Let Them Live (Gods Do Not Love)

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**Let Them Live (Gods Do Not Love)**

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**Summary**

It was a mystery to the world where Sky Flames originated. Skull, once known as Ra, the Golden, the Giver of Life, had no desire to tell the world they were from him. There was a reason he had convinced the world his primary Flame was Cloud.
Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

His eyes were old.

Not that anybody noticed. Not that he let anyone notice. He had learned long, long ago that people died. That they all died, and he would be forced to watch them wither, and return to dust from which they came, unending as he was. It was a pain that never faded. An agony that compounded itself, multiplying with every death of those he claimed as his own.

Perhaps that was why he had suppressed his nature so intensely as to have his Secondary become so powerful it was believed to be his primary. Perhaps that was the reason he chose to submerge himself in what would eventually come to be called Cloud Flames.

Skull De Mort was not his name. It had never been so, only a stage name used as he traveled the world. It was the newest in a long, long line of alias. It had been so long since Skull had heard his name spoken aloud he sometimes thought he might forget it. There were days when even the sound of it spoken out loud gave him pause, as if it meant nothing to him.

It would be entirely impossible to forget it, however as he was pictured in the World's history books. Written about as myth and legend, a fictional creation, not real, never real. Sometimes Skull wanted to laugh about it. Other times he wanted to rage. These people who did not live as he had, who proclaimed all the answers. These ignorant people who refused to believe in what they deemed as ‘impossible’. Narrow minded fools Skull detested.

But as time dragged on and there was less bright precious things to hold on to, he remembered the words of his lioness, of his little one, his only daughter.

Be good to our people, Father. Be a Just King, a compassionate and powerful god. Know I will find you again, this will not be the end. Let your fire light the way for them, and be my guiding light back to your side.

He would not destroy the flourishing people around him, the people his dying daughter asked him to watch over and guide with her dying breath. He would be kind, and compassionate. He would be strong, and he would wait. He would watch for his lioness among these people so different to those who had worshiped him, and yet his people all the same.

The ones his daughter held so dear, the three others who she had grown up with and they who had
earned his affection and acceptance, they were devastated by her loss. Not that, when their own time came, he didn’t feel as if his legs had been cut out from under him, but his cherished one’s murder had ripped his heart from his chest, taken the light from his eyes and the joy from his life.

The subsequent reaping of his lands in the search for her murderer, the one enemy he could never completely annihilate. An enemy he saw every single night, not just in nightmares, though those existed as well, but an enemy he stared down.

His rage had shaken the skies, when it was discovered that Apep, the Great Serpent had killed his lioness with poison the color of infected blood. He had raged like he had never done before, and it had been so great, so intense, that Ra had driven Apep from the sky. For the first time since they clashed, Ra had set his burning eyes upon the God of Chaos with the soul deep intent to murder him.

Ra’s rage had been so powerful, his desire to see his daughter’s soul rest in peace, freed of this God, so all consuming he had succeeded in driving Apep out of the sky. Had driven the serpent to ground, brought him as close to death as could be for an immortal, and kept him there. Then he had buried the husk of a god in the sands of his ancient home, never to touch the sky again, confined to darkness and isolation. An immortal’s ‘death’.

Once, many, many years ago, the world had known him by his name. Devoted worshippers, wary enemies and proud allies, surrounded by a family that stretched several generations. Once he had been worshiped, once he had governed his people and been beloved. In a time long past, he had walked with fire, with Will, and been the light to guide the people.

He had been Ra.

God of the Sun, of Creation, and Rebirth.

He was the source of what would come to be called Sky Flames, the first wielders of this Flame of Harmony being his children, Shu and Sekhmet, and their descendants. He fostered three girls who became family and Tefnut married Shu when they grew old enough. Eventually Flames would become tied to the Soul, as they were now, and those born embodying the characteristics that Ra favored most may find themselves with a spark of his power, awakened from their ancestors who were carriers of Ra’s Flame even if they never became Active.

Those with Sky Flames were carrying a piece of a god with them. They were forces of nature waiting for the moment they found their calling. They could become corrupted and twisted, could drift from the concepts that Ra embodied, but those born with Sky Flames would show their worth throughout their reins in one way or another.

Skies were vast, encompassing. They were places of rebirth and welcome for all who could find their home in the sky. They called people to their side, and found their peace most often in leading for the cause they believed in, much as Ra had once done. That little bit of his fire brought with it hope and light and warmth to those who found their homes beside a Sky.

The problem, Skull had found, was that as an immortal Sky, his bonds could not last. He had reached out, found those that would come to be called ‘Guardians or ‘Elements’ and then lost them. Again, and again, and again.

Blood that rushed through his fingers, the very life of his Elements draining into the ground and all he could think was not again NotAgainPleaseNo -

It was driving him mad with grief and loss. And a mad god would destroy the world without a second thought and a backwards glance.

The love of a god is a great and terrible thing.

So it came to pass that Ra the Shining, Ra the Golden, God of the Sun and God of Rebirth pulled on his secondary Flame, locking his Sky down so that he could not Shatter. He pulled on what would come to be called Cloud Flames, and had done so for hundreds of thousands of years.

It was no surprise then, that with all that practice and work, he would come to be the Cloud Arcobaleno. The Strongest Cloud Flame in the world. He hid away his Sky nature, and instead worked with a Flame not his primary so well and long it was thought to be so.

Skull would keep it that way.

He would never be another Sky to a people that lived barely a century. Never again.
Considering the one to lay this Curse on him was a First One, the oldest Humans, whom Skull had rather hated, save for Sephira, and even he did not know him...

Skull was rather confident no one in this life would learn of his secret. He had lived so many lives, as so many people, and never had he revealed himself in truth.

So what were the chances of this life being any different to the last one hundred? The last one thousand?

It would figure that the life in which he had decided to not search, but allow the chips to fall where they wished, would be the life in which his lioness found her way back to his side in a completely chance encounter.

It’s time for Skull’s yearly invasion of Mafia Land in an almost futile effort to ease his boredom. He wrote out all his options, allowing his pen to write out the words Successful Conquest, before he throws all the slips of paper into his helmet. He hands it to his assistant and when he reaches inside to draw, he already knows which one he pulls out.

Obvious Failure

So goes the luck of the draw.

So Skull signs and sets off to spectacularly fail an invasion of Mafia Land, in a plan you could fly his blimp through. Next year, perhaps, next year he’ll draw something else and maybe even have a little fun to relieve the boredom. Maybe he’ll get lucky and draw something like that time the entire Island refuses to admit happened.

But there is a chance of something interesting. Reborn is on the island, with his student, the heir to the Vongola. Honestly, Giotto’s former vigilante group is one of the bloodiest mafia families and he mourns for the way they strayed so far from Giotto’s wishes. An insult to a man who reminded him so much of her, of precious laughter, warmth and gentle all consuming love. A gentle man with the patience of a saint, the heart of a lion and the righteous fury of a protector.
Of course, when he actually gets to the island and pulls out Oodako as Reborn predictably takes a step back for his student to step up, even as a flash of amber barely catches his eye—Oh, look, Nono actually snagged the civilian of Giotto’s bloodline—and manages to get a good hit on Colonello.

That’s for breaking my helmet visor, you love sick puppy.

Petty revenge keeps him sane over the centuries.

-I will rip you limb from limb if you lay a single finger on them -Do not think I will hesitate to burn this world until only ash remains -

Other forms of revenge as well, but that was neither here nor now. He was not the same man and he was busy, there was no time for thoughts such as those. He had an invasion to fail and hopefully teach the new Vongola boss a lesson or two.

So Skull played his Game, brilliantly, he might add, up until the moment his eyes actually landed on Reborn’s student, met those wide eyes and—no.

No, that wasn’t possible.

It’s a flash of a sunset, the warmth of the sun and a bright flare of Flame, slow and weak as it is, but he knows this.

“No,” says Ra, the Golden, king of kings, as he takes a single step forward.

Around him, those who gave their Oaths to him, who swore their loyalty, their services to him in exchange for learning, for knowledge and protection, sense the change in their god, and they surge forward like the Nile and the tide turns firmly in his favor.

Reborn stands in the midst of chaos and watches as the invaders switch gears and in less than thirty seconds, the defenders are beaten back and there’s a clear circle of men clad in purple leather and
motorcycle helmets surrounding his charge and the Cloud he knows as ‘Lackey’.

Reborn is not perfect, he knows this. He’s fought hard to carve out a reputation, he’s bled for knowledge and spent years learning everything he could. Languages, science, math, history, religion, culture, Reborn will not be ignorant of the world and it’s workings.

But here, here the hitman knows as deep as his bones, something has changed, Skull is the eye of the storm and those around the Cloud suddenly leap levels from hired mook to scarily focused and skilled bodyguards in an instant. Skull though...Skull says no like the world will bend to his very Will, and the way his voice rings unlike anything the hitman has ever heard from him is... concerning.

But something inside him whispers that the questions he has on Tsuna’s oddities, the little things, the glaring obvious quirks and habits that don’t match up to her lifestyle...might have something to do with the way Skull is staring at her right now.

Reborn knows without a doubt, that if any of his hunches are correct, then whatever this is, it’s the cause for the one time the hitman has ever seen Skull act as a natural Cloud. A Cloud whose territory was just obliterated.

Colonello is a soldier. His loyalty is to his fellow Arcobaleno, to Lal most of all, but it’s also to those he trains, those who pay his fees, his employers, for however short a time. He’s an Arcobaleno though, there’s a lot he can get away with and he refuses to do anything he doesn’t want to.

He’s worked at Mafia Land for several years now, he’s dealt with all manner of Skull’s yearly invasions, some better than others, some downright weird, and that one that no one will ever mention, but never this.

Hell, he doesn’t even know what this is, kora!

The lackey took one look at the Decima candidate Reborn is training—with her too old eyes—and despite not being a total stranger to emotions, he can’t even begin to identify what was on his face.

Everyone who has ever met Skull knows he is the Un-Cloudiest Cloud anyone has ever met. There
is no rage to him. No anger, righteous fury, no desire to carve out territory, be it in land or people or possessions. No nothing. It’s unnerving and it shows how much of a not-Cloud the not-baby is.

(Except for that one time. That’s it. Over thirty years, Colonello has known Skull and there was only a single instant in which their Cloud was actually a Cloud. The stuntman refused to even discuss what happened, instead deflecting and outright ignoring any attempts to find out what triggered what little instincts he had.)

Sure, his Flames are overwhelmingly strong, earning him the nickname of ‘Immortal Skull’ due to their potency and ability to negate any damage Skull receives, but that’s about the only thing Skull has going for him. Other than his questionable skills in operating a machine.

He is a stunt driver, after all and those talents were useful as a getaway driver.

It’s not enough, in the Mafia, which is why Skull is with the Family he’s with, one that barely anyone knows, lead by a Don no one of any significance has seen or conducted business with.

Which just goes to prove Colonello’s belief that Skull was tricked into joining and that he really has no business being in the Mafia.

Really, he feels sorry for him. None of the reflexes he tried to drill into Skull’s head stuck. He barely dodged, he didn’t wield any weapons and the only trick he could pull with his Flames was enlarging his octopus or his own body. There’s also his immortality trick, but that’s only useful after the fact.

The belief that is rapidly being obviated and changed with every second the sniper continues to hear what Reborn’s student is saying to Skull and what he is saying in return.

Even then, Colonello still maintains that the Carcassa Family isn’t important. Honestly, a Don with a ridiculous and obviously fake name like Ras Dagold doesn’t have a leg to stand on in a world such as theirs.

It’s in the Purity of her Flames, as weak and stifled as they are.
The manner in which she takes a single step forward, a peculiar kind of catlike grace.

There is confirmation in the way her eyes burn, both with Flame and tears and love.

Ra, King of the Gods, stands before a tiny slip of a girl and stares into her very soul as she collapses to her knees in front of him, her mouth forming words with no sound.

He makes a noise, not a sob, not laughter and not a plea, but the girl with a mane of amber and shining eyes still does not speak until a name leaves his lips with all the desperate hope of a man who has been searching and hoping with all the fierceness of a father who had held her both as she entered and passed from the world, first with a wail, then with a promise to return on her bloodied lips.

“Sekhmet?”

Tears spill over her cheeks and she smiles. She speaks deliberately and clearly, no matter the hoarseness to her voice. Those around them can easily hear the words and with depth of emotion in them leave many speechless, regardless of their meaning.

“Hail the Shining One, the Just Ruler, the Strong King and the Sun God of the Land of Egypt,” says Sawada Tsunayoshi, Vongola Decima, as she kneels before a long thought dead god and radiates pure happiness from her very being.

“My Great and Beloved Father,” says Sekhmet, Goddess of Destruction and Healing as she reaches out for the tiny body of Ra, the Golden, the Giver of Life.
The day Tsuna wakes up, is also the day she dies.

It begins with a visit from the man mama tells her is her father. She doesn’t really know what a father is, but the man smiles at her and laughs happily at the sight of her. It brings warmth to her heart and a tiny voice inside her goes, oh, I remember this.

The older man with white hair and wrinkles had a kind smile and said he was her grandfather. He likes to sit and listen to her stories and watch as she plays.

So in her mind, she figures out that a father is someone who visits to make you feel happy and a grandfather will exchange stories with you, if you ask nicely.

It isn’t until when she decides to show him how good her tree climbing skills have gotten that this image of a ‘father’ and a ‘grandfather’ crumbles into pieces.

She misses a step, her fingers aren’t strong enough to catch her and she tumbles from the branches. Tsuna’s not worried though, she’s fallen lots of times before and as always, the warmth from inside goes outside and saves her, just as it always does. She pauses only a moment to make sure she hasn’t stained the dress mama put her in before she looks up, a wide grin on her face.

Only, her father is standing behind grandfather and he’s not smiling. It scares her, the look that she can’t quite understand.

Grandfather is standing in front of her and she doesn’t know what he’s doing but she can’t really breathe through the terror that surges through her. She makes to scream, to get away from whatever this awful feeling is, but she can’t move.

Grandfather is scaring her as he kneels in front of her and raises his hand, lifting a single finger to press it directly to the center of her forehead. It’s a flash of heat that brings no warmth and something inside her breaks and shatters before darkness swallows her whole.

Nana is besides herself after her husband leaves.

When he brought their daughter in, sleeping soundly in his arms with regret on his face, she knew what he was going to tell her.

He couldn’t stay.

Both he and his boss left not an hour later, and Nana couldn’t help how much it hurt that he didn’t even bother waking Tsu-chan before walking out the door with a flippant wave and a cheesy one-liner.

Oh, she smiled and laughed and returned the gesture, but as soon as the car was out of sight, she couldn’t help the way her the smile fell from her face and the laughter dried up in her throat. She
stood for a moment, on her front porch, and all she felt was tired and disappointed.

Still, as much as she loved Iemitsu, she couldn’t help but blame him for his ways.

There’s a small part of her that *hates* and *rages*, how *dare he abandon us*, but she boxes it up and puts it away with practiced ease. Those emotions do not help her raise her daughter. There is no place for them in their life.

She sighs heavily and turns away to go back inside the house Iemitsu had bought for her when they married.

It’s almost dinner and Tsuna needs to be woken up from her nap.

Only…

...*Tsuna doesn’t wake.*

In a normal civilian, perhaps the sealing of their Flames would have had less of an effect. In a civilian who was not a *Sky Flame*, perhaps things would have played out entirely different.

In a child that was *not* Tsunayoshi Sawada, *not* a descendant of the line of Primo, there may have been an entirely different conclusion to these actions.

But the Ninth Boss of Vongola did not think of these facts when he sealed the young Sky away. Iemitsu did not ponder the results of sealing an *Active* Sky Flame of his daughter’s power. No. Timoteo Vongola looked at this child, with a terrifying likeness to a specific portrait in his office and saw a *threat*.

She was barely five years old, a direct descendant of Primo, and a Sky so powerful even so young that Timoteo’s own Flames were pulled in. Should she be brought into the Vongola, she would take the rightful heirship from his sons. And by that same token, he could not leave her be, for if any other Family were to discover a Sky of this power and use her *against* the Vongola?

No. Timoteo Vongola would not- could not- allow that to come to pass. It would be simple to seal her away. She was a civilian. She had no use for her Flames, and in the event that he had need of her later it would be a simple matter to unseal the child. If he looked at it right, he was even saving the child.

Sealed as she would be, she need not worry of being dragged into the Mafia at all, and wasn’t that the better choice for her in the end? She wouldn’t know any hardships, living a quiet life in this small town. She would be safe and protected and thus didn’t even have a need for Flames.

So it was without hesitation or even a second thought that Vongola Nono pressed a Flame-wreathed finger into her skin and commanded his Flames to *Seal.*

Iemitsu watched his daughter erupt into Sky Flames, her hands and eyes burning bright and *pure*
orange, and he frowned. She was barely five. She had no reason to have Flames of that purity in a civilian life. (*She was too powerful, no no no. That wasn’t allowed. Tsunayoshi was supposed to be his little Princess. A Damsel in Distress, who will always need Daddy the Knight to save her. She wasn’t allowed to be powerful. Couldn’t be able to fight his mold for her.*)

Iemitsu would not bring her into CEDEF for training either, as that would leave him a gaping weakness for Vongola’s enemies to exploit. (*It would teach her how to stand up for herself, against him. She would learn to gather information with the best of them, would become a viable threat to his private homelife outside the Mafia.*)

As of this moment, none but the barest few even knew the Young Lion of Vongola had a wife, much less a child. If he were to bring her to CEDEF’s base, all of that work would be ruined. (*The work that gave him the perfect civilian home away from the mafia. The work that went into finding a woman like Nana, who let him come home rarely and for short periods of time, let him lay about the house surrounded by alcohol and fed him food fit for a man of his status. The work that went into ensuring no one would be able to find them, or ruin that for him.*) If she were brought into those halls, they would be able to trace her back to Namimori. To Nana. To Iemitsu’s life outside of work. Everything he had set up here in Namimori would be rendered useless.

(He would be forced to start over.)

(Again)

Especially with her very real resemblance to the First Boss. Once they caught sight of her, and made that connection, she would never be able to walk away. Either she would be recruited into the Family in one way or another, or they would try to use her as a broodmare to continue the line and Iemitsu refused to see that happen. (*They were his civilians. He had chosen Nana, and she had given him a daughter. He would not share them, would not allow Vongola to take either of them into their ranks. No one was allowed to ruin this for him.*)

He was a hardened mafia man, he had seen the vilest of evils. He knew the darkest shadows of his world, walked amongst them, at ease in their depths.

He refused to see his daughter walk beside him, to see the world as it was. (*For if she saw the world as it was, she would see HIM, and she would not bow to his whims.*)

If she were to be sealed, she would be safe. Sure, it may have some adverse effects, but she would be safe. He had sworn when he married Nana that he would not let them see his darkness. Would not drag them into blood and shadow. (*Would not allow them to walk beside him for they were never meant to be his equals*)

If he had to seal Tsunayoshi, had to hurt her a little to see her stay civilian (*keep her in her mold*), he would do so. And she would be thankful, when she was older and she could see why he had done it, Iemitsu was sure.

