our official enlistment with PSIA.

"I admit that the mission that you guys are in is dangerous. This is why the officers in the special activities division usually carry a gun with them. But we can't permit any agent to carry a gun. After I've seen it for myself how you guys handled the gun, I guess it's alright to let you guys carry a gun as a self-protection. But then again, you can only use it during your mission. Other than that, you're prohibited from using the gun," he says to us.

What Director Kagami tells us isn't surprising to us. We already expect that we won't be allowed to use the gun other than during the mission. Even though our recruitment as a PSIA agent comes with a caveat, we agree with his conditions. What matters the most is he acknowledges our potentials. With our official recruitment, this will make things easier for us to work together with dad.

CHAPTER ONE

We were only 13 when the government halted Transhuman Development Project. It was because the microchip implant in the body caused side effects to the test subjects. As a result, many of them had developed some behavioral side effects. The known side effects were apathy, hallucinations, and cognitive dysfunction. Not only that, some of them died due to the brain death.

The lead researcher, Dr. Nobuhiko Hayama, insisted that the side effects were only temporary. But somehow, the side effects lasted longer than what they've expected. And they didn't expect death would occur to the test subjects. They believed that death was unlikely in this situation. Because of that, Dr. Hayama and the other researchers involved were pleaded guilty. Instead of being convicted, they were put under the surveillance.

There's no telling if the government decides to abandon the project for good. After all, this project is one of the best ways to solve the aging and declining population. This project will become another breakthrough for the aging population besides the medical advancements.

Well, that seems like a noble idea. But there are still some people who reject the thought of using a microchip implant on their body. Maybe this is about to change if they see the positive outcome from this project. But with the project's failure, I doubt that people are still okay with this idea.

The parents whose children were the test subject became furious with the government's action. They believe that the government still wants to continue this dangerous project. Despite their anger, there's nothing much they can do about this. At least, the government is willing to compensate for the damage incurred.

Of course, the compensation does come with a caveat, though. The government is willing to pay for the damage if the parents keep this incident as a secret. If they've decided to come clean, they will receive a death threat instead. No one will think that the government will go that far just to bury the secret. It's not surprising they're willing to do it as long as it won't cause a public outcry.

Luckily, the children who survived are now able to lead a normal life. It all thanks to the therapists who the government hired to reverse the side effect. It's not easy, but their effort pays off. But then again, the therapists still need to keep an eye on them. There is a possibility for any of the abnormalities to occur at any time. But for the time being, nothing strange happened to them so far.

While it's true that Dr. Hayama is the lead researcher on this project, he's more or less a puppet who runs the show. In reality, the key people who drive the research are Satoru Yuuya and Dr. Frederick Choo. Both of them are researchers from UC Berkeley. Dr. Hayama is only there to camouflage their involvement in this project. It was unfortunate that Dr. Frederick Choo died in a car accident later that year.

There's not much information about Satoru Yuuya. We only know that he used to be a biomedical engineer and neuroscientist in UC Berkeley. He was charged with a murder of his former colleagues while he was still working there. The cause of their death and the motive behind the murder was unknown. But FBI and CIA assumed that he must have used a microchip implant to kill them. Their death remains a mystery even until now.

Even until to this day, they're still pursuing him in the hope that they will find the truth. They only list him as a suspect, but they have no proof which indicates he committed the murder in the first place. They're only making an assumption based on his final research. At that time, he was doing research about using a microchip implant as a mind control device. They drop the assumption later because the research itself is incomplete. So, he's less likely to use such method to kill everyone in the research lab.

A diet member, Saburo Matsuda didn't know that Satoru Yuuya had a criminal record. At that time, he was the Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare, who was overseeing the top-secret project. He ended up resigning from the position as a way for him to take the responsibility. Even after he takes the responsibility, CIA insists on capturing Satoru Yuuya. It's because he's a Japanese national who committed murder in the United States.

But somehow, the government doesn't give them permission to do anything they please on our soil. Director Kagami insists that it's PSIA's responsibility to capture him, not theirs. The CIA representative doesn't look so pleased with the government policy. But still, there's nothing much they can do at this point. After all, Satoru Yuuya is nowhere to be found ever since the day the government halted the project.

The government wants to handle this issue in a confidential manner. So, the Cabinet assigns this covert mission to PSIA Special Activities Division. Public Security Bureau will also be working together with us as well. Director Kagami assigns this mission to dad. So now, we're currently investigating Satoru Yuuya's current whereabouts.

The investigation was already on the way before both Yuuto and I joined PSIA. We join the investigation once we're in the first year in the high school. As a part of our covert mission, dad opens a coffee shop in Ichigaya, Shinjuku. He will conduct intelligence activity and data gathering from there.

Besides him, Mr. Sakakibara will also open a bar which is next to our coffee shop to do similar activities. As for Ms. Chiyo, she'll be staying upstairs above Mr. Sakakibara's bar. She'll be processing the information we gather.

Just like their other covert missions, the rest of them are operating under a fake name. Dad's name will become Akira Kimizuki, and Mr. Sakakibara is now known as Azuma Uehara. Even the kanji name for Azuma is different than the one used in his real name. Ms. Chiyo doesn't need to have a fake name since she's not going to make any contact with the outsiders. As for Yuuto and me, we can still use our real name since we're just a PSIA agent.

As for Hayato, he will help dad with managing the coffee shop. But he will do a specific data gathering and intelligence activities for us. Hayato is more or less work as an undercover. It's easier for him to do it since he doesn't have a record in the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare database. Well, it's not that his record doesn't exist. Ms. Chiyo is the one who camouflages his record so then no one knows about his existence.

Even though the coffee shop works as a disguise for our mission, both Yuuto and I love helping them there. Maybe it's because it reminds us of the old days. Back then, we used to help dad on the organic farm while we were still living in Tochigi prefecture. So, helping dad and Hayato in the coffee shop brings us the same feeling. But then again, dad keeps on reminding us that what we do is a part of the mission. Though, he doesn't mind with us enjoying the task.

Life as operations officer isn't as glamorous as what we've seen in the Hollywood movies. Our life can be as plain as vanilla when there's nothing much going around. Despite that, we still need to continue with our investigation.

But then again, something strange happened recently involving the former researchers. Despite the heavy surveillance, 4 out of 5 key researchers have died for an unknown reason. Their death remains a mystery. There are no prominent signs that they have committed suicide. There's also no sign that they've been murdered either. So, some people begin to speculate that they died because of the work of supernatural power.

The officers from Public Security Bureau think it must be the work of parents who want to seek revenge. But all parents denied the accusation. They admit that they're angry with the researchers. But they know that seeking revenge on them won't even bring their dead children back to life. At the end of the day, they've

decided to drop the investigation. They don't have enough clues and evidence to investigate the case further.

Regardless of what people say, the fact remains that these researchers have died mysteriously. Now, the only remaining researcher left is Dr. Hayama. They also suspect that he must be the one who killed his former colleagues, but he denies the accusation. He thinks that the accusation is absurd because he has no reason to kill them in the first place. And he's not going to gain anything if he does that.

The surveillance record has shown that he had never contacted any of them since then. So, he has concrete proof that he's not the one who killed them. Public Security Bureau drops him as a suspect later on. But we still think that Dr. Hayama must have known what triggered their death in the first place. It's just that, he won't be so open to talking about it.

Now, our current mission is to make sure that Dr. Hayama is safe. We know that they also have a microchip implant within their body besides the test subjects. But theirs was only for accessing the research facility back then. So, we suspect that the microchip implant they had is the cause of their death. But he denied about having a microchip implant when the officers asked him about this. Maybe what he says is true, though. It's because the autopsy report doesn't state anything that these researchers have a microchip implant.

But then again, we can't just brush it off. We still think that the microchip implant is the cause of their death. It works as a mind control device that triggers them to commit suicide. Maybe Satoru Yuuya's research about the mind control device is complete by now. If this is true, then the death of these researchers is just the beginning. It's possible that the same thing will happen to Dr. Hayama as well.

Despite Dr. Hayama's denial, we still check on him from time to time. We just want to see if there's anything strange about his behavior. So far, he hasn't done anything that we deem strange. According to Ms. Chiyo, he always does the same routine almost every day. So, there's nothing unusual about his behavior for the time being.

Day by day, nothing happens to Dr. Hayama. He just goes about his life as usual. That is until one day, Ms. Chiyo notices that Dr. Hayama is no longer in his house. According to the rules, he's not even allowed to leave the place no matter what. It's because he's under the surveillance. He can't make any contact with anyone, not even to his family. In a nutshell, his life isn't that different from living in a prison. He's always under the surveillance all the time.

We head to Dr. Hayama's house in Setagaya ward as soon as we receive a report. Something must have happened to him since he left the house in the middle of the night. "Chiyo, are you sure that Dr. Hayama is not even in his house? Maybe he's hiding somewhere, looking for a chance to run," dad says to her. Ms. Chiyo replies after that through our earpiece. "Yes, the surveillance footage indicates that he did leave the house. But he looks terrified when he leaves. I think something must have happened to him there."

Dad looks anxious when he finds out about this news. We do hope that nothing happens to Dr. Hayama until we arrive there. He's the only one left who knows about Satoru Yuuya and the microchip implant. If he also dies, then it will be more difficult for us to investigate about Satoru Yuuya. "Can you find out what's happening there, Chiyo?" Dad asks her.

"I can't say for sure," she says to us, "But I do detect a lot of unidentified signals in that area. Based on the signals identified, the signals are like the one emitted from a microchip. I thought that it must be drones or something. But that's not the case when I check the surveillance footage. From the footage, there are a group of people in that area. And they're all chasing after Dr. Hayama."

We find it weird that a group of people is chasing Dr. Hayama right now. Don't they realize that he's under the heavy surveillance? "Do you think that these people may have a microchip implant inside their body?" Yuuto says to us, "There are no drones in the area, anyway, other than a group of people who are chasing him. Maybe they do have a microchip implant within them."

Dad nods at Yuuto's hypothesis. "Well, I also think the same too. If it's true, then they must have something to do with Satoru Yuuya. Or maybe, they're chasing Dr. Hayama for other reasons." I also share the same opinion as dad. But

somehow, I feel that something is not right. I wonder why Satoru Yuuya is not using the same way to kill Dr. Hayama. I have a feeling that he's only drawing us to witness something. But I'm not sure what it is.

Dad then asks Ms. Chiyo if she has more information about the people who are chasing Dr. Hayama. "I've already identified the people who are chasing him," she replies, "But I find it hard to believe that these people are from Awatori Group. It's according to the database I've retrieved from Public Security Bureau. Their profiles that I retrieve from the surveillance footage match with the database. So, it's confirmed that they are from Awatori Group."

Things become even more complicated when Ms. Chiyo tells us that these people are from Awatori Group. Awatori Group is a yakuza group who gets involved in human trafficking activities. And they're also one of the groups who are in the Public Security Bureau's watch list. Somehow, we can't relate why these people are chasing him. But we will only know once we reach there.

