

**(CW: Mass Semitwinning, Personality Changes, Unaware Transformation, Accidental Transformation, and so many instances of the name “Akane” that it will stop sounding like an actual name. This story contains massive spoilers for Danganronpa 2, reader discretion advised!)**

Jabberwock Island was a tropical paradise. A small archipelago blessed with a perfectly sunny and pleasant climate year round, and home to a resort stocked with practically any amenity that even the most discerning tourist could ask for. One could say that it was the Ultimate Vacation Spot, and so it was fitting that such a luxurious and exclusive destination was currently accommodating students from the prestigious Hope’s Peak Academy, where the world’s Ultimate talents were scouted, invited to attend, and honed their remarkable gifts while having those same gifts researched at the same time for the sake of promoting hope for mankind.

The students believed they were simply on a school field trip, albeit one with a somewhat obtuse and unusual “goal.” They were tasked with collecting something called “hope fragments,” which as far as they could tell were simply some kind of gamified measurement of the strength of their interpersonal relationships with one another. Once they collected all of the hope fragments, the trip would be over.

That wasn’t even the *weirdest* part to them, that honor went to the fact that this so-called “Heart-Throbbing School Trip” was being overseen by Usami, a talking, anthropomorphic bunny rabbit that claimed to be a teacher and a magical girl. Though the students were naturally skeptical, or even terrified of her when they had first met her, they’d quickly come to recognize her as completely harmless. Of course, Usami’s presence and the utilization of the “hope fragments” made more sense when one knew the true purpose and nature of not only the trip that the Ultimates were on, but also this island.

While Jabberwock Island did really exist, the “Jabberwock Island” that the Ultimates were currently living on technically did not, at least not in the *physical* sense. It was a virtual facsimile of the real Jabberwock Island, and this entire school trip was in fact the pretense for a highly invasive and complex form of psychological therapy, being hosted inside an experimental computer system known as the “Neo World Program,” or NWP

The NWP was a state of the art virtual reality project; a joint venture spearheaded by the Ultimate Therapist, Ultimate Neurologist, and Ultimate Programmer, among others. It was designed to enable the repairing of deep psychological damage that was considered impossible to treat through conventional means, such as that incurred through certain brainwashing techniques. A digital avatar of each patient would be constructed out of their memories from before the inciting traumatic incident, and if the therapy was successful, this avatar would be “re-uploaded” into the user’s brain, essentially overwriting their damaged personality with the healthy one.

To aid this process and keep the participants comfortable and blissfully ignorant to the fabricated nature of their digital environment. The simulation of the NWP was so immersive and

realistic that without prior knowledge, anyone waking up inside it would never suspect that they weren't in the real world. Every sense and bodily function was even perfectly replicated to maintain the illusions: from taste, hearing and touch, to the biological need to sleep, eat, breath and... other things.

Even phenomena like pain were reproduced to an indistinguishable level of accuracy, enough so that it posed a real threat to the user's wellbeing. The brain so thoroughly believed that any trauma it was experiencing was real, that any fatal injuries that occurred in the virtual world would cause almost certain brain death for the unfortunate victim in the real world.

Fortunately, Usami was more than just a guide for the students, she was an AI Administrator tasked with ensuring the smooth and safe operation of the NWP. Even though she was a bit of a pollyanna at times, and a busybody at others, she was still overall a benevolent, attentive, and supportive authority figure, well suited to perform her designated task. But she wasn't doing it alone. Usami was supported by a secondary security program, one that was programmed to live amongst the other participants in the so-called "Heart-Throbbing School Trip" as one of their own, promoting hope and harmony between them.

As each of the participants in the program had had their minds scanned and their virtual avatars crafted, their subconscious desires had been analyzed, and from that data, the secondary security program took on a form derived from their memories of "Chiaki Nanami," the Ultimate Gamer, the person that participants in the program all collectively wanted a chance to see again more than anyone else.

The Administrator of the NWP essentially had complete, unrestricted power over the NWP. Because the world was virtual, the normal laws of physics, or sense, didn't apply and could be bent at a whim. Usami, of course, had no desire to do any such thing, as such behaviors would be highly distressing to her wards. But this fact was crucial to highlight, because of how disastrous it would have been if a malicious or subversion force managed to hijack administrative control away from her...

*Which is why it sure was a relief that nothing like **that** had happened!*

That's right! The New World Program was functioning exactly as intended, without any hitches or disruptions! Under Usami's direct tutelage and Chiaki's more subtle guidance, the other 14 students were steadily building their relationships with one another, and gathering hope fragments at an even faster rate than expected. There had briefly been a *scare* when a peculiar virus that'd been implanted in the system attempted to seize control of the trip, but thankfully Usami was able to relatively easily dispatch it and purge it from the system. Since then, it had been smooth sailing, nothing but peaceful days of fun in the sun as the trip gradually worked towards its hopeful conclusion.

However, even the best laid plans, and most rigorously tested programs, could encounter unforeseen difficulties. Chihiro Fujisaki, the Ultimate Programmer, who's talent built the code base for the NWP, had never had the chance to fully debug it. The NWP was mostly stable, but

as with any program, and especially one as complex as it was, it contained numerous glitches. Not even the Ultimate Programmer could avoid making some errors in the first rough pass of a program's script.

These glitches posed an obvious threat if left unaddressed. Not only because of the possibility of shattering the illusion that this was the real world, but also because of the potential for harm to come to the students. Usami and Chiaki had been working hard every night while the NWP's participants slept to find and patch as many errors and bugs as they could. In a bit of serendipity, Chiaki's inherited gaming expertise made her an expert at glitchhunting... But still, they could never hope to catch absolutely everything.

"Come on! Nekomaru, stop holdin' out on me!" The tall, tanned and incredibly buxom Ultimate Athlete, Akane Owari shouted a challenge to her sparring partner. Dressed in her typical attire of a white button up shirt with a popped collar that put in just as brutal of a daily workout as she did to keep her massive chest contained, alongside a precariously short burgundy shirt, she dug her feels into the sand of one of Jabberwock Island's numerous gorgeous beaches. "I want you to hit me with everything you've got!"

This particular beach was located on the archipelago's second island, and was known as "Chandler Beach." Despite being outdoors, it felt remarkably private and cozy, owing to a combination of its remoteness and seclusion, requiring a walk through a tunnel dug through the side of a mountain to access, and hemmed in by cliff walls on three sides. A small, but luxurious beach house overlooked the tranquil waters.

"Hmph! That would be extremely dangerous." Akane's partner folded his thick, muscular arms and closed his eyes, less than enthused about her request. "It's a coach's duty to train their students right to the breaking point, to ensure they can grow stronger, but nothing comes out of breaking them." The partner in question was Nekomaru Nidai, the Ultimate Team Manager, though his talent extended equally to training individual competitors.

Built like an absolute brick shithouse, which is a term that Nekomaru would use to describe himself, emphasis on the "shit," he was dressed in a black leather jacket, white top, and blue sweatpants. He looked more like a man in his mid-30s than one who was making his way through high school... Though he never addressed that fact and nobody ever called him out on it. Either way, one look at the guy and it was perfectly understandable why he'd hesitate to give him all in a fight meant for training purposes. Especially considering that he was even stronger than he looked!

