

## Schrödinger's Hanged Man

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# Schrödinger's Hanged Man

by [Sealaisx](#)

## Summary

In the Arcana, the Hanged Man means being torn between two sides - or two realities - at once.

Set after Mayuri's ending in the VN, Okabe is quick to find out that illusions aren't always what's best for everyone's sake.

Fortunately for him, a certain somebody understands him well enough.

## Notes

No beta reader, we die like Mayuri.

This is my first long fic after... a while. Depression happened as always and it's taking away my ability to write consistently, but I'll do my best.

Light spoilers for Steins;Gate and Steins;Gate 0, but nothing too heavy, I recommend reading this if you're at least at chapter 8 of the VN or episode 16 of the anime.

Also! This is my first attempt at writing mild smut, so let me know how I did.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

I took the first train to Akihabara this morning.

I know it's not common to wake up so early, but by now I've got used to it. My part time job at MayQueen+Nyan<sup>2</sup> helped me reschedule my routine, after all, so it's not too bad, by now.

However, there is one more reason why I wouldn't be bothered anyway.

I climb the stairs like I've done a thousand times by now, but this simple act always makes my heart flutter and I have to control myself not to run upstairs and end up completely out of breath. Those brief moments always seem so excruciatingly endless when I come and way too brief when I'm about to leave.

It takes a few seconds of searching my pockets before I find the spare key. He didn't trust me to bring it when I left, saying he might need it if he happens to wake up in the middle of the night. From what he tells me, he recently started going out for a walk around the lab's grounds when he feels restless: if only my mother let me stay at the lab overnight, if only I was able to physically be there for him...

No, it doesn't matter. All it does is that he's fine, by now. He should be, right?

My Upa keychain makes a pleasant sound when it accidentally hits the metal doorknob: it reminds me of the wind rattles my mom likes to hang outside the window when the weather gets colder. She says they're a good luck charm, and plus they're super cute! I look at my shiny silver Upa and feel myself smiling. I can't help it. It brings me so many wonderful memories of times now long gone.

The door is locked with three turns of the key. I wonder why he took extra care to lock it so thoroughly: it's not like anyone is going to break through it, right? After all, it's just the three of us in the lab almost every day, and I don't recall Daru ever coming here so early.

When I push it open, the sight of a familiar living room immediately makes me sigh in relief. I close the door behind me and lock it from the inside before putting the key on the sill of a

closed window. I scan my surroundings, but no one seems to be here.

A rustling sound immediately catches my attention: it's like someone was searching for something through a pile of paper sheets.

The sound just came from the development room, I'm sure of it. It's the back room of the lab that he likes to call like that. I briefly giggle before quickly covering the distance that brings me in front of the cyan curtain. Opening it, I see a slender, masculine silhouette sitting on a chair in front of the lab's PC. The monitor is showing numbers and equations that look like gibberish to me: I've never been quite able to understand the difficult matters he was studying into, but the effort he put into them was always enough to make me want to do my best to fully support him.

He has headphones on: this is probably why he didn't hear me enter through the door.

I stealthily walk towards him and put my hands on his shoulders:

“Ohayou, Oka-”

I'm abruptly interrupted by a high-pitched scream he emits while he jumps from his seat and quickly turns towards me, with his eyes wide open; the sudden movement he makes is enough to knock a couple of boxes off the table.

“Ahh! Be careful, Okarin!”

I hurry to put them back in place while checking on their contents: luckily, there was nothing fragile in there. Standing up, I take a look at Okarin: he's sweating and his gaze is lost on the ground, with an almost void look on his face.

“Okarin...? Is everything alright?”

My words seem to wake him up: shaking his head to clear his mind, he replies to me with a half-smile: “Yeah, sorry, Mayuri. I was so focused on my research that I didn’t hear you come in”.

Oh, so that was it. I was actually worried that he had found something seriously shocking while surfing the web, like one of Daru’s h-games save files. Even so, I can’t shake that feeling of worry away.

“Research? Is it something related to your studies?”

He sighs and his lips part in a soft smile. He gets closer to me and puts his hand on my head, gently patting it. This simple gesture is enough to make me melt.

