



BACCANO!

The Rolling Bootlegs

RYOHGO
NARITA



RYOHGO NARITA
ILLUSTRATION BY KATSUMI ENAMI

ONE DAY BEFORE
INSIDE ALVEARE



"We've decided to pay you slowly over about six hours. Starting now."

In a room with simple décor, a mature-looking boy was surrounded by a group of hard-faced men.

"...What would you do if we said that?"

The man with glasses, the one who'd first cracked that dangerous-sounding joke, put his beaming face a bit closer to the boy.

"The way this room feels right now, I'd probably apologize even if I hadn't done anything," the boy answered tensely.

He'd been summoned, and when he'd arrived, all the syndicate's senior executives were there. He wondered what in the world he'd done.

"Uh... Did I do something?"

"All sorts of things. Too many to count."

A large, imposing man spoke in a low voice.

"Boss... No, look, there must be some kind of mistake. I haven't done anything, really..."

"I can shatter that composure of yours easily. I just have to say the word, tell you one particular thing."

"Guh... Go on and say it, sir. Say the word." With a solemn expression on his face, the big man, the boy's boss, opened his mouth.

"Tomorrow, go buy a hat with Maiza."

For a moment, he didn't understand what the words meant. Then he saw the male secretary and the elderly Asari, who had been silent up until now, begin to clap for him, quietly— And he got it.

"No... You can't mean... Are you serious?!" Just as the boss had predicted, all composure had vanished from the boy's face. It had been displaced not by terror but

by an expression as full of worry as a little kid's.

"Of all our young guys, you've racked up too many achievements to count. That's why."

Going to buy a hat with an executive. It sounded trivial, but in this syndicate, it was an extremely significant act.

"Congratulations on your promotion to executive."

The beaming man commended the boy as happily as if this had been happening to him personally. "Tomorrow morning, then, in front of the hat shop..."

“No, no, no she can’t!”

“?”

“Because, I mean, they... They had machine guns!”

At those words, even Isaac went pale.

“...You’re kidding...”

Ennis could die. Their hero—or, no, their heroine—was on the verge of being killed. ...But what could they do?

Isaac looked down for a while. Then he murmured, as if talking to himself:

“You know... By rights, I should have gotten killed by those thugs yesterday.”

“Huh?”

“But Ennis saved me, you know. That’s why, to me, Ennis is a hero.”

“To me, too...!”

“And heroes... They don’t die. They mustn’t die.”

“...”

Isaac seemed to be brooding over something. At the sight of his face, Miria gulped quietly.

“...Holmes, shot and killed when thugs he’d captured broke out of jail... Conan Doyle didn’t write a story like that. He hasn’t written one like that.”

“...Isaac...?”

“I think it’s probably...because that would be boring. Because readers who like Holmes would be sad. If he’s going to get killed, it has to be by a lifelong nemesis like Moriarty or it’s no good... Those guys aren’t big enough for that. Am I right, Miria?”

“...Uh-huh.”

It was absurd logic, but he was probably desperate, in his own way. Desperate to find the words to psych himself up.

“She’s our hero... No, our heroine...and I think we have to return the favor she did us. Listen, Miria... Maybe we can’t become good people anymore, no matter

how hard we try, but...at least Ennis..."

"We absolutely positively have to save her!"

Without even listening to the end of what he was saying, Miria grabbed Isaac's arm and began to run, chasing after Dallas and the others.

"He... H-h-h-h-hey, wait, I'm the only one who's g-g-g-going... L-l-l-listen, we'll be up against machine guns, and you might die too-too-too... Fnghah!"

He'd been talking as he was pulled along at a run, and he'd bitten his tongue.

Putting a hand to his mouth, Isaac thought:

Oh, I'm so glad I'm with Miria.

He smiled as if he found it funny.

A priest and a nun tore through a town of redbrick.

They had no crucifixes.

They didn't know the words to any prayers.

Even so, they were trying to save someone.

As he gazed at the old man, Maiza was trembling. Watching the two of them quizzically, Firo spoke to his senior executive.

"...Uh... What's with the loony old fool? Do you know him?"

Firo had been eyeing the coot suspiciously, but then he noticed a familiar form on the ground behind the codger, in the hallway that led to the honey shop.

"...Miz Seina? ...Wha...? Miz Seina!"

Involuntarily, Firo stood up. Seeing his expression, the other executives also stood, one after another. In a moment, a tense atmosphere had descended over the speakeasy.

The old man laughed merrily, as if the mood didn't bother him at all.

"...Haaaa-ha! Don't worry, Maiza. Or you, nameless sacrifices... I only hit the woman a little and knocked her down. That said, I struck her a bit too hard, so

one or two of the bones in her neck might be broken...”

“...Bastard! I’ll rip you to pieces!”

Randy, who’d been in the corner, angrily pounded the table with his fist. After a moment, Pezzo’s fat hand also struck it. The reaction jolted the plates off, and they shattered on the floor.

“My, my... There are seven bones in the neck, you know. Such a fuss over one or two...”

He gave a mocking laugh. It wasn’t only Randy now: The other executives, Firo included, were enraged as well. They started toward the old man, reaching into their jackets as they went.

“Wait! Please!”

They were checked by Maiza’s shout.

Unusually for him, cold sweat had broken out on his face.

“Men... He’s only after me. I’ll deal with him, so while I do, please escape through the back door.”

“Maiza...?”

“Hey... What’re you talking about, Maiza?!”

After a little hesitation, their leader gave a straightforward, bare-bones explanation of his connection to Szilard: “He is the man who once...killed...thirteen of my...my companions, and...my younger brother.”

At his words, in an instant, silence fell over the room. That silence was broken by Szilard himself.

“I’ve ‘eaten’ five since then, so it’s technically eighteen. Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“...Szilard...”

Only Firo, who was right next to him, saw it. Maiza’s face wore an expression he’d never seen before, not once in the five years since he’d met him.

Although he didn’t really understand why, the moment he saw the hot fury that blazed in those eyes, anger began boiling over inside Firo, too.

“Maiza... I don’t get any of this, but... In other words, this guy’s your enemy, right?”

“...That makes him our enemy, too, yeah?”

Picking up the thread of the conversation, Randy simultaneously launched the battle.

Even as he finished speaking, he shot Szilard with the handgun he’d pulled out of his jacket.

There was a loud *bang*, and a red hole opened in the right side of Szilard’s chest.

Immediately afterward, the hole was joined by another.

“And actually, he was enough of an enemy the second he laid a finger on Seina. Right, Randy?”

As he spoke, Pezzo also held a gun wreathed in smoke.

“In any case, it would be a waste to get our knives rusty on this old gink.”

“Make sure you don’t hit Seina.”

Seeing that the old man hadn’t gone down yet, the other executives drew their pieces, one after another.

Maybe they didn’t care that it could mean jail time, or maybe they’d given themselves over to rage: They didn’t show the slightest hesitation.

Dry explosions echoed through the room.

“It’s no good... Guns won’t work on him.”

Maiza’s murmur was drowned out by the thunderous roar.

The rain of bullets didn’t stop until they’d all exhausted their supply.

The bullets that had passed through Szilard’s body or missed it entirely had turned the magnificent, richly ornamented interior into something that looked like the walls of a Bronx public toilet.

“...Hey...Maiza...”

As he asked the question, Randy shook his head.

“What gives...? That old guy’s still on his feet...”

Szilard’s upper body was riddled with holes. However, once again, his mouth had twisted hugely.

Seeing this, Maiza yelled his answer:

“I’ll explain later; just run! Please!”

He was too late.

Szilard reached down toward his feet. A black case sat there. It was an expensive-looking case, about the right size for a tenor saxophone.

“I tell you, learning not to feel pain was a lot of work. There’s no point in being indestructible if I lose consciousness, after all.”

Beaming, he crouched down and opened the case with a light *click*.

Very few of the people in the speakeasy had managed to predict what was inside it.

Even after Maiza’s warning, not one of them made a move to run.

“If my spine or head are damaged, I stop being able to move for a little while, but... Well, on the whole, you aimed for my heart. I’m grateful for that. ... Although, even if you had aimed for my head, I would have been able to dodge.”

Firo, who’d been the first to realize what was in the case, launched himself forward with all his might.

He closed the distance in one sprint and tried to kick the black case Szilard was opening away from him. Since Szilard was bending over, he was also planning to send a good kick into his face.

“You’re very young.”

Szilard’s arm stopped his leg.

“Yes... Young. That’s more aggravating than anything.”

Firo had been thrown off balance, and Szilard drove a kick into his stomach.

“Gah...!”

He was knocked backward, ending up right where he'd started...back beside Maiza.

"Firo... *As contaiuolo*, I'm ordering you..."

As Maiza steadied Firo, who'd come close to falling over, he gave him an order.

"You go out the back door, right now, and run... No, go tell the boss and the secretary what's happening."

Thinking that he wasn't the type of person who'd run away just because someone told him to, Maiza had made up an order on the spot.

"B-but, Maiza, you—"

"I'll be fine. I don't intend to die yet."

Not until I've killed Szilard. Maiza didn't say the words all the way to the end, but...

".....Understood!"

Firo had been momentarily bewildered, but when he saw the gaze Maiza fixed on him, just for an instant, he immediately broke into a run. For that one moment, the hatred had vanished from Maiza's eyes, and they'd been smiling quietly.

They were the eyes of someone who'd made an unshakeable resolution. *If a guy in our organization has eyes like that, it doesn't matter whether his intent is right or off the mark: There's absolutely nothing to do about it. Either listen obediently to what he has to say, or stop him if you have to kill him. It's a straight choice between two alternatives.*

And Firo believed in Maiza's will. He'd launched himself off the wooden floor, into a run.

"Do you think I'll let him go? Well, I could... But, Maiza, I want to cause you as much pain as possible before I 'eat' you. Both physically...and emotionally."

Smiling happily, Szilard picked up the contents of the black case.

"...Hey... Is that for real...?"

It was one of the executives who'd spoken.

Firo was running for the back door. Trained on his back...was the muzzle of the military-grade submachine gun Szilard held. With absolutely no hesitation, he pulled the trigger.

When the ferocious roar exploded behind him, Firo nearly fell in spite of himself. However, there was no impact. Without looking back, Firo disappeared down the corridor that led to the speakeasy's back door.