"Break? What? You think you could break me?" Akane barked back at him, stepping closer to the towering mountain of a man. "I'm weak? Is that what you're saying? You don't think I could take a single real punch from you!?" Akane was well known as being, to put it bluntly, an airhead at the best of times, even she would admit that she wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. But in this case, it was genuinely difficult to tell whether she was genuinely misconstruing Nekomaru's words, or if she knew exactly what he meant and was just trying to goad him into walloping her like she wanted.

“Nooo, I’m not saying that at *aaaall!*” Nekomaru flexed as he roared back against the assertion, “I know exactly how strong you are, Akane! I know you could take it, I’m saying there’s no point!” He settled down and scoffed, digging his finger into his ear, “It’d be all pain for no gain! If I hit you full force, I’d knock you into next week, and that would completely throw your training schedule off.”

“You’re talking a lot of shit for someone who won’t even step up to the plate!” Akane continued to taunt him, just daring him to really lay it on her, “I’m sick of your wimpy little slaps and pokes! C’mon, I’ve had meals that did more damage to me than you have! You got the balls to back that claim up? Or is the only big thing you got on ya your mouth!?”

A *battle aura* seemed to flare up around Nekomaru as Akane’s words hit their mark, “Wimpy? Now you just hold on there, Akane! Let’s get one thing straight, there is nothing about Nekomaru Nidai that is wimpy or little, you understand!? Not my punches, not my shits, and **especially** not my-!”

“Oh for fuck’s sake! Just sock that gluttonous shit-for-brains bimbo in her oversized cow tits already, you dumb oaf!” A high pitched voice from the peanut gallery watching the fight called out. The source was the deceptively adorable, considering the string of obscenities she’d just spouted, Ultimate Traditional Dancer, Hiyoko Saionji.

She was one of six students who, whether they’d come to watch the sparring match or just happened to come to the beach before or after, they all had ended up on the sidelines. Mostly because, regardless of what plans they might’ve had, once Akane and Nekomaru squared up, it was too dangerous to do anything on the beach with the two of them going at it. Those students, including Hiyoko, were Mahiru Koizumi, Hajime Hinata, Sonia Nevermind, Kazuichi Soda, Chiaki Nanami, and Nagito Komaeda.

“Geeeee! Hiyoko, how many times do I need to tell you? That’s *no* way for a girl to talk... Or anyone to talk for that matter!” Mahiru scolded the childish looking dancer sternly.

Hiyoko tucked her head down shamefully, turning her gaze away from the Ultimate Photographer, “Sorry, Big Sis Mahiru, it just slipped out, I’m sooo tired of waiting for the two of them to be done.” She tried to explain herself, whining, “it isn’t fair! We were on the beach first, so they should be the ones waiting for us to be-”

“Alright, that’s enoouugh!” Nekomaru shouted suddenly, before cracking his knuckles, “Akane, I can see you’re really serious about this, fine then! If it’s the only thing that’s going to satisfy you, then I’ll give you what you want!”

“Yeah, yeah! Now we’re talkin’! That’s what I wanna hear!” Akane perked up, a ravenous, practically unhinged smile on her face as she braced herself. “Now I’m all fired up! So give it to me, Nekomaru!”

“Very well!” The musclebound man clenched his fist and pulled it back as he shifted into a martial arts stance, “Then experience a full power punch from me-!” Lightning crackled and

sparked from his eyes as the assembled students swore that they saw Nekomaru's fist glowing and vibrating with barely contained energy.

Incredulous and a bit nervous for Akane's wellbeing, Hajime was about to ask Chiaki something. But seeing that she was deep in "the zone" on her Gamegirl, clearly on PB pace for one of her favorite games, he couldn't bring himself to bother her. So, he instead settled for the next closest person, leaning over towards Nagito and whispering into the pale, white haired boy's ear skeptically, "T-there's no way that he's really going to-?"

**"Nekomaruuuu Nidaiiii!!!"** He shouted at the top of his lungs as he swung his fist straight forward with the weight of his full body, blasting up sand around him from the sheer power he was channeling.

Akane's manic grin flickered and fell as she realized that, oh shit, he was serious, and this was the kind of punch she'd usually dodge, not take head on. But, she'd asked for it, and there was nothing to do but-

***WHAAAAM!***

With a loud, echoing thud, Nekomaru's fist connected squarely in the middle of Akane's torso. Despite her best attempts to brace herself, she was thrown back off her feet and sent flying like a ragdoll towards the cliff face on the western edge of the beach at an incredibly dangerous velocity, with no way to break or adjust her momentum, or even realize what was going on!

The rest of the students, sans Chiaki who only paused her game and looked up in response to the sound of the impact of fist against flesh, only had barely enough to exclaim in shock and fear as they watched their friend hurtling towards solid rock at the speed of a bullet train. However, when Akane struck the wall, or at least, *appeared* to, they were all astonished to see that she... *vanished!*

For a second, nobody, including Nekomaru, could even react to what they'd just seen. Sonia covered her mouth, her eyes wide with shock as she broke the silence, "A-akane! Akane has-"

*"What the fuuuuuck!?"* But before she could even finish stating the obvious, Kazuichi let out a shrill scream of horror and disbelief, and for once, nobody could even blame him.

"I guess that answers your question, Hajime." Nagito replied, his face turning even more pale than usual.

"Y-yeah, and leaves me with about twenty new ones! Holy shit!" Hajime snapped back at him. "Akane!" He shouted as he ran towards the wall where the athletic girl had seemingly disappeared into thin air. That seemed to be enough to break everyone out of their stupor, and they all rushed over to join him in investigating, aside from Nekomaru who just casually walked over towards the rest of the group.

"There's... Oh my God, I can't believe it." Hajime balked as he looked at the wall closely, "There's no sign of her! No indent, no blood, nothing at all, w-we all saw her hit that wall. It's like she- she's gone, she's just *gone!*"

Kazuichi's jaw dropped as he looked at Nekomaru while slowly leaning back away from him, "Goddamn, Nekomaru, did... Did you *actually* punch her into next week!?"

Nekomaru shook his head, and replied without a trace of irony, "*Naaah*, I pulled my punch at the last second, I only knocked her into tomorrow. She'll be back, around 9:30 or so in the morning tomorrow, give or take a couple hours."

"What!?" Mahiru did a double take as she talked over and shoved him in the chest, which elicited as much of a response as if she'd tried to shove a brick wall. "What are you saying? Joking around at a time like this! What is wrong with you, Nekomaru? H-how could you *hit* Akane like that!?"

The towering man groaned, "First of all, I wasn't joking. Second of all, she asked me to do it, repeatedly. Even after I tried to tell her no!" That response was decidedly not good enough for Mahiru, who continued to scowl at him as she then drove her foot as hard into Nekomaru's groin as she could. This also barely warranted a response, thanks to the sports cup that he wore at all times, as well as his natural toughness. Regardless, he told her, "Please don't do that again."

