Summary

The position of Chief Prosecutor sees Miles leaving his work abroad. As he settles into a permanent residence, he decides to put his personal life in a semblance of order. This means taking action, which immediately leads to helping Wright prepare for the bar exam. But studying with Wright has him questioning whether or not initiative is genuinely worth the trouble that accompanies it.

Notes

The inspiration for this project hit me like a truck. I was actually researching information for the bar exams in Ontario- which I will be taking in a few years- when I started to get and develop the idea. The information about bar exams is based both upon the two I will be taking, as well as the ones in Japan. Partly because I could find more intricate information about mine, partly because the Ace Attorney universe enjoys mixing up the specifics of its legal system. If you ever want me to clarify which details and numbers are which in this, feel free to ask, as I've got waaay too many notes about all of this now.

There's some seriousness, some silliness, and slightly less attempted murder than my last multi-chapter story.

Read, review, and enjoy!
The townhouse felt lived in, just not by him. Depressions meant one could sink into the wooden floor, trip if a particular board was higher than the rest. All the old furniture had been emptied and replaced by his own, but it just didn't gel with the place yet. Such and such belonged on a windowsill, a chair should have been positioned closer to the door. Ghosts of the previous owners all left their little touches on the house, making it not quite his home. The feeling would pass soon enough.

His new residence was located in an older neighborhood, where there was less crime, and dog-friendly space. Pess was already appreciating the existence of a backyard, no matter how small and plain it might have been. A patch of grass to roll in was still a boon in her eyes. She could happily chase the neighborhood squirrels right up to a single, broad tree.

The townhouse was older, but it had nice bones. The character of its structure drew him towards it when he was house-hunting. The first floor was open-concept, with curving archways leading to each room. In the area where his study would be, the window stretched wide. He had a good view of the aforementioned backyard, and squirrel-chasing dog. There was plenty space for bookshelves and his desk, a couch.

"Maybe too much," he mused. "Despite all my furniture being in place, it feels rather empty."

Even with a large dog who savoured getting underfoot, there seemed to be excess area. He didn't yet have use for all the rooms available. It was truly a family-sized house, and he'd recently gone back to square one in that area.

"How about one last kiss for the road?"

With a mental sigh, he pushed that memory away. He was being pathetic and moping, reminiscing. It was a semi-public embrace in the airport. Good-natured, a little sloppier than usual as it ended abruptly. A droning voice over the intercom announced that the boarding for a flight to Zeng-Fa had opened, so the man turned away.

It wasn't as if they were ignorant to what was happening. Both of them had felt pulls in different directions for some time. It was mutual, placing career (the potential for legal reform with it) and family over each other.

He was offered the position of Chief Prosecutor. In the new year, the current one would retire. Until then, he would be back as a regular prosecutor, adjusting to his move.

Lang needed to go back to Zeng-Fa, and begin "raising pups." He did not literally mean having children, the man just loved his infuriating canine metaphors too much. He was given a missive to return, and teach some younger relatives about traditions. It was his duty as the foremost expert of Lang Zi's philosophy, and oldest living family member.

Miles decided this meant Interpol would see a staggering increase of wolf-obsessed agents in the future. But he was well aware he was being cynical and jealous. He didn't have Edgeworth family traditions to pass on. Any behaviours remotely similar to his father's had been systematically untaught. Logical thinking could have been a tradition, but he was not certain. It would still double as one for the von Karma family too.

"Raymond might remember something."
Yet even then, there was no one to pass them on to.

Miles forced his thoughts back to organizing his study. The furniture might have been in place, but the books were not. Boxes filled with them were stacked against his desk. Some were splitting at the seams, and others were held together with liberal amounts of masking tape. There were two full-sized shelves to fill, and then the floor-to-ceiling ones at his office the next day. But he didn't trust anyone to put them up in a way which was proper and organized. He had a system. It was just that no one else wanted to learn how to follow along.

Following his system, he worked his way through a good portion of the boxes. It was admittedly satisfying to see the shelves gradually fill up. The first had law texts he didn't want to keep around the office for one reason or another. Some were too specific for day-to-day use. Others were outdated, but composed what few physical remnants he had of his father. Ray had gifted them to him. The second shelf was filled with the "other" category.

The job was dusty and unforgiving. More than once he brushed a page the wrong way and received a stinging papercut in return. He worked until his shoulder protested and he couldn't ignore how hungry he was getting. Miles thought to stop for dinner, but then recalled the very empty cupboards, and barren refrigerator. Pess might have something to say about eating all her dog treats. Not that he would attempt such a thing. The solution was to go out.

"If I call Wright now I could arrange to meet with him and Trucy."

After a quiet day of just himself, he wouldn't mind some company. (He blamed Lang's near-constant presence for conditioning that.) It would be an excellent time to catch up as well. This decided, he called the man. He set his cell on speakerphone and resumed unpacking. There was no sense in wasting the time he had.

"Hello, you've reached the Wright Anything Agency. At least, the rent-payer's cellphone number."

"Good to hear from you as well, Wright."

"Edgeworth? Sorry, I couldn't see your name through all the duct tape."

Visualizing Wright's ancient flip-phone, he could only roll his eyes. The thing was old when Wright first got it, and now it was flat-out archaic. Somehow it was still functioning eleven years later.

"How's the jetlag?"

"Nothing a good rest can't fix. Speaking of which, would you be interested in an early dinner?"

He said early and meant it, because he and his stomach were not operating in the same timezone.

"Can't," Wright answered, not missing a beat.

"Alright," he paused, to place another volume. "How does Saturday sound then?"

"I'm busy," Wright quickly said, with not a little impatience.

He was somewhat put out by Wright's tone of voice, but also surprised at the rejection. Mutual or not, the breakup had clearly done little to bolster his confidence. Why else could he not stop thinking of it? He shouldn't have felt nearly this bothered, and brushed off the unwanted feeling.

"I'm in the middle of studying for my qualifying exam," Wright explained. "It's Sunday, so if you could call me back later-"
It took a shameful amount of time for him to make the logical connection.

"You mean for the bar, since you're not a recent law student?"

"Well it's not for the grape juice I'm drinking," Wright snapped. There was a definite edge to his voice, he clearly wanted the conversation to end.

"I didn't realize you were going for it so soon."

Miles fixed the dust jacket of a book, and then settled it on the shelf. After a moment's deliberation, he decided it was better-placed somewhere else.

"It's not like I have anything better to do."

Miles got the not-so-subtle hint. Today was a Friday, so he was pressed for time until Sunday. Wright would no doubt be surrounded by books, reading and memorizing as much content as he could for the qualifying test. After he passed that, there were the two exams which the bar was composed of.

The barrister's was first, and the solicitor's came around two weeks afterwards. Both were seven hours long. Last he'd heard, there were around fifteen hundred pages of content to understand. The pass rate of twenty percent hardly made the tests any more appealing. Entire law schools had seen years where none of their graduates passed.

Naturally, Wright would spend most of his time deep in study. This was not something which he could afford to take risks with. But the idea of Wright dedicatedly going through the approved material didn't fill Miles with as much pride as it should have. In fact, there was dread which he couldn't quash.

Miles pictured a dark-circled, glowering man, isolating himself in solitary until the exams came. During his time, plenty of students turned into that sort of hermit, driving people off and becoming obsessive. Already, he could tell Wright was heading down that path.

Strangely enough, his plans for the future didn't involve going months without seeing Wright. Not when they were living in the same city, and would soon be working together.

"I can help you prepare for the bar," he offered.

"Edgeworth, I took this country's bar before they had reforms. You know, when the pass rate was three percent in a good year?"

"It may be easier, but the content has changed with it," he pointed out. "And you might have been able to stay up all night and miss meals as a law student, but you have actual obligations now. Trucy, namely."

Mentioning his daughter was the way to go about things. Miles practically held his breath, knowing it should work, but still fearful he might say "no" anyway. The line was silent, as Wright drew out giving his final answer. Just as Miles' lungs were beginning to hurt, Wright said, "I'll take up your offer."

"I can get you all of the indices free of charge," Miles hurriedly added, so afraid Wright declined that he wasn't paying attention. "I've also tutored two students through it in the past!"

Kay had run off with Franziska to get in and out of international troubles. This was after a short time as an attorney under Raymond. Sebastian was now happy as a domestic prosecutor. Neither of them
had been fully cooperative with the studying, and there had been plenty of tears, but both had passed.

"I already said I agree," he reminded. "But I'm sure you'll be the most overqualified study buddy I could ever want."

"Excellent! I'll call you after you've written the qualifier and gotten some rest!"

"See you."

And with that he hung up.

Miles was already drawing up a list of everything he would need to buy, and planning out study schedules.

"Depending on the number of pages in the indices this year, the time spent studying would be altered," he thought. "It wouldn't hurt to find the guidelines for the essay questions, either."

Working with Wright would be a serious improvement in comparison to the last two times he'd done this. There would be no teenage outbursts, and Wright would understand the value of being cooperative!

Miles willed himself to keep putting away books. He wound up leaning against the desk, never wondering if perhaps he was a little too happy for his own good.
Purchasing all the necessary studying materials and indices had been the simple part of his job. Carrying multiple books from his car and up a flight of stairs provided more of a challenge. Wright said he would be in around this time, and so it was his plan to drop them off. Miles couldn't see much over the wobbling pile of books, and deeply regretted his choice to not find a bag or boxes he could put them in. Goodness knew there were an abundance of boxes around his new residence, now that he was all unpacked. With some tricky maneuvering, he got the office door open.

"Mister Wright can you please pay me already? You're five days-"  

Whoever the voice belonged to, it stopped short. That certainly sounded like something Phoenix Wright would do. But the man had told him his employee was quite competent. Surely he didn't deserve to put up with a late paycheck?

"How much does he owe you?" Miles asked, taking a cautious step forwards.

The man had allowed his office to slowly devolve into a mess. It was composed of magic props, old furniture, papers. There was very little floor space left. One of the few things he recognized was the potted plant Wright was fond of talking to. It was still growing strong despite the clutter.

"That cravat!" the voice muttered. "A-are you-?"

"Yes," he pushed aside some knickknacks which were on the piano bench, and put the indices there. "I am Miles Edgeworth."

The startled person was a lawyer around Kay's age. He was short, and without a blazer jacket. He had good taste in colour however, his waistcoat was a nice red. It matched the flush on his startled face.

"You must be Apollo Justice then," Miles went on, figuring he would not get a proper introduction. Surely he wasn't that intimidating. He'd kept his glare down to a level three, maximum.

"Y-yeah, that's me!" Justice finally gained his bearings, and offered him a hand. "Mister Wright just went out for a sec, but he'll be back."

"How much does that man owe you?" Miles repeated, taking out a check book.

"Sir! I couldn't-"

He dialed up his glare to a seven. Justice stopped protesting and hastily told him the amount.

"That's one thing he'll be paying me back for," Miles announced, tearing out the check. "And a lecture in employer ethics wouldn't hurt either."

"T-thank-you," Justice stammered, cradling the slip of paper with awe. "Can you be my boss instead?"

"The prosecutor's office is always looking for competents," Miles brushed off, knowing he hadn't meant to ask that aloud. "Would you mind lending me a hand with these indices? I've still got more to bring in."

"Of course!"
"He's very loud," Miles noted. "I believe he and Franziska would get along well."

Justice curiously read some of the book titles as they carried the rest back.

"Is this an index for the bar exam?"

"Multiple indices, I've gathered all that I could."

With all the volumes in place, he began to organize them in a single, neat pile. They went according to the order which they were printed, the most logical way to keep them. Justice perched on the edge of the couch, glancing between him and the door.

"So that's why Mister Wright's been quiet lately."

Wrinkling his nose, Miles pushed aside what appeared to be a large, fairground prize. The Blue Badger's eyes stared creepily back at him, until he forced it to give up the floor space it was hogging.

"I wouldn't expect to see much of him in these coming months. He'll be busy studying."

"You're getting him prepared for it."

Since Miles wasn't due to take any cases for a week, he had more than enough spare time to plan. And plan he had, putting together a schedule and series of tests they could go through to check his progress in studying. Justice didn't know half of what he had prepared.

"Naturally."

"You help Mister Wright out with a lot of stuff, don't you?" Justice asked. There was something accusatory about his tone, as if he'd just come to a brilliant deduction.

"He's not blackmailing me if that's what you're suggesting."

The confidence Justice built up in the previous questions drifted away from him. Again, he was nervous and a bit tongue-tied.

"We go back," Miles elaborated. "Read any legal section of the newspapers from two-thousand sixteen."

Justice began shuffling around some debris, revealing the polished surface of what appeared to be a desk. With all its sides surrounded by magical props, it was difficult to tell.

"I know about that," he swept paperclips and thumbtacks into his palm. "I used to drag my friend all the way to court, so we could watch you guys."

"Then you know it was thanks to that man..." Miles trailed off, remembering those days. They brought some of the lowest points in his life, with a few happier times between. Then the same thing had happened to Wright for seven years.

"Well, having someone around makes it easier," Justice shrugged. "While I was getting ready for the bar I had a friend help out. We quizzed and had matches to see who was more stressed."

Once he ceased stuttering, Justice was not the worst person to small-talk with. He was certainly better than that chatterbox Gavin, or either of the Paynes. The prosecutor's office had stacked itself with people he didn't like during his absence.

"Hm," Miles agreed, skimming through the pages of a questionable booklet. Some corners were dog-
eared and yes, sure enough, he found a missing page. The misprint would have to be replaced for a new one. "I find most law students lock themselves away, they don't want to rely on each other for fear of betrayal."

"Ah, he's not a lawyer, he's going to be an astronaut."

"The only tests harder than this country's bar and he took it?"

"Yup. We had our exams around the same time too, practically drove each other crazy."

"Fortunately, we won't experience that problem. He knows what to expect with the bar. I'm going to make sure that man eats and showers regularly in addition to preparing."

Justice smiled a little with his remark.

"Mister Wright doesn't even do those things when he's not studying."

"I forget to."

Something blue streaked towards him, and he was tackled in a hug.

"T-Trucy," Miles winced a little, the girl was getting too strong for her own good. "How are you?"

Trucy's cape blocked Wright from view. Like her, it seemed to have grown bigger since last time they'd met.

"Good, better now that you're going to live here. I can get to see Pess everyday! She'll be like, my dog!"

"She's in the car now if you want to-"

A final breath-taking squeeze and Trucy ran out of the office. The squeaking noise signified that she was sliding down the bannister. Now he could see Wright, who was standing in the threshold and staring at him. Miles looked over the man for changes, but couldn't find many. He'd traded his sweater for a sweat-soaked t-shirt, and looked rested. The last time Wright had visited, he'd been so tired he barely spoke. He was tense with exhaustion and all his nerves were stretched taught. That was shortly before Kristoph Gavin's first indictment, and the events which had turned around his luck.

Miles got off the floor and straightened himself out. Streaks of dust marked his pants, but he couldn't be bothered with them.

"Wright," he greeted.

"Edgeworth," Wright's eyes strayed to the new books. "Only back in the country three days and you're already bossing me around."

He laughed at the notion.

"I don't think there's anyone who can make you do something you don't want."

"Um should I just-?" Justice interrupted.

"Go take a lunch break," Wright suggested.

"It's only nine," he retorted, still making his way towards the door.
"Not in Europe it isn't."

They waited until he went down the stairs to resume speaking.

"He's intuitive."

"You don't know half of it."

"You should pay him regularly."

Wright's tiny smile sunk back into the shadows of his face.

"Don't tell me you-"

"I'm going to pretend that secluding yourself for the qualifier is why you were late on paying him. And that you won't do it again."

"Edgeworth," he sighed, turning away.

"Unlike your studying material you will be paying me back for it," Miles announced. "I've put together a schedule-"

"And colour-coded it too I'd expect."

"If not for your own ease then for my sanity," he tersely said, giving a copy to Wright.

He thumbed through the pages of the organizer, and gave a low whistle.

"You know what I just said about colour-coding?" Wright asked. "I was joking."

"I'm aware you're competent, that understanding the content will not be an issue. It's the quantity which will challenge you, but this will make the studying process easier to endure."

"I don't know about that understanding part of what you just said there," Wright ducked his head, grinning at the floor. "It seems like all anyone accuses me of is tactless bluffing. You don't need a law degree to do that."

More than a twinge of guilt came with his remark. In their first courtroom encounters, and even after that, he'd joked about the man's thought process. He was so illogical at times that it couldn't be helped. Even if Wright was onto something in the end...

"Maybe if you stopped presenting your attorney's badge at every opportunity given it wouldn't be an issue."

"I miss doing that," Wright confessed, finally showing some honesty.

Time together always started off like this. Wright was shifty, quietly holding his cards to his chest. So long as Miles didn't pry deeply into what was happening back home, Wright would become more open by the end. Miles wished he had tried harder to get straight answers about what was happening in his life.

There were infuriating points which made it appear as if someone was methodically undoing the trust they'd established before. Miles had his suspicions. They were built from passing remarks. From implications which were horrifying when thought about. Wright ignored them with the same causal air he usually displayed.
The man Wright had simply dismissed as a "nice guy" for seven years just so happened to be a murderous egomaniac who'd coincidentally gotten him disbarred. He had an unhealthy interest in Wright. Very little else could explain why he stuck around throughout those years. When the news reached Miles (News. Not a call or text from Wright, but from an international paper, two days afterwards!) Miles knew he should have found out more. The man wasn't telling him half of it. And when pressed Wright figured, "It wasn't all that important."

"How do you believe the qualifier went?"

"Eh," Wright shrugged, waggled his hand. "You would not believe the number of snobs taking that thing. When I showed up in my pyjamas they all made a fuss, like you have to wear a suit to be intelligent."

Stooping over, the man examined his new books. He brushed the tips of his fingers across the glossy pages. There was a fascination to that touch, like he didn't believe them to be real.

"But how was the content?"

"I think I wasted more pencil lead filling in the scantron bubbles than I did on the essay. Of course, I used a pen for that part."

Wright could talk about his daughter and what she was doing until he was purple in the face. The moment the conversation was ever steered to any aspect of his life outside of playing the piano, he deflected. He ignored and was cryptic and essentially turned into a paranoid brick wall. No, that description wasn't correct. A brick wall could provide more useful information than Wright ever gave.

Wright used to be openly emotional. His difficulties with reigning his feelings landed him in never-ending troubles. Wright trusted people, believed in a client's innocence until the undeniable end. Someone had carefully dismantled those parts of his personality, transforming him into the man who now curiously poked the indices with a toe.

"Don't do that," Miles warned.

"This is going to be a hundred or so hours of you bossing me around, isn't it?" he wryly asked, prodding it again.

"Until you care about yourself once more," he wanted to say. "Until you stop trying to hide everything from us and feel a modicum of trust for others."

But telling him that might cause problems. It would set the goal further back than any other action he could think to do in that moment. Thus, Miles settled for glaring at the man who couldn't even meet his eyes, and calmly stated, "Two hundred hours, actually."
Permutations and Combinations

Wright had been adamant about reading and taking study notes on his own. "I don't need you to hold my hand through the entire process," he'd insisted. Miles had agreed, knowing the man was more than capable of breaking down the material on his own. He didn't want to make Wright believe he had no faith in him. When he set a goal or planned something, he reached it in the end. Wright exhibited this ambition with trials, and with the elaborate steps he'd taken to indict Gavin.

Yet, just because he had faith in the man, it didn't mean he wanted Wright to spend most of his time in solitary. In fact he desired the opposite, needed a reason to see the man more often. Miles settled for declaring that they would have the first quiz on Thursday. Wright curiously re-read the schedule and remarked, "I think you forgot to colour code that date, I don't see it on here." Then Miles hastily snatched back the schedule and tore it to ribbons with an excuse of, "I must have given you the rough draft by accident. Quizzes will be every other day, not every four."

After a painfully long Wednesday, Thursday came. He persuaded Wright to come to his office with a promise of grape juice. And the assurance he would take steps to prevent crossing paths with Klavier Gavin. Thus, Gavin searched in the basement library for the non-existent PW-3 case file while Wright arrived.

Wright still had some reading to do before the quiz, and thus started on the couch. He balanced a bottle of grape juice against his thigh and rested his book on a pillow. He jotted quick notes, and made marks on certain pages, while underlining other paragraphs.

Miles had work of his own to finish, so the arrangement suited him fine. There were significant precedents set in the country while he was gone. Most were about procedural issues within a trial, and were tedious because of it. Nevertheless, he couldn't allow himself to make the same blunders, and accidentally create grounds for a mistrial…

His eyes would flit up to the clock, towards Wright. Gradually, Wright slid off the couch and migrated to the ground. At first it was to manage his spread of papers, he sat upright and sorted through them all. Then he took a pillow and lay on his stomach, reading over something. The soft rustling of pages died out, and his scribbling pen went silent.

Wright had fallen asleep.

It was a minute to his hour's break anyway, so he let the man be. Students who forced themselves into unhealthy sleep cycles got lower results on the bar. They needed to get proper rest. Not just sleep, either. There had to be waking moments to destress as well. The side effects which came otherwise were unpleasant.

For about five minutes, Miles kept up a steady pace of working. He made notes of significant information, and tested his memory. Next, he found a random case from his books, and determined if the precedent would apply, given the standard guidelines provided by a judge. Then he looked to Wright.

Perhaps the information was too dry for a first week back at work, or maybe his normally disciplined concentration had taken a break. If Wright could have some time off, then why shouldn't he? "Because I'm at work and this is my career," was a mental answer he chose to disregard. Instead his focus drifted to the man.

Wright's concentrated frown gradually relaxed. Usually stiff with tension, his shoulders drooped. He
transformed into little more than a gently snoring puddle of downy grey. Splotches of blue were impressed on the side of his hand, when he'd accidentally smudged ink. That same deep colour stained part of his lips as well, from tapping the pen against his face. Suddenly, Miles was fraught with the desire to wipe it off. A simple brush of his thumb was all it would take.

"Hmph, that man needs a shower," he decided, intentionally ending the train of thought.

Miles didn't understand he was staring until Wright awoke. Startled, Wright fearfully looked around the room, trying to make sense of what he was seeing. It was a brief glimpse of his unguarded self. Terror chased by recollection followed by relief. Wright squashed those feelings behind a neutral façade the second Miles was spotted.

"Sorry about that," he sighed. "I can't keep being an unhelpful layabout."

"You had reached your break anyway."

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"Rest assured," Miles winced at his own poor choice of words. "If you started drooling on my pillow I would have."

"But why didn't you wake me up?" Wright repeated.

He'd hoped to avoid annoying the man by rousing him, but that hadn't turned out as planned. Wright shouldn't have been upset by getting extra rest on his break time.

It would not occur to him until later that Wright must have woken from a nightmare.

"You seemed tired, and with good reason."

Wright closed his eyes and said nothing. But he wasn't going back to sleep, despite how blank his expression turned.

"He's gathering his emotions."

Grunting, he flipped on his back, and his eyes fluttered open again.

"I can't believe you've got the same office," he commented. "Did you request it?"

Miles pretended that the man wasn't blatantly changing the conversation topic.

"No, surprisingly enough. It's been mostly unused; all the younger prosecutors seem to believe it's haunted."

The office was there and waiting for him when he got in. Commandeering it all back in order was an easy task. He knew exactly where he wanted his furniture to go, unlike his new home. Miles had rearranged the setting of his living room at least four times now. It was lucky there were already scratches in the hardwood floors, because his indecisiveness had only contributed to them.

"By what? Did they hear your voice telling them not to defile the sanctity of the workplace?"

"Well there was a man whose body was found some years ago in here," Miles relented. "It was an annoying murder to solve."

"Huh," Wright curiously glanced around, as if the ghost would suddenly materialize. "Well if spirits could haunt without a channeling, Chief would be in the Agency. So I don't think you've got
anything to worry about."

"Pardon?"

"My mentor," he elaborated. Wright took a long drink of grape juice, draining the bottle. "She'd hate me for going against her whole, 'believing in others' philosophy."

He was thrown off by Wright's demeanor. Mia Fey had always been a sensitive topic to him. He looked up to her, and had done everything in his power to follow her teachings as a lawyer. Wright had also said she rescued him, multiple times.

Drawing from his own experiences, if the man who cared enough to save him suddenly despised his existence… Miles shuddered at the idea, even more so at the calm way Wright said that. He could have been talking about the weather, for the way his voice lacked emotion.

"If that's-" Miles stopped, unsure of what Wright wanted him to reply with. "I didn't know her well enough to agree with your assessment."

"Believing in people saved me. But it turned and condemned Wright."

Wright got up. He tossed the bottle and began collecting his work. He piled it haphazardly on the couch. By chance, Wright looked up, taking in the large picture frame.

"Didn't you have your first suit hung up here? What happened to it?"

In its place was a life-sized promotional poster of the fifth Steel Samurai movie, Progeny of the Evil Magistrate. It was objectively better than the third and fourth, as it finally explored the development which the Iron Infant had been receiving in the main series. It also used the screen time to introduce a character which had not yet debuted in the show. This was only the second instance something like this had happened in the franchise. There was a similar occurrence where a popular background character of the film reappeared in the show, but that was only two seasons later. It was a promotional ploy, and blatant pandering to fans. That did not have as subtle nor as clever a build-up. Whereas Makoto, heir apparent of the Evil Magistrate-

Miles recalled he was talking to someone, and turned his thoughts from the poster, its high production value, and perfectly aligned signature from Will Powers.

"It's gone to the same place the pants you're wearing are."

"What's wrong with my sweats?"

He stared long and hard at the linty fabric. It was worn, and one leg had a hole near the ankle. Loose threads hung out, and they overwhelmingly smelled of perspiration. Miles knew Wright owned other clothes, he just refused to wear them. Miles figured burning those pants would stop Wright.

"Despite your hair I'm somehow reminded of Gumshoe's filthy trenchcoat," he settled on saying. Then it was his turn to change the subject. "Now that I mention it, what have you heard from him?"

"He's happy and raising kids."

"He finally married Maggey Byrd then?"

"Um, good question," Wright helplessly lifted his shoulders. "He refers to all the detectives-in-training and canine units as his children. He might be married though."
This served as a reminder that there were other people he needed to catch up with in person. Wright was just the first, and Trucy came in second. Finding out where Gumshoe was now would have to be placed somewhere on that list as well.

"Sebastian I see around the office, so that's simply done," he noted. "Raymond, however, I should arrange to meet with."

He made a show of glancing at the clock and shuffling the books on his desk.

"Your break isn't quite over yet, but should we start quizzing?"

"Go ahead," Wright tossed the pillow back where it belonged. "I guess I know enough."

Wright's "guess" was frighteningly correct. He coolly gave answers to every question he posed. At first, Miles was simply reading out multiple choice to the man. He assumed it would be trickier hearing the questions, rather than seeing them. But when they breezed through that in a fraction of the expected time, he was shown otherwise.

Miles took the study material from him and started to come up with his own questions to ask. Wright made blunders- it was impossible for anyone not to- but his answers were detailed and nimbly given. He stopped, setting down the book after Wright gave a vivid description of how the Oakes Test was applied in a given case.

"Wright, can you count cards?"

He asked this because it required a strong memory, which could juggle multiple pieces of information at once. He wasn't sure if Wright had just memorized the information, or actually learned it. But since he'd played poker for a living, it didn't hurt to check.

"One, two, three, red, spades, man giving himself a craniectomy, seven, two-

"Do you mind answering my question?"

"-thirteen, diamonds. Do you mind not accusing me of cheating at poker? Black, jokers, vignt-et-un-

"Ngh!"

Both annoyed at Wright's cryptic response and embarrassed for his short-sightedness, he reddened.

"Since when should such a reprimand bother me? I've endured worse."

It was a perplexing development, which would pester him for some time to come. This question would also add another layer of complication to an increasingly difficult goal.
"Gavin I need you to-"

Miles glanced up from the list of fake case files he was pretending to read. Gavin- who was always too friendly with him- would be happy to go on a wild goose chase. But he didn't get to reading out the non-existent codes because of who was in the break room.

Had Apollo Justice switched to the job of a prosecutor, or was he sitting on the counter and drinking their coffee for no reason? Both lawyers choked on their drinks when he entered. They scrambled to pretend they were doing something constructive together. Papers were stacked, pages were suddenly highlighted, and they loudly conversed as he approached.

"As you can see from this diagram which the detective sketched for us, there was clearly no method which could have broken a window from the outside like that."

"Ah, but you're forgetting the large hand-mirror, which-"

"The handle was silver and it was an antique. Given the fastidious nature of the store owner, it is highly unlikely that he would-"

They were speaking nonsense. One glance at their documents and he knew they were making up a crime on the spot. None of what they spoke matched.

"I was unaware we'd gotten a new hire," Miles greeted, giving them no room to keep talking.

"Oh, Herr Edgeworth, my apologies!" Gavin smiled winningly. "We didn't see you there!"

That was in direct conflict with the complement Gavin had given him yesterday. Allegedly, everyone in the room stopped to admire his aura of menace when he entered.

"Would someone care to introduce this stranger?" Miles asked, secretly amused at their embarrassment.

"U-um, we're just working on a case together," Justice excused.

All the coworkers rolled their eyes, or had various expressions of disbelief on their faces.

"Ja," Gavin energetically nodded. He was like a bobble-head, and seemed liable to lose his if he didn't stop. "Surely that's not against the rules Herr Edgeworth?"

Thinking of how he'd been inviting over Wright, it would be hypocritical of him to get angry. Especially since they weren't doing something work-related either. Thus, Miles settled for responding with, "As long as you've had him sign in and go through security, there isn't an issue."

With Gavin distracted by his guest, there was no sense in sending him after the fictitious NR-7, ME-2, and LB-0 case files. Wright arrived without incident. He shuffled into the office like a corpse on its feet, with his books tucked into his arms.

"How are you?" Miles asked, not expecting a genuine answer, if any.

"I'm just tired."

Wright was too alert to be fatigued, although he certainly spoke with the bad mood which
accompanied it. Was he in pain? Asking would only make him more irritable, Miles knew that. That was true for anyone who was suffering, it was frustrating to answer through the agony. Wright's penchant to hide things made this fact even truer.

Miles didn't push, they were supposed to get through another test, not argue. Speculations ran through his mind, but he tucked those thoughts away, so he could concentrate.

In the meantime, Wright had made himself comfortable. He pocketed the keys to his bike lock, took the bottle of grape juice he was offered, and collapsed on the couch. He twiddled his socked feet, pointing and flexing his toes.

"How are you?" Wright returned.

"Fine, thank-you. It was my first day back in court."

"Was it an entire session of the judge saying you reminded him of his youthful days?"

It had been a nice open-and-shut case. He spent less time proving his arguments and more of it taking in the courtroom, remembering his old times with Wright. The man would be on the other side of the table soon enough. While the Chief Prosecutor didn't regularly take cases, it was within his jurisdiction. He could prosecute difficult or majorly significant ones with little question, but the simpler ones might bring up questions of bias. Knowing Wright's luck, he would end up with the dangerous and notorious clients straight away.

"Just half. I asked for a recess, so he could get it out of his system."

"Guess I can expect something similar then," Wright twisted off the cap off his juice. "Quiz me?"

"Whenever you're ready."

"Let's start then."

The bar exam's multiple-choice questions were all open-book. There were no more than two hundred eighty-nine on a given test. They covered so much content that it was near-impossible for one to have learned it all. This was the function of an index. Students would put together indices or buy them, so that way they had a fast method to look up an answer when needed. Open-book sounded deceptively simple. Sifting through the average two thousand pages of custom notes was anything but. Less than two minutes could be spent on each question, before one had to move on.

"When the pith and substance of a law is examined, does the collective good reasoning make it intra vires the federal government?"

"No, it's ultra vires," he answered.

"Intra. General well-being of citizens is federal."

"Huh, I could've sworn-" Wright didn't finish his thought, and shrugged. "That was vacuous of me. Next?"

"Who is best known for his development of classical criminology?"

"Cesare Baccario."

"Distinguish between aiding and abetting."

"Aren't they interchangeable?"
"They are used that way, but mean different things. What are they?"

"I don't know," he sheepishly said.

"Abetting is counseling or advising someone to commit a crime, aiding is to actually help perform the act."

"Right," he nodded, and wrote down the proper answer.

Unlike their previous tests, he did not seem as prepared for this one. Miles logically deduced it had to do with how he was "just tired." Whatever Wright truly felt, it was interfering with his learning. His confidence was growing shakier as well.

"What is the one legal defence which says that there was no actus reus?"

"Self-defence."

"Automatism."

"Ah."

Wright paused, and took a swig of grape juice.

"When can a reverse onus be placed on a detainee's bail?"

"In higher level crimes, especially involving narcotics."

"What must they prove?"

"That they're not a flight risk, they're not a danger to society and um-" Wright used his fingers to push up his beanie, and force his hair to stand on end. Uncomfortable, he combed through it, making a larger mess of spikes.

"There's only two requirements," Miles answered.

"Whoops. I guess I'm unparagoned when it comes to my inability to excogitate."

That was an oddly obscure way of putting things. Miles would have asked, if not for how they needed to concentrate on testing him.

"It was a minor slip up," Miles shortly said. "Positivist Cesare Lombrosso believed that criminals all had what physical trait?"

"Sharp teeth?" Wright slowly drew out.

"Yes. What are the three steps to prove undue hardship?"

"It would alter the very nature of the business, they would go bankrupt making accommodations, or-?" Wright stopped, raking his fingers against his scalp again. "Don't tell me, I know this."

Miles patiently waited, but Wright didn't say anything.

"The supposedly discriminatory standard is reasonably necessary in order to perform the job."

"Right. I should have known that."

Underneath his words, there was frustration. He finished his grape juice and reached for a second
"Who developed the Theory Anomie?"
"I don't know."
"Emile Durkheim. Duty of care applies to whom?"
"Don't know."
"What happens to the sentence when joint liability is enforced?"
"No clue."

Miles frowned a bit, looking from Wright to the content in his book. Had he accidentally been testing Wright on subjects he would study later in the week?
"Is surety required with a recognizance?"
"I've got nothing."
"Why are the police not liable in cases where there is-"
"Stop it," Wright interrupted, abruptly standing. "Stop."
"Wright?"
"I'm anachronistic."
"You are not," Miles snarled.
"I'm not ready for this. I've spent hours reading and I can't answer your questions. It's not exactly sagacious of me."
"What is bothering you?"
"I'm just tired," he stubbornly insisted. "It's nothing."
"Wright, Wright please, just this one time tell me about yourself."

Miles shouldn't have been surprised by that unhelpful answer. But his hands pressed against his face anyway. Despairingly, he wished for Wright to be just a smidgen cooperative.

"I hate playing Franz Joseph Haydn's Quadrille. The finger positions in the ninth stanza are annoying. Now tell me something preferably piano-related about you."
"Wolfgang's Menuetto in C Major was the first piano exam I failed," he muttered, not looking up. "But what does this have to do with anything?"
"Haven't you ever played that game as a kid? You know when you're supposed to tell something personal in exchange for the same?"
"No I have not and now certainly isn't the time."
"Then why would you ask?"

This marked their descent into bickering. Miles tried to defend the man from himself, and point out
that he was always dodging personal questions. But Wright wasn't having any of it. In turn Wright insulted himself more, and didn't answer any of his queries.

They did not get further in Wright's studies. Once he could take no more, Miles chased Wright out of his office, and straight into the amused faces of Klavier Gavin and Apollo Justice. Wright kept going, grape juice and all, but Miles stopped there.

"I had expected some self-deprecation from that man," he thought with a mental groan, trying to ignore their laughter. "But that was beyond the pale. So much for this being simpler than tutoring youth."

When he could barely focus on the Steel Samurai, there was a problem.

Pess had taken up two-thirds of the couch for herself. But she continually inched closer, giving him sharp nudges for attention. Miles kept squashed in the remaining third, head tilted, and eyes blankly focused on the screen. The Steel Samurai and Evil Magistrate circled each other wolfishly, their signature weapons not yet drawn.

"You see your progeny as little more than a tool!" bellowed the Steel Samurai.

"Tut, you truly believe such a thing?" chided the Evil Magistrate, waving a finger. "Then what does that say of your own child?"

"The Iron Infant fights by choice, whereas your heir has been presented with no other option."

The shot switched to one of the garden behind the Steel Samurai. From shadows, a masked face emerged. It gleamed red, as if it had been dipped in blood. The Evil Magistrate's heir stalked behind the hero. The sword was poised and waiting for the signal to fly, while he was ignorant.

"I strive to give my child the same thing any parent would want: a perfect world, safe from menaces like you."

"Yes, I suppose justice is a menace to one who believes a perfect world is chaos and aaAAAGH!"

A deep slash raced across his back, segments of his armour peeling off in pieces. There were more bloodcurdling screams, and the striking of metal against metal. The din of their fight drowned out in his ears, his own thoughts louder and more important than his favourite TV show.

"When did I begin to care if Wright was insulted?"

He regularly did that to the man. His remarks could be genuine. Or he might just be poking fun at the man to see him make that one expression. (A flustered look Miles actually had not seen in years.)

"Yet somehow this is different. Could it be linked to Wright insulting himself?"

Some of what Wright called himself was true, but most of it described the antithesis of who he was. Wright had nonchalantly thrown around harsh; insults Miles would never begin to think of. And it didn't sound like him, Wright wouldn't joke about his own intellect while using vocabulary like assiduously and deleterious. They weren't his words.

Someone else had called him those terrible lies.

"Wright was mocking them."
Miles suddenly felt every bit as tired as Wright claimed to be.
Their following sessions only accomplished one thing: Miles now knew, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Phoenix Wright had no self-esteem. Miles was already aware the man lacked self-preservation. Wright ran across a burning bridge. Wright made a bosom friend of the person he suspected of destroying his career. In fact, Miles was certain this sort of behavior dated back to their childhood. Wright must have been born without the traits.

Having no sense of worth and mortal fear for his life was a worrying combination. Miles didn't believe Wright was planning to attempt anything, but it was making him apprehensive. This coupled with his inexplicable anger whenever Wright chose to sell himself short. The man could not take praise, or even backhanded compliments.

Miles had tried, none of it worked, Wright was too stubborn. He made strides with preparing for his exams, but refused to acknowledge this progress. It was driving Miles up the wall, and their meetings always devolved into arguments.

Today was not one of their test days, but he still had plans. They started off with making Wright scarce, so they needn't to bicker in person.

"Today's your deadline for showering," Miles announced over the phone.

He was sitting in the car, waiting outside of Wright's apartment. Miles' objective was to meet with Trucy, sans fighting. He had fine-tuned sending Klavier Gavin on silly tasks whenever Wright was around, so this wouldn't be any different.

"The pioneers didn't shower regularly," Wright answered, already on the defensive.

"The pioneers would die of dysentery regularly," Miles shot back.

"You got me there," he relented. "But have you considered that your dog only needs a bath every once in awhile? This seems kind of like a double standard."

"I'll bring your favourite sweets if you do."

Said candies were already sitting in the passenger seat. Miles had systematically visited local stores he didn't recognize in his neighborhood. One sold nothing but confections. Seeing the bright konpeitō caused him to think of Wright, and he made an impulse buy. Grape juice and the sugary candies were the way to Wright's heart. But he didn't want to appear obvious, or continue bringing him the same thing. Purchasing his favourite candies in addition to juice would be pushing it. And if he couldn't bribe him with that alone, then there was a problem.

"Nice try Edgeworth, but I thought ahead," Wright taunted. "I've still got my own stock from when I took the qualifying exam."

"Ah, but how long will that last you, even with rationing?"

Miles could envision the man standing there confidently, hands on his waist. Then, his pose morphing into a horrified one, with his mouth agape. But in all likelihood, his face was as placid as ever.

There was a pause, as if Wright was processing the information, checking how much candy he had left.
"You win this time, Edgeworth."

Sure enough, when Miles let himself in, water was running, and Wright wasn't there. His voice was present throughout the apartment, singing an indecipherable song. His words were muffled by the walls, but melodic and uncharacteristically upbeat.

"I never would have imagined that he was the type to sing in the shower," Miles thought with a tiny smirk. "But it suits. His voice is quite good."

Hearing him enter, Trucy peeked around the threshold.

"Hey Uncle Miles! Wanna' help me prepare a new trick?"

"Will it involve as much glitter as your last one?"

He'd been shaking sparkles out of his head for weeks. Fortunately, the silver colour complimented his hair, and no one was suicidal enough to question him about the dazzling phenomenon.

"No, confetti this time," she gave him a hug. "I'm going to make it rain endlessly from the ceiling."

He followed Trucy to the kitchen. At a table, she had numerous craft supplies set up. Vibrant streamers trailed across the ground, and she had three separate pairs of scissors out. Shreds of paper were stuffed into a large box, and spilling out the sides.

"I know a man who can do something similar."

Again, he smiled, this time at the memory of Gumshoe. Whenever he won a case, the man would have confetti prepared to throw. The exception to this was when he faced against Wright in court. He did it for both of them, shredding the paper by hand, transporting it to the courthouse, and even sweeping for the janitors afterwards.

"Don't tell me you've already figured it out!"

He set the box of konpeitō on the already cluttered counter.

"I haven't," Miles reassured, handing a bag of chocolate rosebuds to her. "Although if you give me enough time to examine the system you're using--"

"Do not and thank-you," Trucy scolded, putting her hands on her hips. "You're just helping me make infinite confetti."

His logical mind had been a source of never-ending annoyance to Trucy when she was younger. With her first simple tricks, he only needed to see them once in order to figure out how she had done it. Many of them grew more complex (and dangerous) with age, making it harder to decipher. But with that, she surpassed her older competition in skill.

"The most important thing to have in the magician trade is a logical mind," he would say, just to bother her.

"No," she would retort. "The most important rule is to never reveal how it's done!"

Even as she would glare at him for discovering how so many rabbits could disappear, Miles knew he was correct. Beneath the showmanship and talk of magic, Trucy was actually quite logical. She had a way with deductions. (Strangely, he was reminded of the red-clad attorney who kept visiting the office and using their photocopier.)
There was one trick Miles had not figured out since meeting her: the magic panties. He'd given up on them, and decided they didn't count.

"You can start making diamonds," Trucy declared, sitting at the table.

He took a seat as well, and let Trucy lead him through the basic instructions. She had paper cutters, which were more or less hole punchers with varying shapes. He was given an entire book of construction paper, and the order to not stop until every page had been sliced into diamonds. The work was easy, but quickly tiring on his hands.

Bits of paper would occasionally flutter to the ground, joining the rest. The tiled floor had been a mess when he entered, and now this grew tenfold. Trucy was more efficient than he. Bursts of stars and clusters of flowers joined the mix. She swept them into an already overstuffed chest, pressing them down with her hands to make room for more. While they worked, they played catch-up, and Trucy eventually asked him, "Why are you and Daddy always fighting now?"

Miles didn't actually know the answer to that. Of course, he knew what they were quarreling about, but not why.

"We happen to argue about a lot of things. Your father is just being silly."

Trucy didn't reply immediately, eating one of her chocolates instead.

"You didn't that much until you moved back here."

"Like your aunt would say, Wright and I are two-"

"FOOLS!" Trucy happily finished, tossing confetti at him. She loved her aunt, the woman was a constant source of inspiration for her acts.

