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**Joker's Bizarre Adventure**

by [VenomSpider33](http://archiveofourown.org/users/VenomSpider33)

**Summary**

Jolyne Cujoh's future has been stolen from her. Framed for a crime she did not commit, she has been forced to move to Tokyo. Upon her arrival, a dark, twisted game is initiated, ensnaring her and her new friends in events that were set into motion over 100 years ago.
Chapter Zero
11/20/20XX

At a Casino, the gambling floor was bustling. People went from machine to machine, looking to gamble and win big. However, everything ground to a halt as the sound of an alarm cut through the room. Everyone started looking around, talking among themselves.

"What's going on?"

"Is this a show or something?"

Meanwhile, in the rafters above, a dark figure moved around, jumping around and swinging on some kind of string. As the casino's security entered the room, a person in the crowd noticed the figure standing on a light fixture. "Look, over there!" He shouted, which gathered the attention of every in the room.

The figure was a woman, about 170 cm tall with an athletic build. She wore a black trench coat with a green star on each shoulder over a gray collared shirt with a black design resembling a spider web over it, with black trousers that carried the same design. The woman's black hair was done up into two buns with a small plait at the bottom, with the front of her hair died a light green. She wore a white domino mask over her face, with black markings around the eyes, and a pointed nose. She carried what appeared to be a briefcase tucked under her arm.

"She's here! Moving in." The security guard spoke into his radio, and the woman smirked and gave a small salute, before jumping off the fixture into the rafters. Landing on a ceiling decoration, the woman took the case and threw it into an air vent, before tapping the communication device in her ear.

"Good job Joker. Now get running!" A boyish voice said into the woman's ear.

"This is our only chance!" This time a boy's voice that carried an elegant tone.

"Stay calm! You can get away now!" A voice belonging to a young girl entered Joker's ear.

"We'll retrieve the briefcase on our end." This voice belonged to another girl, only this one held a professional tone. Joker gave a small nod, knowing her teammates would carry out their part, and began to run, jumping to another fixture.

"Gotta say, that part where you showed yourself to the ground? Excellent move! Great work as always, Joker!" Boyish Voice commented as Joker leapt to a fixture toed around a column.

"I bet Skull wouldn't have been able to pull that off!" Another girl's voice joked, and Joker was about to respond, when she was greeted with the sight of two guards emerging from a maintenance door.

"There she is! Get her!" One yelled out, forcing Joker to alter her course. She began jumping across a series of arches, each one lighting up as her feet touched it.

"Alright, now's our chance! Let's slip away while the attention's on her!" Boyish Voice said as Joker landed on a sign hanging over a door, before pulling herself up to a circular floor in front of a small
door. Joker grinned, only to be greeted with two more security guards appearing in front of her.

"There she is! Grab her!" One shouted, and hats when things got weird. The two guards began to convulse and contort, before they changed into two humanoid blobs dressed in suits wearing a mask over their black, blob heads, each carrying a Night stick. A third blob dropped behind her, and Joker merely grinned as it began to raise its nightstick. As it swung from behind, Joker leapt up, landing on the blob's back. One red gloved hand grabbed its mask, while another reared back into a fist. Joker brought down her fist, the force tearing the mask off the blob's face, and leapt off as it began stumbling forward. Red cracks appeared over it as it lost its cohesion, before exploding into its true form: a large creature with a bull head that appeared to be two bodies smashed on top of one another, that was easily twice Joker's height. Joker simply smirked at the sight.

"Hey Oracle, what am I dealing with?" The young woman asked into her headset.

"Comparing power levels...this guy's no threat! You can beat him in your sleep, Joker." The first Girl's Voice said, and Joker's smirk was replaced with a scowl.

"A weakling? Good grief...here I was hoping for a challenge." Joker lamented, and the monster simply roared. Joker placed her hand over her mask. "Persona!" She declared, and her mask disappeared in a flash of blue flame, and a shadowy, humanoid figure began forming behind her, with no clear detail present aside from glowing red eyes and what appeared to be wings at the hips. The being raised his hands, with black and red energy beginning to gather, before launching it at the bull creature. The monster roared, before it was blasted away into nothingness. The shadowy figure dispersed into flame, Joker's hand coming away from her face as he Mask reappeared.

"See? I told you it was a piece of-uh oh!" Oracle narrated, as two more guards materialized in front of her. "More of them?!! Be careful Joker!" The guards lunged at Joker, nightsticks crackling with electricity. Joker leapt backwards to avoid the sticks, and jumped onto a display platform, before jumping onto the level above, in front of a small open door. The mysterious woman simply flipped the guards off, before turning and going through the door.

Joker began running through what must have been the Casino's inner workings, narrowly avoiding security guards with the assistance of Oracle. As she passed the main security room, she over heard the casino staff talking.

"She's not alone! Find and kill them all!" The security head ordered, and Joker had to keep from laughing. If all had gone according to plan, her friends were all long gone by now. Joker heard footsteps approaching, and so began to climb the nearby stairs just as the guards, in human form once again, rounded the corner. Joker stayed ahead of them the entire time, eventually reaching an exit door. The masked woman pushed the door open, being greeted with the sight of the casino lobby.

"You're almost there, Joker! You just need to get through there!" Oracle's voice chimed in her ear, as she looked over the lobby.

"Yeah, no problem. See you guys at the hideout." Joker replied, just as the guards had view of her again. She leapt off the edge and threw her hand at the roof, a line made out of strings firing from her hand and attaching to the ceiling. She swung off just as the guards grabbed for her, the thief crashing through the ornate plate glass window and into to the crisp, cool night air.

"Tch. What a show off." Oracle lamented as Joker soared gracefully through the night air, before she landed on the ground. Joker brushed herself off, about to congratulate her team...when multiple bright lights suddenly turned on, illuminating her. Once her vision adjusted, Joker could see multiple police officers armed in riot gear, all eyes trained on her. "Enemies here?! But that's impossible! Unless."
"It's an ambush!" A sophisticated female voice chipped in.

"Joker, what do we do?" A slightly monotone male voice asked.

"This doesn't change anything. Just get away from here. I'll see you all back at the hideout." Joker commanded, staring down the army of police in front of her.

"Get her!" The captain ordered, and the police descended on her. The spotlight's followed her as she ran, jumping up to grab a nearby fire escape ladder. She began climbing it, and was about to reach the top and escape...when she was greeted with the sight of more police waiting for her, guns trained. Strings began unraveling from her body, beginning to convalesce.

"Stone-" before she could finish her declaration, a police man slammed the butt of his rifle into her head, causing her to let go and the strings to disperse. "Shiiiii-Oof!" She grunted as she hit the ground. The police descended on her immediately, restraining her and holding her gloved hands behind her back.

"Suspect secured! Repeat, suspect secured!" An officer yelled, and Joker saw a man approaching her.

"So, this is the leader of the Phantom Thieves, eh? Didn't expect some kid." The man stated, kneeling down. "You can thank your teammate for this. You were sold out, kid."

"What-?" Joker started to ask, but was stopped by the police roughly shoving her face into the pavement and cuffing her.

Sometime later

In an underground hallway a woman with gray heard parted to one side and reddish-brown eyes wearing a gray business suit, black turtle neck, and heels walked towards two men, one of which was a detective in a suit, the other a guard in uniform. "Excuse me, ma'am. This area's off."

"I'm Sae Nijima, from the Public Prosecutor's office." The woman, now identified as Sae, stated, and the detective crossed his arms.

"Public Prosecutor's office, huh? What do you people want here?"

"I need to speak to the suspect. There are things I need to confirm with her."

"All due respect, Nijima-San, but this case is no longer in your jurisdiction. Besides-" the detective began to say, when an older detective approached them.

"Inspector Nijima? Phone call for you." The older man said, handing her a phone. "Can you hurry it up please? Frankly, you're being an inconvenience." Sae glared at him as she took the phone.

"I thought I told you to stand down." A gruff, old voice on the other end said wearily.

"Sir, this case has been my responsibility from the start, yet I'm not even being allowed an interrogation now that we have our suspect?"

"I called ahead because I knew you'd bring this up."

"I won't rest until I can confirm it for myself. This is MY case. I need to see this through to the end." Nijima pleaded, and her superior sighed.

"Good luck to you then. I'm now expecting much though." With that the director hung up, and the
inspector handed the man back his phone.

"Your time will be cut short. We can't permit you to speak with her for long." The Man said, and Sae let out a sigh. "It's for your own sake. Her methods are unorthodox, and frankly, unknown. We can't be sure she won't try to pull something."

"Very well, I understand." Sae responded, and soon, she was sitting next to Joker herself. Frankly, Sae was surprised. When she pictured the leader of the notorious Phantom Thieves, she figured it would be someone who she could pass on the street and not even notice. Someone who would be an expert at blending into the background, completely unremarkable in just about every way.

Instead, the woman in front of her was anything but. With her pigtails and dyed green hair, as well as her unique ethnicity, this young woman, around 17 or 18, would easily stand out in a crowd, especially with her vibrant hair and eyes. The girl wore an open blazer from Shujin academy, which exposed a turquoise halter top with a spider web design that connected to her pants in a fashion similar to Shujin. "It's been a while, hasn't it? If you don't mind, I'll ask the questions this time." Niijima stated, and the girl was silent. Not surprising, given how she had likely been drugged upon arrest. Sae pulled out a file opening it and beginning to read it. "Jolyne Cujoh, age 16. Three quarters American, One quarter Japanese on your father's side. Lived with your mother, Rita Jean, in the United States until she passed away when you were 13, upon which you were sent to live with your father, distinguished Marine biologist Jotaro Kujo, and his family here in Japan." Sae noticed the girl tending up upon the mention of her father. "He's quite the interesting man, your father. He's been on and off our radar for about...30 years now." Jolyne looked at Niijima, her light green eyes burning with intensity.

"And that concerns me how?" Jolene finally spoke up, her voice filled with irritation, and Sae slightly smiled.

"So you can talk. Excellent. And here I was thinking I'd just be talking to myself." Sae's smile faded, replaced with grim determination. "I'm trying to put together a puzzle, Cujoh-San. Trying to see how the daughter of a distinguished marine biologist, that has ties to an American organization like the Speedwagon Foundation, ends up the leader of an organization dedicated to forcing the complete restructuring of our society?." At this, Jolyne chuckled. "Something funny?"

"Is that what you think we are? Spooky terrorists here to tear down the Japanese way?" Jolyne taunted. "Lady, you may be smart, but you are WAY off target."

"Then why don't you help me get on target? There are quite a few things we haven't been able to figure this out." Sae explained, and Jolyne folded her arms in front of her. "When all this started, everyone believed it was just a prank, but I thought the timing was too convenient. However, my evidence was speculation at best, and so I couldn't assemble a case. It was because I couldn't figure out the method."

"Of course you couldn't." Jolyne said, and Niijima glared at her.

"I need to know how you did it. Tell me...when did you discover that world?" Jolyne chuckled once more.

"You really want to know? Because once I tell you, the way you view the world will be shattered." Jolyne stated, rubbing a spot on her shoulder. "We're both involved in something that's been brewing since before either of us were born. Not too late to walk away and forget you ever met me."

"Trying to scare me away? It won't work."
"Alright, but don't say I didn't warn you."

"Noted. Now, tell me everything. About stands, this…other world. About how it's possible to change another person's heart?" Sae asked, and Jolyne sighed. "Tell me everything. Start from the very beginning."

"Alright, but strap in. This Bizarre Adventure of mine started right after I moved here to Tokyo…"
Chapter 1: New Beginnings

Jolyne was walking home at night in Nagasaki, minding her own business, until she came across a woman being harassed by a man, who was trying to force her into his car. Of course she wasn’t gonna let it slide, so she stormed over to the man and shoved him. However, he was drunk and she used more strength than intended, sending the man’s head slamming against the car and bloodied. "Ack…damn brat! I'll sue!" The rest was a blur…policemen dragging her into their car…

Jolyne Cujoh was roughly jostled awake as the train she was on began to slow down. "Ah damn, fell asleep…" She groaned, covering her mouth as she yawned.

"…psychotic breakdowns? You seriously believe that stuff?" Jolyne's ears perked up, attention on a pair of girls around her age in school uniforms similar to the one she had on.

"It's totally true! It's been all over the news lately." One of the girls spoke up, causing her friend to roll her eyes.

"You fall for this stuff way too easily! Remember that thing about the TV a few years ago?"

"This is different! I'm telling you!" Jolyne would've paid more attention, if not for the train intercom announcing that this was her stop. Checking the directions on her phone, she exited the train into Shibuya Station. Following the directions on her phone, she arrived at Shibuya Square, a bustling epicenter full of people. Jolyne let out a small whistle at the sight.

"Damn, this place is a lot livelier than back home." She mumbled, looking back at her phone. "Let's see, take a left at Shibuya Square and…huh?" The thing that had Jolyne stumped was a symbol on her phone she had never seen before, that was a red eyeball with a black star in the center. The image then took up the entirety of her phone screen, pulsating red.

"The hell is-" The green-haired girl began to question, when she noticed something: the loud noise of the square had slowly dimmed until it had vanished completely. Looking up, Jolyne was stunned speechless by the sight in front of her: the world around her had completely stopped, almost as if was frozen in time. Looking around, it was clear something was wrong, and that's when Jolyne saw it. In the middle of the square, a column of blue flame appeared. The column smoothed out into a large humanoid form, with wings on its hips. What looked like a smiling face appeared, and when Jolyne looked at it, she could swear she saw…herself, grinning manically with yellow eyes.

As quickly as it stopped, time resumed, the people in the square acting like nothing had happened at all. "What the hell…what the hell was that?" Jolyne asked herself. "Wait, that app…!" Looking back at her phone, Jolyne saw that the app was still on her phone. She couldn't delete it fast enough. Maybe the stress of the past few weeks had finally caught up with her, making her see things. Yeah, that was definitely the case.

Jolyne followed the instructions on her phone, soon arriving in Yongen Jaya, a district located within
the Shibuya ward of Tokyo. It was a small, quaint district, and the area Jolyne was directed to was a backstreet that was lined with businesses and homes. As Jolyne walked through the street to her destinations, she passed multiple businesses, such as a secondhand store, batting cages, a convenience store, a movie theater that didn't appear open, and a sign that read 'Takemi Medical Clinic.' "Let's see, Sojiro Sakura's house is...this way." She read the directions on her phone, turning right into a small street, walking until she arrived at a two story house with a nameplate that read 'Sakura' at the gate. Figuring this was the place, Jolyne pressed the buzzer...only no one answered the door. She waited a few minutes, before pressing the button again. Still no answer, though this time, Jolyne could've sworn she saw the curtains on the second floor shifting, and the glare of light reflecting off something...but then it was gone.

"Looks like Sakura-san's already gone to work." A voice said behind her, and Jolyne turned to see a delivery man standing next to his truck behind her, holding a package. "Damn traffic, making me late to my deliveries..."

"Mind telling me where I can find Sakura-San?" Jolyne asked.

"Hm? Oh right, you can probably find him at his store, Leblanc. Head back to the street, and take a left when you reach the tobacco shop. Can't miss it."

"Alright, thanks." Jolyne followed the man's directions, soon arriving in front of a small shop with an awning that read 'Leblanc.' A bell above the door rang when she pushed it open, being greeted with the sight of a small restaurant. Two customers sat in a booth discussing an accident that had been on the news, and on a barstool examining a crossword puzzle sat a man in his late 40's with dark hair that was thinning, a chinstrap beard with a pointed goatee, wearing a pink dress shirt and a white apron.

"Let's see, four letter word for a shellfish used to farm pearls..." the man mumbled to himself, and Jolyne cleared her throat, causing him to look up at her. "Oh right, that was today..." the man sighed, placing his paper on the table, as the two old customers got up and left. "So, you're Jolyne? Sheesh, last time I saw you, you barely reached my knee."

"Yes sir, and you must be Sakura-Sama. It is a pleasure to meet you." Jolyne said, bowing. Grandma Holly had told her it would be a good idea to present herself as politely as possible to Sakura, even if all that formal stuff made her insides crawl. Sakura gave a light chortle at that.

"Never thought that Jotaro's kid would be polite..." he mumbled to himself. "You can cut the bowing and the 'sama' crap. Just Boss or Sojiro-San will work." Jolyne righted herself.

"Alright, Saku...Boss." Sojiro sighed.

"So, it looks like I'll be your guardian for the next year. I'm an old friend of your dad, though I suppose that's not important right now. Follow me." Sojiro ordered, gesturing over to a stairway at the back of the shop. Jolyne followed him up into a spacious attic that was cluttered with junk, although there was a walkway cleared towards a bed at the very back..."This is where you'll be staying for the next year."

"Cozy." Jolyne spoke up, looking around the attic.

"Sorry about that. Didn't have time to clean up. I'll be on you to clean up the rest." Sojiro explained. "I'll be locking the door after I leave each night, so you'll have the run of the place. But if I come back and find anything missing, I'll throw you out without hesitation. Understood?"
"Crystal clear."

"Good. Now, you're clear on your situation?"

"Painfully so. You don't need to remind me." Jolyne answered, clenching her fist as she remembered what happened. That man suing her... her expulsion from her high school in Nagasaki... the way in which her so-called 'friends' back home had turned on her in an instant... how the courts mandated she move here to Tokyo to serve out her probation... how her father had been too busy with work to even show his face...

"Good. That's what you get for sticking your nose where it doesn't belong." Sojiro coldly remarked, before pointing to a box nearby. "Your grandparents sent that over. It has all your clothes and personal belongings, along with some mail. Oh, and here..." Sojiro reached into his back pocket and pulled out an envelope, handing it to Jolyne. "Your father sent this to me, asked to give it to you when you showed up." Jolyne scowled at the mention of her father, but snatched the envelope anyways. Sojiro sighed, and headed back down the stairs. "I've still got customers, so just make yourself at home."

"Thanks, I guess." Jolyne said as Sojiro vanished into the restaurant, and she looked at the envelope he had given her. It was sealed with a symbol of a gold hand, her father's personal stamp. 'Tch. Damn bastard... so now he cares? Too little too late, asshole.' She thought to herself, and tossed the envelope onto the floor, walking over to the box, opening it. Inside were her clothes and items such as laptop, phone charger, and a few manga, as well as an assortment of letters. She picked up the letters, and grinned as soon as she saw who the first one was from, sitting on her bed and opening it.

**Jojo,**

*Just writing to wish you good luck in Shibuya. I still think it's total bull what happened to you, for what it's worth. Just writing to let you know that you at least have the whole town of Morioh cheering for you. If you ever need anything, just say the word and I'll get the whole gang up there!*

*Love, Josuke*

*P.S. Almost forgot: Koichi and Yukako are having another kid! Think I can try and convince them to name it after me?*

Jolyne smiled as she read the letter from her great uncle. When she was younger, she spent many summers in the town of Morioh, coming to view her great uncle's friends as a sort of family. The last time she had seen Josuke had been at her Great Grandfather Joseph's funeral a year ago, and it warmed Jolyne's heart that he kept her in his mind. Unlike some other people she knew...

Jolyne sighed, setting down the letters and looking around the attic at the junk. "Well, this place isn't going to clean itself..." she walked over to the box, pulling out and changing into some casual clothes that consisted of a green tank top with a white spider web design and a pair of jeans. Now that she was out of that stuffy uniform, she could finally set about clearing out this attic.

**Several hours later**

By the time Jolyne finished cleaning, it was the evening. She'd dusted, mopped the floors, cleared out space under a shelf to place her things, cleared off the table and the couch, brushed off her bed... the young woman was exhausted, plopping down on her bed with an exasperated sigh. "Sheesh, has
this guy ever hear of a broom before?" She said aloud, and the stomping of feet heralded the arrival of Sojiro, who let out a small whistle upon seeing the attic.

"I'll be damned…so that's what you were doing. Gotta say, I'm impressed. This is the best this place has looked in years." Sojiro mused, stroking his beard.

"And here I thought you were the epitome of tidiness." Jolyne shot out.

"Hey, don't get smart with me. I can give as good as I get." Sojiro retorted. "Get some rest. We're headed to Shujin tomorrow." Jolyne sat up at this, raising an eyebrow.

"Shujin? That's the school I'm going to, right?" She asked, and Sojiro nodded.

"That's right. I figured it be a good idea to introduce yourself to the stuff there, get things started on the right foot. Not a lot of places will take someone in with a criminal record, yknow." Sojiro explained, when he noticed the envelope from Jotaro on the table next to the couch. "Still haven't opened it?" Jolyne averted her gaze, not wanting to meet Sojiro's eyes.

"…I'll do it later. I've been busy." She answered, and Sojiro folded his arms.

"I suppose it's none of my business, but I want you to know that he does care for you. He's just…not the best at expressing it. So just...go easy on him, ok?" Sojiro stated.

"You're right." Sojiro raised an eyebrow. "It is none of your business." The cafe owner let out a sigh, and turned and left, leaving Jolyne to stare at the envelope for a minute. She mulled over her new guardian's words, and sighed before going over to the envelope. Breaking open the seal, she poured the contents onto the desk: a letter, a business card, and a round locket with the symbol of a butterfly on it. Jolyne took the letter and opened it.

Jolyne,

I'm sorry I couldn't be there for you when you needed me. My work forced me out of the country for several weeks, and I did not find out about what happened to you until recently. This may not mean much to you coming from me, but I apologize for that. As a sort of recompense, I've included a few things that should prove useful if you're ever in trouble. If you ever need anything, call the number on the card and give them your name. They will provide you with whatever you need.

If you ever find yourself in trouble, use the contents of the locket. Things will seem strange at first, but I promise it'll all make sense in time. All I ask is that you do not lose that locket under any circumstances, as it is of immense value, and losing it would have dire consequences.

Once again, I am truly sorry for what happened to you, and that I couldn't be there. I wish you the best of luck in your endeavors.

Love, Jotaro Kujo

Jolyne had a scowl on her face the entire time she read the letter. Just who the hell did that bastard think he is? Dumping Jolyne on her Grandparents after her mother died, always disappearing, only showing up at holidays or birthdays, acting like he'd been there all along…did Jotaro seriously think some jewelry was going to make up for it?

She sat down the letter, and picked up the business card, reading the name in it. "Speedwagon
Foundation…?" All she knew was that it was some sort of American organization that showed up whenever her family needed help. When Jolyne's mother grew ill, they got her the best doctors until she passed. When Jolyne was arrested and sued, they had provided lawyers that were able to get her her probation in Shibuya. She wasn't sure of the exact nature of her family's relationship with the Foundation, but she figured it would be a nice thing to have just in case, so she tucked the card into her wallet.

The next thing she examined was the locket. It was found, about the size of a large grape, and was largely dark brown save for the symbol of a green butterfly in it, causing Jolyne to pause. When she was younger, her and Jotaro would spend time in their garden when it was in bloom, which attracted a great many insects. Jolyne had always been fond of the butterflies. Shaking the memory aside, she opened the locket. Inside was a picture of a young Jolyne, probably around 4 or 5, sitting between Jotaro and her mother. She remembered that day clearly. It was their last family outing before her parents split up.

The other half of he locket held what appeared to be a small stone that looked it had been apart of something. It was mostly bronze, the light catching on the edge of it and giving off an almost ethereal glow. "The hell is this?" Jolyne picked up the stone, and examined it. "It almost looks like some kind of arrow and…ack!" She touched her finger to the very top, and a sensation that was like a cross between a stab and shock spread from her finger. "Son of a…OWWWWW!" She groaned, grabbing her finger and dropping the stone. That small prick hurt worse than anything she'd ever experienced in her life. The stone must have nicked an artery or something. Jolyne shakily removed her hand, cautiously examining the damage the stone had done to her…only to find none. She turned her hand over and over, and found no sign that anything had touched her. The stone didn't even break the skin! "What the…what the fuck…" she gently, carefully picked up the stone, examining. The part that had pricked her showed no signed of blood, and only gave off that weird glow when the light caught off the edge. Moving with the grave and precision of a deer, Jolyne carefully placed the stone back in the locket, sealing it closed. 'What the hell…maybe it was just static electricity. Isn't that supposed to build up when you've been moving around a lot? Yeah, that's it.' She thought, and set the locket on the table. With nothing else to do, Jolyne began changing into her pajamas, and hit the sack.

Jolyne had been walking home at night after studying with a friend, when she heard what sounded like an argument. Turning the corner, she saw a woman arguing with a bald man, who was trying to force the woman into his car. "Stop giving me trouble, dammit! Don't you know who I am?!!"

"I-I'll call the police!" The woman protested, and the man laughed.

"You think I care? The police are my bitches! Think they care what some whore has to say about me?" The man spat, and they heard sirens in the distance. "So someone squealed, huh? Incompetent fools like you need to shut the hell up and let people like me steer this country! Now get in the damn car!"

"Hey, asshole!" Jolyne called out, approaching the two.

"What do you want?" The man sneered, and Jolyne approached him.

Jolyne's eyes fluttered open, awakened by the sound of her phone chiming. Pulling it out with a yawn, she expected to see a message from someone, only to see that strange app from earlier. "What the hell…? I thought I deleted this thing…" she mumbled, staring at the eyeball shaped icon. "It's so creepy…" Jolyne deleted the app once again, and fell back against her pillow, yawning as her eyes drifted shut…
Only for the sound of rustling chains to startle her awake, the feeling of her mattress replaced with the sensation of cold, hard stone. Jolyne's eyes snapped open, but instead of being greeted with the ceiling of Leblanc's attic, was greeted with the sight of a velvet ceiling and walls. Chains clinked as she sat up, and Jolyne was shocked to see chains and cuffs on her wrists, and not only that, but she was dressed in some sort of prisoner outfit. "What the…" looking around, all Jolyne could see beyond the velvet walls and stone cot she was on was a jail cell door. Swinging her legs onto the ground, she scratched her head, only to find her hair had somehow been put up into her usual style. Before she could ruminate any further, the sound what sounded like giggling drew her attention. Turning towards the cell door, Jolyne saw two young girls standing in front of the door, both dressed in matching prison guard attire. The one on the left had her silver hair done in a braid, with an eye patch over her left eye, while the one on the right had her hair into two buns that reminded Jolyne of a character in an American movie she once saw. "Hey…” Jolyne stood up, clinking of chains making her realize there was one tied to her ankle as well. "Hey, what the hell's going on? Where am I?" She asked, lumbering towards the door. The girls said nothing, each one gazing at her with a single golden eye. "Hey, you two deaf or something? I asked where the hell I am!" Jolyne demanded, slamming her hand on the cell door. A deep chuckle came from behind the two, and they parted, revealing to Jolyne the source: a hook nosed man sitting at a desk in the middle of the room, atop a rug with a large gold V on it. The man had a hook shaped nose, with thinning white hair, large eyes, and an unnerving grin on his face.

"Greetings, Trickster." The man said, his voice deep and booming, almost sinisterly so. "Welcome to my Velvet Room."

"Velvet…Room…?" Before Jolyne could inquire more, the girl on the right, the one with the buns, slammed her nightstick against the bars.

"Quiet down, Inmate!" She snapped at Jolyne. "Don't you know who this is?! Stand up straight and show some respect!"

"Why don't you make me, Shorty?" Jolyne snapped back, causing the short girl to sneer. "What was that? I oughta-

"Justine, please calm yourself." The one on the left said, placing a hand on her partner's shoulder, and the hook nosed man simply chuckled.

"Girls, girls, behave yourselves. After all, it is not every day that we have a guest of such a prestigious bloodline among us." The Man said, and Jolyne's eyes widened, hands tracking to a spot on her left side, just below her neck, where a purple star shaped birthmark resided. "Yes, my dear child, I refer to the Joestar blood coursing through your veins. Now, before we begin, do you have any questions?" The Man asked, and it took Jolyne almost a minute to speak.

"Where…where are we? What is this place?"

"This is the Velvet Room, a place that exists between both Dream and reality, both mind and matter." The man explained. "My name is Igor, master of this place. These two are my assistants. You've already met Justine, and her sister's name is Caroline." Igor gestured to the two. "This is a room that only those who hold a contract may enter." Jolyne's eyes widened at this.

"All will be clear in due time, my dear. Although I admit, the shape of your Velvet Room is a bit of a surprise to me as well." Igor said, looking around. "I have seen this room take many forms, from an elevator to a limousine, but never a prison such as this. It seems as if you are truly a prisoner of fate. Fitting, I suppose, given your family history." The Hook Nosed Man mused. "In the near future, ruin awaits you. Of that, there is no doubt." Jolyne gripped the bars.

"Ruin? What the hell are you talking about?" Jolyne asked, and Igor's grin never faltered.

"Worry not, child. There is a mean to avoid such a fate. You must be 'rehabilitated' towards freedom. That is the only means to avoid the ruin of the world. Do you have the resolve needed to face this ruin head on?" Igor asked, and Jolyne felt a lump forming in her throat. Ruin? Contracts? Jolyne had no idea what the strange man was talking about, but at the same time, she felt a feeling in her gut, that felt like it originated from her very DNA. A drive to meet this challenge head on, state it down… and overcome it.

"Yes. I accept." Jolyne answered firmly, and Igor let out a solid laugh.

"Excellent! The game has begun!" He cheered, when a chime sounded. "I'm afraid our time is up. I shall grant you more details of your rehabilitation in the future. Farewell for now…my Trickster."

With that, Jolyne's vision faded into darkness…

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Jolyne's eyes snapped open, seeing the ceiling of her attic room once again. She sat up and checked herself, finding no chains, cuffs, or anything that might have signified that might have signified that the events of last night actually human. "What a weird dream…" she muttered to herself, yawning as she rose out of bed.

"Hey, you up yet?" Sakura' voice called from the stairwell. "Hurry up and get decent. Don't forget about our meeting."

"Yeah yeah, I'm coming. Let me get ready." Jolyne called back, getting up to change. As she got dressed, she felt something itchy around the spot of her shoulder where her birthmark was. Scratching it, she felt an odd sensation, and when she pulled her hand back, there was a singular string attached to it. 'Huh. Must have come off my clothes.' Jolyne thought to herself, getting dressed in her uniform and walking down the stair to greet Sojiro in Leblanc, who had on a white blazer over his dress shirt and a white hat.

"Nice hat, ladykiller. We off to a poetry slam after this?" Jolyne said, and Sojiro seemed unamused.

"Cmon, we need to hurry up or we'll be late."

"Where are we even going?"

"Shujin's over in the Aoyama district. Most of the time, you'll be taking the train there, so it'll cost a bit, and figuring out all the route transfers will be a pain in the ass. I'll be driving you there today, but that's it. Cmon, let's go." Sojiro beckoned, leading Jolyne out of the store towards his car, which was parked near the street. "Sheesh, a girl your age in my front seat…people might think I'm some sort of cradle robber."

Several Hours Later
In all the ways she could've thought up something to do, nothing would have been as tedious and time consuming as that meeting. The principal, a shirt, portly bald man in a gaudy yellow suit, and her teacher, a woman named Sadayo Kawakami who couldn't seem more disinterested if she tried, had told her nothing she didn't expect, almost to the point that Jolyne could've written a script about it. "Behave yourself blah blah blah, you'll be expelled if you act up blah blah blah, be a good student blah blah blah, you're sooooo lucky we decided to take you in blah blah blah." As if Jolyne hadn't already figured they had chosen to accept her to try and boost their rep. Taking in the troubled daughter of a distinguished academic like Jotaro Kujo? The PR wrote itself.

Now, Jolyne and Sojiro were stuck in traffic that was moving slower than a snail. Apparently during the meeting, a subway had derailed and crashed into its platform, injuring dozens of people. "Damn traffic. At this rate I won't be able to get home in time to open. What a waste of my Sunday…you're taking the train, starting tomorrow." Sojiro stated as they listened to a news report on the radio as they sat in traffic. "So…what'd you think? Of the school, I mean?" Jolyne simply shrugged. "It's alright, I guess. Seems a little uptight for my tastes, but I guess beggars can't be choosers." Jolyne answered, and Sojiro breathed a sigh of relief. "What a relief. Just…don't go beating up any teachers, ok?" Jolyne raised an eyebrow at Sojiro's request.

"Weird thing to request, but ok." She turned to look at the slow, almost unmoving line of cars on either side of the road. "This sorta thing happen often?" The restaurateur nodded. "Yeah, though lately they've been happening a lot more frequently. Bus drivers driving down the wrong side of the road, subway drivers forcing themselves off the tracks, people losing their minds for no reason…it's why I like Leblanc exactly where it is, removed from all this. The world could go to hell, but I'd still go on like nothing happened." Sojiro stated, and Jolyne sighed, leaning against her hand. "Of all the times to move here, it had to be in the middle of all this? Gimme a break…" She lamented, and Sojiro chuckled. "Something funny?"

"Hm? Oh, it's nothing. It's just…your father used to say something like that a lot when we were your age." He answered, and Jolyne looked at him. "How is it you know my old man, anyway?" She asked.

"We grew up together, here in Tokyo. We ended up in different classes in high school, but we've always stayed in touch. He comes by whenever he's in town, and we catch up." Sojiro answered. "…what was he like back then?" Sojiro adopted a puzzled look, glancing at Jolyne. "Why do you want to know?" Sojiro's ward simply shrugged. "Just curious. My grandfather wasn't around a whole lot then, and my grandmother can be a bit…vague." Jolyne explained, and Sojiro stroked his goatee, thinking back to his youth.

A young Sojiro was walking past a fancy looking restaurant, when out walked Jotaro Kujo, who was being yelled out by the manager. "Get back here and pay, you punk!" The manager shouted, and Jotaro turned and glared at him.
"I'll pay when you don't serve me crap! I wouldn't feed that rubbish to a dog!"

Young Sojiro was walking to his class, walking past Jotaro. About a second after, he noticed a bunch of students staring past. "What's going on?" Young Sakura asked, and a girl answered him.

"Ono-sensei was giving Kujo crap for his uniform, and Kujo beat the shit out of him!"

Some time later, Sojiro was studying at his desk, when another student came up to him. "Hey, Sakura, did you hear about Kujo?"

"What did he do this time?"

"Word is he beat the crap out of a bunch of guys downtown, and he actually got arrested!"

"Your father was…a bit of a punk, actually. Beat the crap out of people, got into a lot of fights…honestly I'm surprised he turned out as well as he did." Sojiro answered Jolyne, who simply adopted an incredulous look.

"You're serious? The 'great Professor Kujo' used to be just a thug?" She asked, and Sojiro nodded.

"Yep. Although, looking back, there was a point where he seemed to just…change." Sojiro reminisced, stroking his goatee. "Back in…I wanna say '87…Jotaro dropped out of school for about 2 months. Way I understand it, your grandmother got really sick, and your father stopped coming to school to take care of her. After that he seemed more…I dunno, mature, I guess." He explained.

"How are your grandparents, anyway?"

"They're doing fine. Grandpa Sadao plays his music whenever he gets the chance, and Grandma Holly's still as cheerful as ever." Jolyne said with a small smile, before that fell, and she looked at the road. "They…they never gave up on me, even after the lawsuit and everything. I…I just wish I'd been a better granddaughter to them." Sojiro watched her expression, and sighed, the two of them sitting in silence as traffic slowly moved.

Elsewhere

In the upper level of an office building in downtown Shibuya, two people, watched a television report about the subway accident earlier. One was an elderly man who was almost completely bald, save for gray hair around the side of his head, who wore a blue business suit, and the other was a woman.

"According to police, the driver's life was not in danger, despite his injuries. When pressed for questions, the driver could not come up with an explanation for why he forced his train to derail."

"This is less of an accident, and more of a crime of accompanying the government." The man, head of the Special Investigations Unit, stated. "Apparently 6 months ago, site inspectors reported deterioration along the tracks, as well as the ATC system designed to prevent such an incident. The Minister of Transport, however, decided to overlook it, insisting that they didn't have the money in their budget to cover it. There's no doubt he'll be replaced soon." He analyzed, and turned to his associate, who was none other than Sae Niijima. "What's your take on all this?" Sae remained silent, watching as the news announced how timetables all across the city had been thrown off. "Let me guess…you're thinking it's connected to the psychotic breakdowns that have been happening all over the place, correct?" Sae looked at him with a small smile.
"Spot on, though I'm also worried about how this might impact my sister's schedule."

"She's a smart girl, I'm sure she'll be fine." The director answered. "It's been far too long since you and I had a drink. Care to stay a bit?"

"Thank you for the offer, but I'll have to take a rain check. I have another meeting to attend to." Sae replied, bowing farewell to her superior and leaving his office. After descending the stair, Niijima saw a boy waiting for her near the bottom. He was young, about 16 or 17, with shaggy brown hair wearing a light grey blazer over a school uniform with a beige tie that had white stripes. He was carrying a brief case that had a large letter 'A' emboldened on it.

"Good evening, Sae-San. I assume you asked me here because of a case?" The boy asked as she approached him.

"Not quite. I just want your opinion on something." The inspector told him, and he nodded.

"But of course. Although, your assessment of a case is often as precise as my own, if not more so." The boy replied, following her down the steps. "Although, since you ARE making a student stay out late, perhaps we could grab some sushi?" Saw rolled her eyes.

"Fine, but conveyor belt only." She stated, much to the boy's chagrin.

4/11/20XX

Jolyne stepped off the Ginza Line train into Aoyama-Itchome station, her last stop before she would have to walk the rest of the way to Shujin. So far, it hadn't been too much trouble figuring out her route, although figuring out where the Ginza line was had felt like navigating a labyrinth. But she had figured it out, and now all Jolyne had to do was follow the students that were dressed like her to Shujin, and her first day of her new life would begin. It had been a rough few weeks, but from here on, Jolyne was bound and determined to make this the best year possible!

Unfortunately, the weather had other ideas. "Rain?! Gimme a break…" Jolyne groaned, taking shelter under a store's awning. "Shoulda grabbed an umbrella…" she mumbled to herself, checking her phone to make sure she was on the right track, only to be greeted with a familiar sight. "That damn eyeball thing again? I'm gonna have to reboot my phone later…" The transfer student grumbled, and was about to delete it again, when a presence coming up next to her distracted her. Looking up, Jolyne saw a female student in a similar uniform coming up next to her, only she had on a light white hoodie under her blazer with the hood up came up next to her. The hoodie had red and blue stripes at the bottom, and a four leaf clover on the back of the hood. The student pulled back the hoodie, revealing long, wavy, ashy blonde hair tied into pig tails. The student was lighter skinned than the average Japanese, and had bright blue eyes.

The student sighed as she looked at the weather, only to notice Jolyne, who was honestly a little dumbstruck, staring at her. However, instead of flipping out, the girl simply smiled. "Talk about lousy weather, huh?" The girl asked, and Jolyne suddenly remembered that she knew how to speak.

"I'll say. Man, I really hope that this isn't an omen for the rest of the year." Jolyne answered, causing the girl to giggle. Almost as if on cue, a car pulled up on the curve, the window rolling down to reveal a man with a square jaw and unkempt brown hair, who had on a smile that almost unnerved Jolyne.

"Good morning, Takamaki. Need a ride? You're gonna be late." The man said, and the girl, now
identified as Takamaki, nodded.

"Yeah, thanks." She answered, getting in the man's car, and he looked at Jolyne.

"You need a lift too?"

"No thanks. I'm fine." Jolyne replied. Something about the way he was looking at her really made her skin crawl.

"Suit yourself. Just don't be late, you hear?" The man said, and as he rolled up the window, Jolyne caught a glimpse of Takamaki's eyes. They were downturned, and seemed almost…sad.

As Jolyne watched the car drive off, she heard what sounded like someone running towards her. Soon, a boy with spiky blonde hair appeared wearing an open Shujin blazer, a bright yellow t-shirt with a large purple star with the letters ZOMG written underneath, and standard Shujin academy pants. "Dammit! Screw that pervert teacher…" the boy shouted.

"Pervert teacher?" Jolyne asked, and unbeknownst to her, the strange app on her phone began to react…

The boy turned to her, a scowl on her face. "What do you want? You planning on ratting me out to Kamoshida?" He demanded.

"Hey, chill it with the third degree, ok? And who the hell is Kamoshida?" The strange app chimed once more…

"What do you mean 'who the hell is Kamoshida'? He was the scumbag in the car just now. You go to Shujin, right?" Once more, the app chimed.

"Yeah, so what? I just got here. Pardon me for not knowing the name of every asshole at the school yet." Upon Jolyne's answer, the boy's scowl was replaced with a look of shock.

"You seriously don't know? Wait, now that I think about it, I've never seen you around before. I'd certainly remember if I had…oh wait, you must be that new transfer student people've been talking about!"

"Ding ding. How many girls around here have green hair?" Jolyne replied, and the Vulgar Boy sighed.

"Sorry about all that. I just…get angry whenever I see that bastard." He apologized. "Piece of advice? Stay away from Kamoshida. Nothing good comes from being around him."

"Noted. So, you're a second year too?" She asked, noting a button on his uniform.

"Yeah. Class C. Name's Ryuji Sakamoto." The boy, now identified as Ryuji, answered.

"Jolyne Cujoh. Pleasure to meet you." Jolyne replied, and Ryuji looked out at the street.

"This rain isn't too bad. Cmon, I know a shortcut to the school." He said, gesturing for Jolyne to follow him. She followed him down a back alley.

"So, this Kamoshida…who is he exactly?" She asked, and Ryuji clenched his fist.
"He's the head of the volleyball team, the 'pride and joy of Shujin.' The school brought him on because he used to be some big shot Olympic gold medalist, and they can't get enough of him." Ryui spat. "Bastard treats the school like his own personal playground, and they don't seem to care."

"So he thinks he's the king of the castle?" Jolyne asked, and the app chimed again as Ryuji nodded.

"Destination found. Beginning navigation. " The app said, and Ryuji and Jolyne both felt light headed all of a sudden.

"Ugh, what's with this headache? It's not even pollen season yet..." Ryuji groaned, and turned back to Jolyne. "It's this next right up here."

"Got it." She replied, but when Ryuji turned the corner, his mouth dropped in shock.

"What the hell..." he muttered, and Jolyne was about to ask what the problem was, when she turned the corner and saw it for herself.

Standing where Shujin should have been was a massive castle made of stone, complete with a drawbridge where the gate should have been, set against a sky that had become red and wavy. "Did...did we take a wrong turn?" Jolyne asked, and Ryuji simply shook his head.

"No way. I go that way all the time..." he answered, looking around. "Look, there's the plate for Shujin...this has gotta be the right place. What the hell's going on here?" They stared for a solid minute, before Jolyne swallowed the lump in her throat.

"I guess we'll just have to go in and ask." She said, and Ryuji nodded. As the two walked up the drawbridge, they didn't notice the castle shifting for a moment, reverting to Shujin Academy, before turning back.
Chapter 2: The Pillager of Twilight

Chapter 2

Entering the castle, Jolyne and Ryuji founding themselves within a massive ornate designed room that even had huge red rugs and staircase. "This is our school?" Jolyne questione dumbfoundedly as Ryuji looked among the room with awestruck eyes.

"It can't be…our courtyard isn't nearly this fancy…"

"Maybe a drama club’s doing some kind of production?" She offered in attempt to make sense of what they were looking at, only for him to shake his head.

"I don't know. I don't think they have the budget for something like this, but I might be wrong…” Sakamoto answered, pulling out his phone. "What the…? No reception? What about you?" The green haired teen looked at her phone, only to see that the strange app had taken up the entirety of the screen, not reacting when she touched it.

"I got nothing." She replied, and they were about to discuss more when the sound of heavy footsteps began approaching them. They turned to see a man in large, bulky armor, holding a sword and a shield wearing a face shaped mask.

"Whoa, maybe this is the drama club after all…” Ryuji spoke with surprise, approaching the armor and inspecting it. "Dude, this thing looks legit! Seriously, this thing could give those American movies a run for their money!" The man in the armor remained silent, and Jolyne got a sinking feeling in her gut. "Cmon man, say something!"

"Sakamoto, something's not right here…” She started to warn, when another man in armor approached them. That's when Ryuji began to realize something was up.

"Uh, Cujoh, maybe we should get out of here…” Jolyne nodded in agreement, the two making their way back towards the door…when two more men in armor appeared, cutting them off. "The hell's with these guys?!

"Shit, this isn't good…” Jolyne muttered, hands balling into fists as she prepared to fight, only for one to bash her blond acquaintance with his shield, knocking him to the ground. The Cujoh was about to start swinging, only to feel a hard impact against her back as another man used his shield on her, knocking her down.

"Take them away! Lock them in the dungeon!" One of them ordered. Jolyne was about to get up, when the one who spoke slammed the pommel of his blade at back of her head, knocking her out.

Jolyne's eyes slowly opened, her vision coming back to her to reveal she was in a dimly lit room that resembled a dungeon, and a splitting headache that confirmed that the ordeal with the men in armor wasn't a dream. "Look who's up.” A familiar voice said, and Jolyne looked to see Ryuji sitting against the wall across from her.

"How long was I out?"
"Couple hours. You alright?" He asked, getting a nod. She felt the back of her head to be sure that there was no wound.

"Aside from the worst hangover of my life, yeah." She answered, looking around. They were in a small room with brick walls, dimly lit by torches, complete with shackles on the wall and bars over the door like the strange prison she'd dreamed the other day. "What is this place?"

"No idea. At first I thought it was some kinda movie set, but I'm starting to think it's something else." Ryuji answered, and Jolyne was about to ask a follow up question…when the sounds of screaming rang from down the hall, drawing their attention.

"What the hell…" The young green haired woman asked in shock as the two stood up, running over to the barred doors. "Hey! What the hell's going on out there?!" No answer came, only the sound of more screaming. Needless to say, Ryuji and Jolyne were freaking out.

"Oh man…shit shit shit shit shit shit…" Ryuji panted out, the two backing away from the bars. "What the…what the fuck is going on…"

"We…we need to find a way out of here!" Start looking!" Jolyne instructed and getting a nod, the two beginning to search the room. Looking for holes, gaps in the bricks they could pry apart…nothing. The craftsmanship of the walls were flawless, with no gaps or anything. "Dammit!" Jolyne cursed, slamming her hand against the wall, although she noticed something weird about her hand: a small string, similar to the one she pulled off her birthmark the other day, was coming out of her finger, around the part where the strange rock had pricked her finger. Before she could examine it further, both her and Ryuji were attracted by the sound of heavy footsteps approaching, turning to see several guards outside the door.

"Your punishment has been decided upon. For the charge of unlawful entry, you have been sentenced to death by his royal majesty." The guard stated, and the two's eyes widened.

"Are you serious?!" Ryuji blurted, while Jolyne's mouth went dry and her knees felt weak. Her head felt like it was about to split open.

"Foolish peasants. No one is allowed to do as they please in my castle!" A distorted, yet familiar voice called out, one that made Ryuji stop dead in his tracks. The guards parted, revealing the speaker: a man with a gold crown over his unkempt brown hair, wearing a dark red cape with red hearts printed around it, and wearing nothing but pink underwear underneath. The thing that left Jolyne and Ryuji speechless was his face with its unmistakable square jaw.

"K-Kamoshida?!" Ryuji gasped out, taking in the volleyball coach's bizarre appearance. "What…what the hell is this?! What are you wearing?" Kamoshida simply smirked.

"I thought it'd be another petty thief, but to think it'd be you, Sakamoto…I guess you didn't learn your lesson the last time." "Kamoshida” taunted, and looked at Jolyne, grinning at her lecherously. "Ooooh, and you brought a friend! I might just have to bring you to my chambers…"

"Piss off, creep. Try anything and you'll regret it." Jolyne threatened, only for the self-entitled king simply laugh.

"Feisty! I like it! Do you fools even realize the position you're in? None can insult me, the king of this castle, and simply get away with it. For the crime of defying and insulting the king, I, Suguru Kamoshida, sentence you to death, Ryuji Sakamoto! Take him out!" Jolyne and Ryuji backed away
from the door as the guard opened it, four of them flooding into the room.

"W-wait, hold on! W-we didn't even do anything!" Ryuji pleaded, as the guards moved between him and Jolyne.

"Stop it! Have you lost your mind?! Don't do this, please!" Jolyne begged, trying to push past the guards, only for them to shove her back. She tried punching them, but it was useless. The same result happened when Ryuji tried pushing past them, with one guard bashing him back with his shield.

"Restrain her! I want her to watch this. Should do a good job of breaking her in."

"Kamoshida" ordered, and two guards shoved her back against the wall, holding her there.

"You'll pay for this, asshole!" Jolyne shouted, as a guard picked up Ryuji by his neck and shoved him against the wall.

"Please…don't do this…" the blonde sobbed out, tears streaming down his face as Kamoshida laughed.

"This is the price you pay for defying me!" "Kamoshida" sneered, and all Jolyne could do was watch helplessly as the guard raised his sword…

"What's the matter? Are you simply going to watch?" A voice said inside her head, that sounded eerily similar to her own. Immediately, Jolyne's mouth went dry. "So, do you plan on letting him die to save yourself? Tell me, was your previous decision simply a fluke? A mistake that you regret immensely?" The voice interrogated, causing Jolyne to think back to her actions that night in Nagasaki.

"It…it wasn't…" she gasped out, drawing "Kamoshida’s" attention.

"What's the matter? You havin' a panic attack or something?" He questioned, but Jolyne ignored him as the voice inside her head laughed.

"Very well. I heed your resolve." The voice stated, and Jolyne was hit with an intense headache. Her birthmark began to throb, and she broke out in an intense sweat, panting and feeling like she was about to vomit. "Vow to me! I am thou, and thou art I! Thou who art willing to perform sacrilegious acts in the name of thine own Justice! Call my name, and release my fury upon those who would stand against you! Show the strength of thine will, to ascertain on thine own, even though thou art chained to hell itself!" Jolyne let out a scream, sending out a massive burst of pressure. It knocked back the guards holding her back and blew back "Kamoshida" and the guard threatening Ryuji. Jolyne slumped against the wall, panting heavily.

"Ouch, what the hell…?" The so called king groaned looking at Jolyne. She now had on a white domino mask, with black markings along the eyes. That was when Jolyne noticed the mask too.

Off…she had to get it off. She gripped the mask, trying to yank it off her face, but it wouldn't budge. She dug her fingers under the mask, screaming as she ripped it off her face. The bloodstained mask clattered to the floor, apparently having ripped off a good chunk of Jolyne's face. She slumped onto her hands and knees, heavily panting."Kamoshida” and Ryuji watched her, her form unmoving, when suddenly she looked up with yellow eyes and a maniacal grin on her bloodsoaked face.
"Come forth… Arsene!" She shouted, and the blood vanished as blue flames surrounded her. As soon as the blood cleared from her face, blue flames spread from the bridge of her nose and covered her entire body, what sounded like laughter echoing across the room as her eyes and mouth were covered by the flames, spreading into a demonic grin. Once the flames spread across her body, she rose up to her full height. The flames began peeling away from her body, standing behind her and revealing her new appearance: Jolyne now wore a black trench coat with a green star on each shoulder, over a grey collared undershirt that had a black spider-web design across it. She now had on black pants with a white spider web design, complete with red gloves. Chains materialized next to her, and she grabbed them.

Almost instantly, the blue flames began materializing into a humanoid figure. The figure had a predominately black body that appeared similar to a waistcoat, with white ruffles around the neck similar to old school Victorian attire, with what appeared to be a red half jacket across its arms, cutting off at hands that each featured a set of claws. The creature's legs were covered in red, with edged heels for feet. It's head was black with two red eyes and a glowing red, jagged mouth, and had two long protrusions sticking out like antennae, and was all adorned with what appeared to be a large black top hat. It had a distinctly feminine figure.

Jolyne released the chains, and a pair of wings emerged from the monster's back, blowing away the enemies and leaving Ryuji unharmed. "I am Arsene, the pillager of twilight! I am the manifestation of the spirit of rebellion that lies within you. If you so desire it, I shall grant you the use of my power!" The monster spoke, and all Ryuji could do was gaze awestruck at the sight as Jolyne looked at Arsene.

"Lend me your power." She ordered, and Arsene seemed to nod.

"Very well." At that moment, Ryuji found his voice once more.

"What... what the hell is happening..." he muttered out as "Kamoshida" and his guards rose.

"Who the hell do you think you are, huh?! Think you can come into my castle, disrespect me?! Kill them all!" He demanded, and the guards began to change. Their bodies darken and distort, before they exploded into a shadowy burst of energy. Where the guards had been now stood around four small creatures, all of which had a pumpkin head, witch's hat, dark gray cloak, and carrying a small lantern. Fireball began forming around their Lanterns. Jolyne turned to them, extending out her hand.

"Ravage them... Arsene!" She commanded, and Arsene put her hands together, creating a ball of red and black energy, before firing it. It hit three of the creatures, instantly wiping them from existence. Only one managed to dodge and charge straight for her. Jolyne clenched her fist, ready to pummel it, when a small dagger materialized in her hand in a burst of blue flames. Jolyne ducked under the pumpkin headed monster's swipe, and swung the dagger, popping off the creature's head, causing it to disperse into black smoke. Arsene dispersed into blue flame that soon vanished, Jolyne's mask appearing on her face in a flash of light.

"Dude, what... what the hell was that?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne's attention was drawn by a sneering Kamoshida.

"You little...! I'll show what happens when you mess with-" "Kamoshida" started to say, when Ryuji launched himself off the floor, slamming into their foe's side and knocking him in the ground.
"How's that feel, you sonuvabitch!" Ryuji shouted, kicking him in the gut, when Jolyne noticed a keyring on the floor next to “Kamoshida.”

"Sakamoto, grab the keys!" She instructed, and Ryuji noticed and picked up the keys. The two ran out of the room, slamming it shut and locking it with the keys they found.

"Alright, it's shut tight!" Ryuji declared, stuffing the keys in his pocket and turning to Jolyne. "Hey, what was all that? The thing with the flames, that demon thing, and…hey, what's with that outfit?"

"My outfit? What are you…" she started to ask, when she noted her attire. "Whoa what the hell? I've never seen this stuff in my life." As soon as Jolyne touched it, the strange outfit vanished in a flash of light, leaving her in her school clothes once more. "What's going on?"

"I've got no clue, but we need to get out of here with before more of them show up!" Ryuji stated, and Jolyne nodded in agreement.

"Yea, let's move." She instructed, and the two ran off, heading away from the cell. They soon heard footsteps approaching and ducked into another cell.

"Shit shit shit! They'll definitely catch us at this rate!" Ryuji panicked, almost visibly shaking.

"Only if we let them. There's gotta be some sort of way we can escape." Jolyne reassured him, looking around the cell, when she spotted something: a hole in the wall, just big enough for a person to crawl through. "Maybe through there?"

"Uh uh, no way we can fit through there. Besides, we have no idea where it leads. Either we come out right in front of them, or they catch us in there and we're sittin' ducks!"

"We're sitting ducks right now! You got any better ideas?" Ryuji remained silent.

Jolyne approached the hole, bending down and crawling into it. Ryuji watched her vanish into it, listened to the sound of approaching footsteps, and begrudgingly followed her. Crawling through the path, it deposited Jolyne and Ryuji at another side of the dungeon, only this part had a small river running through it.

"Whoa, this place is massive. How the hell are we supposed to get out of here?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne looked around, spotting a spiral stairwell on the other side of a bridge.

"When in doubt, go up." She suggested, running towards the stairwell with Ryuji behind her. The stairwell seemed to go up forever, until they arrived at a large wooden door. "Count of three?" Ryuji nodded at Jolyne, the two bracing their shoulders against the door. "1…2…3!" They pushed against the door, putting their weight against it until it swung open. They stumbled into an area that was similar to the one they had just come from, compete with a waterway.

"Dammit! Is this some kinda maze or something?" Ryuji complained as they looked around, walking along the path available and looking around.

"If this is Shujin's idea of hazing, I'm not amused." Jolyne stated, as they approached a raised drawbridge next to a bust of “Kamoshida.” "Gimme a break…" she groaned out, and Ryuji began looking around the bridge.
"C'mon, there's gotta be some sort of lever or something around here. Maybe behind this creepy looking thing?" Ryuji examined the statue, looking for a button or something, while Jolyne walked beyond it, looking for a path over the water or some sort of door, but no luck. Not even a hole like they crawled through last time, only a dead end lined with empty barrels. "Any luck?"

"None. You?"

"Zilch." Ryuji called back, and Jolyne was about to express her displeasure in the most vulgar way imaginable…

"Hey! Bun hair!" A boyish voice called out from behind Jolyne, and she looked at the cell behind her, only seeing a shut cell door and a blank wall. "Down here!" Boyish voice ordered, and Jolyne looked down…

Ryuji had been looking around the bridge for a lever or switch that would lower the drawbridge, when he heard Jolyne scream. Looking back at her, he saw that the transfer student was standing with her mouth agape, an expression of sheer shock. Worried that she was face to face with a squad of guards, he ran over to her, and that's when he saw it. "Dude, what the hell's that thing?!

That 'thing' stood at about 50 cm, with a primarily black body, some sort of belt on its hip with pouches on its hip. It's short arms and legs were black, each ending with white paws. It had a yellow bandana around its neck, with a white mouth and black head. It appeared to be wearing a black bandana around its head, showing only two large blue eyes and a pair of cat ears.

"Hey, who're you calling a 'thing'? You two aren't so normal looking yourselves!" The strange creature demanded, seemingly insulted. "Well what're you two just standing there for? Hurry up and get me out of here!" It demanded as the two students simply stared, mouths agape until Jolyne found her voice.

"A…a talking cat?" She asked aloud."

"This is getting way too weird for me…" Ryuji, and the creature got angry.

"How dare you! I am not a cat!" It insisted. "You two are the ones causing the commotion, right? Do you wanna get out of here, right? I know the way! Let me out, and I'll show you!" It pleaded, and Ryuji turned to Jolyne.

"You're not seriously considering that, are you? For all we know it could be another enemy!"

"If it was our enemy, would it be locked up? Besides, you got a better idea? Because I don't know about you, but stumbling blindly around a dungeon hasn't been fun so far." Jolyne stated. "You still got those keys?" Ryuji looked between her and the creature, heard the distant sound of Armored footsteps, and sighed before fishing the keys out of his pocket. He tried one after the other, until he found the one that fit, undoing the lock and opening the door. It swung open, and the creature walked out, appearing to do some stretches.

"Ah, sweet freedom! How I've missed you!" The creature said.

"Hey, you mind hurrying it up? They'll be here any minute." Jolyne begged, and it sighed.
"Alright, fine. See that statue over there?" Creature pointed to the smiling bust of Kamoshida. "Pull down its jaw." Jolyne was skeptical, but she approached the statue anyway. Putting her hand in that stone pervert's mouth made her almost throw up, but she persevered, managing to pull it down. Almost instantly, the drawbridge lowered, and Ryuji cheered.

"Alright! Let's get out of here and-!"

"Stop right there!" Voices ordered behind them, and the unusual trio turned to see two guards approaching them. "By word of King Kamoshida, you must die."

"Ah shit…" Ryuji cursed, and turned to Jolyne. "Think you can do the thing from earlier?" Jolyne nodded, and took a deep breath.

"Transform!" She yelled out…only nothing. "Transform…now!" There was no change at all. "And…now!" This time she tried striking a pose, bending her knees and bending her arms over her head. Still, nothing happened. "Flame on! …It's morphing time! …Shazam?" There was no change, not even a blue ember. "…uh oh."

"What the hell are you doing?! This is no time to be acting the fool!" The creature admonished.

"Kill them!" The guards barked, beginning to rush the group, and the creature stepped in front of Ryuji and Jolyne.

"Fine, I guess I'll have to do it myself! Come forth, **Zorro**!" The Creature declared, and blue flames swirled around it as a figure manifested behind it. The figure was a large black humanoid, larger than Ryuji and Jolyne, with a chest littered with ornate accents, an upturned collar, a belt buckle in the shape of a large 'Z', a bushy handlebar that reached its shoulder, and holding a small rapier in its oversized hands. Before the guards could transform, the figure, identified as Zorro, lunged forward. It swung its rapier in a stylized fashion resembling a Z, creating a gust of wind that blew back the guards. It had a light blue glow around its body. While they were off center, Zorro delivered a flurry of rapid fast stabs, skewering the guards and dispersing them into shadowy ash. The creature smirked victoriously as Zorro vanished, turning back to a slack jawed Ryuji and Jolyne. "Piece of cake."

"What the hell was that?!!" Ryuji asked.

"That was my Persona, Zorro."

"Persona…" Jolyne ran the word over in her mouth, and the creature nodded.

"My Persona is the spirit of rebellion within me given solid form in this place." The creature explained, and Ryuji looked at Jolyne.

"So then back there, in the cell. Was that…?"

"Maybe it was. It certainly sounds right…" Jolyne mused, and the creature adopted a quizzical look.

"What're you two mumbling about?"

"I managed to do something like that back in the cell downstairs." Jolyne answered. "I heard a voice in my head, then my clothes changed and something like that Zorro thing came out. It all vanished right after, though, and I haven't been able to bring it back out yet." Jolyne explained, and the
"So you awakened your Persona, but it sounds like the transformation's still unstable. That normally shouldn't happen. You must not have full control of your powers yet." It mused, when they heard the faint sound of footsteps approaching. "Time to talk later. We need to get out of here! C'mon, follow me!" The creature took off, its tiny feet almost a blur as it scurried across the drawbridge. Ryuji and Jolyne simply shrugged, and followed after it. However, Ryuji stopped in front of a cell, gazing at the occupant.

"Sakamoto, what's wrong?" Jolyne asked, looking at where Ryuji was staring. Inside was a young man around their age wearing a red sports uniform laying on his knees.

"That's a Shujin volleyball uniform…how'd he end up here?" Ryuji muttered to himself, and began reaching to get the keys out of his pocket.

"What the hell are you doing?!" The creature demanded to know, scurrying back over to them.

"What's it like I'm doing? I'm freein' this dude!"

"Wha…I don't…are you an idiot?! We don't have time to worry about other people right now! Besides, they're not even real!" Jolyne and Ryuji both froze at this.

"What do you mean 'not real'?" Jolyne asked, and the creature sighed.

"You really don't know anything, huh? I suppose there's no avoiding this…” the creature mumbled. "What we're right now is called a Palace, a sort of pocket dimension generated by its ruler's distorted desires and molded by their cognition." The creature explained, and the two just blinked.

"The ruler…hey, wasn't that Kamoshida guy dressed up like some kind of king earlier?" Jolyne asked.

"Look, as much as I'd love to stay here and explain everything, we don't have the time right now. Let's get out of here first, and I promise that I'll explain everything later." The Creature stated, Jolyne nodded.

"Alright, fine. Let's-"

"Screw that!" Ryuji cut in. "There's no way in hell that I'm going to just leave this dude in Kamoshida's hands! Just go on ahead. I'll catch up after I free this dude and-" he started to say, before stopping all of a sudden. "Oh crap."

"What now?"

"I uh…I might have dropped the keys somewhere back there." Silence hung in the air for a moment, before the cat-like creature spoke again.

"You idiot! Now how are we supposed to get out of here?!"

"Hey, it ain't my fault! Your weird wind thing back there must have knocked them out of my hand!"

"Why didn't you put them back in your pocket?!"
"Hey, in case you don't remember, we kinda got distracted by those guards! I didn't have the chance!"

It would go on like this for another minute, Jolyne watching the two of them argue and hurl insults back and forth. Dumb blonde, stupid cat, useless monkey, etc etc…before she decided she had had enough, snapping her fingers.

"Shut the hell up! We don't have the time for this!" She shouted. "Ryuji, I promise we'll come back for him later. But we can't help him if we get caught now, can we?"

"…no."

"And you-" she turned to the creature. "-need to be patient. It's been a pretty stressful day for us, so give us a break, will ya?"

"…fine."

"Good. Now, which way is the exit?"

"It's just through here." The creature said, leading them towards a door at the very end of the walkway they were on.

"Oh hey, I just realized something. We don't even know what to call you." Ryuji stated.

"Huh, everything's happened so fast I must have forgotten to properly introduce myself. You may call me Morgana." The creature, now identified as Morgana, answered as they approached the door. Ryuji and Jolyne pushed it open into a spiral stairwell, the three beginning to ascend it. "We're close to the end now. Just a little more and…oh no!" The thing that made Morgana panic was a wooden door at the top of the stairwell…with a huge, thick lock on it.

"For real?! You gotta be freakin' kidding me!" Ryuji complained, slamming his hand on the wall. "Can't believe I lost those friggin' keys…"

"Of all the luck…can't believe they locked this. Shadows here are smarter than I thought." Morgana mumbled, and Jolyne was about to ask what a Shadow was…when she felt a strange itch in her finger. "We could get through if I had a lock pick or my sword, but they confiscated all my tools when I was captured." That was when they heard the soft sound of approaching footsteps from behind them.

"They had to have gone this way! Find them!" The voice of Kamoshida bellowed, and Ryuji cursed under his breath.

"Damn, they finally caught up with us…there any other way out of here?" Morgana shook his head.

"This is the only way out of here. I suppose we'll have to stay and fight." Morgana stated, and Ryuji was about to ask a follow up question when Jolyne approached the lock. She held her finger over the keyhole, and two strings began emerging from her finger from the spot she had pricked with the stone shard the other day. They began to enter the lock, and after a moment, it thudded to the ground, unlocked. The strings returned to Jolyne's finger, while Morgana and Ryuji stared dumbfounded. "I've never seen anything like that before. How did you do that?!" Morgana asked, and Jolyne simply stared at her finger.
"I… I'm not sure…" She hadn't consciously done any specific action or knowledge, instead acting on what appeared to be… instinct.

"Worry about that later! We gotta move!" Ryuji pushed the door open into an ornate hall, Jolyne and Morgana right behind him. Ryuji slammed the door shut, while Jolyne pushed a small table in front of the door. It wasn't a moment to soon, as slamming sounds originated from the other side as soon as she pushed the table in front of it.

"That won't hold for long. Quick, through here!" Morgana instructed, ushering them through a small door in the hall. They were now in some kind of storage room that had a large open window in it. "Good, they didn't seal it." Morgana said to himself, and turned to his two human companions. "This is where we must part ways. Head through that window, and keep running until you make it back to the real world."

"Wait, you're not coming with us?" Jolyne asked, and Morgana shook his head once more.

"I still have unfinished business in this Palace that I need to take care of." He answered, when they heard the sound of a door breaking in the hall.

"Spread out and find them! They can't have gone far!" "Kamoshida's" voice barked.

"You need to go, now!" Morgana ordered. The humans shared a look, before approaching the window. Ryuji jumped out, landing on the ground below, and Jolyne began climbing over it. She cast one last look back at Morgana, before jumping out of the window. "Hmm, those two could prove useful. Especially the green haired one, if my suspicions are right…" Morgana mused to himself.

Jolyne emerged next to Ryuji in an alleyway. "You have returned to the real world from Kamoshida's palace. Thank you for your hard work." Jolyne's phone chimed from her blazer pocket. The two exited the alleyway, and looked around them. By all appearances, they were just outside Aoyame-Ichitome station. Some time had passed, as it was no longer raining.

"Dude, what… what the hell was all that?! With… with the flames and mask and the string, and… and Kamoshida?! Not to mention that weird cat thing…" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne slumped against a building.

"I… I have no idea."

"And what was that thing your phone said? 'You have returned to the real world'… what does that even mean?!

"I don't know, Sakamoto! I know about as much as you do!" Jolyne answered.

"Hey, what's all the yelling about?" A new voice asked, and the two turned to see two police officers approaching them. "Shujin students? Cutting class to fool around, are we?" One cop questioned.

"What? No way. We were trying to get to school, and all of a sudden we were at this weird castle!" Ryuji answered.

"…what?"

"The castle, man! Had a drawbridge and everything!" The two officers exchanged a look.
"Hand over your bags, please. You two had better not be in any drugs."

"Why would you think that?!!" One of the officers looked at Jolyne, who was standing up straight now.

"You his girlfriend?"

"No sir, we just met today." The two officers exchanged a glance.

"Head straight to school. Any more nonsense, and we'll be forced to contact your principal."

"Hey, I'm trying to figure out exactly what the hell's goin' on here too!" Ryuji protested.

"We just passed by Shujin. There was nothing out of the ordinary." Cop 2 stated. "Are you two sure you're not on drugs?" Ryuji was about to protest some more, when Jolyne grabbed the back of his head and forced him to bow with her.

"Sorry for troubling you, officers. Please, have a good day. C'mon, Sakamoto, I don't want to be late." Jolyne said in an almost sickeningly sweet time, before turning and dragging Ryuji with her.

"Ow ow, cut it out Cujoh!" Ryuji complained as he twisted out of her grip, walking alongside her.

"What was with the whole routine back there?"

"Let's just say I don't want to risk pissing off the cops right now." Jolyne answered as they turned down the alley once more. They took the exact route they did before, only instead of seeing the castle again, they were greeted with the front gate of Shujin Academy.

"What the hell...we went the exact same way. What the hell's goin' on here?"

"That's exactly what I wanted to ask you." A stern voice said, and the two looked to see Principal Kobayakawa. "I just received a rather interesting phone call from the police. Would you like to know what it was? We just saw two students with dyed hair cutting classes and spouting nonsense about castles. To think you've fallen this far already, Sakamoto-kun..." Kobayakawa scolded, before turning to Jolyne. "And you, Cujoh-chan. You're on thin ice around here as it is. What do you hope to gain by skipping your first day of classes?"

"I...we got lost, sir." Jolyne answered, and Kobayakawa crossed his short arms.

"Lost, hm? And where exactly did you two happen to get 'lost' together?" The portly man demanded to know, and Ryuji swallowed.

"A c-castle..." The principal scowled at Ryuji's answer.

"So, you have no intention of an honest answer?" He demanded, and the two remained silent.

"Someone mention something about a castle?" A familiar voice said that sent chill's up the duo's spine. Appearing behind the principal, wearing a t-shirt, track pants, and a stop watch around his neck...

"K-Kamoshida?!" Ryuji gasped out, and that's when the coach noticed him and Jolyne.
"Why am I not surprised it's you, Sakamoto? Y'know, you were never late when you had morning practice with the track team." Ryuji's face twisted into an expression of sheer rage that Jolyne had only ever seen one her Uncle Josuke whenever someone insulted his hair.

"And who's fault is that, you bastard!"

"Enough! I won't stand here and let you blame and insult Kamoshida-san for your reckless actions!" Kobayakawa interjected.

"It's alright, sir. Looking back, I share part of the blame," Kamoshida said, and smiled at Ryuji. Jolyne saw that Ryuji was almost seething and visibly shaking, gripping his right knee. "I get flustered when I get lost in this city, too. Why don't we just leave it that, just this once?"

"...very well. Come with me, Sakamoto-kun. Cujoh-chan, report to your home room teacher at once." Kobayakawa ordered, and Ryuji followed him into the school, stopping to glare at Kamoshida. The volleyball coach turned to Jolyne.

"So, you're the transfer student. You wouldn't have gotten lost if you'd taken me up on that ride."

"...I'm sorry, sir. My grandmother warned me not to get into cars with strange men." Jolyne began to walk up the stairs, refusing to meet Kamoshida's eyes.

"Yknow, extracurricular activities can only help people's perception of you. If you want, I can always arrange a spot for you on my volleyball team." The way he looked at her…it was the exact same way that the other Kamoshida had looked at her in the dungeon.

"...no thanks. Think I'll pass." They went their separate ways, with Jolyne entering the school and climbing up two sets of stairs to the third floor, where the faculty offices were held. Soon, she found herself before a woman with short wavey dark brown hair and tired eyes, wearing a yellow sweater with red and white stripes and a denim skirt. This was Sadayo Kawakami, the woman in charge of teaching Japanese language and the homeroom teacher of class 2-D, which was Jolyne's class. Needless to say, she wasn't happy right now.

"Just what were you thinking, being late on your first day? You've missed half the day." Kawakami scolded, with Jolyne looking at the ground. "Can you explain yourself?"

"...I got on the wrong train. Ended up on the other side of the city. This place is a lot bigger than Nagasaki." Kawakami sighed at Jolyne's answer.

"Sheesh, why'd they dump such a troublesome student on me? A male teacher would've been better suited for dealing with this..." the teacher mumbled. "I'll have you introduce yourself to the rest of the class after lunch. We'll just say...you weren't feeling well, so we had you come only half the day."

"Are people really gonna buy that?"

"Would you rather them know you got lost? Word travels fast around this school, and there are already plenty of rumors flying around about you, especially once it gets out you were with Sakamoto-kun." Jolyne looked up at this.

"Rumors? Gimme a break..." soon, after lunch ended, Jolyne was standing in front of class 2-D on the second floor, noticing Takamaki from the station sitting near the window, looking out of it.
"Class, I'd like to introduce our new transfer student from Nagasaki. Please introduce yourself, Cujoh-chan." Kawakami said, and Jolyne bowed.

"Hello, everyone. My name is Jolyne Cujoh. It's a pleasure to meet you all. I hope we can all be friends. Please forgive my tardiness, as I ate some bad seafood last night." And that's when the whispers started.

"That's the transfer student? She looks like trouble…"

"Not surprising she has a record when she looks like that."

"Quiet down, all of you!" Kawakami ordered, and looked around the room. "Let's see, there's an open seat…over there, behind Takamaki-chan. Would anyone mind sharing their textbooks with her, just for today?" As Jolyne walked over to her new desk, she passed Takamaki.

"Liar…" the blonde girl whispered, causing Jolyne to stop. "I saw you at the station this morning." Jolyne met Takamaki's eyes for a second, intending to find eyes of someone confrontational, potentially a problem, but instead, the blonde girl's eyes seemed…sad, almost defeated. Jolyne took her seat behind her. As Kawakami taught her lesson, Jolyne could hear some of the students whispering about her.

"Dude, I heard she ran a gang back in America!"

"Didn't she get charged for assault or something? What's she even doing here?"

"Word is the school only took her in because her dad's some big shot professor."

"What's with that hair? It's so weird."

"Three-quarters American, huh? She's like a reverse Takamaki…"

It went on like that for the rest of the day, no matter where she went. People talking about her, and not always behind her back. After the school day was over, Jolyne exited her classroom into the hallway, only to get hit with a headache. For a second, the students and teachers in the hallway vanished, replaced with an ornate hallway. Jolyne blinked, and it was back to normal.

"Hey, you ok?" Kawakami asked, coming up behind her.

"Yeah, it's just…it's been a tough day."

"I'm sorry about the rumors. We tried our best to keep it a secret, with the staff and the student council president being the only people who knew, but someone leaked it online."

"Of course, because my life was perfect enough as it was…"

"I'd suggest heading straight home. Sakura-san sounded pretty angry when I called him." Kawakami explained, and Jolyne sighed.

"This should be fun…"

"Oh, and another thing. I'd stay away from Sakamoto-kun if I were you. Don't get involved with-"
"With someone as handsome as myself?" Ryuji stated, walking up to them, and Kawakami sighed.

"Speak of the devil, and he shall appear..." she mumbled. "I heard the police caught you cutting classes. I somehow doubt that you got lost like she did."

"It was nothing. Don't worry about." Ryuji said, and leaned close to Jolyne. "Meet me on the rooftop." She spoke no words, only nodded. Kawakami watched him walk up the stairs to the third level.

"That boy...I'm just glad I don't have him in my class. I don't think I could handle the two of you at once." She sighed. "Although, he wasn't like that when he did track last year..."

"Why'd he stop?" Jolyne asked, and Kawakami looked at the ground.

"It's...not my place to say. Just make sure you don't get into any more trouble, ok?" With that, Jolyne walked up the stores towards the roof, opening it to see Ryuji sitting in a foldable chair.

"So, apparently you're everyone's favorite topic today. All I could hear today were 'tales of the scary transfer student.' Explains why you were sucking up to those cops and the principal." Ryuji said as Jolyne set her bag on the ground, sitting on an air conditioning unit.

"Really? Didn't notice. Heard a bit about you though." She noticed Ryuji stiffen up a little.

"So, sounds like we're in the same boat, huh? Just a couple of delinquents with weird hair and a bad rap. For the record, I don't believe any of that stuff about you."

"Thanks, Sakamoto."

"C'mon, after everything we just went through, we can skip that formal crap. Just call me Ryuji."

"Alright then, Ryuji, feel free to call me Jolyne."

"...so about today. Did all that really happen? All that stuff with the castle, and Kamoshida, then that weird demon thing and that talking cat..." Jolyne thought on Ryuji's questions, mulling over the day's events.

"He didn't seem to remember what happened today, although he did have that same expression on his face when he looked at me. Which...ew. Just ew." Jolyne mused.

"Thanks, by the way, for the dungeon. Saving my life, I mean. Not a lot of people would do that for a guy they just met."

"You're welcome." Jolyne replied, and Ryuji tapped his chin.

"The way that other Kamoshida though...you probably don't know about this, but there are a lot of rumors about him and how he treats the volleyball team."

"I have a sneaking suspicion I know how he treats his female members." Ryuji nodded.

"In addition to...that...word is he puts the volleyball team through hell everyday, and he even beats
them if they don't do well enough." Now that she thought about it, Jolyne had seen several students sporting bruises and casts, including a boy in her class. However, before she could think on it any further, Ryuji sneered and slammed his fist on the unit she was sitting on. "That damn bastard! Treats the school like his own personal playground…no, like his own castle, and the school just let's him do whatever he wants. Didn't you see how that fat bastard Kobayakawa bent over backwards when Kamoshida showed up? I can't stand it!"

"...I know this might be too personal too fast, but...why do you hate Kamoshida so much?" Ryuji froze for a second at his new friend's question, before he sighed, placing a hand on his right knee.

"I used to be on the track team here last year. Pretty damn good at it too, if I do say so myself. But our coach had to step down so he could take care of his sick mom or something, so Kamoshida took over. That's when things went to shit. He started pushing us hard, harder than a lot of us were capable of. Sprinting laps, withholding water from us...it was a nightmare. He told us that it was an 'Olympian method', but I didn't buy that shit. I knew he just wanted the track team out of the picture so that his volleyball team could take up the spotlight. So I went to his office, and called him on his bullshit. One thing lead to another, and...I swung at him. Turns out, that's exactly what he wanted. I gave that mopheaded bastard the excuse he needed to shut us down. After that, the track team was more or less disbanded, and any chance I had at a scholarship to a good college went up in smoke." Jolyne had been listening intently, hands clasped together.

"I'm...I'm sorry that happened to you, Ryuji."

"Don't worry about it, it's in the past." He said. "Y'know, that cat never did tell us what the deal was with that place, did he?"

"I don't think that he did, no." Jolyne answered, when she realized where this line of questioning was going. "Wait, are you seriously thinking about going back there?" The blonde shrugged.

"Maybe."

"Are you serious? We barely got out of there alive!"

"They took us by surprise, that's all. Besides, now you've got that cool Persona thingy, right? And that thing you did with the lock and strings. Should be a walk in the park."

"I have no idea how to control that. Remember when we were cornered by those guards after we freed Morgana?"

"Yeah, but that was like, performance anxiety or somethin'. Got it at my first track meet. You'll do better next time." Jolyne was out of reasons to refuse Ryuji. The truth was, she did want to go back to the Palace, if only to find out how it was related to the strange visions and dreams she'd been having. And that kid in the dungeon...she strongly suspected it was related to the rumors about Kamoshida's abuse. If there was one thing Jolyne hated, it was those who used their power to hurt those who couldn't fight back.

"...let me think it over. I'll get back to you tomorrow!" Ryuji grinned.

"Alright! Oh, and while I got you here, let me get your number and chat ID, so we don't have to wait until school to talk." He suggested, pulling out his phone.

"Aren't guys supposed to be more subtle about getting girls' numbers?" Jolyne asked as they
exchanged numbers and ID’s, before bidding each other farewell and heading home.

Later

The bell clinked as Jolyne entered Leblanc, being greeted with the sight of a very upset Sojiro. "Mind telling me why your school called me today, saying that you showed up hours later on your first day?"

"I got lost on my way to Shujin. Got on the wrong train, and ended up all the way by Tokyo Tower. Took me all morning to find my way back." Jolyne said, and Sojiro stroked his goatee, mulling over her answer.

"…I suppose that makes sense. You are still learning your way around here." He muttered. "Damn city's like a labyrinth. Take a wrong turn or get on the wrong train, suddenly you're on the other side of the country. Just don't let it happen again. Buy a map, if you have to. You get expelled from Shujin, and your life is essentially forfeit." Jolyne nodded.

"Yes sir." She answered, when Sojiro's phone went off.

"Hello? Yeah, I'm about to close up. Be there in half an hour." He said into his phone, when he noticed Jolyne staring. "What're you looking at?"

"Got a hot date lined up?"

"Yeah, her name's Noneof Yourbusiness. It's Russian, I think." Sojiro retorted, before holding the phone close again. "Hm? Oh, I just hired a part-timer. She’s a bit of a mouth on her. …yes, I can afford one. Since when do you care?" As Sojiro talked into his phone and began locking up, Jolyne retreated up to her attic home, setting her bag down and collapsing face first on her bed.

"What a fuckin' day…" she groaned, when her phone chimed. Pulling it out, she saw she had a new message from Ryuji.

RS: hey, it's Ryuji. You still alive?

JC: for now.

RS: that's good.

RS: So, about that the Palace…

JC: I honestly don't have the energy to think about that right now. Talk to you tomorrow.

RS: K.

Jolyne sighed, getting up and changing into her pajamas, letting her hair down. Her head thumped onto the pillow, eyes drifting shut…

…only to be greeted with the sight of a velvet lined cell again. Sighing as she sat up, Jolyne saw the twin wardens and their creepy boss staring at her. "This is the second time I've woken up in a cell today, and it was starting to get old the first time". She stated, standing up.
"Our master wishes to speak with you, inmate. I'd advise you heed his words." Caroline said, and Igor touched the tips of his finger together.

"First, let us celebrate our reunion. It brings me great joy to see you survived your first foray into a Palace." The hook nosed man stated. "And I see that you have awakened to your Persona as well. Excellent. It shall provide excellent support to your rehabilitation."

"Yeah, mind explaining that? Because I got it to work once, and after that all I could muster up was the thing with the strings." Jolyne stated, and Igor chuckled.

"So, you believe those powers to be the same? I suppose they operate on the same basic concept, but I can assure you, they are different." Igor explained. "Personas are the armor of the heart, given shape when confronted with other worldly matters. It is an extension of yourself and your will of rebellion. Should you ever enter the Metaverse once more, it shall feel more natural, like using a muscle or a limb. Your other power, your birthright, is something entirely different. You shall come to find this answer in time."

"Y'know, you kinda suck at answering questions." Jolyne said, and Igor merely chuckled.

"You stand as the bridge between two worlds, Trickster. All shall make itself known as the gap between them closes. Oh, what did you think of my Meta-Nav?"