(He was wrong.)

When it came to the Sealing of one Tsunayoshi Sawada, neither Iemitsu nor Timoteo could account for her soul. Perhaps, if they could have known then, they would have chosen another path. If they had been aware of the consequences of their actions, the *Wrath of Gods* that would reign against
them for this injustice…

Well, it couldn’t be said if their actions would go unchanged, as it was they did not know and wouldn’t until aforementioned Wrath of the Gods came raining around their heads.

They were arrogant men, thinking themselves infallible and could not have guessed nor even entertained the notion that there would be consequences to their actions. And so Tsunayoshi Sawada was sealed as she had been in so many different Realities across the multiverse.

In this universe, however, Tsunayoshi’s soul was not that of a mortal.

Once, a great many years ago, it had been the soul of a Goddess. She did not remember it when the men she once knew as Father and Grandfather acted to seal her away from her Flames. She did not know of her Father’s role. She could not have been prepared for how her soul would react to having her Sky Flames ripped away.

Ra the Shining, the god she had called Father in her first life, was the source of Sky Flames. She had been born in her every life entwined with her Sky Flames, born of the source as she had been in her first. When two mortals reached out with the intent to rip her Flames away and seal them out of her reach...this had consequences.

The least of which was the first and temporary death of her mortal body.

If she hadn’t been Sealed, especially at such a young age, she would have grown into her memories, into her Flames, as the strength and Purity of them alone would have restored her previous state of being, naturally.

Her body had been strained. Injured to a degree and there were going to be complications to its growth now. This was not the way it was supposed to be. Not this forced remembrance, not this forced death.

It could not withstand having something so saturated with her every function, so twined into her very soul, the very core of herself, shut behind the seal. And as he body gave out under the strain, Tsunayoshi Sawada died, but her soul...her soul woke up.

She was Sawada Tsunayoshi, and she had once been a Goddess of Destruction and Healing. She was a Warrior Goddess, the daughter of Ra the Golden and Shining, and she had walked the Skies long before humanity had come to be. She was Sekhmet, a Goddess of Protection, dubber of Kings, and she was not ready to die yet.

She had a promise to keep. Her Father was on this Earth waiting for her to come home, after thousands of years.

She refused to make him wait any longer.

And so it was that Tsunayoshi Sawada died, and Sekhmet had yet to wake.

When Nana Sawada went to wake her daughter from what she assumed was a nap, brought on by playing with her father, she found Tsuna would not wake. At first she thought her daughter was simply in an exhausted sleep. But as the moments passed, and her attempts to wake her became more
frantic and were all met with failure…

Nana’s hands shook.

Something was wrong.

Her heart tried to claw its way up her throat, right with a rising panic. She shoved it back, trembling fingers snatching the phone as she dialed for emergency services.

Nana had no idea what had caused this, but a thought wormed its way through her shields, from that small part of her she never listened to, this piece of her heart that screams-

Was it Iemitsu that did something to our little girl?

It’s too late for her to force that thought behind her walls, it’s far past never allowing it past in the first place, but now that it’s here in her mind, it’s not leaving. Rage is not the emotion you need to raise a child. You need to be happy, be loving, encourage them to do better. Anger, bitterness, pain, you cannot raise a healthy child with those emotions.

But a part of her begins to shriek for vengeance, screaming in righteous fury, how dare he, how dare he, how dare he-

Inside her, in that place she ignores, the pain she forgets and the little things that always bother her about her husband, in that forsaken place she carries with her, something slithers loose.

Nana takes a breath, another, deep, and another and another, each deep and slow, running her fingers through her precious daughter’s tawny hair and waiting for the sound of sirens to come closer. She feels lightheaded and she knows her hands are shaking because her daughter is not waking up.

She can barely make out her tiny body rising with each shallow breath and oh, Nana wonders if this is what it’s like to fear for the life of someone you love.

(by the hands of someone you love)

She feels like every breath she pulls into her lungs depends on the shallow lift and fall of her little girl’s chest.

What would she do if it stopped? (She would kill Iemitsu even if it killed her too-)

Her breath stalls, and it is only the steel will to be there for her Tsu-chan that keeps the hyperventilation from taking hold.

The door to her home is open for the emergency personnel to have a clear shot into her home, and her eyes snap to the door when she hears footsteps. The next thing she hears are voices calling out to her, asking where she is in the home. It takes a moment to draw the breath to cry out, in here, we’re in here, please-

She has no idea of the image she makes to the personnel that step into her home. They have seen many parents panicking over their children, have seen husbands crying over wives, grandparents holding hands. The life on an emergency first responder is not an easy one. They are the first to see the aftermath of bloody accidents and deliberate attacks.
Still, when the man steps into the Sawada home, and he finds the mother with her daughter, he pauses an instant. She is crouched over the still form of her child. Tears run down her face, one hand gripping the limp hand of the child while the other runs through the little girl’s hair. The calls with children are always the worst, but the most rewarding, when they get there on time.

When he steps inside the room, the hand in the little girl’s hair is pulled out to brace on the floor, the mother’s balance shifting so that she can launch herself up off the floor and at anyone to come inside. Burning eyes pin him in place.

It is like watching a dying ember, or perhaps it is like watching embers try to become a bonfire?

It’s a lioness crouched over the prone form of her cub.

Still he walks into that home, and he has to still for an instant as the mother looks up at him, because that is the look of a predator. She was assessing him and threatening him in one glance, a warning that if he was not welcomed, Nana Sawada would see him dealt with.

Truly, he is not surprised. The woman had a husband overseas, and this was Namimori. Dangerous people were in no way uncommon. The vendors on the streets, the clerks at the stores, hell, even the sushi guy. Namimori was a city full of dangerous, secretive people who all looked out for the peace and safety of their home.

They were no different.

“Sawada-san? We’re here to help…” he speaks clearly, calmly, his hands up and open as he eases his way into the room.

Four days.

Nana Sawada spends four days in that hospital waiting for any information on the cause of her daughter’s collapse. Waiting to see if her Tsu-chan would even wake from the apparent coma. She spends four days answering the same questions over and over again.

No, she didn’t know what happened (Yes, she did, she was going to kill him-), Yes, she just went to sleep and wouldn’t wake up. No, she hadn’t done anything different to normal (Her husband was there, that was the only difference he did something-), she couldn’t say what might have caused Tsu-chan’s reaction.

Four days asking the same questions.

Would she wake up? (They don’t know.) Could anyone tell her what was wrong? (They have determined a cause). Will she wake up? (They can’t be sure.) Could they tell her anything? (We’re doing our best Sawada-san, but we’re not sure what the cause of this is.)

They didn't know, had no answers for her. But Nana knew. She knew, in that part of her that screamed louder and louder with every day her precious daughter laid unmoving in that bed. She seethed.

What had that man done?
It took four days for Sekhmet to sort herself out.

She was weak, weaker than she had ever been before. Those men (they were not family and she would never call them such again) had torn her Flames away from her. This was never meant to happen. She was supposed to grow into her power. Now everything was wrong. Her Flame flowed through her entire being. It had been infused into her very bones.

Now it was shoved back behind a seal she could not break.

If she had been awake before the men had sealed her Flames away, it would have been a simple matter to stop their attempt. Now it had already been done, her power taken and chained and she could not free it in this state.

(There was a part of her, in the very back of her mind, that thought it a rather fitting punishment to be barred from the Sky, from that which her Father reigned over for making him wait so long.)

She was stuck, her entire being from her body to her soul out of balance. It was a struggle to simply realign her soul well enough to sync with her body again. Her body was still mortal while her soul had been woken to its full potential before her body was ready. Her soul was meant for an immortal, and her body wasn’t quite ready to deal with that, even with most of her power sealed away. It was why it took her so long to wake, why her body slipped into a coma of sorts. The body still functioned, but her soul had been a step out of sync.

Four days of work saw her soul realigned enough to slide back into her body without even more permanent damage, even if everything was still slightly off.

This incident would see Tsuna tripping over her own limbs more often. And as time would pass, instead of getting better the lack of her Flames, her power, would only make it worse as more time passed and the residue left behind by her Flames before they were sealed faded away. She would find herself losing focus, struggling with the simplest of tasks. Her coordination would be near to nonexistent and she would ache all the time. A chronic unending pain in the back of her head that only made focusing and functioning even harder than it already was.

Some days, she would lay in bed and wonder if the time would come when her brain would cease functioning at all, never mind returning to working properly.

Or perhaps her legs.

Her lungs.

It was a valid concern, for the now eight year old mortal goddess.

Luckily, her mama was wonderful in every way and Tsu-Sekh-Tsuna- she wasn’t exactly in Egypt at the moment- was so happy to have a mother who was everything she imagined her to be. She had family, her uncles, her aunt and eventually ones she could called sisters, as Sekhmet. A family that grew bigger by the year, where she was treasured and cherished, Beloved Daughter of Ra.

Here...here there was only her mother.

Her Flames had twisted and her Harmony was unable to be forcefully stopped as the physical
manifestation of her soul was, so it continued to attract people.

Only in a negative manner, rather than its intended positive one.

She was surrounded on all sides by those out to hurt her, her only safe haven being her home, with her Mama. A very rare few left her be in the mass of children pulled to her by her twisted Sky Harmony. Naturally these few children were the ones that Tsuna found herself seeking out.

Yamamoto Takeshi was a soothing presence, willing to let her be, and also to talk if that is what she needed. He always seemed to just know what would relax her when she sought him out. They’re weren’t exactly friends in the conventional sense, but he was a friendly face in a sea of unrest.

Hibari Kyoya on the other hand...He was an acquaintance. He saw her ability to draw in ‘herbivores’ as both an annoyance and a boon. He was rather fond of using her as bait to lure out the particularly nasty bullies, and in this Tsuna was willing to help him. She would lead the worst offenders straight to him, and was never one to purposely interrupt his naps. She even snuck up to the roof when he was napping on particularly bad days, when her bones felt like lead, and her heart-soul-being screamed, when she almost felt like her lungs were too heavy and even breathing seemed to be too much work. She would sit next to him (relatively- she was well out of ‘crowding range’) and just breathe. He was a quiet companion in these times, always seeming to know when she needed to just be in a quiet place no one could or would bother her.

And Sasagawa Ryohei, who was a walking ball of energy. He was never still or silent, running circles around all the other children. He was an observant soul, behind all that cheer, despite most people missing it. He always knew when she was having a ‘good day’ and would make a point to jog with her, or play games if he saw her. Likewise, he knew when she had a bad day and would quiet down, willing to work with whatever level of energy she had at the time.

They were three pillars in the sea of uncertainty and pain she found herself in, and Tsuna was thankful.

It is almost five years after the Incident that Nana hears from her husband again, over the phone, rather than a short letter and an even shorter postcard.

He’s coming for a visit. Perhaps the week.

Unlike every time before, when she had been excited to hear of his visits (apart from that muffled voice that was getting louder now, in the back of her head) her gaze hardens. He cannot tell, as Nana keeps her voice steady, plays the part she has done every time before. Even as she allows her voice to gush and coo into the phone, her mind is racing.

Her husband is coming into her home. Her husband who almost killed her Tsu-chan and his boss who either stood by and watched or had a hand in the act.

She will never again allow him near to her without her body between them. She needs to find a safe place for her daughter. Most of Namimori is out of the question. Not only because the people have hurt or bullied her little one, but because it is too open.

That leaves her with three choices: the Sasagawa residence, the Hibari’s mansion or th Yamamoto’s restaurant.
When she moves her daughter, she needs her to be somewhere Iemitsu will not be able to get to easily. A place he would not guess she would be at, which means not any of her known friends and easily found home of her classmates.

Which leaves her with only one real choice.

She will leave her daughter with Hibari Kyoya, and will play the part of a doting wife, thrilled at the company of her husband. It will be easy to say Tsuna is with a friend for however long Iemitsu is in the house. Perhaps on a trip out of town? And of course, it was only natural that she forgot to mention it in this phone call, so excited was she to hear of her Honey coming home. It was so rare, after all.

She was busy with cooking for him, buying groceries and making sure the house was clean for his arrival, after all.

When she hangs up the phone, she turns to her daughter, watching her in the kitchen doorway. She kneels before her and her voice is smooth, calming,

“You will be going to Kyoya-san’s home the day after tomorrow Tsu-chan, and you have to stay there for a week alright?”

Her mind is flying through various ploys and plots. Everyone in Namimori knew to go to the Hibari’s in case of an emergency. It had been so for centuries, ever since the family had taken over the protection of the town. With all the dangerous people that lived in the town, it was only natural that there be a ‘safe haven’ in place.

She had never thought she would have to use it, much less in regards to her own husband, but she would never chance her daughter’s life again.

“Mama?”

Nana smiled at her darling little girl, at the trust and curiosity in her gaze.

“It’ll be alright Tsuna. Mama promises. But your-” (he’s not her father anymore), “Iemitsu is coming back to our home for a week. And I will never leave you with him again, alright? So you’re going to stay with Kyoya for a little while. Okay?”

She sees that flash of fear in her daughter’s eyes, nearly smothered under the rage and her heart twists. It was only a feeling. An assumption that she accepted without question. But the look on her child’s face...

(She had known Iemitsu did something, but to see that confirmation in her Tsu-chan’s eyes...)

She wondered absently if she could ‘accidentally’ smother her husband in his sleep? A sedative slipped into the home cooked meals he so loves would ensure that he would not wake. Another thought crosses her mind a moment later- could she get the Hibari to cover it up? She knew they did things like that when people tried to invade the town with intent to harm. Perhaps he could have an ‘allergic reaction’?

She ran through the list of ‘could-be-lethal’ plants she knew, of the various ‘accidents’ that could happen in a town as dangerous as Namimori could be, no matter its appearance of a sleepy little town
in the middle of nowhere.

“You’ll be safe, okay? Mama promises.”

She is gratified by the trust in those eyes, the way Tsuna relaxes where she stands. By the quiet “Okay, Mama.”

“Good girl Tsu-chan. Can you go pack your bag for me? Remember it’s for a week. I’ll be up to help you in just a moment.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Nana watches the careful way Tsuna climbs the stairs (she breathes through the spike of rage as she remembers the way she once used to prance up and down those stairs, the way she used to dart and play-)

It may not be today, it might not be tomorrow, might be years from now, but Nana swears Iemitsu and his boss will pay for this. One way or another, she swears to pull strips out of them for every moment of suffering they had caused.

She leans her head against the wall and breathes. Her eyes close. The part of her that had once been so muffled was louder now. She wonders why she had shoved it to the back of her head in the first place.

She will never silence it again.

It had tried to warn her away from Iemitsu before, and now look what had happened. She would never regret Tsunayoshi, but she did regret not leaving soon enough to prevent this hurt he had inflicted on Tsuna.

She pulls in another breath.

She can do this.

Her eyes open, the embers that had burned in her eyes for the last five years finally sparking to life. She is not a bonfire, not yet, but the embers are burning again and she will not see them smothered a second time.

She turns for the stairs.

She had plans to set into motion.

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Kyoya Hibari pauses, his eyes focused on the Little Animal’s mother. He knows who this is, even if he has never met her in person before. His eyes narrow.

Why was she here?

He opens his mouth to ask, but then she speaks her voice steady and intense “I seek Sanctuary for my daughter Sawada Tsunayoshi.”
And Kyoya stills.

He knows that all Namimori citizens can ask for Sanctuary from his family. He had been trained from the start, he knew what it meant for a person to ask for it. His body tenses, eyes searching automatically for the Little Animal, and locking onto her almost hidden form behind her mother.

Sanctuary was not something asked for lightly. It was a serious thing, and only invoked if it was needed. If the person believed a danger was in effect that normal authorities would not be able to help with.

He steps to the side, inviting the pair of females into his home. He brings them to the living room, serving tea before he asks, “Why do you seek Sanctuary?”

His narrowed eyes catch the way the Little Animal pulls into herself, and the way Nana Sawada straightens her back, her eyes lighting up with a fierce protectiveness.

“My husband is coming home,” her voice is hard, the words deliberate and sharp, “and the last time he stepped into my home...he did something to my daughter. Five years ago...he and his boss almost killed her.”

Kyoya growls low in his throat, quicksilver eyes narrowing as he listens.

“I do not know what they did, but even now...even now it is killing her. Eating at her. I will ensure he does not come back for as long as I can manage when he visits for the week, but in that time I need Tsuna to be...absent. She needs a safe place to stay while I play my part to ensure he will leave us be.”

“Are you telling me,” Kyoya purrs, his voice threatening, despite the silken tones, “that the Little Animal does not have a disease, a failing of her body, as I believed?”

“No,” Nana agrees, her voice going stone cold with its fury, “My daughter was a bright and active child until that man came. This was done to her deliberately. They hurt her. I will see my pound of flesh rendered from their bones when it can be done.” Her eyes flash, burning for an instant, before they dim. “Until then...I will redirect his attentions.”

And suddenly, Kyoya can see that Nana Sawada is not the herbivore he had thought her to be. No she was a bear. One that had been hibernating, hiding behind the guise of a herbivore, until someone had woken her. A mother bear defending her cub.

She was an Omnivore. And her daughter followed in her footsteps, because she was physically incapable of being a carnivore. She was chained.

Kyoya bared his teeth, delight and fury filling him in equal measures. One of his people of interest, one of his charges, a person who respected his wishes and still lingered at the edges of his presence, one who slept beside him without any fear. A girl, a lioness, still yet a cub, sickly and weak in body, not in spirit, because of what was done to her by her sire.

That is grounds for a sanctioned murder, a reaping of the outsiders and spies who lingered where the Sawadas’ resided. His eyes trail over the Little Animal, an omnivore with the potential, the mindset to be an equal to him, to be a carnivore that welcomes his presence.

And her sire leashed her, did something to that potential, did something to her that was killing her.
Which was why, Kyoya now understood, why there were days when Sawada Tsunayoshi could barely walk and she did so, just to prove she could.

Defiance. Determination. Will.

Kyoya stands, and dons his authority like a cloak, deliberately placing a hand flat on the table to lean down to stare straight into the gleaming amber eyes of the mother of the Little Animal and snarled his next words.

“Granted.”

To the one who forced his will on the Little Animal, his own blood, he will not demand his execution, no. He will be patient, bow to the set plans of the Omnivore, until the day came where he understood exactly how to tear this filth down into shattered ruins. He will not attack him, no, Kyoya’s eyes gleam. He will hunt him. Stalk him, pick out his weaknesses, run him into the ground, and only when he cannot run anymore, only when there is nothing he can do but see the futility of his actions will Kyoya demand blood. Will Kyoya take that blood.

Regardless of those who viewed him as a bloodthirsty animal, an evil spirit pretending to be human, even a delinquent with his own followers, Hibari Kyoya knew very well there were opponents he could not yet match. Soon, he would be able to, but not this moment and when one desired to start a war, information was required.

Kyoya had contacts, his family had even more, and he would be making use of those to find out exactly who Sawada Tsunayoshi’s sire was.

A dark smile, lacking any amusement, curled across his face.

Let the Hunt begin.

