Dirty Sympathy

by ideny

Summary

Apollo and Klavier, stuck in abusive situations they can't see any way out of, meet by chance and take a Hitchcock approach: framing each other's tormentors for murder. An alternative take on/explanation of GS4, originally written for the kink meme.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See februeruri's breathtaking image of Apollo from the end of this chapter [here](#). The full post is [here](#), but the other piece in it is from much later in the story and may count to an extent as spoiler content.

It's a Rite Aid tonight.

He rotates drugstores on evenings like this one. Also grocery stores, sundry shops, convenience stores (when it's not too bad) and pharmacies. He wonders whether he'll eventually resort to veterinary clinics, or whether one evening the same clerk will have seen him too many times and make a phone call that really, truly won't make anything better.

Of course, sometimes it's bad enough that pharmacies and drugstores are the only options. There are things grocery stores don't sell.

His head hurts.

Burn cream. Rubbing alcohol. He's found the first and is reaching for the second when a voice to his left says, softly, "What happened to you?"

He hadn't even heard the guy come up.

Stupid, Justice, don't space out like that.

He turns around, prepared to give a smartass answer and march off to line up with all of the college students and their cases of beer, and gets such a shock from the face that he backs up straight into the shelf and knocks stuff everywhere.

"No! Sorry!"

The guy in the hoodie really looks horrified at himself, and as Apollo clambers out of the mess and registers, one loud heartbeat at a time, that this is somebody else - younger, browner, stronger chin, no scar - the blond is already on his hands and knees picking up boxes of band-aids.

Apollo can be a jackass when he's nervous, he knows it, and that's probably part of the problem, but before he can make a crack about that blond hair not being natural he sees that the basket also contains gauze and tape and Neosporin. And for some reason a bag of marshmallows.

Apollo joins him, out of embarrassment - he can't let someone else pick up after him just because he spazzed out in public - and grabs a bottle of peroxide that's rolling around on the linoleum to put it back, when the guy says, "Ah, wait -" and reaches for it and drops it into his own ugly grey plastic basket.

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The guy follows his gaze and makes a face like he's about to say something all clever and cool, but stops, as though he's seeing the stuff he's buying for the first time, and just lets the unformed words out as a long, shallow sigh instead. And then he looks Apollo right in the eye, calm but at the same
time sort of wild-sad, and Apollo can tell that his own face is also broadcasting no, not okay, not actually okay.

"Come with me."

"What?" He says that louder than he means to.

"I mean it. Come with me." And the guy kind of spreads his arms out at a forty-five degree angle, sort of like a statue of a saint, but twitchier. A saint shrugging. "Unless you want to go where you're going?"

Apartment. Home. Subsidized by that smile.

He tries to be sarcastic. "I was looking forward to it."

"I see...and your neck's still bleeding, did you know?"

He hadn't been able to see that in the mirror in the office bathroom.

"...Fuck. No."

"Come with me. I'll clean you up." Hoodie Blond Not Kristoph untangles himself into a standing position and reaches a hand down to Apollo, who takes it. Turns out the other guy's a lot taller, but then, who isn't.

"Actually, here." He takes Apollo's basket and tips it into his own, then hands the full one back, along with a fifty pinched between two of his knuckles.

"What?"

"Use that, buy it all. I'll catch up in a minute."

"I still need a coffee mug."

"No worries. Apparently I need marshmallows. Go get your mug, I'll find you." And off he goes down the aisle under the bright white lights. He's wearing motorcycle boots.

Apollo isn't paid enough to turn down a favor, if that's what this is, and if it isn't, he's sort of too tired to care. He finds a blue-striped mug with a big handle, lines up and pays for everything with the fifty, and ends up standing outside the automatic sliding door on the sidewalk with a double plastic bag in one hand and a wad of change in the other. He doesn't know what kind of fool he feels like.

And then Not Kristoph appears with an ice cream cone in each hand. It's a little cold for ice cream, but all the same Apollo takes one when it's offered in the middle of a surprisingly dextrous you-take-that-I'll-take-this involving giving the change back.

The blond guy makes a wait gesture and pulls out his cell and dials. His voice gets loud when the other person answers, so it must be loud wherever they are. "Daryan...I got spotted." The cocky tone in his voice is an interesting contrast to the faraway worry on his face. "Ja, from USC. Two of
them. Which means that there aren't enough to go around, so don't show up." The other voice becomes almost audible, with a low buzz like an engine. "Don't worry, you'll still have all the Bruin girls to choose from." More buzzing. "It happens. I'll see you tomorrow...What are you saying? I never skip. Ja, sweet, sweet dreams."

He's even twitchier when he hangs up, but he's kind of smiling, too.

"A complete fabrication, in case you were curious."

"I can pretend."

Apollo doesn't even know what made him say that, but the blond's eyes do a whole appreciative laugh before his lungs get into it. "No need. Just finish that and we can get into the car." He pauses. "Rocky road."

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The car is black, somewhere between nice and nondescript, although the stereo is aftermarket and expensive-looking. But the blond guy is driving in silence, and Apollo finds himself staring at the lights on the dash. The red ones - and most of them are red - make him think of magma. The glow. But being driven off to he doesn't know where by he doesn't know who is already making him feel stupid, so he doesn't mention his comparison out loud.

Even if he's not a kid anymore, he knows that just getting into a complete stranger's car isn't the best of ideas. But Kristoph is just about the only familiar face he has left, and he can't help feeling that he's probably better off with a stranger. Recklessness is different when what you know isn't any too safe.

They only drive for ten or fifteen minutes before parking in the side lot of a business hotel that Apollo sort of recognizes. This area is filled with them, and he's been to a few meetings at one that's down the street a block or so, following Kristoph around wordlessly with folders and legal pads and laptop chargers.

When they get out of the car, the air is full of the smell that he associates most with California - car exhaust and jasmine - and he discreetly takes a deep breath, trying to fill his lungs with it. He's developed a melancholy habit of grabbing at the tiniest of fleeting pleasures, and as he catches himself at it again, he just knows what was up with the ice cream and the marshmallows - and as he exhales, he hears his new blond who-knows-what doing the exact same thing.

Their eyes meet over the roof of the car, and he thinks, I get you.

It feels dangerous.

Inside, the decor is all white and brown and minimal. Big sloping vases hold arrangements of flowerless sticks, and the floor is part tile and part fuzzy carpet. As he's glancing around, he feels a pressure on his upper arm. "Wait here."

He almost wants to protest, because if anything Hoodie is the one who's underdressed, but he's
already striding over and talking to one of the front desk clerks, a young woman. Apollo can't hear the exchange over the lobby music, but she seems to be all business at first, and objecting to something, until Not Kristoph bends down conspiratorially, leaning on his forearms, and she stops talking and hears him out. A minute and a half later, he's pulling out his wallet and she's typing on her computer and handing him a little keycard envelope.

They meet up in front of the elevators; the guy hands him one of the cards, and they get on the first one that comes. It's mirrored on both sides, so they stand in the middle of a long row of themselves. Whoever, he thinks, they are.

He's still holding the bag of stuff from Rite Aid, the narrow plastic handles stretching against his fingers. He has trouble imagining what might happen once they get to this hotel room.

This could be a rescue, or a respite. Or it could be a terrible mistake. He has to say something, he thinks, so he doesn't look (feel) so vulnerable, and his big mouth reflexes kick in and he looks at the bigger man and what comes out, in a nervous, squeaky way no less, is, "You know. I could be planning to kill you?"

The blond looks shocked and unhappy for only a second, and his expression moves to comprehension and then to incredulous, quiet laughter. As the chuckles dwindle, Not Kristoph slides down the mirrored wall a little and replies, "Oh, please do. Just so he doesn't get to be the one who does."

It's so sad that Apollo kisses him.

It's encouragement. It's a plea. It's pity and understanding and a shield. And he's kissed back, the same way, until the elevator dings and the doors open and they walk into the hall like the strangers they are.
The room is decorated like the lobby, white and brown. But unlike the lobby, everything in it looks impossibly soft and serene. The brown armchairs are plush. The wallpaper is textured. The bed (and there's only one) is so puffy and white that it looks more like a giant pillow. Even the light is soft, coming from frosted incandescent bulbs and not fluorescents. Snick, goes the heavy lock of the door behind them.

Apollo's eyes flicker repeatedly to the bed and determinedly away. The number of beds only matters if he thinks he's getting into bed, after all. Does he think so? He's getting way ahead of himself, and nervous, and confused.

The tall guy, meanwhile, has gone straight into the bathroom, and his voice says, "Good, they're quick." The door is wide open, and the whiff of steam in the air tells Apollo that the water he hears running is hot.

Well, the sink seems like a good place for the Rite Aid junk. He walks in and plunks the plastic bag on the counter, wincing when the mug he's temporarily forgotten bangs down.

The stopper on the sink is in place, as the tap fills it. What Not Kristoph (who must have an actual name somewhere) seems so pleased about is a very thorough set of toiletries laid out on top of a tray - not just the usual soaps and tiny bottles of shampoo, but things like toothpaste (okay) and shoe polish (sheesh) and a comb. And a white plastic box that could be anything from more first aid things to a sewing kit.

There's a muffled thunk as the blond turns the tap off. The mirror is starting to fog over, and it's warm in there, but he still doesn't even pull the hood down. He just turns and says, "Shall I look at your neck now?"

And Apollo's brought back from examining the room to remembering why he's in it.

"Sure." Then, he feels compelled to add, "You don't need to touch anything, if..."

The look he gets is careful, but not queasy. "Any reason I shouldn't?"

"Um. No."

"All right. Could you undo your tie?"

He turns his back and does, feeling awkward, though that's replaced by something he doesn't have a word for when long fingers start to loosen his collar.

The gesture is clinical, intimate, gracious. All at the same time.

"Buttons?" They both ask that at the same instant, him trying to be helpful and the stranger trying to be not creepy, and it's almost funny. So yeah, he undoes the top few buttons on his shirt so the guy can see what he's doing.

"Ach. What is this?" He feels the long fingers pick something out of his collar and then sees them come around to show it to him. It's a chip of iridescent porcelain, in periwinkle blue. He looks up
from it, and their eyes meet again in the mirror.

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He supposed he'd been working late, though maybe it didn't count as late if it was the rule rather than the exception. A little after nine, when he'd come into the office a little before seven. And even that might have been okay, if he had eaten anything, but he hadn't he and he was tired and his stomach was feeling awfully empty.

The man whose name was on the door was strict about not eating in the office.

The door to the inner room had been closed for hours. And he'd made the mistake of going over to where there was a Zojirushi hot water dispenser set up and a tea service laid out for clients.

It wasn't that he even liked tea. But he'd put a little of the loose leaf into one of the matched cups and filled it directly from the machine. Why bother with the strainer and the saucer and the pot, anyway? He'd just wash the cup out and top off the water afterwards.

He's not sure whether it was the bubbly seethe of the dispenser that brought his boss into the room, or a coincidence, or psychic powers or what. But he's barely set the steaming cup on his desk and sat back down when the smooth voice is saying, "Justice, you really are a philistine. What were you thinking." It doesn't sound like a question. The water is still barely shy of boiling.

And he looks to see the blue eyes behind their lenses go from urbane to batshit, and twitches aside just in time to get a cup of scalding water along one leg instead of in his lap. And the older man follows up by smashing the empty, wet cup at him, like he'd ruined it by touching it somehow. Like it was tainted. Again he's quick, enough that he gets it literally in the neck as it breaks, and not at the base of the skull. He still cries out, and hates that he does.

"I think that'll do for tonight. Why don't you wrap up." So he goes through the whole ritual of sorting out his papers and locking the drawers and turning off lights that was drilled (ha.) into him when he accepted the job, all with his lunatic boss leaning against the bookshelf and watching him and with his leg screaming at him and his head throbbing. But some quirk of mercy means that the blond attorney does go back into his own office and shut the door once the blinds are drawn, and Apollo retreats to the tiny bathroom to press cold towels against the pain and to breathe heavily, head bent so low he almost knocks it on the faucets.

He skips through a list in his mind and decides on a drugstore before sinking to the floor.

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"You are an attorney? And your boss did this?" The stranger looks surprised, and Apollo gets defensive.

"If only he were just my boss. He fucking owns me, okay."
"Owns you?" There's an undercurrent of anger to that as masked as the hum of a fan two rooms away. If not for the bracelet shifting on his wrist, he might have missed it. "While you tell me what that means, I will get these pieces of teacup taken care of. It will hurt. I am sorry." There's a faint accent in the voice, too, one that's easier to notice when his sentences get formal. He sounds like he's being translated.

The white plastic box turned out to have band-aids and cotton balls and tweezers in it, and Apollo tries to hold still and talk as the blond leans very close behind him and picks bits of Kristoph's tea set out of his cuts.

"I was in the system. No family. I made it through school on scholarship, but once I graduated there was nothing. And I have a juvenile record. Not for anything impressive. But enough to make any law firm with a shred of dignity not want to talk to me."

"Except this one?"

"Yeah. He showed up at the fucking eleventh hour. I was going to get kicked out of my apartment, even though the school let me stay in it longer than they normally would. And maybe he seemed a little weird, but what was I going to say?"

"So it turned out that he's the only person in the office. The Offices, plural, is because he has some mostly retired old guys he calls about specialty stuff. Whatever. Fine. He's got a real caseload and everything. Maybe not better than I dreamed of, but way better than I was starting to expect.

"And he finds out that I'm out a place to live, just about, and I can't get a new one 'cause I've got no savings and no guarantor. And he says, well, he'll pay me partly in rent, and he'll cosign the lease. It's like weird lawyer Christmas.

"Until the first time a case doesn't go his way and he slams my hand in the car door."

The taller man has just put the tweezers down and reached for the rubbing alcohol. "Your car? Or his?"

"His. I don't have one. We go to court in his car."

"So without him you have no job, no employment history, no home, and no car. This is bad."

"Thanks very fucking much, Watson, I noticed that!" It's as he's speaking that the alcohol-soaked cloth is pressed against the back of his neck. "Rngh!"

He expects Hoodie to either get pissed back or jump and apologize, but he does neither. What he does is pause and then gently blow across the back of Apollo's neck, a few times, to ease the stinging. "There."

His reactions are way off tonight, he thinks as he has to blink hard a few times. He's already gone from defensive to pretty damn affectionate in a split second, and now he's going from angry to this. What the hell.

He stews as the stranger applies Neosporin and a bandage.

"Your leg, now?"
The scald. Right. Right. "I think I can probably take care of that one myself, I mean...I can see it."

"But sometimes it feels better to be looked after, doesn't it?"

This is insane. He stalls. "You still have your hood up, and I'm supposed to take my pants off?"

"Mm, is that the problem?" And the tall guy just pulls the whole sweatshirt off and bundles it up on the counter. He's got nothing underneath it, and suddenly there's a lot to notice.

He's lean and golden and gorgeous, but there are angry purple crescents on his chest and shoulders, specked with red, and holy shit, those are fucking teeth marks. And while one nipple has a tiny steel ring through it, the other is just a rise of scar tissue. When he brushes his messy blond hair aside, it's evident that one of his ears is tattered like a tomcat's.

"Someone bit you?"

"My shark."

And with that, Apollo is able to draw the lines between what little he knows of popular music and the name mentioned in that cell phone conversation and the physical resemblance and blurts, "You - you're Disappointing Brother Klavier!"

The blond pretty much confirms it when he turns sallow under his tan and his eyes get big and he says, "Your boss - your boss is Kristoph?"
Chapter 3

This probably looks pretty ludicrous. But the mere thought that this situation might have Kristoph's fingerprints all over it has sent him into panic mode, and he's moved so that he's blocking the door. And he's clutching something like a weapon, except that when he looks down at it it's a towel. Very fucking threatening.

And Klavier Gavin, since that's who this is, is backed up against the opposite wall, practically standing in the bathtub, grabbing the shower curtain.

What comes back to him is a memory of the best of his short-term foster moms coming to see why it's taking him so long to take out the trash and finding him having a nervous face-off in the alley with a half-grown opossum. "Apollo, it's more scared of you than you are of it."

His boss doesn't like his brother. Now and again the band is the focus of an article in the paper or the new issue of one of the waiting area magazines, or someone who's come to the office is dumb enough to mention Klavier, and the result doesn't vary - Kristoph makes a few nasty, priggish remarks about dilettantes and pretty boys and sexual misconduct, the second of which is a bit funny given his manicures and the third of which is just hilarious, given that his sex life seems to consist entirely of bruising, bitter, utilitarian sodomy at his apprentice's expense. And it's time to focus, and realize that the likelihood of his turning his otherwise-occupied sibling into some kind of spy is nil. Besides, the bracelet isn't so much as pulsing.

Nothing like the seasick waves it had responded with when he'd been facing eviction and had received Kristoph's job offer. In that case, he'd just ignored it. Here, Justice; have a learning experience.

So he rolls his eyes in disgust at himself, making a show of it for Klavier's benefit, and steps away from the door and puts his stupid double-o-seven war towel down.

"Um...ja." Little brother lets go of the shower curtain, and looks at him with an apologetic twist to his mouth, and they're sliding down the walls and leaning towards each other and laughing again. Feels good, even if it's a little hysterical.

"What is your name?"

"Apollo Justice. I know. I should at least be taller."

"Apollo." The blond tried it out. "I like it. You should own it. Take pride in what it means." Apollo doesn't quite know what to say, and Klavier fills the silence. "Me, I count myself lucky that my parents named me in the living room. And that they had a piano. Otherwise Kaffeemaschine Gavin would have been a real possibility."

It's kind of funny, in a dopey way, but it also sounds like part of a repertoire, as though he's used to making this joke. Apollo looks at him hard, and Klavier starts and lets his real face show, the banter put aside. It's a face worn so thin that light should be able to pass through it.

"May I see your leg now?"

"Almost. Can I help you with the...the toothmarks, first?"
"Ja. Thank you."

They're both sitting on the floor already, so he gets to his feet, lifts one finger to tell Klavier to stay down, and gathers things up from the sink. Same rubbing alcohol, same antibacterial goop, new washcloths, the gauze and the tape - and the marshmallows, why not.

The process is about the same as it had been with his neck, too, but that the wounds are spread out in different places, so he treats one at a time.

"Do you think this is going to be enough? I mean, human bites are filthy."

"I did try to clean them a little before I left."

"With what? Didn't look like you had anything, if you were at the drugstore."

"It was a dressing room, even if just for a radio station event – the 'secret' concert at the 'secret location,' call on the hour for tickets, ja? - so. Za vas! Stolichnaya and bottled water!"

"Blech. I'm sure that's up to United Nations health standards."

"I have done it before." Long fingers rip the marshmallow bag open, and the room fills with the scent of powdered sugar.

There are old marks the same shape, already healed - but he asks anyway. "Daryan Crescend does this - a lot?"

"He picked his animal well."

"But - I mean - why? I get the feeling your brother would have done the same thing to anyone he picked to work for him. It's probably what he was looking for and I probably should have known. But you're - you're not replaceable."

Klavier laughs at that. "I'm a Top 40 radio star! Made of plastic! The most replaceable kind of person on the earth." He stuffs a marshmallow into his mouth.

"Stop it. You know what I'm trying to say, anyway."

A sigh turns into a hum. "Well. If he could sing prettier, maybe our lives would be very different. Or maybe he'd be with someone outside the band - and he'd have killed them already, and this is for the good."

"Your turn to tell me what that means."

The handsome features harden. "Fine. One, Daryan has rules. He knows where his livelihood comes from and so he does not touch my face and he does not touch my hands. Or my throat. As far as he's concerned, so long as I live I'll be able to make music and look sexy in the magazines. If he had some other girl, some other boy, that he was not dependent on? God help them."

"And about his not being able to sing? He can sing. I thought the backup vocals on your songs were him."
"They are. But he does not have so much of a range. Listen carefully the next time the radio is on. He can't sing very high or very low."

"And that means he gets to tear earrings and stuff out of you?"

"He was supposed to be the frontman."

"What? You're still a better singer than he is, and you're a lot better to look at."

"Why, thank you." He flourishes the next marshmallow before eating it.

"Stop."

"Daryan, for all his problems-

I think tearing piercings out of people is something more than a problem -

"-is a genuinely remarkable guitarist. He can play with either hand, did you know that? Reverse the strings, turn the guitar upside down, it makes no difference. It's very impressive to see. And forming a band was his idea in the first place. The others were his friends before."

"You're the one it's named after."

"Originally, no. We called ourselves Criminal Code. We played in terrible little venues around here. We couldn't even order drinks. We had day jobs, ja?"

"But this is Los Angeles. And we attracted all the attention we wanted. Would we like to play better clubs? Would we like to be paid? Would we like to record?"

"We are sixteen years old. We would like that very much."

Klavier’s fingers are marshmallow sticky, and his hair is sticking to his neck in the humid air of the room, but he’s absorbed in memory and his eyes aren’t focused on anything in particular.

"Before we signed anything, the industry people were nothing but compliments. But once our names were on the lines, of course, they were full of suggestions that were not really just suggestions. Come to this event. Get better shoes. We sneered, and complained, and obeyed.

"Then the producer says, one night at some radio station function like tonight's, if you're really going to play the weird slow song, then you, Gavin, you switch parts with Crescend, let's surprise them. And Daryan is happy, because he wants to prove he can play my guitar part better than me. And I call him an asshole because I know he can.

"So fine, I think, I'll prove I can sing his part better than him. Make it more complicated. And sexier, ja? And flirt disgustingly with the prettiest faces I can see in the audience. I mess my hair up beforehand, borrow the bartender's lip gloss. I lie down on the stage. The worst ham I can think of to be. But it was just playing around, playing around and showing off and fucking with Daryan.

"He's cursing me out in the dressing room and everybody else is laughing when the producer comes in. Well, Miss Monroe, he says, you can do it that way from now on. Nice guitar, Crescend."

"Then he comes to rehearsal two days later, wants us to try the same thing on some other songs.
Some don't work very well, but most of them do. And then he asks Daryan to try singing one the way I sang it. And he can't.

"And things are written down, and that night Daryan punches me after he's had a couple of drinks.

"The producer asks me to a solo meeting the next day. Not being completely stupid, at that point, I don't go. So he just calls a meeting for everyone on the weekend.

"You can stay as you are, he says. You can get two singles out of it. Maybe three. Or you can write songs that don't all sound the same. You pick.

"Daryan says he can play anything. That we all can. Not, says the producer, that it matters if everything we play is forced to fit around a voice that obviously can't sing everything.

"Daryan says he can't change his voice. And the producer points at me. Daryan says that a band led by a detective is badass but a band led by a lawyer is a joke. And the producer looks at me and says do I want to make my stubborn friends famous?

And what do I do, I slump down in my seat like I'm not comfortable with the idea but where the others can't see I look him straight in the eye from under my lashes, and Daryan isn't in charge, not of the band, not after that."
The story's been punctuated by occasional quick intakes of breath as Apollo does what he can to disinfect each of the bites, and after the last one the silence puzzles him, until he understands that the story is over, at least for now.

"If he's already been bumped once, why not kick him out for good? There are guitarists everywhere. At least one of them has to be saner than this."

"Breach of contract. We split up over 'personal differences,' we owe the label more money than we all have put together. And the label likes him; they think we sell more records because we have a 'bad boy.' If the stereotype they wanted had been 'the one with glasses' instead..."

"Do you have to make jokes?"

"Ja." Fair enough.

"I'm not one to talk - but couldn't you just call the police?"

"Daryan is police. I do not mean to impugn law enforcement as a whole, never at all...but a dirty cop is a hard person to leave...and I did try. Drove across the whole city to get to a station where I thought he couldn't know anybody. Gave a statement. Was given a place to stay for a night. And woke up to Daryan dragging me out of bed by my hair, because someone had heard of professional courtesy."

The rock star - and that title has rapidly lost whatever glamour he may have thought it had - gets up with one quick grasshopperish unfolding of his knees and walks out into the room proper. Apollo is considering following him when he hears first the scrape of hangers from the closet and then a whumph sort of noise as something sails through the doorway and lands on the counter, almost in the sink. It's a white fluffy bathrobe.

He hasn't yet selected a smartass comment when Klavier leans back in. "My clothes smell like vodka, and so long as I am in a hotel with overnight laundry services I have no intention of smelling like a liquor store delivery truck tomorrow. Yours smell like tea, which wouldn't be so bad, but...I thought I should ask."

Now that it's been brought to his attention, the thought of smelling like Kristoph's tea makes him feel kind of shaky.

"Yeah. Thanks. Just a sec."

In under a minute he's out of his wrinkled red suit and wearing the bathrobe that he'd been planning to make fun of. At least it's clean and sort of comfortable. He wishes he were taller so it wouldn't come nearly to his ankles.

Shirtless Klavier has got a head start, and so it's not surprising when he's already wearing the other bathrobe and holding the receiver of the room phone to one ear. Apollo sees a plastic laundry bag
with a black sleeve trailing out of it sitting by the door and stuffs his own things into it, then retreating closer to the bathroom door, behind the handsome guy on the phone.

On the one hand, it's because he feels awkward.

And on the other hand, it's because despite the weirdness of everything some things are very simple and he just wants to look at him.

He's not just taller than Apollo, he's tall. On him, the bathrobe is a slightly-past-the-knee kind of garment, not a damn formal kimono. And the tangled golden hair above the thick collar of it is a beautiful mess. The backs of his legs, what can be seen of them, are sculpted and as tan as his face.

Apollo feels like a teenage girl for a moment and snarls at himself for it, but not before noting that this here is clearly the person who should have been named Apollo.

And then the functional little conversation about laundry that he hasn't been listening to ends, and Klavier opens the door to the hall for just a second to leave the bag out there, then comes back.

Of course he's barefoot now, and Apollo looks, as he walks over, at the long tan feet.

One with five toes. One with four.

Fuck.

Klavier pretends not to notice him noticing, though the bracelet gives a quivery little twinge, and so Apollo steps (if the journey had been more than four feet long, "bolts" would have been a better word) back to the sink and retrieves the burn cream with a rustle of plastic. He hadn't really looked at his leg while he was changing out of his suit, but he looks now, twisting the robe sideways a little. It's not too bad, mostly just red, with only one spot that seems to be considering blistering even now, but it's still a burn and it still hurts more than it seems like it should.

"You don't want me to?"

"Um..."

"Let me, please?"

He should say no, but he lets Kristoph's brother take the stuff, stands with one foot on the rim of the tub as those careful hands apply it, then apply a layer of ointment-soaked gauze, then tape it in place.

"At least see a doctor if that does blister."

No one has said anything in the past few minutes, and the words startle him into twisting around and looking Klavier right in the eye from a distance of inches. Like a movie cliché he feels his own eyes darken and sees the blue ones dilate.

Then he feels the cold seep up from under his ribs and the mask settle into place, watches the same thing happen on Klavier's face.

And Klavier just says "No."
The only thing he can think of to say is an echo - No? - and he'd rather not. He doesn't want to sound argumentative, doesn't want to disturb the fragile peace.

His heart is pounding for reasons that don't mix well.

"Not now." Klavier speaks first. "It's not that I don't...that I don't. But..." He's breathing hard, if quietly, taking in more air than he'd need just to talk. "I'd rather...when I had something more to for you to see than...than bruised hips and a thousand-yard stare, ja? On a happier day. If not that, then...better to have no such memory at all and just have been friends."

He's seized with a quick flare of disappointment, maybe even a little anger, but it drains quickly and what remains is relief. Gratitude.

He's still going to say something, though.

"You mean we're not ships passing in the hotel night? I'm not some weird variation on the standard groupie?"

There's a flash in those blue eyes then. "And I'm not a weird variation on your standard medicine cabinet?"

Apollo looks around the room, at the ointment tubes and bloodied washcloths, and breathes in the smell of steam and Neosporin and marshmallow. "This is a weird variation on a medicine cabinet. You are...thank you."

It's hard to say that. For what has only been months but feels like his life, everything he's said has been some kind of defensive. Deference to Kristoph. Blandness or rudeness to strangers.

"Thank you too. And you're welcome. And Apollo...I'm so sorry."

"Sorry for what? You didn't do anything, did you?"

Klavier thinks. "I didn't push Kristoph off an Alp when we were on vacation when I was nine."

Apollo snorts. "Not that I don't appreciate the thought, but wouldn't that just have meant there were two Gavin sociopaths instead of one?"

Klavier's grin is incredibly wry, and Apollo follows him when he wanders back into the room. "An opportunity missed, hm?" The blond leans from one foot to the other, considers the desk chair and the glorified chaircouches in front of the window, and instead sits down on the floor at the foot of the bed, leaning back against the mass of mattress and duvet and blanket. After a second, Apollo slides down next to him. "Or maybe I shouldn't have been in such a hurry to leave home."

"When did you leave?"

"Before I was even in the band. Fifteen."

"And your family let you?"

"It was just Kristoph by then. Our parents...accident - fahr'n fahr'n fahr'n auf der Autobahn."

Apollo's stomach clenches in time with the bracelet and he glares. "Spoken like someone who had
parents. Klavier frowns and tilts his head sideways against the bedding, which is enough like an
apology. "You have a defective sense of humor, prettyboy."

"Mm. Ja, I suppose. Is there anything from the drugstore to repair that?"

"I could tape your mouth shut."

"Maybe on your birthday."

He doesn't mean to get worked up, exactly, but he feels like he's being baited. "I know you're
joking, but why do you keep talking like you're ever going to see me again?"

"You dump me before the honeymoon is even begun? Such a Prince Charming you turn out to be."

"Will you shut up, if you're just-"

"Apollo. I cannot not ever see you again. Even aside from the very honest fact that I want to see
you. You took my place with Kristoph, ja? Who wanted his little brother to be a defense attorney
and join the firm. I owe you this. I need to get - get his claws out of you." He's babbling a little bit.
And as tempting as it would be to just lean over and kiss him again and believe him, Apollo won't
do that.

"But can you?"

As spacy as he sounds, Klavier has the expression of a competent architect looking at an empty lot.
"Ja, ja, I can."

Not that it's not exactly what he wants, exactly what his hopeless fantasies have been about, but
hearing it for real is some kind of terrifying. He's not ready to reply for real. So he jokes, and in
that moment he understands Klavier better. "You're going to find an Alp to push him off of now?"

"In Los Angeles? Here, Kristoph, it's the Hollywood sign? Or do you think I'd have better luck
hauling him down to Anaheim and throwing him off the Matterhorn?"

"In one of those mouse hats?"

Klavier makes a loud, startled wheeze that turns into a coughing fit that turns into him leaning over
sideways and practically laughing himself sick. "That is awful. Who has a bad sense of humor
now?"

"You're contagious or something."

Klavier gradually sits up and sober up and unsquints his eyes. "Heh. All right, no. I didn't mean I'd
kill him. I'm not so sure I could kill anybody. There is a right way to do this, you know. So I need
to ask. Are you willing to press charges?"

Apollo doesn't think he's answered the question yet when he sees the expression on the German's
face change. Then he realizes he's been sitting frozen for more than a minute.

The gentle, thoughtful voice is back. "I apologize for frightening you. That seems like a no."
Chapter End Notes

Sorry there, Kraftwerk.
"He's only one of the toughest defense attorneys in the city if not the state. And that's when he's just working for money. Not when his freedom and his good name are on the line."

"You think he'd be acquitted?"

"Acquittals are what he does. And then he'd kill me." He's appalled at himself, but he's starting to shake in place. And he feels guilty, like he's being all melodramatic by saying it out loud, and it's true that Mr. Gavin has never hurt him nearly badly enough for his life to be in danger, it just feels like the promise is there and should he be saying anything if it's all just a feeling? And...

"Shh shh." There's nothing seductive about the feel of warm arms in bathrobe sleeves around him, just something reassuring and immediate, and his panic begins to subside.

He hasn't had someone's arms around him since...not since his law school graduation, when some of his female classmates had been more or less hugging everyone they could see. To be fair to them, they'd known each other and it hadn't been impersonal or anything, but then, they'd also all agreed to stay in touch, and it wasn't as though that had happened.

For that matter, he hasn't had someone in particular since college, and Shallow Boyfriend Brian had jumped for that Silicon Valley job offer with more passion in his eyes than Apollo knew he'd ever managed to elicit.

Anyone who would count Kristoph as a mark in either column could go to a special and creative hell for the willfully ignorant.

Once he's relaxed, Klavier lets go and comes at the topic from another angle.

"If you can't accuse him...is there anywhere you'd like to go, away from here?"

"Even if I had the money to just take off -" Klavier makes an embarrassed don't-even-worry wave, but he's not about to accept that.

"Even if I had the money, the only state I've passed the bar for is California. If I left it'd be another year before I could start over, and that's assuming I don't fail. And stop waving, seriously, you could buy me a plane ticket, but you don't want a pet."

"But if you want to get away...I can help you with that."

It's a good offer. Not one he's likely to receive again. He takes a deep breath and considers - and surprises himself. "I don't want to run away, all right?"

"Why should I give up being what I wanted to be since I was a kid? And when it's the only thing I've got? You can say 'at least you'll have your life,' but...there are things I want besides just being alive. Same as anybody.

"And if I act like a good victim is supposed to and take off? I'm nothing and nobody again. But all your big brother has to do is fill out a want ad and you'll be doing this again in six months with someone else."
Klavier tilts his head back, so he'd be looking at the ceiling if he were looking at anything. His hands are resting on his knees. The lack of a response makes Apollo nervous, and that means he keeps talking. "Self-preservation isn't just about not being dead...right? Running away...just...fuck that!" His voice feels too loud, not to mention ineffectual, in the calm, plush room.

The musician's hair falls away from his face when he turns his head to look sideways. "I did have more I was going to say...but you know, I think 'fuck that' covers it more succinctly."

"So..." Apollo says it almost to himself, but Klavier hears, and his response is slow and light.

"So. Now that you have reviewed and rejected the safest, sanest, and most ethical possibilities, Apollo..."

_He sounds like he's eating my name._

"...what is it that I can do for you? You will not get rid of me so easily. Especially not now that you've pointed out how easily Kristoph might put another person in your current position."

"And if I'm not trying to get rid of you?"

Prettyboy doesn't even need to reply. _Then we have a question still to answer._

"Gavin." He's a little gratified that the guy jumps; he's been practicing his cross-examination voice. "Tell me one other thing first."

The response is a gesture, palms turned up. He understands this one too: _ask._

"Why do you sound like you're so okay with taking my side against your brother? It's weird. He's your family."

"He was always. He. Ach. Normal, nice people...are polite most of the time. But once you know them, they'll make jokes. Interrupt. Laugh. Or if you upset them, they get angry.

"Kristoph was terrifying. He was polite - all of the time. Never familiar. Never temperamental. Just polite."

"He has a fucking temper now."

"Oh, no, he had one then...our parents must have known. They gave my rabbit away...I screamed and cried and threw a monumental tantrum about it. Poor animal."

"And after they..."

"At least he had nothing to do with that. Gott. But the next year he killed his best friend - or whatever that would mean to him? - in another traffic accident. Officially an accident. Drove off the road on a curve and slammed the passenger side into a concrete pylon. Broke the windshield, that's where his scar came from. But as they say. You should have seen the other...I think he did it out of sheer curiosity.

"He never laid a hand on me, but I left anyway. And here you are."

Apollo feels green, doesn't look in the mirror to check because it's a sensation he'd rather not
indulge. "So I'm not just being, um. Taking myself too seriously or something."

"What?"

_He really might kill me._ "He really is dangerous."

Klavier stands up, pulls him gracefully to his feet, stands them both in front of the mirror by the closet, and pulls the collar of Apollo's robe aside so that he can see the edges of the bandage. "First. And forgive me for this, but -" He leans in, quick and aggressive, slings one arm around Apollo's waist from behind and breathes into his ear. And Apollo sees his own face blaze up with fear for an instant and then go dead. Klavier lets go, braces himself for a retaliation.

"Melodramatic prick!" Apollo manages not to take a swing at him, but he's furious.

"It's me you're mad at, as you should be - but was it me you were afraid of?"

Sullenly. "No."

"He is dangerous and you know it."

He shouts back - hopefully the hotel soundproofing is good. "_So what can you DO about it?!_"

"Prosecute."

"I can't press charges!"

Klavier inhales, sharply, once. "Then not you. And not for this. I'm sure you've heard the jokes. The sheer number of witnesses who are the ones ultimately found guilty.

"The next time Kristoph is across the room from me...I don't know what it will be for.

"But he leaves the room in chains."

Apollo is still jangly and pissed off, and now the future is back right in front of his feet like the edge of a cliff. He stands in the middle of the room, staring at nothing.

"Your clothes are still being laundered...but would you like another room?"

"I'm fine."

"It's time for bed, then." And Klavier clicks off all but one of the lights and heads for one of the armchairs.

Apollo doesn't know what the fuck he's doing when, after climbing into the puffy heap of a bed on the left side, he leaves as much room as he can, turns his back, and says, "You're paying, you come sleep like a human being."

He feels the other end of the mattress sag a minute later, can tell that Kristoph's brother is looking away too and giving him his space, and falls asleep right after thinking that he'll never, ever be able to.
You can hear the song here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vN-ZucyG3-s

He wakes up to soft yellowish light tickling the corners of his eyes and the faint sound of humming. He's been sound asleep and comfortable - not that his mattress is bad, but he usually doesn't feel like it's anything to luxuriate in. His alarm hasn't gone off, so he rolls over and shuts his eyes as tight and dark as he can.

He doesn't manage to do the same thing with his brain. Humming, someone, someone here, here? different blanket ceiling where WHAT?

He sits straight up in one massive adrenalin jolt and is greeted by a cascade of fond laughter from the already-dressed blond who's standing by the window.

Well, Klavier Gavin is real.

Apollo isn't coherent out loud yet. "You...crazy. Stop laughing."

He does sound like he's trying. "But do you always wake up like Frankenstein's monster?"

He can feel his face turning red. "Awake is awake."

Klavier's laugh gains in volume again. "No. Not true. I am awake. You are...not sleepwalking. Sleepyelling."

"What time is it?"

"Five-fifteen." Apollo is almost used to those rapid lane changes already; the German is being serious now.

"What kind of rock star knows what five-fifteen even looks like? You're a fraud."

"You have seen nothing yet."

Apollo's hands and feet are suddenly cold despite the white pile of blankets he's still draped in.

Klavier keeps talking. "The early hours are for your benefit. if I am wrong, by all means, back to sleep. But today is Thursday. When will Kristoph be expecting you to arrive at his office?"

He's going to have to leave this room. He croaks. "Seven."

"Do you need anything from your apartment?"
"No...no, I don't think so. Is the laundry back?" Silly question since Klavier's in real clothes.

"Ja, it is." Klavier points to the closet, where Apollo can just see the edge of a white bag on a hanger.

"Then I'll be fine."

"I will drop you off a few streets over. Avoid the question of why you arrived in my car. The car looks boring but that is the sort of thing he would notice."

"Okay." A pause. "Klavier?" The name is still new and awkward for him to use. "You're - We're really doing this?"

"I have to."

"You just met me."

"I have to."

"Don't say something like it's fate; I hate that."

"I do not know that I believe in fate. But I believe in helplessness, and that is almost the same."

Apollo pulls back against the headboard, hauling the heavy comforter back with him, and thinks. "After you drop me off. Where are you going?"

"Back to the house, probably. The band's house. Ours. Whatever..."

"And Daryan will be there?"

"Ja. Asleep, though. Yesterday's stupid event means he took today off and he sleeps till one if he can. I'll get a few more hours."

"Klavier?"

"Ja?"

"Lie back down for a minute and rest."

The musician hesitates for a second, the flops down on top of the blankets on the other side of the bed, limbs at goofy angles like he got distracted mid-snow angel.

Apollo tells the bedside alarm clock another twenty minutes, and Klavier starts to hum lightly, like it's just another kind of breathing. The shorter man listens and later on can't say for sure whether he dozed off.

---

In the car, they exchange a few questions and answers, enough to calm Apollo's nerves, but Klavier spends most of the trip tapping the steering wheel and singing something in German. Definitely not one of his own songs, not rock at all. The tune itself has a dark humor to it, and the tone of the
words borders on conversational. Apollo thinks about asking what it is, but he'd never be able to spell the answer.

"Something green?" The law offices are two streets away.

"Ja. Houseplant, can of pears, banker's lamp. Anything."

"Kay."

They pull up in the empty parking lot of a restaurant that doesn't serve breakfast, a place Apollo has ignored hundreds of times.

---

The first thing Kristoph says is, "You're late."

"I'm sorry, sir!" He answers reflexively before he looks at the ornate little wood-and-brass clock that sits on a high shelf. "Sir. It's six thirty-nine."

"Indeed. Obviously you were aiming to be here nine minutes ago. Otherwise, I would be forced to believe that you felt such an obligation to me and to this firm that you would come in early of your own volition."

Crazy boss can't possibly have a real grudge over this. Crazy boss is just bored.

He's smiling now, like someone tasting something expensive. "Or is that what it is? Are you feeling indebted this morning, perhaps?"

"I woke up before my alarm, sir."

"Ah." A smile.

Kristoph stays where he is, in one of the armchairs, but he picks up a recent issue of some law journal or other and in a second flat is to all appearances engrossed. In the light from the table lamp, his fair hair glows like a halo, perfectly ordered.

On a perverse whim, Apollo imagines that hair snarled, and is surprised by the direction of his surprise. Because what he realizes, doing that, is just how much they don't look alike. There's no way he can rearrange Kristoph's face into Klavier's, not with the taut smirk of his mouth or the subzero serenity of his unlined forehead. He unlocks the drawers, opens the blinds, sets his files out on his desk.

This is a test. Kristoph is paying attention. Better not do it wrong.

---

"If you're worried...you can get me a message. Before next Monday. And I'll back off until I find out why."

"Really?"

"Really. But you won't."
He's been finished with the morning routine for about half an hour, working on a grind of routine legal documents while Kristoph reads in the armchair, silent but for the occasional snapping of a page. Not for the first time, he's reminded of an owl - the quiet hardwired predator, not the imaginary wise old whatever.

"It's worthwhile to adhere to a schedule, Justice."

"Sir?"

"To be where people expect you to be, when they expect you to be there. After all, if no one knew where you were supposed to be, how would anyone notice if you'd gone missing?"

*Go into your office, you scary bastard.*

"Then again, who would miss you but me?"

*The door is right there.*

"Lucky for me if something were to go wrong, I suppose. Hm."

*Klavier, where are you?* He catches that thought at the end of its plaintive mental trail and clenches his hand angrily. This time yesterday he would have been creeped out by this, but not lonely.

Then again, yesterday at the office had gone so well.

"Given enough time and drain cleaner, couldn't I just...rinse you away? I'd have to keep paying your rent, but then, that shouldn't be anything new."

Apollo's blood runs cold. He's got a visual imagination, and what he sees for some reason are his teeth rattling in the drain.

He can't bring himself to look at who he's talking to, but his tone of voice sounds almost normal, although it's the smartass one.

"I'd be missed, sir."

"Because you are an unprecedented genius when it comes to filing." Kristoph's voice, dry and casual, is making this exchange seem as though it could be civilized.

"Not necessarily by you, sir."

"You have friends?"

"I'm charming."

"I know."

He hates this, flirting when he'd rather flee, attracting attention he'd rather avoid. But doesn't it figure that the day this diseased game has turned more blatantly threatening is the same day that
he's first had an idea of it as something he might win?

He thinks of the old cartoons he's seen, with the cat opening its jaws behind the mouse and the dog opening its jaws behind the cat. Big, dripping cartoon teeth. So long as the cat doesn't bite first...

But there's something behind the dog.

He stands up at his desk as Kristoph comes up behind him.

"But you would do well to exhibit some of this charm for me, now, Justice. Otherwise, I might forget."

"I'm not sure what you have in mind, sir."

Kristoph's voice lowers to a hiss. "Assistant of mine, I didn't pick you out of the lost-and-found because I thought you were stupid."

*So long as he wants to fuck me, he might want to keep me around. So long as he wants to keep me around, I might be - not safe. But on a solid kind of shelf below safe but above dead.*

*Klavier. Can you hear me?*

When it's over, he thinks it's worked.

Then he feels Kristoph's fingers, softer and colder than Klavier's, on the bandage on the back of his neck.

"My. Isn't this tidy."
Chapter 7

He has no answer to the question that isn't being asked, and he provides none. He doesn't try to turn around, doesn't want to change this into a chase scene.

"**Very** tidy. Now, precisely how did you manage to do that? Do you have eyes in the back of your head?" He hasn't even started to inhale to say *No, sir* when he's backhanded across the base of his skull. It hurts, but it's the hard wooden sound of it that really stuns him first. "No...apparently you haven't."

If he'd thought about it he'd have asked Klavier to make sure that the bandage was low enough to be hidden by his collar. But he'd had to loosen it for the bandage to be put on in the first place.

"Who did this?"

It's such a weird inversion; yesterday it had been the other brother looking at the same spot and asking just about the same thing.

"**Who did this.**"

He doesn't have to try very hard to look distracted by pain and alarm while he cycles through potential responses.

**Multiple Choice**

Fill in the bubble next to the correct answer.

**Who did this?**

*a. I did.* (Already rejected.)
*b. You did.* (Surprising, okay, but really, really stupid.)
*c. Your little brother.* (Apollo, this is what we call a secret.)
*d. The landlady.* (he could know her)
*e. A doctor.* (SUICIDAL)
*f. A veterinarian.* (stupid too but say something, just say something-)

"A veterinarian."

All right, maybe that wasn't the worst possible answer. Crazy boss has a dog. He might think vets are nice people.

He hears Kristoph's voice repeat the answer. Taken aback. Kind of amused? Still angry but maybe buying it?

"I don't recall licensing you?"

"I'm a stray."

"And there I could not agree with you more. Now, where did you come across this altruistic veterinarian?"
"At the shoeshine stand." Kristoph is strict about the state of his assistant's shoes, enough that Apollo does squander a portion of his inadequate pay on getting them shined. He doesn't know where this lie is going, but he's stuck with it now. He wonders if the bracelet is going to get angry at him.

"Hmm. And you told him what, exactly?"

"That I was trying to get the good cups off the top shelf. And I couldn't reach them, and knocked them down, and one of them hit me when I ducked." *Telling short jokes about myself. Insult to injury.*

Kristoph exhales through his nose, which for him is a laugh. "How clumsy of you." And then he actually walks away, toward the tiny bathroom.

Apollo waits, hanging onto the edge of the desk, until his boss has emerged and gone back into his own office.

At least there's hot water, at least there's soap. Kristoph washes his hands a lot.

---

The rest of the day, the office is as quiet and cool as an aquarium. Kristoph spends most of the afternoon on the phone, but before he disappears into his calls he sets Apollo looking through the firm's archives. The old records don't really need much cleaning up, but their contents are pretty interesting, and he enjoys having the opportunity to leaf through them at his leisure. After all, there are times when he almost forgets that this job is supposed to be teaching him something.

It's about seven-thirty and he's sitting on the floor in front of one of the filing cabinets, partway through the transcripts for a slander case, when there's the small polite sound of the door to the inner office opening and closing, and a few footsteps on the carpet. Apollo gets to his feet right away.

Kristoph doesn't say anything, though. He just quirks his lips and tilts his head and raises his eyebrows as he lounges against the doorframe, and then, when his apprentice doesn't know how to respond, looks ever so slightly at the clock and clinks his keys together in his pocket. It's not menacing - in fact, it's almost conspiratorial.

"Yes, sir!" Apollo moves then, puts all the files back where they go and does all of the shutting, locking, arranging. When he gets out on the sidewalk, he looks up at the orange sky and exhales big and slow.

---

He's only been away from the apartment for an extra day, but it feels stuffy, so he opens the kitchen window and the one in the bedroom and lets the sounds of traffic in with the night air.

Dinner is something frozen, plus spinach from a plastic bag. Not for the first time, he thinks about what his surreal near miss - well, let's be honest. His surreal near miss - might be doing. Maybe living better and eating worse. Something tells him Klavier lives on steam table chow mein and energy drinks.
"If you feel there is good reason for my brother to remain at liberty, then, Justice-for-All -"

"You make me sound easy."

"Justice-for-My-Sweet-Self-Alone?"

"So you roll in marshmallows instead of just eating them?"

"Nein, they stick places. As I was saying - if you truly think my brother deserves the benefit of the microscopic doubt...leave something green on your kitchen windowsill."

"I can't just call you?"

"Not right now. Daryan goes through my phones to entertain himself. And this is not the sort of conversation one has on a land line in the Prosecutor's Office."

---

There's a knock at the front door, and it sounds so much like his landlady that he's several steps closer to the door before he realizes that it might not be. Quiet steps, in his socks.

Klavier, here to...see me?

On the otherside of the peephole is Kristoph.

And the same part of his brain assigned to tea pouring and clock winding and being polite is actually reaching for the knob when the stretched figure in the fisheye lens turns back toward the stairs a little. Said figure is carrying a plastic bag. The plastic bag looks heavy.

The plastic bag contains drain cleaner. He almost gags, puts a hand across his mouth so tightly that he mashes his lips against his teeth.

Kristoph grins to himself, indulgently, and knocks again. Apollo feels the hairs on the back of his neck stand up, and then is nearly sick on the floor, clenching silent and still, when he realizes that that was a physical cold breeze, because his windows are open.

Kitchen window, visible from the street. Kristoph knows he's home.

Kristoph is digging in his pocket for the keys.

And it's Kristoph's hands he's watching, so when something crashes into the door lower down, hard enough to rattle it in the frame and startle the neighbor's little dog into barking, he flinches so hard he bumps into the table by the door and the ruse is over, because Kristoph has heard him and knows he's there.

Kristoph leans against the door he's just kicked and laughs. Then says, conversationally, "Justice. Men your age do not have 'good cups.' Come in early tomorrow." And he walks away, and hearing him descend the stairs, Apollo really is sick on the floor.
Let's be more honest. Surreal co-conspirator. As soon as he's cleaned up, he hangs his red vest in the kitchen window.
Klavier falls in love frequently.

None of the people he falls in love with know anything about it.

The redheaded girl in the backless yellow silk top that he's remembered for three years now. The Chinese surfer at Huntington Beach with his wetsuit pulled down, that overcast day, so that his smooth, muscular chest and shoulders were bare. The short waitress at his favorite breakfast place. Radio announcers - or strangers in elevators - who make him laugh.

Klavier keeps these little infatuations to himself, knows them for a pointless kind of self-indulgence. (Or mostly pointless. He's gotten a few good songs out of it, after all.) The secrecy is for several reasons. For one, he isn't exactly single, and while occasional girl groupies are one thing, by Daryan's logic, anything like belonging, actual involvement, would be - well, not at all okay. Secondly, the feeble daydreams make him happy, while they last. What if one of his crushes turned out to be disagreeable, out on Earth? Better not. And thirdly, he knows he's a mess. His life isn't something he feels like he can taint anyone else's life with - there's no way anything he could promise would be worth it. So he's flirtatious but impersonal, sort of strange, isn't he?, hasn't made an actual friend in forever.

He's the loneliest well-liked man in Los Angeles and all of his best conversations happen inside his head.

Except now there's Apollo. A perfect lineup of circumstances in a Rite Aid and he's broken his own rule about keeping his distance. Apollo who kissed him, mmm.... Apollo whose life is as dirty as his own. Apollo in need of rescue.

Apollo whose brave red figure is disappearing away from the restaurant parking lot. Apollo who he has fallen for terrifyingly, suffocatingly hard.

---

"And did you have something particular in mind, sir? We have all of the latest models and accessories, international plans..."

Something that goes beep, yes, miss?

The salesgirl at the cell phone shop in this overpriced, pretentious corner of town is maybe two years younger than he is, maybe, and in a reasonable world there's no way she should be calling him "sir." But she'll be discreet and she'll have what he's looking for. Time to pour on the glitter.

"Ach, fräulein, I have a little confession to make to you. It is why I am here, ja? I need a phone I cannot lose. You see, this bad habit of mine, it is becoming expensive."

He's almost afraid he's having to waste time charmingly saying no to things like land lines and cases with wrist straps first, but she's a salesgirl after all, used to fools walking in with money they can't in good conscience be permitted to keep. He finds himself in front of a row of smartphones that are trackable via their built-in GPS receivers, so long as he has internet access
some other way and remembers to turn this feature on.

The hapless little daisy petal smile he gives her suggests clearly that he'll never manage to remember that, and that he'll be back in six weeks as likely as not. *Who says it's only the girls who play dumb?*

"And which of these have the longest battery life? I work very long days, fräulein, I am sure you can imagine." *Puppy eyes. Pitiful face. Arf.*

"Well, this one and this one especially. But we have cases with an external battery, to go longer between charges? Let me show you."

And that's what he ends up with, several hundred dollars later, plus a pay-as-you-go plan in the name of K. Gavin, paid for in cash. Once it's activated, she gives him her number - "just to see if the phone is working." He says thank you.

---

The next stop is the Automobile Club. His nondescript black car, after all, is the same make as Kristoph's, and can he please perhaps have one of those plastic cards with the molded key that will only open the door? Do they still have those? After all, he's afraid of locking himself out of his vehicle. His busy schedule really **won't** permit that, fräulein, you see?

*You see, Plan B is a rock and pulling everything out of the glove compartment, but my Apollo would pay for that, and so I do not like that one so much.*

Danke, danke, you are an angel, and into my wallet with this, ja?

---

Third stop, the parking garage for Kristoph's building, where he giddily unlocks his brother's car and shoves a black bundle made out of one of his socks beneath the front passenger seat. It contains the phone, plugged into the thick case with its extra battery, with every conceivable noise-generating or power-draining feature except the GPS turned off. He locks the car with the door switch, leaves, feels lightheaded. In the parking lot of another electronics store, where he'll be buying a second battery pack in case he gets the chance to swap them out, he pulls out his old phone and enters the new phone's number into the website for forgetful people like him. A moment later, he's given a blinking red dot at the address of Kristoph's building, plus latitude and longitude.

It's a start. Before he goes into the store, he throws the other sock into a dumpster. He'll tell Daryan the USC girls wanted souvenirs. This is going to get him killed. This is fun.

---

It's nearly noon by the time he gets to his office, but the nice thing about having a reputation for being spoiled is that individual instances of diva behavior don't excite any particular interest. Gavin is late? Of **course** Gavin is late. We'd be so irritated, if we weren't bored. And for sure no one is going to remember that he's not supposed to be in the office today at all.

He stops at his desk only long enough to ascertain that there's nothing on it he can't get away with ignoring for a while, then heads off to visit the nice people responsible for the court calendar.
One of his very favorite police officers is in the hallway. With her, he can practice his very most irritating smile.

"Hallo-Detective-Ema-Skye!"

"Shoot me."

"Fräulein! I would never!"

"Strangle me then." He wants to wince at that, but nothing disturbs the fop. He can't let on.

"Would you settle for my taking your breath away?"

"Anything involving you would be settling by definition."

"Ach! Wounded! Carry on, Fräulein Detective."

She might hate his guts for real, he reminds himself, but the fact is that she's a reliable constant and he'd rather hear her insult him than hear Daryan call him *babe* or *sweetheart*, any day of the long long week.

The benefit of flirting with the nice people responsible for the court calendar is that they know what's going on it before anyone else does, and they can tell you. But there's nothing with his brother's name on it right now, which frustrates him and makes him wonder what he can do to increase the crime rate in this part of the city.

He could always commit one and **hire** Kristoph, now that he thinks about it.

*Except then there's the question of who would prosecute. And what kind of payment Kris might want. Maybe not.*

He spends the rest of the afternoon locked in his office, playing the guitar, filling the map on his phone with dots like KRISOFFICE and MYHOUSE, and checking to see if the car has moved. It hasn't.

He watches the sky bruise over, drums his fingers on the desk, stalls.

He'll call Daryan from the desk phone so it'll come up as the Prosecutor's Office and he won't have to explain so hard.

And then he'll go by to see if there's anything on Apollo's windowsill.

He knows he must be feeling nervous, because the silences between rings seem to go on forever. The prospect of talking to Daryan, now, makes him feel quite a bit less like a clever fox and quite a bit more like something little and soft and stupid.

Two ring.

He asks himself just when it was he stopped loving Daryan anyway and feels another slither of anxiety when he can't remember.

Three ring.
It’s been a long time since he has done anything significant to which Daryan is irrelevant. But Apollo and he are nothing to each other, and that is how it should be, isn't it?

The fourth ring barely trembles before it's interrupted.

"Princess, where the fuck’ve you been all day." Daryan has a way of starting a conversation like he's already tired of it.

"I had to come into the office after all."

"Heh. Thought maybe you were continuing your higher education."

"At USC? Please."

"There's the elitist fuck we know and love."

"Hmmm." It begins as a sound of acknowledgement and ends as a D-sharp. He pokes at his cell phone with one hand while he holds the desk phone with the other, and it takes a couple of tries to enter the unlock code properly.

"You gonna be up to practicing tonight? You don't get a pass just 'cause a couple of girls think you're pretty." Why does Daryan do this, act as though he's lazy?

"But I am very pretty." Thumbing past his email.

A rough exhalation. "Yeah you are."

"I never skip." Outside the window, the sky is still purple with the sunset. His weather app tells him it's sunset.

"Best not. And hey, bring back food."

"What kind?" Opening the map.

"None of that styrofoam noodle crap you like. Alejandro's."

"You'll die of lard." Opening I-am-so-very-helpless-and-I've-misplaced-my-phone.

"I'll die of old age. Be a gross old rock star fuck who can't shave himself. Not gonna leave a beautiful corpse like you."

"I'll get food." The red dot has finally moved, sits close to an intersection that looks familiar.

"Yeah, you will." The line dies. Near that intersection on the map is the dot labelled APOLLO, and he just can't move fast enough.
So much for the car being boring to look at; it won't matter now that he's driving it like it's a cruise missile. A crazy high-pitched version of the Wicked Witch's theme is playing in his head. He hasn't taken the time to put the phone into its mount, so instead it rattles on the dashboard, and he lunges a hand out to steady it and refresh the map every time he changes lanes or turns. After one especially hard right, the phone slides off the dash completely and lands in the passenger side footwell.

"Scheiße!"

He's still got enough of a sense of self-preservation that he won't drive and rustle under the seat at the same time, and the traffic lights are being mostly obliging, so it's a few minutes before he has the chance to get the phone back - and then, given the choice between doing that and making it through the last major intersection before Apollo's building by the skin of a yellow, he chooses the latter.

What is Kristoph doing at Apollo's apartment? What is he going to do when he gets there? All he can picture himself doing is grabbing his crazy brother and pulling him away, and his brain won't quite stretch to what he's going to do if he's too late for...

He has to stop so abruptly in the lot behind the building that the car squeals sideways and kisses the wall. I don't care! He throws himself out the passenger door instead, grabs the phone in case he needs to call 911 or bring the police into this personally, doesn't even lock the door. Steal it. Fine. Fuck you, I don't want it.

The muscles he works out for are more for looking good than for actual force, since even at his fittest he's down twenty-five pounds of uncompromising muscle on Daryan, but he's good and fast, long-legged, and he takes the stairs three at a time. Loses a couple of seconds staring at the sign with numbers and arrows like he's forgotten how to read, then pelts left.

This is the row of apartments facing the street on the second floor, right, first front door, next front door...firstfrontdoornextfrontdoor,who'sthatlyingonthefloor? His brain devises a sick little jump rope rhyme just in time for him to see something move in the window on the other side of the railing, the one that must be Apollo's, and it's a red vest. Red red which is not green. And not because anyone's wearing it, no, it's just hanging against the screen and shifting in the automotive breeze. Blood running like ice water, he hits the door at full speed, grabbing the knob and slamming his shoulder into it at the same time.

Apparently this door is deadbolted like a son of a bitch. Gasping to get his breath back, he looks down at the sweaty screen of the phone to see the red dot not in view anymore.

And reminding himself to think like law enforcement is one of the hardest things he's ever done. If Apollo is fine or Apollo is dead, one more minute will not make a difference. And Apollo will not be hovering in between, because Kristoph would not leave this errand unfinished.

If he breaks into the apartment, there will be evidence of a break-in, which won't be any good for the case against Kristoph.

Well, Apollo's not going to answer a door to a crash like that. Or to the doorbell, probably. And his
voice...his voice sounds a bit like Kristoph's, it's true.

And he doesn't want people to come see the owner of that familiar famous voice and be able to point out that he was here, necessarily.

So he leans against the wall by the door, stares down at his phone in case he needs an excuse for loitering, and to shade his famous face, and forces his lungs to cooperate, so he can whistle the song that he sang in the car this morning.

The person who's suddenly his one good reason to exist could be lying dead on the other side of the door, and he's whistling in the hallway. He's useless. Has this song ever been so long? The first verse finishes to no response but the vest on its cheap wire hanger floating back on the air currents, then back forward to brush against the screen.

He's a few bars into the second verse, terrified and frustrated and hating himself like Daryan never hated him, when the door opens, and there's Apollo alive and on his own two feet in an entryway whose cheap linoleum smells of bleach.

"Come in. If. If you're just going to...stand in the hall and make noise." The voice seizes up on the last word, and he can't help it. He's hugging Apollo, loose-limbed and babbling with relief, and saying over and over how sorry he is before the door is even closed.

The sound of the door closing in its frame takes him out of himself enough for him to realize what he's doing.

Not making any sense, first off.

And secondly, he's touching Apollo, actually holding him, and this isn't the temporary microcosm of the hotel, this is the real world, where he has boundaries for his little crushes, right?

So he makes himself let go and turn the knob for the deadbolt again.

"What did Kristoph do?"

"Nothing really."

Apollo's voice sounds like there's something twisted around it, and Klavier gives him a flat look.

"I mean, I'm fine..."

"You smell like mouthwash, you're two shades paler than this morning, the last person who came to your door was Kristoph, but ja, you are perfectly all right."

Apollo's eyes flick toward the door, then at him, then at the floor, then he talks.

"Drain cleaner? Oh schatzelein, this is not fine."

"Sha... What?"

It's like darling. "It is not important. Your safety, though, that is important. Go pack your things."

"What? I can't go home with you!"
"And you're not. Go on." Apollo stands in his stocking feet, all of the day's strain evident in his posture and his eyes, looking like he's trying to muster some kind of argument, then acquiesces. Klavier watches him go, then plants himself in the entryway and begins twitching with his phone.

It doesn't take too long to find what he's looking for, so he dots it on the map and waits, fingerling the steel chain he wears as a belt. Just let Kristoph try to come back, while he's here.

Violence has never been anything he's been particularly inclined towards or especially good at, but at this moment he thinks he could make an exception. Verdammt bastard cold-blooded sick evil brother. How would you like a face full of this and a trip over the railing?

_Ach, fantasy life, you don't miss a beat, do you?_ He tells himself to stick with what he's good at. But still, so long as he's hovering by the door like Apollo's guard dog, he might as well enjoy the idea. Sitting at Apollo's feet. Keeping him safe. He likes the idea rather a lot.

And then the real Apollo reappears with a shabby red duffel and the fantasy flicks away like the shadow of a moth. "Is that everything you'll need in the short term?"

"I think so...but it would help if you'd tell me where I'm going."

Klavier shows Apollo the map. "You're going where the junior businessmen go. You'll fit right in."

"Sorry?"

"The dot is a very uninteresting extended stay suite sort of hotel - motel? Place. Where you might stash a visiting engineer from your company's branch office for a month? And it is walking distance from Kristoph's office, but not close enough to be visible, so he will not know you are there, unless...go get your own shampoo and soap."

"What?"

Klavier winces. "The ones in the hotel might...smell different." Apollo flinches and Klavier feels like a monster. "Apollo, I am so sorry. But if I told you to leave now, to run, would you? Say yes and I will help you, I swear that I will."

For the first time since he opened the door, a little color comes back into Apollo's face. "No."

"Then, if you must continue to be around him in the office, at least give me the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe while you sleep." His phrasing is maybe a bit regrettable, when he hears the words out loud, but Apollo doesn't say anything.

A handful of seconds goes by, and he still doesn't say anything. "Apollo?"

"Hm?"

"Your vest in the window. It means what I think it means?"

The hanger jingles as Apollo grabs the garment in question. His spoken answer jerks nervously between soft and loud. "It means I'm sure. You want my permission? You have it."
It takes a little while for him to check himself in and give Apollo the key, longer to drive to Alejandro's, longer to drive home. He knows he's late, but he sits in the car in the dark for a few minutes and listens to the eighties station on the radio for a song and a half before going in.

Daryan is sprawled on the couch on his side, mostly, wild black hair in all directions. "Princess, that had better be the best burrito on Earth, I swear to God."

"I didn't tell you I was leaving right after I called, did I?"

"Nh." Klavier walks over behind the couch and holds the paper bag over it at arm's length. Daryan rolls onto his back to take it, and blows a mouthful of smoke into Klavier's face.

"Sorry, sweetheart, I forgot we had to protect those pipes." Rising up with a quickness belying his apparent sloth, Daryan pulls him forward by his jacket collar with one hand and covers his mouth and nose with the other. "Just don't breathe for a minute." It's not anger - just a kind of crude, resentful playfulness, and he lets go after seconds, hardly a minute. "Tell me about your college girls."

"They stole my socks. One each."

"You're fuckin' kidding me."

"I'm fucking barefoot in these boots is what I am."

"Lame trophy anyway. A dirty sock. Hey, maybe they'd like these better. Like my new ashtray?"

Klavier follows the gesture and sees his own face with holes in it. What Daryan's got is a ceramic plate from the kitchen, with a colorful paper plate on top of it. Some kind of humiliating promotional merchandise. Gavinner's party supplies for fourth-grade girls.

"Think your sock skanks have little sisters?"

"Shut up, Daryan."

He realizes his mistake as soon as he's made it when the shark's eyes flatten and the humor goes out of his voice. If he hadn't been so distracted, he wouldn't have. "Practice first. But you do not say that to me. I've shut up for you enough for one lifetime."
Klavier understands holding patterns, and he's sure Apollo does. The thing you can do, if you are the weaker party in a war of attrition and not prepared to do anything dramatic, is to lose it **slowly**. Which is the same as to say, do not be **provoking**.

It's just that sometimes he forgets.

Daryan is so perfectly businesslike, so perfectly alert and clever, throughout their practice session (once the rest of the band has been rousted from a telephone call and from a bad movie) that it is actually one of the best they've had in months. Significant improvements are made to three different songs - a replaced verse here, a more dynamic guitar line there, and for one song in particular, a truly inspired background vocal that Daryan must have spent hours and hours thinking about before breaking out fully formed. "Repeat Offender" had been consigned to filler track status, but Klavier can tell now that it's got radio potential, like seriously. It's almost fun again, but for the shaking feeling that he's going to come apart.

Because there are two Daryans in the room. The brilliant, cooperative musician that the rest of the band is seeing too, and the dark one who does have a shark's eyes, who is waiting for the instruments to be put away and for everyone to slump away down the halls. The one who may as well not exist to anyone else.

In moments like this, there's a memory that always comes back to him. He's seven or eight in a department store with his mother. They're looking for a winter coat, and for something else he's not sure about, and he's sulking because it's not fair that Kristoph hasn't been dragged along too, never mind that he already has the coat for his school uniform and doesn't need a new one. So he trails behind in the aisles of the store and starts handing things to the mannequins. Things out of his pockets at first - a pen with a chewed-on cap to a plastic woman who looks like kind of a fancy secretary. A week-old half-eaten and half-melted chocolate bar to a motionless boy in a tie who he thinks, mean-spiritedly, is what Kristoph probably used to look like. Grubby balls of crumpled paper to a row of ladies in the same dress in different colors. A rubber band to a boring bride, so she looks like she's going to shoot it at the groom.

Once his pockets are empty he starts picking things off racks and counters. He's just given a pair of blank-eyed, broad-shouldered men a sparkly silver handbag and a tube of lipstick when his mother finally notices him.

She doesn't scold. She just grabs his wrist, pulls him aside, hisses at him to put those things back **right away**, Klavier, and she'll tell his father when they get home, but they are here to buy a **coat**. He follows close in quiet terror while she chats with the salesladies, sticks his arms out like he's surrendering to the police when she finds things for him to try on, feels like he's going too far when she asks what color and he brings himself to say black out loud.

The punishment at home had turned out to be not much of anything. He understands now that his father had probably been trying not to laugh. But the contrast between his mother's pleasant, normal surface and the embarrassed fury she'd hissed at him alone, that had been petrifying.

And now, split between paying attention to Daryan the citizen and Daryan the boogeyman, he feels an adult's version of the same fear. If there is such a thing.
A sudden specific panic strikes him as they play, and he bolts for the bathroom the second someone suggests breaking for hydration.

And when he finds himself gagged and tied and half-undressed in a dark bedroom later, watching the uneven orange glow approach his chest with an nigh-philosophical calm, he is grateful - both for the inanimate reassurance of the mattress under his shoulders, and that he'd thought of the map on the phone before Daryan got curious. The dots reading APOLLO and SUITES have been deleted, the addresses and intersections memorized as lyrics to the tune that is playing through his head as the cigarette descends.

---

The next morning he is slow-moving and sore, painfully careful not to wake Daryan as he leaves the room, but equally careful to make enough noise downstairs that the detective will wake up in time to be at work at the designated hour. *I'm sorry I'm late, Chief, but when I'm playing inquisitioner and heretic with my poor boyfriend, I don't always remember to set my alarm clock.*

He checks the map for the first time that morning as he's swallowing the last of a cup of coffee. KRISPLACE. He puts the phone on the dash when he gets into the car, mounted properly this time, and refreshes at every red light. The dot starts moving about ten minutes into the drive, and he feels a moment's vertigo when it occurs to him that the grid he is driving in and the grid he is mapping Kristoph in are the same city, that Wilshire is, you know, Wilshire.

Shortly after he sits down at his desk, having greeted his secretary and hidden around a corner from his boss, he checks again and sees that the dot is at KRISOFFICE.

*He had better do something interesting soon, or I will need to change the battery.*

Not to Apollo. Please *don't* let him do anything *interesting* to Apollo.

He knows that checking the map too often will just use the remote phone's battery up sooner, so he tries to restrain himself. Adds COURTHOUSE and LAPDHQ onto his map so he won't have to look at them later.

There's a brief moment of excitement at lunchtime, when the car starts to move and then stops somewhere new - but when he checks the street view for the nearest intersection, he realizes that he's found his brother's dry cleaners. And grocery store.

Hurrah.

When the car parks outside something else much later that evening, on the other hand, it's more interesting than he had imagined it could be.

What is Kristoph doing at a place like the Borscht Bowl Club?

He's still in the Prosecutor's building, and he weighs his options before stepping out of his office and back into somebody else's. He picks up the desk phone there and dials, tapping one foot noiselessly and giving the unfamiliar knickknacks an interloper's once-over. He has the feeling the strangers in the picture frames don't approve of him.

The phone rings six times at least - but of course, it wouldn't have an answering machine. A seventh. Is Apollo not there, or just wary of picking up? Finally there's a momentary clatter, but
silence follows.

He hums a bar of the song into the receiver, and that seems to be what Apollo was waiting for.

"Thanks for not whistling. You'd have ruptured my eardrum."

"You're welcome." He can't help relaxing and sighing just a little, like someone sinking into a chair. The slightest wash of static on the other end of the line suggests that Apollo is doing something similar. "Thank you too, for picking up."

"Don't tell me you're just working late and you got bored."

"Half right. I am late at the office, but not at all bored. Did Kristoph happen to speak today about his plans for the evening?"

"Oh. Not this time, but that's okay. I mean, I know where he is. Well, not where, but what he's doing."

"Apollo."

"Sorry, geez. He's having dinner with a friend. They meet every week, just about."

Klavier's heart leaps, but he keeps his voice calm. "Do you happen to know whether they always meet at the same location?"

"Yeah, actually. He complains about the food. I asked him once why they didn't just go somewhere else then, but he said that the guy works there."

His pulse races. This is good news and bad news both. Kristoph has regular appointments at a club that over the years has been notorious for all manner of things. Locking him up might be as easy as watching him. On the other hand, the place is run by the kind of people who would let it become notorious, and one of them is apparently his brother's friend.

*I wonder if I can sour that relationship?*

*Kristoph's a terrible friend anyway.*

He has a thought. "Have you ever met this friend? Are you sure that's where he really goes?"

"Well, I'm not sure, I guess, but the guy's real? And he calls the office if Kristoph's late. Or he did once."

"Did he have a Russian accent?"

"No...no accent at all. You're asking so many questions, where is he?"

"At one of the shadiest Russian-owned businesses in the Los Angeles area."

"Oh."

"Don't sound so nervous, Apollo. If he is there, the chances are very good that he's doing something he isn't supposed to."
"And that's a good thing..."

"...if I want him to get caught."

"Be careful."

"I will. Next week, I think, if you can wait so long?"

"I think so."

---

Klavier does make a brief stop at the shabby restaurant on his way home, but only to change the battery in the phone in Kristoph's car.

He spends a couple of lunch breaks buying a pale blue suit and a pair of glasses with no prescription. And much to his disgust, a pair of white shoes.

A week out from his call to Apollo, he looks in the mirror and scares himself. And then he checks his phone, gets into the car, and drives to the Borscht Bowl Club.
Chapter 11

He has the phone set up on his dash again, but still he drives around the block peering into parking lots until he sees Kristoph's car for real, and without Kristoph in it. Then he parks four streets over, in the loading dock of a bakery that he knows is closed, and walks.

He half expects there to be a goon in front of the entrance, but it's a perfectly ordinary glass door with a wire rack full of a freebie Russian-language magazine next to it. *Gamble number one.* If Kristoph's friend works here, they're probably not in the front room, but if they are, he is going to get some very, very strange looks. The best response he's thought of, if that happens, is to hammily remove the glasses, unbutton the jacket, and break into an impromptu serenade of the prettiest woman in the room. It's not as though there's anybody else he can pretend to be.

*Adin, dva, tri, chetire.* He goes in.

And wonders if he's walked into a refrigeration unit, or if the place has been converted to one of those idiotic Las Vegas ice bars. It is shockingly cold inside, cold enough for him to worry about what they're really refrigerating. But Kristoph is nowhere in sight, and the hostess barely gives him a glance. He feels a brief flare of pride in himself for remembering to push his glasses up his nose as she looks, and that bit of energy is enough to get him moving towards gamble number two.