Even after a whole year, I’ve yet to get used to being in a relationship with someone. I admit it’s not exactly like pictured in the books, but Okarin has been going through hard times, so he’s still pretty cold with me from that point of view. Beside that, he’s such a tsundere, and even Daru agrees with me.

“Kind of. It’s more like something I want to do”

He doesn’t say much after that, so I urge myself to change the topic.

“Ah, Okarin! Faris said she’ll try to be here at the lab today, together with Daru, Yuki and Hifumi. Have you heard that Daru might be seeing someone?”

The last sentence earns me a quick turn of his head: “Seeing? Like in dating or in hallucinations? I’m more keen to believe the latter”

I frow: “Hey, that’s not nice! Besides, I’m serious, I heard him say on the phone that they met on @channel”

Or, at least, it’s what I hope. Daru has never been a guy with a high self-esteem. I used to always tell him that he should exercise in order to lose weight and maybe join a club to meet

other people instead of spending his days in front of a PC screen. Little I knew my advice was so wrong, I can't wait to know what kind of girl she is!

If I had known about it in advance, I would have immediately thought about Faris-chan. I mean, Daru has had a very big crush on her for as long as I've known him. But the sudden discovery of @channel having taken up Cupid's role completely cuts her off the list of possibilities. I wonder what kind of couple would Daru and his girlfriend make...

"Um... Okarin?", and it feels like this is the thousandth time I try in vain.

But still, my eyes lock on his darker ones. I've always loved how his seemed to sparkle a mature aura. Like he had been through so much and always stood back up, each time with a new scar on his irises. And it's probably what he actually did, considering he had to shoulder my pain, too, back when Grandma...

Ah, but why am I thinking about it now? Not in a moment like this!

I smile gently when I notice how bewildered he looks from my lack of words. I'm still a bit shorter than him in terms of height, so I tiptoe and lean closer to him, considering whether to shut my eyes like girls in my mangas do or to just leave them open to see how his face would look like.

He stands still before realization hits him. He draws in a sharp breath and his eyes become filled with the same harsh glint I've been witnessing each time I try to be intimate with him. It's not rage, or pain, it's more like...

Fear.

No, not that. He looks like a prey who's been found out, he frantically adverts his gaze and steps away from me, pupils dilated and eyes wide open, as if he had been startled by something.

"Oka-"

"I'll go buy something to eat for Daru", he cuts me, a slight bitterness in his voice, "Tell me if you girls want anything specific".

He slips on his lab coat and hurries to the door, almost running, and I catch him inhaling deeply to calm himself down just before shutting the door.

Is he really that scared about love?

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It's been a while and he hasn't come back yet. Knowing him, he probably stopped in some PC parts shop to rummage through scrap pieces, looking to make a deal.

If I had to be honest, the lab looks like it's missing his very soul without him around. He's not the chuunibyou he used to be anymore, but he still has it in himself to make the lab lively.

Even so, when I'm not stitching one of my cosplay suits, there is little to do in the lab. Okarin went to buy food for everyone, meaning I can't cook anything yet. Maybe he bought rice flour! I'll have to cook Mayqueen's rainbow dangos for him, sometime, that might be a nice change of pace from the salty ones we use to eat.

I hear something buzzing in the development room and make my way there to check. Maybe the microwave is malfunctioning again-

Wait. Did we ever have a microwave? I remember we once did, but after it broke, Okabe insisted on not purchasing another one, even if we labmems combined could manage the money to do so. He claims to hate the noise it makes and that microwaved food tastes horrible.

Also, I don't remember the old one ever having any problems at all. So why did I...

A flashing screen cuts my thoughts short and I finally locate the source of the noise. It's Okarin's phone, which is displaying Daru's number on it. I cheerfully pick up.

"Tutturu! Mayushii here!"

"Oi, Mayuri! I forgot my phone at the lab, could you bring it to me? I'm near Akiba's train station-"

"Woah! The train station? How did you end up there from the supermarket?"

I hear him exhale before replying "I decided to take a walk and just got caught up in my thoughts. Thinking about it, I am indeed pretty far away from the lab. Change of plan, could you wait for me there? I'll be back immediately, I promise."

"You sure walked a lot, Okarin! By the way, yeah, it's fine! Do you need anything else?"

