

破蛋花旦

broken egg



The Characters



華奢場りん
RIN
KYASHABA

Rin Kyashaba
A respectable
business
woman... or is
she?

華奢場白
SHIRO
KYASHABA

A would-be member of the YPDA, **Shiro Kyashaba** is thoroughly dead. Shiro is known for her lack of imagination and ambivalent attitude. It's a shame she was rejected, because those are the traits that the YPDA admires the most.

先崎羽翔
SAKIZAKI
HATO

Hato Sakizaki's parents wanted a girl. They also were pretty mean to him. But he turned out perfectly fine.



一色柚希
HIRO
YUZUKI

Yuzuki Hiiro
is supposed to be the coroner, but most of the time she's drifting between beauty parlors.



辛子多久馬
KARASHI
TAKUMA

Takuma Karashi
The chief investigator of the YPDA. There isn't much that can faze him. Little known fact is, he takes care of dogs.



葉加瀬梅
HAKASE
UME

Ume Hakase is the YPDA's tech support. She writes programs for fun, and also insults people for fun. When she isn't doing that, she's reading the latest Shonen Flop.

6日12月1996年

Since I first learned of
mortality, my greatest fear was my
own death, but now that I have died, my
new fear is that my death will be investigated
by the Yamagata Private Detective Agency.

Ume, the detectives' tech support, is going through my files
on her state of the art laptop. She constantly talks about it,
bringing it up in conversation even when it makes no sense to. I
suspect that she's really quite introverted. I never saw her leave the
building.

Takuma, the chief investigator, is tapping his foot while reading. Every so
often he will circle the bullpen, muttering to himself. He isn't very skilled,
leaps to conclusions, and had only made quips and putdowns at me, no
doubt do to some inferiority complex. He smells like a wet dog.

Yuzuki, who supposedly runs the whole operation, is attaching long, fake
nails to her hands and sighing, stretched out on the couch in the reception
area. She is the cat of the agency, which I guess makes Ume the ferret, as it
is the third most common household animal.

My sister sits on the opposite couch. Her name is Rin. She has
contacted them about my death. What a terrible situation this is.

She is telling them the basics.

About the stalker.
About the disappearance.

About the egg.

...

It began on a Thursday, as soon as I logged into my personal computer. As it groaned and whined, I clicked around a message board for locals looking to meet up in Yamagata. No new posts.

But a private message from a longtime pen pal, screen name Omurice, was waiting for me as soon as I logged in.

Omurice had contacted me because our post signatures matched. They were both GIFs of the owarai duo Saruganeki.

And so the back and forths began and soon Omurice began their perverse game of asking me to write out scenarios with said owarai duo Saruganeki, based on writing prompts that they would send me.

At first, I put off their requests for weeks. But I became more interested, and soon I was replying every day. It was fun to write out their reactions to events.

As what I assumed was a joke about their screen name, Omurice asked that every scenario end with an egg being cracked over Kazunari Moriwaki's head.

Being of taste, I kept each scenario clean of dirty jokes. But somehow I got the sense that Omurice would've preferred that I add them, as anything close to those things always elicited a "www" or a ":-)". Everything else got a "Good." or "It works."

My latest had been Hiroiki and Kazunari's trip to the red light district, a tasteless suggestion by Omurice. But I'd gently reinterpreted it as them stopping and pointing at various street lights, before an angry driver threw an egg at Kazunari for painting a green light red. Yes, it wasn't very good, but I had to work with the scenario.

I opened the private message with a tinge of nervous energy. Omurice never said much, but I inferred a lot from their brief replies... that is to say I read into them.

"Good :-)" the message began.

"Try to stay on topic. This time owarai duo Sarugansekki & Kazunari Moriwaki give birth & must raise the child."

Not an unusual request, for Omurice.
I tried not to overanalyze it.

But something was bothering me.

...

Yuzuki examines her nails with great fascination. She seems to be toying with my sister, and has asked her zero questions about the case.

"Do you prefer matte polish or glossy polish?" she asks.

"So when this online predator asked my sister for these stories, he was really attempting to find out about her life." Rin says, soldiering on through Yuzuki's rudeness.

"I do not understand. How could these stories contain any personal details, if they were only fiction?" Yuzuki asks.

"There is no such thing as true fiction. Every impossibility in fiction arises from the constraints of your own life experiences." is Rin's thoughtful reply. "By making up stories set in the real world about real people, Shiro was bound by certain rules, even when writing fiction. A story about the red light district was turned into a joke because she has never visited a red light district, and because she is uncomfortable writing smut. The limitations of her own mind caused her to reveal two possibilities to this predator."

"So what you're saying is... Fiction is real. Aliens are real?"

"Aliens had to come from somewhere. Common depictions of aliens are based on either the ravings of lunatics, combinations of Earth creatures, or the ravings of lunatics inspired by other raving lunatics."

Rin is doing her best to put up with Yuzuki's tangents.

"Please continue." nods Yuzuki.

"With each story,
the predator gained more
knowledge of Shiro's tastes,
attitude, and where she was from."

"This is a smart predator. He's making me
scared."

Yuzuki pours herself a cup of tea from the pot on the
table.

"Ahh... cold tea. How unbelievably wonderful."

Rin shifts in her seat, looking askance.

"I'm... sorry to ask this, but do you have someone else I can
talk to?"

Yuzuki looks up sharply.

"Am I not good enough?"

"No, I didn't mean to suggest that..."

Yuzuki rises icily and exits, making sure her footsteps are heard.

A minute passes.

Rin's face gets wanner every second.

Alone, her thoughts remind her of the egg.

...

I set about writing the "childbirth" story with dull interest, but
stopped, drawing a blank. Nothing was good enough, and I
simply didn't know how to write about the subject. I've
never experienced childbirth, or someone else's.

The more I thought about it, the more the request
struck me as off-putting.

So, once again, I had to make it into
a joke.

Hiroiki grunted in pain. "Ugh!" he said, "I'm giving birth!!" "Whoa, but you're not a woman," exclaimed Kazunari, with much puzzlement.

"No, but I've played one on TV!!" "Oh, I see! That'll do the trick! You have to be careful with such things!"

They rushed to the hospital and shoved Hiroiki into a wheelchair.

"Be careful on the ramp!" Kazunari cautioned.

He pushed Hiroiki up the huge ramp in the center of the lobby.

"I'm tired!" cried Kazunari.

"Keep pushing, don't be lazy!"