The time would come, but in the meanwhile… Kyoya swept his gaze to Tsunayoshi, only to find her eyes were already on him. Satisfaction bloomed as he saw she understood his unspoken words.

This was only the beginning.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! This one talked to our muses a lot, so FAST UPDATE. Also! North and I are discussing actual Original Book colab, so that will be fun (and we figured we’d tell you it was in the works.) You will of course know when it actually gets published, so there is that. Enjoy everyone!~
Reborn is not happy.

His information was- is- wrong.

Oh, Tsunayoshi Sawada was a clumsy student, with bad grades, and a reputation around the school, but everything else? It wasn’t adding up.

She was friends with the Yamamoto Rain, the Sasagawa siblings, and Hibari Kyoya. When Reborn watched her move around, he saw her glance around more than once, like she could sense him. More often than not, her eyes would linger over the area he was hidden in.

The children bullied her when they could get away with it, but they almost never managed to corner her. On top of that, the three males she had befriended seemed to take very strong offence if they caught even a hint of bullying. The children involved with the harassment of his target didn’t stop, rather found other ways to cause her harm under the immediate notice of her friends.

The sheer attention centered on and around her from her classmates was cause for concern as it appeared that her inactive Flames were producing a Sky’s Attraction in a negative manner.

He would need to be closer, but Reborn was almost certain there was a budding Element Bond there, between the three, which suggested that there were Active Flames between the three of them, somewhere. He was a little impressed. Not only was it a rare Sky that could pull in a Cloud as their first Element, much less (as a non-Active Flame user) near the beginning of their Element Set, but Activating one’s Flames without pressure and knowledge to do so.

(Unless there had been an incident, one that put someone into a situation where they were in enough danger to Activate…)

It appeared he would have to discard the CEDEF information, and do this the old fashioned way. This level of sheer incompetence concerning Vongola’s intelligence gathering was a concern he would have to address later. He wasn’t going to sacrifice his attention to go do someone else’s job for them.

Of course, once he started gathering his own information from observation…well, that was when he started noticing the oddities.

Her eyes were the first thing that Reborn noticed as odd. Which, of course he did, he was a grown man stuck in a two year old’s body. He knew what it was to look in the mirror and see age staring out of a young face. He walked the shadows of the Underworld. He had seen many children with eyes too old for their face.

(Not like hers, not like that, when he looked into her face and saw centuries instead of decades.)

He had not expected to see eyes like that staring out of his soon-to-be student. A supposed civilian. In a small Japanese town where there was only one small Yakuza family and they were under the control of the Hibari. The Hibari Clan who mostly kept out of sight and protected their territories and
the people in them.

It wasn’t until he saw the mother, Sawada Nana, that he seriously considered going after CEDEF. Because that was a whole other set of revelations and even *more* CEDEF files being burned.

That was *not* a woman oblivious to the world. Her eyes were sharp, assessing the world around her even as her mouth stretched into a genuinely kind smile. She looked around, blinking and smiling at everyone as they gossiped about her child and her friends, even as she gathered their little secrets, the ones that would tear them asunder. Reborn *recognized* dangerous when he saw it, and Nana Sawada was the very definition of it.

It was discreet, subtle and carefully hidden in the corners of her eyes and the brightness of her smiles, but Reborn recognized it all the same. Like recognizes like, after all.

She was not on the level of Daniela, Vongola Ottavo, but she was making great strides towards it. With her keen eyes hidden behind *butter-won't-melt-in-this-mouth* smiles and beaming personality that had those around her relaxing without thought. She lured them into a sense of security and then, she so chose, she could easily strike hard and fast and *lethal*.

She was probably a woman who didn’t make strikes often, but the ones that Reborn saw were all deadly to the ones Nana attacked.

That was the second thing. Nana Sawada had *connections*. She was not *Mafia*, not in the literal sense, but in *spirit*? Oh, Reborn saw *potential* in the woman. He saw the makings of the most dangerous and respected women in his world. He looked at the supposed civilian and saw the makings of a Donna in her own right. Saw a lethal *ruthless* drive wrapped in protectiveness and enforced by brutal pragmatism. No one and nothing would stop her if she put her mind to it.

Which led to the third oddity to come to his attention.

Nana Sawada *loathed* her husband.

This had not always been so. Once, when they were young, she had loved him. Oh, she had loved him *so*. She would not have said *yes* when he asked her to marry him if she had not. But he left, he left all the time would never stay no matter what she did or said. She hurt, every time he left her and Tsuna behind. She *ached* with it. What had she done wrong, she wondered? What could she do differently to make him stay?

Only it never worked. And it hurt. It *hurt*, and she shoved it back, stoked the fires of *anger* instead, because it was easier. Anger was easier than hurt. And she boxed that up too, every day, every time he came and left them over and over again.

Until this. She could box up his *betrayal* her anger, push it away and pretend it wasn’t there. She could do that on her own behalf. But for him to harm *Tsunayoshi*?

No, no Nana could not, *would not*, forgive that.

Reborn was unaware of the reasons for this loathing, did not know the story behind this rage in her eyes, but he could see it. He could see her act, her lies.

She played the part of doting airheaded wife in love, and did so *well*. (Of course she did, she remembered a time it had once been the *truth*. Why make up lies when you can lie with the truth?)
There were pictures on the walls, scattered along the many varying pictures of her daughter and Tsunayoshi’s friends- a few of which he had not seen his student with in this first day of observation such as Kurokawa Hana, and Sasagawa Kyoko- of Nana herself and even a various few that had Nana with her daughter’s friends or with Tsunayoshi herself.. Her husband’s belongings are cared for so that they remain in good shape, tucked in the very back of her closet.

She giggled and laughed, and had a shoebox of ridiculous postcards sent by Iemitsu, but she couldn’t hide it from the Word’s Best.

Reborn could see the seething, furious rage that sat in the very back of her eyes, hidden from most with a vacant smile any time someone mentions the man. He can see the way none of Iemitsu’s pictures were so well cared for as the rest of her collection, only tended to so they did not collect dust. He saw the ring that sat where her wedding ring once had, replaced with a gift from her daughter, the right size to keep the same tanlines of her wedding ring. He can see the little things, the leashed reactions, the words that she says and the ones she doesn’t.

It’s a game Nana plays and one she plays brilliantly. All for the sake of her daughter, the one Iemitsu had practically abandoned her to raise alone. Alone with only lies and postcards in between his visits for a week every few years.

(Reborn disapproves. Family is sacred, different from Famiglia, and everything this whelp did rubbed Reborn the wrong way. Iemitsu should have raised his daughter, should have told his wife the truth.)

On the other hand, the predator in Reborn, the part of him that saw him reach his place at the top, the World’s Greatest Hitman is absolutely fascinated. Sawada Nana had carved out a niche for herself, had taught herself these traits. She had then taught them to her daughter, had taught her how to lie with the truth. How to look harmless and clueless while hiding that dangerous edge.

That part of him sees the web she has laid around her home, around those she choose to fold into her protection. The same web she had taught Tsunayoshi to make, Reborn can see it draped around the school, carefully set until the girl had a need for it.

That part of him that sees the potential Nana had nurtured into his student, and salivates at a chance to sharpen and shine it. He had not expected to find so much to work with in the girl his files said should be ‘no good’, ‘timid, shy’ and ‘just like my Nana!’ . It seemed, however that Nana Sawada had ensured her daughter had learned a few skills Iemitsu was entirely unaware of.

Reborn is a killer, there is no mistaking it, an apex predator lounged on its unchallenged throne. Even now, when his form has been diminished, his age reversed and frozen in time, he is the Strongest among even the Strongest, the World’s Best not only in title, but in fact. He had earned every scrap of that title, given to him rather than taken and enforced through fear.

Reborn is all of these things, but he had not always been so, had not wanted to be so in the beginning. No, Reborn remembers a time before, (before he Activated his Flames, the strongest Sun, and been pulled under the black tar riptide of the Underworld. A tide that yanked him from the fringes he had lingered on for his entire life, and straight into the heart of it, where he had refused to drown and had instead flourished.) when he found a deep and satisfying love of teaching.

He loved finding potential in even the worst, in those who the world declared useless. He loved
looking at what the world thought of as soot, not even worth being called a rock. He relished in the challenge of taking those referred to as dirt and turning them into charcoal and then diamonds. It was why he had agreed to tutor Dino, despite never having done so before (to the knowledge of those who had asked this favor of him).

The teacher in Reborn, so wrapped up and warped into the predator he had become, looked at Tsunayoshi, at the viper hiding among garden snakes and wanted. He wanted to bring her to the surface, wanted to nurture that steel he could see in her spine. He wanted to sharpen her fangs, turn her into a predator that could possibly match him, given time and effort.

She looks at Nana Sawada like she hung the moon and stars. Reborn can certainly see why, the woman was dangerous and a steady positive influence in her life. She emulates the woman in ways that set off Reborn’s predator instincts, that whisper of potential sleeping in this child with ancient eyes. Of a hunter sleeping in her soul. She has parts of Nana in the way she blends, hides in plain sight among her classmates, but in all the ways she is like her mother, there are parts of Tsunayoshi Sawada that are....

...not.

These parts of her that speak of more to Reborn’s instincts. That look at this child and set his hackles up.

Not to harm, no, but in the way of another predator encroaching on territory not his own, that knows something is off about the land he has walked on, but is still unaware of the predator that had claimed it as their own.

These dual signals, that say Tsunayoshi Sawada is both a cub not yet grown into her claws, and yet that she is a Lioness, hidden amongst the tall grass and a breath behind unwary prey, set off Reborn’s curiosity.

They also ensure that he will be keeping a much closer eye on Iemitsu and the CEDEF. Obviously they were useless incompetents unworthy of the breath they pulled into their lungs. It is concerning that there is such a failure of trustworthy information coming from CEDEF, the ones who are the outside advisors to Vongola.

That might be a serious concern, especially when his mission is complete and Vongola Decima takes the throne.

An absent father, who doesn’t even truly care enough to know his own daughter, and a mother who is furious with her husband for his lies. The Advisors of the Vongola Family are supposed to be trusted by the Vongola Don or Donna.

Iemitsu would turn up eventually. That was when his concern would evolve into a serious problem.

Emotional responses in people who produced Flames from their Will tended to be rather...messy.

Xanxus sleeps.

And yet...he doesn’t. Not really. Not quite.
He is aware.

Of the pain, the burning cold and the way he couldn’t take a breath and how he couldn’t remember if he eyes were open or closed, but that didn’t really matter as he couldn’t see.

He is aware of the fury of his betrayal and the hatred that drowns out the why, why, why that screams in his head. His father- who isn’t his father- his brothers, Enrico, Massimo, Federico- they’re not his brothers.

He cannot move, can barely think, everything is so heavy, but he cannot sleep, cannot wake. He cannot even begin to guess how much time as passed, if any.

Is he alive? Is this death?

Is this his Hell? Did Heaven turn him away at the gates? Is this a place of waiting before going on? Xanxus doesn’t know, but the burning cold, the bite of ice is his reality and that is all he knows.

Until…

Until his prison shifts and loosens and his body begins to sag from it’s position before it crumples forward as a wave of heat washes over him. His body is caught before it can reach the floor and he can hear the hum of noises against his ear but none of the sounds make any sense to him.

Xanxus is awake and he is not. He’s free, or still trapped, only no longer burning?

His chest hurts, the sounds are ringing in his head and he can hear- hear…?

“-not breathing, Lussuria! VOI, don’t die on us, shitty boss! Mammo-”

He knows that voice, doesn’t he? His thoughts scatter and the pain in his chest increases as his lingers in this state of being and not.

There’s feeling followed by pure sunshine pouring into his body and then he’s pulled…? A force impacts his back and there’s a sound he makes, a cough as he breathes, chest expanding, lungs filling and it hurts.

He chokes and reaches for that rage, for the anger-

Survival is Fury, Life is Pain, and this is real.

Xanxus of the Varia opens his eyes to the faces of his Elements with fury and pain running through his body and inhales for the first time in eight years.

His fath- Vongola Nono lied, promised him a crown and throne to him, even though he had no royal blood.

Street trash, pathetic scum, whore’s son, how dare he-

He exhales and it’s a yell, but his throat is dry and all his can taste is iron as blood drips down into his mouth and his skin burns with every breath and every brush of air across it. Voices he knows, the sounds he recognizes even if he can’t make sense of them. There is a press of Flames against his own, Wrath Flames that barely rise to the surface, barely spark and flicker in his hands.
He’s being tugged at, pulled and pushed until some distant part of his brain understands he’s on a
stretcher and they’re leaving this place he has been in. There’s a brush of hair against his hand. He
jack-knifes into an upright position, reaching out to grab and twist. His Flames flare and his eyes
open and Squalo is there.

He can barely see in the shitty lighting but he knows the sounds of his voice and the smell of steel,
sword polish and blood the man carries with him.

He can’t form coherent words, nothing makes sense to him other than people are here, his people,
and that shark-trash let his hair grow stupid long. He bares his teeth anyway because he is Xanxus
and nothing is going to keep him down.

If some part of him is screaming for Bonds he can barely feel, for his Elements who, even though
they are right next to him, feel absent and faint, well.

Xanxus is used to the screams.
Chapter 4

Meeting his student is... odd. He had known she was strange from the start, that she didn’t match her supposed file from her father. He had scarcely needed a minute to determine that she wasn’t quite like everyone else around her. It wasn’t the way she dressed, or in the way she spoke, nothing like that, save he had seen the age in her eyes even from a distance.

It’s the way she looks at him, when she opens her front door, and those eyes settle on his form, it’s... heavy, in a way he had not expected. Like she is looking straight through him, into the core of his being. Seeing who he is, rather than who he plays at being.

Her eyes narrow, and for a fraction of an instant, Reborn catches the barest flicker of something Other in her eyes. Something ancient and forever, something feral and wild, something like a controlled force of nature.

And then she blinks and it’s gone.

He doesn’t miss it though. A piece to a puzzle that he carefully tucks away for later inspection.

“Hello,” she greets, crouching to put herself on his level.

It doesn’t feel condescending when she does it, and it takes Reborn a moment to realize why. It is because she is looking him in the eyes and there is curiosity and interest there, rather than someone looking down and humoring a child.

Sawada Tsunayoshi has only just met him and Reborn attributes it to the Vongola blood that she seems to instinctively realize he isn’t a child.
“Can I help you with something?”

“I’m here about the tutoring offer in the mail,” he informs her, switching gears and refraining from launching himself at her the way he might have otherwise done. “I’m a bit early, but I hope that is not a problem?”

The girl pauses. Her gaze turns shrewd and they sit in silence for a moment more as she studies his infant form. Slowly, her head dips down in an affirmative.

“There is a teacher at my school,” she begins almost hesitantly, “He isn’t- he doesn’t like m- certain students. There are- problems.”

She stops, searching his face for any reaction, but Reborn only tips his head to the side, wordlessly encouraging her to continue. There is a devastating relief that washes over her face before she composes herself and takes a deep breath. He sincerely hopes this isn’t going where he thinks it’s going.

“I haven’t told okaa-san,” she says, dropping her volume lower and hurrying over her words, “I don’t want her to worry. I can take care of myself but my grades for that class are- not good.”

Tsunayoshi coughs and clears her throat before her gaze slides away from him. There’s shame in her face. Her cheeks are turning red and there’s discomfort in her posture. There’s an indent where her teeth are discreetly biting down on the inside of her lip and Reborn can see the struggle in her, exactly how much she’s going to say. Which is a telling reaction and his assumptions are being confirmed with her next words.

“I saw your flyer and I asked okaa-san to hire you, not because I can’t do this myself, but because I don’t want to cause trouble for my friends and adults don’t listen to me anyway. If I have proof, that my grades are wrong, that would be enough to make him stop -”

She cuts herself off and nods firmly. The hope in her eyes as she looks at him, as if despite the way he looks, like a child, he can help. As if he’s going to be believed, as if she can trust him to help and Reborn… was not expecting anything like this, merde.

He knew there were problems in her school, what with her high grades in History, English, Literature, Home Economics, the averages in P.E. and Science and the almost failing grades of maths.
Granted, the previous teacher had been a fraud and was arrested for tampering with student’s grades, but when a new teacher was brought in and while other students got higher grade, Tsunayoshi had remained firmly at just barely passing. There was occasionally an 80 or a 90, but those were few and far between.

Which was all around *suspicious*.

Considering he had personally witnessed her sitting at her own desk in the Disciplinary Committee’s office space, going over stacks of paperwork, including their financial records, Reborn doubted very seriously she couldn’t easily make a passing grade in maths.

There is something here he’s missing. Something doesn’t fit into all the information he’s gathered. Not only is there something happening to his student, but there is something *with* her as well.

He can see it in the manner in which she holds herself, the way her shoulders are always squared and her head lifted as she walks. She is clumsy, yes, tripping over thin air, bumping into things and her scraped knees and bruised shins attest to that. She is struggling with school, but it’s only with Physical Education, Science, and Maths, and all that is fixable with enough time and pressure applied to the correct people, *but there is something else*.

He can already tell it’s going to be a challenge, but right now his focus is going to be on dealing with the more pressing problems in his student’s life.

Starting with her maths teacher.

It’s when she stands up and leads him to her room with and rushed explanation of, “This is the tutor I was telling you about, I’m going to go talk with him about my homework, we’ll be upstairs, okaa-san!” that Reborn takes the time to truly look at how his student moves.

The word for it is *heavy*.

As if someone draped a heavy piece of fabric about her shoulders, one that restricted her movements, dragged near her feet and hid any natural grace she possessed. She trips twice on the stairs, once in
entering her room, but the way she barely notices tells him she’s used to it. Only, it’s more of a resigned acceptance then the irritation or embarrassment most people seem to feel.

There’s a concerning picture being painted here and frankly, Reborn is coming to the conclusion that real bullets may be required on top of the Dying Will and rubber ones he was planning to use. He’s restricted from acting against mafia threats, he’s forbidden from interfering with mafia problems, other than training and limited help.

But Nono said nothing about problems from the civilian end of the equation. It’s a loophole that Reborn could and would entirely use, if needed, to eliminate any problems that came from that side.

Her room, when she opens the door, is organized, neat and everything in its proper place. Her desk was covered in files, the take-home paperwork from the Disciplinary Committee, along with a pile of her homework in the corner. There were books on her shelves, animal encyclopedias, several books of the religions of Greece, Rome, Egypt and there was a world map stretched over the space above her bed.

There was a picture of the pyramids of Giza, framed against a blood red sunset, and another of the Nile from a boat in the middle of the river. When the door swung shut, Reborn saw there was another hanging on the back, a simple one of a cloudy sky that was illuminated by sunbeams.

The room was decorated in soft shades of orange and white. It was very peaceful in her room, with the faintest traces of Sky Flames, despite her Inactive Flames. They were of a high purity and they delicately brushed against him, neither pressuring nor irritating him, simply there and in small amounts. Reborn was impressed. It was uncommon for people who had not Activated their Flames to, in a word, leak them, but it had happened in cases where the Flame was very strong.

