The Tempest Temptation

by Luki

Summary

Xanxus is eight years old and desperate to find something more than a future in the slums. When he comes across a man with broken eyes and a mastery of orange flames, he thinks he’s found it.

Notes

So I’ve been in a bad mental place the last few days, and most of the stuff I’m reading online isn’t helping the way it normally does (all my fandoms have suddenly started writing pairings or plots that make me feel even worse, talk about bad timing - I needed fluff and family dammit!).

So I did what any fanfic author does and started working on something a guilty pleasure of my own. Unexplained time travel angst and meeting younger versions of enemies who don’t quite hate you yet.

Inspired by a comment left on Generation Cross about Xanxus becoming Tsuna’s Storm Guardian (and of course harmonisation comes from Araceil & Rei Ghost’s very awesome flame theory universe)
Chapter 1

The Tempest Temptation

The first time Xanxus meets him, it’s utterly forgettable except for how pathetic it is.

Xanxus is eight years old going on fifty, trawling the back alley of an Italian slum far away from the tourists. He was born in a clinic just down the road, and never gone further than ten miles from the bare-walled apartment he and his mother call home. Here, life beats harsh reality into you young – the boy knows full well his future consists of nothing but drugs, gangs and messy death.

But Xanxus isn’t like everyone else here. Most children of whores have already picked chosen their path, but Xanxus refuses to bow. He’s not ready to accept that, there’s a burning desire that life can’t quite snuff out, that he’s meant for more than this. When he prowls the street, his head is high, no matter how much the prostitutes laugh and the runners mock him for refusing their deals.

However, when the slight drizzle that’s been threatening the neighbourhood all afternoon turns into a full storm, it’s enough for him to slouch and slip into the shadows, taking an alley shortcut home. Normally he wouldn’t risk running down the tight dark streets, but even trash is heading inside right now.

Except apparently, for the idiot on the ground, slumped against the wall. He barely registers the new arrival, only raising his head when his footsteps register.

The man is Asian, with wild hair, a two-day shadow and dressed in a suit that was probably quality before it got dragged through whatever war the man had crawled away from. His face hosts a pair of empty, dead eyes, that widen to an extreme degree when he registers Xanxus’s appearance. He looks as if he’s seen a ghost, mouth trying to form words and failing. Xanxus just scowls, kicking the legs away to move forward.

But the second he makes contact, something flickers up his leg. As powerful as an electric current, and strong enough to make Xanxus freeze. From within, something twists awake, and Xanxus shudders at the feeling.

The man utters something wordless, and jerks his legs away, curling into a ball. His eyes however, haven’t left the boy’s face. Xanxus debates confronting him, but an extra pulse of rain falling from the sky makes him retreat, storming past and shaking the feeling off.

However, he can’t resist tossing his head back to check if the man is following him. He doesn’t know why, but it feels as if he should be.

He’s not, and Xanxus sneers at the figure still leaning against the wall, head down and curling in on himself. As broken as everyone else in this godforsaken place.

Just trash. Xanxus doesn’t know why he expected better.

By the time he gets home, he’s pushed the man out of his head entirely. A homeless waste of space like that will be dead or in the claws of a gang within the week.

Except that’s not what happens. Over the next month, the man flits in and out of Xanxus’s purview, sometimes lost in his own world or running to somewhere, and looking more and more like a homeless bum every time he sees him. Strangely, every time he sees Xanxus, he freezes, and refuses
to make eye contact, but Xanxus hasn’t had the inclination to find out why. He’s got his own problems. The last few weeks have been full of headaches and burning feelings in his stomach. He’s always felt this fire in his gut, but it’s been cranked up to eleven ever since he met the man in the alley, and it’s driving him nuts.

As such, it’s not until a month after their first meeting that Xanxus learns how off his original assumption was.

Their neighbourhood caters to some of the lowest mafioso families on the crime ladder, and one of the grunts is slamming on the door of one of their downstairs neighbours. Screaming abuse and fingering a gun with his spare hand. Every person in the building, his mother included, had seen the man and gone running for their own rooms, desperately praying that they weren’t the target.

Xanxus had ignored his mother’s warnings, pulling away from her grip and slipping into the hallway. He sat on the middle steps, just out of sight of the man while keeping him in view. A minute later, the lock on the door gives, and the mafioso is pulling a woman out by her hair. She’s probably in her twenties, but looks a decade older from drugs and life, with bleached blonde hair and makeup smeared on her face. Her legs are buckling, tears streaming down her face as she begs for mercy, arms wrapped around her stomach, the bulge only just starting to be noticeable.

Xanxus snorts in derision. Blood is gold in the criminal underbelly. The whore’s probably one of the boss’s favourites, but doesn’t want an illegitimate heir mucking up his family line. Woman should have known better.

She’s on her knees now, sobbing furiously while the mafioso pulls out the gun and cocks it. The sound has her trying to crawl away, only to get a backhand to the face, sending her crashing to the ground again. The mafioso aims, and Xanxus leans forward.

Another death for stupid mistakes.

“Hey!”

All three freeze at the voice, and turn to take in the figure in the door.

It’s the man Xanxus stumbled over that rainy afternoon, and looks as bad as ever. He’s lost the suit jacket in exchange for an olive-green raincoat with a furry hood, but it doesn’t hide the fact that the orange shirt underneath is as filthy as his dress trousers. He’s filched a wool cap from somewhere, using it and the hood to crush most of those wild locks out of sight and mind while the straggles of a clearly unplanned beard invade his chin. If Xanxus had ever been asked to imagine the epitome of ‘bum,’ this wouldn’t be too far off the mark.

The only aberration is the man’s eyes. Xanxus could have sworn they were mud brown, but now they’re gleaming with a gold hue that can’t be natural, and focused on the mafioso like a cat on a rat.

“Let her go.”

Xanxus feels his spine straighten instinctively, fighting the shudder at the sheer power the bum manages to exude in just three words. The mafioso doesn’t fare much better, his hand releasing the woman almost unconsciously. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, she’s flying back into her home practically on all fours. A second later, the mafioso shakes it off, and makes to follow her.

“Get back here you little-“

The bum slams his hand into the door frame, blocking the door with his smaller frame. The mafioso has at least a foot on him, but there’s not a hint of hesitation. Clearly, he’s insane.
This is the mafioso’s opinion too, and he sneers down at the interloper.

“What, you her newest John? Bitch like her aint worth the bullet hole you’re asking for.”

The man doesn’t move.

“I’ll tell you this just once” he warns. “Back off. Turn around and walk away.”

The mafioso does take a step back, but he’s just running his eyes up and down his target’s frame, sneer turning into a smirk.

“Ohhh, so you’re the one causing so much trouble downtown” he says. “Heard you took out three of Nino’s boys last week for roughing up the girls they’d bought and paid for. Got a lot of people who want you dead in a gutter. What, you want the district for yourself?”

“No” was the reply. “But life has beaten into me the importance of standing up for those that can’t, whether you want to or not.”

“What the fuck are you? A greeting card?”

He doesn’t answer, and the mafioso scowls, hand going out to shove the bum out of the way – only for the bum’s own hand to snap up, deflecting the arm and sending him spinning out the door with a squawk. He pulls himself up and snarls, pulling out the gun and pointing it almost point blank at the man’s skull.

“Piss off you asshole!”

He fires, and Xanxus braces to see blood and brain matter spray over the wall. But it doesn’t.

Before Xanxus could register it, the bum had moved out of the way, his hand slumming into the mafioso’s nose. The bullet flies into the wall, and the next thing Xanxus sees is the bum performing a terrifyingly quick move with his hands that sees the gun fall to the floor and the mafioso’s arm twist in unnatural angles. He’s howling in pain, dropping to his knees, only to find a leg slam into his skull, sending him flying towards the door. With eerie grace, the bum steps forward.

“Get out” he orders.

It’s just for a moment, but Xanxus swears he sees flames burning on the man’s fists. The hall fills with their presence, and from somewhere deep inside, Xanxus feels something fighting to get out and match him. From the way the mafioso is staring at his attacker, he’s not the only one. He struggles to his feet, and throws himself out the door.

His disappearance starts the floodgates, and doors start to open, neighbours utterly confused at the turn of events. The flames vanish, and Xanxus bites back the gasp as the aura he’d been drowning in vanishes as quick as it came, leaving him hollow and clawing his chest at the loss.

Ignorant of what he’d done to the boy on the stair, the bum walks into the woman’s home, and closes the door. When Xanxus heads downwards and tries to push it open, it stays firm despite the lock still being shattered.

He’s tempted to try and get in through a window outside, but his mother descends upon him, and pulls him back indoors, refusing to let him out of her sight until the morning.

When he finally manages to get away, the door is open, and both his neighbour and the bum are gone.
The natural assumption is that the bum took the woman for himself, but gossip flies through the building like wildfire. Those closest to the apartment had seen the man escort the pregnant woman out of the house, a suitcase of her belongings in one hand. He’d been an utter gentleman, and when one neighbour had been brave enough to question him, he’d merely said he was sending the woman somewhere safe.

Nobody knew why he’d shown up – was he a john? A relative? A rival mafioso trying to leave a message? The only one who knew for sure was the bum, and he’d vanished into thin air.

Not that it stopped Xanxus from prowling the streets looking for him.

It’s as frustrating as it is dangerous to be so focused on something you can’t grasp. But Xanxus can’t get the man out of his head. Can’t forget the electric current, or the feeling he’d ignited that night. When he concentrates, he can feel the burning feeling inside him grow, and not a week later, he’d achieved a small flick of red tainted with the familiar orange.

Flames.

Xanxus hadn’t been seeing things. The bum had set himself alight. With this assurance, he asks his mother if she’d ever heard of such a thing. He’d had to wait for one of her more stable moments, but when she was mostly sober and coherent, he’d hit jackpot.

“The man had flames? Oh, I should have brought him home. Things would be so much easier with flames.”

“What are they?”

“Flames are flames” she’d replied, and Xanxus scowled.

“What’s the fucking point of them?”

His mother laughs. “Flames are everything Xanxus. Oh, I hope you get them. Life will be easier then. If you get flames, it’s a straight ticket to the life we deserve.”

He’s still growling, and she leans back, fingering a bottle to her side.

“Flames are the lifeblood of the Mafia royalty” she continues. “If you have orange flames, you are a ruler. Any other colour, and you’re a follower. The stronger the flames, the stronger the person.”

She leans over and clasps her hands on Xanxus’s shoulders.

“You will be a powerful flame user Xanxus” she insists. “I knew it the moment you were born. I dallied with many a powerful man in my younger days, but nobody will believe me unless we can prove it. When they emerge, we will ascend to our true place. Ah, I almost can’t wait.”

She almost makes to hug him, only to pull off and grab the bottle instead. Xanxus shrugs it off – he’s long understood his importance in her priorities.

If she’s expecting him to reveal these flames at some point, it certainly explains why she’s kept him around. Woman with kids don’t exactly make the most money around here.

Still, probably best he keeps quiet until he knows how to control them properly. Especially since the red flames are currently overtaking the orange when he brings them out.

No fucking way is he going to be anything less than royalty.
But he can’t get very far if he doesn’t know what he’s doing. Instinct has limits. The bum can tell him how to master them, all he needs to do is find him.

A week later, and he finds the source of his frustration when a giant pillar of fire soars through the air not two blocks from his home. Most flee expecting a gas leak, but Xanxus bolts in the direction, turning a corner only to freeze in shock at what he sees.

It’s beautiful.

The man is still dressed like a pathetic waste of space, but with the flames burning on his forehead and gloves, flying through the air and ripping through his opponents, he exudes everything Xanxus has ever wanted.

This. This is a King. This is everything Xanxus wants to be. Powerful, strong, untouchable.

Yet, even as he says that, the colour of the flames shifts slightly. Tiny flecks of a darker flame dart through the hue, much like the orange does to his red. Usually when the man is making contact with his opponents. Xanxus wonders if that’s just something all flames do, his own – dim as they are – fluctuate in their presence, and it takes everything he has not to run forward to join him.

The mafioso, survivors at the core, quickly realise just how outmatched they are when the flames enter the match, and they’re quick to flee, desperate to avoid the wrath of a flame user. When they vanish from view, the man’s flames vanish, and he staggers on his feet, only to fall back, lying back on the pavement and refusing to get up. Xanxus scoffs, only to freeze when the man calls out.

“I can feel you. Might as well come out.”

With that, his head turns in Xanxus’s direction. The boy scowls, but decides to take the invitation offered.

Once again, when the man realises just whose coming towards him, his eyes widen and his body tenses. For a split second, Xanxus thinks the man might just bolt, and he quickens his pace to make sure he can cut the man off if he dares.

“Trash” he greets. The man blinks in confusion.

“Xanxus? But…how?”

The boy’s eyes narrow.

“How the hell do you know my name Trash?”

The man just keeps staring, and Xanxus kicks him again. He winces, and pushes himself into a sitting position.

“Sorry, I’m just surprised” he says. “I’ve heard your name around. Sofia mentioned you when I was taking her to the train station.”

“Sofia?”

The man smiles. “The pregnant woman who lives in your building. I guess I should have realised you were the flame user, I just got didn’t expect those flames.”


The man shrugs, and Xanxus gets the feeling he’s not fully there. “That man, or whoever he was
working for, would have tried again. I had to get her out of the city, so I gave her the money for a one-way ticket and told her to pick a direction. She and the baby should be okay so long as she doesn’t come back.”

“Why the fuck would you do that?” Xanxus asks, genuinely puzzled. “You sweet on her?”

A shake of the head. “It was the right thing to do. And nobody else was going to do it. I could help, and right now that’s all that’s keeping me going.”

He looks up at the boy glaring at him. “As for your flames, I felt storm instead of sky flames. I… thought you would have sky flames, so I didn’t realise it was you.”

“Sky, storm?” Xanxus echoes, barely realising he’s sitting down next to the man before he’s on the ground. “What’s the difference?”

The man bites his lip, glancing over, and Xanxus scowls.

“Oi! Tell me.”

“…What do you already know?”

“I know orange flames are the best” Xanxus snaps. “If you have them, you’re mafia royalty.”

The man nods. “Well, that’s sort of true. It’s not a case of being the best though. Orange flames mean you’re a sky. But that doesn’t mean anything unless you harmonise. There are other flame types as well, skies are rare, so most people have one or more of the other types. Red for storm, blue for rain, yellow for sun, green for lightning, indigo for mist and purple for cloud. They all have their own skills and abilities, and what most flame users want more than anything, is to harmonise with a sky and become a Guardian.”

“Harmonise? Guardian.”

He’s clearly reluctant to continue, but Xanxus grabs his jacket and glares, daring the man to move away. It works, and the man continues.

“A sky’s attribute is harmonisation, and the only way to be a true sky is to harmonise with at least one of each other element. They…strengthen you, stabilise you, and you them. They become your Guardians, sworn to protect you as much as you would protect them. To harmonise is to belong to that sky, for that sky to belong to you. If you activate as a sky, you’ll start looking for Guardians.”

Xanxus spits. “Like hell I will. I don’t need anyone to protect me.”

The man smiles as if remembering something fond. “You won’t be able to help it. I thought nobody would want to harmonise with someone like me before I activated but…even if you fight it, you’ll pull in Guardians without even meaning to.”

“Yeah? Then where’s yours trash?”

It was like hitting a light switch. The fond smile vanished and the eyes dimmed back to that dead look Xanxus had first seen all those weeks ago. He suddenly feels like crap, and he honestly doesn’t know why.

“They’re gone” the man rasps. “I’ve gone somewhere they can’t follow.”

It’s an odd way to say dead, but Xanxus can read between the lines.
The man is clenching his hands (wrapped in mittens, strange. Xanxus could have sworn he was wearing gloves), focused on the numbers etched on the front. “Harmonisation is…it makes life better. There’s no words for how a full harmonisation feels. But on the other scale, when you lose that harmony…it can destroy flame users. I’ve been fighting discord ever since I got here – when I felt a budding sky in the area I was drawn to them. You’re not fully active, but you’re leaking enough that I can leech off your flames harmony element and keep mine from self destructing.”

He looks away.

“I might have leech too much and brought your other flames to the surface by accident. That’s why you feel like a storm instead. If I leave tonight, they should go back to normal and you should activate normally soon enough.”

He begins to stand, only for Xanxus to pull back on the jacket, crashing him to the ground. A moment later, the man is staring up at the eight-year-old pinning him to the ground.

“No.”

“…No?”

“No, you’re not just going to leave” Xanxus snarls, eyes bright. “You know how to activate these flames, so you’re going to show me how to do it.”

“Xanxus, that’s not-“

“I’m not asking trash!” he snaps. “I can almost get the red flame out, but I can’t force the orange one the same way. If you’re the reason for that, then you’re going to fix it.”

He tries to focus on his flames, and grins when he feels the man’s own flare against the attempt. However, his prisoner jerks back in panic, bucking the boy off.

“Stop! Before you do something we can’t take back!”

Xanxus’s flames hesitate, and it’s enough for the mans to vanish, locked away so tight Xanxus can’t even feel them. The man is gasping in panic, and holds up a hand while he stumbles to his feet.

“I’ll show you” he agrees. “But you can’t do that again. If you want to be a sky, then that can’t happen.”

Xanxus doesn’t fully understand, but he’s getting what he wants, so he’ll run with it.

“So, what do I call you trash?” he asks, and the man sighs, dropping into a bow (what the fuck?).

“Tsunayoshi” he says, which is far too much of a mouthful and Xanxus has no intention of remembering it. Clearly, this must be obvious, because his teacher is giving him a bitter smile.

“But most people just call me Tsuna.”

“…Fine Tsuna-trash.”

He’s not sure why that makes the man burst into laughter, but he throws a rock at the mans head to make him stop all the same.

Tsuna-trash is still living on the streets, but it doesn’t take much to move him into Sofia’s home. It’s still empty from her midnight flee and nobody in the building is going to argue about obtaining a
guard they don’t have to pay for. If somebody comes sniffing round to rent the room, Xanxus will just move Tsuna-trash in with him and his mother.

The first thing is to get his teacher a shower, because after almost 2 months running on the street in the same clothes, the man is managing to give the slums a bad name.

Oddly, when Xanxus is kicking him into the shower and banging on doors to demand tribute from neighbours in the form of clothing, Tsuna watches him with something bordering on incredulous and a little bit horrified. When he comes out, the bathtub practically stained brown, he shrugs into jeans and a sweatshirt clearly too big for him, before scratching his beard and finding a razor shoved at his face.

“…You’re a lot more of a mother hen than I expected.”

“Shut the fuck up Tsuna-trash!” Xanxus snaps. “I just don’t want to be seen with a bum.”

Tsuna accepts the razor, but it’s not the best quality, and he’s left with stubble. Xanxus glances over, and apparently finds it acceptable, dragging a chair over towards the bed while Tsuna sits on the crappy mattress.

“So how do you start using flames?”

His would-be teacher doesn’t answer, and when Xanxus takes a closer look, his eyes are glazed over. He glances round the room, and grabs a box of condoms, tossing it at the man’s head. He squeaks when it hits, shaking his head in confusion while Xanxus snarls.

“Oi! Stay in the present trash!”

“…Sorry” Tsuna offers. “I…do that sometimes. As for using flames, you already can, it’s just learning how to control them.”

“Fine” Xanxus glowers. “How do you control them then?”

The man bites his lip, but lifts up one hand. A second later, there’s a spark of orange flames burning on his index finger. Xanxus almost can’t help leaning forward.

“It’s all about resolve” Tsuna explains, staring into the flame. “It doesn’t matter how strong your flames are if you don’t know what you want to accomplish with them. Once you have that, they’ll be easier to bring out.”

Xanxus looks away, eventually staring at his hands.

‘Resolve huh?’

He’d never considered that. So far his ‘resolve’ had been getting the flames to come out, but maybe that was too short sighted. What did he want them to come out for?

In his mind, he thought about the crummy apartment upstairs where his mother would be drinking herself into a stupor, about the streets filled with trash who looked down on Xanxus for wanting more than this hell hole. And about the feeling he’d experienced when he’d watched the man in front of him burst into flames and decimate his enemies while he flew through the sky.

‘I want that’ he thought to himself. ‘I want to be strong enough to fly out of here. To be everything I could be.’
His expression hardens.

‘I want to be a King.’

On the bed, Tsuna scratches his stubble, and gives a sad smile when he sees the boys focus.

“Now, think of that resolve, and try to bring your flames out.”

Xanxus makes no sign that he’s heard him, but then the boy’s eyes narrow, and his fingers twitch, a glow starting to appear. It’s an odd, jerky thing, but there’s a definite red and orange aura starting to flicker around his hands. Xanxus is grinning, bringing his hands up to his face.

It gets brighter, and brighter…until a sharp burst of red flames bursts out, flaring against Xanxus’s face and forcing the boy to topple the chair with a shriek. Tsuna does much the same on the bed, scurrying back and gasping as the flare curls around him, searching for an answer and finding him lacking.

“Storm…not the right storm” Tsuna mutters, eyes blank. “Hayato, where…?”

“Who the fuck is Hayato” Xanxus snarls, struggling back to his feet. “What did you make me do?”

Tsuna keeps mumbling to himself, and in disgust, Xanxus ignores him, thinking once again about his resolve and trying to figure out what went wrong. When the aura appears again, Xanxus suddenly finds his hands wrapped in a larger pair, and tries to jerk back on instinct.

Tsuna doesn’t let him.

“You need to learn how to separate the sky from the storm” he warns. “It’s too volatile to try and bring them both out at the same time right now. Dial them back.”

He does just that, more out of curiosity than obedience, and Tsuna releases him.

“You have two flames Xanxus, so you’ll need to learn how to use them both” Tsuna explains. “They work well together, but if you want to be known as a sky, separation is key.”

The man stands, and Xanxus feels the orange flames flare around him, filling the room like a pair of invisible wings before folding back.

“Flaring is something flame users tend to do” he explains, scratching the stubble on his face. “It’s part defending your territory, part Guardian call, and part stress relief. It’s a good way to stretch your flame without too much risk. Just remember, the storm flame is angry, and the sky flame is harmony. Focus on the parts of your resolve that aren’t focused on negative emotions if you want to master the sky.”

“Easier said than done Tsuna-trash” Xanxus mutters, but thinks about his goal.

It’s stupid to think about trash or his mother. They just make him mad with their expectations and goals. He thinks instead about Tsuna flying through the sky. The freedom and power.

‘I want that.’

The flames flicker to life again, and they pulse momentarily – less wings and more a sharp dagger being revealed to gut an intruder, but a vivid, pure orange all the same.

Xanxus grins at the victory, only for his breath to catch when Tsuna answers, his own flare brushing against the boys before sinking back. A brief moment of harmony between the two, and Xanxus is
loath to see it pass. He tries to flare again, but this time it’s a mix of red and orange, and Tsuna backs away, flames hidden. On his third attempt, Tsuna moves and covers his hands before he can gather himself.

“Don’t force it Xanxus” Tsuna asks. “It takes time.”

“I don’t have time” he mutters, pulling his hands away. Tsuna just smiles.

“You have all the time you need” he promises, and Xanxus suddenly feels a need to hug the man.

Before he can act on such a weak thought though, somebody is banging on the door. Xanxus recognises the slurred words immediately. Apparently, his mother figured out why he was pawning clothes in the hallway. Tsuna pulls back before he can decide if he’s happy about it.

“I guess I’ll see you tomorrow Xanxus.”

That night, Xanxus crawls into bed and frowns under the blankets, pulling his hands up. Slowly, he clenches them into fists, and remembers what Tsuna said about flaring, pulling the red flame back and focusing on the calm orange.

It’s tiny, more like a hiccup than an announcement, and Xanxus scowls into a pillow. However, a moment later, his flames pick up an answering flare from the floor below, and the paired sky flames all but sing Xanxus to sleep.

For the next week, Xanxus would patrol the neighbourhood, smashing noses and hunting opportunities. In the evening, he’d slip into Tsuna’s apartment for flame practice. Sometimes the man would be there, other times he’d be waiting – Tsuna would vanish for hours, and didn’t always seem aware that he’d ever been gone. That glazed eye look, if anything, was getting worse.

But there’s no denying that this crazy bum is powerful. If what he and his mother say is true, orange flames are practically nobility, and he doesn’t need to compare Tsuna’s to another mafioso to know the man is strong. He could walk into any familia he wanted with a laundry list of requests in exchange for his services and he’d get it.

So why the hell is he wandering around a slum in hand-me-down clothes and eating from the soup kitchen? Wasting his time teaching a brat the basics of flame theory instead of grooming mafioso from their castles on the hills?

Xanxus finally snaps when he runs into the man midway through the next week. He’s dressed in that crown of fire and gloves again, and the mafioso are running in fear. One however, grabs a suitcase that’s lying on the ground before diving into the car a few metres away and screeching down the road.

“What did the trash want?” he asks, and Tsuna jerks, flame vanishing as he takes in his student. Eventually, he relaxes and gives a half shrug.

“Their boss was trying to extend an offer” Tsuna admits. “I refused, but apparently, that wasn’t an option. So, I made it one.”

Xanxus glowers, a strange possessiveness coming over him as he realises the suitcase must have been a bribe. What’s worse, those men were dressed a hell of a lot better than most of the two bits in
town. They’d been low class, but still a much higher breed than the usual scum.

Which meant it had probably been a good offer.

“Why didn’t you take it?”

Tsuna glances at him in confusion, but Xanxus doesn’t give an inch, arms crossed.

“You’re strong, everyone knows that. But you’re just wasting away out here instead of being a boss or working for a familia. Why aren’t you mafia?”

The man keeps staring, and Xanxus starts to get agitated, only for Tsuna to give a pathetic sigh, stepping back and shoving his hands in his pockets before looking up at the miserably grey sky.

“I was, once. Even had a ring on my finger and a full set of Guardians.”

Xanxus’s eyes widen.

Don’t get him wrong, he’d suspected, but to have it confirmed…

“Were you a boss?”

A shake of the head.

“No. But I was going to be. Didn’t want the title, but there was nobody else who could take it. Gave me a tutor and dragged me kicking and screaming towards the throne. Put me on death’s door a dozen times just to increase the power I could access, even though I didn’t want power in the first place!”

By the end he’s almost hysterical, and the man drops too his knees, eyes somewhere deep in the past.

“What happened?”

Tsuna just keeps shaking his head.

“Something impossible. Now they don’t exist. I don’t exist, and I can’t ever begin to exist because he died before I was even a possibility.”

“Huh?”

“It’s funny, when I was younger I would have done anything to escape the family. Now that I have…I’d give anything to go back.”

“…So join another familia” Xanxus tells him. Surely that should be obvious.

However, Tsuna shakes his head.

“I don’t want a familia, I want my family” he says, bitterness in every word. “I want my home back, my Guardians back, my life back, and that’s the one thing on this earth I can’t get. Half the time I think I should just end it and see if I can’t get back to them in death.”

Xanxus tenses, the words hardly new in the slums, but all the more terrifying coming from this man, even if he’s not sure why.

His reaction must have been obvious, because Tsuna smiles, flames flaring in an attempt to calm him.
“Don’t worry, I won’t” he insists. “I wouldn’t be able to face them if I took my own life. For better or for worse, I can carve a life out of what I have left, free from the mafia. That’s enough to keep going.”

Xanxus stares at him, before throwing his arms out.

“All that power, and this is all you want?”

Really? A rundown apartment, hand me down clothes and his only company an eight-year-old brat that insults him in every sentence? Even if he didn’t want a familia, he could easily create a gang and rise up from the ground level, but to accept this as all he’ll get? All he wants to get?

Tsuna just smiles, and Xanxus shakes his head in disbelief.

“You’re fucking crazy Tsuna-trash.”

“You’re just figuring that out now?” the man replies, and grins as he dodges the empty coke can tossed at his head.

It takes two months of tantrums, lessons and experimenting, but it finally pays off.

Xanxus grins as he takes in the orange glow emanating from his hands, not a trace of red. Sky flames, his flames, are now active and available with ease.

Xanxus is officially royalty. He’s got his way out.

Sitting on the bed next to him, Tsuna is grinning at the flames.

“You really are a natural. This is what you were born for…”

He’s going distant again, eyes fading to somewhere Xanxus can’t follow, and he frowns, one sky-infused hand grabbing his teacher’s. He really hates it when the trash forgets about him, and this is the easiest way to bring him back. Tsuna blinks, come back to the present and relaxing, his own sky flames floating to the service to twist and bind with Xanxus’s.

Xanxus all but purrs, scooting forward and leaning on Tsuna’s shoulder as their flames dance around each other. Tsuna usually keeps a tight lid on his flames, and it’s rare Xanxus gets to enjoy them like this. He can feel shards of that other flame Tsuna keeps locked up on occasion, but when mixed with the other sky’s flame, it’s almost non-existent.

They also tame the instincts that Tsuna had warned him would come with activating his sky flames. There’s an agitation to his actions that wasn’t there before his lessons, an overwhelming need to explore and flare his flames in the neighbourhood, which gets worse each time he fails to get an answer. Tsuna’s flames are a balm that soothe his flame’s need for Guardians that don’t exist yet.

Yes, this is the best. And yet.

Something inside Xanxus wants more. As much as he loves letting their orange flames dance together, everything in him says it would look so much better with a hint of red.

Ducking his head to hide the smirk, he releases the storm flames that are hiding in the wings, letting them fly out, aiming for Tsuna’s flames with the drive of a heat seeking missile.

Tsuna’s reaction is instantaneous.
“NO!”

Suddenly, Xanxus is crashing to the ground, Tsuna leaping off the bed so fast he practically smashes into the wall, flames locked up tight while Xanxus feels as if his own have slammed into a steel door. There’s a prickling in his eyes that suggest he wants to cry, something he hasn’t done in years, and he doesn’t understand why. Everything aches with the painful feeling of loss.

His storm flames are still filling the room though, and they’ve never been anything but effective at driving out other emotions in exchange for sheer raw anger.

“Why the fuck did you do that trash!” he shrieks, standing up and storming over to the man curled in on himself by the wall. Tsuna won’t meet his eyes, and he tries to pull him up, hands yanking on the shirt collar.

“I asked you a question you bastard.”

“-monised.”

It’s too quiet, and Xanxus scowled.

“What are you mumbling abou-“

Tsuna finally yanks his head up, and the fury in his eyes is enough for Xanxus to let go, stepping back in shock.

“I said, we almost harmonised!” Tsuna yells. “Do you have any idea how stupid that was? If your storm flames had harmonised with my sky flames, you’d have become my Guardian. Your sky flames wouldn’t matter because they’d be secondary to your storm flames.”

The words freeze Xanxus to the spot, and almost as quickly as it came, the fire dies in Tsuna’s eyes, and he slumps back down.

“We’ve gotten too close” he moans. “I’m barely surviving without going into discord – I don’t have the willpower to resist a storm as strong as you, but you don’t know what you’re doing. You’re just trying to harmonise because your sky flames haven’t found a Guardian to balance them yet.”

He looks up.

“Xanxus, show your mother your sky flames” he says. “It’s time we ended this.”

“Tsuna-trash, what are you…”

“Don’t Xanxus” he warns. “Just…don’t.”

That night, he reveals the sky flames to his mother, who insists they must belong to the Vongola, the most powerful family in Italy. Clearly, she must have slept with the Don once upon a time and forgotten it. Given the drugs and alcohol she’s inhaled in the last decade, it’s not impossible.

She arranges a meeting with the Vongola Ninth a day later, and even splurges on a new shirt for Xanxus to wear when he meets his ‘father.’

He should be excited, but all he can think about is another sky left along in the room downstairs, and when he brings out his flames, they flare almost without his consent.

They don’t get an answer.
Even with his heavy heart and agitated flames, he’s overwhelmed with feelings when he finally comes face to face with the man his mother says is his father. Unlike Tsuna, this man doesn’t lock down his flames, instead flaring them like a cape, cloaking the area in warm, soothing feelings.

It’s a sign of power as well as a sign of a great mediator, but something about it pisses Xanxus off. Or perhaps that’s the men standing next to him, all emanating different colours of flames. A sky and his Guardians. The way it’s supposed to be but isn’t for the only other sky Xanxus gives a damn about.

When his eyes are finally focused on Xanxus, his mother pushes him forward.

“Go on Xanxus. Show your father your flames.”

Almost on autopilot, Xanxus lifts his hand. Stares into the eyes of this man his mother is insisting is his father, and finally sees everything he’d been ignoring. Now that he has no choice, he can connect the dots with painful ease.

Show off the sky flames that had his mother so overjoyed and leave the slums. Join his father and get everything he always knew he deserved. Everything he’s ever wanted.

Except Tsuna.

His hand shakes as he starts to conjure up his flame.

The Vongola want him because he’s a sky. They might want Tsuna if Xanxus tells them about the man he orbits, but Tsuna has made it very clear he wants nothing to do with the mafia. If Xanxus goes, Tsuna won’t follow.

Has Tsuna always known this would happen? Is that why he wouldn’t harmonise? So that he wouldn’t hold Xanxus back?

He grits his teeth, red flames jerking to life in his hand, and takes some grim satisfaction at the Ninth’s narrowed eyes and his mother’s startled squeak.

“Xanxus! Not those ones” she scolds, panic in her eyes. “Show him your real flames.”

Xanxus turns his head upwards, eyes boring into her skull.

“These are my real flames trash.”

Because yeah, maybe he’s a sky. Maybe he could become a king. With the backing of Vongola it would be handed to him on a silver platter.

But Xanxus has never looked for easy. And he has so little, he sure as hell isn’t giving up anything that’s his. Not if he doesn’t have to.

He’ll fight and claw and kill his way to the top of the world. And he’ll do it with his sky at his side. If he has to give up Tsuna for Vongola, Vongola can just go jump off a cliff.

His mother lunges for him, shaking him furiously.

“Lies! It’s a lie! Show him your orange flames you foolish child!”

One of the Guardians immediately intercedes, prying her fingers away, and Xanxus takes the opportunity to step back. The Vongola Ninth stands back up from his crouch, moving away as well.
“I believe we’re done here.”

“Ninth, he still has an exceptionally powerful storm flame” the Guardian says. “Shall we take him?”

Xanxus scowls, tensing when the Ninth’s eyes linger on his form.

“No, I don’t think that would be wise right now.”

His mother wails, dropping to her knees, but Xanxus ignores her, turning tail and running back into the slums.

There’s someone he has to see.

When Xanxus reaches his building, he’s panting from the run. Tsuna’s door is locked, so he starts hammering on it furiously.

“Trash! Tsuna-Trash! Get out here!”

He hammers for almost a minute, sky flames flaring. He’s about ready to try and kick the door down, when he hears the unmistakable sound of a lock being opened. The door opens enough for Xanxus to catch a glimpse of Tsuna’s shocked face.

“Xanxus? What are you-“

The boy doesn’t wait for him to recover, ramming into at the crack and shoving it open. Tsuna stumbles backwards as Xanxus throws his arms around the man’s waist, forcing them both to the ground.

“I’m not giving you up!” Xanxus all but roars. “You’re mine!”

“Xanxus, what happened?” Tsuna gasps. “I thought you were meeting with Vongola-“

“Those assholes can go screw themselves” Xanxus spits out, pushing himself up to look into Tsuna’s eyes. “If you’re not coming with me, I don’t need them. I’ll reach the top of the world without their help.”

…but…Vongola! You’re meant to be Vongola.”

He sounds so horrified, and his eyes are broken. Xanxus grabs his shirt collar and shakes him.

“Listen trash!” he growls. “You’re not getting rid of me that easy. I might be a sky, but you’re this sky’s sky. I don’t give a crap about Vongola.”

He flares his flames as a confirmation of his statement, and even lets the storm flames out, the two twisting together in satisfaction as they try to coax Tsuna’s into a dance. The man’s still clearly in a state of shock – he’s not even trying to pull them back. A moment later, and Xanxus grins in elation as he feels his storm flames brush against Tsuna’s sky and settle in.

That brings Tsuna back to reality, and Xanxus can feel the flames diminish. It’s taking Tsuna more effort, but they’re getting chained back – Xanxus doesn’t him the chance, merely increasing both of his flames and clawing a space for himself in Tsuna’s soul even as the man squeaks protests.

It’s not a full harmonisation, Xanxus can already tell it’s too fragile for that, but after months of seeing the carrot on a stick dangling in front of him only to be pulled away, he’s finally managed to catch it and snap off the tip. It’s a potential bond, and judging from the panic attack Tsuna’s about to
have, it’ll be up to Xanxus to shove them both over the edge eventually.

Already he feels calmer, his flames satisfied at his conquest, and lets himself drop onto Tsuna’s chest, drunk on the feeling.

“You’re stuck with me Tsuna-trash” he chuckled. “Whether you like it or not.”

A choked sob echoes through the room, but Xanxus keeps grinning when he feels a hand land on his back, Tsuna wrapping him in a one-armed hug.

“Oh, and I think I’m gonna have to start living here. Don’t think the old hag’s gonna want me around much now.”

That gets him a strangled laugh.

“Okay” Tsuna half sobs. “I guess that’s…okay.”

He doesn’t release his flames again, but that’s fine, Xanxus has all the time he needs to convince his sky he’s serious. And even longer to convince him to stop hiding his power and be the man Xanxus knows he is under the crazy and panic.

And on that day, they’ll both take Italy by storm.
Wow, this really got away from me and gained a life of its own. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 2

Xanxus spends a few minutes just basking in Tsuna’s flames. He’s not a clingy kid, but sky harmony is a glorious drug. Tsuna’s not doing much better – he’s dislodged his hat from when Xanxus floored him, but he’s just running his spare hand through the greasy mop rather than try to fix it. He’s also got that look that suggests he’s fighting the urge to cry. Its kind of pathetic, but infinitely better than the glazed ‘not-in-the-present’ look he wears so often – he almost looks happy, something Xanxus has never seen him before.