"Ah, yes."

"Why are you both fools?"

Miles didn't like dismissing children by telling them not to worry. They were more intelligent than adults chose to believe they were. But he didn't particularly feel like spilling his guts to a young person, either.

"If it was something serious, you would know," Miles settled for saying. "Because he's stressed about the exam, everything turns into a fight."

"Normally he's better about hiding his feelings."

"Egad! And I thought the Wright I've been dealing with was troublesome!"

Trucy switched his diamond pattern for a heart-shaped one.

"He wasn't always," Miles answered.

"I know," Trucy said, matter-of-factly. "Uncle Laurice told me."

Even though Miles wasn't the one eating, he choked.

"Larry?!"

Miles looked around, half-expecting the annoyance to pop up from nowhere. Would he have a new
career? How many girlfriends had he gone through since the last time they'd met?

"He prefers to be called Laurice," Trucy corrected. "It's his pseudonym."

Miles didn't say anything to that. Just the thought of his childhood bother and friend was enough to make him tense. Larry had impeccable bad timing. Saying his name was the same as uttering a demonic summoning curse.

"How are the chocolates?" he asked in a strangled voice.

"Great!" Trucy ate another to exhibit her point. "They're way better than the ones I usually get."

"I bought your father some konpeitō from the same store. Hopefully they're just as acceptable."

"He's going to eat them all in a day."

"Well they're not for decoration!" Wright yelled from down the hall.

"Daddy! You need to eat actual food."

Trucy had gotten to her feet and stuffed the candies in her magic panties before Wright could enter the room. He was shirtless, and still dripping water. His inky black hair had been towel-dried, turning it fluffy.

"Where's my candy?"

Miles and Trucy guiltily looked at the magic panties.

"You didn't," he gasped.

"I did."

"Do I have to make another book's worth of confetti for you?"

"That's a good start," his daughter nodded, pressing the triangle paper cutter to his palm. "Also, you need to eat real food."

"Showering or eating, it's one or the other," Wright declared, starting to cut paper with them.

They returned to making confetti for Trucy's planned magic trick. With three people the process should have gone faster, but he lagged behind. Wright was too distracting, Miles kept looking away from the page to view him. It was the first time he'd seen Wright in any state of undress, so naturally, he was curious.

"What're you staring at?" Wright defensively asked.

"I knew you owned other pairs of pants!"

"Uh, yeah," he mumbled, folding his arms over his bare chest. "My favourites are in the wash. So's my sweater."

Figuring he was making the man uncomfortable, he stopped looking. As a team, they filled two whole chests with the confetti. Trucy safely felt they could be trusted to make more after that. She fled to her room, explaining she needed to draw up and try out the plans for her trick. It had to be done in secret, she was typically not open to advice. The only help Trucy ever wanted was when she needed an assistant (victim) on stage.
"By chance have you figured out the secret behind her magic panties yet?"

"No closer than I was the last time."

"I really want my candy back."

"It will show soon enough."

The room filled with paper, and the metallic clicks of their cutters. He didn’t stare at Wright, but snuck glances under his eyelashes when he pushed aside a new heap of hearts. Wright hummed short notes, stirring together the pastel triangles and spades he created. He was adept at his job, swiftly punching out shapes, rarely tearing the paper by accident.

"Wright, why didn't you sing instead of play the piano?"

"Edgeworth, you're really lousy at this game," Wright informed him. "You're supposed to say, 'tell me something I don't know about you' and then hope that in one of your thousands of tries you'll get the answer to that."

"Fine. Tell me something I don't know about you."

"There used to be a box where you could write down and submit your song requests at the Borscht Bowl. I'd come out and do a random draw. But after a few days, I kept getting Gavinner songs. Turns out this one guy rigged it. So, I stopped."

Miles' eyebrow rose into his hairline. That was the most straightforward answer Wright had given him so far.

"Tell me something I don't know about you."

"I didn't realize you could sing until today. And," he flushed a bit. "You're quite good."

"Saying that won't make me accept song requests," he tersely warned.

"I wasn't planning on it."

Trucy's words came back to him over the next little while. A soft inquiry, whose persistence in his mind lead to Miles taking out a notebook when he got home and trying to logically work his way through it.

*Why were they experiencing tension?*

His dining room was coming to resemble the Wright's kitchen. Folded up balls of paper had been chucked clear across the room. It didn't matter if he made a mess in here. He ate alone, and had no use for a dining room to begin with. Pess enjoyed retrieving the first balls of paper he had lobbed. Then she settled under his chair, when she realized there were many yet to be thrown.

To start, Miles listed his reasons for fighting with the man. Usually, it boiled down to Wright saying something depreciating. When he responded in kind, telling the man he was wrong, things escalated.

He noted that he was defending Wright. The insults he came up with were oddly pretentious, he didn't like or agree with them. He also didn't like hearing Wright mock himself.
"Why don't I like this?" he asked, poking his temple. "There is a logical explanation for it, with the evidence I can think of."

He felt concerned with Wright's well-being. It was part of why he agreed to help with the bar exam, and was pushing Wright to take better care of himself. But there were plenty of people whom he felt those concerns for. Franziska, Kay, Trucy, Gumshoe, Ema, Larry on a good day, Lang-

"No, strike that from the record," he scribbled out that listed name. "I'm sure he has more than enough pack-members looking out for him now."

It didn't matter if the breakup was mutual. He was still allowed to be bitter.

The answer his logic kept taking him to was a solution he was already aware of; he cared about Wright's health, wanted to see him succeed in life, and so on. It made sense that he would get annoyed if Wright backtracked.

It didn't explain why he felt so passionate about the issue. Moreover, he was wanting to spend more time with the man, to be happy with him.

When Wright called himself a "spurious layabout" he saw red. It wasn't correct. He wanted to grab the man by the shoulders and tell him that until he finally understood the truth. Wright was smart, and people often underestimated his abilities. When he cared about something or someone, he didn't work in halves. Wright had made mistakes, of course, but he'd done many good things as well.

"What is a precedent in my behavior I can apply to this situation?"

He felt protective of Kay and Trucy, but that was different. Franziska didn't need him watching out for her. He was the "little" brother and thus the one who was supposed to get in trouble. Franziska was actually correct, she rarely seemed to get into the conundrums he did.

"Get out of my head," he snarled at a memory of bantering with Lang which surfaced. "My feelings about Wright aren't like that."

He glared in silence at his logic attempts. The information was matching up with the precedent. They were different from his platonic relationships. He wasn't liking this answer.

"Feelings about Wright, or feelings for Wright?" slyly asked a traitorous voice.

That was a most illogical outcome. This train of thought was clearly getting him nowhere. Miles tore the paper from his notebook, and threw it. The crumpled ball joined the rest. All had an identical solution written at the end.

I have romantic feelings for Wright.
The logic didn't lie. It wasn't capable of telling falsehoods, because it wasn't a living thing. He was living though, and quite capable of lying to himself about reality. For a week he ignored those same, repetitive conclusions.

Miles put the notebook and its torn pages in a paper shredder, relishing the sound of that impossibility being destroyed. When he saw Wright during the week, Miles internally listed everything that he didn't like about the man. In a recurring dream where he and Lang were walking their dogs but kept getting the leashes tangled, his ex suddenly turned into Wright.

Miles woke up before the dream could progress any farther and decided that proper sleep was unnecessary anyway. Sitting on the couch and watching reruns of old game shows until the wee hours of the morning was a fine substitute for rest. Pess liked having the entire bed, not just the foot of it, to herself. So really the arrangement had been fine. He didn't need to fall back asleep and potentially return to that dream.

During that week, he made excuses to himself and spun tales so ridiculous that Wright would have a difficult time believing them. He spoke to the man like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, that everything was fine and no he wasn't staring, he was thinking. Finally, Miles could lie no more. Instead he lay, staring at the ceiling of the foyer and finally accepting his fate. He was on the carpet, not truly caring about the dust and dog hair.

"Why this? And why now?"

He'd known Wright for eleven years. What had changed? Why was it now that he developed such pesterling feelings?

"Fool."

In times of existential crisis, his dear sister's insults always came back to haunt him. Suddenly Miles realized this wasn't recent or shocking. Franziska understood even when he hadn't.

"Who else knows?" he wondered. "Gumshoe, almost certainly him. And Kay. she was surprised when I began seeing Lang, but I assumed for the wrong reasons..."

The true answer was too many people. He really was an oblivious fool.

"Alright," he said aloud, taking a calming breath. "I need to be mature about this."

He was thirty-two years old, and fully capable of dealing with this in a healthy and responsible manner. He just needed to defer his offer of the Chief Prosecutor to someone else, pack up his house in the middle of the night, and move far off. Canada was supposed to be beautiful around this time of the year.

"No! Get a grip! I am a prosecutor and seeker of the truth. I cannot flee from it!"

With an iron will, Miles got up and dragged himself out of the room. He sat on the edge of the bathtub, and glared at his reflection in the adjacent mirror. His dark-circled face glowered right back, eyes boring into his own.

"I merely need to say it a few times," Miles reassured himself. His grip on the ledge tightened, and his knuckles were chalky white. "I have feelings f-for- ngh!"
He forced his vocal cords and tongue into cooperation. They were made to practice the statement until he could say it without flaw, until he settled down and accepted the truth calmly. His face was unhelpful. Just thinking about it was enough to summon blush to his cheeks. The once cool ledge turned warm under his sweaty grasp. He wiped his palms on his pants, but they slid right off.

Pess, curious as to what he was muttering about, ventured into the bathroom. Seeing him distressed, she helpfully wagged her tail and rested her head on his knee. Shakily, he gave his dog a smile, and started to pet her ears. It was soothing, and he found himself looking at her all-too-intelligent face.

"What am I going to do about this?"

His only useful point of comparison was Lang, because their relationship had been the closest, gone on the longest. He didn't want Wright for a quick fling, nor did he want to lose the man forever if something went wrong.

Realistically, things would not fall easily into place like they had with Lang. Then, it had been a simple matter of not rolling his eyes when the man slung an arm around his shoulders for the umpteenth time. He leaned a touch, finally closing what little gap was left between them.

Nothing had happened in the embarrassingly long period he had feelings for Wright, so Miles didn't believe a convenient opportunity was destined to occur. Statistically speaking, nothing was going to happen unless he took action. But initiative was what had landed him in this trouble to begin with!

"What am I going to do?" he repeated, ruffling Pess' fur. She empathetically licked his hand, but offered no suggestion to his quandary. "How the hell am I supposed to communicate with a man who refuses to open up?"

Wright didn't say or show what he was feeling. He kept his innermost thoughts and emotions to himself these days. Flirting was difficult too, because the infuriating man didn't accept compliments!

"Pess, would you like to permanently move to northern Canada?"

Her whining indicated no. She wouldn't want to go somewhere with snow. She experienced it for the first time in Germany, and had despised how it clung to her coat.

"Australia would have plenty of space for you to run around in."

She made that same keening noise, indicating her opinion on the matter. Perhaps Australia was too hot for her, and he'd heard stories of how the wilderness could be dangerous to dogs.

"New Zealand then?"

Another no.

"Czech?"

Negative.

He went through five more suggestions before realizing what his dog was telling him. They weren't moving halfway across the world again, not if she could help it.

Just to make his day worse, he heard the front door open. Pess ran, claws skittering against the floor. She slid right down the stairs, to greet the devil he'd just been speaking of.

"Hello?"
"I'm upstairs."

"Ok. I just stopped by- hey Puppy, calm down there- I like the Edgeworth-shaped indent in your carpet by the way. It completes the feng shui of the room."

"What are you here for?" Miles asked, managing to keep his voice mostly coherent.

"Oh, I just stopped by to say I got the confirmation I passed the qualifying exam. All our work preparing for the bar up to now wasn't pointless."

That was such a Phoenix Wright way of phrasing things. Miles rolled his eyes, but didn't feel any less nervous about the man in his house. It was like he somehow knew. Despite the fear curdling in his stomach, Miles made his way downstairs to greet the man.

"Congratulations," he softly answered. "There wasn't any doubt in my mind that you would."

"I could guess that much," he mumbled towards the ceiling. "Also I brought you something. Consider it to be in the place of champagne."

From his hoodie pocket, he produced a Tupperware container. Curious enough to forget his troubles, he opened it. There were circular shortbread cookies, which had the seals of the Steel Samurai and Evil Magistrate stamped into them.

"These are incredibly accurate renditions," he said, voice barely above a whisper. "I've seen artists who have outright forgotten to include the proper outline of the torse. And the mantle is remarkably detailed! Where did you find such perfect renditions?"

He was overwhelmed with the desire to go out and buy more. All of them. Every box. He would clean the shelves and live off cookies for the rest of his life. Or at least until they started making a brand of tea which went with the franchise. Sense returned momentarily, and he waved the man into his kitchen.

"Eh, I just brought you some in celebration. I figured you'd want them. Perfect for ages ten and up."

"Would you like the usual?" Miles asked, already reaching for a glass.

"Actually, could I have tea?"

"Wha- yes- of course!"

He put on the kettle, and fell into the comforting pattern of making tea. Cups were pulled out, and he busied himself with figuring out how Wright took his tea. The new layout of his kitchen gave some difficulties at first. There was plenty of room for Pess to tail after him without tripping over her, but he could never find anything. The cupboards were in the wrong places, or he was used to the cutlery drawer being near the sink. He was adjusting, but it was easy to forget after years of the same thing.

"Sugar?"

"Yes please."

Wright took three cubes and then proceed to hand one to the dog.

"Can I get you anything to eat?"

"Nah."
The room may have enjoyed confusing him, but he still liked it. The windows (and the rest of the structure) were old, and wide. Usually, sitting near a window made him feel as if he were being watched. Invisible eyes pressed into the back of his head, and he had to suppress the urge to look over his shoulder. But climbing ivy wound up the back wall of the house, so a ring of emerald leaves surrounded the glass. It gave a sense of security he wasn't used to feeling in that situation.

"Here you are."

Gently, he set down Wright's cup, and went back to retrieve his own.

"Thanks."

He joined the man. To hide the way his hands trembled, Miles laced his fingers around his cup, and studiously considered his tea.

"Does Trucy know?"

"Not yet. She isn't allowed to get the mail until I say she's old enough to drive."

"Isn't she close?"

"It's too dangerous."

"Getting the mail, or driving?"

"Both," he took a sip. "This is good tea."

"I could-

"You speed," Wright finished, before he could even offer to teach his daughter to drive.

"Wright, the whole point of the Bundesautobahnen is that there are *recommended* speed limits."

"Recommendations of one-thirty kilometers."

"I'm following the law."

"I heard that they don't even bother sending ambulances when an accident happens, because everyone's bound to be dead."

"Now you're just being dramatic."

Wright flashed him a toothy grin and said nothing. Miles' innards twisted up worse than any car accident he'd seen on the Bundesautobahnen. Fortunately, Pess came to his rescue. She scratched at the back door, begging to go outside. Her squirrel nemesis was waiting for her. Like a rocket, she raced outside and chased it from the yard. It climbed up a tree, chittering and scolding her from where she couldn't reach. When Miles sat down the man looked at him thoughtfully. Feeling self-conscious, he took a cookie.

"What's got you so jumpy?"

Crumbs stuck in the back of his throat, and his mouth went dry.

"*Fine, two can play at the game of obscure answers,*" he decided.

But that vicious voice inside his head became more of a squeak when he tried to reply.
"I had just learned of a murder case when you came in. It involved children, which I've never liked."

He nodded, condescendingly.

"Wright knows I'm lying," he panicked.

"I don't think any of us do. Personally, I also hate the ones where a spouse betrays the trust of the other."

"Tell me something I don't know about you."

It was a spontaneous demand, a fast way to redirect their conversation.

"I can't tell the difference between flowers, but I do know how to keep houseplants alive."

Wright was eying up the spider plant on the counter as he said this.

"What would you recommend?"

"More sunshine and a good name," Wright rubbed the stubble under his chin. "Björen sounds about right to me."

He moved the yellowing plant to the kitchen table. Wright nodded again, this time in approval.

"Tell me something I don't know about you."

"I really do know how to drive properly," he insisted.

"Tch, I don't believe that."

But his eyes shone a bit, and he seemed to grin while he sipped his tea. Once finished, Wright rose to his feet. He did as well, escorting the man back to the front door.

"Thanks again."

"It was nothing. And congratulations once more on your results."

"Thanks erm-" Wright hesitated. "Um, you've already done a lot for me but I-"

He stopped again, to rake his fingers through his hair. Wright's shiftiness was starting to make him nervous by extension.

"W-what is it?"

"Something's come up, so I can't study with you tomorrow. But would you mind checking up on me in the afternoon? Just like, a call, you don't need to leave work or anything, and I'm already taking up too much of your time."

"Of course! It's not an issue in the slightest!" Miles hastily replied. "What are you doing?"

"Thanks for a third time," Wright answered. "See you!"

Wright was out the door and biking down the street before he could demand a coherent answer.
I'm on vacation until Friday, which means that I will be stuck on mobile and with questionable at best internet service. I'm not certain if I will be able to update while on it, so I've posted this chapter earlier. Of course, this is a bit of a mean place to leave you guys, but "evil" is in my username for a reason...

Read, review, and enjoy!

A feeling settled in the pit of his stomach. It had formed the moment he rolled out of bed, and got dressed. It deepened and grew weightier as he drove to the office, got ready to do some paperwork. Miles couldn't ignore it, and decided to blame the problem on not seeing Wright that day. That wasn't the issue and he knew it, but there was no other explanation he could give. He only felt it on bad days. This was a premonition he couldn't ignore, because of what had happened in the past.

It formed when the first chills of winter snuck into his bones, and he saw happy children out with their fathers for the holiday. One February evening, he fitfully tossed around in bed until the sheets were tangled at his ankles because something was wrong. And then he got a call from Larry, the news that Wright was on the brink of death. He remembered failing that one piano exam, being yelled at the entire drive back home, and berated for the rest of the week. All because he was too distracted by that feeling for his index finger to stretch a note higher. There were occasions when he dreaded dealing with a witness in court, times when he woke up and just knew that nothing would go right for him that day.

Every waking hour, he asked himself the same things.

"What is going to happen? Will it be an earthquake? Has someone lost the evidence to the case I've been building?"

He accepted fate, but nevertheless bristled in fear when someone knocked at his office door.

"Yes?"

Busying himself with the illusion of productivity, he didn't glance up right away.

"Will you need me to search for any more obscure case files today Herr Edgeworth?"

He looked at the man. Gavin's typically immaculate hair had a greasy sheen to it, and his one hundred-watt smile appeared tight. Perhaps he figured out the pattern behind the "favours" which had been asked of him. He stood in the threshold, ready to vanish at a moment's notice.

"No, but thank you for offering."

With that, his posture slackened a touch. Gavin was relieved at the answer.

"Nichts zu danken."

"I've appreciated your help," Miles cast his eyes back the desk. "You can spend your free time
gallivanting off with Justice again."

There was a muffled exclamation of shock, proving that he wasn't just imagining the strands of brown hair poking out from the door's left side.

"I can hear you."

"Sometimes I like to imagine I work in a normal office," Justice muttered, stepping into sight. "Just water coolers, annoying coworkers, vending machines, and office plants."

"Wright's office has a plant."

"Mister Wright was acting weird for no reason today," Justice answered, folding his arms.

Miles wondered if Justice noticed how the shoulders of his "annoying coworker" tensed at the mention of Wright.

"Weird how?" Miles asked, thinking of what Wright had told him yesterday. "Irate, sad?"

"Uh, I don't know. But he kept looking at me, and then he would write something. It was too ominous to work around."

"Perhaps he's doing employee evaluations," Gavin suggested.

"You underestimate my boss' ability to-" Justice then thought better of insulting the man in front of him. "That's Charley's job."

"Who?"

"There's this plant in his office, the one Mr. Edgeworth just mentioned, which apparently holds the most seniority."

"As scintillating as your conversation happens to be, have you considered not holding it half in my office?" Miles interrupted.

"Ah, of course."

Miles caught snippets of words as they left

"How can this place be normal when you called my office one-of-a-kind the other day?"

Miles shook his head, and tried to distract his thoughts with the paperwork that needed finishing. He knew it was vital to keep on top of it, but he was still feeling apprehensive.

"Is something going to happen to Wright today? Is that why I'm worried?"

Miles decided to call an early lunch, and use it to check up on the man like he'd asked. He donned his coat and locked up. The journey downstairs went by faster than normal. Then he was outside, chilling air nipping at his exposed face and turning his ears red. The walk was more efficient than getting tangled up in traffic. Many lawyers had their offices within close range of the courthouse and detention center; it was common business sense. Wright's place was one of these.

He buried his stiffening fingers into his pockets and did his best to ignore the wind. It cut through his jacket; each gust was like a knife passing over his skin. The sky was bright and crisp blue, dazzling sun bouncing off skyscrapers and sliding over the hoods of cars.
It was a relief to see the building he was looking for. He fumbled with the door, fingertips stinging when they touched the metal. Then he was out of the cold and into the warmth of the office.

"Wright?"

There was distant stirring of papers, and the man cleared his throat.

"I thought I just asked you to call," Wright said. But there was amusement in his voice, like he'd anticipated this would happen.

"I know," Miles honestly replied.

Almost timidly, he moved closer. The man came into sight. He was at the desk, the clearest surface in the room. Space which hadn't been there before now orbited the desk. Wright hunched over, idly scrawling something on a yellow legal pad.

"Well, you've checked up on me," he announced, not even looking up. Wright's dark eyes glittered ethereally, fixated on what he was doing.

"What has you so busy that you can't be quizzed today?" he inquired, inching forwards. The inexplicable fear was growing, pressing against his stomach and choking his throat.

"Ah, just, you know."

Wright waved the pen in a shooing motion, but he'd already seen the bold-print title of the document. A shiver that had nothing to do with the cold raced down his spine.

"What are you changing in your will?"

"I'm jointly giving the Agency to Apollo and Trucy now. Oh and a few temporary clauses just in case, nothing that will-" Wright barked a laugh at his own macabre joke. "-affect you."

Suddenly dizzy and sick, he was forced to sit on the edge of the couch.

"Don't tell me you plan on dying."

"Nah, that's Kristoph's job. Come to think of it, there actually is something which affects you. I need someone to investigate if I die anytime before-"

He rambled on, pointing out clauses in the drafts of his new will. There were plans for every possible outcome; "accident," "natural causes," murder, murder by Kristoph Gavin, murder by any third party hired or persuaded by Kristoph Gavin, and "suicide." (Wright had actually enclosed terms in quotations, implying his death might only look like those things, when in actuality, it was arranged.)

"Wright, what are you going on about?"

A letter was slid towards him. The first thing Miles recognized was the prison director's name, and the official stationery which it had been typed on. He read a paragraph in, saw a date, and the rest blurred before his eyes.

"With his execution date set as of yesterday, I figured he might try to take a parting shot and-"

It was in March. The method had been chosen and explained but he couldn't read what it said. All Miles saw was how the date set was exactly one day before the barrister's exam. He knew. Somehow that man figured out Wright was going for the March exams rather than the June, and had used his sway to ask for that specific time. Well he'd just have to do the same thing in return. The minute he
was in office as the Chief Prosecutor, he was going to speak with the director of the prison and push that date somewhere else.

"You're not going to die," he snarled, breathless. "That loathsome excuse for a human being is going to!"

"You're first in line to handle the investigation, and update any autopsy reports as needed if-"

"Wright you're not going to die!"

"Franziska's second in line if you can't-"

"WRIGHT!"

Miles wanted to grab the man and shake him by the threads of his grey hoodie. He settled for leaning his hands on the desk, over the will, and within dangerous proximity of his face.

"What?"

Wright looked up, eyes meeting his own, and emphasizing how close they were.


"Tch," he laughed again, breath tickling underneath his chin. "Did you have coffee instead of tea for breakfast this morning?"

"Please, listen."

"I think you should listen," he snapped back, playful expression gone. "I'm not a grocery list of things you can sign off and make better. You can't write neat little checkmarks and fix those seven years. So don't-!" Wright pulled away, trying to take controlled breaths. But his voice still wavered when he continued, "I'd rather be paranoid and alive than shortsighted and dead. If he tries something then I'll at least get the last laugh."

Cowed by his sudden outburst, he stammered, "W-Wright, I didn't mean to- I'm sorry-"

"I remember your freakout when I asked you to be Trucy's guardian the last time I changed my will," Wright waved a flippant hand, returned to sitting and making notes on his page. "At any rate, thanks for checking up on me."

Wright turned back to neutrality. All the signs of his anger were swept up and disposed of. He was immaculate and horrible and placid, not portraying what he felt. Somehow, that was worse than being yelled at. He wished Wright would tell him off for being an insensitive fool, or maybe even kick him out of the office until he'd calmed down. He wished for Wright to scream, "I never want to see your face again!" Just like years ago, when he returned from chosen death.

Stumbling, Miles left the man to plan for his death in solitude.

His mind was reeling, all his trip back to the office. Even the silvery-sharp wind could not snap him out of his stupor. He became so lost, there was no possible way to avoid bumping into Gavin. His coworker froze up in a way that brought old memories to the surface of his mind: fear and awe of his mentor, the expectation of blame for something that wasn't his fault. Then Gavin turned on the charm, helping him stand, pointing out the smear of dust on his lapels, all cool smiles and attempts to laugh off the incident.
"He and Wright just learned of the execution date yesterday," Miles realized, idly watching him clamor to organize the papers he'd been carrying.

Suddenly, it was not a little guilt he felt for asking the prosecutor to go on impossible searches for him. And he had only thought of Wright when vowing to rearrange the date, not the others affected.

"Gavin genuinely doesn't need any more manipulative people in his life."

"I've heard of the case you're working on," he was speaking before his brain even knew what he was planning. "I have a few precedents which would help you with building the case. It involves a tricky yet simple technique-

Miles was leading the man back to his office and scaling the ladder to his top shelves. He ran his pointer finger across the spines until he came to the volume he was looking for. From his organizer, he took sticky notes and indexed the pages he knew would be useful for the case.

"Herr Edgeworth are you alright?"

"I'm about as well as you are."

That man's way of answering personal questions was starting to rub off on him. Miles didn't know if he wanted to change his reply or yell Phoenix Wright's name for everyone in the prosecutor's office to hear. He settled for handing the book to Gavin.

"Thank-you."

Gavin fled with the book hugged against his chest.

Then, he turned back to the waiting stack of paper on his desk. He visualized Wright, nonchalant as ever, working through the fine details of his own will.

"Being yelled at for roughly eight seconds was the most expressive I've seen him."

And finally, Miles knew what that sinking feeling had been warning him about all day.
Wright was so quiet about entering the room, Miles did not realize he was there until the man cleared his throat.

"Hey."

"W-Wright! I wasn't expecting you for another ten minutes, I could have-" then Miles stopped, because he wasn't going to send Gavin off anymore.

"It's not a problem. Apollo and I ran into each other at the metal detectors last week. Apparently, we've both got hairstyles which resemble high class weapons," he awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck. "We biked over together today."

"Ah, I see."

From his shopping bag of study materials, Wright produced a Tupperware container. He'd brought more of the excellent cookies from before.

"I um, remembered what day is coming up next week," he explained. "I wasn't thinking about it when I snapped at you, or started talking about being murdered, leaving a kid behind... I'm sorry."

"Wright…" he trailed. "Wright, it's fine. I'd rather you get mad at me than not say anything. I was the one who aggravated you."

"Alright. Then," he struggled with his words for a moment. "Don't act like you're the single person who knows what's best for me."

"I'll do my best not to."

"I'm the only one who understands how he thinks, I need to prepare."

The statement creepily mimicked something Wright had insisted years ago.

"I will remember that."

"And make up your mind when marking my work! Circles or Xs, pick one! They always take up too much of the page and I hate it."

That caused him to snort. It actually brought a weak to laugh to Wright's lips as well.

"There's a system behind that, you just need to learn it."

"Xs for big mistakes and circles for gigantic ones?"

"Something along those lines."

They shared another laugh, and he felt better about the situation.

"Seriously though, stop doing that."
Wright turned in the essay he'd been assigned for marking. It was written on long sheets of foolscap, words plainly visible through the back side of the thin paper.

"Finished in under the time limit," he declared.

"Excellent, here's your next thesis statement."

Miles had a list of them prepared on different legal subjects. Wright accepted the next thesis, reading it over, and then returning to his books. He began sketching a general outline of what he planned to write, while Miles looked back to the essay on his desk. He wasn't fond of writing the things himself, but he was qualified to mark them for their content and structure.

The particular essay was about suspension of civil rights in times of war. Wright's work was strong, hooking in the reader cleverly. He used well-placed sarcasm and reinforced his weaker points with acknowledging the flaws. It was just enough to prevent the essay from seeming informal, and all the more intelligent because of that.

Miles' red pen hovered above the page, but found no openings to mar his writing. He found small grammar points and areas where a sentence could be rephrased for clarity, but he didn't need to search for that. He wasn't an English teacher, he was supposed to check the legal content and persuasiveness of his arguments. Eventually, he was left with no choice but to push away the essay, defeated.

"You write well."

"Thanks," he distractedly said. "I'd hope so after getting papers and articles published on jurist systems."

He watched the man resume writing. His hand flew across the page, seamlessly putting his thoughts to paper. The pen dipped and looped, dotted his lowercase Is and Js. Again, his knuckles brushed against the still-drying ink, smearing. And when he brought the pen to his lips, royal blue splotched them as well.

"A kiss would be just as effective as a hand, to wipe away the ink," he thought to himself, with a surprising lack of mortification. "Not that I would fraternize at the workplace in such an uncouth way."

"How's that marking going?" Wright asked, not once tearing his attention from his work.

By this point, he was used to Wright calling him out. Wright enjoyed being perpetually aware of his surroundings, and wouldn't hesitate to mention if he was staring.

"There's nothing for me to correct."

"Nothing which you can have take up half the page making a circle around," he grumbled. "Or draw a bunch of Xs next to."

"I write constructive comments as well!"

"You write a book if I miss a comma," Wright corrected.

"That was one time, and it was a run-on sentence! If you didn't enjoy using the subordinate clause in that way, it wouldn't be an issue."

"So long as you're lecturing me about the finer points of grammar, I can't fail," sighed Wright,
sarcasm dripping from his voice.

"Truly, your work fits the expected criteria," Miles insisted. "The segment should be no trouble. Just writing another essay is too easy of study material for you."

Wright dropped the pen in exasperation.

"Thanks for telling me that after I finished all my topic statements. How am I supposed to prepare for it now?"

"Showing annoyance is better than nothing," Miles patiently reminded himself, thinking of the argument they had just been through.

"You need to learn as much content as possible. And get faster at finding answers from the indices."

Those goals had not changed since they started. Wright was still preparing for the multiple choice, but they had recently taken a break, and switched over to essay-writing. But once he shook off the rust, there wasn't much to be improved. Wright had bad and good days with the multiple choice. In some tests he was immeasurably confident, while in others, he fumbled and had difficulties remembering the basics. And they hadn't even touched upon the solicitor's exam. All their work had been for the barrister's, which came first.

"I still have other exercises planned," Miles went on, pulling out a stopwatch.

"Where did that come from?" Wright questioned, suspiciously glancing at it. "And why wouldn't you just use that fancy hourglass on your desk?"

"Because sand won't tell us if you've reached an average of one minute eight seconds and a quarter."

"What now?"

Miles put the spreadsheet in place on his clipboard, filling in the dates and the number of attempts Wright would make that day.

"That clipboard was not there before I blinked."

"Tch. How unlike you Wright, to think I would not be prepared," he smirked, tapping the side of his head. "Pick an index and I will ask the corresponding multiple-choice questions. We will work out on average how long it takes you to find the answer from your material."

Cowled, Wright did as he was told and held up an index. Then he prepared a scantron card, and one of the corresponding practice quizzes to go with his training.

"Um, I'll use the one on administrative law."

"Good," he set the timer. "Your first question begins in three, two, one."

They rushed through multiple choice, Wright shouting, "lap!" each time he finished a question. Within fifteen minutes, he'd pulled through the ten questions. The reason for it taking longer was that Wright wasn't answering based upon what he knew; it was purely searching through the index for the answer. This was easier said than done, as the book was in very fine print, and crammed full of information. He needed to pluck a one-sentence answer from the densely-packed paragraphs of a single page. It was very time-consuming because of this, and further emphasized why one couldn't write off the bar just because it was open book.
"You spend roughly one and a half minutes on each question," he announced, after doing the math on his scientific calculator. "We'll need to shave down those additional twenty-eight and three-quarter's seconds."

"Did that calculator appear out of thin air?" Wright dumbly asked.

"Never you mind that."

"I feel a bit silly," he confessed, rubbing his palms. "It's like we're preparing for the Olympics or something."

"Let's see if your second attempt will be any better."

Pages fluttered, and his pencil raced to fill in the correct bubbles. He would make a quick streak of graphite, just enough for the machine to pick up, and then move on. Wright became so concentrated that he forgot to hide his determined grimace. He worked his way down an additional three seconds, but that was the place where he eventually stuck. Once they'd run through the drill for the umpteenth time, Wright threw up his hands in defeat.

"That's as far as I'm going to make it today," Wright insisted.

"We'll have to continue practicing later," he firmly replied.

"'Course."

"And you need to keep in mind the index is a helpful tool, but not what you rely upon throughout."

"I've been through this before," Wright reminded. "I know there's still plenty of stuff to learn."

"I'd also like to test your cumulative knowledge up to this point," Miles said, more to himself than Wright.

"I'm sure you'll think of some ridiculously intense way to do so."

"Oh, I already have a plan, it's just a matter of timing," he tented his fingers, and looked at his copy of the schedule. It could be more intelligent to move up the test date, to gage how his long-term memory was holding up. They might need to backtrack if the results were lackluster. "I'm wondering if we should move it up."

"This is beginning to sound vaguely painful."

"Afraid?"

"Nah," Wright ducked his head, grinning into his hoodie. "I wrote the bar when it had a three percent pass rate."

"That's the second time you've told me today."

"O-oh!"

Embarrassed, there was a lull in conversation. Wright drank juice to avoid speaking, and eye contact.

"Shall we do one more run through of multiple choice?"

"Ok," he nodded, uneasy still.
Questioning had become routine at this point. He read out what was on the page, or came up with tricky queries for Wright to answer. He would give reply, Miles would check, and the entire process turned rather automatic. He permitted his mind to stray elsewhere, only a bit guilty for not paying attention.

"Is it strange that I still refer to him by a surname? Especially given the present circumstances?"

It was respectful, and then somewhat affectionate. Wright had earned that from him within very little time. He abandoned the unpassionate "Mr. Wright" even faster than that, using it for less than half a trial. Since then, Miles never called him much beyond "Wright." When he wasn't being directly addressed, it was "the defense" or "that man."

"I suppose calling him My Learned Friend is a bit of a mouthful."

The idea of a first name basis was uncomfortable enough just thinking about it. He had pet names for Lang, all in Mandarin and German. But those were kept locked up in the privacy of his mind, and never spoken of again. He used to think and occasionally say them with a straight face, but now thinking of them brought a dusting of blush to his cheeks. An endearment like Shāguā was bad, but plain Phoenix still managed to top the cake. It took all his self-control to keep from reddening. He thought of the cold weather, and how swiftly the new year was approaching in order to keep from blushing.

"You still there?"

"What? Yes, of course!"

"If I keep tripping up like I have been lately, there will be little opportunity to address him as Phoenix."

Chapter End Notes

Shāguā (傻瓜) is an endearment which translates to "silly melon."
Miles got up to check who had stopped by to visit. He was beginning to see Wright on their days off from studying too. If Wright didn't pop in for a quick chat, then it was the other way around. On occasion, he brought Trucy along. At first, he thought Wright didn't want to leave him home alone around this time of year. Many people didn't, Miles found. But he was privately hoping, and beginning to accept it might be otherwise.

Thus, it could only be one person. Besides, he recognized the man's heavy breathing. Wright was collapsed in the foyer, chest struggling against gravity.

"Wright!" alarmed, he rushed forward and ducked over the man. He checked for blood on his chest or ligature marks around his neck, track marks from being poisoned. Just something to indicate injury. "What happened to you?!"

That day was still coming up and now something bad was happening right before his eyes.

"E-Edgeworth, the door," he weakly moaned, batting away his hand. "L-lock it, otherwise-"

Wright never finished. The breath was being squeezed out of his chest, spots swirled and danced against his vision. The orange-clad assailant had both of them in his grasp, iron grip constricting against their struggles.

"L-Larry! Unhand me this instant you ruffian!"

"Edgey! It's Laurice now!"

Excited by the commotion, it was Pess who broke up the hug. Wright flopped back on the ground, like a ragdoll. He continued to take dramatic gasps of air. Miles was half-tempted to join him. Irritability, he rubbed his chest and glared at Larry.

"What are you doing here?"

"In your house? The power of friendship led me to it!"

The power of friendship gave Miles a look which clearly read, "I was trying to lose him but he found me anyway."

"I've just finished my latest sabbatical," Larry jabbered on, as if they cared. Wright had just appeared on his doormat as if he were dying, and Larry thought he was interested in his misadventures?! "I'm home until January, and then I'm flying out."

Larry had lost the fluffy pink sweater, returning to a lurid orange blazer. It was mostly covered by a stained smock, which had paintbrushes and palette knives sticking from it. His beret was worn, but still in place. The pencil crayon stuck behind his ear perfected the messy artist look.

"That's wonderful."

It physically pained Miles to say this. It partly had to do with the ache in his ribs from being bear-hugged.

"I didn't even realize you were back in the country Edgey!"

"I would have preferred if it stayed that way," he grumbled.
"And I can't believe we'll all be back in the same place again, all living successful lives! You'll be Chief Prosecutor, I might get another book deal, Nick will be my talent agent once he passes the bar again~"

"When did I agree to that?"

"An agent is a type of lawyer," Larry folded his arms and rolled his eyes. "I know that much. And besides, it's even what your office is right now."

"Yeah, I guess it is Larry."

Larry's attention snapped back to Miles.

"And don't think I'd let you be alone around this time of year! Not now that you're home Edgey!"

Larry seemed as if he wanted to give him another hug. Miles put some distance between them, using Wright as a human shield.

"I've survived without you."

Actually, Larry made always made a point to call him around the winter holidays. The conversations were awkward and drawn out. It was uncomfortably mushy, and one-hundred percent Larry Butz.

"And you can come set off a bunch of fireworks with us on new year's!" Larry added, as if he hadn't heard the cutting remark.

"Who is us? Whatever new girlfriend you've dredged up?"

"N-nah," Larry grinned shakily, and made a framing shape with his hands. "As an artist, I've sworn off dating. It'll be me, Nick, Trucy-"

"This is the first I'm hearing of it," Wright said.

"Oh man did I mention that I kinda' owe her fireworks? I just kept getting 'go fish' over and over and over again! And then I found out we were supposed to be playing blackjack!"

"And here I was, hoping to keep pyrotechnics out of her acts for a little while longer," Wright sighed, finally sitting up. "Well, I'd better get going. I'm sure you have lots of work to get done."

"You've still got work even you get home?" Larry asked, bewildered. "But-"

"I do have certain commitments," he lied, catching on to Wright's plan.

For a man who'd been lying on the ground like a fish out of water for the past five minutes, Phoenix Wright could certainly run. Larry yelped, "See ya' around Edgey!" Then, having effectively inserted himself back into Miles' life, tailed after Wright.

He sighed mentally, and shook his head at the thought of Larry. Miles had honestly expected the man to show, after accidentally yelling his name. It really was the phrase which could summon him.

Just as he turned from the front door, there was another knock. Could Wright be back so soon? He was proven wrong, Trucy was standing on the doorstep.

"Last I saw your father was running down the street," he answered, before she had the chance to ask. "I'm positive he'll return though."
"I could guess. He left his bike outside."

"Come in," he stepped aside. "I was just moving furniture."

Trucy entered, stopping to admire the clear impression of her father in the carpet. It was plush, and very good at holding shape because of that.

"Again?" Trucy asked. "I thought you'd be all moved in by now."

He went back up the curving staircase. The wooden stairs creaked with every step, and Pess raced past them to the top. She stood on the landing, grinning and wagging her tail at the slower people.

"I've been having trouble deciding where things should go," he replied.

"This room doesn't have anything in it," Trucy remarked, stopping to peek in the barren area.

"I'm aware. I suppose it will make a nice sitting room, given the window, and the good amount of space."

What he referred to was the cutout in the wall, where a trapezoidal window seat had been built. Sunshine poured in through it, and if Pess went missing, she was sure to be found dozing there. The ceiling was high and sloped, as the roof turned downwards.

"You could put all your Steel Samurai merch in here!" Trucy suggested.

"I don't own that much."

"I've seen your closet. You've only got two jackets in there."

"Ngh!" he grimaced, and crossed his arms. "Nevertheless, I don't feel the need to make a room devoted to the Steel Samurai."

A lie. He was entertaining the thought now.

"What are you moving around?" Trucy asked.

"I'm going to take the sofa from my study and put it in the room."

They came to the aforementioned couch, which was already part-way in the hall.

"Daddy's going to miss sleeping instead of studying without it there," Trucy told him.

"Is he?"

If Wright liked it that much, then he didn't want to move it out of the study. But what could he replace it with? It was silly to leave the room empty.

Trucy picked up on his train of thought and suggested, "Turn it into a guest room!"

"I've already got one. Although, two would be better I suppose."

The first was decided upon and organized by Franziska. He mailed her the furniture catalogues from local stores, along with paint swatches. She ripped out pages or circled what she wanted and sent it back. So, when his sister came visiting in the country, she would already have a room which was to her liking. It looked nice, but his strong suit had never been artistic design.
"I'll freely admit my interior design skills are not the best."

They wandered back to the empty room. Trucy spun on her heel, cape swirling with her, and surveyed the area further.

"The first thing you should do," Trucy started, kneeling on the window seat to look outside. "Is get rid of the wallpaper."

"I thought we were getting more not rid."

"It's ugly," she disdainfully informed him.

The wallpaper was once lemon yellow, now faded by the sun. White flower print grew and twined across the peeling corners. Trucy poked an air pocket in the paper.

"It's not that bad." Under Trucy's piercing gaze, he relented, "Though it could be improved."

"I wouldn't mind choosing the colour."

"Stay away from any oranges and I'll let you."

After meeting Larry again, it would be a long time before he could tolerate the colour orange. Besides, it would clash with his Steel Samurai merchandise.

"Really?" she turned her head. "Wait, what's the catch?"

Inwardly, he felt happy about her excitement. Trucy's enthusiasm must have been contagious.

"No orange, I just said."

"What's the real catch?"

"I'll need help painting."

"Of course! I'll be happy to ask Uncle Laurice to come over and-"

"NO! Ah, ahem," Miles cleared his throat. "Pardon me. What I meant to say is no."

Trucy burst into a fit of giggles at his expense.

"Just for that I'm letting your father pick what we're having for dinner."

"We're having dinner together?" Trucy's eyes lit up, before going dark again. "Wait! Nooo! He'll just say we should eat candy, have nothing but energy drinks and coffee!"

Now it was his turn to laugh, and he did.