When Tsunayoshi walked over to her desk and began rifling through the papers, no doubt picking out her math assignments. Reborn carefully studies her, closer than his surveillance had previously be able to get.

Reborn watches her and wonders why a thirteen year old girl feels comfortable, dare he say, safe in his presence, and wonders if this is a manifestation of the Vongola Blood in her veins. She’s in no danger from him, quite that opposite as he’s here to train her, to make sure she’s able to defend herself. He’s a safety net, even if there are restrictions, there is a great many things he can do to swing the tide of a battle.

He intends to train the Decima, and for that, he is glad as already he sees such potential in her. She is clearly a civilian, with a civilian mindset and the problems typical to a civilian teenage girl. Also with
several concerning issues in which she kept her problems to herself and an active discrimination against her from adults and fellow classmates. He doesn’t know the origins of this, but no matter, Reborn has no mercy for scum.

There was no mention of marrying Tsunayoshi off to a suitable man and using her as a broodmare. From what he’s heard, the Ninth’s Guardians were in favor of that idea, but Timoteo shot them down and insisted that the girl would be a splendid Decima. His old friend had that damned look in his eyes, like he knew it. Like he had seen or learned something that made him certain about it.

Reborn agreed with Timoteo’s assessment. There was steel in her spine and embers in her eyes. With his training and encouragement, he could fan that into titanium, with Flame and a Will.

Gathering allies and Guardians wouldn’t be much trouble. Namimori had several youths who would fit well into the Vongola Tenth Generation. Talent with intelligence and every single one of them had potential for Flames.

Tsunayoshi has friendships, or acquaintances with most of them. Hibari Kyoya, Yamamoto Takeshi, Sawagawa Ryohei, his sister Kyoko and her best friend, Kurokawa Hana.

The association with Hibari Kyoya lead to a greater interaction with the very obvious Cloud’s own budding private army. Along with his extremely competent second, Kusakabe Tetsuya, an Inactive Lightning. The teenager and Tsunayoshi were on very good terms and he wouldn’t be surprised if Kusakabe Tetsuya was the one who was responsible for her management skills. It was a shame the teenager would probably never Bond to her as a Guardian.

Tsunayoshi finishes gathering her papers as he continues his observations in silence. On her way over to him, she trips over the fluffy white rug spread over her hardwood floors. She catches herself almost absent mindedly and settles herself down on the floor. There’s a moment of hesitation before she takes another deep breath.

She holds out her hand and already Reborn can see the splashes of red decorating the pages.

Reborn takes the papers easily, his eyes flickering over her work.

And then he stops.
And looks again. The bright red marking every problem and blotting the calculations done in neat pencil to the sides makes them slightly difficult to see.

A third time, slower, his eyes narrowing sharply at the papers. She has handed him multiple copies of her work, stretching back for a month at the least.

*Most of the work is correct.*

Oh, there are a few mistakes, but there is nothing on these papers that deserved the sea of red her teacher had splashed over them. Red that has blotted her calculations in attempts to hide her work.

Each and every one of the papers have, ‘*see me after class* ’ scrawled across the top by her score.

A score that is wrong, deliberately and *intentionally* wrong and Reborn really does *not* like the implications of this. It wasn’t that Tsuna was not applying herself, it was that her teacher was *deliberately* sabotaging her.

He takes a deep breath through his nose.

Sabotaging her grades for *a month*. An entire month, *at the very least*, in which she kept silent. If he remembers his background information- and he always remembers (Japanese-American, 25 years old, high middle-class family, Japanese mother, a degree in Applied Mathematics)- this teacher has been present in the school since he had replaced her previous teacher.

“This are…” Reborn pauses.

How to phrase this...in a way that will be best received.

How was he supposed to explain that her teacher was ignoring her work? That she did not have *nearly* as much trouble with this work as she thought?

“These are mostly correct,” he settles on blunt and honest truth, carefully watching her reactions. “He is marking correct answers out in a way that hoped to hide your work from those who looked at these papers. I can show you where your actual mistakes took place, and will be looking into whatever it is this man thinks he is *doing. ”
His voice is dark and he allows the threat to leak into his tone. His reaction is carefully allowed to show in his face and his body. He’s letting her see that he believes her. He’s taking her side.

He is watching her, so he sees that lightning quick flash of Other in her eyes again.

He sees the flash of wrath that is leashed, the flash of knowing in her eyes, like she can tell Reborn exactly what was going on. He sees the embers in her eyes flare for the briefest of moments, sparking in a way that threatens a wildfire, before it is banked back down to flickers. He is meeting her eyes when he sees that flash of approval at the threat in his voice and body language.

But then it dies, recedes back into something that honestly concerns him.

Her reaction to being unfairly treated, to being persecuted and likely targeted by a teacher, is to attempt to deal with it on her own. She has ties with Hibari Kyoya, a boy Reborn knows is a Classic Cloud, possibly even Active, with Namimori Middle as a confirmed territory and a vested interest in Tsunayoshi.

Hibari is good Guardian material, Reborn believes Tsunayoshi won’t have any trouble pulling him in as her Flames Activate.

Considering that he suspects the sudden and complete destruction of Nezu’s employment and reputation and the debts that are piling up from his hospital bills are due to Hibari Kyoya’s involvement.

A Cloud’s vested interest in a non-Active Sky is a rare thing. Personally, Reborn has only known one, but somehow, he’s not surprised. Tsunayoshi is different in a way that draws attention to herself.

He might even be inclined to call her ‘special.’ Without sarcasm even.

A good Sky, he thinks as he studies her. But there’s that brittle, frail thing in her. Trauma, but of what kind, he cannot determine.

Not yet.
But his attention is required on more pressing issues at this moment. He will have to change the initial methods of her training. It will take time to build Tsunayoshi into a splendid Decima while dealing with her trauma, her insecurities and whatever it is about her that makes his instincts sit up and take notice. His eyes lower to the papers in his hands.

He can start here. Building trust between them. Showing her that he will listen to her concerns, With this teacher that’s sabotaging her grades, and asking her to meet him after class continuously. A thunderous frown pulls down his lips. He has some ideas about the reasons behind this, and he hopes it is simply his exposure to Mafia that is coloring his perceptions.

The teacher had best pray it is simply his darker upbringing at the very least.

Unfortunately, there’s that part of him that notices all those little reactions his student has displayed in the past thirty minutes he’s been talking with her and observing her up close. The part of him that is a Hitman, a killer for the right price. The part that retains everything he sees in case it is needed in a job. The part that makes lightning quick deductions and observations in people, in patterns, for amusement. The part of him that is an apex predator lounging at the top of the food chain and watching the rest of the animal kingdom scurry beneath him in boredom.

That part of him, the part where his Sun Flames nestle, in the core of him, hisses with rage, snarls that he already knows what it is he will find.

The clock strikes 8 o’clock and Tsunayoshi startles, her head jerking up. She’s dressed in her uniform, but Reborn hasn’t noticed a bento so as her gaze swings back to him, he’s already stepping aside.

“School starts in thirty minutes, Tsunayoshi. We’ll speak later about some other things, but for now, focus on school.”

There is relief in her expression, hope and the curlings of happiness, but Reborn can see the touches of shame lingering and Reborn is going to put a bullet in Iemitsu’s head, giuro su Dio.

That idiota is supposed to be the head of his family, a protector and defender and the man barely even bothers to send postcards from Antarctica, while his daughter is being harassed by her adult male teacher. The sixteen-year old Cloud who claims the entire town as his territory has already handled a previous situation and there was nothing in the files Iemitsu provided.
Reborn quickly sets his suitcase down in Tsunayoshi’s room and takes to the window in time to catch her as she hurries out the front door.

She turns a corner, the first on her path to school, and there’s a boy waiting for her. Sasagawa Ryohei who radiates Sun Flames in a constant state of Dying Will. It’s impressive for a civilian boy whose only training is in boxing in a peaceful city.

They both light up at the sight of each other.

_Definite Guardian material._

“Oi, Sawada! Kyoko mentioned you were having trouble with homework and Kurokawa said she would meet everyone after school for an extreme study group for your math class!”

His student’s face brightens at the mention of the two girls, but freezes into icy stillness at the mention of her math class. Reborn is pleased when Sasagawa Ryohei’s eyes narrow, clearly catching that small change in her expression, but he only reaches out to grasp her hand and turns to tug her along.

“We’ll be late for class, Sawada! Hibari will go extremely easy on you, but Kyoko doesn’t like when we fight before class!”

The exuberance that the boy excludes seems to affect his student and she perks up and manages to keep jogging at a steady pace without tripping over anything in her path.

She has twenty five minutes to reach the school. It’s about a twenty minute walk, so they should arrive with time to spare at their current rate of speed. Reborn keeps up with them, staying just barely out of sight. Long distance reconnaissance, as well as close range, is vital to any information gathering, but there’s something to be said about observation from a target’s blind spots.

Not that he is deliberately hiding from her, rather than simply keeping out of immediate sight. Her gaze slides to the side to his form too often to be a coincidence, as if she’s checking to make sure he’s still there.

They come to a y-branch in the road and on the other side is a tall, dark haired and tanned teenager that Reborn recognizes as Yamamoto Takeshi. He is delighted with the natural instincts in this boy
Tsunayoshi has managed to snag.

“Good morning, Tsuna!”

Yamamoto Takeshi is a natural hitman with a talent for swordsmanship. His father is also a named hitman, successfully retired and running his own dojo. Reborn is happy to see his student return the greeting in a familiar manner, asking about the homework they were assigned.

He’s a Rain and essentially her Guardian, if Tsunayoshi were Active and he knows they will have no trouble Harmonizing when the time comes.

It’s when they’re only a block or so from Namimori Middle that they encounter Sasagawa Kyoko and Kurokawa Hana. The group consists of a Sun and a Rain by that point and all three slow down to include the girls.

Reborn studies them together. The dynamics of the group along with the Flame types each of them have.

Yamamoto is a Rain, Sasagawa Ryohei a Sun, his sister Kyoko, a Mist and Kurokawa was either a Storm or a Lightning. Whichever was her Primary, the other was a rather strong Secondary. They all revolved around Tsunayoshi like proper Elements.

But it was only the Sun and the Rain that were Guardian Potentials.

And…

Hibari Kyoya, Cloud.

A teenager who bore a striking resemblance to Fon and was trained formally as a martial artist, although he had chosen tonfas as weapons and a berserker style, influenced by the quick, precise hits of his training. It’s a very effective way of fighting and Reborn approves, even as he can see how it can be better.

Later though, later that can be addressed.
Right now, the Cloud was waiting by the school gates, his second in command a short, respectful distance away.

Hibari’s actions were to essentially herd the group surrounding his student into the school area, visually scanning each of them before allowing them to pass. He easily ignored the Sun’s boisterous greetings and subsequent challenges, and returned the Rain’s casual hello along with a curt nod, and something like a smirk as the waves from the two girls.

Hibari Kyoya shows no hesitation in invading Tsunayoshi’s space, and raking his gaze over her, almost as if he was making a point of her state. There was a half smile on his student’s face as he did so, as Hibari apparently found what he was searching for. His head dipped in a sharp nod, seemingly pleased before turning away, and stalking off.

That was all the Cloud was inclined to do, leaving them to enter school ground and find their way to their classrooms on their own.

According to the schedule Reborn has memorized, they all shared classes with one another, but rarely were they all together as they were in P.E. and English. Maths wasn’t shared with anyone. Litatiture and Home Economics with Sasagawa Kyoko and Kurokawa Hana. Science was with Yamamoto Takeshi. History was with both Ryohei and Takeshi.

Considering Sasagawa Ryohei was a year ahead of them and yet managed to share a class was luck, certainly. Math was the only class where one of her group wasn’t present and thus would explain the entire month Tsunayoshi had kept this quiet.

Reborn suspected that her friends knew there was something bothering her, but were unable to get her to share. Considering her reputation as a loner, somewhat creepy along with her association with some of the most popular kids and Hibari Kyoya, everyone basically ignored her.

If they weren’t plotting ways to corner her, or cause problems at the very least.

Reborn waits patiently for fourth period. He made mental notes of all her interactions with her teachers, but when the bell rung and he noticed as Tsunayoshi walked to her math class, waving goodbye to the elder Sasagawa and Yamamoto, her expression shuts down into a stone cold mask. Her shoulders rise the tiniest bit and her head angles itself down and Leon is already crawling into his hand and shifting into a gun.
The Mafia is a dark, dangerous and cruel world. Reborn is the very definition of the Mafia but there are lines he doesn’t cross and he is very willing to kill those who do.

The door to the classroom slides open and Reborn slides right in before his student. He makes a spot for himself in the back of her room, automatically cataloguing students, escape routes and the teacher who comes in on Tsunayoshi’s heels.

*Much too close to be appropriate.*

He’s not touching her. He’s very deliberately *not* touching her. He is in her space, crowding closer to her, using his arms to move her to where he wants her to go, but he doesn’t lay a finger on her. Really, he doesn’t even have to. His expression shows nothing but the barest of interest but the way in which the man looks at this thirteen year old girl who is Reborn’s student is nowhere near acceptable.

He watches in silence. Leon is exceedingly helpful, shifting into a video recorder and taping every second of Tsunayoshi’s experience with her math teacher.

It begins when tests are returned to the students and Ian Sato tells her to see him after class in order to discuss her grades.

Tsunayoshi does not acknowledge him. Ian Sato only smiles benignly and waves it off, easily moving to ask another student as the rest of the class dissolves into harsh whispers while glaring at her.

She doesn’t speak, not even when he calls upon her. She doesn’t react when the teacher sighs and moves on. She doesn’t lift her gaze from her textbook. She is sitting in the middle of a hostile classroom, acting as if she’s sitting in her own world.

Reborn sees different. She has blanked her face well, if he were not so experienced with the mafia, he would not have seen it. She looks to be in her own world, but Reborn can see the way she tracks the man’s position at all times, using her wider vision and periphery making sure she knows where he is at all times. He watches the subtle ripple of muscle, and casual shifting that allows her the best position to retaliate should the situation turn actively dangerous. He sees the dangerous predator in her eyes, hidden from the casual observer.
Twice, the teacher- (Ian Sato a Japanese-American who occasionally teaches English, but was hired for his mathematical skills)- offers to let her sit up in the front.

In case she’s having trouble seeing the board. If she needs help with the material, shouldn’t she be closer?

Reborn doesn’t move from his spot and Leon doesn’t stop recording.

The clock ticks on the wall and Ian Sato continually finds an excuse to speak directly to Tsunayoshi without making it seem as if he was singling her out. (which he very obviously is) The class ends and all the students file out and Ian Sato’s gaze goes directly to Reborn’s student and stays there.

Tsunayoshi moves, shoving her textbook into her bag and slips easily into the flow of students exiting the room. There is a measure of grace and fluid flexibility to her motions, but Ian Sato’s hand reaches out and his fingers wrap around her arm. The man smiles at her. It’s polite and only mildly interested in the girl trapped in his grip.

Reborn’s student straightens, her shoulders go back, her head rises and she turns to level her own gaze at him.

“May I ask why you grabbed me, sensei?”

There are three students still in the classroom, not including Tsunayoshi. They’re not paying much attention, but that can easily change.

“I asked you to stay after class, didn’t I, Tsunayoshi-kun?”

The man is smiling. Reborn wants to put a bullet in his head. He doesn’t though, he cannot handle this situation like this. There are witnesses and it would unnecessarily traumatize his student when there are other options that would lead to even better results.

Tsunayoshi continues to stare at the teacher. Her eyes flick to the students who are still lingering in the back of the classroom and the audible conversations from the students who are gathered in the hallway just outside the open door.
“I am busy, sensei, I do not have the time to stay after class. Perhaps, if you asked the Principal to set up a meeting with my mother about my tests?”

There. A break in the man’s calm demeanor. Anger, frustration. His fingers tighten, the hitman can see clearly as his hand clenches. He is causing her pain, but Tsunayoshi keeps her face smooth.

“If that is all, sensei?”

This is louder, meant to draw attention and it works. Two of the students look their way, one female, mildly popular and her boyfriend, a member of boxing club who continues to stare even after the girl turns away. Ian Sato releases Reborn’s student and takes a step back. He smiles pleasantly and dips his head the barest of inches.

“Have a good weekend, Tsunayoshi-kun,” Ian Sato says as he watches Tsunayoshi exit his classroom. He stays there and keeps his gaze on her body until she vanishes from his line of sight.

The boy, Seito Kagami, takes a second to whisper something into his girlfriend’s ear and soon the classroom is empty.

Reborn suspects this incident will be reported to the Captain of the Boxing Club.

Leon is still recording.

The school day is almost over and Hibari Kyoya has only just stopped at his desk to check over any memos or important files left on his desk when he feels the presence. It’s remarkably familiar and for a moment, he wonders if the small Carnivore broke his Oath. He turns to level his gaze at the door to his office. His tonfas a flick away and regardless of how it chaffs, he knows well the level the small Carnivore stands on and it is above his current one.

That won’t stop him, of course. He’s bored. There’s are no opponents for him to test his fangs against, other than disciplining herbivores and he has to be careful he doesn’t break them beyond repair.
A small body stands at his threshold. But there is no long braid, no brightly red uniform so a part of himself eases.

Black suit, black fedora with an orange band. Small green animal. A yellow Pacifier.

The small Carnivore doesn’t talk about those he associates with, other than his student, but this one is the same as he is. It doesn’t take an explanation.

“Carnivore,” Kyoya half states and half demands an answer for his presence.

That’s when he notices it. The tall, intimidating shadow that stretches from an impossible angle as the Not-Baby stares at him. He has seen a shadow like that only one other time. Once, when his Uncle had interfered with a kidnapping attempt when Kyoya was still a cub and unable to save himself.

A quiet, seething fury. Moments of extreme emotion that don’t quite manage to convey themselves as facial expressions or body language. Considering the line of work this small Carnivore is in, his emotions are normally contained and used when necessary. As the Carnivore has allowed enough past his walls for him to see, Kyoya can easily make the jump that this visit regards something related to him. Something that has angered one of those people and it’s connected to him.

Kyoya reaches for his chair and sits down. He lifts his head, not quite a welcome, but permission.

A moment later, the Not-Baby hops up and stands on his desk. He holds out a hand because evidence is required and the... small animal ...jumps into his palms and promptly transformers into a tablet. Kyoya delicately picks it up, balancing the small animal turned viewing device in his hands. It wouldn’t do to inadvertently cause pain to this very small animal.

“I have arrived by the request of Vongola Nono, in order to train the last available heir of the line of Vongola Primo to ascend to the throne of Italy’s Strongest Mafia Family,” the small Carnivore says flatly.

Kyoya pauses, makes several connects, comes to several conclusions and nods.

“I arrived with faulty information and thus conducted my own reconnaissance. Today is the day I
made contact with my student.”

A sudden knowing blooms in Kyoya’s mind and he’s shooting to his feet, eyes narrowed and a snarl twisting his lips. How dare he?

“Sawada Tsunayoshi is mine,” he says with all the weight of a thousand burning bonfires and stares into dark, dark eyes.