"You mean that weird eyeball thing on my phone? Figures that you were behind that. Creepy looking app, creepy looking guy…makes perfect sense." Justine slammed her baton on the cell bars.

"Mind your tongue, inmate!" She barked, and Jolyne merely stuck her tongue out, causing Caroline to sigh.

"I suppose it's only natural for two personalities such as theirs to clash. To think we'd have such a stubborn inmate…" she muttered, and Igor cleared his threat, drawing attention back to him.

"I believed it best to provide a way to access the Metaverse and palaces in a method that would be familiar to someone of your age. As your rehabilitation progresses, I shall also grant this power to any that you believe may aid you in your cause." Igor explained, and chiming rang throughout the strange prison. "It seems our time is up. Until we meet again, Trickster."
After everything that had occurred the day before, Jolyne's first full day of school was uneventful, almost painfully boring. Everywhere she went, people were talking about the green haired transfer student. Some of it was just them wondering about why a person like her was at their school and hoping that she stayed away, but most of it was discussing her various crimes and illegal activities. Some of the rumors were either exaggerations or just plain falsehoods, such as how Jolyne had been arrested for almost killing some businessman or how she was caught “hooking up” with Ryuji, but not all of it was exaggeration. Especially the rumors about her life in America…Jolyne did her best to ignore them, heading straight to class and not interacting with anyone, save for a nod to Ryuji as she passed him in the morning.

The actual classes themselves were bordering on tedious. It was basically a bunch of teacher's blathering on about one subject or another, none of it really sticking in Jolyne's brain. When English class came around, a subject that the three parts American was already well versed in, the transfer student's mind began to wander, gazing at her finger and thinking back on how she had unlocked the door in the palace. Jolyne had never done anything like that before in her life, yet when it came time to will the strings out, it had felt as natural as breathing. Igor had called it her 'birthright', although Jolyne had no idea what that meant. Come to think of it, her Great-Grandfather Joseph used to tell her stories about how he had possessed strange powers in his youth, but Jolyne had simply dismissed them as the stories of a very old man. Now, though…

Arsene, on the other hand, was a different sensation altogether. After the palace and her chat with Igor last night, Jolyne felt…clearer. Like she had once been incomplete, but now Jolyne had finally found the part she was missing. Closing her eyes, she could feel Arsene's power humming inside her, almost as if she was hiding in the back of Jolyne's head, biding her time until her mistress would have need of her power once more.

Jolyne's eyes snapped open. Mistress? She'd never thought of herself in that way before, but just now…it had almost felt like Arsene had said that. How weird…

Jolyne's phone vibrated in her desk, signaling she had a new message Making sure the teacher wouldn't see her, she cast her eyes at the screen.

RS: Hey, you made up your mind about that thing we discussed yesterday?

JC: Aren't you supposed to be in class right now?

RS: Dude, it's just History. Besides, I've got more important stuff to worry about right now.

RS: So did you think on it?

JC: Yeah, I thought about it on the train ride over.

RS: And?
JC: …I'm in. I want to find out just what the hell is going on around here.

RS: Awesome!

RS: Meet me on the roof after school. We've got a few more things to I need to talk to you about.

Jolyne sighed, staring out the window while doing her best to concentrate on the lesson at hand. After the school day ended, Jolyne began making her way to the rooftop. On her way there, she spied Kamoshida talking to Takamaki by the staircase, and hid around the corner, eavesdropping.

"It's becoming awfully dangerous to ride the trains. You never know when one of this accidents might occur. If you want, I can always give you a ride home." Kamoshida suggested slyly, though Takamaki simply smiled.

"Thank you for the offer, but I'll be fine. I got called into work today. I think it's a swimsuit issue, so we're shooting down at the beach today." The blonde replied, the coach shrugging.

"Are you sure? You must be feeling awfully lonely lately, what with your best friend staying at volleyball practice all afternoon." Jolyne noticed the grip on Takamaki bag tighten at the mention of her friend. "I'm sorry about that, by the way. Regional's are coming up, so I need all my starters in tip top shape."

"...it's fine. I still see Shiho plenty on the weekends." She maintained a friendly tone.

"Well alright. Just don't work yourself too hard, you hear? Oh, and maybe see if I can get a sneak peek?" He laughed after the last sentence, giving the impression the coach was just joking, and Takamaki giggled with him. However, as soon as he turned and walked off, Takamaki smile morphed into a sneer, her grip tightening on her bag until her knuckles were white.

"Bastard…" she muttered under her breath, when she caught sight of the spying Jolyne. Without another word, she turned and walked down the stairs, leaving Jolyne alone to think. Next to her, Takamaki was the main subject of gossip, with many of the rumors focusing around the exact nature of her relationship with the volleyball coach, with many referring to her as "Kamoshida's slut" and using the car rides he kept offering her as evidence. Though after the conversation she had just witnessed, Jolyne began questioning the exact validity of those rumors. Heading to the rooftop, Jolyne saw Ryuji waiting for her, clutching his bag awfully tight to his chest.

"Finally! I was starting to get worried you weren't going to show." Ryuji greeted as Jolyne walked over. "So, you ready?"

"In a minute. Didn't you have something you wanted to talk to me about?" Jolyne asked, and the former track star snapped his fingers.

"Oh yeah, that's right! Look inside here." He instructed, handing the bag to her. She raised an eyebrow, and opened the bag, only to shut it as soon as she saw what was inside.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" Jolyne demanded.

"Dude, calm down. It's just-

"No, I won't fucking calm down! What the hell are you thinking, bringing something like this
here?!” Jolyne opened the bag, looking to make sure her eyes didn't deceive her.

Inside the bag was a small black handgun, a pistol that was unremarkable in every way. Except for the fact that it was, well, a gun. "Pretty real looking, isn't it?" Ryuji asked, pulling the gun out of the bag. "It's just a fake. One of those pellet guns." He explained, ejecting the clip and showing its contents to her, which consisted of several multicolored beads. And when Jolyne looked closer at the gun itself, she saw that it had it a plastic sheen to it.

"Where the hell did you even get something like this?"

"There's this place in Shibuya that deals in realistic airsoft guns. Whole place is filled with 'em. Bought this a couple of years ago, but never really had a reason to get it out until now."

"And that reason is?"

"Well, remember how those guards were chasin' us? I was thinking that if we ever get cornered like that again, we whip this thing out and get them to back off!"

"…Ryuji, this is a toy."

"They don't know that! They won't even be able to get close enough to tell!" Jolyne followed Ryuji's logic. She supposed it made sense, but she was still a little unsure about it. "I also brought us some medicine and first aid stuff from my house. Figured it could come in handy."


"I do have my moments. Oh hey, have you figured out how you did that thing with the strings yet? Even that Morgana thing seemed confused by it." Her friend asked, and Jolyne looked at her hand. Back then, bringing out the string had felt natural, like she was extending her shoulder. She took a deep breathe, and began to concentrate. That's when several strings began emerging from her hand, not just from the spot on her finger. As the length of the strings increased, it looked almost as if her hand was starting to unravel, yet it didn't hurt at all.

"Whoa…"

"What…what're you doin'? Is something wrong?" Ryuji questioned. Jolyne looked up, seeing an expression of confusion on his face.

"I'm doing that thing with the strings. See?" She held her string releasing hand up with the strings, earning a tilt from him, clearly confused by something.

"I don't see anything. You hit your head on something this morning?" Now it was Jolyne's turn to look confused.

"You seriously can't see them?"

"See what? Your cut your hand on something?" Jolyne's eyebrows furrowed, and she moved the strings over to Ryuji, tickling his nose and causing him to sneeze.

"What the hell? That came out of nowhere…” he muttered, and Jolyne's strings retreated back into her hand, restoring it to full shape.
"You seriously couldn't see any of that?"

"For the last time, see what? You just started spacing out and staring at your hand!"

“…never mind.” Jolyne waved it off. "So, what now?"

"Well, I was thinkin' we could head back to the station and retrace our steps from there. Big place like that, we're bound to find it sooner or later." Jolyne didn't exactly have any better ideas, so soon they were right outside of Aoyame-Ichitome station, right where they had first met. They followed the exact route they had taken to the castle…only to end up right in front of Shujin once more. "The hell? We take a wrong turn?" Ryuji demanded, only for Jolyne to shake her head.

"No way. We followed the exact same path we took yesterday." Ryuji sighed and scratched his head.

"Jeez, and here I was thinking it'd be easy if we knew where we were going…” he muttered, when a lightbulb went off in his head. "Hey wait, didn't you have some sort of navigation app on yesterday right before we got there?"

"Yeah, I think so." Jolyne replied as she pulled out her phone. She touched her finger to the strange eyeball, which Igor had referred to as the “Meta-Nav”, and laughed the app.

"Please select a destination." Its voice chimed, and Jolyne tapped recent history, selecting “Kamoshida’s Palace.” "Beginning navigation." And that's when everything began to change. Ryuji's phone screen changed to show the strange Meta-Nav icon. Around them, the world took on a purplish hue. Ripples began swirling around Shujin. When it cleared, the duo found themselves standing in front of the castle from yesterday.

"Whoa…” Ryuji gasped out.

"Well, guess this proves yesterday wasn't an accident." Jolyne mumbled to herself, when Ryuji noticed her clothes.

"Dude, check it out!" He yelled out, and Jolyne looked down at herself. She was once more dressed in the strange attire that had appeared inside the dungeon, complete with the mask and everything. Jolyne gingerly touched the outfit, only this time it didn't disappear.

"Well that's a relief…” she sighed out, and the two began approaching the castle entrance. They were about to open the door and enter, when a familiar voice called out to them.

"Hey!" The two turned to see Morgana, hiding behind a corner.

"Hey, its that cat thing from yesterday " Ryuji whispered.

"Over here, quick!" Morgana beckoned, and the two walked over to him. "What're you two thinking, waltzing in the front door like that? You'd be killed for sure!"

"It's good to see you too, Morgana." Jolyne dryly retorted, and Morgana began to analyze her.

"That hair…that voice…oh, you're the girl from yesterday! What are you two doing back here? You barely managed to escape from this place the first time."
"And what exactly is 'this place'? Is it the school?" Ryuji asked, and the cat-like being was sighed.

"I did promise I'd give you two some answers…well, you're not entirely wrong, Blondie. This castle is your school, but only to the castle's ruler." The thief explained.

"Castle's ruler…you mean Kamoshida, right?" Jolyne asked, and Morgana nodded.

"That's right. This castle is how his distorted heart views the school." Ryuji adopted a quizzical look.

"Distorted heart? What is that, some kinda condition?" Jolyne slapped him in the back of his head. "Ow! What was that for?!"

"Stop saying stupid shit and pay attention!" She ordered, Morgana sighed as he continued.

"I shouldn't have expected an idiot to understand. What's the best way to describe it?" Morgana pondered. "Basically, this is a realm shaped by the ruler's cognition, or the way he perceives the world around him in regards to this location. Tell me, how does he act in the real world?" Ryuji scowled.

"That asshole has the run of the place, sayin' and doing whatever the hell he wants to whoever. The principal let's him do it too. It's almost like that bastard thinks he's some…kinda…king…" Realization dawned over Ryuji's face. "Wait, wasn't that other Kamoshida dressed like a king or something?" Morgana nodded.

"This is a realm formed by Kamoshida's distorted desires and molded by his cognition. Everything in this world is shaped in some way by how he views this school." Jolyne raised her hand.

"So what's the deal with that other Kamoshida, the 'king' here?"

"That is Kamoshida's Shadow, a representation of the person he truly is. Here, he doesn't have to maintain appearances."

"So how come the real Kamoshida didn't seem to remember anything that happened here yesterday?" Ryuji asked.

"Let's see, how to explain this…ok, so this world's Kamoshida is a reflection of the one you know, sharing his personality, memories, and desires. Events that happen in the real world to the actual Kamoshida will affect his cognition, and by extension, this world. However, it doesn't go both ways. In most cases, the real Kamoshida will remain unaware of anything that happens to his Shadow."

Morgana explained, when the trio heard the sound of faint screaming, causing Ryuji to dryly swallow. "It sounds like you two really pissed him off by escaping yesterday. There's been more of that than usual today."

"Than usual…?" Ryuji gasped. "We…we saw a guy with a uniform from our school down there yesterday. Are there other people like that here?"

"Dressed like that? I believe so. Every day I'd see a bunch of them dragged away to a place called the 'Training Hall', likely on Kamoshida's orders, and that's usually be when the screaming begin."

Morgana explained, and Ryuji sneered.

"That damn bastard!" He turned to Jolyne. "We gotta go in there and see this for ourselves!"
"Believe me, I'm worried about those people too, but we can't just charge in there blind again. We barely got out last time." Jolyne answered.

"...I might know the way there." The two turned to Morgana. "I was able to move freely about this Palace for several days before they caught me, so I have some idea about the layout."

"Dude, are you sure?" The fake blonde asked, and Morgana nodded.

"It's the least I can do to repay you two, seeing as you freed me and all." Jolyne smiled at the short creature.

"Thank you, Morgana."

"However, you two need to follow my instructions down to the letter. No deviations. Understood?" Jolyne nodded, and Morgana looked at Ryuji. "I wanna hear you say it."

"Ok fine, I'll do whatever you say." He said, and Morgana grinned.

"Excellent. Now, the guards will be on high alert throughout the castle. Because of that, Blondie here will have to stay in the back, since you don't have a Persona, while me and Green Hair will take the lead."

"In that case, take this." Ryuji took the airsoft gun out of his bag and handed it to Jolyne. "They'll probably be more intimidated if you hold it, what with that mask and all." Jolyne took the gun, tucking it into the waist of her pants.

"Hmmm, it looks real enough that I wonder..." Morgana mumbled. "Alright, now follow me." He ordered, jumping into an open window. Jolyne and Ryuji followed him, ending up in a storage room similar to the one they had escaped from yesterday. In fact, Jolyne was pretty sure it WAS the same one. Morgana cracked open the door just a smidge so he could look outside. "Coast is clear. C'mon, down the stairs. The place we're going to is back inside the prison."

"Oh joy, my favorite place..." Jolyne snorted, following Morgana through an open doorway that looked like the door had been destroyed.

"Remember, the darkness is our friend. Stick to the shadows, and the guards shouldn't see you." Morgana instructed as they approached the end of the stairwell, hugging the wall and hiding behind a corner. The trio moved across the walkway, sticking to cover and avoiding any passing guards. This time, instead of going straight down the walkway, they turned at the cell that had held the volleyball student, now empty, to cross a drawbridge. Jolyne noticed Ryuji clenching his fist, forcing himself not to think too hard about the student's fate. Soon, they arrived in front of a wooden door with a banner over it that read "Training Hall", only this one had a guard standing in front of it.

"Well now what? I don't think we can sneak around this guy." Jolyne questioned.

"That's right, we can't. Our only option is to ambush him and force him into a fight."

"Wait, won't that just make him call for backup?" Ryuji asked, and Morgana shook his head.

"Not if we move fast. See that mask?" He pointed to the light blue mask that was over the guard's face. "I'm not sure how or why, but shadows tend to drift together and combine their essence into
one form, held together by that mask. In a palace, the Ruler's will often shapes the composite's appearance. By ambushing them and removing the mask, we'll be able to temporarily disrupt the control over them and forcing them to revert into their true form. Afterwards, they'll only be able to focus on the battle at hand, and won't call for backup." Morgana explained, and turned to Jolyne. "You ready?"

"Yeah." She nodded, and rushed the Shadow, jumping in top of its back and grabbing it's mask. She ripped it off and jumped back as it began to contort, its appearance blackening and red cracks spreading across its body before it exploded into shadowy energy. When it cleared, Jolyne and Morgana were face to face with one of the pumpkin headed creatures from her cell and a small, female looking creature with wings that resembled a pixie. Jolyne felt a dagger materialize in her hand, while Morgana now held a scimitar in his hand.

"Let's finish this quick! Let's go, Zorro!" The muscular Persona from yesterday appeared, and waved its sword in a circular motion, causing wind to circle around the Jack O'Lantern. It howled with pain as it dissolved into shadowy ash, and that's when Jolyne made her move, her mask disappearing from her face.

"Persona!" As soon as she called out, Arsene appeared behind her, and lunged at the Pixie. Arsene swiped her claws, obliterating the small creature in one move before dispersing back into flame, Jolyne's mask appearing back on her face.

"Not bad. Your Persona looks like it's a strong one." Morgana complimented as Ryuji emerged from the corner where he had been hiding. "Now, they won't all be that easy. Keep in mind that as we progress up the palace, the Shadows will grow more and more powerful."

"Got it." Jolyne acknowledged, and looked at the door. The sounds of screaming they had heard at the entrance had grown louder, clearly emanating from this location. She turned to Ryuji, who looked a little nervous. "You ready?" He swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Y-yeah. I need to see this." He replied, and the two pushed open the door. The part of the Training Hall they entered was a rather spacious hall dimly lit by torches, with several small cells filled with members of the volleyball team lining the walls. There were several large segments of iron bars along the walls. Ryuji approached the bars, and what he saw made him sneer and grab the bars. "That son of a bitch!" He yelled, and Jolyne approached the cell he was looking at.

It wasn't so much a cell as a different room being overlooked by the main training room. Inside, several young men, all dressed in volleyball uniforms, were clutching the net, crying out in pain as they were savagely beaten with sticks by guards. "Pain is progress! Pain makes you stronger! You cannot be a champion if you are weak!" Kamoshida's voice yelled over ceiling mounted speakers, likely a recording of some sort. Jolyne moved over to the next cell, a similarly sized room, and saw more volleyball team members running on some sort of large treadmill, only at the very end was a spiked roller. "If you can't keep up, you're useless to me! You might as well be dead! There can be no place in my volleyball team for those who cannot push past their limits!" The voice blared. In another large area, there was a student being held suspended in the air in front of a cannon by ropes. Every few seconds, the cannon would fire a volleyball that would hit him straight in the chest.

"So this is what they do in here. I never imagined it'd be something so brutal..." Morgana muttered as they watched what could only be described as torture.

"Hey, Morgana." Ryuji's voice growled, and the two looked to see him visibly shaking, seething with rage. "These guys...they ain't real, right? Like that guy you tried convincing me about
"Yes, that's correct. They're cognitive duplicates, based around the way the real Kamoshida perceives them. Essentially, they're fancy dolls."

"I ain't gonna pretend like I even understand any of what's goin' on here or how it works, but if this place and these guys are based off of Kamoshida's perception…then does that mean these guys are goin' through something similar in the real world?"

"...I'm afraid so." Morgana answered, and that's when Ryuji snapped.

"I fucking knew it! That goddamn monster…who the fuck does he think he is?! He ain't got no right to put people through this shit!" Ryuji yelled. "That's the exact same crap he told everyone on the track team. 'You'll be stronger for it. Pain is just a sign of weakness…' I'll make him pay for this!"

"Ryuji, calm down." Jolyne beckoned.

"Fuck that! You don't know...you don't know what he did to us!" The former track runner yelled, and pulled out his phone. "I was plannin' on getting these guys outta here, but if it turns out they ain't real, ok getting This is all the proof we need to prove that the rumors are true! I'll take pictures, and get that bastard fired!"

"...it's no use." A weak voice called, and the trio looked to see it had come from a bruised, beaten boy in a cell. Jolyne recognized him as a boy from her class. Mishima, she thought his name was. "King Kamoshida's word is absolute…no one dares dispute it. He knows what's best for all of us." The Cognitive Mishima said, and Ryuji sneered, moving his phone so that he could get a clear shot of the bearings.

"Fuck that! This stops here and...dammit!" He yelled. "Why ain't my camera workin'?! I thought I charged this thing?!"

"You can't capture images of the cognitive world. It doesn't exist the same way as the real world does." Morgana explained.

"Then...then I'll memorize their faces! I'll find the real them, get them to rat on Kamoshida, and finally get rid of that bastard!" Jolyne watched as Ryuji began doing just that. When Ryuji had told her his history with Kamoshida, Jolyne had figured he may've harbored resentment for being taken advantage of. But this...this was pure hatred. She had never seen anything like this before.

"Ryuji..."

"Kamoshida must be a truly extraordinary monster in order to cause him to harbor this kind of animosity." Morgana wondered out loud, a concerned look on his face as Ryuji went from cell to cell, memorizing the faces of the inmates.

"Alright, and...that's the last one. I recognize most of these guys, so this shouldn't be a problem." He stated, clearly still enraged, but for now he looked like he was keeping it in check. "C'mon, let's get outta here and-"

"Stop right there!" A voice called, and the three turned to see a guard had entered the room. "Wait, you three are the intruders from yesterday! Your defiance ends here!" It yelled, exploding into shadowy energy and emerging as one of the small Pixies. Jolyne quickly dug the gun from her
waistband and pointed it at the Shadow, causing it to widen its eyes.

"Stop right there!" She commanded, finger on the trigger. "Just walk away and forget you ever saw this, and-"

*BANG!*

The two humans were both surprised by the very real gunshot that came out of the toy gun, the shadow dispersing into ash with a scream. "What the fuck?! I thought this was a toy!" Jolyne shouted, dropping the gun.

"I-it's supposed to be!"

"Hmmm, so it looks like my theory was correct." Morgana spoke up, causing the two to look at him. "You brought that so the shadows would think it's real and back off, right?"

"Yeah."

"This is a word based around perception. As long as an item like that is seen as the real deal, it'll be treated as such." Morgana explained.

"Really? That's awesome!" Ryuji exclaimed, as Jolyne bent down and picked the gun back up.

"This place gets weirder and weirder." She sighed as she tucked the gun back into her pants. "Ryuji, you got their faces memorized?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah I got 'em all memorized."

"Good, then we need to get out of here. I don't want to stay around here any longer than we have to." Morgana instructed, heading towards the door with Jolyne behind him. Ryuji cast one last look back at the guys in the cell, before going after them, catching up with the two outside the door.

"So what's the deal?" The masked girl asked as Morgana looked around the corner, surveying the room.

"They know we're here now. It looks like they have guards watching the way we came down here." Morgana reported, and Jolyne cursed.

"And I don't suppose we can fight our way out?" She asked, and Morgana shook his head.

"Our Personas would be useless in a confined space like that. Besides, I don't think you have the stamina for a prolonged battle like that yet." He explained.

"C'mon, big place like this, there's gotta be another way out!" Ryuji inquired, and Morgana scratched his chin in thought, and Jolyne felt an itch in her hand, just like she did at the lock the other day. She knelt down and placed her hands on the ground, closing her eyes. "...what're you doin'?" As soon as he said that, strings began spreading out from her body, starting with her hand, and beginning to travel around the dungeon area, working their way through the cracks. "Whoa..." As the strings got further away, Jolyne's body began to unravel, before her eyes snapped open, the strings rapidly retreating into her and revealing her body.

"There's a way upstairs back through the training hall we just came from. It'll put us right in the
central hall by the exit. If we hurry, we can make it there before they get guards there." Jolyne reported, and she noticed the two staring at her. "What?"

"How did you do that?" Morgana asked.

"It just felt...natural. I was thinking about how we could find a way out, and I just... knew how to do that." Jolyne explained. "It almost felt like I could 'hear' the guards talking through my strings, talking about places they could look for us."

"So like that thing where you put a string between two cups, and it works like a phone?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne shrugged. "Is this part of that Persona thing?"

"I don't think so, but I could be wrong." Morgana pondered, and Jolyne thought back to Igor's words last night. He had told her that the trick with the strings was completely different than Arsene, calling it her 'birthright.' "Well, I suppose we can't look a gift horse in the mouth. Let's go." The three ran back through the training hall, Ryuji doing his best to avoid looking in the cells, and coming out the other end into a small hallway. Moving through the hall, they were soon in front of a stairwell leading straight up. Without a word, the three climbed it, opening the door at the top and emerging in the room that Jolyne and Ryuji had first arrived in.

"Well this place looks familiar." Jolyne said. "C'mon, let's hurry and."

"There you are! And here I was thinking I'd have to search every nook and cranny myself" A disturbingly familiar voice called out. They looked at the staircase, seeing a grinning Kamoshida descending, flanked by two guards in ornate gold armor.

"An ambush...why am I not surprised? Having an unguarded door right by the exit all seemed too convenient." Morgana cursed to himself, and Kamoshida merely laughed.

"I won't allow myself to be made a fool of twice, you worthless thieves!" Ryuji scowled and clenched his fist.

"This school ain't your castle, you asshole!" He yelled, getting a sneer from Kamoshida.

"You just don't know when to quit, do you Sakamoto? You're even dumber than I thought!"

"I memorized the faces of those guys you're torturing down there. As soon as we get out of here, you're going down, you son of a bitch!" Kamoshida simply sighed.

"You're the same as always, Sakamoto. Rushing off half cocked, dragging everyone else down with you. It's the track team all over again." This sent Ryuji over the edge.

"You shut your damn mouth!"

"Or what? You'll punch me again?" Kamoshida taunted.

"Hey, asshole." Jolyne called out, drawing his attention. "Everyone around here treats you like some kinda sports god. But me? I see what you really are. You're not a god, a king, or whatever else you see yourself as. You're just a perverted control freak that gets off on picking off on those who can't fight back." Kamoshida laughed at this.

"Oh yeah? And what're you going to do about it?" Jolyne smirked, blue sparks beginning to emanate
"I'm going to make it so that you shit out teeth for a week. Arsene!" Her mask vanished as her Persona appeared behind her. "Take him down!" Arsene obeyed without a word, flying at Kamoshida and raising her claw. However, just as Arsene was about to bring her claw down, the gold Armored guards crossed their staves together in front of Kamoshida, blocking the swipe.

"Tch. So be it." Kamoshida stated, Jolyne having Arsene fall back as the staves separated. The guards each began to change, both taking the forms of an angelic being with red wings wearing some sort of medieval themed armor, complete with a sword.

"Archangels! Be careful, these are powerful shadows!" Morgana warned as he brought out Zorro. Kamoshida held out his hand towards them.

"Kill them." He ordered, and the Archangels spread their wings and flew towards the group, each swinging its sword. Zorro parried one with his rapier, while Arsene brought her wings together and blocked the other one, although it forced her back, causing Jolyne to be moved back as well, almost as if on some sort of wires. Arsene broke the stalemate and began swiping with her claws as the two took to the air, with the Archangel avoiding each swipe. Eventually, once there was enough distance, the Persona attempted to use its energy blast, although the archangel avoided it. It retaliated by firing a small ball of pure light that hit Arsene square in the chest, exploding into energy and knocking her on the ground, knocking Jolyne down as well.

Morgana was faring mildly better with his archangel, parrying each strike of it's sword with Zorro's rapier. However, the Archangel was slowly forcing the Persona back, and by extension Morgana, backwards with its strikes. Morgana attempted to use a gust of wind to blow back the shadow, but it had no effect. The Archangel seized its opening and grabbed Zorro by the theist, throwing it and Morgana over to the ground by Jolyne. Ryuji dropped to his knees, dumbfounded by what he had just witnessed. "No way…" Kamoshida merely laughed, the Archangels reverting back to their guard forms as he walked over to the downer thieves.

"How pathetic! This is what you get for defying me!" The Shadow taunted, stepping on Morgana's back.

"Agh! You piece of…" Morgana began to curse, and Kamoshida looked at Ryuji.

"I bet you came here on a whim and dragged these two along with you, right?" He asked, and Ryuji began to shake.

"That's…that's not…"

"What a worthless piece of trash, getting worked up so easily. How dare scum like you even think of raising your hand to me! Have you not forgotten the kindness I showed the track team by supervising them after your coach left?" This unnerved Ryuji, and he found his words again.

"You call that shit kindness?! You abused us simply because you didn't like our team! Nakamura almost died because of you!" Ryuji shouted back, and Kamoshida sneered.

"That track team was an eyesore! The only one who deserves accomplishments and recognition is me alone! To think that trash like you believed you could have a future. Who else was going to show you the truth? That you were merely worthless trash, the same as your father!" Kamoshida taunted, and Ryuji slammed his fist in the ground.
"You shut your damn mouth right now, or else I'll-"

"You'll what? Punch me again? It'll just go down the same as last time! Hell, I'll tell the exact same story I did then, too!" Kamoshida said, his face adopting an expression of false empathy. "You have to believe me, Principal Kobayakawa, I didn't have a choice. I was merely acting in self defense!"

"Shut up!" Tears were now welling up in Ryuji's eyes.

"Your son was trying to kill me, Mrs. Sakamoto! It's unfortunate that he'll never run again, but I had no choice but to break his knee!" A shocked expression spread across Jolyne and Morgana's faces, as Ryuji collapsed onto his knees, visibly shaking.

"So that's why…" Morgana stated. Jolyne's reaction was less subdued.

"You bastard! When I get my hands on you, I'm going to shove my foot so far up your ass-" She started to shout, when a guard came up behind her and shoved her face to the ground.

"This is what happens when you dare to oppose me!" Kamoshida taunted, and Ryuji was shaking as he stared at the ground.

Am I gonna lose it all again? He took it all from me…my scholarships…the track team…the friends I had…all gone, because of him! Now this…What's even the point… He thought to himself, tears falling to the ground as he gave into despair…

"Ryuji!" Jolyne's voice called out, and he looked up at her struggling against the guard's grip. "Don't let him win! You have to stand up for yourself! Otherwise, you'll-"

"Silence!" Kamoshida cut off, grinning at Ryuji. "Watch as these hopeless scum you've dragged down die, simply because they associated with trash like you!"

"…you're wrong." Ryuji's comment caught Kamoshida off guard, wiping the grin off his face as Yuji began to raise himself up off the ground. "All you do is use people, casting them aside as soon as they're not useful anymore. If anyone here is trash, it's you, Kamoshida!" He got on his feet, weakly moving to Kamoshida. "Right now, the only thing I want…no, the only thing I need…is to make you stop looking down on me with that stupid smile on your face!"

"Finally! You've made me wait quite awhile, you know." A voice declared within Ryuji's head, one that sounded suspiciously like his own, and he gripped the side of his head as splitting headache began to form. "You seek power, correct? Then let us form a pact." As the voice spoke, the headache grew worse, forcing Ryuji to the ground as he writhed about in pain. "Your name has already been disgraced, so why not raise the flag and wreak some havoc? The other you who resides within desires it thus." Ryuji began crawling towards where Jolyne and Morgana were being held down. "I am thou, and thou art I! There is no turning back!" As he approached the guard holding down Jolyne, blue embers began swirling around his face, originating from his downturned face. "The skull of rebellion is your flag henceforth!" Now, Ryuji looked straight up, a skull shaped mask manifesting around the top half of his face as he stared daggers at the gold Armored guard.

"Hmph. What can you do? Simply cower in fear and watch!" The Shadow asked, beginning to raise its sword and preparing to bring it down on Jolyne…
Ryuji began to stand up, hands grasping the skull shaped mask as he rose to his full height. "I… ain't gonna let you take anything else from me… ever again!" Ryuji yelled as he ripped off the mask. As soon as he did, a pillar of blue flames erupted, consuming Ryuji and blowing the guards and Kamoshida back. When it cleared, Ryuji was clad in a black leather jacket, black leather pants with knee pads, combat boots, yellow gloves, and a red ascot around his neck. In his hand, he held what looked like a pipe.

Behind him stood an ethereal figure dressed as a pirate. It had a skull like face with a single red eye and an eyepatch, with a tricorn hat on its head. Two crossed swords were mounted on a leather belt across its light blue skeletal chest, with black pants on its legs. In place of its right hand, there was a small cannon. The entire figure was mounted on top of a small black boat modeled after a pirate ship. Up until now, Ryuji's face had been down turned, until he looked up, a maniacal grin on his face.

"Now that's what I'm talkin' about! Wassup, Persona?" Ryuji grinned as Jolyne and Morgana got off the ground, and saw the gold guards beginning to get off the ground, holding his hand towards them. "Take 'em down, Captain Kidd!" Captain Kidd lunged forward, crushing one of the shadows under its boat before it could transform. However, it didn't reach the other Hurd in time, and it transformed into its Archangel form once more. Captain Kidd simply aimed its arm cannon at the Shadow, and a blast of lightning came out and hit the shadow head on, knocking it down to the ground.

"Now's our chance! Let's hit it while it's down!" Morgana ordered, and the two humans nodded as they all attacked the archangel, using both their melee weapons and their personas, destroying it.

"It won't be long before more guards show up. We should get out of here while we still can." Jolyne instructed, and Morgana and Ryuji nodded, his mask reappearing on his face as Captain Kidd dispersed. The three ran out the entrance, leaving Kamoshida behind to cower on the floor.

"Another one with the same power as the other two? This shouldn't be possible…" he whimpered out.

Outside the Palace, the trio ran across the drawbridge, stopping and hiding in the alleyway they had first arrived in. "Nice job, Ryuji!" Jolyne congratulated, and Ryuji smirked.

"What can I say? Easy as… wait, what am I wearing?" He asked, noticing his change in clothes. "How'd I end up in these clothes?"

"That's what happens when you awaken your Persona in this world. They clad you in attire that they feel best compliments your personality." Morgana explained.

"That… doesn't make any sense. At all." Jolyne answered, and Morgana shrugged.

"That's just how it is. I didn't make the rules."

"Then who did? And how do you know all this stuff, anyway?" Ryuji asked, and Morgana's face fell.

"I… I'm not sure. I just… do." Jolyne and Ryuji blinked at this.
"How can you not know? You've been here longer than we have!" The green haired girl asked, and Morgana sighed.

"I'm missing a large chunk of my memories. All I know is that I woke up in this form one day, and I've been searching for my memories ever since. I came here looking for any sort of lead. All this information about the palace feels like instinct, sort of like your trick with the strings." He explained, and Jolyne sighed.

"And just when I thought we were finally going to get some answers, too. Gimme a break…" she lamented, and turned to Ryuji. "Well, I don't think we're going to get anything else done. Wanna head back?"

"That sounds great. I dunno about you, but I'm absolutely exhausted." Ryuji answered, and the two turned to Morgana.

"Well, see you around, I guess." Jolyne said, and Morgana nodded, watching as the two retreated back into the real world.

"To think I would meet not one, but two Persona users here. Talk about a coincidence…" he mused to himself.

Evening

The bell above the door chimed as Jolyne entered Leblanc. "Welcome back," Sojiro greeted from behind the counter. "I didn't get a call from the school today, so I'm assuming you actually went to school today."

"Yep. No problems this time." Jolyne responded.

"Still, you're awfully late getting back tonight. Where were you?"

"I…made a friend, actually. He was showing me around the city." Sojiro's eyebrows perked up at this.

"'He', huh?"

"Nothing like that, you old geezer. He's not my type."

"Whatever you say. It's none of my business what you do or who you do it with, as long as you're not getting into trouble. Here, take this." Sojiro tossed a key at Jolyne, which she caught. "I can't stay here all night waiting to lock up until you come back, especially if you plan on having a social life. Just make sure you lock the door when you leave, and when you come back at night." He explained, and she smiled at him.

"Thanks, Boss. I won't let you down." Jolyne said, and began heading towards the stairs towards her room.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Your father called this afternoon." Jolyne stopped dead in her tracks, hand gripping the stair rail. "He wanted to see how you were settling in. I just told him you were doing well, but I didn't mention the incident yesterday." Jolyne remained silent. "I told him you'd call him as soon as you got a chance. Left his number on the desk up there."
"...thanks, I guess." She replied, and her guardian just sighed as she ascended the stairs. Jolyne set her bag on the counter by the stairwell and walked over to the desk. Sojiro had left the number by the locket, and Jolyne picked up the number.

Jolyne watched from the window as he walked away towards a cab, not even glancing back as he got in.

She scowled, and ripped up the paper, tossing it in the trash can. Her phone chimed, and she pulled it out as she sat on her bed, seeing a message from Ryuji.

RS: Dude I'm so exhausted. I can barely type this right now.

RS: Was it like this for you yesterday?

JC: More or less.

RS: I don't think I've ever been this tired before, even after track practice.

RS: So about what Kamoshida said in there…

RS: Sorry I didn't tell you the whole truth yesterday.

JC: It's fine.

RS: No it's not. I made you think it was just some grudge.

JC: You barely know me. I understand.

RS: Still, I shoulda been upfront with you.

JC: You at least remember the faces, right?

RS: Yeah. I only recognized a handful of them, though.

JC: It's better than nothing.

JC: There's a volleyball rally or something tomorrow, right?

RS: Yeah.

JC: Than we can start there and ask around.

RS: Sounds good.

RS: Oh hey I almost forgot.

RS: When I got home today, there was this weird eyeball app thing on my phone.

Jolyne's eyes widened, and she began typing once more.
JC: Delete it. Now.

JC: And reboot your phone, just in case.

RS: I tried all that, but it just showed back up.

Jolyne thought back to her conversation with Igor last night. The long nosed man had mentioned that he would gift the app to any who might aid Jolyne in her “rehabilitation”.

JC: Don't worry about it.

Several minutes passed by with no response, so Jolyne had figured Ryuji must have passed out on his end, something that sounded really good right about now. Jolyne changed into her sleepwear, and hit the sack, closing her eyes…

…only to open them to a familiar sight. "Y'know, this is already starting to get kind of old." She called as she sat up from the stone cot, turning to Igor and the twin wardens.

"Welcome back, Inmate." Justine greeted, now holding a clipboard.

"Our master wishes to speak with you once more." Caroline stated.

"And here I thought it was because you missed me, Shorty." Jolyne snapped back, and turned to Igor. "What do you want now?"

"Simply to congratulate you, Trickster. Your rehabilitation is off to a fantastic start." Igor replied in his deep, almost sinister voice. "To think that you would meet another who shares your aesthetics and has also been robbed of his place to belong…Fate truly appears to be on your side. You have formed what is sure to be the first of many bonds that shall aid you upon your rehabilitation." Jolyne gripped the bars as a glowing card began descending from the ceiling. It landed on Justine's clipboard, on top of a blank piece of paper. There was a flash of light, and when it cleared there was a picture of Ryuji, with 'The Chariot' written above it. Before Jolyne could ask what was going on, the chimes sounded once again, her vision darkening as she exited the room…
Jolyne knew the school almost worshipped its volleyball team, or rather the man in charge. That would've been clear even if she hadn't seen the way Kamoshida viewed this school. However, she didn't grasp the magnitude of how much Shujin valued the volleyball team until it was the day of their rally. Apparently, the competitive season was about to start, and so the entire back half of the day was going to be dedicated to an exhibition match between the members of the team in order to try and drum up support. However, most of students were simply mulling about, waiting until they could go home.

Jolyne was now dressed in Shujin's gym uniform, which consisted of a red tracksuit that had white chevrons on the sleeves and a plain white t-shirt. She had met up with Ryuji in the gym, and were currently watching the game. "So, how you feelin', champ?" Jolyne asked, watching as Kamoshida participated in the match.

"Honestly? Feel a lot clearer. Like…a fog's cleared up or something. I can still sorta feel Captain Kidd in the back of my head."

"Any weird dreams? Like say, a guy with a weird nose?" Ryuji was clearly confused by this.

"That's…oddly specific. Why you askin'?"

"…no reason. Forget I said anything. So, who're these guys we need to be looking for?" Cujoh asked.

"Alright, so I only know a few of 'em. One's in your class, another's a third year, and there's a first year who lives in my apartment building."

"The one on my class is the one who was in the cell, wasn't he? Mishima, right?" Ryuji nodded.

"That's him down there." He pointed towards the game, where Jolyne could see the dark haired boy engaged in the opposite team from Kamoshida. As Jolyne looked, she saw Takamaki watching the game, sitting near the court.

"What about her? What's her deal?" She gestured over to the Quarter-American, and Ryuji followed her gaze.

"What, you mean Takamaki? I wouldn't expect much. She's all buddy buddy with Kamoshida." Jolyne wasn't quite sure, but the interactions between the two she had witnessed over the past few days made her doubt how accurate that was. Still, she figured it'd be better to chase the leads they had before chasing after gut feelings. "So, how do we wanna do this? Go after them together, or split up?"

"I think it'll be easier if we split up. Cover more ground in more time." Jolyne instructed, getting a nod from Ryuji.
"Gotcha. I'll take the first year since he sorta knows me."

"Sounds good. I'll take the third year." They watched as Kamoshida spiked the ball, hitting Mishima square in the face and knocking him down. "Gotta say, the bastard knows his way around the court. It'd probably be awesome if we didn't know what we did." Ryuji didn't say anything, simply watching as they gathered around Mishima and ushered him off the court. Jolyne could sense something was bothering him. "Something you wanna get off your chest?"

"It's nothing. It's just…ever since what went down between me and him, I'd kinda given up on taking Kamoshida down. But now, that bastard's going to get what's coming to him." Jolyne simply nodded in agreement before the two finally split up.

Jolyne headed to the third year classrooms, located on the third floor, and did her best not to stand out, though that wouldn't have been easy even if she didn't have green hair. Ignoring the whispers that were caused by her presence, she looked around for her target. Eventually, she spied a boy that has bandages on his face and his arm in a sling, wearing a volleyball uniform. Jolyne approached him, causing him to notice her. "You're that transfer student, right? What do you want?" He questioned and, for a second, Jolyne considered buttering him up, putting on a false, innocent facade to try and lower his guard. After all, tough guys love helping girls in need. But then she remembered all the rumors swirling around about her, and figured that wasn't the best course of action. So instead, Jolyne was going to get right down to the point.

"Where'd you get those bruises?" The boy swallowed nervously at Jolyne's question.

"I-I fell down the stairs at the station yesterday. That's it." Jolyne didn't quite believe him.

"You fell down, huh? You sure Kamoshida didn't give them to you at volleyball practice?" This clearly unnerved him some more. "Look, I know you're probably scared to death of him, but if you come forward, you can help take him down for good."

"I…I don't know what you're talking about! You've been listening to those stupid rumors about coach Kamoshida, right? Well they're not true! You can't bring him down to your level!" The boy shouted, leaving Jolyne sighed as he stormed off.

"Gimme a break. I wonder if Ryuji's having any luck…" she sighed, pulling out her phone to text him.

JC: Any luck?

RS: Nope.

RS: I almost got him to cave, but another volleyball member showed up and he clammed right up.

RS: Although he did mention something that's worth following up on.

RS: You?

JC: Take a guess.

RS: Damn .

JC: Meet you back up on the roof?
RS: *Nah, some third year's already up there gardening or something.*

RS: *Meet me in the courtyard. See you there.*

Jolyne made her way up to the courtyard, seeing Ryuji already waiting for her at a table. "Yo. So no luck?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne shook her head.

"Nope. Tried selling me some story about how he fell down the stairs at the station. He was rattled when I brought up Kamoshida, though, so that's something. You?"

"I almost got him to talk, but a second year showed up and he clammed up. I did get somethin' out of him, though." Jolyne raised an eyebrow at this. "Apparently, Kamoshida gives 'special training' to Mishima."

"That's the one that got knocked on his face out there by Kamoshida, right?" Ryuji nodded. "Think we can get him to talk?"

"Two of us together? I'm sure we can get something out of him."

"What you know about him?"

"Not much. Went to middle school together, but he mostly kept to himself. Even more so since he became a starter on the volleyball team." Ryuji explained. "He's in your class. You know anything?"

"I've been here less than a week, and about two thirds of the school thinks I'm some sort of career criminal. People aren't exactly lining up to talk to me. Though when he looks at me, he does seem…I dunno, guilty I guess." Ryuji scratched his chin at this.

"Really? Weird. What do you suppose that's about?" Jolyne simply shrugged.

"Might as well go talk to him. He should be at the nurse's office by now, right?" Ryuji nodded. "Then lead the way."

"In a minute. I really gotta take a leak right now. Be back in a bit." Ryuji answered, then turned and walked off, leaving Jolyne alone at the table to mull over what their investigation had turned up. It hadn't been much, but she had just about expected that. Maybe if they pushed Mishima just right…

"Hey." A female voice called, and Jolyne looked up to see Takamaki standing in front of her. "Cujoh, right? I don't think we've actually had a proper introduction." Takamaki said.

"I don't think we have. Takamaki, right?" The blonde nodded. "Pleasure to meet you."

"So, I actually wanted to talk to you about something…" Jolyne raised an eyebrow. "What exactly is your deal?" The friendly tone that Takamaki had adopted earlier was gone, instead being accusatory now.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that weird lie about how you were sick on your first day. Plus, there are all those weird rumors about you…" Takamaki's bright eyes were filled with an unspoken accusation, but Jolyne
wasn't unnerved.

"I got lost. The school didn't want to embarrass me on my first day, so Kawasaki said I was sick. That's all. Now for those rumors-"

"Don't sell me that crap. We spoke at the station. It's not possible to get lost that bad, even on your first day." Takamaki retorted.

"Hey, whaddya want with her?" Ryuji called out, reentering the court.

"I could ask you the same thing, Ryuji. You're not even in our class."

"We just…happened to get to know each other. Don't see how it's any of your business." Takamaki didn't quite seem to buy Ryuji's answer.

"What're you planning on doing to Mr. Kamoshida?" Both Jolyne and Ryuji were thrown off by the question. "Word travels fast around here. I know you two have been asking around about those abuse rumors."

"Oh, I see what this is about. You're just trying to cover your boyfriend's ass, aren't you?" Jolyne saw Takamaki flinch at Ryuji's accusation. "If you knew about half the shit he's pulled, you'd dump him right away." Takamaki clenched her fist.

"…you don't know what you're talking about." She eventually replied, before her expression melted into one of concern. "Look, I don't know what you two think you're trying to pull, but no one's going to help you. I just wanted you to know that." With that, Takamaki walked off, leaving the two behind.

"Sheesh, she's always so aggressive. Guess something's never change…" Ryuji mumbled, catching Jolyne's attention.

"You two have history?"

"Sort of. We were friends in middle school, but we stopped talkin' after we got put in different classes in high school." Ryuji sighed. "Well, we're burning daylight. C'mon, let's go." The unlikely duo departed from their table and arrived in front of the nurse's office, which Mishima was just leaving.

"Hey, Mishima! Got a minute?" Ryuji called out, drawing his attention.

"Sakamoto?" Mishima grew pale as soon as he noticed Jolyne. "A-and C-Cujoh-San?! W-what are you doing here?"

"Calm down, will ya? We just wanna talk." Ryuji assured him. "Oh, and don't believe any of the rumors about her. She's chill." Jolyne flashed a peace symbol.

"Pleasure to meet you." She greeted, only to get a meek nod from Mishima as he swallowed.

"R-right. So, what did you two want to talk about?" Mishima asked, and Jolyne leaned in close.

"Word is that Kamoshida gives you 'special training' at practice. That how you got those bruises?" As soon as she asked that, Mishima backed away.
"W-what are you trying to say?! M-mister Kamoshida is simply trying to get me at my best!" He protested, though Ryuji stepped forward.

"C'mon man, don't give us that crap. We know what he's doing to you guys at practice. We know about the abuse!"

"Y-you have no idea what you're talking about! Mister Kamoshida is simply pushing us to do our best! Yes, he has been paying special attention to me lately, but that's because I let my skills go dull during the offseason. I'm a starter, so I have to be at my very best at each game." Mishima 'explained.'

"Then what was that spike in the face on the court today? He coulda seriously hurt you!"

"That…that was my fault. I let my guard down, that's all." Jolyne was reminded of the cognitive Mishima that they had seen in the cell yesterday. The cognitive being had been beaten down, completely devoid of all hope and resistance. And even though they were two completely separate beings, she could see the exact same expression on Mishima's face.

"Mishima, is he forcing you to keep quiet?" She noticed him swallow at this. "Please, just tell us the truth, and-" Jolyne started to say.

"What's all this commotion about?" A disturbingly familiar voice said, and the two turned to see Kamoshida standing behind them. "You two again? Everywhere I go, you two are right behind me. What are you doing here?" The volleyball coach questioned.

"I could ask you the same thing." Ryuji spat, Kamoshida giving him a glare.

"I was checking on my starter. I hit him awfully hard out there, and I wanted to make sure he was alright. How are you, Mishima?" Kamoshida asked, Mishima swallowed dryly.

"I-I'm fine sir. No concussion."

"Good. We've got a game next week, and we can't afford any starters missing out." Kamoshida then turned to the dyed hair duo. "Now, what're you two doing here?"

"We were…asking Mishima about some homework for Ms. Chouno's class." Jolyne lied, though Kamoshida raised an eyebrow.

"She teaches English, right? Sakamoto I understand, but I thought you were from America."

"Exactly! Which is why I space out during the lessons, and can't remember what the assignments are!" That answer seemed to satisfy Kamoshida, even though he didn't seem to completely buy it.

"Alright, but I don't think Mishima's in much shape to be recalling assignments right now." The coach turned to Mishima. "Head on over to practice. You wouldn't be here at all if you didn't have such a crappy form."

"I-I'm not feeling well, sir. The nurse said I should lie down at home." The boy nervously replied, but just got a glare.
"Then I guess you may as well just quit. I'll have no choice but to remove you if you can't improve your form." This clearly unnerved Mishima, reason why Jolyne and Ryuji stepped between them.

"Hey, you deaf? Kid says he doesn't feel so hot." She defended, and Kamoshida stared her down.

"Now where'd that polite girl from the other day go? Didn't principal Kobayakawa tell you to keep in line?" He warned, and turned to Mishima. "You coming to practice, or not?"

"...I'll go."

"Good." The coach turned back to Jolyne, and he leaned in close to her. "Don't fuck with me, little girl. I'll make you regret ever setting foot in my school." He warned, but she didn't waver, even as he turned to Ryuji. "Just give me a reason, and I'll finally get rid of you once and for all, you piece of trash."

"I'd like to see you try, asshole." Ryuji shot back. Kamoshida glared at them one last time, before walking off. "I'm gonna be glad when we blow the whistle on that asshole once and for all."

"...it's no use." Mishima whimpered out, drawing their attention. "Proving that he abuses us is meaningless...because everyone already knows. The school, our parents..." the pair's eyes widened at this.

"No way..." Jolyne gasped out. "Your parents just...let this slide?"

"What choice do they have? We don't have a lot of money, and being a part of a champion volleyball team is essentially a free ticket to a good school."

"That's bullshit!" Ryuji shouted.

"Don't be a pain. It is how it is. Besides, shouldn't you of all people know how pointless it is to go against him?" Mishima walked off as Ryuji grit his teeth, leaving the two alone.

"Dammit! So that fat asshole sweeps it all under the rug? No wonder Kamoshida views this place as a castle!" Ryuji groaned.

"So what now? Are you going to give up?" Jolyne asked, and Ryuji looked at her with determination.

"Hell no! I ain't stoppin' til that mopheaded bastard's gone for good!" Jolyne smirked.

"That's what I thought."

"So, what's our next move?" Jolyne tapped her chin.

"Way I see it, we can maybe get the rest of the team to come forward."

"But if the principal already knows-"

"Then we don't take it to the principal. We get them to take it to the media." Ryuji raised an eyebrow at this. "If word gets out that he's allowing a teacher to abuse students, then he'll go into damage control mode, and blame it all on Kamoshida, firing him."
"Whoa, you really think that'll work?"

"Kobayakawa cares about the school's reputation more than anything. It's why he accepted me here. If there's a chance that it'll tarnish the academy's name, he'll definitely throw Kamoshida under the bus." Ryuji grinned at this.

"Oh hell yeah! I'm down!" He held up his hand, and Jolyne gave him a high five.

"We'll start first thing after school tomorrow. For now, let's head home and brainstorm." Jolyne instructed, and Ryuji nodded, the two going their separate ways.

4/14/20XX, After School

Takamaki was sitting in the school's courtyard next to a girl with brown eyes with dark hair done up in a ponytail, with bandages around her face and her legs. "How're you doing, Shiho? It feels like forever since we've talked face to face." The girl, now identified as Shiho, weakly smiled.

"I'm doing fine, Ann. I…I should be heading to volleyball soon." Ann frowned.

"That bruise above your eye…is that from practice?" She asked, and Shiho averted her eyes, swallowing.

"I-it's nothing." A look of concern spread across Ann's face.

"Are you sure you're not pushing yourself too hard?" Shiho weakly smiled.

"I'm fine. Volleyball's the one thing I'm good at, so a little bruising is worth it." Ann didn't seem convinced, but before she could speak, her phone chimed. "That's work, isn't it?" Shiho asked as Ann pulled out her phone, and the blonde nodded. "Go ahead. I need to get going anyway."

"Are you sure?" Ann asked, and Shiho nodded. Ann watched as she walked away, concern never leaving her face.

Currently walking down the stairs, on her way to meet her friend in the courtyard as well, was another female student who was having volleyball related difficulties. "Give me a freakin' break…" Jolyne groaned out as she entered the first floor. During lunch, Ryuji and her had split up and gone around, trying to get more volleyball members to come forward about Kamoshida's abuse, but punching a brick wall would have been more productive. Everywhere they went, the volleyball team stonewalled them, all sticking to some sort of story to explain their injuries. If Jolyne and Ryuji didn't know any better, then Shujin had the clumsiest volleyball team in the world, given how many 'fell down the stairs' at the station and at home. At this rate, they'd have an easier time getting the Shadow Kamoshida to confess…

Jolyne was roused from her thoughts when she bumped into Shiho in front of the vending machines. "Shit, I'm sorry." She apologized.

"It's alright. I wasn't looking where I was going." Shiho responded, and that's when she noticed who she bumped into. "Oh, you're that transfer student, right? From class D?" Jolyne sighed in response.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to mug you or anything. Just wasn't watching where I was going."

"No, it's my fault." Shiho apologized, and looked at the ground. "Hey, I realize this may be
overstating my boundaries, but…don't let the rumors get to you, ok?"

"Ah, I don't worry about it. I don't really care one way or another what people think about me."
Shiho smiled at this.

"That's good."

"Why the interest?"

"Hm? Oh, You just…remind me a lot of my best friend. She has to put up with a fair amount of rumors as well, and yet she doesn't let it get to her. I wish I could be as strong as her…" Shiho answered, and blushed when she realized the time. "I-I'm sorry for rambling. I need to go to practice."

"See ya around." Jolyne waved, and Shiho nodded before walking off. Those bruises…didn't she see her on the volleyball court yesterday? And now that Jolyne thought about it, they hadn't seen any female volleyball members back in the cells in Kamoshida's Palace. Weird…shaking it off, Jolyne walked over to the courtyard where a certain blonde former track star was waiting for her. "Yo, any luck?"

"None. They all kept sayin' the same shit Mishima did about how it was pointless." Ryuji reported.
"Man, what're we gonna do?" Jolyne tapped her chin, thinking it over. They couldn't call the cops, because Kamoshida might just cook up some bullshit excuse. They couldn't attack him and risk getting caught, earning Jolyne a one way ticket to prison. They'd almost have an easier time trying to get the Shadow Kamoshida to confess. Wait…

"Finally, I found you!" A familiar boyish voice said, interrupting Jolyne's thought train.

"You say something?" Jolyne asked. Ryuji shook his head as a black cat approached them.

"Don't think that you two can get away without paying me back!" The voice said as the cat jumped onto the table, and that's when the two realized where the voice was coming from.

"I-is the…is that cat talking?!!" Ryuji gasped out, and Jolyne weakly nodded, in a similar state of disbelief.

"W…what the hell's going on around here?" The transfer student asked. As if things hadn't gotten crazy enough since she'd been here.

"You know, you two whipped up quite a storm the other day. It got so bad in the Palace that I actually had to leave." The cat said, and Jolyne looked closer at it. White paws, white mouth, black fur, yellow collar, bright blue eyes, and that voice…it almost looked like …

"…Morgana?" She asked, and the cat almost seemed to nod. Ryuji wasn't so quick on the uptake.

"Why the hell's the cat talking?!? What the hell is going on?!!" He shouted, and Morgana got angry.

"I am NOT a cat! This just happens to be the form I took when I came to this world!" Morgana shouted.

"Why'd you leave the Palace and come here?" Jolyne asked.
"Like I said, you two whipped the Shadow into quite the frenzy after you left. The guards were beginning to find all my hiding spots, and so I decided to get out while I still could." Morgana explained.

"Does…does that mean you have a phone?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne at him with a deadpan expression on her face.

"Does the cat…have a phone?" Morgana simply scoffed.

"Please. When you're on my level, you don't need a phone to get in and out of the Metaverse. Although I did get lost on the way out, and it took me awhile to get back to this location." He explained.

"So how can you talk?" Morgana made a motion similar to a shrug at Ryuji's question.

"I don't know. I just can."

"Well, this isn't the weirdest thing that's happened to me in the last few days…" Jolyne muttered. "So, what do you want?"

"Well, I couldn't help but overhear you two just now. You're trying to take down the Kamoshida in this world as well, correct?" Jolyne nodded. "No luck out here, right? You know, I could tell you a thing or two about how to take him down." Morgana stated matter of factly, getting a scowl from Ryuji.

"That condescending attitude…yeah, you're Morgana, alright."

"You were still doubting me?!?" Morgana shouted.

"Hey, keep it down." Jolyne instructed as two teachers rounded the corner, and Jolyne hid Morgana behind her bag.

"Did you hear that meowing? I think it's around here somewhere." One of the teachers stated.

"To think we have to spend our time looking for a cat of all things…what a waste of my time." The other teacher said, and they noticed Jolyne and Ryuji. "Hey, you two. Have you seen a cat around here?"

"Uh, no sir." Ryuji answered, and the first teacher sighed.

"Damn, I could've sworn I heard it."

"We haven't checked the student council room yet, have we? Let's go." The second one said, and turned back to the students. "If you two don't have any more business here, is suggest you head on home."

"Yes sir." Jolyne answered, and as soon as the two teachers left, Jolyne moved her bag.

"Meow? What, are we the only ones who can hear you?" Ryuji asked, and Morgana almost looked shock.

"Wow, I'm surprised you picked up on that." Ryuji sighed, scratching his head.
"This is the weirdest week of my life…Anyways, how can we take down Kamoshida if we can't get the volleyball team to come forward?"

"We punish the king, right?" Ryuji's eyes widened as Morgana nodded at Jolyne's answer.

"Whoa, is that actually possible?"

"After all that you've seen, you're still a skeptic? What an idiot…" Morgana muttered.

"This probably isn't the best place to talk about this. The roof should be clear by now, right?" Jolyne stated, and opened her bag and placed it on the table. "Hop in." Morgan's looked undignified.

"Wait, are you serious? You can't expect me to get in-hey!" Morgana protested, when Ryuji picked him up by the scruff of his neck and place him in the bag. Before he could say anymore, Jolyne zipped up the bag, leaving the zipper cracked just enough for Morgana to breathe. As soon as they were up on the roof, Jolyne opened the bat, and Morgana jumped out. "You bastards! Even the guards weren't that cruel to me!"

"Hey, calm down. We couldn't exactly carry you through the school in our arms." Jolyne explained, but Morgana was still indignant. "So, how do we punish the king and make it affect our Kamoshida?"

"Well, remember when I explained to you how the Palace was shaped?"

"It's based on how Kamoshida views the school, yeah?" Ryuji answered, and Morgana nodded.

"That's right. It changes based on how his perception is. However, in most cases, it only goes one way."

"But not always, right?" Jolyne asked, and the cat nodded.

"There's only one method I know of that will cause a change in the real Kamoshida. We have to erase the Palace." Eyebrows were raised at this. "Think about it. The Palace is the manifestation of Kamoshida's twisted desires. If that were to disappear…"

"Then Kamoshida's desires would vanish as well." Jolyne finished, and Morgana nodded.

"Precisely. The memories of his actions would stay, but without the desires to justify them…"

"Then he'll realize what a shitty person he is?" Ryuji finished.

"Not how I'd put it, but essentially, yes." Morgana answered.

"So how do we do that? We need to get explosives or somethin'?"

"Nothing so flamboyant as that. What I'm proposing we do…is we steal his heart." Ryuji was about to open his mouth. "No, Ryuji, not his literal heart. Rather, we steal the Treasure at the center of the castle."

"And that is…?"
"A Treasure is essentially the manifestation of the desires around which a Palace is formed. It's what holds it all together. If we take that away, then the Palace will crumble, bringing about a change of heart." Morgana explained. "However, there is a risk here. If we do this wrong, we may end up accidentally killing the Shadow."

"And that's bad because…?"

"The Shadow is essentially the manifestation of the innermost self, what others may call the 'soul.' If we take away the soul, we'd essentially render him brain dead. There's even a chance he could even die." The human's eyes widened at this.

"Whoa whoa whoa. Are you serious?!" Ryuji asked. "I may hate the dude, but that doesn't mean I want him to die!"

"Calm down. If we do this right, then there's almost no chance that'll happen." Morgan's answered, and looked at them. "What do you think? Do you two wanna do it?"

"I…I don't know. I need to think about this." Jolyne responded, and Ryuji nodded in agreement.

"Same here."

"That's understandable. This is a lot to process." Morgana replied. "I'll hang around up here until you make up your minds." Ryuji's phone chimed.

"Ah damn, my mom needs me to pick up a few things from the store. I gotta jet. See ya." Jolyne waved after him as he left the rooftop, leaving her alone with Morgana.

"So, changing his heart, huh?" Jolyne asked, leaning against an air conditioner, and Morgana hopped onto it.

"Having a tough time grasping it?" She shook her head.

"Nah. After this week, I'll believe anything." She looked at her strange compatriot. "Y'know, when I moved here, everyone told me to just keep my head down, live a normal life, stay out of trouble. This all seems like the exact opposite of that."

"Things don't always work out the way we went them to. I certainly never pictured myself working alongside people such as you." The 'cat' replied, and Jolyne chuckled, scratching behind his ear.

"Ain't that the truth?" She pushed off from the air condition. "Well, I gotta get going too. Later, Morgana." He nodded, watching as she left.

A short while later

Jolyne stepped into Shibuya Station, beginning to make her way over to the line that would take her to Yongen, when she passed a familiar set of blonde pigtails. "…I already told you, I'm not up to it. Just give it a rest please!" Takamaki said into her phone, and Jolyne decided to stick around and listen, especially after the dumbfounded expression that covered Takamaki's face. "Wait, what? That's not what you promised! What kind of teacher are you?! This has nothing to do with Shiho!" The blonde shouted. "Hello? Answer me!" Takamaki cursed as the line went dead. She curled up and began to shake, tears beginning to well up in her eyes. "Shiho's starting position…who does that bastard think he is?!" Takamaki sobbed, and Jolyne walked over to her.
"Takamaki? You ok?" Jolyne asked as she placed a hand on Takamaki's shoulder, only for the blonde to react and recoil away.

"C-Cujoh? What... were you eavesdropping on me?" Takamaki asked, and Jolyne held up her hands.

"Not on purpose. I was just walking by, and happened to notice you."

"That seems like a really bad habit of yours." Takamaki began wiping away her tears. "I'm sorry, that was out of line. So... how much did you hear."

"You were arguing with someone. Something about a starting position?" Takamaki swallowed and gripped her bag.

"It's... it's nothing. Don't worry about it. I really need to go and..."

"Is this nothing named Kamoshida?" Takamaki had been about to cut and run, but Jolyne's words had stopped her dead in her tracks.

"I... I don't..." Takamaki was about to run, before Jolyne grabbed her arm, looking her in the eye.

"Let's get something to eat. My treat, ok?" After a moment, Takamaki nodded, and soon they were in the Big Bang Burger on Central Street. "So, you and Kamoshida. What's the deal there?" Jolyne asked, and Ann sighed.

"You've heard the rumors, haven't you? About me and him?"

"Yeah. Don't believe a word of them, though." Takamaki lightly smiled.

"Thank you." Her smile fell once more. "He... he's the one who first spread the rumors, trying to pressure me into making them come true. So far, I've managed to keep him at bay just by flirting with him, but lately, that doesn't do the trick anymore."

"Why acknowledge him in the first place? Why not just tell him to kiss off?" Jolyne asked, and Takamaki pulled out her phone.

"This is why." She showed Jolyne the screen, and Jolyne saw a picture of Takamaki smiling next to the girl she'd bumped into at Shujin. "This is Shiho Suzui. She's a second year, a starter on the volleyball team, and... my best friend." Takamaki explained. "Volleyball was the first thing Shiho was truly great at. But I was worried she wouldn't be able to keep her starting position, and so..."

"You flirt with him to make sure she can keep her position." Jolyne finished, and her companion nodded.

"Yeah. I'd flirt with him, accept his car rides, and he'd be content for a couple of days. But lately, Kamoshida's been getting more... aggressive. I'd avoided giving him my number for the longest time, but somehow he got a hold of it. He... he told me to go to his place after he's done with practice today." Jolyne's eyes widened as she realized the implication. "He said that if I don't, then he'll take Shiho off the team. I've been telling myself it's all for her sake, but... I can't take it anymore." Ann gripped her shoulders and began to shake. "Kamoshida doesn't care about anyone. All he cares about is using people for his own sick gain." Tears began to fall down her face. "I... I hate him! I hate him..."
more than anything! But…I can't do anything. You can't fight against him, or he'll destroy you. What should I do?” Jolyne was silent, trying to find the words. "I…I'm sorry. None of this is your problem."

"...I disagree. If anything, this just gives me more motivation." Ann looked up at this. "Guys like him who get off on taking advantage of people really piss me off. After this, there's nothing I want more than to see his ass tossed out on the street." Jolyne stated, and Ann chuckled.

"You're pretty weird, yknow? Everyone else just ignores me." Ann said, wiping away the tears. "You're not nearly as bad as the rumors say." Jolyne just smirked.

"Hey, I'm bad to the bone, baby." She joked, and Ann giggled.

"I kinda had a feeling all those rumors were exaggerations. You almost seemed...lonely, like you didn't belong anywhere." Jolyne looked at the table, idly stirring her drink with her finger.

"Believe it or not, I'm...kinda used to that. It's always been that way for me, even in America. Not a lot of places for someone like me to fit into." Ann's eyes widened at this, before she lightly smiled.

"Seems like we're the same in that regard. Maybe that's why I feel so at ease around you." She stated, before sighing. "I wish he'd just forget about me. Forget about Shiho, about...everything. As if something like that could ever happen..." As soon as the blonde said that, Jolyne stopped stirring her drink, thinking back to Morgana's words on the rooftop.

"It...it could happen." She stated, and Ann raised an eyebrow at this, before chuckling.

"I wasn't expecting a serious answer, you know. But...I do feel a little better." She said, and began to collect her things. "I'm gonna head home. Thanks for everything."

"Want me to walk you to the train?" Jolyne asked, and Ann shook her head.

"Thanks, but I'm good." She got her bag and got up from the booth. "I'll try to think of a way to persuade Kamoshida without giving him what he wants." Jolyne just smiled and waved at her.

"Alright. See you tomorrow." Ann nodded, before she left the booth, leaving Jolyne to think.

**Shujin, sometime later**

Volleyball practice had just ended, and Shiho was heading towards the exit with her things, when Mishima approached her. "Um, Suzui-San?" The boy was staring at the ground, an expression of absolute regret on his face.

"Yes, Mishima-kun?" She asked, and Mishima swallowed.

"M-Mr. Kamoshida's asking to see you in his office." He replied, and fear spread through Shiho's body.

"I-I see. Thank you, Mishima-Kun."

"...I'm sorry." Mishima whimpered out as she walked past him, causing her to tighten her grip on her bag. Walking up the stairs to the PE faculty office, Shiho entered to see Kamoshida alone at his desk.
"Ah, Suzuki-San. Thank you for coming." He greeted, and Shiho started to break into a cold sweat.

"M-Mishima-kun said you wanted to speak to me?"

"That's right. I'm a little concerned about your performance lately. If this keeps up, I may have to move you from our starting lineup." Kamoshida explained, and Shiho gasped.

"I-I'm sorry, sir. I just…have a lot on my mind right now."

"Hey hey, don't panic." He 'reassured' her. "Whether you can stay as a starter or not depends entirely on you."

"R-really? What do you need me to do?" She asked, and Kamoshida grinned at her.

"All I need you to do is remain completely quiet until I'm finished…"

Later

Jolyne was in her attic home at Leblanc, doing some homework, when her phone chimed.

RS: Hey, so I know it's late, but have you given any thought as to what Morgana said?

RS: I don't really get all this stuff about 'stealing desires', but if we mess up, he could end up brain dead or something…

JC: How does that make you feel?

RS: I dunno.

RS: Sure, I hate him, but killing him?

RS: I don't wanna end up a murderer over him.

RS: So what do you think about all this?

Jolyne thought about her conversation with Ann, about the expression on her face when she talked about how he had her trapped. If there was a way to make it so that Ann would never feel that way again…

JC: I think we should do it.

RS: For real?!

JC: If there's a way to break his grip on the school, I think we should take it.

RS: I dunno.

RS: Let me think on it some more.

Jolyne leaned back in her chair. They had to do this. There was no other way. If they couldn't get to Kamoshida through normal measures, then they'd have to go the Supernatural route. She sighed, got changed into her pajamas, and went to bed.
Jolyne was sitting in Social Studies, listening to the teacher prattle on about checks and balances. She didn't really care, instead making little doodles in her notebook. She was currently working on a squiggly doodle of Arsene…when a familiar cat shaped head stuck out of her desk. "Well? Have you made up your mind?" Morgan's asked, causing Jolyne to slam her hand over her mouth to keep from shouting.

"Jesus! What are you doing in here?!" She whispered, and the teacher's ears perked up.

"Hm? Did I just hear meowing? Could that rumored stray cat be around here?" He asked a loud, causing Morgan's to freeze up.

"Stay quiet!" Jolyne whispered, and the teacher looked at her.

"Settle down! This is an important lecture!" He ordered, and Jolyne just nodded, before her phone vibrated in her pocket. Setting it inside her desk next to the cat inside, she read the message from Ryuji.

RS: *So I've given it some thought.*

JC: *And?*

RS: *I can't think of any other way.*

RS: *Can't believe I have to listen to that damn fur ball…*

Morgana simply scowled, or at least did the feline equivalent. "If only he knew I'm reading this too." He was about to speak some more, when a student on the other side of the room stood up from the desk.

"Hey, what's that?" The student asked, pointing out the window. "Oh my god, is she going to jump?!!" Mishima shot up as soon as he realized what the classmate was pointing at.

"Suzui…?" He gasped out, and Ann and Jolyne's eyes widened.

"Shiho…?" Ann gasped out, standing up and running out the door, much to the teacher's chagrin.

"Hey, settle down! Return to your seats at once!" But it was no use, as all of the students had already vacated the room. Jolyne ran over to the window next to Ann, seeing Shiho standing on the edge of the roof.

"What the hell is she doing?!" Jolyne asked, but all Ann could do is watch in terror.

"Quick, someone get up there!" A student yelled, but everyone's eyes remained transfixed on Shiho. She looked over to Ann, weakly smiled, mouthed something out…

And she jumped.
Chapter 5: Flames of Retribution

Chapter 5

Ann and Jolyne stood at the window, stunned speechless as they watched Shiho fall. "No way…" Jolyne muttered out, while Ann began to shake.

"Shiho…no…” The blonde turned and ran down the hall. "Move!" She ordered, pushing students aside.

"Hey, wait up! Dammit…” Jolyne began to run after the blonde, passing Ryuji in the process.

"Hey, what's-"

"Courtyard! Now!" She barked, and he ran after her without a word. They quickly descended the stairs, right on Ann's heels as they arrived at the courtyard entrance. However, there was already a massive crowd in front of the door, but that didn't deter Ann, who began pushing her way through the crowd. Jolyne and Ryuji were right behind her, forcing their way through the throng.

"Hey, move it!" Ryuji shouted, and the pair finally made it to the courtyard. An ambulance had already arrived, the paramedics having placed Shiho on a stretcher. Ann looked like she was about to collapse.

"Shiho…no…”

"Everyone, please remain calm!" A panicking Kobayakawa yelled, and a Paramedic approached him.

"We need someone to go with her." He stated, and Kobayakawa swallowed nervously.

"M-me?! But I can't possibly abandon the school at a time like this! Someone else will have to go." Ann stepped forward at this.

"I'll go!" The paramedic nodded, gesturing for her to get in the ambulance as the two began to pick up Shiho. However, as Ann walked past her, Shiho began to stir, and Ann knelt down. "Shiho, why?"

"I…I'm sorry. I just…I can't take it anymore."

"Can't take what?" Shiho mumbled something once more, and Ann's eyes widened.

"Kamoshida…?!" She gasped out, and Jolyne's eyes widened. That was all Shiho managed to say before passing out, and the paramedics loaded her onto the ambulance and drove off, leaving a crowd full of students, including a dumbfounded Ryuji and Jolyne.

"I can't believe Suzui jumped. What the hell…" Ryuji muttered, when he noticed his companion was silent. Not only that, but she seemed to be shaking. "Jolyne? Hello?" She ignored him, instead turning towards something out of the corner of her eye. That 'something' was a rather nervous looking Mishima, who was currently sweating buckets.

"No way…” Mishima gasped out, but as soon as he saw Jolyne staring at him, he began backing away, before running into the school.

"Hey, get back here!" She called out, before turning back to Ryuji. "Let's go!"
"Right." He nodded, and the two chased after Mishima. Eventually, the manager to corner him in the empty boy's locker room.

"W-what do you two want now?" He nervously asked.

"Why'd you run, Mishima?" Jolyne demanded, and he looked away.

"I…I didn't run…"

"Cut the bullshit! She jumped and tried to kill herself!" Ryuji interjected, causing the volleyball player to flinch.

"Please, just leave me alone." Mishima pleaded, and Jolyne placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Mishima, please, just tell us. We're not going to rat you out. Kamoshida doesn't have to know you even spoke to us." Mishima looked away for a moment, before he began to speak.

"Suzui…was called up to the PE faculty office yesterday by Mr. Kamoshida after practice." Jolyne and Ryuji's eyes widened. "He does this every time he's in a bad mode. He calls people up to his office, and he…he beats them. I've been up there often"

"So the physical abuse rumors were all true." Jolyne said, and Mishima nodded.

"That's not all. Sometimes, when he's in a really bad mood, Kamoshida…I think he does something different to the female members." Mishima didn't elaborate on this, although the implication that hung in the air was more than crystal clear.

"That bastard…!" Ryuji growled, and stormed off while Jolyne clenched her fists.

"Sakamoto, wait!" Mishima called after him, and turned to Jolyne. "What is that idiot doing?!" Jolyne was silent, her head turned so that he couldn't clearly see her eyes. Without a word, she took off after Ryuji. "Wait, what are you doing?!" Mishima received no answer, instead sighing as he followed after her. The two entered the practice building, following Ryuji to right in front of the PE Faculty Office. Ryuji swung the door open as he barged into the room, where Kamoshida sat alone.

"You son of a bitch! What the hell did you do to her?!" Kamoshida looked up at the trio with an expression of annoyance on his face.

"You're like a bad rash, Sakamoto. What are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb with me!" Ryuji yelled as he kicked a chair in his way, causing Kamoshida to get up.

"That's enough! I won't stand here and let you yell whatever you want!" He barked, and Ryuji was about to start another shouting match…

"What you did…wasn't coaching." Ryuji and Kamoshida both turned to Mishima, who had just spoken.

"What did you just say?" Kamoshida growled, and Mishima swallowed the lump in his throat.

"You…you ordered me to call Suzui up to your office here, and…and I can only imagine what you did to her!" Kamoshida sneered at the Boy.

"Be very careful now, Mishima. You're going on and on about things you have no proof about. You're making these claims because you can't quite cut it as a regular, aren't you?"
"That's not-

"Even if what you said is true, hypothetically speaking, what can you do about it? We just got a call from the hospital. Poor Suzui's slipped into a coma, and her chances of recovery are slim at best. I'm afraid no one's around to corroborate your little story." Ryuji and Mishima's eyes widened, while Jolyne simply stared at the ground.

"No…Suzui…" Mishima whimpered out, while Ryuji was seething.

"You goddamn bastard! I'll make you pay!"

"Tch. This again? We need to have another case of 'self defense?'" His face, and the way he said those words, was the exact same as his shadow the other day. Ryuji clenched his fists, and was about to swing…

…when Jolyne grabbed his arm. "What're you doin'? Let me go!"

"Calm down, Ryuji. We should go." Jolyne's voice was flat and emotionless.

"Go?! What're you-?!" That's when Jolyne's grip on his arm tightened, and Ryuji whirled to look at her. However, it was the look in her face that gave him pause. Sheer anger, the likes of which Ryuji had only seen in his own face, burned within her chartreuse eyes.

"Because right now, it's taking everything I've got to keep from beating him into a bloody pulp." Jolyne's whole body was shaking with barely contained anger. Kamoshida simply laughed at this.

"Oh cmon, Cujoh, let him at me! There's no need for both of you to hold back! Why not just cut loose? Oh, that's right, you can't!" He turned back to his desk. "As of right now, everyone here is expelled. I'm reporting you all at the next board meeting." Everyone's eyes widened at this, and Ryuji shook himself from Jolyne's grasp.

"You can't just make a decision like that!" Jolyne shouted, and Kamoshida smirked.

"I can, and I will. Would hardly be the first time. Who would seriously believe what scum like you would have to say?" He taunted. "Don't think I've forgotten your role in all of this, Mishima. Far as I'm concerned, you're just as responsible."

"Huh?! B-but-" Mishima tried to protest.

"You've outlived your usefulness, you insignificant worm. Why do you think I kept someone as useless as you around? You act like you're a victim, but you're the one who leaked Cujoh's criminal records onto the internet, remember?" Jolyne's eyes widened, and she turned to Mishima, who tried to shirk away from her.

"Mishima, you were the one?" He began to shake.

"I-I'm sorry. He made me do it…" Kamoshida simply laughed, before turning back to his desk.

"You're done for! Your futures are mine to take. Now, get out of my sight, you pieces of garbage!"

"You asshole! You won't get away with this!" Ryuji shouted, when Jolyne leaned in close to his ear.

"We'll make him pay." She whispered, and his eyes widened as he realized what she was implying.

"Oh right!" He said this slightly louder than intended, causing Kamoshida to raise an eyebrow.
"You finally lost it, Sakamoto? Try whatever you want, it's no use. All trash like you can do is wait for your disposal." He barked out, and Ryuji and Jolyne exited the office, dragging Mishima with them.

After parting ways from Mishima, Jolyne and Ryuji had met up with Morgana back in the courtyard, as the roof had already been occupied by a third year.

"So, I take it you two have made up your minds?" Morgana asked, and the two nodded.

"I'm 100% certain now. We need to head to that other world and kick his ass." Ryuji answered, and Morgana sighed.

"I told you, we're not beating him up. We're just stealing his distorted desires."

"Eh, semantics." Jolyne shrugged.

"And you've considered the possibility that we could induce a mental shutdown?" Ryuji nodded.

"Someone almost died because of him. I don't give a rat's ass what happens to Kamoshida any more."

"And you?" The cat said to Jolyne.

"There's no other option. We've exhausted all our options out here, and we're running out of time." She answered. "So, where do we start?" Morgana just shrugged.

"I don't know. I'm thinking we make our through the-"

"Wait, you've never done this before?!"

"I never indicated otherwise, did ? I just know how to do it."

"For real?! You were just talkin' out your ass this whole time?!" Ryuji asked. Morgana was about to answer, when Ann appeared from around the corner.

"Hey..." Ann looked exhausted. Her eyes were still red and puffy from crying. "Is...is it true you guys are getting expelled? It's all people are talking about."

"Already? Good grief, it's barely been half an hour." Jolyne groaned out.

"Did you come all this way to tell us that?" Ryuji asked, and Ann looked at them, determination in her bright blue eyes.

"Of you two are going to take down Kamoshida, then I want in." Jolyne and Ryuji's eyes widened at this.

"This has got nothing to do with you, Ann." Ryuji stated, and Ann frowned.

"But it does! Shiho's my-!"

"Stay out of our way!" Ryuji shouted. Ann grimaced, but stormed out without another word.

"A bit harsh, don't you think?" Jolyne asked, and Ryuji shook his head.

"We can't take her somewhere like that. She'd slow us down."
"I hope she doesn't torture herself over this…” Morgana muttered, and Jolyne simply nodded in agreement with the cat.

"Cmon, we don't have any time to lose." Jolyne instructed, and soon the three were in the alley in front of the school. "You two ready?" Ryuji and Morgana nodded.

"Once we're over, we'll treat each other like the Phantom Thieves we truly are!" Morgana stated, and Ryuji was pumped.

"I like the sound of that. Let's go kick his ass!" With that, Jolyne activated the Meta-Nav. Unbeknownst to them, a certain blonde was spying on them.

"Let's see, she's getting out her phone…looks like some sort of app?" Ann said to herself as she watched them. "Kamoshida's name…and the school?" As soon as she said that, a crippling headache hit her as the world began to distort.

Jolyne, Ryuji, and Morgana all stood before the castle drawbridge, and Ryuji slammed his hand into his fist. "Alright! Let's break through!"

"W-what the hell?!" A familiar voice yelled, and the three thieves turned to see a dumbstruck Ann behind them. Her confusion only increased when she noticed the strangely dressed pair and the strange catlike creature beside them.

"Ann?! What are you doing here?" Jolyne asked, although Ann seemed just as confused.

"That voice…and that hair…is that you, Jolyne-chan? So that must mean…” she looked over at Ryuji, squinting at him as she mentally removed the skull mask on his face. "Is that you, Ryuji?" Ann then looked around, noticing the castle. "What the hell?! What happened to the school?!"

Morgana, on the other hand, was simply dumbstruck by the appearance. Hearts clouded his vision as he took in Ann's beauty…before Jolyne shook him out of it. "Hey, Morgana, how'd she get here?"

"Hm? Oh! Let's see…my guess is she was in close enough proximity when we activated that app thing. If multiple people can enter with the user, then it stands to reason that it'll also pull in anyone close by." Morgana explained, and Jolyne groaned.

"Great, so now we have to be careful about who's around? Gimme a break…” While Morgana spoke, Ann looked around the castle entrance, taking it all in.

"Wait, so is all this related to Kamoshida?" Ryuji scratched the back of his head.

"It's a long story…anyways, you gotta leave!" Ryuji replied, and Ann scowled.

"No way! I've got just as much right to be here as you two!"

"If she makes too much of a commotion, the Shadows will be all over us." Morgana stated, and Ann's eyes widened as she realized who the third voice was coming from.

"A monster cat…that talks?! Ohmygodohmygid…” she panicked, and Morgana was taken aback.

"Hey, I'm not a monster!" He protested, and after a moment, Ann collected herself, and stared at Jolyne.

"You better explain what's going on! I'm not leaving until you do!" She demanded.

"Looks like we gotta force her out…” Ryuji groaned out, and Jolyne sighed.
"Looks like it. But the only question is how?" She mused.

"Why don't you just take her out the way we came in? That's how you left the other times." Morgana explained, and Ann scowled.

"No way! I'm not leaving until-hey!" She shouted as Ryuji grabbed her by the arm.