"I wasn't aware that was a takeout option. The entrepreneurial decisions of youth never cease to amaze me."

"Just order noodles before he gets here! It's what he'll ask for anyway."

"What happened to candy and caffeine products?"

"They're his second-highest choice."

"In that case, I'll bet on him asking for something sugary."
He joined Trucy at the window, wondering if he would spot Wright coming up the road, or perhaps climbing down from a tree. There were plenty in the area, branches stretching up to meet and tangle with the power lines. Acorns scattered the sidewalk; all had rolled from trees near the top of the street.

"There he is!"

Trucy pointed to a grey smudge on the horizon. It was only a blur because he'd left his glasses when moving the couch. Steadily, it became clearer, turning into a recognizable grey figure—alluring as ever—and wearing a vibrant hat. He toted a customary plastic bag, only this time, there were two weighing down his arms.

"He actually went out and bought ramen," Trucy wisely nodded. "That's what took him so long."

"I wonder how he knew I planned to ask them to dinner."

They went back to open the door for Wright. He smiled gratefully and stumbled to the kitchen, heaving his shopping on to the counter.

"Eldoon's finest," he announced, rubbing his hands. "And saltiest. It was on the way, and I figured, 'Hey, I can't leave Edgeworth out!'"

"I appreciate it," he mumbled. "Trucy, could you go set the table?"

She launched into action, snagging placemats, and setting three places for them. She went through the bags and pulled out the packets of chopsticks enclosed with their meal, and lay them with each bowl. While she busied herself with the task, he turned to Wright.

"You managed to lose him?"

"Not before I promised we would spend new year's together," Wright glanced to the dining room. "Don't forget water Trucy."

"As if I could," she stated, reaching for the first glass.

It was an odd setting; three people were at a dining table for ten, eating from folded paper bowls instead of dishes. They were seated in a row, no one at either head of the table.

In a fit of pique, he stole Wright's chopsticks and broke them for the man.

"That's what you get for giving me a death scare not once but twice this week."

"Hey!"

"Did you know that your father couldn't evenly split wooden chopsticks until he was an adult?" Miles asked Trucy. "Larry and I had to take turns doing it for him."

"G-give that-" Wright reached around Trucy and tweaked them from his hands. "It's more complicated than it looks. Metal ones are better anyway!"

Trucy, who was already in the middle of eating, snorted at their antics.

"That sounds like you."

"Well he," Wright jabbed the perfectly broken sticks in Miles' direction. "Couldn't do any sort of origami, refused to be taught how by his classmates, and then cried about it."
"First of all, you cried at least once a week at school. Moreover, I can expertly fold paper cranes without flaw now!"

Paper cranes were the only thing he knew how to fold, but that really wasn't the important detail.

"What did you cry about at school?" Trucy asked.

"Well," he rubbed the stubble under his chin, thinking. "Larry tied together mine and Edgeworth's shoelaces when we weren't paying attention, I fell. And one time Edgeworth deliberately mixed up all the caps on my set of thirty markers because I chose Larry to be my buddy on a field trip. Come to think of it, crying usually had something to do with you two."

"Your father has a selective memory," he whispered to Trucy. "He's neglected to mention the time-"

They might have continued to tease each other all evening if not for how hungry they were. The ramen was steaming hot and good. True to the warnings of the Wrights, it was also dangerously salty. But it was a taste of home, and the happier moments of his childhood. His father didn't cook that often either, usually busy with work. It meant quick takeout dinners, and learning how to buy or make lunch for himself.

"You've got food on your cheek," Wright told his daughter. He licked his thumb and rubbed it off.

"No! Ew!" Trucy squirmed away in disgust. "Did your parents make you suffer like this?"

"I know for a fact that um-" Wright looked to him for permission. He slowly nodded, allowing the man to continue. "His father used to do the exact same thing. Right in front of his friends too."

"Eventually I just learned to wash my face," he finished. "Of course, I wasn't a teenager at the time."

The event had been mortifying. Larry and Wright hadn't laughed. But they stood behind his father's line of sight, with equally large smiles.

"Are we all finished?" Wright asked, standing.

"Yup!" Trucy chirped.

She pushed her container to the side for Wright to collect. Wright leaned close to stack his own. The unexpected action made him stammer, "Y-yes."

As her father turned to the kitchen, Trucy gave him a funny look.

"I also brought more cookies," Wright announced.

"Wait, you mean he's the reason why we never have any left?" Trucy gasped. "I thought you were just baking them for yourself!"

"And I thought you were buying them."

He wanted to be a bit annoyed with Wright, because he never told which store he'd bought them from. Distractions always seemed to pop up before he could give a reply. This caused an hour of fruitless grocery shopping, and unhelpful internet searches. Yet the revelation Wright had been making them, apparently just for him...

"I bought the molds for the cookies," he corrected.

"So you really haven't been eating thirty cookies a day?" Trucy repeated.
"Just twenty-nine," he reassured her.

"Shall I put the kettle on?"

"Yes please!"

He rose, and joined Wright in the kitchen. The rest of the evening passed by in a blur. He was too distracted by the information to pay much attention.
The house was deathly silent when he woke up that morning. Rather than getting out of bed, Miles stared at the ceiling; willing himself to fall back asleep and make the longest day of his year a smidgen shorter. He couldn't, once he was coherent there was no turning around. So, he turned in bed for a time, his sides and back aching on the suddenly uncomfortable mattress. Falling asleep was more akin to plummeting back into all his nightmares, anyway.

It was mostly dark, only a sliver of orange cutting through the drapes. Eventually, Miles propped himself up on his elbows, and checked his phone. He had turned on silent mode the night before, anticipating exactly what he saw now.

Nine texts, four emails, two voice messages.

"And a partridge in a pear tree."

The texts were mostly the same, wishing him well, saying he could talk to them. Only Raymond's asked what time they should go to the cemetery. The emails were similar to the texts, just longer. And more heartfelt, at least for Franziska's standards. Larry's message (why had the fool called him at five in the morning?) was more or less what he expected, but with a "call me back" tacked on the end.

"Lang didn't send anything," he detachedly thought.

"Course. You've always been more interested in work than in family," Lang had replied, when he declined the offer to move to Zeng Fa with him. He wasn't angry or condescending, he just seemed to be stating the facts. "You really are a lone wolf."

Maybe his silence was for the best on this day.

The final message, which Miles deliberately left to the end, was from Wright. He'd missed the call by a few minutes, naturally never hearing his cell phone go off. Miles pressed a button, and it began to play.

"Uh, hey Edgeworth," Wright began.

His unusually gentle voice echoed through the room and bounced around in the walls of his mind. Miles didn't hear the middle of what he was saying, it all drowned out in a sea of white noise.

"Tell me and Trucy if you need anything."

"We love you!" Trucy chimed in.

"T-Trucy when did you get there?!"

The rest was Wright fumbling to hang up, abashed by her "sneak attack."
Mechanically, he crawled out of bed and got dressed for the day; black shirt, black pants. He laid out black gloves and took a matching winter coat from a closet filled with *Steel Samurai* merchandise. Standing in the bathroom mirror, he made the habitual motion of adjusting a cravat that wasn't there—out of respect. He put his glasses on and almost immediately cast them off. A ghost stalked him through the mirrors of the house when he wore them.

Throughout breakfast, he picked apart his toast, until his plate was a mess of crumbs. He let his tea go cold, and wound up handing the slices of apple to Pess.

Miles had the day off, always took it, but there was not much he could do until the afternoon. (When he would go with Raymond…) He sulked around the house, unable to become absorbed in anything. He tried books, television, playing fetch with Pess. But an ever-present restlessness squirmed in his chest. Tears would come later. They inevitably did.

Sitting on the couch, he resigned himself to calling back Larry. There were dire consequences if he didn't. Pess joined him, a comforting, albeit shaggy weight on his legs. Fur tickled under his neck, and brushed against his collar.

The line rang once before Larry picked up.

"Edgey!"

"Larry."

"You got my voicemail then?"

He was guided through the standard end-of-December conversation. Larry was peppy, cramming as much cheer into his voice as possible. He was led around many conversation topics; failed artistic models, the side jobs he picked up while being an illustrator, the no-good stupid-faced contractor who tried to give him a pittance per page. It was the most distracted he'd be all day.

Absently, he scratched Pess' ears and sunk deeper into the couch. It took all one's attention to understand what Larry rambled about. No, he did not care about the poor fool who could actually be *seduced* by Larry. And if Pess was the only trustworthy girl Larry knew, she wasn't a good model. (She was too cuddly to sit still for long.) Yes, he would certainly send a copy of Larry's human rights as a worker if that would make potential employers more cooperative.

Larry did his best to pretend it was a normal day and a normal talk between them. Even though he didn't call Larry if he could help it. Texting was worse, Larry had a fondness for elaborate j-emoticons between his sentences. At the very least, Miles appreciated his friend's awkward method of making him feel less *awful*.

The final thing Larry squeezed out of the call was a promise; they would see each other on New Year’s Eve. There would be fireworks and the Wrights. Larry wasn't sure of the location yet, but he still had a few days to figure that out.

"Hang in there Edgey!"

"Goodbye."

And with that, his call was finished. He'd gotten dressed, eaten breakfast, taken Pess for a walk, wandered around his house without purpose, and talked to Larry. All his messages, beyond Wright's, had been responded to.

He was already overloaded on emotions without having to experience more of the feelings he
"I've done all this and it's only ten," he muttered.

To be fair, he'd woken up at six, after a fitful series of night terrors. It was all darkness and revolvers, bodies laying out before him. He remembered waking up in the falsely bright children's ward. The only thing he recovered from in that place was the oxygen deprivation. There was a sterile odor he could never scrub from his mind, and one cheerful nurse who tried to seem motherly. Not that he knew anything about maternal figures. The nurse was such a bizarre image, a contrast to the monster she escorted into the room. He was shocked into muteness by the news and then petrified right out of it.

The dream would have gone on longer if Miles hadn't woken up, so he shouldn't have felt that bad about it. And it was also his fault for feeling drained, as he hadn't bothered with his tea that morning. He whittled away the time until he was expected to leave by sitting on the couch and fidgeting.

When that point arrived, he could only struggle to fasten the buttons of his coat. His hands experienced difficulty wriggling into his gloves, and holding the customary pot of chrysanthemums. With legs like cement, he marched out to the car, and composed himself enough to put the key in the ignition.

The drive was short, and his parking job sloppier than usual. He didn't bother with correcting it, and instead got out of the car. Raymond and his flowers were lounging on a wooden bench in the lot, waiting for him. The brown grass had a coating of frost. Crystals of ice caught the light, making it sparkle. It was like walking on millions of glass splinters, which crunched underfoot.

Neither of them said anything. They wound through the rows of tombstones, and kept their gaze focused on the jewel-bright sky. This day was popular for mourners, and they needn't make eye contact with anyone they passed. They bent over to replace the old flowers, and shook the dusting of snow loose from the artificial ones. Raymond brushed away frost, so the inscription was clear again. He wasn't wearing gloves, and rivers of water trickled down the stone.

When his mentor announced they would leave Germany, Miles decided he wanted to see this grave. He couldn't ask where it was. In fact, that would be all the man needed to decide they would not leave the country. Miles quietly went through archived obituaries, and made an absurd amount of calls to cemeteries, until he found what he was looking for. Sneaking away was simpler. He had a series of directions, flowers, and a resolve which grew weaker the closer he got to the little X on his map.

The man must have suspected what he did, but never asked. Miles remembered being given a case study about Slayer's Law the next day.

"It is illegal to inherit from a person one has killed. The wishes of the will-writer are overridden."

For years, Miles was bothered by how well-kept the grave was. He saw decrepit headstones with pale lichen clinging to the side, and blades of grass covering inscriptions. So, there was no staff going around, maintaining all of them. It was hard to imagine that a client had been so grateful they came to place flowers and rip up the crab grass which tried to sprout for eighteen years. Some rainy visits, he saw poor impressions of footprints sunken into the ground. Or there would be incense, recently lit. It stood there and reduced to cinders, as if to say he had just missed someone. Not until twenty-nineteen did he meet Raymond- his father's legal assistant- and learn he was the person doing this.

"I wish I knew how to express gratitude for that," he distantly mused.
When the duo had their fill of staring at the plot and not speaking, they turned back. Raymond must have been talking to him; white clouds billowed from his mouth and nose. It shimmered with warmth, before dissipating into the atmosphere. Like every other conversation Miles had been dragged into that day, it was the end he paid attention to.

"How about you give your old Uncle Ray a hug?" he asked, with a grin that didn't reach his lined eyes. They seemed to say, "Because I sure know I could use one right now."

Raymond spread his arms in the customary gesture. Refusal was on the tip of Miles' tongue when his arms went rogue.

"W-whoa, easy on the ribs there!" Raymond wheezed. "I'm not so young anymore."

"Dear God, I'm even picking up habits from Larry now!"

He let go, and permitted Raymond do most of the hugging from there.
"We need to talk."

Trucy had abruptly taken her breakfast and moved from her seat beside him to the head of the table. From where Miles sat- at the other end- one almost had to yell to be heard. The image of her leaning against the placemat with her fingers tented might have been an amusing one, if not for how serious her tone was. Setting down the newspaper, he looked at Trucy with equal graveness.

"I am always here if you need to."

"I had," she took her spoon and began to stir the milk left in her bowl. "The most interesting call with Aunty the other day."

Suddenly, his mouth went dry. Miles wondered what the hell Franziska could have told Trucy to make her look this stern. She was doing an apt mimicry of his sister, now that he thought about it. Miles had been the one who taught her to glare properly, but not like that. There was a tick in her slightly narrowed eyes, one which Franziska used.

"Did you?" he asked, sincerely hoping there was not a whip coiled inside her hat.

"I would have discovered the truth eventually, even without her help."

"T-truth?"

"I'm not hiding anything… That's important to Trucy."

Then Miles thought for half a second more and realized there was something fairly major. Wright was her father after all.

"And Franziska knows, she could have told Trucy. Is this why she came over for breakfast today?"

"You let her pick furniture for a bedroom, not just the paint colour!" "Don't listen to whatever she's told you about my feelings for your father!"

This was followed by the simultaneous cry of. "WHAT?!"

Miles stared at Trucy.

Trucy stared at him.

"Say that again, slowly," she demanded.

"Yes, um, what I er, said was, Franziska did get to pick the furniture, and I was going to extend the same offer to you."

Trucy upped the ante on her glare.

"Your father isn't due to arrive for another hour," he innocently went on. "If you've already selected a colour we could go to the hardware store today."

"You can't bribe your way out of this."

He couldn't tell what Trucy was referring to. Did she mean the question he avoided answering? Did
she think he was being nice to her in order to get closer to Wright? That was the natural conclusion he would have jumped to in Trucy's position.

"My intentions are honourable," he sighed. It was an equally vague answer, which applied to both thoughts.

Trucy stiffly nodded, but still looked displeased with him. She finished her breakfast quietly, making sure to cast suspicious glances at him every two or so minutes.

"Did you wind up choosing a colour?" he lightly asked, trying to appear conversational.

"Yes, but I'm going to tape it up in the room and see how it looks in the sun."

"May I see your choice?"

From her heart purse, she found the swatch. Trucy flicked it with her nails, and it slid the length of the table to him.

"This is orange!" he protested, looking at the colour she had starred.

"Actually, the label says it is peach sorbet. I could have picked orange creamsicle, but I remembered to stay away from your least favourite fruit."

"I was referring to colours when I made that restriction."

"Peach is a colour name. Besides," Trucy stifled a giggle. "It's better than wine red."

His head snapped back to Trucy

"Ngh! Who told you that?!"

"Who hasn't?"

Well, he'd certainly experienced enough embarrassment for one day. And Wright wasn't even at the house yet.

They left for the store after she taped up her choice, and confirmed that it was nice. Grudgingly, Miles confessed that the soft shade of "peach" was acceptable in the light.

"Come to think of it," he asked as they were in the parking lot. "Does your father know where you are?"

"Tch, I'm old enough to not tell him where I go all the time."

"I suppose."

Miles couldn't help but feel that if he were in Wright's position, he would have texted her to ask where Trucy was.

When they entered, Trucy took on an authoritarian stance. With long strides, she ignored the greeter and went straight to the paint section. She determinedly presented her selection to the employee working the desk.

"Are you certain about your choice?" he repeated, watching as the can of paint was put into the mixer.
"So long as you keep asking me every five minutes, I will be."

All the drive back, Trucy kept the can in her lap. She protected it, just waiting for him to decide that the colour would clash too much with his Steel Samurai posters and thus they needed to return it. A bike was parked against the garage wall, indicating that Wright had arrived and was waiting for them to come back.

"I hope we didn't keep your father waiting too long," he murmured, smoothing his bangs in the rear-view mirror.

Again, he was placed on the receiving end of Trucy's suspicions. She became less happy with the paint she chose, and more cynical. Never being one for subtitles, he decided to nip the issue in the bud, so it wouldn't fester. Trucy made a move to get out of the car, but he held up a hand, asking her to wait.

"I know Wright, your father, has his questionable moments and flaws a parent."

"My dad is the best," Trucy amended. "Even if he's not perfect."

Perfect. He flinched at the choice of word. It was too soon (only a day after) to be reminded of him. But he was who they would talk about, anyway.

"My adoptive-" he stopped, because father was too far a stretch. "My mentor adopted me. And he was. Perfect, that is. But he was also a living nightmare; corrupt as a prosecutor, and abusive as a parent."

One could imagine his horror when not only was Wright disbarred, but he had taken in the child of the man who ruined his life. He trusted the man, had more faith in him than that, but the similarities were all there. They were referred to as parallels for a reason. Wright was strong, but there were too many corrupt people in the justice system, who once believed in law. He feared Wright's brand-new daughter could wind up in the same dark places he did.

(Never had he been so grateful for Wright to prove his thoughts and apprehensions wrong.)

"Do you know... has he told you what yesterday's significance was?"

"Your father was killed?" Trucy's voice rose up, making it more a question than a statement.

"He was murdered by my mentor. I was taken in with the intention of turning me into someone my real father would hate, and with the plan to frame me for murder on the same date. All this for his so-called perfection."

He thought of Manfred von Karma's friends, his closest coworkers. Men like Ernst Armano, Blaise Debeste, and Damon Gant. Men who knew, or at the very least should have suspected what life under his tutelage was. They weren't afraid of standing against him, they weren't incredibly loyal, but they chose to remain indifferent or ignorant. Wright was his closest friend, but he would never stand by and remain willfully blind if he wasn't a fit parent for Trucy.

"My point being, I would never manipulate a child in that way, to fulfill my goals. I am not doing any of this," he waved to the paint, and swallowed nervously. "Because of who your father is. I consider you to be like-"

He faltered, but Trucy picked up for him.

"Family?"
He nodded, grateful she could state what he still had difficulty expressing. Affection was tough, explaining his feelings was emotionally draining, and he'd just about reached the end of his strength.

"I just thought you should know."

Trucy leaned over and hugged him, mumbling thanks into his shoulder. She exited the car first, leaving him to regain some composure. Again, he fixed his bangs, and readjusted his collar. When he entered the foyer, Trucy was showing off the choice in paint to Wright.

"How come I don't get to choose the colour?" he teased.

"Because there are only three bedrooms," Miles answered, rolling his eyes.

"Did yours have hideous wallpaper as well?" Trucy asked.

"It's not reprehensible," he objected.

The geometric theme was a bit dated, and he wasn't certain as to how he felt about black and neon green, but he could live with it.

"Wait," Wright made a pausing motion. "It's as in it is, present tense? As in you haven't chosen a colour or painted in that room yet?"

"No!"

"Truce do you still have the fan of paint chips you were going through the other day?"

"Yes," Trucy took it from her hat. "Find something quick Daddy! I bet it looks like an old lady slept there or something!"

"Now's not the time for that!" he snatched up the samples from Wright. "You're here to study!"

"The way you phrased that implies there will be a later," Wright quipped. "But yeah, I guess we should get to that."

In the end, Miles had the last laugh. Wright should never have provoked the person who was going to be quizzing him. He found deliberately obscure questions for the man to answer, and drilled him on the particularities if he was being too vague. He jumped from one subject matter to the next, so that Wright would not have the chance to see a pattern with the information. It led to him collapsing, and taking off his hat. Wright turned it inside out, so the white lining was visible, and waved it like a flag of surrender.

"You're giving me a headache," he complained.

"You need to get up. We're only halfway through."

"H-half?"

"If I recall correctly," he tapped the side of his head. "You still need to practice retrieving information from the indexes."

"Fine."

Wright managed to crawl back up to the couch, glaring at him the entire way.

"I've got aspirin if you need some," he said, taking out the stopwatch and spreadsheet.
"I'll be fine without it," he grouchily snapped. "Let's just get going already."

And they did. Wright had to go searching through more than one of his indices now, it was more realistic of a simulation. He first needed to pick the one which would hold the information he was looking for. Then, he needed to scan through the pages finding the correct number. Oftentimes, there were multiple options, and he was forced to read them all if he wanted to find the reference which he was looking for. With his timing, a few more seconds shaved off. He'd clearly been practicing. They came to an eventual rut, as always, where he could not budge the time average.

"Faster!"

"What do you think I'm doing?" he muttered, eyes rapidly scanning the paragraph.

"Your page-turning technique is sloppy."

"I don't like licking my fingers and then touching the corners," he retorted. "It's gross."

He didn't say anything, turning back to the numbers which flew across the digital timer's face. Wright was falling three seconds short of what they needed, always those three, miniscule seconds.

"Don't bother," he cut in, once the window of opportunity passed. "You're still short."

"I'm working as fast as I can," he defiantly said.

"I know you are, but you're so close to the goal."

"Won't a minute and eleven seconds be just as acceptable as the insane one you want?"

"No."

"Edgeworth," he groaned.

"I've already done the calculations Wright. This is the optimal time for you. I do not trust the simple two minutes the bar association proposes for every multiple-choice question."

Wright began to rub his red palms, and the spots on his fingers where the pain set in. It was a gesture Miles had become used to seeing, a physical strain many chose to overlook when writing long exams. Watching it now made him feel a smidgen of sympathy for the man.

"I suppose we are due for a break."

That ended his sulking right away. Wright straightened up and grabbed the paint samples- which he'd mockingly left on the desk- and sorted through them.

"We can use it to go to the hardware store and get my choice!"

And that was how he wound up taking a Wright to the store for paint twice in one day.
Miles could not wait until it was Wright again, facing him from the other side of court. It was always something he had missed, but in a distant sort of way. There were plenty of Shi Long Lang-shaped distractions in Europe, he did not have to think of their rivalry. But returning to this court system made him nostalgic. Even if those times involved conspiracy, murder, and trouble in general.

Wright solving the *crises du jour* was something he wanted to see again. He enjoyed facing off against actually competent attorneys. And even if Miles would not be prosecuting as often by the time Wright passed the bar, there would still be opportunity. If there wasn't, sitting in the audience and silently judging his decisions from behind was still an option. It would probably drive the man crazy. Just imagining his annoyed expression was enough to make him laugh.

"Mr. Edgeworth are you paying attention?" inquired the judge. "You haven't said anything."

"I was merely thinking, Your Honour," he politely answered.

Miles was unruffled on the outside (unless one counted the cravat) but mentally he was questioning why he let his composure slip so blatantly in court. He needed to concentrate!

"Would you care to enlighten us then?"

"Of course," Miles folded his arms, glaring at the attorney. "I was merely wondering how the defense believes such a shaky testimony would uphold in court. Especially since there is a blatant contradiction in it."

"Ah, yes, I see," the judge nodded gravely. "Well Mr. Jowd I'm afraid I will have to give you a penalty for- wait, what was the contradiction?"

What *was* the contradiction? Why had he claimed that one existed when he didn't have definitive proof?! Without thinking, he provided an excuse which he now had to back up with some sort of evidence.

"A good question Your Honour. If you could look at the list of evidence which has been compiled-"

Miles managed to scatter the twenty-page list of things found at the crime scene, all while making it look like an accident. Apologizing, he stooped over and began a clumsy job of picking up, willing himself to think about what he could bring attention to.

"There must be something in the testimony. It wasn't a good one by any means."

He wracked his brain, combing over every bit of information. And there was something, fortunately. He had merely been too distracted by thoughts of Phoenix Wright to immediately point it out.

"Turn to page fifteen, and you will note that the artificial flowers at the scene were made from *silk*, not plastic and styrofoam like the witness claims."
The trial proceeded onwards from there, and he almost wanted to breathe a sigh of relief.

That man had rubbed off on him in more ways than one.

Wright was waiting for him when he got back to the office. He was fiddling with the stopwatch and twiddling a pencil in the other hand.

"Long day?" Wright asked upon seeing his expression.

"You could say that," Miles replied, hanging up his coat. "Are you prepared?"

"I don't think we can cut my time any shorter."

"I'm not interested in what you think, I'm interested in what you can do."

That put an end to his protests, and he got ready to try for the umpteenth time. They faced the same results as before, where his overall average remained stagnant. It was difficult, but they needed to keep going, honing his abilities. The bar would never know what hit it, by the time he was finished with the man. Plenty of students went through exercises and practices just like these, in order to perfect their abilities and take on one of the most difficult set of exams in the country.

Between sessions, Wright gave him plaintitive or frustrated looks. He didn't think it was worth the time, and would have rather focused on something else. Of course, repeatedly failing a goal by a hair was probably bad for his confidence, too. Miles kept that in mind when testing the man, aware that pushing him too far would not end well. It could completely ruin Wright's motivation to do anything else related to studying. That, and, he truly didn't want Wright to feel worse about his abilities. They existed, he just had difficulties seeing them.

"Lap," Wright called out, after finishing another question.

"One twelve."

"Lap."

"One nine. Try to keep your-"

"Don't break my concentration."

It was a miracle he hadn't torn any pages clear out of the books by this point. They turned into a near-blur of white as he worked.

"Lap."

Just one more question left. Miles looked at the tidy spreadsheet, and the times he'd already punched into the calculator. He did the mental math; a habit he'd taken up due to the periods of silence when Wright searched. If he could clock in the last time in just under one minute seven seconds, he would make it.

"Finished!"

By the first syllable, he'd already pressed the timer. It read one minute, eight seconds. Right on the dot, exactly what he needed for the average. But rather than get excited, he announced, "Again."

Miles didn't tell Wright that he failed, nor that he passed. Just that he needed to do more rounds. It was vital to make sure this was not a fluke of some kind, that he had actually reached the goal which
had been set. His heart began to race, and he scarcely dared to breathe. It might disturb his concentration, his newest record. Wright would call a lap after every question, and his stomach jumped with it.

Wright made it twice.

Miles could have gotten excited and made a fuss then. Two made it less likely to be an outlier. But he didn't. The third was the charm, or so everyone always said. Three consecutive of the same result showed replication, that he could reach such a point.

"Once more."

"Come on," he sighed. "Just accept that I'm not going to get it."

The despair in Wright's voice almost had him wanting to tell the man then. But he exercised control, and schooled his face into a neutral one.

"Again."

"Please-"

Miles rose from the desk, log of times, calculator, and all. He joined Wright on the floor, glaring determinedly across at him.

"This is the last," he promised.

Wright swallowed back a snarky answer, choosing to crack his knuckles instead. Miles winced at the gesture.

"I hate it when you do that."

"I know," he smirked. "That's why I did it."

The seriousness of the matter overtook any opportunity to flirt. Wright closed his eyes and took composing breaths, preparing to concentrate yet again.

"I believe in your ability to do this."

"Thanks," he said, without opening his eyes.

One eight.

One five.

One six.

And so the list went on, but Miles didn't need to check the math to know it had been achieved. He still wrote an average at the bottom. Then, taking out his red pen, he made one of the large, supposedly obnoxious circles which Wright despised so much. He drew it all around the last three times he gained. Mutely, he pushed it towards Wright.

His eyes grew comically wide, mask of an expression falling off in pieces.

"What does this- what?"

"You've done it."
"I-I-!

"Wright you glorious fool you've done it!"

"I've done it!"

Miles tried to reach over and take back the spreadsheet, but his right hand was already holding something.

It was another hand.

He spent a good two-thirds of a second, pondering where a tough, warm hand could have come from, when he realized just who it belonged to. Wright jumped (literally) to a similar conclusion.

"Ack!" Wright tried to pull away, but he wasn't getting go. "I-I'm sorry, I didn't realize that I'd-"

The wrong person was apologizing. In his excitement, he'd grabbed him and squeezed his hand without hesitation. Words couldn't express the pride Miles felt, and even though he wasn't the demonstrative type…

"That's because it was me."

"H-huh? What?"

"You don't need to let go," he explained, swallowing nervously. "So long as you don't want to."

Wright immediately ceased fidgeting. Both of them worried about how their palms were so sweaty, didn't notice how the other's hand was the just the same.

"I don't want to."

His once sharp mind struggled to comprehend what Wright had just told him. He examined the syllables of the phrase and sensed the growing blush on his face. Mortification and relief and joy all swept into a single understanding.

"Likewise."

Wright studied one-handed for the rest of the day.
Miles' list of New Year's resolutions was a short, and a particularly uninteresting one. His goals were simple, as he did not bother with writing down the obvious. (Legal reform to come in the future, and so on.) They were little aspects, more centered around his personal life. The single glaring exception to all that he'd written was the item scribbled on the end.

Kiss Wr- P- my p-

He'd scratched out names and alternate forms of address, turning his page into one large black streak. It was embarrassing to look at, and hardly something Miles could stick to the fridge as a reminder.

After their initial... understanding, nothing much had happened. They didn't speak about it, and Wright hadn't tried to touch him again. But there was a different note to his voice a happier one, when Wright spoke. And he had certainly become clumsier as well, too nervous to be guarded. If Wright wasn't going to act, then he would.

Initiative had caused Miles to help the man study. This had its painful moments, and had also caused him several existential crises within the past two months. Initiative had also led him to recognize his own feelings, the troubles which accompanied them. Even though his track record wasn't necessarily great with taking action, Miles would blind himself to it now. It was the last day of the year, and when the clock struck twelve, it was customary for couples to kiss. He wasn't certain what exactly they were, but this didn't have to be a spectacular display of affection. (After all, Trucy would be there, Larry would be there!) He would step up and take action for something he was fairly sure they both wanted.

Miles tucked away the list in a drawer of his desk, somewhere no one was bound to look.

The thirty-first marked their first day of painting. They would strip the wallpaper to start and move on from there. To keep Pess out of the way, he'd put on her leash and tied it to the railing. Even now as he passed her in the hall, she gave him dirty looks.

"That's what I get for teaching her to glare," he mentally sighed.

Pess' idea of help likely involved stepping in the paint and brushing her tail against the still-drying walls, so hairs would get stuck on them. It had to be done.

"We're h-e-re!" Trucy sang, just in case the Wright family's inability to have a quiet entrance didn't make it obvious enough.

Like him, they were dressed in old, casual clothing. Wright didn't appear much different from his usual, although he was cleanshaven, and his hair did not hold its usual greasy look.

"What's the plan for today?" Wright asked, beginning up the stairs.

"It seems most efficient to remove the wallpaper from both rooms first, then move on to painting."

"So, what does the wallpaper in your room look like?" Trucy chimed in, tailing after her father.

"Nothing interesting," he replied, gesturing to the open door.

Both Wrights took a single glance at the walls of his room, and then looked back at each other. Suddenly, they collapsed into a boneless pile of howling laughter, pointing at the design and then at
"It's not that awful," he ground out, blushing.

"It's ancient!" Wright snorted.

"Does it glow in the dark?" Trucy asked. "How do you sleep at night?"

"There's no need to exaggerate."

"That literally belongs in the seventies. I was in the arts department, I should know."

The two hyenas eventually got it out of their system. They rejoined in the spare bedroom, where he was laying out scrapers and preparing trash bags.

"Fortunately, it's the simple kind of wallpaper, where it comes up in sheets," he announced, tearing up a long strip to prove his point.

Miles' plan for the day (which he never finished telling them) meant that they would work until dinner. They would grab something to eat with Larry around six, and put up with his new year's antics from then on. After some debate, they decided his house was best, as there was enough room for fireworks.

With three people, they made quick work of the wallpaper in the room Trucy had chosen to decorate. More often than not, they got in each other's way, and painting easily became a mess. They had to guide Trucy through the instructions of how to not drip on the floor, and coat the walls evenly. But the end result was worth it, as they got the first layer of paint on the walls by the time they were supposed to. After that, they tidied up and got out of their paint-splattered clothing. While Trucy was changing, Wright pulled him aside to the foyer.

"I've got something planned for Trucy," he whispered. "I'm just going to head out and pick up the surprise now."

"Oh?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Set five places," Wright told him. "Don't worry, I've got an extra pochibukuro for you to give. And if Truce asks, I'm just out getting dinner."

Someone else was coming? It must be a person he knew, and had no trouble inviting over. Otherwise Wright would have broached the subject sooner. Wright had also mentioned the custom of giving money to close relatives, so it had to be a young person he knew. (It was fortunate the man remembered to get another pochibukuro, because he was all out of the special envelopes.)

As he snuck out the front door, Larry raced up the porch steps. He staggered in from the cold, arms piled with graphic boxes of fireworks. Miles accepted some from his breathless friend, dutifully carrying them out back.

"I'm fairly certain some of these brands are illegal," he thought upon examining the names.

A flurry of activity took over his house. Miles set the kitchen table, rather than the dining room's. The chairs were situated closer together, and there wasn't as much elbow space. However, it served to be more intimate for their little get-together.

Larry, as it turned out, had not just bought fireworks. He found streamers, conical party hats, noisemakers, and more. Larry dumped out the single apple which had been sitting in the fruit bowl,
and filled it with celebratory crackers. They were wrapped in metallic paper, and looked very festive as a centerpiece. But neither Larry's nor Trucy's impulse control was very good, and he had to chase them off before they could pull apart more than one. He wouldn't wear the flimsy paper crown that came out of it, despite their insistences, so Trucy put it on the dog.

"Oh, you got out too many glasses," Trucy informed him, as she stood again.

"Don't touch," he warned, knowing why she was edging closer to the table.

"Really, it's not a distraction," she insisted.

"Later," he responded, deliberately ignoring what she was telling him.

"You really do have too many out," Larry chimed from the back door.

"Larry, would you mind taking some chairs from the dining room to the back deck?"

Just as Miles thought he would be cornered by the duo, the front door swung open. He looked down the hall. Wright stood in the threshold, his foolishly grinning face rosy from the wind. His arms were burdened with takeout, and a petite figure stood beside him.

"What did you get for dinner?" Trucy called from the kitchen.

"Come see for yourself."

Miles heard Trucy come up behind him, but nothing could have prepared his heart for her delighted scream. She flew down the hall and practically leapt into Pearls' arms. Then she turned on her father, constricting him in a hug and giving him a deliberately sloppy kiss.

"Pearl! I thought you were busy over the winter break!"

Pearls' face was equally bright, but her teeth chattered from the cold.

"We planned a surprise for you," she answered.

The combination of Trucy's death-scream (The girl must have possessed vocal cords of steel!) and the arrival of Pearls caused him to forget his manners. Another cold draft escaping into the house helped snap him out of it.

"It is good to see you again Pearls," Miles said, stepping forwards and offering to take her coat.

"How was the train ride here?"

"Good!" she chirped. "But cold. I'm going to keep my jacket on for a bit please."

He waved both girls from the threshold. Wright limped after them, leaving him to close the door.

"Can I pull a cracker with Pearl?"

"May you and yes."

Everyone was seated at the table now. Pearls shyly took the other end of the cracker from Trucy, they began to tug. Larry was circling around, giving every bowl a bun to accompany it, asking the girls whether they liked soba better cold or hot.

Wright… Wright made his breath swell and catch in his throat. He observed the growing chaos, said nothing. There was a fluffy knit scarf tied around his neck, and he was snug in his hoodie. But his
eyes sparkled with more joy than any expression could hope to convey. Together, the group was framed gold against the dark backdrop of the window. They could have been a family on a typical end of the year postcard, illustrated with happiness and mischief. Only one place had yet to be filled, and then those cheerful eyes turned to him, beckoning.

He slipped into the vacant chair. From under Wright's fingers, Miles took the accompanying chopsticks again, and neatly severed them down the middle. Wright gave a muffled noise of indignation into his scarf before taking them back.

The meal was good, still warm. Their chatter rid what little cold remained in the room. Pearls grew hot enough to take off her coat, and he caught up with the girl. If not for photos Trucy had shown him, he might not have recognized her at first. To him, Pearls had always been a child. How could she have grown so much when he was living in Europe? He expected her to be eternally small, and timid.

"So, you're going to live here for good?" Pearls asked him. "No more moving?"

"I'm through with traveling," he honestly told her. "I find it more difficult to tolerate frequent moves like I did when I was younger."

"It does seem like a hassle." "It is. But I would never discourage visiting other countries, and broadening your horizons."

There were days when he wondered if it was selfish to not go with Lang to Zeng Fa. Did he truly consider his career more important than his long-time partner? Or was he self-centered for not wanting to make that sacrifice? In the end, Miles was content with his decision, but it made him question how much he valued their relationship to begin with…

"Out with the old," he reminded himself. "The new year is approaching after all."

"Pull a cracker with me?" Wright offered, having already fished a bright gold one from the bowl. "What?" Larry whined. "No fair Nick! I was just going to ask Edgey!"

"Ask Trucy or Pearl," he dismissed.

But they were already occupied with one of their own. Larry eventually coerced Pess into biting one end and tugging with him. She snapped at the confetti which rained from the container, and Larry affixed another paper crown to her ears. Their own also came with a hat, and a small bag of choking hazards. They bickered and fought over the cardboard puzzle pieces, hands frequently brushing against each other as they assembled it. There was a picture of a goat, which was the coming year's zodiac.

Once they finished with the meal, dishes were piled high into the sink. Wright began to lay out candy, enough to make his fillings hurt at the thought of so much sugar. Trucy piled a bowl with chips, Pearls wiped down the kitchen table, while Larry made excuse to avoid doing any work. Wright then washed, while he dried and put back their dishes.

Afterwards, he snatched up the bottle of grape juice from Wright.

"Not the juice!"

Miles poured the contents into a wineglass, so there was at least some uniformity. Larry then took his can of pop and did the same, so they were all matching. When this had finished, Larry announced
that it was time for fireworks. Then, there was a scramble to get bundled up in their warm clothes, and brave the cold outdoors. They tumbled out into the backyard laughing, and legs shivering with the chill. The alcohol solved that problem nicely. So did physically sitting as close to Wright as he could, without blatantly leaning on him.

Fireworks were already going off in other parts of the neighborhood. From over the fence, a particularly loud one shrieked. It did a fair imitation of Trucy. But Pess, alarmed by the noise, howled. There was a sudden lurch, and he was forced to support the one hundred pounds of dog which had jumped in his lap. That was how Miles spilled perfectly good wine on the grass, and experienced the first major setback in his plan of "kiss that man." No matter how much he soothed her, she refused to be comforted.

"This is what I get for keeping her away from the paint this morning."

Still, it was difficult to be close to a person when one had a large dog sitting on them. In fact, he was rather pinned to the chair, and Pess dug her nails into him when he tried to shove her off. He couldn't take her into the house, where it would be quieter, as she was rooted to the spot.

"Are we ready for fireworks?" Larry asked.

"Yeah!"

"How ready?"

"Super ready!" both girls affirmed.

"Alrighty then!"

Larry whipped out a book of matches, and struck one against his own teeth to light it. Beside him, Wright groaned faintly, and muttered something about Larry being a bad influence. Miles could envision Trucy wanting to do something similar with her tricks. He could also understand why Wright said he wanted to keep her away from pyrotechnics and explosives.

The first was a series of basic flares, which brightened as they rose into the sky. Emerald green and red alternated, each seeming to grow higher than the last. Next was the classical burst of stars, which erupted in white and crackled. Acrid gunpowder floated in the air, along with their clouds of breath. Larry must have bought one of everything available. There were lights which shot up in tight curls, and short bursts of orange which rained little crackling sparks down on them. Fireworks which seemed to have no purpose other than to wail loudly when set off. Pess hated those ones, he covered her ears to reduce the sound.

The display was pretty, and joined by the others which neighbors had. It was easy to forget about the cold, to not focus upon the arm which had tentatively curled around his shoulders at some point. And when there wasn't entertainment in the air, it was on the ground.

Larry made a dramatic display of fleeing from the firework every time the wick caught, as if it were a bomb. From somewhere in his jacket, he grabbed a package of sparklers. Trucy and Pearls were suddenly eight years old again. Trucy chased Pearls, who would run away nervously, afraid of getting burned. She would hide behind Larry. The tide of battle eventually turned. Larry fought back Trucy with two sparklers in his hands, and a third clenched between his teeth like a rose.

Wright had to cover his eyes.

"Remind me why I agreed to allow this."
"Larry cajoled us both. Though, I suppose you could go set off the remaining fireworks like a responsible adult if it bothers you so."

Wright didn't budge, so he reprimanded the others. They settled for standing at safe distances from each other and drawing out their names (and vulgarities in Larry's case) with trails of white light.

When those petered out, there were more fireworks to burn. When those ran out, Larry the man-child still had a few extra sparklers, so the entertainment went on. Even if Larry had lost a card game to buy these things, he took defeat with uncharacteristic grace. They did not end until later. A few, bigger displays still lasted. They made a game of predicting where the next firework would explode, searching the winter sky for signs of it.

Larry took a chair next to them. Trucy fiddled with her jacket and detached her cape. She spread it on the grass, so she and Pearls could sit away from the adults. Though, their conversation was still audible.

"I've never spent the new year outside of Kurain before."

"Do you miss it?"

"There are a lot less rules to follow," then she laughed. "But that's true most of the year as well."

"The bells are going to start ringing soon. I wonder if we'll be able to hear your village's?"

"Maybe…"

The din of the fireworks mellowed out as twelve approached. But in its place, temples struck the bells. It was a deep, thunderous sound, and far off. There were one hundred and eight strikes, one for every human sin. Miles tried to keep count but lost track after thirteen, as the ringing all melded into one pulsing sound.

"It's almost twenty twenty-seven," he thought. "Almost time to kiss him."

Again, he tried pushing off Pess. As the night grew quiet, she no longer felt the need to cling to him. She hopped off and gave a lazy yawn, before stretching out in the frosted grass. His legs had fallen asleep no thanks to her.

The bells resonated, they seemed to make the very air shake. With his free arm, he checked the time on his phone frequently, observing as the minutes trickled closer. Miles talked himself through the process as he did this.

"I will turn my head and he will too, as we address each other and give wishes for the new year. Our faces will already be close, leaving me with the simple task of closing the gap between us."

Unnatural warmth prickled at his cheeks and turned his gloved hands sweaty. He practically choked on the clouded breath which swirled around his lips.

Numbers flew across the face of his clock. It was just like the timer, like watching the man finally succeed in the strenuous goals which had been presented to him. The seconds inched closer, exactly to where he wanted them to be.

"It's time to separate from the old. To move on from the past where I can, and look forwards to a better future."

"Happy New Year."
"Happy-
Miles caught him mid-sentence.

"His nose is so cold!"

Trucy didn't see, but Pearls gasped.