As soon as we reach Setagaya Ward, dad begins to brief us about our mission. At the same time, Ms. Chiyo also sends us the list of people who are chasing Dr. Hayama through our smart watch. "We have no idea what sort of enemies we're going to face here since we don't have much information about them. But, we still need to save Dr. Hayama from these people. His safety is our utmost priority right now. Get rid of them if you encounter one."

The rest of us split up after that. Yuuto is the first person to encounter them after we leave. "I've spotted one of them. But Dr. Hayama is not here, though. He must be hiding somewhere," he informs us through his earpiece. I haven't encountered any of them yet. But for now, my priority is to locate Dr. Hayama and protect him from these people.

"Touka, I've just spotted Dr. Hayama in your area. There are already five of them who are chasing after him. I manage to place a tracker on him. So, you can locate him with that tracker," Ms. Chiyo informs me. She then sends me Dr. Hayama's current location to my smartwatch, along with the tracker she uses to track him. I begin to head into his direction by just following the tracker.

As I'm heading towards Dr. Hayama's location, Yuuto contacts me. "I've already killed two of them. I also spot Hayato in your area as well. He probably will kill one of them. That should be easy for you to save Dr. Hayama." I'm so glad to know that Yuuto eliminates two of them on my behalf. Even if I have to fight one of them, it won't be too much for me to handle.

"Azuma and I have eliminated the remaining Yakuza guys in this area," dad informs us, "I hate to say this. But their movements aren't your typical yakuza move. I certainly haven't seen any yakuza guys who move like a skilled assassin. I'll be toast if Azuma is not here to back me up." It doesn't sound good to me. If they can move like a skilled assassin, then it's going to be difficult for me to escape with Dr. Hayama. I'm sure that they won't let me pass just like that.

As I'm getting nearer to Dr. Hayama's location, I hear a loud scream that comes from the back alley. It doesn't look like the scream comes from Dr. Hayama itself. Based on the tracker, Dr. Hayama is no longer in the back alley. He seems to be moving away from that area. But it doesn't seem like he's moving anywhere further than that.

But still, I'm just curious about what happened in the back alley. I know that I should be heading to where Dr. Hayama is now, but I can't help it. I just want to know what's going on. After feeling contemplated, I've decided to take a peek at the back alley. Besides, it won't take that long if I'm just taking a sneak peek.

When I peek into the back alley, that's when I realize that Hayato is there. He's only standing still, with blood splashes on his face. I don't think that the blood on his face is his blood because he doesn't even have any signs of injury. But what terrifies me the most is the scene itself. These people look like they're brutally murdered. The blood is still dripping from their bodies, staining the wall. Hayato just looks at them with a cold expression. Is he the one who does this?

"I'm sorry, Touka. The other person just got away and chased Dr. Hayama. I manage to injure him a little bit, but he can still be powerful enough to kill him," Hayato says to me. "What about Dr. Hayama? Is he alright?" I ask him. Hayato nods at me. I'm glad that Dr. Hayama is still okay. But then again, we're far from over. There's still one person left who is after him.

I exit the back alley after that. Even after leaving that place, the scene of what's happening at the back alley is still fresh in my mind. I don't know why it feels so disturbing to me, but maybe because I've never seen Hayato kill anyone before. I know that he's strong, but I never thought that he can be this strong. As expected from someone who can escape from the research facility unscathed.

I'm lucky that Dr. Hayama isn't going that far from where I am. As I reach Dr. Hayama's current location, the yakuza guy is about to kill him. "Don't kill me! I promise that I won't tell anyone about the microchip implant. I also won't tell anyone about Satoru Yuuya!" Dr. Hayama is pleading to the guy for not killing him. The yakuza guy just ignores his plea and begins to kill him.

Luckily, I'm fast enough to prevent the yakuza guy from killing Dr. Hayama. Dr. Hayama still looks terrified even after I've arrived and save him from the yakuza guy. "Who are you?" He asks me. "I'm from PSIA. That's all you need to know," I tell Dr. Hayama. Telling him that I'm from the special activities division will make him scared of me. So, it's better for me not to tell him anything about it.

Dr. Hayama shrieks at my response. He looks like he's scared of me more than the yakuza guy itself. Do I look that scary to him? I think what scares him the most is the fact that I'm from PSIA. Maybe he doesn't expect that PSIA is here to save him. Or maybe he thinks that we're going to interrogate him once I finish dealing with this yakuza guy.

The yakuza guy laughs at me when he finds out that I'm from PSIA. "I can't believe it that PSIA is sending a kid like you to kill me. They must be out of their mind." I don't respond anything to his remark at all. It's because I know that he's here to provoke me. He must be thinking that provoking me will leave a lot of opening for him to launch his attack on me.

"Say whatever you want. Once I kill you and retrieve Dr. Hayama, I'm out of here," I say to him with confidence. He smirks at me. "That's fine by me. But I doubt that you can leave this place alive, along with that scaredy-cat old man," says the yakuza guy. Dr. Hayama looks terrified when he finds out that the guy won't spare him as well. With this man threatening him, I bet that Dr. Hayama is going to run whenever he has the chance.

Even though I only take a brief look at the profile that Ms. Chiyo sends me, I know that this man is Ryu Mikado. He looks strong, but maybe because he has a large built that makes me think that he's strong. I'm pretty sure that he's a lot stronger than before thanks to the microchip implant. "Your name is Ryu Mikado, right? I receive information that you have a microchip implant. Where do you get it? Is Satoru Yuuya the one who gives you that?" I ask him.

It's better for me to ask him before we begin the fight. Even if we interrogate him, I don't think that he's going to reveal who gives him the microchip implant. I have a feeling that the outcome will be the same. The microchip implant may trigger a command that forces him to commit suicide. I'm not even sure myself, but it doesn't hurt for me to be cautious about it.

He sighs before he answers me. "You have so many questions, kid," he says to me, "But I'm happy to know that you get my name right. Since you're going to die anyway, I guess that it doesn't hurt for me to tell you." He doesn't hesitate at all to tell me what he knows. Well, maybe he's going to tell me blatant lies. So, he's not scared to reveal everything to me. These are fake information, anyway. It won't jeopardize him in any way.

"You're not scared something will happen to you when you reveal everything to me?" I ask him. Yakuza is also known to be tight lip about their dirty little secrets. I'm sure that this guy knows the consequences if he tries to reveal everything. Mr. Mikado only laughs when I ask him that question. "Well, why I should be worried about that? There's nothing confidential about it." Maybe he's right about that, but I still need to be cautious.

I guess that I should just see if our hypothesis is correct or not. But I won't be able to test the hypothesis if he's giving me false information. "Well, you're right about us having a microchip implant in our body. In fact, everyone in the group also has it. We do get the microchip implant through the illegal mean, but not through the guy you mention. We have no idea who he is. We've never heard of him," he says to me.

So, Satoru Yuuya has nothing to do with them? "But, why you're after Dr. Hayama?" I ask him. "Sorry, I can't tell you that. Since you already know a lot,

both you and that old man have to die,” he says to me. Mr. Mikado starts to run rampage towards me when he begins to attack me. I manage to evade his attack, but it’s just plain luck that I’m fast enough to dodge him. I doubt that I can stand if his attack hits me. His attack is fast despite his large built.

“Does your high strength and durability is because of the microchip implant as well?” I ask him again. He laughs at me, thinking that I ask him such a funny question. “Of course, it is. Do you think that a human is born with this kind of superhuman strength? You have no idea how much I yearn for this sort of power. It’s superficial, but I don’t care about it as long as I can crush anyone like pulp.”

His attack may not hit me directly, but I can estimate how strong he is. His first attack leaves a slight mark on the ground. For a normal person, Mr. Mikado’s strength is already considered strong. But for me, it’s still not strong enough. I’m not being cocky or anything, but I know that he’s not as strong as I thought. Even I can create a similar mark on the ground. “Is this what you call strong? I can do better than that,” I say to him as I begin to attack him back.

During the commotion, Dr. Hayama takes this opportunity to run away. This is his chance since none of us are paying attention to him. Before he can run anywhere further, I draw my gun and shoot at his direction. The bullet doesn’t hit him, but I’m missing the shot on purpose. I just shoot in his direction so then he won’t try to escape from this place and do anything reckless.

“Your reaction is good. The way you move is the same as us. Don’t tell me you also have a microchip implant as well?” I cringe when Mr. Mikado is comparing me to him. “Don’t lump me in the same category as you, scumbag!” Mr. Mikado only laughs when he sees my reaction. “Okay, I’m sorry. You must be a lot superior to us. But still, I like the way you look now. Your eyes are telling me that it’s filled with murderous intent. Come and attack me with what you have.”

Murderous intent, you say? Maybe he’s right. I haven’t killed anyone else other than the pursuer who tried to capture both of us in the past. “Are you sure about that? If I do that, you’ll be the one who’ll never see another day in your life,” I say to him. He laughs at me, as if I’m saying something funny to him. “You think

that you can beat me with that matchstick arm of yours? You sure know how to entertain me right now.”

I chuckle when he’s looking down at me. “I may only have matchstick arms. But I do have similar strength like you. And I can do what you can do even without the help of microchip implant.” I then look at Dr. Hayama. “I’m pretty sure that the names Touka Kimizuki and Sayuri Kimizuki must have ring a bell to you.” Dr. Hayama is in disbelief when he hears the name. I bet that he must have never expected to meet me here.

Without wasting my time, I begin my counterattack on Mr. Mikado and attack him nonstop. I just do it in the hope that I can end this fight faster. I don’t have a lot of time to play around with a fool like Mr. Mikado. The fight ends when I draw my gun and shoot him in his chest. He falls down on the ground after the shot. He’s breathing hard, but I know that he’s about to die soon. I just leave him lying on the ground. My task in eliminating him is over.

“What do you want from me? Do you want to avenge your mom’s death?” Dr. Hayama asks me when I come near him. I’m happy to know that he still remembers my mom who was his ex-colleague. But it still pisses me off. I only stare at him, making him feel so intimidated. “If my goal is avenging my mom, I would have killed you just now. I’m here because we need to ask you a few things. I’m pretty sure that you know what we want from you,” I say to him.

“So, you’re here because you want to know about the microchip implant we have?” He asks me. I nod at him. He looks hesitate at first, but he finally agreed to tell me after that. “I can’t say for sure if the microchip implant we had in our arm is the cause of their death. But I’m not surprised if it is. We were the foolish one here who thinks that Satoru Yuuya isn’t capable of something like that. He’s on another level than us.”

He then begins to tell me everything he knows about the microchip implant he has and about Satoru Yuuya. “The microchip implant was for us to access the research facility. After seeing my colleagues died one by one, I begin to suspect that the microchip implant we have. It seems like the microchip implant we have is more than just access to the research facility. It’s also an experiment for him to

turn this microchip implant into a mind control device. Your mother was right after all. If only we'd listened to her."

