Dog Town.

by FatherRubes

Summary

Saguru Hakuba witnesses something he was never meant to between Conan Edogawa and Kaito KID.
It was four miles off Tōkyō’s ebullience and just tucked behind the slope of Haido’s suburban hills where 1412’s latest heist was held on the chilly night of June the first. Beika’s jaded sky was polluted with the search lights of the JBPD’s helicopters, thrumming like thumb-plump bees in a field of efflorescences. The morbid merigold of the police tapes swaddling the Beika National Museum were a familiar sight among the town’s gruesome potting, and, at first glance, one would never guess the skyrocketing crime rate behind those bucolics and schools. Perhaps it was the tight link between Beika’s locals that kept the echo system stable, or perhaps it was the mass clinging to those trusted not to unzip their guts onto the ground that provoked a sense of community — whatever the case, that merigold tape began eliciting less wonder and alarmed dread and more; oh, another one today—.

What baited the ebbing crowds out on such an inhabitable night may have been the lack of first division officers behind those yellow tapes. Tonight wasn’t so much as Meguire’s.

Hakuba found Beika’s deplorable track record both intriguing and off-putting, as steady macabre was not what he ever would have deduced to be just under the city’s skin.

It had not been the lingering darkness that had drawn Hakuba nor the crowds to the National History Museum, however. They all desired a glimpse of a little magic.

Hakuba had time to rub at his rosed cheeks as Nakamori and his loyalists flitted, felling vents closed and tweaking advanced security implementation with the hopes of preventing this months heist. Saguru himself had run his own check-up, not assured in the slightest by Nakamori’s. He had checked for looseness in the reachable window sills and searched for abnormalities in the National Museum’s many exhibitions. Housed in glass coffins were an abundance of foreign mammals, each of various phylum and genus’. Large felines were pursed over ornamental herbivores, herding animals clustered in pairs. A polar bear was haunched in its stand, towering over the most burly of officers, yet by it, a thin wallaby nibbled, unanimated, on a shriveled tussock. Hakuba spied a terrarium of eye-glazed skinks, each tied onto their respective wood block like ribbons. A large iguana above them had its sneering maw pointed toward a framed case shifted against the beige walls, presenting a gaggle of butterflies and moths. They had their wings pinned and spread so browsers could see their patterns, textures and colours.

Nothing seemed to be out of order — but then again, order wasn’t usually applied to KID heists, which warped logical foundations until they were disfigured and disabled echoes of their true laws. Hakuba massaged his temples as a wracking throb riveted through it; heists did him no good, and with each scheduled night that passed, he found his confidence to be further dislodged.

A glint showed off to the side of the detective’s peripheral vision and he flinched on instinct. There was still a splintering twenty minutes until twelve AM, but in such a fragile period of time, Saguru was certain anything could happen.

He turned, cautious as he did, to investigate. Into their talkies officers whispered numbers and alphanumeric codes and still not a single cheek was turned to the glint. The detective frowned and stalked over, spying movement around the back of a wolverine exhibition. His hands twitched wittily despite having only a steampunk gas mask for defence. As he neared he found himself staring into the hollow eye sockets of the wolverine behind the thick glasswork, and it stared back. its jaw was cocked and its tongue lolled out friendlily despite the contrast of it’s fangs and needly plastic teeth. He heard a repetitive clanging, insidious and constant as it ate at his nerves. Had one of KID’s
mechanisms malfunctioned? 1412 was furtive, but he was bound to slip up sometime, right? He bit his lip, the claws of doubt prodding his mind. Perhaps this was a carefully calculated lure leading to his demise and humiliation? It happened frequently enough at heists to be a visible possibility.

“Um, hi?” Hakuba blinked, startled, into the eyes of Conan Edogawa. He had his hands shoved lucidly in his admiral blouse and seemed to be tilted back. He was bouncing a soccer ball absenty on one of his erythraean cement threes and looking at him through large, distinguishing glasses Hakuba was almost certain weren’t prescription. They had slid down his nose (as if he had been looking at something moving up and down such as his soccer ball) and Conan was staring up at him in a way that would make the glasses cover only half his vision. While this would be discomforting for someone with troubled sight Edogawa still stared at him as blaze as on the diaphanous television or in the newspaper. The child seemed to realise this and he pushed his glasses up self-consciously.

Hakuba blinked at the boy, this time in relief and slight amusement at the child’s antics. He said, “ah, Edogawa Conan, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Hakuba Saguru.” Hakuba extended a hand as he kneeled down, which Edogawa shook with a perked eyebrow.

“Likewise, Hakuba,” he smiled glitteringly before he drew his hand back into his pocket and caged his soccer ball under his shoes. “Say, how do you know who I am? I’ve seen you on the news before,” the child began conversationally as his eyes flicked over to the British detective’s deerstalker, recognition briefly on his face before he met Saguru’s eyes for the third time. Hakuba tried not to shiver and ignore how invalidated he felt under a seven-year-old’s scrutiny.

“Well, I’ve seen you on the news as well, not to mention you have quite the reputation within the third division. You run into trouble quite a lot, don’t you?” Hakuba explained. Conan looked at him, taken aback. Usually people only bought up his rivalry with KID. Conan gathered himself and shrugged. He looked back up to Saguru’s hickory deerstalker.

“Do you read Sherlock Holmes?” The child questioned.

Saguru nodded, “I have a hawk named Watson, if that alone could describe my love of Conan Doles’s work,” Edogawa nodded knowingly, “but I’m sure you must have quite the history with the literature as well, Conan.” He smiled fondly and Conan smiled in a way that made his other smiles seem fake in comparison.

“Every single book countless times over,” he verbally lilted, and Hakuba stared at the child with jubilant intrigue. “See, my relatives in the area — they aren’t around at the moment — have this huge library so I can read as much as I want. They even have the English copies, which are just as interesting to read as sometimes things can be lost in the translation,” he yipped and Hakuba looked at him in an astonished way that made Conan falter.

Not wanting to dissuade the child, Saguru continued with, “English? Bilingual and at such a young age, as well,” he looked impressed. Conan seemed to think for a moment before looking back at him with a jovial expression.

“I was born in America and growing up my parents spoke both languages frequently,” the little detective explained as he switched his speaking patterns to English. It attracted some curious glances from two passing officers, but Conan looked as dulcet as before. “At first it was hard to distinguish between the two but I always was a fast learner,” he twisted his soccer ball under his shoe and propelled it upward until he balanced it atop his head, flaunting his skills in a boyishly charming way. Hakuba couldn’t help the surge of fondness swelling in his chest when the child looked at him briefly for validation.

"I grew up largely in England, so I am well versed in their mother language. So, what got you so
interested in detective work? I’m sure most children your age would find more entertainment in catching beetles.” Hakuba ventured after glancing at his watch. Ten minutes left. Conan opened his mouth with an automatic response before he seemed to reconsider. The child glanced around their general vicinity with a veiled calculation in his eyes that made Saguru slightly shaken.

Conan turned back to him with a boyish smirk, and said, “I always had certain connections and odd influences, I suppose.” Conan looked into him. “I also tend to have very bad luck.” The little detective looked grim for a moment. Hakuba stared, stuck with worry at the child’s grim look, one that looked far too gloved to be on a child’s face. He was quick to perk up however, childish ebullience lighting up his features. Saguru had to remind himself that he was, in fact, talking to a child.

“Say, Hakuba,” began said child, “doesn’t KID’s heist start at twelve?” Saguru looked down to his watch, sure they still had a few minutes of nerve-calming chatter before the hair dying festival really motioned. He was astounded only a few seconds remained until —

Saguru recoiled, shooting to his feet as stiff as an asparagus. Conan only followed the detective with his eyes before his face darkened and he hurried back behind the cover of the wolverine exhibition. His blue eyes distantly watched Hakuba slither away, hand twitching towards his belt. Once the British detective was yonder with the other officials, Conan slunk from the wolverine exhibition to behind a sycamore replica. Its exhibition was conjoined with that of a baobab replica. KID had appeared atop the Gambino — a titian gem about twelve centimeters in height, imported from Suzuki’s Florin connections, and KID’s heist target — but Conan instead continued to speed walk towards a set of large double doors. Though they were previously guarded by four burly looking officers, said men had rushed towards the investigation target, 1412. Conan tumbled by one last bird exhibition, displaying a honey-pot finch and a magpie. It had a separate section housing a raven and a crow, with two large, overlapping placards listing their similarities and differences. As Conan passed into the darkness of the gaping hallway, he couldn’t help but gaze into what was left of the crow’s eyes. Its facial feathers were battered around the more hollow and delicate areas of the animal’s face, and the taxonomy was old enough for the bird’s left glass eye to be slightly bulging from its socket. Conan ran past it and into the hallway that would, after fifteen meters of uninhabited loneliness and educational placards, lead to a winding stairwell. Conan had mapped out KID’s escape route, and unless Hakuba had blown his cover, the faux child would have succeeded in evading 1412’s ‘eyes’. He’d utilise the element of surprise to the best of his ability.

Even if KID had seen him, Conan wasn’t in much of an unpleasant mood. However short, the conversation he had shared with Saguru had been most pleasant. The detective had almost treated him like an equal. Conan clutched the soccer ball under his arm wistfully. Life was hard.

Kid had appeared in a glorified amass of feathery lavender, and the distinctive scent of night jasmines was a clear waft throughout the room. It was almost nice, if it wasn’t for the growing dread suffocating Saguru’s chest. KID maneuvered upward from his place atop Gambino and proceeded to announce his victory in an eloquent voice, “ah, Nakamori, it’s wonderful you and your men have attended my performance this quaint night. Hakuba, it’s an absolute terror to see you here, as always.” KID smiled with pearly white teeth. His canines were slightly sharper than average, something Saguru could recall Aoko bugging Kaito about — she regularly called him a shark and a vampire, which he scoffed at —. Just another scintilla of evidence toward’s Kuroba’s double job. “I hope England was swell. Perhaps you’d like a throw back?”

No, he really didn’t. KID wasn’t able to read his thoughts or his depreciating expression, however, as the thief had clicked his fingers and the white of his suit conflated into that of the wall. Hakuba
and the officers reeled back, looking at what seemed to be an invisibility cape thrown over their criminal.

He said, “too many Sherlock references for you, dear Hakuba, so I thought I’d stir the soup in the opposite direction,” as he stepped down from the Gambino, doing a twirl that looked overly disturbing without the body to twist with his head. All the officers backed away from the sorcerer. In retaliation KID grinned a smile so catlike Hakuba was sure the thief’s eyes were chatoyant. The apparent ailuroophile looked at Hakuba. “And I’m sure whenever one thinks of England, Harry Potter comes to mind!”

Hakuba gulped as KID continued to smile at him expectantly before he glanced over the room. In his eyes was childish excitement, not so different from Conan’s. Whatever KID was looking wasn’t present as his expression dropped after scanning the room. The thief frowned for the briefest moments, something that Saguru wouldn’t have caught if he blinked.

KID looked at Nakamori, “say, where’s Tantei-kun?” He stepped towards the inspector, who stood his ground despite the backing of his officers. He had a hard, unbothered look in his eyes. “I’m surprised he isn’t here. Perhaps it’s too late at night,” the thief smiled, resigning the absence of his youngest opponent. Perhaps he should have set the heist at nine, after all. He had been looking forward to seeing his soulmate after two weeks of unchecked separation. With how much the child got into trouble even the thought of him disappearing for an extended period of time was nerve-wracking.

Hakuba’s eyes widened as he swerved around to face the wolverine exhibition. Conan wasn’t there. Saguru cursed himself for leaving Conan alone and unprotected in a museum, then cursed himself again for underestimating the child who had proved himself more capable against KID then all of them combined, then cursed himself for overestimating a child that could get hurt because of his blind faith. Smart and energetic Edogawa may be, but on occasion there were shady, unlisted figures reported at heists with weaponry and rifles. If Conan were to run into one of them . . .

As Hakuba turned back around, his nose almost brushed with KID’s. the British detective yowled and stumbled back, but 1412 followed his ungraceful flail with a flattening smile. “You wouldn’t happen to know if he is here, is he?” The thief’s voice was unmalicious and prodding, yet KID seemed almost strained. Almost desperate. Hakuba opened his mouth to reply with the truth before his words dried. He licked his lips tentatively as he considered his options. He really had no proof that Kaito was KID, and if there was a chance Saguru’s theory was incorrect he didn’t want to alert a criminal to the position of a wondering, vulnerable child. KID had acted out against the child before. If KID was innocent however, he could too be concerned for Conan’s safety.

He settled with, “I . . . I am not sure,” all the while resolving to find Conan while KID was making his escape. The safety of a child was ultimately more important than chasing a punctual robber.

If anything, KID seemed to agree as he eyed the room pensively. He grinned at Hakuba, and the British detective wasn’t surprised when he ended up searching for Conan in a heavy wizardry cloak, fingering his yellow and red tie as he wondered the halls of the Beika National Museum. He overlooked the aquatic section as he passed it, attempting to use an edgy misplaced elevator to move up a level as the stairs seemed to be under construction. Perhaps it was intuitionism that lead him higher until he was situated within the demure darkness of the museum attic, struggling with a pencil-thin torch he kept under the lip of his shoe.

He found the emergency exit hatch rather easily — there were three roofed pockets of keys, one of which was used, possibly by Conan as KID likely would have entered the roof in a more showy way. The first one Hakuba attempted to use crumbled somewhat and a small chip of rust lodged itself
in his finger. Saguru yelped and drew his hands back, dropping both the key and his light source. His uninjured knuckle thudded against the key sockets, and he felt a third clatter against the ground. Saguru whined in pain as he attempted to cradle both hands at the same time, settling for sucking the rust chip wound in an attempt to dislodge any stray bacteria from his blood. He drew his foot back, formal shoe colliding with the small torch enough for its already dim light to blink a few times before it waned and died. A plethora of curses riveted through his usual soapsud clean mind.

It took a long while to gather himself, and it would have taken impeccably longer if he hadn’t heard Conan’s startled cry from the level above Saguru’s. the sound was skewed by the roof over the teen detective’s head, but the voice was still youthful and wet behind the ears. The British teenager hissed as he pulled himself back to stability, adjusting his eyes to the darkness as he skittered about in search of one of the keys or his torch. Out of one of his many pockets a spindly, sticklike object careened onto the hardwood floor of the attic, and Saguru was quick to grab it before it could roll under any of the various surreptitious assortments of old exhibitions, and while most of which were probably not preserved animal corpses, Saguru didn’t want to waste time sorting through large objects when Conan could be in danger just a few inaccessible metres away. The teen grit his teeth.

He pulled up, relief shining on his face as he recognised the wand in his hand. It was overly elongated, and Saguru had seldom experience in lock picking, but both the safety of a child and the denouement of a thief was at stake. Saguru leaned taller against the trapdoor, hearing more muffled voices. One was tender yet hard and the other, silky yet orotund. So KID was up there.

Saguru barely hesitated as he plunged the wand into the keyhole, whetted air delving down his throat. He felt so much sweat on his forehead he was sure his fringe would be jagged. It was humid in the darkness of the attic. He found himself slightly at ease, sure that KID wouldn’t hurt the child, especially if KID was Kuroba. Children were a large part of a magician’s demographic after all. Saguru still willed himself to hold more caution to the professional criminal, however, as there was always an off chance that KID wasn’t in fact Kaito. The noises had seemed to disappear just as Saguru clicked open the trapdoor. It was smooth and light as the British detective slid it open, as if oiled. Saguru used the ladder to hoist himself up into the chilly night air.

The first thing he gathered upon exiting the attic was the night sky. It was mostly a dark abyss swampy with clouds and the occasional blinking star. While most had been drowned out by light pollution, it was far more extravagant then Tōkyō or London. There was a certain serenity to being so high up, far above the streets and Nakamori and his task force, able to see the vast ocean of vehicle lights but unable to hear their droning. It was . . . Nice.

“Hush Tantei, I think the door opened, someone might be here!”

Saguru jolted out of his procrastination as KID’s voice sounded, unusually harsh and commanding. He heard a slap of flesh upon flesh and a small, disagreeing gasp, as if someone had been gagged or had their mouth covered abruptly. Saguru’s eyes narrowed. Something wasn’t adding up.

With more caution then before, Hakuba pulled his lower body out of the depths of the attic, not bothering to straighten himself up like he usually would. He still held the wand out defensively, but kept it close to his body. It wouldn’t do for KID to see the wand before Saguru was prepared to face the thief.

There was what sounded like a brief struggle and a growl before Edogawa’s voice sounded, “nice try, stupid thief, but there’s no one bad here.” A pause. “Trust me, I’d know if there was.”

Saguru rounded a large ventilation tank, light on his feet as Edogawa and 1412 commenced their usual banter. The effervescence from Edogawa’s tone was all but gone, and he sounded cocky and smirky and far less boyish. Saguru pursed his slim body around the ventilator, clutching its gills for
support as he propped himself into a warped but doable position. His eyes finally found a familiar chocolate cowlick. Conan had his soccer ball under his cement threes again, and every time he rolled it in a circular motion under the souls of his shoes 1412 had an odd expression on his face.

“I had history, today, at school,” shrugged Edogawa in an acerbic elision on any cheer. His ghostly, phantasmagoric eyes shone through KID. If Saguru didn’t know any better, he’d say KID shuttered. “It’s my least favourite subject, you know. The constant droning on the founding of western holidays and how most stemmed from Christianity and Catholicity or how the English invaded Australia. We learn about Japanese legends. It bores me to death, really.”

Conan moved. He fell into step with KID and they circled each other, feline eyes narrowed, both were smirking but only one, the eldest of the two, had a sort of cynosure aimed after the child’s every breath, every twitch of lips or fingers. Ladderlike shadows fell upon Saguru’s pharynx as he elevated his head higher.

“You’ll be history too, once I’m done with you. Next lesson they’ll be droning on about the world’s most elusive thief, and how he was put behind bars with a soccer ball bruise blackening his left eye,” Conan suddenly grunted, propelling the ball off towards KID’s right and into the abyss of free falling over the city. The wind made a whetted noise. KID barely had to dodge and looked back to Conan, smug and about to comment about the child being off his game when the ball reverted its course. KID didn’t even seem to notice the object careening towards him, forbearance ever present.

1412 parted his mouth a little, wanting to say something mocking. He was only able to squark out and flail as a bullish globule swooped past his cheek, grazing it with the belligerence of a chuffed bullet. It slandered the thief’s monocle and continued on its collision course until it was embedded into a tidmouth shed. The shed’s skin rumbled like freight and Saguru hauled back on his heels, not sure whether he should goggle at the destructive child or rush up to KID to enforce justice.

Said thief and been reduced to a crouched mess, clutching his monocle in place under his brow. He was barely able to avoid the glint Conan projected from his watch, which was slightly scratched up. The significance of the watch’s damage would have been measured on its price, however.

KID healed fast, leaping to the air but not taking the opportune currents to zip away on his glider. Saguru narrowed his eyes and shifted his weight as 1412 landed majestically upon the tidmouth shed, smiling blondly.

“First of all, it’s nice to know you hold me in such high regards, what with the whole ‘world’s most elusive thief’ and all.” 1412’s voice was bouncing with inflation. Conan ground his eyelids closed and chanted something about Lupin and not flattering yourself in a barbed way. “Secondly, while you’re correct I will be going down in history, you got the reason wrong, for I am uncatchable,”

“And Titanic was unsinkable,” Conan scoffed. KID whimpered and leaped down from the freight and tidmouth shed until he was kneeling directly in front of Conan. The boy stumbled back, surprised by the breach of personal space. KID followed him with sad eyes.

“Also, I’d like to think of myself as more entertaining than school and far less deprecating then history class.”

KID pounced forward, and a dissembled Edogawa raised his haunches and ducked away. KID’s cape flicked across his dark brown locks and erstwhile a gaseous scent was present. If Conan wasn’t as addled as he were, perhaps he would have identified it as oolong tea or a quixotic herbal mix.

KID sat like a gargoyle on the tin and cobalt mesh fence, barely rocking despite the churning clash of his formal shoes. When Conan gathered himself, he could barely bridle the wince that flashed across
his face as even the slightest of wind currents seemed able to tilt KID over the building and down to
the city below. Edogawa blinked as he comprehended the wistful expression upon KID’s face.

When neither the thief nor the prodigy child pursuing him made to move for a while, Saguru
considered making a move of his own to disrupt the odd tension. Edogawa didn’t seem to quite
understand it himself, judging by his searching expression. He seemed to disrobe the fabric of the
somber criminal’s poker face with a single hard frown. Conan’s troubled scowl softened before
Saguru could have a move against the thief, and its concerned curiosity caught the older detective off
guard. Conan seemed to have a distinguished sense of law and Hakuba couldn’t grip why he was
both expressing concern for a disruption of that law and not taking advantage of the robber’s moment
of weakness.

Conan stepped closer, looking skittish and jumpy and prone to spook yet still determined. KID’s
eyes were glazed until Conan interrupted. “Oi, K-KID?” The addressee startled and looked to Conan
as if the child had never been seen before. The criminal seemed to silently contemplate the waning
distance between him and his undoubtedly lethal adversary. When KID’s eyes befell Conan’s,
however, any doubt or uneasiness seemed to be wiped away violently — almost as if seeing
Edogawa up close, receiving emotions besides angry determination and looking into his eyes was
worth getting arrested, damned and locked away. This bought Saguru pause, and his eyes fell for the
briefest of moments. The blond looked up once more and KID had no trace of emotions on his
leisurely creased brow. What he thought he had seen before had very quickly disappeared.

Conan narrowed his large, glassed eyes in comprehension. For a long minute he seemed to consider
something, and he chewed on his bottom lip in indecision. “Are . . .” He was searching for the right
words, and KID looked at him interestingly. His lips were corked in a crooked smile, as if it had been
screwed in place, but his eyes displayed his genuine inquisition. Saguru was intrigued at how
skinned the usually careful thief was.

“Are you ok?” Were the simple words Conan had uttered, yet Saguru could see they shook the thief
greatly so. KID looked at Conan, really looked at him, and smiled a little. He reached forward and
caressed the detective’s youthful jawline, affection clear in his eyes.

