
The White Demon



Kaito and Riko were sent back to their homes, but they now worked for the mafia.

Telling the police would not help them. The mafia already knew who they were, and no one would easily believe that they were being forced to work for them.

Escaping was not an option either. If they tried, the mafia would come after them, and the retaliation would probably be much worse.

Igor left the place to go on vacation. They never revealed who Kaito and Riko really were. They only explained what had happened to them and why they were there.

“I hope to see that you’re a good boy. As long as you stay here, the government won’t know about you. But nothing comes for free.”

“……”

Kaito simply stared at Igor.

“Weird kid… Anyway, see you around.”

Igor put on his hat and left to begin his trip.

Riko looked at several of the boys who were there.

“Hi. Who are you guys?”

One of them stared directly at her.

“Who am I?”

“Huh?”

Their gazes were vacant. They did not even seem to know their own names. Their bodies showed obvious signs of disorientation.

A lobotomy?

No.

“They erased their memories.”

Kaito appeared beside her.

“All I see when I look at them is a disturbed mind. They don’t know why they’re here. They simply follow orders. They don’t even know how long they’ve been in this place. Their fingers are trembling, and they show no sense of comfort. They did the same thing to them that they did to Igor, but this time, completely.”

Kaito and Riko returned home.

Kaito began investigating the machine used to erase memories.

“Hmm…”

“What is it?”

“Apparently, that thing doesn’t actually erase memories. It sends them to a deep part of the mind, somewhere you could never access on your own. You retain the basic functions of your mind, but you lose every memory related to who you were.”

“Then those kids can recover.”

“Not really. Unless you teach them what their lives were like again, it won’t happen.”

“Something like when you’re about to die and see your entire life flash before your eyes in a few seconds?”

“Yes. Something like that. I suppose something of that sort could work.”

“Well, then we’d better focus on making sure that doesn’t happen to us.”

“Yeah…”

However, Kaito decided to make a deal with the mafia.

“Leave my sister out of this, and I’ll do twice the work.”

“Why would we do that?”

“She’s a child. Come on, she couldn’t do almost anything you would need her to do.”

“Oh, really? And what are we going to ask her to do?”

“Win bets and perform certain jobs related to obtaining money. Come on, they’re not as unpredictable as you think.”

“And you’ll be able to do all of that by yourself?”

“Of course.”

“Hmm… Fine. But let’s make one thing clear: your sister could pay for any of your failures. And she will.”

“I know.”

Riko was removed as one of the employees and was kept as leverage to force Kaito to comply. Even so, she continued appearing in the mafia’s records.

“WHY?!”

“Because I want you to be safe. I’ll be fine.”

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but you’ve literally been at your physical limit for months! Stop this!”

“I know. But this was my fault. Let me bear the consequences.”

“Tch… You’re not going to change your mind, are you?”

“No. This is just an empty attempt.”

“…… Don’t die, Kaito.”

“I don’t intend to.”

While Riko remained at home, Kaito was sent out to place bets.

He carried one of the mafia’s seals in his pocket.

He entered one of the casinos.

“Alright… So this is the place. I’m supposed to play… poker.”

Kaito headed directly toward the tables where the high rollers played.

“Is this where they play poker?”

“Yes, kid.”

“Good… I’m feeling lucky. When does the round start?”

“Right now.”

The dealer opened a new deck and picked up the cards.

(Alright. Each manufacturer can use a different order when arranging the cards. I researched the manufacturers of the decks used for poker. These were made by Don Ferlone, so the order should be spades from Ace to King first, then hearts from Ace to King, diamonds from Ace to King, and finally clubs from Ace to King.)

The dealer began performing an overhand shuffle, taking groups of between two and five cards from the top and placing them back onto the rest.

Kaito watched carefully.

(The first movement was 2 cards; the second, 4; the third, 3; the fourth, 2; the fifth, 5; the sixth, 2; the seventh, 4; the eighth, 3; the ninth, 5; the tenth, 2; the eleventh, 4; the twelfth, 3; the thirteenth, 5; the fourteenth, 4; the fifteenth, 3; and the sixteenth, 1.)

(Then the order should be: K♣, Q♣-10♣, 9♣-6♣, 5♣-A♣, K♦-J♦, 10♦-7♦, 6♦-5♦, 4♦-A♦, K♥, Q♥-10♥, 9♥-6♥, 5♥-4♥, 3♥-A♥, K♠-Q♠, J♠-10♠, 9♠-7♠, 6♠-3♠, 2♠-A♠.)

The cards were dealt.

However, Kaito had tracked the entire distribution. He knew which cards the other players had, which ones he had, and which ones remained in the deck.

With a single chip, he gradually began building his way up, taking as much as possible from the high rollers and later handing it over to the mafia.

In another game, the shuffle was different.

A riffle shuffle.

The dealer split the deck into two groups of 26 cards.

(The deck is new. It's now divided into two blocks. Since they belong to the same deck, one contains spades and hearts, while the other contains diamonds and clubs.)

The riffle shuffle began.

Kaito watched as the cards interlaced.

(I can't mentally follow every single movement, but I can distinguish the sizes and precision of the groups. The first was thin, the second slightly thicker, then the third was thin and the fourth was thin. Then the pattern repeats. So it's 1L - 2R - 1L - 1R.)

(Then the overall order should be: A♠, A♦, 2♦, 2♠, 3♦, 3♠, 4♦, 5♦, 4♠, 6♦, 5♠, 7♦, 8♦, 6♠, 9♦, 7♠, 10♦, J♦, 8♠, Q♦, 9♠, K♦, A♣, 10♠, 2♣, J♠, 3♣, 4♣, Q♠, 5♣, K♠, 6♣, 7♣, A♥, 8♣, 2♥, 9♣, 10♣, 3♥, J♣, 4♥, Q♣, K♣, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥, 8♥, 9♥, 10♥, J♥, Q♥, K♥.)

And so it continued.

He would enter with one chip and leave with thousands, taking only 1% of what he earned. The rest went directly to the mafia.

Every time he finished a game, Kaito analyzed what had happened.

(Good. I was able to track everything correctly. I also adapted well to the opponent's reactions. I should be more subtle when observing the cards. I won practically the same amount of chips as in the first game. I need to improve that.)

Until…

"Excuse me, Mr. Kaito."

