The threats in Astral World have been dealt with, and for once, the world is at peace. The Arclights have returned to their manor out in the country, far away from Heartland and back to the Victorian Resurrection—a society that attempts to live like their ancestors whilst using a bit of technology from the present. Everything should be exactly like how they left it, all those years ago...But are they? When Byron proposes a union between the eldest Arclight and Tenjo son, the two must decide if they should bend to the wills of their fathers or choose their own destiny. As they begin to walk on their own two legs, the world around them begins to descend into hell as Byron becomes more and more deranged with each passing day...With each agonizingly slow swing of the grandfather's clock pendulum, they begin to count the hours left until they are shackled against each other's will.
Thank you for taking time to read my work.  
This is a project I have worked on for 4 years and running.

**Enter the Rose Garden**

The looking glass is fogged

The framed smiles have blurred

In the dull sunlight of the murky windows, the dust dances

For who, not a soul knows
Chapter Notes

There will be some French with translations in later episodes. I thank iyliss and sleepy-space-nerd on tumblr for them! Please enjoy and hopefully we will go for season 2 and beyond soon.

Dramatis Personae

The Present

The Arclight Family

Christopher Arclight (21). The main character, the eldest Arclight brother
Thomas Arclight (18). The middle Arclight brother
Michael Arclight (16). The youngest Arclight brother
Byron Arclight (47). The Arclight patriarch

The Tenjo Family

Dr. Robert “Faker” Tenjo (50). The father of the Tenjo brothers
Kaito Tenjo (19). The eldest Tenjo brother
Haruto Tenjo (7). The youngest Tenjo

The Past

Kingdom of Laelle

King Byronne Davine Blanche. Byron’s previous life, King of Laelle
Chrisseine Aurelia Rilliane Blanche. Christopher’s previous life, Princesse of Laelle
Tuomas Davine Blanche. Thomas’s previous life, Crown Prince of Laelle
Rionè Marie François. Rio’s previous life, personal maid of Chrisseine
Drosenia Anne Benoit. Droite’s previous life, lady-in-waiting and mentor to Chrisseine
Mizairen. Another previous life of Mizael. A palace guard.

Kingdom of Bucchanary
King Robertson Ferellen…………………………Robert’s past life, King of Bucchanary

Kaith Gregory Thiras Ferellen…………Kaito’s previous life, crown prince of Bucchanary

Harold Gregory Thiras Ferellen………Haruto’s previous life, prince of Bucchanary, Kaith’s elder brother

Prologue Illustration
- Prologue -

(Rose petals are fluttering about. Birdsong fills the air. The sun rises, dyeing the fluffy clouds and sky pink. There is an empty chair and small, white table. Rose bushes and rhododendrons surround the perimeters of the garden. The peaceful scene beckons the reader into the world of the Victorian Resurrection. Slowly. Christopher’s voice comes into the scene.)

Christopher’s voice: My father had finally come back. We were able to reverse the ravages of the Barian World and return him to his original form. Tron had been a constant reminder of the World Duel Carnival and the awful events that transpired there. Now that he was gone, we were finally at peace. We had rediscovered our haven, thinking that we had reached our happy ending... But a story—a compelling one—never truly ends in the reader’s mind, now does it? It goes on, haunts them at night. Whispers in their ears and creeps in the edges of their sight. What we thought had been our happy ending slowly plunged into hell. But we were too entranced by the lush garden’s flowers to see the snakes at our feet. Slowly, this man we called our father became colder...More harsh...More aloof...More like...a stranger... (Sadness fills his voice.) But we were all obligated to follow our father out of loyalty and respect...for that is what is expected of children, is it not? Our father was here...wasn’t he? Yes, he was the man we knew and loved physically...But...his personality was not the same. And that was what truly saddened our hearts the most. So close yet so far. This man we followed for a year...Was he truly Byron Arclight? Or was he a monster dressed in his clothes?...That is for you to decide.
Years ago, this story was a joke between my friends and I. It slowly developed to have a more serious air, although I do like to remember its roots by making some scenes quite overdone. Without further ado, I present to you the first season of Scattered Roses in the Palm of Your Hand.

---Episode 1---
Tea is Best Served Cold

(It is the countryside, filled with rolling hills and deep blue skies. The roads are sparse and nature is aplenty. Amidst the pastoral landscape, large mansions dot the land. One specific mansion, with blue shingles, whitewashed walls and a small tower is where the Arclights live. Stopping at the mansion's expansive porch, on a small table we can see scattered rose petals and a cup of tea. This is where the story begins.)

Christopher: (A tall and thin man of 21 with shin-long silver hair with blue and lavender bangs. His skin is pale from staying inside for so long. He wears a rich blue set of aristocratic clothes with a long outer coat, pure white dress pants and white dress shoes. His piercing sapphire eyes each have a small black streak from each corner. With his elegant looks he seems almost delicate and feminine if not for his deep, velvety voice heavy with a British accent. He walks onto the porch and breathes in.)...It's only been but four months since we've returned to Carnation Valley...Yet it feels as if we've never left our home.

Michael: (He is a small boy of sixteen years of age with pink bangs and chocolate brown hair in the back. His attire is that of a dainty aristocrat which includes a mahogany outer coat with a long neck covered by a cream-colored cravat and a coral-pink undershirt. He wears white pants that are ended with brown lace up boots. His large green eyes emit intelligence and naivety at the same time that are further accented with his sweet expression. His voice is soft with a British accent. He comes out next to Christopher and hugs Christopher's side adoringly.) Well, it took a few days for me to readjust to our home. I was only 10 when we were forced to leave, as you can remember. The city is so bright and lively while here...in the countryside...(The shot switches to their surroundings. There are only hills and greenery to be seen. The Arclight's front yard is abundant with lovely carnations and rhododendrons. The fountain also bubbles merrily. Bushes are cut into creatures such as elephants and peacocks.) It's so...peaceful. (He pauses again for a few moments, contemplating.) Coming back...it feels as if time has stopped here. As if none of that mess ever happened.
Christopher: (He turns to Michael and smiles.) Yes...It does seem as if everything has been the same since we left all those years ago. (A smile appears on his face.) We can just close our eyes and breathe in the sweet scent of the countryside...Finally content with ourselves. (His expression softens.) Even father has returned...(He closes his eyes.) Yes, it would be pleasant to pretend that none of that mess ever happened, wouldn’t it? (He opens his eyes.) But we can’t. Those events made us who we are today.

Michael: (He looks up at the clear blue sky. He is clearly lost in his thoughts.) We were reborn in the flames of tragedy, weren’t we?

(A scoffing sound interrupts Michael's thoughts. The camera turns to Thomas who is lazily slouched over a futon. Thomas is a tan boy of 18 with a strong, masculine build. His hair is wildly mussed in shades of blonde and magenta hair. He also wears clothes similar to Michael's but in a cream and golden color. He wears a long outer coat with a white dress shirt underneath along with knee-high pants and lace-up brown boots. He has deep magenta eyes and has a scar of his right eye from a burn. He speaks like an American to the average onlooker but his accent would seem somewhat forced to the experienced American-English speaker. His voice is rough and husky. A determined expression is constantly on his face and accents his masculine qualities.)

Thomas: (To Christopher.) Yes, because if... all that ...never happened, you would have never met your oh-so-wonderful student.

Christopher: (Annoyed.) That is exactly why it’s just pretending. Kaito has played an important part in my life...and without the incident...

Thomas: (Shrugs.) You wouldn’t have met him. (He turns towards Christopher. His tone has a bitter edge to it.) So are you saying that father’s disappearance was a good thing? The event that forced us out of our home and separated us? Are you that selfish? Just because one good thing happened to you doesn’t mean anything good happened for me or Michael.

Christopher: (He looks away, contemplating.) Then what of your professional dueling career? Would it still be here if father hadn’t disappeared? We’d still be cloistered in the clutches of the Victorian Resurrection if he remained.

Thomas: Don't try to twist my words. (His voice has an undercurrent of anger in it as he
restates his question.) Are you saying that father’s disappearance was a good thing?

Christopher: (He is shocked.) No! Of course not! But in life, we must eventually all face a downfall. If I had not met Kaito, I still would have been the dull child I was six years ago.

Thomas: (Bitterly.) You still are. And if he'd have heard that, he'd have made an example of you. I don't need an encore performance of last week.

Michael: (He winces at the mention of last week.)...Brother...

Thomas: (He shrugs nonchalantly.) As I said. It's the truth.

Christopher: (Tersely.) Really, Thomas. That mouth of yours will get you into trouble one day.

Thomas: (He is quick to make a retort.) As a well loved celebrity, the fans will decide what’s right and what's wrong.

Christopher: (Bitingly.) And if it's decided to be wrong, the media will overdo it and you will be remembered for that sole mishap.

Thomas: (He smirks.) I've always wanted to be notorious. Besides, being notorious gets more news. Do one good thing, five people know. Do one terrible thing and 100 people know.

Christopher: Do you see that? How else would you have started your career if father had not disappeared?

Thomas: (His mood darkens.) It still sounds as if you are saying that father’s disappearance was a good thing.
Christopher: No, it isn’t. And it never will be, though I believe it was necessary for us to build character. (He turns to Michael.) You would have never met Yuma if father hadn’t disappeared, now would you?

Michael: (He is reluctant to be pulled into the conversation.) Yes...I wouldn’t have met him...

Christopher: The incident has ingrained itself within our lives. Without it, we would have been entirely different people. At least agree with me on that, will you, Thomas?

Thomas: Yes, I see your point there. But I–

(He is interrupted by a deep, cultured voice calling from the inside. Thomas’s expression further darkens while his brothers stiffen. The tension in the air continues to build amongst the brothers.)

Voice: Christopher! I request your presence here in the drawing room immediately!

Thomas: (He grimaces.) Request, my foot.... A "request" is a command to that almighty dictator we call our new father.

Christopher: (He gives Thomas a sharp glare.) I suggest you watch your mouth, Thomas. The walls may have ears in this estate.

Thomas: (Darkly.) If they do have ears then I’ll cut them off when I see them.

Christopher: (He gives Thomas a sideways glance.) How can you, when they are connected to the ones you love? (He walks into the mansion before Thomas can come up with a counter.)

(The mansion is filled with antiques such as a rotary dial phone along with vases whose colors have long faded away. As Christopher walks into the drawing room, we can see that the place has fallen on hard times but has been miraculously renovated. A large wooden bookshelf lines one part of the wall with old and dusty books. Four lofty chairs are in the room. There are three chairs facing the one in the middle, creating a wide triangle. The
wooden floors are covered with a large oriental rug with a small table in the center having a teapot and two cups. Sitting in the middle chair is an elegant middle aged man with golden locks braided past his back and small light blue streaks on the sides of his head. He holds a walking stick with a golden handle across his crossed legs. He wears a monocle on his left eye with a small chain tipped by a golden bead. His aqua-colored overcoat is accented with his layered cream colored cravat and the green suit underneath. He wears white dress pants and brown penny loafers and gives off an air of superiority. His skin is slightly tanned from the sun and his facial features slightly resembles Christopher. His honey-colored eyes glimmer in the sunlight from the windows. Crows' feet edge his eyes when he smiles coldly.)

Byron: Christopher, my son.

Christopher:...Dearest father. (He dips his head in greeting.)

Byron: (He nods.) I assume you are well?

Christopher: Very. (He thinks as he purses his lips.) It's always like this with father nowadays. What happened to the warmer...more open father that I knew in my childhood? It hasn’t been the same these few months...

Byron: (He motions to the chair in front of him.) Please, sit. I'll pour you a cup of tea.

Christopher: (He hesitantly sits down and puts one leg on top of the other and watches as Byron pours his tea.) Does something concern you...Dearest father?...Something concerning Thomas?

Byron: (Byron rests the teapot on the table. He grimaces at the mention of Thomas’s name. But he quickly replaces it with a smile. His voice is level and calm.) No, my son. It's quite the opposite, I'm pleased to say.

Christopher: (He raises an eyebrow as he blows his tea.) Yes, father?

Byron: There comes a time in every young Arclight's life where they must serve their family, am I correct.
Christopher: ...indeed.

Byron: I myself had to answer the call of the family when I was your age.

Christopher: But it went well, I hope?

Byron: It depends on the person who is asked. (He chuckles.) Faker didn't see it as a good thing.

Christopher: ...now...what was it you would like me to do?

Byron: Goodness, impatient today, aren't we? (He takes a sip of his tea.) Impatience never suited you, my son.

Christopher: (Abashed.) A...apologies.

Byron: (He chuckles good naturedly.) It is quite alright. (He pauses, taking in a small breath and then smiles warmly.) I have arranged your marriage with an advantageous partner.

Christopher: (He nearly spits out his tea.) I beg your pardon...?

Byron: (He continues to smile and explains to Christopher in a calm voice.) It's about time the tradition is continued. You surely haven't forgotten, have you? After all, we are one of the most powerful families of the Resurrection. (He looks down at his tea.) And we must continue to show them that we still wield it. Although our crest features a stag, we are far from being herbivores. (He chuckles at his own joke.) The horns of the stag must remain poised for defense and an elegant display of power.

Christopher: (Shock fills his expression. He attempts to reign in his emotions but is only able to nod gravely.) I...I understand. But to...(He swallows and grips his teacup tighter. His grip shakes a bit and the tea sloshes about.) To whom is this woman?
Byron: Why, it's a very familiar partner you'll be wedded to.

Christopher: In all my life, I have met just a handful of girls from the Resurrection. Their faces are quite blurred now, so I’m afraid I am no longer acquaintances with this individual. She will be a complete stranger once I meet her.

Byron: Your impatience once again interferes with your thoughts. Don't jump to conclusions my boy! Are you not aware that the Resurrection accepts couples of the same gender? (Good humored.) My goodness, it’s the twenty third century and you still have your values somewhere in the past.

(Christopher remains confused.)

Christopher: But I thought...

Byron: Yes, the law was passed around the time Michael was born. It’s been in effect for quite awhile now. It just hasn’t been utilized as much as the council expected. (He stirs sugar into his tea.) You see, a lot of individuals are still quite conservative. But I’d like to think that our family is able to mix with the modern world and the Resurrection just perfectly. (He chuckles a bit.) Although I do think that you need more exposure to Resurrection society. (He looks down at his tea.) Our union with the Tenjo family will hopefully encourage more forward thinking individuals to follow suit. (Pride fills his expression.) Five, soon six generations of Arclights will lead the Resurrection. I’m sure you will inherit the council position from me in a few decades or so. Since we will be bonded with the family that rules Heartland, we will become the strongest family in the Resurrection. The perfect union between the modern world and the old...Something we have never seen until now.

Christopher: (His expression turns to that of mild horror as he realizes what Byron has just said. His voice slowly comes out as a whisper.) Kaito? He...he will be my intended? (His thoughts come out in a stream.) No. Not under this dictatorship. Kaito would surely suffer. He can’t succumb to these rusted values...

Byron: Yes. Faker's son. (He smiles.) What other perfect way is there to make up for our past grievances than marriage? It will benefit both of our families. We will be protected by Heartland’s defense force and have a child of the modern world in our family. His unique views will help us sympathize with the younger population. In turn, we will influence their
culture by increasing our trade with them.

Christopher: You jest, father. (He swallows.) S...surely...

Byron: (His mood suddenly darkens.) Have I ever been known to jest?

Christopher: (Nervously.) Well...yes...? When we were little you made us laugh and–

Byron: (Firmly.) I'm talking about the present. Get your head out of the past and focus on the here and now, Christopher.

Christopher: (He looks down at his tea.)...Then no...I apologize, dearest father.

Byron: (He shifts his walking cane.) Exactly.

(The camera turns to Christopher, who is now visibly sweating.)

Byron: Will you marry him and prove your loyalty to our family by being an obedient and loyal son? In the world of the Victorian Resurrection, the ties of blood are the strongest bonds one can have. You must remember that. Nigh everything is determined by your blood in this society. If one of us falls from grace, then we will all fall into the depths of hell. Although we may allow a few modern values to mix with ours, we are Victorian at heart. Will you remember that, Christopher? You must represent our family with pride. Are you able to do that?

Christopher:...(He bows his head, his lips trembling. There is a moment of hesitation.) Of course...(He chokes on the words.) Dearest father.

Byron: (He smiles coldly.) As expected of you, my most loyal son. You are excused.

---♀---
Thomas: There is absolutely nothing to do in the boorish countryside.

Michael: You could learn how to play polo.

Thomas: And risk falling and break my neck?

Michael: Father played it in his youth and he's still walking upright today.

Thomas: That's because he has athletic prowess. I prefer looking beautiful and acting.

Michael: Isn't there a community theatre troupe down in Victoria Town?

Thomas: (He makes a gagging noise.) Me? Act with those plebeians?

Michael: I went to see some of their productions myself. They're quite well done.

Thomas: I would honestly rather die.

Michael: Suit yourself. Continue being bored, then.

(Christopher enters the room.)

Thomas: (To Christopher.) Did you hear the balderdash that our youngest brother is spewing?! He suggested I join the plebeian troupe in Victoria Town to alleviate my boredom!

Christopher: Well, it's better than having your morals loosen and becoming a rake.

Thomas: (He perks up.) A rake, you say? This sounds like quite the deal.
Michael: We haven't even properly met the women of the Resurrection yet.

Thomas: Well, my charm is quite a universal thing, actually. I'm sure they will be swooning over my charms the moment I set my eyes on them.

Michael: Would they? Your forced American accent may turn them away.

Thomas: (He becomes self conscious.) I'm sure they will find it quite unique.

Michael: Just don't become too emotional over them, then.

Thomas: (He balls his hands into fists. A bit of his natural British accent is heard.) I am not emotional over such trivial things!

Christopher: Now, now, settle down...

Thomas: (Calming his emotions.) Actually, I am quite settled, thank you very much.

Christopher: I have an announcement to make to the both of you.

Thomas: What? You're off to the Arctic lab again? (He sneers.) With Kaito?

Christopher: No. I...I am to be married...to Kaito...

(Shock fills the two Arclight brothers’ expressions.)

Thomas:...do you jest?
Christopher: (A bitter smile fills his face.) How funny. I had asked father the same thing.

Thomas:...oh gods... (Melodramatically.)...he can't be our brother-in-law! He can't be! I'll positively die! Just seeing him sucks out the very essence of my soul!

Michael: (He looks nervously at Thomas and Christopher.) This can't be true. Dearest brother, tell me that this is a jest.

(Christopher's expression remains rigid.)

Michael: Oh gods. What fresh hell awaits us?

Christopher: I fear that the storm is only beginning.

---Episode 1~END---

Illustration for Episode 1
(The brothers are relaxing in the upstairs living room. It is furnished with elegant couches, potted plants and a mahogany table. The windows are open, allowing the bright summer sunshine to fill the room.)

Christopher: (He looks outside the window, his expression contemplating.) No matter what he does... I still blindly follow him... But isn’t that what is expected of children?

(There is a moment of silence. No one bothers to answer Christopher’s question. He sighs and is about to speak when Thomas interrupts him.)

Thomas: (He sits on a floral patterned couch while brushing a porcelain doll's hair. He doesn’t look up to Christopher as he speaks.) You’re just like her.

Christopher: (Slowly, he turns around.) Like who?

Thomas: (He holds up the doll.) Annabelle here.

Christopher: ...What exactly do you mean?

Thomas: You’re both dolls.

Michael: (He is sitting in the corner of the room with some tea. When he hears Thomas, he chokes on his drink.) Th.. Thomas! Please...! We’re all a bit shocked by father’s announcement but that doesn’t give you the right to be hateful...

Christopher: (His expression is shadowed over.) ...Say that again please. (He walks up to Thomas, towering over him.)

Thomas: (His expression remains unchanged.) You’ve done that so many times but nothing’s ever happened. I stopped being scared of that approach years ago. (He looks away, smiling. Then he takes in a breath.) So I’m gonna say it again. (His expression returns to Christopher.) You are Byron’s favorite doll.

Christopher: (He glares at Thomas.) Do not call our father by his name.

Thomas: (He stands up.) Can’t you see? That's not our father. That's a man that looks like father but is actually a complete stranger inside. It’s another Tron, just grown up! Would our real father do this to you? Would he?!

Christopher: (Shock fills his face. With difficulty, he regains his composure. His voice shakes a bit with anger.) He is our father, Thomas. You saw as well as I the process for restoring his body back to its former age. (He exhales.) We are Neo-Victorians, Thomas. It’s what we do. We live in the past and use the conveniences of the modern world. But our values still
Thomas: There you go again. Anyone tell you that you’re starting to sound like the man we’re forced to live with?

Christopher: (He steps back, clearly shocked. His fists shake.) You really do enjoy testing my patience, don’t you?

Thomas: (He sits down and resumes brushing Annabelle’s hair, turning away from Christopher.) It’s just that you refuse to hear the truth.

(There is a moment of silence. It crackles with tension. Christopher continues to glare at Thomas while he brushes the doll’s hair. Michael holds his tea with shaking hands.)

Thomas:... (He then looks back up to Christopher. His voice is quiet.) You look like a doll too.

Christopher: (Anger fills his expression. Once again, he walks towards Thomas. He raises his hand and Thomas continues to brazenly look at him. His raised hand shakes. When it looks as if he is about to strike Thomas, he abruptly puts it down and takes a deep breath. Without another word, he leaves the room.)

Michael: (Sips his tea, uneasy.) You shouldn't get on his nerves at a time like this, Thomas. Out of all of us, he has the most responsibility to carry.

Thomas: (He grimaces.) He'll never be able to raise a hand to someone and he knows it.

Michael: (He gives Thomas a sideways glance.)...ask Kaito that.

(The scene changes to Christopher, who is angrily walking through the halls. Unlike the room he left, Carnation Valley’s halls are dark. The carpets are dark red and the wallpaper is yellowed. Only a few dim lights are on. They illuminate the ancestor portraits eerily. Shelves with fabric flowers and dolls are scattered here and there. When Christopher walks, his footsteps are muffled by the thick carpet.)

Christopher: (He mutters under his breath.)...I must be the responsible one. (He grimaces.) 18 years old and still acts like a spoiled child. I must be the responsible one. Always...Always! (His fists continue to shake. Byron’s voice echoes in his mind.)

Byron’s voice: ...we are Victorian at heart. Will you remember that, Christopher? You must represent our family with pride. Are you able to do that? If one of us falls from grace, then we will all fall into the depths of hell.

Christopher: (He starts at remembering those words.) He’s doing this for us...isn’t he? For our family’s glory..? No, no. What are you thinking? Of course he is...! Do not doubt him. He is your father... (He looks at his reflection in a dirty mirror. Dust coats the glass and he attempts to clear it away.) What ever were you thinking..? (His bedraggled expression stares back.) I am not a doll. (Doubt flickers across his expression.)...Right? (He eyes a porcelain doll on a shelf further down the hall. He walks towards it and grabs it off the shelf. Then he walks back towards the mirror. The doll in his hand has blue curls and a dress patterned in stars and moons. He looks back at himself and the doll.) We have nothing in common. (More firmly.) We have nothing in common. (He looks down at the doll’s limbs and compares it to
his. They are almost the same color.) I stay inside for too long. (He looks at his hands.) The
delicate fingers are from mother. She always said that these were hands meant to play the
piano. (Absently, he fingers the doll’s hair.) It’s so soft... (He runs a hand through
his.) Just like mine. It must have come from a real person. And those blue eyes...are almost
too blue for the rest of the doll’s features. (He laughs quietly to himself.) What am I doing,
comparing myself to a doll? I must be half ma– (He turns back to the doll, which now looks
exactly like him. In shock, he drops it. When he looks back into the mirror, a porcelain doll
version of himself stares back. He takes in a sharp breath. The camera shows Christopher
visibly shaking with a bead of sweat trailing down his cheeks.)

Thomas: (He runs up to Christopher.) Just who are you talking to?! (He sees the doll at
Christopher’s feet and

Christopher, staring at him in shock.) Moonie?! That’s so pathetic of you! (He picks up the
doll and inspects the damage. There is a crack in the arm.) Taking it out on mother’s dolls?!
Have you gone mental?!

Christopher: (He looks to Thomas, still visibly shocked.) M-Moonie?

Thomas: (He cradles the doll in his arms.) The doll you just broke!

Christopher: (He looks at Thomas’s arms.)...It looks...different.

Thomas: (Confusion and disbelief passes through his face. He is speechless for a few
moments.) Of course it looks different! You threw her onto the floor! What’s wrong with
you? You’ve never been this immature!

Christopher:...I...I just thought for a moment...(He looks back into the mirror, where his
normal reflection shows.) That that was me.

Thomas: (He exhales, the anger being replaced by annoyance.) Oh, go get some rest. I told
you that that sleep-once-a-week schedule wasn't working!

Christopher: (Distractedly.)...Yes...Rest. But...I’ve a fitting today.

Thomas: (Annoyed.) For what?

Christopher: My suit. What time is it?

Thomas: (He rolls up his sleeve and looks down at his watch.) A little bit past noon.

Christopher: My appointment is soon then. I’ll have to sleep later. (He walks past Thomas,
who sighs. The scene fades to black.)

--- ♦ ---

(We are downstairs in the front parlor. Two men stand facing Byron and Christopher.)

Byron:...Meet my son. Christopher Arclight.

Christopher: (He gently smiles and holds out his hand.) I’m pleased to meet you.
Tailor 1: (He smiles and shakes Christopher's hand.) I am Liam. Pleased to be of your acquaintance.

Tailor 2: (Shakes Christopher's hand.) David. We are very excited to be able to work with your esteemed family.

Liam: Sir Arclight, do you have a full body mirror anywhere?

Byron: (He motions upstairs.) Right this way.

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(They are once again downstairs, with Thomas and Michael at the head of the stairs.)

David: Please do not hesitate to call upon us.

Liam: (He shakes Byron's hand.) The suit will be finished in time for the wedding. Do not worry, Sir Arclight. I will make sure it is of the finest quality. (He pulls away and closes the door behind him, with David following.)

Byron: (He smiles.) Oh, Outsiders. (Then without warning, his expression darkens and he turns towards Christopher.) Now then...I can tell something is on your mind, Christopher. Do tell.

Christopher: (A grim expression fills his face.)...I...I can't bear to lie to Kaito.

Byron: (Raises his eyebrow) And?

Christopher: ..I don't think I have the courage to do this.

Byron: Please, continue. I appreciate your honesty.

Christopher: (Nervously.) Kaito...He's...

Byron: He's what?

Christopher: (A note of confidence fills his voice.) My most dearest friend. And that is it. I don't think we can go any further.

Byron: Are you confusing your wants with your needs? You can want to not marry the Tenjo boy. But... not needing to marry him is another matter. (He swiftly yanks on Christopher's hair, causing him pain. His voice is eerily quiet.) Are you going against my wishes? I thought you were loyal.

Christopher: (He winces.) I...apologize, father.

Byron: (He lets go of Christopher's hair and slaps him. Michael gasps and Thomas covers his eyes.)

That's dearest father to you.
(Christopher looks away)

Byron: (Once again, he takes a strand of Christopher’s hair.) Look at me.

Christopher: (Slowly, he turns to Byron with the red burn on his cheek.) Yes... Dearest father?

Byron: Go against my wishes and Thomas will be next. Not only that, you will be cast out of the Resurrection without a name.

Christopher:... What? (He looks at Thomas, who is still holding Michael.) He... wouldn’t.

Byron:... Really? Thomas would do anything to earn my approval. You and I both know that. He even set fire to the Kamishiro girl...

Thomas: (He stands up, pain filling his features.) I... I didn’t know... I didn’t know that the card would do such a thing! I didn’t—

Byron: (He yanks Christopher’s hair, causing Christopher to take in a sharp breath.) Perhaps... Michael could be next. He’s a lot more gentle than Thomas. A docile, good child. (He looks down at Christopher.) Something I thought you were. (He lets Christopher go.)

Christopher: (His eyes go to Michael who is now trembling and being held by Thomas.)... N... no. I won’t let... No. (He straightens his posture and winces a bit.) I’ll... marry Kaito.

Byron: (He smiles coldly.) And with that, your little rebellion has ended. Don’t you see how well everything goes if children just obey their parents? One day, you will also have to make this decision for your own child. I am preparing you for the future. (Slowly, he walks past his sons and up the stairs. Silence follows in his wake.)

Michael: (He holds Thomas’s arm and Christopher’s. After a while, he speaks up.)... I think we all must have a discussion. (He leads them towards the chairs. They all hesitantly take their seats.)

Thomas: Among brothers.

Michael: Among true brothers.

---Episode 2~END---

Episode 2 Illustration Here
Christopher: (He props his head on his hands and stares at the ground. The hand mark is beginning to fade.)...He never laid a hand on us when we were young.

Thomas: (He shifts his position on the cushions.)...But it is the present that matters now.

Michael: ...It was very sudden for all of us...I've never seen him this angry before...He always was so composed...

Thomas: (He turns to Michael.) You’ve only begun to realize that?

Michael: Well...There were a few other instances...but...I thought that those were only...occasional.

Thomas: (He lets out a bark of sardonic laughter.) This too must also be “only an occasion!” Goodness, with all of these “occasions” stacking up, we’ll all be limping by the end of the summer.

Christopher: (He bites his lip.) It’s true he has become a bit more...strict over these past few months...

Michael: But he was just like the man we had known when he returned...a few months ago.

Thomas: (A hint of anger in his tone.) Oh yes, continue to stuff your ears with cotton. (He grimaces.) I’ll be the one who stays awake.

Christopher: (Quietly.) He used to patiently speak to us whenever we contradicted him. No matter how frustrated we were...He would always calmly answer us. I almost have no memories of him losing his patience. And it had never been at us.

Michael: (He smiles a bit.) I guess that’s who I take after.

Thomas: (He snorts.) I don’t recall father having a sarcastic streak.

Michael: Yes, I do believe I learned that from you.

Thomas: (He folds his arms behind his head.) Touché.

Christopher: I believe father is just stressed from planning the wedding. I’m sure his mood will improve once this passes over.

Michael: (He smiles hopefully, although his lips waver a bit..) Surely.
Thomas: (His relaxed posture shifts to that of action.) He’s been becoming more and more violent these past few months! Do you need any more evidence?!

(His brothers look at him quizzically.)

Michael: He’s only stricken us a few times... There is nothing that--

(Michael’s gasp is heard as Thomas rolls up his sleeve. Scars crisscross his arm. There is a moment of silence as the brothers absorb the sight.)

Christopher: Th... Thomas... I didn’t know that... (He swallows and shakes his head.) I didn’t know...

Thomas: (His expression is dark.) No, of course you didn’t. You’re too high up in that ivory tower of yours to realize what is truly happening. (He pulls his sleeve down.)

Michael: Oh, Thomas... You should have told us.

Thomas: (He grimaces.) And what will you two rabbits do? Pity me? I don’t need pity! I need someone to get that man we call our father OUT of this house!

(Michael and Christopher gasp.)

Thomas: (He stands up.) Yes! I’ve finally said it! (Rage fills his voice. His suppressed British accent surfaces.) Out in the open for all of you to hear! For Tron’s beloved little rabbits to hear! News from the outside world that shows you the true nature of the monster you reside with!

(Without warning, Christopher slaps Thomas. Thomas staggers into his seat, shocked. But he is quick to regain his composure, his American accent back in control.)

Thomas: Without even realizing it, you’re becoming more and more like him.

Christopher: (Rage fills his face. He spits out every word with barely controlled anger.) I am not violent without reason. Remember that. Because that man is.

Thomas: (He closes his eyes and raises his eyebrows.) From that statement, you are aware of the hell we are slowly descending into. (He opens his eyes.) Then why do you lie to yourself?

Christopher: Why don’t you learn to respect your elder brother?

Thomas: (Coldly.) I cannot respect a man who threw Michael and me into an orphanage and abandoned us there for more than four years.

Christopher: (His eyes widen and he covers his mouth. Tears fill his eyes and before they can fall, he turns around and storms off. The room is left in silence. Only the ticking of the grandfather clock is heard.)

Michael: ... You know that he attempted to do what was best for us.
Thomas: (His anger has not disappeared.) Always like Tron. Always so sure of himself. Needing no one to come close to him. An absolute carbon copy.

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(Christopher is alone in his room. It is quite large, with blue walls and a large window. His four poster bed is in a corner of the room, in a small nook besides the window. Star maps line a wall and telescopes are lined up in front of the window. A desk is beneath those maps. On another side of the room are the doors of a closet. Shelves of books line another part of the room. He sits beneath the window, quietly flipping through a photo album. His face is grave and the exhaustion of staying up three nights in a row clearly show. The tears have completely dried on his face, leaving his cheeks tearstained. He looks at an image of him and Kaito in their younger years.)

Christopher: ...could I..? Does Kaito agree to this..? What would he say..? (He turns to another page and his expression saddens. It is a childhood picture of him and his brothers.) I betrayed them...didn’t I? (He rests his head in the pages.) I betrayed them...Have I ever apologized for my actions?...No. I haven’t, haven’t I?

(Darkness fills the scene. When it is light again, we see through Christopher’s eyes. The first thing we see is a young Michael and Thomas.)

Michael: ...Please don’t leave us, dearest brother.

Thomas: Yes...! Please don’t...

Christopher: N...no...Of course not...I wouldn’t leave you. Why would I..? We’re all fine now...Father has returned. We’re... (He swallows.) We’re a family again.

Michael: (His face begins to melt, his flesh dripping down his chin. His voice comes out as an accusatory whisper.) Lies. They are all lies.

Thomas: (His voice is distorted as his body melts into the ground.) Bloody lies.

(Before the brothers disappear, they say one last word in unison.)

Michael and Thomas: Lies.

Christopher: (He reaches an arm towards the melting figures.) N-no..! Please...! Wait..! (His voice becomes desperate.) I promise! I’ll never leave you again! Please...!!! THOM–

(His cry is cut off as two sets of hand wrap around his throat. One is Thomas and the other is Michael. There voices echo across the scene.)

Thomas and Michael: Lies, lies, lies. You left us to rot.

Christopher: (He gasps for air, his eyes growing wild, his hands clawing the air.)

Thomas and Michael: Why didn’t you ask us? We could have helped. Instead...You replaced us. With him.

(The last thing Christopher sees is Kaito, suspended in the air by a noose.)
Christopher: N...no...I..didn’t...I’m...

(The scene fades to black. When there is light again, Christopher jolts up from the album. Sweat beads his brow and he breathes heavily. He looks down at the childhood photo again.)

Christopher:.sorry. I’m sorry...I- No...(He takes in a deep breath.) I came back. I came back...(He looks out the window. It is dusk. He stands up, placing the album on the sill.)...I musn’t...I musn’t be late for dinner...Or else I’ll upset him...(He shakily walks out of his room.)

---♀---

(The scene is now that of a quiet dinner scene. The family is seated around a rectangular table, quietly eating their meal. The chandelier above them shines dully. Only the sound of silverware is heard.)

Byron: (He dabs at his mouth with a napkin. Then he clears his throat. His sons focus their attention on him.) I apologize that we lack the necessary staff to enjoy the proper meal. (He sighs.) Times have changed. When all of you were younger, this house was bustling with servants. You remember, yes?

(The brothers look at one another. They quietly nod.)

Byron: I aim to restore Carnation Valley to its former splendor.

(Quiet murmurs of agreement from the brothers follow.)

Byron: In order to do that, we must display our prominence to the rest of the Resurrection. The union between Tenjo and Arclight is necessary if we wish to return to our former position. (He looks at Christopher. He shifts uncomfortably.) Have we any objections on this matter? (He continues to look at Christopher.)

Christopher: No...Dearest father.

Byron:(He returns to his meal.) I expected nothing less of you, my eldest. I trust that there will be no more rebellions?

Christopher:(He looks up at Thomas, who is glaring at his plate.) N-no, dearest father.

Byron: Hopefully your good behavior will keep your younger brothers in check. (He chuckles.) Not that Michael needs any disciplining. He’s the most well-behaved out of you three, it seems.

---Episode 3~END---

Episode Illustration Here
I'm very excited for the next episode. The character we've all been waiting will make their appearance!
In the Rose Garden

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

---Episode 4---

In the Rose Garden

(The summery afternoon sun fills the windows of the living room. Christopher is playing the piano while Michael sits on the couch and reads a book. The piano music fills the room with its soft, gentle notes. Christopher is deeply focused on playing the instrument. His eyes have a distant look in them as his long and elegant fingers waltz across the keys. Quietly, Michael closes the book and rests his head on the cushion. He closes his eyes and listens to the music. Once the piece is done, the sound of someone slowly clapping is heard. The brothers turn around in surprise to see Byron in the doorway.)

Byron: (He walks towards Christopher.) It’s been awhile since you’ve played. I had forgotten how much it reminded me of your mother. (He smiles fondly.) She was quite the skillful player. Before she passed, I remember how she allowed you to sit besides her whilst she played. Sometimes she even taught you. By the way, what interested you to play this instrument?

Christopher: (He stands up and faces his father. He dips his head.) I was a young child and the piano at the time seemed so large. I was fascinated by how such a large instrument could sound so gentle...and at times sound so angry. (He strokes the ivory keys.) Mother always played so...soulfully. As if she put every fibre of her being into a piece.

Byron: It seems you do, too. (He smiles.) We have quite a musical family, it seems. You with the piano, Thomas with his guitar, Michael with his viola...and I with my fantastically awful violin. (He chuckles.) I haven’t played that thing in years. My instructor left me years ago because I was so awful. (He lets out a short exhale.) If only we had a singer in our family. Then we could have someone to sing alongside us. Your mother had her sister...with her melodious soprano. (He looks outside the window and laughs.) Your mother hated singing. It made her self conscious.

Christopher: She only sung to lull us to sleep. It was a low, husky voice. A contralto, or close to it, if I remember correctly.
Byron: (He smiles.) Growing up alongside someone who sang like an angel must have made her pale in comparison.

Michael:...aunt Chloe?

Byron:...yes. (Sadness fills his expression.) She passed before you arrived. She was...very young.

Michael:...An accident?

Byron: (He looks down at the floor.)...Yes. (He is a bit uncomfortable as he says this.) An...accident. Like my two younger sisters.

Christopher: (He slightly raises an eyebrow and solemnly clears his throat.) We...shouldn’t talk about such sad matters on a bright day such as this.

Byron: I agree. (A smile appears on his face.) On more joyful matters, someone is waiting for you in garden, Christopher.

Christopher: (He perks up.) Indeed?

Byron: I suggest you hurry. They dislike waiting.

Christopher: Thank you for telling me, dearest father. (He stands up, dips his head and leaves the room.)

(Now, only Byron and Michael are left. Byron seats himself next to Michael.)

Byron: (He pats Michael's head good naturedly.) Out of all three sons, I have to say that you're the one who reminds me of her the most.

Michael: (He swallows.)...who..?
Byron: Your aunt Chloe. (His eyes grow distant.) She was always such a lovely young lady. In their youth, your mother and Chloe were inseparable. (Sadness fills his face.) Your mother was inconsolable after she passed. (He pauses a bit, attempting to regain his composure.) I believe that was one of the factors that led to your mother’s untimely death.

Michael:...I never got to know her very well. How was she like, from your point of view?

Byron: (He chuckles.) A small bit like you...But Thomas is where she truly lives on. She was so headstrong...(He closes his eyes and smiles a bit.) She wasn’t prepared for marriage...But her daring personality and hardiness got her through anyways. She was ahead of her time and was stronger than anyone I had ever met. How else was she able to bear three sons? She also had influence in the Resurrection Council, thanks to your grandfather. (He laughs quietly to himself and smiles at Michael.) We should spend more time leisurely conversing. I do miss the conversations in this house. Remember when you would always ask me about the Aztecs and the Incans?

Michael: (He brightens up. A smile fills his face.) Yes, I do remember. Did I bother you?

Byron: (He leans back against the couch.) Not at all. In fact, I enjoyed learning alongside you.

Michael: (He nods.) Yes, it would be nice if we could do that again. (He picks up his book and shows it to Byron.) I’m halfway through Don Quixote and would like your opinion on the main character. Do you believe he is truly mad? Or is he only pretending?

Byron: (He smiles.) There have been theories explaining both. And there is evidence to support both. For example, his time with the Duke and the Duchess. (He clears his throat.) But first, I would like to hear your opinion.

Michael: (He returns the smile. There is a glimmer in his eyes.) Well...

---♀---

Christopher: (He walks through a path lined with roses. The sun shines on his back and fills the garden with light. The path leads up to a whitewashed gazebo, which is also surrounded by flowers. In it, a young man stands waiting, his back turned. Christopher’s eyes widen in
Kaito: (He turns around, his steely blue eyes focusing instantly on Christopher. Blonde hair is piled at the back of his head, outlined by a turquoise fringe. His boots with small heels click as he turns around and walks towards Christopher. His voice has a hint of a southern drawl as he speaks in English.) Chris. Took you long enough.

Christopher: Kaito…(He smiles.) It’s been so long since I’ve seen you. And it’s been longer since I’ve heard you speak English. (He chuckles.) I don’t think I’ll ever get used to hearing the American south in your voice.

Kaito: (He smirks.) And I don’t think I’ll ever get used to the fact that you speak like you have a cold.

Christopher: (Resigned.) Of course…no matter what language you speak, you always have something to counter me. When we first met, I had taken you for a quiet Japanese boy who grew up with his family here for generations.

Kaito: (He laughs.) You were halfway right. My grandfather was Japanese and went over to America. There, he met an American woman and had my dad. Then my dad also married white, came back to Japan to work and now here I am. (He smirks.) You never saw my southern heritage until I started to speak English while I could see the Resurrection gentleman in you a mile away.

Christopher: (He smiles a bit.) Your accent was very, very heavy back then, if I remember correctly.

Kaito: Yes, that’s why we spoke Japanese. (He returns the smile.) What’s the use of speaking a common language if you can’t understand the other person half o’ the time?

Christopher: (He scoffs.) So much for mutual intelligibility. Anyways, it's a bit far from Heartland, isn't it? You wouldn't come here just to chat with your mentor.

Kaito: (His mood darkens.) No, no of course not. I came here to help prepare the merging of our families.
Christopher: (His expression also darkens.)...I thought so.

(There is a brief pause in the conversation. The two stand in the gazebo, bodies turned towards one another but gazes averted to the floor. A breeze stirs up and rose petals flutter about.)

Christopher:...It wasn’t my choice, if that’s what you were wondering.

Kaito:...(Slowly, his eyes go up to meet Christopher’s.) I know.

Christopher: I’m surprised your father agreed to this.

Kaito: (He grimaces.) The guilt’s been eating away at him ever since the WDC.

Christopher: Ah...But weren’t our relations repaired after the feud?

Kaito: For you and me, yes...But...(He smiles wryly.) You think a children’s card game can solve everything?

Christopher: (He opens his mouth in shock. He is at a loss of words for a few moments.)
Kaito...For you to say such a thing...

Kaito: (A hint of sadness now fills his expression.) It’s been a year since the WDC. We’ve all grown, Chris.

Christopher:...Yes...I see. (He puts his hand to his mouth and inhales.) So we have. And that must mean that we are one step closer to leading our communities.

Kaito: The old man looks likes he’s centuries old, but he’s somewhere in his 50’s. It’ll take awhile before he croaks.
Christopher: (Surprise fills his expression.) Really. He’s only in his 50’s? I beg your pardon, but my father is in his mid 40’s and doesn’t look a day older than 35.

Kaito: (He shrugs.) In his youth, he worked a lot and I guess the stress just got to him.

Christopher: He looks like he’s…(Whispers.) in his 70’s.

Kaito: (Sarcastically.) Really? When Haruto was born, I thought my old man fought in the civil war.

Christopher: (Playing along.) Which side?

Kaito: What do you think? He’s a proud Texan.

Christopher: I’m afraid my knowledge of America fails me there.

Kaito: (Snorts.) The American Civil War was centuries ago. I don’t blame you. Besides, I don’t know too much about the history of Great Britain either. So we’re even. Anyways, my old man stays up at night in his workshop all the time. I reckon it’s the guilt that’s keeping him up.

Christopher: Well, my father is sleeping quite soundly at night. Apparently, he’s had a few women interested in him and...(He pauses and smiles wryly at Kaito.) Oh dear. You’ve found my weak spot for gossip.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) Mhm. Resurrection Gentleman through and through. I try not to idly sit around and talk about things that may or may not be true. Out in the countryside, life’s easygoing and nothing happens. People’s imaginations can get wild. But out in the city, there’s a lot to do.

Christopher: (He laughs nervously.) Yes, I do believe that all these months in the countryside have been wanting.
Kaito: Well thank the gods that I came, then. And at the right moment, too. (A determined expression fills his face.) We’re gonna get out of here together.

Christopher: Wh...what?

Kaito: You heard me. I ain’t gonna have a major decision in my life made for me by some old men.

Christopher: Well what do you suppose we do? Run away?

Kaito: Yes, as a last resort. But I have a better idea.

Christopher: ...and that is...?

Kaito: We voice our opinions in the most public way possible. Via television. All of Heartland and the Resurrection know that this wedding is coming. Might as well break the news so that the gossip can stop.

Christopher: And where will we get such resources to stage this?

Kaito: I’m the son of Dr. Robert “Faker” Tenjo and Marleen Korrina Jones. I think I can find a few channels to broadcast this.

Christopher: But...

Kaito: We'll do it or die trying to.

Christopher: He'll stop us, Kaito. He always will.

Kaito: (He sighs.) Remember how you always beat me within an inch of my life in our duels? Remember how we spent day and night fighting one another without rest or nourishment?
Remember how I almost died? Gods, I miss that Chris. Where'd he go?

Christopher: (Quietly...) V killed him.

Kaito: I'm not going to take that as an answer. You still have a spine. You're just hiding it behind all that hair.

Christopher: If only it would have been that easy! A pair of shears and then your old mentor would be back. (Scoffs) Really, Kaito. I was but a child back then.

Kaito: But you were the one who opened up the doors to my world. Pushing me to no end and making me stronger. That was all you.

Christopher: I understand...but this is different.

Kaito: Because we're on the same side now, waging a battle between our fathers.

Christopher: (Realization fills his face.) We are, aren't we? Since when did you stop being my apprentice?

Kaito: (Wryly.) A long time ago, Chris.

Christopher: (He looks away.) How much time has passed...Ever since that day? (He shakes his head.) You just arrived here. Let's talk about the old days. When things were good and peaceful. Before the betrayal, before the feud...Before the moon. (He looks at Kaito helplessly.) Language has never really been my strong point. I just can't find the correct words sometimes. (He sighs.) If I can't communicate my feelings in any tongue then what good am I?

Kaito: (Scoffs.) You even fail in body language. Always so stiff and stern.

Christopher: Then please...continue to speak to me so that we may further form a bond. A
bond where no language is needed. Anything.

Kaito: (Deadpan.) Y’all.

Christopher: (A bit surprised.) ...Pardon?

Kaito: (His words blend against one another. His southern accent is deeply exaggerated.) Y’all need to learn how to fight against this here dictatorship.

Christopher: ...I’m sorry but I didn’t understand a single thing you said...

Kaito: (Back to normal.) You see, Chris? If we’re gonna talk openly’n’honestly, we’ve gotta be comfortable with each other. And that means being comfortable with ourselves first. You all need to learn how to fight against this here dictatorship.

Christopher: How did you...?

Kaito: I didn’t. I guessed. (His eyes narrow.) So he does lead the family with an iron fist.

Christopher: ...no...it isn’t as bad as you think. If you listen to him–

Kaito: And if you listen to a dictator, he won’t execute you.

Christopher: (He swallows, his voice a bit shaky.) You don’t understand.

Kaito: There’s a lot of things we don’t understand about each other. But I know for sure you don’t want to go through with this marriage as much as I do. (There is a pause as Kaito looks at the ground, contemplating.) Will you promise me you'll be strong? (He exhales.) We'll be out of this mess before you know it.

Christopher: (He gives a look of sadness and pity aimed at Kaito.) ...We are encouraged to
dream in our youth...but when we reach adulthood, the dreams stop. It is very rare that childish fantasies come true. You know that, don’t you, Kaito?

---Episode 4-END---

Illustration for this episode here

Chapter End Notes

So. A southern Kaito. He is very fun to write and I’ve never seen another southern Kaito. May I please hear your thoughts on him?
(The episode opens with Christopher standing in the doorway of Byron’s study. It is a medium-sized room. The window faces the door, sunlight streaming in. A plant sits besides the window, green and healthy. Byron’s desk stands between the doorway and the window, made of sturdy mahogany wood. It is surrounded by bookshelves. A fireplace, now empty, lies in the corner waiting for winter.)

Christopher: (He knocks on the doorframe.) Dearest father...May I request a word with you?

Byron: (He looks up from his papers and readjusts his monocle. Clearing his throat, he then sweeps his arm to the chair in front of him.) Yes, my study is always open for the inquisitive.

Christopher: (He smiles a bit.) You always said that to us when we were younger. (He comes in and seats himself in front of Byron.)

Byron: (He chuckles.) Human curiosity is as infinite as human stupidity. No matter our age, we should always aim to question. After all, there wouldn’t be any science if no one was curious. And where would we be without science? No better than the animals in the forest, I’d hazard.

Christopher: Indeed. I... (He swallows nervously.) I never knew that the Tenjos lived so close to us.

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow at the sudden change in the conversation.) Indeed. It’s a small world. They’re just on the bottom of the hill. Go through our garden gates, down the steep hill, through the creek and woodland area, a few paces more and their quaint villa is right there.

Christopher: I spent most of my time inside or on the veranda. I didn’t dare venture far from
our home when I was younger.

Byron: (A bit sarcastically.) Yes, because all of the world’s books were in our library. Why travel outside when you could travel through pages from the comfort of our own home. (Sighs.) Sometimes, I wish you could be a bit more like Thomas. He always snuck out to explore. A lot like my sister, Edeline. She always acted like an angel in front of the adults but when it was just her and Beatrice, she was always the one getting in trouble. And Beatrice, rest her soul, always had to clean up afterwards. At least the Tenjo boy has a small sense of adventure. He used to come out and play in the woodland area when he was young.

Christopher: ...Kaito doesn’t like the idea of this union either.

Byron: (He sighs in exasperation.) We’ve been through this already, Christopher. It's an adult's world out there. Your dreams and the Tenjo boy's dreams mean nothing. He is a boy of 19. What does he know?

Christopher: (He looks down at his lap.)

Byron: (Attempting to be understanding. His voice softens.) I was once a young man just like you, Christopher. (He sighs.) I have done things that I will regret for the rest of my life in those tumultuous times. When I met your mother, we both knew that we had no choice. She did not love me at first. In all honesty, I preferred her sister, but she was only 17. Your mother was 20 when she married me and I was 25. It was your maternal grandmother’s decision to do so. Your mother was becoming too much for her. But...everything worked out well. We had three, beautiful sons and a wonderful home. So you see, Christopher? Something that begins bad does not have to end the same way.

Christopher: (Quietly.) But I am only 21. And Kaito is only 19.

Byron: He turns 20 in a few months. (He puts his hand on Christopher’s.) Yes, people from the Resurrection tend to marry in their mid-twenties or early-thirties...but...We have a reputation to maintain.

Christopher: (He looks from underneath his eyelashes.) ...For marrying young?
Byron: (He grimaces a bit, but then regains his calm demeanor.) Please don’t try to make this difficult more than it already is.

Christopher: Why can’t we marry later?

Byron: I have a reason for everything, Christopher.

Christopher: Then what is the reason for such an early marriage?

Byron: (He closes his eyes and sighs.)...It is not my secret to divulge.

Christopher: Is it about Kaito? Dr. Faker?

Byron:...I’m sure all will be revealed in due time.

Christopher: (A bit frustrated.) That isn’t a sufficient answer. What is it about the Tenjos that I do not know of?

Byron: (He looks at Christopher sadly.) Many, many things.

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(We are inside the Tenjo villa’s living room. It is cozy and appears cabin-like. Fur lined seats line one wall and hunting trophies line the other walls. Birdsong and bright sunlight filter through the large open window.)

Kaito: (He leans against one of the couches. He has changed into his fashion fiasco of an outfit of a white shirt, a belt, suspenders and khakis. At home, he speaks English with a bit of a heavier southern accent.) Seems like today’s Arclight visitin’ day. Never was one for such fancy places.

Dr. Faker: (He is a lanky, somewhat elderly man. His blonde hair, which is paler than Kaito’s, sticks up at irregular angles. His small, amethyst eyes are sunk deep into his features. Similar to his son, he is wearing almost the same outfit minus the suspenders. He
Kaito: (A bit snappishly.) For what? (Contemptuously.) Father-son bonding? Regular fathers and sons go fishin’ or huntin’. Hell, buildin’ a go-kart if they’re really dedicated. Not visits to stuffy rich families so that the son can be sold off.

Dr. Faker: (A flicker of hurt flashes by his expression.) ...Well, I’ll be off now. (He leaves.)

(The camera focuses on Kaito, staring angrily at the wall. He says nothing as the sound of the door is locked. Then, a child’s voice speaks up, tinged with a southern accent.)

Child: You should give him an easier time, brother.

Kaito: (He turns around.) Haruto! Come here. You shouldn’t worry about such things. It ain’t good for your soul.

Haruto: (He is a boy of 7. His large, honey colored eyes look up at his brother. Like his brother, he has pale skin. His hair is ashen-blue. Unlike his brother and father, he wears a dark jacket and shorts. He goes towards Kaito and gives him a hug.) You smell like soap.

Kaito: Yeah? That’s ‘cause I just pulled them out of the dryer.

Haruto: (He pulls away from his brother.) Why are you so mean to dad?

Kaito: (He ruffles Haruto’s hair.) It’s nothing you should worry about.

Haruto: (He sticks his tongue out.) You always say that. When will I be able to? I’m 7. I’m a big boy!
Kaito:..But not big enough.

Haruto: (He groans.) At least teach me how to hunt!

Kaito: It’d be like a blind man teaching a blind man. The old man never taught me how. And momma never trusted me with the family firearms. (He looks at the mounted hunting rifle on the wall.) It hasn’t been fired since...(His lips tremble.)

Haruto: (He looks at his brother sadly. Taking the message, he holds his brother’s hand.) Will you tell me another story about her?

Kaito:...yeah. (He motions for Haruto to sit besides him.)...This might be an old one.

Haruto: You lived with her for 12 years! You shouldn’t be runnin’ outta stories this fast!

Kaito: (He sighs.) You’re right. For 12 years straight I was never separated from her save for that last day...Which were 5 hours of absolute pain.

Haruto: (He playfully punches his brother’s arm.) Momma’s boy.

Kaito:...yeah. I guess I was. She loved me enough for both her and the old man. (He smiles ruefully.) Which was good ‘cause he never came home.

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(We are back in the Arclight front parlor.)

Byron: Christopher, we have a guest.

Christopher: (He comes downstairs.) Who is it?

Byron: Why, it's none other than Dr.Faker. Your future father-in-law. Please, come join us.
(Christopher enters the room.)

Christopher: Good afternoon, Dr. Faker.

Dr. Faker: (Good naturedly.) Well, if it isn't the man of the hour. I haven't been seeing you around these few months but I'm sure that's about to change real soon. (He snorts.) Never had any in-laws. Marleen n' I cut all ties with our parents when we left. Wonder how this one's gonna turn out.

Christopher: (A bit uncomfortably.) Er...yes.

Dr. Faker: (To Byron) Your son's as well behaved as ever. And still keeping that posh accent of his going strong. (Back to Christopher.) Must have been quite a surprise when you saw Kaito waiting for you.

Christopher: Yes...It was a bit of a surprise.

Dr. Faker: Have your English skills been fading, Christopher? You're not saying much. Come, come! Take a seat! You're gonna start losing air if you keep on standing that high! The air gets thinner and thinner the higher you go, unfortunately for us titans.

Christopher: (He forces a laugh and seats himself.) How have the experiments been going, Dr. Faker?

Dr. Faker: I feel like we're about to get onto something. Just a few more nights...We're close I tell you. Very close. Just need a few more pokes and prods. (He smiles.) It's kinda boring without you and your father.

Byron: “If it's boring then it's good” was something my father said. Kaito isn't causing any problems?

Dr. Faker: (He shrugs.) So-so. He’s got southern sass, that’s for sure.

Christopher: Oh yes, I’m quite aware of the fact.

(The men laugh quietly among themselves.)

Christopher: (Reminiscing.) He was a fine student. I'm sure he didn't cause you as much trouble as he did with me.
Dr. Faker: (Resigned.) Well, that’s debatable. But you survived, which means something. You’ve been with him since he was just in his teens and he hasn’t bitten your head off. I applaud you.

Christopher: (He laughs.) A mere boy at the time! Yet he was filled with so much determination...It's rare to find such a genius like him.

Dr. Faker: It seems to be a curse and a blessing. Y’know the saying how two women can’t be in the same kitchen? Over here, it’s two geniuses can’t be in the same interdimensional research lab. I cannot tell you how many times he has snapped back at me or gave me a less than pleasant comment. Sometimes, his sharp tongue keeps me up at night. (Sighs.) Where did he learn how to be so mean?

Christopher: Well, he had to harden himself somehow. The world beneath Heartland is not kind.

Dr. Faker: A sharp tongue can only take you so far.

Christopher: Asides from his dueling and his mind, what else can he do? There is only so much of him.

(Dr. Faker bursts into laughter at the comment.)

Dr. Faker: (Between laughter.) These things just don’t write themselves!

Christopher: (Confused.) P...pardon?

Dr. Faker: (He roars with laughter.) THERE’S ONLY SO MUCH O’ HIM!!!

(It takes awhile for Christopher and Byron to get the joke. Christopher blushes and tries to hide his laughter. Byron politely smiles.)

Byron: (His smile widens.) Well, not all of us are blessed with towering height. There need to be some people of smaller stature so we can still be called “tall.”
Dr. Faker: (He has stopped laughing but continues to smile.) Everyone in my family is between 5’11 and 6’9. And then there’s Kaito, who’s only what? 5’4? (He chuckles.) Well, at least he wasn’t tiny like Marley.

Byron: I believe that’s the reason why he is of such a small stature. She was only 4’11, if I remember correctly.

Dr. Faker: (He shrugs.) Her personality made up for what she lacked in height. (Snorts.) And her chest.

Christopher: (He smiles awkwardly at the exchange.)

Byron: (He notices Christopher’s discomfort. He then clears his throat.) Anyways...About the union...

Dr. Faker: (His mood sobers.) Of course, Byron. About the union...(He turns to Christopher.) There’s something I gotta ask of you.

Christopher: Yes, Dr. Faker?

Dr. Faker: Will you take care of him?

Christopher: Of course...Dr. Faker.

(In the background, Byron looks down into his tea, satisfied with himself.)

Dr.Faker: Good. Because he's half of what I got left of Mrs.Tenjo.

Christopher: I...understand.

Dr.Faker: (He sighs and leans into his chair.) 'been pushing daisies since Kaito was 12. Still a bit of a fresh wound. (He looks down at the floor.) And...About Kaito...
Byron: (Murmurs) Oh dear. Is it about the wedding? Nerves? Agitation? That boy needs to learn how to relax.

Dr. Faker: (He shakes his head.) Now, I know you folks don't like suspense so I'm gonna be frank. Kaito's sick.

Christopher: (He is actively listening now.) ...what...kind...?

Dr. Faker: ...A wasting disease of sorts. (He swallows.) From Photon Transforming so much. It's been going on since...the WDC. But y'all must've known about this for awhile now.

Christopher: (He swallows.) ...Actually...a little bit before the WDC...

Byron: I remember when I dueled him as Tron. When I took his.....soul...it didn't seem to feel...complete. (He looks at Dr. Faker.) I thought you had done something about it.

Dr. Faker: ...He's passionate about dueling. I can't take that away from him.

Christopher: But he's...

Dr. Faker: (Resigned.) ...I know, I know...He already hates me and we're slowly rebuilding our trust. If I took his Photon Transformation from him, that would destroy what little love we share left...

Byron: This is dreadful news. Is it severe?

Dr. Faker: No, not at this point. The doctor estimates that he has 15 years...if he doesn't Photon Change frequently.

Christopher: Oh...(He swallows.) And he'll slowly die from the inside?

Dr. Faker: ...(He slowly nods in defeat.) Sorry for ending in such a sad note. I'm sure we'll have happier days in the future. (He slowly gets out of his seat.) These old bones...Don't know when they'll give in but it feels like soon. (He turns towards the door.) Well, I think it's about time I go. I reckon Kaito's getting himself in trouble. Have a good day.

Christopher: ...Have a good day, Dr. Faker.

Byron: I'll see you soon, Faker.

Dr. Faker: (He looks over his shoulder, smiling weakly.) Really, Byron. I told you to stop calling me that years ago.

Byron: (He smiles.) But I can't help it.
Dr. Faker: Even the papers call me Dr. Faker.

Byron: (Chuckles.) You’ve had the name for decades now.

Dr. Faker: ...I honestly cannot remember the last time someone called me Robert.

Byron: (He smiles.) And I can’t remember the last time someone smoked opium with me.

Dr. Faker: (He turns around with a smile.) Our glory days are far done, Byron. (He leaves the room.)

(The door closes behind them, leaving Christopher and Byron in silence. Only the ticking of the grandfather clock is heard.)

Byron: (He looks at Christopher. His expression is serious.) Don’t think that this is the end.

Christopher: ...How can I?

Byron: Two weeks and three days.

Christopher: (He lowers his head.) Yes, dearest father.

---Episode 5-END---

Illustration for this episode here
Kaito: Chris.

Christopher: Kaito.

(The two are face to face on the shore of a pond. A silence quietly flows around them. Animals call yet there are no human voices for a few moments.)

Christopher: Are you enjoying the countryside?

Kaito: (He looks around at his surroundings.) Like coming back to my childhood. Breathing in clean air and wearing whatever the hell I want.

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito’s suspenders and belt in mild revulsion.) You don’t say.

Kaito: (He turns towards Christopher and points.) Hey, it’s actually more comfortable than you think it is. Sure, I don’t look like I’m about to sip tea and nibble on cookies with the Queen, but who cares? Khakis do wonders for comfort. And it’s perfect for running around and looking at all the mansions dotting the countryside.

Christopher: (He turns his gaze towards the direction of his house.) Like Carnation Valley?

Kaito: Mmmhmm.

Christopher: You are now in Resurrection Territory. Of course the houses are spacious.

Kaito: (Emotionlessly.) Oh yes, entitled foreigners in Japan’s countryside.
Christopher: (Sarcastic.) How romantic.

Kaito: More like (He imitates Christopher's accent.) 'how troublesome'.

Christopher: (He turns towards Kaito, a wry smile on his face. Clearly, he is amused by Kaito’s impression of him.) What do you mean?

Kaito: (He shrugs and lists all of the trouble the Tenjos and Arclights have caused.) Us. Family feud. Communication with otherworldly entities. Costly science experiments. Involvement with the underground. The list goes on and on.

(There is a pause in the conversation. The pond’s water continues to ripple in the sun.)

Christopher: (Quietly, his eyes focused on the water.)...Your father...isn't he doing anything about...about your wasting away...?

Kaito: (He starts and mutters a curse under his breath.) It's none of your business how much Photon Transformation has taken from me! Besides, I told the old man to keep it a secret!

Christopher: (Sighs.) Well, he is your father. And he does care, no matter how you see it.

Kaito: (He grimaces.) Never had much of a dad. Now you know why.

Christopher: (His frustration is slowly growing.) Why didn't you tell me?! We are friends, aren't we?! You trust me, don’t you?!

Kaito: (He sighs.) All the more reason to keep it from you. The last time I trusted someone, he betrayed us and started a bloodbath. Oh, and did I forget the news? Rumors start like wildfire and it's dangerous for a hero to start being the subject of them rumors. When you're the subject of adoration and idolatry, you need to keep being the god they all think you are. And as you know, gods don't get sick.

Christopher: (Hurt.) But hiding your illness from me! Your mentor! What have you to say for yourself?! I knew you were ill, but not to this extent!

Kaito: (His agitation and frustration clearly shows.) What can you do about it? Don't ask any questions. Just continue to keep your back straight and your hands folded in your lap. Smile sweetly and please the audience. Like you've been doing for these past few months.
Christopher: (He is shocked at the harsh criticism of his recent behavior. His eyes are wide and his nostrils flaring. He replies with even sharpness.) I don’t need someone telling me what to do. I am my own man and refuse to acknowledge what my student has told me to do. The Fates are the ones who guide me. Not the people around me in this stiff society.

Kaito: (He says it coldly, his steely eyes meeting Christopher.) Are you going to become your father?

Christopher: I am and will be nothing like him. It is a choice to become our fathers or to blaze our own trail. I prefer to be my own man.

Kaito: Actions speak louder than words. You abandoned your very own flesh and blood in return for safety under my father's domain. I hope nothing like that happens again.

Christopher: I am showing concern for you. Why must you always push all attempts of assistance away with your sharp tongue?!

Kaito: (Angry.) Because, Chris! Whenever someone gets close to me, they get hurt! Or I get hurt! And my heart can only take so much! (He pauses for a bit, realizing what he had just said.) Godsdamnit... (Hurt shows on his face.) Sometimes...sometimes I wonder if everyone’s forgotten the fact that I’m just human, like everyone else here.

(Christopher looks at Kaito in stunned silence.)

Kaito: (A bitter smile fills his face.) You too, Chris? Just because I’m imbued with burning, hot blood don’t mean I’m immortal. Besides... (He grabs Christopher’s hand, tightly squeezing it. Christopher winces in pain. Kaito looks up at Christopher, his expression betraying nothing. His voice is eerily quiet as he speaks.) It’s your fault too.

Christopher: (He swallows.) P...pardon?

Kaito: You n’ my dad...both had a hand in killing me. Keep that in mind the next time you try to help me. (He lets go of Christopher’s hand. Without another word, he turns around and walks off. Christopher stands there in shock, one hand holding the other. A red mark shows on the area that Kaito held onto.)
Christopher: (Trying to find his voice.) Please…wait. Kaito…please…

Kaito: (He turns around, a cruel expression on his face.) Why? You didn’t wait for me. (He continues to walk away.)

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(We are transported to another time. It is night and we are in the outskirts of Heartland. Unlike the usual bright lights of the city, this part is fairly dark. The rain pours and thunder is heard in the background. Running, wet footsteps are heard.)

Kaito: (He is drenched from head to toe in his country boy outfit. He runs after Christopher, who is walking away from him in the rain. In this moment, he speaks Japanese.) Chris! Please! Wait! (He grabs Christopher’s arm but is roughly shoved away. Kaito falls into a puddle. The lightning flashes, revealing Christopher’s anger filled face. Without replying to Kaito, Christopher turns around and walks away. Kaito is left to watch, his eyes wide in shock and hurt. After awhile, he speaks again, in English. His voice is hoarse from shouting. At this point in time, his accent is heavier than the present-day Kaito.) Chris…What did I do wrong…?

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(We are back in the present. The scene fades slowly into that of present day Kaito’s face. He irritatedly sits on the couch, reorganizing his deck. When he hears a knock at the door, he glares at it.)

Kaito: (He shouts.) The door ain’t locked! (He turns back to his deck and mutters to himself.) Gods, how many times do I need to tell him that?

(Christopher hesitantly opens the door.)

Christopher: Kaito…?
Kaito: (Not looking at Christopher. He is preoccupied with looking at his cards.) Oh. It’s you. Thought you were the old man. (He sighs.) Nowadays I don’t even know where he goes half of the time. Good riddance to him, though.

Christopher: (He looks around the living room.) The lack of Orbital is...Unusual.

Kaito: He’s on his honeymoon. I promised him.

Christopher: How are you managing without him?

Kaito: Same as always.

Christopher:...look, Kaito.

Kaito: (Annoyance fills his expression. He continues to focus on his deck.) What?

Christopher: (He looks down at his feet.) There’s no need for secrets between us.

Kaito: (He snorts.) The last time a “secret” got out, I remember how one of us got hurt.

Christopher: (He bites his lip.) But...We all care for you.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) ‘We?’ As in the president of the United States, Vector, Tron and you? (He lets out a sarcastic huff.) Haruto’s the only who cares if I die or live, as far as I’m concerned.

Christopher: I understand that you are angry but there truly is no need…(He makes a helpless motion with his hands.) You are like a brother to me.

Kaito: And as your brother, I ask that you leave.
Christopher: ...It’s the wedding, isn’t it?

(Kaito allows the question to hang in the air for awhile.)

Kaito: ...To put it bluntly, we would suck as a couple.

Christopher: ...I’m assuming that “suck” isn’t a good thing.

Kaito: (Slightly growing tired.) Yes, Chris. “Suck” has a negative connotation.

Christopher: (A bit flustered.) Well, it isn’t my fault that I wasn’t raised in a place that uses modern English.

Kaito: (Sarcastic.) Oh yes, before you left the Resurrection and into the outside world, you sounded like something straight outta Shakespeare.

Christopher: No, it was actually English that the Outsider could have understood with a small bit of difficulty. (He shrugs.) We tried to speak like our Victorian ancestors but it’s been five to six generations since the first members arrived. As languages are wont to do, it changed.

Kaito: Mmmhm. Interesting history lesson. Now, (He motions to his deck.) as you can see, I’ve got some organizing to do.

Christopher: But...It’s going to kill you.

Kaito: (He almost rolls his eyes but stops himself midway.) Oh yes, cards are so damn
dangerous. One more touch and I’m gonna die.

Christopher: Kaito!

Kaito: (He whirls around, his patience clearly frayed.) Can drug addicts stop (He snaps.) just like that?! Can alcoholics stop drinking when they’re told to?! Can I stop dueling just because you told me so? Can you stop jabbin’ your nose into other people’s business if I told you to? It’s my problem and I prefer to keep it that way! (He turns away from Christopher.)

Christopher: (He purses his lips. His hands are balled into fists. His voice comes out small and shaky.) And Atlas held up the world until he could no longer...Destroying everything the gods had begotten. (His voice is pleading.) You need to stop trying to carry everything upon your shoulders. I don’t want to see you get hurt.

(Silence answers him. After a few moments of silence, Christopher shakes his head and leaves.)

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(Christopher has returned home. He opens up the garden gate and walks through the path. When he gets to the porch, Thomas is lounging on a chair. In his hand is the book *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*. When he sees his brother approach, he snaps the book closed and turns his attention to him.)

Thomas: Judging from your expression, Kaito was being ornery. (Snorts.) Like a mule.

Christopher: (He sighs.) All snark aside, Thomas, you are correct. (He walks up to the veranda and pulls a chair besides Thomas. He gives a brief glance at the book behind Thomas’s back. When he realizes that it is a book in a language he cannot understand, he refocuses his attention back to Thomas.) An interesting choice. Michael is also reading the same story...albeit in English.

Thomas: (He gives a dismissive wave.) Translations are worthless when compared to the original. You read the translation to understand the plot in your mother tongue. You read the original to understand the soul of the story.
Christopher: (His eyebrows raise.) That is quite a surprising comment, coming from you.

Thomas: (His eyes slightly narrow.) I’m actually quite well-learned, believe it or not.

Christopher: I wasn’t doubting your intelligence. I…(He motions to himself.) I can only speak English and Japanese. I never really had the aptitude for languages.

Thomas: And then there’s Michael, who knows Latin and a bunch of other things. *Latin.* Who even speaks that anymore in the twenty-third century?

Christopher: As long as he enjoys it…

Thomas: (He shrugs and returns to his book.) Well, he’s got a gift is all I can say.

Christopher: (Flatly.) He even speaks the language of swords.

Thomas: (Snorts.) You with your nerdy personality but stunning looks, me with my emotional problems but absolutely ravishing physique and then Michael with his agreeable personality and handsome face. It took them three tries but the third time’s the charm. They finally got it right with Michael. (Humorously.) I wonder if old man Tenjo could try for another one. It’d be interesting to see how that’d turn out. Just…it’d be difficult to find a willing female. (He smiles.) Just imagining his face gives me a stomach ache.

Christopher:...They could always try for a New Blood.

Thomas: (He leans back into his seat.) Why add more artificially created humans when we already have so many? Sure, nowadays most of us come from the bellies of a female, but if we trace back to perhaps three generations ago, we’ll find that one of our family members came from a test tube.

Christopher: It goes further back for Outsiders. The Resurrection didn’t allow New Bloods until about 60 years ago.
Thomas: (He shivers a bit.) Just imagine it...Spending all 9 months inside of a test tube, subsisting entirely on chemicals. And then you come out perhaps with slightly blue skin like the Blues or with strikingly red eyes...It’s unsettling.

Christopher: (Quietly.) They didn’t ask to be made.

Thomas:...But now look at us. Sometimes I wonder how we’d be if there were no New Bloods in our family.

Christopher:...You can definitely bid farewell to your lion’s mane. And that mop of mahogany in the back.

Thomas: And I your tricolor of blue, purple and silver.

Christopher: Yes, I do believe we’d all be blue-eyed and have a shade of blonde in our hair. A lot like grandfather. The last pure Old Blood in our family.

Thomas: I don’t understand the purpose of New Bloods.

Christopher: They were once considered a hobby of the rich. Creating children that would not look like any other children must have been exciting at that time. Your child could have been the only turquoise haired, tan skinned, green eyed child in the city.

Michael: (Appearing suddenly.) What was once taboo had become normal once money came into the equation.

Thomas and Christopher: (Surprised, they turn around.) Michael!

Michael: Such a lovely way of greeting your little brother.
Christopher: How long have you been standing there? I’m sorry that we didn’t notice you sooner.

Michael: (He waves his hand dismissively.) No worries at all. I was just overhearing your delightful conversation from the dining table.

Thomas: You seem to have a lot more to add to the conversation, historian that you are.

Michael: (Happily.) In fact, I do. (He finds himself a seat.) You see, New Bloods have very dominant genes. That is why how one New Blood can affect an entire bloodline for generations. I suspect in the Tenjo’s case that there were perhaps a few, but all were either a quarter New Blood or less. They have the characteristics of typical westerners. But the New Blood still clearly shows in either their eyes or in their hair, most notably Haruto.

Thomas: (He takes in a deep breath.) Here comes Professor Arclight…

Michael: (He smiles.) Anyways, after 25 years of New Bloods being legally accepted, discrimination against them broke out into an all out war. At that point in time, the upper-middle class began to invest and utilize this technology. Now that they were somewhat common, the Old Bloods, which as we all know, are naturally conceived human beings, feared them. With their strange colored eyes, hair, markings and skin, who knew what they were actually made up of. Perhaps one day the New Bloods would rise and wipe out the Old Blood. They couldn’t let that happen, now could they? Leading up to the war were international tensions between many countries, including debts, politics and trade. This was also a period aptly known as “The Killings” due to the violence and murders of countless New Bloods. When two influential countries declared war on each other due to conflicting values, weapon proliferation and constant security attacks, what followed was the Third World War, otherwise known as the New Blood War. All of that happened 145 years ago. Now, shall we move onto the post-war history?

(The camera turns to Christopher, who is trying to remain interested and Thomas who is clearly bored.)

Christopher:..Perhaps another day, Michael.

Thomas: Maybe sometime in Heartland, when we have nothing better to do?
Michael: (He stands up and takes a bow.) I will look forwards to that day.

Christopher:...Don’t we all.

---Episode 6~END---

Image for this episode here
(It is night. The lights in the dining room shine merrily, the chandeliers gently swaying in the summer breeze. The Arclights quietly eat their dinner, the brothers’ heads bent down towards their plates. All is silent except for the occasional sound of silver hitting china.)

Byron: (He sighs and puts down his fork.) It’s so unsettlingly quiet...Doesn’t anyone have anything to say?

(When he is answered by silence, he turns towards Christopher.)

Byron: Anything of interest with Kaito?

Christopher: (He looks up, a little nervous.) No. I’m afraid there’s nothing of interest.

Byron: (Slightly exasperated.) Come, Christopher. There must be something. He’s an interesting boy.

Christopher:...He’s the same as always. Sharp tongue and such.

Byron: (He dabs at his mouth with the napkin on his lap. He chuckles a bit.) Fear not. Once he becomes a part of our family, I will see that he will have more manners.

(In the background, Thomas shifts uncomfortably. He involuntarily puts a hand on his arm.)

Byron: Before you know it, he will be like a brother to all of you.

(Thomas lets out a bark of laughter. Everyone stares at him in perturbed silence. His
brothers especially watch him in guarded fear.)

Byron: (He lifts an eyebrow.) Is there something you find amusing, Thomas?

Thomas: (He slowly eases his laughter down.) It’s just...He’s already a brother to one of us here. Moreso than Michael and I.

(Christopher flushes bright red. He puts his fork down.)

Byron: Oh?

Thomas: Ryoga told me.

Christopher:...From..(He swallows.) From who?

Thomas: The Tsukumo boy. Who was at the duel between you and Kaito during the WDC. An eyewitness to your very words proclaiming that Haruto and Kaito were your true brothers.

Christopher: (He bites his lips. Scanning the room for support, he swallows when there is no one.)...It...was...More than a year ago. Before Astral world and the Barian invasion. We were still...struggling as a family. And...I was struggling...with coming to terms...

Thomas: (Sunnily.) I see. (He turns to Byron.) Well, I was able to have a conversation that lasted for more than 5 seconds. You see, exposing secrets has always been quite a conversation starter, even in this house of silence.

Byron: (He sighs and smiles begrudgingly.) Divulging secrets aren’t for the table, Thomas. That is for social gatherings.

Thomas: Touche.
Christopher: (He gives Thomas a sideways glance. He thinks.) No. It isn’t over. He wouldn’t fire one shot and run away. He wants something. But what?

...

Byron: I’m very excited to see the wedding. It will take place in the cathedral where your mother and I were married in.

Christopher: Indeed…

Michael: (Nervously, he speaks up.) I...I myself am excited to welcome a new member to our family. Kaito would be a delightful addition...with his..liveliness.

Byron: Indeed. Once his rough edges are smoothed down, he will offer new insight, especially about the outside world.

Michael: I’ve always enjoyed looking at the world through others’ eyes.

Byron: Yes, it is good to stay open-minded.

(Another moment of silence as the conversation dies down.)

Thomas: (Suddenly, he holds his glass up. There is an air of sarcasm in his tone.) To the groom’s health...And to the wedding.

Christopher: (Uncomfortably.)...And to the wedding. Yes. (He raises his glass. Then he thinks.) Why must everything be so forced..? Where were the evening meals of our youth that were filled with laughter and good-natured japes at each other?

Thomas: (Amidst the glass raising, he turns to Christopher and quietly whispers.) Too tired to fight?
Christopher: (Whispers.) 'Been fighting too much.

Thomas: (He whispers.) I need to talk to you.

Christopher: (He gives a slight nod.) All right then. Tonight.

(The glasses clink quietly. Then everyone rests their glasses.)