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The county recorder's office hadn't actually turned up what he needed, but the (young, bored, enterprising) desk officer outside the police headquarters records room was absolutely desperate to be helpful. And no, no, thank you but he only needs a few minutes. Why sign out the files for something that is almost nothing? Perhaps you could just let me in, or are the police and the prosecutors not on the same side anymore? You stay at your desk and look pretty like you were just doing.

---

Now, like any loyal customer, he knows where the passage to the basement is. And he ignores the obvious arched doorway that will take him to the dining room where the man he looks like may already be, and heads for a coat closet with flaking paint.

He's descending a narrow, slanting hall that's broken up with irregular flights of mean-spirited steps when he realizes he can hear his own heartbeat.

*Gamble three. Keep moving. Find Kris. Find somewhere to watch what Kris is doing. Don't stop to think until then.*

When he emerges into the basement, it's lit only by a reflected glow from the main stairs, and the first thing he sees in that glow is a cloud of his own breath. He picks his way between the pieces of furniture with his hands outstretched, avoiding a table here, the back of a chair there. It won't do to make any noise. Everything is frigid and damp.

He tiptoes up the stairs as quietly as he possibly can, stops near the top to wipe the condensation that has begun to fog the glasses onto his sleeve.
A few seconds later and he thanks Daryan, just a sliver of thanks, for the hard lessons in how to be silent when he is frightened, silent when he is amused. He hasn't seen Kristoph in two years, but he hasn't seen the man Kristoph is dining with in seven, and so that is who he stares at first.

*Of course I will beat him. I have to; he has the only pair of blue eyes in Los Angeles prettier than mine.* He hears his seventeen-year-old voice in his mind and winces at the egotism of it - but there is no mistaking those blue eyes now, even if they are looking out from under a tacky toque and the face is aged and unshaven.

Gott. This is what happened?

*I did this?*

He puts a stop to that line of thought. **He did this to himself.**

Phoenix Wright doesn't look like he works in this club. He doesn't look like he works anywhere at all. Between the hat, the cheap flip-flops, and the shapeless clothes, he looks like a vagrant. **He didn't have to fall this far. Or stay down for this long. Did he?**

*But he's having dinner with Kristoph. Either he's stupider than I thought or they really are friends. Either way, I can't waste time worrying about him.*

He takes a soundless breath and forces himself to look directly at his brother.

He hasn't changed a bit. In his heart of hearts, Klavier has been afraid, since meeting Apollo, of seeing Kris: afraid that he might lose his calm and do something stupid (**don't worry, prettyboy, this is plenty stupid,** sings the voice that's calling him what Apollo called him), even more afraid that some current of brotherly loyalty too deep to otherwise perceive might take over and introduce an element of doubt. Instead, as Kris leans back and stretches his legs forward, Klavier's first coherent thought is **And his damned squeaky shoes.**

He'd managed to forget how much he’d hated hearing those footsteps in the entranceway in the evenings, back as a teenager in Germany and here. He looks down at his replica pair. Not squeaky. Probably for the best.

Kristoph is calm, generically amused. He chuckles a residual chuckle at something Wright must have said, and hangs one arm over the side of his chair for a moment. Klavier pictures a plastic bag hanging from those fingers, and isn't worried about having an attack of mercy any longer.

"So how's your short, loud apprentice?" Klavier flattens his hands against the wall.

"Noisy as ever, and still in my employ. For the moment."

"For the moment? You think he might quit on you?"

"Oh, he hasn't said anything to that effect. But he's young. And rootless. I wouldn't be surprised if he were to disappear on me after all. Up to San Francisco or somewhere."

"Hm. Would you replace him, if he did?"

"Eventually."
"I have to say, I'm still surprised that you took on an apprentice at all. You never struck me as the mentor type."

"Now. I think of myself as highly educational."

Wright snorts and leans forward on the piano bench he's sitting on. Freezing cold or no, the air is heavy with water. The instrument must be in deplorable condition. "No contest there. But that's not what I meant."

Kristoph smiles. "Wright. You know no man is an island, correct? We all need other people in our lives. For our various sad reasons."

"Amen," says the man in the toque, and lifts a bottle in place of a glass. When Kristoph taps his drink against it, a sour note bounces down the stairs and into the darkness below.

Kristoph changes the subject, and a good thing, too. The pressure that has been building in Klavier's chest during the prior exchange is doing odd things to his breathing, and the white shirt is too tight around his neck. "And your own dependant? How is she?"

"You mean my daughter?" Wright sounds a little incredulous. "She's fine. Or as fine as you might expect a girl her age to be. There's an element of opera that never quite dissipates."

Kristoph wraps his fingers around his glass. "Tosca? Or Butterfly? You had best keep a watchful eye on the cutlery, in that case."

"Was that supposed to be funny?"

Another defective sense of humor...I didn't know I sounded like him. I didn't know Wright had a daughter. It's freezing. And...I don't know what I'm going to do.

He's tracked Kristoph here in the hopes that he'll find him doing something that's obviously wrong. But all he's doing is fucking eating dinner. And if Apollo disappears, it will not be to San Francisco.

Cartoon scenarios start popping into his head.

**Looney Tunes #1: Look What You Did**

He jumps out of his hiding place, murders Wright with a knife - but no! they're eating soup! with a spoon! - and flees dressed like Kristoph, making sure to be seen. But not caught. That would be a problem, after all.

**Looney Tunes #2: The Duel**

He throws something and hits Kristoph. Kristoph assumes it was Wright and lunges across the table. Wright responds in kind! They strangle each other! He leaves whistling, with a cartoon halo over his head.

**Looney Tunes #3: I Bet You Haven't Heard This One**

He goes back upstairs, finds the people who actually run this place, and does something to offend them. Threatens them. Runs away back down here! Hides! They appear with guns blazing and shoot the other guy in the blue suit.

*That's all, folks!*
This is a fucking demented waste of time.

And then Kristoph gets up to leave.

Well, he's worn this disguise for a reason, even if he hoped it wouldn't come to this. He stays and watches Wright as the man sits at the ruined piano.

It's sort of a shame, given their past history, but he'll have to do for a victim if no one else comes along.

With Kristoph gone, the cold dining room falls still. The former lawyer isn't really doing anything - just sitting on the piano bench and staring at something on some other plane of existence. The matryoshkas along the mantel are expressive, by comparison. Klavier still has no idea what he's paid to do here – the man looks pathologically idle, merely occupying space.

It's such a contrast from the energy and devotion for which he is still, in legal circles at least, famous. *Phoenix Wright, you have thrown your life away. And my Apollo wants so badly to keep his.*

*He does not know I think of him like that, no...but I...*

*If I am going to throw my life away, I will know who I am doing it for.***

*Maybe you know too.* He stares at the older man's blank face, trying to see any trace of love, of fierceness, of fatherhood. *If it came down to it...would you protect yourself for her sake?*

Wright clearly has no idea of the silent conversation he is half of. And Klavier realizes, with a wrenching feeling behind his ribs, that peering at the man he's almost decided to hurt feels too much like one of his unspoken infatuations feels. When was the last time he really spoke to anyone? The question brings him back to Apollo, which brings him back to his brother, which brings him back to Wright. No exit.

He's so caught up in his own mind that his nerves twitch him hard against the wall when another three people enter the room. A pretty blonde waitress. A man in a white suit, who apparently doesn't know that you shouldn't wear white suits unless you're a drug lord. And a gawky man with a large binder and a pen behind his ear.

Wright looks, and even though he doesn't speak or get up, some change in the pitch of the air tells Klavier he's interested, more than interested.

The man in the white suit speaks first, and his voice has just a touch of the theater in it. "This. This is a fucking disappointment, Mr. Wright. Remember me?"

And maybe it's because the evening has been full of ghosts already, but *Klavier* does. And that tells him in turn who Wright's daughter probably is. *Is the whole damned courtroom here tonight?*

Shadi Enigmar, the man in the white suit, keeps talking. "Svetlana. Anastasia. Sweetheart. Whatever. You're gorgeous but I don't want you listening, pravda? Go unfold the card table and turn on some goddamn lights." He pinches her when she turns away from him and towards the
stairs to the basement.

Klavier doesn't know how he gets down the stairs ahead of her in the dark, except that he has to, and he's only just woven his way between the last of the cold damp furniture and retreated back into the passage from the coat closet, his mouth open like a dog's so she won't hear him panting, when he's half-blinded by the light coming on in the basement room. He sees her get cards and chips both from a drawer, and thinks he might understand what Phoenix Wright's job is after all.

Kristoph should be well on his way home by now. And once he is at home, with no one to provide an alibi for him, it'll be time to sneak back up and into the dining room, to pretend to have forgotten something, to come down the stairs...

He turns away from the doorway, calls up the map on his phone, and doesn't quite understand what he's seeing. The dot that is Kristoph's car hasn't moved. Either Kristoph has gone for a walk somewhere in the neighborhood, or Kristoph is still here.

Kristoph is still here. And he's just asking himself how he knows that when he hears a light, light sound from above him, from the far end of the passage, and listens through the echo to recognize it as the squeak of a shoe.
Chapter 12

O frabjous day callooh callay, vater unser in himmel geheiligt werde dein name, mayday, mayday.

That little internal voice is intent on its high-pitched tongue-twister hysterics, but beneath its noise he tries to take stock of his situation.

On the one hand, if he really is here, I won't have to work so hard to convince people of the fact. On the other hand, I am trapped with the one person to whom my excellent Kristoph costume isn't going to be the least bit convincing.

There's another faint squeak. Then a silence. Then a closer one. Meaning that the pause had probably been his brother descending one of the little sets of wooden stairs before stepping onto the concrete again. How many of those had there been? He can't remember.

The blonde waitress finishes setting out the poker chips, unbearably slowly. Her lips are moving. She must be double-checking the count.

Squeak, after another silence.

She picks up the deck and shuffles it with the disinterested expertise of a professional.

He strains his ears trying to identify the almost-not-a-sound of wood compressing under a tall man's foot, tenses himself to spring without having decided on a direction.

Squeak - and the waitress smacks the perfectly neat deck onto the table and heads briskly for the far doorway, and he's out into the room a split second after she's disappeared, sidestepping to get out of Kris's sight, looking for another place to hide.

He's in front of the big cabinet that disguises the passage in the event of a raid. The diagrams he'd seen in the police records had described the mechanism that moved it.

If it moves, how heavy can it be? Maybe it won't have any shelves in it. Maybe he'll be lucky.

He yanks it open, and it's empty inside. He starts to mouth a thank you that comes out as Apollo and by the time the word is finished he's shut himself silently inside the thing and is peering into the frigid basement from the space above an upper hinge.

He's a long way from safe, but the cresting wave of relief is so strong that he shakes with noiseless giggles and chilled tears well in his eyes.

And if someone opens the cabinet? Don't mind me, herrs and fräulein. I just needed a quiet place to think.

Oh, and I've converted to the worship of the Greek pantheon. In case you read lips.

He doesn't have to wait long before the game, the official one anyway, begins. Shadi Enigmar strides into the room first, followed by the blonde, Wright several steps behind. Gott, he's wearing those plastic sandals. Why are his feet not blue?
From where Klavier is hiding, it's hard to track the progress of the night's entertainment. He can't see the cards or Enigmar's face, and the conversation is, well, a poker conversation - all about testing moods and breaking concentration, with nothing of substance discussed. The erstwhile waitress is acting as the dealer.

He has enough room to check the display on his phone, if he's careful. But each time he checks, no matter how many times he checks, the dot hasn't moved, and it means that Kris is only a few feet away, almost certainly standing just far enough into the passage to be invisible. Behind him and to the left. A spider in the dark.

Why isn't Kristoph just coming into the room? Why isn't he leaving? It's sinister and it makes no sense.

He tries to tell himself that he has the advantage, that Kristoph doesn't know he's here, but that's no help for the tangle of fear in his stomach. Kristoph wouldn't find his hiding in a cabinet sinister or alarming, would he. He'd just find it laughable.

Think. If Kris is lurking here, why is he doing it? He's either waiting to see something, or to interfere with something.

He's known here. He doesn't need to hide if he all he wants to do is see.

What does he want to do, then?

_I don't know._

"Oh, I don't think so, my friend!" The man in the white suit jumps out of his chair, and for a terrible heartbeat Klavier thinks he's been discovered. But it's Wright who is the focus of the man's attention. "You cheat!"

It's all of a sudden hard to concentrate on Kristoph.

The former attorney doesn't move, but the blonde woman turns to face Enigmar immediately. "Whoa now. You accuse him?"

"Yes! I do!" She just stares at him, waiting for him to keep talking. "He's got his own cards! Poker champion like hell!"

She turns toward the other side of the table. "Mr. Wright?" The blue-eyed man doesn't look surprised. Only politely interested, if anything. He flips his cuffs back, then tugs the sleeves up, exposing his forearms but no hidden stash, gazing at his opponent the whole time. The blonde turns back. "He hasn't touched his hat or moved his hands below the table since this started."

The answering voice is a growl. "Check his pockets."

Finally Wright speaks. "I've only got the one. Benefits of a casual dress code." He stands up, stretches his arms out to the sides, and allows the young woman to reach into the kangaroo pocket of his sweatshirt.

A second after she does she looks startled, making Klavier think she's actually found something, but then she shakes her head, pulls her hands back empty, and looks questioningly across the table. "There aren't any –"
And something in Enigmar snaps. "Incompetent, lying bitch!" There's a wine bottle close at hand and he grabs it, but it's not the card shark he goes for. She's still leaning towards Wright, and when the green glass hits the base of her skull there's an awful, matter-of-fact sound, and she wobbles like a weighted doll. Klavier's mouth falls open and for some reason he's expecting the ex-defense attorney to do something chivalrous, but instead Wright pulls his phone from his pocket and bolts for the main stairs.

*Maybe his cell network doesn't work as well down here as mine, but he's a *coward* -

*So am I.*

The young woman's eyes are flickering, not quite refocused, and Enigmar raises the bottle again.

And Klavier bursts out of the cabinet, having the presence of mind to kick the mechanism that will slide the thing back in front of the passage and block Kristoph's view, and grabs the man hard by the shoulders, spinning him around so that he's not facing her.

So he's facing Klavier, and the younger man has a perfect close-up view of that furious expression as it mixes with a bewildered kind of recognition. That small distraction is enough for the dealer to appear behind him and pull the bottle from his loosened fingers, and Klavier looks away from the man's face and over his white-clad shoulder to see her looking straight at him, the intruder.

He tries to think what Kristoph would do, and settles for a small, serene, conspiratorial smile. It's easy to fake, it's such a slight gesture.

She raises the bottle and swings it at Enigmar's head, as he looks in confusion at who he thinks is Kristoph, and the sound is different this time.
Chapter 13

He takes it back. This may get him killed, but it isn't fun.

It isn't any fun at all.

He doesn't want to think about this sound. Even as he tries to compartmentalize it away with other things not to be thought about, though, he knows that he'll have more than enough time to consider everything about it: before he falls asleep at night, or walking around his house, or sitting at his desk by himself. It's now stained into his memory for the rest of his life.

He catches the man in the white suit as he falls forward, and Gott, the face isn't just blank, it's different - like a painting when the canvas has been warped out of shape. That, more than the uncoordinated toppling weight, is what makes it obvious to him that he's holding a dead thing and not a person anymore.

He pushes the corpse down into the closest chair and does not look back at it. He knows he does not want to see the other side of its head.

The waitress is still holding the bottle, and she's shaky on her legs, but she's looking at him now. She still must think he's his brother. He can keep up the act just a little longer.

He smiles at her again, but more broadly, with a little more ice in the gleam. "Thank you so very much for your assistance. I had heard that the service here was impeccable." Even in her daze, she looks wary. "Put that down. Now." She does. "And I would strongly suggest that you lie down and close your eyes. People will ask fewer questions. And I think that will suit us all, don't you?" Again she complies. Not that he trusts her - he's just learned what she's capable of if your back is turned, and he cannot let his sense memory seize on that right now - but at the same time he's relieved that she's still alive herself.

There's a grinding noise behind him, and the cabinet jerks into his peripheral vision. The other mechanism for it is at the top of the passage. Diagram.

Decision. Face Kris in the darkness. Hide here in the basement again and take his chances with both Kris and the police. Or go past Phoenix Wright.

_Herr Wright, you sound like the least of three evils to me._

He bolts for the stairs, stops when he has an idea. Returns to where he saw the waitress shove her woolly hat and coat in favor of the pirate getup underneath. Shoves the glasses into his pocket, puts the extra things on, and scurries right behind the man as he talks into his cell phone.

_What do you call a blond man disguised as a blond man disguised as a blonde woman?_

It sounds like a great dirty joke, doesn't it. Something his bandmates would tell. He puts the hat and coat in a shadowy corner behind a table once he's through the other doorway, then walks right out the front door as Kristoph.

Hears the rattle of a shopping cart and gives the suit jacket to the babbling man pushing it.
Throws the glasses and the tie into a storm drain, and resolves to record that Keep Our Oceans Healthy radio spot the Gavinners had been asked to do.

Makes it the rest of the way to his car behind the bakery, strips off the dress shirt and pants to reveal a second outfit in black silk and black leather. Throws the costume pieces into a trash bag with the white shoes, puts on the jacket and boots hidden in the trunk.

Drives twenty minutes to a dog park and throws the plastic bag into the trash there.

Then stops at Alejandro's. After all, he has to get home, because Daryan will be waiting.

Whatever Daryan wants to do to him, he deserves now.

---

He goes home expecting cruelty, ready for the first time almost to welcome it, but Daryan does nothing cruel. And he knows better than to confess.

He falls asleep holding a pillow clutched to his bare chest like a toy, which is not his usual habit. Except that then he wakes yelling and shoving the floppy thing away from him with all the force of an uncoiled nightmare, the sound of Enigmar's skull fragmenting still echoing in his ears.

Daryan, who stays up until all hours, appears in the doorway with his black hair loose around his shoulders and a cigarette lighting his face in the dark. The orange glow makes him look almost gentle. "Princess. Go the fuck to sleep."

"I'm trying."

"You need a drink?"

Like never so badly. "No."

"Kay. Keep it down."

"All right."

The second time the sound wakes him he is able to stay quiet, though his face twists and he pleads with the black ceiling wordlessly, all his muscles taut and resonant.

The third time, the room is smudged with the grey beginnings of dawn, and he sits up and over the course of an hour watches a branch of the neighbors' tree achieve color and texture.

---

He goes to work as early as he decently can and not have anyone remark that he's early, but despite that, he misses the call that comes to his desk phone, because he's too tired coming down the hall from the elevator to notice that it's his door that the ringing is behind. The number it's from means nothing to him, and there is no message.

He waits several minutes to see if it will ring again. When it doesn't, he goes to visit the nice people who compile the court calendar.

He wonders if any of the police officers he sees are going to arrest him, and then is dully bemused
by the realization that he's pretty sure they won't. There is no sane reason for anyone to think he might have been there, and no one is looking for an insane reason.

All the same he keeps a low profile. He doesn't think he's up for hallo-Detective-Ema-Skye.

What he sees on the page he's handed once he's done with his mechanical flirting is phantasmagorical, Carrollian, all wrong. He feels like the coyote who's already walked six feet straight into the air off the cliff, and he carefully reaches for the wall with his other hand.

April 20th, 2026
Courtroom No. 2
For the charge of murder
Defendant Phoenix Wright
Defense Counsel Apollo Justice
Prosecutor Winston Payne

Where is the waitress in all of this? Where the hell is Kristoph? Where is he?

What has happened overnight?

He desperately wants to call Apollo, but Apollo will be at work right now (will he ever) and he has absolutely no presentable excuse to be calling the Gavin Law Offices. So instead he lopes down the hall, shoves into an elevator past the person vacating it, jabs the button for the top floor, and slouches against the back wall as it rises.

The ceiling of the elevator is mirrored, and he looks up at his own reflection, sees there the blond strands straggling over his face that are barely blurs in his vision up close. He's seen this expression before on other people, at crime scenes and in interrogation rooms. It doesn't have to do with guilt or innocence, as far as he's ever been able to tell. Not despair. But it is to disappointment what silence is to quiet, and its target is never one person, but the cosmos as it has shown itself to be.

The Chief Prosecutor is not receptive. "Gavin, you know as well as I do - or you should - that cases cannot be reassigned according to personal whim. And the mere fact that you've asked about it means that you're now on the absolute bottom of the list to take over if Payne can't continue. Thank Manfred von Karma for that rule.

"But it's more than the pushiness that's the problem, Klavier. It's unseemly. Whether you want to gloat over Wright or you just want to reassure yourself that you did the right thing seven years ago, one way or the other, it's inappropriately personal. I know we're shorthanded and these things happen, but I'm certainly not about to overturn protocol to help it happen more often. Now don't ask me anything like this again. Please."

He bows his head and apologizes, his pose one that his muscles remember from boarding school and the headmaster's office. His rings are digging into his clenched fingers.

For a brief moment he considers flinging himself on Payne's mercy, but Payne doesn’t have any, as far as he is aware, and neither is his help liable to be helpful.

The whole thing has flown out of his hands. Where is the canary, Sylvester?

The day passes as slowly as a dropped glass seems to fall. But evening manages to come; he
notices it when he's jerked up from the intolerable pages on his desk by the ringing of the office phone.

"Hello?"

A few prickles of static on the empty line.

"This is Prosecutor Klavier Gavin."

"Ah-" And he's simultaneously relieved to the centers of his bones at who it is, and dismayed that he's so far gone he doesn't even need a whole syllable. He also can't have this conversation on his office line, and Apollo must know that. He hangs up, but lightly.

He ends up in the same office he'd used as a phone booth before, grateful for its occupant's apparent tendency to skip out on the early side. When he dials the room, Apollo grabs the receiver before it's rung once. Klavier's barely hummed the first two notes of...their song? what a thought...before he's interrupted.

"It's you, you can stop." Apollo sounds frayed around the edges, worried and snappish. With their next breaths they talk over each other.

"What happened?"

"What happened, Gavin? You first." There's suspicion there, and even though it's entirely justified it's hard to take. His knees get a little shaky.

"I didn't." That might not be enough. He couldn't bear Apollo not believing him, so he fills the silence. "I didn't. Please, I swear to you. And he didn't. And he didn't."

"Then who?"

"It was arguably self-defense."

"Oh." He can hear Apollo slotting the thoughts into place, but he has questions of his own.

"Why is it - why are you-"

"Wright insisted."

"What?"

"I don't know. I don't think Kristoph does either. He seemed disgusted at first - but he actually got over it pretty fast."

"He doesn't do that."

"I fucking know."

He has to stop himself using the endearment. "Sch-. Ach. I was there. But I don't know what they're thinking. Will he be there with you?"
"Yeah."

"Listen. She doesn't trust him."

"Wright's daughter?"

"No!"

"Nh, okay. Who doesn't she trust?"

"The one who wasn't playing. She thinks she played into his hands. And she will turn on him if she thinks she has to."

"You're sure."

"Guess how I know."

"Oh."

"Can I see you?"

"I have to get back to the office."

"Be careful. Please."

"Yeah." A sigh fills the line with a white rush of noise. "Tell me why isn't it going to be you?"

"Because Wright is the defendant. The way it turned out. And the Chief Prosecutor thought I would make it too personal."

Despite everything there's a snort of a laugh.

"What?"

"You sound all indignant about that. But your boss did the wrong math and got the right answer anyway."

"Don't start believing in fate now, of all days."

"Not a chance. But it's me against everyone else in there now."

"I'll be there."

"It's not...we're not lucky people. I guess."

It breaks his heart that Apollo is forgiving him.

The morning of the trial, he takes a seat in the balcony above the defense's side of the courtroom, to escape his brother's notice. He's wearing the same hooded sweatshirt he wore on that trip to the drugstore. It seems like the least he can do.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

For the absolutely none of you who were wondering, Apollo's cologne is Grey Flannel. I don't know what it means that I headcanon cologne.

At the end of it all, Kristoph is led away by the police. When people ask Apollo about that day later on, he tells them to get a transcript, because the parts of it he really remembers aren't the important ones.

---

He wakes on the morning of the 20th to the sound of his own pulse in his ears. He lies flat on his back for several breaths, but can't chase the nerves away.

He warms up his voice in the shower, puts on what he realizes is probably too much of his violet-mossy cologne, slicks his hair back, buttons up the vest of the suit he paid more than he could afford to get dry-cleaned on a day's notice.

---

In the lobby before the trial begins, Kristoph catches him staring out into the hall where the spectators are coming in and softly points out that that sort of behavior is extremely unprofessional.

Apollo knows Klavier is here anyway. In the wrong place, but at least here.

---

He writhes inside, standing behind the defense's table, when Kristoph makes a scathing remark about just how many people were in the basement that night anyway.

---

But at the end of it all, Kristoph is led away by the police.

And Apollo punches his client, who deserves it.

And when he returns to his apartment - the real one, and not his hidey-hole - there's a tall figure in a hooded sweatshirt waiting by the door.

---

Klavier looks like he hasn't been sleeping. Once they're standing in Apollo's kitchen, in the middle of the floor, the first thing he says is that he's sorry.

"You apologize too much."
"No. Not nearly enough. But I wanted to see you again."

"I'm here."

"I know." Klavier stares at the pattern of the wood laminate on the cabinets like he's trying to memorize it, and Apollo realizes that he's been waiting to feel better. He should have been exultant when Kristoph was taken away. Instead he's been waiting for something else, but Klavier isn't providing it.

"Tell me what happened that night."

"I didn't kill him."

"I know you didn't."

"I was dressed as Kris. He hit her with the bottle, and Wright...left the room. I jumped out...grabbed him before he could do it again. And I held him, while she hit him." He swallows. "I'm sorry. Please tell me you are all right."

"Sorry? For what? She'd have died instead of him. That wouldn't have been better."

"I keep hearing that noise."

Apollo winces at that, and Klavier misunderstands.

"I never...I don't want to get your life dirty, schatzelein. I shouldn't call you that. But I needed - are you all right? I needed to hear you say you were all right."

"I'm better than all right." It's true. A sea of relief laps behind his thoughts, almost accessible but for the dizzy unhappiness in Klavier's posture and his face. He looks like he's considering running.

"I am glad to hear it. Thank you, Apollo." And he really does move towards the door, and Apollo jumps to block his way. Klavier could shove past, of course, but he doesn't. He holds himself as though he doesn't want to touch anything.

The crest of the wave finally breaks, and the wild exhilaration that Apollo has been a hair's breadth away from washes over him.

"Are you crazy? You won't get my life dirty. You saved it. And I didn't tell you you should leave."

"I did not save your life. I did not know what I was doing. For a rescue attempt, you could have found someone much better."

Klavier is looking down at the linoleum and not ahead towards the door, but he's still shifting his weight right to left like a cat wanting to escape past its owner's ankles. Apollo keeps in front of him, determined to be an obstacle if nothing else.

"I could have found no one. And you know how he was acting. You think I would have had much time left?"
Klavier, caught mid-movement, seems to be remembering something, though he doesn't answer the question.

Apollo keeps pushing, raises his voice. "Do you think so?"

"Ach. I..."

"Do you? Remember the hotel? You were the one who was so intent on proving that he was dangerous." The question seems to make Klavier twist in on himself even more. Apollo tries a little less volume instead, and changes tacks. "Do you really have that much to feel guilty about?"

It sounds like the musician is trying to swallow a rock. "Not Kristoph, but the other. He was alive when I grabbed him. He was dead when I let him go. Even with my renowned skills, that generally does not happen."

"Too bad. That would have addressed your Daryan problem."

"I have addressed my Daryan problem. Now, whenever it is that he kills me, I will have the satisfaction of having earned it."

"No you fucking won't." The tall blond punctuates his last sentence by trying to make a break to get past, and Apollo collides with him. "You owe me an apology, plus you're crazy. First you barely know me and you decide you have to help me. Once you actually do it, you decide that it was such a bad idea that you need to go atone by committing boyfriend-assisted suicide. I'm insulted. But maybe you're just the kind of person who gets weird when he's left alone. Says dumb things. So I might forgive you, if you make it up to me. " He's reminded of mock trials in law school, when his arguments would take off on their own, almost, and he'd stand there and just let the words come out. And he'd win. And it was a fucking fantastic feeling. So the next thing his mouth wants to say, he just says. "And I'll be the one to take care of your Daryan problem."

For all that he barely has time to notice the silver glinting in Klavier's ear before he closes his eyes, or to register the soft, coarse warmth of Klavier's shirt before his attention is elsewhere, they frame the memory for him afterwards. Klavier's kiss is sudden and ardent, but still there's a tentative quality to it, and so what Apollo tries to convey, as he rises onto the balls of his feet to keep the blond from having to bend down so far, is simply stay.

Stay. Don't run off, don't disappear. Stay.

When they break apart, Klavier's hands are still clutching his vest, and he has his own fingers splayed and pressed against the taller man's back. He is nearly successful in forcing himself not to shudder, and a jolt of the muscles he can feel through the fabric tells him that he's not alone in the impulse.

"I'm sorry." Klavier exhales with the words.

"Not that again."

"You mustn't. I can never thank you enough for saying it - but Daryan is irrelevant to you. Do not endanger yourself trying to help me, please, Apollo, don't."

"Would you keep saying that if I kissed you again?"
"Ja." The German looks away and his grip loosens.

"Even the 'irrelevant' part? Really?"

"Ja." The bracelet squeezes hard and sudden and painful, like a beat of a migraine.

"Then tell me what that German word you call me means."

"It does not translate well." The movement against his wrist is an irritable twitch.

"Try."

"No. I already said I shouldn't call you that."

"Wuss." Klavier's eyes fly open at the childish insult, and he looks at Apollo speechlessly for a second. Then he starts to laugh, helpless and loud.

And they're kissing again, both laughing and breathing hard in between and clinging to each other's shoulders and waists and hips, and Apollo can't help his fingers brushing the chain of the other's belt when he fishes the keys out of his pocket and flings them down the hall into the front room. "There, now you're not going anywhere." It's hard to form the words as he laughs and Klavier bends to interrupt him, and he knows he should be troubled by what he so easily announced his intention to do, but tonight is a triumph, and he will not let it be otherwise. Kristoph will never come to this door again, he'll find another job, another apartment, the waitress broke down and changed her story just like he'd said, and he's realizing that on some level he's been gone since the kiss in the elevator. They must look drunk, rotating in almost-circles and bumping into everything.

Klavier backs up against the doorframe, but Apollo stops him before he slides down. "Not the kitchen."

Somehow both their sets of fingers interlace on the trip to the bedroom, which, once he flicks the lamp on, is still sort of a mess from his nervous preparations this morning. He wants the lamp on. He just does. He lets go with his other hand to unbutton his vest, watches out of the corner of his eye as Klavier snakes out of the sweatshirt - though he does have something under it this time. He kicks off his shoes, steps on the toes of his socks while Klavier argues with his boots. Hangs the tie over the knob on the closet door. And stands barefoot, in his white dress shirt and slacks, when Klavier looks up at him from his seat on the edge of the bed.

"Are you sure?" The wobble in the voice isn't a laugh now. "You know I am - still."

"Yeah." It's not much of a line, and it comes out a little like a sigh, but it's enough for Klavier to motion him over and gently, gently start to unbutton the white shirt. After the first few are undone, he begins to return the favor - the black shirt the tall man has on is smooth and slippery and probably stupid expensive, but buttons are buttons.

He rolls his eyes a little at the clink when the chain spills to the floor, and gets an abashed smile in return.

Then he moves too fast. He goes from kissing Klavier's neck to his chest, and the musician flinches hard enough that the bed jerks. Apollo sits back just enough to see that he's been about to kiss the edge of one of the purple bite marks. He reaches out a hand in inarticulate chagrin, and it's met with
an icy one.

"I'm sorry -"

"Stop apologizing -"

He reaches for the edges of the red comforter, not sure it's the right thing to do, and pulls it slowly towards them both. Klavier gives him a questioning look, a shadow still in his eyes, and all he can do is tilt his head. *Wait. Just a minute. Please trust me. Stay.*

He draws the red fabric up, slowly, covering feet, legs, knees. Pulls it further, until it swallows the scars on Klavier's chest, then places one hand flat atop the blanket, over the spot he'd nearly kissed. *Warm. There.* He's almost afraid to look back towards the blond man's face, but when he does he sees shock, gratitude...more than that.

Klavier shifts, and his golden hair untwists the rest of the way against his shoulders. And beneath the comforter, he reaches one arm around Apollo's chest, trails the other hand down his side, in along the curve of his hip.

They're so careful. Apollo is reminded of being a teenager again, with every sensation new - not because of ignorance or innocence this time, but because it's been so long since it's been good.

One last, amazed laugh escapes when he's wrapped in tanned arms and pulled down on top of a tanned body, and he feels the kiss against his shoulder become a smile.
Early the next morning, Apollo wakes up with yesterday's events - all of them - crowding into his memory. He closes his eyelids again almost immediately, as if he can pause the world that way.

There's a rock star under my blanket with me.

That's such a bizarre but gratifying sentence that he repeats it in his head a few times.

Kristoph is in custody.

Which sounds pretty good too.

I don't think I need to go to work today. There's a nervous energy to that particular thought, and he twitches his eyebrows and nearly mutters it out loud, but wrestles the feeling back. Klavier is sleeping still.

Klavier. He opens his eyes and looks to his right, and his words recede from him. In sleep, with his strained face relaxed, Klavier is beautiful - and Apollo is torn between admiration and the knowledge that Klavier's beauty has not always been a blessing. He's utterly asleep, breathing as slowly as leaves grow, with the lightest trace of a smile at the corner of his lips. Only a vandal would wake him now.

At this angle, all Apollo can see from the window is a length of telephone line against the sky, but that sky is grey, and it must be raining, because drops of water are rolling along the underside of the wire.

He's much - too happy, how strange - in the little world of this room to smile. And he wants so much to keep this instant the way it is that he lies still. Once he listens for the sound of the rain, he can hear it behind Klavier's soft breathing, and the occasional muffled rush of a passing car. When he wakes next, it's because Klavier is sitting up.

"So you don't wake up yelling every morning. I had been wondering." The voice is affectionate. "Lucky me - getting to watch you again."

Well, that's one way to bypass awkward good-mornings. He says what he didn't say earlier. "I don't think I need to go to work today." Klavier drops back into a pillow, laughing.

"I think you are right."

"I don't have anywhere to be. At all." It's a sobering thought, and he looks up at the familiar ceiling.

"Right here." Klavier grins and gives him a suggestive look.

"Mmph." He rolls over so he's facing away, but reaches a hand back so it won't come off as a rejection. Klavier takes it for an instant, then lets go to embrace him from behind and pull him up into a sitting position, keeping the red comforter draped around them both. Rain beads on the window. The sky looks darker, if anything.
"What are you thinking?"

"I need to move. Or get a job. Or both."

"Not today."

"Kristoph was paying the rent."

"I remember."

"He's not coming back."

Klavier sighs then, and tightens his arms around Apollo's waist and shoulders. "No. No, schatzelein, he is not."

And he'd ask what it meant again, but another avoided question seems suddenly more important. "I don't know - I don't understand why he would confess to everything."

"He really did tamper with the scene. And, speaking for the system, confessions in the hopes of more lenient treatment don't work so well if you get choosy about which charges you confess to."

"Still."

"Apollo, I do not know. If I had done a better job of this -"

Apollo leans back and tightens the blanket. "No more apologizing."

"- then I might be able to say more certainly. But he's locked tightly away now. Maybe it will even be good for him. There must be a nice padded room for him somewhere, ja?"

"It wouldn't help."

"...I suppose not." Klavier starts to hum, and though there's barely a tune to it, it's soothing.

"What about you." It doesn't even sound like a question, does it - the way his tone drops at the end turns it almost into an accusation.

"What about me?"

Despite the control that he works to have over his voice, it happens again. "Where do you have to be today."

He feels Klavier inhale before he answers. "Ah, well. The Prosecutor's Office...will be well aware of the results of yesterday. My absence will not surprise them. My appearing bright and early and doing my job - that would surprise them."

Apollo's eyebrows draw together, and he's glad that Klavier can't see his face. "And?"

"And?"

"What about rock star you." Damn it, again. "Daryan's not going to think you're upset about Kristoph, is he?"
"Nein, nein, not upset about Kris, but upset at him. Or celebrating."

"Did you tell him you were with another random one-night stand?"

"No...I did not call him at all. I did not want to hear his voice. He will have to extrapolate. He is a detective."

Apollo doesn't want to ask the next question, doesn't want to be the kind of person who would ask it, but... "Were you with another random one-night stand?"

Klavier's response is joking at first. "You don't mean to tell me you've forgot- oh. Oh no no." He lets go, twists around sideways, tilts Apollo's chin up with two callused fingertips. His expression is a mix of reassurance and worry and shame. "You are entitled to think it of me. But please. I..." He catches himself on an unspoken something and shakes his head once, sharply, like he's rebuking himself. Then he starts over. "Last night was not a distraction, schatzelein. It was an honor." He's sounding weirdly formal again, and seems to have realized it, because he follows up with a quick, warm, searching kiss, then pulls away to kiss the back of Apollo's hand. The bracelet doesn't so much as twitch the whole time.

When he looks up he catches Apollo glancing at it. "You never take that off?"

"No." Part of him wants to explain, but he suppresses it. "Now tell me what your word means."

The blond flattens his lips together as if he hadn't noticed that it had escaped again until now, and Apollo's amused, but not enough to drop the subject. "Tell me."

"The ending part is a diminutive. Please forgive me." He holds out a pillow with a ridiculous look of puppy-dog apology on his face.

"I figured. And I'll get you later for that." He says it very deliberately, watches Klavier's fingers release the pillowcase and watches Klavier's face brighten with relief - no smile, but still - at that later. Relief and hope, even. The bracelet stays perfectly inert. "What about the word?"

"It is not something you say in English. It will sound odd."

"We can't have that." Klavier keeps shifting his gaze, and every time it lifts Apollo meets it, challengingly.

"It means 'treasure.'"

"You were right, we don't have that in English." It's a response but not an answer, and the taller man doesn't seem to know where to go from there. "But...so. Are you - " Apollo's lip is trying to curl out of shape with his sudden nerves. "Are you calling me - is that like darling, or..." Klavier jumps at that, and the bracelet jumps at his nervousness, swinging like a light fixture in an earthquake, but of course Apollo’s nervous too, and he keeps talking. “Sweetheart?”

And Klavier looks like he's been slapped, which makes no sense, but a split second later his bare feet are thumping onto the floor and he's grabbing at his jewelry and his boots and his clothes. Apollo's voice rises in surprise. "Don't leave!"

"Apollo Justice." And those blue eyes actually look sort of teary, as well as frantic. This makes no
sense either, but he's not in a mood to be called by his full name.

"Klavier! What the hell? Just stay!"

"I can't. I wouldn't want Daryan coming here in the end. Neither would you." He's sort of dressed, sweatshirt and jeans on, boots unfastened, his shirt and socks and belt balled up under one arm. Apollo throws his old bathrobe on just to keep up with him, since it's taken precious time to untangle himself from the sheets.

"That doesn't mean you have to leave in the next two minutes! And I told you I'd get him." They're most of the way down the hallway.

"And I told you you can't. I don't want to beg. You just got out from under one monster. Don't go looking for another one."

He knows he's being crude, but screw it. "And what about you? Where are you going? You just got out from under me."

Klavier stops in the front room, and tilts his head wryly. "Different kind of monster." And then he bends down, and there's a metallic scrape against the floor as he grabs the keys from where they'd landed last night.

"If I'm not a one-night stand then stop fucking treating me like one!"

A deep, shuddery, whistling breath. "For a one-night stand, I would not have gone to the Borscht Bowl Club." And he makes it to the front door while Apollo stands in shock, and opens it and lets the cold and the smell of wet concrete in when he goes out.

The sound of an engine starting in the back parking lot returns Apollo to reality, sends him diving for the nearest pair of shoes and then stops him before he can put them on, knowing it's too late.

He walks back to the bedroom, where the warmth is fading from the air. The room looks smaller. The bed is in knots. His shirt from yesterday is still on the floor, and a drawer in the nightstand is half open. And there's a ring on the dresser that's not his, which is cold to the touch and too big for him.

You failed already. You let him go.
Klavier knows better to return to the scene of a crime, so it's a different dog park that he drives to, biting his lips and blinking to keep his vision from blurring. It's already dicey with the rain on the windshield.

He doesn't know why he does this when he's upset - he's not really a dog person after all, that was Kris - but he finds himself watching people in plastic rain jackets throwing horrible tennis balls and hiding under dripping trees while their big soggy retrievers and shepherds and mixes run around in circles. No little ones today. There is absolutely nothing glamorous about a dog park in the rain, but he watches the bedraggled people and their wagging, eager pets and, as always, finds a kind of warmth in it.

He doesn't actually go home with nearly so many strangers as Daryan believes he does. Occasionally, sure. But more usually, when he makes that excuse, he ends up taking the girl (if there even is one) for some drinking and dancing and being seen, and then leaves her gallantly at her door and spends the night by himself in a nameless motel, curled up under the blankets, feeling temporarily safe and permanently sad.

And as for the ones he has stayed with - he's never treated any of them so badly as he's just treated Apollo. Sitting in the car in the cracked municipal parking lot, with the windshield wipers and the heater going, he slams his hands into the steering wheel and sobs. It's loud, jagged, angry crying.

Sorry, sweetheart, I forgot we had to protect those pipes. Just don't breathe for a minute.

What's the matter, sweetheart? You feeling a little delicate? You too good for this?

Sweetheart, it's been a long fuckin' day. But I promise you, we'll talk later.

Why would it matter that Apollo had used one of Daryan's words? Words don't belong to anyone. And there's the other problem. His crushes are never supposed to know. And they're never supposed to love him back.

And he can't really begin to untangle whether it was the choice of words, or whether he wishes he hadn't given in to temptation (to translate, to wait outside the apartment door, to everything) or even whether he wishes Apollo had offered those endearments as endearments and not as a sort of challenge.

The thump and squeak of the windshield wipers calm him down to a functional level, after a while, and a look in the rearview lets him know that if he tells Daryan he drove around all night because of Kristoph, he'll probably get away with it.

Though he does sort of lose it again when he realizes that not dreaming of that sound, sleeping under Apollo's red blanket, that was probably just a one-time deal.

Back to the grind, ja?
He listens to the radio as he drives back to the house, his preferred eighties station, and loses himself in the heartless vocals and the electronic drumbeats. But at the last light it switches to some commercial trying to get grocery-shopping housewives to buy life insurance. He stabs at the button.

The little voice that's left in the hollow space inside and out makes observations as he drives.

They've trimmed the trees.

Tomorrow I might need to go to the gas station.

And pay the credit card.

My voice will not be good today.

He doesn't have an Apollo song.

And his bleak composure is ruined by a convulsive swell of nausea. He doesn't want to have an Apollo song, songs are for fantasies, and he...

He's parked in front of his own house now. He just has to get inside like a rational person. The doorknob is cold, with a film of water on it, and so he's looking down at his hand as he opens the door.

"I guess I can call off the search party."

Daryan is standing in the front hall with a jacket already on, and he's turned the overhead lights off in preparation to leave the house, so the only illumination in the entryway is the grey of the skylight.

Fucking prick Daryan why couldn't you have just gone to work on fucking time!

"Your creepy brother surprised you that bad?"

He meets Daryan's gaze for just an instant, looks from the skylight to the floor. "Kris? Ja...I guess thinking it was one thing, but -"

"Bullshit. Bitch. They have groupies at the courthouse now?"

He doesn't move, doesn't look up, but the meekness of the posture isn't enough. Daryan's voice gets much closer. "Ask me how I know."

He doesn't ask. He doesn't say anything. At this distance, Daryan can hear his nervous breathing. He can hear Daryan inhale through his nose.

"Your boots aren't tied right. You didn't answer my calls. You actually had me worried about you for a little while there, sweetheart. But you were just fine, weren't you?" Again he holds still, though he knows it will make him look guilty now. "Diva. Bitch. Why do you make me do these -" Daryan's eyes seem deeper set into his face than they were a minute ago, and he cuts himself off. "Fuck it. Now you're making me late on top of it. Don't get me wrong. You do look like shit. I just know you had some fun first."
"Fuck, princess, you never met anything you couldn't ruin."

Gravity seems to contract around him as he says it, but then he walks out the front door, slamming it on the way out.

Klavier stands under a hot shower for a long time before he reaches, unwilling, for the bottles to wash Apollo's room out of his hair.

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Apollo has two options, the way he sees it.

He can write the whole thing off. He's had a monster removed from his life, and he's had a really good night, and even if there are some pretty fucked-up bookends on either side, he's up on this one. Grand prize and a bonus.

Which totally explains why he's back in bed staring at a pillow that's so close to his face that it's mostly a blur.

Or he can go find Klavier instead of having Klavier find him, for once. Make sure, again, that he's real. Yell at him a little. Probably kiss him. Probably.

And figure out some way to neutralize Daryan Crescend. An armed, wealthy, famous, vindictive, law enforcement agent.

Right.

He's feeling a little vindictive himself, though. And a part of his mind that he'd thought would be doing its best to distance itself from this cracked, suicidal not even a plan is instead coming up with more satisfactory synonyms for "neutralize."

Like "break." *He thought I'd bite him.*

Like "erase."

And a job. He also needs to find a job. He'll put his resume together this afternoon.

He hears they're short-handed at the Prosecutor's Office.

In the meantime, he curls up under the comforter and tells himself to stop playing with the ring, because, for fuck's sake, it is pathetic.

He'd really like to know what he said wrong.
Chapter 17

When the bus lets him off a block from the Prosecutor's Office two days later, he finds himself wishing for some background music. Like in a movie. But there's no cheerful staccato in the air to tell him everything will be fine, no anxious strings to warn him, nothing but a burst of hip-hop from a car window that doesn't make him feel anything except out of place. He glances down at his badge, then at his briefcase, then heads up the broad stairs and goes in.

He should have made an appointment. Not calling Klavier and not calling ahead for an interview had been deliberate, in line with the whole forgiveness-easier-than-permission idea, but after coming up to the twelfth floor on the elevator and knocking on the door that says Gavin and receiving no response at all, not even the sound of the floor creaking, and getting funny looks from the people going up and down the hall, he starts to feel ridiculous. And this may be a government building, but it's not exactly public, and he knows without anyone having to tell him that if he stands here long enough he's eventually going to be escorted out by one of the police officers who keep coming and going out of doors other than this one.

Though a couple of people look first at him and then at which door it is and then just sympathetically roll their eyes. That probably buys him some time.

An hour later, though, an officer whose scalp is visible through his dishwater hair and who's on his third or fourth trip by does a quick, circumspect double take at him, and he knows his luck has run out.

And then he hears a door open off to his left and a hoarse voice says, "Mr. Justice? Yes? Come in."

That is not Klavier. Even with laryngitis and amnesia that is not Klavier. But it's sort of a familiar hoarse voice, and he'll take that over Lieutenant No Loitering, no question. So he walks, as bidden, into Winston Payne's office.

The frayed-looking man doesn't really look at him as he comes in, instead leafing through two stapled documents sitting side by side on the desk. And he doesn't say anything but "bah," and Apollo is fairly sure that's directed at the papers and not at him.

So he just stands there and looks at what there is to look at. The shelves in the office hold binder after binder, labelled in the same scratchy but legible handwriting. They're all dated, and the ink on the oldest ones (which seem to be closest to the door) is fading from black to bronze. A few gaps are occupied by photos in cheap frames, mostly of Payne and a surprisingly sweet-faced woman with good cheekbones. And, judging by her smile, very good teeth. Sitting in a swivel chair and reading, Payne looks older, but calmer, than he'd looked in court. He's still tense - the bracelet does little hiccup-shimmies when Apollo focuses his attention on him - but it's more like background radiation than anything else. And even he's taller than me.

Minutes go by. Payne turns the last page of one of the stacks he's flipping through, but then he reaches for a new file.

"Sir?" Fuck. Kristoph had been the last person he'd called sir. He hangs tightly onto his briefcase, so tightly that the leather of the handle squeaks under his fingers.

"Yes?" The man doesn't even look up.
"Why did you ask me in?" That...wasn't particularly polite, was it. Whoops.

"Because it was that or watch you get strong-armed to the nearest exit. Which, of course, could still be what happens. But I thought I would give you a chance to explain why you were standing out in the hall."

"I'm out of a job."

"After the Wright trial?" Payne laughs, like he's just gotten the joke. Which Apollo doesn't really appreciate. "I imagine you are. Not the most forward-thinking career move, that."

Jerk. "But I heard that the Prosecutor's Office is short on warm bodies. And since they don't seem too picky, after all..."

Payne laughs again. It doesn't seem to matter to him who's being scored against. "Presumably you have a resume or two with you." He fishes something out of a desk drawer. "There's a pre-screening, usually...but here's an application. Bureaucracy's a grand thing. Knock yourself out."

It's an overcomplicated beast of a form, but he's come prepared and is able to fill out the whole thing, though it takes nearly another hour to do it, especially because he's keeping an ear and an occasional eye on the hallway.

When he's done he puts the pen down on the desk more loudly than he needs to. Payne finally looks up.

"Give me the form, not your pen. Your resume too."

He does, and the prosecutor starts to read both of them quickly and with interest, eyes flicking from one to another behind thick glasses.

It lasts for about fifteen seconds.

"Absolutely not."

Apollo's temper flares. "You haven't even finished reading them!"

"You have a juvenile record."

"Yeah, I do. I broke into cars when I was fourteen. I did community service too. That's an instant disqualification?"

"It's a contraindication. More to the point, your coursework is more suited to defense than prosecution."

Apollo stays silent.

"And then, even more to the point, you have participated in precisely one criminal trial so far in your career."

You knew that before I started writing, asshole!
"And your mentor is a convicted murderer."

But Apollo knows about the recent history of the Los Angeles courts.

"That's nothing new for this place, now is it."

Payne smiles, not nicely. "It's a contraindication. We may be slow learners, but we get there eventually."

"You knew you were going to turn me down before I even started. Didn't you." He's simmering at the pettiness of it.

"I expected to. You might have surprised me, but..." The man in the green suit spreads his hands out.

"Thanks for the fucking waste of time!"

"You are thanking me for entirely the wrong thing."

"A nice start to my win-loss ratio?"

"A place to sit for an hour, possibly more, while you wait for Klavier Gavin like an anxious puppy."

He wants to spit a retort to that, and his mouth even opens so that he can, but the words don't form.

Payne continues the conversation without his help. "You think I'm asking you to bare your soul? Don't. We both know you had an ulterior motive, but I don't want to hear even the first thing about it."

_Then why?_ He nearly asks out loud, but holds off, hoping Payne will keep talking. He'd rather listen than speak, on this subject.

The hope is borne out, too, except that Payne gives him a look that makes clear he knows exactly what Apollo is trying to buy with his silence.

"Mr. Justice. I have had what you might call a front-row seat to some spectacular goings-down-in-flames. Before I worked across the hall from Gavin, I worked across the hall from Miles Edgeworth. And then there was his sister. Before you ask, I was hired before admission was restricted to the beautiful and badly broken.

"And you're as much a type as all of our prodigies are, I hope you realize. You're a cliché from Central Casting. But nothing good ever seems to come of getting between our stand-up tragedies and the ingénues they attract.

"So I don't know what you want with Klavier. You got his brother locked up, and whether you're trying to apologize and you've never even met him, or you have and he's just the prettiest thing there ever was since your tennis instructor the year you hit puberty - ah, that's right, you were a delinquent, so scratch the tennis instructor..."

_You weird, long-winded, bizarrely helpful prick._
"I'm not about to get in the way. By all means. Talk to him. And don't tell me about it."

"Sir, honestly - fuck you. And thank you."

Payne is still entertained, from the sound of his voice. "Sit tight."

And he's barely been slouched in the hard wooden visitor's chair for another five minutes before the hairs on the back of his neck rise and he registers the sounds of footfalls coming from the elevators. Two sets. And every nerve in his body is identifying one of them as Klavier's. He turns the chair to watch the figures as they come into view through the crack of the door, and that's how he gets his first look at Daryan Crescend.

He's had plenty of time to build Daryan up as a monster in his imagination, so what he sees is both better and worse than he's been picturing. Daryan's even taller than Klavier, because life isn't fair, and he's got a feral mess of black hair. That famous pompadour apparently isn't an everyday event. His face is visible for only a second, but that's enough time for Apollo to come away with a few lasting impressions: sharp features with a scornful shading; hard, perceptive eyes, deep-set and very unpleasant.

His unhurried walk is the scariest thing about him. All he's doing is putting one foot in front of another and slouching his shoulders, but what he's saying with it, to anyone who sees, is you are already on my shit list, try me.

But still - he's just a guy. Tall and angry, but come on, lots of people are tall and angry. He's no less human than anyone else.

Daryan's not a monster, he's just a resentful asshole, and on the one hand that makes this even sadder. But on the other, it means he's vulnerable.

Klavier's office door clicks shut and Apollo stares down at his shoes, already losing their most recent polish. He listens so hard that his neck tenses up. Payne turns pages, makes nasal mm or nn sounds at them now and then. A female someone in an office with an adjoining wall is talking on the telephone. Ten minutes pass.

Fifteen minutes pass.

Daryan leaves, tapping the fingers of one hand together like he's got a prize on his mind. Apollo watches him disappear and stands up in a rush, and Payne speaks without glancing up. "Run along now."

He doesn't run. He pauses outside the door, and knocks in a way that he hopes is too gentle to be afraid of and too businesslike to ignore.
Chapter 18

He's way more nervous than he should be as the sound of his knuckles against the door dies away. He starts counting the seconds, though he's got no good reason to, and though he knows he might be counting too fast. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. I know you're th-

The door opens. And the surprise on Klavier's face is watered down by exhaustion. Seven-eight-nine.

In the end, Apollo has to break the silence for him. "If you want to apologize this time, I'll let you. But only once. And, um. Hi."

Klavier looks lost.

"Come on. Let me in."

The prosecutor does, backing up and hanging onto the door so that it swings open as he retreats. Apollo is the one to close it behind them.

"Apollo, why are you here?"

"Oh, fuck you."

The hand that Klavier's been holding up in an indeterminate gesture drops like a string's been cut, and the blond has the nerve to look sad.

"If you could come after me all those times, I can come after you."

"There is nothing here you should have."

"Do you have any idea what a cold bastard you sound like?"

The singer's voice drops, and without thinking Apollo takes a step closer just to be able to hear him. "Bitte. Please. You can't put yourself in harm's way after what - after Kristoph, and the club."

"You mean Daryan? I got a look at him."

Panicked blue eyes fly open. "Why will you not listen? He is dangerous -"

"He can't be worse than Kristoph, and I didn't tell you not to go after him! Kind of the opposite!" It's the strangest shouting match he's ever been part of - both of them know better than to be loud about this, and Klavier seems barely able to be audible anyway. More like a murmuring match. A muttering match.

"Kristoph was my problem!"

"Daryan is my problem!"

"Why?"
"Because I want you with me."

The volley stops there, and God but he wishes he'd been talking a little slower, even though it's true. And what Klavier says next doesn't make it any better.

"You were never supposed to care what happened to me. Stop caring."

"Are you stupid?"

"Schatzelein, I can't sleep."

And the energy goes out of the air and just like that they're not arguing anymore. Apollo gives him a tentative hug, looking off away towards the wall, and Klavier presses the side of his face into the shorter man's hair.

"You did okay at my place."

"Only then."

"What happens when you try?" Without thinking about it much, he's steering Klavier towards the big chair by the window.

"I can close my eyes and fall off the earth...but then I always end up back in the basement. Holding a man in a stupid white suit by the shoulders and listening to his skull come apart." A tremor runs through him. "Please. I wanted to save you."

"You did." Klavier is draped in the chair, eyes closed, and Apollo perches on one of the arms, leaning backwards.

"But if you turn around and get hurt for me it's nothing, it's a waste, worse than waste."

But what does that make me, if I just walk away and let you go through everything now?

That's not what he says out loud. He's never been suave, not ever - but the question appears fully formed and all he needs to do is pronounce the sounds. "And you won't even let me give you a place to sleep?"

"Thank you for the offer. But I am not sure how it would work."

Apollo makes an indistinct reassuring sound, because he's not too sure himself. But the contrast between this plaintive scarecrow and the peaceful, warm feline of a few mornings ago is so obvious, and this one is so obviously wrong.

"Did Daryan do anything? Just now?"

"In the office? No, no. That was a legitimate visit. He needed the records for an old case involving this same shipping company."

Apollo breathes just a little easier. There's a lock of hair straggling across Klavier's face, and he's tempted to brush it aside, but he restrains himself.

"Klavier? Why did you leave?"
He's not given an answer right away, and he thinks for a second that the blond is dozing - or pretending to doze - but his pessimism isn't warranted.

"I'm sorry." Klavier's eyes may be closed, but he's awake. And hearing the apology, and the awkwardness in the tone, untangles something behind Apollo's ribcage. He doesn't have to feign the calm in his response.

"Okay. And that's the only time you get to say that. But you still haven't answered the question."

"Lawyer." The closed eyelids crinkle with a grin.

"Damn straight."

"I don't think that is true." The grin gets bigger, and he wrestles with his own.

"Like you can talk. Answer the question, Klavier." The seriousness coming back into his voice is mirrored on the other's face.

"It wasn't your fault."

"I didn't really think it was."

"It was a very stupid reason."

"Let me decide that."

"Daryan is one for pet names. Just like me. He calls me sweetheart."

"Oh." One of Klavier's hands is dangling off the same side of the chair that he's sitting on, and he takes it. It's not precisely an apology back, but it's in the neighborhood.

"And I. I was afraid."

"Of him?"

"Afraid for you, of him - you should not have come here. But also afraid to hear you say it. Because you might mean it...and because you might not."

"Would it be so terrible to have someone give a damn about you?"

"Ja."

But Apollo knows what stubborn sounds like. "Why, because of Daryan? He's just a person, you're not doomed!" He gives Klavier a hard look. "Unless you want to be?"

"No!" It might be the single least affected, least deliberate word he's ever heard Klavier say.

"Well, that's a relief."

The veneer is back on, in the shape of a smirk. "Depending on the operative definition of relief, ja? Giving up would be easier."
You're not allowed!

Wait, I'm shy about saying that?

"You're not allowed."

As he'd half expected, that sets off another mood swing. The musician leans up on his elbows, opens his eyes to smoldering blue slits, and purrs. "Make it worth my while."

"Let me help you out. Like you helped me."

That takes the wind out of his sails, all right. "I do not want you to put yourself in this position. How many times do I need to say it, verliebte?"

That's different.

"I am not worth getting yourself in trouble for."

"I want you in my position. No more threats, no more trips to the drugstore...plenty of sleep."

And Klavier shivers like a junkie.

He concentrates on his bracelet. "Are you sorry you did it?" He doesn't know what answer he's expecting, exactly, except that Klavier is chivalrous enough to lie.

But the bracelet doesn't react at all, though it clearly costs the blond to say it. "Only sorry that I am not sorrier for them both."

Seconds go by, and then Apollo tries to ease the tension. "I've got your ring." He fishes it out of his pocket and holds it out.

A small laugh. "Is this a proposal?"

He feels his face heat up. "With your ring? Some class act you must think I am." The laugh stretches into a chuckle. "It's not a bad idea, though."

"...What?"

"If you got married, you could move away from Daryan. You'd be expected to actually. And he couldn't say anything. Or do anything."

"Are you quite sure you are not proposing?"

As always, trying to fight his blush just makes it worse. "As far as pretty much anybody else is concerned, I barely know you. It'd look pretty suspicious. People would wonder."

"So I would have to exclude present company from the pool of candidates? Then, to quote the great Apollo Justice...no. Possibly even 'fuck that.'"

He has no idea how serious Klavier is or isn't, which is a very uncomfortable feeling. He decides to give him a taste of his own medicine and leans backward to gaze out from under his eyelashes,
pausing long enough to make the taller man look at him. "...You know how to tease a girl."

Klavier bursts out laughing and flings his arms around him before dropping them both back against the chair. "Well, I would apologize, but you will not let me."

And the damn bracelet hasn't so much as quivered through the whole exchange, which is enough to fluster him even more, despite or because he's never been able to figure out its position on jokes.

He steadies his voice. "Let me ask you a couple of things?" Klavier's breathing changes when he says it, though his tone remains light.

"Go on?"

"Do you want to stay with Daryan?"

"No. That was easy. Ask me another."

"Fine." Though it's hard to keep going. "I'm not proposing, but -" "Ja, I want you with me too."

It's probably the kindest, most generous interruption he will ever hear. And it makes his mind up for good. "Now tell me a lie." He grabs Klavier's right hand and places it against his left forearm, lets the heavy bangle drop to cover the rough fingertips.

"What?"

"Not too serious a lie. Your hands are valuable."

"What?"

"Just say something that isn't true."

The musician sighs, but with a tone that suggests he's seen crazier things, after all. "All right. I sleep the sleep of the just, I don't love you, and I'm a leprechaun."

The bracelet that's been hanging there like any piece of jewelry squeezes in irritation, and the musician yanks his hand back. "What is that!"

"Here." He grabs Klavier's hand again and puts it back where it was.

"My name is Apollo." Nothing.

"I own a Bentley." Squeeze.

"I own a ballpoint pen." Nothing.

"And I don't fucking love you either." Big squeeze.

Klavier is looking down at the thing with his mouth hanging open. Then he frowns, and tests it a little.
"I have carrots in the refrigerator at home." Squeeze. "My middle name is Konrad." Squeeze. "There is a green sticker on the inside of the lid of my old guitar case." Squeeze. "Blue." Nothing.

"This is amazing."

Nothing.

"It has an ego!"

"It doesn't answer questions. It just knows when someone is nervous. Or lying."

"Apollo, this exists?"

And he has to be so cautious now. He raises his left hand to finally brush that straggle of hair out of Klavier's face, and in the process lifts the bracelet away too. Klavier is so astonished and distracted and so, so tired, that maybe he won't think too closely about what he's hearing.

"It exists. It's my hidden advantage. And I promise to help you."

There's no answer but the sound of breathing.

"And I will stay as safe as I possibly can." When the bracelet jerks, he's the only one who can feel it. "Now sit up for a sec." He squishes himself around against the back of the chair, and pulls Klavier back against him so that the blond's head is resting against his chest.

A murmur. "I hear your heartbeat, schatzelein."

"I know. Now shush and just...listen to it, okay? I'll give you another sound to remember."

"You're...very romantic. I didn't notice before." Klavier's eyes are shut again.

_You don't even know._

Fifteen minutes later, Klavier is asleep, while Apollo is still wide awake.
Once he's able (and willing) to extricate himself from between Klavier and the unhelpful chair, he leaves a note - face down, for discretion's sake - on top of the document that's front and center on the desk.

Then he rethinks it and folds it into Klavier's jacket pocket.

Remembers Daryan, rethinks it again, and puts it back on the desk, then slides the ring into Klavier's pocket instead.

In a normal world, he'd have a boyfriend now.

---

Klavier -

_Someday it will be better than this._

_I meant it all. Except for the parts where you knew I was lying._

_If you still can't sleep, you know where I'll be for a little while, at least._

_I didn't tell you - I came here today to apply for a job. It didn't work though. Payne's a strange guy._

_Don't not love you._

It's signed with a spiky sun instead of a name.

---

The next morning, as he heads out with a briefcase full of fresh resumes, he finds a note taped to his door.

Apollo -

_I have not visited the basement since you visited me. You are a magician._

_Not the Gramarye kind, do not worry._

_Keep the ring (and there it is, taped to the page) - Daryan noticed it was missing after the night of Kristoph's trial and I told him it was lost. It would be problematic if it appeared again._

_Yes, I trust you. I love you._

And a sketchy little drawing of a hand playing a chord on a cluster of piano keys.

When he thinks about that later, he blushes.

But the note is already gone, shredded like confetti piece by piece into planters and wastebaskets
and gutters as he walks. It's too bad, but it's more important to be circumspect, and he knows Klavier will have done something similar.

---

The job hunt doesn't go well.

When he makes it far enough to talk to a person, half the time they look at him like he can't be serious. The other half, they're so nice and so complimentary about his display of courage that he almost forgets that Kristoph wasn't guilty, at least not of that - but then they make civilized fluttery noises about his lack of experience and the juvenile "errors of judgment" and the result is the same. He applies for clerk and paralegal positions too, but they don't want to hire an actual attorney, however green, to do that kind of work. They're afraid to pay him what they think he'd ask for no matter how many times he swallows his pride to try to make it clear that he's good with the going rate.

He's thorough. He exhausts literally every other opportunity he can find in the legal field before he considers the offer from the man he'd punched.

The first time Wright had offered him a job had been immediately before Apollo punched him. Or immediately after. He's confused himself trying to recall the details, so now he kind of remembers it both ways - but it had definitely been after the man had admitted forging the card. Which was what made it so fucking nervy, what pissed him off so much about it. Here, kid. Come work with another crooked lawyer. And he'd had the gall to smile like he was holding the keys to the Jaguar, the big cardboard check. Like it was a prize that would just knock his fucking socks off.

And the really infuriating thing was that if it had happened just a few days earlier, it would have. Phoenix Wright had been his hero.

If you're working your way through law school on hardboiled eggs and sleepless nights and a rickety scaffold of random scholarships, it's reassuring to be able to look at old articles about your role model and remember that you don't need the expensive suits. The ice-cold Prada confidence. The private school education. Hell - the dignity.

And then it turns out the guy already knows you, not just because of your old boss but because you've actually spoken, even if you didn't know who he was at the time and thought maybe that he was somebody who owed your boss money. Like having a fairy godfather or something. Like that doesn't sound stupid.

And then the smug asshole pulls the rug out from under your feet and lets you know that you spent years wasting hero worship on a fraud. So you hit him, though you're not going to let him ruin your big day beyond that.

Phoenix Wright had offered him a job and he had most definitely refused.

He'd called again two weeks later, and Apollo had been more gracious then, sort of, and had maybe suggested that his other prospects were better than they actually were, because there's nothing wrong with a little fucking optimism.

And five days after that. At which point Apollo had been much briefer and much more profane and
had hung up on the smug, faux-shocked protestations that a teenage girl might be on the other extension.

This last call didn't sound like Wright was messing with him, though.

At least, not as much.

Fuck it. Klavier's already given up worse than a chunk of ego, and it'd be nice to be a real lawyer if he's going to be going up against a real policeman. So he goes to Wright's office. It isn't a dream come true anymore, but it's a means to an end.

---

It's surreal, meeting Klavier for the ostensible first time, with Alita Tiala's letter of request in one sweaty hand and Wright's daughter hovering by his elbow.

Klavier's voice is light, he flirts outrageously where everyone can hear, and they barely have time for a heated handful of seconds behind a tree in the park while the detective is running her handwriting analysis and Trucy is off making friends with someone's Basenji.

"You haven't called or left any notes. Are you okay?"

"I am all right. I see that you do not have my ring..."

"I can't just wear it, don't be dumb. Besides...your fingers are bigger than mine."

"Imagine that." And Klavier presses their hands together palm to palm, quickly, and his long, rough guitarist’s fingers are longer than Apollo's too. One trusting kiss, a rushed one, and he walks away.

The case is bizarre enough on its own, too, in all of its gangster...noodle...underwear...ness.

Damn Klavier and his sense of humor. How could I pass up a chance to see the true strength of the little boy who bested my brother?, for fuck's sake.

And it's strange working for Mr. Wright. He's gone from hero to client to irritant to boss much too quickly, and it's hard to tell at any given moment whether he's a fool or a mastermind, whether he’s intrusive or oblivious.

Like the singing.

Apollo has taken to humming Klavier's weird German song to himself in odd moments – it’s welded itself to his memory and it’s going to be there for the rest of his life. He has no idea of the words, though, so humming it is. And then, one day in the office that by now he's living in, Mr. Wright says, "Grabschrift."

"What?"

"Die Dreigroschenoper."

"What?"

"You don't even know what you're humming? The Threepenny Opera?"
"I've heard of it. I just heard this somewhere."

"Hm. If it had been Pirate Jenny I'd be less surprised."

"Why do you know it, then?" It's nice to have his curiosity satisfied, finally, but he doesn't especially like how Wright is asking questions without really asking them.

"I did this in college. I was a theater major, after all."

*Figures.* He nearly says *I must know a lot of theatrical people* but even that feels too close to the truth.

"I know you don't like pop, given how snippy you get about Trucy's radio, but this really makes me wonder about you." And then Wright launches into singing it, in a big stagy baritone, and hearing him do it is just incalculably weird.

Plus his accent...isn't the most convincing, put it that way. And when the tune's over he's apparently still feeling German, because he continues with "Lili Marlene" as he wanders down the hall.

And despite how incredibly dumb it is, Apollo feels like he's come too close to risking...something.

---

It's surreal, how well Daryan is behaving.

Not that he's met Jiminy Cricket or the Ghost of Christmas Future; nothing has turned him by magic into a Nice Boy. But the worst he's done since Kristoph's trial is make some nasty remarks and haul Klavier around by the wrist, shove his shoulders against the wall, that sort of thing. More like blowing off steam, more sexual than angry. And the band is writing songs and practicing hard and getting ready for a smallish tour, west of the Rockies only. Vegas, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver...

It's the sort of easy spell that Klavier might have felt hopeful about, pre-Apollo, when he didn't have the contrast ever-present in his mind. If he thinks about it too hard, he might even feel guilty about what he's waiting for Apollo to do. So he doesn't think about it.

---

It's surreal when Apollo's former client's gangster baker mother invites them for tea.
"Good boys."

Plum Kitaki teeters around the small, overdecorated room on her elevated shoes, as Apollo perches on the edge of a slippery couch and Klavier hunches in an armchair seemingly designed for people with knees and elbows not located where his are. Sitting on the glass tabletop are three very hot, very delicate teacups, as well as a platter of baked goods big enough for an entire police station.

It's been what feels like too long since he's seen Klavier properly, if that's ever been the word for it. The Meraktis case meant that they'd kept running into each other both officially and incidentally, but Trucy had pretty much always been around on those occasions. Otherwise? Clasped hands in passing in the courthouse hallway. And a few notes passed, written in advance and so never much more than I love you. and a scribble of piano keys or trust me and a pointy sun. There haven't been any further opportunities for interludes in the Prosecutor's Office, and Klavier hasn't come to the agency.

Well, one of Klavier's notes had actually said I LOVE radishes!!! and nothing else, which had been confusing enough to lead to a quick verbal exchange:

"Radishes?"

"So that you would be thinking about me!"

"You...are a dork."

A brilliant smile, and they had kept going in opposite directions.

But then Plum Kitaki had invited both her son's defense attorney and the prosecutor who'd been, well, prosecuting him, to tea.

"Good boys. Better than mine. Mine's an idiot. I'd have had your names on the serious list if you'd hurt him, mind. Here, have a pastry." She sets the teapot down on the table decisively enough to break either one, though that doesn't happen.

It isn't the most comfortable teatime in any respect, but seeing Klavier trying to eat in that chair without getting crumbs all over it or himself is sort of worth it. And then, after maybe half an hour of tea-appropriate but awkward chitchat about the bakery business, Plum's front garden, and Trucy, plus (somehow) two flaky desserts and three cups of sencha Apollo doesn't remember consuming, she seems to get to the point. "Thank you both for doing the right thing by Wocky. I know how stubborn he can be. And I know he didn't make your jobs any easier. If there's a thing I can do for you, you just need to ask. My boy's not in jail with the real thugs, so I do mean it."

How about some money, then, Apollo thinks, but Klavier tries to deflect her.

"Herr Justice defended the innocent party - my interest was in the guilty one. You are simply thanking us for our assigned functions, Frau Kitaki."

"You're the charming one, I already know."
He keeps trying. "It is we who ought to be thanking you, in fact, for your hospitality and for these delicious, ah…morsels."

A broad grin from her. "If you want to thank me, Mr. Gavin, see what you can do with this." She opens a trunk that's up against one wall after handing Apollo a pile of fringed pillows off the top of it, and pulls out an instrument that resembles a guitar about as much as a zebra resembles an elk.

Klavier's eyes light up. It's practically Pavlovian. "A shamisen?"

"Can you play one?" She hands it to him along with the plectrum, then bangs the lid down and takes the pillows back.

"I really do not have any idea. So...probably not, to be quite honest. But I would be happy to try."

"I thought you might be. D, G, D is standard tuning. Do entertain yourself. Your little red friend can help me with the dishes." She sails out of the room with the teapot. Apollo looks over, but Klavier is enraptured by the thing already, so he gathers the cups and the platter and follows her. Quite a few closed doors lead off the hallway, but it leads to a reasonably ordinary kitchen with a double sink and a large refrigerator.

"You know, Mr. Justice, you can just go ahead and sit in his lap." Apollo fumbles the expensive teacup he's been rinsing and nearly drops it, but recovers in time.

"Wh-what?"

"Oh, keep your voice down. I don't think everybody could tell, but I can. And I'd tell you that he likes you back, except you already know that and I know that too."

First Payne, now Little Plum. He's not the only one with a gift for reading people. He squirms, but she keeps talking.

"So what is it you're up to?"

"I'm sorry?"

"No - you're not." And the change in her voice is as subtle and as significant as looking up from a picture on a Christmas card to actual snow. "Don't try to play confused innocent with me, please; I have much too much experience for that." She takes the cup from him - he can't help flinching - and puts it safely aside before backing him into the corner between the sink and the granite counter, partly by way of bulk and partly by virtue of sheer charisma. "You wouldn't do well to forget my former line of work, and what it taught me about young men's habits and young men's faces.

"I have seen all of the looks, Mr. Justice. All of them. Every permutation and mixture of innocence and guilt and one becoming the other. I know what the ones in love look like. I know what the ones who don't want to admit they like other boys look like. Those are easy.

