"We can be both of God and Devil, since we are trying to raise the dead against the stream of time."
–Vermouth

On an island paradise, Shinichi's carefully maintained control over his life is lost. Even as he gets the leverage he needs to end the organization, Ran leaves him for another, and more people wring his secrets from him. The plans he sets in motion have unforeseen consequences, reaching beyond him to those he loves.

About the Title: The term 'Okiagari' (起き上がり) is usually used when talking about dolls that are weighted at one end. When they are rolled on the ground, they always end up sitting upright. This term can be used to describe any inanimate object that behaves in a similar manner. It's made from two verbs, 'okiru' (起きる) - 'to wake up' and 'agaru' (上がる) – 'to rise up under one's own power'.
Disclaimer: I claim no legal rights to the Detective Conan/Meitantei Conan/Case Closed franchise, and I'm making no money off of this work.

Beta Reader: Neyane

Warnings: Spoilers up to Manga File #871. Gore, death, a few original characters, and a zombie. The prologue is a good sample of the height that the gore and violence will reach in this story. If this prologue makes you uncomfortable, you probably shouldn't read on. It doesn't get much more dark and graphic than this, and there is no sexual violence in this story, but we're going to dark, scary places. You've been warned.
I awake. I arise.

Blood pools about my feet. It's mine. My body is in pieces, and I pick those up and stuff them back in. I can't do much about the blood though. The people around me – they know what I am. They wanted me like this, until they were trapped in a small room with me. No sympathy for the cowards. They fall apart and die as I take pieces I need. The rest are opened for their blood. There's one above, where I can't reach. The ash from its cigarette falls into the small room. Humans are dangerous creatures, more dangerous to themselves than anything else.

A soft breath, from the ground. One of them is still alive, and uninjured. It's small. Sometimes humans are small like this. Mostly they're big. The small ones aren't very dangerous. Held up to the faint light from above, it opens its eyes, and recognizes the human who had my body. This one liked the human. This one shared a name with the human. It looks like my old enemy, but only half of it. I tell it the name I shared with it, from long ago. It rejects it, because it's weak and missing half of itself. I hold the frightened halfling close, and make certain my only enemy and ally can't get away.

I fall. I sleep.

Hello fair readers! I'm dreamingfifi, and I'm a sometimes author and most of the time linguist. For author notes, I figured I'd do something a little different than what normally people do… which is chat about daily stuff or give translations. I'm going to talk about the linguistic concepts (plus some anthropology?) and fun language bits that I got to play with in writing this story!

A main reason for that is because this story is already finished. I wrote it for NaNoWriMo and am posting the chapters weekly. The normal chatter as the story grows before the readers' eyes wouldn't really work here. Also, I wrote this story with the idea that the reader wouldn't have to know any Japanese. I'm using no honorifics, no phrases, nothing that isn't clearly defined in the text itself. Therefore – no translation notes, which is actually weird for me because I normally write for the LotR fandom, and have extensive Elvish translations all over the place.

The whole, "I'm not going to use Japanese in this fanfic set in Japan" thing actually stems from a pet peeve of mine. See… I speak Japanese. I studied it for 5 years in college, even learned how to do some classical Japanese translation and interpreting grass writing and 变体漢文 texts (a specialty of my professor's). My audience, however, doesn't speak Japanese. I'm not going to confuse my audience by expecting them to know the complex honorific systems or casual Japanese phrases. It's like the first time I tried to watch a poorly translated Korean Drama. I had no clue what was going on much of the time because I was expected to have some competence in a language I'd never dealt with before. So, no, not doing that to my readers.
When I used Elvish in my stories in the past, it was with the intention of not being understood by the reader. The characters would be faced with a language they didn't know, and we'd be seeing that language from their perspective – a mass of unfamiliar letters and words, therefore confusing and frightening the characters and making it easier to be in the characters' shoes. I will use this tactic later on in the story, but not with Japanese because the characters all speak it.

I love linguistics and want to interest other people in it. Personally, I think it's very useful to learn about as a writer, possibly more than literary criticism. Understanding how human language works makes it easier to manipulate, and it makes it easier for me to manipulate my own influences to make a writing style that I want for a story. Maybe you'll find it helpful too?

また来週！(See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
Act 1 Scene 1 - 熊島 [Kumajima] ‘Bear Island’

Chapter by dreamingfifi

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two sets of footsteps echoed up the stairwell. One set light, but causing the stairs to creak. The other louder, but not making the stairs creak as much. Sonoko’s chipper voice was amplified by the narrow staircase. Deduction: Ran and Sonoko were arriving. Ran’s height and muscle mass made her deceptively heavy for her slim build, and her considerable strength and agility allowed her to walk nimbly, with little sound.

Another set of footsteps joined them, light, rapid, little squeaking in the stairs… Probably Masumi Sera. She’s smaller than Ran, and also had nimble feet from years of self-taught martial arts.

Conan looked up from his little kiddy homework, to watch the girls enter. First Ran and Sonoko, then a slightly winded Sera gave their hails and respectful “Pardon the intrusion”s.

Once shoes were removed and stowed away, Sonoko darted around giving out tickets from a wad of them in her purse. “Surprise!” she exclaimed. The tickets were too wide for train tickets, and the end of the Japan Air’s logo sticking out. One was sticking out of Ran’s bookbag, and Sera’s grin meant that Sera likely had received one too, though Sera grinning wasn’t exactly an unusual occurrence.

“Where are we flying to?” he asked.

She dropped one onto the table, and skipped over to Kogorou’s desk to drop off another. “We,” she paused, likely for dramatic effect, “are going to an island resort in Kumajima, for four days!”

Kumajima… there are hundreds of small islands in Japan. The name “Kumajima” sounded suspiciously like “bear island”, which hopefully wasn’t named for its inhabitants.

Kogorou looked up from the horse racing statistics in the newspaper, eyebrows raised. “Any particular reason this time?”

Sonoko laughed, not entirely convincingly. “Well, you see… it’s a light family and friends get together, and you guys are my friends. I wanted to take Ran, but she can’t leave Conan behind, and since Masumi doesn’t have any family with her, there needs to be some sort of chaperone for the lot of us troublesome girls.”

Kogorou made a vaguely affirmative grunt.

Sonoko spun around and grabbed Ran’s hands, doing a little dance. How much caffeine was in her system? She was normally quite expressive, but this was a little more hyper than usual.

“Is there something special happening at Kumajima?” Conan asked.

“Not really.” She chittered on, ignoring Conan. “You guys need to get packed! Remember, it’s a lot warmer down there, so light summer clothes and swimsuits are best! Also, we leave tomorrow, at 4 AM.” Before anyone could respond, she started pushing everyone out the door, humming.

Conan followed them up the stairs to the living quarters to get packed. He wondered if perhaps a
Kaitou KID heist had been announced there, but if that’d been the case, she’d probably have said so already.

He didn’t have much clothing, so his packing was finished quickly. He even slipped in extra batteries for his gadgets. He could hear Sonoko singing a nostalgic tune in Ran’s bedroom down the hall. He dragged his suitcase into the kitchen and listened to her for a while, then his stomach churned with fear. She was singing ‘Nanatsu no Ko’, the song that the Black Organization’s phone number was based on. He charged into Ran’s room. The door was open, and the girls were helping Ran pick outfits. Masumi was arguing for a loose pair of shorts that would facilitate more active adventures on the island, and Sonoko was waving about a bright sun dress. Ran was sitting between them, staring at her already stuffed suitcase, mumbling something about space for souvenirs. Finally she snatched them both from her friends’ hands, and stuffed them both in, and zipped the suitcase shut.

“Where have you heard that tune?” Conan asked, trying to stop his knees from shaking.

“I dunno,” Sonoko shrugged. “I’ve just heard it around, and it gets stuck in my head.” She pulled a low-cut shirt out of the closet and held it up. “But what about-“ Sonoko began.

“Nope, we’re done,” Ran snapped. Did Ran not want to go? “What’s special about that song, Conan?”

He couldn’t tell her that. Time to change the subject. “So,” Conan said from the doorway, regulating his breath. “Why are we going?”

The three girls exchanged glances. “I think it’s alright to tell him,” Masumi said, shrugging. “It’s not like some horrible secret or anything.”

Sonoko sighed, the over-the-top excitement gone. “You know how I’m the last Suzuki kid who hasn’t run away to be an artist? My grandparents are coming, and they’re really putting on the pressure to join the family business. They even have the university and the degree I’ll be getting planned out.”

Ran frowned. “They don’t seem to care about what Sonoko wants at all. Sonoko is going to tell them no, and we’re going to give her moral support, okay?”

Yikes, that didn’t sound fun at all. The old generations were weird about stuff like this, and with the wealth and power the Suzuki’s had, it was easy to see why they wanted to keep it in the family. It wasn’t a very good recipe for a happy family though. Conan gave a Kamen Yaiba salute and shouted, “You can count on me!”

That might have been a bit over the top, in hindsight. The girls all laughed at him and poked his cheeks, cooing about how cute little kids are.

Then they left to help Masumi choose a wardrobe for the trip, with Sonoko making the vigorous oath, “No one who sees you this weekend will have any doubt that you are a girl!”

Masumi looked a little uncomfortable at the idea, but didn’t protest.
In this chapter, you may have noticed that the girls gave a greeting upon entering the apartment. English speakers generally don’t come from cultures that have this tradition, at least not when entering a home along with the owner/person who lives there. The phrase that Sonoko and Sera would be saying is 「お邪魔します」 or “Ojamashimasu”, which means something akin to “Sorry to be imposing on you,” or “Pardon the intrusion.” It may have had a different meaning in the past, (“I’ll be bothering you!”) but it’s now just what you say when you enter another person’s home, like saying “thank you” or “you’re welcome” or “how do you do?” These phrases have lost their old meanings to become purely functional social phrases, independent of grammar or sentence structure.

You’ll also notice that they take off their shoes at the door – another common Japanese practice, but not one near as exclusive to Japan, because it’s often considered polite to not track mud all over another person’s house. I don’t know about the rest of the world, but up here in Montana, it’s common for the front door to open into a “mud room”, which will have a space to hang your coats and hats and take off your dirty shoes before entering a house. Growing up on the ranch, we had a large mud room that had heaters set up to dry mittens and boot linings on during the winter. Now that I’m living in a “big city” (what counts as one in Montana, anyways) I make do with a short corridor with a closet and welcome mat, since I don’t have to worry about people coming in covered in hay and manure. In Japan, this “mud room” is called a 「沓脱」 or “kutsunugi” (the whole entryway/foyer is called a 「玄関」 or “genkan”), which includes a 「靴箱」 or “kutsubako”, a rack or shelf for putting shoes away in.

Because I’m not using Japanese phrases all over the place, I’m trying to give the reader a sense of the setting by including Japanese customs instead. This is actually a running theme, and I’m planning on writing more about this.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
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After too little sleep and a groggy flight, Conan found himself staring miserably at the ocean. It was barely warm enough to play in yet. With all of the bustle and commotion the Suzuki family and their servants brought, his grand plans for reading his dad’s latest novel, which hadn’t been published yet, had to go by the wayside. At least it was the off-season, and there weren’t crowds of tourists yet. He observed Sonoko playing with the bracelets on her arms. She was on edge, and her grandparents hadn’t shown up yet. He shuffled down the beach, following the edge of the water.

The resort was a small, homey one, meant for five or six families at most, with a restaurant by the beach. The forested cove separated the resort from the small tourist-town nearby. The other side of the cove was wilderness, and the kind receptionist girl had cheerfully warned Conan to not wander in it without his “daddy”. Mr. Mouri was still sleeping off the booze he’d needed to survive the flight.

There was a tree with low-hanging branches that dipped into the sea in his way. He’d either have to get wet going around it or go through it, and he wasn’t wearing swim trunks. He slipped between the leaves, and found himself in a quiet, isolated natural room. He’d have to remember to get the novel out of his pack and go there when he wanted to read. He climbed over a big root, and his foot landed on something that was warm, soft, and definitely not sand. He lost his balance and fell back with a yelp on the sand. His voice wasn’t the only one either. A drowsy, dark-skinned head with sun-bleached, tangled hair popped over the wood and loomed over Conan.

“This is my spot. Go find your own!” He was a teen, roughly the age that Conan should be, but perhaps a little younger. He also had a touch of a foreign accent, though he didn’t look particularly foreign. Mixed descent, perhaps? His T-shirt was sunbleached, starting to form holes along its seams, and several sizes too large. It once had been green with a logo across the front, but that was long gone now. Oddly, other than the smell of seawater, there wasn’t much of a smell coming from him, and his worn out clothing wasn’t terribly dirty. He was wearing clothes ‘til they fell apart, but still keeping himself groomed somehow.

“I didn’t know anyone was here!” Conan snapped back, pulling himself up. His elbow stung, and he flinched.

The boy grabbed Conan’s arm, lifting it up to look at the injury. His own arms had tanlines where his shirt-sleeves ended. His hand was skinny, but not all skin and bone, indicating a small but adequate diet. “You’re a tourist, right?”

Conan nodded.

“You should get this looked at. Just remember that this tree is my bedroom, and don’t tell anyone that I’m sleeping here, okay?”

So he was sleeping here. Living on the beach, a homeless teen, that meant… “Why? Are you a runaway?”

The teen nodded. “Our secret, right?”
Couple that with the foreign accent and… “Are you an illegal?”

He froze and looked down, letting his hair fall over his eyes. Common body language of discomfort, distancing and hiding from one’s conversation partner. That could mean the next words out of his mouth would be lies. “Something like that.” These could also be a response to perceived aggression, coupled with his age, which meant probably running from abuse. “Why are you-

“Are you hiding from someone?”

The boy let go of his arm, and vanished behind the branch. Bingo, this one was easy to read.

“I won’t tell anyone if you let me come here and read,” he said, putting on his sugariest child-impression.

There was no response for a while, and Conan could hear the boy gathering things and putting them in a plastic bag. Finally he clambered over the root, a plastic trash bag with all of his belongings slung over his shoulder, stuffing an inhaler into his pocket with his right hand. “How did you know all that? I don’t recognize you. Have we met?”

Conan grinned confidently. “We haven’t met before. Your clothes and hair and the fact that you’re sleeping here tells me that you’re homeless. Your age tells me probably a runaway, and your accent tells me you’ve been learning Japanese informally through immersion for a few years. I’m Conan Edogawa, a 探偵!”

“A tantei?” the boy asked. “I don’t know that word.”

“In English, it’s ‘detective’,,” Conan said in his best English. As he’d thought, not a formal education in Japanese, and probably not someone who was listening to the news.

“A bit young, aren’t you?” the boy replied in English. The accent for the first part sounded American, for the shortened I and cropped T in ‘bit’, raised A, and heavy shwa in ‘young’, but the dropped R and distinct T and Y made it sound British.

Conan beamed his cheekiest kid-grin.

The teen stretched out his right hand – scars and callouses from handling rope – probably fishing nets, considering the setting. “I’m Areku. Pleased to meet you,” he said, switching back to Japanese. “Do you want me to leave, or will you let me stay here?”

“I’ll let you stay here. I just want a quiet place to read.”

“And you won’t tell anyone about me?”

“About that…” Conan smiled up at the teen. “Maybe if you told me about your problem I could help? I may know people who could help you, perhaps remove the danger or at least help you hide better.”

The boy shook his head. “You won’t tell anyone about me, right?” His voice was louder, more agitated.

“But-“ Conan started in his whiny-kid impression.

“They’d kill you!” he said in English, grabbing Conan’s shoulders to make him look directly at into his dark eyes. Then he switched back to Japanese, his voice low. This was fear, genuine fear and
anger, perhaps even terror. Though it was possible this was an attempt to scare him away from
needling for more information. Or both. “They’d take me back and kill you and anyone that they
think knows about me so please! Don’t tell anyone.”

So, not simple abuse. Had he been kidnapped? A kid escaped from a child-trafficking ring? If the
yakuza was involved, he probably had good reason to be scared. Bringing down a child-trafficking
ring would be a fun project during vacation.

Chapter End Notes

Have you ever spoken with someone who’s speaking English (or your language) as a
second language? If you have, you’ll notice that the times that they switch back to
their own language (called code-switching) aren’t when doing the easy phrases, like
“hello” or “What?” Code-switching usually happens when the speaker doesn’t know
how to say something, or isn’t confident that they know how to say something. So,
when I was writing this scene, I had Areku be competent on normal conversational
speech, but confused when it came to specialized vocabulary that he wouldn’t be
familiar with, like “private eye”. Private eyes aren’t usually hired to chase off
homeless kids, after all.

Another time that code-switching is common is when under stress. When Areku starts
panicking that Shinichi will blow his cover, he switches back to English. Luckily,
Shinichi is close to bilingual in Japanese and English (as evidenced by him being able
to identify James Black’s English accent) and is still able to understand him.

You can compare this to Jodie Starling and her attempt to fake difficulty speaking
Japanese. She uses a lot of English gap fillers (um, oh yes, okay), but she’s able to get
across complex concepts and use specialized difficult vocabulary with ease, which is
why Shinichi figures out she’s faking. Point to Goushou Aoyama for getting this right!

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
“Okay, I won’t tell anyone. But don’t the people around here already know you?”

Areku let go of Conan’s shoulders and slumped against the root. “You’re a really nosy kid. You’re not going to drop this, are you?”

Grinning, Conan shook his head.

“Fine.” The teen wasn’t meeting his eyes. He probably was going to try to lie again. “I’m an orphan, got adopted by some nasty, very powerful people who hurt me, and I ran away. If they find me I’ll have to go back, and I don’t want to. That’s all you need to know. Happy?”

The story was vague enough that it was probably true, but it was too vague to be of any use. Conan pouted. “I figured that part out already. What’s your original nationality?”

“Don’t you need to get your scrape looked at?” Areku snapped. Evading the question.

“You’re English is really hard to place. At first I thought you’re an American, but then it sounded more British. Where did you learn English?”

Areku grabbed Conan’s hand. “I’m either taking you back to the resort for some first aid, or to the doctor. The people at the resort have caught me sorting through their trash a few too many times, so they really don’t like me. The doctor is a nice person though, and she helps me out a lot. I’d rather take you there, if you don’t mind.”

“Okay,” Conan said, letting himself be walked into the forest. “Where did-“

“India, okay? I was born in a small village along the border between Pakistan and Tibet that doesn’t exist anymore, and I learned English in India. Happy?” He glanced sideways at Conan, observed him for a moment, then sighed. “You’re never going to be satisfied, are you?”

“Nope!” Cheeky-kid impression again. “Did you spend a lot of time in the US? My parents are there right now, and I go back and forth a lot. That’s why, when I speak English, it sounds American. England-English is a little difficult to understand sometimes.”

His eyebrows raised. “Your parents aren’t here?”

“Nope! I’ve been living with friends of the family for the past two years, actually. I’m with them here.”

“You should be careful,” Areku said suddenly. “Kids on their own are often seen as disposable, especially by people who aren’t directly related to them.”

“Ran and Uncle Kogorou would never dispose of me,” Conan retorted. “I’m Ran’s little brother now; and she’d never let Uncle Kogorou throw me away.”

“Okay, okay, sorry I said anything.” He’d effectively evaded the topic of himself, Conan realized. This one was easy to read, but slippery.
They stopped at a picket fence that hadn’t been treated by any stains or paint, and therefore had become quite broken down and clearly rotted through in places.

Areku crouched by a hole and twisted aside one of the panels to make enough room to squeeze through. He beckoned to Conan.

“There’s some things you should know, just to make sure everything goes smoothly. My name in town is Areku Kusanagi.” A common surname, coupled with a weird first name. Researching him would be difficult, especially if they didn’t know the Kanji, or Chinese characters, for his first name.

“Okay. I won’t say anything to get you in trouble.”

“Thanks.”

They crawled through the opening, into a small Japanese garden that was slightly overgrown. Dead leaves floated in the artificial pool.

“Areku,” Conan whispered. Areku was peeking through a window into the house. “Are you sure you’re allowed to do this?”

Areku smiled, and tapped on the glass. “Just checking to make sure she’s not busy.”

The window slid open with little noise, as though it had been opened often. A woman in her forties stuck her head out. “Alec dear? I thought I gave you enough medication for a whole month. Ah,” she noticed Conan. “Who’s this? Why don’t you introduce me?”

“Dr. Fumika Nishiyama, this is Conan Edogawa. He fell and hurt his arm at the beach.”

“Oh dear,” she said, sighing. “Come on in, and I’ll fix that up for you.” Her head vanished from Conan’s sight, and the window closed. Areku led the way to the back door.

“Alec dear?” Conan asked. “So Areku is Alec in English?”

Areku blushed. “Yeah, she knows my English name. She treats me like a son.”

This doctor was probably responsible for Areku’s good health and relative cleanliness. She may have been letting him wash his clothes and take bathes at the clinic, and slipping him the inhaler he needed.

The door slid open, and she waved them in. There was a staircase going up that was corded off, likely leading to her living quarters. She led them to a small room on the ground floor with a cot in it, and gathered some bandaids and disinfectant from a cupboard.

“So, Mr. Edogawa, have you met Alec before?” she asked smiling as she gently cleaned the scrape.

“He was amazing.” Areku interrupted. “He was able to figure out all about me just by seeing me for a few minutes! He’s a tantei.”

“Oh really?” her eyebrows arched. “Boy, you know how to keep secrets, right?” Her tone was suddenly sharp.

Conan nodded. “Areku told me I shouldn’t tell anyone about him, so I won’t. I’m really good at keeping secrets.”

“Be careful about being too nosey. That can get you into trouble.”
He wasn’t certain if that was a threat or not, but Alec said, “Don’t worry about me Dr. Fumika. He’s just a little kid, and I’m letting him hang out in my tree in exchange for his silence.”

“I already know about being careful where I stick my nose,” Conan interjected. “Whatever it is really scares Areku, so I know it should scare me too.”

The doctor began applying the antiseptic. “Good. Then maybe you could convince this fine young man to let me make him my son?”

Areku looked down, and didn’t say anything.

“I agree,” Conan said. “He should live with you. He’d be safer that way. Whoever is looking for him won’t think to look in families; they’ll probably look for people living alone. Also, he could help out with the things that make your back hurt.”

Areku bolted and vanished through the hole in the picket fence.

Dr. Nishiyama sighed. “He’ll come around eventually. As soon as he figures out they aren’t after him anymore.”

“Do you know who they are?” Conan asked.

“No,” she said. “He never told me. I think though,” she paused. “I think I shouldn’t tell you anything else. If he gets too frightened, he’ll pull a vanishing act for me too.” She laid the bandaid over the scrape, and patted it. “All done. Do you know your way home?”

Conan nodded. “If I go through the back fence, I can follow the trail to the tree-house, and from there I’ll follow the shore back to the resort.”

“I’ll lead him back,” Areku said from the doorway. His eyes were a little red, and he kept them fixed on the ground.

“Good. Don’t let him get lost!”

“Yes ma’am,” he said quietly, and held out his hand for Conan to grab.

As they ambled through the woods, taking a different shortcut to the restaurant, Conan tried to break the silence. “Sorry, if I pushed too much.”

“It’s okay. I know you just want to help.”

“I just don’t know why you won’t move in with that nice lady. She likes you a lot.”

“Truth is,” Areku said, “I’d really like to stay here, and live with her as her son. But I can’t stay anywhere for too long. If I did, I’d be putting her in danger. Also there’s all of that paperwork, and I’d have to explain where I came from. That alone might alert them to where I am.”

“You think they’re in the government?” Conan asked.

“I don’t know that, but being in the government’s structure makes it easier for them to find me. If I’m homeless, and not part of the system, I don’t have a paper trail for them to find me.”

Conan looked down, studying the ground, wishing he had a soccer ball to help him muddle through his emotions. He could have done something like that too. Perhaps Ran and everyone else he loved and cared for could be a lot safer. But, he couldn’t passively hide. He had to take the offensive. If they weren’t stopped, they’d keep tearing apart people’s lives, and there was no way
he could live with that. “Isn’t that the same as letting them win?” Conan turned his face up, looking right at the teen’s brown face. “What if they hurt other people, because you don’t do anything?”

Areku shook his head, eyes also downcast. “I don’t have that kind of power. Besides, governments and crime syndicates, there isn’t much difference between them. It’d be just as dangerous for me to fall into their hands. It’s better for everyone if I live quietly, out of sight.”

“That makes no sense.” Conan kept staring up at the teen’s face, but Areku kept his eyes averted. Conan was getting angry. “How could it be better for everyone if they’re still hurting people?”

“It’s not your decision. You know nothing about my situation.”

“Then explain it!”

“No.” Areku refused to speak the rest of the way back.

Chapter End Notes

I love naming things. I have this huge website devoted to it: realelvish dot net. There’s a story behind every name I come up with.

アレク - Areku. If you’ve heard a lot of Japanese names, you may have noticed that this one sounds a little off… a little weird. That’s because it’s not a Japanese name, as we discovered in this scene. Areku started out as Alex, which is really difficult for Japanese speakers to wrap their tongues around. It’d end up sounding something like this: Arekkusu. So, Alex cut the S off the name, making it Alec. But, there was another force at play – Alec’s own lack of competency in Japanese. Being new to it, he couldn’t hear the double consonant (something that English lacks), and he said his name “Areku” instead of “Arekku”. After a while, it stuck.

草薙 - Kusanagi. Generic. Bland. Common. Not as bad as Nakamura, but pretty boring. Kinda like “Anderson”. He chose this name after being much more fluent in Japanese, probably off of someone he met while bumming rides from island to island. Ironically, it means something like “mowing down the enemy like grass”. Not a fitting name for this cowering child, but definitely something appealing to a teenage boy’s desire to be badass.

西山 – Nishiyama. It means “western mountain”. Her family is from the mountains that form the spine of mainland Japan. She moved down south to the islands after going to school.

文香 - Fumika. Because she was the second child, her name has “fu” in it, a play on the Japanese number “futatsu”. It’s common for Japanese names to have puns based on their birth order or their date of birth. You’ll notice this in the name “Shinichi” too. He’s his parents’ first child, and his name has the number 1 – “ichi” in it.

A number rarely found in Japanese names is the number 4, because it’s considered unlucky. This is because one of the pronunciations of the number is “shi” which sounds like the word for “death” – 死. I don’t know if this is intentional or not, by Shinichi’s name can be a pun for “death-day” (or “fourth day”), seeing as his birthday
is May 4th), if you divide the words “shi-nichi” instead of “shin-ichi.” One pun I know is intentional is having Shinichi be read as “one truth”, which matches the character nicely.

You also won’t see the number 9 (ku) referenced in names often, because it sounds like the word for “suffering” - 苦.

Next time you’re reading/watching a piece of Japanese literature, have a little fun and research the names. You’ll never know what crazy layers of puns you’ll find!

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Conan was late for lunch, and after the past few weeks, or rather, the past two years, they knew better than to ignore it.

“Conan! Where are you?” Ran and Sonoko called. Their voices together made their call the loudest, and first that Conan and Areku heard.

Kogorou Mouri’s call was a little more colorful, but held the same meaning.

It sounded like everyone was out searching for Conan. They aimed for Ran and Sonoko, who were looking in the garden behind their cottage.

“I found him!” Ran spotted them first, and ran over to meet them. “There you are! And who is this?”

He grinned up to Ran, turning his child-act up a few notches. “Ran, this is Areku. I fell, and he took me to the doctor, so we should give him lunch!” He showed off the big bandaid on his elbow.

“You took Conan to the doctor?” Ran asked. “Thank you so much!”

Areku looked bashfully at the ground and said, “It wasn’t any trouble. You don’t need to repay me.”

“I disagree,” Sonoko said, grabbing Areku’s hand. “Come on, everyone’s already waiting.” She started dragging him towards the restaurant.

“He-HERE? There’s no way… I can’t…” Areku stuttered, his Japanese failing him. Ran took up the rear-guard, and together they marched barefooted, raggedy Areku into the fancy restaurant, and sat him down between them. Conan took the seat on the other side of Ran. The waiters, who were busy seating the rest of the group gave him icy glares. “They don’t like me here!” Areku whispered.

“I’m Sonoko Suzuki, and you are?” Sonoko asked, leaning closer.

“Umm…” he turned red under his tan. “I’m Areku Kusanagi.” His voice was almost a whisper.

“So how did you save Foureyes?” She got a little closer, and Areku leaned a little away.

“I just led him to the doctor and led him back here, that—that’s all.”

“Give the poor boy some space,” Sonoko’s mother barked. “He’s a small town boy; he isn’t used to Tokyo girls.” Her tone shifted dramatically into a soft, welcoming lilt as she addressed Areku. 

“We’re very glad that you looked after little Conan. He always manages to find himself some sort of trouble.”

“You’ve got that right,” Kogorou said loudly from the other end of the table. “He’s been shot, blown up, kidnapped… all within the last year!”

His dark eyes went wide. “Really? Being a detective must be really dangerous!”
Ran sat down on the other side of Sonoko, her new place setting ready.

“Normally Ran does the rescuing,” Sonoko giggled. “She’s like his personal bodyguard! She’s a Karate champion, and she’s won all kinds of awards!”

“You’re exaggerating,” Ran said, smiling.

One of the waiters took Mr. Suzuki, Sonoko’s father, aside and whispered something to him. Areku noticed, and made himself smaller.

“Is it true that you’re homeless, boy?” he asked, and the entire table fell silent, and stared at Areku. His sun-bleached, tattered clothing and messy hair suddenly seemed important.

“If… if you want me to go…” Areku said, not looking up, tensing.

“No, we don’t want you to go,” Mr. Suzuki said, sitting back in his chair. He tapped the waitress and said, “Tell them to get a cot ready for this young man. He can sleep in Mr. Mouri’s room along with young Conan.”

Areku jumped up and bowed, saying, “Thank-you very very very much sir!”

“Sit down boy, and order something to eat,” Mr. Suzuki said, resting his hands on his large stomach.

He sat down quickly, blushing even more. A frowning waitress handed him a menu with a sharp “Here.” He looked at it a moment and set it down, not saying anything.

“What’s wrong?” hissed Ran into his ear.

“I can’t…” he mumbled, hunching over, “…read it.”

“Oh my gosh,” Sonoko said quietly, her hand over her mouth. “I didn’t even think about that. You don’t go to school, do you?”

He shook his head.

“Well then, we’ll read it too you. Problem solved!” Sonoko grinned. Ran put the menu back in his hands. The two of them leaned over a madly blushing illiterate Areku, explaining the menu and giving their recommendations.

After ordering, Areku held onto the menu, and started asking about the kanji readings. “That really says, ‘Lightly roasted chicken with bamboo’?” he pointed to the phrase he was referring too. “Because that looks like ‘the garden bird is burning bamboo’ to me.”

“You can read Kanji?” Sera piped up, brows furrowed. “I thought you couldn’t read?”

He shrugged. “I can read Kanji – in Chinese, not Japanese. My Chinese isn’t Mandarin either – it’s a dialect that I’ve never seen anyone else outside of China speak, so I think it’s non-standard.”

“You come from Tibet, right? Did you learn Chinese from the soldiers?” Conan asked, thinking of the history of the region.

The teen bit his lip, thinking. “The soldiers didn't teach us anything. There was a school that we all had to go to. The teachers were trying to teach us Mandarin, but they themselves didn't speak it natively, so I learned that strange Chinese instead.”
“So when did you learn English?” Conan asked.

“He speaks English too?” Sera asked, studying him.

“Yeah,” Areku self-consciously fiddled with the corner of his napkin. “We ran away to the south, in India, and we learned English at the orphanage, because rich foreigners would want to adopt kids who could speak English.”

“So, how did you end up in Japan?” Sonoko asked.

He winced. “Let's talk about something else.”

Sera caught Conan's eye and gave a perplexed frown. Conan nodded.

Areku went back to amusing his hosts by reading the Kanji in Chinese, the way he knew them, then retranslating the phrases into Japanese. Their end of the table was quite lively, and the meal lasted for a whole two hours. By the end, they’d gotten used to the scraggly teen.

Looking at the skill that Areku had for manipulating the group, and endearing himself to them, Conan figured he was witnessing Areku’s survival strategy. Be non-threatening, make them feel in control, make them laugh… make them want to keep you around them. Conan must have disrupted his strategy by frightening him earlier. It was probably second nature to him now. First nature would be hiding.

After dinner, Sonoko’s father took the boy aside and spoke to him quietly, with a concerned expression on his face. The teen kept his head bowed, staring at the floor, and eventually nodded. Mr. Suzuki tried to give him a hearty clap on the shoulder, but the teen flinched away from it, and scurried to catch up with Masumi, who was waiting at the door.

“I'm not a charity case,” Conan heard him grumble in English, but he kept his cheerful expression on.

The sun had heated up the air quite a bit, and the humidity outside the air conditioned building was like stepping into a sauna. “This is soooo nice,” Sonoko said, “going outside and actually feeling warmer. I bet we could even go swimming!”

Areku laughed. “The water is still pretty cold. The currents here come from the north, so the water isn’t as nice as the air, at least not until summer.”

“Then we should go shopping!” Sonoko countered. “You know your way around town, right? You can show us where everything is, and we can buy you some new clothes…”

Areku scowled. “I don’t need any new clothes. I don’t need any things either. Just because I don’t have much doesn’t mean I need more.”

“Oh,” said Ran. “Did we insult you? Sorry, that wasn’t what we meant. We just want to hang out with you and get to know you more, and thank you for helping Conan.”

“I know,” he sighed. “You’ve already thanked me for helping Conan with the meal and bed. Over thanked, I think.” The girl’s faces drooped, and Areku quickly said, “But I do want to hang out and get to know you better! Just not in a way that ends up with me having more than I can carry in my bag.”

Sonoko looked puzzled. “How to socialize with someone that doesn’t involve buying things…”
While you think on that, I'll grab my bag and stow it in the room you want me in,” Areku said, starting off at a brisk jog towards the shoreline.

“Wait up!” Sera called, “I have some questions to ask you.”

“Me too!” said Conan, starting up after them.

Once they were out of earshot of the others, Areku slowed to a walk and let them catch up to him.

Conan looked up at Sera, the two of them building a strategy on the spot.

“You know,” Sera began. “The Chinese government has been mandating the use of Mandarin Chinese for schooling, even forcing Uyghers and other ethnic minorities to learn it. They bring in teachers from the big cities in the East, where they speak Mandarin natively.”

“Not to mention, the Chinese government simplified the Kanji to make them easier to read and write. Those words would all have been unintelligible to him,” Conan added.

“Why would he lie about the place he came from?” Sera wondered out loud.

“Maybe because I don't want people to know where I came from,” Areku said. He was hiding his eyes again, and his fists clenched. Fear and anger… mostly fear. They were breaking through his defenses. Time to close the noose.

“What would the harm in it be? If it was painful, I'd understand not wanting to talk about it, but why replace one sad story with another sad story?” Conan asked.

“Unless, knowing that sort of information is dangerous…” Sera guessed, stroking her chin as though trying to puzzle out some great mystery.

“Or he just wants to make fun of us,” Conan said, crossing his arms and shaking his head.

Areku made a strangled growl and spun around to face them. “What the hell do you want from me?”

“You’re in some kind of trouble,” Conan looking out of the corner of his eye to Sera.

Taking the cue, Sera added, “We’re detectives, and we can help.”

“Now there’s two of you?” Areku teared at his hair. “Are all Japanese kids obsessed with being detectives?”

“Don't change the subject. What sort of trouble are you in?” Sera said, looking him directly in the eye.

He evaded her glare, then spun and broke into a sprint towards his tree. Suddenly he ducked into the thick forest and vanished behind the veil of vegetation.

“Dammit,” Sera cursed. “No choice but to follow him in there. Did you get an idea of its layout when he led you through last time?”

Conan shook his head. “I could recognize the path he took me on, but I don't know much else. It’s dense in there.”

They slipped into the forest, instantly being swallowed by the trees, losing all of the landmarks. The sun was lost to them, the canopy was so thick. There was a game trail where Areku had run
into the forest. A few yards in, and it split into two trails, with no obvious signs pointing to the right path.

“Shall we split up? We can’t get too far without hitting the town or the road, so getting completely lost is unlikely. We’ll be able to cover more ground,” Sera suggested.

“Sounds like a plan.” He walked to the left, and Sera walked to the right.

A few twists and turns in and a newly bent branch told Conan he was probably going to right direction. Then a quiet whine, like a puppy dog confused over why its master was angry, confirmed Conan’s suspicions.

Areku was slumped on the ground at the base of a tree. Spotting Conan, he said softly, “When people know something, their behavior changes. They act in accordance to that knowledge, and that alone is enough of a pattern for them to find me… and kill… everyone…”

This wasn’t a normal crime syndicate. Normal syndicates could be bloody, but killing everyone would mean they wouldn’t have people to do business with, which meant their goal wasn’t business. A cult perhaps? “No one is that powerful, not without making a lot of enemies just as strong.”

“They said they had people in the government.”

“I could say I was the Emperor of Japan, but that wouldn’t make it true.”

“They were able to catch other people who ran away and kill them. Then they’d put their kids’ to work in their place.”

This pattern sounded suspiciously like the story of Shiho Miyano. It was worth the guess, at least. “These people, do they wear black?”

The teen looked up, his brows furrowed. “I hadn’t really noticed any sort of color scheme. Why do you ask?”

Conan put back on his kid-face and smiled, “The people you were describing reminded me of some cases I saw when watching Uncle Mouri. They get rid of anyone they suspect of knowing anything, even business partners. Their hitmen wear black, but their spies don’t, at least not often. Their scientists, at least Sherry,” the teen winced at the name, “wears red.”

Areku finally met Conan’s eyes. They weren’t focused on Conan but on some distant, horrible memory. “This Mouri person, he lets you know these things?” His jaw didn’t move much when he talked. He’d tensed up. This guy was definitely connected to them somehow.

“He doesn’t know the cases are connected. I’m doing the investigation on my own. You don’t have to blame him,” Conan said quickly.

“Then what did they do to you?” The words were sharp, rapid, designed to turn the conversation around and distract him, make him stop needling.

Match this aggression, with aggression. Make him break, it doesn’t matter if he’s hurt, make him confess. He knew the name Sherry. He was connected to the Black Organization somehow. This chance couldn’t be let go of, before the teen ran away again and vanished without a trace.

“They tried to kill me with Sherlock.” If he knew about APTX 4869, and its nickname, derived from the Japanese pronunciation of “Sherlock” – “shyaarokku” and those numbers – “shi-ya-ro-
ku”, then he would have to have been intimately involved in its making.

The teen stared at him, eyes wide, mouth slightly open, body ridged. Confusion, no probably terror.

“You recognize it, don’t you? Which means you’re probably part of the team that developed it.”

“Alive.” The boy voice was shaking. “You’re still…”

“They must really mess with their scientists heads.”

