

481 KIRIHARA'S PAST GLORY

Exhausted, Sakurai could finally end her lessons at night. She had been swinging her sword for the entire day. Her public image was one of amiability and generosity, which won her great respect.

Now, despite her grudges against Lu Shu, she could not vent her negativity on others...

Actually, she had expected a break after her morning sessions. But, to her astonishment, Kirihara Yousuke was nowhere to be found!

"From Sakurai Yaeko's distress, +199!"

Was it a scheme to distract her so that he could carry out some secret activities?

A childish move indeed, but she could not do anything about it. Since she had promised to give it all she had, there was no way she would regret it now!

There were few minds of great wisdom in the world, and Sakurai was ashamed of her falling for such a simple trick.

Thus, Sakurai messaged her teacher once she got the chance, reporting on Kirihara Yousuke's disappearance. She hoped her mistake could be compensated by locating Kirihara with her teacher's help.

In the worst case scenario, Kirihara Yousuke would have to be wiped out should he be found to be in contact with the Jingoists.

Although it would be tough to kill him in broad daylight, there was poison.

As a matter of fact, driven by results, many Japanese Practitioners had resorted to such hideous means. They used poison together with practices such as ambushes or assassination.

Admittedly, Practitioners were blessed with a high resistance against poison. But they would become an easy target once their powers were weakened!

Truly, it would be almost impossible to locate Lu Shu in a big city like Nishinokyo with only the limited manpower of the Conservatives, but a group of commoners served them too.

That was very normal and standard practice for most big organizations, just like how Taniguchi Bunndai worked for the Heavenly Network.

This was because some duties were better off not done personally by Practitioners. The Heavenly Network was at the extreme end, though, and even jobs such as plumbers and toilet cleaners in the Lingjing Lane basement were filled by their own people. They had done it in the army anyway, so it was not something to be fussy about.

What was the matter with cleaning up the place, if that was the task assigned?

On the contrary, all Practitioners, regardless of their level, in the Phoenix Society led an aristocratic life. They hired commoners to take care of their needs. The Phoenix Society hoped to develop a sense of honor and pride in Metahumans through this.

Therefore, a new service industry had emerged among the commoners. Some had an eye on its lucrateness, while others wished to be recognized and practice cultivation

with the pros. After all, legends said that many big organizations were interested in improving the efficiency of power awakening.

Matsuura's brains throbbed in pain at the order to monitor Lu Shu. But he had to obey. "Okay. I'm going right away."

"Don't lose him again."

"... Understood."

"From Matsuura Haraichiro's distress, +399!"

When Matsuura arrived at the place following the clues given, he saw Lu Shu peeking furtively into a building by its door. Matsuura was happy. Caught ya!

Could it really be a secret meeting with the Jingoists? Complicated feelings bubbled up in Matsuura's heart. After all, Kirihara was one of the people most wanted by the Conservatives, for his family had a great influence in the circle due to their mysterious inherited trade.

But if he had betrayed the Conservatives, they had to kill him before any agreement was made between him and the Jingoists.

Nonetheless, it would be a great loss for the Conservatives.

Hiding in Lu Shu's blind spot, Matsuura observed him closely.

Suddenly, someone exited from the building and Matsuura saw with his own eyes that Kirihara Yousuke stepped forward with a stack of unknown materials in his hands.

Matsuura's heart began pounding hard. Here he goes!

However, in the next instant, he realized from the building walked out a group of students who had just finished their weekend tuition classes. And Lu Shu distributed to each of them a piece of white paper with prints "Beika Dojo. Sakurai Yaeko's swordplay. We welcome you to join us for swordplay classes conducted by Sakurai Yaeko herself. Extraordinary sword skills!"

"From Matsuura Haraichiro's distress, +666!"

Can you please stop being such a joker? You've come so far just to give out leaflets to tuition students?

Then, Lu Shu asked those students a few questions before rushing to the next location with his leaflets. It was hard for him to find tuition classes by himself, but those students had a much better knowledge of that.

Matsuura Haraichiro was dumbstruck. Apparently Lu Shu was planning to cover all the tuition classes in Nishinokyo!

As a result, a second wave of students crowded into the dojo right after Sakurai finished her morning shift...

Advertisements always worked, Lu Shu knew it.

On the other side, Sakurai was close to desperate upon seeing even more students. What's going on? Then, she received a call from Matsuura. "Sakurai, Kirihara distributed leaflets to seventeen tuition classes and students are still rushing to the dojo right now..."

"From Sakurai Yaeko's distress, +999!"

Matsuura also could not explain Kirihara's peculiar behaviors...

Why, as the owner of the dojo, are you out publicizing on your own?

People have great expectations of you, be it to restore the Kirihara's influence and your family's past glory or to stay closely connected with the Jingoists and the Conservatives. Otherwise, you could also contact those hidden clans who used to be on your side!

482 A MURDEROUS NIGH

The Heavenly Network sent Lu Shu to cause trouble.

And the Conservatives believed that he would, judging from his drastic change of temperament.

However, he seemed to be going in the wrong direction.

At night, as Lu Shu was counting money in the backyard, Bunndai opened her mouth as if to speak, but hesitated. Lu Shu smiled. "Just say whatever you want to. It's fine."

"You are very focused when you make money... I'm going to prepare your meal." Then Bunndai left. She was confused about her mission now. What happened to being an ace's assistant in wreaking political havoc? Now they were starting a business!

Sakurai dragged her tired body over and said, "Sensei, I shall go back first if there's nothing more for me to do."

She was really exhausted today and in no mood to seduce Lu Shu any more. Even for a Practitioner, high-intensity teaching would be energy draining, or rather, emotionally draining. Now, all she wanted was a good sleep.

Smiling cheerfully, Lu Shu counted a few hundred thousand Japanese Yen and passed it to Sakurai. "This is yours."

Sakurai froze for a second. "Sensei, there is no need for this. Really."

She had access to a large fortune in the Conservatives and a measly few hundred thousand was only enough for several meals.

But Lu Shu insisted and stuffed the money in her hand. "Take it. You earned it. Yes? Are you happy about making money for yourself?"

Puzzled, Sakurai shot another look at Lu Shu, wondering about the hidden meaning behind his words. Lu Shu smiled and said, "Now you may go. Have a good rest."

At home, Sakurai lay on her pink bed. Although she still had to kneel on the floor beside her teacher, she preferred places such as beds, sofas or chairs that felt more comfortable and convenient.

Having not changed her clothes, Sakurai stared absently at the money in her hand. Speaking of which, it was her first legitimate income.

Despite a faint feeling of oddness, her conscience was more at ease.

Then, Sakurai stood up and stuffed the money into a hidden chamber in the ceiling. She could not explain the urge to do so, as if there were certain meanings attached to

it. Logically, she was rich enough to ignore that pathetic amount.