"But even though you know you shouldn't, you *still* punched her anyway!? Grrr, I just can't even-!" Mahiru smacked her forehead in frustration, "If someone asked ya repeatedly to push them off a bridge, would you do that too!?"

"Depends on the height of the bridge... and if they were attached to a bungee cord and wearing a proper harness, of course." Nekomaru answered her straight.

"You...! I just-! Ahhh!" Mahiru stomped away from him and back towards the wall, fed up.

"What? I answered her questions and she-?" Nekomaru shrugged and threw up his hands, "ahh, forget it! If anyone needs me, I'll be alone with my thoughts... And by that, I mean I'm gonna be in the diner taking a shit." He started to walk away, his hands slipped into his pockets. He wasn't showing it, but he was just as worried about Akane as everyone else.

Hiyoko, meanwhile, kept herself scarce, not wanting to be called out for being at least partially responsible for spurring Nekomaru into deciding to throw that punch. Sure, she wanted to see her get clocked, but she didn't want her to get disintegrated!

"This is unbelievable! It is truly as though Akane simply... ceased to be!" Sonia remarked as she tried to keep her composure, not wanting to accept the fate that her friend could possibly be dead.

Nekomaru barely had the chance to make it more than a couple of steps towards the tunnel when Usami inexplicably appeared, as she was known to do, and loudly shouted for everyone's

attention, “*Everyone!* P-pl-please, calm d-down!” She urged them, though judging by how she was shaking and sweating (How a stuffed animal, or robot, or whatever she was could even sweat in the first place was a mystery for another time) she wasn’t particularly inspiring confidence at the moment. “I p-pr-promise you that Akane is fine! She’s perfectly fine! Well, not perfectly, she’s definitely going to have some nasty boo-boos from that punch, but... She’s still alive!”

“As much as I’m sure that we’d all prefer to believe you, Usami, how exactly do you know that for certain?” Nagito asked the obvious question. The serene and tranquil state of life on the island had produced little opportunity for his... proclivities to surface. So aside from the occasional bout of inappropriate waxing philosophical about hope, he actually came off as one of the most level headed of the group.

“U-uhhh, w-well?” Usami nervously tapped her stubby paws together, “It’s a teacher’s job to know these things, that’s all!” Of course, her status as system administrator allowed her to track the vital signs of the student’s avatars at all times. That’s how she knew Akane was alive, though she obviously couldn’t just say that. She was *trying* to use those same abilities to locate wherever Akane went to, though at the moment she wasn’t showing up, at least, not in any of the parts of the NWP that the students were *supposed* to be.

“Yeah, I mean, if you’re claiming that she’s okay after that, then you should at least be able to tell us what the hell actually happened to her!” Hajime pointedly challenged her, out of all the participants, he had held onto his skepticism of not only Usami, but this entire “trip” for the longest.

“I, um... Oh dear, well... You see, that is?” Usami wracked her rabbit brain trying to think of an excuse that would satisfy their questions.

Chiaki stepped in, seemingly to bail her out, however the answer she gave was... “It’s obvious what happened to Akane, isn’t it...? She no-clipped through the wall.” Perhaps just a *bit* too honest.

“No clipped? What does that mean? She doesn’t clip her toenails or something?” Hiyoko asked, clueless as to the meaning of the gaming term.

Chiaki, however, was perfectly willing, even seemingly eager to explain, “No-clipping is when an object manages to break or bypass collision with an object that should be solid and impermeable, and manages to phase inside of, or through it, in other words, accessing an out of bounds space.”

“B-but, that’s the kind of thing that only happens in games, isn’t it?” Kazuich pointed out, scratching his cheek, “Unless... Holy fuck! Are we living in some kind of simulation!?” He shouted, inadvertently stumbling dangerously close to the truth without realizing it.

“Uwaaah!? Yes, don’t be ridiculous, *Chiaki...!*” Usami replied to both Chiaki’s claim and Kazuichi’s outburst, addressing her technical subordinate in as subtly scolding of a voice as she could.

But Chiaki wasn’t concerned, or at least hid her concern very well behind her poker face, she simply replied, “Well, it should only happen in video games, you’re right! But we all just saw what happened to Akane, didn’t we? So it must be possible in real life too.”

“Chiaki is correct!” Sonia unexpectedly backed her up, “I have heard of such phenomena as this! Allegedly, there are places where the world is less solid than it appears, and if one should stumble into one of these facades, they will, as Chiaki put it ‘no-clip’ through it... I fear that our friend, Akane, may currently find herself in the... *The Rear Spaces!*” She dramatically pressed her hands to her cheeks as she gave her theory.

A moment of silence passed, before Chiaki replied, “Nope,” and shook her head, “that’s just a made-up internet story, Sonia.”

“Oh... I, uh, I see.” Sonia sighed, the wind taken out of her sails.

“It’s incredible, unbelievable even...” Nagito folded his arms, “This kind of thing should be completely impossible, but the rules of what’s possible and impossible don’t really apply whenever Ultimates are involved.” That was a truism that was hard for anyone to argue with.

“Either way, it’s likely that Akane will either pop back into bounds soon, or already has somewhere else on the island.” Chiaki gave an optimistic assessment, one that Usami quickly latched onto.

“R-right! And if she has, then I will find her!” She declared, putting her paws on her hips triumphantly. Or as triumphant as a two foot tall, stalking stuffed animal could manage to look. “So please, everyone! Don’t worry about Akane. I made a promise to you as your teacher, that I will not allow any harm to come to you on this school trip. That is a promise I will keep! I’ll locate Akane and return her safe and sound as quickly as I can.”

“I guess for now, we’ve done all that we can. Alright, Usami, we shall entrust our hopes for Akane’s well being to you.” Nagito spoke for the rest of the students, not quite using the exact words the rest of them would’ve chosen, but the sentiment was right at least.

“Yeah, I still gotta take that shit, so, uh...?” Nekomaru scratched his scalp, “I’m gonna go take care of that.” That was as good a cue as any for everyone else to depart the beach. Everyone except Chiaki, who hung back and waited for the rest of the group to leave before her and Usami talked in private.

“Chiaki! What in the world were you thinking saying something like that! Why, if I had my magical rod on me right now, I might just give you a... a tap on the noggin!” Usami castigated her, coming from *Usami*, that was the equivalent of threatening to kill someone. “Kazuichi almost figured out the truth!”

"No he didn't." Chiaki bluntly denied, "Trust me, I know what he was thinking... I think, and he was still widely off base. It was just a coincidence that he happened to say something like that. Sonia on the other hand? That was a little spooky."

"That 'no-clip' stuff you were talking about, is that what you really think happened, Chiaki? I can't detect Akane's avatar anywhere here in the system shell." The talking rabbit relayed to Chiaki, once again leaning on her gaming knowledge and her intuitive knowledge of Chihiro Fujisaki's code base to find the answer.

Chiaki tapped her chin, "Yeah, I do... I don't think that Chiaki is on the island right now, though. I think she managed to end up in the system kernel. You'll have to look for her in the hidden files. If I had to guess exactly what happened, it seems like Akane was sent flying backwards at such a high velocity from Nekomaru's punch that she managed to slip through the collision of the wall."