‘I did that’ he thinks with rightful smugness, happy from his perch on Tsuna’s chest.

The only thing that would make it perfect was if the stupid trash would cut loose all his flames and complete the harmonisation. Right now Xanxus has to make do with the tiny amount that’s connected to his own storm flames and amplify it with his own sky. Although maybe it’s best they’re starting small – Xanxus almost feels drunk as it is.

“Man, if we could bottle this, we’d make a fucking mint” he sighs. This is easily the happiest he’s been in his life.

So, naturally, it has to end in the worst way possible, when a voice and dangerously familiar flames curl into the room.

“Oh, you’re not the first to suggest that, I assure you.”

Tsuna’s flames flare dangerously while Xanxus’s react in panic. The hand on his back tenses, and Xanxus hisses as his sky jerks into a sitting position, still holding Xanxus close, staring in shock at the man now standing in the doorway.

It’s the Vongola Ninth, watching them both with something that could be called affection if it wasn’t for the traces of shock accompanying it. Behind him, two Guardians are flanking him, cutting off any chance of escape, and when Xanxus flares his flames in reaction, he can feel someone flame active standing outside the window.

Tsuna’s flames feel chaotic, and when Xanxus dares to look at him, he can’t help but wince. The man looks as if someone’s shot him in the stomach.

Fuck…Xanxus led the one thing Tsuna didn’t want right to his door.

The Vongola Ninth steps inside and kneels down, offering a hand and staring at Tsuna in wonder.

“My apologies for dropping in. If I’d known you would be harmonising right now, we would have waited.”
Xanxus scowls, resisting the urge to punch the man in the face and instead tightens his grip on Tsuna’s shirt. Tsuna’s grip isn’t much better, supporting his weight as he struggles to his feet, refusing the hand and keeping his eyes on the Ninth. The hand retracts, and the Don returns it to the walking stick in his hand.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Timoteo Vongola, the Ninth Don of the Vongola family.”

“I’m aware” Tsuna replies, still taught as a spring. He’s keeping the arm tight on Xanxus’s back, as if he’s trying to keep him out of sight.

Screw that. Xanxus doesn’t need anyone protecting him.

He struggles in the grip, managing to loosen the hand enough to twist himself around, glaring at the Don.

“Why did you follow me trash?” he snaps. “I’m not a sky, and you said you didn’t want me.”

Timoteo smiles indulgently.

“Now lets not lie Xanxus. You might have revealed your storm flames, but I haven’t lived this long without being able to recognise someone suppressing their primary. And I never said I didn’t want you, just that it wouldn’t be prudent to take you right then. Not when you were clearly courting a sky of your own.”

Tsuna’s hand spasms, and his eyes close momentarily in pain.

“You felt someone else’s sky flames on him.”

When Timoteo nods, Xanxus kind of wants to sink through the floor.

“It was faint, clearly you were resisting the urge to complete it. Understandable giving your situation. Skies with secondaries are rare. But even rarer are skies that can coax another sky into harmonising with their secondary. It didn’t seem right to separate my son from a sky strong enough to turn his head.”

Tsuna growls at that, and Xanxus returns his attention to his skies face. The man looks about as angry as he’s ever seen him.

“You’re the one who said no lies Timoteo” Tsuna warns. “Xanxus might have Vongola blood, but we both know he’s not your son.”

Xanxus’s eyes widen.

How the fuck can he say that with such certainty?

Timoteo is frowning now, and outside his Guardians are tensing.

“Perhaps not biologically, but that does not mean I can’t love him as if he was. Blood is important, but family is far more than that. Especially in your case-”

“Not interested” Xanxus snaps, frustrated at the line of conversation. “I’m just fine where I am, so piss off.”

Timoteo doesn’t answer, choosing to lock eyes with Tsuna, and Xanxus feels the sky tense as the Don focuses on him.
“I must admit that your existence is as much as surprise as Xanxus. Your last name wouldn’t perhaps be Sawada would it?”

Tsuna’s eyes twitch involuntarily, a tell large enough he doesn’t even bother denying it. Timoteo smiles in relief.

“I can’t tell you how happy I am to know your bloodline has survived. We all thought Sawada Iemitsu, God rest his soul, was the last remaining—”

“We weren’t related” Tsuna interrupts, and it doesn’t feel like a lie, but—

Timoteo is frowning now, staring at the two the way one does misbehaving toddlers.

“Perhaps this isn’t the best location to have this discussion. Will the two of you join me at the Vongola Mansion so we can discuss things further?”

It’s not a request. Already Xanxus can feel the flame users moving in.

He’s strong. Tsuna’s even stronger, but he’s never fought flame users before, and even Tsuna will struggle against one of the most powerful skies in the world plus a full harmony.

His hands clench, and he grits his teeth, choking on the anger that makes his storm flames seethe.

He’s been a storm Guardian for all of five minutes and he’s already managed to fuck it up. This isn’t fair.

Dammit, screw the Vongola all to hell! He’ll go at them with everything he’s got and give Tsuna a chance to get away. If he doesn’t die, he’ll get back to Tsuna eventually.

He starts to pry himself from Tsuna’s grip, only to feel the man pull him closer, practically hugging him

“Xanxus” Tsuna whispers. “Wrap your arms around my neck, and get ready to move.”

The boy frowns, but gives a hesitant nod and does as asked. When Tsuna feels the grip tighten, he smiles and gives the Ninth a shallow bow.

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible Vongola” he says, sounding genuinely apologetic, before the room utterly fills with sky flames.

Even Xanxus, harmonised to the man exuding it, gasps as the power blasting from the man. His eyes turn to see the Ninth taking a step back, almost in shock, before he feels Tsuna’s hands twist his body, spinning the small frame until he’s on his back instead of his chest. The second Tsuna has the boy piggybacked, he’s spinning on his foot, running for the window and lifting his hands to protect his eyes as he smashes through the window.

Like Xanxus picked up earlier, one of the Ninth’s Guardians is waiting in case they try this exit, but the man is blown back from the sheer wave of sky flames being thrown his way. They weren’t expecting him to be this strong, and are utterly unprepared to handle a sky that knows how to fly. Xanxus roars in delight as Tsuna soars into the sky with him hitching a ride.

“SCREW YA LATER TRASH!” he screams, laughing as the building falls out of sight and Tsuna picks up speed.

Of course, hanging around in the sky is not a viable long term plan, and eventually Tsuna has to
land. He chooses an almost empty alley on the very outskirts of Xanxus’s neighbourhood. The landing’s not perfect, he stumbles and hits the wall when he falls, and Xanxus quickly rolls off before Tsuna drops to the ground, leaning against brick and pulling at his hair reminiscent of the first time he’d ever seen him.

“Oh god, they know they know they know. The one time I don’t have my hat, god they know… need to run, run…run where?”

Fuck, he was spacing out again. Xanxus pulled the hands out of his hair and yanked him up. Flames flared from the contact, and he jerked back when instead of the pure orange flames, he was greeted with streaks of black twisting through the colour. He flared again, resulting the orange overtaking them, and Tsuna was back again. He stared at the opposite wall incoherently, and groaned.

“So, we’re now on the run from Vongola. Because life wasn’t hard enough already.”

Xanxus scowls, crossing his arms and looking way.

“It’s not like I meant for this to happen” he mutters.

He hears Tsuna sigh, and frowns when a hand lands on his head.

“I know” his sky admits. “This isn’t your fault. If I’m honest I knew I’d draw the attention of Vongola eventually. I just didn’t think it would be this soon.”

Xanxus accepts the contact begrudgingly, eventually pulling away to watch him.

“How come? Because of this ‘Sawada’ guy?”

Tsuna’s shoulders sag.

“Sort of. It’s complicated, and not something I really want to get into right now. We need to get off the street before they get the word out.”

Xanxus isn’t privy to whatever selection process Tsuna uses, but after wandering the streets for a few minutes, he jumps the fence on a small house with all its windows boarded up. A few minutes later, the two of them are prying open the door, and slipping into the dark building.

“Why this one Tsuna-Trash?” Xanxus asks, glancing round and taking note of furniture still in place.

“Uh, I saw the owners move out last week” Tsuna admits. “Figured the place wouldn’t have been hit up yet.”

Now that he’s looking, there is a distinct lack of dust or vandalism Xanxus expects from this area. He’s relatively impressed.

“Better than a street I guess.”

Tsuna is in the living room, kneeling by the fireplace. As Xanxus watches, he sees Tsuna collect a pool of orange flames in-between his hands. It’s an exercise he’s seen him do a few times to warm up his apartment. But it’s not quite the same this time – when Tsuna drops the flames into the fireplace, they instantly start warming the building up…but those weird black streaks are back.

Tsuna’s aware of them now, judging from the pale look on his face from their appearance. He starts staring down at his hands, mumbling gibberish to himself. Xanxus leave him to it and wanders
through the kitchen. It still has a fridge, but the electricity’s been turned off so it’s useless. He does however find a box of cereal and a tin of anchovies, so it’s not a total loss. He grabs both and carries them upstairs. Tsuna, over whatever was bothering him, follows silently.

There’s two bedrooms, but only one has a bed. Xanxus tosses the food on the old chest of drawers next to it and jumps on the mattress. There’s no sheets, but it’s still in pretty good shape.

Tsuna apparently doesn’t think so, because he walks straight out and returns with some rather mothball laden blankets that he found god knows where in the house, dropping them on the edge of the bed. Xanxus takes the chance to grab his wrist and pull him onto the bed too, grabbing a blanket and tossing it over him before thumping his head on Tsuna’s shoulder.

“What’s the deal with the black flames?” he asks, now that he’s got the man pinned down. “Don’t you normally have them locked away?”

Tsuna just runs a hand through his hair.

“Yes…no…Harmonisation knocked something loose. I’ll figure something out.”

“Why? They bad?”

That gets him a very harsh chuckle.

“They’re a cancer” Tsuna whispers, and his hand clutches at Xanxus’s arm. He’s trembling, so Xanxus lets him, and chooses to change the subject, only half faking the yawn that follows.

“Don’t know about you, but harmonising is exhausting” he mutters. “Let’s figure out the plan tomorrow.”

Tsuna’s a little too quiet, but before Xanxus can query it, he feels a hand brush through his hair.

“Xanxus, you realise that I don’t have any plan, right?” Tsuna warns. “It’s been a major accomplishment just to get up in the morning sometimes. You’ve thrown your lot in with a pretty big waste of space.”

Xanxus just snorts, punching the man’s arm before flopping down again.

“Don’t fucking call yourself that again Trash” he replies. “I’m the only one who gets to insult you. Besides, I already figured I was gonna have to be the brains of this operation Tsuna-Trash. I’ll figure it out, you just focus on not being crazy and teaching me everything you left out about flames.”

“Xanxus-”

“Hush! Sleep now.”

“…It’s not even dark out.”

“SLEEP!”

Tsuna gives a tired chuckle, but the hand in Xanxus’s hair starts to drop away, and the two drift off until morning.

For the first few days, they lie low. Everyone in the area knows Xanxus by reputation, so Tsuna scrounges up yet another lousy hat, zips up the ugly coat and slinks out to get more food and hopefully more clothes. Neither of them will dare risk going near their old building again, so they’re
Tsuna at least had proven to have some street sense when he reveals several hundred euros stashed in the lining of the coat, so they weren’t completely without funds. When he comes back, he’s clearly hit up a local charity shop and grabbed anything that might fight Xanxus, and a few things that will fit – unfortunately – fit him.

Xanxus is quickly learning Tsuna should not be left to shop for himself. His taste in clothing is atrocious – he lives in hoodies and oversized sweatshirts. The first time they met, Tsuna was wearing a suit, so clearly, he knows other clothing exists and is just doing it just to piss Xanxus off. At least he’s smart enough not to bring that crap home for him.

He also lets it go because it’s distracting Tsuna from the black flame that has finally been unleashed. Despite his best attempts, Tsuna can’t seem to get it back to the little flecks it’s been up until Xanxus harmonised. It’s a noticeable addition now, as much as Xanxus’s flames when he’s mixing both Sky and Storm together to try and trick Tsuna into embracing a bit more of their bond. The only thing that seems to have an effect is Xanxus’s pure sky flames, which drown out the black temporarily.

While Tsuna is off getting necessities and avoiding reality, Xanxus is trying to plot their next move. Just idly patrolling the neighbourhood is no longer an option. If Tsuna is right and the Vongola are looking for them (and something tells him that his sky is right on the money), they need protection. Out here, that meant obtaining power.

In the evenings Tsuna runs him through harmony and elements and everything that’s not ‘activating-sky-flame’ specific that he’d not had time to go over before, and can usually manage a few hours before his mind starts wandering too much. The biggest emphasis is what each element can do and how much more stable skies are with them. Frankly it sounds like something both of them could do with quite badly.

Xanxus needed to hunt down some more flame users. Harmonise with them and start carving out a place for himself, while trying to vet someone older and wiser to harmonise with Tsuna and help him stop being so crazy.

Course that’s easier said than done. He’s been running round the neighbourhood flame active for weeks without so much as a whisper. The only option is to start trespassing on other territory, see if there’s anyone on the edge that might have been overlooked.

However, when he mentions this plan to Tsuna, it immediately gets shot down.

“Flame users are picked up early out here” he tells him from the chair he’s curled in, staring into the fire and its ever-growing black flame. “The only ones left alone are those too weak to gain notice, which means you won’t want to harmonise in the first place. You’d be better off biding your time, getting stronger so you can poach flame active mafioso in your teens.”

“We don’t have time for that Trash!” Xanxus snaps, moving from a sitting position and lying along the sofa opposite him. “How can I get stronger if we keep hiding?”

Tsuna pauses at that, staring into the fire.

“Xanxus, how would you feel about leaving Italy?”

The boy freezes.

“What?”
“Not forever” Tsuna adds. “Just…until the heat dies down. I’d like to try and get back to Japan. Vongola probably wouldn’t chase us that far, and even if they did, I think I know somewhere we’d be safe.”

“I’m not running halfway across the world to hide like a coward!” Xanxus roars, jumping to his feet and hissing at Tsuna, who flinches at the anger in his voice.

“It’s not hiding.”

“We’re not leaving Italy” Xanxus demands. “Maybe we could move North, but I’m not leaving Italy. And neither are you.”

Part of him realises that Tsuna probably misses Japan the same way Xanxus misses his old neighbourhood. It was stagnant and a bad fit, but it was home. But Xanxus is not flying to a country where he can’t speak the language and is even more of a freak than he already is. In Italy, at least the flames and his reputation give him respect. He is not starting from scratch in a country with one of the highest criminal conviction rates in the world and a distrust for foreigners.

Tsuna doesn’t reply, merely cocks his head and nods.

“Okay. I won’t mention it again.”

Xanxus just scoffs, dropping back on the sofa.

“What the fuck brought this on anyway? It’s been three days and the Vongola haven’t got a clue where we are.”

“Vongola aren’t really what I’m worrying about” Tsuna admits. “I’ve been hearing rumours. There are people running around in the North District, abducting strong kids. Word is they’re looking for flame actives. I can track Vongola, but I don’t know enough about them to predict what they’ll do. I’d rather avoid them than have to find out.”

Looking for flame actives?

…Which probably meant they had flame actives with no bonds.

Xanxus grins as he stares into the fire, then releases more, letting it spread out from the fires and fill the room. Tsuna gives him a suspicious glance, but answers the apology in kind, the room all but glowing orange, with the odd speck of red showing up, and drowning the black flame. It’s enough to make them both relatively sky drunk.

The next morning, when Tsuna is out information gathering and avoiding Vongola spies, he slips out of the bed and runs towards the North Districts.

It takes him nearly a month to get a good lead. He has to sweet talk a few drug runners and run a few dangerous routes off the books to get it, but he gets it. There’s some guys who trail around a bar far outside Xanxus’s usual flaring grounds that doesn’t card in exchange for double price, and people have mentioned seeing people glowing odd colours. Could just be junkie’s delusions, but it’s more than enough to go on.

The bar itself is fairly nondescript, it’s only outlier being just how packed it is at 12pm on a Tuesday. Most of the clientele are clearly too young to be in here, but Xanxus is hardly one to talk. He grabs his own drink before settling in a dark corner table to wait. Tsuna has issues with alcohol, and especially with his young storm drinking, but Xanxus has 8 years of being weaned on his
mother’s leftovers to deal with – alcohol keeps him sharp.

It doesn’t take long before he starts to notice the glimmers of light darting round the room. It’s not full out flame, but with so many in vicinity, perhaps because Xanxus is in vicinity, there’s a distinct aura around several people in the room, the oldest of them in their mid-teens. He takes a chance, making sure nobody is watching, and flares is sky flames for just a brief instant.

The result is impressive. Almost everyone in the room straightens, and those he’s seen glinting start scratching their skin, looking round for the presence they just felt. But most interesting are the four men in the corner, who immediately stand up and scan the perimeter. They’re armed and have some of the stronger flames in the room – he can almost see actual flame hitting back against the remnants of his flare. He smirks.

Jackpot.

But before he can go confront them, someone slips into the seat next to him, leaning over the table to analyse him with sharp eyes.

“That was a risky move” he says, pulling the blonde hair that’s escaped his ponytail back behind his ear and smiling. “Skies shouldn’t just announce themselves uninvited.”

His hand flicks, inciting a small spark of blue flame that Xanxus’s own barely register. Xanxus narrows his own eyes, and out from the corner he can see the men sitting down, catching sight of the arrival and relaxing. He’s one of theirs.

When he returns to the conversation, the man has out a hand to shake.

“I am Greasy” the man says. Actually, he probably says Grassi or something, but the bar is loud and frankly Xanxus is more focused on the sheer amount of product the Trash has got in his hair, so Greasy it is.

He ignores the hand, and Greasy shrugs, tucking it out of the way while he balances his head on his other hand.

“What’s a budding little stormy sky like you doing in a place like this?” he asks, smirking at the way Xanxus bristles. “It’s faint, but I can feel a bond, your sky wouldn’t let you walk in here on your own.”

“He doesn’t own me” Xanxus snaps. “He knows I can take care of myself.”

Tsuna does. Xanxus does as much caring for Tsuna as Tsuna does for him. The man has never doubted for a second how capable Xanxus can be.

“Oh, so he knows you’re here?”

Xanxus snarls, and the man chuckles.

“Easy now, let’s be friends. What brings such a bright little spark like you all the way over here without your sky’s blessing hmm?”

He really hates how much this bastard is talking down to him. Everyone in his neighbourhood knew from age five that Xanxus wasn’t someone to be taken lightly. Normally he’d be clawing Greasy’s face off right now, but he can’t quite muster up the energy.

Probably Tsuna’s influence. And helpful – these morons might not be taking him seriously, but he
needs to find out where they’re from so he can find some flame users.

Instead, he smirks, nails digging into his palms as he tries to ignore the slight. “Actually Trash, I think I was looking for you” he replies. “Heard you know where to find some more elements for harmonising. My Sky and I were interested.”

Greasy chuckles. “Looking to build up your own gang huh? Can’t say I blame you – strong flames like yours need strong allies.”

Well, he’s not wrong, but the comment shouldn’t be enough to make Xanxus’s shoulders relax as much as they have, so why?-

“But if you’re starting at the very beginning, wouldn’t it be better to join forces with a family with potential?” Greasy continues. “One that people underestimate, but could become a dangerous name with time and care. It’s a lot easier than building up from scratch. Our boss is a good man, one with many loyal followers but not enough power to stand up against their enemies. You and your Sky would be very well received.”

Xanxus just laughs. “Forget it Trash” he says. “We turned down the fucking Vongola, we sure as hell aint throwing our lot in with you. Not without seeing what you can offer first.”

Huh, are people smoking in here? The room is getting awfully hazy…

Greasy ducks his head in agreement. “I’ll tell you what, why don’t you come along and meet them right now” Greasy continues. “We’ll even have a bed made up, and you can call your Sky to tell you where to meet.”

His hand reaches for Xanxus, and Xanxus tries to arch back – only Tsuna gets to touch him so casually – but he doesn’t move, frowning in confusion as the Greasy ruffles the hair on his head.

Something’s wrong. Everything in him is screaming to get out or fight, but the commands aren’t reaching his brain. Even his sight is starting to get saturated in a blue hue.

“I…don’t. Not…right…what?”

Why can’t he move? And why is everything blue-

It hits him like a gunshot. Rain flames. Tsuna had fucking warned him about the effect of Rain flames!

He staggers to his feet, but immediately drops back down. Storm flames try to eat at the interlopers, but it’s too late, and he can do little more than watch as Greasy lifts the hand from under the table, dripping with rain flames as he pulls Xanxus into his arms. His colleagues stand up, and as they walk out the door, they pull out some brightly coloured rope.

“Don’t worry little sky” he soothes in a horrifically calm tone. “We’re just going to restrain you so you can’t hurt yourself, and we’ll take you to meet a whole lot of other kids like you. Won’t that be fun?”

“You…bastards” Xanxus growls, still trying to burn through the flames. The men just chuckle, and begin binding his wrists. Almost instantly, his flames vanish, locked behind an impenetrable door, and Xanxus whines when he realises Tsuna’s harmony is blocked out too.

His heart bursts when his storm flames go into overdrive, trying to discover the source of the threat,
only to hit a brick wall before they get started, and he tries to start thrashing, despite the number of hands on his person. He doesn’t stop even when they pick him up, fully restrained in the flame-dampening ropes, and toss him into the back of their car.

The futility of struggling doesn’t really hit until he hears the car start, and starts smashing his head into the stinking carpet when they start moving.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK.

He’s an idiot. He’s a giant, stupid, fucking idiot! What the fuck was he thinking? They were middle ground mafioso and Xanxus thought he could take them just because he knew his way around flames? Even though he knew they were hunting flame capable children? All that time he thought they’d been underestimating him, and HE’D been the moron that played into their hands.

Crap, Tsuna didn’t even know where he went every day. Because if he didn’t know he couldn’t forbid Xanxus from doing it. Now he’s going to vanish into the underworld, get tortured or experimented on or tossed into the sea, and Tsuna isn’t going to have a clue.

He’s going to leave Tsuna alone. Alone with his memories and his episodes and that ever growing black flame.

Storm flames try and fail to rise to the surface at that thought, and he starts kicking the wall of the boot. Maybe if he can angle himself, he can kick out the lights and signal someone.

…Who is going to do exactly what you do when you witness an abduction in the middle of mafia territory and pretend they haven’t. Fuck, fuck, FUCK!

The fight suddenly leaves him, and he almost tries to curl into the foetal position, mind clawing for even a crumb of flame to slip out.

‘I’m trash. Just stupid trash. Tsuna, I’m sorry...’

Fate allows him approximately five seconds to feel sorry for himself, before the brakes of the car screech and the crash into something, throwing him into the edge of the boot. His abductors are yelling, and he hears doors open, but another five seconds later they go silent, and his damped flames flare at the unmistakable feeling of warmth and home...

The boot is flung open, and Tsuna’s pulling him out bridal style. Xanxus is too in shock to be embarrassed by it.

“Tsuna-trash, how did you?-“

He cuts off when he realises Tsuna’s flames are out and his eyes are in no way friendly.

“Xanxus” he says. “Not. Now.”

A tremor of...he’s not really sure what, rushes up his spine, and he keeps quiet as Tsuna kneels down and drops him on the pavement. A knife appears, and he frees Xanxus’s hands, before handing it to him and stalking back to the would-be abductors. They’re currently staggering to their feet, and the front of the car looks mangled.

…Did Tsuna actually fly and drop onto the bonnet? And Xanxus missed it?

Oh if Tsuna doesn’t make these guys pay, he will.
Greasy seems to have mostly recovered from both the crash and what must have been a very badly thought out attempt to take out the guy who stops cars by using them as landing pads, because he’s standing and pulling out a gun. Tsuna doesn’t appear to care.

“You just tried to abduct a harmonised storm” Tsuna growls. “My harmonised storm. In what universe did you think that would end well for you?”

Xanxus will bite off his tongue before he admits it, but he always gets a kind of thrill when someone pushes Tsuna into being possessive of him.

Greasy doesn’t seem to appreciate the warning.

“Oh screw you outsider!” he snaps. “You might be a sky, but you’re an unaffiliated nobody. Skies aren’t unaffiliated unless there’s something seriously wrong with them, we were doing the kid a favour getting him away from you. Especially if you can’t even control him.”

Xanxus is now fully free of his bindings, and his flames spike at the insult. He wants to throw in with Tsuna, but his sky snaps his head back, freezing him in place, before returning to the conversation.

“I don’t have to ‘control’ him” Tsuna replies. “I can find him when it matters, that’s harmony.”

Greasy rolls his eyes.

“We’re taking the kid” he warns. “And you know what, we’re taking you too.”

“I’ll give you one last warning” Tsuna replies. “Take one step towards Xanxus and I will kill you.”

All five of them crack smirks at that.

“Cute, but everyone in the street knows you don’t kill” Greasy snaps back, lifting the gun. “You leave your enemies alive every single time. Too civvie to stomach our way of life.”

He fires, probably aiming for a disabling shot rather than a lethal one. Only Tsuna isn’t there anymore – he’s two feet in front of one of his allies, smashing a punch straight into the side of his face. His other hand jerks out, grabbing the mafioso’s collar before he can hit the ground, and throws the man straight through what’s left of the windshield before returning to the conversation.

“Watch him” Tsuna orders, and turns back to the car, the flames in his hands starting to burn with insane intensity – one a soft, warm orange that Xanxus recognises from harmony, the other a vivid and violent hue he usually sees in fights, although both are dipped in black.

“A lesson you should have learned a long time mafioso” Tsuna warns, hands burning with incredible ferocity. “Do not mistake reluctance for inability.”

The hand collecting the warmer flames is thrown back, while the darker orange is thrown in front of him. Xanxus can only gaze in wonder as Tsuna’s eyes narrow, gleaming liquid gold, rimmed with a new black line.
“X-burner.”

The energy blast that bursts from Tsuna’s hand almost makes Xanxus’s ears pop. The mafioso barely have time to register what he’s doing before their caught up in the heart. The flames are so powerful, they disintegrate on impact.

It only lasts three seconds, but when Tsuna cancels his flames, the only thing remaining of the car is the remnants of four melted tyres on the ground.

And the crippled man still lying several metres away, gaping in horror at the hit. When he realises Tsuna’s eyes are on him, he yells and tries to crawl away, shrieks getting higher and higher when Tsuna starts walking towards him. Xanxus just strides over, stamping on his spine and enjoying the sounds as he’s pinned down, making a point to cock the gun for the sound effect. Considering how low he’d felt ten minutes ago, he’s almost grateful for the man’s actions – he’s finally gotten to see what happens when his sky gets serious.

And he doesn’t care what it takes. Tsuna is teaching him that attack.

“Do you know why you weren’t in that car?” Tsuna asks, boring down on the mafioso. He just shakes his head.

“Because I want answers” Tsuna tells him, holding out a hand to Xanxus, who happily hands him the gun. “Answers you are going to give me.”

“W-what do you want to know?”

“Why?” Tsuna asks. “Why are you collecting flame actives. And how are you doing it without attracting attention?”

Greasy gives a crazy laugh at that.

“Without attracting attention? We can’t step out the door without attracting attention!” Greasy yells. “We were desperate! The Estrano are marked! We need firepower!”

Tsuna’s eyes widen.

“…Estrano?”

Tsuna’s flames pulse, black miasma flickering, and Xanxus winces.

Not now, not now!

“Estrano…Estrano…I know that name, Estrano, where…mist. Mist and teeth and yo yo’s but, no, gone….or not yet? I forgot.”

He’s completely out of it again, and the mafioso’s fear is changing to confusion. Xanxus quickly darts in, flame covered hand reaching for Tsuna’s back, sky flames binding and trying to coax Tsuna back.

“Trash, focus. Stay in the now.”

Tsuna mumbling stops, and both Xanxus and the mafioso gasp as the sky flames spike, interspersed with black fragments throughout, but now back in control.

“Where. Are. They.”
Greasy swallows. “Who?”

“The others” Tsuna all but growls. “The other flame sensitive children you’ve got locked away. The ones you experiment on. The ones you justify turning into monsters. Where are they!”

Greasy stares in horror, but then a wave of acceptance comes over him, and his face calms. Xanxus can read it in his eyes. He’s not going to answer the question, no matter what Tsuna does or threatens.

Apparently Tsuna can tell the exact same thing, because he’s sighing and checking the gun for bullets.

“Fine. I guess you die now.”

“I was wrong about you” Greasy mutters, eyes still locked on Tsuna. “You’re not a civvie. You’re a mafioso, just another part of a broken system, punishing us for being better than you. For creating something you couldn’t even dream of.”

Tsuna glares at him.

“You mean the possession bullet right? I’m not killing you for that. As far as I’m concerned creating that bullet wasn’t a crime.”

He raises the gun.

“I’m killing you because Xanxus is mine. They are mine. And I won’t let you do what you wanted to do to them.”

“Whose they?” Greasy shrieks.

Tsuna fires.

They don’t bother hiding the body. Once it hits the ground Tsuna melts the gun into an unrecognisable puddle, tosses Xanxus’s on his back and flies him home. Xanxus protests throughout, but Tsuna doesn’t appear to hear him.

When they finally get inside, Tsuna throws him in before locking the door. Xanxus spins, ready to argue, but doesn’t get the chance to defend himself, because Tsuna is dropping to one knee and yanking him into the tightest hug he’s ever experienced, sky flames washing over him like a dozen blankets. Normally, he’d try to fight it – Xanxus has always been the one that initiated contact, always been the one in control and he’s not sure he likes losing that power, but he’s frozen when he hears the words his Sky is whispering.

“You can’t do that again” Tsuna chokes. “I hate it. I hate that I’m dragging you down and you can’t see it but, I need you Xanxus. I could have taken it before the harmonisation, but not now. You’re all I’ve got keeping me sane and I can’t lose you, do you understand? I can’t.”

Slowly, delicately, Xanxus lifts his arms to return the embrace, flames rolling round both of him. Tsuna’s shoulders are trembling, betraying just how bad his emotional state is, no matter how well he hides it.

Still…

“Big statement from someone who still won’t fully harmonise” Xanxus mutters a little spitefully,
because for all those pretty words, his storm flames are still getting rebuffed at every turn, unable to gain more than the foothold they’d wedged that one night.

Tsuna goes stiff, and then sags into Xanxus’s embrace as he gives a mirthless chuckle.

“That’s for your own good” Tsuna promises. “One day you’ll understand why I can’t. You’re mine, and that means I have to protect you, even from myself.”

“That doesn’t mean anything” Xanxus snaps. “You’re just making excuses. You want to know you can leave me behind if you have to. Run off to Japan and forget about me.”

Tsuna shakes his head.

“No, no I swear it’s not that” he insists. “I need to know you can leave me behind.”

“Hah?” Xanxus gawks. “I turned down the fucking Vongola for you trash! You’re staying with me even if I have to drag you the whole damn way!”

Tsuna sighs, pulling out of the hug and staring at him with distant affection.

“Xanxus, I’m a sky falling headfirst into discord with no signs of stopping” he warns. “I’ve lost a full set of guardians – most would be completely mad by now. My brain and flames are ripping each other apart.”

To illustrate his point, he summons a small spark in his fingertips, and Xanxus spots that black flame again, darting through in tiny spots.

“That black flame is night flames” Tsuna explains. “It’s gnawing at my sky flames, trying to overtake them, and it’s winning. One day they’ll succeed, and I won’t be a sky. I’ll be lucky to be alive, never mind sane. If I harmonise with you, completely? I’ll drag you down with me. As you are? It’ll hurt, but you’ll walk away in one piece.

Xanxus just snorts, red and orange flames swirling on his hand as he grabs Tsuna’s, snuffing out the black flame completely.

“Won’t happen” he guarantees, eyes full of conviction. “Any time you fall I’ll drag you right back up. We’re going to be Kings one day.”

Tsuna gives a sad smile.

“I never wanted to be a King.”

Xanxus rolls his eyes.

“Fine Tsuna-Trash. I’ll be a King and you’ll be, I don’t know, the King’s bum or something. You can stroll around half shaved, wearing stupid oversized sweatshirts and sleep all day and nobody can give you shit for it so long as you teach me that attack you used today. Otherwise, I’m totally making you the Trash-King.”

Tsuna just bursts into laughter.

He starts showing him the X-burner that weekend.

After the run in with Estrano, Tsuna becomes a man possessed. He’s shadowing Xanxus, using him to ferret out more stories of the people that tried to take him.
Estrano had definitely knocked something in his head loose, and Xanxus isn’t sure how to take his sky’s focus now that it’s not completely on him. It makes him serious, and there’s been almost no episodes since Greasy triggered one, but Xanxus – or at least his flames – feel neglected.

Of course, then he made the mistake of telling Tsuna this, and the man hasn’t left him alone for more than five minutes. At first it was kind of nice, but now it’s a little suffocating.

“I can do this myself Trash” he growls, the second time Tsuna gets to close and chases off Xanxus’s informant.

“Can, but shouldn’t” Tsuna corrects. “If the Estrano are still looking for kids in the area, I want to be around in case they lure you in again.”

“They’re hardly going to do that if you’ve got me on a damn leash!”

Tsuna ignores him, glaring at the street for anyone who might be staring at Xanxus a little too long. All Trash, nobody is even acknowledging the storm when Tsuna’s right there, acting like the world’s least intimidating bodyguard at all of 5’3.

“Why the hell do you care so much about the Estrano anyway?” Xanxus asks, picking at his nails when he realises the day’s a bust. “You said something about a ‘they.’”

The man sighs, shoving his hands in his pockets as he comes to the same conclusion. “It’s complicated.”

He gets a scoff for that. “Wow, never heard that one before.”

Tsuna darts in and ruffles his hair as he chuckles. Before Xanxus can do more than swear and try to push him away, the sky is speaking.

“One of…my former Guardians, he was once Estrano” Tsuna whispers. “I know what the mafia pushed them to do. There are children being tortured right now, and nobody’s coming to help them. They’ll do to them, what they did to him, and I can’t let them. I can’t let it happen this time around. Not if I can stop it.”

His hand is on Xanxus’s shoulder, and he tugs him closer.

“So, we’ll keep looking, okay” he chokes. “We’ll find them. And we’ll save them. Because this time I know nobody else will.”

He stays quiet the rest of the way home.

It’s two months and three days after the Estrano incident that Xanxus’s world falls apart.

It starts out like any other day. He feels the glare of the sun coming through the window, groans and rolls over, using the arch of Tsuna-Trash’s body as a shield and kicking the man’s legs to try and make him move into a better position. Technically Tsuna got him his own bed within the first week, but somehow Xanxus always finds himself grabbing his blankets and curling on top of Tsuna’s own for extra warmth.

At least, that’s the excuse he uses whenever Tsuna-Trash is stupid enough to ask.

Tsuna however, doesn’t react to the kicking, so Xanxus is forced to wedge his eyes open and sit up, whacking him on the chest. The light is already in Tsuna’s face so it’s got to be irritating.
“It’s morning Tsuna-Trash” he groans. “If you’re not going to move to avoid the light, we need to get up.

There’s no response.

“Fine” Xanxus warns, climbing off the bed. “But I’m using all the hot water if you don’t get up and stop me.”

He intends to do just that, but fifteen minutes later he’s turning off the water and quickly shoving on a shirt and his trousers, heading back into their room. Tsuna still hasn’t moved…has he always been that pale?

Something dark and cruel twists in his chest.

“Tsuna? Tsuna-Trash, wake up!”

He darts over and climbs onto the man’s chest, trying to shake him awake, sky and storm flames bursting to life to try slamming into the unconscious man like a freight train.

As usual, flames instinctively flare out to match him, but both elements curl away in horror at the thick black that emerges instead of orange. It’s not the awkward streaks Xanxus has come to despise, but a writhing entity.

A few months ago Xanxus had seen images of an oil spill on the news, and he’s struck by the similarities. The orange sky flames are still dominant, but they’re being overrun by the black that’s eating into them by the second. His flames don’t want to go anywhere near it.

Xanxus grits his teeth and powers through, forcing his flames to make contact, trying to disintegrate this invader.

It’s like getting stabbed in the chest while swallowing acid. He stumbles off his sky, fighting the urge to throw up as his flames writhe in horror.

When he recovers, he tries again, this time with his sky flames. The sky has always kept Tsuna grounded – it feels almost as bad, but the blight hesitates.

He shoves everything he has into this minor victory, but it’s not enough. It doesn’t recede like it has before, just…waits, as if waiting for Xanxus to tire, so it can continue. And he’s already starting to run dry…he needs more sky flames. More than he can provide.

An idea pops into his head…and is immediately discarded.

One hour later, it comes back…and is considered.

Three hours, his flames are almost running on empty, and Tsuna is still unconscious. It kills him to leave Tsuna’s side right now, but there’s no choice – he bolts out of their home and runs towards his old building.

When he slams open the door of his mother’s flat, she screams insults and tries to smash his head in with a bottle. He just avoids it and spits in her face.

“I need the Vongola Trash’s number!”

It takes a painfully long time for the car to arrive. Xanxus is glued to Tsuna’s side, the man fallen ridiculously far in the time it took to call for help, and all but screams in the faces of the mafioso who
make their way upstairs.

“What the fuck took you so long?” he howls, brutally aware that he shouldn’t be insulting his only hope but finding it impossible to care.

Timoteo at least, seems to take it in stride, focusing instead on Tsuna. As he walks towards the bed, he flames arch out to join with Tsuna’s, and the black flame starts to hesitate.