As the night grew thicker, a black shadow swooshed out of the backyard of Beika dojo. In full control of his muscles, Lu Shu walked on the rooftop without making a sound.

Ten minutes later, Lu Shu paused to check his direction, and moved on again.

Till another half an hour later, he had finally stopped behind the neon lights on the rooftop of a bar. The lights provided the perfect disguise for him.

Lu Shu started to wait with his good patience, just like how he waited for the skeleton cavalry at the Beimang remains.

Lu Shu let out a sigh of relief. Target confirmed. One of them was Nogiwa Takenobu's son, Nogiwa Hakushun, another key member of the Jingoists.

Honestly Lu Shu did not expect his appearance that night, though he knew the man frequented the place.

Earlier in the afternoon, he investigated the area while giving out leaflets. Lu Shu was cautious. He would not take chances without enough familiarity with this big city.

As a matter of fact, the Collection of God's warrant for his arrest was issued by Nogiwa Hakushun, according to the information given by You Mingyu.

Lu Shu knew something that Bunndai did not, including Nogiwa Hakushun's habits. After all, Bunndai did not know every Heavenly Network member hiding in the city or even inside the Collection of Gods.

There was no way for the Collection of Gods to send spies into the Heavenly Network but not the other way round. During their age-long enmity, neither side would show any mercy towards the other.

In Japan, pubs were a far cry from izakayas, which were simply another form of eatery. Usually, student part-timers were only allowed to work at izakayas, but not pubs.

Undeniably, though, not all pubs were that messed up.

Lu Shu decided not to follow his target into the pub, as many pubs in Nishinokyo, although open to the public, had many rules and often required bookings. This one, for instance, was almost a VIP club.

Unspoken rules abounded in such places. Waiters might have already started observing you from the moment they passed you the first piece of towel. From your actions and expressions they could tell whether you were a first-timer, or a customer of a specific type.

Some items in the pubs should not be touched either. For instance, higher-class wines cannot be purchased in bottles. Thus, Lu Shu was not confident about his pretense as a native Japanese in this situation.

Culture differed from country to country. Take for example phones in Japan were supposed to be in silent mode in public, but the sound had to be turned on for photo-taking. One could call the police if he or she had been photographed without permission.

And Lu Shu could not be sure that he had complete knowledge of all the details of the local culture. In any case, those places were different from schools. In fact, he would not have been able to accustomed to the school environment so easily decades ago.

Thus, the best solution now was to continue stalking after the target was out. He should not risk exposing his own identity inside.

Lu Shu waited patiently until 3am, when Nogiwa finally boarded the car and left.

Not concerned about Nogiwa's companions' whereabouts, Lu Shu changed his face into another Jingoist Practitioner's who shared a similar body shape as him. Then, he went on in pursuit of the car. A car could never outrun a Practitioner.

Without unnecessary turns, the car drove straight towards its destination, showing the full sense of security Nogiwa had in Nishinokyo. He did not seem to think that anyone would dare to be in his way in Japan, not even the Conservatives.

Ten minutes later, the car picked up a young lady, and finally it came to a stop in front of a villa.

In the darkness, Lu Shu stood still on the rooftop of the villa. He watched in silence as Nogiwa walked into the villa with the woman in his arms. Another half an hour later, all the lights went off in the house.

The windows were connected to the alarm system as fine metal wires were embedded in the glass. Any attempt to break the glass would trigger the alarm.

He waited for twenty more minutes. In the end, he released a thin layer of divine water to corrode the rooftop.

Everyone was fast asleep, and no one even noticed the existence of the man-sized hole in the rooftop!

The faint golden glow was visible, but there were no eyes to see it. This was why Lu Shu had chosen to take action at 4am.

Lu Shu was not a man of generosity. He who wanted his life would pay with his own life.

483 PRECISE MACHINERY

Impermeable silence shrouded the world before sunrise. Quietly Lu Shu lowered himself into the room underneath. His desire to kill Nogiwa Hakushun had been there since the post on Darkness Kingdom, and it took him great patience for this day to come.

According to the information available, Nogiwa was a Class C Practitioner, which increased Lu Shu's confidence in taking him down. But he needed to be careful because the last thing Lu Shu wanted was for Nogiwa to escape and leak any unfavorable information about himself.

Lu Shu had no interest in earning Nogiwa's distress points, as he would soon be able to receive those from the Collection of Gods as compensation. All he had to do was deal a fatal blow to Nogiwa.

However, the silence was torn apart by a piercing swoosh just when Lu Shu was about to jump into the room. He had sensed the approach of a sharp blade!

Holding onto the edge of the hole, Lu Shu immediately changed his direction and evaded the attack!

The room was lit up at once. It was Nogiwa Hakushun's voice, with a tinge of surprise. "It's you?! Kitamura Hirono!"

That was the face Lu Shu was wearing at the moment. Without a word, he sprang towards Nogiwa. Underneath him the wooden floor instantly collapsed into pieces!

In the not so spacious room, two shadows moved around at tremendous speed. Nogiwa Hakushun had always been on guard against his opponent's sword, which was the fastest among the Class C's!

Surprisingly, though, in the next instant two flying daggers shot out from Kitamura's hands. Despite Nogiwa's quick defense, he was unable to resist the attack from two flying daggers at the same time!

Before he could utter a sound, Concealed Arrow had punctured his neck, reducing his voice to an indistinct groan.

Lu Shu was ready to leave after robbing Nogiwa's longsword. He had no intention to kill that young lady, from whom Lu Shu detected no energy waves and deduced that she was only a commoner.

Moreover, Nogiwa had mentioned the name Kitamura Hirono. Would it cause confusion in the Collection of Gods if the woman heard that name?

Yet, he was also cautious about underestimating his rivals. How could Nogiwa Hakushun have anticipated his move, which was supposedly too stealthy to be noticed? What went wrong? Thinking back, Lu Shu recalled a pause in Nogiwa's motion right before he entered the villa earlier.

Was it because of his reflection on the body of the car? Seriously?

Even so, Nogiwa had decided to be on the alert silently instead of startling the intruder!

He might have been dead if not for his extraordinary powers that were way beyond Nogiwa's.

Indisputably, Lu Shu in his current state could defeat any Class C's effortlessly in a one-to-one combat.

Fifteen minutes after Lu Shu had left, more than twenty black cars roared towards the villa.

Everyone was clear on his or her own task. The entire group operated like a piece of machinery with all cogs fitting together perfectly.

The door of the villa was wide open, into which the Collection of Gods members were guided in by a pale-looking young lady. Shivering in nervousness, she was making an explanation.

Next to the middle-aged man stood a young man respectfully. The former asked the latter calmly, "What do you think, Kitamura?"