There is silence between the two of them before the Not-Baby’s head nods in acceptance of Kyoya’s claim.

“I am aware.”

The screaming, yawning rage in him quite suddenly dissipates and Kyoya pauses a moment before he retakes his chair. He takes a breath and eases his grip on the small animal currently in computer form. There is no challenge nor threat to his territory.

He motions for the small Carnivore to continue.

“I am her tutor,” he says evenly, “I was asked to help with an issue she was having at school.”

Kyoya stills and turns his attention to the screen as it turns on. It is playing footage of the small lioness as she unpacks her textbooks and settles into a desk. He recognizes the way she moves, on the days in which the small lioness’ weight is eased. Today will be a good day for her then, he thinks.

He glances up at the Not-Baby.

A heavy gaze is all he receives so he returns his attention to the screen. The recording plays, complete with sound and high definition features. There are moments when the frame blurs, just the smallest amounts, but other than that, Kyoya is given a perfectly clear view of Sawada Tsunayoshi’s maths class. The only class in which her grades still suffer.

A minute ticks by. Five. Then ten. Fifteen.
Kyoya doesn’t move no matter the screaming in his head. He ignores that because the small Carnivore is still staring at him and so he stays and watches the entire video until the end. He doesn’t move, doesn’t \textit{rage} the way he wants to, because the video is still playing. He cannot react properly to this until he has seen the transgressions all the way through. He breathes. He waits. He watches.

He is quiet, when the small animal in his hands shifts back into his natural form. His is silent as he stands up and goes for a filing cabinet in the back of the room. It takes only a couple seconds to pull a file out of the drawer and return to his desk. Only then does he go for the phone and punch in a number.

It rings only once.

\textit{“Kyo-san?”}

\textit{“Bring the small lioness to me immediately. Inform Sasagawa Ryohei and Yamamoto Takeshi that Abyss Protocols are in effect and to prepare accordingly.”}

There is a harsh hiss of unintelligible words before Kyoya receives a curt, “Understood,” and he presses a finger into the receiver and dials another number.

This one is picked up in the same manner only no one answers on the other end. Hibari snarls faintly only two words.

\textit{“Sato Ian.”}

The other lines clicks dead and Hibari hangs up. Silence falls a moment before Hibari turns to Reborn.

\textit{“Small Carnivore, such behavior towards the little lioness is not tolerated.”}

The teenager speaks as if he is commanding him, \textit{ordering him}, but the Not-Baby makes no outward reactions. Only tips his head in agreement. They are alike in their fury, in their wrath and they both know the other would not hesitate to take this man’s life.
Neither of them would think twice.

It’s barely five minutes later when his door slides open and Yamamoto Takeshi steps through with a face carved from stone and a grim set to his mouth. There’s a baseball bat hanging between his shoulder blades and Kyoya approves of the implications. Sasagawa Ryohei steps through, utterly silent and impassive, with his sister trailing behind him. Sasagawa Kyoko was quietly whispering to a pale faced Tsunayoshi and they were loosely holding hands.

Bringing up the rear was Kusakabe Tetsuya, his face the very picture of a protective rage. He does not bother to hide it and closes the door behind them with a sharp snap.

Kyoya doesn’t bother with greetings, merely making straight for the small form of the little lioness and holding out his hand for her to take. It never fails to warm a spot in his chest when Tsunayoshi unflinchingly places her trust in him and her fingers are wrapped around his half a second later.

It’s when he reaches out as if to grasp her arm that she flinches. He stops. Kyoya’s eyes flicker up, wandering over the emotions displayed in her face, before they shift to the side and land on Kyoko. The brightly colored female is very well informed of all the happenings in the school.

“There’s a hand-shaped bruise around her entire upper arm,” the female not-quite-a-herbivore says in glacial tones and sharp smile splitting her pale pink lips.

Kyoya nods in acknowledgement of her sharp eyes and astute observations, before reaching up to remove his jacket, swinging it around to drape over the lioness’s small shoulders. Kusakabe takes that as his cue and snags Tsunayoshi’s elbow in a gentle hold to guide her over to the couch. Kyoko follows her, but Takeshi and Ryohei stay put.

Hibari pulls out a cellphone from his pocket and presses a number. The phone rings several times before it’s answered.

“Ah, Hibari-kun. What can I do for you?”

“Sato Ian will be removed. Immediately. Under suspicion of harassment, attempted sexual assault, assault, fraud, theft and solicitation of a minor. An investigation will be opened and further charges will be filed.”
There was a lengthy silence on the other end before there was a response.

“As you see fit, Hibari-kun. Do let me know how this situation turns out, yes?”

Hibari snapped his phone shut and headed for the door. Takeshi and Ryohei quickly fell into step behind him. This was his school. The students, the teachers, the staff, they were all his responsibility.

This was acknowledged.

How dare this, Hibari whistled sharply, ending it with a throaty growl, dare to challenge that?

Kyoya pulled in a sharp breath, his eyes narrowing as he moved to open the door. A knock interrupted the movement, and Hibari stilled. The student body knew better than to come to him with petty concerns, going instead to his Committee, which would vet the situation and then bring it to his attentions only if needed. And his Committee members announced themselves before or after knocking.

That this person had done neither meant it was a student who had braved approaching his office. Hibari pulled the door open, his face thunderous in a quiet way, as his rage was not directed at this herbivore.

The girl at his door- Ishikawa Shizuka, fourteen, good grades, average features- shared the lioness’ math class and looked nervous but determined. He recognized her as one of the females that had been present in the video the small Carnivore had presented him with.

“How dare this?”

She leaned around Hibari, her eyes falling on Tsunayoshi, sitting on the couch beside Sasagawa.

Tsuna’s eyes lifted, meeting Ishikawa’s, smiling faintly as she asked, “Can I help you, Ishikawa-san?”

“I...I wanted to make sure you were okay,” the girl’s brown eyes dropped from Tsuna’s amber. “I
saw...Sato-san, I saw him grab you and I-” her voice broke, and the attention of the entire room narrowed in on her.

Tsunayoshi stood, approaching the girl slowly, “Ishikawa-san? Did something...did something happen?” her eyes narrowed for an instant, that flash of Other in her eyes a dark threat if something had.

Ishikawa looked up, her eyes darting around the room, at all the eyes focused on her.

“I…,” she looked like she was going to deny everything, but Tsunayoshi’s eyes narrowed sharply, and then her eyes settled on a seething Hibari.

“Yes,” she finally breathes the answer like a secret, “I saw...I saw your tests and homework Sawada-san,” her eyes drift back to the Sky in the room. “How Sato-san wrote on them all that he-” her voice stutters a moment, “wanted to see you after class.”

Burning brown eyes meet amber, tears gathered in her eyes, even as a helpless rage shone out of them.

“Don’t go,” she pulls in a breath like it hurts, heavy and pained, “Don’t. He- my friend, she- Sato-san wrote on her tests too. She went to see him when he refused to set up a meeting. He said- He said it would be better if it was just- if it was just them. She didn’t.”

For a moment it looks like Ishikawa is going to hyperventilate. It takes her a few moments to calm down, the room frozen. At his feet, Reborn’s shadow writhes. Behind Ishikawa, the murderous rage reflected in the three boys- three Guardians- grows into a diamond hard unshakable thing. Kyoko goes still.

“She went to see him,” Ishikawa breathes on a sob “and then he- he-”

A hand lifts to cover her mouth, a sob choked back and her eyes close. She forcibly chokes her tears down and takes a deep breath.

“She moved away two days ago.” Ishikawa whispers, “She moved away, and I didn’t...I didn’t see it, before, but now...now...He wants to do the same thing to you, Sawada-san, and I can’t- I won’t let him hurt someone like that again. Not ever. Now that I can see the signs...he’s trying to do the
same thing to you, has been from the start, right?”

Tsuna staggers back, away from the girl, her eyes wide. Horror etches itself into her face as it drains of color as she *stares* at Ishikawa.

It’s not because she is surprised, not because she didn’t see what that man had wanted to do. No, she had known, she just hadn’t been sure how to address it without pulling her own into the mess. What to do when all the teachers refused to listen to her in normal setting and so were useless in this one. Her knees weaken and she stumbles away from Ishikawa, because she had never imagined Sato would target another girl. She had never imagined that *someone else* would be hurt while she tried to sort the mess out. It had never crossed her mind, with Sato’s intense focus on *her*, that the younger, more vulnerable, more *trusting* females in her class could fall prey to the man.

She can’t quite take a breath. Her head is spinning and she can’t keep her balance. She sways.

She’s going to be *sick*.

Warm hands are cradling her face.

It takes her a few moments of hard gasping breaths that seem to do *nothing* before she can focus on shining silver eyes. When had she fallen to the ground? How had he gotten so close, when had Kyoya moved?

“*Breathe* Lioness.” the boy commands and Tsunayoshi sucks in a breath automatically.

The fury in his eyes is a comforting thing. She recognizes the promise of *Destruction* in him, as she had once promised the world.

“He will be *dealt with* shortly. He will never touch anyone again. This, I swear,” Kyoya fairly snarls into her ear.

It’s comforting and reassuring in a way that eases something in her. Kyoya’s hands are calloused against her skin, solid and firm and a part of her nearly *weeps* at the *warmth* she can feel.
Tsunayoshi is not a fool. She knows Kyoya is dangerous, that he has no doubts about killing to keep his own well. She recognizes the promise he has given her, the Oath he has uttered knelt before her. When her eyes lift to the boys behind him, unmoving and just as furious, she knows they include themselves in that oath.

Sato Ian will never touch another person, so he had sworn, and so they would see it through.

She closes her eyes, her stomach turning, that she had not seen him aim for the younger girls. She leans into his hands for a moment, allowing him to brace her. Allowing this one moment of weakness. She steels herself and opens her mouth.

“Kyoya?” she breathes the whisper near silent, but he hears her.

He always hears her.

“Yes?”

Her eyes open, the amber burning with a soul deep rage, the kind of rage only a Goddess of Destruction can bare, “Make him scream for this.”

A sharp baring of teeth, not a smile, but a promised threat and approval shine brightly in his eyes.

“Small Lioness, I need no prompting to hunt vermin .”

Kyoya watches his Lioness close her eyes, blocking the sight of the Carnivore that sleeps in her soul, and feels her settle her weight into his hands for a moment. He offers her support easily, the fires of his rage stroked higher at the sight of what this has done to his own. He makes no move to pull away, allowing her what she needs from him.

She pulls back and he helps her to her feet as he rises from his crouched position. She meets his eyes and dips her head. If this had been a usual night in which Kyoya was going after prey, she would have smiled up at him and wished him a good hunt in the way she always did- ‘May you have Interesting Prey’ - but in this case, she did not.
No in this case her eyes, burning with fury met his own and she growled “May you eradicate him so entirely, the Scales have nothing to Weigh.”

He had long gotten used to her oddities, and knew the Lioness had made a reference to the beliefs about the afterlife in Ancient Egypt. She wanted this man so ruined in life there would be nothing left of him in death.

Kyoya could get behind that kind of thought. Kyoya very much approves of that kind of thought.

He whirls away after seeing her set back on the couch, tired and guilty. He stalked towards the door, pausing beside the herbivore who had shared this information with him. Most of the herbivores in his school would not be as brave as her.

“Sato Ian will no longer be a problem. In the event you suspect another adult of something of this nature again, come see me. I do not care if they are a teacher or not. Those who wish to prey on cubs in my territory will be eradicated.”

Unlike most times he snarls a threatening promise, Ishikawa smiles at him, a fragile, timid thing, but a smile.

“I will,” she promises quietly, but firmly.

Kyoya nods once, striding out the door and into the hallways of his school. Class has let out and the hallways are crowded with students, but most barely take a glance at him, as the visible black cloud of anger is a halo around him before throwing themselves out of his way.

Takeshi and Ryohei are a step behind him, flanking his movements, and every bit as infuriated as himself. The air around the three males almost pulses with the intensity of their feelings. It only expedites the process with which the herbivores clear a path before them. Like deer scattering before wolves.

This leaves them with a mostly cleared path straight to the Lioness’ maths classroom.
Takeshi Yamamoto is normally a calm person. He’s the kind of guy who can roll with the punches life throws, get back to his feet and laugh it off. He’s the sort that enjoys games best, finds easy solutions to break up tensions and doesn’t mind being the butt of a joke for that same reason.

This isn’t a joking matter.

He can’t laugh this off. He can’t shake it away, pretend everything is alright.

Not when there’s a burning pit where his stomach usually is, when someone, a teacher, had planned to hurt one of the only people who saw Takeshi.

Not when the part of him that he hides behind smiles and oblivious eyes has risen so strongly. He can’t pretend when the person who had become his light had been threatened. His hands tighten on the bat hanging over his shoulder. His eyes are sharp, stripped of their oblivious mask and revealing the killer instinct he’s learned to hide.

Takeshi is scanning the students, logging positions and threat levels without a thought. Absently tracking exits, and advantageous positions. He can’t stop the part of him that whispers ways he can kill them all. Can’t hide the knowledge from showing in his eyes. It’s always been there, he’s always had more of a problem leashing his reactions and strength when compared to others of his age.

They used to be terrified of him. It was why he had learned to laugh, to hide his predator mindset behind laughter and stupidity. What did math matter, when he could calculate the exact angle and force needed to throw his pencil through his teacher’s juglar, the way he was contemplating doing to Sato Ian?

No, when the one who had looked at him and seen something, someone, worth knowing, is threatened, Takeshi refuses to limit himself. When his light, when Tsuna who accepted all of him, was threatened…

Takeshi has practiced with his sword hours, days and weeks of his life and by now, it’s not hard to call up those blue flames. Some have said that mercy is for the strong, but a quick, clean death is all the mercy that Takeshi has for those who would decide to harm Tsuna. The girl is his light and he’s not going to lose her to some misplaced mercy for people who have no hesitation in harming children.
He had decided so, that day a few years before, when he saw Tsuna following Hibari and got curious. He had followed the two of them straight into claimed yakuza territory. Hibari had gotten himself into a bit of a mess, and Tsuna had jumped straight into it on his behalf without a thought. He really should have expected that though.

Even Yamamoto couldn’t have stopped himself after that if he had wanted to. His inner darkness had been much closer to the surface with no light to temper it at the time. He had taken to long hours of baseball practice just to wear him out, but it wasn’t helping. And when the yakuza had come at him with intent to harm Hibari, to hurt Tsuna, his instincts had taken over.

Yamamoto had lashed out, sharp, instinctive and deadly with only a baseball bat in his hands. He’d killed men that day. He knew he had. Maybe not exactly on purpose, in that he had not planned to kill them, but to take them down in a way they wouldn’t get up from. He was barely a teenager, these were grown men, surely they weren’t so weak?

If they were, if they died from that, well it was their own fault for attacking him wasn’t it? It was their own fault for not being strong enough to offer any real resistance to an eleven year old.

Takeshi had sworn loyalty to Tsunayoshi that day, when she had seen his darkness, the killer that slept in him, and instead of retreating in horror, she advanced in concern. Asked if he was hurt, asked if he was okay. She had looked at his blood splattered form, the cracked baseball bat in his dirty hands, and extended her own clean hands without a thought.

To protect the person who had met his darker half, his true self behind all the socially accepted behaviors, first and been worried about him, grateful he knew how to protect himself and looked at him with happiness anyway, Takeshi would become anything.

Ryohei was not one easily angered. Oh, he was easily excitable and irritated, but anger took a while to build. For most things.

He was a bright, excitable, loud and generally happy individual. A dangerous one yes, one who enjoyed the rush of a good fight, the burn of his muscles, the adrenaline of a worthy opponent. But he was controlled. He knew how to bank himself, lest he burn the world in a fit of extremeness.

He learned to channel his energies into happier emotions, as when he lost control to anger, he tended
to leave swathes of destruction in his wake.

Like the time Tsuna-chan had been taken by yakuza— the same ones that had targeted Kyoko once upon a time— and he had gone in like a *tank*. He hadn’t stopped, not until he had saved his adoptive little sister, who carried an invisible weight on her shoulders. He wiped the clan off the map, along with Hibari and Yamamoto, as a three man army.

At this moment, with the knowledge that Sato Ian had *targeted* Tsuna-chan, had the gall to go through with something like *that* in his town…

Ryohei makes no move to smother or control the bonfire in his soul. The one that pumps energy into his limbs, makes him *quiver* with the urge to *pummel* everything in his path.

No, Ryohei strokes that fire hotter, focusing it on his target.

He was a fighter, had a fighter’s soul. He thrived with a good fight. It was why he was participating in the Underground Fighting. He *needed* a place to let himself go, where he could strike as hard as he liked, and people would be able to strike back, fight back, *survive*.

He had never told Kyoko, who so disliked his need to fight, but Tsuna-chan knew. She had been the one to direct him to the Underground Pit Fights in the first place. She had understood the way he *needed* to fight.

She *accepted* him for who he was and didn’t try to change him. She called him ‘*oni-chan*’ just the same as Kyoko-chan did.

And this *scum* had thought to snuff her will, her light.

Well.

Ryohei would just have to *educate him* on how *extremely* he had screwed up in concerns to his little sister.

Besides, those yellow Flames could just as easily *burn* as they could *heal*. And, it was common
knowledge, if you could fix a body, you can just as easily break it. As far as Ryohei was concerned, an extreme man did what he had to do to keep his loved ones safe.

Hibari was extreme in the same way and while Ryohei was occasionally annoyed with the way Hibari referred to those who didn’t understand that knowledge, that if you had a choice between your life, the life of a loved one and someone who was threatening them…

Well, that was an extremely obvious choice, wasn’t it?

Kyoya does not pause in front of Sato Ian’s assigned classroom. He simply rips the door off, throws it away and strolls in.

There are two people inside.

One is the man himself, a bundle of papers in his hands, with his suit jacket discarded and his tie loosened. The other is a female student with her assignment in her own hands with red ink slashed over the top.

She does not look upset or anything along the lines of being hurt, either physically or emotionally, so Kyoya counts this as a win.

Sato Ian straightens his spine and squares his shoulders, painting a pleasant smile on his face. He shifts to face Hibari and speaks semi-formally.

“Ah, Hibari-kun, I-”

That’s as far as he gets before Kyoya lunges.

His tonfas slid out, his fingers wrap around the handle and the blunt object slams quite forcefully into the teacher’s face. The man goes down, blood gushing from an instant broken nose and a cracked cheekbone. He’s clearly unconscious on the floor. Kyoya does not stop a smirk from forming on his
lips as he noticed that the man’s head ricocheted on his desk before crumpling to the ground.

The girl cries out, one startled shriek before falling silent, large eyes fixed on the terrifying Hibari Kyoya.

He only speaks to the unconscious filth on the floor. His words carry clearly to the girl and to those lingering in the hallway.

“You are accused of attempted sexual assault, assault, fraud, theft and solicitation of a minor. Evidence has been produced to verify several of these charges. An investigation will be launched to fully record the extent of your crimes.”

The student left to witness this took a shaking step backwards as her mouth gaped open in absolute shock. Her gaze darted from Hibari, to her teacher, to the Captain of the Boxing Club and the Star of the Baseball Team.