"Huh? What is it?"

"One of our VIP guests has invited you. He asked me to bring you to him."

"Huh? Alright."

Kaito followed him.

"This way."

The employee pointed toward a chair at a table in the back of the VIP area, several meters above the tables where the regular customers played.

Kaito sat down.

"Hello. Do I know you?"

A figure remained hidden in the shadows.

“Probably not. You don’t seem to have been doing this for very long. You also don’t look like someone who works for the mafia.”

“The mafia? Me?”

“Don’t lie. You have a mafia seal in your right pocket.”

“I don’t have it.”

“Ha. You just confirmed it.”

Kaito remained completely still.

“It was a test. Even after I told you that, you didn’t react at all. You’re not a normal player. You’re not even simply an expert player. You’re someone who was trained and sent here.”

“……”

“But it doesn’t matter. Come on, let’s play poker. You only have one chip?”

“Yes.”

“Good. If you win, you’ll get the chips you’ve earned here multiplied by a thousand, plus an extra amount that the mafia won’t be able to take from you.”

“This is a trap.”

“A trap? We’re just playing poker.”

The man placed his chips on the table.

There were one hundred chips, each worth 100,000 pesos.

“I can’t refuse.”

“Good. I’m glad you know that.”

“So… alright.”

The dealer began with an overhand shuffle.

Kaito watched.

But then…

“Hey. Shuffle it differently.”

“Understood, King.”

Kaito looked toward the man who had invited him, although he continued watching the cards.

“King?”

“Yes. I’m the King of Poker around here.”

“Hmm.”

(Stubborn.)

The dealer performed a riffle shuffle.

However…

“Cut.”

Kaito cut the deck.

“Do it again.”

The dealer shuffled again.

“Cut it again. And now shuffle it again.”

All the cards were dealt.

Kaito received:

A♠ 9♠

7♦ 4♣ 2♥

The King received:

K♠ K♦

10♣ 8♥ 3♠

The King bet.

“One chip.”

Kaito didn’t want to reveal information about his tracking.

“Fold.”

The King won.

But he did not celebrate.

He expected Kaito to use his tracking, and Kaito had just denied him that information.

Kaito: 1

King: 100

Round 2.

The dealer used an overhand shuffle.

Kaito knew what was going to happen.

But the King changed the conditions.

“New deck.”

The deck was replaced.

Kaito continued observing.

“New dealer. And put up a barrier.”

“Understood, sir.”

Kaito immediately understood the problem.

He would no longer be able to completely observe the movement of the cards.

So he changed his strategy.

(I won’t be able to see everything. Then I’ll divide my information into confidence levels. Cards I know with high confidence, medium confidence, low confidence, and cards that are completely unknown.)

The King watched him.

He noticed the change in his expression.

(He doesn’t need complete information.)

So he changed the conditions again.

“Cut. Second cut. Swap two blocks. New partial shuffle.”

Kaito updated his model.

But his brain began paying the price.

A small amount of blood began coming from his eyes.

The King noticed.

“Crying blood? Hemolacria? Thinking that hard didn’t exactly agree with you, did it?”

The cards were dealt while Kaito wiped his eye.

Kaito:

Q♠ J♠

10♣ 9♦ 4♣

King:

A♥ A♦

8♠ 6♣ 3♥

Kaito needed a K or an 8 to improve into a straight.

The King had a pair of aces.

The King bet.

“One chip.”

Kaito called.

“Two chips.”

Kaito called again.

“Five chips.”

Kaito stopped.

(Something’s wrong. He’s trying to determine whether I’m calling because I can read him or because I’m tracking the deck.)

Kaito observed the cards.

But he did not have enough information.

So he made a decision.

“All in.”

Kaito put down his last chip.

The King called.

Kaito drew a card.

K♣.

A straight.

Kaito:

K-Q-J-10-9

King:

A-A-8-6-3

Kaito won.

Result:

Kaito: 2

King: 99

The King had just gained information.

(He’s capable of turning incomplete tracking into a correct decision.)

Meanwhile, Kaito had learned something as well.

(He’s willing to invest chips to test a hypothesis. The chips are information.)

Round 3.

The King changed nothing.

Kaito observed him.

(He wants me to think he's trying to preserve the state of the deck.)

Kaito observed every card.

His model was excellent.

Kaito:

A♣ K♣

8♣ 5♣ 3♣

A flush.

King:

10♠ 10♦

7♣ 6♥ 2♠

A pair of tens.

The King bet three chips.

Kaito called.

The King put down ten chips.

Kaito called.

The King put down twenty.

Kaito called.

(He’s too confident. Does he want me to notice that expression?)

Kaito tried to evaluate his microexpressions.

But he could only identify confidence.

(He’s deliberately contaminating the information I can obtain from him.)

So he abandoned psychological reading and returned directly to the cards.

Kaito called.

They both revealed their hands.

Kaito won.

Kaito: 32

King: 69

The King watched him and gave a faint smile.

(Why is he smiling?)

Meanwhile, the King thought:

(If psychological information doesn’t work, he’ll go straight back to structural information.)

Round 4.

The King began varying his bets using strange patterns.

Kaito noticed that his predictions about the King’s behavior were becoming less accurate.

So he returned to the deck.

(Hmm… hasn’t he responded?)

The King changed his pattern again.

But Kaito still did not react.

(He’s stopped reacting.)

The cards were dealt.

Kaito:

A♦ A♣

K♦ K♣ 7♥

Two pair.

King:

Q♠ J♠

10♠ 9♠ 8♠

A straight flush.

Kaito knew exactly what hand the King had.

And he knew he was losing.

The King bet.

“Five chips.”

“Fold.”

The King won.

But he did not reveal his cards.

(Hmm… The King had a straight flush, but he only bet five. He wasn't trying to win with that hand.)

(He was looking for a reaction.)

(A reaction Kaito didn't give him.)

Kaito: 32

King: 69

Round 5.

Kaito noticed something.

(The King has too many tools. He can't use all of them at once. So… what does he actually need?)

The cards were dealt.

Kaito:

10♠ 9♠

7♠ 6♦ 2♣

King:

A♠ K♠

Q♦ 8♣ 4♥

(10-9-7. I need the 8.)

(And I know where it is.)

The King put down ten chips.

Kaito called.

The King put down another twenty.