Byron: (He smiles contentedly.) I’m glad that my sons are also excited at this prospect. (He sighs.) If only your mother was here to witness this. She would be proud that the law she helped instill into the Resurrection was finally going to be put into action.

Thomas: (He suddenly slides back his seat, clearly agitated.) Permission to leave?

Byron: (He lifts an eyebrow and waits for more.)

Thomas:...(He sighs and drums his fingers on the table.) Dearest father?

Byron:...Permission granted.

Thomas: (He walks away, aware that everyone is staring.)

Michael: (He dabs his mouth with a napkin and also pushes back his chair.) Permission to leave, dearest father?

Byron: (He dips his head.) Permission granted.

Michael: (He pushes in his chair and Thomas's.) Please have a good evening...dearest father and...dearest brother. (He walks away.)

Byron: (As he looks at the two boys.) They’ve always been the closest of brothers. I’ve always wanted a relationship like that. (He smiles at the floor.) The closest I ever got was Faker. We were the closest of friends in our university days. And if I had spent more time with Kazuma, I'm sure we would have been the best of friends...But you know what happened. (He takes in a deep breath.) Now...

Christopher: Yes, dearest father?

Byron: On the topic of the wedding...

Christopher: Of course. (Thinks.) If he says that ‘everything is back to normal’, why must my brothers endure such stiffness? All these silly etiquette rules...

Byron: (A cold smile fills his face.) Kaito will be playing the part of the bride.
Christopher: ...(A mildly alarmed expression fills his face.) I'm...afraid to ask what that means.

Byron: Don't fret, Christopher. It isn't good for your complexion.

Christopher: But what does his part entail?

Byron: A little surprise for his father.

Christopher: But...I thought...

Byron: (He continues on, pretending he does not hear Christopher’s protest.) With 16 days left, I do hope you will begin practicing for the wedding. As an Arclight, you are expected to show class, grace and overall be the embodiment of perfection.

Christopher: (He lowers his head.) ...Yes, dearest father.

Byron: You are excused.

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(We are in Thomas’s room. We can see that it is a room almost as big as Christopher’s. Green and honey colored wallpapered walls are accented by an ivory carpet. Gifts from Thomas's fans are piled on one side of the room. On the other is a wooden desk that is barely recognizable, covered in various riffraff and clothes. Another part of the room has a collection of dolls eerily staring at Thomas's bed. A large closet covers half of a wall. At the very end of the room is his canopied bed, left in disarray. The beige sheets are strewn about and the pillows are spread out in every direction. He sits on his bed with Michael, who is trying to console him.)

Michael:...Yes, it just isn’t right.

Thomas: No, it isn’t. (He looks down at himself and grimaces.) I hate feeling powerless. I want to do something but...
Michael: (He looks at the wall in front of him.) None of us can.

Thomas: This isn’t honoring mother’s memory. She...She would be upset if she saw this.

Michael:...If she was still here, I don’t think we’d even be in such a situation.

Thomas: (He looks at Michael quietly.)...If she was still here, I’d be worried for you.

Michael: (He looks at the ground.)...Nonetheless...

Thomas: (Sadly.) I wish we could be a family again...whatever that means.

Michael: (He puts his head on Thomas’s shoulder.) As long as I have you, I’m happy. I try not to expect too much from others because I hate the feeling of disappointment. But you...are someone I can trust.

Thomas: (He ruffles Michael’s hair.) It’s strange how you can be so lonely whilst being surrounded by the people you once knew.

Michael:...Sometimes, I wonder how it would be if father had never met the Tenjos.

Thomas:...We would be entirely different people, wouldn’t we?

Michael:...No solid interior is what I think.

Thomas: Whether we liked it or not, that orphanage really toughened us up.

Michael: Maybe dearest brother was right. Perhaps the betrayal had to happen. Otherwise, where would we be? Growing fat from lazing about in the countryside?

Michael: But look at us now. We have one thing that dearest brother doesn’t.

Thomas: (He raises an eyebrow.) And that would be…?

Michael: (He smiles a bit.) A solid backbone. We can hold our own even without a duel.

Thomas: (He rests a hand on Michael’s arm. He gently squeezes it. Surprisingly, it is solid.) With an arm like that, you could punch someone’s teeth out.

Michael: I hope I won’t ever have to resort to violence to solve the problem. It causes far too much pain for my opponent.

Thomas:...And that's why I always let you win after you turned 14.

Michael: Hm. The oppressed has become the suppressor.

Thomas: Throw a sword into the equation and death is guaranteed.

Michael: Well, I could have roasted Mr. Heartland on a spit had Yuma allowed me.

Thomas: Y’know, I never expect these things coming from you.

Michael: (He laughs.) ‘Tis all the better.

---♀ ---

Christopher: (He opens the door to his room. He has changed into simpler clothes reserved
for sleep.) Thomas?

Thomas: (He sits on the chair at Christopher’s desk, with his legs besides the back of the chair. From his expression, he is still a bit agitated.)...He has no right to abuse mother’s memory like that. She was the one who instilled same-sex marriage into the Resurrection in hopes that others could love freely. Not for...this...this... shan.

Christopher: (His expression crumples a bit.) Yes, it’s dreadful that father is using such a law to his advantages but...What can we do?

Thomas: Say no. I know you care for Kaito in a brotherly way. But this marriage...(He looks down at his hands and shakes his head.) It just doesn’t work that way. You can’t...force two people together in hopes that they will become even closer. (He looks at Christopher sadly.) You can only have so much intimate relationships.

Christopher: (He comes into the room and stands in front of Thomas.)...I still don’t understand why you decided to mention... that with the Tenjo brothers and me.

Thomas: (He looks away at Christopher. He half speaks to himself and to Christopher.) Let’s say that I’m jealous. Childish. Attention-starved. And since I’m petty and childish, I want the man I’ve always wanted recognition from to understand my pain. Not only that, I’m starved for affection. I want the person who hurt me to realize their mistakes. That I’m just as good as the person they replaced me with. I want them to know that yes, I can be smart. I can be observant. And...things they say behind my back will always come back to me.

Christopher: (He is clearly shocked by Thomas’s confession. When he is able to find his voice again, he chokes on his words.)...I...I...I didn’t...

Thomas: (He continues on, ignoring his brother. This confession is just as much to himself as it is to Christopher.) 4 years, almost 5. I went through the majority of my adolescent years without you. (There is a hint of emotion in his next words.) You know what that can do to someone? I didn’t have any support from any of the people I had loved. Because they were either dead or too far away. I was alone...save for Michael. If he wasn’t there...I don’t know how bad I would have gotten.

Christopher: (He bites his lip.) It wasn’t my choice. You were taken from me by force. If...it
had been up to me, I would have taken both of you with me.

Thomas: (Bitter.) Yes, it would have been nice if you had asked the old man. Or hell, would shedding a tear have hurt when we were being taken away?

Christopher: (Ashamed, he looks away.) I couldn’t do anything. I was so frustrated...

Thomas: (He seems as if he wants to continue on the subject but in a moment of self-control, he stops himself. Instead of becoming angrier, he simply lets out a long and audible sigh.)...well, I didn’t come to talk about the past. That’s for another time. Maybe when we get in a row. Anyways, this marriage is a sham and you know it. And from the way Tron is acting--

Christopher: (Pleading.) Please, Thomas. Call him our father.

Thomas: (He grimaces.) No. That person isn’t the man I recognize. I stand by my opinion and refuse to be convinced. (He takes in a deep breath.) Anyways, with the way Tron is acting, if Kaito comes in here with his attitude and sharp tongue, you and I both know that this won’t end prettily.

Christopher: (He looks at Thomas with wariness. His voice is quiet.)...But what can I do?

Thomas: No, what can we do? See, Chris? If you keep on thinking that it’s just you, we’ll never be able to stand up to him. Parents are human, just like us. They are not perfect. This means that they are not correct all the time. We are at the age where we can decide what is right and what is wrong. This clearly isn’t right. Forcing two people to marry each other despite the fact that they are just fine with being friends isn’t right. But what makes this even worse is the overall purpose of this marriage. Merging two powerful families for the sake of political and cultural influence is selfish. It’s the 23rd century. We marry for love.

Christopher: (He is taken aback. His expression then relaxes.) I can always depend on you to tell the truth, can’t I? You see the world differently from Michael and I...(He sighs.) It’s good to hear from another point of view.

Thomas: We need to be unified. Yes, we are all different, but we grow from the same vine. If
we cannot be unified, we can never be the family that we once were.

Christopher: (He smiles sadly.) Oh, Thomas. You know that we will never be the same again. Far too much has happened.

Thomas: Then if we cannot be the family we once were, I’m sure we can be a better family than this. Whatever this is. Would a dictatorship be a suitable word?

Christopher: (Nervously.) Thomas...

Thomas: (He puts a hand on Christopher’s shoulder. His brother shifts uncomfortably. Thomas speaks softly, despite his intense expression.) This isn’t living. We’re all slowly dying from this oppressive atmosphere. If you say no, I will support your decision and stand beside you. I’m sure Michael will also take your side, because despite his soft exterior, he is stronger than you think. One thing is for sure, though. (He pauses for a bit, scanning Christopher’s expression.) We can’t bear to see another innocent soul suffer at the hands of Tron.

Christopher: (A small smile fills his lips. For once, his eyes are filled with hope. Slowly, almost hesitantly, he takes Thomas’s hand from his shoulder and holds it between his.) Hope is such a dangerous, yet necessary thing.

Thomas:...After the 99 demons were released into the world, humans had only Hope left. If there had been no hope, we all would have died a long time ago.

Christopher:...(He squeezes Thomas’s hand.) If we are going to be completely honest with each other, I’m...frightened of the future.

Thomas:...Nothing is set in stone. We decide our own destinies. (He pulls his hand away from Christopher’s.) Always remember that there is a choice, even if it isn’t the most favorable.

Christopher: (He quietly looks at Thomas.)...Yes, there is always another choice. And that is death.
Thomas: (Unflinchingly.) If you die, he will only replace you with me. The cycle of misery will continue and Kaito will suffer.

Christopher: (He closes his eyes. Pain etches his expression.) He has always been someone I respected. How can I go against him..?

Thomas: The man you love has died. This is a stranger dressed in his clothes. (He stands up and turns to leave.)

Christopher: Harsh words, Thomas. Harsh words.

Thomas: They are necessary at times. (He begins to walk out the doorway.)

Christopher:...Have a good night, Thomas.

Thomas: (He pauses for a bit and smiles.) You too, aniki.

---Episode 7~END---

Illustration for this episode [here](#)
Christopher: (He glances at the clock which says that it is 10:47 P.M. He sits on his bed in silk pajamas.)...Only suffering will await if we head down this path of blind obedience...(He quietly looks around his room. He thinks.) But what about Kaito? Surely...he will say no. What would be the use of this marriage to him anyways? He is strong and independent. Of course he will say no. And then...we can put this all behind us. (He lifts the sheets over his body and lies down. Then he closes his eyes.) So I can continue to be the obedient son.

(There are a few moments of silence. Off camera, the sound of a door creaking open is heard. In walks Byron.)

Byron: Soon, my dearest son. You needn't despair anymore...Your worth will soon be proven. And your brothers shall soon follow suit. (Whispers.) Soon. (He places his lips on Christopher's forehead and then closes the curtains, enveloping the room in darkness.) But there will be more. There will always be more. (He walks out of the room, for a second there is a beam of light. Then, the door closes and the room is completely enveloped in darkness.)

--♀--

(Light slowly comes into view. We are transported to a whitewashed hall with sunlight pouring in through the large stained windows, all depicting a golden dragon. Looking around, we can see that there is a crowd of people dressed in elegant late 1700's clothing on both sides. They are staring at the viewer. Amidst the colorful sea of elaborate dresses and hair, there is a certain purple haired woman absentmindedly toying with her curls, her neckline scandalously low. Sounds of an orchestra playing in the background is heard. Then, the camera focuses on Christopher's face, covered by a thick veil.)

Christopher: (He opens his eyes abruptly and thinks.) Wh...what....? (He looks around in confusion.) Where am I...? (He shakes his head and looks forward.) Who are these people...

(The priest standing in front of Christopher clears his throat. The room immediately silences. Only the music of the distant orchestra is heard.)

Priest: (To the crowd.)...On this wondrous day, we shall witness the union of the Princesse de Laelle and the crown Prince of Bucchanary. May Kaith Gregory Thiras of House Ferellen be forever bound to Chrissaine Aurelia Rilliane of House Blanche.
Christopher: (He looks at the man next to him. The young man wears 17th century regal wedding garb. His hair is blonde and styled into a queue at the end. The curls at the side of his head are dusted with turquoise powder. Slowly, the man gazes back, his eyes piercing and a deep blue. His lashes are long, softening his severe eyes. A beauty patch in the shape of a four pointed star lays on his right cheek.) It must be the prince. He bears a resemblance to Kaito, strangely. (Christopher turns to the other side and faces a window.) Is that...me? (Christopher’s reflection in the window completely takes him aback. He wears a dress of white and gold, with embroidery and trimming. Lace spills from his sleeves, layer after layer. His skirts are almost as wide as he is tall. Around his neck is a collar of lace and pearls. The pendant is a blue stone that curiously features his crest. Half of his hair is piled high atop his head while the other half is in ringlets that go a bit past his shoulders. His bangs are lightly curled at the front of his face. The rest of his features have been obscured by the lacy veil.) Just what am I wearing..? This clearly isn’t Resurrection garb. This brings to mind...the doomed French queen Marie Antoinette.

Prince of Bucchanery: (Amidst the droning of the priest, he takes Christopher's hand. His voice is soft and soothing like Kaito's, but without a twang. ) My dear soon to be wife...Please reveal your face. I cannot bear this ceremony any longer.

Christopher: (Hesitantly, he allows the prince to lift his veil. His eyes widen at the sight of the prince close up. He lets out a small gasp and thinks.) Just like Kaito. (His voice comes out airy and light, the words flowing together like water. One could describe the lyrical pronunciation of his words almost like French.) A-ah...M...My future...husband...It is a relief to finally be able to see your face.

The woman with the purple curls: (She shouts, startling the crowd and disrupting the lulling voice of the priest. There is something masculine about her voice.) Do be quick! The two might even run off before the ceremony is all done and over with! Goodness, Kaith! Her breasts aren't even that big! Compared to mine, they are mere pebbles! (A ripple of laughter fills the room. The woman laughs shrilly at her own salacious comment and motions towards her large chest.)

Christopher: (Hesitantly.) K-Kaith...?

Kaith: (He nods regally.) That is my name. Is it alright for me to call you Chrisseine?

Chrisseine: O-of course...Anything for my future husband. (Christopher thinks.) Just what is happening?!

Kaith: (He smiles gently.) I have always disliked formality. It is good to address each other by our given names.

(The priest clears his throat, silencing all.)
Kaith: (He nods.) Do continue. I yearn to be with my bride.

(The priest nods and the sermon continues.)

Kaith: (He whispers to Chrisseine.) As nobles we are forced to don masks…

Chrisseine: (She whispers back.) I despise marriages such as these.

Kaith: But what can we do? The country comes first before the heart.

Chrisseine: (She wets her lips and looks at the floor.) Then let us remove our hearts completely and become the pawns that we were meant to be.

Kaith: (He looks at his bride in mild concern. There is pain in his expression.) Perhaps...in our next lives...This will not happen.

Chrisseine: (She continues to look at the floor contemplatively.) Yes...We...we will be able to choose in our next lives. (She pauses a bit, trying to find the words.) Who we can love. Who...we can marry. Our hearts will belong to us. Not...to the hands of our fathers or country.

Kaith:...Surely. We won’t be born dolls in our next lives.

(The sermon continues indefinitely, with the priest droning out in Latin. The scene fades to white. When we return, the priest has just closed his book.)

Priest: With the power vested in me, I unite the kingdoms of Bucchanary and Laelle together with the new husband and wife! May they be guided under the great dragon towards a golden future. Draconem et custódiat nos. (He makes a sign professing his reverence. The bride and groom do the same.)

Chrisseine and Kaith: Draconem et custódiat nos.

Courtiers: (They also touch their foreheads and pull their right hand across their chest.) Draconem et custódiat nos.

(The deafening sounds of clapping erupts through the hall, with the woman in purple cheering the loudest. The orchestra bursts into spirited Baroque music. The dragon statue at the altar sparkles in the sun.)

Kaith: (He pulls Chrisseine to him and kisses her.) Forgive me…

Chrisseine: (After the kiss, she pulls away...)...It is our duty as nobles to smile and paint a picture of divinity.

Kaith: Must we live like this for the rest of our lives?

Chrisseine: Once a mask has been donned for a long time, it melds with the skin until it is no longer a mask. (Sadness fills her expression.) I have worn such a mask...
Kaith: ...So have I...(He looks into the joyful audience.)...and I continue to wear it to this day.

(The scene fades to black.)

--♀--

Christopher: (He jolts up from his bed, lightly sweating. He feels his forehead and looks down at himself. He breathes heavily but is trying to regain his composure.) A...a dream...? (He looks at the time.) Oh dear... (It is 10:30 AM.) I must have overslept. (He gets out of bed and starts folding the sheets.) That dream...Just...what did it mean? Did it even have meaning? (He finishes folding the sheets and walks over to his wardrobe to prepare for the day.)

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Michael: Are you alright, dearest brother?

Christopher: (As he is coming downstairs; he answers a bit distractedly.) Hm? Oh, yes.

Michael: (He smiles a bit.) Decided to go for a change in apparel?

Christopher: (His hair is tied and draped over his shoulder. He wears a waistcoat of light grey with an undershirt of light blue. A cravat is tied around his neck, matching his undershirt. His pants are close fitting and light grey. The stockings beneath are white and he wears brown dress shoes.) Yes, perfect for the Resurrection, isn’t it?

Michael: Indeed. Were you getting tired of the blue coat?

Christopher: (He smiles.) I thought that it was about time we put it in the wash.

Michael: Who’s on laundry duty this week?

Thomas: (He enters the room.) Your one and only fanservice prince will be in charge of making sure your boxers n’ britches will be spotless by the end of the week. And—(He looks at Christopher.) Interesting choice of apparel today, Chris.

Christopher: (A bit flustered.) Is it bad that I wish to change what I wear every once in awhile?

Thomas: (He puts his two hands up in defense.) Just remarking. Nothing to take personally. After all, fashion is the best way to express yourself, as I’d like to say. For me, I prefer modern day clothes compared to the Resurrection’s. They’re a lot more comfortable. If Tron had allowed it, I’d be wearing t-shirts and shorts all day every day.

Christopher: (Amused.) Even in the winter?

Thomas: (He shrugs.) Ugly Christmas sweaters and sweatpants all the way.

(Christopher and Michael look at Thomas in an awkward silence.)

Thomas: Of course, out in public I’d be wearing Neo-Victorian garb. Gotta keep up my gentleman persona, after all.
Christopher:...Indeed...(He looks at the grandfather clock, which is about to be noon.)

Thomas: (He stifles a belch.) That was a good breakfast, by the way. My compliments to the chef.

Michael: (He laughs.) Well, someone needs to be the gifted cook in this family.

Christopher:...Life was a lot easier when we had servants. Do you remember when we didn’t have to button up our own shirts?

Thomas: (He snorts.) We were kids, Chris. Of course we needed someone to button up our shirts. And I’m pretty sure it was mum who helped dressed us, not some random nursemaid.

Michael: I think it’s quite pathetic if you have the ability to dress yourself but choose not to. There are many people out there who can’t dress themselves and require the help.

Thomas: (Jokingly.) Way to throw some shade, Michael.

Michael: (He’s a bit disappointed.) Are you really using 21st century slang?

Thomas: (He raises an eyebrow.) Would you like me to continue?

Michael: Oh please no. Those were dark times, if the history books had anything to say about it.

(If this had been a comedy, the three brothers would have been looking at the camera in the next shot; unfortunately this is a serious drama and must remain so.)

Christopher: (He sighs and his posture relaxes.) Well, the world is at peace now. And that’s all I’m going to say on this subject.

Thomas: (He rests on the sofa and exhales contentedly.) So...

Christopher: Hmm?

Thomas: (He slowly turns his gaze towards Christopher.) I wonder how Kaito’s doing.

Christopher: What do you mean?

Thomas: With the stress of the wedding and all.

Christopher:...Even if he is under pressure, it’s difficult to tell.

Thomas:...until he collapses and starts coughing out blood.

Christopher: (Horrified and shocked.) Thomas!

Thomas: (He shrugs.) Should’ve kept your voices down when you were talking. (His eyes narrow.) The walls have ears...was what someone once told me.

Christopher: (He clenches his fist.)

Michael: (Trying to diffuse the situation.) Come, brothers. Secrets and conflict will do
nothing to strengthen our bonds.

Thomas: (He turns to Michael.) That’s why I’m exposing them for all to hear!

Michael: (He purses his lips.) But...

Byron: (As he walks downstairs, his voice echoes grandly across the walls.) Michael is correct, Thomas. There should be no secrets within a family...(He smiles smugly.)...except for well-kept ones. It is a personal right to be able to keep a few secrets to yourself. But...problems concerning others should be for all to hear. (He has entered the room.) Isn’t that right, Christopher?

Christopher: (He stiffens, slowly, almost hesitantly, turning to his father.) Y-yes, dearest father.

Byron: Would anyone like to join me for a stroll in the garden?

(Silence answers him for a few moments. Then Michael steps forwards.)

Michael:...I would. The summer sun would do me a world of good.

Byron: (He pats Michael on the back.) That’s my boy.

(The two leave the room through a door. Christopher and Thomas look after them in silence.)

Thomas:...The only one brave enough to walk with the tiger...

Christopher:...Is the lastborn child himself.

Thomas: (He scoffs.) What does he have that we do not?

Christopher:...The favor of the tiger.

Thomas:...I wonder about that.

(The scene fades to white.)

---♀---

(Only to reveal another time in the Arclight manor. It is a tense moment in the dining table as Michael stands in front of Byron. He is visibly shaken as his father looks down at him. His elder brothers stand in the corner, looking at the scene warily. Christopher has a hand on Thomas’s shoulder.)

Byron:....to have misplaced your mother’s favorite tea set...

Michael: (His eyes are wide in fear and he wrings his hands.) It was...I...I just wanted to...we were out of tea sets...I...

Byron: (He shakes his head.) That is still no excuse to have taken your mother’s tea set from the china cabinet...

Michael: (His lips tremble.) I...I was missing her. (Tears fill his eyes.) Is it a crime to miss
Byron: (His anger slowly rising.) And what do you know of her? You were only 4 when she passed!

Michael: The...the stories keep her alive…(He sniffs.) She was kind...fun-loving...spirited…

Byron: (Grimacing) And weak. On the outside, she wouldn’t let a single man come near. But when I truly got to know her...She was simple minded and pliable as clay. Only caring for her children. Especially Thomas, that little devil.

(In the background, Thomas grimaces and Christopher squeezes his shoulder.)

Michael: (He swallows and shakes his head.) I...I don’t understand.

Byron: (He looks at Michael. His eyes narrow.) In this moment, I absolutely despise your visage.

Michael: (He chokes on his breath. Byron’s words have bludgeoned him.) I...I’m sorry.

Byron: (His voice shakes with emotion.) That woman took Chloe away…

Michael:...

Byron:...seeing you reminds me of something I could never have. (He takes in a deep breath and grabs a handful of Michael’s hair. The young boy yelps in pain.) So close...yet so far…

Michael: I-I’m sorry…

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow.) Are you really? (He twists the handful of hair.)

Michael: Y-yes...I’m sorry. I-I’ll find the tea set…

Byron: Honestly...I’m disappointed in you. (He lets go of Michael. The boy collapses onto his knees.) You should know not to touch things that aren’t yours...Let me give you a lesson that you’ll be able to remember. (He turns to Christopher, his following words devoid of emotion.)

Christopher, my walking cane, if you will.

Christopher: (He shifts uncomfortably.) I…

Byron: (He gives Christopher a sharp glare.) Christopher. My cane.

Christopher: Y...yes...dearest father.

Thomas: (He glares at the scene, his fists shaking with anger at his powerlessness.)

Christopher: (He hands Byron the mahogany cane. The golden handle shines dully in the light. Once Byron takes it, Christopher slowly walks back to Thomas. His lips are trembling as he sees Byron raise the staff.)

Byron: (He smashes the end of the staff onto Michael’s outstretched hand and twists. A scream of pain escapes from Michael. As Byron does this, he looks down at his son
I am not violent without reason…

(Thomas takes a step forward but Christopher holds him back. His lips continue to tremble and there are tears in his eyes.)

Christopher: (He whispers in a shaky voice.) Don’t. Please...He’ll only hurt our little brother even more.

Thomas: (He angrily shakes off Christopher. Then he takes a step back and turns away from the screams. Tears brim in his eyes.)...tch..!

Byron: (He lifts the cane away from Michael’s hand. His voice is eerily calm, as if he was just having a normal conversation.) Perhaps...perhaps this may remind you of where you put the tea set. (He proceeds to mercilessly beat Michael’s legs. The screams continue but the scene fades to black.)

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(We are back to the present. Thomas looks at the bright blue sky with an air of contempt.)

Thomas:...He was limping for weeks after that beating.

Christopher: (He looks at Thomas uncomfortably.)

Thomas:...and we did nothing.

---Episode 8~END---

Illustration for this episode here
Ain't No Running Away

---Episode 9---
Ain't No Runnin’ Away

(We are inside the Tenjos' living room. The afternoon sun spills through the windows. The dusty brass light swings lazily, occasionally catching the light.)

Kaito: (His voice comes out with a heavier southern accent than usual and his tone of voice is barely hiding his anger.) I don't know how you were able to work with someone like that.

Dr.Faker: (He nervously laughs.) Byron was different back then.

Kaito: (Annoyed.) They're from a completely different class than us! Haven't you noticed?! All those manners and rules in their house...And all their fancy clothes and traditions...Tch! What ever made you think that this was a good idea?! I'd be damned if Tron made me sit through a whole tea party!

Dr.Faker: (He swallows a bit. His reply is slower than normal.)...Well then I guess you're gonna have to get used to it. After all, you're falling headfirst into Victorian Resurrection high society.

Kaito: (Angered.) And whose fault is it?!

Dr.Faker: (Trying to be understanding.) Look, I'm doing this for you.

Kaito: (Very angry.) I ain't havin' any o' that! You're just a greedy old man who wants to stick his pointy nose into some crazy costume drama society and earn some money while you're at it! You don't care about how I feel! Being wedded to my very own teacher! It's wrong! Even Haruto knows that somethin's up!

Dr.Faker: (He appears a bit annoyed at first but then his expression falls into that of resignation.) You should ask me how I feel about this instead of jumping to your own conclusions. (He closes his eyes and leans back in his chair.) I remember when I was a lot like you. (He opens his eyes.) Always gettin' into trouble with my big mouth and not to mention my 'barbaric' streak.

Kaito: (His anger has calmed for a bit. His arms are crossed against his chest, one finger angrily tapping against his elbow.) Get to the point.

Dr.Faker: (He sighs.) You're a genius. And it don't take a genius to know that this ain't my first choice.

Kaito: (He narrows his eyes.) And...?

Dr.Faker: (He sighs.) You're right, Kaito. Byron is still Tron. He wants compensation. For
what I did... (He looks at Kaito in pain.) How else could I pay...? He already has money. He already has all the land he wants. He already has all the technology he wants. He has everything besides my defeat by his own hands...(His eyes become misty and his voice shaky.) What else could I do but give my eldest son to him...?

Kaito: (His voice slowly rising in anger) Because you shook the beehive, I have to get stung? BECAUSE YOU HAD TO BETRAY HIM, / HAVE TO BE FORCED INTO THEIR FAMILY?! HOW DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?! EVEN A CHILD KNOWS BETTER THAN THIS! CLEAN UP YOUR OWN PROBLEMS, OLD MAN! (He storms out of the room. Dr. Faker looks after him in remorse.)

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(We are in the pond area near the Arclight mansion and the Tenjo villa.)

Christopher: (He walks by the pond and hears stones being skipped.) Kaito?

Kaito: (He curses under his breath and throws a stone. It appears as if he hasn’t noticed Christopher yet.) Stupid old man...

Christopher:...Look, I'm sorry about yesterday. My father...he's...

Kaito: (He readies a stone between his fingers. It turns out he did notice Christopher.) What? Changed? Greedy? Power hungry? (He grunts with effort as he throws the stone.)

Christopher: (His face falls in dismay.) I’m sorry. It's just that...I don't want to do this either.

Kaito: (Not looking at Christopher.) But you're gonna do it anyways. You simple-minded puppet.

Christopher: (He is clearly taken aback at Kaito’s insult.) I say! Just what is the matter?! (His voice turns brotherly.) Please Kaito, if it bothers you, I’m ready to listen.

Kaito:...Nothin'. (He throws a stone. It skips 4 times.)

Christopher: (He is growing a bit frustrated.) Please look at me when you talk.

Kaito: (He grimaces.) Am I expected to follow your house's rules as well? (He imitates Christopher's accent and turns to face Christopher.) Yes, dearest teacher. Yes, dearest father in-law. Shall I also lick your shoes? (He turns back and continues to skip stones.)

Christopher: (Hurt fills his expression.) Kaito...Is it something that involves your father?

Kaito: (He is quiet for a few moments. He readjusts a stone in between his fingers.)
Christopher: If you don’t want to talk, that’s quite alright.

Kaito:...You know why Tron wants us together?

Christopher: (Uneasily.) To...To strengthen our family’s bonds and improve relationships between Heartland City and the Resurrection.

Kaito: So you don’t know.

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito’s backside in confusion.)

Kaito: (He turns around, bitterness filling his features.) *Recompensation. Humiliation.* That’s what he really wants from us.

Christopher: I...I don’t understand...

Kaito: (There is emotion in his words.) ’Course you don’t, Chris. Bein’ stuck in your ivory tower an’ all.

Christopher: That’s downright cruel of you, Kaito.

Kaito:...yeah? (He throws the stone. This one makes 2 skips.) I have some more insults up here but that’s for another time.

Christopher: Well...! (With a hint of anger.) Though you may be little, you are fierce.

Kaito: (He pauses mid bend towards a rock.) Little? Is that what you think of me? You spit on my mother's feet.

Christopher: (Quietly.) And that’s why you're the bride in this wedding.

Kaito: (Shock fills his face. He turns around to face Christopher.) *What?*

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito, pleased to return his words back at him.) *Oh? You didn't know?*
Kaito:...(His voice grows wary.) What does this mean for me?...Whose idea was this?

Christopher:...Who do you think?

Kaito: Oh. Of course. (He pauses a bit and mutters.) There ain't a difference between you two.

Christopher:...To even say something like that...(His eyes narrow.) You know that's a lie.

Kaito: (He grimaces and looks down at the ground.) I wish...(He purses his lips and then takes in a deep breath.) I wish my illness would accelerate so that I wouldn't have to deal with this. It’s better to be dead ‘n’ free than alive but imprisoned.

Christopher: (Shock fills his expression.) Kaito!

Kaito: It's true! There's only a week left until the wedding and then after that, I'll be spending my last years inside a gilded cage! Don’t try to deny it! He wants me to become yet another disposable pawn! I'M DONE WITH BEING EVERYONE'S PUPPET! First with my father and Mr. Heartland... And soon your father! The first time I was being controlled, I almost died! Photon changing and soul hunting...I did things that kept me up at night, long after you were asleep! (His lips tremble.)...But they didn't care about how I felt. They never did. After all, they were just a bunch of selfish adults. But (He looks back up at Christopher.)...but what will your father do to me?

Christopher: (He takes in a sharp breath.) He'll...

Kaito: (Grimly.) I'll tell you what he'll do. He'll break down my spirit. (His voice begins to shake and turn into a whisper.) My free, "American" spirit! He sees me as wild, untamed and uncouth! He won't stop until he sees me as dull and obedient as you! He won't stop... (His voice breaks) He won't stop until Haruto is erased from my list of priorities and he becomes my only reason to live. And it won't happen until I'm dead so that means he'll keep on grinding me against the same stone. Over and over again. I will wear down. But I will only give in after I die. So while I'm living...I'm living in hell.

Christopher: (His voice is a hoarse whisper.) K..Kaito… I didn’t know that you felt like that. You always seemed so...

Kaito: Put together? Organized? Focused? (His next words drip with acid.) We all wear masks, Chris. And sometimes, they meld with our true faces until we can no longer take them off.

Christopher:...! Those words...
Kaito: (Irritated.) *What? Are they too much for you?*

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito in shock. Flashes of his dream passes by for a few moments.) I...I have said those words before.

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes.) Genius minds think alike it seems. (He turns to leave.) And the part of the bride for me?

Christopher: (He tries to regain his composure.) Y-yes?

Kaito: (He gives Christopher a sideways glance. His twang is more emphasized than usual, betraying the anger he feels.) Tell Tron to shove that idea up a place where the sun don’t shine ‘cause I ain’t doin’ it. (He continues to walk away, hands in his pocket.)

---♀ ---

(It is night in the Tenjo villa. The Tenjo brothers voices are heard calling to each other.)

Haruto: Goodnight, *niisan*!

Kaito: (He is in his room, covers wrapped around him.) Goodnight, Haruto!

Haruto: Sweet dreams!

Kaito: You too!

Dr. Faker: (His voice is suddenly heard from downstairs.) Can y’all pipe down for a few moments?! It’s 2 in the mornin’ for crying out loud and I’m on the brink of a breakthrough!

Haruto: Sorry, dad!

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes, buries himself under the covers and closes his eyes.) Fifteen more days...Til’ I show that old man that he’s wrong.

---♀ ---

Byron: My dear boy...
Kaito: (He is wearing a white set of clothes similar to Christopher's. His eyes are lowered as he speaks.) Yes, dearest father-in-law?

Byron: How are you faring?

Kaito:...I fear the end is near. But I will spend it devoted to you.

Byron: Excellent. (He rests a hand on Kaito.) I will make sure your passing is an easy one.

Kaito: Thank you.

Byron: Join me for some tea?

Kaito: Of course. (He sits down, his back straight.)

(Byron pours the tea.)

Kaito: Where is Christopher?

Byron: He will be joining us soon.

Christopher: Yes, dearest father. (He sits down next to Kaito and looks at the ring on his finger and gently smiles.)

Kaito: (Looks at Christopher's ring and a chill runs down his spine as he realizes that it is on his ring finger. Turning back to himself, he looks at his own hand and horror creeps into his face. There is the same ring on his finger. He turns to look at Christopher, who gently smiles at him.)

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito and smiles.) Isn't it wonderful?

Kaito: Y-yes...I-it is... (He chokes on the word.) Wonderful. (He looks away and into one of Carnation Valley's windows. He then sees Thomas, looking directly at him, a cruel smile on his face. In Thomas's hands are dolls of Kaito and Christopher and Thomas mouths incomprehensible words as he plays with the dolls.)

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow.) Is something the matter?

Kaito: (He pushes out of his seat and runs away, his breathing heaving.) No...no...No! (He struggles to take the ring off his finger. After a few tugs, he gives up and continues running.) This can't be happening...! (He trips and falls onto the floor. Soon after, the scenery changes into that of the training room Christopher and Kaito used to duel in. Kaito's attire changes to his dueling suit and the ring disappears. In front of him is a young Christopher, wearing a science lab coat and a braid.) Ch...Chris...?

Christopher (Past): Get up, Kaito. You still have life points. How many times have I told you?

Kaito: (He pauses, dumbfounded.)...what..?

Christopher (Past): (Encouraging.) Even if your heart stops beating...

Kaito: (The light comes back into his eyes. He slowly regains his composure.) E-even if your
Christopher (Past) and Kaito: You have to continue to fight until your life points hit zero!

Christopher (Past): Excellent. Now stand up. You can still fight. (He slowly fades away.)

Kaito: Wait! I- (The room changes again. It is now the Tenjo villa’s living room. The lights are warm and sweet and the sound of birdsong can be heard. When the camera focuses on Kaito again, he is now a small child, dressed in a white shirt and shorts. He is being held in a faceless woman's arms. She has Kaito’s turquoise fringe and Haruto’s silver locks. Curls drape her shoulders. Her voice is breathy and has a southern twang.)

Woman: Listen, Kaito.

Kaito (Child): Yes, momma?

Woman: Would you like a little sibling to play with?

Kaito (Child): (Nods eagerly.) We'd be best friends.

Woman: (She laughs.)...Do you know where they come from?

Kaito (Child): (Unlike regular children, he gives a scientific explanation.) Yep! From a sperm cell and an egg cell! From there, the fetus develops in the womb of the mother for a period of nine months. And then after nine months, the fetus is fully developed and is ready to be brought into the world.

Woman: (She laughs.) Do you even know what you’re even talking about?

Kaito: (He nods slowly.) I’m pretty sure.

Woman: Well, do you know how the sperm cell ends up with the egg?

Kaito: (He thinks for a few moments. Then he shakes his head.) No, momma. I don’t.

Woman: (She ruffles Kaito’s hair.) That’s fine. You’ll learn about that later. Still, you're so smart...Just like your father. And you're only 7. Sometimes I worry if being too smart will make you unhappy. (She sighs and pauses for a few moments.) I guess we all come from the same place, once you simplify it.

Kaito (Child): (He rests his head on his mother's stomach.) From there.
Woman: Uh huh...(She rests her hand on Kaito's head.) ...And you'd protect your sibling...even if I'm not there to see them?

Kaito (Child): Yeah! But...(Confusion clouds his face.) Why wouldn't you be there?

Woman: (She pauses for a bit.) I...It's just...a silly 'what if' question. (She hugs Kaito.) I love you.

Kaito (Child): I love you too, momma. (A tear falls onto his sleeve. He doesn't notice it.)

Woman: I promise I'll get you a sibling.

Kaito (Child): (He smiles and nods.) I'll play with them everyday. We'll sing songs, read books, go out into the forest together...It'll be so fun!

Woman: It'll probably take awhile...Maybe even years. (She coughs.)

Kaito (Child): I can wait! I can wait for a very long time! Once, I waited for three hours for dad to come home!

Woman: (She pats Kaito's head.) My, you're such a good little boy.

Kaito (Child): I'm on Santa's Nice list for sure this year!

Woman: If you're not, then nobody's on the list!

(The two laugh, but the woman suddenly has a coughing fit.)

Kaito (Child): Momma? Momma?! Please be okay!

Woman: I...I'm fine! Really! (She hugs Kaito.) It'll be just fine. Don't worry your smart little head about me. I'm a fighter. Just like you.

(The scene slowly changes into that of an ornate palace ballroom. A stately piece is being played as nobles dance about the marble floors. Kaito is now dressed in late 17th century attire. Now, he looks exactly like Kaith, save for his paler eyes. He is dancing with Chrissaine.)

Kaito:...(He looks at the scene in confusion. Then he looks into his partner's eyes.) Chris!

Chrissaine: (She slightly tilts her head.) Where did the rest go?

Kaito: The rest of what? Chris, what are you doing, done up like that? And what's with all of this? (He motions to the people around him.)

Chrissaine: (Annoyed.) The rest of my name. Chrissaine Aurelia Rilliane of House Blanche. Also, I am dressed in the latest of Versailles fashion. I know you discourage against French fashions, but one should stay in the trend, yes? And the people here (She takes a look around the noisy ballroom.)...are your subjects. Have you been drinking too much wine?

Kaito: (Dismayed.)...Y...You're not Chris?

Chrissaine: (She pauses for a few moments. Then she takes in a deep breath and speaks...
slowly.)...I am your wife. And no, Chris is not here.

Kaito:...(He steps on Chrisseine's foot.) Tch!

Chrisseine: (Annoyance flickers by her expression.) Are you really going to do something like that to my newest pair of shoes?!

Kaito: (Testily.) What, do you expect an apology? (He looks down at his feet.) I can barely walk in these shoes.

Chrisseine: The nerve! Is there something bothering you today?

Kaito: (Deadpan.) A lot of things, yes. You, for one. (He looks down at his outfit.) This for another.

Chrisseine: (Annoyed.) Tch! But I have done nothing!

Kaito: Alright then. (He sighs.) Maybe it's not you. Maybe it's me.

Chrisseine:...What are you implying, my king?

Kaito: (He stares at Chrisseine when he is addressed with that title.)...Where the hell am I?

Chrisseine: (Exasperated.) Our summer palace in the kingdom of Bucchanary! My God! You really have had too much wine!

Kaito:...And what's with your accent?

Chrisseine: (Self conscious.) I...I try to speak English. It is not easy. I am a born Laellen.

Kaito:...Right. Can you tell me anything else about yourself?

Chrisseine:...We are in an arranged marriage.

Kaito:...Go figure. Are you happy about this?

Chrisseine: (She sighs.) Of course I am happy.

Kaito: You sure don't sound like it.

Chrisseine: (Taken aback for a few moments. She swallows. Looking around, she seems to be looking for something. When she returns back to Kaith, her voice is lowered.) They told me I would find love. It is all just lies. If we are to be reborn, I would never want this to happen ever again. Parents forcing their children to fight their wars...It isn't right.

(Time stops but the sentence echoes. The scenery slowly fades to white.)

--- Φ ---
Kaito: (He jolts up from his bed, gasping.) What just...(He looks at the clock.) Just four…? (He gets out of bed uneasily.) Ain’t no use going back to sleep now that you've seen the dead and the livin’.

---Episode 9~END---

Illustration for this episode [here](#)
Heart-to-Heart

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to Rilya and Iyliss for the French translations. Please, if you have time, give them a follow on Tumblr! They are one of my first zexal friends I have ever made and are super cool! (@sleepy-space-nerd and @iyliss).

---Episode 10---

Heart-to-Heart

(The doorbell rings. Christopher sets down his book and answers the door.)

Christopher: Kaito...! (A smile fills his face.) What a pleasant surprise.

Kaito: (He calmly stares at Christopher.) I wish I could say the same, Chris.

Christopher: (He slightly tilts his head.) How so, Kaito?

Kaito: The old man told me to pay you and Tron a visit.

Christopher: (He gives Kaito a lopsided smile.) Well, at least you have me.

Kaito: Right.

(Christopher lets Kaito into the living room. There, he sits down and looks at the room in distaste.)

Kaito: Must there be so much...antiquity?

Christopher:...It is the style of the Resurrection. Now, I must be off to tell my father that we
have a guest.

Kaito: (He tilts his head back.) Just stay with me for a few moments, Chris. I’m not ready for someone like him yet.

Christopher: (He tilts his head in confusion.) You haven’t even met my father in his current form.

Kaito: Actually, I have.

Christopher: When?

Kaito: On the day I came over here.

--- ⮝ ---

(A flashback.)

(The sound of the door knocking is heard. Byron answers it.)

Byron: (He opens the door and speaks in Japanese.) Ah. Faker’s son. (He smiles.) What a pleasant surprise. Do come in, Kaito.

Kaito: (He comes in. He speaks in English and appears uncomfortable with formality.) Mr. Arclight. A pleasant day to you.

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow in surprise but soon regains his usual calm demeanor.) Yes, it has been quite a pleasant day, hasn’t it? Even more pleasant now that you’re here.

Kaito:...mm.
Byron: How was the drive here?

Kaito: A boring three hours.

Byron: The Resurrection countryside not pleasing to you?

Kaito: Afraid so, sir.

Byron: (A small smile creeps up his face.) You’ll have to get used to it, my boy. After all, at the end of these two weeks, you’ll be a part of the family.

Kaito: (He grimaces but then tries to put on a poker face.) I wonder about that, sir.

Byron: Oh come, Kaito. You are speaking your native tongue. Surely there’s more to say that just a few words.

Kaito: I’m in need of fresh air after being cooped up in the car for so long. Could I go out back?

Byron: By all means, I’ll show you the way myself. (He leads Kaito through the halls.) ...I must say, your accent has lessened since I first met you...all those years ago.

Kaito: (He seems annoyed at the observation.) You have Chris to thank for that.

Byron: (He chuckles.) Chris said that you were very difficult to understand in English when he first met you. That’s why he communicated in Japanese.

Kaito: Well, I couldn’t understand him either.
Byron: But you can now?

Kaito: More or less.

Byron: What about me?

Kaito: Clear as a bell.

Byron: I’m glad.

(The two silently continue to walk through the halls. They then enter the kitchen and then out the back door. Now they are in the garden.)

Byron: The gazebo is just over there. I’ll call Chris for you.

Kaito: (Stiffly)...thanks, sir.

--- ♀ —

(Back to the present.)

Kaito: It took all of momma’s etiquette lessons to survive that encounter.

Christopher: Indeed? (With a lopsided smile.) Well, I’m sure it will be more comfortable this time.

Kaito: I honestly don’t think so.

Christopher: Now, I must be off. (He heads upstairs, leaving Kaito alone.)
Kaito: (He mutters to himself.) I’d rather be lyin’ in a hospital bed.

(Michael enters the room with a tray of tea in his hands.)

Michael: Oh! (He beams.) What a pleasant surprise, Kaito. (He sets down the tea set and begins to pour himself and Kaito a cup of tea.)

Kaito: (He looks at the cup and frowns.) III.

Michael: (He laughs and adds sugar to his tea.) No more of those silly titles, please. Once again I go by Michael. (He sits down next to Kaito with a cup of tea.)

Kaito: And your brother?

Michael: IV to the fans, Thomas to friends and family.

Kaito: (He smirks.) As if he had any friends.

Michael: (He frowns and blows on his tea.) I do say! That is quite a harsh criticism of my brother. He does have friends...just very few.

Kaito: How has life been here in the countryside?

Michael: (There is a moment of surprise as he grapples with the sudden topic change. He then sips his tea thoughtfully and tilts his head in thought. ) Peaceful, to say the least. Yes, that’s the word. Peaceful.

Kaito: (He looks at Michael with a sideways glance.) And what would you say about your father?
Michael: (He stiffens for a bit but quickly regains his composure. Yet his grip on the teacup continues to be tense.) He’s in excellent health.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) His behavior as of late?

Michael: (His hand begins to shake, ever so slightly.) Fine. Just like when I was a young child.

Kaito: Interesting.

Michael: (Stiffly.) There is nothing of interest to my father’s behavior. (He drinks the last of his tea and pours himself another cup.) And what would you say of your father?

Kaito: An absolute degenerate bastard who’s currently grappling with the bad choices he made.

Michael: (He gasps and turns to Kaito.) Well…! I never…

Kaito: I grew up in a different environment than yours. It was just me and my momma.

Michael:...your father was never home?

Kaito: Of course not. Too busy working.

Michael: (He looks down at his cup of tea.) I’m...sorry to hear that.

Byron: (He enters the room with Christopher behind him.) Good afternoon, Kaito.

Kaito: (He stands up.) Good afternoon, Mr. Arclight.
Byron: Have a seat, my boy.

Kaito: (He hesitantly sits down.)

Byron: (To Michael.) Do be a dear and fetch us some more cups, Michael.

Michael: Yes, dearest father. (He exits the room briskly.)

Byron: (He sits down.) What brings you to our dwelling?

Kaito: A simple visit...that's all.

Byron: I see. Well, have you seen the cathedral that you and Christopher will be wedded in?

Kaito: Yes, I have. It's quite...grand...compared to the small hall my parents were married at.

Byron: Of course. We’re Arclights. My great grandfather had his wedding there and so have subsequent generations. I was no exception.

Kaito: Do you strictly adhere to tradition here?

Byron: Of course. It has been so for generations and I see no reason for changing it all of a sudden.

Kaito: Sometimes, the new ways are better than the old.

Byron: Yes, in some cases but this is a place that is composed on tradition.

---♀ ---
(The sun shines in through the gilded windows. We are in a room with ornate furnishings. Chrisseine is at the center of the room, sipping tea. Unlike before, she does not speak English. Instead, she speaks in fluent French.)

Chrisseine: Drosenia...

(A woman wearing a dress of brocade and long gloves looks up. Her amber eyes are gentle and motherly. Violet and deep purple locks are done in a simple manner. She speaks with an authoritative tone. She is none other than Chrisseine’s lady-in-waiting.)

Drosenia: Marquise Drosenia, princesse Chrisseine. Marquise. C'est indigne de votre rang d'appeler les autres par leur seul prénom.

Drosenia: [Marquise Drosenia, princesse Chrisseine. Marquise. It is below you to address people by only their names.]

Chrisseine: Oui... Marquise... Puis-je vous poser une question?

Chrisseine: (Yes...Marquise...May I ask you a question?)

Drosenia: (She closes her eyes and sighs.) Parlez en Anglais, votre majesté. Vous devez vous entraîner. Vous avez déjà une maîtrise parfaite de votre langue natale—le Français. Votre époux ne peut avoir une femme qui parle Anglais comme si elle s'étouffait sur les mots.

Drosenia: [(She closes her eyes and sighs.) Speak in English, your majesty. You need to practice. You have already mastered your mother tongue—French. Your husband cannot have a wife that speaks English as if they are choking on the very words.]

Chrisseine: (He refuses and continues on.) Que voyez-vous en moi? Le pion de mon père? Une princesse angélique? (Chrisseine sneers and her voice deepens.) Ou un homme qui s'indigne de ce qu'on lui a fait et qui souhaite s'en libérer?

Chrisseine: [(He refuses and continues on.) What do you see me as? My father's pawn? The angel princess? (Chrisseine sneers and her voice deepens.) Or a man who resents what has been done to him and wishes to break free?]

Drosenia: (She sighs, looking away.) Nous n'avons aucun pouvoir face aux désirs du roi. Vous savez aussi bien que moi que tout acte de rébellion sera réprimé. (She purses her lips.) Arrêtons de traîter de ce sujet.

Drosenia: [(She sighs, looking away.) We are powerless against the wishes of the king. You know as well as I that any acts of rebellion will be quashed. (She purses her lips.) Let us not exhaust this topic anymore.]

Chrisseine: Pourquoi? Est-ce parce que je me comporte en enfant? Le peuple a le droit de savoir la vérité! Il n'y a pas de "Princesse de Laelle", seulement les Princes de Laelle. Dois-je être aussi bruyant et arrogant que Thomas pour avoir le droit d'être un homme?

Chrisseine: [Why? Is it because I'm being childish? The people deserve to know the truth! The prince of Bucchanary deserves to know the truth! There is no “Princesse of Laelle”, only the Princes of Laelle. Must I be as loud and arrogant as Tuomas to earn my right to be a man?]

Drosenia: (Pained.) S'il vous plaît... Nous devons continuer notre leçon.
Drosenia: [(Pained.) Please...We have to continue with our lesson.]

Chrisseine: (He is further agitated.) Ah oui, des leçons faites pour me forcer encore plus dans un rôle que je n'ai jamais voulu.

Chrisseine: [(He is further agitated.) Ah yes, lessons designed to further force me into a role that I never wanted.]

Drosenia: Le roi est aussi un père. Il sait ce qui est le mieux pour ses enfants.

Drosenia: [The king is also a father. He knows what is best for his children.]

Chrisseine: ...Vous avez tort, Marquise. Il ne veut que ce qui est le mieux pour son royaume. Nous ne somme que de simples pions pour lui.

Chrisseine: [...]you are wrong, Marquise. He only wants what is best for the kingdom. We are mere pawns to him.]

Drosenia: (She sighs and rearranges the books in her hands.) Dans ce cas vous devriez savoir que votre devoir va au pays en premier. Et si cela veut dire que vous devez sceller votre véritable identité, qu'il en soit ains.

Drosenia: [(She sighs and rearranges the books in her hands.) Then you should know that your duty is to country first. And if that means you must seal your true self away then so be it.]

Chrisseine: Si je dois jouer le rôle d'une femme, je le jouerai avec le coeur lourd. (A sad smile fills his face.) Plus je porte ce masque, plus il se confond avec mon visage. (With that, he stands up and walks away, much to his lady-in-waiting’s protests. Slowly, he walks through the ornate halls of the palace, seemingly searching for someone. He stops at a corner and starts when someone covers his eyes. When he speaks, he has regained his airy voice.) Oh, mon dieu! Mizairen?

Chrisseine: If I must play the part of a woman then I will play it with a heavy heart. (A sad smile fills his face.) The longer I don this mask, the more it melds with my skin. (With that, he stands up and walks away, much to his lady-in-waiting’s protests. Slowly, he walks through the ornate halls of the palace, seemingly searching for someone. He stops at a corner and starts when someone covers his eyes. When he speaks, he has regained his airy voice.) My god! Mizairen?

(A youth of 17 or so pulls his hands away from Chrisseine. His long blonde hair sways in the wind through the open windows. He wears a uniform of deep blue, with a saber at his side. One golden earring dangles from his right ear. Mizairen's voice is soft and gentle.)

Mizairen: Seul moi aurait l'imperiance de toucher une si belle peau…

Mizairen: [Only I would dare touch such sublime skin…]

Chrisseine: (He turns around and pulls away.) Chut! Pas ici... Même si il serait drôle de répendre quelques potins. (He smiles playfully.) Le prince est toujours au centre de l'attention alors pourquoi pas moi?

Chrisseine: [(He turns around and pulls away.) Shh! Not here… (He smiles playfully.) Although it would be fun to spread some gossip. The prince always is at the center of attention so why not I?]
Mizairen: Ma rose blanche, être sujette à des rumeurs diffamatoires? Que le dragon me terrasse! Vous êtes la princesse des anges et devez le rester.

Mizairen: [My white rose, being subjected to slanderous rumors? May the dragon strike me down! You are the princess of angels and must remain so.]

Chrissine: Ah oui, nous avons tous une réputation à garder. La mienne est la plus lourde.

Chrissine: [Ah yes, we all have a reputation to carry upon our shoulders. Mine is the heaviest.]

Mizairen: Comment cela? Vous êtes comme les papillons du jardin. Insouciante et magnifique sous le soleil.

Mizairen: [How so? You are like the butterflies in the garden. Carefree and beautiful under the sun.]

Chrissine: (He laughs daintily.) Oui et moi, tout comme le papillon, suis à la mercie du mauvais temps. Une mésaventure et je suis souillé pour toujours.

Chrissine: [(He laughs daintily.) Yes and I, like the butterfly, am at the mercy of foul weather. One mishap and I am forever sullied.]

Mizairen: Dans ce cas je vous protégerais du vent et de la pluie. En tant que garde du plus haut rang, c'est mon devoir personnel de protéger votre sourire.

Mizairen: [Then I will shade you from the rains and wind. As a guard of the highest order, it is my personal duty to protect your smile.]

Chrissine: (He looks into Mizairen’s eyes and smile.) Vous êtes tout ce qui me rattache à mon frêle espoir d’un monde bon.

Chrissine: [(He looks into Mizairen’s eyes and smile.) You are the final link to my waning belief of a good world.]

Mizainen: (His eyes soften.) Je vous en prie, reconsidérez cela. Il y a tant de personnes en ce monde. Je me souviens, vous m’avez un jour dit de lever les yeux vers les étoiles et de les compter. Cela serait le nombre de personnes merveilleuses que je rencontrerais au cours de ma vie. C’est vrai. Et vous êtes la plus brillante des étoiles.

Mizairen: [(His eyes soften.) Please, reconsider that. There are so many people in this world. I remember you once told me to look up at the stars and count them. That would the number of wonderful people I’d meet throughout my life. It's true. And you're the brightest of the stars.]

Chrissine: (He smiles sweetly, a blush spreading across his face.) Vous souvenez toujours de ces paroles puériles?

Chrissine: (He smiles sweetly, a blush spreading across his face.) You still remember my childish words?

Mizairen: Bien sûr. Chacune d’entre elles.

Mizairen: [Of course. Every single one.]

Chrissine: Bien qu’il puisse y avoir de bonnes personnes en ce bas monde, je suis confiné
pour toujours dans des courts étouffantes. Et nous savons tous que c'est la que se jouent les plus sanglants des jeux.

Chrisseine: [Although there may be good people out there, I am forever confined to stifling courts. And we all know that this is where the bloodiest of games are played.]

Mizairen: C'est peut être vrai mais vous êtes un papillon. Vous volerez au dessus de toute la boue de cette court.

Mizairen: [That may be true but you are the butterfly. You will float above all of the filth in this court.]

Chrisseine: (He laughs.) Puisse le dragon tous nous protéger.

Chrisseine: [(He laughs.) May the dragon protect us all.]

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Byron:...I find it interesting how you are willingly obeying your father to marry into the Arclight family.

Kaito: (He shifts a bit.) I’m going to be completely honest with you.

Byron: (He leans back in his seat.) Ah yes, the frankness of the Americans. Do tell.

Kaito: I have no intention of going through with this.

Christopher: Kaito–

Byron: (He is unperturbed.) Really? Why not? You would be living in splendor.

Kaito: I’ve never been one for the high life. I prefer the simple things.

Byron: A romantic, aren’t you? Well, I was once like that too. But...one becomes accustomed to luxury after awhile.

Kaito: Yes, an absolute prison, the Resurrection.
Byron: (He feigns shock.) Indeed?

Kaito: I live in the future and have no intention of going back in time.

Byron: Quite a noble statement. The further you go into the future, the more complicated things get.

Kaito: Yes, but the Resurrection is also complicated in its own way. It is governed by strict traditions and laws unlike any other places.

Byron: So we are backwards?

Kaito: Yes. You are.

Byron: A bold answer. But are we trying to kill one another with grotesque weapons?

Kaito: (He is taken aback.) I would not know, for I have not been here long enough.

Byron: As Arclights, we are known for our sparse public appearances. (He sips his tea.) We are more modern than many other Resurrection households.

Kaito: Yes, but it is a gilded prison here.

Byron: Indeed?

(Christopher has been listening to the conversation this whole time. He is very uncomfortable.)

Byron: Do list your reasons.
Kaito: Your sons seem to be afraid of you.

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow.) Perhaps you are mistaking respect for fear. How would you know? You speak to your father as if he’s a beggar.

Kaito: I can tell mutual respect from fear and dominance. You run a dictatorship.

Byron: (He looks at Kaito under his eyelids. His voice has turned slightly menacing.) Have you any evidence?

Kaito: It’s always eerily quiet here. Michael acts as if he does not want to be seen nor heard. I haven’t even seen IV.

Byron: Children should be seen, not heard. Michael is a shy boy. Besides, your fearsome aura tends to ward off many people.

Kaito: If that is so, then why, when I asked him about you, did he seem so nervous?

Byron: As I said, you are sometimes far too intense.

Kaito: Yes, you may say so. But I refuse to be married into a family that is ruled by an absolute dictator. (He turns to Christopher.) He has been almost silent this entire conversation. Where did my strong, outspoken mentor go? As of late, he has been quiet and subdued.

Christopher: (He closes his eyes and exhales.) Please, Kaito. I’m just tired...It’s nothing to worry about.

Kaito: (He ignores Christopher.) I know that if I marry into this family, you will do everything in your power to subdue me. You will turn me into yet another of your porcelain dolls. (He stands up.) I want nothing to do with that. (He leaves the room.)
Byron:...Outsiders...They truly don’t understand us...

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(It is night now. Christopher sits in his bed, speaking to Kaito on a screen.)

Kaito:...I had a strange dream last night.

Christopher: Did you eat something?

Kaito: Of course not! You know I prefer a healthy diet over some junk!

Christopher: (Snorts.) Well, it didn't help you grow.

Kaito: (Annoyed.) Hope you like the weather up there.

Christopher: (Amused.) Alright, alright...Continue.

Kaito: (He is hesitant at first.) We were married. And I was... "civilized"...(He grimaces as he remembers.) I was as docile and soft as a kitten.

Christopher:...Go on.

Kaito: I ran away. But then I tripped and fell. The world then turned into the dueling room. You were there, telling me to get up and fight. I did, but then I turned into a child and was held into my mother's arms. It was at a time when her illness was...not much of a problem. We didn't think it would have gotten so bad that...(He looks away, his eyes growing misty.) Anyways, before I woke up...I was a king. Married with a woman that looked like you. She had a strange accent that seemed almost French. And she told me...that if she were to be reborn...She wouldn't have wanted to be stuck in an arranged marriage.

Christopher: (A chill creeps up his spine.) Kaito...

Kaito: Yes?

Christopher: I had a dream somewhat similar to yours. I was getting married...To a man that looked similar to you. We were the prince and princess of different kingdoms. I'm sure in that dream, that's what they called me. The Princess de Laelle. And I too, had an accent. (He smiles a bit.) It was a myriad of endearing pronunciations.

Kaito:...Well, this is...unusual. But at least we're not going to the moon.

Christopher:..Indeed. But these dreams could be a warning.

Kaito:...For what?
Christopher: For something like this to never happen again.

---Episode 10~END---

Illustration for this episode [here]
Kaito:...And a whole day has passed...Just like that. (He walks into his room and spies a present on his bed. The box is white with gold ribbon.) Just what...? (He inspects it and then opens it. A look of disgust flashes across his face. It is a grey and gold set of clothes similar to the Arclight brothers'. A rose pin is clipped to the neck of the vest and the shirt has a note on it. Kaito snatchs it and reads it.) Join us for tea at 6...Carnation Valley’s garden. Sincerely, your future father in-law. (He sets the note down.) I'd rather die.

Dr.Faker: (At the door frame.)...You need to go.

Kaito: (He grimaces and turns around.) Why? So I can show my throat to the predator?

Dr.Faker: (An exhausted expression fills his face.) No, so we can continue to keep the peace. Don't you know that we're walking on a thin line? Besides...after the visit yesterday, gods know that you need to make amends. Sometimes, you're just too honest. Yes, it’s clear that Byron runs a strict household but you shouldn’t go runnin’ around screaming about it.

Kaito: (He is quiet for a few moments, looking down at the clothes.)

Dr.Faker: (He steps into the room.) He's...he’s your future father in-law.

Kaito: (He turns to his father.) Yeah. And my future jailer.

Dr.Faker: (He pauses for a bit, trying to find an appropriate reply. He swallows.) It’s not going to be that bad. Byron is a kind man, just sometimes a bit too conservative. Besides, if not for me then do it for Haruto.

Kaito: (He bristles.) Don't you dare pull Haruto into this! You started this problem!
Dr. Faker: (Firmly.) And now it's your problem too. We wouldn't have to put up with this damned balancing act if you were more like Byron’s sons!

Kaito: (He drops the clothes and turns his entire body around to face Dr. Faker. His hands are balled into fists and his shoulders are squared.) You want me to smile? You want me to pretend like I'm one of Byron's dolls?! (He dons a British accent and lowers his eyes.) Oh, dearest father, I apologize for my previous actions. Will you ever forgive me?

Dr. Faker: (He is clearly uncomfortable with Kaito's mockery.) Kaito...

Kaito: (He continues.) Yes, dearest father? Have I displeased you, dearest father?

Dr. Faker: (Exasperated.) Kaito, please! There’s only two weeks left until the wedding so everyone’s high-strung... Please don’t pour gasoline on the fire...We don’t need to fall further into hell...

Kaito: (Back to normal.) How do you think I feel about this? If everyone’s high-strung then I’m about to snap!

Dr. Faker: (He is unwilling to fight anymore. He turns around and lets out a long sigh.) ...Just...just wear the clothes and get out of here...(He walks out of the room and closes the door behind him.)

Kaito: (He growls and sits down on his bed, looking at the clothes.)

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(The doorbell rings.)

Christopher: (He opens the door.) Oh...! Kaito! You came!

Kaito: (He stands at his full height, wearing the clothes given to him by Byron. Involuntarily, he fixes his cravat and adjusts the rose pin.) Not that I wanted to come. I feel like I've been chewed up and spit out by some rose garden. (He sighs.) Let's just get this done with. (He walks inside.)

Michael: (He comes downstairs and sees Kaito.) O-oh...It fits perfectly...

Kaito: (He is suddenly self conscious and raises his head high.) It's a ridiculous getup. I can't understand how you three are able to bear it.

Thomas: (He looks up from his book and smirks.) You don't say. At least it's better fitting than your other clothes. They're all so tight and restricting. You don't even have much to show off in the first place. (He sneers.) You should get used to wearing more...decent clothing.

Kaito: What I wear doesn't need your concern.
Byron: Kaito...(He walks into the room.) You look ravishing.

Kaito: (Deadpan.) You shouldn’t have.

Byron: (He is slightly amused for a quick instant and then regains his demeanor.) I didn't think you had anything suitable for this event. (He smiles.) So I took it upon myself to have something made for you. I asked your father to provide the measurements and when they came in, I thought: goodness, what peculiar numbers! (He turns to Kaito, smiling.) Do they feed you properly at home? You're so... petite for your age.

Kaito: (Pink begins to color his cheeks. He knows that Byron is toying with him.) My diet is just fine. I go to sleep full and I have never gone to sleep starved. My... small stature... is from my mother. B-besides! I'm five feet and a half. It's not short.

Byron: Well, genetics are just a small part in one's height. Outside factors can also affect the outcome, such as stress. It’s also possible that Photon Mode could have stunted your growth.

Kaito: No need to concern yourself, sir. I’m happy with the way I am.

Thomas: (He calls out.) Then why do you hang out with middle schoolers?

Kaito: (He stiffens a bit.) At least I actually have people to be with!

Thomas: (He laughs.) Yes and they drag you into all sorts of trouble, don’t they?

Kaito: For someone that is surrounded by adoring fans, you’re quite lonely.

Thomas: (He opens his mouth to reply but then Byron puts a hand on his shoulder.)

Byron: Boys, boys. Settle down. Save the playful bantering for dueling. (He looks at the clock.) I think it’s about time we head out to the garden to enjoy tea. (He begins to walk towards the gardens.)

Kaito: (He follows Byron and looks at his surroundings. The halls are covered with family photos and have cream colored walls. Small decorative pillars have busts and vases on them.)
Kaito wrinkles his nose as he passes by a hefty peony bouquet.) Quite a strong smell with those peonies.

Byron: Yes, but they're quite lovely, aren't they? If only they were without their smell...

(The two continue in silence and the Arclight brothers follow behind. Byron opens up the door to the garden, a sprawling expanse of flowers and bushes. In the center of the garden is an elegant gazebo with a set table inside of it. The porcelain tea set is organized neatly and plates of sandwiches, scones and pastries are spread about.)

Byron: I invite you to partake in the splendor of the Resurrection.(He walks over to the table and then sits down. He motions for Kaito to sit in a seat below him. Christopher then sits next to Kaito and following that, Thomas and Michael sit across from the two. The seat at the end remains empty.)

Kaito: (He looks at the end seat.) Are we expecting anyone else...?

Byron: (He clears his throat.)...It is an Arclight tradition...

Christopher: (Quietly.)...To leave an empty seat for the late woman of the house.

The Arclight Family: (They make the sign of the cross.) May she rest in peace.

Kaito: (He stiffens.)

Michael: What about your mother?

Kaito: (He stiffens for a bit and looks down at the tea Byron has poured.)...

Michael: (He puts three sugar cubes in his tea and stirs.) Oh dear, have I said something I shouldn't have?

Kaito: No, no...It's nothing...(He swallows.)...nothing personal. We just like to pretend she never existed. It...it takes away the heartache.

Thomas: (He lets out a low whistle.) How old were you?

Kaito:...Twelve.

Christopher: Oh...(He rests a hand on Kaito's.) I was only nine. (He smiles.) If it weren't for the family photographs, I surely would have forgotten her face by now.

Kaito: (Quietly.)...I've been trying to forget.

Byron : Oh come now...Your mother worked very hard to have you...Give her at least a little
Kaito: (He sighs. His voice comes out forced.) May we please move on...?

Byron: (He sips his tea.)...Of course. Have you tried the tea yet?

Kaito: (He blows and takes a small sip.) It's decent.

Michael: (He giggles.) That's because you didn't put anything in it! Some sugar would definitely help improve the taste.

Kaito: I like things plain. Including my tea.

(This causes an awkward silence at the table. Thomas coughs politely.)

Thomas: Say, how's Heartland?

Kaito: (He takes a finger sandwich and stares at it.) As bright and cheerful as ever. Since that piece of scum Mr. Heartland went, crime rates have decreased. (He eats the sandwich.)

Thomas: (Deadpan.) I wonder why. He always seemed like such a nice man.

Michael: (He laughs.) He was an interesting gentleman is all I can say. I believe I may have made him uncomfortable with my show of swordsmanship.

Byron: Alas, of all my sons, only you decided to master the noble art.

Michael: It keeps me close to our ancestors...and keeps away people like the former mayor of Heartland.

Kaito: I don't know what my father was thinking...Hiring a cat burglar for mayor.

Thomas: (After he finishes a finger sandwich.) Compliments to the chef.

Michael: (He laughs.) Oh, you.

Byron: A gentleman that can’t cook isn’t worth his salt.

Christopher: What can you cook, Kaito?
Kaito: A little bit of this and a little bit of that.

(All attention is focused on him now.)

Kaito: (He readjusts his cravat.) I can make...sunny-side up eggs...Sandwiches, deviled eggs...cornbread...rice...y’know. A...a lotta southern stuff. I can fry up some fish pretty well too.

Michael: (Hopeful.) Can you make any pastries? I’d love to exchange recipes with you.

Kaito: Unfortunately, no. I’m not one for sweets.

(It is quiet for a few moments.)

Byron: (He dabs at his mouth with a napkin.) The wedding...How do you feel about it...?

(The elephant in the room has been discussed. Everyone stops what they're doing.)

Kaito: (His mood darkens. His blunt answer brings silence to the scene.) It's just a chance for you to get your revenge.

(Michael gasps at the subject.)

Byron: Now, Kaito. Please.

Kaito: No. I won't stop. All you want is for my father to pay for his sins! He has paid! He made a city for the people! He nearly died trying to save Haruto's life! And he watched me die on the moon! Spare the man some misery!

Byron: Spare...? Spare...? Did he do the same for me? When he pushed me down that cliff into Barian world (He motions to his sons.) did he think of them?! No , he only thought of your brother!.

Kaito: He was a sickly child! Wouldn’t you do the same for your sons?!

Byron: Only as a last resort! And even then I would show profound remorse at having to sacrifice my two colleagues! I will never forget the day he left Kazuma and me at the bottom of that cliff. He laughed as we fell and all I saw was malice in his eyes. Your father has a heart of stone.
Kaito: It’s difficult for someone like him to–

Byron: I hear he locked himself up in work after your mother died. He tried to forget about her. So why then, did he suddenly care about Haruto? If he’s one of the last things his wife gave him, then why look upon him at all if it's too painful? You are also no exception.

Kaito: (He stands up.) My father loved my mother. We all have ways to deal with grief. Even if he didn’t show it, he loved Haruto.

Byron: (His voice is harsh.) And what about you? Did he think about you when he made you collect numbers and hunt souls? He only started to care when your health began to deteriorate because you are a tool. A machine. And a machine isn’t allowed to break, now is it? Hark! He only begins to care when something is in danger of breaking down. He worked tirelessly until the day your mother died, because he thought she had been fine on the shelf, collecting dust. But when he saw the errors of his ways, he was far too much of a coward to repent and so he went back further into his cycle of ignorance. Only to have history repeat itself in his sons. He does as he pleases until something irreversible happens. Your father takes his family for granted. You are all just flowers in the background, pleasing to look at and a decoration to the walls of his life. He doesn’t notice anything is amiss until you begin to wilt.

Kaito: (He shifts uncomfortably. Slowly, he sits down. His expression is unreadable. He is scrambling to find a reply.) We...we aren’t tools...We’re–

Byron: Do you see what he's done to you? After Haruto was born, your father left to work and handed all the responsibilities to you. A mere twelve year old boy! You aren't his son! You're his slave! He has taken advantage of you!

Kaito: (Disgust flashes in his face. His voice comes out hushed.) Don’t...you dare tell me what is and isn’t in my family. (He slams his hands on the table and stands back up. His voice grows with emotion after each sentence.) You don’t truly know who a man is until he leans on your shoulder and cries on it. You don’t know who a man truly is until he’s come to ask for your help in the most troublin’ of times. You don’t know who a man is until he’s trusted his youngest child to you. (Suddenly his voice grows soft, yet his accent is heavier than usual.) An’ I’m shore as hell mah father never came t’you fer any o’that.

Byron: (He drains the last of his tea. His voice comes out cold and calculating.) Quite the hypocrite, aren't we? Don't go jumping to conclusions when you haven't been officially made family. You’re quite excited to become Kaito Arclight, aren't you?
Kaito: (He bristles with rage.) I’d rather di-

Christopher: (He rises from his seat.) Kaito! Please! Learn how to hold your tongue! (His eyes are desperate.)

Kaito: So he can walk all over me?! I refuse to be a doormat!

Christopher: Stop thinking that way! No one is out to kill you, no one is out to hurt you! No one is out to take advantage of you! 

Kaito: Can I help it?! You made me this way, instilling me with duelist instincts.

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito in mute shock for a few moments. Flustered, he sits down and gazes at his tea.)

Kaito: (He turns to Byron.) Ya see what I was talkin’ about? All of your sons have been reduced to mere ghosts of themselves!

Byron: They are the result of good teaching, unlike you.

Kaito: ‘Least I still have a backbone.

(The moment is tense when Kaito pulls back his chair.)

Kaito: You don’t even see me as a proper human being, do you? Apologies, sir, but my momma taught me that stayin’ with people who look down on you ain’t proper so I’m gonna leave if that’s gonna be alright. (He undos his cravat.) No matter how much Venus beautified the cat, it was still a cat at heart and continued to chase mice, even as a beautiful woman. So. No amount of gentrified teachings or clothing will ever change me. I will never be tamed at my very core. Have a good night, Mr. Arclight. (He walks out of the garden gate.)

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(It is now early the next morning. Kaito comes downstairs to Dr. Faker on his screen.)

Dr. Faker: 13 more days left and it’ll all be over.

Kaito: Oh yes, a life of eternal suffering then awaits me.
Dr. Faker: (He sighs and rests the screen on the table.) Kaito, Byron told me about last night.

Kaito: And? Are you disappointed?

Dr. Faker: (He looks at Kaito in exhaustion.) What would your momma say about this?

Kaito: Well, if she was still here, we wouldn’t be in this mess, now would we?

Dr. Faker: Can it with the sass, boy.

Kaito: (Ignoring his father.) Y’know, I think she’d be saying that I’d be doing the right thing, giving Tron a piece of my mind. We all know how she felt about the Resurrection.

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(We are in an ornately decorated study. The shouting voice of a youth is heard.)

Kaith: An absolute stranger! I haven’t even seen her face yet!

(King Robertson stands above his son. He has Dr. Faker’s heavyset eyes and long face. His blonde hair has gray streaks and is tied back with a red ribbon. His voice speaks of reason and logic.)

Robertson: That is the way of those blessed...or cursed by the Dragon. It was the same for your mother and me. And in the future, your children will also have the same fate.

Kaith:...Laelle, isn’t it? Do they not speak another language?

Robertson:...What matters is an alliance. The Spaniards are approaching. A small kingdom like ours will cease to exist alone. Our feelings are inferior to what the country must do to survive.

Kaith: (He purses his lips.) Of course, father. As the chosen crown prince, it is my duty to ensure the survival of our kingdom.
Robertson: The crown is a heavy burden to bear...(He looks out the window and lets out a sigh.) Off with you, now.

Kaith: As you wish. (He walks out the large oaken doors. A young man comes up to meet him. His hair is platinum blonde and has a bluish tint to it. He keeps his hair long and ties it up with a blue ribbon. He wears a coat of cobalt blue and shoes the color of night. His eyes twinkle with boyish youth.) Harold! My brother. (Kaith embraces his older brother and he joyfully returns it.)

Harold: (He resembles an older Haruto.) My dearest little brother. How did the negotiations fare?

Kaith: I have been betrothed to the princess of Laelle...of whom I know only by title and nothing else.

Harold: (He laughs softly, the color rising to his cheeks.) Ah! I remember when I was told that I would be marrying the princess of Allesar. My friends had told me rumors of how hideous their rulers looked. But when I met the princess, she had average looks and a very kind disposition. (He chuckles.) It could be worse. (He pats Kaith's shoulder.) Like being chosen as father's heir.

Kaith: It always mystified me how I was chosen over you. Perhaps father loved you too much to condemn you to the throne. (His attention returns to Harold.) But...why are you here?

Harold: Diplomatic reasons, my brother. That's all there ever is these days. We're on the verge of war and we need allies.

Kaith:...War...? With whom?

Harold: (Pain flickers across his expression.) Spain...

Kaith: What could such a large country want with a small kingdom?

Harold: Land...what else? Our tiny kingdom does not stand a chance against this behemoth.

Kaith: But you will fight, won't you?

Harold: Of course I will. I'll fight until my last breath.

Kaith: (He makes the sign of the dragon by touching his forehead and pulling his right hand across his chest.) May the dragon watch over you.

Harold: My dearest brother...This may be the last time I see you. So. (He takes in a deep breath.) Farewell, dearest brother. May all your battles be won and may you forever remain kind. Your children grow to be respected nobles loved by all and especially may Ryara never get on your nerves.

Kaith: (He laughs.) Oh, it takes more than a blessing to keep her away.
Harold: (Jokingly.)...Oh. And may your wife have real breasts as large as Ryara’s fake ones.

Kaith: (He lets out a laugh.) Indeed, H-harold! Really! Of course. May the princess of Laelle be fertile so that we may ensure the success of our kingdom for the next generation.

Harold: (He embraces Kaith.) Never lose hope.

Kaith: (He smiles a melancholy smile.) We all know that it is a difficult thing to do in such times.

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(The sun is lightly covered by clouds.)

Robertson:...My son. (He holds a letter in his shaky hands and his clothes are disheveled.)

Kaith: (He stands behind his father, his posture rigid.) Yes, father?

Robertson:...Your brother has been killed and the kingdom of Allesar is no more.

Kaith: (Dismay fills his expression.)...P-pardon?

Robertson: (He continues to plow on, trying to outpace his tears.) You’ll be married in three months. Her portrait was delivered to us a day ago. Please unveil it in your room. (He hands Kaith a package.)

Kaith: (He gingerly takes it.) O-of course, f-father.

Robertson: Your brother... (His voice breaks.) will be buried in the new Spanish lands...(He grimaces.) And to think...! I wished to spare him the fate of the crown but he was killed by another enemy!

Kaith: (He looks at his father morosely.) He would have been a fine king.

Robertson: (He waves at his son dismissively, reading the letter one more time.)...begone...Kaith.

Kaith: Yes...father. (He walks backwards out the door.)

(As Kaith goes through the lavish hallways, one can see that portraits, vases and chairs adorn the halls. The sun filters in through the ovular windows. Sunlight bounces off the yellow walls and gives the palace a glowing atmosphere. Kaith then stops in front of two ornate oak doors and opens them. The guards at the doors remain unflinching. Kaith walks through a smaller hall and a few smaller sets of rooms into his bedroom. A lush carpet covers the right side and
a family portrait is on the wall. Two very large windows are located at the back of the room and the velvet curtains are parted open. Kaith sighs and sits down on a cushion.)