"Sorry, Takamaki, it's just how it's gotta be." He stated, but the mode wasn't having it, beginning to squirm and wriggle in his grip.

"Let go of me! This is my fight too!" Ann protested, beginning to try and squirm out of his grip, only for a red glove to place itself on her shoulder. She turned to see Jolyne, who'd raised her mask up to reveal her face.

"Ann, please listen. You're right, you have every right to be here as we do. But in there-" Jolyne pointed at the castle. "-there are things that make no sense. And you just don't have the power to take on those things like we do." Her grip on Ann's shoulder tightened, though instead of trying to be assertive, it was more comforting. "I promise you, on my mother's grave, I will personally make him pay for what he did to Shiho." Ann was about to protest some more, but there was something about Jolyne's presence that felt…reassuring to her.

"...fine." Ann said, though she wasn't happy about. Jolyne motioned to Ryuji, and he let go of her arm. Morgana and Ryuji watched as the green haired girl walked the blonde to the exit of the Metaverse, before she returned to them.

"Think she'll be alright?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne thought for a moment.

"...I honestly don't know." She replied. "We're gonna have to be careful when we use that app from now on. We can't risk any more people hitching along for the ride."

"You should've checked the tools you use. How do I, who just watches, know more about this stuff than you two?!" Morgana scolded, and Ryuji just rolled his eyes.

"Whatever, we got bigger things to worry about. Takamaki found out about us right when we were getting started. What if she rats us out?" Ryuji asked.

"I...don't think we have to worry about that." Jolyne replied.

"That's girl's name is Ann Takamaki, right? Lady Ann..." Morgana said to himself, before turning to the castle. If they strained their ears, they could vaguely hear the sound of armored footsteps frantically moving about. "The shadows are bound to have noticed us by now. Brace yourselves!" He instructed, before turning to Jolyne. "Lead the way, Joker!" She raised an eyebrow at this, pointing at herself.

"You talking to me?" Morgana nodded. "That some sort of nickname?"

"Please, don't make it sound so lame. It's a code name." Both Ryuji and Jolyne raised an eyebrow at Morgana's answer. "Wait, were you two seriously about to use your real names?"

"Well...yeah." Ryuji replied, and Morgana scoffed.

"What kind of idiot Phantom thief would use their real names?! There's no telling what effect yelling out your real names in here will have!" Morgana scolded.

"What's a 'Phantom Thief'?" Jolyne asked, drawing his attention. "You called us that before, back
before we crossed over. I meant to ask, but then the whole thing with Ann happened."

"Phantom thieves are those who covertly sneak in and stylishly steal treasure…that is a what we must become." Morgana explained, and the two mulled it over in their heads.

"Phantom Thieves, huh? I kinda like the sound of that!" Ryuji stated, and Jolyne nodded in agreement. "So, why's Jolyne Joker?"

"Because Jolyne's our trump card we can play whenever we're in a pinch. Remember the lock in the dungeon? We would've never gotten out of there if it wasn't for her and the strings." Morgana explained, and Jolyne thought over the name.

"Joker, huh? I kinda like it. Simple, easy, rolls off the tongue…" Joker said, and Bob turned to Ryuji. "So I guess it's your turn. Any ideas?"

"Let's see, how about…Thug?" Morgana suggested, and Ryuji frowned.

"Seriously? No thanks. I'll choose it myself!" He said, and began to think. "Let's see, when it comes to me, it's gotta be this mask. Why not name me after this?" Ryuji suggested, and Morgana sighed.

"I guess if you want to do it like that…how about 'Skull'?" as soon as Morgana said that, Ryuji grinned.

"Oh man, that sounds awesome! From now on, call me Skull!" Skull declared, and looked at Morgana. "Got any ideas for him?" Joker tapped her chin, thinking for a moment.

"Hmmmm…I got nothing." She stated, and Skull thought for a moment.

"How's 'Mona' sound?" He suggested, and Jolyne nodded.

"Yeah, that works."

"If Joker approves of it, then I think it's a good idea." Mona replied. "Alright, from here on out, we're Joker, Skull, and Mona! We need to be absolutely thorough in using these code names from now on." Joker and Skull both nodded.

"Alright, we're on a time table. Let's go!" Joker stated, and the trio ran to the castle, hopping through the window into the storage room as they began their infiltration. Sneaking into the central hall, they pushed a door open into a small room. Inside there were several wooden tables, a few chairs, and other door. Moving towards the door, Joker pushed it open into another long hall. The three walked down the hall, passing a doorway that was walled off by iron bars. Behind it, there was another hallway that had several suits of armor lining it, heading straight to a door that had dark purple light leaking out.

"What do you think's back there?" Skull asked, and Joker shrugged.

"No idea." Though just staring at the door made Joker feel sick to her stomach. "You got any idea, Mona?"

"None, unfortunately. I only ever made it as far as the main hall back there." The cat-like creature replied, and looked at the bars. "It doesn't look like we'll be able to go that way. Let's keep moving." Joker and Skull nodded, and continued moving to the door at the other end of the hallway. Pushing that door open, the Thieves were now on some sort of armory, the walls lined with all sorts of weapons, as well as three guards patrolling the room. The trio hid behind a pillar as the guards patrolled the room. Joker surveyed the room, taking in each Shadow's position.
They're too spread out. If we try and take them out one at a time, then the other two will see it and attack. We'd be surrounded. The only way I can think of… Joker thought as she looked over the room, before turning to her companions. "We'll need to take them out before they can transform. We'll have to each rush one and take it out before they can transform." Skull and Mona nodded.

"Just tell us when." Mona replied, and Joker pointed out each of their targets to them.

"Now… go!" Joker ordered, and the Phantom Thisves went after their targets. Joker went after the closest one. "Arsene!" The winged creature appeared behind her as she rushed her target. Before the guard could react, Arsene swiped her claw and cleaved them into pieces, which would disperse into ash.

Mona went after the one farthest from them, who had noticed the commotion. "Come forth, Zorro!" The mustaches persona sprung to life, and charged the guard. Zorro's rapier pierced the armored body, leaving a sizable hole where it's right arm had once been, the Shadow crying in pain as it died.

Skull rushed the second closest one, raising his pipe and bashing it against the armored head. It crumpled to the ground, and before it could get up, the former trap star jumped on its chest and bashed the armored shadow's head in with one last swing, the creature dispersing into ash.

"Good job everyone. Let's move." The green haired leader said as she wiped sweat from her brow. Their enemies dispatched, the trio left the room, entering yet another hall.

"Jeez, who designed this place? It's starting to get a little repetitive…" Skull complained, and as they walked past a door, Mona stopped.

"Hm?" Mona looked at the door, squinting his eyes as he examined it. It almost appeared wavy the more he looked at it…

"Something wrong, Mona?" Joker asked, and Mona turned to his compatriots.

"See the distortions on that door?"

"Yeah. What about it?"

"This indicates what's called a Safe Room. It's an area of the Palace where the distorted desires are exceptionally weak." Mona explained. "Because of this, the ruler's control of this area is weak, and Shadows won't patrol here."

"So we can use this to hide if we have to?" Joker asked, and Mona nodded.

"That's right. We can also regroup and discuss strategies here if we need to." Mona jumped up and pushed the door open. They entered, seeing a small room lined with a table and a couple of chairs. However, when Joker looked at it closely, the room almost seemed to become a classroom for a second, before changing back. Joker pulled up a chair, sitting at the table. "Alright, let's discuss…"

Meanwhile, outside the castle, a familiar figure approached the drawbridge, phone in hand. "This is that place from earlier…" Ann said, and looked at her phone, the screen of which was now occupied by the image of a certain red eyeball. "What's with this weird app? All I did was say the words that Jolyne said, and now I'm here…"

"Princess!" A voice called out, and when Ann looked up, she saw what looked like three men, all dressed in some sort of armor, running at her.

Back in the Safe Room, Ryuji had his ear pressed against the door, listening to the sound of armored
footsteps outside. "Sounds like there's a lot more of them out there than last time." He said, and Morgana nodded from his perch on the table.

"What'd you expect? You two did provoke Kamoshida, after all. Still, this does seem excessive. He shouldn't be this on guard…" Jolyne turned to him from her chair.

"How are we going to go about stealing the Treasure?" She asked.

"First, well need to secure an infiltration route to the treasure, a path directly to it." Morgana explained, and looked between the two of them. "Honestly, I think we may need a little more manpower to accomplish this."

"How do you-"

"Shhh! Two of 'em are talking." Ryuji barked, and pressed his ear to the door.

"I swear we were pursuing readings of an intruder. What was she doing out there?"

"I don't know, but that doesn't matter. We have to take her to King Kamoshida at once."

"Let me go!" A familiar voice yelled out, one that caused everyone's eyes to widen.

"Was that…Ann?" Jolyne asked, and Mona leapt over to the door, cracking it open and peaking his head out.

"It can't be. We sent her home!" Ryuji protested, and Morgana reentered the room.

"It looks like Lady Ann found her way back somehow. The Shadows have her!" Morgana stated, causing their jaws to drop.

"Do you think that weird app showed up on her phone too?" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne bolted up out of her chair.

"Dammit! We need to rescue her, now!" She ordered, and turned to Mona. "Did you see which way they took her?"

"They went back the way we just came through." Mona reported, and Joker nodded as she pushed the door open. They made their way back through the armory, back into the hallway. As they ran through it, Skull noticed that the iron bars were now gone, and one of the suits of armor in the hallway behind it had been knocked over.

"Think they went through there?"

"Worth a shot." Joker made her way down the hallway, stopping at the door. A string emerged from her finger and slid under the door, and Joker closed her eyes as she 'listened' through the string.

"Look, I'm sorry! I'll apologize for touching that armor without position!" Ann's voice said from the other end, and Joker's eyes snapped open as the string returned to her finger.

"Through here!" She ordered, and kicked the door…only for it to not budge. "Dammit!" Joker looked around for a lock to pick, but she saw no sign of a lock.

"It must be held close from the other side, and I don't think we have time to find another route…"

Mona cursed, and Skull began walking backwards.

"I've got an idea. Stand back, everyone…” he instructed, and blue sparks began to emanate from the
corners of his mask…

Meanwhile, on the other side of the door, Ann had been shackled up to some sort of X shaped apparatus by her wrists and feet. "What the hell's going on?! If you don't let me go, I'll call the cops!" Ann protested, when a familiar voice filled the area.

"So, this is the intruder?" King Kamoshida said as he walked over to her, accompanied by a golden armored Guard.

"K-Kamoshida?! What're you doing here?" Ann asked, and that's when she saw who was accompanying him: an exact copy of herself, right down to her eyes, that had on nothing but a bikini and a headband with cat ears on her head. "Who...who is that? Why does she look like me?!" Kamoshida simply chuckled.

"I can't believe you mistook my Ann-chan for someone like her. Tell me, are you afraid?"

"More like confused. What is this place? Why are you dressed like that?"

"I can do whatever the hell I want here. This is my castle, after all." Ann's eyes widened at this.

"Castle?! W-what is this, some kind of red light district?!" She asked, and Kamoshida just laughed.

"Oh, you'll make a lovely slave!"

"Shut the hell up! I'm not making you anything!" Ann shouted, and Kamoshida turned to the Cognitive Ann next to her.

"It seems she's decided to tell me off. What do you think of that, dear?" Up until now, the duplicate Ann had simply remained silent and glassy eyes.

"Talking back is like, totally unforgivable." Kamoshida grinned at this.

"I agree. The price for defiance is death, after all." He turned back to Ann. "Now, how should I play with-" Kamoshida was cut off when the ethereal pirate ship of Captain Kidd smashed through the door on the other side of the room, reducing it to splinters.

"Jeez, Skull. Talk about an entrance." Joker said as Skull's mask rematerialized, and the three stepped through the hole. However, what rendered them speechless wasn't the captive Ann, but rather the sight of several young women lying topless on the floor. "Good lord…"

"So this is how he views the volleyball team...this is eff'd up." Skull muttered, when Mona noticed the captive Ann.

"There she is!" He yelled, drawing their attention.

"Ann!" Joker called out, and the there began to approach the irritated Kamoshida.

"You three again?! You're like a bad rash I can never get rid off." Kamoshida spat, before he turned to Ann. "You're just like these pathetic thieves, aren't you? You only came here because you're pissed at me, right?" Kamoshida simply sighed. "You know, you've got no right to be made at me. It's your fault that...what's her name? Anyways, it's your fault she jumped." Ann's eyes widened at this.

"W-what?"

"You were so reluctant to throw yourself onto me, I had no choice. Someone had to take her place."
The grinning king taunted, and tears began to well up in Ann's eyes.

"You bastard!" She yelled, and the gold Guard began to approach her. Joker clinched her fists and began to move, only for the ruling Shadow to turn to her.

"One more step and I'll kill her on the spot." He barked, stopping the Persona user in her tracks. "Just sit back and enjoy the dismemberment show, kids."

"Damn you!" Joker yelled, and Kamoshida simply laughed, turning back to the captive Ann.

"Maybe I'll start with her clothes..." he chuckled, and Ann's head was downturned as the Guard approached her. "Oooooh, that's more like it! You shoulda looked like this from the start!"

Maybe he's right...maybe it is my fault Shiho jumped. He only ever looked at her because of me. I deserve this... Tears began to streak down her face as images of Shiho in the ambulance and in the hospital filled her head. Tears streaked down her face, as Ann accepted her fate. Shiho...I'm sorry...

"Hey!" Jolyne's voice called out, causing Ann to look up at her. "You're just going to listen to what this asshole has to say? You did all you could for Shiho. The only person who's to blame for what happened is him, and him alone.

"Silence!" Kamoshida barked, but it was too late. Ann was already thinking over Jolyne's words.

She's right...She began to chuckle. Letting this price of shit play with me...what the hell was I thinking?

"It's no use. Slaves like you should-"

"Shut the hell up!" Ann yelled, cutting off the perverted King. "You think this school is your own playground?! You think I'm just a pet for you to play with?! Fuck that! I'm never letting you get your way ever again, you son of a bitch!"

"My, it's taken far too long." A soft, seductive voice purred inside Ann's head, and a splitting headache hit her as he eyes turned yellow. "Tell me, if you're not going to avenge her, then who will? Forgiving him was never an option." Ann began squirming and writhing as the voice continued to speak. "Such is the scream of the other you that dwells within. I am thou, thou art I. We can finally form a contract." Ann quit squirming as the pain finally receded.

"I hear you...Carmen..." she looked up, and a red mask that was shaped like a cat appeared on her face in a flash of blue flame. "You're right! No more holding back! No more letting him do whatever he wants!" Kamoshida watched awestruck, as Ann managed to force her arm's out of their shackles.

"There you go! Nothing can be solved as long as you are chained!" Carmen purred inside of her, as Ann gripped he sides of her mask. Ann gave a yell as she ripped the mask off, and was soon consumed by a pillar of blue flame. "You're right! No more holding back! No more letting him do whatever he wants!" Kamoshida watched awestruck, as Ann managed to force her arm's out of their shackles.

Before the guards could recover, Ann kicked a sword out of one's hand, caught it, and used it to chop of the head of the Cognitive Ann, who dispersed into ash. "I'm not some cheap girl you can toy with, you scumbag." Ann growled out, dropping the sword to the ground as a red whip materialized in her hand. "You stole everything from Shiho, and now? Now I'm going to rob everything from
"How dare you?! Your insolence shall not stand!" The gold guard captain growled, and he began to change, exploding into dark, shadowy ichor and reforming as a massive demon sitting on a toilet.

"You up for this?" Jolyne asked Ann, and she nodded.

"I've been looking forward to this. Let's make him pay!" Ann responded, and Joker smirked as she turned back to the demon. The demon made what looked like a straining motion, and a blast of ice flew at them, but Ann simply held out her hand. "Make them squeal…Carmen!" The persona twirled behind her, firing two fireballs out of the mouths of the heart shaped men. One blast struck the ice blast, cancelling it out, while the other hit the demon, knocking it to the ground. While it was knocked down, Zorro, Captain Kidd, and Arsene all materialized next to Carmen. They all rushed the toilet bound demon, blasting it with fire, lighting, wind, and demonic energy. At first, it looked like that it would survive, but a blast of flame finished it off, causing it to disperse into ash. The personas dispersed, with a red panther shaped mask appearing on Ann's face. Kamoshida simply watched this all unfold, an expression of sheer terror on his face.

"P-please…not again…" he whimpered out, and as soon as they all turned to him, Kamoshida turned tail and ran.

"Get back here you-!" Ann yelled at him, and made to chase after him, before she collapsed into her knee. "Not…letting you…run…" Joker kneeled down to Ann's level, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"You're probably exhausted. C'mon, let's go." Ann just shook her head.

"I'm fine. Just…a little winded." Ann panted out, and Morgana approached her.

"Lady Ann, don't push yourself. You're drained from the awakening."

"Lady Ann…?" Ann looked over at Morgana. "What…what is this thing? How can it talk? And…and where is this place? Oh my god, this isn't Hell, is it?!"

"Lady Ann, please calm down!" Morgana pleaded, and Ann placed a hand on his head as she stood up.

"I won't calm down until I figure out what the hell is going on!" She shouted as Jolyne stood up as well.

"Like I said out there, it's a long story. Well explain as soon as we-" Ryuji started to say, when Ann notified her outfit, causing her to blush.

"W-what the hell am I wearing?!" She hastily covered herself. "How did I-?"

"Calm down. I think it's a great look on you." Jolyne said, only for her to blush as she realized she had said that last part out loud. Fortunately, none of them seemed to notice.

"How can you expect me to be calm like this?!" Ann yelled, and Morgana sighed.

"Well, I'm out of ideas. There's going to be a search party headed here soon. If we don't leave now, we'll be surrounded."

"Cmon, Ann. I promise, we'll explain later." Jolyne pleaded, but Ann was still unresponsive.
"We ain't got time for this! Let's just carry her out." Ryuji stated, and Jolyne was forced to agree, taking her right side as Ryuji grabbed the left.

Later

Jolyne and Ann were in the station, with Ann sitting on a bench and Morgana's head sticking out of Jolyne's bag, although he was far more cooperative this time. Ryuji returned, with two bottled drinks in his hand. "Which one you want?" He asked, and Ann looked between the bottles.

"Whichever ones not carbonated."

"Uh…I think they both are." Ann sighed, and took the one in his right hand, while Jolyne took the other one.

"Hey, what about me?" Morgana asked, and Ryuji shrugged.

"You're a cat, and I've only got two hands." He stated, and Ann chuckled.

"You alright now, Ann?" Jolyne asked, and the blonde nodded.

"Yeah, thanks. It's just…a lot to take in." True to their word, they had explained everything to Ann to the best of their ability.

"Trust me, we know. Hell, I don't even understand it all myself." Ryuji said, and Morgan's scoffed.

"Of course you wouldn't, you numbskull." Ryuji scowled.

"What'd you say, you damn furball?!"

"Hey, knock it off you two." Jolyne ordered, and Morgana turned to Ann.

"Your Persona's incredible, Lady Ann."

"Thanks. Um…Morgana, right?" The cat nodded its head. "Sorry, it still seems a little weird to be talking to a cat. Oh, my bad, you're not a cat."

"It's alright. It's understandable for you to be confused after all you went through." Morgana replied.

"Honestly, I still can't believe that all happened. It seemed like a dream, but it all felt so…real. And that power, my…what was it called? Persona?" Ann asked, and Morgana nodded.

"It's your will of rebellion, Lady Ann. With it, you'll be able to fight inside the Palace."

"You may feel weird at first, but you'll get used to it. Arsene just hangs out in the back of my head." Jolyne said, and Ryuji looked at her dumbstruck.

"Wait, your's just chills?! All Captain Kidd does is give me shit!" He groaned out, and Ann chuckled, before her face turned serious.

"So all that stuff, about how we can change Kamoshida's heart…is it all true? Is it really possible to make him confess his crimes?" The new persona user asked, and Ryuji nodded.

"The volleyball team's keeping quiet, and the school and parents ain't saying anything. We ain't got any other options." Ann nodded, eyes filled with determination.

"Then let me help too. I want to make him pay for what he did to Shiho. If I let him keep going like
nothing happened, then I'll never forgive myself." Ann declared. "That is, if you're fine with that."

"Sounds good to me. More the merrier. What do you two think?" Ryuji asked the cat and the leader.

"I welcome your aid, Lady Ann. With you, I believe that we finally have the manpower we need to make it through the castle." Morgana replied, and they all turned to look at Jolyne.

"What, you honestly think I'd say no? You've got just as much right as we do. Welcome aboard. We'll be counting on you." Jolyne replied, and Ann nodded with a smile.

"Thanks. I won't let you down." Jolyne felt a strong fighting resolve coming from Ann. "Just let me know when we're heading back in. Oh! We should probably trade info." They all pulled out their phones, trading their contact information with Ann. "Let's see, and…there!"

"Awesome! I'll set up a group chat when I get home." Ryuji said, and Ann nodded, before yawning.

"Sorry about that. I'm exhausted. Guess I should head on home. See you guys tomorrow." Ann bid, before heading over to her train.

"What a kind girl. Such consideration for others, and her willingness to cast herself into the jaws of death for others…what a girl!" Morgana whimsfully purred out, and Jolyne subconsciously nodded.

"Yknow, since we're not a trio any more, it'd be best if we could all get together quickly from now on."

"I agree. Our best option is to establish a secret hideout where we can meet."

"A hideout, huh? I like the sound of that." Jolyne mused. "Think the rooftop will work?"

"It should. That third year shouldn't be too much trouble." Ryuji replied.

"Now, onto the next matter. I can't contact you guys from inside the Palace, and it'd be dangerous to let me wander around like a stray. So, I'll need someone to take care of me."

"Sorry, can't be me. Our landlord doesn't allow pets. Besides, me and you spending every minute together? We'd kill each other in a week." Jolyne sighed.

"And it's too late to ask Ann…I guess I'll take you. Never really had a pet before…" Jolyne said, and the station intercom belted out a message of an arriving train.

"Well, sounds like I gotta go. See ya at the hideout tomorrow." Ryuji waved goodbye, and they parted ways.

"I suppose we should go now. Come, let's go check out my new residence." Morgan's ordered, and Jolyne sighed as she headed towards their train.

"Hope you're not expecting much…"

Evening

The bell chimed as Jolyne entered Leblanc, drawing Sojiro's attention. "Oh, it's just you." He coldly greeted.

"Anyone ever tell you that you really know how to make someone feel welcome, Boss?" Jolyne shot back, and Sojiro just rolled his eyes.
"I've still got customers, so head upstairs." It was more like 'customer', singular, said customer being a young woman with blue hair dressed like some sort of punk rock doctor, complete with a choker and everything.

"It's fine, Boss. I was just leaving, anyway." The woman said, beginning to collect her things and get up.

"You sure, doctor? Got a fresh pot of coffee brewing. Got those Colombian beans you like, too." Sojiro said, and the Doctor simply politely shook her head.

"No thanks. I've got some business things to attend to. Thank you for the meal." Doctor said as she got out of her booth, and turned to Jolyne. "Haven't seen you around before."

"She just moved here. She's living with me for a bit." Sojiro explained, and Punk Rock Doctor simply raised an eyebrow, but didn't ask anything else. Instead, she squinted her eyes as she examined Jolyne.

"You remind me of someone, but I can't think of who…" Punk Rock Doctor mused, before she shrugged. "Oh well, it's not important." She bid farewell, before exiting the restaurant.

"Who was that?" Jolyne asked.

"Hm? Oh, that's Dr. Takemi. She runs the clinic down the street. Rumor has it she cooks up all sorts of weird, illegal medicines, but I've never seen anything like that over there." Sojiro explained, and Morgan's poked his head out of Jolyne's bag.

"Hey, are we there yet?" He asked, only for Jolyne to elbow him as Sojiro's ears perked up, before he shrugged.

"Need a hand?" Jolyne asked, and Sojiro shook his head.

"Nah, I've got it. Takemi-san's normally my last customer on Fridays. I've just gotta clean up, then I'll head home." Boss answered, and Jolyne nodded as she headed up the stairs. She set the bag on the bed and unzipped it, allowing Morgana to exit.

"Finally! I thought I would never-wait, what is this place?" Morgan's stated as he looked around the attic. "Are you living in some sorta abandoned house?"

"Eh, it's honestly starting to grow on me. Could be worse." Jolyne replied, when Sojiro's head appeared from the stairwell.

"I knew it! I thought I heard meowing!" He accused, walking over to the two. "What's the meaning of this?!"

"I found it outside the school. It looked abandoned, so I gave it some food." Jolyne 'explained', and Sojiro glared at her.

"Why'd you bring it here? This is a restaurant for crying out loud."

"He started following me, and I didn't have the heart to chase him off. I mean, look at that face." Jolyne gestured to Morgana, who took the hint and began putting on his cutest, most pathetic face. Sojiro crossed his arms, before he sighed.

"I…suppose having a pet to take care of might help you stay on good behavior. Fine, it can stay." Jolyne grinned and wrapped Sojiro in a hug.
"You're the best, Boss!"

"Yeah yeah. We're gonna have a few rules though." He stated as he wriggled out of her grip. "It stays up here at all times, especially during business. If I see that thing wandering around downstairs while I've got customers, I'm kicking it out. And I better not see any hair in my ingredients. Understood?" Jolyne nodded. "Good. Now, I'll kick a little extra into your allowance to let you afford food, but other than that, it's on you to keep it fed and watered."

"Sir yes sir." Jolyne replied, and Sojiro nodded, before heading back downstairs.

"Was that the ruler of this place?"

"Essentially."

"He seems pretty understanding, even though he keeps you locked up here in this dump." Jolyne just shrugged.

"Eh, he's not so bad. I can tell he's a big ol' softie." As soon as she said that, Sojiro reappeared, holding a saucer of milk.

"It just had to keep calling out in that cute little voice…" Sojiro muttered as he set it down in front of Morgan's, who eagerly lapped it up. "Make sure you wish that dish when he's done. So…have you decided on a name?"

"Morgana."

"Weird name for a cat. I was…hoping I'd get to name it." Sojiro said, and Jolyne smirked. He simply glared at her, and left before she could taunt him, and Morgana laughed.

"The chief likes me more than youuuuu." He tainted in a singsong voice.

"That's only because he can't understand you." Jolyne replied, and Morgana looked…unsure about something. "What's on your mind?"

"Well, remember how you asked me what I am?"

"Yeah. What about it?"

"Well, I…honestly don't know what I am. I can't remember anything about my birth. I just woke up in this form one day."

"Nothing? Seriously?" Morgana nodded.

"I've come to the conclusion that the Metaverse's distortion may have taken away my memories and my true form." Jolyne's eyes widened.

"Wait, so the same thing might happen to us if we stay in there for too long?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. As far as I can tell, this was done to me somehow."

"You think someone did this to you?"

"I…I'm not sure. But what ever explanation can there be for why I can talk like this? I've gotta be human…” Morgana contemplated as he 'frowned', and Jolyne sat down next to him, scratching his head.
"There's an answer out there, I'm sure of it. I promise, we'll help you find whatever that is." He looked up at her, a gleam in his blue eyes.

"Really?" She smiled nodded, and he 'smiled.' "Thank you so much!"

"No problem." She replied, and her phone chimed. It was a message from Ann.

AT: Thanks for everything.

JC: Don't mention it.

AT: No seriously, I mean it.

AT: if you hadnt spoken up when you did...

AT: well, I'd probably be dead by now.

AT: sorry, I'd just realized that I hadn't properly thanked you or anything.

JC: just buy me dinner sometime to make up for yesterday

AT: it's a deal.

AT: see you tomorrow.

Jolyne just smiled, setting her phone down as Morgana finished his milk. She took the saucer downstairs, washed it out, and came back up. With nothing else to do, she changed into her pajamas, let her hair down, and went to bed. Although at some point in the night, Jolyne felt a heavy weight curled up on her chest…
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Short chapter today. I just a few little logistics stuff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

AN: Alright, just a few little logistic things in this chapter, then we start getting into the meat of things. And y'all, the stuff

Chapter 6: Preparations

11/20/20XX

"Wait, hold on." Sae cut Jolyne off. "So let me get this straight. On your first day of school, you just 'happened' to wander into another world. While inside this other world, you and two others awoke special powers that were sleeping inside of you. This other world, this…Metaverse…is one generated by the hearts and minds of those with distorted desires. Am I right?" She got a nod. "And this was all explained to by-and this is the part I'm having trouble believing-a 'talking cat'?

"Hey, I told ya this was gonna get bizarre." Jolyne answered, scratching her right arm, before seemingly to catch herself and pulling the sleeve of the blazer down.

"That's quite the story, Cujoh-San. In fact, it may be a little too bizarre." The inspector stated. "For all I know, you're either selling me some ridiculous story you made up to hide the truth, or they drugged you to the point of hallucination."

"And?" Jolyne retorted, and Niijima glared at her before sighing.

"And yet…it does make a certain amount of sense. The presence of this 'Metaverse' does line up with my theory that you used unorthodox methods to enact a 'change of heart.'" Sae replied, before narrowing her eyes at Jolyne. "So let's say I believe all that. The four of you still had to make your way through this 'Palace' to steal Kamoshida's 'Treasure.' Now, even with these…Personas?"

"Right."

"Thank you. Even with these 'Personas', it would not have been an easy task fighting through all those enemies."

"It wasn't. Where are you going with this?" Jolyne asked.

"That requires weapons, special medicines. Things that high schoolers and 'talking cats' such as yourselves would have been unable to acquire on your own."

"I dunno, we just figure it out."

"Then why don't you explain to me exactly how you went about this." Sae ordered more so than asked, getting another sigh.

"Alright, where was I?"
Saturday, 4/16/20XX

Jolyne was sitting on the train to Aoyame-Ichitome, clutching the bag with Morgana in it close to her chest. "Can't see this growing old any time fast…"

"I agree. Maybe you could start bringing a book or something?" He suggested, when they overheard two students in uniforms from another school talking next to them.

"Ugh, I feel terrible. It's not even allergy season yet…" One groaned out.

"Maybe you should head to a doctor? I bet they can prescribe you something that can help."

"Maybe…" Morgana turned to Jolyne.

"Hey, wasn't that customer the other day a doctor?"

"The weird hot goth lady? I think so. What about it?" Nothing weird to see here. Just a girl talking to a cat in her bag.

"Well, Boss mentioned that she supposedly has all sorts of weird medicines. Maybe we could get some of that to use in the Palace."

"I'll think on it." Jolyne said, as they continued to ride the train.

Afternoon

Ann and Jolyne were sitting in class, with Morgana inside of Jolyne's desk, when their phones vibrated with a message.

RS: We're meeting at the hideout today, right?

AT: Don't text now. We're in class.

RS: Wait, you're actually paying attention to this crap?

JC: Not really. It's English, literally the one thing here I don't have to worry about.

AT: I'm trying, but none of it's really sticking.

RS: Anyway, hideout after school!

AT: And where is that exactly?

JC: The school rooftop.

AT: Can we still go up there?

RS: Yeah, checked this morning.

RS: You'd think they'd have locked it after...you know.

RS: See you guys there.

The rest of the school day passed by in a blur, and soon Ann and Jolyne met Ryuji at the entrance of the roof. They pushed it open, only to find a third year with fluffy pink hair wearing a sweater over her uniform. "Ryuji, I thought you said her plants were almost done!" Jolyne whispered.
"Hey, I thought she was! I ain't a gardener or whatever." He protested, and the the third year looked over to the sound of the commotion.

"Hm? Oh, hello there." She greeted with a smile, and Ann smiled back.

"Sorry for intruding, Senpai. We thought there was no one up here."

"It's fine. I was just about to move my garden anyway. After the…incident…yesterday, it doesn't feel appropriate to keep them up here." Her voice was polite and soft, with a sophisticated tone to it. The girl picked up the container with the plants, and began walking past them. "I should be going. My ride is here."

"You need any help with those?" Jolyne offered, and she shook her head.

"No thank you. Have a pleasant day." She said, leaving the rooftop.

"Well, that was…awkward. It worked out though." Ryuji said, as Jolyne opened her bag to let Morgana out.

"We would've been in big trouble otherwise." Morgan's stated as he hopped onto an air conditioning unit.

"They usually hold board meetings at the beginning of the month. The next one should be held at the start of May." Ann explained.

"So we don't have any time to waste. Let's go!" Ryuji said, getting out his phone.

"Hold on. It's still too early for us to enter the Palace." Morgana stated, and the false blonde's brow furrowed.

"Whaddya mean? We've only got a few weeks."

"We can't underestimate the dangers of the Palace. We need to prepare."

"That Persona shit has been enough so far."

"But that may not always be the case. True, your Personas are powerful, but we can't always rely on those. In any event, our priorities should be weapons and medicine."

"Where are we supposed to get weapons?" Ann asked.

"Ryuji, where'd you get the gun I use?" Jolyne asked.

"Some place in Shibuya. I think it's called Untouchable." He answered. "Whole place is lined with real looking guns."

"Good, then it looks like you have that covered. Morgana and I'll handle the medicine." Jolyne stated, and Ann raised an eyebrow.

"Where are you gonna get stuff like that? I don't think they'll sell what we need to minors." She asked.

"Let us worry about that, Lady Ann." Ann was still curious, but didn't pry any further.

"Well, we should get going, Morgana. I'll text you guys afterwards."
Yongan-Jaya

Jolyne stood in front of a door with 'Takemi Medical Clinic' written on it. "Well, this is definitely the place." Morgana stated. "What're you gonna say?"

"Well, I was thinking 'hey lady, give me drugs so me and my friends can fight supernatural monsters in another world', but that might be a little heavy handed. So, I'll just wing it." Jolyne said, and entered the clinic. Inside was an empty waiting room, with the doctor sitting behind a reception desk lazily reading a magazine. She looked up and saw Jolyne.

"Is this your first visit?" She asked, before squinting. "Wait...you're that girl from Leblanc, right?" Jolyne nodded.

"Jolyne Cujoh. Pleasure to meet you, Doctor." She greeted, and Takemi put up her magazine.

"So, what can I help you with?"

"I uh...I have chronic nightmares. Just, awful nightmares. I'll wake up screaming in a cold sweat, and it's getting to the point where I can't get a good night's rest. Do you have anything that can help?" She knew it was an awful lie. Hell, she came up with it and she didn't buy it.

"Very well. Head into the exam room, and I'll look you over." Takemi instructed, and they entered the exam room, Jolyne sitting across from the strange doctor. "In most cases like this, the nightmares are often brought on by stress. When your body's all wound up, it tends to have an adverse effect on the mind. I'm going to prescribe you some pain relievers, ok? Now, do you want a sweet tasting pill or a bitter one?" Jolyne thought for a moment.

"Dealer's choice."

"Well then how about a stinky one then? I call it 'Bullshit.' Now, why don't we stop beating around the bush?" Takemi stated, and Jolyne gulped. "You're not sick at all. I'm not as dumb as I look."

"Crap, she saw right through us!" Morgana winced, and Takemi crossed her legs as she evaluated Jolyne.

"You came here because you heard those rumors about me and my medicine, huh?" Takemi interrogated, and Jolyne searched for her words.

"...are the rumors true?" She asked, and the goth doctor shrugged.

"Who's to say? All I know is that I have a patient with ulterior motives, who thinks she can walk in here, cook up some crazy story, and get some drugs." Takemi stated. "You think doctors are just chumps who pass out pills like candy?"

"Not at all. My uncle's a doctor, so I knew you wouldn't give me anything without a reason." Takemi raised an eyebrow at this.

"Anyone I might know?"

"Josuke Higashikata." Jolyne replied, and Takemi's eyes widened as her jaw dropped.

"Tall, with weird hair? Practices in a small town?"

"That's the one. Though uh, maybe don't mention the hair whenever you see him." Takemi snapped her fingers.
"That's why you looked familiar. To think I'd run into his niece here of all places…" She mused, and chuckled. "Seems fitting, I suppose."

"You know my uncle?"

"Only enough to call him an acquaintance. We've met at a few conferences here and there. I mainly know of him through his reputation." Takemi explained, and pursed her lips as she thought. "Well, I suppose I can prescribe you something." Jolyne and Morgana's eyes widened.

"Wait, really?" Jolyne asked, and Takemi nodded.

"I remember what it was like to be your age. High schoolers have it rough, between exams and what not. Besides, you seem earnest enough. I don't think I'll have to worry about a drug ring popping up anytime soon." Takemi said, and began unlocking her medicine cabinet. "All my formulas are original, so you'll have to come back here when you run out. Assuming you can pay, of course." Jolyne smiled as Takemi out several bottles in a paper bag.

"Thank you very much, Doctor Takemi." She said, taking the bag from the doctor.

"Just don't take it all at once, alright?" Jolyne nodded, picked up her school bag, and left the exam room. However, when she entered the reception area, she was greeted with a stern faced man in a suit. He stormed past Jolyne, slamming the exam room door shut behind him.

"…reason for your visit?" Takemi's muffled voice asked. "Please take a number, and-"

"Enough of this! You're the only one capable of producing that type of medicine!" The man's voice yelled, catching Jolyne and Morgana's attention. Her curiosity getting the better of her, Jolyne began unraveling a string from her finger, sending it under the door and closing her eyes to focus on what they were saying.

"I'm afraid I have no idea what you're talking about, sir."

"Don't play dumb with me. Word is you're developing a powerful, experimental drug, one that could give someone unlimited power!" Jolyne heard Takemi laugh at this.

"Unlimited power? I'm afraid you read too much manga, sir."

"You know that developing experimental medicines on your own violates all known health regulations. Are you attempting to create some new sort of hyper stimulant?"

"You're awfully persistent. I'm just a back alley quack, sir. I have no idea what you're talking about." Takemi's voice remained polite, yet Jolyne began feeling a tinge of annoyance and anger in her voice.

"You trying to ruin my reputation again, is that it? Just try it, and I'll sue your ass! You're a disgrace to the medical community!" Through her string, Jolyne could hear Takemi sharply inhale. "Struck a nerve, did I? It was your mistake, was it not?"

"…sir. For the last time, I have no idea what you're talking about." Anger now threatened to overtake Takemi's polite voice.

"I won't have you drag my name through the mud. Dispose of that medicine and resign immediately. The name 'Tae Takemi' shall never-" the man stopped talking for some reason. "Is someone at there?!" Jolyne's eyes widened, and she quickly retracted the string and left, exiting the clinic just as the exam room opened.
"That was close…" She sighed out, and Morgan's nodded in agreement.

"He didn't seem happy. I could barely make out what he was saying. Were you able to hear anything?"

"Something about a super drug. She seemed pretty adamant that it didn't exist, though." The Phantom Thief replied, and the cat in her bag furrowed his brow.

"I wonder…if a drug like that really existed, that would really help us out inside the Palace."

"It could, but it still seems kinda sketchy. I don't want to grow a third eye or something. If it even exists." Jolyne replied, and her phone chimed.

AT: how'd it go?

JC: Went down alright. Got us some stuff that should help.

JC: What about you, Ryuji?

RS: I was on my way to Shibuya when my mom called.

RS: Said she needed my help around the house, so I had to head straight home.

JC: We've got tomorrow off, right?

RS: Yeah.

JC: So why don't we all head there tomorrow?

AT: I'm planning on visiting Shiho in the hospital tomorrow.

AT: I'll try to head over there and meet you guys if I can.

JC: Don't sweat it.

RS: Yeah dude.

RS: Do what you need to.

AT: Thanks, you guys.

"Yesterday must have been hard for Lady Ann. First watching her friend try to take her own life, and then finding out about the Metaverse. She's stronger than she thinks…” Morgana observed, reading the messages as Jolyne walked to Leblanc.

**Sunday, 4/17/20XX, Afternoon**

Jolyne and Morgana stepped off the train into Shibuya. She was now dressed in a light green jacket that had 'Lucky Land' written across the back in white letters over a light blue tank top that had white stripes on it, with dark blue pants. "Yo!" A voice called, and see turned to see Ryuji waving at her. He was now dressed in the same yellow shirt as always, but now he had on a purple hoodie that had '777' written on the back and black track pants.

"Hey, Ryuji." Jolyne greeted as she walked over to him. "You heard from Ann?" Ryuji frowned and shook his head.
"Not since yesterday, no. Think she'll be fine?"

"All we can do is hope so." Jolyne replied as they began to walk. "So what exactly is this place we're headed to?"

"It's a place that specializes in realistic guns. They got a few other real looking weapons, too. Knives, brass knuckles. I think it even has a few swords." Ryuji explained as they entered Central Street. "Word is that the guy who runs it used to be pretty high up in the yakuza."

"Seriously?! Gimme a break…" She groaned out as they entered a back alley. Ryuji led her to a small store that had a neon green sign that read 'Untouchable' above the door. Entering the store, Jolyne saw that her friend hadn't been exaggerating. From wall to wall was all sorts of realistic weaponry, ranging from pistols to assault rifles to grenade launchers. "Guns…lots of guns…" She muttered out as Ryuji started looking around.

"Hey, start looking around. We need to pick out something for Ann. The realer lookin', the better." Ryuji suggested, and Jolyne began looking around. He wasn't kidding when he said this place specialized. It all looked so real, and it was so varied too. Pistols, revolvers, grenade launchers, mini guns, flintlocks, shotguns, sniper rifles…if it fired a bullet, there was a model of it here.

"You weren't kidding. This place is insane." Jolyne whispered to her friend as they perused the wares.

"Right? And check out these prices too." The former track star gestured at the price tags. The cheapest variation of each gun was about 3,000 yen, while the most expensive had so many zeroes they almost seemed to run together.

"This could get expensive…" Morgana muttered from inside the bag, peeking out from the partially open zipper. After a few minutes, Ryuji picked up a model shotgun, testing its weight, the pump, and the trigger.

"I kinda like this one." Jolyne was mostly satisfied with her pistol, and so she focused her efforts on finding a weapon for Ann. Eventually, she settled on a small sub machine gun, one that could be held in one hand.

"Think she'll like this?" She asked, and Ryuuji looked the gun over.

"Looks like a good fit for her. C'mon, let's hurry up and get out of here. This place give me the creeps…" He said, and the two approached the counter. The shopkeeper looked up from the magazine, a look of slight annoyance on his face.

"The hell do you want? This ain't a place for kids to hang out." He asked, his gruff voice carrying a tone of indifference. He was a middle aged man wearing a grey hat with yellow goggles over his grey hair, with a grey coat over a black turtleneck. A gecko tattoo was visible on his neck, partially hidden by his turtleneck.

"We'd like to buy these." Jolyne answered, setting the shotgun and the sub machine gun on the counter. Grumpy Shopkeep simply raised an eyebrow as he looked over their selection.

"Mind if I ask what you two are plannin' to do with these?"

"It's for…our cosplay group. We heard this is the best place to get stuff like this." Jolyne answered, and the Shopkeep turned his lollipop over in his mouth as he thought over her answer, before he shrugged.
"Whatever. None of my business anyway. Just don't go pointing this stuff at people. Last thing I need is a buncha dead kids with my merchandise on 'em." Grumpy Shopkeeper answered as he rung them up.

"Yes sir. We'll be extra careful." Jolyne answered, Ryujj nodding in agreement as they paid for the 'weapons.'

"Well that was easy." Morgana remarked as they left the store, sticking his head out of Jolyne's bag.

"I'll say. I just hope none of these things break. Replacin' them could get expensive." Ryuji said, and Jolyne nodded in agreement. Ryuji was carrying his shotgun in a paper bag, while Jolyne carried the sub machine gun they had bought for Ann.

"Between the guns and the medicine, we should be just about set." Morgana stated. "We've got a lot of ground to cover in the Palace, and not a lot of time to do it."

"Our deadline's the start of May. If we can't change Kamoshida's heart by then, not only will we be expelled, but I'll have violated the terms of my parole. There's no telling what'll happen to me." Jolyne stated, and Ryuji groaned.

"That's right, I forgot you're on probation. So we'll have to be sure we take care of it by then." Ryuji replied as they walked to Shibuya Square, heading towards the station. "So, sounds like we've got some kinda schedule. See you tomorrow?"

"Sounds good. Make sure you rest up and-

"-we must take action for ourselves!" A voice yelled out, and the three looked to see a man standing on a soapbox outside the entrance to the subway. He was in his early 50's, with slicked back dark hair, thick eyebrows, and brown eyes, wearing a black business suit with a green sash that had 'friendly Society, bright future' written on it in kanji. "The Ruling Party has become too subservient to their own interests, prioritizing its own wants over the needs of our citizens! Why, the subway accident earlier this month could have been avoided had the Ministry of Transport made sure that the tracks were safe, rather than lining its own pockets! We must take action, and elect officials who place the needs of Japan's citizens above their own!" The man yelled to a small crowd that had gathered around him.

"Who's that?" Jolyne asked Ryuji, who simply shrugged as they resumed walking

"Not sure. Likes to stand out here and give speeches. I think my mom said he used to be some big shot politician or something. I dunno." He answered, and they entered the station. "Well, suppose I better start getting rested up for tomorrow. See ya."

"Later." Jolyne said, and the two went their separate ways.

Later

Jolyne entered the attic of Leblanc, setting her bags on the desk and allowing Morgana to hop out. "Well, this was a productive weekend, wouldn't you say?" Morgana stated as he stretched.

"Yep. Bought drugs from a weird goth chick, and bought guns from a scary ex-Yakuza guy. All so we can fight supernatural monsters in an attempt to change an asshole's heart." Jolyne lamented as she took off her jacket, and Morgana adopted a quizzical expression as he saw something on his caretaker's body.

"What's that on your back? Some kind of tattoo?" He asked.
"Hm? Oh, you mean this." She pointed to the star shaped mark on her left shoulder blade, just below her neck. "Nah, it's just a birthmark. Everyone on my dad's side of the family has one just like it." She explained, and Morgana's brows furrowed as he looked closer at it. "Is there something wrong?"

"Not really. It is making something in my head itch, though. Almost as if it's something important…" he mumbled, before sighing. "It's no use. I can't remember anything."

"Don't worry about it. I'm sure it'll come to you when we find your memories." Jolyne reassured him as she scratched behind his ears, although it did ring a few alarm bells in her head.

The first night she'd arrived in the Velvet Room, Igor had said she was of a 'prestigious bloodline,' mentioning something about 'Joestar blood.' Could her father's side of the family have something to do with the Metaverse? Family history had always seemed to be a sore subject on that side, with her grandmother and Josuke being reluctant to even discuss it. The only person willing to discuss it with Jolyne was her great grandfather Joseph. However, whenever she asked, he'd always ramble about 'Pillar Men' and 'Caesar', talk about something called 'the Ripple', and go into long, curse filled rants about someone called 'Dio.' Jolyne couldn't figure out what an American heavy metal band had to do with an old Englishman-turned-real estate mogul, so she just brushed them off as dementia fueled delusions. And it wasn't like her father was around to answer any questions…

Jolyne simply brushed it aside. If there was an answer to all of this, it more than likely sat at the end of her 'rehabilitation'. She'd just have to be patient.

Jolyne was shaken out of her thoughts when her phone chimed, signaling a message.

AT: *Hey.*

AT: *So I saw Shiho today…*

JC: *How's she doing?*

AT: *She's stable. The doctor's say the worst is behind us.*

AT: *She still hasn't woken up though…*

JC: *I'm sure she'll be ok.*

AT: *Thanks.*

AT: *All I can do is believe in her.*

AT: *I'll make sure Kamoshida pays for this.*

JC: *I know you will.*

JC: *See you tomorrow.*

"So, what should we do for the rest of the day?" Morgana asked,

"Well, it's too early for bed, and I don't feel like going back into Shibuya. I guess I'll just work on some of this homework." Jolyne stated, and she did just that.

Hours passed as she worked on her assignments. Math, Social Studies, Japanese, English, History… it all blended together as Jolyne poured over the homework, with Morgana providing occasional assistance. It was late when they finished, and with nothing left to do, Jolyne and Morgana went to bed.
The clinking of chains above Jolyne's head woke her, and she sat up and turned to Igor and the Twins. "I was wondering where you three were. Miss me?" Jolyne asked, while Igor gazed at a series of files laid out in front of him.

"Your rehabilitation is progressing smoother than I anticipated. You have already formed contracts with more confidants than I expected in such a short time." Igor snapped his fingers, and the files began floating off the table over towards Jolyne's cell. Jolyne saw pictures of Ann, Morgana, and Takemi, each with their own separate folder, and read the words.

'Ann Takamaki: The Lovers.'

'Morgana: The Magician.'

'Tae Takemi: Death.'

"What exactly does all this mean?" Jolyne asked, looking at each file.

"By forming bonds with others around you, you can forge a contract with them in order to gain power and become stronger. The deeper your bond is with a particular arcana, the more power you will acquire from the bond." Igor explained as the files floated into Justine's hands. "That is the power of the Wild Card." Jolyne's brow furrowed at this.

"Wild Card? What exactly is that?"

"The Wild Card grants one the power to weird multiple Personas, rather than just the one naturally born of your will of rebellion." Igor explained, referring to Arsene. "Over time, as both your own strength and the bonds you hold grow stronger, the strength of the Personas you control shall also increase." Jolyne thought over this. Now that he mentioned it, upon meeting Ryuji, welcoming Ann and Morgana to the group, and forming her deal with Takemi, she had felt a tingle pass through her body.

"So how do I use this 'Wild Card' thing?" She asked, and the hook nosed man chuckled.

"That is for you to discover on your own."

"Of course it is. Because nothing can be simple..." she groaned, and Caroline smacked her baton on the bars.

"Be grateful we bothered to explain it to you at all, Inmate. Personally, I would've preferred watching you fumble around blindly." She snapped, but Jolyne ignored her as Igor spoke again.

"For the time being, this shall be the last time I summon you here myself. From now on, you will be able to visit us under your own power."

"So I'll be able to get a good night's sleep without you pulling me here? However shall I survive?" Jolyne snarked, and Justine simply sighed and shook her head as the bell began to ring.

"We will appear to you when the time is right." Igor stated, and snapped his fingers. In his hand appeared a glowing tarot card that read 'the Fool.' "I look forward to observing your progress. Farewell, and good luck, Trickster." He said, as Jolyne's vision darkened.

**Monday, 4/18/20XX, After School**

Jolyne's school day was as normal as any other day, with none of her teachers even mentioning the word 'expulsion.' However, the rumors that swirled about her, which Jolyne had gotten used to, had
undergone a slight change.

"Apparently Cujoh and Sakamoto tried mugging Mr. Kamoshida yesterday!"

"Oh they're totally gone. No way Mr. Kamoshida's gonna let them get away with assaulting him."

"I saw Cujoh talking with Suzui the day before she jumped…"

"Seriously?! I can't believe she did that to Suzui!"

"I can. I could tell she was trouble the minute she walked in. Good riddance, I say."

Jolyne listened to the whispers as she made her way to the roof. So Kamoshida had put out a warped version of the truth. Jolyne couldn't say she was surprised. Putting it out of her mind, she arrived at the roof with Morgana, where Ryuji and Ann were already waiting for her. "Everyone's already talking about you two. Especially you, Jolyne." Ann stated as Jolyne let Morgana out of the bag.

"So it's same old same old, then." Jolyne replied. "Same shit, different words. I don't let it get to me, though."

"Good. We need everyone completely focused inside the Palace." Morgana said, and Jolyne took the Submachine gun out of her bag and handed it to her.

"Hope you like it." Ann took the weapon, turning it over in her hands.

"And this'll work just like a real gun inside the Palace, as long as the Shadows think it's real?"

"Yup. Don't ask me how though. I try not to think too hard about any of this." Ryuji answered, and Morgana rolled his eyes.

"Of course you don't…" he muttered, and Jolyne looked at the rest of the group.

"Is everyone ready?"

"Hell yeah!"

"I am. He needs to pay for what he did to Shiho."

"Ready whenever you are, Joker." Once she got her friend's answers, Jolyne nodded. The group went down to the alley in front of the school, pulled out their phones, and activated the Meta-Nav. The world around Shujin darkened and began to distort, ripples spreading across the school. When it settled, the group stood in front of the castle under that sinister red sky, now wearing their Phantom Thief attire. Joker cracked her knuckles as they looked at the castle.

"Let's go."

Chapter End Notes

I'm so excited for you all to see what I have in store.
Chapter 7: The Castle of Lust

Chapter Summary

The newly formed Phantom Thieves embark on their first mission.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait. The first palace is by far my least favorite, so I decided to get most of it done in one chapter.

Chapter 7: Castle of Lust

"Wait!" Mona called out, stopping Joker, Skull, and Ann in their tracks before they could go off into the castle.

"What is it now? I was starting to get pumped!" Skull protested.

"We've humiliated the Shadow Kamoshida three times. There's no way the guards won't be expecting us now. Charging in headfirst again is suicide. We need some kind of strategy."

"Alright, but we still don't know anything about how the Castle's laid out, let alone where the Treasure is." Joker pointed out, and that's when Ann's face lit up.

"Well what if we had a map?" She suggested, and everyone turned to look at her.

"Whaddya mean by that? If this place is Kamoshida's heart, then why would his guards need a map?" Skull asked.

"When I got captured here the other day, one of the guards had to ask for directions to that room they took me too." The blonde explained, Mona started tapping his chin.

"Shadows still display individuality when under a Palace Ruler's thrall. If the Palace is big enough, then it stands to reason that some would make a map to avoid getting lost."

"Alright, so keep an eye out for a map." The Phantom Thief Leader instructed, getting a nod from the rest. "Good. Now, anything else we need to discuss, or can I have my moment back?"

"Well what about Ann's code name?" Skull chimed in, and Ann looked at him with a confused expression.

"Oh yeah, that's right. I almost forgot." Joker said, and Ann looked between the two of them.

"I'm sorry, my what?"

"Y'know, your code name! To keep your real identity a secret, like in spy movies. I'm Skull, she's Joker, and he's Mona." The former track star explained, and Ann nodded along as she crossed her
"Alright, I understand. So what do you guys wanna call me?" She asked, and the three began to think. Well, Jolyne and Morgana began to think, while Ryuji let his thoughts wander...elsewhere as he looked over Ann's costume.

"Hehehehe..." Jolyne simply rolled her eyes and smacked him on the back of his head. "Ow!"

"Stay focused, Ryuji."

"I am! I was uh...I was thinking of her codename! Y'know, trying to think of something based on her clothes, like we did with me!"

"Uh huh. And what did you come up with?" Ann inquired, and Ryuji swallowed as all eyes were on him.

"Uh...Kitty Woman! Y'know, because she got the tail and everything!"

"Hmmmm...nope. Although I do kinda like the train of thought..." Ann mused. "See if you guys can't come up with something based on this?" And so Joker and Mona began to think.

"Catgirl?"

"Nope."

"Catwoman?"

"Pass."

"Dominatrix?"

"Hell no!" Ann sighed. "C'mon guys, I don't wanna be called some little cat or sex freak!"

"Well what do you wanna be called then?" Skull asked, and Ann looked over her costume. The mask, the tail...

"How about...Panther?" The rest of the team mulled over the name Ann had picked out for herself.

"Why 'Panther'?"

"I dunno, it sounds more...ferocious? Why do you call yourself Skull?"

"Fair point."

"I like it." Joker stated, getting a smile from Panther.

"Alright, so it's settled. Panther it is." Mona stated.

"Is there anything else we need to settle? Any last minute potty breaks?" When she got no answer, Joker turned towards the castle. "Then let's go."

**West Building, First Floor**

The door to the safe room opened, and out poked the head of the Phantom Thieves' Leader. "We're clear. Let's move." Joker instructed, and the four poured out into the hall. Rather than go the way they had come before, the group went right, towards a closed door at the end of the hall. Panther
opened the door, and entered the room. Inside looked like some sort of small dining room, with a table filling up the majority of the room. Inside were two shadows, though each Phantom Thief quickly took cover before they were spotted.

"What do we do? They're right in front of the door!" Panther whispered.

"Calm down. See those masks? All we gotta do is rip 'em off, and we can fight them without worrying about alarms."

"For once, Skull's right. We move on Joker's mark." With that, Joker began motioning towards them. Joker and Panther hid underneath the table near one of the guards, while Skull and Mona hid behind a pillar. As soon as the guard was in front of her, the transfer student emerged from under the table and jumped onto the Shadow's back, with Skull doing the same. They ripped off the guards' masks, jumping off as they dissolved into the black tar and reformed as monsters. The one Joker had ambushed turned into one of the lantern wielding pumpkin creatures from the dungeon, while Skull's morphed into some sort of demonic goat with two horns.

"In the name of King Kamoshida, die! Hee Ho!" The pumpkin creature yelled, a fireball shooting out of its lamp. Joker jumped to avoid it, but Panther remained in place.

"Carmen!" The Persona materialized behind her as her mask vanished, holding one of the heart guys in front of her. The fireball impacted the man, only for the ventilated mouth hole to absorb the blast, while the other heart man fired a similar fire ball at the creature. The blast knocked it back, allowing Joker to quickly finish it off with her pistol.

"Nice one Panther!" Mona called out, as he and Skull were dealing with the demonic goat. Skull swung his pipe at it and Mona swung his scimitar, but the demon was fast, dodging each strike effortlessly. Eventually, it swung its head, generating a massive blast of wind. Mona was unaffected, but Skull was knocked back against the wall. "Skull!" Mona called out, and while he was distracted, the goat head butted him, knocking him down.

"Oh no!" Panther yelled, and Joker sneered as her mask vanished.

"Arsene!" The winged Persona appeared behind her, and flapped its wings. Instantly, some kind of needles began shooting out of the wings towards the Shadow. It dodged most of them, but a few managed to hit their mark.

"Fools! King Kamoshida will-!

"Captain Kidd!" The ethereal pirate manifested above where Skull had landed, revealing that he had now recovered, shooting out a bolt of electricity that hit the demon and knocked it down. Skull picked up his shotgun and cocked it, while Joker and Panther surrounded it, guns drawn.

"Nice going, Skull." Joker complemented, and he nodded with a smirk as the demon looked between them, desperately looking for a way out. "Alright, now lets-"

"Wait!" Mona interrupted, having recovered from being knocked down and walking over to them, slingshot drawn. "This is the perfect opportunity for us to negotiate with it!" This clearly caused confusion to spread across the humans.

"Negotiate? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean this is our chance to get something out of it! Money, items, information…we shouldn't let it go to waste!" Mona explained. "Alright, Joker, take the lead!" Joker cleared her throat.
Alright, uh…Demon Goat…thing…give us whatever you have." She demanded, and the Shadow seemed to he…searching itself?

"Hmmm…me no have money." It spoke in broken, guttural speech.

"Ok then. Give us an item."

"Sorry. Me no have pockets." Mona looked shocked at this.

"Oh crap. This isn't going at all how I thought it would…" he groaned out. "I guess we'll just have to-" Before Mona could finish, the Shadow staggered, almost as if a shock had passed through its body.

"Me…me remember now. I am thou, thou art I. Me name is…Bicorn!" It declared and before anyone could ask what exactly that meant, Bicorn exploded into a flash of blue light. When it died down, a glowing domino mask similar to Joker's floated where the Shadow once stood, and the mask flew to Joker's face, merging with her mask in a flash of blue flame.

"Whoa! What was that?!" Panther asked, and Joker touched her finger to her mask.

"I…I don't know. I was just talking to it and it just…did that." Joker replied, and turned to the dumbfounded Mona. "Do you have any idea what that was?"

"None! I've never seen anything like that!" The flabbergasted creature answered, and Skull scratched his head.

"So how come it went into your mask? Does that mean you can summon it like Arsene?"

"Don't be an idiot, Skull. There's no way she could-" as Mona started to criticize the false blonde, Joker put her hand on her mask.

"Bicorn!" Her mask vanished, and instead of the winged demon Arsene, the two horned Bicorn appeared behind her, only now it was cloaked in some sort of blue light. The rest of the Phantom Thieves watched slack jawed as Joker grabbed the chains coming off it, and in a pillar of blue flame, it turned back to Arsene.

"The power to wield multiple Personas…incredible…just what else can she do?" Mona muttered out, and Jolyne thought back to what Igor had told her. Was this the Wild Card ability he had mentioned? She couldn't dwell on that for now. They had a mission, and they had to pull it off.

"We'll wonder about it later. Let's keep moving." She ordered, and the others all nodded and moved in.

An hour would pass of the group progressing in silence, and as they moved throughout the palace, a certain theme of 'long hallways' and 'small rooms' began to emerge. If this place is based on Kamoshida's heart, then he must have the worst imagination in the world. Jolyne thought to herself as they cleared the third long hallway in a row. Eventually, they reached a stairwell, climbing it to reveal…another long hallway.

"Sheesh, it just goes on and on…" She muttered, and they pressed on. Eventually, after about another half hour, the Phantom Thieves found themselves in some sort of library. Having already scoured the entire second floor, and dispatching a few of the guards, they had yet to find another stairwell, with Panther reasoning that the Library would hold their best bet.

"Ughhhhh this is hopeless." Skull groaned out, slumping at a desk. "How're we supposed to find a
"Don't be like that, Skull. There's got to be a way out." Panther reassured, while Joker and Mona looked around at the shelves of books.

"Hey Joker, I can feel some sort of draft over here." Mona said, standing in front of a wall of books.

"Think there's a way to get it open?"

"There's gotta be. Any ideas?" Joker pursed her lips, looking around the room at the walls of books. There seemed to be a gap in each wall, signifying a missing book. *Hm, in a place like this, I doubt that's coincidence. Some kind of puzzle. I wonder...could there be a switch behind those holes?* The transfer student examined the three gaps, and there did appear to be some sort of switch at the very back. *Alright, so it looks like it needs a book to work. Except I bet it's not just any old book...* she began looking around the room, looking at book titles and concentrating...when the room seemed to dim, her focus enhanced, and three books were highlighted in gold. It was almost like some sort of third eye had opened...

Jolyne went around and picked up the 'highlighted' books, noting the titles on the books. *The King Book...The Queen Book...and the Slave Book...* she read through the titles, and cracked open the King Book. Inside seemed to be a glorified biography of Kamoshida, talking about how he had risen to stardom and 'ascended to the throne of Shujin.' *What a load of malarkey.*

The Slave Book contained stories about individual members of the male volleyball team, including Mishima, that talked about how pathetic they all were. It went into great detail about how King Kamoshida had 'blessed them with his presence.' *More like cursed them.*

Joker then took the Queen Book and opened it, only to almost immediately shut it with such force that it drew the attention of her companions. "Is something wrong, Joker?" Panther asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just...don't open that book. No matter what." Joker replied, blinking rapidly. "Good grief, I'm going to have to get my eyeballs bleached when this is done..." she muttered, and tucked the books under her arm as she walked towards the gaps. She set the King Book between books titled 'Rise of a Legend' and 'King's Game', the Slave Book between 'Yuuki Mishima' and 'Shinji Kobayakawa', and set the Queen Book between 'Ann Takamaki' and 'Shiho Suzui.' Almost as soon as Jolyne placed the third book in its slot, there was a *click* followed by the wall Mona pointed out to slide back, revealing a room that almost made them all sick. "Oh god..."

Inside the room was not only a path out, but all sorts of sexual devices, ranging from ball gags to riding crops to a few things Jolyne didn't even want to think about. The worst part had to be the wall, as it was lined with pictures of female students.

"No effin' way..." Skull muttered out, looking at the photos. Jolyne, Ann, Shiho, the student council president...they were all up there, along with countless others.

"This is truly sick. Kamoshida's even more twisted than I thought..." Mona muttered, and Joker noticed Panther standing with her fists clenched, almost visibly shaking.

"Hey." The green haired student placed a hand on the blonde's shoulder. "You ok?" Ann looked at the pictures, particularly the ones of shiho, took a deep breath, and nodded.

"Yeah, I will be. I'm just...I'm just ready to give that bastard what's coming to him." The model responded, when Skull noticed something on a shelf inside the secret room.
"Wait, is that…" he walked over to the shelf. "No effin' way!"

"What is it, Skull?" Joker asked, and Skull turned back to the group, holding a golden medallion that had a symbol of 5 interlocked rings on it.

"Check it out! It's that asshat's Olympic gold medal!" He answered, holding it towards the group. Needless to say, the other two teenagers were slightly awestruck.

"Whoa, so this is what a gold medal looks like…"

"Never thought I'd see one up close…what's it doing in here?"

"Because it's not real." The group asked turned to Mona.

"Say what now?"

"It's not the real medal. It's merely a cognitive duplicate." Mona explained, and the three humans almost seemed to deflate.

"Aw man. I was looking forward to beating him over the head with it…" Joker lamented, when a light seemed to go off in Panther's head.

"Wait a minute. Even if this ain't the real deal, then why's he keep it in here?" Panther mused, and this got the gears turning in Skull's head. He looked at the pictures in the wall, then at the 'medal', and then noticed faint white streaks on the medal…

"Ahhhhh!" Skull screamed, tossing the medal as far away from him as he could, before frantically rubbing his hands on his pants. "Gross gross gross gross gross…"

"Better him than me…" Panther whispered to Joker, who nodded in agreement. However, Mona noticed something about the shelf from where he was standing at Skull's knee. He jumped up and grabbed what was sticking out of the shelf, pulling down what looked like a large piece of parchment. Mona looked at its contents, and he grinned.

"Alright!" He held up the parchment for his companions to see: it was a map of the palace, with detailed outlines of the hallways and rooms. In the upper right hand corner, there was a circle marked 'tower' that had a large red crown drawn on it.

"Whoa, nice eye Mona!" Panther congratulated, and he almost seemed to blush.

"Oh Lady Ann, your praise is worth more than any treasure~"

"Hey, what about me? He wouldn't have noticed if I hadn't grabbed that…actually, let's not talk about what that was. Ever." Skull lamented, and Joker simply patted him on the back. Mona examined the map, noticing an area of the palace marked 'tower' that had a large red crown drawn on it.

"Hey Joker, take a look at this." She knelt down to look over Mona's shoulder, resting her elbow on his large head as she looked at the map.

"Think that's where the treasure is?"

"That'd be my best guess. It wouldn't be marked like this otherwise."

"Well, its not like we've got anything else to go on." Joker sighed out, and stood back up. Mona handed her the map, and she tucked it in her jacket. With that, the Thieves resumed their trek.
The Phantom Thieves had been progressing through the castle for almost an hour now, following the map. It was largely uneventful, save for encounters with a few Shadows, some of which Joker had managed to sway to their side and convert into a mask. Now, however, the quartet found themselves entering what appeared to be a large cathedral, with a large golden statue of Kamoshida spiking a volleyball in the center. "This guy's never heard of modesty, has he?" Mona remarked as they entered the room, looking around at the elegant-yet-garish stained glass windows behind the statue, which seemed to depict the King of the Castle at various volleyball games.

"Just when you think this place can't get anymore ugly…" Joker sighed, and looked around the room, almost seeming to squint.

"This layout…hey guys, doesn't this place remind you of anything?" He asked, and Oanther raised an eyebrow, before she looked around the cathedral as well.

"Now that you mention it, this place…kinda reminds me of the gym at school."

"Hey Mona, is this that cognition thing you talked about?" Joker asked, and Mona nodded.

"Exactly. Since the Palace is based off how Kamoshida views a physical location, in this case the school, it stands to reason that the way Kamoshida views specific locations will have an effect on how the Palace is arranged." The not-cat explained, and Skull scowled.

"So he thinks that the gym is some sorta church, where everyone comes to worship him?"

"Makes sense, given how we had that big volleyball rally the other day. So, Joker, where to next?" Panther replied, and Joker took out the map and examined it. According to the map, they were still on track to reaching the Treasure, with the Tower being right next to the Chapel, but save for the way they came in, Jolyne could see no exits. They were so close, and Jolyne really didn't want to risk retracing their steps. There had to be a way to get to be Tower…

"Halt, intruders!" But that would have to wait, as a hostile voice cut though the air. At the feet of the large Kamoshida statue, two golden armored guards appeared. "For crimes against our glorious King Kamoshida, you will pay for your crimes!"

"Ughhhh, more of these guys? Great…" Skull groaned out, and the two gold guards exploded into pools black and red energy. When the energy reformed as a solid shape, both Shadows now stood as red clad knights with horned helmets and fur trim on the shoulders. They now rode atop black horses, and each carried red spears.

"Take 'em down!" Joker ordered, and Carmen materialized behind Panther, firing two fireballs at the charging knights, only for them to shrug them off like they were nothing. The quartet jumped to avoid the charging Shadows, with Mona and Joker facing one and Skull and Panther facing the other.

Joker took out her gun and fired at the Mounted Knight, pulling the trigger until the weapon clicked empty. However, while the Mounted Knight was slightly staggered, it was largely unaffected by the attack. Mona leapt at it and swung his scimitar, only for the Knight to block it with its spear. Mona was knocked back, although he was able to bounce off a pillar and land on his feet. "Show your might, Zorro!" The cartoonish swordsman appeared behind him, swinging its rapier and generating a blast of wind. The Mounted Knight was pushed back by this, having to visibly brace himself, and
that's when Joker made her move. Fireballs shot out of the Knight's spear, but Joker managed to dodge most of them. She leapt up into the air and swung her dagger, slashing through the knight's armor and causing black blood to gush out as Joker landed on the ground. However, the Knight still had some fight left in him, as he swung his spear at Joker, the flat end catching her in the chest. The resulting blow knocked her backwards into a pillar. "Joker!" Mona cried out, and Zorro charged the wounded Knight, finishing it off with rapid stabs from its rapier. As it dissolved into black ash, Mona ran over to Joker, who was slumped against the pillar. "Joker, are you ok?"

"Yeah, I'm...I'm fine." Joker responded, Mona looked her over, especially her chest, where the Knight's spear had hit her. But no matter how hard Mona looked, she couldn't find any sign of injury. Although she noticed what looked like a light blue shimmer crossed in front of her chest, before it faded away. Joker placed her hand on Mona's hand, using him as leverage as she stood up, popping a painkiller into her mouth.

"C'mon, Skull and Panther probably need-"

"Whoa, are you ok?" Skull's voice called out, and the two looked over to see Skull and Panther running up to them, looking none the worse for wear. The Mounted Knight they were fighting was nowhere to be seen, save for a few crushed pews.

"I'm fine. What about you two?"

"Oh, we're fine. Skull just zapped the big guy with Captain Kidd and that knocked him down for us to finish him off win our guns." Panther explained, and held up what looked like a small, round stone. "He dropped this when we beat him. What do you think it is?" Joker took it from her, turning it over in her red gloved hand.

"Not sure. Mona, check and see if the one we fought dropped one." Mona nodded and trotted over to where they had felled the Mounted Rider, returning holding an identical stone. Jolyne took it and rolled them over in her hands. They kinda looked like eyeballs, which freaked her out more than a little bit.

"Maybe they're like, some sorta key or something?"

"Don't be stupid, Skull. What sort of door could possibly have a key like this?"

"Hey, you never know. It's not like anything else the past week has made any sense. Hell, you're a talking cat."

"I'm not a cat!"

"I think I'll side with Skull on this one, Mona. It definitely wouldn't surprise me." Joker said, tucking the stones into her coat.

"We still need a way out, don't we?" Panther asked, and Joker nodded.

"We're right next to the tower where the Treasure is supposed to be, but I can't think of a way to get there without backtracking."

"No thanks. I don't wanna risk bumping into that loud mouthed 'king' again."

"Well, Skull, I don't see any way up there. Do you?" Mona asked, and Panther began looking around, before gasping and pointing.

"Look, up there!" They looked the direction of where she was pointing, squinting until they saw a
plate glass window with a sizable gap in it behind the statue. Through the hole, they could see the red skies that surrounded the Palace. "That should let us get up to the roof, right?"

"It could, but how do we get up there?" Mona stated, and Joker furrowed her brow as an idea began to form in her head.

"God I hope this works…" she muttered to herself, and began walking over to the statue. Arriving at the statue of Kamoshida, the leader took a deep breath, held her right hand towards the top, and began unraveling her hand into strings. The strings began moving upwards towards the statue's head, her arm unraveling the higher they went. Eventually, one she had unravelled past her elbow, the strings reached the top of the statue. Condensing to form a rope and a 'hand', they grasped the statue, and Jolyne turned back to her companions. "Start climbing. I don't know how long I can hold this."

"Whoa, nice goin' dude!" Ryuji congratulated as he and Morgana walked over to her, while Ann stood slack jawed.

"What…how…what the hell is this?!" She asked, and Morgana turned back to her.

"That's right, we forgot to tell you about this. We don't know how, but basically, Joker can turn her body into these strings that serve a variety of purposes, from lockpicking to eavesdropping. I guess we can add rappelling to that now." He explained, but the red-clad blonde was still confused.

"But…how? How's her body do that?"

"It just works. Now can you guys hurry up, before my arm gets tired?" Joker called back, and Skull tested the 'rope', pulling on it a bit. "Hey, watch it! That's still my arm, y'know."

"Sorry, sorry." He apologized, and began to climb up the rope. Joker did her best to conceal the strain on her face, watching as he climbed up her 'rope.'

"Jeez, Ryuji, lay off the ramen!" She groaned out, and Skull soon reached the top, climbing in top of the statue's head. Mona was next, jumping onto her shoulder, then jumping off onto the rope. He was significantly lighter than the skull-masked blonde before him, though it was slow going as the not-cat had to make use his stubby little arms and paws to climb. Eventually, he reached the top, joining Skull at the top. Panther had watched them climb up, a look of uncertainty remaining on her face.

"So I take it this isn't related to your Persona?" She asked, and Joker shook her head.

"Pretty sure it isn't, since I can do it outside of the Palace too. Haven't exactly had much time to figure this all out." Joker explained, but Panther still looked uncertain as she looked the rope up and down. Joker put her free hand on the red leather clad woman's shoulder, and gave a reassuring smile.. "Hey, don't worry. If I can handle Ryuji, then you'll be fine." Panther returned the smile.

"Alright, if you say so." With that, Panther took hold of the arm rope, and began to climb. Once she was above Joker, Joker looked to the side and began whistling.

*Don't look up don't look up don't look up...* Joker told herself, glad none of her teammates could see the red spreading across her face under her mask. After a few minutes, Joker felt a tug on her arm/rope, looking up to see her fellow Phantom Thieves standing at the top.

"Yo! You ready?"

"Whenever you are!" She called back up, and they began slowly pulling her up by her arm/rope. Once she reached the top, she pulled herself up and unraveled the rope, the strings reraveling back
into Jolyne's right arm. Panther's nose crinkled as she took a few sniffs of the air.

"Does anyone else smell… is that soap?" Panther asked, and the others sniffed the air.

"Oh yeah, now that you mention it, I kinda smelled this back in the dungeon, when Joly… I mean Joker found us a way out. I was still pissed from seeing what Kamoshida was doin' to the guys he had down there, so I didn't bring it up." Skull answered.

"Guess it's just part of that weird power." Mona answered, and they all turned to look at the hole in the window. After counting to three, Joker jumped the gap between the statue, grabbing onto the sill and pulling herself up. On the outside of the church there was a small ledge for them to walk upon, with a large roof being visible right next to a large tower.

"We're almost there. Let's just move one at a time." She called back, and the other three nodded. She pressed herself against the castle and shimmied along the ledge towards the roof, with Mona, Panther, and Skull respectively following after her. They soon reached the roof facing the tower, with a single wooden door on the tower.

"We're close enough now that I can feel it. The Treasure is definitely up there!" Mona exclaimed, and Skull grinned as he pumped his fist in the air.

"Hell yeah! Hope you're ready for us, you bastard!" He cheered, and Panther smiled as well.

"Almost there…I'll make him pay, Shiho…" she whispered to herself, and Joker approached the door, kicking it open to reveal a red spiraling stair case.

"Alright everyone, homestretch. Let's go!" The transfer student turned Thief ordered, and they all began running up the stairs. When they reached as far as they could go, they went through another door, being faced with a spacious, extravagant room once again. However, as opposed to the rooms below, the floor up here was tinged in purple light, various cracks appearing in the floor with rubble that seemed to float.

"Whoa, what's going on here?"

"The distortion is particularly strong up here, probably due to the Treasure's presence." Mona explained, and Joker noticed a staircase leading upwards.

"There!" She pointed, and they ran over to that staircase. As they arrived at the next floor and the next room, they saw several guards stationed around the room, along with several statues of female torsos decorating the room. The Phantom Thieves wasted no time, taking cover behind the garish statues as they progressed through the room, avoiding detection of the knights as they approached another staircase. Climbing the staircase, they found themselves faced with two options: either progressing through the hallway towards the next staircase, or going to the left across a suspended bridge, leading to the other side of the hall. When the group tried going the way of the former, however, the floor seemed to rise up, blocking their path.

"Well, guess we don't have any choice." Mona said, and Joker nodded, stepping across into the bridge to her left However, as soon as she stepped foot on to the bridge, she heard a small click, and jumped backwards to avoid a bladed pendulum. Several bladed pendulums began to swing back and forth all along the bridge, cutting them off.

"Shit!" Joker cursed.

"There's gotta be a way through there! Maybe if we time it right?" Panther suggested, and Mona shook his head.
"No one's that fast. We'd be chopped to pieces." He said, and looked at the raised floor that went all the way to the ceiling. "And I don't think we'll be able to go that way."

"Dammit! We're so close too!" Skull groaned, and that's when Joker noticed a bust of Kamoshida next to the doorway. Memories of their time in the dungeon flashed through her head.

This kinda reminds me of that bust by the drawbridge. I wonder... The black clad leader walked over to the grinning bust and pulled down on its jaw. Just like the one in the dungeon, the jaw pulled down, but unlike the dungeon, nothing happened. "Dang..." she muttered under her breath, when the green haired woman noticed something about the statue: it was missing its eyes. A light went on in her head, and Joker's red gloved hand went into her coat, pulling out the stones that they had taken from the Mounted Knights in the cathedral. Going off her gut feeling, Joker placed each stone in the eyehole, and to her elation, the stones fit perfectly into the holes, emanating a faint yellow glow as they clicked into place. Taking a deep breath, she pulled on the jaw...and the pendulums stopped swinging.

"Whoa! Nice job Joker!" Mona cheered.

"Looks like Skull was right about those being some kind of key." Panther said, and he sheepishly grinned.

"Aw, it was nothin'!" He said, and Jolyne patted him on the back.

"Good call, Skull. Alright, let's keep moving." She said, and they crossed the bridge to the other side of the hallway. The corridor circled back around to where the floor had risen up to block their path, revealing an open doorway that held yet another stair case. However, this one was different, as instead of being a spiral, it lead straight up. The Thieves began to climb, eventually reaching the top and being greeted by an extravagant hallway that was even more ornate than the other ones. As soon as they entered the hall, Mona shuddered.

"This feeling...the treasure is definitely on this floor!" He said, running over to a nearby doorway. The others followed after him, taking cover and peering past the doorway. They were greeted with the sight of a spacious, extravagant room with a large throne in the center. In the throne was none other than the Shadow Kamoshida, with several guards kneeling down in front of him.

"Over the last few hours, we've gotten reports of a number of our guards going missing. This can only mean one thing: those good for nothing Thieves are back!" The King bellowed, rage contorting his already distorted voice. "I won't allow this defiance to stand! You are to kill them on sight, no exceptions! Any who allow them to escape-" as the Shadow began to rant, the Thieves turned to each other.

"See that painting behind him?" Mona said, pointing to a large painting of a shirtless, overly muscular Kamoshida on a horse with a sword. "I'm definitely sensing the treasure behind that."

"So we just need to get there. The question is how?" Joker asked, and Panther spotted a raised balcony that encircled the throne room.

"What about up there?" She pointed, and Mona nodded.

"That'll do it. Remember, stay in the shadows." He instructed, and they began to move. They found a hole in the wall, jumping up and sneaking through it onto the balcony. As Kamoshida ranted and raved about what would happen if any of the guards let them escape, they stayed out of sight, slowly sneaking around towards the painting behind the throne. Luckily, all the guards still had their heads bowed in reverence, so they didn't notice the students-turned-Thieves sneaking behind the throne. As
they neared the painting, Joker began to focus, trying to activate the 'Third Eye' she had used in the library. It worked, and through her dimmed vision, Jolyne saw a yellow outlined brick next to the painting. Motioning to her companions, Joker pressed the brick, and they all began to gently push. The painting began to swing around, and once they were past the doorway, they shoved it close. However, just before it could slam shut and give away their position, Skulk braced himself against the door, grunting as he stopped its sudden swing. Joker and Panther slowly pulled it shut, the painting sealing with a light *click*. Kamoshida paused in his rant at the light click, getting up and turning around to see that there was now a painting of him standing victorious in gold armor, holding a volleyball in one hand and 'Ann' in the other. He squinted for a second, before he sighed.

"Guess I forgot to shut it all the way last time. Wind must have blown it closed." He muttered, and turned back to his guards. "Now, where was I?"

Behind the painting, the Phantom Thieves let out a light sigh. "Man, that was close…" Panther groaned, and Skull nodded in agreement, only to let out a small yawn as a wave of fatigue washed over him.

"Oh man, anyone else tired?" Joker nodded, covering her mouth as she yawned.

"Now that you mention it, yeah. All this Persona using, fighting, and sneaking takes a lot out of you."

"Hmph. Amateurs. I can still keep going!" Mona jeered, although he was looking a little disheveled himself. He motioned for them to follow him. "C'mon, the Treasure's this way. Let's go." He instructed, and they all followed him. Soon, they were all left slack jawed as they stared at a huge mountain of gold items. Crowns, swords, necklaces, rings...if it was exquisite, then it was here. But what was most eye catching had to be what was in the middle: a large, shapeless, white light, that had a light film surrounding it almost like a bubble.

"Whoa…is this the treasure?" Joker asked breathlessly, the white light bathing them in its glow.

"Correct. This is the manifestation of Kamoshida's distorted desires, the heart around which this Palace was built." Mona answered. "If we take this, then we'll bring about a change of heart in the real version of Kamoshida."

"Then what're we waiting for? Let's go!" Skull said, and made to grab the Treasure…only for his hands to pass right through. Mona sighed, watching as he fruitlessly tried to grab it.

"We can't steal it now, dummy. Desires have no solid form. We'll have to send a Calling Card and make it manifest." Panther pursed her lips and raised an eyebrow at this.

"A Calling Card? What's that?"

"Basically, we warn him that we're going to steal his heart!" Mona said with a grin, while the others looked confused. "Like I said beforehand, desires have no solid form, largely because the person the Palace belongs to sees them as a part of them. However, if that person becomes conscious of the fact that their desires are in fact something that can be stolen, then it affects their cognition and causes their desires to manifest as a Treasure." Joker and Panther were listening intently, while Skull looked a little lost, but didn't say anything.