Kazunari was so shocked at Hiroiki's rudeness that he let go of the wheelchair. Hiroiki flew down the ramp and slammed into the back wall.

"Oof!" he cried as the baby flew out of him.

"Now we have to raise it." Kazunari observed stoically. Then an egg fell on his head.

I shut off the computer. It wasn't good enough. I would have rewrite it. But that would interfere a bit with my schedule. I would have to drink coffee while showering, that would give me enough time.

...

"That was all it took for the killer to find her location?" Takuma asks, his brow furrowed with interest.

"The ramp in our local hospital is very distinct," says Rin. "There's really no hospital it could've been other than that one."

"That's true, I do like taking photos of that ramp..." Takuma mutters. "It's practically a tourist attraction."

"When you see a nice ramp in public, it's simply wrong not to snap a photo of it." Ume chimes in.

"Yes, that's why I always bring a camera wherever I go. To catch those ramps in their raw, intimate moments."

"So what's your professional opinion?" asks Rin.

"Our 'professional opinion' costs extra, but our layman, ignorant, misinformed opinion is still that it's highly likely this could've lead to her murder." says Ume.

"Speaking of costs, before you go further, perhaps you'd like to actually hire us."

"Does that mean you'll take the case?"

"Yes, we'll take the case." says Takuma. "it's finally getting interesting. Especially if someone gets murdered. Please continue."

"Nobody's been murdered. My sister is missing. You know that."

"Perhaps she is missing because she was murdered."

"Well — yes, but... let's not talk about it like that."

Rin smooths down her outfit, composing herself.

"She's clearly impressed by your brilliant deduction, Takuma." says Ume.

"It's all about being observant, and applying logic and reason, and then anything is possible, it's really quite simple." Takuma replies.

"Are you going to listen to the case, or should I take it elsewhere?" Rin asks.

"Of course we're listening. You have our full attention."

"The kidnapper stalked Shiro online first. But suddenly, she began to suspect he had transitioned to the corporeal world."

"If only my husbando could do the same." Ume comments.

"And my waifu." Takuma adds, with no shame.

"Could you please take me seriously?"

"Me and Ume have been waiting for the serious part..."

Rin breathes in deeply.

"I wasn't always in touch with my sister. In fact, we were slightly estranged. I didn't pass her purity test. I don't know how long she was being stalked, only that she called me to tell me she was being stalked. About a week later, the egg arrived."

Ume clicks her tongue in excitement.

"The egg." she says. "How did the egg arrive?"

"By mail, in a packaged carton. The other egg holders had been cut away."

"Any idea how the killer learned your address or who you were?" Takuma asks.

"Kidnapper, not killer. It wouldn't have been hard. Shiro kept a very organized contact book. If the kidnapper got inside her house, he would've known who all of her friends and relatives were and their numbers and addresses."

"Now..." Takuma says in a low voice, "tell us about the egg itself."

Rin draws a shuddered breath.

"It was perfectly clean on outside. Smooth. No blemishes. And as white as a dentist's smile."

"Cool dentist reference." says Ume.

"I didn't examine it very carefully before opening, but I'm positive that it had no perforations or holes — completely seamless."

Rin's voice catches in her throat. She has come to the part of the story that she dreads the most. The part the detectives are most eager to hear. The part that the authorities found laughable, ridiculous, and impossible.

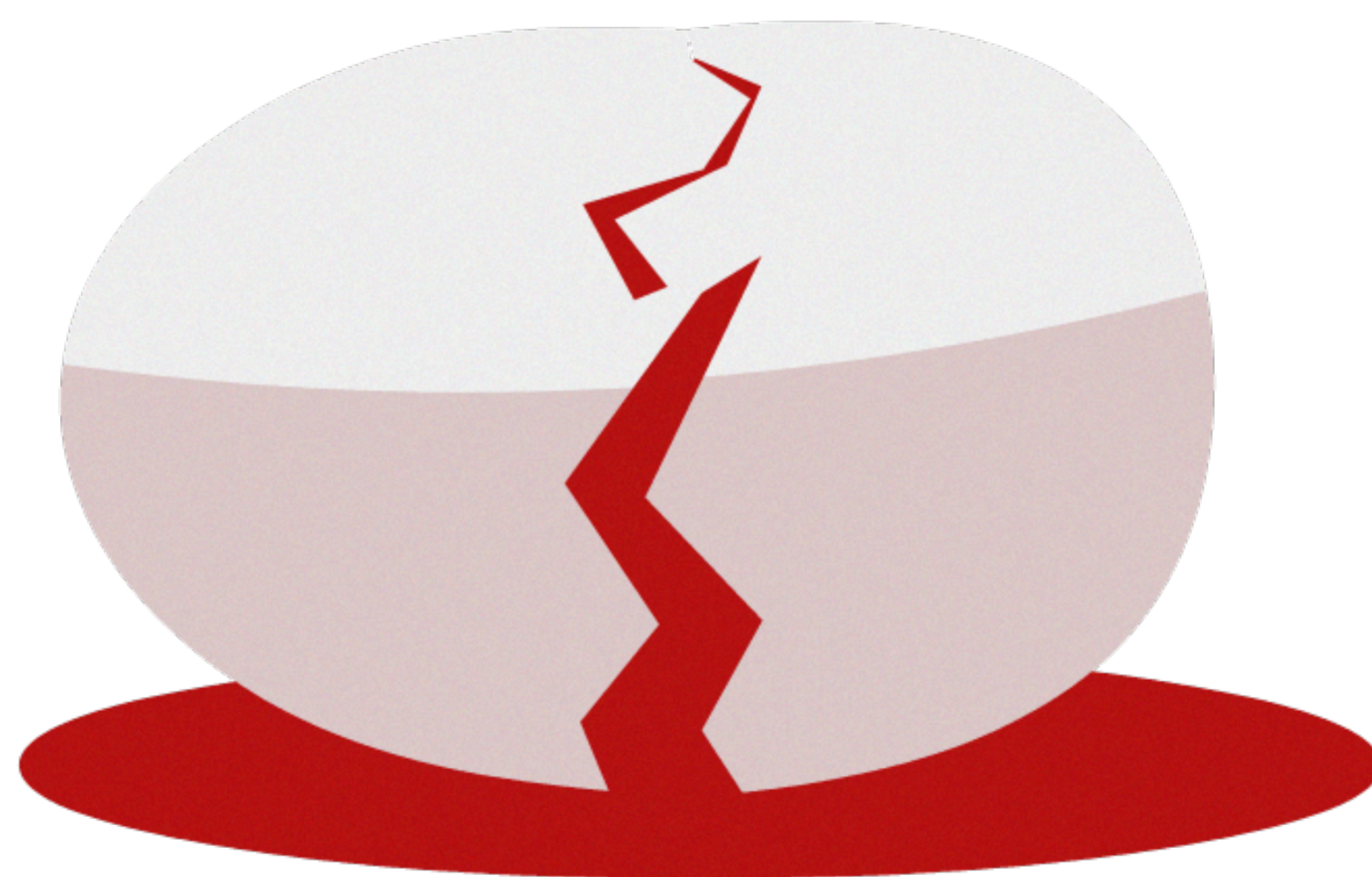
Though the YPDA is not to be trusted, I can't deny that they were at least willing to take on the case when no others would.