"How could you do this to Mystic M-

With a whoop of joy, Larry joined the fray. He was kissed smack on the lips. There was Larry's annoying scratchy beard in the way, and he had cheesy nacho chip dust on his lips. Miles was too scandalized to process what his soon-to-be-eviscerated-friend had done until Wright got the same treatment.

"LARRY, YOU UNCOUTH FIEND!"

Wright's exclamation was more understated, but just as repulsed.

"Somebody call poison control."

"What? How come you're ok with kissing each other but not me? Platonic kisses are a thing, the latest trend! I thought that was what we were doing!"

Then there was a second round of kisses. Mercifully on the cheek this time, and from Trucy.

"Happy new year's," everyone was saying to each other.

Wright tipped some grape juice into his empty wineglass, so he could toast with the others. They were all smiling and laughing, wishing each other well in the coming times. Forgetting Larry's action was too easy in the excitement of the new year.
The High Council of Weird Uncles

Chapter Notes

Read, review, and enjoy!

The conversation was a short and quiet one as they walked to the Agency together. By the time he mockingly held open the door for Wright, the man agreed to inform Trucy about their relationship. She was already inside, rummaging around for one magic prop or another.

"Ugh, where did you put my artificial bouquet of lavender?" Trucy asked as they came in.

"What do those look like again?"

"Cluster of small flowers, short petals."

"You've lost me."

"If you hadn't tidied up stuff around here this wouldn't be an issue!" she grumbled.

There was more legroom that day. Though Trucy's things still took up a large amount of the space.

"The flowers can wait," he firmly stated.

Miles knew Wright would try to avoid the coming discussion with an argument if given the chance. Sure enough, Wright closed his mouth and gave him a dirty look for interrupting. In return, he made a subtle "go on" gesture to Wright.

"Um, Trucy," he swallowed nervously. "I've got something to tell you."

"Huh?" She turned around to face her father. "You never tell me anything."

"Y-yeah," Wright laughed uneasily, and rubbed the back of his neck. "Well I'm talking to you about this."

Trucy's eyes met his, searching for confirmation about what she suspected. But Miles schooled his expression into a carefully blank one, wanting the girl to pay attention to her father, not him. It was already difficult enough for Wright to go the office that day. Explaining the new… situation might just kill him. Thus, it was important that she was paying attention.

"Can't you tell her?" pleaded the look on his face.

"She's your daughter," Miles' level eight glare warned.

"My, the floor sure is flat today!" Wright announced, staring at his feet.

"What is it?" Trucy inquired.

"Right, so, Trucy, Truce, daughter of mine, light in my darkness, child of magic, future first sorceress to be High Empress of our planet, the teen who will finally get me to know more than three flowers one of these fine days- OW! Edgeworth!"
"Get on with it."

"Well, it just so happens that we-" Wright poked his chest in retaliation. "Havedecidedtotryaromanticrelationship!"

Miles grabbed Wright by the collar before he could decide to run away.

"That's it?" Trucy skeptically asked. "Couldn't it have waited until after we got the lavender?"

"I-It's important!" Wright objected. "I'm your dad, and this affects you."

"I thought it was going to be something unexpected. Maybe like you two planned on eloping, or that you're a furry."

"Unexpected? F-furry?"

"You always stare at him when he's not paying attention," Trucy commented. "It's the exact same thing my school friends do when they have a crush on someone."

Wright had been staring at him too then? And he never noticed...

"Do you have any questions?" Miles asked, finally taking some pity on the man. If it were up to Wright, Trucy would have never been told. Thus, he could appreciate Wright's effort to keep his daughter in the loop. (Confessing that she already had "suspicions," and was ok with the relationship did much to bolster his shallow confidence.)

Now Trucy bit her lip, thinking.

"What should I call you?"

"Hm," Miles pushed up his glasses, suddenly every bit lost as Wright. "You were correct about the floor. It is especially flat today."

"I'm not sure if Edgeworth is quite ready to make the mental leap to Father or Papa."

"Yeah," she nodded a bit sadly. "He's still sort of a weird uncle in my head."

"W-weird uncle?" he sputtered "How dare I be relegated such a status? It's more befitting someone like Larry!"

"You're both title champions," she smirked back.

"Urk!"

"But, on the subject of names, are you guys going to keep calling each other Wright and Edgeworth?"

"Huh, good question," Wright replied. "What's your expert opinion on the matter?"

"Yeesh!" Trucy threw up her hands in defeat. "You're both awful at answering my questions."

"Sorry. We truly are attempting to be helpful."

"Attempt being the main word there."

Trucy returned to her search for the flowers. Wright joined in, pulling out ten different bunches, none
of which seemed to be the flowers Trucy was looking for. He helped too, peeking under the coffee
table, and trying to think of an unconventional place they could have gone. The problem with the
office was that everything was stored in an unconventional place.

The piano bench was filled with menus and faded old manga issues. The music books which should
have been in there were tucked beside the plant. ("Listening to music is good for plants," Wright
explained when he asked. "So I figured Charley would enjoy teaching himself the theory behind it.")

A letter opener was wedged between a crack in the floorboards, and the return address on an
envelope with a neat cursive "Phoenix Wright" had been shredded. The pieces were sitting in an
otherwise empty ashtray. The only things which seemed to be in order were the case's books.
Someone had given them a dusting recently, and Trucy's name was smudged into the otherwise
sparkling glass doors.

"Are you ok with given names?" Wright asked, sweeping the pieces of torn letter into his sweater
pocket. "I think we've always used our family's."

"It is a bit strange to think of," he agreed. "But I see no logical reason to be squeamish over the
issue."

"I'll do it if you will."

"You ought to watch out for that lamp cord, Phoenix."

He didn't.

"Ack!"

Miles offered a hand, but Wright didn't seem to spot it. While he was on the carpet, Wright inspected
underneath the second small desk which had recently been pushed into the room.

"So that's where Apollo keeps his blazer."

Justice had looked quite resplendent in deep violet the other day. (Someone had left a window open
overnight in the staff room, making it freezing.) At the time, he wondered why the attorney had not
brought his own jacket with him. The answer appeared to be he'd lost it in the void of the Agency.

"You should hang that up for him."

Wright crawled back up and shook off the dust with a careless motion.

"Still not my flowers," Trucy sighed in response, when the red blazer was presented to her. "You're
going to have to buy me another set."

That got Wright moving faster than before. He resumed searching, but could not for the life of him
find the bouquet which Trucy had described to them. It occurred to him to ask if the girl truly needed
lavender, rather than the thirteen other options which had been scrounged up at this point.

"Have you thought of reworking your trick?"

It was a bit of a dangerous question to ask. Trucy jealously guarded the secrets behind her routines,
and was reluctant to let others help. But she didn't appear too annoyed with him for daring to speak
up.

"The illusion won't look as impressive if the marbles and flowers aren't the same colour."
"Why don't you change the marble colour?"

"Because I don't have brown and yellow flowers, but I do have those marble colours left."

There was a set of nail polish and top coat sitting behind a photo of Trucy's deceased father. The main colour was a vile-looking purple. It had separated from the yellowish oils and chemicals of the paint, from sitting stagnant for a long period.

"Why not pick some dead ones?" Phoenix suggested. "Go out and find some."

Someone had placed a coin on top of a framed movie picture near Wright's desk. It was out of his reach, but could have been knocked over if he stood on his toes.

"I can't work with dead flowers. They'll shed across the stage if I handle them too much."

"You're a magician," Wright reminded her, grabbing the nail polish. "Turn them into live ones."

"Huh. That's not a bad idea."

"I know it's strange coming from a dolt like me, but I do say smart things once in awhile," Wright dryly said.

Trucy gave a resigned nod, accepting that she was not going to find the lavender which had eluded her.

"I'm heading out," she announced, clipping her cape back in place.

"Where?" he asked. "I could give you a drive."

"Just to People Park."

He did the mental math, and did not like how things were adding up.

"It's too far to go there, it will be dark on your walk home. Temisk Park is closer."

"Temsik will be muddier."

"Trucy can handle herself," Phoenix added in his two cents. "She's got plenty of tricks up her sleeve if necessary."

"And pepper spray."

"And pepper spray," Wright agreed, head bobbing.

Outnumbered, he was left with little choice but to accept. Just as Trucy got past the threshold, Wright subtly cleared his throat.

"So, are we all good on this?" his fingers were gently squeezed, and then brought into plain view of Trucy. "There's not too much confusion?"

"Nope, I get it."

If she coughed "mostly" into her fist they pretended not to take notice.

"Keep looking and see if you can't find the lavender please."

They stopped the second she was out the door. Wright fell onto the couch and tugged the knit hat
over his eyes. He delicately perched on the end, now sweating fingers still in Wright's clutches.

"Phoenix," he spoke the man's name all within a sharp inhale. "Tell me something I don't know about you."

Phoenix. The name was odd on his tongue, the stress on the syllables wrong. It sounded seamless in his head, but incorrect aloud. Phoenix was like a tricky legalese term his childhood self couldn't quite pronounce. It reminded him of days when he sat down with a book that almost weighed as much as him. Quiet afternoons home alone, or patiently waiting in the lobby when court went for recess. He tried to decode the meanings behind the things his father was always staring at, and became fascinated with law in the process.

"I called you Phoenix in youth..." he remembered.

"I'm tired."

Watching the man yawn, he said, "I can tell that."

"I've been getting offers from Ivy U the past week."

"To give a guest lecture?"

"Guess what the subject is on."

"Law?"

"Shakespearean theater. I was an arts student there remember?"

"What? Why would they-?"

"Of course it's about law," he interrupted, giving a silly grin. "Be more specific."

"Jurist systems."

"Right in two tries."

"That's a superb opportunity. I wonder what prompted them to contact you now?"

"A friend of a friend heard I passed the qualifiers, or so I'm told," his answer was punctuated by a yawn, and he stretched lazily. "Your turn."

"I'm officially taking the Chief Prosecutor's position on Monday."

"Where's your new office going to be? Higher than before?"

"Yes," he grimaced. "The fourteenth floor to be precise."

His predecessor had shown him the ropes, not that the incompetent man had done very much to begin with. He served more like a rubber stamp of approval than someone who took the job and cases seriously. He was similar to a particular judge he frequently dealt with: seemingly authoritative, but easily intimidated, and not strong in critical thinking. He knew more about the position from his own worldly studies than from the former Chief Prosecutor.

"Your lungs are going to collapse one of these days," Wright commented. His grip slackened, their hands coming apart. "So many... stairs."
"Are you offering to carry me?"

"Only if you pay for my funeral when…" he tiredly trailed off. "When I break my back doing it."

He laughed, but permitted the man to doze off. Upon checking his phone, there was a text from Larry.

**Hey Edgey! Wanna come c me off the airport in thirty?**

*Not particularly.*

( ；人；) it will be the last time we see each other for a while!1!

*Why don't you have Wright see you off?*

**Nick says hes busy today! -д´-**

"Busy sleeping," he muttered aloud.

"Very busy," Phoenix agreed. "I'm not going."

**Alright.**

There would be little harm in seeing Larry one last time. Wright was already driving him insane, so there was nothing Larry could do to make his life problems worse.

Miles was impressed to find that Larry was somewhat on time for his flight. That approval went away with Larry's explanation for it.

"They always stop me because of all the metal in my bags!" Larry pouted. "I try to explain that a pallet knife is different from a regular knife, but they confiscate them anyway! Don't they know how much art supplies cost? Especially when you can't sell anything at its true manufacturing worth in this market?!"

With the holiday coming to a close, the airport was bustling with activity. He was fortunate, being able to find Larry sitting in a small café. It was cramped with people who had phones out and laptops plugged in, using the internet service while they still could.

"Have you considered putting them in your suitcase instead of your carry-on?"

"But then I wouldn't have room for my *actual* knives!"

Larry had a sugary disaster of a gingerbread cookie. It was rock hard, and had a coating of vibrant royal icing slathered across the top. He thoughtlessly dipped it into his coffee and let crumbs scatter across the table. A tea had been waiting for him at the opposite seat when he arrived. The journey was therefore, not entirely pointless.

"What do you need real knives for?"

"Art! Have you ever tried cutting canvas with scissors? It just doesn't work Edgey."

Miles decided then and there to avoid travelling with Larry at all costs. Customs with him would be an absolute nightmare. In fact, if he didn't have a dream about prosecuting Larry for trying to smuggle in weapons or alcohol or *something* across the border, then he would be surprised.
"You're destined for trouble Larry."

"I know, right? No one understands my creative spirit around here! That's why I've gotta' leave the country again, expand my horizons and find my people."

The tea was cheap and scalding. The thin paper cover did nothing to shield the heat. He kept his palms not touching the cup, but just beside it.

"When you were made they broke the mold," he replied. A staticky voice announced something over the intercom. "Is that your flight?"

"Be patient," Larry scolded, waving about the cookie. "I'm gone in twenty minutes and then Nick's all yours until summer."

"..."

"What are you glaring at me like that for? I'd rather it be you monopolizing him than that blonde homewrecker."

Larry didn't need to name names for Miles to know exactly who he was talking about.

"Homewrecker seems to imply that you and Wright were-" he shuddered in revulsion at the very concept.

Larry scowled, and bit off the arm of his gingerbread.

"He was a homewrecker of friendship!" Larry corrected.

"How so?"

Wright would never have replied if he dared to ask about Kristoph Gavin. Larry, on the other hand, could not be quiet for longer than ten seconds. He would be happy to rant about a person (and Miles used that term lightly in Gavin's case) who had obviously rubbed him the wrong way.

"So, Nick just announces one day that he's got a new friend, a replacement for me! The guy who's been pals with him since we were babies!"

Prying off the plastic lid, he peered into his cup. Steam poured out, and he placed a stir stick in the tea.

"Did he actually word it like that?"

"Well, no," Larry confessed, crossing his arms. "But it was definitely implied!"

"Was it?"

"I'd take being the third wheel with you over him any day," Larry affirmed.

"I'm flattered."

"Maya and Pearly both had to go home eventually, but I tried to stick around, I really did!"

Larry would leave the country if a slightly attractive person so much as crooked their finger at him. He'd done it back in two thousand seventeen, when a girlfriend of his had demanded it. Miles liked to hope the Butz had changed since then, but knew it was unrealistic at this point in life. Had he really tried to remain and support Wright after his disbarment?
"What prevented you from staying?"

"You mean who."

"I didn't want to ask a leading question," he lied.

Miles knew it was a who, he just wanted it to be something else.

"He wouldn't let me be alone with Nick. And he always tried to boss me around, like he was you or something. I kept calling and texting Nick to complain, but he just started brushing me off."

"Gavin wanted to ruin your friendship?"

The more he learned, the stronger his hatred grew for the man. Discovering the murder plots and truth behind Wright's disbarment from a newspaper of all things was bad. It showed that he was out of the loop, and he had not realized the full extent of what Wright hadn't been telling him. But he thought that was it. How could there be more details? How deep did the manipulations and paranoia run?

"Fucking homewrecker."

The parents with two young children who were sitting at a close table gave Larry a dirty look.

"...Larry."

"Yeah?"

"I know you have zero interest in Wright, but he and Gavin weren't-?"

His stomach twisted unpleasantly at the idea alone.

"Edgey you're going to wind up with a wicked-nasty burn if you keep crushing the cup like that."

"Answer the question."

"What am I a crime scene witness? You could at least tack on a please there! Especially since I just saved you from a hand injury, and bought the tea you're drinking."

"There's going to be a crime scene if you don't answer. But you won't be the witness," Miles wanted to snarl. He tucked that retort in the back of his head, and tried to focus on the subject at hand.

"Please may you?"

"As far as I can tell, they were just two guys being bros. Not even that, really."

"You don't know for certain?"

"How would I? It's not like I can go up and ask if they were fuc-"

"Larry!" he hissed. "There are children around!"

"You're the one who asked. But it doesn't matter if they were-" Larry made a crass gesture. "-or not, because I know Nick's guilty about what happened between us."

"Is he?"

"Why else would Nick lie about being busy today?"
Larry's voice was bright, but there was an underlying sadness to what he spoke.

"Larry…"

There was another call over the intercom, this time announcing that boarding had opened for a plane.

"That's my flight!" Larry chomped off the head of his cookie and chugged his coffee. "I've gotta' go."

Larry was in a scramble to reorganize his carry-on and finish his food.

"Don't give me that look," he muttered between a mouthful of gingerbread.

"What look?" Miles indignantly asked.

"I'll give you something to glare about if you don't stop," he warned. "Oh God where did I put my passport? Edgey did you see it?"

"With your wallet," he sighed.

"Ah," Larry felt his back pocket. "You're a life-saver!"

With his things gathered up, Larry turned back to him.

"Safe flight," he wished.

"Thanks!"

In a seamless motion he could never hope to replicate, Larry kissed him again. Miles couldn't even threaten to murder him; the taste of coffee and saccharine icing was overwhelming.

"See ya' June!"

"LARRY GET BACK HERE THIS INSTANT!"

But he was already gone, lost in the groups of bustling people.

It suddenly occurred to Miles that he had kissed Larry more times than the actual man he was dating at this point.

"I never should have underestimated the Butz's ability to make things worse."
This marks the end of the chapters which I have written ahead of time, and the start of university for me. So, you can expect the update schedule is going to be less regular in the near future.

Read, review, and enjoy!

“Detective, I would like you to clarify something for me.”

“Yes Mister Chief Prosecutor Sir!”

The detective gave Miles a tiny salute.

“Look at Klavier Gavin,” he instructed, pointing his chin in that direction.

“I see him.”

“How many people are talking with him?”

“Two Sir.”

“Has your department recently changed mascots?”

“Nope! Of course not! We all love the Blue Badger down at the precinct!” she hummed the Blue Badger jingle for his benefit.

“If he is not a mascot, could you provide any logical reason as to why there is someone wearing a spacesuit and helmet in the prosecutor's office?”

Miles tried to recall if they had accidentally hired the scruffy-haired man in his past two days of being Chief Prosecutor. But he recalled nothing of the sort.

“Sorry,” she shrugged. “But I don't see any reason for there to be an astronaut around these parts.”

“Thank you.”

It was bad enough that Justice was always around the office. Now the intruders had somehow multiplied! Tax dollars were going towards the doughnuts they’d all stolen from the break room.

“Gavin,” he began, striding towards the trio.

“Would you care for a doughnut Chief Prosecutor Edgeworth?” Gavin innocently asked, holding the box out to him.

“I have difficulty believing that a complete spacesuit made it past our security checkpoints. Especially since it takes hours to properly get into one.”

“I was told strawberry-filled are your favourite,” the blond pressed, now using the box to keep some
distance between them.

“Mister Chief Prosecutor Edgeworth this is my friend Clay Terran,” Justice introduced, trying to
distract him.

“Nice to meet you Mister Chief Prosecutor Edgeworth Sir,” Terran flashed a sunny grin.

“Stop with the titles,” he growled at them all, shaking Terran’s hand. “Gavin, I can pretend that you
and Justice are doing something work-related together. But this, I would like to hear an explanation
for.”

“We were just leaving,” Gavin justified. “In fact, our work finished five minutes ago. We didn’t
intend to loiter, truly.”

An obvious lie, but he could appreciate the creativity behind the story. It wouldn’t do to come off as a
soft, easily manipulated superior. He intended to maintain a specific level of professionalism around
the office. Yes, he did let Wright in for purposes unrelated to the job. But they were working at each
other’s houses more frequently. He also made sure that the man was properly signed in with security,
had a visitor’s pass. Something the chests of Justice and his astronaut friend were distinctly lacking.

“Be on your way then,” he frostily answered. “But remember, I’m not in the habit of giving second
chances, let alone thirds.”

They turned to leave, but Miles remembered something.

“And give me those doughnuts! They’re for the staff, not just you three.”

“But there’s only-“

“Now.”

With a sigh, Gavin handed over the box to him. Then they could leave unhindered. There was only
one doughnut left, but that wasn’t a problem.

Strawberry-filled were his favourite after all.

On the drive home from work, he stopped in, to pick up Wright. They still had some painting left,
mostly touching up the walls and trim. He had the energy and time for it today, so there was just a
matter of looping the man into helping. Trucy was out, but Phoenix knew to expect him.

“I’m here,” he announced from the living room.

“Hey.”

Wright’s voice was quiet, coming from his bedroom. Not hearing any stirring, he went down the
hall, and peeked into his room. Wright was sitting slumped on the bed, dressed right down to his
shoes. In one hand was a letter. The other held a white shirt.

“Thinking about the lecture offer?”

“Yeah,” he answered, not looking up. “It’s a good opportunity. I just… don’t know what I’d do with
it.”

His fist tightened minutely around the collar of the formal dress shirt.
“I’m happy to help plan if necessary.”

“No, I can handle it. You already do too much for me.”

“Have you actually accepted the offer yet?”

“Not yet. Geeze, I don’t even know what I’d show up in. It was bad enough getting looks for writing the qualifier in my pyjamas. I need them to take my lesson somewhat seriously.”

“Well that shirt certainly isn’t going to fit you,” he answered, reaching over to pluck it from his hands. “I’ll take you shopping.”

“S’not mine,” he said, dodging his attempt to take the shirt. “I know I’ve got stuff to wear, it’s just in the back of my closet.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure something out.”

Phoenix went and returned the shirt to his closet.

“...right.”

The drive over was quiet, and they didn't talk much as they began to paint. This suited him fine, after a long day on the job.

He had his work cut out for him at the office. There were piles of neglected issues, and the poor secretary had been doing more than his fair share of the work. He was handling duties which strictly belonged to the Chief Prosecutor for over a year. It was no wonder their legal system was in such a state.

On top of administrative issues he would need to straighten out in the coming weeks, a suspicious case had been shoved into the corner of an old filing cabinet. A young man was slated for death row, but Miles immediately noted contradictions.

Something needed to be done about that. He would arrange a meeting with the prison board and its director. He was going to investigate the Blackquill issue further, and something had to be done about the Kristoph Gavin situation as well.

The mess was enough to make any reasonable person go grey from stress.

That wasn't an issue for his hair, but Miles wrote a mental note to stock up on aspirin for his very near future.

Painting, therefore, was a mindless task that wasn't half as liable to make him pinch the bridge of his nose in frustration. Wright had been merciful in his choice, not opting for eye-searing pink, or something equally terrible. Infuriatingly, Miles found himself agreeing with most of Wright’s selections, discovering he liked them. Wright settled on a deep amethyst colour, because, “It was almost like my favourite brand of grape juice.” Arbitrary as the reason was, he couldn't deny that the room looked better. The wallpaper had been somewhat dated.

He was in charge of painting over any uneven spots in the wall, where bits had been missed with the first few coats. Wright took charge of the trim. He peeled up the lengths of green tape and brushed wherever splatters had landed, or a touch-up was needed.

“You’ve got a tiny smudge of paint,” he remarked. “On your face.”
Wright happened to glance towards him, and then he stood from his crouch

“Do I?”

“It looks like you’ve been eating blueberries or something. Hold still, I’ll get it.”

Wright closed the gap and licked his thumb.

“Don’t you dare,” he growled. There was nowhere to go, unless he wanted to be squashed against
the drying wall. Wright had him at a disadvantage.

“What? At least I don't do it to flip pages,” Wright shot back, trying again.

Grumbling and cursing his hypocrisy, he allowed Phoenix to try rubbing out the smear of paint. He
was rough about it, doing his best to remove the paint. He scrunched up his nose in distaste, but
patiently stood there.

“I rank this two and a half points higher than kissing Larry,” he said aloud for Wright’s own benefit.

“We can fix that in a sec,” he distractedly answered. “I think I’m making the problem worse.”

“What have you done?” he sighed. “Let go and let me see.”

“Trust me, you don't want to.”

“Wright-”

Instinctively, he tried to push away from the man. But their proximity and the collar bone right before
his eyes was distracting. (Any reasonable person would experience the same problem!) He forgot
about the paintbrush in his hand until it was in the man’s hair.

“...don't look now, but I believe your hair might be sporting the same colour as well.”

“What?” he squawked, feeling the back of his head. “Ah! It’s going down my back!”

That ended their closeness. Phoenix sprang away, examining his very purple hands.

“Come to the bathroom,” he instructed, tugging by the crook of his elbow. “We'll wash up.”

The smudge across his cheeks was nothing in comparison to the paint splattered on Phoenix, so he
was relatively unbothered by the issue. A little warm, soapy water and a washcloth could fix the
problem faster than saliva and a thumb. Wright rinsed his palms, taking care to not spread paint
across the counter or taps. Then Miles made him sit on the edge of the bathtub, so he could mop up
his hair and neck.

“I'll find you a clean shirt,” he said. “Take off that sweater.”

“I’m fine,” Wright insisted.

“Your screams a few minutes ago seem to contradict that.”

“Time flies when you’re having fun.”

“You cannot go around my house dripping paint on the hardwood floors and carpets.”

“It’s all done dripping.”
“I forbid it.”

“This seems like a clever way to dispose of my hoodie,” Wright told him. “A set-up. First you get paint on me, then, while I’m sitting here distracted, you toss it out.”

“I’m sorry for getting paint on you and no it is not my master plan. You can keep the thing in plain sight the entire time.”

His master plan for getting rid of that awful sweater was more elaborate and devious than merely getting paint on the man. No, that was too pedestrian a method to employ. His own involved incineration and paper shredders. That was sure to solve the problem, should Wright trail after it like a lost puppy.

“I don’t want to,” he stubbornly replied. “My hands are clean, so let’s just get back to work.”

“Sit down,” he pressed on Phoenix’s shoulders, preventing him from escaping. “I will not tolerate such foolishness.”

“Edgeworth…”

“Yes?”

“I’m—” Wright pinched his waist, pulling up skin and fat between his fingers. “Not really young anymore.”

“I’ve seen you in states of undress before,” he answered with a roll of his eyes. “I’m not anticipating any surprises.”

It was only once, true, but he needn’t mention that part aloud. He would have been more surprised to find a toned pack of abs under his bulky clothes, rather than the gentle folds and ridges of fat. Wright didn’t possess much energy these days, and there were more important things for him to be doing than wasting away in a gymnasium to have perfect-looking muscles.

“Alright,” he embarrassedly mumbled. “Ok.”

“Do you know how many pounds I am?”

“No.”

Wright’s eyebrows rose into his hairline when he whispered the amount.

“You don’t look it.”

In response, he shimmied out of his waistcoat and untucked his shirt from his pants.

“That really makes a difference.”

“Even if I wasn’t, I would hardly care about your waistline.”

“Why does that sound like an insult?” he groaned.

“Because I’m affronted by the very idea of being considered so shallow,” Miles told him. “The best way to make it up would be if you removed that thrice-damned sweater so I won’t have to scrub paint out of these floors.”

“I’m getting white hairs too,” Phoenix remarked as he finally took off the sweater. “And I get back
pains whenever Trucy asks me to carry her. I feel so old."

“You're not even thirty-five yet.”

“Both our birthdays are coming up though.”

“Stop talking as if you’re about to keel over from old age,” he scolded. “I’m not letting you go anywhere.”

“Most days I wake up and wonder how I’m still alive,” Phoenix sighed. “That’s really cold.”

Wright shuddered a bit as the washcloth was dragged along his skin.

“It was warm before we started arguing,” was all he said.

The rivers of paint came off simply, but left stains behind. He concentrated on those, attempting to wipe them out. Phoenix shuddered theatrically from time to time, in protest of the cold.

His gaze trailed with each motion of the cloth; against the bumps of his spine, past the two dimples which formed near Wright’s tailbone. Despite the lack of paint on his shoulders, his hands passed over them.

“I don’t think there was that much on me,” he softly remarked.

“Of course not,” Miles declared. “This wasn’t a set-up to destroy your clothing, it was to make you clean!”

“Curses! I’ve been foiled!” Phoenix replied, no real heat in his voice. “Too bad I showered yesterday. It sort of takes away from the accomplishment.”

“Yes, I suppose it does,” he demurred.

He continued to trace patterns along Phoenix’s back anyway.
Phoenix Wright,

A little bird told me that you’ve received the chance to lecture at your alma mater. How interesting that they would extend such a prestigious offer to you. The next time we meet you’ll have to tell me all about it. I wonder how long you spent-

The upside-down message, along with the rest of the mail, was swept off the kitchen table. Wright laid out two coasters and tucked the letter with neat cursive into his shirt. A drink was presented to him, and Phoenix dragged over the closet chair.

“You brought along a catalogue?” Wright confirmed.

“Yes.”

Miles took it out of his organizer, and flattened the creases in the front page. It was a catalogue for his preferred tailor, currently earmarked with some personal choices, as well as ones he believed would suit Phoenix. They would find some selections first, and then go in to make alterations and purchases. It was somewhat premature to buy the clothes Wright would wear in court, but he still needed something proper for the lecture, and clothes for when they went on dates with a dress code. (He had several plans for that in mind.)

“I see no reason for to get a full suit right now, unless you want to.”

“How accurate are these colours to the samples?” Wright asked, examining a page.

“Very, in my experience. Although, I find anything in white tends to be somewhat off from what’s been printed.”

“I like that tie,” he said, pointing to a bubblegum pink one. “It matches the lettering on my hat.”

“Not for long,” he darkly muttered, glaring at the vile thing in question. Miles knew Trucy had knitted it for her father, and thus it was a work of love and some such, but the hat needed to go. Preferably out the fourteenth floor window of his new office at work.

“What was that?”

“How do you feel about sweaters?”

“No sweater vests.”

“Tch, as if I’d let you dress like my eight year-old self.”

“I can’t pull off a bowtie,” Phoenix added for good measure. “But a regular sweater sounds good. I’ve always liked them.”

“It can’t be bulky,” he cautioned. “It will need to fit you properly.”

“I used to layer a dress shirt and turtleneck when I was articling,” he answered thoughtfully. “And learning from Mia too…”

“Casual, but acceptable for our purposes.”
He licked the tips of his fingers to flip to the page of sweater styles. Wright naturally gave a squawk of disgust.

“Why must you do that?”

“I’ll stop as soon as you cease cracking your knuckles,” he reassured, landing on the section he was looking for.

There was an array of sweaters in different patterns, cuts, and styles. Some he was personally drawn to, and had already marked down for consideration. Wright curiously poured over the page, before stabbing a single choice.

“That.”

“Move your finger so I can circle it.”

Phoenix made another sound of disapproval when he deliberately drew a large red circle.

“Hey, no prices,” he noted upon inspecting the image.

“Don’t you worry about the cost.”

“But-”

“Consider it a gift.”

There was a pause.

“I don’t understand.”

“For the lecture, and a better future.”

“I don’t get-” his tone was stiff and uncomfortable. Phoenix kept his eyes glued to the page, though his mind was clearly distant. “What do you want from me?”

“Pardon?”

“What could you possibly see in me that's worth buying anything for? Let alone tutoring and dating and-” his fingers curled up, trembling. “I haven’t done anything to deserve you, so why are you doing this?”

“I want you to succeed in your goals, and get back on your feet again,” he stammered, forcing himself to put his emotions into words.

“But people don’t do that. They don’t befriend you, and pay for your meal every time you go out for seven years, and tutor your daughter in science because you were an arts student who never paid attention because they care about you,” he ranted. Phoenix squeezed his eyes shut, and kept a hand pressed his chest. “So what do you want? Am I just useful to your plans of legal reform? Is it sex? Or am I being kept close so you can devise a perfect scheme for when it’s finally expedient to murder me-”

“Contrary to what my glares may suggest, I do not plan on killing you.”

“I can’t go through it again,” Phoenix tried to wipe the sweat glistening on his forehead, but his shaky hand fell short of its target. “Please don’t make me. Whatever it is just tell me or get it over with.”
Telling the truth wasn't going to accomplish what it normally would have. He decided to rationalize, hoping that would prove his intentions to Phoenix.

“Do you remember how Gumshoe used to cut up a tree’s worth of paper and hand it to observers in court, so they could throw it with our victories?” he gently asked.

“Y-yeah.”

“And how he would let you into crime scenes, and fudge up a testimony for you to find contradictions?”

Those moments were the bane of his existence in the early days. But when the roles were reversed, and he was the one who needed to sneak into a crime scene, it was useful. Gumshoe was ready to give his all, even his beloved K-9 unit Missile, if it meant that much to the investigation.

“Yes.”

“Do you want to know something both infuriating and humorous about the man?”

Swallowing thickly, he nodded.

“The first time I met him, he was nearly convicted of murder. All because he promised a little girl he wouldn't reveal she’d talked to him, a stranger, so they could buy swiss rolls.”

Taking him away from the stressful subject helped some. Still, Wright pulled at the neck of his sweater, and was too shaken to keep his expression schooled.

“That sounds like Gumshoe.”

Phoenix’s voice was croaky, almost as if he’d been crying. It nearly sounded like the insides of his throat were covered in rough sandpaper, which scratched at his words as they formed in his vocal cords.

“And he's still taking little actions like that now. Not necessarily for us, but certainly for the new detectives he mentors,” Miles went on. “Do you really believe Gumshoe has had ulterior motives for the past decade or so?”

At Wright’s uncertain expression, he glared.

“Gumshoe doesn't have the mental capacity to scheme. It’s not a part of his personality.”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

“You suppose? Then what about the Feys?”

“Dahlia and Iris had their fair share of-”

“Did a seven year-old child decide you would be her adoptive father because she planned to kill you, or-”

“Trucy’s a great kid,” he interjected. “I don't know how but she’s managed to put up with my worthless parenting skills, but she has.”

“And there are good people out there,” he stated, reaching to caress his face. “It took me a long time to recognize them. But there are a lot more Gumshoes and Trucy Wrights than there are…”
Phoenix slipped away from his touch, turning his head.

“I’m sorry.”

“I’ve told you before that I’d rather have you speak up.”

“You don’t know what it was like.”

“To be close to a person who despised me and planned my ruin all along?” he condescendingly asked, each syllable dripping with displeasure. “To be systematically belittled and insulted by a narcissist?”

“...I don’t push you to talk about it.”

“I would if you asked.”

It was a spontaneous declaration, but somehow, Miles was aware that it was true. He was comfortable with the idea of talking to Phoenix about those times, should he ever want to know.

“You’ve had eleven years. I’ve had three months.”

Phoenix was certainly doing better than he was at the three-month point. By then he’d fled from his identity and the country, choosing death over facing the realities of his life. When put into perspective, it really wasn’t that long.

“I’m not demanding you tell me everything. Just that you’ll tell me something. Even if it is your opinion on my houseplants or piano sonatas.”

“Edgeworth...”

“Yes?”

For a moment, he thought Phoenix would begin arguing anew. But he merely slumped his shoulders, and made a put-upon sound.

“How can you stand dealing with me?”

“I knew what I was getting into.”
Out of a growing sense of obligation, Miles began to attend Trucy’s magic shows. They were usually in the evening, he did not need to call his work short to go. Because of that, he could list the number of performances he had missed on a single hand. Phoenix usually stayed backstage with her, until the last minutes before. Then he would sneak around the edges, avoiding the colourful stage lights to join him at a table. That evening, Justice was also with them. Miles was half-surprised that Gavin or his astronaut friend had not invited themselves in as well. Apparently being joined at the hips only extended to the workplace, and not in situations where it was sensible to drag friends along. Miles wondered why Justice was there to begin with. Was he just present because Trucy worked as his investigation partner and courtroom assistant?

“You want anything to drink?” Phoenix, who had already finished half a bottle of grape juice, asked. “It’s all on the house, a fringe benefit of being the owner of the talent agency.”

“I will pass, thank-you.”

Trucy went through her usual routines, dazzling members of the audience and drawing others in. He watched for the slightest tells which gave away her tricks, but it was always more difficult when she was on stage. The lights glared, the shiny props and objects made it harder to see everything from his vantage. If Miles wasn’t already looking for the edge of a hidden scarf in her ponytail, he would never have noticed that it was there. The most basic of illusions were not easily spotted. Miles refused to not figure out at least one before the evening show was over. If he didn’t, Trucy would bother him about it mercilessly, and the score would need to wait until the next show to be properly settled.

Despite her gloves, Trucy maintained all of her dexterity. Even Franziska had to take hers off when it came to controlled tasks like dealing cards. Trucy was completely at ease on stage, not intimidated by the crowd. Her voice never wavered, and she paced from location to location, performing tricks, and making deliberately exaggerated motions with any object she held. If the audience didn’t find one routine as interesting, then she directed their attention quickly, yet without a sense of desperation that any lesser performer might have revealed.

Phoenix didn’t seem too anxious either. He wasn’t disinterested, he was smugly confident. Thus, the man didn’t feel the need to yell or cheer with every successful turn. However, no one’s clapping was louder than his, either. Whenever a silly grin threatened to grow on his face, Phoenix turned his attention to the juice instead, hoping that no one else would see it.

But Miles did.

“I will need yet another volunteer from the audience,” Trucy announced, twirling a baton. “This is the last chance for you to step up and help! So how about you there?”

She had stopped twisting the baton. It had transformed into a riding crop, not unlike the kind that Franziska had carried around that age. Miles wondered how much of this trick had been inspired by the aforementioned woman, and resolved to stay out of it. Unfortunately, their table appeared to be on the receiving end of her attention.

“I believe she’s pointing at you Justice,” Miles said.

“Oh no, I’m not falling for that,” he growled under his breath. “I’m not risking impalement twice in one week.”
They looked at Phoenix, who helplessly lifted his shoulders.

“I’m her father. I’m not allowed to assist once she gets up on stage.”

In some unfathomable way, Justice had vanished during this short exchange. A quick look under the table revealed that he was tying his shoes. The shoes which did not have any laces on them.

“Be a good sport,” Phoenix whispered as he stood.

“As if I wouldn’t.”

Putting on a polite smile, he allowed Trucy to drag him up to the center stage. It was blinding when he stood there. How did the girl function with those lights constantly in her eyes? Miles was tempted to shield his face, but kept his focus where it was needed. With a flick, she tugged off her scarf. In a second darting motion, she’d done the same thing with his own cravat, and tied them both together. With a third, sharp reaction, the fabric had spun itself into a pair of scissors. Miles fought back the instinctive “ngoh!” but his expression must have been a startled one. Wright’s laughter sounded above the rest.

Trucy was opening new packets of cards with the scissors. She passed them onto him, with an instruction to make sure that they were properly shuffled. In comparison to Trucy, who worked with ruthless efficiency, he felt clumsy and unpracticed. The end result was a thick stack of cards that Trucy then held.

“Pick three and show them to the crowd,” she instructed, turning her back to everyone else. “And to the rest of you, no yelling out what they are.”

Taking care not to disturb the cards, he selected three. He had the three of spades, six of diamonds, and nine of spades. He showed them all for the crowd to see, proving that there were no markings on the back, or other hidden tells which Trucy could use to discover what they were.

“We all good?” Trucy asked.

The crowd cheered their agreement.

“Alright, then we’ll have those three returned back to us.”

The deck was shuffled once more. Trucy then looked at him with a happy, if not slightly worrying grin.

“Are you familiar with card games?” she sweetly asked.

“Yes, a good number.”

“Then you’ll know what pick up fifty-two is,” Trucy continued.

There were hoots of laughter, as everyone came to the same conclusion. He didn’t want to say anything, but was left with little choice.

“I am familiar with it,” Miles winced.

“Then pick up six hundred seventy-six won’t be that much more complicated, now will it?”

Miles couldn’t think of anything witty to say to that. It wouldn’t have mattered, at any rate. In an arcing motion, Trucy swept out her arms, sending the cards everywhere. They went astoundingly high for such a throw. He tilted his head up, amazed by the sight of cards temporarily suspended in
the air. White faces gleamed, the suits and numbers were an indistinguishable swirl of red and black. Half a second later, he realized staring up wasn’t an intelligent idea. He looked back at Trucy, whose permagrin was more intense than the lights. Cards and their sharp corners came tumbling down. Miles covered his head, but Trucy didn’t. Instead, she whirled on her toes and threw something. When the shower of cards ended, he saw just what she had done.

“Go see,” Trucy smugly said. “Be careful not to slip.”

The floor was now coated in cards, it was difficult not to. But, with as much care as he could manage, Miles went to the single card with a riding crop pierced straight through the middle. He held it up for the crowd to see. Sure enough, it matched.

“She really has been taking Franziska lessons!” Miles thought with not a little fear.

“Ahem.”

Their attention snapped back to the girl. There, pinned to a prop table, were the scissors. Two more cards were stuck under its gleaming points. Trucy wriggled the scissors until they came out, and presented those cards as well.

Could there be any other result than a perfect match?

Mercifully, the scissors were turned back into his cravat. There were still pieces of shredded card in it, which Trucy delighted in showing to the equally amused crowd. Miles fixed it back in place, and graciously took a bow with Trucy. Ignoring the stares of everyone, he went back to the table. The girl continued to take bows and curtsies. She left the stage by the time he sat down.

“Nice job,” Phoenix murmured in his ear. “I’m glad to see your new job hasn’t made you even more high and mighty.”

He was about to rebuff that, but Justice began choking on his drink.

“Are you two-?”

They snapped apart, remembering that there still was an audience. Even if it consisted one beet-red attorney.

“Are we what?” Miles flatly asked, just daring Justice to screw up. “Doing the exact same thing I’m beginning to suspect you and Klavier Gavin are?”

“Um, on second thought, this is just a company outing- er, ah- damn, that was a bad choice of words,” he muttered to himself. “I’m going to go check and see what the policy is on refills.”

“You do that Apollo,” coolly said Phoenix, stifling a smile of his own.

Justice snagged his glass and retreated from the table.

“Come to think of it, what is your policy on PDA?” the man quietly asked.

“Nothing overly showy. I need to maintain a certain level of reputation for my job.”

“What constitutes as showy in the eyes of a man whose imported car matches his suits?”

Miles didn't rise to the bait.

“I’ve nothing against short kisses and linking arms.”
He wasn’t comfortable to instigate that in public, unless specifically asked, but he would do it. Being a semi-public figure, he generally tried to avoid unwanted attention.

“Sounds perfect. With Dahlia, Iris I guess, we were always holding hands or something like that. And when I was—” he paused, rethinking what he was saying. “Well, with my experiences, if you can call them that, I don’t actually know what real couples do.”

Justice felt it safe to come back, and did exactly that.

“They say you and your family get free refills. So if anyone goes around mentioning that I’m Trucy’s older brother, it’s just because I told the bartender that—Mister Wright are you ok?”

Exactly like Justice had done a few minutes ago, Phoenix started to choke on his drink.

“He’s just being foolish,” Miles answered for him, rolling his eyes.

A distraction came in the form of Trucy. She pushed her way up to their table. She hugged Phoenix—who ruffled her sweaty hair—and then him. They all gave their congratulations.

“Oh, orange pop, perfect!”

Justice watched in dismay as Trucy snagged his free refill and chugged it.

“How was the balancing ring trick this time Polly? Great or what?”

“...that was my pop.”

“C’mon, we’ll get you another one,” she sighed, tugging his sleeve. “But the rings! Were they close enough to what I did in practice?”

Justice slipped off his stool, and they vanished into the crowd again.

“You know,” Phoenix remarked. “I think they just left us to clean up the cards on stage.”

“Us?”

“You and me.”

“Us?” Miles repeated again.