“Wrong.” His voice was small. “I wasn’t making… I’m not…” he said in English, his Japanese failing him.

Conan frowned. They liked to isolate their scientists. Sherry had been raised in the organization for the sole purpose of working on their project. Another teen scientist like her wasn’t impossible, though this guy hadn’t seemed particularly intelligent. “Then what are you?”

The teen started shaking. His eyes weren’t focused anymore, and the blood was draining from his face. His lips turned the color of the bloodless flesh, a pale yellow. This was getting dangerous. He might faint here, in the middle of the woods, and Conan couldn’t carry him.

He stepped forward cautiously, and grabbed Areku’s arm. Areku shuddered and shook off Conan’s hand. “They won’t find you. Tell me everything you know about them, and you can stay hidden. Just give me a way to contact you when I’ve rid the world of them.”

The color was returning to his face, and he’d started breathing again. “If you fail, you’ll be a lab rat. If they find out that it worked…”

“What worked? It’s a poison, isn’t it?”

The teen shook his head. “They want to make people like me.”

“Like you? How?” Conan recalled something that Haibara had said, about never wanting to make a poison.

“Immortal.” That was absurd. Then again, Vermouth had played the part of both Sharon and Chris Vineyard, and he and Haibara had become children again. He didn’t understand the science necessary to believe this claim. He’d have to ask Haibara later. The teen drew his knees to his chest and covered his head with his palms, the fetal position. He seemed genuinely in distress, and didn’t seem to be lying. Conan felt a pang of guilt. He’d have to help Areku feel safe again, perhaps hide him in Oosaka, with Hattori. Keeping such an important piece close at hand, in Tokyo, would probably be more dangerous, especially if they knew his present face and appearance.

Not hearing a response, Areku continued. “You could shoot me in the head, or chop my head off, and my pieces would come back together. I’ve been living like this for thousands of years, and every time I’m found, many people die. I can’t be found. I can not be found. And now you also…” his voice shook “…can not be found.” He suddenly lunged at Conan, knocking him to the ground. In one smooth motion, he was on top of the little chest, hand clamped over Conan’s nose and mouth.

Conan was too shocked to struggle at first. This guy had seemed so passive, so weak, that he could turn violent so quickly hadn’t occurred to him.

The teen started speaking. His words came out too fast, making his Japanese slightly slurred and
his English accent more apparent. “You need to disappear, like I have. I’ll show you how to live between the cracks. It’ll be really hard, but you have to do it, because your existence alone means they’ll keep trying, keep killing, keep fighting for this. They must not know it worked yet, which is good, that makes it easier.” Conan choked on sweating palm on his face, trying to squirm out of its grasp. The teen was suffocating him, believing that he could survive it.

Chapter End Notes

Japanese is classified as a Topic-Comment language. This means that you start a sentence by saying what you’re talking about, then the rest of the sentence. We do this in English sometimes too, generally framed something like this:

In March, the snow melts into a vast sea of mud.
My friend Cait, she speaks Mandarin Chinese.
About going to work tomorrow, can’t we call in sick?
As for me, I like linguistics.

But, this isn’t the primary structure of a sentence in English. Instead, we have “Subject Verb Object” and stick to that most of the time. In Japanese, you’d use a Topic-Comment structure first, in a way that would sound awkward directly translated into English.

Both of these, for example, would be a translation of “I go to college.”

私は大学に行く。 (Watashi-wa daigaku-ni iku.) – As for me, I go to college.
大学は私が行く。 (Daigaku-wa watashi-ga iku.) - About college, I go to it.

These sentences are perfectly grammatical in Japanese, but weird sounding in English. To make the dialogue sound more like a translation from Japanese, I applied Topic-Comment structures where I could without sounding awkward. See if you can spot any!

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
He’d pushed the teen too hard. Now Conan’s own flight or fight response kicked in. His heart 
hammered in his chest, and he gnashed and scratched at the hand clamped over his mouth. Not 
good, he couldn’t get enough air. Not good! Calm down, think… He had to get out, had to explain 
before he was kidnapped, or worse, killed by someone who thought he could survive it. Trying to 
scratch and bite the hand wasn’t doing anything. The guy didn’t remove his hand, even when 
Conan tasted blood. Time to change tactics. Target the source of the hand, not the hand itself.

He dug his own hand into the dirt, and threw a wad of soil and leaves into Areku’s face. The young 
man snarled and tried to paw it out of his eyes. His grip on Conan’s face loosened enough for 
Conan to shout, “I’m not immortal!”

Sera must have been using the sounds of their voices to find her way to them, because she sprinted 
towards them through the forest like a charging boar. She grappled Areku off of Conan, the force 
of impact sending them both sprawling on the forest floor. Then she was on him again, wrestling 
him for control over his arms.

“You!” the boy’s the hissed reply was interrupted with a short scream into the forest floor as Sera 
twisted his arms sharply into a hold behind his back and pushed him down.

Threat eliminated, she panted and looked up at Conan, cocky, toothy grin in place. “Jeeze, Conan, 
I can’t leave you alone for five seconds!”

Conan paused, catching his breath before explaining it. “I said they tried to kill me with it, I didn’t 
say that I stopped aging or couldn’t be killed!” He scowled at his attacker, who’s unfocused, 
tearing eyes left trails of mud on his cheeks.

“You’ll have to tell me more about this,” Sera said smirking at Conan as his gingerly pushed 
himself into a sitting position. He could taste Areku’s blood on his teeth. He spat it out.

“Will you behave?” Sera asked Areku, giving his arm an extra twist.

He nodded dumbly. She released his arms, letting him carefully shake the pain out of his limbs. 
Then she let him sit upright, keeping one hand on the teen’s right, ready to put him down again if 
he made a wrong move.

“Then you,” Areku tried to wipe the dirt out of his eyes with his hand. It was the one Conan had 
bitten, leaving a smear of blood across his face. “You didn’t even take it? Or you did, and it didn’t 
have any effect?”

Conan gathered one of his flip-flops that had escaped in the short scuffle and put it on. It took a 
few tries, because adrenaline was making his hands shake. “I’ve grown two inches in the last year. 
I’ve almost died a few times, so I’m pretty sure I’m still mortal.”

The ‘teen’ was still trembling. “I’m an idiot. It’s a wonder they haven’t found me already.”

“Good question,” muttered Sera. “Why haven’t they found you already? And you Conan, you’re
like him?"

Conan sighed… sometimes one has to give information to get it, and this guy wasn’t exactly the trusting type. Sera probably had the good sense to not blab, but she’d already heard so much already… “I’m nothing like him. It changed my appearance instead of killing me. I’m hiding right under their noses.”

“You’ve been able to figure out the basic structure of the organization, and you even know the code name of their miracle drug, and the codename person who is in charge of developing it. All this by watching Detective Mouri?” Areku asked.

Conan and Sera snorted. “Conan’s been solving all of Mr. Mouri’s cases, then tricking him into figuring them out.”

Areku was giving him the “What are you?” look of astonishment that Conan loved squeezing out of the people foolish enough to underestimate him. This time he could go in for the kill. If Areku flipped out again he had a practitioner of Jeet Kune Do to control him.

“If you decide to help me take them down, I won’t be in contact with you directly. If I ever do need your help, I’ll send some disguise experts I know to keep you completely hidden. How about it?”

“You have disguise experts on call?” Sera asked, gaping at Conan.

“Yeah, my mom.”

She stifled a giggle.

The ‘teen’s shoulders slumped. “You’re not giving me a choice, are you?”

“We already know enough to get ourselves killed several times over,” Conan pointed out. “You might as well give us something to use against them.”

He took a deep breath, and shakily let it out again. “If you can keep their hands off me, and keep me from the government, and swear that you also will only ever treat me like a normal human… I’m in. I’ll tell you everything I know.”

The detectives exchanged eager grins. Perfect. But where to start? How would this idiot know what would be useful? He wouldn’t. He had an average intelligence at best; well-practiced at manipulating conversations but not at avoiding traps or thinking strategically. “Start at the beginning of your interactions with them, and tell us everything you can think of,” Conan suggested. They could work from there and if anything stuck out, they could expand on it.

Areku lay the rest of the way down, the dried leaves crunching under the weight of his human form. Eyes closed, as though watching it happen before him again, he started to speak. Many of the Japanese words he didn’t know, so he switched back and forth continually between Japanese and English.

“I’d been buried and asleep for over 50 years when someone got the bright idea to redevelop an abandoned town in Yorkshire, and turn it into a gawdy attraction of some sort. When they dug me up, no one knew what to do with me. I didn’t know anything about the wars that had happened or how to use modern technology. I couldn’t speak right; I didn’t know how to act; I was pretty helpless. My strange case made a stir in the newspapers, and a wealthy family, the Morrison’s, took interest and decided to adopt me. They had me tutored privately, and taught me how to live in the modern era.
“They figured out something wasn’t quite right about my body after a few years. I should be in the midst of a growth spurt, but I never gained an inch. It started with a few visits to their private physician. They had dozens of tests run, but they couldn’t find the problem. They started keeping me under guard, and never showed my face publically. Then they brought in a scientist who treated me strangely. He was from Japan, and I couldn’t understand what he said most of the time. He’d have me knocked out, and when I’d wake up weeks or months later, I’d have new scars. One time I wasn’t allowed to awaken for an entire year, and my right arm was missing. I knew by then that they’d figured me out and weren’t going to be benign about it. I started begging my adoptive family to make the experiments stop, but instead, they stopped coming to see me. I don’t know if they thought of me as human anymore, didn’t care, or had handed me off to someone else.

“One day, I woke up and the staff had changed, and the sadist was gone. My arm was back in its place, and I was whole again. I asked what happened, but no one told me anything. They treated me more kindly, and made me have some hope I could get out… but the experiments didn’t stop. The leaders of this research were a Japanese-American husband and wife team, Mr. and Mrs. Miyano, and there were several different groups working under them. I also overheard them talking about their findings. They didn’t try very hard to hide their research from me, and even tried to justify it. They said that if they could figure out what made me the way I was, they could save millions of lives. They spoke of a new plague that attacked the immune system, and how I could be the key to stopping it. The medicine they made from me could be the silver bullet that pierced the heart of disease. Their words sounded so pure and righteous; I was swayed for a while.

“The thing that kept me from fighting back the most was this young woman they brought in. She’d had leukemia, and the treatment had destroyed her bone marrow. They had taken some of my bone marrow, and given it to her. Her name was Samantha, and she was a symbol of what could be accomplished by researching me. She came to visit me all the time, to cheer me up, to help me through painful procedures. Eventually, I noticed that she wasn’t aging normally. She’d been 19 when we first met, and seven years later, she looked like she was barely reaching 21. I asked her about it one day, when we were alone. She told me that she was the only successful test subject. There had been dozens more, and they all died, just from having my blood circulate in their bodies. She was the only one that they had introduced me to. I begged her to help me get out, but she said she couldn’t. Instead, she snuck about and told me more about what they were up to.

“I found out that during some of my longer stretches of unconsciousness, they’d been killing me over and over, trying to find what made me able to recover. They did it so often, they came up with some nicknames for my death cycle, like Zombie Time and Hibernation. Zombie Time is particularly violent, so run away as fast as you can if you ever see it. The sadist probably triggered it by accident and got himself and his assistants killed. When I was awake, they called me Ambrosia to my face, and The Humanoid to my back. Most of them didn’t seem to like me much. They never talked to me. Mrs. Miyano gave me comic books to read.

“One day, under the influence of a lot of painkillers, I told the Miyano’s I didn’t want to be experimented on any more. I vaguely remember tearing at Mrs. Miyano’s shirt, begging her to let me go. They vanished shortly after that, and Samantha stopped visiting me. People I didn’t know came. They dragged me to the basement, shoved me into a water tank and shot me in the face. I didn’t wake up until the Miyano’s daughter, the one you called ‘Sherry’, took up her parent’s research, years later.

“The first time I saw her, I’d been drained of a lot of blood and was too weak to talk to her. She was still a girl. Under her lab coat, she was wearing a bright red dress, and she had sparkling clips holding back her light brown hair. She sat down beside me and talked at me for a few hours. It was really nice.
“She had the same naive idealism that her parents did. She really believed that she could make some kind of panacea from me. She was so young. That’s probably why she was so easily manipulated. Her fascination with the puzzle I was dehumanized me, and let her keep up what she did. She said that the key wasn’t my zombieness or my hibernation, but my normal self. Her new effort was called 4869, a pun on ‘Sherlock’. After a few months, she told me that she’d found a way to synthesize the compound without taking my blood. She told me I was saving the world. She told me that they were going to let me live as a normal boy now.

“She lied. Or they lied to her. It’s hard to tell. They took me to the basement and put me back into the tank of water. The next time I woke up, Samantha was carrying me on her back up a flight of metal stairs. The walls and stairs pitched and groaned, and I remember her strides rattling the steps. We were on a ship. She snuck me out onto the deck, and sat with me for a while, the way we used to. She told me about being an actress; about getting married, making a happy life for herself, and having to pretend she was her own daughter. She told me that they were never going to let me go. Then she said good-bye and threw me overboard. That was the last that I saw of them, until I met you.”

Areku’s voice had grown hoarse.

Conan contemplated the story for a while, and Sera studied Conan. Areku’s amount of disassociation with the violence that had happened to him was disturbing. If he’d really lived as long as he said, and really suffered as much as he claimed, then this was to be expected. But, it could also be explained by him making it up on the spot. This had to be verified. He had to think about the people and events Areku was talking about, and if they made sense with what he knew.

One thing he did know: this guy had something to do with the organization. Areku hadn’t seen the criminal side, but was aware of it, and afraid of it. They’d probably threatened him, told him they could find him no matter where he hid. They likely had also told him the same experiments would happen to him if he sought protection from the police. That might be true too. Isolation of their assets was their MO.

He knew the name Miyano, and his description matched their timeline, what little of it he’d learned from Haibara. Also, the woman he called ‘Samantha’, could that be…

“What was Samantha’s codename?”

Areku frowned. “Vermouth. She never told me what they had her doing though. I don’t know what being an actress has to do with what they were doing with me.”

Pieces started coming together, and fast. Vermouth hadn’t told anyone about the de-aging effect of APTX 4867, and deliberately protected him and Ran at least twice, that he knew of. This meant she was actively going against the organization. She was probably doing counter-intelligence, and keeping the organization away from Areku as well. Then her hatred for Sherry ran much deeper than just Sherry, but all of the suffering that her family had caused.

“Did you hear the name ‘Gin’ at all?”

The teen squinted, like he was trying to peer into the past. “He’s one of the ones who earned a codename. I never met him formally, while I was awake. I heard rumors that he’d come and talk to me when I was Zombie. He scared everyone.”

“How did he do that? Aren’t you supposed to run if you see Zombie?”

He unconsciously rubbed his wrist, like he was trying to massage away an old ache. “It’s really
strong and can’t feel pain, but it can’t break through heavy chains or concrete walls. If you chain me down well enough before making Zombie come out, you’re safe as long as you don’t let it go.”

The image of someone strapping a zombie down and interrogating it popped into Conan’s head, and he stifled a giggle. “Zombie is sentient enough to talk to?”

Areku shrugged. “I’ve never talked to it myself… but people have told me that. A few cults have grown up around crazy people talking to it. There are some people that it talks to and doesn’t kill. They usually stick around and help me out after meeting it. They tell me that they are reincarnations of my older brother and the Shaman who made me the way I am, but I don’t know if that’s true, or if it just chooses people it thinks would want to help me. I think it thinks I need companions.”

A shaman… but that weird mysticism stuff rarely ever had any connection to reality, beyond people’s disturbed fantasies.

“What do you think Zombie is?” Sera asked.

“Current theory - Aliens. I’ve never met anyone like me, so I think an alien, maybe the last of its kind, or an alien machine or life support system that got flung out into space, came to earth, and that somehow infected me when I was 16.”

Laughter broke loose despite the detectives’ best efforts. “You’ve read way too many comic books!” Sera said through a quite unladylike series of snorts.

“Shut up,” Areku huffed. “I didn’t have much else to do when I was conscious, other than be in pain. And yes, I know that’s basically Venom’s backstory. I just don’t have any clue how this happened to me. Almost anything seems plausible at this point, and it’s been so long than my memory of it is hazy at best.”


“I was really sick, dying. I went to sleep. When I woke up, I was in the cave we used as a barrow, wearing a corpse’s clothes. I went down to the village to let them know I was alright, but everyone was gone, and the village was in ruins. It looked like many years had passed. I started wandering, and slowly discovered the changes that had happened to me. So, nothing I know is really helpful. If it was, they’d have figured it out long ago.”

“I suppose so.” Conan frowned. What would be helpful to ask? Where to start? “How many names can you remember?”

Areku was quiet for a while. “A few. Some of the scientists never talked to me, so I don’t remember them, or only parts of their names, and I don’t know how to write any of the Japanese people’s names, but I could sound them out for you. Do you mind if the list is in English?”

“I know my ABC’s; I can read and write in Romanji very well. I visit my parents in the US all the time, after all.”

“And I’m from the US. I lived there until I moved to Japan a few months ago,” Sera quickly added.

“Right, right. I forgot.” Areku stood up. He winced as he dusted himself off, noticing the deep bite-mark on his palm. “Oh, there’s something that I can do now!” he said, grinning like a madman. “I couldn’t do it before because it scares normal people who don’t know about me.” He helped a confused Conan up, and clasped Sera’s hand. “Would you like to see me hibernate?”
“S-sure,” Sera said, hesitantly. “What does hibernation involve?”

“We’ll need to take a short detour to a freshwater pond I know about. You know what the word ‘hibernate’ means, right?” He started trying to dragging Sera and Conan off the trail and into a darker part of the forest. The ocean was getting farther and farther away.

“It means to sleep through winter,” Conan said.

“Right. Except when I do it, my body heals itself really fast. But in order to do it, I need to put myself to rest. It looks like I’m dead to most people. When I’m doing it to heal injuries quickly, I need a partner to wake me, or I’ll stay asleep forever.”

“So, how will we wake you?” Sera asked, holding his wrist. This was sounding dangerous.

“What about Zombie Time?” Conan added.

Areku laughed. “Zombie Time is really rare, and you’d have to kill me violently in order to make it happen. Though poison makes it happen too, sometimes. It depends on the type of poison. Some just put me into hibernation for a short while. As for waking me – just make sure I can breathe. You’ll see what I mean.”

They reached a shallow, shaded pond. There was no visible source of the water, but a small stream out of the pond proved that the source was probably a spring. The bank was covered in thick, dense moss. The water was so clear, they could see right down to the bottom, which had very little vegetation, and mostly rocks as its bed.

Then Areku started stripping.

“What are you doing?” Sera asked, trying not to stare at the bizarre behavior. She let go of him to cover her eyes.

“You know that Sera’s a girl, right?” Conan said, arms crossed.

“Sorry if seeing me scars you for life. I don’t have a change of clothes, so I’ll have to go in naked.”

“Why are you going in?”

Finished, he gingerly stepped in the water, shivering. “To trigger hibernation. Agh, this water is really really cold…” He got waist deep, took a deep breath and slowly let it out. “Give me about 10 minutes, then pull me out. Make sure you put me on my side, so the water drains out quickly.”

“Wait, what are you-“ Sera said, unshielding her eyes.

Areku submerged himself completely. They ran to the edge of the water. He was holding onto a large rock in the bed of the pond. A batch of airbubbles rose to the surface, then stopped. Suddenly Areku convulsed and let go of the rock. He was drowning himself?

“Has he gone completely nuts?” Sera yelled, jumping fully clothed into the pond.

Conan climbed down the bank and tried to follow, but the rocks were really difficult to walk on, and the water was so cold it hurt. He slipped and fell into the water, the sudden icy embrace knocking the wind out of him. Why’d his body have to be so little and useless?

Taking a deep breath, Sera dived under. Wrapping one arm around Areku, she dragged his lifeless body to the surface. Conan climbed out and ran around the bank to the spot it looked like Sera was
aiming for.

Teeth chattering, they pulled his cold, limp body onto a mass of soft vines that grew into the water. Conan cleared Areku’s airway, the way he’d learned during diver-safety classes he’d attended with his father in Hawaii. Areku had better be right about this immortality thing, or else they’d just watched a crazy person commit suicide.

“Wait!” Sera said, eyes wide. She held up Areku’s injured hand. The skin was knitting itself back together, leaving only faint scars. The bruises Sera had given him earlier had completely vanished.

As soon as the injury was gone, Sera rolled him onto his side and checked that his mouth was open. Water poured out, a lot faster than if it was simply draining out. About half a minute of this weird spectacle had passed when Areku finally thrashed and coughed. After expelling the last drops from his lungs, he said weakly, “That was hibernation.” He looked at his healed hand and grinned.

“Why are you all wet?”

“You freakin’ idiot!” Sera yelled. “We thought you were killing yourself!” The white blouse Sonoko had chosen for Sera to wear was now transparent, showing her plain sports bra underneath. She unbuttoned it and wrung it out.

“You didn’t believe my story?” Areku laughed.

“Well, you had just lied to us,” Conan reasoned. “And there was no way to tell if you were delusional or not.”

Areku grabbed his pants, and pulled them on. Thoughts about modesty had long been deemed irrelevant. “It’s always a little nerve-wracking for people at first. You could have left me in longer, by the way. Then some of these old scars would have faded a bit more. If you left me for a whole day, I’d probably have no scars left on me anywhere, and I’d been completely healthy.” His damp skin caught his threadbare shirt as he pulled it over his head, making it twist into a tight roll under his armpits, which he busied himself with untangling.

“Is that why they’d put you in a tank of water?” Conan asked, wringing out his shorts.

“Right. It’s the safest way to transport me when I don’t want to be transported. Just force me into hibernation, and I’ll stay healthy and passive as long as they need me that way.” He pulled tight the nylon cord he used for a belt, and tied it off. “Don’t tell anyone that though. It’s like getting knocked out and having no control over what strangers do to you. Never, ever put me into hibernation without my permission, okay? And if I want to be in hibernation, make sure you follow my instructions to the letter, like you just did.”

They nodded fervently. Conan definitely was going to need Haibara to explain a lot of things when he got back. For a start – did this mean immortality was actually possible? If the teen was telling the truth, and he’d re-grown limbs and survived being shot in the head, just like he’d spontaneously reanimated after drowning… that would make any person with half a brain want to pin him down and study him. No wonder so many people had been driven into doing so many horrible things to try to figure this out.

Sera’s voice pulled him out of his thoughts. “Shinichi Kudou.”

He looked up.

“Well, that explains that. I knew I was right about you two, but I just couldn’t figure out how.” She went to work on the once light, floaty skirt that a blushing Sonoko had insisted upon. “By the way,
why haven’t you told Ran?”

He winced. “If I told Ran, she’d want to charge in and beat them all up, and she’d get herself killed.”

“I don’t know about that,” Sera said, shrugging. “She’s smarter than you give her credit for. Someday you’ll have to tell me how the death of my brother fits into all of this, and I don’t want you to hold anything back. I imagine it’s the same for her.” She wasn’t his meeting his eyes, which was odd for Sera. To Conan, she’d always spoken straightforwardly, unsubtly, barreling through in a very American fashion. His intuition told him that she was holding something back, lying by omission. Had Ran already figured it out?

“Don’t tell her, please?” Conan plead. “A lot more lives than hers or mine are on the line here.”

“I get it; I won’t. It’s not my place to either.” Sera shook out her skirt, flinging water everywhere.

“Hey! A little warning next time!” Areku snapped.

“Same to you,” grumbled Sera.

Like wet cats, they spread out on the bank, taking advantage of the break in the dense foliage that let drying and warming light through.

“It wasn’t all lies.” Areku pushed aside a pebble that was in his back. “I really did learn Kanji in China. It was a long time ago, and I can’t speak with modern Chinese speakers at all. I don’t even know if I learned an ancestor of Mandarin.” He closed his eyes, and flopped in his cleared spot.

“And I really was born somewhere along the border between Tibet and Pakistan. Or, I think I was. I told my story to an archeologist, and he told me that was probably where I was from.”

Turning onto her side, Sera asked, “What about your own language? Can you still speak that?”

“I can’t speak it anymore, but I remember one thing.” He took a breath, and started to sing, a strange, quiet chant. It was slow and repetitive; every other phrase was the first one repeated. The cadence of the strange language made them sleepy, like a lullaby or mantra. There was a bitter catch in Areku’s voice as they reached the end. How many times had he repeated these verses to himself in some forgotten corner of the world, clinging to the last remnants of his identity?

“iʃɛmmaa reʔtəəm fɔymyɔy” he repeated one last time. They settled into a comfortable silence.

Under his breath, barely audible, he repeated it in Japanese:

“Out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
It pulled the root, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
Old bones rose up, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
Covered in mud, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
Rivers carved it, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
The Ice came, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
Great Crow laid down, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
The Growing came, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
It fell to pieces, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
The pieces became humans, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
Above the great river bank, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.
That is our home, out of water, Great Crow, in the sky.”

“It sounds like a creation myth,” Sera whispered, as though it was sacrilegious to speak normally.
“A small piece of one. That’s just the part explaining why we were living in a valley shaped like a ribcage, and why we called ourselves the Crow’s People.”

Still not with a full voice, she attempted to reinterpret the poem. “Your people are the pieces of a gigantic crow that froze to death in winter, after pulling a big, muddy skeleton tangled in a root from the water, which is where you live.”

He chortled. “Every culture has an embarrassingly silly origin story. Japan is a clump of pond scum that fell off a spear that a god was mucking about with, after all.”

“Do you still believe it?” Conan asked. Too late, he realized that this might seem a rather rude, pushy question coming from him, a strident Skeptic and Non-religious Atheist. Ran was used to him brushing off all of that baseless superstition, but he’d had a few run-ins with people who hadn’t appreciated his evidence-based view of the world.

To his relief, Areku didn’t seem to notice the subtext to Conan’s question, or at least, chose to ignore it. “I don’t believe it anymore. I’ve seen too many to believe any of them, so I’ve given up trying to guess about such a distant past. I just repeat my people’s song because it’s nostalgic. I can’t do it as well as I remember our…” he paused, struggling to find an equivalent title. “Doctor? Teacher? Witch? Matriarch?” he shook his head. “We called her our ēstē. She taught the song to us, and I hear her voice in my head whenever I repeat it. Hers is the only voice from my first life that I can recall.”

At a normal speaking volume, making them jump, he said, “Oh, and my name was Barai. It’s a word for the soft undercoat in an animal’s fur. If I had lived long enough, I would have been a weaver, so I chose that name when I came of age.”

The name had many sounds in common with Haibara’s name. Thinking of her, Conan realized there was another way to corroborate Areku’s testimony, at least the modern parts. “I know another person who escaped. I’ll ask them if they’d like to meet you. Would you want that?”

“Someone else escaped?” he asked, sitting up. “Yes, I’d love to… Only if you’re absolutely certain that they’d never turn me back in.”

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Conan laughed. “They hate the organization about as much as you do, maybe more.” He pulled out his phone. Luckily it hadn’t been damaged in the water. “I’ll give them a call.”

It took her a while to answer, and it almost timed out.

“What do you want Kudou? I was in the middle of a bath.” Her tone gave him a prickly sensation in his fingers and up his back.

“I have made a break-through in the case that I thought you’d want to hear about. I met Ambrosia.”

He heard the cell drop from her hands and clatter on the floor. Then a very loud, “WHAT?!”

“He’d like to meet you. I didn’t tell him anything about you, except that you escaped.”

“Professor!” she yelled. “We’re going to go to Kumajima, and we’re leaving as soon as possible!” She took a deep breath, and sent a volley of questions. “How is his health? What’s his mood like? What did he tell you? What does he know about me? He could be the way to find a cure for you, don’t you dare let him go!” She paused to catch her breath.

“I won’t let him go, don’t worry. He really wants to meet you too. Can I tell him who you were?”
“Yes! No!” she paused. “Do you know if he hates me?”

“He described you as a believer, blind to the dark side of what you were doing. I don’t think he hates you, but he hates what was done to him.”

“I’m going to have to apologize a lot. I never hoped that I could get a chance to do that. Go ahead and tell him who I am. I’m coming over by tomorrow at the latest. Profess-!” She hung up.

Conan sat a while, staring into the fractured light slipping through the leaves. Would Haibara finally tell him everything after this? Probably not, because she was still paranoid. But she might give him details he could use finally. This was one reunion he’d have to catch every second of.

“So? Who is it?” Areku asked, pawing at Conan’s bare shoulder.

“You knew her as Sherry, but she’s changed her name and her appearance since then.”

He gaped. “Sherry got out?” He pumped his fist in the air, hooting. When he finally could sit still, he asked, “What’s she like now?”

Conan thought back to when they’d first met. “At first, she was really paranoid that they’d find her again, kinda like you. She tried to commit suicide once, but I stopped her. After that she got a lot better, like she’d decided that she could be frightened all the time, or she could enjoy her new life. I doubt she’ll ever go back to being Shiho Miyano, even after I take them down.”

“Is she like you?” Sera piped up.

“Yeah. She’s the one who made the poison, even.”

Areku looked confused. “She survived too? Does that mean her appearance was altered like yours was?”

“Right. She’s also able to hide in plain sight.”

Sera smirked, having figured out who it was.

“So,” Conan said, a though suddenly coming to him. “I can use your ‘room’ to read in, right? My dad sent me his latest novel to critique.”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” Areku said, gears in his head grinding as the topic switched.

Conan’s phone went off again, disrupting the subdued mood they’d found themselves in. “Hello, Kudou?”

“What is it?” he asked, rubbing the drowsiness from his eyes.

“Bad news, Kudou. I can’t make it there for a few days, at least not without draining Agasa’s bank account. I’m still coming!”

“Okay. See you then.” He hung up and looked over at Areku. “Sherry can’t come for a few more days, but she’s definitely not giving up.”


Conan rolled his eyes. How’d this idiot lasted so long on his own?
This chapter, I had a challenge. How to make Areku’s story feel like he was codeswitching throughout it? Furthermore, Conan and Sera could understand every single word, they’d just have a small amount of jarring switching back and forth with him. How to accomplish that?

There were several methods that I tried out. First, I tried writing the English, with no modifications. No good, that was too easy to read. Then I tried making the words he’d have trouble with bold, but that was too distracting. Third, I tried writing the English words phonetically, but I didn’t get far before remembering that while I can read IPA fluently, most people have never encountered IPA before. And lastly, I split the difference and just made them italic. Hopefully that makes them just hard enough to understand to get across the idea that it’s a little difficult to follow what he’s saying, without making it too hard to read. Let me know if I failed, or need to change my approach, will you?

Speaking of IPA, did you notice the weird alphabet I used for transcribing the refrain? That Alphabet is IPA – the International Phonetic Alphabet. If you know it, you can sound out the refrain very accurately.

It is awesome. I love, love, LOVE IPA. I sometimes compose poetry using it, because it makes it so much easier to analyze the rhyme-meter of a poem if you can visually see how it sounds. Sometimes I write whole stories in it. I take notes in it, especially if I’m dealing with a foreign language that I don’t know the spelling conventions of. I’ve always hated English orthography because I suck at spelling. I remember being in Kindergarten, and the teacher pointing to the letter A.

“What sound does the A make?” she asked us, smiling pleasantly.

Four hands raised up, and each had a separate correct answer. That’s ridiculous. One sound per a letter is much easier to deal with.

The genius of IPA isn’t just that it’s one letter = one sound, it’s that it’s not listed according to an arbitrary order (ABC… and so on). It’s listed in a chart, according to where and how the sound is made. This way you can very easily and quickly spot patterns in how sounds effect each other. For linguists – it’s incredibly useful. It’s also used for reporters, singers, and actors, people who have to reproduce names/words that they’ve never pronounced before accurately. I think that it should replace the system used in American dictionaries and taught in schools, perhaps replace our spelling system entirely. We already have a standardized dialect (reporter-speak), so why not?

Anyways, here is a transcription of the IPA /iʃɛmmaa rɛʔʃəəm ɸymmyy/, into… Japanese romanji-ish? I’ll give some additional notes to explain some of the sounds.

“ishemmaa retchaam fummuu”

The R is rolled. The /ɔ/ is pronounced like the U in “but”. The /потребляем y/ is pronounced like the Japanese F, not the English F. The /y/ is pronounced like a French U, like in “pull” or “lune” or a German Ü.

Would you like to see my dialect of English in IPA? It looks like this:
dreamingfifi

/ˈwʊdʒu ˈlaɪk tʰəˈsɪj ˈmæj ˈdæʒəlɛkt ən ˈɪŋɡlɪʃ ɪn ˈajˈpʰiˈɛj/ /lɪt ˈlʊks ˈlaɪk ˈdɪs/

/mətə ˈreinɛɛ/ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
The days passed quietly and peacefully. Areku avoided Sonoko’s family, especially her father. The girls, plus Sonoko’s older sister and her husband, made use of Areku’s knowledge of the island, and spent most of the time exploring. Shinichi made good use of Areku’s ‘bedroom’ and was able to call his dad and give him a review, or critique rather, of his latest novel. The characterization was getting strained and unrealistic because he’d neglected several characters that he’d made important from the start. The Night Baron series hadn’t been intended for serialization, his father reminded him, so such weaknesses were to be expected. It was the editors and book companies’ faults for making him stretch out a simple story indefinitely. Then Shinichi gave him a cathartic rant about integrity as an artist.

Afterwards, as he walked along the beach back to the resort, he spotted Kogorou. He waved and called, “Go round up the girls; it’s dinner time!”

Conan let his toes dig into the sand one last time before shaking off the grit and going inside. He could hear voices coming out of the bedroom as he approached the door. They were Ran and Sonoko’s, and both were speaking softly, and slightly muffled. He heard Ran say his name, and stopped before entering, to listen in.

“—confessed, and I know I should answer him, but… I don’t know anymore. We’ve been apart for too long.”

Something in his chest panged, and he dropped to his knees. It sounded like… it couldn’t mean… was she going to break up with him? Was she falling out of love with him? Paralyzed and ashamed, he listened for more.

Sonoko wasn’t helping, she was agreeing. “I know, right? I’ve been in this relationship with Makoto for months now, and I’ve seen him only a handful of times. Long distance relationships suck. Half the time I wonder if our relationship is just some fantasy playing out in my head.”

“Yeah, and when I do see him,” Ran added, “he leaves suddenly, without saying goodbye, with nothing resolved. In London, if he’d just stayed around for a little longer, I probably would have said yes.” She released a long sigh. “But when he vanished again, I was reminded, he’s the one who isn’t there. How can I have a relationship with someone I can’t even touch?”

“Ugh, that! That so much that!” Sonoko said loudly. “Makoto doesn’t really let me touch him when he’s here, and he’s always telling me what to wear or how to act… sometimes I think he’s not in a relationship with me at all, but some caricature he dreamed up. If we could spend more time together, and he got to know me better, maybe we could start having a real relationship. We haven’t even kissed yet, and we’ve been together for months!”

“Together being only in the loosest meaning of the term. At least he’s honest with you. Shinichi is close by, always, but he doesn’t show his face to me, and he lies constantly.”

“Oh Ran!” Sonoko cried. There was sounds of movement on the bed, muffled sobs. Shinichi’s heart sank further. He was making her cry. He leaned against the wall, his own tears dripping down
his face. Why did this have to be so hard?

Finally Ran spoke again, her voice slightly choked. “I know I told him I’d wait, but it’s been almost two years now.”

“It’s unreasonable.” Sonoko’s voice sounded a little husky, like she’d been holding back her own tears. “He hasn’t thought about your feelings at all in this.”

‘Yes I have!’ Shinichi wanted to scream. ‘That’s why I lie, why I beg you to wait for me!’

“It’s as though he can’t trust me,” Ran said. “During Valentine’s Day last year, he took this picture…” Sounds of her cellphone’s beeps echoed about the room. “See? He was there, but he didn’t let me see him.”

“Do you know if,” Sonoko began hesitantly, “He gets most of his information about you from Conan, right? It’s like he’s having Conan spy on you. Conan worships him so much that I bet he does it without realizing what it means…”

Is that what it seems like on the outside?

“For a long time, I’ve suspected, even though it seems completely implausible… and don’t laugh at me when I say this! I sometimes think Conan and Shinichi are the same person.”

A muffled laugh. “You’re right, that is completely implausible, but it’d make sense, wouldn’t it? You said it yourself: he’s always close, but never shows himself.”

“They have the same blood type too, same as me. I was able to give him a blood transfusion when he was shot… but that could just be a coincidence. It’s statistically possible, as Shinichi would say, but improbable, because it’s so rare.”

“Maybe Conan is Shinichi’s dad’s secret love child.”

It was Ran’s turn to laugh. “I really couldn’t picture Shinichi’s dad cheating on his mom.”

“Hey, it’s possible they have an open marriage. They are awful weird, and they’re also gone most of the time, so who knows what they get up to?”

“Then they’d have to lie about being polyamorous, lie about Conan being related to them; it’d be no wonder if Shinichi feels like lying is the way to go about things.” Ran sounded a bitter at the last statement.

“Yeah, that makes a lot more sense. Also him name: Conan Edogawa. It’s like a mystery nerd’s username. Mr. Kudou probably named him,” Sonoko giggled.

“Yeah… their family situation is weird.” More squeaks of bedsprings and shifting of sheets could be heard. “His parents came by one time to pick him up, and he didn’t even recognize them. He needs his real mother, and I don’t think I can…”

“It’s a lot of responsibility. I don’t think I could do what you do. You’re amazing, you know that?”

Something had changed in Sonoko’s voice. It wasn’t her tone when fangirling over something, this was more intimate. Do girls really talk like this to eachother when they’re alone?

Sonoko continued, “You’ve made incredible accomplishments in karate, your grades are good, you take care of your dad, and a little orphan who’s too smart for his own good and gets into trouble all
the time. I don’t think most people could do what you do. I wish Shinichi could see what I see in you.”

“I wish that Makoto would see what I see in you too. You’re always kind, always making everyone around you happier, and when you’re excited about something, I can’t help but get excited with you. Just being near you makes me happy. You’re the best friend I could ever hope for.”

A soft sound followed, like a large raindrop hitting the ground. Shinichi suddenly felt nauseous, and confused. That sound, why… why there… between them… He couldn’t listen any more. He got up, and grabbed the door handle.

“Sometimes,” Sonoko said softly.

He stopped. He felt dread hang over him, and he couldn’t move. What if he saw them?

“Sometimes I think we’re in more of a relationship than we are with our boyfriends.”

“Yeah.”

Stop agreeing with her Ran!

“I should call Shinichi, make things clear. I owe him that much.”

“Ran,” Sonoko said suddenly, a slight nervous edge to her voice. “Do you think that we’re really… like… that?”