"...As usual, you make no sense. Is that brat really so important to you?"

Szilard looked mystified. Maiza stood in front of him, blocking his way. The machine gun had opened pitiful holes in his body, and red liquid gushed from them like a fountain.

"...So, none of the bullets that went through you hit the boy... Hmm. Was it the quality of the powder...? Or maybe that's the best this gun can do?"

Without seeming particularly interested in Maiza's condition, Szilard began to look appraisingly at the machine gun, which was still faintly wreathed in smoke.

"Maiza!"

"I'm...fine... Hurry and...run...plea..."

"Maiza, you moron! You think we could run when one of our guys just got shot?! I'm gonna smack you one after we get him, so don't you go dying yet!"

As he spoke, Randy grabbed the leg of a stool and hurled it at Szilard.

"Whoops... Hmm?"

He evaded the first stool by simply moving his upper half, but Pezzo had thrown a second one right on the heels of the first. At the same time, the other executives threw stools in rapid succession.

Concluding that he couldn't dodge them all, with no other choice, he stopped them with his hand. A strong vibration coursed through Szilard's arm.

Taking advantage of that moment of vulnerability, Randy, Pezzo, and several other executives closed in.

They were too spread out for him to shoot them all at once, and he didn't

have time to take them out one after another.

“Pin him down!”

Drawing his knife, Randy leaped at Szilard. Szilard’s only response was to retreat slightly.

The executives who’d closed in on him from the front didn’t notice, but from Randy’s perspective, Szilard had disappeared into a dead angle: He’d backed up into the narrow hallway.

“You’ve done well, nameless sacrifices.”

“Oh, hell...”

Unable to kill their momentum, the men had fallen into a straight line.

Then a ferocious, spear-like barrage of bullets ran them through.

After the space of a breath, Pezzo—whose shirt was now dyed red—and several other executives fell near the entrance. To make sure they were dead, Szilard raked the floor with the trench-sweeper gun. He then turned the muzzle on the others who’d stayed in the room. There was a brief roar as the speakeasy that had symbolized the splendor of the Prohibition era had become something that looked like a post-Civil War ruin.

“Don’t screw with me... Bastard...”

Randy, who’d quickly hidden against the wall, had been spared by the bullets’ weak penetration through the barrier. Since Szilard had backed into the hallway, he was currently in his blind spot.

“...Hey...Pezzo... Dammit...!”

The sight of his buddy’s big body lying at the mouth of the hall nearly sent him into a rage, but he desperately calmed himself down, only to close in on the hall, crouching low. His knife was in hand, and he was prepared to take Szilard’s head off the moment he showed his face. He knew he wouldn’t actually be able to do that, but if he could at least drive it into his brain...

Suddenly, a shape darted out of the hall.

“_____!”

Randy raised his knife...and froze.

The figure that had leaped out...or rather, had been thrown out by Szilard... was Seina's unconscious body. Its head drooped limply.

In the instant he stood, frozen, the muzzle of a gun appeared from behind the falling Seina's.

Randy, who'd been about to scream something, danced the dance of death in a spray of blood, in time to the gunfire.

This happened just as Maiza finished regenerating. A humorless comedy.

When he opened the rear door, Firo was struck by an odd sense of *wrongness*.

Even before he'd located the source of the feeling, he hastily leaped backward.

The next moment— Something swept past him, right in front of his nose, like the blade of a guillotine.

It took him several seconds to realize that it had been the heel of a leg, raised high. Up until then, his attention was focused on the leg's owner.

"You're..."

Firo knew that face. Or rather, those clothes.

"From yesterday..."

"You're the..."

Realizing she recognized her opponent's face, Ennis halted her attack.

It was the guy from the knowledge she'd gotten from Barnes, via Szilard. The guy who'd been going around looking for her. That was all she knew about him, but in spite of herself, she paused.

Szilard had told her to detain Maiza if he fled out the back door, so she'd launched a surprise attack the moment the door opened... But apparently the shadow of her leg falling across his face had given her away. Not only that, but to *this* man, of all people.

After giving it a little thought, Ennis decided to reopen her attack. This guy was probably Szilard's enemy as well. If she let him go, she might lose her own life.

However, on the other hand, Isaac's and Miria's faces flickered through her mind. *If Szilard ordered me to kill them, what on earth would I do?*

"Waugh, hold it!"

After a few seconds' pause, the woman in front of him launched another kick.

He managed to evade the first attack, but the second kick, propelled by a spin with the opposite leg, sank neatly into the top of Firo's shoulder.

The impact was greater than he'd expected, and it sent him staggering into the wall behind him. Along with a light shock, he felt the cold of the bricks upon his back.

"Ghk... Careless..."

Without pausing, Ennis sent a fist his way.

Huh. That looks like the Oriental martial arts I'm learning from Yaguruma. At that conclusion, Firo naturally slipped into the motions he'd practiced with his primo voto.

"I..."

Using his own right hand, he grabbed the right wrist Ennis had thrust out. It was moving pretty fast, but compared to Yaguruma's jabs, he'd been able to follow it with his eyes...and since her wrist was thinner than a man's, he was able to stop it fairly easily.

Ennis's eyes widened slightly.

"...said..."

Then he raised his left hand high, turning his back to Ennis as he pulled her closer. Firo's body slipped past Ennis's side, almost as if they were dancing...and for a moment, the two of them were parallel to each other.

"...wait, all right?"

Twisting his opponent's wrist, he swept her feet out from under her. As her

body tilted, he pulled her down in one move. The result was that Firo dropped into a crouch...and Ennis's back lightly struck the ground.

Not only that, but Firo was still holding her right wrist. From this point on, no matter what move she tried to make, she'd lose the initiative to the boy in front of her. Without more "knowledge" than her mind currently held, there was nothing Ennis could do. This boy seemed to have combat training she didn't possess.

Firo asked the woman a question. His expression was quiet.

"...Explain this, would you? You got anything to do with that old guy in there? Why is he here, and why doesn't getting shot kill him? And most importantly... Who are you?"

On hearing this, Ennis was a bit startled. This guy didn't know anything about her. Not only that, he didn't even know about Maiza and Szilard... In which case, why had he been looking for her?

"Listen. Please... I don't know a thing, and I'm the only one. If things stay that way, I'll look like an idiot."

Doesn't know a thing... That was exactly the way she'd been, once. The world as it had been before she'd "eaten" the alchemist rose again inside Ennis. Herself, given only the bare minimum of knowledge. The memories of that time made her feel nauseated, even though it was herself she was remembering. After she'd learned everything, she'd felt, and continued to feel, the pain of not knowing.

".....You won't regret it?"

"...Huh?"

"Once you know...you may not be able to go back. Do you still want to know... even so?"

For the space of a few breaths, there was silence. After thinking briefly, Firo spoke.

"You know... They said something similar to me at the ritual last night."

"...Pardon?"

“Tell me. I might regret it, but I’m good at forgetting stuff. ...I’m no genius.”

With that, he let go of Ennis’s right arm and stood.

For a moment, Ennis looked blank. Then she followed suit, a mystified expression on her face.

“...You don’t think I’ll run away?”

Her eyes were fixed steadily on Firo’s.

After another short pause, Firo answered. If the situation hadn’t been what it was... If the two of them had met normally, he might have blushed a bit.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m just dumb, that’s all.”

“You really are a dull-witted man, Maiza.”

Szilard gave Maiza a pitying look.

The smell of blood filled the speakeasy. The only ones standing were Szilard and Maiza.

“I’m not as dumb as you are.”

At this point, both Maiza’s polite tone and the smile that put people at ease were gone.

“Back then... When you managed to summon the demon on the ship, I should have stolen the privilege from you, even if I had to kill you to do it.”

In contrast, Szilard preserved a persistent calm. Though facing another immortal, he didn’t seem to doubt his absolute advantage.

Even as the terrible scene around him inspired white-hot rage, Maiza squashed it down and spoke, casting about for a way to break out of the situation as he did so.

“That demon... If I’d died, no doubt he would have gone straight home. He’s rather conscientious about things like that.”

“Ha! You speak as if you and the demon are friends. You, who’d researched alchemy, ultimately betrayed the way of science by turning your hand to magic, and then, not satisfied with even that, summoned a demon. And in front of our band of thirty companions, the demon said, ‘I’ll give you knowledge!’”

Almost like the narrator of a silent film, Szilard began to speak in a tone that made it sound as if he was watching that long-ago scene.

“You, a companion... Don’t make me laugh.”

“You said, ‘I want to know about eternal life.’ We were given a cup of elixir that resembled liquor, and we all drank, sharing it among ourselves. ...That was where our current lives began. And you learned the method for preparing this elixir of immortality! In other words, you also obtained the right to spread immortality around the world!”

He spoke loudly, commending Maiza’s great achievement. Then he changed completely, shaking his head and lowering his voice.

“...But... The very next day, you began to spout nonsense about sealing the elixir’s production method. I will have you explain yourself now, Maiza. At first, I thought you were planning to monopolize the method...but you seem to have a loathing for immortality itself.”

Slowly and clearly, Maiza answered the question that had been tossed at him.

“One reason...is that there was a flaw in this immortality.”

“A flaw?”

“Our immortality...ends when an immortal is ‘eaten’ by someone who has the same power.”

“Hmm... But the demon said that was a system he’d created out of kindness, did he not?”

“No. It truly is a ‘demonic’ system. It can provoke murder not only among those who hate, but even among those who love each other. Think about it: Even you want to dispose of those who could kill you...myself and our other comrades. That’s what I mean. Even those who’ve overcome death by old age fear dying more than ever before. We each try to become ‘the last one.’ If even one other such person appears, inevitably we see danger where none exists, and immortals begin slaughtering one another.”

“.....”

“Even those who love each other... At some point in the midst of eternity,

they may think they want to know everything about the other...whether their partner truly loves them, for example. There is one sure way 'to know everything about the other'... By 'eating' them, one can unlock the deepest secrets of another's heart. If they are unable to resist this temptation..."

"People that foolish *should* consume one another and die."