Kaito called again.

The King put down thirty more.

Kaito called once more.

The King watched him.

Kaito knew what he was trying to determine.

(He’s trying to find out whether I have a strong hand.)

So Kaito made a decision.

“All in.”

The King could call.

But Kaito had already constructed the situation specifically for that moment.

The King called.

King: 29 chips.

Kaito: 2 chips.

Kaito drew his card.

8♠.

Kaito:

10♠ 9♠

8♠ 7♠ 6♦

A straight.

King:

A♠ K♠

Q♦ 8♣ 4♥

Insufficient hand.

Kaito won.

The King looked at the cards.

“You knew it was there. Since when?”

Kaito looked at the deck.

“Since the second round.”

Kaito had stopped trying to reconstruct the entire deck.

Instead, he began tracking only the cards with the highest expected value.

He let the King believe that he was becoming increasingly dependent on psychological reading, when in reality, he had returned to tracking.

However, after many hours and numerous consecutive games, Kaito eventually collapsed.

He lost consciousness.

Riko took care of him.

Kaito eventually woke up.

“Huh? What…?”

“You’re alive, Kaito.”

“…… Oh, no. What happened?”

“You passed out after playing for sixteen hours straight.”

“And why are we in… the mafia building?”

“They’re deciding what to do with you.”

One of the mafia members entered the room.

“Riko, you can leave.”

“What are you going to do with him?”

“We can’t tell you. Go back home, or you know what will happen.”

“……”

Riko looked at Kaito one last time before leaving.

Kaito was taken to a memory-erasure room.

“Alright… Goodbye, Kaito. We’ll do the same to Riko afterward.”

“No.”

“Hm?”

“You won’t do it to her.”

“Why?”

“It’s unnecessary. It would be a waste to use such an expensive procedure on someone who doesn’t pose a threat. Besides, I’m the one who made the mistake. So let me bear the consequences.”

“……”

“Alright.”

“If she is suddenly dragged into this and forced to participate, I gave her a mechanism capable of sending information directly to the police about you. So I wouldn’t recommend it.”

“Tch…”

And they erased Kaito’s memory.

Kaito was taken to a brothel.

“Go. Someone there will get you ready.”

“……”

Kaito’s body simply obeyed the order.

They put a wig, seductive clothing, makeup, and perfume on him. Everything necessary to make him look like a woman.

Then they sent him to the brothel.

"……"

The place was packed with people.

Some were gambling, others were throwing money at the dancers, others were drinking, and some approached people like Kaito in an attempt to seduce them.

Kaito simply followed the orders and the path he had been given.

But someone stopped him.

"Huh? You're new, right?"

"Huh?"

The woman observed him for a few seconds.

"Wait… you're a teenager. So you're one of them."

"……"

"You don't really want to be here, do you?"

"I have to do it. It's my job."

"But if this is your first time, I'll make sure to delay it for as long as possible before it happens."

"……"

"You're the leader of them."

"Caretaker. I try to keep bad things from happening to them."

"Then… what should I do?"

"First, watch out for the pimp."

The pimp was watching from a window.

He stared directly at Kaito.

Then he closed the window.

"He's gay."

"What? Him? No way."

"He looked at me. He knows what I am. I can only see repression in him. He's repressing something."

"He takes any of the girls here, brings them into his office, and…"

Kaito remained silent for a few seconds.

"It's a method of hiding what he's repressing, but it ends up revealing it even more. Someone punished him for who he was. Perhaps a father figure. Someone important to him."

"……"

The caretaker observed him.

"I suppose you'll be alright here. Let me take you to the others."

She took him to the other prostitutes.

Most of them were young.

"Hi. My name is Pamela."

Kaito observed the group.

"They're being forced to stay here."

"Hey! Let them speak first."

"But they're being forced."

"…… Why do you say that?"

"They're very young. Around sixteen or seventeen. This place is a subsidiary of the mafia. There's a reason they brought me here. And one of you has a bruise."

"Ah!"

One of them quickly covered herself.

Kaito watched her.

“No… You don’t have one. I tricked you.”

“If you covered yourself, it’s because you knew there really might have been one.”

“……”

The girl slowly lowered her hand.

“Um… My name is Camille.”

“Hi.”

“And the other one is Maria.”

“Nice to meet you.”

Kaito observed their expressions.

“Are you uncomfortable around me?”

“What?”

“I can see you breathing more heavily and keeping your bodies more rigid than before.”

“No… It’s not because of you. We just have to work.”

“Come on. Let me show you.”

And Kaito was forced to work at the brothel.

Every day.

Then he returned home.

(Why am I doing this?)

(What is this place?)

(My body simply tells me to go there and do this.)

“Kaito?”

The woman looked into his eyes.

“……”

“They erased your memory.”

Kaito looked at her without understanding.

“Who is Kaito?”

“……”

Kaito cooked for Riko.

Then he went to sleep.

Every day, Kaito repeated the same cycle.

“You! White-haired girl! Come here.”

“……”

Kaito sat beside one of the customers.

“How about we go now and have a little fun?”

“……”

“Hmm. Fine. First, two drinks.”

“Alright.”

“Oh, you don’t even want to get drunk? Very well.”

The man took Kaito and led him away.

Several minutes later…

Kaito was sitting on a bed, covering himself.

His mascara was running, and he stared blankly into the distance.

Someone threw money onto the bed.

“There you go. And a tip, sweetheart.”

“……”

The customer left.

Kaito, in pain, picked up the money.

(W-what is this supposed to be…?)

(Where am I?)

(Why do I have to do this?)

As the warm days passed, the cycle continued.

Kaito did the same thing over and over.

And he gave all the money he earned to Riko.

(Who am I?)

“Kaito…”

Riko clenched her fists.

“Ggh… I hope you really have something planned…”

(Why am I taking care of a little girl?)

Weeks passed.

(Why is my eye bleeding?)

“Kid! Why do you have those bruises?”

“…… Someone hit me when they found out I wasn’t a woman.”

“Tch! Girls! Come here now!”

“But I have the money…”

“It doesn’t matter! Come on. Let’s wash you up. You’re leaving early today.”

“…… Alright.”

Months passed.

Until finally…

The collapsed body of a white-haired boy lay on the ground.

His wig was lying several meters away.