“You. Since- WAIT! EDEGWORTH GET BACK HERE!”
Chapter Notes

I like to call this chapter: just in case you forgot that I'm a law student.

The fluff at the start is to balance that out haha.

Read, review, and enjoy!

Miles sat on the bed, pretending that he was examining the cue cards and not his very naked boyfriend as he got dressed. There was a towel wrapped around Phoenix’s hair, and drips of water trickling down his back.

“E-Edgeworth,” Phoenix had stuttered when he first saw Miles.

“Phoenix,” he said with false idleness, acting as if he were more intrigued by the notes spread across the duvet.

Phoenix resigned himself to pace before the mirror, looking at himself and the clothes which were neatly laid out on a chair. Just as Phoenix was about to get dressed, Miles spotted something. It was almost unnoticeable, since the blinds were drawn, leaving the room darker.

“Hold still for a moment,” he requested, sliding off the bed.

“Oook?” Phoenix stretched.

“What’s this?” he asked, stepping towards the man.

“What’s what?”

Feeling unusually mischievous, he pinched exactly where he was talking about.

“AIE!”

Phoenix squeaked, and whirled around to face him.

“I-I uh, I got that when I passed the bar for the first time,” he confessed, pulling up his underwear. “I went with Larry. He’s got an ex’s name in the same place.”

“Thank you for that mental image,” he shuddered, due to the unnecessary information. “I suppose you’ll need to get a twenty percent to replace it.”

“Only if you get something too.”

“And what would that be?” he asked, entertaining the man’s idea.

“Phoenix Wright was HERE!”

And then he was pinched back.
"AH!"

"You know, there's an awful lot of screaming in there for just putting on some clothes!" Trucy called from the other side of the door. "C’mon! Polly says he’s there already!"

"You heard your daughter, get dressed."

"You’re the one who distracted me," he mumbled, doing up his belt.

"Do you have any other tattoos I should be aware of?"

"Tell me something I don’t know about you."

Phoenix turned around, and made a sweeping motion towards his torso.

"You’ve seen all of me at this point. Do you have any secret armpit tattoos or something I missed the first time around?"

"Your turn. Tell me something I don’t know about you."

"None. Although I did have my ears pierced when I was a teenager."

The little scars and indents were still on him. He’d gotten them done to emulate his mentor, but Franziska kept stealing his earring backings when she lost hers. Eventually, Miles gave up on wearing them altogether.

"Hah!" Phoenix laughed upon inspecting his earlobes. "You should get them redone!"

"And have all of the legal world believe I’m a closet Gavinner fan? I think not!"

"You could make them match your cravat."

"Get the twenty percent tattoo and I will have them redone," Miles answered, crossing his arms.

"Is that a promise?"

"Put on your sweater already."

In his lifetime, Miles had seen many lecture halls. After a while, they stopped leaving impressions upon him. The ceilings were high, the floors shiny with mysterious “coffee” stains. Gum in hues of slimy pink and yellowish white adorned every hidden surface there was. He gently stopped Trucy from inspecting the side desk before she could touch something she would regret. In addition to all this, there were hundreds of cheap seats which caused back problems earlier in life. It did not matter how deceivingly cushioned they were, some fault in their design prevented them from being comfortable.

That didn’t stop one student from plopping down in a desk and passing out, before the lecture had even begun. Miles glared that person awake, mentally burning holes into the back of her bed-head, just daring her to not pay attention. Wright had worked tirelessly to put together a rather last-minute lecture for his old university. It did not deserve to be slept through, and the content was invaluable. Funnily enough, the student actually woke up, and looked around in a school-induced daze. Trucy didn’t speak, but her grin showed she knew exactly what he had just done. Apollo sat on Trucy’s other side, and also seemed faintly amused by this.

“So, this is university,” she commented.
“They all look the same after a time,” he said.

“Do the chairs always squeak like this?”

“Unfortunately,” Apollo answered. “It feel like I just got out of school and now I’m back.”

Somewhere along the way, *Justice* had become *Apollo* instead. Perhaps because Miles was seeing more of him, even when he wasn’t loitering in the prosecutor’s office. When Miles asked Phoenix why Apollo seemed to go everywhere with them, he avoided the subject because he was hiding something. Typical. When Miles asked Apollo, he tried to not insult “Mr. Wright” even though it was very clear he had some issues with his boss. The very least of which was his inability to give paychecks on time. They were both content to mutter about corporate unity, and Miles had temporarily resigned himself to this.

“Daddy said they would be, that they were even when he was in school, but I didn’t believe him.”

“Unsurprising. The school was older even when he attended almost…” Miles paused to do the mental math, and then balked when he realized how old they both were. No wonder why his back was hurting after a mere five minutes in the lecture hall. Hadn’t he possessed more endurance than that when he was younger?

Miles could have easily gotten lost in his horrified musings about old age, if not for the professor of the course stepping up to the lectern. A somewhat abashed Phoenix was held by the crook of his elbow, and looked too polite to do something about it. Which was ridiculous, because the man could become anything but polite when he wanted to be.

“Thirteen years ago, I had a student come up to me, then new head of the law department. And, in one enormous run-on sentence, he asked me about the best way to go about changing his major from arts to law,” she paused for a moment, allowing this to sink in with the crowd. “During his third year.”

There were a few catcalls, hesitant laughter from the students. Miles wanted to pinch the bridge of his nose, because *of course* Phoenix Wright would. He’d forgotten this particular story, and could have leisurely gone about the rest of his life without being reminded. Trucy and Apollo snorted with the rest of the crowd.

“And he went on, not stopping for breath, telling me *all* his reasons for why he wanted to do this. He was passionate, seemed to possess a genuine desire to throw himself into the thick of our society, and wrangle with the law. Recent experiences proved to him that it was a calling he could no longer ignore. There were many people who needed- pardon me- *need*, saving from the failures of our system, and he wanted to help. And he went through with that. I’m sure you’re aware of his impact on the precedents surrounding the cross-examination of parrots, and-”

Now the laughter returned in bold full force. Back in two-thousand sixteen and seventeen, Phoenix’s cross-examination of Polly had become something of a… meme. Miles hardly saw the humour of the situation. That was his *freedom* which had been staked with the testimony, and the trial had been one of the lowest points of his life. The joke was ancient now, but it still brought grins to the faces of many who recognized it.

“Long story short-” the professor restarted, waiting for them to settle. “Long story short, this student might not be here today, if not for the paper bag I offered him so that he would stop hyperventilating. Phoenix Wright everyone!”

Amidst the wild cheering he was met with, Phoenix now stepped up to the lectern. He made a show
of stacking the cue cards which had lay scattered on his bed not an hour ago, and tugged fingers through his thick hair.

“How many of you are here for extra credit the syllabus promised you?” Phoenix asked, grinning wryly.

A sea of hands rose to meet him.

“How many of you are here in the hopes that I’ll tell some old bench stories?”

Almost all the hands were risen now. Apollo and Trucy jokingly put up theirs as well.

“Keep your hands up. Now, how many of you,” Phoenix turned, seeking the crowd for something. Miles wasn’t sure if their eyes had actually met, but he didn’t look away. That would constitute as backing down from a glaring challenge, which was absolutely unacceptable. He. Would. Not. Lose.

“How many of you are here because you are genuinely interested in a major reform which our legal system is examining and considering implementing?”

There was general uncertainty, as they tried to process his deliberately long statement.

“That’s ok, you can be honest.”

A few went down.

“My feelings won’t be hurt.”

Many more did, and again, there was some nervous giggling.

“S’ok,” Phoenix beamed. “This is a good thing. If you were all super-students the point I’m about to make about the jurist system would be a lot less effective and you would have ruined my lecture with your studious ways.”

With that, he had neatly hooked in the audience. He smirked mentally, admiring the clever little ploy which Phoenix had devised. The professor’s introduction kept him humble, despite the amazing things which Phoenix had accomplished. It was a good ice breaker, keeping him from seeming too distant a figure. In turn, addressing the crowd somewhat informally at first just garnered their attention further. He wasn’t a “frilly intellectual” (as Phoenix or Larry surely would have put it) but a more relatable everyman. Anything more and he would have seemed like a politician, someone praising the merits of a system that would somehow benefit tax-payers, or make money. So long as he kept the cryptic showmanship to a low...

“With this, we see a bit of the reality that can exist with jurist systems. Some members are there because they don’t want to fail class- sorry, pay the fine for missing jury duty. Others don’t care about their task, and quickly become disinterested if the topic isn’t exciting. Then, you have those who are actually concerned with what other countries refer to as a civic duty. This is considered to be one of the major flaws of jurist systems around the world. But with the current state of our judiciary, one could argue- can argue- that our judges and mediators currently have the leeway to do the exact same thing. To look at this more historically-”

From there his lecture went on. Phoenix gave accounts from the history which he had gone through. Some of it even dating back to a many-great grandfather of his, whom had been an attorney battling the law (and racism) in London. Then he opened himself up to criticism. Phoenix actually allowed people with dissenting opinions to write them down, and then throw them at him on stage. Most missed, but a few hit him. Miles suddenly knew where Trucy’s flare for making a giant papery mess on stage had come from. Who thought such a trait could actually be passed down?
Catching one paper airplane, Phoenix ironed it out on the lectern, and read an interesting question.

“Why would I want to entrust my life in the hands of twelve people who may or may not be biased?” Phoenix asked in a booming voice. Even without the microphone, he was loud. The natural smiles and joking that came with throwing paper faded, as the students grew thoughtful again. “Now this question is really adorable to me, because whoever wrote this has obviously not been falsely accused of murder three times and counting.”

His dry humour worked well with the group. Maybe because they were cynical students, but it just made him that more effective.

“However, you don’t need an ex-girlfriend, corrupt businessman, or an- a former friend to frame you in order to understand the perspective. A counterpoint to this question would be: why should I trust my life in the hands of a single person who may or may not be biased? We ask our judges to operate behind Rawls’ veil of ignorance, but true objectivity is unachievable in humans. There are good judges of course, but there are good average people as well. I’d like to hope that there are more honest shmoes to counteract the bad apples in our society,” Phoenix stuck his hands in his pockets. “But I’m just a guy who plays piano for a living, I dunno’. Comments?”

“Judges train to become more objective!”

“That’s the same with a lot of professions: teachers, social workers, police officers, managers of any business, you name it. Average people, the same kind that just so happen to make up a jury. But that’s still a good point. So what regulations would you create to prevent bias in a jurist system? Brainstorm that while I start to deal with this mess on stage.”

While students turned to their neighbors and chatted about what they would do, Phoenix began to scoop up the masses of paper which had come to meet him. At least he possessed the integrity to clean up after himself, rather than leaving it for the cleaning staff. There was still much left in the aisles, but he suspected Phoenix would tell them to clean it all up at the end.

“What do you think?” asked a student to their neighbor.

“He’s hot.”

“Yeah, I guess does look a bit sweaty. Do you think the way jury panels can be questioned and challenged would be a good place to-”

“You know what I meant. He’s sort of older-looking, but I wouldn’t mind being f-”

“What do you think Trucy?” Miles questioned in a too-loud voice, trying desperately to drown out their conversation.

“He’s so embarrassing,” Trucy mumbled. “But I think he’s having fun.”

Apollo was wistfully looking at the mess on stage.

“I wish Mr. Wright would mentor me like that instead of being obscure all the time.”

“He’s surprisingly energetic.”

“I wouldn’t mind throwing paper airplanes at him again.”

“The one he read wasn’t yours, was it Polly?” Trucy wondered.
“Objection! Leading question!”

“Sustained,” Miles had ruled even before he realized what he was saying.

“What?” Trucy balked at this.

“Could the prosecution please clarify their question for the court?”

“Ugh,” Trucy crossed her arms and looked to the side. “Fine. What did you write on your airplane?”

They would never know, for Phoenix chose that time to resume the discussion.

“I’m surrounded by a bunch of law nerds,” she groaned to herself.

“Shhh!” they both hissed back.

Miles was almost surprised that he could listen to Phoenix Wright talk as long as he did. At least, without yelling his objections somewhere in the middle, and using the evidence to contradict the reasoning which that man developed. The desks in the hall weren’t too good for hitting when he wanted to emphasize a point, either.

Given how Phoenix had wound up the students, their discussions could have gone on for much longer, but he still had specific topics to cover before the end. With his conclusion, he gave a short, almost comedic bow in the direction of a few hesitant claps.

“I don’t take song requests, but I do take applause,” he confirmed.

That was enough for the class.

The congratulations given were not unlike the ones which Trucy experienced after a show. Only this time, Phoenix had to deal with the trail of students who wanted to get last-minute facts for their notes, and even some tips about the bar. That had made him laugh. Apollo preened under the envious looks he got from others, for being the student of Phoenix Wright, and an upcoming attorney to boot.

After a solid hour of questioning students, they managed to pull the man away, and go out for celebratory noodles. The ramen was insanely salty, but just as good as the previous times he ate them. Apollo and Trucy held most of the conversation, Phoenix adding his two cents when they dragged him into the subject. The duo poked chopsticks at each other and bickered. When Phoenix told either of them to stop, they teamed up against him. Apollo tried to keep a more mature image, but Trucy continued to ruin it. The tired expression which occasionally flitted across his face caused Miles to recall times when he was forced to humour Franziska’s antics. It always came at the sacrifice of his image, making him feel childish.

They really were like siblings.

“Not just in behaviour,” Miles noted when they glared at Phoenix for the umpteenth time.

Just another issue to investigate, on top of the ones which he was already making for himself as Chief Prosecutor.

It was not until they arrived back at the apartment he got to congratulate Phoenix properly for his job well done. And by then, he was distracted with other things.

“Your presentation today was well put-together,” he said, having finally settled on an appropriate
“Mhm,” Phoenix replied, thumbing through the mail pile on the kitchen table. “I guess.”

“The students seemed to find it informative,” he went on, striving to make him pay attention.

“They were pretty talkative, yeah.”

Phoenix absently ran his fingertips along the edges of the envelopes. When a seam of blood spread across his skin, he did not seem to mind, or notice.

“Are you evening listening to me?”

“Course.”

“Are you really?”

“You know,” Phoenix said, looking up from a series of glossy coupons. “You’re just as bad as me when it comes to accepting compliments.”

“I am not.”

“I’ve always thought your bangs were attractive,” he answered, frowning as he came to a specific letter, no doubt a bill. “Even when you were calling my reasoning shoddy, and pulling tricks in court.”

Like the simple flick of a switch, his face flamed bright red.

“Y-you’re just saying that!”

Damn. He’d fallen right into the trap with that one. He just reacted without thinking about how it would be constructed. And before that, Miles had not realized Phoenix had changed the subject from the lectures.

Not until it was too late.

Not until he understood why that was.
After the lecture, some things altered for the better, and some for the worst. The most noticeable change was how Phoenix was swamped with both emails, and actual pen-and-paper letters. Some of it was praise, some of it was hate, and as a whole, it was nothing either of them weren’t used to. The mindless vitriol was tossed, but not before he offered to prosecute some of the more violent responses. (“Stop being so bloodthirsty,” was the only thing Phoenix would utter in response to that.) Phoenix gave the occasional reply to people with interesting points, and got into correspondence with other interested parties.

Then the proposals started coming in. Other universities wanted to have him speak. Themis had a conditional position, based upon whether or not he passed the bar again. A few publications were asking for him to write an article. Phoenix found that especially funny, because he’d already worked for many of them under a penname in the past.

And, with all of this came money. Not much, but enough to make Apollo hug Trucy and swing her around the room when he got pay that was on time. It was enough for Phoenix to hand him a small check in return for part of the study material he had bought. Miles didn’t want to accept, but understood that there was a matter of pride behind it.

Even with the bar fast approaching, Phoenix was happier as a result. The jurist system was one of his passions, and now he was getting to do more about it. Phoenix kept up dialogue with a few of the first students whom he had lectured. He tried to convert Apollo into a jurist system fanatic. That goal was still a work in progress. Apollo just began nodding along with everything his boss spoke, while concentrating on his own paperwork.

But mostly it was letters, so many letters. The year may have been two thousand twenty-seven, but handwritten letters were still being mailed in. If he saw how tired Phoenix looked with some of them, Miles assumed it was just the quantity of correspondence causing it. Things were better now, Phoenix was getting better. His work as chief prosecutor was fulfilling, Phoenix’s studying for the bar was going just as smoothly. And, in silent reply to all of Lang’s “it sure is nice to be back in the wonderful country of Zeng Fa with my brand new partner who also just so happens to be a prosecutor” photos on social media, Miles now had someone else to take pictures with.

"Things are improving," Miles kept telling himself. "Things will be fine."

But he was nevertheless uneasy when Klavier Gavin entered the office as he’d been asked. It wasn’t going to be a pretty conversation. He knew from the moment Gavin sat down in the chair across from him and gave that confident smile.

“You wanted to see me?”

“Yes,” he pushed up his glasses, trying to muster the strength to say what he had mentally rehearsed.
“I should probably clarify that this isn’t a meeting between a superior and employee. None of this-ahem-conversation will affect your job.”

All his instincts were screaming to grasp his arm and look away. It was the reaction that always took hold when there was something unpleasant, something he did not want to look at or speak about. It was a struggle to keep in control, make sure his gaze was level with his coworker’s.

“If this is about Herr Forehead-” he started, raking fingers across his scalp.

“It’s. Not.”

“Oh?”

“The date for the execution is going to be changed, and I need to know if you want it pushed forwards, or back.”

“Oh.” Gavin repeated, still smiling, still acting as if this were a simple meeting where he was being scolded for bringing guests into the workplace too often. “What you mean to say is that you’ve persuaded the prison into changing the date because it interferes with the March bar exam. Which, you are no doubt doing as a favour to that man.”

God how he wanted to look away.

“Yes.”

“Don’t sugar-coat Herr Edgeworth. It doesn’t become you.”

“My apologies.”

“How come he can’t take the June examinations instead?” Gavin flatly asked.

“You know the sign up is a year in advance.”

“So you can pull strings over the execution date, but not when he will take the exam?”

They both knew what the answer to that question was. The sooner Phoenix took the bar, the sooner he would go back to his job as an attorney. It didn’t help that he wanted Kristoph Gavin dead and buried and out of Phoenix Wright’s life.

“Have you nothing to say for yourself Chief Prosecutor?”

The title took on a mocking tone, laced with all the contempt that he deserved. Miles gave in, looking to the side, anywhere but the person in front of him.

“Well I have something.” he shakily went on, figuring there would be no reply. “Why does it always come down to him? Every visitation I have, every other conversation with Herr Forehead, with Ema Skye. Why is it always him?”

“He shouldn’t be receiving visitation.”

“You know how the prison system is. Life isn’t life and solitary isn’t solitary.”

“How long do you want off work?”

“How much did you take when Manfred von Karma hung himself with bed sheets and the bars of his cell?”
Miles tensed at the name alone, felt a spark of righteous anger. As much as he wanted to yell at Gavin to get the hell out of his office (and preferably the continent) he understood. Gavin was certainly expecting the repercussions. He flinched, the moment Miles opened his mouth.

“If it’s any consolation, Wright didn’t ask me to.”

“Maybe you should try flowers instead of rearranging my brother’s death. I think most relationships fare better with those types of surprises.”

“Please, tell me when the date should be moved.”

“I don’t care,” he lied. “It’s Wright you’re doing this for, so why don’t you ask his opinion?”

“Because he’d be about as helpful as you are right now. Because I’m trying to avoid being too manipulative in a situation where I already am.”

Gavin stood up, his chair scraping loudly in the resounding silence.

“Herr Edgeworth.”

Miles couldn’t bring himself to watch the other man leave.

Phoenix was slumped over his kitchen table. Envelopes and stamps were piled high. There was a letter opener still grasped between his fingers, which Miles eased out of his grasp before somebody had the chance to be stabbed. This proved a sensible choice, because the moment Phoenix woke up, it was with a start. That wasn’t too unusual, but his lashing out with what would have been the letter opener was.

“Oh hey Edgeworth,” he stifled a yawn. “Whose funeral did you get those from?”

Miles cleared some bottles of grape juice to make room for the bouquet.

“One day you will recognize more than three flowers, and that these are hyacinths.”

“Were those the ones that caused Trucy some issue lately?”

“No, that was-” he stopped, not about to let Wright get his goat. “How are you?”

“Alive. You?”

He grimaced at that choice of expression.

“Uh oh, what’s with the grumpy face?”

“I’m not grumpy,” he snapped in what one might consider a grumpy tone of voice. “Although I’d certainly feel better if you appreciated those damn flowers.”

“You only swear when you’re-” Phoenix then thought better of contradicting him. “They’re great, I really like that shade of blue… Thank-you.”

“What are you going to name it?”

“Name?”

“Are you not the self-professed champion of houseplants?”
“Vanja sounds like a good fit.”

He plucked the little tag that came with the flowers, looking at the sun and watering requirements that came with it. Then he scooped up the little planter, fussing about where to safely tuck it away. After some indecisiveness, Phoenix wound up setting it right back where it was in the table’s center.

“Hey, what time is it?” he asked, stooping over the blooms and taking a deep inhale. “These smell great.”

“Six on the dot.”

“Ah, I better head for my pre-bedtime nap then. I definitely don’t want to miss that.”

“Were you not just sleeping?”

“That was my after lunchtime nap, nap. Also known as the pre-dinner nap. One of the most vital of the day.”

“That and the other ten I’m sure.”

“And he catches on,” Phoenix smirked, tipping his beanie. “You should come take one too.”

“I-I shouldn’t.”

“What do we have dinner plans?” Phoenix asked, already tugging on his arm.

Miles allowed himself to be pulled forwards.

“Hardly.”

Phoenix let go of him. Then he fell back on his toes, collapsing in a belly flop upon the covers. After another moment’s hesitation, Miles hung his blazer and waistcoat, before joining Phoenix. He tentatively lay next to the man, not quite touching, and staring at the stucco ceiling. They had slept together before, but they hadn’t actually slept together. Phoenix didn’t want to leave Trucy home alone overnight, and he couldn’t stay because Pess needed to be taken care of. This situation now was new, somewhat awkward. Were they supposed to be touching? Should he roll onto his stomach as well? What about the covers? It was chilly, he wouldn’t mind being under them right now.

Besides his current predicament, there were other complications. Ones he needed to discuss with Phoenix before took up snoring again. The comforting arm which snuggled around his waist just made him feel all the more guilty. Which was saying something, considering how wretched he already was. Stubble brushed along his cheek, and breath pressed against his neck.

“What happened at work today?” Phoenix mumbled into his hair. “Annoying witness? Incompetent detectives?”

“It isn’t exactly pillow talk.”

“I don’t care.”

“I don’t care. It’s Wright you’re doing this for, so why don’t you ask his opinion?”

He swallowed nervously.

“You will.”
Phoenix twisted onto his back, but kept a hand sprawled across his chest.

“Let’s hear it.”

“I’m not changing the execution date. It will be a day before the first exam.”

Phoenix drew in a long breath, not saying anything at first. He didn’t move, or try to push him away, but his whole composure was very still.

“Interfering with, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Gee Edgeworth,” Phoenix chirped. “Thanks for telling me all about your plans for my life only after you cancelled them. It was super nice of you to condescend and tell lil’ ol’ me. Sure is a real honour!”

He potentially may have neglected to tell Phoenix about his intention to change the date. He knew, like with Klavier Gavin, the discussion was going to be an unhappy one, and Phoenix would not want to talk about it with him. So, he may have procrastinated somewhat, not planning to tell him until later.

“Franziska or Klavier Gavin?”

“Gavin.”

“Well that must have been a shitty conversation. I just hope this doesn’t ruin what little working relationship ‘Pollo and I have built recently. He’s been joined at the hip with that guy for awhile now,” Phoenix gave an exaggerated yawn. “I’m going to call your sister so she can yell at you too.”

Franziska didn’t know about their relationship yet. That was another something he had chosen not to bring up in calls with his sister.

“Ngh! Nothing less than I deserve.”

“And that’s the reason for the flowers?”

“How upset are you with me?”

Miles despised how weak his voice sounded with that question. It was pathetic, he really didn’t want Phoenix to be angry with him. But he knew that Phoenix’s calm state was worse, that he should be showing some kind of reaction because that was what any reasonable person would do.

“What did I ask you after we made up over the will argument?”

“Not to take control of your life.”

“So please don’t. I’m going back to my nap now.”

And Phoenix did just that, effectively closing any more discussion they could have on the matter. It simultaneously left him wanting to escape the room, and unable to move from the spot. Phoenix’s arm was still resting on him. It was practically leaden, the weight of all his mistakes in handling the situation.

“I just want you to come out of whatever dark place you’re in.”
He cursed his stupid emotions for causing all this trouble. If he didn’t care about Phoenix Wright. If he didn’t want to see the man succeed, enjoy life with his daughter, make hilarious expressions when he was pushed into a corner- If Miles didn’t have anything to do with the man he would probably be more miserable than he already was. And that idea was even more infuriating. Stupid, stupid, stupid feelings for causing him to act out like an irrational teenager.

More than that, he blamed Kristoph Gavin. It lead back to him, it always seemed to lead back to him. He was involved to the point where Larry- the oblivious, self-centered fool that he had always been- could look outside his egotistical bubble and take notice.

Now Klavier Gavin was going to avoid him and glare at him when he believed his back was turned. It would be lucky if they could hold a civil conversation for weeks, even after he apologized for his transgressions. And he couldn’t even guess what Phoenix was going to do at this rate.

He must have berated himself for a long time. It was hard to tell how long it had been when one stared at the patterns on the ceiling and wallowed in self-loathing. But it was long enough for Phoenix to wake up from his nap.

“Ack!” he yelped, cringing away. “You’re still here?”

Had his remark earlier been his cue to leave? Feeling even worse, Miles slid away as well.

“Your arm was on me.”

“Not anymore it isn’t,” he answered, pressing his palms into his eyes.

“Phoenix?”

“Every time I wake up I expect him to be there. Sometimes with a knife or a syringe,” Phoenix barked a short laugh. “You know, poison in the ear and all that.”

What did one say to such a statement? That things would be fine? That there was no need to be paranoid because the person he feared was in jail?

Miles’ stomach was already nauseous with guilt. But it plummeted further with that statement, until he could almost wretch at the idea. The contents within him curdled or froze up until he thought that he really would be sick. All over the feathery duvet, upon the scratched wooden floors. He told himself to breathe, but he knew his complexion was milky, his eyes, pit-like.

“Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

He needed a conversation to pull his mind from the places it was going.

“You know how in cartoons, one character is tricked into standing on a target they can’t see, while another prepares to drop a piano over their head? That’s what being around Kristoph for seven years was like.”

“I didn’t need to know that.”

He didn’t want to know that. The one time he wished for banter about houseplants, or gossip about the man who owned the ramen stand, and this was what he got.

“I knew you were going to start logicing answers out of me one day.”

“...that’s not a word.”
“Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

“There aren’t enough synonyms available to describe the hatred I feel for-”

“I can tell.”

Having been shut down, Miles cleared his throat.

“You became acquainted with Shi-Long Lang, correct?”

“Wolf guy right?”

“He was my partner. Before you.”

Laughter was certainly not the reaction he anticipated with this.

“Pffft! I can’t believe-!”

Phoenix cackled at the top of his lungs. He grabbed his middle, and eventually rolled off the bed, too amused to catch himself.

“I fail to see what is so funny.”

“Do you have a thing for spiky hair? I mean, there’s us, then your celebrity crush on Will Powers-”

“I do not have a crush- as you so simply call it- on Will Powers! I merely appreciate his work as an actor, finding him to possess a level of professionalism and dedication that is admirable.”

“Oh my god you do.”

Even if it was at the expense of his pride, the tone had lightened. Miles took Phoenix’s willingness to laugh as a good sign, that he was at least a little bit forgiven.

Something he couldn’t be more wrong about.
“You know,” Apollo commented from the other side of the staff room. “I’m actually signed in with security today.”

The name tag and approved visitor’s pass was clipped to his chest, right where it was supposed to be. Apollo had a plain mug of coffee, which hovered over the documents he was inspecting.

“That is quite clear to me, yes.”

Miles’ words resonated in the otherwise empty room.

“Then why are you glaring at me?”

He was not glaring. He was merely taken off guard by Apollo’s appearance. Miles shouldn’t have been, the attorney turned up frequently. But something inside of him nevertheless jumped when Miles realized that he wasn’t alone.

“I was thinking.”

Apollo didn’t comment, angling his head to focus on the readings he’d found. It was painfully quiet. The normal office sounds were present outside, muffled by the closed door, but there was nothing in the staff room. He wanted to turn away and leave. Miles blamed the smell of coffee, and whiteboard markers for that, rather than the fact that Phoenix’s irritable words had come back to him.

“I just hope this doesn’t ruin what little working relationship ‘Pollo and I have built recently. He’s been joined at the hip with that guy for awhile now.”

Miles loathed feeling this guilty. It interfered with everything he tried to do. His lungs and his heart were seized into a single, constricting knot. There was little more he could do than take the feeling. Gritting his teeth, Miles forced himself to march over to the whiteboard, and start relaying all the messages for that coming week. It was a list of menial things, small reminders about courtesy, short goals for the workplace. It was one of basic administrative tasks he was supposed to keep in line, now that he was Chief Prosecutor. A second notice was pinned on the cork board. When Miles checked that Apollo wasn’t looking, he added a flyer for Trucy’s upcoming magic show as well.

“Wright wants to know if you would be interested in helping him study for the bar.”

“Why wouldn’t he ask me himself?”

“I believe the way he phrased it was, ‘Since I’m pretty much paying him to go to your office at this point…”’

“I don’t think I’d know anything that you wouldn’t have covered.”

“It’s better to be over prepared than not at all.”

“I’ll get back to him.”

Next came the office calendar. That day was the first of February. After the shortest month of the year was the March bar exam, the execution date. He filled in all the important squares with the necessary information. A national holiday on a Friday, Valentines on a Sunday, a planned staff meeting, and an expected visit from a group of students.
“What are you thinking about?”

“Pardon me?”

“Well if you’re not glaring at my reflection on the whiteboard, then what are you thinking about?”

“Ngh!” Miles looked to the side, abashed.

“I’m going to overstep my boundaries here and suggest that you should probably talk to Mr. Wright soon, if that’s what you were thinking about.”

Miles’ instinct was to snap that he didn’t need Apollo’s help.

But Phoenix hadn’t needed his, either.

Phoenix was capable, and had other contacts beyond Miles, no matter how much the man liked to insult his own abilities. For seven years, Phoenix built up the connections needed to implement the jurist system in their country. All without drawing attention to himself. He worked to support his daughter, doing frankly borderline things to keep afloat. If Miles had not offered to help with the bar, there would have been someone else who would volunteer to step in. And if Phoenix didn’t want their help, then he was self-sufficient enough to study on his own. It may have not been as easy an experience for Phoenix and Trucy, but Miles was confident that he could pass without his interference.

The idea that Phoenix could happily go without him stung, and Miles visualized a coroner’s report with his name at the top. The probable cause of death would be the feelings caused by Phoenix Wright. The fear of how that man would nonchalantly come up to him one morning and say, “You’re not needed anymore. Then Phoenix could wander out of his life forever.

“Geeze,” Apollo shook his head with a frustrated sigh. “This is the first and the last time I ever offer you advice.”

Recognizing that he should acknowledge Apollo before he got any more exasperated, Miles answered, “I will try to… keep that in mind.”

“That’s all I ask.”

It wasn’t as if he planned to avoid Phoenix, Miles just found little reason to visit the man again.

His job was encouraging him to not stop by as often, for it had begun to choke up more of his free time. No matter how often Miles rearranged his schedule, figured the hours and the time-efficient paths in life, he was finding less of it to spend with Phoenix and Trucy. The unexpected and administrative often liked to pop up from nowhere. But that was often the case with managing other people.

Miles frequently found himself reaching for the aspirin, and thanking genetics that he didn’t have any hair colour to lose with stress. The smaller opportunity for leisure was a bother, but there wasn’t much he could do. Miles knew what the position entailed, and would not pass off his duties to someone else because he’d rather be with the Wrights.

Miles invited himself into the Agency. He looked around, but Trucy was the only one in. She was sprawled across the couch, watching something on TV.

“Will your father be back soon?”
Trucy nodded, curling up her legs so there was room. Miles brushed the snow off his coat and hung it up, joining her. On TV was a rerun of the original Steel Samurai. Will Powers and Jack Hammer glared at each other between the masks of their heavy costumes, waving swords and throwing projectiles. Miles recognized the old sets they chased each other across, having seen them in person. Miles couldn’t get invested in the episode, because he was more concentrated on waiting. As things broke up for commercial, he looked to Trucy.

“How was school?”

“Awful,” Trucy dramatically rose a hand to her forehead. “I’m watching cheesy violence to undo all the education they’ve forced into me.”

“Cheesy is an inaccurate description of the fights in the original show,” he contradicted. “It was composed of many artful shots, referencing the genre of samurai movies. It is retro, but cheesy would be a more apt label for the style utilized in the era of the Nickel Samurai.”

“Nooo!” Trucy then lobbed a pillow at him. “I didn’t even have history today and now you’re making me go through it anyway!”

“It’s important.”

“You’re just stuck in two thousand seventeen.”

“Sixteen,” Miles corrected, raising an arm to prevent the second pillow from hitting him.

They continued to joke about the quality of the Steel Samurai and history class, but something cold and sharp had cut inside his chest.

“Am I really trapped in my earlier years?”

Miles thought of Phoenix, how he so very wanted the man to revert to the open, determined person he’d come to admire. There was so much of that which couldn’t be replaced. Not trust, not believing in others. Paranoia didn’t just pack its things and leave once it had settled in. One could never know, what was coming, the future was unpredictable, and safety a comfortable illusion. But Miles still hoped it would go away, did everything in his power to get rid Phoenix of it.

Then Miles recalled Lang, and how spiteful thoughts still came to him easily, despite their amicable parting. They both had new partners, they had moved on, and what little romantic attraction they felt to each other in the end was now gone. He shouldn’t have been as critical as he was of a man who had done little wrong.

“Well, I’m not good about letting go of the past,” was the deduction that Miles came to.

“I can see the strings on that floating prop,” Trucy mumbled, interrupting his speculation.

“No you can’t. That’s computer-generated.”

“The white fire in the emperor’s throne room is animated, but those are definitely strings making the emblem hover like that.”

Trucy would know more about special effects than he would, but Miles would rather deny that there was such a blatant mistake in the pinnacle of Steel Samurai media.

“I cannot see it without my glasses on,” Miles finally said, deciding for a compromise. He took them off and placed them out of reach on the coffee table. “Therefore, they do not exist as far as I am
concerned.”

“This is why you and Uncle Laurice fall under the weird uncle category,” Trucy said, despair clear in her voice.

“Shush. This coming monologue is an important one.”

Though he still felt pained inside, Miles could eventually settle down and pay attention to the episode. *The Steel Samurai* was always a relaxing thing to watch, despite the action and violence in it. There was a comforting quality to the show, which likely stemmed from the reruns being familiar. He could recite the scripts from auditory memory, and give a literary essay on themes or symbolism present through his favourite story arcs.

Despite Trucy’s insistences that her father would return, he did not come during the episodes they marathoned. Miles gave up waiting at the halfway point of the season, leaving the girl to her own devices.

“Do you want me to tell him you stopped by?” Trucy asked, hugging him before he could put on his coat.

“No, I’ll be certain to see him later.”

Besides, he suspected Phoenix already knew he was there. His car parked outside the Agency would give that away.

“Have you been a foolish fool recently?” Trucy suddenly asked, looking up at him, but not letting go of the embrace.

“Your chin is poking my ribs.”

“You only fold your arms like that when you’re avoiding the subject Uncle Miles.”

Trucy already had one parent who did so full-time. Miles didn’t want to contribute to that, and knew he needed to be more open. It was something that would affect her after all. And Trucy was perceptive, she knew when things weren’t right.

“I have been rather obtuse. I was hoping to speak to your father today, and rectify that.”

“Ok,” she accepted. “So long as you’re doing something about it.”

“I certainly am trying.”

But nobody was making it easy for him.
Trucy had a list of chores which needed to be done. The torn sheet of paper might have gone into the void through a magic trick. Out of sight out of mind after all, and she couldn’t be held at fault for accidentally “losing” the tasks which her father had written for her. Of course, Miles happened to glance at what she was rolling her eyes at, so there was no opening left for the girl to avoid her chores. Despite how the note quickly found its way into the stack of old papers which were designated for confetti, Miles had already memorized it all.

1. Pick up some grape juice from the store. (Money’s in the usual place, buy whatever you need for the office with the extra.)
2. Do a count of how much soup we have in the avalanche cupboard.
3. Stay away from the mailbox.
4. Charley understands level eight musical theory now, so he needs to have the next book put out where he can read it.

*Luv,*

*Dad*

“Daddy’s been doing this lately,” Trucy said, drawing out a long breath. “I think he’s trying to be organized, like you, but he just doesn’t know what to do with himself.”

“What even is,” Miles squinted, and then adjusted his glasses. “The avalanche cupboard?”

Trucy strode over to the counter, and then opened one cupboard. Tupperware came falling out, rolling across the floor of the office kitchenette, and sliding under the table. A bag of elastic bands followed, bursting when it touched the linoleum, and scattering a few of the bands as well.

“That’s the avalanche cupboard.”

“I see. Well, how much soup is there?”

At his question, she stuck her head into the darkness of the cupboard.

“None,” Trucy answered, her voice muffled. “We keep the soup with the rest of the canned food.”

“Is anything he asked you to do a real chore?” Miles asked, both amused and unimpressed at the same time.

“Buying the grape juice is I guess. And so’s tidying up the avalanche.”

When she emerged, there was money in her hand.

“I take it that was the usual place?”

“C’mon,” Trucy linked arms with him. “Let’s go out and get the juice.”

Phoenix wasn’t around, so it was as good a time as any to leave the Agency together. With winter, the sky was dark earlier in the day. The streetlights provided an orangish glow, that contrasted the bruised purple which stained the bottoms of clouds. The horizon trickled from blue to black as Trucy led him down the sidewalk.

A burst of warm air greeted their reddening faces as they stepped inside. The girl made a beeline
straight for the refrigerated section, plunging them right back into the cold. Miles offered to carry the juice for her, as the bottles looked rather heavy. And they were. Miles cringed a bit, shifting his grip uncomfortably as Trucy resumed a leisurely stroll through the aisles.

Trucy glanced from the sweets to the display of sour apples, and then back at him. With some clear deliberation, she managed to find a balance of that which was healthy, and what she was more interested in eating. Sugary or otherwise, he was still relegated to carry this as well, since he had so generously offered to hold the grape juice in the first place.

“Do you want anything to take back to the office?” Trucy asked him.

“I couldn’t. It’s not as if I’m working there as well.”

“Okay,” she nodded emptily, tapping her chin. “Should we get Polly the extra strength coffee mix, or just the regular?”

Upon further consideration, it wouldn’t be too hypocritical of him if he bought Steel Samurai-themed cereal for the Agency. Apollo oftentimes had food at the prosecutor’s office when he breaked for lunch with Klavier Gavin, and Miles never bothered with fussing about that. As Chief Prosecutor, things got to the point where he had more significant tasks to concern himself with. If Apollo had been the one to eat the last tuna sandwich (and Miles was convinced the attorney had) was an afterthought.

“Extra. It’s more cost-efficient. And reach some of the double strength earl grey as well.”

The box of tea and canister of coffee were added to the stack of things they had amassed.

“Trucy, do you mind?” Miles asked, unable to keep the grimace off his face.

“Of course I don’t Uncle Miles! It’s fine if you have food in the office!”

“N-ngho-”

“Psssh, I knew what you meant the first time,” she joked, relieving him from some of the burden. “Even with his bad back, Daddy can last longer than you.”

“My spine isn’t in peak condition either,” he answered, leaning against the shelf of baking supplies.

“We’ll get some extra bags to carry stuff.”

As they stood in checkout, Miles diverted his attention to the tabloids which were staged there. He needed something to distract his mind from the way in which his arms were starting to shake, and how his shoulder felt as if it were slipping from its position. Most of the lurid covers were caught in the fluorescent light’s glare, obscuring the bold statements. Unable to read them, he looked to the packages of gum and bars of candy. When he’d seen all there was to on their labels, there were the bouquets. They were stood upright in a bucket of water, and weren’t personally something that Miles would consider buying. The flowers were simple, inexpensive; daisies which had been dyed with food colouring, chrysanthemums. Nothing overly eye-catching, unlike the hyacinths he’d purchased before.

Trucy could have noticed how his attention strayed to the flowers, out of the corner of her eye. Or there was a chance he wasn’t paying attention when he handed the grape juice to the cashier. Yet a bunch of sunflowers was added to their queue somewhere between wrangling with the plastic bags and cash.
The wind almost pushed them back indoors, but they braved the chill. Snow danced, swirling along the asphalt, and shifting with eerie skittering noises. It stuck to their hair, and one particularly stubborn snowflake attached itself to his eyelashes.

“If we survive this can I get a bunk bed?” Trucy inquired, kicking a snowdrift.

“There is no need to be so dramatic.”

Then the nearest street light went out, and they were trudging through cold, wet darkness.

“We can buy you one tomorrow.”

Phoenix arrived when they were putting away the shopping, and tidying up the avalanche they had left on the ground earlier.

Miles wondered how much of a shock it was to Phoenix. He’d deliberately walked that day, not wanting to give away that he would be at the Agency. If Phoenix was surprised, his face certainly didn’t show it. Phoenix turned all his attention to his daughter, scooping her up into a hug, and then shaking the snow from his scarf onto her. The girl shrieked with the cold, pushing him away, and ducking under his arm.

“You do your chores?” Phoenix called after her, sticking his nose out the kitchenette threshold.

“Almost. I’m just going to handle Charley’s musical theory now.”

The door was shut quickly, not leaving Phoenix any chance to reply. Miles didn’t realize it was possible to make such a discovery, but he knew that even with Phoenix’s shoulders to him, the man didn’t want to turn around. Yet he bit the bullet anyway, slowly meeting his gaze.

“Hey… Edgeworth.”

“It’s Miles,” he corrected. He’d never insisted that with anyone. It was always the other way around. “At least, if you still want anything to do with me.”

“I do. O-of course I-” Phoenix’s hands went to his pockets and stuck there. He glanced away, uneasy with the situation, with being cornered.

“I haven’t had the chance to properly apologize.”

Phoenix hadn’t given him the opportunity. Despite his cool acceptance of the situation, Phoenix had still been upset. And he showed it through avoidance, rather than yelling or stating what he felt.

“Speak now or forever hold your peace,” he quipped. “I think Trucy’s moved the entire office in front of the door until it happens. You plan that too?”

“What?” he surged over to check the door knob. Sure enough, it wouldn’t budge. Trucy could be heard conversing loudly with Charley about sonatine. “N-no, I didn’t. I was not remotely certain that you would be here today-”

“So Trucy planned it then.”

“There wasn’t any plan,” he vehemently told Phoenix. “We just bought minor groceries and attempted to un-avalanche that ridiculous cupboard!”