"Can't be sure as of now."

"Okay. Go take a look inside."

They ascended to the second floor from the staircase, only to see Nogiwa Hakushun

lying in a pool of blood. The entire room had been blocked off and staff in white clothes, goggles and masks were gathering every useful clue.

As if calculating something, Kitamura Hirono paced a few steps and then, suddenly, he threw a punch into the white wall, extracting a small black box to be passed to the middle-aged man.

The man connected the box to a phone in his pocket with a cable. Then, Nogiwa Hakushun's confused voice in his last minutes was heard by everyone in the room. "It's you?! Kitamura Hirono!"

The line seemed to be the greatest clue, casting aside the fighting sounds that ensued after. However, it had already been mentioned by the woman just now.

The middle-aged man was expressionless. "An outsider's doings."

Kitamura seemed totally unconcerned, though he was the only suspect pinpointed at the moment. He analyzed the situation with composure. "If it was one of us, he would have known that every room is installed with this equipment and he would have destroyed it altogether. Besides, not a clever trick to purposely leave behind clues."

Indeed, if it were really Kitamura, he could have killed the woman and taken the box with him. Then, he would be free from suspicion even if others found out that it was done by their own people because the pool of suspects would be too big.

The middle-aged man looked up at the hole, whose edges were smooth like a mirror. However, he did not associate it with the divine water. Rather, he was misled into another direction, the earth type.

In Pattaya, an earth-type Metahuman once helped Li Yixiao in killing the materialization-type expert Johnson. And the unknown person's level was suspected to be Class B.

This gave the middle-aged man an ill hunch. To them, expansion was a necessary cause but the current Heavenly Network was too powerful an opponent to be messed with. They were no longer the sleeping lions as they were decades ago. Now, even the Collection of Gods felt helpless sometimes.

But there was no turning back. The Collection of Gods would be suffocated by the shortage of resources if they did not venture out. Many elites chose to support the Jingoists because they knew there were no better alternatives.

Of course, there were a number of extremists agitating for a radical idea like "let Japan merge with China and become an autonomous province". They believed it was the shortcut to economic growth in the context of increasing volcanic and tectonic activities.

Clearly, though, the Collection of Gods did not agree.

484 SAKURAI YAEKO'S SWORDPLAY TEACHER

Once Lu Shu entered the dojo, he saw Bunndai waiting in the yard. Earlier, he had ordered her to retreat immediately if he had not returned by sunrise.

Bunndai made a deep bow to Lu Shu. "Welcome back. Did everything go well?"

"Yes. I killed Nogiwa Hakushun. But I'm not sure whether it can be planted on Kitamura Hirono. However, we should be safe." In any case, Kirihara Yousuke's enemies should be the Jingoists and there was nothing to do with Nogiwa Hakushun.

Lu Shu received 1000 distress points in Nogiwa's dying moments and a great deal from the Collection of Gods superiors following his death.

Checking the names of the entries, he was relieved to know that the name list was almost identical to the one registered after the end of the Beimang remains.

Mystery solved. In other words, those names belonged to the Collection of God superiors and last time it was related to the relic and their missing Class C spy.

Now, the illumination of the third layer of his celestial map was almost complete. Lu Shu's mind was at total peace.

He did not like to owe anybody anything. Thus, when the breakfast vendor Uncle Lee and others were kind to Lu Shu, he often allowed them to try some of his stinky tofu for free when he sold it. Certainly a piece of stinky tofu would not mean much to them, but Lu Shu would feel uneasy had he not done so.

The more coldness one has experienced in the world, the more he will cherish the warmth around him now.

Thus, Lu Shu did not take the Heavenly Network's care and kindness for granted either.

As the saying goes, "sow nothing, reap nothing". Be it at the Beimang remains or the Salt Lake remains, he had not spared a single spy's life. Of course, it was his duty too. He did it out of responsibility and also as an act of reciprocation.

Lu Shu had never forgotten the importance of re-paying other people's goodwill, even though he had experienced the full taste of darkness, indifference and heartlessness of

the world.

This time, he had accepted the mission, knowing all too well that he was the most suitable candidate for Kirihara Yousuke's replacement.

Nie Ting gave him the divine water for free. And the Heavenly Network had decided to give him deep sea white sand as well despite their ignorance of Lu Xiaoyu's control of an earth-type Metahuman's spirit. It was all because of the same reason, that Nie Ting saw Lu Shu as deserving of it.

On the other hand, they could have confiscated both thinking that they would not be useful for Lu Shu.

Hence, Lu Shu was determined to make some contribution this time. Although he was upset about the inheritance scam and he had overthrown his supposed persona, he did not think it was a big issue at all...

But it would have been just wonderful if the Heavenly Network had fulfilled its promise on the inheritance...

Easy-peasy. Most of the remaining Collection of Gods forces were Jingoists, who well deserved to die...

Following this vein, he might have to rely on the Collection of Gods for his future promotion.

The thought dragged him out of his bed and into the yard for sword practice, until the full dawn of the day.

At the moment, the news on Nogiwa Hakushun's death spread out, and Conservative members like Sakurai Yaeko and Oda Tokuma were the first group of outsiders to learn about it.

No one had any clues on the murderer's identity. According to the insider information of the Collection of Gods, the Heavenly Network was the only suspect and no attempts were made to create an illusion of an internal conflict.

Oda's face was expressionless upon hearing the news. He agreed on the involvement of the Heavenly Network. Yet... Where were they? Why was there no trace at all?!

In fact, Oda did hope for the interference of an external force to disrupt the Jingoists' complete dominance. But it certainly had better not be the Heavenly Network, a non-native force.

In the meantime, Nie Ting was reading the update in the Liuhai Lane. His fingers tapped rapidly on the stone table, and his face remained expressionless throughout. Shi Xuejin shot him a curious look and asked, "Why so happy?"

Nie Ting showed him the news, and the latter was stunned at once. "So fast? It's only been a few days. This kid, is certainly not very forgiving... You need to watch out."

"No worries. I'm waiting for his safe return so that he can seek revenge from me," replied Nie Ting lightheartedly.

The key thing was, the information in their hands was not from Taniguchi Bunndai, who had yet to file any report. But when Nie Ting and Shi Xuejin learned about Nogiwa Hakushun's death, they instantly arrived at the conclusion that it was definitely Lu Shu's doings.

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In the morning, Lu Shu walked to school as usual. The streets were clean as always and nothing seemed to have changed since Nogiwa Hakushun's death. Kirihara Yousuke was free from any suspicion too.

But once he entered the campus of Beika High School, he sensed strange stares all around.

Indeed, he was a different person from the Kirihara Yousuke in the past, and in this case it was only shown in their attire style. The old Kirihara used to be properly dressed and would even button up the top button of his uniform shirt. But Lu Shu did not button it.