Shinichi… Conan couldn’t take it anymore. He burst into the room and ran over to the bed. Ran and Sonoko jumped apart, but it was too late, he’d seen them lying side by side, their faces close, hands entwined. Their cheeks were red.

He needed to say something, anything… “It’s time for dinner! They told me to go find you.”

“Roger,” Sonoko said, stretching her arms up in the air.

Ran leaned over and patted Conan’s head, then stopped, her brow furrowed. She grabbed his chin and leaned in close. “Conan, were you crying?” She froze, something coming together in her head. “Oh no… you heard us, didn’t you?”

Conan couldn’t answer. His mind was blank and his tongue useless.

“Yikes,” Sonoko muttered into her hand. “We’re going to have to explain the birds and the bees to an eight year old.”

He had to say something, but the last words he overheard, that was what he wanted to know. “What… does ‘like that’ mean?” Conan instantly regretted it. Their faces lost their façades. They were hurt and angry, and a little scared.

Sonoko spoke first. “We don’t really know ourselves, yet.” She glanced sideways at Ran. “I don’t know how Ran feels, that’s why I was asking her. I’m kinda confused myself.”

Ran nodded. “You might be right, Sonoko.”
More tears slipped out. He couldn’t stop. He never wanted it to end this way. Maybe it’d have been better if he’d just died in that theme park.

“Don’t tell anyone, especially Shinichi,” Ran let go of Conan’s chin, and started wiping the tears off of his cheeks. “It’s something private that I need to tell him. It’d hurt him too much to hear it come from you.”

“Does this,” dammit, he couldn’t stop crying! “mean that you don’t like Shinichi anymore?”

Ran plucked him off the floor, and gave him a big, motherly hug. “I still like him, but I don’t know if we can be a couple. It’s too hard to be close with someone who you aren’t close to. Especially if they lie to you.”

“He has a really good reason!” Conan sobbed into her shirt.

“And he could tell a little kid, but not me.”

This hurt too much. He wriggled free of Ran’s grasp, and fled outside, not bothering to grab his sandals. A hedge was in the way, so he turned and found himself in the garden. He cursed and kicked the head off of one of the flowers, and it stung him back, as though to say, “Don’t take it out on me!” He stomped over to a stone bench to take a look at his foot. As he climbed up, he felt his chest tightening. He couldn’t catch his breath. His head spun, and his sense of balance seemed to think he was on a boat in rough seas. Nausea washed over him, as though he’d been thrown overboard. He closed his eyes, trying to steady himself, but his limbs stopped obeying his commands. He felt himself hit the ground. What was in that flower? He didn’t care. He was tired, and wanted to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

In Japanese poetry (Haiku, renka, and so on) you don’t count syllables. You count morae. (This term isn’t Japanese; it’s a linguistic term, BTW.)

A “mora” (plural “morae” because Latin!) is a unit of comparative time in speech, measuring how long it takes to say something. In Japanese, this is expressed in their writing systems – Hiragana and Katakana. So, to figure out how many morae are in a word or phrase, just count the letters in the word.

This can be a bit confusing, because a syllable and a mora are different things in Japanese, while in English, mora aren’t really counted at all.

So, let’s look at a few names and count their syllables and morae, to get used to this.

Kudou Shin’ichi – 5 syllables (ku-doo shin-i-chi) and 7 morae (ku-do-o shi-n-i-chi)
You’ll note that the long O in “doo” counts as 2 morae, and the N coming at the end of the syllable in “shin” gets its own mora.

Hattori Heiji – 5 syllables (hat-to-ri hee-jii) and 7 morae (ha-t-to-ri he-e-jii)
Please note that the T at the end of the syllable in “Hat” gives that syllable an extra mora.

Toukyou – 2 syllables (too-kyoo) and 4 morae (to-o-kyo-o)
Interestingly, the Cy- (CONSONANT+y) beginning syllables aren’t given an extra mora; being in the beginning of the syllable rather than the end of it.

This has some other effects which aren’t as obvious to non-Japanese speakers. In songs, the singers will sing according to the moraic structure of the words, not the syllabic structure. This has the fascinating effect of singers having to sing lone consonants.

It also effects the way one slow-emphasizes a name. You know when you’re yelling at someone, and you break down their name into syllables, to make the person know they’re really in trouble? In Japanese, you break the name into morae instead. Listen closely next time you watch the anime when Ran yells “Shi-n-i-chi!” or Kazuha yells “He-e-ji!” It’s more noticeable then.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Conan was still awake. His vision had blacked out, or browed out? All he could see was a mottled brown color. His ears were ringing too, but he could still hear what was happening around him. Even as his limbs lost sensation, he wearily refused to fall unconscious. Suddenly shouting cut through the noise in his ears, and he was picked up. He was being carried like a baby. One arm cradling his upper back and supporting his head, to keep it from lolling and straining his neck. The other held him up, encircling the back of his knees and the hand clutching his lower back. The soft mound his head was resting on meant female. It felt familiar. Ran?

She started to jog with him in her arms, snapping commands at someone he couldn’t quite hear. He instantly felt ashamed. He tried to squirm, but his limbs weren’t listening to him. They were limp, useless lumps of flesh. “Let go,” he tried to say, but his tongue felt thick and stiff as a plank of wood. His vocal chords seemed to be made of wire, and pushing any air through them was extremely difficult. He tried opening his eyes. At least they obeyed him, but the brown haze was all he could see. He closed his eyes again.

“How much farther?” Ran’s voice came from above.

“See the fence? That’s where we’re going.” Areku’s voice? The fence… they were taking him to the doctor’s through the woods, and not bothering to go through the front. What happened to him?

Ran broke out into a sprint. He could hear Areku struggling to keep up, a few paces behind.

“Where’s the gate?”

“We’re going through the fence. You won’t fit carrying him; I’ll go first.” His voice was breathy, and his breathing audible. The inhaler from before, Asthma? An immortal with Asthma. He would have laughed if he could. The loose board rattled. Ran crouched, and supported Conan’s body with her thighs. “Alright, head first.”

“Got him?” A lot of hands were on him, gently passing him through the fence. His own hands dragged on the ground.

Then he was back in Ran’s arms. She was clutching too tight; it was getting harder to breathe.

Areku was shouting the doctor’s name, knocking on the windows.

Ran was rocking Conan, whispering, “Hang in there. Your big sister will miss you if you’re gone. The doctor will fix you up, and you can go back to sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong.”

“Areku, I’m in the middle of dinner, and I have guests!” Dr. Nishiyama’s voice was high pitched and loud.

Ran moved again. “Pardon the intrusion, it’s an emergency!” Ran yelled. Her voice was shaking. “Conan’s all swollen, and we can’t wake him!”

Swollen? What was going on?
The doctor’s tone of voice changed immediately. “Examination room. Now.”

They were running again, doors rattled and then, he was on an examination table. The sink was running, and the doctor was questioning them.

“How long has he been like this?”

“He was missing for 10 minutes, maybe 15.”

“Where did you find him?”

“We found him in the garden. We went searching because…”

“Not important. Was he unconscious when you found him?”

“Yes.”

“What position was he in?”

“Curled up like a baby, on his side. His hands and feet were weird.”

“Weird like how?” The sound of a paper towel dispenser rattling.

“All scrunched up, like this…” Plastic gloves applied with a sharp rubbery snap.

The doctor’s hand were cool through the plastic. They gently held his wrist a short while, then prodded his left ankle, opened his mouth as wide as it would go. She opened his eye, pointed her flashlight into it, making him see spots.

“Is he allergic to bee stings?”

“I don’t know, he’s never said.” Come to think about it, he’d never been stung by a bee before. A few nasty hornet stings, yes, a few spider bites, some ants, but never a bee.

“This is anaphylaxis, likely.” The hands left him, and her voice was echoed against a wall. “I need to inject him with something. It’s going to make his body shake. Young lady, you hold his hand; he might be scared.”

Ran grabbed his hand. Too tight. Ouch.

He didn’t notice the injection. But after it, that he felt. His heart raced, and his body trembled uncontrollably. He tried to call Ran’s name, but his voice still wasn’t working. They must have seen his mouth move though, because some unknown voice cheered. Were there more people in the room? He tried opening his eyes. The brown haze was gone. Ran was to his side, holding his hand tightly. There was sweat running down her brow. Areku was sitting in a chair in the corner, his face in his hands. The doctor’s dinner guests had come downstairs, and were poking their heads through the door. The doctor was setting up an IV, working very fast.

“Can you speak?” the doctor asked gently.

Conan shook his head. It was more difficult that it should have been. His muscles didn’t want to cooperate.

“That must have been very scary, not being able to move like that.”

Conan nodded.
“Wait, he was awake?” Ran interjected.

Conan nodded again.

“Yes, he just was too weak to move, and his throat is too swollen for him to speak. The hands and feet curling, that’s a symptom that he wasn’t getting enough oxygen. It happens as the body shuts down blood supply to unneeded limbs too keep one alive longer. Good job bringing him in as fast as you could, any longer and he could have died.”

Ran and Areku’s faces were grim and frightened.

She turned back to Conan. “Did a bee sting you?”

Yes, that was a reasonable deduction. He nodded.

She wiped his arm down with rubbing alcohol. The fumes stung his eyes. “I need to poke you again, are you ready?”

Nod.

She inserted the IV, and taped it so it wouldn’t wiggle. “Is it comfortable there?”

Nod.

“Are you still having trouble breathing?”

Conan attempted to take a deep breath, but it didn’t come easily, and made a frightening hissing noise.

The doctor inspected his lips and tongue. “Would you like some oxygen? We have a tank full of it, just for times like this.”

Nod.

“Stay here and rest while I go get it, okay? Young lady, please contact his parents and have them come here.” She looked at Ran.

Ran shook her head. “We don’t know where they are, but my dad and I are looking after him, so I can call my dad.”

“Very well, do that then.” The doctor hurried off, shooing her guests out and closing the door behind her.

With her spare hand, she pulled out her cell phone, fumbled with the keys. Ran took a deep breath, and punched the ‘dial’ button. As she waited for her father to pick up, she looked at Areku and said, “Thank you for helping rescue this accident prone little brat.”

“You’re welcome. I’m glad I could help.” He pulled his inhaler out of his pocket and sucked in a dose.

Finally Kogorou answered. Conan couldn’t hear what he said, but listened to Ran.

“Hi Dad… yes, Areku and I found him. He’d fallen behind a bench in the garden. … We’re at the clinic Conan went to the first morning. … He’s alright, didn’t get shot or stabbed this time. Doctor says it was a bee sting. He’s all swollen. … Doctor thinks he might be allergic. … I’ll ask her. She wants you to come here. … I don’t know. … No, he can’t talk yet. … Yeah, he can listen. …
Okay, I will.” She punched another key, and Kogorou’s voice echoed about the room.

“Do you have a death wish, you shitty brat?”

Sonoko’s voice called from the background, “You tell ‘im Mr. Mouri!”

“From now on, you aren’t going anywhere without an adult present, got that?”

Conan nodded, and Ran punched the key again. “He gets it. … Right. … Seen you in a few minutes, Dad. Bye.”

The trembling in his limbs kept going. It was embarrassing to watch his feet vibrate on the table. One of them was swollen up, like someone had pumped it full of air. Maybe he could try to speak again. Maybe he should just never speak again. He closed his eyes. He was too tired to think about all of this.

“Hey, no going to sleep,” Ran said. He could feel her breath on his ear. “You’ll scare us again.”

“Sor…” he’d responded without thinking. At least he knew now that his voice could still function. Not very well, but at least something could come out.

Ran gasped and hugged him. “I couldn’t hear you; try again!”

“Sorry. I’m sorry.” He really was. And now he was crying again. “I have something… to tell you.”

The doctor came back in, and he clamped his mouth shut.

She set down the tank, and connected a breathing mask to it, and opened the valve. “Just breathe normally,” she said as she strapped the mask on.

“Thank you very much,” Ran said, bowing politely. “My name is Ran Mouri, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you Miss Mouri.” She returned the bow, stripping off her gloves. “Areku, you can stay the night here. You look tired. Did you take your medication?”

“I did,” he mumbled. “They invited me to stay with them the last time I brought Conan here, so I’ve been sleeping in the resort. If this turns into an overnight stay, I’ll help out here.”

“You can stay in my spare room.”

He nodded, eyes down.

She smiled broadly. “Good, that’s settled. Now,” she turned to Conan. “Is your breathing getting better?”

“Yes ma’am,” he answered quietly. Breathing and talking had gotten a lot easier. His leg was starting to itch, and he lifted his trembling hand to scratch. He could move his arms.

“Ran dear, don’t let him scratch,” the doctor said.

Ran pressed Conan’s hands down on his stomach. It was a pleasant, warm weight.

He had to tell Ran the truth. He had to, or else he’d lose her. Or maybe he’d already lost her. It was too murky, but Sonoko had been right. He wasn’t being fair to her. Ran had been right. He should be able to trust her, if not with all of the truth, his identity at least. Then let happen what will.
But Bourbon was so close. If her behavior changed, if she let something slip, it’d be out of his hands, he wouldn’t have control.

But she’d had a pretty good idea who he was for a long time. She wasn’t dumb; that was one of the reasons he liked her. Smart, strong, caring, honest… telling her meant he’d have to ask her to lie.

“What do you have to tell me?” Ran asked.

But she deserved to know. Perhaps lying constantly was skewing his perception, changing his personality. It’d become too easy to lie to her. He beckoned, and she leaned in. He whispered in her ear, ““Alone. Later.”” His voice was muffled by the mask.

Areku frowned and chewed on his lips. He probably wasn’t going to approve. Haibara definitely wouldn’t. Then again, if the men in black found him, they’d kill everyone around him whether they knew anything or not. He had to try telling her. It was his last shot at staying with her.

“Oh, after dinner then.” Ran smiled and pinched his cheek. He wondered if she would ever treat him like this again.

From the front of the clinic, the sound of someone knocking on the door came to them. “Oh good, they’re here. I’ll go bring them back here.” She scurried off.

Conan squeezed Ran’s hand. “Sorry,” he said again.

“You already apologized to me; apologize to them. They’re worried too.”

“Sorry.”

The doctor greeted Mr. Mouri at the door, and from the sounds of it, Sonoko and Masumi had come along too. Sonoko. Another pang of guilt. They came through the exam room door, and Mr. Mouri stepped forward. He was still in his obnoxiously bright Hawaiian shirt and swim trunks. For once, he didn’t yell or curse. He stood over Conan and stared for a sec, then placed his hand on Conan’s shoulder. “Damn. Kid, you look like something out of a cheap horror flick. You scared the living daylights out of us. What happened to you?”

Conan closed his eyes. His memory of it was foggy, he’d been so upset. “I was in the garden and a bee stung me.” The words sounded all jumbled and murky, coming through the mask. They clearly couldn’t understand much of it.

The doctor smiled, and cleared her throat. “If I may?”

“Ah yes,” Kogorou said quickly, stepping back so they all could see her. “Please.”

The doctor gave her best reassuring smile and started explaining. “Well, we’ve learned something important today. Young Conan here is allergic to bee stings. From what I gather, he was running around in the garden, and was stung by a bee on his ankle. Lucky for him, Miss Mouri and Mr. Kusanagi here found him and brought him here before something worse happened.”

“What do you mean by ‘worse’?” Sonoko interrupted.

“Don’t be alarmed please,” she paused a moment, looking at them. “He was in Anaphylactic shock, and could have suffocated.”

The warning didn’t help much, judging by Sonoko’s face.
She continued on. “Now, I’ve given him a shot of epinephrine, and that’s reduced the swelling and eased his breathing. The IV has basic hydration fluids in it, and he only needs the oxygen as long as he’s having difficulty breathing. I may administer an antihistamine later tonight, if he needs it. He should stay here under supervision, or be transferred to a hospital on the mainland. I wouldn’t expect longer than a night’s stay, as long as there are no complications. You’ll want to keep him away from bees, and keep an EpiPen with you in case he gets stung again. Allergic reactions like this are extremely dangerous for small children, so don’t hesitate to treat him.” She pulled out a pamphlet on allergies and allergic reactions that she’d been holding while talking to them, and handed it to Kogorou. “This has some more information on it, and it has a link to a website that explains it in even more detail, if you need it. Any questions?”

They all quietly shook their heads, still trying to take it all in.

She gave another broad, comforting smile. “I’ll leave him alone with you for a little while. Call my name when you’ve decided what you want to do.”

“I have his insurance card,” Kogorou said, pulling it out of his wallet. “Do you need it yet?”

“That’ll be handy, yes. Anything else?” Hearing no response, she said, “If you’ll excuse me then,” and slipped between them back out the door and closed it behind her.

They stood quietly for a little while, staring at Conan breathing.

At last, Masumi spoke. “I still don’t get why he ran away like that.”

Ran and Sonoko blushed. “He may have overheard,” Sonoko started, covering her mouth. “We were talking about his family… didn’t know he was there.”

Ran interrupted, “He was really upset, and ran off. It’s our fault. We should have followed him right away, but we thought he’d come right back.”

“His family? Those no good irresponsible-“ Kogorou started, but was silenced by Ran and Sonoko making wild, “SHUT UP” gestures.

Masumi frowned, deep in thought, she probably didn’t buy it, but held her tongue. Conan wondered if she’d known about them all along.

Conan closed his eyes. He was tired. He hadn’t eaten dinner. His muscles felt like a handful of writhing worms. They couldn’t hear him through the mask. Maybe he could sleep a while…

A jolt of pain from the soft underside of his foot roused him again. “No going to sleep yet!” Sonoko said.

He groaned.

“So,” Sonoko continued, “One of us can take the first shift while everyone else brings back dinner. Then we eat, and then we take turns watching him overnight.”

Ran raised her hand. “I’ll take the first shift.”

“Then I guess we’ll go get food, and whatever else we need for the night. Shall we?” Sonoko sounded like a general, getting everything moving.

“Let’s go!” said Masumi, helping Sonoko push everyone out the door.
Conan heard Kogorou explaining the plan to the doctor, and then, finally, silence. Ran and he were all alone.

Ran closed the door, and pulled the chair to the side of the exam table. “So, what did you have to tell me?”

Shinichi hesitantly pulled off the oxygen mask. As though a cork on an agitated bottle of Champaign had been loosed, everything he’d wanted to say as Shinichi after eavesdropping on her and Sonoko came out. In his high-pitched, child’s voice, to him, his confession sounded like a bad joke. “I’m really, really sorry I hurt you. I’ve acted like a fool from the day this happened. For so long, I thought that protecting you was the most important thing. I thought that me hurting you and lying to you would keep you safe, but I wanted to keep you at the same time, because I’m in love with you. I can’t do both. I should have trusted you, and I shouldn’t have let everyone convince me that I was doing the right thing. So, I’m ending the lies now, because I love you, and I really need you to help me through this. I’m too weak on my own, and not just because my body is like this. There were two attempts on my life that day. There was nothing I could do to stop them. I was completely helpless, and now I’m vulnerable too. It terrifies me. You’re different from me – you’re strong. You have so much responsibility, you carry so many people’s burdens alongside your own, and you still stand tall. I wish I had that kind of strength. Sonoko was wrong; I do see what she sees. I’ve just been an idiot and not acted on it. I’m acting on it now. I love you; I need you; please stay with me.”

Ran didn’t answer. Her expressions kept changing – eyebrows furrowed and then relaxed, eyes blinking back tears, jaw clenched, then forced open to take slow breaths, hissing between her teeth. There were too many mixed signals. As usual, he couldn’t deduce what she was thinking.

“Maybe I should have just died at Tropical Land, and spared you all this grief.” He put his mask back on, closed his eyes, and waited for the blows to come.

They didn’t. Instead, Ran slipped Shinichi’s small, trembling hand into her own.

“Idiot,” she whispered. “Don’t ever say you wish you were dead.” He could feel her pulse hammering through her palm. “I’ve been waiting so long for you to say those words. Somewhere along the line, loving you got twisted, an exercise in how much loneliness I could take.”

“I’m sorry,” he said again. “I didn’t think you would want to be with me…” his tongue felt like it might choke him again. “…like this.”

“Apologies are nice, but they don’t change what’s happened.” Ran sighed. “I need to confess something too. I was in love with you for a long time, and I thought that I was supposed to hold out for my one true love. But love, and falling in love isn’t so simple. Sonoko and I, we’ve been close for a very long time. Somewhere along the line, we became closer than being best friends. Our first kisses, I don’t think we realized what they meant right away. We called them ‘practice for our absent boyfriends’ at first. We were both lonely, and we needed to be close with someone, and we couldn’t stop. It just… got out of our hands then.”

Ran looked down, her free hand fiddled with the hem of her shirt. “Then Sonoko’s grandparents found out somehow, hired someone to surveil her, and they caught us together. That conversation you overheard – it was right after her grandparents and parents had confronted her about it. They’re pretty mad, because their heirs are supposed to have children and continue the family line. I don’t know what we’re going to do about that.” She bit her lip, biting back tears, then took a deep breath to steady herself.

“There is a good thing that’s come from all of this. It’s made us reexamine our relationship, and it’s
not friendship anymore. The things I want to do with her aren’t things that friends do, they’re things that lovers do, and it’s mutual. We’re in love.”

She turned back to Shinichi, squeezing his hand again. “But with you, even when you were back to normal those few times, I hadn’t felt that yet. Maybe it’s because we’ve never done anything like kissing together. Maybe it’s because we never got a chance to make our relationship something more, but it still feels like friendship-love to me. I’m sorry, I can’t return your feelings right now. Things are too complicated.”

As though something else had control over his limbs, he yanked off the breathing mask, sat up, and grasping her neck with his tiny arm and pulled her into a kiss. Her eyes were wide for a moment, and she didn’t move. “Please Ran—” He didn’t get a chance to finish his sentence. She gently pushed his little body back down onto the table and put his breathing mask on securely over his nose and mouth. The hand that had been gently holding his was now restraining him.

She choked suddenly, and left him to go to the sink and swallow a gulp of water from a small paper cup. She turned back to him, looking nauseous. “I can’t do that with the face… the body of eight year old Conan, my little brother. I feel like I kissed a child.”

The body of a child. Of course she couldn’t feel attracted to it. She was interested in people her own age, and she probably didn’t even want to consider being with a child, even if it was an 18 year old at heart. That plus the nature of the temporary cures – there was no way he could stay an adult long enough for a physical relationship to form. She’d end up having to wait until his body grew up again, and that wasn’t fair to her.

“I’ve seen you in your grown up self since then,” she went on. “Why can’t you try when you’re an age I can kiss?”

He looked away from her. His own stomach was twisting into knots, realizing that he’d just ruined any chance of her trusting him enough to let him date her. Why’d he do that? He recalled a fleeting thought that they just needed to kiss and it’d all be better and she’d come back to him; but now it seemed like the stupidest thing he’d ever done. Another fleeting thought came to him: Maybe if he kissed her when he was his adult self… but that wasn’t going to happen now, not with the way the cures worked.

He nudged the mask partly off, just enough to speak. “I’ve been waiting for, searching for a permanent cure. All I’ve got are temporary cures that risk my life every time I use them, and they work for shorter periods each time.”

Dammit, he was going to start crying again. That made him feel even more like a child. “It feels all wrong, just looking at my own reflection. Sometimes my body doesn’t really feel like my own. My voice… I hate it. If I could use the voice changer all the time I would. If I’m creeped out by my own body, I can’t expect someone else to want it.”

“Voice changer - Dr. Agasa, I presume?” She finally cracked a smile.

He mentally thanked her for changing the subject. “Yeah. I can’t ever make fun of his inventions ever again.”

She rubbed her forehead, thinking back. “That ridiculous lie he told me, he definitely knows what happened. Is he working on the cures? Oh, and the little girl living with him, Ai! She came out of nowhere, and she’s weirdly mature. Is she like you?”

It felt like a betrayal of Haibara’s trust to tell Ran. “I can’t say,” he said finally. “If there are any
other people that are in the same situation that I am in, it’s up to them whether or not you know. I didn’t even tell my parents; Dr. Agasa did that behind my back, and even though I’m glad they know now, I wished he had let me tell them myself. They scared the hell out of me when they picked me up in disguise.”

Ran nodded, still deep in thought. “I still want to be your friend,” she blurted out. “I can’t be your girlfriend, but I can still help you fight them!” She paused, chewing her lower lip again. “There is a them, right? I presume that you’re trying to fight whoever did this to you, and that’s why you’re always turning up injured. You need a capable bodyguard, and I happen to be the Kantou regional karate champion!”

He shook his head. “That’s the exact opposite of keeping you safe, Ran.”

“Shinichi, don’t you think that’s a decision that I should get to make? You said it: you need to be less vulnerable, and that’s something I can help you with. And now that I know, I can help cover it up for you.”

“I do alright with Dr. Agasa’s inventions.” It was nice to hear his name from her again.

“—says the boy who just almost died from a bee sting.” She smirked and prodded his swollen ankle. It smarted.

“Fine,” he mumbled. “It’s not as though you weren’t already doing that anyway.”

She nodded, an eager glimmer in her eye. “Now you have to tell me everything.”

The front door banged open, and the slightly winded voices of their friends and family coming in with food and sleeping bags for the long night ahead echoed down the hall.

“Later,” he sighed. Then a thought struck him and popped out of his mouth, “Does this mean you’re going to stop stripping me naked and dragging me into the bath with you?”

Ran turned a very, very dark red, and her dad came in carrying a load of boxed and plastic-wrapped dishes from the restaurant.

“Glad we had this talk, Conan,” she muttered.

Shinichi winced at his alias. Yup, she was still pissed. They really weren’t going to get back together, were they?

They dug into dinner and lined up sleeping bags on the floor. Luckily, Conan’s condition only improved through the night. By the morning, he had the doctor’s approval to go back to the hotel, as long as he took an EpiPen and a prescription for anti-histamines, to keep the swelling down in his foot. Exhausted, they all went back to the hotel and slept late into the morning.

Chapter End Notes

Japanese is a language that is pretty easy to learn by ear, but incredibly difficult to learn how to write in. That is because it has four different writing systems being used, all at once. They are:

Romanji – the Latin Alphabet, what we use to write English in. It’s usually reserved
for acronyms though. Using the Arabic numerals, instead of the Chinese characters, also falls in this category. You could also consider Latin punctuation marks classified as Romanji.

Hiragana – A phonetic (or close to it) syllabary for writing Japanese words in, and for writing meaningless, grammatical morphemes in. It’s also used as Furigana, the pronunciation notations over other forms of writing. It has a fascinating history. It was made from the cursive, shorthand forms of Chinese characters. Long before there was a set syllabary, Japanese writers were using the pronunciations of Chinese characters to sound out Japanese words, and there were thousands of variations. One of the earliest examples is the Man’youshuu, a collection of Japanese poetry. In that collection, there is a poem about birds, written phonetically, entirely with different Chinese characters for birds. This practice actually carries on to today, but only in a handful of set phrases, like “Congratulations!” - 「お目出度う」 (o-eye-depart-degree-u, for the sounds o-me-de-to-u). Another variation of this words is 「御目出糖」 (honorable-eye-depart-sugar for the syllables o-me-de-tou).

Katakana – Notable for its much more angular appearance, Katakana is a mirror of Hiragana, with a slightly different history. Katakana was a phonetic shorthand that was popular amongst Buddhist monks. Buddhism is a foreign religion, which is probably why it became the form of notation favored for writing foreign words and phrases. In modern days, it’s often used for people’s personal names, when the parents decide to not use Chinese characters in the name. It’s also common to put the words for animals and sound effects in Katakana. This syllabary is also used in Furigana – but not as often as Hiragana is.

Kanji – Literally “Han-Chinese Letters/Symbols/Characters”. This is what gives Japanese students the world over the most headaches. There are over 2000 standard Chinese characters that students are supposed to learn. Unlike the Chinese, they haven’t simplified the forms of the Kanji; just tried to restrict the number of Kanji in use after WW2. In Japanese, they’re used for nouns, verbs, adjectives, and occasionally adverbs. Even if grammatical (as opposed to meaningful – things like the past tense suffix and so on) morphemes have a Kanji, they’re usually written in Hiragana. Really common words, like “to be” or “to do” or “good” are usually just written in Hiragana as well.

This gives Japanese a strange mosaic like appearance in its writing. It’ll have intense, crowded Kanji followed by smooth, flow-y Hiragana, some big, blocky Katakana, and an odd jumble of Romanji in any given sentence. See if you can figure out which is which in the sentences below:

どうしてコナン君がFBIを信じるんですか。日本人の警察よりFBIのほうがいいですか。インターポールは？

[Doushite Conan-kun-ga FBI-o shinjirun desu ka? Nihonjin-no keisatsu-yori FBI-no hou-ga ii desu ka? Intaaporu-wa?]

(Why does Conan trust the FBI? Are the FBI better than Japanese policemen? What about Interpol?)

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Conan was roused by his cellphone. He didn’t check the caller ID, and answered, his head still in an antihistamine fog.

“Who is it?” he croaked.

“It’s Haibara. Professor and I are at a… no… the only coffee shop in town. Can you make it down here?”

He rubbed the sleep from his eyes. “I’ll need a little help. I found out that I’m allergic to bees yesterday.”

“Should I look for the Stay Puff Marshmallow Man?”

“Ha. Ha. It’s just my foot that’s swollen. And I almost died yesterday.”

“Anaphylactic Shock, eh? Sounds fun. When do I get to see Ambrosia?” Conan rolled his eyes. Sarcasm didn’t translate well into Japanese.

“I’ll have him take me to you. He goes by Areku now, by the way.”

“Well hurry up. It’ll be our turn to order pretty soon.”

“Rodger.” He ended the call.

Areku was dozing on his cot. Conan carefully slid off the bed. Putting weight on his foot sent a bolt of pain up his leg. Slowly he limped over to the teen and shook his shoulder.

“What?” he grumbled.

“I need a lift to town. Sherry’s arrived. She’s waiting at the only coffee shop in town for us.”

Areku sat up like he’d been dowsed with cold water. “Let’s go!” he whispered, in order to not wake Kogorou. He crouched on the floor, and let Conan climb onto his back. Like thieves under the hot sun, they slipped out of the cottage and hurried through the forest to the town.

When they got to the coffee shop, Areku slowed down, then stopped. “Is… is this really a good idea?” he asked.

“You already said you would, so you might as well. You can always run away and disappear again if you want.”

“Right. It’s just been…” he took a deep breath, and opened the door. He looked around, for a moment, then whispered to Conan, “I don’t recognize anyone.”

“Let me down,” Conan whispered back. “I can’t really see from here.”

He gently put Conan down.
Conan scanned the faces, and spotted Haibara and the professor in darkest, farthest corner. They’d already been served their food. “See the old fat man and the little girl with brown hair beside him? That’s them.”

“Are you sure?” Areku hissed.

“I’m sure. Now carry me over there! The old man’s name is Dr. Agasa.”

Areku crouched and let Conan climb on again. Slowly, he walked past all of the empty tables to Dr. Agasa and Haibara. They didn’t notice Areku coming.

“Um…” Areku said quietly, like he was trying to build his confidence. “Pardon me, but are you Dr. Agasa, by any chance?”

Haibara looked up, and dropped her fork. Her mouth hung open. “Ambrosia?” Her voice shook a little, and got high-pitched. Then she jumped off her chair, ran over, and hugged Areku by the knee.

“Who are you?” Areku asked.

She stepped back, put her hands on her hips and said, “Kneel. Take a good look at my face!”

He obeyed, giving Conan a chance to slide off and climb on a chair.

“Impossible!” he said suddenly. “Sherry? How is that possible?” He fell forward and gave her a big hug. “I’m so glad you got out!”

“Kudou,” she snapped. “You didn’t tell him about the side effect of the poison, did you?”

“Nope.”

Areku touched a lock of her wavy brown hair that hung over her ear, and tucked it behind her ear, gently touching her cheek. “He said it changed your appearance, but I never thought that… wow.”

His inspection over, Haibara suddenly snatched Areku’s wrist and measured his pulse. Then she pulled apart his teeth to look at his gums, and his eyelids to look at the whites of his eyes.

“What are you doing Sherry?” he mumbled, jerking his head away from her little prodding fingers.

“You’re healthy! I just had to make sure.” She turned around and climbed back onto her chair.

“Take a seat Amb… You go by Areku, right?”

He plopped himself down on a chair. “Yeah, just call me Areku. Or Alec. Whichever you like best.”

“It’s really weird speaking with you in Japanese.”

“It’s really weird speaking to you when I’m fully conscious.” Haibara frowned and looked down.

“What name do you go by these days?” he asked quickly.

“Ai Haibara. I’m 8 years old, and I live with my grampa.” She grinned at Dr. Agasa who smiled warmly back under his mustache.

Areku stared at her for a while. “You… you’re so happy.”

“You too. You’re healthy. None of your internal organs are about to fall out. Island boy looks good
They clammed up as the waiter dropped by to hand Areku and Conan menus. Conan read the menu to Areku. The two escapees couldn’t take their eyes off of eachother.

They ordered, and when the waiter was gone again, Conan suggested, “We should speak in English, so that no one we don’t want to hear will be able to follow our conversation.”

They all nodded in agreement, continuing in English.

Areku asked, “When did you escape?”

“Almost two years ago. They hunted me for a while, but now they think I’m dead, thanks to Conan. They kicked up a huge ruckus when you escaped. No one could figure out how you did it or who helped you. Someone even started a rumor that you’re telekinetic when you’re hibernating.”

He laughed at the idea. “Samantha, or rather, Vermouth helped me. Has she escaped yet?”

Haibara frowned.

“She’s on the border,” Conan interjected. “She tried to kill Haibara a few times, but I think she’s given up now. She hasn’t told anyone about the side-effects, or about our identities, but she’s still working for Them.”

Areku frowned too. “Conan… you never told me what Samantha does for them.”

“Mostly, she’s a spy,” Conan said, realizing how bad this was going to be for him to hear.

“She also kills people,” Haibara said. “She’s one of the most cold-blooded women I know. She hates me, and hates that when I’m like this, she can’t go after me.”

“That doesn’t sound like her.” Areku fiddled with his silverware. “She must have really not wanted me to know. Do you think…?” he slumped in his chair and covered his face with his hands. “…that they were threatening to make things worse for me, to keep her in line? I know that they threatened your parents with you and your sister, so it’d make sense since Samantha doesn’t have any other family.”

“Then why is she still working for them?” Haibara snapped. “If she wanted out, she could have gotten out as soon as she rescued you.”

“Like I said,” Conan interrupted. “We don’t know what she’s after. I know that she doesn’t want me or Ran to get hurt, and she is willing to lie to them in order to protect us.”

Areku took the hint to change the topic. “So, how is your sister doing?”

“Doctor,” snapped Haibara. “I’m going to need extra chocolate for dessert to make it through today.”

Reaching for his wallet Dr. Agasa said, “Yes ma’am.” He went towards the pastry stand on the other side of the room.

“Did I say something wrong?” Areku asked, looking at Conan.

“Her sister died right before she defected. She was killed by the organization.”

Areku sighed. “Sorry Haibara, I didn't know. This isn't going as well as I thought it would.”
Haibara echoed Areku’s sigh. “Apology accepted. Almost everything from that time is tied to some painful memory. I suppose we should have expected it.”

Dr. Agasa returned with another slice of chocolate cake, and placed it before Haibara. She took a few greedy bites, then set her fork down. “I should also apologize, for what I did to you. I could say that I was young, stupid, and hadn’t been allowed to study research ethics, but I still knew we shouldn’t have been doing those things to you. I did them anyways, then lied to myself that it was okay, because you could be completely healed, with no lingering scars, so easily. Having done those things hurts, and I’m never going to let myself heal from it, because it reminds me to never do it again. Therefore, I swear, upon this delicious slice of chocolate cake, upon the death of my sister, that if they ever capture me and try to make me do that work again, I will kill myself.” With that, she took another bite of chocolate cake.

Areku covered his face again, and silently wept until their food arrived. Then he spent a while blubbering out various versions of “thank you” into his soup.

After the waiter was out of the way, Conan continued the conversation.

“I think this gives us a perfect opportunity to go on the offensive,” his wicked little grin spreading across his face. “If you give me a list of every agent and member that you know, and as many real names as you know, I can coordinate with my own intelligence network and get them all brought in by the FBI. They’re going to know there’s a leak, so I’m thinking we should set up a dummy target for them to aim at. While they’re aiming at that, we can take out the militant criminal sides of the organization, at least the sides in Japan. If we get lucky, someone will know something that can lead us to Anokata, or we can get someone high enough to turn traitor, someone who’s already hiding information from them and protecting the people who she knows can do a lot of damage.”

“Vermouth? You’re planning on turning Vermouth?” Haibara glared at him. “That’s like trusting a boa constrictor to not squeeze the life out of you because you’re holding a feather. Why do you think she’d turn if you asked her to?”

“Mostly, because she hasn’t continued to go after you since we tricked her on the train. Add that to the fact that she hasn’t revealed my identity or killed me, and has gone to some lengths to keep me under the radar – even not killing you – she has something special planned for me. As for what that is, I think she wants me to take down the whole organization, because of Areku’s story. She hated you and your parents for being part of the experiments, on her and on Areku. She probably hates the organization by proxy. She helped Areku escape, so she’s probably been getting ready to do the most damaging defection she can muster.”

“You’re way too optimistic, Kudou.” She sighed and pulled out her purse. “I’ve been holding onto this for a while. Don’t get yourself killed.” After shuffling through things in her purse for a moment, she snatched something and dropped it on the desk. It was a blood-stained floppy disk. “This is one of Pisco’s. I snatched it when the whole place was going up in flames. It looks old-fashioned, but it’s got a nasty virus on it, and you probably can only open it on a computer on the organization’s network.”

Conan rubbed his chin, thinking. It’d be really difficult to get his hands on an organization computer, especially one old enough to run a floppy. It might have to wait until after he’d busted one of their headquarters, but they were a long way from doing that. “That’ll have to wait, I guess. When the FBI pick up one of the researchers or scientists that you will list, we’ll be able to get our hands on a computer. Who do you think should be the dummy target? I was thinking that recently deceased Sherry is a good choice, because these people will all be clearly linked to you.”

Haibara shook her head. “Then who would be acting on dead Sherry’s intel? We need someone who
would be capable of acting on it, someone that they could believe would do that.”

Who would the organization think enough of a threat to pull off such a thing? Especially if it required the FBI’s help, which was likely. Shuuichi Akai was a possibility, but they believed he was dead. They’d watched him die even, so that was a poor choice, especially if he wanted to keep Akai as a trump card. Then it struck him. An idea so simple, elegant, and fitting.

“Shinichi Kudou could be the one orchestrating their downfall.”

Haibara gaped at him. “But, don’t you want to return to your life? What about Ran?”

“Ran and I,” he choked back the pain rising in his chest, “are over. She broke up with me yesterday. There isn’t really a reason for me to hold onto my old life.”