Kaith: (He murmurs under his breath.) May you continue to fight for the dragon in the afterlife, Harold. (He unwraps the painting. The painting features Chrisseine in a blue silk dress with a rose at the neckline. Roses adorn Chrisseine's hair and a choker with Christopher's crest is barely hidden underneath some silver curls.) ...What ravishing beauty. (He narrows his eyes.) It's obviously too good to be true.

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(We are in a private room where Chrisseine sits besides Mizairen. The sunlight streams through the slits in the ceiling.)

Chrisseine: (He holds the painting in his hands.) Eh bien... c'est quelque chose.

Chrisseine: [(He holds the painting in his hands.)]...Well. Isn't this something.

Mizairen: (He peers over Chrisseine's shoulders.) Le peintre s'est dépassé, ce tableau est magnifique.

Mizairen: [(He peers over Chrisseine's shoulders.)] The artist outdid himself. It's beautiful.

Chrisseine: (Bitterly.) Non, il ne l'est pas. Voit comment il a capturé le blanc de mes cheveux. Comme ceux d'une vieille femme. Cette rose dans ma main était à moitié fanée et, malheureusement, il a aussi capturé ce détail! N'y a-t-il rien de laid qu'il est oublié?

Chrisseine: [(Bitterly.) No, it isn't. See how he captures the white of my hair. Like an old woman. That rose was half wilted in my hands and unfortunately, he captures that detail too! Isn't there anything ugly that he missed?!!]

Mizairen: (Teasingly.) ...Votre poitrine?

Mizairen: [(Teasingly.) ...Your breasts?]

Chrisseine: (He grimaces.) Oh, bien sure. Je pouvais à peine respirer dans ce corset.

Chrisseine: [(He grimaces.) Oh, of course. I could barely breathe in that corset.]
Mizairen: (He kisses Chrisseine's cheek.) Mais vous souriez tout de même. Et c'est ce que je suis sensé protéger.

Mizairen: [(He kisses Chrisseine's cheek.) But you still smile. And that is what I am supposed to be protecting.]

Chrisseine: (He sighs, giving Mizairen a resigned smile.)...Oh, Mizairen. Vous allez tant me manquer.

Chrisseine: [(He sighs, giving Mizairen a resigned smile.)...Oh, Mizairen. I will truly miss you.]

Mizairen: Vous aussi, ma magnifique princesse. Mais n'est ce pas le rôle d'un messager de confiance?

Mizairen: [As will I, my beautiful princess. But is that not what a trusted messenger is for?]

Chrisseine: Ah oui, dans une court de dague et de couteaux, un messager de confiance est aussi rare qu'un apon dans une horde de corbeau.

Chrisseine: [Ah yes, in a court of daggers and knives, a trusted messenger is as rare as a peacock in a murder of crows.]

Mizairen: Pourtant, nous devons essayer.

Mizairen: [Nonetheless, we must try.]

Chrisseine: Je ne connais même pas le visage de mon intendant, ni si il sera bon ou cruel. C'est là la méthode des rois. Si seulement je le connaissais aussi bien que je vous connais, mon garde loyale. Le souvenir de ce jour décisif reste claire dans mon esprit, lorsque j'avais 8 ans et vous, un enfant de 10, vous agenouillant et embrassant ma main. Vous avez séché mes larmes...

Chrisseine: [I don't even know my intended’s face or if he will be kind or cruel. (He sighs.) ‘Tis but the way of royals. If only I knew him as well as I know you, my loyal guard. The memory remains fresh in my mind on that fateful day, when I was 8 and you, a child of 10 knelt down and kissed my hand. You dried up my tears…]

Mizairen: Je me suis toujours demander la raisons de vos pleurs. Vous en souvenez-vous?

Mizairen: [I always wondered what you were crying about. Do you remember?]

Chrisseine: (He shifts uncomfortably and there is a falter in his smile.) Non. J'ai peur que la
mémoire me fasse défaut. Cela... devait être quelques broutilles d'enfant.

Chrisseine: [(He shifts uncomfortably and there is a falter in his smile.) No. I’m afraid my memory fails me. It...must have been some childish trifle.]

Mizairen: Je n'avais qu'un an de plus que vous... Pourtant j'en savais bien plus que la princesse protégé.

Mizairen: [I was only a year older than you...Yet I knew so much more than the sheltered princess.]

Chrisseine: (He smiles wryly.) Mais désormais, en savez-vous plus que moi?

Chrisseine: [(He smiles wryly.) But now do you still know more than me?]

Mizairen: J'oserais dire que nous sommes aujourd'hui égaux. Vous connaissez presque tout de moi, et je connais presque tout de vous.

Mizairen: [I daresay we may be even now. You know almost all of me, and I know almost all of you.]

Chrisseine: (He smiles.) Je partage ce sentiment (He thinks.) La seule chose que vous ignorez, mon tendre ami, et que je suis un homme. Tout comme vous.

Chrisseine: [(He smiles.) The feeling is mutual. (He thinks.) The only thing you don't know, dear friend, is that I am a man. Just like you. ]

---Episode 11~END---

This episode illustration [here](#)
Midway

Blind Obsession

With hands flying on the keys,
he wanted to set himself free.

On the wings of a dove,
obtaining the unobtainable love.

His eyes depict a sadness
that descended into madness
from all the corpses that he saw.

For him the crows caw;
for there is nothing he can do,
that much is true.

Struggling silently in dread,
for what lay ahead
relentlessly pushed him on,

despite the
screaming
crying
darkness
and shattering
of his soul.
A Lesson in Hierarchy

Chapter Notes

Ah, yes. It's finally here after a few weeks of silence. Apologies. Tremendous, stupendous thanks to Iyliss and Rilya for the French translations. The world of Laelle would not be complete without you.

---Episode 12---
A Lesson in Hierarchy

(It is in the afternoon. The Arclights are gathered in what appears to be a cathedral. They sit solemnly in their cushioned pew, side by side. They wear Victorian-era suits. Thomas has his hair slicked back while Byron and Christopher have their hair braided. A sermon is being held and they quietly listen.)

Priest: (He finishes up his sermon and looks at his audience.) Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

(The audience stands. Some begin to shuffle out the cathedral while others mill about to talk.)

Thomas: (His voice is lowered.)...what is the meaning of “God” in this place anymore?

Christopher: We must not question tradition, Thomas.

Thomas: (He mutters.) The word has lost its meaning in this society...If there truly was a “God”, we wouldn’t be in such a hellish situation.

Byron: (He whispers.) As a man of science, I personally do not believe in a higher power. But… (He eyes the congregation.) We must give the people of the Resurrection what they want to see.
Thomas: Ah yes, the surname of Arclight bears a heavy weight around these parts.

Byron: Yes, although we are one of the most powerful families in the Resurrection, we are believed to be cursed for mingling with the outside world. The reason why we attend Communion is to prove that we are not.

Thomas: Well, I guess that narrows down my marriage options to the occult and the spurned of our society.

Byron: (He smiles, not giving Thomas an answer.)

Christopher: Although the true meaning of religion has left this society, we must continue to follow tradition.

Michael: Do you truly think so, dearest brother? I believe that there are some of us who will always believe in a higher power.

Christopher: That is up for you to believe, Michael. In my opinion, it is the work of the people around us and ourselves that govern our fates.

Thomas: (He snorts, overhearing the comment.) In some cases, a certain number of people will let themselves be ruled by their environment more than they rule themselves.

--- ♦ ---

(We are back at the Tenjo villa. Kaito looks dejected as he is in the master bedroom with Dr. Faker.)

Dr. Faker: The suit you'll be borrowing from me...I don't know if it will fit.

Kaito:...It won't. You know damn well it won't.

Dr. Faker: (Deadpan.)...You're pricklier than usual.
Kaito: Maybe if you raised me better, I would be talking about it. But no, I usually bottle stuff up until I'm near death.

Dr. Faker: (He ignores Kaito.) Let's see...(He rummages through his closet.)...Your momma used to tell me it was a waste to buy a suit.

Kaito: I'm sure it was. She was always right.

Dr. Faker: (He pulls out a gray suit and looks at it quietly.) She rented her dress. She said she had no use for sentimentality.

Kaito: Of course. What's the use of wasting hundreds on something you'll only wear once?

Dr. Faker: (He gives a singular nod.)...True. And Byron would have a fit if he found out that you were wearing my suit.

Kaito: I'm sure he would have a heart attack on seeing me like that. After all, it'd be like putting a monkey in a gorilla's suit.

Dr. Faker: We could make some last minute adjustments. After all, we're both just skin and bones. It's just that I have longer legs than you.

Kaito: Yes, you're even taller than Chris. (He sighs as he looks at the suit.) Maybe we could go thrift shopping. I'm sure we'd find something there. Perhaps a bright green suit with a purple bowtie and red pants. That would truly make Tron go ballistic.

Dr. Faker: (He stifles a smile.) As funny as that sounds, we could get the same thing for free from Mr. Heartland's closet.

Kaito: Like hell I'd be touching anything from him.

(There is a moment of silence as the father and son share a moment of contemplation.)

Dr. Faker: He wanted you to be in the dress.

Kaito: (He stiffens.) So that's what Chris meant by saying that I was going to be playing the
part of the bride.

Dr. Faker:...More humiliation on our side, I guess. (He exhales.) I still have my pride though, so I said no. A firm and clear no. My son will be wed wearing the finest Italian suit.

Kaito: (He eyes the suit in his father’s hands.) And is it Italian?

Dr. Faker: (Slightly indignant.) Of course it is. (His expression returns to his usual tired expression.) The style’s a bit dated though...

Kaito: (Annoyed.) It's more than twenty years old. Of course it’s dated. Do you think Tron wouldn’t notice? He'll probably laugh in your face and say that you're being stingy. (He mimics Byron's cultured accent.) Oh, Faker. What a...vintage look for your son. Why, it looks like the exact suit that you wore for your wedding! How charming.

Dr. Faker: I didn’t know that you were one for mimicry.

Kaito: Momma hated it when I did that. She said I was like a yappy parrot.

Dr. Faker: (He throws back Kaito’s words.) And she was always right.

Haruto: (He peeks into the room.) Wow! A suit! You really are getting married to Chris aren't you?!

Kaito: (He tries to muster up a smile but it only ends up as a sad smile.) Yes, Haruto. I am. (He beckons Haruto into the room and hugs him.)

Haruto: (After a few moments, he pulls away.) I'm so excited to be the ring boy! I get to wear a suit too, just like you!

Kaito: (He smiles at Haruto.) Thirteen more days...Until you can walk down the aisle...

Haruto: (His expression shifts to that of worry.) Are you okay, niisan?

Kaito: Yes, I'm fine. Don't worry. (He pats Haruto's head.) Isn't it about time I make you lunch?

Haruto: (He sticks out his tongue.) But I wanted to watch...
Kaito: I was thinking of making some chicken and rice...Maybe after that we could cut the cheesecake in the fridge. If you don’t want to, then I guess dad and I are gonna starve because we won’t eat if you won’t eat.

Haruto: (He crosses his arms and rolls his eyes.) Alright, alright. I know that you two don’t eat because you’re too busy doing whatever...so it’s always up to me, huh? (He sighs.) I guess I’m eating then.

Kaito: (He laughs.) Developing some of that southern sass momma always prided herself over? (He ruffles Haruto’s hair.) Let’s wash up together and you can help me make food. (He turns to Dr.Faker.) Wear your own suit. I’ll go find something from a secondhand store just to spite Tron. (He walks out the room.)

---♀—

(It is early in the morning. Chrisseine is being dressed.)

Chrisseine: (He grunts as Drosenia tightens his corset.) Est-ce la nouvelle mode? Depuis le portrait, j’ai l’impression que les baleines sont resséréés.

Chrisseine: [(He grunts as Drosenia tightens his corset.) Is this the new standard? Ever since the portrait, I do believe that the stays have been becoming even tighter.]

Drosenia: (She raises an eyebrow.) Et si elles le sont?

Drosenia: [(She raises an eyebrow.) And if they are?]

Chrisseine: (Bitterly.)...Je serais incapable de faire quoi que ce soit. Je serais contrainte de rester assise, à suffoquer dans le rôle que mon père m’a imposé.

Chrisseine: [(Bitterly.)...I wouldn't be able to do a thing. I'll just sit here and continue to suffocate into the role my father has forced me in.]

(Just then, another lady-in-waiting speaks up. Everything besides her mouth is shadowed over.)

Lady: Mon dieu, vous n’avez aucune colonne vertébrale.

Lady: [Goodness, you really don’t have a backbone.]

Drosenia: Rionè! Excuse-toi donc!
Drosenia: [Rionè! Apologize at once!]

(The lady steps into the light. Her eyes shine scarlet in the sun and her black hair has a bluish tint to it. She is of thin build and is dressed in a gown of dark blue. Her pale skin causes the light around her to have a slight halo effect. Although she appears young, her actions speak of maturity and a hidden burden.)

Rionè: Je refuse. La princesse ne doit plus être autant protégée. Autant de protection ne l'aidera en rien.

Drosenia: (Shocked.) Rionè! C'est un honneur de servir la princesse, et tu déshonore ta position en l'insultant! As-tu la moindre idée combien il est difficile d'atteindre ton rang?

Rionè: (Boldly.) Plus que vous n'en savez, passant votre vie monotone à cette court. J'ai dû me battre pour arriver jusqu'ici, après ce qui est arrivé à ma mère. Et sur ce chemin tortueux, j'ai subis railleries, insultes et actes de haine envers mon frère et moi.

Drosenia: (She dips her head at Chrisseine.) S'il vous plait, excusez-moi, princesse. C'est bien ce que je dis. Vous n'êtes qu'une enfant. Je ne suis pas née dans le Palais du Soleil. Je suis née dans un village lointain, d'un alcoolique et d'une folle. Je n'étais pas la première. J'étais la cinquième de sept enfants. Mon père me battait. Ma mère était trop occupée à parcourir les rues pour le remarquer. Chaque nuit, il rentrait à la maison et nous fouettait. J'ai fui à l'âge de 12 ans... incapable de supporter de telles conditions. Le Roi du Cerf est un être clément, il a laissé une enfant telle que moi travailler à la court. J'ai aussi dû me battre pour arriver jusqu'ici. Le Royaume de Laelle n'a pas de pareil. Même le plus pauvre paysan a une chance d'un jour travailler pour le roi. Contrairement à toi, je suis née dans la difficulté. Tu es née derrière les murs du palais, ta mère étant la demoiselle de compagnie de notre défunte reine. Même lorsque tu as presque tout perdu après l'exécution de ta mère, tu es restée entre les murs du palais. Que sais-tu donc du vrai monde?

Drosenia: [(She dips her head at Chrisseine.) Please, excuse me, princesse. (She turns to Rionè.) As I said. You are a mere child. I wasn't born in the Palace of the Sun. I was born in a distant village to the town drunk and a madwoman. My arrival wasn't the first. I was the fifth of seven children. (She rolls up her sleeve, earning a look of surprise from Rionè. Scars crisscross Drosenia's arm, marring the pristine, white skin and not at all matching Drosenia's delicate body.) My father...}
lash. My mother was too busy wandering the streets to care. Every night, he would come home and whip us. I ran away when I was twelve...being unable to bear such conditions. (She unrolls her sleeve.) The King of the Stag is a merciful being, allowing a child like me to work in his court. I too had to claw my way up here. The Kingdom of Laelle is like no other. Even the lowest of peasants have a small chance of one day working for the king. Unlike you, I was born into hardship. You were raised behind palace walls with your mother being the late queen's lady in waiting. Even when you lost nearly everything after your mother was executed, you still remained behind the palace walls. So what do you know of the real world?

Rionè: (She is clearly taken aback. She holds her gaze with Drosenia but then loses it. Her eyes glide to Chrisséine, who is feigning interest at the potted plant.) Avez-vous froid?

Rionè: [(She is clearly taken aback. She holds her gaze with Drosenia but then loses it. Her eyes glide to Chrisséine, who is feigning interest at the potted plant.) Are you cold?]

Chrisséine: (He starts and he then turns to Rionè.) Si je suis en sous-vêtements à me réchauffer sous la lumière matinale, qu’ne pensez-vous?

Chrisséine: [(He starts and he then turns to Rionè.) If I am just in my undergarments and basking in the morning sunlight, what do you think?]

Drosenia: (Her attention turns back to Chrisséine.) Oh...! Toutes mes excuses!

Drosenia: [(Her attention turns back to Chrisséine.) Oh...! My sincere apologies.]

Rionè: (Quietly.) ...Les rumeurs sont elles vrais?

Rionè: [(Quietly.) ...Are the rumors true?]

Drosenia: (She grimaces as she pulls out a dress.) Rionè...! Encore des questions indécentes?!

Drosenia: [(She grimaces as she pulls out a dress.) Rionè...! Again with indecent questions?!]

Rionè: (She is unfazed.) La princesse héritière est-elle un homme?

Rionè: [(She is unfazed.) Is the crown princesse truly a man?]

Drosenia: Rionè!

Drosenia: [Rionè!]

Chrisséine: (He takes a step towards Rionè. A sad smile plays on his lips.) Je te félicite. Une dame de compagnie aussi audacieuse est bien rare. Veux-tu vraiment le savoir?
Chrisseine: [(He takes a step towards Rionè. A sad smile plays on his lips.) I applaud you. It's rare
to have such a bold lady-in-waiting. Do you really wish to know?]

Rionè: Si je ne le voulais pas, aurais-je demandé?
Rionè: [If I didn't want to know, would I have asked?]

Chrisseine: (He smiles and places a finger on his lips.) C'est un secret gardé par peu de
personnes. Si tu le dis, tu seras exécuté. Suis-je bien claire?
Chrisseine: [(He smiles and places a finger on his lips.) It's a secret between only a select few. If
you tell, you will be executed. Do I make myself clear?]

Rionè: (She coolly nods her head.)

Drosenia: Votre majesté! Je vous en prie...!
Drosenia: [Your majesty! Please...!]

Chrisseine: (He puts aside his curtain of silver hair and approaches Rionè. He then corners
her and touches her shoulders. He gazes into Rionè eyes.) Je te prie de voir mon visage et me
dire ce que tu y vois.
Chrisseine: [(He puts aside his curtain of silver hair and approaches Rionè. He then corners her and
touches her shoulders. He gazes into Rionè eyes.) I bid you to look at my face and tell me what you
see.]

Rionè: (She calmly gazes into Chrisseine's sad eyes.) Il y a un trouble dans vos yeux. Quelque
chose que vous voulez dire... mais ne pouvez pas. C'est comme si vous —
Rionè: [(She calmly gazes into Chrisseine's sad eyes.) There is a burden in those eyes of yours.
Something that you want to tell...but cannot. It’s as if you’re—]

Chrisseine: (He grabs Rionè and kisses her, receiving a squeak of surprise from Rionè. He
then pulls away and his voice has deepened.)...Est-ce qu'une dame respectueuse d'elle-même
se retrouverait à embrasser sa dame de compagnie?
Chrisseine: [(He grabs Rionè and kisses her, receiving a squeak of surprise from Rionè. He then
pulls away and his voice has deepened.)...Would a self respecting lady go out of her way to kiss her
lady-in-waiting?]
Rionè: (She hesitantly shakes her head.) Tout... dépend.
Rionè: [(She hesitantly shakes her head.)] It...would depend.

**Chrisseine:** (He tilts his head.) Tu n'as pas l'aire convaincue. Veux-tu en voir plus.

Chrisseine: [(He tilts his head.) You don't seem to be convinced. Would you like to see some more...?]

**Rionè:** Que pouvez-vous me montrer d'autre?

Rionè: [What else can you show me?]

**Chrisseine:** (He smirks.) Le lit.

Chrisseine: (He smirks.) The bed.

**Drosenia:** Votre majesté! (She runs towards Chrisseine.) Il est temps pour vous de vous habiller! Vraiment, vous devenez comme le prince, Tuomas.

Drosenia: [Your majesty! (She runs towards Chrisseine.) It's time for you to get dressed! Really, you are becoming just like the prince, Tuomas!]

**Chrisseine:** (He laughs sadly.) Si le roi m'avait laissé réclamer ce qui m'est due par ma naissance, peut être serais-je devenue pire que Tuomas. Que ne donnerais-je pas pour marcher dans les halls tel que ce que le Dragon voulait que je sois... En tant que Prince héritier de la couronne de Laelle, Cristophe Augustus Blanche...

Chrisseine: [(He laughs sadly.) If the King had allowed me to claim my birthright, perhaps I would have become worse than Tuomas by now. What I wouldn't give to walk down the halls as the Dragon had intended for me to be…As the rightful crown prince of Laelle, Cristophe Augustus Blanche…]  

**Drosenia:**...Le roi est un homme sage. Il sait ce qui est le mieux pour le royaume. Si il vous a jugé trop faible pour diriger le royaume, alors vous devez accepter votre destin.

Drosenia:[...The king is a wise man. He knows what is good for the kingdom. If he deemed you too weak to rule then you must accept your fate.]
Chrisseine: (Pain flickers across his expression.) Je peux tout juste me souvenir du garçon que j’étais auparavant... Il est peu a peu entéré sous une couche de poudre, de jupe et de bijoux.

Chrisseine: [(Pain flickers across his expression.) I can barely remember the boy I had once been...He is slowly becoming buried under a layer of powder, skirts and jewelry.]

Drosenia: (Solemnly.)...C’est pour le meilleur, princesse.

Drosenia: [(Solemnly.)...Only for the better, princesse.]

Chrisseine: (He purses his lip.) En tant que femme, je dois rester docile et gracieuse. Mais au fond de moi... Mon véritable désir est de refuser. Un homme peut-il complètement s'effacer?

Chrisseine: [(He purses his lip.) As a woman, I am expected to remain docile and graceful. But at heart...my true self wishes to disagree. Can a man truly suppress himself?]

Drosenia: (Calmly.) Savoir controller ces désires est un signe de maturité. A présent... nous devons vraiment vous habiller. Rionè!

Drosenia: [(Calmly.) Being able to control those urges is a sign of maturity. Now...We truly must get you dressed. Rionè!]

Rionè: Oui, madame. (She approaches Chrisseine and thinks.) Enfermer un homme d'une si affreuse manière... Que demande donc un pays pour que son roi fasse cela à son propre fils?

Rionè: [Yes, madam. (She approaches Chrisseine and thinks.) Imprisoning a man in such an unsightly way...What does a country demand that pushes a king to do this to his own son?]

--- ♂ —

Kaith: (He is being fitted for his wedding garb in his room. As tailors shuffle around him, he absentmindedly gazes at the portrait of Chrisseine.) The Laelle princess. Have you heard anything of her?

Robertson: (He stands in a corner, gazing stonily at his son.)...They're just silly rumors, but I hear she truly does have silver hair, like an old woman. And she has a laugh like a dozen
Kaith:...As I expected.

Robertson: (He raises an eyebrow.) What do you mean..?

Kaith: (He continues to be focused on the portrait.) A bride whose face I've never seen is shrouded in praise. How much of it is true, though? Perhaps she is a monster in reality.

Robertson: Nonetheless, she is the embodiment of Laelle. Marry her, you marry the kingdom. Appearances do not matter.

Kaith: Then am I also the embodiment of Bucchanary? Am I nothing more than the land in mortal form?

Robertson: As rulers, we place the needs of the country above our own. Serfs may be chained to the land...but they do not have to obey what the land tells them to do. But kings—wise kings—are chained to the lands they rule and must obey what the land wishes of them. We are but servants to the Dragon. Humans are born to serve, no matter how high their ranks are. There is always the divine to be served.

Kaito: And as a son, not a prince, I was born to serve you.

Robertson: An acute observation, Kaith.

---♀---

Dr. Faker: (He knocks Kaito’s room’s doorframe. Kaito is detailing out blueprints via a set of digital screens. His voice is quiet.) I want to talk to you again about the tea part yesterday. Your behavior yesterday was unacceptable.

Kaito: (He stops and then coolly turns around.) He was insulting you. That’s my job, not his.

Dr. Faker: (He deflates a little bit.) Still, you need to apologize.
Kaito: (Rage fills his expression.) Apologize?! To the man that called me a machine and you a coward?! I’d rather die!

Dr. Faker: Yes! He’s as loving as a bramblebush but ya need to keep the water calm or else he’ll drown us all! Do you know what he’s capable of?! It just takes one word of the incident to the press and we’ll all sink to the depths of hell!

Kaito: Why now are you trying to teach me?! Why now are you playing the part of a good parent?! You’ve been dead to me for 10 years now! 10 FUCKING YEARS!

(The father and son look into each other’s eyes.)


Dr. Faker: Kaito...don’t do anything rash. How about you wait until tomorrow...where you can think about it?

Kaito: Just be glad I’m not comin’ over with momma’s rifle. She’d be glad to see his blood splattered on them clean walls.

Dr. Faker: Just what are you going to do?

Kaito: I’m gonna duel him. And tonight, I’m going to prepare.

---♀---

(Moonlight fills the palace courtyard. Two men are sword fighting. The sound of metal clashing fills the scene. On one side, a man with unruly blond locks and red eyes challenges his opponent. He gracefully maneuvers his blade in a cream colored outfit. His opponent is a man with long, silver hair tied at the back. His blue eyes shine black in the night and his silver outfit outlines his thin build.)
Blond man: Cela fait longtemps depuis notre dernier affrontement. Ces nuits insouciantes me manquaient.

Blond man: [It has been a long time since we have sparred. I missed those carefree nights.]

Silver-haired man: Mes excuses, chère frère. Affaires de court.

Silver-haired man: [Apologies, my dearest brother. Courtly duties and all. (He clashes swords with his opponent and sparks fly.)]

Blond man: Ah oui, l'union avec Bucchanary! Je plains le prince qui tombera dans ton piège.

Blond man: [Ah yes, the union with Bucchanary! I pity the prince who will fall into your trap.]

Silver-haired man: Ce n'est pas mon choix, c'est mon devoir envers ce pays. Toi et moi savons tous deux que ces nuits ne sont pas éternelles, Tuomas.

Silver-haired man: [It is not a choice, it is my duty to this country. You and I both know that these nights will not last forever, Tuomas.]

Tuomas: (He lunges towards his opponent, a sad smile on his face.) Bientot je serais forcé de dire un adieu éternel à mon frère... et être heureux avec la pale soeur qui le remplacera. Mais Chrisseine ne peut se battre aussi bien que Christope!

Tuomas: [(He lunges towards his opponent, a sad smile on his face.) Soon I will be forced to bid farewell to my brother forever...and be content with the dull sister that has replaced him. But Chrisseine cannot fight as well as Christophe!]

Chrisseine: Non, elle ne peut pas, mais elle t'aime tout autant! (He blocks his brother’s blade and smirks.) Il semblerait que ces semaines de confinement aient érodés mes techniques. Ah, combien vas-tu me manquer, mon frère fougueux! Dans un pays si loin du mien, nos souvenirs communs me réchaufferont.

Chrisseine: [No, she cannot, but she loves you just the same! (He blocks his brother’s blade and smirks.) It seems that these weeks in confinement have dulled my skills. Ah, how I will miss you,
Tuomas: (He pushes the blade harder.) Alors, reste ici, pour toujours. Nous pourrions rester les frères que nous étions destinés à être... enfermés dans un tableau.

Tuomas: [(He pushes the blade harder.) Then stay here, like this, forever. We can be the brothers that we were destined to be...Locked in a tableau.]

Chrisseine: Comme les comédiens sur les planches?

Chrisseine: [Like actors on the stage?]

Tuomas: (He laughs.) Nous ne sommes que des comédiens dans cette court. Je suis le prince hérîtier indiscipliné et tu es la princesse mélancholique.

Tuomas: [(He laughs.) We are nothing but actors when at court. I am the unruly crown prince and you are the melancholy princesse.]

Chrisseine: Préfères-tu que je sois l'héritier?

Chrisseine: [Would you rather I be the one destined for the crown?]

Tuomas: La couronne est un fardeau amer. Mais être forcé dans un rôle contre son grès est un destin plus cruel encore que la couronne ne sera jamais.

Tuomas: [The crown is a bitter burden. But being forced into a role against your will is a crueler fate than the crown will ever be.]

Chrisseine: Etre enfermé dans de lourdes robes et des coiffures élaborées n'a jamais été mon choix. (He pushes back his sword with unexpected strength and Tuomas stumbles back.)

Chrisseine: [Being trapped in cumbersome gowns and elaborate hairstyles has never been a choice of mine. (He pushes back his sword with unexpected strength and Tuomas stumbles back.]

Tuomas:...! Ta force me surprend.
Tuomas: ...! You surprise me with your strength.

Chrisseine: Ne sous-estime jamais ton frère aîné.

Chrisseine: [Never underestimate your elder brother.]

(From the dark, a commanding voice calmly speaks. The brothers immediately stop in their positions.)

Voice: ...et ne sous estimez jamais le roi.

Voice: [...and never estimate the king.]

Chrisseine and Tuomas: (They turn around and drop into bows.) Père.

Chrisseine and Tuomas: [(They turn around and drop into bows.) Father.]

(The speaker is shown to be a middle-aged man with a regal posture. His honey-colored eyes coldly examines the scene. His hair is golden like Byron’s and it drapes over his shoulders like a curtain. He wears clothes of deep green and gold, befitting a king. Slowly, he approaches Chrisseine.)

King Byronne: Levez-vous.

King Byronne: [Rise.]

Chrisseine: (He hesitantly rises. Sweat trickles down his forehead and his hands shake. Fear fills his expression. His voice comes out wavery and hushed.) Oui... père?

Chrisseine: [(He hesitantly rises. Sweat trickles down his forehead and his hands shake. Fear fills his expression. His voice comes out wavery and hushed.) Yes...father?]
King Byronne: Pensais-tu affronter mes ordres sans conséquences? (He roughly grabs Chrissine’s chin.) Christophe, osez-vous défie votre père, le roi du cerf d'or?

King Byronne: [Did you think you could go against my word without any consequences? (He roughly grabs Chrissine’s chin.) Christophe, do you dare defy your father, the king of the golden stag?]

Chrissine: Père, je ne peux défier ma naissance.

Chrissine: [Father, I cannot defy what I was born to be.]

King Byronne: (He tightens his grip on Chrissine’s chin, digging his nails into the soft flesh.) Vous êtes ce que je dis que vous êtes. Et vous êtes une femme, non un homme. Maintenant, débarassez-vous de ces vêtements.

King Byronne: [(He tightens his grip on Chrissine’s chin, digging his nails into the soft flesh.) You are what I say you are. And you are a woman, not a man. Now be rid yourself of those clothes.]

Chrissine: Le prince de Laelle finira par l'apprendre.

Chrissine: [The prince of Laelle will eventually know.]

King Byronne: Mais son père est un homme désespéré.

King Byronne: [But his father is a desperate man.]

Chrissine:...toutefois…

Chrissine: [...Nonetheless…]

King Byronne: Allez, Christophe. Dois-je vous ammener à vos servantes comme un enfant? Devrais-je assister au retour de cet enfant pleurant et hurlant?

King Byronne: [Come, Christophe. Must I drag you to your maids like a mere child? Will I witness the screaming, crying child all those years ago resurface?]
Chrisseine: (He gulps.) ...non père. Il n'y a pas besoin de me forcer dans les routines d'habillage de la princesse. Car je... j'y irais de mon plein grès. Avec votre permission?

Chrisseine: [(He gulps.) ...no, father. There will be no need to force me into the dressing routine of the princesse. For I...I will go willfully. With your permission?]

King Byronne: (He dips his head.) Allez à ce que vous devez faire. Et jespère que vous ne me défierais plus jamais.

King Byronne: (He dips his head.) See to it that you do. And I hope that you will never defy me again.

--- ⚘ —

(It is night. Kaito sits at his desk and shuffles through his desk.)

Kaito:...He’ll learn, alright. I’m not someone to be stepped on.

(The scene fades to black.)

--- ⚘ —

(There is a knock at the door. Sunlight fills the windows. Christopher hesitantly answers it.)

Christopher: Kaito? What brings you at such a time?

Kaito: (He glares at Christopher.) Where’s Tron?

(Christopher flinches at the mention of his father’s previous name.)

Christopher: He’s—
Byron: (A bit irritated.) Here to greet our guest. (He dips his head to Kaito.) A lovely morning, Kaito. I can’t help but admit that I am a bit surprised you came here at such a time.

Kaito: I wish I could say the same.

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow.) I know you dislike small talk...so I will be blunt. Have you come here to apologize over your behavior?

Kaito: No, unfortunately. (He takes his duel disk out.) I’ve come to challenge you to a duel.

Byron: (He smiles tiredly.) Your duelists’ pride never ceases to impress me. So much like my sons’... Even at 10 in the morning, after we’ve barely finished our morning meal...you come knocking at our door. (He sighs.) Very well. I accept your challenge. I will go get my deck. (He heads upstairs.)

Christopher: (His voice is a hushed whisper.)...What will you gain from this?

Kaito:...I’ll be able to prove that I am his equal...and your family’s equal.

Christopher: (He blinks tiredly.)...what do you mean?

Kaito:...Your family looks down on me.

Christopher:....! No...we don’t...Since when did you—

Kaito: Just because we don’t flaunt our wealth as readily as your family doesn’t mean that we’re below you.

Christopher:....! I…
Kaito: Even if we aren’t getting married, I just want to prove my point.

(A moment of silence passes by.)

Christopher: (Quietly.)...But if we are to be bound...I would still be happy with you.

Kaito: (He smiles sadly.) Don't say that. Stop lying to yourself. If you keep on doing that, you'll never be able to be honest with anyone...We will both suffer under your father’s dictatorship. Deep down you know that.

Christopher: (He bites his lip.) As long as we satisfy him...

Kaito: (He raises his voice slowly.) Are we expected to act like we're grateful? Grateful that our fathers agreed on this without any of our say in this?! Happy that we're going to be masquerading for the rest of our godforsaken lives?! Should I finally submit to Tron and give him what he wants?! A delicate porcelain doll?!

Byron: (As he comes downstairs.)...Refrain from calling me that, Kaito. I have turned over a new leaf.

Kaito: (Without turning around.)...More like revisited an old leaf.

Byron: (He glares at Kaito.) I will not have you speak to me like your father. (He glares at Kaito) If I had my way, I would have you spend some more time here at Carnation Valley where you could be taught real manners.

Kaito: (Coldly.) I prefer to be a real, live boy who can make his own decisions compared to your porcelain dolls.

Byron: (His eyes widen at the insult. Barely containing his anger, he shoves his deck into his duel disk.) Very well. Let us proceed. Shall we head to the garden?

Kaito: Of course. Wouldn't want one of your precious dolls to be accidentally broken. (As he passes Christopher, his mentor grabs his arm.)
Christopher: (He whispers into Kaito’s ear.) He only plays games that he can win.

Kaito:....(He turns to Christopher who is looking at him with worry.) Sorry, Chris. Even if you claim that your old man only plays games that he can win, I’m gonna take that chance anyways. (To Byron.) I’ve grown since the day you beat me. My deck has expanded and Galaxy Eyes remains with me, stronger than before.

Byron: It is the same here, Kaito.

---♀—

(We are in the garden. Byron and Kaito face each other in a flat part of the garden. Their duel disks are out and they are ready to fight.)

Kaito: If you think you can tame me and beat me into obedience...you’re wrong.

Byron: I beat you in a duel once. I reckon I can do it again. (He smiles cruelly.) Thanks to your duelist's pride, you will do anything the person who beats you tells you to do. Your one little weakness. Since I was the one who taught your mentor how to duel...I believe that this...will be an interesting duel.

Kaito: (He smirks.) We’ll see once the action begins. Now…

Byron and Kaito: Duel!

---Episode 12~END---

Link to this episode's illustration here
A Lesson in War

Chapter Notes

Officially halfway through this story!

---Episode 13---

A Lesson in War

(Kaito and Byron's lifepoints drop to 0 at the same time. The duel is a draw. Both are drenched in sweat and covered in scratches. The AR visions fade away.)

Byron:...Well.

Kaito:...Next time.

Byron: (He smiles.) You forget, Kaito. I was the one who taught your mentor. I know all of the tricks and strategies he passed onto you.

Kaito: Well, do you know of my parents’? Or my own methods?

Byron: (Calmly.) I've worked with your father and mother before you were even born. Of course I know. And I've dueled you twice and have seen your ways throughout your crusade through Heartland. They have only evolved to be more complex, but deep down their roots remain firm.

Kaito: You say all this but we ended up in a draw. If you really do claim to truly know me, you would have soundly trounced me minutes ago. Stop bluffing.

Byron: (He takes in a deep breath.) My dear boy...Perhaps we should move onto another subject? Like how we owe one another a favor and vice versa?

Kaito: (He grimaces.) We don't owe each other nothing. It was a draw.

Byron: But think about it...I do something for you...You do something for me... (He smiles.) Paving a new path towards son and father in-law.

Kaito: (He heads towards the door.) I'll have no part in that.
Byron: So. You won't be playing this game.

Kaito: (He pauses at the doorway.) A game?

Byron: A test wills and strength. We see who can last longer. Before they break under the other. (A sadistic smile fills his face.) Will I submit to you or will you submit to me?

Kaito: More like 'tame' one another.

Byron: We aren't animals, Kaito.

Kaito:...You say that. But you look at me like I'm something that's wild and uncontrollable. Isn't that how you look at a dog with rabies or a feral pig? (He scoffs and then his voice turns sarcastic.) Oh wait. I am an animal. You never really liked how I did everything I could to save my brother. Cheating, killing, lying... (After a momentary pause, his voice comes out unexpectedly soft.) Is it because you would never do the same for your children? Too focused on revenge?

Byron: (Rage fills Byron’s face. He slowly walks towards Kaito.) Kaito...you still have so much to learn about my family and I.

Kaito: (He glares at Byron.) Do I even want to know? (He walks into the house.)

Byron: (He looks after Kaito, a dark expression filling his features.) You will learn...whether you like it or not.

---♀ ---

(Byron and Christopher are drinking tea in the parlor. After the duel, Byron has changed into another suit. Christopher has a book in his hands but does not read it. Instead, he is emptily staring at the fireplace.)

Christopher:...There are many noble things about our esteemed family...But you may tarnish it with the way you will teach him.
Byron: (He rests down his teacup with an audible clatter. He still wears a dark expression on his face.) Pardon me, Christopher? Were you insulting my teaching methods? The same methods you used to teach Kaito to duel with, if I’m not mistaken?

Christopher: (He stiffens.)...

Byron:...That's what I thought...(He looks down at his tea contemplatively. He takes in a deep breath.) Has Kaito always been like this?

Christopher: (He turns to look at his father at the sudden change in subject.) In the beginning he was a lot kinder...I'm afraid life decided to throw many obstacles in his course and he turned somewhat...rough as a means to preserve himself.

Byron: (He closes his eyes and raises his eyebrows.) Well. When he is part of the family, we shall smoothen those rough edges. Do lend me a hand when the time comes. (He sips his tea.)

Christopher: (He looks down at the floor uncomfortably.) Yes...dearest father.

---∮---

(It is dark. The vague outline of Kaito's body is all one can see. Suddenly, one of his eyes open.)

Kaito: W...where...?

(Thumping noises can be heard from above. First gently but then arriving in great thunks.)

Kaito: (He thinks.) ...I can't breathe...No...No... (He raises his hands and they are barely able to move.) ...in...a box...? (He feels the soft flowers underneath him and the single rose in his hands.) This can't be...A coffin?! But I'm not dead yet! (He begins to knock on the roof of the coffin.) Let me out of here! SOMEONE!

(All the while the thumping noises continue, becoming more distant with each thump.)

Kaito: I refuse to be buried alive! Let me out of here! (He continues weakly pounding the roof of the coffin, due to the small amount of room he is allowed to move in.) Please...! (He breathes heavily.)
Kaito: (His eyes widen.) ...No......PLEASE! (He continues to pound on the roof of the coffin, his voice increasingly desperate and his twang becoming heavier.) I'M NOT DEAD! I'M NOT DEAD! MY NAME IS TENJO KAITO AND I'M NOT DEAD! PLEASE DIG ME UP! I AIN'T DEAD! I AIN'T DEAD! Please..! (He begins to cough.) Please...I...I can't die like this again...no...(Weakly.) Please...someone...

(All of a sudden, Orbital's voice echoes about.)

Orbital's voice: 99% of systems are down. Life support has been disabled. Oxygen levels are at 0%. Operation system shutdown.

(The world turns pitch black.)

...

(Kaito sits up from his bed, heavily breathing.)

Kaito:...There's not enough...! (He pushes open the windows and inhales deeply. His eyes turn to the moon, and his breathing becomes erratic.) NO! (He pulls the curtains closed and sits on his bed.) No...no...Not again...I...I can’t...

Dr. Faker: (He gently opens up the door.) You alright there, Kaito?

Kaito: (He slowly looks up at his father.) I...

Dr. Faker: (He comes in and closes the door behind him.) You gave us all a scare this afternoon.

Kaito: Wh...what?

Dr. Faker: You collapsed, remember? After the duel you had with Byron. You were in the doorway and then you just fell down.

Kaito:...I...I did?
Dr. Faker: You’ve been out for hours now.

Kaito: But...There’s...still...

Dr. Faker: (Gently.) We'll talk about it tomorrow. I think you should rest.

Kaito: (His expression darkens.) It’s your fault.

Dr. Faker: What?

Kaito: That I’m like this.

Dr. Faker: (He sighs.) A decision I will regret for the rest of my life. I know that and I’m sorry.

Kaito: (He stands up, a bit unsteadily.) No. No. I don’t want your empty apologies. They don’t “fix” me, they don’t turn back the events of the past few days, and they definitely don’t turn back the events on the moon so get out.

Dr. Faker: (He sighs once more and slowly stands up.) I’ll see you in the morning. (He walks out of the room.)

---♀ ---

(We are transported to an ornately decorated hall with dozens of crystal chandeliers. The sounds of laughter and conversations bounce about the halls. Many nobles dressed in sparkling outfits eat merrily around a long table. We then go to Chrisseine who emptily stares at his food.)

Byronne: Ma fille, pourquoi ne mangez-vous pas?
Byronne: [My daughter, why aren't you eating?]

Chrisseine: (He purses his lips and looks away from his father.)

Byronne: Drosenia?

Drosenia: Oui, mon roi?

Drosenia: [Yes, my king?]

Byronne: Alllez donc voir ce qui ne va pas.

Byronne: [Do see what is the matter.]

Chrisseine: (He lifts his arms up from the table and shows his heavily bandaged hands. Dried blood and fresh splotches of blood spatter the white bandages. His face reveals nothing.)

Byronne: Evidemment. (He raises his voice so all can hear.) C'est ce qui arrive lorsque mes enfants désobéissent. Vraiment, ma fille ainée. A quoi pouvais-tu bien penser... danser ainsi sous la pleine lune?

Byronne: [Of course. (He raises his voice so all can hear.) This is what happens when children misbehave. Really, eldest daughter. Just what were you thinking... dancing under the full moon like that?]

Chrisseine: (He rests his hands back under the table and grimaces.) Vous êtes celui qui tient les fers chauds. Vous ne pouvez pas comprendre, vous n’êtes pas celui qui souffre.

Chrisseine: [(He rests his hands back under the table and grimaces.) It's because you are the one who wields the hot irons. You do not understand, for you aren't the one who is hurt.]

Byronne: (He swiftly grabs one of Chrisseine's bandaged hands and roughly squeezes it, causing more blood to bloom through the bandages.) Je vous prierais de faire preuve de retenue dans vos paroles, ma fille ainée. Une dame ne répond pas aux volontés de son père.

Byronne: [(He swiftly grabs one of Chrisseine's bandaged hands and roughly squeezes it, causing
more blood to bloom through the bandages.) Please do hold your tongue, eldest daughter. A lady is
not one who objects to her father's wishes.]

Chrisseine: (He grimaces and pulls his hand away.)

Byronne: Maintenant a propos de votre... invalidité. Dronesia, assurez-vous qu'elle soit
nourrie.

Byronne: [Now then, about your...disability. Drosenia, do make sure she is fed.]

Chrisseine: Puis-je m'excuser et retourner dans la chambre ?

Chrisseine: [May I be excused to go to my room?]

Byronne: Et manquer le spectacle de ce soir ? Je ne pense pas. (His voice hardens to a sadistic
edge.) Êtes-vous embarrassée de devoir être nourrie a la main comme une enfant ?

Byronne: [And miss tonight's performance? I think not. (His voice hardens to a sadistic edge.) Are
you embarrassed at having to be hand fed like a mere child?]

Chrisseine: Une telle chose n'est pas necessaire... (With a bit of difficulty, he is able to hold an
eating utensil.) Voyez, je peux supporter la douleur.

Chrisseine: [There will be no need for that... (With a bit of difficulty, he is able to hold an eating
utensil. The blood continues to bloom from the bandages.) For you see, I can bear the pain.]

--- ⚘ ---

(We are in Byronne's study. A large room with ornate gilding and a desk at the back wall
with a large window behind it.)

Byronne: Je vous en prie, asseyez-vous, Christophe.

Byronne: [Please, sit, Christophe.]

Chrisseine: (He gingerly sits on the chair facing Byronne.) Oui, père ?
Chrisseine: [(He gingerly sits on the chair facing Byronne.) Yes, father?]

Byronne: Vos mains.

Byronne: [Your hands.]

Chrisseine:...excusez-moi?

Chrisseine: [...Pardon?]

Byronne: Placez vos main sur cette table.

Byronne: [Rest your hands upon my table.]

Chrisseine: (He slowly rests his hands on the table.)

Byronne: (He stands up.) Êtes-vous devenue fou? A quoi pensiez-vous, sortir ainsi? Je pensais que vous aviez abandonné vos manières indécentes.

Byronne: [(He stands up.) Have you gone mad? What were you thinking, going out like that? I thought you had given up your cavorting ways.]

Chrisseine: Vous ne pouvez défier ce que la dragon m'a offert. Avant que je ne sois marrié et forcé de porter ce manteau pour-

Chrisseine: [You cannot defy what the dragon has given me. Before I am married and am forced to wear this mantle for—]

Byronne: Il suffit. (He grabs a poker from the blazing fireplace. It glows a light orange.) Je ne tolèrerais plus une telle désobéissance.

Byronne: [That's enough. (He grabs a poker from the blazing fireplace. It glows a light orange.) No longer will I allow disobedience.]

Chrisseine: (His voice has deepened.)...Vous pêchez! Je suis le véritable héritier de Laelle, ce n'est pas Tuomas. Une âme libre comme la sienne ne mérite pas un fardeau tel que la couronne ! Allez a l'encontre de la volonté du dragon ne conduira qu'au péché! Il n'est pas
trop tard pour abandonner mes fiançailles et éviter le punissement divin...

Chrisseine: [(His voice has deepened.)...This is a sin! I am the rightful heir to Laelle, not Tuomas. A free spirit like him does not deserve a burden like the crown! Disobeying The Dragon will only lead to sin. It isn’t too late to annul my betrothal and avoid divine punishment…]

Byronne: (Calmly, he looks at his son.) Et si je n'en fais rien...? (Without warning, he grabs Chrisseine's left hand and forces it onto the poker. The sound of flesh burning follows.)

Byronne: [(Calmly, he looks at his son.) And if I don't...? (Without warning, he grabs Chrisseine's left hand and forces it onto the poker. The sound of flesh burning follows.)]

Chrisseine: (He screams in pain.)

Byronne: (He is eerily apathetic about this situation.) Soyez un bon enfant, très chère. (He takes Chrisseine's right hand and pushes it onto the surface of the poker.) Nous n'aurions pas à faire une chose aussi horrible...

Byronne: [(He is eerily apathetic about this situation.) Do be a good child, my dear. (He takes Chrisseine's right hand and pushes it onto the surface of the poker.) Then...we wouldn’t have to do such terrible things…]

Chrisseine: P-par pitié arrêtez! Vous n'accomplissez rien en détruisant mes mains ! Que...qu'est ce le roi de Bucchanary dira?!

Chrisseine: [P-Please stop! You're achieving nothing by ruining my hands! What...what will the Bucchanary king say?!

Byronne: Vous pouvez toujours porter des gants. (He releases Chrisseine's hand and replaces the poker.) Maintenant...(He takes out a long rod and flicks it, earning a satisfying swish.) Nous n'en avons pas encore finit...

Byronne: [You can always wear gloves. (He releases Chrisseine's hand and replaces the poker.) Now...(He takes out a long rod and flicks it, earning a satisfying swish.) We aren't done yet.]

Chrisseine: (Disgust flashes across his face.) Cela vous amuse-t-il de me voir autant souffrir?! Est ce que je ressemble à ce point à mère?!

Chrisseine: [(Disgust flashes across his face.) Do you get stiff from seeing me in pain?! Do I
resemble mother that much?!

Byronne: (His face is surprisingly calm.) Non, aucunement. Vous tenez plus de moi. Et par pitié Christophe. Cessez un tel langage. (He smacks both of Chrisseine's hands with the rod.)

Byronne: [(His face is surprisingly calm.) No, you don't. You take after me more. And please, Christophe. Refrain from such language. (He smacks both of Chrisseine's hands with the rod.)]

Chrisseine: (He grimaces in pain.)

Byronne: (He repeatedly smacks Chrisseine's hands until Chrisseine screams in pain. Each hit is slow and measured.) Voilà un bon enfant.

Byronne: [(He repeatedly smacks Chrisseine's hands until Chrisseine screams in pain. Each hit is slow and measured.) That's a good child.]

---⊈---

Byron:...That's a good child.

(The camera zooms out and shows Michael pouring the tea for the family.)

Christopher: Eleven more days...

Byron: They will all pass by in the blink of an eye...

Christopher:...Indeed.

Thomas:...Tch! I'm tired of you moping around! You get to be married off to someone you know! And they're rich, too! So why...Why are you mis-

Christopher: (Agitated.) Because he is my student.

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow.) But you seemed so happy with him. Don’t tell me that this is all just an act and that you continue to loathe the idea of a marriage.

Christopher: (Quietly.) But I’ve always viewed him as a brother.
Thomas: (He scoffs at the word. It seems to leave a bitter taste in his mouth.)...Brother...Do you see me as one?

Christopher: (He starts.) Thomas! How dare you question my—

Thomas: Well how dare you complain about being married off to a life of luxury?! (He turns to Byron.) You've never loved me so I know what's left for me. Some random whore off the streets.

Byron: (Amusement flickers in his eyes.) You silly boy...The person I'm planning for you to marry off to is none other than that Kamishiro girl. We have time to rearrange, if you'd like. Perhaps you prefer her twin brother?

Thomas: (He grimaces.) I'd rather die than be stuck with that fish-faced brat. (His expression changes into a contemplative look mixed with regret.)...His sister...Rio... is a better alternative but nonetheless...she is only 15.

Byron: (He sips his tea.) That's why I said we still have time.

Thomas:..But...what would Ryoga say...?!

Byron: What would that boy's opinion matter? We are far more influential than those two.

Thomas: Then what is the purpose of marrying one of the two?

Byron: (He looks down at his tea and smiles.) Time will tell, Thomas. But know this...I have a purpose for everything.

Thomas: (He puts his teacup down with an audible clink and stands.) Permission to leave?

Byron:...Granted.

Michael: (Quietly, from his own cup of tea.)...Do you...do you have plans for me, dearest father?

Byron: (He smiles.) No, not yet. I’m not ready to part with my youngest child yet. Even the thought of you leaving saddens my heart.
Michael: I...I’m happy you think that way, father. (He sips his tea.) I do like the idea of us four—soon five—in this house.

Christopher: (He abruptly stands up.) Permission to leave, dearest father?

Byron: (He nods.) Permission granted.

Christopher: (He walks upstairs into Thomas's room. Thomas is seen gently cradling a porcelain doll that resembles Rio.)...Thomas? Are you alright?

Thomas: (He shakily puts down the doll.) Ch-Chris!

Christopher: (He eyes the Rio doll.) Is something the matter?

Thomas: (His eyes grow distant.) It's...just a lot to take in...The girl that I burned...Will be my future wife...? I don’t think she’d agree to it. She’s a strong girl from what I see and she doesn’t deserve being stuck here. Whenever I see her...I can’t speak, I can’t move...I just think back to that day...(The sounds of wood burning is heard in the distance.) The day I injured her...

Christopher: It isn’t your fault, Thomas. It never was. (His voice lowers.) It was Tron’s. We both know that.

Thomas:...Are you sure?

Christopher: Is it your fault that you didn’t know what that card would do to her? No. It isn’t. Is it your fault that you played that card because you were told to do so? No. You were just a good son obeying what he thought was his father.

Thomas: But...I…

Christopher: You’re a hero for saving the Kamishiro girl.

Thomas: But I started the duel.
Christopher: On Tron’s orders. Is the executioner acting on the king’s orders a sinful man? He is only doing what he is told by a higher power. At his very core, he is innocent. It is the king who is the sinful man.

Thomas: (He mournfully rests the Rio doll on his desk. It seems out of place amidst the papers and envelopes.)

Christopher: (He picks up the Rio doll and eyes the other porcelain doll that resembles Ryoga.) This is excellent craftsmanship. You could almost call the resemblance disturbing.

Thomas: (He shrugs.) Just like you to give a backhanded compliment like that. (He folds his arms behind his head.) I’ve been doing it for awhile now. Country life gets boring when you’re cut off from the rest of society.

Christopher:...I guess we all have our hobbies and ways to manage our boredom. Care to show me?

Thomas:...Keep it a secret, ok? I don't need half of Heartland to know I make creepy replicas of the people around me. (He picks up the Rio and Ryoga dolls and walks over to his personal bathroom. In it are the doors to his walk-in closet. He opens up the doors and the lights turn on. There’s a few articles of clothing on the floor but the rest are neatly hung on both sides of the room. At the back of the room, there are shelves with a few porcelain dolls on them.)

Christopher:...Thomas...They’re beautiful.

Thomas: (He puts the Rio and Ryoga dolls on the shelf and turns around.) Do you really think so?

Christopher: (He looks at the dolls in amazement.) They’re so detailed... And you grouped them according to family name...Kamishiro and Arclight...(He pauses for a few moments as he looks at the dolls. He pauses at the Thomas doll.) Why do we all look happy besides you? (The Christopher, Michael and Byron dolls serenely smile while the Thomas doll has missing eyes and is marred with scratches.)

Thomas: (His voice has an edge to it.) Isn't that how I look like? Scarred and deformed? Besides...I didn't make any of these dolls perfect. Look at yours. There's a hint of sadness in his smile. And Michael's. Doesn't his smile look forced? And father's...Didn't he always have that hint of grief in his smile after mother passed? (He lets out a laugh.) We've been a broken
family from the very start, even before Tron returned.

Christopher: (He gives the dolls another look and nods his head. Then, he pauses.)...And...mother...?

Thomas: (He gently puts back the Rio and Ryoga dolls.)...I didn't make one yet because I don't think my skills are good enough. Besides, I can barely remember her personality.

Christopher:...That’s understandable.

Thomas: (Looking at his doll.) I think it's better to leave it like this.

Christopher: (Gently.) Thomas, you aren't deformed or ugly.

Thomas: (He looks away.) Mother always said I reminded her of when she was young. That's mostly all I can remember. And from those photos and videos...She always seemed restless. And always showed the right side of her face and never her left. Because she had different colored eyes. One deep blue, like yours...and one red...like mine. The red one was what she called her "affliction." Do you remember that? Well, imagine her surprise when she gave birth to a son with both afflicted eyes. (A small smile fills his face.) But she loved me...despite everything I was. (He exhales.) I miss her.

Christopher: Thomas...

Thomas: (The words come out, one after another. With each word, he returns to his natural British accent.) I left my eyes out because I don't like them. They remind me too much of mother. They remind me too much of the awful things I’ve seen and done. Despite everything I do...It always turns out horrible. (His voice breaks.) It’s...it’s terribly difficult to love yourself when you’re plagued by grief every night. When you keep on hearing the wood burning...When you keep on feeling the heat of the flames on your skin...(There is a long pause.) How does one live with oneself if they’ve lived a life full of sin such as I?

Christopher: (His face is gentle and he embraces Thomas.) My dear brother...You must learn how to love yourself. (He instinctively wipes away Thomas's tears.) All is said and all is done and we, as a family have been forgiven. Please stop lingering in the past, Thomas. Rio has recovered from her injuries. Ryoga has...forgiven...your actions...to an extent. So please...Stop hating yourself. It's not your fault. It was Tron's. The Lord forgives those who repent...And you have repented many times over...
Thomas: I thought you stopped believing after father disappeared. When...we realized that there was no gods or God. Just demons.

Christopher: (He swallows.)...It’s an old habit of mine. Even after all these years...it remains. Habits are difficult to overcome.

Thomas: (He buries his face in Christopher’s chest.) Nonetheless, hearing about God is soothing at times like this...Even if He may not help us.

Christopher: (He looks down at Thomas gently.) In times of turmoil, we all must have something to hold onto...(He rests his head in Thomas’s hair and begins to whisper The Lord’s Prayer.) Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come…

(Thomas finishes the rest of the prayer with his brother in unison.)

Thomas and Christopher:... your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...Give us our daily bread...And forgive us our debts...as we...have also forgiven our debtors...And lead us not into temptation...but deliver us from the evil one. Amen.

(Silence fills the room and the two brothers continue to embrace. After awhile, Christopher takes in a deep breath and separates himself from Thomas.)

Christopher:...It has been a long time since I have recited that prayer...You...and I...both need to stop hating ourselves.

Thomas: (He weakly nods.)

Christopher: We must learn to forgive and forget…

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(The sounds of carriage wheels fill the air. Kaith is seen riding with his father. He takes a locket out of his jacket and opens up the pendant to reveal a miniature of Chrissieine. Quietly, he speaks.)

Kaith: I wonder how she will feel about me. Is it not part of Laellan culture for the groom to, instead of first sending a portrait, meet his prospective bride in person? She has never even
Robertson:...They are a demanding people. But, you will see your bride’s initial reaction to your face instead of a practiced one after she has seen your face on a portrait dozens of times.

Kaith: Granted that she is a poor actress.

Robertson: (He chuckles.) Yes, granted.

Kaith: (Still looking at the miniature.) Perhaps I should paint a star on my right cheek to compliment her moon.

Robertson: A strategic choice for gaining the trust of your bride. But do not try to compliment her too much. It would be a sign of weakness on our part.

Kaith: Of course. At your weakest, appear most confident.

Robertson: Indeed. Our kingdom is but a small pebble in the river. That is why we must pretend that we are mountains in order to continue living.

Kaith: (He looks outside the window.) Laelle seems the same as Bucchanary.

Robertson: (He reclines in his seat.) You must not judge a place by its people. It is its inhabitants and the culture that surrounds them that make a kingdom.

Kaith: (He closes the curtains and closes his eyes.) I can see her now. A beautiful woman who holds me in her arms. And then...(He opens his eyes.) She takes my neck and snaps it.

Robertson: Kaith…!

Kaith: A true king has no friends. Only enemies that he keeps close and people that despise
him. My future wife is no different.

---💫---

(Kaito jolts up from his bed. Sunlight fills the room and he blearily looks at his clock. It reads 12 PM and he sighs.)

Kaito: Another one of those dreams... (He gets up from his bed.) Just what do they mean...?

(He heads downstairs to where Dr. Faker and Haruto are poring over an engineering magazine.)

Haruto: (He turns around as he hears Kaito reach the bottom of the stairs.) Nii-san! I was so worried about yesterday! (He runs over to his brother.) Are you alright now?

Kaito: Yes, I'm fine. (He goes to the kitchen.)

Haruto: (He follows his brother.) You were out for awhile.. I wasn’t sure if you were okay or not.

Kaito: (He opens up the cupboards.) It’s difficult to keep me down for long. Besides... (He pulls out a box of cereal.) I needed that rest.

Dr. Faker: (From his seat.) Yeah, since you were sleeping so peacefully, I didn’t want to wake you.

Kaito: (A brief grimace passes over his face.) Sure. I’m heading over to the Arclights after breakfast. Once I come back, we can get to talking.

Dr. Faker: Thought you said the next time you were comin’ over, you were bringing a gun.

Kaito:...(He gives his father a sideways glance.) An uneasy truce has been called.
(Kaito is in the Arclight living room. He sits on a chair facing Christopher, a drink in his hands.)

Kaito:...And I swear, Chris...these dreams keep on coming…

Christopher: (He sighs.) You are not alone, Kaito. The dreams are also happening more and more frequently to me.

Kaito: If this truly is a warning...then why must these dreams be so cryptic?

Christopher: I am a man of science, Kaito…

Kaito: (He snorts.) Despite all the crazy things you’ve been through?

Christopher: (He stiffens.) That’s…

Kaito: (He looks at his drink.) Nonetheless...I too, am a man of science...But I do have my doubts.

Byron: (He comes down the stairs. His calm voice has an undertone of anger.) Ah, Kaito. What a surprise. Christopher, I thought I told you to keep disrespectful guests out.

Kaito: (He grimaces and stands up.) I show respect to those that I feel deserve it.

Byron: (He has reached the bottom of the stairs.) And is your father in-law someone you think deserves respect?

Kaito: (Unflinchingly.) Of course. Unless he's being an asshole.

Byron: (He wrinkles his nose at the coarse language. With unexpected quickness, he slaps Kaito across the face.) There will be no vulgar language in this house.

Kaito: (Instinctively, he puts his hand to his stinging cheek.)...!
Christopher: K-Kaito!

Byron: Truly...has Faker taught you nothing on respect…? Well...your mother wasn’t much help either, now was she? I can see where you get your penchant for direct and indirect jibes...Well, that only makes it more suitable what you’re wearing on your wedding day.

Kaito: I ain’t wearin’ no dress, if that’s what you’re implyin’.

Byron: (A smug smile fills his face.) We shall see about that. Now, I do believe it is your time to leave, Mr. Tenjo.

Kaito: (He stands up.) No.

Byron: Indeed? The last thing I remember is that this is my domain. If you refuse to leave... (His arm comes towards Christopher and grabs a bunch of his hair. Christopher gasps in pain as Byron begins to pull it.) Then Christopher will leave.

Christopher: Father...! Please...I...I can—

Byron: (He tugs harder on Christopher’s hair, eliciting a gasp of pain.) That’s dearest father to you. Now, come.

Christopher: (He shakily stands up and follows his father. Kaito stands there in shock.) Apologies... (As he is lead into another room, he gives Kaito one last glance. He mouths an apology.)

(When the door closes behind him, the room has grown eerily silent.)

Kaito: Ch...Chris...You let yourself be abused like that...?
(In another part of the house, Michael and Thomas are organizing their decks.)

Michael: Should I include any of the new cards I purchased…? On second thought, they don’t seem to fit with my deck as I had initially thought.

Thomas: (He looks at the cards in Michael’s hand and scrutinizes them.) Well...(He points to one of the cards.) Don’t include that one. It doesn’t fit with this deck’s strategy. Save it for your other one, the one with the Karakuri.

Michael: (He rests the card down and looks at the others in his hands and on the table.) Good point. Now...(He holds up a card for his brother.) Does this one fit with my original deck?

Thomas: (He nods in approval.) Smart. This would help with summoning support faster.

Michael: That’s what I thought. (He puts the card on top of his deck.) I’ve been debating on whether or not I should include—

(The sound of a small bell being rung is heard. The two brothers immediately stiffen.)

Michael: (He shakily sets down the cards in his hands.) D-dearest brother…

Thomas: (He takes Michael’s hand and squeezes it.) Let’s...let’s go…

Michael: (His lip quivers and he shakes his head.) I’m scared, Thomas.

Thomas: He...he probably just did something small. It’s...it’s Chris, after all.

Michael: I don’t want to see...(Tears fill his eyes.) I don’t want to stand there and look...(His voice breaks.) I...I can’t bear another...(The next word comes out in a shaky whisper.) presentation.
Thomas:...It only gets worse if we don’t come.

(Slowly, the brothers walk out of the room. The camera goes to a servant’s bell. It rings, its eerie tone filling the room.)

---Episode 13~END---

Episode illustration [here](#)
Falling Apart

Chapter Notes

Thank you to Iyliss for the French translations! Once again, the world of Laelle would not be complete without you!

----Episode 14---

Falling Apart

(The scene slowly fades into a dark basement. Byron stands above Christopher, who is splayed on the floor. Thomas and Michael stand in a corner, with Michael holding onto his brother for support.)

Thomas:...Stop...Please...For Michael...(He protectively holds Michael in his arms. The young boy is shaking as he looks at Byron’s cane.)

Byron: (He slowly turns around to face Thomas.) Are you telling the man that raised you what to do? You, the spurned middle child?

Thomas: (Hurt flickers across his face but it is soon replaced by an incredulous smile.) You...? Raise us?! Ha! That's like saying I'm a proper British boy with manners! (His smile turns into a sneer.) You abandoned us.

Byron: If I remember correctly, I was pushed down a cliff without being asked if I wanted to be with my children or not...(He looks down at Christopher.) Thomas, I will not physically punish you...Instead, you will continue to watch your brother suffer. Because of your insolence. (He smiles coldly.) Isn't that right, Christopher?

Christopher: (He is sprawled on the floor, his hair covering his face. Parts of his clothes are ripped and scratched.)...

Byron: It is quite fitting that you have “Christ” in your name...For you are paying for the sins of Kaito and Thomas.
Christopher:...And like Christ, I am being wrongfully punished.

Byron: (A flash of anger passes by his face. He turns to Thomas and his apathetic expression returns.) You see, Thomas...This is what happens when children do not listen. (He yanks Christopher's hair and tilts Christopher's head to face him) I will break you. Into obedience. Into servitude. Into love. Mark my words.

Christopher:...Before I drop dead from your cruelty?

(He drops Christopher onto the floor and steps on his back, his patience growing thin. In the background, Michael buries his face in Thomas’s chest.)

Byron: (With warning.) Watch, Michael. And learn from your brother’s mistakes. You see...Boys without their fathers tend to grow up wild. (He raises his cane.) You were without me for 5 years...(Disgust fills his voice.) and what damage that has done! If it wasn't for Faker, my boys would have grown up to be the very definition of the Resurrection gentleman! (He grinds the bottom of the cane in the middle of Christopher’s back.) Honestly...You are almost as bad as Faker’s son. (He takes a step back and kicks Christopher in the ribs, sending him across the floor.)

Christopher: (Weakly.)...W-Well if you never left...

Michael: (He snaps. The entire room silences, everyone looks at him in mute surprise.) You never would have changed into the bastard that we're all trapped with! My God! (He trembles half in fear, half in anger.) Where the hell did our true father go?! Every day all of us live in fear like rats! (Tears fill his eyes.) How long before one of us goes to hang ourselves on a nearby tree or jump out the second story window?! (The tears fall out of his eyes.) Are you even our father...?

Byron: (His eyes widen in shock. His expression darkens. His voice comes out unsettlingly soft.) Is this what all the unrest is about? Me, changing for the greater good?! In those 5 years wandering that desolate, warping hell, it dawned upon me that the good people are the first to die. The ruthless majority will take advantage of them. Like how all the weak creatures are disappearing, the good people are too. Only the strong will survive, and I intend to see through this rebellion.

Christopher:....Justifying your actions by blaming it on society....A weak excuse...

Byron: (He grinds his heel into Christopher's back.) Well, I see that those 5 years have affected every single one of you. What is this, a zoo? (He lowers his eyes onto Christopher)
You have become such a slovenly mess. You have even neglected to tie up your hair. Instead, you let it sweep down your back and allow the wind to toss it back and forth as it pleases. Man is not to bow down before nature, Christopher. He must adapt in order to overcome it. (He lifts his cane and grinds it upon Christopher's hand.) I would rather have a son with broken fingers than a broken set of morals. Pity. Your hands always did resemble your mother's in her later years. Soft and delicate.

Thomas: Stop it! Please!

Christopher: (He gasps as the foot of the cane digs deeper into his flesh) Dearest...Father...

Byron: Kaito’s blatant disrespect must be rubbing off on you. You’ve failed to control him and for that, you must be punished. In fact, you’ve failed to control any of your brothers. They’ve all grown wild and must be trimmed down. (He turns to Thomas and Michael.) If he truly loves you then he will gladly bear all your sins. But if he doesn’t...(He lifts the cane.) You have a choice, Christopher. You may have a brother of your choosing take your place...and have him suffer tenfold what I am about to unleash...Or stay here and accept all of their sins...You abandoned them once so it would not be hard to abandon them again. (He begins to pace around Christopher, his newly shined shoes’ heels clacking against the floor. He observes the scene of fear in the basement and a cruel smile fills his face. His voice fills the room as he speaks.) So. What will it be?

Christopher: (He looks at his two brothers. Thomas’s expression is unreadable while Michael trembles with fear.) ...I...I cannot...I will not abandon you two again. (He takes in a deep breath and looks at Byron. He grasps at the floor, his hands balled into fists. His voice has hardened.) Punish me. Do your worst. But no matter what...Remember that I am a dedicated brother. Leaving them to the system was a decision I was as powerless in making as you when you were pushed into Barian world. (His voice is quiet as he says the next words.) I love them.

Byron: (He coldly smiles.) An animal’s loyalty to another’s is fascinating to observe. Very well. (He turns to Michael and Thomas.) Observe, my sons...The disciplining of your brother. (He grabs Christopher’s hand, which is red from the cane grinding it.) You have always played the piano well. Unfortunately, I think you’ll need to take...a rest from it for awhile. (He takes Christopher’s index finger and slowly bends it all the way back. When he almost gets to the back, there’s a sickening crack and Christopher screams.) For Kaito. (Byron then moves to Christopher’s middle finger.) Thomas. (He angrily breaks the finger and Christopher continues to scream. Michael begins to cry. Byron takes Christopher’s ring finger and returns to slowly pushing it backwards.) Michael.

Christopher: (Tears are streaming down his face and he screams in pain as his finger is broken.)
Byron: (He rests Christopher’s hand on the cement floor and steps on it, eliciting another set of screams.) We are not done yet, Christopher. (Christopher weakly looks up at his father but Byron roughly steps on his head, the impact audible in the silent room. After a few moments facedown, there is a small puddle of blood from underneath.) The floor does not deserve your filth. *Lick it up.* (He removes his foot from Christopher’s head.)

Christopher: (He lifts his head up, revealing his bloody nose. He gives his two brothers a glance. Thomas is burying his face in Michael’s hair and Michael is looking at Christopher with tears in his eyes.) A-as you w-wish...dearest...father. (He begins to clean the floor of his blood with his tongue.)

Byron:...like the filthy animal that you are...It sickens me. (He takes his walking stick and begins to mercilessly beat Christopher.)

Christopher: (He is in already too much pain to scream. Instead, he collapses in his own blood, tears streaming from his eyes.)

Byron: (He harshly strikes Christopher’s back.) Kaito. (He smashes his cane on Christopher’s left hand.) Thomas. (He strikes Christopher’s legs.) Michael. (He repeatedly bashes Christopher’s back.) THOMAS! (He kicks Christopher’s side.) Marleen’s creature! (He stomps on the back of Christopher’s knee.) Michael! (He repeatedly stomps on Christopher’s hand with the broken fingers. There is a hellish scream following with each step.)

Thomas: (He steps up.) STOP! This...this is barbaric! If...if you’re going to hurt one of us like that, then hurt me! Break me for all I care! Break every single goddamned part of me! But don’t...hurt...Chris. He’s done nothing but reject what has been decided for him and wants to be on his own. He’s just drunk on the American morals. Other than that...(He swallows.) Other than that he’s your most loyal son. Deep down he will follow you wherever you lead him...He’s just stressed from the upcoming wedding...So please...

Christopher: (His voice is a pained whisper, his face a bloody and tear-streaked mess.) Thomas...Don’t. Please.

Byron: (He looks at Thomas.) He has already made his decision. He will bear your sins. But...it *is* interesting that you actually *do* think highly of your slovenly brother. Well. Animals have always stuck together. (He gives Christopher one last savage kick in the ribs, eliciting an exclamation of pain.) Good day. (He walks out of the room.)
Michael: (He kneels down next to Christopher and gingerly takes his crushed hand.) Sh-should I call the hospital…?

Christopher: (He weakly shakes his head.) N..no...don’t.

Thomas: But…!

Christopher: Please...no…

Michael: You’ve…

Christopher: It’s...fine.

Thomas: Fine, my ass! Your fingers are fucking broken!

Christopher: One of you can search up ways to splint broken fingers, can’t you?

Thomas: You need a fucking hospital! Bloody hell, Chris! Health insurance doesn’t cost us a cent!

Christopher: (He weakly shakes his head.) They’ll know father did it.

Michael: Please…

Christopher: (Despite his weakened state, his voice suddenly hardens.) No.

Michael: (He is silenced by his brother’s glare.)

Thomas: Tch…! (He quickly turns to Michael.) Michael! Get the bandages.
Michael: Y-yes, brother! (He runs off.)

Thomas: (He mutters to Christopher.) You’re lucky that we learned how to do this when we were in foster care. All that fighting taught us a lot. Especially how to defend ourselves...Which is useful as hell when he's beating us.

Christopher: (After a moment of silence.)...I’m sure...our father is in there...somewhere deep down. S-surely...

Thomas: (Examines the hand) Hmph. That's an understatement. He's dead.

Christopher: Thomas...! I will not have you speak that way about father! He's here! He is! I'm sure of it! If only...If only…(His lips tremble.)

Thomas: YOU’RE A BLOODY MESS FOR GODS’ SAKE! AND YOU STILL INSIST THE MAN WHO DID THAT TO YOU IS STILL OUR FATHER?!

Christopher: (A fresh wave of tears fill his eyes. His voice shakes.) Yes.

Thomas: (His anger builds.) Does he let us do the things we once were allowed to do? Does he still shower us with gifts? (He loses his self control. His voice becomes hoarse as he shouts, tired of his forced American accent and slowly slipping back into his natural British accent.) DO YOU STILL SEE LOVE AND WARMTH IN THOSE HONEY COLORED EYES?! DOES HE STILL INVITE US TO HIS ROOM TO READ?! DOES HE...(His voice suddenly turns soft.) Does he even care about us anymore? (He looks down at Christopher’s hand and tears fill his eyes. Sadness fills his voice.) To tell you the truth...I too have been hoping for our father to resurface...although I am not as patient as you are. But...I can tell that we are both starting to split at our seams. (He clears his throat and quickly blinks away his tears.) I've always loved mother's hands. Everything about mother was just so perfect...Even her mismatched eyes were beautiful to me. You carry yourself with the rigidity and grace of father. Everything you do reminds me of him. Except your hands. (He grimaces at the broken fingers.) J...just like mother’s.

Christopher: (He gives Thomas a weak smile.)...You always did have a strange liking towards beautiful body parts. I've never understood why. Whether it was a set of eyes...a certain finger...sculpted legs... (He sighs.) What am I doing...? Talking to you like this…?
Thomas: (A cloud of anger fills his expression.) Tch! We were talking just like the old times! When we were just Thomas and Christopher! Not IV and V! I actually thought my brother came back for a few moments!

Christopher: (Tears well in his eyes.) ...Thomas…I’m trying so hard to be the column that you can lean against. Isn’t that what you want? I want to be strong for you. I want...I want to be someone you can depend on. It shouldn’t be me who is crying and you who is comforting…(His lips tremble.) I’m sorry, Thomas. I just want to be there for you...for all those years that I couldn’t have.

Thomas: (His anger dissipates into dismay.) No, Chris. No. It’s not like that. The past can stay in the past. Look, we weren’t at our best. We all know that. But now, we’re starting anew. As brothers, we should be here for one another. Yes, you are strong...but...we must let go sometimes...We shouldn’t suppress such feelings that eat us from the inside out. For gods’ sake...It only leads to tragedy...I out of all people would know that.

Christopher: (Tears fall down his chin.) For a moment...I thought I saw mother in you.

Thomas: (There’s a gentle smile on his face.) Well...I always did resemble her the most.

Michael: (He enters the room with a first aid kit.) I’m here.

(Thomas beckons Michael to come. Immediately, the youngest Arclight sets to splinting Christopher’s wound.)

Christopher: (He winces in pain.) Goodness...You’ve had experience.

Michael: (His expression is grim.) Growing up in the system taught me things.

Thomas: (His eyes grow misty.) Sometimes, I wonder what we did to deserve any of this. Is it a failure in our characters?
Michael: No. (He secures a bandage with his mouth.) Sometimes, we are just dealt unfavorable lots in life.

Christopher: (He closes his eyes and sighs.) We are what we are.

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(It is the next day. Christopher and Kaito are near the lakeside, sitting side by side. Kaito plays the harmonica while Christopher reads.)

Christopher: (He gently closes the book.) Literary rubbish.

Kaito: (He abruptly stops playing the harmonica.) Mmm?

Christopher: This is supposed to be a psychological novel about the intricate workings of one's brain, but in reality, it's just a cynical outlook on how awful the human race is. It's just an excuse for the author to scream out their opinions through thinly veiled insults.

Kaito: (Quietly.) Isn't that how all books are...? Authors just screaming out their opinions?

Christopher: You may have a point there…

Kaito: Let me see. (He grabs the book and skims through it.) It's just like the others. (He continues flipping through the pages.) A self obsessed person wanting to be heard. (He hands the book back to Christopher.) Garbage. (He looks at Christopher’s bandaged fingers.) What happened there?

Christopher: (He colors a bit.) A careless mishap of sorts....it's nothing, really.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) You shouldn’t let your guard down, Chris.

Christopher:...I’m...I’m aware of that…

Kaito: (He continues looking at the injury.) You sure it was just ‘an accident’?
Christopher: (Unflinching.) Yes. It was. In a fit of anger, I punched a metal wall.

Kaito: (His eyes narrow.) What made you mad?

Christopher: I was not mental I was—

(Kaito looks at Christopher with a quizzical expression.)

Christopher: Oh. *That “mad.”* Apologies. (He clears his throat in embarrassment.) We don’t often use that word at my house with that definition in mind. U-unfortunately we don’t use a lot slang or basic terms...Resurrection English and all. (He gives Kaito a sheepish smile.) Cultural differences can be trying at times.

Kaito: But didn’t you work with my father for a long time? His American English must’ve rubbed off of you somehow...

Christopher: It's been ages, Kaito. Goodness, is time playing tricks on your mind?

Kaito: (Contemplatively.) Maybe so...maybe so...The wedding is in more than a week but it feels like years...(He takes in a deep breath.) Thank goodness.

Christopher:...Have you found what you'll be wearing?

Kaito: (Deadpan.) I was thinking of going to the dumpster behind a nightclub or heading to a secondhand store in Heartland City.

Christopher: Ah, yes...Heartlandian fashion never ceases to catch the eye. But...my father already has something for you if...if something like that happens.