Ryohei could see the exactly moment when realization washed over the girl’s face and she rapidly paled. She attempted to speak, but her words were quickly drowned out by Hibari.

“You will remain in a secure hold, until such a time the investigation is finished.”

Naturally, Sato Ian was unaware of this development as he was unconscious. And would likely remain so for some time.

Takeshi and Ryohei stepped forward, their faces thunderous as they each reached down for one of Sato’s ankles.

It was automatic as the student looked towards Takeshi in hope of some sort of comfort in the situation. She looked to him as one of her ‘idols’ and Hibari wasn’t a comforting person. Ryohei was relatively unknown to her, compared to the baseball star, and so she turned her eyes on him.

“Yamamoto-senpai….? What…?”

Takeshi turned. He smiled. It was nothing like his normal ‘baseball star’ smiles. This one was dark,
dangerous. His lips pulled back, his eyes open and focused on her rather than closed as they usually would be (to hide that the smile never reached his eyes).

His eyes are seething, open and showing the dangerous killer instinct he barely has a hold on.

He is not comforting, as the student had hopped, instead she takes another step back, bumping into a desk.

“He was threatening my friends. He won’t threaten her again.”

The female student cannot pull her eyes away from his, no matter that her heart has dropped to her feet. This is not the Yamamoto-senpai she had learned to look up to. No, looking into those glacial eyes, the threat she can clearly see in them, she finds that the emotion she feels is fear.

She tries not to think about what Yamamoto-senpai could possibly have implied with that sentence.

“I’ll just,” she gulps and avoids the eyes of all three boys, “just be leaving then.”

She skirts around them, edging for the door. It’s not until she’s out the door and down the hall, that the fist that had tightened over her heart loosens, and she feels like she can breathe. Her eyes lift, wide with shock as her brain finally registers properly what Hibari-san had accused Sato-sensei of doing, and being.

She has to tell everyone.

What if one of her friends had been caught? What if they had planned to meet him somewhere? Like- Like she had been asked to do? She has to make sure.

Tsuna sits on Kyoya’s couch with his jacket about her shoulders and comes to the startling realization that her decision to handle this situation by herself wasn’t out of concern for her friends.

It was due to her pride.
She had once been a goddess. She had once unleashed hell to her enemies and ravaged their lands, their soldiers and their armies with a smile on her face and blood on her armor. She was respected, admired, beloved, and no man would dare take such liberties with her.

She wasn’t that woman any longer.

A sob broke through Tsuna’s lips.

She wasn’t her any more. She was Sawada Tsunayoshi, a clumsy middle schooler with bad grades and a gaping hole filled with ice in her chest. She was not the woman who lead armies with fistfulls of flames in her hands and gold at her brow.

She just wasn’t.

And she was still holding on to who she used to be, not who she was now. She couldn’t do this as she once had. She needed allies, comrades, friends and family.

She needed supports, pillars.

Her mind flashed to Kyoya, so viciously protective, relentless in his hunts and enforcing. To Takeshi, who held a darkness in him that made him at home in the presence of a once-Goddess of Destruction. Of the fighter that dwelled in Ryohei, perfectly balanced with his desire to care for his own.

She needed to open herself more to those who were already standing beside her. There was no reason she had to do this alone.

She knew this. Her pride had almost cost too much. Had cost more than enough. She had made mistakes, many of them, and if she was not careful…

Well it was said that pride came before a fall, and she had fallen far enough from the Sky and her home. The ball of ice filling the hole in her being was reminder enough. She wasn’t strong enough to protect anyone, least of all herself.
How could she be so stupid?

She had only spoken to Reborn when he entered her room, told him of the situation because he reminded her of her father. Not in looks, or in actions, but in the way he held himself and the age in his eyes. She had looked at the older man trapped in a tiny body, unending and ageless in the way her father and she had once been. At the man who stood straight, chin lifted, and shoulders back, the *weight* in his gaze.

He was nowhere near the level of a god, not even close to the right weight or feel to Ra, but in this life he had been the closest she had found.

It was that reminder of her father, lost in this world and hidden from her senses with the lack of her Flames, her King and beloved family, that had seen her reaching out to him. That likeness that had her setting her pride aside as she lead the Sun into her house and explained the situation.

Her throat constricted, a hand raising sharply to cover her own mouth as she muffled the pained noise she couldn't stop. Kyoko pulled her into her arms, soft words washing over her ears without comprehension. Tsuna let herself lean into the hold in a way she usually refused.

It wasn’t long after that when Kyoya returned, Takeshi and Ryohei only a couple steps behind, along with another member of the Disciplinary Committee who was carrying a clipboard with a file that Hibari was signing. Takeshi and Ryohei were both handed after, signing their names next to Kyoya’s.

His stride momentarily faltered when his gaze landed on Kyoko and Tsuna still gasping and sobbing bodily into her friend’s shoulder, but his mouth twisted and his eyes hardened before he stepped forward.

He slid on the other side of Tsuna, pausing a moment to give Sasagawa Kyoko a brief nod of acknowledgement before he slid his hand into the Small Lioness’s mane and gently tugging until she leaned back and slumped against him. Her fingers curled into his shirt and Kyoya allowed the warmth of her pressed against him to quiet the rage in his chest.

A carnivore trapped in a fragile, herbivore body.

A small part of him wondered if such a strong spirit would be smothered by her body’s inability to
function as it should.

Some days Kyoya’s thought- cannot help but think- whatever had been done to the Small Lioness will one day suffocate her, if a cure cannot be found.

It’s an ordinary day.

Truly, there’s nothing special, momentous or anything that sets this particular day apart from hundreds of thousands of ones just like that that Skull has endured over the centuries. Unfortunately, the only thing of note about this day, is that he’s current alone in the meeting place that all the Arcobaleno have agreed on, since they been together in the last decade. Not that they’re here at the moment.

They’ve all arrived before him, but when he got here, they were all out. Skull suspects they went to the nearest store to stock up on groceries as all their luggage is unpacked in their rooms. Everything is completely normal. Skull figures nothing of note will happen today.

At least, that’s all it is, until the moment there’s a bright flare of warmth in his soul and Sku- Ra’s breath catches and the world stops and starts and oh.

*Oh. This- this feeling…*

Tears spring to his eyes as orange swirls and then overtakes the bright amethyst and his hair quickly follow suit. He’s on his feet, reaching out his hands and tipping his head back even as his eyes slide shut and his breath stutters in his chest.

*Sekhmet lives.*

He can feel her. Brilliant and beautiful, radiant in the gift of his own Flames and a sob of joy leaves his lips as they stretch into the widest smile he’s allowed himself in *centuries*. He laughs bright and absolutely happy in a way that he’s only vaguely remembered being.
It’s been so long since he’s felt this way and his body turns to the east before it’s pulled just a bit ot the south.


Her Flames are resonating with him for the first time since he held her as her blood spilled out on the sand and she eventually went cold and stiff in his arms. His own swell in response, reaching out, desperate for a connection, and the edges of their Bond, gray, lifeless and cold flares to life as he feeds his Flames down.

The edges of his precious child’s Flames are clumsy, but he’s just barely brushed the frayed ends and his smile stretches wider because she’s there-

She’s gone.

Ra crumbles to the floor as his Flames recoil from the ice and the sudden, swift void that overwhelms the warmth and the precious familiar Flames that die a sudden death.

Something claws its way up his throat as his heart constricts in his chest and Ra howls. His world is gone once more and he lunges forward, desperate to grasp anything, any lingering trace, because she can’t be gone, she was just there.

His hands encounter the wall of his assigned bedroom and without a thought, he screams as his fingers dig into the wood and he tears through it like tissue paper. His Flames, pure Sky as they once were, amber and glorious, shift into their usual purple and he screams.

There’s a cold breeze that hits his face and he can feel tear tracks on his cheeks before white noise drowns out all logical thought process.

GONE GONE GONE MY DAUGHTER, MY FIRST BORN, GONE SOMEONE TOOK HER FROM ME AGAIN.

His hands are curled into claws and he rakes them through the walls surrounding him. He doesn’t notice when he cuts through the doors to the room’s closet and it’s only a brief acknowledgement as something sprays into his face.
There’s an instant suppressing of his flames, but he ignores that.

He’s never run out of Flames and regardless of the centuries between the last time he battled entire armies for a seven-day stretch without sleep, without rest and now, he easily pulls more from his soul.

*What is this insignificant irritate,* he doesn’t wonder.

*Did Verde put this here,* he doesn’t roll his eyes in mild irritation.

*I will make sure I put this somewhere that gets him instead,* he doesn’t snicker to himself.

Skull is lost beneath the raging grief of Ra the Golden. He was the first and a part of him dreads the knowledge that he might be the last, but in this moment, he is alone and his daughter is lost to him once again.

There’s a dragging feeling that almost entices him to sleep, but he ignores that too.

The walls are in shreds, there are splinters in his hands, but what does Ra care for such insignificant pain when he can feel his heart bleeding and breaking into pieces that will never heal.

Someone killed his little girl, once again. *Someone killed her and she had died alone.* He had not *been there*.

His daughter dies far away from him, his daughter is lost to him once more.

It’s been *millennia* since her first death, and if her soul ever comes back, it will be a millennia more.

There are tears running down his cheeks, his voice cracks, even as he *screams,* and his hands are bleeding as he reaches out and *destroys everything he can touch.* The walls crumble into sawdust, the furniture explodes into bits and pieces and *it’s not enough.*
Amethyst flames drown out his vision and he screams, howls, cries and rages and destroys everything in his path. There’s blood, he can smell it and for a moment he wonders how Sekhmet dies this time.

His mind is all too eager to come with each and every scenario that would lead to Flame Activation and a death, not even five minutes later. None of them are painless, none of them are merciful and oh, Ra cannot breathe.

He is dead and dying and she’s gone. She has died and she was only a lingering flower and just as before all that’s left of her are the memories Ra holds close to his heart.

Abruptly, it all leaves him. All the rage and emotions overflowing in his chest and his knees give out. They hit the floor with thud and the rest of his body follows suit. His forehead presses against the ground and Ra stays there on the floor as tears cloud his eyes and drip onto the polished wood underneath.

The brief lingering warmth of his daughter’s Flames were only a fleeting impression on his own. They were gone now and would be gone for another thousand years. Ra could only wonder, if Sekhmet's death was an accident or intentional.

The rage comes again not long after.

The Arcobaleno are snipping at each other as they approach their meeting place. It is a playful sort of snipping for all the damage they do to their surroundings as they argue and tussle with one another. It looks comical with their infant forms, but it’s less amusing when tree trunks splinter and give way under the force of their bodies.

Still, there is an ease in their interactions.

That all changes as they come within Flame sensing distance of the mansion.

They still, every one of them, in the shock that swells as they realize it is Skull’s Flames they feel spiking and thrashing, raging in the clearing.
They have never seen their Cloud lose his temper, no matter what they threw his way.

It was a source of reluctant respect from the other Arcobaleno, that Skull could roll with the punches the mafia threw at him, with their instantity. In every situation, he had always seemed to be calm, if annoying, never snapping or panicking even when things seemed helpless for even the best. He always seemed to have a plan- as insane or stupid as they sounded- or able to spark an idea in the others.

Never once have they felt his Flames spike out of his control.

So as they come near the house, the clearing so saturated in furious agonized rage Flames that even now waiver and writhe, they cannot help that momentary pause.

It lasts less than an instant before they fly over the distance between them and the clearing that hosts their gathering point. The only sign of surprise they allow themselves as the mansion comes into view is the slight falter in their steps.

The mansion is destroyed, walls collapsing, windows shattered, doors kicked to the ground leaving charred marks both on the doors themselves and their frames. They can see the scattered smoking remains of furniture both inside and scattered across the yard. Crushed wood and stone lays like dust over the destruction, and the roof itself is sagging or nonexistent in places.

In the center of it all is the swaying form of their Cloud, his Flames lighting him up like hellfire, and his shadow a jagged unnatural reflection of his emotional state. When he turns to them, his face is twisted into a visage they do not know.

He is wrath given form, his eyes shining like pits, lips pulled back to bare teeth, inhuman in the flicking fires of his soul. And he is in unspoken agony the likes of which the Arcobaleno have seen only in the faces of parents who have lost their children, in sisters and brothers who held their sibling as they died, in children who watched their parents gunned down.

There are visible tear tracks- dried now, like he had nothing left to give- in lines down his cheeks. Leaving a morbid warpaint streaking through the sawdust and powdered bricks he had crushed barehanded.

They don't know how to react at first, to the sight of this loss of control in their calmest, the only one
of them who doesn’t act in any known manner of their Flame type. This temper that lurks in their most carefree member. A Cloud that acted completely opposite of any Cloud they had ever met or heard of. One that did not hold any territory, held no regard for personal space and was loud and obnoxious. If it weren’t for the times his Flames were visibly flared, they would doubt even his claim as a Cloud.

(A part of them, the part that learned lessons in blood and shadow whispers: Remember the Rage of the Cloud)

Colonello is the first to react beyond their stillness, the first to move towards their seventh member. There is caution in his step, a wariness in his gaze that has never been there before.

“What the absolute hell, Skull?”

It is a genuine question, born of a need to understand exactly what had set Skull off (so they can never, ever touch that particular button ever) and partly an attempt to bring the man back into a familiar situation with Colonello snapping questions and expecting answers.

(The way all military were trained, the way teammates would respond to a certain tone instinctively, the way Colonello had unconsciously tried to condition the Arcobaleno.)

It is a tone entirely unwelcome in that moment, as Skull spits a vile sounding spew of vaguely Egyptian words at the Rain he does not recognize. There are several familiar words buried in the string of whatever language Skull is half-way to screaming at them. There’s Russian, Hebrew, and Arabic that are immediately recognizable. The rest...isn’t.

Colonello knows despite his lack of understanding that he is being cursed at from the tones alone. It is his military training, the instinctive knowledge learned in trenches and blood, in life or death, that has the blonde raising his hands and changing his tone. When a there’s someone beating at the ground and howling, breaking all in their immediate path until they just can’t go on anymore. There’s blood dripping from Skull’s hands and smeared in his hair and spread on the floor, over the walls.

Colonello reaches out, spreading his fingers, and shifts his tones to soothing and soft as he asks, “What happened, Skull?”

The vaguely Egyptian language continued to pour from Skull’s lips, no words understood in their
entirety, but the tone shifts from rage to grief so strong it makes the Rain’s core shiver. There’s an absent part of Colonello’s mind that notices the complete lack of an accent in Skull’s words, how his tones lessen from shrill to simply the high-pitched tone of toddlers everywhere and the way they flow so easily from the purple haired infant.

At the same time, Colonello cannot help himself now that the soldier instincts are so close to the surface, awakened by Skull’s temper. This shift in tone, triggers an automatic response in Colonello. One that has him lowering his body into a less threatening position, dropping down to his knees, and keeping his hands up and open even as he speaks softly in a steady, even tone meant to reach those whose minds have gone elsewhere.

“Skull, Skull what happened? It’s Colonello, kora. You know who we are, we won’t hurt you. What happened? Who hurt you? You’re with the Arcobaleno, can you hear me? What happened? Skull?”

It seems an age before the questions, repeated in the calm soothing tone Colonello had taken, sink into the Cloud’s mind.

Colonello will never admit how relieved he is when amethyst eyes actually focus on his blue despite the way the mourning rage in him seems to deepen now that his mind is actually present and not just running on emotions and Flame-influenced instincts.

The breath that Skull takes in catches several times and he makes a half aborted motion with his hands before he notices the blood. The low, mournful sound that escapes him as he presses his his palms to his forehead makes Colonello grit his teeth. That is not something that he ever thought he would have to hear from Skull.

The Cloud mumbles something in a language that is probably English, before he switches halfway to an Asian one.

“I didn’t hear you, kora,” he says gently, carefully watching for reactions, and body language.

Skull takes another breath and straighten, but he doesn’t lift his gaze up from the floor. The wood burned and splinted in most areas. His next words are in clear Japanese, although quiet and subdued.

“The great Skull-sama is fine.”
Reborn, who has remained quiet, although alert next to him, visibly twitches. Colonello allows his eyes to shut as he mentally prepares himself.

“Lackey,” Reborn hisses in the same language, still sounding menacing in his toddler form, “You didn’t answer the question.”

There’s a moment just after the hitman finishes speaking when Skull’s eyes snap up and a snarl twists his lips. There’s a moment when Skull lunges forward and Reborn throws himself back as a very purple gaze stares straight into his own black.

It’s the only moment the Arcobaleno will remember that Reborn yielded to his ‘lackey’ and it’s when the Cloud’s very Cloudy stare rakes across all of them as he repeats himself that they decide to leave it alone.

“The Great Skull-sama is fine,” Skull says again, still practically snarling.

However, the rage and the defiance drains out of him just as quickly as it came. He simply stands there before his body jerks to the side and he starts walking away.

“The great Skull-sama requires time away.”

Colonello calms himself and calls after Skull, still keeping a hint of Tranquility in his voice.

“Where are you goi-”

“AWAY!”

It’s a roar, the word the Skull screams at them as his Flames rise and twist about his limbs and the ground cracks effortlessly under his feet. It’s his next words that ensures he isn’t followed.

“Before I slaughter you all.”
MERRY CHRISTMAS ALL!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas, our lovelies~!
Ho Ho Ho!

He was awake.

It was dark, his eyes did not see, nor could he hear any other other than his own slow breathing.

The world was dark and the sun did not warm his body. There was no sand beneath his hands, no fine linens tangled in his legs. There was an absence of familiar gold twisted about his arms or his ankles and he could not feel any armor adorning him. There was a collar about his neck, but it wasn’t *his*. He strained against whatever force was keeping him from moving, attempting to reach out for his staff, for the knowledge that his favored weapon was still by his side.

It wasn’t.

The world came rushing in with a roar of noise, machines beeping, the scientists laughing and shouting in triumph as quite suddenly Anubis became aware of exactly how he had woken. His heart stuttered in his chest, even as he gasped for breath and his muscles jerked sporadically. He could feel the Flames of his soul surging against a barrier along his skin.

His eyes were open, the bright light and the stark whiteness of the walls around him magnifying the harsh burning that caused tears to slip down his cheeks. His hands fisted against the restraints that cut into his wrists and the familiar warmth of blood was almost a comfort.

He was *alive*, again in this world, his Sky had drawn him back and he had felt the echo in his soul, even as he dwelled outside his mortal flesh. There was a jumble of conflicting memories in his head, but quickly realized that he was a prisoner to be used to further the gains of his own *blood*. He was a child, Anubis understood in this moment of clarity.

His body was only covered by a breathy material with ties holding it shut across his chest, there were scars pin pricking his arms and several long, thin lines he could see trailing down his chest. There was an aching in his bones, a hollow pit in his stomach and his mouth was dry and tasted of iron.
His Flames were trapped beneath his skin, and he could feel the flickers of the warmth of Sky Flames but—then there was absence in the corners of his soul and Anubis jerked his hands free of leather, throwing his head back as he howled.

