

## Story 2: Lost Fragment of Snow

Red : A child with a grotesque red arm .

Mana Walker: A newcomer clown employed by the circus

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Snow falls quietly onto the Earth.

As if it is healing the land which has been abused.

Under the layer of gray clouds which stretch on endlessly, there stands a young boy.

He is young, but alone.

The boy has no name.

He is only referred to as Red .

Simply because of his strange, wrinkled left arm –

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Thunder – like claps and cheers break the silence.

“Thank you for everyone’s patronage today.”

It is the voice of the pleased Ringmaster.

It looks like today’s performance is successful as well.

Thought Red distractedly as he polishes the tools in the backstage of the circus.

From the slit in the hanging screens, the stage surrounded by lights could be seen. It was beautiful and full of life—contrasting with the darkness and eeriness of the backstage.

With only a small light bulb swinging above his head, Red sits on the freezing floor and concentrates on polishing the rings.

The red and white striped rings are so big that he can only hold one.

Using both his legs to clamp the ring, and supporting it with his mostly unmovable left arm , he wipes the ring with his more nimble right hand.

In the beginning, he was unable to do these jobs well, and would always curse his left arm , but he is used to it now.

Grind the knives, then wash the clothes. The person who does odd jobs needs to do many things.

“Urgh...”

Red ’s body is shaking because of the cold.

The tent, made up of only one piece of cloth, is very cold.

In order for his hand to gain some warmth, Red exhales some air on his hand.

Just then, even louder cheers and claps could be heard from the stage, it sounds like they are seeing of the performers who have completed their act.

It looks like they are returning soon.

After a while, the backstage was also filled with a festive atmosphere.

The costumes made by the skilled workman are very bright.

A clown wearing a brightly coloured clown suit. An accordion player with a pleated blouse. The magician's sleeve was decorated with a star shaped golden button, and shone with the light. The hair accessory decorated with flowers and jewels belonged to the female trapeze artist. The one wearing black and white stripes was the animal trainer—

The performers, who have yet to snap out from the excitement felt during the performance, walked past Red with a proud air around them.

Red glanced downwards at his own clothing.

It was extremely sloppy around the collar, and the shirt was very dirty as well. A very short vest was worn as the outer layer. In contrast, his shorts were very big, and can even be pulled to his shoulder level.

Looking at the tragic state of his clothes, it felt really out of place.

The performers put their respective props in succession in front of Red, who had not moved at all.

Of course, no one will speak to him.

"The guests' interests today were really high."

"Yeah, I felt really great when I was balancing on the ball."

"Me too, at that time, I really wanted to flip backwards twice."

All of the happy conversations passed over the head of Red.

No one looked at Red in the eye.

It has always been that way.

Yes, it has always been that way.

He clenched his right hand tightly, and this told him that, it was as if his heart had been pierced by a knife, an uncontrollable grief bubbling up.

Thinking that way, Red put more force behind the hand polishing the ring.

"You're still the same, so frustrated and hot tempered!"

The person who said it was the clown Cosmos, his mouth twisted in a vulgar smile.

A white clown outfit. And on the left side of his face, a red star which is unique to the clown.

It was totally impossible to see his expression underneath the thick layer of makeup and powder, but the only fact known is the malicious twinkle in his eye.

Red looks up at Cosmos, without stopping the polishing of the prop.

He cannot let this sort of guy see his weakness.

Red immediately his hand from shaking.

Yes, this happens often.

“Every time I see your face, I lose my motivation.”

Cosmos roughly pushes Red in the chest.

Red, who is still young—not even ten years old, was flung back easily.

“And, your disgusting arm! Not only is it dirty, it can’t even move, can it? How can such a useless fellow like you manage to stay here!”

Red looks at his left arm.

On it were a few deep wrinkles, just like an arm which had been dyed by a thick coating of blood. It took him a lot of effort just to make his hand move a tiny bit.

Even though he wanted it to move just like his right arm, he can’t do anything.

But—this sort of thing, has nothing to do with Cosmos.

Even he knows that this happens often, but as usual, he is unable to control his hatred for Cosmos.

Red’s eyes naturally fill up with power.

The smile suddenly disappeared from the edge of Cosmos’ mouth.

“What’s up with you, that sort of arrogant look!”

Cosmos’ fist hit Red’s chest, he groans softly. The heavy hit made him sick.

Red curled up as he knelt on the floor.

Cosmos had always been that way. Making him suffer in places where it is hard to see from the outside.

“What are you saying, hahh! You’re just a piece of trash!”

This time, Cosmos used his leg to kick Red in the stomach.

Red clenched his teeth.

How can he shout?

How can he cry?

This is his only way of rebelling.

He understands the reason behind Cosmos' frustration.

The new clown has stolen away his popularity.

He planned for himself to always be the best—to this sort of Cosmos, the fact that other people could surpass him, is the hardest fact to swallow.

He wants to break Red into pieces to vent his anger. Facing this sort of Cosmos, from the bottom of his heart, Red feels only contempt towards him.

I will absolutely not give in to this sort of person.

But Cosmos would not let him off easily.

As if he wanted Red to see his shining sneakers, Cosmos cruelly kicks Red's stomach.

He kicked again and again, causing Red to slowly lose his consciousness.

Even then, Cosmos did not forgive and finally aimed a kick at Red's face.

Red's small body was flung away by the force of the kick, and crashed into the pile of props.

"What is that noise!"

The Ringmaster heard the loud crash and rushed out.

He wears a top hat on his head and has a brush moustache under his nose.

Even though he is short, his pants are tight around his large belly. The buttons on the vertically striped shirt looked like it was going out pop out any moment.

The Ringmaster turned towards Cosmos, his tummy shaking.

"Cosmos, did something happen?"

The Ringmaster asked Cosmos first, as he thought it was due to the Clown's vigorous activity.

"This bastard was lazing around. For the future of the circus, I need to teach him a lesson!"

Cosmos smiled at the Ringmaster as if he was trying to flatter him.

--That's not it!

Even though he wanted to say that, no sound came out in the end.

No, even if Red denied it, the Ringmaster wouldn't listen anyway.

In front of the Ringmaster who is only interested in money, how he sees these two people is very clear.

The Ringmaster looks at Red with cold eyes.

"...seriously, not only can you not make money, you still want to slack off. Forget about dinner tonight."

The Ringmaster said impatiently. Then he hauls Red up.

"Who was it that took you in, with no memories and ugly looks, who was it that gave you a place to live and a job? Hmm?"

The Ringmaster leans his pudgy face close.

If he did not answer, then he won't have a place to belong to anymore.

"...It's you, the Ringmaster."

"Who was it that refused to go on stage to perform and insisted on doing odd jobs? Ah?"

"...Me."

Red replied, the Ringmaster nods in satisfaction.

"That's right, listen up, I will not allow you to slack off. For Cosmos to think of the circus is really rare."

"No, it's what I'm supposed to do."

Cosmos smiled at the Ringmaster with a smile meant to flatter.

"Really, I spent so much money buying you...you should at least earn my capital back! Definitely no slacking!"

The Ringmaster let go as he said so.

Cosmos seemed to be satisfied at last and leaves with the Ringmaster, smiling and humming to himself.

The other members look away from Red, who had collapsed on the ground, like they did not want to be involved, and left quickly. In the end, no one was left.

In the backstage, which had regained its silence, Red, who is alone, finally tries to stand up.

The chilliness of the floor sends a shock through his body.

“Urgh...”

After an unknown amount of time, the nauseous abdominal pain finally subsided a bit.

Red gets up shakily.

No one will look at me. But, it's fine like this. I don't want to care about you people either.

He puts the ring which he had polished into the box, and to let out his feelings of frustration, Red walks out of the tent.

“Ah....”

It's a silver world outside.

White snow drifts down slowly.

No wonder it's so cold.

The circus which was originally filled with people, noisy and extravagant, is currently standing in the square, just like a quietly blooming flower.

Red walks a few steps, unconvinced.

Shashahsha, his foot sinks into the snow.

The air he blows out is white, bone piercing cold seeps in through his thin shirt.

Even then, Red does not stop walking.

There is no place to go. But, he just wants to leave this place.