"And then there are the more complicated things. Klavier -" She watches his expression for a moment. "You think of him that way. Not Mr. Gavin, not Prosecutor. Your face says. Anyhow. His face says he's done something worse than he knew he was capable of, and he wasn't ready for the guilt. It says he's waiting for something.
"And yours says you're getting ready for something you know very well you shouldn't do. But you're still good boys. So very good. The kind who push the button at the crosswalk even when there's no one around and not a car for miles. And that's quite a contrast, Mr. Justice. I'll ask again. What is it you're up to?"

He looks at the print of her kimono, at the wall over her shoulder, anywhere but at her face until he's run out of alternatives. A few notes come down the hall into the silence.

"You won't tell me."

He nearly says no, and catches himself. "There isn't anything to tell."

"Better, but not good enough." He stares at her shoulder again. "You misunderstand. I don't want to catch you. I want to help you."

Again, the words are fully aligned before he stops them coming out. You want to help, you don't know with what.

"You have a blank check from me. Thank Wocky for that. If and when you decide you need it - I have a long memory, and you know where I live. And same goes for your softhearted songbird, too. Keep it off to the side of your mind, and let's go see what he can play."

A few folk songs later - one Japanese, to the hostess's delight, and the others more or less Bavarian - Plum sends Klavier to walk him home. He can come back for his motorcycle.

---

Walking Apollo back to the agency is nice. The afternoon has faded most of the way into evening, and the sidewalk trees are rustling in a cool breeze. It's the sort of moment that he'd like to enjoy purely as a moment - but Apollo seems distracted.

"What is it, schatzelein?"

The short attorney jumps when he's spoken to. "Nothing. It's nothing. I'm fine."

"Reassurance in triplicate is not very reassuring."

Apollo huffs, opens his mouth, closes it, starts over. "She told me to sit in your lap."

He can't help it, he bursts out laughing. Apollo looks so indignant.

"Do you not get it?"

He calms himself. "That she figured it out, ja. Do you think she is likely to gossip?"

"No. Not at all. Other way round. She wants to help us out."

He snickers again. "By having you sit in my lap? How direct."

Apollo's face is red and he's scowling at the sidewalk where the ficus roots have cracked it. "That wasn't the only thing she figured out."
This time the amusement fades instantly. "Is she a mind reader? What does she know?"

"She knows what sneaky people look like. She thinks we are."

That's not as bad as he'd feared. "That sounds like an occupational hazard."

"I don't like that it was obvious."

He'd like to put an arm around Apollo's shoulders, but they've already turned the last corner towards Wright's office. He sighs instead. "Maybe, someday, we can be as obvious as we please, when this is done. But in the meantime, I suppose, we can avoid one another in social situations. If you are troubled by what others may see." It hurts to say it, because they've already been doing that, and it's lonely, but.

"I guess so." Apollo wraps his arms around his own waist.

"Are you cold, mausi? Do you need to borrow my jacket?" He slips back into the flirtatious goofball persona, because this way he can be a little affectionate for just a little longer. "And whatever happened to the red one from your suit?"

"It never fit - look. Plum is probably going to make you an offer when you go back for your bike." The streetlights are blinking on, and as they do the shadows between them get darker.

"It is not a bike. And what kind of offer?"

"...Pretty broad." They're at the front door, and he at least has the chance to hover protectively while Apollo fiddles with his keys. But all they do to say goodbye is wave, and he pulls the collar of his jacket up as he turns back towards the Kitaki residence. It's a shorter walk, now that he's alone.

She's waiting by the gate, with a look of such stern comprehension that he's tempted to break down and let everything out against her comfortable shoulder. But he doesn't. He just hears her out, and takes her up on it, for one small favor, and one large.
Chapter 21

For a long time thereafter, Apollo will ask himself why he didn't move sooner. Waiting for another case and a pretext, maybe. Trying to sort out Plum's proposal. Fearing what other people might notice, hoping for an opportunity to fall into his lap.

When one does, it's not ideal.

---

Vancouver is amazing. It rains in Seattle, but the night is still okay. Portland is amazing too, although ticket sales are mediocre. The drummer's favorite actress comes to the show in Las Vegas and hangs around backstage, and while she's perfectly good company and they take some good publicity photos, it reduces him to a distracted gawky geek and does nothing for their sound. The other Gavinners are merciless about this. After Las Vegas is Orange County, and then the tour will end with the special performance with Lamiroir in Los Angeles. Orange County is so close to L.A. that they could sleep in their own house, if they felt like it. It should be the easiest show of the whole run.

Instead there's some kind of delay at the venue, something with the lights, or the truck the lights are in, and not being able to get a straight answer from anyone about the exact, specific and therefore fixable nature of the problem frustrates Klavier so badly that he finally stomps off to an unused dressing room, flops into a really distressing armchair with stuffing leaking out of a slash across the seat cushion, and just stays there. If he smoked, he'd be smoking.

He knows he has a reputation, in his musical career, for throwing tantrums. (Never, never at the Prosecutor's Office, where if anything his attitude is blithe to a fault.) It's a terrible brat habit he knows he should remedy. But given an arena where the risks are minimal, where the tasks at hand are so straightforward, why can't people do their best? With music there should be no need for nerves, no good excuse for crises...of course, the one time he'd said those exact words to the rest of the band, they'd looked at him like he was certifiable.

Besides, it's the only realm in which he can indulge in displays of temper without Daryan retaliating. He's never been entirely sure why – it could be because the guitarist would rather spare himself the effort of keeping musicians in line, but then maybe it's because he thinks it's funny. Either way, it doesn't exactly give him an incentive to stop.

He smells cigarette smoke almost before he registers the sound of the door opening.

"It's getting up on time, princess. Time to get your sparkly ass off that nice throne you found and sing for the good people of fuckin' Newport Beach."

"So we won't be playing in the fucking ink darkness? We have lights?"

Daryan grins, showing off sharp teeth. He'd actually paid a dentist to shave the edges of them for that look. "They'll see every hair on your head and every time your zipper moves."

He sighs, stares into the air, and doesn't budge for a minute. Daryan sighs too. "Come on, sweetheart, or do I have to carry you?" They'd done that a few times, before they'd been famous - Daryan had just slung him over one shoulder at the end of a show and carried him away, to the
jeers and wolf whistles of the audience. Again he says nothing.

This is the first tour they've been on since Kristoph. There's a kind of normalcy to it that he'd forgotten even existed - the sound checks, the hotels, the smiling for the cameras. It's almost over, and he doesn't want to lose it. He doesn't want to get out of this chair.

"Get up, Gavin. Your chains are waiting."

He releases all his breath at once and slams his feet onto the floor simultaneously. "Ja, all right."

They've been starting every show like this, and he isn't sure how well he likes it - the other band members silhouetted in the dark while he appears upstage center, webbed in stainless steel chains like a Home Depot Houdini, a shirtless one with his jacket open. Chains are their thing, and the girls in the audience always love it, but some of them are barely teenaged and whenever he remembers that it's creepy.

"Let me tie you up tonight, babe?"

He's been sulking longer than he thought. Usually it's their keyboardist who helps him get all tangled up, plus whatever house crew the venue has, while Daryan gives his guitar a final tuning. But if that's already done, then the keyboardist will already be set up on one of the moving platforms. And he prefers not to rely on the venue people, who've never worked with them before.

He feels a wash of relief when he realizes that he hasn't pissed Daryan off in quite some time.

In fact the detective is very careful, draping the links around him like he's a mannequin, stepping back to check the effect, pulling the slack back where nobody can catch an ankle in it and trip. "Thank you," he says. And jumps in surprise when Daryan buries his face in his hair.

"Smells good. Your fucking cologne."

He holds stiller than even the chains at his chest and shoulders require him to be, not wanting to do anything that Daryan will take as a welcome or as a rejection.

"Rubber. Sweet. Powder."

"Saffron."

"Pssh. Snob." Daryan takes another breath, without moving. "But it's good."

"I didn't know you could smell anything after all those years of hairspray."

Daryan grips his shoulders. "I recognize it. Can just about find you in a crowd. And it doesn't smell like girl soap. Fucking flowers. Doesn't smell cheap."

"It isn't."

"But I know you've got that cheap taste after all." Daryan sounds muted, frustrated more than angry. Which isn't at all reassuring. He can see the spark now, but not what the fuse is leading to. And they're about to go on stage, aren't they?

"Daryan, how long until the curtain?"
"Few minutes. Plenty of time. Stop interrupting, you...you cheat. You fairy. You fuck."

This whole tour, they haven't been arguing.

"This tour, Gavin. I've been watching you. No girls." Daryan is draped over his right shoulder now, too close to see, close enough to hear in every detail. "Not even in Vegas, not even the one with the tattoos in Portland who was fucking panting for it, remember?"


Daryan shakes him for a second, and the chains rattle. "More for me...you fuck."

"Daryan, what -"

"The morning after they got Kristoph, when you came back."

"You were late for work."

"Cheap cologne, princess. You smelled like a fucking drugstore."

The memory overloads all of his senses at once. His chin on Apollo's shoulder, inhaling the green and not-at-all-sweet haze of soapy, scratchy violet.

He stays silent a second too long, not that there's anything he can think of to say anyway.

"Girls are one thing, Gavin. You made a fool out of me with this band, you know it. Payoff or no fucking payoff, still, you humiliated me. I was never going to let you do that again. And now I'm like some fucking pathetic housewife, like I'm looking on your collars for fucking lipstick."

"But I'm not a bitch."

Yes you are, Klavier's inner monologue helpfully supplies.

Daryan's voice has been getting lower and lower, and now it's practically a whisper. "If this is going to be a fight, princess, you know who wins. You like taking risks?"

It's why I ever liked you.

He doesn't say that. Tonight, after the show, it's going to be bad.

Finally Daryan steps back, and Klavier can see the weird combination of hurt and intent and something like empathy in the taller man's look. It's familiar somehow, something he remembers from someone else.

"Later, sweetheart. Maybe." The guitarist walks off into the wings, running his hand along one of the chains.

Klavier stands in the blue darkness, waiting for the performance to start, for his temporary public reprieve, and realizes that he's freezing cold.

And that tips the domino into the next realization, why he knows that look. He's felt it, instead of
seen it. It was how he looked at Phoenix Wright when he was gathering himself to attack the man, before Enigmar showed up.

How apt.

Oh, Apollo.

When the curtains split and the lights begin their swell, he's very convincingly slumped into the chains. The girls in the audience scream, on and on, and the lights pause until the high-pitched ocean of noise calms. Save me, someone.

But they like him better in distress, after all.

The platforms the other Gavinners are on start to glide into position, and there's a metallic sound right next to him. This is new, has never happened before, and his sensitive ears catch it right away. Then a second later he feels one of the chains moving, slipping up over his shoulder and against the side of his neck. He opens his eyes in alarm, jerks his head up, tries to pull away.

The audience screams louder than before.

His yell is drowned by a wail from Daryan's guitar. A second chain that has been tightening painfully around his other shoulder jerks up and crisscrosses with the other one around his neck, and the screaming and the redness in his vision and the bright light and the guitar mesh into a singular roar.

And for a few seconds he feels completely lonely.
After the Kitaki trial, Trucy had proclaimed herself a Gavinners fan and set about making up for lost time. And as odd as it is to see a two-foot-by-three-foot picture of Klavier's face on her wall when he can't keep so much as a sticky note (never mind the ring, which isn't identifiable and which isn't exactly his to part with, he tells himself) and as sick and chilly as he feels when her fangirl monologues veer onto the subject of Daryan Crescend, it's actually helpful, in that he's able to osmote a pretty good idea of Klavier's schedule. When the band gets a so-so writeup in the Las Vegas Sun, he knows because she's indignant over breakfast.

And of course she watches the late nightly news for the entertainment segment, which he knows starts at about fifteen after the hour. So he's already stepping out of the kitchen in curiosity after the anchor's voice says "tonight in entertainment" about ten minutes too early, when Trucy gasps at whatever's on the screen. The next words he catches are "a terrifying incident at the Gavinners concert in Orange County tonight. Here's Karen Park with more from the scene -"

_He's not dead, if he was dead they'd have said "tragic," not "terrifying."_

He's in a haze, listening to the report as he grabs his badge and a couple of files, any files, and says he's not sure what to Trucy. He hurries down the stairs, lets himself out into the night air, and then breaks into a flat run for the Kitakis'.

He doesn't know what he's going to say if it isn't Plum who answers. But then, neither Wocky nor Wins strike him as assiduous door-getters. Except that it's late.

Fuck, the Kitakis might have a **policy** for people banging on the door late at night.

Too late to worry about that now.

The gate isn't latched (something else he hadn't even thought about) and so he skids to a stop under the little porch roof, pounds on the door long and hard enough for it to be unmistakeable, and then collapses back against the wall with his hands on his knees, files nearly slipping to the ground. He's been running in oxfords, but that's not the only reason he can't stand upright. Nearly strangled in front of a paying audience. The words are all in newscaster-voice in his head, which is **fine**, they can **stay** that way, he doesn't want it to be any more real than it is until he can find Klavier and just make sure he's in one piece and Gavinners' trademark chains alive and set malfunction somewhere in a **local hospital**.

There's the sound of leisurely footsteps, and the door opens, and Plum Kitaki is silhouetted in the yellowish glow of the hall. She takes one look at him and tilts her head for an instant. When she speaks, her voice is perfectly calm and kept low. "Mr. Justice."

He looks up at her and the air catches in his throat. It works as well as saying anything.

"You need something."

"I need a ride."

She doesn't ask why he can't drive himself, doesn't ask whether it's urgent. "Where?"
"I don't know." Her painted eyebrows do go up at that. "A hospital in Orange County. I don't know which."

"Who."

It's all he can do to meet her eyes. She heaves a sigh. "That motorcycle?"

"No. His - someone put him there."

He doesn't know whether she's beyond all surprise or just good at looking like she is. Or even whether she anticipated this. "One visit isn't necessarily going to solve that, Mr. Justice."

He takes a deep breath. "I know. I - I might need more than a ride."

She nods, a little sadly, more like a merchant agreeing on a sale. Then says, as she had before, "Good boys." So he's a little unprepared for the change in volume when she turns her head and yells. "WOCKY!"

---

Wocky's big overcustomized barge of an SUV is ridiculous. For that matter, Wocky himself is ridiculous, but Apollo is too anxious (and really too indebted) to feel embarrassed by the ride or the company. Also too distracted to talk. He's still clutching the manila folders, which are getting fuzzy where he's been gripping them too tightly. He stares at the dash for a minute, but...that reminds him too much of sitting in Klavier's car, the first night of this. This what. This tragedy, it's come way too fucking close to this tragedy.

Klavier's note. Yes, I trust you. I love you.

He stares ahead at the freeway instead. He's heard that the 405 is the busiest road in the world. It's not jammed or anything now, but there are still plenty of other lights in the dark, people doing their own things. The green overhead signs flick by. He can feel Klavier's eyelashes against his neck, when he lets his mind wander.

"Hey."

He should have known Wocky wouldn't be able to keep his mouth shut.

"Hey. Apollo."

"Nh?" It's not even a word.

"What happened, yo? All I know is I'm taking you to some hospital in OC. 'Cause the DA landed his ass there?"

"He's not the DA. Just a prosecutor." His throat closes up on the second sentence.

"You don't know which one?" Which - oh, hospital.

"No."

"Anyone you can call and find out?"
He's famous, dumbass. And I'm not supposed to be doing this.

I just can't not do it.

"No."

The SUV's so lit up inside that he can watch Wocky's reflection turn entirely away from the road to raise both eyebrows and a hand at him. "Aight then."

"Watch where you're going. I'm not feeling lucky, okay? If you get us sent to the hospital it'll be the wrong one."

"Leastaways I can drive, yo." Wocky turns away and pokes a thumb at one of the buttons on the stereo. The radio comes on loudly, and for a few seconds it's just noise before resolving into music. Guitar, lyrics.

He's hearing Klavier, because that's Klavier on the radio, and there behind him are Daryan's fucking background vocals. Fuck. His composure is wobbling.

But the song is nearly over, and the host's sexy cigarette voice intrudes over the last few notes.

"That was 'Repeat Offender,' people, the new single from the Gavinners available in just four days. I know, I can't wait. But you all heard what happened at their show tonight. If you're just joining us from your cozy home under a rock, Klavier Gavin, you know, the pretty one with the band named after himself? His scenery attacked him. Can you imagine, being choked out by chains in front of thousands of people? Pret-ty scary. So yeah. He's in the hospital, but don't worry, girls...boys?...he'll be just fine and back in Los Angeles in no time! They're saying the final concert of this kindasortofa tour is going to go on as planned just a few days from now. Suck on those ice cubes, Klavier, no one wants to pay to hear you lip sync. And now that we're all in a good mood, let's continue with the top five -"

He's startled when Wocky turns the radio back off. Wocky himself sounds shocked.

"Dude, he could have died -"

"I KNOW!"

As his voice fades from the air he realizes that this isn't quite the tone you'd use to express concern about a professional colleague.

Wocky doesn't say anything for several minutes, several miles, and Apollo thinks maybe he's offended him by shouting. But that's not it. When the boy with the fox haircut starts talking again, his tone is more subdued.

"His - I mean, chains just don't - sorry, but that don't sound like an accident to me, you know? Like, someone made that happen. Or let it. Something. Yeah?"

The air shudders out of him, but actually it helps to say it out loud again. "No, you're right. Someone did that. Set that up."
Wocky whistles low and raps the knuckles of his left hand against the dashboard. Then he sighs. "Man. It's different, when someone goes after your friend. Kind of, harder."

Apollo's so used to thinking of Wocky as a poser that he nearly says *what are you talking about*, before he remembers how it was that his former client had ended up his client in the first place. Wocky knows about violence; he was a gangster, he got shot. He closes his mouth on the interruption.

Wocky continues. "When it's you - it's scary, man, it is. And you get *pissed*. But, at the same time - fuck, this is hard to explain, sorry. I mean...you always knew you were gonna walk into something that killed you one day. It could always be today. You feel a little more, I dunno, responsible? You can accept it better. But someone...hurts your *friend*...you don't think, aw, he coulda handled it better, he was gonna die sometime. You think, fuck, I *shoulda been* there, and I was just stuffing my face or mad at my mom for some shit that don't matter. You wish you'd shown up an hour ago and said fuck this place, man, let's go eat ramen. Drive around in circles.

"And man, a fight is one thing. This is fucked up. Sick. Some asshole thinks he's Edgar - the raven guy."

*Edgar the raven guy.* Despite everything, he almost laughs.

"No, man, you know that story? With the guy who chains the other one up and then cements him in the fucking wall? This is like, somebody read that story in junior high and instead of going that's some good Halloween shit, man, they went you're my role model, this is gonna be how I solve my problems in life, 'cause I'm a punk."

It's too much. He does laugh at that, though it's the startled, overstimulated, bubbling laugh he knows people make when things aren't okay. And after he catches his breath, he's grateful.

"Wocky. Thanks."

"No fear." A big exhalation. "I mean, he's okay, right? Mostly?"

"As far as I know."

"We'll find him, though, dude. You'll feel better when you do. Do you know where the concert was?"

"Um..."

"S'okay. We'll start at UCI Medical."

And with that he changes lanes abruptly and gets off the freeway. As they turn onto the street where the big chilly buildings loom, the drip of adrenalin starts again in Apollo's abdomen, and he briefly and viscerally understands people who refuse to go to hospitals - and then Wocky makes a U-turn, probably an illegal one.

"He's not here, man. We'll try Kaiser next."

"What? How do you know?" He drags his gaze from the white glowing windows down to ground level, and sees a trio of teenage girls on the sidewalk, holding plastic-wrapped grocery store roses and walking towards the main entrance in a clump. There are more girls across the street, at the
"If they let the crowd think he's here, he's somewhere else."

"You're sure?"

"I can find someone in a hospital, man. Kitaki 101. Not like you forget."

There are no teenagers outside of Kaiser Permanente, and so Wocky pulls into the parking structure. "If he's not here, we'll try Hoag next. Move!"

Apollo jumps, but the interruption seems to have been directed at a white Toyota in front of them. "Move, lady, come on. Thanks. Come on. Move, labcoat man. Move, dickhead in the shark jacket, it's not as cool as you think it is."

At "shark jacket," Apollo simultaneously jumps, smacks the switch for the overhead light off, slinks down in the leather seat, and stares wild-eyed through the windshield. Sure enough, Daryan Crescend is cutting in front of the SUV at an unhurried pace, though he doesn't turn to look inside.

"The fuck? You trying to hide under the seat?"

He doesn't reply until he sees Daryan's back disappearing into the row of vehicles and Wocky has already pulled forward. "He is here. That was the second guitarist."

"Their second guitarist dresses like an action figure?"

"He's as much of a dick as he looks." He nearly adds, *More*, but manages not to.

"We're right by the side door if I let you out here, man. Take all the time you need."

"Are you sure?"

"Ah, yeah, you know? I've been where you are."

Even if it's not exactly true, it's really nice.
Chapter 23

The stony nurse in the pink scrub jacket isn't at all receptive to his request to see Klavier Gavin until he presents his attorney's badge and the manila folders. "Um, I'm here because of his casework. Not because of the band. He needs to see these. Or, he needs to be able to sign off on not seeing them, so someone else can take them over. So he can recuperate without worrying about them." He hopes he's projecting bottom-of-the-totem-at-big-law-firm hard enough.

"It's late at night."

He gives her his best sheepish look and doesn't back away. "That's why they sent me."

"You know he's not going to be at his best right now."

"Well...if he can't see me or he doesn't want to, I'll try later, but can I at least stick my head in the door to see if he's awake?"

This she permits, though she insists on leading the way to the room, and tells him that she won't tolerate a patient being bullied. His shiny black shoes and her big white ones squeak down the linoleum hallway past carts and desks and walls full of signs in four languages until she stops and knocks on the doorway of room 485. The curtain that it has in place of a door is already pulled back enough for him to see in, standing to her right.

Klavier, in the hospital bed, looks so - so breakable - that he wishes he'd told Wocky to step on the gas.

Just as he's thinking that dark thought, Klavier looks up at the nurse's knock, sees him, and flashes a surprised, happy smile. From anyone else he'd have called it brilliant. Compared to Klavier at full wattage, this is wispy. And silent.

The nurse is moderately more deferential with her patient than with his visitor. "Mr. Gavin. He says he has some legal things for you to sign off on real quick?"

Klavier still doesn't say anything - he just beckons Apollo in with a hurried, circular motion of his arm and smiles again and points to the chair. The patches of gauze are very white against his neck, and so fucking familiar that Apollo can taste hot tap water and marshmallow.

"You sure about this?" The nurse isn't about to leave quite yet.

Klavier picks up a pen and a legal pad from the table-arm that's sticking over the bed and scrawls something that he holds up: HIM I LIKE.

She actually cracks a smile. "Just him?"

The blond flips the page, scribbles again, and holds up a drawing of a big heart with the word ANETTA in it. Along with giving her a really devastating puppyeyes look. Apollo slides his gaze sideways, and sure enough that's the name on the brass nametag that quavers on her broad bosom as she chuckles.

"All right, all right. Guess you're entitled to a visit. You, don't tire him out though. I'll come back to
She swings off down the hall in a businesslike fashion, leaving Apollo to step inside and pull the door curtain the rest of the way shut. When he turns back around from doing that, Klavier's blue eyes are glowing, but still, compared to how he can look - how he should look - it's like there's been a brownout.

The chair's metal feet grind against the floor when Apollo drags it closer. He sits, and it's worse than Plum's couch.

"You were flirting with the nurse."

More ballpoint scratches. SHE HAS A BOY IN HIGH SCHOOL & A GIRL IN ELEMENTARY. SHE'S WORKED HERE FOR 5 YEARS.

"Klavier."

The look he gets in return is questioning and quiet and perfectly guileless, and so it's utterly frustrating. It's discordant, the singer acting as though nothing at all has happened when he's come too close to slipping out of reach and leaving the world worthless without him in it.

Stop all the clocks.

It's cold in here. So he pulls down the extra blanket that he sees on a shelf and puts it over Klavier's shoulders. And Klavier draws in a hoarse breath, the first sound that he's made other than pen scritches, and sits up to lean against Apollo's chest as the last little vestige of his smile goes out.

He's still real.

It's more reassuring than he would have thought it could be, to have tactile proof that Klavier is still alive. As the warmth of the side of his face radiates through the fabric of the red vest and the dress shirt, the knots that have been in Apollo's stomach all night begin to unravel. But it's a momentary feeling, because the musician gathers himself and pulls back away.

Apollo opens his mouth and, to his horror, starts to babble. "Look, I hope you're better with being apologized to than you are about not apologizing yourself when you don't need to, because I'm sorry, I don't even - do you - do you even fucking want me here? I should have been there-"

Klavier picks up the pen again. HOW COULD YOU HAVE BEEN?

"I should have stopped him before this could even happen -"

DARYAN
CHANGED
THE
RULES

He stops. "What does that mean?"

Then remembers. ...he does not touch my face and he does not touch my hands. Or my throat.

He pulls Klavier against him again, and meets with no resistance, not even as he rests his chin on
"I'll say he changed the rules. He tried to - he tried to kill you." It's hard to modulate his tone, and he scowls to get it back under control. Klavier can probably feel the muscles in his jaw moving.

Tan fingers pick up the ballpoint - and throw it down in impatience and disgust. Soft, scratchy escaped words instead. "Not. Not exactly."


Apollo unclenches his jaw and listens, though part of him wants to give Klavier the pen back because his warm voice just doesn't sound right like this, weakened and with pauses in the wrong places. The rest of him is feeling lucky to be hearing it, and then pissed off that he needs to consider himself lucky.

"I don't think...he really expected me to get, killed. He would have been - all right with it, probably...but I think he knew what happened...would happen."

"What did happen?"

"The...winch. That moves the others' platforms. Chains got tangled with it. A bad...accident."

He starts to object, and Klavier beats him to it.

"Of course not...but officially. The record company - already asking the venue for money. If they say they'll keep all their...artists away - they'll get it. They won't want to hear it was a...Gavinner's fault. They'll hang up." Apollo grits his teeth again, and Klavier feels it and manages a recognizable chuckle. "I belong to so many demons."

He feels furiously possessive at that, but you belong to me is the wrong thing to say. "You aren't property."

Klavier makes a noise that might be demurral, might be a cough. "Anyhow...the crowd...thought it was ah, sexy - but the stage manager. Stage managers have no...romance in their souls. She. Stopped the winch. Called the - ambulance."

It's painful, listening to this broken speech. "Are you sure you don't want to go back to writing?"

"I am sure!"

Actually, it's a relief to see him get mad. "It sounds like it hurts you to talk, though."

"Ja? It does."

"You could whisper?"

He expects a flirtatious response to that, one of the blond's abrupt switches into sultriness - and maybe it's selfish, but he wants to see that. More proof that Klavier is still Klavier and still brave and still his. He doesn't expect that the suggestion will make the patient even angrier.
"Never! I will never whisper to you!"

He steps back, probably looks as confused as he feels.

"Did you never whisper for Kristoph?"

Well... "...no. Just called him sir. It was always better if I was, um...businesslike. Why?" The truth was, he'd always been afraid to break the surface tension of Kristoph's own good manners. He hadn't wanted to give him any excuse.

"Apollo..." Klavier reaches for his hand and pulls him back closer to the edge of the bed. The cover is nubbly and yellow. "I am sorry I snapped at you."

"You've had a shitty day."

Klavier laughs for real, even if it's quiet and hoarse. "I have. But. Apollo. It was only because."

He lets the pause stretch through mere politeness before interrupting. "Because?"

"Because...no matter how sad, how angry, how numb...you can say anything in a whisper, and make it sound - like seduction. Or submission. I've whispered to Daryan - when I've hated him, when I wanted not to wake up afterwards. So...never for you, verliebte. If you don't mind."

His mind fills with images he doesn't want to see, of long arms and legs and tangled hair. And with the imagined sound of Klavier breathing please and meaning please die, please don't. A hand waves in front of his nose, and he blinks back out of his trance to see the flesh-and-blood rock star tilting his head and giving him a shrewd look. "You are letting your - imagination run away with you?"

"Sorry." His face flushes.

"Me, also. But this is not - what I wanted to tell you."

"Then what?"

"Listen for the nurse."

"What?" He barely gets the syllable out before he's pulled close and thoroughly kissed by somewhat chapped lips. He's the first to open his eyes, and enjoys a momentary glimpse of those long blond lashes against Klavier's cheekbones.

"That first."

"Dork."

"Mausi. I meant...to say. I - made, a mistake." Klavier's hesitation isn't just because of the physical discomfort. The bracelet shivers.

"What mistake?"

The blond looks down at the blanket and picks a fuzzball off of it. "Daryan knows - he knows...he
has a rival now."

In spite of all he's told himself about how Daryan Crescend is just another human being, his blood runs cold.

"You didn't say -"

A hand takes one of his. "Shh, shh, schatzi, of course not. He doesn't - know who. But he...he has apparently...known for some time. Enough time to, to plan this - escapade. So maybe...maybe after all, it would be best -" It's clearly leading up to something Apollo doesn't want to hear. So he cuts in.

"Your next show. In Los Angeles. They said on the radio you were still doing it."

A cough. "We are. There is - a contract, with...a visiting artist, from outside the country."

"Get me there."

"Outside the -"

"Get me to the concert, Gavin, get me **backstage.** And stop playing stupid." His heart is absolutely hammering in his chest, and Klavier doesn't respond at first. "I know you **can.** Somehow."

The musician stares straight ahead at nothing for a second, then snorts. "Oh, ja. I can. I know how, precisely."

"Good. And tell me everything about the people who'll be there. Tell me who they are and why they're there and everything."

"I - some of them are...certain to be, ach, venue staff. I do not know them."

"Whoever you do know."

He watches Klavier think. Watches him look down at the hospital bed. Twist his rings. Reach up through his blond hair for his torn ear.

"No one here noticed that? Or anything **else?**"

"No...I am sure someone **noticed.** But their patient - was a tall young man, with...muscles and black leather pants. Who - gets chained up for a living. And, they were very busy saving him from something else."

He sniffs, and Apollo reflexively turns to find tissues. When he swivels back around with the box, Klavier's licking his lips, but there's still a tearstreak on the near side of his face. Apollo looks down for a second.

"So, ah - want to get back to telling me about the usual suspects?"

"Hah. I'm - asking you this, again."

"Asking me what?"

"...that means, what...I think it means?"
He should answer seriously. He should. It's serious time. But... "Ja, schatzelein." And he ruffles Klavier's already messy hair at the same time.

The blond man gapes at him, but his blue eyes come on the rest of the way, like the sun just came up, and who knows what doesn't happen because Anetta the nurse comes back into the room.

"Mr. Gavin, is he wearing you out? It's real late now."

And Klavier picks up one of the irrelevant file folders and smiles charmingly, then trades it for the pad and the ballpoint.

SOON
VERY SORRY!

THIS IS JUST -
A LITTLE
COMPLICATED
Chapter 24

It's complicated, all right.

He waves to the nurse and gives her an apologetic smile as he heads back out, after Klavier is finally satisfied with his grasp on what he'll be walking into.

Which is more than he'd thought, but he tries to tell himself that's a good thing. Better to snag Daryan in a web that already exists than try to spin a new one, right? A better chance of keeping his hands clean.

The smell of exhaust tickles his nose as he emerges from the side door, which slides shut behind him with an electric sigh. Instinctively he draws in a bigger breath, hunting for the smell of roadside jasmine, and feels slightly calmer when he finds it.

Wocky isn't asleep in the driver's seat the way he'd half expected; he's rapping along under his breath to something that the SUV's stereo is playing (at a fairly low volume, which is amazing) and drumming his fingers in an elaborate rhythm on the sill, or whatever you call that on a car. Apollo comes around the other side and knocks on the rolled-up glass there, so as not to startle him.

Wocky jumps anyway, and leans over to open the door. "Yo! You done?"

"Yeah." It takes him a minute to settle himself and buckle the seat belt and everything, during which he doesn't speak.

Wocky breaks the quiet once they're en route. "He - he okay?"

"As much as you'd expect."

"Better than the alternative, yo."

His exhalation is more like a chain of little ones. "True that."

There's no immediate response, so he thinks that's going to be it. But the reprieve only lasts for as long as it takes Wocky to change over two lanes and then settle into seventy.

"So what next?" The words sound weirdly fierce.

"Sorry?"

"You said somebody did this, man. You gonna go all lawyer on his ass now?"

"I'm a defense attorney." The same exits they'd passed on the way down are flicking by in reverse order.

"Pssh, yeah. Is Gavin gonna take them down then? Like, shoulda choked me harder, bitch?"

God. Klavier might, given the chance, actually say that. Hopefully he's smart enough to wait until Daryan can't retaliate.
He probably is.

Apollo isn't sure whether Wocky's really expecting an answer, so he gives something that's not exactly one. "I don't know if they'd let him do it himself."

"Meh."

"Thanks for waiting outside all that time. I didn't think I'd be in there so long."

"Like I said. It's cool. It's something you - you gotta do when you can. You need another ride tomorrow?"

"They're releasing him tomorrow, probably. So I don't think so...thanks, though."

"Just say the word if. Gavin nearly gets his ass killed, you can bring him a burger and a fucking balloon." Wocky swallows hard and seems to be looking a long ways ahead on the road. "Where you want me to drop you off?"

"Actually - can I just ride back to your place? I, um...I want to talk to your mom."

He's briefly concerned about what Wocky's going to infer from that, but the fox-haired kid is biting his lip and staring ahead and blinking just a little too much.

Apollo knows he has no talent for entertaining people even on good days, and there's no way, today. So the least he can do is look out the side window and watch the shopping centers and the light industrial slide by under the streetlights. Be a tactful passenger to Wocky, not to mention whoever Wocky is thinking of.

---

At least a small part of him is hoping that Plum will have gone to bed by now. He's going to do this, he is...but it's reassuring to have one comparatively sane and orderly step still in front of him. But he should have known better. When he follows Wocky up to the front door, he can see a glow inside the house. Plum's been waiting up.

She greets them in the hall, hugging Wocky and then smacking him lightly on one arm and saying something in Japanese that sounds like a complaint. Her son replies in the same language and disappears through a doorway.

Apollo is still standing in the entryway, trying to decide whether to take his shoes off, since there's a pile by the door except Plum still has those sandals on, when she comes up beside him and puts a heavy hand on his right shoulder. He manages not to lose his balance.

"How was he?" Her voice is calm.

"Pretty okay. I mean - considering...he has these, um, bandages, and his voice sounds off, and -"

"Come and talk to me."

They end up back at the same table, where there's already a pot of the same sencha waiting. A couple of lamps are on in opposite corners, but the room still feels shadowy. It's not that it's not cozy. But it's warm in the way that an inadequate sweater on a cold day is warmer than none.
She waits for him to pour the tea, and he does once he realizes that's what she's doing.

"You've thought of something else that you need."

She's not looking for confirmation, so he doesn't nod. His voice doesn't sound especially brave when he speaks up. It sounds nervy. Amateurish.

"Do you know somebody who's good with gadgets?"

She raises her eyebrows, as he'd thought she might. "We aren't MI6."

"I don't think you'd need to be." And he slides her a crumpled sheet of paper from Klavier's notepad, out of one of his file folders. There's a drawing on it, and a few numbers. "I want one of these. And the remote that goes with it."

Her face doesn't change much, but he can tell even without the bracelet that she disapproves. "An igniter. These are toys. Nasty toys, but toys. Cheap. And too specific."

_The first thing...you need to know, Herr Forehead, is that it is not...only a concert. A concert - I could cancel. Daryan...gave me a good - excuse._

"I won't be the only person there who has one."

_It is - like the movie._

A sting.

"Mr. Justice, you're being clever. I suppose that's no surprise, from a lawyer. But I'm no lawyer. And sometimes the cleverest thing you can do is put aside a solution that's _apt_ in favor of one that's _effective._"

"I need this. I don't know how to make one."

"It's a lighter plus a remote control car and minus the extra pieces. It's not sophisticated."

"Even one on that same frequency?"

"Did you never own a remote control car? Wocky must have had almost a motorcade's worth."

"Mrs. Kitaki, my upbringing probably differed from your son's in several key areas." Talking with her has brought out his courtroom side, and for a moment he's concerned that he's angered her, but she opts for amusement.

"I'm sure you're right. But what results are you looking for from this?"

_Lamiroir is - a sort of friend. And she has an...accompanist. A teenage boy...he follows her, everywhere. Like he was...her son. Almost, more. Her pet._

"I'm going to implicate Prosecutor Gavin's - I'm going to implicate the guy who did this."

"Implicate him. In what?"
But this boy...Machi. He is not - a good son. He's into an...unfortunate...line of work. He will be, caught.

And she has...good reason, to want him - caught here.

"Smuggling."

Plum picks up her teacup, drinks, and then keeps hold of it instead of putting it back down. Steam twists up from it, rising past her face and hair and then disappearing.

"Drugs?"

"No...well...sort of."

What is it the doctors say? The poison - is in the dose.

"Mr. Justice, listen to me very carefully. You want to be smart. You want to be good. You want to act as though this is an Agatha Christie novel, where you can commit a crime politely. I understand. I do understand. I've read all of them. But if it's between you and your songbird's boyfriend - don't gape at me, what else could it be. If that's it, you need to remember that your enemy didn't try to cleverly implicate anyone in smuggling. He just chained your poor love up and nearly killed him. He isn't studying his Agatha Christie."

He grits his teeth. 'I'll keep it neat."

"Will you."

"I will. But if you won't get this for me, will you at least tell me who else to ask -"

She sighs, and her shoulders settle and the ribbon of vapor from the teacup jerks violently. "I didn't say I wouldn't get it for you. When will you need it?"

"Soon. The night of the seventh."

"July seventh - this month."

"Yes."

"Come by here that afternoon. Don't knock. Just come through the gate and look under the big clay turtle. He's hollow."

He picks up his own cup, finally. "Thank you."

"Mr. Justice. Stay alive. And Klavier too."

"Yes, ma'am."
Chapter 25

When Trucy sees him pull out his briefcase to go to the concert with, she teases him mercilessly with names like wet blanket and buzzkill and old man. He tells her to be quiet, Trucy, and she laughs like she's scored a point. And when they're a block and a half out from the Agency, he tells her she's forgotten the CD she wants autographed. The one he'd very carefully taken from under her hat and hidden in a bookshelf. And when she darts back home to get it, he pelts the other way.

True to her word, Plum has left the gate unlatched, and there's a grocery tote under the turtle. It's as he's putting it into his briefcase and hurrying back down the sidewalk that it sinks in. The bag is really - really a lot heavier than it should be.

He opens the tote with the very tips of his fingers, not wanting to lift it back out of the briefcase, and peers in. The first thing he sees is a small clear plastic box containing the igniter and the remote. Plum is right. It looks like something from a hobby shop.

Underneath that is a pair of gloves. Not a bad idea, if he can avoid being seen wearing them and asked awkward questions. Even if he didn't ask for these.

But gloves don't come close to accounting for the extra weight of the bag. Underneath the gloves is a -

It is it is, she did. God damn her.

Underneath the gloves is a handgun. This is clearly Plum's effective rather than apt solution, and it's the last thing he wants to be carrying. And he's about to run back to the Kitakis' and throw it back under the turtle - except there's Trucy, barreling around the corner and waving the CD in the air and yelling at him.

"I found it! And hurry up, Polly, you'd better not make us late!"

"Trucy, we have backstage passes. He's going to show you around personally. We're not going to be late to the concert. We're going to be ridiculously early."

"Well, excuse me for being excited, grandpa! It's not my fault you can't appreciate how amazing Prosecutor Gavin and his band are."

He grimaces at the sidewalk in front of his feet and doesn't reply as she hauls him along. Judging from her expression, Trucy thinks she's up on points again.

Klavier's fucking idea of problem solving. "I know how, precisely" had actually meant "come as the chaperon for your boss's fangirl adolescent daughter". Not to mention "the tickets will be twenty percent off." Between Trucy being around and his having paid for the passes, he's probably safely beneath Daryan Crescend's notice. But its being a good idea doesn't mean Klavier's sense of humor isn't all fucking over it.

When they reach the Sunshine, he sees a couple of security guards standing around outside the front entrance, and breathe out in silent relief that he'd thought to ask to come in through the stage door when he and Klavier were hashing out details. There's no way he would have made it through security with the igniter - and even less than no way, now that Plum's bonus is sitting in his
briefcase like a dormant snake.

Trucy is talking her head off and pointing at everything - posters, balloons, designs people have drawn on the venue stairs with chalk - and he's glad of her ability to hold up more than her own half of a conversation all by herself. She won't really notice that he's not saying much back.

Truth be told, even - or especially - if this weren't what it is, he wouldn't want to be here. He doesn't like loud music, doesn't like crowds, doesn't like people expecting him to look like he's happy. While Trucy looks down and exclaims over chalk pictures, he looks down and notices where people have abandoned water bottles and beer cans, and greasy paper bags, and burst bits of cheap firecrackers left over from the Fourth.

Around the side of the building where the stage door is, the mess is worse. The scraggly flowerbeds are scattered with cigarette stubs from, probably, years of musicians trying to relax before their sets.

"Trucy, do you have your pass?"

She bounces on the balls of her feet. "Pol-ly! Like I could possibly forget that!"

"Okay then." He feels like he's carrying something with a mind of its own. His hands are frozen even though it's warm outside, and so he tells himself to just keep going.

Klavier -
Daryan -
Machi -
Lamiroir -
LeTouse.

He knocks.

_I will tell the backstage staff to expect you_, Klavier had said. _The door - is technically not marked, but no one cleans - the cigarette mess, ever._

When he hears the knob rattle, he's expecting to see a complete stranger, and so he's got his pass out, but it's Klavier's nose he finds himself holding it under. Klavier and Trucy both think this is hilarious.

"You seem very eager, Herr Forehead. Are you quite sure that the fräulein Trucy is not the one chaperoning you? Please, do not be too embarrassed to answer truthfully - your secrets are safe with me!" He's laying it on pretty thick, but Trucy loves it and giggles and starts asking six questions at once. His voice is even warmer and smoother than usual, and it's impossible to tell how much of that is him really feeling better and how much is painkillers and how much is sheer willpower. No matter what the mix is, the import is clear. He's doing his best.

And the thought of letting him down is already unbearable, so it must be an illusion, something, that hearing this ridiculous made-up rocker Deutschlish is making Apollo's chest and fingers tighten even more. He's spent most of the trip over furiously asking himself why he doesn't just send Trucy ahead to buy cough drops or a couple of sodas and throw the thing down a storm drain. And what it seems to come down to, on a subverbal level, is that he's been given this to save Klavier with, and Klavier isn't safe yet. But he can't imagine shooting Daryan, just cannot successfully imagine it. Or he can, but his imagination won't stop; it goes into exactly what will
happen if he does that. After all, there is something Plum doesn't know.

Daryan is the boyfriend, and Daryan is a cop.

"Prosecutor Gavin, thanks for having us!" It's Trucy's attack of good manners for the evening, as Klavier leads them up the hall past the dressing rooms and towards the stage. "Are you sure we won't get in the way, since Polly got us here so early?"

Says the girl who was...oh, never mind.

"Of course! I am very happy to have you here, and it is no trouble at all. You are not the only guests tonight. See there ahead? That is our drummer's mother." A nervous-looking young man in a vinyl vest and suspenders is walking with a junior-high-social-studies-teacher-looking woman and listening to her explain something at great length. "I know for a fact he will be taking her to look at the scenery up close. Would you like a tour as well, Fräulein?"

Trucy nods with her entire body, and Klavier turns to his other guest. "And you, Forehead?"

Klavier is playing his part. And fuck, he's annoying when he decides to be - but Apollo knows his own role too. "Um, that's okay. Thanks. I can just...wait, you're not gonna be chained up again, are you?"

Trucy jumps in. "You'd better not be! That was too scary. Besides, your fan club decided. You shouldn't do that anymore."

"Ach, I always try to honor the desires of my public. And fortunately in this case my doctor agreed with my fan club. Perhaps she is a member, ja?"

"Anything's possible," he hears himself grumble. They catch up to the drummer and his mom, and the former seems relieved when Trucy is added to his entourage.

"And now, Herr Forehead, we shall see about finding you a box to stand on, ja? And perhaps a souvenir program." This last is mostly for Trucy's benefit, and she waves impishly as she's led away, but Klavier really does pull a glossy program out from inside his jacket, and hands it over with a flourish.

I want to get a look at everyone important. And meet them. Don't just hide me in a corner.

All right, then...but you should not - be scribbling in a - notebook, ja? People might...observe you...observing them, and get - suspicious. And the same, for your famous piercing stare!

So I should just stand there? Won't that look a little suspicious too?

I will - think of something.

And "something" is this dumb booklet, which apparently he's supposed to hang around and pretend to read. It's so flashy; it looks like something for a musical, not a rock concert. Better than nothing as an eavesdropping aid, though. And at least it's not all pictures.

Klavier sticks him in a plastic chair near a set of speakers. His gestures probably would look breezy to anyone else. But they're pointed underneath, and they mean wait here. For a few minutes, though he can hear human noise from various directions, he's effectively alone.
Klavier?

Ja?

Back up. What is the kid with Lamiroir - what is he doing?

Machi is - a smuggler.

And why's she want him **caught**? Can't she just tell him to stop doing it or she'll fire him?

**Does that**...work, on teenage boys? **Don't scowl** like that. It is - too late. He - **will** be caught. Interpol is...already, reaching. All she can do...is try to - pick a, **jurisdiction**.

How much of a difference does it make?

**You should - know this, defense attorney...I said, don't scowl. Here, it will mean**...many years in prison. **Possibly a more - lenient sentence, since he is a - minor...but, probably not. But at home? Borginia isn't just - the old country, ja? It is...the - **very** old country. He...faces capital punishment, if he is tried by his own government. Snicker-snick. And...the last cigarette, I am assured - will be shit. Rotten tobacco...in Soviet-era newsprint.**

Apollo jumps, fumbles the program, and looks up when a burst of feedback interrupts his memory. Klavier is the first person he sees, standing on the stage and holding a guitar at arm's length. An electric one, not the gift from Lamiroir that they've discussed. But behind Klavier, pointing at an amplifier and laughing with his head tilted back...

Well. It's his **second** look at Daryan Crescend.

Apollo's jaw abruptly hurts. And somehow it takes him nearly a minute to associate that sensation with how hard he's gritting his teeth. This is Daryan packaged for public consumption. That stupid pompadour is shellacked in place, and he's got the whole shark outfit on, down to what have got to be bespoke boots. He's wearing clothes that probably cost more than everything Apollo owns put together.

Apollo is as guarded with affectionate words as Klavier is free with them. But the speech whirls up out of nothing in his mind and he's half surprised at himself as he listens. **You. I. I - I love the person you hurt. You evil fuck, you're jealous enough to strangle him but too dumb to be afraid for your own skin after you tried it, or too dumb to consider that maybe someone would want to get him the fuck away from you - and I'm smarter than you, you entitled carnivore.** A crease sharp enough to cut forms in the shiny page he's holding. **I don't think you know what sorry is like. I can't ever make you sorry. But I can make you pay for it.**

He watches the two of them together. Or more specifically, he watches Daryan watch Klavier. Watches the dark-haired man's angular face as intently as he can, from behind the booklet. Watches the expressions and little tics, until they become a kind of information he can use.

Contempt - it's the way he draws his neck back and the way his upper lip sets.
Anger, carefully nursed anger, in where the whites of his eyes are showing and in the corners of the mouth.

And fascination. Absolute, helpless mesmerization. When Klavier looks up from the gear and talks, Daryan turns away and responds without looking back, so that Klavier has to pay attention. But when the singer returns to tuning and fidgeting and double-checking, Daryan stares as though he's thirsty. He looks at the messy golden hair at the back of Klavier's neck like it's alight and he's frozen. At his fingers, the side of his face. Maybe a merciful person would see affection there. But Apollo doesn't care.

So you let him hide one of those cocoon things in your guitar?

It is...a sacrifice. I would - take the guitar, any day. But yes. Lamiroir, and I - we were very clear, in conversation, where he of course could hear. About how it would be...shipped, sealed up. And then, we left the room. I - checked, before I had it sealed, to make sure. Machi left...two things. One cocoon. One little device - that starts a fire. A precaution.

What kind of device?

And the plan he'd come up with on the way back out through the hospital corridors is so simple. He has an extra suspect to add to the equation. But it won't take two cocoons to make anyone suspicious, will it. All it will take for that is two fires.

He hasn't told Klavier the details. Plausible deniability has to be maintained. But he's asked for access to the dressing rooms.

Daryan doesn't know about the sting?

Nein. Not with what - he could hold over my head...if it fails.

"Do not touch it, it is fixed." Klavier sounds peevish, and he glowers vaguely in Daryan's direction as he turns away from the amplifier. Despite his tone, he doesn't attempt eye contact.

"If you say so, princess. Tonight is your dog and pony show." Daryan walks off towards the far wings. And Apollo suddenly has to scrape his chair back into the shadows to get out of the way of a pair of fairy tales.

They look like the porcelain figurines one of his foster families had in a cabinet in the living room. Serene and overdressed and irrelevant, like leftovers from another history. The figure closer to him is Lamiroir, and she's surprisingly small. He hasn't looked at the part of the program that features the Borginian musicians yet, and he's been thinking of her as tall and willowy. There's a soft poise to her movements which he almost likes, until he remembers why she's here at all. It may be better than he deserves, but if she can walk with Machi Tobaye in quiet, almost tender unison like that when she's planning on getting him put in prison tonight, her heart is pure permafrost. The bracelet does react as he focuses on her, but with a soft bump not much more than a strong pulse in his wrist could produce.

He's seen people called on to answer in class more nervous than this.

And Machi. What had he expected Machi to look like? Thin and rodenty, with a big nose and hair in his face. But this - if Apollo hadn't been told, he might have thought Lamiroir's accompanist was a girl. Even without the lacy clothes, there would still be the pretty face - honestly pretty - and the
too-long, not-long-enough hair such a yellow blond that it's only one step from red.

When he looks at the pianist, the bracelet tries to leap off his arm.

It's so agitated that he picks up some of its panic and has to take deep silent breaths in the plastic chair, feeling his shoulders heave up and down. He watches Klavier bow to the two figments with an old-fashioned courtesy, and hears just enough of the softspoken conversation Lamiroir begins to peg the slightly Slavic sounds as Borginian. Klavier greets her in the same language, then returns mostly to English. Machi speaks only when he is spoken to, standing close by his employer's side, face and gaze pointed at nothing in particular.

Or presumably nothing. The boy's big dark glasses are almost too concealing, and Apollo finds himself skipping ahead through the booklet, to find a picture of him without them. And suddenly there is one, and either this is Photoshop or Machi's eyes are an incredible blue. Bluer than swimming pools, than those butterflies. On the next page, there's another picture and they look the same.

He looks back up at Machi on the stage, and his internal voice starts talking again. Blue eyes. Blue eyes, blond hair, pretty and desperate. Blue eyes, blond hair, pretty and desperate. Blue eyes, blond hair, pretty and desperate.

I know someone who would love to get his teeth into you.

He'd heard his classmates in law school say it a million times to each other over drinks or over lunch: I just had an evil idea. Usually they sounded coy, or pleased with themselves. But he knows as he watches. He's just had, in the literal sense, an evil idea, and the only emotion he feels around it is a dry satisfaction. Somewhere in another room, some part of him is probably appalled. He'll go look for it later.

The guest stars leave the stage and head back towards the dressing rooms. If they notice him, they don't acknowledge it. The German is left alone.

"Kl-. Prosecutor Gavin."

"Hm?" An innocent question mark, as he hurries over.

Let's get out of here. Right now.

Sorry. Nothing, never mind.

I love you.

If I ever made you feel guilty about the Borscht Bowl, I completely fucking apologize.

"I need you to bring Lamiroir back out here. Without Machi."

He receives a totally guileless look, and one question. "Don't you want to see everyone first? The band? Our magician?"

"Later."

Klavier nods, trustingly, and sets off down the hall, belt jingling. After a few minutes, he returns
with Lamiroir on his arm, murmuring intently. Once they're past him and distracted with something - and it's probably a double diversion, Lamiroir is probably discussing Machi's future while pretending to talk about the light cues - Apollo hurries in the direction they've come from and goes straight to the dressing room with the door all the way shut. He lets himself in.

Machi turns at the noise, to not quite the right angle, and looks expectant.

It's a fantastic performance. He reacts only to the sounds of the door and of Apollo's feet. Looks reasonably alert but unimpeachably helpless. And all while Apollo's bracelet is shaking and jerking in grand mal.

"Hi."

A polite, short, and distant response in Borginian. It goes up at the end, so it's some kind of question. When he gets no reply, he turns back to the can of strawberry Crush that's sitting on the dressing table, reaches for it very precisely, snaps the tab down, and pours the contents into a glass that he reaches for and pulls closer without ever looking at.

Speech sticks at the base of Apollo's tongue like a last-minute saving grace. But not for long.

"Machi. I know you can understand me, and I know you can see me, so don't waste my time."
Chapter 27

His back-of-the-mind curiosity about how the bracelet will react is settled as it tries to iris itself shut in one desperate squeeze. It's incredibly painful, worse than Kristoph and the car door, but then it eases, unclenches, and goes back to shaking.

He's afraid that Machi will have seen something strange in his face, but the pianist's fingers are still autonomically drawing the soda glass along the table. It must just have been an instant. And a distracting one. The bubbling stuff is sloshing up to the brim, and it wasn't before.

"You... Who?"

At least the accent isn't so bad. If it had sounded like a Cold War spy movie extra's, he might have laughed and not been able to stop. The situation is crazy, and only the need to stick to simple vocabulary keeps him from sounding like a third-rate villain himself. Or maybe not. He hates this. Klavier would be better at the theatrical stuff, a lot better at being intimidating.

_Just maybe not as good at following up on it._

He leans back an inch against the door. It's no time to be nervous, and he's been so angry, for so long. Let the kid hear that. "I'm someone who knows things."

"You know your name?"

_Brat._ "Yes. I'm not stupid. But you are." The porcelain face looks sullen and spoiled. Klavier's fingers are rough and brown; Machi's look pinkish and soft. "You hid a Borginian cocoon in Klavier Gavin's guitar. It isn't the first one you've smuggled. If you weren't stupid, how would I know that when you don't know who I am? If you were smart, why would I be here?" Machi stays quiet, though he's breathing like a rabbit. "I'm not police. I know some of them, but I'm on the other side." So far he hasn't told a single lie. It's not that he's playing games, it's that he doesn't want to get the bracelet upset again. "But the other side can't help you very much when the police already know about you. Interpol already knows. Which means this is the last cocoon. Last concert. Last everything."

He's braced himself for a repeat of the pain, but it doesn't come. Machi's eyes are flicking around behind his dark glasses, focusing on nothing, and his lips are moving around words that don't come out. Trying to think his way out of this, obviously, and that must be providing enough of a distraction from panic. Apollo looks from the dark glasses to the lacy shirt to the childish face, desperate to get away from responsibility.

_Do it. Ask me to help you._

"You here, then, you not give up. You will help, ja? How?"

_He's picked up "ja," for fuck's sake. Daryan will love him. Maybe it's the same in Borginian - doesn't matter. Idiot. Brat._

"You need more than my help. You have the police after you. You need police with you."

"What police? Bad police?"

He lets himself laugh at that. "Of course bad police! You think the good police are still your friends?"
"You have one?"

"I don't have anything for you. I only know things."

"What you know?"

He grins, darkly, because the bracelet won't get him for this one either. "I know a bad police."

Machi squirms in the chair, like he wants to believe him. "Where?"

"Here actually. On the stage. Detective Crescend - the shark." He's been leaning against the door long enough that the spot between his shoulders is getting sweaty.

But that's it, it's what he came in here most wanting to say, and now that he's said it the questions he'd walled off come flooding back in.

**Why did you tell him that? Why the fuck would you tell him that? You've just given Daryan a replacement Klavier! This might not even work!**

The cool certainty of the response, as he blocks the exit and watches Machi think, is enough to surprise him again.

**It'll work. Daryan is International Affairs, he likes money. He likes owning people, he's -**

Daryan is prepared to give Klavier up anyway. In a manner of speaking.

**Why frame him if he'll actually do it.**

**What do you think, Machi? Feel like trying it?**

Machi seems to have thought of something. "You. How I know you the one - you from the people buying?"

For the second time since coming in, he laughs. "Machi, you don't. You misunderstood. I don't know who you were selling that to." The kid's eyes go huge behind the lenses, and Apollo keeps talking no matter how hard the bracelet is trying to crush his wrist. "I'm from the people you're selling to now. And in the future. Always. Otherwise, I tell Interpol to come get you right this minute. And I tell Lamiroir what you do."

And of course Lamiroir already knows but of course the kid doesn't know that, and he starts planning again and the circulation comes in pins and needles back into Apollo's arm.

**Figures. He'll smuggle deadly poison without caring but he can't stand the idea of Mommy finding out...**

Maybe there's a bitterness older than his promise to Klavier in here somewhere, if he thinks about it.

"Let me out. I go see him."

He takes a step forward and to one side, getting out of the doorway as Machi rises from the chair.

In junior high, his science class had spent a day playing with litmus paper. Water was a neutral seven. Lemon juice was a two. Soda was about a three, and he's reflexively dropping his briefcase and covering his eyes with his hands and bending over blindly because it stings like a bitch, the fucking **brat...**
Tears are streaming down his face, and the salt taste mixes with fizzy artificial strawberry.

He vaguely registers the sound of the closing door as he scrapes the stinging mix of tears and soda from his eyelashes with the side of his hand. Once he can sort of see again, he glances around through the blur for the obligatory box of tissues, and finds it where Machi had been sitting. That speeds things up.

He feels better only until he sees that of course the fucking briefcase is gone.

---

Klavier is discussing Machi with Lamiroir, because Machi is a subject she will always discuss. Machi and music, to be fair - but when the subject is music, he has to be able to respond intelligently. This way, he only needs to make sympathetic sounds every so often. And he prides himself, really, on his sympathetic sounds.

They’re standing at the base of one of the moving platforms, and she's resting a hand against the metal and telling a story about a holiday concert in one of Borginia's cathedrals, when he sees Machi himself slip past behind two of the other towers and vanish - no, not quite vanish, he's wearing white and there he is - between two of the side curtains. Apollo must be done with him.

Except he can't not have heard Lamiroir's beautiful voice describing the children's choir, and the scent of the fir garlands, and how the sound of the piano made the elderly bishop weep, and if he's leaving the dressing room and not searching for Lamiroir, what is he doing? There is nothing over in the wings there.

It's only where Daryan has stalked off, carrying a chair, to to tune his guitar.

Gott, does the boy have no instinct for self-preservation at all?

Klavier backs up around the platform, drawing Lamiroir with him as she talks. It's a slow process - taking a step back every time she gestures or shifts her weight. But before long he can see what both of the musicians are doing.

Daryan is tuning the guitar. Surprise.

And Machi is silently watching him do it, with a look of frightened determination.

He should go interrupt. There's an awful tension to the tableau, but because he doesn't know what prompted it, what Apollo is up to, he stays where he is.

*Do you - really have a plan, so quickly? Clever you...what is it?*

*No. I don't want you able to answer all of the questions.*

He's not close enough to hear anything said, but he can tell when Machi gathers up the nerve to interrupt. The guitarist leans back in the chair with a what-the-fuck-is-this expression, staring the way he stares at the people he interrogates. He probably hasn't had any idea that Machi speaks anything but Borginian.

The frail-looking pianist holds his ground. If Klavier were to have to guess, he'd say that Machi is asking questions, simple ones. Daryan looks impatient, which would be an understandable response to Machi's English.

The boy steps closer (the sight knots Klavier's stomach a little) and then pulls his hands into his
sleeves. He's looking down at his shoes and he's stopped talking, just swallowing in a way that makes his neck move. Daryan reaches out and snaps his fingers right under his supplicant's nose. It's not a fond gesture in the least; it means pay attention, be serious. And Machi must say something surprising then, because there's a metallic squawk as Daryan pushes the chair backwards with one shove of his long legs and puts the guitar down as rapidly as he can without hurting it. His impatient look has turned incredulous, and there's a hint of a smile in it. Not a smile that anyone who knows him likes, either, but that's probably lost on Machi.

Lamiroir's accompanist starts to talk again, but it's clear that Daryan is only half listening. Instead he's gazing at the boy's face. And his hands. When the pianist finally seems to finish explaining whatever he's explaining, he looks up to find two fingers beckoning him closer. It's brusque, not seductive, though you couldn't entirely say the same about Daryan's expression. And when Machi steps close enough, Daryan pulls the sunglasses off, looks at his eyes, then leans forward with a menacing set to his jaw and says something almost in the boy's ear. There's a long pause before he gets a nod in response.

Then Daryan claps Machi on the upper arm, squeezing hard, and shakes his hand with what is sure to be his usual crushing grip. And only then does he return the sunglasses.

The Gavinners toured exactly once with a band whose bassist paid an unpleasant amount of attention to the youngest female fans who showed up, and who, two weeks in, made the mistake of admitting that he "liked them young" over beer after the show. A split second later and Daryan had broken his right hand and his jaw and was kicking his abdomen as he lay on the floor.

But Klavier still feels sick. Lamiroir is still talking about Christmas.
Apollo bursts out into the hall and nearly trips over his missing bag, lying partway open on the floor. He grabs it up and conducts a quick inventory - everything's been pulled out and shoved back. Or almost everything. He curses Plum and Machi with all his heart, under his breath, as he runs toward the stage.

*Hey, at least he didn't come back in and shoot me.*

It's not funny. Really it's not. The brat, for reasons known only to himself (well, maybe Apollo can extrapolate a little; the police are after him) has stolen Plum's fucking gun-that-shouldn't-have-been-here-in-the-first-place, and he's run away somewhere in the Sunshine with it, doing...something.

So what are the chances he'll just give it back?

Apollo barrels out of the far end of the hallway and nearly collides with someone.

"Now who's acting like he wants to see the show after all? I knew it, Polly, I knew it!"

Trucy has picked a hell of a time to finish her guided tour.

"Why are there wet spots on your vest?" "That's just - soda."

He's short of breath and shifting back and forth, trying to look over her shoulders.

"Well, you know you're not supposed to shake them, right? Anyway, come on, we have to find our seats!"

"Already?" "Yes already! They're going to start letting the rest of the audience in!"

"Our seats are assigned. We don't have to be the first people to sit down."

"Sure we do, so everyone else will wonder who we are and how we got in early! It'll be like we're famous and mysterious all at once!" She frowns. "Well, us and Mrs. Drummermom...and anyway, if you're not in a hurry, why were you running?"

For a mad moment he thinks about telling her. She's great at finding hiding places.

She's also his boss's fifteen-year-old daughter, and if he knowingly ropes her into a search for an armed criminal, losing his job could be one of the better possible outcomes.

"I...need to find a bathroom." She explodes in giggles and reaches out like she's going to tickle his ribs, and he reflexively twitches away. "Look, Truce, go ahead and find the seats. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"There are bathrooms by the entrance, you know."

"But there'll probably be a line."

"Oh, fine. Don't get lost. If there's an announcement over the PA for a lost boy I might not come get you." She sticks her tongue out and flounces back the way she came.

There's been no sign of Machi in the meantime, so he lets her get out of sight ahead of him and then
picks his speed back up, heading for the wings. There are considerably more people milling around there now, people all in black with weight belts, or headsets, or tattoos, or all three. Machi ought to stick out, still, but before he catches a glimpse of white ruffles a hand takes his upper arm.

It's Klavier.

"Herr Forehead." His words don't have quite the same teasing tone as earlier.

"You're not busy right now?"

"Extremely. As a matter of fact. But I wanted to ask you something, about Machi." There's a studied casualness to the words.

"Yeah. Me too. Have you seen him go by here?"

Klavier has stepped around in front of him, and his shoulders are harder to see over than Trucy's. "Not in this direction, no. But a few minutes ago I saw him approach Daryan. And I wondered if you might know why."

He doesn't answer, and Klavier doesn't move. Still there are no flashes of white amidst the busy shadows on the stage. Then he sees the singer inhale, and gets in first. "Klavier, do you trust me?"

It's a shit question. It is an absolute shit question. He knows that if Klavier's solution to Kristoph had just been to find his big brother a mouthwatering replacement intern, he would have felt queasy about it for the rest of his life. Not that this is supposed to be more than a one-night arrangement, but Machi's not supposed to be running around with a gun either, and Klavier has no idea about that. And here he is making it about do you really love me.

"Ja - yes. Of course I do." "Then -" He starts over. "Machi's terrified. That's why he went to Daryan. Just - don't do anything to make him any more nervous. He's still on the hook."

Least helpful warning imaginable.

"Schatzelein, Machi Tobaye is not one of my favorite people. He takes advantage of Lamiroir's good nature - and of her loneliness. But Daryan will eat him alive with shark's teeth. And I would rather not have to care about that."

"The plan is still for him to get caught tonight." He doesn't say, so Daryan will have to eat fast. "When were you going to?"

"The same as we discussed. Partway through the third act. Ema Skye will be present - though she has not been informed why and is irritated."

"Who's his buyer?"

"I do not know. We could not have one of our own - my involvement would have made it entrapment. But all the staff know to tell me if they see anyone backstage who should not be present. And there is no reason for him to try to meet them here when he could wait to meet them in or near the hotel later on. Strangers can come and go in a hotel much more easily."

"All right. Okay. It's...it's okay then. Klavier?"

"Hm?"

"No more monsters. After this, no more."
Klavier sounds just a little confused, but still he offers reassurance Apollo's not sure he deserves. "Ja, baby. That sounds nice." And he pauses, like he wants to say something else, but instead just turns and walks out onto the stage, in response to someone's summons.

"You can't stand there." A gruff man with a big ring of keys on his belt and a salt-and-pepper beard, in the uniform all black, takes Apollo by the shoulders and firmly shuffles him back towards the wall. He considers resenting it, then remembers that it was a member of the same tribe who called Klavier an ambulance while the audience was busy swooning, and lets it go.

Machi still hasn't come by. He's not in the first set, and he can't seriously be planning to hide away from the dressing room the whole time, can he? It didn't look like he'd had any makeup on yet.

He's not going to have any luck milling around onstage, that much is clear. And Machi won't be out in the audience. So, he can go back down the hallway. He can head up the staircase that must lead to the catwalks or the sound booth or something like that. Or he can go where he told Trucy he was going.

The backstage men's room is empty when he walks in. But his own reflection moving in the mirror automatically draws his attention, and as he's glancing to see just how noticeable the soda spots are, the door whines open. And there, finally, is the brat.

"Give it back."

Machi doesn't jump, but the bracelet does, and that's gratifying at least. The boy hunches his shoulders and tosses his head and tries to skip ahead to another topic, the phrases tumbling together in his agitation. "I talk to him, bad police, detective. He agree."

"Great. Give it back."

"He thinks my idea. You pay me, I pay him after. He no know you here, I tell him, if you say buying, is lie."

At least greed is predictable. "No one pays you until we have it. And give it back."

"Too many its." The pianist starts to wash his hands, using too much of the gritty pink soap and making a production out of it.

"Too many times you're making me ask you." I'm going to retroactively fail every English class I ever had if I keep talking to him.

"Did you use it?"

The bracelet is shaking, but Machi still manages a little grin that says you hate this, don't you. A delicate pink-nailed finger points in the direction of the stage. "Maybe." The boy flings a handful of barely used paper towels into the trash and faces Apollo as he backs out the door.

"Maybe not."

And stress is probably most of it, but Apollo could almost laugh at how he backs smack into a tall bearded man standing right outside. A man who's facing the door, not just walking past, but who
doesn't have a hand up like he was going to pull it open.

_Herr Forehead, did you ever read Les Misérables?_

_Believe it or not, Klavier, some Americans can read._

_Is that a yes? Or merely a very cute deflection?_

**Yes it's a yes!**

_Then I want you to picture Jean Valjean. Big. Sad eyes. With a beard. Ja? Now put him in a cheap suit, and you have Interpol agent Romein LeTouse._

Does it matter that LeTouse has probably just heard Machi speaking English? Does it matter that he's seen the two of them together? Apollo doesn't know, but he's fairly sure that the big man won't assume he's on the side of the angels - and he's fucking Interpol and Apollo is here to commit a fucking crime. Somehow he'd almost forgotten that.

The longer he stands here in front of the sink, the worse it's going to look.

Before LeTouse can start paying attention to him or Machi can say something fatally stupid, he excuse-mes his way into the hall and makes a break for the safety of row seven, seat B30.
Klavier is revealed in a yellow-tinted spotlight when the curtains split - the leather he's wearing gleams, and his messy hair is as richly gold as the jewelry Apollo's seen in store windows in Little India. His breath catches in his throat as the rest of the audience, Trucy included, screams.

Apollo hunches down in his seat.

He's glad that this isn't his kind of music to begin with, because he'll never be able to listen to any of these songs again without having some kind of delayed nervous breakdown. There are too many versions of the world in this building right now.

There's the show on the stage, with the colored lights and the fast, flagrant guitars, and all the figures in the band shining in ridiculous skintight clothes, and it's all for show and being sexy, except how can it be fucking sexy when that predator smirk on Daryan's face is from real life?

There's whatever's going on backstage, with LeTouse and with the brat and with that cocoon and that fucking revolver of Plum's, as if hell couldn't have broken loose even without it...and he'll have to go back there...

And there's the audience, this passive dark environment where people are shrieking, dancing in the aisles, stretching their arms at all the shiny things on stage they don't really expect to reach, wouldn't or shouldn't want to if they did...they're just in the dark reacting, and once they've writhed through all of the songs and worked through all of their vicarious frenzies they'll go back outside to their cars and then back wherever they come from.

And tell everyone, wow, what a fucking experience it was...

He's not sure whether he hates them because they're reminding him of a primate exhibit or because there's part of him that...I am fucking out of my depth, okay? Okay?

There's a small but distinct part of him that doesn't see why he can't just quietly watch the rest of the show with Trucy, never set another foot backstage, and go home.

So he stares at Klavier, really stares, watches the muscles jump in his neck and the rings on his fingers catch the light as he plays, watches the hair untwist, and lets his face heat up and his hands start to sweat. Maybe the hormones will counteract the cowardice, who knows, maybe he should go after Machi right now, maybe he just needs somewhere quieter to think...

The screaming reaches high tide as a song ends, and the blue and red lights on the stage fade and meld into a shadowy purple. A faint glow highlights the keyboardist, and Klavier vanishes for a moment and comes back dragging a chair.

When he bends toward the mic, his accent is a little more German than it has to be. "So...we have not played this one live, I think in two years. Three years. It is hard to dance to - yes, fräulein in the top with stripes, I see you."

There's a localized whistling and screaming in the next section over and a few rows back.

"But we are just giving our drummer and our rhythm guitarist a few minutes to relax, so they can do their magic next. So take a deep breath, drink your water bottles, consume your...other things...."
A swell of chuckles.

"Ach, this is a law enforcement event, what do you want me to say?"

A bigger laugh, and Klavier grins quickly and looks strangely vulnerable before he lifts his guitar and begins to play. The audience calms, and a slow melodic intro drags itself into the air before he begins singing in a low voice, with the strain as unmasked as Daryan's smile had been.

You must have heard me close the door...
You must already know I'm here
Tonight, what do you hate me for?
Same time next week
Same time next year

I see you've lit the light upstairs...
I know you're waiting up for me
Why don't you go collect some love affairs?
You rather would collect debris

His tone is understated, because it's the guitar that is sounding worried, sounding bruised.

Can't claim that I know every reason
Don't know who's funding this campaign
Can't say I'm innocent of treason
But we both know that I'll remain
Remain silent

Apollo sneaks a glance at Trucy, who's gazing at the stage with a teenager's sloppy empathy all over her face. Looks up at Klavier, then down at his hands.

The original plan had been simple. One, plant Plum's igniter in Daryan's things. Two, scare Machi into using his. Three, set off the planted one at about the same time. Implicate Daryan, collect Trucy, go home. Wait reasonable amount of time, collect boyfriend. Live very happily ever after.

It's not Plum's fault that it's gone off the rails. It's his fault. He hadn't been able to resist giving Daryan the opportunity to dig himself in deeper...no, not quite. Hadn't been able to resist the chance to make sure Daryan would know exactly which of his own failings had ruined him. Poetic justice. Poetic, Justice.

Put aside a solution that's apt in favor of one that's effective.

I think you think you liked me better
When you had everything to gain
You killed the spirit for the letter
But we both know that I'll remain
Remain silent

There aren't three worlds here. There's only one, and the fear is his stomach is spilling away and leaving calm determination behind. Daryan's in. LeTouse is suspicious. Deep breaths. Wait for the third act. Do whatever you have to. And everything will be fine.

---

Plum was right about something else - back in high school, he'd spent a lot of his lunch hours in
the library reading his way through the stained Agatha Christie paperbacks that lived on one of the spinning carousels. All those variations on the same people in the same cheesy England, having the same cheesy conversations about the same overcomplicated crimes...but they had been easy to get engrossed in, and he'd enjoyed trying to figure out the who and how - he'd averaged about fifty-fifty, better with Poirot than with Miss Marple.

And he'd always liked the scenes where people who had all kinds of secrets and suspicions and ulterior motives were stuffed into one room and had to be civil to one another.

In his experience, that wasn't how real people with grudges behaved. Depending on who they were and what it was about, they'd punch you or punish you or ignore you...but it was kind of satisfying to think of what you might say, if your battles were verbal instead. And, you know, in complete sentences.

Now and then he'd imagine himself as Poirot. He never told anyone about that.

But working for Kristoph had put the first serious nails into the coffin of the idea that subtext might be fun - and this visit to the Gavinners’ dressing room is knocking in the final ones. He has a headache vibrating high and thin behind his eyes.

Klavier is the only actual Gavinner here - the drummer's probably off with his mother again, and wherever Daryan and the other two are, Apollo's reasonably happy not to have to see them. The room is already crowded enough, and something about the whole situation is making him feel like a paper bag puppet.

PUPPET KLAVIER: Und now, to introduce everyone!
PUPPET TRUCY: Hi!
PUPPET APOLLO: ...yeah.