She reached forward to touch him but pulled back. “I’m sorry.”

Dammit, he was going to start… scratched that, he’d started crying again. He took off his glasses to wipe his face. His eyes stung. “I told Ran who I am, and she still broke up with me.”

“You idiot!” Haibara hissed. “What possessed you to make you think that was a good idea?”

“She was leaving me for someone else, and I had to do something. I confessed, and she dumped me anyways.”

“Jeeze, Kudou, just because you broke up with your first girlfriend doesn’t mean that you should kill yourself.” She slapped her forehead and groaned. “When it comes to Ran, you’re dumber than a bucket of boiled gravel.”

“She said that she’ll help me fight the organization, and that she’ll stay by me as a friend and a bodyguard. I haven’t had a chance to tell her everything, just who I am, that’s it.” He took a shaky breath. “She suspects that you’re like me, Haibara. Can I tell her?”

Haibara scowled. It seemed to Conan that the room was suddenly a swirling pool of her demonic miasma. “How high is her pain tolerance?” she asked.

“She’s into karate, so pretty high, I think…” he said, shrinking back.

“So if she gets caught and tortured by Them, she’s not going to squeal?”

“I don’t think she would…” The little hairs on his arms and legs stood at attention.

“Fine.” The miasma vanished, or at least lessened. “But I’ll have to meet her too. By the way,” a sinister smirk seeped out the side of her smile. “Who’d she leave you for?”

“Sonoko.” Head, meet table. Ouch.

Everyone else at the table choked on their food. “I did not see that one coming!” Haibara giggled.

“The headband girl, right?” Areku asked.

“They have been friends for a long time,” Dr. Agasa said. “Best friends do make the best lovers…”

“Eww, Agasa, not helping,” muttered Conan. He wanted to hate Sonoko or hate Ran, but the only deduction he could make was that it was all his fault. “I should have told her right after it happened, that first night. I guess I was hoping that this would be over with before I had to tell her. I’ve put her through so much pain, it’s a wonder she waited this long for me.”
“So how do you go from there to ‘I think I’ll kill myself by evil organization?’” Haibara insisted.

“I won’t be killing myself,” Conan said with a sigh. “I’ll be killing my old identity. Conan will still be alive, while Shinichi will be dead after his two year long battle with APTX 4869. A battle he lost because Sherry, who was keeping him alive until then, had died and no longer could slow the progression of his deterioration. After Sherry’s death, he puts together all of the data he gathered, and gets it to the FBI. It’s a believable narrative.”

“I don’t think so,” Haibara said, her arms crossed. “It works as a poison because it enters the blood stream so quickly, and only a small amount is needed to be fatal.”

“What if someone were to spit it out before much of it got absorbed?”

“You’d still die, but it’d take a few days.” Her eyes brightened suddenly. “And I went to inspect your place not long after you’d disappeared! They could think that I slipped an antidote that I’d been working on in secret to you, and then you helped me escape to keep yourself alive! This could work.” Her face darkened, and she frowned. “Are you really ready to give up Shinichi Kudou completely? This isn’t just first-break-up angst?”

“Yes, I’m really sure about this,” he grumbled. “What would you know about break ups anyways?”

“I’ll have you know,” Haibara huffed, “I’ve had several lovers and had my heart broken several times. I know what you’re going through.”

“I… didn’t want to know that,” Conan mumbled. “What about you Areku? I bet you’ve got loads of break up stories to cheer me up.”

“Not really,” Areku said, shrugging. “I’m asexual. I’ve broken a few hearts by not being able to return people’s feelings, so I’ve watched other people go through it.”

Haibara’s eyebrow raised. “Really? Is it linked to the level of maturity you’re stuck at or to whatever made you what you are?”

“No idea.”

“Have you tried-” she started.

Areku cut her off sharply, clenching his fist. “Never of my free will. Now drop it.”

She looked down, and clenched her own. “Sorry,” she answered quietly. “I should know better than to ask about things like that.”

He looked back and forth, at the gloomy pair, noting a change in topic was needed. “So… what are the goals of the organization?” he asked. “According to Alec, you were trying to make people immortal, just like him.”

“That’s partially correct,” Haibara said. “They tried that early on, before they learned of some of the nastier side-effects of his condition.

“If you’ve heard Alec’s story, it sounds like he died and was buried. Then hundreds of years later, when the people of his village had died off or moved on, something reanimated his corpse, which may have been preserved as a mummy in the cave. They – we were trying to figure out what or how that could be possible.

“But, the organization is older than discovering Alec, and our goal predates us. It’s a process
begun when the first hominids used their first tools. We continue that legacy to this day, by adding
to and modifying our bodies with our tools and medicines. These days, it’s getting more and more
complex. We’re making machines that can think, simulations that look real, and extending lives
long past the capabilities of our bodies. Our goal was to be at the forefront of pushing ourselves
farther and faster in our specie’s evolution.”

“So,” Conan said, carefully thinking it over, “you were trying to figure out how to raise the dead or
become immortal because you believe that’s where humanity is already headed?”

“Exactly. If it can happen by chance to one person, we may be able to figure out what happened
and duplicate it. Unfortunately, that meant torturing that one unlucky person.” Haibara looked at
Areku, who shuddered. “It was all a waste of time. Not even Zombie seemed to know the reason
behind its existence in Alec.”

“You talked to Zombie?” Areku asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Not personally, but they have records of interviews with it. I’ve read them – they’re terrifying. It
doesn’t think of itself as human, and doesn’t care about other humans. It only cares about Alec,
and it’ll erase or modify Alec’s memories.”

Areku nodded. “I’ve noticed that before. I’ve lost entire decades of memories that way. I was
surprised that didn’t happen this time. Zombie probably thinks I’m still in danger.”

“How do you know any of your memories are real? If it changes your memories whenever it feels
like it, how do you know that you ever lived before the organization found you? What if you were
made by the organization?” Conan thought out loud.

“I suppose that’s a possibility, but if I were to think like that, I’d be unable to function. I just trust
my memory until I find something contradictory about it, because I have no choice but to do that.
You too… you could be figments of someone else’s dreams or simulations in a computer, but you
also have no choice but to act on what you believe is real,” Areku said. “Someone I respect a lot
gave me the same answer when I was frightened by that possibility,” he added, noticing their faces.
“I’m not actually much of a philosopher.”

“What were the Zombie-conversations like?” Conan asked.

“They’re really confusing. I’ve no idea whether it’s being metaphorical or literal, because it seems
to have a bit of difficulty communicating in human language. It’ll take the speech patterns and
language from someone it’s touching, but when it only has Alec, the stuff it says sounds like word
salad. It uses words from all of the languages that Alec speaks, and the grammar will end up a
conglomeration of whatever it thinks is best suited to get the meaning it needs. It takes a team of
researchers months to decode anything it says.”

“Why didn’t you let someone touch it so it can speak clearly?” Conan asked.

Haibara polished off the last of her chocolate cake. “Anyone who touches Zombie dies. Only
Vermouth has managed to survive it, and the reason it stated made no sense. It said Vermouth was
Alec’s older brother. As far as I know, researchers are still trying to figure that one out. Vermouth
was too busy to come by often, and whatever Zombie said wasn’t helpful enough to continue.”

Conan thought back to his conversation the previous day with Areku. “Did Gin ever talk to
Zombie?”

“I don’t think so,” Haibara said. “If he did, I didn’t see it, and there’s no records of it.”
Conan’s cell rang. Kogorou’s name illuminated the screen. “We didn’t tell anyone we were going out, we’ll have to go back,” he hissed to Areku. Then he answered, switching back to Japanese.

“Where the hell are you?” Kogorou bellowed.

“Areku and I just went for a walk into town. We’re coming back now, I promise!”

They left the restaurant in a hurry, with Kogorou screaming abuse into Conan’s ear ‘til they reached their cottage.

Chapter End Notes

So after the past two chapters on fanfiction.net, there was a bit of hubbub over there being a lesbian relationship in this story, and I’m not sure why.

I understand that LGBT rights are controversial right now. In fact, in Japan, lesbian couples are discriminated against pretty badly. In the US, gay men face more discrimination than lesbians do, but in Japan, lesbians face more discrimination. That’s part of why Sonoko’s grandparents are overreacting so much. Anyways, I get that acknowledging that lesbians exist can be controversial. Kinda stupid that it could ruffle feathers, but that’s the world we live in.

There are a few differences between most slash and femslash fanfics and this fanfic.

1. It’s not fetishizing Ran and Sonoko’s relationship. This story isn’t porn.
2. Ran and Sonoko’s relationship is a subplot. The main plot is about the organization’s downfall, and the main character is Shinichi.
3. It’s from Shinichi’s perspective, not Ran and Sonoko’s perspective. He’s the protagonist, not them.

I think that part of why Shinichi is so cruel to Ran in the main canon is because he views her as his love interest, as though that means he has some sort of ownership over her, or he’s supposed to be her guardian. (i.e. He’s trying to fill the role that he thinks men should hold. It’s been mentioned before, many, many times before, but Shinichi is extremely sexist. I wanted that to backlash and challenge his idiocy.) He doesn’t trust her, and he sure as hell doesn’t respect her. There is no way this is a healthy relationship. So, in order to repair their friendship and give Ran a greater role in the story, I broke them up, and paired Ran with someone who in canon loves and supports Ran no matter what.

As for Ran being OOC – I only changed one thing. I made her bisexual/pansexual. She didn’t realize it right away, not until she and Sonoko were confronted, and they had to sit down and reanalyze their relationship. As I mentioned before, Ran and Sonoko are already extremely close and have a loving, honest, and equal relationship. It’s pretty easy to see them getting together.

In some ways, I modeled Ran and Sonoko’s relationship off of a crush I had on one of my friends in highschool. I never let it develop because I was in small-town Montana with very religious Christians all around me, who thought that gave them the right to control everyone’s lives. I’m kinda ashamed I let myself be intimidated away from even letting her know I liked her, but if I’d gone through with it and found it was
mutual, and we’d started dating – she could have ended up being disowned by her parents and thrown out of her house, or worse. I didn’t realize I was crushing on her at first. We got quite close before I figured out what was going on in my heart and pulled away. Thing is, I started crushing on her while I still had a boyfriend. He went to a different school, so we didn’t see each other much, and our relationship never really went anywhere. Meanwhile, she was there. Hers was the shoulder I cried on. She was the one I laughed with and hung out with. That’s the idea that I built Ran and Sonoko’s relationship off of. They fall in love with the person who is really there.
When they got back, they were greeted by the girls and Kogorou, who was slightly red in the face, arms crossed. He swatted Conan on the head and scolded, “Always tell us where you’re going! It gives us a heart attack every time we realize you’ve vanished. We thought you’d found the one opium-den in town and had gotten snatched by drug-crazed killers again.”

“Yessir,” Conan mumbled holding his head.

By the door, the girls were hovering, talking quietly. Conan hobbled closer to hear them. “Are you ready for lunch?” Sonoko asked Ran.

Ran nodded, and wrung her hands. “As ready as I’ll ever be, I guess. I’ve got butterflies.”

“I’ll do most of the talking,” Sonoko said. She gave Ran a quick peck on the cheek and grabbed her hand. “Let’s go in.”

“I’m cheering for you,” said Sera, following them only a pace behind.

“Huh,” muttered Kogorou. “I wonder what those two are up to this time?” They followed the girls into the restaurant.

Once everyone (sans Areku, as usual) was seated, and drinks were being served, Ran and Sonoko stood up. “If I can have everyone’s attention please!” Ran shouted. She grabbed Sonoko’s hand and squeezed tightly. “Sonoko and I have something to tell you.”

Sonoko took a deep breath. “We’ve realized something after talking with Grampa and Gramma. We talked it over with our boyfriends, and we’ve decided to make it official. Grampa and Gramma are right; Ran and I are dating.”

Sonoko’s grandmother stood up, snarling. “Girl, do you want to be released from your fate so much that you’d shame your family so?”

“No! You’re wrong!” Sonoko said, looking her straight in the eye. “These are unrelated issues.”

“We’re trying to be honest about our feelings, so that other people don’t get hurt,” Ran interjected. “It wasn’t fair to our boyfriends to continue the way that we had. We don’t want to lie to our families either.”

“Right!” Sonoko exclaimed. “This is about honesty.”

Kogorou raised his hand. “So, are you two still dating your boyfriends?”

“No,” Ran said quickly. “We broke up with them last night.” Her eyes flickered over to Conan. He looked down, and couldn’t look up again.

Sonoko’s grandmother looked like she was about to squish a cockroach with her bare foot. “Word of this had better not get out,” she hissed, looking around the table. “I will not have our family publicly ridiculed for one pig-headed delinquent girl! And you!” she hissed at Sonoko, resembling
a coiled snake. “Until I hear of the end of this nonsense, you will get no financial assistance from the Suzuki Financial Group!”

“Mother!” Sonoko’s father said, aghast. “You don’t need to go that far!”

“If that’s how you want it,” Sonoko said before her grandmother could answer. “Then so be it. I’m not going to lie to make you feel better, and I’m never going to lie about loving someone.”

“Your place with your family will be waiting for you when you come to your senses,” her gramma said. Then she muttered a Buddhist mantra under her breath.

“Well,” said Kogorou, “I’m just glad you’re done with that arrogant brat Shinichi. Good job bagging a rich girlfriend, honey!”

Conan sighed to himself. At least Kogorou was happy about this. Ran too. Even helping Sonoko face down her grandparents, she seemed to be getting the strength to continue standing through holding Sonoko’s hand. Their fingers were interlaced. He had no choice but to be happy that Ran was happy, even though seeing her getting that happiness from someone else hurt worse than transforming through flu-Baigar reaction.

“I’m happy for you,” said Sonoko’s sister, softly. “We should order our dinners now. Everyone is tired and anxious from low blood sugar. Let’s continue this when we’ve gotten some food in us.”

“Right right,” said Mr. Suzuki. He signaled the waiters. The rest of the meal passed with very little talk.

After the meal, Kogorou led the girls to the Mouri cabin, before Sonoko’s grandmother had the chance to attack. Once inside, he closed the doors and the windows, then shooed Conan out of the room to give them a bit of privacy. Then he sat them down on the bed, while he leaned against Conan’s cot.

The girls watched him a little nervously as he took a deep breath and looked them in the eyes.

“I meant what I said. I fine with you two dating. You can get married too, and I won’t mind.” He nervously let out the extra air he’d been holding in his lungs, and started again. “Listen, don’t let anyone tell you that you must be like a traditional family. As you know, Eri and I…” he looked down, frowning. “Eri and I tried the traditional way at first. We lived together, had lots of fun, but when Eri got pregnant, and there were staff-cuts at the prosecutor’s office, they laid her off. So we thought that she’d be a stay at home mom for our little blossom, and I’d be the bread-winner. It was a disaster.”

Ran bit her lip. She’d never heard about any of this before.

“We fought constantly. Eri was miserable; I was miserable because she was miserable; we both did a lot of stuff we aren’t proud of.”

“But,” Ran interjected, “I don’t remember you fighting! I just remember Mom suddenly moving out one day.”

Kogorou half smiled, half sighed. “That was one thing we did right. We never fought in front of you.” He looked into his daughter’s eyes. “We didn’t want you to think it was all your fault. Mostly, I’d say it was because Eri felt trapped. When she was fired and all of her hard work taken
away, and the chance to continue doing what she loved was gone…” He shook his head, eyes closing to some old memory. “We realized that we had to change things. She moved out, got a job as a defense attorney, and I quit my job as a policeman so I could work from home as a private eye to take care of you. Since then, that’s worked for us.”

He took Ran’s and Sonoko’s hand in his. “You’re young. Don’t rush things the way we did. Don’t let anyone pressure you into a lifestyle that you don’t want.”

He turned to Sonoko. “And if you break my daughter’s heart, don’t think that being female will make you any safer!”

Ran and Sonoko giggled and hugged Kogorou.

Leaning against the wall in the hallway, Shinichi Kudou cried quietly, his jealousy of Sonoko raging but his heart glad that Kogorou was so supportive of Ran. The old man could be wise, he realized. Didn’t change the fact that this sucked. He mopped his face with his handkerchief, hiding the evidence of his heartbreak, and he went off to find a quiet place.

After hobbling for a few minutes, he found himself back in Areku’s “room”. He nestled himself between two large roots. Completely hidden from view, he pulled out his cellphone, and called him mom.

It took a while for her to answer, and when she did, her voice was drowsy. “Shin-dear, it’s 4AM. Is anything wrong?”

Whoops. He did some quick math. 15 hours of time difference meant they were in Europe, probably London. “Sorry, I forgot about the timezones. It’s not an emergency; I’ll call back later.”

“Well, now I’m up. Might as well tell me.”

He took a long, shaking breath, hoping he could make it to the end of this sentence. “Ran and I…” - another breath to hold him through- “…broke up.”

His mother let him blubber incoherently into his cellphone for a few minutes before interrupting him.

“Shinichi, she’s not the only girl in the entire world.”

He paused to wipe off his eyes again. “I know that. She’s just the only girl I’ve ever liked.”

His mom sighed. “Well, I know from personal experience, that you can like someone again. Goodness, before your father, I had five or six boyfriends. Some of them I was sure were The One. Turns out that it didn’t turn out. By the way, Shin, you inherited the crying from me. After my first break-up I could barely go fifteen minutes without becoming a red-eyed, swollen-faced zombie.”

She laughed softly. “Truth is, I’m surprised this didn’t happen sooner.”

“How could you possible predict this, Mom? I think that being poisoned by an international crime syndicate and turning into a first-grader isn’t something that you can predict.”

She sighed. “Well, that was certainly not a twist I was expecting, but highschool relationships don’t usually last beyond highschool. Sometimes people get lucky and their highschool-love is the love of their life, but that’s pretty rare. It’s normal to go through a few trials and errors before getting it right. Even then, sometimes it doesn’t last.”

Shinichi blew his nose, and his mother waited for him to pick up the phone again.
“So, do you need me to go rant at Ran for daring to break my little pumpkin’s heart?”

“No, that won’t be necessary. I still love her, and I don’t want to see her hurt.”

“That’s very mature of you, Shinichi.”

He sighed, thinking back to the dinner. “She’s got enough to deal with. Turns out she was falling in love with Sonoko while I was away, and Sonoko’s grandparents found out, and they’re determined to make life difficult for them.”

His mom giggled.

“It’s not funny, Mom.”

“No, no no… I was just remembering how enthusiastically Sonoko cheers at Ran’s karate tournaments. I hadn’t considered the possibility, but it makes sense. Or, would you rather have me rage at Sonoko, because I can do that too.”

“No, I don’t want to hurt her either. But, when we go back to Tokyo, I’ll have to live with Ran again.”

“Would you like to stay at home for a few days, get some space between you two?”

He fiddled with the hem of his shirt. “Yeah.”

“Alright. Your father and I will get on the next plane to Tokyo and you can cry and eat as much curry as you want. Mr. Akai has a talent for making curry, and I’m sure he’d be happy to help you there.”

“Thanks Mom.” He meant it too. He was feeling a lot better already. Letting the soft sand caress his toes, he read his parents in on the latest developments in the case, and his grand scheme to catch them once and for all.

Chapter End Notes

To make this story have a Japanese feel, there is a set of phrases that I avoided, even if they make sense in English – ones that are Christian themed. Phrases like, “dear god!” “for god’s sake” “oh god!” “Jesus Christ!” “I pray that…” “you get the idea. Christianity is a weird, exotic religion in Japan, one which has a pretty marriage ceremony and apparently uses crosses as Omamori (protective talismans)... and that’s about all most Japanese people know about Christianity. So, I made the decision to make the Japanese characters not use references to Christianity, even in passing. (And it pisses me off when people just replace English idioms with “god” in them with “kami” as though they mean the same thing... but that’s a rant for another day.)

There is something that I included. In Japan, when something bad happens or if someone needs to calm themselves down, it’s pretty common for someone to say a Buddhist Mantra. Though, there is a slight twist – most people aren’t very serious Buddhists, and haven’t actually learned any mantras. There’s a few sounds that are common in them though: “namu” and “on.” Then there are a few Buddha names that people remember, like Amida, the supposed founder of Pure Land Buddhism.
According to Pure Land Buddhism, if you say Amida’s name before you die, you’ll go
to a pure land after death, where you can be a perfect Buddhist and from there, go into
Nervana. So, with all of these fragments, you might end up with “On Amida namu
on!” or “Namu namu on!” or “Onnnnn…” (if you noticed the similarity between “on”
and “om,” give yourself a gold star!)

Therefore, I had Sonoko’s pissed off gramma repeating a Buddhist mantra to calm
herself in the chapter. But Shinichi, who is a stanch Skeptic, firmly non-religious, and
tactless enough that he mocks people who are, wouldn’t be using one of these.

Let me know if you want to know more about Japanese religions. I studied them in
college.

また来週！(See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
With another anti-histamine in his system, the swelling in Conan’s foot had gone down enough by the afternoon that he could wear shoes and walk with little difficulty. Upon learning this, Sonoko grinned and suggested, “Why don’t we go shopping in town? We need to pick up souvenirs. Also, since we need to dote on Areku some more, since he saved Four-eyes again.” She turned to Areku. “We can get you things that don’t take up space, like taking you to a barber and replacing your clothes. That way you won’t have anything extra to fit in your bag. Deal?”

“I just showed Ran the way through the woods to the doctor’s house. Ran did more of the saving than I did,” Areku protested.

“Shut-up and let us dote,” Sonoko commanded. “Now, which way to the hair salon?”

“Does my hair bother her that much?” Areku whispered to Sera, who’d managed to get her hands on a pair of shorts and was merrily shoving her wallet into one of the pockets.

“It is quite…” Sera paused, trying to think of a tactful way to put it, “… wild.”

He sighed and drug his feet.

At the hair salon, the shop keeper peered over her glasses at the tangled, matted mess before her. Her breath whistled through her teeth. “2,000 yen, up front. And it will be more later.”

“Done!” Sonoko said, slapping down her credit card.

The barber smiled graciously and pointed out an empty chair at the end.

Guarded on all sides, Areku was dragged to it. “You’re not going to cut around my ears, right?” he whimpered.

The brushing ordeal took about half an hour, with Areku whining between the two women who yanked away at the knots and mats. Because it had been so tangled, it was a good deal longer and thinner than it had at first seemed, and the sun had bleached it in odd patches. The length was also quite uneven, and full of split ends. Areku was adamant that they not cut around his ears, so they cut it at mid-back length. Then they dyed the bleached spots black. It took three hours, and Areku fled the shop as soon as they let go of him, before they could cut anymore of his hair off. He braided it as they walked up the street to the only restaurant that wasn’t a bar in the town, and he tied it off with a hair-elastic band Ran gave him.

With just that, he looked completely different. He no longer looked pitiable or scary; he looked normal. His non-Asian heritage was much more evident, with his slightly stronger brow and longer nose coupled with his dark skin. His wide, hooded eyes and wiry, straight black hair proved his part-Asian descent. How long ago had Areku been born, and what forces had brought together the disparate lines of his past?

Conan didn’t see Sonoko covertly snap a picture of Areku after his hair had been treated with her phone, and post it to her facebook account. Later, he’d wish he had.
While Sonoko and Sera played dress-up doll with Areku, Shinichi and Ran slipped quietly outside, away from everyone else.

She crouched down to face him at eye-level. “You said you’d tell me everything. How about you start now?”

He nodded, eyes down, still unable to look at her directly. “It’d take too long to tell you everything. But, there are several things you should know now, and be on the lookout for,” Shinichi said. “First is: Tooru Amuro. He’s one of their smarter agents, and he’s been tailing us, and I’m not certain why. He knows I’ve been helping your dad solve cases. Don’t ever mention the name Shinichi in front of him, and pretend you know nothing about anything in this case when there’s the slightest chance he could be listening in. I thought he’d leave when he’d killed the ex-member Sherry.

“Second is: Sherry. She’s Ai Haibara. You’re right, she’s shrunk like me, and she was a scientist for the organization. They killed her last living relative. She made the poison, and it’s a top priority that she be kept safe and hidden. The ‘Sherry’ they killed on the train was Kaitou KID, and he managed to escape out the back with his hand-glider before they blew him up.

“Third is: I’m coming up with a plan to take them down within the next few weeks.”

“Are you going to tell me what it is?” she asked, hands on her hips.

He missed that gesture. He missed speaking with her face to face, as an equal. But the potential it used to represent to him, it was all gone, and replaced by his long string of mistakes. He cleared his throat, his voice beginning to waver. “I don’t have enough details figured out yet. Can we talk about it later?”

His expression must have been quite pained, because she made an affirmative hum. “One more thing, Dad’s in on it, isn’t he?”

He blinked, confused.

Not hearing him answer, she went on. “The whole Sleeping Kogorou thing – he’s been letting you solve the cases with your bowtie then taking all of the credit, right?”

Slowly he shook his head. She was really going to hate him now. “He’s not in on it. He’s Sleeping Kogorou because I’ve been knocking him out.” He winced, readying himself for some sort of blow, his eyes squeezed shut, but it never came. When he opened his eyes, she was gone. Hands in his pockets, he limped back to the others.

The makeover party wrapped up by replacing Areku’s clothes, which he enjoyed much more than the painful and terrifying adventure in the hair salon. They found him a pair of shorts that had zippable attachments to turn them into pants, and very big pockets to put things in. The shirt they got him was a baggy t-shirt with a picture of some sort of waterfowl flying over stormy seas, which he’d chosen because he liked the artwork. Then they found him a blue rain jacket, which he tied around his waist.

After their busy, and weirdly exhausting adventure, seeing as most of it was spent waiting in the lobby of the hair salon watching Areku make new and improved expressions for “Ouch!” and “Eek!”, they (sans Sonoko’s grandparents – they’d left in a huff after Ran and Sonoko’s announcement) joined Dr. Nishiyama at her house for dinner. Conan spotted Sonoko’s father take the doctor aside and slipped her a wad of cash after dinner. Then he took Areku by the shoulder and announced to the party that Areku’s address would now be the Nishiyama Clinic. His chest
puffed out with pride and happiness for the benevolent deed he’d just done, and Areku gave him
the thanks and gratitude high he’d been looking for.

Feeling particularly pleased with themselves, the group left for home.

Chapter End Notes

Making arguments for things is pretty common in speech, even when you’re not
arguing. One Japan VS America cultural-linguistic difference is the approach to
arguing a point. In Japanese, the more polite way is to present the evidence first, then
say the conclusion. In the English speaking US, the polite way is to start with the
conclusion, then establish the evidence. In fact, if you argue the other way in the
English-speaking US, people may think you’re being dishonest or wishy-washy. In
Japanese, if you argue with the conclusion first, it makes you sound pushy and
arrogant. This can come out more subtly when dealing with less argumentative
arguments, like a habit worked into you by long practice.

This difference is apparent in the way Areku, Haibara, and Sera organize statements
versus the way that Shinichi does. Despite being quite fluent in English, Shinichi
didn’t live for any extended period of time in the US, and wouldn’t have picked this
habit up. Sera, however, has lived in the US for a long time, and has picked up the
argument style drilled into children in school from a young age. Areku has just been
around it for a long time, so is more used to phrasing statements that way.

To spot it, organize an argument into two groups: supporting facts and conclusion, like
this argument:

Conclusion: I like apples.

Supporting Fact: Apples are crisp and juicy.

Supporting Fact: Apples’ bright colors never fail to cheer me up.

When writing dialogue for a character that is a native/longtime Japanese speaker, I’d
structure it like this:

Apples are crisp and juicy. Their bright colors never fail to cheer me up. Therefore, I
like them.

When writing dialogue for a character like Areku or Sera, I’d structure it like this:

I like apples. They are crisp and juicy. Their bright colors never fail to cheer me up.

As for me… when analyzing my own argument structures, I find myself flipping back
and forth all over the place. I think it has something to do with being around a lot of
Japanese exchange students, studying Japanese for years, and reading/watching an
unhealthy amount of poorly translated manga and anime.

This subtle difference in argumentation was something that a Japanese professor of
mine first alerted me to. She’d had her childhood in Japan, then her teenage-early
adulthood in English-speaking Canada and US, then back and forth ever since. She’d
picked up the conclusion-first argumentation style and expectation. Because of that, she had a good 10 minute rant about Japanese politicians using this to their advantage to trick people.

また来週！ (See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
Act 2 Scene 4 -実践的な戦闘 [Jissenteki-na Sentou] ‘Practical Fighting’

Chapter by dreamingfifi

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a few days of getting used to the idea of being single again, ‘Conan’ returned from visiting his ‘Aunt’ Yukiko. It was late when he arrived, so he didn’t bother rousing Kogorou and Ran. He curled up on the couch and fell asleep in his clothes, his luggage abandoned in the foyer.

Early the next morning, he was awakened by a hand gently shaking his shoulder. Blinking the sleep from his eyes, he blearily looked up at who’d disturbed his rest. His heart sank. He’d hoped he could just avoid Ran.

“Shin-“ she stopped, biting her lip. She took another breath and started again. “Conan. From now on, you’re my little brother. As your big sister, it is my responsibility to help you protect yourself. When you find yourself in a dangerous situation, you will call me first. If you need advice, you can ask your big sister. In return, it is your responsibility to alert me of danger, so that I can protect myself. If I find myself in a dangerous situation, you’ll be my first call. If I need advice, I’ll seek council in my little brother. Do you understand?”

Slowly, he raised his eyes to meet hers. “I do. From now on, we’re family.”

She ruffled his hair the way she’d done when he was just Conan, but stopped halfway through, giving him a wry smile. “Is it okay if I do that?”

“As long as you don’t drag me into the bath anymore, I think we’ll be fine.”

She giggled and resumed messing up his hair. “Go put your stuff away, and I’ll get breakfast ready. You’ve still got school today.”

This wasn’t exactly how he’d imagined joining her family, but this wasn’t so bad.

Amuro grinned and waved at Ran and Conan going to school as he bussed a table at Café Poirot. He was there, watching them return that afternoon as well. Then he came up behind Ran and Conan with a plate of sandwiches, same plaque-less grin on his face. Conan caught her eye, and frowned. She nodded. Something had to be done about this. She had to get him away from Conan and focused on something else.

“Amuro, can I speak to you alone about something for a minute?” she asked, interrupting her father’s monologue about techniques for tailing people.

His eyebrows shot up, and he blinked. “Sure…” He didn’t sound like he meant it.

Ran pulled him outside, ignoring Conan’s worried frown.

“Lately, a lot of dangerous things have happened around us. I’ve been studying karate for years now, but I don’t know much about fighting outside competitions. During some of the cases, I’ve seen you take down people who were causing problems. You did it really fast, with minimal collateral damage. I want to learn how to do that, so I can better protect my family and friends. Could you teach me?” None of it was lies, actually. She did need more experience for dealing with
street fights, and Amuro did seem to be good at it. She looked up at him, waiting for his answer.

“Wow,” he said at last. “The karate champion is asking me for help training? I’d ask the same of you actually.”

“We could teach each other. What do you think of that?” she added hastily.

“I suppose we could try it out for a while. I don’t know how much I could teach you though.” He studied her a minute, squinting. “Anything in particular bring this on?”

“Ah, no…” she looked away blushing. “We didn’t run into any trouble on vacation, but Conan almost died again.” Seeing his shocked expression, she elaborated, “It was an allergic reaction to a bee sting. No one tried to kill him except a suicidal honey bee.”

“That kid just attracts trouble, doesn’t he?” he muttered.

“Yeah,” Ran laughed, “you can see why it’s necessary. So when is a good time for you?”

He thought a moment. “How about after the dinner rush? My hours are fairly flexible, so if I ask for evenings off I should get them.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Ran smiled and bowed. “Thank you Sensei!”

He laughed, “Same to you, Sensei.”

They re-entered the office. Conan and Kogorou had been listening in, it turned out, and they ran back to their places embarrassed.

After dinner, Conan dragged Ran into her room and closed the door.

“What the hell are you thinking? Why do you want to spend more time with him?” he asked, keeping his voice low.

“It’s less time he gets observing you! He’s close to figuring you out, right?”

“Yeah, but…” Conan scowled, huffing. “It puts you more directly in danger.”

Ran groaned. “We’ve been over this. Trust me; I can protect myself. Besides, maybe I’ll learn some good practical fighting skills from him.”

“Fine,” Conan said, slumping his shoulders. “Be careful. Keep the conversation on fighting and normal stuff, don’t talk about cases or me at all.”

“Don’t worry about me. I can handle myself.” Ran picked up her homework, which had been sitting on the bed where she’d tossed it when she got home, and put it on her desk. Conan slipped out and put GPS trackers in her shoes.

The next day, after dinner, Amuro knocked on the door. “Get your coat, we’re going to a good place to train.”

Ran grabbed her coat, and they walked through the chilly early spring air a few blocks, to an abandoned building. As soon as they entered the building, Amuro punched Ran in the stomach, doubling her over and forcing all of her breath out.

“First rule of street fighting: Always hit first.” He leapt agilely back into the room. “The winner of a street fight usually is the one who lands a blow first. Even though it’s messier legally speaking,
you’ll have a better chance of protecting whoever you’re trying to protect.”

Ran rubbed her stomach gingerly, catching her breath. She imitated his movement, mirroring it perfectly.

“Now try that move on me,” he said, walking quickly towards her, like he was passing her on the street.

She threw the punch, but stopped it right before it connected.

“No no no! Don’t pull your punches! You have to hurt the person you’re fighting or they won’t stop trying to hurt you.”

“Is that the second rule?” she asked, stepping back to start the approach again.

“There isn’t an order to my rules beyond the first one,” he said, shrugging. He started the approach again.

This time she struck. The blow lifted him off the ground, and he dropped like a sack of rice. He lay on the floor a minute, gasping. When he’d finally caught his breath again, he wryly asked, “Is your fist made of lead or something?”

“That’s why I was pulling my punch. I didn’t want to end our lesson so soon.”

He coughed. “Probably a good idea, actually. I think that’s the second hardest punch I’ve ever taken,” he moaned.

“How about pointers, then?” Ran suggested, helping him up.

“Sure…” he thought back, trying to connect his experiences into some sort of coherent lesson, as they started back home. “If a fight is going to take more than one punch to finish, try to get your opponent surprised. When your opponent is off balance, strike the hardest, and keep the blows coming. They’ll be pretty helpless to stop you stopping them. Then get them immobilized. Then you just have to intimidate them into doing what you want them to.” He paused, thinking again. “Actually, just intimidating your opponent is best usually. Then you don’t have to worry about all that pain. For that, just practice your acting chops.”

“That sounds simple enough, but people usually aren’t intimidated by a teenage girl,” she pointed out.

“That’s useful too though,” he said. “It gives you the element of surprise, so you can hit first.”

As they approached the Mouri Detective Agency, Ran asked, “Shall we do this again tomorrow then?”

“Give me a few days to heal,” he laughed. “I may bring you some of my buddies to spar with next time. What do you think?”

“That’d be fine,” she said, going back up the steps. She’d done it. It seemed like he’d bought her story, and he was really trying to teach her.

The next night, a small group of men and women met Ran at the door, and Conan tagged along. He’d insisted on it, after hearing that she’d be facing a bunch of Bourbon’s friends. As he walked with her down the street, bundled up an embarrassing amount against the cold, he whispered in
Ran’s ear, “Listen to the key-tones of their cells when they dial someone. If it sounds like the first line of Nanatsu no Ko, then they’re calling their boss, and we know that they’re an agent.”

Straightening up, she smiled and said loudly, “I don’t know if I can beat them all. I’ll do my best!”

Turning up his child-impression, Conan blurted out, “But Ran’s the best! She always comes in first place!”

The people they were walking with chuckled. Winning karate tournaments didn’t impress this lot.

In the building, their breath created the same clouds that it did outside, but they still found themselves stripping off layers as Ran faced each one. She was unfamiliar with other fighting techniques, but she was able to hold her own, even as they got rests, and she didn’t. The one that gave her the most trouble was the knife wielder, who was wielding a piece of chalk to prevent serious injury, and she ended up with chalk marks all over her clothes.

Conan sat in a corner, watching. He knew that Ran was good. Her many trophies and medals were proof of that, but he hadn’t known just how good she was. She was picking up moves from the people she fought, and turning them against the next person she fought. What surprised him though, was how fast many of the exchanges were. Ran was pulling her punches, but still putting her opponents down and disarming them incredibly quickly.

She was facing the knife wielder again, when a cold hand touched his shoulder. “Hey Cool Guy,”
the owner of the hand said.

He took a few deep breaths, creating a series of large clouds before him to calm himself. “I found your little brother,” he said quietly.

“Did you, now?” she asked, shading the face she was wearing from him. “How did he look?”

“Good, actually. He’s happy. He misses you.” Conan looked up at her, but she turned away. “Are you ready?” he whispered.

“Give me five minutes alone with Sherry,” she said softly. She offered him a handshake. In her palm, he could see a slip of paper. He shook her hand, grabbing the piece of paper in the process. He quickly stuffed it into his coat pocket.

“I don’t know if I can.” He couldn’t allow that. She’d kill Haibara, without question.

“Ask her.”

He nodded and went back to watching Ran get smeared with chalk again.

That night, he spent three hours writing down everything he knew about the organization, and how he found the information out, and how it could be verified. He uploaded it to a cloud server, and emailed Ran the link. She’d earned the truth, every last bit of it.

Chapter End Notes

Not much of a note today, because I’ve been working on a series of short essays about
writing Detective Conan fanfiction, and I want to give you the link: Detective Conan Fanfiction Rants
In the cold evening, the doorbell to Dr. Agasa’s house rang. It was in the midst of dinner, and he went to answer the door, muttering about how inconsiderate it is to call on others during mealtimes. His tune changed when he opened the door, however. At the door was a strikingly beautiful foreign woman, with long, pale blonde hair and a generous bosom. He recognized her as the actress, Chris Vinyard, who was a semi-ally of theirs. After the Bell-Tree Express, she’d given up on killing Sherry, and occasionally acted as a double agent in their favor. She smiled brightly at him and said, “Is Miss Haibara home?”

“Yes,” Dr. Agasa said with a cautious smile. “May I ask why you want to see her?”

“Tell her Vermouth-“

Haibara peeked around Dr. Agasa’s legs. “I know what she wants. Conan told me.”

She raised her eyebrows. “He told you our deal?”

“He told me not to take it. But, this isn’t his decision, is it?” Haibara beckoned Vermouth into the house. “Dr. Agasa,” she snapped, as though she’d caught him breaking his diet, “You are to go out and eat whatever you want tonight. Do not get take-out.” She grabbed her bright red coat and her boots and put them on. “Let’s get this over with.”

After Agasa left, she led a slightly confused Vermouth into the basement. Haibara’s computer and antidote manufacturing tools had been moved out, leaving it bare.

Vermouth looked down at the little girl before her, studying her choice of clothes.