"So why didn't we send this Calling Card thing before we started? If he knew we were coming for him, then we could just take this thing and call it a day." Skull asked.

"Because once the Calling Card is sent and the Treasure is given solid form, then the Palace and its
ruler will be on high alert. Guards would be everywhere. We'd have never been able to make it through here in one day like we did."

"Then why couldn't we have just come back?" Panther asked, and Mona's grin vanished.

"Because once we send the calling card, we'll only have 24 hours to act, and we only get one shot." Their eyes all widened at this. "If we threaten someone that we're going to steal their hearts, and then nothing happens, then they'll write us off if we try again."

"That's…a pretty huge bomb to drop on us, Mona." Joker said. "Why didn't you tell us all this at the beginning?"

"Because this is your first time. The pressure of knowing that we only have one chance to do this would've inadvertently caused someone to slip up and make a mistake." The not-cat explained, and his grin returned. "But now I see that was a mistake. You've all performed beyond my wildest expectations. Even you, Skull." Panther smiled at him.

"Thanks, Morgana. You were pretty great out there too." She said, and he blushed.

"Oh Lady Ann, I don't hold a candle to you. You're so amazing~" he purred out, and Joker looked at the treasure.

"So this is Kamoshida's desires, huh? It's almost kinda beautiful, in its own demented way. Jolyne thought, and clenched her fists as she thought of everyone who had been hurt because of these desires. Ryuji, Ann, Mishima, Shiho, the members of the volleyball team…everything bad that had happened to them had been because of this. Jolyne was going to enjoy snatching the treasure right out from under his nose. "Morgana, have we done everything we need to?" She asked, and he nodded.

"Yes. We've located the treasure and secured an infiltration route. All that's left is the Calling Card."

"Then let's call it a day. We'll rest up, and tomorrow we send the Calling Card and steal his treasure. Is that good with everyone?"

"I am. I'm ready to make him pay for everything he's done!" Ann said, determination burning in her eyes.

"Dude, do you even need to ask? Hell yeah I am!" Ryuji stated, and jabbed a thumb into his chest. "I'll take care of the calling card tonight." Panther let out a small chortle at that, before she caught herself. "Something funny?"

"Hm? Oh, it's just…are you sure? Arts and crafts was never your strong suit." Panther lamented, and he huffed indignantly.

"Well do you want to do it?"

"Hmmmmm…no thanks."

"That's what I thought. Joker?"

"I'm good. Go nuts." Joker said, and he grinned, only for Joker to hold up her hand. "Just…try not to make it too personal. We don't want to tip him off that it's us."

"Got it." He said, and they all looked at the Treasure.
Ryuji thought of what Kamoshida had done to the track team. He thought of the ache he still felt in his right knee, and of the limp he still walked with. He thought of how Kamoshida had ruined his future and countless others.

Ann thought of Shiho. Thought of her jumping off that rooftop and the sickening sound she heard when she landed. Thought of how Ann had done nothing to help her friend, and had inadvertently brought her to Kamoshida's attentions.

Morgana thought of his missing memories. Thought of the people he had met since coming to this palace, and how helping them might lead him to the life he had lost.

Jolyne thought of everyone Kamoshida had hurt. Ryuji, Ann, Shiho, Mishima, countless others… making her a pariah was nothing compared to what they had gone through. All because Kamoshida still thought he was entitled to their suffering. It was time to put an end to that.

Joker turned away. "Cmon, I saw a safe room a little ways back. Let's head home."

**Monday, 4/18/20XX, Evening**

The bell above LeBlanc's door chimed as Jolyne pushed it open, being greeted with the sight of Sojiro wiping the counter. "Welcome back. Anything exciting happen at school?" Sojiro asked as he finished wiping the countertop.

"Same old same old." She neglected to mention how she and her friends, including the cat in her bag, had infiltrated an otherworldly castle generated by a volleyball coach's perverted desires to try and steal said desires. All to avoid being expelled and sentenced to a very lengthy prison sentence.

"That's good. Once you get set in a routine, it'll be easier to stay out of trouble." Sojiro stated, and Jolyne looked around the empty cafe.

"Slow day?"

"Yeah, but Monday's usually are." He answered, taking a sip of coffee. "So, you talk to your dad the other day?" He asked, and Jolyne felt a lump in her throat.

"I uh…I tried, but I just got his voicemail. He must've gone home." She lied, but Sojiro didn't seem to buy it.

"Uh huh. Guess you'll just have to call him another time." Sojiro suggested, and he left it at that. "So, you hungry?" Jolyne looked up at this, a curious expression on her face.

"A little. Why?" In the week she'd lived at Leblanc, Sojiro hadn't offered to feed her, instead leaving her to get her meals on her way to and from school.

"Well, like I said, Monday's are slow, and I don't think I'll get any more customers tonight. I just brewed some fresh curry, and I don't want it to go to waste." He pointed over to a large, earthen pot resting on the oven. "Well? Do you want some or not?" Jolyne purses her lips as she thought for a moment, before her stomach growled and decided for her.

"Sure, if you're offering." She answered, and Sojiro's stern countenance was broken the corners of his mouth tugging upward into a small smile.

"Good. Take a seat." He instructed, and Jolyne sat herself at the bar, setting the bag with Morgana in it down by her stool. "So, you've made yourself some friends, huh?" He said.
"Yes sir."

"Anyone I might know?"

"Do you know anyone named Sakamoto or Takamaki?" Sojiro thought for a minute, before shaking his head.

"Can't think of anyone with that last name. So, mind if I ask what you've been doing with them that has you out until night?" Jolyne raised an eyebrow at this, watching as he stirred the curry.

"I thought you didn't care what I got up to?"

"Ever hear of small talk? Sheesh, you're just like Futaba…" he muttered that last part out under his breath, so softly that Jolyne couldn't hear it.

"Well, if you must know, they've been showing me the city. Helping me figure out my way around so I don't get lost again." Jolyne 'answered.'

"Uh huh. And one of these friends is a guy, correct?" Sojiro asked with a hint of mischief in his voice, causing Jolyne to roll her eyes.

"Like is said, it's nothing like that. He's just a friend. He's not my type anyways."

"Uh huh, gotcha. Now, you don't have to answer this if you don't want, but when you say not 'your type…" Sojiro's voice trailed off, and Jolyne narrowed her eyes as she followed his train of thought.

"Yeah, I'm not into guys that much. That a problem?" She asked defensively, and Sojiro merely held up his hands.

"Hey, no worries here. I don't care one way or another who you love or how. As long as you stay out of trouble, it makes no difference to me." He answered, and Jolyne let out a sigh of relief she didn't know she'd been holding in.

"…thanks." Sojiro nodded, and began ladling the curry into a plate, before setting it in front of her along with some silverware.

"Careful. It's hot." He warned, and Jolyne took a big sniff of it. It smelled incredible, the scent of all the different spices mingling together to make her mouth water. Jolyne took a spoonful of curry, examined it…and took a bite.

Whenever she visited her uncle Josuke in Morioh, he always took her to an Italian restaurant where the meal was custom tailored to the guest by the chief.. Every meal Jolyne had eaten there consistently put every other meal to shame. But next to Sojiro's curry? Tonio Trussardi didn't hold a candle. The curry was the the single greatest thing she had ever tasted. The spiciness of the curry helped seal the flavor in and unpack it for her tastebuds. Her mind was racing trying to come up with new words for how delicious the curry was. Angels sang in the distance as her eyes watered, her mind transcending to a higher plane of existence that could only be attained through tasting truly great food…

"Well?" Sojiro asked, bringing her back down to earth. Jolyne remained silent for a moment as she swallowed…before digging into the curry, consuming it like she had been starved for a month.

"Hey, slow down! You're going to burn yourself, ok?"

"Sorry, it's just…it's so GOOD!" She stated, and upon seeing the childlike expression on her face, Sojiro let out a good, hearty laugh.
"Well, I'm glad you like it." He said, and gears began turning in his head as he watched her devour the curry. "Hey, what have you been eating for breakfast?" He asked, distracting her from her eating.

"I've just been getting a breakfast bar on the way to school." She answered, wiping away some curry that was dribbling down her chin.

"I figured it was something like that." He said, stroking his goatee. "Growing kid like you needs more than some measly breakfast bar. How about you and I make a deal?" The restaurateur asked, piquing Jolyne's interest.

"Go on."

"Lately, I've had a few ideas rolling around about new curry recipes I could try. The only thing is, I have no idea how people will react. So, what I'm proposing is that, in exchange for providing you breakfast every morning, you tell me if any of these new recipes are any good or not." Sojiro explained, and Jolyne didn't even hesitate.

"Free breakfast in exchange for being a taste tester? Count me in." She answered, and Sojiro smirked.

"It's a deal then." Sojiro extended his hand, which Jolyne gladly shook, before she returned to her meal.

Some time later, she was sitting in the attic with Morgana, who she had managed to get some curry for. Her phone chimed, and she saw a message from Ryuji in the group chat.

RS: *attachment*

An image loaded onto her phone of a bunch of red construction paper, markers, and scissors.

RS: see you guys tomorrow!

"I hope that idiot doesn't mess things up for us." Morgana said, reading off of Jolyne's phone.

"I'm pretty confident he won't. Ryuji hasn't let us down yet." Jolyne replied, and yawned.

"You should get some rest. Tomorrow's going to be a big day." Morgana suggested, and Jolyne gave him a thumbs up as she yawned again.

"That's a really good idea." She yawned out, and began to get her pajamas on, before getting into bed.

Tomorrow's the day…we'll make him pay for what he did. She thought to herself, as her eyes drifted shut and she went to sleep.
Chapter 8: The Bastard of Lust

Chapter Summary

The Phantom Thieves carry out their first heist.

Chapter Notes

Not nearly as long of a wait this time. Hope you guys enjoy reading this one as much as I did writing it.

Tuesday, 4/19/20XX, Morning

Jolyne approached the Ginza line, stifling a yawn as she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. "Hey, shake the lead out! We've got a big day ahead of us, and we can't afford to be tired!" Morgana scolded from inside her bag.

"Yeah yeah." She mumbled out.

"Oh hey, over here!" A familiar voice called, and Jolyne looked to see Ann approaching them. "Looks like our trains connect here."

"Looks like it." Jolyne replied as they passed through the ticket gate. "So, today's the day. You ready?" Ann nodded as they both boarded the Ginza line train towards Aoyame-Ichitome.

"Definitely. I've been waiting for this day for a long time." The blonde replied. "Speaking of which, have you heard from Ryuji?" Jolyne shook her head.

"Not since last night, no. I tried texting him when I left, but he didn't answer." She replied, and Ann sighed.

"Same here. I'm just worried he overdid it and didn't get enough sleep last night."

"I just hope he doesn't go overboard and make it too obvious it's from us." Morgana piped up from Jolyne's bag, and the green haired leader simply sighed.

"Well, I'll guess we'll just have to see when we get there."

A short time later, they arrived at Shujin Academy. As they entered the school, they noticed a bunch of students gathered around a bulletin board, exchanging hushed whispers.

"Whoa, is this for real?"

"How could someone say this about Coach Kamoshida?"
"Take your heart? The hell does that mean?"

"I heard someone posted something like this a few hour ago online?"

"You think it has anything to do with those rumors?"

Jolyne and Ann exchanged a glance, before approaching the board. Tacked to it was a large red piece of construction paper, with kanji letters of alternating black and red that appeared cut out from magazines plastered under a crude drawing of a cartoonish smile under a top hat, with large letters in English that read 'Take your Heart'. The letters read:

Sir Suguru Kamoshida, the utter bastard of Lust,

We know how shitty you are, and that you put your twisted desires on students that can't fight back. We know you are the reason Shiho Suzui tried to kill herself. That's why we have decided to steal away those desires and make you confess your sins. This will be done today, so we hope you will be ready.

From, the Phantom Thieves of Hearts.

"Well, you did tell him to go nuts…" Ann lamented, and Jolyne simply rubbed her temples. She wasn't expecting anything this extravagant…

"Psst!" A voice loudly whispered, and the three turned to see a grinning Ryuji hiding behind a corner, gesturing for them to come over to him. "Well? Whaddya think?" He excitedly asked as they approached him.

"Isn't it a little…much?" Ann asked, and he shook his head.

"No way! We had to make sure he knows what we're talking about, didn't we? I had to keep from giving away that it was us, so I looked up a bunch of anonymous stuff like this from America!"

"From…? Ryuji, this looks like something a lunatic would write!" Jolyne scolded, and he simply shrugged.

"You told me to went nuts, so I went nuts."

"I didn't expect you to make us look like serial killers!"

"And what's with that logo? It looks like something a kindergartner made."

"Well I figured we needed some sorta symbol or somethin' to make us look legit, and I drew the first thing hat popped into my gead." He justified. "Besides who cares what it looks like? As long as that-

"What's going on here?" A familiar voice yelled out, and the group turned to see none other than Suguru Kamoshida approaching the board. He read the message, and the more he read, the more enraged he appeared. As soon as the volleyball coach was done reading, he spun around, a wild look in his eye. "Who responsible for this?!" Kamoshida demanded, and began turning to nearby students. "Was it you? Did you do this?! Answer me!"

"I-I don't-" the student he grabbed started to plead, when Kamoshida noticed Ann, Jolyne, and Ryuji standing together. He stormed over to them, getting in Jolyne's face.

"Are you three behind this?! Well?!" He demanded, practically spitting in Jolyne's face. She wasn't
fazed, responding to his rage filled glare with cool determination.

"I don't know what you're talking about. We just got here." She responded, and Kamoshida snarled, grabbing her by the blazer and pulling her close.

"You think you're so tough? You think expulsion's the worst thing I can do to you? I will fucking end you, you little bitch!" He hissed out through clenched teeth. Jolyne's face remained unmoved, and Ryuji grabbed Kamoshida's wrist.

"Hey, she said she don't know anything. Why don't you lay off?" Kamoshida glared at him, but he didn't budge. After a few more seconds, Kamoshida let go of Jolyne's collar. Before he walked away, something truly bizarre happened. The temperature dropped as all light vanished from the room and the ambient noise vanished. The volleyball coach in front of them vanished, replaced with his Shadow duplicate.

"Go ahead. Just try and steal it, you damn pests!" The Shadow snarled, his yellow eyes burning with rage. Then, as quickly as everything had changed, everything was back to normal, with the real Kamoshida giving them one last glare.

"Get to class, all of you!" He yelled, and stormed off, leaving the slightly confused Phantom Thieves.

"Uhhhh…what was that?" Ann asked, and Morgana stuck his head out of Jolyne's bag.

"That was a warning, perceptible only to those who can perceive the meta verse like us. He'll be expecting us more than before. We need to be careful." He explained, and that's when Kobayakawa entered the scene, an exasperated look on his face.

"Everyone, report to your classrooms at once! This is nothing more than a childish prank!" He bellowed out, and the crowd hat had massed around the Calling Card dispersed, albeit reluctantly.

"We should probably do that as well. Let's meet on the rooftop as soon as school ends." Jolyne suggested, and the others nodded.

"Gotcha. See you guys later." Ryuji said, and they all went to class, walking separately to make sure they didn't draw too much suspicion.

4/19/20XX, Afternoon

"And so, while the word 'robot' is assumed to be an English invention, the word actually had its-"

"Dude, did you see that weird message that hint out front?"

"The one about Mister Kamoshida? What do you think it means?"

"-roots in Czechoslovakia, the word first appearing in the works of-

"What the hell does 'steal your desires' even mean? And what's was that part about Suzui?"

Kawakami sighed, rubbing her temples. It had been like this in all her classes, students unable to talk about anything other than the strange message at the front of the school. "The principal has already determined the letter to be the work of childish pranksters. So please, settle down and focus on today's lesson." She pleaded/ordered, and resumed her lesson. While she did that, Jolyne and Ann sat in their desks, trying their best to act like it was just any other school day.
Jolyne was doing her best to focus on the lesson, but it wasn't enough to keep doing from entering her mind. What if they failed and didn't steal the treasure? They'd have wasted their only shot, Kamoshida would have them expelled, and she would be thrown in prison, with no amount of legal help in the world able to save her. She shook those thoughts out of her head, swallowing the lump in her throat. They would succeed in stealing Kamoshida's treasure, and changing his heart. They had to.

After School

As soon as the bell rang, Jolyne and Ann bolted up from their desks, heading for the rooftop. They saw Ryuji waiting for them, pacing around the rooftop. "Hey, you guys hear what everyone's been talkin' about?" He asked.

"You mean the calling card, right? It's all anyone could talk about in our class." Jolyne replied.

"It was the same in my class. It got so bad, I thought Ushimaru was going to put someone in the hospital with that damn chalk of his." He remarked, and began bouncing on his good leg. "So, we ready?"

"Morgana?" Jolyne turned to the cat, who was sticking his head out of her bag.

"We're ready. I can't think of anything else that we need to go over."

"Ready when you are, Jolyne." Ann said, and Jolyne nodded. They gathered in the alleyway outside of Shujin, and activated the metanav. The world around them spiral and rippled as their school was replaced by the massive castle, their school uniforms and Mona's cat body replaced with his cartoonish appearance.

"This is it…" Panther said, as they all looked at the sinister compound and the red skies that served as a backdrop. Ryuji nudged Jolyne in the side.

"Hey, leader. Wanna say a few words?" He asked, and she raised an eyebrow. "C'mon dude, ain't you ever seen a movie? The leader's always supposed to give like, a speech or something before a big thing like this." Jolyne was about to protest, when she noticed that Ann and Morgana's eyes were already on her as well. So, she swallowed the lump that she didn't know that was in her throat, and turned to them.

"We all know what's riding on this. Our futures, justice for the people he's hurt...this is our only shot. There's a very real possibility that we could fail. But you know what? I'm not worried about it at all. Because I have faith in the three of you that we'll be able to pull this off easily." She said, and Morgana smirked.

"Couldn't have said it better myself, Joker." He remarked, before his face turned serious. "This won't be easy. They'll be expecting us." Joker nodded, and turned back to the palace.

"Then let's go."

The Throne Room

Joker poked her head out of the safe room. Upon seeing that there were no guards in sight, the Phantom Thieves began pouring out of the safe room. They took cover behind the doorway they had spied on Kamoshida from the other day, and saw that the throne room was empty. "Why's it so empty?" Panther asked.

"Did you see how many guards we snuck past on the way here? They must be spread out all over
the castle looking for us." Mona remarked, but Joker wasn't so sure. Why would they leave the Treasure unguarded like this…?

"I was kinda looking forward to smashing old Mop Head's face in, but I ain't complainin' if he ain't around." Skull stated.

"Alright, let's move. Just be careful." Joker instructed, and they began walking through the throne room. Joker's head was on a swivel, checking for any guards that might be lurking in the shadows. But she saw nothing, which only served to further the strange feeling in her stomach. As they approached the large, ornate throne in the center of the room, Skull scowled.

"This thing looks even uglier up close." Skull said, and Panther nodded as she tapped her chin.

"So, if this place is based off his cognition, and the gym was a church…then is this place the faculty office?" The model asked, and her scowl deepened as the gears began to turn inside her head. "And if this is the faculty office, then this is where he took Shiho and…” Panther stopped walking, her gaze transfixed on the throne. The others noticed that she had stopped, turning back to her.

"Panther, is something wrong?" Mona asked, noticing that Panther had her fists clenched and was shaking. Before any of them could ask if she was ok, her red mask disappeared as Carmen materialized behind her. Carmen simply pointed both of the heart-headed men at the throne, firing balls of flame that blasted the throne away. Panther took a deep breathe, wiping a tear away as her Persona vanished and her mask rematerialized.

"Sorry, guys. I…I don't know what came over me." She apologized, and Joker simply patted her shoulder.

"Don't worry about it." Joker said, and they approached the large, garish painting. Pressing the brick on the side, they pushed it open and entered the Treasure Room. However, as soon as they entered the Treasure Room and noticed its contents, everyone went slackjawed. "Whoa…"

Floating in the center of the Treasure Room, where the large white blob had been the day before, floated a ridiculously large, ornate crown that was easily larger than a small car. "I wasn't expecting it to be this big…” Panther said, and all Skull could do was simply nod in agreement.

"Hng…"

"I was expecting like, a trophy or something. Not…this." Skull remarked.

"Mmm…mrrr…"

"Honestly, same. Getting this thing out of here is going to be a huge pain." Joker said, and turned to Mona, who almost seemed to be shaking. "Hey Mona, any idea on how we can…Mona?"

"Mrrr….MRRRRROWWWWWW~" They all winced at the shrill, loud, almost unholy sound that came out of Mona's mouth, and Mona launched himself onto the treasure, rubbing his body on is and rolling around on the treasure with an expression of pure ecstatic on his face. All the Phantom Thieves could do was watch, caught in a state between amusement, embarrassment, and sheer horror.

"Uh…what the hell is going on?" Skull asked after about a minute.

"Meow~ meowwwww~"

"Hey, Mona!" Panther said, but he didn't seem to hear her.
"Meooooowwww~"

"Mona, snap out of it!" Joker finally shouted, and that seemed to bring Mona back to his senses. He realized what he had just been doing, and a look of sheer embarrassment spread over his face.

"O-oh! I'm sorry you all had to see that. Please forgive me for displaying such inappropriate behavior in front of a Lady." He apologized as he hopped off the Treasure.

"What was all that about? You were completely out of character just now." Panther demanded, and Mona sheepishly looked at the ground.

"I…I couldn't stop. To think that I'd be drawn to human desires like this…" His face seemed to light up as he looked up at them. "Wait, doesn't this mean that I'm truly human?"

"How the hell should we know?! All I know is that we ain't losin' our minds over this thing." Skull replied.

"So, now that…whatever that was…is out of the way, how do we get this thing out of here?" Joker asked, and Mona looked at the treasure.

"You'll have to carry it out of here yourself." Skull groaned.

"All you do is bark orders…" He grumbled as he looked over the crown. "Still, this was a piece of cake. I thought for sure Kamoshida'd set some kinda trap or something."

"He must have figured that he'd catch us on our way up here or something." Panther commented, but Joker wasn't quite convinced. "So, if we get this thing out of here, then this place will disappear, and Kamoshida'll change too, right?" She asked, and Mona nodded.

"I believe so."

"Well then, what're we waiting for? Let's move!" Skull stated, and the humans all got on a side of the crown and grabbed it.

"Ughh, this thing's so heavy…" Panther grunted out, Mona watching as they did so.

"Remember, lift with your knees!" The not-cat coached, and they began to move, albeit slowly. Mona watched as they moved. It was slow going, but soon they were outside of the treasure room, slowly moving across the Throne Room. Jolyne grunted as they passed the spot where the Throne had once stood, constantly readjusting her grip so that she didn't drop the rather weighty crown.

"Almost there…" She grunted out, the others readjusting their grips as they walked…

"Go go, Kamoshida~" A disturbingly shrill, ditzy, and yet familiar voice yelled out, and the crown was knocked out of their hands as a small projectile impacted the side of the crown. A bugle began to play as the Thieves jumped back so as not to be crushed by the crown, watching as a familiar shape jumped over them and landed where the throne once stood. He held his hands out, and the crown vanished, appearing normal sized in the hand of none other than King Kamoshida. To his right, clinging to him with a vacant expression on her face, was the cognitive Ann from the slave room downstairs. To his left stood a cognitive version of the Principal, dressed in garb resembling a court jester holding a bugle in his hands.

"All hail the glorious King Kamoshida, blessed be his name!" The Cognitive version of the Principal bellowed out, and the Shadow grinned as he rose to his full height, unflinching from the murderous glares being sent his way.
"Well, well, well, look who it is! Did you pitiful thieves really think that I would just let you just walk out of here with my Treasure? I knew Sakamoto was that dumb, but come on!" Shadow Kamoshida jeered, tossing the crown up and down in his hand as he sneered. "I won't let anyone take this! This proves that I am the king of this castle, and this world belongs to me!" Panther scowled, seeing the Cognitive version of herself clinging to the Shadow's side.

"Is that really how that bastard sees me?"

"Hey, Pervert!" Skull called out. "Were you just waiting to ambush us?"

"Please, I just made it easier to find you. All I had to do was wait until you made your move." The King barked. "I won't let you get away with humiliating me again! I'll finish you off myself, here and now!"

"That's our line, you mop headed pedophile!" Joker shouted, and the King simply sighed and shook his head.

"To think, all this over a simple misunderstanding..." Panther's face contorted in rage.

"How is this a misunderstanding? You abuse your players, rape your female students, then you cover it all up!" The volleyball coach's shadow chuckled at this.

"The ones around me were the ones that kept it secret. Adults who wish to share in my accomplishments." He gestured to the cognitive Kobayakawa beside him. "-students who have the drives to become winners...they willingly protect me, so that we all may profit from it!" Skull's eyes widened.

"Prof...?"

"There are so many imbeciles that don't understand that, like you three and that idiot who tried to kill herself." Panther stiffened up at this. "What was her name again? Suzuki? Shimura? Ah, who the hell cares?"

"Shiho...while it's true she may have been a bit of an idiot letting you manipulate her like that...I'm even more of an idiot for not having faith in her abilities and letting things get to that point!" Panther said, her whip materializing. "But no matter how much of an idiot someone might be...they still don't need your permission to live their lives!" She shouted, and cracked her whip. Kamoshida simply watched as they all materialized their weapons.

"What does it matter if I use my talents for my own gain? Mediocre peasants like yourself simply don't realize that I'm simply a cut above regular humans!" The king bellowed out, and Joker scowled as she clenched her dagger.

"Cut above? Gimme a break, more like a cut below." Joker retorted. "Someone like you, who pushes down people weaker than you and takes advantage of their suffering...ask me, that makes you less than human. Far as I'm concerned, you're not a god. You're just some pitiful demon, obsessed with your sick desires!" The transfer student yelled...and Kamoshida simply laughed, his voice taking on a slight demonic tone.

"You're right. I'm not like you." He said, fark red energy beginning to pull around his feet as he grinned. The whole palace began to shake, and the black and red eergy began to bubble up around the Shadow as he pulled Cognitive Ann closer, a sinister grin on his face. "I am a demon, who RULES THIS WORLD!" Red and black energy erupted, consuming Kamoshida and his cognitive entourage.
"What the hell?" Skull shouted.

"I've never seen anything like this…" Mona muttered out. All the group could do was watch as the energy erupted like a volcano. When it died down, Kamoshida had changed. He had morphed into a large pink demon that towered over them, wearing nothing but his cape and speedo. He had four arms, with a golden fork and golden knife in his lower arms, and a large riding crop and glass of wine in his upper arms. His head had large eyes that bulged out, with a row of jagged teeth for a mouth and a large tongue sticking out lazily, and the Treasure nestled atop his head between two horns that stuck out of his messy hair. Between his legs was a large golden trophy shaped cup that seemed to have legs sticking out of the top, and small humanoid figures were chained to where the throne had once stood.

"Hahahaha! Gyahahahaha! I'm allowed to do whatever I want!" Suguru Asomodeus Kamoshida bellowed out. Joker simply scoffed.

"This supposed to scare us? Take him down!" She ordered, Arsene appearing behind her as her mask vanished. Arsense launched a blast of dark energy at Asomodeus. Carmen, Captain Kidd, and Zorro materialized behind their users as well, launching flames, blasts of electricity, and a gust of razor sharp wind at the large demon. All the attacks hit their mark, slightly staggering Asomodeus causing burn marks to appear on his chest.

"Ack! Damn brats, that hurt!" He complained, and used his massive fork to pick one of the pairs of legs out of his cup. His jagged mouth parted and the legs slid down his gullet. As soon as he swallowed, the injuries that the team had dealt him seemed to vanish. "Ah, much better!"

"Shit, he can heal?!" Skull exclaimed, and Asomodeus raised his knife, swinging it at them. The thieves scattered, with Mona narrowly avoiding the large golden blade. Joker and Skull took cover behind a pillar, firing at him with their weapons while Panther fired her submachine gun at him. The bullets seemed to injure him, but just like before, he ate a pair of legs out of his cup, and his injuries vanished.

"We'll never take him down as long as he can heal!" Mona analyzed, and Joker nodded.

"Skull, move up! I'll cover you!"

"On it!" Skull moved out from behind the pillar and ran towards his tormentor. As Asomodeus began to raise his fork and skewer Ryuji, Joker placed her hand over her mask.

"Come forth, Pyro Jack!" Her mask disappeared, and rather than Arsene appearing behind her, one of the small pumpkin creatures appeared. Pyro Jack and Carmen began shooting fireballs at Asomodeus, burning him and stopping him from skewering Skull. As Skull got closer, Kamoshida began to catch on fire, and that's when Zorror appeared behind Mona, swinging his rapier and generating a gust of wind. The wind only seemed to exacerbate the fire, causing the flames to spread across his demonic body.

"AHHHHHHH! IT BURNS IT BURNS!" At this moment, Skull ran full sprint towards Kamoshida, and leapt up into the air.

"Captain Kidd!" The large ethereal pirate ship appeared behind him, and it slammed into the trophy cup, crushing it beneath the ship part of the Persona. Captain Kidd vanished as Skull leapt backwards, narrowly avoiding Asomodeus's knife.

"No! That was the trophy I won at the nationals! How dare you even touch it?!" The enraged
demon bellowed out as the flames died, and that's when Ann caught his eye. "Princess…" He hissed out, and Panther suddenly felt herself in a cold sweat. This feeling of discomfort was soon proven to be justified, as his pink tongue suddenly shot out towards her. Panther managed to duck, and launched herself forward just as he brought the tongue down, the force demolishing the balcony she had just been standing on.

"Gross!" Panther commented, landing on the ground next to Mona. "Mona, why's he like this?"

"I-I don't know! I've never seen anything like this before!" He replied, and looked at the crown on Asomodeus's head. "This all started over his desire to protect his Treasure and maintain his distorted heart. So if we can take that away…" He looked over at Joker, who was behind a pillar next to Skull. "Joker! If we can take away the crown, we'll be able to defeat him!"

"Easier said than done!" Joker called back, and Kamoshida raised his riding crop and pointed at them. The small figures chained up around him began to run off behind him, and returned holding a large volleyball.

"That doesn't look good…" Skull said, and Asomodeus took the ball into his hands.

"Get ready to get a good taste of my glory!" He bellowed, and tossed the large ball up in the air. Joker's eyes widened as he began to jump up in the air.

"Everybody run!" Panther and Mona ran for the doorway and took cover behind it, but when Skull and Joker began to run for the doorway, Skull let out a cry of pain as he clutched his knee and fell to the ground.

"Dammit, not now!" He groaned, and Joker picked him up and dragged him towards the doorway.

"What's wrong?"

"Damn knee…" He grunted out, and that's when Kamoshida spiked the volleyball down. They were nowhere near the doorway, and Joker frantically looked around. The only place that could shelter them was a large piece of rubble from the balcony his tongue had knocked down…but it was only big enough for one person. Joker didn't hesitate, tossing Ryuji against the rubble just as the volleyball hit the ground. While it didn't hit Jolyne herself, the impact generated a large shockwave comparable to a bomb, one that she caught the full brunt of. The shockwave propelled her forward, causing her to skid across the floor.

"Joker!"

"No!" Mona and Panther began to run towards her, only for Kamoshida to land between them and Joker's body.

"Dammit!" Skull cursed from behind the rubble, running towards them as he was forced to watch as Kamoshida began to raise his knife.

"This is the price you pay for defying me!"

Jolyne's head was ringing. Everything was sore, her vision was cloudy, and she could feel something hot and sticky on the side of her head. She couldn't move her body, and she could only simply feel the vibrations from Kamoshida landing. She managed to weakly turn her head, seeing Kamoshida begin to raise his golden knife. Is this it? All that fighting, all that planning…only to die like this? She thought.

"You are a prisoner of fate." Those words rang out in the back of her head. "You are a slave. Want
emancipation?" Those words…had Igor said them? She couldn't remember who had said that, all she knew as that a soft voice spoke it in the back of her head. Was it Arsene? No, it didn't sound like her.

"I hold your futures in my hand!" Kamoshida, the real world version, had said those words to her when they had confronted him in his office after Shiho's suicide attempt. Jolyne had refused to accept that, refused to allow someone such as him to dictate her future. After what had happened in Nagasaki, and the lawsuit that exiled her to Tokyo in the first place, she refused to allow a man like him to dictate the path of her life. But now it looked like it had all been for naught, as she was at his mercy.

Fate…fate was something she had always hated. Jolyne had always believed that one made their own path in life, and that nothing could ever force her down a path she never wanted. But the events of the past few months, and now…now, she could feel fate bearing down on her. The burden of fate was weighing her down, restricting every facet of her being. Trying to break through fate felt like trying to swim against a stone ocean: it was cold, it was unmoving, and it was unrelenting. But as Jolyne watched Kamoshida bring his knife down on her, she was struck with a desire. She wanted to live. She wanted to endure. She wanted to be…she wanted to be…

Free.

"What?!" Asomodeus bellowed out, and Ryuji stopped running towards them, as did Ann and Morgana. The knife was about to impale Jolyne…only it had stopped just as it was about to reach her. What had stopped the knife were too pale blue arms that materialized beside Jolyne, grabbing the knife and stopping it. Strings were coming out of her body, composing and linking the arms to her.

"Hey, bastard…" Joker muttered as she began to stand. "…if I'm not mistaken, I made you a promise…" the strings began to emerge from her body, raveling together to form a humanoid shape. "I promised you…" the form began to take shape. It was humanoid, about Joker's height and build. It had a light blue body with elliptical shoulder pads, hexagonal knee pads, and had several small studs from its midriff down. It appeared to have dark sunglasses on its head, with four bladelike protrusions that went from its jaw to the back of its neck. "…that I'd make you shit out teeth for a week"

"Ora!" The strange figure took the knife and pulled it out of Asomodeus's hand, tossing it to the side. All the Phantom Thieves could do is watch dumbstruck, until Mona found himself.

"Well? Don't just stand there, take him down!" He ordered, and Panther and Skull regained their composure.

"Right! Captain Kidd!" Skull's mask vanished as his Persona appeared, slamming its ship into Kamoshida's leg. This brought him down to one knee, and that's when Panther and Mona made their move. She swung her whip and wrapped it around one of his lower arms, pulling herself and Mona up onto his back. The used his cape as leverage as they began to climb, and eventually reached the head where the Treasure rested.

"This is for Shiho, you fuck!" Panther yelled, and they pulled the crown off his head. It thudded to the ground behind them, causing him to gasp as they jumped off his back.

"No! Not my treasure!" He shouted, and once the treasure was off of him, his body began to dissolve into black and red ichor. "No no no!" Kamoshida cried out as he returned to his normal form. "Please, just take my treasure and go! Just leave me alone."

"Sorry, we're past that." Joker said, cracking her knuckles, the figure behind her duplicating her
movements. "Hey, Mona. You said we need him alive, right?" Mona nodded at this.

"That's right." He answered, and Joker grinned.

"Good."

"No please, do-" Kamoshida's pleas were cut off by the strange figure's fist smashing into his face. He staggered back, and Jolyne rolled her neck.

"Let's make him suffer…Stone Free!" She ordered.

"Oraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraora!" The figure called out, rapidly punching Kamoshida so fast that their eyes had trouble keeping track.

"Oraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraora!" Stone Free relented in its onslaught temporarily, only to deliver one more punch to Kamoshida, sending him flying. "Oral!" The figure cried out, and faded away, leaving a confused group of Phantom Thieves.

"So uh, I think I speak for everyone when I say…what the eff was that?!" Ryuji asked, and Jolyne shrugged.

"I'm…not quite sure."

"That wasn't a Persona. It was something entirely different." Morgana stated.

"Have you ever seen anything like that before, Mona?" Ann asked, and he looked unsure of how to answer.

"I…may have. But we can worry about that later." He stated, and pointed to Kamoshida, who was trying to crawl away. Panther's narrowed her eyes, and stormed over to him. As soon as she was next to him, the leather clad woman kicked him in the stomach, and picked him up by his cape.

"Please, no more!" Kamoshida begged, but Panther wasn't hearing any of it. She spotted a window that had an outside balcony, and began to drag him over to it.

"Look!" She ordered, pulling him next to the rail. Skull made to go stop her, only for Joker to hold out her arm and stop him. "Do you see it? Walls closing in, with only one way out? This is the exact show that Shiho saw, all because of YOU and your twisted desires!"

"I'm sorry!" Kamoshida sobbed out, tears and snot mingling with the blood on his broken face. Panther simply sneered, pushing him against the rail.

"Sorry?! You're sorry?!" Anger burned in her blue eyes, her Persona manifesting behind her as her mask vanished. "We passed 'sorry' a long time ago, you sick son of a bitch! Shiho's entire life was ruined because of you!" A flame materialized in Carmen's hand, and the Thieves could only watch. Carmen threw the fireball, Ryuji about to run and stop her…only for the fire ball to hit the wall next to Kamoshida.

"She…didn't kill him?" He asked, and Ann turned away from the broken king, her mask returning to her face.

"He can't confess to his crimes if his brain shuts down. That's the only reason I'm sparing his miserable life." She coldly answered as she walked past them, and Kamoshida fell to his knees.

"I've lost, and when you've lost…you're through." He sobbed out, hanging his head in defeat. "What am I supposed to do now?"
"Atone for your sins." Joker stated, causing him to look at her.

"But…how?"

"I don't care. Just atone, or we'll be back." She said, and surprisingly, Kamoshida smiled.

"Thank you. I'll return to my real self and begin to atone." Kamoshida began to glow, and vanished in a flash of light. As soon as he vanished, the whole palace began to rumble.

"We need to move, now!" Mona said, and Joker picked up the Treasure, which had shrunken down to a normal size. The shaking began to grow more intense, and Joker turned to the group.

"Run!" And they did just that. As the Castle of Lust began to collapse around them, the Phantom Thieves began to run through the collapsing Palace as fast as they could. Joker was in the lead, with Skull and Panther right behind her.

"We're not gonna make it!" Panther yelled, dodging a falling piece of debris.

"Not with that attitude we're not!" Joker yelled, when Morgana leapt on top of Panther's head in his cat form.

"What…?" Morgana jumped onto Skull's head, then onto Joker's shoulder.

"Pick up the pace, slowpokes!" He called back.

"That damn cat…" Ryuji cursed, while praying his knee didn't give out again.

"Al…most…there…"

Aoyame

The Phantom Thieves tumbled into the real world, finding themselves in the alleyway they had entered the Palace from. "Ugh, that was close…" Ryuji groaned, helping Ann up off the ground.

"I'll say. That sucked." Ann panted out. Jolyne's phone chimed, and she pulled it out of her blazer pocket.

"The Destination has been deleted." The Meta-Nav chimed.

"So we can't go back there?" Ann asked.

"That'd be rather hard to do, considering it no longer exists." Morgana said, only for his eyes to widen. "Wait, what about the treasure?" Jolyne felt something in her blazer pocket, pulling out an identical version of the Olympic gold medal from the library.

"Is this it? What happened to the crown?"

"It means that this is the source of Kamoshida's desires. To him, this medal was worth as much as that crown." He explained, and Ryuji scowled.

"So that perv couldn't let go of his past glory, huh? Figures." The former track star spat out, anf that's when he noticed something. "Hey Jolyne, what happened to the blood on your face?" She raised an eyebrow at this.

"What do you mean?"
"Well, back at the Palace, you got all banged up when he did that weird volleyball thing. Had blood pouring down your face." Jolyne adopted a quizzical expression, and felt the side of her face. Sure enough, there was no blood there, though everything did feel sore.

"Injuries suffered in the cognitive world don't carry over to the real world, as long as it's nothing too severe. You can't regenerate limbs, for instance, and death is death." Morgana explained, and Ann turned to him.

"So since we stole Kamoshida's treasure, does that mean we stole his heart?" The 'cat' shrugged.

"I'm not quite sure. This is the first successful example for me as well. We stole his treasure, and made his cognitive self promise to atone. We did everything we could. Now, all we have to do is wait." Jolyne sighed at Morgana's answer.

"Well, that sounds fun." She lamented, and tucked the medal back into her pocket.

"'C'mon, aint there a way for us to know right away?"

"Not unless we want to track him down ourselves."

"Yeah, no thanks. I'm not going anywhere near him ever again." Ann stated, and she yawned. "Oh man, I'm beat. If we've done all we can, then I think I'll just head home."

"That sounds like a good idea. See you guys tomorrow?" Jolyne said, and Ryuji looked like he wanted to say something, but decided against it. At least, he did until Ann had left.

"Hey, Jolyne, I'm…I'm sorry that I slowed you down out there. Didn't know my bum knee would just give out like that. You really saved my ass out there." He said, sheepishly rubbing the back of his head.

"Don't worry about it. You would've done the same thing for me."

"Not like that. You didn't even hesitate. What I'm tryin' to say is…thank you." He managed to say, and Jolyne simply smiled.

"Don't mention it. I'd do it again in a heartbeat." He smiled back, and held up his fist. Jolyne fist bumped him, and that's when his phone chimed.

"My mom needs me to pick some things up for dinner tonight, so I gotta jet. See ya tomorrow." He said, and she bid him farewell, before departing herself.

**Yongen-Jaya**

"Welcome home." Sojiro greeted as Jolyne entered the restaurant. The coffeeshop was empty, save for one man sitting alone at a booth, wearing a large hat on top of his long, greasy blonde hair. Sojiro's unspoken order was clear: wait upstairs while there are customers here. Jolyne nodded in acknowledgement, and headed upstairs. However, as she passed the man at the booth, he looked at her, and smiled. Written on his teeth were the words 'GO! GO! ZEPPELI!', with the two GO's occupying his top teeth. Jolyne simply ignored him and headed upstairs, letting Morgana out of his bag.

"Well that guy was certainly creepy." She commented, and Morgana nodded.

"What do you think was wrong with his teeth?"
"I don't know, but that hair looks like he didn't know what a shower was. I guess you get all types here in the city…” Jolyne remarked, and fell on to the couch. "So, we finally did it. We beat Kamoshida."

"I knew you could do it. There's something about you that makes me feel like we can accomplish anything." Morgana said, hopping onto the couch next to her.

"So about that thing I did in the Palace, Stone Free. You said you've seen something like it before?"

"Well, I think I have. It's not quite like what I'm thinking of, but it's similar." He replied. "It's tied into that string power, right? Try using it now." He instructed, and Jolyne closed her eyes. She barely had to think about it before the pale blue figure materialized in front of her, it's face unmoving and expressionless.

"What do you think it is?"

"It's definitely not a Persona, that's for sure." He mused. Jolyne tilted her head, and Stone Free did the same. She raised her left hand, and it did the same. She did several movements, the figure duplicating this one. It didn't appear sentient, not like Arsene and the other Personas she possessed were.

"And just when I think I've gotten a handle on things, too. Gimme a break…” Jolyne yawned, rubbing her eyes as the figure dispersed. She and Morgana would stay up a bit longer, chatting about various things such as the City, classes, etc., before they turned in for the night.

**Wednesday, 4/20/20XX, Morning**

Jolyne had arrived at school a little early today, and was walking towards her classroom, when she spied Kawakami and Ushimaru talking about something by his classroom. She was going to ignore it, when she saw Ushimaru mouth out something that looked a lot like 'Kamoshida.' Hiding behind a corner, she began unraveling a string from her finger, extending it towards the two and eavesdropping on their conversation. 

"…leave of absence? Did he say how long?" Kawakami asked, and Ushimaru simply shrugged.

"All I know is what I heard from Chouno-san. Apparently, Principal Kobayakawa got a call in the middle of the night from Kamoshida-san, and he said he was taking a leave of absence. Though she expects he'll be back by the board meeting at the beginning of May." Ushimaru explained, and Kawakami sighed.

"Do you think this has anything to do with that strange message yesterday?"

"I'm not sure. Perhaps the stress of the accusations was simply too much for Kamoshida-san? I know I wouldn't be able to handle being accused of being responsible for Suzui's suicide like that.” Jolyne withdrew her string, thinking over what she had heard. If Kamoshida was taking a leave of absence, then did that mean the change of heart had worked? She couldn't be sure, not until Kamoshida himself confessed.

**Afternoon**

JC: Did you guys hear about Kamoshida?

RS: You mean his leave of absence?

AT: Do you think this has anything to do with the change of heart?
JC: Morgana seemed to think so.

RS: I ain't relaxin' until I hear the confession coming out of his perverted mouth.

AT: Same.

JC: All we can do is wait, just like Morgana said.

JC: Personally, I'm looking forward to a week without any weird shit happening to me here.

Yongen-Jaya

Sojiro was in Leblanc, preparing himself mentally for the lunch rush. It was never particularly busy, seeing as few businessman ever deigned to take time out of their busy routines to travel to Yongen, but he liked to be prepared nonetheless, just in case. He was currently preparing the ingredients for a fresh batch of coffee, when he heard the bell above the door ring. "Excuse me, are you Sojiro Sakura?" A man's voice asked.

"At your service. What'll you have?" Sojiro asked, and turned to the man. The first thing he noticed was his strange haircut, with a fashion Sojiro could've sworn went out of style at least 20 years ago.

"I'm looking for my niece. I was told she lives here now?" The man asked, and Sojiro raised an eyebrow.

"Your niece? Do you mean Jolyne?" He asked, and the man slapped himself in the head.

"Oh man, I'm sorry. Totally forgot my manners. Let me introduce myself." The man was in his early 30's, with purple eyes and features indicating a heritage of both Japanese and American. His dark hair was done up into a pompadour, and he wore a white jacket over a yellow shirt. On the left side of the jacket there was a golden heart pin, while on the right there was a golden peace sign. The jacket's sleeves were pushed up, revealing a tattoo on his right arm of three purple vines spiraling down from his wrist. The man extended his hand toward Sojiro, and smiled. "My name is Josuke Higashikata. It's a pleasure to meet you, Sojiro-san."

Chapter End Notes

Oh Jolyne, where's the fun in having a normal week?
Chapter 9: The Man from Morioh

Chapter Summary

An unexpected visitor leads to Jolyne and the Phantom Thieves getting a crash course about her bizarre family history

Chapter Notes

Hoo boy. This chapter ended up being a lot more difficult than I expected. Fun fact: The word count for this chapter is 6969 (Very NIceu, Caesar-chan!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 9: The Man from Morioh

Shujin Academy, 4/20/20XX, After School

Jolyne sighed as the bell rang, ushering Morgana into her bag from her desk. Today had been largely uneventful, with no events of note occurring. However, everyone was talking about Kamoshida and his sudden ‘leave of absence’ and what it meant.

“What do you think’s wrong with Coach Kamoshida?”

“Think it had anything to do with that weird poster yesterday?”

“It must have been too much for him. I don’t think I could handle being accused of Suzui’s suicide like that.”

“I just hope he comes back soon. Our team will get destroyed without him…”

And so turned the rumor mill, churning out speculation on the reasons behind Kamoshida’s sudden disappearance. By the end of the day, Jolyne had heard all sorts of reasons as to why he was gone. The stress of the accusation had been too much to bear, he had injured himself stretching and was too embarrassed to face anyone, Jolyne and Ryuji had attacked him and he was recovering…well, that one wasn’t necessarily false.

“Hey.” Ann’s voice shook Jolyne out of her musing, looking up to see Ann turned back to face her.

“Think we should head to the rooftop?”

“I’m sure Ryuji’s already up there waiting for us. Might as well discuss what’s going on.” The two got up and began making their way to the roof. “So, how’s Shiho doing?” Jolyne asked as they began to climb the stairs.

“Shiho’s…well, ‘fine’ is a bit of a strong word.” Ann replied, her face becoming downturned. “She still hasn’t woken up yet, but the doctors say the worst is behind us. They expect she’ll wake up soon.”
“That’s good to hear.”

“Thanks.” And with that, the three arrived at the rooftop, seeing Ryuji indeed waiting for them.

“‘Sup.” He greeted as Jolyne unzipped her bag, allowing Morgana to jump out and inhale the fresh air, before he turned to Jolyne with an angry glint in his eye.

“From now on, you’re keeping that bag unzipped in school!” He ordered.

“But if someone sees you then-“

“I don’t care! Do you know now stuffy it is in that thing?! At the very least, leave it unzipped while you’re walking.” Morgana complained, hopping onto the air conditioning unit next to Ryuji.

“So, you think this ‘leave of absence’ crap means we changed Kamoshida’s heart?” The former track star asked, and Morgana looked…uncertain.

“I’m not sure. This is my first time stealing a heart as well.” He answered, and Ann’s eyes widened.

“Wait, so you’ve never done this? But from the way you were talking, I thought you were an expert or something!” She said, and Morgana shook his head.

“Like I told the two of them before, I just know how to do all of this stuff.” He replied. “Still, we did everything right. We followed the directions perfectly, and the timing is too convenient. I’m positive that we changed his heart. It’s just…taking a while.”

“As long as its by the board meeting, I’m good.” Ryuji responded, and pursed his lips. “So…what do we do now?” That…was a good question. Beyond stealing Kamoshida’s heart, none of them had really given a thought as to what would come next.

“Well, the Palace is gone, right?” Morgana nodded at Jolyne’s question. “I guess…we could just hang out?” The other’s brows furrowed at Jolyne’s suggestion. “Well, we don’t have anything left to worry about Kamoshida wise, and now that I think about it, we don’t really know each other, do we?”

“That’s…actually not a bad idea.” Ann said. “We haven’t really stopped just to hang out talk. Where do you guys want to go? The diner? Big Bang Burger?” She suggested, and Ryuji shook his head.

“I blew all my money on that shotgun the other day. I’m outta money until my mom gets paid on Friday.”

“Well why don’t we go to our place? We’ve got plenty of space in our room.” Morgana suggested, causing Jolyne’s eyes to widen.

“Uh, Morgana? I don’t really think that’s the best idea.”

“Why? We should be fine, so long as we stay out of Boss’s way.”

“What’re you two talkin’ about? There somethin’ wrong with your place?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne rubbed the back of her neck.

“Well, I…kinda live in the attic of a coffee shop.”

“Oh yeah, that’s right. I forgot you were on probation.” Ann chimed in.

“What about your places?”
“Can’t do it. My mom doesn’t like me to have a buncha people over when she’s not there.” Ryuji answered.

“I can’t do it either. My place is..a bit of a mess.” Ann replied, and Jolyne sighed.

“Well, as long as we stay out of Sojiro’s way, I guess we’ll be fine. Just brace yourselves in case he kicks us out.” She warned, and Ryuji grinned.

“Alright, party at Jolyne’s!”

**Yongen-Jaya**

“Whoa, you live all the way out here in Yongen?” Ann remarked as they stepped off the train onto the platform. “How long does it take you to get to school?”

“I just take the train to Shibuya, then get onto the Ginza line.”

“I don’t think I could do it. I practically live next to Aoyama, and I’m almost late every day as it is.” Ryuji chimed in as they entered the backstreets. “Man, I haven’t been here in forever. Hasn’t changed that much.”

“Not gonna lie, the place is kinda growing on me.” Jolyne said, and she lead them do the alley where Leblanc was. The bell above the door chimed, revealing Sojiro behind the counter while there was a customer facing away from them.

“You’re home early. And…you brought friends.” Sojiro greeted, and before he could say anything, Jolyne held up her hand.

“Don’t worry, we’ll stay in the attic. I already told them the rules. We won’t bother your customers.”

“Actually, that’s not-“ Sojiro started to say, when the customer stood up.

“It’s been a while, hasn’t it, Jojo?” The man said, and Jolyne’s eyes widened as Ryuji and Ann raised an eyebrow.

“Jojo…?” Ann said, while a smile began to spread across Jolyne’s face. There were only three people in Japan who could call her that and remain unscathed, and two of them were in Nagasaki. Which meant that the customer in front of her could only be…

“Grunkle Josuke!” She exclaimed, and that’s when the customer turned to face them. Ann and Ryuji took in his strange hairstyle, his white jacket and yellow shirt, the vine tattoos on his left arm…and the slight, yet noticeable resemblance he held to Jolyne.

“How ya doin, Jojo?” Josuke asked, and she tackled him in a hug, which he gladly returned.

“What are you doing here? Don’t you have patients back in Morioh?” She asked.

“I got invited to a medical conference up here in the city that starts tomorrow, so I figured that’d be as good of an excuse as any to see how my favorite niece was doing.” The strange pompadoured man replied, and that’s when he noticed the two teenagers standing behind her. “Going to introduce me to your friends?” He asked, and Jolyne pulled back.

“Right. Grunkle J, this is Ryuji Sakamoto and Ann Takamaki.” She gestured to each of them as she introduced them. “Guys, this is my great uncle, Josuke Higashikata.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir.” Ann greeted, and Ryuji waved in agreement.
“Sojiro-san was telling me you had made some friends. Guess I can thank you two for keeping this one from getting lost, huh?” Josuke asked as he patted Jolyne on the shoulder, and Ryuji’s brow furrowed in confusion.

“What do you—“ He started to say, only for Ann, who had caught on to the lie Jolyne had told Sojiro about how they were spending their time together, to cut him off.

“That’s right! I remembered how confusing and intimidating this place was when I first moved here, so I figured we could help her figure out her way around the city.” Ann ‘explained’, and Sojiro sighed.

“You two were a godsend.” He praised, and turned to Josuke. “Did I mention that Jolyne got lost on her first day of school? Missed half the day.” Josuke merely shrugged.

“Eh, getting lost happens. Especially here in the big city.” He said, and gestured to the booth where he had been sitting. “Why don’t you two take a seat? I’d love to get to know Jojo’s friends.”

“Sounds good to me.” Ryuji grinned as Ann nodded, and as they approached the booth, Ryuji leaned close to Ann. “Hey, what do you think’s with up with that weird hair?” Unfortunately, he said that a little louder than intended, and Uncle and niece alike froze as fear crept up Jolyne’s spine.

Shit! Literally the one thing I didn’t want him to do! Jolyne thought to herself, while a feeling of pure menace began to emanate from Josuke.

“Hey, Ryuji, was it?” He asked, his voice low and unsteady. He turned back to Ryuji, his hair almost seeming to spike up as he adopted a grin that seemed almost angry in its intent. “The hell did you say about my hair?”

“I-I uh, just said that uh…” Ryuji stammered out in fear, and Jolyne stepped between them.

“He said that he really likes your hair, and that he’d like to do his like yours someday. Right, Ryuji?” Jolyne interjected.

“I didn’t-“ Jolyne grabbed the back of Ryuji’s neck.

“Right, Ryuji?” She grunted out through grit teeth, her face transfixed in a nervous smile as sweat beaded across her forehead. Ryuji and Ann swallowed nervously as Josuke reached into his jacket… only for him to pull out a small comb. He fixed his hair back into its pompadour, and his face returned to its ‘friendly uncle’ countenance.

“Oh really? Let me warn you, it takes a lot of work in the morning to make it work. I think you could pull it off, though.” Josuke said.

“T-thanks…” Ryuji responded, and the Phantom Thieves piled into the booth.

“Sojiro-san, four coffees, please. I’m buying.” Josuke said, and Sojiro nodded as they entered the booth. Ryuji and Ann sat next to one another, while Jolyne sat at the interior of the booth next to Josuke.

“Hey, so what was that word Jolyne called you? Grumple or something?”

“Grunkle. It’s an abbreviation of the English words for ‘great uncle.’ When Jojo was little and I would visit her in America, I’d try to speak English until she got her Japanese down. One time I messed up the pronunciation of ‘great uncle’, and it just sorta…stuck.” Josuke explained, and Ann looked confused.
"Jojo? Is that her nickname or something?" She asked, and Jolyne nodded.

"Yeah, I think it’s a family thing."

"Oh, I think I get it. You take the ‘Jo’ at the beginning of your name, and the ‘Jo’ at the end of your last name, right?" Ann asked, and Josuke nodded.

"That’s right. The ‘suke’ part of my given name can be written as ‘Jo’, but no one really calls me that.” He explained. "Well, enough about nicknames. Jojo, how are you settling in here?" Josuke asked, and Jolyne shrugged.

"So far so good. Nothing too daunting so far." She lied. Somehow she doubted that her uncle would believe that the other day they fought a demon that was the manifestation of a volleyball coach’s twisted desires.

"That’s good. How’re your classes?"

"It’s not so bad. English is a cakewalk, and everything else isn’t too hard."

"That’s great!" Josuke then turned to Ann and Ryuji. "So, how’d you two meet Jojo?" Josuke asked, and Ryuji swallowed as he tried to remember their cover story.

"Oh uh, me and her ended up getting lost together on our way to school on the first day. After we made our way to school we just kinda started hangin out." The false blonde answered. Not the whole truth, but also not a complete lie either. Josuke then turned to Ann.

"And you?"

"Oh, we’re in the same class. She actually sits right behind me."

"Very cool. I’m glad she’s been able to make friends." Josuke remarked, and turned to Jolyne. "You hear from your dad lately?" Ann and Ryuji took note of how Jolyne averted her eyes and seemed to sink into the booth.

"…I’ve been busy. Haven’t had a chance to call him." She answered, her tone making it clear she didn’t want to discuss it any further. Josuke looked like he wanted to say something further, but decided against it, simply sighing and smiling once again.

"So, Shujin Academy, huh? Feels like I’ve seen that place in the news a lot over the past week or so." Josuke mentioned, and from the way Ann’s eyes became downturned, he could immediately tell he had changed the conversation to the wrong topic.

"It’s…been a busy week, that’s for certain." Ann replied, and Josuke saw Ryuji making a slashing motion across his throat. He felt Jolyne nudge him in the side, and looked to see his niece shaking her head. Taking the hint, he searched desperately for a new topic.

"So…what do you do, Josuke-san?" Ryuji asked, switching topics, which Josuke gladly picked up on.

"I’m a general practitioner in Morioh.” He answered, and Ann’s brow furrowed.

"Morioh? Where’s that?"

"M Prefecture, about 5 hours outside of Tokyo."

"Did you drive here?" Ann asked, and the great uncle shook his head.
“Took the train in. My family and cars don’t get along.” Josuke answered, and Sojiro, who had been making coffee behind the counter, let out a small curse.

“Dammit!” He grunted, and saw that all eyes were on him. “Damn coffee siphon’s jammed. Coffee will have to wait until I can fix it.”

“Want me to take a look at it?” Josuke asked, getting a shrug from Sojiro.

“Be my guest. Not much you can do until I find my kit. Now where’d I put that thing….” Sojiro mumbled, and Josuke turned to the group.

“I’ll be right back.” With that, Josuke got up and headed behind the counter, and Ryuji and Ann leaned close to Jolyne.

“Dude, your uncle’s kinda weird.” Ryuji whispered, making sure to keep his voice low this time.

“Oh come on, he's not that-“

“I feel like he would’ve killed me over that hair comment if you hadn’t stepped in.”

“And now you know not to mention it ever again.”

“He’s supposed to be your great uncle, right? I thought those are supposed to be old, not in their 30’s.” Ann asked, and Jolyne sighed.

“The way I heard, my great-grandfather used to be kinda…loose.” Jolyne answered. “Look, I’m sorry this got sprung on you guys. I had no idea he was coming either.” Ryuji opened his mouth, ready to say something…when they saw it.

Josuke had gone over to the coffee siphon to look at it, while Sojiro had gone off into the kitchen to find the maintenance kit. Sure enough, the machine was jammed. Making sure Sojiro was out of eyesight, Josuke grabbed the siphon with his right hand, and the air around his left hand almost seemed to shine. It shimmered, before a pink arm with white armor on the forearm and around the hand and fingers materialized next to Josuke. It clenched its fist, and smashed through the siphon.

“Dora! The siphon was smashed apart, but a split second later the parts of the machine began flying back together, reassembling back together as if nothing had happened. Josuke turned the nozzle, and the black liquid flowed once more. “Hey, Sojiro-san, I think I got it working again!” Josuke called back, and Sojiro returned from the kitchen with a bewildered expression on his face.

“Well I’ll be…how’d you get it working?”

“Magic hands, Sojiro-san.” Josuke replied, and that’s when he noticed Jolyne and her friends staring at him, their eyes all wide as saucers and jaws dropped all the way to the floor. Josuke’s eyes widened as realization set in and shock spread across his face for a second. He walked back over to the booth, sitting next to Jolyne once more. Only instead of the friendly, welcoming smile he had before, the doctor’s face was somber and downcast. “So, did you three…see that?”

“Uh, what….what are you talkin’ about? W-we were just talkin’ about school and stuff.” Ryuji tried to explain.

“R-right!” Ann supported, but their rushed explanations answered Josuke’s question, and he turned to Jolyne, who looked shellshocked herself.

“What…what was that? That…arm?” Jolyne asked, and Josuke sighed.
“I suppose it was bound to happen sooner or later.” He muttered under his breath. “Where’s your room?”

“Upstairs. Why?”

“We’re gonna need somewhere we can talk in private.” Josuke said, and turned to Ryuji and Ann. “You two saw it too, didn’t you?” They looked to Jolyne, and she nodded.

“Y-yeah. I couldn’t see much though. Just some kind of outline.” Ann replied, and Josuke raised an eyebrow, but didn’t pursue that for now

“And you, Ryuji?”

“I could kinda make out a shape, just like her.” Ryuji’s answer seemed to further confusion in Josuke, and he gestured to the stairs. As the four spilled out of the booth, Josuke approached Sojiro.

“We’re gonna head up stairs so we don’t get in your way. Don’t worry about the coffee.” Sojiro looked around the otherwise empty café, but shrugged.

“Allright, suit yourself.” Josuke gave the shop owner a thumbs up, before heading upstairs, following Ann up the staits behind Jolyne and Ryuji.

While Josuke spoke with Sojiro, Jolyne and Ryuji had gone up ahead, being greeted with the sight of Morgana sitting on the bed. “Finally! I was wondering how long you’d keep me waiting.” Morgana exclaimed.

“I was wondering where you went. When’d you even get up here?” Jolyne asked.

“I got out of your bag when you got in the booth. Didn’t feel like being crushed against the wall.” He replied, and that’s when Josuke and Ann entered the attic.

“Huh. Cute cat.” Josuke mused upon looking around the attic. He then turned to Jolyne. “Did you receive anything from Jotaro recently?”

“Yeah, a locket with some weird rock in it.”

“Can I see it?” Jolyne nodded, and walked over to the desk by the bed, opening a drawer and pulling out the locket, which was next to the medal they had taken from Kamoshida’s Palace. Shutting the drawer, she tossed the locket to Josuke, who caught it. He opened it, and as soon as he saw the shard, he cursed under his breath.

“Damn, he really sent it…Jojo, have you cut yourself with this?”

“It pricked my finger a few days ago.” Jolyne answered, and Josuke mulled that over.

“And you two, have you cut yourselves with it too?” Josuke asked, and Ryuji and Ann looked at each other, unsure of how they should answer. Should they tell him about the Meta Verse and their personas?

“Josuke, what the hell’s going on? What’s got you like this?” Jolyne asked before they could answer, and Josuke sighed as he closed the locket.

“Can you show me?”

“Show you wha:-“
“You know what.” He responded, and Jolyne swallowed a lump she didn’t know was forming in her throat.

“Stone Free.” The air behind her shimmered, and the pale blue humanoid materialized behind Jolyne, it’s face unmoving, Josuke’s breath sharply hitched as soon as he saw it.

“It was only a matter of time…” He said under his breath.

“Do you know what this thing is?” Jolyne asked, and he nodded.

“It’s a manifestation of your fighting spirit, your spiritual energy given solid form by your own willpower. Because of how they stand by us, no matter what, we call these manifestations ‘Stands.’” Josuke explained, and Jolyne dryly swallowed. Was this related to their Personas? Igor had mentioned that her Persona and Stone Free operated on the same basic principle…

“Ok, so these…‘stands.’ What exactly are they? What causes them?” Ann asked, and Josuke pursed his lips.

“That’s a good question. We’re not exactly sure about the exact science behind them, but from what I’ve been told, a long time ago a meteorite crashed into Earth. Over the years, someone took pieces of that rock and forged them into six arrows. Something about the meteor’s properties awakens the hidden potential inside of certain people, giving them a Stand.” He answered.

“So, do you have one?” Ryuji asked, and Josuke nodded. The air around him shimmered and shined, and a figure materialized behind Josuke. It was about two heads taller than him, with a predominantly pink body and silver armor across its head, abdomen, arms, and legs. The head was clad in tall head gear, with a heart shapes adornment on its chin. It had heart shaped shoulder pads with spikes on them, and cables that connected to its head to its back. It’s purple, rippled eyes were unmoving and its face was unchanging, just like Stone Free.

“This is my stand, Crazy Diamond. It has the ability to fix whatever it touches.” The doctor said, and Ryuji and Ann seemed to squint as they looked behind Josuke and Jolyne.

“I can almost barely see them. Like I said earlier, I can only see some sort of outline, maybe a few colors?” Ann said, and Ryuji nodded.

“Same here. This that ‘hidden potential’ thing you talked about?” He asked, and Josuke shook his head as Crazy Diamond and Stone Free dematerialized.

“You can either see them or you can’t, and Stands can only be seen by other Stand Users. There’s no in between. I don’t know why you two can see the outlines.” Everyone swallowed at this, as they all had a sneaking suspicion that their Personas played a role in this.

“Wait, so how come we have these things?” Jolyne asked, and Josuke sighed as he scratched the back of his head.

“That is…a long story. How much do you know about our family history?”

“Next to nothing. Every time I asked you or Grandma, you’d redirect me to something else, and it’s not like my dad’s been around long enough for me to ask.” Jolyne replied. “The only one who I could get to talk was your dad, and you remember how he was at the end. I couldn’t tell what was real and what was the dementia talking,” Josuke crossed his arms as he thought over that answer, before pointing to Ann and Ryuji.

“How much do you trust these two?”
“Anything that you can say in front of me, you can say in front of them.”

“Then you all should take a seat. This is a long story. I don’t know all the details, since I heard about this secondhand and thirdhand from the people who were involved.” Josuke said as he pulled up a chair, and they did that. Ryuji sat on the couch, while Jolyne and Ann sat on the bed together, with Morgana occupying the table next to the couch. “Alright, so you know how our family originally came from England, right?” Jolyne nodded. “So, a long time ago, my great grandfather, a man named Jonathan Joestar, came into conflict with a man by the name of Dio Brando.” Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“Dio…Joseph always mentioned that name every time I asked him.” Josuke nodded at this.

“Now, this is the part that’s going to take a bit to believe. As ridiculous as this sounds, I want you to know that this is the complete truth. I’m not making any of this up.”

“C’mon dude, don’t keep us waiting. It can’t be that weird.” Ryuji said, and Josuke sighed.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you. I don’t know exactly how, but during his conflict of Jonathan, Dio abandoned his humanity, and became a vampire.” Ann let out a snort at this.

“Seriously? With fangs and a cape?” She chortled out, but it was clear from Josuke’s face that he wasn’t joking.

“I never actually met the man. I heard all of this from Jotaro and my old man years after the fact.” Josuke replied, and placed his right leg over his knee. “Ok, so long story short, Dio and Jonathan ended up fighting on a cruise ship bound for America, the ship went down, and Jonathan died. Somehow, Dio managed to remove Jonathan’s head, and steal our ancestor’s body for himself.”

“No freakin’ way.” Ryuji blurted out. “I’m sorry, but this can’t be real, right? This sounds like some sort of manga or TV show.”

“Ryuji, shut up.” Jolyne said, leaning on the edge of her seat and hanging on every word. After all they had seen since coming to Tokyo, she was ready to believe anything. “Josuke, you can continue.” Josuke nodded, and resumed.

“Dio had stolen Jonathan's body, but he was trapped in a coffin at the bottom of the ocean for a hundred years. In 1985, deep sea scavengers pulled up the coffin containing Dio, and he was unleashed on the world again.” Josuke said.

“And I’m guessing that this Dio guy got the arrows you mentioned earlier?” Jolyne asked, and he nodded.

“That’s right. The shard in this-- Josuke held up the locket. “--was one of the arrows Dio acquired and distributed among his followers. Over the next couple of years, Dio would use the arrows to amass a small army of Stand Users loyal to him, and gave himself a Stand as well.”

“And how does this, very interesting, history lesson concern how we have these Stands?” Jolyne piped up.

“Because of this.” Josuke took off his jacket, turned around, and pulled down the neck of his shirt to reveal the star shaped birthmark on his neck, in the same exact location as Jolyne’s.

“…what is that? Some kinda tattoo?” Ryuji asked.

“It’s a birthmark. I have one just like it.” Jolyne said, shrugging off her blazer and pulling the collar
of her uniform down to reveal an identical mark.

“Every blood member of the Joestar family is born with this mark on our left shoulder. It ties us together, and is what linked us to Dio.” Josuke explained, putting his jacket back on. “When someone gets stabbed with an arrow and acquires a Stand, it affects their entire bloodline.”

“So let me see if I’ve got this straight: because this Dio guy stole your ancestor’s body—“ Ann felt crazy just saying those words aloud. “—when he gave himself a Stand, it affected you guys too?”

“Bingo. Everyone who was alive at the time gained a Stand, including myself and Jolyne’s father, Jotaro.” Josuke explained, and Jolyne gripped the edge of the bed.

“So, the whole reason I’m like this is because of him?” She asked, her voice low, and Josuke reluctantly nodded.

“…yeah. Children of Stand Users that are born after the parent acquires their Stand are either born with a stand or have the potential, more so than others.” Jolyne scoffed at this, her grip tightening on the bed.

“That bastard…so our whole family knows about this? Even Grandma Holly?” Josuke almost seemed to shirk from the glare she was giving him, before he nodded. “When exactly did you all plan on telling me all this?”

“Jotaro…thought it best to keep you as far away from all this as possible.”

“So that means running around doing god knows what while leaving literally everyone else to raise your daughter? I don’t think he gets a lot of say in what I should know.” Jolyne spat out, leaving Ryuji, Ann, and Morgana with the uncomfortable feeling that they didn’t quite belong.

“He has his reasons. For what it’s worth, I’ve always thought we should’ve told you everything.” Josuke responded, and Jolyne scowled. A pregnant pause hung in the air for a minute, until Ryuji cleared his throat.

“So uh…what exactly can these things do?” He asked, and Josuke seized upon the chance for a subject change.

“Just about anything. Each stand is different, with its own unique characteristics and abilities. For instance, in addition to being able to restore something to a state it was in before and essentially fixing it, Crazy Diamond has incredible speed, precision, and offensive power. And they don’t have to be humanoid, either. There are even some Stands that are bound to certain objects.” Josuke explained, and gestured to the tattoo of the purple vines on his arm. “This tattoo is based off my old man’s stand, Hermit Purple. It had the ability to take what he called ‘spirit photographs’, which were essentially visions he could capture in photographs.”

“This is all so weird…” Ann mumbled, while her eyes shifted to Jolyne, who was staring at the ground. Ann couldn’t imagine what she was thinking right now. She supposed Jolyne was angry, which wouldn’t surprise her. After all, if Ann found out that her family knew they had special powers, but didn’t tell her, she’d be pissed too. The blonde couldn’t exactly think of anything to say that would alleviate the tension, instead opting to place a comforting hand on Jolyne’s back. Her breath hitched, before the transfer student softly exhaled.

“So…” Jolyne said, drawing Josuke’s attention. “…when you say that these things can do anything…what exactly does ‘anything’ mean?” She asked, and he let out a sigh of relief.

“Well, from what I’ve seen, anything means anything, but as weird as this may sound, there’s a set of
rules to everything. Every Stand comes with its own drawbacks and weaknesses, balancing out the scales. Crazy Diamond has incredible speed and offensive power, but it has a maximum range of only two meters. Also, while Crazy Diamond can restore almost anything and return it to its previous state, I can’t use it to bring anyone back to life. Learned that one the hard way…” Josuke answered, remembering how he had tried to bring his grandfather back in 1999. “So, Jojo, what all can your Stand do?"

“I haven’t really had a chance to test it out yet. It only fully materialized yesterday.” She answered, and Josuke’s brow furrowed.

“Fully? Did it manifest in any sort of way before that?”

“Only like this.” Jolyne answered, and her hand began unraveling into strings. “I can use these to eavesdrop on people and pick locks, or I can unravel my arm and use it as a rope.”

“How’d you find that out?” Josuke asked, and Jolyne’s eyes widened. She hadn’t thought of an explanation for how she knew she could do all that.

“I uh…I accidentally locked myself out going to the convenience store around the corner one night, so I used these to get back in. It all felt like instinct, like it was natural.” Josuke raised an eyebrow, as it was obvious that there was something Jolyne wasn’t telling him, and from the looks on the faces of Ryuji, Ann, and even the cat, they all knew what that was. However, he didn’t pry.

“Since a Stand is an extension of yourself, it’s essentially like a muscle or a limb. You’ll know exactly what it can and can’t do and what it’s limitations are.” Josuke explained.

“So, it’s just like our Personas.” Morgana said.

“How many people are there that have these Stand things?” Ann asked.

“A couple hundred. Less than a fraction of the population, which is why most people don’t know about a Stands, but they’re spread out all over the world. The Speedwagon Foundation keeps a registry of known Stand users and what they can do.” Jolyne’s brow furrowed.

“Speedwagon? Aren’t those the guys that showed up when…you know…” She trailed off, and Josuke nodded.

“Yeah, part of the Foundation’s mission is to monitor and evaluate Stands. We would know even less than we do now without their research.”

“So what’s the connection with us?”

“The way I understand it, the guy who founded the Speedwagon Foundation was tight with our family back in the day. Before he died, he declared that the Speedwagon Foundation will provide our family with anything we need.” Josuke answered, and snapped his fingers. “Which reminds me, we’ll need to go down there soon and get you registered and introduced to the people down there.”

“That sounds fun…” Jolyne groaned out, and Ryuji nervously cleared his throat.

“So uh, that Shining Diamond-“

“Crazy Diamond.”

“Right, sorry. So that thing…when you said it can fix anything, does that mean people too?” The blonde former track star asked, and the pompadoured doctor nodded.
“Yeah, I can heal just about any wound or injury on a person. I can even reattach limbs and heal holes in a person’s chest.” He answered, and noticed Ann’s eyes widen. “I can’t bring someone back to life, and I can’t heal myself. It doesn’t work on illnesses either, as there technically isn’t anything physically wrong.” He explained, and looked at Ryuji. “Why?” Ryuji nervously gulped, and clutched his right knee.

“So about a year ago, my leg got bust up by…by an asshole. It’s healed since then, but my knee’s still pretty effed up. It pretty much ended my track career, and it gives out every now and then. The other day it gave out and I…I almost let someone down pretty bad.” He said, thinking back to how his leg had given out against the Shadow Kamoshida yesterday. “I was wondering…could you fix my knee up?”

“Yeah, that shouldn’t be a problem.” Josuke replied almost instantly, causing everyone’s eyes to widen. Josuke gestured for Ryuji to come to him, and Ryuji walked up to him. The air behind Josuke shimmered and shined as Crazy Diamond appeared in front of him, and the stand placed its hands on Ryuji’s knee. An aura of sorts engulfed him for a second, before the Stand disappeared once more. “There you go. Good as new.” Ryuji looked unsure, as the whole process took only a few seconds. However, as soon as Ryuji began placing weight on his right leg, his eyes widened as his mouth dropped.

“Holy shit…” He muttered out, bouncing on his right leg and testing it out as tears began to well up in his eye. “Holy shit…it…it doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“No way…” Jolyne whispered as she watched Ryuji move around the attic. Gone was the almost unnoticeable limp that Ryuji had walked with, even in the Meta Verse, and he now walked as if he had never been injured in the first place. Ann, on the other hand, was experiencing different thoughts. While of course she was happy for Ryuji, her mind was racing elsewhere, taking into account Josuke’s abilities and reaching to the conclusion that…

“Um, Josuke-san?” She spoke up, drawing his attention. “You mentioned that you saw Shujin on the news, right? Because of the suicide?” Josuke somberly nodded, and Jolyne and Morgana realized what she was about to ask. “Shiho, the girl who jumped…is my best friend, and she was messed up pretty badly.” Ann said, hands clenching the edge of the bed. “I was wondering…could you heal her?” She asked, and Josuke began to think.

“How bad?”

“Hmm?”

“How bad was she injured?”

“Oh, let’s see…” Ann had to fight back the tears as she remembered the extent of Shiho’s injuries. “Her legs were both broken, her spine was damaged, and the doctors say she could have some serious nerve damage. And she…she slipped into a coma, and hasn’t woken up since.” Josuke tapped his chin, thinking it over.

“Well, it’s not a question of if I can or not. Something like that is no problem. The real question is whether or not I’ll be able to.” He replied, causing everyone to look at him with a confused expression.

“What do you mean by that?” Jolyne asked.

“She’s already in a hospital. They’ve already had their doctors record the extent of her injuries and the condition she’s in. If this young woman’s injuries just completely vanished overnight and her
body was in top form, then it would be noticed by everyone.” The doctor explained, and Ann gripped the edge of the bed as tears threatened to well up in her eyes. Now it was Jolyne’s turn to comfort Ann, placing a hand on Ann’s back.

“Lady Ann…” Morgana lamented, and Jolyne simply glared at her uncle.

“Seriously, Uncle Josuke? Is there nothing you can do?”

“I never said that. I just said it’d be difficult to pull off.” He responded, and looked at Ann. “Takamaki-san, I promise, I’ll do what I can for your friend. Just…give me a few days to come up with something, alright?”

“…alright.” Ann responded, and began to get up. “I…I should get going. I’ve got homework to do.” Jolyne frowned.

“Are you sure?” Ann put on a smile and nodded.

“Yeah. It’s fine. I’ll text you later.” Ann said, and turned to Josuke. “It…it was nice to meet you, Josuke-san.”

“Likewise, Takamaki-san.” Josuke said, and Ann smiled, before vanishing down the stairs. This left Ryuji alone with the two Joestars and Morgana. Needless to say, Ryuji felt like a bit of an intruder.

“So uh…I better go with her. Make sure no creeps try and hit on her, yknow?” He said, and to Jolyne’s surprise, Ryuji actually bowed. “It was nice to meet you! T-thank you for healing my leg!”

“No problem, Sakamoto-san. Get home safe, alright?” He replied, and Ryuji disappeared down the stairs, leaving Josuke and Jolyne alone with Morgana.

“So…they seem nice.” Josuke said after a moment of silence. “Though I kind of got the feeling that Ryuji guy didn’t really grasp all the concepts.”

“Yeah, he’s…not the brightest, but he comes through when you need him.” Jolyne responded, and shuffled where she sat. “So, how long have you known about all t?”

“Since I was your age. Your dad was the one who explained it all to me back then.” He answered, and chuckled. “Kinda fitting that I be the one to explain this all to you, I guess.”

“Someone had to. Not like my dad was going to do it this time.” Jolyne bitterly said, and Josuke looked at Morgana.

“So…what's the deal with the cat?” He asked his niece, and she shrugged.

“He just started following me home one day, so I took him in. His name is Morgana.”

“And Sojiro-san’s fine with this?”

“As long as I don't get into trouble, he doesn't really care what I do.” Jolyne answered, and Josuke scowled.

“This probation crap…it's a load of shit. You shouldn’t have been forced to move all the way up here.” Jolyne simply shrugged.

“It is what it is. And frankly, it could've been a lot worse.”

“You should've never been put in that position just to begin with. Now your whole life’s been
ruined, all because of some drunk asshole. Least they could’ve done was let you live in Morioh with me.”

“Hey, I’m lucky I was able to get sent up here at all. I’d rather be up here than in jail.” Jolyne said. “Besides, it hasn’t been too bad up here so far.”

“Yeah yeah…” Josuke grunted out, and sighed. “So...what do you think about all of this? I know learning about this can be a bit...daunting?” Once again, Jolyne shrugged.

“A week ago, I probably would’ve laughed in your face, but after this week, I’m willing to believe anything.”

“Yeah, acquiring a Stand does a lot for what you’ll believe.”

“...right. My Stand. That was...pretty crazy.” Jolyne dryly replied. “So, how long are you going to be in Tokyo?”

“About three days. I’ll be busy for most of the day, but I should be done by the time you get out of school.” Josuke said. “I’ll text you the details later. I need to call the Speedwagon Foundation so they can set everything up properly.”

“And Shiho? What are you going to do about her?”

“Something else that I’ll need to discuss with the Speedwagon people. I won’t have any definite plans until tomorrow at the earliest.”

“Alright, I’ll tell Ann tomorrow.” Jolyne responded, and Josuke got a bit of a mischievous smirk.

“So, Takamaki, huh? You two seemed awfully close a minute ago.” He jeered, and Jolyne’s cheeks reddened as she looked away.

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She said, and Josuke chuckled.

“Whatever you say, Jojo.” The doctor remarked, and looked at his phone. “Well, it’s getting a little late. I need to go and get checked into my hotel.”

“Where are you staying?”

“A place near Shibuya. I’ll text you the name of the place when I get there.” Josuke said.

“Alright. Need help getting there?” Josuke shook his head.

“I’ve been here enough times to know my way around. See you tomorrow?”

“Sounds good. Just be careful, alright? Lot of accidents have been happening in the city lately.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I can handle a lousy car crash.” Josuke said, and got up. “Later, Jojo.”

And with that, he vanished down the stairs, leaving Jolyne and Morgana alone.

As Josuke exited Leblanc and headed towards the station, he stopped in the middle of the street, and looked around. After about a minute, he shrugged, and headed towards the trains. Unknown to him, a small model plane circled the air above the backstreet, before flying off towards Shibuya at a high speed. After flying for a few minutes, it flew into the open window of a building, landing in a dimly lit room. “So, that was Josuke Higashikata, huh?” A man’s voice said as a hand picked up the plane off the ground. “Tch, he doesn’t seem like such a big deal.” The voice said as it set the plane on a shelf next to several other planes and model cars...that was above a woman that was bound and
gagged. “Now, where were we, sweetie?”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the big info dump. I'll make it up to you guys next time.
Chapter 10: The Man from Morioh Part 2

Chapter Summary

While en route to the Speedwagon Foundation, Josuke and Jolyne take an unexpected detour.

Chapter Notes

Really looking forward to seeing what you guys think about this. Please, leave a comment so I can see what I need to work on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 10: The Man from Morioh part 2: Stand Proud

Thursday, 4/21/20XX, Early Morning

Jolyne was sitting at the bar in Leblanc, eating a bowl of curry Sojiro had prepared her for breakfast, Morgana in his bag in the seat next to her. As she was eating, her phone chimed, signaling a new message.

JH: hey jojo

JH: U at school yet?

JC: No, I’m about to leave.

JH: Ok

JH: tld 2 speedwagon. Ready 4 u after school

Jolyne could only roll her eyes as she deciphered Josuke’s text message. After all these years, he still had yet to figure out how to text properly, no matter how hard she or Shizuka, Josuke’s adopted sister who was around Jolyne’s age, tried to teach him.

JC: Sounds good. Where do you want me to meet you?