He and Trucy are introduced to Lamiroir and Machi, for what is supposed to be the first time. Neither of them opt to speak English.

PUPPET KLAVIER: Ah, Lamiroir!
PUPPET LAMIROIR: Asterisk, Egyptian bird design, squiggle.

LeTouse translates. Maybe.

PUPPET KLAVIER: And the manager! He manages things. (stage whisper) And he isn't a policeman.
PUPPET LETOUSE: Lamiroir says that tonight - the music will be different.
PUPPET MACHI: (silence).

We all sound like idiots. This is not very cool, or very clever, and he's not exactly taking pride in his own sophistication. The only person who seems to be operating at face value is Trucy, but at least she's happy.

Rephrase. She's having the time of her life. And he can't help looking at her funny a few times when she can't see it, and he notices that Klavier and Lamiroir honestly seem to think she's cute, and possibly LeTouse does too. She's giddy and oblivious...

She's probably the only reason this isn't getting really uncomfortable really fast. Credit where it's due.

They stand there for a while flapping their paper bag puppet mouths, and file out as the
intermission ends. The taut chord of pain between his temples is getting tighter and tighter, and he shoos Trucy on ahead as they pass the men's restroom again, ducks in and splashes water onto his face and presses a wet paper towel to his forehead, and meets his own eyes in the mirror.

The guy he sees looks tired and serious, and fuck, yes, he's both of those things, but at least the feeling like he's juggling too many torches isn't visible in his expression.

Then there's a scuffling sound and a voice saying something like *oi* right outside the door, and the instincts of a fourteen-year-old delinquent foster kid take over. He could go straight through whatever it is, but instead he scampers for the handicapped stall, shuts the door, and backs up far enough that no one will see his feet.

What. It's not like Machi actually needs a handicapped stall.

"You tug on my wrist like a girl? What do you want, kid?"

Daryan. He can picture those expensive boots on the grimy tile.

"Someone in my bag."

And Machi. Blue shoes with buckles.

"I thought you said it was in Gavin's fucking guitar?"

"Is. But someone looking."

"Sure it wasn't just your mom?" "Lamiroir is - is not -"

"I know. Geez. But don't freak on me. You sure she wasn't just looking for a fresh pair of those frilly socks of yours?"

"She with me. Mr. LeTouse come to dressing room minute after. Maybe he looking."

"So? He's your manager, looking after your shit is his job."

Machi pauses. Wrestling with his English? But the bracelet jiggles, so maybe he's just deciding how much to say. "**Somebody** looking there, maybe look everywhere. Maybe is looking for. Bad."

*Because you have such high moral standards when it comes to going through people's stuff, brat.*

Thinking that, he nearly misses Daryan's reply.

"So are you actually asking me anything, kid? 'Cause this is cute and all, but I got stuff to do."

"When I on stage, you look, see who in dressing room."

"Waste of time -"

There's a clack, like Machi has taken a step in those Mary Janes he has on. Forward or back, Apollo isn't sure. "You, look. Is your money too."

"Fine! You got it, Peter Pan. I'll make sure to have a good look at the nothing and the nobody!"

"Yes. Good. Now I go, I have also stuff."

The door squeaks open and closed, and Daryan hisses to himself. "Fuckin' brat."
Apollo considers, briefly, attacking him while he's otherwise occupied in here, but the best thing he's got for a weapon now is the igniter, and he's not going to get much of anywhere trying to set the bastard on fire.

The succession of noises finally ends with the same twin squeals from the door, and Apollo counts to fifty before letting himself back into the hall. His head still hurts, and even though he makes it back to his seat before the music starts, Trucy kicks him in the ankle for being late.
As the next part of the performance begins, what he thinks is, *I could have shot him. If Machi hadn't stolen it I could have shot him.*

He tries to imagine Daryan in prone disarray on the tile and can't get more than disorganized flashes. But he can picture the headlines, easily.

Like **GAVINNERS GUITARIST FOUND DEAD.**

Like **DARYAN CRESCEND MURDERED BACKSTAGE.**

Like **FATAL SHOOTING AND LIFE-THREATENING ACCIDENT: VIOLENT INCIDENTS RELATED?**

Like **SHOCKING TRUTH! GAY LOVE TRIANGLE DESTROYS ICONIC BAND!**

What the fuck does it mean that the more like a tabloid they sound, the closer they are to the truth right now?

"**Klavier, without Daryan...what's going to happen to the Gavinners?**"

"**Up in - smoke. The contract, likewise. I spend...two years - half-naked, on a sunny Caribbean beach, with you. And come back...better. Solo. The...**band**... can fuck itself.**"

"**The Caribbean? You should have mentioned that sooner.**"

"**I am in the - hospital, schatzi, I get to...exaggerate.**"

And so he always remembers that he was leaning forward in his seat, with his fingertips pressed to his temples, caught up in a brief and dirty fantasy with its scenery cribbed from travel posters and beer commercials, when the guitar caught fire and the night took the next step towards going hideously wrong.

---

The cocoon is gone, and with it, so is Plan B. His brilliant idea about getting Daryan to fuck himself over is worthless when there's nothing left to change hands and no deal to intercept. Up in smoke.

He reaches down in the darkness, clicks a catch open and feels past his papers and the glossy program for the flimsy plastic box. His fingers brush past a scratch in the lid, and there's a cold flutter in his chest. He tells himself that there's no similarity between Plan A for Agatha and bringing a banana in a handkerchief to a gunfight. None.

When the lights come back up, he's as impatient as Trucy to get back to the dressing room, but she grabs his arm like she wants to drag him there and he lets her; it might look less suspicious, if only to Trucy herself. He ducks his head when they pass the rest of the band coming the other way, Daryan walking backwards and complaining. "Fucking diva. Probably planned the whole thing."

Another speaker, maybe it's the drummer. "Daryan, man, there's kids around -"

Apollo's face burns and he can feel Trucy stifling a giggle, but thank God she keeps going instead
of stopping to make smart remarks. Daryan's retort follows them: "Kids know all the words, dumbass, and if they don't - they should."

Klavier's raised voice is audible in the hallway, and when Trucy barges in he's talking angrily to a member of the venue staff, complaining about the loss of the guitar and the loss of his dignity and the damage done to the Gavinners' reputation and is something like this going to happen at every single concert now. It sounds as stagey as his flirtatious greeting had sounded when he'd opened the door, but this person in a black polo shirt doesn't look the least bit skeptical. Put-upon and nervous, but not skeptical. He looks down at a huge document in very fine print that he's holding - the Sunshine's contract with the band, probably - and Klavier takes that opportunity to make eye contact as they hover near the door. With Trucy first (and she waves a tiny, hyperactive wave) and then with Apollo. He looks faintly quizzical, but only faintly.

And Apollo just points. At Polo Shirt, at Trucy, and at Klavier himself, and then firmly at the door. Everybody out of the pool. Shoo. I want to be alone.

He doesn't, actually. He wants to send Trucy to buy souvenirs and Polo Shirt somewhere just not here and to grab Klavier and tell him everything that's been going on and maybe Klavier will have a brilliant idea because I'm not doing such a fantastic fucking job on my own...

But that's not what happens. Klavier intimidates Polo Shirt out and charms Trucy out and gracefully, annoyingly, gives him the option of staying in the dressing room because he can't take the power of the rock that is about to ensue, and he's alone with an igniter and a pair of gloves and Plan A.

"What does Daryan's bag look like?"

"Forehead, you think - he carries...a purse?"

"Well, no, but -"

"Ach, don't frown. He has a...a tactical bag, the catalogues call it. His policeman purse. Navy blue."

"No one else's is blue, is it?"

"How...lucky for you, I notice colors. No."

The blue bag is there, and though he knows it's just a thing he's almost scared to touch it. For a second. Only for a second. Then he tugs the zipper open, and leans back with a grimace at the suggestion of locker-room air. Shoes, wallet, socks. Spare picks and strings. A heavy black flashlight, spare clothes...fine. He'd been hoping for a newspaper, but he's not about to introduce any more to the contents than he has to, and the socks will have to do. The wallet, he nudges to the other end of the bag. No point destroying the proof of ownership if he doesn't have to.

A flashbulb of adrenalin shifts his attention from the bag on the floor to the ceiling. Smoke detector. Yes. Good. He doesn't want to commit arson on top of everything...

Real arson anyway. Fuck Plum fuck Machi fuck Daryan fuck life fuck this...

His head still hurts, but he gets the igniter stuffed into the bottom of a sock and the bag zipped shut, removes one glove and stuffs it into the briefcase. He'll set the igniter off as he leaves. The staff aren't going to be casual about another pyrotechnic event, and he doesn't want to be in the path of whoever comes running when the alarm goes off. With his pulse pounding so hard he can hear
it, he holds his briefcase in his bare hand, has the gloved thumb of the other inside it, ready on the igniter button.

*Leave, push the trigger, find someone to be innocently sitting with when the cavalry shows up.*

He steps into the hall.

*Ormaybenotquiteinthatorder*

He's startled by a crunching sound behind him, and his thumb glances off the button as he jerks the glove loose and spins around to see Ema Skye.

*Klavier said she'd be here.*

She's supposed to be the one to arrest Machi, and she is, in her strange, prickly way, a kind of friend. But he's reminding himself of all of these things in between panicky heartbeats, heavy vascular thumps that are interfering with his vision and making his headache almost intolerable. Meanwhile, she's nibbling on those vending machine kitty treats and giving him a look that says she's unimpressed, as usual, and why even bother to expect better. She's got very eloquent eyebrows.

His feet aren't completely listening to him, either, but he manages to walk over to her in what he hopes is more than a zombie shuffle, and mumbles through a few perfunctory remarks that give her the opening she needs to start complaining about Klavier. In a distant way, he feels bad for her. Obviously she hates her job, obviously Klavier enjoys irritating her, and she's being used at the moment more than she knows...but he can't do much better by her himself right now. Instead, her litany of grievances is shrinking away to one of those old Charlie Brown cartoon wa-was, as he listens to her with one ear and waits, with the other, for the fire alarm.

So what if the sting doesn't happen quite the way Klavier and Lamiroir have planned. She'll connect the dots between the fires, the Borginian singer will appear and hand the brat over, he'll say *Hey, isn't that Daryan Crescend's bag...* He just needs the alarm to go off. *Burn,* you stupid sock. Keep talking, Ema. He hugs his briefcase, decides nonchalant might be better, lowers it to where it bumps against the side of his knee.

Then they both hear something.

Millisecond one. The first thing that registers about the noise is how loud it is, which is right. But his relief only lasts until he recognizes that it's the wrong sound.

Millisecond two. He thinks, in a complacent haze, *Oh. Machi's finally shot somebody.*

Millisecond three. His bracelet jumps with his own fear, and he holds in a lungful of air, because he's forgotten the words that would make it a prayer or a curse.

And he's back in the real world and Ema, who hasn't been expecting to hear anything but whining and amplified radio rock, is ahead of him. She calls out and then barges into Lamiroir's dressing room.

It's a mess in here; stuff is scattered across the armchair and the couch. A faint frigid breeze from the ventilation system is making the colored streamers hanging from the ceiling twitch irritably.

It smells like fruit, and coffee, and other things. There are bananas in the basket on the table, and a slice of watermelon going sticky on a china plate. A dinky Mr. Coffee on top of a minifridge by the door. There must be flowers in here, big syrupy lilies - something...
There's a loud hum from the refrigerator, a softer one from the fluorescent lights. The muffled, distorted roars of the concert are making their way in, too. And on top of it all, Ema is saying something and his head hurts and he wishes she'd stop.

The air in the room is three sizes too tight. He's standing there trying to breathe it. Someone else is dying.
Chapter 31

He'd had trouble picturing a dead Daryan lying on the bathroom floor, but now he has all the detail he'll ever need, looking at Romein LeTouse sprawled on the thin carpet and breathing in wet, uneven sighs that jerk at the ends. It's not going to matter how much he tries to pay attention to the fruit, or the fluorescent bulbs, or anything else.

The brat didn't even shoot the right person.

Or let's try that again. The brat shot someone who started off this evening having nothing to do with Daryan, or Plum's gun, or Apollo's problem.

He's starting to hear Plum's calm, calm voice in his head. Mr. Justice.

Mr. Justice, I provided you with a weapon on the assumption that - should it come into play - it would be you using it, ah...as a response to your sweetheart's wicked boyfriend. But now you've lost it and it's been used by someone else to shoot someone else entirely...Mr. Justice, you ought to see your face right now.

Back up. He's still in the dressing room, standing and staring uselessly at the green carpet and all of the stuff in here and the big man lying there like a sawed-down tree, and Ema is saying something that sounds like back up.

His words come out before he thinks about them, fast and shaky: "Ema, do you really think he can get back up? He -"

She cuts him off with a look.

"Watch this room for me. I have to call for backup!"

That makes more sense. He swallows, nods and inhales. She goes. He hears the slam of the dressing room door, and then the secondary bang of the stage door. She's ducked outside.

LeTouse's thick, interrupted sighs continue. And Apollo has the uncertain, Jiminy Cricket idea that he should be...comforting the man, or something.

Would this make me feel comforted, if I'd been shot?

Maybe it's not the right word.

Maybe it's something that you just have to do because otherwise you're standing there and watching someone die, and good people don't do that.

Either way, he goes over to LeTouse's side, slowly, like the floor is moving under him, and kneels down. As he does, the sighing stops, and he freezes. Then there's a groan. Worse than a groan. The man's struggling to clear his throat. Another pause.

"Shot."

There are a lot of things he could say back, or there should be, but all he can think of is to ask a
question he already knows the answer to. Even if it's a waste. "Who? Who shot you?"

It's not like his conversation in the hospital with Klavier. He remembers that very well. This one, he's forgetting the words of almost as soon as he hears them, clinging to the import but letting the - the gory details, he's never going to use that phrase again - come and go without making a solid impression, or at least he hopes -

*Please, the hole in his back, the sounds. I don't want to remember this.*

- Le Touse was shot.
-- He doesn't know who.
--- But he thinks there was a witness.

It's a good tidy little list, it's fine.

- He says the witness was the siren.

*What...no. How could the fire alarm be...and why hasn't it gone off, did I not -*

He jerks his head up, following some stupid instinct like he'll find the sound if he looks for it, and is distractedly glancing at the ceiling, which probably isn't very comforting at all, when...

His first thought, once he looks back down at the body and understands what he's seeing, is that he hadn't even considered the possibility that the man could have survived, and maybe he should have. Maybe he should have considered that and done something more helpful because it's too late now.

The first lie he tells Ema Skye, when she returns: *He wrote something down.*

---

Apollo doesn't know how much time he loses, staring at LeTouse, his knees starting to bruise on the concrete under the carpet.

*I - sort of killed you.*

That's an inadequate little sentence, isn't it. What's wrong with him? He's not reacting enough. Or he's reacting too much...

Klavier is on stage with Daryan right now. There's a reason he's doing this. He can feel as bad as he needs to later. And Klavier's been in this situation too, right? He didn't fall apart halfway through. What would Klavier say?

*I am sorry for your death, Monsieur LeTouse, but you must forgive me making the best of it. My beloved can live because of it.* Something like that.

All right. He looks down at the giant, presses his lips together, and thinks hard. *I'm sorry. I never meant for this to happen and you don't even know who I am. But if I can...if I can use your death to keep the person I love alive, I'm going to do that. I hope you understand.* There's no response but the hum of the lights. And he puts Plum's gloves back on.

The gun lying on the floor is fucking artillery compared to the one Machi stole. That one was tiny,
the sort of thing you'd hide in a handbag, and no way she gave him that just because it was easy to hide. *She probably figured I'd hurt myself with the recoil on something like this.*

*I probably would.*

*So would Machi...*

Fuck, fuck, how long is it going to take Ema to call? The stage door is locked, she'll have to get someone to let her in or go all the way around, and there'll be no explaining this if she comes in at the wrong moment, but oh my **God**, please, **fuck**.

Exploding to his feet, he scans the floor below the two holes in the wall (that may not have been much of a gun but the ammo, on the other hand - probably not especially legal) and finds a couple of misshapen bits of metal, pockets them. Darts back over past LeTouse, where Machi must have been, stares hard until he sees them. Casings, one...two. Pockets those.

LeTouse's gun is as heavy as it looks. He's breathing with his mouth open.

*Oh, fuck, I'm sorry.* He focuses his vision again, leans back against the wall, and takes aim at the wet patch on the back of the man's coat. But the gun doesn't go off.

It's the safety, **shit**, the safety must still be on. He fumbles around for it, trying to remember cop shows, finds it. Takes another deep breath, and focuses on the barrel, the angle, the body, really looks.

He's used to doing this to living people, watching for movements. This is - this is weird. But he needs it to work, so it **will**.

There's a thunderous crescendo of drumming from the concert through the wall, and he stops thinking and fires.

His shoulders are wrenched in their sockets and the hole in LeTouse's jacket is bigger.

Yet there's barely time to feel relieved that his aim was good before he has another flash of logic, if anything worse than the last. Bullets. If Machi missed once and hit once and both hit the wall, there need to be two.

The drum solo is still going. He shifts his stare from the body to the pockmarks by the door and squeezes the trigger again, is rewarded with the same perfect geometry which frightens him a little - but that's for later with the guilt and the headache and...

That leaves two casings by this wall, one bullet by the far one, and the other. Squeamishness is going to have to wait too.

He'd thought the fucking **gun** was heavy. LeTouse is a sequoia. But he's jacked up enough on nerves to roll the body onto its side, and the little plug of metal is there, half flattened into the floor.

*Better than having to feel for it,* he thinks, and gags. But it's bloody, and he can't leave finger marks on it, gloves or no gloves...

There are styrofoam cups next to Mr. Coffee. He grabs one, kind of scoops the bullet up with the
edge, carries it across the room, drops it next to the door.

LeTouse's body is more or less in the same position it was in before, and he figures close enough is good enough since Ema left while he was alive, but his arms are a little too far from the streaky smears his fingers left on the carpet. Which almost look like -

"Klavier, why do I need to memorize this?"

"Because, you might...need it. Here - I'll...write you a song."

"You're setting it to music?"

"That way, you will...never forget."

Like writing. A moment later and he's holding one of LeTouse's inert hands by the wrist and the index finger while a sequence of notes like a commercial jingle play over and over between his ears.

IPXX, tracing the number in sticky, drying red, 314, dum-de-dum, into the fibers of the rug. 206.

And his saliva's turned sour and his throat is seizing up, but it solves his last sudden realization, that there'd better be some way to prove LeTouse is Interpol other than Klavier admitting it was a sting, and he has no clue how deep this cover was.

It's not very legible, because the blood was already drying. But Ema will get to play with luminol, which should make her happy.

Ema could be back here any second. He uses the last of his burst of adrenalin to rearrange LeTouse's arms, scuffing a sleeve across the letters in the process, and to nudge the gun back into the right place. Squashes the gloves into his bag inside-out. Then all that's left is a slightly bloody coffee cup, and he goes over to the door one more time.

---

The second lie he tells Ema: I didn't touch anything...no, wait. I'm sorry, I did. I got myself coffee while I was waiting, after he...the machine's in there, it's on top of the fridge. I...I don't think I actually want it though.

Ema shelves her grouchy attitude long enough to pat him sympathetically on the shoulder and say, that's okay.

And he drops the mostly full cup into a wastebasket.

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The third lie he tells Ema Skye: No. Nobody else came in.
Chapter 32

When the door swings open, he's expecting Ema. Ema coming back is all right, it's fine, it's part of the plan even if she's not on his side. The frantic, hyper-observant fear is boiling out of his system, and he feels weirdly still, like he's as ready as he'll get. Maybe that's exhaustion talking, but he'll take that over panic.

So when it's someone else, the first thing he feels is cheated.

He knows something's up before he even sees her, actually, because of the way the door opens. Ema bangs through them, but this time it's swinging slowly, and the hinges give a quizzical upwards yawn instead of a sharp shriek.

It's Lamiroir.

Well, this is her dressing room.

She navigates reasonably well, though not very quickly, taking graceful little steps and occasionally reaching out to touch the furniture.

If he stays quiet and out of her reach, she won't know he's here. Of course, he should just speak up and tell her to get out, this is a crime scene, but something tells him that if she's here without Machi, she already knows. And she's bound to end up a witness, and he wants to know what she's thinking.

And what she's carrying, under that fluttery blue wrap. She's holding her left arm funny, like she's pressing something against her side with her elbow. She glides closer, until she's within maybe two feet of LeTouse's body, and then stops and gathers up her long white skirts.

Blood would show for miles on that dress. She definitely knows. And what the hell are those things on her feet? They're way, way too big, they look like heavy black clown shoes on her, and there are rhinestones on them.

Oh, the bitch.

---

"You're all here for a little laying down the law, ja, a little...discipline?"

Three songs into the first set, Klavier had darted into the wings for a quick change while the keyboardist entertained the crowd with a story about rescuing the band's gear from the rain in Seattle, and he'd come back wearing a jaw-droppingly tacky version of a policeman's uniform. The starched shirt was open over a black muscle tank (while it was on at all, which wasn't long - Apollo had spent most of that song staring at Klavier's gorgeous shoulders) and there was this fucking vinyl hat, and tight uniform slacks with rhinestones down the outer seams of the legs. And this pair of black policeman's brogues with more little fake gems on them, that had sparkled in the whirling red and blue lights.

Hold out your wrists
Nobody ever resists
"Don't you dare do that."

Lamiroir jumps at the sound in the still room, but when Apollo waits for some response from her other than a flinch, he doesn't get one. So he says it again. "Don't you dare do that."

Of course, she's good with voices, and she recognizes his. "Mr. Justice? Why are you here?"

_You know what? Everyone who calls me Mr. Justice patronizes me._

"I'm here stopping you. From pinning this on Prosecutor Gavin." She gasps softly and lets go of the white fabric so her hem covers the shoes again, but of course it's too little too late. "What were you going to do? Walk through your manager's blood and leave a trail of footprints? I saw a comic strip like that once." Since Kristoph's arrest, he hasn't gotten as much practice at not saying that kind of thing out loud.

"I...I cannot."

"Cannot what?"

There's an irrational edge to her tone, and the bracelet vibrates to match. "I...do not get in my way, Mr. Justice. You have no idea."

"I have plenty of idea. Machi is smuggling those cocoon things, and you talked Klavier into agreeing to get him arrested by the LAPD instead of Interpol so Borginia wouldn't execute him. Except now, the brat's killed someone himself and you're having second thoughts. And not the right kind of second thoughts. Take those stupid shoes off and give them to me or I'll take your picture and tell Detective Skye you intruded on her crime scene and refused to leave."

He doesn't have a camera, but she can't know that. She yanks her wrap tighter around herself, the choppiness of the gesture betraying the emotion that doesn't quite make it into her lovely voice.

"You are a little boy. Just pretending to be an adult." He remembers after an instant that she doesn't know what he looks like, but that doesn't make him any less angry. Maybe more. "A good citizen. Doing the right thing for its own abstract sake. But those feelings are nothing against love for a - an actual person. Machi - is like my son." She takes a deep breath. "Get out of here, Mr. Justice, or you don't know what I'll-"

He cuts her off. "What you'll do, when the only person you love is threatened, and you can't trust anyone else to help them, or you? You're right." The band around his wrist actually loosens, but he keeps going. "People do get more dangerous then. So take off those shoes and stop trying to bite the hand that feeds you. Right now." There's a hum from the fluorescent lights.

Then her arms twitch under the shawl again, and she takes a step back out of the brogues, so she's barefoot. But since she doesn't make any move to hand them over, he sidles in a wide semicircle around LeTouse's body and stoops to pick them up himself. He gets the disconcerting feeling she's doing whatever her version of staring is.

"You are defending Klavier." For some reason he doesn't like hearing her say the name. "But that does not tell me why you are here."
He hears his voice get louder and feels his face flush. "Well, maybe if I didn't know what you'd come in here to do, I'd sit here like an idiot and talk about myself. But he thinks you're his friend and you're pretty obviously not. So right now your thinking I'll answer you is bizarre, except to say that the detective is going to be back any second. And she expects me to be here, but I don't think she's going to be too impressed with your saintly routine." He sits back on his heels and tries to stuff the shoes into his bag. They don't fit. Fuck.

Her dress rustles as she steps uncomfortably close again, and she sounds - what. Sad? "I imagine there is nothing I could say that would influence you."

"I imagine I'd be about as willing to listen to you as you would be to hand Machi over to the man with the black hood and the chopping block." He doesn't even look up at her. Instead he's scanning the room, wondering where the brogues might fit that Ema won't pay attention to them until he can tell Klavier to get them himself. Makeup drawers? Fridge?

She may not like him, but he's the prosecutor. She's not going to think he ran backstage and murdered another police officer. Probably.

He has the funny feeling that he's just blown past something requiring further attention there, but he doesn't go back to it right away. Because, after all, Lamiroir has just grabbed his shirt collar, and there's a pair of flat little noises as she drops her own shoes from under that same arm. Come on, fire alarm. Hurry up, Ema. This evening already has enough crazy in it.

Lamiroir feels around for her slippers with long feet, one at a time, and slides them on as she responds. "We seem more alike than I realized, Mr. Justice. And I like Klavier very much. But it was his guitar." She draws one more thing out from her shawl with the hand that's not holding him.

He's getting another look at Plum's gift now.

She's startled when he laughs at her.
He can feel his shoulders shaking, he can feel himself grinning, and he knows it isn't the brightest thing he's ever managed to do. If he dies because he just had to laugh at the person pointing a gun at him, he's going to be disgusted with himself for all eternity. Or for a couple of seconds. Whichever it turns out to be.

If he dies, Klavier will -

Um, all right. Not funny.

The singer isn't laughing, either, and she tightens her hold on his collar and his tie. He's up on his knees. "If your amusement has to do with my inability to see you, you ought to know that at this distance it will make very little difference. And I can hear you extremely well."

He becomes aware, again, of the shoes dangling from his crooked fingers, and reaches out, very slowly, to put them down. He's not even sure there is a sound, maybe the faintest bump of a heel touching the floor, and with the carpet to muffle it. But it's enough for her, and he finds his nose suddenly that much closer to the weapon she's holding.

"Don't do anything clever." And even though he tries not to, he laughs again. *Too late, your majesty. Sorry. And you sound like Plum Kitaki.* He's so tired and his nerves are so overworked and this is just so dumb. Here he is, clearing the brat of another capital charge, except that the brat's mother bear is going to shoot him first. But then he feels her arm tense up and he knows what that means. And he blurts the first thing he can think of to say. "Stop and I'll save him."

Her arm relaxes again, a little. But he's not out of the woods yet. "Machi?" It sounds like a test.

"I - yes. Klavier too. But yeah."

"From everything?"

He could say yes. Yes to all of it, the brat goes scot-free, you'll be back singing before the crowned heads of Europe in no time, Interpol or no Interpol.

If he says that, she'll either know right away or soon enough that it's more than he can promise. And she'll shoot him now or ruin everything later. Honesty doesn't seem like much to go on at the moment, but it's all he has.

"No. Not everything. I can't make the smuggling charges go away. Neither can you. If Interpol isn't satisfied it'll only get worse."

She doesn't reply at first, just twitches her hand in a way that his bracelet echoes, and his imagination takes off into a film noir from there.

*Sound clip: "That isn't good enough, Mr. Justice." Click, bang.*

*Visual: Me lying there with Mr. LeTouse. Hey, buddy. Camera spiraling to the ceiling.*

*Wordless sequence, black and white: Ema finding me. Ema telling Trucy, gently. Ema telling Klavier, not so gently.*

*One of the following:*
Klavier, pills and liquor.
Klavier, motorcycle accident.
Klavier, LeTouse's gun.
Klavier, picking a fight with Daryan.

We filmed all four, we'll see what the test audiences go for.

I'll be leaving him worse off than he started, I fucking can't -

"Very well. Explain it."

Not being dead is a shock for a second. He has to breathe hard to answer.

"Fine. That thing you're holding? That's not the murder weapon anymore. Different gun, different killer. I just - I just need you to do two things."

"And those would be?"

"Machi's still going to be the initial suspect. Don't let him hire anyone as his defense but me."

"And the other?"

"I know you were in the vents for your magic trick. So you need to tell people what you heard in here."

"I heard nothing."

"You heard Daryan Crescend."

They both fall silent as she thinks furiously, and so they both hear the music that has been reverberating through the walls come to a sudden stop. His eyes widen, and so do hers. "On that basis, perhaps we can cooperate. So long as your plan accounts for shots being heard in this room while Mr. Crescend was performing?"

Fuck, fuck, fuck, I knew I forgot something –

Before he gives himself a chance to think about what he's doing, he grabs her arm and drags her into the hall and towards the other dressing room. "Where did you leave the - leave him?"

"Almost?"

"Don't shoot anyone."

Door, gloves, shoes, bag, igniter.

By the time the door closes, he's all the way across the room and tugging the gloves from his briefcase, and the damn shoes are over by the mannequin where he's thrown them. He smells sweat and hair spray and cologne, but not smoke, and his knees are stinging where he's given himself rug burns.

He would have waited forever for the igniter to do its job.
Ema'd startled him too badly, and that glancing blow on the button hadn't been enough to fire it. Or it just doesn't work. The sock isn't even singed. Panting, he pulls the device out, stuffs the sock back and yanks the zip shut again, and stumbles as he bolts back out the door. It's been maybe a minute, and the displeased noises from the audience are getting louder.

Lamiroir hisses between her teeth when he grabs her arm again and pulls in the other direction, just as hard. Once she realizes that they've passed her dressing room, she drags her feet and tries to stop, but he shakes his head. Which of course she can't see, so then he says "Not yet."

They're in front of the stage door. "Now give me the gun, and let me back in when I knock." She hesitates, and the squawk of a bullhorn echoes down the hall. "Now."

"Go then." The metal is pressed into his still-gloved hand, and he clutches his bag against his chest so that neither the gloves nor the gun will be too immediately visible, if he's spotted. The door clicks shut behind him.

The night smells like gasoline and wet grass, and his eyes don't want to adjust. Darkness is just the absence of light. One of his foster dads had said that, trying to logic a six-year-old out of elemental terror. Don't look at it, kiddo, look through it.

He's hovering on the concrete stoop; his original thought had been a storm drain, but the coliseum is in the middle of a park and there isn't one in sight.

His second thought is a dumpster, except what he sees first is a duck pond, and that'll work. He bursts into yet another sprint, stopping when he gets close enough to the edge that the ground is slippery. No good beating Ema back if she shows up and he's covered in duck slime.

The gun disappears into the water with a heavy plonk when he throws it. It's almost like making a wish.

But he's out here primarily to get something, not to throw something away, and by now his vision has sharpened enough for him to be able to make out the bits of trash on the ground. Staring at them makes him feel like a lunatic, but he needs - straws, bottlecaps, crumpled-up napkins, and - there, what he'd seen before. Shreds of paper, ragged and smeared with soot.

He stuffs his pocket with the remains of a few patriotic firecrackers and runs back. When he raps his knuckles on the door, not too loudly, Lamiroir lets him in. He'd known she might not, but there had been no time to plan anything else. Once this is over he knows he'll spend hours in knots over what went wrong, what could have gone wrong.

But for now he's brushing past the flutters of her gown, letting himself back into the dressing room as the first brusque voices start at the other end of the hallway, shoving the igniter and the leftover bits of firecracker under the couch, packing up his gloves, reaching for the awful cup of coffee.

And shortly thereafter he's lying to Ema.

He wrote something down. I didn't touch anything. Nobody else came in. I didn't leave the room.

Maybe she believes him. Maybe she just knows she should never have left him alone here, and she has a stake in not questioning him.

Either way, she writes it down.
Chapter 34

When the sound of police sirens filters into the Sunshine and uniformed officers appear at the entrances, the audience takes it for part of the show. They start twisting around in their seats, waiting for the new backup dancers to do something besides stand there and look cool. But Klavier knows that this is not part of the concert as they rehearsed it, and he gets a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach. He can't meet Daryan's gaze from where he's standing at the moment, but he sees the keyboardist and the drummer both glancing out over the house in concern.

A crowd of people this size can't be allowed to panic. They keep playing.

They're through the second verse and almost to the bridge when there's movement in his peripheral vision and he flicks his eyes sideways to see another officer standing in the wings. Even his dark and functional uniform looks flashy, next to the black the techs are wearing.

Lamiroir had been supposed to signal him between songs, for Machi's arrest. But that would only have involved Ema, maybe an additional squad car. Even with the complication of the fire, something isn't right.

The show must go on.

But it doesn't need me. Ask Daryan.

He takes advantage of a dramatic light cue to dart offstage, and a second after that, he hears the drums and the keyboard crash into an enormous (and as far as he can tell, improvised) instrumental riff on the original bridge. The part of his mind responsible for blithe irrelevance thinks, not bad, we should let them record that.

The rest of his mind is reminding him, as he covers the distance to where the officer and the stage manager are talking and he feels the surface of the stage resonate beneath his boots, to not say Is this about the cocoon, because he's not so stupid as all that.

He has his law enforcement face on by the time he reaches them, and the stage manager instantly steps back. He addresses the other. "Exactly what is happening here?"

"Prosecutor." The officer barely blinks at what Klavier is wearing before addressing him correctly, which is a point for him. "We received a call from Detective Ema Skye, who reports that she was backstage. She's come back in through the loading dock with the EMTs."

"EMTs." It amazes him how businesslike he sounds.

"Yes. She reports that a man has been shot in a visiting artist's dressing room -"

After that, the decision-making happens far too fast for words, is purely chemical. And the only things that save Daryan's life at that moment are the thousands of eyes watching him onstage as he plays, because Klavier knows what's happened.

If this is going to be a fight, princess, you know who wins.

There's no one else here who carries a firearm and who would have any motive to shoot a man backstage, and he knows, at that moment, that Apollo is badly hurt or worse.

He shoves between the two people in front of him and runs.
I'll be a whole different kind of ambulance-chasing lawyer -

Hospitalized thanks to Daryan at a concert, oh my, we have got to stop meeting like this -

He's dead.

He was supposed to stay safe. Why is my life so full of psychopaths?

My life is not the point, I would not think that unless I were a monster -

He's dead.

He dodges people and equipment in the darkness backstage, brushing through or bruising himself sideways off what he knows he can't damage, until he plows straight at a hanging curtain that shouldn't have anything behind it. Instead there's resistance and a sound like someone punching a mattress, and he's going purely on instinct when he reaches out and seizes the wrist of the fleeing figure in childish lacy white.

For a few seconds, Machi flails like the kid he is, but then he gets slightly smarter and tries to stomp on Klavier's foot. It's a Mary Jane versus a motorcycle boot and doesn't accomplish a thing. Klavier tightens his grip, feels the bones of the pianist's wrist, and says in Borginian, |stop that|.

There's a gasp. "Persecutor Gavin!" At some impossibly distant time and place, he would find that funny. But right now he can't imagine himself laughing ever again.

"Where were you going? You should be with Lamiroir.|"

The boy just stares up at him with those laser-blue eyes, his sunglasses practically falling off his nose, and Klavier curses and lets go of him. He barely makes it another step away before Machi grabs his arm.

|You can protect me - |

"I don't want to protect you anymore.|" Borginian is a good language for sounding harsh in. He's pushing for the dressing rooms again, struggling to keep his balance as Machi clings like a limpet.

|I can tell you about the shooting.|"

A jolt of something sicker and darker than adrenalin goes through him. "|You saw it?|" Machi doesn't answer, but it's clear that he knows something. "|Let go of me and talk to me later. I have to see him.|"

They're coming from the dark of backstage towards the brightly lit hall, and so the shadows on Machi's face are scalded into his memory when the boy answers him, prompt and callous.

|You don't need to go so fast, he's dead.|"

Sometimes lingering hope is only made perceptible by its loss.

Klavier staggers and inhales, and doesn't realize that he's closed his eyes. Machi takes over and steers them both into the restroom.

When the prosecutor risks opening his eyelids again, the initial turquoise blur resolves into dirty tiles and walls covered in that bumpy paint he associates with public schools. The boy in lace is leaning against the door, while he's got his own trembling hands on the edges of one of the sinks.
The water is on, running cold and uninterrupted into the drain, and he stares at it.

"You listen, I will explain."

He thinks he has words to reply with, but all that comes out is a groan. His head fills with images. Apollo, small and ruined and carried away in the ME's truck.

Daryan, destroyed, in the styles of every murder that he's heard of at the Prosecutor's Office.

Why am I still listening to Machi?

"You barely knew him, to care so much? Are you paying attention?!"

A few months. Two nights. Scattered minutes, it was enough!

"...but I can tell you who killed him -!"

"I already know, exactly, who killed him -!"

That is the moment when strange things, even stranger things, start happening. Machi's diplomatic facade fades and he looks terrified again, more than he had been in the wings, somehow.

And Ema Skye's voice, carrying down the hall and over the noise of the sink. "Okay, that's it for now. Get lost, before I think of something else."

And the voice answering her. "Okay. Thanks. Or not thanks, but -"

He shoves Machi out of the way and doesn't even look back.

---

The concert has come to a halt, and Apollo's expecting Trucy to appear in front of him in the hall after Ema releases him. Instead he hears the creak of the bathroom door and watches in bewilderment a second later as Klavier races toward him, chest heaving and looking like he's seeing a miracle. And in even greater bewilderment when the rocker's apparently shaky legs go out from under him and he lands in a heap on the floor at Apollo's feet.

There are several better reasons that he never considered becoming a doctor instead of a lawyer, but General Lack of Tact is still high on the list. This looks like the sort of moment in which he should ask something like are you all right?, but what he says, if gently, is "Get up. You look silly."

Klavier just looks up at him with enormous, overwrought blue eyes, like he's forgotten how to operate his limbs, so Apollo reaches down, takes hold of his upper arms, and hauls him to his feet. Which sort of works, insofar as it gets the blond mostly upright again, except that he grabs Apollo to steady himself on his way up and then doesn't let go.

The brunet speaks very softly and distinctly. "Klavier, we're not in private. People will see this."

"Mmmf!" Klavier makes an inarticulate, intense noise and hugs him so hard that the air is squeezed out of his lungs and his heels are lifted off the floor.

He starts to say, Tell me what happened, and actually says "Put me down, you big dork, what are you doing?"

The blond chuckles like it's a funnier remark than it really was, and untangles himself and steps
backward, but he's still got something sober and overwhelmed in his expression, and he's still staring. "Apollo." It's soft, almost a question.

"Yeah." That is, too, because the word hitches in his throat.

"They told me a man had been shot and killed backstage. I - I thought it was Daryan, I thought it was you -"

This time, he's the one who hugs Klavier, even harder, and he almost doesn't care if anyone sees because if they do he can say he's upset from what happened in the dressing room, it's even true. And he doesn't want to see that look in Klavier's eyes anymore, it'll turn him inside out. "Yeah, no. It's LeTouse...It was LeTouse."

Klavier's first response is confusion. "Daryan shot LeTouse?"

They've drawn far enough apart for it to look like a normal conversation at this point. Apollo doesn't answer, tilts his head, feels one corner of his mouth quirk into something smaller than a smile, looks up at his prosecutorial counterpart steadily.

A few seconds later, Klavier leans back and breathes in like he's inhaling the idea. The exhalation has the beginning of a laugh in it. "Okay with me."

They each have the same impulse at that moment and it results in an odd little gesture, not quite a handshake or a brush of the fingers or a bump of knuckles.

Then Ema's voice is heard as the dressing room door opens again, and Trucy scurries up from the other direction. The girl in the cape looks, well, thrilled. "Polly! Guess who I met! I met Daryan Crescend, and you missed it!"

"Ach, that we can remedy," says Klavier.
No one says anything back to him, and a couple of seconds go by, and it's almost friendly, standing in the hall.

Then Klavier drops something heavy into his pocket, surreptitiously while Trucy is spinning around to watch the dressing room door, and right away he thinks of the misshapen lumps of metal in his **other** pocket, that he's lucky that whatever *(oh God)* might be on Machi's bullets won't contaminate whatever Klavier has just given him. He should have thrown those into the duck pond, too, but he didn't remember and he can't do it now, with Trucy hovering.

A touch tells him it's a keyring, not round - some kind of shape that comes to a point. He combs through the keys with his fingers, careful not to jingle them, trying to work it out. Klavier trusts him to understand this, and he - he trusts Klavier's trust, *like that doesn't doesn't sound dumb.*

If this were a real crime -

It is.

*If Daryan were really guilty of this, Klavier would be wanting me to, um, unlock stuff with these. And look around. But I can't investigate something that didn't happen.*

And...I'm not supposed to get rid of them, am I? He has more authority to go wherever he wants than I do right now, he doesn't need me if he just wants to trash stuff.

*So I'm not supposed to lose them -*

"Oi."

A chill runs up his spine.

His blank gaze has been directed at the floor while he thinks, but the new voice shifts his attention, and what he sees that he's seeing are the fucking shark boots.

Daryan knows these keys, if they're Klavier's.

Then he gets it.

- **I'm supposed to find them.**

"The venue's locked down. We took names and addresses before letting the crowd go."

Daryan doesn't sound like a smug rock star right now, or a predator. He sounds like a plain old responsible adult, and it amazes Apollo that he can do that, sound so calm when everyone in the little knot of people he's interrupted is, well - not feeling calm about **him**. There's Trucy's fangirl adoration, fizzing like soda behind her wide eyes and her hands balled up together under her chin. His own taut, wriggling loathing, and **yes** fear, since he's so close to the man and so close to the falling dominos. And whatever Klavier is feeling.

The twist of jealousy in his gut surprises him, and he feels guilty immediately, guilty and
thoughtless and rough. He knows better, he knows the situation for what it is, is one of the very few people who do.

He needs to focus on what he's doing. That, in the end, will get Daryan away. And if he tells Klavier he felt jealous, Klavier will just laugh and stroke the back of his head and say something like you showed him, ja?

He rubs his thumb over the keyring some more, pressing hard against it as a stress response, and realizes it's in the shape of a heart.

There's a kind of placeholder feeling that comes when your emotions gave been used up on other things and you know you should be reacting but you can't, not yet. Later. This is that.

And Daryan turns away and Ema comes up, and she and Klavier snipe at one another, and he's given something to sign that means he can look around without getting in trouble with the police at least right away, and his head reminds him that it still aches.

Once he finally gets back home, such as it is, to the half-emptied supply closet at the Agency and the IKEA folding bed in it, he almost can laugh, because that moment was barely the beginning of a long night.

---

It's dark. Apollo wakes up suddenly, legs tangling in the covers, and his first half-formed thought is that it's because he's heard some kind of sound, so he strains his ears listening for it to come back.

But there's nothing, not even the noises of feet on the floor, and neither his boss nor Trucy could wake up quietly if their lives depended on it. If there was a sound, he was the only one to hear it. The red digits of the old clock radio say 3:06. It's not a sight he's familiar with.

Growing up being bounced from place to place to place, most of them not great, means he can usually sleep like a cat, anywhere and anywhen - it was learn to do that or never sleep at all. He'd even managed to fall asleep in the hotel room on Hot Tea and Ice Cream Night, and that should have been impossible. So he tells himself to cope and rolls over, pulling the bedding over his head.

At 4:14 he finds himself alert and looking right at the clock radio again. There's a weird light splayed across the ceiling, too, not just the barely-there red of the numbers, and his heart pounds as he turns toward the dirty window with its jammed venetian blinds. (Phoenix had tried to argue that the presence of the window meant that it was a room and not a closet. The fact that he'd been making this argument from the other side of the doorway because the folding bed took up all of the floor space not occupied by shelving had gotten him outvoted two-to-one.)

The light is from the headlights of a box truck in the alley, backed up to the rear door of one of the businesses on the other side of the block. It's the sandwich shop, and that's a delivery truck; he can stop having a heart attack, this must happen every morning and he's just not usually awake for it.

The closet-room had felt foreign two months ago, as sullen as any new room in someone else's house feels, but he's accustomed to it now. It's his fucking file storage mousehole and to be honest he likes it in a way. It's cozy and it gives him the illusion of simplicity. But now this unfamiliar light is limning the edges of the old folders in the lidless boxes and throwing bars of shadow over the top half of the door, making the room strange, and his sense of belonging in this place pulls away from the walls and the shelves and back into his skin, and his heart starts pounding faster.
than before.

I'm Apollo Justice, I'm a defense attorney, I'm broke, I live in Phoenix Wright's storage closet.

I'm a defense attorney and I have a client who's charged with murder.

I'm a criminal.

I'm a criminal, I live in Phoenix Wright's storage closet, I'm nobody, and I'm framing an officer of the law because his boyfriend kissed me.

He's ascending to a silent panic, and all he can think to do to stop it is throw the blanket over his head, curl up into a sideways ball, take in a deep breath and shiver it out.

The touch of the red comforter on his face is what calms him down. Klavier is real too, it says.

The blanket is his, actually his. The apartment Kristoph had so suddenly stopped paying for was a furnished one, and he'd never gotten around to decorating. But nowhere outside of student housing do you find twin extra-long mattresses, and so he'd spent part of one of his first Gavin Law Offices paychecks at a Bed Bath & Beyond.

He's spent bad nights under this comforter before, cocooned a lot of bruises and burns and fears in it. Klavier had put a stop to those. Klavier whose long golden hairs he'd found for a week, every time he pulled the edge of the blanket up or thrown it back.

In four days the bruises and burns will be gone from Klavier's life too, if he can keep it together. Four days isn't a long time.

If he calms down, he'll even be able to spend part of those four days asleep.

The third time he locks gazes with the clock, it's 5:59, there's sunlight coming in through the blinds, and he gives in. He reaches down under the bed to the floor, pats the soft-sided briefcase, and then walks on his knees to the foot of the bed and opens the door.

Trucy is sitting in the front room on one of the couches, not playing with any of her props, not watching television, not doing much of anything. Normally, she'd be bounding up to greet him or show him something, but she doesn't even look up. "Morning, Polly."

"Hey."

She has a blue velour bathrobe on over her pajamas, and she's stroking one end of the belt with her thumb and watching the plush go from bright to dull and back. Her voice is softer than usual, too - though that could be because Phoenix isn't up yet. "Hey. So...are you still, y'know...glad we went to the concert?"

He stifles a reply of You thought I was glad before? and says, lamely he thinks, "Yeah...I guess so. At least we're here to figure it out."

"Mm. You're right. It's good it's us." She sets her jaw for a second and her eyes flash. "But I had bad dreams. I don't blame you for feeling sick."

What is she - Oh. Right. After they'd come home late to the Agency, he'd sent her upstairs first and
sat down on the curb, incidentally letting her have the first go at explaining the whole evening to Daddy.

He doesn't tell her that he was actually putting Machi's bullets down the sewer grate. There doesn't seem to be a point, and anyway, she's gone into the kitchen and he can hear her messing with the box of Cocoa Krispies.
Sugary cereal seems to be enough to restore Trucy's spirits. Shortly after breakfast she's dressed and back at her standard decibel level, even though Phoenix hasn't made an appearance yet. And now that she's energized, she's indignant about Machi's arrest. Her expostulations on the subject go on as Apollo unlocks the door, brings in the paper, and pokes the power button on the ancient, wheezing computer. It's nowhere near such an involved process as it had been with Kristoph.

"I can't believe such a cute little boy could do something so horrible!"

"Maybe, I already use. You still want back?"

His stomach twists, and he considers sitting Trucy down for an instructive chat, but Phoenix has probably covered that ground and then some. And I can only tell Trucy stuff I'm supposed to know now. Not "Guess who shot Romein LeTouse," even if she is way too romantic for her own good.

And not guess who else shot Romein LeTouse, either.

He's closing the door that leads to the kitchen and the other private rooms - "the residence," as Phoenix jokingly calls it - when a pair of dry hands cover his eyes and Trucy giggles, her complaints interrupted.

"Mornin'." Even with a yawn in it, it's unmistakably Klavier's voice. He's come to officially state what everyone's already assumed: Machi Tobaye - or far more likely Lamiroir - has requested the services of one Apollo Justice, Esq., as defense attorney. Trucy's already eager to swoop to Machi's rescue, cape and all, and she tolerates only a minute or so of small talk before she clatters down the stairs.

She must be expecting them to follow, but they're left standing in the front room, and he can't think of anything better to do than look at Klavier. Klavier looks back and smiles a little and swallowing is suddenly a challenge.

The taller man is mindful of where he is and keeps his voice low as he leads the way out into the hall and closes the door. "Anything you think I should know, at this point in time?"

"Um. Yeah. Yes. You have to call Daryan. As a witness I mean."

The idea clearly makes Klavier apprehensive, and he draws his shoulders up so he looks even taller. "Herr Forehead, he will not like that. He hates being on the stand even when the circumstances are impersonal."

Don't imagine what happens to Klavier when Daryan has to do something he doesn't like. "I'm sorry. I didn't know that. But you have to, over the Interpol number or something. It can be minor. Lamiroir needs to hear his speaking voice."

There's a soft sigh of resignation. "Very well."

"And, about Lamiroir." A metallic noise from the bike rack outside filters up past the landing.

"What about her?"

"You're going to see her while we visit Machi, right? Be careful around her. She's in, but she's not happy about this, she... She thought she had a chance to get Machi completely clear." Blond
eyebrows approach blond hair.

"Did she?"

"She did. It was not acceptable." His throat closes up, and maybe Klavier notices.

Another, sadder sigh. "Would this have anything at all to do with why my shoes were not in their box after I certainly put them there?"

"Everything. Be careful with her."

It shouldn't be as seductive as it is when Klavier murmurs "I hear and obey."

"Yeah, please."

"Is there anything else?" Another clang; Trucy is not gentle with bicycles.

"That song you and she did. It's fucking terrible."

Klavier cracks up, grabbing the banister with both hands so as not to lose his balance. "You didn't find it romantic?"

"The music was fine, but who wrote the lyrics?"

"I did!"

"No, you didn't, you speak English."

"But I wasn't as good at it, when I was thirteen and scrawled them on the inside lid of my guitar case, thinking they were profound."

"And that's the case you took to Borginia?"

"Ja! One of them!"

"Lamiroir has a rotten sense of humor. Or bad taste."

"A little bit of both, yes." The laughter dims out of Klavier's tone. "And is there anything else about last night you need to tell me?"

"Like what?"

"Such as who shot the Interpol agent?" All of a sudden his heartbeat is so obvious in his ears. The bracelet is alert, too. But he answers just like he'd learned in law school, calm, targeted. "Machi Tobaye shot and killed Romein LeTouse."

There's a pause. Klavier has been to law school too, and he knows that the extra verb is important here. And Apollo wants to explain it all - wants to be sure Klavier will forgive him - but this isn't the place or the time.

Trucy picks that moment to swing back in through the downstairs door and yell at him to hurry up, Polly, and so the true story of the concert is the first conversation he doesn't have that day.

The second conversation he doesn't have is with Machi, who refuses to speak in anything but Borginian while they're at the detention center, and who gives Apollo peevish, frightened miniature looks from behind the sunglasses. The bracelet flicks every time. At some point the
shoe's got to drop for him that I'm not in the market for anything he's selling.

The third conversation fails to happen later, back in the Agency's neighborhood just as evening is falling. He's taking a last walk to collect his thoughts, and not paying a whole lot of attention to which block he's on, when he glances ahead and sees that he's in front of the Kitakis' gate. And it's open, and Plum is there sweeping the flagstones. He stops.

"I'll keep it neat."

"Will you."

She looks up when the sound of his footsteps ceases, leaving only the *skisk* of the broom. And she meets his gaze, but he turns on his heel before she can say anything, too fast for dignity, and races the sunset back home.

---

On the night before the trial, Klavier lies on the couch upstairs, the one in front of the big TV, and listens to the sound of cabinets slamming as he adds notes to the case files in purple ballpoint. Daryan is looking for a pint glass, or a coffee mug, or a plate, and despite the fact that they've all lived in this house for two years he can never remember what goes where. Whenever he's the least bit distracted, he ends up starting at one end of the kitchen and banging down the row, cursing, until he finds what he wants. It makes him look foolish and it makes him look volatile, and the rest of the band teases him about it. Klavier doesn't.

There's a pause, then a clink of glass and one more bang, then the rubber-sealed thump of the refrigerator closing. Not coffee, then.

The sane thing would be to stay up here with his folders and his notes, incidental as they really are to what's going to happen. He can say he's working. He is working. But always before, when they've been assigned to the same case, he and Daryan have had a conversation about it the night before. It'll be strange if he doesn't come down. And besides, he's practically memorized the meager information he's been given here.

He sits up, scattering pages in the process, collects them again, and stuffs them into his briefcase. Pauses a while to stare off into space. Then brushes a few strands of hair back where they go, and goes downstairs empty-handed.

Daryan has his pack of cigarettes on the coffee table and his glass of beer and his sagging monstrosity of a sandwich (Wonder Bread and ham and a week's worth of refrigerator odds and ends) on the floor next to the couch where he's flopped.

"Hey, princess. No dessert until your homework's done."

"I know my times tables by now." Klavier moves from the doorway where he's been hovering and climbs into the black leather armchair that matches the couch, sitting cross-legged in it. The chair isn't big enough for two people.

Daryan's indolent expression hardens to attention, and he sits up in a rain of breadcrumbs. "Wish we'd never held that concert. You and your Iron Curtain Borginistan charity tour."

"Daryan, remind me how it is that you work in International Affairs."

"Cause I speak so softly and I carry a big fuckin' stick. Your voice sounds a little rusty, you gonna be up to tomorrow?"
Of course my voice is hoarse, you gottverlassen cannibal. What with the singing yesterday and oh, the choking before that. "Always."

"Diva."

"It works for me."

The detective forces air through his nose with a dismissive sound that's not quite a snort. "This case."

"Is mine."

"The shrimp beat you before."

"Shrimp!"


Klavier tries to swallow and it turns into a coughing fit, at which Daryan smirks for the wrong reason. When he does recover his voice, there's a rough sting of acid in the back of his throat. "The Kitaki trial was different."

"They're all different. Different how?"

No ulterior motives on the part of counsel. "Different in that while the, ah, somewhat deluded defendant may have wanted to get himself convicted, he wasn't guilty."

"And Tobaye?" There's a glitter in Daryan's eyes, and oddly it makes him look more serious. Up until the concert he'd called the pianist an array of things up to and including "Thumbelina," but never used his name. He's not being professional; he's interested.

"Machi shot LeTouse, and killed him."

"You think?"

"I know."

"Can you prove it?"

"Of course, I can prove it. I won't, but I can."

"Motive?"

"Imported from Borginia in Machi's little brain, ja? Not our problem until he made it ours."

"Who's 'ours'?" The glitter again. Klavier's not sure he understands it, but he tries to defuse it anyway.

"Los Angeles. The United States of America. And lovers of good music everywhere."

A loud sigh seems to announce that he's succeeded. "Good to know you have your fuckin' priorities in order." The detective gets up from the couch, narrowly avoiding the glass and the plate, and scoops up the pack of cigarettes.

"Where are you going?"
"Smoke. Outside." Klavier watches the spot between Daryan's shoulder blades as the man starts to leave, and feels, to his concern, a sudden wave of pity, if not mercy.

Apollo will succeed, of this he has no doubt. And he does not forgive Daryan, never will. But I wonder if this is the last time you wear that shirt, and you do not know it. The last time you make one of your disgusting sandwiches. The last time you stand on the patio at night.

"Daryan. Thank you."

He's not out of the room yet, and he turns, eyebrows raised. "For what."

"You are smoking that outside for the sake of my voice, tomorrow?"

Daryan smirks again, and comes back over, walking behind the chair. "Wasn't about you, prima donna. You keep thinking you matter a fuckton more than really you do." And he reaches through Klavier's hair to trace around his neck, fingertips still cold from the pint glass.

The brief bubble of tenderness bursts and leaves bottled fury and nausea in its place. Klavier trembles with the effort of restraint, and Daryan takes it for fear, laughs once, and finally goes. It takes him a minute to regain enough of his composure to think in complete sentences, but when he does, he thinks, The prosecution is ready, your honor.
Sorry for the delay! Eventful week.

It's the night of the 9th, and the keyboardist is emptying the dishwasher with Klavier in an uncomfortable silence when Daryan gets back from the detention center. At the terrific slam of the front door, he bolts for upstairs, while Klavier stays where he is.

Daryan comes straight into the kitchen like he knows he's there, like some kind of bloodhound. He looks tired, rumpled, and completely pissed off, and he knocks everything else on the table to the floor when he flings his blue tactical bag onto it and it slides across the surface. "You put me on the stand, bitch! And look what fucking happened!"

"Daryan, I only asked you to verify the ID number, ja? It was the judge who called you back up." He forces himself to put the dishcloth he's holding down. It's not a security blanket.

"Like he'd have done it if you hadn't already! That blind bitch is insane, Gavin, I was onstage with your sparkly ass in front of, oh, five thousand fucking people! And still they fucking suspend me!"

"But hey. Let's put the blame where it belongs. You fucking suspended me, princess, that's what those mouthbreathing gargoyles guarding the venue said." Another step, and now there's no way out of the room that doesn't involve squeezing past him. "Want to explain that to me?"

Damn them. Did they have to tell him that? He holds up his hands, leans back against the counter. "I had no better option. You should have heard the phone calls from the press this afternoon. The reporters are having hysterics, all while the Chief Prosecutor is saying hurry, hush, we will do this quiet and fast. Since Lamiroir - I am sorry, Daryan, you are already a story. But if you remained on the case, you would be two stories and all of the same magazines would be tying up the phone lines again, saying 'tell us why.' 'Tell us why he is still permitted to have an official role,' 'tell us what went into this decision,' 'tell us about your history with Detective Crescend."

"And what would you tell them about that, bitch?"

"What have I ever told them." His voice sounds bitter, more than he expected, and so he ducks his head down a little and skates his feet forward on the linoleum, trying to counteract with his posture any challenge that might have come across in his tone.

"Yeah, you're fucking discreet at least. With a couple exceptions." Daryan realizes he's gotten sidetracked, and shakes his head, and they both let out long breaths, not quite in unison. When the detective starts up again, the flame is lower. "I absolutely did not shoot LeTouse, all right? I barely knew who he fucking was. And I have an alibi so solid that it's coming around the other side, but everybody's ignoring it. I should not be a suspect, Gavin. This is retarded. I didn't shoot him."

"Dar, I know you didn't."

It's been years since he's used that nickname.
It's not lost on Daryan, who grins incredulously. The expression looks off, with his filed teeth. "Fuck, I haven't been Dar to you since before you grew your hair out, Goldilocks. Are you being nice to me?"

"Maybe. Maybe I am."

He feels the edge of the counter against his back as he watches the impulses flick across Daryan's face like the numbers of a roulette wheel. It'll depend which one takes hold, whether he ends up bitten and bruised, or worse, or whether Daryan will want to practice, or drink, or storm out of the house.

But because he's so close to the end of this, because he has cards that Daryan can't dream of, he does what he's never done before and interrupts the silence with a suggestion of his own. "Get your wallet and get in the car, I'll take you to Alejandro's."

The dark-haired musician barks a disbelieving laugh, tilts his head to one side, and apparently decides the offer is serious. "Okay, babe. Sure."

There's a moment in the driveway where Klavier thinks Daryan might insist on driving, and it makes his nerves light up silvery below his skin, but the guitarist climbs into the passenger side of the nondescript black car. The scrapes from the wall behind Apollo's apartment still decorate the driver's side door.

Klavier belts himself in and checks the mirrors as Daryan pushes his seat back as far as it will go. Long legs he's got. The radio comes on when the ignition does, and Klavier is fine with letting Depeche Mode fill the gaps and shadows.

"It's always the eighties with you."

"Says the man who makes Prince references...and besides. Synthesizers are sexy."

"Slut." The air threatens to change at that, and so he gets the car moving, heading through the warm night towards Daryan's favorite place for burritos with too much cheese and sour cream.

"Daryan, tell me something."

There's no verbal response, but he hears the man shift in the seat, sees fingers tap a knee in his peripheral vision, and knows it's as much of a cue to continue as he'll get. He bites his lip and focuses on getting through the next intersection safely before he asks.

"Why didn't you ever just - break it off? If I am so hard to tolerate?"

He risks a glance to his right as they pass under a streetlamp. Daryan looks unsettled, in the orange sodium glow. "Good fucking question." With that, he reaches over an arm in a tight blue sleeve to turn up the eighties music he doesn't like, and slouches to look sideways out the window.

They drive the rest of the way to Alejandro's like that, and the next time the black-haired man speaks is when he's giving his order at the small sliding window. No one working there has ever given the slightest indication of recognizing them.

They eat in looming silence too, at the scratched table bolted to the sidewalk. The sounds of another radio come tinnily out of the window they'd ordered from, but Klavier's Spanish is pretty poor, and whatever the announcers are saying mostly registers as noise. Daryan's is better, but then, he grew up here. The guitarist is drinking Negra Modelo from a bottle with condensation running down the sides; Klavier has an almost-too-sweet horchata in a styrofoam cup.
They're two blocks back towards the house when the sudden words make him jump. "S'not about wanting you here. But **fuck** if I'll let you get **away**...get away with it."

He could ask **get away with what**, but by tomorrow night, the answer to that question will be different.

"Why you asking me this now, anyway? Feeling brave after you got my wings clipped?"

"I just thought you might answer." The calm of his response belies the fear leaping up his throat and tightening his grip on the wheel. He's grateful for the long washes of darkness between streetlights, on the residential roads. **You can't know, you can't know you can't possibly know.**

"Do yourself a big favor, sweetheart, and don't think anymore. Just nail that brat to the wall tomorrow, and we'll see."

A week later he'll find the receipt in his jacket pocket as he's leaving the Prosecutor's Office, looking for his sunglasses. Neither of them ever eat at Alejandro's again.

---

*I told him not to go home.*

Apollo wants to sleep, he needs to sleep, but again the night is punctuated with glimpses of the alarm clock. Lying in a sleeping pose to fool his body into it hasn't worked, and now he's flat on his back, limbs at weird angles as though he's fallen from several stories up.

On the pretext of having dropped his pen ("It's just a pen, Polly!" "Yeah, but I liked that one!") he'd jumped back into the elevator at the Prosecutor's Office that afternoon, leaving Trucy tapping her foot in the lobby, and shoved back through the door labelled *Gavin*. Klavier had been on the phone again already, and his tone held the heatless flirtatiousness which meant it was another reporter who'd called. His eyes had lit up a little at Apollo's reappearance, and he smilingly held up the plastic implement.

And Apollo had taken it, had reached across the desk for the nearest pad of paper and written on a blank page DON'T GO HOME.

DARYAN IS PISSED, underline.

HE WAS AT THE SUNSHINE - WE SAW HIM.

STAY SOMEWHERE underline SAFE.

And he'd turned the pad upside down and shoved it at Klavier, who'd read it, then fed the page into the discreet whirring shredder attached to the top of his wastepaper basket and covered Apollo's writing hand reassuringly with his own, all without hanging up.

So he'd left. And now it's the middle of the night and he can't get out from under the thought that a pat on the hand is not the same thing as a yes or a no.

*Please, Klavier, tell me you didn't go home.*

The last number on the clock blinks over from an eight to a nine, and it'll have to do that so many more times before the sun rises, before anyone will call if something's happened, before he can get dressed and go to court and do his job, before he can do everything wrong to make everything better. He reaches a hand down to the briefcase under the bed, scrabbles at a pocket for the pen,
lies there and twirls it in the dark.

In the morning he accidentally leaves it in the covers, and has to borrow another one from the bailiff.

---

Trucy is still aflutter over Machi, and she seems to feel that the best way to occupy the time before the trial starts would be to sit in the defendant's lobby and try to bolster his courage, even if he's still not responding to English. Apollo can't say he agrees, but he feels a little guilty as he leaves the two of them there and steps into the hall - at least until he considers his options and smirks. *Trucy left alone with a criminal, huh?*

*It really hasn't seemed to be a problem so far, Mr. Wright.*
Kristoph was right about one thing. He's not supposed to be wandering through the courthouse before the trial. All the lobbies exist for a reason, and the last thing he wants is to make anyone suspicious. But there's one acceptable destination, at least, and so when a quick glance around doesn't lead him to Klavier, he ducks into the men's restroom and waits. *Come find me.* He bites his lip, repeats the thought. *Come find me.*

It's simultaneously nervous and boring. He steps into one of the stalls when he hears unfamiliar voices outside the door, comes back out when they vanish. Twitches with his hair and his tie when he notices them in the mirror, then purposefully stops paying attention to his reflection for fear he'll look like a haystack at the bench if he can't stop messing with things. He waits.

And then he waits long enough. Before Klavier is even all the way through the door, Apollo's first, physical impression coalesces - that he's just sprayed himself with that cologne that he wears. It's a good smell, wicked-soft, but it's not especially appropriate for court, and he's wearing a lot of it.

His second impression is emotional, a bright blue firework of relief and gratitude that Klavier is in one piece, smaller gratitude that the other had known he'd be here, and he steps close and wraps his arms up around the prosecutor's shoulders before either of them says a word. But Klavier, usually so affectionate, just squeezes quick in response and winces and steps back.

And logic arrives and points out that what he had taken for the harsh note of cologne whose alcohol has not had time to evaporate is instead a different smell, one that the cologne is covering. Exactly like something in a plastic bottle that you buy at Rite Aid.

So what he says, and it's neither sweet nor businesslike, is, "You idiot."

"He calls me princess, and still I like you better." Klavier doesn't quite look at him. Up this close, Apollo can see that he's got makeup on his neck, carefully blended spots that match the unmarred skin nearby.

"I told you not to go back! Why - " He can't raise his voice here, not the way he's realizing that he wants to, so he pauses and tries to squeeze the feelings in his gut into something calmer. "Tell me you're not fucking having second thoughts about this."

"Not even one."

"Then why couldn't you do like I told you? What did he do?"

"Like the night we met, but not so bad."

"Bullshit."

"Well, then, about as bad."

Apollo really would like to punch something right about now, but he doesn't, just clenches his fingers and tightens his jaw and glowers at the floor. "I don't know which one of you is stupider, him for acting like that now, or you for giving him the chance."

Klavier gingerly tilts his head back up with a few fingers under his chin. "Shh, schatz, listen. I had to."
"You ignored me -"

"**Apollo.** It would have been too strange, my suspending him and then disappearing from home in the middle of the trial. It would have been too obvious that it was not a fuck-up but a plan. He needed to be here at the courthouse today, ja? I had to be sure he would come."

"Is he here?"

"Ja...ja. He is here. In the witness lobby as a civilian." Klavier has his hands in his pockets, his knuckles forming bumps in the leather. The bracelet jerks, but even without it Apollo would know that there's more to it.

"And?"

"And...and. Schatzelein, do you think this trial is likely to take the full three days?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, you know what the judge is like. Why?" Klavier's question had not been idle; neither is his.

"Because if it runs another day...yes, I will need somewhere else to stay."

"Better late than never." Klavier slides a glance at him and withdraws it, accepting the rebuke before explaining.

"Daryan dislikes being under oath, I told you that. He was...incensed, at having been called. Yesterday, he wanted me to promise that he would not be put on the stand again."

"So what did you -"

"I **promised.** And today, he will find out the value of that promise. It is what he has bought for himself. But it is not much for my chances of a pleasant evening." Klavier speaks so lightly, though he's looking at the floor and playing with his hair, and Apollo feels a chill run over him. He speaks slowly, once he can.

"I think...I think we can do this today. But you need to do something then, you need to call Ema before we start and have her look under the couch in Lamiroir's dressing room, if she didn't already."

Klavier looks like he's flipping through documents in his mind. "No...no, I have been given nothing about under the couch. The Fräulein Detective missed something?"

"Yeah."

"I could dock her pay for it. But you know, sometimes a detective without curiosity is what is wanted, ja?"

"Stop pretending to be evil and pay attention."

Klavier actually looks embarrassed.

"The biggest problem we have right now is the gunshots. LeTouse wasn't shot until the third set."

"For which Daryan has an alibi but Machi does not."

"Right. We need it the other way. What Ema's going to find under the couch - oh, God, Klavier,
they haven't cleaned in there, have they?" All of a sudden he's taking big panicky breaths and Klavier is running tap water onto a paper towel and holding it to the back of his neck to calm him down.

"No, no, hush. No custodians at the crime scene until the trial is over and the police permit it. But should she be looking for rubbish?"

The panic doesn't dissipate quite as quickly as it came, and his response has a nervous giggle to it. "Trash. Actually, yeah. But not the trash can, just under the couch."

"Then I will be very specific that she direct her attentions to under the furniture, but that she is to bring back anything of note, immediately. What a good thing she already hates me."

"Tick her off enough and she'll bring me the evidence instead of you. Makes no difference."

Klavier's eyebrows raise, but he nods. "And the evidence is?"

"Something that'll account for the shots we heard in the corridor."

"You are not very forthcoming."

No, because the more I tell you the more complicit you are and I'm trying to help you. Like that's not a lost cause at this point, Justice. Try again.

No, because the more I explain...the more I explain the closer we get to two guns and where was the other one and where was it from.

"No, I'm not." Their eyes meet and he swallows. "Not yet."

"Our drummer's mother was at the concert also."

"I remember her. What does that have to do with anything?"

"Special guests in the audience make him nervous. That was why we got a poor notice in Las Vegas. But thank Gott-im-Himmel for his nervous fingers, if we need to hear gunfire where there was none."

"Sorry?"

"If you have the imaginary shots for Act Three, then I have the real ones for Act Two."

Cold droplets are running down the back of his neck. (Again.) He wants to say quite a few things. I didn't even think of that. I could have just fucked this up so badly...I did fuck up already, he would never have died. God, forgive me, let's get out of here -

But he just says, a little weakly, "Deal...did you really have to go back to the house last night, though?"

"Apollo, I said so-" Klavier breaks off. When he resumes, it's with an expression of calm, tender reproach. "You will have all the rest of your life to make him jealous. If you want to."

His chest warms. And of course it's not just jealousy, but once more he says less than he's thinking, just mutters, "Sorry."
"I am too."

"Are we...um...we good?" The question encompasses so much that it's practically meaningless.

"Almost." Klavier leans down and presses barely moistened lips to his forehead. "Forgive me for what I might say, ja? In there?"

"What does that mean?"

"My faith is with you. Don't believe me if I must say otherwise."

"Kay."

"Showtime," Klavier says softly, and bows Apollo out the door.

Lamiroir is waiting for him outside the defendant's lobby, settling her shoulders and fiddling with her shawl. And blocking the way just enough that he says "Ah-" as he reaches for the knob.

"Good morning, Mr. Justice."

"Good morning." He has no idea what her real name is, and ma'am would be worse than awkward. He tries to ignore the shiver in his spine from how quickly she knows him.

"Ought I to expect anything startling today?"

"I might need you to translate."

There are people going up and down the hallways that cross this one, and maybe the sounds of their footsteps are enough for her to tell that they're out of earshot, but his nerves sizzle when she says, baldly, "How well?"

The answer comes out as a grumble when he tries to keep his voice even lower than hers. "Just don't complicate anything."

"The gunshots, Mr. Justice?"

**Fuck you sound like Plum Kitaki.** "They're taken care of."

"I'm relieved to hear it, for your sake - and for Machi's too, of course."

*You're not a mother bear. You're a fucking reptile.* His face burns when he realizes he's trying to avoid her gaze.

---

By the time it's over the damn song is stuck in his head. So are a lot of other voices, phrases and sentences that he knows he won't be able to chase out even if he tries.

Klavier's voice, stinging deep even though he knows: "Don't destroy what little respect I have for you."

The judge pronouncing Machi Not Guilty. At least of this, at least officially.

Daryan scoffing at "a little noise on a tape that could be anything."

Klavier again, with almost a smile in his voice, almost, if you listened: "The situation's changed,
Daryan."

The dark-haired man screaming on the stand for Machi not to talk, muscles in his neck straining.

Mr. Wright's voice, when the man had appeared during the recess: "You'll get Machi Tobaye off the hook, no doubt. But you're after that detective, aren't you?" For some reason that's the one that reverberates the deepest.

But they look up at the same time, as they're gathering their papers from their mirror-image desks, and Klavier stands up straight, stands up straight for once, as silently as the sun rises, as golden. Looks at him in wonder. And Apollo's heart lifts out of his chest, and because it wouldn't be enough to smile he nods.
Chapter 39

Right now would be a big scene if this were a movie, for sure. Something with a slow pan and some slow music. But as it is, he has to drop his gaze back to his briefcase before Trucy or anyone else has the chance to think he's acting funny.

If this were a movie, Trucy would find it incredibly romantic.

He doesn't know what she'd think of it for real, actually, but it's not like it matters; if she knew, Mr. Wright would know, and he'd be only the first on a long list of people who...

_Deep breath, straighten your shoulders, think of the reason you did it. Mr. Wright doesn't know. And he won't. And you have a client to follow to the detention center._

"Come on, Truce."

She looks at him skeptically. "I just said that to you."

---

The courthouse steps are crowded with entertainment reporters trying to pretend they're serious journalists, and Trucy pulls him backwards by his vest and speaks too loudly into one ear. "Wanna talk to them?"

"Of course not."

"Then follow me!" She stands on tiptoe for a sec and then bursts down the right-hand edge of the stairs, practically running down them the way she does at the Agency, and he clings to his briefcase as he tries to follow. Nearly everyone just gets out of the way, but one woman a little sharper than the rest positions herself on the sidewalk, where Trucy's obvious upcoming right turn is going to lead them. Truce skids to a stop in front of her, and he catches up thinking he'll need to step in, but his boss's daughter has other plans and is twinkling as she speaks. "I'm sorry, but Machi Tobaye's defense team is unavailable for an interview at the moment. Move or I'll pull a whole roll of quarters out of your ear." The woman instinctively sidesteps as she reaches up a hand, and it leaves enough room for Truce to grab his wrist and run for the bus he can see pulling up further down the block.

She's chattering about Machi again before they've even found seats, but he lets her voice fade into the background as he leans his forehead against the window and watches the storefronts and skyscrapers go by. He'll thank her for running interference once she's quiet enough to notice.

He supposes it's too late to try to send her home.