Looking at the trees which have been covered by snow, just like a white sculpture.

This comforted his soul a bit.

Seeing the snow that dyes everything white, it is as if his soul has turned pristine white.

It feels as if all his troubles have been forgotten.

Far away from the circus tent, Red kneels on the ground.

Quietly scooping up some of the snow, and placing some on his cheeks, which are as hot as fire. Because of Cosmos' hits, the corner of his mouth has cracked.

Ah, even though it is painful, the coldness of the snow made him feel comfortable.

--What, in the world am I doing.

Red does not have any memories of the past. When he became aware, he realised that he had been sold to the circus.

Because he refused to perform on stage, so he decided to do odd jobs to earn a living.

The Ringmaster saw him as a piece of trash who cannot earn money and drifted away from him, he also became an outlet for Cosmos when he was angry, he was even forced by other members to do various things.

When can I—be freed from all these things.

Behind these strong feelings, are feelings of frustration and unease—how is he going to survive with a left arm like this.

Red touches his already protesting stomach, it still feels painful.

Now—he can't leave. He still needs to continue this humiliating and lonely life.

Because he is young, and has no one to depend on.

Red clenches his teeth.

“Eh? You're from the circus?”

Hearing this innocent voice, Red can't help but look up.

It was a kind looking boy wearing a large coat, the boy watches with interest.

His cheeks look rather plump.

He looks around my age.

Red looks at the young boy with a puzzled expression.

“It's really great, the circus!”

“...”

“What tricks do you perform?”

Hearing this, Red feels a tightness in his heart.

“Nothing much...”

--This guy who doesn't know any tricks and does nothing!

The Ringmaster's words resonate in his ear.

“Wow...the circus, it's great. You can go to a lot of cities? And can see all sorts of people...it's awesome!”

The young boy continues talking without any prompting.

No matter which city I go to, and who I meet, it's all the same to me.

Red rolls up his sleeve.

"...!!"

He knows that the boy's expression has frozen.

A scary, red left arm covered in wrinkles.

"Erhm, that is, has...has something been done to your arm?"

"..."

The young boy looks at the silent Red with fear and turns around in the end, running away.

It has always been like this. Always.

He used to it.

Even though that is what he tells himself, he still feels a sharp pain in his small chest.

The quiet night seems to be able to absorb all sound.

The customers of the circus have gone back home, there is no one left. The circus members are going to sleep very soon as well.

"Ah...!"

Red gave a cry and hid behind a tree.

Someone walked out of the circus tent, it was Cosmos.

I thought he already went to rest!

Cosmos looks drunk.

He was holding a beer bottle in one hand and walking unsteadily.

"Ah~hh, I really can't continue anymore!"

He does not greet anyone and walks to the member's tent while talking to himself.

He's not coming towards here. Red's heart is pounding as he watches Cosmos quietly.

"I'm...not supposed to stay here...because I have a noble bloodline..."

Cosmos, who was completely drunk, did not notice Red, who was hiding in the shadows of the trees, he simply continues walking unsteadily.

Red let out a sigh of relief and leaves the shadows of the trees.

Just like what the other members said. Cosmos will drink himself drunk every night, and complain non-stop.

--I'm not a person who should stay here

Cosmos' words echo.

This is not the place I belong to.

But, if you want to know where this place is, you are unable to find the answer.

All alone.

What am I doing in this sort of place? How long will I stay in a place like this?

His stomach growls.

W soup and bread would be nice.

Red feels that his situation is too tragic, and bites his lip.

He brushes the snow of himself and walks into the tent.

“!”

The prop box's contents, which had been arranged properly, are scattered all over, like a thief has been through it.

Red stares dumbfounded at the scattered props.

Before leaving the tent, he had already kept everything properly.

Members who have finished their work would not take the trouble to come back, they should be asleep now.

He could only think of one suspect.

--Cosmos.

The name appeared together with his anger.

It must be that drunkard.

In order to vent his dissatisfaction, he can do this sort of thing.

Even then, if he leaves it like this, he would still get scolded by the Ringmaster the next morning.

--time to check the props.

If it was to vent anger, it is very possible for props to be thrown away.

The Ringmaster only thinks about money. He always thought that giving salary to the members and buying props were unnecessary.

Even if one small ball was lost, he'll definitely lose his temper. Then throw all the blame onto Red , who does the odd jobs.

Red picks up the things scattered on the ground.

The five big balls are all there. The cigar box used for magic tricks, red, blue, yellow, two each—

Just at this moment.

A kacha sound is emitted from a wooden box.

It is box in the corner of the room, big enough to hold an adult.

--who is it, don't tell me Cosmos is hiding inside?!

An uncontrollable feeling of violence surges up inside him.

No wait, didn't I see him return just now?

Then, what is this-

Red watches the box warily—

A large form slowly walks out from the shadows.

"D, dog--?"

Discovering something which he didn't consider, caused Red to be very shocked.

A huge dog had come out from the box.

Tea coloured fur mixed in with white fur which looked really soft.

On its neck was not a collar but a clown ring.

Which means, this dog belongs to the circus.

Maybe because it's late at night, not only does it look sleepy, even its movements are dull.

So, it didn't notice.

The dog picked up a ball with a star pattern on the ground, and ran past Red , who was still in shock.

“Ah, wait!”

If one ball is missing, it would mean a lot of trouble.

Whose dog is it! Help me stop it!

Red runs after the dog in panic, out of the tent.

As Red ran through the snow, he felt as if he had seen that dog before.

Recently, a lot of new performers were hired. It should be the partner of one of the newcomers.

It should be a clown.

The circus is a gathering of wanderers.

It's a place where people of different backgrounds and different goals gather.

And because the Ringmaster is prone to mood swings, the turnover rate of the circus is high.

Because of this, Red cannot remember everyone's faces.

They are people who are going to leave anyway—

That dog walked towards the darkness.

He is unable to catch up with the dog which can run through the snow easily, so the distance between and the dog grew bigger and bigger.

“Ah!”

Red's foot sinks into the snow, causing him to fall over.

The cold sensation of the snow causes him to get up hurriedly.

If the prop is lost, I'll be beaten up again, and I will not get anything to eat again.

His cheeks throb.

“I'm telling you to wait!”

Red shouts.

The dog continues running single-mindedly, as if it did not hear the shouts.

In the darkness of the outdoors, he searches for the dog's footprints, but has stopped running.

He is at his limit.

“ ... ”

Not only has he been hit, and kicked, his stomach is extremely empty well, there is also the freezing air and the snow which traps his feet.

He is unable to think about anything else.

Red collapses on to the snow, like he had turned limp.

And just like that, he flips over.

Red lies spread-eagled in the snow.

“Hah, hah!”

His rapid breathing could not slow down.

His heart is pounding furiously.

Snow falls onto Red .

His body is covered in white.

He’s cold, and tired, and heart-broken, and suffering—

--he can’t think of anything anymore.

PA!

“!!”

His face seems to be hit by something like a ball.

Red opens his eyes, and discovered that the dog that he should have lost was in front of him.

The dog seems to want to say something. It opens his mouth and pants.

“Wha, what?”

At this moment, the dog quickly stands up on its hind legs.

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Then shakes its head vigorously.

“Ah---”

The clown tag shakes together with the dog’s movement.

In the midst of the heavy snow, the clown tag shines under the dim street lights. As it turns, it is as mystifying as the dances from another country.

Red stares dumbfounded at the sight.

Just then, the dog meets Red's eyes.

That expression is very playful—

This mutt—

He finally understands why the dog ran out.

That right, he wants to play.

No, it should be he wants to tease me.

Even if he knew that—

Red picks up the ball dropped on the ground, and threw it towards the dog.

Even though it was meant as a small joke, the dog jumped lightly and catches the ball perfectly in mid-air with its mouth.

The dog puts down the ball in its mouth.

"Take this!"

Red picks up the ball. This time, he throws it further and harder.

In the air where snowflakes are drifting, the star shaped ball leaves its perfect trajectory.

The dog ran across the ground like a typhoon and jumps towards the grey sky.

Just like it was dancing in the air, the dog catches the ball easily—Red is fascinated with such a scene.

He is very agitated.