"I wonder. The thought may be foolish now. However, if immortality were to spread... If it permeated the world, the world's ethics, religions, and laws would change completely. Before long, thoughts like this would no doubt surface: 'If you take all the other's knowledge into yourself, it can be said that that person lives in you.' If, in the future, the world naturally evolves into that sort of world, I don't mind. However, I don't want to be the one to create it. I like this world, you see."

"...Hmph. In that case, you may rest easy. Giving this power to the thickheaded masses isn't my inten—"

"And the greatest reason is—"

Maiza spoke firmly, interrupting Szilard.

"—because people like you exist."

"In order to increase his own knowledge, Master Szilard began to 'eat' the alchemists on the ship, those who had been his companions. Maiza's younger brother was 'eaten' as well, because my master mistook him for Maiza. Immediately afterward, the survivors surrounded Master Szilard, and he threw himself into the ocean... The surviving alchemists drifted to New York. Master Szilard also reached the American continent without succumbing to death."

Firo was captivated by Ennis's story. He'd never even heard of this "alchemy" field before, and then, on top of that, there was the business about immortality. It sounded completely crazy, but after seeing Szilard riddled with holes and still smiling, he had no choice but to believe it.

Come to think of it, that must have been why Maiza's bloodstain had disappeared the previous night. As various things clicked into place, Firo listened attentively.

"...Look, don't call a jerk like him master, all right? What are you to him?"

Darker shadows crossed Ennis's face.

"...I'm... You might say I am Szilard himself."

"And anyway... Why do you want to know how to make the elixir of immortality? You'll only increase the number of people who can kill you."

Maiza asked a perfectly natural question. As he did so, he kept a regular distance between himself and Szilard.

"...Paracelsus's homunculus could not survive outside its flask."

".....?"

Maiza had heard Paracelsus's name before. Homunculi were beings made by human hands. Paracelsus, the world-famous alchemist, was said to have created one. It had been a little person, small enough to fit inside a flask, and had been unable to leave that prison.

That said, after the death of Paracelsus, the homunculus had vanished as well, or so the story went.

"A perfect homunculus, born of knowledge, is in possession of *all* knowledge from the time of its birth. Originally, we attempted to create artificial life in the hopes of gaining that perfect knowledge. ...This isn't your field, but you do know that much, correct?"

In contrast to Maiza, Szilard remained obviously relaxed as he spoke.

"It was outside my field as well, to begin with, but... Some of the knowledge I 'ate' had made significant headway in that research, and so I put it to use."

Maiza hadn't known that one of the alchemists on the ship had progressed that far in his studies.

In any case, more than that, Maiza couldn't forgive the fact that that knowledge—or rather, the life of the comrade who had had that knowledge—had been consumed by a man like Szilard.

Disregarding the hatred in Maiza's eyes, Szilard cheerfully continued his explanation:

"A homunculus: a tiny, artificial life, born inside a flask. Not only that, but if

not provided with a steady supply of human blood, it dies. It sounds like a very fragile creature, does it not? And so, as I am quite merciful, I had an idea: I would give these fragile beings the power of immortality.”

Abruptly, a leg fell off a mutilated chair. At the clatter, Szilard’s gaze shifted slightly.

Taking advantage of the opening, Maiza closed the distance in one sprint, thrusting his right hand out.

“Simple-minded fool.”

As if he’d anticipated the move, Szilard quickly twisted around. He was still holding the machine gun. Maiza’s right arm was caught up in that rotation...and a sound not often heard in everyday life echoed through the room.

Snnnap.

“Among the knowledge Szilard acquired was information related to homunculi... To artificial life. In simple terms, it’s, um...the creation of a person without intercourse between a man and woman. Two types of cells were used as catalysts in my creation: Szilard’s own immortal cells...and cells from a woman. Apparently he kidnapped one about my own age. It seems to have been quite different from the original production method the man called Paracelsus used...”

At that point, Ennis paused for breath. She turned to Firo and went on: “Technically, those cells should have returned to Szilard immediately, but... Possibly because he used the failed product as culture liquid when he created me, I grew to the same age as my ‘mother’ inside the cultivation tank. Then, as my physical nature was the same as Szilard’s, I stopped growing.”

“...Uh... In other words?”

“As an independently mobile colony, I am able to receive knowledge from Szilard. Conversely, Szilard can separate the composite elements of the woman’s cells inside my own cells from the composite elements of his immortal cells—”

“Wait, wait, wait. I’m not a smart guy... Use short words, all right?” Firo begged, putting his hands to his head.

“If Szilard is the company’s main store, I am a branch store. Think of each colony’s intellect as the managers of those respective stores. The main store can fire my intellect, the manager of the branch store, at any time.”

“...Meaning...what?”

“...Meaning, if Szilard wills it, I’ll die very easily.”

At that, for the first time, anger flashed across Firo’s face.

“What’s up with that? That’s the most selfish thing I ever heard!”

“I think I’m something like a daughter as far as Szilard is concerned.”

“What kind of parent can kill his daughter anytime and uses that as a threat to work her like a slave?! Don’t worry, you’re way too pretty to be the daughter of a crafty old guy like him. You don’t look a thing like him. I’ll vouch for that... Well, anyway, don’t worry.”

“Huh? ...But...”

“It’s fine, just don’t worry! Besides, Maiza and the other guys are probably beating that geezer like a rug right about now...”

At that point, their conversation trailed off.

“Wow. Dating in broad daylight... Punks sure do things differently these days.”

When Firo and Ennis turned, they saw a familiar face.

“Oh... You’re from yesterday...”

“Dallas... Why are you here?”

Like Firo, Ennis also seemed surprised.

“Well, well... You’re here, too, huh, doll? ...That’s great. Real convenient.”

When they looked, the two behind Dallas were holding tommy guns at the ready.

“...What the hell?”

“That should be pretty obvious. They’re machine guns. Ha! Ha-ha...”

The two gunmen beside Dallas smiled wryly.

“Well, uh, just so’s you know, doll: We’re cutting ties with that guy Szilard. And as our last big event in this town, we came to rub out that punk. ...Only, you did a real number on us, too, remember? So we’ll plug you while we’re at it.”

Dallas’s group had heard that Ennis was immortal as well, but they’d decided that as long as they made their getaway before she regenerated, it wouldn’t be a problem.

“Got any last words, punk?”

“I’m curious as to how you gentlemen got those guns...Dallas.”

It wasn’t Firo who’d spoken.

When Dallas turned, cautiously, toward the voice behind him, he found a gun pressed to his head. Keith and Berga had their pieces trained on the other two cronies.

“Uh... Hey, c’mon... Luck... Gimme a break, mister.”

“Just answer the question, if you would.”

Luck’s gun dug into Dallas’s forehead, right between his eyes.

What were they doing here? Without the slightest suspicion that it might be because they’d killed four people, Dallas desperately tried to think of a way to break out of the situation. If he got blown away here, Ennis might fetch Szilard while he was regenerating. That meant his advantage of immortality might as well not exist.

“The guns were... That Firo punk over there was hiding them. We found them.”

On the spur of the moment, Dallas decided to lie. He went on, talking fast, so that Ennis wouldn’t have time to deny it.

“To tell you the truth, we were watching that kid last night, planning to hit him with a surprise attack...and the punk headed over to your place with a machine gun! After that, we heard all this gunfire from your hideout...”

Dallas was trying to pin last night’s massacre on Firo. They’d catch on to the lie right away, of course, but all he had to do was distract his opponent for an

instant. If he could get that muzzle to shift down slightly... If he got shot in the head, things would get nasty, but he could probably take a shot to the body without passing out. If he grabbed that chance to slash the other guy's throat with his knife...

"...How do you know about the incident last night? It hasn't been in the papers yet..."

"Huh? L-like I said, we followed Firo over there to..."

"...Are you under the impression that we're on bad terms with the Martillos?"

"Huh?"

"Last night...the three of us were *with* Firo."

"Wha...?"

"We grew up in the same tenement. Our precious sworn brother was being promoted, so we attended the celebration. ...That's right, until quite late... While Mike and the others were getting killed!"

A shot rang out, and part of Dallas's head was blown away. Immediately afterward, Keith and Berga also fired. The remaining two crumpled to the ground, heads blown off, Thompsons still in their hands.

"We're not letting you shoulder that on your own."

"....."

As his two older brothers grinned at him, the youngest spoke, sounding troubled:

"I'm sorry, Berga, Keith... I was the least calm of any of us..."

"...Don't worry about it."

Keith used his vocal chords for the first time in about a day.

Firo, who'd been watching, spoke to the three of them:

"Thanks. You saved us."

"No... We heard machine gun fire, and when we came around back, we found this. Firo... We have no idea what's going on here. Could you explain what

happened?”

“I absolutely will, but later. Right now, I’ve got to go find my boss, and...this...”

When he’d gotten that far, Firo realized he didn’t know her name yet.

Meanwhile, Ennis wasn’t sure what to do. Who were these three? Should she tell them about the regenerating bodies? In the first place, Firo was an enemy, too, and yet...

...Ennis was already unable to think of him as an enemy.

“Hey, Keith. How’re we gonna hide these bodies? ...Hold it... Say, Luck, these guys have machine guns. Couldn’t we call it straight-up self-defense?”

“Wait, please! ...First tie up those three men on the ground...”

Without thinking, her mouth went on ahead of her.

Firo and the others looked at her curiously.

“They’re also... They’re imperfect, but they are immortals.”

“...What?”

“? Hey, what’s the dame saying? These guys are perfectly *dead*...”

As he spoke, Berga looked over at the corpses. Then his face tensed.

“...What the...?”

The head he’d blown away had been neatly repaired.

...And its eyes were wide open.

“Wha...?”

The next instant, a huge shudder ran through Berga’s body. A storm of bullets blasted up from below, punching through him.

“Uooooh...ou...”

Gushing blood from his bullet-riddled torso, he crashed to the ground.

“Berga...?”

“...Berga!”

No one—not the other two brothers, not Firo, not even Ennis—understood

what had happened.

“Why...? How can they have regenerated so quickly...?”

Ennis didn't know it, but they'd already had their heads destroyed once, and their bodies had gotten proportionately used to regenerating. In addition, it was also possible that since their bodies were younger than the old men Ennis was used to seeing, the basic speed of regeneration was faster for them.

Maybe because they hadn't had time to shut down the fuses in their brains (even though their heads had been cleanly blown off), Dallas and the others were conscious as soon as they regenerated.