“Fuck you, you damn tranny! Next time you try to fool someone, make sure they don’t beat the shit out of you afterward.”

The man kicked Kaito again and again.

Blood began pouring from his body.

“Aahggh!”

For approximately three hours, the man continued beating him until he grew tired.

“Ggh… huff… That should be enough. And I’m not paying you anything. See you around, bitch.”

The man left.

Kaito, mortally wounded, remained on the ground, staring at the sky.

Then it began to snow.

A snowflake landed on one of his eyes.

And suddenly, Kaito began to see his entire life.

His mind began connecting every memory.

Every memory.

Every feeling.

Every emotion.

Everything he had forgotten.

Everything he had lost.

The memories returned.

"…… So I'm… Kaito."

Kaito breathed slowly.

"Exactly as I planned."

Kaito stood up.

The snow continued falling.

He walked back home.

One of his arms was completely bent out of place.

He used his other hand to reposition it, straightening it until it returned to its proper position.

"…… So, a brothel, huh?"

Kaito continued walking.

"What a plan."

A small smile appeared on his face.

“But I think I can squeeze a little more information out of this… Just a little more.”

Kaito returned home.

His gaze was completely empty.

He placed the money on the table.

And began cooking.

“…… It’s been months… and you still haven’t come back.”

“I’m sorry.”

While Kaito was cooking, he heard the movement of a knife.

(Huh?)

He turned around quickly.

Riko was holding a knife pointed directly at his neck, about to stab him.

Kaito reacted immediately.

His hand moved between the knife and Riko’s neck.

“……”

“Huh?!”

“What are you doing?”

“…… You’re back.”

Riko hugged him with all her strength.

“Yes… I’m here. Sorry for making you wait, Riko.”

“Kaito! I knew you were pretending!”

“…… What?”

“I can tell when you’re pretending.”

“……”

Kaito looked at the knife.

Then he understood.

It was one of those fake prank knives.

“……”

Kaito sighed.

Then he patted Riko on the head.

“Hey!”

“Don’t ever do that again.”

“Geez… Alright.”

Kaito tried to hide the wounds he still had from the beating.

Riko noticed.

“Let me guess.”

Kaito looked at her.

“You waited until your body was on the verge of death so you could have a life reveal and recover all your memories.”

“Yeah, something like that. There was only one situation in which I could recover my memory after a machine like that. Besides, it was obvious they would erase our memories if we failed even once, so I had to engrave the route home, giving you the money, cooking, and sleeping into my muscle memory.”

“You’re such a cheesy brother, but… I’m glad you’re here. Are you going to keep going?”

“Yes. I need to gather more information. They must not know that I recovered my memories.”

“…”

“Don’t worry. I’ll avoid doing those things. But what have you been doing while I was without my memory?”

“I started creating an identity as a university intern.”

“Hmm? Why?”

“I’m going to travel to Blackwood Penitentiary. The government is going to visit the place, and I have a plan for our revenge.”

“Oh… alright. Here.”

Riko handed him a flash drive.

“Hmm? What is this?”

“Information about Kim. Dad had it. I found it in a cave and took it.”

Riko connected the flash drive to a computer and began reviewing its contents.

“…”

Her expression changed.

“This is gold.”

“Will it be enough?”

“It’s more than enough. Hahaha!”

“Be careful, Riko. It’s a high-security correctional facility.”

“I’ll be fine.”

Kaito returned to work for two more days.

Until, one of those days, someone called him.

“Hey, you. Come here.”

“Hm?”

The pimp met with one of the mafia members.

Kaito immediately recognized the mafioso.

(This must be serious if they can’t discuss it over the phone. Something’s wrong.)

He discreetly approached the door and began listening.

“In about three days, you’ll have a new one.”

“A new one?”

“Yes. She’s fourteen.”

“Go on.”

“She’s Kaito’s sister. So far, she hasn’t done much. We’ve only kept her under threat because she might have information, but there’s no need to erase her memory. We’ll simply threaten to kill her

brother if she doesn't start working. We'll force her to fail and send her here. Who knows, maybe she'll end up becoming one of the ones involved in smuggling, along with…"

The mafioso checked a piece of paper.

"Camille… Violet. Those two."

"I understand. Why couldn't you tell me this over the phone?"

"You already know. Calls can be traced."

Kaito heard every word.

Outside, a snowstorm was beginning to cover the streets.

"…"

His expression changed.



(Sufficient.)

Three days later, a series of events occurred that completely altered the situation.

A fire provided evidence directly pointing toward the mafia.

Two criminal organizations became trapped in a war against each other.

Igor was found murdered.

And Governor Kim, after escaping a trial related to the murder of the other governors, disappeared without a trace.

Meanwhile, Kaito and Riko went to the government offices to reveal information.

“Hum… come in. You’ve been trying to arrange this meeting for months, so we might as well get this over with.”

Both of them appeared distressed. Their expressions conveyed sadness and exhaustion.

“Do you remember Governor Kim? He was trying to kill us…”

“What do you mean, he was trying to kill you?”

“When information about Kim was uncovered, we discovered that our father had obtained it.”

“When did that happen?”

“Nine years ago, sir.”

“Yes… our father used that information to try to force Kim to adopt us.”

“But he couldn't do it.”

The official stared at them for several seconds.

“Wait. Are you able to swear to that?”

“Yes.”

“Then bring the polygraph.”

They were fitted with the same polygraph that had been used on them when they were children.

“Alright. Continue talking.”

“Kim tried to kill us.”

“He sent an assassin after us, but he failed to kill us. Instead, he murdered Saiko.”

“After that, he decided to use us to cover up his own crimes and murder the other governors.”

“How do you know that?”

“He told us himself.”

“He told you?”

“Yes. He forced us to escape from the orphanage so he could catch us.”

“And then we became wanted by the government.”

“It wasn't until now that we were able to come here and tell you what happened.”

The polygraph recorded multiple physiological and vocal variables: heart rate, breathing, skin conductance, temperature, muscle tension, involuntary movements, pauses, response latency, speech rate, and changes in the voice.

The results showed responses consistent with sadness, fear, and desperation.

“Hmm… We’re going to thoroughly investigate the information you’ve provided.”

“Alright.”

The government began an investigation.

They discovered that much of what the two had said matched the facts.

They found no direct evidence proving that Kim had communicated with them, but the other events were corroborated.