"Don't worry about it. Just take care", and he hung up.

Okarin had this weird but great habit of always telling me to "take care" each time we greeted each other. He had developed some sort of sweetness towards me in the past year, since we got together, and I couldn't be any happier.

I rustle through the papers on the desk and tried to clean it up a bit. Tons of notes on spare sheets of paper laid around made that place a real mess. No wonder, though: Okarin has always been untidy, even in his own room. He claims to know exactly where everything is as long as nobody tries to clean his room up, which I strongly disagree with.

I took a moment to go through his notes: the letters danced in a definite order on the papers, like ballet dancers on a stage, a neat contrast to their surroundings. Writings, schemes, drawing of circuit boards go by, until I find one set of sheets bound together. I don't pay it any mind at first, but then I read the header.

"Kurusu's paper"

Kurusu...



Why does that name sound familiar? Have I met her before? It may be possible that she's one of Yuki's friends, since the first image that pops in my mind when I think about it is Comima. I'll have to ask Okarin later-

A knock on the door claims my attention and I think for a brief moment that Okarin might be already back. But then I discard that thought: why would he need to knock when he always has the lab's key with him?

As to prove me right, I hear a loud chattering from outside, with Faris' voice being the most clearly audible.

I hurry to the door and unlock it, barely noticing who's standing outside before Faris leaps to hug me, almost throwing me off balance.

"We've come, nyan! Faris never breaks a promise", the catgirl winked.

"Oh, welcome here, Faris-chan! And hi Yuki-chan, Hifumi-chan, Luka-kun!", I'm so relieved to see all my friends gathered here.

"S-Sorry for intruding...", Luka bows his head gently, a trembling smile on his face.

The next half hour is spent with us girls (plus Luka) looking through some magazines Yuki-chan brought, commenting on various fashion models and outfits.

"Oh! This summer suit would look great on you, Luka-kun!", I show him a navy blue swimsuit with white stripes along the edges of the fabric.

"I... don't think that would be appropriate, Mayuri-chan", Luka gives me the same answer he always does when I suggest him on what to wear. It takes a bit of convincing for him to actually listen to my advice, though, and he always looks gorgeous afterwards!

A scratching sound coming from the door almost has me jumping on my seat. The rustling sound of keys turning in the lock has me lock my eyes on it, hoping to see...

"We're back! Sorry for being late", a fairly deep but caring voice, a soft smile that has become his signature one, and above all that rebelling hair that he struggles in keeping straight, sometimes locks finding their way on his forehead and making him look twice as handsome as usual.

"Welcome back, Okarin! Did you bring food?" I asked, not having forgotten about my dango mental note.

"How impatient you are. Yeah, me and Daru went to get some, thank me if it's not precooked food like this lazy ass wanted it to be", he nodded towards the larger guy who had just entered the lab.

"Aw, come on, man, I just wanted to make the girls comfortable without pressuring them about cooking. BTW, how are you all doing?", he replied, beads of sweat falling from his forehead and armpits. It was still spring, but summer was getting closer and closer, and so the temperature kept rising. Today was a particularly hot day, so we kept the windows open since the only fan the lab had was currently broken into pieces due to Daru falling over it.

"Hi, Daru-kun!", Yuki said cheerfully. I took a while to notice both the honorifics and the first name being used.

"Wait, Yuki-chan, do you know Daru?", I asked, and she suddenly averted my gaze and stared at the ground, cheeks lightly blushing.

"Yeah, she's my... uh...", Daru was stumbling on his words, but everything became crystal clear to me.

"Wait, don't tell me... you guys are dating? For real?!", I couldn't help but ask.

"It's not been a while, really!", Yuki waved her hands in front of her, "We met on @channel and started hanging out as friends". There clicked all the puzzle pieces!

"Eeeeh? Why didn't you tell me about that, Daru-kun?", I feigned ignorance.

"I would have told you by walking here with Yuki-chan, hadn't this mess of a scientist got that far away from the lab without his phone on, smh"

"Oh, right, the phone!", I stood up from the couch and went to the development room next to it, grabbed the metallic red phone on top of the desk and handed it to Okarin.

"Thanks, Mayuri. I can always count on you"

"Eheh, no problem! By the way, Okarin, I snuck a peek on your notes while you were gone", I started.