“My God…” Timoteo whispers. “How have you survived this long?”

“What is it?” Xanxus hisses, clenching Tsuna’s hand so tight he’s relatively certain he’s broken bones. The Ninth stares at him in pity, before choosing to answer with a question.

“Xanxus, do you know what happens to a sky that’s lost all of their Guardians in a short capacity?”

“They go into discord” Xanxus snaps.

“No, discord is what happens when flames are forced or manipulated, or one or two bonds are shattered” Timoteo explains. “When a Sky loses an entire harmony, that’s something else entirely. Something far more dangerous.”

Xanxus opens his mouth…and then closes it.

He knows that Tsuna’s not…all there, most of the time. He can wander in his own head for hours when triggered unless Xanxus drags him out, and he’s hinted enough times that this discord thing is responsible. He also knows about the black flames eating up his incredible sky flames, but he’s never really asked about the specifics. Tsuna had seemed to understand, so he’d just accepted it.

“But…Tsuna-trash said it was discord! He’s going crazy and his flames are changing. Those are signs of discord!”

Timoteo shakes his head.

“It’s likely Tsuna wasn’t aware of the difference. Skies are usually so protected this kind of event never happens, but for him discord is just the beginning, just symptoms. The body fighting off the loss. When it finally gives up, all of the flames are snuffed out. Night flames are the antithesis of everything a harmony should be, and when Tsuna’s flames change to night flames completely, he won’t be Tsuna anymore. There’s only one place in the world he could survive, and believe me when I say that everyone would choose death over that.”

Xanxus’s eyes widen.

“At least he was smart enough not to fully harmonise. The night flames would probably have infected you and taken you-“

“Just shut up Trash!” Xanxus screams. “Stop talking about what’s not going to happen and tell me how to stop it! I’ve been helping! All this time he was getting better, I kept them from getting stronger, so tell me how to do that again!”

“You can’t” The Ninth replies, but before the dark feeling in his stomach can get any worse, the Ninth continues. “At least, not on your own.”

He sinks more flames around Tsuna, pushing back the night flames.

“If he’s surrounded by sky flames, it can strengthen his own. He’s survived so far by allowing your
flames to plug the gap, but it’s no longer enough. The night flames are building a resistance to you the longer you’re harmonised. He needs more sky flames that aren’t connected to him. I have three sky element sons, along with a few weaker skies sworn to Vongola. If we take him to our headquarters, we can surround him with a veritable army of flames. It would take time, possibly years, but it could stabilise his flames enough that the night flames could revert back. Unlikely back to a pure sky, but still a true element."

Timoteo turns to face him.

“However, I am not in the business of doing favours of such magnitude for strangers. I would need something in return.”

Xanxus can see where this is going.

“Fucking Trash. You want me to swear loyalty to you.”

His flames are already writhing at the thought. He can’t. Surely the Ninth knows that.

“I would need Tsuna to swear loyalty” Timoteo clarifies. “I know better than to expect an harmonised element to swear themselves when their sky does not. What I suggest, is that we take Tsuna to headquarters, help him recover enough to regain consciousness, and get his answer. If he refuses, he will be removed from the premises and left to his fate.”

“He’ll say yes” Xanxus immediately agrees. The Ninth looks at him with frustrating sympathy.

“Are you certain? He has proven to be very reluctant about entering the mafia world.”

“I’ll make him say yes Trash” Xanxus snaps back. “I promised him he wasn’t getting rid of me, and I’m not letting him use death as an excuse. Take us there.”

They take him to a mansion with grounds big enough to fit Xanxus’ entire neighbourhood and settle Tsuna in a medical ward three floors below the surface. The entire day almost passes in a blur, Xanxus hands clamped to Tsuna’s shoulders as other foreign skies flit about, pulling and tugging at Tsuna’s dulling flames. He’s sky drunk almost immediately, but has to focus on his own bond less one of these other skies forces themselves on his storm flames. Tsuna had mentioned it could happen if the original bond wasn’t strong enough, and he’s certainly not taking any chances now.

To be surrounded and as powerless as he was should have resulted in a complete breakdown, but Xanxus survives on one simple fact. Tsuna is responding. By the time night falls, the black flame is starting to recede. He keeps his eyes on Tsuna, even when the nurses decree he’s stable enough to move, and transfer them to an odd room. It looks like a guest room, for all that Xanxus knows about them, but there’s no windows, and he just knows there are cameras in every corner. Plus, the door locks from the outside.

It’s a cell. A very expensive and fancy cell, but still a cell. He can live with it though, so long as Tsuna just wakes up.

He only leaves the man’s side to relieve himself, growling when people try to coax him over to the table to eat, happy to munch over the side of the bed. A lot of the skies stare at him, and he hears the odd whisper of ‘Secondo,’ but he blanks them out. They call Tsuna ‘Primo’ too, so maybe it’s just code.
It’s hard to tell time without any natural light, but Xanxus guesses its two days before Tsuna opens his eyes. He’s a messy, exhausted scrap curled into his side when he feels the chest he’s half lying on hitch a breath, and shuffles himself into a sitting position as Tsuna winces back to consciousness.

It’s a slow, awkward process, with Tsuna’s eyes looking blank for a few brief moments, until he starts to recognise the ceiling isn’t covered in the black mould of their room but some kind of arty crap that looks like gold (and given the net wealth of this building, probably is).

Tsuna doesn’t even realise Xanxus is there, just staring up at the pattern, before his face falls in dismay.

“Is this hell?”

Something snaps in Xanxus, and his storm flames erupt.

“You asshole!”

He tries to punch the sky, struggling from his position, but Tsuna doesn’t even try to dodge, seemingly more surprised that Xanxus is there than anything.

“You were dying!” Xanxus shrieks. “You were dying, right there and I, I couldn’t do anything! So I called the only bastards I knew that might. I’ve been fucking waiting right here, all this time, and all you can say when you wake up is ‘is this fucking HELL?’”

He punches him again, and tries one more time, only for Tsuna to grab his hand. The other hand is immediately up, only for that to be pinned down too. Xanxus is spitting fire, but Tsuna is just staring at him in utter confusion.

“Xanxus, what did you do?”

He glowers. “I saved your life.”

Judging from the way his eyes narrow, Tsuna doesn’t seem to appreciate the answer.

“Xanxus, where are we, and what did you promise?”

The boy pulls his hands loose, and struggles to stand on the mattress, glaring down at the sky.

“Fine Trash” he spits, face red with anger. “I went to the Vongola alright? Even though I know you don’t want one fucking thing to do with them. Because your flames were wrong, and I couldn’t get them to go right. They were the only people I knew who could help.”

Tsuna all but collapses, sagging back into the bed.

“You swore loyalty to the Ninth, didn’t you?” he asks. “The Vongola wouldn’t help us for free. No matter who...who we might remind them of.”

Xanxus howls and tries to kick the man, only just managing to keep his balance.

“What the fuck is wrong with you! Your mine! I’m yours! Get that through your thick skull! I didn’t swear anything, they knew damn well it would be pointless if you didn’t swear first. But you were unconscious, so they had to fix you up enough to ask! If you don’t agree now, they’ll kick you out.”

Tsuna frowns, trying to process that.
“No…no they wouldn’t just let me go. That doesn’t make any sense.”

The boy growls again, sinking back down to his knees and pulling Tsuna’s head back up.

“It does considering you’ll fucking DIE if you don’t agree to stay” Xanxus snaps. “Whatever this isn’t discord you moron, it’s something worse. If you don’t swear, then you’ll just get worse and die in the streets in a week.”

He shakes the man again when it looks like he’s actually thinking that choice over.

“I know you don’t want to be mafia, and I’ve not tried to make you” Xanxus pleads, voice breaking but holding back tears through sheer force of will. “But you do not get to die, not like that! So, when the damn Vongola walks through that door, you are going to swear loyalty, sign anything he shoves in front of you, and focus on surviving. When you’ve recovered, then we can run away, but we can’t do that if you don’t shut the fuck up and get better dammit!”

Tsuna stares at him in shock, but he doesn’t have time to answer, because the door to the room opens, revealing the Vongola Ninth and answering the question quite nicely without his input. Xanxus releases the man’s shirt and leans back.

“I saved your life Trash” he mutters. “Now shut up and let them finish doing it.”

Tsuna glances between the Ninth and his men, and Xanxus, before letting out a heavy sigh.

“Xanxus, can you wait outside.”

“Tsuna-Trash-“

Sky flames flare, then shudder out of existence. The Ninth steps forward.

“I wouldn’t recommend that” he warns. “Your flames are still very fragile.”

Tsuna struggles to nod, and returns his attention to Xanxus.

“Go, wait, outside.”

“But-“

“That wasn’t a request.”

Xanxus grits his teeth, but shoves himself off the bed before the Ninth can order one of his own men to remove him.

“You could at least pretend to be grateful Trash!” he spits out, and slams the door.

The boy spends his time in the hallway experimenting with his storm flames and seeing how many swear words he can carve into the dark wood panelling along the wall. It’s that or try to listen to the conversation happening in the room, but the Vongola sprung for the decent soundproofing – he can’t hear anything.

Tsuna has to say yes.

He will say yes.
Xanxus can’t wrap his mind around a future where Tsuna doesn’t say yes.

It’s almost an hour before the Vongola leaves and let’s Xanxus back in. The Guardians look more than a little angry, but the Ninth is staring with what’s almost affection.

“You can go back in now” he says. “It looks like we’ll be getting to know each other now, Xanxus. You and Tsunayoshi Sawada.”

The weight Xanxus hadn’t realised he was carrying lifts from his shoulders, and he swallows.

“He agreed to join Vongola?”

The Ninth smiles. “Yes, although how loyal he intends to be is up in the air. Believe me when I say we’ll be watching both of you very closely.”

Xanxus can’t help the grin crawling onto his face, and runs past the mafioso and into the room. Tsuna is still in the bed, head tossed back on pillows and eyes closed. They open when they hear Xanxus walking over.

“So, the Trash has a brain” Xanxus jokes. Tsuna huffs, pushing himself into a sitting position and holds out an arm.

“Come here.”

Xanxus scowls, but he crawls up into the bed and leans into the crook of Tsuna’s shoulder anyway. Tsuna’s flames flare, and his own storm matches them almost subconsciously-

Only to gasp as he feels them touch and sink deeper than they ever have. Something ripples through his head, through his body, flushing his system with endorphins and cutting all connection to his limbs. Tsuna just curls his arm tighter around the boy’s body as he sags into the embrace, drunk on flames.

“Easy” Tsuna whispers. “I’m told it can be a little overwhelming. Deep breaths.”

Xanxus obeys almost without thinking, brain spinning on what just occurred.

“Harmonised” he chokes out, barely able to process it, because this, this is the real thing. “You…we harmonised.”

But god fucking dammit Tsuna had been underselling it. How had he lasted the last few months with that pathetic little bond and thought it enough?

Tsuna just holds him tighter.

“It’s my promise to you” he says. “I’m going to get better Xanxus. I’ll be the sky you need. I don’t want to be mafia, but if they can stabilise my flames for good, I’ll live with it for now. This is where we both need to be.”

Xanxus smiles, closing his eyes and letting himself drift off. But not before getting in one more parting shot.

“About time Trash.”

Chapter End Notes
This is about 3 times longer than it was supposed to be and that's even with discarding the original plan (which involved hiding in a prostitution house and Xanxus getting schooling from the Accountant). It had to go because it sounded funny in my head but felt hideously insulting and awkward to write. The next chapter will probably be a lot longer (and again, after my other fics update).
Chapter 3

Okay, this is officially the last chapter you get of this before I update DK&T and GC, because otherwise it's going to take over my life (note how the chapter number has now gone? That's how out of control this story has gotten). It was meant to be relatively short and sweet and now it's starting to steal future plot points from other fics! Hope you enjoy.

Chapter 3

It’s a very strange adjustment for Xanxus to go from the streets into the Vongola halls. He might have abandoned his mother for Tsuna without a second glance, but they’d just gone from one slum room to another, only now with the complete trust of the person he was staying with.

Vongola on the other hand, saw him surrounded with people he couldn’t necessarily trust, his one ally recovering in a bed, and an elderly man with adult children who seemed insistent on ‘bringing Xanxus into the family.’

If Tsuna hadn’t been so positive when he’d said Timoteo wasn’t his father, Xanxus might even have been swept up in it. Enduring the collective harmony of Timoteo, Enrico, Massimo and Federico without succumbing to their wishes was a lesson in self-control Xanxus had never wanted, and his Storm flames pined for Tsuna while he tried to fight off the growing need to bask. Perhaps that’s why Tsuna finally buckled and harmonised completely – Xanxus isn’t sure the Vongola couldn’t have overwritten it if they’d truly wanted to.

It’s clear Timoteo’s sons want to embrace Xanxus as another brother, and insist that even if he’s not biological, he’s clearly Vongola. They get as evasive as Tsuna-Trash when he demands they tell him why though, and shove him at tutors.

Yes, fucking tutors. Because apparently Vongola don’t value the importance of life skills. He’d stopped going to school nearly a year before when it was clear he was not only outpacing most of the class, but the school didn’t have the funding to advance him. As such, ‘gifted’ children were a hindrance rather than a pride, and when they’d strongly hinted that his time would be better spent elsewhere, Xanxus hadn’t argued.

Tsuna had tried to talk him into going back exactly once. It took Xanxus less than 2 minutes to make him regret ever bringing it up.

But Vongola don’t consider him gifted. In fact, he’s woefully behind and finds himself face to face with stern men with weapons under their suits and a stare that can pin him to a desk as they try and cram in useless facts and information. It’s almost embarrassing how many tantrums he has in less than a week.

The only class that sees his full attention is languages, and only because his teacher has started him on Japanese first. A chance to understand Tsuna when he’s mumbling nonsense is too good to pass up. Plus, it’s one of the few topics Tsuna can genuinely help him with. The man has a decent grasp of several languages, and a tolerable understanding of financial numeracy, but is utterly hopeless at
He only gets to see Tsuna for a few hours after his schooling and before dinner – the man isn’t bedridden, but he’s not allowed off the medical floor. Both Tsuna and Xanxus are relatively certain it’s because Tsuna’s still a flight risk more than health related at this point. Xanxus however, seems to be the only one upset about it. Tsuna just sits at a table when he appears and listens to Xanxus complain, making no attempt to change the status quo. He also doesn’t seem to appreciate his disdain for tutors, just smiling and laughing when Xanxus regales him with the latest story regarding Pythagoras theorem and memorising the names of the last dozen Prime Ministers that had resulted in the room gaining a new Skylight and some Storm graffiti.

“You’re being challenged though, isn’t that a good thing?” Tsuna asks once Xanxus has calmed down. “It’s frustrating and hard, but only because you’re not used to people pushing you.”

“They think I’m stupid” Xanxus snarls back, hand idly doodling one of his tutors getting impaled in a pit of severely sharpened pencils. “They look at me like I’m trash! Like teaching me is a waste of time!”

“Yeah, teachers can be like that” Tsuna admits, a bitter smile on his face. “I had a lot of trouble in school, and most teachers stopped trying to help after a certain point.”

That’s not surprising, considering Tsuna often looks at his homework like it’s an inexplicable cypher. “How the fuck did you get them to stop Tsuna-Trash.”

The man laughs. “I didn’t. Every teacher I had just gave up on me eventually. All except one. I got where I am because of him, whether I liked it or not.”

Xanxus already has Sky flames flaring when Tsuna reminisces, and they manage to avoid a full episode, with Tsuna ruffling his hair in thanks.

“The difference between you and me though, is you want to understand it. If you didn’t, you’d be proving them right.”

Storm flames start disintegrating the notebook in front of him, and Tsuna quickly peels it from his grip.

“When I was your age, people said I was useless, and I chose to believe them, because it was easier” Tsuna explains. “But you’re a King, Xanxus. You’re quality. There’s no doubt in my mind there’s nothing you can’t do if you truly decide you want to.”

Xanxus sits a little straighter at that, and glances at the homework with new purpose.

…Nah, he can worry about it later.

“So how goes the check-up’s Trash?” he asks, choosing to get off the subject for the far more important issue. Tsuna watches him push the paperwork to the side, but doesn’t call him on it. His Sky is awesome.

Or just knows he doesn’t have any room to judge. Either way’s good.

“I think just about every Sky in the Vongola and the allied families has passed through those doors by this point” Tsuna admits, lifting up a hand and bringing the orange flames to light. They look the same as they have done the last several days, a bright orange with a black core refusing to die.

Xanxus glares into the centre, trying to kill it off with sheer intent. Unfortunately, completing the
harmonisation nullified any remaining effect Xanxus had on eradicating the black flames. The working theory was now that they were harmonised, the night flames had a natural immunity to his Sky element.

Not that it stopped him from trying.

Stormy-Sky flames clapped onto the hand, clenching when they caused no change, and wincing when prodding the black flame specifically caused that same skin-crawling effect they had before. Tsuna is already pulling away, Sky flames flaring to calm Xanxus down.

“I hate that I can’t help” he hisses despite himself. Tsuna smiles.

“It’s okay Xanxus” he promises. “You kept me alive for months without even knowing you were doing it. Let Vongola finish the job and focus on yourself for a bit. You can learn a lot here, and I’ve never seen you happier than when you’re about to be fed. Dinner’s in what, two hours?”

“Two hours and Eighteen point five minutes” Xanxus corrects, and hides the blush with a scowl when Tsuna chuckles.

“Shut up! I’m not used to a fucking buffet for every meal alright? I’m allowed to look forward to it!”

Who can blame him? The first night he was here the nurses set him up with a plate of steak and veg. They seemed surprised he even touched the vegetables (you’re serving a street brat, morons, if it’s free and edible he’s eating it), but the second that meat touches his lips he felt like he’d gone to another plane of existence.

Tsuna doesn’t share his enthusiasm, spouting some crap about being ‘hopelessly Japanese this way’ and sticking to rice and noodle dishes. On the plus side, it means when they do serve Tsuna half a cow on a plate, he usually hides at least half of it away for Xanxus to eat later.

If he was solo, he’d be signing up for the Vongola just for the food. As it is, he knows the two of them will break out eventually, but he really hopes he can empty out the fridge on the way.

Two months later, and Tsuna is finally allowed to leave his room and start getting indoctrinated into the way of Vongola. The black flame is still ever present, but it’s getting smaller, and every now and then Xanxus swears he sees the colour change, but it happens too quickly to be sure. Tsuna still has to spend a few hours in the company of at least one Sky every morning and evening, but now he usually does it in the Sky’s office, while being escorted by one of the Ninth’s guardians.

He’s also joining Xanxus, the Ninth and his sons and their Guardians at dinner, which has gone from very close to the top of Xanxus’s favourite things to almost at the bottom, because the Ninth pries.

Not that he didn’t before. Xanxus ate dinner with the main Vongola family every night, and Timoteo would always ask questions about Xanxus’s upbringing and Tsuna. But while Xanxus had no issue telling him about his crappy existence, it seems abhorrently wrong to reveal anything about Tsuna. He knew so little about the man before they tripped into each other’s lives, he doesn’t want to share a crumb.

Timoteo had clearly figured out a few days into this strategy that Xanxus didn’t know most of what he was looking for anyway, and focused on Xanxus instead, which had worked out fine. But now they have Tsuna under a spotlight, and his Sky is not happy.

As it is, they spent the entire starter and half the main course revolving around one big question
mark. Where the hell Tsuna came from.

“You must understand that I’m sceptical” Timoteo insists as Tsuna averts his eyes. “You have too much understanding of your flames to have just stumbled upon them in Japan.”

“I don’t know what else to tell you” Tsuna replies. “I was raised in Japan and a tutor was the one who showed me how to use my flames.”

“Then why were you in Italy?”

Tsuna stabs his fork into the soft flesh of his steak a little too harshly.

“A wrong turn.”

Xanxus can feel Timoteo’s flames flaring, trying to coax Tsuna into revealing more, but Tsuna’s are shying away. He scowls, ready to snap his own flames to his defence, but Tsuna just catches his eye, and slips half of his steak onto Xanxus’s plate.

He grins and chomps down on the extra dish. He’d refused to mention the revelation Tsuna had given him about being mafia – and the man was clearly grateful. Though it did beg the question why Timoteo didn’t know of him anyway.

“Then who was your tutor?” Timoteo keeps pressing. “Perhaps I know of him?”

“I doubt it” Tsuna replies.

“True, especially considering that despite thorough investigations from CEDEF, we haven’t been able to find a trace of a Sawada Tsunayoshi living in Japan that is unaccounted for in the last 50 years.

Tsuna’s hands pause momentarily, while Xanxus feels his fork slip from his hand, clanging against the plate and ringing far too loudly.

“Really” Tsuna says, continuing to eat. “That’s interesting.”

That’s the breaking point for at least one of the Ninth’s Guardians, fist slamming on the table.

“Why don’t you just cut the bullshit and just tell us the truth!” he snaps. “We’re doing you the favour and you can’t even show common courtesy of transparency!”

“Ganauche!” Timoteo snaps.

“Ninth, this man is spitting in the face of your kindness” the Guardian pleads. “We can’t keep pretending that it’s safe to know nothing about him, no matter what you think of his origins.”

Tsuna sighs.

“You don’t need to believe me, but it’s the truth. I have no relations to any mafia families, and I was raised in Japan.”

“And you’re connection to Sawada Iemitsu?”

“…We never met” Tsuna replies stiffly. “I have no clue if I’m related to that line of Sawada’s or not. I also have no desire to be mafia, or cause any harm to Vongola.”

“That would be a lot easier to believe if you could explain-“
“I know, but those are the facts that I can share” Tsuna finishes, before glancing down at his plate and dropping the cutlery down.

“If that’s not enough for you, kick me out. But we both know you’re not going to do that, so let it go.”

He stood up.

“Forgive me, I don’t appear to have much of an appetite. Thank you for the meal.”

He gives a short bow and walks out of the room. Xanxus waits until he’s out of sight before he not-so-subtly pulls Tsuna’s plate towards him.

“Quite the independent spirit you’ve harmonised with” Timoteo muses, smiling at Xanxus. He smirks back with a mouthful of steak.

“You dun know the haf of it.”

That night, Xanxus can’t sleep, and finds himself storming down the hall to Tsuna’s new room a few doors down. There’s a prickle of Mist flames when he walks past – no doubt a guard making sure they’re not planning to flee – but he ignores it.

When he opens the door, he’s hit with crippling anxiety, even as he slips inside. It was one thing when they lived in a crappy house with lousy heating, but now Xanxus has a stupidly opulent room, as does his Sky, who has only just gotten out of constant medical supervision. What the hell is he doing here?

Before his mind can think to answer those questions, something moves from the bed, and Xanxus spots eyes glowing orange in the dark.

Tsuna stares at him wordlessly, before lying back down with the covers to his right pulled back.

“Come on” he says. “I’m too tired to hear you pretend to justify it. Get in here.”

The knot loosens, and Xanxus crawls under the blanket, curled under Tsuna’s chin as the man pulls the covers back over the two of them. Flames cloak Xanxus immediately, and both can feel the misty presence outside relax as it finally accepts that it’s nothing to worry about. Xanxus smirks, already feeling lethargic, and grabs a chunk of Tsuna’s shirt in a vice grip as he closes his eyes.

Above him, Tsuna gives a tiny sneeze, head trying to avoid the ridiculously messy spikes that made up his Storm’s hair.

“You’re going to need to do something with this mop soon” he muses to the room, tugging at one of the strands. “It’s getting a little long to leave alone.”

Xanxus chuckles. “Like you’re one to talk. Can’t believe those spikes are natural.”

“Yours is spiky too” Tsuna offers, hand twisting through his hair. “Just not quite as obvious. It flops when it grows out. You could pull off a ponytail better than I could.”

The boy groans. “Forget it, I’d look like a girl.”

“Maybe a braid?” Tsuna offers. “I knew a really strong guy who had a braid.”

That gets a snort. “How the hell would I know how to do that Trash? I’ll just cut it off.”
“Sorry. I had a little girl who stayed with my family for a while, she taught me how to braid, but that’s about it.”

His hand is still running through his hair, and Xanxus lets himself drift off. When he wakes up, Tsuna’s already gone, but most of his hair has been pulled into a short, loose braid. It looks utterly ridiculous, and he immediately brushes it out.

But while he’s not paying attention to his tutors, he starts stringing short chunks together into tiny braids for practice.

Xanxus sneaks into Tsuna’s bed at least once a week, but Vongola keep him so busy he usually passes out till morning. Once he starts making headway in his tutoring, his classes start reducing to make time for Xanxus’s favourite pastime. Shooting things. They take him to the gun range a month after Tsuna is released from the Medical Wing, and the boy has to be dragged out every time. He loves guns.

Flame theory is also getting hammered into him by someone whose credentials are less shaky than Tsuna’s (although so far they’ve yet to tell him anything useful Tsuna hasn’t already revealed) and a sparring partner for learning to fight with them, usually consisting of one of the three Vongola heirs.

That, ironically, was the only time Tsuna actively fought against Xanxus’s training, insisting that he should be allowed to do that. It was the Sky trying to be protective of his Storm, and as a compromise, Tsuna got to train Xanxus twice a week.

Unfortunately for the man, he also had to train other members of Vongola the other five days – it was only meant to be three, but once word got out just how good Tsuna was at flame hand-to-hand combat, the number of eager volunteers doubled. It was all Xanxus could do to get private sessions with him anymore.

After almost a year of grooming, check-ups and observation, Vongola decide it’s time to announce their new arrivals to the world. They’re holding a function in Vongola’s main banquet hall, and both Xanxus and Tsuna are expected to attend. Both have been getting etiquette crammed into them with constant lessons, although Tsuna gained many a frustrated teacher when it became clear he knew what to do, but was mostly choosing to ignore the lessons in the hopes that the Ninth would change his mind.

Tsuna’s also been spending a lot more time in meetings with Timoteo for reasons Xanxus wasn’t privy too. He’s been talking to the boss a lot more than usual lately, and Timoteo hasn’t looked particularly happy after the meetings. Rumours around the mansion suggest Timoteo wanted Tsuna to do something, while Tsuna wanted Timoteo to do something else, and neither were willing to budge. Xanxus gets the feeling this event is some kind of compromise between the two.

Xanxus isn’t looking forward to being presented to a bunch of rich old men either, but he’s been promised good food and the chance to make connections, so he’s gritting his teeth and powering through.

Plus, he’s now been introduced to the concept of ‘bespoke.’

In his short life, Xanxus had never really put much thought into clothing. Most of what he owned was second hand and was selected for functionality, not style. He’d heard what some Trash could spend on a shirt and trousers and scoffed at the sheer frivolity of it all.

It’s a bitter thing to choke back words, but at age ten, he’s wearing his first tailor made suit, and he
completely, utterly, gets it.

The fabric is so soft he might as well not be wearing anything, and the cut has far more flexibility than a dress suit has any right to have. When Xanxus stares into the mirror, he’s standing straighter, his shoulders firm, and desperately wishes he’d listened to Federico on how to style hair for the full effect. The Vongola heir was the only one of the three who was willing to help him with the mop and share gel. Right now his hair is just a messy bedraggled knot with a handful of braids tucked under his ear, and looks utterly out of place.

Sadly, Federico is going to be far too busy preparing for the party, so maybe Tsuna will be able to lay some harmony on the hair. He knocks on the door before pushing straight in.

“Yo Tsuna, you got any ideas on how to fix this—what the hell are you wearing Tsuna-Trash!”

The man looks up from the bed where he’s lying, reading through a report Xanxus is fairly certain he’s not supposed to have without a chaperone, and next to him is a suit. Probably a fine make, looking very similar to the one he’d been wearing when they first met. So why the hell is his Sky still dressed in brown slacks and an oversized sweatshirt?

Xanxus growls. He does not have time for this. His Sky follows his gaze, and winces.

“Yeah, I can’t really bring myself to put it on just yet.”

That just gets him an eyeroll and a disgusted snarl as Xanxus Storms over and starts yanking the sweatshirt off.

“All this wealth just lying around and you’re still running around in second-hand trash” Xanxus snaps. “Newsflash, somebody wants to give you a stupidly expensive shirt, you put on the stupidly expensive shirt and enjoy the feeling.”

He tosses the sweatshirt in a corner, before grabbing the shirt and tosses it over. Tsuna catches it out of the air, and sighs when he takes in the vivid orange. He just keeps sitting and stroking the fabric, eyes starting to fade out. That’s never good, and Xanxus sighs, jumping onto the bed and leaning into him.

“Use your words Trash” he mutters. “What’s screwing you up this time.”

That succeeds in getting a sharp chuckle from the man, before he drops the shirt in his lap.

“It’s just…I really hoped I’d never have to wear something like this again” he admits. “For everything I lost, the idea that I might have broken free of the mafia was…for a while, the only thing that kept me going. But now here I am, in a mafia household, surrounded by mafia, about to be introduced to mafia society, and I’m doing it all willingly. Am I really that weak?”

Xanxus scowls, and elbows the man in the ribs.

“You’re not fucking weak Trash! You’re strong! If you let yourself die in the street, then you’re pathetic. We’re alive, and getting stronger every day. And when we arrive in that room, you’re going to show them that.”

“…I don’t want to though” Tsuna whispers. “I just want to be left alone.”

“And that’s never gonna be an option so buck it up and dress up!” Xanxus snaps, pushing and prodding at Tsuna until the man stood, then scowled until the man started to dress. The second the shirt was on, Xanxus threw the trousers in his direction, before noting a tie and shoving it into his
pocket.

Ties were too much like collars, and neither he nor Tsuna were collared just yet.

Once Tsuna had finally gotten dressed, Xanxus tossed the suit jacket on the man’s head and walked over to the dresser in the corner, sitting on the table and leaning on the wood.

“Now that you’re done with the mental breakdown, you have any idea how to fix this miss?” he said, pointing to his hair, once the man had pulled the jacket off. Tsuna cocks his head, before sighing and giving a small smile and heading over. The jacket is quickly flung on before Tsuna pulls him back on the chair, and starts brushing his hair.

“We should have gotten it cut sooner” he muses, frowning at the frayed ends. “Did you use your flames to cut this?”

“No!” Xanxus snapped. He hasn’t. He may have gotten a little too close to explosives in the gun range, but he hasn’t been stupid enough to use flames for personal reasons.

Tsuna just hums, taking in the hair before coming to a decision. He leaves the three small braids on the side of his head alone, and pulls the hair into a sharp braid, the line trailing into Xanxus’s collar and out of sight. The tufts on his hair are slicked back with some kind of wax Tsuna has hiding in the dresser, and Xanxus grins as a mafioso emerges from the bird’s nest.

Still…

“I think I’m gonna shave the sides tomorrow” Xanxus decides, taking in the look. “Long hair doesn’t work on me. Maybe I’ll let what’s left spike like yours”

Tsuna slicks back one last strand and grins.

“I don’t know, maybe you should grow out the fringe. You look cool with it long and loose.”

“How?”

“…Nothing.”

That gets him an eyeroll, and Xanxus yanks his hair from Tsuna’s grasp before glancing back over at the bed.

“So, what were you looking at Trash?”

Tsuna follows his gaze, then pauses, glancing between his Storm and documents, clearly torn, before walking over and picking them up.

“This, is all the information Vongola currently have on the Estrano” Tsuna explains.

Xanxus feels his jaw drop.

“Seriously Trash? You can really hold a fucking grudge.”

That’s kind of awesome though. He honestly didn’t think Tsuna had it in him.

Sadly, his Sky nips that belief in the bud.

“It’s not a grudge. They’re experimenting on flame active children” Tsuna says. “I…I need to find them. I need to stop Estrano and get them out before it’s too late. I won’t ever be able to look them
in the eye if I don’t.”

“Who?” Xanxus presses, though he can guess it’s the ex-guardian Tsuna mentioned the last time they tangled with the Estrano.

Tsuna shudders, his eyes brightening as he brushes off the shadows, and shoves the folder into a drawer near his bed.

“It doesn’t matter” he promises, turning to look over his bed.

“Now, did you see a tie when you were tossing clothes at me?”

Federico clearly wants to throw a fit when both of them appear without ties, but since doing so will give Xanxus an excuse not to behave, holds his tongue.

Tsuna has managed to talk the Ninth out of a giant spectacle, and the two of them slip into the ballroom with little aplomb. Tsuna is already scouting the tallest guests, while Xanxus’s eyes immediately lock onto the buffet table. Before Timoteo or his three sons can grab either of them, they’ve vanished into the crowd.

Xanxus is a child, and Tsuna is a short man in a room of men bred for intimidation, so it’s hard to catch them. They find Xanxus first, mostly because he’s stationary and they’ve long since realised the street kid will hunt down any food that’s going. He’s just grabbed a second helping of some weird pink paste along with shrimp when Massimo clamps a hand on his shoulder.

“Alright kiddo, time for you to meet some folks” he says rather jovially considering he has a vice grip on the boy. He hisses at the nickname, but is marched towards Timoteo and his guests, a man and a young blond boy just a few years younger than him. Timoteo smiles at his arrival.

“Ah, Xanxus, there you are” he greets. “I’d like to introduce you to the Cavallone Boss, and his son, Dino.”

Dino looked about as happy to be there as Tsuna had, but holds out a hand and gives a nervous smile.

“N-Nice to meet you. I’m Dino Cavallone, Sky flames.”

Xanxus glares down at the hand, but gives it a brief shake regardless.

“Xanxus. Storm and Sky flames.”

To his confusion, both Cavallone frown at his words. Timoteo just smiles.

“Xanxus here is a Sky, but he’s also harmonised to our other newest member, Sawada Tsunayoshi.”

“Sawada? As in-“

“That’s still up for debate. Xanxus, I don’t suppose you know where he is?”

Xanxus looks up, then glances through the room, flames flickering slightly.

He locates Tsuna immediately, off in the far left near the windows. But the second his Sky felt his flames, he was on the move, away from Xanxus. He glances back up.

“He’s mingling” he mutters.
Timoteo sighs. “Of course he is.”

“So Xanxus,” The Cavallone boss begins. “I’m sure it’s still some time away, but do you know your future plans? I know Timoteo’s been looking for an heir for CEDEF ever since Iemitsu’s passing.”

“CEDEF?” Xanxus queries. He knows of it from his studies, and understands its importance, but it holds no interest to him due to its lack of importance during peacetime, Xanxus is a fighter and wouldn’t be able to stand it.

That’s hardly a politically correct answer though.

“Not unless Tsuna-Tr…Tsunayoshi decides to join” Xanxus answers, crossing his arms and glancing around the room again for Tsuna. “We’re staying together.”

Eyebrows are raised at the reply. “Such loyalty is commendable…”

Judging from the way he glances at Timoteo, and the way the Vongola boss stiffens, Xanxus gets the feeling he’s missing a big chunk of the conversation.

“I would like Tsunayoshi to consider the position” Timoteo agrees. “But it requires a level of trust we’ve yet to establish. Xanxus would be a better option.”

“Really? Despite the harmonisation?”

“Their relationship is somewhat…unique. However, there is a new development with Tsunayoshi which would make it more understandable…”

Xanxus scowls as they talk over his head, only to feel Tsuna’s flames shudder, the way they only do when he’s stressed. He locks them down almost instantly, so Xanxus can’t even try to get to him, and his own flames ripple in frustration. They pause when they feel another Sky flame brush them instinctively, and glances over at Dino, who squeaks and darts behind his father’s leg.

“Xanxus! No intimidating our guests.”

The boy bites the instinctive ‘he started it’ and steps back.

“Quite the livewire you’ve got there.”

They all turn at the feminine voice, and Xanxus frowns as he takes in the very small people walking towards them.

They look like toddlers, but they’re clearly not. One is female with a vicious scar on the side of her face, while the other is dressed in a black suit and fedora.

‘Arcobaleno’ his lessons remind him, just as the edges of their flames hit him and he stands a little straighter. These are some of the most powerful people in the world, no matter what they look like.

“Good to see you Lal Mirch” Timoteo greets. “And you Reborn. I wasn’t sure you would be able to make it.”

“Hm, when Vongola announce the introduction of two previously unknown skies of such…pedigree, curiosity won out over business obligations” Reborn replies.

“Speaking of which, I see the brat but where’s the other one? You fools keeping him locked up or just playing us for fools?” Lal chimes up, clearly not even pretending to be polite.
Xanxus likes her already.

“She’s somewhat shy, but I’m sure Xanxus is capable of hunting him down.”

Timoteo is smiling at Xanxus, who winces when he realises the trap.

“Fuck it, fine. Wait here and I’ll drag him over” Xanxus snaps, ignoring Massimo’s groan and Dino’s squeak at his cursing as he breaks away. He’s been holding his tongue all night, they can give him that.

It takes a few small flares, but he eventually detects Tsuna hiding in a corner, using a few tall mafioso and a potted plant to hide himself. He’s exceptionally pale, and looks like he’s seen a ghost. Clearly, he wants to be anywhere but here.

Xanxus ignores it, suppressing his flames as much as he dares, and darts forward to grab Tsuna by the edge of his jacket. The man squawks in surprise.

“Hiei!”

Xanxus grins.

“No more running Tsuna-Trash” he crows. “I’ve had to play nice all evening, now it’s your turn. Cavallone and some midgets want to meet you.”

Tsuna shudders, flames jerking in reflex. “Xanxus, please. I can’t. I’m not ready.”

The boy just snorts, already pulling him towards Timoteo and flaring his flames to let the man know he’s found the Sky. “What’s to be ready for Trash? You say hi, shake a stupid hand and make stupid small talk before you make an excuse to leave. It’s easy.”

Tsuna’s shoes squeak along the floor.