"But... How is that possible?" Usami asked, unfortunately being a digital entity didn't give her perfect knowledge of the NWP's physics engine.

Chiaki explained, "So, here in the NWP, the current location of each avatar is updated sixty times per second. That's how fast the human eye can track changes, so they can't notice it happening. If they're in contact with a solid object, something they shouldn't be able to pass through, then their velocity is supposed to be halted... But if they're moving so fast that in the time between two frames, their position is updated to be past a wall, it'll just keep going. That's a limitation of our virtual world. In the real world, there's no such thing as frames, things like velocity and current location aren't tracked by a computer system, they just... *are*."

"Um, that's unfortunately going over the head of this bunny." Usami was forced to admit, pressing her hands against the top of her head shamefully, "But does any of that help us with finding where Akane went exactly?"

"Actually, it can!" Chiaki nodded, "If we want to determine where in the system she ended up, we need to view the camera footage to figure out what her velocity was, and then we need to figure out what coordinates her momentum would've ended up taking her to... But to answer that, first, we need to talk about parallel universes!"

"Parallel universes? Aren't we in one of those right now?" Usami asked.

"Not until 2026," Chiaki blithely answered, before blinking and looking at Usami befuddled, "I mean- wait, what?"

"Wait, what?" Usami replied, feeling equally as baffled.

"...Ugh." Akane's eyes shakily fluttered open as she tried to figure out what had just happened to her. "Aww, my aching stomach-!" She sat up, complaining as she gripped at her abdomen, before a loud grumble made her realize, "Oh, wait, never mind, I'm fine! Just hungry, that's all, hehe!" She smiled playfully, "Damn though, Nekomaru, I gotta hand it to you though, you sent

my ass flying! Y'know I didn't mean any of that shit I said about your balls and stuff, right? I was just..." She looked around, noticing her surroundings for the first time, including the fact that she was alone. "Nekomaru? Guys?"

She was laying on some kind of bland looking beige carpet. Something was off about it though, she couldn't place exactly *what* was off about it, she just knew that it was. Same went for the walls, which were ostensibly just painted an inoffensive off-white, but it had a similar look and texture, like something about it was incomplete.

Overhead, the soft humming of lights provided the only break in the otherwise eerie silence. The room was furnished with filing cabinets, office desks, office chairs, and in general it gave the impression of an office, but something was missing that made it feel uncanny. Part of the reason for that, she realized, was the fact that the place was seemingly deserted. "Err... Hello? Yooo! Anybody here!?" She thought she heard something in response, "Hey! Glad I'm not al- Oh, wait? Is that? Yeah, yeah, that's just my echo..."

She picked herself up off the ground, stretching and popping her joints loudly, "Phew! Well, shit... Where am I anyway?" She asked herself as she started walking through the unremarkable room towards one of several twisting corridors. "It looks like some kinda office building." She sniffed at the air, "But it smells like... a locker room?" She took another whiff, trying to locate a source of the smell, before lifting up her arm and checking it, then flopping it down and frowning, "Nope, that's also me. How did I end up here?"

A realization struck her, "Shit, am I fucking dead?" The last thing she vaguely remembered was getting absolutely bodied and then flying face first towards a wall, "Oh, c'mon! There's no way I went out like that from one punch, you gotta be-! Aw, this *sucks!*" She stomped her foot on the carpet angrily, "That ain't right! What is this supposed to be, purgatory? This where they do all the afterlife paperwork or somethin'? This sure ain't heaven, if it were heaven, I'd be scarfing down my fifth rack of barbeque ribs by now... Wait a minute." She aggressively tapped her forehead, "if I'm dead, then why am I hungry? Unless..." She grabbed her hair, "No fuckin' way! Am I in *Hell!*?"

"Unh-uh! Nope! That's bullshit! No way, no how have I done anything that warrants landing in Hell, this is-" She paused and winced, "Wait. Oh no, man, don't tell me they took some kinda issue with the whole 'stuffing my face full of food every day' thing." She speculated before shaking her head, "Nah, nah, I need all that energy for my training! That is **not** gluttony, it's carbo loading! This is a bum rap! They're doing me sooo dirty right now? Y'know what, I'm gonna find a help desk or somethin' and get this shit straightened out pronto!"

She began to stomp angrily down the halls of the Neo World Program's internal file system, getting increasingly frustrated at the repetitive and monotonous design of the place. It was never really meant to be walked around in like this, the fact that it had these graphics and assets at all was really just as a failsafe in case something like this happened.

“Okay, one of these pieces of paper has to explain where this is and what’s the deal.” She snatched a random file off a desk and looked inside. Sure enough, the documents within were covered in writing, but it was nothing but ones and zeros. “Wow, this is impressively unhelpful!” She remarked, before grumbling it up and throwing it in a garbage bin... Somewhere in the general goods store on the island, a bag of chips poofed into thin air.

There were only a couple of rooms down here that were meant to be accessed, and all of them contained very sensitive data that should’ve only been handled by other system processes, or one of the admins if it was *absolutely necessary*. Letting Akane get anywhere near those rooms was like taking a bull on a walk by a china shop, and as fortune, or misfortune, would have it, she had managed to drop in right next to one of the most important rooms in the entire program.

She tried each of the doors on her way down an adjoining hall, and found all of them locked. She was about ready to start busting them down in the hopes that it would get her somewhere, but managed to find one that would actually open before she had to go that far. Inside, she saw a dimly lit room that was an absolute mess of wires, keyboards, monitors and computer towers. “Wooaaah... Okay, now I think we’re getting somewhere!”

She walked in and looked around, trying to make heads or tails out of pretty much anything on the screens, as she looked around, a few things did jump out at her immediately. Mainly, the map of the island, alongside the images of her friends that occasionally flickered on the screen with their names and current statuses. “Hey! What the-? That was Byakuya... There’s Peko, and Fuyuhiko... What the fuck is this? Are they spying on us or something? Or no, this whole place must be where they, like, watch over all of us and stuff, weighing up our sins against our good deeds and shit... Looks like whoever’s in charge of everyone on the island is out to lunch.”

Without realizing it, she’d stumbled into the control node for the student’s avatars... Which was constantly tracking their locations, along with their physical and mental health. As she scanned the screens, she suddenly saw her face pop up, “Oh, oh! There I am! What’s that saying? ‘Active?’” Her face lit up with vindication, “Ha! Goddamn right I’m active! I knew it, this is all a big screw-up! I’m supposed to still be alive! They’ve gotta send me back! All I gotta do is wait for whatever angelic or demonic IT guy works in here to get back and they-”

But as she thought aloud to herself, her stomach grumbled again in protest, much louder this time, obviously not thrilled at the prospect of waiting. “Hmm, shit, I’m getting really hungry though,” she complained, “and who knows when that guy’s gonna come back. I didn’t see any vending machines around here either.”