They even found Saiko’s buried body.

“…”

“We’re sorry.”

“It appears we found what you were talking about. It was true. It even seems that Kim was the one directly commanding us during the search for you.”

“Alright… What if we do something to prevent other people from discovering what happened? You were searching for children, and we were being hunted by the government. We could erase our memories of all of this.”

“Hum… Alright.”

The government recorded the information they had obtained in official notes and stored it in a protected database for future reference.

Afterward, everyone underwent the memory-erasure procedure.

Kaito and Riko also lost their memories related to the case.

They said goodbye and left the offices.

“Alright… It went as planned, right?”

“Of course. What we said was true… more or less.”

Riko checked a note where the events had been recorded.

“We shouldn’t interfere with the notes or the database.”

“Leave it alone. They won’t access that information unless there is an official reason to do so. Besides, the polygraph determined that we’re innocent. Now we can live freely as Kaito and Riko.”

During the following years, they were able to live using their real names.

Until Kaito turned eighteen.

“We are gathered here to commemorate these young people coming of age.”

Everyone present watched in silence.

“At this moment, you will have to prove that you are truly capable of considering yourselves adults.”

Their test was simple in appearance.

They had to kill a Dracaron.

“If you accomplish this while working as a group, you will prove that you are worthy of adulthood. If you fail, may death guide you wherever you are meant to go.”

Kaito was placed in a group of five people.

The others were visibly nervous.

“Have you heard how big that thing is?! It’s twenty meters tall!”

“Yeah… and fifty meters wide.”

“Calm down. I’ll tell you what to do.”

“And why are you supposed to be the one doing that?”

“Because if we have no chance together, we’ll have even less of a chance separately.”

“But why you?”

“Because you’re nervous. We have to decide right now whether we’re going to work together or give up and die.”

“Alright! It’s time for you to be sent out!”

“Kaito, don’t you dare die!”

Kaito said goodbye to Riko with a thumbs-up.

The five were sent into a snow-covered forest.

The terrain was extremely dense, and they could barely see through the trees. Each of them received basic weapons.

“First, stay together. A twenty-meter creature can’t remain hidden forever.”

“But how are we supposed to catch it?!”

“Second, don’t speak too loudly. These weapons can kill it, but first we need to limit its movement.”

Kaito observed the terrain.

“According to what I researched, Dracarons don’t have fur. They have exposed skin and a body structure that is relatively vulnerable to the weapons they gave us. The problem is their claws, their teeth, and the speed at which they can use them.”

The others remained silent.

“We’ll act quickly. If it catches us by surprise, we’re dead. If you obey me, we’ll all return home. If you don’t, we’ll come back as a pile of bones. Understood?”

“…Understood.”

“We’re not going to chase it. We’re going to make it come to us.”

Kaito pointed toward the surroundings.

“We need a place where it won’t be able to move easily. We’ll travel through the forest for at least an hour.”

“An hour?”

“Yes.”

The group began moving.

During the following hour, Kaito memorized the characteristics of the terrain: slopes, trees, changes in elevation, areas of deep snow, and possible approach routes.

Finally, he stopped.

“Alright. I’ve memorized the forest.”

The others looked at him in confusion.

“To the lower right, there’s a slope. You, what’s your name?”

“Samuel.”

“Samuel, I need you to go to the top of that small mountain and hit the trees as hard as you can.”

“Why?”

“You’ll understand soon. As quickly as possible.”

“Alright…”

Samuel climbed up.

When he reached the top, he began hitting the trees.

The others remained hidden.

Suddenly, they heard a roar.

Kaito raised his head.

“It’s here.”

Then he looked toward Samuel.

“Samuel, come back to us.”

Samuel quickly descended.

“Did it work?”

“You did very well.”

Kaito took out a chocolate and handed it to him.

“Here.”

“Huh? Thanks.”

The group headed toward the area Kaito had prepared.

When they were near the chosen position, Kaito spoke again.

“Alright, Samuel. Start making noise again. When the Dracaron comes here, we’ll all run toward that area. Understood?”

“Understood.”

Samuel began making noise.

The creature’s footsteps grew closer and closer.

“Alright…”

Kaito waited.

“Now.”

The five ran toward the prepared location.

It was a snow-covered slope.

“As you can see, the Dracaron needs to grip the ground with its claws to maintain stability. On a snowy slope, its control will be much worse. That will be our advantage.”

The Dracaron appeared between the trees.

When it saw them, it accelerated.

But when it entered the slope, the snow gave way beneath its limbs.

The creature lost its balance.

“Now. Everyone to your positions! Attack the claws!”

The four companions split up and attacked the creature’s limbs.

One attacked the claw on its left leg.

Another attacked the right.

The other two attacked the front limbs.

“Fall back!”

The Dracaron attempted to lunge at them.

Kaito threw his weapon directly toward its face.

The projectile struck one of its eyes.

“GGRGRGRR!”

“Keep going!”

The five continued attacking.

The accumulated injuries eventually rendered the claws useless.

The Dracaron tried to stand.

But it no longer had enough support.

The creature fell heavily onto the snow.

“Now do we kill it?”

“No. Wait.”

Kaito observed.

The Dracaron attempted to get back up once more.

It couldn't.

“Alright. Now.”

The five rushed toward the creature and began stabbing it until they finished it off.

When they returned, they were greeted by the supervisors.

“Wow! That was fast. And what a surprise… every member of the group is alive and healthy.”

“We couldn't have done it without you.”

The supervisor looked at Kaito.

“What’s your name?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

The supervisor smiled and handed them several chocolates.

“Here. You earned them.”

The young men and women accepted them.

“You are now considered adults.”

“Mmm… thanks.”

A few days later, Kaito was sitting with his eyes closed.

Inside his memory palace, he could visualize countless versions of himself at different points in his life.

Billions of mental representations.

Each one contained specific memories, details, emotions, and events.

Kaito was searching for something.

“Hum…”

He continued navigating through his memory.

Until, finally, he found what he was looking for.

“There you are.”

Kaito opened his eyes.

He left his house, rented a vehicle for one day, and traveled to a remote area.

Eventually, he reached some abandoned caves.

“Hum… according to the records, these were mines that were never completed. They were originally intended to transport goods between different countries.”

Kaito took out mining equipment.