Lu Shu decided not to waste too much time on trivialities like this. Suddenly he pulled a boy up with his collar and asked, "Why are you staring?"

"From Suto Keiji's distress, +199..."

Caught off guard, Suto replied nervously, "People are saying that you are Sakurai Yaeko's swordplay teacher..."

"Oh..." Lu Shu nodded. So that was the aftereffect of making so much money. Never mind the trouble, so long as he had enough money to make!

Lu Shu let Suto go. Those students around were dumbfounded. Based on his strength, there was no doubt that he was a well trained swordsman. But why had he remained silent in the past despite being a victim of bullies?

However, what was happening now seemed completely justifiable given his parents' sudden death and the title as "Sakurai Yaeko's swordplay teacher".

When Lu Shu walked into his classroom, the seven students who were beaten up by him instantly went quiet.

As he walked past Noguchi Yuki, the latter lowered his head diffidently. Lu Shu knocked on his table and demanded, "Did you tell your family to put less salt?"

"From Noguchi Yuki's distress, +555..."

485 A RACE BETWEEN THE EXPERTS

Actually, school bullying was a very serious matter in Japan and had received vast media coverage. In recent years, repeated cases had been reported on victims of bullying throwing themselves in front of trains in an attempt to end their lives of humiliation.

Undoubtedly, though, this could partially be attributed to their students' fragile mental resilience. Many Chinese students studying in Japan had realized that the education system there was not as good as expected, as it failed to groom their students into psychologically strong individuals.

Yet, one must acknowledge that mentally weak people exist in all societies.

And just like other countries, Japan has both the beautiful side and the ugly. Some girls even preferred gangster-looking boys because they were deemed to be more "manly".

Thinking that Kirihara Yousuke's bento used to be robbed everyday, Lu Shu loathed that people of Noguchi Yuki's kind did not even suffer from any guilty conscience.

At this moment, a girl with a sense of righteousness suddenly stood up and confronted Lu Shu. "Kiriharakun, you must hate how others used to bully you. But please, tell me the difference between the current version of you and sorts like Noguchi Yuki. Can you answer me?"

The difference? Lu Shu gave it a serious thought and answered, "The difference is I'm stronger than them."

"From Noguchi Yuki's distress, +666!"

"From..."

Ouch! What a painful truth!

Lu Shu was amused too. Why didn't you stand up earlier when Kirihara Yousuke was bullied in the past? Why? Do you think it's easier to bargain with me?

Then, he slowly paced over to a window seat in the last row. Lu Shu looked at one of the seven boys and asked, "Can we change seats?"

Quietly the boy carried his bag and went to Lu Shu's original seat. No one dared to raise any objection and they could only stare as the familiar yet alien Kirihara Yousuke transformed into a newborn bully.

But that by no means meant that Lu Shu was everyone's enemy, because other victims of bullying felt that their justice had been rightfully upheld.

At the moment, Lu Shu was surrounded by many layers of aura, the most prominent

of which was his role as Sakurai Yaeko's swordplay teacher.

All of a sudden, he had become an existence close to a high school celebrity.

During morning recess, some girls came over to Lu Shu's seat, hoping to clarify the myth whether he was really Sakurai Yaeko's teacher. Even a few girls from other classes came to their class and asked to be introduced to whoever Kirihara Yousuke was. Not everybody knew how he looked like anyway.

Nevertheless, Kirihara had been sleeping all along, as if determined not to listen to any lessons.

Finally Lu Shu woke up before the start of the last lesson. A girl appeared outside their classroom door, surrounded by quite a few girls chuckling beside. Then, Lu Shu heard someone in his class murmuring, "Isn't that the girl Kirihara confessed to in Grade 10?"

Lu Shu was shocked. I didn't know there's such a thing! Come on, it's Grade 12 now!

Back then, it was quite a hit in the school, because the girl had actually posted Kirihara's confession letter on the school notice board. The incident also contributed to Kirihara's low self-esteem.

"Kirihara, someone's waiting for you outside," a classmate called him.

Chiba gave Lu Shu a concerned look. Having been his classmate for so many years, she knew full well just how hurt Kirihara was by that episode.

Even in Grade 12 some people still jeered at him for that.

Frowning, Lu Shu walked out, wondering what the girl was doing here. He asked her, "Yes?"

The girl smiled and said, "I was wrong back in Grade 10, because I did not know you well enough. Recently my friends have been telling me that you are a good person, so I'm hoping to get to know you again. Now, I want to give you one more chance to introduce yourself. What's so good about you?"

Lu Shu drew a startled breath. Wasn't it the usual question he liked to ask others? How should he answer his own question?! She must be an expert to anticipate her enemy this way!

The key strategy to defeat a strong opponent was to make a quick and fatal move. Lu Shu pondered for a few seconds and replied, "I'm good without you."

"From Shirakawa Yuna's distress, +666!"

He won!

Lu Shu let out a sigh of relief, yet looking serious. "My apologies."

"From Shirakawa Yuna's distress, +666!"

Under people's astounded stares, Lu Shu returned to his seat. Supporting his chin on his hands, Lu Shu gazed outside the window. His high school life had never been so carefree. In those days, he was desperate to finish his studies in school so that he could have more time with Lu Xiaoyu or to help with her work. How could he have the time to admire the school scenery outside?

It felt as if it was a compensation for his lost youth. No one knew he was from the Heavenly Network, and no one knew he had just ended a man's life the night before. Nonetheless, what a view, seeing so many girls in white T-shirt and shorts on the field attending PE lessons...

The girl called Shirakawa Yuna was still in shock outside their classroom. In the past few years, any mentions about Kirihara Yousuke often came together with her name, and her wise decision in rejecting him. It seemed that people were still living in the old days of Kirihara's feelings for her, and her sense of superiority.

Maybe the real Kirihara would be happy to see this day coming. But, unfortunately, Lu Shu was not Kirihara Yousuke, and he had someone at home awaiting his safe return.

Just when the bell rang for the last lesson, the teacher led someone into the classroom. Immediately all movements in the class stopped as they stared in astonishment.

"Sakurai Yaeko!"

"Why is she here?!"

Standing on the podium, the teacher introduced her to the class. "Let me introduce a new transfer student to our class. I believe she is no stranger to you all. Sakurai Yaeko from Shiyoge Girls High School."

Lu Shu was shocked. Did it really have to be like this?!

After the self-introduction, Sakurai walked towards Lu Shu casually. Then, with a

smile, she asked the student sitting on Lu Shu's right, "Hi. Can I sit here? I mean, could you let me take your seat?"

The boy immediately packed his bag and moved to an empty seat in the last row. Everyone in the class held their breath, not hoping to miss anything in a blink.

