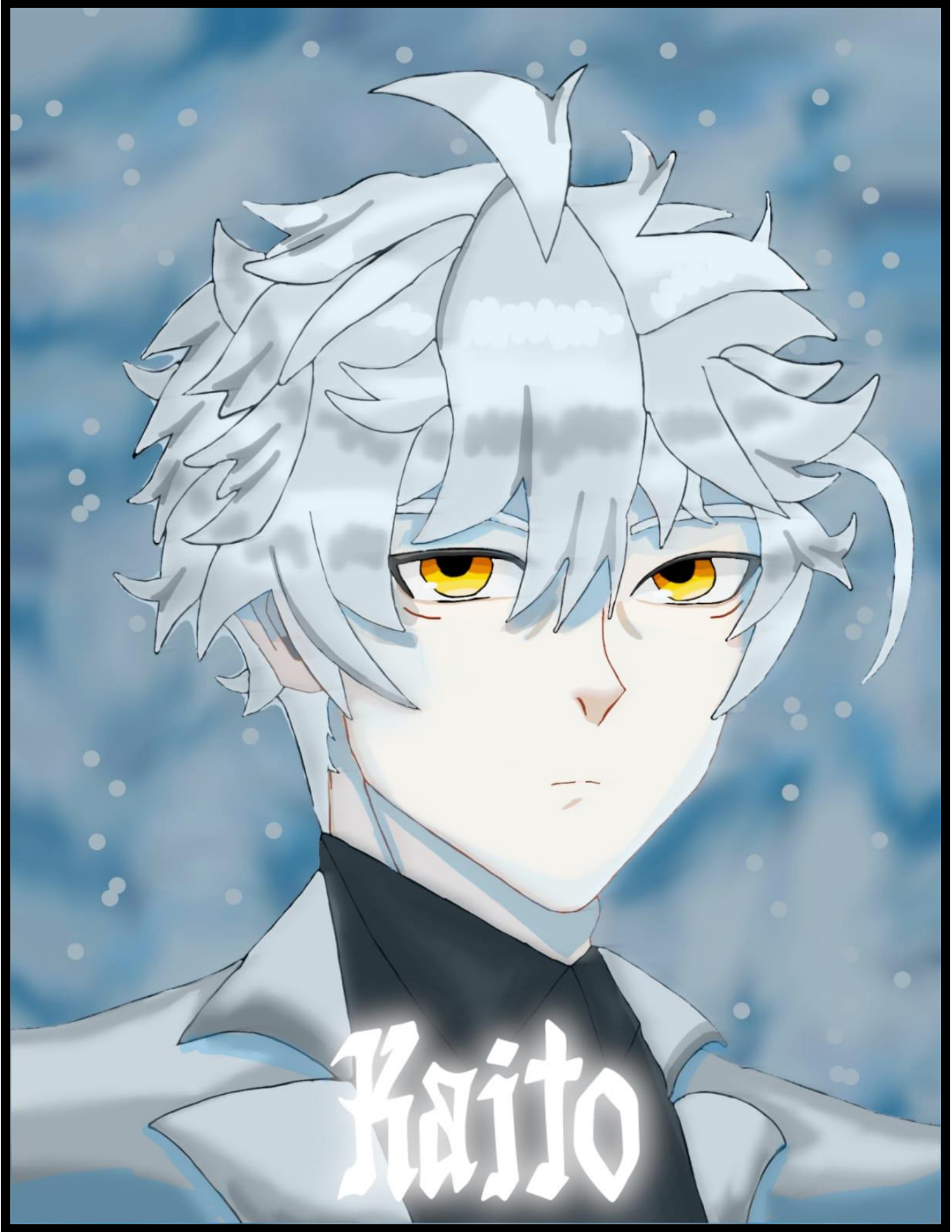

The White Demon


Kaito

Here again. The motionless hands confirm this is my dimension.

I check my injections; the dosage was high. I'll correct it.

When they wake up, they scream the same things they always do. Then they see me and fall silent.

They remember me as someone useful or close. None of those people ever existed. Some cannot even recognize me; perhaps the drugs worked well.

I don't want them to recognize me.

Those who do not identify me survive.

Those who do, die.