“No. Nonononono, not them. Please, anyone here but Reborn. I can’t take that.”

That makes Xanxus pause, and glances at Tsuna in confusion.

“What, you know the baby?”

His Sky opens his mouth, then closes it again. Hands flail helplessly, unable to explain any more than words can. When Xanxus sees an answer isn’t coming, he just keeps tugging, and flares his flames so that Timoteo will feel where they are. Seconds later, he feels the skies and the scarily strong babies heading their way. Tsuna’s eyes have gone terrifyingly wide, and it’s starting to frustrate Xanxus.

“Will you just man the fuck up and do this one little-“

He doesn’t get a chance to answer. Tsuna floods him and the few surrounding mafioso with Sky flames, dropping several to their knees while Xanxus clings to a nearby table, drunk on flames.

It vanishes soon as it comes, and when Xanxus recovers, the Arcobaleno are on the table, frowning at the residue, while Timoteo and the Cavallone glance around.

Tsuna is no longer anywhere to be found, though Xanxus can just about pick him up. He’s still in the building, but definitely not the ballroom. Probably went for the patio doors and jumped off a balcony to a lower floor, bastard moves fast when properly motivated.
As he gets to his feet, he finds himself staring at Reborn, the man his tutors say is the Greatest Hitman in the World.

“Pity. I heard from Timoteo that you’d harmonised to quite the powerful Sky” he says. “I didn’t expect him to be cowardly too.”

The looks in the eyes of people nearby suggest they feel the same way, and he can feel the looks of pity on his back even as he glares at the Arcobaleno. Xanxus grits his teeth, but doesn’t try to defend Tsuna. The toddler’s not wrong. At the end of the day, Tsuna turned and ran rather than talk to a handful of people powerful and influential people. Now everyone in this room thinks Tsuna is a coward. That he’s weak, and by association, so is Xanxus.

For the first time since they harmonised, he’s angry that Tsuna’s his Sky.

Xanxus’s flames were fluctuating for the rest of the party, to the point that Timoteo insisted he excuse himself. Tsuna was waiting for him outside the door, looking apologetic. Xanxus didn’t wait to hear it, ignoring the man and storming down the hall, Storm flames almost strong enough to disintegrate the carpet beneath him. Behind him, Tsuna is chasing him down, Sky flames out and trying to calm the red flames down-

“Xanxus, wait!”

-Only to get rebuffed by a boy eager to hold onto his anger as long as he can. When he reaches his room, the door opens with a slam, but he holds it open long enough to Tsuna to slip in before slamming it shut again. He knows Tsuna well enough to know that if he slams the door in his face, the Sky will walk away, and he still has plenty to tell the man that just embarrassed them both. He throws his arms out, screeching at his Sky.

“I can’t believe you just ran and hid!”

Tsuna winces, running his hands through his hair.

“I know. I messed up. I didn’t think any of the Arcobaleno would be there and I panicked.”

“Why the fuck would that even matter!” Xanxus roars. “I fucking asked Reborn if he knew you, and you know what he said? He’d never fucking heard of you before Timoteo took you in. Neither did Lal Mirch, so why would meeting them be so fucking difficult?”

“…It’s comp-“

“YOU SAY IT’S FUCKING COMPLICATED ONE MORE TIME AND I’LL THROW YOU OUT THE WINDOW!”

Xanxus grabs something small but heavy from his desk and hurls it at the Sky. Tsuna throws his arm up to defend, but does little else.

“Now everyone in that room thinks I’m weak!” Xanxus screams. “Because only a weakling would harmonise with a coward who runs from strong flames. From someone who can’t even give the people SAVING HIS FUCKING LIFE the one favour of playing nice in front of their allies!”

Tsuna doesn’t answer, just stares at Xanxus in misery. Xanxus throws his hands up in the air, his final comment spat out before he can register the words.

“You’re a fucking disgrace to Vongola Trash!”
Tsuna’s eyes widen in shock, and Xanxus pales as he realises just what he’s said.

The two of them aren’t supposed to be Vongola. This was meant to be temporary. He was the one who told Tsuna that they didn’t need to join Vongola, just use them until he was better, and then go on the run again.

Tsuna’s been working on that understanding. Xanxus…

Xanxus had forgotten that. Had let the Ninth and his brothers and Vongola lure him away with the very things he’d rejected for Tsuna two years ago.

He swallows, tries to take the words back and-

‘I don’t want to.’

That thought is almost as bad as his outburst, but it’s true. It’s so much harder to give up paradise once you’ve had a taste of it.

Tsuna doesn’t want to be mafia, but Xanxus does. He wants it with everything he is. Vongola can give it to him, will happily give it to him. Even Tsuna says he’s a natural, a King. Tsuna can learn to be happy here, surely? It’s not like the Ninth has him out performing hits, he’s a paper pusher and a trainer.

Somehow, he doesn’t think voicing that will make it any better.

Ironically, it’s Tsuna that breaks the silence, with a harsh, broken laugh that shatters something deep inside Xanxus. He desperately wants something to shoot, but there’s no target other than himself, and his Storm flames react harshly.

His Sky drops to his seat, ignoring the red flames and pulling at his hair before looking up to stare at Xanxus, eyes glistening.

“I don’t know what to do now Xanxus” he admits. “Vongola is good for you. I’ve known they would be since I met you. Taking you away could only cripple you – you need to be here, but-”

His head drops.

“I can’t be loyal to Vongola” he says. “One day they’re going to want more than what I can offer and I just can’t. I’m not a mafioso-“

“But you could be!” Xanxus interrupts. “You’d be a fucking awesome-“

“And I don’t want to be,” Tsuna finishes, silencing Xanxus’s protests.

Xanxus feels both his flames flare at his next words.

“I think it’s time we parted ways.”

“LIKE FUCKING HELL WE ARE!”

Xanxus is already storming up to him, eyes furious, ready to spew the same words he’s been telling Tsuna over and fucking over since Xanxus chose him. They’re a team, and they’ll work it out together, mafioso or not, because that’s what they do.

Tsuna however, isn’t ready to play ball. He gets to his feet faster than Xanxus can track, and for the first time, slams Xanxus into the wall, flames flaring.
“I’m not saying we stop being harmonised!” Tsuna yells. “You’ll still be mine dammit! But if I stay in the main Vongola branch, my bloodline will force the Ninth to push me into either CEDEF or a higher underboss position. Skies can’t be left in the lower masses, it doesn’t work that way.”

“Then what the fuck are you suggesting!” Xanxus snarls back, point blank refusing to acknowledge how much of a thrill Tsuna dominating him is. “Your flames aren’t fully recovered yet Trash!”

Tsuna’s hands clench.

“I’ve been speaking to a family that’s neutral regarding Vongola” he says. “They have a strong Sky who’s willing to help me, and I can go there under the guise of forging an alliance. They’re powerful enough that Vongola will struggle to say no. I’m almost fully stable now, it won’t take much more, especially if it’s a completely new Sky. It’s what Timoteo and I have been talking about, I was planning on telling you this week.”

The man takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself, and releases his Storm from the wall.

“Once I’m done, I’ll keep travelling – I have ties in Japan, if I stay in contact, the Ninth will let me stay away. Especially when he realises I’m doing it to support you.”

“…What?”

Tsuna stares at him in sympathy.

“Xanxus, you introduce yourself as my Storm first, when you need to be introducing yourself as a Sky. Being known as a Storm will cripple you on your way to the top. I love being your Sky, I do, but you’re a Sky too, and a very important one. You know that right?”

His confusion and frustration must be evident, because Tsuna stares at him with sharp realisation.

“The Ninth has never shown you, has he?” he says. “You don’t know why the two of us are so special.”

Xanxus frowns. Tsuna bites his lip, before his eyes narrow.

“Come with me.”

---

Tsuna gets less freedom to navigate the mansion than Xanxus, so the boy can’t even begin to explain how Tsuna manages to walk down the corridors and down stairs without getting lost. Logically, the man shouldn’t even be aware that this floor exists. Xanxus sure as hell hadn’t.

“It’s technically accessible by the library, but they’ve got monitors on the door” Tsuna explains. “Normally these would hang in the main hall, but I think they chose to move them when we arrived.”

“Why?”

“Trust me, you’ll know when you see them” Tsuna promises.

Finally, they pause at the start of a long thin corridor, the odd door littered along the walls but otherwise left empty. It’s the kind of place rich folk use to showcase fancy art, and there’s definitely portraits on display.

Then Tsuna turns on the lights and Xanxus forgets how to breathe.
It’s not Tsuna, but the likeness is so eerie Xanxus would be willing to call him Tsuna’s father or uncle or something. He’s not Asian, not like one of the other men in the painting clearly is, and his hair is blonde, but the hairstyle, the look he has in his eye, the way he carries himself in a suit, that smile…

“Trash” Xanxus whispers. “Who the fuck is this?”

He feels a hand drop to his shoulder, fingers digging into skin.

“The Vongola Primo” Tsuna tells him. “The founder of the Vongola family, and his Guardians. When he started the Vongola, it was a vigilante group, but he struggled to cope with the monster he made when they started to grow too powerful.”

Xanxus swallows, taking in the painting with dull awe. No fucking wonder Tsuna was so terrified of staying, who wouldn’t when they were the spitting image of the man he built the empire they stood in but wanted no part of it.

Tsuna however, isn’t done, and pushes him forward.

“Oi, Trash!”

“This isn’t the main reason I brought you here Xanxus” Tsuna warns him. “Brace yourself.”

He barely has time to consider the words when they reach the next painting, and Xanxus almost drops to his knees.

Because give him ten, twenty years? The man in the centre of the painting could be him.

“Ricardo, the Vongola Secondo” Tsuna reveals. “The Primo’s cousin, and the one responsible for most of Vongola’s criminal success.”

He’s not even looking at the other men in the painting, eyes focused on the ponytailed mafioso that shares his face.

“You knew” he whispers. “That’s why you knew I was Vongola, even if I wasn’t the old man’s son. Why he wanted us so much.”

He and Tsuna look like the first two bosses of their family reborn. Vongola would have razed Italy rather than let them swear loyalty somewhere else. The intimidation effect alone…

Is that why Tsuna vanished in the party? Xanxus is still young, the likeness forgivable, but Tsuna… Vongola didn’t need to do anything but show him off in order to make a point. What would powerhouses like the Arcobaleno think at the first bosses ‘return?’

It soothes some of the wrath in Xanxus’s heart, but not nearly as much as the feelings that come from the idea that he was truly born for this life. How Tsuna can’t feel the same is beyond him.

“If you want to be a King, Xanxus, this is where you need to be” Tsuna continues. “But I don’t want to be, which means I need to get out of here. Part of me knew you wouldn’t come. And there’s part of me that’s grateful for it.”

Storm flames flare in anger, but vanish when they see the glint in Tsuna’s eye.

That’s not black flames, that’s…

He’s not sure, but it’s not black, and it’s not orange.
It’s clear Tsuna realises he’s spotted it, and smiles, even as the black snuffs it out and both die down.

“I need space Xanxus” he finishes. “Space to figure out what’s left when the night flame is gone for good. Flames affect people, and I need to be somewhere safe to figure out who I am while I work it out. And you need to spend some time being a Sky and not just my Storm.”

Xanxus feels his teeth clench, and digs fingernails into his palms. It makes sense, he knows it makes sense, and yet…

“You’ll come back, right, Trash?” he hisses out, refusing to let his voice crack. “It’s temporary, and you’ll come back for me.”

Tsuna is already kneeling, arms wrapped around Xanxus and Sky flames wrapping the two of them up with fierce protectiveness.

“Of course I will” he promises, with more focus and determination than Xanxus can ever remember hearing his Sky offer. “I’m yours, your mine, nothing is going to change that. I promised.”

Two weeks later, Tsuna is gone.

An hour after he says goodbye, Xanxus hears some underbosses talking about the ‘fraidy-cat Sky’ and discovers something called Flames of Wrath.

Nobody trash talks Tsuna in his presence again.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

You're getting this early because I got some really awesome reviews via fanfiction.net and decided what I had was worth posting even if it's half as long as I wanted. Plus if I get it out of my head maybe I can stop wandering into this file and start pushing through the last 60% of the next chapter of DK&T.

Slightly different format this time. Originally it was going to be a Tsuna centric chapter, but starting to think that's best left until the last chapter (which is now a lot further away than planned, what is wrong with me???) and so it's Xanxus on his own, taking it as well as can be expected. A lot happens, but most of it is happening away from our favourite stormy sky.

Chapter 4

Tsuna has been gone for three months, two weeks, and five days. It feels like years.

Xanxus has found his temperament nosediving as he tries to grapple with the keen loss of his sky. The man is still in Italy, but so far away it might as well be America. He’d given Xanxus a secure number for his new home, and the phone has rung twice, but his pride won’t let him answer it or let him return the call. If Tsuna wants to stay in contact, he can damn well come back and talk to him face to face.

This decision however is doing nothing for his harmony. His storm flames are utterly frustrated, and sky flames come out more often than not just to keep him from destructing. On that regard, his education is taking huge steps forward. Two months in and sky flames are his go to instead of storm. It’s a pretty big deal for a dual flame like himself, but it doesn’t feel like it.

The Vongola seem happy at any rate. They’re starting to talk about introducing him to a few appropriate flame actives, and Xanxus was torn between being irritated at their expectations, and thrilled that he might finally start filling in this hole that comes with being an active sky.

Although…maybe he should wait until Tsuna returns. Not that he needs his approval, but he’d be more than a little pissed if Tsuna came back with another element without consulting him. He’ll be back soon, there’s no need to rush, right?

That’s the mindset he keeps following right up until he walks past one of the conservatories and overhears Tsuna’s name being hissed between three of Nono’s guardians.

“He’s left Italy with his host. Sources say he’s gone to Japan.”

Xanxus feels his blood chill.

“He did at least leave with the Giglio Nero boss” another replies. “That does suggest he will return.”

“And they did contact us to explain the absence.”

“That’s hardly the point! The agreement was for him to remain in the Giglio Nero home, not go
gallivanting in Asia!"

Xanxus has heard enough, throwing himself away from the door and running to his room. He digs through the front drawer of his desk and finds the card with the number.

His hands aren’t shaking when they make the call, no matter how many misdials he makes. They’re not.

Tsuna wouldn’t leave. Tsuna promised he wouldn’t leave. That he’s coming back for Xanxus. He is.

It takes a biblically long time for the phone to answer, and his flames spike at the unfamiliar man on the other end, accusation in his voice.

“How did you get this number?”

“Where the fuck is Tsuna-Trash!” he snarls. “What the hell is this about Japan!”

“Ahhh” the man says, tone softening. “You must be Master Xanxus.”

Xanxus burns part of his desk as the patronisation.

“Oi! Answer the question!”

“I’m afraid Master Sawada is unable to connect at this moment” the man replies. “He is in Japan looking for a distant relative.”

What?

“If that’s all, I would like to get back to my duties-“

“No! It’s not all!” Xanxus snaps. “Why the fuck wouldn’t he tell me?”

“That’s a question you will need to take up with him” is the reply he gets. “Good day Master Xanxus.”

He hears the dial tone, and his curtains burst into flames.

He’s in a foul mood for the rest of the day, and spends the night tossing and turning and contemplating turning the 200-hundred-year-old antique he calls a bed into splinters, when his phone starts ringing. He almost trips on the blankets trying to reach it in time. By the fifth ring, he’s spitting teeth with anger and fear.

The phone is in his hand, and with just a split second to remember there are other people on this floor, manages to lower the volume of his yell. Partially.

“Where the fuck are you Trash!” Xanxus yells.

There’s a groan on the other end.

“Hello to you to Xanxus.”

It’s Tsuna. It’s really Tsuna.
...Xanxus is going to kill him.

"Why are you in Japan?" Xanxus hisses. "You said you were just going to another mafia estate!"

He viciously bites down on the question, 'are you coming back?'

"I swear, this wasn’t intentional" Tsuna insists. "I was going to tell you, but you never answered when I called. A few weeks ago, I let something slip to Luce about a relative in Japan that I might have and one thing led to another and...well, I always intended to come to Japan to find her eventually. This just sped things up."

"You have family trash? Since when?"

Tsuna groans, and Xanxus rolls his eyes.

"Let me guess. It's complicated. Fine, did you find her?"

"...I did."

He sounds so melancholy Xanxus feels his flames flare in an attempt to calm his sky, despite the futility of the act.

"Didn’t go well?"

"No...yes...I don’t know" Tsuna sighs. "She’s happy to see me, and I’m really happy that’s she’s okay but...I guess I was hoping things would be different for her. I don’t really know how to act around her and it’s not safe to be a big part of her life."

Xanxus frowns. When Tsuna had said relative, he’d assumed the man had either gone to stay with them, or collect them back to Italy, but...

"You’re coming back right?"

He winces as he finally snaps and asks the question. Tsuna just chuckles.

"Yes Xanxus. I’m coming back" he says, with the tone of someone who’d been expecting the question. "If nothing else, I’m still not fully recovered. Two more weeks and then Luce is escorting me back."

"I want to know the second you’re off the plane" Xanxus warns.

"Will you answer the phone this time?"

The boy winces at the bite.

"...Yeah. I’m sorry Tsuna-trash."

The man sighs.

"It’s okay. I know you’re not happy about any of this. How are you coping? Are you improving with your sky flames?"

Xanxus scoffs, leaning back on the chair and smirking.

"Please. I’m leaving half the trash in this building in the dust. By the time you get back I bet I’ll have a dozen Guardian wannabes."
He finds himself rattling off a play by play of the last several months, barely interrupted by Tsuna as he lets loose all his frustrations and lessons. By the time he comes back to reality and lets Tsuna hang up, the sun is starting to peak through the window. Oops.

True to his word, Tsuna is back in the country before the end of the month. He guessed as much when all of the Ninth’s guardians (and the old man himself) stopped walking around like they had lemons in their mouths. But Tsuna confirmed it with a phone call in the evening, despite sounding ridiculously jetlagged.

“I need rain flames” he moaned. “I’m exhausted but I can’t sleep, and everything’s moving.”

Xanxus grins at the voice.

“How’d it go with the family Trash?”

Tsuna makes some weird sound that’s probably meant to be recognisable but gave up midway through, and Xanxus can all but see him running a hand through his hair.

“Better. Yeah, better than it was. Decided to transfer some of the allowance Vongola gives me to their bank account, help them out a little. Got them a better job too, good for her, good for them. I hope.”

“Half figured you’d come bringing them back.”

The man on the other side of the phone chuckled. “No, if I know one thing, it’s that they’re happier not knowing about the Vongola. She’ll stay in Japan, and I’ll make a point to stay in contact as much as I can. I’ve got someone looking out for her too, and she can look out for him. Just wish I could help her more, she really wants a family to love that can be around her all the time. It’s the least of what she deserves.”

That entire drawl starts in that lilt Xanxus hates, but he shakes it off and is back before he finishes the last sentence. Xanxus can’t help but grin – if Tsuna’s managing to pull himself out that easily now, he must be close to being cured.

“How about you?” Tsuna asks, bringing Xanxus back to the conversation. “Did you find your dozen guardian wannabes?”

Xanxus goes bright red.

“J-just shut up trash!”

He ends the call not long after. The meetings hadn’t gone quite the way he’d expected, and he should have seen it coming considering he’s not family, family. The handful of flames that have been brought over for dinner are the children of smaller mafioso families or much older men who had reached a level in Vongola that Nono was looking to reward them. Or give them incentive not to leave for another sky.

Essentially, all of them were weak, immature or not looking to follow Xanxus as much as make a deal for their family. Each and every one of them was an insult and he’d let the Ninth know about it loudly and violently. He’d looked disappointed, but Xanxus hadn’t been forced to go to another dinner, so he counted it as a win.

In hindsight, Xanxus can sort of see why he’d been shown to low value elements. He’s not in line
for Boss, he’s technically loyal to a sky whose loyalty to Vongola is questionable, and the Ninth doesn’t really know what Xanxus is going to do for Vongola in the future.

Perhaps that’s why he finds himself being sent to CEDEF for additional flame training with Lal Mirch, the one Arcobaleno 100% loyal to Vongola. It’s a major part of Vongola that runs fairly independently, but there’s nobody really in charge since the previous boss had retired just before his protégé kicked the bucket in a shooting gone bad. Lal’s been left to pick up the slack, but finding leaders in Vongola is a difficult feat. None of the sons want the gig due to the necessity of removing themselves from succession, and it takes Xanxus all of 45 minutes to realise the training is a farce to see how well he and Lal get on. Harmonising with the current life support of CEDEF would almost guarantee him the seat of power. On paper, it makes perfect sense for Xanxus, a sky with no right to inherit, to aim for here.

It’s not a bad plan either, because Lal’s idea of training meshes well with Xanxus’s general opinion of life. She also doesn’t see the point in keeping liquor away from ‘kids’ when they’re capable of destroying buildings. Xanxus is pretty certain that if they did harmonise, they’d work well together, but he just can’t shake the feeling that she’s utterly wrong for him.

Maybe it’s because she’s a mist and cloud, two of the more unstable flame types. Technically she’s a rain too, but it never comes out. The last thing Xanxus needs is more issues in his harmony.

Or maybe it’s because she harmonising means heading into CEDEF. It’s a role he’s starting to realise Vongola would very much like Xanxus to consider, but he shies away on principal. It might give him power on a level only rivalled by the Ninth, but there’s too much paperwork, too much micro-managing. His gut tells him he’ll go crazy in that part of Vongola.

If he’s honest. Really, truly honest; he doesn’t want to cut off any chance he has for inheritance. He wants to become Decimo. He wants to rule the family as well as his ancestor did, ideally with a right hand with messy hair and no comprehension of fashion.

But that’s never going to happen. There’s no direct biological link between him and the old man, and Tsuna would rather pull his teeth out with a pair of pliers than take such a direct role in a mafioso organisation, so it’s a pipe dream from the get go. He needs to find somewhere else to belong.

An underboss could be satisfying, so long as it was one that got to do something rather than sit on their ass all day telling people what to do from a desk.

Dammit, he needs Tsuna back so he can figure this out. How the hell can he figure out the future if he doesn’t know what the stupid Trash is planning?

Three months, fifteen phone calls, and Tsuna still isn’t back yet. As an added bonus, Tsuna had warned him he’d be out of touch for the next few weeks. He’d still be in Italy, but his flames were going through a vicious reigniting process as the night flames finally fade and whatever’s replacing them takes root. For someone used to having active flames, it’s like going through puberty again – he’s experiencing mood swings, personality freak-outs and the occasional waking-up-in-the-middle-of-the-night-to-burning-sheets. Xanxus laughs himself sick when he hears it, and just laughs harder when Tsuna offers a multitude of swears and hangs up on him…only to call five minutes later sobbing and apologising profusely.

With his sky out of availability, Vongola is on tenterhooks around Xanxus. Tsuna’s phone calls had a noticeable improvement on his temperament and they’re not looking forward to the next few weeks. Someone has the bright idea of pre-emptively exhausting the boy by sending him out on missions. Nono had been hesitating on letting him loose until he was at least twelve, but his
Guardians make a very convincing argument.

They win. The maids send each of them a fruit basket, and Xanxus finds himself hitting the streets of Italy for the first time in actual years, escorted by Ganauche.

He performs brilliantly. Well enough that he got volunteered on another two missions, and Lal Mirch starts making enquiries to bring him along on a few CEDEF excursions. Xanxus was born to wield a gun, and he’s never been fully alive unless his blood is pumping from adrenaline or harmony. With his back to a wall and his flames out almost constantly, he rips through his tasks and sleeps well each night.

This is exactly why he wanted to join the mafia. The power, the fighting, the fear and prestige that comes from walking into a building in the name of something so much bigger than himself.

It’s everything he could ever hope for, and the part of him that misses Tsuna like a limb fades out to a tolerable itch, just wishing the man could see him in his element. See how utterly perfect this life is for them.

Then, on his sixth mission, there’s a break in security. A member of the Tortellini family isn’t where he’s supposed to be, and while Xanxus is digging through the records for proof of drug running in Vongola territory, he feels a presence behind his back.

The Vongola might have him out on missions, but they jump through hoops to keep him out of the line of fire. If fatalities are required, Xanxus is far, far away from that part of the job. Missions are one thing, but Vongola aren’t quite ready to let a boy make his bones before puberty. Especially when he’s a storm and his sky hasn’t been informed.

But this target slipped through, with a gun in his hand. Xanxus barely registers what’s happening before his gun his up, and the man’s blood splatters against the wall.

His teammates get reprimanded for the slip up. Whoever did the pre-planning has disappeared, and Nono is heavily debating calling up Vongola’s preferential priest.

Xanxus just screams blue murder and slams his door, wedging a chair underneath the lock just in case somebody thinks he needs a fucking hug or some such crap. He collapses on his bed, and pulls at his hair.

He feels guilty…that he doesn’t feel guilty.

What the fuck brain?

His storm flames quiver, tugging on the faint bond and Xanxus scowls.

He’s not calling Tsuna. Xanxus is nearly eleven, which is slum years is practically an adult. The Ninth’s tutors have him reading at a high school level, he does not need his sky to hold his hand over what is a perfectly normal mafia event.

The red flames shake again, and he thrusts them down.

He doesn’t. He really, really doesn’t.

On the table, his phone starts ringing. He sits up in shock, before stumbling over. Inexplicably, he fumbles, the phone crashing to the ground, and Xanxus recovers by scooping up the device in one smooth motion.
“Tsuna-Trash?”

“Xanxus?”

The boy swallows.

“Why are you calling Trash?”

“You could at least be happy about it brat!”

Xanxus winces, and Tsuna groans.

“Sorry. I felt… I don’t know” Tsuna admits in confusion. “I just had a feeling you really needed me to call.”

A knot loosens in Xanxus’s chest.

“Oh?”

“Are you okay?” Tsuna asks. “You don’t have to tell me if-“

“I killed a man today.”

Tsuna goes silent. Xanxus twists a finger into the telephone cord as he thinks back.

“It was a job. Guy had it coming, Vongola wanted him dead, and I was there. Shot him right between the eyes, before he even knew what was happening.”

“I see.”

Xanxus tenses. Tsuna sounds far too calm, nothing like the man he knows.

“Are you mad?”

“Mad?” Tsuna repeats. “Why would I be mad?”

He still has that calm tone and it makes Xanxus want to rip out his nails.

“You don’t like killing. You can, but you don’t” Xanxus reminds him, hissing the words. “Not unless they really piss you off.”

Tsuna sighs.

“I don’t” Tsuna admits. “But you’re not me. I’ve known since the day we met what path you’d walk, and I let you without complaint.”

Xanxus pauses at that.

“It was okay? Killing that guy was okay?”

Tsuna hesitates, and Xanxus snarls.

“It either was or it wasn’t Trash!”

“And that’s not my decision to make” Tsuna reminds him. “You’re responsible for your own actions. If you did it without regret, then it was the right decision for you.”
The boy grits his teeth. That’s not really a helpful answer.

Tsuna must be able to pick up his frustration, as his next words are clearly meant to be comforting, but fail badly.

“Xanxus, what do you want me to say?”

“I don’t KNOW Tsuna-Trash!” Xanxus snarls, and the man sighs, finally giving up on calm and going for blunt honesty.

He gets a sigh in return.

“I wish I was there in person” his sky replies. “I should have been there with you. This isn’t something for over the phone.”

“…Tsuna-Trash?”

“This might come as a shock to you, but I know who and what you are Xanxus” Tsuna tells him. “If I’d had trouble with it, I would never have agreed to teach you. And I’d never have agreed to a full harmonisation. When I became your sky, it meant accepting everything.”

Xanxus swallows, silent as the sky chooses his words carefully.

“Xanxus, all I’ve ever wanted from you, was for you to be yourself” Tsuna tells him. “This was a mission. He was a threat, and you took him out. I’d be lying if I said I was proud, but I’m certainly not mad about it. You did what you needed to do.

“Really?”

“Really. And I think you knew that. You just couldn’t process it right now.”

The ugly feeling inside starts to unbind.

“The old man wants me to take over CEDEF in a few years.”

“Oh?”

“I’m gonna tell him to take a hike. There’s no way I’m wasting time over there.”

He can almost feel Tsuna smiling at that. “It’s not my first choice either. Do you have an alternative?”

Xanxus scowls.

“Not yet, but I’ll figure it out eventually. Something that can take us both. That’s a guarantee, Trash.”

He pauses, and then-

“Where do you wanna go? I don’t want to pick something you’ll shy away from.”

For a moment, Tsuna doesn’t answer, mulling over the question.

“I don’t really know” he admits. “I want to stay out of the main family as much as possible, but that’s a hard thing to swing. To be honest I’m pinning my hopes on you being able to fill that hole for me so I can slip under the radar.”
Xanxus grins, proud of the responsibility being thrust upon him.

“How’s that plan coming anyway trash? Your little jaunt East sent everyone crazy over here. Doubt you’ll get to pull it off again.”

Tsuna chuckles. “Oh…I have something resembling a plan for that. I need a bit of time to put it together, but I think I can get the Ninth to see things my way. Just need another…six months, maybe?”

The boys’ hearts sunk.

“Six months? You’re going to be gone another six months?”

That’ll make it a whole year! Xanxus has barely made it as is, he can’t take another six months with just phone calls!

“You can’t be gone another six months!” Xanxus demands, standing up and gripping the phone tight. “You said you were almost recovered six months ago! It can’t possibly take that long!”

“Well…no” Tsuna admits. “Another month and my flames will be stable. But if I want to stay out of the Vongola house long term, I need a little more time.”

“Then I’m coming to you Trash” Xanxus snaps, already packing his bag mentally in his head. “Give me the address.”

“Xanxus! You can’t!”

“Screw you Trash! Nobody said anything about you being gone a year!” he hisses. “I don’t care how bad your flames are, I’m coming to see you!”

“Don’t you dare!”

The boy’s flames shudder, but Xanxus shakes it off – even if he’s impressed Tsuna’s own harmony can affect him over a phone – and just scowls.

“I can’t take another six months Trash” he warns. “And I bet you can’t either.”

They need to see each other. They need to harmonise so Xanxus can realign with Tsuna’s new flames and vice versa. They need to talk in person and decide what future is going to happen. Tsuna might have left to heal and to give Xanxus the spotlight, but Xanxus isn’t going anywhere without Tsuna, and he can’t make decisions unless he knows Tsuna agrees with the end result. The man is already distancing himself from Vongola, Xanxus needs to know he can drag him back when it matters.

“Well…it doesn’t have to be six months for us” Tsuna offers. “If you can wait one more month for my flames to settle, there is an independent project I could use some backup for.”

Xanxus feels his heart leap.

“Yeah?”

“It’ll have to be done without the Ninth knowing” Tsuna warns. “I don’t want Vongola involved until the very last moment. Possibly never depending on how things turn out.”

“What kind of job are we talking about?”
“Remember the Estrano?”

The boy can feel the grin threatening to split his face.

“You’re kidding…”

“I think it’s finally time to go pay them a visit…”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Tsuna and Xanxus take on the Estrano. It doesn't quite go to plan.

Chapter Notes

Don't even ask me what happened with this chapter. The original plan was literally Tsuna showing up with 3 kids and shuttling them off to Japan - but my brain decided that was too much like GC and I could do better than rehash the same story twice. So instead I write plot, go back to an earlier idea and find myself writing a fight scene - I hate writing fight scenes!

Anyway, hope you enjoy.

Chapter 5

With Tsuna’s promise to call him, Xanxus finds himself having to deal with the most frustrating wait-and-see for the next four weeks. The information he has is limited - he doesn’t know how long the mission will take, or what he’ll need, so he’s climbing the walls trying to predict what he can carry, and how his absence can go unnoticed.

Not to mention keeping anyone else in a building filled with rampant suspicion and paranoia from picking up just how excited he is that he’s finally going to see his sky again. The easiest way? Sticking around his siblings who take his agitation as just a need for sky flames and company.

Although that often leads to conversations such as the one he’s listening in on now.

“Five hundred says it’s storm. No way is he coming back without red flames.”

Across the table, Massimo scoffs, discarding a card. “Please. Sun or lightning, no contest.”

“Oh, come on! He’s been hooked to Xanxus for years. The night flames can’t even tell the difference between them anymore! It’s going to be storm.”

“He’s spent the last year recovering, his body is going to demand healing or strengthening. It can’t not!”

“I don’t know, I’ve been talking to some of medics working on his case, and they’re putting money on cloud flames” Federico adds, picking up a new card. “Would explain why he’s so desperate to stay away from everyone.”

Enrico just rolls his eyes.

“That’s just stereotyping clouds, and it doesn’t explain, considering that little habit has been around long before the flames started changing. Little bro, what do you think?”
Xanxus jerked up from his cards in surprise. The Vongola brothers had invited him to their monthly poker game, a habit they’d gotten into once Tsuna left the house. Very little poker actually got played, with the main source of entertainment being gossip and gambling on its outcome. Needless to say, Tsuna’s reigniting, and the flames it would reveal was the most popular topic. The teen glances at the three pairs of eyes, and snorts.

“I thought I wasn’t allowed to bet on account of having insider information?”

“It’s not gambling, it’s just asking an opinion. Come on, if you could, what would you bet on?”

Xanxus just rolls his eyes.

“I don’t know. Not mist, that’s for sure. Rain maybe?”

Tsuna’s always had a talent for calming Xanxus down, and the man pines something fierce for the ability to find peace. The man would definitely be happy with blue flames.

Although...

“Then again, storm would make sense, so I’m going with Enrico on this one” Xanxus finishes, and tosses the cards down. “Straight flush assholes.”

The three of them groan, cards hitting the table as the teen cackles and drags the chips over.

“Easy money trash. Should have paid more attention to the cards than my sky.”

“We can hardly help it brat” Massimo warns, grinning despite himself. “Dual skies are rare, and nobody’s even heard of someone surviving night flames as long as Tsunayoshi did. Closest I know about is Lal. Everyone’s curious to see how it’ll end.”

“I can at least agree that he’s definitely not going to be a mist,” Federico adds. “I know Lal went from rain to mist and cloud, but rains are often a little…foggy.”

Enrico and Massimo chuckle, and Xanxus smirks. That’s no argument – the average mist is nuts even by flame standards, you can pick one out a mile away. Tsuna, for all his quirks, doesn’t even come close to qualifying.

“Dad really wants to hear soon though” Federico continues. “He’s hoping whatever flame he gets aligns with one of us.”

Xanxus freezes.

“…Really?”

Federico winces and gives a curse.

“Shit…you weren’t supposed to know, but yeah Xan. The guy’s still kind of a flight risk, so Dad is hoping the secondary flame will harmonise and guarantee him sticking around.”

“And I’m not enough?” Xanxus growls.

“It’s a sky thing Xanxus” Massimo offers. “If he’s got another flame that can harmonise with a sky, then Vongola can’t risk him harmonising outside the family. If anything, you make it worse – if he leaves he could drag you with him whether you want to or not.”

The ire fades as Xanxus takes in that revelation, dread sinking.
That’s right, Tsuna will have secondary flames like him. Flames that will be new and fresh and probably itching to harmonise since Tsuna has only has one guardian. He’ll be an easy mark for any opportunistic sky with more power than sense.

He digs a poker chip into his palm. Over his dead body.

It makes sense to get him to harmonise with one of the Vongola siblings. But even the concept fills Xanxus with a vicious, territorial fury. He cares about the brothers, really, he does, but not with this - Tsuna is his, and he’s not sharing.

Thankfully, it doesn’t need to come to that. All he has to do is harmonise his sky with Tsuna’s… whatever, before anyone else in Vongola gets their grubby palms on him.

Two and a half weeks after that conversation, Xanxus gets a phone call not long after the sun sets. All Tsuna offers is an address and a promise to pick him up as soon as he’s out of the territory. The only other thing he says is that Xanxus should probably wear leather.

Xanxus smuggled a pair of guns out of the gun range last week, and has had a bag ready for days, so in a matter of minutes he’s grabbed the outfit he normally wears for missions before slipping out the door and heading towards the servant quarters to sneak out. He’s learned the hard way that going out the window just starts blasting alarms, but nobody ever double checks the exit on the left side once dinner’s over.

However, he still has to walk through the living areas, and is relying on the family having retired for the night.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Xanxus freezes, and slowly his eyes flicker to the side to see Massimo sitting in a chair in a nook of the hallway, arms crossed and smirking.

“I…uh….I want some fresh air trash” Xanxus mutters.

“Oh? With a pair of guns and a change of clothes?” Massimo counters. Xanxus tenses up, the weapons feeling heavy against his waist.

“It’s not what you think.”

“So you’re not sneaking out to go meet up with Tsunayoshi?”

“…Okay maybe it is what you think” Xanxus mutters. “But it’s only for a little while. I’ll be back before anyone notices.”

Massimo just keeps staring, and Xanxus starts to fidget.

“How the fuck did you figure it out anyway trash?”

“It’s called intuition. One of these days, you might figure out how to use yours with the common sense I know is buried in that head. You’ve been practically giddy all day, nothing makes you that excitable outside of Tsuna and a mission. So?”

Xanxus grits his teeth and eyes the door.

“I promise Xan, I can get you to the ground a lot faster than you can get outside.”
His shoulders drop in surrender. “Fine. Tsuna says he needs another five months to recover, but I can’t wait that long. There’s something he needs to do, and I’m going to help him. It won’t be more than a day…I think.”

Massimo eyes up the guns on his hips and the clothes on his back. “This ‘something’ is going to involve violence I assume?”

“…Maybe a little.”

The older Vongola sighs, and begins to stand while Xanxus tenses, wondering if he should risk the gun or the door.

It’s a moot point, because all Massimo does is toss him something. When Xanxus grabs it, his eyes widen as he recognises the security key for the outer gate.