The hatred and anger in the depths of his heart had melted—that was the feeling he had.

Red held onto that feeling, and threw the ball again and again.

The dog gracefully leapt through the air to grab the ball, as if it did not want to lose. This elation was a feeling he did not experience before.

Red couldn't help but shout and leap in joy.

I really want to stay on a stage like this.

When he came to his senses, the pain and hunger pangs have decreased greatly.

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The person doing odd jobs needs to wake up very early.

“Okay, Red. This is the last one.”

“...”

Red grumpily puts the bowl of soup and bread onto the trolley.

He just needs to send these to the Magician’s tent.

As long as he finishes this, then he can finally eat.

“Breakfast!”

“How slow!”

One of the performers glanced at Red expressionlessly.

“...Sorry.”

Breakfast is sent late because the performers are not popular.

Eating order is determined by popularity.

It looks like this performer’s patience is going to run out soon.

This fact would probably irritate him even more.

Red leaves the tent he just entered. He doesn’t want to be taken apart.

Even then, Cosmos still shouted at him this morning.

--Why am I not the first one? You bastard, you spoke about the previous incident, did you?

Red hurriedly ran away from the angry looking Cosmos.

If he got beaten up again, he wouldn’t be able to take it.

Red breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, he can eat his own meal in the corner of the kitchen.

“Hurry up and finish eating!”

The chef said these unkind words, like he did not want to see Red at all.

Because of Red’s ugly arm, a lot of people hate him.

He's used to such cold looks already. Red holds the bowl of soup.

His tightened stomach felt a bit warmer because of the soup.

Red quickly left the tent after finishing and distributing the food.

The person doing odd jobs has a lot of work.

I need to finish them quickly.

Red picks up the performer's clothes which have been drying at the corner of the tent. Using his immobile left hand to support the clothes, and using his right hand to tightly hug the bundle.

"Okay..."

All he has to do with bring these to the backstage and stack them piece by piece in an orderly manner. Because he's already used to it, he can quickly finish the job with only his right hand.

Sometimes, performers will walk past him.

But no one will talk to him.

Red will not talk to anyone as well.

Every day, in the backstage, he is used like a tool.

These sort of lonely jobs are also very common.

Common—

At that moment, someone nudges him from behind.

"!!!"

He turns around in shock, and saw the dog, with ragged breathing, behind him.

"...Huh, it's you again!"

Red gave a cold look at the mutt staring at him with a wet nose.

Maybe it was satisfied with the reply, the dog sat down next to Red.

After that snowy night, the dog will always pick the times when Red is alone to be next to him.

Red ignored the dog, and turned his back on it to fold the clothes.

The dog stayed next to him quietly.

He can feel the dog breathing behind him, and sometimes, it was very clear that it had yawned.

Who's going to turn back?

Red continued to sit with his back to the dog.

And simply continued with his work.

Quietly, he wanted to suppress his feelings.

Actually—really, he wants to pat it.

He wants to play with the dog.

He wants to be really close to it.

The elation he felt that snowy night, replayed itself in his mind over and over again.

It was the first time since he came to the circus.

That he can feel happy from the bottom of his heart.

But—

“Strange? What happened to that acrobat? (The one who balances on the ball)

“Ohh, that one? He resigned yesterday.”

“Is it? He should have said something—whatever, it doesn't matter much anyway.”

Hearing the conversation of the performers walking past him, Red clenches his teeth.

It is difficult to tell when the performers will leave one after another.

The dog's owner will leave one day, and go to another place.

That means that he would not be able to see the dog again.

Red could not tolerate it anymore, and stole a backward glance at the dog.

The dog's good senses picked that up and shook its head.

This pitiful action, made Red feel very warm inside.

Something warm gushes out from the depths of his soul.

Red stops the hand folding the clothes, then clenches his fist, looking away from the dog.

I can't get close to him.

Definitely not.

The presence of the dog behind him pains him, Red thought of it that way.

This dog will leave me soon, together with its owner.

If I accept it, it will be especially painful when we say goodbye.

It would definitely be as painful as stabbing a knife through his chest, an unimaginable pain.

It may also be as painful as swallowing a rock.

No matter what, it will only increase the feelings of loneliness.

Once he thinks about this, it feels like he fell into a deep chasm.

So I will turn my back to it.

Red concentrates on his job once more.

Red does not talk to it, does not pat it, and even more, did not pay attention to it at all—

Even then—

The dog keeps loitering behind him.

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“Ka!” Red’s face comes into contact with hard object. It’s a ball used in transformation magic.

“Ow...”

He bears the pain and lifts up his head, only to come into eye contact with Cosmos, who is filled with nastiness.

“Drat, it’s because the ball slipped from my hand! Having been touched by such a dirty hand, the ball is really dirty! If the stunt fails because of this, then it is definitely your fault.”

“...”

He meticulously polishes the props every day. But, not just Cosmos, many others like to blame Red.

If things cannot be performed properly by the person, the props are blamed.

They’re so shameless.

It’s too much.

Red stares disgustedly at Cosmos, whose back is facing him. He had taken off his wig and thrown it on the floor.

Even though Cosmos often finds faults with Red, Cosmos is in a very bad mood these few days.

Because a clown more popular than Cosmos has appeared.

That would be the dog’s owner.

All of the clown's techniques are well executed; his amusement tactics are unique; and the special canine partner, both of them are very popular.

His popularity continues to increase. Now, there is a rumour that many returning customers specially come to watch his show.

"It looks like Cosmos may not be able to snatch his No. 1 spot back."

He remembered that someone has whispered this sentence before—

"Oi!"

The low, angry voice, made Red jump.

It came from Cosmos, who had stuck his head in through the Circus' curtains.

And I thought he had gone outside already.

His heart beats furiously.

He's going to get badly beaten up again.

"I have something to talk about with a useless fellow like you. Hurry up and come!"

Red stands up slowly.

He wanted to reject Cosmos, but if Red did not listen, he will be on the receiving end of more violent beatings.

With no abilities, a left arm which cannot move.

No one will protect a troublesome person like Red.

Red can only surrender to the flow of events.

Cosmos grabbed Red's arm and dragged him to the small pocket of trees outside.

After removing the wig, Cosmos' golden hair drapes around his face, giving off an even more disgusting feeling.

"Oi, you, seem really close to that dog, right!"

"D,dog...?"

For a short moment, Red did not know what Cosmos was talking about. But after a while, he realised that Cosmos was referring to the dog which kept following him.

"I'm referring to that smelly dog with a collar around its neck. Listen, you must not tell anyone!"

Cosmos lowers his volume and whispers next to Red's ear.

Then, he shoves a small bag to Red.

Even though he was very reluctant, but Red accepts it anyway.

"What, is this...."

Touching it lightly, he realises that it's hard.

With a very bad feeling, Red looks into the bag and gasps in shock.

There was a lot of crushed glass in the bag.

Reflected in Cosmos' light blue eyes was the expression of cruelty.

"Mix these things into the dog's food."

For a while, Red does not understand the implications behind the statement.

"Eh, eh? If I did that—"

Red got slapped, hard.

Cosmos started to shout at Red, who was stunned by the blow.

"No nonsense from you! It'll be fine as long as you do as I say. Unless brat!"

His face, which was hit, hurt a lot.

Then, Cosmos' statements started circulating in his head.

The dog, whose tag kept spinning, in the heavy snow.

The dog, which will use its nose to nudge his back when he's stacking the clothes.

The dog, which will quietly follow him when he's moving props.

"...I won't!"

He says it easily.

"Hah?"

"I won't do this sort of thing!"

Red throws the bag back to Cosmos.

The bag full of glass, lands at Cosmos' feet with a crack.

Cosmos runs a hand through his hair, and breathes in impatiently.

Then he takes a big step forward.

His light blue eyes giving off a fierce look, Cosmos brutally gives a kick in Red's direction.

After that, was a flurry of kicks.

Red collapses with a groan.

Chest, stomach, leg—

His body is in so much pain that it feels like it's falling apart, but the blows keep coming.

But Red continues clenching his teeth.

He will never say "Yes"—even if he was killed.

He swore to himself.

His vision starts to blur.

Ah, am I going to die—

Just as he loses consciousness, he hears a dog barking.