“Maybe I am,” 1412 assured and Conan stepped back, startled for a number of reasons. Though the
child had retreated from the gentle grip of the thief’s gloved hands, Conan couldn't help but feel a
loss. “For my favourite little detective,” quipped the buoyant criminal, sending Edogawa a smarmy
grin as he tossed over the bulbous form of the Gambino. Conan caught it with one hand, inspected it
for a moment, and then pocketed it. “Also,” the thief added, and Conan looked alert. “For my
favourite little assistant,” 1412 smirked and presented a note to the child. Before the young
investigator could even hope to finish the first line, KID materialised a cinnabar English rose behind
Conan’s left ear. The child started, automatically reaching for the object invading his personal space.
KID leaped outwards, throwing a “next time!” To the wind as he went.

Conan mumbled under the condensation of his breathing about there not being a next time as he
plucked the rose out from behind his ear. It was well farmed, hydrated and de-thorned, something he
could appreciate. “-and I’m not your assistant,” he ground out as Saguru approached, whipping his
head up chunkily as he realised someone else besides KID was present. Rather paranoid of him,
Saguru mused.

“Hakuba?” Conan asked. Saguru observed the puppyish tilt of the child’s smaller head. The blond
took a few steps forward until he was closer to Conan and he eyed the rose as he quietly said,

“I’m sorry if I startled you,” while he visually searched for the Gambino interestingly. “I was looking
for you earlier, and I’m quite surprised at what I saw upon finding you.” Conan searched through his
pockets and tossed the Gambino over to Saguru. Once the Brit had caught it, Conan began to walk towards the roof exit. Saguru followed him, “Are you ok with KID treating you like that?”

Conan leisurely looked at Saguru over his shoulder popularly. “Treating me like what? You mean giving me roses and not smothering me with glue and decorative streamers?” The cub fingered KID’s rose for a while considerably.

Saguru was unsure. “I suppose,” was all he said, and Edogawa looked business-like for a moment as he frowned in thought. The child stopped by the trapdoor Saguru had left open and took one last breath of fresh air before he mounted the ladder and climbed out of Saguru’s eyesight.

When Hakuba had climbed down the trapdoor he looked around to see Conan haunched over and picking one of the lost keys from where it was lodged in the wrinkles of his shoe rubber. He said conversationally, “you know, if you’re concerned about how touchy-feely he is with me, don’t. I’m sure he only does it ’cus he knows how much I hate it.”

One part of Saguru agreed but another part wasn’t so sure. The emotions KID had been exposing during the heist had been oddly gnarled, meaning he was either overreacting or he wasn’t reacting enough. While he was sure Kuroba would never do anything he or Edogawa would regret, there was always the off chance that his deductions were incorrect and it was simply unnatural to see the thief so emotional towards what appeared to be a young child.

“KID is many things, but he isn’t a pedophile.” Conan had insisted with finality when Saguru didn’t immediately respond. The blond met the brunette’s eyes and wished deeply to change the subject.

With a small nod, Saguru said, “is it by any chance that you have seen Of Mice And Men?”

Conan nodded solemnly; “by John Steinbeck? It was a beautiful story but I have to say it’s resolution caught me off guard.”

Edogawa finally dislodged the key from his shoe and he brushed off his navy formalwear. “You should get back to the others soon,” Conan said as he pulled at the side of his sangria retro bow. “Nakamori would appreciate the gem back, as well.”

Saguru asked, “aren’t you coming along as well? Technically, you were the one to get the gem back from KID and I’d hate to steal any credit.” The pair began walking towards the exit of the attic. It was dark enough that Saguru had to follow the sound of Edogawa’s light footsteps a small way in front of him to gorge the general direction of the exit.

“Actually, I’d greatly appreciate it if you didn’t tell anyone I was here,” Conan winced as he fringed across the attic wall. He had to step around the odd vent panel and exposed pipe. “I was behind that exhibition and away from the other officers for a reason. Not many people know I’m out tonight, let alone at a KID heist.”

Saguru’s brows dropped, and he said disapprovingly, “you snuck out at midnight to attend?” Conan didn’t answer at first, he just licked his lips.

“I know it sounds bad, but to be fair I didn’t want anyone, including KID, to know I was here. Element of surprised and all.” Saguru listened to Edogawa’s excuse as he stepped over the odd vent panel and exposed pipe as Conan had done before. Conan stopped and walked away from the wall. He kneeled down and opened an industrial fishnet gate. Saguru followed him through. “That and I wanted to avoid the media. I haven’t been to the past few KID heists either, so I thought I’d swing around.” Conan stopped walking forward when the pair entered a small staff room. The room was
bathed in whiteish lamplight and there was an elevator on the left side of the room. On the other side of the room there was a deep slope downwards and a staircase made of echoey steel. Saguru looked down at it and a distorted reflection of himself looked back up at him.

“I can understand, Conan, but you really shouldn’t be sneaking around at night.” Saguru sat on his knees and looked over Conan. “I know you can’t help it when trouble finds you, but there is no real excuse for when you go looking for trouble.” Conan seemed to understand his words but like any child, hated them. Saguru sighed and ran his pale hand through Conan’s dark hair. He ruffled it slightly. Edogawa almost looked like Kuroba with messy hair. “How did you stay hidden, anyway? From the security camera feeds and KID’s own?”

Conan looked relieved. “Earlier on I came to scout the building when Ran and her best friend, Sonoko Suzuki, went to explore KID’s heist arena. Sonoko is a huge 1412 fanatic, and though the heist was situated in the local area, she had a date with her long-distance boyfriend who was coming over for a martial arts competition the day after the heist so she couldn’t attend.” Conan leaned back and smirked, boyishly superior. “It was all child’s play after that. I simply located all the areas where official cameras were located and deduced where KID would likely hide his own cameras. There was always a chance I could have been incorrect, of course, as it was just speculation.” Conan trotted away from Hakuba and clawed at the fence lining the stairwell. “These stairs will lead down to the car park, and from there it’s simple treading to avoid cameras. TV really is helpful, that’s where I learnt all this from. Super cool spy movies! I really need to get back. Bye, Hakuba.” Conan smiled disarmingly at the blond detective as he began to climb down the stairs. Saguru wanted to ask why nobody was guarding the car park entrance, and he was also baffled as to how a child was able to infiltrate a high security building without being detected. Maybe KID was a worse influence on Edogawa than anyone had considered. Saguru thought that he might pay Ran a visit soon.

Saguru waited until he could no longer see Conan’s back in the stairwell before he turned away and entered the elevator. He dabbed the number one on the keypad and the elevator descended. He knew Conan would be mad at him for telling Ran about his nighted escapade, but Saguru knew it was for the better. He didn’t want Conan to grow up thinking sneaking around was ok, nor did he want that potent mind to be used for delinquency.

Saguru recalled the way KID had gazed deeply, longingly at Conan, a sort of look that shouldn’t be reserved for a second grader. The strange phenomenon required investigation. Just who was Edogawa Conan to Kaitou KID? After all, KID was usually haltered and perfected. How could one single little boy render him so inept?

3

When Saguru had returned home at around three in the morning, his face was as hard as wood and his eyes were hard. His vision was dark from the feeding frenzy of reporters milling about outside the Beika National Museum. According to them, he had cornered KID atop the National Museum until he dived for KID and the burglar swooped to the wind. The thief had dropped the Gambino throughout the rush. Edogawa Conan had never happened.

Hakuba had washed his face and teeth and went to bed without dinner. His baaya had been fussing over sickening himself due to an empty belly, but he got off by assuring her he would prepare a large breakfast the next morning.

The youngest Hakuba wasn’t hungry once as he lay awake in his bed well into the dwindling hours of five o’clock. While the blond may have slept through six o’clock, seven found him not having the large breakfast he had promised, but searching the kitchen cupboards for a bindle of coffee beans. They were hidden with his father’s medicine in the furthest cupboard from the western oven. He
pushed aside two small bottles of melatonin and was careful not to jostle the half-singed smudge stick. He brewed his coffee with the week-born drink machine, which was only able to make ice chocolates, hot coco and black coffee. Hakuba wondered if his father had something that was the opposite to melatonin in his medicine cabinet. Saguru locked the medicine cabinet anyway and put a strawberry pop tart in the toaster.

Still chewing on his black coffee, Saguru pocketed his credit card in his phone case and hid it in one of the internal sockets of his chestnut Burberry.

He rushed to his study with haste and scooped a few empty cardboard folders up from an outlook on his desk island. When he had made it back to the kitchen he was able to juggle the pop tart out from the snappy jowls of the toaster. He blew on it and forced it into his mouth, using the following burn to wake him up more. It was the first day of the weekend, and he intended to utilise it to the best of his ability. Tomorrow he, Aoko and Kaito would be going to a theme park in Beika called Tropical Land. One of its rollercoasters was notorious for a decapitation incident that had happened not too long ago. Kuroba, ever the dare-devil, was eager to try it out. Hakuba managed not to shriek as his tongue was burned by the pop tart.

While he was not eager for the theme park, it would be a good time to interrogate Kurouba on what he knew about Edogawa. There was always an investigative plus to Kuroba.

He had left for the Ekoda PD before his baaya could ever force feed him.

He had been greeted with many tired computer jockeys upon arriving at the station. “Ah, Hakuba. What brings you here this harrowing morning,” Nakamori greeted unhappily. “I’m not sure if we’ve done anything to lure your humble majesty to this boy crib of overworked and under paid ill-wishers, but it’s an honour to be in the presence of a KID professional.” Nakamori swirled his cigarette in his mouth.

Saguru smiled politely, “it’s a pleasure to see you as well, Inspector. Judging by your enthusiasm I take it that the media is still bugging you.”

Nakamori showed him towards the reception while giving him a fickle smile and said, “Where is that legend, Samuel Sanders? Where’s the hero that foiled Fourteen? Is Hakuba Saguru here? The Bullitin would like a statement! Insiders this, we’ll pay you well that,” Nakamori looked at Saguru in the eye and Saguru felt his hackles raise. “I wouldn’t be surprised if you covered in Vogue.” Saguru smiled at him again, but didn’t say much else as he excused himself to speak to reception. He heard the automatic sliding doors make a whirling sound when they opened and slid shut as Nakamori left.

“Heh,” the officer at reception scoffed, “he was mad at’cha. You hadda, Hakuba. You Hadda.” Curley his name tag read. Curley leaned over the reception table and twitched Saguru’s elbow. “Never you mind. A guy got to sometimes. Deal with tha’ bastard sometimes.” Saguru groaned and the man leaned down beside him, leaned very close to him. “An I ain’t no foxy when I say he got it bad for yeh. He never gon no treat littel Edogawa like that, ain’t he.” It wasn’t even a question.

Saguru flinched with recognition at the name and he remembered what he had gone to the police station for. “A-ah, on the subject of Edogawa,” were his first said words to Curley, “I was wondering if I could have some run down files for a few of his encounters with KID. 1412.”

Curley nodded with understanding and said to him, “ah yeh, sure you be needing them. You needing them to find ways to make Nakamori not ait ya guts.”

Saguru grinned uneasily and nodded along with Curley’s guess.
“Yeah I cn’ do that,” said Curley as he sifted through some draws behind the counter Hakuba couldn’t see. “Now I’en up in here only cus of yah old man, *Hakuba* cus yah a well-bled one aren’t cha.”

Curley submerged with a key chain draped over his finger. He tossed it informally over to Hakuba, who jolted to catch it.

“Now you go on over there to locker 017 unna that there placard that says fourteen twelve, n’ there it bes,” Curley directed. Hakuba knew where it was so he didn’t listen too intently. He had searched through KID’s post-infiltration case files on multiple other occasions so he could better himself when against KID. Never would he of thought to be investigating something such as Conan.

Hakuba nodded to Curley and went over to the fourteen twelve placard. He opened the locker with the granted key and searched through the contents, picking out the heist files that Conan attended, dating back to the Black Star and its prequel on April 1st. He tucked them under his arm.

One of the passing workers offered him a sample of potstickers, of which a he gladly accepted on his way out of the building. As he tossed Curley back the key, he heard a, “n’ don’t forget to bringem back tomorrow,” over the gasp of the automatic sliding doors.

It was a short and uneventful trek to the local Ekoda Stocklands Library, and he made it there in under thirteen minutes. Hakuba tapped his watch comfortably as the quiet of the library offered him peace of mind. He could smell the biblichor fragrance from the old books, and the familiar face of the librarian greeted him. Like with Nakamori and Curley, he offered the librarian a polite smile and settled down at the farthest corner away from the computer section and all the children playing on them. While at most public sitting areas one might find themselves brushing away bits of food and rubbish, Hakuba had to brush away dust from his table and walled seat. He breathed in the scent of gimp and tanned leather as he settled all of his hired case files down and made sure there was no-one around to see them.

Saguru sorted them in a chronological pile off to his left, and he started with the first heist Conan had attended; the one set on April 1st. Out of the file the Londoner found newspaper samples clipped behind an original shot of 1412 snapped by one of the grounded police officers during the infamous ‘chase’. According to the case file, KID had escaped on the roof of the heisted building by disguising as a task forcer, so Saguru deduced the picture was taken before Conan intervened. Saguru eagled through the case details but slowed more as he read over the parts of which Conan was included. It provided no significant intel on the thief’s behaviour towards Edogawa, however, so Saguru disregarded most of it in favour of reviewing Conan’s statement in one of the newspaper articles. Conan had revealed in one of the clips that KID may have suspected him being one of Nakamori’s tricks, possibly to catch the thief off guard and dissemble him enough for his detainment to be carried out. Other then that particular theory of Edogawa’s, each of his statements in the other newspaper clippings had been the same or similar, and the April 1st case had been rather dead to Saguru’s cause.

There was far more information on the next case file Saguru revealed — Edogawa’s first success and public explosion, the Black Star heist. Though it’s thumbnail seemed promising, Saguru only found photos of Nakamori ruffling the mirthful-looking Edogawa’s hair to be different from the April 1st heist. He gathered no significant information. Much to Saguru’s disclosure, the rest of the case files left him with the same dry results, with not a single one suspecting the thief’s odd attachment to Edogawa.

After two hours of tearing apart the files, Saguru only left the library with one mildly interesting fact; Conan admitted in one of his interviews that he and KID had met up more than the media was aware
of. The thought of Conan being alone with the criminal on multiple occasions left Saguru feeling uneasy. With dissatisfaction weighing Saguru’s shoulders down, the blond detective socketed away the case files back in the transportation folders, binned his recyclable coffee cup and was ready to leave. For the rest of the day, he had planned a relaxing Sherlock binge-read. His Baaya was sure to prepare him some oolong tea and they had Nutella stored away. Saguru wouldn’t mind some Nutella to massage away his parental worries for a child he had met but once, yet had felt a connection to. It was his duty as a detective to protect all innocents, especially a child that could easily be sent astray by dealing with glorified criminals at such an influential age. As one of KID’s most prominent detectives, he would make sure Conan Edogawa would never get hurt.

4

Saguru was wrong- he wouldn’t be wallowing in the Sherlock literature he so adored any time soon that day, for as soon as he set foot outside the Ekoda Library, he was swarmed with the k-mart version of reporters; KID fans. They grinned smarmy smiles and gulled about in large droves, each one starving for information on their pedestaled criminal.

Saguru could only wish a cauterising fate upon the plebeian that dared rat out his location to the public.

After 32 minutes of dodging limbs and projectile threats, Hakuba escaped by the skin of his elbows as a mysterious, cheaply cloaked figure pulled him into a backstreet, where he could only shutter at the peeling stench of off paint and he tried not to touch or step on any verdigris. The cloaked figure that had saved him promptly uncloaked themselves to reveal a petite girl about a year younger then him. She had the KID insignia fake-tattooed on the side of her left cheek — at least he hoped it was fake. There was a wetted plastic sheet felled over the tattoo, suggesting it was new. Saguru felt afraid.

The KID fanatic watched him for a moment with narrowed eyes. She had brown eyes. “Well, aren’t you going to thank me? You mildly damaged KID’s reputation and prevented him from keeping the Gambino in his possession for about three days, yet I still rescued you from those dingos,” she yipped.

Saguru didn’t requite her due respect, instead bringing to the surface a point that had bothered him for months now, “mildly damaged reputation? Prevented theft? Doesn’t Edogawa happen to do that almost every heist he attends? Does his interference with your idol not bother you?” Saguru was so mad as he thought those words, sick of the constant hate fans and higher-ups threw at him despite the great deed he had accomplished. As the words left his mouth, however, he instantly felt sick with himself. He wanted nothing more now than his Nutella and oolong tea.

The KID fanatic stared at him openly for a long while, before replying flatly, “man, those fans must really be buttering your cream roll for the ever-polite Hakuba Saguru to cry about a little kid.” The fanatic narrowed her eyes at the blond detective. “Also, to answer your question, Edogawa is adorable!” She smiled brightly, minded away from her angry sarcasm. Hakuba blinked at her.

“I’m sorry,” said Saguru with a practiced flick of his hair, a formal smile twitching at the side of his lips. “I stepped out of line. My apologies, miss . . ?” Saguru took her hand and kneeled down.

The fanatic followed him down with her eyes, but she lifted her head higher. “Yoki Sasha,” she sniffed. While Yoki could admit Hakuba Saguru was quite the charmer, she would much rather her revered Kaitou KID in his place. Feeling like she was betraying her thief and her headcanon for Saguru, she snatched her hand away and held it to her chest. Saguru stood and looked sheepish as he found her judgmental gaze once more.
“And I’m sorry for not thanking you sooner. Had you not come to my rescue, I may have been fatally mauled.” Yoki didn’t look like she believed him. Her chocolate eyes narrowed in resolution and she stared him down purposefully. Hakuba’s smile grew more strained and less sorry.

“Yeh, yeh, humour me, cornflake. I saw you up in there with those heist files,” she said, and Hakuba clutched the files closer to his side. Noticing this, Yoki continued, “an I ain’t gonna steal them. I just wanna know, why the interest in Edogawa Conan?” While she didn’t have much hip, Yoki still looked curvaceous as she propped her side out.

Hakuba frowned. “And why were you overlooking police files?”

Yoki hissed at him like an affronted cat. “Vast, early hours, thick darkness, screams and light pollution and people far taller than you- thanks to the viscosity of the fan gatherings each heist night, little, simple Sasha has grown observant and calculating. Now I practically govern the KID fan base. I am literally the fandom’s president, it’s matriarch, and I clawed my way to the top with no one to patch me up if I was bludgeoned.” Yoki clutched her cloak over her forehead, displaying a complex KID embroidery. “This is the symbol of my fort. The one who wears it holds supreme power over the fanbase. How do you think I got you, the mortal enemy of KID, out of that hornet swarm?” Hakuba openly stared at her, to which she smirked. “And I was wondering if you perhaps needed help, Detective.”

Saguru swallowed, and the pretty girl’s spidery gaze speared through him. Behind them back in the open streets, buggy cars sounded and the fanatics could still be distantly heard squawking on. “I- I don’t need to drag a civilian into what happens to be a rather personal investigation. I’m sorry, miss.”

Yoki didn’t look too deterred, something that seemed like an ill boding on Saguru’s part. Yoki smiled and said, “I don’t think so buttermilk. You can hear those girls out there, can’t you?” Sasha began to circle him, a wide yet porridgey smile on her plump lips. “You’ll find I wasn’t lying about you being the enemy of the Kidstorians. That’s what we call the fanbase, by the way. You have allies in your own fanbase, correct, but the Kidstorians have deemed you as eternally defective in the ways of Kidstonic approval, and if I give the sign, they will ready their clips, feed the ammunition magazine, fatten the barrel, unhinge the suppressor, and you will die by the kick of over thirty-seven .22 handguns, with each wagon swollen with over ten bullets. Not even Kudou Shinichi will be able to identify your body after they are done with you.”

That time, Hakuba Saguru stayed silent for a while. He was scared. “If the- your fanbase despises me so, then why do you wish to help me?” Yoki finally stopped circling him. She stopped in front of him and looked him over with such intent disapproval Hakuba felt greatly invalidated.

“As the archkidstorion, president of the largest cultivating fan club in the Kidstorian battalion, The White Knight Kites, un-illicit trafficker and judge of KID merchandise and the founder of the hugely successful 1412 White Road Convention, it is my duty to make sure you aren’t aiming for KID or dear little Edogawa.” Yoki stared at Saguru seriously. “I also like knowing things. I constantly have uppers trying to rob me of my authoritarian cloak, so knowing inside information like this ensures that my political enemies can’t dethrone me.”

Saguru just kept looking at her, knees unappreciative to the weight he was applying to them. Hakuba felt as though the skin of his throat had been replaced with sandpaper when he spoke. “I was unaware the KID fandom was so . . . Intense.” The blond sounded hoarser than he would have liked. Yoki looked like a wolf about to delve into her beleaguered, sick and ailing prey.

“Oh, you have so much to learn, crumpet. Perhaps the answers to what you are asking lie not in the official records, but in plain sight.” She watched with a detached superiority as Saguru attempted to gather himself.
“Shipping?” Hakuba asked as they strolled through Ekoda National Park. It wasn’t too grand — just some dim, unimportant open plains with trees sprayed about in seemingly random areas, such as by oddly positioned benches.

Yoki, who was lapping an ice cream she manipulated Hakuba into getting her, repeated, “shipping, yes.”

Hakuba watched her eat her cuisine for a little while. He looked at her awkwardly and unsurely as he waited for an explanation.

Yoki licked her ice cream one last time before drawing in a long, possibly, possibly-not exaggerated breath, and said, “shipping is about sixty percent of the reason why people hate you. For all your wealthy, runway charm, you are totally incompatible with KID.” Hakuba looked like he died.

Yoki ignored him in favour of her quickly melting dessert. “Remember how I mentioned Kudou Shinichi before? I’ll use him as an example. Despite only attending one heist a couple years ago, he is still shipped with KID compulsively. I’m talking clubs, galleries of fan art, archives of fanfiction. Thousands of people have a construct of those two together. I, for one, totally approve. It’s one of my most proud ships. It’s called Kaishin, Kai for Kaitou KID and Shin for Shinichi.” Once Yoki had finished her explanation she turned back to Hakuba to see if he was following. “Kaitou And Kudou are compatible. I really wish Kudou didn’t disappear; that one heist he attended was so fucking badass. If you can, contact him and tell him to go to another KID heist. Not only would that be absolutely quenching, but it would ensure I stay in power over the Kidstorians. ‘Archkidstorian Yoki Sasha bringing Kudou back to the frontlines of modern shipping’. Kaishin could be a reality!”