“Knowing you, the plan for getting out of the estate involved a stupid amount of flames and hopping over the gate. That’ll get you through the gate on the Eastern wall without setting off the alarms – I’ve told the guard to look the other way.”

Xanxus swallows, and looks down in a rare moment of guilt and gratitude.

“Thanks Massimo.”

The man smiles.

“Just make sure you come back in one piece okay? And find out what his flames are, I want to put a late bet in the pot.”

Xanxus has forgotten just how damn big this stupid estate is when you have to walk it. By the time he makes it to the gate, he’s a ball of exhaustion and hate, with no desire to deal with any hiccups. Thankfully, the guard does as Massimo promised, looking up once from his post, and then becoming extremely focused on his sudoku as the gate opens.

He breathes in the fresh air and flares his flames as quietly as he can. Tsuna wouldn’t necessarily know he was coming out this entrance – Xanxus hadn’t known what would be the easiest route out until Massimo gave him the best option, so it could still be some time.

Two minutes later, he hears the roar of an engine, and glances down the road.

It’s a bright red motorbike. Xanxus loves it instantly.

The bike rolls to a stop next to him, and the rider dressed in black and orange leathers pulls off his helmet to reveal gravity defying hair.

Tsuna. Who through some miracle has clearly visited a barber in the last week and gotten a clean shave and something resembling a haircut before coming here. Despite the clean cut look, when it’s mixed with biker leathers, the sky almost looks as dangerous as Xanxus knows he is.

The man gives him a once over, and then gives a small smile.

“You did clip your sides. Looks good Xanxus.”

He doesn’t know what comes over him, but the next thing he knows he’s got his arms wrapped around the man’s chest. There’s not as much size different between the two of them now – he’d been aiming for the waist.
His sky just laughs, ruffling the teens hair and letting the storm flames mix with his sky, flames singing at the reunion. When they die down, Xanxus gives a curious nudge to see if he can coax anything else out, but all he gets for his trouble is the flame equivalent of a flick on the forehead.

“Don’t be so nosy” Tsuna warns, tossing him the spare helmet – a red one lined with orange flames. “You’ll see them soon enough.”

Xanxus grins. “I’m stealing this after we’re done” he announces, slipping onto the back and holding tight to the jacket as Tsuna revs the engine and sends them flying down the street.

Tsuna drives for nearly 30 minutes, avoiding going into the city and sticking to the backroads, before pulling into a district that’s clearly seen better days. It’s not that far from the bar Xanxus had a run in with Estrano once before, but he’s never been quite this far out of his neighbourhood.

On that thought, his mind flashes to his mother, and wonders how she’s doing. He vaguely remembers Nono saying something about paying her off in order to streamline getting custody, but she’s probably spent it by now.

Tsuna pulls into a street that announced the end of the domestic area and into the business district, containing mostly warehouses, with just one building – a large house that has clearly been turned into tenement flats before it was abandoned. It’s run down and bedraggled, windows either smashed or boarded up, and Xanxus honestly can’t see why Tsuna is pulling the bike to a stop outside one of the warehouses.

“Where’s the Estrano mansion trash?”

Tsuna gave a mirthless chuckle. “Burned to the ground months ago. They’re hiding Xanxus, why do you think it’s taken so long to find them?”

He nods over at the warehouse.

“Most of this isn’t real. Estrano were known for breeding strong mists, and they’ve still got some good ones on their side. It’s all a cover to hide the labs underground.

Xanxus looks down, slightly impressed. “Underground?”

“How else could they have stayed out of sight this whole time? People notice flame actives going missing, even in the slums.”

The storm mentally kicks himself. That should have been obvious.

“So, what’s the plan?”

Tsuna is eyeing up a nondescript door on the side of the building.

“Two goals. One, get all the flame active children out of the labs. Two, take out the mafioso experimenting on them. Right now, we’ve got an advantage - they only moved to this location three months ago. They haven’t had much time to put together this base, so there’s little security or defences. My sources say they’re planning to move to a more permanent location soon, and there’s no telling where they’ll go or how fortified it’ll be.”

Xanxus nods in understanding. “You want me watching your back or heading in first?”
Tsuna’s upper lip quirks.

“Back. I don’t want you going off where I can’t see you. They have the numbers, and probably a lot more flame restraints. No running off half cocked.”

The boy scowls at the jab. *One* time and he’s marked for life…

He activates his flames when they reach the door, and Xanxus hears more than sees the lock break as Tsuna forces it open. The inside looks like a generic warehouse, but when Xanxus flares his own sky flames, he sees things ‘shimmer’ for just one moment before settling.

Don’t trust your eyes here, gottit.

Tsuna’s already moving, heading for something Xanxus can’t see, when his head snaps to the side and leaps back, hand grabbing Xanxus’s arm and yanking him just out of the way of the tentacle that’s suddenly writhing where they’d been standing. As it curls, thorns start to emerge – it’s some kind of crazy plant.

Xanxus follows its path into the shadows, and out steps the illusionist responsible. It’s an Asian woman with dark blue hair, and equally blue eyes. In her hand is some kind of sceptre, probably a focus for her flames.

At her arrival, Tsuna goes still, eyes wide and face pale. He doesn’t move, even when she’s clearly beginning to focus another illusion. Xanxus, not suffering from whatever flashbacks got Tsuna stalling, quickly aims a gun and fires, forcing their opponent to move back while the vine lunges forward. This time, he’s the one grabbing Tsuna backwards, storm flames up as a shield and punches the sky in the head.

“Tsuna!”

He’s not sure if it’s the scream or the hit that does the trick, but Tsuna jerks back to life, spinning on one foot and flying back towards the mist. More vines and flowers start to appear – like most mists the woman’s fighting style isn’t designed for close range and she needs the cover. She’s clearly in a completely different class compared to the last Estrano members Xanxus ran into; despite Tsuna’s best attempts, he can’t quite seem to get past them in order to disarm her. His flames are strong and furious, but she’s refusing to budge, and Xanxus’s instincts tell him that’s more competence than whatever had Tsuna hesitating earlier. With her range and speed, Tsuna can’t even think about using his X-burner, there just isn’t time to calibrate.

Tsuna’s quickly figuring that out himself, and propels himself backwards, dropping to the ground next to Xanxus with a scowl.

“I can circle round and take her from the back” Xanxus offers.

Tsuna shakes his head, eyes focused on the woman inching forward. “You can’t, she’s expecting that. Her blind spots are limited, we need to force her to make one.”

He risks shifting one eye to Xanxus before smiling.

“Storm flames. I’ll keep her distracted, but I want you burning the floor of this place. There’s a door somewhere leading to the lab – you won’t be able to see it, but your flames will feel something give way. Second she realises you’re getting close, that’s our opening.”

He braces himself to jump back in.
“Don’t take your eyes off her” he warns. “She’s fast – you need to be faster.”

With a burst of sky flames, Tsuna’s back in the fray, shattering an illusion that had been a lot closer than Xanxus realised, and sending orange flames in every direction to limit the mist’s vision. When it’s clear he has the woman’s full attention, Xanxus gets to work. Storm flames, rich and strong burst outwards, Xanxus normally focuses them towards his hands, but with a little mental manipulation, they crawl towards his feet as well, letting all four limbs burn through the mist construct hiding the real building.

He's almost overwhelmed at just how strong they feel right now. He’s never had them active without Tsuna until he left – could they have weakened over time and he’s only just now noticing thanks to Tsuna’s return? Or is Tsuna’s own flames amplifying them?

He doesn’t have time to question it, Tsuna’s currently too busy to answer and he has a job to do. The flames stretch our further, and Xanxus starts running. The mist is very obviously keeping Tsuna in one part of the building, which means they’re either blocking the door with their own body, or trying to convince Tsuna that the door is there when it’s in the opposite direction. There’s one way to find out, and Xanxus heads for the furthest part of the building from the fight.

It’s a dud, but he feels something shift to his left, and moves towards it. Flames scratch against the surface of metal, despite Xanxus’s brain insisting there’s only concrete, and his flames focus in.

The reaction is immediate.

Those crazy flower vines immediate burst from the floor around him. Storm flames lunge up to attack, but they only get about half before Xanxus feels his limbs restrained, forcing him to the ground. He never saw her move, but the mist is suddenly in front of him, sceptre forming a curved blade on the bottom as she arches it up to thrust into his back.

There’s no way to dodge, she’s got him bound tight, and her eyes are focused completely on him.

And not on anyone else.

Suddenly, Tsuna is behind her.

“Got you.”

The woman doesn’t have time to react before Tsuna slams an elbow into her neck, knocking her out old. Before she hits the ground, he’s grabbed the lapels of her jacket and throws her straight into the far wall. The mist crumples to the ground, sceptre rolling away and vanishing into mist.

Xanxus gasps as the bindings vanish, and all around them, the warehouse ripples. Not much changes, but the edges seem sharper, there’s light in places there were shadows, and only a few feet away, lies a trap door in the concrete floor.

Xanxus struggles on whether to focus on the door or the assailant, but Tsuna quickly decides for him, pulling Xanxus up by the hand and dragging him towards the now visible door.

“She is not going to stay down for long” Tsuna warns. “And I’d rather dispatch whoever she sends our way before they have a chance to prepare.”

“Why not just kill her and be done with it?” Xanxus asks. Tsuna just chuckles.

“Because that’s not her. She used the possession bullet. All I’d do is kill whatever idiot stumbled upon this place the last time and got used as cannon fodder. It’s a waste of flames right now.”
Xanxus does a double take and looks at the body. Now that he’s looking, Tsuna’s right, the hair and clothes belong to someone completely different.

“How the fuck did you know that before she was knocked out?”

Tsuna shrugs. “I’ve seen what a mist of her calibre can do, and her illusions didn’t match up with her body. The movements and reactions were just a touch off, like they were uncomfortable in their own skin. I’ve seen the possession bullet in action before - it takes a very specific person to utilise it properly, even mists struggle. Whoever she is, she hasn’t had time to master it - wouldn’t have used a full body illusion if she had.”

A nostalgic smile slips on his face.

“Lucky for us though. If she’d been here in person that fight wouldn’t have gone nearly so well.”

They reach the trapdoor, and Tsuna’s eyes narrow at the warped simplicity before stepping back.

“Storm flames Xanxus” he orders. “As strong and as deadly as you can make them.”

Xanxus grins, red flames already starting to emerge while Tsuna starts charging up his X-burner. Thirty seconds later, the door crumples like cardboard, and the two jump in. An alarm immediately starts blaring, and Xanxus starts to grin, looking up and shooting any camera he can spot while Tsuna moves forward.

Seconds later there’s five men rushing towards them, and Tsuna starts flying while Xanxus curses and ducks the bullets heading his way. There’s a cry of pain, then another, and when Xanxus looks up, there’s a pile of dead men blocking his view and giving him cover. He happily crouches behind and starts shooting anyone Tsuna isn’t immediately slamming into the walls, and when the hallway is clearly, jumps up and strides behind his sky, whose only focus is deeper in the facility.

Every minute or so there’s another attack. Some are physical, often with men and woman armed with flames and flame-dampening tools, others are mechanical, Xanxus having to stick close to Tsuna as both use their sky flames to harmonise the toxic gasses that they find themselves walking through until they grab gas masks from the next wave of assailants.

None of it even seems to register with Tsuna though. His eyes are blown, wide and miles away as he goes through the motions of taking out the men. For the first time, Xanxus is happy to let him wander – Tsuna’s restraint is as MIA as the rest of him, and his sky never looks better than when he’s got a man burning to death in one hand and a man knocked unconscious in the other.

Xanxus sadly, is forced to pull his attention away when they reach a door on the final level, and a whip flies through the air. He recognises the brightly coloured material, forcing all other thoughts out of his head as he jumps backwards and aims at his attacker. The first bullet misses, but forces the man to dodge, giving Xanxus time to push forward and shoot at much closer range. The man goes down, and satisfied he’s going to stay that way, he eyes up the hall where Tsuna is charging up another X-burner to take out a heavily fortified door.

He quickly does a count on his ammo. Despite his best attempts, he’s starting to run out of bullets, which is a little frustrating. Too bad infinite bullets are something only found in Hollywood.

Although…flames are almost unlimited, just difficult to focus. Could he maybe fuse the accuracy of a gun with his viciously destructive storm flames?

It’s a thought for another day. Tsuna’s attack blasts through the door, and the man steps through molten metal. Xanxus is quick to follow, and finds himself looking at a sterilised lab. Everything is
painfully white, with doors to operating rooms line one side, while the other…

Xanxus doesn’t give a damn about the majority of the human race, but even his hackles raise when he looks in the wide windows of the closest room and sees cots lining the floors, each with a child restrained to it. Some were barely out of infancy, all the way to those nearly his age. None were awake, and there was a hazy quality to the lighting that suggested it wasn’t natural.

Tsuna’s making a beeline for the closest, flames charging in his hands. His back turns on Xanxus, and for a second, Xanxus swears he sees a flicker of something other than orange before the door crumples in on itself from the blast.

Dammit – whatever the colour, it vanished too quickly for Xanxus to recognise.

The hazy air is seeping out of the room now, and Xanxus quickly follows, eyeing up vents on the roof before activating his own flames and crushing them into dust. It’s not quite enough to avoid the dosage, and his body winces as he feels whatever chemicals try to hit him before his storm flames start repelling it.

Tsuna doesn’t seem to be affected at all, far too focused on ripping the restraints off the children closest to the door and lifting the bodies outside. He lines them along the wall, and Xanxus eyes up some of the younger infants, and yanks them out under his arms.

There’s about thirty kids locked up here, and about a third of them clearly aren’t Estrano-born. Mostly the older kids, with clear malnutrition and scars that children don’t get inside rich mafia families. The younger ones look healthier, but it’s hard to tell if that’s because they haven’t been experimented on, or because they’re used to a better quality of life.

Most of the kids are European, but when Xanxus drags the last brat out, he finds Tsuna crouched over three infants of what he assumes is Japanese descent. Two can barely be more than a year old, while the other’s maybe three. Tsuna can’t seem to take his eyes off him, and Xanxus frowns when he realises the toddler’s hair colour is identical to the woman Tsuna threw into a wall earlier.

Speaking of whom-

“Get away from them!”

Xanxus squawks, going for his pistols while Tsuna snaps to his feet. The woman is back, eyes furious.

Now that he’s got a good look, there is definitely a resemblance between her and the brat. He’s got this little tuft starting to form at the back of his head, identical to the one on the woman’s now that he can see her in better light. Her tirade stops at the door though, staring in shock at the scene in front of her.

“What is this?”

Xanxus is already prepping to aim, only to pause when Tsuna holds out a hand.

“You’re the illusionist that hides this place?” Tsuna begins.

She nods wordlessly, and Tsuna’s eyes narrow.

“But only the outside. You’ve never set foot inside.”

“Can’t reveal any secrets if I don’t know them” she whispers. Xanxus is relatively certain she’s not
even aware she’s talking. Not that it’s keeping Tsuna from pressing.

“Your son is in here and you never questioned it?”

Her eyes are focused on the children on the ground.

“My husband promised it was to keep them safe” she replies. “So that if they found the main house they wouldn’t get our children.”

She shakes her head, as if breaking out of a trance and walks towards the children. One eye is constantly on Tsuna, who to Xanxus’s shock is actually stepping back, until she reaches the sleeping hoard. She pulls the child that had Tsuna’s attention into her arms, and stares at his face as if she doesn’t understand what she’s seeing.

Tsuna’s eyes are glowing, and he cocks his head as he stares.

“You really didn’t know.”

It’s not a question, but the woman snaps her head up with fury.

“Of course I didn’t know!” she yells. “What kind of mother do you think I am? What kind of man do you think I follow that would allow…this? To our own flesh and blood!”

She looks down at the child in her arms, and then at the group still out cold. A bitter light takes over her eye as she grips her sceptre, mist flames forming around the children, creating collection of cots hanging from a vine. It slides across the floor towards her, and the woman turns her attention back to Tsuna.

“Who are you?” she growls. “Why are you here?”

Tsuna merely narrows his eyes.

“We’re with the Vongola” he begins, and immediately steps back, hands up as several vines lunge towards them.

“Several years ago, men from the Estrano tried to abduct my storm” he continues, and the vines pause. “I knew enough from sources that Estrano were abducting children. Considering the Estrano’s situation, I wanted to get them out. It wasn’t till I had the Vongola resources that I could pull it off.”

“And wipe out the Estrano while you were at it” she snaps back, though there’s not much bite behind it.

“Hey, they’re the ones experimenting on kids” Xanxus snaps right back. “you don’t exactly have the moral high ground trash!”

“This is not the Estrano!” she yells back.

“I’m starting to understand that” Tsuna interjects. “But clearly some of your family disagree.”

She clearly can’t argue with that, and as the vine-cot vanishes down the hall, her eyes flicker between the two of them before coming to a decision.

“I’m taking them to the main house” she says. “And I’ll kill anyone who gets in my way. This ends tonight.”
Tsuna trades glances with Xanxus, and the two step in line to follow the woman down the hall.

“So, what do we call you trash?” Xanxus mutters after a minute, stepping over a body. She glances back, but keeps walking.

“…Rokudo Kasumi.”

Tsuna stumbles, but keeps walking as Rokudo glances down at her ring finger.

“Although the last name might be changing very soon.”

That gets a smile out of Tsuna, and even Xanxus feels a smirk coming.

“Then what would you prefer?” Tsuna asks.

Kasumi looks back again, and her lips twitch into a smile almost against her will.

“I was born Karasu Kasumi.”

Tsuna nods.

“Karasu then.”

Karasu chuckles.

“Well, aren’t you polite for Italy.”

Xanxus eyes them both up, and rolls his eyes.

“That’s too damn long. You’re Kara-Trash.”

“Xanxus!”

He immediately grins and ducks the hand coming to slap him upside the head.

This is more than a little anti-climactic.

“We’re seriously just going to let her walk away?” Xanxus snaps.

Tsuna, who has chosen to lean against the warehouse wall, merely shrugs.

“Following wasn’t really an option Xanxus. This isn’t a situation I was prepared for.”

The second Karasu had exited the warehouse, she and the children had vanished in a cloud of mist flames. Tsuna had quickly summarised she’d fled into the illusion hiding the main house. The only way to follow would be to try and break the illusion, but Tsuna was hesitant.

“You do do remember the part where there’s an execution order for the whole family right?” Xanxus replies. “The experimenting on kid’s thing isn’t even the reason for that.”

Tsuna just frowns.

“I’m aware, but I don’t agree with that order” he says. “The bullet was dangerous, but so are a lot of other mafia weapons.”

“Most weapons don’t take away someone’s free will Tsuna-Trash!” Xanxus snaps, because he’s
read up on the bullet when he realised they were going after Estrano and that’s more than a little terrifying.

Tsuna’s eyes narrow. “You do realise a strong mist can possess without one, right? The only reason the mafia got scared was because the Estrano didn’t have any strong alliances. It was easier to wipe them out rather than fight each other over who would get to use it. If it wasn’t for the abductions, I’d have left them alone – this is more complicated.”

Xanxus frowns, and finally capitulates, stomping over and leaning against the wall next to Tsuna.

“Maybe she was just some low-level grunt that wasn’t in the know? The upper Estrano are probably in on it.”

Tsuna is shaking his head before he even finishes.

“I know a well-trained mist when I fight one. Karasu was too powerful to be anything but a Guardian, but her shock down there was genuine. She didn’t know what was happening. The only way that’s possible is if there’s a rift in the main family.”

“Then what? You think someone in the family was trying to perform a coup?”

His sky nods.

“It’s possible. Nobody’s seen the former Boss of Estrano since they went into hiding, but he wasn’t a young man. All his children were killed in the first year, leaving only his grandson. I assumed he’d died and the experimentation was whoever took over the family getting desperate. But if he’s still alive, it could be one of them trying to rip the family out from under him.”

“So…if we’re not going back in, what are we doing Trash?”

Tsuna growls, pushing off the wall and running his hands through his hair. Xanxus chases after him, eyes flickering between the buildings and the motorbike to the side.

“I don’t know. I’m not sure there’s anything else we should do. Maybe we should cut our losses, head back before-“

Tsuna’s eyes widen.

“Shit! Xanxus, down!”

Xanxus barely has time to register the warning before Tsuna is on him, arms around his chest and throwing him to the ground as the condemned building beside them all but explodes. Brick and glass thrust out in a terrifying blast, crashing debris around them.

The building shudders, and the illusion gives way, revealing a building that was in far better condition, and clearly built as a single home rather than apartments. A significant quarter of it was now missing, the walls blown back from what could only have been a pretty powerful flame blast. When Xanxus finally managed to push Tsuna off, he could make out a body on top of the rubble. Whoever they were was wearing a relatively expensive suit, but was most definitely dead now.

“Gonna make an estimated guess and say that was the ringleader of the lab rats” Xanxus mutters.

“Or the former boss of Estrano” Tsuna warns, staring at the mess before glancing in the direction of the blast.
It’s was probably some kind of makeshift meeting room at one time, but had seen better days long before its newest renovation. Kara-Trash was in the corner, looking slightly ruffled as she stood over a body that was bleeding into the carpet. She was working a ring off her finger that she then tossed into the blood. The kids were nowhere to be seen.

She however, wasn’t the source of the blast. That was clearly the older man in the centre of the room, a skinny creature with grey hair clinging desperately to a mostly bald scalp, grasping for a walking stick and stumbling towards an old leather chair. As Tsuna walked forward, climbing over the rubble, their eyes met, and Xanxus felt them both flare sky flames.

Kara-Trash darted behind the chair with suspicious eyes – and the partial harmonisation between her and the man becomes blatantly obvious. Xanxus was quick to get to Tsuna’s side, but the man just gave a tired smile when Tsuna stopped in front of him.

“I am Leonardo Estrano” said the man. “And it appears I have committed the grievous sin of outliving my family.”

“Leonardo, don’t talk like that” Kasumi insists, hand on the man’s shoulder while her eyes stayed on Tsuna. He just pushes her away, and stares at Tsuna and Xanxus with painful eyes.

“I just wanted my family to stay strong” he says. “We have always experimented with flame enhancers – Vongola have for too long held that advantage. But if this is the path my family chooses to walk, then perhaps the mafia were right to remove us from the history books.”

Tsuna glances outside, at the body lying in the rubble.

“Your grandson?”

Leonardo nods.

“He confessed when Kasumi revealed to me what she’d seen. I had always known his morals could be questionable, especially when it came to biological testing, but I never thought he would go to these extremes.”

“Was he the one that created the possession bullet?”

Leonardo shakes his head.

“His father and mother were the ones to create the Possession Bullet. They were so proud, the Estrano have always been known for its strong mists. This was a way to become valid in a way we previously could only have dreamed of.”

His face falls.

“When the order came out, my son and his guardians were the first casualties. I don’t think my grandson ever truly recovered. It didn’t help when his rain vanished a few years later.”

Xanxus’s mind quickly flickers to a greasy man in a bar and decides it’s probably best not to clarify the rain’s name.

The Estrano boss looks straight at Tsuna. “You came for the children, that much is clear. But you had no intention of hurting them?”

Tsuna shakes his head. “I wanted to get them out. Get them away from anyone who would hurt them. That’s it. I didn’t realise Estrano hadn’t made the choices unanimously.”
Leonardo nods.

“There is nothing I can say to justify what you found. Even if they went behind my back, this is my family, and I must pay the price for their actions.”

“Leonardo! You couldn’t have known.”

“Kasumi, I would rather see the Estrano die here and now than betray those children another minute. All I ask is that the children be allowed to walk free.”

Tsuna stays quiet, and Leonardo clenches his hands against the chair.

“I have nothing I can offer, but I can tell you are a good man” he utters. “You came for the children. Killed those who attacked you but spared them. Please do what you must to us, but let them go. Don’t allow them to pay for our sins.”

“Leonardo…”

The man looks up at the one semi-guardian he has and smiles.

“You will not stop him Kasumi. That’s an order.”

The mist looks like they desperately want to disagree, and Xanxus is starting to get a little excited. This is getting good – far more interesting than just ‘show up and shoot everyone’ that he’d expected.

Course, that’s when Tsuna has to ruin his fun. His sky glances over, eyebrows furrowed in thought, and the boy frowns.

“What Tsuna-Trash?”

“I need you to leave the room” Tsuna replies. “This needs to be private.”

Xanxus blinks, and makes a show of gesturing to the missing wall.

“Seriously?”

Kara-Trash looks just as confused, and Xanxus scowls at her before returning his attention to the sky in front of him. Before he can argue, Tsuna starts talking.

“Xanxus, right now you’re Vongola and required to report whatever you hear back to the Ninth” Tsuna snaps. “You need to leave so you have plausible deniability until I can fix it.”

“I can lie!” Xanxus snaps right back.

Tsuna however, just points to the door.

“Tell him where you put the kids” Tsuna requests. “He’ll guard them until we’re finished. I swear he won’t touch them so long as your men don’t”

Kara-Trash is frowning, but with a nod from Leonardo, capitulates, creating a copy which heads for the door. Xanxus is still scowling, but Tsuna’s flames are starting to feel irritated, so he stomps towards the door in ire.

“This takes more than 20 minutes and I’m coming back down guns blaring” Xanxus growls. The Estrano boss might be old, but he just proved old means experienced and Tsuna’s used up a lot of
flame ploughing through the lab. The second he feels flames in action he’s coming back down and Tsuna can just deal with it.

As they walk out, he glances at the corpse the mist had left, and cocks an eye at the original.

“And congratulations on your ‘divorce.’

He makes a point of slamming the door as they leave, but the copy of Karasu seems oblivious to his ire as they walk out the door, right up until they reach the stairs.

“You know there are some men unaccounted for from the labs” she says, almost quiet enough that one could assume she was speaking to herself. “They might come for the kids while the Boss is distracted.”

Xanxus blinks, and then fights the smirk.

Maybe missing the conversation-and-possible-fight part of the evening won’t be so bad after all.

Tsuna’s out of sight for an hour, but his flames never flare once. Xanxus on the other hand, finds himself taking out two idiots who don’t think an illusion and a pre-teen are a threat worth avoiding.

That’s the last of them, or word has gotten round, because Kara-Trash’s illusion vanishes and Xanxus starts rooting through the drawers for anything entertaining for the last thirty minutes when Tsuna opens the door.

“She says we can stay in one of the rooms further down the hall. Do you want to stay or head back?”

“Are you staying?”

Tsuna nods. “I kind of have to.”

“Then I’m staying” Xanxus snaps. “God only knows what stupidity you’ll get into if I leave you alone.”

Tsuna grins, and cocks his head towards the hall. Xanxus rolls his eyes but quickly follows, shoulders slumped as they head towards the room.

It’s painfully bare, consisting of motel quality furniture. The boy scowls in distaste, then mentally slaps himself – clearly, he’s gotten too used to Vongola life. Back in the slums, this would have been a palace. He’s gotten soft.

Tsuna eyes the bed, and then falls backwards onto the blanket with a groan. An arm flops over his eyes as Xanxus perches on the edge.

“Today has not gone anywhere near how I pictured it” he mutters, and Xanxus smirks.

“You don’t say?”

He gets a rough chuckle in reply.

“I came to terms with wiping out the family because they crossed a line, but I didn’t expect this. They…care. What little of the family that was in the dark is still a family, not just a hive of desperate monsters. We came too early.”
“So…we’re not killing him?”

Tsuna ran a hand through his hair. “The ones that weren’t in the lab haven’t really done anything wrong Xanxus” he admits. “They’re scared and paranoid, but they’re not ready to make the leap the others have. I… I’ve lost a lot of myself over the last few years, but I don’t think I could look myself in the mirror if I just let them die.”

Xanxus grimaces.

“You realise the order’s still out on them, right? Just because you don’t want to kill them doesn’t mean the rest of the mafia will agree. The second Nono finds out you know where they are- “

“Why do you think you weren’t in that meeting?” Tsuna interrupts. “I have a plan. It’s kind of messy and awkward, but I think I can make it work with what I already have in motion. We’ll know in five months if I can pull it off.”

“And if you can’t?”

“Then at least I tried. That’s got to count for something.”

Xanxus could argue that point, but it doesn’t seem worth the battle.

“Fine. But how are you going to keep them out of sight for five months?” he asks. “If you managed to put together where they were, other families can do the same. And if that old fart didn’t notice three quarters of his Familia double crossing him right next door, I doubt he’s in top form to protect them. Flames or no flames.”

Tsuna winces, and sits up.

“I know, and Leonardo agrees with you. In a face to face fight he can hold his own, but handling the day to day matters are getting too much. Doesn’t help that he only has one flame user worth their salt to help.”

His face goes through some awkward expressions before settling into something resembling weary defeat.

“So, I’ve agreed to help out until everything is settled. I’ll still be staying with the Giglio Nero Familia, but I’ll be helping the Estrano move and keep things going until they can come out of hiding.

Xanxus stares, brain making the connections but refusing to accept it, because if he did he’d start laughing and never stop.

“…Tsuna-Trash, did you just make yourself the acting Don of a minor Familia?”

“Regent!” Tsuna splutters defensively. “I’m just a Regent!”

Nope, no choice. Xanxus bursts into laughter, and Tsuna throws his head into his hands.

“It’s only temporary!” Tsuna defends. “I’ll get them into Vongola, or at least get an alliance, and then I can back off.”

“Holy crap! Even when you’re actively trying to avoid mafia duties you just screw up!” Xanxus roars. He can almost feel the tears, this is hysterical, Tsuna will never be allowed to forget this. Xanxus will be telling this story at his freaking funeral!
Tsuna makes a few half-hearted attempts to shut Xanxus up, before giving it up as a bad idea and throwing himself face down, shoving his head under a pillow. Xanxus gives himself a minute to stop snickering, before he side-eyes Tsuna, and shuffles to lie on his back, looping his arms around the man’s neck. It’s a lot harder than he expected – he’s really grown in the last few months, and Tsuna’s a twig. If he keeps up like this he’s going to dwarf his sky before he even hits puberty. Tsuna at least, takes it in stride, only emerging from his hideaway when Xanxus flares out his sky flames and starts mentally prodding.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

Even though he knows the man can’t see it from this position, Xanxus rolls his eyes. “Don’t be stupid Tsuna-trash. I want to see your flames so I can see if we harmonise. I played nice all freaking night, didn’t get to shoot half as many people as I expected, and you haven’t let them slip once. Out with it!”

Frustratingly, Tsuna just sighs, pushing himself back into a sitting position, forcing Xanxus to release him and lean back as he turns to look at the younger sky.

“Xanxus, making me your first guardian would just result in the two of us being even more co-dependent than we already are” Tsuna warns. “You need a few more non-skies of your own to ground you.”

“What! That’s a cop out!” Xanxus squawks in outrage. “You promised I could see them!”

“I’m not saying never” Tsuna insists, heading the tantrum off at the pass. “When you have one or two guardians, then you can try, but not until then.”

One or two. That’s not awful, but-

“Dammit Tsuna-Trash, could you at least tell me what you have?”

Tsuna raises an eyebrow.

“Why? So, you can actively dissuade anyone of that flame and avoid a perfect harmony just to make sure I can’t say no?”

The boy scowls, and Tsuna just ruffles his hair.

“Patience Xanxus. There are perfect elements out there for you, it’s just a matter of finding them. I promise nobody else in Vongola will see them before you.”

A weight leaves his shoulders, one he hadn’t even realised he was carrying. Still…

“What about you?” Xanxus mutters. “Now your flames are settled, you gonna go hunting for more elements?”

He gets a chuckle for his efforts.

“I’m not planning on it anytime soon” Tsuna replies. “You’re more than enough for me just now.”

His storm flames purr at the comment, and he leans into his sky with satisfaction, letting Tsuna’s sky flames harmonise with his.

Still…

“What about Kara-Trash?”
“What about her?”

Xanxus cocks his head to glare at his sky.

“You’re sticking around the family, might as well try to harmonise with her.”

Tsuna just glares right back. “She’s already harmonised to Leonardo, Xanxus.”

The boy snorts. “It’s only a partial bond, and Estrano-Trash is so old he’s practically in a coffin. If you’re taking over the family, might as well take the mist too.”

“One, I’m not taking over the family, it’s a temporary thing. And two, a partial bond is still a bond. She was a patch job to keep him sane” Tsuna explains. “Had four guardians, but they’re all dead now. Karasu is basically Leonardo’s version of you – a partial bond to keep him from going crazy. They don’t dare fully harmonise due to the age difference, but it still counts.”

Xanxus shrugs.

“Which means when he does kick the bucket she’s going to be antsy anyway.”

Tsuna just shakes his head. “Why don’t you focus on your own harmony issues before you start worrying about mine, Xanxus. Get more than a sky and then you can offer commentary.”

Xanxus makes a show of thinking about it, before grinning and letting his storm flames loose.

“Nah. Making fun of you is too much fun Tsuna-Trash. I like watching you squirm.”

His sky rolls his eyes, but flares his flames in reaction to Xanxus’s, and the two settle in, harmony refreshing after so long apart. Xanxus leans against him, grinning in part relief, part glee.

He cannot wait to see the look on Nono and the brother’s faces when Tsuna reveals this little secret...
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I admit it, I'm not happy with this chapter. But I don't think I could make it any better short of scrapping it and writing from scratch so...here comes a slightly lackluster finale to an awful lot of plans.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Xanxus, get out of bed or I will drag you out of it.”
The boy snarled and pulled the covers further over his head.
“Just try it Massimo-Trash. I can do whatever I want today.”
He holds tight to the blanket, and sure enough, Massimo starts trying to yank it away.
“You’re being ridiculous! Get up and act your age!”
“No!” Xanxus snaps back. “It’s my birthday and I can do what I want. I don’t care what the old man expects.”
He curses when his grip slips, and Massimo succeeds in pulling the blanket off the bed. The man is matching him glare for glare.
“You know, most kids your age are overjoyed when they get a birthday party.”
Xanxus just hisses like a cat, grabbing a pillow and shoving it over his head.
“It’s a bunch of the old man’s allies and suck ups hanging out in a room” He growls. “What part of that is overjoying?”
He can hear Massimo muttering, but misses the man walking up, and so howls when the pillow is also tossed from the bed.
“Is this because Tsunayoshi hasn’t called to say he’ll make it?”
Xanxus lunges up in outrage.
“Shut the fuck up Trash! That has nothing to do with it!”
Massimo however, just takes the opportunity to hook an arm around Xanxus’s waist and pull him off the bed, hauling him towards the bathroom like a feral cat.
“You can have your years-too-early-puberty-tantrum later Xan. Shower, dress and be downstairs with a smile or the friendliest snarl you can muster in the hour, or Dad will withdraw your access to the shooting range for the rest of the week.”
He half drops, half throws the boy onto the tiled floor and shuts the door with more fuss than necessary, drowning out Xanxus’s dozen expletives. When he stumbles to his feet, his kicks the door in token protest, but heads straight for the shower. Now that he’s out of his nice, warm nest and
walking barefoot on freezing tile, a shower sounds like a frustratingly good idea.

It doesn’t however, cool his temper. Tsuna hasn’t answered a single call in the week. He was due back last month and hasn’t even give Xanxus a half-assed reason for it. Just vanished off the face of the earth without a trace. Xanxus hasn’t taken it well, especially when his birthday started crawling closer. Not that he or Tsuna really celebrate them – Xanxus found out mostly by accident that the Sky’s birthday was only a few days after his, but Vongola had heavily pressing Xanxus to make something out of it since August, and he’d been assuming he could make it a joint thing and ride it out with his Sky without the man jumping off a balcony. He’s been spending most of his spare time toying with coming up with a new gun design, something that could channel his flames so that he didn’t need to worry about reloading, and he wants to run a few ideas past his sky. Tsuna isn’t exactly tech savvy, but he’s currently semi-ruling a family in hiding for designing a psycho-bullet. He’s got to have picked up something.

But no, he’s not here, and Xanxus has to endure yet more stupid mafioso with nobody at his back, and he hates that he even considered getting his hopes up. When Tsuna does show up, Xanxus is giving the present of a fist to the stomach for not letting him know.

It’s as bad as he expects.

There are maybe three guests in his age range, two of them skies – but one of them is the Cavallone heir, and the other two are wrapped up in what is clearly a very fresh harmony, so they’re not worth the effort of talking to.

The rest of the guest list has a good decade on him, minimum. Normally that’s hardly an issue – he gets along with Tsuna and the Vongola siblings just fine, but they’re all skies, unlike this hoard of Trash that keep poking him with their mediocre flames.

He’s grabbed a plate of food and slammed himself into an alcove near the balcony in a desperate attempt to avoid starting a war via shooting the face of some advantageous non-sky heir. Not that it really helps, the flames are freaking everywhere. Tsuna’s actions at the last party suddenly seem perfectly understandable.

He’s seriously considering jumping out the window himself, when there’s a commotion at the front doors, and it draws the attention of enough men that Xanxus is curious despite himself. He dumps the plate in the hands of an unsuspecting waiter and pushes through, using more force than probably necessary to shove some of the skinnier ones out of the way, and flames on the ones who are too stubborn or dumb to move.

It’s a full-on entourage of men in white suits, and the Ninth is very quickly moving to greet them with no less than three of his Guardians in tow. For a party that’s meant to be informal, the brothers have been the ones who greet most of the guests, so this must be someone important.

He gets his answer once he gets a look at the figure in the centre. It’s a teenage girl with black hair and a strange mark on her cheek, but everyone’s eyes are on the figure in her arms. She looks like a baby, dressed in white and adorned with the most ridiculous hat Xanxus has ever seen, but her eyes are far too old to belong to a child. Of the Arcobaleno, there are only two recorded as female, so this can only be Luce, the don of the Giglio Nero family.