"I didn't
know what to do
with the egg I'd been
sent. There was no
information on the package or
inside it. I kept it in my fridge ...
until the day I decided to use it."
"Ah, the good part, at last." says
Takuma.

"I cracked the egg on the surface of
my cutting board..."

Rin stops. She has unwittingly
recreated the horror in her mind. It
replays over and over.
I wish I could tell her not to
be so upset.

...



*Oh, if only I could be fifteen again.
Fifteen was the year when good things
happened to me.*

*I requested a song on the radio, and they
played it.*

*I hung a wish at the shrine, my secret hope,
and it came true.*

*I went out of my way to be nice to my
elderly neighbors. When they died, their
grandson helped pay for my college tuition
with his inheritance.*

*I started going to a therapist who would
actually help me instead of talk about
himself.*

*It sounds like a list of things I want to
happen.*

*But they all happened.
I'm grateful.*

...

The detectives are alone.

Ume locks the door to the bullpen.

Takuma and Yuzuki calmly wait while she makes a
phone call.

They don't wait to intrude, but they also want to listen in.

"Hello." Ume clutches the phone tightly, as though it will run
away. "We have a new case."

That is all she needs to say. She hangs up.

"Hope that wasn't the wrong number."

"Is everyone ready to begin?" asks Yuzuki.

"Yes." replies Takuma.

"Then... CASE START!"

Yuzuki throws up her arms like she's at a beauty pageant.

"What are your thoughts on the case?" Takuma asks.

"I refuse to offer my opinion until I have this delicate little parcel
analyzed." Yuzuki says, shaking a gray, sealed bag containing the egg.

"Good, because nobody wanted to hear it." says Takuma. "Unless you
did, Ume?"

"No, I didn't want to hear it either." says Ume.

"Come on..." says Yuzuki, pouting, "it's been five years and you're
still making these jokes..."

"Yuzuki, please. You're making everybody feel old." says
Takuma. "Unless that didn't make you feel old, Ume?"

"No, I also feel very old."

"MMmmhm! Hmmhmhmhm! That's the sound of me,
bound by your terrible humor, forced to listen to
it." says Yuzuki. She leaves with a sob.

"How mannered." comments Takuma.

"Now, let's get on with this mystery. The first thing that struck me about it is the seeming randomness of this Omelet Killer's methods. He targets women online, has them make up stories that unintentionally reveal personal details, then stalks them and stuffs them in eggs?"

"I agree, that is pretty random." says Ume. "The egg thing comes out of nowhere."

"We have to figure out how A connects to B and so forth... How did the Omelet Killer develop this methodology?"

"My guess is, it worked one time and then he kept repeating it. If something isn't broken, don't try to rehabilitate it."

"That's a good start, Ume."

Takuma takes a key from a nearby desk.

"I'm going to scope out Shiro's house first." he says.

"You should cast a net out on the net, and see if you can catch any suspicious looking fish."

"A fish using the internet would indeed be suspicious."

...

*I would dread to be sixteen again.
Sixteen was the year when bad things
happened to me.*

*I injured my foot on purpose so that I
wouldn't have to learn how to drive, but
my mother became house-bound and we
had to live off of leftovers for a week
before my father got back into town.
I had a freak-out at the mall, but because I
had told my friends off for breaking into
my neighbors' abandoned house, nobody
was there to help me, or knew who I was.
I started staying up late, and so missed
breakfast.*

*This may seem like a list of imagined woes
and engorged guilt, but they all really
happened.*

*Sometimes what I want is to never have
known sorrow. But then I wouldn't be as
appreciative.*

*Of all of the ways I could've gone, I went in
an egg.*

...

Takuma opens the door to my apartment with an unattached look on his face. He doesn't take off his shoes when he steps inside -- perhaps he was raised in a Western culture?

Takuma surveys my many possessions and how they have been laid out for him.

He sees the clothes stretching across my bedroom like tiles. My things laid out in the geometric patterns. My toothbrush, comb, and sanitary products squared in the bathroom. My plates, chopsticks, knives, and tableware triangulated in the kitchen area. My television, cushions, and comforts circled in the living area. My personal computer, files, schoolwork, and supplies nonagoned in the office. Once they were in that order, they couldn't be in any other order. It's just the way things had to be.

"Well, I can confirm that she was organized." Takuma says to himself.

He pulls a file out of its special place.

It is my diary.

"Who keeps their diary in a folder?"

He opens it, and thumbs through to the last entry at the 60% mark.

December 1st 1996

*Today I ate some things, then I did
some things.*

*An omelet, black sulfur ramen, yuba.
Took a walk in the park. Learned how
to make black suffer ramen. Watched
television.*

*But tomorrow is what fills my
thoughts.*

*Tomorrow is when I meet the
detectives.*

Takuma frowns at my diary entry.
"Nothing about the stalker." he says.
"Useless."

He sets the diary on my desk, and keeps searching.
He doesn't put the diary back in the nonagon. He really
should, would it even take that long? Just put it back in the
pattern. It shouldn't be left out of the pattern!

...

Ume opens a new case file in her computer program. She
outlines a summary of my case. She carefully catalogs the
evidence -- my emails, the egg, the people I knew.

There are empty spaces she must leave blank.
Time of death.
Culprit.
Motive.

...

It was a long walk to the meeting place: the detectives' offices. I was forced to walk there because I don't own a car. I had to check my pocket's contents several times. This I allowed for in the schedule.

The office was appallingly Western in design. It made me uncomfortable to be there. I sat on a red couch, looking at the many framed newspapers and evidence. I didn't know how the detectives got away with framing a bloodstain from one of their cases, but they did.