While Hakuba was tempted to ask more questions regarding Kudou’s deplorable fate, he instead found worry gripping at his heart. “But you’ve hinted at Edogawa’s popularity within the Kidstoric fandom. If shipping is such a prolific part of making one of KID’s enemies likable . . .” Saguru felt uncomfortable at the thought of many people paring Kaitou KID and Edogawa together for a multitude of reasons. Yoki winced a little, confirming his fears.

“Well, the internet is a pretty experimentally explorative place, and there are some influential KIDCon shippers. You will be lucky to find that a large portion of Kidstorians is only supportive of platonic fluff and friendship, but there are still those who find the forbidden romance to be endearing. Many, however, think that Conan would be somewhat of a little brother figure, perhaps even KID’s son. You never know when a pedophilic fic might just pop up, but it’s bound to happen. While I refuse to claim approval for some people’s darker perception of KID and Conan’s relationship, you’ve gotta admit sometimes they’re a bit too . . . Close.” Yoki seemed uncomfortable at discussing something perceptively damming about her idol, but Saguru had to continue.

He said, “what do you mean?”

Yoki licked her soggy cone and licked her lips. “I never paid attention to the romantic aspect of KIDCon shipping with their present ages. It was always the odd time skip fic when Conan was of age, if at all. I’m a fan of fluffy platonic love, friendship fics, but for my gracious and gentlemanly KID to be pursuing a seven-year old? Anyway, it was bought up in one of the White Knight Kite’s official chat rooms, the Boatshed. As I’m sure you can guess, the Boatshed was used to discuss the various Kidstoric shootings. The KIDCon concept was introduced to the chat by a nameless user, and it bought about great conflict within the chat room due to the pairing’s controversy. Admins such as myself and the co-admin, WKK name being AirmenCapes6, had to be bought in to temporarily disband the chat. Honestly, in that particular feud, there were far too many KIDCon supporters then I ever could have expected or been entirely comfortable with.” Yoki broke off from her explanation to
glance around at her surroundings before she turned and faced Hakuba with a clandestine appearance. “What freaked me the most was their points, however. Their proof.” Now, Yoki sounded more guilty and down then ever as she chewed her lips, ice cream forgotten.

“For the first time in my life, I doubted Kaitou KID.” Yoki looked angry as she blazed Hakuba down. “Repeat that to no-one. No - one, not a soul. KID is still my religion, don’t you question that, but that was a period in my life I don’t want to remember and if my opponents caught wind of my unfaithfulness to the ode of Kidstory, I’d be through.”

Saguru nodded dumbly as Yoki pinched her temples. She looked around and walked toward an earthly painted bench. She sat down in it and looked at Saguru expectantly. The blond detective sat down by her, but not so close as to come off as ill-intended. His face grew serious as hers did.

Yoki sighed, “they were adamant about KID not only holding a romantic, emotional and sexual attachment to little Edogawa, but convinced they had a spiritual one, as well.”

Hakuba’s eyebrows shot up into his hairline. “Soulmates?” The blond questioned. Yoki nodded glumly. While soulmates were rare, those who were lucky enough to have them had, somewhere on their body, an imprint of their soulmate’s first words to them. Saguru didn’t even know if Kurouba or Edogawa had soul marks, and he certainly hadn’t considered them to be destined for each other. Despite the oddity, age gaps weren’t entirely unheard of and it would explain KID’s antics around the brilliant child.

Yoki said, “I’ll admit they only had speculation to back up that quip. It was a strange day, that one.” She turned to smile weirdly at Hakuba. “Then again, I’m sure any fandom is strange.”

Saguru looked back to Yoki, contemplative. She crossed her slim legs and assessed him for a moment before she said, “of course, that’s not the only reason Conan is significant to the Kidstorians. He’s Conan, and he’s saved countless lives. He’s a little hero, and I’m hoping to interview him soon.” As Yoki stood from the bench and swivelled through her blueish phone, she added, “I hope I was of help to you, detective. You owe me and the KID fanbase.” She turned to leave the park the way the pair had entered, and though Saguru’s throat was itching for more answers, he said nothing as he watched after her.

Hakuba sat back on his park bench and thought. It seemed he would be required to check his schedule and dedicate his free time to another trip back to the library. He wanted to know more about soulmates.
Chapter Summary

Like Hakuba, some people found the tick of a watch calming, as they did the sound of a marble rolling on a wooden floor or a soda can being opened.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

1

A claret was the rose of given,

of fire and of blood and of war,

but red was the rose of given,

of love, of strength and of valour.

Shinichi had come to memorise those twenty-nine words, and the forty-third time he repeated them, Conan looked down at the rose he still clutched in his hand. He was unable to defuse its meaning — of the rose, the riddle had been figured out within the hour he had returned from KID’s heist. The riddle described the meanings of the colour red; of which it represented many things. He supposed that was why 1412 had given him the rose in the first place. Despite his conclusion, Conan felt as though something was missing, like he was missing a deeper meaning. It was a rather unsweet feeling.

Conan sighed and tried to decide what to do with the letter. It wasn’t a heist note, so he couldn’t see reason to give it to Nakamori. The boy recited it in his head once last time before he tucked it under his drawer and padded unswervingly down stairs from his shared room to see Ran off.

He arrived just in time to see Ran lingering in the door frame, Sonoko dunking about just out of the boy’s view. He tried not to sneer in disdain as Sonoko groused at him.

She said, ringing a finger through her straightened locks, “the brats not coming, right? Oh pleassee please pleasaassee—” and Ran threw a lecturing glare over her shoulders as she kneeled down to meet Conan at his level. Conan squeaked childishly and trundled into his sister’s embrace, glaring at Sonoko from his mantilla of dutch brown hair when he was sure Ran wouldn’t be able to see his expression. Sonoko’s clean face wrinkled up like an old boot as she silently bared her teeth. Ran pulled away from the embrace first.

She looked at her sibling-figure appreciatively. “Are you sure you’ll be ok here on your own, Conan?” Suzuki smiled grinch-like, glad the brat wouldn’t be following them around. “I know how much trouble you get in. I still can’t believe you snuck out to KID’s heist!” Suzuki faltered and Conan whimpered weakly. Ran’s resolve cracked as Conan looked sadly at the ground.

Sonoko didn’t know weather she should gripe with envy or laugh until she hyperventilated. “The brats turned into a delinquent! He’ll start selling arcada and Shinichi-ing for weeks on end and no-one will know where he went! Then he’ll return with an assortment of STDs and a heroin addiction...”
and he would have killed a bunch of people- I mean, he already knows how to shoot a gun-“

Ran visually kicked her and Conan made sad noises that lurched his sister’s maternal instincts into overdrive. He said, “you’re so mean Sonoko. And I was gonna give you this rose KID gave me.” He really wasn’t. Sonoko, however, made amusing strangled noises and eyed the rose with a chilling intensity.

“Yo- you need to give me that rose . . .” She breathed, taken aback and her knees trembled with anticipation. She made grabby hands for Conan’s flower, but the child pulled it away from her vicinity and she gave the boy an affronted stare. He looked back up at her, unimpressed. “You don’t understand, Cuh-Conan! I need that rose more than you could ever imagine!” She could finally win against Yoki in the Kidstoric election!

Ran looked like she wanted to object.

Conan clutched the rose to his chest and swivelled around until Sonoko was staring at his back. She made a broken noise and looked as if she were going to die. Ran stood up and approached Suzuki unsurely, afraid the heiress would snap and bite at her wrist. She fell out of step when Sonoko took on an odd, nefarious air. Conan felt his skin crawl for a short moment.

The wealthy girl’s cropped hair flamed around her cheeks as she rushed forward and threw her arm around the child’s shoulders. Conan started and almost protested when a heavenly odour wafted by his nose and stilled him. Sonoko smirked and reached behind her Tommy Hilfiger bomber jacket as if she were drawing a gun. Instead she pulled out the only substance that could ever subdue the wildcard that was Edogawa — ever tame him or domesticate him — a bag of caffeine. It seemed that Sonoko was aware of the child’s unhealthy addiction and was willing to use that to her advantage.

Conan watched the bag sway from its string like he was in some hypnotic funk; one which lead him to throw the rose rather forcefully at Sonoko and swipe the bag away from her.

The Suzuki heiress shrieked like a harpy and cradled the captured rose to her chest. Ran continued to watch the scene unfold, not sure where to put herself or what to do. The martial artist stepped toward her youngest brother, curious as to what Sonoko had given him and hoping it wasn’t inappropriate. Conan curled over his caffeine filter bag and hissed defensively.

Ran whirled over to Sonoko as Conan galloped over to the kitchen, crying out in unrestrained joy. “S- Sonoko- what did you give him?” She tried.

As he climbed atop the kitchen island, Conan could hear the Suzuki heiress reply with something probably offending, like a Yaiba doll or fake bank papers, but ignored her in favour of plugging the kettle into the wall and filling it with a cup of water. He waited until Ran and Sonoko left, calling out a detached farewell to them upon their departure, before he switched the kettle lever downwards and it began heating the water.

The kettle sighed coarsely and Conan took some time to luxuriate in the redolent of his acquired caffeine bag.

Once the kettle was finished the child leaned down and swiped a thick clay cub from the lower cupboards below the dark kitchen island and carefully put the filter bag into it. He poured the piping hot water into it, after, taking extra care as to not overfill the cup. The cup had a photograph of the Susquehanna at sunset on it. Not wanting to wait much longer, Conan stirred the caffeine filter bag around before he waited impatiently for the brew to seep.

After four minutes of unthought quiet, Conan removed the droopy filter bag from his elixir, still
swollen from water, and left it to deflate in the sink. He handled his cup with love and affection as he dropped down from the kitchen island, unplugged and shelved the kettle, and carried it over to the Mouri’s lounge room couch. It was clear from Kogoro’s alcohol and cherry cola cans because Ran and he had cleared it away a few hours prior, and the child had the residence to himself due to the old man being out morning-gambling, or grocery shopping as he called it. That man really was a future gas station attendant.

Conan allowed himself to relax for the first time in a while. The sullen depths of his mind had been whisked away in place of beachside views and complimentary pina coladas.

Conan held the heat of his coffee cup close, appreciating the painfully pleasurable sting it left on his fingertips. If he was lucky enough, it would burn away his fingerprints and no one would be able to forensically prove him to be the missing Kudo Shinichi.

Unless, of course, they took his DNA and realised he hand burnt his fingerprints off.

Conan pressed his hands against the cup hardly, and breathed in it’s scalding breath. The heated steam rising from the cub plunged down his throat, submerging his small body in the erotic grasp of bitter herbs and meringue. It was enough for an obscene, oily moan to slip past his slack lips.

Not wanting to waste anymore time, Conan’s eyes rolled back into his head as his eyelids fluttered shut and he allowed the sweltering fluid to melt down his throat, burning it in a way that made Conan want to cry but the unforgiving potency of the black caffeine sent signifying jolts through his tender immune system. It had been the first dose of coffee he had touched in four weeks because Ran had tarnished his caffeine allowance to once every two months.

Conan was unsure how long he had sat there, suffocating in his body’s petrol, but as he sipped away the last gossamer of his concoction, Edogawa was stuck feeling out of place. It was that feeling you get when you have lost something important, but can’t place what it is you’ve lost. The detective willed himself deeper into the cushioning of the plush couch seat and delved into his thoughts, feeling giddy and induced.

Conan stretched until his back rolled. One hand instinctually straightened his glasses, while the other absently felt around the folds of the leather couch for KID’s rose. Frowning when he couldn’t immediately locate it, the child shifted his body and put more effort into searching for it. Not finding it in his immediate vicinity, the frustrated faux child scanned the room from behind the glint of his glasses. Eventually, his agitated gaze fell upon the stiff gait of the agency door frame, and Conan recalled his abandonment of the efflorescence in favour of his coffee.

Conan slid off the couch driftingly and padded over towards the door frame. Conan didn’t know why he felt so disoriented, but he really wished he hadn’t given Sonoko the rose. The child resolved to get the flower back — though he didn’t quite understand why he wanted it so badly — and to escape his monachopsis.

Conan looked at his honey-pot watch and winced at the time. The Junior Detective League would swing around to pick him up soon, and he — Conan looked sheepishly over at his coffee cup — still had a few tasks to complete.

The child picked up his Susquehanna cup from the couch arm and trotted lightly over to the sink, where he thoroughly scrubbed it and removed any evidence of prior use. He placed it upside down in the lower cupboard he had taken it from and climbed higher on the kitchen island so he could pull the caffeinated filter bag from the sink. He wrapped it in a paper towel and binned it. Conan turned the tap on and moved it around in a zig-zag until all the darker liquid had been rounded down the drain.
Hopping down, Edogawa dried his hands on a disposable cloth and fleetingly ascended upstairs where he could change out of his chartreuse knickerbockers. He hesitated on a windbreaker before ultimately donning his familiar admiral suit top and grey shorts.

He stared at himself in the bathroom mirror, struck with onism as he fitted his tie around the collar of his white dress shirt, of which he had fitted his suspenders. He slipped his cement threes onto his socked feet and secured the shoelaces tight enough that they wouldn’t drift mid-kick. The grim-faced boy sucked his teeth. He couldn’t help the feeling that something would go wrong today. He tugged at his shoelaces one last time. Conan tended to be very unlucky.

It was when he was swaddling his belt around his waist that he heard it - a fast knock on the front door. Biting his lip as he fingered the buckle, Conan managed to shout, “coming!” In response to the three voices calling out his name.

They didn’t seem satisfied with his confirmation, however, as the hollering continued until Genta, Mitsuhiko, Ayumi and Ai spotted him descending the stairwell and approaching the door. He unlocked it with a little strain and pulled the rather heavy door open. Three of the assembled children barked out greetings as he stepped out to join them, his skateboard fitted under his arm. Haibara just offered him a smirk and she looked him up and down, observing his technological regalia. Conan grinned at the children until they lost interest in him and the pack began to inform him on how they would walk over to their destination instead of catch a ride in Agasa’s sun-baked buggy. Conan just shrugged along with them and fell into step with Haibara when the three children began to move forward.

Ai regarded him quietly and said, “my, aren’t we going out prepared today, Corpse Magnet®.”

Conan proceeded to side-eye her. Though disregarded by the sixteen-year-old rather fluidly, Mitsuhiko, ever tuned to Ai’s voice and snarky quips, twitched Conan’s elbow. “Why do you have your skateboard, Conan? We all agreed on Friday that we’d walk to and from the theme park, and it’s just a bother carrying it around everywhere, right?” Mitsuhiko didn’t intend to disrespect Conan by asking, he was merely curious. The thinly boy knew better than to question Edogawa, with all that his friend had accomplished.

Genta didn’t exactly understand that, however. “He’s probably just too lazy to walk,” the stout second-grader guessed, scratching his chin considerably and looking to the sky. Conan just gave the tanner child a deadpanned glare.

“Oi, oi…”

Ayumi giggled airily as she fastened her pace. She walked slightly in front of the group and began whistling a summery tune. “Maybe Conan had a nightmare,” she said seriously, dropping her serenade for the moment. “Whenever I have nightmares sometimes I get all nervous like it’ll come true.” The young girl chewed her nail thoughtfully. “Which leads me to becoming paranoid and jumpy.” She looked proud enough at her deduction that Conan barely had the heart to tsk.

“You’re right!” Piped Mitsuhiko. “And Conan can get really paranoid.” Conan squarked. “Whenever I so much as look at him during math class I observe that he gets all stiff and begins looking around for the culprit. Its almost like he’s some fugitive on the run.” Mitsuhiko held his finger in the air like a conductor. The other children stared at him.

Haibara internally laughed and Conan internally cried. Why was he always the victim of speculation?

“Or maybe a victim of domestic violence?” Genta added. He felt left out.
Haibara’s smile fell and Ayumi gasped, dismayed. “How do you even know what d- domestic violence is?” Was all Mitsuhiko could say as Genta battled the combined glares of Ai and Ayumi.

Genta husked. “I done my poster on homelessness in Japan,” the large boy argued. He said seriously, “and domestic violence is the number-one reason for homelessness!” Mitsuhiko hummed in thought, seemingly accepting the answer. Conan just furrowed his brows and side stepped a tap protruding from the pavement.

“So how am I a domestic violence victim?” He cautioned. Haibara began to disconnect herself from the conversation, and she looked away distantly. It made Conan’s stomach churn unpleasantly; Haibara was like a sister to him, despite how she threatened calling an exorcist on him three times even though she was a poltergeist herself. “N-never mind. I don’t want to know.” He also didn’t want the flock to begin theorising and asking questions about his history.

The children were not easily dissuaded, however. “It’s almost like you’re trying to avoid talking about your history, Conan,” Ayumi pouted and scuttled back towards him. “Tell us some more about America!” Both Mitsuhiko and Genta brightened considerably. The pair chanted their approval. “Unless . . . It brings back bad memories!” Ayumi fraughted, worried she could hurt Conan’s feelings. Conan being mad at her sounded like a nightmare.

She had seen him mad before. It was like he aged ten years.

Conan just massaged his temples. “America was like here, I guess. Just change the sort of songs they play on the radio, make everyone judgemental and remove half their clothing.” The Detective Boys had varying reactions. Haibara glared at him, but he was unsure why.

“Well . . . Did you guys see that ad this morning?” Genta tried, mind wondering as he smiled largely. “That knew solder action figure! You can even bend his knees completely!” Mitsuhiko gasped.

“A figure that’s fully articulated? I didn’t see that on the tv!” The three children continued to gush while Conan and Ai proceeded to discuss worldly topics and the fundamentals of extension physics.

With Tropical Land quite the distance away still, Conan found his mind distancing itself from convoluted terrorist bombing threats in the West and finding’s KID’s familiar enigma to be more endearing. With how many murders he encountered, Conan didn’t need a reminder on how bleak the world could be — something that was evoked the longer he talked with Haibara.

He hoped KID’s next heist was soon.

After a long hour of trekking through urban Beika, the group of children had covered more than three quarters of the walking distance it took to arrive at their destination. The uneasy feeling sloshing in his stomach twisted like a knife as another twenty minutes presented a glimpse of Tropical land’s main entrance.

It was the theme park that ruined his life, he mused. Today would be the first time he returned there after his freak accident, and Conan could not be more displeased with that fact. The faux child almost felt sick and subconsciously clawed his stomach. Haibara shot him an analysing look, her own disfigured attempt at concern, and wondered if bringing Conan to the amusement park was as funny as it seemed when the Detective League had first proposed the idea.

She wasn’t the only one to have noticed, apparently. “H-hey . . . Conan?” It was Ayumi’s voice that sounded Haibara’s worry. “Are you ok? You aren’t afraid of rides, are you?” It was an impossibility, and they all knew it. With everything that Conan had done, rushed into and experienced, there was no way he could be scared of an entertainment convention. This time, Conan didn’t scoff at the little
girl’s question.

He grit his teeth together one last time and glared at the gathering of people swarming around Tropical Land’s grassy entrance. “No, I’m not. C’mon, let’s go.” The brunette walked a little ahead of his group, a blazing determination in his eyes. He wondered if his bad feeling was nothing more then nerves. Conan wasn’t post-traumatic or anything — the thought or sight of Tropical Land seldom sent him aquiver with fear. He just knew that something was going to go wrong. What it was, he could barely deduce, but something was bound to go awry. He was very, very unlucky.

“Well . . . Can we go get some eel? All that walking has made me so hungry I could eat Conan’s fear and still not be full!”

“Genta!”

“But we still need to line up for our tickets!”

“Only you, Mitsuhiko. We’ve snuck into Tropical Land before, why can’t we do it again?”

“You what?”

“Guy’s look, an apple sticker!”

“Hey, look, that guy has red hair!”

“Haha, cool!”

It was going to be a long day.

2

It was going to be a long day.

Of course, Hakuba had realised that fact long before he, Keiko, Aoko and Kuroba had boarded the train (after dealing with the horror of a misread timetable), but actually living through Kaito singing the entire Bohemian Rhapsody and making kazoo noises while the dwindling occupants of their railcar glared at them was far more deplorable than Hakuba ever could of imagined. About three of them already excused themselves and hadn’t retuned for the last forty minutes.

Aoko sobbed into her hands. “Jesus Christ, please stop, Kaito!” It seemed even the valiant knight Aoko Nakamori had been felled into submission by the young magician’s voice alone. For the first time in an hour, Kaito stopped. Aoko peeked at him from where she had hidden her face in her hands.

The magician leapt over to her buoyantly. “You know you love me,” he yipped as he balanced on her shoulders. His voice was barely scratchy from his prolonged vocalism. “And I know you love my singing as well.”

Aoko proceeded to make an aggravated fox noise as she swiped for his ankles awkwardly. The magician back flipped off her, stunning the railcar’s un-high-school occupants with his acrobatics. Saguru wasn’t surprised — one had to be bendable and light to fly and leap across buildings in the dark of night.

The inspector’s daughter attempted to massage her shoulders. “Love your voice? Kaito, you either sang so horribly my ears began crying, or that wetness I can feel is blood!” She scrubbed her ears tiredly.
The thief shrugged noncommittally as he lilted over to his seat next to her, ignoring the way she flinched at his approach. “It isn’t that, dearest Aoko. I think the problem stems from you loving me too much.” He willed himself further into his plastic seat and nailed the permanent marker tag scribbled on the wall behind him. “You see,” he began factually, “the chemical formula for love describes dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin. An overdose of which would result in schizophrenia, insanity and extreme paranoia.” Everyone stared at him and no one moved.

How Kaito knew such a thing, Saguru didn’t know. To the blond detective’s immense surprise, Aoko actually looked thoughtful for a moment, and she took on a sad sort of feel.

She said, “that’s actually really sad,” and Kaito smiled tranquilly. “To know that one of man’s truest emotions can have such a violent outcome.” She sighed, looking at something by her feet. She twiddled them under her chair. “Just let that sink in and it makes life so much darker.”