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“Urgh...”

Red gets up slowly. Suddenly, pain courses through his body.

Slowly, he becomes more alert.

“Ah...”

Red remembers.

Cosmos took him outdoors, told him to feed glass to the dog, then because Red refused, he got violently beaten up—but it feels like he had heard a dog barking...

What he heard before he lost consciousness should not be that dog’s barking.

Red felt a chill go down his spine.

He had—a bad feeling.

What if, it came to save him.

If that was the case.

Cosmos wants to kill that dog. It’s possible that something had been done already.

The sun had already set, and the surroundings are getting dark.

Red stands up slowly and shakily made his way back to the Circus.

After entering the tent, he crossed the backstage to glance at the stage.

“Ah--”

He felt extremely relieved.

The dog’s performing on the stage with its owner.

Leaping to catch the ball, the tag turning round and round—

Red breathed a sigh of relief seeing its energetic self.

And I thought Cosmos had done something to it, it looks fine.

The bark that he heard before he lost consciousness must be an illusion.

Maybe it was because he felt relieved, Red, who displayed no interest in the performances before, stood quietly by the curtains watching the stage.

The dog’s owner took a cup out from the box and swung the cup around in an amusing manner.

Then threw it towards the dog.

But, the dog turned in the other direction with a 'humph', as if it was ignoring him.

The dog's owner shrugged his shoulders, and—stuck both his hands on his face.

This hilarious look caused some outburst amongst the audience.

The dog's owner then took the ball with the star shaped pattern.

"Ah..."

Red exclaimed to himself as the memories of that snowy night resurfaced.

The dog caught the ball which the owner threw very gracefully.

Loud claps ensued as the audience saw how experienced the dog was when it caught the ball.

The dog's owner was indeed more popular than Cosmos, his tricks were varied and exquisite.

Sometimes hilarious, other times elegant and showy.

The audiences' eyes were always filled with light; they laughed till they fell over, and they wouldn't stop clapping.

He was able to transform the rowdy audience into one entity.

Everyone was absorbed with his performance.

Being able to perform with such an owner must be a very happy thing.

The dog performed, full of life.

It was so bright.

The clown, and the dog—

Red couldn't help but squint.

It was too bright.

The customers and the dog, they loved the clown on the stage.

It was an incomprehensible feeling.

Love, and being loved—this had nothing to do with him.

He would not love anyone, and no one would love him.

Even though it was right in front to him, it needed to be treated like something that happens in a land far away.

"Urgh..."

Something warm is rising up in his chest.

Red tries to keep it down.

Possessing an ugly arm, abandoned by his parents, isolated by others in the circus, and having to worry about violence every day.

One day, there was a dog.

There was a dog.

At my side where no one would approach, there was a dog.

Until the day, I always thought it was okay to be alone.

But it's not like that—

I was only forcing myself. If I did not do that, I would not be able to live on.

The situation happening in front of me, part of a bright world—is that “love”?

If it is like that—then I want to obtain “love”

I envy those with “love”. I am too lonely, too miserable.

Even though it's just right in front of me, I can't touch it.

I am unable to obtain it.

When I realised it.

My face was covered in tears...

After the performance, the clown and dog returned to the backstage.

“Bark!”

The dog discovers Red, and bounds towards him happily.

Thump thump, his heart is pounding.

What, what should I do? What should I—

Many emotions are swirling in his heart.

The image of the brightness of the dog and the clown on stage, surfaced in Red's mind.

“Shoo, go away!”

Red kicks hard, and sends the dog flying.

Bark! The dog whimpers and falls on the floor.

“Ah--”

Red is stunned.

I, I didn't want—to do this sort of thing...

He quickly runs away from the place.

He just kept running and running, unable to control his sad emotions.

So envious.

So jealous—

He did not know what to do anymore.

Red, who was confused, did not realise that he had just brushed past Cosmos.

He also did not realise that Cosmos was currently rubbing his leg, which had been bitten by a dog, with a vengeful look.

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Ever since that day, the dog never returned to Red's side.

It was expected, because he suddenly sent it flying.

But he did not feel any pain.

In fact, he thought it was better that way.

Because he did not want to see them.

Just hurry up and go to another place, stay out of my sight.

This circus is just a temporary stop.

The performers will appear before disappearing one after another.

Because it's all temporary, so there cannot be any expectations.

It will only cause pain.

Therefore, do not get attached to others, and do not let others get attached to me.

But—something aches in heart.

“Red, I'm going out to buy something, come with me as well!”

“Yes!”

Red was called out by the chef, into the streets.

The streets are filled with Christmas decorations, it was very lively outside.

In the more prosperous stores lining the road, there were many customers. There were also many roadside stalls, trying to promote their wares.

Everyone is looking at presents happily.

Children circle innocently around their parents.

All of this feels a world away.

The chef would not talk to him as well.

Red walks on the prosperous streets silently.

In this place, he could feel the difference between him and the happy people.

I am—very lonely.

But, it isn't that bad.

It's fine like this.

After shopping, he put the mountain of bread, meat, vegetables, wine and other things onto the trolley and pushed it back to the circus. He sees the dog sleeping beside the heater.

Normally, just before the performance, it would always be practicing together with its owner.

What's wrong, is it not feeling well?

Red hesitates in approaching the dog.

He remembered that he had sent the dog flying.

I did something really horrible to it.

It's still a better decision not to get myself involved.

But—

He slowly approaches the dog, still feeling hesitant.

The dog is lying on its side, with no energy in its limbs.

The coat covering the dog must belong to its owner. Even though the coat is really old, once you look closely, it's actually of high quality.

The dog's chest rises and falls.

The dog, which is breathing deeply as it sleeps, now looks older than he imagined.

And very weak as well.

Red stretches his arm towards the dog, he is worried.

--it's okay if I just touch it a bit, right?

But I could be hated already.

Even though he felt uneasy, but he still reached out regardless.

He nervously touched the dog's body.

The dog did not move.

Slowly stroking its body, the dog suddenly opened its eyes.

"Ah..."

I must have woken it up.

Seeing Red standing there, the dog got up quickly.

Watching Red's face, it quickly used its back legs to stand up, panting as it did then. Then, it collapsed on the floor.

It must want to perform tricks for him.

The dog rolls around listlessly.

Red continuously rubs the body of the dog, which had fallen down once again.

He wants to make up for sending it flying.

Can this intent reach—

The dog looks comfortable, and licks Red's hand.

It licked the hand which everyone was disgusted with, the left hand.

Red felt all warm inside.

Like he had been forgiven.

He strokes the dog again.

"If you're healthy again, if you get well, if-- "

He said it naturally.

It was almost like a prayer.

Red concentrates on stroking the dog.

Then, there was a taste of sunlight.

The dog which was being stroked quietly.

It was as if time had stopped between them.

Just then, the bell announcing the start of the performance rings.

The dog's ears perked up instantly.

It got up quickly and ran to its owner's side.

Seeing it like that, Red breathes a sign of relief.

Maybe it was just a little tired...

He holds his hand tenderly.

If it's possible, he would want to touch it more.

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It was still snowing heavy up till yesterday, but today, there were no clouds in the sky.

"Ah..."

Red, who had finished washing the clothes, discovered the dog's owner sitting by himself under a tree near the tent.

It's Christmas Day today. The performers have all gone out to the street to publicise their performance.

The man in the clown suit did not move at all, just like a puppet which had lost its strings.

The man just silently stared at the ground in front of him.

--What is he doing?

If he's just resting, then this scene is weird.

But, it has nothing to do with me.

Red will not approach the performers on his own, because they will think Red is disgusting, and ignore him, or order him around like a servant.

But no matter what, he is still concerned.

He is the person who is partnered with the dog.

What kind of person is he?

Red moves closer to the man.

“--!”

He almost stopped breathing.

In the man’s line of sight is a hole—the dog is lying in it.

“Is it dead?”

The man stared at Red, with a rather shocked expression.

From the clown’s makeup, he can see that his eyes are a deep gold colour.

“It’s dead.”

The man replied, loneliness evident in his voice.

Then, he started to pile soil on top of the dog.

Red watches all of this quietly.

“...those are all bruises!”