JH: Will meet u n Shibuya after conference

JC: I’ll see you there

JH: K

“Hey, quit texting and hurry up. You’re going to be late again.” Sojiro scolded from behind the counter.

“Yeah, yeah…” She grumbled, and quickly finished the meal he had prepared for her. A short while
later, she was heading towards the Ginza line. However, as she followed the line to the ticket gate for her transfer, Jolyne heard a voice.

“Excuse me, pardon me, excuse-oof!” Followed shortly by something colliding into her. It didn’t knock her down, but Jolyne saw binders and papers fly out of a bag into the air as well as the sound of something hitting the ground. Stone Free manifested behind her, and with astonishing speed, it grabbed the papers and the binders before they could go in every direction, neatly composing them back into a stack and into Jolyne’s hands as the Stand vanished. Jolyne looked down at the ground to see a girl with short brown hair and reddish brown eyes around her age in a Shujin uniform, only her blazer was replaced with a black halter top and a different kind of turtleneck, with a button on the top that indicated the girl was a third year.

“Hey, you ok?” Jolyne asked as she extended her hands towards the girl, and she nodded as she took Jolyne’s hand.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Sorry about that.” She said as Jolyne pulled her off the ground.

“It’s alright, we all have those mornings.” Jolyne said, and handed the girl her binders.

“Thank you. Normally I should be at school a lot earlier, but I must have stayed up too late studying for entrance exams and overslept. Need to adjust my schedule…” The girl muttered, and that’s when she really took in Jolyne’s appearance. “Oh! I didn’t realize it was you, Cujoh-san. My apologies.” The girl apologized, and Jolyne sighed.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to try and mug you.” Jolyne groaned, and the girl raised an eyebrow before realization donned across her face.

“That’s right, we haven’t had a chance to actually meet yet.” Now it was Jolyne’s turn to raise her eyebrow.

“Should we? You’re a third year, aren’t you?”

“Sorry, allow me to introduce myself.” The girl said as she tucked the binders into her bag, and straightened her uniform. “Makoto Nijjima, student council president. It’s a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance, Cujoh-san.” Makoto greeted, taking a small bow, and Jolyne returned the favor.

“Nice to meet you two, Nijjima-Senpai.” Jolyne said, before something she had just said fully clicked in Jolyne’s head. “Wait, aren’t entrance exams not for another few months?” Makoto shrugged at Jolyne’s question.

“It never hurts to get started early.” She replied as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

“Right…” While Jolyne hadn’t met the student council president, she had heard a few people muttering about how the Shujin class president was a bit of a perfectionist. Between this and the rumors about Kamoshida, Jolyne was slowly learning that not all the rumors around Shujin were complete bull.

“Cujoh-San-“ Makoto spoke up, pulling her out of her thoughts. “-we should probably get going, or else on the way. We can talk on the way.” The class president suggested, though there was something about the way she said it that made it feel more like an order to Jolyne.

“Uh, right.” Jolyne said, and they began making their way to the Ginza line, passing through the ticket gate.

“How are you settling in here at Shujin?”
“It’s alright so far. Once I started to tune out everything people were saying behind my back, it got a lot easier.” Jolyne shrugged, and Makoto winced when Jolyne mentioned the rumors.

“Allow me to apologize for that on behalf of the school. Your criminal record and probationary status were supposed to remain confidential, known only to the principal, your teachers, and myself. We have no idea who could’ve leaked that knowledge to the student body.” Jolyne knew full well that Kamoshida had forced Mishima to leak her records online, but any dirt on Kamoshida was essentially useless until he came back from his ‘leave of absence.’

“Don’t worry about it. Believe me, I’m used to people talking behind my back.” Jolyne replied, and Makoto sighed as they boarded the train towards Aoyama.

“Well, if you say so…” She muttered, before putting her cheerful face back on. “Well, if you ever need assistance with your academics, or if you need advice on something, you can normally find me on the third floor in the library. Though lately, my afternoons have been spent dealing with the fallout of last week’s…incident.” Makoto lamented, and Jolyne gripped her bag as she thought about Shiho.

“What’s your take on all that?” Jolyne asked, and Makoto’s face fell.

“I’m saddened that Suzui-san chose to try and end her own life. I wish she had come to me or someone else and tried to talk through it.”

“And what made her jump?” Jolyne asked, but Makoto wasn’t taken off guard like she expected.

“You refer to the accusation made in the message to Coach Kamoshida on Tuesday, correct? That he was responsible for the suicide attempt?” Jolyne nodded, and Makoto sighed. This was clearly not the first time she had been asked about the calling card. “We have been aware of the rumors surrounding Coach Kamoshida’s training methods for some time now. However, that’s all they are: rumors. He simply…knows how to push his members to do their best.” Makoto stated, but Jolyne noticed a tinge of hesitance in her voice. However, she didn’t have the chance to pry further, as they arrived at Aoyame-Ichitome station. “Well, this is our stop.”

“Looks like it. See you around, Niijima-senpai.”

“And you as well. It was a pleasure to meet you.” Makoto said, and with that, they were separated as they merged with the crowd of students heading towards Shujin.

“So, that’s the student council president.” Morgana spoke up from inside the bag, having been biding his time while Jolyne conversed with Makoto. “She doesn’t seem too bad.”

“Seems like it.” Jolyne responded, though she could almost swear there was something…off about Makoto. Like there was something just under the surface ready to explode outwards. Still, Jolyne wasn’t in a position to be too picky about her associates, and the young woman didn’t appear to be openly hostile to the transfer student as the rest of the student body. So, for the time being, Jolyne shrugged it off as she entered Shujin Academy. Making her way towards her classroom, Jolyne saw Ann sitting at her desk with her arms folded on the desk. “Hey, Ann.” She greeted as she passed Ann’s desk, but the fellow Phantom Thief didn’t seem to hear her.

“Lady Ann? Are you alright?” Morgana asked, poking his head out of the bag, and this seemed to bring Ann back down to Earth.

“Oh, hey, you two. Sorry, I was just…thinking about yesterday.”

“About Shiho?” Jolyne asked, and Ann nodded.
“That too. If your uncle can do for her what he did for Ryuji, but he’s not able to…” Jolyne put a hand on Ann’s shoulder.

“He’ll come through. Trust me, Josuke hates letting people down.” Jolyne said, and Ann swallowed before smiling.

“Alright. I trust you.” Ann said, and with that, Kawakami entered the room.

“Alright everyone, please take your seats.” She instructed. Jolyne and Ann shared a glance, before Jolyne sat down at her desk.

After School, Shibuya

Josuke stood in the Underground Walkway of Shibuya Station, back against the wall as he watched the crowds. While Morioh was by no means a small town nowadays, it still didn’t hold a candle to Tokyo. Every time Josuke was here, he had to just sit and watch the sheer chaos that was the big city. “Ah, are you people watching too?” A voice said, and Josuke looked to his right to see a tall, lanky young man standing beside him, with dark blue hair and wearing a white school uniform.

“I might be. What about it?” Josuke responded.

“My apologies, I did not mean to appear confrontational. I am just not used to seeing someone else partaking in this hobby.” The boy said, his tone polite and sophisticated. Something about his voice reminded Josuke of Jotaro, but he couldn’t quite put his finger on it…Josuke brushed it off, simply shrugging.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m just doing this to pass the time while I wait for someone.”

“I see.” The boy said, and his gaze was drawn to Josuke’s hair. “What an unusual hairstyle…” The boy muttered, and Josuke felt irritation and anger building…until the boy held his hands in front of him, the index finger and thumb of each hand almost forming a frame. “The unique style, the way the light catches it and accentuates your features…Japanese, English, and…Italian?” The boy muttered, before beginning to reach into his school bag. “Excuse me sir, but would you mind if I sketch you?” He asked, and that’s when Josuke noticed a familiar hairstyle among the crowd.

“Maybe some other time, kid. Have a nice day.” Josuke bid farewell to the strange boy, and made his way towards the familiar set of buns he had spotted through the crowd. “Hey, Jojo.” He called out as he approached Jolyne, who waved at him. “So, how was school?”

“Boring. Where’s this Speedwagon place?” Jolyne asked.

“Over in Bunkyo, not too far from Tokyo U.” Josuke instructed, and the twi began making their way towards a nearby train directory.

“Let’s see, to get to Bunkyo from here, we need to…oh gimme a break…” The thing that brought the ‘uh oh’ was the line that indicated the route from Shibuya to Bunkyo, and right above the dot for Bunkyo was the word ‘CLOSED DUE TO ACCIDENT’ in bright red kanji. “Damn, that must have been where that big crash was the other day.” Jolyne said, and Josuke groaned.

“Well, that’s great…” He groaned out, and tried reading the directory to find what would get them closest to their destination. “Man, this place is so big. I can’t understand any of this. You?” Jolyne shook her head.

“Not on my own, no.” Josuke sighed at his niece’s answer.
“Guess we’ll have to head topside and find a cab. C’mon, let’s go.” Josuke instructed, and they began making their way towards Shibuya Square. The two Joestars emerged from the Underground Walkway into the bustling square of Shibuya. As Josuke and Jolyne began heading towards the street, Josuke heard a small whirring sound above him, and looked up to see what looked like a small model plane based off of an American fighter plane from World War II flying around in a circle above them. “You see that?” He asked, and Jolyne looked up to see the plane flying in a circle above the street.

“Looks like one of those remote-controlled toys. Probably some middle schooler messing around.”

“Yeah, probably.” Josuke said, but as he and Jolyne looked down, Josuke noticed something: no one else around them seemed to notice the plane. While scores people glued to their phones while they walked wasn’t out of place in today’s society, if the drone was loud enough for Josuke to hear above the drum of the crowds, someone should have at least looked up to see what the noise was. But no one even seemed to acknowledge it, going about their days as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Josuke looked back up to see the small model plane had been joined by two others, circling over them in formation… before they began diving downwards, heading straight towards Jolyne and Josuke. Josuke cursed under his breath, and the air around him shimmered and shined. “Crazy Diamond!” The armor-clad Stand manifested behind him, and that’s when the three planes began firing their guns.

“Dorarararararararararara!” Crazy Diamond unleashed a series of rapid fire punches, smashing most of the projectiles before they could reach him. However, one made it past the barrage of punches and pierced the pink flesh of Crazy Diamond’s left shoulder, causing Josuke to grit his teeth in pain as he felt the injury appear at the same location on his body, causing his jacket to darken with a small splotch of red blood. The bright side of this was that the injury to his Stand confirmed his suspicions.

“What the hell?!” Jolyne asked as the planes pulled up, circling them once again. “What was that?!”

“It’s an enemy Stand!” Josuke said, and Jolyne’s eyes widened as she watched the planes circle them, almost like vultures circling fresh roadkill.

“Those things? Seriously?”

“I told you, Stands come in all shapes and sizes.” Josuke said, and looked around as he evaluated their situation. “We’re sitting ducks like this. We need to get off the street and-“ Josuke started to say, when he noticed something else. Weaving it’s way through the crowd at a high speed , expertly maneuvering around the feet of the people going about their day, was a small model formula car. However, Josuke saw the light glinting off the back wings, and his eyes widened. “Jojo, watch-“

“Stone Free!” Before Josuke could finish, Jolyne had turned towards the direction of the formula car and manifested her Stand as the car got closer to her. Josuke noticed that Morgana’s head was poking out of the back of Jolyne’s bag.

“Ora!” Stone Free launched its fist at the model car, only for it to turn on a dime and narrowly avoid the punch. It tried heading straight for Jolyne’s leg, but she wouldn’t let it. “Oraoraoraoraoraoraoraora!” Stone Free cried out as it launched a rapid series of punches, but the formula car dodged each and every one, maneuvering with an unnatural accuracy, before it sped away, retreating back into the crowd.

“What the hell is this thing?!” Jolyne asked.

“It’s an ambush. Those things were waiting for us.” Josuke said, and blocked out the pain from his
shoulder.

“Ambush? By who?!”

“We’ll have to figure that out later. Right now, we’re sitting ducks. We need to get off the street before those things make another pass at us.” Josuke instructed.

“Back into the station?” Josuke shook his head.

“If those planes follow us in there, there could be people caught in the crossfire.” Jolyne cursed under her breath, and got an idea.

“What about an alleyway? There are a bunch of those around here.” She suggested, and Josuke thought it over for a second.

“That could work. If they come at us again, we’ll be able to tell what direction they’re coming from and be able to deal with them.”

“Then let’s get moving.” Jolyne said, and they began to move. They pushed their way through the afternoon crowd, heading towards Central Street. The two entered Central Street, and that’s when the planes made their move, diving towards the Joestars once again. As the three planes began to fire their guns, Josuke and Jolyne ducked into an alley, Jolyne narrowly avoiding the bullets. However, two bullets struck her in the right thigh, going clean through the bone and muscles, and she let out a cry of pain as she collapsed into the alley with Josuke. “Ah! Shit!” She exclaimed as pain spread up her body and tears involuntarily welled in her eyes. Jolyne had easily taken worse hits than the bullets in the Palace, but that was the Meta Verse, where the lines between what was real or not tended to blur and her strength and endurance were enhanced by her Persona, but this was the real world. Everything hurt here.

“Damn!” Josuke exclaimed, and picked Jolyne off the ground and set her against the wall of the alleyway. Crazy Diamond manifested behind Josuke and placed its hands on her leg. A golden aura seemed to surround the leg, and the wounds sealed completely shut, even repairing her uniform leggings without a scratch. “That better?”

“Yeah, thanks.” Jolyne said as she wiped her eyes dry. “What are those things?”

“My guess? A remote-controlled Stand, one that’s spread out across multiple objects to let the user control them. If that’s the case, then—” Josuke answered, and looked out the alley at Central Street. He couldn’t see them, but he could still hear the whirring of the planes above the street. Jolyne’s bag, which had fallen on the ground, began to shuffle, drawing the attention of the two. However, rather than the Stand Josuke was expecting, out from the bag popped Morgana, who looked none the worse for wear, save for his fur being ruffle.

“Jolyne, are you alright?!” Morgana asked, though Jolyne knew Josuke could only hear meowing, and she nodded at him.

“Jojo, why is the cat in your bag?” Josuke asked, and Jolyne cursed under her breath. Morgana had spotted the formula car with the blades for wings racing towards them, which was the only reason neither of the humans was walking with a limp. However, she didn’t think Josuke would accept that Morgana was really a magical creature that could talk and see Stands, so she had to come up with some sort of explanation.

“He…comes to school with me.” She answered, and frantically searched for an explanation. “Sojiro doesn’t want him in Leblanc during business, and he’s…declawed, so I can’t leave him outside.”
She could tell that Josuke didn’t buy that explanation for a second, but he knew that now was not the
time to press this. “What was that you were saying about the user?” She asked, causing Josuke to get
back on track.

“As I was saying, if this is a remote-controlled stand we’re talking about, then they could be
anywhere in the city.” He explained, and rubbed his chin. “But if this is a Stand that lets them have
control of multiple objects at once, and still be able to have enough fine control to dodge our attacks,
then the user would have to be closer. I’d say about...20 meters, max.” Jolyne’s eyes widened at this.

“20 meters?! Do you have any idea how many people there are in just 1 meter here? We’ll never find
the user!” She exclaimed, and Josuke unconsciously bit his lip in thought.

“Could it have been that kid? No, he was weird, but not that kind of weird…” Josuke muttered to
himself, and that’s when Jolyne noticed the wound on his left shoulder.

“Grunkle J, you’re hurt!” She gasped, pulling Josuke out of his thoughts.

“What, you mean this? One of those planes hit Crazy D. It’s just a flesh wound. Trust me, I’ve had
worse.” Jolyne’s eyes widened at ‘worse’, but she pushed forward.

“Why don’t you just fix yourself with Crazy Diamond?”

“I can’t use it to heal myself. One of the drawbacks I mentioned yesterday.” He answered, and
Jolyne’s brow worried in concern as she stared at the wound. “Don’t worry about it. I can handle a
little scratch. We need to focus on finding the-“ Josuke started to say, when he almost saw a small
light turn on in Jolyne’s eyes.

“Let me see it.” She instructed in a tone that suggested it was an order (something that reminded
Josuke a lot of Jotaro), and Josuke obliged, shrugging off his jacket to reveal his yellow shirt was
matted with blood. Without hesitation, Jolyne pulled down the collar of Josuke’s shirt to expose the
wound not even flinching at the sight. She held her finger up to the wound, and a string began
emerging from her finger tip. Josuke slightly winced in pain as the string pierced his skin, but he
watched in slight amazement as the string began to stitch the bullet wound. When the hole was
completely shut, the string broke off where it had entered and returned to her finger. “There. Should
hold together until we can get to a doctor.”

“Well damn. Not bad, Jojo.” Josuke congratulated as he put his jacket back on. “How’d you know to
do that?” He asked, and she shrugged.

“If I could manipulate these things to pick locks, then I also figured that I could use them to stitch up
wounds.” Jolyne explained, causing Josuke to smirk.

Heh, she always keeps her cool, even under pressure. Just like her old man. Josuke thought to
himself, before he turned back to Central Street. The doctor stuck his head out of the alley, and saw
the planes flying around the street in a circle, and Josuke ducked his head back in before they saw
him.

“What’s it look like out there?” Jolyne asked.

“Those things know we’re here, but they’re not attacking. The User must be planning something.”
Josuke answered, and Jolyne frowned at this.

“If only I could use my Persona…” She softly under her breath, to the degree that Josuke
couldn’t hear her, but Morgana could. His little mouth dropped as realization dawned in his eyes, and
was about to speak.
“Come play with us!” Before he could say anything, a high pitched, almost childlike voice sounded out, and they all looked to see a familiar sight had appeared at the entrance of the alleyway: the bladed formula car, almost staring them down. “Come play with us! Come play with us!”

“Good grief, this thing again…” Jolyne groaned, and the two Joestars manifested their stands as they braced themselves. They all stood perfectly still for a moment, the alleyway almost quite save for the soft whir of the formula car’s engines…until it darted towards them.

“Oraoraoraoraoraoraora!”

“Dorararararararararara!”

Both Stands unleashed a flurry of punches, but the formula car was simply too fast, narrowly racing past the punches. However, instead of swerving to slash their heels like the two were expecting, the car instead sped directly forward, breezing past a hissing Morgana. They all watched as the car raced past them, before stopping halfway down the alley and beginning to turn. But instead of turning all the way around and charging them, the car instead turned right and stood still. “Come play with us! Come play with us!” The voice called out from the car, and it sped forward, into the space behind the record store.

“The hell?” Jolyne asked, and Josuke was about to respond…when he heard whirring behind them.

“Come play with us! Come play with-“

“Doral!” As the three planes entered the alley and flew straight at them, Josuke spun on his heel and slammed Crazy Diamond’s fist forward, destroying the lead plane’s wing and causing it to spin out of control as it crashed to the ground, while the other two flew right past them and turned right where the car had turned. Josuke and Jolyne watched them vanish.

“The hell was that about?” Jolyne asked.

“My guess is that the User is in that direction, and they want us to come to them.”

“They can’t think we’re actually stupid enough to fall for such an obvious trap.” Jolyne spat, but from the way Josuke’s eyes were narrowed, she got the feeling he didn’t 100% agree. “You can’t be serious.”

“If we don’t take care of them now, the User will just keep coming after us. And I don’t think they’ll be so considerate of others next time.” Josuke said. Jolyne was about to argue, but the more she thought about it, the more her great uncle made sense. Whoever was controlling these things was obviously after them specifically, and if they came after her again, there'd be no telling who’d get caught up in the crossfire. Sojiro, Ryuji, Ann…

“Alright. I see your point.” Jolyne responded, and Morgana’s eyes seemed to narrow with determination.

“I’m with you, Joker.” He said, switching to her codename. Jolyne nodded, and she and Josuke began to head in the direction their attackers had gone, with Josuke making extra sure to stomp on the crashed plane as he passed it. Following the path the car and the planes had taken, the three saw a dilapidated building with boarded up windows a little bit past a gym, with the door hanging wide open.

“Come play with us…come play with us…come play with us…” The soft, childlike voices called from the door.
“That is…really creepy.” Josuke commented, but he noticed Jolyne didn’t seem fazed. In fact, there was almost something different about her. Josuke brushed it aside, and the three began to enter the rundown building.

The building they entered appeared to have been some kind of toy store or manga shop, judging from the shelves full of unopened dolls and action figures that lined the walls, as well as the tattered posters of various anime across the walls. Josuke’s head was on a swivel, keeping an eye out for the user. However, save for the two Joestars and the cat, there was not a soul in sight. However, in addition to noting that the door behind the counter was cracked open, everyone’s attention was drawn to a rather large, extravagant dollhouse on the counter, where the cash register should have been. “The hell is that thing?” Jolyne asked, and Josuke narrowed his eyes as his brain reached the only conclusion it could. However, before he could open his mouth, a single voice spoke out from behind the cracked door.

"Toy Story." The windows of the dollhouse began to glow an ethereal green, and the door swung open. Out shot about a dozen puffs of green smoke that shot out in every direction, shooting into several of the boxed toys that lined the walls. Josuke and Jolyne watched as the toys began tearing their way out of the boxes, getting back to back as the toys leapt off the shelves. Jolyne noticed that several of the accessories, such as plastic swords and such, had been replaced with various bladed objects, such as razor blades, boxcutters, nails, and the like.

“Come play with us…come play with us…” The toys chanted out in their sing song voices, as they surrounded the niece and nephew. However, instead of pouncing on them, the possessed toys began circling them, almost like a predator circling its prey.

"Josuke, you’re the expert here. What do we do?” Jolyne asked, eyes never leaving the toys for even a second. Josuke did the same, only he noticed a small, ethereal aura around each toy.

“Don’t let your guard down. If these things are being controlled by the Stand itself, then that means they’ll be able to injure out Stands. And since our Stands our extensions of ourselves, any injury inflicted on them also affects us. Which means-“

“If our Stands get too beat up, we die. And you can’t reverse that.” Jolyne finished for him, watching as a mecha and a Phoenix Ranger eyed her.

“Right.” Josuke shot a quick glance towards the dollhouse. “That thing must be what the Stand is bound to. If we destroy that, then this’ll all be over.” As soon as Josuke said that, the voice from the door began to chuckle.

“Very astute, Higashikata. You’re every bit as sharp as the stories say. You’ll make a fine doll indeed-“ The voice, which was high pitched and nasally, said, but before they could try and talk with him…the toys charged them.

"Crazy Diamond!"

“Stone Free!”

Both Stands exploded into existence as the toys charged them. Crazy Diamond began punching at a toy with a top hat and some sort of Mecha, but the toys dodged each punch. The Mecha jumped onto the right fist and used it as a launch pad, launching itself towards Crazy Diamond’s face while raising the box cutter blade it used as a weapon. However, before it even reached the shoulder, Crazy Diamond’s left fist smashed into it’s plastic body, sending it flying off. At that moment, Josuke felt several small stabbing sensations in his left upper arm, and looked to see the Top Hat figure, which Josuke now recognized as Pink Dark Boy, and what looked like several Risette dolls climbing up
Crazy Diamond’s arm, using nail to create handholds in the pink flesh that appeared on Josuke’s body. “Of course it’d be that one…” Josuke muttered out. Crazy Diamond’s right hand took Pink Dark Boy in it’s hand and flung it onto the ground, smashing it into pieces. He then began flinging around Crazy Diamond’s left arm, trying to shake the idol dolls loose. While they did try their damndest to hang onto the nails dug into Josuke’s arm, the speed and force was too much, and they were flung off in every direction.

Meanwhile, Jolyne braed herself as the other half of the Toy Army rushed her. “Oraoraoraoraoraoral” It fired off a series of lightning fast punches at the toys, but only succeeded in hitting one, a green Phoenix Ranger Featherman that was sent flying back and smashed against the wall. The other toys, which included the rest of the PRF cast, another Risette doll, and what looked like a plush of a white, humanoid snowman with two fangs and a blue hat with bells on it. They all rushed her feet, and Jolyne grit her teeth in pain as she felt them dig nails and razor blades into her Stand’s legs, using them to create footholds as they climbed the pale blue humanoid.

“Come play with us! Come play with us!” They chanted out, and Jolyne began to bring Stone Free’s hand down to swat them off her legs. However, at the last moment, one of the Feathermen tore out its nail and held the sharp end towards the fist. While the toy was indeed smashed, the nail tore through the hand, causing the flesh in Jolyne’s right hand to rip apart as a nail sized hole appeared in the same spot.

“Dammit!” She grunted out, and the remaining toys reached Stone Free’s torso. A quick thought entered Jolyne’s head, and the toys lost their grips on the torso as Stone Free unraveled into strings from the chest up. They tried in vain to grab onto one of the whirling strings, but it would be in vain, and they began to fall. As they fell towards the ground, several of the strings began to reform into Stone Free’s fists.

“Oraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoraoral” The barrage of fists rained down on the possessed toys, smashing them into pieces as they impacted the ground. Jolyne panted as her Stand recomposed itself, groaning in pain as she felt the nails still imbedded in her legs. This was just as Josuke shook off the remainder of attackers, blood pouring down his left arm and darkening his white jacket.

“That…sucked…” Jolyne panted out, her knees beginning to wobble as she slumped against Josuke’s back.

“Don’t worry. It’s almost over.” Josuke said back to her, and he looked towards the dollhouse. With a sigh of relief, Josuke noted that it was within two meters of him, and prepared to smash the dollhouse with Crazy Diamond’s good right arm…

When they both felt their heels being slashed, causing Josuke to collapse onto his knees while Jolyne got on all fours, trying her best to balance herself with her wounded legs. The two looked to see the model formula car from before racing from between their legs, blood on the bladed back fins. The voice from before began to chuckle, while clapping began to sound from before.

“That was simply marvelous!” A man’s voice, high pitched and nasally, called out, the door swung aside to reveal a Japanese man in his early 40’s, with unkempt greasy black hair, buck teeth that had a devious grin circled around them, and hazel eyes that had a demented glint in them. “At first I had my doubts, but you’re every bit as incredible as the stories say, Josuke-san!” The man said, and Josuke glared at him.

“Who the hell are you?” He grunted out, trying to suppress the pain from his slashed heels.

“Well, considering how far into our playdate we are, I suppose introductions are in order. My name is Toshiro Matsumoto.” The man, now identified as Matsumoto, said as he gave a bow, the planes
from before circling around him. As soon as he was done with his bow, Matsumoto looked at Jolyne, who was glaring at him with anger in her eyes. “I have to say, I’m not familiar with your friend here. I didn’t think you liked your women this young, Josuke-san.”

“Eat shit, asshole.” Jolyne spat, and Matsumoto simply shook his head.

“Tsk tsk tsk. Such a mouth on you.” He admonished, and cupped her face in his hand, almost as if he was examining her. Jolyne responded by spitting directly into his face. “And an…unsavory disposition as well. Oh well, I’ll remedy that shortly.” Matsumoto said as he released Jolyne’s face. While he was distracted, Josuke saw his chance, and Crazy Diamond manifested behind him, launching it at the dollhouse on the counter. However, just before Crazy Diamond could reach it and smash it, Matsumoto got up and planted a kick directly in Josuke’s back, knocking him onto the ground and causing Crazy Diamond to miss, it’s hand sailing forward and stopping just under a shelf, before slowly travelling back to Josuke and vanishing. “A good attempt, but in your condition, simply not enough.” Matsumoto said, and picked up Jolyne by the collar of her blazer.

“Let go of me, you asshole!” Jolyne shouted, beginning to writhe against him. However, with all the blood she had lost from her leg wounds and her heels being slashed, she was in no condition to fight, let alone summon her stand. Matsumoto pinned her arms behind her back, and began dragging her towards the dollhouse.

“What are you doing to her, you bastard?!” Josuke yelled, but Matsumoto simply shot him a grin. “Giving you a demonstration of what awaits you.” He said, and arrived in front of the dollhouse. Jolyne attempted to struggle against him, but Matsumoto simply shook his head. “Don’t fight, sweetie. It’ll only make it harder.” The Stand User admonished, and the door of the mansion began to glow. “Toy Story!” The glow’s intensity increased, and Jolyne almost felt like it was sucking her forward.

“Stop, please! Leave her out of this!” Josuke pleaded, but it was all for naught. Jolyne’s body went limp, as a silhouette of her made out of green smoke was dragged out of her body and pulled towards the mansion door. For a second, Matsumoto noticed that the silhouette was bizarrely dressed, wearing some kind of weird outfit and a mask, but before he could examine it, he heard a low growl coming from his right. Glancing in the direction, the man saw a pair of angry blue eyes glaring at him…

“Mrow!” Morgana shouted, jumping off of the shelf where he had been waiting with claws extended. Morgana dug his claws into the right side of the enemy user’s face, and dragged them downwards, past the open right eye that had glanced at him. Matsumoto cried out in pain as his right eye was clawed out, causing the glow from the mansion to shut off. As soon as the light dissipated, Jolyne’s silhouette went back into her body, causing her to take a big gasp of air. Matsumoto’s grip had loosened enough that Jolyne could break her arms free, and she collapsed onto the ground.

Watching all of this, Josuke smirked. “Good kitty.” He said, and he opened his right hand, putting his plan into action. Inside was a screw, one that looked like it was part of a shelf. The pass Josuke had made at the Stand hadn’t been a failure, for her had never intended to hit the dollhouse. He knew he wouldn’t have the strength to destroy it in one hit, not with his body in the shape it was. Instead, he’d used that outburst to set up his trap. Josuke clasped both hands around the nail, and the outline of Crazy Diamond’s hands covered his. “Crazy Diamond!”

Meanwhile, Morgana was pulling the injured Jolyne towards Josuke, dragging her by the collar of her blazer with his mouth. Considering how he was just an average sized cat, and Jolyne was a full sized human, it wasn’t easy. “Was wondering where you went…” Jolyne weakly muttered out, the
blood loss finally starting to get to her.

“Hng nf thr, Jokr!” Morgana yelled out around the blazer, intending to say “Hang in there, Joker!” However, before the cat could reach Josuke, Matsumoto towered over them, his one good eye burning with fury.

“Screw this! No toy is worth this much trouble!” Matsumoto bellowed out, but before he could direct the planes to shred the cat, he heard what sounded like metal groaning behind him.

“Hey, nutcase!” Josuke yelled out, drawing his attention. “You’re next line is…argh!” With that, the metal shelf behind the counter tore itself from the wall, seeking to be reunited with the nail Josuke had lodged firmly in his Stand-clad hands. The shelf knocked Toy Story off the counter and struck Matsumoto square in the back, knocking him onto the ground.

“Argh!” Josuke grinned as he watched Matsumoto crumple to the ground, the shelf on top of him, while Toy Store clattered to the ground, yet strangely enough, it did not break. Josuke let out a sigh of relief. “What a pain…” He muttered out, and his grin faded as he turned towards Jolyne and Morgana. Morgana was still dragging Jolyne by the collar in his mouth, her wounds leaving a trail of blood as she was dragged. Jolyne had said he was declawed, but as evidenced by the state of the enemy Stand User’s face, that was clearly not the case. Josuke shook those thoughts aside for now. He had bigger things to worry about. “Thanks, Cat.” Josuke called out, causing the cat’s head to turn to him as it let go of Jolyne’s collar. Josuke saw something in it’s bright blue eyes: not just intelligence, but concern and anger. The same emotions Josuke was feeling as he looked at Jolyne’s injured form. Crazy Diamond’s arm manifested around Josuke’s arm, and the cat watched with concern as Josuke place its arm on Jolyne’s shoulder, and the healing aura of Crazy Diamond flowed into the downed niece. Instantly, her leg wounds began to close, her slashed heels knit themselves back together, and much of the blood she had lost began to flow back into her body. After a moment, Crazy Diamond had done it’s work, vanishing back into Josuke. “There we go. Good as new.” Josuke said, and after a minute or two, Jolyne’s eyes fluttered open.

“Owwwwww….!” She groaned out, slowly picking herself up off the ground. The transfer student looked around, taking into account the smashed toys and the unconscious attacker. “That…that was not fun.”

“Trust me, this was nothing. Remind me to tell you about my fight with Kira sometime.” Josuke said as she got up. “Still, for your first time? Not bad. You handled yourself well, Jojo.” He complimented, and Jolyne looked at him.

“This kind of stuff happen to you often?” She asked as she extended her hand towards him, and Josuke nodded as he took her hand.

“Not as often as it used to, but yeah. You get used to it.” He replied as she helped him up. Jolyne looked over at Matsumoto, still face down under the shelf.

“Why do you think this guy attacked us?” Josuke shrugged.

“Honestly, who knows with these people. For all I know he could’ve been doing it for shits and giggles.” He answered, and Jolyne’s brow furrowed.

“But he seemed to know who you were.”

“ Doesn’t exactly mean much. Considering how few Stand users there are in the world, word about
us travels fast. Especially about our family. He could’ve seen me walking around yesterday and decided to make a name for himself.” Josuke explained, and began to pull out his phone. “I’ll call the SPEEDwagon Foundation, and—“

“You…” Matsumoto’s voice growled, and his body began to stir, as did the pieces of smashed plastic and the downed toys that littered the shop. “Such ugly people…you’d make terrible toys…” he growled, and began to rise up. As he began to rise up, the broken pieces began moving towards him. The broken toys began piling up on one another. Soon, a figure began rising up behind Matsumoto, reaching all the way up to the ceiling. It was a towering behemoth, with the dollhouse that represented Toy Story making up the head. “I will destroy you! Make you wish you had never been born! Rip you limb from limb!” Matsumoto yelled, and he raised his hand into a fist, causing the figure to do the same. “And I’m going to start by ripping off that eyesores you both call hair!” He yelled, and both of the Joestars stopped. The room temperature almost seemed to drop, as an overwhelming feeling of dread began emanating from the two.

“Oy, asshole…” Josuke asked, a cocky, menacing grin appearing on his face as his hair seemed to spike up. “The hell did you just say about our hair?!” Matsumoto simply sneered, all logic leaving his mind.

“I said I will rip off those eyesores—”

“Dora!” Crazy Diamond’s fist smashed directly into Matsumoto’s face, causing him to falter. Stone Free manifested next to Crazy Diamond, cracking it’s knuckles.

It was at this moment, that Matsumoto knew…he fucked up.

“W-wait! I-I didn’t mean—”

“Dorarararararararara!”

“Oraoraoraoraoraoraoraora!”

One could almost mistake the sounds of the Stand cries as machine gun fire, and they wouldn’t be exactly wrong, given the speed and ferocity with which both Stands unleashed their punches on the man, his body almost ragdollying under the barrage. After a few more seconds that seemed like hours to Matsumoto, Stone Free and Crazy Diamond both delivered a final punch to his face, one that sent him flying through the toy amalgam, smashing it back into it’s individual pieces and sending green puffs of smoke flying out of the smashed plastic, and smashing through the counter to impact the wall.

Name: Toshiro Matsumoto. Stand: Toy Story. Status: Retired!

“Good grief, this guy was such a pain in the ass…” Jolyne muttered as Josuke retrieved his comb, fixing his hair back into his pompadour. Morgana stood behind them, staring at them with slackjawed terror/amazement.

S-so scary! He thought to himself, as Matsumoto slumped forward facefirst onto the ground.

Sometime Later

At the edge of the street, Jolyne and Josuke sat on the back of what looked like a black ambulance, while Morgana sat on the ground, with Josuke having his arm injuries being treated by a man in a white shirt with the symbol of a golden wheel on his sleeves. “These look like quite the nasty scratches, Josuke-san. You should really be more careful.” The man said as he bandaged the arm,
and Josuke rolled his eyes.

“Yeah yeah…” he muttered out, and Jolyne watched as another black van parked next to them. To her surprise, Jolyne saw the man with the strange teeth from Leblanc hop out of the van. As he walked towards them, he maintained an impartial face as he looked at Josuke.

“Rough day?” The man asked, his Japanese fluent but with an unmistakably thick Italian accent. Josuke shrugged.

“Eh, I’ve had worse. You should see the other guy.” Josuke said, and that’s when the blonde man noticed Jolyne, and she could see momentary recognition in his eyes. However, he didn’t say anything to her, instead turning back to Josuke.

“And where is this ‘other guy?’” The man asked, and Josuke pointed back towards the alleyway.

“Take a left at that gym, abandoned toy store.” Josuke instructed, pointing in the direction, and the man nodded.

“Grazie.” The man said, and walked off in the direction of the toy store.

“Who was that guy?” Jolyne asked as she watched him walk off.

“Hm? Oh, that was Gyro.” Josuke answered, and Jolyne rolled her eyes.

“And Gyro is…?” She asked, and Josuke looked back in his direction.

“Let’s just say our families are old friends.” He answered. “If you ever need help, go to him.”

“Alright.” Jolyne responded, and the man in white patted Josuke’s shoulder.

“There you go, Josuke-san. Just take it easy for a few days.” The man said, and Josuke got off the bumper, groaning as he put weight on his feet. Jolyne had stitched his heels up with Stone Free, which should hold him together until he could get to another doctor.

“Oh yeah, that’s not gonna be a problem.” Josuke groaned out, and soon Gyro emerged from around the corner, dragging Matsumoto by a set of handcuffs with one hand and Toy Story tucked under his arm. Josuke had healed Matsumoto’s wounds, but only to the point where he wouldn’t die of his injuries, leaving the right side of his face mauled by Morgana…and also healing his arm bones in a way that his bones didn’t fuse properly.

“What’ll happen to him?” Jolyne asked, watching as Gyro loaded the man into the back of his black van.

“That depends. If it turns out he used his Stand to hurt people, like I think he did, then we take special precautions to make sure he doesn’t hurt anyone again.” Josuke explained, watching as Gyro drove off. Jolyne didn’t like the implications of ‘special precautions’, but she didn’t press for more details.

“Want me to give you two a ride?” The Speedwagon nurse asked, and Josuke nodded.

“If you don’t mind.”

“Then hop in.” The man beckoned, and they obliged, all three of them getting in the back of the van. The man shut the door, revealing the words written on the backdoors in English: Speedwagon Foundation.
Jolyne and Josuke sat in the back of the van, sitting among a collection of medical equipment. “So… the cat. Morgana, right?” Josuke said, getting Jolyne’s attention.

“What about him?”

“He’s not a normal cat, is he?” Josuke asked, and Jolyne dryly swallowed. “The way he waited for his chance to strike, then the way he started to drag you…it’s pretty obvious that Morgana’s a special kind of cat.”

“…yeah, you’re right. He’s not a normal cat.” She answered, and Josuke folded his arms.

“The way you handled yourself out there…you did it a little too well. At first I brushed it off as just being natural, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed like you had done something like this before. Which shouldn’t be possible, seeing as your Stand only manifested the other day.” Josuke said, and sighed. “Jolyne…what’s going on with you?” Jolyne felt a lump forming in her throat, beginning to cross her hands in front of her in uncertainty. Josuke leaned forward and placed a hand on his niece’s shoulder. “You know you can tell me anything, right? You should know that by now. So please, just tell me what you’re mixed up in.” Josuke pleaded, and Jolyne sighed. She glanced at Morgana.

“Whatever you think is best.” He replied, and Jolyne sighed.

“Grunkle Josuke…do you know what a Persona is?” Josuke’s brow furrowed.

“Persona? No, I can’t say I do.” Josuke answered, and Jolyne leaned back.

“Then take a seat. I’ve got quite a story for you.”

Matsumoto sat in the back of the van, regretting his life decisions. He couldn’t see out of his right eye, his bones ached, his arms felt weird, and his collection…Josuke and Jolyne had ruined his collection, releasing all the souls he had accumulated since acquiring his Stand. How dare they? Didn’t they know how hard he worked? “Toshiro Matsumoto…” A voice said, almost from nowhere, and Matsumoto went pale as he recognized the voice. “You failed me. You were supposed to defeat Josuke Higashikata and remove him from the board.”

“W-wait! You don’t understand! That Higashikata…he’s a demon! And that girl, and her stupid cat…they’re just like him! It wasn’t my fault!” Matsumoto shouted out, and banging sounded from the wall that separated the driver’s cab.

“No more chances. I can’t risk you exposing me just yet.” The figure said, and began to raise it’s hand.

“AIEEEEEEEEEE!”

A few minutes later, Gyro pulled into a parking garage, got out, and headed towards the back of his van. He grabbed the handles. “Hey, quit your screaming. We’re here.” Gyro said as he opened the door, revealing Matsumoto sitting in the van. However, for some reason, the man was looking around, a blank expression on his face. “Hey, you hear me? Get out here.” Gyro barked, but Matsumoto simply looked at him, the same blank expression on his face.
“Who are you?” He asked, and Gyro rolled his eyes.

“I’m Peter Pan, here to whisk you away to Neverland.” Gyro answered, but to his surprise, Matsumoto seemed to smile.

“Oh, really? I can’t wait! What’s Neverland, Mister Pan?” The man asked, and Gyro’s brow furrowed. There wasn’t anything mocking about Matsumoto’s question, instead seeming…sincere. Almost childlike. But then, to further the Italian man’s confusion, the Stand User seemed… confused. “Um, Mister Pan? Can I ask you something?”

“…sure.”

“Who am I?”

Josuke and Jolyne sat in an extravagant, top floor office located in the Speedwagon Foundation building in Bunkyo. Josuke was silent, still mulling over everything Jolyne had told him. About her Persona, about the Meta Verse, about how she had come into conflict with Kamoshida and the actions they had taken. “So…” Josuke said, breaking the terse silence. “It sounds like you’ve had an…interesting…start here.” Josuke said, and Jolyne chortled.

“That’s putting it mildly.” She replied, and Josuke began to laugh.

“Just when you think you’ve seen it all…” Josuke said, and leaned back in the chair he was sitting in. “So, this Kamoshida guy. What happened to him?” Jolyne shrugged.

“He hasn’t been to school since the day of. Morgana says the change of heart may take a few days to take hold.”

“Sounds like the next few days are gonna be tense for you guys.” Josuke said, and the door opened. In walked a man in his 50’s in a three-piece suit with grey around the temples of his slicked back hair.

“Josuke-san, I’m sorry for the wait. Had to take care of some important business.” The man said, and Josuke got out of his seat.

“It’s no problem.” Josuke said, rising from his chair and shaking the man’s hand. “Jojo, this is Shuhei Ikari, head of the Speedwagon Foundation here in Japan.”

“A pleasure to finally meet you, Cujoh-san. Jotaro-san has told me a lot about you.” Ikari greeted, and Jolyne shook his hand.

“Nice to meet you too.” Jolyne responded.

“I hear you two have had quite the interesting day. Do not worry. This Stand User will not trouble you anymore.” Ikari said, and pulled a card out of his pocket and handed it to Jolyne. “In the event that another hostile Stand user comes after you, or you find yourself in need of anything, do not hesitate to call this number. This is a special phone line, set up specifically for you.”

“…thanks.” Jolyne said, taking the card and examining it. It was the same as the card Jotaro had sent her, but had a different number on it. “So uh, when you say ‘anything’…”

“He really does mean anything.” Josuke said, and Ikari took a small bow.

“’We shall provide Jonathon Joestar’s descendants with whatever they need, no matter what that may be.’” Ikari recited. “That is the decree of our founder, Robert EO Speedwagon, made shortly before
he passed away. No matter what you need, we shall do our best to provide it. I shall see to it personally.” Jolyne turned the card over, before tucking it into her blazer pocket.

“Neat.” She remarked, and let out a yawn. “So uh, I realize this may make me sound crazy but after today I’m looking forward to that paperwork.” She said, and Ikari let out a chuckle.

“Understandable. I have the papers on my desk.” Ikari said, and lead her to his desk.

Night Time

The bell above Leblanc chimed, and Jolyne trudged her way into the coffee shop. Sojiro was nowhere to be seen, having already gone home for the night. Locking the door behind her, she dropped the Morgana bag onto the floor, and collapsed into a booth. “Ugghhhhhhh…” She groaned out, as Morgana exited the bag.

“Today was certainly interesting.” He said, hopping onto the table.

“So…much…paperwork…” The Phantom Thief groaned out. She’d had to fill out form after form, filling out stuff that she had no idea what it meant. The hell did ‘Stand Potential’ mean? Why did she have to circle “I cannot stop time” a million times. Why would that even be a question?

“After all that, you must be tired. You should to go to bed.” Morgana advised.

“Can’t. Too exhausted. Carry me.” Jolyne ordered.

“Jolyne…”

“Fiireere…” Jolyne groaned out, and pried herself out of the booth, shambling up to the stairs. She didn’t even bother changing her clothes, instead collapsing face first onto her bed.

“Welcome back, Trickster.” A familiar voice called out, and Jolyne let out a groan.

“Of course…” She mumbled, and began pulling herself off of the harsh cot, seeing that she was now in the Velvet Room, the sound of Igor’s fingers tapping the desk thundering around the room.

“Welcome back, Inmate.” Justine greeted, while Caroline had her arms folded, her single yellow eye glaring at Jolyne.

“What is it now?” Jolyne asked, and Igor chuckled.

“I simply wished to bring you here to congratulate you on surviving the events of the past few days. Not only did you topple he who let his lust run rampant, but you also awakened to your birthright, and gained knowledge of your family history.” He said, and Jolyne scowled.

“And you couldn’t tell me any of that…why?”

“It was not my place.” He simply responded. “May we see it?”

“Yeah, I’ll show it to you alright…” Jolyne muttered. “Stone Free!” The Stand manifested in front of her, and grabbed the bars in front of her. However, as soon as Stone Free grabbed the bars, blue flames enveloped her hands, and Jolyne had to let go as her hands were burned.

“Ah, this Stand is indeed a powerful one. To be expected, I suppose.” Igor analyzed, and Caroline smacked the bars with her baton.
“Don’t do anything stupid, Inmate. Just because you’ve gained power doesn’t mean your standing here has changed!” She barked.

“Really? Why don’t you come in here and we’ll see who’s in charge.” Jolyne challenged, and Caroline growled.

“Sister, that’s enough.” Justine warned, and Caroline scowled.

“…fine.” With that, Igor cleared his throat.

“Be careful, Trickster. Just because you have overcome your first hurdles does not mean your rehabilitation will be a ‘piece of cake’, as you mortals say.” The Prison Master stated, his grin never faltering. “Many trials and tribulations still await you. I wonder, how exactly shall you prevail?” Before Jolyne could ask anything else, the bell chimed once more, and her vision tunneled as the Velvet Room vanished.

Chapter End Notes

Jolyne's first stand user has been defeated! Who is the mysterious figure, and what are their plans?

For anyone who might be unclear: Toy Story has the ability to extract someone's soul and force it onto a toy, allowing Matsumoto to control them. Think Telence D'Arby's Atem mixed with Keijo Niijimura's Bad Company.
Chapter 11: Man from Morioh Part 3

Chapter Summary

Josuke follows through on a promise he made, and Jolyne begins to realize that there may be more to a new friendship than she first thought.

Chapter Notes

Hoo boy, this took longer than expected. Life and writer's block tend to make a slow chapter, but hey, it's finally here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 11: Man from Morioh Part 3

Friday, 4/22/20XX, Shujin Academy, Lunchtime

“No effin’ way any of that happened.”

“Really? After everything you’ve seen and done the past week and a half, you have a hard time believing that?”

“Yeah, but that was in the Meta Verse. Nothin’ makes sense there. That kinda stuff ain’t supposed to happen out here.” It was lunchtime at Shujin Academy, and the Phantom Thieves were currently gathered on their rooftop hideout to eat lunch. Jolyne had just finished telling Ryuji and Ann a condensed version of her, Josuke, and Morgana’s fight with Matsumoto, and Ryuji was having a difficult time accepting the way events had transpired.

“Didn’t Josuke-san say that Stands could do anything?” Ann shot back, and Ryuji scratched the back of his head.

“Yeah, but I didn’t think that meant ‘turning people into killer toys.’” Ryuji responded.

“Well, it’s what happened. That sicko would’ve turned me into one of those things too if it hadn’t been for Morgana.” Jolyne stated, and Morgana looked rather proud of himself.

“It was nothing. Pitiful lowlifes like him are nothing to me, even in this form.” He boasted, and Ryuji rolled his eyes.

“So, you guys managed to beat him up. Then what happened?” Ann asked, and Jolyne swallowed nervously.

“Well, I…kinda told Josuke about the Meta Verse.” She stated, causing Ann and Ryuji’s eyes to widen.

“Wait, are you serious? What did he say?” The blonde model asked, and Jolyne just shrugged.
“He didn’t really react. We were both pretty exhausted after the fight, so he didn’t really push. He just had me sign the paperwork at the Speedwagon Foundation and sent me home.” She explained.

“He didn’t…react? Freak out, demand proof?” Ryuji asked, and the transfer student shook her head.

“I think he was just taking it all in. Regardless, I don’t think we have to worry about him ratting us out.” Jolyne responded, and Ann sighed.

“Honestly, after what he told us the other day, it’s not surprising he’d just…accept the Meta Verse.” She stated. “Oh! Has Josuke-san gotten back to you about Shiho yet?” The blonde asked, and Jolyne shook her head.

“He’ll definitely have something ready by the time we get out of school.”

“Well, if anyone can fix her, it’d be that guy. My leg feels better than new ever since he fixed me up.” Ryuji said, and that’s when the bell chimed, signaling the end of lunch.

“Oh wow, lunch is over already? It feels like we just got here…” Ann said, and Ryuji sighed.

“Aw man, I didn’t even get the yakisoba pan today…” The former track star groaned out, causing Jolyne to raise an eyebrow.

“Yakisoba pan?” She asked.

“That’s right, you wouldn’t have had the chance to try it yet. Basically, every Friday, the school store sells these yakisoba pans that are just DELICIOUS. Thing is, they sell out super fast, so you have to be pretty lucky to get one.” Ryuji explained, and Ann nodded in agreement.

“They’re the best! I’m normally not big on yakisoba, but the ones from the school store are amazing!” Ann said, and Jolyne pursed her lips.

“Noted. Well, looks like we should be getting back to class.” Jolyne said, ushering a reluctant Morgana back into her bag. They reentered the building, and began heading towards the second floor. However, as they passed through the third floor, they didn’t notice a certain student council president noticing them.

“What were those three doing up there…?” Makoto muttered to herself, before returning to her class as well.

Afternoon

Jolyne sat at her desk, trying to pay attention to Ushimaru’s social studies lecture, when her phone vibrated in her desk. Propping it against Morgana, Jolyne checked the new message from Josuke.

JH: Tlk'd 2 Speedwagon about ur friend.

JH: Get Takamaki and meet me @ hospital @ 4

Jolyne’s eyes widened as she deciphered Josuke’s message, and began typing out a message to Ann, only vaguely acknowledging what sounded like Ushimaru addressing her.

JC: Josuke just got back to me about Shiho. He wants us to meet him at Shiho’s hospital at 4

As soon as she hit ‘send’, Jolyne saw Ann take a sharp inhale, and was about to send a follow up…

“I said pay attention!” Ushimaru growled, and Jolyne felt a sharp *thwack* on her forehead as the
Social Studies teacher chucked his chalk at her, hitting her square in the forehead.

“Ow!” Jolyne groaned out, and the class began to react.

“Whoa, was Cujoh seriously spacing out while Ushimaru was talking?”

“Man, she’s gotta be dumber than I thought. Everyone knows that’s suicide!”

“You really surprised a delinquent like that doesn’t care?”

“Settle down!” Ushimaru bellowed out, and the class began to slowly quiet down. “Now, as I was saying…” From inside Jolyne’s desk, Morgana simply snickered as Jolyne rubbed the welt that was forming on her forehead.

“Damn, that hurt…” She muttered out.

“That’s what you get for slacking off during class. Though if your reflexes were better, than you might be able to dodge it…” The not-cat advised, but Jolyne just grumbled as she turned back to the lecture.

After School, Shibuya

Jolyne and Ann stepped out of the underground subway platform, Morgana having left to hitch the train back to Yongen as the hospital didn’t allow cats, and Jolyne had to almost run in order to keep up with Ann. The blonde model almost broke into a sprint, with Jolyne struggling to keep up as Ann pushed her way through the crowd of people. “Ann, slow down!” Jolyne called out, but Ann didn’t seem to hear her, instead continuing to push her way through the people going about their day.

“Dammit… Stone Free!” The Stand materialized and reached forward, grabbing Ann by the back of her hoodie.

“Oof!” Ann grunted out as she was stopped in her tracks, and turned back to Jolyne. “What are you doing?” She asked as Jolyne caught up to her.

“Slow down, will you? Josuke said he won’t be there until four, and Shiho isn’t going anywhere.” Jolyne said, and Ann sighed as she rubbed the back of her neck.

“Right, sorry. I just…got a little excited.” Ann apologized, and let out a sigh. “I just thought about undoing what that bastard Kamoshida did to Shiho, and my legs just started moving on their own.”

“Shiho really means alot to you, doesn’t she?” Jolyne asked, and Ann nodded.

“Yeah, she does.” Ann said, and Jolyne gestured forward.

“Why don’t you tell me about her on our way?” Jolyne asked, and Ann nodded, and the two began to walk. “So how long have you known Shiho?” Jolyne asked, and Ann pursed her lips as she thought.

“Let’s see, this year it’d be about…six years, I think.” Ann answered, causing Jolyne to whistle slightly.

“Damn, that’s quite a while.” She commented, and Ann nodded.

“Growing up, I was pretty lonely. My parents were always gone on work, and the other kids tended to keep their distance. Like I was…exotic, or something. The closest thing I had to friends were the people my parents hired to take care of me while they were gone.” Jolyne knew that feeling all too well, minus the part about the caretakers, but she didn’t speak up. Instead, she let Ann continue to
speak as they continued to walk towards the hospital. “But one day, back in grade school, I’m in art class. The teacher wanted us to paint something, I can’t remember what. So I’m just sitting there, trying to paint...” Ann began to smile. “…and then this girl, her brown hair just a mess and paint all over her face, comes up to me and says, straight to my face ‘Takamaki-san, your painting sucks.’” Ann recalled, and Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“Wow. If that was me back then, she probably would’ve been swallowing her teeth.” Jolyne commented, and Ann chuckled.

“At first, I thought that she was just trying to make fun of me like everyone else. But she told me that they were so terrible, that she just had to tell me. It was harsh, but...that was the first time someone had ever spoken to me without mentioning my looks.” Ann explained, and her smile widened. “After that, we started talking and growing closer, and we’ve been best friends ever since. Well, she’s a bit more than a friend-” She didn’t know why, but Jolyne could swear she felt a small pang in her heart. “-she’s more like a sister.” And just like that, the feeling was gone, but Jolyne didn’t really think on it, as Ann’s smile began to falter. “Shiho…isn’t good at a lot of things. So when she made it onto the volleyball team, she was happier than I’d ever seen her before. I started to worry that she wasn’t good enough to keep her position, so I started flirting with Kamoshida. And because of that, he…” Tears began to well up in the blonde Phantom Thief’s bright blue eyes, and Jolyne put her hand on her shoulder.

“Hey, stop blaming yourself. What happened isn’t your fault.”

“But it is!” Ann exclaimed, stopping and turning to face Jolyne, tears streaking down her face. “The only reason that Kamoshida even looked at her is because I pointed her out to him! I didn’t...I didn’t even notice what he was doing to her! She was suffering, and I just ignored her!” Ann shouted, and slumped backwards against a building, sinking to the ground. “I’ve been such a terrible friend…I might as well have pushed her off that roof myself. I’m...I’m so weak. I’m garbage, that doesn’t even-“

“…shut up.” Jolyne said in a low grumble, and Ann looked up at her.

“What...?”

“I said shut the hell up!” Jolyne shouted, and Ann noticed that she was almost shaking. “You saw his Palace. Kamoshida was a sick bastard, and Shiho was far from his first victim. For all you know, he would’ve hurt her regardless of whether or not he met you. All you wanted to do was help Shiho. So stop blaming yourself for shit you can’t control!” She shouted, and Ann was caught off guard. The transfer student was normally so calm and collected, but now she seemed...enraged was the wrong word. The leader was definitely livid, but it was more like she was upset. Jolyne took a deep breath, and her body seemed to steady. “…sorry. Some of the stuff you said…it brought back some bad memories.”

“…no. You’re right.” Ann muttered out, catching Jolyne’s attention. “Kamoshida...Kamoshida is a monster. Blaming myself was just a way to rationalize how he could do something so horrible.” Ann began to wipe her tears away with her sleeve. “The whole reason I went into the Palace with you guys is because I hated myself for not believing that Shiho could keep her starting position using her own talents, and I wanted to try and make up for that somehow.”

“Well, I’d say you more than made up for that, and then some. And for what it’s worth? I don’t think you’re weak.” Jolyne stated, and Ann raised an eyebrow. “I think that most people, if they were in that position, would’ve just given up and wallowed in despair. But you pushed through, and you made sure to pay that sick fuck back for what he did. And the way you spared him like that?” Jolyne chuckled. “If it was me in your situation, I don’t know if I could’ve done the same.” Jolyne said, and
Ann smiled up at her.

“Are you kidding me? I don’t think I could’ve done any of that if you weren’t there.” Ann said, and Jolyne chuckled and rolled her eyes.

“Well, I dunno about all that…” she muttered, and her phone chimed with a message.

**JH: where r u guys?**

“Looks like Josuke just got to the hospital. We should probably hurry up.” Jolyne said, and extended her hand towards Ann. The model took her hand, and Jolyne pulled her up. However, when Ann got up on her feet, Jolyne accidentally pulled her a little close. Their faces were awfully close to another, close enough to feel each other’s breath. The thing was, Ann didn’t pull away immediately. They stood there for a moment, hand in hand and closer than they should be. Jolyne’s heart hammered in her chest, staring into Ann’s eyes, as a tint of red appearing on both their faces…

“*You’ll never see it coming~*” The sudden noise startled the two of them, and they remembered where they were. Jolyne slipped her hand out of Ann’s, allowing her heart rate to calm down, dug out her phone, and saw “JOSUKE HIGASHIKATA” on the caller ID. Hitting ‘answer’, she put the phone to her ear.

“*Hey, where are you guys?*” Josuke’s voice asked through the speakers.

“The trains were running slow.” Jolyne answered.

“*Just making sure.*”

“We’ll be there in a minute.” Jolyne said, and hung up. “Looks like we should get going.” Ann nodded in agreement, and they resumed walking.

**Tokyo Metropolitan Hiroo Hospital**

Jolyne and Ann stepped out of the elevator into the Intensive Care ward of the hospital, seeing Josuke sitting in a chair outside of a hallway. “There you two are. I was beginning to worry you two got attacked by another Stand User.” Josuke greeted, and Jolyne rolled her eyes.

“Good grief, you’re so dramatic. Is that the excuse you use every time you’re running late?”

“Just making sure.

“‘I’m sorry I’m late for your appointment, ma’am. I was attacked by a guy who controls killer grass or something.’”

“Laugh it up. That may actually be a thing.” Josuke retorted, and turned to a giggling Ann. “Are you ready?” Ann’s face turned serious, and she nodded.

“Yeah, I am.”

“Then lead the way.” Josuke beckoned, and they entered the hallway. Walking through the sterile white hallways, they eventually spotted a door with “Shiho Suzui” emboldened on it in kanji. Ann took the doorknob in her hand, twisted it, and they entered the room. Inside the hospital room, a woman in her early 40’s with messy dark hair was sitting in a chair at the foot of the bed. Her brown eyes were bloodshot and looked exhausted, like she hadn’t gotten any sleep in a few days. However, when she turned towards the sound of the door opening and saw Ann, she attempted a weak smile.
“Ann-chan!” The woman greeted, getting up and walking over to give Ann a hug.


“The same as yesterday, unfortunately. Shiho…still hasn’t woken up. I haven’t seen any of her doctors all day, and the nurses won’t tell me anything, and I’m afraid that…that there’s something they don’t want to tell me.” Tears began to well up in Miko’s eyes, and Ann squeezed her shoulder. The older woman composed herself, and noticed Jolyne and Josuke behind Ann. “Ann-chan, who are these people?” The woman asked as she composed herself, and Ann moved to the side and gestured to them.

“This is my friend Jolyne, and her uncle Josuke.”

“Pleasure to meet you, ma’am.” Jolyne said, the two bowing to her. Miko’s brow furrowed, and she turned to Ann.

“Ann-chan, you know Shiho’s not ready for visitors yet. Why did you bring these two here?” The woman asked, and Ann scratched the back of her head, and Josuke spoke up.

“Well, to put it simply, I’m going to fix your daughter.” Josuke said, and the woman looked confused.

“Wait, what? But the doctors said—”

“Let’s just say you don’t have to worry about what the doctors said anymore.” Fear spread across Miko’s face, and she opened her mouth to ask more questions, but Josuke held up his hand. “Relax, not like that. Just…watch, ok?” An expression of confusion dominated Miko’s face, and she looked at Ann, who simply smiled and nodded. She still looked unsure, but the older woman stepped to the side, allowing Josuke and Jolyne to approach Shiho’s bed.

Looking at Shiho’s face, sleeping in the bed with her brown hair in a halo on the pillow, one could think she looked almost peaceful. That is, until one saw the bruises on her face, the brace around her neck, the casts around her raised, broken legs…if it wasn’t for the steady beep of the machines around her, Jolyne would’ve assumed she was dead. Josuke sighed, pushed up his sleeves, and cracked his knuckles. “Well, time to get to work…” Josuke muttered, and walked up to right beside her head. “Crazy Diamond.” The pink stand materialized behind him, and Ann seemed to tense up as it raised its hand. However, instead of punching like she expected, Crazy Diamond placed its hand on her forehead, and Josuke closed his eyes, and activated his ability.

As the healing energy of Crazy Diamond flowed into the comatose volleyball player, Josuke could feel the true extent of her injuries. Her legs had been badly broken, twisted to the point where the bones almost shattered. Josuke healed those first, the bones resetting to their natural position and mending together until they were as good as new. As he healed her lower half, Josuke noticed another piece of damage in that area, and he had to force back his disgust as he healed the damage to the best of his ability. Then, Josuke moved onto the rest of her body. In addition to several cracked ribs, Shiho’s lower vertebrae had been badly damaged. Even with years of intensive therapy, the chances of her walking again were slim to none. Well, that would normally be the case, if Josuke wasn’t currently using Crazy Diamond to heal her ribs and vertebrae. He then fixed some minor nerve damage on her hands, and then healed her broken neck. That part was tricky, as he had to make sure everything went back exactly where it was supposed to be. Fortunately, this wasn’t his first time doing this, and everything went back perfectly. All that was left was some minor brain damage, and Josuke wiped that away like it was nothing.

If Miko was confused before, it didn’t compare to what she was feeling now. The man with the
strange hair had just placed his hand on Shiho’s head, and the next thing Miko knew, Shiho’s casted legs began to shuffle, and if one listened close enough over the *beep* of the EKG, they could hear the bones in Shiho’s leg shifting and fusing back into their proper place. Then, the bruises and scrapes that decorated Shiho’s body even before her suicide attempt began to vanish, and soon it was as if she had never been injured at all, save for the casts and neck brace.

“There. Good as new.” Josuke said as his eyes snapped open, and he removed his hand from his forehead. The confused Miko’s head darted from left to right, looking between Josuke and Ann.

“How…what…?”

“Let’s just say Josuke-san has…special talents.” Ann replied, and squeezed Miko’s shoulder. “I promise I’ll explain everything later.” Miko still looked unsure, but she slowly nodded as Josuke began to walk away from Shiho. Miko was about to open her mouth to ask more questions…when Shiho began to stir. Everyone turned to her and watched closely as her face began to contort, softly grunting…before her brown eyes fluttered open.

“Hmmm…wha…?” She softly groaned out as her eyes open, her eyes scanning the room. “Ann…? Mom…?”

“Shiho!” Ann cried out, her and Miko rushing to her side almost immediately. “Shiho, how are you feeling? Are you ok?” Ann asked, tears welling in both Miko and Ann’s eyes. Shiho looked confused for a moment.

“Everything…doesn’t hurt? But that’s not right…because I…I…” Shiho began to say, before tears began to well up in her eyes as well. “Because I can’t do anything right…”

“Shiho, don’t talk like that. You’re extremely fortunate, and-“ A teary eyed Miko tried to say, but Shiho ignored her, instead turning her head to look at Ann.

“Ann, I’m…I’m so sorry…” The volleyball player squeaked out, but Ann grabbed the wrist closest to her.

“Shiho, you don’t have to apologize for anything. It was all Kamoshida’s fault, and he can’t hurt anyone anymore. I’m just glad you’re ok!” Ann replied to her, squeezing Shiho’s wrist, and Shiho grasped back as she began to cry.

Josuke and Jolyne stood around the corner, both of them smiling as they watched Shiho’s awakening and reunion. “We should get out of here.” Josuke suggested, and Jolyne nodded, the two of them heading into the hallway. “That’s why I do it, you know.” Josuke said as Jolyne silently closed the door, catching his niece’s attention.

“Hm?”

“Did you see their faces when Shiho woke up? When they realized that she really was going to be ok? That’s why I became a doctor.” Josuke replied. “Ever since I got my Stand and discovered what it could do, I used it to help anyone I could. A friend’s broken arm, my grandpa cutting himself shaving…just anyway that I could. At the beginning, I just did it because I thought helping others was just the right thing to do, but as I got older, I realized something: I didn’t do it because I was supposed to. I did it because I loved to do it. The feeling I got when I helped someone who should’ve died, and seeing them living their lives with the people they loved…I never wanted it to end.” He explained. “Eventually, I realized that I couldn’t fix everything with Crazy Diamond, so I went to medical school to try and bridge the gap of what Crazy Diamond could fix and what I had to do on my own.”
“I see.” Jolyne said, listening intently.

“And you wanna know something? I think you’re exactly like me, Jojo.” At this, Jolyne raised an eyebrow.

“What are you talking about?”

“You like to help people, just like me. It’s why you helped that woman in Nagasaki, and why you helped take down Kamoshida instead of just walking away.” Josuke stated, and Jolyne looked away from him.

“…it’s not like that. I just did it because it was the right thing to do.” She stated, and Josuke sighed.

“Whatever you say, Jojo.” He replied, and they stood in silence for a moment, before the door to Shiho’s room clicked open, the door opening to reveal Ann standing there, tears still visible on her face.

“Oh, you two are still here. I thought you would’ve left by now.” Ann stated, and the two Joestars turned to face her.

“Something wrong?” Josuke asked, and Ann shook her head.

“No, I just thought I’d give Shiho and her mom some time alone. Her dad’s already on the way.” Ann replied, wiping the tears away from her face. “Shiho…she still blames herself for doing what she did.”

“I’m sorry. There are some things even Crazy Diamond can’t fix. It’ll be up to you and her family to help Shiho heal her mental scars.” Josuke replied, and Ann nodded.

“Yeah, I figured it’d be something like that. I’ll make sure to be there for her every step of the way this time.” Ann said, and to Jolyne’s surprise, she actually bowed. “Thank you very much for this, Josuke-san!” She exclaimed, her voice about to crack. Josuke just nervously scratched the back of his head.

“Uh, you’re welcome. It was no trouble at all, really.” He replied, and Ann righted herself, and turned to Jolyne.

“Hey, uh…do you mind if I talk to you in private for a moment?” Ann asked, and Jolyne raised an eyebrow.

“Uh, sure.” She responded, and glanced back to Josuke, who just nodded.

“Go on ahead. I’ll be waiting downstairs.” He said, and walked off towards the elevator. Unbeknownst to either of them, as he walked away, Josuke had a mischievous grin on his face. Knock her dead, Jojo!

As Josuke walked off, Ann and Jolyne were left alone. They stood in silence for a moment, with Jolyne scratching the back of her head and Ann nervously rubbing her right arm. “So, uh, I just wanted to say thank you. For everything.” Ann said after a moment.

“Hey, you don’t need to thank me. Josuke’s the one who did all the work.” Jolyne responded, and the blonde phantom thief shook her head.

“You did more than you think. Last week, when Kamoshida called me, I felt like I was trapped. I was running out of options, and I could feel the walls closing in…but then you showed up. I’d
treated you coldly, brushed you off…but you still stopped to help. To just…listen. Aside from Shiho, no one’s really done that before.” Ann said with a small smile. “And then when we were in the Palace, and Kamoshida’s shadow was about to kill me…I was ready to give in. I was ready to just…accept it as my punishment for not helping Shiho. But when you called out to me, I realized what an idiot I had been, letting that asshole play with me like that.” Jolyne just swallowed dryly, rubbing the back of her neck.

“Ryuji and Morgana probably would’ve said the same thing. I just happened to be the first to say it.” Jolyne said, but Ann simply shook her head.

“No, they wouldn’t have. Earlier today, when I told you I still blamed myself for what happened to Shiho…they would’ve just listened and nodded along. But you made me realize just how stupid I was being. You made me realize that I WANT to be stronger, so I can be there for Shiho this time. After all that, I just wanted to say…” before Ann said her next word, Ann reavhed out and pulled Jolyne close into a hug. “…thank you.” Jolyne was stunned, her heart racing a mile a minute, before she slowly returned the hug. When Josuke had told her that she was just like him, that she liked to help people, she had just brushed him off. After all, how could he possibly base that off of just a handful of incidents. But now, with Ann thanking her and telling her that Jolyne had made her want to be stronger…it felt good. That was the only way she could think to describe it.

“You’re welcome.” Jolyne responded, smiling softly. They held the hug for another moment (were platonic hugs supposed to last this long?), they began to pull apart. However, as they pulled apart from another and they made contact, they both felt…something. The same something they had felt when Jolyne had helped Ann up earlier, and when Josuke had asked Jolyne about whether Ann was just a friend or not. As they gazed into each other’s eyes, the world seemed to slow around them…

“You’ll never see it coming~” The ringtone punched through the silence, bringing both of them back down to Earth.

“S-sorry, that’s mine.” Ann said, her hands darting into her jacket and pulling out her phone. “Looks like it’s just one of those telemarketers. Crazy how they never stop.” Ann said, and Jolyne chuckled.

“Yeah, they can be pretty persistent.” The transfer student responded, and they were silent for a moment that felt like an eternity. “So…see you tomorrow?” Jolyne asked, and Ann smiled and nodded.

“Yeah. Tell your uncle I said thank you.” Ann said, and Jolyne smiled, before walking off towards the elevator. Sending one more wave back towards Ann, Jolyne entered the elevator. As soon as the door closed, Jolyne collapsed back against the wall, clutching her chest.

“Holy shit…” She panted out, and began to recompose herself as the doors opened on the first floor, revealing Josuke waiting on her.

“You guys have a good talk?” Josuke asked, and Jolyne nodded as she got out of the elevator.

“Uh, yeah. She just wanted to say thanks for everything.” Jolyne responded, and Josuke simply grinned mischievously as she walked up to him.

“So when’s the second date?”

“Ora!” The breath left Josuke’s lungs as Jolyne elbowed him rather roughly. Josuke’s grin was unflinching, even as he tried to regain his breath. After a moment, Josuke righted himself, his grin dying down into just a smirk. Jolyne just scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Didn’t you say you were only here for three days?”
“That’s right. My train leaves in an hour, and some Speedwagon guys are taking my bags down to the station.” Jolyne raised an eyebrow. “Hey, old man Speedwagon said they were to provide us with ‘anything.’” Josuke defended as they left the hospital. “I figured we could use the time to just… chat. It’s been a while since it was just you and me.” He suggested, and Jolyne shrugged.

“Alright, sure. What do you wanna talk about?” She asked, as they began to walk through the city.

“Well, you’ve just gotten a lot of info, and had a hell of a day yesterday. How are you holding up?” He asked, referring to the history lesson and their encounter with Matsumoto yesterday.

“I dunno. Everything you told me about Dio and Stands just…makes a certain amount of sense. I always knew we were different from most people, I just didn’t know how. Explains why entering the Meta Verse and getting my Persona felt so…natural.” The transfer student responded. “By the way, do you know anything about those?” Josuke shook his head.

“I’ve never heard of anything like that before. Though the way you and Ryuji first entered the Meta Verse reminds me of how Koichi and Rohan found Reimi’s alleyway…” Josuke said, and Jolyne’s brow furrowed.

“Reimi? Who’s that?” She asked, and he just shook his head.

“Something that happened a long time ago. Don’t worry about it.”

“Ok…wait, you just said Koichi-san. Does he have a stand too?” Jolyne asked, and Josuke nodded.

“Yeah, so does Yukakko. And Okuyasu, and Rohan, and Tonio…just about every person you met with me whenever you came to Morioh. And that arrow shard Jotaro sent you was once part of the Arrow that gave them their stands.” Josuke said, and Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“Wait, seriously?”

“Yep. Matter of fact, that Arrow’s the whole reason I even met your dad.”

“NO way.” Jolyne said, with an incredulous expression on her face.

“Way. It’s a pretty long story, so I’ll have to tell you about it some other time.” Josuke said, and his expression turned serious. “Jojo, I want you to promise me something. No matter what, you cannot lose what’s in that necklace. If something like that got into the wild, there’s no telling what could happen.” Jolyne nodded solemnly.

“I promise. I’ve got it locked up in the drawer in the attic, so it shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Good. Just make absolutely sure. Enough people have gotten hurt by that thing.” The pompadoured doctor replied. “So, what’s next for you guys?”

“What do you mean?”

“After Kamoshida confesses. Are you gonna keep doing all that Phantom Thieves stuff?” Josuke asked, and Jolyne’s brow furrowed.

“I…I don’t know. We just focused on getting through the Palace, and then you showed up right after. I haven’t really thought about what comes next.” Jolyne stated. “I don’t even know if we can, since the Palace collapsed.”

“I see.” Josuke tapped his chin.
“Honestly, right now, I think I just want to keep my head down. I’ve had more excitement in the past 2 weeks than I have in my entire life.” Jolyne said.

“I think that’d probably be for the best. Take a few days to recharge your batteries. Explore the city and just relax” Josuke suggested, and they began to approach the station. “So, when’s the last time you spoke to your dad?” And there it was. Jolyne had been hoping that they would be able to get to the station and send Josuke on his way, but she supposed that had been too much to ask for.

“In case you didn’t notice, that asshole was ‘out of the country on work’ during the trial, so I don’t exactly feel a great need to talk to him now.” Jolyne stated with a scowl on her face, causing Josuke to sigh. He was afraid that it was like that, and seeing his great-niece talk about her father, his nephew that was more like a brother, like that…it pained him. For a moment, Josuke considered just changing the subject, but he quickly banished that thought out of his mind.

“Look, Jojo, I get it. My dad wasn’t there for most of my life, and when he finally wanted to be a part of my life, I treated him coldly. After all, he didn’t care for 16 years, so why should I believe him now? But the more time I spent with him, the more I realized he genuinely cared for me.”

“There a point to this?” Jolyne asked, cutting Josuke off, and he sighed.

“Well, if you wanna get right to the point…what I’m trying to say is don’t be so hard on Jotaro. I know he wasn’t around a whole lot when you needed him, but that isn’t because he doesn’t care. Jotaro loves you more than anything.”

“He’s got a funny way of showing it. If Jotaro cares about me so much, then where was he? Why did he leave mom to raise me all her own? Why did he pawn me off on Grandma Holly after my mom died?” Jolyne spat.

“Look, he has his reasons-”

“And just what is that?”

“I…it’s not my place to say.” Josuke said, and Jolyne scowled. Josuke stopped walking, faed Jolyne, and grabbed her shoulders. “Look, I’m not asking you to just forgive him on the spot. I’m not asking you to even give him another chance. Just…call him, ok? Talk to him.” Jolyne met his gaze for a minute, her scowl unmoving…before she sighed.

“If it’ll make you happy…then I guess I’ll give him a call tonight.” As soon as she said that, a grin spread across his face.

“That’s great! Here, let me send you his stuff and-“

“Don’t worry about it. Sojiro gave me the number a few days ago.”

“Oh. Alright then.” The great uncle replied, and they stood there in front of the station for a moment in silence.

“So…thanks for everything. For telling me the truth, for helping with Shiho…I don’t know what I’d have done if you hadn’t shown up when you did.” Jolyne spoke after a moment, and they began to enter the station.

“It was nothing. You know that if you ever need anything, give me a call. I’ll be here faster than you can say ‘Ora.’” Josuke responded, and Jolyne chuckled, before a light turned on in her head.

“Oh hey, I almost forgot, I met someone who said they knew you.”
“Really? Who?”

“The doctor around the corner from Leblanc. Her name is Dr. Takemi.” As soon as Jolyne said that, Josuke’s eyes widened.

“Wait, Takemi? As in Tae Takemi?” Jolyne nodded.

“Yeah, I think that’s her first name. Mean anything to you?” Jolyne asked, and Josuke’s brow furrowed.

“Not beyond saying hello at a conference or two. All I know about her personally is her nickname: ‘The Plague.’” Jolyne’s brows shot up at this.

“Wait that’s, uh…certainly a nickname for a doctor.”

“I don’t know the story behind, not beyond rumors anyways.” Josuke stated, and sighed. “To think a person like that would end up right around the corner from you...” With that, the last vestiges of a smile vanished from Josuke’s face, and he turned grimly serious. “Jojo, before I go, there’s one more thing I want to tell you.”

“I’m listening.”

“A long time ago, someone told me that Stand Users are attracted to other Stand Users. And something about this— Josuke pointed to the spot on his neck where his birthmark was. “—just naturally draws trouble to us. With those things together...just promise me you’ll be absolutely careful.”

“Hey, don’t worry about me. I’ve spent the last week fighting scary monsters from Hell, and you saw Matsumoto. I can handle some assholes with powers.” Jolyne said, but Josuke’s face remained serious, and he placed his hands on her shoulders.

“Matsumoto was nothing compared to some of the genuine monsters out there. Just...promise me you’ll use your head, ok? If you come against a strong Stand, find it’s weakness. If you can’t find the weakness, swallow your pride and run away. Live to fight another day.” Jolyne dryly swallowed, before she nodded. She had never seen Josuke like this before...

“I promise I’ll be careful.” As soon as those words left her mouth, relief seemed to spread through Josuke’s body, and he let out a sigh of relief.

“Thank you. You have no idea how much better that makes me feel.” Josuke said, and the two stood in silence for a moment.

“So...guess you better get going.” Jolyne spoke up after a minute, and Josuke nodded.

“Yeah, guess I should.” Josuke said, and the two hugged.

“Love you, Grunkle J.”

“Love you too, Jojo. Don’t hesitate to call me if you ever need anything.”

“Got it. Who knows, I may even visit you next time.” Josuke chuckled at that.

“That’d be great.” With that, the two separated, and Jolyne went over to the Yongen line. As she stepped through the ticket line and into the train for Yongen Jaya, she cast one last look back at Josuke. Josuke flashed a smile and a nod, and the doors in front of Jolyne shut.
Evening, Yongen Jaya

Sojiro looked up from the coffee mug he was polishing as the door above the bell chimed, looking to see Jolyne entering the establishment. “Welcome home. Your uncle still in town?”

“No, he just left.”

“Ah, I see. Seems like a nice enough guy. Almost can’t believe he’s related to punk like you.” Sojiro jabbed, and Jolyne just rolled her eyes. “So, how’s school been going? You’ve been keeping your head down?” Jolyne nodded.

“Yeah, so far. Pretty easy, since just about everyone avoids me like the plague.” Jolyne answered, omitting her struggles against Kamoshida. Sojiro sighed, placing the mug on the bar.

“I guess staying under the radar would be difficult with a rep like yours. Still, if they keep their distance, then that means you can’t get into any trouble. At least you were able to make some friends. Just keep doing what you’re doing, keep your grades up, and this year will pass by.”

“Whatever you say, Boss.” Jolyne replied, and began to climb up the stairs. Entering the attic, she looked over at her bed…and saw Morgana licking himself. “Aw, Morgana! That’s where I sleep!” She complained, averting her eyes as the cat almost jumped.

“Hey, this is how I have to bathe myself! I didn’t choose this body!” Morgana retorted, sitting up on his paws.

“At least don’t do it where I sleep!”

“If it’ll stop you’re hollering, then fine!” He conceded, and Jolyne set her bag on her desk. “So, how did it go?”

“It went great. Josuke got Shiho all patched up.” Jolyne replied, and Morgana seemed to smile.

“Great! I’m sure Lady Ann was thrilled by that.” As soon as Morgana said Ann’s name, Jolyne recalled the moments they had shared that day. The closeness on the sidewalk, that oddly intimate hug they had shared in the hallway…Jolyne had known she was attracted to women for a few years now, but she had never met anyone that had made her feel the way Ann did. What exactly did that mean? She definitely had some soul searching to do…

“Uh, yeah. She was.” Jolyne replied, and then her brows knitted together in thought. “Wait, how come she’s ‘Lady Ann’ and I’m just Jolyne?” She asked, and Morgana’s dryly swallowed. He had to choose his words very carefully.

“Well, uh…that’s because I owe you a debt! Yeah, that’s it!” Morgana said, and Jolyne crossed her arms as she raised an eyebrow.

“Really?”

“That’s right! If it wasn’t for you, then I would still be in Kamoshida’s dungeons. I could never think of someone I owe such a debt to in the same fashion that I think of Lady Ann.” Morgana hastily explained, and Jolyne dryly chuckled.

“Sure, Morgana, sure.” Jolyne replied, and spotted the trashcan by her bed. Feeling a lump in her throat, Jolyne began walking to the trashcan, beginning to rifle through it. “It should still be here…” Morgana looked confused, hopping over to the desk as he watched his companion.
“…what are you doing?”

“Looking for something. I haven’t taken the trash out since then, so it should still be…there!” Jolyne declared, and pulled out a crumpled up sheet of paper, uncrumpling it to reveal the number Sojiro had given her last week.

“A phone number? Why’d you throw that away?” Morgana asked, Jolyne sitting on the bed as she pulled out her phone.

“Don’t worry about it. Just…stay quiet for a while, ok?” She asked. Morgana looked concerned, but he nodded anyway. Jolyne dialed the number, took a deep breath, and hit ‘call.’ The phone rang once…twice…a third time…

“Hello?” A gruff, older voice said on the other end, and Jolyne swallowed the lump in her throat as she found her words.

“Hey there…dad.” Morgana’s eyes widened, and Jolyne heard what sounded like a gasp on the other end.

“Jolyne? Is that you?” Jotaro Kujo asked from his office at Hokkaido University in Sapporo, his voice containing what could almost be described as a mixture of relief and disbelief.

“Yeah, it’s me. Haven’t had a chance since you called last week, and so I thought…why not?” Jolyne said, nervously rubbing her arm with her free hand. She had to keep her emotions under control. Keep down the anger, the feelings of abandonment, and just talk to him. She had promised Josuke she would at least do that much.

“That’s good. Good that you had some time, I mean.” Jotaro said. “How have you been settling in?”