She gasped, and slapped her forehead, “Wait, what am I thinking? They’re the ones who fucked me over, I’ll just go ahead and unfuck myself!” She looked around to make sure she was really alone, and began to smirk as she rubbed her hands together, “Hell yeah, in fact, they should even count this as a good deed too; fixing their fuck-up for ‘em!”

She walked up to the central keyboard, about to push a button before grabbing her own wrist, “Wait! I’ve gotta be careful about this... I mean, this is a keyboard that controls, like, the

universe! Or at least part of it, I press one wrong key, and the consequences could be absolutely catastrophic.” She took a deep breath, bringing her fists to herself as she centered herself... In and out... In and out... She stared at the keyboard in front of her for a few more moments, contemplating her first move, and then.

**BANG!**

Slammed her fist down onto it, “Send! Me! Back! Right now!” She demanded, before pounding on it again with her other fist, “I mean it guys, I can’t be dead, okay!? I’ve got lots of important shit to do! There’s like, so many more meals I was gonna eat!” She randomly mashed at the keys, then started doing the same on the other keyboards around the room, alongside bashing on the cases of the PC towers.

“Come on! Come on! Work, damnit! Somethin’ here’s gotta do the trick, right!?” She had less than no idea what she was doing, but her thought process was either that if she hit enough buttons something would happen, or else it would attract someone who *did* know what they were doing just to make her stop! After one particularly harsh kick to a server rack, she saw the main screen starting to go haywire, “Huh, well, that got things moving at least...”

She leaned close to the screen and squinted her eyes as electronics in the room crackled and sparked with electricity, “Lesse here... ‘Page fault in... non-paged area...?’ What the *fuck* does that me-e-eE-EE-eeA-nnnn!” A massive jolt of bright green electricity suddenly surged out of the monitor and started zapping Akane relentlessly. Her voice warbled and stuttered as her Avatar’s graphics squashed, stretched and pixelized before she was seemingly pulled into the screen itself.

Akane opened her eyes and looked around from within the monitor, “Woooah, check this out!” Her body looked like it’d been reduced to a roughly 32-bit sprite graphic, and her voice sounded badly compressed and bitcrushed over what was left of the nearest speakers. “This is awesome, I’m like, one with the universe now!” She reveled in her newfound sense of “enlightenment,” meanwhile the system was having a... difficult time accommodating her presence within it. An avatar was never meant to be inside of the codebase like this, let alone one that was as... strong-willed and dull-witted as Akane’s.

“Damn, this almost makes the whole trip worth it!” She excitedly gushed, “It should be a snap to get back to the island now, man, everyone’s not gonna believe this! Now, the question is, how *do* I get back to my body from here?” She shrugged, “Guess I’ll just take a look around, maybe they’ve got something to eat in here.” She sniffed around, and started to drool, “Ooooh, are those cookies I smell?”

She “swam” through the system, her avatar moving from monitor to monitor. The green lightning surging through the control room began to shift to brown and dark-olive gray, the same colors as Akane’s own hair and eyes respectively. Error messages were popping up all over the screens warning of “data corruption,” along with a mess of other warnings.

Akane's bull-headed simple-mindedness was proving to be too much for the complex systems to withstand as she became one with it. Their diagnostics and readouts were becoming increasingly simplistic, based on a misguided notion that "simple" was the same as "efficient." She was spreading her code, her "*self*" to everything she touched, and she was touching everything...

It was a lucky break that the different subsystems of the kernel were as compartmentalized as they were, limiting the damage she could do, otherwise she may have dumbed down the entire NWP! However, what she was damaging was still the other student's Avatars... As Akane became more integrated with the system, it was re-writing itself to define the basic class of Avatar **as** Akane.

Which meant that instead of a blank template upon which the student's memories and characteristics were then encoded. **She** was becoming the template, with anything else about the students that wasn't overpowered and overwritten by Akane's... *Akane-ness*, being incorporated into their Avatars afterwards. Unfortunately, that would *not* include their intelligence.

---

The effects of Akane's tampering were instantly felt across the entire island... Or rather, they weren't felt at all. There was a split second of glitching as everyone's Avatars were reconfigured around having Akane as their base, instantly shifting in height, weight and even gender. But not one of them realized that anything had even happened.

Their minds instantly adapted to their new reality at the unfathomable speed of a super-computer, their lives re-written faster than they could blink, and from their perspective it was like it had always been this way. Their memories weren't replaced, so much as they were melded together with Akane's. Their own memories took precedence, but Akane's filled the cracks wherever there was room, and every memory was shifted to be more in line with Akane's personality, and of course, appearance.

### ***WHAM!***

The door to the men's bathroom in the diner flew open as a wooden geta on a tanned foot jutted out of the doorway, Akane walked out and stretched, hitching up her sweatpants and scratching her ass for good measure. "Ahhh, now *that* feels better, nothing like a healthy shit to clear the mind, *and* the guts... Wait a minute. Somethin' ain't right here." She looked behind herself and checked the door she'd just come out of, "Well that explains it! How did I end up goin' in the *boy's* bathroom by mistake?"

Before she had any time to consider that, she realized that she was *starving*, "Woah! Guess I freed more space in there than I thought! Good thing it's about lunchtime anyway, I can't wait to see what Chef Akane's cookin' up today!" Akane Nidai rubbed her stomach and licked her lips as she made her way out of the diner, seeing nothing strange about the fact that she'd just

referred to the Ultimate Chef, who until a few minutes ago she, or rather *he'd*, known as Teruteru Hanamura, as yet another Akane.

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"Alright, c'mon! Give it to me straight! How am I looking!?" Dressed in her typical two piece pinstriped black suit, Akane Kuzuryu sat on the examination table in one of the rooms of the hospital on the third island. As almost always, save for when they were sleeping, she was accompanied by Akane Pekoyama as she watched her dutifully with her bokken slung over her back.

To be honest, she really only carried it around because she thought it made her look more badass. She knew that she was supposed to be the Ultimate Swordswoman, but she kinda thought that weapons like swords were for wimps and wasn't a wimp. She much preferred to deal with any problem with her fists, *especially* anyone who dared try to lay a finger on her young Mistress, she'd rip them to fuckin' shreds if they tried...!

Then again, she often doubted even her *own* usefulness, seeing as how the young Mistress was literally every bit as strong as her and was liable to pound any would-be attacker into submission before she even got the chance to lay into them.

Dressed in a pink and white nurses uniform with a blue skirt, and tons of gauze wrapped around various parts of her body, Akane Tsumiki grimaced as she looked over the results on the clipboard in her hand, unsure exactly how to break the news to her, "Well, I mean, y'know, uh... Your shit ain't *that* fucked up or anything."

"That ain't exactly giving it to her straight, Doc." Akane Pekoyama commented in a somewhat reserved, stoic voice... As far as Akanes went, anyhow.

"Akane, please, let me handle this, alright?" Akane motioned to Akane, before turning back to Akane, "That ain't exactly giving it to me straight, Doc!"

Akane groaned and scratched the back of her head with the clipboard, "Well, look, I know it isn't what you wanna hear but like... For the most part you're healthy as a horse! There's just like, one little problem. Your cholesterol is way too goddamn high!"