— Welcome Paul Gerson, you are at your judgment.

It always happens the same way: questions, screams, insults.

— WHY CAN'T I MOVE!?

— The injection didn't just leave you unconscious, it also left you paralyzed. Save yourself the effort.

When they become irritating...

— I'LL KILL YOU!!

I place a cloth in their mouth. I don't like noise.

—I can see that look. I've seen it hundreds of times. Everyone asks: What did I do to deserve this? I'll answer you.

My real memories do not deserve to be used here. I access my mental filing system. Folder: Violet Gerson.

— Your mother possessed a considerable fortune. She was murdered without any trace of the culprit.

That is when they usually react. I continue.

—I went to the scene after the police left. I have an arrangement with them. Second opinions in exchange for unrestricted access. The crime occurred 40 hours ago. The children were interrogated for up to 8 hours. After that, the culprit would disappear. Very little time.

—Crime scenes speak. You only need to know how to listen.

—Violet fell down the stairs, was strangled, finished off at the neck, and stabbed five more times in the stomach.

—Too many actions. Too many stories.

—When a scene tries to tell too many stories, I abandon the what and move on to who wants me to believe what happened.

—The shove and the strangulation indicate a right-handed person. The stab wounds, a left-handed one.

—It is not a contradiction. It is narration.

—Her expression showed surprise. She knew her attacker, and he waited to be seen. No signs of defense. On her right hand, the mark of a recently removed ring and abrasions. Another convenient story.

—I then examined the family photographs. Three were manipulated: the first was missing four children, the second two, and the third one. Violet had five. The report stated that the fifth child had abandoned the family years ago.

—It seemed like a natural progression, but I checked the dates. The modifications were unnecessary. Someone altered them so they would appear manipulated and direct the investigation. They did not hide information. They focused it.

—I abandoned the question of who benefits from Violet's death and began asking who benefits from a mistaken investigation.

—I continued reviewing. A child's room with old blood. A bedroom with a whip. Three distinct blood groups, separated by years. Real abuse or staged?

—The kitchen was more revealing. Stove off, pot untouched. Two served plates containing Violet's DNA, but only one with her fingerprints. Blonde hairs strategically distributed: trash, fingernail, pillow. From the same person, but with different levels of temporal degradation. As if someone had gathered traces and planted them.

—Cigarette butts, blood altered with anticoagulants. Missing jewelry, money, devices, and a notebook. Everything pointed in one direction. That is why I became suspicious. The clues worked together too well. People lie, murderers lie, but reality is usually messy. The scene was too coherent. Too prepared.

—I investigated the inheritance. Paul would receive 50%. Perfect motive. Too perfect. The will was modified twice: 3 weeks earlier it favored you. Two days earlier, it removed that benefit and transferred it to a stranger.

—How curious, you remained motionless, but when I mentioned the second modification you tried to move your fingers.

—I continue. I reviewed calls and previous inquiries. There was interest in specific details of the first modification. But no evidence of knowledge regarding the second.

—And I understood. The scene did not show the current reality, but an older one. The killer knew Paul would inherit, but was unaware that he had stopped inheriting two days earlier.

—I confirmed with those responsible for the will that the family attended the second alteration. They told me yes.

—The scene ceased to be a collection of clues and became a mistake of knowledge. Much more difficult to conceal than a fingerprint or a drop of blood.

—The killer needed family knowledge to construct a scene based on years of conflict, yet enough distance to ignore recent changes. The relatives knew about the second modification. Strangers lacked the historical context. Only one person fulfilled both conditions: the absent son. The fifth child.

—The evidence did not point to you, it was created by you. Everything was false except you, what you knew, what you ignored, and your mistakes. I ended up seeing you. Paul Gerson.

—Your scene did not show a murder. It showed the murderer. I want to see how you try to defend yourself.

I always find it interesting to hear how they attempt to escape a decision already made. I removed the cloth.

— ..... I can give you all the money you want! Just get me out of here!

They almost always disappoint me.

—You denied nothing, nor did you ask how I found you or what evidence I had. You went straight to negotiation. Keep your money, Paul. I'm not interested.