Following the news that Kirihara was Sakurai's teacher, people were very interested in their relationship. Now, however, the answer was right in front of their eyes.

486 MUTUAL GUARD

The news that Sakurai seemed to have transferred schools for Kirihara soon spread out during the last morning lesson through the phone. Almost everybody knew someone from another class due to the annual rearrangement of class, which resulted in the fast circulation of this information.

Thus, just ten minutes into the lesson, Lu Shu had started receiving numerous entries of distress points from other boys, ranging from one point to more than a hundred.

Lu Shu started pondering about his chances of igniting the sixth star should the news be spread to other high schools which Sakurai had influence in.

However, it required 1,600,000 points to reach the sixth star...

Suddenly Lu Shu began to look at Sakurai in a different light and his respect for her deepened. What a blessing in disguise!

Speaking of which, she had not done anything harmful so far, except for her incessant employment of honey trapping.

Then? Not only had she helped to revive the dojo business, she had also indirectly

made a huge contribution to Lu Shu's cultivation progress through distress points!

The catch, though, was making him many enemies outside. But did Lu Shu care about that? Absolutely not...

"My blessing... No, I mean, Sakurai, why did you transfer here?"

"Because I want to stay with you, sensei, whenever possible," she replied.

Sakurai had always been straightforward in her interaction with Lu Shu, but she highly doubted whether this moron could actually understand...

At noon, Lu Shu's fifth star was lit up. Now he felt that Sakurai's face was much cuter than before...

The bell rang and many students took out their bentos for lunch. Just when the seven boys were worried whether Lu Shu would ask them for food, Sakurai retrieved a box from under her table and said, "Sensei, I prepared this bento for you."

She opened the box herself, revealing fine-looking dishes inside. Lu Shu was surprised. "You made it on your own?"

"Yes, I did," Sakurai replied with a cheerful smile.

Noguchi Yuki and the other six almost teared up on the spot. Sakurai was their true savior! Kirihara would have probably eaten their bentos again had Sakurai not prepared one specially for him!

Just a day before, they were still hoping that Lu Shu would leave some leftovers for

them so that they would not have starved. It would be miserable if they had to play sports after school on an empty stomach!

But would Lu Shu do that? Nope. He literally finished seven bentos just to maximize his earnings of distress points from them... Honestly speaking, even Lu Shu himself did not expect his good appetite, probably thanks to his Practitioner abilities...

Meanwhile, the seven boys were on the brink of desperation staring at their empty lunch boxes...

Under her innocent look, who knew whether the Conservatives suddenly decided to kill him after repeated embarrassment?

Lu Shu grinned. "If I eat yours, what do you eat?"

Puzzled, Sakurai looked under Lu Shu's table. "But you did not bring any food, sensei."

"Never mind. I have. Who's that, err... Noguchi Yuki, be a good boy." Lu Shu waved at the seven boys.

"From Noguchi Yuki's distress, +666!"

"From..."

What? You didn't even bother to bring your own bento? So you've decided to eat ours the moment you stepped out of your house?!

Complaints aside, they had no choice. In the next moment, seven bentos were opened

in front of Lu Shu. What a variety of food!

Struggling to understand what was going on, Sakurai looked at the seven lunch boxes in shock.

"From Sakurai Yaeko's distress, +666!"

Lu Shu was a bit unhappy, because from the next day onwards he would no longer be able to earn steady distress points from the seven of them. Sakurai's party could easily sneak into the students' houses to poison their bentos, which eventually would be consumed by Lu Shu.

What a pity...

As he felt sorry for the loss, Lu Shu finished up the seven bentos, not leaving a single grain of rice...

"From Noguchi Yuki's distress, +666..."

"From..."

Sakurai was confused. Could Kirihara's wariness be due to his discovery of her true identity? But she had always been with her teacher in secret and never made any appearance among the Conservatives.

She had been specially crafted for this mission, and she even believed that she was not the only person trained by her teacher to serve such roles.

Therefore, her identity was kept absolutely secret. So, then, how did Kirihara Yousuke

find out?

Yet, she hoped that was not the case.

Upon deeper analysis, there seemed to be many blind spots in Kirihara's sudden change of temperament and a series of happenings after that. But Sakurai could not find any hints of disguise even when studying him so up close.

After finishing up the seven bentos, Lu Shu rubbed his face, as if to rub away his food coma. He could sense Sakurai's confusion and her cautious stares on his face.

Then, Sakurai felt relieved. A mask could never withstand a rub like that, so he could not be anyone else but Kirihara Yousuke. Moreover, she knew full well that no mask could be so perfect, detailed and durable.

And that was the precise reason the Heavenly Network had chosen Lu Shu for this task.

Across the entire Network, only Lu Shu could transfigure into Kirihara Yousuke so seamlessly.

487 SAKURAI YAEKO'S CONFUSION

Regarding Sakurai's school transfer, Chiba's feelings were the most complicated. However, her name did not appear in Lu Shu's distress record.

Lu Shu still chose to leave the campus immediately after school. He had no intention to join any co-curricular activities because of a lack of interest and the necessity to keep low-key as of now.

The noon incident had made him realize that his identity could cause suspicion even under the disguise of someone else's face. Thus, he could not be sure whether Sakurai

would finally find any evidence against him in the long time spent together.

Sakurai mentioned nothing about cultivation with Lu Shu, as though she was just a commoner. Perfect acting skills.

As Lu Shu was walking out of the school premises, Sakurai followed him closely, which generated another huge wave of distress points for Lu Shu from other boys.

However, instead of heading straight back to the dojo, Lu Shu made a sudden turn and walked Sakurai to the most crowded place in school. Then, they walked a big round around the campus before going back to the school gate again...

"Sensei... What are you doing?" Sakurai was confused.

"I'm showing you around the school!" Lu Shu replied naturally, "Over there is the main classroom block. That's the field and that's the male restroom..."

Lu Shu realized earning Japanese high school students' distress points was an effortless task...

In fact, some students, who focused more on studies and paid little attention to external activities, were not familiar with Sakurai Yaeko. After all, no high school girl was influential enough to be remembered by every boy in Nishinokyo. In the past, she had put in great effort to boost her popularity by visiting swordplay clubs in different schools, but never had she expected her reputation to be exploited by Lu Shu in another way...

At first, boys who did not know Sakurai well did not produce much distress. Yet, they were soon engulfed by jealousy seeing how close she was to Lu Shu, owing to her

overly attractive appearance.

And jealousy was a type of negative emotion too.

Meanwhile, Sakurai felt relieved that Lu Shu did not seem to dislike her that much. If he did, why the trouble to initiate the school tour?

After the end of the lessons on the second day, however, Lu Shu smiled and said to her, "Let's go and have another tour around the school."

"..."