Beside me were the other applicants, each one less wrong than me for the job in some way. They were shown in by an old-looking woman with the immature spirit of a teenager — Mrs. Ume Hakase, I was informed.

She cracked several mean jokes at our expense, then apologized as though that excused her.

When at last I entered the reception area, I was scrutinized by the two other detectives.

"Do you ever dress right?" Yuzuki asked.

Was it rhetorical, a mean jape, or a genuine question?

"What do you mean by 'right'?" I asked.

"You can't solve crimes in a colorful red coat like that." Yuzuki pointed out, not unfairly.

"If it was my job to be a detective, I would dress right." I said.

"Well, it wouldn't be your job." said Takuma. "You'd be doing something else. Stop confusing her, Yuzuki. Are you allergic to ammonia?"

"No."

"Do you stand out in a crowd?"

"No, everyone's dying their hair white nowadays."

"That's true. Do you enjoy
paperwork?"

"About as much as it is possible to."

"Do you listen to Takuma's favorite idol group,
CoCo?" Yuzuki asked.

"No. I don't. Idol groups depress me. Under every note
of false sincerity, cute charm, and positivity, lies a hideous,
exploitative system, where celebrity doesn't even need
talent to sustain itself. Each half-hearted optimistic lyric is but
a dry cough of superficiality in a dark room of strangers to my
ears."

"We'll get back to you." said Takuma, with an intense expression
of anger on his face.

On my way out, I overheard Yuzuki snorting with laughter.

I assumed I didn't get the job, and I assumed right, but not
just because I wasn't a perfect applicant, and the detectives
sent me a long rejection letter rudely pointing that out
along with every single flaw in my personality that their
stupid questions had induced, but because I was killed,
which tends to prevent a person from performing a
job.

...

"I've gone through her files."

Takuma says.

"Anything I can input into the directory?" Ume asks, hands ready to type.

"Yes, but nothing extremely useful. She mentioned meeting us, and it was the last entry -- on December 1st."

"So all we've learned is that the kidnapping took place between the 1st and today."

"It probably wasn't today, but let's not rule it out yet."

"What's the next step?" Ume asks. She enters the diary into her directory. With a few clicks, she even gives it a nice icon, which looks more like a book than a diary, but it was selected from a list of pre-made evidence icons, so a little imagination is required. Oddly, among the list of icons are a clown outfit, a whip, and a twisted rabbit mask.

I don't want to imagine what sort of cases involved those...



"Your program's really coming along, Ume." says Takuma, leaning over her shoulder.

Ume leans closer to the screen, as if to protect it from Takuma's gaze.

"Just call it 'the directory' until I come up with a better name. I've actually been working on a more involved version..."

"Hmm. I'm interested. Actually, I'm not. Let's look for any news articles relating to a killer who stuffs his victims in eggs, or stalkers in general. It's what we should've done immediately."

"Takuma..." says Ume, opening Netscape, "you know the rule. 'Stall the investigation until you have blackmail on the client.' It's what every decent detective does."

"Right, it's just that I don't like it when I have to work with incomplete data."

"Well, I'd better scape every corner of the net, then."

"I'll scape every corner too... Of our local library."

"That's not a very l33t thing to say."

"Cyberspace is just a fad, Ume. Accept it. Like people are going to want to download pixel-y, Microsoft-font smothered versions of real books in forty minutes, when I can walk to a library in ten." Takuma laughs, exiting Ume's dark, cramped office.

...

"To Shiro.

Your eyes drifted twenty times during our interview. Are you uncomfortable when you're being asked questions? Seems like an indicator of a lack of confidence.

Also, though you have the sense to dye your hair and keep it clean, you don't seem to have brushed your teeth in years. That's not very hygienic. Get some teeth whitener.

Your stiff approach to the interview was also noted. Could you have been more wooden and boring in your responses? We at the YPDA feel that, no, you could not have been.

This and many other small reasons are why you'd make a poor detective. You simply have no future. What is your life goal? What is your purpose on this Earth? You seem to be entirely unmotivated.

And stop painting on moles. Two are bad enough.

Best wishes,
-- The YPDA."

I read and re-read that note many times.
The first time I felt a horrible sinking feeling.
The second time I felt someone poking holes in
me and pushing me into the drink. The third time I
was underwater, flailing, drowning.

On a purely surface level, the note was almost ridiculous in
its lack of tact. But imagine if someone had written you a
similar letter. You try your best at a job interview, try to be funny
in a chatroom, try to make a friend.
And someone writes you a letter telling you everything you did
wrong, that would probably make you feel just as bad as it did
me.

Of all the detectives, it was probably Takuma who wrote the letter.
He holds some sort of grudge against me for my speech against
idols.

At a time when your ship is sinking, you must find a friend to
bring down with you. It's only together that you can float
back up.

I went for a walk in the snow.

...

Yuzuki steps
into the bullpen, back from
the lab. She sets the egg package
on the table.

"DNA matches. Shiro was inside the egg.
However, it is just a scoop of her. The rest of her
body must be either buried somewhere or was disposed
of some other way."

"Maybe a body was discovered." says Ume, appearing in the
doorway of her office.

"That's what I was thinking." says Takuma. "Enter this new
information into the directory."

Ume disappears, off once again to her hypnotic screen.

"Anything fun happen?" asks Yuzuki.

"We couldn't find any matches for this particular motive." Takuma says.

"That means this killer probably changes how they kill for each victim. Or
it is the first of many more to come."

"Or..." says Yuzuki, "they aren't a serial killer at all, this is their first and only
kidnapping victim, and you're looking in the wrong places."

"That's a terrible idea."

Yuzuki bursts into fake tears, to annoy Takuma. It works.

"By terrible, I meant 'terribly interesting'."

Yuzuki brightens instantly.

"Oh, thank you, Takuma!!" she says.

"You're right... if this isn't a serial killer, we can't find him by looking
for a pattern in crimes. Instead, we should be looking more closely
at everyone Shiro knows. Since this is your stupid idea, why don't
you do all the work involved, while Ume and I continue to
research along our superior serial killer theory?"

"Okay!" says Yuzuki.

Her pleased expression is almost demented in its
exaggerated glee.

I'm scared to see how she will investigate.

...

On my walk I liked to
pass by a little bridge.
I looked down into the icy water.
Because the ice had frozen, I couldn't
sample the water. Because I couldn't sample
the water, there wasn't much of a point to
walking by the bridge.

At the edge of the wood, I heard a rustling sound.

Was it a deer?

No, deers don't wear black coats.