—I finished in two hours. I waited for your departure, deduced your escape route, and became your luggage inspector. I injected you and we ended up here. Now I will tell you my conclusions: what is false, what is true, who you are... or rather, who you were.

—You are ambidextrous, I noticed it when you carried your luggage. You decided to wait until Violet saw you so that her expression of surprise would confuse the detectives. The ring belongs to a woman; you stole it to suggest a greedy female killer or distract with that possibility. But in your case, it was pure greed.

—No photograph is fake. The blood groups belong to your siblings, the last one is yours. You are the youngest. You fled Violet's abuse. The hair belonged to your eldest sister. The cigarette butts to your smoking brother. The notebook and stolen devices to the others. All to turn them into suspects and take advantage of uncertainty.

—You spent years away, yet your scene included all of them. You never stopped thinking about them. Your first victim was your mother because you never overcame her influence. Resentment tries to erase, you archived. You preserved photographs, memories, names; that is not forgetting. You killed her 40 hours ago, but this scene has been planned for much longer. The last blood pattern is yours, you stopped being a spectator. Regretful people destroy evidence, you manufactured it. Even now I see regret, but not for the act. You regret not checking the will beforehand. Watching you leave with your luggage, I saw only pain hiding satisfaction.

—Now I will reveal something to you. Those who dissociate and only see a white silhouette with golden eyes are judged, not executed. But you see me perfectly. You are not dissociating, you are conscious. Those who recognize me have little time left. In the same way that you murdered Violet Gerson. There will be no audience. You will not be part of a masterpiece. You will only be a name, a number, and a status. It took me one hour to solve your masterpiece and another to solve you. Paul Gerson, Number 204. Executed.

Normally I let them pronounce their final words.

—..... I became this because of trauma. Were you born this way, or did you become this?

I remained motionless. I did not expect it. I observed the stopped clocks.

—Number 204, you have asked a question, not given an answer.

I was the middle brother of a strange family. I still remember Riko's birth; Saiko and I immediately argued over who would protect her more. We used to do the same thing with our mother.

Our father, Abaoa, was distant. From a young age he taught us. He saw something in us.

At 7 years old, I mastered multiple languages.

At 8 years old, I understood anatomy better than university students.

At 9 years old, I diagnosed like a professional psychiatrist.

At 10 years old, people began to feel predictable.

I thought it was normal. It wasn't.

Time passed, but it was not enough to forget that house.

The last time I saw my parents, we were talking. They said it would be the last time together.

They did not stop talking as they faded away until they disappeared.

My mother's teacup fell to the floor.

It took one second to break. That second lasted an eternity.

Agents arrived. Saiko was crying.

I thought they would return. They never did.

They left us in a room. Governor Kim tried to adopt us. But I saw his eyes: he was not seeking benevolence, but necessity.

We ended up in an orphanage for gifted children. A prison of indoctrination. I later learned that compromising information was revealed after he lost the trial. Almost instantly. Sounds like something my father would do. Or perhaps I'm delusional.

The most interesting things were Kamil and Professor Bening. A rivalry and someone who treated us like people.

Four years later, my brother woke up fighting. I was the last to wake up and protected Riko. He was stabbed in the neck. I tried to stop the bleeding, but it was too late. His last words were that I should check my father's letters. I beat the killer repeatedly. I committed my first murder. I followed the instructions on how to hide a murder. I... obeyed everything. I temporarily left my brother's body to find somewhere to bury it and went to sleep. I think Riko heard my tears.

Days later, the authorities found Saiko, but not the killer. After hours of interrogation, we were declared innocent due to lack of evidence. I divided myself into faces depending on the situation. That was when the social one was born.

Kamil left. Riko was going to be adopted by a wealthy family. I decided to let her go so she could live well. But she came back and promised she would never abandon me. I promised the same. We found blind spots in the cameras and escaped without being detected. I took Saiko's body with me. This time I was able to bury him properly...

We returned home, alone. Lumina appeared, a friend of our father. Her presence was supernatural. We accepted her help.

She trained us in spiritual martial arts and combat. She said our parents still existed and that perhaps we would see them again. That false hope annoyed me. She instructed me to go to an address. I did. I found the place and entered. I ended up finding a tape containing information about the Kim Government. I understood.