"Really?", his gaze was on his phone while he absently minded looked through his missed calls and emails.

"Who's Chris-chan?"

He dropped his phone.

Silence fell into the room while everyone looked at him.

The gaze he gave me was one of pure horror.

"Who's... who?", he blurted out.

I stood there petrified for about ten seconds before correcting myself.

"Ah! Sorry, I meant to say Kurisu-chan! I don't know why that name slipped out instead"

His expression didn't falter a bit.

"You... you don't know her, right? Right, Mayuri?", he finally spoke, trailed words with a sense of hurry to them, a paradox that looked on the verge of getting very angry.

"I... don't know. Why, Okarin?", I was beginning to be scared of the way he looked at me, pure disbelief and terror in his eyes, as if I had opened some sort of Pandora's vase. "The only thing I remember about her", I go on, hoping that my words reach him and stop that stare from burning into my very soul, "is a day spent at Comima. I don't really know where this comes from, though. Maybe it's some sort of fee-"

"You don't know her, Mayuri!", he shouts, his tone being way stricter and louder than he anticipated, and I can see Faris laying an arm on top of Luka, who's visibly scared. Okarin takes a deep breath, finally averts his eyes and says, almost whispering, "Nobody does".

Daru, who had gone to sit next to Yuki and was now holding her tight, objected "I actually do. One of her papers was published on Sciency some time ago. She's a seventeen year old genius girl who apparently specializes in neuroscience, which is pretty cool. But I heard that roughly a year ago, she's been kil-"

"SHUT UP!", Okarin screams at Daru at the top of his lungs and I squeal and instinctively cover my head with my arms, feeling water pool into my eyes.

"That's enough!", Yuki stands up from her spot on the sofa and looks at Okarin, steel-piercing gaze aimed right between his eyes. She has the stare of a warrior while she confronts him, and once again I'm faced with a feeling of déjà-vu of having seen a similar expression before.

My head hurts and I can't think straight. I just want everyone to stop fighting.

"Okarin, what's wrong with you, man?", Daru asks cautiously.

His reply never comes.

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Something drew me here.

It was almost natural to roam the streets in Akihabara and end up in this place. I feel like I've been here a hundred times or even more, and perhaps it's true, but none of them was like this.

I've done a bit of research. I knew Okarin wouldn't like the thought of it, but it's been fine hours since he stormed out of the lab and he hasn't been back yet.

I found out that Makise Kurisu was murdered here, on the seventh floor of the Radikan. The culprit was never found, since there were no cameras in that particular hallway she found herself in.

I climb up sets of stairs as I've done my whole life. Midway, I shoot a glance at a surprise prize machine: it's one of those that gives you a random prize hidden in a plastic ball for the price of 100 yen. There is an Upa-themed one, so I stop by and decide to try my luck: a shiny green, sealed shut ball rolls out and, when I finally manage to open it, I gasp in surprise.

"Oh! A metal Upa!"

Those are pretty rare. I've seen auctions for them going as far as 10,000 yen nowadays.

I turn the grey gadget around and look at its back.

Nothing. Obviously, it's a regular metal Upa that just came out of its box.

Then why did I feel like it was missing something?

Later, I keep going upstairs until I finally reach the seventh floor.

Just as I read about, they made some sort of small altar on the floor for Makise Kurisu. Someone has cared enough to bring a flower on it, but that's all there is to it, along with a picture frame.

"Chris-chan...", that name rolls so naturally on my tongue while I look at that picture frame, along with a sweeter taste, something very similar to the Dr Pepper Okabe likes.

Pain, pain, go away!

And suddenly, it's not a déjà-vu anymore.

We're all seated around a square table and Kurisu is right next to me, munching on noodles and trying to shut Okarin up from one of his chuunibyou delusions. I hear laughter, bickering, distant voices. Just about that, I feel like I'm drowning, gasping for air as try to desperately cling to those memories in order to not lose them again.

My head is about to burst. I fall to my knees as trains of thoughts fill my mind, chanting the girl's name over and over until I can feel salty rivers on my cheeks and my throat is too sore from hiccups to speak anymore.

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"Are you one hundred percent sure you want to do this?"