Men and women in white coats quickly exited the room, save for an arrogant few, those who only turned their attention to the machines hooked up to the thin frame of the boy who appeared to be lost in a place only he could see. One even moved closer, making small notations on a clipboard as he observed the tears and the blanking staring eyes even as the boy’s voice reached a new haunting pitch of emotion.

That was the last thing that one saw before his life abruptly ended.

Mist Flames surged, cracking and burrowing holes in whatever walls stood between them and manifestation into the waking world.

Sterile white walls and a blood spattered floor melted away to a scorching sun, burning sands and a glittering pyramid shining in the distance. The scene quickly shifted following a hastily choked off scream and the distinct sound of something heavy falling to the floor.

A man stood, cloaked in Mist Flames to give him the appearance of a canine’s head, and a skin tone rivaling obsidian. He stood alone, wielding a golden staff stained with blood.

There was silence in this illusion, even as some felt the cold touch of fear down their spines and others only stared in delight at the power of one of their greatest success projects. Regardless of what their eyes were seeing, most of them were safe behind reinforced steel walls and bulletproof glass.

Truly, this was proof of their genius, of their superior ability.

The subject in question was almost seven years of age! If their methods could create this kind of strength at such a young age in barely two years of research, imagine what five more years would do! Imagine what secrets they could unlock!
Regardless of the percussion of the other mafia families, this proved the Estraneo Family was in the right. *This* was the proof that their research was finally yielding fruit!

When one woman with a slightly high developed sense of self-preservation reached over to hit the button that would release a knock-out gas of their own creation, and after the illusion wobbled and eventually dissipated, that was when the full extent of damage was revealed.

Blood spattered the entire room, alongside the bodies of every single Estraneo member who didn’t have the sense to evacuate as soon as the subject broke the restraints.

Remarkably, the subject was still conscious, curled into the fetal position softly weeping even as the men and women he murdered with his bare hands continued to bleed out on the floor next to him.

A man in a suit walks up to the window overlooking the room below. His gaze is heavy as he observes the destruction, the way his subordinates have their throats ripped out, and as bodies tumbled down as the bladed staffs that held them up vanished from sight. His expression was one of apathy and he didn’t bother to turn to his audience as he issued commands.

“Upgrade to stronger material when the subject is in use. Verify that any suppressants and sedatives are of a high enough dose and are strong enough to put down the subject before using them. Unless it’s absolutely necessary, don’t both with them at all,” he ordered, before sliding his gaze back and finishing with the edges of dry humor, “It would be expensive to allow his body to grow accustomed to the drugs in order to gain any immunity to them.”

“Understood, sir.”

Ra stands before his throne, overlooking the people that are *his*.

His son and foster daughter, now married, stand to his side, quietly and lovingly conversing even as Shu keeps himself alert and Tefnut searches the crowd for the sister of her heart.

The rising sun shines down into the receiving hall even as a breeze flows through and Ra pauses a moment to allow his Flames to swell and curl arout his family. There are answering flares and the
murmuring dissipates as the God-King of Egypt smiles down on those gathered.

He doesn’t speak though, as there’s a burst of displaced air as his beloved daughter rides into sight on the waves of her Flames and touches down at his feet. Sekhmet quickly rises and hurries to embrace him, a bright smile stretching her tanned cheeks.

“Father, I came as soon as I heard,” the Goddess of Healing says, arrayed in a simple kalasiris, although she wore the pressed gold and cut gems in the style of Ra’s House.

Ra pressed a kiss to her forehead, returning the hug before tugging her away and allowing the seriousness of the situation to reflect in his face.

“I am sorry to call you away, Sekhmet, but there will be need of both your talents in healing and your skills in destruction.”

Sekhmet straightened at his tone, her face shifting to mimic the serious stare he had directed at her.

“Father?” she questioned softly, her eyes gleaming.

The golden depths twisted and shined, hints of the insanity of destruction twisting with a healer’s knowledge of exactly how to break one’s enemies only to put them back together again.

“Apep has overstepped himself, sending his agents into our people’s homes and lands, raiding, burning and killing indiscriminately. Many have prayed to us, asking for aide and I will see it given. Soon the territories in the north will be dangerously damaged if we do not stop him now. If the Chaos Bringer wishes to have a war, than I shall send him my best and end it.”

Sekhmet’s eyes glowed with power, her lips twisting in anger. She was a goddess invoked in protection for a reason. She took the care of their people very seriously. That her father’s enemy wished to strike at the mortals who were so much more vulnerable than them infuriated her. Such news stirred her darker half, and saw the part of her that delighted in Destruction readying herself for war.

“I shall see your Will done, father.” She bowed her head to him, the frown deepening on her face.
Ra reached forward, lifting her head from her bow, and leaning towards her. He pressed a kiss to her forehead, murmuring, “May you have interesting prey my daughter, and be careful. Apep is too confident to not have something waiting in the wings.”

Sekhmet smiled up at him, the rage in her eyes softening to warm affection, and a deep love.

“As you command.” she agreed, easily enough as her Flames flared in acknowledgement.

Ra paced.

Something was wrong, he knew, though he could not place it. Sekhmet had contacted him recently, speaking of cults and priests dedicated to Apep- in his lands! - and her intentions to deal with them. She had been confident of her ability to to deal out justice to them, to rescue any slaves or hostages and she was not one to underestimate her enemies. His precious daughter could just as easily destroy as she could heal. But her healing was a gift, while her skills in destruction were honed through necessity and eventually became part of her.

Regardless, he had faith in his bright one’s ability to fight and come home to him.

But that did not stop the way his Flames twisted throughout his being, nor that knot of dread that sat heavy in his chest. His emotional state- antsy, stressed, worried- transferred to his Court and so they also paced and murmured in unease.

He had but a moments warning.

Anubis staggered, the sand-gold eyes of his jackal headed form widening as he turned towards the northern territories, his face twisting with horror. Like a wave, Ra watched those who were in Sekhmet’s Court turn their eyes towards the territories she had gone to take care of.

And then he felt it though their own bond. She pulled hard and fast on the Flames he had gifted to her, her emotions of revulsion and rage, of pain and terror seeping into Ra’s mind. He was moving before he thought of it, stepping into his sky, and traveling the large distance between them in a breath.
He found her facing down Apep himself, who had stepped onto Ra’s sands, unwelcomed and attacked his firstborn.

He snarled, orange and purple flames swirling around his frame, one feeding the other even as the god-king stepped towards his enemy.

Apep looks over Sekhmet’s shoulder and Ra has but a moment to see the wicked and pleased smile that stretched over the god’s face, victorious and dangerous.

He lashed out, and Ra watched with widening eyes as the weapon he carried, coated in poison colored like infected blood, sank deeply into his daughter’s chest. Sekhmet makes an odd noise, not unlike having the breath knocked out of her. She makes an aborted motion, as if to pull the sword from her flesh, but...it’s already too late.

The world erupts into a massive wave of Flames.

Ra wakes up slowly and painfully, his eyes wet with tears and the image of his beloved cub falling to the sands of his home still agonizingly fresh in his mind. The memory of discovering he could not save her, once he had driven Apep away. The knowledge that he would be forced to watch her fade, killed before her time, and that he as The First would remain.

He had hunted Apep from the skies once he had seen Sekhmet laid to rest in his halls, torn his form from the sky and buried him in the sands he had once sought to rule. His wrath had shaken the planet, reshaped his lands, and ensured none would be so foolish as to attempt and attack on him through his small family ever again.

It had not soothed his loss nor his pain. Even now so many years later, it was a hollow pain. Having felt her, and than lost that bright light in his life so soon had only deepened the wound. He was not sure he would heal from this, alone as he was in this world so removed from what he knew.

He draws in a shuddering breath before he carefully sets aside pieces of himself until he’s just Skull.

A stuntman cursed into infant form and no one at all special or particularly complicated. A civilian
Cloud in a Mafia world.

There’s nothing special about Skull DeMort. He has no family, no significant traits.

It’s when the Vongola Decima stands up with *that Flame* dancing on her head that Mukuro’s mind *stops*. He knows these Flames, hidden away from him as they had been, as well as he knows his Underworld.

There are tears spilling over and running down her cheeks as she reaches for him, rage twisting her face. The form is different, as his own is, but he *knows her*.

He lays the Illusion without a second though, one outside, one inside and concrete, glass shards and darkness melts away to reveal light, a palace of shining gold and glittering obsidian and a cool, dry desert breeze.

He wears linen of the purest white, edged in gold, rings, necklaces and bands against his bare ebony skin. He holds a staff in one hand and a handful of Flames of the deepest black in the other. His head is in the image of a jackal, dark fur, sand-gold eyes, and pointed ear, sharpened teeth before it wavers and pulls back to reveal a handsome but sand scarred face and blue eyes.

She stands across from him, a small pool separating them.

He’s made her in the image he remembers when he dreams of her, before the beginning of the end and the *death*.

Gold at her brow, her arms, ankles, rings on her fingers, the wealth and love of her father prominently displayed in every item adorning her lithe frame. The usekh collar was done in the colors of Ra, his reds and golds. The sheerest linen draped about her shoulders, the colors of amber and scarlet woven into her dress.

Anubis looked upon the beloved face of his Sky for the first time in thousands of years and *wept*. 
Sekhmet stood in front of her enemy, the one she once knew as her Mist in another life long ago and far away and stared in disbelieving awe.

“A- Anubis?”

His name was a whisper, a prayer on Vongola Decima’s lips as she stood a single staggering step forward, the rage draining out of her body.

Mukuro forced his legs to walk, to move closer and took no notice on how his sandals dampened in the water. There was a ache in his chest and his vision was blurry, but his fingers were already reaching out and tangling in burnish orange hair.

“Sekhmet, my Sky.”

His hands, his hands, with their callouses from weapons training, tanned and strong, nothing like the scarred and pale ones of the body of now, they cradled the back of her head as he gently pressed his forehead to hers.

“So many centuries, my Sky, my Lioness, precious soul,” Anubis wept freely as her arms wound around his back and Sekhmet pressed into him with a sob, her Flames, so feeble and constrained flaring against the familiar resonance of his own Mist.

The old, faded Bond snapped into place as their souls recognize one another, and Anubis lost his breath in joy even as he sank to his knees, pulling his Sky down to curl into his arms. His fingers were carding through her hair, pressing against her and revealing in the feeling of Harmony easing the hole in his chest.

“Why?”

At the plantitive, yet quiet wail from the girl sprawled across his legs, Anubis doesn't allow himself to loosen his hold. He simply shifts his surroundings to a sterile white room. A part of himself hates him for the truth he once sworn to tell Sekhmet.

But Rokudo Mukuro attacked a child under her care, went after her friends and Guardians to draw out the Vongola Decima, entirely unaware it was she.
“Rokudo Mukuro was a science experiment who was tortured for the entirety of his life. He lived in a cage most of the time. Brought out only to be strapped to an operating table and dissected and injected with whatever drugs and chemicals his masters concocted to produce results.”

He doesn’t have innocent blood on his hands, he knows this. Everyone he killed, every person whose blood he’s spilled have all been guilty of something. But it was not justice, what he dealt. There was no mercy in his actions, no adherence to any set of laws beyond his own. He sentenced no young man to see if he could be rehabilitated in his prison.

No, instead he enslaved his mind and forced him to murder his own Famiglia plus several others and oh, he’s seen nothing wrong with this before, but what was he thinking?

Anubis stays on the floor, holding his Sky in his arms and details the doings of Rokudo Mukuro before and after he was sent to hell and the exact moment Mukuro was Anubis, rather than Anubis was Mukuro.

He leaves nothing out, and now that he has the calming, balancing, presence of his Sky, only now, as his sanity is returned with every swell of Flame, does he see what he has done.

A part of him laughs in joy at her rage over his treatment, even as the scene around them shifts to the moment when he felt her Flames for the first time since her death so long ago. There is sorrow, anger and hatred and heartbreak in Sekhmet as she watches and feels from his view. She still does not speak.

Anubis isn’t concerned.

He can feel her tears, the way her nails dig into the skin of his shoulder and fist in his hair. He can feel as her body trembles and the breath catches and hiccups in her throat and the way she makes sounds of denial, of pain and happiness as she holds him.

As a healer, Sekhmet understood how to piece together a broken person and Anubis is now so very aware of just how broken he is.

Also, as a woman very capable of destruction on a massive scale, Anubis knows she is entirely aware of just how much trauma was needed to push him into this spiral of self-destruction.
Still, he breathes in her scent, the way her Flames are warm against him and tells himself—swears on the Nile—that he will never lose her again. Even if he had to murder every single living being without an ounce of justice, without a glimmer of mercy.

They are Anubis and Sekhmet, but they are also Rokudo Mukuro and also Sawada Tsunayoshi.

Rokudo Mukuro will not hesitate to burn down the entire world if it took the mafia with it.

Sawada Tsunayoshi would try to keep her friends and family safe on her own, no matter the odds she was against.

Anubis was a Judge, his palace had been a prison, the Underworld in which he reigned, dealing out punishment, delivering justice, granting forgiveness and serving his Sky and her father, Ra, the god-king of Egypt.

Sekhmet had been a healer in a war. The favorite and only blood daughter of Ra the Golden. Her skills of destruction were learned in bloody and desperate times, until her father had forcibly carved out a kingdom along the Nile. As the man who defeated the armies of his enemies and commanded the other, he fashioned a nation, laws, government and a throne to rule from.

Ra, King of Kings, Giver of Life, the Just, the Sun God.

It took half a generation to see their Pharaoh did not age. It took the rest of that generation for the worship to begin.

There was peace and prosperity in the land of Egypt. No threat stood against them, the deaths of loved ones, the raiding, killing and burning were avenged and soon stopped. Who would dare strike against a man who was immortal?

Who would dare to go against a man, who could not be a man at all, but rather a god? A being of great power who wielded fire and it did not burn.
That was the beginning…

...and the end.

One rises, triumphant and the people hail his name.

Another comes, one who sees and hears the tales, the legends. They want. More are not far behind.

Perhaps this God-King could not be called good, but he was great, he was just. A mortal could not expect an immortal being to be like them.

Those who wielded the living Flame as Ra did, those were taken into his courts, to the high places, the palaces and given positions of great power and influence. Yet, some came from outside Egypt and some meant harm to their people, to their lands.

This is the beginning of the rise of the Great Serpent, the Chaos Bringer.

He called himself Apep.
“Sekhmet?”

Tears spill over her cheeks and she smiles. She speaks deliberately and clearly, no matter the hoarseness to her voice. Those around them can easily hear the words and with depth of emotion in them leave many speechless, regardless of their meaning.

“Hail the Shining One, the Just Ruler, the Strong King and the Sun God of the Land of Egypt,” says Sawada Tsunayoshi, Vongola Decima, as she kneels before a long thought dead god and radiates pure happiness from her very being.

“My Great and Beloved Father,” says Sekhmet, Goddess of Destruction and Healing as she reaches out for the tiny body of Ra, the Golden, the Giver of Life.

“My daughter, my daughter, my first joy and my last regret,” Ra holds his child as best he can, his tiny finger fistng her clothes and does not even realize when he automatically slips into the language of his kingdom.

He can feel her Flames fluttering weakly against his own and his breath hitches and tears sting his eyes because she’s suffering. Her soul is too large for this awkward mortal body, delicate and fragile and he allows his eyes to shut as he comes to grip with his reality.

There is silence about him and he cares not for Reborn, for Colonello, his men are more than capable of stopping any who might interfere and Ra knows well enough that there would be questions the Sun Arcobaleno would attempt to gain answers from their interaction alone. His secret would be spilled, but he could not bring himself to care.

“Daddy, Daddy, I missed you, I couldn’t- I’m so sorry I failed you, I didn’t mean to leave you,” Sekhmet begin to sob into his ear, her body folding over around his own even as she trembled in the bright sunshine.

And oh. This was not what Ra was expecting to hear millenium after her death.

His heart ached in his chest and he managed to speak through the tightness in his throat.
“No, my brightest star, no you are not to blame. It was I who did not look after you, I who sent you and did not understand the risks that Apep brought into my lands. My daughter, my fierce lioness, if there is anyone other than those who planned the ambush, who swung the sword and rejoiced at your demise to blame, than it is I.”

His daughter shook her head weakly in denial and Ra only tightened his grip before he pulled back enough to look at the new features of his child. At first, Sekhmet resisted, but he tugged gently and she leaned away. He raised his infant hands and laid them against her cheeks.

For a moment he cursed the First Ones, those arrogant men and women who were first on this planet and their pride and ignorance regarding the safety and needs of the planet. They did not ask for help, merely did as they pleased and such was the reason there was only one left, still blind to a solution and an answer other than human sacrifices.

The one who bore the iron mask was the reason he could not properly hold his daughter. And just for a moment, he hated that man more than any still living in this world.

“Daddy,” Sekhmet whispered as she took on the thick white makeup on his face, the tattoos and bandages and the Flame colored hair. “Daddy, what did you do to yourself?”

Ra’s heart skipped a beat. He was dressed as Skull, his appearance, his manner and it had been so long since he had allowed himself to be Ra- nine years since that day when her Flames vanished- and she had seen him as Skull.

He opened his mouth, but hesitated, finally allowing his gaze to look away, to all the people watching.

Reborn, Colonello, teenagers who all bore a striking resemblance to the first generation of the Vongola, his men, loyal and already in the know. Still, explanations would have to be given, as Ra would never let his daughter willingly out of his sight again.

Especially considering how damaged her Flames and body were. Who had DARED TO TOUCH HIS DAUGHTER?

Ra took a breath and reminded himself to speak Japanese and spoke to his men, softly, yet clearly
“Return to the blimp, all of you and send Asim out,” Ra commanded his men who were surrounding him in a defensive position.

He watched as both Reborn and Colonello stood in silence and merely observed as his men obeyed his commands without a moment’s hesitation. His daughter’s Guardians took that time to move closer, an action that made him happy. He spotted her Cloud easily enough, a Fon lookalike who hung back and he inwardly smiled at the higher ground the boy stood on.

There was something in that one’s gaze when he looked at Ra’s daughter though…

He narrowed his eyes and made a mental note to address that later, once he had his daughter to himself for a while.

He was not surprised when Asim came hurtling over the railing of his blimp, dressed in a traditional white shendyt, which was belted at the front with leather. A khopesh hung at each side of his hips and he born golden jewelry wrapped around his ankles, his upper arms and the Eye of Ra about his neck.

Asim was tall, golden and dangerous, very obviously Egyptian even as he stood undaunted and confident at the side of the small Cloud Arcobaleno. He stared in almost awed shock at the small girl wrapped about his lord.

“My king? Is this-”

“My daughter lives, Asim, my loyal hawk,” Ra proclaimed in softly happy tones, “Sekhmet returns to the land of the living.”

Asim turned, awed eyes to her, and Tsuna- Sekhmet- met the eyes of her father’s right hand. He immediately dropped to a kneeling position as she set her attentions on him, his voice a soft revenant whisper, “My Lady. We have searched for you a very long time at the side of our King.”