Even under the fur, it can be seen that the dog is covered in bruises that would make anyone wince.

It spoke plainly about how the dog met its end.

--there was only one possibility.

Cosmos.

That guy killed it. A boiling anger surged forth.

Endlessly churning, boiling vigorously.

“It was definitely done by that guy Cosmos. Because, you’re more popular than he is. As long as someone is more popular than him, he would not let it go. His performance skills are obviously bad, but he’s good at doing these things!”

Red started to say without pause, as if he had been possessed.

Compared to the agitated Red, the man replied blandly.

“It had been with me for a very long time, so it wouldn’t have much time left anyway. Forget it.”

“ ... ”

The dog's body is now totally buried in the soil; the man gently put the ball with the star pattern on the ground, just like a gravestone.

--Forget it.

Hearing this, Red realises that he is very disappointed.

Why, isn't he angry? Why doesn't he hate Cosmos?

The fury he felt burned more strongly than before. Red, who can't do anything, found himself unable to divert any of these feelings.

“Then you're not taking revenge?”

“If I did that, I'll be chased out by the Ringmaster, which would mean that whatever I did before would be wasted.”

After saying that, the man put his palms together in front of the grave.

--Che.

What is this.

His partner had been murdered!

How can he be so calm?

Even I hate Cosmos this much already.

At least he should mention something about revenge, right?

Opposite from what Red was feeling at this moment, the man is very calm.

“I'm an outsider anyway. I'll be leaving for another place after Christmas tomorrow...”

“I see.”

Behind his peaceful answer, Red's emotions are in turmoil.

He totally regretted it.

To be touched by the performance of such a person, he's really an idiot.

The man who would not even shed a tear, it's too much.

The dog's owner is actually this sort of person.

He really wants to leave quickly.

But he is unable to look away from the dog's grave.

"Hmm?"

The man only looks at Red now.

"Then again, who are you?"

"I'm the one doing odd jobs here...I bought your meals before."

"I'm not good at remembering faces. Ah, now that I've looked closely, aren't you covered in bruises too?!"

The man licked his own finger and rubbed it against Red's face.

Facing this sort of unexpected action, Red dodges.

"Wah! It's gross! Don't use your saliva, idiot!"

"It's antiseptic. Were you hit by Cosmos too?"

"You're irritating!"

Even though that was the case, he did not want to admit it.

"Do you have friends?"

"You're irritating!!"

Red shouts.

"This sort of place...I definitely leave once I grow up, so friends or whatever, I don't need them!"

He remembers the boy's expression, who had run away after seeing his left arm.

A terrified and disgusted expression.

I don't need friends or anything like that—

Red is shocked.

The man used both his hands—and squeezed his face.

"What the heck are you doing!"

"You don't have any energy?"

The man asks, surprised.

Red has no idea what he's talking about.

It was infuriating.

Then, he recalled that the man used that gesture to create an outburst of laughter amongst the audience.

“I’m sorry, I don’t like clowns. In fact, I dislike them?”

“Aiyaya!”

The man smiles.

“I dislike audience and children who don’t laugh as well!”

“Hmph!”

Red just stares at the dog’s grave. As he thought, since he couldn’t understand, so he can’t leave.

“You...why aren’t you crying? You lived with this guy. It’s not possible not to feel sadness?”

When he realised it, the clown was not around anymore.

“?”

As he turned, he found that the man had used a rope to hang himself off the nearby tree.

“I’m so sad I could die.”

“Stop it!”

It could be an act, such a scary feeling.

I have a feeling, this guy, doesn’t feel right...?

“You see, I, can’t cry.”

The man removed the rope from his neck, and explains blandly.

“Maybe it’s already dry. No tears can come out.”

“What kind of explanation is that!”

This person is hard to comprehend.

Red’s attention returns to the grave.

Then again—

“This guy, what’s its name?”

The clown is silent.

“I touched it yesterday, and it licked me, it felt so warm!”

That dog which licked him happily.

That dog did not care about my ugly hand at all.

“So today, I also...”

The words are at the tip of his tongue, his whole body is shaking, tears fall without warning.

I also wanted to pat it today. Like, do your best today as well.

“Why, only having this sort of relationship with it, why am I crying...!”

He can’t hold it in anymore.

Red lets out all the feelings that he kept in.

“Wahhh-----!!”

This is the first time he cried out loud.

The tears flowing down his cheeks feel hot.

“I see.”

The man watches Red, who is crying.

“You’re Allen’s friend.”

--Friend.

This word kept circling around in his mind.

That dog was actually named Allen.

I—have never called that name before.

He recalls the warmth when he stroked the dog.

He wanted to call out its name.

He wanted to be close to it.

Red cried until he was exhausted, and even fell asleep. And the man, just like a puppet with broken strings, just sat next to him.

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“Urm...”

A comfortable swaying—

Red wakes up from a peaceful nap.

How warm...

What, is this...

“Ah!”

Red realises that he’s being carried by the Clown.

He also knows how red his face is.

“Put, put me down!”

As Red said so, the Clown smiles while his body bobs up and down, walking lightly. It wasn’t long before they returned to the tent.

The Clown put Red next to the heater.

“What, what are you doing...”

Even after Red asked, the man does not reply. Not just that, his legs are shaking, like they have been frozen.

“What? Are you cold?”

The man takes out his own coat puts it around him, his expression warms up and he smiles slightly.

“...? You want to say that you’re warmer?...You think you’re acting a mime performance?!”

Then, the man wraps his coat around Red.

It was the coat which covered the dog yesterday.

It’s warm...

A smell just like the sun wafts out. That guy’s smell...

The temperature of the coat, caused him to remember the dog’s warmth. Tears well up, this time, a silk cap was pushed on him.

The silk cap is slightly larger than Red head, and soft.

“Wait, what are you doing, really?!”

The Clown smiled as usual, after that, the Clown passes over the circus’ flyer.

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The streets on Christmas are more lively than before.

The street lights are decorated and people are outdoors, carrying the goods needed for Christmas celebrations.

The smell of meat and bread mixes together with the noisy crowd.

Cheerful cries are heard.

Surrounded by the excitement, Red and the man walk along the streets.

The performers are showing off their skills in the open area.

Red, who was forced to follow, passes out flyers next to the performing Clown.

“...Why do I have to do these sort of things...whatever, I’m supposed to do odd jobs anyway.”

Even though he is not used to being in public, but the coat which the Clown gave him covers up with ugly left arm, so he ignores the stares which others people are giving.

“Wah, look quickly!”

“It’s a clown!”

“It’s great, so vibrant!”

The people who were passing by stopped in their tracks, and smiled at the clown’s performance.

Red, who was standing nearby, had to admit.

This man’s performance has to be the best one so far.

A crying boy approaches.

Even with his mother trying to comfort him, the boy does not stop crying.

The clown gracefully appears in front of the boy.

Then he smiles, pulling a balloon out from his sleeve. Then he inflates the balloon and ties a knot.

What he made was a balloon dog.

The clown passes the balloon to the boy, the boy stopped sniffing and his face is radiant.

It’s perfect.

The children around the clown quickly gathered around him.

“I want one too, I want one too~”

“Me too~!”

The clown is surrounded by smiling children.

Red glances over at the clown while distributing the fliers, and the clown turned in his direction.

“What, what is it?”

The clown did a funny action, first walking around with a spring in his step, then doing a handstand, with just one hand.

The people who were watching clapped.

The clown turned once before standing up again, then danced around in circles.

“Wa..wah!”

Then suddenly spread out his arms and used two fingers to point at Red.

Yes, like he meant “He’s up next”

The surrounding audience watched Red expectantly.

“Eh? Ehh?”

Red, who was suddenly pointed out, is stunned.

Seeing his stunned state, the clown tilted his head and shrugged his shoulders, as if he can’t help it.

Seeing this action, the audience laughed as well.

They thought he had no courage—

Red, competitive by nature, flares up.

I’ll do it, just you see!

Red puts the fliers aside, and stepped on the ground.

The scenery went by in a circle.

A flip in the air. He’s still confident on the nimbleness of his body.

After landing lightly on the ground like a cat, the audience clapped and cheered.

The clown crossed his arms, like he’s considering something.