Just like what we expect, the cause of their death has a lot to do with the microchip implant in their arm. But then again, the autopsy report doesn't mention anything about the microchip implant. Sure, they must have missed it because of the microchip's small size. But I'm pretty sure that they will be able to notice if there's a foreign object in their body no matter how small it is. I can tell that Dr. Hayama feels guilty for not taking mom's warning seriously.

"This is not the only reason why I think this way," he continues, "I've seen this myself in the test subjects. Those test subjects died not because of the complication. Satoru Yuuya was the one who killed them. He only whispered something to them and they began to die one by one. That was the time I realized that he already created a mind control device with a microchip implant."

Before Dr. Hayama is able to tell me, his hands suddenly move on its own and begins to choke his neck. "Help me!" He screams at me, asking me for help. "I think I must have mentioned something that triggered my body to move on its own," he says to me.

He tries to fight back, but it seems like the grip is so strong that it's impossible for him to let go off his neck. I try to help him by pulling his hands away from his neck, but the grip is way too strong for me to handle. Dr. Hayama is gasping for air as I try to release the grip from his neck. But I still fail to stop his hands from choking himself no matter how hard I try.

"Touka, what's going on over there?" Dad's voice echoes through my earpiece. "Something he said must have triggered him to commit suicide. I try to stop him, but I can't stop it no matter how hard I try." If I can't stop him from choking himself, then we won't have any lead in tracking down Satoru Yuuya. Dr. Hayama is the only researchers left that can give us a clue about him.

"I can't believe that we're just his pawns in the end." This is Dr. Hayama's last word before he dies. I feel terrified when I see how Dr. Hayama died right in front of me. I don't know what part of our conversation that triggered his death. But I think this is what Satoru Yuuya wants us to witness. He wants to show us

that his research is already complete. And the best way to do it is to kill Dr. Hayama right in front of us.

CHAPTER TWO

A few days have passed since our last mission to save and protect Dr. Hayama. It doesn't take that long for us to receive the autopsy report about him. But I feel frustrated when I read it. The report still doesn't mention anything about the microchip implant he had. I begin to doubt about Dr. Hayama's statement. But he didn't look like he was lying to me about this. Maybe the coroners have made a mistake, but that seems unlikely to me.

Another thing that bothers me is Ryu Mikado denying about knowing Satoru Yuuya. He didn't say who gave them the microchip implant. He only stated that he got it through the illegal mean. We can assume that they may get it from Saburo Matsuda. But based on our investigation, there's no link between him and the Awatori Group.

"Sis, are you still thinking about our last mission?" Yuuto seems to know what I have in mind. "I can't stop thinking about it. This mission isn't as simple as I expected. Even if we've already found the answer we seek, it will also lead us to another mystery," I answer. Yuuto remains silent. He begins to speak up after

that. "I agree with that," he says, "But I also come up with another conclusion. It sounds crazy, so do you want to listen?"

I nod at him. I wonder what kind of conclusions he has. Maybe his findings are a lot different than everyone else in the squad. "Maybe those guys from Awatori Group did meet him. It's just that, he didn't introduce himself as Satoru Yuuya. He must have introduced himself using a fake name instead. I won't be so surprised if it's true," Yuuto says to me.

Well, Yuuto's conclusion makes sense as well. Maybe it's true that Satoru Yuuya introduced himself using a fake name. So, no one in the group knows who he is. "I think it's possible. But what about the autopsy report not mentioning anything about the microchip implant? I'd like to think there must be an error from the coroner, but I don't believe they will do such thing. On top of that, there's no reason for them to hide it," I say to him.

Yuuto only sighs when I ask him that. I guess he's also clueless why the autopsy report doesn't mention anything about it. "I'd like to think that the microchip implant disappeared, but it sounds too good to be true. I know that it's possible for the microchip implant to disappear after a certain period of time. But disappeared in a split second? That's unheard of. Even Dr. Hayama would think it's impossible if he were still alive."

Both of us become quiet after that when we notice that our classmates are nearby. It's better for us not to discuss something like this since none of the incidents have made it to the public. This is a covert mission, anyway. So no one should know about this. Both Yuuto and I need to be careful not to let something confidential slip from our mouth.

"Morning, Touka, Yuuto," Shiori greets us. Shiori is a friend of mine since we were in the middle school. She's not just my classmate, but she's also my best friend. She always comes to our coffee shop whenever she has the time. She's an idol, so she's always busy with the rehearsal at the live house after the school is over. Sometimes, she will also bring her friends from the idol group, Machina Twist, to our coffee shop.

She has been with Machina Twist since she passed the audition when we were in the middle school. But now, she finally gets the major debut she's been waiting for. With her major debut confirmed, it means that she will be graduating from Machina Twist soon. I'm happy to know that her wish has come true. She's been working so hard to land her first major debut as a talent.

"Are you guys free this weekend? I'll be performing on the stage with my senior idol, Momoko Sugita. I hope that you can come and see me this weekend." Shiori looks happy when she invites us to see her performance. "I thought that you don't have to perform in the live house anymore? What gives?" I ask her.

Yuuto and I are unable to attend her live performance most of the time. It's because we have to help dad and Hayato in the coffee shop. The coffee shop can be so full of people, especially during the weekend. Sometimes, we're also involved with other covert missions. That makes it even more impossible for us to attend the live. Of course, she doesn't even know that we're PSIA agents. And no one knows about that, not even the school.

"It's true that I don't have to perform in the live house anymore," she says, "But this is my last performance with them. This live is my graduation ceremony to commemorate my departure from Machina Twist. I won't be performing in the live house anymore after this. Besides, I want to see my fans one last time at the live house. I feel so much closer to them in the live house than in the large venues."

Yuuto and I look at each other. We understand that this live means a lot to Shiori, but we can't be so sure if we can attend the live or not. Missions can come at any given moment. And I don't think we can let it pass only because we want to attend her live. "We're not sure if we can attend the live," I say to her, "But we will try to convince dad about this. I'm pretty sure that he'll be okay with this. After all, you're also our frequent customer."

Shiori smiles after I tell her about this. I can tell that she feels disappointed with my answer. Her forced smile is the clue to her disappointment. "It's okay. I understand that. But I hope that you can come on that day. I don't know when

we'll see each other again," she says to us. I'm a bit puzzled with what she says just now, but she only denies it. I have a feeling that she has something important to say to me, but she just feels reluctant to say it.

Seeing this tense atmosphere, Yuuto then begins to lighten her up. This is not Yuuto's true nature, but I guess that he's the right person to do it. "Did you say that you're going to perform together with Momoko Sugita? You mean, THAT Momoko Sugita?" Yuuto asks her. "Yes, it's THAT Momoko Sugita. I'm so happy to know that I'll be performing alongside her. It's always my dream to be able to perform together with her," Shiori answers.

"Wow, that's amazing. I hope that we can come and see your performance this weekend. I don't want to miss this chance to see Momoko Sugita in the flesh," Yuuto says to her. "I don't even know that you like her," I say to him. Yuuto only laughs and doesn't say anything about it. I'm not sure if Yuuto is just acting up or if he's just being honest about being Momoko Sugita's fan. But I'm grateful for what Yuuto does. At least it helps with cheering Shiori.

Even during school, she's still talking about how excited she is to perform with Momoko Sugita. I know that she has been a fan of Momoko Sugita since we were in the middle school. And that is also the reason why she wants to become an idol so she can perform with her someday. It seems like her dream has come true. And we're only a few days away until Shiori's first duet performance with Momoko Sugita.

Seeing how happy Shiori is, I can't help but just listen to what Shiori is saying. This is the least I can do for supporting her. I feel guilty for not attending her live performance as much as I can before her major debut. This isn't unusual for someone in her age to get a major debut, especially the idols under Muse Agency. Pretty much everyone who aspires to be an idol will love to be recruited by this talent agency.

After all, idols under Muse Agency receive more opportunities than idols from the other agencies. These idols have a chance to receive the brand endorsement and debuting as an actress and as a recording artist. Of course,

most idols will start off with making an appearance in the variety shows. But they can get far in their career if they're under Muse Agency.

That's the reason why Muse Agency is one of the well-known talent agencies in Japan. And many superstars who start off as idols usually come from Muse Agency. Momoko Sugita is just one of them. We can say that they will have a better future in their career if they're under Muse Agency. A lot of people will love to join this talent agency. But as usual, they can't take that many. Only a few of them made it. And Shiori is one of them.

Despite Muse Agency's glowing review, I also have heard about nasty rumors about them. It doesn't have anything to do much with the agency as a whole. Rather, the rumors are mostly related to Muse Agency founding father, Shinya Fukuyama. I have no idea if it's true or not, but most of them are rather disturbing.

One of the nasty rumors that I have come across is he always sexually harass the idols. And there is also another nasty rumor where Sayaka Minami's fans accused him of the cause of her death. I don't know much about her other than she's one of the popular idols. She also had a major debut when she was only 16 and became more popular after that. Throughout her career, she received many opportunities including famous brand endorsement.

With such a bright future ahead of her, nobody would ever imagine that she would commit suicide. I remember about the news coverage about her death in the mainstream media. This is when the news about her having a depression made into the headline. And they seemed to think that this may have been the cause of her death. She died when she was hit by a truck.

At that time, the staff was about to send her home after she was done with her treatment. She looked fine when the staff came to fetch her. As she was already inside the car, she suddenly left the car for an unknown reason and rushed off to cross the street. She didn't even realize that the truck was heading her way, and she got hit by it when she tried to cross the street.

When Shiori told me that she'll be having a major debut, I can't help but think about Sayaka Minami. I'm not hoping the same thing will happen to her, but I

can't brush off that something dangerous is coming her way. "Will you be alright once you've had your major debut?" I ask her. Shiori looks puzzled because that question seems like it's out of nowhere.

"Why are you asking me that?" She asks me. Before I can say anything, she's quick to guess. "Are you thinking that something like what happened to Sayaka Minami will also happen to me?" Okay, I've caught myself red-handed, but I have a valid reason to think that way. I won't be this worried if she's under a different talent agency. But this is Muse Agency we're talking about. Anything bad can happen when you're in a shady agency like Muse Agency.

Shiori seems mad that I believe in the rumors spread all over the Internet. "I can't believe it that you would believe all those rumors! Didn't I tell you that those rumors are not true? Why you still believe that?" I don't know how to say this to her other than it's just my gut feeling. Even if I say that, she will insist that I shouldn't listen to it. I've been in a couple of missions already, and it's always my instinct that saved me from the disaster.

Shiori then begins to search for something in her smart watch. "Take a look at this," she says to me while showing me a picture collection. I look at the picture collection and notice a picture of her with the rest of the members in Machina Twist. Besides the members of the group, there is also a man who is standing next to her. The man looks like someone in his 60s, smiling at the camera while putting his arm on Shiori's shoulder.

I'm pretty sure that the man is not Shiori's dad because Shiori is an orphan. I don't remember she says anything about being adopted. "Who is this guy?" I ask her. "That's Shinya Fukuyama. You probably know him as the founder of Muse Agency. He's also one of the influential figures in the idol industry," she answers me.