“So…”

He observed the different branches.

“The mine has several paths connecting to different areas. If I can extend them enough, I’ll be able to connect most of them to places where using energy is legally permitted, such as certain military facilities and other installations.”

Kaito began digging.

Day after day.

Then for months.

Then for an entire year.

He used mining tools and explosives to accelerate the expansion of the tunnels.

“It’s not legal for me to be here.”

He looked around.

“But what a shame. This place is perfect.”

He installed rails to facilitate transportation.

“With the entire place memorized, I won’t need to rely on maps to find the routes closest to residential areas.”

He continued working.

At nineteen, he returned to one of the storage rooms and began removing dust from several objects.

“Eh? What are you looking for?”

“I found it.”

Kaito pulled out a tablet.

“Huh? That’s the tablet I gave you at the orphanage when you asked me for it.”

“Yes. Although I should check whether it still works first.”

He turned it on.

The screen responded.

“It still works.”

Riko smiled.

“And how are your three degrees going?”

“I’m already ahead of schedule in most of them. Apparently, I have too much knowledge for them.”

Riko looked at the tablet.

“But what do you need it for?”

“I’ll need it for some pretty important things.”

Shortly afterward, Riko took some red paint.

The two left the house.

They arrived at a property that was for sale.

“Welcome, welcome! This is the perfect place to set up any kind of business. It’s cozy, spacious, and perfect for your customers.”

“Yes, yes. We want to buy it directly.”

“Oh! Wow, you two are direct. Very well. We can start with the paperwork. The price is three million.”

“Three million?”

Kaito looked at her.

“Hmm… are you sure?”

“Huh? What do you mean, am I sure?”

“Yes. I heard certain rumors about this place.”

The woman became serious.

“Rumors?”

“Yes. Rumors that a murder happened here.”

“What are you talking about? There has never been a murder here.”

“Are you sure?”

Kaito paused.

“If I find evidence that a murder occurred here, you’ll lower the price by half.”

She thought for a few seconds.

“No. To a quarter of the original price.”

The woman stared at him.

“And if I don’t find anything, I’ll pay double, directly and with no additional fees. Deal?”

“I can’t believe you think a murder happened here.”

She pointed toward the exit.

“You can leave.”

“Why?”

Kaito smiled slightly.

“Normally, someone who has nothing to hide wouldn’t react like that.”

“Get out! Now!”

“Or we could call the police and have them inspect the place.”

“…”

“That’s what I thought.”

Kaito looked at the property again.

“Now, shall we continue?”

“…Alright.”

“Good. Let’s see how much we can clean.”

“Nothing happened here!”

“Sure, sure.”

Kaito pointed toward different areas.

“We’d better split up. That way we’ll cover more ground quickly, and you’ll get your money sooner if we really don’t find anything. Agreed?”

“Fine…”

The three split up.

Several minutes passed.

Until a scream was heard.

“AAAH!”

“Riko!”

“Miss!”

The two ran toward her.

There were drops of blood on the floor.

Kaito smiled.

“Ah! What did I tell you?”

“…That’s impossible.”

The woman approached.

Kaito noticed something that looked like a heart outside the body.

“Well. Then the price will be five hundred thousand.”

“Wait!”

The woman crouched down and touched the substance.

“This is paint.”

She raised her head.

“Were you trying to scam me?!”

Kaito looked at Riko.

“If it were only that…”

He looked at the floor.

“You heard where she was and came directly here, didn’t you?”

“I came because she screamed.”

“And why would she scream in a clean place?”

“You tell me!”

Kaito remained silent for several seconds.

“Alright. She screamed because she found something.”

He watched the woman’s reaction.

“And judging by the way you reacted, as if your heart had literally fallen out, I think you know exactly what is in this place.”

Riko pulled back a carpet.

Beneath it were dark stains.

Pools of dried blood that had been cleaned repeatedly.

Kaito looked at the woman.

“This is why I called you over.”

“…”

The woman lowered her head.

“Please don’t tell anyone.”

“Whose blood is this?”

“My grandfather’s.”

The woman took a deep breath.

“He was murdered here a few months ago. I tried to clean everything, but this won’t disappear. Believe me.”

Kaito looked directly into her eyes.

“Hum…”

After several seconds, he spoke.

“It’s true, Riko. She isn’t lying.”

Riko nodded.

“Hmm… Then if you don’t want us to reveal what we found, the best thing would be for you to lower the price even further.”

“Y-yes.”

The woman swallowed.

“P-please… just don’t tell anyone.”

“Alright.”

Riko smiled.

“Let’s get that five hundred thousand.”

Eventually, Riko obtained the property.

As they were preparing to leave, Kaito looked at the woman.

“I’m sorry about what happened to your grandfather.”

“It’s alright… it already happened.”

Kaito remained silent for a few seconds.

“He’s in a better place. Watching you and proud of what you’re doing.”

“…”

The woman smiled weakly.

“Thank you.”

Kaito and Riko left.

A year later, Riko joined the police.

Kaito, meanwhile, decided to buy three properties to generate income through employees and independent businesses.

He also went through the regenerator.

However, something went wrong.

“There’s something strange.”

“Huh?”

“For some reason, your brain isn’t regenerating.”

“What?”

“There’s something strange about your system. Are you sure you’re a biosword?”

“I’m supposed to be.”

“Hmm… We’ll have to investigate how to fix it. But for now, you won’t be able to heal.”

“…Alright.”

Kaito left.

Months later, he was reading a newspaper.

Riko arrived with a file.

“Hey. A murderer.”

“Huh?”

Riko placed the file in front of him.

“There.”

Kaito began reading.

It was about a serial killer who had been murdering people for seven years.

There was no apparent connection between the victims.

There was no DNA, fingerprints, or useful footage.

The file stated that he selected his victims at random.

However, Kaito began reviewing the data.

All the victims had apparently been murdered between 10:10 PM and 10:40 PM.

Victim 1: found at 10:51 PM.

Victim 2: found at 10:47 PM.

Victim 3: found at 10:58 PM.

Victim 4: found at 10:49 PM.

Victim 5: found at 10:52 PM.

Victim 6: found at 10:44 PM.

Victim 7: found at 10:55 PM.

Victim 8: found at 10:48 PM.

Victim 9: found at 10:53 PM.