He's gotten skinnier during the years. Yeah, that's probably because of the war, but having a child means taking a lot of responsibilities on your own shoulders, and that implicitly means you end up exercising more.

Mayuri knew that herself, having adopted a little girl of her own. Shiina Kagari, the joy in her life since the day they got to meet each other.

It was now 2025 and the world was slowly succumbing to the horrors of the Third World War. Within so many children who had lost their parents due to that, Kagari seemed to bring back the light in Mayuri's eyes, something her comrades never thought possible since their leader died.

There was nothing they could do, really. The worldline convergence would eventually claim his life in one way or another, but it didn't mean that his death went by without causing any pain.

Mayuri in particular felt like her existence was then devoid of any meaning. None of her friends could blame her: she had been Okabe Rintaro's girlfriend and childhood's friend for as long as they could remember and until the end of his life.

Two things spurred her to move forward: the joy of having a child and the development of a time machine.

Alongside Daru, she worked to turn those old paper sheets and notes into something real.

Kind of. It's more like something I want to do.

And that was his heritage. Since the day his most beloved person left this world up until the day before he died, now formulas and projects were the findings of the Valkyries.

Mayuri knew by now. He had told her everything when he felt his days were coming to a close. Who Makise Kurisu was and how much she meant to him. How she wasn't just a lab member and was always there to lend him a hand during the worst times.

How much he was in love with her.

So much that he had poured all of himself in the research of a time machine, almost succeeding in creating one all by himself. Now that he was gone, Daru took up his projects

and started to fill in the missing pieces.

War raged outside, though, and progress was difficult to spot.

Okabe Rintaro, the man eternally torn between two sides, had finally chosen one. Sacrificing his acquaintance of a few days to save his dearest childhood friend seemed the most logical choice, back then, but Kurisu had left a void in his heart that he had never been able to fill.

And so, he resorted to what his former chuunibyou persona excelled at: illusions. He confessed to Mayuri and got into a relationship with her, tried to forget everything that happened, but it was all in vain. Later, he would learn that it is just as difficult to forget someone important to you as it is remembering someone who never existed.

To them, in fact, Makise Kurisu never existed for as long as a public known person.

What Mayuri felt that day of fifteen years ago, while on her grave, didn't find any similarities among the others. They were pretty startled at first, so she kept it a secret from Okabe until just about when the war started.

Reading Steiner: so powerful, yet so lonely.

"Leaping through time to save the one you love... hey, Daru-kun, doesn't that sound familiar?"

"Sometimes", he admitted, "I've only been able to go on with my theories because of those weird dreams I have from time to time. I've never been able to name them, even less tell them from reality. Sometimes I wonder if it's not just the voice of God speaking".

"Yeah", Mayuri smiled, double-checking the grip on the machine, "Sometimes I wonder if maybe a thing such as a god of time exists".

"Who knows?", Daru chuckled, "But Oka- his theories make way more sense than some imaginary god".



Mayuri stepped back a bit. There it was: a PhoneWave's replica, one that took years to complete and the most complex Future Gadget among the rebels.

A proper time machine was in the works, sure, but with this they could be able to perhaps untangle the last knot on the string of fate and let it unravel, free from any hard times.

"Have you made your mind about the content?"

"I have. For about ten years"

"Good, then. Whenever you're ready, Mayushii"

Because it takes great strenght to tightly grip on something, but it takes even more courage to let it go.

It takes love to fully give yourself to someone, but it takes more to realize that their happiness might not include you. Or it might - just not in the way you imagined.

Mayuri liked to think about it as a death wish from her best friend. He had given and sacrificed everything for the sake of his friends and now it was time to let go.

Erase everything and gift him a life worth living.

The raven haired girl typed at her phone, then looked at Daru, who asked to make sure.

"So... that day, right? Just when he..."

"Yeah", she replied, not an hint of hesitation in her voice, "Back when he burnt himself down and gave up everything to save us".

The day he decided to sacrifice Kurisu and get rid of the PhoneWave.

Daru set the timer to the 16th of August, 2010. Reading that date made Mayuri's heart ache a bit.

He started the PhoneWave and the discharge phenomenon happened for the first time again in fifteen years.