Then he snaps his fingers.

He gently lifts up one leg and on tip-toe, slowly turned one round.

This amusing ballet move caused the audience to laugh.

If it like that, I'll do it too.

"Everyone stand back please!"

After saying so, Red did a little jog and with a push of his arm, executed a somersault, and jumped back up again lightly.

This showy move attracted more applause and cheers.

The clown then pretended he was so shocked that he fell over, which bought about more laughter.

The clown got up slowly, and smiled at Red. And Red also had a smile on his face, although he did not know when it happened.

They bowed deeply to the audience and loud claps could be heard around them.

Being clapped for, and making people happy, this was the first time it has happened.

The clown passed the silk cap over.

Red held the cap out and some of the audience threw coins in.

My skills were recognised?

Red started to blush—

"Kid, what's your name?"

Turning around, he sees a man wearing a coat on top of his black priest clothing.

The silver cross on his chest is shining.

He was a big man, Red raises his head, feeling rather nervous. The man puts money into his cap, and watches him.

His eyes were sharp—like they can see through everything.

Even though he's wearing priest robes, the man gives off a scary threatening aura.

Red is shocked, and stares dumbly at the man.

His deep red hair, the colour of blood, and covering half his face, is tied in a ponytail,

The man's stare seems to stick onto his body, and feels cold.

"Didn't you hear me? Your name."

This pressuring sentence caused Red to jolt.

I don't have a name. Telling himself that, Red ignores the red haired man.

"Oi!"

He acts like he did not hear the man's voice and continues to give out flyers while saying promotional statements.

"You're called Allen?"

"No!"

He mumbled, giving a negative.

He actually said I'm Allen? What is this man saying.

Red glanced at this man.

Allen is the dog's—

"Not a dog."

The man replies like he can see through Red's thoughts.

"...Hah?"

"...If that's not your name then forget it, listen up, brat, don't get too close to Mana."

The red haired man says before disappearing amongst the crowd.

What is up with that...

The man is different from all the people he had seen so far.

What kind of person is he?

Red watches the man leave, his heart pounding.

After he had distributed all the fliers, Red sees the clown.

"Mana...?"

"Hmm?"

The clown reacts to Red's words.

"Mana?"

He asks the clown. The clown nods.

"Hmm?"

“Are you called Mana?”

“Yes.”

Thinking about it, Red finds out that he does not know the clown’s name yet.

“How did you know my name?”

“Just now, a strange man with red hair wearing priest robes spoke with me. That guy told me ‘Don’t get close to Mana’--”

After saying that, Mana’s expression became weird.

It was Red’s first time seeing his serious expression, and felt a little shocked.

Then he suddenly ran off.

“Mana?!”

Red follows in panic.

“Mana, what’s wrong?”

“I need to find that person!”

Mana looks around frantically.

But there was no trace of the red haired man in priest robes.

“Mana, he can’t be found anymore!”

Mana does not listen to Red’s words at all.

So he runs around the streets aimlessly, with no results.

The sun had already set.

The circus performance is going to start soon, it’s time to return.

Mana’s shoulders slump in disappointment.

“...Why do you spend so much effort looking for him, do you know him?”

After Red asked the question, Mana replies with loneliness.

“That could be my little brother.”

“Little brother...?”

Mana, not giving up, continued to search through the crowd.

He steps forward shakily.

“Ah, wait!”

Mana is still focused on searching the crowd.

Red’s voice did not reach him.

Just then, a horse carriage rushes towards them.

Within a split second, Red pushes Mana into a nearby drain.

“Wah...be careful!”

“...”

“You almost died!”

Even though Mana was reprimanded by Red, his eyes never leave the crowd.

“Seriously, I can’t handle you.”

Red brings him to a park nearby to wash off the dirt acquired when they fell into the drain.

Mana also removed his clown makeup and took off his wig.

Red couldn’t help but stare at Mana’s face.

This was his first time seeing Mana’s real face.

A sharp nose, and a face with wrinkles which showed his age.

And the feature which leaves the biggest impression, a pair of bright gold eyes.

Mana meets Red’s stare.

Being stared by Red so much will still make him feel embarrassed, Mana turns away.

“Really, you need to be more careful. You, if I didn’t save you, you would have died!”

“Death is really such a dislikeable thing!”

Mana said, laughing.

“So, you have to be more careful!”

“I guess you’re right, I apologise. Ahh, today’s weather is really good!”

“...what does this matter have to do with weather?”

“The evening sun during this sort of day is the most beautiful.”

“As—I—said, I wasn’t talking about that, I want you to be more careful! I know you’re worried about your brother, but!”

Seeing Red looking rather miffed, Mana smiles slightly.

“You know, I’m only seventeen.”

“Hah?”

Mana looks like a middle aged man no matter how you looked at him.

It could be that Mana sensed what Red was thinking, he smiles, looking rather troubled.

“When I woke up one morning, I realised that I have become a middle aged man. I don’t know the reason at all. But, I was a seventeen year old youth the day before. At the beginning, when I saw my own face in the mirror, I was really shocked!”

Red directed a weird look at Mana, who had suddenly said something weird.

So he really is a rather weird—no, really weird person.

“Even then, after I stared at my looks for a while, I still managed to calm down, then I felt something was strange.”

Red just listens silently without saying anything. Mana felt that Red must be waiting for him to continue, so he continues speaking.

“I have a little brother, but he is nowhere to be found.”

Mana quietly leans towards Red.

“I will say this to you only...”

He moves his face closer to Red’s ear and whispers.

“I am being chased. If I get caught, I’ll definitely be killed.”

“By whom?”

“I think it’s someone called the Millennium Earl, he is a person who can turn humans in AKUMA. Because there are AKUMA everywhere, you’ll need to stay alert.”

Then Mana places a finger over his lips.

This action definitely belongs to a child, this sort of behaviour does not suit him.

Red feels that this person is not just abnormal, he could be suffering from some illness.

“My brother must have been separated from me. I must find him. Because if I have turned into this sort of middle aged man, even if he sees me, he won’t recognise me. I need to go and find him...so I need to be alone, and begin my life of wandering.”

“Is that so?”

Red, who had been silent the whole time, speaks.

“Your little brother could have abandoned you.”

He says this subconsciously.

After the sentence left his mouth, Red is shocked at himself.

“If, if it’s true, what do you plan to do...”

Because of the ugly left arm, you were sold to the circus.

That was what he heard from the Ringmaster.

Being pulled into the circus for an unknown reason, and constantly bullied after that.

Being loathed because of his hideous left arm.

The members who treated him like he’s an object.

It only left disgusting memories.

So he shields away from any relationships that have to do with him.

Because I have been hated by everyone.

Even my parents—abandoned me.

But even a person like me, still had a dog to keep me company. But, it was killed.

The feeling of happiness only stayed for a while.

The painful memories up till now resurfaced in an instant, and it showed in his choice of words.

Red knew what was true sadness and Mana just watched the sky quietly.

The sky was dyed beautifully by the evening sun.

The mix of red and orange, reflected in the snow on the ground, is very dazzling. The rays of the sun lit up the plants, trees and people, changing slowly.

“How beautiful!”

Mana praises.

“I love beautiful worlds the best.”

Mana says, yet he looks like he had cried.

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The time for the performance is nearing. When they returned from the streets, they found a large crowd.

Perhaps it was to get good seats, everyone arrived early.

Entering the circus tent, Red is shocked.

He realises that Cosmos is waiting there.

He is wearing the clown getup, his arms crossed, smiling to himself.

The peace obtained from the time he spent with Mana disappeared without a trace.

This bastard—it was this bastard who killed Allen.

Yet Cosmos is still looking around happily.

“What happened to your partner?”

Mana tilts his head.

“...Who, are you? I’m, not very good at remembering faces...”

Cosmos expression distorts suddenly

“~~~~?! I’m Cosmos!”

“If many customers come today, it’ll be really great~~~~”

Saying that, Mana walks away and disappears to the other side of the canvas.

His steps are light, giving people the impression that he had forgotten his dog’s death.

...Mana may think it’s alright, but I will not think that way.

Red glares at Cosmos.

“...You killed it, didn’t you?”

“Hah?”