The reason Governor Kim tried to adopt us was because our father left a threat against him.

The reason information was leaked was to prevent us from being killed, yet still fail to do so.

The one who sent the information was Lumina.

She profiled Riko and me perfectly to predict our survival and sent Lumina to take care of us.

She left this information here for us to... destroy him. Destroy everything. I will do it. Not now. But I will.

Months later, she vanished as well.

I had to take care of Riko. I worked in multiple professions: forensic work, surgery, painting, test subject. I reduced my own food to feed her. My brain began to fail: migraines, hallucinations. I endured with expired medicine. One day I collapsed. When I woke up, I had been fired from almost everything.

The mafia found us. They threatened to kill Riko if I didn't join them. I accepted for her sake. They sent me to gambling operations, as a mercenary, even into planning. Due to lack of food and mental strain, I failed at something important. The mafia wanted to punish me. They noticed my androgynous beauty.

They turned me into a prostitute. Dressed as a woman. None of the money reached me. If I refused, they would kill Riko. One day, while I was cooking, Riko tried to stab herself in the neck. I stopped her and took the stab wound in my hand. I asked her what the hell she was doing. She said my faces did not fool her and that she could see what I was really thinking. I could only calm her down.

Shortly afterward, I learned she would be sold in three days.

From that moment, I decided it. The mafia must receive what they have done. That is the function of karma, and I am the one who administers it.

I analyzed the situation. I needed to distract the masses and the law while linking them to the mafia. A massive fire was the answer. I also needed to escape poverty. I created several pre-laundered accounts.

The mafia makes people disappear daily. For the police, finding those bodies linked to organized crime would be substantial evidence.

I followed them for weeks to their clandestine cemetery. They buried bodies along the edges to minimize risk and labor; disturbed soil goes unnoticed that way. I would have to start the fire

myself. I must not be recognized as Kaito, but as someone from the mafia. If people ask around, my contingency will be covered: they will identify me as one of them, reinforcing the narrative. The fire must be massive, far from populated areas but visible. The police do not seek the truth; they seek the explanation that closes the case quickly. Confirmation bias will do the rest.

The fire would trigger the raid. I went to the clandestine cemetery. I searched for places where vegetation had not yet covered the disturbed soil: burials less than three days old. I extracted three bodies, wrapped them in plastic to avoid contamination, and refilled the holes by compacting the soil with dry leaves. I hid them in my basement. The cold would slow any odor until the precise moment.

With the Bio Mafia, I needed vital information. Criminal organizations entrust their security to a single master key derived from the leader's ego. I had to profile him. I would enter twice: first to map the cameras and analyze the boss's office in search of material vanity and identify firmware, second to replace the controller with a cloned one. I would cause intermittent failures at specific times to condition them into ignoring them as normal. I would take advantage of the brothel's money-delivery day for the replacement.

I needed false communication from the rival mafia to the pimp. I would force a gang confrontation to access an enemy soldier's phone while chaos covered everything. During the first entry, I mapped cameras and analyzed the boss's office. I found the security firmware. I bought the cloned controller and left provocative graffiti bearing the Bio Mafia's mark in rival territory. While delivering the money on the second day, I dropped the bills as a calculated distraction. While the supervisor collected them, I replaced his controller with mine. I said goodbye to him and began making the cameras fail at specific times. I programmed camera failures at specific hours. During the mafia meeting, I gained access to the enemy soldier's phone.

On the night of the second day, I confirmed the pimp's departure pattern: 4:30 PM to 5:00 PM. I accessed his office. A paranoid profile prefers physical backups over digital ones. I found the safe and, through differences in dust on the cabinet, obtained the safe's password. I opened it and found the phone password. I unlocked his phone, replicated his syntax and slang, drafted false betrayal messages using the enemy soldier's device, and left before his return.

On the third day, I selected abandoned houses. I distributed two corpses, left the mafia's mark in a place that would not burn, poured gasoline, scattered corrosive chemicals to simulate amateur cleanup, and left contradictory weapons (a pistol and a knife) with associated wounds to suggest loss of control. I added torture instruments and exposed organic remains. I lit the match and walked away. From a store, I called 911 while modulating a hysterical voice, reporting mafia members starting the fire. I broke the disposable phone.