The girl smiled to herself, thinking back to the first time she saw it and was absolutely terrified by it. Even then, Okabe had jumped to protect her should anything have happened. She exhaled and close her eyes, her right thumb on the "send" button.

Thunder roared outside and mixed with the heavy sound and quake of bombing. A young Suzuha hid herself behind Yuki's legs, sniffing. As she was about to leave everything behind, she wondered if she would see them again. Mostly Kagari, but the other lab members, too. She sincerely hoped she was doing the right thing.

"Goodbye, Rinta-kun"

Her phone screen read a brief message.

BELIEVE ME

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"Eeeeh? You two are dating? For real?"

The loud chatting of people surrounding them had made difficult for the group to have a conversation, so they had moved to a less populated area of the festival.

Summer fireworks had always been Faris' favourite time of the year, so this time all lab members had followed along, eating local food straight from the grills and buying silly summer glowing horns hats.

The girls were wearing outfits that mainly consisted of a fancy kimono, while Luka went for his shrine maiden plain clothes and Daru... well, let's say he tried his best to look good for Yuki.

Okabe was the only guy who apparently actually tried to dress fancy for a festival that deserved it, and it didn't go unnoticed in the eyes of a certain genius girl.

"Yeah, it's not been that long, but me and Daru are hanging out", Yuki smiled reassuringly.

"Actually, I might just consider this our third date, Yuki-chan", Daru said in a honeyed voice that made Okabe internally cringe.

Who was the normie, now, for messing with girls? Damn you and your hypocrisy, Daru!

"Has anyone seen Kiryu-san? I've been looking for her everywhere by now, nyan", Faris remarked.

The group then split up to look for her. Luka and Mayuri covered the clothes stalls (much to the guy's dismay), Daru and Yuki looked at fireworks ones, Faris went looking among the food shops, while Okabe and Kurisu looked for Moeka near the main temple.

It took no more than ten minutes - and a lot of pleads from Mayuri to make Luka wear a glowing stars hat - to find the blonde girl near one of the stalls, quietly munching on some meat.

Daru and Yuki were the first ones to find her and the group quickly reunited with Luka and Mayuri. They spent a few moments scanning the surroundings before Daru noticed a familiar sight.

"Oi! Look over there!"

Among many other people, it looked like Okabe had bought two caramelized apples and was holding them out of reach for Kurisu, grinning, with the latter obviously displeased.

"We can't even hang together once without both of them acting as a married couple, smh. I should go there and scold that damn normie!", Daru began walking towards them, but Mayuri stopped him.

When Daru saw the look in her eyes, melancholy and wisdom becoming one, he swore he had seen it somewhere else before... or then.

"Eheheh, let them be, Daru-kun! I'm sure they have a lot to talk about!"

She was right.

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The cicadas were singing in the distance, breaking the silence that would instead have fallen on the starcrossed lovers.

They had left the crowded square a bit ago, moving up on a nearby hill on the top of which stood a temple.

The only sounds came from the distant partying and what the wind carried there.

At some point, Kurisu quickened her pace to reach the temple and leaned her back against the back wall, with Okabe doing the same, both without uttering a word.

Okabe was growing restless and pondering whether to make small talk with Kurisu, just for the sake of saying something, even though he knew that would bore her.

She told him she needed a quieter place to talk to him. He was startled by it, but quickly obliged, leading it up to the temple at the price of an awkward silence between the two.

It was now close to their second anniversary as a couple. Two years had passed since the weeks that changed both their lives and, of course, they had their ups and downs, both as people and in their relationship.

Still... when your significant other tells you that they want to talk to you privately, there's always a dreading thought in the back of your mind that gnaws at your brain.

"I've been having strange dreams", the chestnut haired spoke, with Okabe turning to face her.

"I see you slowly sinking into madness and succumbing to your distorted desires. Every time, I'm powerless to help you. Whether you choose to give up and not take anyone's dreams away or give in to your selfish thoughts, I'm always there as a mere spectator. I can only watch as you build up your palace of illusions and make yourself comfortable within it, persuaded by the thought that this way you won't have to suffer anymore. Those aren't memories. Not of this worldline, at least, from what you told me. But I can't help feeling them so vivid in my mind, I'm sure they happened somewhere", she paused, collecting her thoughts, and Okabe gulped.