“Ok, there was no plan.”
“Exactly!” Miles agreed. Then he took a composing breath, wishing to center his thoughts and convey what he wanted. “I know, at least partly, about your feelings for- of him. Yours and Klavier Gavin’s. Yet I went forwards with my plans anyway. I assumed moving the date was for the best, rather than properly considering your opinions.”

“And how would you properly consider that?” Phoenix questioned, sliding towards him. Their proximity meant he could mute his voice to something a note above a displeased whisper. “Enlighten me.”

The could haves and should haves hadn’t left his mind since the understanding that he’d make a mistake. “I shouldn’t have said that,” Miles first thought, when the screwed-up contempt flashed across Klavier’s face. It was followed by a never-ending stream of conditional clauses, things which might have happened, or he wished he did.

“I should have broached the subject,” he said this all in a lurching gasp. “I should have understood what you wanted, what would be fair to the both of you, before I tried to take action. I apologize. I’m aware I’m presently on my third chance, I want to believe I will think things through in our future.”

“Our future?”

“That was presumptuous of me, wasn’t it?” he ruefully asked.

“Didn’t I already say I still want to be with you?” Phoenix answered. His partner smiled lightly, the first reassurance he’d given thus far. “You can stop moping now, it’s weird to see you this straightforward and emotional.”

Phoenix kissed him on the tip of the nose. It was fluttery, and seemed to drain all the nauseous guilt and worry of the past few days with it. Suddenly, Miles felt wobbly, as if all his contents had been emptied and he could no longer support his own frame. But Phoenix gripped him, and so he wasn’t going anywhere.

“Are those flowers for me?”

This was when Miles first noticed the bunch of sunflowers he didn’t remember buying. They rested with deceptive innocence by the sink, buttery petals glinting against the silver faucet.

“The hyacinths were bought with ulterior motive.”

“And these ones aren’t?” Phoenix let go, bringing his fingertips to delicately stroke the prickly stems. “At this rate I’ll actually have to start learning real flower names.”

Feeling that they were straying from the subject, he gently worked to steer it back.

“We can’t avoid each other if we want things to work out. In any future conflicts we’re bound to have.”

“Yeah,” Phoenix nodded. “With the amount of work I’ve been picking up, it’s a lot easier to stay away from you.”

“I noticed a similar phenomenon with my own career.”

“So, what do we do?”

“Well to start, we should not keep secrets that affect each other.”
Phoenix glanced to his flowers and the pile of mail next to it. Then he suggested, “A cool down period might be necessary before talking things out.”

“We won’t force Trucy to pick sides.”


As soon as the viciousness came, it fell away from him. Phoenix was motionless, contemplating.

“Do you accept my apology?”

Phoenix embraced him again, but not long enough for Trucy to get worried about the sudden quiet. Miles permitted himself to lean just a touch further into the man, fleecy sweater and all. Phoenix likewise clung to his shoulders and sighed, “Does that answer your question?”

“Say it, please,” he mumbled back.

“I do.”
When Miles woke up, it seemed like an ordinary Sunday morning. The first pale rays of winter sun navigated past the narrow slats of the blinds, through a tiny gap within the curtains, and just so happened to find the path which shone directly on his face. He cringed at first, trying to pretend that it wasn’t there. But his eyelids filled with red, making the phenomenon impossible to ignore. Turning over wasn’t much an option either, because half of the bed was taken up by his dog, and another quarter was currently owned by Phoenix Wright. That was only the first of many things that would make his morning a not-so normal one.

They had slept together for the first time. As in, actually collapsed into bed because they were exhausted after a lengthy study session. The evening previous, Phoenix had taken one look at the cold weather outdoors, and then looked back at the warm townhouse. Trucy was even with him, which made the decision a simple one.

Leaving the snoring man and dog to their own devices, Miles fell out of bed and lay on the carpet next to it for a time. He really didn’t want to be awake right now, but there was something pressing. A distinct feeling that had a little more to do with than the sun rudely awakening him. The carpet quickly grew uncomfortable as dust tickled his nose. He also got a view of all the old socks and dog toys (as if there was much a difference in Pess’ eyes) which had been carried off the dog.

With that, he got up, resigning himself to the early morning. He shuffled downstairs, still half-blind with sleep. His eyes adjusted by the time his fingertips were burned by the kettle.

“Why is it hot? Who could have possibly boiled water at this outrageous hour?”

Trucy made logical sense, even if neither of them liked early mornings. But then Miles heard the soft clink of china and glass.

Franziska sat at the kitchen table, pouring a generous amount of liqueur into her coffee. Miles watched as it went from black to pale brown, unable to even process what was going on. The clink of the spoon as she stirred her coffee helped establish his grip on reality again.

“Franziska.”

“Miles Edgeworth.”

With his sudden awareness of the situation, Miles concluded that his fingers really hurt from being burned. But, unwilling to admit this in front of his sister, he took a somewhat dazed step closer to her.

“I was unaware that you were planning on visiting.”

“I thought it appropriate to see my younger brother’s new home and office while I have the time.”
“How did you get in?”

“Tch,” Franziska took a long gulp of coffee and did not answer. “You have such a simplistic train of thought. Despite my inclination to have the lock picked, I merely retrieved the spare key from where you would obviously keep it.”

Internally, he groaned. At least she hadn’t knocked down the front door. That would have been a nuisance to replace.

“What time did you get in?”

“My flight arrived at two.”

That explained her intense coffee then, she was forcing herself to accept the time change. Franziska was properly dressed despite the hour. Not a hair stood out of place, nor were her earrings tangled. Franziska could have been ready for a simple day in the courtrooms and crime scenes, despite the exhaustion she must have been feeling. Her whip was out of sight, which was somewhat worrying to Miles, but he would rather not be confronted with it either.

“Is your room to your liking?”

It should have been, seeing as she had specified what paint and furniture she wanted, and where it should be placed. Of course, nothing could come so easily, and Franziska wagged her finger.

“Return the twin-sized bed and purchase a queen.”

As if he could return those things months later.

“I thought you were fine with the twin.”

“Well, I have changed my mi- MILES EDGEWORTH!”

Phoenix, equally bleary from sleep, likely had not heard their conversation until it was too late.

Too late was when he shuffled into the kitchen with squinted eyes, and kissed him on the cheek before yawning, “Morning M-M-”

He stopped mid-sentence, and then forced his eyes a little more open. Phoenix rubbed them, then looked down at his hands, assessing if they were real or not. His gaze flicked back to his sister, who by then had her whip poised.

“What are you doing here?!”

“Me?!” Phoenix held Miles’ shoulders like he planned to use him as a human shield. Which, in all likelihood, was his intention. “What are you doing here?!”

“How long?” Franziska snarled, changing her line of questioning. “How long have you been living with Phoenix Wright?”

“We’re not living together we’re-” then Miles stopped, because the alternative was just as liable to upset the woman.

“Did you never think to tell your sister?” Phoenix asked, rounding on him. “You know, maybe over the phone and out of whipping distance?”

“I didn’t know how to appropriately phrase-”
Then Trucy entered, just to contribute to the confusion.

“I think there’s a monster sleeping on the top bunk,” she greeted, tugging her father’s shirt. “Can you go check for me?”

“And what makes you say that?” Phoenix asked, turning his attention from Franziska. “Aren’t you a little old to be worrying about bed-monsters?”

“I heard it snoring,” she confessed.

“You heard Kay Faraday,” Franziska supplied.

“Kay is here too?” Miles asked.

“We are investigative partners,” she primly informed him, over a sip of coffee.

“And the other kind, hypocrite,” snapped his internal monologue. “That explains why she wants a queen-sized bed now!”

“You’ve yet to answer my question Miles Edgeworth.”

“And you’ve yet to greet your niece,” he retorted.

Franziska’s expression softened a touch, and she waved over Trucy. The girl wrapped Franziska in a loose hug, before taking a chair next to her. Trucy was clad in pyjamas, and her hair was fluffed from sleep. She gently leaned against the table, rubbing her eyes. Trucy was just as fatigued as the rest of them, and not in a mood for much conversation.

“Well that distraction hadn’t lasted nearly as long as I anticipated.”

“Care to enlighten me about this?” Franziska lazily waved a hand in the direction of Phoenix. Miles could feel the ridiculous man flinch.

“Only Franziska could bring what little self-preservation he has out to the open.”

“I had to do this for Trucy,” Phoenix hissed at him. “So it’s your turn now.”

It was then that Miles fully understood the position he had put Phoenix in. He could properly appreciate the squeamishness Phoenix must have felt, discussing the subject with his daughter. But he would not run away from the truth, no matter how painful and whip-shaped it might be.

“We are partners now.”

“And now means?”

“A few days short of the new year.”

“I see.”

Franziska did not get angry. She was better about reigning her temper when Trucy was within hearing range. One of the few times Phoenix had grown a backbone around Franziska was when Trucy picked up a choice few German epithets from her. Thus, her whip remained coiled, like a deadly snake. With a stony face, she poured at least half the liqueur into her drink. Her large coffee became white as the snowdrifts outside.

“Franziska, no!”
“Hmph.”

She relented, not downing it, but didn’t say much else. Leaving Franziska to her sulking, Miles attempted to solve the breakfast conundrum. Phoenix was content to stand in the middle of his kitchen, gaping like a scruffy mime. Coffee was off the menu for the next little while, and he’d meant to go grocery shopping but hadn’t. Fortunately, there was just enough bread for each of them to have toast. Phoenix proved to be an obstacle when navigating the cupboards. After nearly ramming into him for a second time, Miles wove a hand before his face. Phoenix blinked confusedly, eyes tracing the movement.

“What happened to your fingers?” he asked. “They’re red.”

“I had a minor encounter with the kettle.”

Phoenix didn’t give him the chance to withdraw his hand. Despite Phoenix’s fast reaction, his grip was tender, and he was careful to avoid the sore spots. A kiss was planted on the tips of his fingers. It was a mere brush of the lips, not enough to make the pain flare up again. Miles’ face turned a scarlet to rival the burns.

“There, all better.”

“Tch,” Franziska scoffed, glaring out the window.

“We’ll make ourselves scarce for a bit and take Pess for a walk,” Phoenix delicately said, not looking at her. “You won’t want me in the way while you’re catching up.”

“That’s not necessary,” he wanted to say. But nothing seemed to come out of his mouth when he tried to vocalize. After Trucy was promised that she could visit with her aunt later, she was shepherded from the room. They were abandoned to a dour silence. Franziska continued to stir her ruined coffee, peering into its depths as if it could provide her with the answers that she wanted.

“Why Phoenix Wright?”

He did not answer, deciding to make breakfast instead. Jam was slathered across two pieces of toast, a generous amount. He slid the first plate before Franziska as a peace offering. She accepted, taking a moody bite out of the corner. When his own plate was fixed, and the tea was ready, Miles joined his sister at the table.

Franziska had asked Miles something that he did not know the answer of either. Whenever Phoenix was vague with him, or neglected to shower, Miles wondered the exact same thing.

*Why Phoenix Wright?”*

Despite this, Miles was certain of at least one truth.

“He makes me happy.”

Her rebuttal was swift, the logic of it bluntly describing the reality of the situation.

“Plenty of things make you happy; dogs, a good day in court, that inexplicable mess of a television show you like to watch.”

He bristled at the description Franziska gave of *the Steel Samurai*, but did not rise to the bait. He was prepared for that outcome, and knew exactly what he should next ask his sister.
“Why does the thought cause you difficulties?”

“It’s not about suitability,” Franziska elaborated, tearing a strip from her toast. “You’ve always been two fools in a pod. I knew beyond a reasonable doubt you held romantic feelings for him.”

He looked up from the sugar bowl, teaspoon hovering over it.

“But?”

“Will you at least deign to inform me about the wedding before it happens?”

“You know what my feelings about marriage are,” he scowled.

They were frivolous wastes of money, pointless pomp and symbolism for an event that no one wanted to attend. He didn’t need a three-tiered cake which would taste like sand to tell the world he was in a committed relationship. Loyalty was more than silk ribbons and indexed, laminate wedding planners. A groom’s magazine wouldn’t contain any of the phrases to describe what he felt. Phoenix was sentimental, but he had listened to the rant before. It was not in the cards for them. Phoenix understood and respected this.

“Good, at least that much hasn’t changed,” Franziska smirked now, the irritating look she always wore when she felt confident. “All I expect is that one day I will note your family name has a hyphen which wasn’t there before, and that will be the end of the matter.”

“And what of Kay?”

“Sleeping in, no doubt. She’s not as accustomed to international travel.”

That was not the answer he was seeking, and they both knew it. But he didn’t push the issue, because it would be hypocritical. He’d just come through a similar situation with Phoenix, and didn’t want to experience it again.

“Should I consult her advice in the likely event that I will have to redecorate for you?”

He got the impression the room would become less Franziska’s, and more Kay’s. But at least it was finally seeing some use.

“No, we plan on shopping anyway. Your credit card is safe, little brother.”

If only the same could be said for Trucy. But the solution to that problem was sitting across him munching on her toast. Franziska could take the girl, and he would not have to hear about paint colours or wainscoting for the rest of the day. Perhaps forever, if he were fortunate.

“How has work been?”

“Classified, as usual,” she boredly sighed, pretending to inspect her nails. “We meet with a representative of Scotland Yard in a few days.”

“Jurisdictional issues?”

“Tediously so.”

“Are you still finding Interpol as interesting as you once did?”

“It never lacks demand or challenge. Though, Kay’s expertise has made some areas simpler.”
Miles wondered to what his sister referred. Was she talking about Little Thief, or was she breaking into crime scenes now as well? It was hard to imagine Franziska sneaking anywhere. She was more the type to demand entry, and very easily receive it.

“Lang is back, too.”

There was no doubt in his mind that she had said so to gauge his reaction. Therefore, Miles didn’t, opting to fold his arms and regard the subject with indifference. He would see what her test was about.

“That must make things efficient as well. There are fewer mistakes during processing, at the very least.”

“Yes, he said he missed the position, found it rewarded better than familial obligation.”

What was the objective of trying him like this, anyway? Had their separation been any sooner, he might have responded more strongly to what Franziska was telling him. Perhaps with remorse, or the vindictive pleasure of retribution. But, it was nearing seven months now, he no longer thought much of the subject.

“I’ve admittedly never cared for tradition, as far as families go.”

“I once did,” Franziska said, reminding them both of what they already knew. “But finding my own way has been less…”

She trailed, pursing her lips in thought.

“Shallow?”

“Do not interrupt me when I am thinking.”

“Antiquated?”

“Miles Edgeworth,” she growled, cautioning him.

“I’m sure it will come to you,” he grinned back teasingly.

Franziska snarled something incoherent, before mirroring him by crossing her arms.

“Nevertheless,” she squeezed her forearm, wrinkling the pressed fabric of her blouse. “It is good to see that Phoenix Wright is not a tourniquet.”

“I fear your metaphor is lost on me.”

“A tool! Something to staunch your bleeding heart!”

“I was hardly bleeding.”

Phoenix had never been like a rebound, a warm body to use and discard until he felt better. He had never thought of the man as a way to get over Lang. It was perplexing that Franziska would question him about the subject.

Being the sibling that she was, Franziska knew what he was wondering.

“He is the father to my niece.”
Franziska did not discuss his choice in partner for the rest of her visit. Not when Kay finally woke up and joined them, not when the Wrights came back with a snowy Pess. They chatted about work, the things he missed from Europe. Then Trucy, and whether he had dared stick his foolish nose where it shouldn’t be, to interfere with her “weapons training.”

She did not have to keep asking about Phoenix. In some convoluted way, Miles knew that meant she approved of the man. This was a bizarre concept in his mind, but he came to terms with it.

He laughed at the thought.

Phoenix would malfunction if he learned that Franziska sanctioned their relationship.
“I c-can’t believe we’re finally going to meet the famed That Man,” Sebastian said, teeth chattering.

Kay clutched her arms as a gust of wind picked up.

“Y-yeah! I only caught a glimpse of That Man before he vanished again.”

“He’s l-like a cryptid around the Prosecutor’s Office. Every time someone mentions him being with Mister Edgeworth, he disappears.”

“His name is not That Man,” Miles corrected.

“That’s only his nickname, Sebastian,” Kay said. “His full name is The Man Who Still Shines So Brilliantly In My Eyes Even Now.”

“Phoenix Wright is not a made-up creature,” Franziska stated. She held open the door to the Agency for Kay. “No matter how unreal his life decisions may be.”

“Aren’t phoenix mythical creatures?” Sebastian whispered to Kay.

Miles decided that bringing the three along had been a mistake. In theory, his idea had been sound. He had schooled Kay and Sebastian for the bar exam. Kay was conveniently in the country with Franziska, which made the numbers even. Apollo and Phoenix turned the group into four, which was ideal for quizzing.

“That man will never know what hit him.”

Then Miles realized he had referred to Phoenix Wright as That Man, again. Even if it was only mentally, he berated himself for it. The others… truly did have a point.

“Are you going to make me hold this door forever?” Franziska impatiently asked.

He didn’t answer, taking the lead. Now that they were walking up the stairs to the Agency, Kay and Sebastian had lost some of their boldness.

“He doesn’t bite,” Miles sighed, pushing past them to knock at the door.

They both looked at him skeptically.

“I know what you’re thinking and stop it,” he commanded. “Be polite.”

Phoenix caught the tail end of the conversation, as he opened the door.

“I’ll see what I can manage on such short notice,” he dryly promised.

“Not you.”
The others were happy to crowd up the hall and gawk, but he entered the office. It was after work hours for all of them, so it was cold and dark outside. The office provided warmth, and security from the unforgiving wind. It still shrieked, pressing against the frame of the windows, and splattered rain.

Franziska followed briskly. She shook off her umbrella and greeted Trucy. Then, she took a place next to the girl, perching on the edge of the couch. Phoenix had pushed some props around earlier, and a few seemed to be outright missing. There was more space for all of them to sit around the coffee table.

Apollo was kneeling, using the table to write. He welcomed Sebastian, (they must have seen each other around the office before) and introduced himself to Kay. Apollo was setting up a grid to tally scores on a whiteboard. Trucy ran a monopoly of markers, and was contributing her own designs and potential team names to the list. Upon Apollo’s request, she would hand a different colour for him to write with.

“Feeling prepared?” he smirked at Phoenix, who was stacking indices.

“I was until I forgot everything,” he mumbled, looking vaguely nervous.

“There’s no bluffing your way through this.”

“Oh? We’ll see about that.”

“Bluffing about bluffing? Really, Wright?” Miles replied, unimpressed.

“Ack!”

...And Miles had been bluffing when he claimed to spot Phoenix’s tell. But it paid off in the end. His smirk widened a touch, and motioned for Kay to come over.

“Phoenix Wright,” he said, offering a hand. “Unprofessional pianist, and receiver of updated autopsy reports.”

“Kay Faraday,” she shook his hand solemnly. “Great Thief who occasionally works inside the law.”

“It is a lot warmer inside,” he joked.

Phoenix reached to hang up her raincoat. A whip came sailing in their direction. Phoenix yelped, instinctively ducking. Franziska snatched the jacket from mid-air, and placed it up for her partner. Miles could only roll his eyes, and crouched to make sure Phoenix hadn’t thrown out his back before the bar exam.

“I think being hit would’ve hurt less than bending over,” Phoenix complained, rubbing his spine.

Trucy, meanwhile, was putting the finishing touches to the whiteboard.

“What do you want yours and Sebastian’s team name to be, Polly?”

Phoenix muttered something about “hair-horns” under his breath, and opened a bottle of grape juice. Miles had to smother a laugh at that.

“Well,” Kay slapped Phoenix on the back, causing him to choke on his juice. “I know what our team name will be!”

“W-what’s that?”
“Team Avis!”

“Sooo, team bird?” Apollo skeptically asked.

“You know it! Yatagarasu and the phoenix, soaring above the competition!”

Trucy doodled in pink and grey feathers with the name.

“Franziska, would you like to read questions or keep score?”

He and Trucy had figured the layout of the quiz together. He mostly came up with suitable questions to ask, while Trucy copied them down. This was the final test, the last thing Phoenix would do before his barrister’s examination. More studying was planned after he wrote it, for the solicitor’s exam, but this was the turning point. Seventy-two hours marked the time where one was unable to learn anything through study.

“Question,” Sebastian put up his hand. “If Franziska is in charge of the trivia, is she allowed to whip us if we get something wrong?”

“Great idea!” Kay grinned. “That’ll add higher stakes to the game!”

“Y-you’re just saying that because you’re above whipping!” Sebastian retorted.

“Yeah,” Apollo nodded enthusiastically. “I’d rather not-"

Crack!

All the men in the room flinched with the harsh sound. Franziska folded her whip, drawing herself to the center of attention.

“I will keep score, as I do not trust my brother or niece to not fix the points in favour of someone.”

“I would do no such thing!” Miles protested.

“I would,” Trucy unabashedly answered, pulling ten dollars and a new autographed Klavier Gavin poster from her top hat. “Sorry Daddy, I’ll have to return the bribes.”

Miles leveled an icy glare at the man. Phoenix’s sweating started to worsen.

“What?! I didn’t bribe you!” Phoenix protested, before hastily adding, “Not with that poster at least.”

“Oh right!”

Then Trucy went up to Apollo, who looked equally flustered.

“You can keep the poster Trucy,” he said, embarrassed. “I’ve got too much merch already.”

“I don’t even want to know which way he was trying to skew the results,” Miles thought with a mental sigh.

“Are there any other bribes I should know about?”

Sebastian and Kay slowly put up their hands. It was Franziska’s turn to bluster.

“I change my mind,” Miles said, grabbing the scoreboard from his sister. “I will keep track, Trucy will read questions.”
“And what does that leave me with?” Franziska asked.

“Timing. No whipping, unless they go over.”

“I can grab snacks as well!” Trucy offered.

“We definitely can’t have a competition without snacks,” Kay agreed.

“Right, are both teams prepared?” Miles asked.

All nodded, managing to appear at least somewhat serious. Out of the group, only Phoenix looked like he wanted to protest. A level four glare was enough to put any arguments to rest.

“The initial rules are fairly simple. Each side takes turns answering questions, with half a minute to do so. Quantity of points decides victory. Given the amount of questions we have prepared,” he paused, waving to the wide stack of cue cards. “There are more complex questions you can buy for twenty points, and wager for more.”

“Wager?”

Now that had ensnared Phoenix. His doubts cleared, and he seemed more at ease.

“Red or black licorice?” Trucy asked Kay, pulling out a never-ending roll from her scarf.

“Red.”

“Black,” Franziska requested.

“I’m not kissing you for the rest of the night then,” Kay warned.

“Seeing as you want to consume falsely flavoured licorice, I find no issue,” she sniffed back. “It tastes awful.”

“Nothing that chocolate mints can’t fix!”

A shower of them poured from her purse, along with bags of assorted gummies. With a snap of her fingers, her baton twirled into existence, and then dissolved into a bag of chips. Kay didn’t stand a chance. Trucy had won her over with a few simple magic tricks and sweets. Despite Kay’s age, that was all it took.

“Can we adopt her?” Kay asked Franziska. “The Yatagarasu is always recruiting these days, and magic would definitely help out our heists!”

Trucy looked as interested as Kay did now.

“Did you say heists?”

“Daring ones,” Kay answered, waving her arm with enthusiasm.

“My best friend, Pearls, can channel spirits. Would that help as well?”

“Absolutely. You can come back to Europe with us and apprentice under a Great Thief!”


“I’ll make sure she returns in one piece, Phoenix Wright,” Franziska chimed. “A little travel never
hurt a growing mind.

“Well I’m under oath to not vanish anywhere,” Phoenix said, resting his chin on Trucy’s head. “So until then, no adoption.”

Watching the scene, Miles’ throat squeezed tightly. It was a sharp contrast to what he had been witness to in the past. Phoenix being happy, Phoenix feeling optimistic about his future… Phoenix accepting that he was not going anywhere, he was not going to die, and those around him cared.

Miles hadn’t intended to interrupt the moment, just clear his throat of the emotion. It nevertheless brought focus to him anyway.

“Without further delay, could we begin?”

Four “rights” was their response.

With that, the competition began. Everyone had streaks of fortune and bad luck with the questions. Some of the answers were difficult, even according to his standards. Sebastian’s calmer demeanour suited Apollo. They worked well as a team, negotiating how much they should put forth with the bonus questions, and occasionally debating on the answers which they should give. Kay and Phoenix enjoyed staking ridiculous amounts on the tough questions, and unnerving the competition.

Franziska eventually began to fidget uncomfortably. She was hard-pressed not to yell out answers when one was given slowly, or was flat-out wrong. She grit her teeth through most of it, but after a five-wrong streak from Sebastian, she decided to take action.

“Debeste, I will substitute while you recover,” she said, gesturing to the timer.

“Franziska, you haven’t even taken this country’s bar,” Miles protested.

“Yet I am nevertheless qualified to prosecute here,” she snapped back, displeased at being underestimated. “I can handle myself Miles Edgeworth.”

So, his sister joined the mix. She relished in getting the “obvious” responses correct, and accused cheating when she wasn’t. Trucy found the quizzing so fun that she wanted to join as well. Kay happily traded places with her, after being on the receiving end of Franziska’s death-glare six too many times. Trucy did not have the background any of them did in law, but she had written the questions and answers with him. And, if Phoenix stage-whispered answers to his daughter, no one brought it up. After all, it was an event which was supposed to test his knowledge. Despite the younger crowd, Phoenix settled in quickly, and sounded confident with his answers.

Teams quickly became meaningless, as everyone wanted to jump back into the game. Even he was pulled away from the job of reading the cards, right in the end. Things rapidly intensified. Apollo and Sebastian (their teammates) were given less opportunities to answer. He and Phoenix went toe-to-toe, spitting out answers before Trucy could even finish the question.

“Administrative bodies get their powers through-”

“Statute.”

“Cases are appealed based-”

“Upon a question of law, not a question of fact unless there is an error which is gross.”

Phoenix poked out his tongue with the last word, making a face at him. Not to be flustered by such
childishness, Miles crossed his arms.

“Privity-”

“Refers to the parties who can sue when there is a breach of contract.”

“Show off,” Phoenix mouthed.

Having selected the questions, Miles naturally had the advantage. In response to Phoenix’s disgruntled look, he mockingly tapped the side of his head, and waited to see what the man would do next.

“As am-”

“Short form for ‘as amended,’ commonly seen in the citations of legislation.”

Miles peeked at the scoreboard, but they were getting nowhere in the points. Their totals were a frustration, refusing to gain significant lead. He would go for a major question soon, and bet a strategic amount of points. Just enough so that he could win against Phoenix if things went awry.

“Parole board will consider-”

“Recidivism risk.”

“I’m ready to buy a new question,” Phoenix announced, grinning a shark’s smile at him. It was all teeth, and just as teasing.

“How much?” Trucy asked.

“Mmm, how does everything sound to you, Edgeworth?”

No! Already? Phoenix had beaten him to it, and every muscle on his grinning face knew it.

“It’s good you know when to cut your loses Wright,” he rebuffed. “I was beginning to think you would never notice the outcome of victory was a lost cause.”

Phoenix shrugged with feigned carelessness.

“I know a thing or twelve. So why don’t we turn this about, and make the finale an interesting one?”

“My, you must be tired from not taking any breaks, believing I’m foolish enough to accept a bet of your design.”

“You were the one to design the questions, and yet, we’re still tied. So I don’t really see an issue.”

“Ngh! I object!

“On what grounds?”

“Objectionable… Ones…”

Miles hadn’t discovered how close they became, leaning at each other over the coffee table. Not until Trucy and Kay shoved them apart.

“Don’t worry!”

“We came up with something during the time that you two were arguing,” Apollo said.
“Ah, ok then.”

The bravado drained from Phoenix. Miles wasn’t feeling too strongly either.

“What have you decided upon?”

“A mock trial.”

“Civil?”

“Civil. You needed six people to be in a jury for a civil trial, back when they still existed. There’s just enough of us here today!”

Miles did some quick counting. Apollo, Franziska, Kay, Sebastian, Trucy… Phoenix had likely done something similar, because he asked, “Aren’t there only five of you?”

“Charley’s sitting as well,” Trucy explained. “With me and Polly as his chief interpreters.”

“Me?” Apollo stammered.

“Of course! You’ve been around here long enough to know what he’s saying.”

“While the plant will be one… juror,” Franziska had a hard time saying this. “It will be your job to persuade us of responsibility in the case Debeste and I have made.”

“So, I merely need to show that my client is less than fifty percent liable for the damages?” Miles asked.

“You say that as if it will be simple to convince us all.”

“We can’t even agree on what brand of paper towel to buy,” Kay added.

“That’s because you always think about the base price, rather than what will save us money in the long run.”

“Well if we bought the accompanying extra roll with the more absorbent sheets-”

“Those statistics are a lie! They all function the same-”

“Your domestic squabbles are… fascinating, but could we perhaps, start the trial?”

Franziska and Sebastian wrote down the facts of the case they had created. Phoenix became the plaintiff, while Miles was the defendant. A copy was given to both of them. They had five minutes to read and develop their arguments, while the others pushed around the furniture of the office. The coffee table became one for the jurors. Charley was dragged over to the sofa, where everyone else squeezed to sit.

As the plaintiff, Phoenix went first. He gave his recounting of events to the jury, and opened himself up to cross-examination. Phoenix sweated, he objected to any question which was remotely irrelevant, (Sebastian worked the double role of judge and juror) and avoided answering in ways which were incriminating. Then the roles were flipped, as he tried to counter-sue for the plaintiff’s actions, and demonstrate the shared liability.

It wasn’t quite the same as court, but it was just as enjoyable. They snapped at each other, and he got to see the amusing face Phoenix made when cornered. Phoenix came down to the last questions of his cross-examination. It seemed like he was running out of points to raise, but Miles should have
known better than to underestimate the man.

“All this time, you’ve been testifying about how the car never travelled above sixty. But you forgot to mention that in school zones, it’s forty. Wouldn’t a responsible driver know what speed they should be going when children are around?”

“What? Where is there a mention of a…” he looked back to the overview, but there was nothing about a school zone. “Stop making things up.”

“I’m not, it says right here-”

It dawned on them both what this meant. The information was different. They were not able to continue with the trial at this rate.

“Well, it looks like I have no choice but to call a mistrial,” Sebastian declared, in his best judge impression. “Due to the violation of evidence regulations.”

“N-no, impossible!”

“There must be something we can do.”

“You’ll just have to figure out a tiebreaker for next time,” Franziska said, stifling a yawn.

“There is going to be a next time, right?” Kay asked. “This was surprisingly fun.”

Taking in the members of the jury, Miles saw they were all blinking tiredly. Trucy was slumped against Apollo’s shoulder. Sebastian looked moments away from drifting off as well. Only Phoenix seemed awake as he still felt.

“It seems we should call it in for the evening.”

“Yeah, c’mon Truce,” Phoenix nudged his daughter. “We can go home and tidy up in the morning.”

“Carry me?”

“At the rate you’ve been growing, you should carry me,” Phoenix said, showing them all to the door.

Trucy stood, rubbing her eyes and following after them. Phoenix waved at Charley, and turned off the Agency’s lights. While the others trudged downstairs, they lingered in the hall.

“Do you want there to be a next time?” Miles asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “This was helpful. Thank-you for putting this together with Trucy.”

“Are you more confident in your abilities now?”

“I guess.”

Even after earning those points, he was still the same headstrong person. He shouldn't have expected anything less.

“Miles, I l-”

“Hold on for a moment.”

A fully-powered scowl was directed at Kay. She was scheming, and Franziska didn't seem to be
opposing whatever her partner planned to do.

“Kay, you are not stealing Trucy.”

“We’d bring her back eventually,” she pouted.

“Honestly,” Miles sighed. “Now what was it you were going to say?”

Phoenix put his hands in his pockets and started after the rest of the group.

“Um, just that I liked being introduced to your family is all.”

He thought of protesting that definition. But, watching the group, he knew it was true.
Doomsday

Chapter Notes

Writing this chapter was an... experience. I finished it quickly, but spent longer than normal in the editing process. I wound up cutting quite a bit from this in the end, and it's still one of the longer chapters in this fic. Weird.

Read, review, and enjoy!

In the end, Miles did not know whether Phoenix attended the execution.

In not so many words, Phoenix stated he wanted to be left alone. It would have been hypocritical to defy this, seeing as Miles wanted the same thing on that day.

Still, Miles thought of the attention which had come to him. Emails, texts, and phone calls clogged up his notifications from his... his family. And right at the end, there was a little shout from Trucy.

“We love you!”

“I-”

Then his own words snagged, and Miles concealed it with a cough. Cold season had not ended yet, it was believable enough. He even had the burning face to match.

“I’ll expect you to be dressed properly and ready by seven tomorrow,” he finished, voice flat. “It will make your commute to the exam much simpler.”

His fingers grazed the button, uncertain of hanging up. There was admittedly more that he wanted to say. But it was an inopportune time, so he fumbled and eventually ended the call.

Miles pushed papers and sipped tea for the rest the work day. Pretending that it was an ordinary time in the office. Pretending Klavier’s absence (Apollo’s by extension) wasn’t too remarkable. Pretending he didn’t spend every waking moment of that day, wondering why Phoenix ever thought being “friends” with Kristoph Gavin was the smartest route.

“...you did get my message, correct?”

“Yeah,” Phoenix leaned against the door of his car, grinning at him. “What about it?”

“You are aware the bar exam has a dress code then.”

“Edgeworth, being vague is allegedly my job. What is it?”

“What is it?” asked the man who was still wearing that god-awful neon blue hat, and clashing grey sweats. Asked the man who had a five o’clock shadow and irregular patches of stubble peppered under his chin.

“You know, I wrote the qualifying exam in my pyjamas,” Phoenix added, guessing what he was
Miles gave up the attempt to burn a hole through the man with his eyes. It wasn’t going to work, and they were running on a schedule.

“So the legend goes,” he snapped. “Get in the car already.”

If Miles drove a bit recklessly to jar Phoenix, he couldn’t really be blamed. He started it after all. And it wasn’t like anything he’d done broke the laws of the road. It was simply not recommended, unwise. Phoenix twisted his fingers into sweaty, white-knuckled knots, and huffed a sigh of relief when they arrived.

“Here we are,” Miles announced, a completely unnecessary statement.

“Yeah.”

Phoenix said this as if the words were strangling him. Miles could admit to feeling somewhat apprehensive as well. Had they covered every area of study in an equitable manner? What if there was a relatively new precedent which had been included, a last-minute adjustment to the final draft of the exam? Miles squashed those thoughts, knowing at least one of them had to seem collected. Otherwise, they might both fall apart.

Wanting to give off the illusion of control, he took out a clipboard from the glove box and attached the checklist to it. Phoenix fished a pen for him to use, as they reviewed the final details before his bar exam.

“Pens, pencils, erasers, sharpeners, and straight edge?”

A pencil case shaped like a fish was waved under his nose. Everything needed was there.

“Your indices and reference notes?”

The backpack with cat ears (Phoenix had borrowed it from Trucy) was stacked with the necessary papers.

“Valid photo identification, registration papers, any relevant numbers of proof?”

“Check,” Phoenix showed all the verification that would be needed.

“Water and lunch?”

“In the backpack.”

“Kiss?”

He read this part of the list accidentally, not fully understanding the meaning until it parted his lips. Kiss?!

Wait. That wasn’t his handwriting. He didn’t dot his Is with sparkly gel pen hearts!

“Don’t mind if I do.”

When had Trucy gotten access to these notes? Miles was certain they had always been kept in his organizer up until then.
“Good God. Kay must have really taken her under the wing of the Yatagarasu.”

The world as he knew it was no longer safe from thievery. Miles ticked off the final box, a bit flustered by this sneakiness, when it was completed.

“That’s everything.”

Phoenix took up wringing his hands. He glanced from the backpack, to the people who were already filtering up the convention center stairs. Most of the crowd had young faces, tired ones with dark circles and grimaces. The people who knew each other stuck together, until security checkpoints and alphabetical sorting pushed them apart.

“You should go before it gets busier.”

“Yeah,” he agreed.

But neither of them budged from their seats in the car.

“Thank you for all the time that you took, putting this together, helping me prepare, dealing with my trouble. You really did a lot more than you had to, and I appreciate it.”

“You were nowhere near as much as you think. Trouble, that is.”

“Really?”

He reached for Phoenix’s hands, separating his fingers. The man needed to stop bending them like that, it would cause him little more than pain when he wrote the exam. Seven complete hours of scribbling and recollection would do that.

“In comparison to two teenagers?” he rose an eyebrow. “You were nothing.”

Phoenix could be trusted to actually follow the schedule. He didn’t get distracted easily like Kay. He and Sebastian were quick to be frustrated if things didn’t go their way, but Miles learned how to handle their discouragement.

“I find that actually really unbelievable and fake,” Phoenix bluntly said.

“Remind me to tell you about those experiences someday,” he traced the veins of Phoenix’s hand. They stuck out more prominently with age, like the lines of a roadmap drawing together. “You’d get a laugh out of them, I believe.”

“Another day then,” he promised. “Even if I still feel skeptical.”

“That’s because most of the trouble you caused was related to our personal lives.”

It started with his mortifying realization of feelings, and the uncertainty of what should be done with them. Things only progressed from then on.

“Ouch, you got me there, hypocrite. Remember the disaster that was assembling Trucy’s bunk bed?”

“Intimately so,” Miles winced, thinking of the suspicious number of extra parts leftover. “It was nearly as bad as your attempt at fried dough cookies.”

“You keep claiming the kitchen smells like burning sugar, but I don’t believe you.”

“That’s because you’ve kept far from the stove elements ever since.”
“Tch, yeah, I guess,” he said, accepting temporary defeat over the argument. “But the trouble is almost over. Almost…”

Phoenix went distant, shutting away whatever feeling his face had wanted to express.

“There’s one troublesome thing I have to tell you, but that can wait.”

“Wright,” he snarled.

“Edgeworth,” he mocked back, before the solemnness returned. “I’m out of the problem anyway, so it’s fine.”

“I find that difficult to believe.”

“I am, really,” Phoenix squeezed his fingers, lending some credibility to the idea. “I just figured it was important.”

What could be important, even though it wasn’t affecting him anymore?

“You should go now,” he said, dropping his gaze. “We both know how security tends to see your hair as a bomb threat.”

“So long as I keep on my beanie-” Phoenix teased.

“It’s against the dress code, they’ll make you take it off while writing.”

“Huh, I guess I really better get moving then.”

Phoenix adjusted the childish backpack, so it was over his shoulders.

“Miles, I l-”

“No more small talk,” he scolded, waving a finger. “Otherwise you really are going to be late.”

Phoenix looked like he’d swallowed a fly. He made a put-upon noise in the back of his throat, then, bobbed his head in acceptance. Phoenix got out of the car, but hesitated before shutting the door.

“Thank-you.”

Rush hour traffic darted by, and he was eventually swallowed by the onslaught of people.

Watching Phoenix, he barely minded the close shave with a city parking ticket.

It was impossible to distract himself from thoughts of the barrister’s exam. It was six hours of hell with an hour’s lunch squeezed between. In combination with the solicitor’s, it was fourteen. They were “generously” spaced apart, but Miles still remembered the side effects from when he wrote. In fact, his wrists wanted to seize up at the memories.

Scrambling to fill rows of multiple choice bubbles set a pain deep in the bones, until one could barely hold a pencil. There was also the dread that one had made a mistake with multiple choice. That, somewhere along the way, the answer for forty-six had been put in the spot of forty-seven, thus shifting the remaining two hundred or so questions into the wrong place. No matter how often one checked and rechecked, it was impossible to escape this fear.

Somehow, the terror Phoenix must have been feeling became his own as well. It was irrational, and
shouldn’t have been feasible. Yet Miles saw the man- linty track pants and all- curled over the desk and arranging his things into a mess of a system only he could understand. Even if Phoenix maintained a cool front around the others, he was screaming internally. Rather loudly.

The exam was just so notoriously difficult. It was deliberately convoluted, to the point where the top law schools of the country had entire years fail. Schools blamed the Bar Association and government for making it this way. The government blamed the schools for not properly preparing their students. Given the ridiculous amount of time spent studying, and the intensity of law programs, it was clear who was actually at fault. It controlled the number of lawyers which joined the workforce, preventing overflow.

Miles would have dreaded to take the bar in this country, where the standards needed definite reformation.

“Check and double check those indices you fool,” Miles said under his breath, as if Phoenix could hear.

In his mind, he could almost see Phoenix rolling his eyes, and returning back to the index he had abandoned.

Miles knew to expect the burnout, the almost glazed look in his eyes. Phoenix stumbled back to the car, barely conscious of the traffic around him, or the way the backpack was sliding from his shoulders. He almost fell into the car, and found the difficulty in fastening his seatbelt. He struggled, reddened fingers bloated and uncooperative, until Miles took pity and did it for him.

Right afterwards was naturally, never the appropriate time to ask. Phoenix would probably collapse if he was so much as asked to spell his name. But that was normal after the studying, eventual writing, and stress which had greyed bits of his hair. So Miles drove in silence, taking the man straight back to his apartment.

This was easier said than done. Miles was bursting with questions to ask, and wanted to be aware of every detail, so they could better understand the next exam. He also wanted to know how Phoenix felt he did, what stuck out to him the most. Phoenix seemed more comatose, than despairing, which meant it must have gone fairly well. No one left the bar exam with a skip in their step. A mere grin would have the other students mourning the lost sanity of their compatriot. The mental and physical exhaustion saw to that, as did the crushing odds.

When they arrived, Phoenix stopped at the kitchen table. Likely because it lay closer than his room, and he felt he couldn’t press further. He folded his arms and rested his head on the cool wood, staring at something only he could see.

“I’m here,” he spoke. His tone was dazed, slurring the words together. “How am I still alive?”

“I ask the same thing myself every day.”

Phoenix had chewed up a glass necklace with the dregs of poison still left in it. He confronted murderers with only Maya by his side innumerable times. He’d fallen off a bridge into the cold water of a river. Recently, he had been hit by a car. It was only the fact that Phoenix was out of the hospital before telling him which stopped a visit to his home country. And when Phoenix wasn’t doing any of that, he was playing mind games with the untrustworthy. Keeping close enough to make working behind his back dangerous, and more susceptible to be noticed.

“Is there anything you would like me to do before I leave?”
“The old trouble,” he answered, closing his eyes. “I’ve gotta’ tell you about that.”

“You’re exhausted. Now isn’t the time.”

“Alright.”

He didn’t even put up a fight. Watching his defeated form, Miles almost wanted to change his mind. But that was probably Phoenix’s intention. Seeing Phoenix weak put him in a more generous mood. He was more likely to pity the man, rather than get annoyed with him.

“Anything else?”

“Can you water Marina, Iscariot, and Pétain? Also, the mail...”

“Of course. How much do they need?”

A steel watering can was near the sink. He picked it up, and started to run the tap.

“Iscariot and Benedict take the same amount.”

“That doesn’t clarify anything. Who is Benedict?”

“Ikuko’s sibling.”

He looked around Phoenix’s kitchen, but wasn’t any more enlightened. Plants crept across every surface available to them, leaves and vines stretching for the sun. Unlike the measly spider plant in his own house, these ones flourished under his care.