"From Sakurai Yaeko's distress, +66!"

On the third day, the same thing repeated yet again. "Let's have another school tour."

"..."

"From Sakurai Yaeko's distress, +666!"

Even morons could tell that he was up to something! But Sakurai found it difficult to figure out a reason. Was it to show others that you had a pretty girl beside you? What's the point, then? For your ego?!

As a result, Lu Shu would bring Sakurai around the campus everyday after school. Gradually, the names "Kirihara Yousuke" and "Sakurai Yaeko" became tied together in school. Whenever one was mentioned, the other would surely be brought up too.

Gloomy, Chiba went home alone and she was no longer as cheerful as before. Indeed,

all the recent happenings were a bit too cruel for her.

Lu Shu knew it too. But the thing was, he was not the real Kirihara Yousuke, who had already bid farewell to this dark, cold cavern called world.

Now, all that he could do was to distance himself from the girl as far as possible, so as to hide the truth that the boy she had protected for two years would no longer be back again. All their memories, no matter how deep and beautiful, could only be found in those yellowing photos.

But Lu Shu had no other choice. It was not sympathy, though, because no one in this world had the right to sympathize with anyone else.

That night, Lu Shu sat in the hall with a set of newspaper and a cup of tea, while Sakurai was practicing her swordplay in front of him. His flying daggers were scraping against the snow mountain rapidly, trying to flatten it as soon as possible.

In Sakurai's eyes, Kirihara seemed to have no interest in cultivation at all. However, legends went that the Kiriharas' inherited trade focused on one's will, so she could not say for sure how his advanced training would be like after his completion of the basic one.

Take for example the Hall of Swords, they spent ages in the painstaking process of foundation reinforcement. Yet, now, Li Xianyi's focus in cultivation was more about sharpening the intent of the sword instead of specific moves.

Suddenly Bunndai walked in. She made a bow and asked, "I'm going for grocery shopping. What do you want to eat for tomorrow's breakfast?"

Bunndai found it inexplicable why Lu Shu decided to spend so much time with Sakurai Yaeko these few days. But he had told her about his knowledge of Sakurai Yaeko and assured her that he knew what he was doing.

Bunndai's job was to cooperate with Lu Shu. There was no need for her own opinions and she knew it clearly.

Lu Shu thought for a moment and replied. "Anything. You may cook whatever you want."

"Okay." Then she made another bow and went out.

Thus, Lu Shu was left in the room alone with Sakurai. Suddenly Sakurai stopped her training and slowly removed her black knee highs, revealing her smooth legs.

Lu Shu swallowed his saliva at the sight. Sakurai was pleased, because at least it showed that the boy found her attractive.

Then, she pulled her collar to the side, and her delicate collar bones were visible at once. At this moment Bunndai was back again. "Do you prefer river eel or moray eel?"

"Moray eel. It's cheaper..." replied Lu Shu.

After Bunndai had left, just as Sakurai was about to continue seducing Lu Shu, she was back, again. "Are you sure you still don't want to bring your bento to school tomorrow?"

"I'm bringing. Prepare one for me," Lu Shu said. Now he had to be more cautious

about food from outside.

When Sakurai was about to resume, she suddenly forgot which step she was at! What the heck!

In less than five minutes...

488 SAKURA KIMONO

Sakurai did not leave immediately, because she did not know where to go.

Should she visit her teacher, who would continue urging her implicitly to devote herself to Kirihara? Or should she return to her apartment where there was nobody else at home? Sakurai was an orphan. She had no family.

Oda once said that her parents died in a car accident, but the record of which was nowhere to be found despite Sakurai's efforts. Never mind. It would not matter anymore.

Her character was one of indifference, with no particular love, no special person, nor anything on her bucket list.

Her action was dictated by whatever her teacher felt she should.

That day, she did it with conflicting feelings. Unexpectedly, though, it was interrupted by Bunndai. Good for her, as she had not made up her mind whether it was right.

Oda seemed to have forgotten that people were able to think on their own.

Now, Sakurai was lost. Where was she? Where should she go next?

Suddenly she heard approaching footsteps outside the door, and Lu Shu appeared.

Smiling, he said, "Sakurai, why not go shopping with us? Enough training for today."

Hugging her knees, Sakurai looked up in disbelief. "Me?"

"Yes. Let's go." Lu Shu grinned.

"Sure." Sakurai smiled too. She could not explain the trace of joy in her heart.

At that instant, she understood her teacher might be right. It would not be bad to stay with this boy.

Although it was meant to be a grocery trip, soon they found themselves in a restaurant with a bowl of buckwheat noodles in front of each of them. The utensils were delicate and colorful, but the portion was slightly insufficient. Lu Shu finished it fast. "Sir, another bowl, please."

The middle-aged owner gave him a delighted look, as though he had just gotten credit for his cooking skills.

Sakurai and Bunndai were eating in small bites, while Lu Shu did not care so much about table etiquette. He seemed to have a great appetite...

"Kiriharakun," Sakurai asked suddenly, "Aren't you worried?"

Lu Shu was stunned. "About?"

Sakurai lowered her head. "Nothing."

She knew it was not something she was meant to ask. By right, she had no idea about

the connection between the Kiriharas and the Collection of Gods, but even she could not explain how those words jumped out of her lips.

...

The next day, Lu Shu slept through the lessons as usual. As the end of term examinations were drawing close, he did not seem to be concerned at all.

During the morning PE lessons, the class played soccer together. At the start of the game, Lu Shu burst the ball with one kick and walked away as if nothing had happened. Sakurai found it both hilarious and irritating how he bullied commoner students with his Practitioner powers.

Chiba sat at the side of the field. Her friend asked her curiously, "You've been unhappy since Sakurai Yaeko's transfer. Do you still want to deny your feelings for Kiriharakun?"

She had expected a retort, but Chiba did not say a word.

"I heard that Kirihara's dojo is enrolling new students again. Saturday and Sunday classes. I'm planning to go and take a look this weekend. Are you in?"

It took Chiba a long while to reply, "What?"

"I asked, do you want to learn swordplay at Kiriharakun's place?" Her friend emphasized again. "Don't give up if you really like him."

"I'm in!"

...

During the last afternoon lesson, Sakurai was paying full attention in class. Aside from her cultivation experience and school transfer, her academic results were flawless.

Actually it was yet another reason for people's admiration for her. Not only a talented swordswoman, Sakurai had won multiple academic awards in various Nishinokyo student competitions too.

She was seen as a genius in all aspects.

Just when she was engrossed in the lesson, Lu Shu passed a folded paper slip to her. Having made sure no one was watching, Sakurai carefully opened the paper. "No one at home tonight."

Sakurai was stunned. A feeling of relief or some other emotions started to well up in her heart.