Cosmos looks at Red.

“The dog’s dead. It’s body full of wounds. The only person who would do it is you!”

“Of course that’s impossible! Calm down, Red. Haha—hmm, that’s right, that’s right. Hey—everyone! Let’s hear what Red just said!”

Hearing the commotion, the other circus members came over.

Cosmos surveys his surroundings with a smile.

“It looks like that cute dog is dead. And, it was Red who killed it.”

“Wha...!”

Hearing Cosmos words, Red sucked in a breath of cold air.

“You were performing some tricks with that clown during the day, weren’t you? You may have felt that that dog was in the way, so you killed it to be its replacement!”

“How could I have done that!”

When he was about to say—that it was rubbish, Red felt it.

The other members are giving him cold stares.

He also knows that he is shaking.

--In this place, I’m just a burden. No one would believe me.

His feelings of rage have reached his limit.

“Arghhh!”

He picks up a nearby plank and swings it at Cosmos with all of his strength.

But he can only use one hand, and a scrawny child cannot release that much power.

“Ugh!”

Red sighs in irritation, and Cosmos shouts exaggeratedly while holding his shoulder.

“AHHHH!”

Hearing the sound, the Ringmaster rushes over.

“What’s wrong, Cosmos!”

Cosmos jumps towards the Ringmaster’s stomach, saying.

“That bastard, actually used a plank to hit me! Argh...my hand...”

The Ringmaster glares at Red with fury in his eyes, and used the plank, which had dropped on the ground, to hit him.

“Ah!”

Then he repeatedly used the plank to beat up Red, who had fallen on the ground.

He did it until the plank broke, and angrily threw the broken part at Red.

“You, you bastard...you’re just a useless person!”

He glares at Red on the ground, vein popping.

Anger had caused his fat body to shake.

“I can’t tolerate it anymore. Throw him into the animal cage!”

The Ringmaster speaks like he’s going to abandon Red. Red can tell.

--He didn’t even ask for the reason.

To everyone, the truth is not important at all.

For matters concerning me, to everyone—

A boiling anger overflows.

“Okay, come here!”

The Ringmaster reaches out, like he wants to grab him. But Red escapes easily and rushes at Cosmos again.

Anger had caused the scene in front of him to turn red.

Whatever it is, I don’t care.

He just felt that this cannot be forgiven.

He remembers the dog’s corpse, covered in bruises.

Allen jumping around energetically. Always following behind him. And he would even lick the left hand that everyone is disgusted with.

At least, let me take revenge for him.

Even though I’m not his owner.

Even though I’ve only been contact with it for a short time.

But it dying just like that, it definitely cannot be ignored.

If reasons can be said, there are simply too many!

Red silently glanced at his blood red left arm.

Even though this ugly left arm can barely move, but it is as heavy and as hard as lead.

If it's this—

Red jumps up with all his might.

Twisting his body in his air, he adds a flip.

Then he swings his left arm towards Cosmos' skull.

He put all the power into his left arm.

He wants to kill him.

With a loud noise, the hard objects collided—

Light shards shine in the air.

“Ah---”

The shining shards attracted Red's attention, he was shocked.

The person who collapsed was not Cosmos, but Mana.

Mana, who should have gone to the stage, had returned, and even rushed out to protect Cosmos.

“Mana!”

The light shards slowly disappeared on Mana's head.

“No...you can't kill him...”

Blood started to flow from Mana's head.

“You can't do something that tragic...”

At this time, Mana is still smiling.

His face is now dyed red with blood, with Mana smiling, it's like he is shedding blood red tears.

“Why...”

He cannot understand.

I need to talk some sense into this bastard.

Even though his dog died, he still can smile so stupidly and even protected the murderer!

Red turns angrily towards Mana.

“Why must you be so calm! Why must you protect a bastard like Cosmos!”

Red is sitting on Mana and used his left arm to hit him again.

“Ah...”

For an instant, Mana’s eyes lose his focus.

But he regains his smile quickly.

“Don’t smile! Don’t smile anymore!”

Red hits Mana again. Again and again—

Every time he swings his red arm, light shards will dance around together with the blood flowing out of Mana’s head

He can’t move his hand anymore.

“Thank you...for making my friend so happy...”

That was what he heard.

Why, why, why.

He couldn’t think anymore. He’s just, just saying what he believed in.

His body is getting heavier.

Mana gently placed his hand on Red’s head.

“Allen is...a very lonely dog in the circus. In the beginning...he didn’t know any tricks, and was treated as a burden...at that time, he was probably...very lonely.”

“What, that is...”

Isn’t that just like me—did that dog actually notice?

“After meeting you, Allen was very happy...”

Mana stretched out his hand shakily.

“But, don’t spread the tragedy anymore...”

“Mana...?”

Red watches Mana.

“Tragedy...tra,gedy, is...”

Something is not right about him.

Mana is like a broken puppet, with broken speech.

His expression is rather blank.

It felt like something important had broken when he spoke—

Red is trapped by a scary thought—

That’s right, I...used this left hand to hit him many times.

Mana is covered in blood.

His head, unbelievably, is scattered with light shards.

“Red! Stop it right now!”

Hearing the Ringmaster’s voice, Red is jolted back to reality.

Two circus members heard the Ringmaster’s orders. They grabbed him and pulled him away forcefully.

The Ringmaster shouted orders as he left the tent.

“No! Mana! Mana...!”

He keeps his eyes on Mana as he is dragged away.

“Bring him to the animal cage!”

As Red was being bought out, Mana slowly opens his mouth.

“Tra...gedy...”

Followed by laughter.

“Will...attract...the Earl.”

Cheers from the audience could be heard from the stage which should not have been opened yet.

Cosmos, as well as the other performers who had been watching the commotion caused by Red, turned towards the stage.

Continuous clapping and cheering could be heard.

The wind blows the curtains apart and the performers can now see what was happening on stage.

There were countless number of audiences and on the stage was a fat gentleman.

Sharp ears, large mouth and wearing a tall silk hat.

“Who is that guy...”

Cosmos takes a step forward.

“The first act should be done by me. I will to chase him out!”

Saying that, he ran out.

The gentleman used a cane adorned with a small pumpkin to tap on the ground, and bowed to the audience once he was done.

Following that, the audience in the stand turned into something short and fat. It looked like something out of this world, and was very terrifying.

“Wahhh!!”

The members screamed.

Mana, who had collapsed backstage, opened his eyes—and saw what was happening.

“Ah...”

The gentleman made eye contact with Mana, who was shaking due to fear, and smiled.

“...Ea,Earl...”

The customers, who had turned into monsters, shot blood bullets one after another.

On one side of the stage, the members collapsed as star shaped bruises appeared on them.

At this time, the red haired priest appeared in the circus tent.

“Che...as I suspected?

The man took out a gun with a intricate design, and said softly.

“Destroy them, Judgment!”

\*\*\*

The sky had turned dark. After entering the storage, Red was pushed in front of the animal cage.

The two members kept a strong hold on Red, who had no more energy to resist.

From the cage, the sounds of the fierce carnivores can be heard.

Not only was it angry from being kept in such a small cage, the commotion also made it more agitated than usual.

The air smells bad, like rotting fish.

If he entered the cage, he'll be bitten to death for sure.

--Death?

In this sort of place?

Because of that insignificant person?

Then, what was I born for?

Red's body started moving, partly from anger, as well as fear.

What is my purpose for existing?

Is it only to be killed, just like that?

He hears the cheers coming from the circus.

It is such a faraway reality now.

"Okay, get in!"

The Ringmaster's cold voice shouts.

Red's small body was easily thrown into the cage.

It is dark inside the cage.

But he could see the overwhelmingly large silhouette of the beast.

It's tea coloured fur is swaying.

"Ah--"

Growl---

He hears the low roar from beside him.

--There's no more hope.

Just as the beast opens its mouth, something breaks the cage and enters.

It was a yellow round object, and it seems to have wings as well.

“Rawl!”

The beast let out a cry, and collapses, just like that.

“Wha--”

Red stared at the unbelievable change in events.

What just happened?

He stands up shakily. The thing with the yellow wings chewed through the metal bars, flew around the cage once and exited it.