---

As they arrive, they're informed that Machi is waiting. _One advantage of the paddy wagon over public transit - the trip is faster._ The process is familiar: all the same ID checks, forms, guards, locked doors.

If he were on the other side of the glass, that process would be familiar too. Except he wouldn't be
a teenager pulled in for a smash-and-grab anymore, would he.

Machi looks, somehow, less childish but even smaller. "You come. Thank you, Miss Trucy."

"Of course! We wouldn't not come!" Well, that's not going to do anything for Machi's grammar.

"And you, Mr. Yustis. Thank you I not here for killing." And the kid actually smiles. It's all he can do not to shiver.

"I hope it's a good learning experience."

"Polly!" She whacks him on the shoulder in horror.

"I mean...I mean you're getting a second chance. Don't waste it."

"I know. There people to help me."

"Pick the right ones."

"Ja." That again. He could ask Klavier whether that's something Machi picked up or whether it's real Borginian. But he doesn't think he ever will.

"You can write to me if you need to talk to someone!" Trucy has her hands clasped under her chin now.

"Maybe, I do that. Stay friends. Get practice, English."

"Okay!"

"Mr. Yustis. Keep doing working hard. You...good, with words. Maybe, you write lyrics next time." He smiles again. Then the guard glances at the wall clock and steps over.

"Excuse me."

"Okay." Apollo gathers up his bag with alacrity and knocks the chair sideways as he gets up. He and Machi look at each other for another second, but neither of them say anything, and then they're leaving through different doors. Lamiroir is outside in the hall.

He reaches into his pocket for a few crumpled bills. "Truce, go buy sodas or coffee or something. Make sure we have enough left for the bus."

"But nothing for me, thank you," says the singer, and Trucy is gone in a whirl of blue cape. There's another pause as someone with a keyring and a clipboard goes by, and then she asks.

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Justice?"

"Are you?"

She folds her arms, and the contours of her face above the veil shift, slightly. He imagines her lips pressed thinly together before she answers. "All things considered, yes. I suppose. I would have preferred better. But I acknowledge that it could have been much worse."
"Well. Yeah." They stand there uncomfortably for a mouthful of seconds, more, and then he turns on his heel to go, and the briefcase bumps and scuffs against his leg. She hears it.

"However. The very least you could offer would be a more gracious farewell, if you had ever been taught any manners to speak of. You have gained a lover at the same moment as I have lost a son."

Gained a lover. He's not completely sure of that, actually. He assumes - but he doesn't want to assume. At least not until he has Klavier in front of him and nobody else listening or watching or...

He turns back around, sets his jaw so she'll hear it in his voice. "First thing, you didn't lose him. He's just temporarily misplaced, okay?" He doesn't say, and he's not your son. "Second, maybe I'm a better boyfriend than you are a mom. And third, you owe me too. So you can give me a break about the manners. I gave you one."

She pulls her wrap tighter over her shoulders, sighs, and sounds a little sad as she says, "If you prefer."

"I do." He starts to leave again, and stops. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Mr. Justice." The bracelet hangs motionless, and finally she turns away herself and he goes.

---

When he catches up with Trucy, she's in the vending machine alcove stomping her foot. "It was supposed to give me a quarter, but it only gave back fifteen cents!"

"I guess it's out of change, then. Do we still have enough for the bus back?"

"Only if you don't have a drink, or we both say we're twelve. I bet it'd work." She eyes the machine speculatively.

"Just let me have a sip of yours. We should go, anyway."

"I drank mine. Maybe if I kick it -"

"That's vandalism and we're at the detention center. Don't make it that easy for them."

She rolls her eyes and sticks out her tongue, brewing some kind of comeback, when shouts echo through the halls and two guards hurry past. He steps cautiously into the hall, and Trucy hovers behind him, looking over his shoulder. A third guard approaches at a walk, does a double take, and strides over. "Best stay put for a moment."

"What's going on?"

"You're Apollo Justice? They've just brought Daryan Crescend in. He's gone ballistic; there're four guys moving him now."

"But he's on the other side - he's not in the hall here?" He doesn't care if he sounds timid; Trucy's scared of him too.

"No, there's glass and all, but I don't think his seeing you would make their job any easier."
"Ah. Right. Got it." The shouts are clearly a mix of voices now. Most of them are unfamiliar, but the loudest one is recognizably Daryan. "Four guards just for him?"

"Well, I'd take a brainless block of muscle over that kind any day - some wiry guy that won't give up. And with him being so tall, he's bigger than he looks. Mean son-of-a - whoops, sorry, honey." The guard notices Trucy and stops himself.

She insists that it's fine just as Apollo says, "Shark."

"What's that?"

"Son of a shark...never mind."

"Ha. Yeah, he won't be dressed so nice much longer."

Apollo has a thought. "They're not putting him where he can see Machi Tobaye either, are they? Or Lamiroir?"

"No, no, the kid's down in the juvenile wing already. And she's waiting in the back office while the embassy arranges for transportation."

"And Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Yeah, that wouldn't be good either. Worse than you - but he's not coming."

"He isn't?" Trucy makes a tiny noise behind him, like she's surprised too.

"Apparently made it crystal clear back at the courthouse that he wasn't, Grammys or no Grammys. And he's damn stubborn, even if he's an okay guy."

It's kind of a surprise, very much a relief. *I consider that my last session with you,* Klavier had said. It's good to know he meant it.

"Yeah. That's probably for the best."

"I'll tell you, though, I don't envy him."

"Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Well, him either, but I meant our loud guest here. He'd better get smart and behave himself enough to get his own private shoebox, or -" He cuts himself off again, looking at Trucy. She pointedly turns her back and puts her hands over her ears.

"Or, what?"

"A prettyboy dirty cop that anyone young enough to do something about it'll already know who he is? Your shark is about to be tunafish."

The guard mistakes his looking at the floor for dismay and offers to set them up with a ride home. He accepts and doesn't see Klavier that night.
Chapter 40

When the verdict is given and the uniformed officers flanking Daryan steer him away, Klavier doesn't really know what he feels. Not at first. All he can think of is metaphors: that he's been pardoned, or that he's recovered from colorblindness. That he's been watching the same bullet fly from the horizon towards him for years, and now it's missed.

Daryan is being led out of his future days in handcuffs, because Apollo has done it, has beaten him. That feeling, at least, he can name.

He looks up from the papers he's been stacking and restacking as he reassesses reality, and sees Apollo looking up at him, and tries to say with his eyes, his posture, grateful. Thank you. Oh Apollo, I am grateful. He gazes across the room in an incredulous lightness.

And then Apollo nods, once, and looks back down to his own papers, because there is nothing else they can communicate right here and right now.

Apollo and Wright's daughter leave the courtroom, scolding each other to hurry up. The spectator galleries clear in a vague overhead din of voices and feet, and the judge retreats to his chambers amidst a flapping of black robes and the sound of muttering. But Prosecutor Klavier Gavin stays where he is, and no one seems to find that strange.

Soon enough he's the last one there. The courtroom is a different place with its boxes empty of people, all hush and glowing wood. It reminds him almost of church, though he feels a twinge of moral unease at the thought. And even though he hasn't been to church for anything but funerals and weddings since - since well before Daryan, actually. After a while he wanders down from his bench and over to the witness stand, runs his fingers along the grain of the rail.

"Anything to see there, fop?"

He jumps at the voice, but of course it's only Hallo-Detective-Ema-Skye, standing there with her arms crossed and her glasses on top of her head.

"Nein...nein, Fräulein, only the usual."

The corner of her mouth twists, though it doesn't quite seem amused. "They wanted to send a friendly face in here to see if you were okay. Instead they found me. I think they want their courtroom back."

"How long has it -"

"Half an hour, your highness." He'd have guessed ten minutes. "You are out of it, huh?"

He gives her a small grin, then realizes that even that might be inappropriate and snuffs it out. She interprets it differently and looks almost sympathetic - and he feels almost guilty.

"So you didn't cover for him."

"No. I did not."
"Scientifically speaking, that might surprise some people."

"Psychology is a very inexact science."

She makes a *hmph* noise and they both fall silent for a little while.

"For what it's worth, fop, I don't think you were disloyal." He swallows hard, and it's not like he's **trying** to mislead her, she's just **mislled**. "There's that saying about patriotism being the last refuge of a scoundrel? Well, loyalty is usually the last demand of one."

"You learned this from your sister?"

A whole vending machine packet hits him in the face a second later, and she glares at him with pink spots rising on her cheeks. *Too far.*

"You don't know her, Gavin. And actually you don't even know _me_ well enough to say crap like that."

He drops to one knee, retrieves the crinkly bag, and hands it up to her with an apology before getting back to his feet. "I am sorry, Detective. You are quite right and I was very rude just then. I...only wanted to change the subject."

Apparently it's the right thing to say, because she looks away, rips the packet of karinto open with a shriek of foil, and comes to lean against the rail of the stand next to him before offering him one.

He declines, and says instead, "Do you think I should visit him? I wasn't going to."

"You didn't see them trying to move him, did you. Translation: hell, no."

"Kicking and screaming?"

"Not to mention lunging, cursing, elbowing, and threatening."

"Threatening?"

No answer.

"Machi?"

She sighs in discomfort.

"Herr Justice?"

"Pretty much just you."

"Ach. I see." A long pause. "I won't go see him, then."

"B plus for decision-making. Maybe you can start auditioning new guitarists a day early. Carpe diem."

"Before I do that, I have to sit down with the rest of the band and tell them all about what I did at work today."
She raises her eyebrows and gives a cough of a laugh. "Want to know what I'd do if it were me?"

"I am all attention."

"I'd sneak home, pack up all my stuff, stick a foreclosure notice on the front door, and go rent an apartment. Under an assumed name or something. And never answer my phone again."

"Beneath that unflattering lab coat beats the heart of a criminal mastermind."

"Watch it; it's still not like I like you."

"But you are the court-appointed friendly face, ja? Close enough." He goes back to the bench, gathers his things. "Thank you for taking the time, Fräulein Detective. I suppose we should both go home before we delay someone else's day in court."

"Court's over. It's the janitor's way you're in." She doesn't quite smile. Neither does he. They part ways in the hall.

---

Once he lets himself into his car in the underground lot, Klavier sits still for a while, breathing the stale air, again feeling the world realigning itself in the corners of his vision. And as he's about to put the key in the ignition, he notices that the passenger seat is still pushed back all the way, so he leans awkwardly over the gearshift and huffs and shoves until it's moved back up, ready to accommodate shorter legs.

It's such a tiny, petty grace note to the way Daryan has been dismissed from his life that he considers being ashamed, and finally opts against it. The security guard grins and waves at him as he beeps his parking pass at the reader on the way out, and he waves a reply.

He studiously does not think about what's going to happen at home, as he drives. Instead he rolls the window down and lets the passing traffic push the warm, oily air against his face and through his hair. And when he hits a red, he turns the radio on, just in time for the first chorus of "Girls Just Want to Have Fun."

The people in the next car look over to see why he's laughing so loudly.

---

It's only as he's unlocking the front door that he acknowledges the possibilities directly ahead of him. Either the band already knows what's happened, and it it's going to be terrible, or they don't, and it's going to be terrible. Either they're home, or they aren't, or they're all together, or they aren't, and ditto, ditto, ditto, ditto.

He's partway through placing a bet with himself on what it will be when he steps into the living room and finds them all sitting there like cats on the black leather furniture they'd used for a photo shoot, once.

---

The bassist's response is a fluent, expansive set of variations on *Fuck you, Gavin.*
Did you even think about the rest of us?

It's not just finding a fucking new guitarist, you faggy, plastic... He's a friend!

What do you think you ever would have been if he hadn't started this band? It didn't always have your fucking name on it! Fuck you, Barbie doll. Fuck you, Gavin.

---

The keyboardist is all logic, all business. Did you call our producer? The label? No. You should.

You're a lawyer. What does this mean for our contract?

Were you planning to audition other guitarists? I don't think Geoff would cooperate with that. You heard him.

It's too bad this is how it's ending. The law-and-order band. Christ.

But you know, it was Daryan's decision.

Not yours.

---

And then the drummer is the last one left in the room with him.

Klavier, dude. I mean...

Did he really do it, shoot a guy? No, no offense, it's just.

I shouldn't've gotten outta bed this morning.

Actually, you should know, though. We'll all be okay, you know? We, um, we've got offers. We never used to tell you guys about them.

You - you and Dar, I mean. Didn't want to piss you off! But Geoff's got another label, you know, sniffing around, and me and Dominic. You heard that they're reforming Hurricane Hazel, right?

Yeah. So we'll. Probably.

I think my mom likes you better though.

Hey, Klavier. Um.

About Daryan.

How the press would say you guys were, like, kinky super best friends and shit, and I mean that wasn't it. Dominic is my best friend and that's - really fuckin' different.

And man, it's not that, you know it's not.
But...

Your ear, right? Your fucking foot? And holy shit, man, what went down in Orange County? Am I -

...

Fuck, fuck fuck. I'm sorry.

Let's wrap this circus up, man. I bet you can't wait.
Apollo wakes the next day to a broad stripe of sunlight across his blanket and his pillow, and sits up with a shock because it's late, ohmygod it's late and where am I supposed to be right now -

He stares for a few seconds in incomprehension at the clock, whose little red alarm light is most definitely not on, and then remembers that the trial is over and done with.

Klavier.

He collapses back onto the thin mattress, rolls over, draws his knees up, and sits back up facing the other way. It's bright outside, and he has to squint for a second before he can look through the window.

The sun is picking out every piece of gravel on the roofs across the alley, and a couple of crows are squabbling in a shadow over a paper hamburger bag. The screen door at the back of the dry cleaners is open. Barely; just an inch or two.

Klavier is somewhere beyond this alley, in the city, in the sun, and Daryan Crescend isn't.

It's the worst thing he's ever done and it - it just doesn't bother him, not for itself. Machi bothers him. And LeTouse -

LeTouse is a cold knot in his side that he's afraid to really think about. LeTouse bothers him. But Daryan, no. There's a mathematical satisfaction to it, and that's all.

I can be the defense attorney I'm supposed to be for the rest of my life. It's not that I just like seeing injustice done or something.

He pads out of his room(closet) in sweatpants and a t-shirt that's down to one sleeve thanks to a run-in with an especially vicious coin washer. It's quiet, which must mean the Wrights aren't around - otherwise the TV would be on at least - and so the little sounds of his own making serve as retorts to the stillness: opening and closing the cupboard door, the refrigerator door, the silverware drawer, running water in the sink, beeping buttons on the microwave.

He's balled up in a chair with a bowl of instant oatmeal and a newspaper he's not really reading when the sound of voices penetrates in from the stairs. Mr. Wright and Trucy bickering about - fruit, from the sounds of it - so there's probably not a client with them and so no reason for him to burn his fingers on the bowl or trip over his cuffs trying to get out of sight. The door opens.

"Any sensible person would just drink orange juice instead of grapefruit. It isn't bitter and the vitamins are practically the same!"

His boss gives his outfit the once-over and raises an eyebrow as Trucy bounces up with a pink cardboard box. "We brought croissants! Stop eating that!"

The squishy glazed things from the Italian bakery are not croissants, whatever they are, but he doesn't know the right word to correct her with, and anyway he's busy grabbing at his lumpen,
greyish breakfast before Trucy can whisk it into the kitchen and replace it with sugar. As he does, the newspaper tumbles to the floor and flaps open to a publicity picture of the Gavinners.

It looks dated already, the way they aren't looking straight at the camera. The way newspaper pictures of murder victims always look. He grabs at it before he can think about what he's doing and succeeds in crumpling the arts and entertainment section beyond recognition and spilling hot oatmeal onto his remaining sleeve.

"Is that what happened to the other one?" Phoenix has been standing by the door the whole time.

"Don't be mean, Daddy, I like it. It's very Flashdance."

When his boss gives him the choice of spending the day sorting files or going for a hike on the peninsula, he opts for the peninsula. He figures he can't just sit around all day waiting.

---

By the time evening comes, slow and overstuffed and purple, he's tired. He's showered the dust off and is back in the front room not reading the same newspaper while Trucy and Phoenix get ready to go to their respective clubs.

"Daddy, where's my disappearing ink pen?"

"Is that the one with the stubby cap? Honey, don't leave that one on the desk, please."

"Thief! Pen thief!"

"Is this it?"

"Yes, it is!"

"All right. Apollo, we're off. Don't do anything I wouldn't do. Or most of what you might think I would. And get some sleep. You've barely said six words today."


At that moment there's a tinny bang from the back of the apartment, and Phoenix stops mid-retort. "Was that the air conditioner?"

"Probably. I'll go look." Even though it's not just the air conditioner, no way, and the nerves are jumping in his stomach.

"Thanks."

The Wrights head out in the same whirlwind of noise as they always generate, while he untangles his legs and his nearly-asleep feet and heads down the hall.

There's a second bang as he steps into his room, and when he presses his face to the window, it's easy to make out the motorcycle parked in the alley, especially since he's looking for it.

The ancient A/C unit below the window shudders at the impact of yet another rock, or probably a rock. He looks down, and by now his eyes are adjusted enough to the gloom that he can make out
the blond figure almost directly below. (Dork.) But even if he can see Klavier - and his heart's in his throat - Klavier can't see him.

He backs away from the glass, crawls across the folding bed to flick on the light switch by the door, and returns to the window. Now he's the one who can't see, but he holds up a closed hand, then splays his fingers out, then after a few seconds retracts them. Five minutes. Time for Mr. Wright and Trucy to get far enough down the street.

He wanders into the kitchen and watches the microwave display, waiting for the five minutes to be over, torn between eagerness and anxiety. When they've finally passed, he pads down the stairs. He doesn't have to be quiet, he knows the building is empty, but there's a caution to his steps anyway.

There are things he needs to say, to ask, to confess, and he's never been good at any of it - and he can't start talking at first, because he's busy opening the door and noticing how Klavier's fair hair glows under the streetlight, and then letting him in.

And he can't after that, because as soon as the door closes behind them and the dark street is blurred by the pebbled glass, he's standing up on the balls of his feet, and Klavier's arms are wrapped around the small of his back. A car goes by outside, and their lips touch.

It isn't fast, isn't slow. Not rough with any pent-up frustration, but not tender with uncertainty either. They kiss for a long, quiet stretch of time, and when they draw apart, just a little, Klavier's breath ruffles his hair. The only real light, once he opens his eyes, is coming from the open door at the top of the stairs.

"Hello there."

"Dork." He feels his cheeks redden at his own clumsiness, but the blond just rests his chin on top of his head and gives him another squeeze.

He leads the way up, feeling almost shy even though Klavier has been here before. The musician's eyes are lit with some of the naughty curiosity that comes with being in someone's home without them there, especially once they pass through the cluttered front room and into the private area.

"I found an apartment today."

"Huh?"

"Yesterday I talked to the band, and so today I found an apartment." They're in the kitchen, and Klavier leans against the refrigerator.

"Oh. What did they - sorry. I don't know what I'm asking you...how bad?"

"It could have been much much worse, ja? One of them hates me. One of them is thinking strictly in terms of the paperwork. And the drummer told me he was sorry."

"What for?"

"Because he was always the sweet dumb one, except after all maybe not so dumb."

"Move if you're thirsty, I can't open the fridge with you there."
Klavier gives him a mock-wounded look and sidesteps. "Am I thirsty?"

"You are."

"Ja, all right, parched."

Apollo knows he's still a little flushed, the refrigerated air on his face is so cold. "We have...grape juice. More grape juice."

"No thank you."

"Half-and-half. One can of Molson's, why do we...oh yeah, Mexican Coke, I hid them from the Wrights in the crisper drawer."

"Ah...maybe just water?"

"Suit yourself. I'm having one of these." He fishes the bottle out, shooshes Klavier from in front of the cabinet with the glasses, and then from in front of the drawer with the bottle opener in it. By the time he's handing over a tumbler with an oft-scrubbed and patchy daisy pattern, Klavier is leaning on the fridge again. "Cheers."

"Za vas."

"You're German."

"But I like the Russian, it makes me sound more reckless."

He raises his eyebrows now himself, the way Mr. Wright had earlier. "Hey. And anyway, you turned down beer for tap water."

"You want Deutsch? Fine." Klavier tilts his head, like he's a little surprised at himself. "Erst mach' dein' Sach, dann trink' und lach."

"Is that the thing they print on those big kitschy steins that no one drinks out of?"

"...Sometimes." They drink, and he fills a little more time by rinsing the glass and the bottle. Klavier grabs a dishcloth and seems happy to dry things.

"That's just going in recycling, you know."

"Practice for living by myself."

"Klavier, I need to ask - damn it. I need to say something."

He's mostly expecting Klavier to look nervous, after he says that. But instead of concern, the flirtatious grin fades into a smaller, truer smile. "Ja, well, so do I."

His bracelet flicks, and it's not Klavier it's reacting to, so he cuts the musician off and gestures around the kitchen in a vague, nervous way. "Um. We can't really sit down, in here."

He's one step into the hall and one towards the front room when warm arms settle around his shoulders from behind.
"Apollo, I am not a client."

"Uh, no. Apparently you're a jacket."

"Schatzelein, what is wrong?" Klavier holds him tighter and stops moving, which pretty much means he's immobilized too. "I thought we were going to celebrate a little bit."

"I... Here." He opens the door to the storage room, then slumps in expected embarrassment when the taller man twists past him to look through the door.

"This is your room?"

"According to Phoenix Wright, it's not a closet."

"And you believed him? Until recently my small closet was larger than this." All the same, Klavier sits on the edge of the mattress with his feet and knees in the hall until he's tugged his boots off, then kicks them backwards under the bed and pulls his legs up. He can't stretch out, the bed isn't long enough and for that matter maybe the room isn't either, but he rolls onto his side and gives Apollo an anticipatory look. "Come and talk where I can hear you."

It's only going to make it harder, but he curls up next to the musician on what little of the bed is left, pulling the door almost closed behind him. Almost, so he'll hear in case one Wright or the other comes home early.

It doesn't matter very much that he's not really trying to be, well, snuggly, not when the bed is so small and Klavier is. He sighs and purrs as Apollo settles himself. "Mm. It is not too bad a mousehole. Apollo mausi."

"Just - Klavier, please."

"Tell me, what is it?"

"We're...I." He stops, starts again more heatedly. "I'm not sorry you're loose from Daryan. Not at all." He stretches up and kisses the blond fiercely on the forehead, surprising himself. "And I'm not sorry for whatever's going to happen to him. It's only...it's serious, what we did."

There's a pause, and when Klavier speaks again his voice has dropped from light to shadow, softer and lower. "But there is no changing it."

"I'm not talking about changing it, I'm talking about - about not fucking it up and losing it."

"But?"

"If we're together it could look different, if people think...I don't know what. That there's a reason we might have. If Daryan or Kristoph says something. Wouldn't..." His voice rises with his agitation, the anxiety that has been growing like ivy all day. "You'd be safer without me!"

Klavier has been stroking a spot between his shoulders, gently, and as Apollo says it the fingertips
stop moving and become little dots of ice through his shirt.
Chapter 42

The first three words are undiluted and hurt and frightened. The rest are Klavier on stage.

He doesn't know which is worse.

"You don't want...ach, liebling. You can kiss someone hello like that but it also means goodbye?"

"No!" He pushes himself up on his arms to look down at the taller man, and just about growls in frustration when he sees the sad, professional smile. Planting one hand to either side of Klavier's shoulders makes the springs crunch and groan, and the shift in the mattress surface means his left knee rolls on top of Klavier's nearer leg. His shadow covers the prosecutor's face. "I want. I do. I do want you. But -"

He loses his breath and his balance for a moment then, squished against Klavier's chest in an awkward black leather embrace. "...You scared me." The man's pulse is galloping.

"Klavier, I'm not who you should be scared of."

"Do you remember what you said, when you came to see me at work? The first time?"

"I cursed at you."

"Which wasn't in the least unreasonable of you, given the circumstances. But after that."

"To be careful with the bracelet if you didn't want it to pinch your fingers."

Klavier reaches out those same fingers and tweaks the spikes of his hair. "You said, 'I want you with me.'"

"I do. But I want you to be okay now. I want everything to be okay and I don't know if it will be. People get ideas. What if it wasn't enough?"

A sigh. "If it wasn't enough, then we will need each other more and not less. And there is nothing to be accomplished by worrying, verliebte. You freed me and I will behave like one free."

Replying is almost embarrassing. "You, um... You saved me too. But even if I want to just, walk down the street with you. Buy groceries. I can't. It could start with one fucking paparazzo and end with..."

Klavier in prison. Hurt again. Shamed and punished and no.

No.

The real one interrupts his imagination. "But there is a plan."

"Another plan?"

"Nothing cloak-and-dagger like before. I just - I had thought if we could last until Christmas."
"What's so special about Christmas?"

"Someday I will take you to Germany in the winter, and you will not ask that question again."

"Focus."

"I am trying but you have four eyes and four little antennae up this close."

"The prosecution likes the sound of his own voice." Klavier hasn't let go yet, and it's hard to disregard the feel of his muscles relaxing a little as they banter.

"It is simple enough. If we are together now, it is suspicious. You are right. But if we are both blamelessly lonely through the rest of the summer, through the autumn, then by the time December comes people will start feeling sad about it if they think of it at all. Apollo Justice should not be alone at Christmastime. Do I know anyone with a spare niece - nephew? Pardon me!"

"Meanwhile all the secretaries at the Prosecutor's Office will either be trying to find you a boyfriend or batting their eyelashes. Depending."

"I had been thinking of becoming tongue-tied at you during the yearly Christmas party. Mistletoe. A new shirt. Those who would find us suspicious now - they will find it sweet then, ja?"

It takes him a minute to get the words out. "That is either - either the most romantic or the most Machiavellian thing I've ever heard."

"I thought the combination was our specialty, by now."

He exhales in something that's almost a laugh. The logical part of his brain is arguing that caution is everything, but logic is in a wrestling match with the smell of leather and expensive shampoo. "Five months... you really think that's enough?"

"Five months and a holiday mood... by that time I may even have the fabled Mrs. Payne trying to matchmake for me. And she could deputize Fräulein Trucy for that matter."

"I'm not so sure her dad would go for it the same."

"Good. He is not my idea of Cupid."

"And in the meantime?"

"You can hum Christmas carols."

"Fff." He rolls off to one side a little. "You could probably go around the office singing O Tannenbaum at the top of your lungs in September and no one would even blink. The Wrights would ask questions."

"That is what you get for maintaining such a - sensible image..." Klavier traces around and under the collar of his white t-shirt with one finger, and it's distracting enough that Apollo lets him do it for quite a few breaths, until he remembers he's serious and bats the hand away.

"What else?"
"Interludes like this one, ja?" Thwarted in his advances on Apollo's collarbone, the musician instead lightly teases the back of his neck with the tips of his fingernails. "Though it would be nice if Mr. Wright and your clients would pay you properly, and you could live on your own."

"It's not like Lamiroir was in a hurry to cut me a check." The nervous chill he feels at saying her name out loud collides with the slow heat that's building, and his words run away with him. "Klavier, maybe - maybe we should finish talking before we do anything else. Instead of like last time."

"Why -"

"So you'll have. You know. An incentive not to disappear afterwards."

Klavier's eyes widen enough that Apollo can see the patterns change in the blue irises, and he scrambles to prop himself up on one elbow and press a finger to Apollo's lips. "Schatzelein, you only let me apologize once for what happened then. But from now, so long as you want me, I swear, I will never disappear from you again. The worst I may do - is leave the room for a while."

The heat warms further as the cold freezes. *If I kiss him now, I'll never have to explain. Just move up a little, open my mouth and close my eyes. No one's ever loved me this much.*

*Or if they have they kept it to themselves.*

*Do I really need to test it, can't I just not say - do I really have to tell him the worst things to see if he still loves me then?*

And then he realizes that Klavier has lifted his finger away, and that he hasn't responded to that speech, that all he's doing is staring at nothing, and that the blue eyes are still worried.

"I - I don't know if I deserve that." He returns the finger-to-lips gesture, and Klavier lets his eyelashes float closed and kisses his fingertip, soft and tentative. "But if you still want to seduce me afterwards that's fine - oh, fucking stop giggling."

The German's laughter just gets louder. "Herr Forehead. You are adorable. Do you have one of those calendar books in which I can schedule my advances in advance?"

"And don't call me that when other people aren't around!"

Klavier laughs so hard he bumps his head on a shelf, and as soon as Apollo sits up to check on him, he squirms around to lie in the smaller man's lap like an oversized housecat. Before he can be rebuked again, he looks straight up into brown eyes and says, soberly, "So. Tell me what it is that you think will drive me away."

Apollo's throat seizes shut, but he returns the look, forces himself to calm down. "The night of the concert. Everything went so wrong."

"What was supposed to happen?"

"There was supposed to be another fire, like the one with the guitar. Daryan's bag was supposed to go up. I got another igniter from Plum Kitaki."

"But that never happened."
"Plum didn't think I was taking the situation seriously. She said my solution was too polite." Klavier's eyes are closed, but he frowns. "So when I went to pick the bag up, before we left - she'd put in something extra."

"Ha!" It's a shout, not a laugh, and it startles him badly. "That makes sense. She gave you a gun, ja? Small enough for someone unfamiliar with them to fire. But with ammunition dangerous enough...how did Machi get it away from you?"

"He threw a soda in my face and grabbed my briefcase while I was distracted." His arteries are thumping in the way that foreshadows a headache. Klavier works with detectives. It's not weird that he'd figure it out.

"I had been wondering how he could have managed that police weapon. Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet." Their eyes meet again, and he glances away before Klavier can. "I still planted the igniter, but either I set it off wrong, or...I guess I must have set it off wrong, it worked later. Ema came up at the wrong moment. When we were talking, in the hall, I was waiting for the fire alarm, but...we heard gunshots. If I'd just gotten rid of it, instead of bringing it with me -" He has to force the next words out, and only manages to do it because the thought of Klavier saying them first is terrifying. "LeTouse wouldn't have been killed. If not for me."

He's lost track of where he's left his hands, but Klavier's find them where they're twisted in the blanket and draw them close. They're cold and sweaty, but still the musician takes them in his warm large ones, not even hesitating. Apollo's heart wobbles in his chest at what he has left to explain.

"Apollo, LeTouse died because Machi shot him. He is not any the less responsible because the weapon was not his own."

"Well, I - I shot him too." And Klavier says something that probably means What in German, but Apollo is frantically fumbling his left hand away and pressing it back, twisting it so that Klavier's fingertips are under the edge of the bracelet, though that also means that he can feel the pulse pounding in Apollo's wrist.
"I didn't kill him, I didn't even - **hurt** him really, he was already dead and then I saw his gun lying there and remembered how small Machi is..." He's babbling. He starts over. "I shot him with his own gun. After he was dead."

Klavier looks up at him, eyes wide. "But how did no one notice that his wounds were not consistent with one another?"

"Turns out my 'piercing stare' is good for more than identifying hiccups." He doesn't like how smartass he sounds, but the bracelet will have let Klavier know he isn't lying at least. He looks down at his knee, waits for the blond to say something like - he doesn't know. Something cool and polite with nausea at its core.

But instead Klavier holds his other hand more tightly. "Liebe, you thought I would be - angry with you, for this?"

"Well, yeah. Because it's **horrible**. It's gross, and it's - really disrespectful. I -"

"You are not 'gross.' And you are not horrible. A little disrespectful, but only a little."

"But what I **did**."

"It was clever. It must have required nerve. It caused him no suffering. And I owe my freedom to it. I am not about to complain."

"There's more, though."

"Ja. Where is the gun?"

"At the bottom of the duck pond behind the coliseum. But that's not what I meant, I need to tell you about the - other thing I did."

"You lied to Detective Skye? Ach well, me too."

"No. **Before** LeTouse got shot, it's why - it's why Machi threw the soda at me. In the first place. No, keep it there." Klavier had been about to lift his hand from Apollo's left arm.

"You upset him."

"It's worse than that. Before I saw him backstage I didn't know what he **looked** like. I pictured some tall rodenty kid. With bad teeth."

"And instead, you saw a doll in white lace."

"I saw. I saw something I thought Daryan would **love**."

Klavier's lips go thin.

"I went to see him, after I asked you to get Lamiroir. I told him that people knew what he was
doing. And that he needed help if he was going to get that cocoon sold without getting caught. And that...and that he needed to talk to Daryan, that Daryan was a dirty cop and he'd help. I thought - I thought it would be better if Daryan would really implicate himself...that that would be better than just a fire."

"That explains what I saw."

The sentence is unbearably neutral. He bites his lip to finish the job. "He reminded me of you. That's why I thought it would work, that's why Machi stole the gun. I threw him to the shark, because he reminded me of you."

Klavier's eyes are closed, and he lies so still in Apollo's lap that for a moment the defense attorney has the crazy idea that he's asleep, or unconscious, or gone. That that's what his words have done. But then he speaks, slowly.

"Machi is hardly the innocent lamb he appears to be. But neither am I. Do you remember the night I went to the club after Kristoph?"

"Um. Yeah."

"My thought had been to find my big brother doing something illegal. Instead I watched him chitchat with your current employer. Chitchat and eat his dinner. And then go."

"I don't -"

"It is a fortunate thing that Shadi Enigmar chose that night to reappear. Because if he had not...I was dressed as Kris after all. And I was not going to leave without there being something to blame him for, something to make sure that he was in very bad trouble. I am very fond of Fräulein Trucy now, ja?"

"But I was preparing to attack her second father, before the first was so kind as to walk in."

"Klavier -"

"I would have explained it in more detail before, if I had known you would worry about what I might disapprove of."

Now it's Apollo who doesn't know what to say, and Klavier who sounds nervous. "I loved you, schatzelein...it does not excuse it but I had to."

Their pose isn't conducive to kissing, but Apollo reaches out in a sudden impulse and puts his hand, the one with the bracelet, over Klavier's heart. And finally the German opens his eyes, with the fragile beginnings of a smile wavering at the corners of his mouth. "You still intended Machi to be arrested that night?"

"Yeah. Yes. Both of them."

"So he hardly would have belonged to Daryan for life. A few hours. And the kind of boy that he is."

"But it doesn't mean that I should have-"
"Did you know, I'm twenty-four."

"Huh?"

"Something I have been thinking for the past two days. I am twenty-four years old."

"Okay?"

"Until yesterday. Yesterday. I had been with Daryan since I was sixteen."

And Apollo remembers the news coverage of Mr. Wright's disbarment, of the punk kid all in black, so far removed from the wry, weird, gentle Klavier whose head is resting in his lap, and so fucking young. His words come out as barely a whisper. "Thank you for waiting for me."

Klavier doesn't whisper, but he's barely any louder. "And if I were to resume trying to seduce you?"

He swallows. "All right."

Klavier's voice is the softest of echoes. "All right."

He reaches up a hand, not breaking eye contact, and Apollo expects to feel callused fingers along the side of his face. Instead, they alight at the hollow of his throat, and trace up to where Klavier can feel the sounds - not words - he's almost vocalizing. His head tilts back and his hand clenches the fabric of the singer's shirt, and he doesn't remember telling his muscles and bones to do either of those things.

But one of the inarticulate catches in his breath makes Klavier chuckle, and the spell breaks enough for him to move on his own. "Sit up."

Klavier obeys, and Apollo reciprocates with half a dozen urgent kisses, touching to feel the singer's voice in his throat. And just like that it becomes a wordless game of mirrored gestures; one shirt tugged at becomes two thrown off, a nibble at a shoulder begins a complicated, gratifying tease.

When the tangling blond twist of hair falls against Apollo's face, he brushes it away without thinking. And he's suddenly left with a clear view of Daryan's work - of the ragged cartilage left where silver earrings had been torn away, on some bad night somewhere in that cycle of bad nights before Klavier had stopped to help a stranger in a drugstore. He stops, and the blond does too, a moment later. He can feel both their heartbeats.

And then, with an impossibly deliberate gentleness, Klavier leans close and nips at the shell of his ear.

"Wait - um...wait, are you - sure?"

Even as close as they are, the response is just audible, not much more than an exhalation. "Apollo..."

"What is it?"

"If I need to stop you, I will. And the other way around, please..." A sigh that tickles over his
shoulder. "But - but. I know you will never touch me how Daryan would. And if that is true of how - then we will not worry more than we need to about where."

He still wants to hesitate, remembering Klavier flinching away and his hands turning January cold, the night of Mr. Wright's trial. But the singer turns his head, and Apollo presses forward and brushes his lips against the old hurt, runs the tip of his tongue along the irregular edges of flesh.

And Klavier groans in a way that doesn't mean anything like stop. It begins a heated scramble to bare every place that has been a locus of pain, to touch, to redefine the scars. He kisses Klavier's throat, open-mouthed and wet, does the same to the purple arcs on his chest, even though he still has to avoid the most recent ones. Klavier runs a hand up his leg to caress where the burn had been, laps at the back of Apollo's neck, presses his lips to each knuckle of the hand that Kristoph had slammed in the door of the car.

His musical voice weaves between shudders. "How long - how long do we have. Alone."

A glance at the old clock. "A little while."

"Then please."

Apollo starts for the zippered toiletry bag under the bed, but stops midreach without realizing that he's stopped.

"You are staring."

"I want to remember this." All the same he moves again, gets what he was reaching for.

"That has a morbid sound to it, verliebte."

"I'm happy, though -"

"Happier soon."

--

He doesn't repeat them out loud, but the same words come to mind again that night. Once when he's leaning above Klavier, whose hair is splayed across the pillow and whose face is reminding him - not that he could say it - of an angel's, in its joy and its strength. Which in its surprise and surrender could only be human.

*I want to remember this.*

Once, much later, when the Wrights have already come home and the door is closed and the light is off, and he can't say anything out loud because he couldn't keep quiet if he did. They're on the edge of the bed near the window; he's in Klavier's lap. In a moment taken to catch their breaths he's opened his eyes and can see the dark buildings outside the window and the outlines of the taller buildings beyond them, red lights blinking silent at the corners. One arm is draped around his abdomen, holding him close, and then Klavier's back to bracing himself with both arms and he's pushing back, sweat between their skins, then arching his spine -

*I want to remember this.*
And once more after that, even later, after he's ghosted across the hall and back for warm towels and a bottle of water, after Klavier has fallen asleep in his arms and he's less than a moment from doing the same.

I want to remember this. The thought takes the half-step into a dream, and the night continues around them and everywhere in the city.
Chapter 44

He's first nudged back into the world by a smooth shoulder, or something, as it brushes against his chest. It doesn't wake him up, not really, but instinctively he wraps his arms a little more tightly around what he's holding, which gets him an amused purr from Klavier, and that wakes him up. The sun is still low enough that the alley is full of shadows, but there's that feel in the air that means it's going to blaze today, the kind of heat that sinks into the sidewalks and scorches grass.

"You want a teddy bear?" There's a hint of just-woken gravel in the warm voice, pitched low enough (hopefully) to be surreptitious.

"Mmf. Mmhm. One of those..." He yawns. "...expensive German ones."

"Then, if you are a good boy, Saint Nicholas will bring you one this year."

He elbows Klavier, who smiles in lieu of laughing, closes his eyes, and rolls his head on the pillow so that the sunlight hits his face. Apollo considers the sight, then notices the singer's grin widening instead of fading. "Could you be more vain?"

"This is happiness, mausi, not vanity." The grin quirks.

"The later you sleep, the harder it's going to be to smuggle you out."

"Sleep?"

"Look. Ahhm. Stop, pay attention." The hands, immediately, stop. "Mr. Wright's not exactly going to buy that we're lonely if he notices your bike -"

"It is not a bike -"

"- your bike in the alley. Or if he hears you."

Klavier smirks at first like he's going to keep teasing, but then he sits up, pulls the smaller man into a hug, and sighs. The shift of the mattress adds a rocking movement to it, and it's impossible not to sigh back.

"I don't want you to go either."

"Three one zero, eight three three, six one zero two."

"Huh?" It's another little song, sung under his breath.

"I bought a new phone. It doesn't make sense, Daryan is not around to check the old one anymore...but I did it. Call."

"Come up and see me sometimes."

"How could I refuse?"

He struggles into sweats with Klavier cheerfully ogling him from amidst the rumpled covers, then
lets himself out into the hall, closing the door as quickly behind him as he can. It's as quiet as
yesterday was, but the tension is different - not vague dark dread but a bright, almost mischievous
sting.

There's the faint sound of snoring coming from the end of the hall, which accounts for Mr. Wright.
And there's no sound of the television either, but he remembers Trucy the morning after the
concert, and checks the front room anyhow. Nobody. He goes back to the file closet.

"The coast is clear... not that you're decent or anything."

"Mm - will running water wake anyone else, do you suppose?"

It's a risk.

But it's only civilized.

And besides, the Wrights sleep through him showering all the time.

---

They leave the still-quiet apartment together once they're both dressed, feet pressing into the treads
of the stairs in cautious near-unison. He breathes more easily once they're out on the street, on the
other side of the glass door.

"That feels good." Klavier tilts his head back. There's only the faintest breeze shifting the heat
around, but it lifts a few strands of the damp blond ponytail he's got in place of his normal style.
Apollo feels a drip from his own wet hair evaporating off the back of his neck. There's more than a
suggestion of violet and soap.

"You're wearing my cologne?"

"The better to smell like you." He grins when Apollo glances sideways at him. "The better way if
not the best."

"I haven't worn it since the last time we -"

"Oh." Klavier looks down at the concrete, suddenly pensive, though he still keeps pace. "That was
smart." A moment's quiet. "Apollo?"

"Hm?" They're heading up the sidewalk, since the alley doesn't cut through to this side of the
block.

"It is not us against the world, ja? It is us rejoining it."

"I haven't seen a lot of world."

"Even better..."

"Better? How is it good?"

"It made me think of everywhere we could go together for the first time." The prosecutor actually
looks bashful, when he catches Apollo looking at him, and he stares at his boots as they approach
the corner. But he reaches out just an inch or so, and Apollo takes the hint, holds his hand. Even if it's cutesy.

"You are a freaking teddy bear."

"My secret shame."

And Apollo steps in front of him and turns around, and is reaching up to kiss him, because they haven't seen anyone and after that who wouldn't. And because I haven't seen a lot of world seems less and less like a good substitute for thank you.

The only warning he gets is Klavier's eyes flying wide instead of closing before a voice says "Well, good morning!"

The owner of the voice is carrying a pink bakery box. Because of course, it's Trucy.

For the first few seconds - fuck, not just the first few seconds - he doesn't do more than stand there in shock as the bracelet tries to cut off the circulation to his hand. He doesn't need the bracelet to feel the tension radiating off Klavier behind him, either, speechless and rigidly still.

Meanwhile Trucy convulses with giggles, bending over and pointing with one hand and cradling the pink box in her other arm. The first coherent thought that gets through is If she drops them, she'll tell him for sure.

'Daddy, Polly made me drop the doughnuts!'

'Oh, did he? Apollo, is this true?'

He lunges forward and tugs the box out from the crook of her elbow just as the bottom of it buckles alarmingly, and winds up in a kind of straightjacket pose, half supporting and half restraining it. Like it's alive.

"Hey!" She's still incapacitated by mirth, but she makes a half-hearted attempt to retrieve it, and to avoid her he turns back around to a still-dumbstruck Klavier.

"Here. Have a...a whatever." He opens the lid. "... a danish." Then over his shoulder to Trucy: "He's a guest."

Klavier picks up a blackberry pastry wrapped in waxed paper. His face moves like he's about to say something, but it doesn't come out, and he doesn't make any move to eat it, either.

"Oh, at least take a bite! I got up specially to get them early!"

He turns around, still holding the box. "You did?"

"Uh-huh. I was talking to the croissant lady yesterday and she said that they get up really early to make everything, and the earlier you come into a bakery the better everything is. So then I remembered the danish place, because they're good even when you get them later but I thought maybe..." She trails off, the wicked gleam coming back into her eyes. "Ooh, sneaky, Polly. Like the danishes are the interesting thing!"

"We're not interesting." To his own ears it doesn't sound convincing.
"Oh, don't be like that! It's awesome! You're so cute!"

Finally Klavier speaks, and there's the sound of waxed paper crumpling. "That is quite a compliment, Fräulein, coming from you. But..."

"Don't even try to deny anything."

This is why he's a rock star.

Because even with wet hair and danish crumbs on his chin, stopped awkwardly on a random sidewalk, even after she's just seen him standing there like a shellshock victim, Klavier is able to look her in the eye and summon up a voice that she pays attention to.

"I deny nothing."

Trucy makes a tiny eee noise behind her hands.

"But you must understand, what you have just discovered is not something that the whole world needs to know." Her shoulders rise, like she's about to contradict him, but he seems to anticipate her. "Not yet. It is a temporary bit of discretion, ja? Not the start of a lifetime of cowardice."

"How long?" This is what always works on Phoenix - her apparently innocent persistence.

He flashes a smile, a kind conspiracy. "Christmastime."

"You promise?"

"I promise to invite the entire Wright Agency to the yearly Christmas party at the Prosecutor's Office. It's very showy. And there will be mistletoe, and dancing...also a great number of boring people, but you can avoid them. Anyone with a badge of any kind, other than me."

"Even Polly?"

"Well, perhaps we can make an exception for him."

"And Daddy doesn't have to worry about that anymore." Klavier winces.

"Nein...I suppose he doesn't. But Fräulein, do we have a deal? No forums. No websites. No gossip. You know - while other people do not."

"And a really good Christmas present."

"Nothing could be better than the one I am going to get. But yes, agreed."

"Okay." She says it immediately, easily, and there's a moment's uncertain silence before she breaks the tableau, laughing and bouncing up to tug on his necklace so he'll bend down. "Oh, silly. Don't worry. Magicians can keep secrets." And she pecks him on the cheek and flings her arms around his neck in a brief but ferocious squeeze. "This means you're family now."

And Klavier looks as stunned as Apollo feels, standing off to one side and cuddling a squished box of danishes like it's a kitten. Because if this makes Klavier family, what does that mean about what
he already is?

Klavier finds his voice, though it shakes a little, and he misses Trucy’s cheek and so pecks her on the temple instead. "Danke...thank you...I - but I ought to be going." He starts toward the mouth of the alley, toward the motorcycle, shock still evident in the slump of his shoulders.

"I'll wait, Polly." Trucy leans against a streetlamp, grinning, and he hands her the carton before he trots to catch up. It feels better to have their footsteps crunching the asphalt gravel in sync. He tries to speak so Trucy can't hear.

"Hey. I'll - I'll make sure she doesn't tell her dad."

"Ach, ja." Klavier almost laughs.

"That wasn't what you were worried about?"

"I do not deserve family like the fräulein."

"Well. Me either." They reach the bike (it is) and face each other over it. "I didn't expect her to say that...not like I expected to see her at all."

Klavier sighs, sounds frighteningly older for a moment. "The man in the white suit." And Apollo has nothing to say to that. "I am fond of her. But I am not sure it is fair to put her to the trouble of liking me." He slings a black-clad leg over the machine, blatantly trying to avoid eye contact.

Apollo doesn't let him.

"I'm pretty sure you're not going to be able to stop her. And you know...if you're really going to rejoin the world, you're going to have to learn to tolerate people liking you."

"I tolerate you."

"You love me, you bastard."

And Klavier laughs, laughs and slides off the near side of the saddle and murmurs I do, I do and hugs and kisses him and messes up his hair.

Somewhere in there Apollo says I love you too.

Once the bike has veered around a corner and the sound of its motor has ricocheted away between buildings and disappeared, he walks back to where Trucy is waiting, practically giving off visible twinkles of amusement.

"Hubba hubba. You want my big poster?"

He ignores her.

"I guess you don't live in a closet after all?"

He ignores her harder. She pokes him in the ribs with a corner of the box.

"I thought you might have high standards, Polly, but I didn't think -"
"Trucy, can you be serious for a minute?" To her credit she quiets down immediately. "Please. Don't tell your dad. You can't."

"Are you serious? Daddy wouldn't mind that! He's -"

"The problem's not..." He stops, starts again. "Not a boyfriend. That boyfriend."

She looks confused for only a second. "Oohh. You mean 'cause Klavier was the one who - so he's not a lawyer anymore?"

"That's part of it. But not the important part."

"Klavier's record label?"

"They have better things to worry about right now. No, I mean...Truce, Daryan Crescend was a dangerous guy. He deserves to be in prison."

She looks part indignant, part embarrassed. "I know. I took that poster down."

"And Alita Tiala was guilty. Too."

"I know -"

"The defense and the prosecution are supposed to be independent. If people find out about - this, they could end up saying the trials were invalid. That maybe it was collusion. Machi could end up back on the hook instead of Daryan. Wacky too."

He can see the part about Machi sinking in. Still, she says, "I don't see what that has to do with Daddy. Other people, but -"

"Truce, maybe your dad trusts me -"

"He does!"

"- but I don't think he trusts Klavier."

She steps right in front of him, looks right into his face with her big brown eyes. "Do you trust Klavier?"

The words are too big and too private and won't come out immediately, and he feels his face heat up, but she keeps staring and after what feels like an hour, probably five seconds, he answers. "With my life."

And she kisses him on the cheek the same as she'd done to Klavier earlier, though she doesn't have to make him lean down to do it. "Kay. I think you're being kinda silly, but I promise." There must be a look in his eyes. "Even Daddy, I promise." The bracelet doesn't even flick.

He gives her an awkward one-armed hug, and she giggles again. "You are cute. And it is awesome."
They're finally making their way back down the sidewalk to the Agency when she asks, "So why is waiting 'til Christmas going to help?"

He inhales. "Putting a little time between that and the trials, for one thing. And for the other, because it'd be right in front of basically everyone who matters in criminal law in Los Angeles. It's so not secretive that people can't really get suspicious about it."

She gives him a pleased, appraising look. "You'd be great magicians. Wanna be my beautiful assistants?"

"Maybe. We'll see. If this whole lawyer thing doesn't work out. Truce?"

"Huh?"

"Family?"

"Yeah, silly. Don't you dare be embarrassed. Race you back."
Chapter 45

For eight months, or about that, Apollo had been with a foster family who'd thought that holidays solved everything.

He'd been eleven, square in that gap when you're too old to be cute just naturally, and too young to understand needing something to look forward to. But he'd always looked younger than his age, and he'd learned to let people think what they were going to think about that.

So they made sure that he got to see fireworks on the Fourth of July. Halloween costume. Turkey for Thanksgiving. It had bewildered him at the time, not so much that they did it, but that they seemed afraid of not getting it right. And later on, when he thought about them (which wasn't often, but if there happened to be one of those Charlie Brown specials on TV, then for sure) it was somehow easier and harder to make sense of. If they'd wanted to be certain he'd learn how to be happy, and how to be normal, that would have taken, just...more than that. And maybe it was too much to ask, maybe it couldn't be done.

But from his adult perspective it seemed almost frightening. That how could they not understand why bringing a band-aid to someone in the hospital, like a little kid would, was sweet but ignorant, sweet because it was ignorant, that it wasn't really going to help. At the time, he hadn't been able to say why it made him uncomfortable.

Then his foster dad had been laid off, which meant they didn't have health insurance, exactly, and when Apollo had gone back to the department bureau of social whatever, it was supposed to be temporary, but the job offer that finally came was in Indiana and they left right away to stay with her brother until they could get a place of their own, and. Yeah.

But that was the next year. He'd had Christmas with them once. And one of the things they'd put out had been an advent calendar.

It was a cardboard house with glitter snow on the roof, and chimneys where you could see the glue around the edges. And he'd thought it was just another decoration, until his mom for the time being stood behind him and showed him all of the doors and windows that had spaces behind them, and how they were numbered. That you could open one, every day, leading up to Christmas.

They'd put little Hershey bars in there, and after a week he had a bunch of little Hershey foil balls in the pocket of the jacket he wore to school. So he'd taken them out and reflattened them and stacked them up next to the lamp by his bed. It didn't mean anything. It was just an obsessive kid thing that you'd do.

He'd forgotten about doing it, too, except that the next day she noticed while she was turning the lamp off and instead of saying trash goes in the trash she smiled. And he smiled back, just with his mouth mostly, because he would have felt sort of bad if he didn't.

And he hasn't thought of the advent calendar in years, except now he finds himself looking at his planner, which he does have even if he wasn't about to admit it to Klavier in that context, even if it's July. The Christmas party'll probably be a little bit before, right? So...there'll be about a hundred and forty days, until.

He tries to imagine a cardboard building with that many doors and windows, and creeps himself
out with the sudden image of a whole cardboard street without people.

Forget **Klavier** being the type to get weird when he's left alone. He kneels up on the folding bed where he's been sitting cross-legged, and pulls his wallet off a shelf.

*Three one zero, eight three three, six one zero two.*

It's time he had a phone, **not** someone else's, to call Klavier with. He can more or less afford it.

He figures he'll tell Phoenix he's going to the post office, but he doesn't seem to be around. The radio is on in Trucy's room.

The park is between the Agency and the phone store (well, what would you call it), and as he passes it he sees fliers stuck to all of the streetlights and telephone poles.

Obon Festival  
August 15  
carnival - bonfire - dance  
traditional foods and cultural display  

Support Local Business!

He knows **exactly** which local business that means.

---

*Three one zero, eight three three, six one zero two.*

The first time he dials the number, sitting on a bench under a big jacaranda in People Park, Klavier doesn't answer, and so he stares at his knees and feels, irrationally, foolish. It's too late into the summer for there to be any sticky purple flowers on the ground under the tree.

*So much for our first normal conversation.*

He's not especially pleased with himself, at the way his chest seized up at the suave voice on the other end of the line - because he honestly didn't notice it happening, not until that tightness burst like a pitiful little water balloon when he realized that he was hearing a recording. *Ja, hello. This is me. Wait for the beep, and -*

He frowns at not much of anything, after a minute, and dials again. *Ja, hello. This is me. Wait for the beep, and then do your very best to convince me to call back!*

"Klavier, it's me. I b-"

Another beep, a loud one. "Apollo! Forgive me, I could not tell whose number it was." And the balloon is back, except now it's full of warm, quavering air. He keeps it out of his tone.

"You don't answer the ones you don't recognize?"

There's a sound of self-disgust. "No. Still...no."

"It's okay."
A silence falls that might have been companionable in person but is a little awkward this way, with
the sounds of breathing sending scratches of static back and forth.

"I bought a phone."

He can hear a smile in the voice. "So where are you, schatzelein?"

"In the park."

"And is there anything interesting to see in the park, today?"

"Not really...benches. Trees?"

The white noise swells into a chuckle. "You are not doing such a very good job of helping me
imagine myself there."

"Well, fine, where are you?"

"I am in my apartment. It is all over cardboard boxes still - I should have you over to help me
unpack, ja? You are much more organized than I am."

"If 'organized' means not having any stuff."

Klavier disregards that. "I am up high enough to see the ocean. And the floors are wood - badly
worn, ja? not beautiful - but nice and smooth...and with nice warm spots where the light from the
windows is. If you are barefoot." The echoes of his voice change just enough as he talks to make it
clear that he's moving around, and for Apollo the picture is detailed and bright - Klavier walking
from sunny room to sunny room around piles of boxes, silk shirt and silver earrings and bare feet.
"I hope you will like it, when you see it."

He should say I will. Klavier would say Oh, but I am sure that I will. He says, "There're benches
and trees," and Klavier laughs at him.

"I believe we have already covered those."

"Fine. There are fliers up. It looks like the Kitakis are sponsoring some kind of festival. In
August."

"Are they? What kind?"

"Obon? I don't know what that is or anything, though."

There's a bit of careful lightness to Klavier's tone when he responds. "Well...it is a holiday.
Honoring the dead. But not so grim as you might think."

He feels a touch of something uncomfortable, tries to keep it as a physical rather than an emotional
sensation. "You know about it?"

"Not everything; a little. We toured in Japan a few times."

"Ghosts and Plum. Remind me to spend that night in my room." It sounds less like a joke out loud
than it had in his head.

"Oh, no, I do not intend to waste a chance to run into you. And even if I did not press the issue, the Wrights would, ja? Does the carnival exist that the fräulein would not insist on attending?"

"You're right. I'm doomed." Again the joking tone he's going for doesn't quite get there.

"Liebe." It's almost a question; it means you sound sad.

"Can I come see you?" He hadn't called intending to ask that.

"Any time you like. But I am not the one who needed to mind his comings and goings?"

"...Mr. Wright's been out a lot lately. And Trucy's not a problem, so maybe ...tomorrow. Friday? I don't know."

"All you need to do is call."

"I just...want to see you. In some kind of normal situation."

"Apollo?"

"...Not right after court." His pulse thumps with the bracelet; he'd nearly said not after we've just put someone in prison. "Or the detention center. Or for some morbid holiday." His tone is becoming increasingly vehement.

"It really is not morbid -"

He barely registers that he's talking over Klavier. "I just want us to, I don't know, sit on the couch with the television on. And eat takeout. And - God, this must sound insane and boring-"

"Apollo. I like boring, hm? I love boring."

He stops talking then, feels the blood hot in his face, lets Klavier rescue him from the verbal pit he's been digging.

"But I understand. You are wondering whether we have a mode other than Emergency."

Klavier doesn't need an answer, so he doesn't give one.

"Come be boring with me, schatzelein. We both can appreciate it properly." His voice drops into a blatantly seductive register. "I may even have a sweater I can put on."

"It's too hot for a sweater. And it would be some four-hundred-dollar thing made from endangered guinea pigs anyway."

Again Klavier is carried away by laughter. "Apollo, no. The poor guinea pigs."

"You promise?"

"I promise; if you would like to be dull with me, I would be honored."
"I meant the sweater. But that's okay too."

"You are thinking tomorrow or Friday?"

---

It's actually not until the next Tuesday that he's able to leave the Agency for an evening, slipping out between Mr. Wright's distraction and Trucy's tacit blessing. Klavier picks him up, and the hours are occupied with a few cartons of greasy noodles and a Hong Kong action movie.

When Klavier gently jostles him out of a doze on the couch, so that he can get back before the Borscht Bowl closes for the night, his various little flikers of surprise (I fell asleep? In my clothes?) all sink back into a cozy dark contentment, and he leans more heavily against his boyfriend's side instead of swinging his feet down to the floor.

It feels like the right word, finally.

Klavier rests his chin on top of his head for a few more minutes, and then they go.

Boring is so good.
July finishes, August begins, and on the night of the fifteenth he heads down the sidewalk in the dark with the Wrights, to the carnival.

A hot, dry wind is filling the street with the rustle of leaves and the knocking of paper cups; it reaches down the back of his collar and pulls at his shirt. He looks down, to keep the airborne grit out of his eyes, so he's mostly just peripherally aware of Phoenix slouching along in front of him, of Trucy gesturing and chattering and moving side-to-side with her usual excess of energy.

The closer they get to the park, the more people there are, but just as he's thinking of pausing for half a step and letting a few strangers separate him from the other Agency residents, Truce whirls around and tugs him forward by his sleeve. As is so often the case with her, the conversation seems to have started without him. "Polly! Are you good at throwing ping-pong balls?"

*When I was your age I was pretty good with rocks.* "Not really."

"What about darts?"

"No."

"Catching goldfish?"

"I'm not a cat."

"No, I guess you're more of a..." She giggles. "A bunny rabbit! But it's the catlike *reflexes* that matter!"

"Bunny rabbit?" He can hear his boss snickering.

"Duh, it's the hair."

"I'm not good at any of that stuff. So if you seriously want me to be your ringer for the games, you'd better be the one paying. I'm pretty sure you make more than I do anyway."

Phoenix snickers again, but he has a funny realization as he says it.

She may tease and she may nag and pester, but that's...really all there is to it. He can tease her back and barely have to think about it.

There are kids like Machi in the world. Or even just kids like he'd been. And if she'd been one, she could already have...well, he doesn't have much that a teenager would want.

Klavier on the other hand.

She's Shadi Enigmars daughter, after all - nothing says she couldn't have been a great little extortionist. But he trusts her. It's incredibly lucky.

She trusts them back. *Poor Truce.*
He's reaching for his wallet, because you know what? She can have all the beanbag toss prizes she wants, but she hauls again on the sleeve she's still holding. "I don't want you to play for me, silly. I just need you to win me something. Daddy's terrible at these games -"

Phoenix, who's been watching with a kind of superior amusement, finally speaks up. "Harsh words, kiddo."

She ignores him. "- and so no one's ever won me a carnival prize. I don't want to be, like, thirty, and no one's ever won me a carnival prize!"

Um. Okay. I can do that.

"It has to be a surprise!" And with that she spins him around to face the row of booths with their kiddy pools and card tables and hanging toys, and gives him just enough of a shove that he stumbles. There's a flicker of blue in the corner of his vision, and when he turns back around, she and Mr. Wright are both gone.

He'd bet actual money that she's cutting him loose on purpose, too. Okay. She gets the biggest bear he can manage.

He scans the crowd, and the stalls, the first for a tall blond presence (no luck) and the second for a game he might be decent at. Forget the goldfish.

Next to the goldfish is target shooting with rubber band guns. And playing with a toy gun at Plum's party - no way in hell. So he's about to look away and keep moving when it clicks that one of the rubber band shooters - the players, not the operators - is Wocky.

He looks so serious about it, too. Focused on the target, hair brushed out of his eyes, and with a stack of crumpled ones on the counter next to him.

It's hard to imagine him being as serious as this back when he used to carry a real one.

The next noticeable thing about the scene, though, explains it all. There's a girl standing a little bit behind Wocky, wearing a - not a kimono, what are the summer ones called? Thin, short black hair, not Alita, not that it could be Alita. She bends forward, says something that gets lost in the noise of the crowd before Apollo can hear it, but Wocky grins.

There's time for the briefest flicker of thought - a distant that's nice - before a soft hand settles onto his shoulder and a woman's deep voice is perfectly audible. "I didn't know if I would see you here, Mr. Justice."

"Don't sneak up on me." He hasn't spoken with this hardness in his voice since the last day of Machi's trial. Which really wasn't that long ago, but it bothers him that it's so easy to find it again.

"How you overestimate a coincidence."

He turns around. She's standing in the double shade of another jacaranda tree, a spot that provides a clear view of the rubber-band-gun booth. She looks more than ever like something from another time and place.

"You're watching Wocky?"
There's only the barest hint of scorn in his voice, but it's enough for her to hear. "Of course I am. His taste in women doesn't receive the benefit of the doubt any longer. But I haven't seen your Klavier go by, if you were wondering."

"Mm." He moves to rejoin the crowd, but she puts a hand on his arm before he can get out of reach. She knows perfectly well that she doesn't need to grab; the slight pressure of her fingertips has the same effect.

"This will be as good a place as any to keep an eye out for him."

"I have something else to do."

"You're rather angry with me." The bracelet seizes around his wrist, and it's not Plum it's reacting to.

No, I'm not will lead straight into You're lying to me, Mr. Justice. Yes, I am will open him up to Don't forget your manners. He clenches his jaw and stays half turned away, her fingers still heavy on his arm.

"I am curious about what happened at that concert."

"Read the newspapers."

"I read the newspapers every morning, Mr. Justice. But there are questions I wouldn't expect them to answer."

"But you expect that I would?"

"You didn't kill the man yourself."

The tension sizzles the words out between his teeth. "That isn't a question."

"No. An observation. You may believe that you're as troubled by it as you would be if you had. But trust my experience when I tell you no, you aren't."

He looks away at the shooting gallery. A few more of the cardboard targets have fallen; the stack of one-dollar bills is smaller. "Who's Wocky's girlfriend?"

Plum is willing to be distracted, temporarily at least, and she sighs with something not quite resignation. "From the culinary school. He's taking pastry classes, at his father's insistence. Though at the moment he's quite amenable."

"What do you think?"

"She's patient, at the least. We'll see. But you won't deflect me like that. You didn't kill the man. Calm down, no one is listening."

He wants to say why should I trust you, isn't dumb enough to. "I did not ask you for that." The words fall one at a time; he doesn't sound like himself.

"I gave you more than you asked for, no less. Do you resent it?"
"I was a - I was a better person before this started. Or I'm a worse person now."

"A better person? Or simply inert?"

"Inert?"

"Letting things happen, rather than making them happen. You are who you always had the potential to be. And your vicarious guilt is doing no one any good. Answer me two more questions, and I'll let you alone."

"What."

"What is your something else?" She meets his blank look with a knowing one. "Just a moment ago. When you informed me that you had 'something else to do.'"

"I promised Trucy I'd win her something here. Like a bear or something." Plum laughs, a rich, civilized laugh.

"We can arrange that. But my other question, first." She turns him around the way Trucy had, and it's unexpected enough that he doesn't resist, ends up facing the way she wants him to face.

Three-quarters of the way down the row, the light from one of the cheap strings of bulbs is glowing off of Klavier's golden hair, as he picks his gracious way through the stream of people.

The dangerous note is gone from her voice, as is the laugh. "You see him. Have you had - even a moment - where you thought that he wasn't worth whatever you did?"

Klavier gazing across the courtroom, standing around in the kitchen, lying in his lap with his eyes shut. Klavier sweating and shuddering and silent, happy static on the phone, drowsy in front of looping credits on the television screen.

He inhales, can't help it, more than his lungs can hold, with her hands still on his shoulders. "No."

"I'm very glad." She sounds almost maternal.

"Still. Trucy's prize. Don't. I'll get it myself. I won't take anything else from you."

She grips him tighter, in preparation for letting him go. "Yes, you will. For people you care about, you will." And she pushes him out of the tree's shadow, and Klavier sees him, and smiles and waves, and hurries closer.
Chapter 47

The prosecution is dressed for the occasion. He's wearing an impeccably neat black robe, and those wooden sandals Apollo can't walk in without stumbling, and those white toe-sock things that go with the sandals. His hair's in a ponytail and even the gaudy necklace is absent.

It figures.

Klavier closes the distance between them to something just a little less than a friendly arm's-length, a little less, because he's European, he's a flirtatious rock star. A little less because he's Klavier Gavin and calculating what he can get away with is like breathing.

Before either of them can say anything, though, there's an interruption from a girl younger than Trucy, who asks for an autograph and fiddles with the butterfly-shaped clip in her hair. "Of course, fräulein...your name is? Yasmin!...and your friend there?" Apollo hadn't even noticed the shyer girl, hovering a few feet back by a sign reading COLD!! RAMUNE! and poking one sandal nervously into the dirt. "Ana and Yasmin! Here you are - and enjoy the carnival, ja?" They trot off giggling with their newly precious orange fliers and Klavier tucks his pen back into - into whatever you call that little bag he's got on his belt. When he looks back to Apollo, he's grinning, somewhere between smug and insecure. It's like meeting your prom date.

I don't know what kind of expression I should have right now.

He turns so he's only looking at Klavier out of the corner of his eye, and they start to walk together down the row of booths. There's the sound of drumming in the background, behind and below the nearby noises. "You just wanted to come so you could play dress-up, didn't you."

"How do you know I don't walk around in the apartment like this?"

"Because that outfit would make it harder to flirt with the UPS man."

The corner of Klavier's mouth is quirking in the yellow electric light. "Don't underestimate me."

"I don't." It comes out without any humor in it, uncloaked, and blue eyes meet his, their look oblique. **Time and place, remember.**

When he turns aside again, though, the tall figure in black shifts and walks infinitesimally closer next to him.

"So, Forehead. What are we doing here?"

"Trucy wants me to win her a prize. Are you good at any of these things?"

"I am good at crepes...with strawberries..." His boyfriend cranes to watch someone's dessert go by.

"Forget I asked."

"What about that, with the hooks and the balloons and the paper?"

"What?" He follows the pointing arm, forcing himself past the sudden awareness of Klavier's
fingernails and how differently nails that aren't polished shine, to see a plastic pool full of bobbing balloons, and people hovering over it with what look like paper clips.

"The hooks are on strips of paper, and you try to pull the balloons out by the loops in the string, before the paper gets wet and rips," Klavier is making unhelpful hand gestures to accompany his attempt to explain.

"You've done it before? Is this easier than ping-pong balls?"

"Ja. But crepes are easier also..." The bracelet is entirely unnecessary to pick up on the puppydog waves that the musician is exuding.

"No wonder Trucy likes you, you're the same age insi-" with Daryan since I was sixteen. The recollection tears the rest of the words off of his lips, and he freezes, but a moment later Klavier, who hasn't noticed, has a companionable, public arm over his shoulders and is steering him towards the knot of people at the plastic wading pool.

Catching the balloons is harder than it looks. Fortunately, though, Klavier has a nigh-endless supply of small bills and a reckless willingness to part with them. The bald man running the booth finds their joint ineptitude funny, and eventually agrees to let them trade back a small pile of novelty erasers and peach candy for one of the smallest bears on display, a brown one with a floppy neck. It's a little bit pathetic, but that might make Trucy love it more.

As he's getting it down, though, the grey-haired woman who's been wordlessly managing the cash box interrupts with a torrent of Japanese. About all Apollo can make out is "Kitaki." Klavier isn't listening; he's signing another autograph.

"Here. This one. Bigger."

This bear is bigger, plus it's wearing a blue hat which is kind of like the color of Trucy's, at least in the bad light.

Klavier thanks the man and reaches for it at the exact second that Apollo says, "No." Both of them look at him in bewilderment. "We'll take the small one like we said. On the end."

"But this one is perfect for the fräulein -"

"But Kitaki-san says for you, a better one. You know her?"

A look of understanding flashes across Klavier's face then, but he doesn't react quite as Apollo had hoped. He fishes another crumpled bill out of his wallet, says "How about both?", with a wink at the older woman, and makes a valiant attempt to snag two balloons at once with his last paper hook. All he manages to do is soak his sleeve, really, but it settles the transaction to his satisfaction and theirs.

Not to Apollo's. He scowls as they walk to the end of the row. "Why did you do that?"

"Take both?"

"Accept it. I don't - I don't want anything else that has Plum's name on it."

Klavier presses his lips together a little, his thoughtful face. "Because we should not make her
angry, hm? It is not worth arguing over, it will please the fräulein - and this way I will have a bigger gift to give her than you." Apollo grabs both of the toys away from him then, which is a tactical error - the blond refuses to take them back.

The temporary lane of games and food stalls gives way to an open expanse of grass and packed dirt, and they pause at the same instant, because they've come to the source of the drumming.

Small bonfires, each with a couple of hovering figures nearby, mark a circle bigger than a soccer field, and where the milling crowd had been earlier, there's now a wide ring of dancers moving in near-unison in the firelight. The musicians are up on a wooden platform several yards away from where they're standing.

Klavier's right. There's nothing morbid about this. It's not silly, either, the participants aren't goofing around, but on the whole it seems - festive. Fun. And some of the dancers might be impromptu volunteers, now that he looks more carefully - there are a few people who aren't as polished as the rest, a second late to follow the moves of the ones in front of them. "Why don't you join in? You're dressed for it."

The rock-star-until-recently just smiles and leads the way to a spot under a scrubby tree, close enough to the general mass of spectators without being completely public. When he speaks, Apollo can feel the warm thrum of his voice even though they're not touching. "Did you know these dances are regional? You might get a mining dance in the mountains, or a fishing dance on the coast. Very stylized."

"So what's this? The protection racket dance?"

A huff of a laugh. "Wood-gathering, I would have said. Something more ancestral..."

That puts it in perspective, a little. The wavering light from the bonfires interferes with the orderly shadows of the dancers, turns their momentary expressions significant. The music shifts into a slower, less playful tune, and they watch for a while without speaking. Klavier taps one arm with the fingers of his opposite hand, in time with the drumbeats and the melody; probably he doesn't even know he's doing it.

At length, the thought becomes too much to suppress. "I have no idea."

"Hm?" Klavier looks at him and away from the performers, concerned. The fingers stop tapping.

"Literally no idea. Who my ancestors were. Whether I'd be doing the right thing if I..." He gestures at the dancers, with the arm not holding Trucy's bears. "Sorry. It's not a...it's fine."

"I could teach you the dance of the German Midlevel Import/Export Executive."

Despite himself he smirks. "Talk dirty to me some more."

"Later, ja?" is the barely audible reply. And a reassuring hand comes to rest on his shoulder, and somewhere in the gesture is the true response to his wistfulness.

The music comes to a halt, and an unfamiliar man in a suit gets up on the platform and starts to give some kind of speech. He's alternating between English and Japanese, and the handheld microphone fades in and out. All around the circle, people start to come back to themselves and eddy away, losing interest. They wander off then.
Signing the menu board at the crepe booth and adding a little doodle gets Klavier **extra** strawberries, and it's nice if ridiculous how happy he is about that, though he still gets a funny look on his face when he catches himself and amends his request for an extra fork to include an extra plate, too, please.

They both grow quieter as they meander away from the festivities and along the shallow stream that trickles from one of the park's ponds to another. It's a nice place to walk during the day, less familiar at night. And then there's suddenly a light on the surface of the water, and before there's time to exclaim a second one floats into view. They're tiny candles, tealights, on boats made of stiff paper.

"For saying - farewell to the visiting spirits," says Klavier softly, and they stop together in the dark to watch.
There's a third boat, after a delay. A fourth.

"Did you do this, when you were in Japan?"

"I would have liked to," Klavier says, like it's a confession.

The origin of the boats becomes evident as they resume their walk. On the other side of a tall stand of reeds, near the footbridge, stands an older lady with a smallish cluster of what must be her relatives, reaching into a plastic Marukai bag full of the tealights as a tall, thin, gawky probably-grandson folds the boats. It's pretty clearly a family activity, not part of the official happenings, and Klavier tries to excuse their intrusion with a quick, apologetic smile. But she presses a couple of the little candles into his hand instead, says something insistent.

Maybe it's because he doesn't understand the language, maybe it's because he's not sure how to feel, but Apollo's inner voice goes silent, and all he does is back up and look as Klavier accepts a piece of paper, tears it in half, follows the boy's motions to end up with two little boats of his own. He balances them both on his hand held flat, puts the candles in them, and there's the flick of a cigarette lighter as a man who might be the boy's father, the woman's son, steps closer for a second. It's like watching a film.

...fahr'n fahr'n fahr'n auf der Autobahn.

You have a defective sense of humor, prettyboy.

I would have liked to, Klavier said, like it was a confession.