Kuroba quietly offered her a prim, demure rose and she took it, smiling a little. Kaito really didn’t appreciate the mood change, but- “sometimes people’s outlook on life can seem colourless. For example, an animal’s intelligence is measured on how well they obey humans.” His smile took a bitter turn. “It’s the same with students. But then again, the world is a beautiful place.” Aoko’s eyes glittered with joy. She and Kaito shared a deep, hushed conversation, and Saguru really didn’t understand how an atmosphere could revert from fluffy to desultory in such a short amount of time. For Saguru and Keiko, an awkward quiet proceeded.

He leaned towards her after giving up on overhearing Aoko and Kaito’s quiet musings. He really could see why the two childhood friends were in fact friends. “Remind me again why Akako couldn’t attend?” He whispered out the side of his mouth.

Keiko followed suit and whispered, “she said she had some chanting to catch up on. I’m not sure what that means entirely, but if you want a tip-off, she kept mentioning the antichrist and something about thirty-seven minecraft tutorial handbooks.” Saguru nodded along. “She’s smokin’ hot, but sometimes she really scares me.”

Saguru chuckled mirthlessly. “Don’t say that to her face. You’d probably wake up with toady acne.” He was still working in his social skills. Keiko didn’t seem to mind, she just looked at him seriously. Her glasses glinted and her pigtails swayed.

“I did, once,” the geeky girl swallowed. “She told me she’d wear me to school the next morning if I ever said something like that again.” Keiko shrugged, looking rather dismissive. “I told her it was impossible to wear someone.”

Saguru choked. “What did she say to that?” Part of him was afraid of the answer.

Keiko looked down at her nails. “She asked me if I had seen Silence of the Lambs.”

It sounded, to Hakuba, like something Yoki would say. It was then that an interesting thought pricked at the edge of his tongue. “Keiko, you happen to be an avid KID fan, right?” Almost immediately she perked up.

“One of the biggest there is, I’m sure!” She turned back to Saguru from her nails. “KID is everything to me. I’ve been meaning to ask you, Hakuba, you’ve seen him up close, right? I will love you forever if you snap a picture of him next heist.” She squealed at such a high pitch it was almost inhuman.

Saguru licked his suddenly dry lips. “A- actually, I will, if you do something for me. Or, answer something for me, would be a better way of putting it.”
Keiko looked to him in pleasant surprise. “The great Saguru Hakuba looking for answers in a KID fan?” Not one to tease, Keiko smiled kindly. “Well, I’m no academic, but I’ll try to answer whatever you throw at me. I may have failed trigonometry twice, but I know almost everything about gems and criminal physiology.”

Saguru looked over at Aoko and Kaito as he said, “is the word Kidstorian familiar to you?” Keiko jolted upright like a startled cat and looked at him with a bewildered expression. Having the answer he needed, Saguru continued. “Or perhaps the name Yoki Sasha holds any weight to you?” Keiko pouted.

She twitched. “I have no idea how you know about the Kidstorians, Saguru. They are an elite guild that only the most literate of role-players or most avid of fans can infiltrate, but I have even less of a clue how you know about Yoki Sasha.”

Saguru shrugged.

“I had a run-in with her and she explained to me some things I’m curious about.”

Keiko looked around the railcar conspiringly. “Yes, I know her. She’s basically the president of the entire Kidstoric fandom. Heard that KID kissed her on the lips once. Some people say she’s the third cousin-twice-removed of KID’s assistant’s brother’s wife, others say she accidentally shot herself in the foot when she was seven, but I don’t like her that much.”

Saguru cocked a brow at her, to which she responded, “she’s a colossal bitch, and she’s anti-KIDCon.”

*What.*

Keiko took the unbelieving look on Saguru’s face the wrong way. “I know right? They are so cute together! Wanna hear my headcanon?”

*No, no no.*

Keiko took in a large breath and became businesslike. “I love the ship because of the forbidden romance aspect of it. The age gap, the career choice, the law. Conan would have to sneak out often to go to the KID heists because they are late and his legal guardians wouldn’t let him attend. But he had to go. He didn’t know why, but he had to go, so he does, and he thinks it’s because KID is the only one that treats him as an equal, but in reality, it’s because he and KID are soulmates!”

Saguru wanted to cry. *No no nonono no.*

“Another of my alternate universes is where Conan just has a kiddy crush on KID, and, and yeah.” Keiko scooped up air. “And yeah,” she repeated.

The small girl began to chuckle. “This one time there was a whole feud on this online chat room called the Boatshed about KIDCon, and I got into this whole fight with Yoki Sasha and the co-admin, and it was sooo funny. I swear I made her doubt KID or something.”

Oh my god, I’ll never look at Keiko the same way again, Saguru internally whimpered, fingers unfeeling as they fisted his plaid sweater and eyes unseeing as Keiko bobbed in and out of focus. *It was a small world.*

Keiko leaned in towards him, close enough to Saguru that her face looked weird. She questioned, “why?” And she took out her phone from her pocket. “Do you want ins?” *Oh my god-*
"I want ins!" Kaito barged into the conversation and Saguru twitched. The young magician was standing in front of their chairs, swaying like fish ferns as the train slid along the tracks. Keiko grinned at him. "So, what are you giving out ins for?" Keiko stopped grinning at him.

"Well," she began, and when the train went through a lull Aoko got up from her own seat and sat next to Saguru. The blond detective felt slightly caged in. "I was going to give Hakuba here the site link for the White Knight Kites so he could do a little investigating," she winked at him. Sandwiched between his two frail classmates, there was nothing he could do when Kaito wiggled his eyebrows and Keiko wiggled them back.

"My, Hakubastard, I didn’t think you liked the white," said Kaito silverly as he swayed over to sit in the handicapped seats. "Thought you were more interested in, say, law study, pottery, afternoon tea and red.” Saguru tried not to be offended, but -

"Red?" He questioned.

Kaito nodded seriously. "Yes, red. You know, isn’t that your favourite colour?" Saguru just gave him a disdainfully unappealing glare. Kaito physically drooped. “Don’t look at me like that, I thought it was your aesthetic. It is your hair colour after all.” Saguru flicked his fringe.

"While I appreciate your observations, Kuroba, I am blond. Strawberry blond at the most — but I am certainly not a red-head." And those were the words that resulted in Hakuba’s expertly dyed hair. Saguru was honestly surprised Kuroba hadn’t included intricate dinosaur imprints like last time or perhaps edible fake blood on the cuffs of his pants and sleeves.

The train ride was quickly descending into a living nightmare as Keiko proceeded to describe KIDCon to 1412’s greatest hater and his greatest non-Kidstoric fan.

Kaito had laughed and questioned why Saguru wanted to know about it.

Aoko was horrified, expressing her disapproval with an assortment of angry koala noises that could make a dying animal pause from its excruciatingly painful fate to blush. When she was calm enough to reclaim sentence and adapt to modern speaking patterns, her argument was along the lines of, “I think little Conan is as cute as the next person, but if KID so much as looked at him in any way a little more admiring then that, I’d pull out his spine like a drawer and replace it with one of Vlad III’s palisades.” Saguru didn’t miss how unsafe Kaito looked like he felt. “The fact that there are people who wouldn’t do the same,” she glared at Keiko, who looked sheepish, “-worries me.”

Keiko tried to justify herself by stating that it was a fictional paring, but Aoko would always counter. The whole time, Saguru would look hardly at Kuroba, who looked back at him with a mix of confusion and smugness. Time seemed to pass faster than before as it felt like only ten minutes had passed until the train finally pulled into Beika’s station.

The train lurched to a stop and the doors whistled open futuristically. It was a hassle to squeeze out of the railcar with the droves of passengers fighting the currents to get in, and amongst the bustle Keiko whispered to him, “in your free time, visit the WKKs at www.WhitwKnightKites.com. White is spelt with a double-u instead of the e so its W-H-I-T-W and create an account under the name ‘Werottl’. I’ll contact you and hook you up with some hot shota doujinshis. I know one called DoAoDo that I think you’ll enjoy, just don’t tell Aoko.”

Saguru didn’t know what a shota doujinshi was, but — “why is white spelled with a double-u?” He questioned as he shouldered past a medical student.

Keiko manoeuvred around a pregnant women still blanketed in her comforter with surprising
capability. “Yoki set the website link when she was twelve and hasn’t been able to fix it since. Something about WKK’s alternative Premium only accepting Canadian money.”

“You know,” said Hakuba as he found he didn’t need to push past as many people as Keiko, Kuroba and Aoko. According to all the stares directed his way, it was probably because of his offending hair colour. Looking at it directly probably had the same effect as staring at a laser-pointer pen. “The more you say ‘WKK’ the more you sound like you’re in a cult.” People were beginning to avoid Keiko as well.

When the group of four had finally found refuge under a small tin shelter off to the left of the train station, they were lucky to have only a few bruises and scratches. Hakuba was the most uninjured out of all of them, much to Kaito’s frustration. Aoko was flattening her skirt and pulling her oversized jumper lower, Keiko was grooming her pantalooned beach pants, Kaito was freeing two doves from his blue Archie Andrews varsity jacket and Saguru was looking over a map he had plucked from one of the tourist stands. Kaito watched him over his shoulder, trying to recall his fifth grade geography and failing.

“Oh,” began Saguru and his group turned their attention to him obediently. “We should be over here,” he pointed to an indistinguishable grey rectangle toward the lower left of the map, “which means it’ll be a roughly twenty, twenty-three minute drive to Tropical Land, which is located here.” Saguru pointed to a large, disfigured mass of strangely proportioned orange shapes marked with ‘熱帯地方’.

Aoko frowned as she eyed the tangerine squares judgmentally. “Are you sure that’s right? 熱帯地方 is read ‘Tropical Region’ not Tropical Land.”

Kuroba snatched the map away from Saguru, who jumped in surprise. “Yeah,” the magician agreed, looking at the map seriously. “Look, it says here Poirot Café is spelt ’バターショップ’. That’s not right. It’s like this has been run through google translator four times then back to Japanese.”

Keiko snatched the map away from Kaito. “Look! That ones in Spanish!” And finally Saguru snatched the map back away from Keiko just as Aoko was reaching for it. He stuffed it into his pocket and sighed tiredly.

“Ok, forget the map. We’ll just tell the taxi where we want to go and he’ll take us. Who bought the transport change? And if no one has, one of you will just have to tap into your spendings because I payed for us all last time with my savings. My savings.” Saguru glared a little at The gathered teens, who at least looked sheepish.

“What’s the lack of one months interest if your family is loaded,” Kaito scoffed as he dug through his pockets. “I probably have something in here, just let me check—“ he pulled an assortment of questionable things from his pockets until he pulled out a thin, yellow card and cried out with pride. “See, I do have something. Do you think a taxi driver would accept an Australian Go-Card on behalf of five people?”

“Go-Cards are for busses.” Saguru observed.

“Wow, we sure are diverse today,” Keiko commented as she tried to read the writing on Kuroba’s Go-Card. Aoko roughly grabbed the card and angled it more towards her and Keiko, much to the magician’s protesting facial expression.

“Geez,” The slim brunette clicked, “English letters are so weird.”

“Hey!” A foreign voice called. It was scratchy, unrecognised by the four of them and if it were an
object, Saguru was sure it would have been smelly. “Do you kids need a ride?” Saguru and company turned to see that, however close, the voice was not aimed at them. Instead, they saw a crumpled, forty-or-so aged man in an old red Holden. The paint on the car’s bumper and muzzle had been baked off, and the windows had evidence of recently washed-off bat faeces. The man looked to be American, and he spoke with what sounded to be a forced Jamaican accent. He hastily rolled down his window and leaned out, offering a group of five grade-niners a pleasant grin. He smiled with horsey teeth at the gathering of two boys and three girls.

One of the girls, a blonde dressed a white *The People Vs* tank top and belted boyfriend jeans, made an amused sort of scoff. Her other friend, a black-haired girl with green eyes and a Wrangler jumpsuit flipped the man off. There was boy next to her who stood with his burly arm around her waist and lines shaved in his eyebrows — he scowled at the man and made an offhand comment about the spelling of the word therapist, to which all the kids laughed. All the while, the man just sat there in his small Holden and kept up the same smile. He didn’t even flinch, and Kaito couldn’t tell if this guy just had an impregnable poker face or just didn’t care. If this man happened to be the serial killer his vibe gave off, than he honestly had reason not to care.

The addressed children directed their attention away from the man, though one of the boys — he was wearing a white Thrasher shirt, — drew out a cigarette and lit it with his own lighter. Saguru spied two cans of black tagging spray paint dangling like old balloons in his camo South Central bindle, and considered introducing himself as a detective to scare them off, but seeing how they treated the edgy stranger, they likely wouldn’t be held down by an unbadged amateur.

The kids began over toward the timetable post, still chatting amicably between each other, and the man continued to sit still in his car until he was sure they weren’t going to change their minds. His friendly smile barely faltered as he glanced searchingly around the train station. His eyes met Saguru’s. The stranger regarded them, and in the same slurry voice he said, “Hey kids, you want a ride?”

3

Saguru ended up sitting in the front, next to the stranger, — whose name they found out was Slim. He hadn’t given them a last name, and from what Kaito could see, he had all the tags cut off from his visor and bottle green top. While Keiko and Aoko seemed understandably afraid of him, and various road cops had given them the sort of *are-you-kidnap-victims* look Saguru would give sometimes, Kaito was still making colloquial conversation. Something about bringing fourth a sense of humanity in their might-be-murder that Saguru partly agreed with, partly didn’t want to think about.

“So then,” said Kaito, making motions with his arms that Slim and Saguru saw through the front mirror, “I showed Aoko here why, even if her father worked every day all the time and Keiko was being a not-the-best-friend she usually is, life was still valuable and important and that you can always turn a new leaf and you shouldn’t kill people,” the story he was telling was only partly true, but Slim didn’t know that. Kaito waited a moment to see if Slim was still listening to him and not perhaps imagining his voice twisted with agony as he died slowly, and said, “and so, Aoko didn’t end up driving out south and stabbing Keiko while they carpooled to my birthday the next night. Instead they sung happy Christmas carols and engaged in deeply felt philosophical discussions.”

Slim nodded along interestedly as he swerved around a corner, rolling his dark leather steering wheel with ease beyond what his droopy shoulders should be able to accomplish. He stole a glance at Kaito when they were back on straighter roads. “What did they talk about?” He cooed, sounding far too interested.

Kaito’s smile wobbled. “A-ah, well, why don’t you go ahead and tell him, Ahoko?” She glared at
him, before plastering on a shifting smile.

“We-well,” the small girl began, holding onto her Quasia Tote bag like it was a lifeline. “We talked about the impact violence has on humans, and how it’s a bad impact so you shouldn’t do it, and, uh, what else did we talk about, Keiko?”

The pigtailed girl jumped, as if she didn’t expect to be addressed. “A-ah, uh, uh uhuhuh, didn’t we talk about how the world is so dangerous now that you can’t even sit in the front seat of a taxi? And everyone always takes spoon fulls of vegemite when they try eat it for social media uploads and all the Australians out there send for them to be drowned in strawberry milk? And how car-murders are bad, because you should totally murder someone at night in their own homes?”

“Keiko, what the hell?”

Slim nodded understandingly. “I see, those are some intriguing things you kittens come up with,” Saguru shuttered. “And I agree with your last point. Murdering someone in a car would be anticlimactic because the chances one has of dying in a car anyway are extremely great. If I were to kill someone, it would be in the safety and security of their own homes. What an interesting vision that puts in my head. Thank you, Keiko. I never considered that before you told me.”

Aoko and Kaito looked like they were about to strangle Keiko. “So,” Slim continued. “I take it you puppies aren’t from around here?” Kuroba visually flinched.

“You can’t call us kittens then call us puppies!”

“Ah. You’re from Ekoda.”

“Aoko and Kaito looked like they were about to strangle Keiko. “So,” Slim continued. “I take it you puppies aren’t from around here?” Kuroba visually flinched. You can’t call us kittens then call us puppies! “Ah. You’re from Ekoda.”

“What gave it away?” Saguru asked, turning his head to look at the side of Slim’s face.

Slim laughed. “Funny you ask. I recognise you, I do. Your name is Saguru Hakuba.” The blond detective blinked, taken aback, and he opened his mouth to ask — “you’re surprised? You shouldn’t be. You were in the news quite a lot. Why I’ll always remember you,” he quietened. “You put my brother behind bars.” Hakuba’s eyes widened and he looked at Slim with a concentration he hadn’t before.

Slim sighed. “I’m not bitter. My brother killed somebody, and with the way he descended into malice and hate, I’m sure you’d be worrying I may have ill intentions, but I don’t.” Saguru smiled slightly. As a detective, he should have known not to judge a book by its cover. Perhaps this man only wanted to help out. The man looked over at the red-haired-blond and then at Kaito. “How could I ever kill such good lookin’ chaps?”

Slim slapped Saguru’s thigh in jest and turned his attention over to the road. Shakily, Hakuba flipped open his pocket watch and found that they still had 12.37 minutes left.

“So . . .” Said Kaito, who was twiddling his thumbs. “Have I ever told the story of this girl I know called Jeiko and how she had a crush on this kid three grades below her called Edonan Cogawa, and how that was bad and she was much happier after she stopped having a crush on him and began to like people her own age?”

4

“Oh, what the hell?”

“Ugh, shit, I think I just went blind. I literally can’t see through my left eye anymore -“

“Wow, mommy, look! It’s Ariel! Can we go say hi?”

“Look at that dude’s hair colour! It’s like the K-Mart version of yours, Jouline!”
“Ew . . .”

“You see that, Charles, over there? That’s the hair colour people take when they lose themselves in 2013 ABC3 network broadcasts. Never do that, son.”

“That dude looks like he crawled out of a SJW tumblr blog,“

“Haha cool, look at this guy there! He looks like some metalhead that escaped the nineties!”

“Or, you know, the early 2000s.”

“The early 2000s?”

“Everyone knows the nineties didn’t end until 2004.”

“Hey, look, that guy has red hair!”

“Haha, cool!”

Saguru wanted to curl up and starve.

Kuroba was cackling like Akako when she really got on about the fundamentals of ouija boards, Keiko was occupied by her Wattpad feed and Aoko was trying to hide. Saguru ran a hand through his fringe self consciously, unappreciative when the entire ticket line seemed to follow his movement. Having blond hair in the midst of modern Japan was diverse enough, but now he looked like a lost cosplayer.

As a coping mechanism, Saguru proceeded to whelve(*) away his surroundings and tried to walk discretely behind Keiko.

(*) in the sense that he was physiologically tormented enough he developed a combatant solution to Kuroba’s hobbies.

Kaito said, pace accelerating into a skip, “has everyone got the V.I.P tickets I provided you with?”

Read: scammed from a virus-afflicted online source. Kuroba pulled from his pocket a Tropical Land Mega-Pass and he waved it around for the gathering crowds to see. Many eyed it with envy, and Saguru spied a couple park-goers looking ready to snatch it out of the air. Aoko and Keiko, who had finally pocketed her phone, waved their own tickets around. Hakuba didn’t show his ticket, but he felt it in in jeans next to his pocket watch and nodded mutely to Kaito.

Kuroba frowned thoughtfully at him. “You know, Hakuba, at first red really seemed to suit you. It matched your soul. But I jumped through various alight hoops to get these V.I.P passes and it won’t do if you’re miserable all day. Theme-parks are like magic shows in the sense that they attempt daring, exhilarating things for the enjoyment of others.” Saguru felt his heart lift with hope.

“Are you implying that you’ll change my hair back?” Kaito didn’t answer, but the flick of his wrist bought about a dark blue Baylands trucker hat. The young magician forced it upon Saguru’s head and twisted it around until it was backwards. He pet Saguru on the head twice before he stuffed his hands in his varsity jacket and began to canter towards the V.I.P line, which only consisted of one well-dressed family and two middle-aged men.

The group of four lined up rather hastily, just in time to get a spot in front of three middle-school girls. Kaito laughed meanly at his success until Aoko slapped him over the head and he was reduced to a whimpering mess of wound-licking and dramatic sobbing. At least the middle-school girls laughed and excused them. Saguru offered them the place in front of them, to which they happily agreed. Kuroba glared gas-fire at him.
They found that, upon entering, Tropical Land was rather empty. Perhaps this was because the majority of the theme-park’s goers were still lined up out the front and waiting for their tickets, but whatever the case Aoko was determined to act upon the opportunity. They lined up on what Kaito assured was the most popular ride at the time. The cue to get on it was, luckily, half its normal size. As Keiko and Aoko watched Kuroba materialise and shot-gun a glass soda can, Hakuba look his time to quietly review the ride cue’s occupants.

There was a woman just ahead of them with a navy CI Adicolour backpack, and according to her all-black and orange outfit, the must have been a worker for the filming studio just a few blocks west of Tropical Land. She was talking to a pair of men lined in front of her; they too had the black and orange clothing. If he looked to the left, there was a spillage of children, about McDonalds-work-age. He noted with some surprise that he had seen them around Ekoda-High. They were either in their second or first year of high school, maybe a mix of both. With little hesitance, Saguru recalled them being brats to Keiko. He frowned and moved on.

Someone tapped his shoulder. He turned around and levelled the woman that touched him bluntly. She was a business woman of high stature, or at least high enough that she shouldn’t be at a theme park or in a dirty, grimy roller-coaster cue — he was unsure if she would even be able to sit in that tight skirt of hers. He deduced she was one of the high workers at the theme park. If that was so, perhaps she wanted a statement or review.

“Hello. I’m sorry to bother you, but I’m Masai Yoshi, manager of one of this park’s leading sponsors. I’m here on business to collect your statement on the quality of the park,” the lady said in a mellifluous voice. Saguru blinked at her, startled. Masai granted him a sweet, close-lipped smile that suggested she was straining to keep up a pokerface. “I don’t mean to be impersonal or come off as blunt, but would you happen to be Saguru Hakuba?” Despite her fluid Japanese, she had an American appearance that clashed with her accent. It was an odd sound — like Osakan starved off from it’s drawl. “The English detective, I presume?”