“What type of plant is that?”

“A... leafy one.”

“Point to it,” he sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. After all, Phoenix named them because he didn’t know what species of plants they were.

Phoenix gave a lackluster attempt to move his arm, then stopped.

“Plastic saucers under the pot to catch the water.”

Through the shiny foliage, he found what he was searching for. Phoenix couldn’t see how much water he was giving, so Miles decided to use little. Overwatering couldn’t be undone, and Phoenix might need to throw a funeral if something happened to any of his precious houseplants.

“Done.”

“Thanks.”

Phoenix sat up again, leaning hard against the back of his chair. With a heavy hand, Phoenix reached into the depths of his sweater and pulled out his locket. Hooked on the chain was a simple key. He twisted it off the attaching ring, with a deftness he shouldn’t have possessed. There was an eerie sense of gravity, when it was dropped into his outstretched palm.

“Here’s the mail key. Box’s same as the apartment number.”

He ran the next errand, pulling out the sheaves of envelopes and clumsily trying to balance it all. Glossy print coupons slipped from his arms, the rest of the flyers attempted to follow. He took a
moment to stack them by size, just so things could become manageable. Junk mail went to the
top, bills and work mail to the middle, and an odd postcard near the top.

At first, it was simply “odd” because of the photo on the front. There was a picturesque village by a
river, but it was the road sign reading Hell, Norway that drew his eye.

The engraved message at the top of the card was a standard “wish you were here.” But in sweeping
cursive, a footnote had been added beneath.

**Instead of me.**

More hate, from a person who must have disagreed about the jurist system that Phoenix was
promoting. Miles thought of turning it over, to see what else had been written, but squashed the
morbid curiosity. It wasn’t addressed to him. Phoenix wouldn’t appreciate his privacy being invaded
if he did bring it up.

As the fascinated dread made his fingers twitch, he knew it was no wonder Trucy was forbidden
from getting the mail.

“I should talk that man into organizing a PO box,” he decided, filing away the task for a later
time. “I don’t feel comfortable with him and Trucy being so… accessible.”

As a prosecutor, and before that, a disciple of von Karma, there had always been a need for security.
People would do anything to secure a not-guilty verdict, just as his mentor had done the opposite.
He’d seen his fair share envelopes stuffed with powder made to look like anthrax, as well as cliched
hack-and-slash messages composed from cut letters. His mentor had a staff member dedicated to
handle them, and warn of any genuine dangers. One time, he and Franziska attended a trial where
the sender was prosecuted by the very man he threatened.

He and Phoenix were more susceptible than the average lawyer, made doubly so by their
relationship. Phoenix was now a target for anyone who wanted to hurt him, and vise-versa.
Significant others always were.

One tabloid reporter had seen Trucy hug him. This led to wild speculation about when he had
adopted a daughter, which in turn directed the press to Phoenix. Their relationship was “discovered”
without a single photographic shred of them being seen in public together. All it took was the
conclusion that if he was Trucy’s father (Miles wasn’t sure they were at that stage yet.) and Phoenix
Wright was Trucy’s father, then they were a couple. The papers weren’t **wrong**, they just found out
from logic which baffled him.

(He really did want to know what was written on the rest of the postcard.)

There was no possibility of swathing the Wrights in bubble wrap and kevlar. It would never fly, and
it would be suffocating. But Miles would talk to the man anyway, so at least they could plan…

Phoenix was still awake when he got back, going against his expectations.

“I’ve got the mail,” Miles announced, not sure of what else to say. He placed it on the table.

“Thanks.”

Like a cat, Phoenix knocked it off the table. Miles wanted to protest, but Phoenix was holding it. The
postcard. He disinterestedly flipped from the picture to the back, scanning each side. Then Phoenix
motioned with it, asking him to sit. The postcard was slid across, to him.
“That’s the last of the trouble.”

He concentrated on his reflection in the postcard, not the photo. The surface was colourful and slick, as if it had just been printed. The only marrs on it had been caused by his sweating fingerprints.

**Instead of me.**

“You can read it, if you want.”

And he had wanted to, not a minute ago. It was like he had swallowed his tongue, and his heart was in his throat. Everything felt out of place.

**Instead of me.**

Cursive had been redundant even when he went to school, there was little purpose left in teaching it. Out of all the mail Miles had seen in Phoenix’s possession, there were few times when it wasn’t in printing. Logic dictated it was likely the same sender, even if he wasn’t able to distinguish writing like an expert could.

And, when he flipped it, he knew the return address as well. Work had familiarized him with it. The postcard, despite its subject, was from the penitentiary. Though it fell under the classification of maximum security, he found that title more dubious than ever.

People in solitary weren’t supposed to have mail privileges.

Dead people weren’t supposed to write letters.

Astoundingly, illogically, his mind jumped to spirit channeling at first. That was how he had written to Phoenix. It all made sense!

Then he saw it was dated just before the execution.

“How-” Miles grit his teeth, wanting to keep it together, knowing an emotional response would not answer his questions. “How long?”

“After I stopped visiting. So I guess, a bit after the second murder indictment.”

“He shouldn’t have been able to send mail to you.”

“If you look at the addressing info, you’ll see it’s under a different prisoner’s name, despite the signature.”

He didn’t want to look, even though it made terrible sense. Miles shoved the letter not at Phoenix, but away.

“Why would you put up with this?”

“A restraining order would be about as helpful as an umbrella in a tsunami, don’t you think?” Phoenix laughed.

It made cruel sense, everything did.

Why else were there days when Phoenix came over to study discouraged, visibly shaken?

He mocked the insults of someone else, whose wordy vocabulary matched the message on the postcard’s back.
How many times had he watched Phoenix casually tuck away letters, or cover them from his line of sight when he entered the room?

“You ok?”

“I’m not sure,” Miles answered, pressing a hand against his forehead. “I just really, really-”

“Hate him?”

“Yes.”

He exhaled, long and shuddery.

“Thank-you for telling me.”

He didn’t feel too thankful, but knew it was important. Without being pushed into it, Phoenix had actually opened up. It was hard to be proud of the man when he had been dealing with something major, in secret. God, it was eternally that way with him, not speaking up until it was over and there was nothing he could do. But if he got upset with Phoenix, that might cause his progress to backpedal.

Trapped between a rock and a hard place, was the expression.

“Whew,” Phoenix wiped sweat from his forehead. “I think that had me more nervous than today’s exam.”

“I’m sure.”

“Are you ok, really?”

That was rich coming from the man who didn’t want to mention what he was thinking, and had only just revealed something important. Hypocrite, hypocrite, hypocrite-

“I’m. Fine.”

“I think if you were fine, you would be glaring at me for my idiocy, rather than keeping a calm face.”

Communication. That was what they had agreed to, during their last (serious) fight. He wasn’t allowed to avoid this, not if he wanted things to work out.

“I would appreciate time then, to sort my feelings on the matter.”

“Ok,” he nodded. “Should we talk about something else or do you want to leave-”

“The bar of course.”

Phoenix laughed- had he imagined the sadness which flitted across those eyes?- and then hugged him.

“Miles, I really, really-”

Miles had half a mind to push away, but settled for not reciprocating. His reaction mattered little, anyway, because Trucy came home from school. He was pressed into a flying tackle-hug. Phoenix was handled a bit more gingerly, but not by much.

“You’re back already?” she asked, running to them. “How was the exam? What did it feel like?”
Phoenix winced between embraces, feeling his still tender wrists.

“Despite the fact that I flagrantly ignored the dress code, I still made some student friends. For some reason, they seemed kinda’ impressed that I’ve written the harder version of the bar.”

“The real bar exam was the friendship we made along the way,” Trucy answered gravely. Then they shared a grin, which left him wondering how there could be family resemblance between people who weren’t blood related.

“What was the hardest question you had to answer?”

“Yes.”

“Was there anything about Alexander vs Butler on it?” he asked, not wanting Trucy’s questions to take precedent over his.

“It was mentioned in passing.”

“Did anyone break down crying?”

“If so, I was too concentrated to hear it.”

They settled into a good-natured game of twenty questions about the exam, with a man who had just answered hundreds of them.
It was Phoenix who reached over his chest to turn off the alarm when morning arrived.

After the exam, he was still a little worried about Phoenix and exhaustion. Not that Miles would admit such a thing to the man’s face. Miles only blustered and didn’t explain anything when Phoenix asked why he wanted to spend the night.

“Ugh,” Phoenix said into his pillow. “Why do you have to get up so early?”

At the moment, Miles was wondering the exact same thing. Phoenix was very cuddly; their limbs were tangled up when he shifted a bit. Even with the occasional elbow poke, and facefull of spiky hair, his sleep had been restful. The bed was more comfortable than his own, which was strange, because normally didn’t like soft mattresses. It made him feel like he was sinking to a dark place, with only the ceiling as his witness. A warm hollow had formed from where they lay, but he didn’t mind.

“You don’t use half as much time to prepare. For anything.”

“God,” Phoenix answered, turning onto his back. “Don’t remind me.”

“Should I take my leave then?”

“You have to,” Phoenix said, sitting up. “But I’ll be a sport and see you off.”

Phoenix leaned over and kissed his cheek. His face was rough with stubble, and Miles was hard-pressed not to laugh.

“Mph! How, gallant of you.”

“What was that about?”

“Nothing. I’m just not fond of the facial hair.”

“What?” he gave a lopsided smile. “You don’t like stubble?”

“No, it’s that-” Phoenix tried for a second kiss. Miles kept the man at arm’s length, pressing against his shoulders. “S-stop it!”

“Are you ticklish?”

“Do- don’t be- Ngho!”

All he could see were Phoenix’s pupils, and the dark shape of his eyebrows. They rubbed noses- an Eskimo kiss. Despite the view, Miles knew a silly grin was still plastered across his face.

“Tell me something I don’t know about you.”
His voice was low, but still close.

“I am not ticklish,” Miles firmly replied. “Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

“I’m glad you’re following my fashion advice and going into work without shaving today.”

“What?!”

“ACK!”

“URK!”

When Miles rose a shocked hand to his cheek, it made contact with Phoenix’s gut. Winded by this, Phoenix lost balance, and fell on top of him.

With simultaneous groans, they rolled away from each other. Phoenix held his stomach, and he tried to soothe his ribs.

“Nothing like some good old-fashioned pain to wake a guy up in the morning.”

“I feel as though you were the one to cause this.”

“Well if you hadn’t been so worried about your face, it wouldn’t have happened.”

That reminded him. He was supposed to be upset. He couldn’t go into work with an unshaven face, and didn’t have the time to go back home and fix it. He would need to call in late, and think up an acceptable excuse to give the judge for his lateness that day. It would just start his day off on a terrible vein.

“There’s no need to panic,” Phoenix sighed, getting out of bed. “I do own extra razors you know.”

“Ah.”

Well now he just felt foolish. To hide his embarrassment, Miles stayed in bed while Phoenix got dressed. He listened to the faint sound of Phoenix opening drawers, and the rustle of fabric. By the time the covers were yanked away from him (stealing the warmth with it) Miles was ready to take on the day.

“That wasn’t necessary.”

He stretched his arms, and then wandered over to the dresser. Phoenix was sorting through the top level, searching for matching socks.

“I dunno’, you seemed a bit too cozy for your own good.”

“Which level do you keep my spare clothes on?” he asked, opening the middle drawer.

“You’ve got two full suits in the closet of course, there’s a cravat or five somewhere,” Phoenix handed one to him, and turned to the bathroom. “Mostly because you keep forgetting them here. Socks though, you’ll have to borrow.”

Clothes had begun to accumulate at the Wright’s because they were spending more time together. So long as Franziska and Kay were in the country, Miles could spend the night. They could take care of Pess for a single evening, and he could get away with it. True to Phoenix’s word, everything was in place. He swapped clothes and then joined Phoenix in the bathroom. He was wrangling a second razor from the tough plastic package. With a flourish, Phoenix presented it. Miles rolled his eyes and
accepted, before turning his gaze to the mirror.

There was a definite air of scruffiness about him. His bangs were matted against the side of his head he had been sleeping on. His eyes were stubborn, only wanting to squint in the early morning. He splashed some cold water on his face to wake up, and then fought Phoenix for the shaving cream. Once they sported identical, white beards, they pushed each other trying to gain more space at the sink. It was a venture always destined for trouble.

“G’morning.”

Then Trucy squeezed between their legs so she could brush her teeth. The sink became a foamy mess, smelling of mint and aerosol.

“Morning.”

The man fluffed her hair. Trucy sighed, and reached for the comb again.

“Good morning.”

Miles angled his chin, seeking any spots which he had missed. Silvery flecks of hair caught in the harsh bathroom light. He gave the stubborn spot another passover. Phoenix- who was less cautious when handling the razor- had finished and was attacking his hair. It crackled, charging with static, and snapped bristles off the brush. When Phoenix thought Trucy wasn’t looking, he shuffled his feet on the carpet and tried to zap her. Trucy ducked out of the way at the last moment, so Miles’ stomach was jabbed instead. His hand slipped with the electric shock, and a shaving cut nicked the underside of his chin.

“Wright!”

Miles always slipped back to last names when Phoenix did something to bother him. It must have been a habit, one Phoenix shared with him, because his flustered response was, “E-Edgeworth!”

“Trucy!”

Trucy cackled, delighted with the trouble she had caused, and fled the room.

“Is it bad?”

Phoenix’s warm eyes searched his with enough concern to make the exasperation go away. Miles staunched the flow of blood with the damp washcloth offered to him.

“It stings a touch, but I may survive.”

“I hear kisses are the one-all remedy these days.”

“Just because you’re clean shaven now…”

It did help him forget the stinging.

“I got these cut for you,” Phoenix said, tossing a ring of keys. “You can lock up and get something to eat here. Preferably not my candy, but I don’t control your life decisions, so…”

Miles followed Phoenix out to the hallway.

“Which is which?” Miles asked, flipping through the assortment of keys. “And where are you going?”
Phoenix affixed his beanie to his head, and then shimmied into his windbreaker.

“Square gold one and school,” he answered, tying the laces of his running shoes. “C’mon Truce!”

“Almost ready!” she called from her room.

“To school?” he repeated, still confused.

Then from the hall closet, Phoenix took out his granny bicycle. He put Trucy’s lunch box in the basket.

“Yup. I usually give her a ride.”

To answer the further questions this caused, Trucy emerged. She was dressed for school and had her backpack ready. Phoenix gave her a boost, so she could sit on the handlebars.

“Wait, that’s dangerous!”

“Dangerous smangerous,” Trucy said. “We do this to get everywhere. It’s fun even when it’s raining because I get to hold the umbrella.”

“I can start giving her rides if you want.”

“Nope,” Phoenix nudged the ground, giving them a rolling start. “We’re not taking advantage of your niceness. It wouldn’t work with your schedule, anyway. You’d be late to all the important Chief Prosecutor meetings and stuff.”

Being late was a sacrifice Miles could accept, if it would exorcise the images of car crashes and bloodied concrete in his mind.

“But if she falls-”

The Wrights were already out the door and halfway down the sidewalk. Within seconds, they could not hear his warnings about visibility issues and concussion damage. Miles could only hope that they made it to school safely.

“Maybe lecturing him into getting a bike helmet for Trucy will help.”

Miles came home from work, carrying takeout for dinner. Franziska and Kay were discussing over multiple catalogues at the kitchen table. Both held pencils, and were listing the things they wanted to incorporate on a legal pad. When one thought the other wasn’t paying attention, they erased what was there. Miles knew this because the list had gone from four items to three, to five. Personally, he was glad that they would be the ones paying for furniture this time around. Miles also speculated on how they planned to incorporate so much into a single room. There wasn’t space for a couch and two desks. He felt two dressers weren’t a necessary addition, either. They weren’t bringing all their clothes with them every time they visited. (Were they?)

“What else could you possibly need for a single bedroom?”

“Don’t be foolish. No one keeps a gilt coffee table in their bedroom.”

“No one wants a solid glass one either,” Kay retorted.

Miles peered over their shoulders, to see what had been accomplished so far. Pictures had been circled and crossed out in thick permanent marker. The once tasteful photos of houses had become
an ink-coated mess.

“Better than that hideous feathered lamp.”

They sniped back and forth, suggesting equally outlandish things that the other would have liked. While the duo did that, Miles got out dishes and cutlery to eat with. Franziska would never say so aloud, but she was lousy with chopsticks. She needed a fork for anything that could not be stabbed.

“How did you two agree upon what your own apartment would look like?” Miles asked.

“The issue isn’t in selecting a design, it has to do with who it’s for.”

“Isn’t… this for you?”

They looked at him incredulously.

“Is this what spending time with Phoenix Wright has induced? Pointless questions you should logically know the answer to by this point?”

“Hmm,” Kay mumbled. “Fran, I don’t think we told him.”

“Ah!” her eyebrows rose in surprise. “I suppose that would cause him some difficulties. Not that it works as an excuse.”

“What are you doing?” Miles inquired, spooning noodles and broth into his bowl.

“Little brother, I know your taste is atrocious, but surely you have noticed that—”

“-everything in your house is the exact same shade of pink and gold,” Kay finished.

Unimpressed, he crossed his arms and started to glare. He tapped his finger, waiting to hear if there was a genuine explanation for their snobbery. He didn’t criticize either of them for their decisions in clothes or furniture.

“I fail to see what is wrong with matching.”

“Your office, I can understand. Every room of your house, I cannot.”

“I am perfectly happy without your unsolicited interior design advice.”

“We’ve been here two weeks and we’re already sick of it.”

“Two weeks too long, if this is beginning to become a problem for them. Besides, Phoenix would have said something by now if it was an issue… Wouldn’t he?”

The Wrights had only taken issue with the wallpaper, which wasn’t originally in his control to begin with. Phoenix was a bit of an art snob too, having once studied it. He would have mentioned if it bothered him. Not… Not as if it mattered, because it wasn’t the Wright’s townhouse to begin with. They had their own home.

“I’m not paying for this,” was all Miles said, hoping that would put an end to their hair-brained schemes. “Dinner is on the stove.”

They stood up to see what was there. Miles took his bowl to the dining room. That way, he wouldn’t have to listen to the couple scheme about his own house, while they were staying in it.
“Since when have you bought ramen?” Kay curiously asked. “I’d’ve figured you wouldn’t like all the salt.”

“The salt is fine,” Miles scoffed. “I don’t have Franziska’s sense of taste you know.”

The Wrights had reminded him that he liked it in the first place. Miles didn’t see the harm in buying it occasionally. It was faster than cooking, and went well with the rainy weather outdoors. He could watch the cloudy skies while perfectly warm indoors.

“FUCK!” Kay screamed at the top of her lungs, and gagged.

“I hope you spat that in the sink,” Miles said, not wanting to see for himself.

“I’ll clean it up,” Kay sulked. “But why is that stuff so salty? You could’ve given me a warning!”

Miles just sighed.

“Is this some kind of scheme to get us to leave? Salt poisoning?”

“You can dilute it with water you know. That is an option available to you.”

Kay was reduced to quiet grumblings.

“I happen to like the recipe,” he thought. “And the colour scheme of my house. It is not too matchy.”

...So why did he want to seek Phoenix’s approval all of a sudden?

Although he wasn’t normally one to text at the dinner table, Miles sent a message to Phoenix.

What do you think of my house?

The reply was short, typical of a person who owned a flip phone in two thousand twenty-seven.

It’s nice.

“Well that doesn’t answer my question.”

Would you live here in its current state?

This =/= seem like a text convo.

?

U want 2 talk about living sitch l8er?

No, I want to know if you would live in my house in its current state.

Kay is that u?

Wonderful, now Phoenix believed that Kay had stolen his cell phone to ask teasing questions. That was going to do wonders for Phoenix’s paranoia. While it was not beyond the realm of possibility, this entire conversation was starting to give him a headache.

The usage of butterflies as symbol in the ninth Steel Samurai season traces its roots back to the intervention scene in the finale of season eight. It is clever in that butterflies are never a symbol
associated with the Empress or her family. However, it still implies the presence of the literal monarch of Neo Olde Tokyo through the monarch species of butterfly. The episode in the gardens where the resistance meeting takes place was an early hint that there are spies loyal to the Empress among them. Monarch butterflies are present visiting flowers in the background, while the key speech about the consequences of failing goes on.

Ok u r not her.

Answer. The. Question.

Miles, I’m not talking about moving in with you over text. Trucy needs to be here too, my apartment is leased for another year, and there’s a lot for us to consider.

That Phoenix was replying in full sentences (long ones at that) showed he was being serious. It took four presses just to get an S after all. But he wasn’t asking about that!

I’m not asking you to move in. I just want to know if the furniture in my house matches too much.

Phoenix responded with a single word.

Pink.

Miles wondered if mortified was too melodramatic a word to describe what he felt.

Suddenly, another worry occurred to him.

“Does he want to move in with me? Do I want that?”

No, mortified definitely wasn’t strong enough.
Hedgehogs, Crows, and Dogs

Chapter Notes

A bit of a slower chapter, but things are going to pick up again soon. My current

guesstimate is that the end of this will be around the 31-32 chapter mark. We're almost

there!

Read, review, and enjoy!

There was only one duo who rang the bell and gave a series of recognizable knocks. The Wrights

were still doing it when he opened the door.

“Hey stranger,” Phoenix greeted.

Trucy had already slipped past him and run upstairs.

“You’re not a vampire,” Miles said, gesturing behind him. “Do I need to invite you in at this point?”

“I’m just here to drop of Truce,” Phoenix replied, placing his hands in his pockets. “Then it’s back to

studying for me.”

“Ah.”

“You were the one to make the schedule.”

That didn’t mean he wanted to see less of the man. But studying took priority, with the second half

of the exam coming in less than two weeks. It was beginning to feel like whenever he was free, the

schedule he had put together for Phoenix decided to clash. He enjoyed the demand, and found the

job a fulfilling one, but that didn’t change lost time.

“I suppose I was.”

Kay slid down the banister, scarf flapping wildly behind her. She landed with a flourish, striking

what she no doubt believed was a majestic pose. Trucy moved to try the same thing, but Franziska-

whom Trucy had run to meet on the landing- held her back.

“Are you going somewhere?” Miles asked, noting they were in coats and heavy rain boots.

“Girl’s day!” Kay replied. “You and your dear Igelschnäuzchen have the place all to yourself!”

Franziska choked when she heard this.

“Bruder, nennst du ihn nicht so, oder?” she asked, looking between them in horror.

“Of course not! I wouldn't call him that.”


“Do I want to know what any of that meant?” Phoenix chimed in, rubbing his chin.
“I can look it up for you!” Trucy offered. “I’m sure I-gel-shnow-chin isn’t too hard to spell!”

“How about you do that later?” Miles suggested to Trucy. “Perhaps when you’re far, far, away from both our ranges of hearing.”

Miles was just relieved that neither Kay nor Franziska made an effort to translate for the girl. His sense of pride wouldn’t be able to handle it. While Phoenix never did find out that the word meant “little hedgehog snout,” it still put him on an endearment kick that couldn’t be shaken.

Travel was not a large part of his life anymore. Thus, the event nested between various other tasks on his calendar had been mostly forgotten about. There were other chores to take care of, and cases to manage. The small lecture Miles had agreed to in Germany was an afterthought. As an alumni of the school, the staff were always seeking prestigious graduates to visit and give presentations.

“Sunshine? Are you there?” Phoenix asked.

Miles allowed a second pause. The sound of rain pattering against the window filled his senses, as did the cup of lukewarm tea. Remembering his drink, he took a sip, before it could decide to go completely frozen on him.

“Absolutely not and yes.”

“You spaced out there Button, in the middle of our call.”

“Ah,” Miles waved to the empty study, as if Phoenix could see the calendar he was pointing at. “Something else came to my attention. Also that is more suited for a cat than a partner.”

“If you say so Turtle Dove.”

“I associate those with the Christmas song so I would appreciate it if you didn’t.”

“Sorry.” Miles could visualize the man flinch with that misstep, as he leafed through the pages of nicknames left. “What did you realize?”

He had allowed Phoenix to try out every endearment under the sun. Phoenix came up with a list of them from God-knew-where. The man truly was a bleeding-heart romantic beneath the stubble and awful piano-playing. It was difficult to say no, when he was having harmless fun. He just wanted Phoenix to be happy...

“I’m off to Germany on the twenty-third.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, picturing what the voice on the end of the line was doing. He might be in bed, laying on his stomach with the fluffy duvet twisted near his feet, and the ideas for nicknames spread before him. His cellphone could be pinned between his ear and shrugged shoulder, as he flipped pages and crossed out failed options with a pencil.

“Truce and I can take care of Pess if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“If I let her look after Pess, I doubt Trucy will return her.”

“Have Kay steal her back.”

“Kay might get the idea that a dog would be a brilliant addition to the Yatagarasu.”

To be fair, Pess was overqualified to join the Yatagarasu. She would have been an integral part of
any team which Kay put together. And a bright gold brooch shaped like a crow would fit adorably with her collar.

“Double-stealing does seem like a problem Flitter-Mouse.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Bat.”

“And what is endearing about bats?”

“Well I thought it was cute. Anyway, she’s inspired Trucy to new heights with her tricks. Apollo accused me of paying him in chocolate coins and board game money for the week, but really Trucy had pickpocketed his wallet and switched it all around.”

“Would you like me to give her a warning about stealing? It worked with Kay for a time.”

At least, it had prevented her from stealing “unnecessarily.” Crime scenes were still bound to have something taken from them, beyond whatever object caught Kay’s eye.

“I made her find and write down the penalties for theft under and over certain amounts. It’s up on the fridge right now, so we should be good Precious.”

“You already used that one.”

“No, that was Treasure.”

“Either way, it’s a no,” Miles said, reaching for his cup.

“Yes Dreamboat.”

Hearing this, he nearly spat across the documents on his table. It wouldn’t have been easy to explain away the tea stains to the judge.

“Not while I’m drinking!” he scolded.

“How was I supposed to know? You’re too sophisticated to slurp!”

Miles sighed, acknowledging that Phoenix was right. But it was still his fault for thinking such an awful nickname would be fine.

“In what world do you think I would like that?”

“We went through the ones I thought you would exasperately tolerate me saying two pages ago.”

“Egad! You thought I would like any of those?”

“...I’m beginning to think that you’re rejecting them on purpose,” Phoenix replied, sulking.

“If I was doing it deliberately, I wouldn’t offer my constructive criticism on the matter.”

“You call that constructive?”

“You call Dreamboat an acceptable nickname?”

“I’ll head back to the drawing board if it offends your sensibilities so much.”
“We’ll come to a detente at some point.”

“Thanks for the encouragement Honey,” Phoenix sarcastically answered, before changing the subject. “So how long will you be gone?”

“Six days.”

“You can finally turn the tables on Franziska and Kay then. Ask to stay at their place and subtly start replacing furniture.”

Miles’ study was one of the few rooms of his house which had been saved. The couple had taken one look at what they deemed “a miniature replica of his office” and decided that they would leave it alone.

“I’m not certain when they plan on leaving.”

“They’re waiting for you to put your foot down.”

“I can’t just kick out my sister.”

Not only would he feel terrible for doing so, he would never hear the end of it. This would reduce the chance of being allowed to stay with her the next time he travelled.

“Tell them flying to Europe together would be cheaper than going alone. I’m sure you can get a better deal if you buy your tickets as a package.”

Phoenix was the more financially conscious of them. He could plan a budget and then stick to it. He had to, in order to take care of Trucy. This also meant Phoenix didn’t always pay his employee on time.

“Have you written the lectures?”

“I must be turning into you, because I haven’t,” Miles said, bemused. The event had only just resurfaced among the things he needed to do. With it came lists of chores and responsibilities to finish before he left.

“I’d offer to edit but my German’s a bit limited. You need a sounding board for ideas?”

Phoenix was a better writer than him, and his different view of thinking could bring something new to the subject.

“That would be appreciated.”

“Send me whatever outline you’ve got.”

“I will do that posthaste,” Miles woke up his computer, and typed out a short email to the man. He added what themes the school wanted him to focus on, and citations of some recent precedents he would discuss. “Would you like me to bring anything for you while I’m there?”

“So long as you come back, I don’t need anything else.”

“Not even chocolate?” he asked.

“Well yes chocolate,” Phoenix said, exasperated. “I was trying to be sentimental you dolt.”

“You’re sentimental enough without putting in the extra effort.”
“Mhm.”

In the background, he could hear the clicking of a keyboard. Phoenix might not be at home then. He could be at the office, alternating between studies and reorganizing the magic props into manageable piles.

“What do you think would Trucy like?”

“I’ll ask her once she and Apollo get back from their investigation,” Phoenix said. “Oh hey, I wonder who this email just came from?”

“It’s a mystery, I’m sure.”

“It is for the moment. My break time’s up, so I’ll get to it later.”

“You do that.”

“Ok, um,” Phoenix stammered. Lately, things had become awkward near the end of their conversations, though he couldn’t put a finger on why that was. “Bye.”

“Bye.”
“I promise that I’ll take really good care of Pess,” Trucy solemnly told him.

“I’m sure you will,” Miles agreed. “How many cups of kibble at breakfast?”

“We’ve already been over this,” she groaned, rolling her eyes.

“You shouldn’t have brought it up,” Phoenix stage-whispered to his daughter.

They were waiting just outside of customs at the airport. The traffic wasn’t bad that evening, especially when compared to the sights he had encountered in the past. Kay and Franziska were to the side, sipping overpriced coffee and giving them time to say their goodbyes. The reign of terror during their extended visit was finally coming to a close. Now they could conspire about the ideal colour for the wainscoting in their home, rather than his.

“How many?”

“Two and a half unless she had a treat the night before;” the girl recited.

Miles had designed a helpful guide for Trucy, so that she would have no trouble being a good dog owner in his absence. It helped quell his fears as well. He knew Trucy was responsible when put to the test, but Pess could be a handful if she wanted to. Miles wasn’t sure how Pess would take separation for almost a week. They hadn’t gone long times without seeing each other before. He might be left sleeping on the couch for a while when he got back. Keeping her happy while he was gone would mitigate whatever damages she wrought.

“What is the ideal length of walk?”

“Add a minute for every extra biscuit I give.”

“I know for a fact you don’t follow either of those things,” Phoenix interjected. “Just the other day you gave her your leftover peanut butter toast and then had a nap on the couch!”

Impossible! How had Phoenix noticed when he was very subtle about handing it to Pess under the table?

“Nevertheless,” Miles began, folding his arms

“We can have Pess call you every day if that will make you stop worrying,” he teased.

He scowled, and looked away from the Wright’s sappy, grinning faces.

“That isn’t… necessary.”

“Awww, Sweaty-“
“Don’t you mean Sweetie?”

“Nah,” Phoenix squinted at his list. “There aren’t two Es there. And you did begin to sweat when I pointed out that your dog is absolutely spoiled.”

“Ngh!”

“Are you done tormenting my brother?” Franziska called over to them

“Almost!” Phoenix replied. “Truce, go say bye to your aunts.”

Trucy did as she was told, giving them room to have a proper farewell. Phoenix’s grin became more shy than smug. Phoenix angled his head, also looking to the side. The trio were sharing hugs, and no doubt planning when Trucy could come visit them.

“I should still keep an eye out for that,” Miles remembered. “I wouldn’t put it past Kay to recruit Trucy while we’re off guard.”

“It’s kind of strange, isn’t it?”

His attention snapped back to Phoenix.

“What is?”

“It used to be the other way around,” he elaborated. “I was the one who would leave.”

Now he understood. During that time, when he had been seeing Lang, and not even considered Phoenix Wright in that sense. It felt like an eternity ago, when in actuality, it had been less than a year. That was the funny thing about time, of course. Perceptions of it changed with age, and experience. So did opinions of other people. To think that he would be in a committed relationship with the man...

“Indeed.”

“That’s all you have to say?” Phoenix asked, spreading his arms for a hug.

“It’s all I can think of.”

“Stay out of trouble,” Phoenix mumbled into his shoulder.

“I feel as if though it is I who would be saying that to you.”

“Nothing’s stopping you from saying so,” he replied. “I just figured you should know I want you back here when it’s all over.”

Phoenix clung to him a second longer. Trembling fingers ever-so-slightly dug into the fabric of his coat. Franziska was staring daggers at them now, her eyes pointedly flicking between their luggage and the clock overhead.

“We’re being glared at,” Miles warned.

Phoenix let go, and they rejoined the group.

“Take care,” Phoenix said to the women.

Phoenix offered them both a hand. Kay made finger guns, pointed in his direction.
“Right back atcha’.”

“You as well, Phoenix Wright.”

Franziska hesitated, and shook his hand with an awkward motion. She was crushing his wrist, even if it wasn’t her intention to intimidate. Phoenix cringed, and tucked away his victimized hand in his hoodie pocket.

“Where’s Trucy?” Phoenix asked, glancing around.

“Bathroom.”

“Kay.”

“S-she really is!” the thief said, holding her arms. “Fran back me up here!”

Half a second he had looked away from the trio, and now Trucy was gone. It didn’t help that she was so capable at disappearing acts.

“Even if she wasn’t, her education would hardly be lacking,” Franziska said, wagging a finger. “She would be studying under two of Interpol’s finest agents!”

“Neither of you are borrowing my daughter,” Miles snapped.

Silence.

“What are you gaping at me for?”

Had he said something without realizing it? Accidentally slipped to German? He’d been speaking in it with the couple more often, so his accent would be up to snuff for the lectures. It was probable something like that could have happened without him being aware. His question would never be answered, for it turned out they really hadn’t let Trucy stow away in their suitcases.

“There you are,” Phoenix sighed.

The man kept a protective hand on Trucy’s shoulder this time. There would be no more chances for vanishing performances that day. It would’ve been awkward to explain to security why there was a child hidden in the largest suitcase.

“Where did you think I would be?” asked the girl.

“Germany.”

Everyone double-checked that they had the essentials with them, and then they parted ways. Getting through the airport security was an art that he and Franziska had perfected over the years. Kay remained on their coattails, making sure that they didn’t fall behind on schedule. The typical fuss that many went through with their luggage was avoided, a few well-placed glares prevented any “random” selections from their group. Passports were in order, tickets weren’t lost, and they were boarding the plane with plenty of time to settle in.

The flight was a long hall, and the view from the window mostly uninteresting. City lights glimmered for a time, drawing together in clusters of lines. Then they were over the ocean, and there was nothing to see but pitch black, and his tired reflection. Miles’ original plan had been to prep a bit on the plane, review his notes for the first of his speeches. While he put in a good fight, reviewing the cue cards Phoenix had designed for him, the battle was eventually lost. He tucked them back into
his carry-on and rested his head against the cool surface of the window.

Sleep was light. Miles could hear muffled voices- the couple smothering words behind their hands. They had opted to stay awake, and were enjoying their second cups of coffee. He preferred sleeping longer to adjust to the time change, so their conversations mingled with his dreams.

Trucy wanted him to bring back the entire autobahn, or maybe teach her how to drive on it? In his car no less. He decided to import a second one from Europe, so that way if she harmed his during the drive there would still be a back up- but for some reason the manufacturers had given him the wrong shade of red. It was closer to Apollo’s blazer- the upholstery was made of Apollo’s blazer, which was why he never wore a jacket in court. Of course! It all made sense! How had he not logically realized that before?

Miles woke up near the end of the flight, because of air turbulence. Kay squeezed his arm and they practiced calm breathing together. He was fortunate that it left quickly. It was still dark when they landed, because they had flown west. It still felt like morning to him. Franziska had called their elder sister while they retrieved luggage. The woman still lived on the family estate. It had drafts, nosy servants, awful childhood memories, and how she tolerated it was beyond him. But this meant there was a driver waiting to escort them to Franziska’s not haunted, less ostentatious, apartment.

Kay fiddled and swore with her set of keys, while Franziska leaned heavily against the railing.

“Here we are.”

They stumbled inside together, leaving their bags by the door. Not in any mood to be polite or explore around their apartment, Miles kicked off his shoes and lay down on the couch.

“Wonderful. If I’m not awake by eleven tomorrow- today, wake me up.”

He fell into a pattern of relaxed breathing, and listened to their stirring around the apartment. Lights were flicked on and off, one of them dragged a suitcase away.

“I think our fish died.”

“We don’t have a fish.”

“I think someone broke in and gave us a dead fish in a bowl while we were gone.”

“That’s not a fish that’s our eel.”

“Fish are eels!”

“Is it dead?”

“I believe that is is sleeping.”

“I would like to sleep,” he reassured them, twisting onto his side.

“Sorry.”

Now that they were in, Miles thought of texting Phoenix to say that they had arrived without mishap. No luggage had been stolen or lost in the system, their direct flight had not been stalled at any point. Exhaustion won over, he wound up sending a simple “here” to the man.

And so began day one of six.
Contrary to their promise, Franziska and Kay didn’t wake him up by eleven. They were dressed for work and out the door some time in the late morning. Instead, they left a sticky note on his head, which listed where everything could be found in their apartment. There was also a warning about needing to visit with their elder sister, her child, and a dog coincidentally named Phoenix. Fortunately, he was rested enough so that he did not sleep past the lecture. Miles had time to revise, and poke around the apartment while they were gone.

From experience, Miles could tell what was Franziska’s and what was Kay’s. Both had brought their own furniture when moving in together. Some of it was old- he recognized it from their previous, separate, homes. The extra chairs for the table were new, and so was anything there had to be two of. His investigation didn’t yield anything out of the ordinary. He found where the coffee was being stored and made himself some. The weather was just mild enough to sit on the balcony, so he did. The view was naturally picturesque, full of red-roofed buildings and spaces for greenery. Traffic wasn’t too bad. He wondered how far the couple’s work was.

“I’d best practice,” he thought, glancing at his laptop. “My inflection at times is still, lacking.”

With no reason to speak the language for so long, his pronunciation had begun to slip as well. The students might find it difficult to take him seriously if he was throwing stress on the wrong syllables and disregarding accents. Miles did this throughout his late breakfast, while washing off the “late night flight” grease from his face, and during the time he got dressed. He reached the point where he was put together and ready as he would ever be.

The commute to school was quiet, and a bit isolating. No one he knew would be sneaking family or friends into the lecture, he was on his lonesome for the time being. He said nothing to the driver on the way there, choosing to fiddle with his note cards instead. They were a saving grace, but only had key words on them. Speaking would mostly come from memory, from rehearsal. While he naturally felt confident about presentation, the slight apprehension was something which could never be fully quashed. What if his subjects were too dry for them? What if they started to fall asleep? That would hardly be living up to the “incredibly successful alumni” title which had been forced upon him.

Miles tipped the driver upon arrival, and then neatened his appearance yet again. With a composing inhale, he started towards the main entrance. The school building was old, traditional-looking. The granite steps had depressions in them, from where millions of people had tread over the years. Students milled around the steps and in the gardens, clustered in their peer groups. Those who weren’t tearing their hair out over books and examinations tended to glance in his direction.

“A normal reaction,” he firmly reminded himself. “The eye is drawn to movement.”

“T-that jabot-” stammered the young person, as he walked up to the sign-in desk.

“It’s a cravat,” he corrected.

“But only one person would wear a c-crat, and then correct me when I was wrong.”

“I’m here for the-”

Miles wasn’t permitted to finish. An ID tag was given to him, which he clipped to his lapel. Then he was forced to shake hands with everyone who had been around the desk at the time. His guide was at least smartly dressed, and did not linger upon who he was.
“We originally had you in the south building’s case study room,” she said as they walked through the halls. “But several of the professors made attendance mandatory, and the number of students signing up to attend was larger than anticipated.”

“Where am I now?”

“The northern one.”

The biggest one, was what she meant. It wouldn’t be hundreds of faces looking down at him, it would be thousands. The idea suddenly had him feeling faint. Being on stage, even while in his element, easily turned daunting at the prospect.

He was given an obligatory tour of the main buildings- as if he were a postulating student, rather than an alumni of the school. Not much was changed, but there were renovations, to keep the building’s structural integrity together. Having bricks come loose or the central fireplace catch would be a problem. There were two libraries. One for modern legal information, the other for historical, and primary documents. Both were expansive, and silent as crypts. As they passed by the copper busts of the school’s founders, he noticed something.

“Are they wearing cravats?”

They only had two layers in comparison to his three, but they were close in appearance and colour. The fabric and make was noticeably less expensive. He still understood the gist of it.

“A-ah!” she said, flustered that he had noticed. “The students who were organizing this year’s alumni presentations thought it would be a good marketing campaign.”

“Did it work?” he asked, curious.

Genuine oil paintings of important legal figures also had cravats affixed to the protective glass. The vending machine had one, and so did some of the classroom doors.

“Given the unprecedented number of students who want to attend, I would say it has. You’re not um, upset with it are you? They intended to use your trademark as a way to gain awareness, but-”

He tapped his arm, musing over what the gracious response would be.

“If, in a few years, you ask Franziska von Karma to present, I suggest doing the same thing with replica of her whip.”

She grinned, and let out a barely audible sigh of relief.

“I’ll pass along the message.”

“That’s what she gets for unabashedly sticking a note on my forehead.”

They arrived at the wing’s entrance. The guide took out an enormous ring of keys, and somehow found the one needed for the lock. There was a quiet snick as the tumblers slid into place. Then she stepped aside, gesturing to the entrance.

“There you are! Good luck with your presentation.”

“Thank-you.”

He inclined his head, and waited for her to leave before opening the door.
“Of course, I’d nearly forgotten that the stage was circular,” he thought as he walked in. “That may pose a problem, when addressing the audience.”

Students were already filling space in the benches. He was on the bottom level, while the seats gradually elevated. Tilting his neck a bit, he could only just make out the faces near the top.

“How does Trucy do it?” he wondered, not for the first time.

It would probably take some of the girl’s showmanship to walk around the stage. He didn’t want to be spinning like a top, but he doubted half the students wanted to stare at the back of his head for two solid hours, either. Miles tried to recall what other professors had done when lectures were in the room. One dragged an office chair and sat down the entire time, using her foot to nudge herself around. Others had had made a point to turn, to ask questions to the class. Miles realized it was the most fluid way of running things, but he hadn’t prepared any questions to ask the group. The numbers made it impractical, and he hadn’t anticipated this being a problem. He would need to fake some then, to devise them on the spot.

“Good afternoon,” he said, testing the microphone pinned to his vest. “Is the volume fine?”

Various greetings and tired responses rained down upon him. It was starting to become a tight fit. Students were squeezing onto the benches and sitting on each other’s laps. They were also in the threshold of the upper entrances, scribbling down dates and titles with their notebooks against the wall.

“How many of you are in your final year?” he asked.

A few minutes remained until the lecture would start, so he decided to get in some practice questions.

A good number rose their hands.

“Excellent, this will be especially relevant to you then. What are some of your thoughts on the bar?”

“I hear it can cause rivalries between people who want to pass.”

“Stressful.”

“Should I do my articling during the time I’m studying for it?”

“Time-consuming.”

“Long.”

“Your cravat is a wicked fashion statement!”

He picked and chose students to answer from the crowd, making sure to give those with unfortunate seating locations a chance. That would at least make standing near the back edges, or sitting under a desk worth it. It was almost difficult to cut one off, and move on to the lecture.