This is the first time I've seen him. Despite being an influential figure, he has never made any appearance in the public and the media. People only know about him, but not so much about how he physically looks like. "Do you think someone like him will do such thing?" She asks me just to clarify. I'd like to warn her not to

judge him by his appearance, but I don't think she will ever listen to me if I say it to her.

"Okay, I'm sorry for judging him," I apologize to her. It's not my nature to apologize for something that I didn't do, but I don't feel like arguing with her. Arguing with her will only make me feel so miserable. So, I'd rather not do anything like that. "When the agency had announced the news about my major debut, he came to visit us at the live house. It was the first time we met him, so we were surprised that he was nice to everyone," she says to me.

I only nod without saying anything. Shiori then keeps talking about Shinya Fukuyama and how amazing and humble he is to them. I'm pretty sure that Shiori is doing this to convince me that Shinya Fukuyama is a good guy. And the nasty rumors that I've heard on the Internet are not true at all. I just nod in agreement because it's futile to tell her to look from another angle at this point.

After the school is over, I tell Yuuto about the conversation I had with Shiori. He only laughs when he finds out how naïve Shiori is about him. "I find it hard to believe that there is someone out there who doesn't doubt anything about this old man. Do idols from Muse Agency are like this?" He keeps on laughing about it because it seems funny to him.

"Well, I'm just expressing my concern. I wish that the rumors that I've read about Muse Agency in Tako Forum are not true. But how can it be NOT true if their post also includes evidence? Sure, they can disguise those as evidence. But it doesn't look like something that you can fake and call it evidence," I say to Yuuto. I begin to open up the forum on my smart watch and show the rumor thread to him.

Yuuto then scrolls through the thread to read the post. There are a lot of posts in the thread. So, Yuuto transfers the link to the thread to his smartwatch instead. He continues to scroll through the thread on his smart watch. It doesn't even take the whole thread to convince him that they're not making this up. "You know, those rumors are nasty. But I'm not surprised at all if they're true. I still find it hard to believe that Shiori can be delusional about this," Yuuto says to me.

I nod, agreeing with what he says. “I feel like I need to ask dad if he can help me with convincing Shiori about leaving the agency. Sure, my concern seems baseless only because of the rumor. But I just don’t want anything bad happened to her. Those rumors don’t even sound like a joke to me. I have a feeling that something bad will happen to her if she doesn’t leave the agency.”

We’re lucky that our house isn’t that far from the school. Well, it’s not really a house, considering that we live above the coffee shop. We’ve been living there since we’ve moved back to Tokyo. Hayato is staying with us while Ms. Chiyo and Mr. Sakakibara are staying at another shophouse. Well, the shophouse doesn’t have a lot of rooms anyway. So, Ms. Chiyo has to stay with Mr. Sakakibara. On top of that, his shop house is spacious too since there’s just two of them.

As soon as we reach home, we begin to help dad and Hayato in the coffee shop. The coffee shop isn’t that busy today, but there are still many customers coming in. We still have customers even until we’re near the closing time. We begin to clean up and get ready to close the coffee shop once our last customer leaves this place.

Just as we thought that no one is coming in, a man comes into the coffee shop. Since the man itself is a foreigner, we think that he may not know that we’re about to close. “I’m sorry, sir. But we’re about to close the coffee shop,” I say to him in English. Even with the intensive English class, my pronunciation is still far from perfect. I do hope that he understands what I say.

Instead of leaving this place, the man sneers at me. “Is this how you treat an important guest like me? Do you have any idea who I am?” I jolt a bit when he scoffs at me. I thought that I’m already polite enough to him. I’m only asking him to leave since we’re already closing the coffee shop. We won’t be able to take any orders since we have cleaned up everything.

“Don’t worry about it, Touka. He’s our guest. I told him to come here when we’re about to close. Sorry, I should have told you,” dad says to me. The man then takes a seat at the counter. Once he already takes a seat, dad begins to serve him a freshly brewed coffee. “Okay, let me introduce him,” dad says to us, “This is

Alex Johansson. He's from CIA, and he's here to find out about our progress with tracking Satoru Yuuya."

Dad seems to notice that we don't know anything about Mr. Johansson. "Sorry, Alex, they're my children, and they've just got involved in this mission. I haven't told them anything about you yet." Dad becomes formal to him despite he casually addresses Mr. Johansson like his old friend. I've never seen him being formal with anyone, not even to Director Kagami. Hayato then serves him a cup of coffee. He still looks angry at us.

"Oh, so they're also involved in this mission? I thought that they're only your employees," he says to dad as he takes a sip. Mr. Johansson sounds cocky when he talks to dad. Who in the world he thinks he is? His cocky attitude annoys me, but I try not to make a ruckus. After all, this bastard is from CIA. We'd better not mess around with him.

Mr. Johansson smirks at us. He looks more like he's making fun of us. "I never thought that the PSIA Special Activities Division can be this pathetic. Do you really lack talents that much until up to the point that you need to have high school kids in your squad? You sure are good for nothing," he says to us. Dad doesn't even say anything back, but I can tell that dad feels frustrated with his remark.

Without hesitating, both Yuuto and I draw our gun and point at his head. "You'd better watch your mouth, mister," I say to him in anger. "We won't hesitate to pull the trigger to shoot you," Yuuto says to him, "We don't care about you coming from CIA. But you'd better not mess with us in our own turf."

Dad only chuckles when he sees our reaction. "They're right about that, Alex. You'd better not provoking them. I hope that you realize that we have no reason to follow your orders. This is our turf anyway, so you'd better not mess with us. Besides, we know that you can't fight back because you're unarmed." Mr. Johansson cringes, knowing that he's in the disadvantage position.

"I already told you to watch your mouth, Alex. This is what you get when you're so full of yourself," a woman says to him. A woman comes in after witnessing what's happening inside the coffee shop. Mr. Sakakibara is following

her from behind. “Dude, you sure like to mess around with everybody here,” Mr. Sakakibara says to him. They seem to know that Mr. Johansson likes to mess around with everyone in the law enforcement.

Mr. Johansson pushes our guns aside and begins to walk to the entrance. “Heh, fine, you win today, you lousy Japanese. You’d better do what you’re ordered to do.” He leaves the coffee shop after that. That woman sighs after Mr. Johansson leaves the coffee shop. “This guy never seems to learn. Does he have to be cocky with everyone here just because he’s from CIA? He’s getting on my nerve!”

The woman then looks at our direction. “Who are you?” Yuuto asks her while pointing the gun at her. The woman smiles as she answers Yuuto’s question. “I’m your father’s new girlfriend. Don’t tell me that he never tells you anything about me?” I cringe when I listen to her answer. “Stop fooling around. Dad will never be with someone like you,” I say to her in anger while pointing the gun at her.

“Minoru, you sure train them well. They don’t even hesitate to shoot me at all. I can tell right away from the way they gaze at me. Their gaze doesn’t even falter at all. Their hands aren’t even shaking when they’re pointing the gun at me. I can’t believe it that someone this young can be this good,” the woman says to dad.

Mr. Sakakibara sighs when he sees that dad doesn’t even do anything to stop us. “Stop that, Shoko. Otherwise, they’re going to shoot you for real.” He then looks at us. “Put the gun down. She’s not a jerk like Alex.” That woman pouts when Mr. Sakakibara compares her with Mr. Johansson. “How dare you compare me with that jerk? I’m far better than him, you know.” Dad only laughs at us, without saying anything.

Dad then signals Hayato to prepare more coffee. He also signals us to sit down and serves a cup of coffee to us. “Good job, kids. I would have never been able to get rid of Alex if it’s not because of you.” We’re surprised to find out that dad actually praises us. We thought that he’s going to scold us for mistreating Mr. Johansson. “Minoru, you should ask them to apologize to me too,” the woman says to dad while slamming her hand on the counter.

“You deserve to be shot by them. You’re saying something that you shouldn’t say,” Mr. Sakakibara says to her. She seems pissed with Mr. Sakakibara’s remark despite him teasing her. “Now, let me introduce her. Her name is Shoko Mayuzumi. She’s mom’s old friend. And she’s one of the inspectors from Public Security Bureau. Her squad is collaborating with us in this mission.”

We then begin our meeting once Hayato serves coffee to everyone. Ms. Shoko starts talking after she takes a sip. “I’ve already analyzed the recorded footage about Dr. Hayama’s death. To be honest, I won’t deny the possibility it was the microchip implant in his arm that caused him to die. But you won’t believe what I discover.” She pauses for a while and takes another sip.

“According to the autopsy report, there’s no mention of microchip whatsoever, right? To be frank, it’s not that we don’t believe a microchip isn’t capable of killing people. It’s just that, there wasn’t even a sign that they had a microchip implant within their body. That was the reason why the report doesn’t mention anything about the microchip implant. And that was also the reason why we didn’t know what caused them to die in the first place.”

Everyone remains silent until Mr. Sakakibara starts talking. “Do these researchers remove it by force?” Mr. Sakakibara asks her. Ms. Shoko shakes her head. “No, they wouldn’t be able to do that. It won’t be that easy to remove something that is already attached to our flesh. Besides, the microchip implant is way too small for them to remove it by themselves. That would be dangerous to remove it just like that.”

“So, what makes the microchip implant disappeared in the first place?” Dad asks her. “Well, I can’t say for sure since we have no proof. But I can only think that Satoru Yuuya must have included a string of codes. When executed, the microchip implant will self-destruct once it has fulfilled its role. In this case, it disappeared the moment these researchers died,” Ms. Shoko explains.

I clench my fist when I realize where this is going to lead us to. “Does that mean we can’t convict him no matter what?” I ask Ms. Shoko. She nods at me. “I’m afraid, no. In fact, I’m pretty sure that the rest of the murders will follow the

same pattern. Dr. Hayama's death is nothing but to show us how his mind control device works. He was only using Dr. Hayama as a scapegoat."

Ms. Shoko then continues with her explanation. "We also have done the autopsy on the guys from Awatori Group. Their microchip implants are most likely the same one used in Transhuman Development Project. As expected, there wasn't a single trace of microchip implant in their bodies as well. At this point, it's hard to know whether they were telling the truth or not. It doesn't matter whether they have it or not, it's a fact that the yakuza groups are already aware of this."

After listening to what Ms. Shoko's explanation, I have a feeling that what we've seen so far is only a tip of the iceberg. I can't guess what Satoru Yuuya is planning to do next. But I'm pretty sure that there will be more people who will become his victims. It doesn't matter what he plans to do. But what we can do for now is to be ready for any unforeseen circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE

After our last meeting with Ms. Shoko, I begin to wonder if mom also had a microchip implant as well. None of them had mentioned anything about her, so I didn't feel like bringing this up. Mom was also one of the key researchers in Transhuman Development Project. It didn't matter whether she wanted it or not, she still needed to have a microchip implant. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to access the research facility.

I can't seem to recall any of mom's behaviors that felt odd to me. I don't think that will help me with anything. After all, anyone with a microchip implant will behave like they normally would. Dr. Hayama is living proof that the microchip implant doesn't hinder any of his normal behavior. So, I can only assume that mom did have a microchip implant. But it was already gone at some point. It's just that, I don't know when.