Saguru nodded, a little surprised that someone of her stature would be approaching him. “A-ah, yes. That would be me. It’s nice to meet you, Masai Yoshi.”

She didn’t smile. “I see,” was all she uttered, holding her case closer to her side. “I see,” She repeated, and with a last nod at him and at his friends, who were looking at her curiously, she excused herself.

Masai trundled away as fast as she could with he skirt banding her thighs together. She kept her face carefully straight and unsettling, and perhaps her stony pokerface was what attracted the attention of Kaito and a few unfortunate onlookers unlucky enough to be in her way. As she weaved through the crowds expertly, Kuroba and Hakuba watched after her. Eventually the pair lost her in the entanglement of the fattening crowds.

The slim woman continued rather aimlessly through the theme park, smiling presentably at tourists and checking her watch almost impulsively. A nervous twitch, one would have realised upon looking at her closely, would be her fondling of her Bandwagon Syrup Tort le specs, or how her watched hand stroked the corn silk of her vest. She held the case tight enough that she bruised her hand.

With a last look around her shoulder, Masai slipped into a darkened ally. She hadn’t seen anyone, but she still jumped as a soccer ball careened past the backstreet mouth. She twitched with indecision for a split moment, torn between hurrying faster into the backstreet or retreating from her path. She went with the latter.

Masai never saw the piercing blue eyes that followed that soccer ball into the backstreet, didn’t see
them narrowing. She didn’t see them even when they followed her. She didn’t hear the lighter footsteps as she crept into a small staff room behind the Jumba Coasta. She didn’t comprehend someone listening as she revealed she had successfully placed the bomb upon the British superintendent’s son, and that he would die within the next half-hour. She never knew what a grave mistake she had made.

Conan, back pressed against the verdigris of the staff room’s concrete walls, turned away and watched from far down on the ground as the Spooky Coaster’s latest ride was pitched upwards jerkily — in the second row from the front sat Saguru Hakuba, hissing as Kaito behind him threatened to undo his seatbelt.

Conan almost jolted as the wheeze of the staff room’s door sounded. He waited until he could see her step curtly down the small stairwell, long nails sliding along the support bars. In a ritual he had done what seemed like a thousand times, Conan positioned the soccer ball he had chased into the backstreet in front of his shoes. He leaned down until his formal suit wings scraped the uncut grass of the menagerie he hid behind and flipped the nob on the side of his shoe. He set the pressure low enough that his shoe only buzzed and it didn’t glow too brightly. For all she had attempted that day, this woman he followed wasn’t wearing any protection, nor did she have any shielding muscle mass. He didn’t want to break her neck or give her a haemorrhage.

He waited like a panther in the Amazon, and once his prey had stepped in the correct spot, he struck. With an under-breathed grunt, Conan launched his soccer ball at the side of her face. He stumbled back a small way to keep his balance, though it took little effort. Upon contact, the woman lunched dreadfully and a quick shriek escaped her teeth before they clacked together over her tongue. Her legs were quick to give out, and despite there being a second culprit inside the staff room, Conan found himself rushing to assess her injuries. She had blood trickling insidiously behind her thin lips from where she bit either her tongue or cheek, and Conan hastily tilted her head forwards so she wouldn’t choke. He left her examination at that, not bothering to gather his soccer ball, which was now smeared with traces of blood and rolling away from the scene.

The man who had been previously inside the staff room stumbled out, shouting frightfully and swinging around his gun. Conan’s first examination of it concluded it was a short range weapon with a fairly large kick, an update on the types most usually kept in American homes for self-defence — most likely it was an .45 handgun. The man himself had a handsome face and blond hair that reached just above his shoulders in a middle parting. He found what looked like his co-worker’s broken face and the few seconds he stared at her was enough for Conan to produce another ball.

The platinum blond swerved around to face Edogawa threateningly, firing a shot at the first chance he got and stepping back at the initial kick of his weapon. Conan felt the grass and vegetation by his left leg explode before he heard the round fire, and while the friction singed his leg he was able to tumble away in time to avoid the second shot, one that imbedded itself in the brick of the staff room wall behind his chest. Conan was barely able to search for his soccer ball when the third bullet was shot. He at first felt an odd coolness numbing his right arm, before it flared and the child comprehended the open wound now burning on his side. He yelled out, clutching his arm and doubling over. He hoped the Detective League didn’t hear the shots and scramble to investigate — he hoped Haibara herded them away at the first sign of danger. He hoped she looked after his skateboard.

The child groaned as he felt a heavy weight encounter his chest, unfurling him and pinning him to the ground. Conan hissed and gripped his right arm, but his blue eyes found the man’s chartreuse ones. The man’s face was coloured with outrage, and while he opened his mouth to say something three times, he produced no words. The man just kept looking over to the unconscious woman with a grim look. “What did you do to her, you little fucker?” He had an acerbic voice.
Conan welled crocodile tears in his eyes, ones that weren’t hard to produce with the terrible pain in his right side. “I-I-I- it was an accident, honest! I just wanted to play soccer away from everyone else!” The man spat sea foam at him like a rabid animal before he licked his lips and looked over Conan’s prone form. With one last dazed glare at the female unconscious a few feet from their grapple, he adopted a harsh expression and hunched down. His gun wasn’t shaking in his hand despite his unsteady expression.

“M’sorry kid, but I need to scram, and you can’t live to tell this tale.” Of course, Conan wished to say, because you just fired three distinguishing gunshots behind a theme-park ride in a crowded tourist attraction. The man, aware of his grave mistake, cocked his gun and said, “What’s the time?”

Conan had an idea. When the child didn’t immediately answer, however, the man shoved the barrel of the gun into Conan’s throat threateningly. “Check ya fuckin watch, ya prick!” How did this man even expect a second-grader to know how to read clock-based watches? Many children just wore them to seem smart.

Conan bought his watch in front of him and, under a veil of what appeared to be a child attempting to distinguish between the short-hand and the big-hand, Edogawa flipped up the aimer and shot fourth a dart into the man’s general facial direction. For a second he prickled, the hairs on the back of his neck raising, and then he swayed, and Conan used his bloodied but uninjured hand to direct the muzzle of the gun away from his neck in case the man’s hand muscles spasmed. Conan had found some people reacted to the drug differently. Conan couldn’t help his cry of pain when the man fell onto him, not able to prepare in time for the pressure applied to his right side.

Gritting his teeth to starve off the pain, Conan wriggled until his arms were against the man’s chest and able to dislodge the dead weight. He crawled on his stomach until he gathered the strength to pull himself to his knees. The child immediately clutched his arm and eyed the blood-sponged dirt left in his wake.

Conan moved his hand away, uncaring of the blood embrocation on his hands and twisted his body awkwardly so he could determine the severity of his imbroglio. He found that while there was a large red gash and the skin around it was ravelled like burnt lips, there was no bullet lodged in his arm. His wound was the result of a bullet close enough to deal far more damage then a graze, but not intimate enough to get stuck in him. Edogawa grit his teeth at the rate he was losing blood, and scrambled toward the man.

Conan took hold of his attacker’s Critical Slide Society bandana — it was thin and likely a fake print, but the increased blood flow down his side reminded him he wasn’t in the position to be picky. It came loose from the man’s neck after the third tug, and Conan wasted no time in imbuing it around his upper arm. It was uncomfortable against his bicep, but Conan ignored both that and the discomfort of the wound’s coverage by distracting himself with the handgun.

He threw his weight towards it and gathered it in his hands, not bothering to switch the safety off as he twirled it around frantically, searching for any suicide bombs or dangerous modifications. It wasn’t programmed with hand recognition, had three bullets left and had a Nickelback sticker on its side. Conan groaned and switched the safety on as he tucked it behind his jacket and struggled to his feet. He looked hurriedly over toward the Spooky Coaster and felt his lungs jump up to his throat when he glanced at his watch — he had nine minutes to find Hakuba in a theme park before the bomb was detonated.

“Shit!” He cried as he steadied himself and propelled off the back of his shoes, tearing out from the ally way. The front of the Jumba Coasta was swollen with people, alarmed and curious about the three loud bangs. Conan could understand — they probably assumed the ride was malfunctioning
and the average person wasn’t familiar with gunshots. It only intensified his plight, however. There were too many people, and Conan could only hope Hakuba Saguru was in the crowd.

“H-hey! Boy, are you ok?” Conan swerved to his side to see a girl gasping at his bloody face and shoulder. “Someone help! There’s an injured kid here!” She was only young, perhaps in middle school. The crowds turned at her distressed cry and bustled, some people opening phones while others, mostly parents, stepped towards him. Conan winced and glared around him, overwhelmed.

One man reached out to his shoulder, and Conan bit his lip. The child flinched away, winced internally, and reached inside his jacket. The man shouted and stumbled back as the little detective pulled out the A .45 handgun. There was only one thing that would flush out the crowds and leave behind a certain blond detective.

With a grunt, Conan shifted off the safety and fired two shots directly into the air, the resulting kick sending him to the ground once more. He hit his head on the concrete and stifled another cry, the screaming and shouting of the crowds sending him into a confused haze for a moment.

Conan shouldered the concrete pavement and pulled himself up to a kneeling position, and when he looked up, his eyes locked with Saguru’s. The British detective was staring at him, shocked and confused as he handed Conan’s gun to a brunette behind him. Conan almost laughed at the detective’s offending hair colour.

Saguru shuttered and grabbed the small detective’s unhurt shoulder to stabilise him. Slack-jawed an bewildered, he said, “C-Conan . . !”

The child frantically analysed Hakuba, tapping into his glasses in a ritual the brunette behind Saguru seemed to understand. Hakuba looked taken aback as Conan’s lens flickered until it was tinted bottle blue. Conan’s dark gaze immediately zipped to Saguru’s shoulder, zoning in on it, and under the feign of hugging the detective, Conan frantically searched the Londoner’s coat for any bugs or imperfections in the stitching. He nor Saguru saw the brunette frown disapprovingly at the exchange.

Saguru just awkwardly patted the child’s back, wracking his mind for an explanation.

Conan found the bug shoved between the lacing of Hakuba’s sleeve and tugged it out, shoving himself forcefully from Saguru’s embrace. Conan kneeled back, almost stumbling, and produced a soccer ball from his belt. Saguru fell back with surprise on his face and the brunette’s eyes widened as Conan stuck the bug onto the soccer ball. With a strained grunt the boy propelled the sporting implement into the air with an aggressive power. The child glanced at his watch and fell back. The brunette caught him before his head could lull back onto the concrete.

He felt someone hugging him, a stranger, and while he usually didn’t appreciate the contact, his eyes were glued on the soccer ball as it exploded in a fiery balloon of gas far above the theme park. He wrapped his arms around the stranger’s neck and buried his head somewhere around the man’s trapezius, hoping he didn’t mind sweat and blood from a minor scalp wound. He heard voices, but it all seemed to be drowned out.

He could hear the embracing man whisper comforts in his ear as Kaito held him tight around his waist. It felt right. The hug felt right. His arm throbbed and the detective lost consciousness breathing in the scent of night jasmines.
Chapter End Notes

Yes, I spell colour with a u.
Givenchy

Chapter Summary

All alone. Whether you like it or not, alone is a feeling you’ll feel quite a lot.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1

Conan had never expected to live long. Constantly, his life was plagued with bad luck — terrorists, murderers, syndicates — and the faux-child found himself wondering on occasion if his existence could be explained either as a horror movie or a spy movie. He thought, perhaps, one day he simply wouldn’t be lucky enough to defuse the internal circuit formula of the next bomb he encountered, or the jealous ex-lover would be just agile enough to unzip his guts onto the ground. Next time the debris may be too unstable to hook onto his suspenders, and he would have inhaled water into his lungs too fast to be strong enough to move it. Perhaps instead of water there would be poison or ash. Perhaps the black organisation would catch up to him next week or next month. Shinichi had never expected to live past twenty-five — one of the main reasons he was so hesitant to confess to Ran. As Conan, he didn’t expect to live past fifteen.

Sometimes he would think about it, but it never scared him, not really. He had a long time to think about it, and to accept it. He had done plenty good in his short life, and he always hoped he would die for a good cause, too. He was afraid he would die as Conan for a while, but after mulling over it, Conan had realised that fretting over it wouldn’t change anything. He hoped someone would remember him as Shinichi. He hoped someone would solve his murder or defeat the Black Organisation in his wake.

He felt cold, and everything was quiet. Conan didn’t know if he was dying or in a state of sedative-induced lucidity, but it was a lonely feeling. And Conan wondered if this would be his death, in an unmarked hospital van surrounded by strangers in a body that wasn’t his. Shinichi sighed and wondered if anyone would mourn for Kudou Shinichi. He wondered if KID would perhaps lend some luck.

2

Saguru watched as Conan fingered Kuroba’s tarot cards, tracing the lead of the pictures printed upon them. Ran was barely a small way away from his hospital lounge, leaning against his side on her elbows and watching him with a fondly exasperated expression. The child met her gaze for a moment, and his hands stilled.

“So, have you sated your curiosity?” Kuroba asked, prodding Conan’s uninjured elbow. He grinned and said, “I told you they weren’t bugged!”

Edogawa twisted around to face him, breaking his tranced gaze with Ran while doing so. He looked at the quiver of tarot cards one last time before frowning and holding them out for Kaito to take. “I guess . . .” He said uncertainly, all the while looking at the teen magician with a searching expression. What the child was trying to see, Saguru could only guess.
Kuroba grinned whitely and took the cards from Conan. With a practiced flick of his wrist, the cards vanished. “Are you thirsty?” The magician was already reaching for the cup of orange juice concentrate by the lamp on Conan’s bedside table. “You sound a little hoarse.”

Conan swallowed and tasted that slick, medical feeling you get when you use the turbuhaler too much. “Actually, I wouldn’t mind something to drink.” was all he said. He eyed Kuroba carefully as the teen leaned over to the side and materialised a bendable red plastic cup, the type you would see often in movies. He poured a few millilitres of the orange juice concentrate into the bottom of the cup, and levelled the strong liquid out with thinning water. He used a spoon to mix in the concentrate with the water and allowed the solvent to seep for a moment.

Conan made moiety-reluctant grabby hands for the 89 fl oz jug of orange juice. When Kuroba handed it to him he leaned away slightly and eyed it conspiringly. He gave Kuroba one last long, deciding glare and took a quick sip of the concoction. After a moment, when Conan was sure he wouldn’t convulse and lurch into a spasm or reaction fit from poisoning, he took three more sips. Ran frowned at his behaviour and smiled apologetically at Saguru and Kaito.

“I’m really sorry for this, Conan just runs into a lot of trouble and he tends to be jumpy around strangers.” She was looking at Kuroba with a distant recognition. “You really look like someone he knows.” Saguru thought he saw a forlorn look flash through Conan’s mask for a moment. “Honestly,” she sighed and turned to Conan. She ran a hand through his chocolate locks and he preened at the attention. “It’s a surprise he’s not more affected by some of the things he sees.”

All the teenagers in the room looked at Conan with concern. The boy looked around at them from person to person. “I’m fine, Ran! Really!” Ran looked resigned and she reached forward. She gathered his smaller form against her collar bone and held him close to her for a second. “Ran . . .”

The high school student pulled away. “I’m going to refill the water jug, ok?” She pet his head. “The water is running out and getting warm.” She scrunched her nose up for a moment. “It’s pretty stuffy in here, too. I’ll ask if you’re allowed to walk. Maybe we can go to the park later. How does that sound?” Conan clicked happily and he waved her excitedly out the room. He took another thoughtful sip of of his orange juice before he set it down on the beside table next to Ran’s foldable chair.

“I guess I should be thanking you again, Conan,” Saguru began and he laced his hands together on his lap. “If you hadn’t done what you did, my day would have ended on a far more unpleasant note.” Conan twisted back around from where he strained to reach the bedside table and regarded Saguru guardedly. “I presume the first division didn’t give you much trouble when collecting your statement yesterday?” Hakuba was sure Inspector Meguire wouldn’t have stressed an injured child, but Saguru was rather desperate to avoid awkward silence.

Conan shook his head, bangs flowing as he did so. “Nope,” he chirped, but there was a hard look in his eyes. “The only thing they bugged me about was the whole gun thing. It was only the newer officers, though. Meguire worked around it because he already knows I can handle guns pretty well,” the little detective explained factually. He looked rather proud.

Kuroba leaned forward, eyes large. “What do you mean you know how to handle a gun well” Conan chewed his lip unhappily and turned to Kuroba slowly. He didn’t meet the teen’s indigo eyes, and Hakuba just couldn’t figure out why.

“Well, my f-father taught me when I was younger,” Conan tried vaguely, knowing full well any age younger then his own would barely be able to aim a gun. “In H-Hawaii, he taught me. Once Ran was held hostage and the bad man demanded a gun. Instead of Kogoro or Meguire, he made me bring it him because I was just a kid.” Edogawa was no longer looking at Kuroba. “So I shot Ran in
the leg. She became dead weight and the bad man let her go. Kogoro flipped the bad man over his
shoulder! It was so cool!”

Saguru choked, and his mind shuttered in a way that would have needed to be medically alarming.
We wasn’t able to see Kuroba’s reaction, but he assumed it would have been related to his poker
face. Distantly, Saguru could hear Conan laughing sheepishly and greeting Ran as she reentered.

The beautiful brunette had a bouquet of gerbera and tulips nestled in her arms. When Conan looked
at her questionably, she mouthed a word Saguru pretended to understand. “You have quite a lot
of well-wishers, Conan,” she smiled. She placed the gerbera and tulips next to Conan’s 89 fl oz orange
juice. “There are about three more bouquets down there delivered from around town. One was even
from Osaka.” Ran prodded the gerbera a little as to straighten them. The heat of the hospital was
wilting them quickly.

She had two jugs of water — according to the wetness on the outside of the jugs and the
condensation, one was warm and the other was cold. Ran moved to place the cold jug next to the
orange juice and bouquet, but found there was no room. With a slight frown marring her otherwise
unwrinkled skin, she passed the jug to Kuroba. The magician took it from her and placed it on the
bedside table closest to him numbly. Saguru turned to him a little, reading the creases written
between his eyebrows. Ran walked around the room slowly, pouring small but satiable amounts of
the water in the room-temperature jug into the pots, jars and bags of the other flowers accenting the
shelves, walls and cupboards of Conan’s hospital room. “Your room looks and smells beautiful,
Conan. It’s practically a forest now!”

Conan breathed in the fragrance of twenty or so flowers. Once Ran had circled the room over to
Kuroba’s side, she placed the warm-watered jug next to the cold one on the wooded bedside table
with a hollow clang. On her way back around to her seat next to Conan opposite Kuroba, she
adjusted some flowers to make sure they got at least a little sunlight.

When she sat down, Conan reached around her and pulled the newest bouquet into his lap, rather
awkwardly due to it’s much heavier weight and tufted canopy. Kaito reached over and steadied the
assemblage when it looked as if it were about to topple. Conan shot him a look that was a mix
between gratefulness and I-don’t-need-your-help that only a child could really get away with. For the
first time since Saguru and Kuroba had visited the little hero, Conan (accidentally) looked Kaito in
the face. Eyes as cold as the Iceland pools met indigo as velvety as a seraglio and as surreptitious as a
dream. It only took a split second for Conan to lose himself in the gaze of his doppelgänger. Saguru
frowned and looked between the two.

Kuroba smiled and Conan shook his head, pulling away with one last uncertain glance and feeling
up the plant. He stopped when his fingers ran against a small tag. He tugged it higher so he could get
a better look at it. Conan figured there must be something special about it if Ran brought it up instead
of the other bouquets she had mentioned. Besides that, she had placed it on his bedside table instead
of on one of the three shelves Conan could spy around the room.

From Papa and Uncle III.

Conan instantly scowled, something that Saguru, Ran and Kaito immediately picked up on. “Do you
recognise these people?” Ran prodded. Conan nodded as he rolled his eyes and wrestled the plants
back onto the bedside table to his right. Ran jumped to help him.

“It’s no one important,” Conan assured, all the while eyeing the various abundances of purple
carnations. Capriciousness, Conan deciphered. Conan felt the back of his neck make a strange,
piping feeling, and he turned to glare at whoever was staring at him. It was Kuroba again, but this
time he was scowling at his father and uncle’s flowers. Conan disregarded it, long since pegging the
teen to be the type no one could really understand.

The child sat back and pondered about his last encounter with Arsène Lupin III and Daisuke Jigen. He laughed internally, recalling the odd group’s antics and how Inspector Koichi Zenigata reminded him of Inspector Nakamori. Now that Conan really thought about it, there were many uncanny similarities between Lupin III and Kaitou KID — the child would have to bring it up next time he saw the white clad thief.

“Ku-Conan!”

Conan instantly drooped, eyeing the door to his hospital room sharply. In from the door stumbled a tan Osakan with a trucker hat and an unwashed accent. He had on a Stussy Choose Leisurewear Zip Thru that Kazuha probably picked out for him and he looked frantic enough for Conan to flinch a little. Ran beside him perked up instantaneously, a wide smile plastered upon her face at the older detective’s appearance. “Hattori!” She cried, standing to greet him.

Hattori looked as if he would stumble onto Conan’s hospital bed when he straightened out like a board and he stared comprehendingly at Hakuba. Behind his solidified form melted a pretty girl with sun-kissed skin and a ponytail pulled loosely back atop her head. She had baby hairs fluttering around her face, giving her a Baywatch babe look, and she was wearing a Superstar windbreaker reminiscent of Hattori’s, though hers was over-sized in the way it cascaded down past her back and hips. Ran, again, shouted, “Kazuha!” In greeting. The girls rushed towards each other in a friendly hug, smiles tugging at their cheeks.

“We made it here as fast as we could,” Kazuha assured as she gambled between her embrace with Ran and the floristry she was holding under her arms. It was a cardboard box of well-bled, fetching sunflowers that made Ran smile. Their stems were swaddled with a thick rubber band — attached to which was a small woody charm. “There was quite the hold up at the train station, so we hadda take a taxi all the way from Osaka. Heiji refused to wait fer the train stations to clear out.” She smiled a little, recalling Heiji’s beating concern for the little child they had all come to care for dearly. He would be a good father.