I headed to the brothel. I needed the pimp's identity as an excuse to enter and gather the high-ranking members. After changing clothes, I entered his office. I began seducing him. I had noticed his sexual doubts and internal shame. I saw it in the way he looked at me. I decided to use that attraction to lower his guard. I pointed a gun at him using an anti-fingerprint cloth. Someone with those sexual doubts, paranoia, and dedication to this life must have experienced family abuse. I shouted while demanding the security card to awaken his traumas and block rational thought. It worked. He pointed to the safe. I demanded that he hand it to me himself so it would not look like a robbery. He gave it to me. I fired beside him, placed the pistol in his hand, and removed the cloth. I planted subtle signs of forgery in the suicide. I dressed like him, with a cap, glasses, and his perfume. I took his phone and called the boss, perfectly imitating the pimp, requesting a meeting regarding information about the South Mafia. I fired multiple shots to evacuate the place and left the third corpse at the entrance. It was a replica of me with fingerprints and face destroyed.

I activated the remote interference on the way to headquarters. I imitated the pimp's walk and posture. The cameras failed at the scheduled time. I moved through the cameras' blind spots. The crucial door camera shut down due to programmed interference. I used the card and entered.

In the information room, the founder's son recognized me. I shot him. His death would be important for my final move. I quickly cleaned the blood and shell casing. I reached the monitor. I remembered every detail of the boss's room: a painting represented his intellectual vanity. It concealed Morse code. I translated it into numbers. I gained access. The information was encrypted. I saved it onto a USB drive and left before the cameras returned.

I knew the interpretation: disappearance of the founder's son + silence from the pimp = alert. Fake suicide = mockery from the South Mafia. False messages = certainty. Fear -> paranoid anger. And they would find my body: dressed in female clothing, face disfigured, my fingerprints and hair on a corpse. Now they also believed I was dead.

I needed a rival for the Bio Mafia: the South Mafia. Bitter enemies. If they attacked each other while the police closed in, I would eliminate both. I would raise paranoia to the breaking point. Hybrid information was the perfect tool.

In the distance, the smoke from the fire was fading. The police must have been investigating by then. From my truck, I called the South Mafia leadership while imitating the pimp. I analyzed the stolen files: light encryption. I mixed real data with falsehoods. I sent a free sample: the location and combination of a secondary Bio Mafia safe. They verified it was real. They accepted massive payment through pre-laundered accounts. When they asked who I was, I replied:

—I am the pimp.

When they opened the file, the lie did its work: it detailed a total-cleanup operation against the South Mafia leadership that very night. An imminent death sentence. They took the bait.

The police examined the post-fire scene. They saw the mafia seal, contradictory weapons, mutilated bodies, and accepted the favorable narrative: It was the mafia. We have evidence.

Meanwhile, the South Mafia launched an assault on Bio headquarters. A brutal clash. Just as the violence reached its peak, the governor ordered a massive intervention. For the government, it was the perfect opportunity to improve its image in the newspapers.

Leaders tried to flee. But I, parked miles away, had calculated the exact second. I activated the final protocol: total remote blackout. I cut power, cameras, locking systems. Internal chaos. Sudden darkness sowed panic, a delay of seconds was enough. The police arrived like a wall of steel, intercepting hundreds at once. A perfect mass capture for the headlines.

While chaos consumed my enemies and sirens filled the night, I was already driving away in my truck. Seeking to close the final point:

Igor: founder of the Bio Mafia and direct connection to Governor Kim. With his organization nearly imprisoned, he had to return. Exactly what I expected.

I reconstructed Igor's line of reasoning.

He went directly to the cause.

—What started all of this?

They explained the conflict between the mafias and the figure of the "pimp" as the person responsible for the information trafficking and the mass killings.

—And where is he?

—Dead in the brothel.

—Take me there.

He did not ask, "Who did it?"

He asked the correct question:

—Who concluded that this was a mockery by the South Mafia?

Silence.

Someone answered.

—Good. Now tell me who concluded that they wanted you to think that.

Another silence.

—That's what I thought.

Then he saw my disfigured corpse.

—Ladies and gentlemen, we have something interesting.