“So far, so good. Haven’t gotten arrested yet.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” Jolyne couldn’t tell if he was trying to be joking or sincere. “So…I talked to Josuke yesterday. He mentioned that you had awoken your stand.” Jolyne had to bit back a curse. She shouldn’t be surprised that Josuke had told Jotaro she had acquired her Stand. Had he also told Jotaro about the Meta Verse? No, Josuke wouldn’t disclose anything she had told him without her express permission first.

“Uh, yeah. I did. Did he also tell you that we got attacked?” Jolyne asked, and she heard a sharp inhale.

“Wait, what?! By who?!” The concern was evident in his voice, to the point where Jolyne had to keep from rolling her eyes.

“It’s not too bad. He can be a little prickly at times, but as long as I stay out of trouble, we won’t have a problem.”

“That’s good to hear. Sojiro’s been a good friend to me over the years. Don’t hesitate to trust him.” Jotaro instructed, and they were silent for a moment. “Jolyne, let me just say…I’m sorry. I’m sorry
that I couldn’t be there for you.” And there it was. As soon as Jotaro said those words, Jolyne couldn’t stop the emotions that rose up. “I had to leave the country to investigate a matter for the Speedwagon Foundation, and it took longer than I thought it would. I didn’t find out what happened until it was already too late.”

“Yeah, well, don’t worry about it. I’m used to you not being there by now.” Jolyne almost spat that out, sounding crueler than she had intended. But she didn’t care. As soon as her father had brought up not being there, those same feelings of abandonment that she thought she had left behind bubbled up to the surface.

“...right.” A pregnant pause filled the room, none of them uttering a word. For a minute, there was no sound save for the noise of the static from the phone speaker. “Well, it’s...it’s getting late. I’m sure you’ve got homework to do.” Jotaro said after a moment, and Jolyne gripped her arm.

“Yeah, homework. I think there are exams coming up soon or something.” She replied, the venom from before having vanished from her voice. “So, I’ll...talk to you later, I guess. Good luck with your fish or whatever.”

“And good luck on your exams. And Jolyne? Thank you for calling. I lo-” Before Jotaro could finish his sentence, Jolyne hit ‘end call’, and let out a sigh, dropping her phone onto the bed and collapsing backwards.

“Good grief…” She groaned out, Morgana hopping up next to her.

“So, that was your father?” He asked, and she nodded. “Whenever Josuke mentioned him, you seemed to get angry. So, uh...if you don’t mind me asking, what exactly happened between you two?” Jolyne looked over at the cat, and sighed.

“I...don’t really wanna talk about it right now. Maybe some other time.” She responded, but Morgana still looked concerned. Still, he knew that he couldn’t force it out of her, so for now, the not-cat just sighed.

“Very well then.” He replied, and Jolyne’s phone chimed once more, signalling that she had a new message in the group chat.

AT: Shiho’s doing great. Those Speedwagon guys are helping to arrange for her to be released.

RS: For real?! That’s awesome!

JC: That’s great to hear!

RS: Have they said when she’ll be back at school?

AT: Well, Shiho’s mom said that they’re going to keep Shiho at home for a few weeks while she mentally recovers.

AT: If you two ever wanna come with me to visit her, you’re more than welcome too after next week!

RS: Sounds good to me.

JC: Same here.

RS: Oh hey, while I’ve got you guys here, I’ve been thinking.
“I hope he didn’t pull a muscle…” Morgana snarked, only for Jolyne to elbow him as Ryuji began to type.

RS: Jolyne, do you still have that medal that the treasure turned into?
JC: Yeah, it’s locked up in my drawer. What about it?
RS: Well, it’s not his actual medal, right?
JC: Morgana says it’s not, but it’d be identical in every way.
RS: Well, why don’t we try sellin’ it?
AT: Ryuji, how hard did you get hit in the head in the Palace?
AT: A bunch of high schoolers can’t just sell an Olympic medal that’s as old as them. People would just ask questions.
RS: See, that’s the thing. You know that place in Shibuya we got our guns from?
JC: The one ran by that yakuza-looking guy?
RS: Yeah, untouchable!
RS: I heard that the guy there will buy anything of value, no questions asked.
AT: You can’t be serious. Who’d you hear that from?
RS: One of the guys at my gym was talking about it the other day.
JC: Could be worth a shot. I’ll check it out after school someday.
RS: Awesome!
JC: I’d better go. I’ve got some homework I’ve let pile up this week.
JC: See you guys tomorrow.
RS: Later.
AT: Good night!

Chapter End Notes

Fear not, all. Josuke will appear in this story again. Next time, we dive into some juicy social links.
Chapter 12: Beneath the Mask

Chapter Summary

With Josuke gone, Jolyne begins to bond with those around her. Certain revelations send shockwaves around the nation.

Chapter Notes

Man, this chapter was a lot easier to write than the last few. Hope you guys enjoy this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 12: Beneath the Mask

Saturday, 4/23/20XX, Shujin Academy, After School

The bell rang over the intercom, signaling the end of classes. “Thank god…” Jolyne groaned out as she began to collect her things, including ushering Morgana into her bag. “I don’t know why, but this week had felt like it’s taken months.” Jolyne groaned as she rose out of her seat, and Ann nodded.

“I’ll say. I can’t wait to put all this Kamoshida stuff behind us.” She responded as they exited the classroom, seeing Ryuji waiting for them by the stairwell.

“Yo.” He greeted as they approached him. “What’re you guys up to?”

“I can’t stick around. I got booked for a shoot downtown this afternoon.” Ann replied.

“Oh right, I forgot you do all that modelin’ crap.” Ryuji replied.

“They gave me a few days off because of what happened to Shiho. I called them last night after Josuke-san healed Shiho, and so they scheduled me as a replacement.”

“Replacement?” Jolyne asked, and Ann nodded.

“Yeah, apparently the model they originally had scheduled got into an accident last night or something.” Ann explained, and checked the time on her phone. “Well, I’ve gotta go. See you guys later.”

“Later.”

“Have fun.” And with that, Ann vanished down the stairs, leaving just Ryuji, Jolyne, and Morgana standing by the staircase.

“So, what’ve you been up to the past couple days?” Jolyne asked, and Ryuji just shrugged as he leaned back against the wall.
“Nothin’ much. Just trying to keep a low profile since we took down Kamoshida.” Ryuji answered, and Jolyne glanced down at Ryuji’s right leg.

“How’s your knee doing?” As soon as Jolyne asked that, a smile crept up on Ryuji’s face.

“Oh man, it feels great! Doesn’t even feel like it was messed up in the first place.” Jolyne smiled at this.

“I’m glad to hear that. I’ll be sure to tell Josuke how you’re doing next time I talk to him.” Jolyne replied, and Ryuji’s brow knitted together.

“I wonder…hey, you doin’ anything this afternoon?” He asked, and Jolyne shook her head.

“Nope. After two weeks of weird shit happening to me, I’m looking forward to taking things nice and easy for a bit.” She replied. “Why?”

“Well, I was wonderin’ if you wanted to train a bit.” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne tilted her head.

“Training? But we already got rid of the palace.”

“Well yeah, but that doesn’t mean you can just go slackin’ off and let your body decline. Ya gotta keep in shape. Plus, I need to get my leg back up to where it used to be.” The former track star explained, and Jolyne pursed her lips in thought for a minute, before she shrugged.

“Sure, why not. I don’t think we’ve actually gotten a chance to hang out outside of the Palace anyway.” Jolyne answered, and Ryuji grinned.

“Alright!” He cheered. “Change into your gym stuff and meet me in the courtyard.”

“Courtyard? Don’t you have a gym membership?”

“Well yeah, but I don’t really feel like goin’ there today. Besides, I don’t think they let me bring guests.” Ruyji explained, and Jolyne sighed.

“Alright. See you there.”

Shujin Academy Courtyard

Jolyne stood in an area of the courtyard just adjacent to the walkway into the main building, dressed in the red tracksuit and white t-shirt that was Shujin’s gym uniform, with Morgana napping in her bag on the table beside her. They watched Ryuji walk over to them, wearing the red track pants and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up. “So why’d we come here, exactly?” Jolyne asked as her friend walked up to her.

“This place here-“ Ryuji gestured to the courtyard around them. “-is my secret training spot. I used to come here all the time back when I was on the track team.” He explained, as the transfer student raised an eyebrow.

“This place? Seriously?” Ryuji nodded.

“Yes.” Jolyne looked around, noticing that the area they were in was a bit larger than the other areas in the courtyard, and was free of obstacles, save for the singular table that Morgana was on.

“So what exactly did you do here?”

“Warm ups, laps, the works.” He answered, a smile on his face. “Man, being here brings back
memories. I don’t think I would’ve made it as far as I did if I hadn’t come here.” Jolyne processed his answer, before Ryuji’s smile began to falter. “Back in that other world, fightin’ there was a total shock. I was slow, I didn’t move like I used to.” The smile completely fell from Ryuji’s face now. “And then when my knee gave out against Kamoshida, and you almost got killed tryin’ to help me… I just felt lame. Like I was slowin’ everybody down.” So that was it. Ryuji clearly still blamed himself for Jolyne getting hurt in their fight against Kamoshida.

“Look, I already told you, it wasn’t your fault. I would’ve gladly done it for any of you, and-“

“But that’s just the thing: it was my fault.” Ryuji cut her off. “When you threw me behind that rubble, I thought ‘this would’ve never happened if I hadn’t slacked off.’” He explained, his hand drifting towards his right knee the entire time he spoke. However, as soon as he was done talking, Ryuji clenched his hand into a fist. “That’s why we’re out here. Even though your uncle fixed up my knee, I’ve still got a long way to go before I’ll even be close to where I used to be. But if I can pull myself back up, then I can start pulling my weight, and I won’t let anyone else down ever again.” As he said that last sentence, Ryuji looked up at Jolyne, and she saw determination burning in his eyes. As soon as Jolyne saw the look on his eyes, she smiled.

“Alright. I’m gonna be counting on you, Ryuji.” She replied, holding out her hand, and Ryuji smirked, grabbing her hand with his.

“Hell yeah! I’m wreck your expectations!” He exclaimed, before his brow furrowed. “Uh, I mean, in a good way.” They released their handshake, a smirk still on Ryuji’s face. “Don’t think it’s just me that’s gonna be getting in shape too, though. We’re gonna be gettin’ you in shape too. Don’t think I didn’t notice you gettin’ winded in the Palace.” He taunted, and Jolyne just scoffed.

“Hey, you think being a rope for you guys was easy? You’re heavier than you look.” Jolyne teased back, and Ryuji’s smirk was unwavering.

“Alright, let’s get started. I’m gonna start with some knee lift sprints, while I’ll start you out with some regular ones. Ready?” Jolyne nodded.

“Let’s go.” With that, Jolyne and Ryuji began to run around the school. Even though he was out of practice, Ryuji was still able to keep ahead of Jolyne, who struggled to keep up with the former track star. In fact, the only way Jolyne could even catch up was by manifesting Stone Free’s legs around her own, enabling her to catch up and, eventually, overtake him. They ended up back where they started, both of them hunched over and panting.

“No *huff* fair. You *huff* cheated…” Ryuji panted out, leaning against a wall.

“It’s technically *huff* a muscle…” Jolyne huffed out, grasping the table for support.

“Man, if I *huff* had one of those things…” Ryuji wheezed out, and Jolyne’s brow furrowed. Could Ryuji get a Stand…? She was too winded to think about it some more, and just panted against the table.

“Hoo boy, that was…man.” Ryuji panted out, slumping to the ground. “I knew I was rusty, but I didn’t think my legs were that tight…” A smile spread upon his sweaty face. “Still, that feeling was…incredible. Wasn’t it?”

“Sure, that’s one word for it.”

“Man, I haven’t felt like that in forever. Not since…not since Kamoshida.” He said, the smile fading from his space. “I ever tell you what went down between us?”
“Yeah. He busted up your leg because you called him out, right?”

“Well, that’s how it ended, but that’s not the full story.” Ryuji said. “Back before Kamoshida came along, the track team was the biggest thing the school had going for it. I told you our coach’s mom got sick so he resigned to take care of her, but that’s just what we were supposed to say if we were asked. Truth is…Kamoshida got him fired. Cooked up some story about how he was a drug addict, and Kobayakawa just ate it up.”

“Doesn’t surprise me. He never cared about who got in his way.” Jolyne said, and Ryuji nodded.

“As soon as Kamoshida took over, that’s when it all started goin’ to shit. He gave us these crazy workouts, and when we couldn’t do those exactly the way he wanted, he’d add more. Day after day with that bullshit. And he was out for me especially.” Ryuji explained, a scowl appearing on his face. “I’m still not sure why. Maybe I said something that pissed him off. Maybe he didn’t like something about me. Maybe he was just being an asshole. Every day, he’d give me more workouts than anything else, but I just powered through it. Thing is…not everyone could power through it like I could.”

“This that Nakamura guy you mentioned in the palace?” Jolyne asked, and Ryuji nodded.

“Yeah. Nakamura was a third year, but our moms went to college together, so we were kinda tight. Anyway, one day, Kamoshida singled him out, gave him some insane regimen to do, something that was more intense than anything he gave me. Nakamura did his hardest, but in the end, he pushed himself to the point where he ended up in the hospital.”

“Did he…?”

“Nah, he pulled through, but he’ll be lucky if he ever walks again.” Ryuji answered, his face sullen and downcast. “And that was it. That was the breaking point. I marched right down to Kamoshida’s office, and called him on his bullshit. Thing is, that’s exactly what Kamoshida wanted. He knew that I was the kind of guy who would push back if he pushed back hard enough. Talking about it now, I think that’s why he singled me out like he did. I confronted him, and he…he brought up my parents.” Ryuji dryly swallowed. “The truth is, my mom’s the only one I got. All my dad did was drink, cheat on my mom, and beat us. At least, until he just up and left one day. Somehow, Kamoshida found out, and he told the whole team. When he did that, I just…I just lost it. I decked him, and that was exactly what he needed.” Ryuji’s whole body began to tense up. “Bastard took a tire iron to my knee, claimed that it was ‘self defense.’ After that, he convinced the principal to shut down the team, and all the other guys on the team started to treat me like a traitor. I was some kinda outcast.” Ryuji grit his teeth, remembering everything that happened back then. The jeers, the insults from his former teammates, Kamoshida’s leering grin…

“Do you regret it?” Ryuji looked up, seeing Jolyne sitting on the table next to her bag.

“Huh?”

“Do you regret punching him?” Jolyne asked, and Ryuji had to think.

“…yes and no.” He answered. “Ugh, don’t ask me tough questions like that! You know I ain’t that smart.” Ryuji shot back, and Jolyne chuckled.

“That’s what I thought. You know, Ryuji, you and I aren’t too different.” She said, and his brow furrowed.

“Whaddya mean?”
“Well, my dad wasn’t around a whole lot either, so it was just me and my mom. The other kids…they used to make fun of me for that. I was unwanted, my dad didn’t love me, my mom was a whore…looking back, I think they were just repeating what their parents said, but I didn’t care. I…I beat the crap out of them. Pretty often, too. I just wanted to make them shut up, y’know?”

“Yeah, I get it.” Ryuji answered, and he chuckled. “Man, two people with issues like that meetin’ up like we did…what’re the odds of that?” For a moment, Jolyne thought of Igor’s words from one of her trips into the Velvet Room, about how she had found someone who had also lost their place to belong…was it some cosmic coincidence, or was it something more? She would’ve thought on it more, if Ryuji wasn’t grinning once more as he rose off the ground. “Alright, my mind’s made up. From now on, none of that stuff matters. No more lookin’ to the past, only buildin’ the future! We gotta think positive thoughts from now on.” Ryuji raised his hand, and Jolyne raised hers, the two meeting in a high five that didn’t just signify renewed determination, but something more. Of a bond going stronger, of a true friendship taking form.

**Rank Up! Chariot Rank 2!**

“So, now that we’re all ready to go, let’s get down to business. What, you think two laps will work this time?” Ryuji said, causing Jolyne’s eyes to widen.

“Wait, what? Didn’t we just do a lap around the school?”

“Well yeah, but that was just the warm up. Now, the real exercise begins!” Ryuji exclaimed. “C’mon, let’s go! I’ll even go easy on you this time.” He jeered, and began to run, causing Jolyne to sigh.

“Gimme a break…”

**Yongen-Jaya, Evening**

Jolyne entered her restaurant home, now dressed in her green jacket and striped shirt and pants, having changed back into her regular clothes after her work out with Ryuji was over. “Hey, Sojiro.”

“Evening.” Sojiro greeted, sitting behind the counter and reading a newspaper. Jolyne looked around the café, noting that the place was empty.

“Looks like business is booming.”

“It is what it is. I can’t control people’s appetites.” Sojiro responded, folding his newspaper and setting it on the bar. “So, how was your day?”

“Same as any other day. Went to school, talked with my friends, then I came home. Nothing really stood out.” Jolyne responded, fibbing a little bit about what her days normally entailed.

“Uh huh.” Sojiro said, and nodded at the bar stool. Jolyne took the hint, sitting down across from her caretaker. “And you three aren’t causing any trouble, are you?”

“Nope. We just keep our heads down, stay off the radar.”

“Good. I have to report to your probation officer twice a month, and I don’t want to write anymore than I have to. It’s a pain in the ass as is.” The caretaker replied, and was about to say something else, when his phone rang. Pulling it out, he pressed ‘answer’ as he pressed the phone to his ear.

“What is it?” The scolding tone vanished from his voice, being replaced with…was that affection? “Yeah, I’m about to head out. Sorry about that. …I know. The usual, right? Alright, I’ll see you later. Buh bye.” With that, Sojiro hung up his phone. “Sheesh, it never ends with her…” Sojiro
looked back up at Jolyne, and sighed. “As you can see, I’ve got my hands full enough as it is between you, this place, and…it’s not important. Point is, I’d appreciate it if you didn’t make things more difficult for either of us. Actually…” Sojiro began stroking his goatee, gears turning in his head. “Say, you ever had a job before?”

“Is it my turn to talk now, or do you want to lecture me some more?”

“Just answer the question.”

“No, not really. Why?” Jolyne responded.

“How would you like to start helping out around here every now and then?” Sojiro asked, causing Jolyne to raise an eyebrow.

“Like what, clean the toilets? Scrub the floor?”

“No exactly. I’m talking about helping me out behind the counter. Just lending a hand every now and then, even if it’s once a week…it’d really help me out.” Sojiro answered. “I wouldn’t ask you to work for free, either. If you agree to help me, then…” His brow seemed to furrow, before he snapped his fingers. “I’ll teach you how to make the perfect cup of coffee. How’s that sound?”

Jolyne scoffed.

“Really? C’mon, your coffee can’t possibly that good.” Jolyne shot back, and Sojiro smirked.

“I’ll take that as a challenge, one I’ll gladly accept.” Sojiro said, firing up his coffee siphons. Jolyne watched as Sojiro went to work. It was like watching an expert pianist playing Mozart, Sojiro’s hands expertly manipulating the coffee beans in a way that seemed less deliberate and more like a well practiced habit. After a few minutes, Sojiro set the cup of coffee before her, steam rising from the liquid. “Well? Go on.” Sojiro beckoned, and Jolyne examined the cup of coffee. It didn’t appear any different from what she could find at any other coffee shop, but Jolyne couldn’t deny that there was a certain aroma to it. After a moment, Jolyne took the cup in her hands, lifted it to her lips…and took a sip.

“Oh my god…” She gasped out in English, momentarily lapsing into her first language. “This…this is amazing. I don’t think I’ve ever had coffee this good in my life.” Sojiro let out a chuckle at that.

“Let you in on a little secret? That’s nowhere close to my best cup.” He revealed, causing Jolyne’s eyes to widen even more.

“Bullshit.”

“It’s the truth.” As soon as Sojiro said that, Jolyne slammed both hands on the bar and bowed her head.

“Teach me your ways, wise one.” With that, Sojiro fully ceased the gruff exterior he had put up in front of Jolyne, letting out a hearty laugh.

“Well, it sounds like we have a deal then.” He said, Jolyne returning to her natural position.

**Rank Up! Hierophant Rank 2!**

“I’m in. When do we start?”

“Well, I’d start you tonight, but uh…you kinda stink.” Sojiro stated, causing Jolyne to raise an eyebrow and sniff herself. Oh man, Sojiro wasn’t kidding. “What’d you do? Run a marathon or
something?”

“Yeah, or something.”

“Well, I’m going to lock up. Go get yourself cleaned up, and we’ll start some other day.” Sojiro suggested, and Jolyne nodded.

“Sounds like a plan. See you tomorrow.” With that, Jolyne went upstairs as Sojiro began putting everything away. As he walked out of his restaurant and locked the door behind him, Sojiro couldn’t shake one thought from his head.

*She doesn’t seem like such a bad kid...*

**Sunday, 4/24/20XX, Morning**

Jolyne and Morgana sat on Jolyne’s bed, Jolyne lazily flipping through an old volume of Pink Dark Boy. Jolyne was enjoying her day off, looking to decompress for the first time in a while. Jolyne was shaken out of her reading by her phone chiming, seeing a message from Ryuji.

**RS:** So what are you guys up to today?

**AT:** I’m visiting Shiho at her house today to see how she’s doing

**JC:** I’m not really doing anything.

**RS:** Man, I wish I could just relax.

**RS:** My mom wants me to help her run errands today.

**AT:** Has she noticed your knee’s better yet?

**RS:** Nah, I’ve been hiding it around her.

**RS:** Mainly because I don’t know how to even explain it

**RS:** Hey ma, a guy with dumb hair used magic powers to fix my knee like nothing had ever happened

Back in Morioh, Josuke felt a chill go up his spine.

**JC:** I mean, maybe she’d believe that?

**AT:** Shiho’s mom’s asked me a few questions right after Josuke-san fixed her, but she gave up after I didn’t answer

**AT:** Honestly, I think she’s just accepting it as a miracle.

“I think if I was in that position, I’d do the same.” Morgana chimed in, reading the texts from his position standing on Jolyne’s shoulder. “Oh hey, we’ve still got that medal from the palace, don’t we?” Morgana asked, and Jolyne nodded.

“Yeah, it’s over there in the drawer.” Jolyne answered, gesturing over to the drawer where both the medal from Kamoshida’s palace and the locket containing the shard of the arrow.

“Wanna go see if we can sell it at that place?” Morgana asked, and Jolyne pursed her lips.
JC: Hey, I’m thinking about going to sell that medal we pulled from Kamoshida’s palace.

“You”RE thinking?!” Morgana said, irate at his idea being stolen, but Jolyne brushed him off as her friends began typing.

RS: I don’t see why not.

AT: I say go for it.

JC: Awesome.

JC: I’ll get in touch with you guys after I sell it so we can see how we can split the money.

RS: Sounds good to me.

AT: Good luck!

Afternoon, Shibuya, Central Street

Jolyne stood in the alley of Central Street, staring at the green neon sign that read ‘Untouchable.’ “This place creeps me out…” Morgana muttered, his head poking out of her bag, and Jolyne nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, I agree. Still, I don’t know many other places that’ll take something like this.” Jolyne replied, referring to the medal in her bag. Swallowing the lump in her throat, Jolyne pushed open the door, entering the dimly lit store. The cap wearing shopkeep from last time was still there, and when he saw Jolyne, his eyes momentarily lit up in recognition.

“Well well, if it isn’t Cosplay Girl.” He greeted.

“Hm? Oh, right.” Jolyne responded, remembering the cover story that she had used on their last visit…god, had that only been a week ago? It felt like months had gone by since then.

“Whaddya need now? More costume stuff?” The gruff man asked, and Jolyne shook her head.

“Not exactly. I heard you buy things. That true?” She asked, and he nodded.

“Yeah, just about. Long as it ain’t anything that’ll draw too much attention.” He answered, and Jolyne began ‘rumagin’ through her bag, in reality just taking the medal from Morgana’s paws to her hands.

“Well, a few days ago, my…my uncle passed away, and he wanted me to have this.” Jolyne said, handing the medal to the man. As soon as he took it in his hand and got a good look at it, his eyes momentarily nodded.

“This what I think it is?” He asked, and Jolyne nodded.

“Yeah, he used to be an athlete. Thing is, while I appreciated the thought, I don’t really have any use for something like this.” Jolyne ‘explained’, and the man turned the medal over in his hands as he thought over her story. He lightly bit the medal, testing to see if it was indeed the real deal.

“Hmmmm…alright. I’ll give you 30,000 yen for this.” The man said, and Jolyne involuntarily winced.

“Seriously? Only 30,000? I thought gold medals were supposed to be extremely valuable.” She protested.
“That’s my final offer. Take it or leave it, girl.”

“…fine.” Jolyne grumbled, and the Shopkeep opened the cash register, pulling out a stack of Yen bills and counting it out to be 30,000. Tyin the bills together with a rubber band, he handed them to Jolyne in exchange for the medal. As soon as they made the exchange, the man glanced up at the clock.

“Damn, that time already, huh?” He muttered out, and reached under the counter and pulled out a brown paper bag, setting it in front of Jolyne. “Here, take this.”

“What is it?” Jolyne asked, taking the bag from him.

“Just a little thank you for selling me that medal. Just uh…don’t look inside it. Just bring it with you next time you come here.” Shopkeep instructed, and Jolyne narrowed her eyes at him.

“Ok…” She agreed, and the bell over the door rang as it was pushed open. Jolyne and the shopkeep looked to see two men in suits standing there.

“Munehisa Iwai, correct?” The older one asked, and the shopkeep, now identified as Iwai, looked at the man.

“Detectives.” He coldly greeted, and turned back to Jolyne. “Thank you for your business. See ya next time, kid. Oh, and sorry for your loss.”

“Uh, thanks.” Jolyne said, and began moving towards the door. However, one of the detectives moved in front of her, blocking the door.

“Just a minute, miss. Mind telling us what’s in that bag?” He asked, and Iwai glared at him.

“Hey, your business is with me. I’m gonna have to ask you to stop harassin’ my customers.” Iwai demanded, and the detective glared back, before turning back to Jolyne.

“Well?” The detective asked, and Jolyne quickly racked her brain for an excuse.

“It’s medicine. I just got it from the drugstore down the street.” She answered, but the detective wasn’t convinced.

“If that’s the case, then why is it in that paper bag?” The detective asked, and Jolyne cursed to herself, before a light went off in her head.

“I didn’t have any room left in my shoulder bag, and they were out of plastic bags.” She answered, and her cheeks began to turn red from ‘embarrassment’, and she cupped her hand over her mouth. “It’s, y’know…girl stuff.”

“Tadashi-kun, leave the poor girl alone. She’s not who we’re here for, anyhow.” The older detective said, and Iwai looked a little impressed.

“Have a good one, kid.” Iwai said, and Jolyne exited the store. However, as soon as she was outside, she began unraveling a string from her finger and sneaking it under the door. “Now that you’re done harassin’ my customers, what can I help you with, detectives? Maybe some nice tasty evidence?” Iwai’s voice asked, and Jolyne could hear what sounded like a hand slamming on a counter.

“Watch your attitude, Iwai!” The detective who blocked Jolyne shouted.

“Well, you guys gonna search me? Go on, do what you gotta do” Iwai said, and Jolyne could feel
the cocky grin in his voice.

“W-what?”

“You heard me. Upstanding citizen like myself is supposed to help the cops out, right?” Iwai’s gruff voice rumled out, and she could almost hear that young detective seething.

“You sure that lead was legit, Tadashi-kun?” The older detective asked.

“I could’ve sworn it was…”

“You two mind getting’ out of here? I got a business to run, after all.” Iwai asked.

“In a minute. I wanna look around here first.” The younger detective said, and she heard Iwai groan.

“Alright, I guess. I got nothin’ to hide.” Iwai said, and Jolyne retracted the string back into her finger.

“Well? What was that all about?” Morgana asked.

“They didn’t say, but I’m going to guess that it has something to do with whatever’s in this bag.” Jolyne said, examining the bag.

“Let’s open it.”

“Are you crazy? He said not to open it.”

“And?”

“And I don’t want to piss off some guy who’s probably in the Yakuza.”

“Aren’t you the least bit curious?” Morgana asked, and Jolyne couldn’t deny it.

“…fine. You are a bad influence, y’know?” Jolyne said, and opened the bag. “…holy shit.”

“What is it?”

“Holy. Shit.”

“Show me!” Jolyne held the bag for Morgana to see, and his blue eyes widened as soon as he saw it.

Inside the brown paper bag was a gun, one that was so real looking it made the one Jolyne had in the meta verse look like it came from the dollar store. “It’s so real looking…imagine the damage this thing could’ve done in the meta verse.” Jolyne muttered, before closing the bag again.

“We should totally buy that from him next time we go back.” Morgana suggested, and Jolyne looked at him confused.

“Why? You said that the Palace was gone, right?”

“The Palace is gone, but the Meta Verse isn’t.” Morgana answered, and sensed the question that was rising on Jolyne’s mouth. “I’ll explain it next time we meet up with the others. For now, let’s just tell them how selling the medal went.”

“Alright, but I’ll remember that.” Jolyne said, getting out her phone as she began to walk towards the station.
JC: We got 30,000
RS: Seriously? Only 30,000?
RS: I thought medals like that were supposed to be super valuable or something.
AT: Well, I don’t think that’s something that’s really in high demand.
AT: Plus, it’s not the real medal in the first place.
RS: Still, I thought we’d get more than a measly 30,000
JC: Split three ways, that’d be about 10,000 each.
“Hey, what about me?” Morgana protested.
“You’re a cat—“
“I’M NOT A CAT!”
“Fine, you’re trapped in the body of a cat. What exactly would you do with money?” Jolyne asked, and that silenced Morgana’s protest.
 “…fine. But you’d better get me some sushi later!” Morgana yowled, and Jolyne turned her attention back to her phone.
RS: Well, I guess that ain’t too bad.
AT: Oh, I’ve got an idea!
AT: Why don’t we use the money to celebrate?
JC: Like what, throw a party or something?
AT: Yeah, or something.
RS: What’d you have in mind?
AT: Well, there’s this hotel that has this amazing buffet you can go to.
AT: It’s got everything. Sweets, meat, fish…just about anything you can imagine!
RS: Oh yeah, I’ve heard of that place. My mom went there for a friend’s birthday once, said it was fun.
RS: I hear it’s super expensive, though.
AT: It is.
AT: The only reason I know about it is because my parents took me there last time they visited.
JC: Sounds good to me and Morgana.
RS: I’m down too.
AT: Great! We’ll meet tomorrow and talk about it some more.
JC: Sounds good to me. See you guys then.

**Monday, 4/25/20XX, Morning**

Jolyne sat down in her seat as the bell rang, with Kawakami entering the classroom and taking her position at the front of the classroom. “Good morning, everyone. Before class begins, I have an announcement to make. This afternoon, after lunch, you are all to gather in the auditorium for a special assembly, where Principal Kobayakawa will address the events of the past few weeks.” The teacher said, and the whole class groaned.

“Wait, seriously? I thought we were past all that stuff…”

“Think it has something to do with that weird note last week?”

“I think I saw Kamoshida hanging around the faculty offices this morning…”

“Settle down!” Kawakami ordered, and the class quieted down. “Attendance is mandatory, so please make things easier for yourself and just show up.” AS the teacher tried quieting down the crowd, Jolyne’s phone vibrated in her desk.

**Afternoon**

All the classes of Shujin had gathered in the auditorium, all lined up and organized by class. The crowd of students was restless, with chatter filling the auditorium. It began to die down when Student Council President Makoto Niijima stepped onto the stage, tapping the mic. “Everyone, please settle down.” Her voice boomed across the auditorium, the chatter dying down. Makoto stepped to the side as Kobayakawa walked onto the stage, lowering the mic down to his height.

“Good afternoon, everyone. I have gathered you all here today to discuss the events of the past few weeks.” Kobayakawa’s voice boomed across the auditorium. Jolyne was standing behind Ann, both of them watching with apprehension. “I have recently been informed that Shiho Suzui, the young woman who attempted to take her life the week before last, has pulled through. Her injuries were not as serious as they initially appeared, and she is expected to make a full recovery very soon.”

“No way…”

“Bullshit. I saw her after she fell. Legs aren’t supposed to bend like that.”
“I saw her being wheeled back into her house the other day. She looked completely fine.”

“How can someone fall three stories and be completely fine?”

“It’s like some kind of miracle…”

“Thank you, Josuke.” Jolyne muttered under her breath, as Kobayakawa resumed his speech.

“In addition, we have examined the message left last week by the group calling themselves ‘The Phantom Thieves of Hearts.’ Upon closer examination, I have determined that the message was simply a prank by a group of students, who have yet to be identified. We have determined that the claims they made regarding Coach Kamoshida to be nothing but baseless slander, going on nothing but rumors and—"

“Except their true.” A voice yelled out from one of the doors, and everyone in the auditorium looked to see none other than Suguru Kamoshida standing there. His messy, unkempt hair was even more unkempt, and looked like it hadn’t been washed in a few days. His square jaw was covered in stubble, and his clothes appeared stained.

“Holy shit…” Jolyne whispered out, noticing Ann tense up. They watched as Kamoshida walked up to the stage, pushed Kobayakawa to the side, and looked out over the students.

“I’m sure you’ve all heard the rumors about me. That I abuse my students, give them harsh exercises, and pushing them past their breaking points. I’m here to tell you…they’re all true.” Kamoshida bellowed, a stunned silence filling the crowd. “And that’s not all. If there was a student that I didn’t like, I would stop at nothing until I ruined them. I’ve…done this so many times that I lost count. I don’t even remember their faces…” Kamoshida revealed, and Ryuji clenched his fists in the crowd. “That…that isn’t even the worst thing I’ve done. I…I would take my female team members, and I…"

Kamoshida’s face began to contort, as tears welled up in his eyes. “I would…force them into having relations to me, by threatening to take away their positions on the team.” Now, the tears began streaming down the Volleyball Coach’s face, and he collapsed to his knees. “I…I am the reason Shiho Suzui tried to kill herself.” This revelation sent waves throughout the crowd.

“Holy shit…”

“So the rumors are true…”

“Oh god, Masaki was telling the truth and I…I didn’t believe her…”

“Wait, so was that calling card legit?”

Kamoshida was now full on kneeling, his head bowed in shame. “I have done terrible things. I abused the position and trust placed in me and ruined countless young lives, just so I could fulfill my own twisted desires. I thought of this school as my own castle, doing whatever I wanted with no thought to those I hurt. I don’t deserve your forgiveness.” He said, his whole body shaking. “I am an arrogant, shallow, and shameful person. I’m worse than garbage. The only way I could possibly atone…is to take my own life!”

“You fucking coward!” Ann shouted out, causing Kamoshida to look up. “Shiho’s still alive, even after everything you did that made her want to die! You have no right to run from this!” She yelled, her whole body shaking, and Jolyne put a hand on her shoulder.

“You’re right…you’re absolutely right…” Kamoshida sniffled out, sitting up. “I…I should be punished under the full power of the law. I…I also did terrible things to Takamaki-san, as well.” It was like Kamoshida had diarrhea of the mouth, the confessions pouring forward without any rhyme
or reason. “In return for giving Suzui-san a position on the team, I…I tried forcing her into relations as well. And when she refused, I began spreading rumors about her, in the hopes that she would give in. When she didn’t, that is when I forced myself upon Suzui-san, to…to punish her.” As Kamoshida continued to confess her crimes, various students were watching.

In the row of Jolyne and Ann’s class, Mishima watched with his mouth open. “Unbelievable, he actually confessed. The Phantom Thieves…they’re real…”

In the area where the third years were gathered, the pink haired girl from the rooftop watched with an expression of horror, her hand covering her mouth. “My goodness, how terrible…” As the girl listened to Kamoshida’s confessions, her mind involuntarily went back to the message the week before. “Phantom Thieves…?”

In the area where the teachers had gathered, Kawakami was watching as well. She had always had a sneaking suspicion that the rumors regarding Kamoshida’s abuse were true, but to see him actually confessing like that…the teacher had never seen anything like this. A small part of her hoped this didn’t bring too much attention to certain rumors about her…

Makoto Niijima had been watching the whole ordeal from a position just adjacent to the stage, her face an expression of pure disbelief. Just like any student, the student council president had heard the rumors about Kamoshida, but every time she had mentioned it to Kobayakawa, he just brushed them off as rumors. But now… “Just what are these Phantom Thieves?” Makoto muttered to herself. Kobayakawa stormed the stage, standing in front of Kamoshida.

“Everyone, you are dismissed! Please, return to your classrooms at once!”

“How much did you know, Kobayakawa?”

“Why did you cover for him?”

“Wait, does this man that Phantom Thieves thing was real?”

“I said return to your classrooms at once!” He bellowed, and the teachers went to forefront, beginning to usher out the students. A short while later, Jolyne, Ann, and Ryuji were gathered in the courtyard.

“Man, that was…intense.” Jolyne said, and Ryuji nodded.

“I’ll say. I knew Morgana said he’d realize what he’d done and confess, but I didn’t think he’d promise to kill himself like that…”

“He’s getting off easy compared to what he deserves.” Ann spat.

“Hey, I agree completely. But I just didn’t expect it to look like…that.” Ryuji said, and Jolyne noticed someone approaching them. They looked to see Mishima approaching them, with two students behind him. As soon as they were in front of the trio, Mishima bowed his head.

“Takamaki-san…I’m sorry!” He declared, causing Ann’s eyes to widen.

“We all knew what was going on, and we just let it happen.” Mishima said as he rose back to his full height, and the girl behind him stepped forward.

“I had you all wrong, Takamaki-san! I…I’m sorry I spread those rumors about you!” She apologized, and the other girl nodded in agreement.
“We’re so sorry! We had no idea he was forcing himself on you like that!” She said, and Ann smiled.

“Hey, it’s ok. You guys didn’t know any better. Besides, all that stuff’s in the past now.” Ann said, and a teacher approached them.

“Hey, get back to class.” He ordered, and the two girls walked off. However, before Mishima left, he looked straight at Jolyne.

“I can’t apologize enough for what I did to you. I promise, I’ll make it up to you.” And with that, Mishima walked off.

“Looks like Kamoshida ain’t the only one that had a change of heart. Looks like all those weird rumors about you oughta stop now.” Ryuji stated, and Ann’s smile left her.

“My thing doesn’t really matter. We made Kamoshida own up to what he did to Shiho, and that’s good enough for me.” She said.

“If it’s good enough for you, it’s good enough for me.” Jolyne stated. “C’mon, let’s head back to class.”

Afternoon

“This is the news. Earlier today, at Shujin Academy, a teacher confessed to multiple counts of physical and sexual abuse. The man in question, Suguru Kamoshida, is a former Olympic gold medalist who, after winning the gold medal at the 2012 Olympic games, took up a teaching position at Shujin Academy coaching volleyball. Kamoshida has confessed to assaulting Shiho Suzuki, the young woman who attempted suicide two weeks ago. One week prior to this confession, a group identifying themselves as ‘The Phantom Thieves of Hearts’ posted a message that displayed knowledge of his crimes, and promised to make him confess. The school has yet to release an official statement yet, and the police have begun an investigation after Kamoshida turned himself in. We will keep you updated as the story develops.”

Untouchable

Iwai watched the news on a small television he kept behind the counter, turning his sucker over in his mouth. “Man, what’s the world’s coming to lately? Sheesh…” He grumbled to himself, before a light sparked in his head. Wasn’t the medal that girl had sold him the other day from 2012…?

Takemi Medical Clinic

Takemi sat behind her reception counter, filling out paperwork while lazily paying attention to the news. “Hm. What an unpleaseant situation…” she mused, before turning her attention back to her paperwork. Where had she seem the Shujin logo recently?

Kanda

Inside a cathedral located in Kanda, a teenage girl with a red braid in her long black hair wearing a blue blazer was sitting in an office, a Shogi board in front of her. She momentarily glanced away from the board at the television the priest had in his office. “Oh dear, how terrible…” The girl said to herself, and the priest nodded in agreement.

“Times like this are when the Lord tests our faith the most, Hifumi-chan.” The man said, and Hifumi nodded.
**Hokkaido**

Inside an office at the university of Hokkaido, a man watched the news feed on his computer. When he saw the story about Kamoshida, his mouth shaped into a frown as he read the story. “Shujin academy…?” The man said to himself, and glanced towards the photos on his desk. For a split second, his eyes travelled over a photo of 5 people and a dog, before he focused on a picture of Jolyne Cujoh, aged 14. Emotions flooded over him. Love, regret, and concern. After a moment, the man let out a sigh, adjusting the brim of the green cap on his head. “Good grief…stay safe, Jolyne.” Jotaro Kujo said aloud.

**Morioh, Tonio Trussardi’s Restaurant**

Inside the restaurant, three men were seated at a table, watching the news on a television. “Man, would you get a load of that? Poor kids…” Okuyasu Nijimura stated, and Koichi Hirose nodded from his seat beside him.

“And I thought we had a rough time in high school. Can’t imagine what they’re going through.” Koichi said, and unbeknownst to either of them, Josuke had a small smirk on his face.

*Heh. Good going, Jojo…*

**Tokyo, Speedwagon Foundation**

Ikari was in his office, watching the newsfeed on his computer tell the story of Kamoshida’s confession. “Hm. Shujin is the school that Cujoh-san went to. How interesting…” The man mused to himself, before he closed the window and switched to a security camera feed that showed two feeds. One was of Matsumoto being questioned. Unsurprisingly, the man was still being uncooperative, displaying ignorance at any question they asked, acting as if he did not know anything. However, after almost a week of questions, he showed no signs of cracking. Ikari was beginning to wonder if there was something else at play here…

Ikari then cast his attention towards the other feed, the one that was coming from the labs in the Foundation’s second floor. It was of a group of scientists, huddled around a table. However, Ikari’s attention was not on the men, but rather what they were gathered around: a piece of stone shaped like a face, with two sinister eyes and fangs around the mouth. Even through the monitors, Ikari could feel a chill going up his spine, and he said a silent prayer that nothing went wrong, and that what was in the lab would never be unleashed.

**Shibuya**

A shadowy figure was walking along the street, stopping when he saw the news being displayed on the screens at a video store. As soon as he saw “Shujin Academy” on the screen, he chuckled to himself. “I must say, I didn’t expect this. I look forward to what the future holds for us, Jolyne Cujoh.”

**Leblanc**

Sojiro watched the news as he wiped down the bar, a frown spreading across his face as the story went on. “Sheesh, talk about a mess. I just hope she keeps her head down…”

**Shujin Academy Rooftop**

Ryuji, Morgana, and Jolyne were sitting on the rooftop, and the door swung open as Ann entered the rooftop. “Hey, guys. I just…I just got off the phone with Shiho.” Ann said, and their ears all perked
“How’s she doin’?” Ryuji asked, and Ann weakly smiled.

“She told me that she just saw the news. She said she wanted to call to…to thank me.” Ann replied. “I don’t know how she did, but somehow, Shiho knew that I was behind what happened…”

“It’s because she knows how much you care for her. That kind of devotion doesn’t go unnoticed.” Morgana replied, and Jolyne’s hand involuntarily twitched, before Ryuji began to talk.

“So, what do we do now? We’ve got a lot of free time now.” He said. After they had returned to their classrooms, their homeroom teachers announced that school would be cancelled for the rest of the week while they investigated the veracity of Kamoshida’s claims.

“We could do that celebration Ann suggested.” Jolyne suggested, and Ryuji grinned.

“I’m down. No sense just twiddlin’ our thumbs.” He said, and Jolyne turned to Ann, who nodded in agreement.

“Then it’s settled. Tomorrow, we party!”

Chapter End Notes

Man, I’ve been looking forward to the next chapter for a while. Let me know what you all thought in the comments below. As always, feedback of any kind is appreciated. What you guys like, don’t like, what works and what doesn’t, etc.
Also, I’ve finally settled on a voice for Jolyne in my hand: Kira Buckland, voice of 2B from Nier Automata. You can check out her voicing one of the best scenes from Stone Ocean here: https://soundcloud.com/fairyvriska/jolyne-the-worlds-fingers
Chapter 13: Let's Go Eat at The Buffet

Chapter Summary

Jolyne and the gang celebrate their first successful mission, but a chance encounter sets them down their path.

Chapter Notes

Bit of a short one, but important nonetheless. Feels like I'm finally settling into a groove with how I write everyone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 13: Let's Go Eat at the Buffet

Tuesday, 4/26/20XX, Afternoon

Jolyne was dead. She had to have been. It could have been any of number of things that killed her. A Shadow that got a lucky shot, skewed by the Shadow Kamoshida, turned into a doll by Matsumoto, or even something as simple as stepping into traffic at the wrong time. That was the only logical explanation she could think of, anyway, as she bit down into the juiciest piece of meat she had ever eaten in her life. “So good…” She groaned out from her seat in the Walton Hotel’s buffet lounge, Ryuji and Ann to her left and right respectively, Morgana in the bag sitting next to her. On the table in front of them was a wide range of food, ranging from breakfast foods to desserts. Ryuji was tearing into a decently sized piece of beef, while Ann was voraciously devouring a piece of chocolate cake that looked richer than the hotel itself.

“Oh mnf, I colf shiur fureber!” Ryuji stated around a mouth full of food, and Jolyne swallowed her food.

“Hey, swallow.” She scolded, and Ryuji chased his food down with water.

“Sorry. Man, I could stay here forever!” He stated. “This is the best stuff I’ve ever eaten!”

“Now I can see why Lady Ann chose this place.” Morgana commented, and Ann nodded as she swallowed a bite of cake.

“Of course it’s good. This place is famous for a reason.” She commented, not even caring that her face was decorated with cake crumbs. “Oh hey, did you guys hear that the police arrested Kamoshida?”

“Music to my ears. Deserves a whole lot more than that, if you ask me.” Jolyne said, cutting into a piece of ham.

“Sounds like you pawned that medal at just the right time. That Iwai guy would’ve probably figured out we had something to do with that.” Morgana chimed in.
“Hey, it’s not like we actually stole the thing. Real thing’s still at Kamoshida’s place, right?” Ryuji asked, and Morgana nodded.

“That’s right, but how would we have explained that?”

“Eh, it all worked out, didn’t it?” Jolyne responded.

“I’m not so sure. Apparently, they’re going to be interviewing some people at school when we get back.” The model spoke up, and Ryuji grimaced.

“Oh man, and they’ll probably wanna talk to us too cuz of all those rumors people spread about us. Dangit…” He groaned out, before he grinned. “But it was worth it. We got people all pumped up about the Phantom Thieves!” With this, Jolyne and Ann looked at him curiously.

“Explain.” Jolyne ordered, and Ryuji began digging into his jacket pocket and pulling out his phone.

“Let’s see here, where was it…” He muttered out as his fingers began tapping his phone screen. “Here it is!” With that, Ryuji held his phone out towards his companions, who all leaned closer to see what he was showing them.

“The Phantom Aficionado Website?” Jolyne read aloud, seeing the stylized webpage displayed in front of them. The overall aesthetic of the website resembled the calling card that they had sent to Kamoshida, complete with the serial killer copy paste font.

“‘The Phantom Aficionado Website?’” Jolyne read aloud, seeing the stylized webpage displayed in front of them. The overall aesthetic of the website resembled the calling card that they had sent to Kamoshida, complete with the serial killer copy paste font.

“‘Now I can keep going too.’ ‘Thank you for giving us hope.’ ‘Now I feel like I can come forward about what was done to me.’” Ann read, reading the comments on the page. “What is all this?”

“Popped up sometime last night. I searched ‘Phantom Thieves’ before I went to bed last night, and I found this.” Ryuji replied. “People have been talking about how awesome it was that we took down Kamoshida and made him confess like that.”

“Well that didn’t take long at all. But how do they know it was us? Kamoshida didn’t mention us at all yesterday.” Jolyne asked.

Apparently that Calling Card we posted got spread around. Through the news, online, people talking to their friends from Shujin…by the time Kamoshida actually confessed, people were already talking about us.” Ryuji explained, and Ann smiled.

“You know, I started all this so I could solve my own problems, but actually hearing that we helped other people…it feels strange, y’know?”

“Oh, I know exactly what you mean. Like you feel all warm inside, right?” Ryuji replied.

“Hey, are you guys going to eat any of that?” Morgana asked, and Ann gasped.

“Oh my god, I totally forgot! This place has a time limit!” She exclaimed as she bolted up out of her seat. Ryuji’s eyes widened.

“Wait, seriously?!”

“Yeah, we only have an hour.” Jolyne chimed in.

“Why didn’t you tell us?!”

“Because as soon as I gave them the money, you two ran off before I could say anything.” She responded, and checked the time on her phone. “Let’s see, we only have…about 45 minutes left.”
Ann and Ryuji’s eyes both widened.

“Wait, for real?! How am I supposed to finish all the beef dishes in this place?!” Ryuji complained.

“I-I can’t leave here until I eat my way through the entire dessert menu…!” Ann muttered out, and ran off, while Ryuji turned to Jolyne and Morgana.

“You two look after our stuff! We’ll get some stuff for you two!”

“But—“ Before Jolyne could protest, Ryuji ran off towards the buffet tables. Several minutes later, the two had returned, and Jolyne looked over the spread they had returned with. Several varieties of beef, several cakes, danishes, Crepes…just about everything that the two had said they would get. The only problem? That was all they had gotten.

“Oh man, it just melts in my mouth…” Ryuji squeaked out as he tore into a beef dish, while Ann was demolishing a plate of crepes.

“Ughhhhh, it’s so good!” She groaned out around her food, and Jolyne and Morgana just watched.

“So he’s a meathead in more ways than one, and she’s all about the cake. It’s like they’re only thinking with their stomachs…” Morgana lamented, and Jolyne would’ve agreed, but seeing the happy expressions on her friends’ faces (especially Ann’s, but you didn’t see that here), the transfer student just couldn’t bring herself to complain with the not-cat.

“So where’s our share?” Jolyne asked, causing both of them to turn to her with apologetic looks on their face.

“So, uh, about that…”

“As soon as I saw that sweets table, I just couldn’t think of anything else. Before I knew it, my hands were already full.” Ann apologized, and Ryuji just nodded in agreement. “Here, you two can have, uh….” Ann’s eyes frantically scanned the table, before she settled on a plate on Ryuji’s ends. “Here, have these beans!” Ryuji took the hint, and frantically nodded.

“Yeah, help yourselves!”

“Beans?! Are you serious?” Morgana protested, and Ann glanced at the plate.

“A bunch of different stuff got mixed in…but it should still be good!”

“Good grief, you two…” Jolyne sighed out, and Morgana was livid.

“You two don’t know the first thing about fine dining! We’ll show you! Come on, Jolyne!” This was more of an order than anything else, and Jolyne just nodded in agreement. If she didn’t go along with this, Morgana’d just complain about it for who knows how long.

“You two watch our stuff. We’ll be back in a minute.” Jolyne said, but the two fellow humans didn’t seem to hear her, as they had already started to dig back into their food. Grabbing her bag and putting it under her shoulder, Jolyne almost found herself speechless as she looked at all the different options.

“So many options…I can understand why this place is so famous.” Morgana said from his position in her bag. “I say our first priority should be fish!”

“Seems like a good enough place to start. Personally, I’m hoping to try a little of everything.” Jolyne
replied, heading over to where the seafood station. She could practically hear Morgana drooling as they approached it, but as she got their plate and prepared to load up the plate…

“My dear, did you hear about that dreadful news at Shujin?” a haughty, sophisticated voice said, causing Jolyne’s ears to perk up.

“Ah, yes. That teacher who was caught performing indecent acts upon his students, correct? Shameful, really. That school should have never hired such an unsavory individual.” The man’s companion said, and Jolyne pursed her lips as she began loading her plate with fish.

“That’s it, that’s-hey! Don’t overdo it!” Morgana shouted, bringing Jolyne down to Earth. “What’s wrong? You just spaced out.” He asked, and Jolyne gestured towards the two people behind her.

“Those people were talking about Kamoshida.” She answered, and his ears perked up.

“Really? Hm, I guess we shouldn’t be surprised. An incident like that is sure to draw a lot of attention.” He replied, and Jolyne looked around the buffet. All over the place, people were huddled together, talking with one another.

“I wonder…” She said to herself, and began walking from table to table, putting food on her plate as she travelled from table to table. It turns out, a former Olympic gold medalist confessing to abusing his students drew a fair amount of attention around the upper crust of Tokyo society. Everywhere she went, people were talking about Kamoshida and his confession, about how it ‘signalled the end of society’, about how they hoped it didn’t distract from the mental shutdown incidents that had been plaguing the city, about the strange muggings that had been plaguing Inokashira Park…and a fair amount of chatter about the Phantom Thieves. About how they may or may not exist, about how they may have coerced Kamoshida into confessing his sins…and about how they had helped people. How about that… Jolyne thought to herself as she sat back down, drawing Ryuji’s attention.

“Woah. Guess you really wanted to try everything, huh?” He asked, and she looked at him with a narrowed brow.

“Hm?” He just gestured to her plate, and Jolyne finally noticed what she had down. While listening to all the people talking about Kamoshida and the Phantom Thieves, Jolyne had just gone on autopilot, unconsciously piling things onto her plate without any rhyme or reason. The result was a plate loaded high with food, various items mixing together. “Uh oh…”

“I tried…” A weak, sad voice said, and Jolyne looked down to see Morgana sticking his head out. His eyes were downcast, his ears folded downwards in sadness. “I tried to warn you, that there was no room left, but you wouldn’t listen…” He mumbled out, and sniffled. “My fish…” Shit. Jolyne frantically turned to her plate, eyes quickly scanning over the pile of food, before she noticed something. Using her fork, the transfer student carefully removed a piece of salmon from the bottom, scraping off a bit of potato.

“Here, is this fine?” She asked, and as soon as Morgana saw the salmon, his eyes lit up as life flowed back into him.

“Perfect! Gimme!”

“Allright, just don’t get it all over my bag.” Jolyne said, taking an empty plate off the table, placing the Salmon on it, and setting it in front of Morgana. Without a word, he began tearing into it. Jolyne slightly smiled at the sight, before she turned back to the plate.

“I may have overdone it a little…” She muttered out, Ryuji nodding in agreement.
“I’ll say. I’d offer to help you out, but…” He gestured to the plates of meat that still surrounded him. “I dunno how we’re gonna eat all this in half an hour…” Ryuji muttered out, and they cast a look at Ann, who was practically shoveling cakes into her mouth, not even acknowledging that Jolyne was back.

“Oh, this one has cream cheese! But I wanna eat the one with white chocolate too…” Ann muttered around her food, though her friends heard something that sounded like “mmmrdrm mmrdrm.”

“Hey, calories.” Ryuji warned, and that seemed to cut through Ann’s cake induced trance, as her crystal blue eyes glared at him from across the table.

“Hrn!” She tried to say, and took a drink from her cup of water. “Hey! I can say the same about your arteries, Meat Boy!”

“Hey, I’m an athlete. I need protein!” Ryuji shot back, and that’s when Ann noticed the pile of food on Jolyne’s plate.

“Whoa, talk about over doing it! Did you just shovel food?” Ann asked.

“I kinda got distracted.”

“By what?”

“Who cares? We only got a little over half an hour left, right?” Ryuji pointed out, and Jolyne glanced at her phone clock.

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“Then let’s talk later. For now, let’s dig in!” And with that, the Phantom Thieves begun to dig into the large amount of food before them. At first, it seemed like they were making good time, but as time went on, that began to change. No matter how much the three ate, the amount of food on the table didn’t shrink. It just kept going on and on, and as the clock ticked, the space in their stomachs began to shrink. But just when the task seemed impossible, the Phantom Thieves pushed through, and 25 minutes later, all the plates on the table were mostly cleaned out;

“Ughhhhhh…” Jolyne groaned out, clutching her stomach as she sunk into her chair.

“So…full…” Ryuji managed to say, in a similar state himself.

“I…can’t eat anymore…” Ann was hunched over, clutching her stomach and staring at the sweets that were still in front of her. “You betrayed me…I’ll never forgive you…”

“The way you guys put all that food away was kinda scary…” Morgana commented, and Ryuji simply let out a belch, before his stomach began to loudly gurgle.

“Oh man, that ain’t good…I think I need a bathroom…” The false blonde grumbled out, and Jolyne’s stomach began to make a similar noise.

“Hurggg…carry me…” The transfer student groaned, and two finely dressed people walked by, casting a glance at their table.

“Oh my, look at that table. It’s almost impressive.”

“The poor dears. They must not be able to eat such fine food often. I can only imagine what their parents must be like…” As soon as they said that, Ryuji shot them booth a sneering glare.
“What was tha-urp! Oh man, we don’t got time for this…” He groaned out, and Jolyne just weakly nodded.

“You guys go ahead…I’m just gonna…sit here and not move for a bit.” Ann said, and with that, the first two Phantom Thieves began their epic quest to find the bathroom.

It did not go as planned. It turns out, the day they had chosen for their feast had been right in the middle of the Hotel’s remodeling of the bathrooms by the buffet. Much to the chagrin of Ryuji and Jolyne, this meant that they would have to travel back up to the first floor. The two then proceeded to make mad dash for the lobby, their stomachs tossing and turning, and it almost seemed like they wouldn’t make it…

“Whew. Talk about a close one…” Jolyne huffed out as they approached the elevator, having narrowly answered nature’s call.

“I’ll say. Man, I feel 5 kilograms lighter after all that…” Ryuji said, and his brow furrowed as he stared at the elevator. “Uh….what floor was that restaurant on again?”

“Let’s see, we had to come up here, so it’s gotta be on one of the lower floors, so let’s…hey!” Jolyne exclaimed as she was roughly shoved aside by a man in a suit, before Ryuji was pushed aside as well.

“Hey! What’s the big idea?” Ryuji demanded, and the man in the suit barely gave them a glance as several other men in suits came up behind him, and they seemed to be surrounding a bald man in a goatee with orange tinted glasses.

“What’s the progress on the case?” The man asked to one of the men flanking him, who nervously swallowed.

“W-well, sir, we’ve hit a few roadblocks…” He said, and the bald man scowled.

“Well then, pick up the pace, will you?” He ordered. “My time is too precious to be wasted by incompetent fools such as yourself, and-“

“Hey!” Ryuji said with a raised voice, drawing the glare of the man in the glasses.

“It appears that the customer base has changed since the last time I was here. Are they running a daycare now?” He asked, his voice dripping with venom. This, combined with the glare levelled at him, caused Ryuji to dryly swallow, and struggle to find the right words. “Well, what is it? Spit it out, boy.”

“You gonna apologize to my friend here?” Jolyne spoke up, and he turned his glare towards her. For a moment, something about him seemed familiar, and Jolyne could have sworn she also saw a faint flicker of recognition behind those orange tinted glasses.


“We were here first. You and your goons pushed us out of the way.” Jolyne replied, not shirking away from Goatee’s glare. As soon as she said that, the man just scoffed.

“You were simply in my way. I have far more important matters to worry about than the whims of children.” He replied, and Jolyne scowled.

“Sir, we don’t have time for this…” His aide pleaded, but Goatee ignored him, and instead stared
directly at Jolyne.

“A word of advice, children. From now on, mind your own business, and stay out of the way of those who run things.” As soon as he said that, things began to click in Jolyne’s head. That voice, that same arrogant tone…she began thinking back to that night in Nagasaki…

When the elevator chimed, and the doors opened. “Run along now, and remember what I said.” Goatee said, and they began to enter the elevator, though not before one of Goatee’s goons roughly shoved Ryuji.

“Hey!” Ryuji jeered, but he didn’t say anything, just watching as the doors shut. “Man, what an asshole. Just who the hell does that guy think he is? Can’t stand shitty adults like that.” He said, and turned to Jolyne. “Could you believe that…hey, you ok?”

Jolyne had been staring at the ground, her mind racing as she began to put things together. Jolyne had never gotten a good look at his face, but there were certain ideas that she could remember vividly. That voice, that attitude like he was superior to everyone, and that glare…it was exactly the same as that night in Nagasaki. That night where everything started to go wrong. But that couldn’t have been the man from that night, could it? What were the odds of that?

“Hey! Earth to Jolyne!” Ryuji said, snapping his fingers in front of his face and bringing her back to reality. “You ok?”

“Hm? Yeah, I’m…I’m fine.” Jolyne said, trying to shake the thoughts out of her head. “C’mon, let’s take the stairs.”

“Alright. Man, can you believe that guy? Actin’ like he was better than us…who the hell did he think he is?” Ryuji complained as they found the stairs. “Can’t stand shitty ass adults like that. Runnin’ around actin’ like he owns the place…ask me, they’re no better than Kamoshida.”

“Uh huh. Yeah.” Jolyne just nodded along as they descended the stairs, still churning over the encounter in her head as they arrived at the floor with the restaurant on it. As they approached Ann, they saw that Ann had put the bag with Morgana in it next to her, and that they were both looking at Ann’s phone. Jolyne finally put the thoughts out of her head, and just sighed. “Good grief, he’s incorrigible…” She muttered out, as Ann noticed them approaching.

“There you two are! I was starting to wonder if you’d gotten lost.” She commented, and Ryuji just rolled his eyes.

“Hey, cut us a break. The bathrooms down here were outta order, so we had to go upstairs. Then we ran into some asshole.” He explained, and Morgana sighed.

“You two didn’t get into a fight, did you?”

“Hey, he pushed us first.” Jolyne defended. “So what are you two doing?”

“Oh, we were just looking at that Phantom Aficionados thing Ryuji showed us earlier. It’s actually kinda interesting.”

“What, more comments?”

“Not just that. There’s also a poll on there.” She explained, holding the screen towards them.

**POLL: Do you believe that the Phantom Thieves are real?**
“Wait, 6%? Seriously?” Ryuji asked. “I know we can’t actually prove that we made Kamoshida confess, but come on!”

“Are you really surprised? People are already rationalizing why he confessed when he did, like he did it because he felt guilty or wanted to do it on his terms.” Morgana answered, and Ryuji sighed.

“Still…”

“That isn’t all. There’s also something called ‘requests.’” As soon as Ann stated that, expressions of curiosity spread across their faces.

“Requests?” Jolyne asked, and Ann tapped the phone screen a couple of times.

“It’s a part of the website. Apparently, you can submit the name of someone you want to have a change of heart.” Ann explained as she navigated to the page, before showing it to them. Sure enough, there were pages of people making requests for who they wanted to have a change of heart.

‘Please make my math teacher stop giving so much homework.’ ‘Make my mom stop being such a bitch.’ ‘Tell my boss to get off my ass.’ Doesn’t seem like much. Just a bunch of people wanting us to make life easier for them.” Jolyne read. “Doesn’t really seem like anyone with ‘distorted desires.’”

“Yeah, that’s most of it, but we found one that actually seems genuine. Let’s see, where is it…” Ann said, and turned the phone back to herself.

“It was on the third page.” Morgana advised, and soon enough, Ann’s eyes lit up.

“Here we go! ‘Dear Phantom Thieves. Recently, I broke up with my boyfriend. I thought he was fine with it, but the past few weeks, I’ve been seeing him all over the place, staring at me weirdly. His name is Natsuhiko Nakanohara, and he works as a bank teller. I’m worried he may try something soon, but the police don’t believe me. I’m asking if you can please do something before he crosses a line.’” Ann read out loud. Jolyne was just staring at the table in front of them, while Ryuji had his hands clasped in front of him. “There are a few more like that. Of people just pleading to us to get them out of a bad situation. Like we’re their only hope. I wish there was something we could do…” Ann said, and a light seemed to go on in Ryuji’s head.

“Wait a minute…hey, Morgana, you said that Palace thing formed because Kamoshida’s desires got outta hand, right?” Ryuji asked, and Morgana nodded.

“That’s right.”

“So, if anyone can have a palace, then that means they have a Shadow, and that means they can have a change of heart, right?” Ryuji asked, and Morgana nodded.

“That’s right.”

“Out of the three of them, he figured it out first? Never saw that coming…” He muttered, before recomposing himself. “That’s right. By taking the Treasure of a person with distorted desires, then we also take away the source of those desires, causing a change of heart.” He explained.

“Why bring this up now, Ryuji?” Jolyne asked.

“You guys have noticed it too, right? The way everyone’s looking at us.” He said, and Jolyne took a glance around. Sure enough, the extravagantly dressed people around them were staring at them, whispering to each other. She didn’t need to use Stone Free to figure out what they were talking about.

“Yeah, so what? They’ve been looking at us like that ever since we got here.” Ann replied, and his
clasped hands tightened.

“It didn’t bother me when we got here, but after we ran into that guy by the elevators, it started really getting under my skin. Then when Ann started talking about that Phantom Official crap, I started thinkin’…what if we could change the hearts of people like that?” The former track star stated, causing Jolyne and Ann’s eyes to widen.

“Ryuji, what are you saying?” Jolyne asked, and he nervously swallowed.

“I’m sayin’…I think we should continue being the Phantom Thieves.” He stated, and the ambient noise of the restaurant faded away. There was dead silence around the table, as the other three stared at the false blonde. “Hear me out. We put all that work into changing Kamoshida’s heart, but no one even believes in us. Plus, you saw how Mishima came up to us after the confession, and then Shiho thanked you yesterday…if it wasn’t for us, they’d still be dealin’ with all that crap. US, of all people!”

“I…kinda agree.” Ann said, drawing their attention. “If I ignore the people going through the kind of stuff Shiho did, then I’d go back to that same person I was before, the one who didn’t care about what happened to anyone else.” She stated.

“Well, I guess that’s true…” Morgana muttered, before he seemed to smirk. “You guys are under my tutelage. With me guiding you, there’s nothing we can’t accomplish as Phantom Thieves!”

“For once, we agree!” Ryuji exclaimed with a grin, and Jolyne stared at the table as she began to think.

She had never even considered that possibility. That the power that they all possessed would be able to help such a wide range of people, one that extended beyond their immediate vicinity. If Jolyne could stop what had happened to her friends, what had happened to her, from happening to other people…well, now that wasn’t much of a choice, was it?

“Alright. I’m in.” She stated, and Ryuji pumped his fist in the air.

“Alright!”

“Hey, keep it down! There are still people around!” Morgana scolded.

“So if we actually do this…that means we’ll have to fight more of those Shadow things, doesn’t it?” Ann asked, and Morgana nodded.

“That’s right. That’s unavoidable.”

“Eh, big deal. Those things aren’t so tough.” Ryuji said, and Morgana simply rolled his eyes.

“Sure, I’ll let you keep thinking that.” With that, his face straightened out into one of determination. “So, we’re all agreed that this is the course of action we wish to take, right?”

“Hell yeah!”

“I’m in if you guys are.”

“Fine by me.”

“Heh. Even though you guys are just fledglings, we’re a full blown organization now!” Morgana stated, and Ryuji grasped his knee with a grin.
“We’re gonna take all those shitty adults by surprise, and leave our mark on the world!” Ryuji cheered, and Ann turned to Jolyne.

“Are you ok with being our leader?” She asked, causing the transfer student’s eyes to widen.

“Wait, me?”

“Hey, no objections here. I can’t do all that responsibility stuff, so I’m fine trusting you with it.” Ryuji said.

“Hey, don’t I get a say in this? Though since Lady Ann made the nomination…very well. I suppose you did lead us admirably through the Castle.” Morgana stated, and Jolyne was speechless for a moment…before she began to smile.

“Alright, I accept.” Jolyne said, looking at the friends that surrounded her. Before, they had all been outcasts. People with no place to fit in. But that wasn’t true anymore. Now, they had all forged bonds with one another, bonds that would be tested by the trials and tribulations that were waiting for them. Now, they were something more.

Now, they were the Phantom Thieves of Hearts.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve been excited to write the next chapter for a while. The anticipation is almost killer
Chapter 14: Mementos

Chapter Summary

The Phantom Thieves are back in business, and run into a dark presence in a new world.

Chapter Notes

Not nearly as long a wait this time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 14: Mementos

11/20/20XX, Unknown Location

Sae and Jolyne sat across from each other, almost staring each other down. “Any questions? You got awfully quiet when I started talking about Stands.” Jolyne stated.

“That’s because there was no need for an explanation. The information you provided not only matches up with my theory that you used unorthodox methods to carry out your crimes, but it also matched up with certain rumors that have been floating around law enforcement for years, about people who possess extraordinary abilities that are undetectable by normal people.” Sae explained, and Jolyne lightly chuckled.

“Guess Speedwagon wasn’t as thorough as they thought they were…” Jolyne said to herself, and Sae folded her arms.

“So, you managed to enact this ‘change of heart’, and force Kamoshida to confess. You all could have stopped there, returned to your lives and put all that Metaverse business behind you. But you didn’t. I have to ask…why?” The prosecutor asked, and Jolyne mirrored her movement of folding her arms.

“Who’s to say? Maybe I did it because I wanted to help people. Maybe I did it so I could feel important. Maybe I did it for the thrill. Maybe I did it because I was bored. Who knows the truth?” The captured transfer student stated, and Sae let out a sigh. Getting a straightforward answer as to the exact nature of the young woman’s actions would be like slamming her head against a brick wall. Jolyne’s file had indicated that this would be the case, but Sae figured she’d be at least a little more forthcoming. For now, it was clear that Sae wouldn’t know anything until Jolyne didn’t want her to. Sae glanced at the clock on the wall, and bit back a curse. She didn’t have time to waste on that right now.

“Very well. Let’s move onto your next target, shall we?” The prosecutor stated, pulling a file out of her bag and placing it on the table. Jolyne saw that there were big red letters on it that read ‘CLASSIFIED.’ Sae opened the file, revealing a picture of a man in his 70’s, with long grey hair, short facial hair, and wearing traditional Japanese clothing. “Ichiryusai Madarame, age 71. A world
renowned artist known for the wide range of styles he displayed. However, over the past few years, rumors began to pop up that he wasn’t as versatile as he appeared. That he abused his pupils and plagiarized their works as his own, effectively ending their careers before they began. However, no one was ever able to find any concrete proof to verify these rumors…”

“Until the Phantom Thieves showed up.” Jolyne finished, and Sae nodded, leaning forward.

“Tell me everything you know. How this man first came to your attention, how you decided he would be your next target, how you confirmed the veracity of these rumors…leave nothing out, or I’ll make sure they lock you up and throw away the key.” Sae demanded, and Jolyne sighed.

“Good grieved, you’re just as persistent as she said you’d be…” Jolyne muttered under her breath, before leaning forward as well, placing her arms on the table. “Alright, have it your way. It all started after we celebrated taking down Kamoshida…”

Friday, 4/29/20XX

After the Phantom Thieves had made their vow to stay together and change society for the better, they had planned to meet together the next day and plan out their next move. Unfortunately, things didn’t go as smoothly as that. It turns out, since they didn’t have school all week on account of Kamoshida’s confession, Ryuji’s mother decided that the best use of her son’s time would be to have him run some errands for her, and being who he is, Ryuji couldn’t exactly say no to her. Meanwhile, Ann was spending a decent amount of time at Shiho’s house, wanting to be there for moral support when the cops came around asking questions about Kamoshida, which they did on Thursday.

In the meantime, Jolyne and Morgana had been exploring the city, finally getting a feel for their surroundings. They went to the electronic wonderland known as Akihabara, gone to the top of the Tokyo Tower in Minato, checked out the mall in Harajuku, seen the page filled “Book Town” of Jinbocho, passed by the red light district of Shinjuku by train…just generally getting a feel of the wide range of locations that Tokyo seemed to offer, if only so Jolyne could start thinking of the big city as ‘home.’ She still had not returned the bag that Iwai had given her earlier that week, choosing to stay way from Untouchable until she could be certain that the police weren’t still watching it. Sojiro hadn’t had a chance to teach her how to make a cup of coffee yet, as he always had to leave as soon as it looked like business was done for the day.

It was now Friday, and the Phantom Thieves were gathered inside of Shibuya Station. Ryuji was sitting on the ground, Ann was leaning against the walls of the entrance, and Jolyne was standing just in front of them, Morgana’s bag on the ground. “Alright, so why’re we here?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne shrugged.

“Beats me. Morgana just told me to tell you guys to meet us here.” She responded, and Morgana stuck his head out of her bag.

“I promise, it’ll all make sense soon. Lady Ann, do you still have that message about the man stalking his girlfriend?” Morgana asked, and Ann nodded, pulling out her phone.

“Yes, I took a screenshot.”

“Excellent. Jolyne, take out your phone.” He instructed, and Jolyne did just that.

“We’re using that Meta Nav thing again, right?” Ryuji asked, referring to the strange eyeball shaped app that was on all their phones. Morgana nodded at this.

“That’s right. Since you three can’t crossover naturally like I can, the Meta Nav is our only way to
“Alright, so we’ve got his name, and we know he’s a bank teller, right?” Jolyne asked, and Ann nodded. “So that means all we need is a location, and what his Palace is.”

“Actually, that won’t be the case this time.” Morgana interjected, and they all looked at him.

“What do you mean? We needed all that stuff to get to the Palace, didn’t we?” Ann asked.

“True, but that was a fully formed Palace, generated by Kamoshida’s distorted heart running rampant. A man like this Nakanohara guy isn’t that far along yet, so he doesn’t have a Palace yet.” The Not-Cat explained, and Ryuji’s brow furrowed.

“I’m confused.”

“Just sit back and watch. Jolyne, can you open the Meta Nav?” Morgana asked, and his caretaker obliged, opening the strange eyeball shaped application.

“Alright, now what?” She asked.

“Say the target’s name, and then ‘Mementos.’” He instructed, and Jolyne touched the speaker icon on her phone and cleared her throat.

“Natsuhiko Nakanohara. Mementos.” She said aloud, and to her surprise, the app began to react.

“Destination Found. Beginning Navigation.” As soon as those words left her phone, all four of them experienced a familiar sensation. The world around them began to ripple and distort, and the volume of the crowd going about its daily routine began to vanish. Before long, the noise vanished altogether, as did the people who had been there a second ago.

“Whoa!” Ryuji exclaimed, jumping off the ground as they all looked around. “Where…where did everybody go?!”

“I have no idea. I don’t…whoa!” Jolyne staggered as she took a step, Ann catching her by the arm to make sure she didn’t fall.

“You ok?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. It just…it feels like I’m walking on air!” Jolyne answered, steadying herself as they all got used to the sensation.

“Is this that Nakanohara guy’s palace?” Ann asked, and Morgana hopped out of Jolyne’s bag.

“You’re not completely wrong, but you’re not right either.” He answered, sitting down in front of them. “This is a different sort of Palace. This…is Mementos.”

“Ain’t that the stuff you put in soda to make it explode? What’s that got to do with where everyone went?” Ryuji asked, and Morgana sighed.

“That’s not…never mind. It’ll just be easier to show you.” Morgana said, standing up on all fours and heading towards the stairs. “Well? Come on!” He beckoned, vanishing down the stairs into what should’ve been the Shibuya Underground. The three humans all exchanged a glance, before they followed after him. They came off the stairs into an area that resembled the ticket gates, only something was different. The area was bathed in a deep, almost hellish red, with stuff resembling veins growing on the pillars. The information monitors were nothing but static, and those red veins
decorated the escalators that would have lead down to a subway platform.

“Whoa…what is this place?” Jolyne asked as they looked around, taking it all in. As they looked around, Ryuji noticed something.

“Hey, our clothes changed!” he declared, and his two companions looked down at themselves. Sure enough, they were all dressed in the attire they had worn in Kamoshida’s palace. Jolyne now wore the black trenchcoat and domino mask of Joker; Ann wore the red leather catsuit and cat mask of Panther; and Ryuji now wore the black jacket and skeleton mask of Skull.

“Wait, does Nakanohara already know we’re here…?” Ann hasped out, and the others tensed up, eyes scanning for attackers.

“That’s right. The Shadows have known we’re here since the moment we arrived” Morgana’s boyish voice said, and the others all looked to see him in his big headed bipedal form.

“What the hell?! How about a little warning next time!” Ryuji scolded.

“Calm down. We’re perfectly safe here. The Shadows never come up here.” Morgana answered, and Jolyne crossed her arms.

“Alright, what the hell’s going on, Morgana? What is this place?” Jolyne demanded.

“This is Mementos. Think of it as everyone’s Palace.” He answered, and Ryuji raised an eyebrow.

“Everyone’s Palace? The hell does that mean?”

“A Palace like Kamoshida’s only forms when a person’s desires become extremely distorted. Instead of many individual Palaces, the general public has one gigantic shared Palace. That is this place.” Morgana explained, and Ann looked around.

“Now that you mention it, this place does feel a bit different than Kamoshida’s Palace…”

“So when you say ‘shared’, does that mean that everyone’s desires are all just put together?” Jolyne asked, and Morgana tapped his chin as he thought of the best way to explain it.

“Let’s just say…this place is the ‘Collective Unconscious’…no you wouldn’t understand that…” He muttered.

“So if this place is ‘everybody’s Palace’, then does that mean we can use this place to change the hearts of people who don’t have Palaces?” Ann asked, and Morgana grinned from ear to ear.

“I knew that you would figure it out first, Lady Ann. You’re as smart as you are beautiful.”


“Lady Ann’s right. However, the steps to do so here are a bit different, and I’ll explain more when we get there.” Morgana stated, and Jolyne sighed.

“Good grief…” That was when a lightbulb went off in her head. “Wait. When we were going to take on that Matsumoto guy, you said you had an idea in case he overwhelmed us. Was this it?” The leader asked, and the diminutive thief nodded.

“That’s right. If that happened, I would’ve had you use the Meta Nav to bring him here, and you could’ve used your Persona to finish him off.” He answered, and Jolyne fought back a chortle. There would’ve definitely been no hiding this from Josuke after that.
“So how do we find that Nakanohara guy down here?” Ryuji asked.

“Simple: we use the Meta Nav. Joker, check your phone.” Morgana stated, and Jolyne pulled her phone out of her pocket. The Meta Nav was still open, but instead of the eyeball dominating the screen, there was a small map of the floor they were on, in addition to a red arrow pointing downwards. “That’ll guide us straight to Nakanohara.”

“Wait, so this place is already mapped out?” Ann asked, and Morgana shook his head.

“That wouldn’t work in a place like this. Public opinion is a fickle thing, something that never stays the same for long. That applies to this place as well, seeing as it’s generated by the thoughts and desires of the general public.”

“So what are you trying to say? That this place changes every day?” Ryuji asked, and he nodded.

“That’s right. Mementos never stays the same for more than a day, always changing it’s shape and size. The only thing that never changes is that Mementos always looks like a subway.” Morgana explained.

“But why does it look like this?” Ann asked.

“Think about it. In a big city like Tokyo, the train is most people’s primary form of transportation. You can’t get anywhere without cramming yourself into a metal tube with dozens of other people, and staying underground for who knows how long. When you think of this place as the Palace of the Population, it makes sense that it would manifest like this.” Morgana explained.

“Uh, right. Makes total sense…” Ryuji said, scratching the back of his head. “So…how’s the Meta Nav going to help us find that Nakanohara guy?”

“Mementos is massive, with more twists and turns than I can ever count. If we just wander around aimlessly, then we could be here for hours, maybe days. I don’t know exactly how, but I’m willing to bet that the Nav will guide us to where his Shadow is.” He answered, and Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“Wait, it’s that big? Are we just going to walk around?” She asked, and Ann groaned.

“God, I hope not. These boots are not made for that…” The red-clad model lamented, and Morgana smirked.

“Leave that to me! My time has finally come!” He said, and began to focus. “Morgana…Special…” He bent his short knees, before jumping into the air and performing a somersault. “…Transformation!” He exploded into a puff of smoke, and something dropped down onto the ground. However, it wasn’t the diminutive, mascot-like body they had gotten used to, or the feline body that he assumed during their day-to-day lives. Instead, what fell to the ground was a medium sized van, one that resembled a Citroen H van with coloration that resembled Morgana’s. “Come now, Panther! You get first dibs!” Morgana’s voice said, seeming to emanate from the van’s grill. The Phantom Thieves reacted accordingly.

“Holy shit!” Ryuji exclaimed, backing up.

“The fuck?!” Jolyne asked, her jaw dropping.

“W-what? W-why are you a car now?!” Ann asked, dumbfounded at the sight they had all just witnessed.

“This comes from the way cognition materializes here in the Metaverse, plus a little bit of extra
training. It’s just like how you guys transform.”

“That answers literally nothing!” Jolyne responded. “I don’t know about you guys, but I can’t turn into a car.”

“For some reason, ‘cats turning into buses’ is a widespread cognition among the general public.” Morgana answered, and they all let out a groan as they realized the reason.

“Alright, so why didn’t you do that in the Palace?” Ryuji asked.

“Are you serious? I couldn’t transform inside that cramped castle, with all those hallways and stairs!” The cat-bus retorted, and Ann noticed that Ryuji had been slowly sneaking over towards the door…

“Hey! Ladies first!” She called out, grabbing him by the collar of his jacket.

“Ack!” He yelped out, grabbing onto the rear view mirror.

“Hey, be gentle! That’s still part of my body!” Morgana scolded, and Jolyne just sighed as she watched the struggle unfold.

“Good grief…” A few minutes later, they were all seated in the back seat of Morgana, with Joker in the middle, Skull on the right, and Panther on the left. “Alright, are you two good?” Joker asked, and her companions both nodded. “Alright, then. Let’s roll out!” She ordered…and nothing happened.

“What are you three doing?” Morgana asked, his voice booming from the speakers around the car.

“Uh, we’re waiting on you.” Ann said, and a sigh exited the speakers.

“I can’t drive myself! I need someone to drive me so we can go!” Morgana said, and the Thieves all looked at one another.

“I have no clue how to drive. Do either of you know how to drive?” Ann asked, and Ryuji shook his head.

“My mom doesn’t even own a car.” He answered, and they all looked at Jolyne.

“I mean…kind of? My grandpa took me into a parking lot to show me the basics last year…” The blondes began to smile… “…and I hit a lamp post. Literally the only other thing in the lot.”

“Well…that’s certainly better than nothing, isn’t it?” Ann suggested, and Jolyne took a dry swallow.

“Hey, if you smash up my beautiful face, I’ll never forgive you!” Morgana said as they rearranged themselves, with Jolyne in the driver’s seat, Ann in the passenger’s seat, and Ryuji in the back seat all by himself.

“Alright, let’s see here…” Jolyne said to herself, looking over the driver’s side area. This wasn’t anything like Sadao’s sedan. Where was the ignition? Where was the gear shift?

“Well? Start the engine!”

“How am I supposed to do that? Do you have a key or something?”

“Why would you need a key? There’s a switch down next to the steering wheel.” Jolyne looked where he indicated, and sure enough, there was a switch. She placed a red handed glove on the switch, and the car seemed to tremble. “H-hey, that tickles!” Jolyne grasped the switch and turned it. “Ohhhhh yeah….that’s the spot~” Morgana purred out as his ‘engine’ roared to life, and suddenly
they were all acutely aware of what exactly they were inside of.