Ran cooed along with Kazuha. The martial artist offered to take the flowers away from Kazuha, something the dark-haired girl appreciated. “These sunflowers are really blossoming!” Ran yipped, balancing them out. “Must have been a good shop you got them from,” she observed as she carried them over to Conan’s bedside table. She forced room on the small desk, glaring at the orange juice.

Kazuha nodded and smiled at Conan when their eyes connected. He smiled back and she padded over to give him a long hug. When she pulled back she explained, “oh, it was a good florist indeed! Along the way to Beika the taxi driver told us of a family-owned farm we would be driving past. He said it was a secret jewel only those with wanderlust or a taxi driver like him knew about, and we stopped by to buy some of the sunflowers they were famous for.”

Ran gasped, eyes glittering. “That sounds wonderful!” The brunette poured some of the cold water into the stems of the sunflowers. Kazuha smiled enthusiastically.

She clapped her hands and said, “as soon as Conan is discharged, we should all go! There is a very small amount of people who know about it, and it’s very peaceful so I’m sure Conan wouldn’t get overwhelmed.” Ran hastily sat on Conan’s bed next to Kazuha and nodded along sunnily. “There are even some hammocks Conan could lie on if he felt sick and they ‘ave the most wonderful ice chocolates. Don’t they, Heiji?” She, Ran and Conan turned their attention to the tanned detective.

Said consultant looked like an offended cat. “Yer,” he choked out ambivalently. “Yer! What a’re yer doin’ ‘ere?” No-one noticed Conan’s eye twitched as if his brain had haemorrhaged.
Saguru stiffened and his eyes slitted in polite revulsion. “Heiji Hattori, what a surprise to see you here. While I don’t find myself in constant desire of your company, it is a pleasure to see your recklessness hasn’t got you thoroughly killed yet. Maybe next time?” When Heiji looked as if he would lunge and shrivel the blond Londoner’s jugular arteries, Conan saw it fit to intervene.

“Heiji!” He cried out with childish jubilation, attempting to hide the aggrieved accents folded discretely in the fabric of his voice. “I thought you weren’t going to come!” He made grabby motions with his hands, expectantly waiting for a hug. While humiliating, the befuddled, traumatised expression on the tanned detective’s face was highly amusing. If Conan had bothered to tilt his head to the side, even a little, he would have seen the darkening expression on Kuroba’s face.

Rather numbly, Heiji started forward and collected the child into his arms. Conan wrapped his arms around Hattori’s neck more roughly than he needed to and the Osakan distantly realised he had pins and needles bubbling up his hands. What The fuck.

Conan said, “if you so much as raise your voice an octave over mildly disgruntled, I will either die of a severely damaged brain or I will show you just how lacking your Talisman is of Christ,” quiet enough for no-one to overhear but loud enough for the threat to forever echo through Hattori’s aquiver mind.

The tanned detective pulled back, a wobbly smile on his face, and said, “so abou’ tha’ farm trip?”

Ran tapped her chin, dazed from her appreciation of Conan and Heiji’s exemplified brotherly love, when a thought occurred to her. “Well, actually, we might be able to go sooner than you might think.” With those words, all attention was turned to Ran. She smiled softly at them. “When I went to get some of Conan’s flowers from down stairs, I asked if I could take Conan for a walk out by the park. Just to get some fresh air.” The brunette bit her lip, a scintilla of concern visible through her happiness. “The farm might be a little way away but if it’s as peaceful as you say, Kazuha, I’m sure it’d be quite pleasant.” She ruffled Conan’s hair. The child looked like he wanted to swat her hand away — instead he just frowned and blushed a little.

Kazuha nodded, smiling a toothy grin. “Well tha’ settles it! We’re goin’ to tha’ farm!” The Osakan beauty turned to face Saguru and Kaito. “Do ya’ll wanna come? Tha more tha merrier’.” Kuroba, who Hattori stared openly at, jumped at the opportunity to spend more time with Conan.

“Yeah, sure! You know what, I really need a break from Ekoda,” and Saguru rolled his eyes, mouthing something Kaito guessed was about heists. The magician twitched waringly, and the blond shut his mouth abruptly. Conan eyed the pair’s interactions curiously, but then Kuroba smirked at him and winked. Conan glowered at him and promptly turned to Ran to complain about the weird magical man frightening him.

Hattori was still goggling at Kuroba. Wow, That guy looks like Kudo! Kaito flicked his hair and grinned smugly as Conan visually murdered him. Hattori looked away at Kazuha and Ran again. Well, not gonna ruin my day.

“Ran, he’s scaring me!” Conan complained, pointing at Kuroba. The magician promptly fell out of his seat. Instead of being a supporting mother-hen, Ran just laughed and pet his head again.

She laughed mellifluously, “oh Conan. Don’t worry Kuroba, he’s just being shy again. I bet he secretly wants to be friends with you. He acts like this with Hattori sometimes and they’re practically related!” Conan looked at her as if she had just told him to hold hands with Sonoko. Kuroba, however, made various happy dove noises and scooped Conan from the bed. While the magician was careful not to jostle the child’s wounds, Conan still cried out in surprise. Kuroba promptly sat the child in his lap and held him still by his biceps. Conan tried to claw at the magician holding him
captive, but gave up upon realising he wasn’t in reach of any significant arteries. Saguru eyed them warily, something Conan would have appreciated if he wasn’t busy trying to get Kuroba to spontaneously combust. Conan eyed the room until his gaze fell upon a lamp. If he could just —

Kuroba grabbed him by his waist and turned him around until his was facing the magician’s chest. Conan’s doppelgänger put a supporting hand behind the child’s head and held them together, serenading quietly under his breath as he rocked back and fourth slightly, effectively cradling the faux-child. Conan sat stiffly in shock, listening to Ran and Kazuha casually chat. He could feel Saguru watching him and he could hear Hattori laughing, something that made him ball his fists in Kuroba’s Solstice tropic shirt.

Just as Conan forced his shoulder’s to relax, Kazuha’s voice rang out, “hey, ya’ll. We’re gonna go to the Seven Eleven jus’ down the curb from the hospital for some snacks - no one likes hospital food.” The Osakan beauty webbed her finger in the black locks of her ponytail. “Do ya’ll wanna come? Ran’s gonna order on behalf of Conan but ya’ll might wanna order fer yerselves.” At this Hattori stood and stretched until he felt his skin groan.

Kaito watched him as the Osakan teen grinned and made his way to the door. He connected his gaze with Conan’s for a split second before shrugging and leaving the room. “I’ll stay here with Conan,” Kaito offered and bounced the child on his lap. Conan looked disgruntled.

Saguru opened his mouth to decline the offer of food in order to keep an eye on Kuroba and Kogoro’s charge but Ran already grabbed his wrist and began leading him away from the hospital bed. “I’ll get you some curry, Conan!” His sister figure threw over her back. Kazuha was the last to leave, blocking out Saguru’s worried gaze with her own reassuring one. “Do you want some curry or donuts or somthin’?” She asked with big, jolly eyes.

Kaito said, “just get me whatever’s cheap,” with a reassuring smile that made Kazuha flush discreetly. “Anything without f-fish?” Kazuha’s flush died and she nodded with a cocked eyebrow. Kaito winced, and Kazuha left with with a last curious look.

Conan waited for the door of his hospital room to click closed when he drew his legs from around Kuroba’s sides and began kicking his midsection. Kaito winced, winded, and he held the child fast and with enough restraint that Conan was too close to kick at him. “Let me go, KID!” He shouted and pulled violently at the thief’s collar. “You have two seconds until I do something we’ll both regret!” Conan leaned up on his knees and grabbed Kaito’s shirt threateningly. “I swear I know eight ways to kill you with the fourteen objects in our immediate vicinity—

Kaito fraughted internally and said, “calm down, Kudou, jeez!” With that the child went flaccid and he stared up at his captor with large, owlish eyes. Kuroba looked down at him incredulously. “How do you even know I’m KID? Please don’t pull a Hakuba on me.”

“You’re just gonna admit it?”

“Well if this relationship is going to work, we can’t keep any secrets.”

Conan, while he didn’t relax in the thief’s embrace, said unsurely, “well Hakuba’s mentioned someone in his class that he suspects to be Kid. He mentioned that this mystery person holds an uncanny similarity to me, and usually I wouldn’t believe anything like that without solid evidence, but . . .” Conan leaned up and cupped the thief’s cheeks, directing the criminal’s head directly towards his. “You have the same eyes. Colour, I mean.” Conan pulled back and patted down the magician’s cheeks. “It’s a rare colour, you have. Also KID has disguised as m-Shinichi (*detachment used to cope) multiple times without a mask so you would have to resemble me at least a lot. You have relatively the same body type and are old enough to pass off as an adult when in full
regalia despite being in your sophomore year.” Conan sat more comfortable but kept respectable
distance between him and Kid. “Same hair colour, too. And lip shape.”

KID gave another of his smarmy smiles and rubbed the small of Conan’s back. “I wasn’t aware you
looked at me so close as to memorise those things,” he said and both his hands rested on the not-
child’s waist. “Could it be the great detective of the east has fallen under the great Kaitou KID
1412’s charm?” Conan sneered and reached around his midsection to pluck Kaito’s knuckle and
direct it away from his waist.

He said, “if you’re going to harass me like you did Ran and probably a lot of your other misdirected,
unfortunate fans, at least wait until I have my body back, you pedophile,” as he finally wrestled away
from the thief’s hug. He crawled dejectedly under his thin quilts and drew his hospital gourmet closer
to him. He levelled KID with a flat glare.

KID chuckled and rested on his elbows. “Are you saying you’ll let me harass you the next time you
take the temporary cure?”

“-which won’t be for a long time, probably. Also no, but when I have my body back I’ll probably be
able to find a way to legally castrate you,” said Conan as he took a sip conspiringly from his 89 fl oz
orange juice. “Right now you’re talking to someone who could murder you so elaborately both
literally and figuratively, no one would ever be able solve it.” The not-child laced his fingers together
and leaned forward. He wasn’t smiling — in his face there was not a gossamer of humour. “I
personally know the most capable young and old minds in the country and I have defeated all of
them in a battle of wits. In other words, I can work around them. I could frame them for your murder
if I so pleased, and you wouldn’t be able to do anything because you would have died by two
teaspoons of dishwasher liquid and a boater hat.”

Kaito’s smile grew strained. “You can be scary sometimes,” he said as Conan placed his now empty
cup on his bedside table. He refilled it with the cold water jug and took one last sip. The water tasted
vaguely like thinned orange juice due to the remaining vitamin concentrate. “Even with my skill in
disguise and mimicking, I’m not sure if I could ever be as scary as you. You could grate cheese by
looking at it wrong.”

Conan scoffed. “I had good teachers.”

“Someone taught you to be that harrowing?”

“Not directly. It wasn’t carefully cultivated over years of practice like your pokerface — it was
germinated by the nature of my living conditions and the people I surround myself with.” Conan
couldn’t be too obvious as to who he was referring to. Conan glanced around the room rather
jumpily. You never really know if Haibara is hiding around the corner waiting for you to slip up.
The last time Conan back-talked her she had made him scream for several minutes straight by how
she dealt with him. She also manipulated him into buying her a Versace bag, which made him cry for
several minutes too. Versace was overpriced.

Kaito stared at him intensely for a long minute. “Who?” He asked again, though he had a vague idea.
“That evil-eyed strawberry blond that sometimes kills cats to remind herself that she has a bigger
place in this world?”

Conan nodded. “Legend says if you say her name three times she’ll appear in the mirror.” KID
twitched his elbow in jest but Conan flinched away from the contact aggressively. “I will bite you,”
he threatened and the young magician pulled away with a frightful whine.

“Y’know,” he said after staring at an uncomfortable yawny Conan for an entire minute of thick
silence, “we really don’t look alike.” Conan gave him an odd look and resisted the sudden urge to hide his face in his comforter. The child laced his hands behind his head self-consciously but raised his eyebrow in faux disinterest. “Besides the obvious differences like the whole age thing and your neater hair, — which is a little lighter then mine — and your eyes are bluer and lighter, your eyebrows have a more defined arch and your lips are plumper. Also your waist is smaller then mine when I was a kid. Don’t look at me like that, I bet I could literally encircle it with my hands if I want to, just let me —“

Conan shrieked and threw a pillow at the criminal he was alone with. “Don’t come any closer, Saxobat, or I tell Hakuba you tried to coax me into your van with Wiz-Fiz,” he shouted and directed another pillow at the thief’s already mussed up hair. KID laughed loud enough for his lungs to throb as he leapt onto Conan’s hospital bed and tackled the child.

KID tried to intertwine their hands and he threatened Conan with a fate involving endless tickles, to which the child kicked him in the face. “Fuck off, Hotwheels,” Conan said into his palmy mattress as he struggled with the teen. A laugh choked from his throat before he could help it, and there was a smile swelling his cheeks like cherrywood. “Ok, ok,” He ground out. Kaito looked down at him softly and pinned the detective under him by the shoulders. “Ok High School Musical, get off before I act on that approaching restraining order I was browsing the second time I met you.”

Kaito shifted his arms away from Conan’s shoulders and put his elbows on each side of the not-child’s head. Conan’s smile slowly began to falter into something reminiscent of a confused frown — not quite a scowl or warning glare but threatening to become one. “What if I don’t want to?” The criminal asked. Conan’s hackles raised and he felt the hair on the back of his neck raise skittishly. He didn’t like feeling vulnerable and caged in.

He said, “it doesn’t matter,” as he placed his hands on the criminal’s chest and began to nudge the larger weight from above him. “You’re going to move anyway. Geez, you’re so touchy. Do you do this to Hakuba, too?”

Kaito grinned, but there was something sadder in his lavender eyes that Conan couldn’t exactly place. “Nope, just you.” The thief sat up and began to climb out of the bed. The boy remaining on the flattened mattress primly brushed down his sheets and tried to dispel the ripples in them. Heiji would probably think Conan tried to strangle himself and Ran would probably think some fringe-dwelling murderer tried to strangle him. “’Cus you’re my favourite detective.”

Conan glanced at him with a frustrated look Kaito would have called beautiful if it were on a face ten years older. “What makes me any different from Hakuba besides the fact that . . .” Conan trailed off. “Never mind. Forget I said anything. There’s too many differences.”

KID yawned over exaggeratedly and leaned back far enough on his chair it tilted and made Conan wince despite himself. “I’m glad you admit it, Detective, because you are worlds above that plebian.” Conan faked interest as he scooted away from the headboard and sat with his front facing Kaito and his legs were dangling over the side of the bed — he wanted to be able to analyse the thief’s emotions. Honestly, ever since Conan revealed he would be raiding a pregnable BO base that may or may not house vital Apoxotin equations with some friends of his, the thief had been flirting with him non-stop, and now Hakuba was looking at them weirdly.

Oh yeah, he should probably bring that up.

Conan never had the chance to bring it up — Ran and company had bustled in at that moment, chatting amicably about Tater Tots. Much to the child’s bafflement, there had been three more people
with them. One of the girls looked suspiciously like Ran, though they dressed differently and this new girl had a less-curvy figure and far more unkempt hair. It looked like the garden at the Kudou House. The other girl had lacquered pigtails and kept fussing over him and asking him questions about KID. She made him strangely insecure and she manoeuvred her words to seem like a multiple choice question. He answered her with a childish freedom Ran probably would have slapped him for had he been ten years older. The trouble was worth it to see KID suffer beside him, and if he hadn’t known better, he would say Hakuba enjoyed it as well. Sonoko was there, too, but he had long since learnt to block her out. Almost the whole time, she and Kaito had gushed over KID.

The pigtailed girl had joined in at some point as well, but by then, Conan was already worlds away, lost in the suddenly hypnotising light of his bedside lamp.

Saguru was watching the boy closely — the child that had saved both him and the fairgrounds from irreparable damage. The blond detective frowned and replayed the scene in his mind, recalling how tight Kuroba and Conan had hugged. He was worried it would be the child’s last desperate search for comfort as he bled out. Luckily, the wounds hadn’t been so dire as to take his short life.

Saguru frowned and rubbed his eyes tiredly, and realised that Conan was looking at him. The ambiance of the lamp warmed the glint of his glasses, and for a while they summarised each other carefully, for a while until Ran pulled the child into a conversation and Saguru diverted his stare lest someone get suspicious of his intentions. Conan looked oddly stiff, and Saguru himself bristled at the subtle but catchable glances Kaito would throw over his shoulder at Conan almost constantly.

Something was wrong.

“Conan,” he said, lacing his fingers together on his lap above his knees. He was the last one in the hospital room. Kuroba had been seen out by Sonoko, albeit reluctantly, and the rest of the girls had followed. Heiji, it turned out, would be staying in Beika for the time being to support Conan during his recovery. Ran had departed to fetch a dinner more satiable then the indigestible canteen food the medical centre supplied. “Conan,” he repeated when he didn’t quite capture the child’s attention. Conan looked to him with weary, tired eyes. He yawned twice as Saguru continued with, “can I ask you a question?”

Conan knuckled his eye under his askew glasses, resigning himself to twenty minutes of trying to throw off suspicion from something probably related to him in a way he wouldn’t want to confront. “Sure, Saguru!” He tried to beam. He had taken to using the Londoner’s first name around the time the Brit began to call him by his.

Saguru thought for a moment, indecisive. He said, as he fingered his belt on the seat of his pants, “Do you happen to have a soul mark?”
Chapter End Notes

Just some random shower thoughts:

1: Conan/Shinichi is actually rather tan and not that pale, and his hair is officially brown, not black.

2: Never in Dcmk show/movie/manga cannon did KID ever reference a no-one-gets-hurt rule. A reporter once said that he steals gems, not lives, but KID himself never confirmed this and he is an actively violent criminal.

3: regarding fashion back when the show aired/is set, Conan/Shinichi is actually really fashionable despite most fanfic’s depict, and I’ve gone back and watched the oUTFiTs he wears and they are really trendy for the 80s/90s some even now.

4: Ran and Sonoko weren’t Shinichi’s only friends. In a lot of high school scenes both Ran and he are usually talking to other people, so he probably isn’t that antisocial. Before all his character development, Shinichi was probably just another popular dickhead

5: Shinichi = Kaito
   Haibara = Akako
   Aoko = Ran
   Kogoro = Nakamori
   Heiji = Saguru
   Sonoko = Keiko
   Conan = Keiko
   Agasa = Jii

6: whenever Conan is about to die all Ran thinks about is Shinichi wtf

7: wether people admit it or not, Kaito is also probably as much of an another-popular-dickhead as Shinichi and he arguably loves the attention and fame he gets as KID.
8: where and when did Kaito learn to hand glide
Chapter Summary

The brave new world.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1

Conan didn’t answer at first.

“. . . A-ah. Um, yeah, I guess.” The fuck. Conan thought his surprise was rather justified. It wasn’t very often someone confronted him on such a personal topic. It was impolite — quite out of character for the ever formal, tight Saguru Hakuba.

Conan reached up to his trapezius to touch his soulmark, but instantly regretted it as Saguru followed the instinctual action sharply. “I see,” said the blond. “You wouldn’t happen to have found your soulmate yet, would you?”

Ok, Conan was now weirded out. Instead of inching away from the blond or Calling Out To Ran For Help, he shrugged his shoulders. “I wouldn’t know,” he said, deciding to humour the blond but not quite. “It’s a pretty mediocre line, my soul mark. I hear Hey Boy so many times a day it doesn’t even register any more.” The child gave a little smile and crossed his legs, rocking back and about to disperse his pent up energy and feelings.

Hakuba jolted at the way the child had blatantly revealed his soulmark. “Hey boy?” The Londoner repeated.

Conan nodded and twirled the soft textile of his hospital gown around one of his pointer fingers. He missed his blazer, and he felt weak without his gadgets. He felt like a real kid.

“Well,” said Hakuba as he stood straighter. He at least looked sheepish. “I must go. Hopefully next time we meet, it is under more casual circumstances.”

Conan waved his hand blissfully, rosy cheeks remaining until the British detective vanished behind the mouth of the door frame. He stopped smiling and rubbed his cheeks.

Once they stopped aching, Conan brushed his fingers against his soulmark. With a resentful noise, he leaned back into his hospital bed.

It was awfully quiet. If he strained his ears, he could hear the drone of various medical implementation boxing the walls on either side of his bed, though a large amount weren’t activated. And even with the bumbling, thumb-plump flowers decorating the room, it couldn’t have been more colourless.

2

“Soulmates, Young Master?”
Saguru jolted, and in his fumble he wrestled his his two candles to stop them from toppling over and resulting in a spillage of hot wax. He really didn’t need the candles to research, as in his mansion there were various reading lamps, but the candles looked better. They were more vintage and provoked a wistful sense of vellichor in his otherwise dull house.

He looked up shakily. He looked at Baaya. “A-ah. Um, yeah, I guess.” Saguru thought his surprise was rather justified. It wasn’t very often someone melted from the darkness of a depthless library as noiseless as a poltergeist actually trying to be subtle despite having tiring muscles and legs heavy with age and determination.

Baaya took the arm chair across from his tea table and she skilfully distributed a platter of oolong tea across the table — near enough to Hakuba that the platter and its contents were bathed in the oily candle light but not too intrusive as to be a threat to Hakuba’s notes, pressed paper pads, non-fiction textbooks and wrinkly thick-cover novels.

Her craned back melted into the herbarium cushioning of the rocking chair. “Well,” She beckoned after a moment of expectant silence. “Show me the fruits of your research, young one.”

Hakuba looked unsure for a moment. But not one to refuse his precious Baaya, he cleared his throat and set to work on organising his research instruments as to be more presentable.

“Soulmates are scientifically complicated, but they are significant to the physiological and social behaviour patterns of most humans stemming from the tender ages of around three, when soft baby skin hardens and the marks solidify — no longer susceptible to change without outside influence such as injurious contact or surgery. As a side note -“ Saguru directed one of his thinly fingers over to his note accumulations, “surgically removing the soulmark does not sever the soulbond. It merely removes cosmetic evidence of the soulmark from the naked eye.”

Baaya didn’t move much as Saguru delved deeper into his findings. “Which brings us to another point. The soulbond. While sceptics claim the soulbond to be personable idealism, there are many sources of evidence to oppose this argument, of which I’m sure you aren’t interested. Soulmates tend to be attracted to each other, as in they want to be together. Just an embrace from ones soulmate has been known to induce higher levels of dopamine, seratonin, oxytocin and melatonin.”