Kaito: (He scoffs.) Yes, my father told me. It was a dress.

Christopher:...(He sighs and looks at the green book in his hands.)...Yes.
Kaito: Good luck shoving me inside of it. (He laughs.) I'm not above beating him to a pulp for all he's done.

Christopher: (Exasperated.) Kaito...

Kaito: I'm being honest here. If I'm to be a bride, it'd take a hell lot of muscle to bring me down n' into that dress he has.

Christopher: It's a role none of us are willing to play...Bride and groom...What's the difference?

Kaito: Dammit, Chris! (His southern twang is emphasized.) Why the hell aren't we fightin' back?! Ten days and what're we doin'?! Talking like two old ladies in the park!

Christopher: We have ten days to prepare our minds and bodies...

Kaito: Does that make it any better?!

Christopher: It's-

Kaito: (He raises both hands.) I ain't hearin' any more o' this. (He rises and walks away, leaving an exasperated Christopher.)

Christopher: Kaito...

Kaito: (He refuses to turn around.) What?

Christopher: The dress design...(He swallows.) It's your mother's.

Kaito: (He chokes in his words.) R-repeat that p-please...?

Christopher: (His expression is pained.) The dress...is a replica of your mother's wedding dress.

Kaito: (He turns angrily turns around to face Christopher.) That's a fucking insult to her memory!
Christopher: (He winces at the foul language.) Kaito...please...

Kaito: Your father wants to damage *my* pride and destroy my father's mental health! He's tried so hard to forget about my mother! Hell, right after her funeral, he ran away and constructed Heartland just to forget about her!

Christopher: (He is shocked into silence.)...I...I didn't know that he wanted to forget so—

Kaito: Of course you don't! That's because you don't want to know! You lock yourself up in your ivory tower and shut out all the woes of this world!

Christopher: You and I know very well that this isn't true! We've been through thick and thin together and we have suffered equally!

Kaito: I DIED ON THE MOON!

(His voice echoes across the pond and there is a brief moment of silence.)

Christopher: (His voice is a hushed whisper.) Kaito!

Kaito: *Don't ever* tell me that you've had it worse! I was coerced into working under that pile of human refuse, Heartland and my father! Do you know how many sins have accumulated for me over the years?! I'm going to hell and I don't need you to follow me!

Christopher: Kaito...I...I’m sorry that you...

Kaito: Shut up! Sh*t the hell up! You know *nothin’* about what happened to me! So don’t even try to send your half-assed condolences!

Christopher:....! (He covers his mouth with his hand.)

Kaito: I’m tired, Chris! Tired of you just...rollin’ over an’ dyin’! Tired of how you let that man abuse you til’ you’re just dust an’ bones... (His voice is a hoarse whisper.) When will it stop? You can’t hang on forever, Chris.
Christopher:...(His eyes are filled with tears.) I’ve fought so hard to get him back. Why, after all that we have done...why must we lose him all over again? (He swallows.) Kaito...This is where you don’t understand. He is my father. A man who cared for me. A man who taught me how to grow. I can’t lose him...all over again.

Kaito: He’s not your father. That is Tron.

Christopher: (Pleading.) Try to understand, Kaito. I need him.

Kaito: No. No you don’t. You are a strong, capable individual who can stand on your own two legs. He’s only making you think you need him.

Christopher: It’s difficult for you to understand...maybe because your relationship with your father was not as close as mine was.

Kaito: No. It ain’t and it will never be. But that doesn’t change my opinion that the man you are living with is an abuser.

Christopher:...Kaito. Your mother...(He is hesitant to speak the next words because he knows that this is risky territory.) If she came back...would you do everything in your power to keep her with you?

(Kaito’s eyes widen as his suppressed memories fill his mind. He sees a scene from his childhood, featuring his mother and son sleeping in the hot afternoon sun, surrounded by science textbooks. She is a short, curvaceous woman with blue curls and the same set of bangs as her son. Her skin is pale and she wears a simple blouse and skirt. Her black flats are loose from her small feet. Her gentle smile is reminiscent of a younger Kaito’s. The scene fades to black and we see a thin arm connected to an IV. Her voice, gentle and tinged with a southern accent fills the scene.)

Marleen:...please...take care of Haruto for me. You’re...the only one I can trust....(Her final words come out in a whisper.) Kaito.
(The sound of a flatline is heard. Returning to the present, Kaito’s shocked face slowly becomes engulfed in rage. His voice comes out eerily soft but shaking with anger.)

Kaito: You know nothing. (He takes a step forwards.) You know nothin’, Chris. (His fists shake.) She can stay dead. Because you know what? (He gives Christopher a rough shove.) SHE’D BE GODDAMNED ASHAMED O’ THIS GODDAMN MARRIAGE THAT WE’VE GOTTEN OURSELVES INTO! SHE CAN STAY DEAD BECAUSE ALL SHE DID WAS GOT USED AND USED TIL’ SHE COULDN’T GOT USED NO MORE AND DROPPED DEAD FOR ALL SHE DID! DAD TOOK HER FOR GRANTED AND IT HURT TO SEE HER GETTIN’ USED. IT HURT TO SEE HER CRY. IT HURT TO SEE THE ONLY PERSON THAT TRULY LOVED YOU GET BEATEN DOWN AND YOU COULDN’T DO JACK SHIT ABOUT IT. IT FUCKING HURT TO SEE HER WITHER AWAY WITHOUT KNOWIN’ WHY SHE WAS WITHERIN’ CAUSE YOUR DAD NEVER TOLD YOU WHY MOMMA WAS SO SICK. AND ALL THOSE LATE NIGHTS SPENT TRYIN’ TO SEE WHAT WAS WRONG WITH HER END UP IN SMOKE CAUSE IT WASN’T NO DISEASE THAT KILLED HER BUT IT WAS YOUR DAD’S FUCKING SCIENCE EXPERIMENT THAT ENDED UP KILLIN’ HER! SO NO! I WOULDN’T BRING HER BACK FOR THE WORLD, CHRIS! (Tears are streaming down his face.) SHE DON’T DESERVE TO SUFFER NO MORE. (His voice quiets and shakes with emotion. Kaito averts his eyes from Christopher.) She don’t deserve to go through that all over again. (He takes in a shaky deep breath.) And I don’t think my heart could take it, watchin’ her die all over again.

(After a long moment of silence.)

Christopher:...Kaito...what happened to us?

Kaito: (He angrily wipes his tears away.) We broke, Chris. Dying broke us. Even now I feel like somethin’s missin’.

Christopher:...(Pain fills his expression.) Then let us fix each other...to the best of our abilities.

Kaito: How?

Christopher:...I’m not sure.
Kaito: (Quietly.) Do you know how it feels when you’ve been forced to bury all the memories of the person you’ve loved deep, deep down?

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito intensely.) Yes, in fact I have.

Kaito: Who was it?

Christopher: (He has difficulty replying. He swallows the lump in his throat, and his voice remains barely above an inaudible whisper.) You.

Kaito: (He sadly shakes his head.) You ain’t ever felt love like mine before, have you, Chris? It’s a different kind of love than what you have for me.

Christopher: (He takes a step back.) I…

Kaito: (He looks at the pond.) You loved them so much that it made your day whenever they smiled. And whenever they cried, it just about snapped your heart in two. You’d die for them. You treasured every moment you spent with them. You wouldn’t know what to do without them because they’ve been by your side from the second you’ve been born. And then…(His lips tremble.) and then...they’re gone. (A fresh wave of tears fill his face. The scene now features a 12-year old Kaito in a black suit. Baby Haruto is in his arms. Kaito is sobbing profusely.) You feel lost. (It switches to a scene of Kaito taking care of Haruto while his father is throwing away his mother’s belongings. Young Kaito’s lips tremble.) You’re dying. (The sounds of things burning fills the scene. The camera zooms out to Kaito’s apathetic face as he watches his mother’s things being burnt. Kaito’s voice has been reduced to a shaky whisper.) You’re dead. (The scene slowly fades back to the present, where Kaito is looking deep into Christopher’s eyes.) Have you ever felt a love like that, Chris?

Christopher: (He shakes his head.)...I’m afraid not.

Kaito: (A strange, broken smile fills his face. He lets out a sad laugh. The tears still brim in his eyes.) No. I didn’t think so. (His voice is eerily calm as he calls Christopher the slur.) After all, actors can never truly mirror real emotions.

Christopher: (His eyes widen and his voice is shaky as he hears the word. His voice comes out
hoarse and shocked.) Have you any idea...how much weight that word carries when used around people of the Resurrection?

Kaito: I do. You and your family have been living in a world made to mirror a longone past your entire lives. It's not natural, Chris. You're living in a costume drama. Wake up.

Christopher: (His eyes shadow over and he slaps Kaito. His voice drips with acid.) How dare you insult the way my people have lived for centuries. How dare you insult us while you, a mere onlooker, refuse to try to understand our traditions? You have no right to tell us what is and what isn’t. You're not the result of centuries and centuries of gentle breeding! My family has resided upon this land for generations...while you...you have barely stepped foot into the Resurrection. You're nothing but a peasant in the king's robes!

Kaito: (His anger is slowly rising. He massages the cheek that was slapped and stands at his full height.) You haven't even had full knowledge of my family! And yet you make assumptions! Now who's the hypocrite?! My mother was a Jones. She grew up in an old plantation house with her 15 cousins. Our ancestors were just as noble as yours. I may not act like it, but I am your equal! So stop being so condescending!

Christopher:...! Condescending?! I…

Kaito: Yes! Don’t look at me like that! You’ve been lookin’ down on me all my life and you know that! But in no way am I beneath you! (How very ironic…) In fact, I may have even surpassed you! (He changes to Photon mode, his trench coat becoming white and his duel disk appearing on his arm.) And I’m going to prove it here and now.

Christopher: (He grimaces.) Fine! We might as well settle our grievances here and now! (His d-gazer flashes on and his duel disk forms.)

Christopher and Kaito: DUEL!

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Mizairen: (He grabs Chrisseine's waist and buries his face in Chrisseine’s hair.) Plus que trois mois avant que vous ne partiez de ce royaume pour toujours...
Mizairen: [(He grabs Chrisseine's waist and buries his face in Chrisseine’s hair.) Three more months until you are forever gone from this kingdom…]

Chrisseine: (He gasps in surprise, but then his expression softens.) Plus que trois mois avant
que...Je ne puisse plus jamais voir votre sourire a nouveau... mon soleil...
Chrisseine: [(He gasps in surprise, but then his expression softens.) Three more months until...I can never see your smiling face again...My sun…]

Mizairen: Ma lune…
Mizairen: [My moon…]

(The camera backs away and we can see the silhouettes embracing and kissing.)

Mizairen: (With his eyes closed.) Nous nous retrouverons dans nos prochaines vies.
Mizairen: (With his eyes closed.) We shall meet again in our next lives.

Chrisseine: (He pulls away from the kiss.)...comment pouvez-vous en être aussi certain?
Chrisseine: [(He pulls away from the kiss.)...How can you be so sure?]

Mizairen: Ne sommes-nous pas liés par le même fil?
Mizairen: [Are we not bound by the same thread?]

Chrisseine: (Pain fills his expression.) Dans ce cas, pourquoi devons-nous être séparé cruellement?
Chrisseine: [(Pain fills his expression.) If so, then why must we be cruelly separated?]

Mizairen: Notre destin a été cruel dans cette vie...Mais assurément nous ne seront pas un simple garde et une princesse dans notre prochaine vie...
Mizairen: [Our fates have been cruel in this life...But surely we will not be a lowly guard and a princess in our next lives…]

Chrisseine: (Tears brim in his eyes.) Trois mois... Est-ce tout ce qui nous reste avant que je ne vous vois plus jamais?
Chrisseine: [(Tears brim in his eyes.) Three months...Is that all the time we have until I shall never see you again?]

Mizairen: (He brushes the tears away and gazes into Chrisseine's eyes.) Peu importe. Dans nos prochaines vies, nous serons ensemble. En marie et femme. La lune et le soleil.
Mizairen: [(He brushes the tears away and gazes into Chrisseine's eyes.) Hush. In our next lives, we will be together. As husband and wife. The moon and the sun.]
Chrisseine: (He looks away at Mizael.) Mais je...

Chrisseine: [(He looks away at Mizael.) But I…]

Mizairen: (He lifts a sculpted eyebrow.) Oui, ma princesse?
Mizairen: (He lifts a sculpted eyebrow.) Yes, my princess?

Chrisseine: Ce n'est pas si simple... Car je suis...(He swallows and thinks.) Mizairen, pitié comprenez-moi...!
Chrisseine: It is not as easy as you think...For I am...(He swallows and thinks.) Dear Mizairen, please understand...!

Mizairen: Prenez votre temps. Nous avons encore 3 mois.
Mizairen: [Take your time. We still have three months.]

Chrisseine: Je ne suis pas ce que vous pensez...
Chrisseine: [I am not who you think I am…]

Mizairen: (His eyes shine.) Dites-moi...! Êtes-vous née d'un paysan ?(His eyes sparkle.) Si Oui, quel est votre vrai nom? Peut être que je-
Mizairen: [(His eyes shine.) Pray tell...! Are you peasant born? (His eyes sparkle.) If so, what is your true surname? Perhaps I—]

Chrisseine: (He gives a mirthless laugh.) Vous avez une imagination bien fournie... Mais vous vous trompez, Mizairen. Je ne suis pas la fille du roi, mais...
Chrisseine: [(He gives a mirthless laugh.) Quite a creative imagination you possess...But you are wrong, Mizairen. I am not the daughter of the king, but…]

Mizairen: (He rests his hand on Chrisseine's cheek and angles Chrisseine's face towards his.) Dites, mon ange. Je ne serais ni en colère, ni gêné, car notre lien est aussi fort que l'acier.
Mizairen: [(He rests his hand on Chrisseine's cheek and angles Chrisseine's face towards his.) Speak, my angel. I will not be angered nor disturbed, for we have a bond as strong as steel.]

Chrisseine: (His face shadows over.) Dans ce cas, seriez-vous gêner d'embrasser un homme?
Chrisseine: [(His face shadows over.) Then would you mind kissing a man?]
Mizairen: (Surprise briefly fills his face.) Excusez-moi...? S'il vous plait, redites cela?

Chrisseine: Comme je l'ai dis...(He clears his throat and his voice deepens. His arms pin Mizairen to the wall and he looks intensely into Mizairen’s eyes.) Cela vous generiez-t-il d'embrasser un homme?

Mizairen:...Ma princesse...? Est-ce vraiment vous?

Chrisseine: (His eyes narrow.) Etes-vous dégoûté? Preferez-vous la Princesse Angélique plutôt que le prince héritier de Bucchanary? Elle n’est qu'une illusion. Toute ma vie, j’ai due me caché sous ces robes soyeuses et par le Dragon, ai-je tenté de me libérer. Mais cet homme cruel m'a toujours renvoyé dans mon trou. (He comes closer to Mizairen.) Me voyez-vous tel que je suis vraiment à présent, Mizairen? (There is a tinge of fear in his voice.) M'aimez vous toujours?

Mizairen:...Je...Je me suis toujours dis que... vous n’étiez pas comme les autres poupées de la court. Vous semblez essayer plus dure encore de marcher légèrement... parler doucement... Rire délicatement... (He swallows and smiles.) Oh au diable tout cela. Le Seigneur me méprise déjà pour m'avoir accordé cette basse position. Homme ou non, vous êtes toujours la personne de mes rêves! (He grabs Chrisseine and kisses him passionately.)

Chrisseine: (His eyes light up in surprise and then closes as he returns the kiss.)

(The scene fades out to a black and only Mizairen's voice can be heard.)

Mizairen: Je vous attendrai, ma princesse.

Mizairen: [I'll wait for you, my princess.]
Christopher: (He is breathing heavily, his Chaos Dyson Sphere blazing behind him. Kaito's Neo Galaxy Eyes Photon Dragon shines brightly at the center of the field.) Do it, Kaito. Prove to yourself that you are my equal. Once again...Even if I do not need such a reminder.

Kaito: (He clenches his teeth and sweat trails down from his forehead.) Dammit Chris...I ain't your student anymore! That was over years ago! (He takes in a deep breath.) Galaxy Eyes! Attack Chaos Dyson Sphere directly! Photon stream!

(Neo Galaxy Eyes roars and advances towards the Chaos Dyson Sphere and blasts a bright ray towards its core. Christopher's monster slowly folds in on itself and then explodes, leaving Christopher flying into the dirt floor, his lifepoints dropping zero.)

Christopher:...As I expected.

Kaito: Honestly, I thought we were equals during the Kaninja duel...But you proved me wrong. (His D-gazer tattoo disappears and Photon Mode slowly fades away.)

Christopher: (Exasperated.) If you had just listened to me...! I see you as a brother...! That’s why it may seem like I—

Kaito: (He collapses on his knees, clearly exhausted.)

Christopher: (He firmly takes Kaito’s arm and slings it over his shoulder.) No. You’re exhausted. You need a place to rest. I’ll be taking you to Carnation Valley because it’s closer.

Kaito: I said I’m fine...!

Christopher: (Steely resolve fills his voice.) No you aren’t.
Kaito: (He grimaces.) You don’t need to do this, Chris.

(The scene fades to black as the two make their way up the hill.)

---首富---

(Heavy breathing is heard and then a thud. The scene slowly reveals Marleen Tenjo on the floor, coughing heavily. She rests her hand on her stomach, clearly with child. A 12 year old Kaito rushes to her side.)

Kaito: Momma! (He rests a hand on Marleen's shoulder.)

Marleen: (She gently bats Kaito's hand away and choke out her words.) I-it ain't nothing...n-nothing at all...Just another one of those damned fits. (She coughs and blood trickles through her hands.) This...don't matter. Now go back to your studies, Kaito.

---首富---

(Kaito is resting in the Arclight's parlor, with a drink in his hands.)

Kaito:...Only to die a few weeks later…

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito.)...I'm so sorry…

Kaito: She was always saying that she was fine and such…(Pain fills his expression.) Then she died.

Christopher: (He puts a hand on Kaito’s shoulder. Kaito shifts uncomfortably.) But you’re not alone.

Kaito:...I wish I could believe that.

Christopher: (Hurt flickers by his expression.) W-well...I hope you’re enjoying your apricot juice.

Kaito: (He looks down at his orange-colored drink.)...It’s decent. (He lets out a sigh.)
Sometimes, I think momma and I are a lot more similar than I had thought.

Christopher:...(He looks at a portrait of his mother. Her slightly tanned skin and heterochromatic eyes benevolently stare back, her clasped hands holding a black dahlia. The orange dress she wears is patterned with various flowers and her mahogany and light purple hair lightly curls down to her collarbone. A rose is tucked in her hair and her lips are curved into a shy smile. Christopher then looks back at Kaito.) I wish I could relate.

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(The orange rooms have gentle sunlight filtering in through them. Ornately decorated halls sparkle and the carpets are clean and bright; this was a time when the Arclight mansion had seen better days. Children's laughter rings downstairs and running footsteps are heard. Byron appears inside of Christopher's room and softly smiles at his wife, who is combing a 7-year old Christopher's already long locks.)

Byron: (Gently.) Marie-Luise, you don't need to do that. The maids can take care of him.

Marie-Luise: (She looks up in surprise at her husband and then her face relaxes into a smile. Her voice is a deep contralto and clear as a mountain bell. Her cultured British accent is a sign of her wealthy upbringing.) But wouldn't Christopher prefer his mother's touch over a stranger's? He's such a talented little boy and I just cannot bear to see him tossed about by the maids. Isn't that right, Christopher dear?

Christopher: (He gives his mother a smile.) You're a lot more gentle, mother.

Marie-Luise: (She laughs and looks at Byron.) See? I told you.

Byron: (He walks up to Marie-Luise and kisses her. At full height, his wife is at his neck.) Why, I do believe love has changed you quite a bit, my dear.

Marie-Luise: (She looks at a picture of her younger self hanging in the hall. With a haircut similar to Thomas's and one hand covering her left eye, her one remaining eye glares at the photographer. Her light tan causes vivid cream colored dress to be more noticeable, along with the many dirt stains.)...Indeed it has.

Byron: (Gently.) You have beautiful eyes.

Marie-Luise:...(She stops her left hand from covering her left eye involuntarily. Her
reflection from Christopher's mirror causes her to flinch.) I've always hated them...Witch’s eyes...

Christopher: But mother, they're really pretty! One is blue like mine and the other is red, like Thomas's!

Marie-Luise: (She laughs gently and rests a hand on Christopher's cheek.) My little boy...

Michael: (A 2 year old Michael toddles in. His eyes are bright and his smile illuminates the room. He runs towards Marie-Luise.) Mare!

Marie-Luise: (A look of revulsion creeps onto her face. She slams the brush down onto the table.) Get it out of here.

Byron: (He looks at Marie-Luise in exasperation.) D-don't you recognize our son?! Michael?

Marie-Luise: (Her voice is hysteric.) Can’t you see..?! It’s her shade returned...back to take everything from me...Don’t let her take them! Please...! (She begins to sob hysterically.) All I ever wanted was for her to be happy...But she wanted everything that was mine...so I had to...I had to...(Her sobs echo and fade away.) I’m so sorry...

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Kaito:...So your mother had problems, too?

Christopher: Most likely...Of the mental varie—

Byron: Really, Christopher...talking about your mother like that. What would she say? (He slowly turns to Kaito.) And...Kaito...Are you alright?

Kaito:...Wouldn't you like to know.

Byron: As your future father in-law, yes, I would like to know.

Kaito:...I'm fine. (He rolls his eyes to meet Byron's and lazily drawls out.) Peachy keen.

Byron:...Where in the world did you get such a saucy nature?
Kaito: (He sighs.) The one and only, late Marleen Korrina Tenjo.

Byron:...Ah, yes. Why should I be surprised? She is someone I will never forget, (He mutters.) for better or for worse. Anyways, did Christopher tell you yet?

Kaito: (Irritatedly.)...About what? He's told me too much to tell which subject you're talking about.

Byron: What you'll be wearing for the wedding.

Kaito:...! (He clenches the sofa's armrest.) I won't walk down the aisle dressed like that.

Byron: (A cruel smile creeps on his face.)...Your mother will be watching you from the afterlife. Wouldn't you like to honor her memory?

Kaito: (He grimaces.) That is not how one honors the dead. It's more like stepping on their corpse and dancing and stomping over all their memories.

Byron: (His eyes slightly narrow.) Perhaps you'll think differently when the time comes.

----Episode 14~END----
The Fates Begin to Converge

---Episode 15---
The Fates Begin to Converge

(The mahogany walls of the room are tinted with a smoky haze from burning candles. From somewhere behind the walls, a muffled orchestra quietly plays. Quiet laughter is heard from far away and a shrill laugh echoes down the hall. The large, double oaken doors are shut tightly and the velvet curtains are blocking out all sources of natural light.)

Mizairen: We're all eventually going to hell anyways...(He runs his lips down Chrisseine's neck, earning a shudder.)

(The two are on Chrisseine's canopied bed. Chrisseine is in the barest of chemises and Mizairen is topless. Chrisseine lies on his back and Mizairen looks down at him.)

Chrisseine: You are my one and only true love, my only reminder that there is still good in this world.

Mizairen: There is a lot of good in this world, but you must search for it with careful eyes. (He bends down and kisses Chrisseine's neck.)

Chrisseine: (He closes his eyes, enjoying the kiss. Then he opens his dreamy eyes.) We're wonderful actors, aren't we? On stage we are the beautiful princess and the loyal guard, but offstage, we are forbidden lovers, forever forced to dance on a thin thread.

Mizairen: Mmm...Puppets get tired, too...The strings holding up our arms cannot last forever.

Chrisseine: But when the strings snap, we are doomed.

Mizairen: Then let us breathe in each other’s scent before our time is up.

Chrisseine: (His voice is above a scarce whisper. His eyes are misty in the candlelight.)...Take me, Mizairen.
Mizairen: (He lifts an eyebrow.)...Your highness?

Chrisseine: (He sits up and rests his hand on Mizairen's ear and whispers into it, the silver hairs from his bangs slowly unraveling themselves.) Take me as I am...while I am still pure.

Mizairen:...(He grabs Chrisseine's waist and pulls him into a kiss. One hand is slowly pulling off the chemise and the other is tightly holding onto Chrisseine's hips.) At least we'll burn in hell together.

Chrisseine: My love...anything is bearable if you are with me. If not physically then in my mind...So give me this one night to remember.

Mizairen:...Gladly.

Chrisseine: (A rueful smile fills his face.) I pity the Buchanary prince on his wedding night. Instead of a butterfly he will find a caterpillar.

Mizairen: I find both quite charming.

Chrisseine: (He raises an eyebrow.) Oh? I am not the first one to have felt your embrace?

Mizairen: I was sweet on a girl in the countryside near my family’s estate.

Chrisseine: (He sighs.) Despite having an estate, you still cannot marry me.

Mizairen: As the fifth son of seven, I have almost nothing to my name. I am as good as any other peasant.

Chrisseine: But you have the heart fit for a king...

Mizairen: (He sadly shakes his head.) From what I can see, your father is a cruel man.
Chrisseine: (He wraps his arms around Mizairen’s neck and pulls him closer.) Make me forget about him. Please. (He kisses Mizairen.)

(Mizairen returns the kiss and he begins to unclothe Chrisseine.)

Chrisseine: I want to scream with pleasure and know only you in this moment.

Mizairen: As do I, my princess.

Chrisseine: Refrain from using that name...Instead...call me Christophe.

Mizairen: Your true name?

Chrisseine: Yes...A forbidden name that only my brother and father were allowed to use.

Mizairen: Then... Christophe... Let me show you my love tonight.

(The scene moves to the door as Mizairen leans over Chrisseine’s legs. In the crack of a door, we can see a red eye narrowed in anger.)

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(The sunlight filters in through the now open windows of the room. Bird song is heard from outside.)

Rionè: (She carries a tray of tea and biscuits.) Good morning, Princesse. Marquise Drosenia has business with the king to attend to today. I will be taking her place.

Chrisseine: (He is sitting up in his bed and his nightgown shimmers in the morning sun.) A good morning to you as well, Rionè. Hopefully the Marquise will be able to return soon. (He takes the tray and pours himself tea.) Perhaps read me my schedule?
Rionè: Of course, your Majesty. As your lessons have ended, the days are now filled with entertainment of sorts...

Chrisseine: (Dryly.) Yes, entertainment.

Rionè:...(She clears her throat.) After your morning meal, a formal breakfast at 8 is requested. At 10, you will change into your tea dress and visit the Duchess of Lafayette for a scheduled tea party. At 2, you will be fitted for your wedding dress—

Chrisseine: Another one? (He sighs.) There are far too many of those fittings.

Rionè:...And then at half past 3, you will receive the crown prince and king of Bucchanery.

Chrisseine: (He nearly spits out his tea.) I-indeed?!

Rionè: Yes, princesse.

Chrisseine: But I was never—

Rionè: The king intended to surprise you.

Chrisseine: Surprise, my arse! What will I wear?!

Rionè: (She sighs.) It has all been taken care of. May I continue?

Chrisseine:...Proceed. But you may as well not.

Rionè:...At 5, you and the Prince of Bucchanery will attend a ball prepared in your honor. Then at 8 is the final meal of the day...continued by even more dancing and festivities...

Chrisseine: Yes, of course...With two months, it's surprising how very little I've seen of my future husband. Perhaps all of this will make up for it, no?

Rionè: Yes, your highness. At 11, you may retire to your quarters for a bath and a well deserved rest.
Chrisseine: Most likely this will go on for a week...?

Rionè: I believe so, your majesty. Their people are known for their high spirits and long stays.

Chrisseine: (Sarcastically.) Won't this be a pleasant surprise.

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(We are in Byronne’s study, where Drosenia is seen, curtised in front of Byronne.)

Byronne: Rise, Marquise.

Drosenia: (She looks up at Byronne.) Your majesty?

Byronne: Have you been aware that the princess has...an illicit relationship?

Drosenia: (She pales.) A...a mere trifle, your majesty.

Byronne: Indeed? And you refused to inform me?

Drosenia: As I said...it is a mere trifle?

Byronne: Would you call fornication a “mere trifle”?

Drosenia: Th...that’s impossible…

Byronne: (His eyes narrow.) You indulge her.

Drosenia: I…
Byronne: You indulge her and spoil all of the work that I put into her…

Drosenia: Your majesty, I—

Byronne: You are peasant-born, correct?

Drosenia: (She bites her lip.) Yes, your majesty.

Byronne: Is it true that the peasantry are more durable than the noble-born?

Drosenia: (Her eyes are lowered.) I believe that we are just the same...my king.

Byronne: On your knees.

Drosenia: (She hesitantly kneels down. There is fear in her eyes as she looks up at Byronne.) My king?

Byronne: We shall test that theory today. (He roughly yanks Drosenia’s hair.) You are relieved of your duties as the princess's lady in waiting. We need someone of noble blood to serve my daughter. A François is a perfect choice, for they have been serving the princesses and queens of this family for generations. While you...you are no better than a dog in the Palace of the Sun.

Drosenia: (There are tears in her eyes.) Please...I…

Byronne: (He tilts Drosenia’s head up to face him.) From now on, you will serve me. And only me. ...Now...I’m sure you know what to do.

Drosenia: (Her lips quiver.) Yes...my king.
Byronne: I am pleased to introduce my daughter, Princesse Chrisseine Aurelia Rilliane of House Blanche.

Chrisseine: (He curtsies to a slightly shocked Kaith. Chrisseine begins to speak in English, heavily accented.) It is my pleasure to meet you.

Robertson: And it is my pleasure to introduce my son to you, my dear. Kaith Gregory Thiras Ferellen.

Kaith: (He regains his composure and bows to Chrisseine.) What a beautiful complexion you posses, like fresh snow shining in the morning sun. (He takes Chrisseine's hand and kisses it.)

Byronne: Now that the bride and groom have been acquainted, I believe that they must recover from...one another's apparent shock. King Robertson, would you like to have a cup of tea in my study as we allow these two to speak the truth to one another?

Robertson: That would be a most excellent suggestion. Do lead the way, as the halls are quite long and torturous.

Byronne: Of course.

(The two kings walk out of the room, closing the door behind them. Chrisseine and Kaith stand facing one another, at a loss for words.)

Chrisseine:...I...

Kaith: Your English is quite remarkable.

Chrisseine:...Thank you...W-would you like a...what is the word...? Oh, yes...Would you like a seat?

Kaith: Yes, thank you. (He and Chrisseine sit at a table with tea and biscuits.)
Chrisseine:...Finally. You are not just a phantom in my dreams.

Kaith:...And you aren't just a portrait of an angel.

Chrisseine: (Quietly.)...You don't need to tell me lies.

Kaith: But isn't that what this society is composed of? The powder on the women's faces conceal their true ages. The lies weaved amongst the words of a truce. The masks worn during the masquerades...We ourselves could be a lie.

Chrisseine: (He starts.) O....of....c-course…

Kaith: You have your secrets. I have mine. (He smiles.) It's what every human being possesses and should have the right to keep.

Chrisseine: Thank you. (He smiles.) That means a lot to me.

Kaith:...Two months. (He exhales.)

Chrisseine: Are you excited for the wedding?

Kaith:...I cannot say.

Chrisseine: (He looks down at his drink.)...It isn't right. Parents pawn their children off for their own selfish reasons. In my next life...I do not want to be forced to marry someone that I do not desire. Or have to endure those borish waltzes and endless dances. Or have to wear heavy, glittering gowns...and a neck that is about to snap from all this hair... And most of all, smile and laugh even if my eyes are being gouged out. I am weary of being an actor.

Kaith: You are not alone...I am tired of being subjected to long, boorish court entertainments and having my loved ones snatched from me one by one. This stiff, plotting and dishonest society grinds my spirit down, day by day. But what can I do? I am like the stone at the bottom of the river. Powerless as the currents wear me down, bit by bit. People continue to attempt to take my position and kill me. People continue to betray, lie and cheat...The position of a king is a perilous perch.

Chrisseine: (He bites his lip.) Nonetheless...It is a position awarded to only the most fortunate. Do not forsake the Dragon’s gifts.
Kaith: Oh? Would you readily take the position of king?

Chrisseine: (He stiffens. Then he slowly turns to Kaith.) In a heartbeat.

Kaith: (He smiles wearily.) That is what many say...until the heavy crown rests upon their head.

Chrisseine: (He sips his tea.) Men of weak wills but strong tongues bore me.

Kaith: (He laughs nervously.) Unfortunately, we are surrounded by them.

Chrisseine: (His eyes narrow.) I hope that you are not one of them.

Kaith: I am a man of my word. The fate that the Dragon handed to me is a mantle that I will wear with honor. (His expression saddens.)...despite the heaviness in my heart.

Chrisseine:...Perhaps in our next lives...we will not be mere puppets to a god’s whim.

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Dr. Faker: (He reads a letter, horror creeping into his face as he continues.) Kaito...

Kaito: (He places down his deck and looks at his father.) What do you want?

Dr. Faker: You need to say yes.

Kaito: (He lifts an eyebrow.) Or what?

Dr. Faker: Or else it will be Haruto's duty.

Kaito: (Shock rises to his face.) He wouldn't dare! A-aren't there laws t-to prevent these
things from happening?!

Dr. Faker: Of course there are! (His expression darkens.) But when you have money…

Kaito:…Damn your corrupt officials.

Dr. Faker: The Resurrection is its own territory. Heartland has no say over what goes on here.

Kaito: No way in hell are we handing Haruto over to that snake!

Dr. Faker: Then you need to say yes.

Kaito: (Angered.) No! I ain’t.

Dr. Faker: (Angered.) Then he’ll tell the rest of the world what I did to him and then we won’t even have a godsdamned pot to piss in.

Kaito: He wouldn't...wouldn't force a child to...do this kind of thing...would he? Child marriages don’t happen here…

Dr. Faker: (He glares down at the drink in his hand.) A vengeful man is a dangerous man. He'll stop at nothing, as Tron did.

Kaito: But Haruto'll will say no, won't he? He's a smart kid!

Dr. Faker:...He's only a child. (He shows Kaito the letter.) You think I tell lies?

Kaito: (He grabs the letter and reads, his expression growing grim.) What a monster…

Dr. Faker: So please…! Say yes…

Kaito: (He crumples the letter.)...You're asking me, old man?
Dr. Faker: ...What else can I do to make you say yes?

Kaito: Remember momma. Maybe then I'll forgive you. (He stands up and walks away, leaving Dr. Faker gloomily sitting in his seat.)

Dr. Faker: ...You just can't seem to let go, can you, Kaito?

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Christopher: (His voice is quiet.)...he called us actors...Michael.

Michael: (He covers his mouth in shock.) No...Kaito...wouldn’t...He wouldn’t use such a word...(He looks at his brother with pained eyes.) Would he?

Christopher: He did.

Michael: (He moves his hand away from his mouth, revealing bandages on the side of his mouth.) Does he know what that word meant when he used it around you?

Christopher: (His eyes are narrowed.) He knew very well what it meant. An insult to our way of life and an insult to us as Arclights.

Michael:...Someone must have taught him the...slur.

Christopher: Indeed. But who?

Michael: The world is a wide place full of people who despise us. It could have been anyone.

Christopher: (He lets out a long sigh.) Let us move on from this topic and onto something more uplifting. With the upcoming nuptial date, my heart grows heavy at the thought of Kaito.
Michael: Perhaps we should return to a time where we were unaware of our burdens as Arclights...a time where we were just Christopher, Thomas and Michael. Three, happy roses in the sheltered Victorian gardens.

Christopher: (A bitter expression fills his face.) We cannot continue to live in our ivory towers and pretend the world outside does not exist.

Michael:...what do you think happened to us?

Christopher: We grew up.

Michael: (He scoffs.) We were rudely uprooted and thrown into the harsh reality of the Outside. (Sadly.) We can never return to that tower, no matter how hard we try.

Christopher: What are you implying...Michael?

Michael: (He stands up, holding onto a chair for support. When he speaks his voice is surprisingly harsh.) We are living with a brutal dictator, not our father.

Christopher: (He bites his lip.)

Michael: Do you agree with me?

Christopher:...

Michael: (His voice shakes at first.) It’s time to stop dreaming. Even I have stopped trying to pretend. After what he did to your hand...After what he did to...(He shakes his head, pain filling his features.) Our real father is crying from his perch in Heaven.

Christopher: (He looks down at his bandaged fingers and winces.) It may be true that he has changed...But...
Michael: (Harshly.) Stop trying to deny it. We traded Tron for an even worse nightmare. (He takes in a deep breath.) That is a decision I will regret for the rest of my life. At least Tron tried to love us, despite his lack of emotions. The Barian world stripped him of his emotions save for the wrathful ones, but he was more loving than what we have now.

Christopher: He’s still the same person, Michael.

Michael: (His frustration continues to build.) Oh? So Tron showed enjoyment when he broke our fingers? Tron laughed whenever we went to comfort one another? Tron beat us into obedience like animals?! (He lets out a mirthless laugh.) I remember that the last one was V’s duty, whipping us into duty with his sharp tongue. (He turns to Christopher, a cruel expression on his face.) Don’t you remember that, V-niisama?

Christopher: (He takes in a sharp breath.) Refrain...refrain from calling me that name...I am no longer that man.

Michael: From my observations, it seems that the man we call our father now is a mixture of yours and Tron’s worst traits. Cold, removed, sadistic and calculating. Did you know that he wasn’t finished with me when he left that room? Did you know that that night, he told me to come into his study for a special lesson?

Christopher: (Fearful.)...N...no...I didn’t.

Michael: (He undoes his cravat, slips off his outer coat, his waistcoat and finally his shirt, revealing a snow-white chest covered in bruises. His voice is eerily distant as he speaks.) I think he broke a rib, but I’m not sure. It hurts to walk. (He looks over his shoulder, back at Christopher.) He wanted to teach me a lesson on holding my tongue. (He points to the bandage on his the side of his lips.) So he tried to sew my mouth shut. It was only because of a reminder back to aunt Chloe that he stopped...(Ruefully.) After all, we bear the same face. (He bends down to pick up his clothes and takes in a deep breath.) Tell me, does a sane man try to do that to his own son? (He puts his shirt back on.)

Christopher:...He wouldn’t. Our true father wouldn’t.

Michael: (As he is fastening his waistcoat.) But this man did.
Christopher: He’s...

Michael: Not our father. I know that now.

Christopher: ...All of you are losing your faith...

Michael: (He drops his outer coat and turns around to face his brother. He shouts.) What is there to have faith in anymore?!

Christopher: (He stands up.) Don’t you have hope?! Hope that he will come back?!

Michael: He’s not going to so why even bother?!

Christopher: (He sits down again, bitterness filling his face.) I wish I could give in to reality like you and Thomas but I do not know what lies ahead. As the first heir to the Arclight name, all of his responsibilities would become mine. So that’s why...I still believe that he is our father.

(Anger blooms across Michael’s face. With surprising quickness, he lunges towards Christopher and wraps his hands around his brother’s deck. Christopher looks at Michael in surprise, unable to say anything due to the chokehold he is in.)

Michael: (His voice is eerily quiet.) Are you truly that selfish...? Denying that he isn’t our father just because you’re too scared to take his position? You know that he has scarred us. You know that he has abused us. You know that he sees us as his pawns...(He lightens his grip on Christopher’s neck.) And yet...you continue to close your eyes because you’re too damn scared to take care of us?!

Christopher: (He grabs Michael’s left arm and prys it off of his neck.) YES! IS IT WRONG THAT I AM SCARED OF BECOMING THE MAN THAT ABUSED US?!

Michael: (He slaps Christopher.) YOU WILL NEVER BECOME OUR FATHER! NEVER!
Christopher: Am I not cold? Am I not distant? Am I not selfish…? (His voice shakes.) I am only a few steps away from following him.

Michael: (He lets go of Christopher, allowing his brother to sit up again.) No...you aren’t. You are a loyal, kind and loving brother...deep down, we both know that.

Christopher: How can a kind, loving brother rule this family?

Michael: Not all leaders are tyrannical dictators.

Christopher: But the good leaders lead with fear. If they are feared then no one can come near them.

Michael: But lead with love and you will forever remain in the people’s hearts. Take good queen Bess for example.

Christopher: (He sighs.) I can barely remember the person I was before father vanished.

Michael:...I was a spoiled brat.

Christopher: I’m sure we all were.

Michael: (Contemplatively.) Living in the Resurrection does that to one, I suppose. After all, it’s a rich man’s playground.

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(It is night. We are in Byron’s study. It is a medium-sized room with a fireplace in a corner...
and a large, mahogany table at the center. The worn, red carpet is burdened by statues and pedestals with busts atop them. Michael is seated in front of his father while his father stands behind his desk.)

Byron: Michael.

Michael: Good evening, dearest father.

Byron: A good evening to you, Michael.

Michael: I trust that you are well?

Byron: I am quite fair, thank you very much. And how are you?

Michael: I am...fine.

Byron: (His eyes narrow.) Yes, you do look quite fine for someone who dared speak against his father.

Michael: (He shifts uncomfortably.) I...I apologize for my outburst. That was immature of me.

Byron: (He roughly grabs Michael’s arm.) Yes, let us make sure that never happens again. (He walks around the desk, one hand on Michael’s arm, the other reaching into a desk drawer. When the other hand comes out, it is revealed to be a pincushion with a needle and a thread. He stuffs it into a pocket and approaches Michael.)

Michael: (He begins to shake.) I’m sorry, dearest father. I truly am. (He tries to pull away.) I’m sorry. Please forgive me. I’m sorry…

Byron: Children are to be seen, not heard. Let this be a lesson for you. (He pulls Michael out of the chair and pushes him to the floor. He takes his nearby walking staff and swings it
down. Michael yelps in pain.) Count your beatings, Michael. When you get to 10, I will stop.

Michael: O-one…

(Byron swings down.)

Michael: T...two…

Byron: Good. (He swings down again.)

Michael: Th...three…

(Another strike.)

Michael: Four…

(A sickening crack is heard as the fifth strike happens. Michael bites his lip and tears spring to his eyes.)

Michael: F...five…

(As Byron takes the sixth swing, Michael lets out a whimper as the tears fall down his cheeks.)

Michael: (He takes in a shuddery breath. His voice barely comes out a whisper.) S...six.

Byron: Come now, Michael. You’ve endured much greater pain than this. Remember the crest? (He raises the cane and swings down.)

Michael: (Tears are freely trickling down his face. He can barely speak.) S...seven…
Byron: You’re growing quiet, Michael. (Byron smashes the head of the cane into Michael’s side. Michael cries out in pain.)

Michael: EIGHT!

Byron: That’s more like it. (He hits the same area with his cane.) We’re almost done.

Michael: (He lets out a tear filled cry. His face is now a swollen mess of tears, mucus and saliva.) Nine…

Byron: And…(He raises the cane and swings it directly onto Michael’s back.)

Michael: T-ten!

Byron: That’s a good child. But…We are not done yet.

Michael: (Wearily.) P…pardon…?

Byron: You still need to learn. (He forces Michael into the chair and from his pocket, pulls out a pincushion. He takes out a thick needle with red thread from the pincushion.) An obedient, silent son…

Michael: (Tears fill his eyes.) P-please...have mercy…

Byron: (With one hand, he grabs Michael’s chin and the hand slowly approaches with the needle.) I have been merciful all my life. But you three never seem to learn…(He pierces Michael’s bottom lip with the needle. Blood immediately comes out. Michael lets out a cry of pain.) Hold still. We wouldn’t want the needle to pierce unwanted areas. (He chuckles.) Although it would be charming to loop a ring through your nose and lead you like an ox.
Michael: P...please stop.

Byron: You must face your punishment, Michael. Children who grow up undisciplined will be spoiled. (The needle makes its way through the edge of Michael’s upper lip.) Besides, it will only be for a day. (He pulls until the thread gives out at the knot. Michael winces in pain. He aims the needle down.) You’ll learn a valuable lesson in holding your tongue. (He pulls the needle through Michael’s upper lip and down through his bottom lip.) There, see?

(Michael’s lip trembles and large tears fall from his eyes.)

Byron: (Sternly.) Now, Michael. You brought this onto yourself.

Michael: ...y...you’re scaring me.

Byron: (Coldly.) It is better to be feared than loved.

Michael: (He swallows and takes in a shuddery breath.) Would mother want this?!

Byron: That woman was weak-willed. She was too young to know what was good for her children.

Michael: (Quietly.) Then...Then would aunt Chloe want such a thing...?

Byron: (He stops. His expression darkens.) Do not use her name in a situation such as this. The dead...deserve their rest.

Michael: No matter what you tell me, I know she eloped! She ran away from this accursed place and I’m starting to understand why she ran away!

Byron: (He roars.) SHE DIED!
Michael: DO YOU DOUBT THE WORDS ON HER “TOMBSTONE”?! Aunt Chloe eloped! Although she is dead to the Resurrection, she is alive somewhere in the Outside!

Byron: (He picks up his cane and is about to strike Michael but stops himself.) Get out. Get out before I strike you til the point you bleed.

Michael: Gladly. (He shakily stands up and leaves the room.)

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(It is now at night. Christopher is in his room, looking at a map of stars.)

Thomas: (He opens up the door)...Chris?

Christopher: Yes, Thomas?

Thomas: I think I know a way for us to get out of all the plans he has for us.

Christopher: (He looks at Thomas and raises his eyebrow.) You’ve always been quite imaginative. (He beckons for Thomas to come into his room.) I’d like to hear this plan of yours.

Thomas: (He comes in and sits on Christopher’s bed.) I’ve been thinking about this for awhile. Sometimes, I discuss it with Michael. It may sound silly, but...what if...what if we all run away?

Christopher: And where would we go?

Thomas: Anywhere we want. We’re Arclights and I’m IV, the Asia Duel Champion. We’ll be fine living with my earnings as an entertainer. (He pauses for a bit. Without moving his head to look, he speaks.) Michael. I know you're there.

Michael: (Peeking in from the doorway) O...oh...You did...?
Thomas: (He beckons Michael over) We, as brothers, need to talk.

Michael: About running away? Oh, Thomas, we all know that’s not going to work. He’ll always find us.

Thomas: (He ruffles Michael’s hair.) I’m surprised you’re the pessimistic one here. Well, how would you feel if Chris and I ran off and you were the only one left? That bastard would surely marry you off...Maybe to one of his old friends.

Michael: (Alarmed.) H-he wouldn't! I-I'm too young.

Thomas: (He cups Michael's chin in his hands.) 'The younger the better' is what some say...And besides, young flesh is durable...(He squeezes Michael’s cheek.) And oh, so soft.

Michael: (He pushes Thomas away with a grimace on his face.) If I was given a choice, I’d go with you two rather than stay here with this man.

Christopher: (Warningly.) Thomas, don’t scare him like that.

Thomas: He's 16 and has the face of a 13-year old! Someone’s gotta help him grow up.

Michael: I do not!

Thomas: Then why were you placed in the first year at Heartland Academy?!

Michael: Is it my fault that I was too busy focusing on revenge for our family over school work?! You’ve not much to say for yourself either!

Christopher: (He sighs.) Please stop quarreling, you two. Let us keep things realistic. He already has plans for you, Thomas. And I’m sure he will soon have plans for Michael.

Thomas: Well I'll be damned if I follow them!

Christopher: (Grimaces at the coarse language.) Really, Thomas. Anyways...Kaito is determined that he will say no. Depending on him is my best chance if I still want to keep my reputation.
Thomas: Wow. Great plan. What about us?

Christopher: If father is publicly humiliated, that means that he would not *dare* do another wedding.

Thomas: You know that man the most. I trust your prediction, but...What if Kaito says yes? What then?

Christopher: What would make him say yes?

Thomas:...I have a feeling Tron has pulled some strings. If *you* say yes, then he knows that he still has an obedient son. Who cares if Kaito refuses? That is his fault. Forget about the Tenjos. But if you are still obedient, he will find another powerful family to unite through you. And then it will fall to Michael and I...But by that time, he will have beaten down our rebellious spirits. *You* need to be the one to say “no”.

Christopher: Not if I fear for my life..! Yes, I do *not* want to unite our families...but...

Thomas: (Glares at the floor and sighs.) Then all hopes ride with your little student then. But if he fails, we are all doomed.

Christopher: (He yawns.) Kaito is a strong individual. He listens to himself first.

Thomas: (He mutters.) I can’t believe we’re placing our trust in an American.

Christopher: (He raises an eyebrow.) *Japanese-* American.


Christopher: For good or for worse. (He yawns again.) Oh dear...I think it’s about time we disperse.
Michael: Is it one of those rare nights in which you sleep, dearest brother?

Christopher: I believe so. The recent events of today have worn me out considerably.

Michael: You're able to hide it so well...

Christopher: Hide what?

Michael: Your stress.

Christopher: (Feigns indifference.) Don't we all have a bit of stress in ourselves? It's good for the body.

Michael:...Yes...But...You've changed.

Christopher:...How so?

Michael: You're not one to fight or tell. You keep it all to yourself. But it leaks out. Your hair has lost its former luster and shine...It also appears brittle. You seem skinnier than usual. And there are wrinkles beginning to form.

Christopher: (He rests a hand on his cheek.) Th...That's...Not funny...Michael…

Thomas: (Scoffs.) You've always taken your god given beauty for granted, haven't you?

Christopher: (He purses his lips.) I'm not one to preen over my looks. I've never been a dandy. (Eyes Thomas.) I leave that to you.

Thomas: Of course...dearest brother. That's always been my responsibility. The dandy of the house. And I do say...Your looks have been faltering.

Christopher: I...It's nothing a bit of rest can't fix...

Michael: Or a whole days' rest.

Christopher: I wouldn't hesitate to take up that offer but there's only 8 days left after tonight.
Thomas: This night will be quiet without your constant shuffling and wandering. The mansion will be...empty...for once.

Michael: It's always been empty. Too big of a house for only four people.

Christopher: (Wistful.) It was so lively when mother and the dog were around...That was a lifetime ago...

Thomas: It's too serious nowadays.

Christopher: (Yawns.) Oh dear...

Michael: I believe the last time you slept was two nights ago...? (He stands up.) Goodnight, dearest brother.

Thomas: (Jokingly.) I wish you wouldn't wake up. The whole of Heartland has been gossiping about this wedding. They aren't focusing on me, their dearest IV. And if you don't wake up, there will be no wedding.

Christopher: (He climbs onto his bed.) Oh Thomas...You need to learn that there are limits to your joking...If I do not wake, it will be like that scene from Romeo and Juliet. He will think me dead and have a funeral in place of a wedding. Then he will place me in the family crypt until someone tries to find me, and who knows when someone will come?

Michael: Don’t worry, dearest brother. We will play the parts of Romeo and Balthasar. Have a goodnight. (He walks out.)

Christopher: Goodnight, Michael.

Thomas: Just don’t expect me to die with you. (He chuckles and pats Christopher’s back.) Sweet dreams.

Christopher: (He takes Thomas’s hand and smiles.) Sweet dreams to you too, Thomas.

(Thomas nods and gets up. He closes the door behind him.)
Christopher: (He gazes at the moonlight filtering in through the window.) And it's only 9:30... (Closes his eyes.)

---Episode 15~END---

Photo for this chapter [here](#)
(Kaito and Haruto are in the living room. Kaito is flipping through a screen while Haruto is watching television.)

Haruto: ...Niisan?

Kaito: (He turns to Haruto.) Yes, Haruto?

Haruto: (His expression is filled with fear.) ...Will Mr. Arclight really...

Kaito: (He sets his screen down and rests his hands on his brother's shoulders.) No. Not if I can help it.

Haruto: So you'll say yes, all for me? (His eyes fill with tears.) I don't want you to be unhappy. Please don't go back to being unhappy! (His lips tremble.) I love your smile... It's so kind and soft... J-just like... Momma’s.

Kaito: (His expression falters.) I gotta do what I gotta do to make sure you’re happy.

Haruto: But how can I be happy if you’re not?

Kaito: (He gently rests his forehead on Haruto’s.) You’ll find a way. You always will. You’re a Tenjo, after all.

Haruto: W-well... if you’re gonna go, take some pictures of momma with you.

Kaito: (Sadly.) Would if I could. But he burned them all when she passed.
Haruto: (A small smile fills his face.) He didn’t get my collection.

Kaito:...Where?

Haruto: I believe...momma knew *that* was going to happen, so she placed a small box of photos deep inside my closet.

Kaito: (A shocked expression fills his face. It soon melts into a smile.) Will you show me?

Haruto: (He puts his finger on his lips.) Only when dad isn't watching. And he's not here right now so come on! (He breaks into a bigger smile and runs down the hall.)

Kaito:..(He thinks with a sad smile.) *I must say yes...He's too young to be exposed to the real world.*

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Christopher: (He is sitting at the grand piano, playing a song that fills the room with its heavy, pounding notes.)

Thomas: (Nonchalantly, as he is coming down the stairs.) Aren't you in a sour mood?

Christopher: (He stops playing.) Do you have a problem with Beethoven?

Thomas: Michael, aren't your ears ringing from that ruckus?

Michael: (He flips a page in his book.) I manage.

Thomas: I could hear that from my room with the doors closed! I can't write back to my fans with half the house shaking like that! Can you please play a bit softer?

Christopher: I haven't heard you use your manners in awhile, Thomas.

Thomas: All the more reason to vent your anger in a less...disruptive way.

Christopher: (He sighs.) With the wedding in a mere 8 days, I don't think I know any other alternative.

Thomas: (Disdainfully.) Mother often played on that piano and sooner or later with your
angry pounding, you'll reunite it with her.

Christopher: It's none of your business how I play. You can focus on your own instrument.

Thomas: (He mimics strumming a guitar.)

Michael:...Can we get along for once?

Christopher:...You'll understand, one day.

Michael: I'm sixteen, nearing seventeen!

Thomas: Yet you have the personality of an innocent, ten year old child!

Michael: (Taken aback, he prepares a retort. His face turns red as he speaks.) Well I never! It doesn't have to be all about sex and the size of one's own assets!

Thomas: (He stifles a laugh.) You can't even say it. Tits and bum.

Michael: I'm an English gentleman, of course I avoid vulgar terms when I can!

Thomas: (He sweetens his tone of voice and allows his British accent to get the better of him.) Well of course, Michael, dear. We wouldn't want you growing up speaking like that Tenjo boy, can we? He's rubbish through and through.

Christopher: Thomas! That isn't funny!

Thomas: (He clears his throat and tries his best to imitate Byron.) Do you see how he addresses almost everyone he knows as "bastard" and calls his father "old man"? Rubbish. Do you see how he fiddles with his cravat and pulls out his own seat? Rubbish. Do you see how he sits with a slight slouch and he cuts his meat with a knife, a fork and his own hands? Rubbish. Do you see how he never mentions his mother, the woman who gave birth to him and made his existence possible; as nothing more than something he'd like to forget? Rubbish.

(In the background, Michael is trying not to laugh.)

Byron: (He sweeps down the stairs, his voice echoing down the halls.) And do you see how
Thomas has the nerve to mockingly imitate his father? How he constantly attempts to imitate the American accent? How he never combs his hair neatly? And how he never respects his father, coming back after more than five years? An absolute disgrace to the Arclight name!

Michael: F-father dearest! (He drops his book.)

Byron: I just finished all the preparations for the wedding. Now all we must do is practice.

Thomas: (He seethes in the background.)

Byron: And, Thomas...(Contempt glimmers in his eye.) My least favorite son. The next time you do your... parroting ...Do them in the privacy of your own room, please. I do not need your corruption to spread to my other two sons. Now make yourself scarce.

Thomas: (He grimaces and walks out of the room.)

Christopher: You needn't be that, harsh, dearest father. He…

Byron:...has grown unruly in my absence. And at this age, he is beyond help. Perhaps I should disown him. Besides, he has enough money from his performances and championships to support himself.

Michael: (He starts, his eyes wide in terror.) You wouldn't!...! Thomas is a wonderful brother! He's just misunderstood! And he's only cross because you're not the man you once were...! (He gasps as he realizes he has went against his father again.)

Byron: (He coolly turns to Michael.) Out of all my three sons...My favorite is the next to protest... again. Just what has gotten into you, Michael? Have you been eating correctly?

Michael: I apologize for my speaking out of turn, dearest father. Please forgive my misdemeanor.

Byron: (He rests a hand on Michael as if to pat his head. After a few moments of tense stillness, he roughly yanks his hair. His voice comes out through gritted teeth.) Or is it Thomas’s corruption reaching to you?

Michael:....!

Byron: Really...(Michael can be seen struggling under his grasp.) This is much more enjoyable. Your hair is shorter, so the pain arrives much faster. If only you hadn't spoken out of turn...Yes...If only...(He yanks the hair even harder.) Such soft, silky curls. (His expression
darkens.) There are people out there who would love to have you as a pet. Mar your soft skin with a brand, cut your soft white flesh open to reveal beautiful organs that would sell for extremely high prices. (His voice softens.) Would you like that, Michael? I can arrange for such a thing to happen.

Michael: N-no...(Tears fill his eyes.) I-I’m sorry...dearest father.

Byron:...Do you promise to never, (He grabs another handful of hair.) ever, (He savagely yanks the handful.) ever, (His voice is now a mere whisper amidst Michael's short, shallow breaths.) go against my wishes again?

Michael: (Tears are brimming in his eyes and he chokes out.) O-of c-course, dearest, father.

Byron: And how will I know that this is the last time you will speak out...? Do I have permission to sew your mouth shut the next time you speak out against me?

Michael: (He feebly nods.) Y-yes, dearest father. You have permission.

Byron: (He throws Michael on the floor.) There's a good child.

Christopher: Michael! (He runs over and bends down to Michael.) Are you alright?

Michael: I...I'm fine.

Byron: Christopher...Please come with me.

Christopher: (He gives Michael one last look, nods and follows Byron.)

Byron: The suit is all done and ready, and with no time to spare...

(The two walk up to Byron's study and Byron opens the door. The wall facing the door has a glass cabinet with Christopher's suit hanging from it. The deep, navy blue fabric shines dully in the afternoon sun. Deep black trousers are hung behind it and newly shined shoes are placed upon the floor.)

Byron: Made of the finest materials money can buy. (He smiles.) Your mother would have been proud. What a beautiful wedding this will be.
Christopher: (He forces a smile on his face.) Oh, dearest father...It's perfect.

Byron: Have you decided what to do with your hair?

Christopher: A...a simple braid, perhaps?

Byron: (He pats Christopher on the shoulder, a smile on his face.) In honor of your father, I presume?

Christopher: Yes. Indeed. (He thinks.) My real father. May he rest in peace.

Byron:...Will you try it on for me?

Christopher: Of course...But may I see Kaito's apparel, first?

Byron: (Annoyance flashes by his face.) It is slated to come on the eve of the wedding.

Christopher: Ah...Of course. (He takes the clothes from the cabinet and walks out.)---♀---

(Chrisseine is walking down the halls of the Palace of the Sun in a glittering ballgown with a silver mask. Mizael stands in front of a door. Chrisseine looks around and when he is certain no one is watching, he leans in to whisper in Mizairen’s ear.)

Chrisseine: Mizairen?

Mizairen: Oui, Christophe?

Mizairen: [Yes, Christophe?]

Chrisseine: Promettez moi que vous serez heureux lorsque je partirai.
Chrisseine: Promise me that you will be happy when I go.

Mizairen: (A sad smile fills his face.) J'aimerais pouvoir.
Mizairen: (A sad smile fills his face.) I wish I could.

Chrisseine: (He takes Mizairen’s hand and squeezes it.) Après mon départ, je ne reviendrai jamais. (His mouth trembles.) Vous allez tant me manquer, mon amour.
Chrisseine: (He takes Mizairen’s hand and squeezes it.) After I leave, I will never return. (His mouth trembles.) I will miss you dearly, my love.

Mizairen: Vous aussi... mon prince.

Mizairen: As will I...my prince.

Chrisseine: Mais vous devez apprendre à continuer sans moi. Promettez-moi...

Chrisseine: But you must learn to continue without me. Promise me…

Rionè: Votre majesté!

Rionè: Your majesty!

Rionè: (She curtsies in front of Chrisseine.)

Chrisseine: Relevez-vous.

Chrisseine: [Rise.]

Rionè: Je dois vous faire part de nouvelles.

Rionè: [I have news to impart.]

Chrisseine: Oui?

Chrisseine: [Yes?]

Rionè: (She is breathless, barely able to control her emotions.) Marquise Drosenia…(She swallows.) A été retirée de ses fonction. Moi...Rionè Marie de la Maison François…(She dips another curtsy.) Jure de faire de mon mieux en tant que votre nouvelle dame d'honneur.

Rionè: (She is breathless, barely able to control her emotions.) Marquise Drosenia…(She swallows.) has been discharged of her duties. I...Rionè Marie of House François…(She dips another curtsy.) vow to do my best as your new lady-in-waiting.
Chrisseine: (Shock fills his face.) S... savez-vous pourquoi la marquise a perdue ses fonctions?
Chrisseine: (Shock fills his face.) D...do you know why the marquise was discharged?

Rionè: (She rises.) Malheureusement, je ne sais pas. Mais on m'a dit que nous ne la reverrons plus jamais.
Rionè: [(She rises.) Unfortunately, I do not. But I was told that she will not be seen anymore.]

Chrisseine: Ah...C'est donc pour cela que vous étiez en retard pour préparer ma robe de ce soir...
Chrisseine: [Ah...So that was why you were so late in attending to my dress for tonight...]

Rionè: Mes excuses pour ne pas avoir pue vous annoncer la nouvelle plus tôt... (She motions to the ostrich feathers in her hair.) J'ai due me prépare. Excusez mon égoïsme...
Rionè: [Apologies that I was unable to deliver the news sooner...I had to prepare myself. (She motions to the ostrich feathers in her hair.) Apologies for my selfishness...]

Chrisseine: (He gives Rionè a smile.) Ne vous inquiétez pas. Vous êtes encore jeune. Vous devriez profiter pleinement de vos années de jeunesse.
Chrisseine: [(He gives Rionè a smile.) Do not worry. You are still young. You should spend your youthful years to the fullest.]

Rionè: (She smiles in turn.) Ne devrions-nous pas nous rendre à la mascarade a présent? Nous ne devrions pas faire attendre le prince de Bucchanary.
Rionè: [(She smiles in turn.) Shall we head to the masquerade now? We musn’t keep the Bucchanary prince waiting.]

Chrisseine: (He gives Mizairen a glance.) E...en effet.
Chrisseine: [(He gives Mizairen a glance.) I...suppose so.]

(The two begin to walk down the hall. The shot then goes to Rionè who gives Mizairen a sideways glance. Her eyes narrow.)

---♀ ---
Robertson: (He looks at the Laellan masquerade with interest.) It is a lot more colorful than the masquerades in Bucchanary.

Byronne: (He nods.) We pride ourselves in our visual displays of luxury.

Kaith: (He quietly stands besides the two kings. His voice causes them to look at him.) And the peasantry…? Surely it must take high taxes for such entertainment.

Byronne: (He smiles in approval.) You are an inquisitive youth...But what we have here is only a fraction of the decadence at Versailles.

Robertson: Such vulgar shows of luxury there will lead only to ruin…

Byronne: Time will tell. Although the people may be powerless alone, they are a force to be reckoned with when gathered in thousands. (He looks out the window.) That is why I try my best to govern fairly and impose taxes carefully.

Kaith:...even a worm will turn if pushed too far. Being king is a dangerous position.

(The doors at the end of the ballroom opens. The music briefly stops as Chrissieine and Rionè enter in their resplendent ballgowns and masks.)

Robertson: Your daughter appears more beautiful each time I see her, it seems.

Byronne: Yes, she has looks akin to that of an angel. (He turns to Kaith.) The first dance belongs to the guest of honor. Will you take my daughter’s hand?

Kaith: As her betrothed, it is my duty to do so. (He begins to walk towards Chrissieine.)

(Rionè joins a group of nobles as Chrissieine walks towards Kaith. When the two reach the
center of the ballroom, they bow and curtsy to one another.)

Kaith: (The music starts. He takes Chrisseine’s hand. He speaks with a hushed tone and his lips barely move.) A lovely dress for a lovely evening.

Chrisseine: (In the same manner.) Thank you. Are you enjoying Laelle?

Kaith: Yes. It’s a beautiful country. The stars here seem brighter.

Chrisseine: (He tries not to show his pleasure.) Indeed? Do you enjoy the art of...stargazing?

Kaith: (He tries to stifle his smile.) Quite. My tutor taught me the wonders of the Dragon’s distant creations.

Chrisseine: Ah...I have a wonderful...tele...telescope...that was gifted to me on my fifteenth birthday. I pray that I may bring it with me to Bucchanary.

Kaith: If this dance did not require us to remain solemn, I would be smiling brightly right now.

Chrisseine: (He gives Kaith a small smile.) I would also be smiling.

Kaith: I hope to see your telescope one day.

Chrisseine: I would be delighted to show it to you.

Kaith: Not all women are avid scholars. I hope that you are, so that I may have something to discuss with you during long nights.

Chrisseine: I try to learn as much as I can about the stars...Pray tell...are all your people quite...this talkative during dances?
Kaith: Only if they are excited.

Chrisseine: I believe that we will get along fine.

Kaith: If the stars allow us…

Chrisseine: And I am sure they will.

---♀—

Byron: Marvelous.

Christopher: (He is dressed in his suit. His hair is loosely braided.) Thank you, dearest father.

Byron: What a lovely couple you will make with Kaito. You carry the elegance of a true Arclight...I can see my younger self in you, full of vigor and restlessness. Just like your mother, bless her soul. But eventually...even a restless soul must settle. (He rests a hand on Christopher's cheek.) You understand, don't you?

Christopher: Yes, dearest father.

Byron: At the altar...please say yes.

Christopher:...(His eyes shift uncomfortably to the floor.)

Byron: You will make the right choice, I hope?

Christopher:...

Byron: (He smiles and then pats Christopher's cheek.) My smart boy, do make me proud. (He walks out of the study.)

Christopher: (He slowly places his hand on the area Byron touched. He thinks.) For a moment...I thought the father I loved came back...Maybe he truly is still in there. (Tears brim in his eyes.) What a wonderful illusion.
(We flashback to a few months before the events of the upcoming wedding. The scene changes to a room filled with stained glass windows and machinery. Maps of alternate dimensions line the walls and holograms of different places are scattered across the room. Kaito, Orbital 7 the robot, Dr. Faker and the Arclight brothers are waiting outside of another room.)

Dr. Faker: Christopher, are you sure about this?

Christopher: The calculations are correct.

Orbital 7: I also double checked it, isn't that right, Kaito-sama?

Kaito: Of course you did, you miserable rust bucket. And how many errors did you find?

Orbital 7: I found ten errors!

Kaito: Including yourself?

Orbital 7: ...I did not, Kaito-sama.

Kaito: Chris, did you correct those errors?

Christopher: Of course I did, and some more!

Thomas: (Jokingly.) It'll be your fault if we get a mother instead of a father.

Christopher: (He blushes.) Thomas! What do you know?!

Dr. Faker: Relax, we're just reversing the damage done by Barian World.

Michael: He won't have to wear a mask anymore?

Dr. Faker: Hopefully...if it all goes right.

Thomas: What if he comes out with just half a face? The rest is nowhere to be seen and it’s just a bloody mess?

Christopher: (He wrinkles his nose.) Oh, Thomas. That is quite morbid. Perhaps you'd like to work with Dr. Faker, Kaito and I in order to make sure we don’t make such unsavory
results.

Thomas: I don't have time. I—

(The sensors begin to beep alarmingly and a red light flashes. Everyone in the room is caught in a panic.)

Kaito: Orbital! I thought you—

Christopher: It's not his fault! (He runs over to a computer and begins to type commands in frantically.) The space and time warp created just suddenly closed…

Thomas: What the hell does that mean?!

Dr. Faker: It's still a fairly new technology...reversing damage from—

Thomas: What happens to father?! Or do we not have one anymore?!

(The sensors stop beeping and the flashing red lights turn off.)

Christopher: I-it's alright now…

Michael: (Worriedly.) Will Tro—father, be alright?

Christopher:....O-of course he will. It was just a short moment.

Dr. Faker: (He rests a hand on Christopher.)

Christopher: (He whispers.) Are we truly getting father back?

Dr. Faker: Of course Byron will return...(He looks at the board.) The physical damage has been completely reversed.

Christopher: What about...the mental damage?

Dr. Faker: With that brief error...I don't think anything would have happened. Besides, he's
almost done.

Christopher:...How much longer?

Dr. Faker: Five minutes.

Michael:..We can finally be a family again. A true, happy family.

Thomas: (He looks as if he wants to say something and then he turns away.)

Kaito: (He looks down at Orbital.) About that honeymoon with Obomi, Orbital…

Orbital 7: Y-yes...? Kaito-sama?

Kaito: Go ahead. I don't need to see your stupid face for awhile.

Orbital 7: (He salutes.) Thank you, Kaito-sama!

Kaito: Take your kids with you, too. They get in the way of our experiments.

Orbital 7: Understood!

Dr. Faker: (He takes in a deep breath.) Thank you for helping me with these experiments, Christopher. Your contributions to dimensional travel are greatly appreciated by the scientific community.

Christopher: (He smiles.) Thank you, Dr. Faker.

Dr. Faker: (He looks at the door.) Any time now…

Thomas: (He takes in a deep breath and looks out the stained glass window.) This is going to be a hot summer…

Michael: Imagine all the fun we'll have with father around…

Thomas: (He scoffs.) He's an old man, and a gentleman at that. What, do you think he'll toss you up and down like when you were ten?
Michael: (He starts and then he blushes.) N-no...I was thinking we could play golf together...

Thomas: You are so boring.

Michael:...! W-well you're so...so mean!

Dr. Faker: (He glances at Michael and Thomas.) Do they always fight like that?

Christopher:...They used to, on a daily basis.

(At the mention of their names, Michael and Thomas pull away, embarrassed. A few moments of silence pass.)

Thomas: Kaito.

Kaito: Mmm?

Thomas: I haven't heard you speak English until today. Your voice is soft, even when speaking another language. It's...nice to hear.

Kaito: (Bluntly.)...You seem to be flattening your nasal British accent. Are you faking?

Thomas: (He colors.) S-so what if I want to speak like an American?! B-besides! Don’t you know that it’s common courtesy to say “thank you” after someone gives you a compliment?!

Kaito: I don’t say “thank you.”

Thomas: Are all American southerners this rude?

Kaito: Are all British people bad at American accents?

Michael:...He's been trying to since he was thirteen, but whenever he feels a strong wave of emotion, he becomes all undone and his British accent gets the best of him. He's still a proper Englishman, like it or not.
Thomas: Sh-shut your trap!

Kaito: (Boredly.) You'll never speak like a true American if you continue to use British vernacular.

Thomas: (His blush reddens and he quiets.)

Kaito: By the way, it's "shut up" instead of "shut your trap".

Thomas: Sh-shut up!

Dr. Faker: Boys, boys. Settle down.

Thomas: (Mutters.) What’s so great about having a weird southern accent anyways…?

Kaito: I heard that! (Frustrated.) There’re many thangs ‘bout havin’ a southern accent that I’m proud of!

Thomas: I hear your accent was so heavy back then that my brother couldn’t understand you!

Kaito: Yeah?! I’ll make it so heavy that you won’t even know what I called you!

Christopher: (Deadpan.) That is very mature of both of you.

(Kaito and Thomas look away from each other. The sound of a door sliding open quiets the scene. The sound of steam escaping follows. Everyone has their attention turned to the silhouette in the doorway with mist flowing out. Byron’s cultured voice comes out of the mist.)

Byron: My beloved sons...

Michael: (A delighted smile fills his face and he runs to embrace his father.) Father!
Byron: (He heartily embraces Michael and runs his hand through Michael’s curls.) Michael, I am so proud of you. You’ve grown up to be a fine young man, fighting your battles like a true noble. You’ve endured so much for the sake of this family...I must thank you for all you’ve done. (His eyes are filled with tender love.) And Thomas.

Thomas: (He hesitantly turns to Byron.) Y-yeah?

Byron: (His expression softens.) I'm sorry.

Thomas: (He wipes the tears away from his eyes.)...I...I've been waiting a long time to hear that.

Byron: (He lets out a sigh and smiles.) Thomas, you are the son I am the most proudest of. You fought with tooth and nail for your family...despite all of the horrid things I did to you. You are a strong and intelligent individual who has the ability to change things for the better. What more could a father ask for? My loyal son, how can I ever repay you for all you’ve done?

Thomas: (He looks up at Byron, tears spilling from his eyes, his British accent unsuppressed.) With love, father. Love. That’s all I’ll ever ask for and all I’ll ever need from you.

Byron: (He smiles and beckons to Thomas.) Love is something we all need after these trying times. Do come here. I'd love to take a closer look at you.

(Thomas hesitantly walks up to Byron.)

Byron: (He puts a gentle hand on Thomas’s face. His son flinches a bit.) My dear boy...You look just like your mother in her prime...Yet you are so much more...(He takes Thomas into his arms.) I love you...so, so much...I wish I could never let go of you…

Thomas: Th...then don’t…

Byron: (He gently runs his hand down Thomas’s head.) Ah...but we musn’t forget your brother. (He then looks at Christopher and his smile softens.) My eldest...

Christopher: Y...yes, father?

Byron: No need to be stiff, Chris. Come here.
Christopher: (Tears brim in his eyes and he embraces his father alongside his two brothers.) I missed you...so much. It’s so good to have you back... (He sniffs.)

Byron: ...Ah, but wasn't I with you this entire—

Christopher: It wasn't the same.

Byron: (He sighs.) Hm. It wasn't. (He sighs.) Even I can agree. (Christopher pulls away.) You've always been tall for your age... It's good how we can see eye-to-eye now. I remember how, when I was in that wretched body, I always had to crane my neck to see you. (He sighs.) The children grow... (He turns to Dr. Faker.) And we grow old.

Dr. Faker: ...Byron...

Byron: Thank you.

Dr. Faker: (He smiles and shakes Byron’s outstretched hand.) ...And thank you, for coming back to me, my one and only friend. (His eyes widen as Byron pulls him into his embrace.)

Byron: Oh, come now, Faker. Everyone needs a bit of intimacy every once in awhile.

Thomas: Yeah... real intimate.

(The group laughs and pulls away. Their laughter fades away as the scene dips to black.)

--- ⋆ ---

(We return to the present, where the three brothers are seated in the parlor.)

Thomas: He was back...

Michael: But it lasted for about a month until... Something went wrong...

Christopher: (He guiltily looks out the window.) The first time he got angry at us... I’ll never forget it. (He sighs.) It feels as if all of this is my fault.

Thomas: Hey, it wasn't your fault. Besides, it was good while it lasted.

Christopher: But would you pay for a brief bought of euphoria before being launched into an eternal hell?
Thomas: ...Well...during our darkest moments in hell, we can remember our happiness.

Christopher: (His expression fills with pain.)...He began to change...bit by bit...The walls closed in on us slowly...until we realized that there was no escape. (He sighs.)

Thomas: (He sighs and reclines in his seat.) Well...shit was good while it lasted.

Michael: Brother!

Christopher: (He worriedly looks out at the sun and thinks.) Almost a week left...Until history repeats itself again.

---♀ ---

(Christopher is at the Tenjo villa. He seems stiff in the rustic-style living room.)

Kaito: ...I think...I’d rather die with dignity rather than die in a hospital unable to do anything.

Christopher: (He is surprised.) What brings up this topic?

Kaito: A few days ago, when I collapsed...It reminded me that yes, I’m still dying. Photon poisoning ain’t going anywhere. I pushed my body way past its limits and now it’s not ever going back. Instead, it’s going downhill.

Christopher: I’m sure your father is working hard to find a cure.

Kaito: My entire body is affected. The only...plausible...solution is to continuously replace damaged organs...when my condition gets that bad. Sure, we’ll grow my organs from my own stem cells. Finding a donor takes too long. But...(He purses his lips.) Getting cut open and sewn back over and over again isn’t a way to live. Before long...I won’t even be myself anymore. Like a gutted jack-o-lantern. On the outside, sure, it’s still me...but what am I on the inside? A mishmash of artificially grown organs, sticking a middle finger up at death. It’s...it’s not natural, Chris. And...after all that time of being cut open and sewn back, you’d lose a part of yourself. There will always be a hole. This treatment won’t even guarantee to be a permanent solution. Photon mode might keep on eating away at these organs and then here
we are, back again at square one.

Christopher: You...you aren’t going to die. There must be other solutions.

Kaito: Remove photon mode and you remove my soul. Bar me from dueling and you remove my soul. (He smiles ruefully.) I am my own killer. (His eyes slowly trail to Christopher.) But you are also at fault.

Christopher:...pardon?

Kaito: If you had never taught me to love dueling, I would have never been dying in the first place. So is it the man who gave me the knife to blame or is it I who points the knife at my heart to blame?

Christopher: It is your choice on what to do with the knife. I merely gave you the weapon in hopes that you would be able to protect yourself.

Kaito: (He is silent for a few moments. Unexpectedly, he takes Christopher’s hand.) Promise me...(He swallows.) Promise me at my funeral you will stand with Haruto. And promise me that you will take care of him in my stead.

Christopher: (He squeezes Kaito’s hand. His three broken fingers remain unmoving, the cast still on.) I already see you two as my brothers. I...would be honored to take care of him.

Kaito:...thank you.

--- ♀ —

(It is night. Christopher stands by the window, looking at the moon. His lanky build is accentuated by the light of the moon and his hair shines white.)

Christopher: How cruel is it, that a father has condemned his son to a premature death? (He
looks down at the floor and sighs.) I can’t tell which is worse, a father who mercilessly abuses his children under his cruel dictatorship or a father who willingly gives up his son to a painful death…

Michael: It ends at death but continues on for us.

Christopher:...! (He turns around in surprise.) Michael, what are you doing at such an hour?

Michael: The council’s voices tend to carry to my room.

Christopher: Ah, yes…the monthly meeting of the Resurrection’s oligarchy. (He smiles.) Fear not, when I take father’s place on the council, I will organize meetings during noon.

Michael: (He yawns.) Please do. As a light sleeper, I can’t sleep with the constant murmuring. Despite the size of our home, sound easily carries.

Christopher: (He smiles.) It also doesn’t help that your room is on top of their meeting room.

Michael: A quaint euphemism for the billiards room, full of cigarette smoke and crackly music on a gramophone.

Christopher: Now where will you sleep?

Michael: I was hoping to wander the halls like a ghost until the meeting ended, but who knows when they’ll end.

Christopher: You need your rest, Michael. Have you asked Thomas if you could sleep with him?