“You’re not going to kill me,” Haibara said, glaring straight back.

“Why these?” Vermouth asked, stroking the little red coat Haibara wore.

She flinched away from Vermouth’s hand. “I’ll tell the doctors I was run over by a car.”

“Oh?” Vermouth laughed bitterly. “Cool Guy is sure I intend to kill you, and you are sure you’ll be able to walk away from this. Whatever gave you that idea?” Without warning, she struck Ai’s face, letting her long, press-on nails rake the fragile, childish skin. Ai lost her balance, falling a step back. Four deep scratches appeared, bloodless at first, but soon they were swollen and bleeding like the marks left by a pissed off housecat, if it were the size of a lion.

“Do you know what you and your parents did to me?” she hissed. Ai cried out involuntarily as she was picked up and hurled against the wall. Her head struck, leaving her dazed. By her calculations, she’d have a concussion for sure.

She walked slowly to the small form, letting her recover a moment, before the next attack. “I was dying of leukemia when they swooped in, promising me a cure – no family, no money, desperate and vulnerable.” Ai lifted her arms to protect her face, but Vermouth grabbed her wrist, and twisted until it snapped. In the concrete room, Ai’s scream was earsplitting.
Vermouth dropped Ai’s arm to cover her ears, until the echoes passed, then sat back to watch Ai whimper, holding her wrist close.

“Did you know that they cut off some of my toes, to see if I could grow back limbs like Alex could?”

That statement seemed to hurt Ai more than her wrist breaking. Her whimpers turned into sobs.

Eyes flashing, Vermouth continued. “Maybe I should do that to you too. After all, time just slowed down for me, it didn’t run backwards, like it did for you. Maybe if I cut off one of your toes, then gave you another dose, your toe would grow back. Shall we give it a shot?”

Ai smiled as best she could, the side of her face was starting to swell, making it only a half-doable task. “Do you think that would absolve me?”

Vermouth howled, thirty years of pain releasing itself all at once on Ai’s small form. When Vermouth came to her senses, she had Ai pinned beneath her, and her fragile little neck bruised beneath her fingers, her body limp and unmoving on the concrete floor. Vermouth dropped her and crawled away. She was breathing heavily. She’d never killed someone like this before. In all of her years of service, she’d always killed quickly, painlessly, quietly. She had always remembered every second of it, unlike Gin, who preferred to forget it all. Was this what it was like for him? An insane rush of adrenaline, leaving one exhausted, memory-less, and teetering on the edge of self-loathing… She lost herself in these thoughts for a while, perhaps minutes, perhaps hours. Time slipped through her fingers like Sherry’s life had.

A voice, like from a dream, spoke to her, interrupting her pathos. A small, hoarse voice etched out words from swollen vocal chords, like a beginner-violinist fumbling with their bow. “I knew you couldn’t do it.”

She turned to look at the little corpse she’d left on the other side of the room. The moon had come out lighting up the wall behind her. Round windows. That geezer was a little off in the head, though she wasn’t one to judge.

“Because Sherry committed suicide two years ago in her cell,” the little voice said. “That’s why you couldn’t kill me.”

Dr. Agasa didn’t know what Shinichi and Haibara had been discussing the day before, or what this woman wanted with his friend. The way she had looked at Haibara, it felt dangerous to him, though he couldn’t put his finger on the reason why. He disobeyed Haibara and ate a big salad, topped with blue cheese and Parmesan. He hurried home, but while the lights were still on, the house was silent. Perhaps they’d gone somewhere? Haibara had grabbed her coat, afterall. He sat down in the main room and fiddled with his phone, checked Facebook posts, checked e-mail, then checked Facebook again. A full hour crawled by, and there was no sign of them returning. He walked to the front door and peeked out the window, trying to decide whether he should go out and find them.

As he entered the family room, he was greeted by a weary and weeping Vermouth, carrying a bloody and barely conscious Haibara Ai.

“Get her to the doctor,” she said, her voice hoarse.

She pulled a USB-drive out of her pocket, and put it on the table. They left together, without any more words.
This chapter is a new one. It didn't exist in my first draft of the story. I'd glossed over it, because writing about these emotions and this violence is really difficult to put myself through. But, a few months back, I realized I had to write this out fully. Vermouth's story arc is incomplete without it. In this story is a sneaky character-study on Vermouth, so I figured she was going to be the subject of today's author note.

Vermouth likely has a tragic backstory, from when she tells Yukiko Kudou that “no angel has smiled on me, not once.” She's also the favorite of the boss, even though she loves weird, dramatic schemes starring her, and she seems to have very little in the way of actual loyalty to the organization. I think that's bound up with her lack of aging, that because of that, they assume that she'll be automatically loyal, making her beyond reproach. She also really, really relishes every chance she can get to murder Sherry, now that Sherry doesn't have the protection of the organization. That leads into this chapter.

There's something I noticed about the two attempts on Haibara's life by Vermouth. The first looked like it was going to be quick and efficient. The second was a good deal more sadistic, involving cornering Haibara psychologically and terrorizing her into self-sacrifice. But, afterwords, she didn't “accidentally” push Haibara off the platform into an on-coming train or a myriad of other ways she could have quickly and easily killed her, even though her grudge was still there. I think that Shinichi and Ran's idealism is reaching her and affecting more and more of her decisions, and she's slowly losing her nerve to kill Haibara. That's the tipping point that I wanted to reach in the chapter.

In real life... it took me months to write this. I didn't manage it until I met with a traumatic trigger, and I touched the grief and helplessness that Vermouth feels. A few days ago, my best friend's mother was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. So many painful memories have come up for me, especially of my grandfather's death of the same malady. Somehow, that made it easier to dive into tragedy, grief and pain that wasn't real.

また来週！ (See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
Chapter by dreamingfifi

See the end of the chapter for notes

Probably the worst thing about all of this was how freaking happy everyone was. Sonoko and Ran were up obscenely early, their cheerful voices echoing down the hall as they planned the elaborate deaths of their “ugly school uniforms.” It was graduation day.

The previous week, they’d finished their finals. He’d helped Ran study and let himself become immersed in it, so he could ignore this impending day. Ignoring it, as it turned out, didn’t make it not happen.

Now Ran was skipping around the apartment, talking about entering the police academy next month, while waiting for Conan and Kogorou to finish getting ready. Kogorou set down his scissors, having carefully trimmed his mustache to a thin dark line. He looked down at Conan beside him, who was dawdling at brushing his teeth.

“She used to use that step ladder to reach the sink too.” He dampened a washcloth, and wiped away the last bits of shaving cream. “I’m glad it’s getting good use.” He gently tussled Conan’s hair, and looked away sadly, lost in thought.

Conan spat out the toothpaste foam, letting the running sink whisk it away. He silently disagreed, and slipped out of the bathroom.

After school, Conan casually said his good-byes to the Detective Boys, fighting the rising fear that brought bile to his mouth. Haibara hadn’t been in school. He’d tried to contact her during the breaks, but had gotten no answer, and no answer from Dr. Agasa either. Then again, Agasa wasn’t exactly good at remembering to bring his cellphone with him or keeping it charged. When he was sure the Detective Boys were out of sight, he broke into a sprint.

His stubby little legs ached and his lungs burned by the time he got to Dr. Agasa’s house. Panting and heaving he tried to collect himself as he rang the doorbell, then rang it again because a few seconds was too much time to wait for a response. Finally, as he reached for the bell a third time, he heard Agasa’s heavy footsteps hurrying to the door. He leaned against the wall, his body starting the shake from the exertion and adrenaline. The moment the door opened, Conan yelled, “I’ve been calling all day! Why didn’t you answer?”

Agasa crossed his arms and scowled down at Conan. “We were at the hospital, and only just got back. Ai’s been sleeping, and I was in too big a rush to get my cellphone charger.”

“The hospital?” Conan felt his knees weakening. “Don’t tell me-“ he didn’t get to finish his sentence, as Haibara’s red-brown head peaked around Agasa’s legs. She was wearing loose-fitting pajamas over a big red cast over her arm, which dangled from a sling hung off her shoulder. Her face was swollen and purple, and bandages covered one of her cheeks. Her neck had the marks of adult-sized hands wrapped around them.

“Stop gaping like an idiot, Kudou,” Haibara snapped. “It’s not as bad as it looks.”

He closed his mouth and quietly followed them inside, anger and confusion whirling about his
head, bottled up and ready to explode. When they got to the living room, he yelled, “Why? Why did you let her do this to you! I told you we’d work something else out, ANYTHING else out!”

Haibara waited until he had to stop for breath to answer him. “Who do you think is responsible for the most murders in the organization?”

Conan felt something in his chest tighten painfully as he realized something he’d forgotten about, after so long seeing Haibara as an ally and friend to be protected.

“I am. I invented an untraceable poison. I tested it on humans. I killed hundreds of people in the first month alone. And after I left, even after I destroyed my research, they had plenty of it already made, and continued to use it. That makes me responsible for more deaths than even Gin could dream of achieving. Hating that I’ve done these things, hating that they were being done even while I was doing them, that doesn’t change the fact that I’ve done them. When I tried to commit suicide, I felt like it could be some small justice for all of the horrible things I’ve done, but instead, I shrunk and escaped the justice I tried to deal to myself. All of those people I’ve hurt and killed, including you, including Vermouth and Areku, I owe you anything I could possibly do to pay the debt of suffering I’ve racked up. So, I let Vermouth give me her justice until she couldn’t hit me anymore. Because of that, she’ll never try to kill me again. She’s completely devoted to taking down the organization, and has given me directions to a secret stash she’d been building up of compromising documents on all of the organization’s agents since Areku’s escape. Stopping the people using my poison against others is how I’ve decided to repay this debt.” She closed her eyes and sat back on the comfy couch.

“But, I didn’t want you to get hurt!” Conan blurted out. “I don’t want to be repaid in blood!”

“You’re not,” Haibara retorted. “I repaid Vermouth in blood. I’m repaying you with the information you need to take the organization down.”

The words sounded impossible to Conan. It’d been two years since he’d found himself face-down in the amusement park, writhing in agony as his body turned back time. Two years of constant danger and setbacks. Could it really be over so simply? So easily?

Her voice shook him from his thoughts. “What are you waiting for? Go end this nightmare, Shinichi Kudou.”

Agasa came from his study and dropped a small stack of printed off papers. “What’s this?” he asked.

“He came from his study and dropped a small stack of printed off papers. “What’s this?” he asked.

“That woman left these with us last night, after…” Agasa bit his tongue and turned away.

Conan turned the over and examined them. They’d been printed out only moments before. Crisscrossing lines over the first page formed a map of a neighborhood in Shinjuku, from the looks of it. “Professor, could you give us a lift to Shinjuku?” Conan asked, reading over the instructions.

“Shinichi, if it’s all the same to you,” Agasa said, shaking his head. “I think you should just hand this off to the FBI and be done with it. You seem to forget that you’re only one person, and the FBI has been chasing them for decades. They have the manpower and connections to take the organization down; you don’t.”

Clenching his jaw, Conan said, “I have to see this through. The militant side of their organization will be under much deeper cover than their scientists, and they need to be drawn out somehow.”

“At least take Ran with you when you follow this trail. My basement is covered in blood that I’m
going to spend the afternoon cleaning up.” With that, Agasa turned and made his way back into the basement, picking up some heavy-duty cleaning agents he’d left by the door on his way down.

He had a point. After all, Ran had made it crystal clear that she wanted to help fight the organization, and this trip was going to require a trip into a rather sketchy neighborhood of Shinjuku, where the glamorous lights couldn’t reach. A little kid travelling alone would be in danger. He pulled out his cellphone, selected Ran’s name, and hit [send].

“Hello? This is Ran’s phone, Deduction Queen Sonoko speaking!” In the background, Conan could hear the noise of a graduation party well underway. Music was blaring, and shrieks of laughter echoed about what sounded like a room with high ceilings and hard walls.

“It’s Conan; I need to speak with Ran!” he said, turning up his obnoxious kiddy-voice.

“Honey? The phone’s for you!” Sonoko called in the sugary-sweetest, tooth-rotting, kill-me-now voice. They were already calling each other “honey?” Conan grit his teeth. Sonoko is a good person, and Ran loves her. Sonoko is a good person and Ran loves her. SonokoisaGoodPerson and RanLovesHer.

Finally Ran answered, breathless from laughing at something that Conan couldn’t see. “Ran speaking.”

“Ran? I’ve got a hot lead. Can you meet me at the subway station?”

“Could I go home first?”

“No, we don’t want any chance of Them following us.”

The mirth from Ran’s voice vanished. “Roger. See you in half an hour?”

“Right. I’ll explain what’s going on when we meet.”

They said their goodbyes, and he hung up. This could be the end of this mess, he realized. This really could be it. Butterflies danced in his stomach all the way down to the crowded subway. His enthusiasm diminished when he saw Sonoko standing by Ran, talking with her expressive arms over something… Pretending to tip a top hat? Probably Kaitou KID then. There must have been another heist announcement. Trust Sonoko to know well in advance of anyone else. He slipped up behind them, and tugged on the hem of Ran’s skirt.

When she looked down to him, he said in his whiny little brat voice, “Why is she here?”

Ran put her hands on her hips, like a disappointed mother. “Unlike Shinichi, I don’t lie to my girlfriend.”

Sonoko grinned and blushed, not noticing Conan’s horrified expression. He snatched Ran’s hand and dragger her away from Sonoko, shouting over his shoulder, “I just need to ask her something really fast!” When they were out of earshot, he pulled her down to his height and hissed into her ear, “Are you trying to get us all killed?”

“Shin-“ She stopped, face reddening. “Conan. First of all, I didn’t tell her about the poison or what it did to you. All I told her was that you and I are helping Shinichi in a dangerous investigation that needs to be top secret, and that I can’t tell her most of the details, so if she’s questioned by badguys she’ll be able to deny knowledge honestly. Second, Sonoko isn’t dumb. She sometimes plays dumb because people expect her to be, like you. She’s not going to blab about our investigation to anyone. Third, she’s offering to pay for a cab. Fourth, your jealousy is showing. Quit acting like
my jealous ex, and act like my little brother. Got it?"

He nodded, studying the grungy floor. He kept quiet, lost in his own thoughts on the taxi ride to Shinjuku.

The taxi skedaddled as soon as Sonoko paid their fare, leaving them standing at the rusty gate. The building the map indicated was a grim 80’s era grey concrete box. The windows all had shutters or bars over them, or both. None of them could be seen through. The doors has locks and bolts – including the mailboxes. In order to take or leave anything from the steal boxes, one needed a key. The building resembled a hedgehog rolled into a prickly, uninviting ball. The instructions led them to a set of keys for the gate, door, and bolt lock, carefully hidden behind a loose brick in the brick wall of the alley. Shivering in the spring chill as the sun started to set, they slipped into apartment that had been indicated on the map. Other than there being no wind, it was no warmer inside. The lights hadn’t been changed in twenty years, and won’t turn on either.

As his eyes adjusted to the murky darkness of the apartment, Conan’s heart fell. It was a studio apartment, packed from floor to ceiling with paper, manila folders, three-right binders. There was only the small space they were standing in not filled with documents. Vermouth was older than the proliferation of PCs, he realized. She must not trust digital information. There was no way he and his small network of friends could go through all of this, not without years of time to do it. Like Agasa had predicted, he had to hand all of this over to the FBI. Sighing, he dialed Agent Jodie.

She answered in English, but switched to Japanese when she heard his voice. “Oh, Cool Kid! It’s nice to hear from you again. How are you?”

He sniffled, and searched his pockets for his handkerchief. “Cold. Right now I’m in a studio apartment in Shinjuku which is almost completely filled with stolen documents from the Black Organization.”

There was a moment of silence before a near deafening, “WHAT?” assaulted his eardrums.

“You heard me. It’s probably enough intel to do some serious damage to them, far more than you’ve ever been able to do before. If you want it, you’ll have to agree with some of my demands.”

Apparently he’d been put on speakerphone, because James Black’s voice answered him. “Anything you want, little detective.”

He took a deep breath. This was it. This was it! “The Japanese police, or rather, the ones that I’ve cleared of suspicion, must be read in. And, I want to help plan the capture of the militant wing of the organization that’s stationed in Tokyo.”

“Done,” Agent Black said, with zero hesitation. “Is that all?”

Conan grinned. This was it!

Chapter End Notes

I ended up having to do some major revisions to this chapter. Highschool graduation was a huge deal for my family and community. There was a big ceremony that pretty much the entire town turned up to watch. There was a concert, hours of official speeches, ‘the walk’, and afterwards, hours of partying. I was given my second car.
(My first was a junker that had been left to rot in a field. I bought it for $1 and fixed it up. It had no bumper or backseat.) And, I was given hundreds of dollars in cash and other expensive gifts. I had assumed that highschool graduation would be a Big Deal in Japan too. But, after doing some research, I found that it really isn’t. There’s a ceremony, but it’s whenever finals end, sometimes in the middle of the week! Other students don’t get time off to watch the seniors graduate, and it’s a pretty short, swift ceremony. The Big Deal is made over college graduation instead.

また来週！(See you next week!)

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Kaitou KID snickered to himself as he skipped up the street back to his house. He’d managed to outsmart the foureyed brat and Hakuba. Foureyes hadn’t even appeared at his escape route. Had he left partway through? Meh, it didn’t matter. He’d made a flawless escape, and managed to not get beaten up by crazed martial arts girls, a soccer ball lodged in his back, or fallen from any great heights. Humming a cheerful tune, he threw open the front door and tossed his black baseball cap onto the hat wrack, knowing it had hit its mark without needing to see it. His jacket popped open, and his doves burst forth with a flurry of feather, beaks, and claws. He hung his jacket up with a flourish of his wrist, bowing to an imaginary audience. He flicked off his shoes and reached for his slippers, and heard the lock on the door clicking into place. That didn’t make sense, that lock wasn’t automatic.

“Mom?” he asked turning around. The lights switched on.

*Wrong.* Before him was the half-pint, foureyed, demon child, Conan Edogawa, and he was smiling.

He took a few breaths to calm down and re-secure his pokerface. “Who are you, and what are you doing in my house, little boy?” He crouched before the foureyed demon, smiling a hopefully disarming smile. “Are you lost?”

“Nope!” the demon sneered. “I found Kaitou KID!”

His blood ran cold.

“Why do you think that?”

Conan pulled out his cell phone. “Because I loaned Kaitou KID my cellphone, and he didn’t turn it off. The GPS showed that it’d spent a whole night here, before being dropped off at the Mouri Detective Agency. Then I did a little research, and found this was the Kuroba residence. As it happens, Touichi Kuroba had been a famous magician who died ten years ago – right when the thefts stopped. Then, eight years later, they began again, when his son had gotten old enough to continue them.”

“That’s pretty weak evidence if you ask me. It’s just a coincidence.”

“But it lines up so nicely with other things I know about Kaitou KID! He told me he’s a big fan of Touichi Kuroba, that his mother is the Phantom Lady, who also has a suspiciously familiar disguise technique, that I’ve seen two other students of Touichi Kuroba use. First would be Yukiko Kudou, and the second would be Sharon Vineyard. Yukiko Kudou’s husband, Yuusaku Kudou, also was the one to give the KID part of the nickname to Kaitou KID, and based his best-selling novel series *The Night Baron* off of his friend. I happen to be a relative of the Kudous, so I was able to confirm my suspicions – Touichi Kuroba was the original Kaitou KID, and his son, Kaito Kuroba, has taken up the role for the past two and a half years.” Conan beckoned. “Ran, hold him down.”

Something struck him in the back. It made his legs go limp for a moment and knocked him to the
floor. He twisted around to see what it was. A strong pair of hands grabbed his wrist and shoulder and slammed him back to the floor, hard. Flickering lights swam before his eyes. He tried to release a streamer into his attacker’s face with his spare hand, but a knee came down on his back, and his other wrist was grabbed. He was caught. It was physically impossible to get free without doing some major damage to a few joints.

“He’s really flexible,” Ran said from above. “See how far I can twist before there’s resistance?”

“Come on, Ran, don’t break him. He’ll be no use to us then.” He cupped his hand and whispered into Kaito’s ear, “You shouldn’t struggle... Kaitou KID recently stripped her girlfriend naked and locked her in the bathroom. She’s still a little mad, if you haven’t noticed.”

He stopped struggling. He was done for. At least he hadn’t been caught by Aoko’s dad; that would have been beyond humiliating.

Conan’s little hands darted around, disarming his tricks, toys, and traps, one after another. With a triumphant cry, he pulled out the glittering prize Kaitou KID had just snatched.

He moaned. “Alright, I’m done fighting you; you win. What do you want to blackmail me into doing this time?” His captor released him, dropping him to the floor.

“You blackmailed him into helping you before?” asked a pompous British voice from where he couldn’t see. Crap. Double crap. Saguru Hakuba was in on this?

“It saved someone’s life. Also, it meant I knew exactly where to find him, if I ever needed to.”

“So,” he said, shakily pulling himself into a sitting position. “Will there be people with guns, explosives, or both, like last time? By the way, you still owe me for that. Letting that Sera girl beat up on me nullified letting me escape.”

Hakuba walked behind him and grabbed one arm, and Ran grabbed the other. They picked him up and dragged him into the kitchen. “I knew it was you,” Hakuba said, sighing. “Leave it to you to get caught by an 8 year old.”

They dropped him on a chair at the kitchen table, then drew up chairs themselves.

“So, what are you going to do with me?” he mumbled.

“We have something much more important to do than catch you,” Ran said. Her hand was still on his shoulder, just in case he tried to run.

Conan’s face barely peeked over the edge of the table. “We’re going to take down the international crime syndicate that you helped me face on the train.”

“Do I have to?” he whined.

“We know your identity, and we have solid proof. If you don’t help us, we’ll turn you in. Also, you’ll be indirectly responsible for the deaths of a lot of people and the continued deadly operations of said international crime syndicate,” Hakuba said, arms crossed in front of him. “I know you’re not a bad person, and I know you’re dumb enough to face whoever keeps using you for target practice during your heists without backup. Name whatever conditions you have, and we’ll consider them trade for your services.”

“Don’t tell Aoko,” he said immediately. “And I want full immunity. And, you guys help me take down the people who use me as target practice during my heists. And, you reinvestigate my
father’s murder.”

“Your father was murdered?” Conan asked, looking perplexed. “The records indicated an accident during a performance.”

“No. It was murder.” Kaito clenched his fists. “I heard the confession from the lips of the men who did it, right before they tried to kill me. I’ve been trying to get you guys to catch them at the heists, but you’re so freaking incompetent-“

“That’s not fair!” snapped Hakuba. “How were we supposed to know these people would be showing up? How were we supposed to know they’d killed your father? We’re detectives, not psychics! If you’d have come to us sooner, maybe we could have-“

“Let the world know that my dad was Kaitou KID? That’d be painting a gigantic bull’s eye on me, my mom, and everyone we know. No way can I be responsible for that!” Kaito yelled, trying to stand up. Ran roughly planted him back into his chair.

“Boys, knock it off! We have more important things to talk about!” Ran glared and raised her fist, daring the next person to start shouting. They clammed up.

“Now,” Ran said in a quiet, calm voice. “Conan, explain what you need Kaito Kuroba to do for us.”

“Yes ma’am!” He pulled out a folded piece of paper with a list of names and phone numbers. “We need you to help these people get into disguises, so they can flee before the sting goes down. They’ll be on the syndicate’s hit list. This column is the agents and officers that will be taking their places. The rest are people who just need to be made unrecognizable. The preparations for this are going to take at a couple weeks, so we need to be working closely with you.”

Kaito scanned the names. Agent Jodie Starling - FBI, Officer Miwako Satou… “Do they know who I am?”

Conan shook his head. “They’ll only know you as Kaito Kuroba, costume design and stage makeup expert who has a knack for building convincing disguises. They’ll have no idea that you’re Kaitou KID, as long as you don’t tell them.”

“So how will you arrange immunity for me?”

“We’ll tell them afterwards,” Ran said. “My mom is an excellent lawyer, and she can arrange it for you.”

He glanced at the list, noting the name “Eri Kisaki” in the people who would be replaced. “Kogorou Mouri” was on it too. “Mouri, why are your parents on the list?”

Conan and Ran exchanged glances. “Everyone who has a connection to Shinichi Kudou or Conan Edogawa is going to be on their hit list,” Conan said. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “One of their agents has been getting really close to us. He’s likely figured out that I’m the brains behind ‘Sleeping Kogorou’, and he’ll probably figure out with a little clever digging that I’m in contact with Shinichi Kudou – who the syndicate supposedly killed two years ago. He also knows I was involved in the capture and detainment of their operative Kir by the FBI last year. In three weeks, Shinichi Kudou will be dead; they’ll know that he’s been alive this whole time, and the race will be on to plug all of the leaks created by him.”

“But your names aren’t on the list…” he flipped the page over to see if there was a backside, but it was empty.
“I can’t ask a child to take my place,” Conan said grimly. “I’ll go into hiding beforehand. There’s no safer place for me.”

“And I can take care of myself,” said Ran. “Do you want another demonstration?”

“No, no, that’s fine!” an idea that probably shouldn’t have found its way onto his lips, but did anyways, popped into his head. “By the way, which one is your girlfriend? Sera or Sonoko?”

A fist in his gut was her response. “Sonoko,” she said sweetly.

Kaito whimpered. “She does seem to like karate-freaks.” Doubled over and clutching his stomach, he took a sideways glance at Hakuba. “So, your connections to Interpol are the reason they brought you in?”

Hakuba nodded. “They approached me at the heist, and asked for my help. I didn’t like the idea of including you, but they said their usual disguise expert would be in Osaka, helping them protect a particularly important escapee from the organization.”

“Also,” Conan interjected, “You’re really good at manipulating people, especially in groups. We need help with the planning of this sting, to make sure we can take down as much as possible of the organization at once.”

For once, this situation sounded reasonable. “So, I’ll get full immunity if they figure out who I am; Aoko never finds out who I am; and you help me take down my father’s murders; in exchange for helping you plan a massive sting operation on a dangerous international crime syndicate and disguising their would-be victims. Is that the deal?”

They all nodded.

“I’ll put it in writing,” said Hakuba, pulling out a pad of paper and an expensive pen.

“Okay then. I’m in.” Ran let go of Kaito’s shoulder. Conan called Heiji Hattori, and the five of them started planning.

When Mrs. Kuroba came home, a little drunk but very happy, she found her son, his classmate, and two people she’d never met deep in sketches and papers, planning something. It was 3AM. She made the strange kids go to bed in the guest room, sent the classmate home, and chased Kaito up to his room.

“Mom,” he said, with the first truly happy smile she’d seen since he’d learned of his father’s murder. “I think we’re finally going to be able to catch Dad’s killers. It’s going to be all over soon.”

“Good job dear,” she said, a drunken smile over her face. “Be sure to tell me that again in the morning. Mommy had a little too much fun with her coworkers at the theatre tonight.” She closed the door to his bedroom, and wandered back to her own. She closed the door and soaked her pillow with tears.

Chapter End Notes

Have you ever noticed that the ways that laughs are written have very different connotations? For example, “hiihihii” is a sneaky laugh, while “hohoho” is a deep laugh – usually attributed to Santa Claus. In Japanese, there are also a bunch of laughs with
We'll start with laughing etiquette. In Japanese culture, the polite way to laugh is with your hand over your mouth, so that people don't see into your mouth, kinda like how you're supposed to chew with your mouth closed. Laughing with your mouth uncovered is called 「馬鹿笑い」 [bakawarai] “horse laughing” or “stupid laughing.” This is the reason in the Detective Conan manga and anime, Mouri Kogorou is always depicted laughing with his mouth open and his tongue hanging out. It's written “hahaha.”

The polite laugh is “hohoho” with one's mouth covered. It's high-pitched, especially when women do it. When it's exaggerated in pitch, to eardrum-busting heights, it's stuck-up and the preferred laugh of bratty, rich girls. You'll see Sonoko using this laugh occasionally.

An attempted covered up laugh, like a snicker, is “fufufu.” Another is “hiihihi” or “kikiki.” The laugh that you see Kaitou KID using often is “kikiki,” which has an extra mischievous connotation because it similar to the sound monkeys make in Japanese, “ukikiki.”

また来年! (See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
It’d been several weeks, with things running smoothly. Ran had dropped hints to Bourbon that she was worried about a friend of hers who was very sick. It wouldn’t be hard for him to trace the breadcrumbs to ‘dying Shinichi Kudou.’ His mother was positioned in Osaka to pick up Areku, to get him into disguise and move him in with Heiji Hattori. With Areku's dark skin, he could easily pass as a cousin of some sort.

Heiji had been brought up to speed, and Ran kept in daily contact with Hakuba and Heiji who were helping the FBI analyze the documents Vermouth had given them. Heiji and Hakuba kept Conan and Ran in the loop on their progress.

Hakuba organized the agents into a couple categories: scientific research assets (willing, unwilling, or ignorant) and spies (muscle, reconnaissance, assassins, or managers). Not to be out-done, Heiji had discovered that they were organized into cells, and the reason that Conan randomly ran into Gin and Vodka was because they ran the largest cell of the organization in Tokyo. Heiji inferred that the boss of the organization was probably in Tokyo as well, even though the phone number was localized to Tottori. They’d been earning money by ripping off the different gangs, and keeping the gangs convinced that the culprits were rival gangs.

The money was getting shoveled into research for trans-humanist projects. Nano-machines, computer development, vaccines, cancer treatments, and life extension… When Conan read the list of studies the organization was supporting, he almost felt sorry that they’d lose their funding. The organization was large and very international, with the biggest cells in Tokyo, California, London, and the Italian government was on their pay-role.

Kaito’s contribution, other than disguises, was a plan of action. They couldn’t start picking people up right away. For this to work, they’d have to bring them in all at once, and it’d have to be the scientists, the non-espionage-savée people first. That way they could be taken down before they had figured out what was going on and could retaliate.

Ran was off training with Amuro again when Conan received a call from a number he didn’t recognize. He let it ring a few times, before finally deciding to answer it.

“Hello, Edogawa speaking,” he said hesitantly.

“Hello? It’s Areku,” said the hoarse, tired voice on the other end.

“Areku? Why are you calling? Did something happen?”

“Yeah. I’m at the hospital.”

Conan’s heart leaped into his chest. That was one of the worst places to be for someone like Areku. “What’s going on?” he demanded.

A slow, shaky breath. “The clinic was robbed last night. Fumika and I surprised the robbers, and we got beaten up pretty bad. She hasn’t woken up yet.”
“Have the police caught them yet?” The question ‘Are you okay?’ felt stupid at this point.

“No… Apparently there’s been a robbery crew targeting small island-town clinics for their medical equipment, and they flee by boat before anyone knows what went down. At least, that’s what the police told me.” Another slow, shaky breath. “There were some reporters poking around. I think one took a picture of me getting loaded onto the med-evac helicopter, so my cover may be blown. You said something about a disguise expert…?”

“Right.” Conan rubbed his forehead. Hopefully the press would have the good taste to not post a picture of an ‘underage’ victim, and their worry would be for not. “I’ll send my mom to you as soon as possible. With you in the hospital, it may be difficult though.”

“Thanks. It’s just a precaution, but I figured I should tell you.”

“Good idea.”

Areku listed off the address of the hospital and hung up.

This did not need to be happening now. Holding the address up, he called his mom. She agreed that to be on the safe side, she should pick him up.

Then out of curiosity, he checked the news websites for crime reports in the islands. At the top of the page was a big, flashy article, with a fancy headline (Island-Robbers’ Spree Turns Violent) with a big photo of a bloody, terrified Areku being held down and strapped to a stretcher. The article even went into details to tell a dramatic story designed to grab the attention and heartstrings of the readers. It described the benevolent, Buddha-esque Dr. Nishiyama and the poor, tragic street urchin she’d taken in, who’d surprised the evil robbers in the middle of stripping the clinic of all of its valuable medical equipment and drugs. Conan began to wonder if his mother would make it in time.

“I’m coming in!” Ran said, stepping into the old building.

Amuro smiled broadly. “Punctual as always, Miss Ran.” He pointed out a tall man, wearing a black fedora and an old fashioned black duster that just about reached the ground, making him covered from head to toe, except for the very long grey hair that hung down his back. “This is a friend of mine that works as a bodyguard. He’s one of the best martial artists that I know of. I bragged about you to him, and he said he wanted to see your talent for himself.”

“Oh, okay.” She bowed politely. “Hello, I’m Ran Mouri. Pleased to meet you!”

The man took off his glove and stretched out his hand. “I’m John Mizuki.” She hesitantly shook his hand. “Sorry, I work with a lot of foreigners, that’s become a habit of mine.”

He let his fingers linger a moment on her hands, gathering information about her from them. Her hands were rough, fingernails trimmed short, and her knuckles had been pounded until the bone fractured, then healed, then then fractured again. It was a slow, extremely painful process that thickened and warped the bone in one’s hands, turning them into clubs. He made a note to never let her land a clean punch on anything that wasn’t armored.

Ran noticed a bulge in his pocket. A gun. This was probably someone from the organization. Judging from his cold eyes and current company, he was a hitman. She made a note to tell Conan about him later.

Having looked each other over, they moved to the center of the room.
“Amuro tells me that you’re well trained in karate, but you need to pick up other fighting styles, to become a more versatile bodyguard. He also tells me that you’ve had to pull your punches with the others you’ve sparred with. You don’t need to do that with me.” He beckoned.

She walked casually towards him, and like a snake, she struck for the stomach, the way that Amuro had taught her the first day of her new training. Her fist bounced off. Jumping back a few feet, she shook the pain out of her hand.

He laughed. “What you felt was body armor, designed to stop bullets. Your fists couldn’t make a dent in it. So, how would you deal with an opponent like me?” He beckoned for her to attack again.

This time she ran directly for him, making it look like she was going to attack with her other fist, but switched to dropping to the ground at the last moment and balanced on the ball of one foot, kicked the backs of his knees, forcing him to fall forward. He rolled with the flow of her strike, and pulled his gun.

“You’re dead.” He stood up, dusted himself off, and said, “Try again.”

After many similar attempts, they called it quits, and Ran left for home. Watching her receding back, Gin said, “You’re right. With the correct pressures applied, she could make one hell of an assassin. The way you gushed about her over the phone, I thought you’d fallen in love.” He laughed at his own joke. Bourbon scowled at him. “You said you had something else you needed to report. What is it?”

Bourbon nodded. “I’ve found a very dangerous leak. If we play our cards right, we can plug the leak and recruit Ran.”

Gin showed his teeth, half amusement and half intimidation. “Go on.”

“Her father’s ward, Conan Edogawa. He’s eight years old, has an IQ I’d be unable to calculate, and is being used by the FBI to gather information on us. Vermouth and I bugged the FBI agent Jodie Starling, and I heard them talk about his role in smoking out our agent in the hospital. He’s also the one behind the ‘Sleeping Detectives’. He knocks out people, then, using a voice changer hidden in his bow-tie, names the culprit and explains how he figured it out. He’s too young to be an official FBI agent, but he’s definitely one of their assets. He’s also met Ambrosia.”

Gin, who had been listening quietly up to that point, snapped his head up, narrowing his eyes. “What? How much does he know?”

“I’m not sure. He was with the Suzuki family on a vacation in the islands. According to Sonoko Suzuki’s facebook account, Ambrosia helped Conan get to the doctor’s office when he had a severe allergic reaction to a bee sting. I know that they’ve made contact, but other than that, I don’t know anything.”

Gin mumbled something about social networks making the business too easy.

Bourbon went on. “His name is an alias, and not a very well put together one at that. It doesn’t have any paperwork or records to back it up, so it’s not a professional cover. He likely made it himself. He’s bilingual in Japanese and English – with an American accent – and he’s got blue eyes and naturally brown hair, so he’s likely the child of a Japanese-American couple. I don’t know what happened to his real parents, and the Mouri’s have no idea who he is. They treat him like a normal kid.”
Chuckling, Gin said, “That makes sense. When the FBI nabbed Kir, we suspected that Detective Mouri had been the one to plant a bug on her. Just before we were going to snipe him that little kid kicked a soccer ball up from the street and broke the glass, making us delay our shot long enough for Akai to start shooting at us. And before that – someone set up a trap for Vodka to get his fingerprints and put a tracker on him. One of the people seen entering the building right before was a little kid. Do you know how he’s getting his intel?”

Bourbon sighed, shaking his head. “It looks more like chance encounters actually. He just recognizes us in those encounters and sets up traps. I think it may have something to do with someone you killed, right before Conan Edogawa surfaced. Shinichi Kudou.”

Gin shrugged. “I don’t recall the names or faces of those I’ve killed.”

“He was the first person killed with APTX 4869, and he was one of the smarter ‘highschool detectives’. Apparently, Conan looks up to Shinichi and tries to emulate him in many ways. In fact, I’m not sure Shinichi has been dead for the past two years.”

Gin raised his eyebrows. “Really? How come?”

“I’ve been looking into all of Detective Mouri’s recent cases. It’s not in the reports, but when I interviewed witnesses, several said that Conan had been on the phone with Kudou, relaying information about the case to him, to get help solving a case. He was even described at several crime scenes, with one commonality. He always looked extremely ill. A few times it was mentioned that he passed out or had difficulty standing upright. He seemed to be suffering from a fever and some sort of chest pain too. He hasn’t been seen or spoken of since Sherry passed away. Ran mentioned in passing to me that a friend of hers is dying, and though she didn't tell me who, it fits with what I've been able to find about Shinichi Kudou.” He lowered his gaze, frowning. “I think he survived the initial poisoning, possibly by coughing it up when you were forced to flee the scene. Some of it must have gotten into his system though. Sherry may have been supplying him with an antidote, and when she died, he ran out of antidote and is on his deathbed. That’s my deduction, anyways. I haven’t been able to smoke him out yet. He's been very careful to not leave any evidence with the Mouris about where he's been hiding, and Conan appears to be his only connection to the world.”

“So, the little genius kid found Shinichi Kudou and decided to help him. That’s a fascinating story. I suppose you have a plan?”

Bourbon opened up a briefcase he’d stashed in the corner and handed him a gigantic envelope, stuffed to the brim. “This is my full report on Conan Edogawa, and what my suggested plan of action is. Will you get it to That Person? I think I know a way to solve this in a way that secures our legacy and ends in the smallest number of casualties.”

“Your distaste for bloodshed is notable, as usual.” Gin checked the inside of the folder, flipping through the contents briefly.

Bourbon shrugged, stepping out the door. “It’s not my distaste for bloodshed – it the distaste for loss of life. I’m one of those who’s chosen to rebel against death.”