Which was important.

Back when Kaito had first scooped Conan up into a protective cuddle after he had fired the gun, the child had almost immediately fallen asleep. Perhaps it was his injury, but Conan hadn’t been so weak as to fall unconscious in the arms of a stranger. He was a cautious boy.

“And that’s only the tip of the iceberg,” Hakuba explained, becoming jazzed. His hand searched the table semi-blindly for his cup of Oolong tea. He took a quick sip and, unfazed by its piping temperature, downed a whole lot. “That’s only the tip of the iceberg.”

He set the cup down and said, “there is so much information I couldn’t possibly keep it all in my mind until I have properly reviewed it.” He searched through his papers and pushed an accumulation of sticky notes to the side where they fluttered to the ground like leaves. “So I decided it would be best to sort it out into various tables, and here we even have a Decagon graph that helps me see how each of the facts are connected on a cellular level-“

“Hakuba.”

Hakuba stopped.
He looked up to his Baaya with his eyes and mouth in the shape of an O, and she looked back sternly.

“Hakuba, you aren’t burrowing into other people’s business again, are you?” Baaya leaned forward and looked quite like a concave lens with how her back was bent. “Now, Child, we have had this conversation many times before and I’m beginning to think you may be more troubled then I initially thought.”

Hakuba gaped at her like a fish and was so still you might of thought he had been paused, had you not known better.

Baaya took his silence as a way to continue. “You know you can talk to me. And I think it’s important that you realise, Dear, just because you don’t know why your mother left—” she paused for a little while, “—doesn’t mean you need to know about everything else.”

Hakuba quivered. “Th- that’s not- thuh- you-” and unfortunately, he couldn’t quite get his words out. Baaya shook her head in pity.

In her nimble fingers, she took hold of her cup and sipped her Oolong tea. “I’m not sure why you are researching soulmates, Hakuba, and I’m well aware I am not a scholar or famous detective like you. If I am ever to give you advice, tell you something you don’t know, it’s this—”

Despite himself, Hakuba leaned closer in interest, most of his shock dripping off the tip of his nose.

Baaya looked at him almost sadly. “Soulmates can’t be put into words, or diagrams, or textbooks. They can’t be explained. Not in this language, they can’t.” The old woman shook her head so that the dangling skin under her chin swayed a little. “No matter how much you attempt, soulmates will and should never be understood. And perhaps, it is better that way. What is never discovered by man, shall never be corrupted by it.”

Baaya moved her hand to her opposite shoulder and held it there for a moment. “I don’t know what you are up to now, Young One. But don’t interfere with something far greater then you. T’would be like a single, little boy fighting a million desolate crows. It is a battle of knowledge that is simply not won.”

It was quiet for a long, long time. It was only when Baaya took her last sip of Oolong tea — it was derived of liquid and sand dry — that Saguru comprehended just how long he had been sitting there staring at her. She smiled a little, and instead of setting her cup down, she placed it carefully on the trey she had bought down. She said, all the while dabbing the area around her mouth with her handkerchief unnecessarily, “I have some flower tarts in the oven. They might just be done soon. I’ll go check on them and leave you to think.” She stood and used the arm of her chair for support as she manoeuvred around the small space between her and the tea table. Saguru detachedly handed her the trey as she could not reach it, and she handed him an understanding, slightly patronising smile. He looked after her as she lumbered away like a giant, and for a long time he just sat in his seat.

An idea shyly buzzed in the back of his mind. Behind shelves of Kuroba-combative Panadol, emergency stashes of Tide Pods and orgasmic coffee fantasies, but there none the less. And in its timidity, Saguru almost missed it. It germinated under his focus, and soon the Sapling Of An Idea had grown into a sycamore. The Sycamore Of An Idea was watered as Saguru fumbled over from the tea table to a desk in the far corner, and The Sycamore Of An Idea had once again grown taller until it was A Jungle Of An Idea when the blond detective activated the desk computer. Rather proud of his Jungle Of An Idea, Saguru set to work on typing an unfamiliar, slightly horrendous link into his Tor Browser.
Due to DuckDuckGo taking slightly longer than the usual Browser(*), Saguru was intensely relieved when the line connected and went through. It took a few minutes to prove to ReCapta he wasn’t a robot. He found himself immensely disappointed when Tor claimed the website didn’t exist. Saguru had to then sit back and wonder if he had made any typos. He felt like a twelve-year-old, making basic spelling mistakes. *Or maybe, to crack this code, I merely need do the opposite of check for typos.*

(*Saguru never minded the minor setback, as long as he remained untraceable)

Saguru reentered the link on a refreshed tab.

The tab that opened was refined and not very complex. It took minimal time to create an account, though Saguru found himself wincing at some of the registration questions he had to answer. *How Many Times Have You Attended A Kid Heist and When Did You First See Or Hear Of Kid In A Way That Interested You* were expected of a fan site, though others like *What’s Your Favourite Yaoi Paring and Have You Ever Authored Or Read A Doujinshi* baffled him. He skipped those questions. Luckily they weren’t compulsory.

He registered under the name *Wrerottl* as Keiko had said before, and for a while Saguru merely surfed the webpage rather cluelessly — it looked innocent enough. In fact, the site was rather innovative in Saguru’s opinion. He quickly skimmed some of the stories users had posted, and the one that was recommended to him — *Liquor Residue And Salt Shavings*, by aspiring author TakeSix, had been incredibly well written and punctual. Before he could indulge himself in more high caliber stories, one of which was claiming to include himself as a character, Saguru accidentally clicked a sub-link and was directed to another side of the forum.

This one was decorated with accessorised KID stickers of different styles. Some were realistic, others cartoonish and goofy, while others were cute and rather juvenile. Some were even comical or manga-like. When Saguru’s mouse hovered over one of the stickers, the manga-like one, he found there was a link attached. Rather curious, he decided to click it and explore the page it would bring him to.

It wasn’t as much of a page as it were an online archive. The electronic mangas were stacked with a neat distance between them, and each cover was diverse. The search bar revealed they were sorted by popularity, but there were alternative shelves listed with titles like Hot Topics, Alternate Universes, Trending and Shipping. While he could guess the definitions of Hot Topics, Alternate Universes And Trending, he was lost upon the meaning of Shipping. Naturally, that would be the shelf to investigate. As a detective, it was his job to know. You never know when Shipping could be the final clue as to convict a murderer.

The Shipping shelf expanded after he clicked around on it for a while and, unfortunately, it only bought about more confusing words he didn’t understand. There seemed to be a filter option, something that Hakuba gleefully recognised. There were filtering tabs on the blocky PD station laptops to help with navigation. Upon clicking the filter tool, he was graced with the ability to sift through genres, warnings, tags, characters, (characters? Hakuba assumed it was referring to heist constants) and types.

The types elaborated to be western comics and strips, manga, picture books, drabbles, sketches and, a word that Saguru recognised, doujinshi. Saguru felt a rush of pride, like a child who had finally learnt to spell *airport* or memorised the alphabet off-by-heart. He clicked, for though he recognised it, he didn’t actually know what it meant. His pride died a little.
The page provided an exploratory list of words. HakuKid was one of them. He was going to press it, but he got the sort of feeling that said, *Lack Of Christ*, and he trusted his feelings most of the time so he avoided that one. There was NakaKID, AoKaitou, JiroKID, and at the top of the list, the most popular ship- Kaishin. After he read the word Kaishin Saguru was struck with familiarity that danced just out of his reach. Below it was KIDCon.

Perhaps that single, strange word was the first indication he should have turned around and fled. Perhaps if he had listened to his feelings like he had listened to them when he saw HakuKID, Saguru would have been able to sleep easier. He would have been, perhaps, healthier. He clicked KIDCon anyway.

The mangas started off easy enough. Little Edogawa was on the cover, usually with KID. It was strange seeing the little boy that had saved him from a small bomb drawn onto the cover of a Doujinshi, and Saguru wondered if Conan knew about this. He doubted it. He scrolled down for a while and eventually he was led to assume KIDCon Doujinshis were simply fan-works featuring the two. He scrolled down the archive still, and frowned when he came upon a particularly odd manga cover.

Of course, almost all of the covers were a little odd. Conan and KID were usually too close for Saguru’s comfort. This particular one, however, was as much of an oddity as odd could be. Conan was lain under KID with a look of embarrassed hostility on his cartooned face, and KID was leering over him like a moon. Conan was handcuffed to a translucent bar and their albeit un-detailed environment seemed to be an industrial rooftop. Alarm bells were charming, guttural, in his head, and he felt nauseous.

His white hands moved the mouse and clicked open the book. He clicked through the pages, face quickly morphing into something dangerous, and soon later, he clicked out. He jockeyed through three other more seemingly innocent mangas, only to find they held similar contents. With rocks in his belly, Saguru took potshots of the tabs with his phone and shut down the opened tabs.

He stood up from his tawny office chair and prodded back down to his fort of textbooks, gimp liner and oolong tea. He picked up his phone and flitted through the contacts. His fingers felt cold against the screen.

He found Ran Mouri’s contact and clicked. The call went through.

3

The hospital was quiet enough that Conan was sure his plan would work. And as his father used to say — ‘If you can mend a wound - you can inflict one. If you can solve a crime, you can afflict one.’

With those words in mind, Conan carefully unwrapped the hospital comforter from where it was cocooned around him. Luckily, the heavy material worked to muffle the alerting sounds of shuffling mattress, and he was almost soundless as he crawled on his hands and knees over to the far side of the bed. He twisted his midsection awkwardly and dangled his lower half up to his waist over the side of the hospital bed, relying mostly on his core strength to keep him from falling and trying not to disturb his bandaged (but no longer casted) arm. When he was sure he could hear no-one about in the echoey unit hallways he let himself fall to the ground.

There was an admittedly reverberating thud as the child toppled to the floor and landed harshly on the ground. His legs gave out, weak from being immobile for the past week, and Conan landed on his good side. Nevertheless, he let out a startled squark and curled in on himself and he scrunched his eyes shut and listened out for any nurses or doctors. After about three minutes, there was no reactions from outside his door. Conan didn’t know wether he should be grateful or a little concerned.
Still, he opted to wait a few more minutes before he scrambled to gather himself. He walked over to the side of his bed where he knew he had some clothes stashed; Sonoko had gone shopping for him as a thanks for saving an attractive Kid fan (who was also Kaito KID, the narcissistic fuck).

Conan crawled over and unwound the bags from where they were pickled into an underbelly compartment, and pulled the first one he was able to get a grip on away from the others. He sat back and wrestled with the bag’s pulled and frayed handles until he could pry it open. It was wide enough that he almost disappeared into it when he bended over to find something suitable to wear. He could barely see in the dark, and he didn’t know where his watch was so he couldn’t use its provided torch light. He would have to make do.

His hands brushed over something silky, smooth and uncreased. He could tell it was sewed slim at the waist, and it had a stiff collar and cuffs. He felt a tug in his heart as he pulled it from the heap of clothes. He recognised a blazer when he felt it. The blazer was small and he felt a little disturbed when he realised it looked as if it would fit his measurements perfectly. What bothered him was that it was oddly bright in the darkness and he couldn’t pull it from the packaging properly. He frowned and grabbed it by the nobs on its shoulders and pulled it free from whatever it had been that snagged it. His brows fell like wood when he finally comprehended just what it was — it was white and had a cape, a miniature KID costume that was terrifyingly well tailored. The material even felt almost the same from the oddly many times he had contacted KID’s uniform.

He stuffed the white blazer far under the bed away from the other bags, not feeling guilty he would have internally damaged a lot of its structuring. With more aggression and less regard for stealth then the first time, Conan rummaged through the bag and wormed free with more suitable clothes. It was, from what he could tell, a green long top with white under sleeves and nineteen eighty seven printed along said white sleeves. He absently slid on shorts, discarding his hospital gown under his bedsheets.

His arms delved into the bag once more and emerged with a familiar looking varsity jacket — the blue one he had worn when he had saved Haibara from the exploding bus. He checked the back tag to be sure, and the results were affirmative. He faltered, a slight hope kindling within him. If some of his old clothes were in the bags, perhaps his belt or powered shoes would be, too.

He rolled the swollen bag back into the underbelly compartment of his bed and pried open the lips of the second bag — one of which was brimming with trimmed boxes. Shoe boxes.

With little hesitance he searched through it, and was disappointed his familiar, iconic, safe red cement threes weren’t in there. He growled under his breath and pulled free, instead, a collaborative hybrid of Adidas and Vans. If he couldn’t have his cement threes, he may as well have semi-decent sport shoes at the ready. Or as sporty as Adidas and Vans could be. Vans were better for skating, and Conan’s skateboard was probably with Haibara and Agasa far away from the underbelly compartments of his hospital bed. He kneeled and fitted the shoes onto his socked feet, tying the laces up secure enough that they wouldn’t drift mid-kick. Not that he had anything to kick.

Conan frowned and, once he was done, fell onto his rump and sat by his hospital bed on the floor for a while, thinking. The idea of adventuring out into the night while unequipped and weakened was becoming a more glaringly horrible idea. He thought back onto the time he had wagged class in the ninth grade and ran into a murder case. It had resulted in him consequently getting an earful from the police, the witnesses and his school. Not a good day. And then Conan thought back to the sensible fate of wallowing in his loud, sheeny, skinny and ugly and very bad hospital bed, and that was all the motivation he needed to commit his own little crime. Sneaking out of the hospital.

With a mean little look on his face, Conan wobbled to his feet once again and embraced the
underrated feeling of standing up. He felt bad for snakes in that moment, for snakes would never stand like he could. With a second thought, Conan garbed himself with the varsity jacket and did a jerking-tippy-toe-march until he was away from his bed and then he put his ear to the door and listened for sounds. There was a rolling sound, like a printer, licking at his ear, but it was otherwise quiet and the halls sounded lifeless enough for a little child to make his escape.

The door didn’t open easily. He had to stretch his little body as far as it could possibly go in order to reach the door handle, and even then it was stiff from years of bedraggled use. He hopped on one foot until the handle twisted and the door opened outwards. Conan had to do an awkward sort of stumble to curve himself around the door but it was worth it in the end, because soon enough he was pupping down the Panadol-scented hallways of Beika General Hospital and GP.

Eventually Conan realised that he didn’t actually know where he was going, so he had to use his glasses to map out the area. It wasn’t much help because it kept connecting to vital technology — Conan thought he may have turned something off — but it did alert him to the approach of a night shift guard lumbering down the hallways. Conan avoided the porky man by hiding in a maintenance closet that ended up not being a maintenance closet but an unlocked office. Again, Conan didn’t know whether he should be relieved or concerned. His faith in Beika General Hospital lacking but his confidence in himself luxuriating, Conan managed to pry a map from the tall desk by fifty-fifty-ing off an office chair.

He couldn’t find where he was on the map, but he did find what looked to be an emergency exit not too far away from his general vicinity, because he recognised a hospital room number on the map that he had passed a few minutes ago. Decision made up, Conan bundled the map into one of the desk drawers like stuffing and then shuffled over to the exit. He tapped into his glasses — they provided just a little light when the map was activated — and with a last indecisive glance into the relative sanctuary of the office, the faux-child conflated into the night.

The air was whetted, cold and unfriendly when Conan had raccooned his way from the slick jowls of the hospital, but the child found he wouldn’t have it any other way as the aggressiveness of the open night was far more welcomes then the dreary, sullen depths of the hospital hallways. Heart lines and death rattling isn’t worth the comfort of a bed, Conan would think. He was a boy of movement; Conan couldn’t woolgather for more than an hour before he had to do something. Usually he would occupy himself by juggling a ball or doing street skateboard tricks. Or waking, as was his want.

Conan padded down the sidewalk around the hospital, taking care to stay away from the road or any passing strangers who were all hair clips and paternal fuss. He jockeyed around astray car lights and flinched at every noise melting from the backstreets he passed until the hospital was but another skyscraper in Beika’s discordant night garden. He had walked aimlessly for half an hour by the time Beika park submerged from behind a line of bucolic cafes, walked far enough that the moon was dwindling past its half mark and it would have had to of been a little past one. The witching hour, his mind helpfully supplied.

The little detective glanced around at his surroundings after he had crossed the intersection at Nippon and Jackson, finally embracing the cooler wind of the open parks. At night, Beika Park was far more sinister. The trees were banners of grey silhouetted by the leering, fattened moon and they shifted like water. The grass was glittering like angel fire, sprinkled with rainy seasoning from the earlier afternoon shower, and the various wooden ladderlike chairs thrown about looked lonely and mount- less with no one sitting on them. With no one around, there would be no one to die — Conan didn’t dare hope even though he hoped, very much so, for it to be true.

Conan walked over into the park, anyway. He had an ill feeling bumblebeeing in his belly, but he still walked into the park like a dorsal fin slicing through water.
All the sound around him was tilted and dim, as if it were never really there at all. Conan thought it would have been like a swimmer one hundred feet out deep barely hearing cheering beach goers back on shore.

The sycamores offered Conan timid greetings. They waved their branches at him as he passed them, chuckling like bracelets as they did so, and in his own way, Conan greeted them back with a tired but pleased glance. Conan shoved his hands into his pockets deep enough that they bulged, and kept on walking until a white fountain signalled he had reached the middle of the park. The faux-child let out a long sigh and trotted over to the lips of the well, looking down into the water at his reflection for a little while.

A little boy looked back to him, with doe eyes welled with youth and a smaller body and fluffier hair atop his head. He looked down on himself with a blank, unseeing expression, comprehending it somehow with a papered, unthinking mind. Just as he always did when he looked, really really looked, in the mirror. He didn’t see himself anymore. Not really.

Conan felt a heaviness in his eyes, and he hated it. He dug his nails into his sleeves and felt a whirlwind of emotions flit under his skin.

A white, wide-shouldered figure flitted in the ripples behind Conan’s reflection, and the child flinched badly. He swerved around like a knife, a startled noise falling from his lips, and his mouth was open in the shape of an O. Looking down at him, with blueish-purplish eyes and a sallow-toothed smile, was 1412.

Conan said, more shakily then he would have liked, “y-you!” As he stumbled back. His shoes hit the fountain walls.

“Me,” KID agreed, and he took one step forward that was big enough to put Conan’s stumble to shame.

Conan stilled for a moment and waited for his unwanted visitor to elaborate. When KID didn’t say anything for a while — he seemed rather content just staring down at Conan — the child stepped around his larger legs and put some needed distance between them. KID followed the child with his eyes and said, cautiously, “what are you doing out here so late?”

Conan faced him again, loose sleeves moving in the wind like his bangs. “That’s for me to know,” he grit out, but KID noticed it sounded more startled then bitter. The thief frowned and took another step forward.

“I didn’t mean to startle you,” KID offered kindly, more friendly then his usual taunts. Conan stopped looking him in the eye, then, and caught his bottom lip with his teeth. KID watched the action shamelessly for a moment then took another step forward. He walked towards the child until he was close, and he kneeled down and put his hand on the faux-kid’s shoulder in an act of comfort. “Are you ok?”

Conan looked up to him, his weakness precipitating in place of a rising anger. KID smiled a little behind his poker face. “Don’t patronise me,” Conan warned. “Not like everyone else. That’s not what I need right now.” KID’s invisible smile disappeared. His outer-face remained neutral.

He said, “I’m sorry,” as honestly as he could without sounding desperate, and Conan looked startled for a moment at the raw emotions displayed. The child gazed into KID’s eyes, only just realising how close they were to each other. He reached forward and hesitantly drew his small hand against the thief’s cheek, feeling under his palms soft, silver skin. KID looked back into his aegean eyes and they stayed like that for a moment. It was like they couldn’t look away.
Conan quietly said, “who would have thought,” as he made the first move to dispel the languid mood. He stepped back, and his hand fell from KID’s cheek. He inspected it for a moment and found no evidence of makeup or cosmetic products. “Who would have thought that the great Kaitou KID 1412 is merely a child. Hakuba Saguru is sixteen, and Kuroba Kaito is in his class. You must be sixteen, not even old enough to drive or drink.”

KID nodded and smiled mirthlessly. He refrained from teasing the child about his own distorted age — it would have been inappropriate and his precious detective was clearly in a fragile mood. “It would have been better if I had been older, I know, but desperate times call for desperate measures.” Conan looked cute enough with his frustrated stare that KID held back on scolding him for openly talking about his private life.

KID stood up again, and Conan looked up at him. “Desperate times?” He asked, brows slightly furrowed and head tilted. “Just what is your home life, KID?” Kuroba Kaito, Conan thought, didn’t look troubled. However he knew from experience with countless murderers that sometimes, the brightest smiles could hide the darkest sins. Sins that lead to ruined families and lives.

Honest to his character, KID only smiled and in his usual dulcet tones, said, “that’s for me to know and you to find out.” He turned and walked away from Conan, beckoning with a backwards hand motion for the child to follow. Conan did so, despite his better judgment. “I suppose I can give you a little hint. It would be unbecoming for KID to not leave a riddle. And unbecoming for a detective to have no evidence.”

Conan walked fast until he was beside KID. For once, the thief didn’t stare at him as if he were a cynosure. Kuroba was looking ahead, frowning in a sort of deep, seeping concentration that Conan was sure had to be a theatrical act.

KID said, barely hesitant, “there was once a fox. He had a bedraggled coat, and he was worn and dishevelled and tired from city life. He would spend day after day after day dancing around the stray dogs and sneaking around the cats. Eventually, the fox became known for his trickery, his manipulation and his success in those poultry skills. So known that a pack of hyenas asked him to join them.”

Conan watched him carefully, searching and suspicious and admittedly smug. If KID was aware of his secret, he was entitled to be aware of the thief’s. KID continued, not paying attention to the child for once as he weaved his story — careful not to reveal too much information.

“You see, the hyenas were powerful and had large jowls that could snap and bite and claw. They were meaner then the dogs, stronger then the wolves, faster then the cats. Despite this, the fox denied their offer, for foxes weren’t pack animals. They worked alone. So the hyenas burnt the fox to the ground.” Conan flinched.