Her teacher had been impatient in taking down Kirihara Yousuke through her, but she had yet to succeed due to one reason or another. Thus, Oda was getting displeased too.

But now, she suddenly realized that she did not reject the thought that much.

Lu Shu left the class immediately after school. Instead of going straight to the dojo, Sakurai returned to her apartment. She stood in front of the mirror for a long, long time, until nightfall.

Sakurai took her most beautiful kimono from her closet. On its fabric, the cherry

blossoms took a strikingly natural look, as if light pink petals would fall from her sleeves with her movement.

She slowly removed all her clothes and wrapped herself in the kimono only.

Then, carefully she put on light makeup with some lipstick.

Colors danced on her lips, making them all the more alluring. No one would believe she was only 17 years old.

To her, it would be a night of significance, although it was her mission.

She wanted to bid farewell to her past with a solemn ceremony. From that day onwards, she would allow some space for a man in her heart.

"Sakurai Yaeko" was a conservative name and so was she. The education she received outside the school was conducted by instructors carefully chosen by her teacher, and some of them were even of noble character and high prestige.

Sakurai looked at herself in the mirror. Very satisfied. Thinking about the other person who would complete the farewell ceremony with her that night, she was equally pleased too.

Then, she pulled on her white socks and slotted her feet in her clogs. Slowly she paced out of her room, and the door slammed shut.

Nishinokyo at night was a riot of colors. Men in suits walked into izakayas with their friends. Finally it was the time for leisure after a day of work.

It was a city of worldliness, with a certain degree of apathy and courtesy.

Twenty minutes later, standing in front of the dojo, Sakurai knocked on the closed doors... No reply.

One more time. Still no reply.

Dressed in her splendid kimono, Sakurai took a long while to absorb what was going on...

He really meant NO ONE at home! Seriously?!

"From Sakurai Yaeko's distress, +999!"

489 IDENTITY EXPOSED

The funeral custom in Japan was different from that in China, although they shared certain practices in common. For instance, today was the 35th day after Kirihara Yousuke's parents' death. On the 7th, 35th, 49th and 100th day, memorial services were held for the deceased.

Lu Shu could not pay tribute during lesson time, but he had to at least pretend after school.

No matter how much his temperament had changed, Kirihara Yousuke ought not to forget about his parents. On his way home with Bunndai, Lu Shu was wary about his surroundings. He had a few targets in the vicinity, but no action should be taken on memorial days.

Recently, he noticed a middle-class Collection of Gods member had made a conscious effort at reducing his social contacts. Just the night before, Lu Shu had failed to

ambush another key member, who did not even appear at the place he used to frequent.

As a matter of fact, much attention had been focused on Nogiwa Hakushun's death in the Collection of Gods. Despite being an easy target, few could take his life so quickly when the attack had been anticipated by the victim.

In addition, they were well aware of the vacancy in the Heavenly Network's ninth position of Heavenly Kings, for their attempt at rolling in Li Xianyi had never succeeded.

Now, the sudden emergence of an earth-type Class B Metahuman probably signaled the recent appointment of the ninth Heavenly King! The Collection of Gods speculated so.

However, they had overlooked many inconsistencies, for example, Lu Shu was neither a Class B nor some earth-type Metahuman. But their caution was still stern.

Moreover, there was one more thing they found hard to understand, that the Heavenly Network person had taken Nogiwa's weapon after the murder. In fact, his long sword was similar to the standard one distributed to every Class D member of the Network. Maybe it would be seen as a powerful weapon for low-level Practitioners, it should be useless for Class B's.

Could it be a Class B who... despised wastage?!

Nonetheless, unlike Collection of Gods key members who were on alert, Lu Shu noticed that those in the lower tiers of the organization did not seem to be concerned. It was because they thought small fries like them would not pique a Class B pro's

interest. During Nie Ting's killing spree last time, he only directed his blade at key personnel.

"I need to know the internal changes in the Collection of Gods following Nogiwa Hakushun's death," Lu Shu whispered to Bunndai on the metro.

Bunndai gave a nod of acknowledgment. "Okay. I will try to get them in two days. But I suggest a cease fire for this period, for the Collection of Gods is as clever as they are crazy."

"Okay. I will be extra careful," Lu Shu said. He would never take other people's seriousness lightly.

In the meantime, Sakurai was on her way back to her apartment. Suddenly, a man blocked her way. He was in a black suit with a plain glass spectacles on his nose, framed with golden wires. The Collection of Gods badge in front of his chest made Sakurai alert at once, but she showed no expression on her face.

The young man smiled gently and said, "Hello. I am Kitamura Hirono. I reckon you may know me."

Astonishment emerged on Sakurai's face. "Based on your badge, I believe you are from the Collection of Gods. Could I guess if you are recruiting me due to my cultivation aptitudes?"

There was no change in Kitamura's smile. "You appeared beside Kirihara Yousuke right after his parents' death, and your interest in him is apparent. A trained swordswoman, though I'm not sure where you got your skills from, yet you declared Kirihara Yousuke as your teacher. You would be insulting our intelligence if you deny

your identity as a key persona concealed by the Conservatives."

Sakurai's blood went cold. Unarmed, she was defenseless in front of Kitamura Hirono, a famous, powerful Class C from the Collection of Gods.

Unexpectedly, no one noticed anything suspicious about Lu Shu despite the inconsistency between his character and Kirihara's, all thanks to his flawless mask.

However, Sakurai's identity was exposed before Lu Shu's, for the Conservatives were too hasty!

"No worries, Miss Sakurai. I'm not going to hurt you. Instead, I've come for a negotiation." Kitamura leaned against an electricity pole, his face was calm. "That old man, Oda Tokuma, has extraordinary martial arts skills but pathetic brains. What a waste. He once proclaimed himself to be able to replace Kirihara Kuraki with his schemes and intelligence, but we think he is much worse than Kirihara. Otherwise, why do we spare Oda a life when we insist that Kirihara Kuraki must be exterminated?"

His words clearly showed Oda Tokuma's value in the Jingoists' eyes. If a Class C dared to challenge him openly like this, it truly seemed that the Jingoists took Oda lightly.

In their opinion, Oda was a man of conspiracies and schemes. He chose not to inform Kirihara Kuraki of the Jingoists' ambush plan while he could, after obtaining the information from the intelligence agency of the Conservatives.

At the end of the day, Kirihara Kuraki's greatest mistake was to place his trust in the wrong person.

But even Oda himself did not foresee the depressing situation the Conservatives would land in. The conflict started off by targeting Kirihara Kuraki only, yet it soon swept across the entire organization. Without a leader, the Conservatives were at a clear disadvantage.

At first, Oda planned to remedy the situation on his own, but it soon turned out to be an overestimation of his abilities. One after another the hidden clans retreated back to their own lands in avoidance of the battle, because they had no confidence in Oda Tokuma at all.