He stands by the reeds, feeling small and still, waits for the two boats to be released into the water - but instead Klavier comes up to him, face lit from below by the candle flames, and holds one of them out. He doesn't say no.

But as he watches the careful long fingers set the first light on the water, and tries to think of the unknown faces behind him, of who he might wish well...none of it seems real, seems right, it's all hopelessly vague, they're imaginary people, and he ends up thinking of LeTouse.

The family with the plastic bag starts to leave while Klavier is still kneeling by the water and not looking up, so it's Apollo who says thanks, not entirely comfortably. The woman replies with something that the boy doesn't translate - he just makes eye contact with Apollo for a second, half raises a hand, and glances down at the prosecutor. Then they're gone.

And the boats disappear around a bend a moment later, but Klavier stays rooted in place, eyes focused on something that doesn't exist and probably getting his outfit muddy. Apollo takes a careful step forward onto the soft ground and waits. Finally the blond gets up, all in one twitch, and makes his preparing-a-remark face.

"There, schatzelein - you've met the parents."

"You don't need to joke about it." He holds out an arm when Klavier slips on the grass, and the German takes it until he's steady.
"I indulged myself, liebe. What is left of the Gavin family is in no way a family. What else is there to say? They escaped knowing what their sons would become."

"Which is why you light candles to say goodbye instead of fucking it up with vocabulary." Klavier looks at him, eyebrows raised. "Otherwise, I would have been the one to tell them all about their sons."

"My advocate."

"Yeah."

It's dark enough between the lampposts that Klavier slips behind him and wraps his arms around his ribs so tightly that he has to catch his breath, and walks a few steps with him that way, until they come into the next puddle of light. "Apology."

"Accepted."

"I would have some words for yours, too, given a chance."

"Ff. Kind of too bad you turned out to be the kind I could take home, when I don't..."

"Soon. Christmas. And do not sell the fräulein short. You would hurt her feelings."

"She's probably wondering where I am."

It shouldn't come as a surprise that they find Trucy surrounded by spectators. She's by one of the festival bonfires, with an expression of concentration on her face as she draws tissue-paper shapes in bright colors out of midair. Doves, stars, things that might be gloves or just hands, it's hard to tell. They spiral around her and drift into the fire in clusters of even more vividly colored sparks. Phoenix is watching her from the edge of the circle.

There's a moment when she gazes straight at the fire and no further shapes appear, and then a loud pop as one of the pieces of wood in the bonfire gives way with a cascade of very ordinary orange embers. And she jumps, and looks up and says, "You did bring me a prize!"

The audience that has been standing around, unsure whether or not to clap, laughs a little and takes that as the cue to go, leaving Trucy and her dad and Apollo and Klavier in the flickering light.

"Two prizes actually." He holds out the bears, but instead she's hugging the tall German in the black robe.

"I meant the big one." Phoenix's discreet lifting of his eyebrows makes Klavier take a larger than necessary step backwards and pat her on the head, or at least the brim of the hat.

"Hey, I thought you wanted me to win you something. He doesn't count, I found him in front of the crepe stand for free."

"I'm a bargain," says Klavier, and Phoenix snorts. "What do you call this marvel we have just seen, fräulein?"

"Oh, I wouldn't ever do this on stage. It's not a trick. It's just a - a tribute. We've lost a lot of
Gramaryes. " She looks far away, then gathers herself again and starts cooing over the teddy bears before the silence can settle, taking both in the crook of her left elbow and setting off up the slope. "The little one reminds me of you, Polly. He's trying so hard."

Klavier says a courteous goodnight when they come to an intersection of footpaths under a streetlight. Apollo hangs back for an extra step to watch him go, and ends up walking behind the Wrights again as they retrace the way back to the Agency. He sticks closer than he had on the way down, because he kind of wants to say something to Trucy, but ends up staying quiet because he doesn't know what he'd say.

Once they get home, she tosses the bears onto the couch in the front room and scampers down the hall. He picks them up; maybe he'll be able to think of what he wants to tell her between here and the door of her room.

"Ow ow ow..."

That's her voice, and she's not in her room. It's coming from the bathroom instead, and since the door is ajar he doesn't feel too bad about rapping it with his knuckles and pushing it the rest of the way open.

She's standing in front of the sink with her cape pulled back, looking at her right arm in the mirror and dabbing at it with a wet washcloth. Four or five angry little red marks stand out, not bad but enough to hurt.

"Are those from the bonfire?"

"From the sparks...ow."

A third face joins the ones in the mirror; Phoenix is in the doorway and looks appalled. More appalled than the situation really warrants, which is almost funny, except I might not be the best judge.

"Honey, why didn't you say anything? Sooner? Apollo, get out of the way. Let me see that...I don't think we have anything, but I can run to the drugstore -" There's the sound of the medicine cabinet opening and closing, but Apollo's already rummaging under the folding bed. He finds the bag he's looking for and steps into the hall with the tube of burn cream, just as Mr. Wright is coming out of the bathroom. They nearly collide, but then Phoenix sees what he's got between his fingers, grabs it without saying thank you, and turns back around.

He goes back to the closet, himself, sits cross-legged on the bed with the door open and pretends to read while Wright Family first aid (on the noisy side) is administered. Shortly thereafter, Trucy sticks her face in. "Thanks, Polly! Can I have my bears now? Or did you change your mind?"

He flushes. "Here."

She winks at him, takes them, and goes, but before he can untangle himself to close the door after her, Mr. Wright appears in the same spot.

"I really ought to have a kit, with her around." He doesn't seem to be comfortable with gratitude; he fidgets with the back of his hat. "Thanks."

"It's fine."
"You had that already?"

"Yeah."

"That was lucky. You don't have much in here." He doesn't continue. Apollo doesn't respond. 
"Good night, then. Sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs...we don't have bedbugs." Phoenix shakes his head, like he's trying to clear it.

"I don't think they'd fit. I mean - Good night." He sits up to shut the door after Mr. Wright has gone.

---

Time passes whether you do anything or not. As the summer passes and autumn looms, Apollo does very little.

On the good days, he tells himself he's just keeping his head down. He takes walks around the neighborhood, watches other people's trials from the gallery, reads Mia Fey's old files sitting crosslegged on his bed. On the harder days (though thank Kristoph for that much, that almost nothing is enough to be a bad day anymore) he paces around the Agency full of energy he can't use and wishes someone with money and a solvable problem would come up the stairs. And on the occasional best days, when Phoenix isn't around, he ghosts down the stairs, clambers into the black car, sits on Klavier's briefcase because Klavier always forgets it's in the passenger seat and he always forgets to look, and they're boring together.

"It is carryout again. I promise, we will go to all of the good places, once..."

"So long as you dress up."

"Hm?"

"You think I'm going to waste the chance to stroll into the room with a gorgeous blond on my arm?"

"Mm - I do not look so well in fishnet stockings as you might imagine."

He brings the red phone along everywhere. Klavier is still busy, still working at the Prosecutor's Office, and even recording, surreptitiously, with a tiny label he'd handpicked the moment the Gavinners' contract was officially dissolved. He won't say what it is except nothing so loud, ja? It's not always possible to reach him during the day, but at the very least, he'll send a text message before he goes to sleep. The texts wake Apollo up often as not, the sudden greenish glow of the screen next to his pillow bringing him up out of oblivion. He doesn't mind; it's easy to fall asleep afterwards. Even though he deletes the texts after he reads them.

September comes, and Apollo comes back from a bike ride one day to find his boss, who's been missing more and more often lately, going through the office for usable school supplies and looking tired. Together they scare up pens and binders and folders and even a highlighter, and a few days later Trucy goes back to school.
Apollo wakes on the morning of October 7th straight out of a dream, his heart pounding. He'd been running down the advent calendar street towards the courthouse (for some reason the courthouse and not the Prosecutor's Office), hearing birds, then slipping on stairs that were cardboard too and collapsing underneath his feet -

He sits up, shoulders hunched, and takes a deep breath. Thumbs grit from the corners of his eyes. The traffic noises are louder than usual this morning, and a flock of pigeons is burbling hopefully on the roof of the sandwich place.

By the time he's showered and dressed and presentable, he's almost convinced himself that it was a dumb dream and he just needs to calm down. (It's not even eight yet. Calling Klavier before eight is like making a puppy chase an imaginary ball; it's cruel.)

"Morning, Polly."

"It's Wednesday. Shouldn't you be waiting for the bus already?"

"Daddy didn't come home last night. He says I don't have to go when that happens."

It might or might not be true, but he's not going to argue about it, and by the time he's ensconced in the front room keeping half an eye on her, he's convinced himself that shaking off the dream is going to be the hardest thing he has to do in the next twenty-four hours.

Except that Phoenix Wright appears a little before eleven to talk about a girl named Vera Misham.

He's hand-picked her for the first jury trial in the country since the partial repeal of the Seventh Amendment, and he doesn't expect Apollo to win.

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On the morning of October 7th, Klavier gets to work only fifteen minutes late, which is practically early, pulls his desk chair over by the window, and puts *Hunky Dory* on at - well, at an acceptable volume. He's not listening very hard to the beginning of the album, as he starts on the day's allotment of paperwork - he's waiting for "Life on Mars?" mostly.

He's only on the second page, though, when one of the clerks walks in to tell him that he has a new case. But when he says ja, thank you, put the file on the desk, please, he's told that this one is different. He needs to come up to the Chief Prosecutor's office. Promptly.

He follows her out without turning the music off, and since she doesn't say anything else, what he hears as he walks into the hall is *Look out my window and what do I see / A crack in the sky / and a hand reaching down to me."

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By the end of the day, Apollo has more than a few questions that he wants to ask his boss, seething around in his brain like angry betta fish.
Reasonable ones.

*Why didn't you tell me sooner?*

*Why don't you want me to talk to anyone about it? How can I do my job like that?*

*You're in charge? What does that mean?*

Angrier ones.

*Who put you in charge of this? Who would put you in charge of anything?*

*Why should I trust what you're doing, you cryptic, superior, absentee asshole?*

*You picked the lawyer, and the jury, and the rules? Did you pick the murder victim too? Where were you last night?*

The only one he manages to say out loud, once he and Trucy get home to a dark apartment, is "And where the hell are you." Trucy hears his tone, gives him a sympathetic glance, and hurries off to her room.

He sits on the folding bed, leaves the light off, and calls Klavier. He's expecting it to go to voice mail, so it takes him a second to swallow and form words when the phone picks up on the second ring.

"...Hello, mausi."

"Are you still at the office?"

"You can hear it in my voice, ja? I may be spending the night in my chair, cold and lonely. I am a little overwhelmed with a new case."

"The jury trial. Vera Misham, tomorrow. Don't say yes. I'm not supposed to talk to anyone else involved."

"Then I will refrain from saying no! But who is telling you not to talk? The Chief Prosecutor said the same thing to me. He looked very preoccupied."

An ironic sullenness twists into his voice. "The Chair of the Jurist System Simulated Court Committee."

"And who is that?"

He tries to imagine Klavier's face, lips parted, eyes far off, the bright overhead lights of the office doing nothing to mask how tired he is. He has to imagine something, because Klavier doesn't say anything back when he says "Mr. Wright."

The silence lasts long enough that he wonders if the batteries in his phone have given out, and he's about to look when a spatter of static goes straight to his eardrum. What begins as noise resolves into a sigh.

"Mausi. I asked to be taken off this case."
"You did? Why?"

"The victim was - well, not someone I knew, that would be overstatement, ja? Not an acquaintance, even. But he did me a great favor, years ago, acting as a special witness in court. For a case that, without him, I would have lost."

"So..."

"So I pointed that fact out to the Chief Prosecutor. Only as strongly as I could. I had asked to prosecute Wright this spring, after all, and he was not well entertained by that."

"But he kept you on this one?"

"He said it was not his decision to make."

Apollo scowls furiously into the darkness of the room and the hallway beyond. "One guess whose it was then."

"Apollo, I...I don't like this."

He tries to be rational, swallows back I don't either in favor of "What was the trial Mr. Misham helped you with?"

He hears a series of noises instead of an answer, Klavier moving around his office. Footsteps, a metallic click, feet again, background music, and the protest of a chair.

"Is that David Bowie?"

"He was still in the player."

"And you locked the door?"

"Ja. Mausi, there is I-should-not-be-talking-to-you-right-now, and there is I-should-not-be-talking-about-this-thing-ever. This was in a closed session. It was the only way he would testify."

"Fine. Pretend I'm not listening."

There's quiet on the line a second longer, and then the prosecutor sighs again, a weirdly flippant sound. "Drew Misham admitted to forging the little piece of paper that cost your boss his badge, ja?"

He blurts the first thing he can think of. "You think Mr. Wright-" Trucy's home! "um, had something to do with-"

"Not him, liebe. I wish it were."

"Who?"

"Listen carefully, schatz, hang up the phone right now and remove yourself from the case. Please."

"Klavier, if you don't stop calling me cute names and tell me who you're talking about the next
"Apollo...I had no idea who Drew Misham was before that trial. It was my first. I was pointed in his direction. By my - by my thoughtful big brother."

It's not even a gasp. He croaks like a frog. Klavier makes soothing, urgent little sounds into the phone and then says, again, "Call."

"Okay."

"Before midnight, the counsel's names have to be set the day before -"

"Okay. I know." He still sounds hoarse, to himself.

"I love you, schatzelein."

"Love you - too."

His heart's beating like a rabbit's trying to cross a road, but he calls the courthouse. It's after nine. There's no answer. Main desk or any of the extensions he tries.

He calls the police department, not thinking, and gets snapped at by the desk officer to call the goddamn Superior Court offices and stop tying up the fucking line.

He spends forty minutes navigating the Superior Court telephony system trying to find a human being who's still there. Someone hasn't left yet, somewhere there's the one window with the light still on...

He finds her and she puts him on hold while she calls her supervisor at home.

Another twenty-some minutes, before she finally comes back to tell him just a moment, she has to verify something in the computer. Some hollow typing sounds. Can she have his badge number again?

Clocketaclatter, go the keys.

Yes. Mr. Justice. No...

She's very sorry sir but due to the special circumstances, her supervisor can't do a thing, he needs to contact the -

His voice overlaps with hers, loud and angry: the Chair of the Jurist System Simulated Court Committee.

Yes. Would he like to be put through to the number she has listed? Yes.

There's a mechanical silence between connections, and he swallows, tries to put words in the right order, and then there's an uneven ring, louder than he expects, and he jumps.

The phone in the front office is ringing.

He hangs up before it finishes the second shrill, before Trucy can race to get it, and stabs at the buttons for Mr. Wright's cell number with shaky fingers.
There's no answer and it doesn't go to voice and it rings and rings and rings.

He calls the Borscht Bowl Club, like he's been told to do only if there's an emergency with Trucy, gets someone with a Russian accent who doesn't understand him, wastes more minutes getting to someone with a Russian accent who does. There is no Mr. Wright here.

Yes, there is, don't screw with me, he plays poker in the basement and I'm with his daughter.

There is no poker in basement today, Mr. Wright is not here.

Fuck him, fuck him, where is he, where are you!

He nearly calls Klavier again, but he can't miss the return call if it comes. He dials Mr. Wright's cell from the landline in the front office, to make sure it's in the call log too, goes back to the closet and curls up beside one of Mia Fey's file cartons.

He calls every four minutes, waiting for a call back in between, until it's 12:11 in the morning and he stares at the red numbers on the clock with a frustrated sting in his eyes that he will not give in to. The phone slips from his fingers and thumps onto the mattress next to his ear. And he falls asleep in his clothes.

Across town, Klavier does the same.
The morning sky through the storage room window is overcast but not grey enough to rain. He's slept badly, and he surfaces to wakefulness through layers of muscle ache, fear, and lastly, horribly, déjà vu. Good morning, Mr. Gavin.

His first rational thought, in counterpoint to his nerves, is that Vera Misham needs an attorney who can defend her without distraction. The state of California lists poisoning among the special circumstances which may render first-degree murder a capital offense.

He remembers that list from school. Can even remember where it was in the text - right-hand page, first column - even the way the light from his dormitory desk lamp shone on the thin paper. Poisoning, explosives, hate crimes; financial gain, depravity, torture. They'd been flash cards then. Derailing a train, silencing a witness. Some others.

The two other crimes held to warrant the death penalty in California are a, treason, and b, perjury leading to the execution of a prisoner later determined to be innocent.

Lawyers are specialists in fine lines, but they're practically too thin to be visible right now, and they're feeling very, very close. And he blockades this line of thought because he's not going to be able to get out of bed and talk and function and hide in plain sight if he doesn't.

There's nothing to be done about this trial unless he just fails to appear and gets himself dragged in front of the fucking Bar Association, after all.

There's not much he can do about the condition the suit is in, either, except to hang it up in the bathroom while he showers and hope that the steam will help with the worst of the creases. He hears the television through the door while he's in there, but by the time he's dressed and gelled and cologne and what's going to have to pass for okay, Trucy has already retreated back to her room. He can hear faint music and see light coming from under the door.

He sloshes cloudy water over his fingers as he's putting a bowl of instant oatmeal into the microwave. And he's just started to watch the timer count down when a voice startles him into spinning around with his arms up and banging his funny bone. The bracelet jolts at the impact, keeps shivering on its own.

"Ready for today?"

His boss is still dressed like a bum, is leaning in the doorway and smirking.

"How could I be?" It's louder than he meant to be and it seems like the sound should be enough to rattle the cabinet doors - but Mr. Wright barely reacts, just rolls a kink out of his neck, looking unconcerned.
"You should think about saving those lungs for the courtroom."

"Where **were** you last night?"

"Now, darling, I didn't know you cared."

He can feel his face flaming red and fights the urge to say something unwise. "Check your call log."

Phoenix whistles off-key as he does it. The lift in his eyebrows isn't the right height to be sincere. "Would you look at that." He thumbs slowly, extravagantly, through the list. "Well, Apollo, I hate to say it, but can whatever this is about wait until tonight? I wouldn't mind a nice heart-to-heart, but you have a client to defend today, and I'm a little short on undivided attention myself. Sorry."

You aren't sorry - "I was calling to request that I be removed from this case. Sir." The word tastes like ozone or rubber smoldering.

His boss ceases all extraneous movement and just looks at him. "You know, after Kristoph's trial this spring, I thought I was hiring a kid who wanted to make a difference in the world. What did I get instead?"

To Mr. Wright, his standing there wide-eyed and holding his jangling elbow probably looks like he doesn't have an answer. He's got several.

You get what you pay for.

You get what you deserve if you accept a punch in the face instead of a job interview.

**Why, sheriff, you get Bonnie and Clyde. The other one is Bonnie.**

A murderer if and when Daryan Crescend gets himself beaten to death.

Gavin catnip.

An actual person, separate from you and whatever the fuck you're doing and not just a safe fucking neutral fucking placeholder that you can...

Phoenix opens the cupboard the glasses and cups are in, raising his voice so he'll be audible around the door, but maintaining his (deliberate, Apollo will swear it's deliberate) tone of laid-back, seen-everything disappointment. "Was this because I told you Vera Misham was probably guilty? I can see how your old boss...here it is...might not have been the best about teaching you that winning isn't everything." The man reemerges with a chipped mug reading Grossberg Law Offices and reaches over to put it next to Apollo on the counter. "Pour yourself a cup of coffee."

The blue-striped one from Rite Aid is in there, somewhere. "I didn't make any."

"I'd love a cup too."

Apollo's anger flares, and he shoves the mug and a can of Yuban back down the counter so that Phoenix has to grab them before they fall into the sink, then turns his head and listens to the clatter as he watches his oatmeal finish pirouetting in the microwave.
"That was Mia's."

"Sorry." He is, at least for endangering the mug. But the note of rebuke in the voice is genuine, which is a kind of improvement. "Tell me something," The light inside the microwave has gone off, and he can see his boss's reflection in the door. "What would you have done if I'd have found you in time yesterday? To say no."

Phoenix, in the reflection, tilts his head to the side and back like he's avoiding a bug, and doesn't answer.

"This took a long time to set up, didn't it?"

"This?"

"The jury trial!"

"Of course it did."

"And was I your first choice, for the defense?"

"You - became my first choice."

"And you picked the defendant."

"She seemed appropriate."

"And the jury."

A shrug. "Practically in the job title."

"The judge, too?"

"Well, I would have been a fool not to, wouldn't I? When His Honor is practically an argument against bench trials all on his own."

"How about Ema? You've known her since Damon Gant, haven't you? Did you choose her to investigate?"

"Not exactly, no...but she works with Gavin. So it was a package deal when I opted for him. I wanted to make sure you had one big friendly smile in there, after all."

"Bullshit!" He does face his boss then, in time to see an eyebrow lift and disappear under the edge of the hat. "I don't know why you'd ask for him, but I know it wasn't that! You - you had that kind of influence, and you lined up a defense attorney who works for you, a detective who's looked up to you since she was a kid, a judge who's crazy, the prosecutor who took your badge away, and an accused criminal who doesn't talk, and you think no one is even going to wonder if you're messing around?"

"Well, that's a problem for you and Prosecutor Gavin."
The bottom drops out of his stomach.

"What does that mean?"

"The people of Los Angeles got to see you put your mentor, not to mention your meal ticket, away. And Klavier do the same thing to his bandmate. You two are so good at keeping your feelings out of it that it's practically frightening."

He's gaping at his boss and he knows he should stop that and put his fucking face back together, but he can't. He jerks the refrigerator door open and starts rummaging around inside instead, hoping to hide his expression, pushing past the shriveling grapes and the half-full jar of spaghetti sauce that's been here since he moved in. The bracelet tugs in his wrist almost like a person.

Wright's barely noticed, though, maybe. He's still talking anyhow. "But it's not; there are kittens more frightening than him and you. Like the Siamese ones. They bite... The public loves you both already, you know."

Klavier loves him. And Trucy might, too. But you don't lecture someone who's got exactly one and a half candles about darkness.

Never tell a foster kid from Los Angeles that the public loves him, you prick.

He doesn't say that. Instead he pulls the last bottle of Mexican Coke out of the crisper, closes the fridge. Borrows his boss's calm, room-temperature tone and says, "Like they used to feel about you and Miles Edgeworth." He can feel the barb sink in the same as you can feel a nail sinking into the wall when you hammer it.

The man does his best to maintain his breezy attitude, but now he sounds a little dazed. "Junior varsity." He tries to smile and fails. "Just play fair, Apollo, and everything will work out."
Chapter 51

The process of collecting Trucy and leaving the office and getting on the bus is robotic. It's not a blur; he's sure that he's seeing and hearing everything. It's just not making a dent.

When he'd said Miles Edgeworth, Mr. Wright had looked worse than he had the time Apollo had actually punched him. And then he'd made his his junior-varsity-play-fair comment and wandered away down the hall and closed the door. And without him, the anger had gone out of the air, and -

*Anger is always a secondary emotion, Apollo, it's what you feel when you'd rather not feel something else.* The psychologist he'd been assigned to see after he'd acquired his juvenile record had told him that, and in response, he'd gotten angry.

Which doesn't mean it's not true. And now his stomach is full of Quaker Oats and cola and something else. The chilly, wet fear isn't even content to stay there, it's climbing his ribs like they're the rungs of a jungle gym, blocking his throat, nauseating him. And those sensations are more immediate and more real than the ones involved with getting his briefcase or going down the stairs with Truce or counting out correct change.

Wind the clock, open the blinds. He hates that he's remembering how to be afraid.

He lets himself sink below the surface of the road noise once they're underway and watches the gas stations go by through the bus window, the ficus trees and the benches that read *YOUR AD HERE* and *Selling Your Home? Call Today! DAVE TORRES, REALTOR - Local - Experienced.* The black-and-white picture of Dave Torres smiles hygienically, in one fixed direction.

"Polly?" The bracelet has been quavering steadily ever since he'd banged his elbow on the edge of the counter, but there's a new little tweak to it, at the same time as the seat under him makes a faint sound of adjustment. He turns his head to see Trucy twisted almost all the way sideways and peering at him, one arm wrapped around the nearest steel pole and the other hanging onto the back of the seats in front of theirs - fortunately, those are empty. She tilts her head like her dad does, and the growl of the bus makes it reasonably private. "Hey."

"What?"

"You're not concentrating."

"What?"

"Normally you have this rrr! expression when we're going to court, and you're reading your files. Instead of just staring out the window and saying 'What'."

"It's my new technique."

"You should go back to the old one." He turns back away from her, towards the window, but she says again, "Hey."

*Now who's being repetitive?* He actually feels one corner of his mouth grin a little bit, involuntary, like a muscle twitch. "What?"
"I heard you fighting with Daddy this morning."

The faint comfort of her nonsense is yanked away like a blanket. "You were listening?"

"**You** were **loud**. I didn't have to listen, I just heard you, okay?" The okay? isn't like her. "And I wasn't going to, you know, distract you right before you had to defend Vera, but you're already distracted."

Despite her indignance, she really could give Klavier a run for his money in the puppy eyes department. He sighs. "I'm sorry, Truce. You shouldn't have to...I'm going to move out sometime after Christmas, so -"

"Wrong thing!" She smacks his arm with the back of one hand, exasperated. "I knew you were going to say that and that's the wrong thing. I don't want you to apologize just for me hearing you. And I don't want you to move out, either, but under the circumstances I was going to let you."

"You wanted me to live in your storage closet for the rest of my life?"

"Until I went to college. Then you could have had my room. Except for summer."

"**Truce.**"

"Fine, be serious! You were fighting with Daddy. You know your timing is terrible for one thing, and anyway, what makes you think you can get mad at him for being all secretive?" There's a precocious hardness around her eyes that's almost familiar.

"Because this is a murder trial, maybe?" It's the best he can do for a reply. The partial overlaps between what he knows and what Trucy knows and what Mr. Wright knows are leaving him with a kind of mental double vision.

"Says the person who was sleeping with a certain someone else before Daryan Crescend got put away."

The climbing, crawling feeling in his ribs erupts into a coughing fit and she pounds him on the back harder than would be strictly necessary. The nearest passenger, a tired-looking woman reading a paperback four rows in front, looks over her shoulder and Trucy notices her and raises her voice. "It's okay, I've got him!" Instantly she drops back to sub-bus-noise levels. "**Don't** even lie about it. We were at the detention center right after the trial, and you and me and Daddy were all home that night, and then we went for a hike the day afterwards. So either K- either he, works really fast -"

"**Truce!**"

"Stop trying to talk, you're still coughing. So either he works really fast, or, you know, you do, or you had something going on already, and I'm sorry, Polly, but you had something going on already. You don't even stare at the hot grocery store guy and you won't even walk out of the bathroom without a shirt on."

He thinks the coughs have subsided, but he opens his mouth to try to salvage his dignity and another one escapes.
"And he's super nice and it's unfair and stupid how cute he is, but compared to Daddy's that's not even a real reason."

"Want to tell me what your dad's is?" It's worth a try.

"I don't tell secrets. I'm just saying. Pot. Kettle. Magician. And you should apologize. To him."

"I - okay. Okay. Fine. Later. But he did dodge me on the phone and it wasn't a good time for it."

"I'll try to make him apologize to you, too."

"You don't need to -"

"Fair is fair. And this is our stop."

They're both quiet after they get off the bus, except for one moment as they're climbing the steps. "One more question." He doesn't look at her when he says it.

"Mm?"

"Your dad's - whatever. Secret mission."

"I already said -"

"I'm not asking what it is this time, I'm just asking, does it have anything to do with me? Or did I just fall into it?"

"Hmm." She puts her finger on her chin the way she does when she's wondering or pretending to wonder about something. "Polly plummeted. Plunged. Apollo impacted?" At his strange look, she appends, "SAT practice."

And that's the top of the steps and they're here.

---

Klavier's eyes open that morning when radio static explodes into the air of the apartment, a screaming, meaningless texture of noise.

This is normal. It wakes him up faster than music and unlike the announcers and the DJs and the other babbling voices, it isn't irritating - though other people generally do not agree. The rest of the band, on tour in the early days, had protested first about Klavier, your fucking torture alarm and then, with a second wind, about there being an alarm at all. And Apollo, once (because he has only been bold enough to stay one night here):

"Don't tell me you don't know how to set your own clock radio."

"But I set it this way on purpose. How cute you are with your hair in your eyes."

"Turn it off, it's creepy. It's like Poltergeist."

"Boo."
"I know you finished law school, but does the Prosecutor's Office know you did it without ever leaving kindergarten?"

It's the normalcy that strikes him as ominous. It's the static waking him up today, rather than his phone ringing and a secretary saying the Misham trial has been delayed until new defense counsel can be found. He checks his phone; maybe the battery. No. He dials Apollo's number and is immediately told this customer is not available.

The custodian who calls him abogadito bonito had startled him awake at his desk and told him to go home. But he's still wearing yesterday's clothes, and he feels sore all over, and rumpled, and chilly. Both the sky and the ocean are grey through the window and he's spent the night on top of the blankets.

He leaves the phone next to the sink while he showers, on the bed while he dresses, on the table while he eats (it's a rice krispie treat, it's cereal) and stares at his coffee. The expensive coffee machine turns out a substance that smells like enlightenment but at the temperature of the surface of Mercury, and he usually has to have a prolonged face-off with the mug in the morning before he can drink it. At no point does the phone ring, at all.

---

The courthouse hallways echo with the garble of other people's conversations, all adding together to a fluctuating sound that syncs badly with the heaves of the bracelet and does nothing good for the feeling in his chest. He trains his eyes on the crisscrosses of his shoelaces, nearly bumps into a tall woman in navy blue, sidesteps and collides with an unamused bailiff instead.

"Poly. Honestly." Trucy's expression is only a veneer of fluster over a body of concern.

"Truce, I'm going to the, um...you'll sit with Vera?"

"Of course!" She seems a little bit insulted that he'd have to ask, and flounces into the lobby, cape swirling.

His gaze drops back down to his feet as he makes right-angle turns through the hallways. There's a scuff on his right shoe, a dull streak running across the toe at an angle. Probably from kicking it under the bed.

Kristoph wouldn't have allowed that.

He inhales through his nose, the way he'd been told would keep him from getting carsick as a kid. He's not going to have to try too hard to look like he has a reason to be in there, if anyone else is using the restroom.

When he pushes through the door, though, Klavier is there alone, and he looks up from the sink at the same instant as Apollo comes in.
Neither of them look away. It slides, over a loud heartbeat, from pausing and seeing to silence and staring.

Klavier in his black leather is as beautiful as always, but he's got dark arcs below his eyes and his priorities for the morning haven't included a comb.

There's a loud, startling laugh outside in the hall, and the sound of a passing conversation peaks, dwindles, and breaks the circuit.

"You'd better take me to the Caribbean for real, after this."

The singer shifts and sighs in a shaky rush that goes straight to his spine. "I'll buy you an island, ja? With a boat, and a house, and a mermaid."

"You should have stopped at house, now I don't believe you."

The same silence falls, and he glares at his shoes again.

"Apollo. I know that we do not have a good track record with this question. But why are you here?"

"The Superior Court said that I couldn't go through them, that I had to talk to the Chair of the, the Fucking Inconvenient Bonus Conspiracy Committee."

"Herr Wright? What did you tell him? What did he say?"

"Nothing! He wasn't home, until after midnight, and he wouldn't answer his phone -"

Klavier, under his breath, indulges himself in a complex, blatantly profane stream of German.

"Klavier?" His voice shakes - and what does he do those fucking exercises for if this is going to happen?

The blue eyes look darker under lowered brows. "Ja?"

He swallows hard. "I'm so sorry."

He doesn't apologize like this. It had been one of the hundred little lessons that came with Kristoph. You don't say I'm so sorry, because the emotion is like blood in the water. Not Sorry, either, which is casual, insincere, infuriating. I'm sorry for smaller things, I apologize for the bigger ones; the best you can do. Never It'll be fine, never forgive me.

He hadn't enjoyed reading Endgame in college, but he'd considered in his dizzier moments writing a note to his professor to thank her, for the preview of the curtained room and its demanding maniac. Of the wait for the world to end. And for teaching him in advance not to say Forgive me,
because it means you're comfortable giving orders.

Klavier is looking at him in concern. "Liebe, why are you apologizing."

"You shouldn't - fuck."

The musician looks like he does behind the bench when he's listening, very still. Try again.

"If anybody has to deal with Kristoph again it should be me." He hates it as he says it, wants to run back to the Agency, can't.

Klavier's eyes may have bruise circles under them, but the ignition behind their fierce blue glare is still immediate. "Apollo - I work in the Prosecutor's Office."

"...Yeah, as far as I know?"

And Klavier takes a deep breath.

"Liebe, you are not funny right now, do not interrupt. There is a kind of...I work in the Prosecutor's Office and folders go back and forth across my desk. Folders with people in them. All ages, all kinds. I am good at my job, ja? They do not bother me with stolen cars and the little restaurants who do not pay their taxes. I am good enough at my job that they give me folders, shelves full of people whom I would have to be God to help. Do you know you are not very likely to be killed by a total stranger unless one of you is a bad driver?

"My brother - I do not care, I do not care if you never get a chance to hit him. To prove anything to him. He will never see you again if I can help it." He turns in a circle towards the paper towel dispenser, making frustrated gestures with his hands, his voice getting louder. "Military doctors! Have a, the first letters -" He snaps his fingers, trying to remember. "An acronym. S, I, W. Self-Inflicted Wound! And they have an acronym because it happens often enough that people like me who do the paperwork get tired of spelling. And it is a public relations problem to spend money on a rubber stamp that says we have soldiers shooting themselves.

"And it is not their fault, liebe. The people they give me. It is the husband. The boyfriend, the employee. But I get so! tired! of reading them! I read the reports and look at the pictures, and they had these dangers in their lives, they knew, and they still. I should have a stamp of my own, too, and it should say Went Back Anyway. Schatzelein, please. Please. It should not be you. Be brave some other way."

He's felt his mouth open a few times during this speech and closed it again, but the torrent of words finally seems to be finished now.

"Klavier? How much coffee was that?"

"All coffee. But I mean it."

He feels his toes curl in his shoes. "I don't - I really don't think it matters that you mean it."

"I beg your pardon?" Klavier raises his eyebrows and half turns around, with a sudden aristocratic attitude that's more than enough to override the disreputable clothes. There must have been princes somewhere back in the Gavin family tree.
"We're already here. This is already happening. This is Mr. Wright's show, and we're just...in use. In play. I think. And right now you're in more danger from your brother than I am." He sees the interruption begin as an inhalation fluttering Klavier's silk shirt and speeds up. "No, I mean...I was - I was just his lunch. You're the one who's responsible for him being where he is right now, and if he - if he understands that..." His voice sounds small, even in the little tiled room. "That's why I said it should be -"

"He will not. We benefit from the unlikeliness."

"At least we do until he thinks to himself, 'hey, is there anyone who looks like me?'"

"It is still absurd. You would object strenuously in any other trial if my witness came up with such a story."

"I would but it wouldn't make it not true. Klavier."

"What is it?" The prosecutor is leaning next to one of the sinks, now, the caffeinated rush of defiance visibly leaching away.

"Trucy said on the bus this morning that her dad really does have some private agenda with this. And it's not like I think he killed Mr. Misham, that's kind of ridiculous. But it doesn't leave a whole lot else. It's not...me. She said so. It started before me. But you and your brother. He's probably fishing for his badge back, and he might not know which Gavin he has it in for. Or both."

There's quiet. The taller man looks at the floor almost as though he's looking through it. Almost smiles, after a moment, then discards the expression. His hands slide into and out of a clench against the tile. "Then let us do this. I still do not want Kristoph in the room with you. Unless it is absolutely necessary to call him, we will not. Will your pride be stung by that?"

"No. No. Forget...I don't want to see him either." A wave of nervous energy swells up in him as he says it, fingertips to heels to the hairs standing up on his scalp, reminding him just how located he is in this body that Kristoph has hurt.

"Then I apologize too, for my strange outburst." Klavier grabs one of his hands over the sink and kisses the back of it, rubs it a few times like he's trying to keep it warm, then lets it go. "But if you are right, and we have to, then I will have no qualms about turning my brother over to Herr Wright over something that happened seven years ago. I can say everything about that. Ja?"

"Don't bring him if we don't need to, hit him hard if we do?"

"Just so."

"Best we can do, I guess."

"Poor Herr Wright. His plot was probably beautiful. And there was already a mutiny in progress, before he stepped on board with his."

"Heh. Yeah." A silver tingle of adrenalin in his abdomen. They're standing a few feet apart. "Klavier?"

"Ja? You keep repeating my name."
He's about to say, hey. You hypocrite. **You Went Back Anyway, even when I told you not to, and I would have...if Daryan had, I would have...**

But the door from the hall swings open right then.

And Winston Payne of all fucking people walks in, dabbing at his nose with a tissue.

"Gentlemen," he says, into the silence, after a second.

Apollo says good morning at the same instant that the singer's voice says, "Herr Payne," grabs the door before it closes, and leaves. Behind him, Klavier is fixing his hair in the mirror.

Chapter End Notes

I actually asked myself whether referring to Beckett would be pretentious before I remembered. XD
Chapter 53

When Apollo turns the last corner back towards the lobby, he sees a patch of bright blue through the crowd that means Trucy is hovering at the door. He speeds up, ducks around an oblivious bald man in tweed, and reaches out to tap her shoulder as she glances the other way down the hall. "I thought you were sitting with Vera."

"I was, until I started to get worried that maybe you drowned."

"...drowned?"

"Or maybe that you were over in the annex building because every single other one was out of soap." She looks up at him from under the brim of her hat with an expression he would call jaded on anyone else.

"Was I gone that long?"

"Long enough that I could almost believe you were - colluding? colliding? - with somebody in the bathroom. Except that couldn't have been it. Because that would be stupid."

*God, it's a good thing she looks like she looks if she's going to just say those things. *"Yeah - it would have been. Did I miss anything?"

She stamps her foot this time, though she keeps her voice down to match his. "Don't disappear and then ask me that!"

"Huh?"

"Vera's your client and I get that - things - are very distracting, but it's now, and I don't know how you think you can do your job without paying any attention to her!"

"It worked pretty well with Wocky." All the same, she's right and a trickle of guilt adds itself to the tangle of emotions in his chest.

Cold dirty floodwater.

"It's different! You ignored Wocky because of the dumb stuff he said and that was fine. You're ignoring Vera because she's easy to ignore. And you of all people should know what that's like -" And she stops, his stricken expression mirrored in her eyes. "Polly? Hey, I was only teasing. About that, anyway."

"No. You're right. Again."

In the grip of a fear whose roots he's reluctant to trace, he pushes the door open, and she scurries in under his arm. The thud of it settling back into its frame behind them seems, as it does every time he's here, too big and booming for the room. His pulse makes itself felt as the sound subsides.

Truce pops up alongside him and tweaks his sleeve before he's taken more than a step or two, says that he can **totally** do this like she can nudge him into a smile, but it's not going to work. He's
looking past her anyway.

*Easy to ignore.*

Over Trucy's shoulder he can see Vera curled against the far armrest of the stiff, rust-colored couch, head bent over her sketchpad, lost to the outside world. She looks like a toddler, despite her age. There's a painful, inappropriate innocence to her clothes, her posture, the way she cuddles her pad of paper.

*Mr. Gavin knew your dad.*

A list is coalescing in his mind. Zak Gramarye the Disappearing Man. Drew Misham, recluse. Phoenix Wright, disgraced and disbarred, working under the table at a shady Russian restaurant. Apollo Justice, *who would miss you but me?*

Invisible people. Mr. Gavin had collected invisible people, and what Klavier had instinctively opted to become as a teenager now makes explosive sense. And this wordless, worldless, childish shut-in is as invisible as they come.

He tries to make the other list, to be the devil's advocate: Mr. Wright *said* she was probably guilty - her dad and Brushel and there was no one else there - remember Alita, remember yourself, looking innocent doesn't matter. But he can't make it work. He can picture her driven to despair, but collapsing in on herself because of it, only.

He swallows thick nauseous spit and tries a different thought experiment. *I'm Kristoph, what do I see when I see her?*

*Oh God I don't want to do this.*

*You used to try to predict what he was thinking all day long, you lasted as long as you lasted, fucking try!*

She's sitting maybe ten steps away. *Ten steps, be Kristoph; then you can stop.*

It's like taking the lid off a snake basket. And he looks at Vera as she draws, and starts across the room.

She's an *irritant.* That's the first thing he realizes Kristoph would have felt. She's messy. There are tiny spatters of dried paint on her sleeves and flyaway strands of hair twisting out from under the edges of her kerchief. Kristoph has no tolerance for mess.

Eight steps.

She'd have annoyed him but he would never have been rude to her. He's never rude. He's...fascinating, instead. He charms you, and terrifies you, and underneath he *resents* you.

Five.

Isn't it possible he'd just left her alone, though?

No, it isn't, because Kristoph is never rude.
Not when all it would ever have taken was Drew Misham saying, 

*Mr. Gavin, thank you for coming, come in - Vera!*

*Come in, let me introduce you to my daughter.*

Two.

She's one of the other surviving white mice from Mr. Gavin's collection, and she's facing death **now** (because spitefully cracking a man's skull open with a bottle all of a sudden won't get you executed, but poisoning him, that might) and that's almost enough on its own to make up his mind.

And it's enough for him to finally admit what he's been making up his mind **about**.

He's been considering it without ever putting words to it, letting it boil out at Mr. Wright and shadow the bright fear for his own skin that Trucy had seen without understanding, that Klavier is so eager to solve.

If he doesn't get in the way of her conviction, if he does a merely adequate and thus inadequate job of defending her, he'll never need to see Kristoph again.

He can just let gravity do its work. With her. Go through the motions of a trial. Go home today, sit with the red blanket pulled over his shoulders, call Klavier on the phone, keep doing all of these things until Christmas until they all die.

Who is this girl, who **is** this girl, why couldn't she be anyone else's problem, **anyone**...

Klavier, Kristoph shouldn't see Klavier, *how can I put him in danger just because she is?*

Klavier would put **himself** in danger for her sake, but Klavier's an **idiot**, he can't take care of himself and...

Klavier would want this girl's name cleared if she were innocent. And she **is**. The bracelet has never indicated that she's hiding anything. Only that she's scared.

Klavier would want her cleared and Kristoph would want her convicted and it's not even a question, which one he belongs to.

He takes one more step, into thin air, and says, "Good morning!"

And so it's funny, on a cosmic level, isn't it, later that day when her muscles lock up at the stand. When the last l she pronounces swerves down into a gagging sound and she falls backward, rigid, onto the floor like a piece of furniture. When the ambulance comes and the EMTs don't even bother to hurry. It's funny, isn't it, if you can get a little perspective? It's funny.
People expect vicarious life-and-death dramas in the courtroom. Carefully curated and painstakingly explained, with rules of engagement, A/V equipment, and a break for lunch.

They don't expect sirens, chest compressions, or anyone carried away on a stretcher, and so it's bedlam. The bailiffs are clearing people out of the galleries and barking at the ones leaning over the rails taking pictures, and the sound of voices out in the hall surges from background noise to roar and back every time the doors open for someone to leave. The judge keeps raising his hand like he's pointing at something, with a lost, bewildered look in his eyes. Then he'll stop, tap a couple of fingers arthritically on the bench, then raise his hand again. And God knows what the members of the jury are thinking, shut in another room with their closed-circuit TV.

Apollo stays where he is, unable for the moment to think where else to go, but Klavier abandons his post and strides up to the old man, addresses him in a voice too low for the defense bench to hear. Something he says must get through, because the gavel crashes down to put an official end to the trial for the day.

Apollo turns to Truce only to find that she's run off somewhere.

"Trucy?" He says her name even though it's obviously pointless, she's not here. He could really bellow, contribute to the cacophony, but for the sake of his dignity he'd rather not, and why is he panicking anyway? Maybe Klavier's seen her -

Klavier's already gone, too, nowhere in sight and the ballistic-black briefcase no longer on the table.

"Trucy?"

"Polly!" She literally appears out of nowhere at his elbow. "Come on, Daddy gave me money for a taxi. He's talking to the jury, he can't leave yet."

"That's where you were?"

"Mmmh! Come on!"

"Wait, why a taxi? Where are we going?"

"We're going home first and then you're going to the hospital. I have a show tonight and I can't."

"The hospital?"

She yanks his arm as if she needs to take it upon herself to drag him out of the building."Yes the hospital. No one should have to be there without any visitors, that's awful. And it's not like she has friends besides us."

The retort leaps up - *It's not like she has friends including us* - but he can only imagine how she would look at him if he said it.

He doesn't have the same instinct that Trucy does, for caring about people right away. He can't
blame Kristoph for that, either; he's never had it. Or not since he was little, at least. And why should he feel bad about that. It isn't safe or smart to be the one who cares first.

*Except, next thought experiment, Justice. If it had been you behind Klavier at Rite Aid, instead of him behind you, would you have said anything to him?*

Probably not. No. *And exactly how dead could you be right now if not for someone who cared first?*

This line of thought gets him as far as the back seat of the taxi. Trucy chats with the cab driver about where to get mashadi bread around here, while Apollo messes guiltily with his briefcase and looks out at the passing cars. But when they get to the Agency, she's very insistent that he stay buckled in while she runs up to get something.

"I thought I was taking the **bus** to the -"

"Just **wait**, Polly!" Her keys are already jingling from her clenched fingers as she sprints towards the building.

He glances at the meter ticking up, then catches the driver looking at him in the rearview mirror. The friendliness Trucy had charmed out of him apparently doesn't extend to silent accessory passengers who fidget about the fare.

After a minute, a minute and a half, two minutes, there's the sound of the front door banging open - someday she's going to do that and break the glass - and then of shoes slapping against the sidewalk, and then Trucy knocks on the rolled-up window he's been leaning against. With one hand. The other is holding something red behind her back. He fumbles for the controls and only finds them a split second after the driver has pushed the button on the console up front.

"What is that?"

She's puffing for breath. "It's - it used to be a Gramarye prop. She likes us - remember? So I thought -" She bundles it through the half-open gap, and he recognizes it. It's a big plush snake with a satin ribbon for a tongue and a dopey, googly expression. Normally it dangles off the top shelf in Trucy's room.

"You really want me to give her this?"

"Yes. I bet you don't want to - carry it, but - tough luck." And she hands him a crumple of bills, too, with a lump of coins in the center, and gives the man behind the wheel the address like Apollo doesn't know it. Which he doesn't.

"**Hurry, okay?**"

It's not just the driver she's talking to.

---

He's tried to squish the toy boa constrictor into some kind of ball during the drive, but it won't stay, so he's got his arms around it and the briefcase both as the electric sliding doors at the hospital open and he steps through. The woman at the front desk has a demeanor that says her allocation of patience for today has already been spent on other things.
"Can I help you?"

"Yes, please. I'm here to see Vera Misham." She doesn't respond. "The girl from the courthouse today? It was probably all over the news. -"

"Sir. Sir, what is your relation to the patient?"

"I'm her lawyer." She looks skeptical, so he goes into his briefcase for his badge and his letter of request, and into his pocket for ID, which means dumping the snake onto the desk to free his hands. He nearly knocks over a cup of ballpoint pens doing that, and the toy ends up staring an upside-down googly stare at a rack full of pamphlets labelled *Coping With Your Loved One's Diagnosis*. The titles range from *Type I Diabetes* to *Memory Loss* and all of them have the same seagull logo on the front.

"Mr. Justice."

His chest freezes partway. Slushy parking lot snow. It's too easy to envision the whole litany that's coming, someone asking if he'd prefer to sit down, if he's aware of any funeral arrangements, if he's a relative or knows where one might be found. He'd used up his phone's battery down to the red last night and it's been dead (phones don't die, people die) since he woke up, he wouldn't know if they'd called -

But he's wrong. "Access to the unit she's in is restricted, but I'll page someone to escort you." The woman pushes the materials back, and he gets himself back together as quickly as he can in the tingling aura of her disapproval. For a given value of together, anyway, since it amounts to draping the snake over one shoulder and having the briefcase a little more accessible.

The escort is a short, taciturn woman in scrubs. Probably an intern or a nurse and probably has better things to do than this. He holds out the badge again only for her not even look to at him - just at the first woman, who nods.

He can barely keep up with the pace she sets in the halls. When they pause to wait for an elevator, he opens his mouth to ask about Vera's prognosis, except it arrives that second and then the awkward elevator silence is enough to make him close his mouth again, especially since the woman he's following looks at the ascending red LED numbers the whole ride up and never at him. He tries again when they emerge, but she's almost immediately preoccupied with tapping a code into a keypad next to a heavy door, and once they're through into another section of hallway, the second doorway turns out to be Vera's.

The room isn't white like he'd expected. It's all planes of sad, hydraulic grey and green. Monitors beep in a cluster around the head of the bed, but in the whole room there are only two indications of regular, animal life proceeding.

Her hair is loose on her pillow, and the first is the changing sheen of the strands in time with the slight, very slight motion of her shoulders as she breathes.

The second is sitting slumped forward in a metal chair next to the bed, holding one of Vera's inert hands between two tan ones whose silver rings are shining in the flat fluorescent light.

He stops in his tracks and bumps into the woman in scrubs. "Ah."
She looks *what* at him.

"I didn't realize he - Prosecutor Gavin was here. We're not supposed to see each other outsi-"

"I don't care." He must look startled, because her look becomes even more irritated. "Follow me out if you want. Stay if you want. Atroquinine victims aren't supposed to survive, so far as I'm concerned you may as well fuck 'supposed to.'"

She turns away and goes, and after a moment he realizes he's not following.

He tries to be quiet as he steps into the room, but the sole of his shoe catches and chirps on the linoleum and Klavier jerks back in his chair, out of his trance.
Chapter 55

The air has the stale smell of torn-open plastic packaging, laid over the pongs of disinfectant and acetone.

Their eyes meet and it's his turn to flinch, even as Klavier visibly relaxes. It feels like he's been caught at something, even if the woman in the hall doesn't give a damn, doesn't suspect. And even if Vera's not exactly paying much attention. He focuses the nervous jolt into a tightening of his grip on the handle of the briefcase, hoping Klavier won't see and misunderstand.

Of course Klavier sees, but of course he does understand.

"No one warned you that I would be here, hm?" The singer's voice, bemused, warm, sounds as though it's rising out of the remains of a brush fire: somewhere dark and dry and scratchy. "It's all right, schatz. No one cares. But what is that?"

"The - oh, this." He flushes and pulls the stuffed snake off his shoulder.

"Ja, I recognize the briefcase." That fading spark of a laugh in the voice, still. An orange pinprick you can trace through the air.

"Trucy sent it. Instead of flowers. She said the troupe used to use it, and since Vera...hey, be careful." Klavier has swung out an arm and is pulling it from his fingers by its tail. Once he has the thing he holds it up and turns it right way round, smiles a little bit at it.

"I think I have had people make this exact face at me before." But then he tucks it around Vera's shoulders and back behind her pillow. "That is a sweet gift."

"Ah. Yeah." Apollo wavers forward on his feet as he says it and the enervation of the last several hours catches up to him like a tidal surge.

"Sit sit sit." There's a second metal chair on the far side of the scaffold that is Vera's bed, and at Klavier's words (word, anyway) he makes for it and starts to bend down. Then stops himself and reconsideres, and drags it around in a semicircle first so that they can sit next to each other and not stare over her like she's a table. The scraping sound of the chair's legs along the floor sends echoes smashing off the bare walls and shivering down the corridor, but her eyelids don't even tremble. The chair digs into the backs of his knees.

"Even the one in your room was better than this." His peripheral vision registers Klavier's sideways glance. "The chair. In Orange County? In the hospital - " He sighs. "Sorry."

"Well. In here they want things they can toss aside quickly if they need...you are right, though." The musician straightens his spine for a second, shoulders up and chin down so he looks like a crow, and Apollo can hear his neck crackle.

Vera's face is blank, blank, and he's not sure whether there's really anything to distinguish it from the look of someone who's only deeply asleep, or whether he's imagining the difference because he knows. It's uncomfortable, even disorienting, and he turns back to watch his boyfriend instead.

That means he's able to see the impulse pass across Klavier's profile before it's spoken, thinning his
mouth and narrowing his eyes. Not all the way into a glare, more like he's looking into a bright light.

"I hate Kris very much today. Right now." Maybe it's because of the way the place echoes, but even with his matter-of-fact tone, the utterance seems childish. "Do you know there's my mother's voice still in my head, saying Don't say you hate your brother, you don't mean that."

"Look around. We all hate your brother." The arc he describes with his bracelet hand encompasses the three people in the room and flicks toward the door, suggesting maybe the Wrights, maybe everyone out there. He hasn't touched Klavier, but the taller man makes a face as though the gesture had been a blow and a caress at once, then looks back down at Vera Misham.

"She was frightened of me, schatzelein."

"And if a teenage girl is afraid of you, the world's coming to an end."

"The world is not ending." Again the words hang too vulnerable in the air and disappear into the mechanical hum of the hospital's efforts to keep its charges alive.

I shouldn't try to cheer people up.

"She was frightened of me."

"You feel bad for her." It's a question.

"Of course I do -" Klavier stops there, like he's just found himself saying something he shouldn't have.

It's not too hard to guess what.

"...I'm not mad. I didn't want you to convict her."

"Oh, liebe." The musician leans over immediately in his chair, so that Apollo's expecting a sideways embrace, but then pulls back just as suddenly. Klavier explains, amusement of a sort coming back and coloring his voice: "They have a video feed in here, ja? To monitor her." It's a fey, defeated almost-laugh, one that's too reminiscent of the first night.

The remembered emotion that's been held below the bewildered, tired surface of his own thoughts breaks through at that moment to sting behind his eyes and curl his knuckles together. "You know Trucy got after me. For ignoring Vera because she was easy to ignore...and it's true. And that means - Kristoph would never have left her alone." He doesn't think of himself as the type who needs a lot of incidental touch, but he wants Klavier's arm over his shoulders now, badly, and tries to ignore the feeling of its not being there. "But before - wait, they're not recording sound too, are they?"

"No. They don't. I have seen witnesses here before."

"Oh. Good."

"You were saying something." The words are soft in texture as much as in volume. More.

"...before I thought about what he would have done with her - I had - I had been thinking - that I
wouldn't have to see him, if I just let her -"

"...but you couldn't after all."

"It's fucking idiotic. I already got someone found guilty when they didn't, twice, and now - like I can be moral about it."

"You think doing a wrong thing means you can never do the same thing right again?"

"I -"

"That is not how morality works, schatzelein. People do wrong and then right, every day. It is like the Went Back Anyway, one of the things that makes the Prosecutor's Office a difficult place - you think, what were they when they were not doing this, who would they be if they had not done this? A policeman's lot -" He whistles a few bars, head tilted up towards the ceiling.

"We did Gilbert and Sullivan in law school. In the oratory classes."

"Really."

"Our feelings we with difficulty smother when constabulary duty's to be done."

The response to the spoken lyrics is song, though sung quietly. "Ah, take one consideration with another...a police-

Apollo hears himself cut him off. "You went back anyway."

The prosecutor has stopped singing and ducks his head back down at the accusation. "Ja, ja...yes. I did. You too."

He scowls, and reaches for Vera's other hand, if he can't take Klavier's. Looks at her. "Congratulations. You have the two stupidest lawyers in Los Angeles."

Klavier's seeming languor is absolutely shattered by how hard he laughs at that, without letting go of her hand, bending towards the bed until he can almost rest his forehead on it.

"Oh, God, this isn't funny. But he's also laughing as he says it, eyes watering, and Klavier is still bubbling with falsetto mirth, nose practically in the blanket.

"Kris, I hate you, I hate you."

"Better not start out with that tomorrow."

"His Honor will have heard worse. A few more noises and quakes of his shoulders, and Klavier finally settles his head on the mattress, looking sideways.

"Klavier, this isn't evidence, but he did this."

"Ja, I think so too, but -"

"No. Listen. It's proof. We just can't fucking use it."
"What is - and why?"

"Poisoning makes you eligible for the death penalty."

"I know." Klavier sits up, frowns, strokes a few strands of hair from Vera's brow.

"And I guess Mr. Wright's been sniffing around for - for a while. Long enough to get this whole project set up? Probably?"

"You are thinking of what the fräulein said."

"Yeah, maybe Kristoph noticed somehow. I mean, they had dinner together all the time? They weren't friends."

"Not for any normal definition of the word."

"If he didn't know something was going to happen with the atroquinine, it makes no sense. But if he did - poison is special circumstances, but just fucking braining somebody isn't. He knew back in April! Why the fuck else would he have confessed?"

Klavier stares at him. "Confessed to a crime that only we and the waitress know he did not commit."

"Yeah." He's standing up - he doesn't remember standing up.

"I am not about to introduce Kris's innocence as evidence!"

"Me either!"

"But what do we have otherwise?"

"He knew Vera's dad, Mr. Wright wouldn't have been disbarred without both of them, Vera's a forger, and she's scared of people who look like you."

"As much as all that."

"I can go back to the studio -"

"You do that, I will go to the records room - but even if we find nothing, there is nothing to find - at least there is a jury."

"What?"

"People say, 'juries have perspectives, juries, they have common sense.' Maybe so but that is not the important part. Juries have feelings! Apollo."

"What?"

"You know what Kristoph will see. When he looks at you tomorrow."

It's what he's been trying to not think about. The sick fear goes off in his chest and his stomach like
an emergency flare.

"But me too, a little. He will see the little brother who rebelled like a child, accepted help like a child. Apollo, verliebte, we are not those boys that he will see. But there is a value to the appearance of it. Where he sees weakness - the jury will see sincerity. And it will be what they think that matters."

"We're trying to get your brother convicted on a charm offensive?"

The response is immediate. "Oh, yes."

Mr. Wright's voice comes back into his mind. The public loves you both already, you know. Maybe this will work. Still. "This sounds like your Christmas plan."

Klavier looks briefly grim. "Christmas may have been a mistake, schatz. It would have been better not to be in this situation. But we may turn up something tonight. And the jury may be sympathetic. And if it goes wrong - if it goes wrong there is one thing left." Klavier's voice has been dropping, quieter and quieter, until Apollo leans sideways to hear, and imagines the lips he can't see, moving next to his ear.

When Klavier has finished murmuring, he doesn't respond, only blinks.

"Do you understand?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I do."

Klavier stands up all at once in his grasshopper way. "Then I will be going to find what I can find in the files. Be careful in the studio, don't just touch things, for God's sake. When is the next bus?"

"Half an hour."

"Mm." The German leans over Vera's bed and picks up her hand again, squeezes it. "You prove him wrong too, schmusebärchen. Wake up if you can. And -" He swallows.

"And go easy. If you cannot. And the kindest dreams, in the meanwhile."

He kisses her on the forehead, chaste like a prince in a picture book, and something swells in Apollo's throat. And then he meets Apollo's gaze one more time, brushes his bangs out of his eyes, and goes out into the hall. A moment later, there's the sound of the door.
Klavier has let the security door slam shut after him, and the barking metallic echo and the change in air pressure make the close-cut hair on the back of his neck stand up. But Vera lies there still, unaffected and unreachable.

If this were any fucking decent story she’d have woken up when Klavier kissed her.

What did they call Sleeping Beauty in the expensive books? The ones with the gold letters on the front, and the pictures that you don’t let sticky kids touch - one of his elementary school teachers had had one. First grade? He can almost remember the picture that - Briar Rose.

Briar Rose and the birthday party. Palace of dust, palace of thorns. What kind of creepy story.

Apollo reaches for Vera's nearer hand, the one Klavier had held. It's a little bit cold already, and he ends up taking it between both of his without having to think about it.

"I hope you're all right with me talking out loud, because I'm getting weird otherwise."

No response.

"Only for ten or fifteen minutes. Then I have to catch the bus."

The glints on her hair move as she breathes.

"I'm sorry."

The calm on her face isn't forgiveness or patience, but that only seems to make the words spill faster.

"You didn't get what you should have gotten. I'm sorry. I was scared for - myself, once I found out that Kristoph had something to do with this. Because I...I knew him before. And I was thinking about myself and - and Prosecutor Gavin, Klavier's - you didn't have to be scared of him.

"I wish you'd known that, that somebody had thought of...this wasn't fair or independent like it should have been. I'm sorry. But there's - one good thing, at least. We know about him better than anyone. We can make sure everyone knows -"

And suddenly he has to avert his gaze, though he doesn't drop her hand, because there's a voice in his head that he must have been hanging onto since law school. Professor Shimko, criminal defense clinic third year, the most abrasive...

When you question a witness on the stand, who are you speaking to?

Yes, Mr. Yee?...‘A person with useful first-hand information to provide pertaining to the case.’ In other words, a witness? The public defender's office in Imperial County has a desk with your name on it and a drawer that doesn't open, Mr. Yee. Were I you I might consider devoting a little more study time to immigration law and to conversational Spanish.

The rest of you gentlemen! And - for those of you who insist - ladies. Whenever you are questioning
a witness, you are also talking to the judge. You're talking to opposing counsel. To the galleries. Never just the witness. At any given time! You are speaking to whoever can hear you, no more, no less! Ignore that at your peril and that of your case!

There's another double metallic noise and the sound of someone in the hall, but his memory has shut him up in time that they won't have heard anything.

By Shimko logic I'm only talking to make myself feel better.

He hunches his shoulders against the footsteps, but as the person reaches the doorway they stop. Not a nurse or a doctor then. And Klavier jingles, and Trucy runs. He looks up, and his boss is standing there.

The pause seems to last a little too long. "Sir."

"Apollo." There's the suggestion of a smile on Phoenix's lips even now, but he sighs through his nose and pulls at the brim of his hat.

"There's a chair." He gestures at the empty one, still shoved back from the bedside where Klavier had left it. Mr. Wright wrangles it closer and lowers himself into it just a little stiffly, leans forward with his hands on his knees.

"Is that Trucy's boa constrictor?"

"She sent me with it in the taxi."

It's definitely a smile, if only for a second. And Apollo actually can't help a faint smile in return. The expressions flicker over their faces and vanish like passing headlights at night.

"Thanks for paying for the cab. I know it's not -"

"Not what?"

Affordable? Typical? "Not an expense you'd been, um, expecting."

"Ahh." It's this close to Klavier's ach, to an expression of pain. "No. It wasn't, no." His boss tilts his head to look at Vera's face, and a few tiny dried dark-red flecks are visible on his chin. He never actually grows a beard, and he must have made an attempt on the stubble at some point today. He covers Vera's free hand loosely with one of his own for a second, then leans back and lifts it away. "What are the doctors saying?"

Nerves flutter in his stomach. He's supposed to know this. "She's getting the same treatments that some other kinds of poisoning victims get, but that's just because they don't know what else to do. But nobody's come in since I got here."

Phoenix makes a noise of acknowledgement, noncommittal as always.

"I'm sorry."

"No, I can look for someone to ask about -"

"I meant for this morning."
"You're still pissed at me, though."

"Not as much." He glances at the snake. "Truce heard. And she told me on the bus afterward that you have a lot riding on this. I don't think she said anything she wasn't supposed to, don't get mad at her -"

"I won't. Can't, wouldn't." The older man slouches himself down in the uncomfortable chair. "But I guess it seems like a hell of a thing to be dropped into."

"More. With Mr. Gavin tomorrow."

Phoenix kind of hums in response, a nervous, wary sound more nn than mm. "You know Miles was a low blow."

"Sorry."

"Trucy gave me an earful at the courthouse, about Mia and Manfred and what I was forcing you to do. I need to apologize to you too."

"A little like that playing card."

"You already punched me for that one. And...you can go ahead and hit me for this, too, when it's over if you still need to. But I promise you, Apollo, I wasn't just hiding from your calls yesterday."

And he wants to call his boss out for being a liar, for being a manipulative lying asshole, except that the bracelet doesn't move.

"So..."

"There's a presentation the jury's watching right now. It was supposed to come a little later in the day, but we didn't have a choice. That's why I couldn't get over here right away; I needed to introduce it."

"A presentation?"

His boss sighs. "Supplementary footage. Evidence from some additional investigations that turned out to have a bearing on what happened to Vera and her dad. Some of it is years old."

"And some of it isn't?"

"Some of it is from Central Prison last night."

"You shot it."

"That's right. They're not big on cell phones."

"Until midnight?"

"No. Almost. After that I was at the Superior Court's tech facility, getting everything ready to go. Under the watchful eyes of a bailiff who wanted to go home and a multimedia guy afraid I'd melt the computer. I just wasn't paying attention to the phone." Mr. Wright's look is sincere, apologetic
if not entirely repentant. An end-of-the-poker-game look.

"Um. Apology accepted. But I'd better be going now. I need to get back to the studio and have another look around." He stands up.

"Wait and come back to the Agency with me."

"The bus is going to -"

"If the footage I want to show you doesn't answer enough questions, I'll pay for another cab to the studio afterwards. And back. The budget'll stretch that far. I don't have everything, not the interstitial MASON stuff or the voiceovers, but I have the raw video, and I can talk you through it and point you to the important things."

"How long will that take?"

"A couple of hours, I think. Like I said, what you see's going to be a little shorter than what the jury got. Mia's computer isn't up to any fancy software."

"Does the Prosecutor's Office have this?"

"I didn't make it a point to give it to them."

"You're not supposed to be on the defense's side for this, are you?"

"Put it this way, Polly. I'm not about to stop you telling Prosecutor Gavin whatever you think he needs to know."

By the time he falls asleep that night, his eyes hurt from staring at the old monitor, and his left ear is hot from being pressed against the cheap red phone.
Klavier dreams. It starts off as a different kind of dream: with the cool skin of Apollo's back under his hands, the harsh violet smell behind his ear. But as always happens when he goes to sleep worried, he wakes in a jolt just as the scene and its sensations become heated.

The arteries under his jaw are pulsing so hard that he can hear them, and they hurt. The moon is searchlight-bright and so he draws the blinds closed, sits back down on the edge of the bed. His eyes are doing everything they can to close again, even if his blood feels like it's literally boiling.

The rock star in him takes a deep breath and compresses the sensations, as he does when he's anxious before a show, then ostentatiously lies down, telegraphing gestures as though to prove to someone that he's trying to sleep. Under the blanket. Too hot. Without a blanket. Too exposed.

He knots himself up in the dark bedsheets and shuts his eyes and he's in a limousine.

He's keyed up and his ears are ringing like he's just come away from a crowd, and he's tired and feeling a little proud of whatever he's just done, so he settles back against the seat for a minute, rests, unseeing.

The car is moving, rumbles down a vaguely familiar street that becomes a vaguely familiar highway. His guitar. There's something, he needs to check something about the neck of his guitar.

Except it's not on the seat next to him, and when he says Driver, I'm sorry, can we - the question knots in his throat like a rag. Which is okay, he can look on the floor first, but it's not on the floor, underneath, behind, not anywhere, and it will take hours to go back for it now that they're up in the mountains. He can see the patches of snow through the window.

But he can't get there without it, so he stumbles forward on his knees, to lean over the partition and tell the driver I'm sorry, I'm sorry I left it, and sees that the limousine is heading over the yellow lines and straight towards the curve in the road and towards the air a long way above the landscape, nobody is driving.

---

Apollo dreams. He's in his old student apartment, and there aren't any lights, and he knows they've turned them off because he's supposed to be moved out by now. There's just a dim kind of a fishtank, Cerenkov glow. Except there's a red blink on the answering machine, which is hooked up somehow to the television because when he touches the button there's Professor Shimko on the screen, incensed and glowering right at him.

"Justice, we told you to leave. You aren't supposed to still be here! Why don't you leave!"

The eyes on the screen track him when he steps sideways. He backs up and up, through large rooms his apartment didn't have, while his professor's mechanical voice clamors through the blue gloom Leave! Leave! Get out! The floors are covered with water, half an inch of water, he can hear his footsteps in it.

He reaches the last room, and there's Mr. Gavin leaning on the desk next to the television screen in which Shimko is a roaring, droning dragonfly. His tie is undone, his jacket is open, the collar of his
shirt is open. There's an angry smile on his thin lips, an exhilarated hate in his eyes through the lenses of his glasses. "I found you," he says, and sweeps the television off the desk in a shower of sparks, into the standing water.

---

Klavier wakes, gasping, bangs his hand into the nightstand reaching for his phone and sends it clattering to the floor.

---

Apollo wakes in a convulsion of imaginary electricity and sees that the bright light in the room - or bright without much competition - is the screen of his phone next to his pillow.

A terrible dream, schatzelein. I wish your heartbeat was closer.

He sends back *metoo* **me too**.

---

Klavier dresses and looks at himself in the mirror after he has showered, made coffee, after the static from the radio has woken him. Normally he can style his hair while thinking about other things, the way you can meander in your mind and let your hands work better without you, but today the comb and brush are like foreign implements and he's subliminally repulsed by the feel of the gel on his fingers.

One of the few things he and Kris had agreed on as children had been that they would not ever look like this, the row of stiff, staring Gavin portraits with their hair like this. Fuck the Gavins, more or less. And yet.

He tries to do his hair the way Kris would do it, thinking in terms of order rather than effect, not one wisp out of place. It takes forever, three times, four times as long. And it looks worse than usual, not like a style, like an attempt. Just like a good copycat little brother. He puts on the jacket that he has picked out for today, one that has always been a bit too big for him.

---

Apollo dresses. The folds of his slacks are knife-sharp, the tie tied as if by diagram, the collar of his shirt stiff and sticking up.

He tries not to think too hard about what he's doing.

Looking like a kid had been more or less okay in junior high, had sucked but was low on the list of things to worry about in high school, had been a cause of occasional awkwardness in college. Had been a real problem for a prospective trial lawyer. Some of his classmates had said, *dude, make the most of it. You can snow people with that babyface, I wish I could.* Some of his professors had suggested corporate law. He'd had to work out what would look confident, not too immature, not trying too hard to look older.

He slicks his hair down, looks at the result, bites his lip and dabs more gel out of the jar, slicks it down further than normal.
Shiny, orderly, clean. The total effect is too shiny, too orderly, too clean to be relied upon.

*Bait for Kristoph's ego,* Klavier had said on the phone. He looks like a five-minute countdown to a mess. He looks like he'll start coming apart if he moves.

He looks like he's eleven years old on school picture day.

He catches his boss noticing it, as they're all waiting for the taxi, looking him up and down. Noticing, half-frowning, and letting it go with the expression of someone who doesn't know what there really is to say.

---

Dave Torres, local, experienced, is still staring out from the bus bench.

---

Technically Kristoph is a witness for the defense.

Which means that Apollo is offered the chance to meet with him privately, beforehand, and for an instant he's frozen by the question -

Or maybe it's longer than an instant, because it startles him when the silence is broken and Mr. Wright behind his shoulder says, to the bailiff who's asking, "I hardly think that will be necessary. Gav-* Kristoph* Gavin will be a hostile witness, without question, preparation or no." And the bailiff looks over and Apollo only nods.

---

Klavier keeps his face neutral and doesn't turn his head when Apollo and the Wrights go straight past him in the hallway, and he's not sure whether to be grateful or to curse the fact that he's on the phone with the hospital, because for a moment all he can feel is the impulse to grab Apollo's arm and run for sunlight.

But he holds his place and the sounds of their feet disappear behind him: a scuffle of sandals, Trucy's extra steps as she swivels back and forth, and Apollo's dress shoes, walking very slow and straight...

The terrifying, soothing robot music on the phone cuts off mid-trill and a woman's voice says, "Prosecutor Gavin." Her tone simmers with all the righteous antipathy that he's learned to expect from medical professionals expected to heal their patients in order to surrender them to the law. "Vera Misham's condition is unchanged."

"She's still alive." His heart stutters through all of the beats that it's waited to take since the insipid music stopped. "Not awake."

"Correct."

"Thank you," he says into the sound of her hanging up the receiver.

---
Klavier Gavin is ready for the People and Apollo Justice is ready for the defense and *all rise* and they all rise, and everyone else sits down.

---

They seesaw through the opening arguments so easily. The transport of the prisoner is so fast.

---

Kristoph should be in prison coveralls and instead they've let him wear a suit. It shouldn't have been a surprise, not with Mr. Wright's footage - and hadn't that been enough to stop his pulse for a second, because that's **not** how a violent offender's cell **looks**. The furniture, the decor, they all said *I have more resources available than you might assume*. Proving a point, like Kristoph's ego was dripping down the walls.

But he's wearing a suit, one of his blue bespoke ones, and if that means he has the influence here, still, in the **courthouse** like he has in the prison - this is not a line of thought to continue unless you want to be sick. Stop.

*Don't hide it too hard,* Klavier had said. *Don't fight fear and my brother at once. Let him see and let him think you are weak.*

*You mean let him think he can hurt me.*

*Oh, liebe, Apollo.*

He had been able to tell from the timbre of the voice that Klavier would have reached for him had they been in the same room, in private, but he'd been sitting crosslegged on the folding bed, his hand starting to sweat around the phone, trying to keep his voice as low as possible even if Mr. Wright had known about the call.

He stands up straight behind the defense's bench and looks his old boss in the eye. And it's a joke, his spine is like water, and no display of confidence is going to mean anything to the man whose soft, cool fingers had slid into his clothes as though it were an entitlement, had traced that bandage on his neck, had scalded and struck him and casually dangled that bottle of drain cleaner in its plastic bag. So he holds Kristoph's gaze and lets the fear free to tighten his posture and soften his eyes.

And maybe no one else notices, no one else here has had so much of this kind of practice with fucking Kristoph's fucking facial expressions, but the man's hands smooth out and a little color comes into his face and he looks like a smoker who's just had his first cigarette in six months.

And he turns his head to look at his younger brother, because it's not like one's going to be enough.

Kristoph doesn't subscribe to any of Trucy's teen magazines, and he's clearly not aware that the responsible-but-vulnerable concern on Klavier's face is a new, mirror-tested variation on his Girl, *You Can Tell Me Anything.*
Kristoph has all his life had the habit of saying the most cutting of things in the most mild of ways; he relies on it in court to rattle the prosecution and intimidate the witnesses. Klavier watches and listens as he sharpens his knives on Vera Misham, and knows that it's true to form and only the beginning: "the late defendant," "her taste in nail polish."