Chapter End Notes

That Person. Anokata. あの方。
Believe it or not, that's a pronoun in Japanese. It's a polite way to refer to someone whose name you don't know. Pronouns in Japanese are actually quite fascinating. They are very, very much unlike Indo-European pronouns. For one, using a pronoun to refer to someone is rude, especially to their face. Using people's names is preferred. Or, if you want to avoid saying the name over and over, you just leave out the name and replace it with nothing. For another, there are dozens of them. Let's look at various words for “I/me/my/mine” for example.

Watashi/Watakushi – The genderless, polite version.

Atashi/Atakushi – Polite, feminine.

Boku – Casual, masculine (usually). Young girls sometimes use this pronoun too.

Ore – Very casual/Rude, and masculine. Very common amongst little boys, and Shinichi, as Conan, uses it often. Little boy's speech in Japanese is very rough and rude. One thing that surprised me when I was doing a matching exercise (who's doing the talking?) for quotes from various family members, was how informal little boys are to their parents. In the culture I was raised, little kids speak much more formally and politely to their parents, especially to their mothers. There's an unspoken rule that mothers are supposed to teach the kids about manners and etiquette in my culture, and speaking informally is something you learn from your peers when you get old enough. Seeing this difference was a bit of culture shock for me.

And there are dozens more obscure ones like: Uchi – A very polite “I.” It's also a term for one's home. Otaku is also a term for a one's house, and it's a polite “you.” (The derogatory term for nerds is related, since they stay home, and “otaku” is a polite way to refer to someone else's home.)

While first person pronouns often mark one's gender, third person pronouns usually don't carry that information. The few that do, like “kanojo” and “kare”, double as words for “girlfriend” and “boyfriend” respectively. Others, like “aitsu” (he or she, genderless animate third person singular) are derogatory and extremely rude. I often see it translated into English as “that bastard/bitch.”

Speaking of being rude, using a second person pronoun in place of someone's name (you/your/yours) to someone's face is extremely informal or very rude. Even using the go-to polite “you” (anata) after you know someone's name can be like slap in the face – something one picks up quickly when trying to make Japanese friends. Fun fact, instead of something like “dear” or “honey,” lovers refer to each other with “anata.” We do something similar in English, in phrases like, “Oh you, you rascal you.” In the previous chapter, when Sonoko calls Ran “Honey,” she's actually saying “Anata.”

また来週！ (See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
“I’m home!” Ran called into the apartment as she slid off her shoes.

Conan was sitting at the dinner table in his high-chair, working on something in his little Detective Boy notebook. “Welcome home,” he said absentmindedly.

“I got to meet another martial artist today. He was really good, a step above the others. I don’t think I ever got a clear victory. Amuro seemed to respect him a lot and let him run the practice session. I think I’ve met him before, actually.”

“Really?” Conan looked up from his notebook. “What did he look like?”

“He was older, really tall, had long grey hair, and dressed in black from head to toe.” She paused seeing Conan’s terror-stricken face. “You recognize him?”

Conan nodded. His pen dropped from his trembling fingers.

“Who is he?” she asked softly.

Conan looked around, then slid off his high-chair to run to her side. She bent down so he could whisper in her ear. “It’s Gin, the one who force-fed me the poison! We need to sweep for bugs, now!”

Ran saluted and ran to the office downstairs. She returned a few minutes later with her dad’s bug-sweeping tools. After a few hours of tense poking about in corners, they were satisfied. There were no bugs hidden in the apartment.

Free to talk out loud, Conan said, “Bourbon’s probably been relying on his daily visits and keeping tabs on the traffic in and out of the building instead of bugging the place.” He stroked his chin, squinting to find some invisible truth. “I don’t know why Bourbon would bring Gin to spar with you though… maybe it was a test, to see if you’d recognize him?”

“He introduced Gin as a bodyguard friend of his, named John Mizuki. Oh, there was one odd thing, he was carrying a gun.”

Conan frowned. “Why would he do that? Guns aren’t exactly legal here, so carrying one would mean higher penalties if he was caught by the police, and a guaranteed arrest if they saw him with it. I’ll have to contact Kir, see if there’s been an event recently that makes him fear for his life.”

Ran laughed, “He didn’t seem the type to be scared! He was really intimidating. If he was at all scared, then he hid it really well.”

Conan yawned, then checked his watch. “I’ll call Agent Jodie, then I’ll go to bed. It’s past 10PM.”

“Really?” Ran asked, checking her own watch. “I’d hardly noticed.”

Ran took a quick shower as Conan made his call. Then they put on their night-clothes and went to sleep.
In the early morning hours, Conan was awakened by his phone. The caller ID said “Mom.” He slipped out of Kogorou’s room to the kitchen to answer it.

“Hello Mom, what’s up?”

“Shin-dear, your friend is nowhere to be found. When I checked his room, there was an ancient coma patient in his place. I think he’s been taken!” Her voice was rapid and high-pitched, indicating an anxious state.

His thoughts raced. A mix-up didn’t sound likely, as Areku had been awake not long ago. “What about Dr. Nishiyama?”

“I found her. Shinichi, do they know about your connection to Areku?”

“I don’t see how they could know, unless they interviewed the people with us. We’ll play it safe tomorrow, and I’ll stay home from school. I’ll give the FBI a call and let them know.”

“Good night Shinichi, and be sure to get a good night’s sleep, okay?”

“Yes Mom. ’Night!”

Blinking sleep from his eyes, he called Jodie again. To his surprise, she answered right away and sounded wide awake.

“Ah, Conan, I was just about to call you!”

“Really? Why?”

“You were right, the Black Organization is moving in a big way. We just got a call from Kir. We may have to move up the extraction schedule. What were you calling about?”

“One of their former prisoners, codename: Ambrosia, was kidnapped by them earlier tonight. He knew his cover was probably blown, so I sent someone to pick him up, but they were too late. I can’t tell you much, but he’s a high value target for them.”

“His name comes up a lot in the files you got us from your mysterious defector. It sounded like he was important in some way, but the reasons why are redacted from the files we’ve found. If that’s true, then I have bad news for you.” She paused. Conan could hear a loud, busy room in the background. “There’s a hitlist that was circulated about an hour ago to all of the Japan-area operatives. You and Miss Mouri are on that list, though you’re listed as ‘Plan B’ hits, so they have another plan for you two. Whatever the plan was, Kir didn’t know. What’s the progress like on the disguises front?”

“At the moment Kuroba thinks he has a few more weeks to get ready, so I’ll call him. What are the names on that list?”

She rattled off the list of names, which Conan wrote down in his Detective Boy notebook. Then he thanked her and hung up.

There was no way around it, he’d have to rouse Ran somehow. She was a heavy sleeper. He started by shaking her, then he pulled her from the bed and rolled her on the floor, and finally, after fifteen minutes of no progress, he went into the kitchen and retrieved some ice cubes from the refrigerator. He slid them down Ran’s pajama top, and got out of the blast radius.
That did the trick, as she came roaring around the corner, eyes burning, pajama top wet, fist clenching the slick icecubes. Conan thanked his lucky stars that Kogorou was similarly sleep-inclined.

“There’s a really good reason for this,” Conan said, pressing his back against the wall.

“There had better be,” she snapped.

“There are hits out on all of our friends and family. Well, most of them anyways.”

Her expression changed immediately. “What’s our plan of action, Shinichi?”

“Conan,” he corrected. “Remember, I’m Conan from now on.” He held up his cellphone. “It’s the same plan as before, just a few weeks earlier. We just have to get the word out.”

They went back into Ran’s room, and started coordinating the disguise and hide efforts. Conan got the Japanese policemen he knew he could trust in on the plans, and connected them to the FBI, which took a while because the FBI wouldn’t trust an unknown incoming number, so Conan ferried contact information back and forth. Meanwhile, Ran roused Hakuba and Heiji, and got them ready to coordinate the capture of the organization’s over-seas operatives with Interpol, since their analyses hadn’t been circulated through all of the agencies that needed them yet. In order for this to work, they’d have to capture or kill as many operatives as they could before word got out that they’d been compromised, and they’d go into hiding.

That morning, when Kogorou came to wake Ran, he found them talking on their cellphones, surrounded by lists of names scribbled on notebook paper. Upon seeing him, they grabbed him and yelled, “Don’t go anywhere until the police arrive!”

A few minutes later, a sleep-deprived Officer Takagi came and picked Kogorou up to get him into hiding.

Kir ducked into a store’s doorway in the evendim, her black clothing reducing her presence into a mere shadow. Gunfire had just erupted down the street. Some heavily tattooed men were already lying on the street, bleeding out. She wasn't going to be able to pass through that way. Her fingers itched to hold her own gun, safely concealed under her jacket at the moment, but she grit her teeth and resisted. No use in making herself a target right now. She almost jumped out of her skin as a cheery tune erupted from her pocket. It was her handler. After giving the codeword that indicated that she not in danger of being overheard, she rattle off her identification and code number. She took a deep breath, and received her instructions.

“Sniper spotted where?” she hissed into her phone. She wasn't far, and it was away from the gunfight. She started running.

“Take out the sniper and secure the Good Witch,” the tired, scratchy voice of her handler sternly commanded.

“Yessir,” she said, hanging up.

Then she dialed a number she’d memorized. He picked up immediately. “Hello, Akai?”

“What is it Kir?” His voice sounded tired, like he’d already been working through the night.

“Get Dr. Agasa and Ai Haibara into hiding. I’ve been assigned to killing them. You don’t have long.”
There was a brief pause. “Calling me like this, you’re sure you aren’t been watched?”

“I am. They’re stretched pretty tight, trying to plug all of the leaks created by Conan Edogawa.” She ducked into a tall building and ran into the elevator, jamming the button for the top floor a few times.

“Rodger. I’ll get them to safety.”

Top floor, top floor, hurry up!

“Thank you.” Kir hung up, and stepped out of the elevator, right into Vermouth, who was casually leaning against the wall, listening.

“So I was right, you are a CIA agent,” she uncrossed her arms and stepped away from the wall. Holding her hands up, to show that she had no weapons in them, she stepped closer.

“I guess that makes you a simple traitor,” Kir said with a little half smile. “I heard about the intel the FBI suddenly got their hands on. That was you, I presume?”

“How’d you guess?”

“I heard about the conversation between you and Gin right before Akai shot him. You protected Conan. That only made sense if you knew him already. You’ve been grooming him to help you take them down for a while now, haven’t you?” She raised her gun. “Will you come in peacefully then?”

Vermouth stepped forward, letting the gun barrel press against her chest. “You misunderstand, dear. I’m not coming in. I’ve done my part to put down this sick beast of an organization. Don’t hunt for me. I’ll be living a peaceful life with my younger brother from now on.” Seeing Kir’s determined face and the gun still pressed against her chest, she sighed dramatically. “Oh, and Korn is sniping a civilian on the roof. If I know him, he’s probably about to kill that poor, unsuspecting woman. That’s why you came here in the first place, right?”

Kir turned and ran up the stairs, to the rooftop, where Korn was absorbed in lining up a complex shot on Eri Kisaki at her office. He squeezed the trigger, and she squeezed hers. Their guns went off in the same instant, making them sound as one.

Chapter End Notes

Last chapter's talk of politeness versus familiarity in speech is the inspiration for this author's note. I've been told by people who speak English as a second language that they find it either jarring or refreshing that they didn't have to learn polite forms in the grammar. Speaking politely in English is indistinguishable from speaking impolitely, I've been told. But, that is an illusion. English, like every human language on the planet has just as many layers of politeness or familiarity or disrespect that can be expressed in it. The reason that these people couldn't see it, was because it is formed differently than their native tongues.

There are several topics to discuss here, and I'll try make them as simple as possible. First: What am I talking about, politeness, familiarity, and disrespect? Second: What is “marked speech?” and Third: How are these concepts expressed in Japanese and
One: It's best to think of this by using a part of communication which is much easier to visualize – the distance you stand from people when you speak with them. Speech that we classify as “polite” is putting distance between you and your conversation partner. Speech that we classify as “familiar” is much less distance between you and your conversation partner, maybe even physical contact. This is a pretty loose analogy, and every dialect, region, and culture defines when it is alright to come close or when you should back away differently. In my culture, you speak formally at first, but very quickly, maybe even the space of one conversation, you will be speaking like old friends. It is our way of trying to make someone feel welcomed. Conversely, I found when I moved to the city (or what counts as a city in Montana) people speak less formally when you first meet them, but it is much more difficult to get them to the chatting like old friends part, and if you move in too quickly, they get uncomfortable and try to put more distance between you.

Two: The concept of “marked” speech is pretty easy. It's that there is a basic, root form of the language, and other forms are based off of it. For example, in English, the 3rd person singular conjugation of present tense verbs (like, “he runs”) is based off of the root form. You can tell because it adds something to the verb, when the other forms (I run, we run, you run, they run) do not.

Three: In English, the reason for my friend's confusion was that in English, polite speech is unmarked. Familiar speech is marked with slang and cussing, possibly combined with using vernacular or local dialects from the lower classes. Of course, extremely polite speech is also marked, using special titles to refer to people and taking a very long time to say anything. (“No.” becomes “I'm dreadfully sorry, but I must decline.”) In my experience with human languages, the more long winded you are, the more polite it is.

In Japanese, the unmarked speech is familiar. To make something polite speech, you add -(i)mas- to the verb, and go- or o- to the nouns. In French, you use a different pronoun for the word “you” in polite speech. So, when students are taught a language in school, they're taught the polite, unmarked English forms first, and if they want to learn familiar speech, they often don't get to interact in it until they meet a native English speaker or come to an English-speaking community. Because these people came from languages with marked polite forms, when they met with English, they assumed, since there was no marked polite form, that there was no polite form.

Cool, huh?

また来週！ (See you next week!)

dreamingfifi
Kaito could feel panic setting in. Conan’s shaking voice spurred him into action. “Get Ran’s mother’s replacement in place! One of the organization snipers was spotted near her office, where’s she’s working late. I’m texting you the address!”

Ms. Kisaki’s replacement hadn’t come in yet, and wasn’t scheduled to for two days. There wasn’t time to find Officer Satou; he’d have to do it. The play was simple – get the civilian out of harms’ way without arousing suspicion. Normally a phonecall was used, but Conan had some reason to believe that both her cellphone and her business land-line had been bugged. It could be the enemies of her client, or it could be the organization. He couldn’t blame Conan for being paranoid.

He called Jii first, who showed up quicker than a taxi to speed him to Ms. Kisaki’s office. Meanwhile he called as many replacements as he could, instructing them about the changes and telling them to tell the others. The journey took longer than they’d hoped, as they had to go around several streets blocked with overturned cars and angry yakuza glowering behind them. Finally, they screeched to a halt at the office building, and he sprinted inside, his disguise tools in his backpack, and waited for the elevator, hopping from foot to foot. Twenty flights of stairs was too much to finish with hands steady enough to apply the masks. He pulled his baseball cap lower over his eyes. Finally the elevator reached the ground floor. Luckily, it being long before business hours, and there wasn’t anyone else getting on.

Ding!

They were at the twentieth floor. Ms. Kisaki had been working all night to prepare for a trial in a few days. Hopefully this wouldn’t shock her too much and make her uncooperative. He could always knock her out, he reasoned. Luckily, her secretary and assistant had already gone home. He slipped through the doors of her office, and hid behind a wide bookcase. Luckily, there was plants and plenty of cover by the windows. He might be able to pull this off.

“I’m busy,” she started, furious and sleep-deprived.

“You’re Ran’s mother, right?”

“Yes, but-“ She started to look up.

“Don’t look!” He ripped off his backpack and started stripping his shirt. “There’s a hit out on you. I’m going to disguise myself as you, so they don’t realize that you’re not there, and if they take a shot, I’ll be wearing a bullet proof vest, and won’t get hurt, at least not much.”

“How do you know this?” she snapped.

“Conan Edogawa’s friends and family are the targets. A known sniper was spotted in the area. I need your clothes.” He was putting on a flesh-toned bullet proof vest. It was slimmer than a police-issue vest, to avoid getting in the way of his disguises. It forced him into a straight-backed ballet-like pose. Unfortunately, that meant it wasn’t as strong. It was better than nothing. “Get up and walk around the corner like you’re going to get yourself another cup of coffee. Don’t run. You’ll have to open the door a little wide so I can sneak through below.”
She slammed her work down on the desk, snatched her coffee cup, and marched into the secretary’s office. Kaito darted through, crouched low.

“You’re quite nimble,” she observed. “Now who are you and what the hell are you doing here?”

“I’m Kaito Kuroba. You can call your daughter, and she’ll confirm my identity. As for why, I already told you that.” As he spoke, he put on a bra that had rubber flesh-toned latex boobs already in them. Glancing at Eri, he pumped some extra air into them.

Eri pulled out her phone, but Kaito yanked it out of her hands. “Use mine, it’s clean.”

Arching her eyebrows at the boy, she dialed Ran. It barely rang at all, and her daughter answered. “Kaito?”

“Guess again, Ran.”

“Mom? Are you okay?”

“Dear, there’s a strange young man here who’s dressing himself in drag in my secretary’s office. Do you know him?”

“That’s Kaito. He’s a disguise expert. I don’t have time to explain, but do whatever he asks, okay?”

She sighed, trying not to look at the young man who was stripping off his pants. “If you say so, dear.”

“I’ve gotta go, Mom. I’ve got the FBI on hold right now.”

“Then by all means, dear.” She hung up, and turned to face the teen. He was holding a t-shirt and a pair of sweats out to her. “Your story checks out. What do you need?”

“Hurry up and strip, we don’t have time.” He blushed suddenly and turned away. “They’ll get suspicious if you suddenly are wearing different clothes when you come out.”

“Why don’t you give me the bullet proof vest, and let me pretend to go home?” Eri said, unbuttoning her shirt.

“Sorry, I only had the one on hand, and it’s designed to fit me. I’m a lot smaller than you.”

She pulled off her clothes and tossed them over to where the young man was. The replacement clothes he’d given her were too baggy and smelled like they’d just come off of the clothing rack at a store. Fully dressed, he handed her a mirror, and had her hold it up beside her face.

“You can’t be much older than my daughter. Are you still in highschool?”

“Just graduated, ma’am,” he mumbled, applying a temporary latex mask. It was one of his father’s inventions – it had two layers, a slowly hardening under layer that conformed to the wearer’s face, and glued itself to him. It also was pliable, and he could make facial features stronger or less obvious with it. After only 30 seconds of fiddling, and a quickly applied wig, Eri Kisaki was looking at herself. “Do you have your make up with you, like for touchups?”

“It’s in my purse, by the entryway.”

“Thanks.” He slipped out of the door, and was back with her purse moments later. He even had her stride.
The mirror went back up, and he carefully put make up on that looked like it’d been neglected for hours.

“Yetch,” he sighed. “Normally I do a better job, but I wasn’t prepared for this. As long as no one looks too hard, we’ll be fine.” He cleared his throat, and continued in Eri’s own voice. “Stay back here until help arrives. Under no circumstances are you to go outside. Not even if you hear me get shot. Understood?”

“When did you kids start doing the adults’ jobs?” she asked, with a wry smile.

“Ask the adults that don’t do their jobs.” He poured some old, cold coffee into her cup, turned off the light, and walked back into the room. She heard him drawing the blinds. Then the telephone rang.

“Hello, Kisaki speaking.”

The window shattered, and she heard the boy hit the floor with a scream, and the telephone clatter across the office floor, breaking. She held her hand over her mouth, to keep herself from making a noise. Then she dialed Ran again.

She answered immediately. “Mom what’s-“

“That boy, he’s shot!” she whispered. “I don’t know if the phone’s still connected, and if they can hear me or not. They called the office to make sure it was me, and he answered with my voice…”

“Okay Mom, we’ll let them know. Is he alright?”

“I can’t tell. He told me not to go outside the secretary’s office until help arrives.”

Kaito’s muffled voice came from outside. “Ooowww… I’m fine, Ms. Kisaki. I ripped the phone cable out when I fell. I can’t move; I’m talking into the carpet. Get them here fast so I can move because this huuuuurts…”

“He’s hurting but alive, it sounds like.”

Ran took a deep breath of relief. “Good. We’re definitely going to get him full immunity.”

“Full immunity?”

“That’s Kaitou KID, Mom. Conan and I caught him, and got him to help us out.”

“Did I hear ‘full immunity’ just now?” Kaito called from the other room. “If so please please and a side of Ran doesn’t get to beat me up any more?”

Kisaki chuckled to herself. “I may have to represent him. Also, have you been beating up that nice boy?”

“Mom! He stripped Sonoko naked and left her locked in the bathroom! Then he did it to Masumi too!”

“Well then, if you were protecting your girlfriend’s chastity, then I suppose you have every right.” Her voice had a sarcastic edge to it.

“Hey! I didn’t strip Sonoko! We had a bet going that the other Karate-freak she was dating wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between us; she LET me strip her!” he yelled. “And I honestly didn’t know Masumi was female. She even went into the men’s restroom!”
“Young man, you aren’t helping your case. Stripping people naked and leaving them places isn’t excusable, no matter their gender.”

“Ewww! I always leave the underwear alone!” That last statement made him cough involuntarily. “Maybe I should… be quiet…”

His breathing sounded labored. “Ran dear, he’s hurt more than he’s letting on. How far away is the rescue?” She bit her lip. A teenager better not die to save her.

“They’ve got the shooter! The CIA took him down, right after he shot Kaito actually.”

“The CIA? What on earth have you been up to?”

“Help is in the lobby, heading up to you soon. You can't go out there until the paramedics arrive, just in case there’s a second shooter. The FBI hasn’t gotten back to us on that yet.” She heard Conan’s voice in the background. “Dad’s safe!” Ran exclaimed. “The FBI just got the sniper that was aiming for his replacement. They also caught an agent trying to slip a bomb up close to him. Mom, be careful, there may be more than one assassin. Make Inspector Megure check the identities of all of the paramedics. He’s heading up to meet you.”

“Thank you dear. After this, I’m taking you shopping and giving you thirty early birthday presents. Next time let me know ahead of time when something like this is happening. Don’t leave us adults out. Are you sure you’re safe?”

“The lights are off, and it looks like we’re asleep. They’re taking their time. We think they’ll try to get us when Conan leaves for school in the morning.” Ran was sounding so professional, so concise. When did she grow up like this?

“Mom, I have to hang up. The Beika police department is calling again.”

“I love you dear. Stay safe!” The call disconnected. Or maybe it’s the recklessness of youth, the feeling of being unstoppable, immortal. She’d felt like that once. It also made her do stupid things, but nothing this insane.

The Police burst into the office. A few came into the secretary’s office, and Kisaki relayed the instructions, and included a few of her own. She came out, and the curtains had been drawn, and a metallic screen set up. She breathed a sigh of relief. Safe. Finally.

Kaito’s disguise was in pieces around him, as the paramedics worked. They’d cut or ripped it all off, even the delicate mask. His bullet proof vest had been shattered, and the Kevlar was bloody, but there was no hole in it. It’d been a high velocity round.

Inspector Megure joined her in watching them work on the teen. “It’s hard to believe that a kid could deliberately put himself in the sights of an assassin to save a stranger. Not many adults I know could do that.”

“Most adults I know aren’t that stupid.”

Megure chuckled. His phone rang, and he turned away to answer it. Then he blanched and leaned on a bookcase to steady himself. “I’ll let her know,” he said, choking on his words.

Eri Kisaki snatched his shoulder and hissed, “What’s happened? Is Kogorou hurt?”

He shook his head. “Please sit down, Eri.” He rubbed his eyes, holding back tears, and sat down with her. “A few minutes ago, a car-bomb exploded outside the Mouri Detective Agency. Other
than that, we have no news. Emergency response vehicles have been unable to get there, there’s traffic jams all over Beika, from multiple car accidents and other explosions. Conan and Ran are beyond our reach.”

“What?” yelled Kaito from the ground, struggling to get up. “Are Pipsqueak and Ran okay?”

“Stay down or we sedate you!” ordered the paramedic wrapping Kaito’s bloody side. His abdomen was one large bruise. He’d been bleeding out into his own body. The cuts from the shattered vest were only scratches.

Still begging for news, they strapped him onto a stretcher and rolled him towards the door.

Eri jumped up. There was no use in staying there. “I’ll go with him to the hospital,” she told the paramedics. “That way we’ll both get updated at the same time.” She smiled at Kaito. His face was becoming far too pale. He stopped struggling, and didn’t let Eri get out of view the entire trip, until he was sedated for surgery at the hospital. Eri took the phone Kaito had given her, and called the number labeled, “Mom.”

Chapter End Notes

To continue the theme we started last time, let's go over some ways that we can put Japanese politeness into prose and dialogue.

You'll notice it mentioned every now and then in the fanfic – bowing when saying “thank you” or greeting someone or making a request or apologizing. That's a fairly well-known bit of Japanese culture. Some things that you may not have known is that when bowing to someone who is your better in some way, it's polite to bow lower than them. Women typically bow lower than men as well... 'cuz... sexism. When you bow, you keep both hands down, at your sides. Clapping one's hand in front of one's face is reserved for the Kami in Shintou shrines. Or comedic begging scenes. I've never seen someone do that outside of cheesy Japanese dramas (usually when pleading for one's life from someone heavily armed and likely to kill you), or Americans being dumbasses.

One way that I see a lot of writers attempt to do but not get quite right is honorifics and name usage. I prefer not to use honorifics (obviously) because if you don't speak enough Japanese to know what they mean, they are very confusing. I like people who read my stories to not be confused unless I'm trying to make them sympathize with the characters' confused states. For example, if it was an American who didn't speak Japanese visiting Japan, I'd have them meet a lot of Japanese dialogue, because they wouldn't be able to understand it, and most likely, neither could my readers, making them feel a bit of the confusion and frustration that the character is feeling.

So, how does one do name usage in a way that reflects Japanese culture?

Let's look at this in a hierarchy. At the top, the most polite and “distant” is one's family name with an honorific. To get this across, I use Mr./Mrs./Ms./Miss/Sir/Ma'am and so on with the person's last name. Pretty simple. Using the last name with an honorific is common for friends, coworkers, classmates, and acquaintances. Dropping honorifics means that the relationship is very close and perhaps intimate – often used to indicate that two people are dating. Shinichi addresses Haibara and Hattori without honorifics,
to show how close they've become. Using a first name with honorifics is about the same level of intimacy, or more intimate. A first name with no honorifics? You're probably family. Or going to become family. Ran and Shinichi refer to each other by their first names without honorifics, as do Heiji and Kazuha.

Children have different rules for name usage. They refer to people older to them relative to how much older than them they are, like “Granny” and “Grampa” (old enough to be their grandparent) “Auntie” and “Uncle” (old enough to be their parent) “Big Sister” and “Big Brother” (old enough to be an older sibling). These are used like honorifics and attached to the names of whoever they are addressing. For their peers, they use last names for strangers and acquaintances with an honorific, and for friends they use first names with honorifics. If they are really close, first names or nicknames are used. You may remember a cute storyline from DC, when Ayumi decided to make Haibara her friend, but felt nervous about calling Haibara “Ai-chan”, her first name with an honorific, because Haibara is so cool and aloof.

The rules for adults addressing children are different too. Usually the first name is used with an honorific, but if they are close, like family, an adult will drop the honorific or use a nickname.

One last note – when referring to yourself, you never use an honorific. One common mistake I see is thinking that “Edogawa Conan, tantei sa” is “Edogawa Conan, tantei-san.” The “sa” is a childish version of “da” which means “am/is/are/be”. He's saying, “I'm the detective, Conan Edogawa.”

So, I use the “granny/grampa” and “auntie/uncle”, but I don't use the “big sister/big brother” because that's just too awkward in English. I used family names versus personal names in the dialogue to reflect what would be used in Japanese, with simple “Mr.” or “Mrs.” to reflect honorifics. This way, I hope to get across this bit of Japanese culture without throwing a much of words you don't know at you.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Ran’s ears were ringing. What just happened? She was on the floor. Dust was everywhere, and the acrid scent of burning plastic. An earthquake? No, wrong. The earth wasn’t still shaking. There was so much smoke. Where was it coming from? She looked at the window. The glass had shattered inwards. Good thing she hadn’t been by the window. There was a column of smoke rising outside. An explosion? No, given their situation, a bomb.

Where was Conan? Before the blast, he had been sitting at her desk, making phone calls, using both of his cell phones. She stepped gingerly around the glass. Her winter boots were stored in her closet. Those would help. Conan moaned. The chair had overturned, hiding him from view.

“Conan!” she yelled. Her voice sounded distant and quiet, but he responded, waving his hand. Good, still alive. Where were those boots? She dug through her shoes, many of them old pairs she’d gotten years ago, when her feet were smaller. There. She gripped the heavy, dusty boots and wrenched them out. They were tight, but fit well enough for what she needed.

The phones… Hers was hopelessly broken. One of Conan’s still had a glowing screen, but it was cracked, and unintelligible. The other didn’t respond at all. She stuck them into her pocket, and picked up Conan. His eyes didn’t seem to want to focus, and he couldn’t stop coughing. She could hear sounds outside now. Her ears were readjusting. People outside were screaming. The building groaned.

The floor slumped toward the street. She leapt, Conan under one arm, reaching for the inner bedroom wall, just as most of her bedroom peeled off the building and collapsed into the street. The cold night air rushed to greet her and swept away the fumes of the burning lower floors. They were trapped on the two-foot wide strip of floor, wall on one side, burning debris and a three story fall on the other.

They’d have to wait. She held Conan tight, wishing she’d grabbed a blanket off the bed, but then remembered that the bed had been covered in glass.

Neighbors were wandering into the street. They had flashlights, and pointed them at her through the smoke, and called out to her, telling her that it’d be okay, that help was on the way.

It didn’t come.

An hour waiting in the cold, breathing the fumes of burning debris, and they were nowhere in sight. Her neighbors started clearing out the stairwell. Had there been other bombings? Maybe the police were occupied with those. She could hear sirens from every direction, all in the distance. They weren’t in immediate danger.

Wait.

Conan was shaking too much and having trouble breathing. Where were they? The neighbors broke into her apartment and tried to reassure her. Someone said he knew just the thing to get them out. He returned a few minutes later and told them he was going to break through the wall with a sledgehammer. The wall flew to pieces, one strike at a time. He poked his head through. It was
Amuro.

Bourbon.

He’d probably planned this, she figured. That placid smile on his wretched face had to be wiped off. He beckoned. Ran had to gather all of her acting ability. He was the only way out. Through him was the only way out.

Challenge accepted.

Ran smiled, and put Conan down. She buried her aching muscles and exhaustion deep. “Amuro!” she said in what she hoped was a grateful tone. He appeared to be fooled. “Hey, do you remember the first thing you taught me about getting into fights?”

Amuro held out his hand, laughing. “Yeah, I think the bombers hit first.”

She grasped it. Then yanked. He was off balance. There was too little floor here for him to land on. She flung herself on her back. There were pieces of shrapnel still imbedded in her back, she discovered. They made a grinding noise on the floor as she put her boots in his stomach. With a cry, half out of pain, half out of exertion, she rolled with him over the edge. She landed crouching on top of him, in the remnants of the other half of her bedroom. His ribs made a very satisfying crunch.

“Hello Bourbon,” she hissed.

His eyes were wide in panic, his mouth open, trying to suck in a breath. He might die.

He might die?

She jumped off him, trying not to make further damage. To her relief he started to breathe. She grabbed the quilt on her bed, and threw it aside, shards of glass pouring off of it. The sheet beneath was the best she could do. She rummaged through Bourbon’s pockets, looking for a cell phone or anything he could use to hurt her or escape. She threw his knife down the street. He had a burner phone. She tucked that in her pocket. She wrapped him up like a sushi roll. That should keep him stuck while she grabbed Conan and went somewhere safe.

A shadow appeared in her way. A tall, black felt shadow, with cold, dead eyes and long, grey hair. Her body hummed with adrenaline.

“Impressive, Miss Mouri,” Gin said. “And certainly creative. What warranted that?”

“Hello Gin,” she replied. That was all she needed to say, she figured.

Bourbon coughed and sputtered behind her.

He frowned, and tilted his hat to cover more of his face. “Little girl,” he hissed. “I’m not holding back this time.” Gin pulled a gun and fired, all in one smooth action that was a blur to the human eye.

Ran was faster. She moved in time to his finger, dodging the bullet. She felt the branding heat of its path as it cut through the top layers of skin on her left shoulder. The adrenaline burned inside her, pushing her beyond what she could otherwise do. It also gave her tunnel vision, and that tunnel led to Gin. She closed the distance in an instant.

Gin was caught off balance. He’d never seen someone do that. When your opponent is off balance,
strike the hardest, and keep the blows coming. Thank you Amuro, she thought. She knocked the gun out of his hand as he tried to squeeze out another shot. It skittered across the ground. She snatched the hand he’d fired with, yanked it straight, and punched his elbow from below to make it bend the wrong way. It made a satisfying snap.

A sliver of ice-cold pain sliced into her flesh under her outstretched arm. His other hand had a knife, and it was cutting into her. She had to break loose.

Gin grabbed his arm, and re-bent it, jaw locked to prevent any sign of weakness from showing.

Gin laughed. “You’d better hit me in the head little girl! If you want to live, that is. How about it, wanna become a murderer tonight?”

No. She wasn’t going to let that happen. Not with her childhood friend watching. He was covered, from the neck down with various types of body armor. There had to be another way through it. Her aim wasn’t good enough to hit a small target, like his knees or ankles. She smiled, raised the gun, and fired the remaining eight bullets into the lower right side of his chest’s body armor.

The gun was empty. She dropped it loosely from her fingertips, letting an ounce of her exhaustion come to the surface. She slowly climbed up, favoring her cut side, and limped towards him, breathing hard.

He laughed. Her first blow was easily blocked, but her second blow was her foot, crunching through the fractured body armor she’d filled with bullets, taking a few of his ribs. It felt like the last remnant of her strength had been burned up. He’d better stay down, or she was done for. She picked up a brick, crouched by his knee, where there’d have to be a weakness in his armor, and brought it down as hard as she could. It made a pleasing sound.

“Stay down,” she said, her voice hoarse.

He knew better than to move. This orchid was the type that devoured the insects who wished to dine on it.

Conan.

She spun and sprinted up the cleared stairs to their apartment. “Who are those men?” asked Azusa, owner of the coffee shop on the ground floor. A damp bucket was in her hands. She trembled as Ran approached.

“They’re the ones who blew up my house, and tried to kidnap me and Conan.”

“But wasn’t Amuro your father’s apprentice?”

Ran realized that she must be covered in dirt and blood and ash, and her eyes must be red from the smoke, like a demon freshly crawled out of the abyss. She tried to rub some off on her pajama top, but it was in the same state. “He was spying on us. Where’s Conan? Did you move him?”

Azusa covered her mouth, shaking. “Was one of them big? He was dressed in black, said he was a doctor, and he had sunglasses on at night…”
Ran thought on all of the descriptions Conan has given her. Vodka? “It could be one of them.”

“That man, he took Conan!”

Ran was already exhausted, in every possible meaning of the word. Now she was truly furious. She pulled out the burner phone, and punched in the phone number for That Person. She wanted to strike him, hit him in the gut and take him down.

“Hello?” the voice was distorted, using some sort of machine to change it.

“Hello. This is Ran Mouri. I just wanted to let you know that I took down two of your agents. You should let the ambulances through, if you don’t want to lose them.”

Laughter. How could this possibly be funny?

“Why keep two weak agents when I could have a powerful agent like yourself at my side?”

“You’d let them die?” she hissed. Her breath caught as her injured ribs moved.

“Me? They’ll die of the injuries you gave them. How does it feel to have completed your first two kills?”

Ran’s vision blacked out.

“I was thinking of a code name for you. What do you think of Rum? Rum is made from fermenting molasses, and it packs quite the punch. Fitting, wouldn’t you say? Normally I name women after wines, but I also enjoy alliteration.”

This couldn’t be happening.

“Little Conan will be kept safe with us. Now, why don’t you-“

She hung up. Then passed out.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooo... my fanfic is so dated... First Sera's mystery child, second Bourbon, and third, the member named “Rum.” I wrote this back in November 2013, for Nanowrimo. Right before all of the plot stuff started happening. Oh well.

I'm too tired right now to make one of the usual author notes, but I am preparing a topic: The Vanishing Vowels. I also am a fan of alliteration.

まだ来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi

P.S. This was my second favorite chapter to write.
Conan watched Ran binding Bourbon. It had happened so fast, he hadn’t realized that Bourbon had showed up until he was sprawling, dazed and crippled in the wreckage below. Ran was amazing.

A voice called his name from the hole in the wall. It was Azusa, come to rescue him. He crawled his way to the hole. He wasn’t sure if he could stand. Between the many hours of frantic phone calls, the explosion, and the cold night air, he was cold, aching, and weary. How Ran was able to move, he didn’t know. He felt big, warm hands pick him up and wrap a blanket around him. He closed his eyes, glad to be warm and safe. Strong arms carried him through the building.

“I’m a doctor,” he heard the warm body holding him say. The voice sounded familiar. This guy was too big to be Dr. Araide. Who was it?

They reached the street. A gun went off, and Conan opened his eyes and twisted, trying to see what was happening. He caught a glimpse of Ran breaking Gin’s arm.

Gin? He’s here? That would mean that Vodka would be nearby… He looked up at the one carrying him gently down the street. Vodka. He took a deep breath to scream for Ran, but one of the big hands covered his mouth, stifling his voice. There was the sound of a trunk being popped open, and the big man fishing through things for something. Conan thrashed, desperate to get away, but the blanket held his arms and legs in, preventing anything more than a frantic squirm. Vodka found what he was looking for. It was a syringe in the shape of an EpiPen, but when it pierced his skin, he felt himself dragged into dreamland.

Consciousness came back to him slowly, like on a wet weekend morning. He was comfortable and warm. He tried to rollover, but someone snatched his shoulders and stopped it. Then he recalled what had happened before he’d lost consciousness. His eyes popped open. This was a drab white room, with a small window with plain, grey curtains. He was wearing hospital clothes, and he was tucked into a regular hospital bed. His glasses and watch were nowhere to be seen. There was an IV in his arm, and a mask was giving him oxygen. A doctor was holding his shoulder.

“Are you alright little guy?” she had a warm, comforting voice.

He tried to speak, but coughed instead.

“You were asleep a long time. Do you remember what happened?”

She seemed to be following regular procedure. How’d he get into the hospital? Hadn’t he been kidnapped by Vodka? He shook his head.

“You were pulled out of the rumble of the Mouri Detective Agency. It looks like you inhaled a lot of smoke, got a little too cold, and you got a little knocked around by the explosion. Do you remember that?”

He nodded. Waiting in the cold for hours with Ran, waiting for help to arrive, but the men in black came instead. “Ran!” he exclaimed, then shook with another series of coughs.
“Ran Mouri is still in surgery. It sounds like she tried really hard to protect you. You have a brave older sister.”