"I sometimes wonder if this is really the best outcome for you. Among all the great ways you could have lived your life, you chose to do things believed to be unachievable. It looks too easy, way too much, to just give yourself to a pink haired girl who has a crush on you, or to turn the man who loves you into a woman and fulfill both your dreams. Would anything have changed? You told me about how Steins Gate is a timeline free from any attractor field, but there's no guarantee it's the only one. For what we know, the universe could be replicating itself infinitely, even as we speak now. It would have been so much better for you to never meet me, and sometimes I wonder if I'm not the result of your choices, but rather, the cause. Faris, Luka, Moeka, Daru, Mayuri... how much time will pass before they start having those dreams, too? Are you sure that a reality of people endlessly questioning themselves is any better? Do you... do you ever regret your choice, Okabe?"

She cut off her semi-monologue, not because she was at a loss for words, but because tears threatened to fall from her eyes and make the whole thing pathetic.

Okabe breathed deeply, the fresher night air filling his lungs, along with a faint smell of musk and Kurisu's perfume. A leaf fell from a tree in the distance and was carried to them by the wind before falling into a fountain, making the water cripple.

"There was a time in which I did", he said, carefully choosing his words. Kurisu drew a short breath and looked at him.

"A time when I thought that hiding behind my illusions for long enough would make everything else disappear. That firmly believing in something was enough to make it happen. That I could ride my own destiny however I pleased. None of those were real. Each and every time I sent a D-Mail to undo my mistakes, I felt horrible for taking my friends' wishes along the lost timelines. I felt like a murderer, or a thief of the worst kind", he chuckled bitterly at that.

"But I also knew that giving up would lead me to a miserable life. I knew that because I lived that. Being an observer of time means you get to explore each and every scenario that causality has got for you. Some of them were dreadful - some weren't. Each time I gave in to what was easy instead to what was right, I'd end up screwing my life up for good. The only reason I ever did that is because I was out of my mind. I can't exactly remember it: after exploring the R worldline, some memories of the Alpha and Beta ones are becoming cloudy"

"How can you call a fulfilling life, with a family and everything you've ever hoped for, miserable?", Kurisu objected.

"It's because you weren't part of it", the blunt answer startled Kurisu, whose cheeks immediately flushed red.

"W-What?", she blurted out.

"I've been having those 'dreams' too. Or rather, my Reading Steiner is settling down after two long years", he took a breath, then made eye contact with Kurisu, "I could never choose between my childhood best friend and the person I love the most. You're both an important part of my life and I couldn't make it without you. This said, I remember a time when you were left behind, Kurisu. When I left you behind. From the first moment, I regretted that choice and I hated every second of it. I hated waking up in the middle of the night thinking I heard your name being called, despised feeling the taste of your lips lingering on mine when you were no longer there and trembled at the cold in my very bones when there was no one to warm the very core of my being by simply existing", Kurisu's jaw was now slightly dropped, looking at the man beside her in awe. When did he grow this much? No, that was wrong: he had always been like this. Way too chuunibyou in his daily life, but ready to open up to her - and her only - and being so serious and emotionally sincere about everything he said. It was one of the main reasons why she never failed to believe him and why he never got tired of explaining her how he came from the future every time he time leaped.

"So, to answer your question: yes, I've regretted my choices more than once, because from there I couldn't imagine my life without you"

The same firm tone he used when he confessed to her back in the lab, two years before. When he thought she might disappear anytime, and gosh, he actually feared the same right

then, that Kerr's singularity could notice how beautiful the girl in front of him was and take her life, just like it happened before in other worldlines.

"That's so... I can't... why?", Kurisu tried to compose herself, averting her gaze in the vain hope of hiding her blush.

"Because I love you, my dearest assistant"

Kurisu swore she could feel her eyes twinkling, and before she could blame it on the moon reflecting itself, she found the will to fight back the butterflies in her stomach.

"Two years and you still go by that?", she tried to sound angry at the nickname given to her, in the hopes of concealing her true feelings.

"Two years and you're still my assistant"

Well, mission failed.

But then, at that time, she wouldn't have it any other way.