"Cholesterol? Well, that sucks!" Akane slumped back against the wall, "So what the fuck am I supposed to do about that?"

"That's the part that sucks the most, and it's why I didn't wanna have to tell ya about it in the first place!" Akane snapped back, "As a nurse, I really oughta be ordering you to lay off the red meat, you eat way too much of it, but like." She folded her arms, "Damn it, I'd be a hypocrite, because I don't wanna stop eating steak either!"

Akane's shoulders slumped in something resembling despair, "Are you serious!? Can't I balance it out with more training or somethin'? Is life without unlimited meat even really life at all!?"

"Come on, Akane, you're like, smart and stuff with medicine, there's got to be something you can do." Akane interceded with Akane, trying to support her Mistress as she could see the diagnosis was devastating her.

"Shit, I mean- yeah, yeah, there is." Akane admitted, somewhat reluctantly. "I'll go check the pharmacy and prescribe you some statins, we've probably got some... That should get it under control."

"Fuckin' A!" Akane instantly perked up, flashing Akane a toothy grin and a thumbs up, "I knew you'd figure something out!" She didn't know what a statin was, but if it meant she could keep eating all the steak she wanted, she'd pop a hundred of them every day! "...So, uh, what now?"

The sound of three simultaneously growling stomachs made the next course of action pretty obvious for the three Akanes. "In my professional opinion, we should go have some lunch!" Akane answered, whipping the clipboard in her hand at the wall so hard that it shattered into splinters.

"Well, we can't argue with the doctor's orders, young mistress!" Akane's inherited stoicness cracked under the irresistible influence of her base self's ravenous hunger, as she ran for the door...

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"Then, as the hellhound charged towards me! His jaws slavering with vile ichor, hungering for my flesh...!" In Jabberwock park, Akane Nevermind was sitting on a bench, absolutely captivated by the story being recounted to her by Akane Tanaka, in her *usual* bombast. Out of all of the newly transformed Akanes, Tanaka had one of the most distinct appearances.

A prominent, and most like painted on, scar running across her right cheek, she wore a black and red patch over her left eye. She was going shirtless, with a binder wrapped tightly around her chest, for all the good it could do to actually constrain her breasts, alongside a flowing purple robe and a pair of black pants. Bandages were wrapped around her right hand and covered in mystic seals, allegedly to restrain the wicked power imprisoned within her arm, that was only to be released at the end of days... Or when she needed to change them because they were getting too grody.

"I stared down the wicked beast and bellowed, 'Ye shall **bow** before the dread lady of the nine circles of Hell, wretched spawn! I command thee heed thy mistress and fall before me!' She continued her dramatic re-enactment. "Then, the beast, recognizing the power of its superior, knelt down at my feet!"

Akane, who looked almost comical in her green and white dress, which at any moment looked like it was going to pop, clapped her hands excitedly, "That is tubular! What happened next? What did you do after putting the beast in its place?"

Akane cleared her throat, "Well, er... Then he rolled over and I started rubbing his soft belly... Hellhounds really like having their bellies rubbed."

Akane nodded, "That is totally bitching. I will keep that in mind if I ever- *Heh!* Bitchin', that was a pun, wasn't it? I didn't even mean for it to be but it came out soundin' so-"

"Yooo! Ms. Akane! Ms. Akane!" Akane Soda, dressed in her yellowish-green jumpsuit, came running towards Akane and Akane as fast as she could, which considering she was Akane, was pretty damn fast. If there was one thing that had carried over from her transformation into Akane, it was her singular obsession with Akane. "There you are, I've been lookin' everywhere for ya! Well, at least I got my steps in for the day!"

"Oh yes, I've just been here hanging out and listening to Akane's incredible stories of taming demons and binding them to her will!" Akane remarked, showing little interest in Akane.

"Yeah, that's great, real happy for ya, sure it's, uh, what's the word, ribbeting..." Akane replied drolly, showing antipathy towards Akane, who she didn't quite see as the obstacle for Akane's affection that she used to. She could only resent her so much, after all she *was* Akane. "Akane send me to find you, and... Akane too, I suppose, not sure how she *knew* you two'd be together, but anyway, lunch is startin'! Come on, you must be hungry, I sure know I am!"

"Oh yes! Lunch would be, like, so rad to the max right now!" Akane started to salivate as she leapt up from her chair, "C'mon, Akane! Let's hurry up before we miss out on all the choice cuts!" She cheerfully gestured for Akane to follow her, acting like Akane wasn't even there.

"Haha! Indeed!" Akane boisterously laughed, "Now, rise my four dark devas of destruction!" A quartet of hamsters, each with tufts of hair styled like Akane's on top of their heads, popped up from her pockets, the inside of her robe, and one from between her boobs. "Tonight, we dine, in *Hell!* Or, uh, I mean, in the *Hotel* rather! Hehe, nailed it!" She dramatically flourished her cape as she began to march off towards the resort lodge, leaving Akane left behind in the lurch, as usual.

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Akane Saionji and Akane Koizumi met back up on the beach on the main island, just a short walk from the resort, after having split up to search the islands for any sign of Akane. The Ultimate Traditional Dancer, still in her kimono, which hadn't actually gotten any *bigger* than it was before and so now ended right below her thighs, was given the task of searching islands 2 and 3. While Akane, the Ultimate Photographer, her camera nestled securely between her breasts, had taken on searching 4 and 5. They'd managed to cover most of their assigned areas in less than an hour, but unfortunately their work hadn't yielded much in the way of results.

"Did ya find any sign of her, Akane?" Akane asked the buxom, kimono-clad girl.

Akane pouted and crossed her arms, "Nah, I didn't find jack or shit..."

Akane raised a skeptical eyebrow, “and you really looked for her, right?”

Akane turned and looked back at her standoffishly, “Yeah, I did! Geez! I don’t even understand why we’re looking for her so hard in the first place. Let her sweat it out for a while, wherever the fuck she is, she deserved it for being a cocky little shit and mouthin’ off to Akane like that!”

“Akane! You really shouldn’t talk about Akane like that!” Akane chastised her, “This whole thing was a misunderstanding, y’know? Akane pushed it a little too far, and Akane went overboard without realizing it... Nobody needs to be shamed here, alright?”

Akane sighed, “Yeah, alright, Big Sis Akane, I hear ya...” She conceded, as she spotted someone coming towards them on the beach, “Uh-oh, don’t look now, but here comes Hope-girl. Watch, I bet she’ll say ‘hope’ in less than ten seconds.”

Dressed in the original Akane’s attire with the addition of a green hoodie, Akane Komaeda had the distinction of ever so slightly pale skin, a hair that was just a bit wispier than everyone else’s. “Ahh, Akane, Akane! I didn’t mean to pry, but I couldn’t help but overhear the two of you shootin’ the breeze! I just wanted to applaud you for helping keep the hope of finding Akane alive! As long as you can hold onto that, I know that we’ll find her eventually!”