Michael: Unfortunately, he’s awake. Reading gossip about the newest celebrity scandal and hoping that he can get his chunk of the drama.
Christopher: ...the stage is quite a demanding position. Well, I do not have aims of sleeping much either. My bed is free to use. I will go see what the council is all about.

---♀—

(We are in the Arclight billiards room. Cigar smoke wafts about and true to Michael’s word, a gramophone is quietly playing.)

Byron: ...Yes, quite a concerning issue. I’m sure the wedding will encourage more individuals to follow suit…

(A middle aged woman with severe features clears her throat.)

Byron: Dowager Marlon?

Dowager Marlon: The Tenjos are in full cooperation, are they not?

Byron: Indeed.

(A distinguished gentleman nods. He wears a suit of black and a family crest is pinned to his lapel. His hair and beard is all white.)

Gentleman: Trade agreements will go well now that Heartland is an ally.

Byron: Yes, the Resurrection will now have a bit more power on the world stage.

Gentleman: Sometimes I forget that we are a working government instead of a gathering of bored millionaires.

(Quiet laughter fills the room. The doors open and the laughter subsides. Christopher is at the doorway, his hair braided and his dark Victorian suit matching the mood.)
Byron: Christopher. A pleasant surprise.

Christopher: (He bows.) Dearest father. Dowager Marlon, lord Thurston, lord Liddell and lady Phillips. Good evening.

(Murmured replies answer him.)

Lady Phillips: He looks more like you every day, Byron. (She turns to Christopher.) May I ask where your other brothers are?

Christopher: Unfortunately, they are abed.

(Byron motions to the leather chair next to him.)

Byron: Have a seat, my son.

Christopher: Thank you, father. (He takes a seat.)

Byron: (He looks at the clock, which announces that it is midnight.) In a week from now, you will now be united with Kaito.

Christopher: (He looks at the clock.) Y...yes.

Byron: (He pats Christopher’s shoulder.) As a whole, the Resurrection is excited to see this ceremony. It will be quite grand. Do not fail us, Christopher.

Christopher: (He shifts uncomfortably.) Yes, dearest father.

---Episode 16~END--
Photo for this chapter [here](#)
Kaith: It has been 2 weeks since our wedding. (He turns to gaze at Chrisseine in his nightgown, who is staring out at the stars.) Why won't you allow me to become one with you?

Chrisseine: (He starts.) I...

Kaith: (Gently.) Are you still clinging onto that guard?

Chrisseine: (Shock fills his expression.) He is much more than a guard! B-besides...How did you know? (He purses his lips.) N-nonetheless...He was my friend in my time of need! He...he loved me...so much...For who I am...

Kaith: A king always has his sources...

(It flashes back to Laelle, where Tuomas passes Kaith and whispers in his ear in accented English.)

Tuomas:...beware...foreigner prince...my sister...she is enamor’ed with her protector...and he returns her affections.

(Kaith stiffens. He is about to turn around but Tuomas has already continued to walk on. We now return to the present.)

Kaith: (Gently.) ...Why cling onto the past? You will never be able to see him again...

Chrisseine: (A slight edge to his tone.) You've never been in love before. What do you know?
Kaith:...! (He clears his throat and tries to regain his composure.) I have my duties. Such as producing a royal heir.

Chrisseine: My apologies, my dear husband...That...that will not be possible with someone like me. Find yourself a mistress.

Kaith: Just what do you mean? Are you barren?

Chrisseine: (He laughs.) Oh you poor, callow youth...It is far worse than being barren. We have shared a bed for fifteen nights and yet, you still aren't aware…

Kaith:....?

Chrisseine: I will show you. (His expression hardens.) And you will carry this secret to your death, do you hear? Only my lady in waiting, Rionè knows this secret in this damned palace.

Kaith:...I...I understand.

Chrisseine: Do not scream. Do not shout. (He unbuttons his nightgown.)

(The camera shows the back of Chrisseine as he unrobes. His smooth, porcelain skin shines against the candlelight.)

Kaith: (His eyes widen.)

Chrisseine: (He looks up at Kaith, who is a few inches taller than him. He then places his hands on Kaith's chest and looks into Kaith's eyes. His voice is a soft, deep whisper.) Will you bed me now?

Kaith:...(He places his hands on Chrisseine's wrists and detaches him from his chest.) I will be discreet. Let us pretend this never happened.

Chrisseine: (His eyes flicker.) I trust you will.

---Φ---

(It is the afternoon. Christopher is at Kaito's house, conversing with him. The door is left ajar.)
Christopher: The dreams won't stop. It's as if every night I'm plagued by heavy dresses and layers upon layers of powder. I keep on meeting this youth named Mizairen, who bears a strong resemblance to Mizael and a girl who is just like Kamishiro Rio.

Kaito: I believe I know who they are. Mizairen was your lover from back then and Rionè is your lady in waiting. But honestly, you were more like close friends... (He smirks.) And I thought I had it hard, with the beauty marks and powdered wigs.

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito in surprise.)... have I told you about them before?

Kaito: No, you haven't. But I've also been having the same dreams... Every morning I wake up and touch my cheek, still feeling the heavy powder on my face... But there is nothing on my fingers. (He sighs.) It beats having nightmares about the moon though.

Christopher: Do you really think this truly was us...in a previous life?

Kaito: (He shrugs.) Who knows..? But really, would Mizael have truly killed his previous life's lover?

Christopher: (He then freezes, a shiver running through his back..)....!

Kaito: So. I'm not the only one whose death continues to haunt me... (He sighs.) Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, pushing open the windows for air... And occasionally Haruto wakes up crying, witnessing my death all over again. It affected him profoundly. I don't want him to suffer unnecessarily anymore... (He takes in a deep breath.) That's why I'm saying yes at the wedding. He doesn't need to suffer under Tron's dictatorship... because we all know that your father will stop at nothing until he is satisfied.

Christopher: (Shock fills his expression.) Y-you're saying yes...? Just for your brother...? But Kaito—

Kaito: He's the only person I truly love. I should give him my best.

Christopher: ...I wish I could follow your example... You are such a selfless... and noble individual.

Kaito: (He blushes a bit, earning praise from his mentor.) I-It a-ain't anythin' to be proud of...

Christopher: (He smiles, stands up from his seat and gazes at a large piece of fabric draped over an object hung on the wall.) What's this? (He fingers the fabric.)
Kaito: No, don't!

Christopher: (He starts, accidentally pulling down the sheet, revealing a picture that takes up half of the wall. It depicts Marleen, resting her hand on her round stomach and a twelve year old Kaito, supporting his mother on her right and a younger Dr. Faker supporting his wife to the left.) O-oh...! Kaito, I'm so sorry, I...

Kaito: (His face is shadowed over.) No. It's alright. (He looks at his mother.) Who knew the old man kept this here...this whole time...

Christopher: (He sneezes, waving away the dust.) And you never bothered to look...?

Kaito: I was only twelve. He told me not to touch or even look at it, so I didn't. Eventually, it just became a part of the background.

Christopher: (He looks at Marleen and notes her small stature. She rises only to Dr. Faker's chest and Kaito's shoulders.) You weren't lying when you said you had your mother's height genes...(He realizes he insulted Kaito.) Y-you share the same gentle smile.

Kaito:...Uh huh. And you have your mother's eyes.

Christopher:...She hated her red eye.

Kaito: My mother hated being 4'11.

Christopher:...Help me cover this up again, will you? (He grabs the sheet, wrinkling his nose as the dust flies about.)

Kaito:...Yeah.

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(It is now 10 p.m. Haruto is in his pajamas and he is peeking into Kaito's room. His brother is on his bed, swiping through his screen.)

Haruto: Niisan?

Kaito: (He sets down the screen.) Come in. (He smiles.) Have you brushed your teeth?

Haruto: Uh huh.

Kaito: (He feigns disappointment.) Already? I snuck some caramel upstairs for you.

Haruto: (He suggests in a cheerful voice.)...you could give it to me now.
Kaito: (He thinks for a bit. Then he throws his hands up with a smile.)...Oh alright. But promise to brush again after you finish, ok?

Haruto: Ok! (He smiles and offers his hands to Kaito.)

Kaito: (He opens a drawer, rummages around and drops three caramel cubes into Haruto’s hands.) Don't tell dad, ok?

Haruto: (He laughs.) You finally called him dad!

Kaito: (Surprise fills Kaito’s face.) Yeah...yeah I guess I have.

Haruto: (He takes two cubes, pops it in his mouth and begins to chew.)

Kaito: Hey, if you can’t open your mouth, it's your fault.

Haruto: (He nods.) I nyo.

Kaito: Do you want me to tell you a story?

Haruto: (Speaking with his mouth full.) Nyo shanks, nyeshama. Ahm shtarting to get thried afer chewing through all dis caramel.

Kaito: (He chuckles and then pats Haruto on the head.) You're a good kid, Haruto.

Haruto: (He smiles and then hops off Kaito's bed.) Goodnih!

Kaito: Brush your teeth, you hear?!

Haruto: Yesh I hear! (He closes the door behind him.)

Kaito: (He sighs and once again picks up the screen.) One more day wasted...doing absolutely nothing...But, what is there to do after you’ve rolled over and showed the beast your belly?

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Byron: Good morning, Christopher.
Christopher: Good morning, dearest father.

Byron: With only less than a week left, I’m sure you must be nervous. Come, sit next to me on the veranda and admire our garden.

Christopher: (He hesitantly sits next to Byron and looks out at his garden.)...It truly is a work of art.

Byron: (He rests his hand on Christopher's shoulder.) Look at those hydrangeas. The neatly clipped grass. The...rhododendrons...The dahlias that I planted for your mother. And the roses. Especially the roses. Her middle name was Rosanna, did you know? (His eyes grow soft as he remembers) She is smiling upon all of us from her perch in heaven. Especially you. The first one to leave the nest.

(Michael and Thomas are seen eavesdropping from the third floor. Their faces can be seen in the servants’ quarters windows.)

Byron: (Sighs.) Your mother is everywhere. Her looks are in Thomas and Michael. Parts of her personality are in all of you. My God, she’s still here even when she’s not. (He laughs sadly.) The dead always live on, no matter how much you try to forget. Remember that, Christopher.

Christopher: I will remember that statement every day…

Byron: If only Robert would…Well, not that there is any love lost between his wife and I...But every human being deserves the decency of being remembered after death.

Christopher:...Robert...

Byron: Dr. Faker’s real name. (He smiles.) Come now, you didn’t think his parents named him “Faker”, did you?

Christopher: No, no, I just think it’s odd that a man with such a famous history has such a normal name.
(Inside the servant’s quarters, Thomas is whispering to Michael.)

Thomas: I mean, our father was named Byron. And from further research, it means cowshed.

Michael: (He tries to hide his laughter.) I’m sure our grandparents named him after the famous poet, not for the meaning of the name itself.

Thomas: Sure, and he named all of us for the sound of it and not after a bunch of biblical references.

Michael: Well, it is the Resurrection.

(Back outside.)

Byron: Ah…I remember the first time I met your mother. I had mistaken your aunt for her. There were rumours about how the eldest Radcliffe was a wild, mannish, blunt girl who preferred the fairer sex. But after your aunt revealed that she was the younger Radcliffe, I thought to myself that perhaps this arrangement would not be as bad as I had initially thought. You see, her younger sister was…elegant…refined…attractive. The very definition of the English rose. So if she was related to such a gentle creature then how bad could she be? (He pauses for a bit. He then takes a long sigh.) And then she came in, her boots covered in mud, her jodhpurs askew, her grass covered cap pressed to her side and her face dripping with sweat. It was like seeing a…raccoon at an elegant tea party. You don’t see these kind of women in the Resurrection. For a second there, I thought someone had invaded the house and I was looking for a nearby blunt object to defend your aunt with.

Christopher: From your description, I’m sure she would be able to prove a fierce opponent.

Byron: Indeed. That is why I am glad to have stood my ground. She looked at me and narrowed her eyes. I didn’t know that I could still have been surprised, but I was when she said her first words to me. Her voice was…deep compared to the other women I have met. Husky. I will not repeat what she said, but I will tell you that they were vulgar in nature.

Christopher:…I can’t believe that this was the woman who raised me. All I remember was her gentle voice and her soft hands…
Byron: (He looks at the flowers with a bit of a saddened expression.) ...if not for the arranged marriage, she would still most likely be roaming the countryside on horseback. We, as the epitome of the Resurrection...instilled our values into her. So...she...calmed down.

Christopher: (He swallows.) H...how so?

Byron: Your grandmother was a traditionalist.

Christopher:...Yes, I remember her stern expressions whenever she looked at mother. But...did...did mother suffer?

Byron:...that is a tale only the women of this house knows...and unfortunately they have all passed.

Christopher: (He grimly looks out the garden and gulps. He thinks.) Will history repeat itself if Kaito enters this house…?

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(Christopher and Kaito are at the pond. Dragonflies lazily fly about.)

Kaito: Suppose I die before the wedding. Then it wouldn’t even need to happen.

Christopher: Oh, you know that isn't possible. My father will stop at nothing for his plans. Gods forbid but...he might even choose your brother if you don't recover in time.

Kaito: (A chill runs down his spine at how close Christopher has gotten to the truth.) The...the kid's only 7. If worse comes to worst, we can all just run to our Arctic lab.

Christopher: He'll use my other brothers. He's already planning for Thomas and the Kamishiro girl!

Kaito: (Snorts.) Oh, what would Ryoga say? ...Well, I guess it can’t be helped. (He puts a hand on his shoulder.) The burden on my shoulder remains heavy. You wouldn’t have a plan
to lighten my load by saying no, would you?

Christopher: I...I plan to stay by my father's side and marry you. Even if that is not what we want.

Kaito:...Family first it seems. Alright then. I guess we’ll burn in hell together.

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito incredulously.) That is very uncharacteristic of you, Kaito.

Kaito: It’s up to you to decide, Chris. Tron’s twisted my arm. I can’t refuse.

Christopher:...how so?

Kaito: (His expression is grim.) Haruto. He threatened Haruto. He’ll take him, Chris.

Christopher: (He looks out at the pond, pain edging his features.)

Kaito: You aren’t even gonna deny it.

Christopher: No...No, I’m not.

Kaito: Say no, Chris. How hard could it be? (His voice is desperate.) We all know what’s going to happen if we get married and I go under his rule. (His voice is barely above a whisper.) He’ll beat me senseless and destroy everything I have.

Christopher: (He shifts uncomfortably.) Obey him and nothing will happen.

Kaito: (He roughly grabs Christopher’s hand with the broken fingers.)

Christopher: (He winces.) I say…!

Kaito: Take this and make it ten times—scratch that, fifty times worse. That’s what he’ll do
to me and you know it. I am not built like you and your brothers. I cannot hold my tongue all
day and live with it. I am opinionated and that don’t work well in places like yours, where
opinions that contrast the almighty dictator’s is rewarded by punishment.

Christopher:...

Kaito: (He motions to the broken fingers with a tilt of his chin.) What’d you do to deserve
that?

Christopher: (He bites his lip.) I’d rather not talk about it.

Kaito:...fine. Did it have anything to do with me, by any chance?

Christopher: (He remains silent, his good hand’s grip tightening on his pantleg.)

Kaito: So it did. (He sighs.) Imagine what he’d do to me in person. (He gets up.) I need a
change of scenery. This place is getting too stuffy in the summer heat.

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(Chrisseine and Rionè walk down the Bucchanary palace’s halls, out of place.)

Chrisseine: (He whispers to Rionè.) Bien que le style de Bucchanary soit proche, nous
apparaissions tout de même comme des étrangers…

Chrisseine: [(He whispers to Rionè.) Although the style of Bucchanary is similar, we still appear
like outsiders…]

Rionè: Toutefois.... vous êtes la princesse de Laelle. Vous vous devez de représenter votre
peuple.

Rionè: [Nonetheless...you are the princesse of Laelle. You must represent your people.]
Chrisseine: ...Ils le verront comme un acte d'hostilité.

Chrisseine:...they will mistaken it for an act of hostility.]

(A woman’s laugh fills the halls. Chrisseine’s expression darkens as she looks down the hall at the source of the laughter. The same woman with the purple curls at the wedding is airily flapping her dark red fan. Her hair is gathered in a ruby dotted hairnet. There is a jaunty cap in her hair with a feather. When she looks at Chrisseine, stopped in the middle of the hall, a cruel smile fills her lips. Then she returns to speaking to her crowd of courtiers, her laughter continuing to fill the hall.)

Chrisseine: (He switches to English and makes his voice loud so that everyone can hear him. His voice regally echoes around the hall.) I cannot accept this... vulgar behavior...come, Rionè.

Rionè: (She nods. As she walks down the hall, she eyes the woman with the purple curls. The woman returns the look from behind her fan, blue eyes glimmering with delight. The two leave the hall, the double doors closing loudly behind them.)

(There is a brief moment of silence. Then, the courtiers in the woman’s presence begin to murmur. A distinguished gentleman wearing a monocle looks at the doors with a sour expression, his beauty mark on the right side of his chin accentuating his pout. He brushes back a lock of silver hair and feels his bangs that are pointed at the sides.)

Silver gentleman:...you have a challenger, it seems.

(A lady with red curls titters. Her coral colored fan flutters daintily.)

Red lady: I wonder what the duchess will do.

(A lady in spring green angles her fan towards her fellow courtiers.)

Green lady: An interesting fight it shall be, the prince’s cousin and his foreigner queen.

(A lady with a cat in her arms smiles. She strokes the silver cat that matches her hair, green
eyes glimmering with mischief.)

Silver woman: Give us the word and we shall create a spectacle for the ages.

(A youthful gentleman smiles and nods excitedly, his brown curls fluttering about. He wears clothes that are different than everyone else. The maroon color of his clothes compliments his swarthy complexion. His English is accented, but different than Chrissine and Rionè’s.)

Youthful gentleman: Oh yes, yes. It would be fun to show those stiff Laellans who is the true queen here.

Purple lady: (She smiles grandly and flutters her fan. Her speaking mannerism is edged with a sarcastic tone and an emphasis on almost every other word.) Please, please...We must treat newcomers kindly. All of you are far too eager...besides, she is only a step beneath the king. (She makes a twirling motion with her hand.) In the future, we must also serve her.

Silver gentleman: (He scoffs.) I cannot imagine serving a person such as her. She seems quite dismissive.

Purple lady: (She gently taps the gentleman on the shoulder with her fan.) You must jest, Durand. You haven’t even personally spoken to her.

Durand: That may be so...but...(He straightens his posture.) From what I see she does not seem to be in need of our services. She seems to have brought one of her own.

Purple Lady: (She titters.) No...she will need much more than one weak little whisper. Those who seat themselves on a throne will always need...a... choir...of whispers. (She looks at the doors with a sly smile.)

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Byron: (He is sitting and doesn’t turn as the door opens. He sets down his book, “The Prince” by Machiavelli.)...I forgot to show you something, Christopher.
Christopher: (As he enters the house.) Y-yes, dearest father?

Byron: (He stands up and moves towards the staircase.) Up here.

(Christopher follows Byron up the stairs. They walk through a hallway and Byron opens a door.)

Christopher: Is this...(He swallows.) will this be our bedroom once...once we are married?

Byron: Indeed. (He enters the room and Christopher hesitantly follows. The room features a canopy bed that is able to fit more than two people. There is a view of the Arclight gardens below. The cream colored carpet is immaculate and lush. A tidy fireplace is unlit. On the side of the walls are doors leading to two separate walk-in closets.) Once again, the White Room of all married Arclight heirs is ready to host inhabitants.

Christopher: (He looks around the room in awe.)

Byron: (He looks down at the gardens below.) After moving to the master bedroom, I had always missed the magnificent views of our gardens from the White Room.

Christopher: (He looks down at the gardens with his father.) An inspiring view for the next generation...And a quiet room tucked in the corner of the mansion for intimacy.

Byron: (He chuckles.) You are correct. I am sure many a virgin’s blood has spattered similar white satin sheets...some not belonging to the next lady in line.

Christopher: (He blushes and looks towards a closet. Slowly, he approaches it. Pulling it open, he is greeted by empty racks. Taking in a deep breath, he closes his eyes.) It still smells of cologne...even after all these decades. It’s...it’s as if the ghosts of past youth remains here.

Byron: (He turns to look at Christopher.) How poetic of you, Christopher.
Christopher: (He closes the closet doors with a sheepish smile.) Apologies…

Byron: No, no...the world is in need of more dreamers...We are too ground in the muck of reality to be able to fly anywhere anymore. (He gives Christopher a reassuring pat on the shoulder.) I suggest you look at the other closet.

Christopher: (He slowly opens up the other closet. His eyes widen as the lights in the closet turn on to reveal a few grey Arclight uniforms that are similar to what Kaito wore at the tea party.) Ah...I see you are ready for Kaito already.

Byron: (A smile begins to fill his face.) ...I suggest you look in the back.

Christopher: (He gives his father a look and then hesitantly walks deeper into the closet. He stops when he sees dresses. He looks back at his father.) The women’s closet...Why are there still dresses from mother here?

Byron: (Quietly.) I wonder about that, Christopher.

Christopher: (He pulls one out and looks at it.) I’ve always missed her mimosa perfume...(He slowly puts his nose in the fabric folds. Taking in a deep breath, his peaceful expression is interrupted. He pulls it away, realization dawning on his face.) No...They aren’t...These...are new...

Byron: Correct.

Christopher: (He looks down at the dress, examining the size.) No...Kaito wouldn’t…

Byron: He will be wearing the wedding dress so why stop there? With enough guidance, he’d make a wonderful Lady Arclight.

Christopher: (He looks at his father in shock.) That is…
Byron: I do what I must to ensure my family’s success. Who knows? With enough convincing, he may agree to go under the knife and truly become your wife.

Christopher: (Horror fills his face.) It never is enough for you, is it?

Byron: (His smile has turned cold. His voice has lost all traces of warmth.) No, it isn’t. In order for our family to remain afloat, it must consume. A family is like a living creature, Christopher. It needs sustenance in the form of fertile women in order to grow and spread its influence.

Christopher: Kaito would never agree.

Byron: Humans are such fragile creatures. Breaking one is...such an easy feat if you know the correct methods. From all the experience he has had with Haruto, I’m sure he’d make a wonderful mother. Imagine...your heirs are born of your beloved student...(He sighs.) How I would envy such a relationship.

Christopher: (Involuntarily, his hand flutters to his mouth, trying to stifle the wave of nausea.)

Byron: (A cruel smile fills his lips.) Kathryn would make a wonderful name for a wife of the Arclights, wouldn’t you agree?

Christopher: (Slowly, he moves his hand away from his mouth.) You don’t respect the same-sex marriage laws at all...You are only using it to your advantage...and after that...after that...(He swallows.) You will force Kaito to undergo a transition against his will. (He looks at his father incredulously. His voice comes out in a soft whisper.) How far are you willing to go to plunge our family into hell...?

Byron: (He glares at Christopher.) Do not make assumptions...I do respect that law. How can I not, when it was your very own mother who helped instill it into the Resurrection? And she...(He takes in a deep breath and clears his throat.) Arranged marriages have always been an unfavorable affair. Especially to those who have different tastes than what is chosen for them.
Christopher:...Then why…?

Byron: You do want the family name to continue, don’t you?

Christopher: (He’s desperate.) A surrogate...a new blood...

Byron: Why go through all of that when you have a bundle of good genes next to you? Not to mention that he comes from the Jones bloodline...

Christopher: He wouldn’t be happy with the way women are treated here.

Byron: Then he ought to try to involve himself in the Resurrection council to try and change things.

Christopher: The thought of creating an heir in his body sends a chill down my spine...

Byron:... she will happily carry it, knowing that it is yours.

Christopher: (Once again, he covers his mouth.) A-apologies...f-father… (He runs out of the room. Byron looks after him in disappointment.)

Byron: (He murmurs under his breath.) I too was once weak like you...but that is a phase we must all learn to outgrow.

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(The sound of retching fills the dark screen. The scene slowly lightens into Christopher bent over a toilet. His hair is disorganized and his breathing is deep and labored.)
Christopher: I can’t...I can’t... (He puts his hand over his mouth and with the other hand flushes the toilet.) Bloody hell... (He takes a toothbrush, puts toothpaste on it and tries to brush his teeth.)

Michael: (In the doorway.) Are you alright?

Christopher: ...! (He takes the toothbrush out of his mouth.) I... I’m fine.

Michael: (Concerned.) Did my cooking not agree with you?

Christopher: N-no... nothing like that... It’s just... it’s just...

Michael: (Quietly.) That man?

Christopher: (Weakly.) Y-yes... that man.

Michael: (After a moment of silence, he speaks up.) ... Please end this tyranny. I don’t know how long I can last here anymore.

(Christopher looks at Michael sadly as he walks away.)

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(It is late in the afternoon now. Haruto is playing on the tire swing outside their house while Kaito looks on. Dr. Faker comes out of the house to enjoy the sight and Kaito’s mood immediately sours.)

Kaito: ... From the start I had no choice.

Dr. Faker: Pardon?
Kaito: According to Heartland law, I’m still a minor. The age where one is considered their own person is 20 ‘round these parts. (He smiles bitterly.) After all I’ve been through, I’m still considered a child under the eyes of the city. Your city. You could have forced me to marry Christopher even if I openly protested by signing the marriage certificates in my stead. So why didn’t you?

Dr. Faker: (He lets out a long sigh.) I’ve already ruined enough for you. I wanted to give you a choice.

Kaito: You wanted to give me the illusion of choice. (He looks at Haruto laughing melancholically.) And sometimes...that’s even worse.

Dr. Faker: I—

Kaito: (He takes in a deep breath.) Look at this farce. Look at this fucking farce. I’m a child bride about to be wedded off to the family you almost ruined. Is this what you wanted when you held me in your arms, fresh out of the womb, all those years ago? Is it? Because if so, you should have just thrown me against the wall then and there.

Dr. Faker: Does any parent truly wish ill intent on the child they love? (He motions to Haruto.) I didn’t plan for any of this. Not a single one. I thought I’d die alone in a lab somewhere, a virgin. But surprise. It turned out someone along the way actually came close to caring about me. And I let her down, didn’t I? But I gotta live with my mistakes and try to fix them.

Kaito: Yes. Yes you did let momma down. Y’know, if we lived in America, I’d be straight down the border to Mexico right now with Haruto, leaving all this behind. But unfortunately, I’m stuck in Heartland and the Resurrection, both of which still consider me to be beneath my father’s protection. Did you plan this out with the Resurrection?

Dr. Faker: I left the law drafting to others. Building and design was my main purpose.

Kaito: (He shakes his head in disgust.) This marriage might even benefit you personally. Once I’m outta the way, you just have Haruto and I sincerely pray to the gods that you don’t fuck up with him. He deserves better and you know that. (He walks away to go join Haruto,
leaving his father to look at his sons in sadness.)

Dr. Faker: (He mutters under his breath.) For gods’ sakes, Robert...Where the hell did you go wrong?

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(It is late at night in the palace of Bucchanary. Chrisseine is getting ready to sleep until Rionè enters.)

Rionè: (She curtsies.) Ma princesse.
Rionè: [(She curtsies.) My princess.]

Chrisseine: Relevez-vous.
Chrisseine: [Rise.]

Rionè: (She rises, approaches Chrisseine and discreetly hands her a letter.) Une autre lettre.
Rionè: [(She rises, approaches Chrisseine and discreetly hands her a letter.) Another missive.]

Chrisseine: (A smile fills his lips.) La troisième ce mois-ci... Il faut que je le prévienne d'être plus prudent.
Chrisseine: [(A smile fills his lips.) The third one this month...I must warn him to be more careful.]

Rionè: (She curtsies again.) Je vous laisse à votre lecture...
Rionè: [(She curtsies again.) I leave you to your readings…]

Chrisseine: (He puts up a hand.) Non. Reste avec moi. J'ai grand besoin de la compagnie d'une autre personne.
Chrisseine: [(He puts up a hand.) No. Stay with me. I am in need of another person’s company.]

(The candle besides him flickers as he carefully opens up the letter. He relishes each word from the letter, hearing Mizairen’s voice.)
Mizairen’s Voice: Ma princesse... Je me languie de vous chaque nuit. Lorsque vous lirez cette lettre, levez les yeux pour voir la lune et sachez que je suis en train de la regarder également. Si cela vous semble trop exagéré, regardez la constellation de la Grande Ours. Vos yeux vous guideront peut-être au Grand Chariot... et peut-être vous arrêterez-vous sur Mizar et Alcor. Nos étoiles. Je ne me souviens plus pourquoi nous avons choisi une telle paire d'étoiles pour nous représenter, mais c'est tout de même réconfortant. Peut-être était-ce l'instinct. Peut-être était-ce le destin.

Dans tous les cas, j'observerais ces astres chaque nuit. Votre présence manque au Palais du Soleil. Bien que je n'ai jamais été proche du prince, je sens que votre présence lui manque également. Il m'envie, je le vois. Mais nous sommes dans le même bateau, cherchant votre attention. Si les lois de bienséance n'étaient pas entre nous, je lui aurais dit quelques mots rassurant. Il ne devrait pas me voir comme un rival.

D'autre part, il semblerait que les plus grands royaumes ont retiré leurs demandes... pour l'instant. Nous sommes peut-être des hérétiques pour eux, mais le Dragon semble plus proche à nos yeux que leur Dieu sans visage.

Votre chaleur me manque,
Mizar

Mizairen’s Voice: [My princess... I yearn for you every night. As you read this letter, look up at the moon and know that I am also looking at the same moon. If that is far too overdone for you then perhaps look at the constellation of the Great Bear. Perhaps your eyes will trail to The Plow... and hopefully, you will set your eyes on Mizar and Alcor. Our stars. I have forgotten why we have chosen such a pair of stars to represent ourselves, but it is comforting, nonetheless. Perhaps it was instinct. Perhaps it was fate.

Nonetheless, I will be looking at these celestial objects every night. Your presence is missed in the Palace of the Sun. Although the prince and I have never been close, I can tell that he too misses your presence. He is jealous of me, I can tell. But we are in the same boat, vying for your attention. If the laws of propriety had not interfered, I would have told him some words of reassurance. He needn’t view me as a rival.

On a sidenote, it seems as if the larger kingdoms have withdrawn their claims... for now. We may be heathens to them, but the Dragon seems more closer to us than their faceless God.

Missing your warmth,
Mizar]

Chrisseine: (He folds the letter up, a smile playing on his lips.) Bien que j’aimerais pouvoir garder tes lettres, nous savons tout deux que le risque est bien trop grand. (He kisses the letter and glances over the words one more time.) Mon amour… (He puts the letter in the candle flame, watching it burn away.) Ah... Peut-être le bonheur peut-il être encore trouvé en étant sous le joug de celui que l’on n’a pas choisi...

Chrisseine: [(He folds the letter up, a smile playing on his lips.) As much as I’d love to keep your letters, we both know that that is far too much of a risk. (He kisses the letter and glances over the words one more time.) My love… (He puts the letter in the candle flame, watching it burn away.) Ah... Perhaps happiness can still be found if one is yoked to someone not of their choosing.]
---Episode 17~END---

Photo for this episode here
---Episode 18---
To Every Man His Own Truth

Kaito: (He slouches on the bench on his side, his posture incredibly relaxed. One leg is covering the remainder of the bench and one arm is resting over the headboard. Christopher is sitting in another bench, distractedly reading a book. The peaceful ambiance is broken when Kaito speaks up.) Ever been knee-deep in mud before, Chris?

Christopher: (He rests his book down.) No, unfortunately not. (He looks at Kaito’s posture and grimaces.) This really isn’t like you, Kaito.

Kaito: (He slowly turns to face Christopher.) Well, from the looks of it, slouchin’ ain’t allowed at your house so I’m slouchin’ as much as I can before I can’t.

Christopher: Good posture means confidence.

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes.) So does a brazen tongue. I wonder how long it’ll be before your dad gets sick of my yappin’ and cuts my throat open.

Christopher: (Disgust fills his expression.) Honestly…

Kaito: I’m trying to be on my worst behavior in these last few days before the wedding. Care to join me?

Christopher: What would be the purpose of this behavior?
Kaito: To live out my life as the redneck your father brands me as in hopes that he won’t marry you to me. (He rolls his eyes.) No, of course not. I’m trying to enjoy what’s left of my relaxing country boy life style before I’m forced into cravats, breeches and whatnot.

Christopher: (He purses his lips and thinks.) Oh, it’s a lot worse… (He winces as he remembers the events of yesterday.)

Kaito: No more tight-fitting photon pants, that’s for sure. (He makes a small smile.) Forgive my next words. Gotta get all these uncouth jokes far out of my system. (He clears his throat.)

Christopher: (He raises an eyebrow.) Oh? I thought you very mature.

Kaito: I am. It’s just sometimes I realize I’m still 19 and prone to acts of stupidity.

Christopher: (He nods contemplatively.) Well, give me your worst.

Kaito: (He colors a bit and his voice is quiet.)...Y’know, I bet the reason why he won’t let me wear those comfy pants of mine is because I’m 5-inches longer than him.

Christopher: (It takes awhile for the joke to register. When it does, he covers his face, trying to fight a fit of laughter.) Oh my gods…! Kaito…!

Kaito: (His face is still red.) That will be the last immature joke I will ever make concerning...my bits. Thank the gods for that.

Christopher: (He’s still laughing.) And how would you know?

Kaito: (Even shyer.) I don’t. One of the few things I am glad I do not know.

Christopher: Nor I. (Coyly.) By the way, what exactly happens when you get excited in those tight pants of yours?
Kaito: (He reddens even more.) I don’t get excited.

Christopher: That’s hard to believe.

Kaito: I’d show you, but my city outfit’s in my closet. (He wipes his hands on his khakis.) Khakis all the way in the countryside.

Christopher: (Jokingly.) I’d love to try to get you excited.

Kaito: Now who’s being immature?

Christopher: (He smirks.) For science.

Kaito: (His eyes narrow.) Seeing you makes me the very opposite of excited.

Christopher: Perhaps you would like to try some of the things the Victorians did to arouse themselves.

Kaito: (Boredly.) Like what? A game of croquet? Some tea?

Christopher: (He chuckles.) Oh, Kaito. Despite our stiff exterior, we are still only human in the end. I was thinking of certain...toys.

Kaito: (His face remains impassive.) And have you ever tried any of these so-called toys?

Christopher: (He smiles nervously.)...Unfortunately, I haven’t.

(The two enjoy a bit of quiet laughter. Then, a moment of silence follows.)
Kaito: (A melancholy mood slowly overtakes him.) Y’know, you don’t need to humor me.

Christopher: (His smile fades.) Pardon?

Kaito: You don’t need to laugh alongside me if you don’t want to…(He sits back onto the bench.) If I wasn’t laughing, I’d either be crying or smashing things as of now. (He takes in a deep breath.)

Christopher: No, no...I’m not humoring you. I promise.

Kaito:...good to hear.

(A moment of silence passes. Kaito sits on the bench with his back slouched and his hands folded in front of his knees. Slowly, Christopher gets up and joins him. They emptily look out the pond together, both deep in their thoughts.)

Kaito: (Quietly.)...I’m a child-bride, Chris.

Christopher: (He turns to Kaito in surprise.) I...I forgot about that.

Kaito: Your father didn’t. He knows. Throw enough money around and you can make the impossible possible. If he waited for me to be of legal age, he’d risk me running away. But here I am...unable to go anywhere because under the laws of Heartland and the Resurrection, I’m still a minor.

Christopher:...It’s going to be horrible, Kaito. I can’t lie any longer.

Kaito: I know. But I’m ready to accept my fate.

Christopher: You don’t understand…
Kaito: (Bitter.) What can you do about it? Nothing. So you don’t need to tell me what awaits me there.

(Christopher is silenced into shock.)

Kaito: (He takes in a deep breath. Looking ahead at the pond, he suddenly speaks.) It’s getting hot. Do you want to go play in the mud with me?

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito for a few moments, trying to process the sudden change in conversation.) Th...that’s juvenile...

Kaito: I won’t have time to do things like this after we’re married so might as well. I...grew up too fast. (He stands up.) My offer still stands.

(Christopher looks at Kaito in mute horror.)

Kaito: (He continues to look at the pond.) Thomas and I used to do it all the time.

Christopher: Wh...what?

Kaito: Unlike you, he played outside a lot. I’d often see him here and we’d go hunting for insects. I’m not sure if he remembers me but if he still does, I’m sure he’d be too embarrassed to tell you.

Christopher: Really...?

Kaito: (He shrugs.) It’s old history. Back then we didn’t know our fathers worked together. All we knew was that our fathers were scientists. We just enjoyed each other’s presence...surnames not needed. (He sighs.) How simple it was back then.
Christopher: I remember how Thomas often came home splattered in mud. The servants would be quite upset but our father just laughed.

Kaito: He said he liked the way I talked. I told him he sounded like the kind of people my momma wanted me to avoid but that he didn’t seem bad.

Christopher: Why didn’t you tell me all of this before?

Kaito: What would be the purpose? Your brother doesn’t seem to be in a hurry to splash around in the mud with me anymore.

Christopher: (He laughs a bit.) I think one of the reasons I was initially drawn to you was your personality. It reminded me of Thomas.

Kaito: (He turns to face Christopher.) Really?

Christopher: Underneath your sad smile I could tell that you were once lively and fun loving.

Kaito: (His expression softens.) Yeah...yeah I was. Before Haruto came, Thomas and I were...what you could call friends.

Christopher: I couldn’t tell that from the way you two interact.

Kaito: I wouldn’t think so.

---♀---

(The sound of a young boy with a heavy southern accent is heard. When the camera refocuses, it is revealed to be 11-year old Kaito stomping through the mud with 10-year old Thomas.)
Kaito: Late again! Why’re you always takin’ forever to come ‘ere huh?!

Thomas: (At this time, he still has a British accent. Baby fat still clings to some of his features. He gives off a bit of a spoiled and sheltered air.) My tutor refused to let me go until I could finish my arithmetic problems.

Kaito: Arithmetic? Pfft, that’s easy! I’m currently studyin’ calc!

Thomas: (He looks down at the mud, embarrassed.) I just can’t keep the sums straight in my head...How do you do it?

Kaito: (He shrugs.) I dunno, it just comes easy to me. Oh come on, your dad’s a scientist for cryin’ out loud!

Thomas: My father told me that not everything is inherited!

Kaito: True, but bein’ exposed to his work should help you pick up a few things. He lets you see what he does, right?

Thomas: (He shakes his head.) It’s boring to me.

Kaito: Boring?! There’s nothing boring about science!

Thomas: You’re such a drag.

Kaito: (He glares at Thomas.) You’re only saying that because you’re bad at arithmetic.

Thomas: Am not! You’re a true bore! I don’t understand half of the things that come out of your mouth!

Kaito: Yeah? That’s ‘cause you don’t pay attention!
Thomas: I do!

Kaito: No, you don’t!

Thomas: W-well maybe you’re the loser here!

Kaito: No, you are!

Thomas: Am not!

Kaito: Am too!

Thomas: Am not!

Kaito: Am too!

Thomas: (He stamps his feet in the mud.) AM NOT!

Kaito: Then why’re you always late?!

Thomas: It’s because studies are hard! Someone smart like you wouldn’t understand!

Kaito: Well then it’s your fault because you’re so dumb!

Thomas: Take that back!

Kaito: I ain’t takin’ that back!
Thomas: (He proceeds to try and shove Kaito in the mud.) You’re such a...dick! A big, hairy dick with saggy bollocks!

Kaito: (He grabs Thomas’s wrists and pushes him into the mud instead.) Yeah?! Well you’re pretty stupid for someone your age!

(Thomas is stunned, covered in mud. He’s at a loss for words. His expression is searching for a comeback but when he can’t find any, he begins to tear up. Kaito looks down at him and Thomas’s lip trembles.)

Kaito: For goodness’s sake...

(Thomas begins to bawl.)

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes.) Thom, please.

Thomas: (He continues to cry.) You’re...so...mean…!

Kaito: It’s just some mud. Get up.

Thomas: No! I don’t wanna be friends anymore!

Kaito: (Panic fills his expression. He bends down try and tries to help Thomas.) I-I’m sorry I pushed you! It’s just you were makin’ me mad an’ I just didn’t like your lil’ upstart—

Thomas: Go away!

Kaito: (He looks at Thomas for a few moments, pursing his lips. When he speaks again, his voice is soft.) Please be my friend again...I...I don’t have anyone else to play with. You...you seem to have a lot of friends and I’m real happy every time you decide to play with me...I’m
sorry, Thom. I really am… H-hey, we can play knight and princess…I’ll be the princess and you can be the knight.

Thomas: (He wipes his eyes and sniffs.)…R-really? I thought you said that was a babies’ game.

Kaito: (He colors a bit, putting his hands behind his back and digging the tip of his shoe into the mud.) To tell you the truth, I kinda like it…Especially when I’m the dragon. Tell you what, maybe if you can get one of your brothers to play, he can be the princess and I’ll be the dragon. Then you can be the knight and then we’ll all have fun.

Thomas: (He sniffs.)…I…I kind of wanna play treasure hunters today.

Kaito: (His expression brightens.) Me too! (He helps Thomas up.) I found a new path of the forest that I wanted to explore with you!

Thomas: R-really? I’m not too dumb to play with you?

Kaito: (He takes Thomas’s hands and shakes his head.) No. Never. I didn’t mean any of that. You’re actually pretty sharp.

Thomas: Are you telling me the truth?

Kaito: (He holds up his right hand.) Promise.

Thomas: (He brightens up and gives Kaito a smile full of missing teeth.) What are you waiting for then? Let’s go!

(The two run off down a forest path. The scene fades into a time lapse.)

Thomas: (He walks with his hands behind his head.)…’n so I told my brother he could go stick his smart nose up his butt.
Kaito: (Snorts.) He sounds quite unlikable from the way you describe him.

Thomas: Ugh, he’s the absolute worst! All he does is stay inside and read books.

Kaito: I like books.

Thomas: Yeah, but my brother reads big boring books.

Kaito: Well, sometimes I like to read classics.

Thomas: (He sticks his tongue out.) I’d rather be outside.

Kaito: I like to do a bit o’ both.

Thomas: My brother is such a bossy jerk. You’re so lucky that you’re an only child.

Kaito: (His expression saddens a bit.) It’s lonely though, even with momma. She promised me she’d give me a sibling to play with but…(He bites his lip.) It’s been 11 years.

Thomas: Younger siblings are nice, I guess. But promise me you won’t become an imperious jerk like Chris.

Kaito: Imperious…?

Thomas: (Angry.) Yeah! You thought I wasn’t smart enough to use that word?! Is that what it is?

Kaito: N-no...I just haven’t heard anyone use that word besides characters in books.
Thomas: (He blushes self-consciously and swipes his nose.) Resurrection English, I guess. (He clears his throat.) Anyways, my brother Chris is a pompous, imperious, self-absorbed and stuck-up dick. You wouldn’t get along with him.

Kaito: I’ll take your word for it. Chris sounds like a peach.

Thomas: Peach?

Kaito: (He shrugs.) Southern insult. When someone calls you a peach down south, don’t take it as a compliment is all I’m gon’ say.

Thomas: I’ll keep that in mind the next time I go to the south of the United States.

Kaito: I’ve never been, but my momma says it’s beautiful down there.

Thomas: My father told me that England is also beautiful. He went there for university.

Kaito: To each man his own… (He walks off the forest path.)

Thomas:...! You’re not supposed to do that!

Kaito: (From a bush.) And who said so? (He offers his hand.) C’mere.

Thomas: (He tries to find a reply but can’t find one. Reluctantly, he takes Kaito’s hand.) Oh, alright…

Kaito: We’re just takin’ a lil’ shortcut s’all.

Thomas: What if there’s bears?
Kaito: There’s no bears.

Thomas: How would you know?

Kaito: (He puffs up his chest.) I just do.

Thomas: You don’t know for sure!

Kaito: Yes I do.

Thomas: (He exhales through his cheeks and mutters.) On second thought, you and Chris would get along just fine.

Kaito: (He turns around.) What did you just say?

Thomas:...nothing.

Kaito: Mm’kay then. (He continues to lead Thomas through the undergrowth.)

Thomas: Aren’t you afraid we’ll get lost?

Kaito: Nope. I know these woods like the back of my hand.

Thomas: You said that this was a new part of the forest.

Kaito: It’s bound to lead to somewhere familiar. Relax.

Thomas: Where’s the treasure map?
Kaito: (He points to his head.) Here.

Thomas: I don’t see one in my head.

Kaito: It’s a gut feeling.

Thomas: If it’s in your gut, then why is the map in your head?

Kaito: (He stiffens momentarily but then walks even faster.) It just is, okay?

Thomas: That’s a Chris-sort of answer.

Kaito: Well I’m gonna go all Chris up your silly lil’ mouth if you don’t shut up.

Thomas: You’re such a bully! (He wrenches free of Kaito’s hand.)

Kaito: (He is now walking backwards through a bush.) Oh yeah? Then why’re you still followin’ me?

Thomas: (He crosses the bush with Kaito.) Because…

Kaito: (He keeps on walking backwards, arms crossed, oblivious to the muddy bog behind him.) Because what, huh?

Thomas: (He smirks.) Because I want to watch you fall on your bottom into the mud.

Kaito: (His self-righteous expression fades into surprise and he looks behind him. Before he can stop himself, he falls backwards into the mud.) Aahh…!
Thomas: (He laughs.) Not so pompous now, are we?

Kaito: (He begins to blush. A grimace forms across his face.) You planned this, didn’t you, you crafty lil’ fox.

Thomas: (He smirks and crosses his arms.) Yes, yes I did.

Kaito: (Without warning, he lunges for Thomas and tries to pull him down.)

Thomas: (He deftly leaps away.) Can’t catch me!

Kaito: (He shakily stands up, the mud squelching underneath him.) You’ll be sorry when I get you.

Thomas: That’s if you get me, mud monster.

Kaito: Oh, I will. (He takes a step forwards but gets sucked down by the mud.)

Thomas: (He stands on dry land, smiling with a hand on his chin.) Indeed…

Kaito: I think you should run...if you know what’s good for you. (With difficulty, he wrenches his foot free but his shoe is stuck in the mud.) Tch...! (He bends down to retrieve it. Digging around in the mud, shock fills his face. He digs around more and his eyes widen. When he’s finally able to find his shoe, he pops it back on. When he speaks, his voice is softer now.) Th-Thom...I don’t think I’m the only thing buried in the mud.

Thomas: (He peers over the edge.) Did you find treasure…?

Kaito: (Hesitantly, he bends down and slowly fishes around in the mud. When he finds something, he pulls it out. In his hand is a bone, yellowed with age.)
Thomas: Woah! A dinosaur bone! Are there more?

Kaito: (He looks at the bone and shakes his head.) I...it’s not a dinosaur bone. I’m pretty sure this is a human femur, from the looks of it.

Thomas: M-mummies?

Kaito: (A chill crawls up his spine.) M-maybe there’s just this one bone…(He throws the bone to Thomas, who fumbles with it and then drops it. Then he bends down to dig for more things.)

Thomas: (He looks down at the bone in disgust.) Why did you toss this to me?!

Kaito: I wanna see if there’s more. Aha. (He pulls something out.) Another human bone. Looks like an ulna. (He tosses it to Thomas. Walking around the mud with difficulty, he tries to find even more things. He has gotten over his initial fear. Now, he is avidly curious.)

Thomas: I...I don’t like where this is going...

Kaito: Why not? It’s kind of interesting.

Thomas: This doesn’t look right.

Kaito: (He holds up another bone to Thomas.) Found a humerus!

Thomas: Uhm, I think we should go home.

Kaito: (He seems oblivious to Thomas. Now he is digging in the mud with two hands. His eyes brighten as he pulls out two bones in each hand.) A tibia and a fibula!
Thomas: (As the two leg bones are thrown to him, his chin begins to tremble.) I’m scared, Kaito.

Kaito: (He turns around, his entire shirt now splattered in mud.) Why, Thom? This is fascinating! (He resumes digging around. When he pulls out a tiny bone, he rolls his eyes and throws it back in the mud.) It’s just like a fossil hunt!

Thomas: These were living people…

Kaito: Sure, (He throws a tiny bone far away.) they may have been living but they aren’t now.

Thomas: What if they were killed and put here?

Kaito: (He seemingly doesn’t hear this.)

Thomas: I don’t know…I think we should tell someone…

Kaito: (His expression turns serious and he turns around.) No.

Thomas: N-no…?

Kaito: (He looks at a small bone.) These do seem pretty recent.

Thomas: (His knees begin to shake.) Th-then…

Kaito: Hold on, I think I found something. (He plunges his arms elbow deep into the mud.) Woah! (With a bit of difficulty, he pulls out a skull.)

Thomas: (He screams.) TAKE ME HOME! NOW!
Kaito: Oh hush up, you big baby. It’s dead. It can’t hurt you. (He looks at the skull in fascination.) Hmm, most likely a female...Can’t do an accurate Hamlet impression unfortunately.

Thomas: I really want to get out of here, Kaito. Please...?

Kaito: (He continues to study the skull, wiping mud off of it.) Hold on...

Thomas: (His chin begins to tremble.) I’m scared...

Kaito: It’s the middle of the day.

Thomas: (He begins to cry.) Please take me home!

Kaito: (He sighs, looks at the skull for a few more seconds and then throws the skull back in the mud. With difficulty, he reaches Thomas.) Ugh, fine. But this will be our secret, ya hear?

Thomas: (He weakly nods.)

Kaito: I wanna make sure you won’t squeal about this to anyone.

Thomas: (Through his tears.) I won’t! I swear I won’t!

Kaito: I’m gonna take a page outta Huckleberry Finn. Let’s do a blood pact.

Thomas: I don’t wanna get cut!

Kaito: (He pulls out his pocket knife.) C’mon, it won’t hurt. (He begins to write in the dirt.) We, Thomas n’ Kaito promise to ne’er tell anyone bout this bog. (He cuts the fleshy pad of his
thumb with his eyes closed and dribbles blood over the words.) See? Didn’t hurt none.

Thomas: NO!!!

Kaito: (He lets out an exasperated sigh.) C’mon…

Thomas: No!

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes and puts back the pocket knife.) Fine. You can do a spit pact.

Thomas: (He looks up at Kaito.) Th-that sounds better.

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes again.) You’re such a baby.

Thomas: (He stands up.) Am not!

Kaito: (He pulls out his pocket knife.) Then do a blood pact with me!

Thomas: You read too many stupid books! (He spits onto the words of the vow.) There! You happy?

Kaito: (He grumbles and replaces his knife.) Fine. (He stamps his foot over the vow, erasing the words.) Now our words have been sealed. (He kicks the pile of bones back in the mud. He begins to walk back through the bush. Thomas then clings onto his arm.) Baby.

Thomas: Am not.

Kaito: Whatever. (He sighs.) You promise to not tell about this?
Thomas: (Hesitantly.)...No. Not to anyone.

Kaito: Good.

(The scene goes back to the scratched dirt. Then it fades to black.)

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(We are back in the present. Kaito is once again in front of the bog.)

Kaito: It’s still here... (Without hesitation, he plunges his arm into the mud and digs around. After awhile, he pulls out a human femur, the bone still new looking. His eyes narrow.) And it’s still being used.

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(It is the next morning. Kaito stands in front of Byron in his office.)

Byron: And what brings you here, Kaito?

Kaito: Your family sits on a throne of blood. The bones of countless individuals line your house and you know it.

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow.) At such an hour you request a private audience with me just to recite accusational poetry?

Kaito: (His eyes narrow.) Don’t play nonchalant with me, Tron. I know about the bog and its bodies.

Byron: (A brief look of shock fills his face, but it quickly is replaced by his usual calm expression.) I’m sorry to tell you, but that isn’t my family’s.
Kaito: The one in the forest near the pond.

Byron: Yes, I’m aware of that. The Resurrection’s disposal area for...unsavory individuals.

Kaito: Call off the wedding and your people’s secret will be safe.

Byron: (He lifts an eyebrow.)...Is that a threat, mr. Tenjo?

Kaito: Sure as the sun’s in the day and the stars in the night.

Byron: (He calmly meets Kaito’s narrowed gaze. His expression is unflinching and cold.) Your endearing southern phrases never cease to amuse me. It will be a pleasure to have you join our family.

Kaito: (He is taken aback.) There will be no wedding if this gets out.

Byron: Would you actually do it though? This will hurt more than just the Resurrection. This will hurt Christopher and his brothers, even if they have no inkling of these grounds. You know how your mother—the world—views us. We will only be subject to more of their ire as a whole. Do you want Christopher to bear the labels of “misogynist, insane, and murderer?”

Kaito: No, they wouldn—

Byron: (He motions his arm out the window.) Then ask an Outsider what they think of when they hear of the Resurrection. 8 out of 10 will say that the Resurrection is a group of insane billionaires who live conservatively, are godless, wear Victorian “costumes” and mistreat their women. And some will never get past that image of us...(He grits his teeth.) like your mother.

Kaito: (His eyes blaze with anger.) But that’s exactly what it is.
Byron: (He laughs.) Hark! Marleen’s hatred lives on! Honestly, Kaito…For all your father’s acceptance toward my people, you are still quite anti-Resurrection. (He leans closer to Kaito, a cruel smile on his lips.) Christopher told me you called him the slur.

Kaito: (He blanches.) I...I was...

Byron: No matter how beautiful Venus made the Cat as a human, it still returned to its roots when the goddess sent the mouse.

Kaito: No! It was...I...

Byron: (He stands up and walks around his desk.) I don’t blame you. After all, you were raised in an anti-Resurrection environment. (He unexpectedly grabs Kaito’s chin with his thumb and index finger.) Which only makes me happier to disprove all of your preconceived notions about the Resurrection once you are with us.

Kaito: (He looks up at Byron angrily, his fear masked by rage.)

Byron: (He clucks his tongue.) You mostly bear your father’s looks in his youth. But your personality on the other hand...It’s reprehensible, just like your mother’s. (He drops Kaito’s chin.) You’ll look lovely in her dress. (He turns towards the window.)

Kaito: I won’t let you humiliate my family like that.

Byron: (He looks back at Kaito.) What power do you have to prevent me? You are a child in the eyes of Resurrection and Heartland law.

Kaito: (He swallows and looks at Byron with a look of impotent rage.)

Byron: It hurts, doesn’t it? This feeling of powerlessness. (He balls his hand in a fist.) That was exactly how I felt when your father threw me down that portal. (His eyes narrow.) On that day, I vowed to never be powerless again.
Kaito: You’ll regret the day you married me into your family. Mark my words.

Byron: (He smiles.) We shall see. Your father has sided with me. Your friends are miles away. You have no friends besides Christopher and he shall soon be your husband. What could a friendless, faceless, child do?

Kaito: (He grimaces.) I’ll be 20 in a few months.

Byron: But is that soon enough? The wedding is in four days.

Kaito: I’m a very resourceful person.

Byron: Oh, I know. Watching you struggle against the societal standards of the Resurrection will be only more amusing then.

Kaito: So you admit it. The Resurrection is hell on earth.

Byron: (He gives Kaito a patronizing smile.) I said nothing of the sort. We aren’t monsters here, Kaito.

Kaito: Then why is one looking at me as I speak?

Byron: I suggest you check your vision. Anyways...for one, women being barred from higher education is a myth. There are many women who go to university once they are of age. Second, we aren’t as old fashioned as you think we are. (He pulls a book out of his pocket. When he opens it, it’s revealed to be a phone.) We just appear to be old fashioned. In fact, this house itself is monitored around the clock by hidden cameras. Third, we aren’t insane, as you can see. We just wish to be able to live in a...more refined time of Great Britain. You would understand our being here if you were in the United Kingdom during the 21st century. (He puts his phone back in his pocket.) I daresay your existence here could be even...comfortable.
Kaito: (He grimaces.)

Byron: ...Are we finished, Kaito?

Kaito: (He holds Byron’s gaze for a few moments. Wordlessly, he gets up and leaves, slamming the study door behind him.)

Byron: (He doesn’t flinch as the door is closed. Instead, a smile fills his lips.)

--- ♂ ---

(The hand holding the letter shakes.)

Rioné: V-votre majesté...

Rioné: [Y-your majesty…]

Chrisseine: (There is a lock of blonde hair matted with blood in his fingers.) Mizairen…(He puts the lock of hair near his face, tears streaming down his face.) Mon amour…

Chrisseine: [(There is a lock of blonde hair matted with blood in his fingers.) Mizairen...(He puts the lock of hair near his face, tears streaming down his face.) My love…]

Rioné: (She is about to say something but Chrisseine holds up his hand.)

Chrisseine: (In English.) I...I will have no more of that damned language.

Rioné: (She swallows and hesitantly speaks in English.)...but it is your mother tongue...

Chrisseine: It does not matter. I became property of Bucchanary when I agreed to marry the crown prince. (Quietly, he hands Rioné the letter without looking at her. She gingerly takes the letter, and reads it, horror widening her eyes. Two simple sentences, written in elegant French fill the paper.)
Il suffit de vos cabotinages, ma fille. La tête du garde est en train de pourrir à l'heure où nous parlons.

[I have had enough of your cavorting, daughter. The guard’s head is rotting on a pike as we speak.]

Rioné: (She covers her mouth in shock, tears filling her eyes.) My princess...

Chrisseine: (Tears begin to fill his eyes.) No, not here...Please call me Christophe...

Rioné: (She holds his empty hands, her voice breaking.) My sincerest apologies, Christophe.

Chrisseine: (Unexpectedly, he pulls her into an embrace. Both begin to cry.) All of my attempts of happiness...denied. Why must the Dragon be so cruel...?

---♀---

(Coughing is heard. The scene fades in to reveal Kaith sitting by his father’s bed.)

King Robertson:...A king should never sit comfortably on his throne...especially in times like this.

Kaith: (His expression is grim.) I understand, father.

King Robertson: (He takes Kaith’s hand.) Carry this kingdom into the light, my son. Fight off those countries with their faceless God in the name of the Dragon.

Kaith: May the Dragon be willing.

King Robertson: Yes, may the Dragon be willing. And the Dragon does will. (He squeezes his son’s hand.) It is a heavy thing, the crown.
Kaith: (His expression is grim.) You have told me so my entire life...but...Never before have the words weighed so heavily.

King Robertson: (He has a coughing fit. When he pulls his hand away, it is covered in blood.)...I am ready to join our ancestors. (The camera zooms out to reveal that the father and son are not alone. They are surrounded by courtiers and the physician.)

Kaith: (He swallows.) Father…

King Robertson: They think we are godless creatures, but we are not. (He turns to someone in the crowd. It is revealed to be the purple-haired woman.) Ryaris…

Ryaris: (Gone is her effervescent manner. Her posture stiffens. She gives a stiff bow, despite wearing a dress.) Your majesty.

King Robertson: You still choose to grace my presence in such a garish costume at a time like this.

Ryaris: (She purses her lips and hangs her head.)

King Robertson: (He sighs.) At least show me a semblance of respect, nephew. Soon, you must serve your cousin.

Ryaris: (His eyes crinkle a bit in distaste as his true identity is revealed. He furtively glances at Kaith and then bows deeply. When he speaks, his voice has become more deeper.) Apologies, my king.

King Robertson: Durenburg, Michaen, Alastair, Camille, Ryaris, Kristine and Gerad...I entrust the crown’s safety in your hands. Bucchanary’s shadow council must never fall.

Shadow Council: Yes, your majesty. (He bows alongside his fellow courtiers.)
King Robertson: Durenburg...The sword. As the best swordsman in the kingdom, I bestow upon you the honor of using your blade.

Durenburg: (He is the same man as Durand. Gone is his priggish demeanor. Instead, a confident, serious man walks up to the king. He presents Kaith a glinting sword.) I am honored that you will use my family’s sword to begin the next line of succession.

King Robertson: (He turns to Kaith. His voice is steely.) As I did to my father and he did to his, you must slay me, Kaith. Our throne grows only stronger with our forefathers’ blood soaking it.

Kaith: (Grimly, he takes the sword.) It has been an honor, father.

King Robertson: (He closes his tired eyes.) I am not afraid to die. When a king is no longer fit to rule, it is only sensible to end his life and have a stronger ruler to replace him.

Kaith: (His hand shakes a bit. He strengthens his grip.)

King Robertson: Despite your looks, you possess the heart of the dragon. (He takes in a deep breath and exhales.) Now slay me, son, and usher in a new rule.

Kaith: *Draconem ut custodiant viam tuam*... (He raises the sword.)

King Robertson: (He makes a reverent gesture towards Kaith.) *Et draco in praesidio nostro regnum.*

(The next shot shows King Robertson’s peaceful expression. Then, it cuts to black, the sound of a sword cutting through flesh echoing. There is silence for a few moments, then fades into Kaith and Chrisseine’s coronation ceremony. The crown is being placed atop Kaith’s head. He looks ahead, a steely expression on his face.)

Priest: *Draconem et custodiat nos.*
Kaith and Chrisseine:... *Draconem et custódiat nos.*

Kaith: (He murmurs, his lips barely moving.) Dear heavens, we are still too young to rule.

Chrisseine: (There are dark shadows under his eyes, grief still filling his expression.) The Dragon put us on this stage and so, we must perform.

---Episode 18~END---

Photo for this episode [here](#)
The Path Littered with Dead Roses

Chapter Notes

Thank you to Iyliss for the brief translations! Long live the king of the lion's mane.

---Episode 19---
The Path Littered with Dead Roses

(The scene takes place at the cathedral where the wedding will take place. Kaito opens up the doors to the church and starts when he sees the person waiting for him.)

Kaito: (His expression is surprised. He speaks in Japanese, his voice clear and flowing, not a trace of his southern accent heard.) D-droite...! All the way from Italy! Just what are you doing here?!

(A woman with violet hair and light purple bangs stands in front of Kaito, a few inches taller than him. Her honey colored eyes are soft with affection and her porcelain skin sets off her pink lipstick. She wears a white dress with purple and blue accents and flats the color of the ocean. Her voice is gentle and caring.)

Droite: Mr. Arclight assigned me with preparing for the Heartland side of the wedding. (She gives Kaito a small smile.) He wanted someone who was familiar to help you prepare for your role.

Kaito: (Coldly.) I don't need your help. Besides...why you out of all the people in Heartland?

Droite: We grew up together.

Kaito: (He scoffs.) “Grew up” as in endured Heartland’s underground training facilities.

Droite: (Her mouth is a thin line.) It is a time neither of us wish to talk about, isn’t it?

Kaito: (He ignores her question and grudgingly compliments her.) Tron was smart, choosing
you. Your organizational skills are exceptional. I still don’t think giving up your place as WDC manager was a good choice.

Droite: I found my calling in the world of professional dueling. (She looks out the window.) I prefer working one-on-one compared to organizing groups of people.

Kaito: 3 days to prepare for the social event of the summer will be quite a challenge.

Droite: Oh no, I’ve also been collaborating with your father and Mr. Arclight.

Kaito: And they never told me…

Droite: (Amused.) Because you never bothered to ask.

Kaito: And how would you know?

Droite: We trained together for more than 3 years and collected numbers for 2 years. Of course I can tell.

Kaito:...What will you be doing for me, exactly?

Droite: (Her eyes are sad as she says the next sentence.)...The dress. I'll be helping you with that and your cosmetics.

Kaito: (Anger begins to show on his features.) You know as well as I that I won’t be doing any of that.

Droite: Something is...wrong with Mr. Arclight, isn’t there?

Kaito: So...It’s gotten to the point that even an outsider like you can notice.
Droite: (Hurt flickers across her features.) I don’t know what he’s planning for you, but I fear for your safety.

Kaito: (He swallows and takes in a deep breath.) I made this choice. I’ll have to live with it.

Droite: (She takes a protective step towards Kaito.)...He’s threatened you, hasn’t he? And for once...you’re powerless.

Kaito: (He balls his hands into a fist, yet he remains silent.)

Droite:...Despite your declaration, you’ll be wearing the dress, won’t you? You shouldn’t lie to yourself… (She looks down in sadness. Her voice is soft as she says the next words.) It only leads to a broken heart.

Kaito:...I don’t need you to tell me that.

Droite:...I know a place where you can be safe.

Kaito: Are you suggesting I run and hide?

Droite: Whatever Mr. Arclight has planned for you doesn’t look good.

Kaito: I know that. But I won’t run. I’m not a coward.

Droite: (She sighs.)...I’ve always admired that about you, Kaito. You never run from a fight…Even if it’s dangerous.

Kaito: It’s necessary to survive in this cutthroat world.
Droite: It isn’t in this situation. The Resurrection will only benefit from this deal. Heartland will gain nothing. There is no trade happening in the Resurrection. They have no businesses that are worthwhile to invest in nor—

Kaito: (He holds up his hand.) If you can calculate all of these things so well, then why don’t you become Heartland city’s next mayor? And this time, mayor doesn’t mean “puppet of my father.” It means a true leader who works with an elected council.

Droite: (She blushes.) I can’t...what do I know of politics…?

Kaito: What did that scum Heartland know of politics? What does my father know of politics? He’s an inventor for gods’ sake. You’d be doing us a favor, becoming the next mayor. You’d do well, better than my father or that fly.

Droite: But isn’t it supposed to be your city?

Kaito: It won’t be after I become a part of the Arclights. If you take the city from us, you would free us of this burden. We’ll be reduced to just a family with newly found riches but with little power. With that money, we could move far away from this damned city filled with bad memories.

Droite:...The position of mayor is tempting, but I’m not suited for a job that leaves me responsible for the lives of thousands.

Kaito:...me neither. (He purses his lips.) If I couldn’t save one life then how can I be responsible for an entire city? Maybe it’s better this way, that I marry into the Arclights.

---♀---

(We are in an office. The members of the shadow council are present along with Kaith and Chrisseine.)

Durenburg:...Our eyes on the Laellan side have reported that the French have invaded.
Chrisseine: (He grabs his armrest tighter.)

Durenburg: (Apologetically.) The new king Tuomas appears to lack his predecessor’s strategy and tact.

Chrisseine: (He swallows hard. When he speaks, his voice is quiet. Years of speaking English have improved his accent.)...He always was kindhearted, despite his boisterous exterior.

Durenburg: As their allies, we must assist them.

Kaith: (He nods his head, deep in contemplation.)

Chrisseine: If Laelle falls then we are next. (He turns to Kaith.) We must stop them.

Kaith: I agree. But we also have our country to protect. Laelle isn’t the only country bordered by a major kingdom.

Chrisseine: (He grips the armrest tightly.) As their sworn allies, defending their borders when needed is a part of our responsibility.

Kaith: That may be true, but it is only the beginning. It’s still too soon to determine if they will win or not.

Chrisseine: (His mouth is a thin line.) Put a newborn chick amidst a pack of wolves. We all know what will transpire.

Kaith: But Laelle is not helpless. They have their generals from the previous king’s reign.

Chrisseine: Yes, but Tuomas of the Lion’s Mane is their leader. He is but a child playing soldier. He will rush into battle and needlessly be killed. He has no heir.
Kaith: Children must be taught, nonetheless.

(A flash of anger fills Chrisseine’s face. It quickly reverts to a neutral expression, only his eyes revealing anger. Chrisseine and Kaith hold each other’s gazes for a tense few moments.)

Ryaris:...If I may speak, your majesty...Are you allowing sentimentality to cloud your judgement?

Chrisseine: (His expression darkens.) No. I am not. (His eyes narrow at Ryara,) My homeland owes me nothing. It is a necessity to help them in order to save our country. Do you want us to fall to these French dogs and their faceless God?

Ryaris: (He curtsies.) Apologies, my queen...but the Spanish are more concerning to us.

(Chrisseine’s eyes widen with anger. Just when he is about to speak, Kaith intervenes.)

Kaith: (He clears his throat.) No more than 6,000 men.

Chrisseine: (He turns to Kaith.)...6,000...

Durenburg: It sounds prudent, my king.

Ryaris: A quick decision...Decisions made in haste may lead to an untimely downfall. You still need time to think about this, cousin.

Kaith: (His eyes narrow,) Perhaps.

Ryaris: Are 6,000 troops sufficient?
Kaith: Then let us further discuss this decision until we reach a satisfying conclusion.

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(It is raining heavily. Chrisseine is quietly looking out the window, a cup of tea in his hands. Him and Rionè are playing a game of cards, but neither seem interested.)

Chrisseine: In Laelle...do you have anyone left?

Rionè: No, your majesty. I am the last of my line save for distant cousins.

Chrisseine: Then the loss of Laelle will not profoundly affect you then.

Rionè: (Shock fills her face for a few moments.) I would not say so...It held my happy childhood memories before my mother was executed.

Chrisseine: My mother’s former lady-in-waiting? Unfortunately, I can only remember her screams the day she was dragged out of her chambers.

Rionè: (She shifts uncomfortably.) She was innocent of the crime she was accused of. It was entirely my father’s fault.

Chrisseine: Oh? I never inquired much into your house’s history save for what was necessary.

Rionè: I never saw much of my father but from what I knew, he was plotting treason. If that wasn’t enough, he pulled my mother down to hell with him. I still don’t understand why he would leave me to fend for myself.

Chrisseine: Children having to pay for their parents’ selfish decisions is an old tale. (He sips his tea.) And it will not end here.
Rionè:...no matter what Bucchanary sends, Laelle is doomed to fall, then?

Chrisseine: (He grimly nods.) France is powerful. If not in number then in weapons.

Rionè: But they are in debt...

Chrisseine: No kingdom is free of debt. There are only some kingdoms with more debt than others. What they do not owe in gold, they owe in morals. All kingdoms are in debt with their subjects. It is only because of them that we can exist.

Rionè:...your brother...what about him?

Chrisseine: An innocent child. All father saw was his spirit and potential strength. I saw through all of that. Deep down, he only wishes to lead a simple life. Yes, he may adorn himself in jewels and lovers... but...it is only a mask.

Rionè: (Her expression saddens.) May the Dragon watch over both of you.

Chrisseine: (He smiles sadly.) We have lost the Dragon long ago. The moment my father decided that I was to be a woman, he defied the Dragon’s given fate. So...I dove into my role and further debauchery.

Rionè: Debauchery...?

Chrisseine:...Mizairen...was not the first one.

Rionè: (She looks down at her cards.) Who?
Chrisseine: Tuomas of the Lion’s Mane himself. After all, Chrisseine is an illusion. His true brother is Christophe, not this empty headed doll.

Rionè: (She sets her cards down.)...that is a crime punishable by death.

Chrisseine: My existence itself is a crime so why not live the way I am expected to? In the day, I played the role of the empty-headed doll and at night I became Christophe. That was how we lived. We kissed under the Dragon’s golden eye and slashed at each other with swords under the Dragon’s blind eye.

Rionè:...do you feel any remorse?

Chrisseine: We needed each other. I did not want to forget my true self and he did not want to lose his brother.

Rionè: Then why…

Chrisseine: Because it made it bearable. Imagine, an entirely different person is forced onto you but they still bear the same face of the person you love...Our relationship was born purely of spite and desperation. I hated what was being done to me. He was desperate to cling onto what remained of his brother. Meeting under the full moon was not sufficient.

Rionè: (Her eyes are narrowed.) Still...it is a despicable crime.

Chrisseine:...We pretended it wasn’t. After all, I was just Chrisseine, not Christophe...She is just like all the other court dolls, fluttering her fan and wearing her beautiful gowns. (His expression solemn.) But deep down...we both knew. This was wrong, even if it felt like heaven. We, who were abandoned by fate...decided to create our own.

Rionè: And did the king ever find out?

Chrisseine: About our moonlit meetings? Yes. He put an end to them, although occasionally I would still meet him afterwards. But something changed that night. (The sounds of a boy
screaming is distantly heard.) I was held down by the king and forced into Chrisseine’s clothes by maidservants as Tuomas watched...Sometimes, I can still feel their nails digging into my flesh. But they are long dead now...soon disposed of for fear of revealing the truth.

Rionè: Even if you say that Laelle does not owe you anything...do you still love your brother?

Chrisseine: (His smile is pained.) Every day.

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(We are in the midst of a battle. The horses neigh, the swords clash, guns fire. Smoke fills the scene.)

General: Mon roi! Nous devons battre en retraite!
General: [My king! We must retreat!]

Tuomas: (He tries to control his horse as it rears.) Non! Nous devons continuer... jusqu’à notre dernier souffle!
Tuomas: [(He tries to control his horse as it rears.) No! We must continue...until our last breath!]

General: Mais notre défaite est assurée!
General: [But we are lost for sure!]

Tuomas: Si il en est ainsi, nous devons nous battre vaillamment jusqu'au bout! (He turns to his soldiers.) Nous devons protéger ce que nous chérissons de tous nos coeurs. Si nous ne pouvons rentrer chez nous, que nos cris atteignent nos familles!
Tuomas: [If so, then we must fight bravely until the end! (He turns to his soldiers.) We must protect the things we treasure with all of our hearts. If we cannot return home then let our cries reach our families!]

(The troops’ shouts fills the air.)
Tuomas: (He looks at his soldiers in admiration.) C'est un honneur de me battre aux cotés de mon peuple. Je préfère mourir en me précipitant au combat qu'en hermite exilé. Maintenant, en avant! (He unsheathes his sword and gallops further into battle, his soldiers following.) Que le Dragon veille sur nous!

Tuomas: [(He looks at his soldiers in admiration.) It is an honor to fight alongside my people. I would rather die rushing into battle than die an exiled hermit. Now, onwards! (He unsheathes his sword and gallops further into battle, his soldiers following.) May the Dragon watch over us!]

Troops: QUE LE DRAGON GUIDE NOS EPEES!
Troops: [MAY THE DRAGON GUIDE OUR SWORDS!]

Tuomas: Que le dragon guide notre but!
Tuomas: [May the dragon guide our aim!]

Troops: ET QUE LE DRAGON PROTÈGE NOS TERRES!
Troops: [AND MAY THE DRAGON PROTECT OUR LAND!]

(Tuomas disappears into the smoke with his soldiers, their shouts filling the air. The sound of many guns firing amidst swords clanging are heard. Tuomas’s silhouette is seen being shot multiple times. The choked cry of a horse is heard. Red blood splatters the grass. Despite that, the battle rages on. Slowly, it fades to black.)

---♀---

Durand:...Laelle has fallen.

Chrisseine: (Grief fills his expression and he holds Rionè’s hand.) An expected outcome.

Kaith: And our kingdom?

Durand: Safe...for now.

Chrisseine: The king…?
Durand:...he has fallen alongside his kingdom.

Chrisseine: (He is strangely impassive.) As it should be.

---♀—

(Once again we are in the cathedral. The shot is focused on a hand slipping a ring onto another hand’s ring finger. It zooms out and is revealed to be Christopher and Kaito.)

Christopher: Amen.

Kaito: (He is a bit uncomfortable.)...Amen.

Christopher: (Worry fills his expression.) Is something the matter?

Kaito:...I’ve never been in a catholic church before...It’s...quite grand.

Christopher: (He smiles understandingly.) It can make you feel quite small sometimes… Cathedrals, ornate as they are, are meant to intimidate. ”The overall presence of God should be enough to humble a mortal”...was what our father had often said.

Kaito: Tron? (He snorts.) Unlikely.

Christopher: (He raises an eyebrow.) No, no of course not. I meant...the priest.

Kaito:...makes more sense.

Christopher: (He takes in a deep breath and looks at the rings.) Even if these aren’t the rings we’ll be using at the wedding...It feels a lot more real now.
Kaito: (Quietly.) It does, doesn’t it?

Christopher: (He looks at the clock in the back.) It’s estimated that the sermon itself will last an hour.

Kaito: (Deadpan.)...An hour of standing sounds absolutely delightful.

Christopher: (He gives Kaito a reassuring smile.)...It only happens once.

Kaito: So does dying.

Christopher: (Chiding.) Honestly…! Macabre jokes in the presence of God!

Kaito: (Wryly.) I never took you for a religious person.

Christopher: (He nervously fumbles with his sleeves.) It’s...it’s a habit.

Kaito: (Abruptly.) Do you know why you worship God?

Christopher: (Shock fills his face for a few moments. Then he looks furtively around the cathedral, pursing his lips.) I was raised not to question this subject.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.)

Christopher: (He takes in a deep breath. His voice is very quiet, almost a whisper.)...I don’t think anyone understands why they worship God here. Resurrection Catholicism is...interesting.

Kaito: So it’s just tradition that binds you?
Christopher: (He swallows.) Yes.

Kaito: Then this wedding is a sham in itself.

--- ⚘—

(The sound of clocks and bells ringing across the scene is heard. In a room whose walls are entirely made of mirrors, a figure sits chained in the middle. Their sleeves drip with lace, their hands laden with cumbersome jewelry. Only their painted mouth and crescent beauty mark is seen in the next shot. A smile fills their lips. When the figure speaks, it is tinged with a familiar accent.)

Voice: The clocks separated by centuries will soon be in sync...And I shall see you then, Christopher.

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(We are in Byron's study.)

Christopher: May I see the invitation list?

Byron: Of course. (He opens up a drawer in his desk and places the handwritten list on the table.) Resurrection and Heartland alike are invited.

Christopher: (His eyes trail down the list and he pauses at Mizael's and Rio Kamishiro's names.) Ah...

Byron: Yes?

Christopher: Nothing, dearest father.

Byron: Well, even if there was an unsavory guest, you couldn't change it anyways. All the invitations were sent out a week ago. Heartland is most likely abuzz with the upcoming ceremony. (He smiles.) It will be the social event of the year.
Christopher: Indeed, dearest father.

Byron: Why inquire about the wedding now when you barely showed your interest before?

Christopher: Er…(He smiles nervously.) Nerves.

Byron: (He nods.) Understandable. Coming to the cathedral and practicing made it more real, didn’t it?

Christopher: Yes...it did.

Byron: (His expression softens.) I know that you will do me proud.

Christopher: (His eyes go to the floor.) I hope so, dearest father.

---♀—

Rionè: (She is looking straight ahead, pushing her way through the crowd.) Your majesty, please...!

Kaith: (He is behind Rionè, his eyes wide in alarm.) My queen!

(Chrisseine stands in the middle of the banquet, a cup in his hands. Age and grief have done him in, wrinkles lining his eyes and cheeks. His hair is even whiter than before.)

Chrisseine: (Bitterly.) I have resided in this kingdom for more than thirty years, longer than I have ever been in my kingdom of birth. I braved through the execution of my lover. I have braved through the death of the great King Robertson. I have braved through the death of my very own brother...And I have braved through the murder of my very own child.

(At this, the courtiers gathered below the palace begin to murmur.)
Chrisseine: (He takes in a deep breath.) And yet, these experiences with death have drained me instead of strengthened me. No more...(He grimaces.) I am now forty. And the sins I have committed have stretched beyond this life into the next. Refrain from addressing me as the angel princess. (He turns to the crowd.) For this white hair of mine is a curse. It is a constant reminder of how sinful I am. I have lain with my brother and I have killed. Blood stains my hair, but it always washes away in the river like the sins I hide. I will have no more of this.