She observed his face and quickly added, “But don’t worry, I’m sure she’ll be fine. We need to focus on you, and you getting better. Do you feel any pain anywhere?”

His head, he remembered it throbbing after the explosion. It still hurt now. He touched his head with his hands.

“Your head hurts? That makes sense, because it looks like your noggin got rang pretty hard during the explosion. Do you need any pain killers?”

He shook his head. It hurt, but it was manageable. He couldn’t stand to have his wits dulled.

“No need to be brave young man. If it hurts, let me know.” She handed him a wand with a big button that dangled from the headboard. “Press that button if you need anything, okay? I need to get back to work.” She handed him a clicker for the TV, and scurried off.

How’d this happen? Why hadn’t they killed him? Why drop him off at the hospital? He looked up at the window again. Something wasn’t quite right about the way light came through. Slowly, he climbed down from the bed. He grabbed his IV-stand, and hobbled over to the window. There was a chair in front of it, so he climbed onto it, and opened the blinds. It was a beautiful scenic shot of a nameless metropolis. It’d been turned into a poster and pasted over a set of florescent lights. He froze, and listened.

The doctor was talking with someone outside. She was scolding them, something about “leg” and “don’t … weight…” Normal, doctor stuff. It sounded like someone was caught trying to walk on an injured leg.

Then he heard the voice of the person she was talking to. It was deep, jagged, and worn from years of chain-smoking. Could it be…? He had to make sure. He hobbled over to the door, IV in tow, and opened it up.

The doctor spun around. Her patient was sitting on a chair beside her. He had a black fedora and long, oily grey hair that hung limply over his shoulders. He wasn’t wearing his massive jacket, but that was definitely Gin. “You shouldn’t be moving around young man!” she said cheerfully.

Conan ripped the IV out and slipped through the door. He sprinted down the hall, being chased by the curses of the doctor and Gin. A door, somewhere there had to be a door to the outside. Alarms echoed, and the doctor’s angry voice gave his description with strict instructions to detain him without killing him. He sprinted around a corner and ran right into a pair of adult legs. Dazed and struggling to catch his breath, he was snatched up and carried back to his cell. This time they strapped him down and left a guard.

This made more sense. They kidnapped him and were keeping him alive. They’d hoped to fool him into thinking he was at the hospital, to keep him from being troublesome. Why though? He’d been certain that they’d just want to kill him and get him out of their hair, with all of the trouble he’d caused them. Unless… Ran was their target. Kir had told them that killing them was only Plan B. He must be their hostage. Then taking out her parents and her home was a way to isolate her, and keeping him was a way to make her dependent on them for his care and safety. He felt nauseous. No way was he going to let himself be used this way.

He glared at his guard. He was a young man, roughly mid-twenties. He was wearing camo pants and a black t-shirt. His arms had an impressive array of scars and tattoos. “You’re…” he is
statement dissolved into a fit of coughing. The exertion hadn’t helped any. “…not…” he said slowly, trying not to trigger another fit. “…doctors…”

“Right.” His guard smiled. “Would you like to watch TV? Sitting around staring at each other gets awful dull.”

Conan shook his head. He wanted to squeeze this guy for information. “Ran?” he asked.

“Your big sister is fine, from what I hear. She impressed That Person by killing Bourbon and beating up Gin so bad. If all goes well, you’ll see her again soon.”

His eyes went wide. Bourbon was dead? This was all his fault; if he never had told her, she wouldn’t have reacted to him so violently; she wouldn’t be a killer now. If she killed someone, then she’d definitely be isolated now, and easier pickings for them.

“I hear she’s already received her codename. You’ll be calling her Rum from now on.”

He started to scream “Liar!” but his throat couldn’t take it. He fell into a fit of coughing so long that his guard strapped the oxygen mask back onto his face, and turned on the TV. There was a Doraemon marathon on. He cursed his tiny fate.

Chapter End Notes

As promised – The Vanishing Vowels

If you've heard Japanese being spoken and were comparing to a transcription, you'll notice that two vowels do a disappearing act. Or rather, they seem to. To discover what's going on, first you need to know about two linguistic concepts: Assimilation and Voicing.

Put your hand on your throat and make a 七大音 like sound. Then, with your hand still in place, make an SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS sound.

These two sounds are made in almost identical ways. Your tongue and jaw should be in the same position when making them, and you could with a little practice go back and forth between them without moving anything in your mouth. The only difference between these two sounds is the vibrating you felt in your neck as you made the Z sound. The process that produces that vibration is called “voicing.”

Sounds that don't use voicing are called “voiceless” or “unvoiced.” Sounds that do use voicing are called “voiced.” By the way, when you whisper, that's speaking without any voicing. Because so many sounds occur in voiced/unvoiced pairs, whispering is much more difficult to understand, because many words that could be distinguished from each other with voicing, suddenly can't be.

Assimilation is what happens when sounds that are near each other become more like each other. For example, the shortened version of the word “and” in English, which you may recall being written like this: 'n'. The N will assimilate where in the mouth it is articulated from the consonant directly following it. If the consonant directly following it is made with the lips, like a P, B, F, M, or W, (not necessarily spelled like that, but pronounced like that) the N will become an M, which is also made by the
lips. It also changes to match K and G, becoming an NG sound.

Assimilation isn't restricted to place of articulation, however. Linguists have identified any and all features of sounds being copied, swapped, or deleted to make sounds more like their neighbors. In Japanese, short I's and U's can lose their voicing if they are surrounded by voiceless consonants, or a voiceless consonant and the tail end of a word. There are a few examples: (the voiceless vowels have little O's put over their tops.)

imasu > imasū “exist (for animate creatures only)”
Arekkusu > Arekkūsū “Alex”
Kisaki > Kōsakū “Eri Kisaki's family name”
mushishi > mushīshi “Title of an amazing anime that you must watch”
roku > rōku “6”

By the way, have you heard of the English word “skosh”? It's a borrowed word from Japanese, brought home by WW2 veterans who were stationed in Japan. It comes from the Japanese word “sūkoshū” which is an adverb that means “a little” or “a small amount” or “a short distance.” Not knowing how the word would be spelled, the soldiers picked up the word by ear – not hearing the voiceless U and I, and Englishized it into one syllable.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Ran was awoken by a cellphone ringing in her pocket. She was on a bench in the bar down the street. Dr. Araide was at the other side of the room, working on someone. Blood was on his elbows. She sat up. Her bloody pajamas had been replaced with clean clothes, obviously from Azusa’s wardrobe, and she could feel bandages on her back, arm, and side. Her knuckles were also bandaged up, and she couldn’t feel her fingers much. Groggily she pulled the phone out. It was Conan’s phone, the one with the smashed screen. She couldn’t tell who was calling, so she answered it.

“Hello?”

“Oh thank goodness! Ran!” it was Ms…. no… Agent Jodie’s voice.

“Jodie?” she asked.

“Ran, are you and Conan alright? We’ve been trying to get through for hours! We can’t even get a helicopter in, they keep getting shot full of holes.”

“I’m okay…” then her stomach twisted. “Conan! They took Conan! I was fighting two of them, and a third got Conan!”

“Calm down Ran! Tell us slowly, what happened?” The echoes on Jodie’s end became louder. She’d been put on speakerphone.

“We were making phonecalls in my room, and there was an explosion outside. Then part of the building collapsed, and we were stuck in the corner, away from the door. Conan was having trouble – he hit his head during the explosion. No help came. Then one of their agents, Bourbon, also known as Tooru Amuro, knocked a hole in the wall and came to grab us. He didn’t know that I knew, so I grabbed him and we fell into the rubble. I landed on him, then I tied him up and took his phone. He’s hurt really really badly. I think I broke his back, and I know I broke a bunch of ribs. If he doesn’t get help soon-”

“He’s getting it!” hollered Dr. Araide. “The bastard’ll live to be questioned another day!”

There was a chorus of cheers and “Good job Ran!”s from the room of FBI agents. Ran instantly felt a lot better. That Person’s jibes felt like empty threats now.

“When I finished with him, I recognized another one. When I met him, he called himself John Mizuki, but Conan says that he’s actually Gin. He tried to shoot me, but I dodged and then I was really, really mad, and it’s kinda blurry after that. I think I broke his arm, and I know I got a few of his ribs and possibly a kneecap. How’s he doing?” she asked Araide.

“That guy ran off, with the help of his buddy, as soon as you were off him,” Azusa said.

“If he’s well enough to run off, he’ll be fine,” Dr. Araide added. “You didn’t kill anyone.”

That Person was a bastard and a liar. All that was left was to rescue Conan.
“You faced Gin and survived?” someone on the FBI end of the line asked.

“Yeah, twice, actually. Bourbon introduced me to him as a bodyguard friend of his, to spar with me. That reminds me, I called their head honcho-“

A chorus of “What the hell were you thinking!?”’s filled her ear. She waited for them to die down.

“I had Bourbon’s phone, so I called their Big Bad Boss, and told him to let ambulances through to save his men. He said he was going to let them die because I was going to be his new agent, Rum.”

Silence.

“That Person said he’d be taking care of Conan from now on,” Ran bit back tears, trying not to think of what they could be doing to Shinichi. “They have no idea what they’re messing with!” she declared, punching her fist through the seat of the chair besides her. “Conan’s strong, not weak like other kids; he’ll find a way to get away from them.”

“Ran,” Jodie’s voice interrupted her. “It’s not a matter of weakness. If they keep trying for long enough, it’ll change him. Let’s find him before then, shall we?”

“Let’s!” The agony and terror of the past few hours lifted from her limbs.

“Thanks to the shipment of documents your mysterious defector squirreled away, we’ll be able to reduce this syndicate to a few isolated cells within the next few weeks. We have an entire team of analysts doing nothing but working on that. The CIA is picking up that Big Bad Boss as we speak. Ran, you’ve done enough. Rest. We’re sending plain-clothes officers and paramedics to you on foot. It may take them a while, but you guys are going to be safe. Don’t worry about Conan; when we find the place he’s being kept, we’ll let you know. He’ll be home before you know it.”

“Thank you,” Ran said. After a few more assurances, the call ended. Her attention turned to Bourbon, who was whimpering while Dr. Araide worked on him. She walked over, and looked over his shoulder.

“Out of my light, Ran. I need to see where I’m working.” He was duct-taping Bourbon’s back with a makeshift splint built from bar-stool legs. Bourbon had been zip-tied with his wrists in front of him, forcing him to hug the bench he was laid on.

“Ran!” Bourbon cried into the bench’s seat-cushion. “They were going to kill you all; I needed to protect you! It was the only way; I had to make you useful to them!”

Hot rage churned in her chest and sent searing words to her lips. Like a tea kettle whistling, her voice got louder and harsher as she spoke, and it ended in a scream. “Protection? You need protection from me. You told me I’m the most talented martial artist you’ve ever met, and I can dodge fucking bullets!” She panted, backing away, afraid she might hurt him again. “Shinichi told me that their agents commit suicide if cornered. Be careful,” she hissed, her fists clenched, the exhaustion and lack of sleep returning to her. She couldn’t sleep. Dr. Araide needed help, and he couldn’t subdue an experienced fighter. She took up a post by Bourbon’s side, as both nurse and prison guard.

Chapter End Notes
Since we got into a bit of phonetics and phonology in the last chapter, I think that we can continue this theme and go over the sounds in Japanese.

Inventory of Vowels:
Japanese vowels come in two types: long and short. Ignore what English spelling teachers have told you about the meaning of Long and Short in reference to vowels, by the way. I'm referring to the length of time that the vowel is said, not vowel raising or diphthongization.

Short vowels:
a, ʰ/i, ʰ/u, e, o
Long vowels:
aa, ii, uu, ee, oo

Any vowel can go beside any other. EI and OU have blended with EE and OO, which is why “Heiji” is pronounced “heeji”.

Inventory of Consonants:
The vowels and palatalization can change the consonants into other consonants, but these are the core, unmodified consonants. The way I listed them, they are separated with commas, and if they come in a pair, they are voiceless/voiced.

**Stops** (air is stopped, then released in a little blast)
p/b, t/d, k/g

**Fricatives** (air is pressurized into a hiss)
s/z, h

**Nasals** (air is diverted through the nose)
m, n, n (that takes up a mora)

**Approximants** (mouth is moving, transitioning. These are the most vowel-like consonants)
y, w

**Tap** (tongue is flapped really fast. These sounds are really close to being Stops, and if done in rapid succession, you get a Trill)
ɾ (Japanese R)

Palatalization:
The consonant Y is a palatal sound that is on the border between being a consonant or a vowel. The vowel it is closest too is /i/. It can be combined with the following consonants at the onset of a syllable.
py/by, ty/dy, ky/gy
sy/zy, hy
my, ny

The palatalization changes the following sounds, due to the sounds assimilating the Y.
ty-ch, dy-j, sy-sh, zy-j

The vowels also change the consonants directly before them:
ti-chi, tu-tsu, du-zu, si-shi, zi-ji, hu-fu

The Approximants, being almost vowels, can't be paired with the vowels that are most like them. These are the remaining combinations:
ya, yo, yu, wa
You may have seen “wo” written before, but it's pronounced “o”. “Wo” is only pronounced in a handful of dialects. In Japan's past, “wo” was pronounced and got into the writing system, and since it is a very important post-position, marking the direct object of the sentence, its spelling hasn't changed, even after the major reforms done in Japanese spelling in the last century.

Because Y is only compatible with A, O, and U, the palatalized consonants can only be followed by those three vowels. If you come across a “je” or something similar then you know it is a recent loanword in Japanese.

All of the consonants can be doubled, even the palatalized ones. The only non-doubleable consonants are the Approximates, because they are too close to being vowels.

Speaking of loan-words... Because of Japan's close connection to the US, English is changing the available sounds in Japanese, and the available consonant-vowel combinations. Here are some examples:

Before, F was only found before Us.

Before, there were no Vs – though it should be noted, this V sounds more like a Spanish or Italian V, being bilabial, instead of labio-dental like in English. Old people struggle with this, and usually just make V into a B.

These didn't occur in Japanese simply due to its phonetic history with Y and E.

And last, but not least, the moraic-N. This sound, just like the 'n' of English, changes to match the consonant following it in a word. In some dialects, the moraic N assimilates with the vowel before it instead, becoming a nasalized vowel. If you listen closely to Ran's Japanese voice actor, you'll hear her speaking this way. Thus, “senpai” could be pronounced /sɛmpai/ or /sɛ̃pai/.

また来週！(See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
After sleeping fitfully and awaking in what he presumed was the next day, based on the kiddy cartoons becoming infomercials and kiddy cartoons again, a new doctor came in. He let Conan use a bedpan, which bitterly reminded him of when he’d been hospitalized after being shot in the stomach. Then he examined Conan’s throat and listened to him breathe a few times. He also had a kind voice.

“Young man, you are healing up right on schedule. Now you need to eat some food, and we can begin some tests.” He whistled. A tray of food was brought in, all of it hot and steaming. It was all soft food, things easy on the stomach and good for sore throats.

As hungry as Conan was, he turned his head away. He was still strapped down, even though they’d put him in a sitting position, so he couldn’t feed himself anyways. He wondered what the man meant by ‘tests’.

“Open wide, young man,” he said, opening his own mouth wide, as though Conan couldn’t figure out what he was saying.

Conan laughed at him, but kept his mouth shut.

The doctor tutted. “What purpose does getting weak and sick serve? How are you going to meet Rum again if you get too sick to see her?”

He had a point. Conan still hated this. It was beyond the humiliation of being treated like a child, he was being treated like a baby. He opened his mouth, and let the doctor feed him soft, steamy noodles. He’d escape and see Ran again.

After the meal, the doctor replaced the empty tray with a laptop. It had “Jouyou Kanji Proficiency Exam” on its screen. A little panel with four buttons was placed at Conan’s bound hand. So, ‘test’ meant ‘scholastic test’. What on earth were they up to?

“Why are you making me take a Kanji test?”

The doctor smiled proudly. “We help the families of our members as much as possible. You’ll be getting free schooling from now on.” He pointed at the buttons in Conan’s hand. “Whenever you’re ready, click a button and answer the question on the screen, A, B, C, or D. Go ahead.” He pulled his chair around so he could watch the test go by, as well as watch Conan. Then he pulled out a notepad and a high-end pen, and jotted something down.

What were the grade 1 Kanji? Conan couldn’t remember. Better play it safe, and get most of them wrong. The screen flashed red when the answer was incorrect, and he kept it flickering for a few minutes before the frowning doctor snatched the laptop away and brought it back to the beginning of the test.

“You aren’t fooling me, Conan,” he said sternly. “You were reading the Grade 5 Kanji in the test’s title a moment ago without trouble.”
Conan rolled his eyes at the doctor. A minute ago he was being treated like a baby. It was extremely tempting to start acting like one.

“We received a detailed report of your intelligence from Bourbon. We already know that you’re an advanced student, far beyond your peers. We just don’t know how advanced. Now start again.”

A few hours later, Conan was forced to admit that he knew all of the Jouyou Kanji.

“What I don’t understand,” the doctor murmured, putting the laptop away, “is why you want to hide your intelligence. Most people with a bit of intelligence go out of their way to show it off. To know so many kanji at such a young age, you must have an eidetic memory.”

Conan frowned, thinking of his rise and sudden fall as Shinichi Kudou, Savior of the Police Force. “Having people’s attention isn’t always a good thing. You might get kidnapped by evil people who want to turn you into their next mad scientist.”

The man laughed. “Am I a mad scientist?” he asked with his kindest, cuddliest, child-psychiatrist voice.

“Yes,” Conan snapped. “You’re experimenting on me and holding me against my will.”

The man sighed, and left the room, his laptop tucked under his arm. “It’s lunchtime. I’ll be back soon with your lunch, young man.”

After he’d left, Conan grinned to himself. He’d left Conan alone in the room, and his fancy pen was left behind on the covers. The bindings allowed him to move a little, so he wouldn’t be uncomfortable, and the one across his chest had been detached so he could sit up and eat. The ones on his wrists, hips, and ankles had been left attached. The pen rested a few inches to the side of his knees. He leaned over, stretching as far as he could go. Triumphant, he sat up with the pen gripped between his teeth. He dropped it by his dominant hand, and started to work on dismantling the binding on his wrist.

This ‘detailed report’ that the man had spoken of was cause for concern. How much did Bourbon know? If he connected the right dots, Haibara would be in trouble, and his own future would become very painful. This report had to be the reason that they’d been targeted all of a sudden, he realized. Bourbon must have suggested to the boss that they recruit both Ran and him, not just grab Conan to be their hostage. He should have known; he should have planned… but it was too late. Time to focus on what he could do now.

His thoughts were interrupted by the distant but unmistakable sound of a blood-curdling scream coming from somewhere deep inside the building. He almost dropped the pen, as it slickened with sweat from his efforts. The binding was made of padded leather and buckled like a belt. He’d wiggled free the tail of the belt and now was working on the pin.

The sound of people running towards the door made him freeze. Go past, go past, go past… The sounds became faint again. He breathed a sigh of relief. A few minutes more of wriggling the pen and her right hand was free. His heart hammering in his chest, he unbuckled the rest of the bindings and pulled out his IV. Then he slipped to the door, and listened. Nothing. He tried the door handle. To his surprise, it wasn’t locked. He opened the door a crack, and someone out of his sight announced, “Time!”

The door opened, showing the smiling child-psychiatrist holding a stopwatch, the female doctor and his young guard on either side.
“You’re very resourceful. Not our best time, but then again, you are a child without training, after all.” He ushered a shaking Conan back to his bed, hand on his shoulder.

Conan grit his teeth as the doctor picked up the pen and pocketed it. “Why?” he snarled at his captors. The young guard picked him up and strapped him to the bed, leaving the strap for his chest undone, then helping Conan sit up. “Why are you testing me?”

“I thought I already explained that to you,” the male doctor said. “Now, as a reward for doing so well, you get apple slices with your lunch.”

Another tray full of warm comfort food that was good for sick children was placed before him, and his guard busied himself with cutting up an apple.

“I heard someone screaming,” Conan said.

The doctor laughed nervously. “It’s haircut day. One of our members has a phobia of getting his hair cut, if you can believe it.”

“So you guys are tortur-” Conan started, but was silenced by a mouthful of rice.

Once the meal was done, the laptop was set up where the tray had been. Before they could start, two men, dressed in black suits, burst into the room.

“No,” the doctor snapped. “I told you the schedule already. You can’t have him yet!”

“The boss-man gave us special permission,” one of them said, drawling out his words. He was a plain-looking man in every respect, with a clean, boring haircut and no visible scars. Other than his black clothes, his sharp, black eyes were the only indication of the man’s rank. “Now leave the room,” he said, his voice lowering, the threat of violence behind every word.

The doctor didn’t need to be told twice. He collected up his laptop and tray and scurried out.

This was more like what Conan had imagined his capture would be like. The men pushed him down and buckled the binding that held his chest down. He clenched his jaw. He wasn’t going to talk to them, or interact with them at all.

After a few hours of the silent treatment, the quiet one left. He returned brandishing a syringe, and emptied its contents into Conan’s IV. “This is a truth serum that the scientists here developed. It hasn’t failed us yet,” the plain one sneered.

The room was darkening, it seemed to Conan. His vision became hazy, and a strange, floaty feeling washed over him. The men seemed very distant. Somewhere in the gloom, he heard a voice say, “Where is Shinichi Kudou?”

His memory slipped back to the terrible moments when his life as Shinichi had effectively ended. “Your detective game is over,” Conan said quietly. “B-bro. This little shit was trailing us. Should we shoot him. No. No guns. The police are all over the place, thanks to that commotion earlier. We’ll use this. The new poison the organization developed. It doesn’t leave any forensic evidence. It hasn’t been tested on humans yet, so this’ll be our little guinea pig. Bro, hurry up. Right. So long, detective.”

He was reliving that moment. The sharp pain in his head, choking on the water Gin had used to force feed the poison to him. “Your detective game is over. B-bro. This little shit was trailing us. Should we shoot him. No. No guns. The police are all over the place, thanks to that commotion earlier. We’ll use this. The new poison the organization developed. It doesn’t leave any forensic
evidence. It hasn’t been tested on humans yet, so this’ll be our little guinea pig. Bro, hurry up. Right. So long, detective.” Then the pain of that first transformation.

Again. “Your detective game is over. B-bro. This little shit was trailing us. Should we shoot him. No. No guns. The police are all over the place, thanks to that commotion earlier. We’ll use this. The new poison the organization developed. It doesn’t leave any forensic evidence. It hasn’t been tested on humans yet, so this’ll be our little guinea pig. Bro, hurry up. Right. So long, detective.” He couldn’t make it stop. His hands clutched at invisible grass as he writhed in agony.

Then it started all over again. He couldn’t see or hear the confusion of his questioners, or the doctor reentering the room yelling about child-dosages and the fact that Conan was still recovering from a concussion. His wide-open eyes couldn't see anything but the damp, cold earth under his burning cheek, and his ears could only hear Gin's barb-wire voice, saying with a short chuckle and his thin lips stretched into a sneer, “So long, detective.”

The pain of the transformation, then finally, oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

I mentioned the Jouyou Kanji in this chapter, and I've mentioned it before, so I think it's about time I explain exactly what it is.

At the turn of the 19th century, as Japan was forced at gunpoint to join the western world, the desire to be a competitive power grew. To do this, they needed an educated populous. But, they had a problem. The Kanji in use were not standardized. So, after much debate about how to get their population literate, considering only using Katakana and Hiragana, or even adopting the Latin alphabet, as it could produce every word in the Japanese language with only 19 symbols. But, the Chinese-loan words produced too many words that sounded the same. The only way to tell them apart was to use the Chinese characters. So, they made a list of the most useful and important Kanji, and required that all children be taught how to read and write using them.

It went though several revisions, the latest of which being in 2010. The list is 2,136 Kanji long. 1,006 of them are taught in primary school, and 1,130 of them are taught in secondary school. Beyond that, they are divided up into grades, to make teaching them easier. Students are taught the Grade 1 Kanji first, then the Grade 2, and so on. Conan, being in elementary school, wouldn't have been taught Grade 5 Kanji yet. When he tries to fake poor knowledge of the Jouyou Kanji, he was thwarted because he had read the title of the exam, which was written in Kanji without any Furigana, (Hiragana over the top of the main text showing how to pronounce the characters.)

また来週！(See you next week!)
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Officer Takagi probably wouldn’t have believed it if she’d told him, but his face entering the dimly lit bar was one of the most beautiful things Ran had ever seen.

The paramedics joined Dr. Araide, bringing much needed supplies. The policemen took everyone’s statements, but didn’t mark off the crime-scene, and kept the cops in plainclothes, because the gangs that had inexplicably decided to make Beika their battleground all of a sudden might see it as a target.

Ran followed the officers out of Beika in the cold morning light, wrapped up tightly in Azusa’s winter coat. They didn’t go to the Beika police station. According to Officer Takagi, that place had become a warzone. They went all the way to the Ekoda police headquarters before stopping.

In the Ekoda police station, Hakuba had set up a call center to help with the coordination of the various agencies and Heiji. It was his job to deal with the European ones, being the most fluent in English. When he spotted her, he dropped what he was doing, calling out “Mouri!” He gave Ran an awkward, exhausted hug, his height making him stoop. “I’m really glad you’re okay,” he said into her ear. “I heard that Kuroba was shot, then your father’s agency was blown up…” His hands were shaking.

Inspector Nakamori placed his hand on Hakuba’s shoulder. “Now that you know she’s alright, will you get some rest? You’re no good to us half dead. Your father can continue while you rest.”

Hakuba nodded, and let go of Ran. “Where’s Conan?” he asked looking around.

“They kidnapped him.”

His eyes went wide with panic.

“There were three of them,” she continued. “I fought off two of them, but the last one grabbed Conan while I was fighting.”

“Rest,” Inspector Nakamori insisted. “You can’t help Conan without your brain working at 100%.”

He gently took the teens by the shoulders, and led them to the break room, where cots had been set up.

“Before I go to sleep,” Ran said, feeling the weight of the cellphones she’d grabbed in her pocket. “Can you get some cellphones repaired for me? They were damaged in the blast, and they have important contact information that we need for coordinating our forces.” She handed him the three cellphones. Then she pulled out Bourbon’s burner-cell. “This one was on one of the men I defeated. His codename is Bourbon. Get it to the FBI.”

“Good work, Miss Mouri. Your father will be very proud of you,” Inspector Nakamori said, receiving the small cell.

“Maybe,” she answered and flopped down on her cot. She was asleep before she’d managed to pull the blankets over herself. Inspector Nakamori tucked her in gently, thinking of his own daughter.
When Ran woke up again, the three cellphones were in a little pile by her head, rubbing her eyes, she checked the time. It was midnight. She’d gotten twelve hours of sleep. Her body still ached from her battle in the night. She noted as she got up that the knife wound in her side had bloodied Azusa’s shirt and the sheet. She poked her head out the door and called, “Excuse me, does anyone know first aid?”

One of the paramedics that was hanging around ran to her, expecting some sort of emergency.

“Don’t worry, I just need some bandages changed,” she said, pointed at her bloody side.

The paramedic gave a sigh of relief. She sat down on the cot, and took off her shirt. Hakuba was still out cold, but she held the borrowed and bloody shirt over her chest anyways. Azusa hadn’t been the same size as Ran, so she hadn’t been able to borrow a bra. She probably couldn’t wear one anyways, with this knife-wound.

As the paramedic worked on her back and side, she turned on her new phone. It lit up with dozens of messages in her voicemail, and about a hundred emails.

There were a lot of worried messages from her mom, and from Kaito, who had been with her mom at the hospital, waiting for news. She called her mom first. Apparently she’d read the caller ID, because all she could hear was cheers for a few minutes. Finally they were quiet enough for Ran to talk with them.

“Honey are you okay? We were with Inspector Megure when we heard, and we’d heard nothing since then!”

She took a deep breath. “They blew up the detective agency. You can walk up the steps, but when you open the door, there isn’t much floor left and the entire front of the building is gone. There’s about four square feet left of my bedroom. Mom, can Dad and I stay with you?”

“Of course dear! As long as that old lecher stays on the couch, I’m sure things will be fine.”

“There’s more.” She took another deep breath, to steady herself and not start crying. “Three agents went after us. I fought off the first two, but the last one grabbed Conan while I was fighting. They have him now.”

She could almost hear their expressions changing and their mood dropping on the other end.

“I injured one of them bad enough that he’s going to the hospital in police custody. The other got away, but he’s not getting in any fights for a while. I was so mad that it’s kinda a blur, but I believe I broke a few of his limbs.”

“That’s my girl,” she heard her dad say in the background.

“I talked with the bad guy’s boss after that. He wants me to become some sort of assassin for them. The jokes on him though, because neither of the guys I took on died like he said they would, and we’re taking the whole organization apart. You should see the calls coming in. They’ve collected agents from all over the world. Their boss is trying to hold Conan hostage so I’ll work for him, but he’s not going to have an organization to work for much longer. We’ll find Conan before they can hurt him.”

That was a little more optimistic than she felt, but she hoped it made them feel better.

“Oh, and I discovered that I can dodge bullets.”
“For real?” Kaito yelled. “You’ve gotta teach me that trick! It’d have come in handy last night!”

“You’re not going to make a habit out of being around flying bullets, are you?” her dad asked, a nervous edge in his voice.

“That wasn’t the plan.”

“How’d you do it? HowdyoudoitImustknow!” Kaito chattered in the background.

She paused, thinking back. “I saw him drawing his gun. He aimed it, and I moved with his finger as he pulled the trigger, and it only grazed my arm. Then I broke his arm.”

“That’s so cool Iwannatry-“

“Nope,” snapped his mom.

“But Ma-“

“No.” There was a certain finality to her voice that only a parent can achieve. He didn’t try to bring up the topic of dodging bullets again.

Ran giggled, then remembered she was laughing about narrowly escaping death and capture by a brutal crime syndicate, and that Conan was still out there.

“Everyone, I’m glad you’re okay. I need to get back to helping out, and I’ve got a lot more phone calls to make. Take care! Especially you Kaito! Listen to your mom!”

There was a chorus of good-byes, and she ended the call. She continued flipping through her messages.

Sonoko had sent a link to a restaurant she wanted to go to on a date. Sonoko had no idea what had happened the past 48 hours, did she? She could really use some girlfriend time. Ran dialed her. As she retold the story to Sonoko, she didn’t feel the need to hold back her tears or how tired and scared she was. Sonoko let it all come and go, her gentle jokes and sympathy came through the phone like a long, warm hug. Finally her girlfriend swore to get to the police station and give her an actual hug, no matter how long it took her, seeing as the bus system wasn’t running yet.

Finally feeling calm and happy again, she went back to checking her messages.

There was an anonymous one, from an email that was a random series of numbers and letters. The subject read, “Conan”. Hoping it was from the defector, she opened it.

It wasn’t. It was a series of pictures of Conan curled up like a cat, fast asleep on a hospital bed. The last one was of him strapped down to it, eyes half open and head lolling. His fists were clenched, and his jaw was lax, hanging open. His bangs were glued to his forehead with sweat. Was he drugged? The contrast had been raised so the bruises that weren’t very visible in the first pictures were clearly visible in the last. The worst was a ring-shaped one on his temple. Ran remembered watching that one form from the concussion he got in the explosion. Then there was an address, and the words, “COME ALONE”.

In the station, she could hear reports about them taking down agent after agent. There was no way she’d come alone. If fact, it was stupid to go at all. Her injuries limited her movements too much, and she was still too exhausted to put up much of a meaningful fight. She could let the police sweep them up, and find out Conan’s location from them. If that didn’t work, she’d find Conan by making sure the organization was ripped to shreds and there was no ground left for them to stand.
“Hakuba!” she yelled. He jerked awake, his eyes blurry and a bit of drool on the side of his cheek. “The kidnappers delivered their ransom note.” She held out her cellphone for Hakuba to see the message.

“Stop moving,” the paramedic plead.

“Sorry.” She stiffened her pose. “Hakuba, I can’t run around at the moment, can you get this to someone so they can pick up whoever is there to pick me up?”

“Yessam’!” He grabbed her phone and ran off to find someone free, or free-ish, to go to the address listed and bring them down.

The paramedic finished, and she pulled on her bloody shirt.

She went off to find the phone bank and ran into Sonoko, who had had her family driver break a few speed limits getting her there. She was asking, or rather commanding them to tell her where Ran was. Her face was red from the cold air and worry. Ran sped over and swept her up in a hug, ignoring the staring faces around her. She really needed this intimacy, this connection with another human being right now. She could feel Sonoko’s breath catch, her heart hammering in her chest, her soft hips pressed against her own, tired, aching ones. She smelled fresh, like the perfumes in cleaning products, and her straight brown hair tickled Ran’s cheek. She buried her face in Sonoko’s neck and shoulder, and stayed there a while.

When the hug finally broke off, Sonoko looked into Ran’s eyes and said softly, “How can I help?”

Ran’s breath caught in her throat. “You already are,” she choked out.

Ran and Sonoko shared a cheep and greasy meal from a vendor down the street, the best the police could do for them in the situation. It was made more tasty by cuddling in the break room while eating. Cheers erupted from the squad room. Curious, they put aside their meal to see what the commotion was about.

“Hey, what’s going on? Who’d they catch?” she called, grinning.

The atmosphere immediately chilled, and they all turned to look at her. Inspector Nakamori broke the silence by stepping forward. “Miss Suzuki, will you come with me? There’s something I need to speak with you in private about.”

The other officers’ eyes followed her, holding their breath. Ran tried to follow too, but Inspector Nakamori told her to return to Hakuba.

He led her to an interrogation room, and sat her down. “I don’t understand; what’s going on?” she asked.

“The boss of the organization has been caught,” he said watching her carefully.

“So? That’s a good thing, right?” she said, leaning forward. “Why is everyone acting strange?”

Better tell her, to observe her reaction. “It’s your grandfather, and possibly your grandmother too.”

She gaped at him. “You’re joking right?”

“I’m afraid not. They were captured by the CIA a few hours ago.”
She shook her head, crossing her arms. “No way. They’re cranky and old, but other than that, harmless.”

The inspector sighed. “They may be old and cranky, but they aren’t harmless. Word from the FBI is that they were caught in a conference with two known members of the organization. They have it on recording, and they talked about you.”

She bit her lip. “What did they have to say?” Glancing up at him, she added, “I’m sure you wouldn’t try to pull a prank like this on me, but I need proof.”

“I’ll get it.” He got up and left the room.

From the camera, the policemen watched her pace in the room, occasionally stopping to say to herself, “This can’t be true… they wouldn’t do that to me, would they?”

After twenty minutes, the inspector returned, bearing a laptop. He set it down on the table, and Sonoko sat down quickly before it. There was a sound-clip loaded up. The inspector clicked the [Play] button.

A deep voice filled the small room.

“If you keep her off the hit list they’ll get suspicious. You need to keep yourselves anonymous.”

“You don’t have enough reverence for the bonds of family, Gin.” It was unmistakably her grandmother’s reedy voice. Sonoko stifled a cry and jumped out of her chair. “You almost blew Sonoko up on the Bell Tree Express Train. Thank goodness Vermouth and Bourbon had the good sense to isolate Sherry in the luggage compartment and blow up that one alone. It’s important to insure the existence of the following generations. If we don’t, our noble venture will fail.”

Then the hoarse voice of Sonoko’s grandfather, commanding. “Scientists were the first to go missing. The leak is probably there. Find it. And, while you’re at it, assign someone to dispose of Ran Mouri. Bourbon’s plan to bring her in has most definitely failed at this point, judging by your injuries.”

“Yes sir. With your permission, ma’am…” The recording ended.

Sonoko was shaking. “Grampa just…” She back away from the computer as though it was a rabid dog. “…put out a hit…” Her back hit the wall, and she slid to the ground. “…on my girlfriend.” She pulled her knees up and rested her head on them. Her shoulders shuddered with her sobs.

The inspector closed the lid of the laptop. This girl hadn’t been involved, at least not knowingly. He picked up the laptop, and stepped out. “Miss Mouri? You can come in now.”

Ran ripped past him the moment the words left his lips. She stood before her best friend, confidant, and lover and said in a hoarse voice. “Sonoko.”

She looked up. Her eyes were swollen, and tears wove a bed of salt trails down her cheeks.

“I don’t blame you.” She slid down the wall to her side. Reaching out, she softly touched her lover’s trembling back.

Her hair and skin still reeked of smoke and sweat, but Sonoko didn’t care. She fell into that stench, into the arms she loved. “Can I change my name to Mouri? I don’t want to be a Suzuki anymore.”

“It’s be my pleasure to share my name with you,” Ran whispered, her breath stirring the hair on the
top of Sonoko’s head.

At least they knew why the grandparents had been so insistent about Sonoko’s future plans. Had her parents known? Ran brushed aside those thoughts, to focus on comforting her girlfriend. She’d helped Ran, now it was time for Ran to help her.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, one of my stupidest crack theories involves knowledge of Japanese demonstrative adjectives and how the boss is referred as while being deliberately vague.

A demonstrative adjective describes where in relation to the speaker and listener an object is in space or time. In English, we have 4 of them:
this/these (close to the speaker)
that/those (far from the speaker)

Japanese doesn't mark plurals (usually), and has 3, the roots of which are:
“ko-” closer to speaker
“so-” closer to the listener
“a-” far from both speaker and listener

These combine with suffixes:
“-no” for adjectives
“-re” for nouns
“-ko” for place-nouns (“ako” is rare though, people prefer to combine it with “so-” to make “asoko.”)

The pronoun “ano kata” is used to refer to the boss, and it means “that person.”

You could read “Sonoko” as “sono ko” - “this child.”

Yeah, it's stupid. But it's still fun.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Gin panted. His wounded knee and ribs were making it difficult to keep going, but he had no choice. The military squad, probably run by the CIA by their use of English, had crashed his meeting with the boss. He and his wife had been black-bagged and whisked away. Vodka was… behind. Lost. There’d been a lot of blood. He hoped he wouldn’t forget Vodka’s face like the others.

Someone, perhaps many, had betrayed the organization. Betrayal was unforgivable. He had his last orders from the boss. Find the leak. Then he’d kill it. Or them. Whichever.

An old car, one easy to break in to. Smooth, like it’d been in his wretched youth. How long ago had that been? He’d stopped counting years when he couldn’t count the bodies anymore. That didn’t matter. He had to get to the lab.

He took off his hat and tucked his long hair under his coat. The disguise wasn’t as good as what Vermouth could cook up, but that smug bitch could go fuck herself. Or he could. Had she been rounded up too? Nah, she was too slippery, like a cockroach.

They swarmed around him, doing their best impressions of worry and fear, begging for news.

“Listen up, everyone. There are a few people here who have betrayed us all.” They all visibly flinched. “I’m going to talk to each of you, one by one, and the betrayers are going to die horrifically. The Faithful will get to work clearing this place out to move to our new location. Got it?”