“You’ve all given some quite common responses. People globally seem to agree that the qualifications for becoming a lawyer are trying, necessarily so. Different standards of teaching and expectations mean that the experience varies from country to country. Some tests go beyond difficult, and into the statistically absurd. A popular example my colleagues and I enjoy throwing around is the bar in my own country. Up until some serious legal reforms, about a decade ago, the pass rate was three percent. Even now, that number has only risen to twenty. It makes what most of you will go through little more than a cake walk.
He half-expected there to be incredulous gasps from the crowd, or complaints about how he was diminishing their future suffering at the hands of examiners. Instead, he was met with the sight of people rapidly typing, and taking shorthand notes on their papers. The rapid clicking of computer keys was almost like the pattering of rain. He waited for it to slow a bit, taking a sip of water, before continuing his introduction.

“The differences in test results isn’t always a matter of one country having a superior education system, or designers and graders who are more demanding. Unfortunately, some countries use it as a method of systematic discrimination. There are a number of reasons for this. Historically, persons such as teachers, artists, and lawyers have been targeted by oppressive regimes. Due to their specialized educations, or talents to spread political awareness, governments have sought to control those who otherwise might cause insurance…”

The overflow of attentive students was honestly flattering. He was glad the younger generation was taking such interest, that they were only partly here because of his social status. In the end, the slight grin which he’d fought to keep off his face during the lecture couldn’t go away. Miles answered the two hour’s worth of questions they had afterwards, until his face began to hurt. The questions were sillier near the end, and it became apparent that people were asking just to hear what he would say.

“Do you have any dirt on the older professors here?”

“I believe one or two have enough on me to prevent a detailed account from being given.”

“What’s your next lecture on?”

“Statutes of limitation, and how their placement on certain offenses reflects the resources of the police department.”

“Has a lot changed here?”

“The cravat obsession is new.”

The two-hour lecture and two hours of questions made four. It was four hours and many glasses of water later that they were given a reminder the next class was starting soon. With the room being needed shortly, that put an end to his discussion with the students. As he was striding down the hall (to see if they still kept his favourite brand of swiss rolls in the vending machines) he received a call. Having kept his phone off during the lecture, Miles could now see that he had two missed calls and five texts.

“F-Franziska? What is it? Are either of your harmed?”

“I need you down at the café district, right by the footbridge. Difficult witness.”

“But-”

“We’re not in jeopardy, but would greatly appreciate if you got here. Now.”

She hung up.

A scroll through his logs showed that they were all from Kay and Franziska. Realizing that his swiss rolls would have to wait, Miles immediately headed for the destination.

The area was along the river. Due to the many open-air cafés, it smelt perpetually of baking sugar and butter. The cobblestone was uneven, made more so by roots, which had escaped from the concrete benches surrounding each tree. Under the shade of the canopy, he could made out three
figures. Their faces were partially hidden behind a table’s striped parasol. Working his way through the scattering of chairs, he came to the trio. Their uncooperative witness had his back to him. He was an artist, and appeared to be more concentrated on his painting of the river, than the exasperated figures before him.

“There you are,” Kay said, wiping her brow. “Thank God you came!”

“It’s about time,” she huffed. “Only you would be able to make him cooperate.”

What were they referring to? As he approached, Miles came to understand. He shook his head in denial.

No, it couldn’t be, he hadn’t said the name!

“LARRY?!”

“What are you- HOW?”

Everything in his logical mind seemed to shortcircuit. Was there no escape from the Butz?

“His screaming really did snap the guy out of it,” Kay remarked, impressed.

“Told you it would work.”

“Wait, am I not in Europe anymore?” Larry asked in broken, heavily accented German. “Did that travel brochure lie to me? Am I back home?!”

Miles suppressed a groan, and looked at the couple in exasperation. He was not so cold-hearted that he wouldn’t help his sister with a tight spot in her job, but this was beginning to push it. This must have been some sort of karmic retribution for setting her up to present at a law school filled with whips in the distant future.

“Don’t tell me he’s involved in your investigation.”

“Ok, we won’t tell you,” Kay said.

“It seems,” Franziska paused, squeezing her arm in displeasure. “He has made a painting of the incident as it occurred.”

“Every time we tried to steal- confiscate it as evidence, he would smack our hands away.”

“Not even whipping could break his concentration.”

“Oh this?” Larry asked, pointing to his canvas. “Yeah, that’s just something I threw together. Pretty nice, don’t you think?”

Larry had made a good likeness of the riverside. The water was dappled jade, catching the sunshine which got through the canopy. Curious spectators peered over the footbridge, while, underneath, a boat appeared to be racing by. Larry was adding highlights to the wake it created, just before being distracted.

“This reflects the crime?”

“There was a chase with members of a smuggling operation. We need this painting and his
testimony.”

“You can have it at discount rate!” Larry beamed, giving a thumbs up. “Consider it an early birthday present Edgey! Only eight hundred and eight euro!”

“That much, for something you ‘threw together?’” Miles challenged. “Absolutely not.”

“C’mon man, an artist has gotta’ make a living somehow!”

“It will be harder to do that if you go to jail for obstructing justice,” Miles replied.

“O-ok, you win. Ten… euro.”

“I trust you can get his testimony without me?” Miles asked, looking at the others.

They nodded, albeit reluctantly. This freed him from an investigation which had never been his to begin with. Miles shook his head as he strode away.

He had talked for hours and answered countless questions- even the ones that annoyed him. But none of this caused the headache he immediately gained from being on the same continent as Larry.
“What is your favourite civil trial case?”

“Brock vs Ezra. It’s quite an amusing precedent.”

Questions were being asked of him, before Miles even got to the entrance of the school this time. The experience reminded Miles of his younger days, when his reputation had been a more unsavoury one. Tabloid reporters and the exploitative trash they made commentary on were less enjoyable, however. He was never fond of being heckled up and down the court’s steps, and the one time when he had been taking Pess on a walk.

Miles chose to stop walking near the display of stained glass windows. The rainbow of glass was old, thick. It was filled with bubbles, and the wire sections which fused it together looked tarnished. The scales of justice, and the silhouettes of people, representing a jury, were conveyed. The students formed a bit of a semicircle around him. Truly, Miles had wanted to see if the vending machine would have swiss rolls in stock, but it was distracting to give proper answers and search at the same time.

“Has anyone tried to impersonate you in court before?”

“In my investigations, yes, but not in court,” he paused for a moment, as a smile crept onto his lips. “The district judge noticed I was missing something… important. Needless to say the culprit did not get away with his scheme for very long.”

The group tittered, realizing exactly what that was. They really did find the quips about his cravat amusing. Miles noticed it was easier to accept that they would talk about it whether or not he became annoyed with the jokes. Laughing with them was better than being laughed at. Very few understood his decisions in style, so it was not a response he was unused to. Miles had never seen it on a scale that large, was all.

“What were standards like here when you went through legal training?”

Miles fished through his pocket for loose change. He didn’t have much exchanged currency on him, due to his trip being a short one.

“A little less modern than what you have now. I’m glad to see the school, despite its traditional roots, is planning for the country’s legal future.”

“Is there anything you’ve missed so far?”

“The swiss rolls,” he said without thinking.

They laughed again, this time, at him.

“Do you have a sweet tooth Sir?”

Of course not. That title belonged to someone else he knew.

“No, I merely felt them a good way to boost energy halfway through the morning. So long as you know how to avoid spreading the frosting across your notes.”

Miles found it almost startling that he could open up this much to the group. But their often clumsy
attempts at conversing with him were flattering, and he could appreciate their curiosity. Asking questions (even if theirs were not universally analytical) was an important skill for anyone in the legal profession to have. And he found the students were beginning to grow on him.

In his days of study, Miles had not associated with peers outside of group projects. They thought he was insufferable (which, to be fair, he was) and he found them annoying. There was no reason to talk with aspiring defence attorneys. Even the hopeful prosecutors were supposed to be beneath him. On top of that, he stuck out like a sore thumb because he was foreign, and his awful garish sense of fashion at the time hadn’t helped. (Why had he ever believed the shade of germanium pink would work?) Even if the isolation got to him, friendship wouldn’t have been allowed…

“Um, Sir?”

“I think he’s just reminiscing about swiss rolls for dramatic effect.”

“His glow is pretty dramatic.”

“Maybe he’s thinking about a time when the machine didn’t vend his order, even though he paid for it.”

“Ah! I hate when that happens!”

The respectfully puzzled chatter went on for the rest of his time at the school.

“Brother,” Franziska said as she walked by, fixing an earring into place. “We’re going out with some coworkers to talk over dinner in about ten minutes.”

“And that includes me?” Miles asked, skeptical.

Franziska leaned over the aquarium on the kitchen counter. She dropped some food in. A darting ribbon of brown appeared from underneath a rock. The eel (who really had just been sleeping) happily swam up to meet its food.

“I think I prefer dogs,” he thought, watching its greedy eating.

Miles put back the box of crackers he was about to take.

“We’re not going to talk about anything too sensitive in a place where anyone can eavesdrop. It’s more central to administrative concerns.”

“Can I borrow your white boots?” Kay yelled from the hall.

“Our feet aren’t the same size you know.”

“I’ll wad up some unimportant papers and put them in the toes.”

“You’ll crinkle every step of the way,” she answered, with an almost fond roll of her eyes. “Be sure to clean them off afterwards. I don’t want to see a speck of mud.”

“Sure thing.”

For them, getting ready was a bit of a production. Clothes were tossed, perfumes were checked, and apparently both needed help with high zippers. All that to look the same as they usually did, if not a touch older. Miles sat down on the couch and watched them rush from the bedroom to the bath and then back. Documents were gathered, thief’s tools were assembled. When they had at last readied
themselves, he stood.

The restaurant was local, but out of the way from flashier places which were designed for tourists. The interior was small, the furniture even more so. Tables for two were pushed together, depending upon the needs of the customers. About half a side was designated for their party. As Kay had made the reservation, they had to be the first ones there. Gradually, they were joined by people in discreetly coloured suits.

“They must look like a private security force surrounding us,” he noted, sensing how conspicuous their group was.

Names and positions were courteously introduced, and Miles conversed with as much interest as he could feign. To most of them, he was just the “little” brother of Franziska, nothing more. The aforementioned was in her own element, making small talk with her coworkers and discussing recent headaches. The subject of Larry came up because of this. He was scanning the appetizers when Franziska brought him up.

“He is by far the most annoying piece of work I’ve encountered,” she huffed.

“Pretentious artist type?” one woman asked.

“Worse.”

“People who have paintings and jewelry displays stolen are the worst.”

“Very demanding,” Miles agreed. “Does you know if the meat pies here are any good?”

“Depends upon the balance of vegetables you want in your meal.”

The dialogue everyone stuck to was German, even though it was not the first language of them all. Different accents which varied in strength mingled.

“Drinks?” asked the waiter as he approached their table.

He leaned over, a fan of coasters splayed between his fingers. As everyone around the table said what they wanted, one was slid towards them. Idly, Miles picked his up, toying with the corners. As he looked at the shell-pink design on it, he was reminded of something. Miles wrote it off, as it was his turn to order.

“And you sir?” asked the waiter. His monocle caught the reflection of the neon window display, flashing.

“I’m fine with water for now, thank-you,” he said, making a point to sip from his glass.

“What should we order for Lang?” Kay asked.

It was only his iron self-control that prevented him from dousing the table in ice water. Not only would he have been the little brother, he would have been the little brother who spat on everybody due to inopportune timing. Coughing heavily, Miles glared at the woman. Kay smiled at him, guiltless, and tossed her hair.

“You did that deliberately!” Miles accused.

“And so what if I did?”

“Neither of you-” Miles lowered his voice to a hiss, knowing everyone was listening. “-warned me.”
“Can’t you handle a simple dinner where he will not even be next to you?” Franziska asked, pointing her chin at the last vacant spot.

“No,” Miles instantly wanted to answer.

They were coworkers with Lang, he technically could have expected something like this would happen. Franziska had even told him ages ago that Lang was back, and performing some investigations with her. Still, his immediate feeling was discomfort.

“At this time of day, he’ll want a coffee,” Miles icily told them.

“Coffee it is,” chirped the waiter, mustache twitching in amusement.

The next few minutes were spent waiting in agony. His attention was divided between the seashell coaster and the entrance. When the chimes above the door sounded, he pretended to be deeply invested in the topic of horse racing.

“I’ve learned not to distrust the odds my sister calculates,” Franziska said.

“She sweeps us every race,” Kay added. “And now my new niece beats me at poker all the time. It’s awful.”

“Kay!” Miles reprimanded. “You got into a game of poker with Trucy? I thought Franziska would have stopped you, but clearly, I placed too much faith in her.”

She squinted at him funny.

“Shouldn’t you be upset that I was gambling with a minor?”

“In the same vein, I would have to be upset that the sun rises in the east, rather than the west. Trucy doesn’t actively seek challengers, but she tends to find hapless friends and family members anyway.”

“I wasn’t helpless- hapless- is that really a word?” Kay turned her head, and then widened her eyes with false shock. “Agent Lang, you made it!”

“I tied up my problems,” Lang slowly replied, as their gaze met. “Faster than anticipated.”

Eyes swept across him, looking for changes. Miles subtly did the same, but found little.

“Ah, hello…”

“Miles.”

“…you.”

“Good evening.”

Even in his own ears, the greeting sounded too formal.

“Hey,” Lang pulled out his chair and sat down.

“Y-yes?”

“This is only…” Lang glared at the others, who studiously began to read their menus. “It’s only gonna’ be awkward if we let it be. So let’s not.”
Straight and to the point with his communication, something Miles had become a bit unused to after moving back. It was an important skill for someone like Lang, who had to manage other people. He was unguarded in a strangely revealing sense. Acknowledging the situation made Miles feel vulnerable as well. Then it passed, and he gave a curt nod.

“I agree.”

“You know,” Kay said, turning to Miles. “Last I heard from Sebastian, you’re part of the office betting pool on when Apollo and Klavier Gavin are going to become official.”

His answer had been sarcastic when Payne asked him if he wanted to place a sum. Absolutely not sincere! Someone must have misheard the conversation.

“Don’t be foolish, I’ve done no such thing, and I wouldn’t bet on coworkers.”

The agent sitting to his left cut in, stopping the disagreement before it could worsen, “What’s something we would make a betting pool on?”

“How about the next type of case we’ll be assigned?” Kay suggested.

“We’re getting to tourist season,” Lang replied. “So my money’s on major robbery.”

“I’m thinking political assassination.”

“Robbery as well, over five hundred thousand,” Franziska said.

They began to fish around their wallets and pocket books, coming out with money for the betting pool. A man took down the amounts everyone was contributing as they went around the table.

“I’ll say anywhere under that amount then.”

“Mass murder,” someone piped up. “Following the same tourist logic.”

“My,” said the waiter. He came to their table balancing a tray of drinks. “It certainly sounds like you’re having a morbid conversation. Now who ordered the cranberry juice?”

The first round of orders was laid out. As Miles watched this, an odd feeling pestered him. It was akin to the sense of déjà vu, yet more alarmed...

“You guys put in anything for me?” Lang asked, glancing at the kitchen doors.

“Coffee,” he said quietly.

“Tch, I should’ve figured that you would remember.”

There was a lull in the conversation. Those who had their drinks took sips, or stirred in drips of lemon with their straws.

“So, Agent Lang,” Kay interrupted, smiling at them both. “What type of gambling troubles have you gotten into?”

Lang gave a look which seemed to ask if Kay was being serious.

“That had been our subject of discussion,” Miles said, shaking his head. “Although it’s a result of your own hubris Kay.”
“How was I supposed to know she was some kind of poker wizard?”

“I believe she prefers the term Poker Magician.”

Kay’s face went pale, drawn, as she seemed to understand something.

“Magicians can switch cards!”

“You’re only now remembering she’s a magician?”

“What’s this about a magician?” Lang asked.

This was only going to be awkward if he let it be. He just needed to be dignified, not come off as someone who was bragging. Casual, reserved, a passing remark.

“His daughter,” Franziska said over the rim of her drink. “She’s quite talented.”

“Ngh!”

“You’ve trained Pess to do magic tricks?” Lang asked, even more confused.

“She’s. Human.”

Franziska sighed, as if the whole ordeal was too much for her.

“Trucy is the daughter of his partner,” she explained, practically pulling teeth.

Contrary to Miles’ expectations, the man’s face lit up. He gave a toothy grin at the news.

“Really?”

“I found more family than I expected, moving home.”

This revelation came back to him on occasion, ever since Miles had first thought of the group as family. It was soft, glowing warm, and never seemed to hurt like his other strifeful emotions did.

“S’good to hear that you’ve got a bit of a pack now. I was half expecting that you’d just turn yourself into a crazy old dog man.”

“As opposed to a crazy cat lady?”

“Yeah,” Lang nodded. “Joke’s on me I guess, because I’ve got three of ‘em running around my place now.”

“What could you possibly be doing with three dogs? Was two not enough?”

“Back in Zeng Fa I was out jogging, and then this borzoi started following me. Not that you could tell under all the dreadlocks. It took three hours for them to groom her down.”

Lang took out his phone, showing the before and after pictures. What appeared to be a tumbleweed with paws transformed into a sleek, elegant-looking dog. Miles leaned across the table to get a better look. When his sight flitted upwards, he saw that Lang had moved too.

“Coffee,” the waiter announced, upon his return.

He took out a new coaster, placing it before Lang. The china cup was hurriedly set upon the symbol (it seemed different than the others, perhaps the shell type?) as Miles watched. Then, the waiter did
something stranger when he poured the drink. Miles recognized the subtle flick as a gesture Trucy made, in tricks where an object was revealed from up her sleeve.

“Thanks,” Lang said, immediately reaching for his coffee.

“DON’T!”

Miles yelled without considering the waiter might be armed. A shot fired, and a retaliatory one followed. The chimes above the door clanged loudly as someone ran into the streets. Almost everyone at the table had a weapon of some kind, and had leaped in reaction when the guns went off. Chairs and tables were overturned as a result, their drinks smashed against the floorboards. When the racket settled, there was no sign of the waiter. A patron lay dead on the ground, gun still clutched in his hand. Spilling from his trenchcoat were more concealed weapons. Enough to make it clear that he wasn’t just an average citizen.

“There goes dinner,” Franziska muttered, rubbing her temples. “Secure the scene. Attempted assassination on one of our own falls into our jurisdiction. I will call headquarters and inform them.”

This broke them out of their stupor.

“Thanks,” Lang said, his eyes still a touch wide. “How’d you pick that up?”

“I recognized deKiller’s card, and I saw he was going to slip something in while pouring.”

“Good catch.”

“T-thank-you,” he nodded, swallowing.

“Do ya’... Do ya’ mind?”

“Pardon- oh, my apologies.”

The hand he had grabbed Lang’s with still clung on. Lang had the handle between his fingers, but the cup had shattered as the bullet passed through. Their eyes met, and for a second, there was something. It went away when Miles realized they were the wrong shade of brown. Ochre instead of chestnut, and the shape was all wrong.

He glanced aside, hurriedly.

“Looks like nobody won that bet.”
Because of his intentions when he set out to shop, Miles was alone. Miles had taken a certain idea to heart. He would be safely in his home country by the time the delivery arrived, meaning that he would not have to deal with the brunt of their anger. Unless they decided to take a flight directly to his doorstep.

A slight glimmer drew his attention. Had a store clerk not been moving the display, it would have flown over Miles’ head. His initial thought was that the hue of gold matched Phoenix’s locket. Kay could joke all she wanted about how he liked things that went together, but there was more to it which had him lingering. The centerpiece was crystal, Miles knew this from the price next to it. The offset stones were perhaps sapphires, or tanzanite. Phoenix’s favourite colour either way. It wasn’t showy, it obviously wasn’t even the most expensive in the store. It was… just enough.

Miles didn’t believe in foolish notions such as fate, or destiny. There was coincidence, statistical probabilities. He was in control of his own future, and the decisions that he would make. But quite impulsively, Miles found himself entering the store and speaking with the salesperson. This worsened when it turned out it wasn’t just for promises, it was part of a set. If the rose gold and spinel version wasn’t suited to his exact tastes, nothing else was.

That was how Miles left a jewelry store he never even caught the name of, with two rings burning a hole in his pocket.

He didn’t even care for the idea of marriage. That was a part of him which would never change. It was worthless in every sense of the word. People longed for the meaning it conveyed, the idea of eternal dedication on a slip of paper.

“One doesn’t need to be married to feel… To feel… Is that, what I feel?”

When he knew for certain, they could be put to use, sans licences, and him clamouring for a ceremony. Until then, they would be hidden in the back of his sock drawer.

The part of the terminal Miles waited in was sunny. It was the stereotypical setup for an airport; with expansive windows giving a view of the runways. Multicoloured windsocks fluttered, and distant figures hustled across the asphalt. He was waiting for boarding, when the storm of texts came in.

*Miles Edgeworth, what the hell is this ugly lamp doing in my kitchen?*

*Whatever are you talking about?*

Of course, Miles knew exactly what Franziska was upset over. His sister sent the picture anyway. The lamp was hideous, pineapple-themed. Garish yellow covered the cross-hatched base. The colour of the paint looked more spoiled banana than tropical pineapple. The shade consisted of feathers. Green, inverted feathers, which were likely meant to resemble the leaves of a pineapple plant. It was
the most lurid, nausea-inducing piece of furniture Miles could find in the store. That made it ideal for his revenge.

*It goes with the new carpet in your bathroom.*

**THE WHAT**

*And the curtains in the den.*

Then Kay started texting him, equally disturbed. Miles set his phone to airplane mode. This meant his cell would light up like a fireworks display the moment he got home, but, it was entirely worth it.

“That will show them,” Miles thought, smug. “Too matching my foot!”

It was dark upon arrival, but Miles still had the energy to stop by the Wright’s and pick up Pess. The moment he approached, the excited barking started. Pess must have known that it was him. Hopefully, she would not be overly upset that he had left her for almost a week.

This proved correct. Trucy held her back by the collar, but upon seeing it was him at the door, she let go. Pess running into him was the equivalent of being hit by a small car, but Miles didn’t care. She continued to whine and nudge his hands, demanding affection.

“Yes, I missed you too,” he soothed.

She refused to calm down. Pess brought him two shoes, and then a toy. She kept wagging her tail. She was trying to make it up to him in some way, as if it was her fault that he had been gone for so long.

“I was always coming back you silly thing.”

“That’s good to hear,” Phoenix dryly commented. “You have a safe flight?”

Miles could hear the man padding down the hall to meet him, but kept his attention focused upon Pess. It was near impossible to see around her anyway. The immense amount of fluff obscured most of the hall- she needed to go to the groomer’s soon- and Pess just wanted to be cuddled.

“Did she behave?”

“Yeah, but she moped for a bit,” Trucy answered. “Pess felt better after we watched some *Steel Samurai*, just like you said would help.”

“Which season?”

“Four. Starting from when the Copper Canine was first introduced.”

“Her favourite,” he mumbled, tousling Pess’ ears.

“Did you have a safe flight?” Phoenix repeated, sounding a bit miffed.

“I’m here in one piece aren’t I? How was she on walks? Did you get dragged around much?”

“Not at all,” said Trucy. “I honestly thought you were making that up to scare me about responsibility.”

“She always pulls on the leash, no matter how many times I’ve told her not to.”
“How were the students?” Phoenix asked.

“In a minute,” Miles dismissed. “Did she-”

“How do I have to push you over as well to get some acknowledgement around here?” Phoenix asked, exasperated.

“Awww, we’ll stop teasing you,” Trucy mockingly said.

“Truce? You were supposed to be on my side with the joke here.”

“Sorry, I saw an opportunity and I took it.”

What were the Wrights talking about now? Trucy called for Pess to come over. With the excitement out of her system, she willingly did. Miles dusted some of the long hairs off his pants, and then straightened his bangs. When Miles happened to look up from his clothes, something invisible struck him in the chest. He was reeling, winded. Comprehension of what he was seeing came to him in distant snippets.

Phoenix was without his usual knit hat, or the matching grey hoodie and sweats. He was clean shaven, not in his usual sloppy method either. There were no leftover patches of stubble, no nicks of the razor along his jawline. And he had done battle with the comb, subduing his feathery hair into the only style it could hold.

“Your suit is finished!”

“Yup!”

Phoenix spun on his socked feet, his coattails swishing with him in a blur of cobalt. Miles knew it was undignified to gape but couldn’t help it.

“It arrived a little while ago, and I figured I should make sure everything was in working order, just in case it needed to be sent back.”

“They know what they’re doing.”

More than that. It was...

“So, what do you think?”

Miles didn’t think anything. His entire world had become the figure in center hall. Phoenix was alight under the soft glow of the lamp; radiating the feeling which seemed to wash over him like music.

“It looks like you broke him.”

“Hah, seems like I did.”

Phoenix offered him a hand up from the hard floor, which he took.

“Now are you willing to talk about your trip?” Phoenix asked.

“What did you bring me back?” Trucy added. “Jewelry? Something edible?”
Miles smiled not a bit mischievously, never taking his eyes from the man.

“You’ll just have to check the glove box in my car and see.”

That got Trucy out of the room quickly, giving them the privacy to embrace. The fabric of his blazer was still downy soft from being unwashed, and smelted new.

“You’re going to spoil her,” Phoenix sighed. “Then what am I going to do?”

“You’re the one who’s more lax with discipline.”

“Home ten minutes and you’re already picking fights,” Phoenix joked.

“As if you’re any better.”

“I’m glad you came back.”

“Where did you think I was going?”

“Away.” Phoenix came to rest his head on his shoulder. Miles could imagine that the man was listening to his breathing, to the rapid beating of his heart. More softly, he echoed, “Away.”

Miles was jarred out of the quiet moment when a discovery came to him. Phoenix had been alluding feelings. Not just in the hall, but with their goodbye at the airport. When Phoenix hadn’t been visiting, those years were lonely. He had one daughter, a “close friend” who sought to isolate and destroy him. Not even Larry, God, not even Larry. The reminder of those experiences couldn’t have been pleasant. He cursed his lacking emotional intelligence for causing this. He should have made a conscious effort to be thinking during their farewell.

“Stop dwelling on mistakes,” he berated himself. “Show you’ve figured it out.”

“Phoenix, I-I-”

“Y-yes?”

“Missed you.”

Their fingers intertwined, squeezing. In a strange way, the pressure was inviting, familiar. To him, it was clear as any verbal answer.

They let go when Trucy returned, because she needed a hug as well. Pess, not wanting to be left out, then expected similar treatment.

“You want to talk about your trip now or later?” Phoenix asked. “It’s getting a bit late.”

Checking the clock, he nodded.

“It’s a school day tomorrow,” Miles agreed. “And you have to study up for the next assessment I’ve prepared.”

“Don’t remind me.”

“The actual exam is coming shortly you know.”

“Ugh. Double don’t remind me.”
They parted ways for the evening, but not without promise to catch up at a later time.
Denouement

Chapter Notes

This is the last- for lack of a better term- true chapter of the story. I wound up writing two short epilogues. They didn't fit well together as a single chapter, so I divided them. Thus, there is where I will say my goodbyes and give thanks.

To those who followed along, leaving kudos and wonderful comments, never think that I didn't appreciate your support. Thank-you for reading this far, it means a lot to me.

Tiny note before I go: with this finished, all my time can be devoted to the Illusion of Control. (Final exams? What are those?) Check it out if you like artsier prose, angst, and/or casefics. I can almost guarantee you'll be in for a ride.

Well, here's where we part ways! For the last time...

Read, review, and enjoy!

Studying was tough in the time drawing close to the second exam. Phoenix went through a host of trials. There were lengthy pages of multiple choice for him to fill out, a hundred questions for every day. Next there were quizzes, tests, and other types of legal documents that had to be thrown in for good measure.

The solicitor part of the bar looked at contract law. This ranged from business to property, as well as insurance. It was vital to understand the world of agreement interpretation, and what different financial statements were supposed to look like. Phoenix was tested and prepared in every way which Miles could think of. They covered the bases, studied from different angles, and made sure that his critical thinking was up to snuff with the pure legal knowledge.

Even so, watching the man walk off to take the second exam had Miles worrying. There was so much to be aware of, and simple flubs could build up, until it resulted in a failing grade. Like the previous time, he was restless throughout the day, unable to separate his mind from what could be going on in the examination hall.

When he went to pick Phoenix up, the man was conveniently waiting on the steps of the building. There was a flock of students around Phoenix, who seemed to be looking at him with skeptical, wide-eyed expressions. It was impressive that they still had energy to listen to whatever the man was saying. As Phoenix caught sight of him, he strode over.

“What about the end of your story?”

The students chased Phoenix to his car. They were like confused ducklings, following a hen instead of their mother.

“Here’s my ride!”

Phoenix hopped into the passenger seat and unabashedly kissed him on the cheek.

“Those ruffles!” someone babbled, excited.
“Cravat,” they unanimously corrected.

“But that means you’re- and that you- you’re Phoenix Wright! You actually did know what you were talking about!”

“Was there any doubt?” Phoenix teased.

“Say goodbye to your friends,” Miles interrupted, adjusting the rearview mirror. “I can’t idle here.”

Phoenix gave the crowd a tiny salute.

“W-wait, sign my bar exam ID!”

“Can you hire me when I graduate?”

“What was the answer to question one hundred fifty-seven?”

“Pay my student loans!”

“See you guys around!”

They drove off before the mob could worsen. The students tried to follow, a short burst of speed taking over their systems, but it quickly died out. They had just written a day-long exam after all. Even Phoenix leaned hard against the back of his seat, chest heaving.

“Corrupting our youth?” Miles asked, amused.

“I’m no Socrates,” he replied, with a goofy expression. “Our legal system’s reform starts with the kidlets after all. Someone’s got to inspire them.”

Suddenly, Miles visualized an influx of lawyers who would wear unstylish ruffles, or comb their hair into spiky formations. He could only hope the future wouldn’t come to resemble that.

Once they got home, they fell into bed together.

“I’m not sleepy,” Phoenix said, kicking off his shoes. “Just tired.”

“You know what the funny part is?”

“What?”

“I’m tired too.”

For better or for worse, it was over. During the coming months, they could do nothing but fret over when the results would be distributed.

Together, they stared at the ceiling, blinking against the fatigue. Eventually, Phoenix turned on his side. Miles did the same, so they were facing each other. He took Phoenix’s hands in his own, and started to caress the circlet around his wrists. Phoenix sighed, as some of the pain eased up. He had obviously been too drained to do the habitual motion himself.

“Do you want me to ask about it?” he asked, after a period of relaxed silence.

“Nah. We can save that talk until Truce gets home from school.”

“Alright.” There were sharp red crescents near the ends of Phoenix’s palm, and gradually fading
lines across it. That was from all the writing. Heat radiated from them. Miles pressed his thumbs against the spots, working some feeling back into them. “Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

“When I was in the mid-point after lunch break, I suddenly started to hear you lecturing me about checking the indices if I wasn’t sure.”

“And did you?”

“Of course,” Phoenix rolled his eyes. “The insults just got worse when I didn’t.”

Miles snorted a bit, wondering what exactly Phoenix heard. Thinking back to his imaginings of the man at his desk, he could guess what they might sound like.

“Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

“While I was at work, I began to mentally run through all the instructions I gave you… Particularly focusing on using your resources properly.”

“You mean you were calling me a ‘stubborn lout’ telepathically the entire time?”

“I don’t know about that,” Miles said, even though that had been the exact phrasing he’d gone with. “You’re being hoaky and-”

“-sentimental,” Phoenix finished, grinning a cat’s grin.

Miles let go, to cross his arms in disagreement.

“That wasn’t telepathy. It was merely a good-”

“-estimate of my natural responses.”

“WRIGHT!”

Phoenix’s impish laughter was like waving red before a bull. He would just have to turn about the situation, and see how the man liked it.

“I bet you could-” Phoenix started.

“-figure out my thoughts if you tried.”

Deducing how to perform the trick, Miles smirked right back. Phoenix had steadily become more open with his reactions, which made it easier for him to anticipate what the man was thinking. Whenever he made that particular face, he was feeling cornered, and would probably begin sweating bullets.

“E-Edgeworth!”

“I knew it!”

“What?”

“Sometimes you’re too smart for your own good.”

Then Phoenix did something he couldn’t predict; he threw a pillow. It hit him smack in the face. From that point, resting quickly dissolved into a journey for revenge.
Miles would not soon forget the day the test results arrived. He was in the break room when Gumshoe’s confetti began to rain from the ceiling. But that should have been impossible, because Gumshoe wasn’t in the prosecutor’s office, and there was no one to be throwing it. The rain of multicoloured shapes appeared to be endless. Fellow prosecutors glanced around, confused. Miles wasn’t fazed by the situation, so none of them were not overly worried. As he snagged a blue diamond from mid air, Miles understood exactly who was causing the phenomenon. An eternity ago, he had cut out paper shapes with someone. The same someone who was likely behind the magical sight.

Then Phoenix burst into the room. He was giving Trucy a piggyback. His daughter had papers clutched in her victorious fist, which she waved around. With her free hand, she threw more confetti at those in range.

“I guess you failed,” Miles joked, breaking everyone from their stupor.

Trucy scrambled down from his back and showed the test results. He couldn’t see what was written on them; Trucy was too full of energy to stand still. Phoenix whooped loudly. Abruptly, he was seized by the shoulders. Miles knew what was coming the moment he looked into Phoenix’s triumphant eyes.

“Not in front of my-”

A hand slid to the small of his back, and he was dipped into a short kiss. Miles was too elated to feel self-conscious for long. He glared in the direction of the wolf-whistles, but otherwise didn’t pay mind to their reactions.

“Whew.” Phoenix made a pained expression, and then let go of him. “Remind me to never do that again.”

“I will do that,” Miles promised. “Especially if it’s in front of everyone I work with.”

Phoenix griped about his back a bit longer, and how giving Trucy a lift hadn’t helped the situation. Confetti was still falling. It was a bizarre rainbow snow, something he had come to associate with victories in his life. In their lives.

“Phoenix, I’m… proud beyond words.”

The studies, the endless trouble, all of it was worth it to see the man happier, less fearful of those around him. With a goal to work towards, he had started putting his life in a semblance of order again.

“I couldn’t have done it without you.” Phoenix cupped a hand to his face, brushing away some of the confetti in his bangs.

“Flatterer,” he grumbled, his cheeks and ears flush with embarrassment.

“It’s true. I l-”

Their little audience was still present, and the pride of the moment was draining. Phoenix wasn’t even signed in with the security desk; there was no visitor’s tag present on his person. Miles felt a bit ridiculous now, unprofessional. It was one thing to be sharing a moment in privacy, and another in front of all his subordinates.

“You don’t have to say anything more,” he comforted, drawing the conversation to a finish. “I understand.”
“B-but—”

Miles looked towards Trucy. She was in the corner with Gavin and company, demonstrating her never ending tricks. There appeared to be many advertisements for her next magic show printed on the star bits of paper.

“Trucy,” Miles said, looking at the girl. “As inspired as this is, I certainly hope you have a way to tidy it up.”

“Don’t worry,” she scoffed. “I’ve got it covered!”

Miles couldn’t help but thing that Trucy literally had everything covered. Not a surface of the break room was visible under the shreds of paper. They would be finding hearts and flowers for weeks to come at this rate. In spite of the havoc the Wrights had brought with them, the good news outweighed it.

The rest of the day, he walked around with a foolish spring in his step.
“Herr Edgeworth.”

Things were uncomfortable between them still. Miles had apologized long ago, but that couldn’t change the facts. It was awkward in a way which neither person would acknowledge, even though everyone else wanted to point it out to them. He understood Klavier’s continued aloofness, that pushing hard would worsen things.

“Yes?”

Miles was surprised to see that Klavier was giving a faint, almost pained smile.

“Your choice in jewelry is new. Quite stylish as well. Are you hopping on the bandwagon?”

Phoenix, the utter maniac, had gone out and spent real money on a second tattoo. Thus, Miles had to follow up on his word, and get his ear piercings redone.

“It was more of a personal choice, than trendsetting,” Miles told Klavier. “But thank-you.”

They parted ways, walking to their respective offices. Just as Miles was taking off his coat, Phoenix called him. It was his first day in court, and he was with the Agency’s newest hire. Miles didn’t know many of the details of the case or new lawyer yet.

“How prepared do you feel?” Miles asked.

“Pretty prepared for this,” Phoenix answered, before mumbling to himself, “Now how do I use the court record again?”

“Phoenix Wright!”

“I’ll be fine,” he quickly said. “I was just teasing. Mostly.”

“For the sake of my sanity, I hope you are.”

“Oh yeah, that’s kind of the reason I’m calling you. I figured if you heard about me from the newspaper again, I’d be sleeping on the couch for the next week.”

“But we don’t live together.”

“I can picture you coming over every day and sleeping in my bed so I would have to stay on the couch.”

That was quite angry then.

“What is it?” Miles asked, with a growing feeling of dread in his stomach.

“My client’s an orca whale. But I’ve got the case completely under control so you don’t need to freak out or anything.”
“Say that first part again, slowly.”

“M-my client is… an orca whale. I’m doing a murder case.”

Miles had half a mind to hang up on the man then and there. Hours of study, immeasurable stress at the hands of the bar exam, and this was how Phoenix was going to return to the legal scene?

“Well, it’s certainly a return that fits his reputation.” Miles thought, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Anything less and he wouldn’t be the man I know.”

“You still there?”

How was he supposed to formulate a calm response to that question?

From ether, an answer made its debut. The phrase came to him easily now. It was no more difficult than greeting a person, or waving farewell. There was no end to the things he could learn, from a childish game of open-ended questions. It would keep him level-headed, in the face of the exasperation he wanted to vent.

“Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

The period of quiet returned. Phoenix seemed incapable of articulating. Or perhaps, he was assessing what his answer should be. Then, Phoenix spoke. His voice was thick, garbled in his tangled emotions; trying to hold back and failing immensely.

“I’m in love with someone.”

His reaction was swift in cutting all other thought about the world.

“Tell me.” Words began to abandon Phoenix at the worst possible time. “Tell me something I don’t know about you.”

Miles stared at the cellphone in his palm. He wondered if he heard what the lump of metal seemed to have relayed. Miles knew the truth to that question, just as he knew the answer to those words.

“I love you too.”
The townhouse felt lived in, by more people than himself.

His sister and Kay had put their own touches in Miles’ home, donating furniture and replacing it with their own finds. Trucy had deceived him into getting a bedroom as well. Complete with orange paint, a bunk bed, and the sweeping view of the boulevard from the window seat. Even Larry had left his mark- literally. The grass in his backyard was dead in places, from where his hazardous display of fireworks had been set off. Lastly, Phoenix had picked the colour of his room- their room.

The boxes had returned. They were stacked in the halls, and the most inconvenient places for him to trip over. The boxes were cardboard, mostly. They split at the seams and were taped up again, in a gradually failing cycle.

Magic, allegedly, did not extend to Trucy’s furniture-moving ability. She was capeless- as it had gotten snagged too many times while lifting- and helping wrangle an office chair. Phoenix’s work space was going to be in the basement. They wouldn’t be able to drive each other crazy with legal shenanigans, so long as an entire floor was between them. Or so Miles hoped.

Trucy had been steadily (and not very subtly) moving more of her clothes and magic props to her room, long before they had even discussed the possibility of living together. Because of that, their efforts were centered more around Phoenix.

The aforementioned pleaded “weak back” after carrying just five boxes, which meant Phoenix was relegated to unpack what they brought.

Casually, Miles joined the man in their room.

“This is the last of your clothes,” Miles announced, putting the box on the carpet.

“Great.”

Phoenix kneeled over, peeling back the tape. Without hesitation, he took out the heap of unfolded shirts, and dumped them in the top drawer of his dresser.

“Those are going to wrinkle terribly,” Miles said, brushing the dust from his palms.

“Even if I was worried about my t-shirts being wrinkled, I packed the iron.”

“I have one too.”

“I don’t like the settings on yours.”

“Phoenix Wright: Iron Connoisseur.”

And to think he had asked the man to move in with him.

“That’s really it?” Phoenix asked.

“I believe,” he turned away, pretending to fix the bed’s mussed duvet. Then Phoenix couldn’t see his face. “Some of your old clothes stored in my dresser. I would appreciate having the room back.”

“For what?” Phoenix replied, voice full of snark. “Extra socks?”
“Have you seen the state of my sock drawer?”

“No.”

“Then look at it.”

The dresser rattled as Phoenix pulled out the drawer. He let his focus slide to the pillows, repositioning them so they were upright again. With a delicate hand, he brushed some lint from the pillowcase, smoothing out the folds.

“Well, there sure are a lot of socks in here.”

“A lot of your socks.”

From the corner of his eye, he could tell Phoenix was reaching, taking what was his.

“You make it sound like- like-”

His voice ebbed, coming to a weak stop.

“Like what?” Miles retorted, pretending to be argumentative. But the smile gave it away. He knew it was there, could feel his mouth betraying the act.

Bundles of socks littered the ground. Phoenix had been holding them at one point. But now something tiny, something gold nestled in his cupped hands.

“What is this?” Phoenix whispered.

“You’ve never seen one? They’ve been in style for seventy-five thousand years or so. I thought it would be a nice housewarming present.”

“But why would you get it? You don’t like the concept of marriage. Or weddings.”

“Well I like-” his words were fleeing. The confidence, all the internal rehearsals of what he would say to Phoenix, it had gone. His face was starting to burn up. The air conditioning may as well have not been on for how he reddened. “I love you.”

“Oh.”

“Are you happy with the design?” Miles asked, self-conscious. “I could still return it and find something better. I personally think diamonds are tacky, but if you would prefer that to-”

Phoenix stepped over the socks, to touch his wrist.

“If you gave me an elastic band and then called it a bracelet I would wear it.”

“You would not.”

“Alright,” he beamed. “I would probably launch it towards your face. That’s the instant thing which comes to my mind when I have a rubber band. But then I would pick it up and wear it.”

“Do you like it?” Miles repeated.

“I love it. I love you. Was it part of a set?”

“Yes, I have it,” he clumsily felt his pockets, searching for the box. When he first put it there, the
weight had been conspicuous and leaden. Now he struggled to find it. Perhaps that had to do with his trembling fingers. Phoenix gently eased the box from his grasp, and popped it open. Phoenix laughed, twisting the band so its jewels caught the summer sun.

“Did you get this because you wanted a ring to match your earrings?”

“I saw yours first,” Miles defended. “Realizing they were a pair just finalized my decision.”

“Shall I put it on for you then?”

“We’re not getting married you know.”

“So?”

Phoenix pulled it from the box, and took his limp hand. Miles couldn’t tell which of them was shaking worse, as the ring was fitted on him.

“Phoenix?”

“Yes?”

“I think it was supposed to go on the other l-left.”

“R-right! I mean ok!”

The ring was hastily pulled off and put on the correct side that time. It was his turn, then. His shaking lessened, and he managed to put it in place.

“There. We’re all-”

“Yeah,” he nodded, sniffing. “Yeah.”

The rings were cold, squeezing feebly; A reminder of all the times they had joined hands and done the same. They ended up admiring them, too overwhelmed for mere words. They weren’t needed, anyway, for the message was clear.

Welcome home.

Fin

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!