If she still had one, why didn't Satoru Yuuya killed her just like the other researchers? Why did he send skilled assassins just to kill her? I know that he did it just to capture us. He already expected that we wouldn't listen to him. So,

sending skilled assassins to kill mom and dad was meant to be a warning sign for us to follow with his demand.

I can only conclude that mom no longer had the microchip implant at that time. Otherwise, he wouldn't need to send skilled assassins just to kill her. I still have the diary that mom left for us. We had finished reading the diary, but I feel like rereading the diary again. Maybe I can find the answers I've been searching for and other clues on what Satoru Yuuya is planning to do next.

"You're reading it again?" Yuuto asks me. He notices that I'm holding the diary as he enters my room. I nod at him. "I was just curious if mom still had a microchip implant with her when she wrote the diary. From the look of it, she didn't seem to have one. But who knows?" Yuuto sits on the floor before he begins to talk to me. "I think mom no longer had a microchip implant within her. If she did, they didn't have to come all the way to Tochigi just to kill her."

It looks like Yuuto and I are on the same page about this. We firmly believe that mom didn't have the microchip implant within her. But the question is, how did she manage to remove it from her arm? Ms. Shoko did say that it was impossible to remove the microchip implant by force. It may become even worse than triggering the suicide mode.

"Did you ask dad about this?" Yuuto asks me. I sigh when I recall dad's answer when I was asking him about this. "For some reason, dad seems reluctant to tell me anything about mom. He only said that mom was just like the other researchers. But that was just about it. He even told me to go and ask Ms. Shoko about this." Yuuto doesn't even look surprised at all with dad's answer. He may have known this that dad won't tell us anything.

"I guess that we need to see Ms. Shoko. But I do hope that Ms. Shoko is willing to tell us. I'm just worried that she doesn't want to tell us anything," Yuuto says to me. "Well, you don't have to worry about that," I say to him, "I've already told Ms. Shoko that we want to see her. And she's okay with that." Yuuto looks surprised that Ms. Shoko agreed to see us. "Did you tell her why we want to see her?" He asks me again.

“No, but I think she knows why we want to see her. I think dad must have told her that we will come to see her and ask her about mom,” I say to him. Dad can be a jerk sometimes. I wish that he can be honest with us about issues like this. But he’d rather pass it to someone else. It’s heartbreaking for us that dad doesn’t want to tell us personally. But since he already knows that we’re going to see Ms. Shoko, he seems to be okay with us asking her about this.

The next day, we’ve decided to meet with Ms. Shoko after school. We also have told dad that we’ll be late to come home because we’ll be seeing her today. Dad doesn’t seem to oppose us seeing her, so I guess dad is okay with it, as long as we tell him where we’re going. Even though we can always protect ourselves, dad can still be a worry-wart sometimes. There’s nothing wrong with his reaction, anyway. He’s doing what a father will do.

We’ve decided to meet Ms. Shoko in a café which is not far from the school. The café is also not far from Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. Besides, she also loves to frequent this café too, which is why she wants us to see her there. She also comes to our coffee shop once in a while, but only when she has a free time, though. As an inspector, having a free time is a blessing to her.

As we enter the café, Ms. Shoko is already there. She takes a sip from her coffee while waiting for us. “We’re sorry that we’re late,” I say to her as both of us are taking a seat. Ms. Shoko smiles when she sees us. “That’s okay. I’ve just gotten here anyway.” She then starts to look at us. Even though this is the second time we meet, I’ve never imagined that she has a keen interest in us, especially me.

“You look exactly like your mom. Even your expression is the same as her. I still remember the day when your mom came to see me. That was the day she asked me to do something that sounded crazy to me. I thought that she was fooling around because she looked so frazzled. It was hard for me to take her seriously when she looked so...unkempt,” she says to us.

She then sighs before she continues talking to us. “Minoru already expected that you guys would want to see me and asks me about your mom. I just don’t understand why he doesn’t want to be the person to tell you this. He had involved in dozens of dirty jobs which were even worse than this. And yet, he doesn’t want

to tell you about a crucial thing like this. I really don't get why Sayuri loves someone like him."

We feel awkward when she openly criticizing dad in front of us. But then again, we can tell that she must be close with mom just by noticing how much she cares about her. I don't think she can be this blunt if she doesn't know much about mom. "How long you've known mom? You look like you've known her for a long time," I ask her.

She smiles when I ask her this question. "Well, she's my childhood friend. We even went to the same university. Thank goodness that we didn't fall in love with the same guy. Otherwise, I have no idea what's going to happen to our friendship." Yuuto chuckles when he hears her answer. "But you don't look like you approve their relationship. You seem to hate dad so much." Wow, Yuuto. You can be a bastard sometimes.

Ms. Shoko only laughs out loud in response to Yuuto's answer. "Yeah, it sounds like I do oppose their relationship. It's because I'm worried that she'll be lonely if something bad happened to him." She sighs after that. "In the end, it's the opposite. Now, it's Minoru who feels lonely. Come to think of it, I think I know the reason why he wants me to tell you about your mom instead. He can't bear the sadness of losing your mom."

We understand the feeling of losing mom. But we know that there's nothing much we can do other than moving forward. We thought that dad is already moving forward, but it doesn't look that way when Ms. Shoko tells us. That just shows how much mom means to him. Now, we look like we're being insensitive. We never consider how he feels when we ask him about mom. We're sorry for what we've done to you, dad.

"To be honest," Ms. Shoko says to us, "I know that the microchip implant was a bad idea, no matter how small it was. Minoru and I were against it. Both of us even against with her taking part in this project. It didn't matter how noble it sounded. It's against the human nature. I'm fine with using technology to treat incurable diseases or curing physical disabilities. But making a human with a god-like feature? That's just no."

Ms. Shoko resents the idea of transforming human into something that no longer defines us as a human. Well, both Yuuto and I agree with her. Sure, we're fortunate that we're born with high IQ and with no physical disabilities. Even if we're born with the average IQ, we only need to count our blessing. What makes us human is we can still go beyond our limit even if our physique constraints us. It's our mind that makes us achieve what seems like an impossible feat.

So, do we need to have something like this to enhance our physical abilities and intelligence? Well, some people think they need it. It's just like having plastic surgery to look as pretty as a celebrity. But for most people, they don't need to have that. They're fine with what they have. They don't even need it in the first place. I'm pretty sure that Hayato feels the same way.

"No matter what we said, we couldn't stop her. Minoru knew that she wouldn't budge no matter what. So, he could only promise her that he would do what he could to save her if she was in a pinch. I could tell that Minoru didn't want that day to come. But it was too bad that the day when he had to save her had come. That day was like a test between the two of them," Ms. Shoko continues with her story.

Ms. Shoko takes another sip before she continues. "That was the day when your mom found out that both of you would become the test subject for the project. She didn't want to turn you kids into a test subject, but she couldn't run away just like that. That was when she realized that the microchip implant in her arm was a hindrance to her. Satoru Yuuya would be able to capture you kids no matter where she was. And she could get herself killed at any time because of that."

"So, this is when she decided to discard the microchip implant?" I ask her. Ms. Shoko nods. "Yup, but she knew that she couldn't remove the microchip implant just like that. At that time, she already suspected that something was not right with the project. So, she already knew the circumstances if she went against them. That was the time she called me to discuss her method to remove the microchip implant. Minoru was there as well."

My heart races after listening to Ms. Shoko's story. I have never thought that something severe had already happened to us at that time. Yuuto looks calm when he hears the story, but I can sense that his emotion is in turmoil as well. Seeing how I'm about to have a panic attack, Yuuto holds my hand tightly. At least I feel much better when he does that.

"What she wanted to do?" Yuuto asks her. Ms. Shoko seems reluctant to tell us, but she knows that she has to. "She had to fake her death. We're not talking about using a body double here. She needed to commit suicide just to fool the program. If the suicide attempt were successful, the microchip implant would no longer be usable. At that time, she didn't know that it would disappear when she committed suicide."

Yuuto holds my hand even tighter than before when he notices my reaction. I can't even look straight at Ms. Shoko right now. It feels too much for me to handle. I feel grateful that Yuuto is here with me. I don't know what's going to happen to me if it's not because of him. Whatever it is, our support to each other means a lot in this situation.

"So, I presume that the plan succeeded at that time, right?" Yuuto asks Ms. Shoko. She nods as she takes another sip. "It was, but at that time, we weren't even sure. It was such a risky approach. Even Minoru was against it. Despite that, Minoru was there to witness everything. It wasn't easy to fake her death for 1 second just to fool the microchip. Any longer than that, she would die for good."

She breathes a sign of relief after that. "We were glad that the attempt was a success. After double-checking everything, we've confirmed that the microchip was no longer inside her body. And I guess you know the drill after that. The rest of you immediately left Tokyo and disappeared off the grid."

None of us are saying anything after the conversation is over. Without realizing, two hours have passed since then. I have never imagined that the conversation takes a lot of time. I'm pretty sure that she has a lot of things to do in her office. "Just let me know if you need anything. I'll do my best to help you out," Ms. Shoko says to us before we leave.

We part our way after that. “I’ve never thought that mom was bold enough to do something so risky. I doubt that I’ll do the same if I were her,” I say to Yuuto. I feel like wanting to break this awkward silence. “I’m glad to know that you’re alright. You looked like you were about to have a panic attack just now,” Yuuto says to me. I smile at him. “Yes, I was anxious for an unknown reason. I guess that it must have something to do with mom faking her death.”

I know that Yuuto looks surprised about that as well. But at least, he doesn’t feel as anxious as I am. “I guess that we should go home and have a cup of coffee. You barely drank any when we were there.” I nod at him, agreeing with his suggestion. Maybe we should go home and have a cup of coffee instead if it will make us feel better.

“Welcome home,” dad greets us when we reach home. He’s already done with cleaning up the coffee shop by the time we come back. “We’re home.” Dad begins to serve us a cup of coffee while Hayato continues with cleaning the coffee shop. “I’m sorry that you have to see Shoko just to know about your mom. I can’t bring myself to tell you about your mom no matter how hard I try. It was too painful for me, even though it was already in the distant past,” dad says to us.

Both of us look down. We feel guilty for being insensitive. We should have known how painful it is for dad to talk about mom. He even felt guilty that he couldn’t attend mom’s cremation at that time. But at least, he was able to say goodbye to mom before we moved back to Tokyo. “It’s okay. We’re sorry for not considering how you feel. We’re grateful that you don’t try to hide the facts from us,” I say to dad.

Dad feels relieved when he hears that we’re not blaming him. We don’t feel like blaming him because we’re also at fault as well. So, there’s no reason for us to blame him. He doesn’t do anything wrong to us. None of us are saying anything after that. So, I begin to ask him about letting us go to Shiori’s live performance. “Dad, I know this seems like out of nowhere, but can we go and see Shiori’s live performance this weekend? This is her last performance at the live house. So, we want to see her one last time.”