Without the luxury of smiling, Dallas's group turned the weapons they held on the remaining four.

A deafening roar echoed through the alley.

“You're weak... Is that all you've managed in two hundred years?”

Maiza lay on the floor. His broken arm was quietly regenerating.

“You seem to have trained on your own. I used a more rational method. I gave powerful men the failed product... Ah, which is something I made based on the half of the production method you told your brother. In any case, if you give it to someone, they'll still age, but they won't die. And here's the important part...”

He took one step, then another, drawing nearer to Maiza, who hadn't yet finished regenerating.

“...They can be 'eaten.' Only by those of us who drank the finished product; it doesn't work the other way around... In other words, I give that to someone powerful, and then I 'eat' him. Could any training method be faster or more reliable? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Szillard opened the crate that sat on the table, checking to make sure the amount of liquor inside hadn't gone down.

“So you really hadn't given it to anyone...”

“...? What are you talking about?”

“...Oho, didn't you know? This...is the elixir of immortality, the same one we once drank. I finally managed to complete it on my own.”

The blender he'd hired had been the one who'd actually completed it, but Szilard declared he'd done it himself anyway.

“...That's impossible!”

“I don't know how you got this case, but I suppose I'll find out when I 'eat' you. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha...”

Laughing mechanically, Szilard looked down at Maiza, lying at his feet.

“Still... They were quite a pack of fools here, weren't they.”

He looked around at the corpses of the executives that littered the area.

“Or did you ask the demon and manipulate their souls?”

“...You'll...probably never understand it...”

“No, I will. In a moment, after I 'eat' you, I'll understand it as a matter of course.”

Szilard bent down, slowly stretching his right hand toward Maiza's head.

Just then, he heard a deafening roar from outside.

“What's that...?”

He didn't recall giving Ennis a machine gun. He'd heard three gunshots a moment ago, but he'd assumed the boy or his companions had fired them. Had reinforcements arrived, bearing machine guns?

For one brief moment, Szilard was distracted by what was happening outside.

Taking hold of the chance, Maiza grabbed both of Szilard's ankles and simultaneously jumped to his feet. It had been sudden, and Szilard's body made a half turn, crashing to the floor.

Maiza found himself face-to-face with his enemy's moment of vulnerability, but he calculated he wouldn't be able to grab Szilard's head. Instead, using a nearby table as a step stool, he broke a window that was rather high up and leaped through it. At night, when they brought the liquor out, it was closed with a shutter, but during the day, the glass was the only barrier.

A transparent shattering sound. Maiza escaped from the speakeasy in the midst of a blizzard of glass fragments.

“You won’t get away!”

Szilard followed him, leaping out through the window.

...And was hit by a car.

“Ha-ha-ha! That was a cinch... Let’s beat it before the dame regenerates.”

Thinking that the main street would probably be in an uproar over the gunfire, Dallas’s group decided to slip out through the back of the alley.

“...Nn?”

When they’d turned the first corner and gone a little ways, they heard a noise from the far end of the alley. It sounded rather like a motor running, and something else, as if a massive object was hitting a wall.

“What’s that...?”

The source of the sound appeared around the next corner.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me...”

It was a black passenger car, so large that it barely fit into the alley.

“I-I-I-Isaac! W-w-w-we’re slamming against the waaall!”

The sound of the car’s side scraping against the bricks set Miria’s eardrums trembling violently.

“A-a-a-and anyway, Isaac, I didn’t know you could drive cars this big.”

“D-d-d-d-don’t worry! I watched my old man drive all the time, and the b-b-b-basics seem j-j-j-just like a s-s-s-s-small c-c-c-car!”

“I-i-i-i-is that right! That’s a relief-f-f!”

As they chased after Dallas’s group, the two of them had spotted the car that had hit them. It was actually Ennis’s car, but of course they didn’t realize that. Well, and it really was the car that had hit them... But in any case.

Isaac had fiddled with the auto and gotten the engine started. They’d stolen small cars to use in getaways countless times, and their skills were truly

excellent. Taking the Genoard house into consideration, it was apparently safe to say that their thieving techniques—and only their thieving techniques—were top-shelf.

“We can beat those machine guns if we hit ‘em with a car!”

“We sure can!”

They felt absolutely no guilt whatsoever about stealing the car that had hit them. The only trouble was that, although they’d gotten in, they’d lost track of Dallas and the others.

At that point, they’d heard the thunder of machine guns from a nearby alley.

“Found ‘em, found ‘em, found ‘em!”

“Yes, that’s them!”

They sped up, plowing into the three in front of them.

Panicking, Dallas’s group tried to run, but they were struck the instant they turned their backs. Their momentum sent them tumbling from the hood up over the roof and around the sides, where they fell behind the car.

“We did it!”

“Isaac! The road! Watch the road!”

Maiza had suddenly appeared in their path.

“Waaaaaugh!”

Hastily, he slammed on the brakes. Maiza noticed instantly and took to his heels, so they’d somehow managed not to hit him, but...

...they sent the old man who’d jumped down right after him flying.

As a result, they accomplished their revenge for the hit-and-run, too.

Isaac and Miria hastily backed up.

They ran right up over Dallas and the others, who’d fallen behind the car, and then they were stuck.

“Uunh...”

Fully regenerated, Ennis slowly got to her feet.

“...Ah... Why...? How could this...?”

They'd been shot by Dallas's group, and only she had survived...

Not sure what to think, she gazed at the prone corpses of Firo and the others.

And then——

When Ennis rounded the corner in pursuit of Dallas's group, she was confronted with an odd—but, to her, appalling—sight.

Her own car was stopped farther down the narrow alley. Before it, Szilard had a knife to Isaac's throat. Slightly closer, Maiza stood stock-still, glaring at Szilard.

“Ah, Ennis. Excellent timing.”

“Oh! Ennis!”

“Enniis! Save Isaac!”

The three of them called her name at once.

“...What? Ennis, what is the meaning of this? Why do these two know your name?”

This was a problem. Looking disconcerted, Ennis passed by Maiza. He didn't try to move. He only glowered at her quietly.

Apparently, Szilard had taken Isaac hostage and was keeping Maiza at bay. ... Although she didn't understand why Isaac and Miria were there.

“Ennis. I'll hear your explanation later. ...Take over for me here, until I've finished 'eating' Maiza. ...If Maiza tries to resist, kill him.”

“H-hey...Ennis?”

“Ennis?”

The two of them were watching her uneasily. Shoving her agitation into the depths of her heart, Ennis spoke: “...You don't really need to take a hostage, do you...?”

“Ah, you know how it is. Just in case.”

“.....”

Wordlessly, Ennis took the knife, then restrained Isaac.

“Waugh! Ennis, you’re kidding, right?”

“E-Ennis!”

Watching Isaac and Miria panic out of the corner of his eye, Szilard approached Maiza, preparing to complete his eagerly anticipated ritual.

The machine gun had broken when he’d been hit by the car, so he drew a gun from his coat and shot Maiza through both knees.

“Gagh...”

With the joints destroyed, Maiza fell to his knees. This put his head at the perfect height to be consumed.

“Keh-keh... You value the lives of those two? How droll. No, no, I understand emotions like love and friendship myself, and I know humans can die or show strength for their sake.”

Beaming, he took another step closer.

“It’s just that, personally, I can’t stand them.”

As she watched Szilard walk away, Ennis spoke to Isaac and Miria in a whisper.

“...When that old man touches Maiza, hurry and run from here.”

“E-Ennis...? Oh, what a relief... I knew you were really Ennis!”

“Yes, she’s Ennis!”

The pair responded, also in whispers.

But they don’t know anything about me... Once again, Ennis’s feelings were bittersweet.

“Oh... But we can’t... We have to save Maiza...”

“Have to save him!”

“...Why...?!”

“Because...he treated us to dinner yesterday. He’s a good guy, Ennis! I don’t know who that old guy is, but save him, all right?!”

“Save him! We’ll do our best, too!”

Ennis wasn’t able to hide her bewilderment, but she asked the two of them anyway, desperately calming herself down: “...Did you...come to save that man?”

“No, we came to save you!”

“Huh?”

Her confusion deepened.

“Well, uh... You know! Those guys you took to the police yesterday broke out of jail and were walking around with machine guns! ...So we thought you’d be killed...”

“But don’t worry! We hit them with the car!”

And they were currently under it.

“.....”

An indescribable feeling came over Ennis. Had they known the enemy had machine guns and come anyway, not fearing even death? ...Just to save *her*?

For the space of a breath, she contemplated. It felt long, but in terms of time, it was only three and a half seconds. She’d never thought so seriously and come to a resolution about anything before, not since she was born.

“...Isaac. Miria.”

“...Hmm?”

“What?”

Her parting words were brief.

“I’m sorry... Thank you. I’m really glad I was able to talk to you, at the end. If you’ll let me make one selfish request...”

Ennis smiled sadly, quietly lowered the knife, and released Isaac.

“Please don’t forget me.”

Without giving Isaac and Miria time to respond, Ennis broke into a run, knife in hand.

...Toward her master and “main body,” Szilard.

“To continue our earlier conversation... The girl in the suit is the homunculus I created. Well, since she’s the same size as a human, the term *homunculus*—‘little man’—doesn’t really apply. In addition, creating her from both male and female cells wasn’t quite the proper way to do it, but even so...”

Szilard stopped, looking down at Maiza, his expression filled with superiority. He had a gun in his left hand, and despair in his right.

“I don’t know whether it was because I used the failed product to cultivate her or whether the fundamental method was wrong, but Ennis—that girl—was born with no knowledge whatsoever. She’s useless. Once I’ve ‘eaten’ you, I may use the finished product as culture liquid... Or, no, I’ll have your knowledge anyway: I can simply summon the demon and ask him.”

After he’d conceitedly wrapped up the matter for himself, Szilard’s right hand reached for Maiza’s forehead.

“Good-bye, Maiza. And...welcome.”

In the very moment his right hand touched his prey’s forehead...

“Gakh...?”

There was a strong impact at his back, and he felt something enter his body. His sense of pain was already gone, so all that came to him was an odd undulation in the neighborhood of his skin.