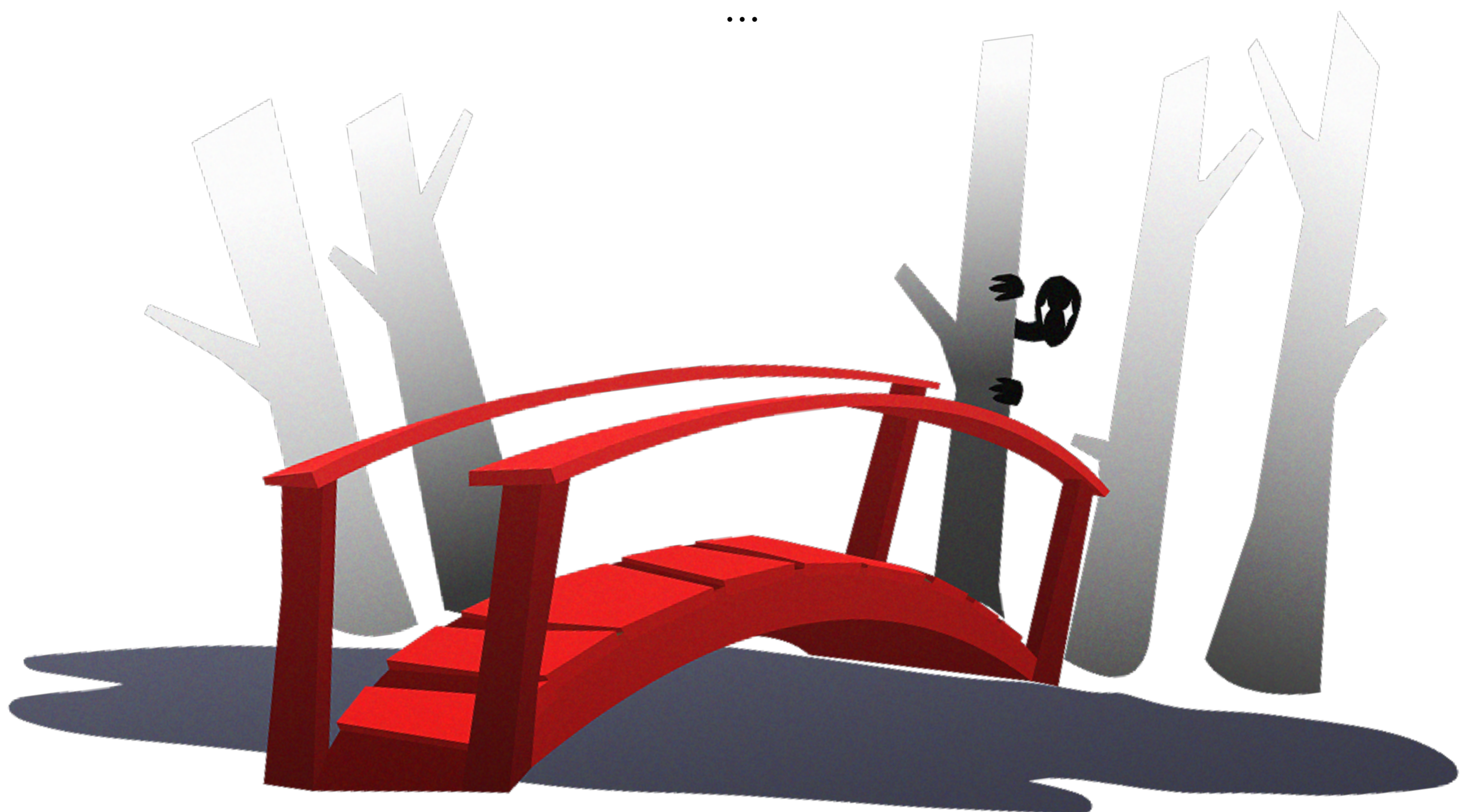
I left the forest, but my onlooker followed along.
Every time I stopped, I would hear footsteps behind me.
As soon as I was on a busy street, I called Rin to let her
know someone was stalking me.

My thoughts immediately sprang to my online
acquaintance, who I had been feeling uneasy about for
a while.

I felt very strongly that this stalker was someone I
knew.

After all, someone you know is probably a
stalker.

...



The happy ringtone jolts Ume awake. She's been sleeping on her keyboard. It is the second day of their investigation of my case -- no further headway has been made.

But this phone call is about to change that.

"Another egg?" Ume asks, feigning surprise. She has to feign surprise because she has to feign almost all of her emotions, just like the other detectives.

She soon finishes the call, and enters the bullpen to find Takuma sprawled on the floor.

"Yes?" he asks, from his odd position.

"Another egg was sent to Rin." says Ume. "this time, there was a message."

"So we were right?" Takuma, says, standing. "This is a serial killer?"

"Serial egg sender. Possibly a killer — if we believe the message."

"What's the message?"

"Written on the egg in marker were the words 'I only kill my victims'."

Takuma stares blankly at Ume. He doesn't know what to make of it.

She doesn't know what to make of it either. Yuzuki, draped over a chair, does know what to make of it, but Takuma and Ume aren't going to ask her.

Yuzuki has been investigating my friends.

There's Youko, who works at the convenience store. There's Hato. He's studying to be a doctor. That's it, really... At least as far as which ones I'd suspect of killing me.

"Let me try to think through this more logically." says Takuma.

"Someone interacted with Shiro online. Was it confirmed that there is a link between them and the stalker?"

"Not really." says Ume. "Rin just assumed that because Shiro revealed so much personal information."

"But DID she...? If the stalker and Omurice aren't the same person, then there's no need to assume that Omurice figured out all that stuff about Shiro. Furthermore... was a link ever really established between the stalker and the killer?"

"Well, there must have been..." says Ume. "Wait, no, Rin just said that Shiro assumed that Omurice had started following her, and then inferred that the stalker later sent her that egg. So..."

"We could be looking at three separate people: Omurice, the stalker, and the killer." Takuma finishes, with a proud look on his face.

My only thought is, why did it take him so long to figure that out?

"Don't look so elated, Takuma." says Ume. "This means we have three times the work. And also, wasn't this revelation supposed to go backwards? Usually the detective thinks there are separate people and it all turns out to be one person..."

"It could still be one person, but we shouldn't base our methods on what television detectives do." says

Takuma, smoking his pipe and adjusting his deerstalker hat simultaneously.