Dad chuckles when I ask him about this. “Well, why not? It’s true that we have a lot of customers during weekend. But I think that we can do just fine with Hayato and me.” Hayato also nods when he’s done with the cleaning. “Yup, don’t worry about us. You should go and see her while you still have the chance,” Hayato says to us. I can’t help but feel happy that dad allows us to see Shiori this weekend. “Thanks, dad,” I say to him.

On Saturday, we head to Ebisu where Machina Twist will have their live performance. As we reach the area, there are so many people who are already waiting in front of the live house. I can tell that these people are here to watch the live performance by judging the way they dress. It’s easy to tell, though, with some of them are wearing a headband on their forehead. The headband clearly says ‘I love Momoko’ or ‘I love Shiori’. They must be the idol otaku.

Most people who are attending the live are men, with majority of them are the idol otaku. As expected for a live performance like this. But there are also women who are attending the live performance too. I can hear them whispering that today is Shiori’s last performance with Machina Twist. From now onward, Shiori is no longer performing with them. She’s officially become a talent, just like Momoko Sugita.

By being a talent, she can now pursue another career path such as acting, singing and even modeling. She will also begin to appear on the variety TV show because this is where the talents will appear most of the time. Seeing that there are so many people who are cheering for her, I can’t help but feel like supporting her as much as I can. I’m proud of what she has accomplished while she was still with Machina Twist.

Once the door has opened, everyone is rushing in so then they can get the best place to see their favorite idols. Speaking about the idol otaku, they seem to be divided into many factions. After all, while they love the idol group as a whole, they usually root for a specific person in the group. Just like most idols, Shiori has a huge number of following. So, it makes sense why her talent agency has decided to make a major debut for her.

The live house is packed than usual because of Momoko Sugita's performance with Shiori. Well, it's not that I've seen her live performance that frequently. This is what people who are here have been saying. I'm glad that the person next to me is nice enough to tell me. She's also a fan of Shiori because of her bubbly personality.

I have to admit that she's right about Shiori's personality. But at the same time, she can be an airhead sometimes. And she can be so naïve too. This is the part that I don't dare to tell her fans, though. Perhaps, I'm the only one who thinks that she's an airhead because of my high intelligence.

Everybody shouts in unison, chanting their favorite member's name when they appear on stage. The cheer is getting louder when Shiori appears on the stage. Shiori looks happy when she sees that there are so many people who are here to cheer for her. She feels even happier when she sees us. She waves at us when she notices us, but a group of guys thinks that she's waving at them. They even argue about that. This is the first time I've seen grown-up men quarreling for something silly like this.

"How are you today, everyone?" Shiori shouts at the crowd. The crowd riles up even with a simple greeting from Shiori. Everyone shouts in unison when answering Shiori's question. I've known Shiori since the middle school. But I've never seen her being so energetic on stage. It's because she always feels shy whenever she's with strangers. I guess that she needs to become a different persona when she's on stage. No one will ever believe that the shy Shiori is now an idol who has a lot of raving fans.

The performance itself is fantastic. That maybe has something to do with me who rarely seeing a live performance. I admit that I am enjoying myself throughout the live. But I still can't stop complaining about a bunch of guys who are in front of me. I'm not sure how old they are, but they seem like they're in the mid-20s. It grosses me out when I see how obsessive they are with the idols.

If I were an idol, I'm happy to have fans who have been supporting me throughout my journey. But I still find it creepy to have people like them to worship their favorite idols like a temple. Thank goodness that I'm not a part of

the idol scene. Otherwise, I would have quit the next day only because I have a bunch of creepy old men worshipping me. I guess the world of assassination fits me better than the idol world.

After Machina Twist's performance, Momoko Sugita performs next. The scream is even louder when Momoko Sugita appears on the stage. Well, she used to be a member of Machina Twist before. So, it feels nostalgic when they see her on the stage where she used to perform as a Machina Twist member back then.

Yuuto seems to be mesmerized by her. He looks like he can't keep his eyes away from her. Momoko Sugita sure knows how to charm her fans, even to the first-timer like Yuuto. Maybe Yuuto is not lying about him being a fan of Momoko Sugita. Or maybe he just pretends to be her fan. I don't see him putting Momoko Sugita's poster in his room. So, I bet that he's doing it out of fitting in with the crowd. Only Yuuto is able to pull off an act like this.

The live continues with Shiori's solo performance. After that, it's her duet performance with Momoko Sugita. Shiori looks happy when she's performing alongside her. Even her fans are tearing up when they see how splendid their performance together. The live performance ends with Shiori expresses her gratitude to her fans. She's hoping that they will support her from now onward as a talent.

After the live is over, someone is calling for us. "You're Touka and Yuuto, right?" He whispers to us. Both of us nod at him. He feels relieved that he gets the right person. "We have so many people who are attending the live more than usual. I'm just worried that I'll get the wrong person. Thank goodness that I get it right," he says to us.

Both of us follow him to the backstage while avoiding the crowd. "How do you know about us?" Yuuto asks him. "Shiori has been telling me about you guys. She also showed me your photos so then it'll be easier for me to recognize you. She's been showing your pics to me countless time. At this point, I don't think that I can ever forget how you look like that easily," he replies.

"I'm sorry for being rude," I say to him, "But, who are you? Why do you know so many things about us?" He only smiles at me. "Sorry, I forgot to introduce

myself. My name is Keiji Ayatsuji. I'm Shiori's manager from now onward." We're glad to know that Mr. Ayatsuji doesn't look like a bad person. I always assume that an idol manager can be a pain to deal with. But it doesn't look that way with Mr. Ayatsuji.

Once we're at the backstage, Shiori jumps and start to hug me. "Touka, I'm so happy that you're here. I'm glad that you've made it this time," Shiori says to me in tears. I can't help but tear up too. "Congratulations, Shiori. Your performance just now was splendid. I enjoyed it so much," I praise her. Mr. Ayatsuji leaves after that. He smiles when he sees how close we are with Shiori.

She then looks at Yuuto. "Yuuto, you're popular among my group members. Initially, they thought that you're Touka's boyfriend. But when I told them that you're her twin brother, they felt like they may have a chance to hit on you," Shiori says to him. Yuuto looks so proud and boastful when he knows that he's also popular among the idols.

"Stop praising him. He can be annoying when things like this get into his head," I say to Shiori in anger. Yuuto only laughs, saying that I'm just jealous that he's popular among the girls. It's not that I care about it, anyway. While we're busy talking, Momoko Sugita walks passing us. Rather than welcoming us, she stares at us instead. She looks unhappy when she sees us. In her eyes, we look more like a nuisance to her.

"Who are they?" She asks Shiori. Shiori seems to take aback when she sees Momoko Sugita's expression. "We're her friends from the high school," I say to Momoko Sugita. Before Shiori is able to introduce us properly, Momoko Sugita suddenly snaps at her. "Who do you think you are? Just because you're an idol, that doesn't mean you can simply just bring anyone here. Bring your friends elsewhere. Otherwise, just leave this place."

Momoko Sugita leaves after she scolds her. Shiori then starts to cry. She has never been this terrified. "Why she suddenly scolds me? Wasn't she the one who said that it was okay for me to bring my friends to the backstage? I can't believe with what she did to me." Shiori just runs off to her dressing room, leaving us

dumbfounded. The situation in the backstage becomes so awkward that Mr. Ayatsuji is asking us to leave.

On our way out, we ask him if we did something wrong that makes Momoko Sugita angry at us. Even he also seems confused with Momoko Sugita's odd behavior. "She is a nice person. But she suddenly acts strange after the live is over. Not only that, her voice sounds a lot different than usual. It feels like it's not even Momoko at all," Mr. Ayatsuji says to us.

"Maybe she has a sore throat. That's why she sounds different," Yuuto says to him jokingly. "No, that's not it. I've been working together with Momoko since she was still a member of Machina Twist. And I know her personality well enough. She would never act like that even if she were under the pressure. Even if she couldn't take it, she would never blow up just like that," he says to us.

Once we're already outside of the live house, Mr. Ayatsuji apologizes to us on her behalf. Maybe Momoko Sugita does have a bad day. But he still thinks that she's not the person he used to know. His gut feeling is saying that she's not even the real Momoko Sugita. There must be some kind of other personality that has taken over her.

To be honest, we don't know much about her since none of us are interested in the idol stuff. Even if we don't know her much, we still find that her behavior is rather strange. Does the idol always act like this all the time? Maybe there IS something wrong with her. And I'm pretty sure that it's far more complicated than we thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

I'm the kind of person who takes everything with a pinch of salt, even if there are individuals who are being rude to me. Well, why should I even care about the strangers who are being rude to me? I'm pretty sure that I won't bump into them anymore. While I can brush things off just like that, it doesn't seem that way when it involves someone who is a public figure. What Momoko Sugita did to us the other day left a bitter taste in our mouth.

When I arrive at school, I bump into Shiori at the school entrance. She avoids me like a plug whenever our eyes meet. Even Yuuto finds it odd because Shiori had never behaved like this before. Have we done something that offended her? I'm pretty sure that I don't. I suspect that Yuuto must have done something to her, but he denies it.

I sigh because I have no idea what's going on with Shiori. The only thing I can do right now is to confront her. As I enter the class, Shiori still avoids looking at me. This will be difficult for me if things keep on going like this. This will leave me no choice but to confront her before the class starts. I'm okay with

confronting people during the covert mission. But I don't feel comfortable facing Shiori like this. It will only make her feel intimidated if I do it this way.

Shiori still avoids me even when I'm standing right in front of her desk. "What's going on with you? You've been avoiding me since we've arrived. Just tell me if I've done something that offended you," I say to her as I'm slamming my hands on her desk. The loud slam on her desk somehow attracts the whole class to stare at us. Seeing the whole class stares at us, Shiori blushes and leave the class.

Darn, I've made a terrible mistake. I don't mean to slam on her desk, though. I just did it because I was angry. I chase after Shiori right away after she leaves the class. Before she can go anywhere further, I grab her arm. She still doesn't even look at me even when I grab her arm tightly. "Touka, let me go! It hurts," she cries. "Not until you tell me what's going on with you," I say to her.

"I'm sorry," she cries, "I still feel guilty for what have happened last weekend. I couldn't believe it myself that the person that I always looked up to treated you and Yuuto badly. I feel so embarrassed about it that I don't even dare to look at you." This is what she's been bugging about? I thought that Yuuto and I must have done something to her. It turns out to be that it's none of those.

"So, that's it? I thought that it was something major," I say to her, sighing. Shiori nods. "I know that you won't have a hard feeling about that. But I do! I'm scared that you will say that she's a bad person only because of that. She was only having a bad day. That's all." I'm amazed that she's still defending Momoko Sugita even though she had treated us poorly. If Shiori has a boyfriend, she will protect him even though he has made a grave mistake.