Victim 10: found at 10:46 PM.

Victim 11: found at 10:50 PM.

The analyses of body temperature, rigor mortis, stomach contents, and other indicators established a window of death.

Kaito frowned.

“None of the victims were seen alive after 9:50 PM.”

“But the autopsies say they weren’t transported after they died.”

“Then they were transported while they were still alive.”

Riko nodded.

“No camera recorded the victims entering a vehicle, leaving one, or walking toward the place where they were later found.”

Kaito continued reading.

“It was a second person.”

He thought for a few seconds.

“But this person doesn’t appear on any camera either.”

“Do you want the weather records from those nights?”

“Yes.”

Riko handed them to him.

Kaito compared the data.

“Hum…”

His finger moved across several lines.

“Between 10:10 PM and 10:40 PM, there was a momentary drop in atmospheric pressure.”

“Is that important?”

“Yes.”

Kaito compared the coordinates.

“It always occurred in a different sector.”

He paused.

“Wait.”

He looked at the maps again.

“Was that sector two or three kilometers away from where the bodies appeared?”

“Yes.”

Kaito held out his hand.

“Give me the victims’ records.”

“Alright.”

Riko handed them to him.

Kaito compared names, dates, locations, and backgrounds.

Then he found a match.

“They all used the same watch-repair service during the six months before their deaths.”

Riko checked the information.

“The company has thirty-seven employees.”

“And the owner?”

“He died eight years ago.”

Kaito raised his gaze.

“Who’s in charge now?”

“His son.”

“I’ll visit him.”

Kaito went to the establishment.

“Hello. I’d like to buy a watch, review the security footage, and speak with the manager.”

“What?”

“Now.”

“Excuse me, what’s going on?”

Kaito observed the watches in the store.

“Do you personally manufacture watches?”

“No.”

“Hum…”

Kaito pointed toward the cameras.

“Let me see the recordings.”

After several arguments, they eventually allowed him to do so.

Kaito watched the footage from sixty televisions simultaneously.

He wasn’t looking for a face.

He was looking for a pattern.

After a few minutes, he found one.

A person entered the workshop exactly twenty-seven minutes before closing.

His face was never visible.

He always wore different clothes.

He never stayed for more than nine minutes.

He never spoke to any employee.

And he always left carrying a small box.

Kaito stopped watching the screens.

“I’m done. Thank you.”

“…Alright.”

Kaito left.

As he walked, he reconstructed the sequence.

(The killer wasn’t selecting his victims at random.)

(Eleven people had used the same workshop during the previous six months.)

(All of them had left their watches within the final twenty-seven minutes before closing.)

(And that same interval matched the appearance of the person who entered the workshop, avoided showing his face, and left carrying a small box.)

Kaito needed to confirm what the boxes were used for.

He investigated the victims’ watches.

He found small modifications in their mechanisms.

The alterations caused minimal deviations from the actual time.

They weren’t enough for a person to suspect that their watch had been tampered with.

But they could gradually alter their routines.

(The watch wasn’t only being used to tell them the time.)

(It was being used to change their temporal reference.)

Kaito connected the information.

(The killer could observe their routines when they left their watches at the workshop.)

(Then he altered the mechanisms to cause small deviations.)

(This allowed him to gradually modify the victims’ schedules without them noticing.)

(The call three days after the repair also fits.)

(“Good evening.”)

(An extremely brief call.)

(He didn’t need to talk to them.)

(He only needed to confirm who answered and how they responded.)

Kaito returned to the death records.

(The time of death is also false.)

(None of the victims were seen alive after 9:50 PM.)

(However, the analyses place their deaths between 10:10 PM and 10:40 PM.)

(This means that the method used to determine the time of death is being manipulated or is being interpreted from a body that was altered afterward.)

Kaito compared the locations.

Eleven points.

Eleven corpses.

And then he found another connection.

(The places where the bodies appeared are connected by the same old underground transportation system.)

He checked the schedules.

(The operating hours coincide with the victims disappearing from the cameras.)

Then he remembered the boxes.

(The boxes used in the workshop have the dimensions necessary to transport certain components through that system.)

The entire structure began to fit together.

(The workshop wasn’t simply where he found the victims.)

(It was the center of the entire system.)

(Selection.)

(Gathering information.)

(Manipulating their temporal references.)

(Preparation.)

(Transportation.)

Kaito mentally returned to the recordings.

Only one person was connected to every stage.

The former owner’s son.

Although he claimed that he did not personally repair watches, he was the only person connected to the workshop’s records, cameras, warehouse, boxes, and access to the underground system.

Kaito picked up a newspaper lying on the ground.

He wrote a note and left it inside.

The newspaper eventually ended up in the hands of the owner of a used-car dealership.

The man opened the newspaper.

He found the note.

“If you are reading this, I know who you are.

You are the owner of the used-car dealership. I know how to find you, so listen carefully.

Leave one of your vehicles at this address.

You will find a safe there.

The password is:

192019203912031

I’ll be watching you.

If you call the police, you’ll pay for it.

I’ll also know if you send someone else.

You will come yourself.

Don’t take too long.

If you don’t come, I’ll investigate more about you, and the consequences will be worse.”

An address was written beneath it.

“…”

The man frowned.

“Is this a joke?”

“What’s wrong, sir?”

“Look at this.”

He showed him the newspaper.

“What if we just ignore it?”

“You should.”

He remained silent.

“But I’ll go just in case. If there’s someone there, I’ll simply beat him up.”

The owner took one of the vehicles and drove to the address.

He got out.

He looked around.

And found the safe.

“Huh?”

He crouched down.

He entered the password.

The safe opened.

Inside were ninety thousand pesos.

“Seriously?”

He looked at the money.

“Hum…”

He took it.

He tried to return to the vehicle.

Then he heard a gunshot nearby.

“AAH! Alright, alright!”

He dropped some of the money and ran.

Half an hour later, the cameras recorded a man with the same appearance, posture, and approximate height walking toward the vehicle.

He took it.

Got inside.

And drove away.

But the cameras did not record the moment when he removed the clothing and false appearance.

Underneath was Kaito.

Kaito looked at the vehicle.

“I figured he wouldn’t leave the key.”

He forced the ignition system and started the vehicle.

He had already investigated the address of the workshop owner’s son.

He drove there.

He parked.