"Well, we should get the second egg analyzed. Yuzuki, you aren't doing anything, why don't you retrieve it from Rin?"

"They say meat and eggs is a good breakfast." Yuzuki says. "So it makes sense to put meat in the egg. But my thought is that it seems like it'd be pretty hard to put the meat there!"

"She's right." says Ume.

"It can't be that hard." scoffs Takuma. "You can find articles all the time, in baking magazines that I don't read, about how to add weird stuff to eggs without breaking the shell."

"Yeah, but guts and bones and blood?" says Ume, skeptically.

"You can fill the egg with anything," says Takuma. "It's not hard to conceal a crack in the shell once you've emptied it. And some superglue probably would hold it together until the... reveal."

"Huh. Guess you're right." says Ume. "Weren't you going to pick up that new egg, Yuzuki?"

They both stare at Yuzuki, who immediately caves.

"Ohhh! You caught me trying to change the subject! Yes, yes, you're right."

Yuzuki slinks out of the office.

Takuma returns to his thoughts. Ume returns to her den.

A special report is waiting in her online inbox.

The Black Report.

...

I waited for my friend Hato to arrive. He's taller than me by a foot, with dark brown hair, and he likes beige.

He walked out of the medical school in an awkward position, like his skin was hurting him.

"Hey Shiro." he said. "Why don't we take a walk in the snow?"

"My favorite thing." I replied.

He set his eyes to the horizon, scanning it for over-produced clouds. Over-produced clouds make you happy with their beauty, but there is a shallowness to them. Though I know this to be true, I can't help but get irritated at scattered clouds. They need to be symmetrical.

"Enough about the weather." I said.

"We weren't talking about it." he replied.

"How's school?"

"I'd like not to talk about it."

"Why not?"

He winced away from me, contorting his face.

"I'd just not like to, Shiro."

"Is it because people make fun of you?"

I saw from reading his face that I was right.

"The shoes I buy... The clothes I wear... These rich kids go through an outfit a day. I wear the same thing... Cheap clothes. These people ... Think they're making good impressions with their fancy watches and socks. But I don't like their socks and also, I don't like watches. Why would I want to tell what the time is? I don't have anywhere to be, you know?"

"Was it your mother who wanted you to be a doctor?"

"No. No, it's not a family pressure thing. I don't quit because I think of what happens if I'm not there for my future patients. Imagine all the lives I'll save. If I quit school, and don't save them...

Then I might as well have killed them. See?"

"Wait -- "

"That makes no sense." I said. "You just said, 'imagine all the lives I'll save'. Imagine them. They're imaginary. There's no definite future where you save everyone. You can't know that. Why are you letting that stop you?"

"You don't understand." he said. "I live for the definite future. Everyone does. You go to school because you know you will learn. You call your friend because you know they will answer when you need them. You solve a crime because you know there's a culprit. To me, being certain of your future isn't some weird prediction, it's just like saying you're going to the store to pick up groceries. The chances of not picking up those groceries is slim. You might forget some groceries, but you can make a list. We don't live in an unpredictable world. Sorry... I'm going on too long."

"It's no problem. I just disagree with everything you're saying."

"Look, when people say 'that came out of the blue', they mean something like, going bankrupt, catching an illness, breaking a bone... but those things happen to millions of people a day, so they aren't unpredictable events..."

"This is why you let yourself live in fear?" I asked.

"I'm sorry I brought it up at all." he said. "I don't live in fear. I live in... well, let's not talk about it."

With that sentence, the conversation died, and we continued along the path in silence for awhile.

...

Yuzuki takes off her shoes at the entrance of Rin's boarding house.

Rin is waiting for her.

Yuzuki approaches her with a gentle smile.

"How's the egg doing?"

"I haven't done anything with it..." says Rin. Her head is lowered. She's fighting down her gag reflex.

"Good."

Yuzuki snaps on a pair of pink latex gloves.

She enters Rin's room.

"I should tell you..." says Rin, "I think I'm being followed."

"Don't worry about it." says Yuzuki. "It's nothing."

She opens the cardboard box resting on Rin's shallow table. Nested in paper shavings is another slice of egg carton.

"Some detective you are..." mutters Rin. "Want some tea?" she continues at a normal volume.

"Lovely, lovely, lovely." nods Yuzuki. "But only flower-based."

"Sure..." says Rin. She goes into the other room and puts on the kettle.

Yuzuki returns to examining the carton. She removes the egg, and studies its surface. As Rin had stated before, it is seamless. Or rather, it looks seamless. Annoyingly, there is a hairpin crack in the middle, smoothed over as best it could have been, but it is there.

"It's Shiro." says Yuzuki.

"What...?" asks Rin, softly.

"It just makes sense, right?" Yuzuki says. "Eggs come in a dozen. A dozen eggs of Shiro. Be prepared for ten more."

Rin pales.

She doesn't like tasteless mysteries such as this. I agree with her, despite being the tasteless mystery in question.

"And maybe... There'll be more cartons after that! Carton after carton, until all of Shiro has been delivered in egg-form! Oh, that's so dreadful..." Yuzuki begins sobbing loudly.

The tea boils.

Rin calmly pours the steaming water into the pot.

As calm as you can with shaking hands.

...

Hato showed me to his house. It was modest. Small, is another word. In fact, it was like his house was made out of hallways, encircling the kitchen.

I started to panic, until I realized how orderly it all was. Each "hallway" wrapped around another, like a box within a box. There were four of them. And four sliding doors. And four separate rooms. His stuff wasn't cluttered, in fact, it was symmetrically arranged. These patterns calmed me.

"Every action you take has a consequence..." he continued, mostly talking to himself at this point. "But it's true for negative actions as well. In this book I've worn to the spine from overuse, 'The Golden Apples of the Sun', there's a short story called 'The Sound of Thunder'... In it, by killing a butterfly, the protagonist changes what happens in the future. However!"

He stared at the ceiling, collecting his thoughts.

"I wonder what would happen if he went back to the time right before the election. And what if the election was decided by a single vote? And what if he changed that vote? Becoming a doctor is not killing the butterfly. It's like voting for the 'good candidate'. If I don't become a doctor... Hey, look at me, talking away. That's boring you, isn't it?"

"I've heard much more boring things said by much more boring people for much more boring longer." I said, though with some gratitude, yet with a smile, still with some resentment. "Thanks for letting me warm up in your house. However, I must be going now."

"What do you have left to do?" he asked.

"Well..." I thought about it. "Nothing... I guess."

"Then why don't you stay a little? I know... have I shown you the hens?"