Perhaps he checked the phone and commented: "Why would you communicate vital information to a soldier? They're not reliable. I just learned that today."

—They say the pimp came in asking for a meeting.

—Hearing "the pimp" so many times gives me a headache. When someone wants you to believe an idea that strongly, doubt it. Confirm this: was it really him?

—Yes.

—Describe him.

The descriptions were contradictory. Igor smiled.

—Perfect.

He looked annoyed, but controlled.

—With the organization collapsing, I'll rebuild what is useful. But first I need the author of this.

Then he saw it. His son's body. That complicated everything.

—..... I'll find whoever did this, don't worry, Alejandro.

He kissed him on the forehead. At that moment things became worse. He was no longer hunting me; he was hunting the man he expected me to want him to hunt.

—Why would a plan leave so many clues of dissonance? This smells like a trap. I've been following something manufactured to lead me here. I'll change my way of thinking.

I imagined his reasoning:

—According to the newspaper, we caused the fire because of a mafia seal. The seal indicates that it's someone from the mafia. No outsider would know how to use it. The seal wasn't for the police; it was there for me. It must be someone who was forced to join.

He would try a different path.

—The author wanted me to discover him through the corpse. So I'll do it another way.

He appeared before one of his subordinates.

—I'll bring coffee for both of us. Pull up the records of forced recruits. When I return, I want them ready. Black coffee or skim milk? I'll take black. Milk doesn't sit well with me.

And he left.

When he returned, he handed him his cup and sat down.

—Hey, who's that white-haired kid? His intelligence assessment is very high. Does your coffee taste good?

—His name is Kaito. The one from the brothel entrance. And yes, it tastes good. Thanks, boss.

—And is that his sister? Is she going to be sold? I should've bought some cookies.

—Yes, but everything happened on the same day she was supposed to be sold.

—Mmm. Right.

—Right, sir?

—This doesn't taste as good without cookies. I'll go get some. Circle those two and send me a copy.

—What do we do with your son's body?

—..... Prepare a coffin.

He left. I think that's what happened.

After the funeral, he probably went to his office while reading the copy.

—So the emotional motive is here. My mafia usually recruits the poor; you were identified as an orphan. You're that girl's only family. Your only reason to live is her. You expect me to try to kidnap her. So I'll change my approach: a brief conversation, a controlled shootout.

Then he arrived. Soldiers outside. He entered the house.

—Well, I thought you had run away, Kaito. Perhaps I underestimated you.

—Mmm. Would you like some tea?

—No, don't worry. I brought my own. I don't take risks with poison.

—Why are you here?

—You should know, Kaito. I've come to settle accounts.

He placed his pistol on the table.

—But first I'll wait for your little sister to arrive. This wasn't where you killed for the first time, was it? The first time was much earlier. Back when you were still a child.

—.....

—That silence. I was right. The way you handle murder... the first time is chaotic. Yet you display familiarity. Killers take years to reach that point. And you're only eighteen. Quite remarkable.

—Your sister wasn't responsible for that first murder. It was someone else. Someone dead. Did you change after that? Witnessing death at such a young age is devastating. Do you like coffee?

—Was it a friend?

—No.

—Interesting. Then something more than a friend. Have you ever tried marshmallows?

—Now then... At first I thought it was because of your sister. But I changed my mind. If it were only about her, you would've run away. This was personal. You wanted to "punish us." And you left clues for me to follow. But I used other methods. What were you trying to accomplish with that?

—I knew you wouldn't follow the obvious clues, Igor. But you still didn't achieve it. I predicted your shift in interpretation. Those clues weren't meant to attract you directly, but to cover every possible way you think.

—..... I see. Do you realize I still have soldiers outside? Also, I noticed the carpet has been moved. You have a bomb here, don't you?

—Yes.

—I investigated your past. Governor Kim failed to adopt you. Are you looking for information about him?

—That's also true.

—And what makes you think I'll reveal anything?

—The fact that you haven't shot me.

Igor smiled.

—Good. Soldiers—

He dialed his phone. No one answered.

—Igor... I don't need you to reveal anything. Your investigation already gave me what I wanted. I left those clues to guide you to me. The fact that you haven't mentioned your arrangements with Kim tells me either that you're overconfident or that your connection to him is complicated. You confirmed that you know about Kim. What matters isn't what you know, but that you're still alive despite knowing it. That makes you a loose end. And I don't leave loose ends.