When Szilard turned, there was Ennis, quiet, a sorrowful expression on her face.

The blade of the knife she held was buried deep in Szilard’s spine.

“...Ennis... What is the meaning of this? ...No, never mind. The time for explanations is past.”

At the same moment, a shout went up from the corner of the alley:

“Maiza!”

Firo, who should have been dead, yelled and came running.

The noise of gunfire was still coming from Alveare.

“You four, split up and watch the ends of that alley. Don’t go in until you’re ordered to; this is *our* turf.”

Having received a report, Edward arrived at the scene with a large squad of policemen in tow.

“...What happened?”

When he opened the double doors and entered the shop, the proprietress was standing there in a daze.

“I, um... I don’t really know... Some strange old man just hit me, out of the blue...”

Warily, Edward entered the speakeasy. He’d heard something that sounded like machine gun fire on the way here, so he proceeded cautiously, gun at the ready.

“...What a mess.”

The place looked as if a storm had blown through and ravaged it.

Broken chairs were scattered near the entrance, and damage that seemed to have been caused by a machine gun was evident throughout the room.

After he’d scanned the area, Edward murmured, sounding vaguely relieved:

“Well, at least there weren’t any fatalities in here.”

There wasn’t a single bloodstain in the room.

“Oho... So you let that brat through, too, Ennis...?”

Slowly, Szilard turned.

“That’s unfortunate...is something I won’t be saying. I thought it was about time. I made several others before you, but the moment they acquired unnecessary knowledge, they betrayed me. I thought things might be different with a female, so I created you... But as I expected, nothing’s changed.”

She’d never heard that she’d had brothers before. ...But it didn’t matter anymore.

She tried to nail Szilard with a kick, but...

“It’s useless.”

“Ah.....”

Szilard closed his eyes for an instant, and for some reason, Ennis fell to the ground. It was terribly abrupt, as if she were a marionette whose strings had been cut.

In that moment, the cellular equilibrium that had been maintained by Szilard’s power collapsed, and Ennis’s physical functions began to break down.

“I won’t kill you instantly. Suffer well before you die.”

His face, which wore a mocking smile, was hit with a fistful of pepper.

“Gwah...”

The immortal man, a man who had obtained immeasurable knowledge and behaved as if he ruled the world, recoiled from a blinding powder of pepper. It was a ridiculous sight.

“Why, you! What did you do to Ennis?!”

“What did you do, huh?!”

The priest and nun threw bags of pepper at him in rapid succession. They looked ridiculous as well, but it also looked a bit as if they were throwing holy ashes at a demon.

“Gkh... You blasted...!”

Firo had run up while this was going on, and he began to drag Ennis and Maiza away from Szilard.

“Maiza! Are you okay?!”

The holes in his knees were already half healed. It might have been the first time his joints had been destroyed: Compared to Dallas and the others, the regeneration seemed slow.

“I’m...fine... Never mind me... The girl...”

Ennis’s face was already pale, and her eyes had begun to go white and cloudy

at the centers. Even then, when she recognized Firo, she began to speak slowly, relying on her weak breath.

“...You’re... You also... I don’t know when it happened, but...you acquired immortality, didn’t you... When I...saw your wounds healing, back there...I knew...”

At her words, Maiza stared at Firo, startled.

“Yeah, I’ve got no idea when it happened either, but...”

“...Then...I have a request. It looks...as if I’m dying... Would you... ‘eat’ me...? I told you...how it was done...earlier...”

“Hey, what kind of crap are you spouting?”

“...I don’t know if a homunculus like me...will be able to go to heaven or hell... It frightened me...and I couldn’t even end my own life... Oh... There’s still...so much I want to tell Isaac and Miria... So...please...would you ‘eat’ me...and deliver my message...? Also...no one ever told me...I was pretty before... Thank you... I was happy... ..That’s...all I wanted to tell you...”

At her words, Firo quietly clenched his fists...and shook his head.

“I don’t have any obligation to deliver a thing like that. ...Besides, I’m an atheist, so I can tell you straight out: Even if you die, there’s no heaven or hell. If you die...you just disappear.”

“...Ah-ha-ha... You’re harsh...”

Ennis laughed; she seemed a little disappointed. Even as she did so, her cells were breaking, one after another. At this point, her heart was already very near to stopping. The moment Ennis died...Szilard’s share of the elements of which she was composed would probably return to him.

Straightening up, Firo spoke flatly:

“Yeah. This world is harsh, and there is no next one. ...So don’t die. Forget disappearing, deliver your message yourself! Don’t worry, I won’t let you die because of that rotten old geezer. ...And actually...I’m not gonna let you die at all!”

Maybe he’d had some sort of idea: Firo drew his knife and turned toward

Szilard, who'd finally managed to shake off the pepper.

Szilard glared back at him with rage-filled eyes.

“Boy... What are you trying to—?”

Something was poured over his head from behind.

“...?”

A pungent, stinking liquid. It was liquid fuel, the sort that was used in lamps.

When Szilard turned around, Randy and the other executives were standing there. Their clothes were torn where they'd taken bullets, but there wasn't a drop of blood on them.

“You! I killed you! Impossible... All the liquor was there! Besides, Maiza would never have given it to you...!”

As Szilard shouted, he looked at Maiza, only to discover that Maiza's expression was very like his own. In other words, he couldn't fathom what was happening here, either.

“What kind of hooey was that? Are you nuts?”

Randy was holding an empty fuel can.

“We've burned gloves and storehouses...”

A blazing red match flew from Pezzo's hand.

“...But we've never burned a head before.”

Szilard's whole head ignited in pale flames.

“Gwoooooooooooooouh...”

Since he couldn't feel pain, he didn't feel the excessive heat, either. However, the violently leaping flames had definitely robbed Szilard of his eyesight.

Even then, somehow, he saw the brat they'd called Firo running toward him.

Was he an immortal, too?

—If he was...

Terror took root inside Szilard.

“Oooooooooouugh! I woon’t alloooooow iiiiiiit!”

Swiftly, he thrust his right hand out at Firo, who was bearing down on him.

“Get that damn hand out of my way!”

Firo had drawn his knife from inside his jacket, and he brought it down in a fit of rage.

The blade ran between the index and middle fingers of Szilard’s right hand, splitting it open down to the wrist. The knife stopped, biting into the bone, and as he held it there with his left hand...

...Firo thrust his own right hand into Szilard’s blazing face.

Not caring that his own arm would be burned...

...the boy wished hard.

To devour the body in front of him, as his hatred dictated.

To gain the knowledge to save a woman whose name he didn’t know.

“Gahk...”

For a man who’d lived nearly three hundred years, it was far too abrupt a death.

And then——

The only remaining earthly traces of Szilard Quates were the bright conflagrations of clothes and shoes.

Before long, those burned to ashes as well and were scattered by the wind.



Edward opened the back door just as Szilard's leather shoes began to burn.

"...What the hell...?"

None of the police officers, Edward included, had any idea what had happened. Shoes were on fire, the Martillo Family executives were assembled, the priest and nun from earlier were there, a car with a badly dented body was stopped farther down the alley, and the whole place stank of liquid fuel.

"What's going on? ...Explain this, Firo Prochainezo."

He strode over to the tired-looking boy and hauled him up by his collar.

"From what I've seen, it doesn't look as though anyone died, but... Are you planning to start a handgun orchestra or something?"

"...I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play dumb with me! We've been getting civilian complaints about nonstop gunfire around here! You want me to haul you in for violating the Sullivan Act?!"

Just then, a roar echoed through the area.

The squad of police officers hastily ducked, shoving their hands into their jackets and looking around for the source of the noise.

On top of the car, the priest and nun had machine guns pointed at the sky. They were the tommy guns Dallas and the others had been carrying.

"Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! The Martillo Family's treasure is ours!"

"Yes, it's ours!"

"So long, incompetent policemen! And by the way, the Martillos haven't done anything!"

"Not a thing!"

On that irresponsible note, they tossed the guns away and took to their heels. They'd probably spoken out of consideration for the Martillos, but the last half of that line had been synonymous with "The Martillos did something."

"...Assistant Inspector...uh... Can we shoot?"

“No... They’re unarmed now.”

Why a priest? After giving it a little thought, he realized that something about them did ring a bell.

“...The bandaged bandits!”

“...Huh?”

“Never mind, just go after them! As long as they don’t have a gun, don’t shoot!”

Edward swiftly issued orders for their arrest to his bewildered men.

The policemen scrambled to follow them, and then Edward was the only police representative left.

“All right. You can’t hoodwink me with something like that, Firo.”

Just then, two more men appeared from inside the speakeasy.

“Ah... Edward, there you are.”

“We need your help with something. C’mere a second.”

It was Bill and Donald.

“But...”

“We’ll tell you what you want to know, too.”

“...What do you mean?”

“Come along and you’ll see,” Donald said, simply.

Edward hesitated a little, but in the end, he went with them.

After Edward had disappeared into Alveare, Bill spoke to Maiza.

“Uh... What happened to Szilard?”

At those words, Maiza gaped at the men in front of him.

Realizing who they really were, he gave them a straightforward explanation.

“Ah. He...disappeared.”

“Erm... Into you?”

Maiza smiled a bit mischievously as he answered:

“I can’t leak organization secrets to law enforcement, you know.”

After the police were gone, Maiza asked Firo:

“Firo... I don’t understand. When did you and the others become immortal? You have Szilard’s knowledge now. You do know what I’m talking about, don’t you?”

“Uh... Well...”

Nervously, Firo confessed:

“I saved this old guy yesterday.”

“I see...”

“He was carrying some liquor, and I switched it out on him on the sly. We’d bought four bottles of liquor, and I dumped out two. Then I poured the contents of the old guy’s bottles into the empties, and filled his bottles with the liquor from our last two...”

Firo had done it on a whim. If the old guy had given him a genuine thank-you, he would have told him the truth and given them back; if he cussed at him, the plan had been to keep quiet and swipe them.

“What you take, you share with the rest. I was just obeying Camorra law...”

“Don’t tell me... You passed it around to everyone at that party?”

“...Come to think of it... If I’d done it right, I probably could’ve switched two bottles and gotten by with only dumping one, couldn’t I...”

That hardly seemed to be a major problem.

“Firo...”