Wait…Giglio Nero. Luce.

Xanxus is a grade A idiot. He’s heard those names before. How the hell is he only making the connection now?
There’s a flicker against his flames, and he jerks up.

No way.

A hand lands on his head.

“Sorry I’m late.”

Xanxus sees red.

“You Trash!”

He swings round and socks the man behind him right in the stomach. True to form, Tsuna crumples in half, one hand jerking out to grab Xanxus’s shoulder.

“Nice to see you too Xanxus” he wheezes.

Xanxus punches him again, and fully intends to keep on doing it. But then both of Tsuna’s hands are on his shoulders, and before he knows it, his hands are wrapped around the man’s torso in a hug.

“Where the fuck have you been Trash?” he mutters into the shirt. It’s a good make, clearly the Giglio Nero have been tailoring him well. “You were supposed to be back by now.”

One of Tsuna’s hands drops to Xanxus’s back, while the other tries to run through the boy’s hair.

“I know, and I’m sorry. We had a communications blackout for a while when the Vindice-“

Xanxus yanks himself out the hold.

“The WHAT?”

Oh crap, what the fuck has his sky done NOW? The Estrano better not have dropped him in their own disaster.

Tsuna however, just rolls his eyes.

“Relax, it’s all sorted now. But I couldn’t exactly get a message out, and I got a little delayed. Luce is explaining the whole thing to Nono, so he should be understanding.”

Xanxus risks glancing over to the two bosses, who have since been joined by Timoteo’s sons. Judging from how wide the irises have gotten on Federico and Massimo, the Arcobaleno is definitely winning them over.

“To be honest, I knew I’d have to deal with Bermuda and Vindice eventually” Tsuna says, drawing Xanxus’s attention back. “It all worked out for the best, and means I can come back with a pretty good gift for everyone.”

Xanxus starts to grin.

“You’re finally ready to put this ridiculously secret plan into action Trash?”

Tsuna grins back and nods over at the Arcobaleno.

“Yup. Now that the Vindice are on board, it’s going to be a lot easier to help the Estrano too. I just need Luce to talk Timoteo into it.”
He pulls out of Xanxus’s grasp and tugs Xanxus towards the group. When she sees them coming, Luce smiles and jumps from the teens arms onto the nearest table.

“Xanxus” Tsuna begins. “This is Luce, and her daughter, Aria.”

“Good afternoon” says the Arcobaleno, holding out a hand. “You must be Xanxus. Tsunayoshi has spoken of you so much I can’t believe this is the first time we’ve met.”

Her flames are viciously pure, enough to make Xanxus straighten his spine instinctively before reaching to shake the offered hand. His eyes flit over to the teen, who gives him a lazy wave.

“Happy birthday kid. Sorry we kept your sky a little longer than planned.”

He would snap some witty retort at the girl, but her flames are just a shade less pure than her mothers, and frankly, his brain is still trying to wrap his head around the whole ‘daughter’ part, so the moment passes, and Tsuna takes the moment to bring the rooms attention back to her.

“I apologise for interrupting the party so abruptly” he begins. “As many of you already know, I have been a guest of the Giglio Nero family for some time, but have returned to finalise the alliance between Vongola and Giglio Nero.”

The room fills with hushed whispers. Giglio Nero are small, but they have an Arcobaleno as their head, and a history that goes back almost to the very start of the mafia era. They have always been friendly regarding Vongola, but never more than neutral regarding their actions. Whatever Tsuna did, it must have been impressive.

Luce is smiling, clearly following the train of thought.

“In honour of the Giglio Nero and Vongola’s new alliance, Sawada Tsunayoshi came to me with quite an impressive gift, one that will aid no only us, but many of our allies. I hope that all of you will be able to help us achieve our goals.

Her daughter hands her a glass, and the Arcobaleno raises it up.

“A toast, in honour of our newest alliance.”

Xanxus quickly grabs a glass of champagne and moves out of grabbing distance of Tsuna. The man rolls his eyes, but lets him keep the alcohol. He takes a sip in triumph.

“…So, do I finally get to hear what this secret game-changing plan is now or what, Trash?” he asks, raising the glass with everyone else before guzzling it down.

Tsuna smiles.

“We’re going to break the Arcobaleno curse.”

Xanxus spits out his drink.

The only saving grace to Xanxus’s embarrassing reaction was that he was hardly the only one in the room after Luce announced it publicly. It still took a few days to set up, with the Vongola and Giglio Nero bringing in allies. Frustratingly, it meant Xanxus barely saw Tsuna while he ran point – and it wasn’t until Tsuna’s birthday that they were face to face again, in a building deep in neutral territory that Tsuna had demanded they use. He looks exhausted, and has foregone a suit for a stupid orange hoodie which Xanxus fully intends to burn the second he gets the chance, but there’s a light
in his eye that the pre-teen would very much like to keep glowing.

Of course, that means getting him through the introduction part of this whole event, and the man has already proven to have issues in that area. So, when Xanxus spots a familiar figure walking towards them, he tugs on his sky’s arm, grip tight.

“Yo, Trash. Time to brace yourself.”

Tsuna, lost in a mental headcount as yet another family arrives, merely looks over in confusion, unable to register the new arrival until his voice hits his ears.

“So, you are the infamous Sawada Tsunayoshi.”

It’s like someone hit a switch. Tsuna freezes, and his skin turns several shades paler. For a moment, Xanxus is positive his sky is going to do another running act and ruin this whole thing.

But then, the man’s shoulders relax, and his forces a smile onto his face as he turns to greet the guest.

“I guess I am, Reborn” he says, giving a short bow to the Arcobaleno in front of him. “Apologies for not greeting you earlier.”

Reborn’s dark pupils slide up the man’s frame. Whatever he sees must impress him, because his lips quirk into a grin.

“Hmm, you’re just full of surprises, aren’t you? Have we met before?”

Tsuna’s eyes darken for just a moment.

“No. I guess we haven’t.”

Reborn’s eyes narrow, but before he can question the answer, they’re interrupted by the arrival of the remaining Arcobaleno, and the hitman wanders off with a parting glance in Tsuna’s direction.

Tsuna merely waits until the Arcobaleno is out of sight, before visibly sagging and dropping his head against Xanxus’s shoulder.

“I cannot wait for today to be over” he whispers, more weary and tired than anyone in the room. Xanxus merely coaxes him back up, mindful of the curious eyes around them.

“C’mon Trash, stay with me” he mutters. “One more day and everything comes to fruition, right? You’re almost there.”

Tsuna stands, but closes his eyes.

“Almost there. Not perfect, but almost there.”

The man’s flames stabilise, and Xanxus lets himself relax as he watches the doors. Eventually, he does a mental headcount of his own and notices one family is still clearly missing.

“Yo Trash, where are the Estrano?” he asks, scowling as he takes in yet another family coming through the door. Not even the Vongola’s most spectacular get together brought in this number of people – he’s struggling to remember all the names – but Kara-Trash and her both are distinctly absent.

This brings Tsuna back to reality, opening his eyes and smiling.
“They’re here” Tsuna admits. “But I’ve asked that they stay out of sight until—”

His head jerks up, and a half smile quirks onto his face.

“Until some special guests arrive.”

Something crawls up Xanxus’s collar, and he instinctively moves closer to Tsuna, just in time to see the air warp near a door, resulting in a dark portal that revealed several black clad…

Men would probably be accurate. But only in the most vague association. What’s most terrifying is the traces of flame he can feel on them. They’re holding them back, but Xanxus can feel night flames on each and every one of the Vindice soldiers.

Everyone in the room steps back, the tension almost palpable. Xanxus’s flames flare almost automatically, and his shoulders loosen when he feels Tsuna answer in kind – still with just his sky but without a single trace of night flames.

“Breathe Xan” Tsuna whispers. “I’m not going anywhere.”

He knows that. Xanxus knows that. He just…wanted to confirm it, that’s all.

It doesn’t help when Tsuna then chooses to step forward, striding up to the Vindice men who part… revealing an Arcobaleno clad in the same outfit.

There’s an audible gasp as the sight, especially from the contingent of Arcobaleno in the centre of the room, and Xanxus only just bites down on the need to gape as he revises everything he’d been told about the World’s Strongest and comes up lacking. Tsuna engages in some small talk before stepping back and letting the Arcobaleno jump up onto a nearby guard’s shoulder.

“May I introduce Bermuda, the boss of the Vindice” Tsuna announces, as if he hasn’t just turned the entire mafia on its head.

Bermuda on the other hand, from what little Xanxus could make out from his bindings, was rather amused at the whole proceeding.

“Tsunayoshi, you neglected to mention that your plan resulted in the intervention of the Vindice” Timoteo warns, brushing off his shock and stepping forward.

Bermuda is quick to motion to his ride, sliding in front of Tsuna.

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“Had you known, you might have refused for your family’s safety. Which would have been… unpleasant for you” the Arcobaleno replies. “As it happens, the Vindice are vital for this plan to work, Sawada Tsunayoshi is was merely fortunate enough that it benefits us enough to cooperate.”

Tsuna’s lips quirk, and Xanxus already knows that Tsuna knew about the Vindice leader, even if he’s not sure how. Judging from the look on the Ninth’s face, he’s also made that connection.

“Yes, I discovered a way to alter the curse, but knew it would only work with a sizeable amount of night flames” Tsuna explains. “However, I lacked the technical expertise to implement it. Thankfully, there was a family willing to help, who along with Talbot, made today possible.”

“I must admit, I was not aware the Giglio Nero were so innovative” compliments the Ninth, to which Luce laughs.

“Oh, we are not” she admits. “Tsunayoshi brought another family to our aid.”
Tsuna nods. “Indeed. All of this would not have been possible without the help of the Estrano.”

The entire room freezes, and the doors to the side slam open, revealing an elderly man in a wheelchair, and a woman with indigo hair dressed in a frockcoat a good century out of date. The man is tense, but the woman is undeniably smug as she rolls the chair as close to the Vindice as she can without ramming into them.

“Be warned” says the Vindice Arcobaleno, once the two are in place. “Any attack on the Estrano witnessed by the Vindice in these halls will be seen as a criminal act. At the request of Tsunayoshi Sawada, their crime has been subjected to appeal. It is of the Vindice’s opinion that their crime has been suitably punished as ‘time served.’

This is not a popular decision. At least a dozen men and woman had been pulling out weapons at the arrival of the duo, and are only reluctantly put back when the Vindice move forward.

This announcement however, is not enough to save Tsuna from the Vongola Ninth, who has stormed forward and is now staring down his rebellious family member, mindless of the hoard of jailers to his side. Xanxus instantly darts forward, just in time to hear his boss growl with a voice laced with angry sky flames.

“Tsunayoshi Sawada, I hope you can explain yourself.”

It’s a tone that would make most men buckle, but Tsuna has never been like most men, and Xanxus only grins when the man replies as if he can’t feel the flames trying to force him into submission.

“What is there to explain?” Tsuna counters. “I needed help, so I enlisted a family that could.”

“A family that should have been executed the moment you tracked them down!” the Ninth argues back, eyes glinting orange. “How can you justify sparing a family that created such a dangerous weapon when-“

“A weapon that performs the exact same ability that a well-trained mist can perform” Tsuna interrupts, eyes glowing right back. “If Vongola had come up with that bullet, there would be no discussion about whether or not they were allowed to use it.”

“That is hardly a fair argument” Timoteo argues. “The Vongola have a long-respected history of using flame bullets—“

“They also have a long-respected history of using guns” Tsuna interrupts. “Should we be taking out any Familia that chooses to have a particularly dangerous new type? Call a spade a spade, the mafia got scared.”

“You cannot expect us to just leave them alone!” yells another Don from across the room, and Tsuna immediately swings to glare in their direction. Before he can do more than intimidate, another voice echoes across the room.

“No, that would be asking too much from old men,” Leonardo replies, struggling to stand from the chair. Karasu is immediately at his side, but he manages to make it to his feet on his own power. “My family has been decimated by your judging, to the point that I no longer have heirs. One way or another the Estrano have been wiped out, they’re aren’t enough of us left to be considered a Familia. All I can do is guarantee a future for those that still live. And for that, Sawada Tsunayoshi is my first choice for heir.”

That causes murmuring throughout the room, and Xanxus smirks as he takes in the Ninth’s frustrated expression. Tsuna on the other hand, is rubbing his hand over his eyes – clearly, he’s had this
“He’s already been acting as Regent while we made the preparations” Leonardo continues. “Although I have agreed that, given his current loyalties and his position as a long-distance informant, an heir of his choosing can be substituted.”

The Ninth’s eyes widen, while is sons gape, either from the revelation of heirship or the fact that this once-dead-on-site family had just announced to the entire mafia world that a Vongola sky was nothing more than a travelling message broker. But before they can argue either point, Luce steps forward.

“The Giglio Nero and the Arcobaleno both accept this decision” she states. “In exchange for breaking the Arcobaleno curse, I think allowing those left alive of the Estrano is a small price to pay.”

Any argument the rest of the mafioso had quickly dies at that announcement, and they step back, shuffling away as Leonardo sits back down, Kasumi grinning at their dismayed faces. She also sends a wink in Tsuna’s direction, which makes Xanxus snicker. Already he can hear men making contingency plans, intending to speak to Timoteo about using Tsunayoshi’s intelligence gathering skills for future events.

He doesn’t get much time to enjoy the fallout though, because the Ninth is pulling Tsuna to the side, and Xanxus is quick to fall in line, just in case the sky needs backup. Timoteo looks as serious as the boy has ever seen him.

“You planned this.”

Tsuna smiles and shrugs.

“I don’t leave family behind. And the Estrano are family…sort of. They didn’t deserve what happened. And I’ve always said I never intended to stick around the main house full time.”

Timoteo is frowning. Tsuna doesn’t give an inch.

“Vongola Ninth” Tsuna says. “This is the family that developed the tools necessary to break the Arcobaleno curse. Do you really think that executing them is the best option for the family? Those that are left are brilliant, and talented. More importantly, they listen to me. Wouldn’t keeping them, and possibly the Arcobaleno’s favour, be a better use of our resources?”

“…You’re in charge of settling them in” Timoteo says. “You will remain their Regent until such time as you find an heir I approve of. I would make them an official family with you as underboss, but I am relatively certain you have already prepared to find a way out of that as well, informant.”

Tsuna’s lip quirks.

“Their scientists, whoever is left, will be integrated into the Science and Technology departments” the Ninth continues. “After being put through a thorough mist wipe to eradicate all knowledge of how to make the possession bullet. If the Estrano wish to stay in Vongola territory, it will not exist again.”

“That will not be a problem, but a mist of my choosing will also be in the room to guarantee that’s all that’s removed” Tsuna replies.

The Ninth nods, although he’s still frowning, and backs away.
“Once all this is over, you will come to my office. Alone.”

It’s not a suggestion, and Xanxus feels his legs shake at the force of the order. Tsuna however, just nods, and the man turns his back on them, walking towards his sons. Once out of their direct sight, Tsuna sags, and gives a nod to both Bermuda and Leonardo before grabbing Xanxus’s shoulder and pulling him towards a corner. Xanxus was almost cackling by the time they were out of sight.

“That was fucking awesome Trash” he snickers. “I can’t believe it worked!

Tsuna grins back.

“It was a gamble, but I knew as long as I could get Bermuda on my side, I could save the Estrano” Tsuna admits. “That was always going to be the challenge. Thankfully, I made a compelling enough argument.”

“How’d you even know about him anyway?” Xanxus asks. “I’d never even heard of an Arcobaleno in the Vindice. He come to you when your flames were screwed up?”

Tsuna shakes his head.

“Let’s just say our paths crossed once and leave it at that” he replies. “I respect him, even if I don’t consider him a friend.”

Xanxus frowns. “What? Cause he’s a night flame user?”

That gets a harsh chuckle.

“It’s not about flames. He and I…he was told how things had to be, and when he didn’t like his options, made a new one through sheer force of will. While I don’t necessarily approve of what he’s done, I can respect being told you must die and finding a way to live regardless.”

He closes his eyes briefly and shakes his head, brushing off the memory.

“Now, let’s get started on this. We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

Despite all of his Sky’s claims, and the sheer amount of curve balls he’d thrown their way, the actual breaking of the curse turned out to be fairly anticlimactic. Once everyone had the method explained, and the initial output of flames had been released, it had gone rather smoothly. The only hiccup was when the jars finally took root, and only Lal found herself in her original form. Other than Luce, none of them had been entirely convinced by Tsuna’s promise that they would grow, but the lack of light from their pacifiers and the lack of drain did give him some benefit of the doubt.

That however, didn’t mean Tsuna was free. The Arcobaleno were very interested in the man who had come up with a cure, despite having no obligation to do so. Fon and Reborn were looking for the ulterior motive, Skull wanted to pay back a debt, Verde looked like he was five minutes away from tying the man down to a table and dissecting him, and Colonello was trying to get an estimate on just how long it would take for him to be legal again.

He gets his reprieve when the Ninth and his Guardians approach him from the back.

“Tsunayoshi” the Ninth begins. “A word?”

Tsuna looks as happy to go with him as he is in his current position, but capitulates and extracts himself from the toddlers, who frown at the disappearance but don’t follow. Their flames flare in
irritation, and Xanxus just grins, flaring his own subconsciously and wonders if they’ll turn to him for answers instead.

He stops when his flames suddenly brush against another’s, and gets hit with a hesitant strand of interest. Another flare, and it’s enough to bring the curious element into the open, an infant sized figure clad in a dark cloak shimmering into view.

“Xanxus of Vongola” Viper greets. “I was hoping to speak with you.”

Xanxus turns and cocks his own head, feeling the flames settle. It’s the first time he’s felt another flame feel quite so…right, next to his own. His pokes them again, and the Mist chuckles.

“I was right. You have exceptional flames for your age.”

He smirks back. “So I’ve been told.”

They’re compatible. Xanxus is compatible with the fucking Mist Arcobaleno. Best birthday. Present. Ever.

Most of Viper’s face is hidden, but he can feel their eyes assessing him.

“You have potential” Viper admits. “I’ve met a lot of skies; not many can catch my attention as well as you can.”

“Really?” Xanxus almost purrs, flames tugging at their leash. “In the market for a sky?”

“I am.”


Then Viper smirks.

“But not you.”

Or maybe not.

“Oi! Why the fuck not?” Xanxus squawks, good mood obliterated in a heartbeat.

Viper smirks. “You’re broke.”

Xanxus frowns. What the hell does that have to do with anything?

Seeing his confusion, Viper explains.

“Money is the only thing in this world I value. I don’t care about flames or bonds or companionship, just cold hard cash. We might be compatible, but if you can’t afford me, I refuse to harmonise. Flames like mine have standards.”

Xanxus frowns, but resists the urge to shoot the baby. At least they’re honest about it. And they haven’t said never, just set out requirements. Requirements Xanxus can meet, eventually.

Frankly if the reward is a goddam Arcobaleno as his mist, he can jump through a few hoops.

He sends the mist a smirk.

“So, if I get myself a position with significant cashflow, you’ll reconsider?”
Viper smirks back.

“I look forward to hearing from you.”

The toddler then vanishes, replaced by a small card spinning in the air. It flies towards him, and Xanxus catches it between his fingers. There’s nothing but a number printed on the front, and he grins as he slips it into his pocket.

He can’t wait to tell Tsuna.

That evening, he finds himself sprawled over his bed while he traces over the numbers, when Tsuna opens the door, thankfully lacking that awful hoodie and in a plain t-shirt. He sits on the side of the bed, ruffling Xanxus’s hair and glancing at the card.

“What’s that?”

Xanxus grins, twirling it between his fingers. “The number of my future mist.”

His Sky’s eyebrows raise, but they quickly fall as the man grins.

“Viper approached you? Congratulations. Are you going to court them?”

“Not yet” Xanxus admits. “They had an ultimatum that I have to meet first.”

Tsuna smiles.

“Let me guess, money?”

Xanxus grins back.

“Yeah Trash. Won’t consider me till I’m in a position to give the Trash stupid amounts of money. Need to figure that out first.”

Reluctantly, he slips the card into a pocket out of sight, and sits up.

“So, what did the old man want to talk about anyway?”

Tsuna instantly looks nervous, glancing to the side. It immediately puts Xanxus on edge, and he cocks his head.

“Trash?”

“He…heard there were unexpected complications with my new flames from Luce” Tsuna admits. “And…well…”

Xanxus is no idiot. He can put two and two together.

“…You Trash! You showed him didn’t you!”

Tsuna throws up his hands.

“I didn’t have much choice Xanxus!”

As far as the storm is concerned, that is not an argument.

“You said I could see them first!” he snaps, clambering to his feet to loom over the man. “You’d
better not be harmonised to anyone Trash!”

Tsuna sighs.

“Don’t worry, turns out, my secondary isn’t as simple as just developing additional flames.”

Xanxus rolls his eyes. Course not, Tsuna couldn’t do anything simple.

“Yeah well, you promised I’d be the first to see them and screwed me over” Xanxus snaps. “I think that at least gives me the right to see them Trash!”

“Xanxus…”

Both orange and red flames fill the room, and Tsuna’s shoulders droop.

“You’re right. I guess you’re right. Just…don’t be disappointed. They’re not what anyone expected.

Xanxus doesn’t care about the warnings, pulling his flames back and dropping to his knees, leaning in with eagerness as Tsuna’s flames flare. First the soft orange of his sky, and then-

It darkens, bursting into a beautifully familiar crimson that curls around Xanxus like a stray cat.

Storm flames. Enrico was right. Tsuna has storm flames because he’s been hooked to Xanxus for so long. And Xanxus doesn’t have even a potential storm guardian yet! He doesn’t care what Tsuna says, he’s not passing up a chance to get at least a tentative hook in.

They flicker in curiosity, and his own sky flames reach out, thirsting for the bond, and only to frown when they contact the red flames and feel…nothing.

The storm flames are wild and frustrated…and look at Xanxus sky with uninterest. There is no compatibility there, for all Tsuna’s sky sings to Xanxus’s own storm, he can’t attract Tsuna’s red the same way.

He pulls at them again, only for them to lash out in frustration at him getting in their space. It doesn’t make any sense – it’s not a feeling of rejection or attraction – but more a flame equivalent of punching air, there’s nothing to influence. He almost drowns the new flames in his own, his hands clamping onto Tsuna’s arms for physical contact, but still to no avail, and Tsuna pulls his flames back with a scowl.

“Xanxus-”

“Why the fuck won’t they harmonise?” Xanxus just snaps. “How can we not be compatible?”

Tsuna looks a little guilty, and tries to pull his arms away. Xanxus doesn’t let him.

“You know something Trash, spill!”

“It’s-“

“DON’T SAY IT!”

Tsuna gives a hysterical chuckle. “Well it kind of is. I was going to tell you I suspected we wouldn’t be. Remember how I was hanging around your neighbourhood to leech off your sky flames? Luce thinks that the storm flames came from me leeching off you for so long, but that just means they already consider themselves yours. My storm flames can’t harmonise with you, because
they’re technically yours to begin with. And you can’t harmonise with yourself.

…Oh, you have GOT to be kidding…

He lets his sky flames loose, drowning the room and ignoring Tsuna’s choking gasp as he all but steals the air, searching for something, anything, that he can latch onto. There has to be something.

There’s a glimmer, but Xanxus quickly realises it’s because Tsuna has released his sky flames, hitting him right back and forcing him to withdraw, the two’s current bond forcing a stalemate and making it clear. Xanxus has already bonded with the only flame Tsuna has available to harmonise.

Scowling, Xanxus pushes himself away, jumping off the bed and kicking at the wall. There’s still a lot storm flames flying around, because there’s now a foot shaped hole in the wallpaper. Tsuna leans forward to tug his arm back, and Xanxus struggles for just a few moments before surrendering and letting his sky pull him into a loose, one armed hug on the edge of the bed.

“I know it’s not what you wanted to hear” Tsuna tells him. “But it’s probably for the best.”

“Shut up Trash” Xanxus snaps. “The second the old man has a spare minute, he’s going to have Federico and Enrico banging on your door. They don’t have storms yet.”

To his surprise, Tsuna just chuckles. It’s a very weird sound to hear.

“I don’t think that’s going to be a problem.”

“Oh?”

The man smiles with an almost evil glee.

“They’re your storm flames Xanxus. Your harmonised storm flames. They can’t harmonise with you, but they can’t harmonise with anyone else either. They already consider themselves harmonised.”

That’s…not what Xanxus wanted to hear, but infinitely better than the alternative in which Tsuna finds himself in service of someone else.

“Fine. But I’m calling you my storm until I figure out how to fix it” Xanxus mutters. Tsuna chuckles in reply.

“Don’t think that’ll fly with Vongola, but go ahead if it makes you feel better. Just don’t let it hold you back when you find a real storm.”

Xanxus just rolls his eyes. Between him and Tsuna, they have all the storm they need. He’ll figure out a way to harmonise eventually. Mark his words.

Chapter End Notes

There's going to be about a 3 year timeskip come the next chapter, just so I can get certain characters to the right ages.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

It's been a few years, and Xanxus accidentally picks up a pet fish that may or may not already have an owner.

Chapter Notes

For anyone who isn't following my Tumblr - I gave myself a concussion in March thanks to a skiing accident and it has literally taken months for me to recover to the point I could look at a computer screen. Unfortunately that means my writing is a little rusty so what's going to come in the next few months might not necessarily be my best work, but I want to get back on the horse now that I can stand looking at it again. Since this chapter was always going to be something of a transition chapter (albeit one with a few important plot points) while GC and DK&T are both at pretty important chapters, I figured it was the best place to start writing again.

Chapter 7

With Leonardo’s health failing and relying on Tsuna and Karasu more and more each day, Tsuna was essentially landlocked into the Vongola estate, which was both awesome and frustrating, because as much as Xanxus likes knowing he can reach out and touch his sky any time he wants, Tsuna keeps gazing out windows and refusing to stay in a room unless the door is kept wide open, as if the mansion is caging him in. He’s not designed for staying in one place, but his responsibilities to the Estrano tie him down.

As such, Xanxus spends a lot of time ‘chaperoning’ his visits to the Estrano and throwing storm flames his way. Now that Tsuna’s flames are settled, their harmony isn’t what it used to be – no matter what Xanxus does, the calm, easy bond he’s used to just isn’t coming back. There’s a weird static when they harmonise, nothing glaringly obvious, probably because they both have storm flames, but it’s enough to be frustrating. Especially since Tsuna doesn’t even seem to notice – hell, since it’s Xanxus’s flames that took over from the black, maybe he really doesn’t.

Then again, given how much time he spends surrounded by little baby fledgling flames, maybe he’s too drunk on them to notice his harmony is out of whack. Whenever the mansion gets too much, Tsuna flees to the nursery housing the Estrano brats. He spends time with all of them, but he’s clearly got a soft spot for Karasu’s spawn and the other two Asian brats. By the time they’ve started walking, they’re following Tsuna around like ducklings. Mukuro-Trash has even taken to calling him ‘Uncle-Zoona’ (which is so unbelievably saccharine Xanxus has cavities from thinking about it). On the plus side, Tsuna always looks like he just swallowed razor blades whenever he hears it, so it’s also just a tad hysterical.

Leonardo manages to keep himself alive for another 2 years before his body gives out, and Xanxus gets to experience the first funeral where he actually cared about the corpse. It’s a quiet ceremony,
the man’s reputation following him to the grave and thus resulting in only the Estrano, Tsuna and Xanxus in attendance.

It says a lot about how relieved Vongola are at his passing that the Ninth has Tsuna in his office the very morning after wanting to know if he has a successor. He’s happy to learn that he does – less happy to learn that Tsuna’s first choice is Karasu.

She’s female, foreign, a mist, and has done nothing to prove loyalty to Vongola. If the Ninth was slightly less the gentleman, Tsuna probably would have been laughed out of the room.

Tsuna on the other hand, decides to take the dismissal as a challenge, and has spent the last year trying to prove to the Ninth he’s not crazy. Unfortunately for him, his constant encouragement for the mist has had one unintended side effect regarding his relationship with her, and is the reason Xanxus finds himself abandoned at yet another ridiculous party – this time in celebration of some medium level contract regarding a long range flame bullet, that Karasu had been put in charge of organising at Tsuna’s request.

In other words, the usual smarmy, awkward get-together where people mingle and flames flirt and Xanxus feels every second of his fourteen years of age shudder at the pointlessness of it all. He’s fielded off five interested flame actives already, and he’s barely been in the room an hour.

Attempt number six is making it’s way across the room, and Xanxus grits his teeth, fingers trying desperately to avoid smashing the glass in his hands. It’s non-alcoholic, just to add extra burn to the situation – Tsuna hates him drinking, and the man has a knack for swooping in just as Xanxus gets his hands on something strong.

But before he can start bristling in earnest, Tsuna is by his side and turning his understanding of the universe on the side, shoving a glass of strong smelling liquor into his hands and grabbing his fizzy water in exchange.

“Here, swap” he mutters, sipping on the water as his eyes glance around the room in suspicion. Xanxus raises an eyebrow, but knocks back the drink before he changes his mind.

“I thought you said no alcohol till I was eighteen?” he asks, dropping the glass down on a table. “Not that I’m complaining but-”

Tsuna just shushes him, eyes narrowing as he ushers the teen into a deeper throng of people. It’s a lot harder than it used to be considering Xanxus now has close to a foot on him, but Xanxus is amused enough to let him.

Once they’re out of sight of whatever’s upsetting the sky, Xanxus digs in his heels and leans on the man, elbow planted firmly on his head and crushing the brown spikes.

“I thought you didn’t like me drinking?” Xanxus asks again, grinning at the frazzled man.

“I don’t” Tsuna mutters. “But Karasu’s been plying me with drinks since I got here and I’m running out of plant pots to toss them in. I’m already two glasses over my limit.”

His eyes narrow, and he pushes out from the arm.

“Besides, if that scotch stash I found in your room last week is any indication, it’s not going to have much effect on you.”

Two years ago, that would have had Xanxus wincing and glancing away, but but he’s fourteen now, and a mix of puberty and genetics are working quite nicely for him. He looks older than he is, and
his training is Vongola quality. These days punishment is a rare thing – Xanxus gets away with everything short of murder these days – and he only gets held to murder because he has to write mission reports. As such, Xanxus just offers a shit-eating grin and a shrug of his shoulders. If Tsuna wants to make him feel guilty, he’ll have to do a lot better than that.

“You know, you could just sleep with her and be done with it.”

Tsuna knocks back his non-alcoholic drink and sags. “I’m not having this discussion with you. You’re fourteen.”

Xanxus rolls his eyes. “A fourteen year old slum child born from a prostitute Tsuna-Trash. My innocence died a cruel merciless death long before you showed up.”

His arm slings around his Sky’s shoulders. “And, frankly, you could do with losing a bit of your own. On this, Kara-Trash and I completely agree. One drunken mistake would probably do you the world of good.”

“I don’t do one night stands Xanxus” Tsuna snaps. “And I make enough mistakes without adding alcohol to the equation.”

“Then tell her to her face that you’re not harmonising with her and stop babying her brats” Xanxus snorts. “You’re the king of mixed signals Trash.”

Tsuna gives out a sound that isn’t quite a whine. “I’ve told her I’m not looking for more Guardians Xanxus! And I can’t just stop seeing her, I haven’t convinced the Ninth she’s loyal enough to be given free reign over her family.”

“And a harmonisation with Vongola’s most infamous information broker would go a long way to solving that” Xanxus snaps back. “After all, why would the boss be willing to let her run free when the one person constantly advocating her won’t even consider harmonising.”

Tsuna’s eyes are slightly orange, but Xanxus’s just flash orange right back.

“You need more Guardians Tsuna-Trash. And my flames can tell from here that you’re compatible. On top of which, she’s pretty, interested, loyal, and gives you the free ticket out of this building that you’ve been craving. You’re not falling into discord any more, so why the fuck are you resisting?”

He throws up his middle finger as Tsuna opens his mouth.

“And if the word ‘complicated’ comes out of your mouth Trash, I’m tying the both of you up and throwing you in a closet until you harmonise or fuck. Try me.”

Tsuna’s mouth snaps shut as he glowers at the storm. Xanxus is unrepentant, and eventually, Tsuna looks away, shoulders sagging.

“...I’m not stupid” he mutters. “You think I don’t know harmonising with her would solve so many problems? But there are things in my head that you don’t know Xanxus, things I’m not ready to tell people. Things I might not ever be able to tell people, but if I harmonise to a mist, especially one like her, who has so much potential-”

His voice stutters, eyes dulling momentarily before he shakes it off.

“I can’t let her in Xanxus. I can’t. At least not without other Guardians in place first. But at the same time I can’t push her away without ruining everything. All I can do is keep the status quo until she’s done enough that Timoteo will see what I do.”
His head turns to scan the room.

“Everyone knows I have secrets. I don’t exactly hide that part of me well. That’s the only reason she’s trying to seduce me. She thinks sex will make me trust her, but it’s not about trust, or interest...”

Xanxus almost has to double take at the phrasing, and starts to snicker.

“Wait, so you...”

He bursts into laughter. “You know, I was honestly starting to think you were a fucking eunuch, or utterly oblivious. But you do still have balls!”

“I know I’m dense, but I’m not that blind Xanxus” Tsuna groans, shoving his head in his hands. “I am well aware that she’s a very beautiful woman, and I haven’t been with anyone in a very long time. Interest has never been the issue.”

“Then what’s the fucking problem?” Xanxus snaps. “If harmonising isn’t going to happen, a relationship would probably do as much good!”

His sky sags even lower.

“Aside from the fact that it’s abhorrently wrong to keep secrets from someone you're in a relationship with? Because no matter what she tries, every time I look at her I see Mukuro and even the idea of sleeping with her makes my skin crawl.”

“...You won’t sleep with her because she’s got a toddler?” Xanxus repeats, disgust forming almost immediately. “Since when do you give a fuck about something like that? Thought you liked the brat?”

Tsuna blinks at him, then glances at the glasses on the table.

“...I must be drunker than I thought. What are they putting in those things?”

“Trash!”

Tsuna shakes his head slightly.

“I don’t mean...baby-Mukuro. I mean Mukuro Mukuro. If he found out I slept with his-”

The man shudders.

“No. No. If it was the other way round, I’d kill him. I don’t care how unlikely it is that he’d ever find out, I’m not risking it.”

“Who the fuck is ‘Mukuro Mukuro’ and what the hell has he got to do with Kara-Trash?”

As if summoned by name, the dark haired mist appears, walking across the room, eyes flicking and disregarding guests even as they compliment her work. Tsuna immediately tenses, and he slips from Xanxus’s grasp, vanishing into the crowd. The teen just shakes his head, and locks eyes with Karasu, who gives him a quick grin as she changes direction.

The mist is relentless, Xanxus will give her that. Although it’s really Tsuna’s own fault for being so damn good with all of the Estrano brats, especially her own. Saving the Estrano got him brownie points, but he treats Mukuro like he was his own flesh and blood, and wants to give Karasu a position woman don’t generally get in the mafia, no conditions required. Karasu knows a good thing
when she sees it – unless the man gives her a flat out rejection, she won’t stop until she gets Tsuna in bed, in harmony, or both.

Depending on how successful Tsuna is at dodging her, Xanxus might just give her a hint when he finally escapes the room for good. The man really needs to learn how to enjoy himself, drunken ramblings aside.

Unfortunately for Xanxus, Tsuna’s dodging means he’s out his entertainment for the evening, and he’s braced for yet another agonisingly boring night of schmoozing and awkward flaring attempts.

It’s not a fun thought. Nobody had mentioned that there was so much unimportant crap like this in the mafia – he doesn’t even have a temporary title like Tsuna so why does he keep getting dragged along? Expecting him to endure something like this without a distraction is just plain torture.

“Voi, so you’re Xanxus – not sure what I expected, but I kind of like it.”

His thoughts pull back as he glares in the direction of the voice, but pauses as he takes the owner in. Tall as Xanxus, but probably younger, with short white hair cut in a style that really doesn’t suit him, and a vicious, shit-eating grin on his face. He’s standing with that air Xanxus has come to loathe, the kind that screams privilege – but with an aura that suggests the confidence might be well-earned, unlike the other bottom feeders he’s been fending off.

Xanxus frowns. By this point he knows just about every kid in his age range that comes to these events, and this guy is a complete unknown. Considering the calibre exuding from the teen, that’s just unacceptable.

“Who the hell are you Trash?”

The boy gives a loose shrug, tossing a lazy thumb over his shoulder, aimed in the direction of the Cavallone contingent crowded in a corner.

“Squalo Superbi. I’m here as Dino’s guest – we’re in the same class at school.”

Xanxus raises a brow. That’s not even slightly normal.

“Since when do guests get non-family plus ones?”

Squalo’s eyes flicker to the sides, and leans in. A second later, Xanxus registers the small flicker of flame and his eyes widen in comprehension.

“You’re harmonised?”

His head jerks in Dino’s direction. How on earth had the Horse-Trash pulled that off? His flame is so weak he should barely be able to pull in an active toddler.

As if aware he’s being watched, the blonde boy immediately trips, crashing to the ground. Xanxus can’t help but stare at Squalo in disbelief – at least the other boy seems aware of how ridiculous it sounds.

“Voi, we’re not harmonised,” he admits. “Not yet. But the Cavallone’s head’s health has been failing the last few months, and Dino’s the only heir. They’re pushing him to start using his flames, and – I don’t know”

He shrugs again. “Something about him drew my attention. We’ll see if he can keep it. I haven’t decided if I want to go through with it yet, voi.”
In the distance, Dino is back on his feet – just in time to trip again, this time falling into a waiter and sending glasses crashing to the ground. Squalo winces at the sound.