Before he arrived, I told Riko to go shopping. "When you come back, there will be soldiers. Do your thing." She agreed. She reviewed files, databases, memorized every detail. According to her, it went like this.

Riko returned carrying shopping bags.

The soldiers immediately raised their weapons.

She looked at the gun barrels, raised her hands, and set the bags on the ground.

—Relax. If I wanted to hurt you, you'd already be dead.

No one answered.

—You must be bored out here. Waiting while your boss talks to my brother. Ten minutes? Thirty?

Silence.

—Henry Lowell.

The man on the left stiffened.

—Ron Vilar. Samuel Nial. Ismael Owets.

The weapons remained aimed at her.

But now there was attention.

Fear.

—How do you know our names?

—Because I studied them.

—Liar.

—Not really.

She looked at Henry.

—Your wife's name is Elena. Your son has asthma. The kitchen window has been broken for two months.

Henry didn't answer.

Riko turned toward another.

—Ron. Your mother lives alone. She leaves the porch light on all night.

Ron swallowed.

—Samuel. Your daughter gets out of school at three twenty.

Samuel lowered his gaze.

—Ismael. Your wife is four months pregnant.

Now nobody spoke.

—How the hell do you know that?

—Because I memorized your files. I didn't study you. I studied the people you love.

Riko took a step forward. Nobody fired.

She smiled faintly.

—Interesting. None of you pulled the trigger. If you were certain I was lying, I'd already be dead.

—What do you want?

—Nothing. I just want you to understand something. Three days ago I hired several people. Some belong to the South Mafia.

Immediate reaction. Denial. Doubt.

—Maybe I'm lying. Maybe I'm not. But your wife still leaves the keys under the blue flowerpot, Henry.

Henry turned pale.

—The only thing that matters is that if I don't walk away from here, you'll receive a phone call. And after that call, a decision will be made.

Riko observed them.

—I'm curious. Which one of you will be the first to assume that the others have already chosen their families?

The four men looked at one another. For the first time, not at her. At each other.

Riko smiled. She had expected exactly that.

—Curious. A minute ago you were aiming at me. Now you're aiming to the sides. Henry isn't looking at me anymore. Samuel isn't either. And you two are watching each other with suspicion.

—Shut up!

One of them slightly turned his gun.

Toward a companion.

Everyone noticed.

Everyone pretended they didn't.

Riko let out a soft laugh.

—There it is. The fun part.

She checked her watch.

—You have ten seconds to decide what you value more: your comrades' lives or your families'.

Nine. Eight. Seven.

Samuel broke the silence.

—I won't risk my daughter.

—Idiot, she's lying.

—Then how does she know where my family lives? What if she isn't lying?

Five. Four. Three.

—Lower the gun.

—No.

Bang.

The shot rang out before the sentence ended.

Then came chaos.

Riko stepped back.

The men stopped seeing her.

They only saw each other as threats.

When the gunfire ended, silence returned.

Riko walked among the bodies and picked up a pistol from the ground.

Igor noticed the lack of response and heard the shots outside. He reacted instinctively, drawing his pistol and aiming it at me. I did the same, but Riko entered faster.

A single shot.

Igor fell to the floor with a hole in his head.

—You took a while, Riko.

—I did what you said. They believed I really had their families trapped. It was boring.

—Well, we don't have the information on Kim. Perhaps I underestimated Igor's loyalty, or perhaps he didn't have any. My part of the plan is over for now. Now it's your turn.

—Very well... Let's finish this act.

I no longer know this part with certainty. The way Riko moves is confusing even to me. She had to explain part of it, and I reconstructed the rest.

Riko had spent weeks preparing under a false identity as a university intern. She managed to infiltrate the logistics team of the governmental visit to Blackwood Penitentiary. She was the first to arrive and headed directly to the cell of the most dangerous prisoner: "The Butcher."

She slipped a message beneath the door.