And so the way Okabe inched closer to kiss her while lightly pinning her against the wall was more than welcome, eyes fluttering shut and arms wrapping against his neck, pulling him closer as if she needed him to live. No, she did really need him to live, because else she wasn't sure what she'd do without her Altair.

Him, for his part, still felt like a mere mortal who had fallen in love with the brightest goddess the night sky had to offer, his Vega, always shining upon him as a beacon, signaling the way home whenever he was lost.

For once, Kurisu kissed back with all her might, each peck on her lips further erasing away any fear she might have had. Her left hand moved from his neck and traced the outline of his spine, making him shiver a bit, before resting on his lower back, sort of hugging him.

He was the one who took the initiative, right thumb on her chin and lightly pushing downward, and no further words were needed. He deepened the kiss, tongue darting on the inside and briefly fighting for dominance before the chestnut haired gave up, and she swore she felt him grinning against her mouth.

In retaliation, she pulled back from the kiss just enough to bite his bottom lip, earning a surprised yelp from him. Considered how much it took them to be comfortable with displays of affection, this was still something fairly new to expect from here, but she was a scientist at heart, so exploring other possibilities only enticed her.

She chuckled seeing the confused and almost betrayed expression on his face, and she was about to remark it when she felt her back fully pressed against the wall, his lips finding their place on her neck and resting there, lightly kissing a trail from her jawline to her clavicle, almost tickling, giving Kurisu the chance to lower her guard before suddenly biting down on her neck.

The scientist couldn't suppress a moan that escaped her lips, immediately regretting it as Okabe smirked against her skin, lightly sucking on the spot he had just bitten until it became of a purple-ish colour, the thought of marking her only spurring him forward.

"Okabe..."

Scared of having hurt her, he pulled back immediately with a panicked look on his face. He rested his hands on her shoulders and looked at her: her cheeks were of a bright red and her eyes were half-lidded and somewhat teary. This time, he had every reason to believe it was a good sign.

She gulped and moved her arms around him, pulling the raven haired close to her again, and his shoulders relaxed, free from the thought of having done something wrong.

There as in the rest of his life.

He resumed the kiss, the gentleness from mere minutes ago now long gone, as he roamed his hands more freely, lightly pressing his thumbs against her lower back, where the spine ended, slowly massaging that spot. When Kurisu moaned into his mouth, he suppressed a chuckle.

Jackpot.



Feeling bold, Okabe pulled her closer and resumed the biting along her jawline, only to put a leg in between Kurisu's thighs, pushing so she was lightly grinding on it.

She tried to hide her face in the crook of Okabe's neck, but he used his hands to firmly pin her against the wall, leaving her very little choice about how to suppress her noises other than biting her own lip.

She wasn't just going to give in so easily: moving so that they were properly kissing again, she ran an hand from his abdomen down to his trousers, quickly finding where the fabric stiffened and lightly pressing on it.

Okabe hissed through his teeth and pulled away from the kiss, but still kept her pinned, to look around: the darkness and the fact that they were pretty far away and hidden from anyone else gave him a mental green light, as he lowered his gaze to lightly untie the ribbon on Kurisu's kimono: not enough for it to be fully undone, just so he could dip a hand under the fabric and put it to good use.

Her hands jolted to his back and hair, holding onto them for dear life, fireworks followed immediately after, lighting the sky up of a thousand colours, and Kurisu was very thankful for the loud sound of the explosions.

She still put a hand flat on Okabe's chest and pulled him away, taking a second to catch her own breath before look at him.

He was a mess of ruffled hair and flushed cheeks, the faintest trace of sweat on his forehead and, the thing that stroke Kurisu's ego the most, ragged breath.

He was the first to ask.

"So... how about we call it a day and bring this to somewhere safer?"

She looked at him, both grinning, complicity in her eyes as she gave him the best answer possible.

"I think my hotel is closer by"

The both burst out giggling, the whole situation still surreal to them after so much time of longing for each other, as they composed themselves at best and walked away, holding hands

and looking at the night sky pierced by the last fireworks, never letting go of each other anymore.

What would be one of many perfect choices.

## End Notes

It's 5 AM where I live now, I've been writing this since 11 PM, please send help (and iced tea, thanks).

Jk. Thank you for reading this, comments and kudos are always appreciated!

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