Only then did Oda finally understand what Kirihara Kuraki meant to the entirety of the Conservatives. He was not competent enough even as a substitute.

Precisely due to the same reason, Oda turned back in the hope of using Kirihara Yousuke as his puppet, and to obtain the authentic inherited trade of the Kirihara's.

Sakurai smiled. "My apologies. But I really don't understand what you are saying."

"It's fine. I'll give you three days to consider. Think about what's left in the Conservatives and the current situation, and I believe you will understand in the end." Kitamura smiled calmly. "I, however, am personally interested in you, Miss Sakurai. On a side note, I'm still single."

Was Sakurai pretty? Very. So pretty that Kitamura could not find a second girl in the entire Collection of Gods comparable to her.

Maybe there were a few commoners who were equally attractive, but at present the Collection of Gods actively advocated for the bloodline theory of Practitioners, which

prohibited the combination between Practitioners and commoners, so as to ensure the pure blood of their next generation.

Lu Shu had heard about it too, but his only comment was that the Collection of Gods had too small a population. They dreaded their offspring would have no cultivation aptitude should they marry commoners.

On the other hand, the Heavenly Network had never had to worry about that. Marry whoever you want because we have a surplus of people...

490 FORGOT MY KEYS

Actually, as an ordinary large-scale organization, the Collection of Gods were reasonably powerful, with a total of over 10,000 members, diverse time-honored inherited trades, high average capabilities and strong cohesiveness.

This made the Collection of Gods one of the strongest Practitioner organizations in the world.

Yet, they loved to pitch themselves against the Heavenly Network, whose sheer number of members was already distressing enough...

The Collection of Gods was notorious for their craziness precisely because of their unusual logic. The mainstream policy towards the Heavenly Network was to avoid head-on confrontations at all costs, while the Collection of Gods coveted their vast lands and huge population...

Sakurai fixed Kitamura with a cold stare. She knew that she could never evade their attention even without her Conservatives identity.

However, despite her discontent with her teacher, Sakurai was a woman of principles. At the very least, she was not a traitor.

"I think you might have some misunderstandings," Sakurai said calmly.

Kitamura asked curiously, "I beg your pardon?"

"I will not like you, because you are not good enough," Sakurai replied, smiling. Thinking back, the feeling of peace she had in her time with Kiriharakun was so precious, for at least it was way better than the disgust clogged up in her throat now.

"Then, is Kirihara Yousuke considered good enough? I'm capable of killing him," Kitamura said.

His words gave Sakurai's heart a prick, but she remained quiet.

Kitamura laughed. "Are you serious? You are in love with him? I wonder what Oda Tokuma may think if he knows it. Given the imprudence of your party, I doubt how the Collection of Gods would establish itself as the leading organization in the world under the leadership of the Conservatives."

"But I know, under your leadership, the Collection of Gods will be doomed," Sakurai said softly.

In fact, the main discord between the Conservative and the Jingoists was peace or war. The Conservatives were not necessarily peace-lovers, nor did they consist purely of calm minds. Rather, they believed that an accumulation of strength would promise better results than inflicting violence upon others.

It was only a matter of different political stands, not a rivalry between justice and evil.

Therefore, Nie Ting had never given Lu Shu any nonsensical orders such as to assist the Conservatives. In overseas battles, casualties were inevitable among Practitioners. There was no need for guilt.

Kitamura's smile faded. "Three days. This is my promise."

As though she suddenly thought of something, Sakurai's lips suddenly curled into a smile. In the quiet alleyway, the girl in a sakura kimono was as beautiful as a goddess, and her smile could cost the city. She said, "Tomorrow night, no one will be at my house."

Thinking of that, Kitamura joked with the slight hint of a threat, "Since you said no one, there'd better be no one at all. Else, I may go on a killing spree."

"Please rest assured. There will be no one at home." With that, Sakurai left at once, as though totally unconcerned about Kitamura's attitude.

Instead of going home, she headed to the dojo, because she had suddenly remembered one thing... she had forgotten her keys and wallet...

...

When Lu Shu and Bunndai were having a chat in the yard, they suddenly saw Sakurai in her gorgeous kimono. Lu Shu's jaws almost dropped in shock. Why was she wearing that? For a ceremony?

Sakurai smiled. "I forgot to bring my keys and my wallet. Could I stay here, sensei?"

Lu Shu pondered for a few seconds. "You'll have to pay for the accommodation fees."

"Sure. Understood."

Then, Bunndai led Sakurai to the guest room. All of a sudden, this girl had become the Kirihara's guest without any prior signs, but it seemed to have happened very naturally.

Bunndai prepared some of her own clothes for Sakurai to change into. After all, it would be inconvenient to be in kimono all the time. Looking at Sakurai, Bunndai smiled politely. "These are my clothes. I think your bust size should be bigger than mine but please make do with them first."

Then, Sakurai raised a question she had never expected, "Sister Taniguchi, do you think Kiriharakun would like a girl like me?"

Bunndai froze. At that moment, Sakurai Yaeko was no longer a spy. She looked like an ordinary teenage girl, lost in her feelings for another boy. Then, sitting down beside her, Bunndai said, "It's impossible for things like feelings to have a concrete answer. They are unrelated to personal interests, nor monetary benefits, nor any specific goals. Many idiots love others so as to prove that they themselves are worthy of love. They hold love tightly in their grip until it dies. But Sakurai, you need to understand that love is not something you obtain. It is not something tangible."

Sakurai took a long while to absorb her words. Then, she thanked Bunndai.

After the door was closed, Sakurai started recounting the night. She realized that her first reaction was to come to Kirihara's dojo instead of her teacher's place when she needed a shelter over her head. The decision itself meant something.

Kitamura's threat was real. It was not that Sakurai could not defeat him, but what was truly dangerous was the Collection of Gods team behind him.

Why did Kitamura Hirono, a mere Class C, dare to despise a Class B expert, Oda Tokuma? It was because of his powerful backers, whom Oda alone was no rival for.

For the first time in her life, the light struck Sakurai that the Conservatives were not where she belonged. She knew full well that her teacher might not even stand up for her if she was targeted by the Jingoists.

It was about his attitude, not his power. Actually, the person who knew Oda Tokuma the most was his student, Sakurai Yaeko.

She would never yield to Kitamura Hirono, for her teacher was, no matter how terrible a person he was, still her teacher.

Now she realized that very soon she would have no place to stay in this vast land called Japan. The only option left for her was to leave.

Yet, she was unwilling to leave like this. Sakurai felt that there was one more thing she must do.

It was easy for people to overlook her combat skills due to the overpowering attraction of her appearance. But in fact, her cultivation abilities were the true thing she had always been proud of.