“See? What did I tell ya?” Akane rolled her eyes, “Hope this, and hope that! That’s how it always is with you, you deranged lunatic. How’s this for some hope, I *hope* that you stop runnin’ your stupid bitch-ass mouth!” She railed at the hope-obsessed Akane. Akane would normally scold her for that, but she was very tempted to just let that one slide... Akane could really get on her nerves sometimes, and while it was a bit harsher than she’d have put it, she had to admit that Akane had practically taken the words right out of her own mouth.

“Hehehe...” Thankfully, Akane seemed to take it on the chin. “Man, Akane, you really know how to turn on the third degree, don’t ya? That’s fine though, honestly, if it gives you a-”

Before he could continue, a fourth participant in the conversation dropped in, or rather, dangled in from the top of the nearby palm tree. “Aaaand fan favorite, Akane Mioda enters the scene! And the *crowd goes wi-i-i-ild! Raaaaah!*” She dramatically introduced herself. Dressed in near identical attire to her previous form, sailor fuku, pink and blue hole-ridden leggings, sleeveless gloves and all, Akane Mioda’s hair was still just about the same as most of the Akanes, save for the presence of a couple pink and blue highlights.

As she waved her arms around dramatically, it was too much to maintain her footing against the top of the palm tree. Her legs began to slip, and after a moment of flailing, she fell out and *literally* dropped in on the conversation, crashing down onto the sand of the beach. “Ooof, okay, not Akane’s finest landing, but... *Hellooooo, Akane!* And Akane... And Akane!”

“*Ugh!* Why are all the most annoying people showing up at once?” Akane whined, “What do *you* want Akane? Are you just here to assault our ears with your lousy music again?”

“Heh, Akane is going to let that crack about her music go for the moment!” Akane replied with a broad smile that hid the implied threat behind her words, “Because the only music Akane is playin’ right now is the sound of the dinner- er, *lunch* bell! *Ding-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling!*” She pantomimed ringing a triangle, “Come on, let’s all go eat!”

“It’s lunchtime already? Damn, where did the time go! Ha, I sure do hope that Akane made something new for us to sink our teeth into!” The wispiest haired Akane rubbed her hands together as all of her thoughts instantly turned towards eating.

“Heh, y’know what? For once? That’s a hope that I share with ya, Akane!” Akane Koizumi shared a moment of camaraderie with Akane as she wrapped her arm around her shoulder, all of them making their way towards the Hotel.

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On top of the Hotel Mirai, Akane was busy laying out the dishes for lunch. Akane had split off from the group and headed to arrive at the restaurant early, where Akane was already waiting. Her arrival was quickly followed by Akane, and then Akane. Akane showed up, and then left to fetch Akane and Akane. Akane made it to the table while she was gone, followed by Akane, Akane and Akane. Finally, Akane, Akane and Akane made their way over together from the Hospital, and Akane returned with Akane and Akane in tow. Which only left Chiaki unaccounted for... Alongside Akane, of course.

At the head of the table, the mostly self-appointed “leader” of the group, Akane Togami, stood with her arms folded as she oversaw the arrival of the other students. It was clearly taking all of her discipline to resist the urge to dive into the dishes as they emerged from the kitchen, carried out in carefully balanced stacks of enormous plates by the Ultimate Chef, Akane Hanamura, who was actually practically *naked* save for her long “Kiss the Chef” tied tightly around her back and the large white chef’s hat atop her head.

Of course, the true self of the so-called “Akane Togami” was obscured from the rest of the group thanks to her talent as the Ultimate Imposter. The other students weren’t exactly difficult to fool, considering they were all Akane, but regardless, she still put all of her talent and effort into playing her role and disguising her true identity which was secretly that of... Akane. It was fortunate that the prodigious appetite of the Ultimate Imposter hadn’t been combined with Akane’s own ravenous hunger, or else it was a very real possibility that her stomach could have been quite literally *insatiable!*

“Ah, yes, yes! Come in everyone, please, sit down!” Akane greeted everyone with a broad smile as she brought out the last of her prepared dishes, “Ahh, what a delight it is to see such a tasty assortment of plump, juicy meats on display...” She sighed contentedly before her smile turned into a lecherous smirk, “Not to mention that lunch is looking pretty good too, *hehehe~!*”

Akane Hinata leaned back in her chair, deep in thought, which ironically made her stand out from the rest of the Akanes. After picking her brain for the last fifteen minutes or so trying to

figure something out, she finally decided that she needed a second opinion, “Yo, Akane, can I ask you something?” She asked the group’s intrepid “leader.”

“Ah! Of course you can, Akane! As your leader, Akane Togami, it falls squarely upon my well-equipped shoulders to address any concerns that you might have. In other words, shoot!” Akane granted Akane permission.

“Well, it’s like this... Have ya ever thought that maybe it’s a bit weird that we’ve all got the same name, and we look the same, and sound the same, and like, come from similar backgrounds?” Akane asked, rubbing her chin.

Akane stared at her from a moment before bluntly replying, “Nah,” with a curt shake of her head. “It’s just one of those coincidences of life, Akane! Why shouldn’t we be similar? I mean, it makes sense that we all ended up on this island together, don’t it? Or perhaps you were all drawn to the beacon of my leadership like moths to a flame.”

“Oooh! Did someone say something about bacon!?” Akane exclaimed from the other side of the table, quickly joined in by the rest of the Akanes.

“No-! No! I said...” Akane tried to correct the misconception, but the mere mention of the word “bacon” was enough to shatter her train of thought, “What was I saying just now?” She asked Akane, she *had* been answering her question after all.

“Huh? Oh, uh, shit... Fuck if I know.” Akane just shrugged, “Couldn’t have been that important, definitely not as important as lunch. Speaking of which, can we *finally* eat now, I’m about to fuckin’ pass out over here, all this thinkin’ drained me dry!”

The students became increasingly rowdy, especially as all of the food was here and Akane had taken her seat alongside everyone else, just as eager to devour her own cooking as the rest were. “Wait, wait! We’re still short, where’s Chiaki?” Akane prompted the table.

“Chiaki said she’s still full from breakfast so she’s gonna skip lunch.” Akane spoke up and answered.

There was a round of good natured chuckles, “Ha! Typical Chiaki... Alright, *now* can we eat?”

Akane groaned, “I really wish I could say yes, but there’s still one more student missing.”

“*Still!?* Who the hell are ya-?” A frustrated Akane yelled, before following Akane’s finger to the empty seat next to her. “*Oooh!* Of course, Akane!” The Akane they were referring to was in fact, Akane Owari, the *original* Akane, not that any of them really distinguished her as particularly special or unique from the rest of them.

“*Aaaggh!* You gotta be kidding me!” The Kimono-wearing Akane complained, “But Akane is still banished to the fuckin’ shadow realm or whatever, who knows when she’s gonna be back? How long are we s’posed to wait for-!?”

**VWOOM!**

**CRAAASSSH!**

Suddenly, a distorted digital rift filled with streaming green lines of binary code tore itself open right above the middle of the long, food covered table. From that tear in space emerged none other than Akane, who flopped out ungracefully right into the middle of the buffet. Splattering and smashing piles of food, knocking plates and silverware all over the table and the floor, and leaving herself covered in a massive, but delicious, mess.