"Okay, I know that she had a bad day. I never even thought that she was a bad person only because of that. I know that she's a nice person. Otherwise, you'll never look up to her all this time," I say to Shiori. To be honest, she was rude to us. But I don't feel like saying anything bad because I don't know anything about her. Maybe she did have a bad day. Still, I have to lie to Shiori so she doesn't have to worry too much about it.

Shiori smiles at me. She feels relieved that I don't think anything bad about Momoko Sugita. "I'm glad to hear that you don't think her as a bad person. I shouldn't have assumed that," Shiori says to me. After that, she heads back to class as if nothing happens between us. For some reason, I feel like Shiori must have been obsessed with Momoko Sugita. Despite her nasty attitude toward us, she still defended her. She looks more like she's in denial to me.

During the break, Shiori behaves like her usual, cheerful self. I'm glad that Momoko Sugita's issue is no longer bugging her. But now, I'm worried about her huge obsession with Momoko Sugita and her denial in certain issues. I hate listening to people talking non-stop about their obsession with female idols. But I have to give this time an exception. I need to find out more about Momoko Sugita. For me, her sudden change in her behavior is not normal to me.

I understand that young women like Momoko Sugita can be prone to a mood swing. But it doesn't even look like a mood swing at all to me. Even if she does, her voice and her behavior don't need to change to reflect that. Even Mr. Ayatsuji also said that it wasn't the usual Momoko he always knew. What's going on here?

"Shiori, can you tell me everything you know about Momoko Sugita?" I ask her during the break. Shiori looks excited when I'm asking her about Momoko Sugita. She knows that I'm not into this idol stuffs. So for her, that seems like good news. "Wow, what makes you have a keen interest in her? Whatever it is, I'm happy that you've started to like her. She's amazing, isn't she?" I should have guessed her response. Now I feel regret for asking her that.

"Yeah, her last performance was...splendid. I felt like I've become her fan ever since then," I say to Shiori. Damn, I have to lie to her just to confirm my hunch. I bet that she must be thinking that she's finally converting me into Momoko Sugita's fan. Thinking about it annoys the hell out of me. "Aww, there are so many things I can talk about her. Where should I begin?" Shiori asks me. She looks like she's on the cloud nine when she starts talking about her.

"I guess you can start off with talking about her personality, her likes and dislikes," I answer. Shiori's eyes sparkle when I give her suggestions on what she should be talking about. "Oh, that's easy!" She begins to talk about everything she

knows about Momoko Sugita. I've also recorded our conversation without her knowledge for future reference.

According to Shiori, she was nice to everyone, not just to her group members, but also to the staffs. While being nice to the staffs is important, she was also nice to the staffs that were also not related to her career. I guess that was why Mr. Ayatsuji claimed he knew what kind of person Momoko Sugita was. With such personality, I bet that the rest of the staffs were just brushing it off that she might have a bad day.

"Do you know anything about her before she became an idol? Maybe it's about her family or her upbringing?" I ask Shiori again. Shiori pauses for a while, trying to recall if she knows anything about Momoko Sugita's past. "Well, she did talk about her past in a magazine interview before. She only said that her parents had passed away, and she had been living with her relatives. Rather than sticking to one family, she was passed from one family to another," Shiori says.

Based on what Shiori tells me, I begin to see her strange behavior must have a lot to do with her upbringing. Maybe it does, it's just that I don't know how deep it's affecting her. Even if she had an awful upbringing, people around her are nice to her. It still doesn't make sense why she has to be rude to us, even though she knows that we're Shiori's friends. And we don't do anything rowdy like their fans.

"Touka, are you listening?" Shiori interrupts me. I don't realize that I'm in a deep thought until Shiori knocks my senses. "Sorry about that, I really am listening to you. It's just that...I'm trying to understand her personality more," I reply. I don't feel like telling her that her upbringing must be the reason why she was rude to us. Even if that's the reason, I'm pretty sure that Shiori will deny me flat on.

"That's alright. It must be hard for you to believe it, right?" Shiori says to me. I just smile awkwardly because it's nothing unusual about that. Something like that usually happens, even to people who are close to us. "That's why I've always looked up to her. After all, our past are similar. Just like her, I had to stay with my

relatives. That was until someone had reported about me being abused while living with them.”

I know it all along that Shiori is currently living in the orphanage. But this is the first time I hear about her being abused by her foster family. “I’m not sure whether she was abused or not. But I understand the feeling of not being wanted. We were put aside because we didn’t even belong to the family. We were more like the excess baggage to them. We were more like a burden to them instead of a gift from the universe.”

I’m not sure what to say to her at this moment. I’m surprised that she’s open to me about her past. I guess that she must have trusted me enough to be open about this. “But you know, I’m glad that my awful past shapes me to become a better person I am today,” Shiori says to me. She smiles when she looks at me. I just nod my head and smile at her. “You’re right. At the end of the day, something good will eventually come your way.”

She then looks away from me. Don’t tell me I’ve said something that upsets her again? “Am I saying something wrong?” I ask her. She shakes her head while smiling at me. “No, it’s just that, I feel guilty about this. I should have told you about this before my performance last weekend. But I keep putting it off. I don’t have the courage to say this to you.”

I wonder what she’s been wanted to tell me until up to the point where she needs the courage to spill it to me. She begins to tell me after she takes a deep breath. This must be such a big deal to her. “I’ll be transferring to another school starting this week,” she blurts out. It’s unexpected to hear this, but I should have expected this long time ago. This school isn’t flexible enough for an idol like her because there will be a time where she can’t attend a class.

I smile at her. “I won’t deny that I feel sad because I won’t be seeing you again. But you don’t have to worry about that. Besides, we can always see each other again whenever you’re free. So, don’t feel bad about it.” Shiori begins to cry when I say this to her. “Thank you, Touka. You’re always there for me all this time. That’s why I don’t have the guts to tell you about this. Even until now, you’re still thinking about me.”

After wiping her tears, she then takes a notebook from her bag and starts writing something. "This is my new home address. I've already moving out of the orphanage, so this is where I'm currently living." I look at the address. Her new house is in Yotsuya, which is still in Shinjuku area. It's not that far from where we live, so I think we can always come and visit her whenever she's around. I begin to add her address to my smartwatch so then I won't lose it.

I always assume that Shiori will attend the same school as I am until we graduate. But I do know that's going to be impossible because of the nature of her job. We don't have any idols in this school other than Shiori. So, there's no way the school is going to accommodate for someone like her. I also tell this news to Yuuto. Just like me, he doesn't expect it. But he knows that day where Shiori has to transfer to another school will eventually come.

As we reach home, we notice that Mr. Sakakibara is filling in for Hayato. "Where's Hayato?" I ask dad. Dad signals Mr. Sakakibara to go upstairs so then he can tell us what task that dad has assigned Hayato to do. We follow Mr. Sakakibara to upstairs. I'm pretty sure that Hayato is involved in a special task. I don't think it's necessary for him to bring us upstairs if Hayato is going out for an errand.

"We received information that there is someone who looks like Dr. Frederick Choo. So, we've sent Hayato to investigate if that person is really him." Both of us are surprised to find out that Dr. Frederick Choo is still alive. "I thought that he was already dead back then when Transhuman Development Project began?" Yuuto asks him with a puzzled look.

"Well, that's true based on our information. So, we just want to confirm if it's him or not. According to CIA, he might also involve in the murder of their ex-colleagues in UC Berkeley. It's because he disappeared at the same time as Satoru Yuuya. It's just that the CIA dropped his name because he was already dead." He goes down to help dad after he explains the whole situation to us.

"This guy isn't just an ordinary researcher. For someone like him who knows how to fake his death, this guy sure is something," Yuuto says to me. I agree with what he says. We admit that Satoru Yuuya isn't an ordinary researcher. But

we've never thought that Dr. Frederick Choo is the same. We don't know much about him other than him who is a specialist when it comes to physical enhancing drugs.

We help dad in the coffee shop as usual. After the customers are no longer around, we begin to close the coffee shop. As we're about to close, Ms. Shoko comes in. She must have something urgent to tell us if she's coming here now. I doubt that she's here for coffee. Well, it doesn't hurt for her to discuss something confidential while sipping a cup of coffee.

Dad serves her a cup of coffee as she takes her seat. "Oh, that cute waiter is not here. Do you send him for a top secret mission, Minoru?" She asks dad. Dad only chuckles when he hears how Ms. Shoko is calling Hayato a cutie. "Well, yup. He's tracking Dr. Frederick Choo. But it's not confirmed if it's him, though. Maybe it's someone who looks like him," dad replies.

"There's something I want you to do," she says to us after she takes a sip. She then transfers the file to dad. "Saburo Matsuda? What in the world you're thinking, Shoko?" Dad asks her as he begins to read the file. "Do you mean that Saburo Matsuda? The former minister for Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare?" Yuuto asks Ms. Shoko. She smiles while taking another sip.

"Yup, it's that guy," she replies. Dad sighs when he reads the report that Ms. Shoko has sent to him. "According to your report, he was the only minister who had a microchip implant. And it wasn't even confirmed yet. Why in the world you guys from Public Security Bureau reacted to a rumor like this? Not only that, but he was also rumored to have a relationship with the late Sayaka Minami. Why it sounds like something you read in a gossip magazine?"

Everyone bursts into laughter when dad says that. "Hey, I didn't write the report that way! It was you who misinterpret my report," Ms. Shoko scolds dad. Dad then transfers the file to the rest of us. Everyone becomes silent as we begin to read the report that Ms. Shoko has given us. I can't help but clench my fist when I read the report. It seems that the statement 'the truth hurts' is right after all. It's hard for me to finish reading the report when I'm filled with anger.

The person who told Ms. Shoko is one of her squad members who infiltrate the agency as Muse Agency staff. According to him, Saburo Matsuda already knew about Satoru Yuuya's background. He was willing to shield Satoru Yuuya from the government threat. That was as long as he would get the final version of the microchip implant that was free from the side effects. He wouldn't mind if there were a few test subjects who died along the process as long as the project was completed.

What surprises me the most is Saburo Matsuda's relationship with Shinya Fukuyama. We all know that he's the Muse Agency founder. And Saburo Matsuda happened to be one of the few high-ranking officials who are invited to his private party. This private party isn't an ordinary party, though. It's actually a sex party where the idols are forced to have sex with these guests. And these idols are popular and have a huge fan base.

The private party was held in Shinya Fukuyama's private mansion in Karuizawa. The party will be held a few times a year. And only those who have attended the previous private party will be notified for the next one. If they want to take part in the party, then they need a referral from those who have attended the party before. And it doesn't matter if they only attended the party just once. Saburo Matsuda has been attending the private party a few times already.

The idol industry is about preserving their virginity and their naive thought about men. But it doesn't seem that way for the idols in Muse Agency. If they refused to have sex with these guests, the agency will end their contract. The agency will also use their influence to create a bad reputation for the said idol. This will mean that none of the idol agencies will want to take them because of their tainted reputation.

As an idol, I doubt that they're willing to risk this for their future's sake. The report feels like what I usually read in Tako forum, but I don't find anything surprising about this. Shinya Fukuyama is one of the influential people in the idol industry. So, if he says that this said idol is a bad apple in his agency, the other idol agencies will follow suit. It can be tough to survive in the showbiz if you're a woman with a tainted reputation.