“Hum…”

While waiting, he ate something.

Thirty minutes later, the owner’s son came outside.

“Alright.”

Kaito took different clothes out of a briefcase.

Thirty minutes later, the man returned home.

“Hello, neighbor.”

“Oh, hello. How are you?”

“Very well, very well.”

The neighbor looked at his clothes.

“Coming back from shopping?”

“Yes.”

“But where are the groceries?”

The man improvised.

“I forgot my card here. I came back to get it.”

“I see, I see. Well, I won’t keep you any longer.”

“Thanks. Take care.”

The man entered his house.

Once inside, he took out a tablet.

The same one Riko had given Kaito.

He used it to infiltrate one of the security cameras in the house as a second user.

Kaito didn’t need to delete the recordings.

He needed to replace the perception of continuity.

He copied the recording from twenty minutes earlier and duplicated it over the current interval.

Now the cameras showed an apparently normal scene.

No one appeared.

The man left the house.

Returned to the vehicle.

Removed his mask.

It was Kaito.

Kaito had installed temporal technology in the vehicle.

It wasn’t particularly large, but it was sufficient for what he needed.

He located the owner’s son.

Eventually, he found his position.

He approached.

“Oh, hello!”

The man recognized him.

“Hum… you’re the guy who came to the store.”

“Yes.”

Kaito smiled.

“Hey, how about we go shooting? My treat.”

“Seriously?”

The man smiled.

“Wow. Sure, let’s go.”

Kaito opened the front door.

“Get comfortable. You’ll see how a professional shoots.”

“Really? I’ve been doing this for years.”

“Yes, I know.”

“What?”

“You can tell. You seem pretty experienced.”

“Oh… yeah.”

The man got comfortable.

“So, are we going?”

“Of course.”

They drove to a shooting range.

Kaito took the weapon first.

He fired.

Bullseye.

Another shot.

Bullseye.

Another.

Bullseye.

“Learn.”

The man smiled.

“Wow. Nice. Now it’s my turn.”

Kaito observed the surroundings.

There was no one around.

“Do it.”

The man fired twice.

Before he could fire the third shot, Kaito moved.

An injection pierced his neck.

The man lost consciousness.

Kaito put the weapon away.

“And we’re leaving.”

He opened a portal.

The energy used was not detected because the location was inside an area where energy use was permitted.

Kaito stepped through the portal.

He appeared beneath the property, inside one of the branches of the underground network he had built.

He sat on one of the rails.

Placed the body beside him.

And began moving rapidly.

During the journey, he took a hidden mask, a smoke vial, a plastic container, and acid.

“Nice trip, right?”

“…”

Kaito looked at the body.

“You shouldn’t be so direct.”

He continued moving.

Eventually, he reached the point in the cave closest to the house.

“Alright. Now…”

He put the man inside a sack.

Took his clothes.

Put them on.

And returned to the surface.

He entered the house.

Put on the mask.

Released the smoke.

The room quickly began filling with it.

The cameras continued displaying the false recording.

As far as they were concerned, nothing had happened.

Kaito took the man out of the sack and left him on the floor.

Then he placed his temporal technology.

(All the sensors are installed underground.)

Kaito positioned the devices facing the ground.

He activated them at maximum power.

The objective was to rewind time by five years at the point where energy was detected, causing the sensors not to register the current energy usage.

Kaito activated his dimension.

(How complicated it is to think through all of this…)

He began constructing it.

The dimension adjusted itself to the limits of the room.

Gravity remained normal.

Time stopped for everything outside Kaito and his target.

Constructing a dimension required forming each individual component.

Without a structure defining its boundaries, the dimension would not have a stable enclosed space.

Finally, he finished.

The owner's son began waking up.

"Eeh… huh?"

He looked around.

"Where am I?"

"That doesn't matter."

The man heard the voice.

“Eh… what?”

“Hello, watch killer.”

Kaito approached.

“I don’t have much time right now. This is my first murder of this kind. Although, honestly, I don’t feel particularly excited.”

“Who are you?”

“Let’s see…”

Kaito looked up.

“Eleven victims. Seven years.”

The man went pale.

“W-What? What are you talking about?”

“Don’t pretend, please.”

Kaito looked at him.

“Let’s begin.”

“Do you regret it?”

“Regret what?”

Kaito remained silent for several seconds.

“I see.”

The man began trembling.

“Would you do it again?”

“…W-Whatever it is, I swear I won’t do it again. I promise.”

“You’re a great liar, aren’t you?”

Kaito continued.

“Are you afraid of dying?”

“…”

The man finally answered.

“Yes.”

“At last, you told the truth.”

Kaito approached.

“But do you know who else was afraid of dying?”

The man remained silent.

“The people you murdered.”

His voice became colder.

“You murdered them in cold blood and built a method to make sure their deaths would never receive a real resolution.”

Kaito tilted his head slightly.

“Why watches?”

The man did not answer.

“Maybe you started after your father’s death.”

Silence.

“Perhaps it was a way of dealing with grief.”

Kaito watched him.

“Or perhaps your father was the first victim.”

“That’s not what happened!”

Kaito smiled slightly.

“So it was a way of dealing with grief after all.”

He paused.

“I wonder how proud your father would be of this.”

The man began to cry.

“I suppose you’ll never know.”

Kaito turned around.

“You won’t go to the same place as him.”

He looked at the man one last time.

“Goodbye, killer beyond twenty-two hundred hours.”

At 10:52 PM, the son of the watchmaker died.

Not once.

Eleven times.

Kaito used temporal technology to repeatedly return his body to the state immediately before each murder.

Each cycle reconstructed enough of the damage for him to experience the process again.

And each time, he died again.

Until finally, he could no longer continue.

Kaito took the body and placed it inside a container.

He filled it with acid.

Then disposed of the remains.

He closed the dimension.

No fingerprints remained.

No physical traces remained.

The cameras returned to normal operation.

To anyone reviewing the footage, nothing had happened.

Kaito left the place.

He transported the containers to a crusher and destroyed the remaining remains.

As he watched the result, he spoke to himself.

“So this will be my life.”

He remained silent.

“Until it’s my turn to pay for my own actions.”

He looked toward the sky.

“In the meantime, I’ll replace death whenever necessary.”

That day, the heaviest snowfall recorded in years began to fall.