The message read: "Butcher, I will free everyone in this prison in exchange for a deal. You will write in blood on the doors: 'I will come for every one of you.' If you do it, you will prove your courage. If you don't, you'll remain in chains. If you comply but betray me, I will reveal where your families are hiding. When the rulers pass your cell, I will be the intern with red eyes and black hair. Blink once for no, twice for yes."

The prisoner blinked twice.

Not because of the deal.

Because of his ego.

He believed the escape would be his victory, not Riko's.

Riko moved to the next phase without hesitation.

She studied the system: sensors, cameras, emergency protocols.

She understood how it worked and, more importantly, how it failed.

Then she designed an application that simulated massive biometric failures synchronized with the system's blind spots.

When she activated it the next day, security collapsed.

The locks opened in sequence as the system prioritized "medical evacuation" over containment.

The prisoners escaped.

The Butcher killed seven police officers before disappearing.

The blood-written message reached the rulers.

At first they dismissed it as an empty threat.

Then a severed hand appeared on their table.

Panic spread.

Riko contacted the prisoner again and proposed one final move: leave a final clue—

"Now I have the files that incriminate all of you. Thank the traitor among you."

Paranoia did the rest.

An old accusation was leaked.

A rape case linked to Kim.

It shattered the group's cohesion.

Its truth no longer mattered.

Everyone began accusing everyone else.

In the middle of the collapse, Riko served tea containing a fast-acting sedative.

By the time the bodyguards entered, the rulers were already unconscious.

There was no fight.

Only execution.

Riko cleaned the scene and forced the narrative.

She placed Kim's hands on weapons, bodies, and blood.

Perfect fingerprints.

No external evidence.

Kim woke up hours later.

He saw his bloodstained hands, the corpses, the silence.

He attempted to flee toward the private airport.

But I was there.

Kaito.

He woke up in a luxury cell.

Then came the trial.

The evidence was overwhelming.

But the verdict was:

Innocent.

We investigated.

Kim had not bribed the jury with money.

He had kidnapped the families of every juror weeks in advance.

"Vote guilty and they die. Vote innocent and they go home."

He is someone who cannot be stopped by ordinary law.

He will have to be stopped by mine.

We finally reached him.

The final conversation took place at night.

—I assumed you would come, Kaito and Riko. Resentment carried you far. Blaming me for the murder of the other rulers will only accelerate the chaos. But thanks to you, I can become the sole ruler.

—Let me guess. You have snipers aiming at us.

—You guessed it! You're a clever boy.

Riko didn't look at the surroundings.

She looked at her phone.

She displayed a message: the lead sniper's wife asking for help.

She did the same with the other profiles.

—You always use the same men. If they shoot, their families die first.

—Well played, little girl. Lower your weapons.

The rifles disappeared from the shadows.

—How did you do that?

—We don't reveal our tricks.

We found their families.

We staged real-time digital kidnappings.

They made their choice.

Kim clenched his fists.

—Fine. And the information... did you get it from...?

—From Dad.

—Then let's make a deal. I'll leave you alone. You let me live. Besides... I'm not alone. All of your people are under watch. Bening. Kamil. If I die, they die too.

—We know.

Kim blinked.

—What?

—Your snipers were neutralized three days ago.

Riko showed the video: Kamil sitting in a café while the supposed sniper had already been taken out of play.

—We bought them before you did. For twice the price. This isn't business. It's closure.

Kaito pointed toward the snipers.

—Your snipers were neutralized three days ago.

Riko showed the video: Kamil sitting in a café while the supposed sniper had already been taken out of play.

—We bought them before you did. For twice the price. This isn't business. It's closure.

—Pfft... We finally did it... Let's play a game, Riko.

—Alright. But I choose what we play.

We left.

It wasn't an easy question.

But the answer would be: both.

—Hey, why were you staring at the clock? Answer my question.

—..... Executed.

Paul fell down the stairs, stabbed in the neck and six more times in the stomach.

I'm tired.

But I still have one more thing to do.

I leave the dimension, wash my face, change my clothes, and head to the park.

I arrive at my destination.

—Hello, Riko. How long have you been waiting for me?

—628,193 milliseconds.

—Don't make it sound like an eternity. It's only 5 minutes and 28 seconds.

—Doesn't matter. Shall we play?

—Of course.

I'm tired.

But I'm happy.