*That's a good start, Bruder, keep going.*

Klavier has nothing like Apollo's bracelet to help him read a given person, but he has a performer's gift for reading crowds. Other people will talk about that moment, when the energy changes, but that's only half of the chemistry, half of what happens. First is recognizing that the audience is receptive to the change, ja? The grand gesture, the new song, the not-so-impromptu confession into the microphone - you only do those things when the crowd is ready for them. Sometimes he wonders what he could have done in politics.

He needs to focus.

But appealing to Kristoph's contempt is working, he knows that as soon as his brother's gaze lands on him and he smiles. Funny, in the back of his head, that it's the same look he'd been petrified of facing in the icy stairways of the Borscht Bowl Club.

"...or else, you'll be short one defendant, for what she's worth," Kristoph says.

---

Apollo knows what Vera saw, he knows from Klavier what the story behind it is. So it shouldn't be enough to throw him off. It's like an urban legend, stupid radio call-in stuff, like ohmigod, the Man With the Scar That Looked Like a Thing.

He's not expecting to remember being trapped between Mr. Gavin and the fireproof file cabinet, the handle of the bottom drawer shoving a bruise into his shin, and having a hand clench against his abdomen below his shirt and lay the tips of smooth fingernails there, in unmistakable warning. Kristoph gives him another little glance as he talks, smooth and cold as glass.

---

Apollo looks terrible, and when he looks over the guilt is almost enough for Klavier to demand a recess, to cause some kind of scene, anything to get Kris's eyes off of him.

Except that Kris had been the kind of brother who would spend an afternoon listening to you talk about your favorite thing, asking questions, just so he'd know it was your favorite the next time you made him angry.

*I'm sorry, Apollo, I'm sorry.*

The other benefit of the too-big jacket is that it is, as Apollo might say, fucking sweltering in this thing. He feels the sweat bead up on his brow and leans on the desk to support himself.

---
Klavier looks terrible. He's posing and making mostly the right faces, but even if you take that into consideration, he can't seem to look at one thing for longer than a second, and you can see it in his neck every time he swallows.

A small crazy part of Apollo's brain is thinking of the conversations they shouldn't have had in front of the men's room sinks and wanting to be there, wanting to kiss him, to snake an arm around his waist and tangle fingers in the chain, to be doing something secret and safe.

He tries to pay more attention to where he is.

---

Klavier closes his eyes in chagrin and hopes when Kristoph turns on Apollo.

"You assume he had something to say in the first place."

But he almost revels, when the barbs come his way.

"My, my. You've upset my poor brother to the point of uselessness."

He can feel the crowd in the galleries turning on Kris the way he'd always hoped a crowd might turn on Daryan, might suddenly understand. And the star in his chest glows a little brighter every time Kristoph says something cruel and the audience feels more and more for that poor girl, that poor boy, his own brother.

A crowd is a crowd, even if people are individuals, and what is true of the gallery will be true of the jury.

He hopes Apollo can feel what is happening.

---

For Apollo the sense of triumph comes instead when Kristoph admits to murdering the man in the basement, again.

---

When Kristoph says there is no way to prove it, it's obvious he believes that he's won. Logic is on his side. And it's the moment that he loses because human sympathy is not.

He falls apart when he's reminded of the jury, and Apollo is staring, and the trial is over. All over but the shouting, Klavier thinks, as the judge begins his final instructions to the jury, although Kristoph doesn't shout when the verdict is rendered, he only laughs.

The first next thing that Klavier thinks, blankly watching the back of Kristoph's suit jacket as he's led away, is perhaps they will send the Fräulein Detective after me again, if only I stand here long enough.

The second thing is, that will not be a very good answer in an interview. If someone asks me what was going through my head. I will need to make something up.

The third thing is that maybe he's not thinking very well about this right now. He blinks at the
mess of pages on the bench in jamais vu and then mashes the whole thing into his briefcase like someone cleaning up wrapping paper after a birthday party.

He'll spare Ema Skye and the janitorial staff.

...and he'll avoid the front entrance, definitely yes.

He can't think of anything more urgent than to sit down on the fire exit stairs, when he gets there, though, and so that's what he does.

---

Apollo feels numb, overwound, as he follows the Wrights out of the building. The fire exit, Mr. Wright says, the TV stations have gathered out front.

He'd led the way in, this morning; otherwise it wouldn't have looked appropriate. But he's more than happy to have people to follow now, to not have to make any more decisions. Except he nearly walks smack into his boss's back as soon as the door to the outside opens.

Phoenix has stopped moving, so after a few seconds he sidesteps to see what the problem is - more television reporters? - and there's Klavier sitting on the back stairs, gazing out at the parking lot windshields as they reflect the afternoon sun - or off in that direction anyway - and holding the handle of his briefcase in limp fingers, the bottom of it balanced on one foot.

Mr. Wright has the strangest look on his face. Discomfort? Recognition? Whatever it is, instinct tells Apollo to do something before anyone else does. He slips past, hurries down a few steps with his shoes making tong sounds on the metal treads, and blurts the first thing that comes to mind.

"I know you like looking like something out of the eighties, but you're overdoing it."

"Polly!" It's a subdued outburst from Trucy, who's been hovering at Phoenix's side and looking wistful - more than wistful, if he's honest about it. Troubled. Even if she'd known about Zak, she can't have been entirely unaffected by today's description of events. Phoenix had clearly been thinking the same thing, declining to interview the jurors today and staying around after the verdict's being given no longer than he'd absolutely had to.

Klavier stands up at the sound of her voice and brushes flakes of rust from his clothes, but can't seem to say anything. He holds his arms out in her direction instead, and she squeezes between Apollo and Mr. Wright to hug him, her dad for once not looking askance at it.

Neither does he say you want a hug too? when his eyes and Apollo's meet in concern and embarrassment. Which is probably for the best. Even if watching Klavier and Truce is making Apollo wish it wouldn't be out of character for him to join them.

Trucy does, eventually, let go, and they both stand there looking awkward until Apollo breaks the hush again. "What are you doing out here?"

The prosecutor holds up the hand that isn't holding the briefcase; he's got his cell phone in it. "Vera Misham is still - alive. Unconscious - but alive."

"That's great." He's aware that his tone of voice doesn't sound precisely great. "Are you going to see her?" It feels almost more devious having this simple little conversation in front of Phoenix
than the whole trial had felt.

"I might do that. Shall we - we might all, ah, go to see her together?"

But Trucy has retreated to her dad's shadow, and she says something softly about going home, which Phoenix repeats.

Klavier, though, says, "Are you sure, Fräulein?" It's more than one question, and his tone is grateful as well as kind, if you know to listen for it.

She nods, looking younger than usual. "Say hi to my snake for me."

"Polly?" That's Mr. Wright talking. "What would you...?"

Absurdly he's reminded of being caught stealing M&Ms in fifth grade. "I..."

But Mr. Wright interprets his unease differently. "I've got Truce, if you want to - I'm not playing cards tonight, so -"

His voice unsticks and comes out loud. "I think I'll go to the hospital then." Klavier has become astonishingly unobtrusive, behind him. "Prosecutor Gav - um, Klavier? Did you bring a car today, or..." He feels like an idiot, like it's another paper bag puppet session, but he's certain that it's amusing Klavier, somewhere below the surface, and actually that's a comforting thought.

"Ja. I did. We can leave whenever you like."

"Um, okay..." He turns around and gives Trucy a hug himself (she squeezes so tightly that he thinks again of the boa constrictor) and slides his hands into his pockets as he looks at Mr. Wright.

Except that Phoenix holds out his right hand, and Apollo reverses his motion and shakes it. And then his boss repeats the gesture in Klavier's direction, and the musician comes up another step to reach. Both sets of blue eyes are fatigued, apologetically guarded, gracious despite it.
They split up at the bottom of the stairs.

The drive is quiet, almost wordless. Klavier pushes the speed limit as much as he can on the surface streets, and Apollo rests the side of his face against the sun-warmed nylon of the shoulder belt.

---

They're told when they arrive that it'll have to be a short visit, since Vera is being moved out of the secure unit. There's recognition in the nurse's eyes, but it doesn't color anything she says; it's probably gentler, anyway, to maintain the fiction that lawyers are the same thing as loved ones.

The waiting room television is muted, but as they head past it to the elevator, the exterior of the courthouse is recognizable behind the scrolling black bars of the closed captioning.

TIME IN DECADES THAT A JURY HAS BEEN CONV ENED TO DETERMINE AN AMERICAN CITIZEN'S G

---

Vera's already been transferred from the bed to a gurney by the time they reach her, so they walk on either side like an honor guard (and one honorable fucking honor guard this is) as she's wheeled through the halls into a smaller room with a bedside table, another television bolted up in one corner, and a window.

The apprehensive thrum that's been propelling him for the past three days, and that he's been trying to disregard since the verdict, does ease a little when he sees it. It's more like an environment for a human being, less like all you can do is wait for a disaster. And it eases a little more when he looks down at her face and she doesn't seem as pale.

Comes back stronger, when it sinks in that it's the sunshine from the window making her look less ghostly than she had under the fluorescents, and she's still not here.

He pulls the stuffed snake off his shoulder, where he'd draped it again after seeing it on one of the metal chairs in the old room, and tucks it back around her once she's settled.

The new chairs have plastic cushions, easy to wipe down. The TV's not on. They stand there awkwardly for a minute, in the yellowing sunlight. Klavier presses his lips to the back of her hand, au revoir, when a doctor tells them to come back tomorrow if they want to.

Apollo means to say sleep well or Trucy says hi but his tongue turns it into "We know."

The doctor and Klavier both look up in surprise and he realizes that it sounded like impatience on his part.

"Sorry. I was talking to -" He gestures at Vera and his gaze follows his hand so that he's looking at her when he tries again. "We know what happened, okay? You're not under suspicion anymore -
You're not guilty." He knows he's being a little too loud, he's reminding himself of a tourist who
doesn't speak the language, but he can't help it.

We told her, the doctor says, with almost a chuckle. Her breathing continues at the same slow pace
as they leave, like a clock set to the wrong time. The bracelet doesn't seem to be moving, but he
can almost hear it singing like a wineglass someone's rubbed.

Klavier has his humming-a-new-song face on in the hall, though he's not making a sound, and he's
distracted enough that he's taking long strides and making Apollo trot to keep up. The red phone
buzzes in a pocket as they turn a corner, and in the few seconds it takes the defense to fish it out
and check it the prosecution disappears into a stairwell. "Hey. Wait."

"Apologies...ach." Klavier's voice, echoing up into the corridor, cuts out before he can get to what's
probably one of his German endearments and becomes a sigh. When Apollo catches up, he's
standing on a step maybe a quarter of the way down, leaning against one of the blank walls.

"Trucy texted me."

"Mm?"

"Just 'how's Vera.' Well, 'how's verb.' I'm assuming." It comes out stacatto, not as funny as he'd
hoped, and Klavier doesn't smile.

"Oh, reply. Reply. The Fräulein does not need more to worry about." Klavier tilts his head up
toward the ceiling and Apollo settles his shoulders against the opposite wall and looks down at the
tiny screen.

She's okay

Deletes that.

The same.
They didn't let us stay, they were moving her to a better room.

The phone whirrs back almost instantly. ok. thats good i guess

He's started to reply How are - when the next text arrives.

are you coming back tonight?

...Hadn't I better?

daddy is askqe
qaeasd
gq

He blinks.

Apple
Apollo, stay with Gavin if you're worrief.
worred
worried.
He blinks harder.

*Mr. Wright?*

*It would be a kindness
kindness
put up with him*

*Sorry?*

There's a very long pause that he (correctly, as it turns out) assumes is being taken up with more careful typing. He steals a glance at Klavier's hands, hooked in his belt, as he waits for the phone to hum again.

*Prosecutors w/ nasty relatives = soft like marshmallow inside = liable to do stupid
do stupid things.*
*If he's acting funny
I assume you can tell if he's acting funny I can't.*

"Mr. Wright is saying I should stay with you if you're acting weird." This doesn't come out humorous, either.

"He is what?" Klavier reaches out a hand for the phone, and looks at it in quizzical alarm, dabbing at the screen with a finger to scroll it back. "**Ha.** The poor man. He is putting me on a suicide watch."

Oh.

Oh.

The phone vibrates just as he takes it back and Klavier exhales. "Marshmallow, hm?"

*sorry, polly, he stole it!*

*It's okay - tell him I'll stay if he really thinks its important?*

Another pause; he can almost hear Trucy's voice parroting the inquiry to her dad.

*he says YES it's imPORTANT and he sounds like he's mad*

*Okay, I'm staying - and tell him I'm sorry, he's not mad at you.*

...**GOOD xmas present** is the last message she sends.

He drops the phone back into his pocket and starts down the steps; Klavier catches up. "They're not expecting me back for a while."

"I could take you to dinner."

"I'm not hungry."

---
The newscast showing in the waiting room has moved onto vox pops by the time they go past again.

E DE DIOS, THE SCAR!
ANYONE CAN HAVE A SCAR. BUT YOU REMEMBER.

SO THE GUY'S LITTLE BROTHER, AND THAT IS F--- UP BY THE WAY, AND THE DEFENSE ATTORNEY, THEY'RE LIKE

---

Again they don't talk much in the car. Klavier sets the radio to some sedate-slash-sedative station and turns the volume low, but the engine noises are easier to listen to somehow. Apollo feels his spine curving, presses himself down and back into the passenger seat.

It doesn't feel like it had felt after Kristoph had been locked up the first time, after Daryan. Not the same victorious crackle in the air.

It's still light out when they get back to Klavier's apartment, and they gravitate towards the bedroom, but they don't undress further than shoes and belts and vest and jacket. Klavier just sits down on the bed like that, rumples the sheets as he draws himself backwards and twists onto his side, and Apollo scrambles up next to him, curls close where he can hear him breathe, can feel the cloth of his shirt rise and fall.

They just lie there, legs interlaced, and Klavier holds him tight in his arms while he closes his eyes and buries his face against the base of his throat, and shivers in a delayed reaction, as though whatever animates the bracelet has seeped into his bones.
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It takes a while for the shivering to stop, for his chest to relax enough for him to draw more than shallow breaths that taste like fabric and the salt-sweet of Klavier's collarbone. After a few minutes, maybe, Klavier starts to hum.

It's an awkward position for it, and Apollo can hear the quick sibilant inhalations between notes and feel the accompanying expansions of Klavier's ribs, but actually that's more soothing than it might be: the unmistakable reality of it, Klavier as human here and close and not some strange, magnetic mirage. The tune he's humming isn't seductive, either, it's something quiet like a music box. Sh, sh, not come here. And Klavier lets it fade and hags tighter when Apollo presses closer to him, picks it up again when he sighs and sinks fractionally back away into the mattress.

By the time Apollo is calm enough to open his eyes, he's not sure how long it's been, but the light in the room seems different. Blank-minded, he looks at the upside-down letters stamped into the shirt button an inch from his nose, can't bring himself to care what they spell, stops and sits up to face the window. Klavier sits up behind him; there's a crunch of springs and a faint radiant warmth at his back where his boyfriend is sitting, waiting.

His words feel too heavy to lift into the air. But the second the stillness threatens to be awkward, Klavier breaks it. "Are you all right for a moment, schatzelein? I'm just going to draw the blinds and turn the heat up, a little bit."

"I'm not cold." Except as he says it he realizes that he's got his arms crossed and his hands curled around his triceps. And even the insignificant few seconds he spends alone because the thermostat is in the hall feel like too many.

I'm not this weak. I'm not, it's only what Kristoph was supposed to think -

There's the faintest, politest rumble of the heat coming on, and then Klavier is back. The singer clambers onto the bed again and shoves pillows around until there's an almost-vertical wall of them to lean on, cushioning the headboard, then sits against it and pulls Apollo the short distance back into his arms. This time, when the waterline of the silence edges too high, it's Apollo who speaks.

"What you said."

"Hm?"

"What you told -" His voice twists up and again he hates his own vulnerability. He scowls at the dresser across the room. "What you told Kristoph. Today."

"That he wasn't needed."

"No. About living in fear."

The response begins as a quiet curse in German. "Oh, my Apollo. I was running my mouth, I thought it was only fair that he'd known what it was to live that way. I am sorry. I was not thinking"
of your being with him, while he was..." Klavier kisses him fiercely on the top of the head and tightens his hold, though Apollo can feel the contrite droop in his posture too.

"No, that's not even what I meant. I just -" He puts one hand on top of one of the tan ones, to emphasize that he's not angry.

Klavier draws his legs up partway, then, and squeezes them against Apollo's. "You just?"

"I've - we've both been. Fuck. Fucking hell, fucking Kristoph. Daryan. Everything." His slowly attained calm is in danger of spiraling away again.

"Apollo?"

"I was afraid of him while I was working for him, but now even after... I don't want to live in fear anymore."

The musician's hands wriggle free, pat around and then slide to cover his own. A noiseless sigh tickles the skin under his left ear, followed by a voice. "Liebe...who doesn't?"

"What?"

"My secretary at work, she is afraid of car accidents. In Los Angeles, and she takes the Metro everywhere, or walks. I have met very few people who were not afraid of anything in the day to day reality...and the ones I have, I either put them in prison, or they were on my doorstep wanting to tell me about God. Everyone lives in fear when it comes down to it, my schatzlein. It is just different afraid of what."

"So what are you afraid of?"

"Bees."

"Dork. Be serious."

"I am perfectly serious. I used to be afraid of Daryan killing me over something too stupid to die for and the rest of the world never knowing it was not an accident. Other things about that. I am less afraid, now, than I used to be, ever since my Apollo fished me out of the wastepaper basket."

"You picked me up."

"You kissed me."

Apollo flushes a little, understands that Klavier's sidestepping is aimed at making him feel better. But he's not ready to let go of the topic yet. "What scares you now?"

"I told you; bees -"

"Oh, shut up." He turns around, knees sinking precariously into the soft surface, and kisses the flippancy off the blond's face. He's aware of the intensity of his own stare as he pulls back, his lips still parted. When their eyes meet Klavier looks surprised at first and then reluctant, almost sulky.

His voice stays soft. "I have never liked making catalogs of the things I could worry about, schatzi."
Apollo continues to stare at him.

"All right. Right now?" He rests a hand on Apollo's shoulder, and Apollo can feel his fingers tap in sequence. "Vera Misham. It is terrible to be in limbo like that. And I do not want her to die - and if she wakes up, I do not understand how she will live." He looks sideways, takes a breath. "Also I still have nightmares about the man in the white suit, now and then. And Kristoph still frightens you so you look at me like this, and I loathe him for it."

"Nothing about getting caught?"

The fingers tap his shoulder again, not as hard. "Oh, well, it is October now, maybe instead we have an awkward near miss in front of everyone at Christmastime and work it out properly on Valentine's D-"

"Klavier!"

"Schatzi, I - we discussed what if after Vera was poisoned. Daryan and my brother are not entitled to more than that from me. Or from you."

"You know not everyone is as good at not thinking about it as you are."

"Then stop asking me what scares me and tell me about what is scaring you." He starts to settle his hands on Apollo's arms, rethinks it and moves them, hesitating, to his waist. "Please."

"If you don't want to talk about it I -"

"Please? Apollo?"

Klavier sounds insecure. They can't both be irrational and upset at the same instant, that doesn't work.


"How do we know this is the last time? I thought last time was the last time."

Warm hands press close and tug at him then, and he topples forward into Klavier's chest in time to feel him sigh. "Who could have - Ach." The voice stops, and regroups. "I was about to say 'who could have anticipated this,' but Herr Wright presents a problem from that perspective."

The noise he makes into Klavier's expensive shirt probably qualifies as a laugh.

"But I cannot imagine that anyone would consider my brother credible now. Or that there would be further cause for you to see him. He is not likely ever again to be a free man or a witness."

It's too sullen to sound like a question. "How come you have an answer for everything."

"Interviews, liebe, they are worse than law enforcement. Interviews still permit the bright lights and not giving you anything to eat."

He tweaks a lock of brown hair, and Apollo mutters into his sternum, fabric catching on his lips.
"Then you should stick up for yourself better."

"We are both demonstrably so competent when it comes to that." This time it's not a laugh, almost a growl of frustration, and in response a hand snakes around his waist and plucks in a purposeless way at his own shirt. "What else is worrying you?"

The apartment is empty except for them. "They could execute him now."

Klavier is far too intelligent to interpret that as gentle concern for Kristoph's well-being, and his reply is stilted, cautious. "It is not - very **likely**, liebe. Not the way he fell apart on the stand, and not with his being who he used to be in the Bar Association. And not with the officials we have at the moment, especially. None of them are much inclined to prove that particular point."

The light pooling at the bottom of the blinds is turning yellower and to orange; the sun is setting.

"Did you worry about it with Daryan?"

"It was even less likely then, with the drug meant to save a child -" He stops cold, expends the rest of his lungful of air in an impatient noise between a sigh and a hiss. "I am sorry. I should not talk so much. Yes. I worried...but he never killed anyone."

"You didn't tell me. And he would have."

"Mmh." Klavier shifts his weight and starts to pet his hair, despite the too-much gel in it from the morning.

"You **know** he -"

"Apollo, liebchen, you are getting to my point ahead of me and proving it. We deal better with one another's monsters. I can talk to the Chief Prosecutor again, ask for clemency for my brother, **if** he needs it, but only after I am satisfied that he will **stay down**." Klavier's muscles have been tensing and tensing as he talks, but he self-consciously softens afterwards. Nervous.

"You - you know you could have begged me, backstage at the concert."

"Begged you?"

"Not to do to Daryan - whatever I was doing. You could have said anything. It wouldn't have mattered. After I saw you in the hospital."

"Then you understand me, about Kris." A minor-key vibration is coming into his voice.

"Yeah."

"We have had this conversation enough times maybe."

"He's in prison, do you hate me now, no I don't, god you're sexy when you're relieved."
Apologies to any readers who are disturbed by the discussion of the death penalty. It is a fact of both the fictitious and the real-world setting, and so not touching on it seemed like a false note. But I understand that it's upsetting.
Chapter 61

The quick, twitchy movements of Klavier's hands and jaw, in time with the bracelet, mean he's acutely embarrassed as well as amused. "Ja. That one." He squirms and resettles, and his breath seems to come a little harder. Almost automatically, Apollo's hand moves to fiddle with the first of the overpriced shirt buttons, but he's interrupted. "Not yet."

"Why?"

"You are still uneasy, I can tell. Something more that you brought home today. Talk to me now, about what."

"Home?"

"Once we have made fools of ourselves in front of the legal community at some holiday function or other, then it's your apartment too, hm?" Klavier twists around next to him, gazes patiently (but not too patiently) from a distance so small that his eyes are nearly crossed.

"It's dumb."

"I don't believe you."

"Fine. Fine."

Klavier waits, but not long. "Fine what?"

"I hate -" The word takes all of the remaining air with it, and he clenches his hands around nothing while he draws a (shuddery, damn it, damn it) new breath. "You were right. I'm not angry at you, you were right. But I HATE him looking at me like that."

"Kristoph."

"Like I was food. Or a silverfish in his bookcase." He's regaining control of his voice. "He would do that, he would talk to you all morning like you were a person and then look over and suddenly you're just. Organic. Something he can smear and it's okay, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter -"

"Apollo, look at me."

He returns his gaze to Klavier's blue one and swallows at what's there.

And Klavier takes in his agitation, lifts his chin with one careful finger, and tilts his own face closer, all without glancing away. "You gave me another sound to remember, once. So look at me now, look at me - and if Kristoph comes to mind...try to picture what you see right now instead, ja?"

Different eyes behind perfectly unsmudged lenses, pale blue irises, pale blue clothes. Smooth surfaces everywhere. Mother-of-pearl. The same composite impression that he'd been perpetually turning his imagination away from, while he'd worked at the Gavin offices, while he'd been Kristoph's.
If it can be replaced, replace it with this.

Klavier with blond strands sneaking loose and trailing into his face, crinkles coming at the corners of his eyes from late nights and bright bulbs, and worry, and the sun. Jewelry with a skin-oil haze. Everything disheveled, a little bit undone. Tenderness in his look, most and first, then apprehension below it, then iron.

And then he blinks for a while, looks at Klavier more normally, and says, "You. Have lint in your hair."

A smile and a huff of air. "Hf. Exactly, that's what I want you to remember."

He thinks he's going to say something back like don't say it like that, maybe more, but the phone in his vest pocket, crumpled at the foot of the bed, chooses that minute to buzz.

They both turn toward it instinctively.

"Um..."

"Nein, go on."

Apollo scoots backward and drops onto his side to reach it. The screen is still lit up.

Where are you?

He starts to tap in a reply, stops, deletes it, and starts again.

With Prosecutor Gavin.
Are you and Truce home?

A longish pause.

You knew it was me:

Truce doesn't capitalize.

Doesn't she? Myflaut
My fault for raising her agnostic.

How is she?

Ok. Not great, ok. No show tonight no school tomorr
...how is he?

He has no idea how to answer that, so he sits up and points the phone at Klavier, who squints at it. "What do I say to this?"

"Ha. I don't know. Better if he were not spending time fretting about me. I have fantasized of being worshipped as another Miles Edgeworth, but this is not what I imagined."

Apollo looks at him skeptically and leans back over to pick up the chain belt from where it's serpentine on the floor. "You -" he jiggles it in the air, then lets go of it - "wanted to be Miles
Edgeworth." To emphasize his point he sits back up, straighter than he needs to, and gestures at his neck with loose fingers.

"To be fair, schatzelein, this was before I knew how to operate a guitar very well."

"Still."

"Is Herr Wright still waiting for you to answer him? Here, give it to me."

He jerks the phone back protectively until his brain catches up with his arms and informs him that he's being stupid. Klavier has a hand outstretched and is beckoning his fingers for it, so Apollo relinquishes it and moves closer to read the screen in a kind of morbid anxiety.

The prosecutor's reply is more than long enough for Phoenix to interrupt it with further messages of his own, but that doesn't happen; instead Apollo can almost feel the bewilderment radiating from the other end.

Would this be the Chair of the very important committee with the unmanageable name? Hello. I beg your pardon, I have temporarily liberated Herr Forehead from his little red phone; he mentions that you seem concerned for my well-being. I hope it will salvage your dignity and mine, Herr Wright, if I reassure you that you have no cause - nor obligation - to waste any worries along those lines? If you need him back, I will return him straightaway, but otherwise I may hang onto him for the time being. If there are any instructions as to his care and watering, however, please do pass them along.

"That should be clear enough, telling your employer not to trouble himself?"

"And weird enough that he will anyway."

"At least my conscience is clear." Klavier gives a funny little sideways nod and flicks his eyes up at the ceiling. "...In and as it relates to this precise moment."

The phone hums like an angry person with a mouthful of toothpaste.

Apollo is fairly good at feeding and watering himself. Just try not to lose him, we'd miss him around here.

Klavier grins and tilts the screen back towards him just in time for Phoenix's second message to appear.

Thank you for your work today, Klavier.

The blond follows Apollo's gaze to it, reads, and frowns at the small sentence, emotions skimming past on his face like riffling pages. Then he types something back and drops the phone into Apollo's hands from about a foot up.

And yours for a rather longer period.

"I will apologize later," he says when Apollo glances sideways.

Hi, Mr. Wright. It's me again.
Did that answer your question?

...No.
To be quit honest
quite honest.
Are you okay keeping an eye on him this evening?

Not in the style he's accustomed to.

Make him spend his own money [ It's not his wallet I'm concerned about.

This time it's Apollo who tilts the phone so Klavier can see.

"What is he thinking? That I would expunge my grief by dragging you from the bar to the club to the opium den? Or perhaps a stop at a drag race in the riverbed."

"You have an opium den?"

Klavier snorts. "It seemed like a good investment at the time." The light in the room is dissipating, the deceptively quick autummnal fade, and the glow from the tiny screen is becoming visible as its own chilly radiance on the musician's face and hair and the white surface of Apollo's shirt. "Are you feeling any hungrier now?"

The lingering nervous energy makes it a harder question than it should be. "I don't know. Not really. Maybe."

Klavier's eyes narrow. "What have you had to eat today?"

"Oatmeal. No, wait, maybe that was yesterday. I -"

"Up." Strong lean arms hug him from behind and then lift him awkwardly to his feet as their owner clambers to the edge of the bed and off. "I cannot return you to your boss like this, he will look at me disapprovingly."

"He will anyway - um -"

An explosive laugh. "You must be starving, liebe, your tact has been shut off. Come watch me overboil pasta for a while and point out how I am doing it wrong."

Walking with Klavier draped over his shoulders is as awkward as always, but he doesn't shrug him away.

"Left doorway."

"I know."

The brightness of the kitchen does something subliminally good for his mood, and though Klavier plunks him on a barstool to rest while he crashes through his cupboards for spaghetti and a pot, it's not long before he's back on his feet and poking through the stainless steel refrigerator. Easily twice the size and a fraction the age of the one at the agency, though with even less in it.

"What do you see there that could go on noodles? I am not sure what I have."
"Eggs. Greens. Breakfast sausage. Whatever this - forget it, plum sauce. Um, unless you like that."

"No, no, not for this. I do not remember why that is there." There's a slippery rattle, and the starchy smell of boiling spaghetti fills the air.

"Did anyone ever tell you that you're supposed to buy groceries that cooperate?"

"Little, little steps. Anything that does not come in styrofoam is progress."

He emerges to another clatter, carrying the more promising ingredients he'd found, just in time to see Klavier dolloping a little more of the pasta's olive oil into a saucepan. "Sit back down, I will take those."

"I'm fine, just give me a spatula."

"Hm."

He winds up with, instead of a spatula, a pair of disposable bamboo chopsticks, and those only after Klavier has gone through all of the drawers and the oil has started to spit on the pan.

The end result is greasy and resembles an omelette minus cheese and plus (overcooked, as threatened) noodles, but as Klavier is dishing it out onto a couple of plates, with entirely unwarranted flourishes, he realizes that it's also possibly the best thing he's ever smelled and he's starving.

"I will get the bottle opener if you will get the drinks?"

"Figures that you have a **bottle opener** but not a **spatula**. I didn't see drinks in the fridge?"

"But I bought Mexican Coca-Cola, with the cane sugar. For you. And put it in the crisper the way you do."

*Not the puppy eyes.* "Which is why the vegetables were on the shelf with the plum sauce?"

The sodas are exactly where Klavier has said they would be, and when he brings two back to the table and sits down, he feels like he's been standing for hours.

"Cheers." The wisps of vapor from the chilled bottles join the ribbons of steam rising from the plates. He looks through them and over the absurd food to smile a tired smile that starts polite and turns real.

"Cheers."

---

His face flushes when he feels a hand on his shoulder and realizes that he's nodded off at the table. Flushes more, when Klavier shows him the message log on his own, much more intimidating phone:

_Herr Forehead is falling asleep, and I am not much better. You will not dock his pay, I hope, if I install him on my couch and return him in the morning?_
For god's sake don't drive. That's fine. If he's hungover tomorrow I'll request reimbursement from the Prosecutor's Office.

Fair enough.

"Fuck. Pretending we're drunk is less suspicious." He hears the sleepy petulance in his voice, but can't shake it off. "Do I have to stay on the couch?"

"Of course not." There's a warm chuckle, and once again Klavier takes his arms and guides him out of the room.

"Light switch."

"Ja, all right." He leans into the taller man's sidestep, feels him reach for the wall plate. Even in the darkness, Klavier is too careful to let him bump into anything as they go back down the hall.
Chapter 62

Apollo wakes to a conversation he can't follow, wearing a t-shirt that isn't his, uncertain what time it is. He lies still with his eyes wide open and lets the words filter in, Klavier's voice innately comforting in the absence of context.

"...She is? What exactly does that mean?"

"...What does she - what has she been told?"

"...We can be there very -"

"...I meant the people from the Wright Agency. And myself, I suppose. I'm sorry. I will call them right away. But not yet, an hour?...An hour and thirty."

"...Thank you. I am very glad to hear it. Thank you."

Apollo has made sure not to make even the slightest noise that might be heard on the phone - he certainly hasn't rolled over - and the tone of voice has been so businesslike that the Klavier in his muzzy mental image is already fully dressed, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Which makes it a surprise when the version that comes into his field of view and sits down next to him is shirtless, tousled, and forcing a calm restraint onto his face that the rest of his body language contradicts. "Vera Misham is awake, and talking. Coherent. That was the hospital."

"It's okay to smile about it."

And that's all it takes; Klavier's whole expression lights up and he tackles Apollo in a Tigger pounce.

"Hey -" But there's no real irritation in it. It feels like something's been unwrapped from around his chest, and since words aren't coming to mind he contents himself with looking up, catching his boyfriend's sunburst of a smile and reflecting it back. Klavier settles onto his forearms, and Apollo ends up with two sets of bangs tickling his face.

The prosecutor's words are soft. "I was very insistent that they call me, as soon as... A miracle. With paint on her elbows."

"She beat him too."

"I love her a little bit for that. It is insane."

"And you're trying to tell me there's enough of you to go around?"

"So quick to jump to conclusions. Are you jealous?" He bumps their noses together. "No, I would not be the suitor appearing on the doorstep, but I might be the person frowning and running the background checks on any who did. I never had the opportunity to be the overprotective kind of brother. Besides. I do not have a need for the groupies anymore, ja? Not with my Apollo nearby."

"What is that supposed to mean?" He jostles Klavier off of him and sits up, but for some reason
that only makes the blond laugh. "What's so funny?"

Klavier's halfhearted, lip-biting attempt to quiet down doesn't really count as an attempt at all. "If you could see yourself right now -"

He rakes impatient fingers through his hair. Then glowers in incomprehension when of course that sets his audience of one off again. "Not - not that. You were very tired last night, schatzlein." He gestures vaguely at Apollo's chest.

The fucking t-shirt has Klavier's fucking picture on it.

His face flames and he sputters into the cotton as he yanks it off, getting an arm stuck for a second. "You - narcissistic jackass - why am I wearing this?" He frees himself from the shirt, balls it up, and hurls it at the laughing musician. All it does is unball in midair and splat against his arm.

"You looked so cute. And I have cartons of them from the promoters..."

"I am not -"

"You are. You are cute, verliebte, and I am pretty, and that will be true until we are tedious old men who resemble Keith Richards and Mister Magoo."

"Screw you -" He's still not really annoyed. He lunges at Klavier and gets a faceful of shoulder, though, because the German has rolled sideways to retrieve something from the nightstand.

"You had better call the Wrights with the good news - before you do anything else, ja? We can meet them at the hospital."

He takes the red phone, sees a missed call of his own, ("You turned the ringer off?" "Last night, you needed to sleep") and dials his boss.

"Good morning?" The man picks up promptly. This time it's Klavier trying not to make noise.

"Mr. Wright, it's Apollo."

"So you say."

He can feel his eyes unfocus. "I'm pretty sure. So, um, it's...it's a good thing Truce isn't at school today. No, I'm sorry, I mean, it's a good thing I'm calling about too. Tell her her snake worked."

---

He's not sure how respectable he's supposed to look, if he's ostensibly spent the night in a drunken but otherwise innocent stupor on the prosecution's living room couch, but his suit (Klavier had put it on a hanger) is in an indeterminate state of not too neat and not too trashed that'll probably be close enough to whatever. They're not talking too much in the hallways, not walking too close.

They find the Wrights waiting in a lounge area with plastic-upholstered chairs.

"Polly!" Trucy streaks towards him and knocks him a few steps backward with her enthusiastic hug.
"Hey, Truce. Have you seen her yet?"

"No, she's with the - not the psychiatrist, the other one."

He starts to say counselor but Phoenix beats him to it. "Neurologist."

"Right, him." She bounces in place. "He said he'd come get us once he was done checking if she was okay."

Not for the first time, he blesses Trucy - if he has the authority to bless anyone - for moving so easily in these social polygons which are complicated for everyone else. There's some kind of morning talk show on the lounge TV, a row of people with the whitest smiles, and even though the sound is turned all the way off he can't seem to help glancing at it. Mr. Wright is doing the same thing, and when their eyes meet he twists the corner of his mouth in mild two-way mockery.

"Ahm. Thank you for the loan of Herr Forehead." Klavier has been hovering back a little, with his hands in his pockets, and Trucy replies first.

"You're welcome!"

"And I am very sorry to have deprived you, Fräulein, though it was his employer to whom I -"

"No, no, she's the real authority -"

"I'm right here."

Which is the conversation that the doctor wanders into. He's a washed-out looking man with a generic chin and a moustache. "Mr. Justice?" His interrogatory gaze slides past Phoenix first, and then gets waylaid by Trucy's hat, before he finally seems to notice the person he's looking for. "Ah. Good morning, Mr. Justice. There you are. You'll be able to visit your client as soon as the nurses have completed another round of that pillow-fluffing and so on that they do. They were very insistent - and it doesn't pay to irritate the nurses, does it, no."

"She's not my client anymore." His mental rule about people who call him Mr. Justice is holding up fine.

"Ah. Ah, yes, well, I suppose your fees will actually be coming from -"

"My brother's accounts," says Klavier blandly, from behind him.

"Prosecutor Gavin! Here to shake the winning side's hand?" The man chuckles at his own wit, and when no one says anything back to him, stands there and peers at them like he's debating a diagnosis.

"How is she, doctor?" That's Phoenix, finally, and he's clearly annoyed.

"Oh, quite well, quite well. A very interesting case, a privilege to -"

"Great. We'll go wait by the door for the nurses to finish up." Mr. Wright cuts him off and starts down the hall, forcing the man to get out of the way, then turns to look over his shoulder. "Come on, folks." Everyone troops after him.
The curtain in the doorway is drawn, and so they form a kind of harmless gauntlet outside, the Wrights on either side of the door and Apollo and Klavier against the opposite wall, spaced at the same interval.

"The courts can't have received access to Kristoph's funds so early."

"Not since yesterday, Herr Wright. Since April. Of course it will take some time to untangle another, ah, helping of his money; the state of his finances is - we shall say very much in character. But I can be of some assistance in the meantime."

Phoenix frowns. "You're not taking responsibility for -"

"No, no. Not like you are imagining. But there are family assets that he controlled by virtue of being the elder that... I suppose I shall be visiting my accountant today."

"Good. Apollo can't work pro bono forever, after all."

"You could always pay me."

"I'm shaking down a rock star for you, what more do you want?"

"Something in writing."

"O ye of little faith."

"Herr Wright, I should certainly not want the forehead to starve, but I must confess, he was not my first concern. May I ask a favor of you, if I am unable to see Vera Misham myself for now? She may not be willing to have me in, and I - I would not insist."

The man in the beanie raises an eyebrow.

"Could you perhaps find out from her, about her financial situation? I intend to make Kristoph's resources available to her, but of course my preference is to do so in a way that is truly helpful..."

"I...We can try. Though that may be a conversation for another day, you know."

"I realize."

There's the sound of the curtain scraping along its track, and a woman in scrubs with paintbrushes printed on them steps into the hall, followed by a second nurse who strides briskly off. "So who's first?" When she sees them look blankly at each other, she explains. "No more than two visitors at once, for now. Don't want to wear her out."

"You go first, Gavin. You're the only person here with a real job."

"I am quite sure that I don't have one." He steps forward, stops, and looks at the nurse shamefacedly. "I do not know if she will want to see me, to tell the truth."

"Simple enough." She turns in place, sticks her head through the door, and calls. "Vera, honey, Prosecutor Gavin is here. Can he come in?" Whatever reply there is isn't audible, but she turns back around. "Go say hello. And don't feel too bad about how you forgot those flowers." The blond's face falls from concern to comical near-horror as she says it, looking at his hands like a
bouquet might suddenly appear in them, and she laughs and pokes him in the arm. "Go on. A couple boys this cute'll work better than flowers anyway."

It's interesting enough to see Klavier turn red that Apollo almost manages not to do it himself.

Once his blushing boyfriend has gone in, followed by the nurse, he stands staring at the partially drawn curtain longer than he should, awash in the half-heard noises and conversations coming from different directions, right until a closer voice makes him jump.

It's a tired voice, strained like it's only just putting down something heavy. "Thank you, Apollo."

"Sorry, what?"

"I don't know if your looking after him last night did more for Gavin's mental health or for mine, but thanks."

"It's fine."

Trucy is, conspicuously to his eyes, hanging around the other side of the doorway and not looking at either of them.

"I'm not losing my mind. I know he's not Miles."

The first thing he can think of to say back is Well, Miles Edgeworth didn't really kill himself, which probably would not be better than nothing, so he stands there and looks at the floor.

"I'm sorry," Mr. Wright says.

"You don't need to apologize for that. He did say he wanted to be Edgeworth when he was younger...you're fine. I laughed at him too."

The mental image seems to have gone a little ways towards making his boss relax. "And you, Polly? Who did you want to be?"

"Some famous lawyer who fishes for compliments."

Mr. Wright gets the strangest look on his face then - like he's been given something incredibly sour, a birthday gift, and a mental math problem all at once. "Are you feeling all right? I think that might actually be the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

And he should have some kind of response to that, except Trucy comes up to them just in time for Klavier to emerge carrying a folded piece of paper and bump into her, and then the nurse comes out and asks who's next (Phoenix) and so somewhere behind Klavier saying in his ear call me tonight, liebe, please, so I can hear your voice? and Klavier leaving, and waiting and then visiting Vera - and he cries then, the Wrights have never seen him cry - hovers that statement that he never has a chance to respond to, even though it's probably absolutely true.
Chapter 63

Maybe if I go back, and look very appealing, they'd adopt me. Or buy me an ice cream.

Klavier stands in the hospital elevator, trying to use up his excess energy by flicking at his hair and shifting his weight from one leg to the other. Even as he watches the red numbers count down, what he wants is to jab the button that will take him back up to Vera's floor, Vera's room, to attach himself to the group from the Agency. For the day. For the foreseeable future.

Maybe not so much Mr. Wright except that Mr. Wright was kind enough or confused enough to worry about him. Maybe it would be all right.

It is hard to be agitated alone, but being triumphant alone feels almost as wrong, and right now he is a slurry of both. The events of the last four days would be enough to...

He tells himself not to worry, Vera is well, Kris - and Daryan, how many years ago (how many seconds ago) was Daryan? - are in prison. He tells himself to behave like an adult.

Fortunately people do not expect too much of him in this regard.

---

The folded piece of paper sits on the passenger seat of the car, Apollo's seat, all day.

He goes to see his accountant, though he has to lean on the man (sunnily, presumptuously) to come into his office at all when he is supposed to be playing golf.

He visits his record label, the new one, the tiny one. They have already stopped being deferential to him, which he takes as a good thing. They say, if he's here, they should take some pictures, and so he gets some practice smiling for a camera - it is not a skill he intends to lose even if the requests are already fewer and farther between.

Evening comes and he can't decide what he should eat. He drives around downtown uselessly and ends up paying through his car window for a bacon-wrapped hot dog from a man with a converted rolling toolchest hooked up with a camp stove and a cookie sheet.


And he's sitting in the hush of his apartment, with the lights off, in front of the dark blank television, when Apollo calls him that night. "Hello, schatzelein."

"First ring. You missed me?"

"You expected as much."

"Yeah." Apollo sighs into the speaker, and it's a sound he could listen to indefinitely. White noise like the ocean.

"Are the Fräulein and her father listening?"
"They're cleaning the front room. I don't know what made that happen, but it's not like I mind. And Truce has one of your albums on, so you're providing your own soundscreen."

"Which one?"

"How do I know? The one with all the dumb police metaphor innuendo."

"To be perfectly honest, mausi, that is most of them."

"The one with the really long piano solo. I think Mr. Wright actually likes that song, you should ask him."

"I will let you do that. But that reminds me - I can bring the Fräulein a very advance copy of the new record on Thursday or about then. If you think she would like it?"

"Wow, yeah...I sort of forgot you were even doing that...she might explode. So yeah. Except -" there's a muffled metallic sound that he recognizes as Apollo shifting on the folding bed - "why does she get one and I don't?"

"Because you were so very insistent this morning that I should not mistake you for a groupie ever again. And because you forgot I was recording it. But how does this sound? I will provide her with a copy of the songs, and you with a copy of the I am told enticing cover photo."

"So long as it's on paper and not something you'd expect me to wear."

"I promise." There's a pause, and he blinks at the shadowed mass of the television set. "Hurry up and move in with me, schatzi. This apartment is lonely in the dark."

Apollo's voice is a little bit aggravated, but mostly soft. "Christmas or later. Kind of up to you. Why are you sitting in the dark, anyway? You turned on the lights for me, turn them on for yourself."

"I did not think of it." But he does it now, while Apollo sighs into the line again.

"Eat something too."

"I did."

"What was it?"

"A hot dog."

"That doesn't count."

"It is good enough...How did your visit go, this morning?"

"Good. Good. It was...good. Did she give you a drawing? She drew Trucy a picture of herself. And me one too, but..."

"She did, but it is yours I want to see."

"No, you don't. She drew just my hair."
"Just your -"

"The **top** of my hair. It's pretty minimalist."

He pictures it, chuckles. "I am sorry, mausi, I do love this girl."

"Are you really...are you really giving Kristoph's money to her?"

"I am. Different reasons, though, not all so noble." Nervous energy makes him turn in a circle, looking again at the bare walls and the cardboard boxes still piled up next to the table and by the doorway. "Move in with me, this place is not real yet."

"Be patient. Or stop exaggerating. I will, okay? I love you - what are these other reasons, anyway?" Apollo is never first to say that, and apprehension runs his sentences together.

Klavier's eyes close and he stands still. "I love you, too. Now and Christmastime and never not."

He swallows, hears the same noise in one ear. "She deserves the money, schatz. And he owes it. But it was also an ideal opportunity to demonstrably not benefit from it myself, better than just not touching it...a precaution. I realize I am a terrible human being."

The reply is only a little slow in coming. "So I shouldn't be expecting a check either."

"...That might be best. Still you should be paid. I can -"

"No. You're probably right. At least I can be *officially* pro bono this time."

"Soon enough you will have all of the royalties for my bad metaphors at your disposal."

"Yeah. Buy a spatula before that happens."

"Ja. I can try."

Two **good nights**.

He returns the phone to his pocket, picks up Vera Misham's drawing from the coffee table again, retreats back into the couch cushions and pulls his legs up after him.

When he'd come into the room and she'd looked at him and not fainted but then he hadn't known what to say, she'd held both her hands out flat in front of her and tilted her head. He'd mirrored the gesture, after a split second's confusion, and she'd bent to her sketchbook and added a couple of decisive lines to something, and then turned it around.

There are three hands on the paper: one slender and limp, pressed between the other two. She'd added the rings to the right fingers.

*The nurses told me*, she'd said.

*I am sorry*, he'd said.

It had been disorienting, a little, to see her awake, clever fingers moving, eyes glancing, **talking**.

But they had talked, a little, and she'd grasped his hand, not like his fans used to, to say goodbye.
She doesn't want him. But she might like him, and it is confusing.

He needs to buy a frame for this.

---

He returns to work and all of its routines, listening to music, not paying much attention to other people, noticing the little pumpkin decorations that are starting to appear on some of the secretaries' desks. This being the place that it is, holiday decorations are not precisely encouraged, but someone's kindergartener draws a picture, and since there is no arguing with that somebody else brings out a mug with a black cat, and then come the pumpkins.

A mass email goes out about bringing sweets to the eleventh floor lunchroom on Halloween, and someone appends that with a plea to Prosecutor Payne to please, PLEASE bring Gert's ginger cookies again this year.

Klavier has never met Gert Payne and regrets it.

The Chief Prosecutor has an unspoken policy, a civilized rule, that anyone freshly off a particularly grueling trial - any crime especially depraved, any investigation especially sleepless - is, if possible, given a little breathing room, maybe a week of doing paperwork and attending meetings.

Kristoph counts, as Klavier had expected that he might. And besides the assigned workload, people are being cautious about what they ask him about, bring to him, bother him with. So when he and Winston Payne are the last two people in the northwest conference room one morning, gathering folders and coffee cups, and the older man clears his throat, Klavier is expecting to discuss gingerbread.

"Mr. Gavin. You seem to be holding up well."

Innocuous, even meaningless, from someone else. But Payne has never offered him so much as a reflexive fine and how are you.

His heart falls a step behind and speeds up; nevertheless his voice stays light. "That was always my brother." He tries to remember what Payne is in the habit of calling him, and can't. They converse infrequently. It can't be Klavier. Just Gavin? Or has it always been, and he hasn't noticed -

"Beg pardon. I don't especially care for being conflated with my brother myself...but, tomato, tomahto. You seem to be holding up."

The man is waiting behind his chair, close enough to the wall that Klavier will either have to ask him to move or go all the way around the long, narrow table to leave the room - and that just to escape a conversation too mild to barge out of (he does not, does not throw fits at the office) even if it's making him uncomfortable. When the thought tickles through that he's taken too long to respond, he says something Apollo might have said. "I'm fine, Herr Payne."

The older prosecutor thumbs at his papers and inhales loudly through his nose, and so Klavier moves to go, but that abraded voice resumes and stops him in his tracks. His mind retroactively identifies the sniffing sound as disdain rather than dismissal. "I don't imagine anyone's told you, have they, that you're the subject of an office betting pool?"
A bit of relief that that's all that this is flickers and sags. He doesn't care about the office's neverending eddies of gossip, he's tired and uncomfortable, and the fluorescent ceiling lights are reflecting equally blank off the window and Payne's glasses.

"I hate to disappoint everyone, but I do not think I will be wearing a Halloween costume to the office this year."

Again he turns to go, and again Payne stops him. "Not that one. I'm referring to the one dealing with your impending departure - or not."

Sweat prickles under his jacket. "My departure."

"From this office. Our celebrities tend not to last too long once they've had a case or two turn personal. As I'm sure you're aware."

He'd asked for Edgeworth's old office.

"I am hardly so broken up about my detestable brother, that I feel a need to disappear."

"Or even about Detective Crescend? Don't answer that, if you don't mind. At any rate, a number of your coworkers don't seem to share in your optimism." The man sounds...impatient? Indulgent?

"I am afraid it is immaterial to me what they might think. If you will please excuse -"

"Far from it, prosecutor. You're more than sensitive to the weight of public opinion."

The rock star in him could toss off any of a thousand flippant nothings to extricate himself from the conversation with. But it's the prosecutor who answers.

"Herr Payne, please accept my apologies, but I am too tired to be cryptic."

"Then allow me to point out a concrete fact, Mr. Gavin. In the last ten years we've lost more prosecutors to the corrections system than we have to retirement and melodramatic European walkabouts combined. There are worse fates than an unplanned vacation."

His own stupid name has never made so much sense to him before. He is a dark hollow thing under insupportable tension. And for the general entertainment.

And Gott im Himmel, but he is reminding himself of Kris, if that is his own voice that he hears responding misshapen as if it's echoing down a stairwell. "You have the presumption to insinuate -"  

"I insinuate nothing, Gavin." The sentence ends with a sigh. "I don't like information that I don't need and I'm not so perverse as to actively collect it. Any secrets you may be enough of a cliche to have are as safe as they can be, in the face of an old civil servant like me who doesn't know and doesn't care.

"But if this job teaches one thing, it's pattern recognition. Or triage, possibly. Mr. Justice seems willing to do reckless things for you - and that is something I have seen before."

Payne's gaze seems to be on him, behind the glasses, and it takes all the energy he has to meet it and tint his words with something weaker than humor.
"I may not have been so eager to become an attorney, had I realized that people would mistake me for Miles Edgeworth in only the least flattering ways."

"Better him than some I could name, Mr. Gavin."

"That is...Kristoph."

"Of course." And the man bows himself out.

Klavier stands there stunned until he feels lukewarm coffee dripping off of his fingers where he's crushed the styrofoam.

He goes to the restroom to clean up and is suddenly sick in the sink.

Apollo does not answer his phone, once he's finally back in his office with the door shut and locked, and he drops to his knees and then his side in the sunny patch of floor below the window, hair straggling into his face, breathes, and doesn't move.
Chapter 64

Friday comes, and that means Trucy has a show. And normally it would mean a poker game too, but Mr. Wright has the night off - the Borscht Bowl is closed until next Tuesday for some kind of health code violation. (According to him, it's the frozen pipes, unless it's the paint thinner in the vodka.)

Apollo had woken under the soft peaks and valleys of the red blanket and stared at the ceiling for a few minutes, had felt the fabric lift and fall with his breath, and when he'd finally mustered his limbs to move, the bracelet had slid down his arm to his wrist, and he'd remembered it was there. Exhilarating that he'd been able to forget it was there.

He's feeling calm, and it had surprised him too.

Probably it's just chemistry, he tells himself, relief filling the space that fear is leaving behind as it deflates. He'll take it, though. He doesn't have a client right now, either, but that's fine, for a little while, that'll be fine.

They all go to the hospital in the morning, after Trucy pouts Mr. Wright into calling her in sick to school again. Vera spends most of their visit giggling with Truce over a Muppets special on PBS, the goofy sounds and bright colors both a little staticky on the television bolted up in the corner. She wears Trucy's boa constrictor over her shoulders like a fur stole, and Trucy picks up its head and makes up Muppet lines in a Muppet voice for it and they giggle more. But she's glad to see him too. She says so.

He spends the middle of the day helping Mr. Wright with his ongoing tidying binge, pulling strata of sad, interesting clutter out of the cabinets and shelves and sorting, and asking, and throwing most of it - an amazing amount of stuff for such a small apartment - away. Klavier's new CD (he'd dropped it off only yesterday) ends up sitting too close to a pile of discs that are supposed to go to the used bookstore, and Trucy descends on it in a protective fluster and moves it to the coffee table.

And then his boss shuts a drawer on his own thumb for the third time and says you know what, enough cleaning for this afternoon. Trucy, get the keys to the bike locks. Apollo, you're coming too.

And so the last of the day's sunlight goes by with the wind pinching at the sleeves of his shirt, as he follows Mr. Wright and Trucy up and down the bike paths of People Park and listens to them laugh even if he can't hear what else they're saying to each other.

They ride past the stream where he'd walked with Klavier during the festival, and he bites his lip - and then it turns into a grin and he turns the wheels of the bicycle straight through a puddle on purpose, and his laugh is as loud as - maybe louder than - theirs.

The leaves don't really change in Los Angeles, yellow at best, but there's the wet metal smell of autumn under the sun's warmth in the air, and there are cardboard witches and mummies staring out from the storefronts they pass on the way home, and it's fine.
He changes out of his sweaty clothes without turning the light in the mousehole on, and through the door he listens to Trucy dart back and forth between her room and the front room, getting her props together and scolding: Daddy, you moved **everything**. Listens to her find her hat ("You're wearing it, honey"), her trick camera, her bubble wands. And that segues straight into the Biblical thunderstorm that is Trucy-going-downstairs-in-a-hurry, the volume of which drops drastically halfway through as the office door thuds shut. **Bye, Truce. Break a leg.** The door to the street closes, and she's off.

He flicks the light on, in the relative quiet, and blinks until his eyes adjust. Then sits on the edge of the bed and stretches his hands out as he looks at them - they're a little dry and red from gripping the handlebars. He can hear Mr. Wright's scuffling footsteps in the kitchen, and the rattle of the jars on the fridge's door shelves, as it shuts. It's another kind of luxury, that between his strange good mood and his tired muscles he's able to silence his own mind and let it slip, soothed, below the surface of the Wrights' household noises.

He's just barely begun to entertain the thought of messaging Klavier, hasn't let the idea progress so far as to actually prompt the necessary movements of lying down and reaching under his bed and unplugging the phone from where it's been charging, when there's a louder scuff of sandals in the hall.

And he's still not really thinking of the sounds in the apartment as more than a nice background as he's reaching for the phone. Not until there's a knock on the door and his boss is standing in the hall and looking down at him with a kind of awkward hopefulness.

The bracelet quirks against his wrist, but not in warning. A shy bump like a dog's or a cat's nose. For the length of a yawn, no one speaks.

He can read that response, there's no doubt that it generically means *please, don't react badly to me*. But there's no chance in hell that it specifically means *I want a date or I want a job*, so he's out of ideas. The bracelet is only good for so much.

"Sir?"

"Hey, Apollo." Something about the man's expression makes it a question anyway.

"Hey."

Phoenix scuffles a foot in place now, plays with the chain of his locket. "...Have you got a...sorry. Do you want - are you busy right now?"

"Not really."

"Ah. Um. Good. Why don't you come sit."

He turns the phone off and slides it into his pocket without looking at it, follows his boss down the hall. The bracelet's telling him not to be scared, so he's relaxed enough to find it kind of funny when Phoenix heads for the couch, stops stock still, and reverses course for the kitchen. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"I'm good."

Since when does his boss get people drinks.
There's something backwards about being the calm one compared to Mr. Wright.

When they turn back around Phoenix sighs, not world-weary through his nose, but filling his cheeks with air and blowing it back into the room, like he's not sure how to start. He settles onto the couch, and because plunking down next to him would be too weird, Apollo takes the chair opposite, across the table. There's a pile of Troupe Gramarye stuff there now, old posters and newspaper clippings. He's not sure whether Truce was going through them or Mr. Wright's still been cleaning.

His boss slouches forward, making little reaching motions with his fingers that don't quite mean anything. "Apollo, I...I guess I want to thank you for sticking around all this time. I know it can't have been easy. And that the Agency doesn't...in a lot of ways...have all that much to offer."

Klavier's CD is still on the table, too, and Apollo keeps his eyes on the case as he tries to figure out what to say back. As promised, the photo is...enticing: Klavier in some kind of vaguely historical black coat with a stiff collar and a lot of silver buttons, leaning against a wall, in the fog. The earrings and the sly, sideways smile, always part of his public image, look more roguish without the all the bright lights and glossy leather. The letters in the lower right corner spell out *Cruel and Unusual*. Apollo hasn't listened to it yet.

Finally he looks away from the picture and tries to answer. "No, I should - I mean. Thanks. I didn't have a job, or a good name, or a place to live. It was all Mr. Gavin."

"Ahh." The sound is almost pained, as it had been that first evening in Vera's hospital room, and Mr. Wright's voice is so awkward. "I don't envy you that. Kristoph - Apollo, I'm very grateful that you came away from him okay."

All he can do is look back at how the ceiling lights are glaring off Klavier's picture.

His nothing response just makes his boss even more nervous.

Mr. Wright pulls something wrapped in cloth from out of his pocket and fidgets with it a little, then rolls it across the table. Starts talking again, and it takes Apollo a minute to realize that it's for his benefit. "I mean it, though. There are people in the world so...dark doesn't seem like enough of a description. He wasn't the first one I've ever met." A nod at the thing. "I had that with me when I talked to him in prison - have a look at it if you want. But I've questioned - how many murderers with it, and it never reacted like that before."

Apollo pulls the handkerchief closer and unrolls a corner, revealing the green stone from the Feys that Phoenix had used in the footage for the jury, shaped like a comma or half of a yin-yang.

He picks it up, cloth and all.

"Be careful with it - it's less benign than your bracelet, I can't just keep one hand on it all the time. You don't really want to know what it does if you ask the wrong questions."

"Thanks for the heads up." He holds it in his palm and looks at it, though, as Mr. Wright talks like the words have been pent up in him.

"I don't even - still, after seven years, and I don't understand how he was - I don't even understand what he was. They've done psychological profiles of poisoners." Phoenix plucks at the knees of
his pants. "Cold-blooded control freaks. Patient if they're getting what they want. Sweet talk for the same people they're killing."

Apollo doesn't say that sounds about right, not when he can hear that his boss isn't to the end of his train of thought. He keeps looking at the green stone. He knows his posture is making him look uncomfortable, subdued.

"But then he killed Zak Gramarye with his own hands, on the spur of the moment. And that's not part of the profile. It's just evil, and that's the only coherent picture of him that I have...and it's what he said about himself. You...you get used to thinking of people as having flaws, and having reasons for what they do, not of evil as...as a chemical element, not irreducible."

"You can reduce elements." He says it without really thinking about it, and he gets a startled wince of a laugh in response.

"Thanks, Polly. You just turned my bad metaphor either to nonsense or something even more terrifying."

"You're welcome."

"You know, you being distracted and you being a smartass sound exactly the same." Phoenix is back to twisting his fingers through the air as his hands droop off of his knees. "I'm sorry. Kristoph wasn't even what I wanted to talk to you about, I just...it's been a long time thinking about him." He sits up abruptly, frowning, and starts paging through the colorful papers on the table and spreading them out, like he's making himself change the subject. "Hold...hold on. Here, can you put this..."

It's the CD.

"Away?"

"That or on." His boss is distracted, facetious, and since it's not too clear what constitutes away right now, in the half-organized room, Apollo takes it from the man's outstretched hand and heads for the old CD player. It's as old as the computer, was Mia Fey's too.

Then this is what happens.

He puts the disc in and pushes the button and the tiny PLAY light comes on. The first song begins, with a rattle of drums.

He turns back around and sees Phoenix holding a color photo of a woman in a cape and hat who must be Thalassa Gramarye. It's right side up from this angle, behind him, and his thumb is covering the lower half of its face.

His knees buckle.

He flings out the hand that isn't holding the CD case to steady himself, reaches for the back of the couch, and the green stone squeezes from between the folds of cloth in his grip, thumps onto the floor and skids across the cheap carpeting like a hockey puck.

Phoenix leans forward that same second to retrieve it, just like he would have if it had been the bracelet, and turns around as his fingers are wrapping around it, and says is everything okay back there?
Mr. Wright's eyes widen, and the bracelet constricts, and the stone changes from green to green and there are a million points of evidence and even without them Apollo doesn't have to be told what his boss is seeing -

And then Klavier's voice breaks into the room, and it doesn't matter that the song is in English now, because the tune is the same as it was in the car, on the phone, in the hall outside his old apartment, as it was when he'd been humming it in the office as a new hire and Mr. Wright had asked without really asking, *Grabschrift*.

*Die Dreigroschenoper.*

Mr. Wright's trying to make it better make it a joke make it go away, that's all he's doing when he says with a shake in his voice, well, is that all it is? It happens to us all. Just how long have you been madly in love with the prosecution?

And Apollo watches his hand clench around the stone like he's holding a live wire and can't let go, feels the bracelet clamp down in a feedback loop of shock, hears his own feet pounding down the building stairs, onto the sidewalk, away, away.
Chapter 65

Déjà vu.

Déjà vu but different. A dumb joke, dumb, Apollo, dumb.

He runs almost blindly, reaches the corner and pelts into the road without looking for oncoming cars, exactly as he's lit into Trucy about, how she should never, ever do that.

The thought of her is overlaid on his pulse as soon as he pictures her face: Trucy/Trucy/Trucy. She's going to come back and he won't be there - later, think about that later -

He's listening desperately behind him as he propels himself desperately forward, listening for other running footsteps. Mr. Wright's legs are longer and if he's coming he's not going to be paying attention to traffic either -

He catches his toes on the edge of the curb just as he makes it across another street and the pain short-circuits him, oh, fuck, because he's barefoot, and he lands on the sidewalk in a full-on sprawl, skids a few inches on the palms of his hands and leaves those few inches of skin behind.

The fall burns through the numbness of his panic, and everything hurts, everything, the little rocks in the soles of his feet, the keening sting in his hands, the breaths tearing into his lungs, shocked joints, everything. But he keeps running until he reaches the Kitakis' front gate, and it swings open under his touch.

They're not home. The house is completely dark and a package with a UPS label is sitting on the porch.

He shuts the gate - all the way, it has to be all the way - and tries to catch his breath, gasps once at the thought that maybe his phone is back where he'd fallen, then coughs trying to pull in air a second time when he plunges his hand into his pocket without thinking and drags the torn skin against the fabric. But the phone is there, and he almost sobs in gratitude, a dry sob, when he pulls it free and leaves a streak on the cloth.

It's as inert as the house, and his next instant's torture is that he might have broken it. But an endless two seconds after he holds the button down with a knuckle of one hand, phone balanced gingerly in the fingertips of the other, the screen illumines, pale and polite, and again he makes a sound like a debarked dog.

A box pops up to tell him in tiny letters that he's missed a call from Klavier - three calls from Klavier - hours ago, and his finger shakes as he tells it to call back.

His feet have had time to swell as he's paused by the gate, so he presses his lips together and limps to where Plum has a decorative bench next to the hollow ceramic turtle, listening to the genteel chirping of his phone trying to find Klavier for him. Between rings, he's still straining his ears for footsteps on the other side of the wall, or the rattle of a bicycle maybe, or sirens - though he tells himself that one's stupid, Mr. Wright doesn't know, not yet, he just knows there's something -

"Mausi, there - there you are."
The voice is a little ragged, still characteristically warm, heavy like a raincloud with whatever Klavier had been wanting to tell him. But he doesn't wait to hear it.

"Klavier. We have to go."

It's so strange to him how calm he sounds, how calm Klavier sounds, even though they've already thought about this. There isn't even a pause. "The Kitakis'?

"Yeah."

"As quickly as I can drive. Be safe." Then they're disconnected, and he's left with what Klavier had murmured into his ear as they'd sat beside each other in the hospital while Vera slept.

...if it goes wrong there is one thing left.

*There are two bags hanging on Frau Kitaki's fence. She has put them there for me, and she checks them every morning.*

He doesn't want to think. He wants nothing more than to curl up on the pebbled surface of the bench and to pretend nothing has happened until Klavier arrives.

Then the lie catches up with him, because of course there are fucking plenty, **plenty** of things he wants more, but all of them involve reaching back impossibly into the evening and not opening the door when Phoenix had knocked on it, not putting the CD on, not...

He gets to his feet and looks along the wall.

A lot of it's covered or shaded by climbing plants, but it's not difficult to pick out the two duffel bags on hooks behind the big dusty bougainvillea in the corner.

*This is what I asked her for, back when she had us come to tea.*

As careful as he tries to be getting them down, there's a crash of leaves when the branches he's bent aside spring back, and his pounding heart nearly stops when there's an answering crash from a towering honeysuckle ten feet away and a scrabbling against the wood - but he finds himself looking at an adolescent raccoon with a shiny black nose and disappointed eyes. He gives it a weak smile and it lopes away past the front door, probably interested in the fishpond Plum has in the backyard.

The bags have the cold, musty smell of fabric that's been left outside long enough to get wet and dry out over and over again, but they're sturdy nylon and hopefully the things inside are okay.

Knowing Plum, she's overpacked.

*Lieber, I know you are not a coward. I know you would prefer not to run. But if we are...found out, if someone says the wrong thing or asks the wrong question, I want you to go to the Kitaki house right away, as soon as you can, and call me from there, and wherever I am, I will come.*

He draws back one of the zippers and sees folded white cloth - a t-shirt, probably. And he's about to reach for it, to see which size it is, when his phone buzzes and the sting in his hand warns him that he can't go touching everything until he cleans himself up.
Ten minutes, the message says. Klavier at a traffic light.

Ten minutes to clean up. Fine. There's the fishpond, except that he has no intention of ending this by dying of some kind of goldfish disease. Instead, he peers into the flowerbeds until he finds the loops of the garden hose, turns the tap on and holds his scraped palms under the trickle, then stands in it. Having to hold still does nothing for the clamor in his brain, and he feels the cuffs of his pants sag as the water wicks into them.

When he'd run here before, he'd still had somewhere else to run back to, even if it was a storage closet, even if it was... The red comforter. Klavier, Trucy saying family: Thalassa Lamiroir -

Mr. Wright, Mr. Wright's pet rock.

Professor Shimko: Some of you may be operating under the misapprehension that there are two sides in criminal justice, the good citizens and the criminals. Remember two things, gentlemen: all criminals were good citizens originally - and while good citizens fear criminals, criminals fear everyone.

It might be ten minutes, he doesn't know. And he doesn't notice his hand reaching for the spigot until the white noise of the water is louder in its absence than its presence. But a moment later his conscious mind acknowledges the familiar motor shuddering to a halt outside the gate, hears boot soles and the faint jingle of a chain.

And it's still a relief that it's Klavier, when it's Klavier, whose hair is pale but stripped of its warm color in this light, like sand under the moon. Apollo's wet feet thap against the flagstones, and before anyone says anything he's dragged into lean leather-jacketed arms and embraced so tightly that his ribs contract. He clings back, just as hard, until he feels Klavier draw in a bigger breath.

"Schatzelein. You can tell me what happened when we are in the car."

They separate and the musician starts to tug at the bags' zipper tabs, shoves through the contents like he's looking for something in particular and then finds it, some folded printed pages in a Ziploc. His voice is still a murmur. "Three hours. That will work."

"For what?"

"To get to the airport and through the lines."

All Klavier had said in the hospital was and we will leave from there, with a little help. Apollo could object. He doesn't. He sounds small, to himself, when he only asks if there are band-aids or something. Doesn't notice the resulting concern on Klavier's face so much as he notices how beautiful he is in the inkblot shadow of the bougainvillea.

A minute later he's gritting his teeth to keep still while Klavier applies a stinging antiseptic and a sticky overlap of band-aids. He's not so gentle as he was in the hotel, in a hurry, in the dark. He can't be, though Apollo can tell he's trying.

Then they stop talking, and the prosecutor kneels down and starts to hand him things, like they're on some kind of insane disappearing-criminal assembly line:
An armful of cloth that shakes out into a pair of shorts and a shirt with a picture of a crane on it, plus the name of some museum he doesn't think he's ever heard of.

- Socks and a pair of sneakers that might be too small.

- A hoodie that could be blue, but looks black.

- A wallet that's not his, stiff with pieces of plastic that aren't his either.

- And something that shines metal in Klavier's hand, that he jerks his own hand away from until he sees that - that it's just a pair of scissors.

There's unexpected supplication in his voice. "I always loved your hair."

"But it grows, ja?" And Klavier turns away to let him see what he's doing.

Apollo threads his fingers into the fair mass of it, so he can spread it out at least and make it even, but finds himself winding his hands through it, instead. Wrapping his hands in it, pulling Klavier close to stave off the shaky breaths full of panic about the next fifteen minutes, three hours, few days, panic about the rest of his life and every interval in between, and the musician sags back against his chest, twists sideways and kisses him. It's an urgent kiss, but only because he's trying to get out in front of Apollo's fear, and the desperate movements all elongate into gentler, more comforting contact.

Apollo is still breathing hard when Klavier's hands slide off of his shoulders, but his heart has slowed enough to make it possible to pick up the scissors and cut through the blond spill of hair, to trim at the longer edges until it looks maybe like a college-kid-kitchen-sink effort. When he's done, Klavier takes the scissors just long enough to snip the spikes from his bangs.
Chapter 66

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Klavier may have ignored the speed limits getting here, but now he drives like he's memorized the handbook, as unobtrusive as can be. All the same it takes Apollo several streets to stop feeling a cold clench in his stomach every time another car passes or pulls alongside at a stop sign. Klavier glances sideways at him and seems to decide that conversation can wait a few minutes more, and taps a button on the stereo that sends a dreamy, nearly ambient tune into the air.

It doesn't help as much as he'd probably hoped. Riding in Klavier's car means shameless new wave with the windows rolled down, not this, and Apollo's not feeling very musical at the moment.

He finds his gaze gravitating to the red numbers of the dash, as though it's safer than looking outside, but memory overcomes him and he closes his eyes, presses back against the headrest.

He's done a lot of running away.

Practice makes perfect.

Just before the car curves up onto an onramp, he catches Klavier glancing over at him again.

"Maybe if I tell you what happened you'll say it was nothing and we should go home."

"No, liebe. I trust your judgment."

"I don't know, how can you go back without your hair?"

Klavier laughs. "I am not bald, am I? I can blame it on emotional difficulties. And either take responsibility for cutting yours off too or express gratitude for your show of solidarity."

Which sounds like him, but it's strange to see him like this, his hair a less aggressively pretty take on what he'd worn in his freshly minted rockstar misery, dressed in a t-shirt, ugly surfer sandals, pants with too many pockets. All of the jewelry is gone too, bundled under Plum's ceramic turtle with the scissors and their clothes and wallets - and badges, even. All Apollo has left of his own things with him is the bracelet. Klavier has less than that, except still the car.

The least he owes him is an explanation.

"Mr. Wright knows -" He swallows and tries to correct himself. "Not everything. Not even...he knows something's wrong. With me, maybe about you, maybe Kristoph or Lamiroir or Trucy, but...you and mostly me."

He turns enough to watch for Klavier's reaction, silhouetted in the pulses of the roadway's orange sodium lights. He doesn't yell or pull over - only keeps his eyes on the road and nods.

"It was an accident. The bracelet didn't warn me." Still the shadows in the car hopscotch and change color.
"An accident?"

"With that thing he has. From his old boss's family."

A little more of the prosecutor comes into Klavier's tone. "He questioned you with that?"

"He wasn't questioning me...he keeps it in his pocket, I guess. He was showing it to me and I thought it was weird that he wanted to talk, and he was **nervous**, but it wasn't even about me. Either of us. The bracelet didn't...it was about Truce." He winces a little as he says her name, unthinkingly flicks his hand out and raps his knuckles against the handle of the door.

"Is the Fräulein all right?" There's a change then; Klavier grips the steering wheel like he's about to whip the car back around the other way if she's not.

"She is. Or I guess. It's -"

"You guess?"

"She's **fine**, it'll be better that I'm not there anyway." He can't tell if it stings to say it out loud because of how much it's true, or because of how much it isn't. "Mr. Wright found out - he found her mom."

"**Thalassa?**"

"Yeah. Telling me was the dry run I think. Thalassa's Lamiroir."

Klavier gets very still, sometimes, when he hasn't expected something, and Apollo flinches and looks ahead to make sure that the road ahead of them is clear while he waits out the blond man's silence.

The first hailstorm of syllables is German and almost certainly profane, but Klavier sounds more incredulous than upset, and more so when he changes languages. "This is - we are in a soap opera. If I were not driving the car, I would ask to borrow your bracelet and make you say all of that again."

"It's - I know, but...you've never had Truce get mad at you, really mad. They get the same look if they run out of patience."

Klavier sighs, taps his fingers in a rapid, musical rhythm against the wheel and then grips it again. "I...am picturing it. So Lamiroir is going to be a frequent face at the Agency now."

"I wish she wasn't. Truce doesn't deserve that...I mean - Truce is too good for her. She won't be a good influence. But she **remembers** her mom too, though. I forget that that's different for her."