They got jitterier, looking at eachother with wide eyes.

“Shouldn’t we be working on packing up, and worry about moles later?” asked one of the medical staff, a woman he knew. That statement was suspicious. Her brain-matter showered the people around her, and her face vanished from his memory.

That should solve the problem of stupid questions.

Conan slowly awakened. His head was fuzzy. A sharp pain, and a loud noise exploded on Conan’s face. Pain sharpened his senses, and he was dragged with a scream to full consciousness. A black fedora. A long scar on the left cheek. Cruel pale eyes, watching his every movement. Breath that stank of cigarettes being chain smoked. He was face to face with the man who’d tried to kill him two years ago. “Gin,” he whispered.

A crooked smile, half triumph, half wrath twisted his lips. “I never would have believed it, until I confirmed it myself. Today, that was all you, wasn’t it?”

Conan didn’t answer, but glared his captor straight back. It was all he could do.

“But Bourbon was right to want to recruit you. Pity I’ll have to kill you.” He stepped back, favoring his right leg. They were in a lab. Complex, expensive equipment was all around, in various states of
being packed up. He grabbed a sheet hung over a particularly large box, and yanked. It wasn’t a box, but a clear, thick glass tube, full of water, and a sleeping Areku. “I know you’ve met Ambrosia. Have you met Okiagari?”

Who, or what was that? It sounded like the word for “self-righting” or “self-rising”.

Seeing the confusion on Conan’s face, his grin became all triumph and anticipation. “His full name is Okiagari Shitai.” Rising corpse.

Zombie.

His eyes widened in horror. Areku spoke English, of course he’d use an English word. Areku’s voice echoed in his memory. ‘Zombie Time is particularly violent, so run away as fast as you can if you ever see it.’ Gin snatched him up. He tried to struggle, but the zipties on his wrists and ankles were too tight and too strong for him to wriggle out of, at least not in the few seconds it took for Gin to drag him to a heavy iron grate in the floor, open it, and throw him in.

He landed on something soft. Moans and cries echoed in the small, concrete room. There were other people here. He’d landed on one of them. They were already cold to the touch. He rolled off the corpse and squirmed his way from the opening. The floor was cold, wet concrete. He tried not to think about what was he was crawling through. Above, he heard water sloshing. The cries of terror from the vague shapes around him told him his worst fear was about to come true. He, and all of the people here with him, were about to die.

“Hey Gin!” he screamed. “At least I got to watch a teenage girl kick your ass!”

Someone wrapped their arms around him, and squeezed him tight. “Face death without fear, without regret. Rob him of our screams, boy.” It was a woman’s voice. He clung to the stranger he was about to die with in the dark.

The light dimmed. He could see the silhouette of Areku’s feet dangling into the pit. They slowly lowered, until he was almost in. Gin must have been hanging him by the neck. The feet suddenly thrashed, and gagging and coughing echoed down to them. “Don’t…” Areku’s weak voice moaned. A bright flash of light at the trapdoor and an ear shattering explosion in the small concrete space answered him. Areku’s limp body dropped.

Okiagari landed on its feet, on top of the corpse under the opening.

Conan pushed his face into the woman’s chest, so he couldn’t see. It wouldn’t make much difference. At least he’d feel a little safer in his last moments. The woman stroked his head and gently rocked him back and forth. Maybe she had children somewhere. They were probably being held hostage. That’s how these people work. His thoughts churned in wrath and sadness. Wishing was useless here. He bit his tongue, and waited. ‘Face death without fear, without regret.’

It was oddly quiet. Some of the people who were still able to use their legs tried to run, to stay as far as possible from Okiagari. No one wasted breath on screaming. No one was going to give Gin their scream. At least he took a large part of the organization down with him, he thought bitterly. He peeked up, at the opening. Cigarette ash, still glowing, fell down from above. Then the woman was ripped from his grasp, and he fell into the deepening pool of blood. He heard her gasp, and he was showered with her arterial spray. He regretted, for the first time in his life, knowing so much about the processes involved in human death. Her falling body soaked him in a wave of other people’s blood.

Then it was silent. Had Conan – no… Shinichi? He… I… – died? He hadn’t noticed if he had.
There was pain. His wrists and ankles ached from the restraints. There were sounds too. A soft *swishh-tap, swishh-tap* echoed in the room. Not dead yet. Was he the only one?

Strong hand lifted him up gently by the armpits. He braced himself for his end.

A voice spoke in his ear. It was Areku’s, but it sounded like Conan through a voice changer, because his own word choices, his own idiolect were being whispered to him.

“Long time, no see Shaman. You’ve come to us small this time.”

He cautiously opened his eyes. It was Areku’s shaved-bald head, but it was covered in blood. The expression on his face was blank. The eyes were wrong too. Areku had dark, almost black eyes, these were green and reflected the little light in the room back, like a cat’s.

Okiagari set him down on his feet, and snapped his restraints as though they’d been made of taffy. Then it touched Conan’s face gently, crouching down to look into Conan’s eyes. “No memory. No power either. This one is only half. We’ll have to wait for a stronger one. None of them are as strong as she was.” Its knees dropped to the floor, and it sat on its ankles. “You think he’s a fool, but the boy likes you. Take care of him.”

“Who…?”

“You call him Areku. He’s the human.” It tapped the side of its head, the other hand still holding Conan. “He’s trying to scream right now. I’ll take his memories later.”

“Can he hear me?”

“Yes.” The word tickled his hair. “But, he won’t remember.”

Seeing it once was bad enough, but feeling it through one’s own body must be torture. How many times Areku had awoken in a room full of corpses and not known how they’d gotten there?

“I beat them,” Conan said at last. “All that’s left is one angry old man and a handful of scientists he could bully into staying with him. It’s not going to last. You’ll be safe from them soon.”

Gin’s scornful laugh echoed from above. “Lucky brat.” The iron grill slammed shut.

Okiagari’s hands were warm. Conan couldn’t hear breath nor a pulse. The only movement was his own trembling. Adrenaline was still saturating his body.

“The big humans are dangerous,” it whispered. “You were big once. When you made us like this, you were big, Shaman.”

“Mr. Okiagari, I don’t understand,” Conan said back, his voice being shaken by his body. “My name is Conan Edogawa.”

It paused, as though considering this. “You feel like Shaman. But you’re too small to be Shaman. You must be half of her, and don’t have her power. Maybe the next time I meet you, you will have it, and you could separate us again. You should remember that: become strong and separate us.”

It sank down on its hip, and pulled Conan with it. Okiagari wrapped its arms around him, squeezing him close, squishing him into the remains of Areku’s chest. Okiagari had stuffed a variety of human organs into the hole the buck-shot had made. Conan retched at the realization, and tried to squirm free.
“Stop being slippery,” it scolded. “You should sleep and remember me.”

He opened his mouth to protest, but he heard Areku’s heart start to thump in his chest. Hot blood gushed over Conan. The chilly concrete had been making him numb. The liquid spread over him like a thick blanket on a cold winter’s day. It was soft. And warm. And he was very tired.

Chapter End Notes

This was my favorite chapter to write.

Now, I've seen a lot of people shrink Kaito, have him pretend to be "Conan's twin brother", and give him names like "Kai", "Arthur", or "Lupin". THESE ARE ALL TERRIBLE AND YOU'RE MISSING THE MOST OBVIOUS CHOICE. "Kai" is way to close to Kaito and Kaitou. Also, "Conan"s parents gave him an English name, so a twin would likely also be given an English name. That rules out Lupin too, but Lupin already sucks because it's the name of a famous criminal character. It also doesn't match the theme of being named after mystery authors. Arthur is slightly better, but in some ways, is the worst one. It's almost impossible for a Japanese person to say "Arthur". In Japanese, it comes out as "Aasaa", which just sounds stupid.

The answer lies with Edogawa Ranpo. This was the penname for a Japanese mystery novel writer who was inspired by English-speaking mystery writers like Edgar Allan Poe, or as he would have pronounced it, Edoga Aran Po. So, the author made his name a pun on his favorite author's name, because he wanted to become the Japanese Edgar Allan Poe.

The choice is obvious. "Conan's twin brother" should be named "Allan".

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Vermouth ripped off her policeman’s disguise and loosened the binding on her chest. She had the address that they were trying to lure Angel to. She fluffed her hair, inspecting it in the rearview mirror. Tires screeching, she sped to the location as fast as her stolen car could take her.

It was an abandoned parking lot. A sapling had pushed its way through the concrete and made itself a happy home at the front.

“What are you doing here?” a voice called from above.

She waved. “Just checking. I think the girl will be coming soon. I was spying on her at the station.”

She climbed the steps to the second floor. The two would-be assassins greeted her. “As expected of the venerable Vermouth,” one said.

“I don’t see the boy; you didn’t bring him, did you?” she finished with a touch of accusation in her presentation, calculated to make them defensive.

“Of course not, Vermouth,” the other answered. “He’s at the Haido Lab with the Humanoid.”

“It’s an honor to meet you, I’d only heard stories,” the first one interjected.

“That’s nice.” She smiled, one bullet for each corner of her mouth.

Her angel safe again for a while, she headed towards the Haido Lab.

Vermouth picked her way through the laboratory’s loading bay. Boxes were everywhere, and the remains of shredded documents covered the floor like snow. There was a semi parked there, and a sweating man in a doctor’s coat, still wearing his stethoscope, was leaning against a box he’d just loaded into the back of it. Upon recognizing her, he straightened up and bowed quickly.

“We’re moving everything as fast as we can, but there’s only five of us left, it’s taking some time,” he said quickly.

She raised her eyebrows. “Only five? I thought there were over twenty stationed here.”

There was a faint bit of blood splatter on the left shoulder of his white lab coat.

Her eyes narrowed. “Gin got here before me, didn’t he?”

He nodded, blanching.

She closed the distance and whispered into his ear, “Where are Ambrosia and Conan Edogawa?”

The doctor shuddered. “Before you came, Gin started Zombie Time. That boy was locked in the room with him, with everyone else…”

She cursed in English under her breath. She patted his shoulder. “Carry on, then. I’ll go speak with
“You shouldn’t!” the doctor exclaimed. “He’s in a bad way. If you want to live, stay away from him.”

A sad smile broke through her ancient mask. “Maybe I don’t want to live.”

She left him and went to the basement, where the Okiagari pit was.

Gin was surrounded by medical tape and gauze. He was trying to redress the wound on his knee. His body armor lay on the floor, along with his duster and fedora. Without it, he was a thin old codger, with a growing bald spot on his head. He was a shadow of the vibrant man she’d met years ago. He’d even been dashing back then.

She picked up a syringe and filled it with her own blood, the she grabbed the most costic looking cleaning agent she could find and filled the needle the rest of the way. Tucking it in her pocket, she entered the room.

He started, eyes darting to the sound. “Relax,” she said. “It’s just me.”

He did, but only a little. His gun was on the counter beside him. “How’d you escape? Wait, stupid question. What took you so long?”

“I was making sure Ran Mouri would be brought in. You’ll get a chance to introduce her to Okiagari soon.” As she spoke, she slipped closer to him, until she was a few short inches from his lips. “You used to be quite handsome. I was taken with you back then.”

He laughed at that statement. “I noticed, Vermouth. You weren’t subtle.” He stopped suddenly, his eyes widening. He fell back into the chair.

Vermouth tossed aside the emptied syringe. She leaned in close, letting her breath stir the hairs around his ear. “You know, I tried to have children with my husband, before he stumbled on my secret and you killed him. But, I miscarried, every single time. Do you know why?”

He started to convulse. She straddled him, pushing the gun out of his reach and restraining him at the same time.

“My blood is Ambrosia’s. It killed everything that I tried to grow.”

A final thrash, and he fell limp, like an old, sick dog being put down. She checked his pulse, to make sure. The action was oddly loving, with her hand gently holding his neck. Satisfied, she let his head drop.

She stood up, but stayed there, staring at still corpse. She didn’t stir until the doctor tapped her on the shoulder.

“Vermouth,” he started.

“No,” she said softly, with a genuine smile, one of the few she’d had over the long years. “Samantha, from now on. What’s your name?”

“Kei Aono,” he said eyebrows furrowed.

“Well then, Dr. Aono. Could you help me get Alex out of that pit?”

He cocked his head. “Who’s Arekkusu?” That name was a difficult one for Japanese speakers, and
his tongue tripped over it.

“That was Ambrosia’s name before we took him.”

“Oh… I didn’t know that.” He dusted off his hands, and walked over to the lift. It had been built into the ceiling, for the purpose of carrying people and equipment in and out of the pit.

She switched the lights on and opened the drains in the pit to observe the ghastly scene. Some of the corpses she recognized. She’d helped hold some of their families’ hostage. Did they really deserve this? To the side, curled up between corpses was a slick red mound. It was Alex’s shape, but it was holding something to itself, almost invisible in the stinking pool. So her Silver Bullet hadn’t survived being fired. She sighed.

They connected the net to chain, and Samantha let Dr. Aono lower her down. Up close, she could see that the red she saw wasn’t blood, at least not directly. It was some sort of gelatin-like membrane. Because Alex was clinging to Conan, Conan had been swallowed up by it too.

“Come on Alex,” she whispered in English, half hoping she could rouse him.

He didn’t answer.

Wrapping her arms around the small bodies, she hefted them onto the net. Conan’s foot twitched inside, like a baby kicking in the womb. Relieved, she signaled Dr. Aono to lift them out of the mess of human remains.

The hibernation tank was still open and on its wheels. They straightened Alex’s legs, but they couldn’t get him to release Conan’s body, so they put them both into the tank. Then, Samantha left to wash the pieces of human bodies that covered her.

The fat and bile from the bodies she’d just been wading through clung to her skin, reminding her of the part she’d had in it. She scrubbed her skin raw for two hours, running through bottle after bottle of body wash, eventually leaving to break out a fresh box of it from storage. To her, it felt like this wasn’t just the stench of the carnage she’s just wallowed in, this was all 20+ years of wet work she’d done for them.

How many lives could have been saved if that desperate teenager with no family, dying of leukemia hadn’t been found by their scouts? At the time, she’d been grateful. I was the first time since she was a small child that she’d felt wanted. If she hadn’t ending up owing her life to these people, to That Person, hadn’t been wrapped up in their mission and the strange family it’d given her…

She had to stop thinking like this. If it hadn’t been That Person, it would have been a cult. They’d have done their horrible deeds without her, with some other desperate child. It was in the past. Nothing to do about it but move on and scrub the blood off.

She left her clothes where she’d pealed them off and replaced them with green scrubs. She braided her wet hair into two pigtails, something she hadn’t done since before she had lost her hair during the leukemia treatments. Then she gathered the five last people to the loading bay.

Standing on a box, she looked over the confused, tired faces. “There’s been a change of plans. Leave the equipment. Bring only the basic first-aid gear, and the living necessities – clothes, food, kitchen supplies, that sort of thing. We’ll pack Ambrosia and that. Once we’re done, you’re free to return to your families.”

One of them hesitantly stepped forward. “What about Gin?”
“I killed him. We’re leaving his corpse here. That reminds me, one of you should go to the police and let them know where this place is after we’re done. That way the others can get a proper burial.” She looked over them, watching their expressions. Nothing but relief on their faces, good. “Alright, get to work!” They scattered, busying themselves with the various tasks that needed to be done.

Dr. Aono walked with her back to the basement. “I don’t have a family anymore. Can I go with you?”

“Why not?” She shrugged. He probably was like her in the moment after she’d killed Gin: looking for a purpose. Why not indeed? She needed the help anyways.

The following day, the police were led to one of the most disturbing and large crime scenes they’d ever seen.

Chapter End Notes

The renfaire was windy, really windy. There's dust on everything. At least I almost broke even. I don't know if I'll work these anymore. It is truly exhausting and draining. Since I'm still recovering, this author note is a bit short, and about Magic Kaitou.

Goushou Aoyama has some archetypes that he likes to reuse. Everyone knows about how similar Shinichi and Kaito are as characters – they look almost identical; they're too smart for their own good; they're both vigilantes. Most people also know about how similar Ran is to Aoko in personality and appearance as well. But, not many people know about the color symbolism that Aoyama uses, and it's very obvious in the names of the Magic Kaitou characters.

Kuroba – 黒羽 “Black Feather”  
Hakuba – 白馬 “White Horse”  
Aoko – 青子 “Blue Child”  
Akako – 赤子 “Red Child”  

Note that Ran is usually depicted wearing her blue school uniform, and the rival love interest Ai Haibara is usually depicted wearing red.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Warm. Wet. What was that? Water. He was being washed. Why?

Conan’s eyes opened slowly. Then closed and opened again, to make sure he was seeing reality. Vermouth was holding a sponge, and she was scrubbing rusty brown marks off his skin. That’s right – blood. He’d been trapped in a room by Gin, and killed with everyone else by Okiagari. Nausea churned his stomach, and he could taste bile. The bitter cold air, the frozen concrete, warm liquid that was… that was…

He slumped headfirst into the hot bath, like a flimsy doll. The echoes of women’s curses drifted to him like a dream. Why were they so mad? Wait, wasn’t he dying? Then what was this?

His head was wrenched from the warm water by a hand grasping his hair. Choking, he opened his eyes again. “Good morning shaman,” Vermouth greeted him.

“How…” he didn’t know if that was the right place to start. He tried again. “Why?”

“Because that’s how twisted and kind the world is,” a high voice from behind him answered. “Don’t think about it too much, Kudou.”

_Haibara?_

“Ver- I mean, Samantha kidnapped me.”

Samantha laughed lightly. “Don’t be so dramatic. I told Haibara that I’d rescued you and Areku, but needed her help. She practically begged me to let her come along.”

He blinked again. “You two are working together?” pulling himself into a sitting position, he peeked over the edge of the tub. They were in a Western-style bathroom. It looked like it hadn’t been lived in much, as most of the surfaces shined too much.

Haibara poured a bucket of water over Conan’s head, propping the end of the bucket up with her bright red cast. “I can’t smell the organization on her anymore.”

“I don’t need to get revenge on Sherry. She committed suicide two years ago,” Samantha reasoned.

“You did hospitalize me.”

Conan remembered that and looked away. There should have been something he could have done to stop it.

As though she read his mind, Haibara added, “It’s not your fault. Stop wallowing in self-pity.”

But, there was something else that bothered him more. He shuddered as another bucket of hot water was poured over his head. “It really happened,” he whispered. “I thought I was dreaming… there was still drugs in my system… or am I dreaming now, and I’m really still in that room dying?”
They were silent, unsure of what to do. Conan’s reality was shattering before their eyes. Dreams can only be told apart from reality because dreams you can wake up from. Until then, you’re trapped, reacting to the world you perceive.

“I saw it too, Cool Guy,” Samantha said softly. “It happened, but you weren’t killed. Everyone else though…”

“Why?” he mumbled into the soapy, mirky water. “Why did I survive?”

Haibara sucked air through the gaps in her little-kid smile, making it whistle. “Probably APTX 4869. Zombie recognized you as part of it, I think, and protected you. I probably could survive touching Zombie too, and we know that Ver- I mean, Samantha can.” She stroked her chin, already putting together countless theories about the nature of the toxin and Zombie’s connection to it. Suddenly she snapped her head up, eyes narrowed with determination. “Enough! Reminding him of what happened isn’t what he needs right now; he needs to feel safe again.” She reached over and pinched his raw, soapy arm. “See? This is real. You really survived, and you’re really safe, far away from Gin.”

Conan started trembling. The protestations of the nerves in his arm told him that this had to be real. He couldn’t remember dreaming being in pain, but then again, most dreams he’d forgotten.

“You never have to worry about Gin, ever again,” Samantha added. “I murdered him myself.”

Conan’s head jerked up, his eyes wide with disbelief.

She chuckled at his serious expression. “Don’t worry, he’s my last kill, most likely. No promises.” She looked down to the floor by the tub, where Conan couldn’t see. “My little brother has a knack for getting in trouble. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep him out of it.” She turned back to Conan, holding up her sponge. “We still have much work to do. Grab a sponge and help; you reek.”

Conan drooped his head, letting them get back to work. He even grabbed a sponge floating in the water and used it to clean off the more tender skin. Washing away the evidence of that room felt surprisingly good. He felt relief, wrapped in his pink, floral-scented skin.

They unplugged the tub and let it drain. As the cool air enveloped him, he realized then that he was naked, and his cheeks blushed a deep red. He snatched up the towel Samantha offered and wrapped it quickly about himself.

“How cute,” Samantha giggled. “He’s shy in front of his other half!”

“What are you talking about anyways?” Conan asked, climbing out of the tub. He almost landed on Okiagari, who was lying on the floor of the bathroom, still partially covered in a slick red membrane. His lax, bloody jaw was in the open air, the membrane cut clear from his mouth. Conan recoiled in terror, throwing himself towards the door, his whole body shaking. The monster wasn’t awake. It was hibernating.

When he’d gotten control over himself again, he rewrapped his towel. “Zombie had a few things to tell us when we separated you from him,” Samantha said, handing him a pile of neatly folded clothes. “There’s a bedroom behind the door to your right.”

He nodded and fled. With two doors between himself and Okiagari, he felt safer. The clothes she’d given him fit alright, even though he didn’t recognize them. Her disguise expertise had likely given her an eye for estimating clothing sizes.

A bittersweet puff of air brushed gently against his raw skin. Curious, he climbed onto the window
ledge and looked out. This was the third floor, he figured by counting the levels of windows. Forest stretched out before him, and he couldn’t see the end of it. The shadows were small, the sun high in the sky. It must be near noon.

“Zombie said we shrunk when we ingested the poison because we’re each only half of a person called ‘Shaman.’” He turned around. Haibara was leaning against the doorway, blushing. “It’s nonsense, of course. I’m pretty certain it has something to do with a mutation in the genes dealing with our…” She paused, looking up. “It’s pointless to think about it; there’s no way I’ll ever pursue that research ever again.”

“Oh, what happened to Ran? Is she okay?” Conan said, remembering Ran’s desperate fight when he’d been kidnapped.

“She’s okay, last I checked,” Haibara said. “But her girlfriend is having a rough time. Sonoko and her sister disowned their family. Sonoko’s moved in with her sister.” Seeing Conan’s confusion, she added, “The boss of the organization turned out to be Sonoko’s grandparents.”

A shudder zipped up his spine. He’d been so close to them, only a month or so ago. It seemed like dumb luck that everything hadn’t fallen apart in those few days.

“And Kuroba? Last I heard he’d been shot.”

Haibara shrugged. “He survived. Inspector Nakamori and he have been planning a sting operation for that ridiculous jewel cult. Seriously, moonlight is just reflected sunlight. They must be a special brand delusional nutcase to think that moonlight would have any affect that sunlight wouldn’t have, and that’s assuming that such a ridiculous notion as a magic crying immortality jewel exists in the first place!” She stopped, blushing from her rant, suddenly a little self-conscious.

“Ah, he’s out of hibernation!” a male voice exclaimed from behind Haibara. It was the doctor that had administered the scholastic aptitude tests.

“So, I take it from how happy everyone is, we won?” he asked, eyeing the doctor with suspicion. His skin still remembered the feel of the restraints.

“You could say that,” the doctor laughed. “My name is Kei Aono, by the way. I don’t think I ever introduced myself properly. Names are a big deal among us at the moment. What will we be calling you?”

Conan opened his mouth, almost saying “Shinichi Kudou” right away, but something stopped him. Shinichi Kudou was an arrogant jackass. He took foolish risks and thought he was invincible. He rode his wave of fame with confidence. He wasn’t that person anymore, and he didn’t really want to be either. On the other hand, Conan Edogawa was a snake in the grass. He lied too easily. His fellow humans were tools, broken down to their usefulness with elegant cruelty. He could go to almost any length to win, and he had. He was battle-scarred and broken and weary of being Conan Edogawa. “I’m not sure.”

“I doubt I’ll be able to make a permanent antidote with any expediency,” Haibara said. “If that affects anything.”

“Why don’t you combine your names?” Dr. Aono suggested. “If you can’t return to the way you were, then you could be ‘adopted’ by your parents.”

“Conan Kudou,” he tasted the name. Not bad. “I’m Conan Kudou, nice to meet you!” He climbed down and bowed to the man who used to be his enemy.
Samantha joined the doctor at the crowded doorway. “Let’s go downstairs and eat. Now that Conan’s awake, there’s something I need to discuss with you.”

They filed down the hall and some impressively narrow, polished wood stairs. Dr. Aono had been the one to cook, as he’d lived alone so long he’d gotten quite good at it. It felt odd, eating a traditional Japanese meal in such a western house.

“I have a proposal for Conan and Ai,” she began, setting aside her chopsticks. “Stay here with me. You’ve been through a lot, and this house is a good place to heal. There may be a few of the organization’s members that managed to escape, and they may be after your blood. No one but us knows you’re here, so you’ll be safe. Also, Areku could use the company. Whatever Zombie’s reasons for choosing to leave people alive, I don’t think it has bad judgment. What do you say? The four people who break nature’s laws living in nature, what could be more perfect?”

Ai and Conan sat, staring into their empty bowls. It was tempting. The air here was pure. The doors to the outside had been left open, letting the pine perfume permeate everything. Nature seemed to be trying to invade the house. The frenzied noise of multitudes of people was missing here.

But… a calming atmosphere isn’t all that’s needed to heal. Ai missed Agasa. Conan missed his parents, Ran, and Kogorou. They both missed the Detective Boys.

“No,” they both said, at the same time. “We have lives to get back to,” Ai went on. “And people who miss us,” Conan added.

Samantha looked down. “I don’t think you two really understand the danger you’ll be walking into. Have you asked yourself why the American government had an interest in the organization?”

They stared blankly at Samantha. Other than stopping the organization’s dangerous fund-raising efforts, nothing came to mind.

“Do either of you know what Kir’s mission was? If ending the organization was her goal, she could have succeeded easily, long ago. I think…” Vermouth trailed off, looking over their heads, to where Areku slept unseen. “I think they were looking for Silver Bullet. I think they want your research, Haibara.”

Haibara blanched. “I destroyed it all when I left.”

“Surely, if they knew the human cost, they wouldn’t dare!” Conan added.

“Wouldn’t they though?” Samantha countered. “It’s been my experience, that with the chance of discovering the secrets to eternal life dangled before us, we’ll go to any length, any cost to grasp it. The organization wasn’t the first to try. Ask Alex when he wakes up. He’s been trapped many times before.” She reached forward, and grasped their small hands in hers. “What do you think will happen to you two when they discover that you regressed a full decade?”

Conan bit his lip, fear building in him again. “I think that they may already know. I don’t know if Akai told anyone else, but Agent Jodie Starling definitely suspects it, though she’s never pressed the issue. I don’t think Kir knows, but she knows that I’m not a normal kid.”

“Maybe it’s a good thing that I turned down their offer for witness protection,” Haibara said, rubbing her chin, using the same gesture that Conan did without realizing it.

The first touch of chill crept in from the outside. It was still spring, and high in the mountains, the days were still brief and cool. Samantha got up to close the door.
When she got back, she slid back into her chair, tucking one of her legs underneath her. “We can make our own witness protection,” she said. “I have all of the skills and contacts needed to do it, and I’ve embezzled enough money from the organization to keep us comfortable. I wasn’t expecting to need to bring you all along with me, but I can easily.”

“What about my parents?” Conan asked. “They’re both famous; they can’t hide like I could.”

Samantha looked away, frowning. “You’ll have to leave them behind. It’s safer if it’s just the four of us.”

“We’ll take our chances back in Beika,” Haibara said, her arms crossed. “I’m not giving up another life because of the organization. If people come after me again, I’ll contact you. Until then, I’m Ai Haibara, and I live with my grampa.”

Seeing her resolution, Conan nodded in agreement. “I’ll be Conan Kudou, and I’ll be ‘adopted’ by my parents. They’ll probably take me to California to live with them there.”

Observing their concerned faces, she said, “If that’s what you want, then so be it. We’ll make preparations tonight, and Dr. Aono can drive you back to Tokyo at first light.”

“Thank you,” Ai said.

“Then it’s settled,” said Dr. Aono. “I have something special for dessert.”

After packing clothes and food for their journey into the back of an old, gray sedan, they went to bed. The next morning they rose early. As they drove off, Conan let Ai sleep on his shoulder as they rolled slowly down the old mountain road in the early morning light. He pulled out the spare pair of glasses that Ai had given him the night before, and put them on.

Chapter End Notes

I went about writing this story a lot differently than I’ve written any story in the past, and I think that if I share with you how I managed to write this fanfic in one month (Yes, this really was my NaNoWriMo project!) that it could help people get past writer's block and make more complex stories without losing any plot threads or opening up any plot-holes.

What I usually do is start with a cool opening scene, and let my inspiration guide me, with only a vague idea what I’ll have happen in the future. This method is wonderful for making characters, because as a writer, you are getting to know the new characters at the same time that the reader would be. It's also really good for soap-opera style stories. The problem with it though, is that you end up with a story that has very little internal structure. It's much, much harder to build up to a climax. Also, if you're writing a mystery, since you basically are solving it at the same time that the readers and characters would be, you run the risk of making an impossible mystery, full of plot-holes. Also, this method is really, really hard to use when writing a story with a non-linear timeline.

The method I used this time was much, much different. I planned everything. The first week of November I spent planning all of the plot threads, designing the climaxes, gathering information. I built the story to have 3 climaxes, and labeled them Act 1, 2,
and 3. After all of that, I started writing, but I didn't write it linearly. I wrote the
climaxes first, then the rising action.

This had several interesting affects on the story. Normally my stories have a strong
opening but a weak middle, and if I've got a lot of inspiration, I can write an end to the
story. This gave the opposite affect: I had a weak beginning and strong climaxes. It
also meant that individual chapters weren't as regularly sized, and they weren't as
strong on their own, with their own little climaxes. The linking material ended up
being much, much weaker too – though that may be more because of the 1 month time
constraint. Another cool effect was the foreshadowing and red herrings were really,
really easy to plant. The hope is that this would make rereading the fanfic fun – let me
know if that worked!

So, in a fandom with lots and lots of mystery writing going on, I think that this method
ought to be promoted, because it makes writing complex mysteries much easier and
really fast.

After this, all that's left is the epilogue.

また来週！ (See you next week!)
dreamingfifi
Conan awoke with a start, heart pumping madly, skin drenched with sweat. The hotel room didn't help either: it was stifling hot, the kind of heat that sticks to you and makes your skin crawl, as though it was covered with small insects. His mother stirred in the bed beside next to his.

“Another dream?” she mumbled, only half awake.

“Yeah,” he whispered, trying not to wake his dad too.

“Want to talk about-”

“I'm fine,” Conan interrupted. He rolled out of bed, grabbed a keycard, his cellphone, and a pair of flipflops. He'd fallen asleep in his baggy gym shorts and a loose T-shirt. Exercising before bed usually helped him sleep dreamlessly, but this one had broken through. He stuffed everything into his pockets as slipped out of the hotel room.

Outside was hot and sticky too, but at least the air was moving. The blacktop was radiating the heat it'd gathered during the day. That dream though... it'd been cold. Snow was piled up higher than a person was tall in some places. It was the kind of cold that was dangerous to fall asleep without a fire to warm you, or at least other bodies.

He'd been climbing down the side of a mountain, when the snow beneath turned into a river, sweeping his body along with it. Snow was in his nose, in his mouth and throat, crushing him from all sides, suffocating him. He'd awoken at the moment he realized he was dying.

He stopped and took a deep breath, trying to shake the feeling of being crushed under tons of snow. These dreams... they were pieces of someone else's memory. From what he'd been able to gather, that person was female, had lived a very long life, and enjoyed taking hallucinogenic herbs, then running around the mountains battling “evil spirits” while high. The drug taking was highly ritualized, and people actually came to this woman hoping she'd get high and hallucinate something amazing for them. Or rather, that's how Conan saw it when he woke up, and was his rational self again.

You should sleep and remember me.

Those words felt like a curse now. Okiagari, whatever the hell it was, had done something to him while he'd been in hibernation with it. It had removed all of his scars, as though they never existed. They'd gotten an x-ray, and found all of his old healed broken bones looked like they'd never been broken. If it could play with Areku's memory, it likely could play with his too. Perhaps it could have changed other things about him, about his personality.

He shook his head again. He couldn't go down this path. He had to think about something else, anything else. His phone chimed, telling him that it'd found some free WiFi and was logging on. The distraction machine, as his father called it. Perfect.

He checked the time. 2AM, so mid-afternoon in Japan. Haibara should be out of school by now. He tapped on the Skype app, found her username (msmadscientist). She was online. Probably on her
laptop in the lab.

“Hi, can I call?” he typed.

“k, give me a sec” popped up a few seconds later.

The WiFi he was connected to was named “Sandy's All-Night Laundry.” Sandy. As in the sand-
man. Cute. He walked briskly to it, then sat down on the sidewalk in front of the building, his back
resting on the building itself. It was still too hot to be inside, especially in a room full of industrial
dryers.

Skype's call-chime sounded, and he answered.

“Hi Haibara.”

“Kudou, isn't it the middle of the night in California?” she scolded.

“It is.” He chewed his lip. Now that he had her on the line, he didn't know what to say.

Seemingly sensing his conversational ineptitude, Haibara began to fill the dead air.

“Mitsuhiko confessed his undying love to me the other day. It was terribly cute.”

“Did you answer him?” Mitsuhiko was still a 3rd grader in Conan's memory. That was five years
ago, and he and Haibara were in middle school now.

“I turned him down. I just feel wrong dating one of them. Of course, I couldn't say that I'm actually
25 years old, and would feel like a lolicon dating a real thirteen year old. Instead, I spouted some
BS about how he was like a brother, yadda yadda...”

He winced. Poor Mitsuhiko. He'd been carrying that torch ever since he met Haibara.

“It might be okay if it was you though,” she continued.

That banished the dreams from his thoughts all together. “What you mean?” he asked, trying not to
sound too hopeful.

“I wouldn't feel like the balance of power was off. Besides, you're the only person on the entire
planet that I know of who has gone through what I have, who knows what it's like, who I can talk
to about all of this. For example: Have you started getting zits again? I had forgotten how insanely
aggravating they are. I'm quite pleased though, that I know what I do now about how to treat them.
My previous 13 year old self would be insanely jealous.”

“Zits, clumsiness, and my voice can't figure out which octave it wants to be in.”

She cackled maniacally. “I can tell.”

He let her laughter slowly die off. “Say. If I were to come back to Japan someday, do you think...”
stupid he felt so stupid change the topic idiotidiotidiot-

“Yes,” she said, as though she could read his mind. “Of course I'd date you, dummy.”

He swallowed nervously, his mouth suddenly feeling very dry. “Really?” His voice squeaked.
Stupid adolescent body sabotaging any attempt to be cool.

“I've been hitting on you for years now. You didn't notice?”
“Really?”

“You're really dense sometimes, you know that?” She laughed again. “But, anything like that'll have to wait until you get back.”

“When I get back,” he repeated.

“Now that that's settled,” she paused, sucking in a breath. “Why are you awake?”

He sighed, the cold memory surfacing again. “I dreamt that I died.”

“Well, that's new. Was it one of those dreams?”

“Yeah.” he picked at a pebble on the sidewalk beside him, and tossed into the street. He didn't want to think about that dream anymore. “I think I saw Areku last week. He was a little kid, following around his big brother everywhere. It was adorable. How's he been doing, since he started school?”

Haibara sighed heavily. “Not good news on that front. The other day, he got lost when trying to walk to the bathroom. He called Professor Agasa in a panic. We got a cat-scan done, and his brain looks like it went through a blender. There's parts which are inactive – which is really bad, according to the doctor. Other parts of his brain have been picking up the slack, but sometimes he gets confused, or words get stuck, like dealing with a malfunctioning computer. They want to test him for syphilis. Forgetting half a century of memories appears to be disastrous for the brain. He said that he didn't think he'd ever lost so much time before, but how would he know?”

Conan swallowed nervously. “Should I get a cat-scan too? I haven't had any problems like that, but Okiagari did stuff a bunch of someone else's memories into my head. That can't be good.”

“If you were going to have problems, we'd have noticed them already.”

He sighed. “I suppose you're right.” He made a mental note to ask his parents to take him to a doctor, just in case. Areku had woken up only a couple months ago, the last time he'd talked with Haibara. It'd been even longer since he talked to Hattori. Not that he was completely out of contact with everyone in Japan, but some goodbyes had been more traumatic than others. Like Kogorou, the man who simultaneously become Conan's adoptive father and his unknowing sock puppet, the man he'd regularly drugged, lied to, and manipulated.

“So, if I come back...” he paused, not sure how to go on.

“You should. Of course, I say that for selfish reasons.”

“Right. How about progress on the antidote?”

She made a halfhearted laugh. “Same as last time. Agasa still doesn't have the money to get the equipment or lab rats I need. Almost makes me miss my old lab.”

“I'm not sure I want to go back now, anyways,” Conan said quietly.

“But, I am going to finish it,” she added hastily. “Just in case there's any of the poison out there, waiting to shrink someone else. It may have to wait until I have the backing of a university though.”

He hummed some sort of agreement. The fact that it was the middle of the night was making itself known in the form of a massive yawn.
“Kudou...” Haibara said, snickering, “Get some sleep. You're a growing boy, for goodness sake!”

“Right. Thanks Haibara,” he mumbled, a smile creeping across his lips.

They said their goodbyes, and he started the long meander back home.

The End

Chapter End Notes

This has been a fun little adventure. I see a lot of people writing stories like this one. Detective Conan has been going for so long, with no end in sight, that to relieve the tension, we write the end for Mr. Aoyama. So many of us, writing the ending, fixing the flaws that we see in the series, whether consciously or unconsciously, that's what we do. But we don't stop there. We go down the roads not walked, paths that the original author would never think to take. We blend it with other series, just to see what would happen.

This is art. Fanfiction is an artform. Don't ever let the claim that fanfiction isn't art go unchallenged.

Art, at its core, is simulation. It can be simulating seeing a sunset, or falling in love, or the feeling of nostalgia. Some simulations are more skillfully done than others, some simulations are of unpleasant things, some simulations show us ugly parts of ourselves and our societies that we'd rather ignore, but these all are still art.

Fanfic writers and fanartists and fangame-makers and cosplayers and role players and filk singers and fanfilm makers and AMV editors and conlangers, we are artists. Our art derivational, and many of us are amateurs and hobbists, and many of us will never earn a dime from our works, no matter how well-loved or well-known they are, but that doesn't make our art lesser.

Don't let the presuppositions of the categorizing of what is worthy of the title of “art” make you love your art any less, or your ambitions for it any smaller.

Odd. I started out talking about how much fun this fanfic was to write, and ended up composing my manifesto.

サヨナラ! (Farewell!)

dreamingfifi

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!