“Stop it. That’s creepy.” Jolyne scolded.

“What a creepy ass car…” Ryuji mumbled.

“Hey, don’t underestimate the power of my meowtary engine!” Morgana shot back, and Jolyne took a deep breath as she looked at the steering wheel in front of her. She placed her hands at 10 and 2, just like Sadao had shown her, and tapped her foot on the gas. Sure enough, the engine revved up a little. Swallowing the lump in her throat, she put her foot on the gas…and they went full throttle, diving into Mementos.

Somewhere in the depths of Mementos, a presence stirred. It could sense the Phantom Thieves, the outsiders invading it’s domain. That wouldn’t do. All outsiders must be purged, in order to maintain balance. Chains began to clink together as the presence slowly began to move forward, slowly ascending the levels of the Palace. All outside invaders had to be erased, had to be cleansed. Then, the presence could go back to it’s quiet life.

If one had to ask Jolyne how her first foray into a mythical demon realm built upon the thoughts of Tokyo’s population, ‘boring’ would not have been what she expected to be her first word. But alas, boring was very much the most accurate description of their trip through Mementos. So far, it consisted of them driving through the vein-laced tunnels of Mementos, following the Meta Nav’s instructions. They faced no trouble, save for the occasional Shadow, but those were weak, being dispatched by their Personas rather quickly. “Come onnnnn.” Ann groaned out, staring out the window at the tunnel walls.

“This is so…boring…” Ryuji complained, stretched out across the back seat. “Jolyne, how much longer we got?” Jolyne glanced at the Meta Nav in her lap, continuing to follow the directions that the app was giving her.

“I have…no idea.” Jolyne responded, keeping an eye on the tracks in front her as she did her best to keep the car going straight. “Hey Morgana, how do we know when we’ve found Nakanohara’s Shadow?”

“I’m not entirely sure, but if his distortion’s strong enough, then it should be something we’ll notice.” Morgana explained.

“You mean like that?” Ann said, and Jolyne and Ryuji turned their heads over to where she was indicating. The tracks began to raise up and distort, surrounding a swirling, hellish red vortex. Jolyne looked down at the Meta Nav, and sure enough, the arrow was pointing towards the swirling hellmouth.

“Well that certainly looks distorted…” Ryuji said, and Jolyne began turning the wheel towards the vortex of death.

“What is this place?” Morgana cut her off, already knowing what she was about to ask. “If I had to guess, I’d say that Nakanohara’s desires have grown to the point where his Shadow has begun to break free of the others, causing this area of Mementos to break off into it’s own pocket. In Ryuji
terms, it’s the beginning of a Palace.” He explained, and Ryuji couldn’t even retort as he and Ann looked around.

“So Kamoshida had a place like this too, right?” Ann asked, and Morgana nodded. Ryuji looked around some more, before he noticed something

“Hey, you said that guy works at a bank, right?” He asked, and Ann nodded.

“That’s right.”

“Wouldn’t he be dressed like that?” The other three looked where he was indicating, seeing a man standing all alone. He was dressed in a black suit, with a bowlcut and glasses.

“That’s the Shadow, alright. Come on, let’s go talk to him.” Morgana suggested, and Jolyne nodded. The four began to approach him, and the man turned towards them, his yellow eyes burning with paranoia.

“Who the hell are you?!” The man demanded, and Panther scowled.

“You’re that stalker, aren’t you? Haven’t you considered how your ex feels?” She asked, and Shadow Nakanohara sneered.

“Himiko-chan is my property! I can do whatever the hell I want with her! Besides, that bitch treated me like a plaything, dumping me as soon as she was done with me! What’s wrong with me doing the same?!” Nakanohara responded, and Skull stepped forward.

“You can’t go treatin’ someone like shit just ‘cause they did it to you! Otherwise, you’re no better than them!” Skull retorted, and leveled his hand at the Shadow. “We’re gonna change the hearts of all the shitty adults like you!” The Shadow scoffed at that.

“Please, there are millions of people far worse than me! What about Madarame? He took everything away from me, but you’re letting him off the hook!” Joker raised an eyebrow at this.

“Madarame? Who the hell is that?” She asked, but Nakanohara wasn’t listening anymore, as black and red energy began to pool around him.

“Himiko is mine, and mine alone! I won’t let anyone take away what’s mine ever again!” The Shadow bellowed out, and the energy erupted. When it died down, Nakanohara was gone, replaced with a demon, one with a cartoonishly large head and long arms with disproportionately large hands.

“Here he comes!” Mona warned, and Joker placed her hand over her mask.

“Arsene!” The mask vanished into blue flames as the winged demon materialized behind her. Black and red energy pooled into the Persona’s hands, and she lauched it at the transformed Shadow. He tried to dodge, but the energy blast still grazed him. Seeing the opportunity, fireballs from Carmen launched forward and hit Nakanohara. Zoro manifested and twirled his rapier, generating a gust of wind that increased the intensity of the flames. Captain Kidd was up next, hitting the demon square in the chest with a blast of electricity and knocking him down. “Now’s our chance! Get him now!” Joker ordered, and the others all nodded, brandishing their daggers, whip, and pipe as they rushed the demon, slashing and whipping and bashing the transformed Nakanohara all at once. The demon tried to stay standing, but he fell to his knees, transforming back into his original form.

“That was…easy. Like, I’m kinda pissed off at how easy that was. I barely even broke a sweat!” Skull stated, and Mona tapped his chin.
“My guess, he’s all bark, no bite. A weak person just trying to make himself look stronger than he actually is.” He commented, and Joker stared at the sniveling man on the ground.

“I… I was wrong. Forgive me…” Nakanohara pleaded, and his body began to shake. “That evil man… he used me, wrung every drop out of me that he could, and then he tossed me out.” He rationalized, and Joker raised an eyebrow.

“You mentioned that before. This that Madarame guy you were talking about?” She asked, and he nodded.

“That’s right. I was faced with the possibility of losing it all again, and I didn’t even care if she wanted me or not. I put her through so much stress…” Panther frowned, crossing her arms.

“Even if some evil bastard did mess you up like that, that doesn’t mean you can take it out on some innocent woman.” She scolded, and he nodded.

“I realize that now. From now on, I’ll put an end to her.” Nakanohara said, before he frowned. “…you’re the Phantom Thieves, right? The one who changed that volleyball coach’s heart, right?’

“That’s right. Guess we can add you to that list now too.” Ryuji stated.

“In that case… can you please change Madarame’s heart? Before he drags more people down with him…” The Shadow pleaded, and the Phantom Thieves’ leader nodded.

“If we ever come across this Madarame guy, I promise.” Joker replied, and the Shadow smiled as he began to faintly glow, before he vanished in a flash of light.

“That’s what happened to Kamoshida when we beat him, isn’t it?” Skull asked, and Panther nodded.

“This means that his Shadow went back to his actual body, and so he’ll have a change of heart, right?” She asked, and Mona nodded.

“That should be how it works, yes.” He replied, and began looking back towards the exit. “We don’t have a lot of time. We need to hurry up and get back to the real world soon.” Mona nervously said, and the others all looked at him.

“Why? You got a hot date or something?” Ryuji asked, and Morgana seemed to fidget.

“We’ve already been on this floor for a while. If we stay any longer, the Cleaner will come after us.” He answered, and they all raised an eyebrow.

“The Cleaner? What’s that?” Panther asked.

“I don’t know what it is. It’s not a Shadow, I know that much. It acts differently than that. All I know is that if I spend too much time on one level, then it starts to come after me, and it doesn’t stop until I’ve made it to the safe zone at the top.” Morgana explained, and they all took into account just how scared he looked.

“Alright, if you say so. Let’s go.” Jolyne said, and Morgana turned back into his car form.

They had all loaded back into the van, and began to drive back towards the surface entrance. For a while, it seemed like it was all going according to plan… until Jolyne slammed on the breaks. “Yow! What was that for?!” Ryuji demanded.

“That’s it…” Morgana whimpered out, and Jolyne pointed in front of them. The other two looked up
to see a figure standing there on the tracks. It was humanoid, standing at about 275 cm. It wore tattered red robes, with a chains wrapping across it’s torso that clinked together as it moved towards them. However, through the robes, Jolyne could almost make out what looked like…was that a suit? A faded purple suit? A hood covered it’s head, a face with sunken cheeks and eyes that gazed right at them.

“So that’s the Cleaner…” Joker gasped out, all of them staring at it as it slowly walked towards them. Ann’s mouth went dry, sweat beaded Ryuji’s forehead, and Jolyne gripped the steering wheel. It slowly marched towards them, chains clinking with each and every step it took.

“Think we can take him?” Ryuji asked, but before Jolyne could answer, a Shadow rounded the corner, just behind the Cleaner. Rather than the knights that had guarded Kamoshida’s castle, the shadows in Mementos resembled large, humanoid blobs, that were bereft of features save for the expressionless white mask that was where the face would be. The Shadow loomed behind the Cleaner, staring down at the mysterious figure. The Shadow raised it’s hand above it’s head, ready to bring it down and clobber the Cleaner…When the air behind the Cleaner began to shimmer, beginning to take a shape, and the Cleaner finally opened its mouth, saying a single phrase in it’s raspy voice.

“Killer Queen.” As soon as it said that, the dark aura behind it fully took shape. It became a muscular, humanoid being, with a head that resembled a cat’s head and two red, cat like eyes. It was light pink in color, with two dark, leather like spiked gauntlets around its hands, with a similarly garter belt around it’s waist. On its shoulders, ankles, belt buckle, and back of its hands was an emblem of some sort of skull with pointed ears like the one on it’s head. Chains were wrapped across its pink, muscular chest. Jolyne’s eyes widened as she saw it manifest.

“That’s…that’s a Stand…” She gasped out, causing the others to have a similar reaction. They all watched as the Cleaner’s Stand raised it’s right hand, and tapped the shadow in it’s chest. There was a faint *click*, and the Shadow exploded, contorting in a way that was almost as if it was ripped away from the inside, until there was nothing left.

“That’s it’s power. If it touches you, it’s all over.” Morgana whimpered out, the whole van trembling. That trembling only increased in intensity when the Cleaner looked directly at them.

“…shit.” Jolyne didn’t hesitate, punching the gas. As the vehicle shot forward, Panther opened her door, leaning her head outside as her mask visited.

“Carmen!” The rose dressed Persona manifested behind her, firing balls of fire at the Cleaner. The Cleaner moved Killer Queen in front of it, crossing it’s arms to block the fireballs. Joker swerved Morgana to the left of the Cleaner, scraping against the tunnel walls as she did her best to avoid the Cleaner’s reach.

“Ow! That hurts!” Mona yowled out as they shot past the Cleaner.

“Sorry! I’ll make it up to you when we get back!” Joker apologized as they sped away. Ryuji looked behind him, but to his surprise, the Cleaner wasn’t giving pursuit. Instead, it just raised Killer Queen’s right arm and pointed it at them.

“Sheer Heart Attack.” The skull emblem on the right hand popped off and flew at them, beginning to change shape. It shifted into a small, tank-like shape, with treads on the bottom that propelled it along the tracks, keeping pace with Mona as she sped along.

“Look over here…” It said, and Ryuji grimaced.
“Uh, guys! It just threw something at us! It’s chasing us!” He yelled back, and Jolyne pushed the pedal to the metal. As they zoomed passed a Shadow, Skull noticed that the tank thing changed direction, plowing into the Shadow and exploded, before resuming it’s pursuit of them. “Can we go a little faster, please?!”

“I’m going as fast as I can!”

“Look over here...look over here...look over here...” It chanted, chasing after them with no yielding. Skull cursed under his breath, watching as it slowly grew closer. He got into the very back of Mona, and kicked open the back door. He brandished his pipe, and as the tank thing jumped towards Morgana. Timing it just right, Skull swung the pipe, knocking away Sheer Heart Attack into the wall just as it made a *click*. It exploded against the wall, the shockwave rocking Mona, and Skull was about to fall out the back...

“Stone Free!” The Stand manifested behind Joker, reaching backwards and grabbing Skull before he could fall out and pulling him back in.

“Thanks…” He replied, but he noticed something else: that thing was still coming after them. “Oh come on!”

“Faster, Mona!” Panther shouted, and Mona groaned as Joker put all her weight down on the guess.

“We’re almost...there...just...a little...further...” The living van groaned out, and as they approached the stairways leading to the safe zone, Sheer Heart Attack quickly closed the distance, almost getting close enough...

When Morgana shot up the escalator, bumpy skidding into the Safe Zone. Sheer Heart Attack stopped at the bottom of the stairs, before it turned around and went back the way it came. The Phantom Thieves’ tumbled out of Mona, collapsing onto the ground as Morgana returned to his regular form. “Well...that sucked...” Jolyne panted out, and Ryuji just weakly nodded in agreement.

“That...that thing...it had one of those Stand things. How is that possible?” Ann asked, and Jolyne just shrugged.

“No clue. Maybe it was someone who got stuck here, just like Morgana did.” She suggested, and Morgana shook her head.

“I don’t think so. It wasn’t wandering around aimlessly like I was. It acted more like...I guess the closest thing is like an organism trying to purge outside organisms.” Morgana suggested, and Ryuji just sighed.

“Man, this place is seriously freaky...” He muttered out. “And that thing will come after us if we stay here too long?”

“If we stay too long on one level of Mementos, then it will. I’ve been able to lose it by heading to a lower level before.” Morgana replied.

“Just when I think I’ve got a grasp on all this...” Jolyne muttered out. “So, we’ve gotta be careful going forward. If that thing corners us, we’re dead.” She stated, and they began to get off the ground.

“Well, we don’t have anything else to do here. Let’s head back.”

Back on the level of Mementos they had been on, the Cleaner blankly stared in the direction that the Phantom Thieves had fled in, as Sheer Heart Attack returned to his right hand. He could sense that they were gone, that they were no longer in Mementos. The Cleaner would have pursued them further, but they had entered the Safe Zone. Going into that area was forbidden, both to him and to
the Shadows that populated Mementos, so he had to let them go. But they would be back. He was certain of that. For now, the Cleaner felt a faint sensation of tugging on his chains, an unknown sensation dictating for him to return to his resting place. And so the being that was once known as Yoshikage Kira obliged that urging, retreating into the depths of Mementos until the next intruder arrived.

*Shibuya Station*

The Phantom Thieves were now huddled together in the real world, standing in the exact same spot where they had entered Mementos. “Man, I feel exhausted…” Ann yawned out. “I almost forgot how tiring the Metaverse can be.”

“That’s why you gotta work on your stamina. Keep yourself from getting tired out so easily.” Ryuji jeered. “So, how will we know that Nakanohara guy had a change of heart? We gonna have to wait as long as we did for Kamoshida?”

“I don’t think so. Since Nakanohara’s Palace hadn’t formed yet, it should take a lot less time for his Shadow to return to him.” Morgana answered.

“Alright, that makes sense, I guess.” Jolyne replied. “How do you know all this stuff, anyway?” As soon as she asked that, Morgana’s face was downturned.

“I…I don’t know. About a month ago, I woke up in the safe zone of Mementos, and I couldn’t remember anything. All I knew was my name, and how the Metaverse worked. The only thing I knew for certain was that I had to get to the center of Mementos, no matter the cost.”

“No matter the cost…?” Ann muttered under her breath.

“Mementos isn’t just everyone’s Palace. It’s the source of all the Palaces. Incidents like Kamoshida, where a Palace would form with just one ruler, only began to happen recently. If we can do something about what’s causing these distortions, then I’m certain my appearance will…” He started to explain, where his voice choked.

“You wanted someone to save yo too, didn’t you?” Ann asked, and his eye’s widened.

“T-that’s not it! I just needed pawns to do the heavy lifting, that’s all!” He tried to rationalize, but Ryuji just scoffed.

“So that’s why you decided to start pokin’ your nose around with us.”

“I’ll help you.” Jolyne said, causing Morgana to freeze. “You’ve saved my ass more than a couple of times already, so the least I can do is help you get back what you lost.”

“I’ll help too.” Ann chimed in, and she glanced at Ryuji, who rolled his eyes and sighed.

“I guess if we come across anything that’ll get you back your memories while we’re doing this Phantom Thief stuff…I guess I wouldn’t mind helping you out.” He said, and tears began to well up in Morgana’s eyes.

“I’ll…I’ll be counting on you guys!” He stated, still trying to act tough.

“So, that begs the question…what do you guys think Morgana really is?” Ann asked, and Jolyne tapped her chin in thought.

“That’s a good question. Maybe he’s really a girl.”
“I think I’d be able to tell whether or not I was a boy! I know that much!” Morgana retorted, and Ryuji snickered.

“For all we know, he might not even be a human. He could be a dog, or even a car!”

“Watch it, Ryuji! How dare you compare me to one of those drooling, mangy mutts!” The not-cat defended. “That’s not important! What is important is that we now know that we can enact smaller changes of hearts by confronting the target’s shadow in Mementos. If we come across any eye catching leads, it may be worth following up on so we can get some practice in before our next big mission.”

“But there weren’t any posts that stood out to me. At least, none that had a name.” Ann responded.

“I bet that’ll change real fast if we can change the heart of someone famous enough, and get the Phantom Thieves’ name out there! Don’t forget, the big names are our real target!” Ryuji suggested. “What about a politician? Those guys are pretty corrupt, right? Or maybe an actor, or—”

“Slow down there, Ryuji. Let’s not get too ahead of ourselves.” Jolyne cut him off. “We can’t just rush in half-cocked. Besides, we still have school to worry about.” With that, the former track star’s excitement left him, and he almost seemed to deflate.

“Ugh, don’t remind me. I still haven’t even started the assignments they gave us to do…” Ann was momentarily taken aback.

“Ryuji, it’s been almost a week.”

“I know! I just...got busy, is all.” Morgana rolled his eyes at this.

“Busy with video games, maybe…”

“Hey! It ain’t my fault that stuff’s boring as hell!”

“Good grief…”

As the Phantom Thieves began to depart, all the while scolding Ryuji for his procrastination, the boy who had spoken with Josuke the previous week watched them depart from a fair distance away.

“What a unique looking person…

Chapter End Notes

SO yeah, that's a thing. As always, feedback is always welcome!
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The Phantom Thieves prepare for their next big challenge: exams.

Chapter Notes

Not so long of a wait this time. That's mostly because this and the previous chapter were originally one big chapter, but I decided to split it in two.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 15;

Monday, 5/2/20XX, Shujin Academy, Morning

Jolyne stifled a yawn as she approached Shujin Academy, trying her best to readjust to having to get up early yet again. “Coulda used another week…” She grumbled out, making sure her blazer was smoothed out and decent looking.

“Oh, Cujoh!” A voice greeted from her left, and turning to see Mishima walking up next to her.

“Oh, hey, Mishima.” She replied, before something clicked in her head. “Wait. You’ve been avoiding me like the plague ever since we talked to Kamoshida. Why are you talking to me now?”

The transfer student asked, getting him to scratch the back of his head.

“Well, I kinda felt like you resented me for leaking your criminal record online, so I kept my distance until now. Figured I might as well try and say sorry…”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I know Kamoshida forced you to do it.” Jolyne reassured, earning a sigh of relief.

“That’s a relief…” A smile spread across the blue haired boy’s face. He almost seemed like a completely different person than the guy Jolyne had met a few weeks ago. “So, did you hear about the Phantom Aficionado Website?” He asked, and Jolyne raised an eyebrow.

“You mean that Phantom Thieves’ fan site? I think Ryuji mentioned it once. Why?” She asked.

“Ooooh, Phan-Site. That’s a good one…” Mishima muttered to himself, before he got back on track, jabbing a thumb into his chest. “Well, I’m the one who put it together.” Jolyne’s eyes slightly widened at that.

“Wait, you made that thing? How?”

“Well, I don’t like to brag, but I’m pretty good with computers, particularly when it comes to social media. It’s why Kamoshida had me of all people leak your criminal record. He knew I could get it out there in a way that everyone could say it.” Mishima explained. “When that calling card was
posted, I put together the Phan-Site, just asking if people thought the Phantom Thieves were real or not, but it didn’t really get a lot of attention. But when Kamoshida actually confessed, it started to get a bunch of hits. I figured that there were people like me and...and Suzui who needed help, so I added the comments and request functions.”

“Damn, Mishima, I’m impressed.” Jolyne complemented, his smile evolving into a full on grin.

“Thanks! I hope it’ll help you guys going forward!” The volleyball player said, and Jolyne raised an eyebrow.

“What are you talking about?”

“Well, the Phantom Thieves, of course. You’re their leader, aren’t you? With Takamaki and Sakamoto?” As soon as Mishima said those words, Jolyne eyes widened. She grabbed his wrists, dragged him into an alleyway, and pushed him against the wall.

“What the hell are you talking about? Where did you even get that idea?” Jolyne asked, a scowl on her face.

“I mean, it’s kinda obvious when you think about it.” Mishima hastily replied, fear on his face. “Ever since you got here, you were locking horns with Kamoshida.”

“Kamoshida was an asshole who pissed off a lot of people. How do you know it wasn’t one of them?”

“Because of that calling card. It mentioned that he was the one responsible for…” Mishima took a dry swallow. “That he was the reason Suzui tried to kill herself. The only ones who knew that for a fact were you, Sakamoto, and me. And then when I saw you guys start hanging around Takamaki, even though you hadn’t talked much beforehand...well, the puzzle wasn’t that hard to put together after that.” He explained, Jolyne letting out a curse.

If Mishima had figured it out that easily, then that meant anyone could. And if a high schooler had figured it out, that meant it wouldn’t be that hard for the police to figure it out as well. And while they had no way to prove anything, the last thing the transfer student needed right now was to even be suspected of wrongdoing. But if Mishima went to the police with what he knew, then there would be no doubt that Jolyne would be heading to a cold cell in juvenile hall. That wasn’t even considering what would happen to Ryuji and Ann. Could Sojiro be indicted for harboring her, even if he had no idea…?

“Don’t worry, no one else knows. I’m pretty sure of that.” The web designer spoke up, pulling Jolyne out of her worse case scenario planning.

“Come again?”

“Like I said, the only ones who knew for a fact what Kamoshida did before he confessed are you, me, and Sakamoto. Everyone else only has rumors to go on, and after he admitted to spreading rumors about Takamaki, no one knows what to believe anymore.” He explained, and the Phantom Thief narrowed her eyes at him.

“Alright, but there’s still you to worry about. How do I know you won’t go to Kobayakawa or the cops?” She demanded.

“Are you kidding? After everything Kamoshida put everyone through, the last thing I want to do is turn in the ones who took him down!” Mishima responded, Jolyne supposed that made sense. “Look, the reason I even brought it up is because I want to help!” Jolyne’s eyebrows shot up at this.
“What do you mean?” She asked, and he nervously swallowed.

“Kamoshida forced me to leak your criminal record, and even though he admitted to spreading false rumors, there are still a lot of people who believe them. Because of what I did, you’re essentially a pariah, and so…” He swallowed again, before looking her in the eye, his once defeated eyes burning with determination. “And so I want to help the Phantom Thieves! Since I’m the administrator of the Phan-Site, that means that I can see everything people post on the site! Most of the comments so far have been just noise, but there are a few genuine cries for help in there. If you want me to, then I can send you the ones that really stand out! That way, not only can you help spread the Phantom Thieves’ name, then you can help the people that need it!” He pleaded, and Jolyne narrowed her eyes. Mishima’s breath hitched as she reached into her pocket...only for her to pull out her phone.

JC: Mishima knows.

RS: Knows what?

JC: He KNOWS.

RS: Oh.

RS: OH SHIT

AT: What the hell???

AT: How does he know?

JC: Says he figured it out after seeing the calling card.

JC: Apparently SOMEBODY put something in the calling card that only the four of us knew.

JC: I wonder what it could have been…

RS: Beats me…

AT: She’s talking about when you mentioned Shiho, you idiot!

RS: OH

AT: What’s he want? Money?

JC: He says he wants to help.

JC: Apparently Mishima’s the one who made that ‘Phantom Aficionado Website’

“Actually, I’m thinking about calling it the ‘Phan-Site’ from now on.” Mishima chimed in, having loomed over to read her texts, and she shoved his head away.

RS: For real???

RS: I guess he has always been good with computers and shit…

JC: He says he can point out comments that stand out, like the one about Nakanohara.

JC: I wanted to know what you guys thought before I said anything.

AT: As long as he doesn’t rat us out, I guess we can let him help…
RS: Same. That way, we don’t have to watch that comments thing all day.

“I agree. We have better uses for our time.” Morgana said from inside Jolyne’s bag, and confusion spread across Mishima’s face as his ears perked up.

“Was that a cat...?” He whispered to himself, before Jolyne put away her phone.

“Alright, we’ve got a deal.” She responded, and he grinned.

“Thank you! I promise, I won’t let the Phantom Thieves down!” He cheered.

I am Thou, Thou Art I

Thou Hast Acquired a New Vow.

It shall become the Wings of Rebellion

That Break thy Chains of Captivity

With the birth of the Moon Persona,

Thou Hath obtained the winds of blessing

That shall lead to freedom and new power!

With that, Mishima glanced at the watch on his wrist. “Oh crap, we’re almost late!” He groaned out, and glanced back at Jolyne. “You won’t regret this!” He said, before heading off towards the school.

“Looks like we got a fan.” Morgan’s commented.

“Looks like it. I just hope he’s not one of those ones that stalks idols or something.” Jolyne stated, and headed into the school.

Morning

“Settle down, everyone!” Kawakami ordered as she took her place at the front of the classroom.

“Now, I hope you all enjoyed your impromptu break. Unfortunately, we can’t afford to push back next week’s exams, so we’ll be moving forward at a more intense pace over the next week in order to make sure we cover all the material.” She stated, and a groan swept over the entire class.

“Seriously?”

“If they’re gonna make us miss a week of school, least they could do is push exams back!”

“Freakin’ curriculum...”

At her desk, Jolyne had to suppress a guilty frown. Sorry, everyone... She thought, when her phone vibrated.

RS: WHAT HAVE WE DONE????

Before Jolyne or Ann could respond, Kawakami spoke up. “Quiet down! We’ve got a lot of material to cover, so you may as well settle in.” The exhausted looking teacher said, and the class groaned as they began their lesson.

Lunchtime
Elsewhere in the school building, Makoto Niijima entered the principal’s office. “You wanted to see me, sir?”

“Ah, Niijima-san. Thank you for coming. Please, come in.” Kobayakawa beckoned from behind his desk, and Niijima entered his office. “I hope you don’t mind me pulling you out of lunch like this.”

“It’s fine, sir. I had a big breakfast on my way to school this morning.” She replied, and he smiled at her.

“I expected nothing less from our Student Council President.” The portly man answered, before his smile faded. “Now, I’m sure you’re wondering as to why I called you here.”

“It’s because of the incident last week, correct?” She asked, and Kobayakawa nodded.

“That’s right. You saw the state Kamoshida-kun was in, right?” Niijima nodded. “It was as if his personality had completely changed. Something’s not right, I’m sure of this.” At this, the scholarly girl’s brow furrowed.

“I’m... not sure I follow, sir.”

“From what I’ve heard in the days leading up to the incident, it appears that some students had been meddling in his business shortly before his absence. If those students did something to them...who could they be?” Kobayakawa pondered.

“Did you tell the police about this?” She asked, and he shook his head.

“The police had better things to do than to chase down vague rumors. I can’t go to them with this unless we have concrete evidence about their identities.”

“Principal Kobayakawa...do you think those students somehow forced Mr. Kamoshida to change?”

“That is what I wish to find out, even if it takes some probing of student matters. That it why I would like you to look into this for me.” He stated, and Niijima’s reddish brown eyes widened.

“Wait, me? A-are you sure?” She asked, and he nodded.

“After the incident, student distrust of the faculty is at an all time high. They would never tell me or any of the teachers anything. But if it were you, their beloved student council president...well, then they might just be a little more forthcoming.” Kobayakawa explained, but Niijima still looked a little unsure.

“While it’s true that there have always been many rumors regarding Mr. Kamoshida, there hasn’t been anything unusual lately. Except...” She trailed off, before it clicked in her head. “Wait, are you talking about those Phantom Thieves?” The yellow suited man nodded at this.

“That’s right. The timing of that message, and the specificity and accuracy of that message...they had something to do with it, I’m certain of it.” Kobayakawa answered, and folded his hands in front of him on his desk. “It is undeniable that Kamoshida has changed in some way. Whether it was the guilt over Suzui-san’s suicide attempt that prompted him to realize the full gravity of his crimes, or if these ‘Phantom Thieves’ somehow coerced him into confessing, I would like to have a full grasp as to what the truth is.” He explained. “In the meantime, the police and myself will be speaking to Mr. Kamoshida, but unless you can find the true culprits, then these nasty rumors will continue to tarnish our school’s reputation.” He noticed that Niijima still looked a little unsure, and decided to lay it on a little more thick. “You’re the only one who can pull this off.”
“Are you really sure about that, sir? Maybe one of the teachers could—”

“Nonsense. You’ve been at the top of your class since day one, even when faced with the loss of your father.” Kobayakawa noticed her tense up a little, but kept going. “Your conduct is exceptional, and your teachers’ favor you. Not only that, but I believe that investigative skills are in your blood. Between your father, who was a distinguished detective, and your sister, who is such an esteemed prosecutor at such a young age...well, investigating a few nasty rumors should be child’s play for someone of your pedigree.” And that was it. As soon as he mentioned her father and sister, Makoto took a sharp inhale.

“I’ll do my best, sir.” The president responded, and Kobayakawa warmly smiled at her.

“Thank you, Nijiiima-san. Once this is all over, I’ll write you a letter of recommendation to any college you chose.” He said, and she bowed.

“Thank you, Principal Kobayakawa.” The brown haired girl spoke, before turning around and leaving. However, as soon as the clicked shut, Kobyakawa’s warm smile turned into a sinister grin. Pulling out his phone, he began placing a call.

“It’s me, sir. Apologies for troubling you at such a busy time, but I just wanted to inform you about the matter we discussed earlier.” He said, and listened to the voice at the other end. “Yes sir, that one. I have all our bases covered. The investigation will begin immediately.”

Makoto exited the Principal’s office, allowing to let out a quick sigh. Asking her to handle the investigation like that...this was unlike anything that he had asked of her before. For a moment, Makoto doubted she could handle it. She considered calling Sae and asking her for help, but the brown haired girl brushed that off immediately. She knew exactly what her older sister would say: “I don’t have time to waste on something so insignificant. Can’t you handle that yourself?” So, Makoto would have to do just that. The only question was...where should she start? Makoto had never been one to pay too much attention to rumors, and there were already so many about Kamoshida and the Phantom Thieves that it was hard to tell what was worth listening to. But then, Makoto remembered something noteworthy. A few days before Kamoshida had confessed, Makoto had been coming out of the library, when she saw something noteworthy. A group of people coming out of a place they weren’t supposed to...

After School, Rooftop

“Ughhhhhh...” Ryuji groaned out, slumping back against a vent. “I seriously can’t believe they ain’t movin’ exams back.”

“I guess they want everything to look like it’s business as usual.” Ann suggested.

“I get that, but why do we have to move so fast? I can barely even keep track of what they’re sayin’ even when things are normal!” Ryuji complained.

“Might as well suck it up. Not much we can do now.” Jolyne lamented, trying her best to hide her nervousness. She wasn’t that good of a test taker either...

“Oooh, maybe we could change Kobayakawa’s heart! Make him push things back!” Ryuji suggested.

“We’re supposed to be keeping a low profile, remember? I don’t think forcing two Change of Hearts in a row at the same school is going to help with that.” Morgana shot down, and Ryuji almost seemed to deflate.
“Yeah, I guess you’re right…” He groaned out.

“I guess all we can really do is just study and do our best.” Jolyne responded, but Ryuji just groaned even louder. “Here’s an idea: why don’t we try studying together one day?”

“Sounds good to me. I get way too distracted when I study on my own…” Ann lamented, and Ryuji just nodded in agreement.

“My place?”

“Works for me.”

“Fine…” Ryuji groaned out, before Jolyne’s phone chimed.

YM: Hey, Cujoh, it’s me!

YM: I just wanted to let you know that I’ll do my best to follow through on our bargain!

“Is that Mishima?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne nodded. “Dude won’t stop texting me either. Keeps sayin’ stuff like ‘I won’t let you guys down!’”

“Do you think letting him know that we’re the Phantom Thieves was the best move?” Ann asked, and Jolyne shrugged.

“Not much I could do. He’d already figured it on his own-” She sent a momentary glare at Ryuji, who slightly flinched. “-and denying it would’ve just confirmed it for him.” Jolyne explained, and Ann crossed her arms as she sighed.

“Like I said before, as long as he doesn’t rat us out, I don’t have much of a problem. I’m just worried that he’ll get obsessed.”

“Nah, I don’t think we got anything to worry about. Dude managed to keep Kamoshida’s shit a secret.” Ryuji chimed in. “Besides, if that means someone else has to pour over all those comments and messages, fine by me. I was on there all day yesterday, and there wasn’t even a HINT of a hint as to where the next Palace was. Just people complainin’ about their teachers and parents.”

“I guess finding all that stuff online would be too easy. Finding both a name AND a location in all those comments would be asking too much.” The model lamented.

“Guess we gotta just find one ourselves.” The track star suggested, and MOrgana looked at him.

“Are you seriously suggesting that we look for a target even the police have ignored?” Morgana lamented, and Ryuji sighed.

“When you put it like that…” He grumbled. “Guess we can’t do anything until after exams are over.”

“We’ll wait and a little longer. If something doesn’t come up soon, then we’ll worry about coming up empty handed.” Jolyne instructed...when they heard the door creak open. Almost immediately, Jolyne grabbed Morgana and stuffed him into her bag, placing him behind Ryuji just as Nijima entered the rooftop, walking over to them.

“This place is off limits, you know.” Nijima scolded.

“We’ll leave as soon as we get done talking.” Jolyne replied, and Nijima began taking a look around at them.
She looked at Ryuji. “The troublemaker…” Then at Ann. “…the girl of rumor…” then finally, her gaze turned to Jolyne. “…and the infamous transfer student. That’s certainly an… interesting combination.” They all sat forward at this, narrowing their eyes at her.

“That’s one hell of a way to start a conversation.” Ann said, but Nijijima didn’t pay her any mind.

“It seems as though the three of you got to know Mr. Kamoshida pretty well before his confession.” She stated, and Jolyne had to keep her expression neutral.

“Not really. Just walked by him a few times in the hallway, that’s all.” Jolyne responded, and Makoto quirked an eyebrow.

“Are you playing dumb with me?”

“Jolyne’s only been here a few weeks. How much interaction do you think she could have had with him?” Ann defended, and Makoto simply folded her arms behind her back.

“I heard that Kamoshida used a volleyball team member to spread details of your criminal record to the student body. He effectively made you a pariah before you even began, ruining your chances of fitting in with your peers.” Nijijima pressed, Jolyne gestured to the two humans beside her.

“I don’t know, I feel like I’m fitting in pretty well with these two.”

“What’s all this about?” Ryuji questioned. “Jolyne’s been nothin’ but upstanding ever since she got here.”

“I didn’t mean to offend anyone. As I’m sure you’re all aware, many students have been affected by Kamoshida’s actions.” Ryuji and Ann both tensed up as soon as Nijijima said that, something that didn’t go unnoticed by Nijijima. “The rumors that have been floating around about that odd, garish looking calling card and it’s message aren’t going away either.”

“I dunno about ‘garish.’ I thought it looked pretty cool.” Ryuji said, and Stone Free’s arm manifested to lightly elbow him in the ribs.

“I didn’t expect the student council president to care about something like that.” Ann stated.

“Are we done here? We can’t really leave as long as you’re talking about us.” Jolyne asked, and Makoto softly smiled. However, this wasn’t a kind smile, but rather one that indicated she knew something they didn’t.

“I suppose you’re right. I was feeling so overwhelmed lately, between dealing with the fallout of Kamoshida and the intense pace of our classes, that I wanted to come up here and get some fresh air before they closed this place.” As soon as the Student Council President said that, their eyes all widened.

“Wait, what?”

“Oh, you didn’t hear? Apparently, a bunch of people have been coming up here without permission lately. The school doesn’t want to risk another suicide attempt, after all.” Ann had to bite her tongue to keep from responding, and Makoto turned around. “Sorry for disturbing you. Have a nice day.” With that, she exited the roof.

“Sheesh, what was that about?” Ryuji asked aloud, as Morgana hopped out of the bag.

“She’s onto us. That girl’s rather sharp. We need to be cautious of her.” Morgana said, and Jolyne
just stared at the door. Through all the student council president’s lecturing and scolding, she saw it again. The same thing Jolyne had seen when she met Nijimia on the train. That certain something hiding just under the surface, ready to explode at a moment’s notice.

“C’mon, let’s get going.”

**Sunday, 5/8/20XX, Afternoon, Leblanc**

The Phantom Thieves were all gathered in Jolyne’s attic room, books and binders strewn out across the floor. Exams began this week, officially making it cram time. They had been up there for about two hours now, studying the wide variety of subjects in front of them. English, Japanese, Literature, Math, Social Studies, History...they studied it all, and it was starting to take it’s toll. “Let’s see, next question. Kaku...cacoonsni? What does that mean?” Jolyne asked aloud, rubbing her temples as she sat hunched over some Japanese.

“Let me see it?” Ann asked, and Jolyne handed the study guide to her. “Oh, I know this one! It’s pronounced ‘kakushinhan.’”

“Oh yeah, I remember now. Isn’t that like, determination or something?” Jolyne mused as she took the paper back, before snapping her fingers. “That’s right! It means ‘having conviction that you’re right, even though you know that your actions are wrong.’” She answered, checking the answer key to make sure she was right. “Alright, next one…”

Ann, meanwhile, was pouring over some English. “What is a wunderkind?” She softly read to herself, biting her thumb as she stared at the question. “Uh, that’s...I’ve almost got it…” Jolyne leaned over to Ann, subconsciously placing a hand on her back to steady herself.

“Oh, I know this one. It’s German, I think.” She stated. “Alright, so ‘wunder’ is German for ‘wonder’, and ‘kind’ means child. So if you put those two together, then you get…” Jolyne trailed off, letting her crush fill it in for herself.

“So you get ‘wonder child’....oh, is that like a prodigy or something?” Ann asked, and Jolyne nodded. Ann cheered to herself, writing in the answer and moving to the next one.

“Ughhhhh…” Ryuji groaned out, sprawled out across the couch with a textbook over his face. “It’s all just words...they don’t mean anything…”

“That’s why you need to study! Give them meaning!” Morgana jeered from his spot on Jolyne’s bed. Ryuji just set the textbook on the ground, and sat up.

“I need a break…” He muttered to himself before he saw something on the desk at the foot of the couch. “What’s that…?”

Jolyne had been studying her Japanese, when she heard Ryuji get up. She glanced up at him and her eyes widened.

In Ryuji’s hands was the locket Jotaro had given him, the one with the arrow shard What caused Jolyne’s eyes to widen, however, was the state of the locket: Ryuji had opened it up, revealing the arrow shard held within. “Whoa, was that you as a kid?  You don’t actually look that different…”

“Ryuji, put that thing down, now!” She yelled, startling him. He fumbled with the locket, and the two parts parted, both the locket itself and the arrow shard coming loose as dropping to the ground. “Stone Free!” The stand manifested and reached out, grabbing the locket in one hand and the arrow shard between two fingers, careful not to let it pierce her. Jolyne had no idea what would happen if a Stand user exposed themselves to the arrow, and she didn’t want to find out now. “What the hell is
wrong with you?!” She demanded, placing the arrow pack in the locket and shutting it.

“I-I’m sorry! I was just trying to stretch, t-then I saw it sitting there and just got curious!” He explained. “I-I’m sorry! I forgot that the arrow thing was in here!” Jolyne sighed as she got up, placing the locket back in the drawer of the desk.

“No, it’s my fault. I forgot to put it back in there after I got that fake medal out.” Jolyne answered.

“Don’t you know you aren’t supposed to touch other people’s stuff without permission?!” Morgana chastised, but Jolyne motioned for him to back off.

“Are you ok? That things didn’t stab you, did it?” That thing didn’t stab you, did it?” She asked, and Ryuji shook his head.

“Nah, I’m fine.” He answered, and Jolyne let out a sigh of relief.

“Good grief…” She muttered to herself. “Now, where were we?” With that, she sat down and resumed her studying, Ryuji decided he might as well get started to. However, unbeknownst to them, there was now a small, almost unnoticeable knick on his right hand…

Thursday, 5/12/20XX, Shibuya

Jolyne and Ryuji has just met up outside the Ginza Line, the latter rubbing sleep out of his eyes. “Rough night?” She asked, and he just nodded.

“I tried studying some more, but I just couldn’t focus. I just played video games all night. I’m totally gonna get destroyed…” He yawned out, and Morgana plucked his head out.

“We don’t have to worry about that, do we Jolyne?”

“Ehhhhhh…” Jolyne squeaked out, preferring not to answer. They looked to see Ann approaching them, who was also wiping the sleep from her eyes.

“Hey guys…” She yawned out.

“Hey.”

“How’s it going?” As soon as Ryuji asked that, Jolyne noticed that Ann was looking around.

“Something wrong?”

“I’m...not sure. Lately, it feels like someone’s been watching me every time I come through here.” Ann replied, and Ryuji’s brow furrowed.

“And? Everyone’s watching everyone here.”

“I...guess you’re right.” Ann said, but she still looked unsure. “...forget about it. Let’s get this exam stuff over with.”

Aoyama-Ichitome

Ann was just outside of the Aoyame station, checking her phone. It appeared as if Jolyne and Ryuji had been separated from her in the crowd, and she was waiting on them to find her. Behind her, a presence began walking up towards, keys lightly jangling with each step. The figure approached her, beginning to reach towards her...when she whirled around, disdain in her eyes as Jolyne and Ryuji appeared from behind a lamppost, standing in front of her defensively.
“Is this the guy?” Jolyne asked, and she nodded. When Ann had seen him get off at their stop, she knew he was stalking her, and so Ryuji and Jolyne had hid so that they could catch him.

Ryuji raised an eyebrow as he looked over the guy. He was tall and lanky, with dark blue hair and parted bangs that partly covered his left gray eye. He wore a collared white mandarin dress shirt, with a fleur de lis on the left side. “Uh, are you sure this is the guy? He doesn’t really look like a crazy stalker…”

“Hey, looks can be deceiving!” Ann retorted, and the boy spoke up.

“I’m sorry, is there something you want?” His voice was soft and sophisticated, and Ann scowled at him.

“Hey, that’s my line!” She shouted, pointing her finger in his face. “You’re the one who’s been stalking me for the past week!” The boy seemed caught off guard at this.

“Stalking you? That’s outrageous!” He declared, taken aback by the accusation.

“I don’t know what else you call following me all the way here!” She retorted, and the boy dryly swallowed.

“Well, that’s because...I simply figured it was the best way to approach and ask-”

“As if I’d ever go on a date with a creep like you!” Ann shot back, and his eyes widened.

“A date…? I’m afraid there has been a terrible misunderstanding. I simply figured that observing and following you would be the best way to accomplish my goal. You see, there’s a person I wished to approach, and I figured that the best way to find them would be to observe you. I apologize for any discomfort I may have caused.” He apologized, and they all looked confused.

“So, then...who’re you looking for?” Ryuji asked, and the boy turned to Jolyne.

“Please, I have to ask...will you be my muse?” He asked, and everyone froze. After a minute, Jolyne blinked, and said the first thing that came to her mouth.

“What the fu-”

TO BE CONTINUED

Chapter End Notes

Didn’t see that coming, didya?
Chapter 16: Art Appreciation

Chapter Summary

The Gang Goes to An Art Exhibit

Chapter Notes

Fun fact: Madarame and Yusuke share the same english voice actors as Kakyoin and Jotaro.

Chapter 16: Art Appreciation

“-ck?!” Jolyne exclaimed, flabbergasted by the strange boy’s even stranger request. The hell did being a ‘muse’ mean?

“Mind explainin’ yourself?” Ryuji asked, the Unforeseen Boy was about to open his mouth to respond, when a car pulled up next to the cur and interrupted him. The back window rolled down, revealing an older man with long grey hair tied back into a ponytail.

“Ah, there you are, Yusuke! I was wondering where you had gone off, too!” The man said, and then noticed the people next to Yusuke. “Oh, so this is where your passion led. All’s well that ends well, I suppose.” He said, and let out a hearty laugh. The boy, now identified as Yusuke, simply turned back to Jolyne, who was still slack jawed.

“I’m sorry. I finally saw you from the car, and I couldn’t help myself from chasing after you. I didn’t even notice the calls from Sensei. My feet had a mind of their own.” Yusuke explained. “Please, you’re the woman I’ve been searching for all this time! Please, will you-” Before he could go any further, Jolyne held up her hand.

“OK, before you say anything else, you gotta answer a few questions. Namely, who the hell are you, and why were you following Ann?” Jolyne asked, gesturing to the still irate Ann.

“Ah, my apologies. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Yusuke Kitagawa.” Kitagawa introduced.

Alright, so that’s question one down. Nice to meet you, I guess.” Ann responded. “So why were you following me if you were looking for my friend?”

“And what the hell’s that muse thing you were askin’ about?” Ryuji followed up.

“Allow me to explain. Recently, my art has been suffering. I’ve hit what can only be described as ‘artist’s block’, and-“

“Ok, slow down. What’s this about art?” Jolyne inquired.

“Oh, my apologies. I appear to have gotten ahead of myself. I am an art student, currently enrolled at
Kosei Academy.” Kitagawa answered, and Ryuji raised an eyebrow.

“Kosei? Never heard of it.”

“Kosei’s a school for gifted students, right?” Ann asked, Kitagawa nodding in confirmation.

“That is correct. I am currently enrolled there on an art scholarship, but the past few weeks, I have been experiencing…well, I suppose the closest equivalent is when an author suffers from what they call ‘writer’s block.’”

“Ok. How do I fit into all of this?” Jolyne asked.

“Last week, I was running an errand for Sensei in Shibuya, when I saw the three of you gathered in the subway. As soon as I saw you, with your unique features and combination of aesthetics, I found myself overcome with inspiration for the first time in weeks. I knew, then and there, that I must make you my muse!” Kitagawa explained, and the car honked its horn.

“Hurry, Yusuke! You’re going to be late!” The older man scolded.

“My apologies, Sensei! I’ll only be a moment longer!” Kitagawa apologized, before turning back to Jolyne.

“So, what the hell does being a ‘muse’ mean?” Jolyne asked.

“You would be the source to which I look to in order to draw inspiration for my artworks.” He explained.

“So…you’re not trying to ask me on a date?” Kitagawa looked taken aback at this.

“Of course not. Why would you think my intentions were so ignoble?” He asked.

*Good grief, this guy’s weird…* Jolyne thought to herself, while Kitagawa spoke again.

“I understand that this is a lot to ask, and you probably have school just as I do. Please, take a few days to consider my offer.” With that, Kitagawa fished into his pocket, retrieving three tickets from his pocket. “Sensei has an art exhibition opening at the Kame-Yu department store on Sunday. I will be there to help on opening day. If you could give me an answer in regard to being a model, I would greatly appreciate it.” Jolyne still looked unsure, but she took the tickets as Kitagawa looked at the two beside her. “I doubt you two have much interest in the fine arts, but I included tickets for you as well.”

“Yusuke!”

“I’m coming, Sensei.” With that, Kitagawa bowed. “I’m sorry for any trouble I may have caused you. I hope to see you on Sunday.” With that, he got into the car, the window rolling up as the car pulled away.

“Well…not how I saw that goin’ at all.” Ryuji said after a moment of silence.

“That dude was seriously weird. I just can’t believe he was looking for Jolyne, not me…” Ann muttered, and Ryuji cracked a mischievous grin.

“You jealous?”

“Of course not! I just thought it was weird that *I’m* the one he stalked!” As the two began to bicker, Jolyne uncrumpled the flyer, looking it over. It was an advertisement for an art exhibition at the
Kame-Yu in Shibuya, just like the strange boy had said. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, until Jolyne noticed the name on the flyer.

“Uh, guys?” Jolyne said, drawing the two out of their bickering. She held the tickets towards them, pointing at the name. Ryuji and Ann leaned forward, reading the contents.

“Come enjoy the works of…Ichiryusai Madarame?” Ann read aloud, and their eyes both widened.

“Wait, wasn’t Madarame the name that Nakanohara’s Shadow mentioned in Mementos?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne nodded. “Think it could be the him?”

“Well, on one hand it’s not exactly a common last name. On the other, it’d be one awfully big coincidence…” Ann contemplated.

“You’re not seriously thinkin’ about goin’ to that thing, are you?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne pursed her lip as she thought for a moment.

…I think I will.” Jolyne responded, but before she could elaborate on her decision, Morgana stuck his head out of his bag.

“I think it’s worth looking into later. Aren’t you three forgetting something?” He chimed in, and they had to think for a moment…

“Oh crap, exams!”

“We’re gonna be late!”

“Run for it!”

**Saturday, 5/14/20XX, After School, Shibuya Underground**

“It’s over!” Ann cheered, stretching her arms behind her head.

“It’s over…” Ryuji sullenly groaned, his entire face downcast.

“Gimme a break…” Jolyne groaned out, rubbing her temples to alleviate the migraine in her head.

“You two need to get your act together! You could have avoided this if you’d studied a little more!” Morgana scolded from inside Jolyne’s bag, and Ryuji just sighed as he pulled out his phone.

“No sense complainin’ about it now. Like it or not, they’ll come back graded next week.” He sighed out, beginning to idly drag his thumb across the screen.

“What’cha lookin’ at?” Jolyne asked.

“The usual site.” He answered, and let out another sigh. “It’s no use. There ain’t any useful info in any of these, and the number of new postings are getting less and less every day.”

“I guess everyone’s already getting ready to move on.” Ann stated, and Morgana scoffed.

“I refuse to let us become one hit wonders!”

“There’s no use getting antsy. Oh, I know what we can do!” Ann exclaimed. “We’ve still got a little money left over, so why don’t we go eat lunch somewhere?”

“Oooh, I want sushi! Or domestic raised eel!” Ryuji chimed in, and Jolyne sighed.
“Good grief, it’s always food with you two…” She muttered, when something clicked in her head. “We’ve still got those tickets to that art exhibition.”

“Well, yeah, but that’s tomorrow. Besides, I’m still a little weirded out by that Kitagawa guy…” The blonde model replied, and Morgana’s feline face twisted into a scowl.

“That damned Yusuke… I’ll never forgive him for causing Lady Ann such distress!” He sneered out.

“I dunno, he seemed more… awkward than creepy.” Jolyne replied, and Ryuji adopted a teasing grin.

“You fall in love with the guy already?” he teased, and Stone Free’s arm manifested to whack him on the back of the head. “Ow!” He groaned out, but noticed, that, as the arm disappeared, Ryuji thought that it had seemed solid, rather than the silhouette he had been able to see before…

“It’s not like that, smartass.” Jolyne retorted before Ryuji could think about it anymore, and out of the corner of his eye, Morgana could have sworn Ann looked almost… relieved? “Like Ann pointed out earlier, Madarame isn’t exactly a common last name, and it’s our only lead on what Nakanohara’s shadow said in Mementos.”

“That’s a good point…”

“I saw a special about that Madarame guy on TV, and his art’s like, really good. So even if that lead doesn’t go anywhere, we’ll at least be able to see some nice art.” Ann stated. “Besides, who knows the next time you’ll get free tickets to something like this.”

“And who knows? Maybe appreciating a little fine art for once will actually make you smarter.” Morgana jeered. “Appreciating the fine arts build character. Any Phantom Thief who can’t identify an original piece of artwork is unworthy of the name!”

“Alright, alright, I’ll go!” The former track star responded. “Sheesh, fine arts… I don’t see what’s so fine about ‘em…” he grumbled to himself.

“It’s settled then. I’ll meet you guys at the exhibit entrance tomorrow.” Jolyne stated, and Ann giggled.

“‘Going to an art exhibit’ sounds kinda mature…” She said to herself, but Ryuji just groaned.

“This is gonna be lame…”

_Yongen Jaya_

The bell above the door of Leblanc rang as Jolyne entered the empty restaurant. “Welcome home.” Sojiro greeted from behind the counter. “How’d exams go?”

“Eh, less said the better.” Jolyne responded, and instead of scolding her like she expected, Sojiro just chuckled.

“Trust me, I know the feeling. Tests were never really my strong suit when I was in school. Just make sure you study a little harder next time.” He instructed.

“Got it, Boss.” His ward responded, the restaurateur looked around his empty shop.

“Not really anyone here, and it’s a little too early to close up shop…” Sojiro muttered to himself, stroking his goatee. “Say, remember that conversation we had a while ago?”

“You mean the one where you asked for me if I wanted to help out around here?” Jolyne asked, and
he nodded.

“I know we’ve both been busy since then, and you’re probably tired from your exams. But if you’re up to it, I can get you started while it’s empty in here.” Sojiro asked, and Jolyne had to think for a moment. Sure, she was a little wiped from the exams, and they had the art exhibition tomorrow, but she still had a bit of energy left.

“Sure, why not.” The Stand User replied, and her guardian smirked.

“Alright then. Go ahead and get changed, and I’ll get everything set up in here.” A few minutes later, Jolyne was standing behind the counter, dressed in a long sleeved eggshell colored shirt, a pair of jeans, and an dark green apron.


“Now then, since you’re going to be working in my store, I’ll need to hammer the basics into you. You know what I’m talking about, right?” He asked.

“Making coffee, right?” Jolyne responded, and Sojiro nodded.

“That’s part of it. The store’s not exactly the busiest around here, but I’m real particular about how we make coffee. A customer tells me you made them a bad cup, I’ll kick you out without a second thought. Got that?” For a second, Jolyne thought that Sojiro was joking, but that notion was dispelled when she saw the stern glare.

“Y-yes, Boss.”

“Good. Now, the other part of it is small talk. In a place like this, good coffee and good conversation go hand in hand. If you properly engage with a customer, and make a rapport with them, the more likely they are to come back and become a regular.” Sojiro explained, and Jolyne just nodded along as she listened intently. As soon as he finished his explanation, the bell above the door chimed.

“Excuse me, is this place open?” A young voice asked. The two turned to see a boy about a year older than Jolyne, with shaggy brown hair and reddish brown eyes. He wore a tan colored coat with black buttons over a black and white tie, black gloves, and black pants.

“I know it might not look like it, but we’re still open for business.” Sojiro replied, the boy smiled slightly as he walked over and took a seat at the bar. “What can I get you?”


“Coming right up.” With that, Sojiro pulled Jolyne close to him. “You know how to make coffee, right?” He whispered into her ear, and Jolyne nodded. “Good. Something like this should be a good chance for me to see what you can do. Remember, conversation is key.” With that, he patted her on the shoulder, and backed away. Jolyne took a rough swallow, before she went to work. As she poured the beans into the siphon and turned it on, the transfer student remembered her guardian’s advice, and turned to the boy.

“So…you’re a little younger than the people I normally see in here. How’d you hear about this place?” Jolyne asked after a moment of silence.

“I heard about this place from someone I work with. He wouldn’t stop raving about this place’s coffee, so when I ended up with some free time, I figured I would check it out.” The polite boy replied, and her eyebrow perked up at this.
“You have a part-time job?” She asked, he lightly chuckled.

“I suppose you could call it that.” The young customer responded, before his eyes travelled over to the television screen. Jolyne followed his gaze, seeing the headline “KAMOSHIDA INVESTIGATION CONTINUES”. “How disgraceful. To think a man like that would be placed in a position of power like that…” He muttered to himself, just audibly enough for Jolyne to hear.

“Are you interested in all that?” The barista-in-training asked, getting a nod.

“Ever since that man confessed like he did. I can only imagine what his students had to endure. However, it’s his confession that interests me more than anything.” The boy said, folding his fingers together and placing them just under his chin. “By his own admission, this Kamoshida had been abusing his students like that for years. Yet because one of his victims tried to take her own life, he suddenly felt guilty and gave up his power like that?” He monologued, Jolyne listened intently as she brewed the coffee.

“Maybe since that was the first time someone had done something like that, he felt guilty enough to confess?” Jolyne suggested, he tapped his chin.

“Possible, but unlikely. A man like Kamoshida would have no compunctions about the impact his actions had on his victims. And then there was that strange message, the one that seemed to display intimate knowledge of his crimes.” He stated, Jolyne dryly swallowed.

“Maybe that was from one of his victims, someone who had decided they’d had enough of seeing him run around with no consequence.” She replied, and the boy raised an eyebrow.

“It seems I’m not the only one with an interest in this case. I thought so as well at first, but the more I thought about it, the more questions that arose. If they wished to accuse him, they simply could have gone to the police, or if they wished to blackmail him, whoever it was could have done so privately. Instead, they chose to ensure that attention would be drawn to it, including picking an extravagant alias. ‘These Phantom Thieves’…what was their goal? Why did they chose to accuse him that way, and what made Kamoshida confess the way he did?” The polite boy pondered, and Jolyne slightly grimaced. This guy was sharp.

“My guess? Kamoshida felt the walls closing in, and figured he’d have a better chance if he confessed himself.” Jolyne answered, and the Polite Boy’s lips flattened into a line as he thought that over, while Jolyne began pouring the coffee into a cup.

“Maybe…” He muttered out, before he saw Jolyne drop two sugar cubes into the coffee cup and begin to stir it. “Oh, my apologies. I didn’t mean to ramble on like that.”

“Don’t worry about it. Here you go.” The secret Phantom Thief responded, setting the coffee cup down in front of Polite Boy. A gloved hand picked it up, and he lightly sniffed the aroma wafting out of the cup. Seemingly satisfied with the scent, he slightly blew the hot liquid, before taking a sip.

“Mmmmm, delicious…” Polite Boy gasped out. “Not bad for your first attempt.” He complimented, and Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“How did you—“

“Know it was your first day? I simply noticed your body language.” He responded, and Jolyne raised an eyebrow.

“Were you checking me out?” She asked, and the boy slightly blushed as he let out a chuckle.
“Nothing so indecent as that. Let’s just say that noticing small details like that is important in my line of work.” He responded, taking a lengthier sip of his coffee this time. “You seemed awfully knowledgeable about that incident. If you don’t mind me asking, what’s your interest?” He asked, continuing to drink his coffee.

“I…have a friend who goes to Shujin. She told me all about it.” Jolyne fibbed, not wanting to give away too many personal details to the complete stranger.

“I see. Well, hopefully, the matter will resolve itself soon enough.” The polite boy stated as he finished his coffee, and fished a few yen out of his coat. “The coffee was delicious, and the conversation was…stimulating.” He said, getting out of his seat and heading towards the door, before looking back at Jolyne. “I believe I may come here again sometime soon.” And with that, Jolyne let out a sigh of relief.

“Good grief, why do I keep meeting so many weirdos this week?” She muttered to herself. No doubt about it, that kid was almost scary smart, displaying a better grasp of the Kamoshida situation as most of the people at Shujin.

“Not bad.” Sojiro said from behind Jolyne, causing her to jump. In her conversation with the Polite Boy, Jolyne had forgotten that her guardian had been behind her, silently evaluating her coffee making. “You engaged with the customer, and it looks like you may have gotten us a new customer. On top of that-“ Sojiro went over to the coffeemaker as he spoke, pouring himself a small cup of coffee and taking a sip. “-for your first cup of coffee, this isn’t half bad, just like he said. You might just have a future at this after all.” He praised, Jolyne gave a slight, sheepish smile as she scratched the back of her neck.

“Thanks, Boss.” She replied. Getting praised from her guardian didn’t feel half bad.

**Rank Up! Hierophant Rank 3!**

“Now, next I’ll show you how to-“ Sojiro started to say, when the bell above the door rang. “Looks like that’ll have to wait…” Sojiro spun around. “How can I help…” He started to say, before he saw the person’s face and stopped cold. “You…”He gasped out, looking like he had just seen a ghost. Jolyne looked to the door, seeing a man around Sojiro’s age with his arms folded.

“Hello there! It’s been quite a while, Sakura-san!” The man greeted. “I heard you opened up a shop, so here I am! It wouldn’t have hurt to mention it to me, though. Gotta say, picking a location right by the subway was a stroke of genius! I can see what Wakaba saw in you.” The man jeered, and Sojiro narrowed his eyes.

“No small talk? I forgot how cold you could be, Sakura-san.” The man stated, and sniffed the air. “Oh, this smell…this brings back memories! I see you’re still making that curry, huh? Guess you’re still not over her, huh?” Sojiro’s hands were beginning to shake.

“What’s your order, sir?” Sojiro asked, almost hissing out the last word. The man just chuckled at that.

“I just dropped by to check in. I’ll come see you again soon, though. Bye!” The man said, and left the café. As soon as the door shut, Sojiro’s face twisted into a sneer.

“How the hell did he find out about this place? Damn bastard…” The restaurateur muttered to himself.
“That guy seemed pretty sketchy.” Jolyne stated, and Sojiro chortled, a small smile reappearing back on his face.

“Heh, you’re pretty sharp. Let’s just say…he’s someone I never wanted to see again. Don’t worry about it.” He responded, turning back to Jolyne. “Anyway, if you have time for questions, you have time to be learning about the different bean types. You’re not any use to me if you can’t learn the ABCs.”

“How many different bean types could there be?” Jolyne asked.

“More than you’d think. First, there’s—” Sojiro began to say, when the clock on the wall chimed.

“Sheesh, that time already? Well, not much we can do about it. C’mon, let’s start closing up.” He instructed, and Jolyne just nodded.

**Sunday, 5/15/20XX, Shibuya**

The Phantom Thieves entered the exhibit, Ryuji letting out a low whistle at the crowd that had already gathered inside. “Damn, wasn’t expecting this big of a turn out here…” He said, Morgana pushed himself out of Jolyne’s bag, steadying himself on her shoulder.

“So crowded. This Madarame must really be talented to draw a crowd of this size…” Morgana mused, Jolyne elbowed the bag.

“Hey, keep your head down. It’ll be a pain in the ass if anyone sees you.” She ordered, Morgana reluctantly obeyed as Ann looked around.

“Wow, these are way better looking in person. TV doesn’t do it justice…” She muttered out, looking at the paintings on the walls.

“You came!” A familiar voice called out, and the three turned to see Kitagawa approaching them, now dressed in a grey jacket over a pink shirt. “And…you came.” He was obviously less thrilled to see Ryuji and Ann than he was to see Jolyne.

“What’d you expect when you gave us those tickets? Ain’t like we got anything else going on.” Ryuji responded, but Ann nudged him in the ribs.

“Ignore him. We’re grateful you decided to invite us, Kitagawa-kun.” She said.

“Just make sure that you stay clear of the other visitors.” He instructed, then turned to Jolyne. “Please, allow me to give you a tour. I’d like to talk more about the picture I would like to draw.” He offered, and Jolyne turned back to her friends.

“Well, see you guys later.” Jolyne bid farewell, before following Kitagawa into the exhibit, leaving Ryuji and Ann alone.

“Ugh, we really gotta do this? Can’t we just go home?” Ryuji groaned out.

“Not like we have anything else to do. Might as well appreciate some fine art while we’re here.” Ann scolded, and tapped her chin. “Now where are we supposed to start…?”

Meanwhile, Yusuke was leading Jolyne through the exhibits, who was taking in all the different paintings on display. “Damn, I didn’t know there were so many types of Japanese art.” Jolyne commented, and Kitagawa nodded.

“Usually, one artist chooses to concentrate and refine one particular style. However, everything you
“See here was created by Sensei himself.” Yusuke explained.

“Ah, there you are, Yusuke!” A voice called, and Jolyne turned to see the man from the car the other day approaching him.

“Sensei!” Kitagawa greeted, and the man, who Jolyne assumed to be Madarame, turned to Jolyne.

“Ah, you’re the girl from the other day.” Madarame greeted. “How are you enjoying the exhibit so far?”

“I don’t really know how to put it into words. All of this is honestly kinda amazing.” Jolyne replied, and Madarame chuckled.

“You’re sensing something from the artwork. That alone is enough to bring me great joy.” The artist said, and turned to Yusuke. “I believe this will be a marvelous piece, Yusuke. I look forward to seeing it. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve dodged the media long enough.” With that, Madarame turned and left them.

“So that’s Madarame?” Jolyne asked, and Kitagawa nodded. “He seems so easy to approach. Unlike some other artists I know…” Images of a certain mangaka that always seemed to have a stick up his ass flashed through Jolyne’s head.

“Indeed.” The strange art student replied, and something caught Jolyne’s eye.

“Whoa…” She began walking towards a painting on the wall. It was an abstract painting, with flecks of red and yellow across a dark green backdrop, almost reminiscent of tree leaves in the fall. Kitagawa followed her gaze, and his eyes widened.

“That one…?” He muttered out, walking next to her. He roughly swallowed, before he spoke again. “This painting…it speaks to you?” Jolyne nodded at this. “If I may ask, what about it speaks to you?” Kitagawa asked, and Jolyne pursed her lips

“I guess…it looks to me like it’s the painter’s anger. I feel a strong frustration from it.” She explained, and softly chortled. “Guess even guys like Madarame have stuff they bottle up…”

Outside of her field of vision, Kitagawa’s eyes became downturned.

“…yes, even Sensei has his issues. We all…we all have our own inner turmoil.” He sullenly responded. “There are better pieces than this. Come now, this way…” He beckoned, and from inside the transfer student’s bag, Morgana took note of Kitagawa’s reaction.

Meanwhile, Ann and Ryuji were wandering around the art gallery. Ann looked pretty interested in the paintings on the wall, while Ryuji looked like he would rather be anywhere else. “Oooh, I saw this one on that TV special. It looks a lot prettier in real life…” The blonde model said, staring at a wave painting.

“If you say so. This stuff all looks the same to me.” Ryuji stated, when he caught something out of the corner of his eye, just by where they were standing: a cluster of reporters, all surrounding Madarame. “Hey, that him?” Ryuji asked as he pointed to the crowd, and Ann nodded.

“Yeah, that’s the guy who was on TV the other day.” Ann answered, and the two moved slightly closer so that they could hear what the reporters and Madarame were saying.

“We continue to be truly surprised by your imagination, Madarame-san! You have such an expansive range of styles, it’s hard to believe that it all stems from one person! Where in the world does such inspiration come from?” One of the reporters said, and Madarame scratched his chin.
“Well, that’s rather difficult to put into words. I suppose my inspiration naturally wells p within my heart, floating upwards like bubbles in a hot spring.” The elderly man replied.

“Your paintings have been reported to sell for millions of yen all around the world. I’m sure you’re able to afford to wait however long you need for inspiration to come.” Another reporter said, but Madarame shook his head.

“I believe it’s important for one to distance themselves from worldly desires such as fame and money. My atelier is but a modest shack, more than enough to pursue true beauty. I only keep enough money to support myself and the pupils living under my roof, and donate the rest to programs designed to elevate young artists.” Madarame explained, and Ryuji’s ears perked up at that.

“A shack…?” He muttered to himself as the interview continued, and Ann listened intently.

“Huh. I never would’ve guessed living like that would be a good way to get inspiration. I guess if it works for him, though…” She mused, when Ryuji took off towards the exit. “Hey, where are you going?”

“I gotta check something. Come on!”

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the gallery, Kitagawa was still leading Jolyne through the exhibit, showing her the various paintings Madarame had done, where he would inform her of the meaning of the paintings and what had inspired Madarame to create them. “Well, I’m certainly impressed. I gotta say, I never would’ve thought too hard about all this stuff otherwise.” Jolyne commented, and Kitagawa merely nodded.

“I’m glad that I could inform your viewpoint. Now, about the reason I invited you here…” The young artist said, and Jolyne sighed. She supposed she couldn’t put it off forever.

“So what exactly is it you want me to do?”

“Like I said before, I wish for you to be the muse for a painting, preferably a portrait.”

“So what, basically be a model?” She asked, and the blue haired boy’s eyes lit up at this.

“Yes, exactly!” He replied, and Jolyne sighed.

“I dunno. I’ve got enough on my plate as it is, so I need to think about it.” She replied, but he just nodded.

“I had been hoping I could convince you today, but I understand if you have not reached a decision. Here, let me give you my contact information, and-“ Kitagawa started to say, when he just stopped and blinked a few times. “Oh dear.”

“Something wrong?” Jolyne asked, and Kitagawa dryly swallowed.

“This is rather embarrassing, but…I don’t believe I ever learned your name?” He admitted, and Jolyne blinked a few times.

“This is rather embarrassing, but…I don’t believe I ever learned your name.” He admitted, and Jolyne blinked a few times.

“So you stalked my friend, tracked me down, and invited me here, and you never even learned my name?” Jolyne asked, and he just sheepishly nodded. However, instead of chastising him, Jolyne just laughed. “Good grief, it never ends…” She just laughed out, before calming herself. “Name’s Jolyne Cujoh.” She replied, and Kitagawa lightly smiled.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Cujoh-san.”
After they had exchanged contact information, the leader of the Phantom Thieves went off in search of her friends. Not finding them in the gallery, she left the exhibition hall to find them waiting just outside the exhibition hall, with Ryuji browsing on his phone. “So how far did he make it?” Jolyne asked.

“We made it almost halfway through, before he ran off.” Ann replied, and Jolyne let out a low whistle.

“I’m impressed. I thought he was going to be gone in 10 minutes.” She commented.

“So how’d it go with Kitagawa? He didn’t try to pull anything creepy, did he?” Ann asked, and Jolyne shook her head.

“Nope. He just showed me around the exhibit, and tried to convince me to do that model thing again. I actually met that Madarame guy, too.” Jolyne answered, Ann’s eyes widened.

“Wait, you mean you actually spoke to him?” She asked, the transfer student nodded. “What was he like?”

“He seemed pretty nice. I expected a guy like that to have a big ego, but–”

“There it is!” Ryuji exclaimed, cutting Jolyne off as he looked up from his phone. “Oh, Jolyne’s back.”

“Thanks for noticing. What’s up with you?”

“Well, we overheard Madarame talking with those news guys, and somethin’ he said reminded me of a post I saw online the other day. I just found it.” Ryuji explained, and began to read off his phone. “’A master of the Japanese arts is plagiarizing his pupil’s works. The persona he shows on TV is merely an act.’”

“And? Madarame’s not the only famous artist in Japan.” Jolyne stated.

“There’s more. ‘His treatment of the pupils who live with him is awful. He forces them to live in squalor in a shack, claiming that it’s for them to find inspiration, while he lives in a mansion, only barely giving them enough money to survive. All the while he teaches them nothing, bossing them around like their dogs.’” Ryuji read off.

“Abuse and plagiarism? That’s quite a combo…” Ann muttered out. “You don’t think Kitagawa-kun posted this, do you?”

“Hard to tell. It’s all anonymous and stuff.” Ryuji replied. “Mishima’s the admin for this thing, right? Think he could help us out?” Jolyne tapped her chin for a minute.

“It wouldn’t hurt to ask. I just can’t believe that a guy like Madarame could be capable of having a Palace. He seems as far from Kamoshida as you could possibly get.” She mused, and that’s when Morgana popped out of her bag.

“I definitely think there’s more to it beneath the surface.” The Not-Cat chimed in. “Just because someone appears nice, doesn’t mean they’re free from having distorted desires. That man you met in there could merely be a façade.” Morgana stated. “Besides, there’s something else that’s been bothering me. Remember that painting we saw in there?”

“You’re gonna have to be a bit more specific.”
“You know the one I’m talking about! The one that stood out to you after we talked to Madarame!”
He replied, causing Jolyne to remember what he was talking about.

“What about it?”

“You were too busy looking at the painting too notice, but there was something about Yusuke’s
reaction that bothered me. When you were talking about how Madarame was the one who painted it,
it almost looked like there was something he wanted to say, but he stopped himself before he could.”
Morgana explained, his feline brow furrowing above his bright blue eyes. “Given Yusuke’s reaction,
and the nature of that message, I think that Yusuke is the one who really painted that picture.”
He stated, Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“Wait, are you serious?” She asked, and he nodded.

“I’m willing to bet money on it.” He stated, and Ann’s brow furrowed.

“All this stuff is definitely worth looking into.”

“This all fits way too well. Madarame’s exactly the kind of target we’ve been looking for, but where
do we even start?” Ryuji asked. “I don’t even know where we would even begin to start askin’ about
this stuff. Ain’t like we can just ask Kitagawa straight to his face…” He muttered out, and a light
went on in Jolyne’s head.

“That…might be easier than you think.” She said, and the other Phantom Thieves looked to their
leader. “He asked me again if I wanted to be his muse, and I told him I’d think about it, so he gave
me his number, and the address for his atelier.”

“Didn’t Madarame say he lived there?” Ann asked aloud, and Ryuji grinned.

“Alright! Let’s go tomorrow, and stake the place out!”

“Sheesh, you’re so gung ho…” Ann muttered out.

“I agree. Let’s head there tomorrow.”
Monday, 5/16/20XX, After School

The Phantom Thieves were on a train, Jolyne and Ann sitting on a bench and Ryuji standing up. “Ugh, I hate this line. It always takes forever to get anywhere…” The fake blond groaned out.

“This is the easiest way to get to Madarame’s atelier, and we can bring pets on here, too.” Ann replied, earning a scoff from Morgana.

“Hey, watch who you’re calling a pet! I’m the one leading you to your goal, so you should all be calling me Master!” The “not” cat protested, Jolyne nudging his bag, giving a warning.

“Hey, keep it down. I didn’t pay the extra pet fare.”

“Oooh, kitty!” A new voice said, the source being a young girl, no more than 5 or 6 years old, staring at Morgana with an eager smile on her face.

“Crap…!” Ann muttered out.

“Is that your pet, Miss? I heard it meowing.” The girl asked, Jolyne frantically searched for an answer. She did not want to pay the extra fare for Morgana…

“It’s uh…it’s a toy! It meows when you press down on it’s head.” She replied, totally not lying. “It’s…a gift for my cousin.” Of course, it only made the girl more curious.

“Really? Can I see?” She asked…which gave Ryuji an evil idea.

“You heard her, Jolyne. Why don’t you give her a little demonstration?” He teased. Morgana scowled and was very much gonna protest, only for Jolyne to press down on his head.

“M-meow!” He obliged, getting the small girl to giggle.
“Again! Again!” She cheered, a cheery smile spreading across her face.
“P-please…Jolyne…have mercy…” Morgana pleaded, his face contorted into an expression of
nausea. Jolyne looked to her nauseous animal companion, then to the smiling little girl….
“Time to button mash.” Jolyne declared, and before Morgana could protest, she began to rapidly
press on his head. “Oraoraoraoraoraoraoraora!”
“M-Meow! Meow! Meowowowowowowowow!” The little girl giggled at Morgana’s repeated
meowing, not noticing that he looked increasingly sick.
“Again!”
“Hurk…” Morgana groaned out, when the PA chimed.
“ Next stop: Shibuya Station.” The voice said over the intercom, and Jolyne smiled at the little girl.
“We’ve gotta get off now, sweetie. Go back to your mom now, ok?” The little girl nodded.
“Ok! Bye bye!” And with that, the girl vanished back into the crowd, as Morgana shuddered.
“I think I just threw up in my mouth…”
Elsewhere, the SIU director sat in his office, staring at a file on his desk. “Suguru Kamoshida…
former Olympian…teacher at Shujin Academy…reason for turning himself in is a ‘heavy
conscience.’ Hmmm….” He read aloud, and tapped his chin. “The human mind doesn’t change that
easily, let alone his natural temperament. Shujin Academy…” The elderly man said to himself, rising
from his chair and walking to the window that overlooked the city. “Seems doubtful…but I’d better
have someone look into it, just in case.”
Sometime Later
The Phantom Thieves walked up to a two story building that appeared dilapidated, Ryuji couldn’t
help but frown at the sight. “Is this really the right address? This place looks condemned.”Jolyne
looked at the address that Yusuke had sent her.
“This is the place, alright. And look, there’s even a nameplate that says ‘Madarame’ on it.” She
pointed out, gesturing to the plate by the door.
“Madarame wasn’t exaggerating when he said he lived in a shack.” Ann observed. “So, who wants
to knock?”
“Are you serious? It looks like it’s gonna blow over!” The track star retorted.
“Oh, quit being a baby, Ryuji!” Jolyne scolded, making him sigh before walking towards the door.
He pressed the doorbell, worried that too much force would cause the entire house to collapse. They
all watched with bated breath…until the intercom beneath the doorbell crackled.
“ Who is it? Sensei is currently out right now.” Kitagawa’s voice crackled over the speaker, giving
Ryuji a slight startle, and Jolyne walked p beside Ryuji and pressed the speaker button.
“Uh, Kitagawa? It’s Cujoh.” She responded, and there was silence for a few moments before the
door in front of them slid open, revealing Kitagawa standing there with an excited smile on his face.
“Cujoh-San, thank you for-“ The artist started to say, but his smile fell from his face as soon as he
saw Ryuji and Ann. “…you two are here as well?” Ann just smiled, while Ryuji merely gave a small


“Sorry, but there was something we wanted to ask you.” The model states, Ryūji speaking up.

“Is it true that Madarame’s plagiarizing stuff? And he’s abusing people too, right?” He asked…only for the blue haired art student just blinked.

“Are you serious?” He questioned, Ann nodding.

“We read about it online.” She responded, and Kitagawa was silent for a moment…before he began to laugh.

“Preposterous! Not only is the plagiarism impossible, but abuse? If Sensei hated children to the point that he would harm them, then he would never allow pupils into his home! And I’m the one residing here and studying under him, so when I say it’s not true, it’s beyond doubt!” Kitagawa angrily retorted.

“And? You might be lying about it.” Jolyne stated, and that seemed to take him off guard.

“That…” He muttered out, before he recomposed himself. “That is utter rubbish! I had no family when Sensei took me in and raised me into the person you see before you! If you continue to philander the man who raised me like this, I promise you that you will rue this day!” Kitagawa bellowed out, Madarame walked out the door behind him.

“Yusuke, the whole neighborhood can hear you. What’s the matter?” The elderly painter asked, and his pupil spun around to face Madarame.

“These people are slandering you with baseless rumors, accusing you of plagiarism and abuse!” Yusuke angrily answered, and Madarame cast a quick glance over the three behind his pupil.

“Forgive them, Yusuke.” The artist ordered, shocking all four of them. “They must have heard those rumors, and became concerned for their friend’s safety.” Madarame explained, but Yusuke still looked unsure.

“…understood, Sensei.” With that, Madarame turned to the three Shujin students.

“Allow me to apologize. These nasty rumors swirl up whenever I have a big exhibit opening, and Yusuke tends to get a tad defensive.” He apologized.

“Well, that’s fine, but…” Jolyne started to protest, but Madarame didn’t pay her any mind.

“I’m sorry to have butt in on your conversation. However, I do have neighbors, so I must ask that you keep it down. Now, if you’ll excuse me…” Madarame pleaded, before he turned around and reentered his shack. AS soon as he was gone, Kitagawa turned back towards them.

“I’m sorry. That was rather uncourteous of me.” He apologized, before his eyes seemed to brighten. “I know! You all would believe in Sensei if you saw that painting!” Before any of them could ask what he meant, Kitagawa retrieved his phone out of his pocket and held it towards. The wall paper was an image of what appeared to be a painting of a woman in red in front of a moon and a branch, looking downwards with a seemingly vacant expression towards a fog that covered the bottom of the picture.

“What is this?” Ryūji asked.

“This is the Sayuri, one of Sensei’s most famous works. This is the piece that first elevated him to
fame, and is the painting that inspired me to become a painter as well.” The art student answered.

“It’s so beautiful…” Ann muttered out, and Ryuji nodded.

“I don’t know the first thing about all this fine art stuff, but even I can tell this is impressive…” The former track star commented, and Kitagawa looked right at Jolyne.

“When I first saw you, I was overcome with the same powerful emotions I felt when I first saw this painting.” He commented, and Jolyne’s eyes widened.

“Wait, seriously?” She asked, getting a nod.

“I wish to pursue beauty like this, and I believe that drawing you will be vital to that pursuit. I implore that you seriously consider my offer. I’m sorry that you took all the time to come up here, and that I acted the way I did, but I must help Sensei today.” He stated.

“Don’t worry about it. We’ll see if we can’t work something out.” Jolyne responded, and the odd boy nodded, before retreating back into the house. Soon, the Phantom Thieves were standing on the sidewalk across from the house, with Morgana sitting on a bench.

“So those two…seemed like nice guys, right?” Ryuji asked, and Ann reluctantly nodded.

“I feel bad. They invited us to that art show for free, and we paid them back by saying Madarame was a plagiarist. Maybe the Madarame that Shadow was talking about is a different person.” Ann suggested.

“Could be. Suppose we’ll have to keep our ears open.” Jolyne said, and Ryuji let out a sigh.

“Man, just when I thought we had our next target, too…” He groaned out, but Morgana didn’t look quite so convinced.

“Hmm, I wonder…check the Meta Nav.” He suggested. Jolyne pulled out her phone and went to open the app.

“Alright, but I don’t think-“

“Results Found.” The app chimed, causing all of their eyes to widen.

“Wait, what?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne looked at the image being displayed on her phone.

“This display…this is what it looked like before we entered Kamoshida’s Palace for the first time.” Jolyne observed.

“Was it picking up on our conversation…?” Ann muttered. “So does this mean that Madarame actually has a Palace?”

“Looks like it. Jolyne, what exactly does it say?” Morgana asked, and Jolyne read the words being displayed.

“‘Madarame’, ‘plagiarism’, and ‘shack.’” Jolyne read aloud, before she remembered something.

“Wait…when we first met, Ryuji talked about Kamoshida, the school, that he was a pervert, and that he thought himself the ‘king of the castle.’”

“Really?” Ryuji asked, and Ann began to think.

“So that’s the person who has the Palace, how their desires manifest, and the location of the Palace.
“So what are we missing?” Ann asked, and Morgana pursed his lips the best he could.

“If Kamoshida viewed the school as his castle, and that’s how the Palace manifested…the last keyword must be how Madarame really views this place.”

“For real? How the hell are we supposed to figure that out?” Ryuji asked.

“All we can do is try saying some random words.” Morgana suggested, and Jolyne tapped her chin.

“Alright, how about…castle?”

“No Match Found.”

“Then how about…Prison?”

“No Match Found.”

“Jail?”

“No Match Found.”

“It’s related to an artist, so maybe…Studio?” Ann suggested.

“No Match Found.” The app chimed once more, and they all let out a groan.

“This is gonna take forever…” Ryuji grumbled, when Jolyne began to think.