“Well, once I got Szilard’s knowledge, it all made sense, but... Maiza...”

At that point, Firo gave a forced smile and continued, addressing a stunned-looking Maiza: “Coincidences really do happen, don’t they...”

The priest and nun ran at full speed, from alley to alley, toward a fleeting freedom.

The hum of the crowd was growing gradually louder. It was proof that they were close to a major street.

“This is bad.”

“Yes, it’s bad!”

Just as the mouth of the alley came into view, they realized there were two police officers standing in it.

The policemen seemed to have noticed them as well, but the pair didn’t let it faze them. Without slowing down, they yelled: “Aaaah! Mr. Policeman, help us!”

“Save us!”

Their charade had been off-the-cuff, but thanks to their appearance, it seemed to have worked. Given their abrupt arrival, the officers hesitated.

Diving against the chest of one of the policemen, Miria trembled in an exaggerated way and cried: “A-a-a-armed men just started chasing us!”

She wasn’t lying.

The police officers, who’d only managed to grasp about half the situation, overreacted to her words. Their hands went to their holsters, and they fixed tense eyes on the depths of the alley.

...But what appeared from around the corner was a group in familiar uniforms.

“Wha...!”

By the time the policemen had hastily turned back, the two had already broken into a run again and were weaving through the crowd.

The pair mounted the NYPD-issued police horses that had been waiting nearby and started after the two, but they were blocked by the very people they’d sworn to protect.

“Meeerry Christmaaaaas!”

As Isaac shouted, he took bundles of bills from his bag and threw them high in the air, scattering them.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! You’re early, too early! You’re a month early!”

As Miria laughed and whooped, the avenue was transformed into a coliseum.

The bills took flight like a storm of confetti, and under their spell, the crowd began to gather them indiscriminately.

Men holding placards that said GIVE ME A JOB, panhandlers who’d been crying that their legs were broken, fine ladies on their way home with liquor they’d purchased, cargo-truck drivers, freight wagon operators, and even the well-to-do with purses full of money—all began to converge on the extremely easy-to-understand “blessing” of money.



Grab more money, faster, more tightly... It was a battle royal in an arena governed by simple rules. Confronted with surging waves of happy hysteria, the horses were unable to overcome the murderous intent of the combatants. ... Even if they had been able to overcome it, it was doubtful whether they would have been physically able to disperse that crowd.

Watching the dismayed policemen out of the corners of their eyes, Isaac and Miria kept running toward the station. Among those who robbed banks, the fact that you scattered money as you made your getaway was basic knowledge. It was effective precisely because everyone knew it... Or at least that was what Isaac believed, and in fact it had worked.

If there was any problem at all, it was that they'd scattered most of their total earnings (99 percent of which had been the Genoard legacy) by the time they reached the station.

That said, these two weren't the type to care about something that important.

"Now, then... Where shall we run, Miria?"

"Anywhere!"

"Well, let's see... Want to head back to LA and try digging up some gold?"

"A gold rush! But that isn't robbery... Are we turning over a new leaf?"

"Uh... Well, no, it's the other thing: We'll be filching a fortune from the earth!"

"That's *amazing!*"

Even as they kept up their usual sort of conversation, one thing bothered the pair: "...We didn't get to say good-bye to Ennis and everybody, did we?"

"...No, we didn't."

At the entrance to the station, the two thieves looked back once.

As they gazed at the kaleidoscopically shifting city, Isaac murmured quietly: "This was an interesting town, wasn't it."

"Yes, really interesting!"

“Let’s come back again, to see Ennis and the rest.”

“Absolutely!”

Taking the last bundle of bills out of the bag, Isaac stepped into the station to buy two tickets to California.

“This is all we’ve got left.”

“Uh-huh... But we gave it away to everybody, so we did something good! I know we did!”

“I see... Yes, you’re right. I bet the late Mr. Genoard is happy, too, don’t you think?”

“And all the dead children!”

“Then let’s split the difference and wish for happiness for Mr. Genoard’s children.”

“Yes, let’s! They won’t fight over the inheritance now, and I bet they’re all living happily together as we speak!”

The two held fast to their self-serving proclamations right up to the very end. With that, the couple who had been the guests of honor at this *baccano*, this crazy ruckus, disappeared from New York.

Just before they boarded the train, the pair spotted a sign with WELCOME TO NYC! written on it.

To commemorate their departure from the city, on his way out, Isaac left a certain mark on that sign.

It was graffiti of a big bite mark, drawn on top of the picture of the apple that stood for New York.

When Dallas Genoard woke up, he was in a dark warehouse.

“Are you awake?”

Right in front of him were three men he was positive he’d shot to death earlier.

For his part, he’d been put into an oil drum, and his hands and feet were

bound. His head was the only thing outside the drum, and he looked around, nervously. When he did, he discovered that his two buddies were in the same state.

“Ah, this place is a bit like a summer home for us. The police are prowling around our house and the hideout, you see...”

“Wh... Why... Why are you alive?!”

Luck answered Dallas’s scream, speaking for his brothers.

“That’s a very good question. Firo just called and told us a few things... But we’re under no obligation to tell you any of it. Worry about it until your lives run out.”

They’d been at that party as well. Meaning, since they’d drunk *that* toast, they’d also joined the ranks of the immortal. Of course, Dallas and the others had no way of knowing this.

Before Dallas could speak, Keith came up and put something into the drum.

It was a deck of cards.

“.....?”

“You’re a real nice guy, Keith...,” Luck offered. “He says you’ll probably be bored on the ocean floor until you die of old age... So.”

When the meaning of those words sank in, Dallas’s group was assailed by desperate terror.

The fifty-two jokers that had been dropped into the oil drum sneered coldly at Dallas’s fate.

“You’ll be able to drown perpetually for another seventy years or so. That’s phenomenal. ...It’s probably a world record, you know. Unfortunately, no one’s going to document it...”

“See, I wanted to just finish you off here and now, but you won’t die even if we slug you or drill you, so there’s no help for it... Hey, how about a radio to help kill time?”

Berga spoke, sounding entertained.

“Ha-ha-ha, the battery will die.”

“Oh, yeah. ...What about a chess set, then?”

“The board will float up through the water. A Conan Doyle novel, perhaps?”

“The paper’ll get all wet.”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha.”

“Gah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“.....Heh.”

After laughing a bit, all three looked into Dallas’s eyes.

Their gazes were terribly cold. Cold enough to bring Dallas to tears.

“Go on... Choose. Which do you want?”

The members’ meeting place. When night fell and the old men assembled, Szilard was nowhere to be seen. Instead, five or six policemen were waiting for them. Edward, Bill, and Donald were among them.

“Wha... What are you?!”

“Erm... We’re the police.”

Bill gave a terse explanation to the old men, who were howling blue murder.

“Uh... You’re under suspicion for illegally distilling liquor, so we came to investigate.”

“Wha—? On what grounds?!”

“Well... There was a fire yesterday, you see, and this turned up in the ruins.”

He took out a soot-smearred bottle. It was, beyond a doubt, one of the bottles Barnes had been in charge of.

“Hmm... It’s nothing to do with you? ...Well, then.”

He moved as if to dash the bottle to the floor. The old men screamed in unison.

“Haaa... You’re terribly easy to read. That’s nice.”

“Quit playing around, Bill.”

Donald picked up the conversation:

“The Bureau has been aware of your organization for quite a while now. We knew about Szilard, too, and about the liquor you were trying to make.”

A stir ran through the old men.

“Wh...why would the Bureau know about Master Szilard...?”

“Uh... Well, you see, one of our higher-ups is extraordinarily long-lived as well... To be honest, we came to New York on orders from above...to dispose of this liquor.

“‘Never close a case.’ That’s our motto at the Bureau. According to our boss, that goes for unscientific incidents from two hundred years ago as well.”

“H-hey! Edward!”

Someone called his name. It was the man at the top of his list of irritating bosses: Police Superintendent Veld. That meant even high-ranking police officials had been among Szilard’s followers... But at the same time, it also meant Szilard hadn’t managed to grab any more power than that.

“Edward! Do something! Stop them! If we have that liquor, the world can be ours! We’ll be evolved humans! You want that privilege, too, don’t you? So... Hey, Edward! Say something!”

Edward was so exasperated that it actually calmed him down.

He even began to smile. Really, there was nothing to do but laugh.

“Superintendent... If you’d at least said, ‘We can rid the world of disease and accidental death,’ I might have thought about it, but... Frankly, you’ve disappointed me.”

“E-Edward!”

“Superintendent... If it’s a choice between personal eternity and eternity for our country, I choose the country.”

Edward took the bottle from Bill.

“And since I am a police officer, I can’t overlook something made in violation

of the law.”

With no hesitation, he hurled the bottle into the corner of the room.

As the old men shrieked, the bottle smashed to bits.

Some of the old men tried to lap up the liquor spreading across the floor, but as if he'd seen this coming, Donald struck a match and tossed it to the ground.

The alcohol blazed up, illuminating the despairing faces of the old men with a beautiful, fleeting light.

The detectives splashed water onto it from a bucket one of the police officers had been holding, and both the fire and dreams of immortality disappeared in the blink of an eye. They'd intended to break the bottle in front of the men all along.

“Erm... Well, then... Do your best at your jobs until you die of old age, gentlemen. Depending on how you work, your honor may live eternally as the foundation of this country. And... Oh, and by the way, Mr. Szilard won't be coming back.”

Saying their good-byes to the old men, who were busy fainting or bawling, Edward and the others left the basement.

As they swayed in the car Donald was driving, Edward muttered resentfully: “...You tricked me.”

At first, he'd been unable to swallow their story of the liquor of immortality. However, when he saw the rat that had been discovered at the scene of the fire—the rat that had survived even as it burned—he'd had no choice but to believe.

“Erm... Sorry.”

“But why did you tell me everything?”

Donald answered that question briefly.

“Our boss... He isn't at the top of the Bureau of Investigation, but he's fairly high up. He heard you were stubborn but had a strong sense of justice, and that you wouldn't bend to bribes or violence, and apparently he took a shine to you.”

“...How did he know about me?”

“You applied to the Bureau. We vet our applicants much more thoroughly than you’d imagine.”

“.....”

“Erm... We’ll look forward to working with you in the future.”