**“Akane!”**

A cry of celebration and relief filled the room as every Akane, even Akane, was happy to see Akane back, safe and sound. Akane picked herself up off the table, “Oh sweet, I made it back just in time for lunch, sweet! Hey, everyone!” She smiled, looking around at the assembled students that noticing... Nothing. Nothing weird about them at all! Nothing that stuck out to her anyway. “Ah, shit, I guess lunch is on me today, hehe...” She joked as she glanced down at her own body, absolutely covered in food.

The students all got a good chuckle out of her joke, seeing as how they all shared her corny and often low-brow sense of humor, it made sense that it'd go over well. “Hehe, yeah! Uh, but for real though, I'm a fuckin' mess, like, there's gravy seeping between my tits, and I'm pretty sure I've got a sausage goin' right up my-”

“Oooh, I'd be more than happy to help deal with the gravy situation for ya, Akane.” The lewd chef drooled and wriggled her fingers as she got ready to leap on the table and “assist” Akane, “This really is a job for a chef, y'know~?” It was like a dream come true, getting to sop up some delicious sauce while at the same time “admiring” a gorgeous woman's body? What more could she ask for?

“Hey, hey!” Unfortunately, Akane grabbed her by the neck and pulled her back down, “Will you have some goddamn decency for a chance, Akane...?” The photographer shook her head sternly, “Seriously, I can't believe you, I mean... You're *not even* going to offer to share?”

“Uh, w-wait, are we good to start eating now? Like, I just wanna make sure, we're all here, ain't we?” Akane somewhat bashfully asked.

Akane looked at the table, doing a mental headcount, which she was pretty sure she got right, but she wasn't really great at counting. “Yep! We're good. Now let's fuckin' *chow down!*” Losing any pretense of stoicism or “leadership,” Akane joined the rest of the Akanes in helping themselves to the veritable feast of unparalleled cuisine that Akane had prepared for them all to enjoy!

From the side stairwell, hidden from sight, even though they could've stood in the open and none of the students probably would've noticed them given how singularly focused they were on the food, Chiaki and Usami observed how the... *situation* had developed. The only reason that

Chiaki hadn't been "Akane-fied" like the others, despite being an Avatar as well, was due to her special nature and the purpose she served towards the program. Her Avatar was not only classified as a unique instance, but it was also stored in a different part of the system, preventing Akane's escapades from having altered it.

"Um. Shouldn't we be trying to fix this...?" Usami asked aloud, it seemed like the obvious course of action, and yet she found herself hesitant.

Chiaki pursed her lips, contemplating it for much the same reason that Usami was, "Ehhh, Nope. Trying to undo what Akane did might just cause even more damage to everyone's Avatars. Besides, you've noticed it too, right?"

Usami placed her hands on her lap and wriggled back and forth uncertainly, "If by 'it' you are referring to the markedly increased rate of compatibility between the students, then yes, I have noticed it."

"Yep!" Chiaki nodded, "As it stands now, their relationship values are rising at a greatly accelerated rate. It makes sense, they have a lot more in common now. They'll likely finish collecting the Hope Fragments in a fraction of the time it would've originally taken."

"But is it really okay to leave them all changed like this?" Usami questioned, Chiaki *was* right, and her primary directive *was* to ensure that the Hope Fragments were collected and the students weren't harmed, but didn't this technically qualify as "harm?"

"Why not? Look at them all, Usami, do you see a single one of them that looks unhappy?" Chiaki challenged Usami as she gestured to the table full of cheerful, big-breasted and small-minded girls cheerfully stuffing their faces without a single care in the world, "I don't think there's anything wrong with this, in fact, this outcome might even be *better* than our originally intended one. They still have their talents, and they're still themselves under all of the, er, *Akane*... I say we just let things keep running as they are."

"Well... Okay, you know them better than I do, Chiaki. I'll trust your judgement." Usami conceded, she had to admit that as a teacher, she wasn't entirely enthusiastic about the concept of having an entire class of students all like Akane, but ultimately what mattered is that they were happy.

Chiaki ascended the stairs and took the remaining empty seat at the table, right next to Akane Hinata. "Hey hey, Haji- I mean, Akane." Chiaki greeted her right as she was in the middle of scarfing down two large chicken drumsticks, one in each hand. The name thing was definitely going to take some getting used to, but she was a gamer, she was nothing if not adaptive.

"Oh, hey, Chiaki! Wus' up? Thought you weren't comin' to lunch." Akane greeted her, fondly surprised, some bits of food in her mouth splattering on the pink haired girl's face as she spoke.

Chiaki just wiped them off and grinned back at her, calmly explaining "I guess I managed to find some room after all."

“Haha, ey! Thatta girl!” Akane wrapped her arm around her shoulder and pulled her tight against her side, “That’s what I like to hear!”

A slight blush appeared on her cheeks, looking in her eyes she got the confirmation she needed that for everything that had changed, it was still Hajime in there, somewhere; enough for her at least. “It, uh, looks like I probably waited too long.” She noted sheepishly, looking at the picked over mess of bones, gristle and scraps that the table had been reduced to in the matter of a few minutes. “Seems like everything’s gone.”

“Well, not quite *everything*.” Akane winked before she leaned down under the table and produced a plate covered in a sampling of nearly every dish that’d been served. “I had a feeling you might change your mind so I made this up for ya.” She lowered her tone as her eyes went wide, “do *not* ask me what I had to do to make it happen and keep it hidden. Trust me, it *wasn’t* easy!”

Chiaki took the plate of food gratefully, smiling warmly at the girl beside her, “Thank you, Akane, I’m sure it wasn’t but, I really appreciate it…”

“Aw, don’t mention it! But uh, hey, anything you don’t finish I’d be happy to take care of for ya!” She cheekily assured her, before leaning in and pecking her on the cheek. Neither she, nor Chiaki, seemed to realize what she’d just done at first. When they did, both of their faces went red and their smiles fell in shock. “A-ah, shit! I’m sorry, dunno what came over me, I just kinda went for it, I- Hmm!?”

Chiaki silenced her by throwing herself forward and pressing her lips against Akane’s, just for a moment, before pulling back and leaving the tanned girl utterly stunned. “It’s fine, in fact, I just wish you’d done it sooner.” Maybe there were some upsides to Hajime becoming Akane that Chiaki hadn’t considered, being more *bold* was one that she could definitely get used to.

Despite how some people might have felt, life was such an unpredictable thing. You could never tell what twist or turn it was going to take. None of the students on Jabberwock Island would’ve predicted that when they were eating breakfast that their entire lives would’ve been reformatted before lunch. But alongside its unpredictability, it also had a funny way of working out. Most of them wouldn’t have chosen to become Akane, and none of them had a clue it’d happened in the first place, but even if they did, most of them probably wouldn’t have gone back.

These simple, peaceful days of fun in the sun couldn’t last forever, but Akane was always a girl who prioritized living in and enjoying the moment anyway. Chiaki could admire that, and she’d certainly emulate it, enjoying every moment that she’d get to spend with her friends. Now the only thing left to figure out was whether or not the Neo World Program could generate food fast enough to keep them all fed!