The singer reaches out a hand to stroke his knee, though they both jump a little when skin touches skin. He hasn't worn shorts in public since his first year of college. But he knows these gestures from their summer drives back and forth from the apartment, and this one feels like I'm sorry.

"But how did the gem come into it?"

"He asked if I was okay."
"He what?"

"He gave it to me to look at, and when I saw Lamiroir's picture I - I fucking dropped it, and then he went to pick it up and asked me if I was okay." He's heard the expression *I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry*, but when he drags his gaze away from his own goose-pimpled knees and balled fists, it's half-right for what he sees on his boyfriend's face. Klavier is on some visible tipping point between laughter and - not tears, but something.

"To think I never asked any of my suspects that question. The crimes I could have uncovered, liebe."

"And your CD."

"What?"

"You recorded that song. I didn't know you were doing that."

"The Doors recorded Kurt Weill. So did Billie Holiday...I meant it as a gift." The small, philosophical frown he makes doesn't touch his voice; Apollo only knows it happens because he looks. "And...Dominic and Theo came to record it with me."

"Your old - the drums and keyboard."

"Ja, Theo...Theo called me, a little after the Kitakis' festival. I had been looking forward to introducing you. After Christmas, or whenever I made a more honest boy out of you."

"They're not -"

It's not so much a laugh as a choking fit. "No. To the exclusion of all else Theo is interested in women, and to the exclusion of all else, Dominic is interested in discretion. But Theo told me to find myself a 'good guy' and turned bright red when we parted ways at the studio."

"And if I'm not good enough he'll arrest me?"

Maybe it would have been a better joke twenty-four hours ago. But Klavier doesn't acknowledge that. "He trains dogs to smell things for the harbor police, and Dominic works in the accounting office. Unless you are heavily involved with cocaine, or agricultural pests, or arithmetic errors -"

He doesn't say *we will be fine."

"Mr. Wright's heard me hum it before."

Klavier is probably making the laugh-or-something-else face again, he doesn't look.

"He thought he was being funny when he asked if the problem was just that I was a typical defense attorney."

"I do not -"

"You know. If I had a thing for the prosecutor."

They're coming up on an exit, but even though he's half expecting that now that he's explained
they'll change lanes/get off the freeway/pull over and laugh themselves sick/go to Dairy Queen for ice cream/go home - they keep going.

Another mile and a quarter in silence, another exit, and past it.

When the hush is broken, it's Klavier being charming because he's nervous. Apollo can recognize that every time, though it doesn't do anything to diminish the charm.

"And do you have a thing for the prosecutor, Herr Justice?"

He wants to say that it's a stupid question, but it's so rare for Klavier to ask for reassurance. He meets the blue gaze in the rearview. "Ever since."

"Then...then we will have our winter in Germany sooner than I had planned. Or fall at least."

"Isn't Germany too obvious?"

"It may be, liebe - but it is also where I have accounts and a house. The debit cards that Frau Kitaki has provided will be more than enough for a few days of travel, and she will broker larger arrangements later if need be, but we will not rely on her for everything."

Plum. "What did you ask her for, anyway?"

"Duffel bags and clothing and a pair of scissors. And incidentally an escape from the country. Have a look."

Apollo takes the unfamiliar wallet from his pocket - it's even worn in instead of brand new - and blinks dumbly at the driver's license, debit and credit cards, and so on, bland and brazen with a face enough like his and a name that's not. Then reaches around in the back seat for the big Ziploc, where he finds passports to match. And boarding passes.

"Hey." It's almost a bark of alarm. "These don't say Germany. They say Tokyo -"

"Sh, sh, it's all right, Forehead. That was the plan, it is a two-leg trip. Three reasons, ja?"

"What reasons?"

"Plum is better able to call in favors at JAL than at Lufthansa. That is one. She has been swapping out a new pair of boarding passes every morning since our very nice tea party, because someone whose job it is to be suspicious about such things, she has persuaded not to be."

"She did this for you and I had to beg for the damn igniter?"

"She chooses her own generosity, liebe, I do not know what else to say. Second, is that if there is a hue and cry after us so soon, in Tokyo she has friends. Not so in Berlin." He looks up into the rearview mirror and sees the worry on Apollo's face. "I do not expect it, schatzelein. There is a long way between a magical rock and a formal investigation, especially when Herr Wright does not know what to look for. It is better to leave earlier than later, always, but I think we are in plenty of time."

"You said there were three reasons."
"And because still the most important part of leaving the country is leaving the country. A flight from Los Angeles to Europe is more than likely to stop for fuel and more passengers in New York, or if the weather is bad. A flight to Japan - we are only a few miles from the Pacific, ja?"

"Why the country? Why not just California?"

"Mm, a little history lesson...or do you remember what happened with the repeal of the Seventh Amendment?"

He can't help scowling a little. "**Partial** repeal. Bench trials instead of juries."

"Ja, within American borders, that was the noticeable effect... but in other places, many other places - it was a last straw. After all here was a country still in the practice of capital punishment, a country with exceptionally high rates of incarceration, now retracting its people's right to be judged by their peers. So the sound of jury rooms being closed here was around much of the world the sound of extradition treaties being canceled. Even some countries having the same problems or those of their own were glad of the excuse."

"Um."

"Apollo. I am not about to drag you away across the world without your consent. If this is too much...I do not have another plan, but...we can try. I can take us to Nevada, to a hotel, to Mexico...we can try -"

The breath he's been holding stutters out in little catches, but he does manage to keep his tone level when he answers. "I thought we were done with Went Back Anyway."

"Ja. Okay." The car changes lanes.

"How long's the flight to Tokyo?"

"Ten hours - more. You will need to try to sleep."

"One of my professors took a couple of us to a conference at Berkeley - I flew up there."

Klavier pats his knee, again, and they get off the freeway.

Chapter End Notes

Pretty sure the song playing in the car at the beginning is Nosaj Thing's "Aquarium":

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdmk3748tLo
What comes afterwards seems like a long series of scenes from a dream. And he blames that on not being able to sleep during the flight - but that's an oversimplification, isn't it? When things have already blurred out of control before the night's exhaustion catches up to him, before he's adrift in the sleepless airborne hours.

*To exhaust, to expend, to deplete,* all of Trucy's SAT words.

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Klavier drives to an empty parking lot on the industrial side of Sepulveda, stops the car and clicks the overhead light on. Apollo says something about how *you bring me to the nicest places,* and the musician waggles his eyebrows under the sloppy fringes of his troubling new haircut and rips open a drugstore blister pack, and the air takes on the smell of the makeup, something between dried flowers and bitter clay.

Apollo closes his eyes when he's told to and lets those rough, practiced fingers dab at his face, at a few locks of his hair, and pulls down the visor mirror to see someone just a little more sun-worn, a little more auburn. Klavier is making himself a little younger, hair a little duller.

He asks if this matters and gets a shrug: *it helps.*

They scuff uphill, carrying the duffel bags, past an auto shop with its metal doors rolled down and a dark office building. The car is left unlocked with the keys in it.

His sneakers, and they are too tight, seem loud against the empty sidewalk, but the stupid sandals are worse, making *thwick* sounds that bounce off the walls across the street. He remembers.

"People can see your foot."

"Nobody knows Klavier Gavin is missing a piggy toe, liebe - which quite helpfully means that everyone knows he is not. And no one who notices my foot will look at my face afterwards. Not if there is any risk of eye contact."

"You and Plum thought of fucking everything."

"Do not tempt fate saying that." The words sound a little constricted.

They're coming back up on Sepulveda, and he's so busy noticing his shoes and the pain in his feet again that he bumps into Klavier in the shadow of a bus shelter. "What's wrong, why'd you stop?"

"My last chance before Tokyo," Klavier says, pulls him crushingly tight, kisses him under the stern gaze of a poster model telling people to stay away from downed power lines and call for help instead. When Apollo reaches up out of force of habit to run a hand through the twist of blond, his fingers flounder in the air. "It will grow, verliebte. Keep an eye on me."

It's what they've agreed on; given the difference in their heights, it's easier for Apollo to track the German in a crowd than vice versa, and they'll be travelling together but separately until they're on the ground at Narita.
Narita. *Oh, yes, ha ha, Narita,* like this is normal. The makeup lands in the bus stop garbage can.

When they reach the corner, Klavier jabs the button for the signal and sets off into the striped crosswalk without hesitating, while Apollo turns left and continues more slowly. His side of the street has another blank office, then a huge, forbidding brick box with no entrance he can see. Klavier, when he glances over, is ahead of him already and backlit by the neon signs for the gas station and the all-night pancake and coffee shop. $8.99!, blares something written in the window.

Apollo doesn't cross until he's opposite the shabby hotel with the blue tile trim, where the airport shuttles leave from, *every twenty minutes or so,* ja? He hovers at the corner of the entrance, just about bumping his head on a hanging pot of geraniums, and sees a tall shape in front and to his left leaning against a pillar and thus out of sight of the lobby.

---

"*Don't you have to be staying at the hotel to ride the shuttle?"*

"*Maybe in theory. In practice, so long as you tip the driver -*"

---

They settle at either end of the van with a couple of retirees and a nervous man with a laptop case in between them. The nervous guy is tapping his fingers and his feet both, and if anyone gets noticed it's him.

The retirees and the person who is probably if he thinks about it the love of his life get off at the Bradley terminal, for international flights, while Apollo stays on until Terminal 4, overtips when he gets off, and walks back, counterclockwise against the traffic looping endlessly around LAX. The air tastes of gasoline.

Inside there's a blond figure well ahead of him in the security line.

---

"*Skip the check-in, you have your pass and the bags are for carry-on. First the boarding pass and passport, then up the stairs, then the x-rays." Klavier smiles. "You and the bag separately."*

---

He feels opposite but equivalent twinges of relief and separation anxiety when he sees the woman checking documents wave Klavier through. And he's reassured when he steps up to the podium himself that the bracelet doesn't move, at least until he remembers that he's not wearing it.

---

"*Your heirloom, liebe? No. We will not leave that behind."

"*But people know I -*"

"*See if it would let me wear it. Just for now.*"

"*Not in your bag?"
"If it were wood. But a big piece of metal like that, it is best to let everyone see."

---

The bracelet had shivered like a windchime, like a live thing, when he'd made to pull it off, but it hadn't clung to him, or seized on Klavier's hand for that matter. Instead it had dropped onto his broader wrist so inanimately that it had appeared to be giving up, and dangled there without shrinking again.

He misses it.

"Passport?"

The woman's tone suggests that it isn't the first time she's asked, and he jumps and nearly lets the booklet slip from between his fingers before he manages to hand it over to her, along with the boarding pass.

"Nervous, huh?" She's wearing bright coral-colored lipstick and it's gotten on one of her front teeth. But her tone is kind, if patronizing, and he stammers an answer.

"...Flying."

"It'll get easier." And she grins and gives him his papers back, and he hurries for the stairs and the tail end of the line up there.

Again, he feels the quick surge of relief when the bracelet doesn't draw his attention to any of the people in blue shirts manning the bag scanners and watching the passengers, and again a larger, reactive thump of fear when he remembers that he doesn't have it. It's terrifying to be without it, even if it won't be for long. It's terrifying that everyone else gets by without one.

No one seems to notice him more than they have to. Security is everywhere he looks, but Plum's documents must be that good. That or they're just waiting for the right moment to -

The next three doorways are a janitorial closet, an emergency exit, and a men's restroom. His nerves want him to bolt for one of them, any of them, but he forces himself into the nearest gum-and-magazine shop and buys a couple of newspapers instead: the Times and the Chronicle.

---

"You should have a little bit of cash in the wallet. About a hundred and twenty."

Which is only more money than his real wallet has ever had in it all at once.

"In the terminal, buy yourself some things to read. Magazines - or newspapers are better. Books will not hide your face the same."

---

After he steps back into the long, bright concourse, the German is nowhere to be seen. But he does what he's done already, dozens of times tonight, and shoves the rapid panic back under his lungs where it belongs. Checks the hanging screens against the pass he pulls from his pocket to find the
When there is no blond head to be seen above the backs of any of the seats at the gate, he makes himself circle around to look - maybe Klavier bought a hat or something - and there he is, lying on the floor under the windows, head on his duffel, pretending to sleep.

Apollo finds a seat that faces that way, opens a newspaper, and waits for the PA system to tell them it's time to go.

---

The safety speech is given in both English and Japanese, in alternating segments, and though he tries to listen to what he's supposed to do with the cushions and tubes in case of catastrophe, the polite voice and its bilingual echo lull him into an acidic stupor, too uneasy to relax but too tired to think.

It's not new, he's already been feeling like this for hours. It's just that he can't keep pushing the adrenal fog aside in favor of the next step and then the next one, now that he's buckled himself in and settled into the seat.

Klavier is seated eight rows ahead, and yes he'd counted - not in first class, but out of earshot and out of reach. Both window seats, though, both on the same side of the plane.

He obeys when the voice says, in English, to sit facing ahead for takeoff, lets his mind wander as the same instruction is given again in unfamiliar syllables.

He only remembers about the change in air pressure as it starts to happen, and has to swallow hard to pop the swelling pain out of his ears. The runaways at LAX are right next to the beach, and so he's still getting used to the sounds and sensation of the engines when the lights of the coast slip out of the view he has from the tiny window, leaving only the expanse of black water.

A petite woman in a pearl-buttoned blouse has the aisle seat, and she does nothing to acknowledge his existence - just puts one of those neck pillows on, dims the little overhead light, and closes her eyes. He can't quite decide, in his gut, whether he's relieved at her disinterest or lonely. No one's in the seat between them.

The plane banks, and he gets one more moment's good view of the coastline. That's California. That's everything. That's my whole life, oh my God.

If he said that to Klavier, Klavier would only apologize like he'd been the one to do something wrong, would squeeze his hand and stroke it, and his eyes would kaleidoscope sadder.

Klavier doesn't owe him an apology. But somewhere back in the semigrid of Los Angeles, just a dot pattern from this high up, Trucy is home by now.

He can't imagine what Mr. Wright will have told her.

Well, maybe part of it, but he can't get any further than the thought of her bouncing through the Agency door, hands full of scarves or cocktail umbrellas or whatever thing, and saying Hi Daddy! the way he always hears her do, and Mr. Wright's face, just, falling. Worse than the hurt he's seen in the man's features before.
It's easy to picture that look even if he's never been face to face with it. He's seen, he's realizing only now, so many shades and degrees of hurt in his boss's expression this year that his brain can string the memories together like a flipbook and show him what comes next in the sequence.

That's as far as his imagination will go.

*Oh, Truce. Fuck. I would have said goodbye if I could've.*
He's looking fixedly at the fabric on the back of the seat in front of him, like it'll help him avoid the gaze of the city all the way below the window.

*I hope your mom is a good trade for the loser living in your storage closet.*

*You deserve better than either of us.*

Telling himself that the people who'd left him hadn't been trying to hurt him on purpose had never helped, when he was Truce's age. Or later.

His eyes are getting a little bit sticky, thinking about beginning to sting, and he could blame it on the canned air, but no.

He's picturing it like it's something about to happen, but it's late. The conversation has happened already. Though they might still think he's coming back. They could be waiting for him to come up the stairs any minute, or tomorrow, or...

There is no point to thinking about it.

He jabs at the button to call a flight attendant and fishes a few small bills from the wallet - he still has most of them, after all. When she arrives he asks for a pillow, a blanket, and some headphones, and when she returns he cocoons himself in them all and tries to sleep.

---

He's listened through all of the hour and a half or so of light classical selections on the preprogrammed audio channel before he opens his eyelids again. The grumble of the engines hasn't changed in all that time, and neither has the blackness outside.

Most of the other passengers have their overhead lights turned off, though when he sits up he can see the whiter glow of tablet screens shining up like birthday candles in a handful of different rows. There are only a few of the lowest conversations going on, that he can hear.

It's the middle of the night and he should sleep.

He can't. Nor can he get up, walk up the narrow aisle and ask Klavier to comfort him. Not that he ever has to ask, when Klavier is the teddy bear always eager to hug and be held - all he needs to do is get within arm's reach. But not right now.

He shuts his eyes again and listens to an hour and a half of smooth jazz, until he starts to feel like he's in a horizontal elevator.

An hour and a half of sugary, incomprehensible J-pop. He keeps his eyes closed tight the whole time and wraps himself neck to knees in the thin fleece blanket, presses his face into the scratchy surface of the pillow.

There's nothing useful he can do right now but rest, **nothing**, he can't learn German or Japanese or manifest any heretofore unknown talent that will do anything to keep them any safer, but
consciousness still won't relinquish him.

He tells the headphone interface to start an hour and a half of relaxation music, all synth and piano and acoustic guitar and nature sounds. But the guitar makes him think of the obvious, and the rain and the wind in the trees make him imagine a Germany straight out of the Brothers Grimm.

---

Time passes.

He's gone without any sleep a few times in his adult life, enough to recognize the change in perception that comes along with it. He feels not just slow but stationary, feels time physically passing like a fluid, like a current. Whoever had first thought of time as a dimension must have been an insomniac - he'd decided that in college.

His thoughts are full of a chatter of voices, Truce first and foremost, but also her dad, her mom, Kristoph, the judge, Machi, Daryan. Plum, and Wocky.

When they land in Tokyo it's still, or already, or again, the middle of the night.

---

Klavier would not say he is religious. He's hemmed and hawed his way around the question of what does he believe many times, with one interviewer or another, but he has never managed to put together the soft wisecrack or rock-philosopher koan that would deflect it, that would satisfy his own integrity and their pointless curiosity both. Agnostic, ja? I don't know. I do not think of it much.

That hadn't always been the case. He'd been aggressively atheistic for a while in his teens, following Daryan's lead, until it had slowly dawned on him that what Daryan was, was having a lot of fun being confrontational and Not Catholic Anymore, and that that was not very much of a metaphysically satisfying basis for anything. And that it seemed to require almost as much stubbornness (and as much willingness to take offense) as believing would.

And he'd been to church once a week as a child, buttoned and hair combed down, after he'd been old enough and until he'd been old enough to become lazy about it - and so he supposes he'd been a Christian in whatever nominal way a seven-year-old can be? Kristoph had been better about attending than he had, later on. Whatever that means.

Not knowing or pretending to know is what suits him best.

But sitting inside the bullet of the JAL Boeing, slumped sideways against the bulkhead and pretending to doze, he still prays.

Bitte. Please.

I am entitled to nothing from you, but please.

He has had so little to protect him and I want to, I would...

I love him, love is something you understand...
Let this work, I do not have another plan, and if you cannot permit that, please...

Please let him wake up safe in the mornings even if it cannot be in my arms.

---

The dual voice announces the plane's descent, then tells the passengers to order themselves and their accoutrements for the landing, then welcomes them to the other side of the world.

It takes Apollo more effort than it should to get his bag down from the overhead compartment, not because he can't reach it, but because his limbs feel weighted down and it's hard to focus long enough to keep himself moving.

He makes his way down the aisle of the jet, bag over his shoulder and bumping off the backs of the seats as he passes, finds Klavier's silhouette in the terminal and follows him at a distance. It's a good thing the musician has been here before, and still seems awake and competent. Maybe he was able to sleep.

A really good thing. At this point Apollo's thoughts are progressing so slowly that even the pictures of the stick man on the airport signs don't mean anything at first glance. Stick man with a bandage. Stick man in a row of stick men, in a box with a downwards arrow. Stick man just standing there.

The halls of the airport go by him in a collage of illumination and voices he can't understand.

He follows Klavier and doesn't know what he's reminding himself of. And because it would be too much work to follow the idea, he lets it go.

---

Klavier pretends to be looking for something in the pocket of his carry-on once he disembarks, holds his breath (don't be silly, he cannot have been lost on the plane) until he sees Apollo out of the corner of his eye, stepping out of the jetway. He looks bad, exhausted and pale and aimless.

Follow me, baby.

He can't keep turning around, but there are so many reflective surfaces and so much bright light that he can keep track of where the shorter man is if he doesn't walk too fast.

They skip the baggage claim, join the line for customs.

---

Neither of us needs a visa in Japan, liebe, we will not be there nearly long enough. And I do not need one in Germany, I have retained my citizenship. You - we will think of something for you, ja? Marry me or something.

...something like a residence permit, schatzelein. The language requirement is waived for deprived Amerikaner.

Anything we need Frau Kitaki can mail to us - we have three months. We left our keys and documents under her turtle and not in the storm drain, remember? All but the car keys. And there
is a key to the house at the house, we have the euros...

Liebe, first things first.

Though you might think about marrying me.

---

The first time Apollo sees some of what Plum's packed is when a customs official in gloves is turning through it. T-shirts, mostly, and socks and shorts and a couple of paperback books.

He's always made fun of the blurry neon shots that represent wowfirsttimeinTokyo! in movies or on the travel channel. But once he's out in the air where the taxis are, that's exactly what it's like.

He's peripherally aware of Klavier striding up to him on the sidewalk, gathering him up in his wake and getting both of them into a cab, handing over a piece of paper with what must be an address. Greeting the driver in the worst-sounding whiteboy Japanese that he's probably ever heard. Everything else fades into passing neon and the smell of the back seat of the taxi - it's clean but there's still a smell - and at some point, they must get to the hotel.
Chapter 69

The room is so small that when he wakes up and reaches out a hand, his fingers brush the wall, and so for a moment he thinks he's still in the Agency's storage closet.

The realizations tumble over themselves when he opens his eyes.

*Good job, Justice, not in Kansas, et cetera, ohayo gozaimasu Yankee-go-home.*

A headache that's stress and dehydration and hunger and too much sleep after not enough, all together like a jazz quartet, rippling under his temples and knotting behind his eyes.

And another warm body taking up most of the small bed even though he thinks he remembers their being down for separate rooms. Klavier's dozing at best, from the way he's breathing, not really asleep.

"How long have you been there?"

The German starts and sits up, but collects himself promptly. "I slept on the plane. My poor Apollochen, you didn't."

"No." That's the only word that comes. Klavier slides off the end of the bed and returns with a squared-off plastic bottle with a white lid.

"Here you are, verliebte. Oolong tea. There is a convenience store down the block and around the corner."

He sits up and gulps at it without getting all the way out from under the covers. Caffeine and water and human consideration. The bottle's three-quarters empty before he puts it down.

"We have more, drink it all."

"What about food?" His manners catch up to him a few seconds later. "Um. Thanks."

"Do not thank me." Klavier gets back up, and there's the rustle of a plastic bag before he hands Apollo something that looks like a cross between a dinner roll and a pastry, in a smaller bag of its own. This bag is stamped with a logo of a round, smiling, stylized face.

"I can't eat this bread. It's too happy."

"Turn it over."

"Now it's upside down and happy."

"If you do not want it I -"

He immediately shoves half of it into his mouth and crinkles the plastic into a prickly ball.

"Breakfast, ja?"
He can't quite match the little smile in Klavier's eyes with his own, and so he watches the German's expression fade into a wistful neutral as he chews and swallows.

"Apollo, I -"

"I still think you apologize too much."

"Mm." The prosecutor scoots back on the mattress and lays a hand on his knee. Flares out his fingers and taps them back down, one after the other in order.

"When do we leave?"

"A little before midnight. This flight is even longer; there is a layover. But it is the same plane. It will be morning in Germany when we get there."

"I shouldn't go back to sleep then."

"Unless you need to."

He forces himself to swing his feet down to the floor and heads for the shower - at least the room has its own. But he's forgotten about the scrapes on his hands and feet, and Klavier comes in when he hears him cursing.

He may not be so tired as he was yesterday, but it still feels unreal in a way to have somebody else wash his hair. Klavier is good at it, though, and for a while he loses himself in the sensations of the hot water and the hands on his scalp, resting against the taller man's chest.

Those hands help him dry off, too, and then redress the hurt spots more carefully than had been possible in the shadows of the Kitakis' yard, remaining innocent until the last bandage is in place and the last drops of water and disinfectant have been wiped away. Though it's Apollo who changes that, really, sliding his arms around the singer's waist and breathing in against the hollow of his throat. Klavier closes his eyes involuntarily, like a cat, at the touch, but manages to open them long enough to meet a complex look with one of his own and to say "The bag."

"Plum?"

"Convenience store."

His hair isn't long enough to spill over the pillow anymore, when he lowers them both down, but Apollo brushes the loose strands out of his eyes, knits his fingers into the tufts at the nape of his neck.

---

Since the room is theirs for the day, even afterwards they barely move from the bed. At least Klavier will get up and meander from the window to the television and back, but Apollo kneels or sits in the center of the white rumple of bedding, as though staying still might help him hold his identity together.

This is what he gets for not appreciating the mousehole.

At one point he clicks through the channels on the television. There's a news broadcast that looks
exactly like every news broadcast he's ever seen, except that he doesn't understand it. A talk show that irritates him within ten seconds. A cooking show, though he's still too preoccupied to think very much about food. A concert?

"Hey. He looks like you."

Klavier looks dubious but comes back from the window to see. The young man singing has bleached hair and bone structure to make angels cry, plus a black-and-purple outfit that wouldn't have been out of place at the Sunshine.

Klavier's genuinely blond eyebrows creep into his bangs and he makes an amused sound. "Your type, verliebte?"

Apollo frowns and turns it off, and his musician climbs up next to him and wraps an arm around him.

He dozes off against Klavier's side, or is pretty sure later that he has.

Time passes.

---

They leave the hotel in separate taxis ("Narita," he can say, and Plum has provided yen) and they follow the same airport routine as before. Klavier up ahead and Apollo following, hanging back. There's still something tickling at the back of his brain, but it's mostly drowned out by his realization of how much he hates this, how much it would help his nervous simmer to have a hand to hold, and a voice murmuring in his ear...

The flight - both flights, the layover a dull and unbearable almost-an-hour sitting still on the tarmac where he imagines seeing red and blue whirling lights advancing up the runway (do police cars even look like that wherever in Europe this is) - is another eternity, although he does manage to sleep for a while, under another blanket. This one is burgundy; yesterday's had been blue. The safety speeches sound the same.

Again they touch down while he looks straight ahead, though this time there's daylight around them and he can see the trees and buildings of the city get larger and closer and finally, big enough and close enough to be real.

And he follows Klavier through Brandenburg Airport the same as he had done before, too, gate and customs and clean, shiny floors.

It requires a little more effort to follow a tall blond through an airport in Berlin than it takes in Tokyo, but not so much that he can't pay attention to where he is. He's doing well enough to understand the signs for elevator and bathroom this time around.

Skipping the baggage claim means that they're through the official stuff quickly, and as they descend the stairs into the main arrival hall, he can see some people who must be waiting for some of their fellow passengers - a Japanese man with smile lines and glasses, and a bouquet wrapped in plastic; a broad-shouldered brown-haired man awkwardly holding up a sign reading ICHIBAN; a blonde girl maybe nineteen with a dingy plush cat keychain dangling from her backpack. None of them glance at Klavier for more than a second.
It's as he's reached the bottom of the steps and is starting to maneuver through the somewhat thicker crowd at the bottom that he thinks *except it wouldn't be stairs down* and he gets a bright flash of imagination turned sour as he remembers just what it is that their airport procedure is making him think of.

*Orpheus.*

The musician, it's just a story but Jesus Christ, *Klavier, don't turn around.* For the worst second of it his teeth want to chatter.

He nearly bumps into the man with the flowers, quicksteps aside and hurries forward, comes alongside the man with the sign.

Except he's not holding the sign anymore.

He's dropped it onto the linoleum and isn't holding anything except, all of a sudden, Apollo's wrist - there's a *click* - and Klavier's blond head is bobbing further away, towards the doors, through the crowd -

He's not going too fast, because he'd promised he wouldn't. And two more men, smaller guys, are moving toward him from either side and just a step behind, like sharks, like eels.

Apollo sucks in one breath and yells out, in English at the absolute top of his lungs before the other granite hand can muffle him, "**RUN!**"

Klavier hears that, his head jerks to one side, and Apollo can only watch him, straining against the big man's grip despite the hopelessness of it, despite the people staring at him now.

*Run. Fucking go. Run.*

*Your legs are fucking longer than theirs, go.*

*Run -

*God damn you to hell, god damn you, god damn you, stupid fucking idiot bitch, selfish, stupid, money for brains, listen, idiot, run.*

*Towards the door -

*Not towards me.*
Klavier would not say he is brave, either. There are too many little abscesses, sore spots in his memory that tell him otherwise.

Stumbling after his mother in the department store.

The swarm of - not butterflies, more like moths panicking under a porch light - that would boil into the gap between his lungs when he would hear Kris come home at night: first at the key in the lock, then at the squeak of his shoes on the floor.

And the way his brother would look at him, head to toe and back up again, whenever he would set out to the clubs in an overcorrection of black leather and stainless steel. Such a slight look, and more than enough to let him know he was intimidating no one.

And I am not frightened of you, he'd said to Daryan, back at the beginning, before they were famous, before they were fucking, young enough that the fact that they were drinking and drunk would have been the problem that anyone who cared cared about. Cold drops running down glass to drip into the carpeting.

But Daryan grinning and looking at him from too close, leaning in from above even closer. You know, Goldilocks, your eyes change when you're lying? What are you scared of? Ruining your good reputation? Like you've got something to lose.

Maybe it had been better in the grey stretch of the last few years. Once he'd known perfectly well what would happen if he tried to leave. (Walk the plank, Mister Gavin. Make it a very long plank, Mister Crescend.)

Though still there had been Detective-Ema-Skye looking at him, when he hadn't been enthusiastic about visiting some of the more gruesome crime scenes.

(He'd found her giggling with a junior officer once, when he'd come down to ask her he forgets what, collaborating on the Official Prosecutor Gavin CSI Checklist.

- Security blanket [purple]
- Safety whistle
- Police officer [burly]
- Klieg lights
- Garlic
- Water wings

He'd walked up very quietly behind them, put on his blandest smile, and requested a printed copy. Then he'd hung it on the wall in his office.)

And still there had been moments with Daryan when just a little more current than usual would seem to be running through the air, when he'd frozen up and thought Not today, it will be someday of course but please not today -

And then there had been Apollo to care about, and once that had happened...once that had happened he'd remembered everything about being afraid that his fey certainty had hidden from
him.

He has seen the judgment in other peoples' eyes often enough, all his life, to have accepted it. He is a coward.

But when Apollo yells he turns, and the decision doesn't even occupy its own instant in time separate from the question.

And as much as he knows that he's just lost, there's a lightness that he feels as he drops the duffel and its junk to the floor and runs that twinges at the corners of his eyes and his mouth and threatens to become a kind of bizarre joy.

That it is so easy, after all, not to do what a coward would do.

---

"Miles?

"...Miles, pick up the phone if you're there -

"I know it's me. Pick up the phone anyway. Unless it's - I know it's night for you if I call in the middle of the day but it's night here and I - guess what, I can't subtract, I'm sorry if -"

"Don't babble, Wright. It's a decent hour of the morning for those of us who don't work in bars; you're civilized. Albeit inadvertently."

"You're there. Miles...you were right."

"...Was I. Regarding what?"

"I shouldn't - I should never have involved Kristoph and the Mishams with the jury trial. Not to mention - God. Don't mind me, I'm a mess. You were absolutely right."

"...I don't find myself inclined to discuss the subject, at least for the time being, and it's unseemly to apologize for success."

"Success."

"According to every piece of commentary I have come across, yes, Wright, success. Congratulations."

"Look, will you just let me say it? I didn't know everything. You told me not to involve all the Mishams and Gavins and Gramaryes and lions and tigers and bears and my reinstatement and the, the goddamn Constitution in the same trial and you were a real asshole about it and you were right."

"...I had been under the impression that you didn't drink on the job. A measure of trans-Atlantic awkwardness over the telephone is one thing, but I hope, for your sake, that the rest of your Friday night is a slow one for poker. If you're so hellbent on coming back to this particular conversation, after the fact though it may be, then perhaps once the lingering thrill has finally subsided we can discuss next steps. However -"
"For Christ's sake. Miles, I'm calling from the Agency and I'm completely sober and I don't want to make the assumption that there'll be a better time."

"Something happened? Is Gavin -"

"No. Not him. Or maybe, I don't know. God. It's hilarious on some level, somewhere, I'm sure. If - if you've been keeping an ear out for what people are saying, tell me what you've heard about Apollo and about the other Gavin. Klavier."

"On the scholastic front, nothing. Those circles are obligated to maintain the polite fiction that it doesn't matter who counsel is."

"We both know that academics are some of the worst gossips in the world. And we both know that you're not precisely an academic."

"That you got very, very lucky, Wright, the same luck that we discussed your overreliance upon. That it is a very good thing for you, given that neither of them stood in what could be called a remotely objective position regarding your personal nemesis, that the boy wonder bookends you picked out, besides being intelligent enough for the task with which they were entrusted, were verily as pure as the driven snow."

"You're still mad at me."

"You are paying a premium rate to ask questions to which you already know the answers."

"No, that wasn't a question. I'm just kind of relieved that you hadn't forgiven me. I'd hate to ruin it all over again."

"Wright -"

"Listen. Before - putting aside the logic, and that it pisses you off so much, acknowledge that Pearls's gizmo works. I need to hear you say that much."

"The magatama? I grant that."

"Thanks."

"I'm waiting."

"Have you got a few minutes?"

"I have as many minutes as you need if you need them, Wright, get on with it."

"I had it when I asked Apollo what should have been some very innocuous questions earlier this evening. I was only trying to calm him down, they weren't anything...except I guess they were. Because...all of a sudden it was like looking at the Marquis de Sade's Christmas tree. And."

"And?"

"He left. One look at my face, and he just took off. His shoes are still here."
"And you didn't follow him?"

"A twenty-two-year-old running like hell versus a patsy like me with flip-flops on and a sparkly rock hijacking my optic nerves? He was gone by the time I could get down the stairs."

"But all the same - correct me if I've misunderstood, but it's only been a few hours. He's probably pacing the neighborhood or visiting a friend."

"Miles, he's not a kid in a Norman Rockwell calendar, I don't think he's sitting at the soda fountain and listening to Buddy Holly records while he waits for me to start getting lonesome. And if the friend he's with is **Gavin** - he's not answering his phone. Neither of them are."

"Wright, what was it that you asked him?"

"I asked him if he was okay. Literally, that was the first thing, and then these **chains**, out of nowhere -"

"And then what? There was more than one question?"

"How long he'd had a thing for Klavier... There was **context**, I was **kidding**."

"As always, your idea of tactful inquiry is **astounding**. And if you are literally making an international issue out of the unhappiness of a closeted young man faced with an attractive colleague I can only point out that your exaggeration is grotesque and your insensitivity no less so."

"You know, I'm still not over the novelty of having **you** try to save people from **me** -"

"Good night, Wright."

"**Wait** - I'm sorry. I apologize. Don't hang up on me, please don't, not right now. You're right, again, or you would be if I thought that was all this was. But I don't, I...don't. I think - I think it's possible I've tripped over the ends of some long threads here. And to be very honest, I am scared to death to find out where they're going."

"Scared?"

"**Yes**, scared, and thinking out loud. I hired him after Kristoph's first conviction. The weird one. He never seemed like the bludgeoning people type."

"You've said as much before."

"It was a **windfall** before. But there's this song from the Threepenny Opera - I know it's nuts, I'll be very grateful if we get to the end of this and you tell me it's nuts."

"Mack the Knife, or Pirate Jenny?"

"Neither, that's just it. It's not one of the ones that people just kind of know. It's Grabschrift. Apollo hums it around the office, he always has. I mean, he's educated, but he's not musical. I thought it was just one of those things. He heard it somewhere and he liked it."

"But?"
"Klavier's just recorded it. The album's not out yet, but he gave Truce an advance copy less than a week ago. And it just seems way less weird for him to know it than Apollo -"

"You're theorizing they were acquainted before the Kitaki trial, on the basis of their knowing the same, admittedly not popular but far from obscure, song."

"I'm not as far along as a theory. But there's something else. A couple of something elses. Apollo took the Misham case at first and then asked to be removed less than a day later."

"You didn't let him."

"But apparently younger brother Gavin asked to be taken off too. I didn't know that until the Chief Prosecutor mentioned it after the fact."

"Hm."

"But that's not the one that's getting under my skin. I went into Apollo's room - which is the storage closet really, but we put a bed in it."

"An invasion of privacy, Wright."

"I know. I know I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have read his journal either, not that there was anything in it. But you need to - he basically doesn't have any stuff, all right? Some clothes. His phone, but he only bought that over the summer. Some bedding. This bracelet that was his mom's - Miles, he left without knowing about that. That's why we were talking in the first place. I thought it would be better to tell him separately."

"You found something in his room."

"You could say that."

"Pornography."

"First aid supplies. Under the bed."

"Band-aids?"

"For a start. Six kinds. I just - I don't know what I was expecting to find, but not - not a private little Walgreens. He has nothing, except there's this big bag and I unzipped it thinking it was going to be, I don't know, yeah, porn? Action figures? And instead it's - it's gauze and tape and disinfectant and saline wound wash. Painkillers. Topical and oral both. Burn cream. And I knew about the burn cream because he brought it out for Truce a few months ago, but everything else...and all of it was open, it's all been used. Kinda rules out earthquake supplies."

"Is your apprentice especially accident-prone?"

"...No. He's awkward but not physically."

"And you don't think he's given to self-injury?"
"That was my first thought, but - I can't be sure but I don't think so. There was nothing that would **inflict** wounds in there, and he has this t-shirt that's missing one arm and I've never...more than that, really, I think it's something Kristoph would have sniffed out and told me. That would have been in line with his idea of dinner conversation."

"Wright, did these items look to have been used **recently**?"

"How would I know?"

"Did the bag seem to have been disturbed? Were there receipts for these things? Dust? Or -"

"No...you're right again. No receipts or anything, but there was dust on the bag. So he's been hanging onto this stuff, since -"

"Since potentially before his former mentor was conveniently imprisoned for a rather uncharacteristic crime, thus precipitating his coming to work for you."

"Miles, Kristoph is inhuman. I would rather step into a snake pit than try to question him again."

"I'm aware."

"The feds are already making noises about a change to the **Constitution** based on the outcome of this case."

"Likewise. That you're cognizant of, is there any love lost between the Gavin brothers?"

"Klavier was certainly obedient enough when he was seventeen."

"**Recently.**"

"...No. Kristoph put him through the mangle, you saw the footage too. But I - **everybody** took that as perceived betrayal. -"

"Yes. Wright, I still imagine your apprentice will be home tomorrow morning if not sooner. But keep your phone close. I want to make a few calls myself."

---

"Hello?"

"Wright."

"Miles, it's been hours. Trucy is awake and upset and he's **not** back here yet."

"I can send them to you for confirmation. But at this moment I am looking at a collection of still shots from LAX security cameras which would seem to depict Apollo Justice boarding a JAL flight to Tokyo last night. Not in the **company**, but the **proximity**, of a taller young man with fair hair and a rather famous face."

"Is there any chance it's a honeymoon."
"With no checked baggage and no credit card purchases in Gavin's name since two days ago, it isn't how I have ever imagined such occasions to be conducted. And though this may be irrelevant to the matter at hand, from the looks of a few of these images in particular, younger brother Gavin may be missing pieces out of one foot and one ear."

"Fuck -"

"Not gaping wounds. Rather old ones."

"Miles, what did they do?"

"Do you want to know?"

"What the hell kind of question is that. What kind of question is that?"

"Are you planning to lay out whatever you know to the relevant authorities and assist in an investigation?"

"I..."

"Don't bother trying to ponder your moral dilemma and stammer at the same time, Wright. I know you don't have any answer to that; if you had wouldn't have called me first."

"Which leads to the next question. Do you want them apprehended?"

"How should I -"

"You have three options. Do you want them at liberty?"

"They can't - three?"

"Or do you want me to make this decision for you."
Klavier slams into the brown-haired man, his shoulder into his chest off-center, and knocks the air out of the stranger's lungs and his own at once. The impact is enough that Apollo's captor lets go of his arm and his mouth, and so a wordless noise bursts out of him too - not forcefully expelled breath but pain, as they all stagger apart and the cuff digs into his wrist.

It's not going to do any good to call Klavier names. It's not going to do them any...

The two other men he'd seen are on them seconds later, while the sounds of their feet against the floor are still echoing against the high, curved metal ceiling and before Apollo's eyes can find Klavier's to say *why did you, what do we - how -*

They each get a hold of Klavier by one arm, and even though he shouts in ragged German and swings away from the one who makes a move to pull the bracelet off, the other handcuffs him first. It doesn't make any difference.

And they're already heading for the exit. They pass the girl with the cat dangle on her backpack; the cat's embroidered smile is still a little black arc of thread, and so are its shut, satisfied eyes, but *her* eyes are wide and her mouth is open now, and she takes an instinctive step back even though she's already out of arm's reach. Some of the other faces in the crowd are more discreet variations on the same thing.

There's a calm, prerecorded woman's voice coming over the PA system, and the electronic signs are still scrolling or discreetly flicking between their messages. It's all the names of airlines (*Air Canada ->, Qantas <-, say the signs; Aeroflot, says the voice*) and none of it has anything to do with them. It is 9:38am, and it's still a bright October morning in Berlin.

The one who hadn't managed to pull the bracelet off and who has the duffel bags now goes ahead to hold one of the glass doors open, and they step out into the swell of cool, damp, different air.

Apollo doesn't try to fight the man who's steering him away. And part of him thinks that he *should*, that it's pathetic to be walking along like this. But the cuffs make escape a lost cause, so long as they're on, and this man is twice his size and has a grim, contained disgust in his demeanor, an opinion that Apollo had felt in the weight of his arms. Even without the bracelet, it's clear enough that it would be better not to give him any excuse.

The two on Klavier, in front, are almost offensively nondescript.

If he did start fighting, he knows Klavier would follow his lead, do the same. He might be able to trip the big one, kick his ankle or his knee and bring them both down in a futile, cursing tangle, and Klavier could flail around, slow his minders down and probably polka-dot the one he's cuffed to with bruises, but it wouldn't help. It wouldn't mean anything.

It means *something* that Klavier would have understood all of that already and would still do it anyway, if Apollo began to.

But kicking and screaming was how Daryan had gone. And maintaining the difference is maybe the best there is to try for, right now.
Apollo's looking for something like a police car, or one of those vans even, something with words on the side or lights or both, so he doesn't quite get what's happening as they move gradually to the left, to the edge of the sidewalk - and then it's Klavier who starts yelling.

The first lungful of words is in German, but the man holding Apollo barks back, "I wouldn't complain if I were you!"

Klavier doesn't back down for even an instant, switching to English and straining against the dull-looking men. "Apollo, this car, it is not a police vehicle, they have no legal authority, this is Entführung! Kidnapping!" He raises his voice for the last two words and up and down the sidewalk, people's heads go up. A man in an orange vest and some kind of uniform hat stops directing traffic in front of the intersection of ramps thirty yards away and jogs toward them, picking up the pace as he moves.

The car they've come up to is an expensive-looking sedan, like Kristoph's had been and then some. Formal past classy; subtle past tasteful. The windows are tinted dark.

Apollo stamps on the big man's instep despite the pain in his own foot ("- punk!" is the only word of the response he catches) and hauls on his arm, more to make his resistance more visible than because it will be enough to free him, adds his own yells to Klavier's even though the only word he can think to cry is help, over and over.

He feels the man holding him swivel to look at the man in the vest, hears him spit something in a third language, maybe Mandarin. One of Klavier's two, the one with his hands free, lets go and strides fast to intercept Orange Vest, digging something out of a pocket. Apollo can't help watching him, staring, craning his neck over his shoulder as the big man turns him around.

Don't listen to him, don't -

There's the short, self-important thunk of the car door opening, and Klavier on his other side makes a bizarre sound, an inhalation caught and stopped partway through, like surprise overridden by pain.

- If you HURT him -

Apollo hauls his freer arm loose for one instant as he spins back around, and then stares like an idiot. Maybe that interruption in the sound was a sob, or a laugh. Because Klavier looks okay for their current piss-poor standard of okay. And because the driver of the car has emerged, and Apollo recognizes him, even though he hasn't seen that face since he was fifteen years old and watching television.

Nothing that flashes across his mind gives him any impetus to do anything better than staring.

He knows exactly what he's looking at. He just has no idea what it means.

It occurs to him that he's hoping Klavier will say something first - and immediately after that thought coalesces, he knows better. If Kristoph's first trial had been right up there as one of the worst possible ways to get acquainted with your former idol, this...well, yeah, this would still be worse. This is more or less the kind of situation that Klavier's band would write songs about.

A mad rush of protectiveness and affection washes through him as he realizes that Klavier will
only laugh if he tells him that, lean forward and laugh and agree, ja, it's true.

If Apollo has the chance to tell him that.

He'd been livid at his stupid boyfriend a few minutes ago, incandescent gravity well stomach-clenchingly angry. And now, except for the last trickles like drops from a cloudburst trailing down the window, his fury is dried up, irrelevant, gone down the drain. He only wants -

you should have run/don't leave me/you should have run/don't leave me

He forces the loop out of his mind and meets the gaze of the man in front of him, grey behind wire-rimmed glasses. It's all uncomfortably like Klavier's brother again, except that Mr. Edgeworth carries it better. He shouldn't be reassured by that. Someone should have said something by now.

The man behind him is running out of patience. "Edgeworth. Do you want them or not?"

From a lesser person it might have been a glare or a wave of the hand, but the man in the expensive suit glances up, and that's enough to cut the big one off. When he speaks, nothing in his voice admits that they're on an airport sidewalk; his tone holds more than a suggestion of paneled walls and frosted glass, of politesse and propriety and method.

"Taking as a starting point the understanding that I am neither interested in nor liable to be convinced by whatever might be printed on such documentation as you could produce here and now, tell me your names."

Another silence goes by, and the man who'd held the sign shifts his weight restlessly.

You know them, Apollo wants to say, and won't.

And so it's Klavier beside him who answers, who speaks first after all, with soft, implausible dignity: "It will always be my honor to present Apollo Justice."

Mr. Edgeworth looks to him, away from Apollo. "So. Mr. Gavin."

"Generally speaking that is my brother."

"I am not speaking generally. And your brother isn't participating in this conversation." The words are civil and the man's voice more so, though a snap returns to it when he returns his attention to their captors. "Yes. I'll take them."

The other men are professionals. Apollo is still reacting to the shock of seeming freefall - horizontal freefall - from the removal of the first set of handcuffs, when the second is applied. Something around his ankle too.

His right wrist is brusquely locked to Klavier's left, the same with their feet, and what seems to begin as the brown-haired man deigning to actually help them into the back seat of the car turns into a shove and a slamming of doors. Apollo buckles his seat belt one-armed and hates himself for it. And before he knows it, they're pulling away from the sidewalk, the terminal, coming up on the fringe of the airport.

It's metaphorical freefall, now. It doesn't seem real.
It would make so much more sense for none of this to have happened and be happening, the way it isn't happening to other people.

He looks down from the window towards his feet once he realizes that he's the only one in the car who can't understand the colorful signs along the road.

The man driving sighs.
Mr. Edgeworth? Daddy said you wanted to talk to me?

No! I don't know where they are! Daddy asked me that too, I'm not lying!

---

Wright's bookends aren't defiant.

People taken into custody fall into broad categories, and the ones who bluster, who expend their energy on displays of outrage, are very much a minority. There are those who respond with agitation - panic - and those who never seem to move beyond bewilderment, and rarely there is smug, misplaced confidence.

Wright's apprentice and Kristoph Gavin's sibling are simply in the fifth category, then. Too tired and too intelligent to waste their strength on anger or confusion when their actions catch up to them.

He wants to be angry with them for that.

In the rearview mirror they're reminiscent of nothing so much as rescue animals, all heavy, dreading eyes and ruffled hair. Like wet dogs and cats after a sufficiently bad storm, docile by simple virtue of being too exhausted to protest at being carried away by strangers. And rescuer is not his appointed role.

---

Theo.

Uh, no, I know, I mean - I'm Theo. Alvillar.

Klavier? Is he okay?

No, d-

No, sir, I don't know.

I don't know anything about that either.

Look... I just care that he's all right, all right? He deserves a break. If he's in Tahiti calling himself George more power to him. I'm out.

I mean, I don't have anything else to tell you.

Sir.

---

Congratulations, you've almost reached Dominic Kim. If it's important, leave a message and I'll
return your call as soon as possible.

If I know you, you're calling the wrong goddamn phone.

---

He listens.

"Klavier." The word is German, the accent American.

"Ja?" Natural, but turned affectation, and then affected for so long as to be nearly natural again.

"Why did you think running back would help."

"I didn't know about the handcuffs."

Wright's apprentice sighs, a quick sigh that speaks mostly of hopelessness, salted with a kind of buried, flatfooted amusement.

---

Why not? ...Well. We aren't colleagues anymore, are we? And it so happens that I like them moderately better than I liked you and your defense attorney, Edgeworth, that's all. Give it a few years. When you get to be my age, you may come to appreciate the pleasure of being petty.

---

There's a sound, fabric and weight against upholstery.

"You're cold, mausi."

"I'm fine."

"You're cold."

It had slipped his mind temporarily, somehow - but they must both be cold, in t-shirts in Berlin in October. And he has to speak to them eventually.

"There ought to be a blanket under the seat in front of you."

It's awkward, he sees in the mirror, but the blond one retrieves the thin fleece, fusses that the shorter one's arms and knees and shoulders are all covered before drawing what's left of the blanket around himself.

---

Mr. Edgeworth. It's an honor, I suppose. But Wocky isn't available to come to the phone. He's very busy with the bakery just now.

And for the foreseeable future, too, Mr. Edgeworth.

Don't ask me whether I remember them. That's a stupid question, Mr. Edgeworth, and you aren't a
stupid man. But you do worry too much. People have told you that all your life, haven't they? Those little lambs are better boys than mine, and you know, all mine does these days is make sugar cookies.

I...no, I couldn't recommend that.

Mr. Edgeworth, none of us get precisely what we deserve. It may be poetic justice, but there's very little market for poetry in this day and age.

---

Apollo feels a twinge of guilt for his silence when Klavier says "Danke sehr," next to him. But he has no reservoir of active politeness for people he distrusts, not when there's nothing obvious that politeness will achieve.

"Bitte sehr."

There are fewer buildings outside the window and more trees. Klavier continues the conversation in English, and it would sound almost offhand, if you didn't know him. "The men at the airport. Why did you not leave us with them?"

One blink too many from the reflection. "Even the briefest and most public account of your year to date would by necessity have a dead Interpol agent in it. However irrelevant that may be, it means that Lang's custody might not be the option you would have preferred."

It seems like a rehearsed answer.

"Irrelevant to what, Herr Edgeworth?"

"Irrelevant to whatever it was that transpired with your elder brother, Mr. Gavin, and that brought you here. And irrelevant to why so many people of your acquaintance have refused to talk to me in the last twenty-four hours or so."

"Herr Edgeworth, we have not - who is not talking to you?"

"Another question first. Which one of you is to blame for this?"

Apollo finally finds the nerve to reply to him. "What?"

"Mr. Justice, it's an argument that could be made. That Gavin hasn't the brains to have orchestrated your disappearance, or that you haven't the physical strength to resist him... More convincingly, that Gavin hasn't the pragmatism and you haven't the money."

---

"I did!"

He almost could laugh.

"Apollo, be quiet!"

"It's my fault, he would never have done this if he hadn't met me. Let him go."
"Herr Edgeworth, it is not true!" The note of panic in the boy's voice is genuine enough, but taken together...

Taken together, the two of them are absurd. It's going a long way to explaining the loyalty of half of Los Angeles, but almost nowhere towards explaining Wright's fears.

"I did this, the blood is on my hands and Apollo could not have kn-"

"You can't even kill spiders!"

"Schatzi, schatzelein, please-"

Justice's eyes meet his in the mirror. "And you should talk to Mr. Wright about some fucking poker lessons, because whoever the fuck you've been playing mind games with for seven years isn't good enough to keep you in practice! If you think I'd sell him -

"- Apollo -"

"Even if I believed you! If you think I'd give him to you just so I could - so I could get to be sixty-four, seventy-four, and still in love with a twenty-four-year-old version of him that I'd fucking betrayed. That I'd never - For the rest of my life. If you think that, you can go to hell!"

The windows of the Audi almost ring with the sound. The blond one, in the rearview, looks stricken, mouth open and close to tears, and is cradling Wright's apprentice close as best he can, with the restraints, twisting sideways against the seat and with an arm partially around him, fingers flat and straining.

Wright had asked if it was a honeymoon.

And with this evidence in front of him, the inner machinery catches at last and he is angry, he wants to rage at them. At Wright, at everyone who's treated partial ignorance like special enlightenment and involved themselves in this situation. At everyone who's known better and known nothing, at Wright for calling and at those who have wasted his time when he's called, and at these inconvenient, inconvenient boys.

He only says "Stop shouting."

The silence is enough to alter the air pressure, and Justice closes his eyes like he's in pain, and leans back. Gavin kneads at his shirt, where the blanket has slipped aside, and speaks in a normal voice, or a softer than normal one.

"Herr Edgeworth. Where are we going?"

"Mr. Gavin." He takes a deeper breath than he'd need for one word. "Explain."

"Explain..."

---

If it were just the fop it would be different, but...
"You cannot fault me for my reluctance to pen the next portion of a story I don't know."

"A thousand and one nights, and perhaps you will not behead us."

One story, he replies. It can't take that long.

Two, says Apollo Justice. Two in the beginning. He'll go first.
Chapter 73

He has heard worse.

They tell him the story as easily as anyone could; too easily perhaps, for its content. How much of that ease is numbness, and how much is the polish of the courtroom and the entertainer and any kind of practiced liar, he reminds himself that he cannot yet gauge. But he has heard, in his career, of worse cases than this. And whenever he starts to recognize any reaction in himself as he listens, it is that thought that he relies on to quell the tension in his fingers, any skip in his pulse. He has heard much worse - and since they make no specific effort to horrify him, it is evident that they understand as much.

At only a few points does he interrupt them to insist on quiet, to allow him to devote his attention to a dangerous bit of road. Each time it is a pretext.

He thinks they must know that, too, even with Justice's bracelet still trapped by the handcuff, around Gavin's wrist.

The stated plan, of each of them speaking for himself, begins in earnest but breaks down. Instead they interrupt each other with elaborations, with at-the-same-time-as-that-was-happenings, with offhand details that, no matter how dispassionately delivered, lodge in his memory the way flecks of ink sink into the page around hastily written words.

They talk over each other without arguing. It's like watching skilled basketball players, perhaps, as they trade the focus between them. He remembers what Wright had said, persistent in trying to convince him that in all of Los Angeles, California, the wide world, these were the only choices worthy of consideration for counsel for his jury trial.

_They operate together well, Miles. It would be true even if he weren't Kristoph's baby brother. Even if he hadn't - You know, people like them. The news likes them, they're a hot ticket. And they're honest._

_They're a little like we used to b-

_Go ahead, Miles, hang up. I'll talk to you tomorrow._

If this is how they operate in court, yes. He can imagine the efficacy of it.

Gavin is talking. Hesitating, coloring in the night at the Borscht Bowl Club. His anxiety is palpable when he explains his eavesdropping on his brother and Wright, and more so when he arrives at his wait on the stairs after Kristoph's departure.

He would have been willing to attack Wright, he admits. No, he did not want to, but he would have...why lie, ja? Why lie.

It has more to do with the layout of the highway in those hundred meters, less to do with the fact that the story is unfinished, that he does not cut the trip short and begin the drive to the Berlin branch office of the Bundeskriminalamt.

The boy knows what he has said and tries to move beyond it. Smith's death is the climax of this
episode, in his memory, and he devotes little time to the process of escaping the restaurant afterwards. Justice, for his part, wastes no words when he describes the phone call from the Prosecutor's Office to his hotel.

Listening to them speaking without direction means he is learning how they think. Justice is blunt while Gavin is circuitous, Justice tends to visual descriptions and Gavin remembers sounds.

Gavin had accepted his own impending murder, Justice never had.

Their primary interest is after all not in the laws that they have broken.

He tries to remind himself that his is, asks himself why he thinks he needs a reminder.

---

When he finds himself gripping the steering wheel as Justice describes the beginnings of the Misham investigation, he is angry for another reason.

Wright, in his apprentice's account, is preoccupied, woefully deep in the dark, arrogant. It's a kind of vindication to hear it from another's perspective, but doubly infuriating, on the other side of the coin. To know how blithely he had carried on.

Wright is absolutely complicit in this business. Absolutely, inescapably, no matter what he didn't know - evaded knowing. A domestic grief mushrooming to the federal level and beyond speaks to his genius for escalation.

If Wright wants the mess cleaned up, he ought to do it himself. It would be simple enough instead to stuff them onto a flight for some microscopic Caribbean tax shelter.

He won't. He asks himself why he would even put such an option into words, much less consider it.

---

It's a dizzying sensation, like watching a discarded cigarette vanish into its own reflection in a puddle, when Justice comes to the last minutes of the story, to their being dragged through the doors and down the sidewalk at Brandenburg. There's a swirl of vertigo, almost, and he misses a few words.

"- since it - it wasn't a police car. But those guys were Interpol. You said."

A moment before he realizes that this is the conclusion of the narrative, as well as a question.

"Yes."

Another moment's silence, while the shadows of overhanging branches spatter across their faces, through the windshield of the Audi.

"But you aren't."

"No."
The light evens out again, greyer than it had been when he'd driven to the airport, distracting himself with Debussy. The plain little words hang in the air.

"So why would they give us to you?"

Manfred would have smiled.

"I would have expected you to have asked me that earlier, Mr. Justice."

He dares a glance in the rearview and sees that Wright's apprentice isn't looking at him. His brown eyes are focused out at the passing landscape and he's attempting to clear his face of the expression that repeatedly pulls at his mouth and darkens his gaze: sorrow, at war with discipline. "It wouldn't have made a difference earlier. It's not like it makes a difference now."

(Sense memory. Winter, instead of autumn, cutting through the countryside beyond Berlin in the museum-piece Mercedes-Benz -)

"Courtesey."

"What?"

"It was professional courtesy that allowed Lang and his subordinates to leave you in my custody. For the past several years, I have been...personal anecdote is immaterial to you, of course. Pardon me. I regularly consult for law enforcement agencies across Europe, to a lesser extent Asia and North Africa. Research and occasional lecturing in the meantime."

"You're Mycroft." There's a kind of scorn in the boy's voice, but it's less open-ended than the sadness and likely preferable to it. He lets the joke go by; Wright had made the same one.

"...What you've told me is in accordance with what I've managed to discover since your employer contacted me. In a near panic."

"Which agency is it right now? Today?" He almost starts at the intensity of the gaze that's reflected when he looks up again. The blond one is watching, too, but not speaking.

"None."

"None, and you're not even friends anymore, but you still came to shanghai us when he told you to? Why?"

"Mr. Justice. The woman who killed your - who killed the biological father of Wright's adopted daughter, self-defense though it may have been, continues on at the club and even sees the girl from time to time, while your former employer - your brother, Mr. Gavin - was unjustly incarcerated for the man's murder. Detective Crescend likewise is currently imprisoned for the murder of Interpol Agent LeTouse - with which he was entirely uninvolved - while the killer serves only a shorter sentence for a non-violent crime in a juvenile facility. Kristoph Gavin's subsequent and apparently legitimate conviction is inextricably dependent upon evidence obtained as the result of his false imprisonment. And so its likely use as the basis for a change to the United States Constitution, however beneficial, presents dire difficulties in light of the doctrine of the fruit of the poisonous tree. Which is leaving aside the proportionally lesser issues relating to flight, arson, breaking and entering, professional misconduct, witness tampering, destruction of evidence, firearms, and illicit surveillance."
The smaller one is trying to look sullen, while the blond one looks far away. A litany like that, in the courtroom, would have been a rare opportunity for theater, but there is no pleasure to be had in it now.

Sullenness in the voice too. "The jury trial - that wasn't our fault. We tried not to -"

"I argued vehemently against your involvement."

Brown eyebrows flash up and down, a laugh unable to ignite. "Thanks?"

"...You could have sacrificed your defendant, and yet you did not."

Finally the blond returns to the conversation. "You expected it? We are criminals, Herr Mycroft. Nolumus contendere. But not villains."

"Villains or not, most criminals express the same sentiment."

"Because very often it is true. It may make no difference to the course of prosecution but still it is a thing for a prosecutor - or any other human being - to keep in mind."

The atmosphere is seeming to heat and eddy like the air around an open flame. He should be above its making him uneasy, but he almost wishes that Justice would interrupt.

"And yet no matter how sincerely you say that, Mr. Gavin, you must have understood from the beginning that the inevitable legal and emotional responses to cases such as this can never share enough ground to stand on. Did that not matter to you?"

Blue eyes only look at him.

"And if it comes down to a question of law or of pity...then presumably you understand also that your exoneration is impossible."

"And our just deserts?" It's almost mockery, it sounds like something any prosecutor he's ever known might have said.

"In comparison - only unpalatable."

"And the law has a strong stomach. Ja. Herr Mycroft, there is something you should know too. This is not a film."

"I don't intend to guess what that means."

"There is a cinematic solution for problems like this. You are running out of soundtrack and people need to piss - but you cannot send the audience away to piss and throw their popcorn containers into the bin without resolving the ethical conundrum, ja?"

"A last-minute plot twist."

Whatever he was anticipating, it wasn't this soft almost-tolerance in the boy's tone. "What sorts of movies do you watch, Herr Edgeworth."

"In the movie - we die. There is no making the police officers look ruthless. And no getting away
with it and setting a bad example for the impressionable boys and girls."

"I am hardly advocating your suicide!"

"I only mean to assure you that you would not get it. The point was to stay alive." He glances down, possessively, at the top of Justice's head. "Or it became so, when there was no point at all, before."

"You never answered the question. Either question." Wright's apprentice's voice sounds bolder, but the sleepy groan of the seat and the clink of the cuffs betray him as he leans into Gavin's side. "If this really wasn't so we could just save everyone the trouble and shoot ourselves in the woods - what did you want us for?"

"I had hoped from the bottom of my heart -" he can't look at them - "That the explanation would be other than what it is."

"So where are we going?"

"After a story like that one, Mr. Justice. Don't - ask me to insult your intelligence."

It's a dreadful silence, finally broken by the rapid-fire German of the boy who'd stripped Wright of his badge, so long ago, back in America.

"Herr Edgeworth, I have lived a useless life with this one exception. Anything! Let him alone!"

"Speak fucking English!"

"Be quiet, you little idiot!"

They both hush, though Justice can only have been reacting to the tone.

"Mr. Gavin. Of course it's a love story. Of course it is."

They wait for further words that do not come.

"Once a prosecutor, always a prosecutor." The blond boy's voice is undeniably musical, even soft and slow, at its bitterest. "I assume you have calls to place."

"Yes."

"If you would have the barest decency to make them from underneath an elm tree at a rest area. I would spend the next while talking to my Apollo and not to you."

He turns up the Audi's heater, wordlessly, as he steers the car into the next Raststatte.
The second of februeruri's artworks for this story corresponds with the end of this chapter, and can be seen here. I can't praise it enough.

Gratitude forever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The gesture fails almost immediately. He should have thought of it - that removing the key from the ignition would stop the warm air blowing from the vents. The fan's calming sound sinks down from quiet to no sound at all.

He says nothing else before exiting the car, and the damp, woody chill and the thump of the door closing strike his nerves as syncopated rather than simultaneous shocks.

From the asphalt he steps up onto slippery grass, then onto the dark packed soil under one of the trees. His ring of keys falls against the smaller one from Lang when he slides it into his pocket.

He pulls out the phone instead. Opens the long list of contacts - so many more acronyms than people - and feels a dull, dissonant swell of unpreparedness like the beginnings of a toothache when he reaches the bottom of it without having found one that he wants to dial.

Stares at Zurich, Kantonspolizei until the meaning of the words starts to fade and the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. From the cold. Certainly from the cold. The sky is going grey in earnest.

Wright, what have you left me with?

I don't know, you offered.

He has never admitted to Wright, the real man in Los Angeles (real and reckless and obstinate), that he does this, that he has internalized part of the man's persona to this degree: the older, younger persona, blue suit and some measure of faith in humanity, as a kind of imaginary debate partner. A crutch. Franziska's diagnosis had been Third Man syndrome.

The legal situation is clear. More than clear.

What clarified it?

There was nothing to clarify! They told me the entire story. You don't need me to argue this case. Winston Payne could argue this case.

Did you get the feeling he wants to? And do you think that was the whole story?

I may not be in possession of a magical paperweight, Wright, but I don't believe they were lying.
But they could have been. They've had time enough to concoct a detailed account - though remove the account and you remove the motive -

It's possible that they've been lying.

It may be the middle of the night in California, but there is one call that he can make.

---

They'll have to get back to him, the sleepy officer says.

He lowers the phone and tilts it toward his chest, gaze drawn the ten yards back to the car.

It's not as though they can run.

Not as though, given a kind of chance, they had.

*If they had turned on each other it would have been simple; I gave them the opportunity!* Why *

*You're asking why they couldn't have had the decency to be unprincipled? You know why, Miles.*

They'd only each tried to take the blame.

And he'd hoped otherwise because it would have been easy to send them away, with his blessings, if -

They love each other. Simple, terrible, no matter how meaningless it is. It has no bearing on the case but that the case makes no sense without it.

They love each other, and he could hate them, for their clumsiness and selfishness and the unimaginable mess they've left behind, and he doesn't -

He doesn't.

*What happens to them, if they're tried?*

*You know the answer to that too. Come on.*

Spectacle, scandal, conviction. Prison. Separation, of course separation.

*I told you you knew.*

*And in prison?*

*What about it?*

*They'll. They'll be destroyed, Wright.*

*Lana Skye hasn't been killed in prison, you know.*

*Not for any shortage of attempts.*
Did they not recognize that in acting the way they have, they would be tying the hands of legitimate assistance?

But then, what kind of faith could they have been expected to retain in legitimate assistance?

Neither of them would have done this alone. If they hadn't met -

He laughs without feeling like he's laughing, a defeated, breathy up-and-down-the-ladder. If they hadn't met.

Klavier Gavin, dead in full color on the entertainment industry's front lawn, the center of a maelstrom of television exposés and tribute events and zeitgeist moments, marketing from the start to the finish. And Apollo Justice dead unofficially, merely missing, and that only if anyone noticed his absence at all. A nightmare equal parts Tiger Beat and Drano. No one aware -

He could give them the car.

He could give them the car and tell them to go to - Greece? The Baltics? Xanadu.

Their running off - farther, again - is no solution.

*Because that's not justice?*

Well. It isn't.

*Is that the only reason?*

*It's the most significant -*

*Is it the only reason? If you don't want to deal with this, why were you so quick to volunteer?*

He could ascribe that to a desire to be helpful.

And Franziska would laugh at his saying so and Wright wouldn't even be able to.

So much for the claim that he'd taken it on to spare Wright the trouble.

Possibly because he didn't trust Wright to do it. Possibly. But the jury system will have other, better opportunities. Surely any desire to pick up the pieces of the whole damnable project is dwarfed by the fact that if the man has been making this bed for the better part of a decade he ought to lie in it.

So.

It would be simple enough to say - another *argument that could be made* - that the offer had been purely a pragmatic one.

If: Wright's goal is worthy,  
if: his knowledge of events might endanger that goal,  
then, exploration would best be left in the hands of a third party.

But it hadn't been practical any more than it had been cooperative. Not from the first moment he'd felt Wright's contagious qualms and entirely not, once he'd been made aware of the bag under the bed and the demure horror of its contents, not once he'd seen the dispassionate camera images of
the second young man. It had been apprehension; wordless, organic dread.

Recognition in one case: a boy or close to it, with no family and a mentor like that one -

And in the other, memory failing, failing, infuriatingly and repeatedly failing. Two and a half weeks seven years ago when Klavier Gavin had been the new boy in the office, and whether there had been anything he should have noticed, then?

*You don't owe them anything.*

*Only due process. And as Gavin said, the barest decency. But that isn't... I don't feel indebted.*

*Then what do you-*

The phone rings and he drops it into the dirt.

It continues to burble as he bends to get it, pulse leaping, and brushes flecks of bark and grit from the screen. The number is a Los Angeles one, a familiar prefix only.

"Mr. Edgeworth."

"Yes?"

"This is Detective Warren from the LAPD, the Captain passed your request along. There was a phone number registered with that name on the right date. But there weren't ever any calls placed from it, and it's no longer active. Sorry not to have more for you."

"Thank you, Detective. Pass my thanks on to the Captain."

"I will, sir."

He hadn't thought the phone in the sock was a lie. But he's not quite ready for it to be true, judging by the electrical tremors below his lungs. The last chance for this to be straightforward.

He stares down at the screen and dials from memory, again after he taps in a six instead of a three in his rush.

It's not a number he's really needed to remember, not when it's in the alphabetical list, not when Wright calls him, not when they'd gone such a time without speaking.

---

"This is your plan, Wright? Keeping your enemies closer? Protracted private revenge?"

...

"It isn't perseverance, it's -"

...

"It's sick, single-minded retribution, and you are capable of better than that, disbarred or not!"
"Only that if you're truly determined to carry on in this manner you and Kristoph Gavin deserve one another!"

This time it's Wright, across the Atlantic and North America, who answers the phone midscrabble as though he's dropped it.

"Miles. It's late. Early."

"Let me apologize if I woke you."

"You didn't. I was up, I'm...do you know anything, did you find them?"

"Wright, I want you to look for something for me. In your storage room."

"...that goddamn doctor's kit again?"

"No. Or at least probably not. More likely on a shelf or under the pillow -"

"What am I looking for?" The faint scuff of sandals.


"He had that bracelet on when he left, I'm sure of it. Did he not have it, in the LAX photos?" Something heavy sliding.

"No, not that. Something silv-"

"...A ring? I just found it. This has got to be Gavin's. It almost fits me." A heavy exhalation.

"Miles."

"Yes?"

"All those years, fending off the jokes, and the Wright Agency is in bed with the prosecution after all?"

He says nothing.

"Never mind. I wasn't really expecting an answer...let me tell you something." The door closes again and it's impossible to know which side of it the man is on. "It was never just because they were talented. I admit it. I...I wanted it to be them so he could feel it. It was revenge like you got so righteous-wrath at me for. Get as mad at me now as you want to, too - but I needed to, once I had the idea, I...his monkey-see-monkey-do little brother. His apprentice. I needed to see him lose them and know he'd lost them, God knows he never seemed hurt by anything else I did. Maybe it's why I hired Apollo in the first place, I don't know -"

"Your motives were...heterogenous, Wright, put it that way and don't overstate the case."

"Miles, this has gotten...if I could just backtrack... You'll tell me if you find them?"
He takes advantage of the broken rhythm to delay his own reply. "I'll pass along any helpful information as I have it."

"I can't ask fairer than that, can I." The springs again, possibly. "Thanks."

"Say nothing of it. And go to sleep."

A muffled click and the silence on the other end of the line compresses from hollow to flat.

They haven't been lying to him. He knew it; now he knows it.

Wright has asked for them, he thinks he wants them back. And granting his request would give a kind of symmetry to their history, perhaps. More understandable than the sudden break, the dissipating awkward silence and fraught, combative reconnection.

According to those mathematics, all he has to do to pay Wright at last, for disappearing, for his own rescue all those years ago, is sell two other young men away. Liars. Menaces to the collective belief in law and order. And complete strangers.

He looks back to the car, and notices that something about the silhouettes has changed. He moves closer without thinking, and his steps start to cover more ground as he reaches the flat surface of the parking lot.

And the voice rises up, still sounding twenty-four despite the reality, despite the conversation he's just had.

*You need to make up your mind.*

*There's nothing to "make up." They're guilty.*

*Then call the Bundeskriminalamt like they think you already did.*

*As soon as you tell me what good is going to come of punishing them! Just tell me that!*

He's still fifteen feet or so from where the Audi is parked, and as the shapes become more distinct through the glass he calms, slows down. Still two of them there, and not limp like ragdolls after all, alive, awake -

*You shouldn't keep talking to me so much.*

He's facing the passenger side of the car.

*Why?*

Wright's apprentice is leaning against Gavin's chest, their arms curled awkwardly between them. He can't see their faces.

*Because it makes you sound crazy. And because it makes you think like a prosecutor.*

*I'm -*
The blond boy's shoulders shake all of a sudden, as though he's laughing.

It's believable, until they continue to shake longer than even hysteria could make him laugh.

The cold air shifts around above the asphalt and the paint, a suggestion of helplessness as false as it is implicit.

Gavin lifts his free hand; a quick, uneven gesture.

Strokes Justice's brown hair, in irregular semicircles.

Tilts his own head back against the glass as his shoulders quake because he's weeping as though his heart has once and for all been broken.

A silent film, viewed from the outside.

*I'm not a prosecutor anymore.*

*No. So think like what you are.*

Chapter End Notes

Hi, all.

I apologize for there being such a long time between updates. Too many major life events (feeble phrase, but it does stop me oversharing) in the recent past and more of them getting larger on the horizon. But I'm around! I'm essentially okay! And I'm grateful to you, as always, for reading.

End Notes

I'll be importing this a little bit at a time, since I'm editing as I go. This story began in September 2012, and so it isn't GS5-compliant. A not-entirely-lockstep response to this prompt:

"Strangers on a Train, judicial style.

What if all of GS4 is a variation of the Hitchcock plot? Klavier is stuck in an abusive relationship with Daryan, and Apollo likewise with Kristoph. The two of them meet accidentally, come to a realization that their situations are similarly bad, and agree: YOU take down MY nemesis, and I take down YOURS. That is, Daryan didn't kill anybody, and Kristoph at least didn't kill Shadi Smith - both of them were FRAMED, and the two squeaky-clean lawyers are, well, less so, though I'd like it if they were still sympathetic.

Extra points if Klavier doesn't initially realize that Apollo's evil boss is his own brother, puts two and two together about some strange things he remembers from his own
childhood, and complies anyway. Extra extra points if Phoenix realizes what's gone down after it's all over and is aghast - and estranged! Edgeworth steps in to help them escape/get away with it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!