(The murmurs grow even louder.)

Chrisseine: Our court is filled with French and Spanish spies. We are besieged and we do not have the power to remain much longer. With the deaths of the Glittering Seven, our court is no longer as lively as it once was...nor as strong. I cannot bear to witness another death in the bloodbath that will surely ensue. My heart is already far too broken, the shards cutting at me every waking hour. Yes, you may see this as selfishness...(He looks down at the cup in his hands.) But...I no longer wish to see anymore suffering. So...spare me this sight. (He lifts the cup to his lips and drinks.)

Rionè: (She tries to further push her way through the crowd but everyone is stuck in their position.) MY QUEEN!

Kaith: (He runs towards Chrisseine, mercilessly elbowing abashed courtiers. He knocks the cup out of Chrisseine’s hands. It is too late though and Chrisseine falls into his arms.) The court physician! Where is he?! Find him! (Quietly.) Christophe...I can’t do this without you...

Chrisseine: (His face is eerily calm as blood trickles from his mouth.) Ah...I have not heard my name called in such a long time...such a bittersweet sound. (He looks at the ceiling, filled with cherubs and clouds. He smiles.) May I have another opportunity to cleanse myself of my sins...(He coughs, more blood trickling from his mouth. He takes in a shuddery breath.) Soon...(His eyes slowly roll to Kaith’s face.) Mizairen...(His hand weakly touches Kaith’s cheek. Slowly, it slides down Kaith’s face.)...I hope to see you again...in...our next lives.

Kaith: Ch...Chrisseine...

Rionè: (She lets out a wail of grief. A courtier tries to comfort her and she brushes them off.) Useless...! All of you! Who gave her the poison?! Who?
Kaith: (He starts and looks at the cup, shattered across the floor.) GUARDS! Bar the doors. (He gently rests Chrisseine on the ground and stands up. White fury burns in his eyes.) We will not leave until the killer is found. (He swallows hard.) Someone...has taken advantage of the queen.

(The ballroom is sent into a panic. The murmurs crescendo into hysteric shouts. There is a flurry of confusion as courtiers begin to attempt to flee. Slowly, it goes back to Chrisseine, eyes slowly closing, blood still trickling from his mouth. Contrasting with the chaotic scene, his face is oddly peaceful. It slowly fades to black.)

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Christopher: (He wakes up, gasping. Sweat trails down his face.) Oh dear God...I've died again.

Chrisseine: (His ghostly figure stands at the side of Christopher's bed, still dressed in the gown from that day. Blood still stains his chin.) So it may seem. Tell me, will you make the same mistake as I did?

Christopher: (In alarm, he throws off his sheets and retreats to the wall besides him.)...Y-you're...

Chrisseine: Christophe Aures Alexiel Blanche.

Christopher:...N-no...It can’t be...This must be a dream.

Chrisseine: You believe that a dragon created the world so why do you not believe in ghosts?

Christopher:...! I do not...

Chrisseine: Then why did you allow Kaito to go to the moon?

Christopher:...It was his destiny.

Chrisseine:...then...is it your destiny to repeat my mistakes?
Christopher: (He looks at Chrisseine, trying to hide his alarm.) You’re a trick of the light. Begone…

Chrisseine: I cannot be banished so easily...We only show ourselves if we need help. Do you know what today is?

Christopher: I...it’s the…(He gives a furtive glance at the clock which says that it is 1:38 AM.) The 19th.

Chrisseine:...Exactly the 500th year since my wedding.

Christopher: (He shakes his head.) Why haven’t I read of you in my studies?

Chrisseine: The victors are the ones who are allowed to write history. Would they allow someone like me to be remembered?

Christopher:...no.

Chrisseine: Of course. That is one of the reasons why I am forced to remain in waiting.

Christopher:...If you say that you are a man, then why do you still wear a gown?

Chrisseine: (A bitter smile fills his face.) Yet another one of my punishments. I continued to defy the Dragon, long after my father died. This was the result. But I couldn’t let Bucchanary fall to ruin.

Christopher:...All these years...waiting. So why now do you choose to haunt my dreams?

Chrisseine: The chains were beginning to weaken as the date approached. I lay in wait, hoping that you wouldn’t condemn me to another 500 years of waiting. But...it still appears as if you need more convincing.
Christopher: (Hesitantly, he comes closer to Chrisseine.) Why must you be blamed for my mistakes? We are separate beings.

Chrisseine: No. You were given another life to not repeat my mistake. Do not waste it. In truth, we are one being.

Christopher: (He looks at Chrisseine with wariness.) I want to protect my family’s honor.

Chrisseine: But this isn’t the correct way. Bowing down to someone and being their puppet… (His expression is filled with pain.) That isn’t living at all. You know that, don’t you?

Christopher: I…

Chrisseine: Your entire life you’ve been obeying. Your mother. Your tutor. Dr. Faker. Your father. It’s time to cut the strings they have wrapped around you and decide for yourself. Are you not your own being?

Christopher: And if I fall?

Chrisseine: You will not fall unless you allow yourself to fall. (He takes Christopher’s hands into his own, earning a shiver from the latter.) You have my word.

Christopher: But how…? I cannot fight my father...

Chrisseine: Then I will arm you with the needed weapons.

Christopher: What can a spirit do? You're a wisp of air, a trick of the light.

Chrisseine: Close your eyes…and I shall show you, Christopher.
(A young child's laugh can be heard, eerily ringing across the room. The camera then reveals the child to be none other than Tron, Byron's previous form. A small child with braided platinum blonde hair, whose entire face is obscured by a large and grey mask, laughs cheerfully as he sits on a couch, holding a doll in his hands. The right side of the mask veils his eye with a red film. A smile is etched on the right side. On the left side, his honey colored eye can be seen with his mouth. He wears the clothes of a young noble, with sleek, white, belted pants, a dress shirt and a mint green coat. His voice comes out sickeningly sweet and sadistic, his British accent flowing.)

Tron: Oh Kaito...It's time for the wedding. (The doll in his hands is revealed to be a porcelain doll of Kaito, its limbs connected by ball joints and its clothes delicately tailored to fit its body. The ice-blue glass eyes stare soullessly back.) Allow me to dress you. (Laughter bubbles up from him again as he takes out a pair of scissors and begins to savagely cut and rip off the doll's clothes. Once the clothes are ripped off, Tron smiles and reaches for a white wedding dress.) My, my...doesn't this gown look familiar? Just like your mother's. (He roughly shoves the doll into the dress.) Now...something seems missing. Ah! (Sarcastically.) I know. The groom! (He walks over to a shelf and grabs a Christopher doll from its place with Thomas and Michael.) Now...kiss the bride. (He rubs the dolls' heads together, laughing as the sound of porcelain scraping against one another quietly fills his ears. He then throws the Christopher doll onto the floor and then continues to play with the Kaito doll.) Are you hungry?...Of course you are. Let me feed you. (He takes the macarons on the coffee table in front of him and smash smashes it over the doll's face, laughing.) Ah...you've gotten yourself all dirty...(He takes out a handkerchief and then wipes the doll's face.) I feel like it's still not clean enough... (A demonic smile creeps up his face and he slowly gouges the doll's eyes out.) There. All better. Now...I'll make you into my perfect son-in-law. (He rips off the doll's arms.) So you won't be able to hurt me. (He smashes the doll's legs against the table.) So you won't be able to run away from me. (He takes a finger and jabs it onto the doll's mouth, pressing in and breaking it.) So you won't be able to talk back. (He looks at his work, smiling.) We're far from done...dearest Kaito.

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Kaito: (He sits up from his bed, breathing heavily.) T-Tron... (He takes in a few more deep breaths and then examines his limbs and feels his face.) No...I'm still here...I'm still here... (He looks at the digital clock at his bedside, with bright red numbers blaring out 1:10 AM.) I can't do this anymore... (He gets up from his bed and runs downstairs, starting as he sees his father on the couch, flipping through a photo album, his expression grim.) D...dad?

Dr. Faker: (He jumps and then slams the book shut.) Just what are you doing at a time like this?!

Kaito: (He glares at Dr. Faker.) I should be asking you the same question. (He looks at the photo album, his eyes slightly widening in surprise.) I thought you burned them all.
Dr. Faker: I kept the one with the least photos.

Kaito:...The one with the least memories. Fitting. You never did care for her.

Dr. Faker: (Indignant.) Of course I did! What made you think I didn't?!

Kaito: (He angrily approaches his father.) You barely came home. You never, ever showed any kind of affection to her. You never allowed her to work after I came. Did you know that she often talked about you? How smart you were, how kind you were, how you learned to dance, just for her?! She loved you! It wasn't until I caught her crying late at night that she admitted she made a bad choice, marrying you!

Dr. Faker: (Weary.) Kaito, please... Haruto’s sleeping.

Kaito: (He bites his lip. When he speaks, his voice is an angry, harsh whisper.) She only wanted to stay in this miserable excuse of a marriage for me! Because who else would take care of me?! Who?! When we were isolated miles and miles away from any modern city?! Definitely not the Arclights! Momma didn't like them! Definitely none of the other mansions around here, with all their children who live like it's the 19th century! No one who agreed with our lifestyle was nearby!

Dr. Faker: I was busy!

Kaito: (Rage fills his face and he struggles to keep his voice at a whisper.) That's exactly what you said when I was twelve! After she died, you buried yourself further into your work. You left Haruto, who was born two months prematurely, onto me! All alone, in the middle of the goddamned countryside with nothing but a clunky, homemade robot to help me! What would you do if Haruto died?! Would you also have forgotten about him?! (He angrily takes the album away from Dr. Faker.) You don’t deserve her! You ne’er did! And you definitely... ne’er...e’er...deserved sucha sweet boy like Haruto.

Dr. Faker: (He attempts to take the album away from Kaito, but his son continues to tightly hold onto it.) Please Kaito... Go back to sleep. It's only one in the morning. I don't have time for this...

Kaito: You never have time! All you do is work! Why don't you just continue to work and forget her right here and now?! (He frees the album from Dr. Faker's grip and glares into his father's eyes.) You're a shitty dad and an even shittier husband. Momma shouldn't have
married someone like you. You never deserved any of us. (He turns around to leave, but stops when Dr. Faker touches him on the shoulder.)

Dr. Faker: Kaito...You're being unreasonable.

Kaito: (He whirls around, shaking off Dr. Faker's hand. His voice is at regular volume now, no longer able to control his anger.) *Don't* try to talk to me as if I was her. She may have kept her head level for me, but I ain't got that kinda control. (He walks off.)

Dr. Faker:...

---♀---

(There is a faded, colored image of Marleen and a much younger Dr. Faker dancing a foxtrot. The background consists of a whitewashed wall, arching windows with the stars shining through and paper lanterns strung across the room. The date is marked August 15, with the year being blurred out.)

Kaito: That bastard may have loved her for awhile, but when a child came, he abandoned her. (He flips to another page.)...And that must be what Tron's preparing for me.

(Staring back is an image of Marleen in her wedding day garb. She wears a flowing, chiffon dress. Her veil is pulled back to reveal her light blue hair done up in a bun with curls surrounding her neck. She holds a bouquet of red roses and stands on a path of scattered rose petals. Her gentle smile lights up her deep emerald eyes.)

Kaito:...I’m sorry, momma... (He flips through a few pages and stops at an image of Marleen holding him as a baby. Dr. Faker looks at the baby in her arms with pride. Kaito grimaces and then closes the album.) It's all a lie... He only sees me as a disposable pawn.

Voice:...At the end...all children are extensions of their parent, are they not?

Kaito:...! (He looks up from his album.) Y-you!

Kaith: (His spectral form stands at the base of Kaito’s bed.) Are you still determined on agreeing to this union? Even if it brings you an indescribable amount of pain?
Kaito: (He closes the album.)...Yes. I do.

Kaith: Why?

Kaito: I have a brother I wish to protect.

Kaith:...a noble goal. But this isn’t the only way you can protect him.

Kaito: I won’t run.

Kaith: I would not think so. But...Denouncing that man in front of all would work.

Kaito: I’ve considered that. Yet this entire wedding is his plan. He has absolute control.

Kaith: In a theater, who has the most power? The performers or the audience?

Kaito:...I’ve never been one for the arts.

Kaith: A pity. Well...I will allow you to ruminate on that question as I take you to tonight’s performance.

Kaito: What do you mean...?

Kaith: Close your eyes and I will take you to the theater.

Kaito: Do you promise to return me in the morning?

Kaith: You have my word.
Kaito: (He looks at Kaith in doubt.)...for someone so grandly dressed, I’m still surprised you killed your father.

Kaith: (He wrinkles his nose at the blunt accusation.) It was purely ceremonial. But yes, I am quite the skilled swordsman...third only to my cousin and Duke Durenburg.

Kaito: A fitting death, then.

Kaith: Yes, it was, wasn’t it…? Unfortunately, it is one of the reasons I am condemned to remain here.

Kaito: (He takes in a deep breath and closes his eyes.)...Humor me. I don’t have much time left until the walls close on me anyways. What will be playing at the theater tonight?

Kaith: The future...

---Episode 19~END---

Photo for this episode here
Chapter Notes

 Brace yourselves. This will be a lengthy and quite disturbing episode.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

---Episode 20---
Masque of the Dead

Christopher: (He opens his eyes and attempts to move his hands. A metallic rattle follows and he realizes his hands are chained together. He then attempts to stand up, but is unable to as he is weighed down by a multitude of skirts. Slowly realizing his predicament, he turns to observe his surroundings and realizes that he is in a circular room whose walls are entirely covered by mirrors. He studies himself in the mirrors, now dressed in a fashion similar to Chrisseine. His hair is gathered high above his head and the the hair remaining is styled into elongated ringlets that trail all the way to the walls. A heavy rose headaddress weighs down his head and he struggles to hold his head in its usual position. Roses connected by golden chains twist around his hair from top to bottom. Pearl necklaces intertwine with gold, jeweled chains and a multitude of pearl bracelets cover his wrists.)...What have—

Chrisseine: (He steps into the room, his hair styled into a simple queue. He wears a silver outercoat with a matching waistcoat and breeches. His cravat is elegantly tied, a jewel fastened to the lace. His buckled shoes click across the marble floor while he looks at himself in wonder.) For once... I am truly who I was born to be. (He gazes at Christopher.) Do you feel the weight of my sins?

Christopher: Is this your plan? To imprison me here? (The chains angrily rattle.)

Chrisseine: (He is contemplative.) I could. And then possess your body and say “no” at the wedding. After all, this prison needs only one, and it does not discriminate on who takes my place... But I am not that cruel. No...this room of mirrors...it shows the past to remind me of my sins. The present to show me your decisions...and the many paths of the future ahead. (He glances at Christopher.) That is the reason why I have brought you here tonight. It will be only a continuing cycle of suffering and pain if you decide to repeat my mistake. I have gazed into the mirrors for years now...and I have seen your futures, both tragic and happy.

Christopher: S-surely there is a future where I am happy with Kaito...
Chrisseine: Yes. There are. Ones where you revel in marital bliss...but...none of those futures have your father as he is now. (He points to the mirror besides Christopher.) Take this one for example.

Christopher: (He slowly turns to see the mirror on his left and gasps. Kaito and Christopher are standing side-by-side at an altar, both in suits. In the background are Tron and Dr. Faker, proud smiles on their faces. Kaito and Christopher smile and kiss, cheers filling the air. Slowly, the vision fades.)

Chrisseine:...that is a future closed to you now.

Christopher: Wh...why?! This could—

Chrisseine: Because of your decision to return his father to his original form...but alter his mind...This future will only happen if he is gone.

Christopher: (He swallows hard.) It can’t be.

Chrisseine: If you don’t believe me, then look at the mirror to your left.

Christopher: (Hesitantly, he turns and sees Kaito attending a tea party with Christopher's family. His clothes are a gray variation of the Arclight coats. His eyes are soulless and his southern twang has been replaced with a slight British accent.)

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Byron: Isn't it a beautiful day to be enjoying the sun?

Kaito: Yes, dearest father-in-law.

Byron: (He sighs.) I'm so glad you have become a part of the family. When you came to me, you were uncouth and uncivilized...But now no one can see that boy from the country anymore. I have smoothed your rough edges and you have become the quintessential Resurrection gentleman.
Thomas: (He glares down at his cup of tea.)...A brainless one, at that.

Byron: (His eyes narrow.) Do repeat what you just said, Thomas. My ears are somewhat hard of hearing.

Thomas: (He grimaces and stands up from his seat, earning a gasp from Michael and Christopher.) Are you proud of what you turned Kaito into?! He was a sensible, intelligent and spirited young man before you grabbed ahold of him! You beat him half to death whenever he disrespected you and drilled meaningless lessons into his brain, day and night. It's a wonder he can even walk on his two legs! You broke him! You broke him and turned him into a mindless little doll that you can display and throw away as you please! Is this what you wanted me to be?! Is it...?!

Byron: (His expression is calm and his voice is leveled.) Exactly, Thomas. But unfortunately, you have quite the mulish demeanor.

Thomas: (His fierce expression falters.)

Byron: I broke your mother just like that. (A cruel smile fills his expression.) Just like a dog.

Thomas: (His expression further darkens.) You're a monster.

Byron: (Calmly.) To each man his own truth. (He smiles.) Of course, taming Kaito was almost as fun. You two were very similar in personality. Both pawns to their fathers.

Thomas: (He seethes.) You're not going to break me. Ever.

Byron: But then why are you marrying the Kamishiro girl? Wasn't that what I wished of you?

Thomas: Stop playing with my words! (He turns around to leave.) You're not my father!

Kaito: It's alright, dearest father-in-law. For you have me.

Byron: (He smiles and pats Kaito's hand.) Indeed.

---♀---

(The image in the mirror fades. Christopher is then seen staring at it in grim horror.)

Christopher:...It can't be. That's not Kaito at all!

Chrisseine: Perhaps we should go to an earlier time...Maybe then you'll understand the full
extent of your betrothed's transformation.

---♀---

Kaito: Do it, Chris.

Christopher: I...I can't...(He is holding a rod in his hands.)

Byron: (He is standing besides Christopher.) You see Kaito...I've grown too old for disciplining. I leave that to Christopher now.

Kaito: And you'll watch, I assume?

Byron: Why yes, I need to see the job carried out. (He rests a hand on Christopher's shoulder.) It isn't your fault Christopher. It's entirely Kaito's. He shouldn't have tried to sneak out at night.

Christopher: (He takes in a deep breath.) But...h-he's my husband.

Byron: (His voice grows harsh.) You're scrambling for excuses, Christopher. We all know that if he isn’t disciplined, he’ll do it again. He needs to be taught, just like a dog.

Christopher: (He inhales.) I...I'm sorry, Kaito. Please...Sh-show me your hands.

Kaito: (He offers Christopher his hands, palm up.) Just get it done with.

Christopher: (He closes his eyes and then brings the rod down upon Kaito's palms. A sickening crack is heard, yet Kaito's face remains emotionless.)

Byron: One.

Christopher: (He repeats the action, with hesitation.)

Byron: Two.

Christopher: I’m sorry, Kaito. (He swings down again.)
Byron: Three.

Christopher: Please...forgive me...(He hits again.)

Byron: Four.

Christopher: (He hits Kaito again.)

Byron: Five.

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito's hands, which are now starting to bleed.) Oh, Kaito...

Kaito: (Emotionlessly.) Do it, Chris.

Byron: Yes, Christopher. Would you like me to take your place? I'm sure Kaito would get the punishment he deserves if I were to—

Christopher: (He tries to make his voice firm.) I'll do it, father. There's...only twelve more to go...

Byron: (He smiles.) Excellent.

Christopher: (He closes his eyes.) Forgive me, Kaito.

Kaito: It's not your fault.

Christopher: (He nods and then continues on with his duty. He continues to smack Kaito's palms, only focusing on them. With the final smack, he then gazes into Kaito's face.) I...I...I'm...so sorry...Kaito...I...

Kaito: (Tears are flowing from his face, yet his voice remains steady.) It's alright, Chris. I'll behave from now on.

Christopher: (His face falls into despair, realizing that he had taken a part in breaking Kaito.) Y-you may rest your hands now.
Kaito: (With tears still flowing, he rests his shaking, bloody hands to his sides, staining his clothes.) Thank you, Chris. That means a lot to me.

Christopher: (He falls on his knees and embraces Kaito.) I'm so sorry...I don't ever want to hurt you like that, ever again...

Kaito: (He smiles weakly and then places a bloody hand on Christopher's face.) We'll see, dearest husband. (The hand then weakly falls down again, leaving a trail of blood down Christopher's face.) We shall see...

---♀---

Christopher: No...It can't be...

Chrisseine: The mirrors do not lie.

Christopher: But isn't Kaito sick? Won't his suffering end...?

Chrisseine: If he marries you, your father will do everything in his power to help stop his deterioration. And he will succeed, prolonging Kaito’s suffering for more than twenty years.

Christopher: Th...that's horrible...This man...to what depths of hatred must one go in order to commit such heinous crimes...?

Chrisseine: Your father is slowly turning into an endless well of hatred...(He sighs.) And he only gets crueler and crueler. Unfortunately...(He massages the bridge of his nose,...those were one of the more tamer pathways. (He points straight ahead.) This is the future that will most likely happen.

---♀---

(We are in the Arclight living room in wintertime. The fireplace roars merrily and Christopher plays the piano in the background. Byron is seen, his hand pressed against a woman’s pregnant stomach.)

Byron: The marvels of human life never cease to amaze me...You yourself are a marvel, Kathryn. You overcame photon illness all by yourself...

(The woman is revealed to be none other than Kaito. There are dark circles under his eyes. When he speaks, it’s in a woman’s voice, tinged with a southern accent.)
Kaito: (Bitter.) If you mean forcing me to undergo a sex transition surgery that drastically changed my hormone balances, removed a bunch of my organs and removed photon mode as an after-effect, sure.

Byron: (Firm.) It was necessary. Christopher needed an heir.

Kaito: (Angrily.) Of course. After all, I am only a vessel to carry children.

Byron:...it is your duty as the next Lady Arclight.

Kaito: Which also includes being held down while I’m screaming and begging as my husband plows into me.

(The sound of the piano music briefly breaks as Christopher misses a few notes.)

Byron: You were being stubborn. It was your duty as a wife to consummate your marriage and you refused to do it.

Kaito: (A wave of nausea fills his body. He puts his hand to his mouth.)

Byron: (His eyes narrow.) This is the Resurrection.

Kaito: (Raw emotion is heard in his voice.) This is hell.

Byron: To each man his own truth...

Kaito: You lied to me.

Byron: And so did your father to me.
Kaito: (Anger fills his face.) And for that, I’m being punished? What kind of justice is that?

Byron: The apple does not fall far from the tree...

Kaito: (He stands up.) You continue to lie and lie until you can’t see the truth anymore.

Byron: Lie enough and you build a foundation. Now sit down, Kathryn. It isn’t good for the child’s health.

Kaito: (Venom fills his expression. He spends a few moments glaring at Byron. Then, he slowly sits down, maintaining eye contact the entire time.)

(The mirror blackens and then clears to show an older Thomas and Rio. Their personalities remain the same, adamant and strong. Both seem out of place, wearing Resurrection garb. They speak in Japanese, their voices hushed.)

Rio:...I can’t do this anymore, Thomas.

Thomas:...nor can I.

Rio: (She sighs.) Right now, I thought I would be putting my 7-year degree to work, not stuck in an arranged marriage.

Thomas:...I’m sorry.

Rio: Please stop. I’m tired of hearing your empty apologies.

Thomas: (He looks down at the floor.)

Rio: (She balls her hand into a fist. Anger slowly rises in her voice.) I can’t do anything anymore. I’m just a decoration now...The thing that I never wanted to become. I’m tired of having to bow down to your father and bending and twisting myself to your Victorian Resurrection beliefs.
Thomas: (Pain fills his expression.) I want to see you happy. After all you’ve been through...it isn’t fair to see you unhappy.

Rio: But you can’t do anything about it, can you? Puppets, the both of us.

Thomas:...He wants a grandchild.

Rio: (Anger fills his expression.) First Kaito and now me. When will it be enough? I will not have a child just because he wants one. I have an entire life ahead of me and I would rather spend it unburdened.

Thomas: What life?

Rio: (The anger deepens.) I’m still young. I can still go places. So can you. We can get out of here together, annul this damned marriage and part ways.

Thomas:...an inviting plan. But how will you do it?

Rio: Even if I may not like it, Vector is a good chance. He’s a lawyer, after all. And then there’s Durbe...Mizael...Gilag...Alit...and my brother. (She looks at Thomas.) Connections. That’s all that matters in this world.

Thomas:...then we are in a spiderweb of connections.

(The reflection once again fades to black. The sound of a door opening is heard. A voice is then heard, scratchy and elderly.)

Voice: Chloe...

(The reflection then comes into view. 23 year old Michael stands in front of a silver barred window. He grasps a bar and sighs, looking at himself in the mirror. His curls have extended to his chest and he wears a flowing, golden dress adorned with roses. Michael winces as two, wrinkled, spotted hands grab at his chest and pelvis.)
Michael: ...Yes...Mr. Williams?

(The camera then turns to show Mr. Williams. He is an elderly man in a suit of black. His balding, silver hair is unkempt, matching his scraggy mustache. A wide smile creeps across his face as he rests his hands on Michael's shoulder.)

Mr. Williams: It's such a sunny day. Wouldn't you enjoy basking in the sun with me?

Michael: (He closes his eyes and once again winces.) As you wish...Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams: But first... (He leans closer to Michael’s ear. His voice is a giddy whisper.)

_Pleasure me._

Michael: (His lip trembles. Slowly, he unzips the back of his dress. The shot goes to the floor as his clothes pool around his bare legs. With reluctant steps, he walks towards the elderly man. He lowers himself onto his knees, trying to keep the emotion showing in his voice.) I am at your service...sir.

(The reflection then fades to black. The next scene features Kaito, entirely bare. This happens after the first scene, his stomach still round with child. He is tied to the four posters of the bed in the master bedroom. His expression is unreadable as Byron approaches him, Christopher silently following, his expression unreadable.)

Byron: (He looks at the poker in his hands, the tip still glowing with heat.) All children are born innocent...yes? Then who are you to end its life?

Kaito: (His lips are slightly trembling.)...its reluctant mother.

Byron: Do you hate the child that you carry?

Kaito:...with all of my heart. This body is not mine.

Byron: Oh, but it is. (He forces the burning poker into Kaito’s hand. Kaito screams in pain.) If it isn’t, then why are you feeling so much pain... _Kathryn_?
Kaito:...My...my name is...Tenjo Kaito.

Byron: Forget about the past. You are Kathryn Arclight, the wife of the next Lord Arclight...and the mother of the seventh heir. (He slowly lifts the rod away from Kaito’s hand and turns to Christopher.)...Christopher, shouldn’t you be the one to discipline your wife?

Christopher: (He shifts uncomfortably.) I...

Byron: (His expression darkens.) She tried to kill your child. Doesn’t she deserve punishment?

Christopher: (He looks at Kaito, his face twisted in pain.) I...

(Byron hands Christopher a barbed rod.)

Byron: Strike her arms and legs. They are not vital to her duty.

Christopher: (He looks down at the rod.) W...will it not cause stress for both mother and child? I...

Byron: It is only one instance. She has led quite a comfortable life before.

Christopher: (Out of excuses, he reluctantly approaches Kaito, lips trembling.) I...I’m sorry, Kaito. (He raises the rod, his voice breaking.) I truly am. (He closes his eyes and strikes Kaito’s arm.)

Byron: (Turns to Kaito.) You will love that child. It is your only salvation in this world.

(Another strike. Kaito’s arm begins to bleed.)
Kaito: (He meets Byron’s gaze with a look of hatred.) You held me down while he fucked me. How can I love a child that will remind me of that night every day for the rest of my life?!

Byron: All children are innocent. (He turns to Christopher.) Strike harder, my son. She must see the error of her ways.

Christopher: (He grasps the rod tighter, his lips trembling.) I’m sorry.

(The scene fades to black, the sounds of the rod striking skin multiple times fill the air, melding with the screams of a woman.)

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Christopher: (Horror fills his face as the image fades away. He slowly looks into all the mirrors around him.) Will we all fall victim to father?! (His hair is now disheveled, falling in strands all around him.)

Chrisseine: (His expression is grim.) The mirrors do not lie...

Christopher: (He struggles against his bonds.) Why...? Why did no one protest...?! Thomas, especially?!

Chrisseine: (Coldly.) Would you like to travel down that path and see for yourself?

Christopher: NO!

Chrisseine: Then have you made your choice...? Will we both be damned to another 5 centuries of suffering?

Christopher: (His eyes are wide in desperation.) I refuse! I will never, ever hurt my brothers or Kaito.

Chrisseine: So. You will cut the strings that have defined you as a puppet…?

Christopher:...(He hesitates, looking around at his reflections. Determination then sparks in his eyes as he is exposed to even more horrors around him, each vision becoming increasingly disturbing.) Yes. I will. I will free both of us.
Chrisseine: I hope you keep this promise, Christopher.

Christopher: ...I...I will play the part of the obedient son...Until it is time to stand at the altar.

Chrisseine: (He nods.) The means will justify the ends...

Christopher: Now...Do discharge me from this tiring duty. My neck is about to snap in two from this bothersome coiffure.

Chrisseine: (He smiles and then takes Christopher's hand.) I believe my imprisonment here is not much longer. (He squeezes Christopher's hand and then gazes into his sapphire colored eyes.) Please don't go back on your word, for I would have come to you for naught.

Christopher: You have my promise. Or else we shall suffer here together.

Chrisseine: (He nods and then the room is filled with light.) Farewell.

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Christopher: (He wakes up gasping, the early morning sun filling his room.) The promise I made... (He takes a few heaving breaths.) Will I be able to uphold it...? (He looks down at his hands, now free of the shackles. The scene slowly fades to black.)

---♀---

(The first thing the audience sees in the next scene is someone’s stomach being stabbed through by a sword. How pleasant.)

Kaith: (He slides the sword deeper into Kaito, who is chained to a stake. His expression is filled with grief.) I apologize that the path to seeing the future is so violent. But this is what I have endured for 500 years...

Kaito: (He looks at Kaith in mute horror, blood dripping out his mouth.)
Kaith: (He closes his eyes and takes in a deep breath.) This was punishment for my death...to experience every waking hour of my afterlife reliving this fateful moment.

Kaito: (When he tries to speak, only blood comes out of his mouth. Soon after, his eyes roll to the back of his head.)

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Byron:...I formally welcome you to the Arclight family, Kaito. (He raises his glass of wine. The other sullen Arclight brothers follow their father.)

Kaito: (He seems ill at ease in his Arclight clothing. Reluctantly, he raises his glass.)

Byron: May we continue to further our bonds and forget about our misunderstandings.

(The glasses clink quietly. Kaito’s glass hits Byron’s a bit too hard and some of it spills on his clothes.)

Kaito:...!

(The Arclight brothers look at Kaito in mute horror.)

Byron: No need to worry. (He turns to his sons.) Dispel those misconceptions in your minds...a glass of spilled wine means nothing.

Arclight brothers: Yes, dearest father.

Byron: (He looks at Kaito.) You may address me as dearest father for we are family now, Kaito.

Kaito: (He tries to swallow the lump in his throat.) Yessir.
Byron: (An amused smile fills his lips.) I have always thought that your accent was endearing. I hope to hear more of it.

Kaito: Just...just the sound of my heritage is’all...(He thinks.) Something is wrong, isn’t there?

(The Arclights look at the feast laid in front of them with empty eyes. Slowly, Kaito can begin to see silver strings looped around the brothers’ limbs.)

Kaito: Chris...?

(Christopher slowly turns to face his student. His eyes are glassy and grooves are at the sides of his mouth, like a puppet. The atmosphere slowly becomes darker.)

Christopher: (His voice comes out hollow and distorted.) Yes, Kaito?

(There are multiple clicking noises as all the Arclight brother turn to face Kaito. One can begin to see the grooves around their necks and their jointed hands. The food at the table is slowly beginning to rot.)

Kaito: (He slowly backs out of his chair.) This...

Byron: (His expression is shadowed over.) Where are you going...Kaito?

Kaito: (He looks at his surroundings in fear. The silver strings are everywhere. The Arclight brothers have completely turned into marionettes, slowly crawling towards him. The food has become a collection of maggots and worms. When Kaito looks at Byron, he too is standing, his head bent over.)

Byron: Once you enter this family, you can never leave. (Four, jagged legs tear his back apart. Slowly rising from Byron’s flesh is God Medallion—Coat of Arms.)
Kaito: (He slowly backs up, looking around for a weapon. Without noticing, he backs up into a tangle of silver strings. Caught, he uselessly struggles, helpless as the marionettes and the creature approaches him.)

Byron: (His voice comes out distorted, demonic.) Foolish boy...thinking you could defy my rule...

(The clawed creature slowly approaches Kaito.)

Byron: You will make a lovely doll.

(The creature approaches closer and closer. When it is face-to-face with Kaito, it raises a great scythe and slices him apart. The scene fades to black with Kaito’s strangled cry.)

---♀—

Kaito: (He regains consciousness with a gasp. He’s still in the room with Kaith.) Wh...why...?!

Kaith: (He holds another sword in his hands.) You still have not fully awakened. The night is still young. Would you like to see another vision?

Kaito: (He looks down at his stomach, shocked that the wound has completely healed.) These...these are nightmares.

Kaith: Nightmares mixed with truth.

Kaito: I’ve had far too many nightmares...I...I can’t stand dying again.

Kaith: (He sighs.) You become used to this...The dying. (He looks at Kaito.) But I can
understand your pain. Are you sure you don’t want to see anymore visions of the future…?

Kaito:...are they set in stone?

Kaith: No. But they are highly likely.

Kaito: (He swallows.) Then...then one more time. (He closes his eyes.)

Kaith:...as you wish. (He pushes the sword through Kaito’s body.)

Kaito:...! (He bites his lip as his world becomes dark.)

---♀——

(An older Haruto is seen, peacefully swinging on the tire swing. Orbital 7 comes around, bringing refreshments.)

Orbital 7: Haruto-sama, I brought you some water.

Haruto: (He looks at the drink.) Thanks. (He gets off the swing and takes a sip of water. He looks at the Arclight mansion’s rooftops at the top of the trees.) I wonder if we’ll be able to see my brother today.

Orbital 7: That would be nice...I guess.

Haruto: I haven’t seen him in awhile. I wonder what happened.

Orbital 7: He must be busy, pursuing science with Christopher.

Haruto: I guess so…(He brightens up.) He probably hasn’t had time to go stomp in the mud like we used to, what with all his research. Let’s go, Orbital! (He runs off, his laughter filling
(Haruto runs through the woods, passing by disturbing scenes in the trees. Screams fill the forest, yet he seems deaf to them. All of the people suffering are Kaito. Each situation is painful and bloody, often leading to a severed limb. They all scream for Haruto. One even makes it as far as the path where Haruto is on. This Kaito has half of his torso missing, his bloody entrails hanging out.)

Kaito: H...Haruto…

(Haruto jumps over the body, laughing.)

Haruto: The weather sure is nice today! I hope the mud is still mud!

(He passes by Kaito’s corpse, hanging from a branch. On arriving at a fork in the road, Haruto is contemplative.)

Haruto: Now...where was it..? Oh! Here. (He heads down the left path, far darker than the path he walked on.)

(As he walks deeper down the path, the scenes of Kaito being tortured become grislier and grislier. The screams rise to a crescendo.)

Haruto: I think we’re almost there, Orbital.

Orbital 7: (Weakly.) Th...that’s nice to hear.

(Haruto slows down to a walk. When he arrives, he laughs.)

Haruto: Here we are! (He rolls up his pants and walks into the mud.) Ah...It feels nice to cool off on such a hot day. I wish you could feel this mud, Orbital.
Orbital 7: It seems pretty messy to me, Haruto-sama. Are you sure you should be playing in this?

Haruto: I’m positive! (He dips his hand in the mud and throws them up after a few moments. Upon closer inspection, the mud is actually composed of blood, entrails and severed body parts. Haruto is unaware of all of this and continues playing in the “mud.” He bends down and scoops out Kaito’s head, laughing.) This mud feels great! (He squishes the head and it crumples in on itself. After a few more moments of playing in the mud, Haruto is covered in his brother’s blood.) It smells nice too. You don’t smell this kind of stuff in the city! Real earthy and natural…! (He looks back at the empty pathway and a melancholy expression slowly fills his face.)...You know what would make it better?

Orbital: Yes, Haruto-sama?

Haruto:...if my brother was here.

(The sun fills the sky. The screams stop. Haruto is just in a normal forest, playing in a normal mud puddle.)

Orbital: Yes...that would be nice, wouldn’t it?

(The scene slowly fades to black. Kaito wakes up again, with a gasp.)

Kaito:...how was it?

Kaito:...I could feel their pain...in every scenario…

Kaito:...does it convince you to say no at the wedding?

Kaito: (He looks down at his torso, healed once again.)...Amidst all of it, Haruto was happy. (His smile is sad.) I stand on my decision. I’m not going anywhere.
Kaith: (Pain fills his expression but he slowly nods.)...I understand. Are you ready to awaken?

Kaito:...I guess so.

Kaith: (The sword in his hand glints.) Apologies. (He pushes the sword through Kaito’s body.)

---♀—

Kaito: (He wakes up, falling from his bed. The sun fills his room and birdsong fills the air.)...!

Haruto: (He runs into the room.) Niisan! Are you alright?! (He approaches his brother.)

Kaito: (He pulls Haruto into a hug.)

Haruto:....! Wh...what’s this for?

Kaito: I...I’m glad you’re safe, Haruto. I truly am.

Haruto: (He slowly returns the hug.) Me...me...too...I guess.

---♀—

(Christopher is standing in front of a blond youth. His fair skin sets off his cornflower blue eyes and the red markings on his face. The youth pulls back a portion of his long, blond hair, causing the ring in his hair to slightly jingle. He wears a waistcoat of grey and an undershirt of white, the same shade as his pants. His grey boots shift uncomfortably across the wooden floor. He has a husky voice that softly echoes against the spacious living room. Christopher and Mizael exchange a conversation in Japanese.)
Mizael: V...

Christopher:...Mizael...

Mizael: I...have come to congratulate you...on your union with Kaito.

Christopher:...Thank you very much.

Mizael: You both make a good match.

Christopher:....(His eyes look away from Mizael.)

Mizael: Is something the matter?

Christopher: N-no...Nothing.

(An awkward silence follows.)

Mizael:...By...by chance...have we...had any other interactions besides our...duel? 

Christopher:...Not that I'd know of...

Mizael: (Hesitantly.) Perhaps in another time, or another place?

Christopher: (Light fills his eyes.)...Why do you ask?

Mizael:....! Because...because...this may sound ridiculous, but recently I...I've been meeting this person in my dreams that resembles you.

Christopher: (His expression is wary.) D-describe them.

Mizael: A...man dressed as woman. He often wore a sky blue dress, with silver flowing locks...and his hair was always styled elaborately. This may sound silly, but...he had your face. The same eyes...the same sharp nose...(He looks at Christopher.) You would just need a beauty mark in the shape of a crescent moon to look exactly like him.

Christopher: (He swallows.)...By chance, could his name be Chrissieine?

Mizael: (His face drains of color.) Have you also...?

Christopher:...I have. You were Mizairen...my lover.
Mizael: Yes...And I promised us...that we'd...

Christopher: (He laughs gently.) How fate has changed for us.

Mizael: It’s strange to think that we were all once connected...From you, the king of Bucchanary...to me.

Christopher:...Who could have guessed? My previous lover, killing me.

Mizael: (Bitterness fills his expression.) What a cruel thing the gods have forced upon us.

Christopher: (His eyes are gentle as he speaks.) But how could we have known?

Mizael:...Foolish mortals that we are.

Christopher: But you also had another life from before...right?

Mizael: Yes, as the hero of China....above my many other lives.

Christopher:...?

Mizael: Every century, Don Thousand would allow us to reincarnate...at the cost of us dying extremely painful deaths...Mizairen, for example. His executioner was inexperienced. It took six swings of the sword to fully lop his head off. (He winces.) No matter how many times I die or experience death, it is always painful. But after Don Thousand’s defeat...I believe that this cycle of misfortune will finally end.

Christopher:...You have come a long way, then.

Mizael: (His smile is pained.) And so have you.

Christopher:...the nuptial date approaches...Ah, where are you staying?

Mizael: The Barian emperors and I rented a villa.
Christopher: Ah yes, all your names were on the invitation list. By chance, is Kamishiro Rio with you?

Mizael: Unfortunately, she's back at the villa, helping Alit and Gilag unpack.

Christopher: ...I see.

Mizael: ...You were hoping to meet your lady in waiting?

Christopher: Yes, I was. We have never personally met each other before in this life, but...we were the best of friends back then.

Mizael: (He smiles.) Merag would have been glad to see that.

Christopher: Yes, I believe she would have.

Mizael: (He looks at the clock.) ...I believe it's my time to go. I'd also like to congratulate my rival.

Christopher: (He nods his head.) Allow me to show you the front door.

---♀—

(Kaito and Mizael are engaging in a conversation while Haruto runs up to them, speaking in Japanese.)

Haruto: Hey! Aren't you the one who killed my brother?!

Mizael: ...! Wh-who is this?

Kaito: That's my brother, Haruto. (He turns to Haruto.) Next time, please mind your manners, Haruto. He's an...ally now.

Haruto: ...(He glares at Mizael.) I don’t know why you’re invited to niisan’s wedding. (He turns around and walks up the stairs.)

Kaito: ...My perishing on the moon never really left him.

Mizael: (He looks after Haruto with saddened eyes.) I understand.
Kaito: ...How has human life been for you?

Mizael: (Annoyed.) Fine. I keep on forgetting that I don't have my Barian powers anymore.

Kaito: Hm.

Mizael: Anyways, I just came here to say congratulations on your union with V. May you have a happy future together.

Kaito: ...Thank you.

Mizael: (He turns to leave.)

Kaito: Wait.

Mizael: What do you want?

Kaito: ...You never did tell me what happened to you.

Mizael: (A shy smile creeps up his face.) Really...? You still remember what you said to me on the moon?

Kaito: ...Every moment.

Mizael: ...well...I don’t think I owe you anything. Not after what I discovered about my past life.

Kaito: Oh...?

Mizael: We became even after the duel on the moon. A life for a life.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.)

Mizael: Have you told your mentor the truth... your majesty?

Kaito: (He pales a bit, immediately catching on.) We are entirely separate entities...What he
did does not concern me.

Mizael:...I still stand on the fact that we are even.

Kaito: (He’s uncomfortable.)...to each man his own truth.

---♀—

(A hand is seen receiving a letter from Ryaris.)

Ryaris: The new messenger showed me this.

Kaith: (He reads the letter with narrowed eyes.) So...my wife continues to keep a lover from afar...Nonetheless, she is still a subject. And I expect undying loyalty from all of my subjects. Ryaris...send a messenger informing the king of Laelle.

Ryaris: (He curtsies in his gown of maroon and gold.) You have my promise.

Kaith: And...make sure this letter arrives in the queen’s room. I wouldn’t want to ruin her...bliss so prematurely.

Ryaris: As you wish. (He takes the letter from Kaith’s hand.)

Kaith: I want that guard’s head on a pike at the Palace of the Sun.

Ryaris: (He titters.) That will be easy to arrange.

---♀---

Kaito:...Yes, I have been practicing. Everything has been done over and over, to make sure I won't offend your friends. You wouldn't want them to know that your son is being married to
a boy from the country, do you?

Byron: (He tightens his grip on his cane.) Of course not, Kaito. But shouldn't you be acting more thankful? Your father and I have taken care of almost everything for this wedding.

Kaito: (Sarcastic.) Thank you, Tron, for controlling every single aspect of this wedding. I have barely any say in what I want to do or wear, and for that, I thank you, for I do not have to worry my commoner brains into oblivion. Amen.

Byron: (He inhales.) About your apparel...It arrives—

Kaito: On the night before the wedding, Droite told me.

Byron: Ah, of course. That's just what I love about that sensible woman. Always one step ahead...

Kaito: You brought her over here, so where is she staying?

Byron: She is currently residing at the Victoria hotel, where most of the guests for the wedding will be staying. An hour’s drive from here.

Kaito: Where the hell did you even find my mother's dress design?

Byron: (He calmly smiles.) Goodness, Kaito. This is becoming an interrogation. If you haven't forgotten, I am a very close friend of your father's. I attended their wedding and I have an entire album dedicated to that joyous occasion. There were more than ten images of your mother.

Kaito:...You are one sick bastard.

Christopher: Kaito, please...!

Kaito: (He turns to Christopher.) My foul mouthing days are soon coming to an end. Might as well make the most out of it when I can.

Byron: (He prepares to leave.) Christopher, you may have a moment or two with...Kaito. (He walks out the door, closing it behind him.)

... 

Christopher: Do you know what will happen if we are wed...?

Kaito: Life turns to hell. I’m in hell, you’re in hell, we’re all burning in hell and your father sits on his throne of bones, laughing.

Christopher:...As morbidly amusing as that may sound, that is very accurate. I had a disturbing dream last night. More disturbing than the usual dreams as of late...
Kaito: ...you aren’t alone in that.

Christopher: I saw the future.

Kaito: And so did I.

Christopher: It’s hell, Kaito.

Kaito: But Haruto is happy. And that’s all that matters...unless you want to change it.

(There is a moment of silence as Christopher and Kaito look down at the floor, contemplating. The sound of the clock ticking can be heard. Outside, a bird calls. Christopher breaks the silence by taking in a deep breath. His voice is small and quiet.)

Christopher: (He suddenly grabs Kaito's hand.)...Oh Kaito, I truly do want to break free. But...I'm scared.

Kaito: (He meets Christopher’s eyes. His voice is gentle.)...You...? Scared...? Don't mess around, Chris. If you're scared...then...what do you think I'm feeling right now?

Christopher: (He squeezes Kaito’s hand.) You've always been so brave and steadfast. You’re faring better than I in this situation, I’m sure.

(Kaito turns away and purses his lips. His expression is dour.)

Christopher: (He sighs and lets go of Kaito’s hand.) We have all been dealt an unfavorable lot in this life...If I am scared...then you must be...

Kaito: ...horrified. (A little bit of his usual confidence fills his next words.) But one of us must learn to say no. What can Tron do once you say no? He can't beat you right then and there, in front of everyone. He just can't. If he beats you half to death at home, you can run over here, where my old man and I will be busy guzzling beer, celebrating my freedom.

Christopher: (He smiles nervously.) That sounds nice...if I could find a way to limp over to your house after the severe beating.
Kaito: *Or after the wedding, you could just run over to my house.*

Christopher: The options you give me are tempting. It’s unfortunate how there is so little time to decide which path I will take...

Kaito: ...well, whatever path you take, I hope you will think about who it will affect.

Christopher: (He nods.) A good piece of advice. (He glances at the clock.) It’s almost time for tea. Would you care to join us?

Kaito: And have a repeat performance of that awkward tea party? Nooo siree. You’re on your own, Chris.

Christopher: Understandable. (He turns to leave, putting his shoes on.) I hope you have a good day, if I don’t see you again.


(Christopher leaves, closing the door behind him. Kaito looks at the empty door for a few moments. Then he goes over to the couch and collapses into it, putting a hand to his forehead.)

---Episode 20~END---

Chrisseine's character design [here](#)

Chapter End Notes

There are officially 2 days left before the wedding...What do you think will transpire
on that day?
Chapter Notes

This will also be a lengthy episode. Perhaps this will become the norm.

---Episode 21---
Prayer to the Silent Skies

(Kaito and Christopher are standing inside the cathedral. Stained glass windows reflect their colorful rays upon the fresh, snow white carpet. A streak of crimson, splitting the room in half, leads to the expansive altar. An arch of flowers stands in front the altar. The long, wooden and cushioned pews are arranged in rows of two and the arched roof has small lanterns hanging from it.)

Christopher:...Are you ready to walk down the aisle?

Kaito:...Yeah. I know the people of Heartland respect my choices.

Christopher:...?

Kaito: Tron's trying to humiliate me and it's not going to work. I'm not gonna let him get my goat.

Christopher: (He stifles a laugh.) What a strange saying you have there!

Kaito: (He feigns a British accent and narrows his eyes at Christopher.) Yes, and Bob’s your uncle.

Christopher: (He now laughs out loud.) Have I 'gotten your goat’?

Kaito: You outright took it and kicked it.
Christopher: (He feigns worry.) Oh dear, can we become friends again?

Kaito: No.

Christopher: (He laughs.) Oh how very feisty of you. Itching for a duel?

Kaito: Damn right I am! But I'm not supposed to unless I want to die.

Christopher: Just one wouldn't hurt, now would it?

Kaito: You wouldn't even know how much damage it'd do if I were to transform right here and right now. My heart accelerates along with my body heat to the point of being on the verge of death. Life on the edge ain't so pretty once you get to know it.

Christopher:...What about tabletop dueling?

Kaito: (He holds out his hand.) You can stop talking now. I won't hear a thing about that stone-age method.

Christopher: (Accusatory.) As always, you're stubborn as a mule on tabletop duel—

Kaito: It's what beginners do, Christopher. It's safe. It's simple. It's boring. There is no rush to it whatsoever. I'd probably fall asleep.

Christopher: It's how I taught Thomas and Michael...

Kaito: Would they be tabletop dueling today?

Christopher:...If worse comes to worst, then, yes...?

Kaito: (He scoffs.) Uh huh.
Christopher:...(He looks around the cathedral.) My mother and father were wed here.

Kaito:...You told me.

Christopher: To think...I'd be walking the same path...22 years later...

Kaito:...Yeah. It's kind of surprising, once you think of it. Human lives pass by quickly. We grow up while they grow old.

Christopher: And so on.

Kaito: Yes, and so on...(His voice is quiet.) I wish I could grow old alongside the people around me.

Christopher: Of...of course you will.

Kaito: (He looks at Christopher sadly.) No I ain’t. 3 years is the best I’ve got. A few months is the worst.

Christopher: (Horror fills his expression.) No. Kaito, you can’t just...You’re still too young...

Kaito: (His smile is heart-wrenchingly sad.) And young I’ll forever be...preserved in everyone’s minds as they all slowly crumble into dust.

Christopher: How did you know how long you had left?

Kaito: The old man. And self-diagnoses. (His voice is quiet.) And I’m sure this isn’t his first time dealing with photon illness so take his word for it.

Christopher: How so...?
Kaito: Just a hypothesis, but I think my momma went the same way as I will. There were a few years where she seemed perfectly normal but then the symptoms returned worse than before. She fainted sometimes. Coughed out blood.

Christopher: Perhaps your mother just had frail health.

Kaito:...perhaps. But in her youth, she went out and danced the nights away with my dad. She could go on for hours and hours without tiring. Along with that, she could duel and withstand the falling and crashing. I’m sure she was healthy before she met the old man. He had a hand in killing her, I’m sure of it.

Christopher: (Trying to change the subject.) Have you inherited some of your mother’s dancing skills?

Kaito: No. Not a single lick of dancing skill lies within me.

Christopher: And how would you know? Have you tried?

Kaito: (Embarrassed.) Yeah...Fell down and momma laughed at me for hours...She was real good at the foxtrot n’ Latin dances. But not so much the graceful ballroom dances of Europe.

Christopher: If it doesn’t embarrass you, I could teach you some dances.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) I don’t know why I’m surprised. But I am.

Christopher: (He laughs.) Thomas is a far better dancer than I, but I have my skills. I’ve quite a mastery of the waltz and the gavotte. In case you are invited to any formal party in the Resurrection, I suggest you have basic knowledge of at least the waltz.

Kaito: (His smile is pained.) Then let’s just hope I won’t get invited to any parties.
Christopher: So it’s a “no” to learning?

Kaito: If you were strict in teaching me on how to duel, you’ll probably be strict in teaching dancing. Being someone who isn’t naturally talented in this art, I’m sure you’d throw glass bottles at the floor every time I fell to “encourage” me.

Christopher: That is quite morbid, even for you, Kaito. (He sighs and puts a hand on his forehead.) We will be the embarrassment of the Resurrection at our celebratory feast.

Kaito:.....are you trying to guilt-trip me into learning how to dance?

Christopher: Why yes, I am.

Kaito: Not gonna work.

Christopher: Oh come, Kaito. The waltz is easy. You bring your feet together, step forward with your left foot, then with your right foot. After that, you bring your feet together and–

Kaito: My head’s already spinning. You can stop, Chris.

Christopher: (He laughs.) It would be easier if I showed you.

Kaito: Then show me.

Christopher: Then I need a partner.

Kaito: Tough luck.

Christopher: (He raises an eyebrow. Without warning, he bows elegantly and takes Kaito’s hand.) May I have the pleasure of your company for this dance?
Kaito: (Deadpan.) Unfortunately I have a sudden case of second-hand embarrassment and must be off.

Christopher: (He gracefully pulls away.) A pity.

Kaito: Indeed. I think I’d rather die than be forced to dance at a gathering.

Christopher: The newly wedded couple are required to dance at their celebratory feast.

Kaito: I hope the hunting rifle at home still works.

Christopher: Oh Kaito, please don't talk about death so casually.

Kaito: It's all going to happen to us one day, Chris. Even to you. So why is it treated with so much reverence? It's an all natural process, just like eating. We all do it.

Christopher: (He sighs.) You do have a point there. But death...is final. Like the final page of one's life.

Kaito: It doesn't have to be. Although the protagonist has ceased living, the characters around them continue. Their memories continue to...animate the character.

Christopher: Memories are but fragments of what was once reality.

Kaito:...I feel like I'm confessing my sins at a booth, with you spouting all these philosophical statements.

Christopher: (He laughs.) If you would like, the confessionals are down the hallway to the left.

Kaito: With all my sins, I'd probably be there til' the wedding.
Christopher: The bride comes on her wedding day absolved of all her sins and dressed in pure white... Such a romantic notion. We are all sinners in each other’s eyes. To each person is a unique set of morals. If you are not a sinner to one person, you will be one to another.

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) Am I a sinner to you?

Christopher: No. You do what you must to protect the ones around you. You have my respect.

Kaito:...I never thought something like that would come out of your pinched mouth.

Christopher:....!

Kaito: The closest thing before that was when you called me your true brother.

Christopher: (He bluses.)

Kaito: If I am considered your true brother, wouldn't that mean you love me?

Christopher: In a brotherly way, yes...

Kaito: (He cracks a smile.) Isn’t marrying me incest then?

Christopher: (His blush reddens.) I...How do...How would I say no...?

Kaito: Just say it. Explain your reasons, as if you were arguing with one of your brothers. Give a speech. Calmly walk off the altar, through the benches and out the door. Then cry your heart out on the front lawn.

Christopher: You must jest, Kaito. I can't humiliate my father like that.
Kaito: I'm someone who's all in for "an eye for an eye" belief. He's trying to humiliate me and it'd be nice if someone returned the favor...Ten-fold.

Christopher: I-I...

Kaito: I don't want to marry you either, but I must. For Haruto's sake.

Christopher:...Kaito...Please...Think of yourself.

Kaito: How about you think about other people for once?

Christopher: I am!

Kaito: Well, you’re thinking about the wrong people here! In Tron’s future, all the wrong people are happy for all the wrong reasons!

Christopher: (He bites his lip and holds Kaito’s furious gaze. Taking in a deep breath, he whirls around and leaves.)

---♀---

Thomas: Make up your mind...You were never one to make last minute decisions so you might as well decide now. Yes or no?

Christopher:...Kaito asked me the same question. Are you sure you two don’t want to become friends?

Thomas: (He crosses his arms.) As if I’d want to be caught in public with that yoga-pants wearing freak.

Christopher: That’s going too far, Thomas.
Thomas: Tell that to his fashion.

Christopher: He told me how you two used to play together by the pondside. Why not rekindle that friendship?

Thomas: (He stiffens for a bit, a blush forming on his face.)...we were innocent back then. Not so much now. We’ve changed far too much to have any chance at rekindling anything.

Christopher: He invited me to play in the mud with him.

Thomas: And you turned him down, naturally.

Christopher:...yes, I did.

Thomas: You see? We...we grew up. We’re in different worlds now.

Christopher: It doesn’t have to be that way. You two are still children at heart. You both had your childhoods stolen from you.

Thomas: (He scoffs.) There you go again, with your brotherly condescendence...calling us children as if we were still in our britches.

Christopher: (A guilty look fills his face.) I...

Michael:...He’s only looking out for us.

Thomas: (He snorts.) If only you were looking out for us when we were separated.

Michael: Brother!
Thomas: (Mockingly, in a high voice.) *Brother!*

Michael: I *do not* sound like that!

Thomas: It’s a close enough impression. (He clears his throat and resumes the mocking voice.) *My name is Michael Arclight. I love smelly old things because they keep others away from me! That gives me more time to study said old things and learn even more useless facts that I cram my curly head with!*

Michael: (He gently shoves Thomas.) Oh stop it, I say! I love artifacts because I enjoy learning and teaching others about them!

Thomas: How precious. But do people want to listen?

Michael: (The words sting him more than expected. His lips begin to tremble.)

Thomas: (His smug expression falls and he begins to panic a bit.) I-I’m sorry. I-I’ll listen. Uh...tell me again about the uh...the...the sex toys of the Victorian era!

Michael: (He is still upset.) Honestly...Thomas.

Christopher: I think that’s quite enough, you two. Let us talk about the preparations for the wedding!

Michael: D’you have your refusal speech prepared?

Christopher: R-refusal speech...?

Thomas: Oh hush up, Michael. He can't do such a thing and everyone here knows that. He'd rather kiss that bastard's ass than say no to him.
Christopher: (He flinches.) Thomas...Please refrain from such vulgar terms...That isn't how an English gentleman acts.

Thomas: Well do you think acting like 'an English gentleman' was how I became such a good duelist? Yes, it served as a good persona but it was only a mask. I am a ruthless demon at my core. You need to be strategized, well-prepared and have an attitude that outshines your opponent. The ruthlessness is what matters the most.

Michael: (Mutters.) Since when was it all about you?

Thomas: Since now.

Christopher: (His voice is quiet.) I hope I can gather enough courage to refuse. If not...then...

Thomas: How can you be so selfish, allowing your best friend to fall into this hellish family?

Christopher: I truly am not selfish! I just...I don’t have...the resolve to disobey.

Thomas: So you're just letting the stone roll? You're not going to stop it?

Christopher: I can't!

Thomas: (He scoffs.) That's a load of rubbish right there and you know it!

Christopher: (Desperate and a bit angry.) Bloody hell, Thomas! Think of me! Think of my personality! I've always been the loyal, good son and now I'm expected to change that?! It's like throwing a newborn chick out of its nest and expecting it to fly! It’s impossible!

Thomas: (He points at Christopher.) You’re a coward.

Christopher: (His anger escalates and he narrows his eyes at Thomas.) See how it feels when you walk down the aisle to the Kamishiro girl.
(Silence washes over the room like a wave. Michael shakily sifts through his deck while Thomas and Christopher's eyes are locked in a silent battle of wills. Michael then breaks up the fight, his voice barely above a shaky whisper.)

Michael: Why...why are you two always fighting? We used to be so happy together. When father returned, I thought it would have solved our problems...but instead, the situation became worse. I really thought that...you...you two could come to love each other like real brothers again. (He bursts into tears.) I'm losing my family all over again and I'm so tired of having to fight alone. You're both awfully different people, but couldn't you make amends? We may all be different people, but we come from the same mother and same father. The same blood flows through our veins...so why...? (He wipes away his tears with a tissue.)

(Thomas and Christopher stare at Michael in shock. The two brothers then exchange heated glances and then approach Michael.)

Thomas: (He rests his hand on Michael's shoulder.) It's just that sometimes...our personalities clash and things don't work out. (His gaze softens.) But you have a gift, Michael. It's a wonderful personality that almost everyone can get along with. I'm afraid Chris and I just can't do that. We're like the sun and moon. Polar opposites. (He hands Michael a tissue.) I just hate it when you cry so please...Do it for me. (He brushes his lips against Michael's forehead.)

Christopher:...I've been losing sleep and hair over this. (He closes his eyes and sighs.) I'm just not myself lately. (He glances over to Thomas, who is comforting Michael.) I've been drifting apart from everyone these past few years...(He takes in a deep breath.) So I apologize for my behavior. I'm trying to shed V off, I truly am. If you just have patience, I promise Christopher will return. (He looks away, sighing.) I'll excuse myself now.

--- ⚫ ---

Kaito: Prepare yourself some beer, old man. You'll be needing it.

Dr. Faker: For what?

Kaito: For the depression that follows after I become an Arclight.

Dr. Faker: What do you mean? You'll just be a few hours away.
Kaito: Tron's gonna lock me up and throw away the key. He's not gonna let you visit me. He'll beat me half to death and then feed me to the dogs. He's just after the money of a successful scientist.

Dr. Faker:...I don't want you to do this either, but you have to, for Haruto's sake.

Kaito:...Sometimes, I wished you loved me as much as you loved Haruto. (Without another word, he walks upstairs.)

Haruto: (Peeking from his room.) Niisan?

Kaito: (He tries to still his trembling chin.) Y-yeah?

Haruto: (He comes out of his room.) Are you alright?

Kaito:...I’m peachy.

Haruto: (He frowns.) You always say “peachy” when you’re not feeling well.

Kaito:...I’m fine. Really.

Haruto: I come from two of the smartest minds of the century. Don’t try to trick me.

Kaito: (A mischievous smile creeps up his mouth.) Tron would have loved to prove the fact that smart parents don’t equal smart kids. (He clears his throat and mockingly imitates Byron.) Of course, Dr. Faker, your sons are smart, but their inherited intelligence is only a small factor in determining their overall intelligence. You see, what they learn from the outside world and the environment has a greater impact on how intelligent they are than how genetics affect them whatsoever. We're all equals here, Dr. Faker. (Kaito then proceeds to feign drinking from a teacup.) Isn’t this tea divine...? It’s only available once a year and comes at such a high price! Goodness, Dr. Faker. You’re saying you don’t have this?! Well, you wouldn't know how to prepare it properly, now would you? And have you noticed how Kaito never, ever puts anything in his tea?! (He laughs.) What a strange boy you have!
Haruto: (He bursts into laughter.) Does Chris know you're doing that?!

Kaito: (With a small smile.) No, he doesn't. Because if he did know, he'd be very angry.

Haruto: (Through his giggles.) B-but w-why?! Your impressions are great!

Kaito: (He shrugs.) The Arclights just think differently.

Haruto:...How?

Kaito: They're just...different people compared to us. (He winks at Haruto and whispers.) They have more boring rules.

Haruto: (He laughs.) But why? Doesn't everyone hate boring rules?

Kaito: Every family is different.

Haruto: (He smiles.) I’m glad you’re in my family.

Kaito: (He smiles gently.) Me too, Haruto.

---♀—

(It is a deep sunset now and Christopher is in his silk pajamas, sitting at his desk and staring at the setting sun.)

Christopher: (He murmurs, as if in prayer.) I pray that you'll never set. Drown the night so that the next day can never come...I still can’t find it in myself to say "no". Please...help me find courage. And-

Kaito: (He calls from below the window.) Chris, I want to talk.
Christopher: (He starts and then gazes down.) Kaito! What are you...?

Kaito: *No*, don’t expect a balcony side serenade. I just want you to come down and meet me in front of my house. (He runs out of sight, hops over the fence and back to his home.)

Christopher: (He sighs and walks over to his closet.) Oh, Kaito...whatever you’re going to show me must be quite the spectacle.

---♀—

(Banjo music dances about the countryside. The sun is now almost completely submerged below the horizon. Heather clouds dot the sky and the sound of frogs and crickets from the pond can be heard. Kaito is sitting on his villa's porch, playing the banjo and gazing out at the setting sky.)

Christopher: (Now dressed in his usual clothes.) Well, aren't you the perfect portrait of an American.

Kaito: (He starts and stops playing.) You were taking too long so I got bored.

Christopher: (He tilts his head a bit.) A pink, button up shirt, suspenders and khakis. Just like when we first met.

Kaito: (He blushes a bit.) You remember?

Christopher: Of course I do. Did you wear those on purpose?

Kaito: (Defensively.) Do you think I'm some love struck school girl? No, of course I didn't. They were the most comfortable thing in my closet currently. It's stupid how no one's told me about what I can bring over to your house and what I can't, so I just packed up half my belongings.

Christopher: (Dryly.) Haven't you been busy.
Kaito: Droite's worrying her head off about me and I just need to get away from her for awhile. She brings back too many memories. Even though it's not her fault that she's...like this. I was protecting her a lot, back then, but I guess from those actions, she just kinda developed unwanted feelings for me. Now she's just trying to return the favor. (He sighs.) I did it for me though, not for her.

Christopher: Then why can't you do that again, for this? Do it for yourself. Not for anyone else.

Kaito: (His eyes narrow.) Because the person involved is one hundred times more important to me than Droite will ever be.

Christopher:...That is cold.

Kaito: Just being honest. (He looks down at his banjo and begins to play.) The devil went down to Georgia/He was lookin' for a soul to steal/He was in a bind/'Cause he was way behind/And he was willin’ to make a deal ...(He gives the banjo one last strum.) Learned this before the guitar.

Christopher:...impressive skill.

Kaito: I’m not bringing this with me to the Arclight mansion. I just wanted to give it one last round before it goes to Haruto.

Christopher: A pity. I would have loved to hear more of it. And your harmonica too.

Kaito: Tron would hate hearing those instruments. He’d call them uncivilized.

Christopher: But they aren’t.

Kaito: (A bit sad.) Most people think of hillbillies n’ rednecks when they think of a banjo. It’s such a wonderful, lively instrument though.
Christopher: Would you care to play me a song?

Kaito: Sure. Any specific requests?

Christopher: Unfortunately, I am not well-versed in what your instrument is suited for. I leave it to your judgement.

Kaito: Alright then. Well, are you in the mood for some classic country, classic American or somethin’ bluegrass?

Christopher: Something bluegrass would be nice.

Kaito: Alrighty then…(He looks down at the banjo a bit, in contemplation.) And here we go, in a one...! Two...! Three...! (He begins to play a spirited melody, strumming very quickly. Christopher is enraptured by the music. Kaito’s brows are furrowed in concentration as he plays and he doesn’t notice Haruto coming out onto the porch to watch him play. The performance lasts a few minutes. Everyone is quiet as Kaito plays, minus the crickets. When the performance finishes, the silence remains for a few more moments. And then, Haruto claps.)

Haruto: That was amazing!

Christopher: Yes, it was! Are you sure you won’t bring that over to our home?

Haruto: What?!

Kaito: Yes…(He takes the banjo strap off and turns to Haruto.) Haruto…

Haruto: Y-yeah?

Kaito: (With two hands, he gives Haruto the banjo. His brother hesitantly takes it. The instrument is almost as tall as him.) Keep it safe for me, will you?
Haruto: But…

Kaito: It’s just gonna collect dust over at the Arclights.

Haruto: I thought you promised that we’d be able to play together one day. Me on my fiddle and you on your banjo. How can you keep your skills sharp if you don’t practice?

Kaito: (A pained expression fills his face.) I...I’ll keep ‘em sharp. Don’t you worry.

Haruto: Are you leaving behind all your instruments?

Kaito:...what’s the use of a guitar, a banjo or a harmonica in a house of classical European instruments?

Christopher: Actually there–

Kaito: (He puts a hand up and gives Christopher a warning look. Then he turns back to Haruto.) They’re safer in your hands.

Haruto:...are you sure?

Kaito: (He helps Haruto hold up the banjo.) As positive as the stars in the night and the sun’s in the day.

Haruto: (He nods.) A-Alright then…I’ll try my best to keep them dust free.

Kaito: I trust you, Haruto.

Haruto: (His lip trembles.) D’you promise that you’ll play with me one day?
Kaito: Promise. Now you go put that in a safe place while me an’ Chris go to the forest.

Haruto: Well…(He musters up a smile.) I hope you two will have fun. (He walks inside.)

Kaito: I’m sure we will.

Christopher: Was that what you wanted to show me?

Kaito: Yeah. (He motions to the world around him.) And this, Chris…Do you really want to take this away from me? Do you? He'll lock me up and never let me feel the soft mud under my feet ever again. I'll never feel the refreshing coolness of the pond on my skin again. And the sun…you see that? (The sun has almost completely set.) I'll only feel its heat through windows. (The breeze rustles his hair. He takes in a deep breath.)…Like a sip of cool water on a hot day. This world is nothing like ours. It has no rigid lines. It’s…organic. It’s…imperfect but perfect at the same time. And that's what I've always loved about the outside. It's simple. It’s complicated. It’s...beautiful. Do you understand?

Christopher: (His brows are furrowed.)...

Kaito: (His expression falls.) You’ve spent too much time inside, haven’t you? You’ve spent too much time surrounded by brick and concrete. (He sighs.) I hate the city. I’ve always preferred it here, with stuck-up Neo-Victorians or not. We’re humans, Chris. We all came from this place. And too many people forget about that fact and– (His posture relaxes and he rolls his eyes.) Oh gods, I’m sounding like a weed-smokin’ nature loon.

Christopher: (Trying to be understanding.) No, no. You have a point there. Our ancestors roamed in nature. But then we imprisoned ourselves in our own devices…

Kaito:...Nature–what’s left of it–is beautiful. It was mine and Haruto’s playground. It still is to this day. …Would you really take this from me?

Christopher: (He looks at the nature around him in contemplation.)...
(When Kaito is not graced by an answer, he bites his lip and turns away. The two sit side by side on the porch, looking in different directions.)

Christopher: ...If you're trying to have me understand, then show me a firsthand experience.

Kaito: (He points towards the forest.) Look down there, below the hill. That's where I used to catch butterflies with Haruto.

Christopher: Take me there.

Kaito: (He stands up.) About time we go. (He slowly walks down the hill, waiting for Christopher.)

Christopher: (He stands up and makes his way towards Kaito.)

Kaito: Just through these trees.

Christopher: (Looking at the dark trees.) It's getting late...don't we need a torch?

Kaito: (Snarkishly.) And what, set the whole forest on fire?

Christopher: (Flustered.) You know bloody well what I'm talking about!

Kaito: (He smiles, and then disappears through the trees.)

Christopher: (Exasperated.) Oh, slow thy swift feet, forest nymph! This lost adventurer shan't know the way home if he loses sight of thy visage! (He bursts through the trees after Kaito.)

Kaito: (Teasingly.) Then shall I cast a spell to transform your head into that of an ass? Perhaps the queen of fairies may find you tonight if I were to do such a thing! (He disappears through a bush.)
Christopher: Honestly…! (He closes his eyes and dives into the bush after Kaito.) I’ve had enough of your games, you trickster!

(Kaito’s voice is heard offscreen.)

Kaito: If this truly was a Shakespearean play, we would just be starting! Before the play ends, we’d have mistaken identities, resolved family tensions and have gotten separated and then reunited!

Christopher: (He turns towards the voice.) Kaito!

(Kaito stands in front of a picturesque forest grove. A stream pools into a small pond, shining with the last light of day. Lily of the valleys grow on the lush forest floor. The sound of night creatures blend with the last few voices of the day creatures. Moss grows on the few trees in the clearing, their leaves crinkling and rustling noisily. A patch of night sky soars above the tree canopy, and a few stars have appeared in the sky.)

Kaito: Salutations and welcome to the fairy king’s retreat.

Christopher: (He looks around in awe. He walks over to Kaito, careful of where he steps.) It's...so tranquil.

Kaito: When Haruto was born, we only lived in the city for a brief while. I couldn't stand it so the old man shipped Haruto and me back here. He was about to sell the house, but we came back just in time. (He takes in a deep breath.) I'm glad we kept it. There's just too many memories to just sell it off to someone.

Christopher: (He nods in acknowledgement.) I see. Did you– (He stops as he sees a lightning bug pass by.) Oh...

Kaito: (A smile creeps up his face.) It's almost time for my favorite part.

(Slowly, fireflies flutter up from the lily of the valleys and lights up the grove with a soft glow. The voices of the day creatures have completely died out and now only frogs and crickets can be heard.)
Kaito: Haruto could never stay up this late back then...He was always somewhat sickly. But now...we do this whenever we can.

Christopher: Then why didn't you take him tonight?

Kaito: I’ll be taking him tomorrow...on my last day as a Tenjo.

Christopher:...(He looks around him as the fireflies begin to lazily fly about.)...Your second-to-last night here, and you're inviting me?

Kaito: (His eyes are misty as he fingers a firefly.) Yeah. I just hope you can come to understand the beauty of this world before the door closes for both of us. (He walks over to the center of the clearing. He then faces Christopher, who is staring at the scenery in awe.)

Christopher: (He gingerly touches a firefly.) Oh Kaito...It's...(He turns to Kaito, illuminated by fireflies. From afar, it appears as if he has a halo. Christopher’s expression is part in awe, part in joy.)

Kaito: (He looks at Christopher, a gentle smile on his lips.) It’s what?

Christopher:...breathtaking. From afar, I would have taken you for Oberon, greeting his subjects.

Kaito: (He laughs.) If I were truly the king of fairies, I’d be flying far, far away from this place with Haruto as my charge. We wouldn’t have to worry about anything because the laws of the human world wouldn’t matter to us.

Christopher: You’d be…(A teasing smile fills his face.) Kaitoberon.

Kaito: (He snorts.) That was horrible, Chris. Absolutely horrible.

Christopher: Shakespearean comedies do have puns though.
Kaito: But not as bad as yours.

Christopher: (He laughs.) You have a point there.

Kaito: Momma and I used to dance amongst them, our laughter filling up the night sky...We always slept well after that. (There is a tinge of sadness in his voice.) But that was back when she was still young and healthy...And when dad still loved her.

Christopher: W-well...(He looks at Kaito.) Would you like to do that one more time?

Kaito: Don't be silly, Chris. We're all grown up now. And you know how I feel about dancing.

Christopher: (Eager.) I could teach you the waltz right now, if you’d like. No one will come here besides us.

Kaito: (Dryly.) How romantic, learning how to dance amongst fireflies in a tranquil forest. Like a scene from a romance movie.

Christopher: Well, I am from the Resurrection. We enjoy romanticising things.

Kaito: (Looking around at the fireflies.) I’d probably step on some of these guys. I’ll have to turn your offer down.

Christopher: I see… (The two stare at the fireflies in a daze. The scene is very tranquil.)...How could I have known that such a magical place was only a walk away?

Kaito: You stayed up in your tower like Rapunzel. You imprisoned yourself in there willingly, never bothering to learn about the world around you.

Christopher:...I was a...passive child.

Kaito: Just like a pretty doll in a window.
Christopher: (He flinches at the comparison, remembering Thomas’s words.)...I want to learn more about the world around me.

Kaito: It's too late now.

Christopher:...no. It isn’t. I... we can still change.

Kaito: (He holds up one finger.) One day to change. That’s all we have. Twenty-some hours. To the universe, that’s less than a blink of an eye.

Christopher:...Humans are transient creatures...There one day, gone the next. (He takes in a deep breath.) I don’t mean to pry, but...why does mentioning your mother upset you?

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) You totally mean to pry by askin’ me that.

Christopher: (He looks down at the floor.)

Kaito: She don’t upset me herself...S’just that...s’just that...I did her wrong.

Christopher: How...?

Kaito: I forgot about her.

Christopher: But...

Kaito: (His hands ball into fists. He speaks quickly, trying to outpace his emotions.) The old man told me to, an’ as a vulnerable 12-year old, I listened. He was just foistin’ his grief all o’er me but... (His voice breaks a bit.) But I listened ‘cause I wanted him to love me. (His lips tremble.) He was my only parent left, after all. We used to be so close b’fore momma got sick...I...I just wanted to go back to those times. I wanted him to hold me, tell me it was gon’ be alright...but he didn’t. He didn’t do none o’ that. Just threw me in Heartland Tower with
Haruto and went off to do science. (He looks at Christopher with tears in his eyes.)...Is it wrong to want to be loved? I wanted his love so badly back then. I listened to everything he told me. But looking back, he did nothing for me.

Christopher:...I’m so sorry you had to go through all that.

Kaito: (He is even sadder.) Someone you’ve seen every day for 12 years, someone who helped you learn n’ grow n’ become the person you are today...just erased. She deserved so much better than that. She really, really loved me. (His voice breaks.) And no one’s ever gon’ love me like that again.

Christopher: (He gazes at Kaito, looking very sad.) We may only experience a mother’s love once in our lives...and sometimes, it is far too brief. (He pauses for a few moments, gathering his courage. When he speaks, his voice is quiet.)...May I...may I hold you?

Kaito: (He slowly looks up at Christopher’s expression, trying to read it. When he doesn’t see a trace of pity in his face, he wordlessly wraps his arms around Christopher and begins to cry.) She did everythin’ for me an’ I did nothin’ but insult her memory...

Christopher: (He holds Kaito close, silent for a few moments. Then he takes in a deep breath.)...You’re not alone for...I...I too have insulted a dear person’s memory.

Kaito: (He looks up at Christopher.) D...Did you love them?

Christopher: (His lips trembling.)...Dearly. As if they were my own flesh and blood.

Kaito:...do you still have the chance to apologize to them?

Christopher:...yes. But...their time is short on this earth.

Kaito:...if I still had the chance, I’d hold her n’ tell her I’m sorry over n’ over again...I wonder how you’ll apologize to your person. (He pulls away.)
Christopher:...Kaito...(He puts his hand on Kaito's shoulders.) I don't like to see you cry. You're one of the most resilient people I've ever met and it's painful to see you like this. (He brushes away Kaito's tears.) If this is going to happen everyday, I'd rather suffer endless beatings than see you like this for twenty years. You are my brother and I must protect you. (He smiles.) I'll try to close the curtains to a happy ending.

Kaito:...Please do. I'm worn out from all this tragedy plaguing our two families.

Christopher: (He nods.) I understand. (He starts as a firefly flies in front of his face.)

Kaito: (He cracks a smile, wiping away his tears.) We should go. They don't like it when we stay too long. (He walks through the trees, not looking back.)

Christopher:...Agreed. (He follows Kaito. As he walks through the moonlit forest, he thinks.)
_Taking this away from Kaito isn't right at all. It'd be like ripping out his heart. His brittle, cracked heart._

---Φ---

(It is early in the morning. Kaito is once again in the cathedral with Droite. The two converse in Japanese.)

Droite:...the dress arrived.

Kaito: (He glares at the dress draped over the mannequin in the corner.) I can see that.

Droite: Perhaps you should try it on.