“Voi…he’s got potential, but he needs a lot of work. I have dreams too, and I’m not wasting my time trying to improve a fixer upper unless he can prove he’s worth it.”

Xanxus scoffs as he turns away from the chaos. “I can answer that. He aint.”

Squalo snickers, and Xanxus feels something deep inside curl in satisfaction at the sound.

“Voi, biggest issue is the Varia” Squalo admits. “They offered me a position after I graduate, so long as I keep beating my opponents.”

Xanxus frowns. “Varia? Vongola’s kill squad?”

He’s heard of them, certainly, but they don’t really come near the main house. All he knows is the Ninth only calls them as a last resort, and they’re not known for subtlety. Not that they can’t, they just prefer not to. And they’re very exclusive.

“Voi, Vongola’s Independent Assassination Squad” Squalo corrects. “Pure quality, just getting the offer proves my potential. But as close as Cavallone and Vongola are, they won’t grant a Guardian of another Boss a position. They might be independent, but they’re still Vongola.”

His smile grows wicked.

“To be honest, I just really, really want to fight the current Boss. He’s the Sword Emperor, and voi, that’s a title I dearly want. But if I kill him, I have to take over, and I prefer following. Cavallone could get me out of being in charge.”

What must it be like to know exactly what you want and how to get it? Xanxus is almost envious.

“What about you?” Squalo asks. “Rumour has it you’re practically a white whale. Rejected every flame that comes your way, regardless of status or power.”

“Because I like strong flames and personalities Trash” Xanxus growls. “What good is status if they can’t keep up?”

That just has Squalo laughing again.

“You’re old school! Voi! The second coming of the Secondo is a traditionalist! I love it!”

It’s not the first time he’s been referred to as the Secondo, and most of the time it frustrates him, because it’s a reminder of something he’ll never get a shot at. But there’s something about how Squalo says it that makes it more a compliment than a snarky remark.

“Fuck it” Xanxus snorts, pulling off he wall and heading into the party. “Tsuna-Trash is occupied, you can rant about the Horse-Trash and Varia over something decent to drink.”

“Voi!”

That verbal tic is going to get annoying. Xanxus already knows it. But the pale haired boy is following just a few steps behind, the traditional spot of a right hand rather than trying to keep pace. The Cavallone aren’t wasting any time it seems.

But when Squalo slips away and returns with glasses filled with Xanxus’s favourite ball-acceptable liquor, the teen can’t really fault them for it.
Squalo has clearly been looking for someone willing to let him rant without offering an opinion – and as long as the teen keeps making runs for alcohol Xanxus is happy to listen. Lord knows Tsuna’s done it for him on more than one occasion. But with the booze flowing, the ranting only lasts about an hour before it descends more into laughter and mocking of the general ball goers.

“God, is Bellagio still making the rounds” Xanxus cackles, sipping from the glass. “He’s pushing 60 and barely flame active. Give it a rest Trash, if you haven’t harmonised yet, you’re not going to.”

“Voi, he’s nothing” Squalo challenges. “That would-be Casanova Lightning in the corner chatting up the Sun from Medici? He’s tried harmonising with nearly a dozen skies and not a single one clicked. They say his flames are, how do you say, shooting blanks?”

Xanxus bursts into laughter, and shoves the other teen away, only for Squalo to whine and try to drape himself on one of Xanxus’s shoulders. Both are falling deep into drunk territory, and the pale boy is definitely more tipsy than he is. Looking back, Xanxus will happily blame that for not realising what was happening until it was too late.

Squalo nuzzles his shoulder, yawning into the shirt.

“Voi, you’re strong. Dino’s warm like a fireplace, drags you in and keeps you close. You’re lava, destroying everything that can’t survive your heat. Feels good.”

Xanxus snickers, and finds himself leaning in himself. He’s starting to feel a little lethargic – been a while since he’s gotten this soused, he normally burns off the excess before it affects him. “You think getting burned is good Trash? Somebody’s got a kink.”

With his face smushed into Xanxus’s shirt, he feels, more than sees, the smirk Squalo gives.

“Gives me pride. To know I’m strong enough to take whatever you give and keep going.”

Xanxus’s eyes start to feel heavy – and that’s when his flames realise something’s not right.

Or rather, they realise something is very good for them, but unbelievably bad for Xanxus personally.

He jerks up to his feet, letting Squalo face plant to the ground with a squawk, as his storm flames ripple through his body, burning out the excess rain flames. They practically fly off – Squalo had been releasing them subconsciously, which meant it wasn’t a complete disaster, it might even just be a false alarm-

His heart sinks when the red flames finish their purge, only for his sky flames to wake up and nudge at the tiny flicker of potential that’s wedged itself into his soul. He gives in a mental prod in disbelief, and Squalo – still clambering to his feet – freezes.

His flames flare, and he glances up at Xanxus in horror.

“Oh shit.”

There’s a commotion to the back of them and Xanxus is brought back to reality when he spots Dino Cavallone barrelling straight towards him, not an ounce of klutziness in sight and rage in his eyes. Xanxus barely has time to register the sight before the smaller teen slams into him, sending them both crashing to the ground.

“You bastard!” Dino roars. “He’s mine! Mine you hear! Keep your fucking flames off!”
The boys hands are clawing at his throat, and Xanxus tolerates that for all of half a second before Dino is thrown off, Xanxus crouching and gathering his storm flames to burn that hysterical face off for good.

He’s never been fond of Cavallone, but right now the very sight of him makes Xanxus itch for guns he isn’t carrying. It’s as irrational a feeling as it is all encompassing.

Before he can act on that thought however, he’s jerked back by a hand on his collar, and there’s a man in a suit trying to pin Cavallone down. To the side, Squalo is being forcefully escorted away, still in shock but trying to glance back at the two skies in full territorial mode. When he’s out of sight, some of the agony inside Xanxus fades, and he glances up to see the faces of the Vongola brothers and a very irate Vongola Ninth.

Xanxus winces.

Tsuna is going to kill him...

One of the Ninths Guardians all but drags him into an office room, and Federico wastes no time, screaming in his face the second the door is closed. He’s so angry most of it is barely coherent.

“ost irresponsible, ridiculous, narcissistic acts I have ever seen! Do you have any idea what this little stunt could cause?”

Federico’s face is red, and the Ninth isn’t far behind. Judging from the pale expressions on Enrico and Massimo, support will not be coming from that corner.

His head ducks down and he prods the foreign flame one more time, trying to figure it out. It’s not a harmony – not even the semi-bond he’d forced on Tsuna years ago. Instead it’s more like...Xanxus gave Squalo a key to a door but the Rain hasn’t unlocked it yet. It’s a potential bond – probably as much as Dino had offered when he’d approached Squalo.

But given everyone’s reaction, he might as well have gone full harmonisation.

There’s a knock at the door, and everyone tenses, before Tsuna walks through the door, confusion on his face.

“What’s going on?” he asks. “I heard a commotion but nobody is saying anything. Why are the Cavallone being isolated?”

“One storm...” Nono bites out, and Xanxus feels his shoulders hunch. It’s never a good thing when Vongola refers to him by his guardian status. “Decided to spend this event poaching another sky’s guardian candidate.”

Tsuna blinks, and stares at Xanxus in disbelief. Xanxus refuses to give in to the urge to drop his head.

“It’s not like it was intentional Trash” he defends. “If Dino-Trash can’t keep his attention, it’s not my fault he went looking for something better.”

“This is not a joke Xanxus!” Nono yells, and both Tsuna and Xanxus step back, mostly in shock. It’s a rare thing for the Vongola Ninth to raise his voice – even to his biggest headaches. “For all the Cavallone’s recent troubles, they have always been strong allies to the Vongola, and you just spat in the face of the next Don. Do you have any idea the political ramifications of this act?”
No, but from the way the old man’s guardians are frothing at the mouth, he can make a pretty good assumption.

Nono doesn’t get a chance to spell it out though, because Tsuna’s apparently remembered he owns a spine and is stepping up.

“Sorry, can someone please explain to me exactly what happened?” he says, moving so he’s almost completely shielding Xanxus. It’s a little hilarious considering Xanxus dwarfs him by now, but it makes the point clear. “I admit it’s not something I have a lot of practice in, but I don’t feel any new bonds within Xanxus’s flames.”

“Squalo Superbi” Nono explains. “He is currently being courted by Dino Cavallone, and is making enough headway to bring him out as a potential guardian. Xanxus however, chose to make his own claim known, and now the boy is fending off two sky flames while the Cavallone are calling for Xanxus’s head!”

“…But they weren’t actually harmonised?” Tsuna replies, after a brief moment of silence. “Not even partially?”

The Ninth hesitates. “It hadn’t gone past potential interest, but-”

He’s cut off when Tsuna gives an elaborate sigh, crossing his arms and glaring at the man.

“Poaching is when you overwrite a tentative or full bond with the Guardian of another sky” Tsuna interrupts. “The whole point of courting is to see whether or not you want to take that step. If Dino didn’t have even a tentative bond at this point, he shouldn’t have been bringing Squalo to an event where he knows there are multiple strong skies all looking for potentials.”

“Regardless, the intent should have been-“

“Furthermore” Tsuna continues, talking right over the Timoteo. “I know my storm, and as much as he wants to start collecting guardians, he hates those parties. There’s no way he chose to interact with anyone there willingly, which means Squalo came to him.”

“You can’t possible know-“

“That room is covered in security cameras” Tsuna snaps. “Watch them. I’ll bet everything I own that Xanxus was minding his own business when Squalo picked up his flames and came to say hello. Which means the courting with Dino Cavallone can’t have been going anywhere near as well as the Cavallone are probably suggesting.

Tsuna relaxes and shrugs. “If what everyone is saying is true, then all Xanxus did was express interest in a technically, if not ethically, available element. Dino still has the ability to harmonise, he just has competition for it. I’m sure he and Xanxus are mature enough to fix the issue without scorching Squalo, but frankly, if he chose to stray from Dino’s side, he brought this on himself.”

He turns and claps a hand on Xanxus’s shoulder.

“Now if you’ll excuse, my Storm and I need to go speak to the Cavallone and clear up this little...misunderstanding. Xanxus?”

“…Yeah, Trash?”

His sky’s eyes shine gold.
“Start walking. **Now.**”

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Tsuna spends the next 30 minutes in full boss mode, speaking to Dino’s father while Xanxus keeps his head down. Any time he considers lifting it, Tsuna’s head bursts into flames and his eyes have Xanxus’s own ducking back to the floor again. Probably for the best, considering any time he spots Dino-Trash, he feels the urge to finish what they started, and judging from the fire burning in the brat’s eyes, the feeling is mutual.

Squalo has been forced into a chair in the corner, hidden from sight by a wall of men, and is probably using his own flames on himself to keep himself from freaking out – that entire part of the room feels like a typhoon just blew past.

Regardless, whatever Tsuna is saying is clearly doing the job, because by the time the Cavallone are leaving the room, the Boss is smiling and patting Tsuna on the shoulder while the Ninth and his sons stare in poorly hidden wonder.

“You know, honestly, I’m a little grateful” The Cavallone boss chuckles as Tsuna gives a final apology. “Dino has been so resistant regarding his place in the family, we were starting to wonder if he’d survive inheriting. This little incident is the first time I’ve seen him fight for something. There might be hope for him yet.”

Tsuna smiles back. “Dino strikes me as the kind who cares deeply for people he considers his own. It might take time, but I’m sure he’ll be a great boss. One the Vongola will be happy to call an ally.”

The boss nods in agreement, before he and his entourage head for the door as Tsuna escorts them. Dino is sticking close to his father, Squalo’s hand in a vice grip while the other teen keeps his head down until he’s out of sight, not even sparing Xanxus a glance.

That’s...irksome. But not something Xanxus has time to worry about, because the Ninth is leaning on his cane and giving out a deep sigh.

“I do not know what to make of your sky, Xanxus” he sighs. “Every time I think I have him figured out, he does something like this.”

“...He’s protecting me” Xanxus replies in confusion. “It’s not that strange.”

“It’s more than that my boy” Timoteo corrects. “The way he speaks, how he solves problems, the way he utters possibilities as if there were stated facts...”

Timoteo shakes his head. “He doesn’t want power, yet he cultivates it just by breathing. He has no interest in politics, but he rips the mafia world on its head by saving a condemned family and earning favour for the Vongola even we could only dream of. Even now, he solves a possible blood feud with a few words and a smile. If he wanted it, Tsunayoshi would have the world eating out of the palm of his hand. But all he wants is for the world to leave him alone.”

The old man gives a sad huff of laughter. “I keep thinking that there’s more to it. That he’s got some grand plan, but in reality, I just want there to be one so I can finally put him in a box and be done with it. I keep forgetting human beings aren’t that simple, even with flames.

That said...”

Xanxus scowls as the smile vanishes and the frown returns.
“Do not think you are getting away with this unscathed young Xanxus” Timoteo warns. “I assure you, an appropriate punishment will be exacted. Do not sleep well tonight.”

The teen nods, and the Ninth and his Guardians leave. Federico and Massimo both pass without words, but Enrico pats him on the shoulder and gives him a sympathetic smile.

“On the plus side, maybe Dad will stop forcing you to go to these parties?” he says. “I mean, if this is what you do when you’re trying to lay low...”

“Goodnight Enrico!” Xanxus snaps, shoving the hand off and storming towards his own room. He’s officially done for the night.

As it turns out, someone else had the same idea, because Tsuna’s waiting outside his door, and Xanxus grins as he lets him in.

But before Xanxus can crow about Tsuna’s upgrade to awesome, he gets the wind knocked out of him by his sky knocking him upside the head.

“You could have at least warned Dino that Squalo was approaching you” he chides, before sitting on his bed. “Trying to save my storm from a diplomatic nightmare while drunk was not how I wanted to spend my evening.”

Xanxus smirks, falling on the bed, limbs splayed out.

“Hey, got you out of avoiding Kara-Trash didn’t it?”

He knows he hit a nerve when Tsuna just rolls his eyes.

“I wonder if this happened the first time? I didn’t know about this at all. Guess it explains a few things though.”

“...What?” Xanxus asks, picking his head up from the blankets.

“Nothing” Tsuna sighs. “So, you finally found a flame you liked? Or was a jealousy thing?”

Xanxus scoffs. “I’m not that petty Trash. Besides, the Shark-Trash did most of the work, I didn’t even realise what was going on till it was done.”

“Yeah, that’s a thing” Tsuna admits. “Most of the time a potential bond is enough to make a flame user look unappealing, but you must have really impressed Squalo.”

Xanxus grins at the thought. For all the trouble it’s caused, now that he’s had time to think about what happened, he can’t find it in him to regret it. The other teen is loud, with a frustrating verbal tick and a lousy haircut, but there’s something about him that makes Xanxus think the teen just gets him in a way that even Tsuna doesn’t always do.

Still...

“Doesn’t mean I can convince him to go all the way” Xanxus mutters, mostly to himself. “I’m good at picking up potentials, not so good at convincing them to stick around.”

He’s not wrong either. There hasn’t been a peep out of Viper, and he’s made next to no headway in finding the income to coax the Arcobaleno back. Tsuna can’t harmonise with him, and now he’s in competition for a Rain that has dreams outside of being just a family member.

“...I have a feeling Squalo will pick you” Tsuna mutters. “He’s drawn to you. You just need to
figure out why.”

Xanxus slowly feels a grin curl on his face at the support.

“Actually Trash, I’ve started thinking about that.”

If Xanxus wants to start making a name for himself, keep Tsuna out of the main family and finally lure his Guardians in, he needs power, influence, and a lot of cash. To get that kind of influence, he needs a high position in the Vongola – underboss won’t cut it, it could take decades to crawl up the ladder to where real power lies. And since the tenth position is out of his grasp and he has literally no interest in the CEDEF, there’s only one real option left. It’s not that hard to figure out. To be honest, he’s been mulling the idea over and kicking himself for not thinking about it ever since Squalo mentioned it.

“I know what I’m going to do now Tsuna-Trash.”

“Oh?”

Xanxus grins, and points into the distance, where the roof of a building not even in the Vongola grounds can just be made out.

“Yeah. I figured out a way to keep you around and out of the mafia, keep Squalo satisfied and make enough cash to keep Viper happy” he boasts. “I’m going to become the Varia Commander.”

Tsuna’s eyes widen, and Xanxus continues.

“It’s so obvious. Varia’s independent, so they can’t force members to take over positions in the main family. I take over, and hire you as an informant rather than an assassin. You can travel and visit and they can’t do shit about it because you’ll work for me. Squalo gets to take on Tyr and accept their invitation, and I can put Viper in charge of the finances. It’s perfect.”

Tsuna gives a choked laugh.

“You want to become an assassin. Again.”

Xanxus frowns. “Again?”

His sky blinks, and shakes his head.

“Uh, sorry. Was somewhere else, but…the Varia? Are you sure?”

The teen scoffs at his hesitancy. “Well I’d prefer the whole fucking Vongola, but since they’re so ridiculously old fashioned they won’t consider hazy bloodlines, that isn’t an option, so it’s this or CEDEF, and that whole group bores me to tears. The Varia are independent and get the best missions, so I’ll set my throne there.”

Tsuna is shaking, and vaguely, Xanxus wonders if he’s upset the man.

“What, do you think I can’t do it? Sure, I need a few years to train but-“

His frustrations get drowned out when Tsuna bursts into laughter, dropping to his knees and wrapping a frazzled Xanxus into a hug.

“The more things change!” Tsuna cackles out. “The more things stay the same. This is what you want? Even now? This is all you want?”
“Tsuna-Trash!”

The man doesn’t stop chuckling, and just holds him tighter.

“You’ll be the best Varia boss” he states. “You’re perfect for the Varia.”

Xanxus grins.

“**We’ll** be perfect for the Varia” he corrects. “Even if I have to make up a job title, you’re coming too.”

Tsuna chuckles.

“I don’t think so.”

“…No. You’re coming” Xanxus states, flames curling around the room. “You can be the Varia’s bum and occasional informant. End of story.”

Tsuna’s flames join him in celebration.

“I’m not assassin material Xanxus” he says. “But I appreciate the thought.”

Xanxus just rolls his eyes and allows himself to become flame drunk on top of the typical drunk he’s still shaking off.

One of these days, Tsuna is going to remember that Xanxus has never taken no for an answer.

But given his help with the Cavallone, he’ll let him live in his fantasies a little while longer for now.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Apologies, this chapter was planned for December, but it just didn't want to come. Hope it was worth the wait.

Also, Tempest Temptation now has a beta! This chapter was edited and cleaned up by the awesome Beyondmyreach.

Word of warning, there is a scene near the end of the chapter that may come off as somewhat assault-ish.

As much as Xanxus would love to stroll right into the Varia and assume command, he knows he can’t. Though it might shock Tsuna to hear it, Xanxus is aware of his limits. The current Varia commander, Tyr, did not get his position by asking nicely, and Xanxus doesn’t have the level of training or experience to take him on in a fair (and if he’s being brutally honest, even unfair) fight.

So he gives himself a deadline. One year to the day. For the next year, he’ll do nothing but train and work with the aim of taking Tyr down.

He even announces his intent to the Ninth, who is far more agreeable about Xanxus planning to slaughter a loyal Vongola member than he had expected.

“Given the current circumstances, it does seem like an excellent fit for you,” the Ninth admits once Xanxus had finished blustering out his intent to eventually take down Tyr and assume command over Varia. “Are you sure you wouldn’t prefer to transfer under Tyr for now? He may not be a sky, but you might find working under him more accep-”

“Not a chance,” Xanxus snaps, cutting that thought off at the pass. There are already two people on this planet he’ll take orders from on a regular basis, and he’s not adding to what’s already a painfully high number for his rebellious spirit.

Timoteo is clearly disappointed – probably aware that this means he’ll be losing either Tyr or Xanxus in the near future since Varia don’t understand the term surrender and both of them are the type to die before they kneel – but it’s well within the rules of the family, and he gives him his blessings. Not that Xanxus needed them, but it does make planning a lot easier.

“Very well, if you’re certain about your choice, I won’t stand in your way,” Timoteo replies. His expression darkens, and Xanxus suddenly remembers what happened the last time he met with the boss.

“Now, as for your little... transgression...”

“It’s fucking outrageous!” Xanxus howls as he paces in front of his audience in the Estrano labs. The developers were ignoring him, tinkering at the nearby tables, but Tsuna is watching dutifully, sitting backwards in a chair, while Karasu sits in a ridiculously plush armchair, drinking from a delicate china tea set and grinning like it’s the best entertainment she has had in years.
Although considering what the last few years have been like, maybe it is.

“All things considered, you’re getting off lightly, Xan,” Tsuna says, and winces as the teen rounds on him.

“No gun range for three weeks, no missions for six, and house keeping detail for a month, adding a day every time I’m rude to some random Trash,” he snarls. “To teach me, humility.”

“Be grateful I haggled him down to one month,” Tsuna argues.

“Oh, please tell me you have to wear a maid’s outfit.” Karasu snickers from behind her tea.

Xanxus ignores her. “They’re also banning Squalo from the grounds for two months! Plus everything I made from my last mission goes to the Cavallone as ‘penance.’ I earned that money fair and square!

“He started at a full three months docked pay, Squalo away for six, and paying for anger management classes,” Tsuna counters. “Which to be frank, probably should have stayed on the table.”

“I DO NOT NEED ANGER MANAGEMENT CLASSES!”

Tsuna dropped his head into his hands, and there’s a malicious cackle from Karasu.

“They’re adding a day every time forget your manners?” she comments. “You’re going to be on cleaning duty until you retire.”

“WHY ARE YOU EVEN HERE!” Xanxus screams.

Karasu raises her cup.

“Uh, I live here, Junior.”

Xanxus hisses, and his storm flames start flickering around his hands. However, the second Tsuna registers the flames, his head jumps up, and flares his own sky flames in reply, shaving off the edge of his ire.

“Xanxus...”

The teen scowls, but Tsuna’s face is stern.


Karasu, on the other hand, is eyeing up the orange flames curling around the edges of Tsuna’s hands with interest. She leans closer, pretending to set down her tea cup, while her mist flames join the conversation, using the china as a bridge to subtly reach for the limbs. But before they can do more than brush against the edges of the loose sky flames, they’ve vanished, locked up tight while Tsuna scowls.

“Karasu...”

The woman just smiles and picks up her cup. “If that tone doesn’t work on the kid, it’s certainly not going to work on me.”

Xanxus bites down a snicker at that. The mist might have zero sympathy for his situation, but he’d be just the same if the situation was reversed. When Karasu gets her way and finally harmonises with
Tsuna, Xanxus will have no real complaints. Whether Tsuna is willing to admit it or not, the mist is carving out a bond piece by miniscule piece.

Just then, from the table, one of the Estrano scientists pipes up, “Um, the prototype’s ready if you are?”

Xanxus immediately abandons his argument and rushes to the table, while the older duo follows with less enthusiasm. He’s been waiting far too long for this.

To take on Tyr, Xanxus needs to step up. He has no qualms about his physical ability, but it’s about time he finally committed to a weapon. That it would be a firearm was never a question, but he wants something a little more personal.

Over the last few weeks, he often got lost in his mind, talking out loud to the walls as he tries to explain how he wants the guns to function, only to find Tsuna has entered the room at some point and pulled up a chair to listen. There’s always this sappy, wistful look on his face when he does it too, which is annoying, because it means he’s doing something Tsuna thinks is adorable, and Xanxus has never been adorable in his life.

His sky never offers input on the designs though, happy to act as a sounding board without adding an opinion. The man admits he’s never been the type to care how something works as long as it does – his gloves had all but been handed to him and he never bothered to learn exactly how they worked. He knows just enough to know when to shut up – and pointed Xanxus in the direction of the new Estrano division of Vongola, if he wanted to keep his tools secret from the rest of the family.

As it turns out, the Estrano are quite delighted to have a new project that’s less ‘Vongola’ and more ‘one-of-the-men-that-saved-us-from-gruesome-death,’ and already have history with enhancing weapons, so they’re on board with any idea Xanxus has, no matter how crazy it sounds.

He clearly picked the right team for the job, because the black firearm in his hand is almost perfect. Solid but lightweight, the handle coated in absorbing material that helps channel his flames. He’ll need to test it out to make sure the aim isn’t off, and can handle the destructive power of his wrath flame before they make the second, but he already wants to take it home.

Tsuna seems to approve of it too, when he gets a chance to hold it. He traces the side of the black muzzle in musing, drawing out an X shape.

“Aren’t you going to sign them?” he asks, and Xanxus wonders why the hell he hadn’t thought of that.

“Damn, that’s perfect,” Xanxus chuckles, the creators already jotting down the aesthetic change.

‘I think I’ll make it red...’

In the second month, he gets to meet his would-be rain for the second time. The Cavallone had been digging in their heels about letting Xanxus see him again, even once the Ninth’s ban was finished, but Squalo is, for all intents and purposes, still an independent agent. They legally can’t keep him from seeing another sky, especially when the bond isn’t showing signs of dying.

“The idiots are starting to panic”, Squalo tells him, while the two spar in the courtyard. “Dino’s old man took a turn for the worst and Dino himself is in no state to inherit. Even he thought he’d have a few more years to get used to the idea. They even considered having him homeschooled and asked if I wanted in.”
“You said no right?” Xanxus asks a little too quickly, masking his panic with a wild uppercut.

Squalo dodges with catlike grace. “Course I did. Cavallone’s training grounds don’t hold a candle to the schools. They’re not a blade-oriented family.”

Xanxus bites down the relief. He’s already at a disadvantage bond wise, considering the Horse-Trash gets to see Squalo on a regular basis already. The last thing he needs is them constantly in the same room surrounded by Dino’s flames.

“Cavallone’s doomed anyway,” he replies. “Not a chance that brat will keep em afloat if he’s got to take over soon.”

“Voi, I think they agree,” Squalo admits, thrusting his palm towards his throat. “That’s why they’re bringing in the big guns, voi.”

Xanxus frowns, blocking the strike and attacking with one of his own.

“What do you mean, Trash?”

Squalo jumps back and circles, looking for an opening.

“Voi, as of now, Dino’s training is being taken over by Reborn.”

Xanxus’s spine goes ramrod straight.

“The Number One Hitman?”

A man known throughout Italy as the ultimate killer? The most dangerous man in the world? The one person who even now makes Sawada Tsunayoshi freeze at the mention of his name?

“That’s the one,” Squalo sighs. “He’s legendary. Cavallone figures if anyone can get a few decades of training crammed into the horse in a few months, it’ll be him.”

Xanxus grits his teeth, and when Squalo jumps back in, throws the teen over his shoulder, the boy shrieking in outrage at the move. Xanxus ignores it, throwing himself at Squalo to keep him on the defensive. He can’t let the rain know how frustrated his words are making him.

A prior bond and a tutor of mafia-god proportions? He needs to up his game if he wants to stay in the competition here.

Unfortunately, Xanxus isn’t really sure how to go about that. He’s still being forced to spend most of his spare time scrubbing floors and polishing silverware, and his guns are still a good few weeks from being complete. Which means he can’t prove he’s strong or determined enough to take on Tyr. He also doesn’t have the spare time to just be around Squalo, especially since no power on this earth will make Xanxus attend mafia school. His tutors barely survive his presence.

He complains about it to Tsuna, once Squalo has left and Xanxus has finished rearranging the storage cupboard (to Karasu’s shock, he has only added 2 days to his punishment, rather than the week she’d expected). He paces and rants around the man’s room before finally dropping to the bed, splayed out while Tsuna watches him from his desk.

“Do you think if I ask really nicely, the Ninth will let him study the sword here?” Xanxus asks, staring at the ceiling. “We’ve got a few good swordsman, right?”

Tsuna winces. “I’m pretty sure Timoteo is still trying to curry favour with Cavallone, especially if
Reborn’s in the mix. If Squalo does come here, I almost guarantee Dino will join him.”

...Which, given the way the two skies react, would probably result in them sending Squalo into a flame meltdown. Right. At this point, the bond is so new and weak Xanxus doesn’t even like Tsuna being too close to the rain. Thankfully his sky doesn’t take it personally.

“Then what the fuck am I supposed to do?” Xanxus moans. “I don’t have time to sit around courting, and our fighting styles don’t mesh. How do I win him over against company and a fucking legend? At this rate the Trash’ll be harmonised to the horse in weeks!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” Tsuna offers, and Xanxus sits up in confusion.

“Squalo and Dino have been active and around each other at school for years right?” Tsuna continues. “But they’ve only just created a potential bond, which even now is growing at a fairly slow pace, and that didn’t stop Squalo from attracting you. When they’ve been around each other that long, compatible flames usually harmonise whether the user wants them too or not.”

He grins over the teen. “We only had what, six months before you basically threw me to the ground and set up shop? Even trying to hold my flames back you still made significant headway in harmonisation. Dino and Squalo’s flames have around each other years and haven’t come close to reaching that point.”

Xanxus frowns. “But...the Horse-Trash succeeded in a partial bond.”

Tsuna shrugs.

“Yes...but not harmonisation. So while the two of them are compatible, it’s not a perfect match. That’s why the courting is taking so long.”

He smiles at his storm.

“Squalo chose to bond with you for a reason, and despite the lack of time together, your bond isn’t much weaker than Dino’s. Clearly, there’s something Squalo wants from harmonisation that Dino can’t give him, but you can. If you want to harmonise, you just have to figure out what that is.”

In the third month, he heads to the Estrano lab and admires the red ‘X’ carved on the side of two beautiful firearms. Tradition says he should name them, but he scoffs at the idea.

They’re his guns. Only Xanxus and his very specific flames could ever hope to fire them. They’re a part of him – they don’t need a name.

When the enemy sees them fire, the only name Xanxus wants on his enemies lips is his own.

He’s in the gun range, testing out his new toys when he gets a visitor. Karasu glides into his vision, but stays quiet until he drops the weapons on the counter and tosses the earmuffs down.

“What do you want, Trash?”

Karasu smiles, walking up to him and leaning backwards against the counter to watch him.

“I need you to help me corner Tsuna.”

Xanxus scoffs.

“You’re pretty successful at that all on your own.”
The woman nods at that. “True...but I’ve hit a wall. I thought I was making headway, but he’s become a ghost recently. He can tell a bond is starting to form, and it’s terrifying him. The second he feels me coming, he’s running in the opposite direction.”

Xanxus sniggers. Sounds about right.

“What’s in it for me?”

“Oh, come on,” Karasu chuckles. “You know you’re rooting for me.”

Xanxus smirks back. Well, that’s kind of true. Honestly, he doesn’t know why Tsuna is so stubborn about this, especially since he clearly understands how harmonisation and compatibility works. Short of leaving the continent for a few years or shooting the woman, Karasu is going to get her flames in, and there’s no reason Xanxus can see for not letting her. As much as Xanxus hates the idea of sharing his sky, once he takes over the Varia, he’s going to have his own harmony to work on and a lot less free time, so Tsuna is going to need someone when Xanxus is busy being a King. The last thing anyone wants is the man getting lost in his own head again, and Xanxus knows that’s more likely to happen than Tsuna will admit.

As much as he’s improved, Tsuna still fades on occasion. It’s hard to tell what will trigger it – a sentence, a picture, a walk down a hall. Never for long and never spoken about, but it’s a weight Xanxus has realised will never fully leave the man, even if the night flames have.

So, helping Kara-Trash drag the man over the finish line could only be beneficial.

“Fine,” he says. “Do you have a plan?”

Karasu grins.

“The makings of one. I’ll tell you the basics and then we’ll wait for an opening. From the rumours I’ve been hearing up above, we might have the perfect opportunity soon...”

She’s right. The fourth month gives them a perfect opportunity.

It’s the first time his sky has ever looked happy to be at a celebration in Vongola’s honour – hell, Tsuna looks like the cat that ate the whole aviary. Karasu might still have some dissenters in the ranks, but she hasn’t put a foot wrong in her campaign, and the last few missions she’s done through Tsuna have been exemplary. The Estrano’s scientific study has also been praised by Giannini and the other Vongola researchers to the point that to continue holding the title from Karasu is starting to look like foolish.

Granted, the Ninth is walking around looking like he swallowed a lemon, but the mist is now officially in charge of the Estrano Família, under the Vongola name, and Tsuna has finally been released from his obligations. Which he’s enjoying to its fullest extent.

“Do you have to look so smug?” Xanxus asks when he walks up to him, glass in hand. “It’s a weird look on you.”

“I earned smug,” Tsuna replies. “This took far longer than it needed to and I was about to climb the walls. Smug is my minimum level of satisfaction right now.”

Xanxus rolls his eyes and lifts his glass. Or at least tries to – before it reaches his lips Tsuna has expertly plucked it from his hands and is throwing the contents in a nearby plant.
“Oh for fucks sake- you realise I’m legal right, Trash?”

“I know. I just don’t care,” Tsuna replies, grinning as he takes a sip of his – alcoholic – drink.

Xanxus contemplates storming off and grabbing another glass, but he knows from experience that Tsuna will just swoop in on him, especially considering how happy he is right now, so he settles for shoving his hands in his pockets and scowling.

“So now that your chain is finally loose, what’s your plans?” he asks, eyes boring into his sky.

“Japan,” Tsuna replies instantly. “I’m going to Japan.”

Xanxus raises an eyebrow. “Answer faster Trash.”

His sky huffs. “Sorry. But being caged here means I’ve gotten behind on a few things. There’s a few people I need to see, and some ter- some issues I need to work out.”

“How many issues can you have in a place you haven’t visited in years?” he mocks, and Tsuna looks away. Xanxus rolls his eyes.

“Let me guess, complicated?”

“You’re wise beyond your years, Xanxus,” Tsuna chuckles, glass landing on the tray of a passing waiter. Xanxus smirks – he knew teaching Tsuna how to snark would finally start to pay off.

“It’s a word that suits you well, Sawada” another voice chimes in, and Xanxus grins, while Tsuna’s smile becomes slightly strained.

“Karasu, congratulations again,” he offers, turning to face the woman, and Xanxus follows. It’s the first time the teen has seen the woman in a modern dress – normally the mist wears clothes of a more Victorian vintage – although she’s still wearing a long coat with a tad more lace than is fashionable acceptable.

She smiles, and takes a glance at the crowd who are not so subtly watching her.

“I’ve never seen so much pandering and crow eating at the same time,” she says. “In a couple of weeks, it’ll be annoying. But right now that little part of me that spent months hiding in a decrepit old house terrified her family was going to be wiped out is loving every minute of it.”

Tsuna’s smile becomes more genuine. “You deserves it, Karasu” he says. “Don’t ever let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“Yeah, what he said, Kara-trash.”

Karasu looks over, and gives him a knowing nods, and then slips through the crowd and out of sight. Xanxus gives her five minutes, before he slings an arm around Tsuna’s shoulders and pulls him in the same direction.

“Hey, since you’re finally free, there’s something I’ve been wanting to show you,” he says, guiding them down the hall.

“What, right now?” Tsuna questions. “This is one of the few parties that the Ninth isn’t shoving flame-compatible old men at you. Don’t you want to enjoy it?”

“Hah. I take two steps towards anyone and all his Guardians flip out,” Xanxus mocks. “They keep expecting me to poach. They’ll be elated that I make myself scarce for a while. And this really can’t
Tsuna makes some random mutterings, but lets his storm guide him out of the ball room and into the hallway. They turn into one of the quieter areas, home of a handful of guest bedrooms for the odd guest that is staying post celebration. Xanxus keeps his hand tight until they reach the very end room.

“In here, Trash.”

Tsuna frowns but opens the door and walks in regardless.

“What could you possibly be hiding in a spare room that would—”

His voice trails off and he freezes several steps into the room. Directly in front of him, Karasu is leaning on the bed, smirking in triumph.

“Evening, Ex-boss,” she greets. “We have some unfinished business before you swan out of the country.”

Tsuna’s spine goes ramrod straight and he swings on one foot, lunging for the door – that Xanxus immediately pulls shut and grins as he hears the heavy lock fall into place.

“Sorry Trash, but the mist has the key!” Xanxus cackles. “Automatic lock.”

“Xanxus!”

He hears and feels Tsuna slam a fist against the door.

“It’s flame enhanced,” he chimes back. “You’re not getting through it.”

“And you’ve got other things to worry about!” Karasu calls.

Xanxus senses the storm flames building on the other side of the door, and he growls, kicking at the wood and flaring his own in warning.

“Goddammit, Trash! This is for your own good! Stop acting like a coward!”

“Xanxus, I am begging you here, open the-”

Suddenly, the door becomes engulfed in mist flames, and Xanxus steps back.

“Karasu...I...”

“Get over here, Sawada. I’m done playing nice about this.”

Tsuna makes some kind of protest, but the sound become muffled as Karasu clearly drags the man away from the door. Xanxus ponders about leaving, but when the mist flames ebb away from the door, he can feel the flames at full force. Both sky and mist flames are out and active in the locked room, as well as raised, intelligible voices.

Xanxus absentmindedly pokes at Tsuna’s harmonisation with him. If he focuses, he can just about feel Karasu’s flames on the outskirts, fighting fiercely for ground, but Tsuna is still keeping them at bay.

He wonders if Karasu has taken her dress off yet. That’ll throw his sky off kilter without question. He’s ridiculously prudish for a man in his twenties that insists he’s not a virgin.
Probably not though. While physical seduction is an accepted (though not necessarily approved) way to achieve harmonisation, Karasu’s a professional through and through, using words to make her argument and challenging Tsuna to counter. While her mist flames are probably drenching the room, she most likely won’t be doing more than holding Tsuna’s hand, and that’s assuming he hasn’t yanked it away after being dragged from the door. By now the two of them have spent so much time together that the only reason they haven’t obtained a flame bond is because of Tsuna’s force of will.