Several years ago, a 7-year old Jolyne was walking through the streets of Morioh next to Josuke, and they rounded a corner to come face to face with a man that had a sideways undercut. “Rohan.” Josuke calmly greeted, and Rohan Kishibe curtly nodded.

“Higashikata.” Rohan almost spat out, casting a glance towards Jolyne, who hid behind Josuke’s leg. “Give Jotaro-san my regards.” He stated, before he walked past them and approached a large, extravagant house across the street. Jolyne watched the mangaka enter the house.

“Grunkle Josuke, how come Rohan-san never invites us to his house like Koichi-san and Okuyasu-san?” Jolyne asked.

“Well, a long time ago I beat him in a game of Cee-Lo, and he’s been mad about it ever since.” Josuke responded. “Besides, a mangaka like him probably doesn’t want kids anywhere near his ‘precious manuscripts.’ I swear, it’s almost like he treats that place like some kinda-“

“Museum.”

“Destination Found. Beginning Navigation.” As soon as those words left the phone’s speaker, the world around them began to ripple and distort. The ambient noises of the neighborhood faded away, and the sunny afternoon sky was replaced by a dark blue light. When the distortions finally settled, Morgana, now in his mascot form, blinked several time in shock as he hopped off where the bench had been.

“Whoa! When did you activate the Nav?” He protested, and the others, having already changed into their Phantom Thief attire, simply looked at him.

“Didn’t really have much of a choice. I think we just happened to get it right.” Ryuji responded. “Hey, how did you guess that, anyways?” He asked to Jolyne, who merely shrugged.
“Josuke knows a mangaka back in Morioh. Met him whenever I would go to visit. All this art stuff has been making me think of him.” Jolyne responded, adjusting one of her red gloves, and Morgana just scoffed.

“What if I hadn’t noticed where we were, and wandered off and gotten captured by an enemy?”

“You probably would’ve figured it out once you started walkin’ on two legs.” Ryuji shot back, and Morgana just grumbled.

“So even you can slip into the Metaverse without noticing, Morgana?” Ann asked, and he nodded.

“Yup. In a Palace with minimal cognitive distortion, the differences can be subtle. I might not notice right away.”

“Forget that. Look over there!” Ryuji interjected, and they all looked behind them, and their jaws dropped. Mere moments ago, Madarame’s quaint, modest, two story shack had stood behind them. But now, the shack was replaced with a towering one golden building, about the size of a skyscraper. Written on the side of the building, next to elaborate golden drawings of dragons and tigers, were golden kanji letters that spelled out “The Madarame Museum for Excellence in the Fine Arts.”

“Whoa…” Jolyne muttered out, as they all looked up at the massive golden building.

“That guy seriously views that old shack as some kind of museum? Guess this is what Morgana meant by ‘distorted cognition.’” Ann remarked, taking note of the buildings intricate designs.

“Well, what’re we waiting for? Let’s check it out.” Ryuji suggested after a moment of silence, and Jolyne nodded, and so they approached the museum. As they neared the front entrance, the Phantom Thieves were met with the sight of a massive line of faceless people gathered in front of the door. “Whoa. Is this really Madarame’s?” The false blonde asked as he looked at the seemingly endless line of people, and their diminutive mascot nodded.

“That’s right. A Palace is scenery driven by desires, just like Kamoshida’s castle.”

“So all those people are cognitive duplicates, just like the guys in the dungeon?” Jolyne asked, and Morgana nodded.

“But Madarame’s art is already on display in museums, and people are lining up to see him in the real world. Why would he need to fantasize about a museum?” Ann asked.

“Ann’s got a point. This doesn’t really look related to abuse or plagiarism either.” Ryuji commented, and Morgana just shrugged.

“I’m not sure. But we won’t come up with an answer just standing around here staring.” He replied.

“I agree. We should start looking around.” Jolyne suggested.

“Where do we even start, though? That crowd isn’t moving at all, so I don’t think we can try and blend in with the line.” Ryuji commented.

“There’s gotta be some sort of side entrance or something, right?” Ann suggested.

“We won’t be able to find it just standing here. Let’s move.” Joker ordered, and Morgana smirked.

“That’s our Joker! The Infiltration has begun!” He cheered.
The Phantom Thieves dropped from the open skylight, landing firmly on a metal shelf. “Man, talk about lucky. I dunno what we would have done if we hadn’t found that skylight.” Skull commented. After finding a way around the high walls surrounding the museum, the quartet had moved around the side of the golden building, hopping on an elevated walkway in order to avoid the Shadows patrolling the grounds. Eventually, they had jumped over several outside sculptures until they reached an elevated wall, where they stumbled across the open skylight.

Without a word, the Phantom Thieves jumped off of the shelf onto the floor, and exited the storage room they were in. As soon as Joker opened the door, they were greeted with the sight of a large room, lined wall to wall with paintings. “Are they…moving?” Panther asked, and the Phantom Thieves all turned towards the painting closest to them. The painting, which appeared to be a portrait of a young man, did indeed appear to be moving, with ripples moving across the portrait, distorting the subject.

“Hmmmm…the Palace reflects its ruler’s heart…we may want to check these out.” Mona suggested, and Skull leaned closer to read the plaque under the painting.

“Kazuya Inoue. Age 21.” He read aloud. “A name and age? The hell does that mean?”

“That can’t be what the title of the painting. Maybe it’s the name of the artist?” Panther mused, while Joker and Mona both frowned. They had a sneaking suspicion of what it meant.

“Check all the paintings in here.” Joker instructed, and Skull just looked at her with a confused expression.

“We really got time for that?”

“Humor me.” With a shrug, they begun to check all the paintings in the room, before meeting in front of the first painting after several minutes.

“They’re all the same. No title, just a name and an age.” Mona stated.

“This doesn’t make any sense. Madarame’s famous for his wide range of art styles. But these paintings all look the same.” Panther said.

“It’s a far cry what we saw at the-“

“Whoa, look over there!” Skull shouted, cutting Joker off as he pointed behind her. They all turned in the direction the loud Persona user was pointing, and what they saw caused all of their eyes to widen.

“That’s the guy from Mementos!” Panther exclaimed. Indeed, hanging on the wall close to the painting they had been looking at was a portrait of Natsuhiko Nakanoahara, the man who’s Shadow they had fought in Mementos just a few days ago. There was even a plaque beneath it, with his name and age emboldened.

“What the hell is he doin’ in here? And why’s his name written beneath it?” Skull asked, while Joker folded her arm and tapped her chin, beginning to think.

“Nakanoahara was the one who first gave us Madarame’s name, wasn’t he?” The Joestar asked aloud, and Mona nodded.

“His Shadow did, yes.”
“He also told us that the reason he acted the way he did was because Madarame took everything from him.” Panther chimed in.

“This is turning into quite the mystery…” Mona mused.

“We won’t figure it out just standing here. Let’s keep going.” Joker ordered, and they all began to move on. The quartet passed through a doorway that resembled a picture frame, and that’s when they came face to face with something they didn’t expect to see: a portrait of none other than Yusuke Kitagawa, just like all the others in the adjacent room.

“Whoa, it’s that Kitagawa guy…” Skull observed, and Panther looked at the plaque below the portrait.

“‘Yusuke Kitagawa, Age…To be announced?’” Panther read aloud, and Skull scratched the back of his head.

“‘To be announced?’ What’s that supposed to mean? What the hell are these paintings?” He asked aloud.

“They’re Madarame’s pupils.” Joker piped up, drawing their attention. “Remember those books in Kamoshida’s library, and how they had pictures of the people he had hurt? I think this room is something like that.”

“I…I think you might be right.” Panther agreed, and Skull’s eyes widened.

“For real? But it was only Yusuke when we visited this place in the real world.”

“This must include former pupils as well. Yusuke’s the only one left…” Mona stated, and Panther’s brow furrowed under her cat shaped mask.

“So if those are all his former pupils, then those ages under their names must have been when Madarame decided he was done with them.” The model-turned-thief guessed.

“Then why’s Kitagawa not have an age?”

“Because Madarame’s not done with him yet.” They all went silent as soon as those words left Joker’s mouth, all of them staring at the painting of Yusuke. “…come on, let’s get moving. We won’t find anything to confirm all this just standing around here.” Joker instructed, and they were on the move once again. Passing by several more paintings, they passed through another frame shaped doorway. They passed through a hallway, before being deposited into a spacious lobby, with cushioned benches and racks of pamphlets lining the walls, with a television displaying some propaganda about Madarame. As the Phantom Thieves walked through the reception area, Joker looked at one of the pamphlets. The pamphlet read ‘Your Guide To Exploring the Talents of Ichiryusai Madarame’.

“This is getting’ way too detailed for a Palace. Why’d he even make something like this?” Skull commented, reading the pamphlet title from over her shoulder.

“Your guess is as good as mine.” His friend replied, and took one of the pamphlets from the rack. Opening it, Joker was greeted with the sight of what appeared to be some sort of map. “This should make things easier. Hey, Mona, can you sense the Treasure yet?” Jolyne asked, and Mona sniffed the air.

“It’s very faint, but I’m getting a whiff of it. We’re definitely heading in the right direction.” The supernatural creature stated.
“Do you have any idea how close it is?” Panther asked, and Mona shook his head.

“I don’t know exactly how far away, but it’s still a quite a bit away.” He replied, and the red clad model sighed.

“So much for wrapping this up quick…” She muttered out, and Joker took a closer look at the map.

“Says here that it’s ‘one of two.’ If there’s another pamphlet to complete the map, then that must mean that~”

“That’s seriously only half of the Palace?!” Skull blurted out, cutting off Joker. “Just how big is this place?”

“Complaining won’t do anything. If this map does only show half the palace, then we’ve got a lot of ground to cover if we decide to target Madarame.” Joker stated, as she folded the map and placed it inside of her coat. The others all nodded, and they moved once again. Passing through the reception area, they soon arrived at another large, circular room, this one with a large golden statue in the middle of the room with ramps on either side, leading to a door. The statues themselves seemed to be several golden sheets spiraling upwards from the platform in the middle, with formless golden people that seemed to be apart of the sheets. All of this seemed to be entered around a golden statue in the middle, one that had a not-so-slight resemblance to Madarame. The Phantom Thieves approached the statue, reading the plaque on the platform.

“‘The Infinite Spring…’” Panther read aloud. “‘A conglomerate work of art that the great director Madarame created using his own funds. These individuals must offer their ideas to him for the rest of their live. Those who cannot do so have no worth living!’” She read aloud, before swallowing a lump in her throat. “This…this is most likely about the plagiarism, right?”

“No doubt about it. This lines up with what Nakanohara’s Shadow told us about Madarame tossing him aside as soon after he was done with him.” The Phantom Thieves’ leader responded, and Skull scowled.

“Dammit! That no good phony geezer…”

“In other words, his pupils are his property. If this is true, he doesn’t even qualify to be called an artist.” Mona spat out, crossing his stubbly arms. “Stealing the ideas of talented students in exchange for securing their livelihood, then tossing them to the side after he’s done with them…it’s no wonder a Palace formed around Madarame.”

“Then all those paintings back there…if those were the students that he stole everything from, then that was some sort of fucked up trophy room!” The blonde track star shouted, clenching his fist.

“He’s treating them like slaves or tools!” Panther declared, her face downcast.

“Why’s Yusuke lyin’ about all this stuff? He’s got no reason to cover this up!”

“Didn’t he say Madarame took him in and raised him? I can’t blame him for not wanting to see the truth.”

“But still-!”

“I’m not so sure.” Jolyne cut them off before they could begin to argue some more. “Back at the art exhibit, Mona said Yusuke acted strange when I praised one of the paintings on display. If that really was Yusuke’s painting, and he let Madarame plagiarize it, he has to have his reasons.” She explained, and Skull let out an angry huff.
“We know Madarame’s plagiarizing his students. Ain’t that enough to target him?” He asked.

“Slow down, Skull. I think we should confirm this with Yusuke first.” Mona interjected, and Panther nodded.

“I agree.”

“Confirm what though?! Ain’t this Palace enough proof that Madarame’s guilty?”

“We should still get solid evidence that he actually did all this. Besides, there’s still a lot we don’t know about Madarame.” Joker responded, and Skull groaned.

“…I guess you’re right. Though how are we going to get Yusuke to come clean?” Skull pondered, and Joker tapped her chin, thinking on all the possible ways they could get the info they nodded.

“…I still have his contact info. If I accept his modelling offer, I may be able to squeeze something out of him.” As soon as Jolyne said that, Ryuji snorted.

“Wait, you’re seriously thinking about doing that?”

“It’s not like we have any other options. If we just turn up at the front door, he’ll just kick us out again.” Joker retorted, and placed her hands on her hips as she sighed. “Never thought I’d be doing this modeling thing. I don’t even have any sort of idea how to do this…”

“It’s not as hard as it looks. I’ll give you any advice you need!” Panther piped up.

“That’s good and all…” Mona spoke up, drawing their attention. “…but if we’re done here, we should go ahead and leave the Palace. We’ve been lucky so far, but it’s only a matter of time before the Shadows notice we’re here.” They all nodded, and began to head towards the exit.

5/16/20XX, Evening, Yongen Jaya

Jolyne let out a sigh as she entered her room, setting the Morgana Bag on the table so it’s occupant could exit. “Well, at least that wasn’t a total waste of time.” She huffed out as she fell backwards onto her couch, and Morgana nodded.

“Agreed. Now that we know that Madarame really does have a Palace, we can start from there.” Morgana stated as he stretched, and Jolyne’s phone chimed.

RS: Oh man, I’m so excited!

RS: We finally have a target! Our first official mission as Phantom Thieves!

JC: Remember, we haven’t officially decided to target Madarame yet.

AT: She’s right. We still need some hard evidence from Kitagawa-kun.

RS: Well yeah, but we know it’s gonna check out.

RS: Speaking of which, you message Yusuke yet?

JC: Not yet. I wanted to give him a day to cool down after what happened this afternoon.

RS: Just don’t wait too long, alright?
RS: We wait too long, and we could lose our chance!

AT: Chill out, Ryuji.

AT: If we rush this before we’re ready, we could end up causing one of those mental shutdowns Morgana talked about.

RS: Oh shit.

RS: I almost forgot about that.

Jolyne just rolled her eyes at Ryuji’s message.

JC: I'll message him when I'm ready. That exhibit's supposed to last the whole month, so we've got plenty of time.

AT: See? So just chill!

RS: Yeah yeah...

RS: See you guys tomorrow...

AT: Good night!

JC: Night.

**Sakamoto Apartment**

Meanwhile, in the small apartment he shared with his mother, Ryuji yawned as he exited the bathroom. “Man, that Metaverse is really exhausting…” The former track star muttered out, heading into his room. By the time he collapsed onto his bed, Ryuji noticed that he’d forgotten to shut his door. He groaned to himself, unable to muster up the energy to walk over there and close it himself...when he heard it shut. For a second, the vulgar Phantom Thief thought that his mother had closed it for him...before Ryuji remembered that she was working a late shift that night. Ryuji slowly turned his door....where he saw what looked like a transparent emerging from his leg.

“Gahhhhhhh!”

**Chapter End Notes**

As we go into 2018, I am so excited to show you guys what I've got planned. This year's gonna be a Gold Experience for all ;)
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Jolyne spends some alone time with Yusuke, as life unfolds throughout Tokyo.

Chapter Notes

Hello folks! I know it's been a while. I don't know how many of you recall the original chapter 18 premise, but I had to tweak things around, because I was stuck on it for six months. Then I finished it, posted it on FF, and forgot to post it here. My bad. Hope you all enjoy!

Chapter 18:

*Tuesday, 5/17/20XX, After School*

Jolyne stood on the sidewalk, looking up at Madarame’s atelier, alone save for Morgana in her bag. Ann had gone to check on Shiho, and Ryuji had been acting weird, choosing to go straight home following the end of school. She should probably follow up on that later, but for now, the youngest living Joestar was walked up to the door and knocked three times. Jolyne waited for a moment, before the door opened to reveal Yusuke. As soon as he saw her, Yusuke’s face brightened up.

“Ah, Cujoh-san. I wasn’t expecting to see you again so soon.” Yusuke greeted, and looked around her. “You…didn’t bring the loud one, did you?”

“No, it’s just me.” She replied, the artist let out a small sigh of relief. “Sorry to come over without warning this time. I just wanted to apologize for how we acted the other day.”

“Please, don’t worry yourself. After talking with Sensei about the matter, I realize now that having concerns is only natural. If anything, I should be apologizing for my own behavior.” Yusuke reassured her, and Jolyne just chuckled.

“So, I guess that means we’re even.” She responded, and Yusuke gave a small smile. “Now, you still wanna paint me, right?”

“Of course. Please, come in.” Kitagawa beckoned, and Jolyne stepped inside the shack.

“So, you and Madarame both live here?” Jolyne asked as she looked around the narrow halls of the atelier.

“That is correct, though Sensei has a studio in the city he occasionally sleeps at when he gets too busy.” Yusuke responded, beginning to lead Jolyne through the shack.
“And you’re the only pupil he has?” At this question, Jolyne noticed that Yusuke faltered slightly.

“There have been others, but you must understand that art can often be cruel and brutal, and Sensei is a tough master. Many are unable to handle the… pressure, instead choosing to live more mundane lives.” Yusuke explained.

*So, most of Madarame’s pupils burn out? Interesting…* Jolyne noted, as Yusuke lead her into a small room that was littered with paint supplies, with a canvas in the center of the room and a stool.

“Pardon the mess. I was not expecting you to come today.” Kitagawa apologized, but Jolyne just waved him off.

“Don’t worry about it. My place isn’t any better.” Jolyne reassured, and Yusuke gestured to a stool in the middle of the room.

“Fortunately, I had already picked out the colors I believe will best suit you. Please, have a seat there, and we will begin in a moment.” He instructed, and Jolyne obliged, setting her bag down on the ground and sitting on the stool. Yusuke took a minute to settle on the proper brushes and paint colors, occasionally holding his hands as if he was making a picture frame. “Yes, that’s it. Please, hold that pose for as long as you can.”

“Like this?” Jolyne asked, sitting up straight with her hands on her lap, and Yusuke nodded.

“Yes, that’s perfect.” He responded, and began picking out the type of brush he would be using. After about a minute, the blue haired artist had begun, and Jolyne cleared her throat.

“So…what exactly is it like studying under a famous artist like Madarame?” She asked, but she got no response. “Right, probably not a good question to ask given how things went yesterday. Well then…so it’s just you living here? Madarame doesn’t have any other pupils?” Again, Jolyne was met with silence for a solid minute. Curious, Jolyne glanced over at Yusuke, and from the expression on his face, one might think he was in another world. “Yusuke?” Yet again, there was no response from the young artist, who was laser focused on the canvas in front of him.

“It’s no use. He’s in a totally different world right now.” Morgana piped from his spot in the bag. “So much for our plan.”

“Good grief…” Jolyne sighed out. The plan the two had come up with the night before was for Jolyne to show up to Yusuke’s door, apologize, and start modelling for him, hoping that her sudden appearance, apology, and focus on painting would cause Yusuke to lower his guard and answer a few of their questions. Unfortunately, the duo had underestimated just HOW focused Yusuke would be on his painting.

“He’s like a machine…is this a result of Madarame’s discipline, or is he just like this?” Morgana wondered aloud, while Yusuke continued to paint away.

“Well, this is going nowhere…” Jolyne said, when she got an idea. “Hey, why don’t you go look around? Madarame shouldn’t be home for a while, so see if you can find anything that stands out.” She suggested, and her cat-like companion nodded at his caretaker’s suggestion.

“Sounds like a good plan. Even in this body, I should be able to at least see if he’s hiding anything.” Morgana replied, and Stone Free materialized, unzipping the bag and allowing Morgana to quickly exit the bag and dart out of the room. The sudden movement caused Yusuke to momentarily look up.

“Did you just see something?”
“Hm? No, I didn’t see anything.” Jolyne feigned, and Yusuke just shrugged, placing his attention back on the canvas. Jolyne let out a sigh of relief as she returned to her pose.

*Talk about a close one…* Jolyne thought to herself, as she stared at the wall. *I wonder what everyone else is doing…*

**Elsewhere**

“All right, now…appear!” Ryuji shouted into his empty apartment. He concentrated and he strained…but nothing appeared. “Get on out here!” Still nothing. “Dammit!” The former track star cursed out, collapsing onto his couch in frustration. Ever since Ryuji had seen that transparent arm manifest out of nowhere the night before, he’d been uncertain if what he’d seen had been real or not. So, Ryuji was trying to duplicate the experience, but so far he’d had no luck. He was starting to think it was just his tired mind playing tricks on him. Resigning himself to that fact, Ryuji obeyed his grumbling stomach and headed towards the kitchen heading for a snack. As he approached the refrigerator, he accidentally tripped over his own foot and slammed into the fridge, knocking a rather hefty decorative tray off the edge of the fridge and hurdling towards Ryuji. Before he had the time to brace himself, a yellow and brown arm appeared out of nowhere, grabbing the tray and keeping it from harming Ryuji. When Ryuji looked and saw the slightly transparent humanoid figure it was attached to, Ryuji smirked. “Now that’s more like it!”

**Shibuya, Underground Mall**

“You’re coming back?!” Ann blurted out in the middle of the underground shopping center, unable to control her volume.

“Ann, keep it down!” Shiho beckoned.

“Right, sorry…” Ann apologized, before lowering her voice. “But you’re seriously coming back to Shujin? That’s great! I know everyone’ll be really happy to see you!” The blonde cheered, and Shiho softly smiled at that.

“Thanks, Ann. Because of…what happened, my parents wanted me to go to somewhere like Kosei, but…” Shiho swallowed the lump in her throat. “…but I don’t want to run.” Ann smiled at her best friend’s resolve, seeing a determination in those brown eyes that she hadn’t seen in quite a long time.

“I’ll be there for you every step of the way. And I know that Ryuji and Jolyne will be there too!” Ann reassured, and Shiho smiled. She remembered Sakamoto from middle school, and even though they hadn’t really spoken in a while, he had always seemed nice enough, even if he was a little vulgar at times. And Jolyne…Shiho didn’t really know what to think of her. There were all those nasty rumors floating around about her, but Shiho didn’t really put much stock in those, and when Shiho had spoken to her shortly before the…incident…the transfer student had seemed nice enough. And when Shiho had woken up, miraculously healed of all injuries, Jolyne had been there along with Ann and the man with the strange hair. As if that wasn’t enough to make the transfer student stand out to the former volleyball player, there was that strange look Ann got in her eyes whenever she talked about Jolyne…

This was going to be interesting indeed.

**Bunkyo, The Speedwagon Foundation**

In his top floor office, Ikari was sitting at his desk when the door opened, signalling the entrance of one of the Foundation’s researchers. “Sir, the tests have come back on Matsumoto.” The researcher said, walking over to Ikari’s desk and handing him the file.
“And?” The branch head said as he took the files, opening them up and beginning to read them.

“Well, as you can see, our scans have determined that there are no signs of brain damage, making it highly unlikely that his amnesia was caused by the injuries he suffered at the hands of Cujoh-san and Higashikata-san.” The researcher reported, and Ikari stroked his chin.

“And he shows no signs of faking it?” Ikari asked, and the researcher shook his head.

“We sent agents to his hometown to inquire about his history. When our interrogators brought up these details, he still showed no signs of recognition.” The researcher explained, and Ikari folded his fingers in front of him.

“Hmm...I believe we’ve been approaching Matsumoto’s amnesia by the wrong means. Given all the details we have, I believe it may have been caused by the work of a Stand.” Ikari stated, and the researcher frowned. “Have our agents begin searching through our files. See if there’s anyone in Japan with the ability to affect memories.”

“Yes sir.” With that the researcher left, and Ikari frowned.

If my hunch is correct, and Matsumoto’s memories were taken away by another Stand user, then his assault of Higashikata and Cujoh wasn’t an attack of opportunity. He was working with someone, and that someone didn’t want him to talk. And if that’s the case...I’m afraid that this is far from over. Ikari thought to himself, getting out and looking out his office window at Tokyo, unable to shake the menacing feeling he was starting to get. There’s something evil lurking in this city. And I’m afraid it’s just getting started.

**The Atelier**

Morgana was still wandering through the halls of the shack, looking for anything that looked as if it could be hiding something. Unfortunately, Morgana had had no luck, as most of the rooms in the atelier seemed like they had been abandoned. Judging from what he had found, Madarame truly did live with only the bare minimum, not even owning a TV or a computer. “Does a Palace owner really live here? It’s so...modest.” Morgana said to himself, and let out a sigh. “I guess it was too much to hope that Madarame would leave evidence just lying around like that. That would’ve been too...wait, what’s that?” The thing that had grabbed Morgana’s attention was a closed door, same as the others in the shack. However, there was one thing that set this apart from the others: the rather elaborate peacock design on the door. “Hmmmm. I wonder...” With that, the dimunitive thief moved closer to examine it. Squinting his bright blue eyes, the ‘cat’ jumped up, grabbing on the lock and holding on with his paws. It was a thick, metallic lock, but it was one Morgana could have easily picked...had they been in the Metaverse, where he had opposable thumbs and tools. But sadly, in the real world, all he had were his claws. But maybe if he had some tools...

Jolyne was convinced that she was dead. She must have died against Kamoshida or Matsumoto, or maybe even some random accident, and she was being tortured for some previous misdeed.. That was the only excuse she could think of as to why she was trapped in the hell that was modeling for Yusuke, a task that required her to sit completely still for what seemed like months, but, as revealed by using Stone Free to check her phone, had only been about half an hour. She had to remain completely motionless, and trying to get a conversation out of Yusuke was like talking to a brick wall. “Good grief...” She groaned out, impatiently tapping her foot. She was about to ask Yusuke how much longer it was going to take, when Morgana finally came back in. “Finally! Did you find anything?” Jolyne asked, making sure to keep her voice low so as not to disturb Yusuke.

“Unfortunately, I didn’t find much. There’s a door with a lock on it, but I don’t have the tools to open it with me.” Morgana explained, and Jolyne raised an eyebrow.
“A lock?” She furrowed her eyebrows as she began to think. “I could use Stone Free to pick it, but it’s way out of my range.”

“Maybe, but how are we going to get over there? You can’t pick the lock if you can’t see it…” Morgana suggested…when Yusuke sighed. Panicking, Morgana quickly scrambled into Jolyne’s bag as Yusuke turned his attention back to his muse.

“I’m terribly sorry, Cujoh-san, but I can’t seem to start in a satisfying manner.” Kitagawa apologized, and Jolyne just gave a reassuring smile.

“It’s fine. Take your time.”

“I don’t know what I expected, honestly. Trying to do a nude painting with a clothed subject? I should have known better…” The skinny artist lamented.

“It’s really no problem. I-” Jolyne started to reassure, when what Yusuke said clicked in her head. Nude portrait.

As in a painting of Jolyne.

Naked.

“EHHHHH?!” She exclaimed, startling Yusuke. “What kind of sick scam are you running here, Yusuke?!?!”

“Hm? Is something the matter?”

“Is something the-? I didn’t agree to a naked painting of myself!” Jolyne shouted, and a light went off in Yusuke’s head as he realized where he had gone wrong.

“Ah, I see the problem. Allow me to apologize for not being clearer. There are few things as beautiful as the human form, and when I saw you in the subway, I thought you would be a perfect muse for my first painting of this kind.”

“And you didn’t mention this upfront because…?”

“Because I believed I could accomplish my goal without necessitating any actual nude modeling. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I was foolish to think my skills were that advanced…” He lamented, while the blushing Jolyne just folded her arms. “You must believe me, my intentions were not impure. My interest never stemmed from a place of lust, rather a place of artistic longing.” Jolyne just continued to glare at him, almost ready to storm out with her bag and never talk to Yusuke again…but then a thought occurred in Jolyne’s mind. One that was more than a little underhanded, and one she wasn’t particularly proud of…but she had no other option if she and the others wanted to know the truth.

“…alright. I’ll stick around.” She said, and Yusuke’s eyes widened. However, before he could speak, she held up a finger. “On one condition. You answer one question of mine, with nothing but the complete, honest truth.” Yusuke sat silent as he thought it over for a moment…before he nodded.

“Very well. If that is what it takes. Ask your question.”

“Who painted that painting we saw at the exhibition? The one that I thought represented Madarame’s anger.” The Stand user asked, and Yusuke’s eyes widened. “Don’t think I didn’t notice how you reacted when we were looking at it. Like there was something you wanted to say, but couldn’t. I’d
very much like to hear what that was.” Yusuke remained silent during her question, staring at the
floor. There was silence in the air for a minute, and Jolyne sighed. She went to go grab her bag off
the ground.

“…I am the one who painted that.” Yusuke was visibly shaking as he spoke, and Jolyne felt a tad
guilty for forcing the information out of him like this. “That painting…I am the one who created it,
right here in this very room.”

“So the rumors are true, then? That Madarame’s plagiarizing his pupils?” Jolyne asked, and
Yusuke’s head bolted up.

“It’s not what you think! I…I volunteered this for Sensei to claim as his own, of my own free will.”
The lanky artist revealed, causing the Phantom Thieves’ leader’s eyes to widen. “You must
understand. The exhibition was fast approaching, and Sensei had no new work to unveil. At his age,
the ideas don’t flow as easily as they once did, and I could tell he was despondent. So, I…I told him
he could use my painting.” Yusuke explained, Jolyne listening intently.

“And you’re not bothered by this at all? Someone else taking your own hard work, something you
clearly poured your heart and soul into, and passing it off as their own?” Jolyne asked.

“Of course I’m bothered by it. But after everything Sensei did for me, taking me in when I had
nothing and raising me as his own…how could I not help him in his hour of need?” Yusuke
explained, and Jolyne grit her teeth. This wasn’t the information she’d expected to get…but at least
now she understood Yusuke a little bit more. “And while Sensei has been known to get…passionate
in his teachings at times, I can assure you that he has never once laid a hand on me.” He was telling
the truth, that much was obvious. But at the same time, Jolyne couldn’t just ignore the existence of
the Palace. Something was clearly up with Madarame, but it was clear that Yusuke didn’t know
anything, or rather chose not to see it. Regardless, it was clear that she wasn’t going to get any more
information this way. Besides, she’d already overstepped her boundaries enough as it was.

“…I think I should go.” Jolyne said after a minute of silence. “I’ll…I’ll think on if I still wanna do
this.”

“Yes, I…I do believe that is for the best.” Yusuke agreed, as his muse began collecting her bag. As
he began escorting her through the shack, they passed the door with the golden peacock on it,
something Jolyne made sure to note. “Have a good day, Cujoh-san.”

“You too, Yusuke.” She said, and Yusuke nodded as he closed the door. “Good grief, that didn’t go
as well as I thought it would…” Jolyne sighed out, as Morgana stuck his head out of her bag.

“Still, it wasn’t a complete wash. We got confirmation that the plagiarism rumors are true.” He said.

“True, but according to Yusuke, it was completely voluntary. Still, that’s better than nothing…”
Jolyne sighed out, as she began walking towards the station.

“What do you think’s behind that big door?” Morgana asked, and Jolyne shrugged.

“No clue, but it’s definitely something important. We should keep an eye out for something like that
when we’re in the Palace.”

“So you want to move forward with Madarame as our target?” Jolyne nodded at this, as she boarded
the train back towards Yongen-Jaya.

“Yeah, I do. He needs to go down.”
Evening, Yongen-Jaya

Once she was changed into her evening clothes, Jolyne sat on her bed, getting her phone out and messaging the other Phantom Thieves.

JC: Kitagwa admitted to me that the plagiarism rumors are true

RS: For real?! Dude was like a brick wall the other day!

AT: How’d you manage to get him to admit to it?

JC: It was a trade. If I agreed to do a favor for him, he would answer one question for me.

AT: Well, I guess that’s one way to do it…

RS: So what was the favor?

JC: That’s not important

RS: Well it had to be something if it made Kitagawa rat on Madarame like that

JC: ...I gotta be a model for a painting

JC: A uh...nude painting

AT: WHAT????

RS: I knew that dude was a creep!

RS: He’s lucky we weren’t there, or I would’ve beat him to a pulp!

JC: Calm down, Ryuji.

JC: He’s an artist, not a pervert.

JC: He just thought that he could paint it while I kept my clothes on

JC: So I appreciate that

JC: I think…

RS: So...what now?

RS: Palace?

AT: We should definitely try and take down Madarame before his exhibition ends

AT: Otherwise we’ll lose the whole point of why we picked him.

JC: The exhibition runs through the rest of the month, so we’ve got time.

RS: So I guess we’re meeting tomorrow?

AT: Seems like it. See you guys then!
Chapter 19: Fox on the Run

Chapter Summary

The Phantom Thieves uncover definitive evidence about Madarame, and someone's life is never the same again.

Chapter Notes

And now for a chapter that, honest to god, wasn't finished back in November! Hope you all enjoy!

Chapter 19: Fox on the Run

Tuesday, 5/17/20XX, Evening

Mishima let out a sigh as he finished the last equation of his math homework. Ever since Kamoshida had went down, the volleyball team was all but disbanded. All their games and practices were cancelled for the foreseeable future, and their 'practices' mostly consisted of study sessions, as their substitute coach was woefully underprepared when it came to coaching athletics. Not that Mishima minded all that much. While Kamoshida had been in charge, inflicting his twisted abuse and brutal training regimens on them, Mishima’s grades had begun to slip, and now that he was gone, not only did Mishima have more time to focus on his schoolwork, but it also freed him up to run the Phan-Site.

The Phantom Thieves...the ones who finally ended Kamoshida’s reign of terror. Mishima had cobbled together the website the day the volleyball coach had confessed, and it had caught on faster than he’d ever thought it would. Mishima was prepared to do whatever it took to repay them, but unfortunately, since he had confronted Cujoh about his realization that she was the leader of the Phantom Thieves, she had yet to even look his way in class. If only he could prove to her how valuable he could be…

*Breep! Breep!*  

As soon as he had that thought, his phone chimed, signifying a new message. Mishima picked up his phone, his eyes widening as he read the message.
JC: *Hey, Mishima, it’s Cujoh.*

JC: *So is the Phansite completely anonymous?*

YM: *Well, all the postings themselves are anonymous, but not just anyone can post.*

YM: *You have to give a valid email address before you can post.*

YM: *That way the chat doesn’t get flooded with trolls and bots posting spam.*

JC: *Interesting.*

JC: *So since you’re the admin, does that mean you have access to email addresses?*

YM: *Yes*

JC: *So if I sent you a post, would you be able to find the person who made it?*

YM: *Yeah.*

There were no messages for about five minutes, and Mishima almost asked if everything was ok, when a link to the Phansite came through. As Mishima read her request, he couldn’t help but smile. His chance to repay everything the Phantom Thieves had done for him.

**Wednesday, 5/18/20XX, Afternoon, Shujin Academy**

Jolyne sighed as she picked her water up from the vending machine, turning to Ann and Ryuji. “I’m telling you, everytime I think I’ve got a good reading on Yusuke, he goes and surprises me.” Jolyne stated as she opened the water.
“So, are we going to the Palace today?” Ryuji asked a little too excitedly.

“Maybe. I’ve got Mishima running down what I think could be a lead, so I’m waiting to see if that pans out.” The leader stated.

“‘Leads’, ‘pan out’...man, our lives got real weird, real fast.” Ann remarked.

“Tell me about it. Now it’s all ‘personas’ and ‘stands’ and ‘Palace rulers’.” Ryuji agreed.

“So what’d you guys do yesterday?” Jolyne asked, and Ann broke out in a smile.

“Ok, so you guys have to promise you won’t say anything to anyone else, but…” The model began to say, before leaning closer to her friends. “...Shiho’s coming back to Shujin!”

“Whoa, for real?!” Ryuji asked a little too loudly.

“Keep it down, you idiot! Lady Ann obviously doesn’t want this broadcast where everyone can hear it!” Morgana scolded from Jolyne’s bag.

“Right, sorry…” The former track star apologized. “So, when’s she coming back?”

“Shiho says her parents want her to start back at the end of the month.” Ann answered, and Jolyne smiled.

“I’m really happy for her. We’ll all need to get together once we wrap up all this Madarame stuff.” No sooner did the transfer student say that than Mishima approached them.

“Uh, hey, Cujoh.” Mishima greeted. “So, remember that thing you asked me about last night?” He asked, and she nodded. “Well, I found the post and emailed the address. I actually wasn’t expecting anything, but the guy just emailed me!” He explained, causing Jolyne’s eyes to widen.

“Whoa, seriously? What’d he say?”
“He said he can meet in Shibuya this afternoon, right around the time school gets out.” The administrator answered.


“No problem! Anything I can do to help!” He cheerfully replied. “Do you...want me to go with you?”

“Nah, we got it.” Ryuji piped in. “We really appreciate it, though.”

“Oh! Uh...hope it pans out!” Mishima said, before he headed off and left the Phantom Thieves.

“Is it just me, or does he seem a little TOO eager to help us?” Ann asked.

“I think he’s just excited. He’ll calm down. I hope…” The leader commented. “So, are you guys doing anything today?”

“Nope.”

“I don’t have anything going on.”

“Then, I guess we’ve got a meeting.”

After school, Shibuya

The Phantom Thieves stepped into the main area of Shibuya Station, not far from where they had first met Yusuke. “So how do we know who we’re looking for?” Ann asked, and Jolyne shrugged.

“I dunno. I guess Mishima told him what to be on the lookout for.” Jolyne responded, and a certain blonde just sighed.
“Aw man, I don’t wanna be here forever. I got shit to do!”

“Like what? Play video games and slack off?” Morgana asked, and he looked away.

“I’m uh...practicing something.” He said, and Jolyne’s brow furrowed. For the past several days Ryuji had been acting...weird was the only way to really describe it. She could tell there was something he wanted to talk about, but the Stand user couldn’t tell what…

“Uh, excuse me?” A voice asked from behind them, and Jolyne sighed. She’d have to ask him later, as they all turned around.

“Whoa!”

“No freakin’ way!”

“Holy crap!”

...to see none other than Natsuhiko Nakanohara, the man whose heart they had changed in Mementos, standing behind them, looking a bit confused. “I-I’m sorry, do we know each other?” He asked, and they all composed themselves.

“N-no, sir. You just...scared us, that’s all! We’re all on edge because of finals and typical high school stuff, right?!” Ryuji hurriedly explained, and the other two frequently nodded.

“I’m sorry if I disturbed you.” Nakanohara apologized. “I’m supposed to be meeting someone here, but I don’t know what they look like. I was about to head home, when I saw you three. I..I don’t know how to explain it, but when I saw I felt an overwhelming sense of familiarity.” The Phantom Thieves’ eyes all widened. Was this because of their encounter with his shadow…? “I’m terribly sorry. I’ll be on my way and-”

“Is it about Madarame?” Jolyne asked, and the bank worker’s eyes widened.

“So it is you!” He realized, and Jolyne nodded. “Before anything else, just let me say thank you! I-I don’t know how you did it, but you prevented me from doing something truly terrible! If it weren’t for you-”
“Don’t mention it. Especially for something we don’t have any idea about.” Jolyne stated, and Nakanohara nodded as he caught her drift. “So, about your request…”

“You wish to know why I want to trigger a change of heart in Madarame, correct?” He asked, and they all nodded. “You see, I myself am one of Madarame’s former pupils.” The former stalker revealed, shocking them. “Years ago, I lived and studied under him, alongside a man several years older than me. Our every waking moment was consumed with artistic thoughts, with Madarame pushing us above and beyond our limits. As we finished our pieces, Madarame would claim them as his own, citing a need to keep his reputation alive until he could finish his ‘masterpiece.’” Nakanohara explained. “One day, my fellow student grew tired of Madarame stealing his work, and threatened to go public with it. However, before he could, Madarame claimed that he himself was plagiarizing works.”

“And it was the word of an established artist versus his.” Jolyne finished, clenching her fist in anger as the memories of her trial resurfaced.

“That’s right. He was blacklisted, unable to find any work elsewhere, and...and he took his own life.” Their former enemy revealed.

“My god…”

“That bastard!”

“That served to be the final straw. Despite Madarame’s pleas, I left that place, and renounced art. Not before Madarame used his reputation to denounce me, off course.” Nakanohara said, his eyes becoming downcast. “It’s a shame. I was quite skilled with a brush…”

“So now we’ve got real proof that the plagiarism is real.” Morgana stated from Jolyne’s bag.

“I tried turning over a new leaf, finishing my schooling and getting a job at a bank, but I’m afraid that, in my attempt to fill the void that art had left, my heart became corrupted to the point of obsession. I even put my girlfriend...ex-girlfriend...through hell.” Nakanohara muttered.

“Hey, you only turned out that way because that shitty old man used you up. All you can do now is own up to it, and try to do better.” Jolyne reassured him. “I promise, Madarame will pay soon because of you.”
“Thank you. You have no idea how much that means to me.” Nakanohara said, and was about to walk away...when he stopped. “If...if I may be so bold as to make on more request?” He asked, and Jolyne nodded. “Even now, one young man remains in Madarame’s grasp. Not only is he one of the most talented artists I have ever seen, but he owes Madarame greatly for taking him in after his mother died, so he has no choice but to stay with him.”

“He must be talking about Yusuke!” Ann whispered, as the man continued.

“Shortly before I left, I offered to take him with me. However, the young man refused me, saying ‘I have no other choice.’” He explained. “Please, I’m begging you...save him!”

“Consider your request accepted.” Jolyne stated, and Nakanohara nodded, before walking off.

“Damn. That was...intense.” Ryuji said after he had walked away.

“I’ll say. To think that the nice old man we met is capable of forcing someone into suicide like that...” Ann agreed, and sighed. “I should know better than anyone that looks can be deceiving, but I still can’t believe it.”

“So we’re all in agreement. Our next target...is Ichiryusai Madarame!” Jolyne declared, and turned towards a subway line. “Let’s get started.”

After School, Madarame’s Palace

A Shadow shaped like a security guard ran through the hallways, blowing his whistle. “Get back here, you damn intruders!” It called out, only to round a corner and be greeted with the empty room of paintings. “Where’d they go? Probably ran off, if they know what’s good for them...” The Guard mumbled to himself, and headed back down the hallway. Once he was gone, Joker poked her head out of her hiding spot behind a wall, as the others did the same.

“Damn, security’s already pretty tight. Wasn’t like this when we were here the other day.” Panther stated.

“Think it had something to do with us?” Joker asked.
“If our questions the other day raised his suspicions, I think so.” Mona stated.

“These Shadows don’t seem so tough. We just gotta avoid them, right?” Skull said. “Hey Joker, you still got that map?” He asked, and she nodded.

“Yeah.” She pulled it out, the others crowding around her. “Let’s see, it doesn’t look like the treasure’s in this building. But apparently there’s a walkway that connects to the second building a few floors up.”

“So it sounds like that’s where we need to go.” Mona pointed out, and Joker nodded.

“Let’s move.”

And with that, Joker began to lead the others through the elaborate museum. They went through the lobby, past the ornate gold statue, and ascended into the upper levels, either avoiding or dispatching any Shadows that they came across. Most of the Shadows that they went up against were a little tougher than the ones in Kamoshida’s palace, but they still fell before the Phantom Thieves. Joker even managed to obtain a few more Personas, though she had to ditch the ones she had gathered from Kamoshida’s castle. They cleared out the second floor, before moving on to the third, and then the fourth. It honestly started to get a little repetitive, before they made it halfway up the building...

Joker dodged a swipe from a small creature with a white mask and feathered wings, and Joker’s mask disappeared. “Jack Frost!” A white, snowman like creature with a blue jester’s hat appeared in front of her, and it let out a “Hee Hoo!” before it covered the Koppa Tengu in ice that then shattered into a thousand pieces.

Panther was surrounded by several of the small Koppa Tengus, using her whip to lash them into black and red ash, before summoning Carmen to blast several of them away. Skull was in similar situation, but he was using his pipe to smash them away as they got close. However, one got close to his face...only for Skull to backhand it away, his hand momentarily covered by what looked like another hand that electrocuted it. Mona was the least troubled of the four, using his slingshot to pick off the last one.

“Jeez, those things were annoying!” Skull sighed out, slinging his pipe across his shoulder.
“Tell me about it. Thank god they weren’t any tougher. I dunno if I could handle that…” Panther agreed, turning to Joker. “How much longer until we reach that walkway?”

“According to the map, it’s...this floor!” Joker exclaimed, reading the map. “Follow me.” She instructed, and began to lead the four. However, as they did so, Panther hung back with Skull.

“So do you ever notice how...different she acts when we’re in here?” She whispered, and he nodded.

“Oh man, I thought it was just me. Out there she’s all sarcastic and stuff, but in here she’s all business. It’s kinda scary, right?” Skull asked, and she nodded as Joker lead them to the walkway. They could see the second tower of the museum, and the bridge was occupied by large wooden slats with intricate peacock designs on them.

“That’s the same design that was on that door in Madarame’s…” Joker mumbled.

“I can feel the treasure coming from that second building!” Mona piped up, and Skull’s eyes widened.

“Whoa, seriously?! Already?!”

“Yep! All the way up at the top level!” The not-cat stated, and Joker nodded.

“Let’s get moving.” Jolyne said, and they began to move across the bridge, the wooden slats parting for them as the Thieves approached them. They were about to reach the end…

When they were greeted with the sight of an electrified security grid. “Oh come on!” Panther groaned out.

“Spread out. There’s gotta be some kind of mechanism or switch or something.” Joker instructed, and they all nodded. The group combed the area that they were in, Joker jumping onto a lamp to get a better view of the surrounding area. “Anyone see anything?”

“Not really…”
“I’ve got nothing.”

“No dice!”

“Good grief. And just when I was thinking this was too easy…” Jolyne muttered to herself as she jumped down to join the others. “Mona, explanation.”

“Let’s see, if the Palace is divided into two parts…” Mona said, tapping his chin in thought. “Alright, I’ve got it. Back in Madarame’s shack in the real world, he has a door with the same design as those panels, with a real heavy padlock on it. Think back to Kamoshida’s palace, where the gymnasium was represented by that chapel. If we apply the same thinking to this place…

“Then these gates represent that locked door?” Panther asked, and the diminutive thief nodded.

“That’s right. Because Madarame perceives whatever’s behind that door to be protected, then so too is the part of the palace that represents this locked room.”

“Alright, seems simple enough.” Skull piped up. “So how do we get through it?”

“It’s simple: we change his cognition!”

“Aaaaaaand you lost me again.” Mona just sighed.

“Isn’t it obvious? If Madarame perceives that room as being secure, then all we have to do is open the door in the real world, get him to see it, and the gate’ll drop!” The group’s resident model explained.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself, Lady Ann! As brilliant as you are beautiful!” The suck-up complimented.

“Yeah, but how are we going to get in the shack and have him the door open?” Joker wondered, as the gears in her head began to turn… “No. Nononononononono…”
“I’m afraid we have no other option.” Morgana stated, and Joker groaned and put her head in her hands while Skull and Panther just exchanged a confused look.

“Uh...what do we gotta do?” Skull asked, and Joker looked up, a look of pure dread on her face.

“I gotta make a call.”

**Thursday, 5/19/20XX, After School**

Yusuke nervously paced back and forth in his room at the Atelier. For most of yesterday, he had been worried that he had scared away Jolyne after he had revealed that he wanted her to be his nude model, so when she had contacted him last night and said she would do it today, the art student was over the moon! For a moment, he had thought she was coming simply to ask more questions about Sensei, but the transfer student had assured him that that was not the case. At last, the day Yusuke had waited for since he first saw her with that strange man with the pompadour last month. His masterpiece would finally be complete!

If Jolyne ever got here, of course. It was taking her a rather long while to get there, and Yusuke was starting to get worried. Had Jolyne been mugged...? No, that was absurd. From the brief interactions he had gotten with her, Yusuke got the sense that he should be more worried for any potential mugger. He glanced at the clock on his phone, and frowned. The exhibition would close soon, and Sensei would be home soon. Not that he would impede their painting session, of course. The expert painter knew what art required sometimes, but the apprentice was more worried about whether or not Jolyne would be uncomfortable in his presence. A bridge that would need to be crossed if Jolyne didn’t show up...

*DING DONG* The ring of the doorbell rang and roused Yusuke from his thoughts, and he went to the door. He opened the door, expecting to see Jolyne...

And was greeted with that sight, thought a bit...differently than he was expecting. “Uh, Cujoh-san? Are you...alright?”

“Hm? Yeah, I’m fine! I just got a little held up.” Said Jolyne from underneath the mountain of clothes she was wearing. If Yusuke didn’t know any better, he would swear that she had on every piece of clothing she owned. “I heard something about a polar vortex on the news or something, so I thought it’d be a good idea to bundle up.”
“...it’s May.”

“Well, yeah, but have you heard of this climate change stuff? Weather’s not acting like it’s supposed to. Figured it be better to be safe than sorry.” She explained, and Yusuke was about to question some more… “Can we go ahead and get started?”

“Very well. Please, follow me.” He instructed, leading her to his work room. As they passed the door that Sensei kept locked at all time, Yusuke could’ve sworn he heard rustling, but he figured it was just his imagination, as he lead her to the workroom.

“Uh, do you mind...turning around while I get undressed?” Jolyne asked, and Yusuke nodded.

“Of course. Whatever will make you comfortable.” He stated, turning around. He could hear her getting undressed, but he didn’t say anything…until a tank top and skirt landed near him, causing him to blush

As Jolyne peeled off layer after layer, she sighed to herself. This had better work… Back in the hallway, Morgana was at the lock, holding on with his paws as he manipulated a lock pick.

“This damn body…! What I wouldn’t give for some opposable thumbs…” Morgana muttered to himself. “Lady Ann and Ryuji better be in position…” He mumbled out.

The Palace

Skull and Panther were standing in front of the security gate, having finally arrived after making their way through the Palace. “Finally made it! Doin’ this without Joker and Mona ain’t so tough!” Skull cheered, and PAnther sighed.

“I hope they get this done soon. I don’t like the idea of leaving her alone with that Kitagawa guy like that…”

“Honestly, I’m more worried about him if he tried anything. Jolyne kinda scares me sometimes…” Skull replied, and broke out in a devilish grin. “Are you worried, or are you just jealous that you ain’t the one in there with her?” He asked, and she turned a shade of red on par with the color of her
“W-what?! T-that’s insane! Where’d you even get that idea?” She embarrassingly asked.

“Hey, I might be a total idiot, but don’t think I don’t notice how you two flash googly eyes at each other when you think the other ain’t lookin’.” Skull teased.

“I-I don’t even like girls like that!” She defended. “Look, can we just…talk about something else?” Ann asked, and Ryujii sighed.

“Whatever you say…” and with that, the two waited in complete silence.

The Atelier

Back at the door, Morgana was angling his lockpick, trying to find a good angle to unlock the door with…when the lockpick broke. “Shit!” He cursed out, spitting the remnants out of his mouth. He truly overestimated his skills in this body, and so only brought one lockpick. How foolish he was…it was time for plan b.

“Oh man, it’s so tight!” Jolyne called out as she peeled off another layer, noticing Yusuke stiffen up noticeably.

“Tight…?” He muttered out, and shook his head. “No, you mustn’t think like that!” Jolyne couldn’t help but chuckle. While she’d thought Ryuji’s time buying suggestion had been one of his dumber ideas (which was saying something), it had done the trick. Now that she was in the last layer of a green ‘lucky land’ tank top and shorts, it was only a matter of time before Madarame arrived. If only Morgana did his part...

“Psst, Joker!” A familiar voice whispered, and she looked up to see Morgana in the doorway.

“What’s wrong? Why aren’t you at the lock?!” She whispered back.

“The lockpick broke! We’re gonna have to use Stone Free!” He explained, and Jolyne scowled.
“Shit, really? Alright, I’ll be right there.” She responded, and cleared her throat. “Almost done~” she teased our, and Yusuke gulped nervously. Before he could question it, Jolyne ducked out of the room and followed Morgana out into the hall, straight to the door with the peacock design. She grabbed hold of it and pointed her finger at the keyhole, and her finger began to unravel into strings as her Stand ability activated. The strings went into the keyhole, and she closed her eyes as she began to focus. This lock was a bit more complicated than the one in Kamoshida’s palace, but it shouldn’t be too difficult. It was just a matter of finding the mechanism and getting it to move the right way. It was just figuring out how to do that the right way…

“What are you doing?!” Yusuke demanded, and Jolyne’s eyes widened as she spun around to see Yusuke standing there, a confused look upon his face. “Is...is that a cat? I thought I heard meowing…” The artist said, and Jolyne rearranged herself so that Yusuke couldn’t see the lock. “What is going on here?”

“I have to bring the cat with me when I leave, because my guardian doesn’t like me to leave him alone.” That’s it, just keep him talking. Focus on the cat, while Jolyne tried to manipulate the lock.

“I...suppose you could have asked me but…” Yusuke started to say, before he got back on topic. “Why did you run away? What are you trying to accomplish here?” Shit, he was getting straight to the point. And Jolyne almost had the lock…

“I-I got nerves, so I went to go find the bathroom and-”

“No.” Yusuke stated, his voice filled with more resolve than she had heard before. “No more lies. You have had an ulterior motive since day one, that much is obvious even to me. Your obsession with Sensei, your constant hounding for answers...I was willing to overlook it, to give you enough answers to satisfy you for the sake of my art.” If he kicked her out before Madarame saw the open lock, this would all be for nothing, and she would have wasted their only shot. Almost there.... “But now...now, I cannot overlook it. You must give me answers now, or i will-”

*CLANK*

The lock fell to the ground, startling the three of them as the Peacock Door opened behind Jolyne. Seizing the opportunity before Yusuke could react, she bolted into the room.

Yusuke’s eyes widened as Jolyne darted into the room, and bit back a curse as he followed after her. What did Jolyne hope to gain here…? “Stop right there!” He barked after ther, noticing that she had
stopped and was staring at something. “Now that’s enough! You are going to give me a straight
answer, and tell me what is-” Yusuke started to say, when he noticed what she was staring at. As
soon as his eyes focused on the object, Yusuke’s eyes went wide, his jaw dropped, and his hands got
all clammy and sweaty as he realized what he was looking at.

“Sayuri…” There was no mistaking it. Lining the room were several paintings that resembled the
painting that Yusuke had soon the trio the other day, down to the very way the light reflected off of
it. “But it was supposed to have destroyed. How...I don’t understand…”

“Yusuke, what is this room?” Jolyne asked, looking around.

“This...this is sensei’s room. But...but I don’t see a bed in here. I know that he sleeps in his studio
when he is busy, but...there’s no bed? What’s going on …” Yusuke looked like he had seen a ghost.
Jolyne could practically hear the gears turning in his head as he desperately tried to process this.

“Yusuke, I’m home!” Madarame’s voice called out, as they heard footsteps approaching. “Did
Cujoh-san ever come by? I know how much this means to you. And-” Madarame’s voice stopped as
he rounded the corner and saw the open door.

Palace

Skull and Panther were leaning against the bushes, almost convinced that Jolyne and Morgana had
failed, when the red defense gates shut off and the pylons lowered. “Alright, they did it!” Skull
cheered.

“Was there ever any doubt?” Panther asked. “Come on, let’s go shut down the security console
before the gates come back on!”

“Right!”

The Atelier

Madarame had walked into the room, his eyes wide as saucers as he noticed Jolyne and Yusuke.
“Yusuke, what is the meaning of this?! You know this room is off limits, even to you!” Madarame
scolded, but Yusuke didn’t seem to notice that.

“Sensei, what is going on?” The pupil demanded, spinning to face his teacher. “You told me that the
Sayuri was destroyed, irreparably damaged by thieves. And yet here we are, surrounded by
these...forgeries! I demand to know what is going on!” He yelled out, and Madarame sighed.

“I figured this day would come sooner or later…” The teacher mumbled. “Yes, it’s true that the original Sayuri was destroyed years ago. However, I have never told you the real truth. You see, years ago, one of my pupils lashed out at me, and destroyed my masterpiece out of frustration towards me and my teaching methods. That incident...it rattled me. It cast me into deep into a rut that I have been unable to recover from since.” Madarame admitted. “Because of this distress, my pupils would, on occasion, volunteer their own ideas for me to pass as my own.” Jolyne didn’t look so sure, but she held her tongue for now as Madarame continued to speak. “I knew I couldn’t keep this up forever, and so...I resorted to attempting to recreate the Sayuri. However, lightning never strikes twice, and my attempts to create the masterpiece simply resulted in replicas.”

“So what’s the deal with all these paintings?” Jolyne asked.

“A-ah, well, one day, I was contacted by a potential buyer. He knew that it wasn’t the original, but he didn’t care. I sold him a painting, and form there it spiraled. Soon, demand reached the point where I had no choice but to continue creating replicas.” The elder man explained, looking at the ground in shame. “I...I only did it so that I could further your education, Yusuke.”

“Sensei, I—”

“Yeah, no. I’m not buying it.” Jolyne spoke up, startling the student-teacher duo. “Some things aren’t adding up here. You said the original was destroyed, so how did you manage to find something to copy?” She asked, clearly throwing Madarame off guard.

“W-well, you see, I happened to find a detailed image in an art book one day, and had the image magnified and printed out.”

“Must have been some printing place, to get it blown up and printed out with such detailed quality…” Jolyne mused. “Also, selling replicas of a magnified photo? I’m not going to pretend I know how the art world works, but the people who buy art have sharp eyes, right? Wouldn’t they notice something like that?” As Jolyne spoke, she couldn’t help but notice Madarame’s demeanor begin to change. Until now, even when they questioned him, his eyes had been warm and kind, with a welcoming smile that had reminded Jolyne of her Grandfather. But now, his eyes were sharp and cold, his smile replaced by a frown that, for some reason, reminded her an awful lot of Kamoshida.

“Young lady, I think you’ll find that it’s rude to make baseless assumptions like this.” Madarame growled out, and that’s when Morgana, who had been silent until now, noticed something: a painting on an easel that was covered by a purple tarp.
“Joker, the one on the easel!” He pointed out, and she nodded. Taking her cue, Morgana leapt off and took the tarp in his mouth, pulling it down with him. The noise caught the attention of Yusuke and Madarame, and when Yusuke saw what was behind the tarp, his life would never be the same.

It was the Sayuri. Not a replica, not an imitation, not a copy, but the real painting. There was no mistaking it. The woman’s features, the look on her face, the way the colors seemed to work together… “The Sayuri…” Yusuke gasped out. “But…you just said a moment ago that it was destroyed. So… how is it here?!”

“I-I told you, I had an image printed out, so that I would have a reference to go off of!” Madarame tried to explain, but Yusuke shook his head.

“No. This painting…I would know it anywhere. This is what kept me going, what drove me…” Yusuke said, causing Madarame’s eyes to widen.

“How could he possibly know…?” He whispered to himself, as Yusuke spun around.

“Sensei…is this…?”

“It’s counterfeit!” Madarame blurted out. “Yes, yes, that’s what this is! I-I’d heard someone was trying to sell a counterfeit, so I bought it before they could tarnish my good name!”

“So you’re saying to artist bought a counterfeit of his own work? Give me a freaking break. Do you really think we’re that dumb?” Jolyne asked, and Yusuke narrowed his eyes.

“Sensei, please, tell us the truth.” Yusuke demanded, but instead of answering them, Madarame pulled out his phone, pressing a button on the flip phone.

“I’ve just reported you to my private security, Cujoh-san. Honestly, to think I’d have to use it on some high school girl…” The plagiarist scolded, and Yusuke stepped forward.

“Sensei, please! Let us talk about this!”

“You can talk about this all you want to the police, Yusuke.” He warned, causing his student’s eyes to widen.
“Jolyne, let’s get out of here!” Morgana advised, and Jolyne nodded.

“Move!” She ordered, as she and Morgana shot past Madarame.

“Run all you want! They’ll be here in two minutes!” Madarame taunted as they ran out of the atelier, across the street to the entry point of the Palace.

“We don’t have much time before the security gets here! The nav will take us right to Ann and Ryuji, right?” Jolyne asked as she took her phone out of her pocket.

“Ideally, yes! It’ll help if they’re on the bridge itself!” Morgana answered, and Jolyne began to open the Nav.

“Wait!” A familiar voice said, and they both turned to see Yusuke behind them, panting. “Wait...just a minute...” He panted out, as he caught his breath. “In...in all my years with Sensei, I have never seen him behave like that. Not even with a disobedient pupil. And yet, when you came along, you knew exactly which buttons you needed to press.” Yusuke panted out, and Jolyne noticed that he was shaking, with tears in his eyes. “You, you come along and you shattered everything I thought I knew about my life. You clearly knew something that I didn’t, even after all these years. What could it be? What could you possibly gain from all this?”

And at that moment, Jolyne was made aware of precisely what she had done. Ann and Ryuji, they had known what Kamoshida was long before she ever showed up. But Yusuke...while he had to have had some idea what Madarame was, he had been content to simply look the other way. At least, he was until Jolyne had come along and blown the lid right off of any semblance of a peaceful life. But now there was no ignoring what he had seen And could she really just walk away after that?

“You’re right. I do know something. I’ve known what he really is for a while now.” Jolyne stated. “Look, we don’t have much time before the security arrives. I...I could take you with me. With us. Show you what Madarame really is.” Morgana’s eyes widned, but he didn’t say anything as Yusuke thought it over. Jolyne didn’t say anything, but just extended her hand. Yusuke didn’t say anything, silence hanging in the air for a moment that seemed to stretch on forever...before he took her hand.

The Palace

Panther watched as Skull swung his pipe down on the security console again, shielding her eyes as it
exploded into sparks. “Maybe you need to hit it again? Y’,know, just to be sure?” She teased.

“Hey, I’m not the one who torched that guard before he could give us the code!” He shot back, as they made their way back to the bridge. “Besides, if the console’s all busted up, then they can’t fix it up, right?”

“Gee, I’m starting to wonder who the brains of this group are…” Panther sighed out as they returned to the bridge. “So they should be here by now, right?”

“Maybe they got held up?” Skull suggested, and Panther frowned.

“I swear, if that Kitagawa tries anything…” No sooner did Ann open her mouth did a red and black portal open up in the sky, and down dropped Joker, landing flawlessly on her feet. Ryuji looked up in time to see Yusuke falling on top of him, Mona landing on them slightly after.

“Ow…” The blonde groaned out, as Panther’s eyes widened.

“Whoa, is that Kitagawa? What’s he doing here?”

“He wanted to see what Madarame really was for himself.” Joker stated, extending her hand for Yusuke to grab, helping him up. It was then that he noticed that bizarre clothing she was now wearing.

“Cujoh-san? Is...is that really you?” He asked, and she nodded. He looked around, noting the golden decorations of the Museum Palace. “Where...where are we?”

“We’re in the Meta-Verse, a dimension that exists as a kind of second skin for reality. More specifically, we’re the Palace generated by Madarame’s twisted desires.” Mona explained, and Yusuke’s eyes widened.

“That mascot character...is that the cat?” he asked himself, looking around at the others. “Those hairstyles...Sakamoto? Takamaki? Is that you?”

“Yep.” Joker responded as she helped Ryuji up.
“What is going on? What is this ‘Palace’?” Yusuke asked.

“A Palace is basically a manifestation of someone’s twisted heart. And this...well, this is Madarame’s.” Panther explained.

“She ain’t lyin’. This is how that money grubbing bastard really feels.” Skull backed up.

“Basically, this is reality as Madarame views it.” Joker finished. “He thought of that shack as some sort of museum, something dedicated to showing off how great and talented he is, and so that’s how it appears in here.”

“This...this is all too much.” The artist muttered.

“Oh, trust me, this ain’t even the half of it. Wait’ll we tell you about our Personas.” The former track star commented, and Yusuke massaged his temples.

“I don’t even know what is happening anymore. Reality, my life as I knew it...I’m trying to be rational about it, but a part of me wants to believe that this is all some twisted dream.”

“Trust me, it’s real.” Joker said.

“Look, I don’t want to sound insensitive, but we should probably move!” Mona piped up. “Everything we just did, both in here and the real world, have probably raised security through the roof. If we stay here too long, then-”

“Well well, what have we here?” A familiar, yet distorted, voice called out, one that made the hairs on Yusuke’s neck stand up straight. They all looked to see a squad of guards approaching them, and they were all flanking the voice’s owner: Madarame’s shadow, dressed in an ornate golden kimono with his hair done up in a gaudy topknot that resembled a paintbrush, white paint across his face. “It seems we have some uninvited guests! Welcome, to the museum of the great Madarame!” Shadow Madarame bellowed out, and if Yusuke wasn’t already confused, he was now.

“Sensei? Is...is that really you?”
“In a sense.” Mona piped up. “That’s Madarame’s shadow, the manifestation of his true personality.”

“Sheesh, first an ugly king, now some kind of effed up shogun. What is with these guys and their fashion choices…?” Skull muttered to himself as Yusuke continued to process what was happening.

“This...this is all some sick joke, right?”

“Oh, Yusuke. Naive to the point of stupidity. I suppose that’s why you were always my favorite pupil.” Shadow Madarame stated. “Did it never strike you odd that I was always ‘so busy’? That I would work so late I had to sleep in my studio? Please! I’d never be caught dead living in that run-down shack! I have another home, one I keep under a mistress’s name.” Shadow Madarame revealed.

“Some setup you got there. If you weren’t such a piece of shit, I’d be impressed.” Joker piped up, and the Palace Ruler simply laughed.

“Oh little girl, you have no idea what I’m capable of.”

“I don’t understand. If the Sayuri was destroyed, why was it in the storage room? And why make copies if you had the original? None of it makes sense…” Yusuke rambled out, and the Shadow of his teacher just chuckled.

“Oh you poor fool. Isn’t it obvious? The painting being destroyed was just a false rumor I spread, to perpetuate my own legend!” Yusuke’s eyes widened at this.

“But...how? Why?!” He demanded, and Madarame just sighed.

“I’ll put this in the simplest terms that I can: ‘I found the real painting, but I can’t go public with it! You can have it for a special price, though...’” Madarame couldn’t help but scoff. “Art snobs eat that crap up, and they’re all too self absorbed to brag about owning it!”

“No…!” Yusuke fell to his knees, unable to bear hearing this from the man he thought of as his mentor, his teacher...
“What’s wrong? Can’t handle the sheer brilliance of my business scheme?” Shadow Madarame teased, and Panther scowled.

“You bastard! How can you do this?!”

“How can I not? The worth of art is purely subjective, to be determined by the eye of the beholder! If some poor fool wishes to assign a monetary value to my art, who am I to stop them?”

“Good grief, with all this talk of money, no wonder you ended up with this disgusting museum.” Joker said, stepping forward. “You call yourself an artist? How do you stomach stealing other people’s work and selling it as your own?!”

“Haven’t you been paying attention?! Art is nothing but a tool, a device to be used for nothing but money and fame!” The Shadow bellowed out, and Yusuke began to shake.

“And what about your pupils? Yusuke, Nakanohara, all the people down there in that gallery...what are they in all this?” The Phantom Thief leader asked, and Madarame scoffed.

“In this life, there are those that are destined for greatness, and those with the duty to get the former to their destiny! So what if I use them as my stepping stones? All that matters is that I rise to the level I was destined for!” Madarame ranted. “It’s only when fools like-

“That’s enough!” Yusuke’s voice called out, startling them all as he rose to his feet. “Tell me, why did you take me in? Take all your pupils in?”

“Plucking talented young artists and stealing all their ideas is but one way to stay ahead in this vicious art world. As I was trying to say when you interrupted me, it’s only when fools like that Nakanohara try to rebel that I have to crush their futures!” Madarame explained, and Yusuke scowled.

“To think that I was under the tutelage of such a wretched man. One who views life and art as nothing but a money-making scheme, who has no care for anyone but himself…” The others watched as Yusuke began to shake, clenching his fists so hard it started to draw blood. “You are truly unforgivable!”

“You damn brat! Is this how you repay me for taking you in all those years ago?!” Madarame
bellowed, and scoffed. “I tire of this! Men, dispose of them!” As the guards began to circle them, the Phantom thieves closed ranks.

“It looks like we’ll have to fight our way out!” Mona noted, as Joker’s dagger manifested in her hands.

“Skull, make sure you cover Yusuke.” She ordered, and was about to give Panther instructions...when Yusuke began to laugh.

“It seems the truth is stranger than fiction…” He muttered out. “All this time, I deluded myself into ignoring the truth that was right in front of me. My eye were truly blind, and unable to see the true self of the man I thought of as my guide...my teacher...my father. But now...now I see things as they really are.” Yusuke’s laughter faded, as he pointed his finger at Madarame. “I see you as the vain, cruel, greedy parasite you truly are...and I reject you!”

“Ah, I see you’ve finally come to your senses!” As soon as Yusuke said that, his eyes turned yellow as a migraine threatened to split his head in two, as a voice eerily similar to his own echoed in his head. “How foolish you have been to avert your eyes to the truth until now. A deplorable imitation indeed…Best you part yourself from that aspect.” As the voice continued to speak, the pain grew to the point that Yusuke had to drop to his hands and knees. Panther was going to check on him, but as he continued to writhe around, Joker held up her hand. “Let us now forge a contract. I am thou, thou art I.” Yusuke’s nails began to drag on the floor, leaving blood behind as he continued to writhe. “This world is filled with beauty and vice! It is time we taught people which is which!” And with that, Yusuke looked up, a flash of blue flames depositing a fox-shaped kabuki mask onto his face. Madarame watched in terror, the Phantom Thieves watched in awe, and Joker just smirked as Yusuke rose to his full height, blue flames licking his feet.

“Very well. Let us show them the truth.” And with that, Yusuke took hold of the mask, and ripped it off his face, causing him to be engulfed in a pillar of blue flames.

“Whoa!”

“Another one?!” Mona exclaimed as they jumped back.

Once the flames died down, Yusuke stood clad in a sort of black, high collared jumpsuit with puffy sleeves, a striped sash across his hips, and a white and red fox tail. Towering behind him was a Persona that could only be described as a character out of kabuki theater, complete with the raised sandals, painted face, and massive pipe. Yusuke held his hand out, the Persona mimicking his...
movements. “A breathtaking sight…” Yusuke spoke up, his voice free of the doubt that had plagued it before. “Imitations they may be, but together they make a fine spectacle. Though the flowers of evil blossom, be it known…abominations are fated to perish. Strike... Goemon!” And with that, Goemon swung his massive pipe, creating a gust of wind so cold it froze the nearby guards before they shattered into pieces.

“Whoa! That’s one strong Persona!” Mona commented, and Madarame scowled.

“Guards!” With that, four more guards erupted from the ground in an explosion of red and black, including a large red one that towered over all of them. “Kill them!” And with that, their masks all shattered, and the shadows exploded and reformed into several of the smaller winged demons, and the larger one formed into a malformed demon that resembled a blacksmith.

“It’s going to get tough here.” Joker said as she stepped up next to Yusuke. “Are you ready?”

“For the first time in my life...I believe I am.” With that, Joker smirked.

“Good. This is where the fun begins.” And then her face was all business. “Let’s go!” The Koppa Tengus all rushed them, but Skull pulled out his shotgun, shooting them down as they got close. However one got by, but before they could react, a sheathed katana manifested in his hands, and he unsheathed, slicing the Koppa Tengu in half.

Carmen appeared behind Panther as her mask vanished, blasting the Ippon-Datara with fire, but the creature didn’t seem phased by the fire. “It’s got a fire immunity!” She called out, and Joker nodded as she stepped in front of the creature swinging it’s hammer.

“Arsene!” Her winged persona manifested behind her, bringing it’s arms together to block the hammer. Joker still winced at the impact of the blow, but she still grabbed her chains, as Arsense shifted to Jack Frost.

“Hee ho!” The diminutive persona unleashed a blast of ice that staggered the Ippon Datara, enough for all the Phantom Thieves to rush it, swords, whips, and dagger strikes causing it dissipate into black and red smoke.

Shadow Madarame watched in horror as Yusuke landed in front of him, his fox shaped mask appearing on his face as he levelled a glare at Madarame. “You fool...you just realized that you’ve just thrown your future away, right?” The Shadow asked.
“A future spent in service to furthering your own greed and vanity...is a future I want no part of.”
The new Persona wielder stated, and took another step towards his mentor...before his leg’s wobbled, and he collapsed, Skull and Panther catching him before he could fall. “What...what is happening?”

“You’re exhausted from your Persona waking up.” Panther explained. “It happened to us too.”

“C’mon man, let’s get you out of here.” Skull said.

“But Madarame-”

“He’ll get what’s coming to him. Count on it.” Joker stated, glaring at Madarame as she spoke.

“Hmph. You’re more than welcome to try.” Madarame shot out, and cast a glare at Yusuke. “I’ll give you this opportunity to leave and try to see the error of your ways. But if I see you again...I’ll crush you like the others.”

“Same...to you...” Yusuke panted out, and without another word, the Phantom Thieves fled through the museum.

**Evening, Shibuya**

The group was gathered in the local beef bowl shop, watching as Yusuke scarfed down bowl after bowl. “Man, it’s like watching a vacuum cleaner...” Ryuji remarked.

“I don’t blame him. When I got Carmen, I cleaned out my entire pantry and slept for almost ten hours and was almost late for school.” Ann chimed in.

“So, how are you feeling?” Jolyne asked, and Yusuke paused his eating as he contemplated his answer.

“Physically, I am more exhausted than I have ever been in my life. Mentally...’troubled’ seems the only appropriate word to describe it.” He answered. “To think that all this time, Sensei was only using me and the others to further his own ambitions.”
“Living with him for all that time, you must’ve had some idea, right?” Ryuji asked, and Jolyne nudged him.

“Hey!”

“No, it’s quite alright.” Yusuke defended, and he let out a sigh. “I…did know something was off. Strange people would often come by, and the plagiarism…well, you already know about that. I must ask, how did you find out that it was more than rumors?”

“We met one of Madarame’s old pupils. A guy named Nakanohara.” Man answered, and Yusuke smiled slightly.

“Oh, Nakanohara-San. He always treated me with kindness.” He reminisced, before his smile fell. “He tried to show me the truth, to get me to leave with him. But…I couldn’t bring myself to see the truth. I used the debt I owed sen…Madarame to cloud my judgement.”

“You and Madarame mentioned that debt thing a whole lot back there. Is that why you couldn’t leave?” Ryuji asked, and Yusuke nodded. “If you don’t mind me askin…”

“What could I owe him that would lead me to delude myself?” Yusuke finished, and they all nodded, and he sighed as he collected himself.

“You don’t have to—“

“No, it’s fine. You all deserve to know.” The new Persona wielder reassured. “You see, years ago before I was even born, my mother and Madarame were colleagues, studying under the same art teacher in college. My father passed away shortly after I was born, and when my mother pass when I was four, Madarame…he agreed to take me in.” He explained, clenching his fist. “All this time, I thought that he had taken me in out of the kindness of his heart. But knowing what I know now…did the man I know ever truly exist?”

“So that’s why…” Morgana muttered. “If any of us were in that situation, we would have behaved the exact same way.” Yusuke looked at Morgana, a look of bewilderment on his face.
“...I’m sorry, the cat being able to talk is...something I’m still trying to get my head around.” The artist apologized. “But yes, that is why I was so defensive when you brought up the accusations. A part of me still wanted to view him as the man, as the father that I thought he was.”

“We completely understand.” Jolyne spoke up. “No need to apologize. We’re the ones who came in and blew it all up.”

“But if you hadn’t...I don’t want to think about what would have happened to me. And for that, I must thank you, Cujoh-san. Had it not been for you, I would still be trapped in that awful place. I am...grateful I got the chance to see and face the truth for myself.”

“Aw, it was nothing.” The transfer student reassured, sheepishly scratching the back of her head.

“So...what now?” Ryuji asked. “You got a place to stay? From what you guys said, things got pretty heated between you and Madarame back at the shack. If you need a place to stay, I’m sure one of us can-”

“Actually, as much as I appreciate the offer, that will not be necessary.” Yusuke cut off, pulling out his phone. “You see, since we got back from that...Palace...I have been receiving messages and voicemails from Madarame, apologizing for his behavior. He claims that Cujoh-san’s questioning caused his emotions to get the better of him, and that I am welcome to return.”

“Whoa, seriously? He’s willing to just...forgive and forget?” Ann asked.

“For me, at least. But...I don’t know if I should. Knowing what I know...can I truly return there? What can I do going forward?”

“You can join us.” Jolyne said, her voice causing all the noise in the restaurant to fade away. “I’m sorry, Yusuke, but I don’t we think we’ve properly explained who we are yet. We...are the Phantom Thieves.” She stated, and Yusuke’s eyes widened.

“That name...it was in the news, recently wasn’t it?”

“That’s right. We’ll give you all the details later, but long story short, we had a teacher who thought of our school as his own personal playground. We discovered the Meta-Verse there, and that he had a Palace. We then used that to ‘change his heart’, so to speak.” Jolyne explained, and Yusuke
noticed something...different in her eyes. “We did this by infiltrating his Palace, then finding and stealing his treasure, the manifestation of the distorted desires that had created the Palace.”

“And Madarame is your latest target.” Yusuke concluded, and they all nodded. “Why?”

“We all had our lives messed up because of shitty adults who don’t care about anyone but themselves. We got tired of just sitting back and watching it happen.” Ryuji explained, and Ann nodded.

“We’d gotten Madarame’s name from another of our targets, and when you came along and invited us to the exhibition, we saw our chance.” She explained, and Yusuke folded his fingers in front of him in thought.

“I see. I must ask, why did you select Madarame as your target?”

“Well, this is a bit...shallow, I guess, but the fact is we wanted a target that would allow us to stand out.” Jolyne admitted. “We actually want to change society, make sure people like Kamoshida and Madarame get what they deserve. But we can’t do that if we fade into obscurity.”

“And with the exhibit being as highly publicized as it is, there is no better target. A controversy like this at this time, at that this stage in his career, would surely ruin him.” He concluded, and chuckled to himself. “I would very much like to see that. Very well. I shall join you. If you’ll have me, of course.”

“Well, we don’t really do anything unless it’s unanimous. Guys?”

“You’ve got my vote!” Ann cheered. “I know I called you a creep, but knowing what we know now, about how Madarame had you trapped under him like that...I’d be a hypocrite if I turned you away now.”

“Hell yeah he’s in! You gotta make Madarame pay for everything he did to you and the others.” Ryuji agreed, and Morgana scoffed.

“The more crew members you add, the more the chance of failure increases.” Jolyne was about to scold him, only for the not-cat to simply grin. “But your Persona is a powerful one, and I can’t deny you have potential. I say yes.”
“Then it’s official. Welcome to the team, Yusuke.” Jolyne congratulates, and the newest Phantom Thief smiled.

“I am truly honored, and will do my best to make you all proud.”

11/20/20XX, Unknown Location

“So, you gained another accomplice.” Sae’s voice cut through, cutting Jolyne off. “Your target’s own pupil, revolting against his own master to make him pay for his injustices…I have to say, for such a critical part of tour operation, you sure took your time getting there.”

“What can I say? My grandfather always says it’s the journey, not the destination that counts.” Jolyne answered, and Sae checked her notes.

“The involvement of Madarame’s pupil actually raises a new question. When you were arrested, the arresting officers retrieved numerous pieces of paper off of them, with various designs on them that seemed to make no sense. Was it him who created these? What purpose did they serve?” The prosecutor asked, and the Phantom Thieves’ leader simply clicked her tongue.

“Wouldn’t be a good storyteller if I jumped ahead, would I? We’ll get there in time. Now, as I was saying…”

Thursday, 5/19/20XX, Evening

I am Thou, Thou Art I

Thou Hast Acquired a New Vow.

It shall become the Wings of Rebellion

That Break thy Chains of Captivity

With the birth of the Emperor Persona,

Thou Hath obtained the winds of blessing

That shall lead to freedom and new power!
As soon as Yusuke said that, his smile faded. “Now, for the time being, I believe it is for the best that I return to Madarame.”

“Whoa, you sure?” Ryuji asked, and his new friend nodded.

“It would serve us well to avoid raising his suspicions. Besides, I can be our ‘man on the inside’, keep an eye on him and ensure he doesn’t grow wise to what we’re doing.”

“If you think it’s for the best, I won’t stop you.” Jolyne agreed, and scratched the back of her neck. “So, that was kinda every piece of clothing I own back there. If you could send that all back to me…” The others all laughed. They had their target, they had a strategy, and they had a new member. What could go wrong?

Shinjuku, Late Night

A man staggered out of one of the more adult oriented stores in the red light district, taking a swing from the drink in his hand. “Ah, damn bitches! I’ll just take my money elsewhere!” He called out, going to take another drink from his bottle...only to get a chill down his spine as he walked down an alleyway. He turned around, being greeted with a shadowy figure. “Oh, it’s you. Whaddya want this time?”

“I have a job for you. Something that requires your particular set of skills.” The figure said, and the man sighed.

“Look, I already told you, I ain’t bein’ your damn bodyguard while you run around the world! Everything I could possibly want is right here in Tokyo.” The man stated.

“No, not like that. There’s an individual here, one who is of great importance to my plans.” The figure stated. “My endgame is still miles away, but this person is someone I would like to get a handle on as soon as possible. Bring her to me. Alive. If she dies, you will suffer a fate worse than death.”

“Look, is this is your kid or your wife or something, I try not to get involved in domestic stuff. Crosses a personal line for me. Now, if you actually wanted to come here and talk to me face to face, then-” The man started to say, when his phone chimed. He pulled it out, his eyes widening as he saw the amount on the screen. “Whoa…”
“Is that enough?”

“Man, for that amount, I’ll bring you whoever you want.”

“Excellent. Remember, I want her—”

“Alive, or a fate worse than death. I heard you the first time.” The man said. “Where do you want me to bring her?”

“Contact me as soon as you have her. Your instructions will follow soon after.” The figure instructed, and the man nodded.

“Understood. What’s the target’s name?”

“Jolyne Cujoh. I will send you the relevant information I have soon.”

“Huh, sounds American. Eh, makes no difference to me. You got a name you want me to call you, or you want to keep it anonymous?” The man asked, and the figure thought for a moment.

“You may call me Whitesnake.” And with that, the figure seemed to vanish, and the man sighed.

“Jeez, that guys creepy. Oh well, as long as his money’s good.” The man stated, and walked down the alley. He was about to take another swig of his drink, when a stray cat ran across his path, startling him and causing him to drop his bottle, shattering it. “Damn pest!” He cursed, and the cat hissed at him. The cat turned to run away when it felt something almost menacing behind it. It didn’t even have time to react before it’s head fell to the ground, sliced clean from it’s body. As the spilled liquid settled back onto the ground, the man sighed, and walked off. “Dammit, where the hell am I gonna get something to drink this late…?”

To Be Continued...

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