Kaito:...(He slowly approaches the dress. It has an intricately embroidered bodice with long lace sleeves. The skirt flares out in a ballgown style, a ribbon tied behind the back of the dress. His grimace deepens.) What a sick old man...How dare he insult my mother like this?!

Droite: This dress...was your mother's?
Kaito: (Not listening to Droite.)...He truly does have some nerve...looking down on my family like this...! (Without warning, he tries to rip the dress. In a flash, Droite pulls him back.)

Droite: Don't you dare, Kaito!

Kaito: (Struggling against Droite.) Why? Don't you understand?! He's trying to--

Droite: Mr. Arclight has put so much work into this wedding..!

Kaito: In order to see me humiliated in front of Heartland!

Droite: Although his intentions are less than noble, the people of Heartland are proud of you for your courageous sacrifice. Besides, do you not value the work of the person who made this? When I was a young girl, I would have given everything to have a dress like this...

Kaito: (He relaxes and Droite lets him go. His tone is bitter.) May my blood water the seeds of the future. And may the tailor working on this be paid handsomely for their hand in exacerbating this disaster. (He approaches the dress again and with difficulty, takes it off its rack.)...Might as well be comfortable walking down the pathway to hell. (He looks down at the dress and while still in his khakis, tries to stick his leg into the opening.)

Droite:..! You unzip the back first...And...(She colors a bit.) Mr. Arclight also had specific undergarments tailored for this dress. They’re...they’re in a box behind the changing screen.

Kaito: (He glares at Droite. He takes his leg out of the dress and heads towards the changing screen, dragging the dress along.)...He saves no expense in humiliating me...(He goes behind the screen and begins to toss his clothes on top.)

Droite: Will you need help with--

Kaito: (Angrily.) I’m fine. (Mutters.) Does everything truly need to be changed…?
(Scene fades to black. When we return, the scene is that of the wedding dress’s skirt. Slowly, the camera pans upwards to Kaito, a sour expression on his face.)

Kaito: *Don’t show me any mirrors.*

Droïte: (She looks at Kaito in surprise.) Well...you look nice.

Kaito: (He colors.) Well. It fits. And that’s all that matters. (With difficulty, he reaches behind and tries to unzip the dress.)

Droïte: (Gently, she tries to help him, but he angrily brushes her off.)

Kaito: If I can pull it up, I can pull it down.

Droïte: B-be careful. You might rip it.

Kaito: I hope that happens. (He tries to unzip the dress again.)

Droïte: Perhaps...before you take it off, I could do your cosmetics.

Kaito: (He looks at her with vehemence.)

Droïte: Alright then…

(Byron suddenly opens the door. When he speaks in Japanese, his voice is smooth and elegant.)

Byron: Good morning, the two of you.
Droite: Good morning, Mr. Arclight.

Kaito: (He glares at Byron.)

Byron: (He meets the glare calmly.) You will be practicing in that dress. Christopher is waiting.

--- ⚘ —

(Michael and Thomas are standing at the altar, wearing suits. Christopher stands behind them.)

Christopher: (He silently watches Kaito make his way through in his mother's dress.)

Kaito: (He walks down the red carpet, his head held high and his face obscured by the veil.) It looks like y'all are at a funeral, judging from those faces. I’m probably no better, though.

Thomas: You look like a ghost bride.

(Michael elbows him.)

Michael: You look lovely. The white matches the color of your eyes.

Thomas: You can’t even see his eyes.

Christopher: (He tries to relax his face.) I'm sorry, Kaito. I was just...deep in thought.

Kaito: (Sarcastically.) Only you know how to make thinking look painful. (He walks up the stairs to the altar.) Isn’t the priest supposed to be here?
Christopher: In the afternoon, he will. Currently he’s busy. (He lifts Kaito’s veil.)

Thomas: (Mutters.) Recovering from a hangover, no doubt.

Kaito: Well what d’ya know...A British gentleman and his southern belle bride.

Christopher: (He glares at Thomas.) Now...shall we recite our vows?

Kaito:...Alright then.

Christopher: I, Arclight Christopher, take you, Tenjo Kaito, to be my partner. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

Kaito: (He balls his hand into a fist and takes in a deep breath.) I, Tenjo Kaito, take you, Christopher Arclight, to be my partner. I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life.

Christopher: (There is a brief pause. Christopher looks around.) The rings…?

Kaito: (He looks around.) Haruto?

Haruto: (He runs in, the practice rings on a cushion.) H-here! S-sorry! I feel asleep ‘cause it was so early when I got up!

Kaito: (He sighs.) Calm down, Haruto. You’ll drop the rings.

Christopher: No, please drop them. It’s considered good luck.

Haruto: (He runs up to both of them, the rings still on the cushion, although jumbled.) Uh… (He shifts his arm a bit and the rings drop. Then he looks at Christopher for approval.)
Why’re you wearing a dress, niisan?

Kaito: I...It’s cause...The clothes order got mixed up. I look fine though...right?

Haruto: (He beams.) You look wonderful. (He picks up the rings.)

Kaito: (He returns the smile.) Then that’s all that matters. (He offers his hand to Christopher and he slips on the ring. After that, he takes Christopher’s ring and puts it on his finger.) And now...our fates have been sealed.

Christopher: (Grimly.) For better...or for worse.

---Episode 21~END---

Although it has absolutely nothing to do with this chapter, here are Kaith's character designs
(It is in the afternoon. Kaito and Dr. Faker are sitting at a table, eating their lunch.)

Kaito: (Muttered.) Strange seein’ you here.

Dr. Faker: What? It’s the day before my son’s wedding. Is there something wrong with a father wanting to stay with his son for the last few moments of his bachelor life?

Kaito:...spare me. (He picks up his plate and goes to the couch.)

Dr. Faker:...your friends came over here last night, wanting to congratulate you.

Kaito: (Not looking at his father.) They can tell me so at the wedding. But I know they’ll quickly change their minds once they see me.

Dr. Faker: (He lets out a sigh.)...They were disappointed when I said that you were off with Christopher.

Kaito: They should have had better timing then.

Dr. Faker: Almost everyone you knew in Heartland was here. Kazuma’s son, his friends, the Kamishiro twins...Droite and Gauche...

Kaito:...so that's why Mizael was the only one who showed up to congratulate Chris and me. The others were planning to go in an entire surprise group. (He scoffs.) Good riddance.

Dr. Faker: You'll value friendship later on in life...A lesson I learned far too late. (He clears his throat.) Here's the message Yuma wrote. (He slips a note of paper to Kaito.)

Kaito: (He reads it silently. The haphazard Japanese is scrawled across the lines.)
Dear Kaito,

Congratulations! We hope you and V have a happy future together! Don't forget to Kaitobing! ⊕ I can't wait to eat all the good food at the wedding! Miss Droite says it's really good! By the way, will you have onigiri? My mouth is watering just from thinking about all the food...Man, you're both so cool, showing us that a bond between student and mentor can end so happily! I hope one day I can have something like that, minus the heartache. Oh, Kotori just told me that I shouldn't have written that. Sorry! It's an ink pen. Anyways, see you tomorrow!

Kattobing!
Tsukumo Yuma

Kaito: (With a small smile on his face.)...He never changes.

Dr. Faker:...just like his old man.

Kaito:...the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree...huh?

Dr. Faker: Well...in some cases. Just look at Thomas and—nevermind. Byron was quite the loose cannon back in our college days.

Kaito: (He puts his plate back on the table.)...what?

Dr. Faker: I mean, I was too, but it was mainly Byron who dragged me along.

Kaito: You’re kidding me.

Dr. Faker: (He looks at Kaito.) I ran out of kiddin’ years ago. (He looks down at his food.) He lived under a strict mother. When it was time for him to become independent, he relished the freedom and well...went wild, so to speak.

Kaito: Well, he sure cleaned up his act.

Dr. Faker: (He snorts.) Not before going on the rampage of a modern day Dorian Grey. It
seemed like every week he came back with a new person… (A small smile fills his features.) It was fun and horrible at the same time, being his roommate. We smoked a few things too. One night when we were fueled up on some old 21st century drug, because that’s what he liked—the drugs of yesteryear—we kissed. I woke up in his bed thinking something horrible happened but neither of us could remember anything after the kiss. It’s still a mystery to this day, though he won’t be too open discussing it...from his current circumstances.

Kaito: (He looks at his father in shock.) Then how did he become a scientist…?

Dr. Faker: Oh, he was smart. He just did the bare minimum because despite all his brains, he just wanted to experience the life he had never been allowed to live before. Living behind walls does that to some.

Kaito: ...It’s hard to imagine you two doing something like that.

Dr. Faker: We were all young and stupid once.

Kaito: (Looking down at the floor.)...that sounds nice. The idea of going to college, that is.

Dr. Faker: (Pain fills his features.)...a degree doesn’t mean everything.

Kaito: Says you, who pastes his doctorate title to his name.

Dr. Faker: Look, maybe Byron will let you and Chris—

Kaito: Don’t lie to yourself. Tomorrow I begin my life behind walls. (He stands up, leaving his food untouched.)

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(Christopher looks at himself in the fogged mirror, fresh from the shower.)
Christopher: ...who am I?

(The water on his body drips from his legs, the towel wrapped around his waist. Slowly, a puddle forms.)

Christopher: When the world is blurred, perhaps that is when I see clearly.

(The shower in the back begins to drip.)

Christopher: (He pulls his hair away from his face and continues to look at his blurred reflection.) A son. A brother. A mentor. A friend. A...pawn. (The water continues to drip onto the floor.)

V’s voice: A spineless ingrate.

Christopher: (He turns around.)...who?

V’s voice: In the mirror.

(Hesitantly, Christopher turns towards the mirror. It is still fogged up but in the edge of the mirror, he can see the blurry shape of V standing in the corner of the spacious bathroom. He wears his usual coat of blue, his hair elegant and combed. Yet his face is unseen. Christopher looks behind at the corner, but there is no one.)

Christopher: (Looking in the mirror.)...begone, specter. That man has evaporated.

(The figure in the mirror shifts. When it opens its mouth, only a hole of darkness can be seen, opening and closing.)

V: No, I have not died. I live on in your conscience. I am still deep inside of you, Christopher.
Waiting. Watching for signs of weakness.

Christopher: I am only Christopher Arclight. V, IV and III died when our father ended his revenge.

V: Oh? But it hasn’t ended...No...It’s only lain dormant these past few months. Tomorrow it rises from its bed of ashes, angrier than ever. Haven’t you felt its tremors?

Christopher: (He swallows hard.)

V: (He laughs, a mirthless, dark laugh.) You’re such a child, covering up your eyes and ears and living in a world of your own. In that world, Thomas and Michael are still children. Kaito still looks up to you..., nay, he worships the very ground you walk on. And Byron Arclight is still the kindly man that held you in his arms when your mother left this earth.

Christopher: That isn’t true. We’re all broken. But we can be fixed. We are fixing ourselves right now.

V: “Fixed” as if we were all just toys in need of a skillful set of hands. The human mind is far more complex than that. We’re beyond the point of no return.

Christopher: (He glares at the figure in the mirror. The fog is beginning to clear up a bit.) We are not.

V: Kaito will despise you for the rest of eternity for your decision tomorrow. He might even hate you now. And I don’t blame him. You’ve grown weak, Christopher. A worm. Writhing in your own muck.

Christopher: Silence your tongue.

V: You should disappear for all the things you have done. The world has no need for spineless cowards. How will you possibly lead the family when the time comes?
Christopher: I will lead with logic.

V: Just like that man residing in your house...They say that imitation is the highest form of flattery but in truth, it is only for weak minded individuals who cannot think for themselves. *You* are weak.

Christopher: I am *not*. There is strength in the love I bear for my family. There is honor, something you would not know of. Kidnapping a child like that...I will never forgive those actions of dishonor.

V: (He scoffs.) “Honor.” A word made to be substitute for a weak man’s spine. It is an invention entirely human in nature, having no hold in nature. What is honor to you, a spineless coward?

Christopher: More than it will ever mean to you. When you abandoned the name of Arclight, you left your honor in these ancient walls.

V: That may be, but I had a spine of my own after that. Why did you return to these walls? Why did you return to this unneeded notion of “honor?” V was fine back then.

Christopher: *No. I wasn’t*. Despite how stoic I was...despite how disciplined I seemed to be...I was clawing at the chance to return to honor. (He glares at the reflection.) I hated V. He was nothing like warm and loving Christopher.

V: I was your spine. Your long-worn mask. I almost became your skin, so why did you cast me off?

Christopher: I was suffocating under that mask of ice. It felt like if I did not resurface soon, I would have lost myself in those icy waters.

V: You were weak, that was what you were. Too scared to completely kill Christopher. Too scared to kill the child within you.
Christopher: I am *not* a spineless coward! Perhaps it is you, who hides under a mask of ice that is the coward! Although you possess the face of a man who has been embittered by this cruel world, you are desperate underneath this facade! You blindly followed the creature you called your father for you had no one else to turn to! *You* are a lonely, petty individual who won’t even show me his face!

V: Face? Of what do you speak? (The shape runs towards Christopher with surprising speed, bursting out of the mirror and landing on Christopher, hands wrapping around Christopher’s neck.) We are the same person! There can only be one of us walking this earth and that is the one with the face! (When it speaks, its black mouth is revealed to be the only part of its “face.” The rest is just smooth pale skin.) *I* am forced to lurk in the shadows like a filthy rat! While you...a weak worm wanders this earth...!

Christopher: (He tries to answer, but his answer comes out a strangled cry.)

V: (It sneers, forming a crescent shape with its mouth.) You lost your voice a long time ago...That man fastened your collar too tight. You can only let out feeble barks heard by none now...

(A tear slides down Christopher’s cheek.)

V: A dog’s death you shall die...And then forgotten you will be, for that man has two other dogs.

(Christopher tries to speak again, but it is still a strangled cry.)

V: Your promises are all lies...Cease your tongue.

(Weakly, Christopher tries to pry V’s hands away.)

V: You’ve grown weak. Months of being in the countryside have softened you. *I* had been hardened by the rain, the hatred and anger in my heart...Yet you dashed that all away. Why? This was our armor. Our spine.
(Christopher’s fingers try to dig into V’s hands.)

V: Desist, I said...It will do you no good.

Christopher:...L...l...ies…

V: It is you who lies. (His grips tightens.) Now disappear.

(Christopher lets out a strangled exhale.)

V: I have always despised you. Always hoping, always trusting...Haven’t we been hurt enough?! Haven’t we been scarred, over and over again? So why...why must you continue to love?! It’s so much easier to recede back into V...back into your mask of ice. No one can touch you then. No one can affect your mind...Just allow the ice to encase your body in armor...

(It takes a few moments but soon, Christopher’s hands weaken and he lets go. His body then relaxes.)

V: (It lets go of Christopher’s neck. Now, it has the face of Christopher Arclight.)...such a pitiful creature.

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Thomas’s voice:...s...Chris...Chris...Chris…

Christopher: (He blearily opens his eyes.) Wh...where...?

Michael: The upstairs living room. On the daybed.

Thomas: You had a nasty fall on the bathroom floor...You’re lucky you didn’t split your head
Michael: But there is quite the bump…

Christopher: (He looks about in confusion, trying to process the stream of information. Blinking a few times, he then slowly feels the back of his head. When he feels the bruise, he winces.)

Thomas: You shouldn’t leave such a puddle at your feet next time.

Michael: Yes, and it’s the day before the wedding too…

Christopher: I…(He looks down at himself, dressed in his light blue silk night clothes.)

Thomas: That was the work of Michael.

Michael: I couldn’t have you waking up in that damp towel.

Christopher:...th...thank you.

Thomas: What happened exactly? You’re usually a lot more careful than this.

Christopher: (He puts his hand to his forehead.) An act of vanity...it must have been…

Michael:...well.

Thomas: (He snorts.) Never thought you were one who enjoyed preening at your reflection. Thought that was just me.
Christopher: ...I...I was just nervous for the wedding.

Thomas: Ah, for once you are shaken.

Michael: Just be careful next time, alright?

Christopher: ...Of course...

Thomas: Are you sure you’re fine?

Christopher: J...just a bit shaken...I’m fine asides from the bump in my head.

Thomas: Just don’t fall again. Wouldn’t want to cancel the wedding...or would we?

Christopher: Are you insinuating something...?

Thomas: Oh no, no...When have I been known for such things?

Christopher: (He frowns a bit.) I truly did fall on accident, Thomas.

Thomas: Yes, I know.

Michael: (To Thomas.) Yes, brother. It was an accident.

Thomas: When I found you there, I thought the Arclight curse had struck again.

Christopher: (Mumbles.)...We musn’t speak of such misfortune on the eve of the nuptial date...
Thomas: (He turns to Michael.) Yeah he’s fine, spouting Shakespearean as usual.

Christopher: (Petulant.) It isn’t Shakespearean...It is how I usually speak. Let me rest, Thomas. I just bumped my head.

Thomas: (Mockingly.) *Give me a rest, Thomas. I just bumped my head. I’m the victim of my own clumsiness.*

Michael: Brother...

Thomas: Tron was worried about you.

Michael: (Bitterly.) Ah yes, a precious lump of meat could have been damaged. It would have put a sudden detour in his plans. A tragedy best avoided.

Thomas: I say..! Quite bitter, aren’t we? Not in front of the invalid!

Michael: Apologies...A lack of self-control.

Christopher: (He lets out a long sigh.) Perhaps we should call the physician...

Thomas: (He snorts.) And let him see the other bruises on your body?

Christopher: He hasn’t...done anything in a while...They’re fading.

Michael: He’d see our signs though...I’m still limping.

Thomas: (He looks down at the floor uncomfortably.) Yeah...(He bites his lip.) Yeah.
Christopher: (He looks at Thomas in concern.)...when did he do it?

(Thomas bites his lip harder and Michael holds his hand.)

Thomas: (He lifts up to reveal the back of his neck, covered in an almost fresh burn mark.) Just yesterday.

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(In a room where only the light of the blazing fire is the only source of light...)

Byron:...you truly have no control over your tongue...do you? (He holds a poker in his hand, glowing bright red.)

Thomas: (He is kneeled on the floor, bare back facing Byron. It is covered in scars, fresh and old. He bites his lip and his hands grasp tightly onto his pants.) Speaking up under oppressive conditions is the only way change can happen.

Byron: (He grimaces.) I could sew your mouth shut but since you are such a crafty individual, I’m sure you could cut those threads in no time.

Thomas:...At least I have the guts to do it.

Byron: (He narrows his eyes.) We shall see once we’re through with this lesson.

Thomas:...You never invite my brothers to witness my beatings. Why?

Byron: (He chuckles.) They both know you’re a failure so why show them what happens when they already know?

Thomas: (His lips tremble. The words hurt him more than expected.) That’s not true.
Byron: Tsk...Such a child...(He places the poker on Thomas’s back. Thomas screams in pain.)

Thomas: (Weakly.) Th-they hurt less each time...You’re burning off all my nerves, Tron.

Byron: Then I must find a fresh spot of skin to burn, must I not? (He roughly throws the poker back into the fireplace.) And this time, the metal must be glowing hot to make its imprint.

Thomas: (He grimaces.)...Just say it, Tron. Say the words you say every damn time you do this.

Byron: Should a father obey his wayward son? I think not. I will tell you when the moment comes. (He looks at Thomas’s back.) Some scars require reopening I see. (He takes a knife off the wall.) You must bleed until all the rebellion has been bled out of you. (He traces a fresh scar with the knife. Thomas takes in a sharp breath as Byron continues. His cuts are somewhat shallow, but still deep enough to cause pain.) You tried to spread the disease of rebellion onto your brother. (He unexpectedly twists the knife, causing Thomas to cry out in pain.) Unacceptable. (He puts the knife in deeper.) You are chaos, Thomas. Chaos in a garden of order. A weed.

Thomas: (He grits his teeth.) Say it. Say those bloody words.

(Byron continues to pull the knife down.)

Thomas: F...fuck...just say it…

Byron: (He twists the knife.) No.

Thomas: You want me to die. Just say it.

Byron: Not yet. (He looks at Thomas’s back, now covered in cuts, almost completely red with
blood.) We are far from done. (He continues to carve into Thomas’s back.) I only say those
words when we are nearing the end. You are nothing, Thomas. You are a puppet. Faceless.
An extension of me.

(Blood is seen dripping down Thomas’s back and onto the hem of his pants.)

Byron: (As he cuts.) You must obey me. You were created from my seed. I brought you to
life. And I can take that life away if I so please. Never forget that.

Thomas: (He winces in pain.)...mum was...

Byron: (He presses the knife in deeper.) Women are only vessels meant to carry the seed of
successful men.

Thomas:....! My real father...would never say such a thing! I...if mum heard that...she’d have
your head!

Byron: (He digs his knife in deeper.) Have you ever considered the fact that the father of
your youth was only a mask? (He twists the knife.) Perhaps this was his true nature the entire
time.

Thomas: (He lets out a gasp of pain.) N...no...! He was a man, not a monster.

Byron: (He abruptly stops the knife. Standing up, he begins to slowly walk in front of
Thomas. He raises the bloody knife and Thomas looks away. Unexpectedly, Byron cuts open
his own palm. The blood that comes out of it is red.) Look, Thomas.

(Thomas hesitantly cracks an eye open.)

Thomas: Wh...what..? (He opens both eyes.)

Byron: Do monsters bleed red? (The blood drips onto the floor. He wipes his bloody palm on
Thomas’s face.) Does a monster’s blood smell like that? (He puts his hand over Thomas’s mouth.) Does a monster’s blood taste like that? (After a few moments, he takes his hand away with Thomas gagging.) I am a man, just like you…(He looks down at the poker.) May my blood remind you of your source. An orderly conception. (He picks up the poker, the tip glowing white. He looks at it while he walks behind Thomas.) I am returning you to order. (With one hand, he lifts the hair off the nape of Thomas’s neck.) You are an Arclight. (He places the poker horizontally on Thomas’s neck. Thomas’s pained screams fill the room. The sounds of flesh burning is heard.) And you must act like one.

Thomas: (Tears run down Thomas’s cheeks as he screams in pain, no longer able to suppress his natural British accent.) SAY IT!!! SAY THE FUCKING WORDS!

Byron: (He presses the poker deeper onto Thomas’s skin, eerily silent.)

Thomas: (He tries to slide away from the poker, but Byron steps on his back, forcing him onto the floor. Then he once again places the poker on Thomas’s neck.) KILL ME! DO IT ALREADY! FUCKING KILL ME!

Byron: (He looks down at Thomas coldly.) You are still useful. I would not sacrifice my knight so willingly. (Thomas’s flesh is bright red. His screams still fill the room. Byron throws the poker into the corner. He takes a needle and thread out of his pocket.) Now…for a lesson in etiquette.

(Thomas lies on the floor, crying. Byron roughly grabs his chin and begins to sew Thomas’s mouth shut.)

Byron: You must remember your place. This will teach you how to hold your tongue.

Thomas: S…stop…!

Byron: (He proceeds to force Thomas’s mouth shut.) Silence is golden. Silence is orderly.

Thomas: Mmmpphh! (He struggles against his father, but Byron forces him onto the floor. He winces in pain as the cement floor comes into contact with his back.)
Byron: You decided to spread the seeds of discord two days before the wedding...Such a scheming creature you are.

Thomas: I– (Byron forces his mouth shut again.) Mmpphh..!

Byron: If only you would put your creative mind towards more productive causes...You could have had the makings of the next Resurrection bank executive with all the creative manipulation you do... (He roughly threads the needle through Thomas’s upper lip.) But you devote it to that woman’s dolls...

Thomas: (Tears begin to fill Thomas’s eyes. He talks from the side of his mouth.) That’s noth– (Byron pinches his lips shut and continues to sew.)

Byron: Silence.

Thomas: (He lets out a shuddery breath.) St..

Byron: In my eyes, you are still a child. And children are to be seen, not heard.

(Thomas struggles against Byron one more time, only to be stilled.)

Byron: You are strong. But with strength comes responsibility. If you weren’t so unruly, you would have been more useful than Christopher and Michael combined. (He pulls the needle through Thomas’s lip.)

Thomas: Mmpphh...!

Byron: Children who have too many ideas of their own are useless.

(Thomas furiously holds Byron’s gaze as his mouth is being sewn up.)
Byron: Do you not want to be useful?

THomas: (He thrashes against Byron.) No...! Y— (Byron pinches his lips shut.)

Byron:...Such a stubborn creature...(He quickly threads the needle through Thomas’s lips a few times through the corner of his mouth, rendering him unable to speak. He then ties the end of the thread and rips off the remaining thread. Standing up, he pockets the needle and looks down at Thomas. Black thread runs through Thomas’s lips and tears are sliding down his cheeks. He looks up at Byron in pain.) At last...you are silent. (He walks to a corner of the room and grabs a few lengths of rope.)

(Thomas closes his eyes and takes in a shuddery breath.)

Byron: I will now remind you of your role. (He grabs Thomas’s wrist and ties the end of a rope around it.) Tight, but not tight enough to cut off circulation. After all, I want this to be a reminder, not a lesson. Blink if it is too tight, do you understand?

(Thomas glares at Byron.)

Byron:...of course. (He ties up Thomas’s other wrist with another rope.) You are a puppet. (He grabs Thomas’s leg and ties a long rope around his ankle.) Nothing else. (He ties another long rope around Thomas’s other ankle.) The champion duelist IV is my creation, as well as everything you are. IV would not have existed if not for Thomas Arclight...And you would not have existed if not for my seed. Do you understand? Now rise.

(Giving one last glare, Thomas stands with difficulty. Byron walks him over to a wall with closed hooks an arm’s length taller than him. Then he takes the ropes connected to Thomas’s hands and firmly ties his arms to the far left hook and the right side hook. He takes the ropes around Thomas’s ankles and ties them to lower hooks. He steps back and looks at Thomas, now suspended a foot from the ground, limbs splayed out. He glares at Byron, as if telling him to say the words.)

Byron: (He holds Thomas’s gaze for a few moments. When he speaks again, his voice is eerily calm.) And now...my customary parting words. (He tilts his chin up.) I wish you would die, Thomas. You are not worthy of the Arclight name. You are a failure, a useless branch that
should have been cut a long time ago. Your death would return honor to the Arclight name. (He silently turns around and closes the door behind him.)

Thomas: (He struggles against his bonds.) Mmpphh…! MMMPPHHH!!! (His bloody face is eerily lit by the dying fire, tears falling down his face.)

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(Darkness. Then the door opens. Judging from the light, it is early morning. Byron enters the grey room and turns on the light. Thomas winces, still tied up to the wall.)

Byron: Good morning, Thomas. (He unties the ropes. Thomas collapses onto him and Byron holds him tightly. Easing him onto the floor, he takes out a pair of shears and cuts the thread between Thomas’s lips.) Have you learned your lesson?

(Thomas quietly nods, subdued. Byron nods his approval and kisses Thomas’s forehead.)

Byron: That’s a good child...Now...we must prepare you for the morning. We have a rehearsal at the cathedral we don’t want to miss…

(Thomas swallows and then rests his head against Byron’s chest.)

Thomas: Y...yes, dearest father.

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(Present day, in the upstairs living room.)

Thomas:...I’d rather not detail the entire experience. (He bites his lip.) I just...I should just be more careful with what I say. (He looks at Christopher.) You were right. The walls do have ears.
Christopher: (He holds Thomas’s hand. Thomas shifts uncomfortably but soon relaxes. Christopher looks down at the arm and notices the rope markings on Thomas’s wrist. He closes his eyes and a pained expression fills his face.) I shouldn’t have lost my temper back then. He should have punished both of us.

Thomas:...don’t. Don’t even say that. The things you go through are tame compared to the things he does to me.

Christopher: (He squeezes Thomas’s hand.) You are brave, a trait I wish I could have more of.

Thomas:...But if I had been obedient, like you two, I would have experienced far less pain.

Michael: (On Thomas’s other hand.) The lambs in the meadow blindly obey the shepherd until they are brought to the slaughterhouse. But the wolf does as he pleases. Wouldn’t you rather be free than sheltered and subdued?

Thomas:...freedom has its dangers. (His voice is lowered.) The freedom to even think in this house is perilous, let alone speak. (He looks straight ahead, not looking at any of his brothers. When he speaks, his voice is barely above a tremulous whisper.) We live under a tyranny....He...he burned my neck with a poker and cut open all the scars on my back. Then he sewed my mouth shut and tied me up to the wall and left me there for the entire night. No matter how much I screamed, he never came down to help me.

Christopher: (Dismay, horror and shock fills his face. His voice is quiet.)...Y...you were right this entire time. I’m sorry. I should have believed you. (His lip trembles.)

Thomas: (Quietly.)...am I a failure?

Christopher: (His eyebrows rise.) No. No, Thomas. Who would put such a poisonous idea in your mind?

Thomas: (He looks at Christopher with pained eyes.)...who do you think?
Christopher: (He holds Thomas’s hand tighter.) Just because you don’t fit into one person’s idea of a successful person doesn’t mean you are a failure to everyone else. We may have our differences, but we are both successful in our own ways.

Thomas:...th...thank you.

Michael: You aren’t a failure. There are people here who genuinely care for you and will help you succeed. (He gives Thomas’s hand a firm shake.) We are brothers, linked by the same blood coursing through our veins. We will always be there for one another, like it or not.

Michael: You aren’t a failure. There are people here who genuinely care for you and will help you succeed. (He gives Thomas’s hand a firm shake.) We are brothers, linked by the same blood coursing through our veins. We will always be there for one another, like it or not.

Thomas:...like it or not, huh?

Michael: (He nods.) We will cover for each other’s weaknesses and strengthen each other’s strong points…I wish I could be as strong as you, but I can’t. I just don’t have it in me.

Michael: (He nods.) We will cover for each other’s weaknesses and strengthen each other’s strong points…I wish I could be as strong as you, but I can’t. I just don’t have it in me.

Thomas: (He gives Michael a gentle gaze.) You are so much stronger than you think you are.

Michael: The lamb can never possess the lion’s strength.

Michael: The lamb can never possess the lion’s strength.

Thomas: (He takes his hand from Christopher’s and holds Michael’s hands with both. He gives it a firm shake and gazes into Michael’s eyes.) You are a ram. Tranquil when unbothered. Fierce when trifled with.

Michael: (A pained expression fills his face.)...my horns have not proven me much use…

Michael: (A pained expression fills his face.)...my horns have not proven me much use…

Thomas: (Firmly.) When the day comes, you will impale someone without realizing it.

Michael: (He lets out a small laugh.) Ask Mr. Heartland that.

(The brothers all have a small laugh.)
Christopher: You are strong, Thomas. And you are loved.

(Thomas’s lips tremble a bit. He looks away. When he speaks, his natural British accent has returned.)

Thomas: ...yeah. And that’s all I ask.

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(Kaito is sitting in his room, now emptier than before. 2 worn, blue suitcases sit at the door. The setting sun’s light fills the air.)

Haruto: (At the doorway.) Can I come in?

(Kaito looks up from the floor. He gives Haruto a smile.)

Kaito: Of course. You’re always welcome here. (He opens his arms and feigns a rough southern accent.) Give ‘yer brother a big hug!

(Haruto happily runs towards his brother and holds him tight.)

Haruto: I’m gonna miss you so much when you’re gone…

Kaito: (He holds Haruto closer.) Not as much as I’ll miss you!

Haruto: Promise me you’ll visit?

Kaito: Whenever I can.
Haruto pulls away and crosses his heart.

Haruto: Cross your heart?

Kaito: (He horizontally and vertically crosses his heart. A pained expression fills his face.) Cross my black lil’ heart.

Haruto: (He puts his hands on his hips and frowns.) Your heart ain’t black, niisan. It’s gold.

Kaito: Says you. Other people would disagree.

Haruto: (He crosses his hands.) Other people can go eat a boot. They don’t know a thing about you.

Kaito: (He lets out a sigh.)...y’know, now that I think of it, you’re right. Asides from our parents, you’re the person who’s been with me the longest my entire life. You do know me better than the rest of them, even Chris.

Haruto: See? I told you.

Kaito: (He sighs.) You’ll do just fine without me, now that you’re strong and healthy.

Haruto: (He frowns.) It won’t be as fun without you.

Kaito: (He offers Haruto a weak smile.)...You’re creative. You’ll find yourself a friend sooner or later.

Haruto: (Sadly.)...But a friend will never be as close as you.
Kaito: (Pain fills his expression.) You’re so honest it hurts.

Haruto: Leave it to me to tell you the things you don’t need to hear.

Kaito: (Mumbles.) I thought that was my job.

Haruto: Well, you’re not the only one who’s frank in this family.

Kaito:...Just don’t be too honest. It gets you in trouble at times.

Haruto: Why?

Kaito: Do you remember that aesop fable about the king of monkeys and the two travelers?

Haruto: (He shakes his head.)...Not really.

Kaito: Alright. So there’s these two travelers, one’s a constant liar and the other’s as honest as they come. They get welcomed into the pompous monkey king’s palace. There, the king asks what the travelers think of his kingdom. The liar gushes about how magnificent the king is, how beautiful his kingdom is and how lucky his subjects are to be ruled by such a wise monarch. The monkey king decides to handsomely reward the lying traveler. The honest one says the monkey king is fine and so are his subjects. The monkey king is enraged and sentences the honest traveler to death.

Haruto: Why was the honest one executed while the one who was lying rewarded?

Kaito: I asked the same question when I was you age. But growing up, I realized that lying is sometimes the only way to save your skin. Those who are stronger than you with bigger egos than the sun sometimes need to be given what they want to hear.

Haruto: Isn’t that sucking up to them?
Kaito:...yeah. Mr. Heartland was real good at doing that. That’s only one method of lying, one that I never use. The other ones...like white lies...those lies are used by everyone, whether they’re aware of it or not.

Haruto: (He catches on what Kaito is implying. He asks Kaito the question quietly, with slightly raised eyebrows.) Will you come and visit?

Kaito: (He holds Haruto’s hand.)...I can’t guarantee anything. (He looks away.) Tron’s...Tron’s unpredictable.

Haruto: Surely he’d let you visit.

(Kaito looks down at the floor, sadness filling his expression.)

Haruto: The house will be empty without you.

Kaito: (Trying to be strong.) No it won’t. Y...you won’t even notice I’m gone. All I do is stay in my room or the lab.

Haruto: Just seeing you in your room adds to the atmosphere. Knowing that you’re there is reassuring.

Kaito: (He looks out the window, towards the Carnation Valley.)...The so-called atmosphere at the Arclight house is oppressive and fearful. It feels like you’re suffocating.

Haruto: Tron’s not that cruel, is he?

Kaito: (He looks back at Haruto.)...you wouldn’t even know, Haruto.

Haruto: (His lip trembles.) Will he hurt you?
Kaito: I’d love to say no to you, but you’d see right through that.

Haruto: (Tears fill his eyes.) Why? Why would he hurt you?

Kaito: (Bitterly.) Because he hates me. He hates me and all the things I stand for.

Haruto: What’s there to hate about you?

Kaito: Everything, according to him. And I hate him too, so it’s fine.

Haruto: No, it’s not. You can’t just keep on hatin’ and hatin’. It ain’t good for your heart.

Kaito: (Surprised.)...who told you that?

Haruto: Don’t you remember? You did. When I was sick.

Kaito:...(He looks at the floor.) Those were dad’s words.

Haruto: Not momma’s?

Kaito: No. She wasn’t that kind of person. She carried hate to her grave.

Haruto:...I didn’t expect dad to say that...

Kaito: It was when I was younger and I was complaining about vegetables. He said it half jokingly, half seriously. But it’s true. Hating ain’t good for the soul. It eats away at your heart until it’s just a pitiful black piece o’ coal. Like what happened to Chris during the World Duel Carnival...(Quietly.) And like what happened to mine.
(A brief moment of silence passes.)

Haruto:... Niisan?

Kaito: Hmm?

Haruto: I think I’m starting to hate Tron.

Kaito:...careful. That just might be you empathizing with me. (He looks at Haruto.) I was like that with momma. It’s hard to tell your own emotions from the emotions of a person you love.

Haruto:...(He hugs Kaito.) I’m gonna miss you more than a shoe missin’ its laces.

Kaito: (He tears up.) And I’m gonna miss you more than the sun missin’ its shine.

Haruto: (He sniffs.) N-niisan ...

Kaito: (Emotional.) Naw, naw, Haruto...If you start cryin’ now, I’m gonna start cryin’ too...

Haruto: (Tears fill his eyes.) B-but...

Kaito: (He holds Haruto close.) I don’t want my last memories of you to be sad.

(Haruto buries his face in Kaito’s shoulder and begins to cry.)

Kaito: (His lips begin to tremble.) Oh, Haruto...(He looks up at the ceiling in desperation.) Losin’ you will be like losin’ a part of my soul.
Haruto: (Crying.) It’s not gon’ be the same without you…!

Kaito: I...I wish...(His voice breaks.) I wish we could go somewhere far away. Where no one knows who we are. With none of these stupid squabblin’ families to pull us apart.

Haruto: (He pulls away, face streaked with tears.) A-at least you’ll be happy with Chris.

Kaito: (He sadly shakes his head, tears about to spill over.) N-not with Tron.

Haruto: (A fresh wave of tears overcomes him.) Why can’t people just let you be happy?

Kaito:...Because I’ve done so many bad things...It’s what I deserve.

Haruto: You died on the moon! Isn’t that enough?!

Kaito:...not for some people.

Haruto:...(He holds Kaito tightly.) Why’re some people so evil?

Kaito: (A tear finds its way down his cheek. His voice is quiet.) ‘Cause their heart just ain’t in the right place. Their soul’s been damaged in some way.

Haruto: (He sniffles.) They don’t understand….(He swallows.) All the things you’ve been through.

Kaito: (He glances outside at the setting sun.)...I want to make one last happy memory with you...In the forest, like when we were younger. Let’s pretend that tomorrow isn’t coming. In those trees, we’re just Kaito and Haruto, alone in the world. Where no one can bother us.

Haruto:...L-let’s just turn into lightning bugs and fly away from all of this.
Kaito: (Pain fills his expression.) How simple that life would be. But we were born human and must remain so.

---Episode 22~END---

Photo for this episode [here](#)

Chapter End Notes

Ah...so many tears for this episode.
Are we ready for the wedding next episode?
And so here we are...The day of the wedding. Don your fancy apparel (Don't forget your fancy hats and shoes!) and let us go see the wedding of Arclight and Tenjo. Don't forget to take some food from the tables at the front. I hear they're stellar.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

---Episode 23---

The Words of My Father

(The Arclights are seated around the table, slowly sipping their morning tea.)

Michael: (He looks down at his cup.) This tea...I don’t think I’ve had this before.

Thomas: (He looks down at the tea and takes a sip.)...This was mother's favorite tea.

Michael: Do they not sell this brand of tea anymore?

Byron:...the plant it was made from went extinct a few years ago.

Michael:...oh.

Byron: There were a few bags left. I was saving them for an occasion like this.

Michael: (He takes a sip and closes his eyes.)...This elegant, sublime taste...It's definitely something she would have liked.

Thomas: To me, every other tea tastes the same...besides this one. Her favorite.
Byron: You always were the one who took after her the most.

(Thomas shifts uncomfortably at Byron’s comment. Michael notices and tries to change the subject.)

Michael: (To Christopher.) Have you tried some of this before, dearest brother?

Christopher: (He gazes down into the tea cup, his reflection wobbling.) No, I...I don't think so. (He swallows and tightens his grip on the teacup.) It tastes wonderful.

Byron: Are you nervous, Christopher?

Christopher: Y-yes, dearest father. I barely slept last night.

Byron: (He sighs.)...I understand. I too, was like that on the eve of my wedding. I was a bundle of nerves and youthful excitement.

Christopher: (He manages a weak smile.) History repeats itself...

Byron: Indeed it does! And in more ways than one. Your mother was the same age as Kaito when she wed me. Our wedding was one of the most frequent topics of conversation at gatherings that summer. I hope your wedding will also have the same lasting impact.

Christopher: Indeed...

Byron: It will be the sight of the summer for both worlds—Resurrection and Outside. In two hours, we must be off to the cathedral. When the ceremony begins, do all of you know what to do?

The Arclight Brothers: Yes, dearest father.

Byron: Good. I do not want any of you to humiliate me. (He turns to Thomas.) Especially you, Thomas. As the first groomsman, you have specific responsibilities.
Thomas: ...show people their seats, make conversation, make merry, sign autographs and take photos. I’m the usher and the groomsman. More credit for me, I guess.

Byron: (Dryly.) I am impressed by your dedication. Do remember to slick back your hair. An unruly mop will not do.

Thomas: Duly noted.

Byron: Don’t cause any scenes.

Thomas: I’ll do that at my own wedding. It’s Chr— brother’s day in the spotlight.

Byron: See to it that you adhere to your words.

Thomas: (He raises his right hand.) I am a man of my word.

Byron: (He turns to Michael.) Your brother’s duties are also your duties, as you are well aware.

Michael: (He smiles sweetly.) I’m happy to take part of the burden off my brother’s shoulders.

Byron: Excellent. And Christopher?

Christopher: (He stiffens.) Yes, dearest father?

Byron: You know what to say when the priest speaks to you.

Christopher: ...yes, dearest father.
Thomas: *I do, dearest father.*

Byron: ...exactly. Minus the “dearest father” part.

Thomas: (He mockingly imitates Christopher.) *I, Arclight Christopher, take you, Tenjo Kaito, to be my partner. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.*

Byron: If you have memorized your brother’s words, perhaps you should be the one to marry Kaito.

Thomas: (He laughs.) We would be a disastrous couple. We’d always be trying to argue about the smallest things.

Byron: (He sips his tea.) Perhaps you should rekindle that childhood friendship of yours.

Thomas: (He reddens a bit.) We’ve both changed far too much.

Byron: (He looks at Thomas from underneath his eyelids, a cruel smile playing on his lips.) No, Thomas. You haven’t. You’re still a child. It’s Kaito who changed.

(Thomas quiets, looking down at his tea. A moment of uneasy silence follows and everyone finishes their morning tea.)

Christopher: ...Permission to be excused, dearest father?

Byron: (He nods.) You are excused. Now go and prepare.

Thomas: (He waits a few moments after Christopher, making sure his brother has went upstairs before he pushes back his seat.) Permission to be excused?

Byron: ...Granted.
Byron: (He raises his voice a bit.) Calm your movements, Thomas! We do not need a collapsed ceiling upon our heads! (Quietly.) He never changes...always full of energy and the like. Just like your mother. How I despise those kind of people.

Michael: The ability to possess a countless reserve of energy can be admirable at times…

Byron: (Sighs.) It isn’t their energy themselves that I despise, it’s their youth. As you can remember, your mother was only 29 when she passed. She remains forever youthful in our memories whilst we grow old and decrepit.

Michael:...A life cut far too short.

Byron: Indeed...(He finishes the rest of his tea.)...such a pity that the plant this was sourced from went extinct. The stupidity of human beings will never cease to amaze me. (He sets his teacup down.)

Michael: I'll take care of cleaning up the silverware and teacups, dearest father. You already have many things to worry about.

Byron: (He sighs and bows his head in acknowledgment.) Thank you very much, Michael. If only we still had the servants employed...This work isn't suitable for a gentleman. (He rests his hand on his forehead.) We truly have fallen on some hard times.

Michael: I don't mind, dearest father. There isn't much to do anyways. School is out and my friends are miles away. Nowadays I only shuffle decks and read books. Overtime, it fattens a lad.

Byron: (He chuckles.) Indeed. (He stands up.) Well, I am off to prepare.

Michael: Good luck.

Byron: Thank you. (He walks off. His gentle footsteps can be heard on the wooden floors as Michael stares at the now empty breakfast table.)

Michael:...monster.
(We are in Christopher’s room.)

Thomas: ...so, what’s your decision?

Christopher: (He ties his tie, avoiding Thomas’s eyes by looking in the mirror.)...on what?

Thomas: Don’t play dumb.

Christopher: (He roughly pulls up his tie and winces as it becomes too tight. He quickly loosens it.) I’m not sure.

Thomas: So when the priest asks, what will you say? “I, Arclight Christopher, don’t know if I shall take Tenjo Kaito for my partner? Can we wait for an hour or so as I think?”

Christopher: (He blushes a bit.) No, no of course not!

Thomas: Come to a decision! It’s now or never.

Christopher: I will make the decision when the time comes...

Thomas: That’s like waiting for the flood to be at your throat before you find a place to run.

(Christopher shifts uncomfortably.)

Thomas: (He throws up his hands in resignation.) It’s your funeral, buddy. Oh, and Kaito’s. If that doesn’t convince you, I don’t know what will.
(Two mint juleps are placed on the wooden table without much ceremony. The ice cubes clink against the glass a bit as they are placed down. Two worn hands release their grip on the glass and a sigh follows.)

Dr. Faker: Here's some courage. (He takes a swig from his.) For you and for me.

Kaito: (He looks at the glass in front of him.)...So much for 20 being the legal age. (With hesitation, he takes a bit and his eyes widen in surprise.)

Dr. Faker: (He chuckles.) Yeah, it burns, huh? You get used to it.

Kaito: (He looks at the glass warily. Then he takes another sip.) Better to have some extra courage than none at all...

Dr. Faker: Careful. Don’t drink too much in one go.

Kaito: I’m fine.

Dr. Faker:...You're really nervous, aren’t you?

Kaito: As if I’m telling you.

Dr. Faker: Take it easy. It’s the best bourbon in the cellar and I want you to enjoy it.

Kaito: Am I *supposed* to enjoy this burning sensation?

Dr. Faker: As I said, you get used to it.

Kaito: Aren’t you supposed to be at least *trying* to be a good parent?
Dr. Faker: I’m at my wits’ end with you, Kaito. (He takes a sip.) Let’s just take things as they actually are and be done with it. You hate me. And that’s never gon’ change, so why try to butter you up? Let’s just cut our ties over some mint juleps and be done with it. You’ll never see me again after this wedding and I’d rather it end quietly than with a roar.

Kaito: (Quietly.) I don’t hate you. (He takes a sip.) I’m just disappointed in the decisions you make. If I truly did hate you, then I would’ve let you fall to your death back then.

Dr. Faker: (He is surprised.)...Kaito...

Kaito:...I wished you had cared more for your family, especially when momma was sick. I wish you had seen Haruto more as a son instead of a test subject. (He takes another sip.) And...I wish you had seen me as an actual person with my own emotions and thoughts before you made me take all those souls.

Dr. Faker:...I’m sorry, Kaito.

Kaito: (He holds up a hand and shakes his head.) Don’t. Don’t make it worse than it already is.

Dr. Faker: (He lets out a long sigh.) When you’re at this age and you look back, and all you see are regrets and mistakes, you know you’ve fucked up big time somewhere along the way.

Kaito: (He props his cheek on his hand and looks out the window.) Decidin’ to start a family was probably where it started.

Dr. Faker: Your momma was the best and worst thing that happened to me.

Kaito: Funny. She told me that I was the best and worst thing that happened to her.

Dr. Faker: I’m not surprised. We didn’t mean to have you.
Kaito: I’m not surprised. I always did feel like a mistake until Haruto came. Turns out I was right. I’m an oops baby.

Dr. Faker: We loved you just the same though.

Kaito: You don’t know the meaning of love anymore, old man.

Dr. Faker:...Everything about me’s done shriveled up, huh?

Kaito: Damn straight it is. (He takes a sip. Then he looks down at his glass. It’s nearly empty.) Could I have some more after this glass?

Dr. Faker: Don’t get ahead of yourself...I don't want you returning your breakfast at the altar.

Kaito: Ain't that a dandy thought...all over Tron's face. I’d love to see what he’d do then.

Dr. Faker: I think you're getting tipsy. It's your first time. You need to be careful.

Kaito: (He glares at Dr. Faker.)...I ain't tipsy.

Dr. Faker: Sure you ain’t.

Kaito: I’m fine! (He takes one last sip.) Really! This...this here julep’s a big help!

Dr. faker:...I think I’m starting to regret my decision. You haven’t even had a proper breakfast.


Dr. Faker:...Mainly sadness.
Kaito: (He takes a mint leaf and twirls it.) Sad, sad old man…(He shakes his head.) Glad I’m dyin’ before I end up like you.

Dr. Faker:...Are you sure you’re fine?

Kaito: (His cheeks have colored a bit.) Peachy.

Dr. Faker: You say that whenever you’re not fine.

Kaito: (He nearly slams his glass on the table.) How very observant of you! Gods, the last time you noticed anything about me was when I was dying on the moon! (He claps his hands.) Observation of the fuckin’ year! Someone hand this man a Nobel prize!

Dr. Faker:...I won one at the turn of the 22nd century.

Kaito: Well good for you! (He takes a mint leaf and angrily chews on it.) No, I’m not fuckin’ fine. I’m fuckin’ miserable, ‘avin’ to leave our family like this, gettin’ dragged off into perpetual slavery and livin’ in Resurrection hell for the rest of my short life! Karma for our ancestors! Gods bless the South! Gods fuckin’ bless the South! (He drinks up all the ice cubes.)

Dr. Faker: Kaito...Calm down.

Kaito: (He angrily crunches on the icecubes.) I want another glass. If you want me to go through with this fuckin’ sham of a weddin’ you’re gonna give me another glass.

Dr. Faker: (He looks down at his empty glass and sighs.)...You can have half a glass. No more after that though, you hear?

Kaito:...Bargaining. That’s all you ever do. Oh, and apologizin’ without meanin’ it. (He hands Dr. Faker his glass.) Fill ‘em up regular if ya please.

---♀---
Christopher stands at the entrance to the cathedral, dressed up in his wedding suit and braid. He looks at the stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible.

Christopher: (His hands are clasped together in prayer.)...please grant me the strength I need...to go through with this...That is all I ask. I will bear all pain You send me willingly after today... Amen.

(A girl’s voice is heard, cutting through the gloom of the cathedral like a blade.)

Girl’s voice: Now isn’t the time for prayers, V. It’s the time for action.

Christopher:...! (He turns around. In front of the doors is Mizael and a teenage girl. When Christopher sees them, he speaks in Japanese.) Mizael...! Ryoga’s sister!

Girl: (She brushes her blue hair from her shoulder. Her crimson eyes gleam with intelligence. She wears a dress of aqua, diamond earrings hanging from her ears. Her skin is a bit tan, with barely visible scars crisscrossing her skin. On closer inspection, it seems that Rionè bears resemblance to her.) Please refrain from calling me that. I refuse to be acknowledged as a mere appendage to my brother. You may call me Rio, for we have known each other for awhile. Isn't that correct, your majesty?

Christopher: (Taken aback.) Y...yes...

Rio: We may not have spoken in this life, but we were the closest of friends in our previous lives, as I’m sure you remember.

Christopher: Yes...I do.

Rio: We, as Barian emperors had multiple lives after Don Thousand condemned us. He had us reincarnate in order to gather more of our suffering. Once we were freed from his grasp...all of our memories came free. (A sad smile fills her face.) All 7 of us would always meet and die in terrible ways. That was our fate for centuries and centuries...until Yuma saved us. (She looks at Christopher.) Please don’t let me suffer in this life.
Christopher:...apologies, but what do my decisions have to do with you?

Rio: Your father...and his plans with your brother...They don’t sit well with me. I’d rather be free to choose who I’d marry. I don’t need the man who planned my burning to dictate who I can and can’t spend my life with.

Christopher: (He looks at the scars across Rio’s body.)...Do you suppose this was Don Thousand’s doing?

Rio: (She laughs sadly.) Partially. But it was also by your father’s hand.

Mizael:...fate does strange things to us...

Rio:...I’m tired of suffering. I don’t want to play the part of the helpless woman ever again. I’m going overseas to study. I’m going to travel the world. And I don’t want anyone to interfere.

Christopher: Such a strong resolve...I admire you.

Rio: (She beams.) Perhaps in this life, you also may possess what Chrissine lacked—the ability to protest against your father.

Christopher: (He smiles nervously.) I...I pray that I do.

Rio: Congratulations on being forced into the same tragedy again. But perhaps this time, tear up the script and follow your heart.

Christopher: That...that would be...

Rio: Your decisions will affect countless amounts of people. I trust that you will choose correctly.

Mizael: V, please excuse Merag, she's—
Christopher: She is someone who will tell me the truth...(Sadness fills his expression.) much like Kaito.

Rio: (Pain fills her expression.) Kaito...(She winces.)

Christopher: Is something the matter?

Rio:...it isn’t Kaito that...makes me...uncomfortable. It’s...it’s the reminder of Kaith that is attached to him that...

Christopher: (Concerned.)...what did Kaith do to Rionè...?

Rio: (She sighs.) In time, I’m sure you will find out...the truth behind his and Rionè’s death.

Christopher: (He looks at Rio worriedly.) When did you begin to receive the dreams of that life?

Rio: Dreams? No, they came in a mess of visions after I came back from the Numeron Code. They trickled in, one by one with other memories of other lives. It took awhile to organize all of the visions.

Mizael: We would often spend hours, gathered in the living room of the Kamishiro mansion, trying to decipher each of our stories.

Rio:...there were moments where we laughed...and where we cried together.

Mizael: The lives in which we are cruelly separated are the most painful.

Rio: The lives spent in glittering courts felt like hell amidst splendor.
Mizael: (He looks at Christopher.)...and sometimes, we would encounter the lives of other people from today.

Rio: Those were Don Thousand’s other attempts to corrupt other noble souls… (She laughs nervously.) All of a sudden I feel so old…

Christopher: (He gently laughs.) You are still young in my eyes. Enjoy those beautiful years of youth while you still can. There is nothing better than the gift of youth. Do not waste it.

Rio: (She smiles.) We all have our lives ahead of us...and I pray that they’re all bright paths that we will walk. (She looks in Christopher’s eyes.) Break free this time, V.

---♀---

(Kaito and Droite are inside a room of the cathedral. Droite carries a suitcase in her hands while gently looking at Kaito. It is a mirrorless and windowless room. Unlike the cathedral's main room, this one lacks its grandeur. There is only a table with a stool and a screen for changing clothes. The pure white walls reflect the lights hanging from the ceiling.)

Droite: Were you able to sleep last night?

Kaito: (His face is red and his words are slurred.) No, like always. But a strong cup of coffee always solves the problem...this morning it was Irish.

Droite: (She raises an eyebrow.) Kaito...are you...(She clears her throat.) How are you feeling, in all honesty?

Kaito:...Like I'm about to vomit. Maybe it's just from the stress of Photon changing recently.

Droite: (She takes in a sharp breath.) Kaito...I thought you were..

Kaito: The Numeron Code doesn't fix everything.

Droite: (She gazes at the floor.) Oh...(She looks up.) But this is different, isn't it? You’ve…

Kaito: (Ignoring Droite.)...I knew I was going to die young for awhile now.

Droite:...! How could you say such a thing?!

Kaito:...From the moment my first test results came in, I just knew...Partially it's the old man's fault. But the rest is mostly mine. I signed up for this. So I need to face the
consequences.

Droite:...Well at least you'll spend the rest of your life with someone you love. But, Kaito, are you sure you aren’t—

Kaito: (He scoffs.) "Love"...? Chris is only a close friend. This was forced onto us.

Droite: Kaito! Are you—

Kaito: Intoxicated? Yes! And for a good reason, too!

Droite: You’re underage!

Kaito: I’m the son of the founder!

Droite: (She shakes her head.) How will the wedding be able to...Kaito...Why...? This is...

Kaito: The walk down to the Sanzu River should be joyous, no?

Droite: (She puts her hand on Kaito’s forehead and tsks.) Out of all the times to lose your composure...

Kaito: (Bitter.) Nobody wants what’s best for me...All they do is use me! And when I’ve stopped being of use to them...I’m just thrown away.

Droite: (She bites her lip.) You aren’t alone. Don’t you think Gauche and I also understand? We’ve been working together with you since the beginning! We've died with you! And yes, we were also tired of being used! But what could we have done?! What could you have done?! Nothing! Because we were kept under close watch. Because we were oppressed. Because we were corrupted into believing that they were our only reasons to live. But then we broke free.

Kaito: Did we...?

Droite: Yes! We did! You’re the one who’s caging yourself in.
Kaito: (He laughs.) Really...? Well give me an example then.

Droite: Who’s stopping you from running away? Yourself. Who’s agreeing to this marriage? Yourself. Who agreed to wear the dress? Your—

Kaito:...Tch...! (He shakes Droite off and has a moment of clarity.) If I do this, will you leave me alone?

Droite: (Her expression saddens.) If that’s what you want, Kaito. I’ll be back in Spartan City before the end of this week.

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Kaito: (He stumbles out behind the screen, now haphazardly dressed in the wedding dress.) Does he intend to just shove me inside this dress without any further alterations? (He smooths down his layered skirts.) It’s getting hot in here...why couldn't we have a winter wedding instead of a summer one...?

Droite:...Mr. Arclight wanted me to touch up your face and hair...

Kaito: (He angrily seats himself on the stool, glaring at Droite.) Good luck.

Droite: If only you slept earlier...you have dark circles under your eyes.

Kaito: My body's forgotten what it means to sleep peacefully.

Droite: (She pulls out her cosmetics kit from her suitcase.) I'll see what I can do.

Kaito: Might as well make me look like a clown. Because that’s what I’ve become. (Bitterly.) A laughingstock for all of Heartland and the Resurrection.

Droite: No, no of course not, Kaito!

Kaito: Don’t tell me what I want to hear. I want to hear the truth. (He sways a bit.) The truth’s the best answer for these times...

Droite: None of us will be laughing at you. You have my word. We all respect your choice...no matter what it will be. You gave your life to save the world. This is the least we can do to repay you.

Kaito: Repay...(He scoffs.) I’ve been repaid with scorn and abuse for these past few months. Is this how they treat all their heroes?
Droite: No. You’re just in the wrong place. Back in Heartland, they appreciate you.

Kaito: (He laughs bitterly.) How ironic, the city I’ve always despised has come to love me! But I can’t receive love anymore. My heart’s turned to ash.

Droite: Have you mistaken that for the shell of ice you’ve grown around your heart in order to protect yourself? (Gently.) You may not remember any of this...but...I think you have a good heart. (Pain fills her expression.) That far too many people exploited.

Kaito: Used and used until I can’t be used anymore...That’s my fate. (He closes his eyes.) Now do what you’d like to me.

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Dr. Faker: (His expression is horrified and his voice is barely above a whisper.)...K...Kaito?

(Dr. Faker and Kaito are in another room. The walls are white, sunlight is pooling in through the sunroof and there are steps leading to Kaito. Kaito is faced with three, long mirrors. His back is turned to his father, as he is preoccupied with looking at his reflection. When he realizes that he is not alone, he turns around to face his father, his expression unreadable. Part of his hair is let down into ringlets and the rest of his hair is styled atop of his head like a crown. His face now bears very close resemblance with his mother’s. Only his blue eyes and blonde hair set him apart.)

Byron: (As he enters the room.) Doesn't something seem wonderfully familiar about Kaito's apparel...?

Dr. Faker: (He turns around to face Byron, rage engulfing his face.) I trusted you to take care of my son...And this is what you decided do?! This is a mockery! Gods, Marleen would be hysterical if she saw this!

Byron: (He smiles.) It's a pity she isn't.

Dr. Faker: (Pain fills his expression.) That’s crossin’ a line there. Is this all a game to you, Byron?

Byron: (He returns Dr. Faker’s enraged expression.) Was sacrificing Kazuma and me a game ?!
Dr. Faker: Haven’t you noticed? I’ve been spendin’ these past few years regrettin’ all the shit I’ve done! D’you want an apology? Here! I, Robert Faker Tenjo hereby apologize for my betrayal and forthcoming actions. (His voice begins to shake.) I gave you my son. And this is what you do to him? He’s innocent! If you’re still angry, then take it out on me!

Byron: (A cruel smile fills his face.)...But this way it's much more enjoyable. Seeing you squirm and balk at your child's changed image. After all, he is quite the spitting image of your wife on her happiest day. Along with that, he's such a suitable replacement for her. After she passed, you just put all of Marleen's duties onto him. He's no different than your deceased wife. (He turns to Kaito.) Go on, Marleen . Give your disgusting husband a kiss. It'll be your last one anyways, because after that, he'll leave you for the world of work.

Kaito: No, he didn't. (He totters down the steps, and places a gloved hand on his chest.) He left after I was born. It was my fault that he left. Not her. So, Tron. You just made the old man look at the thing that took his wife away with another set of eyes. (A drunken smile creeps us his face as he turns to face Dr. Faker. His voice is softer than usual as he imitates Marleen's voice and mild southern drawl.) So, Robert...Are you bored with me now? Once a child comes into your world, the fantasy's aalll over. A child means responsibility. A child means...that your plaything belongs to another now. And now I have to suffer because of one night. One night in which we changed everything. One night in which you became one with me, without any walls, just because it felt good. (His voice is now cold and back to normal.) One night in which you changed both of our lives. Was it worth it afterwards? ‘Cause you brought all this onto yourself.

Dr. Faker: (He backs away from Kaito.) Damnit, Kaito. I never wanted this to happen! Honest! Just please...Try to understand.

Kaito: I'm tired of having to listen to your long winded excuses. You're just a coward under all those words. At this point, I'm finished. (He raises his voice a bit.) I’ve seen everything and I don't wanna hurt no more. (He walks past the two men, not looking back.) Let’s just head into Hell and be done with it.

(The room is silent for a few moments after Kaito leaves. Then Byron speaks up.)
Byron: (A knowing smile on his face.) Kaito's acting a bit odd today, wouldn't you think? If I didn't know any better, I would have said that he was... besotted.

Dr. Faker: (He shifts uncomfortably.)...it's just nerves.

Byron: Yes, yes. Of course. Wouldn't want the son of Heartland City to be drinking underage. That would be dreadful news for the Heartland public.

Dr. Faker:...is that a threat?

Byron: I’m not sure. To each man his own truth.

(Outside, Kaito stumbles into Christopher.)

Christopher: My word...! Kaito?!

Kaito: Yeah? (Contempt creeps into his reddened face.) You look just like your old man.

Christopher: (He glares at Kaito.) You don't say, Missus Tenjo.

Kaito: It wasn't my choice.

Christopher: (He sighs.) It’s bad luck for the groom to see his bride in her dress before the wedding. Shall we pretend this never happened?

Kaito: (He grabs Christopher’s arm.) Fuck your superstitions. This is a sham marriage anyways. Stay with me.

Christopher:...Kaito, are you alright? Do you have a fever?

Kaito: Sure feel like it…

Christopher: My god...you can barely stand straight...Are you sure you can walk down the aisle?

Kaito:...If I don't vomit first. Just...just keep me away from mirrors...What he did to me is disgusting...
Christopher: (He nods and then slowly walks besides Kaito, supporting him.) Are you...by chance...intoxicated?

Kaito: (He gives Christopher a glare.) What do you think?

Christopher: But...you’re underage.

Kaito: ‘Bet you never had a pint of alcohol your entire life, even though you’re of legal age. I’m just drinkin’ for the both o’ us.

Christopher: Well...As a young child, I was often allowed small sips of wine for religious purposes.

Kaito: Mmmhmm. Religion. Y’all don’t even know why y’all worship some man in the sky. The Catholic church’d be ashamed o’ this. A mockery, just like this wedding.

Christopher: (He furrows his brows.) You have no right to judge our traditions before experiencing them.

Kaito: I think I’d rather not. This wedding seems like a real fuss and I’m scared to find out what other ceremonies would involve.

Christopher: Well...if this were a truly traditional wedding, you would have entered in a carriage pulled by grey horses. There would be flowers and bells and ribbons and—

Kaito: Sounds awful.

Christopher: (A bit of a wounded expression fills his face.) I find the idea quite romantic.

Kaito: Ah yes, romanticizin’ things. Always rosyin’ things up just ‘cause reality’s too harsh.
Christopher: It...it’s not like that...

Kaito: Uh huh... (Irritatedly, he sweeps back his curls.) Damn summer heat... Don’t know how you can bear it.

Christopher: ...I never knew you had enough hair for that kind of—

Kaito: Extensions. Can't wait until this is all over and I can rip them off... (He turns to Christopher.) Honestly though, how aren’t you not dyin’?

Christopher: (He brushes back his bangs self consciously.) I've been maintaining long hair for as long as I can remember. The heat doesn't bother me much.

Kaito: What made it... this long?

Christopher: As a young child... my mother enjoyed brushing my hair. Eventually, she had me grow it out... I didn’t object at that time for I was mere child... and now it has grown to a remarkable length... (He smiles sheepishly.) Due to a mixture of frugality and vanity.

Kaito: ...Are you planning to grow it out more?

Christopher: (He laughs.) No, no. I think this is quite enough, thank you. Anymore and I'd be tripping over my own locks.

Kaito: If you say so, Rapunzel.

Christopher: If I remember correctly, Chrisseine had even longer hair.

Kaito: Mmhm. At that time, it reached the floor and then spread out for more than three feet. Of course, that was how he was able to sport such absurd coiffures. (He stumbles a bit, looking out the window.) I remember on some days, it would be piled atop his head so high that it would barely fit through the doorways. And then at the end of the day, he would be rubbin’ his sore neck. Does that still happen to you?

Christopher: ... occasionally. There were some nights where I wished that I were bald.

Kaito: (He chuckles.) Tron would've had a fit.
Christopher: Maybe even a heart attack.

Kaito: If only...I’d put the fun in his fun eral. (He trips on his heel and Christopher catches him.)

Christopher: How many drinks did you have? You're fairly intoxicated…!

Kaito: (He glares at Christopher.) I ain't “fairly intoxicated” if I can carry a conversation an' walk straight.

Christopher:...You aren't walking straight.

Kaito:...says you. (He releases himself from Christopher and attempts to walk on the line bordering the rug. He stumbles alongside it.)...damnit.

Christopher:...I told you.

Kaito: Shut up.

(The two stop at a door with a window. It is located on the side of the cathedral's main room and only a small portion of the benches can be seen.)

Kaito: Are the guests here yet? Can’t fuckin’ see, even with these damn heels on.

Christopher: (He peers out the window.) The benches...from where I'm standing, are half filled.

Kaito:...How much more time do we have?

Christopher: About half an hour. We should get in our places. Stay safe.

Kaito: Real funny, Chris.

(The two exchange glances and then head off to their respective places.)

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(Cathedral bells can be heard ringing across the countryside. Back inside the cathedral, a voice booms over the announcement system, first in English and then in Japanese.)

Voice: The procession will begin in ten minutes. All attendees shall now enter the main room.

Yuma: (He is busy gobbling food in the main hall. He then washes down a muffin with some punch.) Man, this is good…! (He tugs at his red tuxedo.) If only this wasn't so tight...

(Kotori tugs on his sleeve. She is a young girl of fourteen. Her flower patterned dress and white outer coat sets off her green hair and orange eyes. Her voice expresses exasperation...
and hurriedness.)

Kotori: Come on, Yuma! V and Kaito are about to get married!

Yuma: Alright, alright..! (He takes one more muffin.)

Kotori: Your entire family is waiting for you!

Yuma: (He sighs.) The food here is really good though…(He offers Kotori a cookie.) Have you tried them yet?

Kotori: (She glares at Yuma.) You and your food...

Yuma: (He laughs nervously and then stuffs the cookie in his pocket.) Don’t worry! I’m coming.

Kotori:...really…(She pulls Yuma along.)

(In another section of the cathedral, the Barian emperors are gathered.)

Ryoga: (Rio's twin brother is a youth of fifteen. His piercing blue eyes and slightly tanned skin blends in with his navy blue suit. He brushes back his purple, shoulder length curls and glares at the sun.) Let's get this over with.

Rio: Let’s hope for a happy ending this time...

Durbe: I hope in this life, they will be able to have the lives they wished for.

Rio:...the Shadow Council won’t be at his back this time.

(Alit, Ryoga, Durbe, and Gilag exchange glances.)

Durbe:...fond memories of those times. But yes, we are merely Ryoga, Rio, Alit, Durbe, Gilag, Mizael and Vector in this life.

Mizael: (He sets his drink down.)...Agreed.
Gauche and Droite are seated at a bench, conversing with one another. The burly 20-year old is a cheerful character. He greatly contrasts Droite’s organized and reserved manner, but they are still the best of friends. Even their appearances are the opposite. Where Droite is thin, Gauche is muscular. Where Droite’s hair is purple and smoothly combed, his is red and spiky. Where her skin is pale, his is tan. While her orange eyes are usually half closed and calm, Gauche’s purple eyes glimmer with passion. He seems ill at ease in his suit while Droite fits her purple evening gown perfectly.

Gauche: ...I can’t believe he’s really getting married. Y’know, now that I think of it, I never really did see him as someone who’d get married. Too prickly. Like a cactus.

(Droite picks at her purple silk evening gown. She purses her lips in reply to Gauche's remark.)

Gauche: (Concern fills his face.) Is there something the matter? Are you worried about the wedding plans? Y’know, from the meticulous way you dictate every aspect of my life as my manager, I don’t think Mr. Arclight has anything to worry about, let alone you.

Droite: (She sighs.) Kaito didn’t seem like he was happy today.

Gauche: He’s just nervous...(He snorts.) Tenjo Kaito. Nervous! (He laughs.) Well, it seems he too, can feel love! Beneath all that height-induced anger, he can actually feel love…! Now think about that!

Droite: (She shifts uncomfortably in her seat.) I don’t think so...not in this case...

Gauche: (His face falls in despair.)...a political marriage? (He looks at the portrait of Kaito and Christopher hanging near the door.)...they seemed to work well together...I thought...

Droite: I think they’re kind of like us. Just happy being close friends.

Gauche: (He sobers.)...Who’s idea do you think it was?

Droite:...look at all this. It’s obvious.

Gauche: (His expression darkens.)... Tron.
Droite: ...No matter what form the cat took, it was still a cat at heart.

Gauche: (He stands up.) This isn’t right…! Kaito doesn’t deserve this…! Just another petty attempt at reven—

Droite: (She stands up and places a hand on Gauche’s shoulder.) It’s alright, Gauche. You don’t have to say anymore.

(Gauche opens his mouth, about to say something and then closes it, thinking better.)

Droite: (She turns towards the doors leading into the main hall.)...It's time.

Gauche: (Grimly.) Alright...Just hope he makes the right choice this time.

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(A soothing, string ensemble begins their piece. An air of peaceful quiet spreads through the crowd. One side of the room is occupied by the people of the Resurrection, identifiable by their historical gowns and suits. On the left side are the citizens of Heartland, their colorful hair and fashion brightening up half of the room. Rose garlands are hung about the rafters and meld with the ivy. The red carpet is scattered thickly with rose petals. On the walls are enlarged Arclight crests framed by flowers. Colorful shadows are cast by the stained glass windows, depicting angels amongst the sun and flowers. At the altar, Michael and Thomas stand, Thomas on the second step and Michael on the first.)

Michael: (Through the side of his mouth.)...nervous?

Thomas: No. A mere walk in the park.

Michael: Hm.

Thomas: Did you not hear the cheers from the Heartland side as I made my way down the aisle...?

(The wedding march flutters about the large room. Everyone silences. The door facing the red carpet then opens. Christopher and Byron step out. The father and son proudly walk
across the room, arm in arm. Their heads are raised high and their expressions are calm and collected.)

Christopher: (He thinks erratically, despite his mask of calm.) *I can't believe it...No one is hearing my fluttering heart but I?! He's holding on too tight...Please, gods...mother...I can't have this happen once again...*

(The two then approach at the altar, where Thomas and Michael are wearing tranquil masks and appear almost like dolls. On the opposite side is Haruto, smiling at Christopher. Christopher exchanges a weak smile with Haruto and then walks up to the final step, stands to the right and turns around to face the crowd. He exchanges small glances with Thomas and Michael, who are three steps in front of him. Byron gives Christopher a hand on his shoulder and then returns to his bench at the front row.)

Christopher: (He takes in a deep breath and thinks.) *Any moment now…*

(The crowd buzzes with anticipation to see Kaito. A few silent seconds pass by and then the door to the small room once again opens and Dr. Faker and Kaito walk out. Their faces are grim, as if attending a funeral. As Kaito walks down the aisle, he avoids eye contact with everyone in the audience. His eyes are focused straight ahead, but it seems as if he isn’t seeing anything. There is a slight wobble in his gait that Dr. Faker tries to right by supporting his son. Kaito’s skirts brush against the rose petals and causes them to scatter. The audience is quietly murmuring amongst themselves and stare at Kaito. They are then silenced as Kaito approaches Christopher. Kaito is seemingly sober as he makes his way up the altar, but as he reaches the altar and stands, he sways a bit. There is a moment of tense silence as people wait for the clergyman to enter. When the doors swing open, a middle-aged man slowly makes his way through the aisle. He then moves past Christopher and Kaito and behind the altar.)

Priest:...Good afternoon. As we all know, today is a momentous occasion for the worlds of the Outside and the Resurrection. For the first time in decades, an Outsider bride shall wed a bridegroom of one of the 7 Great Families of the Resurrection. (He gives Byron a nod.) My sincerest congratulations to you, Lord Arclight.

(Appplause fills the hall. Meanwhile, on the Heartland side…)

Yuma: (Whispering to Kotori as he slowly claps.) What? Will we be getting a translation…?

Kotori: I...I don’t think so.
Yuma: How’re we supposed to celebrate if we can’t understand half of the things they’re saying in English?

Kotori: (She looks at Kaito and Christopher worriedly.) I don’t think they want us to understand...

(As the applause dies down, the priest begins to speak again.)

Priest: ...now, shall we begin our first prayer for this couple? (He closes his eyes and begins to pray.)

O God, who since the beginning of the world

have blessed the increase of offspring,

show favor to our supplications

and pour forth the help of your blessing...

(His voice drones on as the camera turn to Christopher, a grim expression on his face. The scene slowly fades to black.)

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Priest: ...Do you take Christopher as your lawful partner, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish until death do you part?

Kaito: (Solemnly, without revealing any emotion.)... I, Tenjo Kaito, take you, Christopher Arclight, to be my partner. I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life.

Priest: ...Do you take Kaito as your lawful partner, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish until death do you part?
Christopher: (He starts, at a loss of what to say for a few moments.) I...(He turns to the crowd, scanning it. Byron wears a mask of calm, although he can be seen gripping his cane tightly. The people from Heartland have grown a bit restless. He then turns to Kaito, but instead, only a skeleton in a white gown faces him. The skeleton begins to whisper with Kaito’s voice, its teeth click-clacking as it speaks.)

Skeleton: Chris...Chris, what’s wrong...?

Christopher: (He swallows. When he turns back to the crowd, animals sit in the place of the humans. On the side of the Resurrection are dogs, besides Byron, who is a horned, ram-like creature. On the Heartland side are tropical birds, twittering nervously.) I...(He looks at his brothers, who have the heads of dogs. Their collars are fastened too tightly and they let out whines. He slowly turns back to the ram-like creature. Its sinister red eyes glimmer. It takes both hands on its cane and begins to clasp and unclasp the handle. Christopher shifts uncomfortably and turns his eyes towards the floor. Sweat beads his brow and slides down his forehead as he utters the next words.) *I refuse to be bound to Kaito.*

---Episode 23~END---

Illustration for this episode [here](#) (To lighten the mood...)

Chapter End Notes

Oh dear...Such an unexpected reply from the bridegroom. Perhaps it is just his nerves. Remain in your seats, my dear readers. There are still pages left in this story.
Christopher:...I refuse to be bound to Kaito. (He looks up and everything has returned to normal. Kaito is looking at him in shock. When Christopher repeats his words, he becomes more confident.) I refuse to be bound to Tenjo Kaito in this sham of a marriage. (He repeats again in Japanese.) I refuse to be bound to Tenjo Kaito in this sham of a marriage.

(Murmurs begin to fill the crowd on both sides.)

Christopher: (He turns to the audience. His gaze is calm while Byron seethes in his seat.) We were forced to fight our fathers' wars. My brothers and I have suffered for more than half a hellish year under Byron Arclight's tyranny. His name and appearance are the same, but an entirely different personality resides within his heart. He is a demon dressed in my father’s clothes.

Byron: (He stands up.) How dare you?!

Christopher: (He coldly glances at Byron.) You never were my father and you never will be. From the moment you had stricken me for interrupting you at the table, I had always suspected that this was not the man I had called my father. (Coldly) Apologies, Mr. Arclight, but I'm afraid this isn't something I can do. (He looks at the audience, and nods.) Please have a wonderful rest of the day. (He calmly walks down the steps, through the doors, never looking back.)

Kaito: Ch-Chris... (His eyes are still turned towards the door.)

Byron: (He rises, barely able to compose his anger.) I do apologize, everyone. But I believe this ceremony has been...postponed.

Haruto: (Whispers,) Niisan ...?

Kaito: Y...yeah, Haruto?
Haruto: What...what will we do now...?

Kaito: I...I guess...(He musters up a weak smile.) I guess I’ll be stickin’ around for awhile longer.

Haruto: (Surprise fills his face but it soon turns into a smile.) Welcome back...I guess...!

Kaito: (His smile widens.) Y-yeah...It feels good to be home.

(Thomas and Michael are exchanging shocked looks.)

Thomas: (In his natural British accent.) He did it...That bloody bastard did it…

Michael: Well then...Now what…?

Thomas: We end this farce...I guess.

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Chrisseine: (He calmly sits in the center of the mirror room. He then relaxes as his adornments and chains disappear.) So. We are both free.

(All the mirrors in the room break and shatter.)

Chrisseine: (He breathes a sigh of relief, stretching his muscles and then walks through a door, never turning back.)...But I am still fated to wander these halls for the rest of eternity.

(The camera zooms out, showing an expansive golden palace covered in ivy. The sky is colored golden and nothing besides grass is seen in the distance.)
Chrisseine's voice:...Now, for the others...

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Thomas: (He comes home, taking off his suit and throwing it over the couch.) You got a lot of nerve...coming back here. The old man is ready to cut your head off.

Christopher: (He is in his regular clothes. He puts his book down.) I know.

Thomas: You better head your crazy ass out of here before he comes in.

Christopher: (He narrows his eyes.) I refuse to be a coward.

Thomas: (He walks upstairs.) Well, I'll tell Kaito you said goodbye. Thanks for the six months of crepe. I really do appreciate being forced to dress like a vampire.

Michael: (He walks into the room, his face red.) Dearest brother...! You shouldn't be here!

Christopher:...It is my home, isn't it?

Michael: (He shakes his head.)...Well I never...! (He huffs and then walks upstairs.)

Christopher:...So they've abandoned me to fend for myself. (He takes in a deep breath and begins to cross himself but then stops midway as he hears his father’s footsteps.) No...praying won't do anything...It’s just old habits resurfacing in times of desperation...

(The sound of heavy, angry footsteps approach. Byron then bursts through the door. His usually calm face is a mask of rage.)