Bill and Donald gave sly grins.

Edward shook his head and smiled wryly, responding to the two who were slated to become his senior colleagues.

“...When that happens, no more secrets.”

Afterward, Edward became one of the leading agents at the Bureau of Investigation, which would later be known as the FBI. At this point in time, he didn’t yet know that Firo and the others had become immortal, but once he found out the whole story, he fell into the habit of declaring, “There are some fellas I have to put away for life and turn into permanent jailbirds.” ...They say that he’d laugh and repeat those words whenever he remembered Firo and Maiza.

“...Oh...”

After Edward and the others had gone, Maiza slumped to his knees.

“Wh-what’s wrong, Maiza?!”

“I’ve... What have I done...?”

Now that he’d heard everything from Firo, Maiza was on the verge of being swallowed up by guilt. Because of him, his companions, Firo included, had been pulled into the eternal cycle.

“Huh? Wait... Maiza, what are you saying?!”

“The pain of living for eternity... And to you, all of you, of all people...”

“What are you talking about?! We don’t care! And actually, it feels more like, ‘We don’t have to die, yahoo!’ Right, guys?” As Firo hastily contradicted Maiza’s thoughts, he turned to Randy and the others, who were beside him, for

support.

“Huh? I-I don’t really get it, but ‘yahoo.’”

“Yahoo! Cheer up, Maaaizaaa.”

Randy and Pezzo started to dance. The fact that they’d become immortal didn’t seem to have really sunk in yet. Apparently the other executives didn’t understand either: They watched the dancing pair and guffawed.

“And look, if we don’t tell the boss and Yaguruma, we can sweep it under the rug by saying, ‘Wow, you’re long-lived!’”

However, the anguish hadn’t cleared from Maiza’s expression.

“Firo... If you have Szilard’s knowledge, then you know...to be honest...I’m tired of living. Now that Szilard, my brother’s enemy, is dead, there’s no point in living any longer... Of course! Firo...would you...?”

When he’d heard him out that far, Firo’s face grew a little earnest, and he answered.

“I can’t do that. ...Listen, if you’re gone, which of us is going to be able to count up the money? Maiza, are you planning to sink us?”

“...Drat, that’s a good point... Oh, but wait, if you ‘eat’ me, you’ll have my knowledge of accounting—”

“No. I’m dumb. Even if I get knowledge, I forget it right away. ...As a matter of fact, I’m already starting to forget the knowledge I got from Szilard.”

“You won’t do it, no matter what...?”

“Look, Maiza. Camorra law says that if you kill a comrade, no matter the reason, you pay with your life. I don’t want to die yet, so please, gimme a break.”

“...That’s a problem... You’re making too much sense...”

Maiza smiled. Firo smiled back.

“*Incidentally*... If you disappear, we’ll be lonesome, so stick around. All right?”
Then, at last, the two of them broke into loud laughter.

“Um...”

At the sound of a woman's voice, they turned. A girl in a black suit was standing there.

"Why did you...save...?"

The first thing Firo had done with Szilard's knowledge was return life to the dying Ennis. He'd taken the links of life Szilard had severed, set them resonating with his own immortal cells, and closed the links again. With that, it wasn't too much to say that Ennis, who'd called herself part of Szilard's body...was now a part of Firo's.

"Oh! That's right, of course! Edward just came out of nowhere, and I completely forgot... I'm sorry!"

Ennis only looked bewildered.

"My name is Firo Prochainezo. ...I was looking for you because you were attractive. I saved you because there was something I wanted to ask you."

"Something you wanted to ask...?"

Ennis was at a loss. Firo smiled as he spoke.

"...I want you to tell me your name."

"Huh...?"

After a little thought, Ennis answered.

"Wasn't it...in Szilard's knowledge?"

Firo shook his head in an exaggerated gesture, grinning awkwardly.

"Uh...well...you know. ...I want to hear it from you."

At that, the rest of the crowd started to hoot at them. "Look, it's not like I confessed to her or anything! What are you guys, grade-schoolers?!" Firo argued back, but nobody listened. Led by Randy and Pezzo, everyone cheerfully "yahooped," making fun of them.

Just as if it were the happy ending to some movie...everyone there was smiling.

"That ruckus was something else. What in the world happened?"

“...From what I hear, a priest was throwing around bundles of money.”

As they walked down the broad street, which echoed with the cries of countless panhandlers, Ronny answered his leader respectfully.

“Oho... And here I thought priests only used God’s name to get money *from* people. That’s real admirable. Well done... Heck, God doesn’t usually save even the ones who believe in him...”

At Yaguruma’s blunt comment, Molsa reprimanded him:

“Yaguruma... Don’t sell God short. The guy’s only flaw is that...he’s incredibly capricious. That’s all.”

The upper-level executives had returned from work. For some reason, they’d seen lots of cops around the speakeasy, so they’d decided to go around back, just in case. ...And there were all the executives, making a racket.

“What’s going on? Why are they horsing around outside?”

Yaguruma cocked his head, looking puzzled.

Ronny gazed at Firo and the others, looking as if he’d seen something rather unexpected.

“I noticed it during the toast last night, but...in the end, I didn’t stop it. I had the vague idea that, if it was us, we’d stick with it for a long time. ...Well, never mind.”

“Nn? What was that? What are you muttering about?”

“Nothing. ...They look like they’re having fun.”



“Well, it’s good to be young.”

The two of them smiled, agreeing with the words of their leader, who was holding a huge armful of pepper.

The spiral came tumbling down. When they poked their heads out of the rubble...

...they found the beginning of a new one.

There was just one difference: This spiral went on forever.

That’s simply all there was.

EPILOGUE...2



EPILOGUE...2

“All right... The tale ends here.”

I'd been listening, riveted, but he clapped his hands lightly in front of me, and then I remembered I was a person from 2002.

“This story has no planet-destroying monsters, no princesses in towers, no fortunes large enough to purchase the world. Even so, as far as we're concerned, it's a fine legend.”

He'd pulled me right in. Whether it was true or not, it had been an interesting yarn. ...But was a string of coincidences like that really possible?

“Ha-ha-ha. In this world, is there any notable piece of history in which coincidences were not involved?”

I didn't know, but it sounded convincing.

“...So, did you believe that preposterous tale?”

Were you lying?

“No.”

Then, why not? What problem could there be with that?

Maybe my answer had satisfied him: The man said he'd treat me, and ordered dessert.

“You really are an unusual person. It makes me glad I confided in you. When talking of the past, there can't be many listeners as exemplary as you.”

I don't remember doing anything that would warrant a compliment. ...And in any case, that might have been roundabout sarcasm.

But... What part of what he'd related had been “the lonely tale of a miserable man”?

“Szilard was a lonely, pitiful man, wasn't he?”

...Him, huh?

Still, what had happened to the people in the story afterward? The thieving couple, for example.

“Right over there.”

He glanced at a rather dim-looking couple farther back in the restaurant. They were both wrapped in chains from head to toe, and—I’m not sure what about this was festive—lots of bells hung from the chains. Talk about a pop culture overload.

In that case, the fat guy and the skinny guy sitting in that corner are...

“Pezzo and Randy, yes. Lately, Pezzo keeps complaining that because his body’s like this, even if he wants to lose weight, the fat regenerates right away, but he’s still eating five meals a day.”

...Okay, then what happened to Firo?

“Huh?”

He gave me a strange look.

“I’m right here. ...Oh, I was speaking as a storyteller, so I talked about myself in the third person as well, but... Ah... That’s right, I hadn’t told you my name yet. Generally, when I do business with someone, we get all the way to the end and part ways without my ever introducing myself.”

...Good lord. I’d just assumed this guy was Maiza...

“Oh, Maiza’s... He taught me the ABCs of being *contaiuolo*, then left on a journey about thirty years ago. He said he was going to look for fellow alchemists who’d scattered around the world. ...If he keeps his promise, he should be returning soon.”

Was that how things were...? Still, he wasn’t at all the way I’d pictured him. I told him so, straight-out.

“Well, it’s been more than seventy years since then. Even I’ve learned how to carry myself. The glasses are a fashion item, just for show. What do you think?”

With that, Firo Prochainezo smiled cheerfully. He looked happy. I was a little

jealous.

Come to think of it, what was Ennis up to now?

“Oh, she’s my wife.”

...There, see, *now* I’m jealous.

“Well... Only... In a romance novel or picture book, we probably would have fallen in love with each other right then...but...”

Firo went on, looking a little embarrassed:

“You know. Ennis started without a sense for love or any such emotion, so... erm... Apparently it was just me, getting carried away on my own, and... Well, and I was the only one who’d fallen in love at first sight, after all...”

Giving a slightly dejected smile, he confessed a certain truth:

“The upshot was that it took us quite a long time to get married. Just about... fifty years.”

That’s pretty awful. ...Talk about being a late bloomer.

I was surprised they hadn’t gotten sick of each other, after having been together for more than half a century. On the other hand, you could say it showed just how well they hit it off.

No, wait... In a way, Ennis is part of Firo’s body, so...isn’t that narcissism? The thought was too meaningless to mention.

“Anyway, all sorts of things have happened since then, but we’re doing pretty well. ...Although things were tough when Prohibition was repealed and our revenue dropped...”

After that, he grumbled a bit about securing new revenue and their troubles with turf wars. ...Even so, it was clear to me that they were all enjoying life. It was someone else’s business, but I was as happy about it as if it had been my own.

“Did you know? They say that Eliot Ness, the Prohibition agent and hero of the Untouchables, was destroyed by alcoholism in his later years. ...Ironic, isn’t it.”

As we were entertaining ourselves with stories like that one, the young guy from earlier returned. In his hands, he held a gleaming silver camera bag! Welcome home, my camera.

“Ah, Ronny... Thanks for going to all that trouble.”

“No, my hands were free. There’s no problem. Still, Bobby’s group is pretty dim, aren’t they? Pulling a stunt like that on our turf...”

Ronny... Oh, the guy who was the syndicate’s secretary.

“Well, never mind. I did work them over a bit, like you told me to.”

...So they weren’t in cahoots? And actually, why is even Ronny speaking Japanese? Not only speaking it, but using jargon like “work over”...

“All right, I’ll go reckon the value of the contents. Wait just a minute.”