They live out back."

"You made the garden?"

"No. That's for later. It's just a dry patch with a chicken coop."

"Certainly. I'll certainly go with you." I said.

...

Ume clicks open the report. Inside, she learns everything there is to know about my sister. Her fears, her weaknesses, her mothball collection.

"Good." Ume says, nodding her head.

She leaves her little office. Takuma is peering at a list of names.

"There sure are a lot of killers who stuff people into things..." he says, annoyed. "Flower pots, glass boxes, canopic jars, plastic bags... Not eggs, though. But maybe there's a connection. I'll look into all of them personally. Stupid Yuzuki's hogging the car, I need it right now."

"What's the rush?"

"She called. The egg contained more of Shiro." his eyes are cold, blank, deadset. "There won't be much left of her if we don't hurry."

"...Right." Ume grabs the Utsu Neko teapot. "I'll double down on my search. Sift through the directory again with different keywords."

"Yes, do that." Takuma taps his fingers rapidly on his mouth.

My death means nothing to him. At least solving it does.

He glances at the doggy bag of evidence he took from my house. He sees the bulky lining of my diary. He sees I've kept things there.

...

Hato gently lead me to the chickens, who are clucking and pecking softly. It was a small backyard, not even A backyard really, as it was squared off by the other houses tightly surrounding it. It was many backyards.

"Chickens are stupid..." he said, expecting me to think so as well. "And sometimes they don't work right. Do you know what lash eggs are? To call them eggs is a disgrace. I find them very interesting. They're mostly pus... and tissue. Sometimes I eat them to see what they taste like, and they're awful... ah... I'm sorry to have said that." He'd caught my expression. "I don't mean to gross you out. That was really gross, wasn't it? I was just kidding. I actually think that's really gross as well."

He laughed, but I didn't see the humor. That was a problem some people had with me, I'm not very funny.

"Here... I'll make up for it... you can feed the chickens." he said, with an encouraging smile. He opened the coop, and shoved me inside.

...

Takuma rips off the lining, and finds my stash of letters. If he'd bothered to look closer, he would've seen the hinge where you could open it properly. It wasn't even locked. What a waste of a good journal.

He skims through my personal materials.
"Trash, trash, trash, trash." he says, over and over, which hurts. "Ah."

To Shiro.

I know you were worried about the chickens having enough space, so I negotiated for the whole backyard for this purpose... Now I can have as many as four! I hope you like eggs, because I'll have too many. They're symmetrical, at least on one plane. I hope that's good enough... Medical school is getting scarier. Please send help. Just kidding, don't send help. I'm fine. Just stop by if you're feeling lost again, and we'll solve our problems together.

*Best wishes,
- Hato.*

"Well, there you go, that's the culprit right there. And I have his address. Easy." says Takuma.

He puts the letter in his pocket, and leaves, slamming the door to let Ume know he is going.

But she didn't hear... and he is in more danger than he thinks.

Ume soon emerges to refill the teapot. She pokes through the papers Takuma had so easily dismissed. She sees the letter from the YPDA, uncrumpled, as smooth as I could make it.

"Did Takuma send this?" she wonders.

...

I fell into the chicken dirt and corn kernels.
The chickens crowded around me, pecking me. At
my eyes, mostly. I soon was blind, and had gone into
shock from the bleeding, but mostly the surprise.

That was about when he began stabbing me with his kitchen knife.

I won't go into the details, because I don't personally like them. In any
case, I was soon very many pounds of dead flesh, surrounded by bloodied
feathers and eggshells that he'd clumsily stepped on in his earlier days of
attempted chicken-raising. Attempted chicken-raising sounds like a crime, but
really it's just what happens when you get all your information from online
forums.

The nasty chickens continued to peck at my corpse, probably out of spite.

Hato dragged my body out of the coop, kicking them away.
He lifted a section of moss from the ground, where he'd been hiding a hole. A
vertical grave, the only way he could fit me in his minuscule backyard.

But first he needed to get to my leg flesh and stomach bits. The parts
buried deeper would decompose sooner, was his likely reasoning, so
that's what he cut from me first.

To make his eggs.

Making eggs at nighttime, how strange.

...

Takuma approaches Hato's house, brimming with dangerous levels of confidence. He finds the door slightly open. He is expected.

Takuma steps inside, ignoring the house slippers once again, tracking dirt on the mat. Being incorporeal, the assumption is that I would no longer care about such things; that they wouldn't bother me; that the weighted world carried no weight, so to speak. But who can say that an ocean doesn't feel every drop, or that a mountain doesn't feel every molehill?

I can confirm that yes, Takuma tracking dirt on a tatami mat was thoroughly irritating, no matter how much less of the world I walked.

"Hello... enter..." a voice beckons from inside.

Takuma navigates through the small packed rooms of the house: hallway, bathroom, hallway, bedroom, hallway, kitchen, hallway... storage closet.

Hato is crumpled on the floor of the closet, covered in shoes and old clothes.

"This is how I think." he says.

"When I want to think, I just have a cup of noodles." says Takuma.

"Why are you here, detective? Don't you have a case?"

"You know who I am? How good! I'm famous."

"In Yamagata..."

"I'll take what I can get."

"I'm the killer, you know." says Hato, looking sad.

"Yes... it was very obvious once I saw your convenient letter."

"It WAS convenient, wasn't it?"

"Hmm."

Takuma considers how convenient the letter was. He decides that it certainly was convenient, as Hato had pointed out.

"Are you saying it was a trap?" he asks.

"No. I just wanted to speed things up. Speaking of up, would you help me... up?"

Hato holds out his hand. Takuma ignores it.

Hato stands all by himself, just like a adult.

"Let me make you something."

Takuma's eyes narrow.

"If it's an egg, I won't eat it."

"Not even a Deviled Egg?"

"I think I'm looking at one already..."

Hato ignores Takuma's bad detective wisecrack and begins to cook.

Takuma paces around the house, eyeing Hato's movements.

"Why did you kill Shiro?" he asks.

"I helped her." Hato starts cutting an onion. "I cut out her bad parts and put them in an egg. The symbol of fertility. So that she can be reborn. I call it 'egg medicine.'"

"Yes, your planted letter indicated you were studying medicine. What else did you plant at Shiro's house?"

"Just one other thing. But it was all to help you find me. Because you're going to decide if I'm right..."

"Well, you're not, so that ends that." says Takuma, readying his handcuffs.

"Not yet, Takuma. We haven't had my debate. I want to... tell you..."