Byron: You've slandered our good name and yet you dare return to this house?!

Christopher: (He grimaces.) It was already slandered a long time ago, dearest father.

Byron: Don't get all smart mouthed just because you rebelled once.
Christopher: I guess Kaito has been a bad influence.

Byron: All the more reason to bring him into our ways.

Christopher: Our ways? They are your ways, steeped in fear and oppression. This isn’t living. You’ve turned this house into a hell on earth. I used to love coming through those doors...But now I dread it. You’ve drained this house of love. Only fear and desolation remain.

Byron: Have you inherited the title of Lord Arclight? As I still walk this earth, I think not. To Lord Arclight goes Carnation Valley, the seat of power for all Arclights. This is my home. My domain. My word is law.

Christopher: (He stands up, at his full height, he looks Byron straight in the eye.) I am a twenty one year old man, nearing twenty two. I can make my own decisions, thank you very much. (He walks towards the door, calmly. He is then stopped as Byron yanks on his hair.)

Byron: I don't think you can, Christopher. Just look at yourself. Rebelling against your father. Keeping your hair past your knees like a ghost. Staying up until the moon itself goes to sleep. Really, Christopher, how far can you go in life with a set of traits like that? If it weren't for me, you would be swearing and speaking like those damned southerners.

Christopher: (He glares at Byron.)

Byron: Oh? Telling me what to do? (He pulls Christopher's hair, causing him to walk backwards.) You're still too young for that. Far, far too young.

Christopher: (Without looking back, he continues to walk forwards, ignoring the tug on his hair.) And you are far too old, set in your traditional ways like that.

Byron: Have you forgotten already? Look at me when I speak to you, Christopher. (He roughly yanks Christopher's hair, causing him to fall onto the floor.)

Christopher:....!

Byron: You will marry that boy whether you like it or not. Next time you will smile and say
yes and bring him home to me. Do you hear?

Christopher:...Or what shall become of me?

Byron: A severe beating and then the sight of Thomas being wedded to your student.

Christopher:...If you can still arrange it, Mr. Arclight.

Byron: (He narrows his eyes.) What would you know?

Christopher: You've been humiliated in front of half of Heartland. (He pulls his hair free from Byron's grip.) Will anyone else believe you? You aren't even my real father so you have no right to lay your goddamn hands on me or pull my strings as if I were your marionette. (He briskly walks to the door.) Goodbye, Byron Arclight.

(With unexpected swiftness, Byron grabs Christopher’s arm.)

Byron: We are far from done, Christopher. You are in need of a lesson.

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Kaito: (His hair is let down and he is in his regular clothes with a towel draped over his shoulders. He has recovered from his alcohol.) Nothin’ a good nap and a shower can’t fix.

Dr. Faker:...I’m worried about Chris. I’ve never seen Byron this angry.

Kaito: (He stops a bit and looks at the clock.) Yeah. I’ll check on him.

Dr. Faker:...call first.

Kaito: (He walks over to the kitchen and picks up the communication device. Typing in Christopher’s contact number yields no results. Sighing, Kaito dials the Arclight house number. The Arclight phone leaves a few moments of silence. When he’s finally answered, no
hologram image appears.) Chris? Is your bracelet not working correctly? What happe—

Thomas’s voice: This is IV. I’m currently using the phone. Antiquated device, yes, but we can’t help it.

Kaito:...right. IV...where’s Chris?

(There is a slight pause and a crackling on the other line.)

Thomas:...with Tron.

Kaito: Is he...

Thomas: (He takes in a deep breath.) It doesn’t sound too good.

Kaito:...gods...

Thomas: Don’t be a hero.

Kaito: Why not?

Thomas:...just...just don’t.

Kaito: Are you scared?

Thomas: Aren’t we all...?

(There is a bit of a pause. Then Kaito takes in a deep breath.)
Kaito: ...you’ve changed a lot.

(There is a very long pause. When Thomas speaks again, he is a lot more quieter.)

Thomas: ...You too.

Kaito: ...He’s really gettin’ it, isn’t he?

Thomas: ...I...I can hear his screams even from the second floor.

Kaito: ...Hang tight. I’m coming over.

Thomas: What did I just tell you…?

Kaito: He’s my friend. Wouldn’t you do the same for Ryoga?

Thomas: He...Ryoga...(He sighs.)...Just what will you be able to do?

Kaito: I’ll call the authorities on him.

Thomas: You don’t understand...the Resurrection authorities...they...they can’t lay a finger on a family with our kind of power.

Kaito: ...I’m going over anyways. (He hangs up the phone.)

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Byron: You are nothing to me.
(He is looking down at Christopher, whose head is bent over and whose limbs are tied to hooks on the walls. His shirt removed, his skin is pale and his thin features make him look almost sickly. Bloody cuts cover his chest.)

Christopher: ...As are you. My real father would never hurt my family like this. He was a kind, intelligent man. But you... you are Lucifer incarnate.

Byron: (He roughly tilts up Christopher’s head. Christopher’s face is bruised, with one eye swollen shut. He has a bloody nose.) Look at me when you speak.

Christopher: My true father is crying from his perch in Heaven as he witnesses this.

Byron: (He yanks Christopher’s hair and edges his face close to Christopher’s.) I am your real father. There is no kindly man in Heaven, nor is there a man in Hell. He is right here, in front of you. I was the man who read to you at night. I was the man you worked alongside with at Faker’s lab. I was the man who taught you how to duel. And I was the man who was thrown down that cliff into Barian World and survived its horrors there. I came out broken...but then you returned my body to me. And brought back my mind.

Christopher: You aren’t my father!

Byron: (He swings his whip across the top of Christopher’s chest, earning another scream.) How? You spoke with the beings of the Astral World during our journey. They gave you the astralite needed to fix me. You were with me the entire time. How could I not be your father?

Christopher: My...my father was killed in Barian World. Another creature has stolen his face and crawled back to the human world bearing his memories but not his heart.

(Byron slaps Christopher with all his might.)

Byron: You have gone without guidance far too long...Being far away from the Resurrection too long has made you forget who you truly are.
Christopher: This...this is Hell.

Byron: (He whips Christopher again and is answered by a shout of pain.) Heaven and Hell do not exist. They are just imaginary worlds meant to scare feeble minds into following another person’s code of morals.

Christopher: If you say Hell does not exist, then why am I here?!

Byron: *Hell* on Earth is only a mindset. (He unties Christopher’s restraints, grabs a fistful of Christopher’s hair and drags him out of the basement and into the living room. Throughout that entire moment, Christopher can be heard shouting.) I will prove to you that all this *injustice* is all in your mind. You will obey. You will marry that boy. And then you will realize that this is a garden of beautiful roses. THOMAS! MICHAEL! IN THE GARDENS THIS INSTANT! (He drags Christopher through the halls and out into the garden. There, he pushes Christopher down the stairs. Christopher’s ankle twists and he lets out a yelp of pain. When Byron gets to the bottom of the stairs, he proceeds to drag Christopher near the roses. In the background, Thomas and Michael have made it to the front patio and are slowly making their way down the stairs.)

Byron: ONE OF YOU! GET A PAIR OF SHEARS!

(The two brothers look at each other hesitantly. Michael quickly runs to the greenhouse.)

Byron: You have grown wild, Christopher. I must drag you back into civility.

Christopher: (His face is a mask of pain.)...I...I refuse...to be a puppet...

Byron: I will trim your unsightly flowers. And then you will marry that Tenjo boy.

Christopher: I won’t...

(Byron steps on his son’s twisted ankle. Christopher lets out another shout of pain.)
Byron: (Disgust fills his face.) If I cannot control you, then I will continue to break you until you die.

Christopher: (His voice is hoarse with pain and tears can be seen sliding down his cheeks.) Then kill me now! It isn’t hard, snapping a thin neck like mine!

Byron: Then you will die a martyr. I’d rather have a broken ghost.

Michael: (He shakily presents the shears to Byron.) H-here are the shears…

Byron: My thanks, Michael. (He calmly takes the shears and cuts three, long rose branches. The branches have long, sharp and wicked thorns at the top. The flowers on the branches bloom red and vibrant. He turns to Thomas, who is clearly disturbed by this scene.) Boys...Take a branch. Be sure to hold it tightly.

Thomas: N...no…

Byron: (He raises an eyebrow and hands Michael a branch. Michael reluctantly takes it.) What…?

Thomas: I’m not...I’m not going to…

Byron: (He grabs Thomas’s arm and forces him to take a branch.) You have no choice. (He turns back towards Christopher.) Let us punish this worthless branch on our family tree. (He turns to Thomas and Michael.) Come closer.

(Michael takes Thomas’s hand and pulls him closer. Both of them are shaking.)

Byron: Raise the branch midway. And then swing down. Make sure the tips of the branches make contact with the skin. I want him to bleed. (He takes one step back, raises the branch and then swings down. Christopher lets out a shout of pain as the thorns pierce his skin, already lacerated with cuts.) Like this. Come, boys. Don’t you want to be rewarded for being good children?
Michael: This...this isn’t…

Byron: (His voice has a warning tone to it.) Or shall I have all of you strip and present your backs to me? I will cut every rose branch in this garden and beat all three of you mercilessly until the last flower has rotted on your backs.

Michael: (He shakes his head.) I won’t hurt my brother. Not like this.

Thomas: Me...me neither.

Byron: (He turns to Thomas.) You do wish to be useful to me...don’t you? This is your chance to prove it. You never truly liked Christopher, did you? He was always busy with his studies...never having time to bond with you...And not to mention...he abandoned you. Who knows...he may do it again. But beating him into submission will keep him here. All those years of being oppressed...It’s time you finally show him your anger.

(Thomas’s hands shake a bit as he holds the branch. His eyes are wide in fear.)

Michael: Don’t listen to him…

Byron: And Michael...At the young age of 10...he left you in that orphanage. When he returned, you could barely recognize him. Is he even your brother? He’s a stranger. He doesn’t even bother to bond with you. He looks down on you, Michael. You are just an object in the way of his full inheritance. All the attention I give to you makes him jealous. He hates you.

Christopher: I...I don’t…

Byron: He says he loves you, but he doesn’t. He used you. He took advantage of your kind heart and dragged you down with him. He could have dueled Mizael on his own. But instead, he was a coward and needed your strength. He wanted someone to die with. And who better than kindhearted Michael? You could have accompanied Yuma to Barian World. But your brother’s selfish needs got in the way...Show him your anger, Michael.
Michael: I...I won’t.

Byron: Why…? He knew he would have lost the duel. He knew you were weak. He wanted you to die because he wanted to spare you the events that would transpire later. You are weak…

Michael: I am not…!

Byron: Then show me your strength.

Michael: (He shakes his head.) The thought of spilling his blood…

Byron: He is nothing but a stranger…(He turns to Thomas.) You are a loyal son. Wouldn’t you like to show me your strength? You’re so strong, Thomas...If only I could have been with you during those awful years...You would have become even better than your brother. Wouldn’t you like to take his place? Why is a stranger occupying a position that is rightfully yours…? I will let you take his place if you beat him…

Thomas:...I…

Byron: That is all you need to do...

Thomas: (He grasps the rose branch and swallows. Slowly, he takes a step forwards. He bites his lip.) Michael...let us...let us do what is expected.

Michael: Y...you can’t be serious...I…

(There is an over-the-shoulder shot of Thomas turning to face Michael. Michael’s eyes slightly widen in horror.)
Michael: ...It...

Thomas: (Through gritted teeth.) Do it, Michael. (He swings his branch onto Christopher’s back.)

Michael: (He takes in a deep breath and grasps the branch. He takes one steady step towards his brother.)...all this resentment...it isn’t good for our hearts. (He raises his branch and swings down onto Christopher’s back. After that, Thomas takes a swing. It soon escalates to an endless onslaught of sharp thorns raining blows on Christopher’s back. The flowers disintegrate with each hit, petals raining over Christopher’s back. Christopher screams in pain, tears flowing down his back.)

Christopher: I’M SORRY! I’M SORRY I ABANDONED YOU! I’M SORRY FOR BEING SELFISH! PLEASE, KILL ME! (His plea is hoarse and shrill.) KILL ME!

Byron: Do you see him for the coward he is?! He abandoned you two in your time of need! He only used you when he thought it was useful!

(The blows rain harder on Christopher’s back.)

Christopher: PLEASE...! KILL ME FOR ALL I’VE DONE...! I’M A WRETCHED CREATURE...! PLEASE END MY LIFE...!

Kaito: CHRIS! (He vaults over the fence and runs towards the rose bushes. His eyes widen in horror when he sees the scene. He shoves his way through Thomas and Michael.) What’re you guys doin’?! (He looks at Christopher’s back, red with blood and covered in cuts.) That’s fuckin’ barbaric! (He turns to Byron.) You started this, didn’t you? Turnin’ your sons ‘gainst each other. (He looks at Thomas and Michael, now trembling with fear.) If they all hate each other, then they can’t team up on you and end your reign. You’re the coward here! (He shakes his head.) Distrusting your sons up to the point that you decide to sabotage their relationships...You’re despicable, Tron.

Byron: (He glares at Kaito.) Stay out of my family’s business. You have plenty of problems in your family, so why not go back there and fix those first?
Kaito: (He kneels down and tries to help his mentor.) Christopher is my family! Seeing him like this...It’s degradin’...(His lip curls in disgust.) Not even being allowed to choose the one you love in this house...This is a prison. (He helps Christopher stand up. Then he turns to Michael and Thomas.) He’s a monster. How about y’all come with us?

(Thomas and Michael exchange glances. Then Thomas steps up.)

Thomas: Gladly.

Michael: I-if Thomas is coming...I shall too…

Kaito: (He turns to Christopher.) Let’s get you to a hospital. (He looks down at Christopher’s swollen ankle.) We should get that checked...

Byron: Impudent wastrel...Thinking you can enter my home and walk away with my sons like that...(He raises his branch and strikes Kaito across his face. Blood trickles down the young man’s face, yet he continues to look at Byron defiantly.)

Kaito: Are you aware of what you just did? You must’ve forgotten this fact over the long summer. Your family is not the only family with power. I am the son of the founder of Heartland City. This could mean war. And you’re definitely not on the winning side. You’ve been humiliated in front of the entire Resurrection. Ousted by your very own son. Where will your allies be in case war breaks out? (He leans his face closer to Byron.) Strike me again. I dare you. And then every Heartlander here for the wedding will storm your house. I have their love. Do you have yours? (He pulls back and leaves with the Arclight brothers. Byron stands in front of the rose bushes, his hands shaking with rage.)

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(The sound of a heart monitor is heard. Christopher opens his eyes. He is in a hospital bed, surrounded by his brothers.)

Kaito: They want to keep you for tonight.
Christopher:...that sounds like a good idea.

Kaito: Your brothers will be coming home with me.

Michael: Don’t worry. Our injuries from past encounters were seen to. We’re quite alright.

Thomas: Yeah, they got something for my burns.

Christopher: I’m happy to hear that...And Kaito...your face…

Kaito: (There’s a bandage on his cheek where Byron struck him.) I’m fine.

Christopher:...my brothers...they can actually stay with you?

Dr. Faker: (He is sitting in a chair in the corner of the hospital room.) ‘Course they can. We owe you a favor anyways.

Christopher: For what...exactly…?

Dr. Faker: (A smile creeps up his face.) For freein' my son, of course.

Christopher: (Concern fills his expression.) What about my father?

Dr. Faker: (His expression grows grim.) The authorities are coming for him tomorrow morning.

Thomas: But they won’t do anything...

Dr. Faker: (He raises an eyebrow.) I didn’t say Resurrection authorities did I? These are Heartland’s.
Michael: But…

Dr. Faker: Remember what y’all did during the WDC. I still haven’t made any charges for the damage you guys caused.

Christopher: (His eyes widen.) But that means that I…

Dr. Faker: I pardoned you.

Christopher:...th...thank you...Dr. Faker.

Dr. Faker: It’s the least I could do. They should also be arrestin’ me for the things I did but...well, let’s say I’m also untouchable when faced with my side’s authorities. Your side does have the right to arrest me for the things I did to your father but no one knows, do they? Well, even if they did arrest me, Heartland would get mad and then we’d all be on the brink of war.

Christopher: Oh...this political crossfire is giving me a headache…

Michael: Wouldn’t arresting Tron also incite our side?

Dr. Faker: (He shrugs.) Que será, será . I just want to see you guys in a safe environment. After all the things he did to you...I think you guys all deserve better.

Thomas: But why? We aren’t even your kids.

Dr. Faker: I owe you guys a whole bunch. Besides…(He shakes his head.) I can’t stand the sight of kids being stuck in horrible conditions. (He stands up.) Let’s just end this conversation and head back to the house. I’ve a hankerin’ for a can of beer.
(It is dusk. Byron calmly looks outside his study’s window.)

Byron:...I mustn't let them know that I have weaknesses. I am an Arclight. The embodiment of the Resurrection. But, how can I when the eldest has abandoned me and half of Heartland doubts my authority? What can I, a man who is a stranger to his own children do?

(The scene fades to a deep black. Only Byron's voice is heard.)

Byron's voice: Ah. There is only one way for a disgraced man to return to his former glory. And that is...

(His voice now fades away, but his footsteps are heard going upstairs.)

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(We are in the Tenjos’ living room, where Thomas and Kaito are on the couch and Michael is playing with Haruto.)

Kaito:...those scars aren’t gonna leave anytime soon, huh?

Thomas:...I already had scars before this. From the fire incident. What difference will a few more make?

Kaito: I have a few scars of my own, but none as big as yours. Underground training was intense.

Thomas: We’ve both been dealt an unsavory lot in life, haven’t we?

Kaito: But we worked with it and now here we are. I’m dying and you’re emotionally
scarred.

Thomas: ...But we’re still alive.

Kaito: ...Barely.

Thomas: ...hey...

Kaito: Yeah?

Thomas: I’m sorry I didn’t say goodbye to you.

Kaito: ...don’t be. It was a difficult time. Besides...It’s all in the past now.

Thomas: I saw your father drag you into the car...I was standing in the trees as you guys drove off. You just looked so busy with the baby in your arms that I...I guess I sort of chickened out.

Kaito: ...Yeah...That was a tough day for all of us...Y’know, when I came back to here...After Haruto started showing signs of being sick...I climbed your fence to see if you were still there. But you weren’t. I wanted to tell you everything at that time. About the baby, about my momma...I just wanted someone to talk with...But...I wouldn’t have another friend like you for a long time...

Thomas: (He colors a bit.) That must have been after Michael and I were taken away. Y’know...I always did wonder what happened to you after that day. (He smiles a bit.) When I first saw the baby, I thought you had gotten some girl pregnant. But then I remembered that you’re a nerd and only in another life and another dimension would that have happened.

Kaito: (He lets out a laugh. Then he covers his mouth in embarrassment.) Yes, I remember you were quite the mischievous 10 year old. D’you remember what you told me about momma when you first met her?
(Thomas’s blush reddens but he does not reply.)

Kaito: Would you like a reminder? (He clears his throat and assumes a young boy’s voice, replete with a British accent.) Your mum’s got a nice pair of knockers, she does. Bet your dad sucks on them when they have sex.

Thomas: I...I was just a stupid kid...Really, I didn’t mean any of that...

Kaito: (He thumbs towards his father at the table, working on a small piece of machinery.) He’s right there if you’d like to ask him.

Thomas: N-no...I don’t.

Kaito: (He turns his head back.) Hey dad! IV here’s got a big question he’s been dying to ask you ever since he was 10 years old!

Dr. Faker: (He turns towards Thomas.) 8 years of holding in a question...? Ask away.

Thomas: (His face is entirely red.) No, I don’t…! Mr. Tenjo, Kaito’s just being silly...

Kaito: How dare you accuse me of superfluous actions…? Go on, you’ve been holding it in for years now! Don’t you want to ask?

Thomas: Hush up! I have nothing to ask you, Mr. Tenjo! Honest!

Dr. Faker:...Alright then...(He goes back to working on his machinery, shaking his head.)

Kaito: He wants to ask if you sucked on momma’s knockers when you guys were in bed.

(In the background, Michael is seen covering Haruto’s ears.)
Dr. Faker: (He fumbles around with the screwdriver, placing it on the table and then lifts up his goggles.) Pardon?

Kaito: IV wanted to know if–

Thomas: (He pushes Kaito, his face entirely red.) That’s old news! Weren’t you ever a 10-year old with stupid 10-year old ideas?

Kaito: No, I was an intelligent 10-year old with intelligent ideas.

Dr. Faker: Well…

Thomas: NO!

Dr. Faker: (He raises an eyebrow.) Thomas, if you think I’m gonna talk about the deceased like that, you’ve got something else comin’ your way. (He lifts both hands up.) What happens in bed, stays in bed. I ain’t ever gonna tell anyone what went on between the sheets. (He looks at Thomas.) I’m just here to tell you to enjoy your youth because when you’re this age, you’re just waiting for the day you drop dead.

Thomas:...th..thanks for the advice...

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(It is early in the morning. The sun has barely risen. The voices of Michael and Thomas are heard.)

Thomas: Are you sure about this…?

Michael:...It’s the least I could do..after all, I am the favorite.
(The sounds of chinaware clinking is heard.)

Thomas: You’re going to get yourself killed.

(The two are revealed to be in the basement of the Arclight mansion, in the servants’ quarters. Michael is holding a teaservice in his hands.)

Michael: (Pretending to be brave.) No, I won’t.

Thomas: Why the hell did you think going back was a good idea…?! We should’ve just went with the Tenjos to pick Christopher up from the hospital!

Michael: (He walks towards the stairs.) I want to give him a proper farewell.

Thomas:...I’ll be waiting in the living room.

(It is later now, the sun has small bits of light filtering through Byron's room. It is still early morning as the grandfather clock chimes 8:00. Michael gently opens up the door to Byron’s study, a tea tray in one hand.)

Michael: Good morning... (His eyes widen in fear and he takes a few steps back. His hands shake and he drops his tea tray as he looks ahead of him, transfixed in fear. The sound of china shattering and silverware hitting the marble floors resound across the empty house. Michael's face is stricken with fear. He hits the wall, slides down and sits on the floor. He clutches his wrist, breathing heavily. His voice is a scarce whisper.) B-bloody...h-hell...M...my...God...T-Thomas! (He finds his voice.) THOMAS! THOMAS! PLEASE...! THOMAS! COME DOWN HERE, PLEASE...! OH MY GOD, FATHER HE'S...HE'S...(He breathes heavily, tears beginning to fill his face.)

(The sound of heavy footsteps thumping running up the stairs is then followed by the sound of the door being roughly pushed open.)

Thomas: (He tumbles through the door, looking wildly around.) What did he do?! Are you
alright?! Michael just wh– (He sees the pile of shards and the silverware on the floor. His eyes then go to a terrified Michael, at the right side of the room. He then slowly turns to the left side of the room, in which a shiny pair of oxfords can be seen. When Thomas speaks again, he has his British accent.) Oh gods... (He rushes over to Michael, embracing him and stroking his hair.) I'm so sorry you had to be the first person to see that...I...I'll clean this mess up and then we can call the Tenjos...You can just go down to the living room and rest.

Michael: Y-yes, dearest brother...(He meekly nods and then weakly walks out of the room, his breathing still heavy.)

Thomas: Bloody hell...(He grimaces as he looks at the left side of the room. The camera follows his view and for the first time, the viewer is able to see what lies above Byron’s desk. With the backside of his body facing Thomas, Byron is suspended in the air by a noose around his neck. He hangs limply, his body unmoving in the still air. The once alive Arclight patriarch is dead. Thomas then silently sits at Michael's previous spot, burying his face in his hands.)...Just like mother.

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(The sun is shining brightly into an elegant sitting room in Carnation Valley. One can tell from the bright paint and shiny furniture that this was from many years before. The camera is now focused on a table with a lantern and an ornate dish. Small puffs of smoke fill the room. Mrs. Arclight is reclining on a seat facing the table, an opium pipe loosely in her hand. Her eyes are glassy, looking at nothing. A small, peaceful smile is on her face. Six year old Thomas enters the room. There are wildflowers in his hands. His British accent is still quite strong at this time.)

Thomas: Mummy? Look at me, mummy…! I brought you your favorite flowers! The Alyssum snow carpets, see? (He walks over to his mother, waving the flowers in front of her red and blue eyes. He places the flowers on the table and proceeds to shake her, yet she remains in a daze.) Mummy, wake up! You've been on that pipe again, haven't you?! Father said that wasn't good for you! Wake up! (He continues shaking her until the pipe falls out of her hand.)

Byron: (His voice can be heard as he is about to walk into the room.) Thomas, dear...please lower your voice...Christopher and I are trying to read the paper...(He trails off as he enters the room.) M-Marie-Luise...! Th-Thomas, did you...

Thomas : I walked in and she was like this! She wasn't saying anything, even when I shook her! She always wakes up when I shake her!
Byron: (Horror creeps into his face.) No, no...it can't be...Thomas, please, go play with your brothers.

Thomas: But why...? Mummy's alright, isn't she...?! 

Byron: (He checks for a pulse and then a hint of breathing on Marie-Luise. His eyebrows are knitted in worry. After a few moments of nothing, his face fills with grief.)...Thomas, my son...Please...tell Christopher to call the physician.

Thomas: So she isn't alright?! What happened?! I–

Byron: (He gingerly puts a hand up.) N..now...isn't the time...Please...Thomas...I...I'm begging you...

(Realizing that this is serious, Thomas nods and then runs off.)

Byron: (He buries his face in his hands.) Oh, Marie-Luise...what have I done…? May the Lord forgive me...

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(Byron walks out with the doctor, a tall and aged woman. Both have gentle faces. The doctor nods, pats Byron's shoulder and then walks out.)

Doctor: I apologize for your loss, Sir Arclight.

Byron: (His voice breaks.)...It's...(He tries to regain composure.) It’s...quite...alright...

Doctor: We could have saved her...if we had came earlier. (She looks at Byron.) She’s been gone since six in the morning, sir. (She clasps Byron's hands in hers.) You have my deepest condolences. My grandmother was also taken by the opium...Please, if you have any questions, do not hesitate in calling me. (She walks downstairs.)
Christopher: (At 9 years old, his hair is shoulder length and loose. His skin is pale and his eyes are deep blue and wide, still too large for his thin face. He wears a sailor suit of blue. He looks delicate as if he were a doll. He is holding hands with a four year old Michael. His eyes are wide in worry and his voice comes out a timid whisper.) Is mother...?

Byron:...(He turns around, trying his best to keep his tears in.)...yes, Christopher. Your mother...she...she will no longer be with us.

Thomas: Sh...she isn't...? B-but that's not fair! (He shouts at the top of his lungs, the tears spilling out of his eyes.) MUMMY PROMISED...! SHE'D BE WITH ME FOREVER AND EVER!!! IT ISN'T FAIR! IT ISN'T FAIR AT ALL! SHE LOVED ME MORE THAN CHRISTOPHER AND MICHAEL AND...AND...

Byron: (He bends down and hugs Thomas.) I'm sorry, Thomas. I'm so, so sorry...

Thomas: (He tries to push himself away from Byron.) YOU COULD HAVE SAVED HER! BUT YOU JUST LET HER DIE!

Byron: Son, I didn't know that she would–

Michael: (He is bewildered by Thomas's shouting.) Mare...?

Christopher: Not now, Michael...

Thomas: (He turns around to Michael, rage creeping into his voice.) You...You killed her! IF YOU WERE NEVER BORN, MUMMY WOULD STILL BE HERE! SHE CHANGED AFTER YOU WERE BORN! YOU KILLED HER! YOU DID! YOU DID! (He pushes Michael and then stomps into his room, slamming the door.)

Michael: (His eyes are wide in confusion. He then bursts into tears.) Thomas doesn't love me...

Christopher: (He leans down, wiping his own tears away. His voice is shaky.) No, no of course not, Michael...Thomas doesn't...hate you...he loves you...he truly does...but sometimes...he just needs some time alone. We all love you.

Michael:...Mare too?

Christopher: (He winces and his tone is forced.) Yes, yes mother too.
(We are back in the present. Thomas has just finished throwing away the shards into the trash bin.)

Thomas: (He approaches Michael, who is lying on the couch.) Are you alright now, Michael?

Michael: (He shifts away from Thomas.) I...I don't want to talk about it.

Thomas: (He sits down next to Michael. There is a brief moment of silence.)...Do you remember how I said you killed mother and how I wished you were never born?

Michael: (Sadness fills his expression.) Of course I do, Thomas. It hurt.

Thomas:...I take it back. I'm sorry. I was just a jealous kid back then... I didn't know...the impact of my words.

Michael:...(He shifts once again.) Why did they both have to take their own lives...?

Thomas:...I guess when you've had enough...you've had enough.

Michael:...

Thomas: You'll understand one day.

Michael:....No, I understand. I...I sometimes daydreamed about doing it. Back then, when our family was in shambles. How easy it would be to drink something that wasn’t supposed to be ingested. How easy it would be to take a knife and cut myself open...And when I dueled Yuma...Tron told me if I gave up my life...I would help us–

Thomas: (Firmly.) Don't talk about that bullshit anymore. We're done fighting. We're at peace now...That chapter’s been firmly closed and glued shut...Mostly. (He sighs.)
Michael: ...It's Rio, isn't it? She's—

Thomas: That and more, alright?

Michael: (He looks down at the floor.) Already, we have ghosts who will follow us for the rest of our lives.

Thomas: No, you're still young. You can change. (He kisses Michael on the forehead and holds him close.) Don’t ever consider killing yourself again, you hear? You’re destined for great things. Don’t waste this life that you’ve been given. What would our true father say if you came before your time? He’d cry and cry until all of the Resurrection would be drenched in his tears. He loved you the most, giving you enough love for both mother and him. Don’t waste that love.

Michael: (He begins to tear up.) It’s so hard to remember that in times like this...

Thomas:.... I love you. Don’t leave me alone in this world. Please.

Michael: (He buries his face in Thomas’s shoulder.) I won’t...I love you too. (He sniffs.) Even if they say that true love never goes without being mentioned, it still feels good to hear it every once in awhile.

Thomas:...if only we could have more of it.

(The sounds of sirens begin to fill the room. Thomas slowly looks up.)

Thomas:....and they’re here...

--- ♂ ---

(Christopher and Kaito are sitting in Christopher’s hospital room, drinking coffee.)
Christopher: (He looks out the window.)...My father used to make your father coffee every late night.

Kaito:...How history repeats itself...just this time, it’s reversed.

Christopher:..He'd often tell me of their adventures together.

Kaito: Is that why you joined them?

Christopher: Partially. I was bored of my life behind walls. I needed to get out of the house and do something useful with the life I was given.

Kaito: (He blows on his coffee.) Your dad came home often?

Christopher: (He smiles fondly.) Almost every night, full of stories about his partner, a man with a strange nickname, Dr. Faker. Even with a name like that, my father and him were the best of friends. (He sips his coffee.) Oh, how the times have changed.

Kaito: Hmph. My old man was never home. Always working his ass off on who knows what, miles and miles away. It was one of the reasons that sent my momma to an early grave, I reckon.

Christopher: My father always talked about how his partner always overworked himself and came home after him. First to come to the lab...last to come out.

Kaito:...He didn't. He always slept in his office. Nowadays, he "works" in his workshop, all screws and gears and cacophony. Heartland's construction is pretty much done so his life goal's been completed. Now he's just messing around and tweaking things to make life a little easier for the people of Heartland.

Christopher: A noble goal...(He sighs and takes another drink of his coffee.) How can we go on so casually...when such an awful event took place just a day ago?

Kaito:...We just do.
Christopher:...resilience. A trait we all surprisingly possess. Even when we’re so young...

Kaito:...Children may be the strongest of us all. They have youth, time and an unreliable memory on their side.

Dr. Faker: (He enters the hospital room, a panicked look in his eyes.) Gentlemen, I hate to interrupt your conversation but it’s an emergency. The Heartland Police found your brothers in the Arclight mansion along with your father’s...body. Michael was the first one to find him. God knows what those two were doing but Michael was shaking in Thomas’s arms when the police found him.

Christopher:...what...?

Kaito: Tron can’t be...!

Dr. Faker:...he...he hung himself.

Christopher: (Panicked.) That can’t be..! It’s...it’s impossible...he can’t...was there a note...? I...

Dr. Faker:...The police were unable to find a note.

Christopher: (Tears fill his eyes.) Oh God...I killed him, didn’t I?

Dr. Faker: No! Don’t blame yourself for any of this...!

Kaito: It’s not your fault...! He...he had his own reasons.

Christopher:...I should’ve said yes...I should’ve said yes...(He clasps his hands together.) Oh Lord, forgive me!
Dr. Faker:...Jesus ain’t gonna help you at this moment, Chris. We...we gotta head back...

Christopher: (He unclasps his hands.) A-apologies...old habits...are difficult to be rid of.

Dr. Faker: (He hands Christopher his crutches leaning on the side of the bed.) You go get dressed. Kaito and I will be waiting. (His face is grim.) You may see this as rushed and brash, but...we gotta take action before word gets out...His dignity was the last thing he had.

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Thomas: Where's Chris?

Michael: He is with you, correct?

Kaito: He sprained his ankle. He’s gonna take awhile to get in.

Thomas:...gods...it was an awful sight.

Kaito: (His expression is grim.) My condolences.

Thomas:...thanks.

Kaito:...I still can’t believe it…

Thomas: Me neither.

Kaito:...he was like a cloud looming over all of our lives. (He looks outside at the sunny skies.) Now that we’ve been reunited with the blue skies, we don’t know what to do.

Thomas:...you’re starting to sound like my brother.
Kaito:...is that so…?

Michael:...right down to those very words.

Christopher: (He enters the room, hobbling on his crutches.) What did I miss?

Thomas:...you know what happened this morning...?

Christopher: (He gravely nods.) Indeed. (Pain fills his features.) And it was all my fault.

Dr. Faker: (Enters from behind Christopher.) No, no it ain't, Christopher. It's no one's fault. He...he wasn't himself.

Michael: (He puts a hand on Christopher’s shoulder.) It wasn’t your fault.

Christopher: (He shakes his head.) Even if...even if he did such cruel things to us...His face...there was always hope that…

Thomas: Hush...(He puts an arm on Christopher’s other shoulder.) What’s done...is done.

Christopher: It’s just...

Dr. Faker: Byron’s gone. We just...we just gotta accept that.

Kaito:...Here one day…(He bites his lip.) Gone the next.

Dr. Faker: (He closes his eyes and puts his hand on his forehead.) Excuse me...I think I’ll go check on Haruto. (He heads upstairs.)
Kaito: ...you go do that...

Thomas: (He walks Christopher over to Michael. He then seats himself besides Christopher.)
It was no one’s fault.

Christopher: ...(He is staring at his hands.) No...it's my fault he did this.

Michael: No it isn't! That man was never our father! It was on his own accord that he—

Christopher: (With trembling hands.) I humiliated him in front of everyone. I smashed his pride and his faith...

Kaito: (He turns around to face Christopher.) But would you have rather lived under his tyranny than be your own man?

Christopher: No, of course not...but...

Kaito: There aren't any "buts" in this situation. (He bites his lip before speaking.) I'd say he deserved it if I knew less.

Christopher:...Kaito...

Kaito: Promise me...when you’re Lord Arclight...you won’t become a monster.

Christopher: No...no of course not. Why would I...?

Kaito:...nothing...just...the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

Christopher: (Pain fills his expression.) That man wasn’t my father. That was just a stranger bearing the face of my father.

Kaito: Then why do you still mourn for him?
(All three brothers turn to look at Kaito.)

Christopher:...because we have never seen our true father die in the physical sense.

(There is a moment of silence as Kaito takes in Christopher’s words.)

Christopher: (He looks at his brothers.)...we have a funeral to prepare, don’t we? And mourning garb to order…

Thomas: (He solemnly recites the rhyme.) Nine months shrouded in dark, three months in grey mark for the parents of unfortunate larks.

Christopher: (He sighs and turns to Kaito.) You’ll be seeing us in mourning garb for the next year or so.

Kaito: (He gazes at Christopher for the longest time.)...I see.

Christopher:....are you alright?

Kaito:...it’s just...this will likely be one of the last times I’ll see y’all in blue, red and cream.

Thomas:...what do you mean? It’s only a year. We’ll be sporting our team colors back in no time. (Mutters.) Thank gods the mourning periods were shortened compared to our ancestors’.

Kaito:...Chris, you remember when I said that I only had a maximum of 3 years left?

Christopher: Your father said you had 15…!

Kaito: (He rolls his eyes.) Always the fucking optimist...Well, it’s gone down to 2 years now.
Christopher:...how?

Kaito: I did a test a few days ago. You remember the duelist antibodies? My body’s starting
to not get along with them anymore. It’s starting to attack those cells along with my blood
cells.

Christopher: Will photon mode be affected?

Kaito: (He shrugs.) It’s still too early to tell.

Christopher: It’s in its early stages...surely you can reverse this.

Kaito: My only hope is a blood transfusion...but...my blood’s been drastically altered from its
original composition. It’s impossible to find a match. And you’d need to drain the rest of my
tainted blood out of my body, or else the antibodies will keep on attaching themselves to my
blood.

Christopher: Your father will find a way. He’s a genius.

Kaito: (His lips are pressed in a thin line.) I refuse to let him find a way. He’s already done
enough harm to Haruto. I’m not going to let him go any further.

Christopher: But he could save your life...!

Kaito: (He shakes his head.) Don’t worry about me for now...Y’all need to prepare for the
funeral of a man who died lost and broken.

---Episode 24~END---

Photograph for this episode [here](#)
On the Winds of Autumn

Chapter Notes

A double update this time. How very exciting.

---Episode 25---
On the Winds of Autumn

(We are in Carnation Valley’s living room. The drapes have been pulled and there is black crepe over the mirrors. On top of the fireplace, the family portraits have been laid face-down. All of the clocks’ hands have been stopped. The Arclight brothers are standing in front of an open coffin. Michael is wiping his eyes with a handkerchief, Thomas is looking down mournfully and Christopher looks at the coffin with a haunted expression. All three are dressed in black suits, with white roses in their lapels and their hair brushed back or tied up. The camera then moves onto the coffin, showing Byron. He is dressed in a black suit, his hair is braided neatly and there is a rose tucked in his lapel. Byron's skin is lighter than usual and his arms are folded atop his chest. The sun glints off of his monocle, the gold chain hanging loosely. For once, his face is relaxed and he seems at peace with himself. Flowers fill his coffin, with a profusion of them near his head.)

Michael: I haven’t seen his face like this in a long time…

Thomas:...nor I…

Christopher: (He turns to Thomas. His voice is barely above a whisper.)...The white dahlias were your idea, wasn't it?

Thomas:...Yes...They were mother's favorite flower.

Michael:...Do you know what white dahlias represent?

Thomas:...Purity.

Michael:...which means his soul has been purified. (He takes in a deep breath.) If his soul has been cleansed of his sins, have you forgiven him?

Thomas: (He grimaces.) I wouldn't put it like that.
Christopher: ...He wasn't himself, Thomas. You may not forgive the man who has resided in our household for the past few months, but do you forgive the man who raised you and loved you? (He looks down at Byron with sad eyes.) I myself cannot forgive that cruel man that resided with us...But our father...our true father...did nothing wrong towards us.

Michael: ...Tron...?

Christopher: (He bites his lip.) That is a complicated question...

Thomas: ...no, I will not forgive that cruel man... (His voice breaks and his British accent returns.) B...but of course I shall forgive our true father. (He wipes his eyes.)

Michael: (He places a hand on Thomas's shoulder.) Then all is right. (He smiles.) None of us can bring ourselves to forgive that man at this time, but we have forgiven our father for a long time now...And that is all that matters.

Christopher: ...He's left this earth for years now...But it is only today that we send him off...

Michael: ...we were so desperate to return to those beautiful days that we turned our decent home in front of our eyes into a nightmare.

Thomas: ...how could we have been so blind...? Despite...despite all the problems that persisted, our father did return after the duel carnival...so why were we not satisfied...?

Christopher: (Sadly.)...we wanted more than what we already had. That...body of his...was a constant reminder of what had happened...So we changed it.

Thomas: ...you changed his body...but you also changed his mind. (He sighs.) I'd give anything to have Tron back...at least he tried to love us.

Michael: ...we should have been happy with what we had.

Christopher: ...but now...it is too late... (Slowly, he places his lips on Byron's forehead.)
Goodbye, my beloved father. I'm sorry we took so long.

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(It is later in the day. The Arclight house is filled with quiet voices. People dressed in black, historical and modern, mill about the house. The Arclight house, in an ironic sense, is lively with people. Byron lays at the front of the receiving room, surrounded by people wishing to pay their respects. The Tenjos stand in front of Byron’s coffin, all of them wearing solemn expressions. All three of them are wearing their best black suits. Kaito’s suit appears to be tight in a few places.)

Dr. Faker: You were a good man...At least...the one I knew before the...incident. I’m sorry it had to go this way. If I...if I knew that the restoration procedure would have done that to you...I...I would have stopped Chris right in his tracks.

(Kaito looks at Byron, lips pressed into a thin line. He says nothing, but his gaze is steely.)

Haruto:... niisan…?

Kaito:...yeah?

Haruto: (Quietly.)...d’you think he deserved it?

Kaito: (His eyebrows raise in surprise at Haruto asking such a question.) I...

Haruto: (He looks at Byron, his gaze frigid.) He caused both of us so much pain...

Kaito: Haruto...you don’t need to ask these kind of questions...

Haruto: Why?

Kaito: Because...because what’s done is done.
Haruto: (He looks around.)...why does he have such a big, grand ceremony when he did so many bad things?

Kaito:...that’s just how old money works.

Haruto:...Your funeral will be bigger and more people will be there. And you’ll actually be loved.

Kaito: (A shiver runs down his back.) Wh...where’d you hear that from...?

Haruto: (He turns to his brother and smiles.) I just know. You’ll lead a better life than Mr. Arclight, make friends with lots of people and they’ll love you. Just like dad, you’re gonna do good things for this world. You won’t die a sad old man like Mr. Arclight, but a happy and satisfied old man.

Kaito: (He laughs nervously. He receives a few glares from the people of the Resurrection besides him.) Y...yeah...And that won’t happen in a long time...I hope.

Haruto: (He smiles.) Everyone will love your funeral.

Kaito: (He gives Haruto a weak smile and straightens up his tie. He turns to Dr. Faker.) I...I’m gonna go look for Chris now. Keep an eye on Haruto.

Dr. Faker: Sure. Tell Chris and his brothers I send my condolences...(He looks down at Byron.) I think I’m gonna spend awhile here.

(In the library, the Arclight brothers sit in the middle of the room in a line from eldest to youngest. They are alone, all teary eyed, all in mourning. Then, the library doors open. A flustered, middle-aged man is heard protesting.)

Middle-aged man: The brothers are strictly in mourning..! I say, are you even listening...?!
(Kaito pushes through the man and into the library.)

Kaito: Chris!

Christopher: Kaito. (He turns to the middle-aged man.) It’s quite alright, Lord Liddell. This is a close friend of mine.

Lord Liddell: (He mops his forehead with a handkerchief.) Lord Arclight, I suggest you adhere to the mourning etiquette…

Christopher: (He sighs and holds up a hand.) Please…it is far too early to be addressing me by my father’s title…I insist that Kaito stays…

Lord Liddell:…as you’d like…(With a huff, he closes the door.)

(After a moment of silence, Kaito speaks up.)

Kaito: Already being addressed by your new title…? The life of a Neo-Victorian isn’t easy, now is it?

Christopher: No…it isn’t.

Kaito: (He looks at the three brothers, all clad in black.) What rule says you aren’t allowed to mingle with the funeral attendees?

Christopher:…we would not like to spread our misfortune to others…

Thomas:…we interact with them later in the day…after we’ve finished crying our eyes out. Or something like that.
Kaito: Later in the day? I thought this was it.

Thomas: (He gives a sad little laugh.) No, heavens no. This is only a private gathering. Close friends and family only. It's later in the day that the majority of the Resurrection comes to the cathedral to mourn.

Kaito: It's ironic how just a week ago, the cathedral was used for a wedding and now it’s being used for a funeral.

Christopher: indeed...

Thomas: (He looks up and down at Kaito with scrutinizing eyes.)...not to be rude, but, I think you should get a...better fitting suit the next time you go to someone’s funeral. Unless...this is another one of your tight-fitting clothing preferences.

Kaito: (He self-consciously readjusts his lapels.) My father never saw use in buying me a suit. This was from the very bottom of my closet. The last time I wore this was at my momma’s funeral.

Thomas: (Annoyed.) You had more than a week to buy a suit...

Kaito: I was busy helping the old man with his experiments and we lost track of time. By the time we realized it, we only had two days left to prepare. When we got to the nearest store in Victoria Town selling suits, they said they were already sold out. We considered going to Heartland, but we didn’t want to cause anymore drama just after the wedding.

Thomas: (Annoyed.) You could have just hired someone to buy a suit. And shouldn’t your family have a personal stylist...?

Kaito: (He raises an eyebrow.) Why waste money on such frivolous things...?

Thomas: (He dons his British accent.) You Americans and your maddening sense of practicality...
Kaito:...I didn’t really feel like going out just for the sake of buying a suit either.

Thomas:...but you’d go out, freeze time, and crash through a glass ceiling for a card.

(Kaito stares at Thomas for a few tense moments.)

Kaito: (Deadpan.) Glad to know you’re still a brat, even after all these years.

Thomas: (Dryly.) Glad to know you still fit clothes from before puberty.

(Kaito glares at Thomas.)

Thomas: Puberty didn’t do much for you, did it? After all you can still fit a suit from what…? 7 years ago?

Christopher and Michael: (Exasperated.) That’s enough, Thomas.

(The two brother’s look at each other in surprise. They then share small smiles.)

Michael: Besides, you shouldn’t wear anything new to a funeral. It’s bad luck.

Thomas: (He rolls his eyes.) We all know that’s a lie. People wear new suits to funerals all the time. It’s a way of “discreetly” showing off.

(Christopher glares at Thomas.)

Thomas:...Just one more, please?
Christopher: No, Thomas. This is a house in mourning.

Thomas: (He rolls his eyes. Then he turns his eyes towards Kaito.) I wonder if you still get child discounts in some places.

Christopher: (Warningly.) *Thomas*…

Thomas: (He shrugs.) I can’t stand this mournful ambiance! Hasn’t this house seen enough misery?! Why can’t I just laugh for a few moments…? Haven’t we cried enough?! Gods, are we so Victorian now that laughing, let alone smiling has become forbidden? Is cracking a joke a crime now…?

Kaito: (Mutters.) At my expense...

Thomas: Oh, hush. Your family is new money! Surely you can afford a few jokes at your expense or so.

Kaito: Chris, can we have a conversation without any distractions?

Christopher: (He glares at Thomas.) Not another word out of you.

Thomas: (Boredly.) Yes, Lord Arclight.

Christopher: This isn’t a joke!

Thomas: I can’t tell if you’re the undertaker or my brother!

Christopher: There is a time and place for everything!

Michael: And we are in mourning!
Thomas: (He gets up from his seat, resigned.) I’m going to go take the servant’s passages to the kitchen. I’m hungry. (He walks towards a wall, presses a certain button on the wall’s gilding and the wall opens into a doorway. He then goes through it.)

Christopher: Make sure you aren’t seen!

Thomas: Noted.

(The door closes behind him. Christopher lets out a sigh and massages his temples.)

Christopher:...I just don’t know what to do with him sometimes...

Kaito: (He looks around at the large grandfather clock.) Speaking of food...Oh, you should get that clock fixed. It’s currently...(He looks down at his watch.) 11:47.

(Pain flashes across Christopher and Michael’s face.)

Michael: (He has difficulty speaking about the subject.)...it’s...it’s a Victorian tradition to stop the clocks at the time of...death...or...the...discovery of such...

Kaito:...I see. So how do you tell the time?

Christopher: (Quietly.) We don’t.

Michael: (He smiles nervously.) Actually, our digital devices help us keep track of the time on the outside world.

Kaito:...that sounds sensible enough. In the end, this is just for appearances, isn’t it? (He turns to Christopher.) The old man sends his condolences.

Christopher: (Stiffly.)...I thank him.
Kaito: (Looking down.)...And I send my condolences. I know how it feels to lose a parent.

(Christopher’s eyes slightly widen.)

Christopher:...thank you...Kaito. That means a lot to us.

Kaito:...Even if I was unable to see his good side, from what you said about him in the past… (He looks back up at Christopher.) I’m sure he was someone you were proud of calling “father.”

Christopher: (His lip trembles. When he speaks, his voice breaks.) Yes. I was very proud to have Byron Arclight as my father. It was a pity I was unable to have him longer.

Kaito:...the good parents always leave early it seems.

Michael: Or perhaps the time they spent with us was the same, yet it felt so short because we loved them so much.

Kaito: (Coldly.) But the shadow of a bad parent will haunt us for years.

Christopher: (He purses his lips.) That may be so…

Michael: (His hand touches his other arm’s shoulder.)...yes, that may be so.

(Kaito notices the lockets hanging from the brothers’ breast pockets.)
Kaito: Are those new?

Christopher: (He looks down at the charm.) Yes...they are. Mourning jewelry.

Kaito: I thought you weren’t allowed to wear new things to a—

(Christopher opens up the locket. A lock of honey colored hair is arranged into a picture Byron’s crest. On the other side of the locket is a picture of Byron Arclight, from his younger years. The resemblance between him and Christopher is even more pronounced in that picture.)

Christopher:...Jewelry such as this is permitted.

Kaito: Is that...

Christopher: (He nods.) Yes, this was made from our father’s hair.

Kaito:...an interesting set of traditions the Resurrection possesses involving mourning.

Michael: They are derived from the Victorians, naturally.

Kaito: It isn’t uncomfortable for you, wearing jewelry containing the deceased’s hair?

Michael: Not at all.

Kaito: Don’t you believe in ghosts?

Christopher: (He gives Kaito a wink.) We are men of science.
Kaito:...right.

Christopher: (He gives Kaito an apologetic look. He is still standing.) I apologize that there is no chair for you.

Kaito: It’s fine. I’m used to standing.

Christopher: Under normal circumstances I would have offered you Thomas’s seat...but...anything we touch is deemed bad luck for others.

Kaito: Goodness, you guys must be like a plague for the superstitious.

Christopher: (He laughs nervously.) Yes. Exactly. A plague.

Kaito: (He calmly quotes Shakespeare.) “A plague on both your houses… ” was what the dying Mercutio once said. Death has such a long shadow...(He shakes his head.) He isn’t going to be the same after this.

Christopher:...who?

Kaito:...my dad. Your father was the only true friend he had.

Christopher: (Quietly.)...It’s understandable. It must be difficult, grieving for someone you’ve known for so long.

Kaito: (Matching Christopher’s tone.) I’ll return the favor though, won’t I?

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(It is in the afternoon now. We are in the same cathedral that Christopher and Kaito were in for their wedding. The flower arch has been removed and so have all the festive decorations.)
It is now decorated in dark, solemn colors. The ceiling is covered in dark flowers, save for the center, which is filled with dark red roses. In the seats are a few citizens of Heartland city, now dressed in black. It seems as if the entirety of the Resurrection has come to the funeral, their dark, elaborate clothes overtaking the Heartlanders bright features for once. Sunlight spills in through the stained glass windows and Byron's open coffin is placed at the altar. Christopher and his brothers are standing besides the coffin accepting people's condolences.)

Mizael: (He walks up to the brothers, looking into all of their eyes. His eyes linger on Christopher.) I am sorry for your loss, proud brothers. May you be able to climb the stars, despite your loss.

Christopher: (He nods and he looks at Mizael directly.) Thank you, Mizael. And may you too, climb the stars.

Michael: Please, don't hesitate to visit us. We've dueled before and we can duel again.

Mizael: (He smiles.) That would be a very fun opportunity. Perhaps...when this all passes over?

Christopher: (He gives Mizael a wan smile.) That would be perfect.

Thomas: (He nods stiffly, having never spoke to Mizael.) Thank you for your wishes. We will keep them in mind.

Mizael: (He dips his head.) I believe in your ability to remain resilient. (He walks away.)

(An elderly lady walks up to the three brothers. Her hair is pure white and her black dress brushes the floor. Despite her age, she stands tall and her gait is dignified.)

The Arclight Brothers: (They bow.) Mrs. Phillips.

Mrs. Phillips: (She curtsies in reply. When the brothers stand, she takes each brother's hand into hers and looks at each one with her soft, amethyst eyes. Her voice is soft with a British accent.) My, how the times have passed...You three are all grown up now...My goodness, Thomas...You look just like Marie-Luise in her prime. And...Michael...(She turns to Michael and smiles sadly.) So much like Chloe.

Thomas: (He smiles and kisses Mrs. Phillips's hand. His forced American accent has been completely replaced with his natural British accent.) Mrs. Phillips, as lovely as ever. (He pats her hand.) I'm afraid time has been unkind to me. (He motions to his scar.) But you still remain as beautiful as the day I first met you.

Mrs. Phillips: (She affectionately pats Thomas's cheek.) You always were such a cheeky little
child...(She whispers into Thomas's ear.) I always did prefer you over your tame brothers.

Thomas: (He smiles and then bows to Mrs. Phillips.) Thank you for paying your final respects, Mrs. Phillips.

Mrs. Phillips: (She looks down at Byron.) Even if I went to his wake...it still doesn’t seem real. He was such a kind, intelligent gentleman.

Christopher:...The best ones always leave first.

Mrs. Phillips:...just like your mother, bless her soul.

Michael: We hope to see more of you in the future, Mrs. Phillips.

Mrs. Phillips: I am sure you will, after all, your brother is now a part of the council.

(Christopher winces at the mention of his new set of responsibilities.)

Mrs. Phillips: (She gives Thomas's hand a firm shake.) I hope to see you as Lord Radcliffe soon. (She then walks away without another word.)

Christopher: (He whispers to Thomas as an insignificant member of the Resurrection walks up to curtsey to the brothers.) Just what did she mean by that...?

Thomas: (He whispers back.) I haven’t the slightest idea.

Christopher: (He shakes a man’s hand and whispers almost inaudibly to Thomas.) It's nice to see you pretending to be what father always wanted you to be.

Thomas: (He snorts.) I don't want his friends leaving with disservice.

Christopher: (He sighs as he receives another mourner.) Let's hope you can continue, Thomas.
(The camera zooms out to show a long line stretching across the cathedral.)

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(The line has completely dissolved. Guests are now milling about, talking to each other and enjoying refreshments. There is an overall peaceful air. Christopher and Kaito are speaking in a corner, Michael is gently weeping with Yuma embracing him and Thomas is surrounded by a group of Byron's elderly friends. The camera is focused on Christopher and Kaito.)

Christopher: (He looks up at the elegant stained glass windows.)...He's truly gone.

Kaito:...He's been gone for a long time.

Christopher:...I know...but the funeral makes it seem...more real.

Kaito:...(His eyes grow distant.) They do, huh?

(The screen turns black. Only crying is heard, weak at first and then stronger. Light then returns. A younger, twelve year old Kaito is dressed in a black suit and crying profusely as he holds Haruto. Dr. Faker stands behind him, a hand resting on his shoulder. The father and sons are in front of a black coffin. Although the dead is not revealed, the audience can guess.)

Dr. Faker: (He looks grimly at the coffin. His voice is barely above a whisper when he speaks.)...After this, never, ever, talk about her again. Do you hear me?

(We return to the present. Kaito shifts uncomfortably in the same black suit.)

Kaito: It’s finally cooling down...

Christopher: (He sighs as he readjusts his braid.) I agree.

Kaito: Have you prepared your eulogy?

Christopher: Of course I have. My brothers, too.

Kaito: (He looks at his watch.) They’re about to start the procession. I need to go find Haruto so we can have a seat together. But before that, do you have your eulogy on hand? I’d like to see what I’m going to translate.

Christopher: Oh...of course. (He digs around in his breast pocket and gives Kaito 2 sheets of folded up paper.)
Kaito: (He unfolds the paper and begins to look through the eulogy with swiftly moving eyes.) Yeah. This looks good. Do you have your brothers’?

Christopher: Yes, I was just proofreading them on the way here. (He digs around in his trouser’s pocket.) Ah. Here they are. (He gives Kaito 3 other sheets of folded up paper.) I wish you the best of luck.

Kaito: (He unfolds them and begins to scrutinize them.) Y’know, I can tell each of your writing styles apart. It’s interesting.

Christopher: (He gives Kaito a smile.) Thomas’s is quite dramatic, isn’t it?

Kaito...mmhmm. (He reads the other sheet.) Michael’s is pretty short but effective. (He folds up the papers again.) Yeah. I’ll be able to translate these. I’ll see you at the burial?

Christopher:...yes. We’ll only be a few carriages ahead of you. Perhaps you’ll be able to catch a glimpse of us.

Kaito:...just wondering, who else besides the old man is carrying your father’s coffin?

Christopher: Well, Kazuma-san was asked. He solemnly obliged...And then we have the four members of the Resurrection.

Kaito:...It’s nice to have friends to send you off, isn’t it? (He is quiet for a few moments.) Only five people came to momma’s funeral. And one of them doesn’t even remember it. Haruto, me, the old man, your father and momma’s cousin. Your father helped carry her out alongside my dad. Did you know that?

Christopher:...no, I didn’t…

Kaito: She didn’t like him and often insulted him at work. Yet he still helped lay her to rest. (He turns to leave.) Your father was a good man.
Meanwhile, Thomas is busily speaking to Byron's friends. He proudly flaunts his manners and speaks with a cultured British accent. He is natural in his act and has earned the favor of Byron's elderly friends.

Thomas: (He is holding a glass of wine and is entertaining the group with a story.) So I ask this chap of mine if he wants to take a long rest after the duel, and he heartily obliges. He's still dizzy from the poison and has absolutely no sense of direction, whatsoever! Of course, we win the duel against that accursed jellyfish and then...then...!

Man: (He pats Thomas on the back, laughing.) It seems as if you've had too much wine…

Thomas: (He shrugs and flashes a charming smile.) Well, it's five o'clock somewhere, isn't it?

(The crowd bubbles up with laughter.)

Thomas: (He swishes his wine glass around.)...As I was saying, after we finish the duel, he falls on his silly little face. 'The venom's done its work' was what I thought, so I carried the poor chap home. It turned out his home was the mansion that we were dueling at! Looking at it, you could tell that it was something from our wonderful Victorian Resurrection. Well, it seemed as if he hadn't come home in awhile and the place was covered in dust! I say, “where the bloody hell have you been living instead of this luxurious mansion of yours...?!” And he replies, in his venom induced fever, "the hospital!"

(Even more laughter follows.)

Mrs. Phillips: (She pats Thomas on the back.) You see, this lively child of Marie's has always been a step above our boring sons and daughters. It seems as if he was able to avoid the Victorian Resurrection teachings we had so abhorred back in the day...Yet passed onto our own children the same thing...for we knew nothing else.

(The camera moves away from Thomas and to Michael, who is sitting at a bench with Yuma. Besides him, Yuma hands Michael tissues as Michael continues to cry. The two converse in Yuma's mother tongue, Japanese.)

Yuma:...he didn’t act like your father...did he?

Michael: (He wipes his eyes.) No, he didn’t, but...

Yuma: He hurt you...

Michael:...there were times where he was kind, though.

Yuma:...but was it worth it?
(Michael is quiet for a few moments.)

Yuma: ...Hey, you'll always have me. And you’re always welcome at my home. My grandmother loves you and my parents think you’re a good influence on me.

Michael: (He wipes a tear away.) Th-thank you...

Yuma: You helped me with Astral's loss so I'll help you with yours.

Michael: (He nods.) But at least you were reunited with him...once we battled the threat in Astral world.

Yuma: ...Yeah...but we still had to say goodbye at the end.

(There is a moment of silence between the two friends.)

Yuma: Your father...doing that to V and Kaito...

Michael: It was wrong. I know. But...how could we have gone against our father at that time? We fought so hard to get him back...so it would be for naught if we went against him.

Yuma: ...you knew he wasn't your father though, didn’t you?

Michael: (His lip trembles.) It was complicated.

Yuma: He acted more like Tron. Calm, controlled and cruel. Yet you still followed him, just out of respect and distanced yourself.

Michael: ...You know me so well...(He dabs at his eyes.)

Yuma: ...So then why are you still crying?

Michael: (He looks down at his feet.) He's still my father, isn't he?
Yuma: ... (He leans back in his chair.) Yeah. Even if ... he didn’t act like it.

(The sound of a bell being rung across the room is heard. The crowd's chatter slowly dies down.)

Michael: (He sniffs. Putting a hand on the armrest, he slowly stands up.) ... Well, I believe it's time for us to head out.

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(In the summery countryside, the road possesses a solemn sight. A long procession of horse-drawn carriages trail down the black asphalt. After the horse drawn carriages are elegantly built cars. And then after that are a few normal cars. In the first black carriage are the pallbearers and the clergymen. Following the first carriage is an impressive, black hearse pulled by six black horses with plumes atop their heads. Feathers line the outside roof. The walls are made of glass. Inside the hearse is Byron’s elegant, gilded and polished mahogany coffin. It is surrounded by flowers, the ceiling itself forming a canopy of red roses. The carriage next to that is also black and its black drapes are closed shut. Michael can be seen briefly pulling back a drape and looking out. They are followed by a few other carriages. The final carriage is a bit larger than the others. Its drapes are open and the faces of Yuma, Akari, Mirai, Haruna, Haruto and Kaito are seen. Then come the vehicles that appeal more to the modern side of the Resurrection. Rolls Royces, Bentleys and other luxury vehicles can be seen trailing down the long hills. After those vehicles come more common vehicles. Those belong to the few Heartland citizens that attended this funeral. We go to the Tenjo-Tsukumo carriage. In one row sits Yuma, Mirai and Haruna. In the other sits Akari, Kaito and Haruto.)

Haruto: ... so this is how it feels to be in a carriage. It’s really bumpy!

Yuma: It’s nice that the Arclights paid for this but ... ulp ... I think I’m starting to feel sick.

(His mother, Mirai begins to laugh while Akari rolls her eyes.)

Akari: Don’t have an accident here. I need to cover this. It’s going to be the next big scoop and I’m not going to lose this chance!

Mirai: With all the work you’re doing, I don’t think this will be the last exclusive event you’ll be invited to.

Haruna: Besides, you have Yuma to thank for this opportunity.
Yuma: (He laughs nervously.) I just knocked some sense into Tron back then…

Kaito: Well you should have knocked harder because he went back to being a monster a year later.

Yuma: Give me a break...It was hard, dueling him!

Kaito: Hmph.

Yuma: Wait, isn’t your dad and my dad in the same carriage?

Kaito:...you’re right. They are.

Yuma: Well. That’s going to be awkward.

(In the pallbearers’ carriage, Dr. Faker sits besides Lord Liddell and Dowager Marlon. Kazuma sits besides Lord Thurston and Lady Phillips. Kazuma has a black version of his hat in his lap.)

Kazuma: (He speaks in Japanese.)...Even if I didn’t speak to him much, he seemed like a good man. I think...Byron was able to look past our differences and connect with us.

Dowager Marlon: (She replies steadily in Japanese.) Yes...and he had such a kind soul. His disappearance changed him.

(Dr. Faker shifts uncomfortably.)

Lord Thurston: (He speaks in accented Japanese.) He was a family man. I had always admired how dedicated he was to his wife and sons...What I wouldn’t give for three loyal sons.
Kazuma: (He turns to Dr. Faker and speaks gently.) Hey, Dr. Faker...How was Byron as a young man?

Dr. Faker: (Surprise lights up his face. He slowly turns to Kazuma.) Well...when I first met him, he didn’t seem like much. Honestly, I thought he was quite spoiled.

Lord Liddell: (He sighs.) Oh, you Americans and your frankness.

Dr. Faker: He could barely dress himself. And he still had puppy fat in some places. He didn’t seem used to wearing glasses and they’d often fall down his nose each time he read a book. He told me he wore a monocle back at home. He was a strange fellow for sure, but his mind was sharp. Oh yes, his mind was sharp. I have never met anyone else whose calculations were as detailed or as precise as his. I’m proud to have called him a coworker.

Lady Phillips: (She speaks in Japanese.)...When he was a young boy, I never thought he’d become lord Arclight. He seemed to shy away from any leadership opportunity he got. But when he returned from university, he...he had an air of quiet confidence about him. Yes, he was still quite shy...but he carried himself in a way that you could respect.

Dr. Faker: He was an excellent athlete, even in middle-age. During our explorations, he could climb mountains faster than I ever could.

Kazuma: He was quite the excellent armwrestler too!

Dowager Marlon: (She raises an eyebrow.) Indeed?

Kazuma: (He chuckles.) On a whim, I challenged him to a battle and almost lost.

Dr. Faker:...he was a man of many faces, wasn’t he?

Kazuma: (He gives Dr. Faker a smile.) Yes, despite all of the things he went through.
(We now go to the Arclight brothers’ carriage. Michael sits besides Thomas while Christopher sits alone. The carriage is shrouded in silence. Christopher pulls out his locket and opens it. He looks at his father’s image for the longest time, sighing.)

Christopher:...I am filled with nothing but regret when I look at this.

Michael:...then you are grieving correctly. (He lists of his fingers.) First comes denial, then comes anger, bargaining or regret—the current stage for all of us, I believe—then depression and finally acceptance.

Christopher:...I am frustrated with myself for being so selfish. And I regret the actions I took to restore father to his current form. Had I not...he would still have been with us, albeit in the body of a child. But...at least he still would have been with us.

Thomas:...He’d probably outlive us all then.

(The carriage is once again plunged into silence. Christopher pulls the drapes back a bit. In the horizon, one can see the peaks of a town.)

Christopher:...We are approaching Victoria Town. Get ready. When the carriage stops, we all get out.

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(The streets of Victoria Town are lined with onlookers, tourists and residents alike. The buildings of Victoria town consist of gothic buildings with their tall spires, elegant townhouses and a few small shops. This is where the “middle-class” (But still incredibly wealthy) of the Resurrection resides. Everyone looks towards the distance, where the sound of hooves on cobblestone are heard. The camera focuses on two women who are also anticipating the funeral procession. One woman is short with black curls and wears a jet hairnet. Her skin is slightly tanned. In her hands is a camera. She is a bit unkempt compared to her fellow companion. The other woman is tall and has auburn hair styled in a neat bun. She holds up a black parasol to block out the sun’s rays. Both are dressed in black.)
Dark-haired woman: For once, I wish there was rain.

Auburn-haired woman: Yes, that would mean good news for Lord Arclight, rest his soul.

Dark-haired woman: Yes, the dirt would be easier to dig up.

Auburn-haired woman: And it would also be a sign that he has gone to heaven.

(The sound of horse hooves fill the air.)

Dark-haired woman: ...And here they are, Lord Arclight’s pallbearers.

(Am)ost everyone has gotten out of their carriages. The carriages have slowed to a walking pace and the mourners walk besides it. Some weep, some console. In front, the four members of the Resurrection council walk proudly down the cobblestone road. Behind walk Dr. Faker and Kazuma, albeit a bit stiffly.)

Dr. Faker: (Mutter.)...this heat is unbearable.

Kazuma: Actually, I find this quite pleasant, even in a tuxedo. After you’ve traveled through the Sahara Desert, everything else is a walk in the park.

Dark-haired woman: (She lowers her voice.) Say, those two gentlemen in the back...they seem a bit out of place. Heartlanders by the look of it.

Auburn-haired woman: He had great influence, that lord Arclight.

Dark-haired woman: (She takes a picture of the hearse and shows her companion the image.) A perfect image for the front page tomorrow, wouldn’t you agree?

Auburn-haired woman: (She looks down at the image for a few moments.) Yes, it is. You
already know what to write?

Dark-haired woman: Of course.

(The hearse passes by, bedecked in flowers. It shines brightly in the golden summer sun. Then comes the Arclight brothers, slowly, elegantly walking down the road. They all have mournful expressions on their faces. Christopher spots a top hat and his father’s walking cane.)

Christopher: (He thinks.) This is bad...there’s no rain so that must mean father has been condemned.

Dark-haired woman: (Her eyes trail after the Arclight brothers.)...he ends the final chapter of his life in grandeur.

(Kaito walks into Victoria Town with Haruto. He ignores the hostile stares aimed at him. People begin to turn to each other and whisper. Voices in the crowd can be heard.)

Crowd: ...filthy Outsider...

...doesn’t know his place...

...sent Lord Arclight to an early grave...

...evil soul...

...wicked...

Haruto: (He looks up at his brother.) Niisan ...what’s going on...?

Kaito:...they probably just aren’t comfortable with Outsiders.

Dark-haired woman: (She whispers to her companion.) Isn’t that the eldest Tenjo son...? They say Christopher knew he possessed a wicked soul and thus refused to bring him into the family. He charmed Byron into arranging a marriage between him and the Arclights, just so he could possess more wealth.
(Kaito passes by.)

Dark-haired woman: (She hisses.) *Evil soul.*

Auburn-haired woman: (She places a hand on her companion’s shoulder.)...don’t believe everything people say. Christopher had said something about his father being a cruel man during the wedding.

Dark-haired woman: He must have mistaken his father’s wise council for cruelty.

Auburn-haired woman: (She shakes her head.) As outsiders...we may never know the truth.

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(We are in a scenic cemetery. There are forested mountains in the background. Lush green grass grows in abundance. The elegant gravestones are well-kept, some depicting angels, some with beautiful carvings.)

Christopher: (He stands in front of the crowd, prepared to make his speech. Below him, Kaito stands as a translator for the Heartland side. Christopher pauses every few sentences or so for Kaito to translate. Byron’s coffin is slowly being lowered into the ground.) I’m sure the Heartlanders remember when my brothers and I came to Heartland, seeking revenge. On behalf of my family, we apologize for the damage and people hurt.

(The Heartland audience laughs nervously after Kaito’s translation.)

Christopher: We only wanted to get what was rightfully ours back. Tron was ruthless, but we, hoping to have him return to Byron, followed him unendingly. Because of that, our actions rippled across this wonderful city and disrupted the lives of a few individuals. In the end though, it was because of Yuma who saved our father from himself.

(He scans the crowd, meeting as many people’s eyes as he can.)
Christopher: Now this may sound like absolute nonsense to members of the Resurrection, but please, feel free to ask a Heartlander for the full story. It is one you will not regret hearing. The most important lesson I learned from this experience was that you should never forget an outsider’s kindness. It is one of the best gifts a person can receive in this world.

(He pauses to allow Kaito to translate.)

Christopher: Unfortunately, we still were not used to seeing our father’s...warped form wandering the halls with us. After battling the threat in Astral world, my brothers, the doctor, his son and I, decided to return our father to his true form. Although the physical damage was reversed, the man in front of us was not our father. Somehow, the procedure had reversed his mind into that of the man we fought to erase. Slowly, he became colder. Crueler. More calculating. With each passing day, it became more difficult to see his love for us.

(He pauses, meeting his brother’s eyes.)

Christopher: Because of our selfish decision, we landed ourselves right back at the beginning...It will be an action that I will regret for the rest of my life. Before this chain of unfortunate events, my family and I lived peacefully in our estate, Carnation Valley. My father was a gentle and kind man who was always open to questioning and discussions from us. Work was a mere pastime for him, as he always had time for his family.

[ What an interesting take on such a concept. Ah, the joys of being part of the privileged Resurrection. You run out of normal problems so you need to make up your own set of problems. ]

(Christopher takes in a deep breath, reliving a moment in the past of Byron reading a book to him as a small child.)

Christopher: He was a man to be admired. With the passing of my dearest mother, he tried even harder to be a good parent. When he was once again restored to his true form...we thought our haven was once again restored. But instead, it slowly peeled off its layers and revealed itself as a Hell on Earth.

(He pauses to allow Kaito to translate.)
Christopher: We burned in those flames for weeks, enduring his cruelty, always hoping that someday the man we had loved would return...all for naught. We were all pushed beyond our limits, to the point of breaking. But when I was broken...

(Tears fill his eyes. He has to pause for a bit.)

Christopher: ...but when I was broken...I finally realized that our desire to return to the past was but a castle in the sky. We were deluding ourselves, forcing ourselves to bend to the wills of a...cruel ghost. Hope is a double-edged sword. It can bring light, but it can also paint an illusion that leads down a path of misery.

(He lets the audience process his words, scanning their expressions.)

Christopher: I dislike speaking ill of the dead, but I must speak the truth. Our true father had died a long time ago. May the gods—(He remembers where he is.) May God lay his poor soul to rest after a life of misfortune. (He crosses himself and murmurs under his breath.) And may I forgive myself for thinking that we could return to the past. (He solemnly walks off the stage and hands the microphone to Thomas.)

Thomas: (He faces the crowd and then exchanges glances with Kaito as the translator for the Heartlanders. He mouths 'you better not try anything funny' to Kaito and then clears his throat. He wears his mask of the British gentleman as he speaks.) Where do I begin...? My father was a wonderful, admirable man before he vanished. He never hesitated to help his children and teach them wonderful things. To this day, I still remember when he bought me a dog to help cope with my mother's passing. And even still, to this day, I still sharpen the ends of my pencils just for that small bit of eraser left at the top. A valuable asset when you have spent late nights and have made more mistakes than not.

(He allows the crowd to laugh. Kaito gives him a glare and mouths at him to slow down.)

Thomas: (He gives Kaito a look from beneath his eyelids.)...There were no favourites back then. He loved us equally. When he disappeared, I was inconsolable. It was only made worse when Michael and I were sent to the orphanage. Those were a lonely, five years, filled with despair and tears.

(His expression saddens. His show of theatrics has captivated the crowd.)
Thomas: Dueling helped keep my mind off of him, but when he returned from his accident...The dam on me broke...He was warped beyond belief and his personality had taken a turn for the worse. Of course, Yuma was able to return him to his former sanity. We were able to enjoy a few months in peace, back in the countryside. Although we did not know it, those were...his final golden days. After my brother reversed the damages of the Barian world a few months later, we began to plunge back into the depths of hell.

(He pauses to allow Kaito to translate. Kaito continues to glare at him. Thomas shrugs.)

Thomas: (He whispers to Kaito without looking at him.) My words flow too well...! The pauses are far and long, unfortunately...Perhaps you should listen better. (He returns to his normal voice.) I have survived endless acts of tyranny...but through all of it...I love him, despite his actions. (He hands the microphone to Michael and then walks up to Christopher, smirking as polite applause follows him.)

Christopher: (Dryly.) What a beautiful, tear-jerking performance. Which part of it were you actually earnest about?

Thomas: (He smiles.) I appeal to the crowds. There’s nothing honest about being on stage, even if it’s at a funeral. It's only about what the audience sees and not what’s underneath. You out of all people should know that, aniki.

Michael: (He is in the midst of his eulogy.)...What I wouldn't give to have one more day with the man I loved. Parents are essential to a child's life. They help a child find their inner strength and grow in unexpected places. I never knew I could wield a sword, yet my father encouraged me to take up the sport. With my newfound skills, I learned to protect my loved ones from danger.

(He pauses to let Kaito translate.)

Michael: Please, before it's too late...tell your parents how much you love them and thank them for what they've done, no matter how small their deed. I've always been one for language and lengthy speeches...But for today, my only wish is to convey this simple message to all of you. I do hope you'll excuse me. I...I've been mourning too much to think clearly. (He bows and then hands the microphone to Dr. Faker.)

Thomas: Well. I thought you were going to be up there for an hour or two.

Michael: (Quietly.) Not today...
Christopher: (He rests a hand on Michael's shoulder.) After today, we'll begin anew...won't we...?

Thomas: We begin as a family in mourning.

Christopher: (He closes his eyes.)...We have freed ourselves from our self-made illusion. Mourning is the first step to facing reality.

Thomas: (He scans the crowd.) It’ll be a harsh one at that.

Christopher: But at least we are truly living. We will pick up the shards of our family and piece them together again...even if there will be jagged edges.

Michael: We won’t take anything for granted after this, now will we? (He clasps his hands together.) I pray that this chapter of our lives have ended and that we are merely starting down a more hopeful and brighter chapter of our lives.

Christopher:...as do I...

(A drop of rain falls on his hand. More drops fall and people begin to look around.)

Thomas: (He looks up at the sky, a hand out.) Would you look at that…?

Michael: (Tears begin to fill his eyes.) He...he made it…

Thomas: (He begins to make the sign of the cross, alongside many other mourners in the background.) In the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit, may the real Byron Arclight rest in peace...

(Michael and Christopher follow suit.)

The Arclight Brothers: Amen.
---Episode 25~END---

Photograph for this episode [here](#)
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Epilogue

Into the Lost Years

He picked up the treasures
Left to him by the absentees.
Amongst the treasures were a pipe that echoed with death
A violin no longer fit to play
A collection of winged jewels
And a library composed by the Roses
The Roses gently, gently
Wrapped their tendrils
around him
and slowly
reeled him in
Like a hook to a fish.

The tendrils turned back
The clock hands and
took him d
  o
  w
  n
into the perfect garden
filled with poisonous thorns.
But he was too busy admiring
the vibrant roses and
the glistening insects and
the clear, clear sky
To notice
that the tendrils were slowly,
ever so slowly,
  wrapping around
his thin, frail neck.

Until he ventured deeper
  into the garden.
Was that a scream?

No. It must have been birdsong.

Another scream is followed by a sob.

Had it been his imagination?

The roses did not look so
pretty or vibrant now.

And there was the ever present sound of sobbing.

But what was there to cry about in such a beautiful, peaceful garden?

The stone path began to turn uneven and mossy.
The further he ventured into the crumbling rose garden, the more screams he could hear.

The birdsong had faded away by now.

He was walking on a dirt road now.
The roses had turned the color of night.
Upon further inspection, he realized that the roses were no more.
Instead, they had turned into black, black dahlias.

Silently and swiftly, the creeping thorns pierced his
perfect, clear, sapphire eyes.

All he could see was black.
The color of despair,
   hopelessness
and desperation.

“No one is coming to save us,”
whispered the Roses.

And then a dark liquid began to spill out of his eyes.

When he could see again, there was no rose garden in sight.

Only a field filled with dilapidated tombstones and rotted flowers remained.

Scattered Roses in the Palm of Your Hand: The Illusion of Reunification
If it doesn't detract too much of your time, would you please kindly answer this short 10-question survey on how I did?

All replies are highly appreciated. Please do not hesitate!

Chapter End Notes

Dear readers, thank you so much for taking the time and patience to read this story. I hope you enjoyed it. I value each and every one of you like gold. I hope to see you soon for season 2.

Just a side note: Have you ever been on TVTropes.org and visited Zexal’s page? Its fanfic reqs part has very good classic pieces. Feel free to update the list with more recent works, such as yours!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!