Red leaves the cage, feeling nervous.

“--!”

The Ringmaster and the two members are on the ground.

Beside them was the red haired priest he had met during the day.

He seemed to be the one who finished them off.

“Why...”

The question is circling around in his mind.

As he approached, he realises that the priest’s breathing is a little irregular.

Why, is he here...

Just as Red is spacing out, he is suddenly punched in the face.

“You stinking brat...!!”

Red falls on the floor but quickly sits up in shock.

Did I do something?

Just as he thought that, he froze.

“--!”

A gun is suddenly pointed at his forehead.

Red breathes in sharply.

The priest approaches him, full of killing intent, Red could smell a lingering smell of cigarette smoke.

It was not like Cosmos, who had an unkind expression, or the Ringmaster, whose gaze held authority.

It was really a gaze filled with killing intent.

Killing people, killing, after killing a lot of people, would a person obtain that sort of expression?

The eyes of the priest were filled with blood.

“I told you not to get close to Mana, didn’t I?”

This time, I will really get killed--

Just as he thought that, the priest’s face collided with something. It was a large impact.

It was that yellow thing, it threw the metal bar it was still holding on to.

“Tim!”

--What was that, this is? A living thing? Why would it save me?

“Che!”

The priest glares at Red, and kept the gun.

“I ran out of bullets.”

The reason did not explain anything.

The priest forcefully picks Red up, who had already turned stiff.

“Don’t forget, this is all because of you.”

Saying that, he released his hold roughly.

Red falls on the ground again.

“Disappear.”

He said that with a sigh, and disappears into the darkness together with the yellow thing.

Red could only stare at the darkness.

If I stay here, I will be killed—

He realises that, and runs away quickly.

He can’t stay in the circus anymore.

But he is still concerned about Mana.

What happened after that?

He regrets leaving Mana there, this thought is tormenting him.

But Red remembers the priest's words, but he wants to return to the circus.

What should I do...

\*\*\*

The next morning, Red, who had wandered on the streets without a goal, returns to the circus without knowing how he got there.

He found the place surrounded by people.

What happened...where's Mana...?

Red listens quietly to the voices of the people around him.

"Disappeared? That many performers?"

"Yeah, the Ringmaster and some of the other helpers are still around. The others have disappeared in one night. It seems like the performance cannot be held anymore."

"!"

Red is shocked.

When he was locked inside the animal cage, he could still hear cheers coming from the tent.

I thought, the performers were still performing as usual---

That many members could disappear so quickly?

"And it seems like they didn't run away. The clothes of the missing members are still around!"

"All the clothes all carry traces of being shot. And there were rumours that they were attacked, but there were no bodies...it really doesn't make sense!"

"...what, really happened, even though it's Christmas!"

Red silently left the chatting crowd in order to hide his expression.

His heart is beating very fast.

The missing members.

What happened after I was bought to the animal cage by the Ringmaster and the others?

Did Mana—disappear too?

Who was that red haired priest?

Even though he's a priest—but he still carries a gun, and has the smell of cigarettes on him.

And, he even wanted to kill me...

--don't forget, it's all because of you.

The words which the man wearing priest robes said echoed in his mind.

"Ah--!!"

Red shouted.

"Mana!"

Appearing from the crowd was Mana, wearing a rather dirty clown suit.

Just like yesterday, his head and face is covered in blood.

--You're alright!

Mana took a look at Red and smiled.

"Where have you been , Allen?"

"Eh?"

Red stared at Mana, shocked.

"Mana?"

Allen is the dog's name. And it was even a dead dog's—

Mana did not notice Red's feelings of uneasiness.

"Today is Christmas! Okay, let's go to a different place!"

"Mana...? What's wrong? I'm not Allen. Allen is...!"

Mana did not hear any of Red's cries.

Instead he took Red's hand and started walking.

"Right, where should we go next?"

"Instead of that, don't you need to do something about your head wound?"

"Does Allen have a place he wants to go?"

"Mana!"

Mana is very strange.

“Mana? Hey, Mana?”

“Hmm—where should we go? Strange, why, am I travelling?”

Mana tilts his head.

Red, hearing this unbelievable statement, froze entirely.

“You said...to look for your little brother...”

“Little brother?”

Mana stops walking all of a sudden.

“What’s that?”

Mana is smiling as usual, Red turned stiff.

--he had forgotten his motive for travel entirely.

Why?

Because I hit him too much?

--Don’t forget, this is all because of you.

The priest’s words hurt Red again.

Don’t tell me...it’s because of me? Because I hit him with this cursed hand many times...?

“I feel that...I’m looking for something really important.”

Mana is still smiling.

This tone of voice is even.

But his whole body is shaking.

He is sad.

Because he had lost his memory.

His hand, which is being held, can feel it.

“You’re looking for your little brother! Your little brother who was separated from you. Didn’t you say it, yesterday!”

Mana did not react.

Only one night, and Mana had changed entirely.

Red stares at Mana with a helpless look.

Quietly, something white drifts down.

It's snow—

From above the two of them, falling quietly, collecting on their bodies.

Snow, which can turn everything white—

“Mana...”

Mana, cannot revert back anymore.

He had this feeling.

Tears fall from Red's eyes.

Mana stretches out his hand slowly.

“Don't be sad...if you're sad, the Earl will come.”

He says with an empty voice as he rubs away Red's tears.

“Allen is really warm. And, strange? Why have you grown so big? And you don't have a tail as well.”

He mixed me up with the dog.

Red had to admit while feeling totally hopeless.

Mana...

The person who was destroyed by me.

“Take me with you Mana. I'll tell you, what you have forgotten...I'll remember it for you....please.  
Take me with you...”

This is my reason for living.

Mana...playing in the snowy night with your dog, then going out to the streets with you yesterday, it was the first time I felt “happiness” together with someone else.

So, this time, it's my turn.

To make you happy.

I will become your Allen.

“We’ll be together always, Allen.”

Mana says innocently, these words hurt Red’s heart very much.

“...That’s true, we’ll always be together...”

Then Red and Mana walked towards the snow.

Always, the two of them, together.

This was the day Red, the young boy, became Allen.

Allen’s story will start from now on.

Meeting the priest again, travelling with a golem, becoming an Exorcist—that will be another story.

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## **Afterword**

Hello everyone, this is Hoshino Katsura.

This is the third volume of the awaited novel, the stories have some relation to the main story this time and both these stories were written by Kizaki-san.

The one that gave me the most trouble while creating (laugh) is Mana and Allen’s story.

Allen’s past is still a total mystery, and was practically not talked about in the original work, and even the more mysterious Mana makes an appearance...it might be really great to turn it into a novel, I started working on it with such relaxed feelings, but~it was still really hard.

Even though the meeting between Mana and Allen is a simple story, but in order to integrate more mysteries related to the original work, this time Kizaki-san suggested for the first time to produce a work with more structure and collaboration.

This time, I felt really strongly, that I definitely would not become a novelist... (laugh)

It’s really too difficult to tell a story just using words.

I really admire Kizaki-san a lot, she could craft my rough transcript into such a brilliant objective story.

After so long, being able to work with Kizaki-san again made me feel so happy.

And, to the Fan who is holding the book in your hand right now, I’m very thankful for your support.

I work hard for everyone who has read the entire story, I’m happy if I’m able to make you feel some happiness as well.

Then, I’ll see you next time.

Hello everyone, this is Kizaki Kaya.

This is the third volume of the novel.

To the old and new readers, thank you for picking up the book.

This time is the story of Roufa as well as Allen and Mana.

Roufa's story is about a maiden in love, I felt really happy while creating this piece!

How should I write about Roufa's romance next? (Even though I'm still writing the short story, but just asking that will cause my heart to beat faster)—I suggest you wait patiently for the stories in this volume.

And Allen and Mana's story has some connections to Allen and Mana's story in the original series.

In order to write this story, I re-read the original series, and felt some pain when I saw Allen's smile and determination.

I feel fortunate that I am able to show the D.Gray-man world to everyone in this fashion.

Lastly, the acknowledgments.

Hoshino-san, who has cared for me, thank you very much!

Lastly, thank you to all the readers who have read this book.

Some day in November 2010

Kizaki Kaya

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