No sooner had he spoken than he disappeared into the back of the establishment, through a door that had a “staff only” look to it. Good-bye, my camera. That’s right: I’d promised to pay them 10 percent.

Ronny looked at me and grinned.

Come to think of it... In Firo’s story, at the very end, this guy was depicted as the demon. ...Did that mean the demon had disguised himself as a member of the syndicate in order to see how the immortals ended up? If he was a demon, I could see him knowing a term like “work over.” Sort of.

Casually, I thought, *If you’re a demon, show me proof.*

I have no memory of the next few minutes. However, I’d been instilled with an intense terror of Ronny. The feeling I’d forgotten, ever since being attacked by that brown bear. ...What had I ever done to him, huh?

I was dazed. Quietly, Ronny murmured to me:

“Technically, I’m not a demon. ...I’m just an alchemist who acquired too much knowledge in antiquity.”

After that, Firo came back, and I paid him three hundred dollars and reclaimed my bag.

Still...What if I’d run back then, when Firo stabbed himself in the hand with his

knife? What would he have done?

“Huh? ...Well, obviously, I’d just have been richer by the price of the camera. That’s why I didn’t introduce myself to you or ask your name: to give myself the greatest possible advantage in court, just in case.”

Listen to that. Here I’d been on the verge of thinking there were good gangsters, too, and he’d just stomped my illusions into the ground. ...For the first time since I’d come to this town, I laughed out loud.

“Ah, you finally laughed. Most Japanese people smile for no reason at all, but your face was practically blank.”

Hey, easy, pal.

“Even so... The way you told me to ‘respect your elders’ back then... Edward... and Paul, actually, said that to me the first time I met them. Even if you used different words, to think you’d say exactly the same thing as that father and son... If it hadn’t been for that, I never would have thought of giving you a scare. And if you hadn’t been someone who didn’t feel fear, I probably wouldn’t have told you that story...”

Was that really all? The only reason he’d told me about the past?

When I asked him, he hesitated, and his gaze swam a bit. Then, laughing, he told me:

“...To be honest... Lately, my connection to the world has begun to feel tenuous. Even though I’ve lived this life longer than anyone. And so...I may have wanted to make some sort of connection with someone from the outside world. Particularly with a straight-and-narrow type such as yourself. It’s enough if you’re aware that beings like us exist... Possibly I wanted that sort of self-satisfaction. That may be why I was so talkative today...”

“When Maiza comes back, I think I’d like to visit Japan. When I do, could I ask you to show me around?”

Nothing could be easier. I handed him a piece of paper with my address and telephone number written on it. *If someone Japanese had said this to me in Japan, I doubt I’d ever have given them my phone number...* As I thought this, I finally succeeded in reclaiming my bag. ...Although all I’d done was shell out

money.

“I’ll be sure to send a letter before I come.”

Saying a simple good-bye, I left the shop. It was a very brief farewell.

I could see Manhattan Bridge. When I’d walked down the street for a bit, I saw a sign in the shape of a big hat. Was this where Firo and Maiza had made their purchase?

When I wandered into the shop, I found it filled with a wide variety of the latest popular styles, and more than half the space was taken up by accessories like bandanas and buckles. Japanese helmets...were nowhere to be seen.

The clerk was a young woman. Come to think of it, the silent old man hadn’t been immortal. That was only natural, but for some reason, it seemed terribly sad.

Beside me, a tall man picked up a bandana. It was a vivid pearl green, and the man who’d chosen it seemed a bit like Firo, only about ten years older.

Maiza Avaro.

Involuntarily, I cried out.

The man looked my way and said something. ...But unfortunately, I know zero English.

I said “Sorry” several times, and he left, looking puzzled.

...Maiza. He’d come back. As I thought this, there was no doubt in my mind: I was sure that had been Maiza.

I’d won a special prize I hadn’t even wanted in a lottery, then just happened to get mugged on the Martillos’ turf. Out of the thirty thousand members of the New York police force, by sheer chance, I’d run into Paul Noah. Then I’d said the same thing as both Noahs *fils* and *père*, and I was a guy who didn’t scare easily... What were the odds?

At first, I’d cursed my lousy luck, but... I might actually have been really lucky today.

The prison of eternity. The prison of the spiral. In getting involved with these

people and experiencing that final coincidence of running into Maiza, had I been trapped in those prisons as well?

With such thoughts still on my mind, I returned to Narita Airport.

2002 Summer Ikebukuro

A sauna-like, three tatami mat-sized room... In a sense, this was a prison, too.

Growing sticky with sweat, I checked my souvenirs for family and friends...and my camera case.

Inside the film case, which I'd ended up never using, was...

THANKS FOR LISTENING TO MY STORY ALL THE WAY TO THE END.

...a note written in clumsy, childish *hiragana* characters and three hundred-dollar bills.

The amount I'd paid Firo had been put right back in there.

He said he was coming to Japan for a visit. I bet he's going to have trouble with Customs over the age on his passport.

I'm already looking forward to seeing it.

As I think about dumb stuff like that today, I'm waiting for that airmail letter to arrive.

AFTERWORD

Thank you very much for reading this brand-new-writer's postscript.

In this story, you can't even tell who the protagonist is. As the author, it would thrill me to no end if you'd just think of the character you liked while you were reading as the main character.

I first thought of writing a story set during Prohibition when I ran across an anecdote about Eliot Ness in *Capone: The Man and the Era* by Laurence Bergreen.

Eliot, the hero of the Prohibition era, became an alcoholic late in life, losing both his wife and his job. When I read that story, I was just a little moved, and then I burst out laughing: "This is a joke. A completely unfunny joke that Eliot Ness spent his whole life carrying out."

As if to counter this joke, there was also a story about Capone's habitual cocaine use. A guy who was probably the world's most famous Mafia boss took the rule, often seen in picaresque tales, that Mafia executives don't do drugs because they know better than anyone how dangerous they are, and turned it on its ear. *What an irony-filled time*, I thought.

Of course, I'm aware that this was an illusion: Ironies like that are a dime a dozen today, too. Even so, I'm fascinated by this era, which is shown in all sorts of movies, and by gangsters and the judicial organizations that pursue them.

I think this is due entirely to the fact that this era and these organizations are a type of "other world." One is the past, a place we can never go to. Not only that, but it was the unique time when the Prohibition Act was everywhere. Another is the underworld, which you'll never cross paths with as long as you're living a normal life, although it definitely does exist.

I wanted to write a story about this "extraordinary within the extraordinary," with even more elements of fiction tossed into it. That was how it began.

These days, I'm smiling wryly over the idea that something I wrote on sheer

momentum brought about these results, and wondering if this isn't some sort of unfunny joke as well.

Now then: I bet some of you had never heard of it before, but the Camorra is the name of an actual organization.

Frankly, from a Japanese perspective, I think it's a rather stupefying moniker. If it had been a product of my own delusions, I would at least have given it a sharper-sounding name, but it's a proper member of Italy's three big crime syndicates (the Mafia, the Camorra, and the 'Ndrangheta).

In contrast to the Mafia's taciturn, nihilistic image, the Camorra seem to be considered violent but also more cheerful and talkative. In fact, although Mafia bosses won't even admit that they belong to the Mafia, Camorra bosses will openly declare they're Camorra.

I thought that temperament might suit this *Baccano!* story, so I did some research into the Mafia and the Camorra, but... It's deep subject matter, and to be honest, I was barely able to touch on either the Camorra's charm or their dark side as a criminal organization in this book.

I'd like to put together the plots for my next and subsequent books thinking—selfishly—that, if I get the chance, I want to write more about those aspects someday.

Since I brought out the Camorra and the Mafia, I think eventually I'll probably have to write about the last of Italy's three great crime organizations, the 'Ndrangheta, but... 'Ndrangheta... It's an even more blah-inducing name than *Camorra*, and I'm really not sure what to do.

Although, before worrying about little things like that, I need to work on refining my writing and ideas so they'll let me keep releasing books. ...And before *that*, there's the knotty problem of having to graduate...

As you can see, I'm an unreliable newbie, but if we get the chance, I hope we'll meet again.

*Everything past this point is thank-yous. If those don't interest you, go ahead and skip them.

First, to the slush reader who noticed the script I'd submitted, to everyone in

the editorial department, and to the individuals on the judging committee who sent both the honor and the huge opportunity of the Gold Prize my way.

To all my friends and acquaintances who gave me the energy I needed to expand the material... Particularly everyone connected with S City, and the several friends who completely tore into my manuscript the day before the application deadline, highlighting the places I needed to fix.

To my family, who cheerfully supported my entry into the uncertain business of writing.

To my more experienced colleagues at Dengeki Bunko, who helped me at the awards ceremony and the Dengeki Tenth Anniversary Festival.

To everyone in the novel, illustration, and comic divisions who won awards at the same time I did.

To my editor, Chief Editor Suzuki, to whom I am constantly indebted for all sorts of things, and to everyone at Media Works.

And to Katsumi Enami, who stylishly embellished the story with wonderful illustrations.

Thank you very, very much.

I can't even imagine how many people have used the following sentence in the past, but now that I'm on the side that uses it, I feel it from the bottom of my heart:

“And most of all, to everyone who picked up this book: Thank you so much.”

Ryohgo Narita

November 2002

Thank you for buying this ebook, published by Yen On.

To get news about the latest manga, graphic novels, and light novels from Yen Press, along with special offers and exclusive content, sign up for the Yen Press newsletter.

Sign Up

Or visit us at www.yenpress.com/booklink

Copyright

BACCANO!, Volume 1: THE ROLLING BOOTLEGS

RYOHGO NARITA

Translation by Taylor Engel Cover art by Katsumi Enami This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

BACCANO!, Volume 1

©RYOHGO NARITA / KADOKAWA CORPORATION 2003

All rights reserved.

Edited by ASCII MEDIA WORKS

First published in Japan in 2003 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.

English translation rights arranged with KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo, through Tuttle-Mori Agency, Inc., Tokyo.

English translation © 2016 Hachette Book Group, Inc.



Yen On

Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas New York, NY 10104

www.hachettebookgroup.com

www.yenpress.com

Yen On is an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The Yen On name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

First eBook Edition: May 2016

ISBN: 978-0-316-27037-3

E3-20160429-JV-PC