Now, it's true that Shinya Fukuyama is using his idol agency for sex trafficking conduct. What's even worst, none of the newbies know about this. Only idols who have gotten their major debut know about this. None of them lodge a police report. It's because they don't want people to know about the shameful things they have to go through. This is the last thing they want to do if they want to protect their own reputation.

Dad sighs after he has finished reading the report. "I don't think that you're here just to hand us this report. I'm pretty sure that you're here with a request," dad says to her. Ms. Shoko takes another sip before she starts talking. "You're sharp as usual, Minoru. It's no wonder that you're the head of the special activities division. You seem to know what I have in mind."

Dad looks annoyed when Ms. Shoko is saying something like that to him. It looks more like Ms. Shoko is making fun of him instead of complimenting him. "You're right. I do have a request," she replies. Everyone listens to her attentively as she begins to tell us about her request. "Saburo Matsuda wants to meet the idol from Muse Agency in Le Gardenia Hotel tonight. This is what my squad member told me."

Mr. Sakakibara only chuckles when he hears that. "Wow, I'm pretty sure that he wants to get hot and steamy with that idol. He must have paid a lot to Shinya Fukuyama to quench his desire for sex with a popular idol." Ms. Shoko nods, agreeing with what Mr. Sakakibara is saying. "You're right. What he's doing right now is no different than hiring a prostitute. On top of that, no one knows about his meeting with a Muse Agency idol."

"Who is he going to see tonight?" I ask her. Ms. Shoko pauses for a while. I do hope that she's not telling me that Saburo Matsuda wants to see Shiori tonight. Shiori is an idol who has just gotten her major debut recently. I know that the chances for Saburo Matsuda to choose her are slim. But I still hope that she's not the one who Saburo Matsuda wants. "It's Momoko Sugita," Ms. Shoko replies.

Both Yuuto and I become surprised when we find out that Saburo Matsuda wants to see her tonight. "So, you want us to save her? Why do you want to go all the way just to save her?" Yuuto asks her. "It's simple. Public Security Bureau has

been keeping an eye on Shinya Fukuyama for so long. Since they have no proof to convict him, saving Momoko Sugita allows them to have a proof for arresting him. As for us, we can interrogate Saburo Matsuda. Maybe he knows about Satoru Yuuya's current whereabouts," dad answers.

Ms. Shoko looks at us. "In other words, we both benefit in this mission. You guys get to arrest Saburo Matsuda and ask him about Satoru Yuuya. As for us, we can use Momoko Sugita to prove Shinya Fukuyama's crime. Isn't that great?" She says to us with enthusiasm. We only smile sheepishly at her. Somehow, we feel like she's using us instead. She can always order her squad to save Momoko Sugita and arrest Saburo Matsuda for us. But she doesn't.

We begin our meeting for the next mission once Ms. Shoko leaves. "In this mission, I'll be assigning you guys to save Momoko Sugita and capture Saburo Matsuda. I know that it won't be good for us to interrogate someone like him. But be sure to do this without letting anyone knows about our involvement," dad says to us.

"Will he be a huge threat to us since he also possesses a microchip implant?" I ask dad. Dad laughs when I ask him that. "Do you think the microchip implant will help someone like him? If he desires to have such things, then he should turn himself into a cyborg." Everyone laughs when he tells us that. "Don't worry about it. I doubt that he'll be a threat to us," dad convinces us.

After the meeting is over, Yuuto and I are getting ready for our mission. Saburo Matsuda will meet Momoko Sugita in his suite by 9. So, we have plenty of time to get ready. Once our preparation is complete, we begin to head to Le Gardenia Hotel. Yuuto and I are heading to the hotel on a separate way. Even though it's a simple plan, I can't brush the feeling something bad is bound to happen.

As I reach the hotel compound, I take a deep breath, trying to calm myself down. This isn't the first time I'm getting involved in a mission like this. But my heart is beating so fast, and my instinct keeps on telling me that something bad is about to happen to me. I hate it when the feeling is so strong that I can't shake it off no matter how hard I try.

Both Yuuto and I arrive at the designated area at 8.55 p.m. There's still 5 minutes left before we can begin our operation. As I'm waiting for the signal to get started, Yuuto starts to talk to me through my earpiece. "Sis, this is bad," he says to me. Yuuto seems alarmed when he tells me that. "What's wrong?" I ask him. "Saburo Matsuda's bodyguards are there, and they're a few meters away from his suite. But they're all dead."

What? How can that be possible? "Did you see anyone nearby?" I ask him again. "I don't see anyone. I can't even spot Momoko Sugita either. Are we that late to arrive here?" No, I don't think we're late. If Yuuto can't see Momoko Sugita anywhere, then there are only two possibilities. It's either Momoko Sugita is late, or she's already inside. "Yuuto, I'm heading straight to the suite. So, please back me up. Even if the bodyguards are already dead, maybe someone else will come after me," I say to him.

After I cut off my communication with Yuuto, I make a quick dash to the suite. "Touka, I've already turned off the security camera on every floor. But somehow, the security camera on the top floor has been turned off before I even intercept. I'm currently accessing the footage in the security camera. Whatever it is, be careful," Ms. Chiyo says to me.

My instinct becomes even stronger as I'm getting near to the top floor. What in the world is going on here? Don't tell me that someone is here to assassinate Saburo Matsuda instead? Once I reach the top floor, I don't see any of his bodyguards who are still alive. The scene looks and feels like I'm in a warzone, with dead bodies are all over the place. These people are brutally murdered. It seems like a serial killer who did this.

The smell of the blood is so strong, which means that they were killed a while ago. As I'm reaching Saburo Matsuda's suite, I smell something pungent. Wait, this is the smell of the blood. Don't tell me that Saburo Matsuda has been murdered as well. Without wasting time, I barge into the room. That's when I see Momoko Sugita, with her holding a knife which is tainted with blood in her hand. It's hard to believe that she's cutting Saburo Matsuda's neck.

“We meet again, girl,” she says to me as our eyes meet. I grit my teeth as I look at her. Is she really Momoko Sugita? I don’t know if I should feel amazed or not. But she doesn’t even look terrified at all when she’s cutting Saburo Matsuda’s neck. She looks more like she has been doing this for a long time. For some reason, I feel like she’s not the Momoko Sugita that we know. The Momoko Sugita that we know won’t do something like this.

“I can tell from your reaction. You find it hard to believe that the popular idol, Momoko Sugita is a murderer here. Well, fret not. The real Momoko Sugita will never do such thing. She can’t even kill a fly, let alone kill a human being,” she says to me. She’s sharp for an idol. She seems to know what I’m thinking. My eyes widen when I realize that it’s the same voice who was scolding us when we were in the backstage. What’s going on here?

“If you’re not Momoko Sugita, then who are you? How come you look like Momoko Sugita?” I ask her. I’m glad that I still sound calm even though I’m trembling in fear right now. She smirks at me when I ask her that. Is she already expecting me to ask her this? “I guess that it doesn’t hurt for me to let you know who I am. In fact, Master Yuuya doesn’t tell me anything not to reveal my identity to anyone,” she replies.

Master Yuuya? Don’t tell me she comes here under Satoru Yuuya’s order? She throws away Saburo Matsuda’s body to the floor when she begins to introduce herself. “My name is Mika. Momoko Sugita and I are the same people. It’s just that Mika is her alter ego. The real Momoko Sugita doesn’t even know that she has committed murder here. And she’s not even aware of my existence. I will only resurface when Master Yuuya wants me to assassinate someone.”

So, she really is here under Satoru Yuuya’s order. “What’s your relationship with Satoru Yuuya? And why do you have to kill someone like Saburo Matsuda? You don’t have any reason to kill him anyway. Does it have anything to do with him having a microchip implant?” I ask her again.

She smiles at me, as if she finds my questions rather amusing. “You seem to know a lot, little girl,” she says to me, “It’s true. Satoru Yuuya is the one who orders me to assassinate Saburo Matsuda. He hates greedy people like him, so my

master thinks that someone like him deserves to die. So, I'm here to execute his order. That's what I'm here for."

The atmosphere around me becomes intense. She maybe an idol, but I can sense that her killing intent is so strong that I'll be dead meat if I'm not prepared. It looks like I have to face her even though I don't want to. At a first glance, I know that she's not an ordinary person. I don't think an average person can kill Saburo Matsuda's bodyguards without getting injured. I don't see any injuries at all. It means that she kills them with just a single strike.

Before I can do anything, she launches a quick attack on me. Unlike my previous fight, Mika is on the different level. As soon as she lands a hit on me, I can feel that my rib cage is about to explode. It is so painful until up to the point that I barely stand up. Not only that, I end up coughing blood because of the internal bleeding. Her strength is the same as Hayato. I doubt that I can win against her even if I use my full strength.

"I'll let you into another secret," she says to me, "I did tell you that Momoko Sugita doesn't realize about my existence, didn't I? Well, it's possible now because of the microchip implant inside her body. This is the thing that makes it easier for me to resurface when I need to. And yes, my extraordinary strength is also because of the microchip as well. The microchip implant makes it easier for Master Yuuya to manipulate her in any way he wants."

So, this is another level for the microchip implant? This kind of mind control device is a lot different than the one Dr. Hayama has. "Do the other idols have microchip implant too?" I ask her. She doesn't look hesitate at all to answer my questions. Does Satoru Yuuya give her this much freedom? "Well, they do. Even the new talent has one. But the microchip implant is exclusive to the Muse Agency idols, though. Among us, I'm the only one who has the ability to become an assassin."

I'm glad to know that the other idols won't turn into an assassin. But it's still not good news that all idols have a microchip implant within them. "Why does Shinya Fukuyama have to play alongside Satoru Yuuya? I thought that he has everything he needs?" I ask her again. She shakes her head when I ask her that.

“Little girl, you know nothing about the man’s desire. All he ever wants is to have sex with each of us with no strings attached.”

It’s hard to believe that an old man like Shinya Fukuyama is willing to sacrifice his own idols for his own desire. This is sickening, but I have to stop him no matter what. Otherwise, Shiori will be his next victim. Mika then launches her counterattack after the conversation is over. With me who barely stands up, I can’t dodge her attack quickly enough. She already hits my vital point, so it won’t be easy for me to evade her attack this time. This is the end of me.

Because of her counterattack, I’m too weak to fight her back and just lands on the floor. I can always grab my gun and shoot her. But I’m way too weak to do such thing. She smirks at me when she sees me lying on the floor, unable to fight back. “You know, I wish I can kill you right now because you already know a lot about me. But my master won’t allow me to do that. He says that he has something waiting for you. I don’t know what it is, but you should look forward to it.”

She leaves me just like that, knowing that I barely survive. I’m lucky that she decides not to kill me because Satoru Yuuya doesn’t allow her to do that. But I’m not sure if I’ll be able to win the fight against her. I doubt that I’ll be lucky the next time I see her again.

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