There was a moment of stillness and silence before Sekhmet- for she was more Sekhmet than Tsuna in this moment, knelt with her father in her arms- spoke, “It took me too long to find my way home. I thank you for standing with my father while I could not.”
“We would follow him into death My Lady, for he has been a good and just King for those that follow.”

Sekhmet turned her eyes to meet amethyst, warm and bright and smiling.

“Just as I asked of you so long ago.”

Ra shook his head.

“It was the last thing you asked of me, and for those that chose to stay at my side, how could I not be as you asked?”

“Lackey, what is going on?”

Reborn’s tone is sharp and biting, a hint of what could almost be called sarcasm lining his tones as he interrupts the moment.

Aisim was not the only one to turn burning angry eyes on Reborn, Sekhmet joining him as her own eyes narrowed at her tutor. She had grown to enjoy Reborn’s company, despite the situations he got her and her own into on behalf of the Ninth (may that man rot in the darkest pits of the Underworld), but she would not allow the Sun to talk badly of her father. Regardless of what persona he adopted since the millenia after her death.

“Reborn,” her voice was dark, a deeper rumble than Reborn had ever heard, lined with a lioness’ snarl as she reprimanded the hitman. “You will not speak that way to my father.”

Reborn’s surprised eyes lifted to meet glowing amber, that sense of Other very present in her eyes, more so than it had ever been before. He was not considered the world’s best hitman for no reason however, and he would not be talked down to by his student. He straightened, opening his mouth to respond when Skull-Ra though Reborn was not yet aware of that particular distinction- interrupted.

“Enough.”
The words was heavy and loud in a way that was echoed in one’s bones. Ra’s voice was commanding and Sekhmet responded instinctively to the voice of her parent and king, snapping her mouth shut, although her eyes remained narrowed on Reborn.

Reborn himself found he had closed his own mouth without thought, responding instinctively to the tone of the Cloud’s voice, as it reminded him so strongly of a time nine years before when he had lost control of his temper.

Ra shook his head at both his daughter and his right hand.

“Do not worry about Reborn’s lack of respect in addressing me. He knows not who he speaks to, and I have allowed him liberties in how he addressed Skull. I presented a certain personality and he responded to it. It is no fault of his that I did not correct him nor give him reason to believe ‘Skull’ was any sort of competent.”

They both frowned deeply at him, but dipped their heads in grudging acceptance.

“Yes sir.”

Ra turned his eyes to Reborn, and returned to Japanese as he answered the man.

He shed the screeching annoyance of Skull’s normal voice, allowing his tones to become only the natural high pitched tones of a young child rather than grating as he had often done.

“There is much that you do not know of me, of all that I have seen and done. Long have I awaited my daughter’s return, and long have I walked the earth. I have been here before you, and I will be here after you, which is why I do not concern myself with your opinions of my behavior.”

Ra could not help the wry smile the tugged insistently at his lips.

“I am immortal, Reborn,” he said almost in sympathy at the hitman, “Imagine if you could live forever, if there was no mortal who walked this Earth who could defeat you, who could bring any amount of hurt to you that would actually linger, imagine who you would become, Reborn. Centuries drag on, people die, die and die some more and the world changes and you change to suit the demands of the people around you.”
Ra flares his Flames, beautifully amber and warm as the Egyptian sun in the spring, his Blessed Flames of the Sky and watches as Reborn’s facial expressions and body language locks down. Colonello, on the other hand, cannot help his reaction. Shock is painted across him entirely and a part of Skull is pleased, before he lets it go and turns back to this daughter. Reborn can be called his, but he doesn’t have either the time nor the need to explain himself when there are clearly more important matters to attend to.

“And Sekhmet,” he says, keeping to Japanese for the sake of those around him even as the weight of the air grows heavy and his faces darkens and twists into a snarl, “What was done to you? What was done to your Flames, your body, your soul that I felt you die?”

Around him, his men go down to their knees and the pacifier about his neck begins to glow, along with the ones about the necks of Reborn and Colonello.

His daughter’s face twists up in rage and the desperate glimmers of hope and her words tumbled out almost breathlessly.

“That man came to my house. I was five and okaa-san called him my tou-san. He brought an old man with him and named him my grandfather, that he was to be called Nonno.”

Ra has a moment to truly understand what his daughter is explaining to him in the space in which she takes a breath and already he can feel the utter fury rising in him.

“I already knew about my Flames, they were always there and I used them to get out of trouble, or to have fun, and I climbed up a tree. I was not yet aware of who I had been Before, I was not yet Awake. My fingers slipped and I fell from the branches. I called my fire to get me down safely and- and he was looking at me and it scared me,” Sekhmet says and there is a hitch in her words and Ra takes a deep, tightly controlled breath.

“He turned to the old man and said something I didn’t understand and the old man knelt in front of me and he- he- his finger had a flame on the end and he-”

There are tears gathering in her eyes, and she looks at him like she’s pleading for him to understand, like she tried her best and she didn’t know. His daughter, his precious child, his brightest star is looking at him as if he’s going to react negatively, as if it’s her fault and Ra-
Ra had officially ran out of reasons to give a shit and he let go.

His Flames ignite higher and unfurl themselves in all their glory, bright and shining, and no longer hiding behind his Secondary as he reaches, stretching as far as he Wills, covering his people. He gathers his Flames at his back to manifest two wings that shimmer like golden sand under the sunlight—just as he had long ago, in a way that had seen the depictions of himself in Ancient Egypt painted onto temple walls—and they surge forward to wrap themselves around his little girl, his fierce lioness, who is no more than a cub now. He used to do this when she was an infant, back in the days they called him pharaoh.

His Flames resonate with hers now just as they did so long ago, only there is a darker, stained and filthy Flame suppressing a mass of brighter Flames deep in her soul.

Ra can literally feel chains wrapped around her entire being. That is not acceptable.

His Flames surge like the tide, washing over and into his bright one, sinking into that which did not belong in her core. “Be gone, filth. Return to the soul from which you spawned.”

It fights. Of course it does, and Ra takes pleasure in ripping it out by the root in Sekhmet’s head.

He doesn’t utterly destroy them, he wants them to return to that scum, after all. He wants Vongola Nono to wake in the middle of the night in terror. He wants the famed Vongola Intuition to scream at him. He wants Timoteo to suffer in the suffocating fear until Ra makes his way to stand in front of the arrogant, ignorant filth and informs him of just how much of a mistake he had made. Takes pleasure in speaking on exactly what Ra will do to make him pay for it.

Sekhmet tenses in his arms, a sharp gasp escaping her as his own Flames cleanse her of the intruder that has chained her very soul in filth. A hand absently soothes through her hair as he hums an ancient hymn their people used to sing in their honor. The way she pressed in closer even as he is too small to wrap his arms around her, made his heart ache, but she lives, when before he thought she lay dead nine years ago.

It doesn’t take long to assess exactly what damage that fool has inflicted on his child. It’s obviously all throughout her body, in her bones, in her brain and all her organs and oh.
His lips pull back in a snarl, his wings snapping open and mantling behind him as hands wreathed in golden Flames pull slowly back from her brow. He could have burned the sad excuse for Flames out from her without this step, but it would have made the aftermath of what Ra had been made to do worse, and he wished those present to see what had been done to his brightest star.

Blackish burnt orange Flames are gripped in Ra’s hands, appearing to almost drip from Ra’s fingers, obviously jerking and flailing as they attempt to return to Sekhmet. Ra’s fingers tighten their hold, jerking backwards hard and furious, his Flames flaring higher, brighter, purer as he focuses on separating every single piece of the foreign Flame from his child.

When he finishes, Sekhmet is curled up in the ground, her skin slick with sweat and her body trembling and a part of him weeps, but he breathes and returns to his task.

He pulls all of the invading flames into his hand and watches as they writhe in his grip. He rears back, lifting them and hurles them into the sky. It’s a very useful technique he developed, making sure a Flame returns from where it came from. He doesn’t need very much. These remains are decayed and it will hurt when they begin to reintegrate with the soul it originated from.

They’ll carrying the taste of whatever pain Sekhmet has endured while suffering underneath them. Nine years worth.

Ra wonders if Vongola Nono will scream.

He hopes so.

Reborn had not expected this.

Nothing could have prepared him for this. He had hoped that perhaps he would have gotten some answers for the oddities of his student, but all he had found were more questions to replace those that had been answered.

And more than that, the Lackey had revealed facts that shook him. He had locked down his expressions and body language, but the moment Skull had released his Flames to reveal he was a
Sky and not the Cloud he had presented himself as, Reborn had felt the foundations he had based his beliefs on crumble.

And, even disregarding the new facts about the- about Skull, his student had been sealed.

Reborn had not been informed of that little tidbit. He and Nono would be having words about this willful withholding of information. Important information. He fought to control his own Flames, taking deep even breaths as he tried to keep his reactions contained. Still, his shadow writhed on the ground at his rage.

Sealed. Really. What kind of stronzo sealed an Active Sky?

If he had mishandled even the slightest thing while Tsuna had been sealed he could have killed her. It was lucky she was such a powerful Sky- and she had to be, if her Flames were this powerful while sealed - as it had probably been the only thing that saved her.

Sealing an Active Sky Flame! A child. What had they been thinking? That was grounds for a sanctioned Hit in and of itself, and he knew Nono and Iemitsu both knew this.

His hands ached for a gun. If he had known of what the two pezzi di merda had done, he would have shot them both before going to fix the seal himself.

Still, he had not known, and now he was watching the Lackey- no, he did not feel like a Lackey now- shed masks Reborn had not been aware of.

Reborn had scoffed at his title for years. Immortal Skull. How was he to know it had been a warning and not a boast? How would he have expected Skull to be Sky?

And oh, but that put an entirely different light on on their interactions up until now. A Sky and not a Cloud. No wonder Skull- Ra? - had not acted in any way that the Arcobaleno had expected of a Cloud- even an Inverted one.

Reborn was still as he watched wings of Flame sprout from Skull’s back, large and in the image of hawks. He did not move as those wings folded around his student- who Skull called daughter - nor did he react as Sk-Ra soothed Tsuna in his arms.
No, Reborn did not react until he watched Ra pull *sickly* blackish *dripping* Flames away from from his student. Only then did Reborn move, as he could not help the way he recoiled from the rotting Flame. It was the most subtle of flinches, but Reborn was horrified.

*How could he have missed the sickness that slept in the Ninth’s Flames?*

How had he *not seen*? His eyes are narrowed as Skull *snarls* his Sky Flames flaring as he rears back, infant hands clenched on the Flames that do not belong, that have smothered his student’s fires.

And when Ra has those sick Flames balled in his hands, and he snarls, “*Be gone, filth. Return to the soul from which you spawned,*” before he throws the Flames away from them, Reborn has a sudden moment of understanding.

He understands that day, nine years ago, he had been so much luckier to survive Skull’s Rage than he had believed. He had not confronted a Cloud as he believed, dangerous enough on its own, but a *Sky* who had a Cloud secondary. Skull had been a *Sky* on the verge of a breakdown. The stuntman had had *much* better control over his emotions than *any* of them had given him credit for, as the Arcobaleno House had not been ash in the wind despite being demolished.

He had not lashed into them as they approached in his grief, had instead *walked away* with a snarled warning of what he *would* have done.

There were stories, told of Skies who lost control. The world, the Mafia, those that knew of Flames and all they entailed, told the world that Guardians were meant to protect the Sky.

This was not wrong, but it was not the *true* purpose of the Bonds the Sky formed with their Elements. Skies were forces of nature given form. A living, breathing, natural disaster when they finally snapped.

Guardians were not just there to protect their Sky. They were there to act as tethers. A grounding force for their Sky. Guardians were there to protect the world from their Sky’s Rage just as much as they were there to protect the Sky. In return for Home and acceptance, Elements would provide their Sky with calm, and an outlet for their Rage. Would act as their Sky’s hands, enact their vengeance and anger so that the Sky never had a reason to unleash the full force of themselves on the world.
It was said that Sky Flames were a gift from Gods, a little bit of a deity passed into mortal hands. And when a Sky Raged, it was said to be akin to the Wrath of Gods still whispered about in modern times, told of in stories meant to be a warning even if none believed anymore.

Reborn couldn’t help but wonder, staring at the form of Ra- Ra, the Sun God, Giver of Life, King of Kings, Ra the Golden - how true those whispers he had dismissed and scoffed at happened to be.

Reborn jerked as Tsuna- Ra had called her Sekhmet- arched against the ground, crying out in agony.

He took a step forward, noticing the smallest flicker of Flame at her forehead, burning the last of the Ninth’s tar-like Flames from her body. That was as far as he got, before the small flicker surged.

It was with a roar reminiscent of a hunting lioness that previously bound Flames exploded from his student's arching form.

Reborn could literally hear the moment when all the potential Guardians lit their own Flames and all their Bonds snapped into place with such strength there was a shockwave of colors.

Cloud, Storm, Rain, Sun, Mist, Lightning and Sky all collided in the visible spaces between the people that wielded them in a brilliant display. Reborn couldn’t help but stare in awe at the overwhelming strength and purity in the manifestation of his student’s Flames, along with her Guardians. It lingered, as each and every one of her Guardians basked in the Harmony of the Flames of their Sky.

When Tsuna’s Flames receded, the hitman couldn’t help but twitch as his student collapsed to the ground. There was no need to interfere, as Skul- Ra caught his daughter and lowered her gently to the sand.

Ra sat by her head, carding his tiny fingers through her hair and he could not help the tears that blurred his vision and spilled over to drip down his cheeks. His infant body shook and his breath caught and hitched on almost silent sobs, but he couldn’t quite stop himself.

His precious child, his brightest star, he shouldn’t have taken it for granted that she had died. He should have searched for her. He should have at least looked for a body to bury, a name to remember, something, anything. Instead, he did nothing. How could he have just left it there?
There was a swelling of Mist Flames at his back and Ra would have reacted, save for the fact that when he turned his gaze, it was only that little slip of a girl who Sekhmet claimed as hers.

However, she melted away to reveal that of a boy who looked remarkably similar, only taller, with sharper features and a crimson eyes stilling where the other had none. And soon enough, as the boy drew closer, even that visage dissipated to reveal someone who made his heart stop once more.

Ebony skin, with the head of a jackal, dressed in formal attire, but without his weapon, there stood Anubis and Ra cried out, reaching for the boy who had been as a son to him.

“Anubis, my wild child, Anubis,” Ra hoarsely sobbed even as the intimidating head shifted to a more human look and Sekhmet’s Mist dropped to his knees, his own eyes filled with tears.

“Father of my Sky, God-King of Egypt, long have I awaited this day,” Anubis breathed, projecting his Flames out to curl protectively and affectionately around his reunited family.

Ra’s Flames stretched outward, finally freed from the vice grip he had kept on them as he gathered them close around his daughter and his adopted wild child. He had never thought to hope that he would see another of his family beyond his daughter again, and yet…

Yet, here he stood, and not only had he discovered that his Sekhmet lived, but Anubis as well. He was not sure why or how, but even as he mourned how long it had taken him to discover his brightest star lived, that he had not found her sooner than this, he celebrated their life.

They lived.

For the first time in lifetimes he had found not one child, but two. Anubis had followed Sekhmet into the cycle of rebirth shortly after Ra had lost his daughter. It had been a blow to Ra, that two of his own children had been taken from him. He had not known what happened to his Judge, his son, and to see him again was a gift he had not expected.

This was a joyous day. Even as he knew his carefully constructed lies, his masks, would crumble in the face of this, he could not-would not-regret it. His tears were silent, carving shining lines down his cheeks and towards his throat, but the smile that pulled on his lips-shaking though it was with emotion-was a bright and wild genuine thing.
He could not have stopped the way his Flames- his true Flames, amber and gold and shining- danced around his little family in a reaction to his euphoria. And though tears, and gasping silent sobs that escaped him, he could not stop the little bursts of laughter that joined them.

Oh, the stories of a God’s Wrath have been told for centuries, but so too had stories of their joy. And this day, this day Ra set aside the burning fury that sat in his breast for what had been done to his daughter. There would be time to plan out the meticulous fall of Timoteo Vongola, his Guardians, and Iemitsu Sawada for their sins.

That was not this time. No, this time was to celebrate the discovery of Ra’s family.

His eyes, soft and warm, glowing the color of desert sands, even as his once amethyst hair begins to bleed into the shining amber-orange of his Sky Flames, focused on his lioness. His wings, huge and powerful things that did not quite fit this tiny body stretched wide and threatening for a moment before Skull folded them down and around his unconscious daughter.

It was underwhelming when he was trapped in this too small body, but remarkable all the same, as for the first time in thousands of years, mortals were getting a glimpse of a once god as he had been.

Stained in the colors of the desert, oranges and ambers, golds and not-quite browns. Surrounded on all sides by sands that were not quite like home, but a reminder all the same.

And Anubis, stood beside his family, could not help as his Flames reacted to what he wanted, layering over the scene, presenting to the Arcobaleno and Guardians present in this moment with a scene of ancient times. As Mist condensed over them all, their bodies and changed what was into what had once been.

Biker suits in their violently purple coloring, along with the modern clothes worn by the others faded away, quickly replaced by linens and jewelry fit for the Royal Family they were now a part of.

Pale skin tones were darkened into tans and olive, bodies aged upwards, grown to what he once remembered, as old calluses lost in rebirth formed, weapons favored and beloved materialized at their sides, fastened in leather belts or laid at their feet. As pale sands of a beach were replaced by dark golden desert, the ocean fading and replaced instead with an Oasis straight out of legends, a palace rose in the distance, glittering and shimmering in its splendor.

Reborn was still as the scene changed before him, and suddenly he could see what had once been.
Oh, it was one thing to hear what Skull- Ra- had said, but to see a scene straight from ancient legends take form around him…

Reborn did not believe yet- not quite- but it was still awe inspiring, to see the beach of Mafia Land shimmer and fade to be replaced by golden sands and palaces. To feel the heat of this desert scene, the dryness of the air, the power that radiated off those who Skull claimed as Gods.

Ra, Sekhmet, Anubis…

Reborn knew those names, knew the legends behind them. Of course he did, when he thrived on learning what he could.

He had already failed to see a Sky standing in front of him, hiding behind Cloud cover as it had been, but Reborn didn’t quite believe Gods walked the Earth. Could not quite accept that his student, his lackey, and the criminal his student had taken a shine to had once been deities.

And yet...Reborn had always trusted his instincts over all other things, and even as he did not want to believe celestial beings were real, he could not deny that now the blinders had been pulled away there was something... more to the three people huddled together on the steps leading towards the palace in the distance.

Did not want to acknowledge the way certain facts, habits, and quirks were suddenly making sense when presented with the idea that his student and lackey- who was not a lackey - were ancient, immortal beings who once ruled Egypt several thousand years ago. There were still temples dedicated to Ra, Sekhmet and Anubis, and entire monuments and statues scattered throughout the Middle East as well.

That they were all depicting Skull was almost unbelievable.

Almost, and yet...looking at him now, his image aged up, and feeling his Flames as they were meant to be, Reborn can see it.

He can see the way this Sky, this ancient being, could have been called a God.

End Notes
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