Although if Tsuna still refuses to give her a straight answer after all this, Karasu will probably just bear hug him to the ground the same way Xanxus did when he was was eight and try her luck at coaxing his flames to let her in regardless.

Suddenly, the navy flames withdraw, and Xanxus straightens, closing his eyes and digging into the bond.

...They’re still there, but they’ve gotten weaker. As if Kara-Trash…stepped back.

He doesn’t understand – the mist has the sky in a locked room with nowhere to go. Either Tsuna should have rejected the bond and sent her flames away, or they should have found a spot in at least a partial harmony. Why would Karasu be the one to withdraw?

...What the hell could Tsuna possibly say to her to make the mist not want to harmonise with him?

The door opens a few minutes later, and Xanxus frowns when Karasu walks out, looking somewhat dazed. She’s definitely not harmonised, and doesn’t look like she had a chance to get Tsuna in bed. Honestly, the mist looks like she just lost something she didn’t know she could lose. She staggers past him down the hallway.

“What happened?” Xanxus asks, because at this point he’s invested enough in this woman that roadblocks are irritants.

Karasu pauses, and when she glances back, gives a despondent huff and a tragic smile.

“It’s complicated.”

Xanxus’s eyes widen, and the woman slips back to the celebration, all but dragging her steps.

...Oh fuck. It’s contagious.

Almost reluctantly, he prods Tsuna’s sky flames again, and winces at the sheer amount of pain radiating from them. His storm flames instinctively rise up, looking for an enemy to beat and finding nothing. He wants to storm in and ask Tsuna what the fuck just happened, but before he can even take one step, the door slams shut.

“What the, Tsuna-Tra-”

“Go away, Xanxus!”

Xanxus freezes.

That’s Tsuna’s ‘I-don’t-like-killing-but-damn-if-you’re-not-an-exception’ voice. In all the years he’s known him, it’s never been directed at him. No matter how pissed Tsuna was.

He tries the door, but it is locked. Xanxus can feel Tsuna’s sky flames diminishing on the other side as his familiar storm flames flares up, all but hissing at him. Xanxus’s curls back, unhappy and miserable.
“I...I’ll see you tomorrow Tsuna,” Xanxus offers, and steps away, dragging himself down the hall and back to the party, though his head constantly turns to see if the door opens as he leaves.

It doesn’t.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Once again, a thousand thank you's to Beyondmyreach for editing and cleaning up my original frenzy.

Xanxus fully intends to apologise in the morning. He’s still not entirely sure what he’s apologising for, but he understands the concept of damage control.

However, come dawn, Vongola learn that Tsuna hasn’t just fled the grounds, but the country. Timoteo is livid, but since the Estrano are under new leadership, Tsuna is no longer confined to the city. It may be crass of him to flee so quickly, but he hasn’t technically done anything wrong, and trying to drag him back isn’t worth the effort considering the public humiliation it could bring.

Although speaking of new leadership, trying to pry answers out of Karasu isn’t any easier. She has sequestered herself with her family and is rather pointedly ignoring Xanxus’s calls for a meeting. It’s more than a little frustrating – it’s brick walls no matter where he turns.

As such, he has little option but to throw himself into his training and scream the majority of his frustration at the only person willing to listen.

That task falls to Squalo, who is probably regretting that willingness right now considering he’s lost his entire shirt to Xanxus’s brand new storm bullets, but given that the rain is loud and violent even at his most peaceful, it’s hard to tell.

“Voi! What’s gotten up your ass?” Squalo howls, as he frantically ducks a blast that singes the tips of his hair. “You’re more pissed off than usual, and that’s saying something!”

“I am not fucking pissed!” Xanxus roars. “You’re just being slow today.”

The next shot actually hits the teen’s sword hilt dead on, and Squalo squawks as his weapon starts disintegrating in his hands.

“Voi! Dammit, shoddy piece of crap.”

He drops the remains of his sword to the ground in disgust, and Xanxus happily fires several more shots into the warped metal to erase the whole thing from existence.

“You don’t have a flameproof weapon, Trash?” he asks in disgust, and Squalo glares at him.

“Unlike you, I don’t have a pedigree familia backing me up. Unless I harmonise, I’m forbidden from using flame weaponry until I graduate. Right now, I’m stuck with whatever I can buy or get on lease from the Academy.”

Xanxus visibly winces. For someone of Squalo’s level, it’s a major handicap. Although that’s probably the point – he’s too powerful to leave unaffiliated, especially with two families already circling him.

With his favourite choice of weapon no longer accessible, the two of them spend a few minutes
grappling hand-to-hand, but Xanxus is still too pent up to fight anywhere close to fairly. Squalo lets him get three storm-laced blows in, but when one fist gets close enough to make an earlobe start decaying, he snaps, unleashing his own rain flames in an extreme counter attack. Xanxus’s storm flames try to defend – but his sky flames are still itching for a connection and are basically leaving the door wide open for the rain.

As such, Xanxus finds himself flat on his back, feeling fully sedated but with his high trigger still enraged.

“Don’t fucking do that, Trash!” he snarls.

“Voi! Shut it or I’ll tranquillise your damn mouth!” Squalo grows back, crouching down and glaring at the older teen.

Xanxus hisses, but considering he’s basically paralysed until Squalo stops showering him, there’s not much else he can do but grit his teeth and try to calm down.

“So, want to tell me what’s got you so mad you’re hankering to kill me?” Squalo asks, once Xanxus has run through a rather pathetic breathing exercise. He so dearly wishes his eyes had laser vision.

“Let me up and I’ll talk,” Xanxus replies, and when Squalo just raises his eyebrows, he grits his teeth in submission.

“...I swear on my honour as a member of Vongola,” he half mumbles, and the other teen smirks.

“I’ll give you freedom above your waist. I’m not trusting you with full motion just yet.”

The flames suddenly stop their constant flow, and Xanxus’s storm flames eagerly eat up the excess, allowing Xanxus to scrabble into an awkward sitting position. Squalo joins him on the floor with a knowing grin.

“Voi, on with it,” he warns, and Xanxus scowls.

“Fine! I helped Kara-Trash corner Tsuna so he could stop dodging harmonisation with her,” he snaps, running a hand through his hair. “But something went wrong, I don’t know what, and he vanished to another continent and Karasu has gone and holed herself with the Estrano. Nobody is talking.”

Squalo whistles. “Voi, talk about courtings gone bad. But going to need more details if you want my help.”

So Xanxus tells him everything. The deal with Karasu, the locked door, Karasu’s broken expression when she left. It’s still as confusing to him now as it was then. Squalo however, is leaning back with an odd expression on his face.

“Voi, your Tsuna, he was mafia before he met you, but nobody seems to know him, right?”

“What’s that got to do with anything, Trash?” Xanxus snaps, and Squalo shrugs.

“That just suggests that before he was mafia, he was a civilian,” he explains. “I don’t need to know the details, but civilians always have the most misunderstandings when it comes to courting.”

“...What are you talking about?” Xanxus asks.

“Eh, it’s calling courting for a reason, voi,” Squalo continues. “Sometimes the lines between sky
bonds and romantic relationships get a little..."

He waves his hand in the air in front of him, and Xanxus scoffs.

"Tsuna’s not that naive."

"You sure? From what you’ve told me, you don’t know much about where he came from. Who knows how badly his first harmony went, especially if he lost them all at once. If you don’t know it, maybe it’s something he never wanted to tell anyone."

Xanxus wants to argue that fact, but hesitates before the words leave his mouth. He tries to think about what he knows about Tsuna pre-Xanxus...and it’s painfully short.

Squalo takes his silence as a positive, because he keeps talking. “Whatever he was keeping secret might have been related to Karasu in some way, and something important enough he needed to tell her before harmonisation,” Squalo explains. “That’s probably why she looked so damn broken – whatever revelation Tsuna gave turned her right off."

It makes more sense than Xanxus wants to admit. But what on earth could possibly have happened to Tsuna in the past that Xanxus didn’t need to know before harmonisation, but Karasu di-

“...Mukuro Mukuro” Xanxus mutters, and Squalo frowns.

“The kid?” he asks, and Xanxus shakes his head.

“No... back when we were on the streets together, we had a run in with the Estrano,” he begins. “They didn’t know Tsuna, but Tsuna definitely knew them. Or... someone related to them. It’s why he ended up taking out the Estrano base a year later. And when he got drunk a few months ago, he spoke about another Mukuro.”

Squalo’s eyes widened. “Voi... think one of his former elements was Estrano?”

Xanxus nods slowly.

“Yeah... or at least related in some way, that would make sense,” he says, mostly to himself. “Maybe a relative of Karasu’s given whoever they were had her kid’s name but... he didn’t know Karasu when they first met, so had to be someone estranged. Maybe family in Japan? He keeps going back there. Says its for family, but...”

Squalo gives a dark chuckle. “Family, or familia?”

The thought rubs Xanxus the wrong way, and his body flinches. His legs twitch in response, and he’s grateful to realise Squalo has finally let up his flame completely.

“Just family,” Xanxus insists. “He wouldn’t keep that from me. No way.”

It’s impossible. If Tsuna had anything resembling familia in Japan, he would have brought it up when he tried to talk Xanxus into leaving the country.

Squalo, not knowing Tsuna outside of a name, merely shrugs, letting Xanxus mull over his recent revelation.

“It would explain why he had to tell Karasu, but not me,” Xanxus admits. “And maybe why Karasu got so upset. I’d be pissed too if it turned out Tsuna was harmonised with my old man or something before we met.”
“Voi, why don’t you ask him?” Squalo asks, and Xanxus chokes.

“He was NOT harmonised to my old man!” he yells.

Was he? Tsuna did use to look at him a little funny-

“Well! Not that!” Squalo insists. “Karasu. Apologise for forcing him into it, and then ask him exactly why he couldn’t do it.”

Xanxus scowls. Apologising is the worst, and he highly doubts Tsuna’s going to be any more eager to explain his backstory now than he ever is.

Dammit. He might as well just file the whole thing under ‘complicated’ and be done with it.

When Tsuna returns a week later, looking surprisingly calm and refreshed, Xanxus is just as reluctant to go through with it as he was earlier, but it must be done. He considers ambushing Tsuna in his room for privacy… but even he can see the flaws in that plan. Instead he waits outside, tapping on the door and leaning on the wall until the man opens the door. While he doesn’t look elated to see his storm, the warmth is definitely back in his eyes when he greets him.

“Afternoon, Xanxus,” he says, eyes glinting orange. “Your bond with Squalo’s improved.”

The teen blinks, and his jaw drops.

“Wha- you can tell?”

Tsuna gives a half shrug. “I’m hardwired to always pay attention to your flames. It’s a side effect. Did you need something?”

He can sense the offer to brush what happened aside, but his intuition is screaming not to accept it. Whether he likes it or not, he needs to be more sky than storm.

“Oh fuck it. I’m sorry, okay?” he snaps. “I shouldn’t have interfered with your courting.”

Tsuna, however, stares at him in confusion, and Xanxus bristles.

“What?”

“…Do you even know why you’re apologising?” Tsuna asks, and Xanxus’s face flushes red, hands clenching into fists.

“Fine. No. You happy, Trash?” he snaps. “You need more Guardians and Karasu was practically tailor made for you and I don’t understand why you don’t let her in. But it doesn’t matter why because I just know it upset you bad enough to jump continents several days early, so even though I don’t get why, I’m not going to do it again. Okay?”

Tsuna just keeps staring, and Xanxus feels his thin grasp of self control preparing to snap, only for the man to sigh and lean against the doorway.

“It’s more than I normally get, and more than I expected,” he mutters to himself, hand rubbing at his temples. “I’ll take it.”

To his relief, Tsuna gestures for Xanxus to follow him into his room, and heads back inside. It looks about the same, except the documents on his desk have tripled. Tsuna catches him staring and runs a hand through his hair.
“Yeah. The whole ‘informant’ thing actually generates more paperwork than you’d think,” he explains. “Might have to bite the bullet and ask the Ninth for an office.”

He sits down while Xanxus leans against a wall, the sky’s eyes staying on his element.

“You don’t ever do that again, Xanxus,” Tsuna warns, Xanxus’s back straightening at the tone. “My elements, my harmony, my business. I don’t interfere with yours, and you don’t interfere with mine.”

“I wouldn’t have to interfere if you were taking care of it properly!” Xanxus snaps, immediately snapping his mouth shut and wincing at the instinctive reaction. Tsuna is already glaring with orange eyes and red flames at his fingertips.

“That’s… I’m sorry,” Xanxus chokes out again, before Tsuna can reply. “But I’m part of your harmony too. You might be the one who has final say in who you let in, but you can’t act like it’s not going to affect me. I can feel your flames, Trash, and you need more than me to keep you sane. Don’t pretend you don’t.”

Tsuna almost looks as if he wants to punch him.

“As true as that might be,” Tsuna admits, “you don’t ever lock me up with no way out. While I might not have been handling the situation as well as I could have, you have no idea how badly that could have ended.”

“Then why didn’t you tell her whatever you told her months ago?” Xanxus argues. “This could have been avoided if you’d been blunt from the start.”

“Because Karasu is my friend Xanxus!” Tsuna counters, standing up from the chair. “And she could have lived a long, happy life without learning what I had to tell her. I was hoping that once she had control of the Estrano and I could leave long term, our compatibility would fade out, and she wouldn’t be so insistent. She would have been happier for it.”

Xanxus is already shaking his head in disbelief.

“That was never going to happen,” he insists. “Have you even met Kara-Trash? She stuck by a boss that was keeping a family marked for death, gave up her kid for his ideals. You think giving her a position of authority would make her less insistent?”

Some of the fight leaves Tsuna at that.

“No,” he says. “It was a pipe dream. But I had to hope. Now I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Xanxus feels himself sag. He really doesn’t know either.

“I won’t go to this extreme again,” he tells Tsuna. “And I’ll… help, with Karasu, if I can. But you have to promise that you’ll at least try to find another element to bond with. There’s no way I can run the Varia and handle my own elements if I know nobody is watching your back.”

Tsuna sighs, running a hand through his hair and sagging back in his chair.

“It’s not as easy as that,” he tells him. “But I’ll try. It’s not like I’m actively avoiding harmonisation. Karasu was just a bad choice, history wise. There was always going to be baggage in the way.”

His eyes fade, thinking back on something unknown, before he looks back up at his storm.
“How’s she doing anyway?”

“How makes you think I know?” Xanxus replies, head snapping to the side. “She’s refusing to see anyone right now. I’m definitely not making the cut.”

That seems to surprise Tsuna, from the surprised ‘Hiiee?’ the man doesn’t quite manage to suppress.

“She didn’t tell you?” he finally manages to squeak out. “I mean, I guessed she didn’t tell you *everything*, but I thought-”

Xanxus rolls his eyes. “Christ, sometimes you’re a true idiot, you know that, Trash? As if anyone would spill any secret out of this house willingly.”

Tsuna winces and nods in admittance, but Xanxus takes the opportunity for what it is.

“So what happened anyway?” he asks. “I’ve got some ideas, but wouldn’t mind hearing it from you, if you’re finally breaking that ‘complicated’ vow of silence you’ve got going.”

Tsuna sighs.

“Yeah, I know. I really don’t do myself any favours by keeping my reasons quiet,” he explains. “But it’s not something I really want to tell. It could be dangerous if the wrong people heard about it. I didn’t even want to tell Karasu but… our bond was almost complete. I had to tell her – she’d have hated me if I’d let her harmonise without knowing.”

“Know what?” Xanxus asks, more than a little curious. Tsuna, however, just glances over, and gives a sly smile – it’s a wicked look that almost looks alien on Tsuna’s face.

“Why don’t you try and figure that out on your own?” he offers. “I told you, I didn’t plan on telling anyone.”

“Wait… you’re going to let someone you’re not harmonised with know, and not me?” Xanxus snaps. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

Tsuna grins and stands up, heading for the hall.

“Oi! Don’t you fucking walk away from me, Trash!”

“Consider it your punishment for causing it in the first place!” Tsuna calls back, and just laughs when Xanxus starts screaming obscenities.

Of course, just because Tsuna is willing to forgive Xanxus easily, doesn’t mean the problem is solved. It doesn’t take much to tell that the once easy camaraderie of Tsuna and Karasu has hit a major snag, and every flame-sensitive Mafioso on site can all but feel the metaphorical bruises on the flame bond that had been forming. Tsuna tries once to talk to Karasu, following Xanxus into the Estrano labs for yet another touch up on his guns. The woman quickly shuts him down and immediately finds an excuse to be anywhere else. Her scientists look rather broken, even as they look over Xanxus’s project.

“What happened, Mr. Sawada?” one of them - an older man called Gio who probably knows the schematics of Xanxus’s weapons better than he does - dares to ask in between taking apart the muzzle, which still melts if Xanxus overdoes it. “We really thought you would be harmonised by now.”
“It’s really messed up the betting pool,” another mutters, and Xanxus makes a note to test his weapons on that one at a later date.

“It’s personal,” Tsuna replies. “She needs time to process a few things, that’s all.”

“Must be pretty awful to scare her away that easily,” the first says, clearly relieved that Tsuna is ignoring his colleague. “Kasumi didn’t get where she is by having thin skin.”

Tsuna gives a sad smile, and his eyes flit towards the door.

“It’ll get better,” Tsuna insists. “I promise.”

To no one’s surprise, it doesn’t.

By month five of Xanxus’s year long plan, Tsuna and Karasu haven’t managed to even be in the same room for more than a few minutes, and, and people are starting to notice. The Vongola brothers have even started to ask Xanxus if Karasu is looking at alternative skies, and that’s not encouraging.

The only reason it hasn’t caused more upset is because Tsuna makes a point to visit the Estrano whenever he knows Karasu isn’t in the building. Mukuro clearly doesn’t understand why his two favourite people are suddenly never together, but Tsuna is at least attempting to make sure he knows it’s not his fault. He has open permission from Karasu from before the incident to entertain Mukuro in the Estrano grounds provided he informs his caretakers, and she hasn’t been to take it back often after that night, so he’s been stretching the rule as much as possible. Most of the time, he takes over Mukuro’s Japanese lessons, teaching him the kanji in the research labs while Xanxus tests his guns to oblivion. Like many born into the mafia, loud chaotic violence is the best environment for Mukuro’s education.

Ironically, it’s on one of those shared custody trips where Tsuna is helping the boy with his reading and Xanxus is getting the final adjustments to his guns put into place, that Karasu ends up being the one to break the stalemate. When Xanxus walks out of the firing range, Tsuna’s sitting cross legged on the ground with Mukuro’s nestled in his lap as he fumbles through one of the dozen or so Japanese picture books Xanxus remembers struggling with when he was beginning. The kid’s got youth on his side though – most of his issues with reading are to do with his age and vocal chords, rather than not understanding the text at this point. Mukuro stops when he registers Xanxus walking over, eyes focused on the weapons.

“Do your guns work now?” the boy asks, and Tsuna glances over with a curious look.

Xanxus grins, spinning one of them in his hand.“Finally fixed the melting problem. Gio-Trash says if I manage to wreck them, I’m officially the god of destruction.”

“So they’ll be in pieces by the end of the week?” Tsuna jokes, and then winces as he hears screaming from the research labs.

“Mr. Gio’s crying again,” Mukuro notes.

“Oh, what else is new?” Xanxus snaps back, though he’s still grinning. Tsuna gives it a valiant effort but starts laughing, and Mukuro happily joins in… which sets Xanxus off, and has them all half in hysterics when the main door opens.

Their good mood is probably the reason none of them realise Karasu has walked inside until she’s practically on top of them. She immediately locks eyes with Tsuna – who is giving a pretty accurate impression of a deer in headlights. The tense mood is only shattered by Mukuro stumbling up to
show her his progress in his book.

“Mama, I made it halfway through” he tells her. “Look!”

Karasu, however stressed she is, gives her son a perfectly proud smile, ruffling the little tuft at the back of his head.

“That’s my little genius,” shecheers. “You’ll be reading better than me at this rate.”

The boy gives a wide grin, and Xanxus instinctively suppresses the urge to snarl. He’s always had a short temper, but getting pissed that a six year old has a mother that gives more than half a damn is petty even for him. It’s not like he’s even thought about the woman since he turned his back for Tsuna, but watching Karasu in this setting always seems to get his hackles up.

Karasu’s eyes flit up for a moment, before she returns her attention to her son.

“I need to talk to Tsuna for a minute, sweetie,” she tells him. “Paulette is just down the hall with her boy. Why don’t you show her how far you’ve come?”

Mukuro’s smile falls to a pout, and she’s quick to soothe him.

“I promise, I’ll be right along,” she says. “Can you do that for me?”

The boy glances over at Tsuna, who gives him a nervous smile as he stands.

“I’ll see you later, Mukuro,” he soothes. “Paulette should see how far you’ve come.”

It’s enough to coax the boy out the door, running down the hall to hunt down one of the more maternal scientists and her son, the hyperactive Ken. When his footsteps finally fade out, Karasu returns her attention to Tsuna, face blank.

“How are you doing, Karasu?” he offers, only to falter as the woman speaks.

“I need you to come to Japan with me.”

Xanxus frowns.

“What the fuck, Trash?” he says.

“Xanxus, please stay out of this,” Karasu warns, though her eyes stay on Tsuna, who looks as confused as Xanxus feels.

“Why?” he finally asks. “Not that I won’t, but—”

“I’m going to visit my sister,” Karasu replies. “She never went active, so our parents left her in Japan with our paternal grandparents and let her live a life as a civilian. But I just found out through the grapevine that she had a baby girl a few years ago, and I want to see if her flames are dormant or active.”

Tsuna frowns, and Karasu gives a bitter smile.

“My little niece is called Nagi.”

It’s not a name that Xanxus recognises, but the whites in Tsuna’s eyes go impossibly large.

“Oh… don’t you think… I mean, it’s early.”
“Not if she’s gone active,” Karasu says. “And I want to make very, very sure she’s got support if she has.”

Xanxus doesn’t like how pale Tsuna has gotten, but in an instant, the man briefly shakes his head and pulls himself back together, giving the mist a nod.

“Okay. Let me know when you want to leave. I can be ready by tomorrow morning.”

Karasu nods, not hiding the clear relief in her eyes. Xanxus waits until she’s out the door, before huffing and walking over to his sky. Dropping his arms over Tsuna’s shoulders from the back, Xanxus leans his weight forward, crushing the sky’s locks of hair underneath his chin.

“Can I expect any explanation from that scene, Trash?” he asks, scowl deepening as he feels just how antsy Tsuna’s flames have become from just that short conversation.

“Family might be in trouble, Xanxus,” Tsuna explains. “Do you really need any more explanation than that?”

Xanxus growls, and when he feels Tsuna try to pull away, tightens his grip and brushes his storm flames against Tsuna’s sky.

“Your last mist was Estrano, weren’t they?” he asks, and when Tsuna stills, continues, “Or at the very least, related to Kara-Trash.”

Tsuna is choking on air. Xanxus gives him a few seconds to recover, before releasing his hold and letting the man face him, though his expression promises retribution if his sky tries to brush it off. Tsuna clearly picks up on it, because he starts laughing. It’s a horrible, hysterical noise, and Xanxus almost regrets asking. Almost.

“You know what, that’s technically true,” Tsuna admits, once he recovers. “Missing a few key details, but… yes.”

Xanxus grins. “I knew it. That’s why she’s so testy. Were you lovers?”

He bursts into laughter when Tsuna gives the highest pitched ‘Hiieee!’ he has ever heard yet.

“No!” he squawks, face red. “No, no, no, no! That wasn’t- he was, no!”

“Protesting a bit much, Trash,” Xanxus cackles. Tsuna’s entire body sags, looking up to the sky as if asking for divine patience.

“It wasn’t like that,” Tsuna insists. “He was…”

He gives a full body shrug.

“Possessive,” he decides, still looking slightly manic. “Let’s go with possessive, in more ways than one. And big on innuendo, if only because he knew it pissed people off. But his flames are-were, similar enough to Karasu’s that she’d know the second she harmonised. While they’re long dead and dry, I still have echoes of my former bonds in my harmony.”

“You do?” Xanxus asks, genuinely surprised, because while their harmony has had it’s ups and downs, he can’t really say he’s felt any other storm flames brushing against his.

Tsuna clearly follows his train of thought, letting his sky flame emerge from his hand and grasping
Xanxus’s shoulder, coaxing him out the door and into the hall.

“Your sky flames coat over a lot of the residue,” he explains. “And between the night flames and our long term partial harmonisation, you wouldn’t have even known what to look for, especially since you never met. Karasu wouldn’t have had those luxuries; she would have recognised the signature.”

“Now then,” he says, quickly changing the subject as they reach the exit. “We haven’t sparred in a while. You want to give those guns a challenge?”

“Oh damn you, Trash,” Xanxus mutters, because as much as he wants to keep prying, he also dearly wants to fight, and Tsuna knows perfectly well which of those desires is going to win out. “I won’t go easy on you.”

Tsuna’s smiles as if butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth.

“You never do.”

The two of them leave two days later with Mukuro in tow. Xanxus, rather annoyingly, is forbidden from joining them – Tsuna has gotten surprisingly territorial about letting Xanxus anywhere near his home country, even if he pretended the excuse was giving Xanxus more time to train. Three weeks later, they return, and when Xanxus comes to the front entrance to greet them, he finds Mukuro dozing in Tsuna’s arms; and a little girl that could have been popped out of Karasu sleeping in her own.

“What the fuck?” Xanxus gapes. “How long were you away?”

Karasu immediately rolls her eyes as the front door closes.

“This, dear Xanxus, is my niece, Nagi,” she explains, nodding down at her sleeping cargo. “My sister was proving to be a less than stellar mother, and a decision regarding custody was made.”

“She’s active?” Xanxus questions, leaning down slightly to look at the girl, and Karasu shakes her head.

“But she’s showing all the signs. Better to get her acclimated now.”

“He almost sounds disgusted, and Xanxus can appreciate the thought. It doesn’t surprise him that Tsuna thinks unkindly of parents that don’t fight for their children.

But the arrival of a new bratling end up being the second most shocking thing to come out of Tsuna’s and Karasu’s trip, because when Xanxus moves to greet his sky properly, his flames flare instinctively, only to still when he feels potential in Tsuna’s harmony where there had earlier been none.

“Trash...” he starts, when Tsuna realises just what he’s picked up. “Who. Is. That?”

Karasu starts giggling, and Tsuna looks embarrassed, but Xanxus isn’t feeling the humour. Because there is a very blatant rain harmony happily planted in Tsuna’s elements. Admittedly, it’s only a partial bond, but it definitely wasn’t there last month.

“Well, it’s kind of a funny story?” Tsuna offers. “After we got custody of Nagi, Karasu and I got
talking, and she wanted to meet the family I’ve got there. So we went to check up on her, and while we were there...

“’You harmonised with your relative?’ Xanxus questions. The relative he’s suddenly very pissed he’s never met?

Karasu immediately bursts into laughter, catching his attention.

“Oh god, no,” Karasu promises. “His cousin is as civilian as they come. It would be cruel to bring her here. She’s perfectly happy with her new boyfriend and his baby boy. However, said new boyfriend...”

Xanxus swings his head back in Tsuna’s direction, the man pointedly keeping his eyes on the sleeping Mukuro in his arms.

“Trash?”

Tsuna winces, and gives a hapless laugh.

“’It... kind of just... happened?’ he offers. “I didn’t even know he was active. He wasn’t last time I was there.”

“I think his kid forced him over the edge” Karasu offers. “Runt’s got that look that suggests he’ll be flame active by puberty. And Tsuna popping up on their doorstep to check up on his family member recently probably didn’t help. Any civilian would go active with that many flames and potentials hovering.”

“You made a civilian go active?” Xanxus questions, hiding the wince, because he’s heard enough stories to know that’s dangerous.

“Not necessarily,” Tsuna insists. “There is a lot of flame active people in that town. It could have just happened.”

That doesn’t fill Xanxus with a lot of confidence.

“It’s not that bad,” Tsuna assures him. “Besides, he’s not civilian, civilian. While he’s not in the underground, he has a few contacts in our circles. Apparently actives are pretty common in his family. So long as it stays just a partial bond, he’s pretty happy with it.”

“And you?” Xanxus asks. “While a partial bond is better than nothing, you need something stronger.”

“I know, Xanxus,” Tsuna says. “But this is right, for now. And it means I can keep an eye on what’s happening back home without having to call every five minutes, and Tsuyoshi doesn’t feel the need to uproot Takeshi.”

Xanxus makes a mental note of the names and vows to run a quick background check as soon as he pries a surname out. While Tsuna might be happy keeping his elements separate, Xanxus wants to know who he’s sharing partial harmony with.

But he might also owe this Tsuyoshi a drink, because while Tsuna is clearly still not harmonised with the mist, the two of them are laughing and smiling and no longer acting as if their very existence burns the other. Whatever happened in Japan did both of them the world of good.
Any fears that Karasu may have had about Mukuro becoming jealous of unexpectedly obtaining a sibling are not long lasting, as Nagi quickly becomes her son’s favourite playmate. Xanxus has a suspicion that’ll change when the boy realises she might also be Tsuna’s favourite. The man dotes on her with a passion that would make Xanxus suspicious of her genetics if not for the fact that Tsuna was under house arrest during the window of her conception.

She doesn’t even seem to remember that she’d ever lived anywhere else, outside of knowing no Italian. Nagi is perfectly content to cuddle up in the arms of whatever member of the Estrano is feeling particularly doting, and hasn’t asked for her parents once.

Xanxus thinks she might be his favourite Estrano brat too, just for that reason alone. Not that he ever spends time with any of them unless Tsuna is around, but his sky clearly enjoys being around Karasu without the constant fear of accidental harmonisation, and has a tendency to invite her and Mukuro along on trips to help Nagi ‘explore’ her new home. The little girl has a tendency to create bouquets, and nobody has the heart to tell her to stop before the flower beds become barren – quite a few mists have taken to padding them with illusions.

Normally, Karasu sticks to the kids’ side while they explore, but with Tsuna sitting rather patiently on the grass watching Nagi ‘teach him’ how to make a daisy chain alongside Mukuro, she’s sitting on a low garden wall, keeping Xanxus company. While this is the kind of activity he’d usually avoid like the plague, he’s been vying for a chance to catch Karasu without Tsuna to get in the way. And he has questions.

“How’s the bratlette holding up?” he asks, rolling his eyes as Tsuna’s ‘failed’ daisy chain falls apart and needs Nagi to show him how to fix it (Mukuro’s has become a tangled mash that is almost beautiful in its own anarchy). Karasu’s glances over for a brief moment, before returning her attention to the three on the ground.

“Frightfully well,” she admits. “Her flames and Mukuro’s are still latent, but they’re already so intertwined I half feel like I gave birth to both of them. She’s so young, but already desperate for approval.”

“Her mother was that bad?” Xanxus questions, and Karasu shakes her head.

“Don’t get me wrong, my sister wasn’t abusive,” Karasu explains. “At least, not in the traditional way. Maybe, one day, she would have made that step, but she wasn’t raising Nagi the way you need to raise a mist. There’s a reason mists have a reputation, even among flame users, for extreme personality defects. In a few years, my sister would probably be lucky to be capable of expressing anything but frustration at anyone, and poor Nagi would have been broken inside and out if we left her there. At least now she can have the upbringing she deserves.”

“Mists can’t possibly be any worse than any other flame,” Xanxus scoffs. “And she isn’t even active yet.”

“Even latents show signs, Xanxus. There’s a reason we don’t leave flame actives amongst civilians,” Karasu reminds him. “They really don’t fit into normal society. Not without giving themselves major issues along the way.”

Isn’t that the truth, Xanxus thinks to himself, watching over the baby mists and his sky. Although Tsuna would probably argue the case.

“Why are you here, Xanxus?” Karasu finally asks, after a few minutes of silence. “Gio’s stopped looking like he’s two caffeinated drinks away from cardiogenic arrest, so your guns must finally be perfected. And you’ve never had more than a passing interest in my kids. Why’d you tag along?”
Xanxus huffs, smirking as he turns to look at her.

“Well, considering the last conversation we had together, I wanted an update,” he says. “You’ve given up on harmonisation? Because if so, one of the Vongola brothers is probably going to knock on your door soon, and I want to know if I should be dissuading them or not.”

Karasu winces, leaning back on her hands.

“It’s not so much given up as… taking a break?” she explains. “Tsuna’s told me that if I still want to harmonise, he’ll accept it. But the choice has to be mine.”

Xanxus stills, staring at her in shock.

“Then… then why the hell aren’t you harmonised?” he growls, low enough that their audience can’t hear. “Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Oh, we’re not there yet,” Karasu says. “I’m still processing what I know.”

“But?” Xanxus pushes, and the woman gives him a mock glare, before she catches sight of the man crouching down in front of her son and niece, and it softens into a smile.

“But, what he told me two months ago didn’t erase the things that drew me to him in the first place,” she admits. “There’s part of me that can’t stand the thought of him having any other mist. It’s already aggravating to know I’ll be number three for him.”

“Wait… three?” Xanxus chokes, and Karasu grins.

“Oh, you didn’t know?” she asks. “He has no problem letting two flame actives share an element. Might want to watch him around any other bratty, arrogant storms that make him smile.”

Over Xanxus’s rotting corpse.

“There’s already an abundance of storm flames in this harmony, Trash,” he warns. “Any storm that even looks his way is getting a bullet in the head.”

Karasu laughs. “Does Tsuna know that?”

“It should go without saying!” Xanxus snaps. “And don’t change the subject. You still want to harmonise?”

The woman sobers up.

“Part of me does,” she tells him. “I’m just not sure if that part is ready to take on the burden that’s involved. Until then, I have to step back.”

“Is it really that much of an issue?” Xanxus presses, and Karasu laughs.

“Xanxus, when you finally figure out the whole story, I really hope I’m there to see the look on your face,” she says. “It should be magnificent, watching you look back at everything with context.”

“You could just tell me and be done with it,” Xanxus growls.

“I could. But Tsuna asked me not to,” she says. “And since we’re still – technically – courting, I’m honour bound to follow that request.”

Xanxus rolls his eyes, but finds himself tensing when he realises there are tiny footsteps running
towards the wall.

“Auntie, look!” Nagi says, pointing over at the slower Tsuna. “I taught Uncle Tsuna. Isn’t it good?”

The sky smiles and holds up a daisy chain, and while Karasu is smiling indulgently, Xanxus feels the need to throw up.

Mukuro, on the other hand, watches his mother accept Nagi’s own flower crown, the woman leaning her head down so the girl can plop it on her head. He catches her eyes, and Karasu gives a silent nod. Mukuro then scrambles onto the short wall between his mother and Xanxus, and turns to the storm.

“We made one for you too Xanxus,” he says, and before Xanxus can process that sentence, Mukuro has dropped his own disasterpiece on his head. He instinctively takes a hand up to investigate – he honestly can’t believe he’s feeling flower petals.

“What the-”

“Xanxus?” Tsuna calls, and Xanxus turns his head, just in time to see the sky take a photo with a disposable camera.

“What the fuck!” Xanxus yelps, yanking off the flower crown as Tsuna brings the camera down and grins.

“That’s was a good shot,” he says. “I’ve always wanted a good family photo.”

Xanxus sees red.

“YOU WILL NOT BE SHOWING ANYONE THAT PHOTO, TRASH!”

He lunges for the camera, but it’s no longer in his hand, and the sky dances away. Karasu laughs on the wall, patting Nagi and Mukuro on the head.

“I did good, Momma?” Mukuro asks, while Nagi glances at the two in confusion.

“Oh, you did great, sweetheart,” Karasu assures him, lifting the boy into her arms. “Now Tsuna’s got a great office warming present.”

“That is NOT going in your office!” Xanxus howls, and Tsuna smiles.

“Tell you what,” he chimes. “You keep the Vongola brothers from knocking on Karasu’s door while she work through some things, and I’ll keep it locked in my room.”

Xanxus freezes on the spot. “Oh… you Trash!”

Karasu just starts laughing again, and the two brats join in. Xanxus feels his rage starting to redirect, but before he can lunge at them, Tsuna’s hand is on his shoulder, holding him back.

“Xanxus,” he warns. “Don’t blame Mukuro for being obedient.”

That actually has the man giggling at some private joke, and Xanxus feels his irritation turning back to his sky. His emotions are playing tennis and he desperately wants something to burn.

“You’re all assholes and Trash,” he snarls.

“And you wouldn’t have us any other way, Xanxus,” Tsuna finishes for him. “You love it when I
don’t play fair.”

“Not when I’m the target!” Xanxus yells back. Tsuna just smiles back, and his storm starts hissing.

“...When I’m head of the Varia, you are being shoved in the highest position of authority I can find,” Xanxus vows, pointing one glowing red finger in his sky’s direction. “Forget informant, you’ll be the goddamn... Storm Officer or something. You’ll have so much paperwork, you’ll never leave the building!”

“Well, at least I’ll have a great photo to keep me company” Tsuna replies, and dives straight into dying will mode as Xanxus lunges for him.

Rather frustratingly, Tsuna makes it out of Xanxus’s rage intact and with the camera still somewhere on his person. But said photo never actually appears in his office or his bedroom, so Xanxus drops his anger levels from apocalyptic to mildly enraged for the time being. Besides, he’s pretty sure that little stunt was mostly Tsuna’s final act of vengeance for the whole locked room incident, and if keeping Vongola from pressuring his mist candidate for a few more months is all he needs to let them all move past for good, he’s probably getting off lightly.

He’s still going to destroy that photo the second he finds it though.

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