Hato is crying from the onion.

"I got the confession." says Takuma, "The only reason I'm not arresting you is because I'm hungry. I always get hungry on the job. Especially with your annoying food-based mystery. But since you're here and all... I was wondering what you meant by 'I only kill my victims'."

"That was supposed to stimulate your appetite."

Hato fries noodles in a pan.

"It's my entire thesis, really. By never killing anyone who wouldn't consent to me killing them, I am never in the wrong. I am only doing what I already would have done. Here are your noodles."

Hato gives Takuma a bowl of noodles.

"What?"

...

Rin pours the hot tea on Yuzuki's hand.
She screams and recoils, sobbing hysterically.
"I'm clumsy, I'm clumsy, that's why." Rin insists.
"No, it isn't why." Yuzuki's voice has gotten very
low. "You think I'm taunting you with my crying and
such. I'm just a very emotional person, why don't people
get that?"
"I'm sorry, Yuzuki. It just doesn't seem like you really care,
despite all your carrying on."
"That's very rude, Rin. Yes, I will call you 'Rude Rin' now. I'm
also leaving." Yuzuki stands. "I think I've investigated
enough all around here. I need my treatment. And
goodbye."

Rin is left as confused as ever, and slightly ill. She
decides to mop the spill and think about it.

...

"What you just said makes no sense, I hope you know that." says Takuma. He is attempting to reason with someone for whom reason is an unfed dog. "It does make sense. Just trudge through the logic. You'll get to the sunset." Hato slurps his own bowl of noodles.

Takuma slurps his noodles as well.

They stand there slurping.

It's a bit awkward.

"The sesame seeds were a nice touch." Takuma says, setting down his bowl. "But you're a despicable person. How do you presume to know that someone is consenting to you killing them? And I hope you know that assisted suicide is still illegal?"

"I can see the future." says Hato, stirring his noodles.

"Could you tell that I would be rolling my eyes at that sentence? Because I am."

"I'm serious." Hato looks straight into Takuma. "I see the future. It fills me with endless regret and relief, for the things that I lose and the things that I gain. But more importantly, I control other people with my actions. You wouldn't be here without me. And you're not going to let me go unless I give you a reason."

"I'm not letting you go. I'm just respectfully waiting for you to finish your noodles."

"An egg would go well with them, hmm? I wonder, can you guess? Can you guess how I manipulated Shiro into wanting me to kill her?"

He's too close to Takuma.

Takuma grabs Hato's wrist. He pulls him even closer, and slaps the cuffs on him.

"I'd say sorry... Well, no I wouldn't."

Takuma pages the office the good news.

"Another case solved by the YPDA." Takuma is triumphant.

Hato only coughs.

His bowl of noodles is half-finished.

...

Ume studies the Black Report. Then the records of Rin's interview. She slaps her forehead, privately.

Carrying her mug of secrets, she enters the bullpen, unpins the note that reads "Shiro's stalker", and tosses it in the trash.

Yuzuki enters, her hand wrapped in a scarlet scarf.

"Where's Takuma?"

"Where's the new egg?" Ume glances down Yuzuki's person.

"I didn't take it. It's just more of Shiro."

"Every piece of evidence must be cataloged."

"Yes, but it's just tiny bits of her."

Ume sighs.

"That's true. No value." she makes a note on a ledger.

"Takuma left spontaneously, on pure detective instinct."

"What a visionary!"

"Let's hope he comes back alive." Ume smirks.

...

Hato hunches over, clutching his stomach, his mouth drawn taught.

"You detectives were always going to find me." he says. "But I had many ways of dealing with it. Many choices."

"We have a strict protocol at the YPDA, we're a very professional service."

"No... the one... constant is that you never played fair." Hato's voice is stretching out of his mouth like a baby bird for a worm.

"You cut corners, you played tricks. In fact, you barely did any proper detective work at all."

"Never said what the protocol was." Takuma says, masterfully gaining the conversation comeback award.

"You... don't..." Hato collapses on the threshold, frothing at the mouth.

He shakes violently.

Takuma watches.

He is still.

Takuma scratches his head.

His eyes look dead. His hands look dead. He is dead.

"Hmm." says Takuma. "I suppose I did let him go, after all."

He pages Yuzuki the address.

And also...

"Sharpen your knife."

...

Rin sits across from
the detectives yet again.

"Excuse me?" she asks.

"Expert forensic analysis, intellectual deductions,
two crime scene investigations, quasi-arrest, body
discovery..." lists Ume. "It comes to roughly 900,000 yen, but
the exact figure's in the bill."

"I guess you did all you could do..." says Rin. "except you
disrespected me the whole time. You were unprofessional. You left more
evidence than you found at the crime scene. It will take weeks for a proper
agency to sift through the mess you've created... In short, that fee is ridiculous
for the low quality service you provide."

"You know what I find ridiculous? Giant mascot characters." says Ume.

"Oh, I like them." says Yuzuki.

Rin pales.

"But you wouldn't think a highly regarded business woman would be into that sort of
thing... That would be a very surprising fact." says Takuma. "And what about all those
strange pictures of mascot characters on her computer? There's a word for that, and it's
'mildly offputting, but I try not to judge'."

"Well, well, well... well what do you want?" stammers Rin.

"Just stop complaining and smile at me!" says Yuzuki.

"And pay what you owe." says Takuma, suavely sliding the bill across the table.

"And don't spill tea on it." adds Yuzuki, rubbing her hand.

Rin forces a smile.

"Fine. This is extortion. But you got me." she pulls out her checkbook,
"Another case closed." says Ume. "Boy, it sure was tough. But we had some
laughs. We had some times. We timed some laughs... It was a special
experience. I liked the part when you —"

"There." Rin snaps, slamming the check on the table and bolting from her
seat.

"I will never hire you again, and I will never recommend your services.
Thank you for taking on my case. Goodbye."

She slams the door.

"Someone needs more blackmail." says Ume.

"We should get on that..." says Takuma.

"I need a shower." says Yuzuki.

...

If one hand got a cut, so
did the other. If one side of my
face had a mole, I had to paint the
other side with a mole as well.
Things needed to be symmetrical. But
the YPDA was asymmetrical in every way.
They did their best to make my case
asymmetrical as well.
So I am glad I never joined them.
And that my grave is comfy.
And that my bad parts are gone.

...

Kuroyo behind the tree.

A picture for the YPD.

What awful secret would she find?

A broken egg, a broken mind.