KID turned his upper body and scanned the hollow park. He looked over trees and benches and paths and statues and menageries and he breathed in the scent of his own night jasmine cologne, mixed with pine and peat, mint and meringue. As he breathed out there were puffs of cloud and condensation. Conan watched their rhythmic pattern as if it were the most important thing in the world. KID, with his edgy expression, almost looked like a stranger.

“There was a kit and a vixen left behind to remember him. The vixen left, and only the kit was left. So he had to spend day after day after day dancing around the stray dogs and sneaking around the cats. And eventually, the kit became known for his trickery, his manipulation and his success in those poultry skills. He became a fox, too.” KID sighed, his tale finished, and he turned and tried to smile down at Conan. It was a little forced, but Kaito knew he was ok. He had long since gotten over his father’s death. “He became a fox, too,” KID repeated.
Conan opened his mouth to say something — that he was sorry, that everything was going to be alright, that the past was in the past — but he thought better of it, and kept his mouth sealed. In all honesty, he didn’t really know what to say. KID was an enigma, unsolved and phantasmagorical and as wild as nature. As thirsty as fire, as quenched as a storm. Conan found his thoughts wandering a little, and attempted to wave them away. When he looked back at KID, he found the thief looking indecisive and uncertain and it rattled the little detective so.

Feeling like he hadn’t spoken in a while, Conan opted to change the conversation. “You asked why I was out here?” It caught the criminal’s attention and seemed to distract him from his brooding. Conan looked away and said, “to tell you the truth, I’m not really sure why. I just couldn’t stay cooped up in that hospital anymore.” He chewed his plump lips skittishly, listening to his vans break glassy grass as it was more soothing then his and KID’s breathing. “In a way, it reeks of death. It’s bland and colourless and I feel so trapped there and it’s like I can’t breath.”

KID blinked, startled at the blatant rant about medical facilities, and Conan tried to calm himself down. The mere thought of having to return to the ratchet building of radiating bore and loneliness grated at his nerves. He wasn’t even able to read Sherlock Holmes or drink his beloved coffee. . .

KID broke out into an amused smile, pace fastening as he and his company approached the ending of the park. Conan recognised some trees he had passed earlier. “My, if I knew you felt so cooped I would have whisked by to rescue you sooner, darling.” Conan resisted rolling his eyes in favour of being polite.

KID bounced on the balls of his heels, spurred on by the little detective’s lack of response. “You never told me why you came here anyway, idiot,” Conan hissed under his breath, cheeks a little flushed from the cold. While Conan payed it no mind, KID thought it endearing.

“I wanted to check up on you,” yapped KID as he hopped along. “And it’s a good thing I thought so far ahead. Who knows what batty, bemused, cereal box bastards are out here just waiting on their chance to steal away cute, miniature detectives.” Conan side-eyed him heavily, muttering under his breath about being able to handle himself even though he knew he was in danger the moment he left the hospital. “Now I can escort you home.” KID finished as he stepped onto the concrete pavement surrounding the park. The hard clang of his formal shoes lurched Conan out of his dwam.

“W-wait,” Conan said as he stopped walking. 1412 stopped, too, and looked back at him sternly. “I don’t want to go back. Didn’t you hear about me saying why? Let me enjoy a few more hours of freedom.” Conan turned back to the park, intending to enter it once again and continue with his mindless trek. KID tsk-ed disagreeably, and Conan instantly felt as though it was a bad idea, turning his back on a national criminal. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up in fright.

He felt a hand cover his mouth, muffling any noise threatening to escape. “I think,” he heard as KID pulled the child into his chest, “that you forget sometimes. That I’m a bad guy, I mean.” Conan cursed himself for letting himself relax in the presence of a mastermind. Instinctively, the child reached up to claw at the wrist stifling his mouth, considering biting it for his freedom. KID lifted him from the ground, letting him dangle for a moment before he gently and, if Conan didn’t know any better, carefully, adjusted his grip. “Or at least, I’m an anti-bad guy, in a way. Chaotic good.”

Conan searched through the dark and glared at KID when he found the thief’s shaded eyes. He began to kick and squirm and KID had to hold him tighter to keep him from falling. “Now now, Tantei, it isn’t sleepy time, is it?” Conan stilled. He didn’t need sedatives in his system — not when he had his final check-up tomorrow before he got the ok to spend the rest of his healing process at home. “Not only will you further injure your arm, you wouldn’t be able to enjoy the view.”

KID removed his hand from over the faux-child’s mouth and used it to better support the smaller
body on his hip. “Enjoy the view?” Conan said unsurely, wondering if he should keep struggling. He was in reach of the thief’s Solar Plexus, and with a little manoeuvring, he could probably hit his inner elbows — disabling the criminal enough for Conan to make his escape.

“Yes, the view. I’m not heartless, I know there is nothing worse then being cooped up in a hospital.” KID flashed Conan a goofy grin and Conan looked at him, concerned. “You just feel like you wanna fly away, no?” Conan’s worry dissipated and was replaced with alarm as KID hurriedly crossed the road and clambered, cloaked in dark, up the side of a small shop. A small shop that quickly ascended into a skyscraper.

Conan cried out as one of KID’s supporting hands left him and he fell into a dwindling hold with only KID’s neck stopping him from toppling down to six months of hospital. “What are you doing, you absolute prick!” The faux child choked out as he buried his head deep into KID’s neck. He felt better, no longer feeling the high wind against his face. “My arm is weak, I can’t hold myself like this for much longer!” And it was true, though Conan loathed to admit it. He could feel his strength sapping, and let out a distressed noise when KID made a lunge for a high balcony.

KID winced and, after he passed a curtained window, said, “don’t worry. This won’t take much longer. Just hang on a little longer.” Then, he opened his mouth to say something else and closed it again. “Actually, you could probably get my arquebus from my jacket. Top left.”

Conan shook his head to get KID’s clover off his face, and grunted, “I’m gonna make you die after this,” as his hand dived into the top left of the thief’s blazer anyway. It bought back uncomfortable memories, Conan winced, colour lighting his cheeks just a little.

“You couldn’t pull off a bandaid much less a murder,” KID scoffed, half sitting half kneeling like a gargoyle on a ledge one of the skyscraper’s balconies provided while he waited patiently for Conan to finish. He tried to ignore the soft hand roaming across the thinner material of his dress shirt.

Conan gripped something metallic but straight enough to not be a grappling hook. He sighed in frustration. “If you fill a ten-inch syringe with air and deplete it into an artery your body will simulate a heart attack, air embolism, and die,” the faux-child explained. “If you can hide the incision wound, you will get away with murder.” Conan searched the thief’s collar more forcefully then he needed to. He felt more than heard KID gulp. “I’ve got it!” He cried and drew himself away from KID as far as he could without falling. He could feel KID’s chest rise and fall against his own shifting belly. He presented to KID the arquebus — a bulky, oddly heavy device with a fat hook slightly submerging from it’s tip. Conan waved it around unnecessarily.

“Ok,” said KID as he bounced Conan on his hip. “Aim it at that ledge up there. Not the fence, the ledge.” Conan looked at him with surprise — he never would have thought KID would trust him with the arquebus when they weren’t in a dire situation.

Conan then frowned. He said, “I know how to use a gun,” and he took aim at a semi-stable pole protruding from a ledge on the top of the skyscraper they were dangling off. If they stayed too long, Conan realised with a start, they would attract attention.

“Well,” KID said, using his shoulder to misdirect the firearm, “I know you’re trigger happy, but unless you haven’t noticed, this isn’t a pistol or a Nickel Plated M1911A1 or whatever you shot at me with at the clock tower heist. It is an artistic electric ascension device and you will treat it as such.” Conan glared at him for a moment and when he was sure KID was distracted explaining the fundamentals of the arquebus, he aimed and fired it anyway. He had used it before, after all, and he had saved his and KID’s lives in the process.

The arquebus fired with a mightily belligerent shout, zipping the pair through the air like an angry
horse the moment it collided with the ledge railing. Conan barely held back a cry at the pressure wind resistance provided, and he was increasingly glad he had fired with his good hand lest he sent KID and he plunging down to the street below.

KID shrieked and clutched Conan so close the child wouldn’t have been surprised if their skin melded together for a moment. He would have been flustered if his weakened arm wasn’t throbbing so aggressively. It had been squished between him and KID from where it was bundling up the thief’s blazer for support. Despite their rough start, KID gathered himself and in a split second, lowered Conan to his collar bone and curled his larger body around Conan’s smaller one. When they landed — which was all tumbles and knee-scrapes and angry concrete — Conan was relatively uninjured despite his arm.

For a long moment they lay together on the rooftop, intertwined. “. . . Fuck,” said Conan after a minute of silence, and he used his legs to peel himself away from under KID. At the same time, 1412 struggled to his knees, where he panted for a moment. “That didn’t happen last time,” Conan hissed and wiped away the sweat gathering under his bangs. KID looked at him.

He said, “I updated it,” as he stood and walked over to where the arquebus was pendulous and swinging over the side of the skyscraper. Conan looked after KID as he kneeled again and winded the arquebus’s thick, warm rope of iron around his wrist to gather it. The faux-child turned to a large, cursive light board pitched above the skyscraper they had scaled; The Koala Carousel, it read.

He flipped off Koala Carousel and then he toddled the little-boy toddler of the untutored out until he stood by KID. He watched the robber unwind the ropes of iron spindles from his arm and gentle it back into the tip of the gun. He said, “sorry,” awfully careful because, wether KID gave him roses or not, 1412 was still a criminal who had tasered him for shits.

KID shook his head and smiled a little. “It’s ok. Like you said, that didn’t happen last time.” Conan looked over at him unsurely, then scanned his figure for injuries. His knees were darkened from rooftop powder, as were his elbows, but the majestical criminal was otherwise untarnished. “I’m sure if I ever tried to use your other, more unspoken gadgets, results would be much the same.”

Conan shrugged and looked over the park from their new vantage point. “Doubt it,” he said, and he rolled his injured shoulder over and over in its socket to limber it. “Though I would like to see you navigate through some of them. I’m sure many would be helpful.”

KID looked at him interestingly. “I’m sure they would. I’ve been meaning to ask how your inventor friend hasn’t yet either been hired by the government or just super rich with all the technology he teapots out.” Conan didn’t answer at first, still looking out over the park. From way up atop The Koala Carousel, Beika Park looked no less sinister. He was torn between imagining a soccer match between he and the detective boys — they always fought over who’s team he should be on, it was quaintly animating — or thinking about the next body that would roll out from under the russet bracken. Would it be a widow, a single father, a hooker, a broker, a fisherman? Only time would tell.

Conan tiredly said, “have you noticed Hakuba acting weird? Staring at us, getting all politically-correct-disgruntled-raccoon whenever we so much as look at each other, talk about each other, mildly reference each other?” KID was staring holes in him. “I can’t juggle a famous detective’s scrutiny on my shoulders along with a childhood friend, the FBI, the CIA, a fucking syndicate and my entire social life. He’ll figure me out in no time. To top that off, I think he’s convinced you and I are enwrapped in some illicit love scandal.”

KID leered. “We kinda are.” For some reason, Conan just rolled his eyes and ignored 1412’s eyebrow wiggling. “But to answer your question, yes, I have noticed. You know, yesterday he asked me if I have a soulmark! Rude! It seems as though we’ll have to put more effort into keeping our
nightly escapades secret.”

Conan growled. He said, “see, it’s quips like that that probably got us into this whole mess. Tone down the flirting, please, or your days will be numbered.”

“You little demon child from Insidious. You know, it just occurred to me that heavens no is the opposite to hell yes.”

“I will literally eat a cat and leave it on your doorstep.”

“Sorry,” KID looked behind them, far enough that he could see the hospital and Conan could see the moon doing the oddest intense reflection sequence in KID’s monocle he’d seen since Sharkboy and Lavagirl. “We’d better get going. It’s about three o’clock now, and I’m sure nurses get up awfully early. Hakuba would flip his shit if he found out I flew you across the city and into your window like Aladdin.”

Conan paused in everything. “What?” KID scooped Conan up as he did so and leapt off the building. Conan cried out as they plunged to their deaths for about two seconds before KID unbarred his hand glider and they soared. “You unbelievable shit!” Said Conan as KID held him bridle style across his front. Conan wrapped his arms around KID’s neck so that, when they landed, he could apply enough upper-body strength to provoke severe jugular vandalism. KID simply chuckled, luxuriating in the feeling of freedom and flight. In Kaito’s opinion, there was nothing more exhilarating then gliding fifty stories above ground level.

“Why consume ecstasy when you can find it?” KID asked, and Conan simply concentrated on breathing for a moment. He looked away from the landscape below them and, like when they were scaling the tower, hid his face in KID’s neck. The thief faltered from his scorn of illegal drugs. Having the child’s trapezius against his collarbone sent electric sensations throughout his body. Why buy pleasantries when you can find happiness? “You should enjoy the view while you can, Tantei,” KID advised kindly. “The hospital is growing ever closer.”

Conan just grumbled something incoherent into his shoulder and held the thief tighter, afraid of falling.
Chapter End Notes

I’m not dead! At least on the outside.

Also I made little chapter edits instead of just random photos. Hope u like the them, they are on the previous chapters too (all different).

Also, I shamelessly made Conan’s outfit the same as Bruno Mars’s in Finesse bc fuck I love Cardi B and his outfits and everyone’s outfits in that video like yesyesyes
Ran squinted a little and breathed loudly through her clenched teeth. She had been having little sleep recently — the stress of Conan’s constant hospital visits were beginning to sink in. She was afraid the next time he was hospitalised he would never leave.

Figuring she had been awoken for a reason, Ran quickly bent her body up into a sitting position. Her fingers searched around blindly for her alarm, which was chiming rather repetitively, only to find it didn’t shut off when she pummelled it. She frowned — it was a charmingly vintage, expensive Typo clock she had purchased a week ago when she and Sonoko had gone shopping for Conan. While it wasn’t overpriced, it was far too expensive to be breaking so soon.

She blinked until her eyes were no longer foggy from sleep, though they were still unpleasantly strained and her eyelids were heavy. The clock wasn’t easy to inspect in the darkness. She wondered if she had accidentally set her alarm clock too early. The pretty brunette picked up the ball sized clock in her hand and turned it around until she was satisfied. It took a moment to realise the droning wasn’t coming from her clock, but her phone.

She gave a startled squeak as she placed the clock back down hurriedly and she replaced it in her hand with her phone. She was backhandedly glad her clock wasn’t broken. With no hesitance and not enough time to register who was calling her, she flipped her phone open and accepted the call. There was a moment before the call connected, and her Shinichi-esque mind realised it must be from somewhere at least a few hours away from Beika. She frowned and hoped she hadn’t wasted her time on a broker or some baptised and bibled preacher. Then she wondered if it was Shinichi.

“Ah, Hello?” Whispered an awkward voice just hesitant and socially cautious enough to not be Shinichi. Shinichi would have said something mildly offensive. “Mouri Ran? It’s me, Saguru. Hakuba.” Ran was sure he sounded rather shaken up, and she decided to be nice to him instead of use him for an emotional punching bag directed at Shinichi. He seemed too fragile to endure verbal abuse.

“Hello, Hakuba,” She said rather tiredly. She secretly hoped it showed in her voice so Hakuba would feel a little bad about waking her up.

Hakuba said, with little feeling-badness in his voice, “ah, wonderful. There is something important I need to talk to you about. In regards to Conan. How is he, by the way?”

Ran smiled a little. “Conan’s doing just fine. He’ll be coming home tomorrow.” Then, with more worry, she said, “and what do you mean something important regarding Conan?” Saguru didn’t answer for a minute; Ran thought he could either have been mulling over how to word his next
“You see,” he said, and there was a distinct way he said it that reminded Ran of how a trainer would talk down an unfortunately discordant tiger. “I have a frie- a contact. A contact of whom I have been speaking with. About KID.” Ran had to bite back a spit it out, and then she felt bad because that would have been a most untoward thing to say and she wasn’t usually so snappy. She blamed it on the Shinichi scare of getting an unmarked call during ungodly morning hours. It was an assholeish move that Shinichi would specifically pull. “And they bought something to my attention. The Kidsto- KID’s fans refer to it as KIDCon, and, well . . .” Saguru trailed off. “There are some pictures I think it might be in your best interests to see.”

She heard some shuffling from on the other side of the phone. She said, “what do you mean? Is Conan ok? He isn’t in trouble, is he?” And then she added as an afterthought, “I swear that boy is going through his rebellion stage already, what with all that running off and secrecy.” Even though what she had said bought concern to the forefront of Saguru’s already addled mind, Ran was smiling a little, because even if Conan was stressful, she wouldn’t have him any other way.

“If he’s already descending into delinquency, I’m terrified to see what he’ll be like when he’s fifteen,” said Saguru.

“He’ll be just like Shinichi,” said Ran with conviction.

“Do you mean Kudou Shinichi?” Saguru asked, leaning into his phone even though he was busy attempting to send Ran the many photos he had gathered — he cringed at some of the more provocative material he was forwarding. While others were only mildly disturbing, others were darkly pornographic and would surely spook the karate champion. “I’ve heard of him. He was actually a large influence in my life, what with being the first internationally and photogenically recognised teenage detective and all.” Saguru was lying.

While Saguru didn’t doubt Kudou’s deduction skills, he was usually sure to include one major factor when regarding the teen — Kudou Shinichi was probably the most famous teenage detective only because he was well-bled. He had connections in fields Saguru and others such as Hattori Heiji didn’t, like athleticism, glamour and acting. His parents were household names after all. The the world practically melted into Kudou Yukiko’s hands upon her debut. It was because of this, Saguru had mixed feelings towards the detective. Respect was earned, not born, and Saguru was unsure if Kudou was more then just a pretty face news articles could throw across their headlines to attract attention.

Also, he wasn’t sure if he could ever look at Kudou the same way after recalling what Yoki had said about Kaishin — something he had forgotten about prior to his horrible revamp of KIDCon.

Ran sighed tiredly. “Yea, Kudou Shinichi. I hope that idiot gets home soon.” And a little more quietly she added, “it’s different without him around. Quieter.” Saguru’s lips thinned, but his thoughts were interrupted by the vibratory buzz of his many messages going through. “Oh, what’s this?” He heard Ran say. “You sent the messages fast. You know, Shinichi was barely on his phone. He was always doing something. Skating, soccer, reading. He travelled a lot. Even though he likes to tell himself he isn’t like his parents, he’s like a migratory bird. An angry bird, or an elk, or something.” Saguru could hear the fondness in her voice and he felt a little bad because he knew it would soon disappear. “He went to Hawaii a lot. Learnt to drive there. He was going on about flying a helicopter there — his parents are crazy! He went to shooting ranges so much I questioned if I should be concerned. By fourteen he was a crack shot, and its a good thing he was, too. When he was fifteen he shot at Kaitou KID. Could’ve killed the bloody thing! Sonoko could’ve killed Shinichi!”
Ran sounded ready to continue, but she trailed off and became awfully quiet for a long time. “What . . . What is this?” She asked, her tone racked.

Saguru had a sullen look as he said, “KIDCon. My contact explained that many people ship, or believe Conan and 1412 should be romantically involved. To the point they would create such content.”

Saguru couldn’t see Ran, but he was sure she would be opening and closing her mouth like an up-watered guppy, unable to form a coherent sentence. “T- this,” she finally said, sounding more upset by the second. “This is horrible! This isn’t ok! This needs to be stopped! Oh god, Conan! No, no, no, this is wrong, he’s- he is six! A six year old!” And just as Saguru had deduced, her shock was quickly being replaced with outrage. “Who is your contact? I believe I need to give them a piece of my mind! ’I’ll break their elbows!’”

“Now now, Ran,” Saguru charmed, and even though there was a slight tremor in his voice, the Londoner tried to sound composed. “Before you break any bones, please note that my contact isn’t the distributor.” Or so he hoped. “I will try my best to stop this. As you may know, this could be possibly jeopardising.”

Ran almost shrieked. “Jeopardising? That’s KID in these pictures. A forty-year-old! God has left us. Breathing is a sin. I want to murder my eyes a little.” Saguru’s frown deepened and he thought for a little. “That’s it,” Ran decided. “Conan isn’t going to anymore KID heists. Not if it means this content is created.”

Ran was quiet for a moment, abandoning her anger in place of a conspiring air. There was plenty of time to lose faith in humanity later, she told herself supportingly while she died inside. “Oh yes, the tip is very greatly accepted. I’ve tried so many things to keep him restrained in the past — child leashes, cribs, baits, police custody, threats of abandonment. Nothing seems to work, though.” Then Ran scrolled past a particularly bad doujinshi scan and she said, “fuck dammit I’ll use their kneecaps as bowls and I’ll wear their livers as shoes!”

Saguru said, “children are, by nature, curious creatures. Like kittens, in a sense. Kittens are all yarn and fake mice until they find out they can scratch you and cause you pain. Children are all kindness and bucket-booting until they find out they can say hurtful words. And Conan could probably make me cry if he wanted to.” Saguru shuffled around and sat back more comfortably in his chair. “Kittens are all warm milk and blankets until they find out they can go outside to this large cornucopia of adventure and mystery. Children are all warm milk and blankets until they find out they can go outside to this large cornucopia of adventure and mystery. I believe your problem with Conan is that he has, perhaps too soon, discovered the adventure and mystery of beyond the back garden. He yearns to leave the easy life, which is all warm milk and blankets.” Ran nodded along with the famous detective’s deductions as if he were a cynosure, and her eyes were wide and had this particularly enlightened look that Saguru would have blushed at had he been there at the agency with her.

Ran stood from her bed, which was creased and messed up from her fidgeting. As quietly as she could, she made her way from her room to down stairs, taking extra care when she passed her
father’s room. She stepped heal first and as silent as the martial arts master she was. “I believe you should find the source of this early-birding wanderlust before it evolves into something more dark. Conan is a nice, polite boy, but he is already sneaking out for heavens sake!” Ran frowned at the truth in his words. Tentatively, she sat down on her couch. Her knees were felled together and she sat with a stiff, reserved posture and her shoulders were raised. Had she not been holding her phone, she would have been balling her hands in her lap waiting for the numbness in them to disperse.

Ran just couldn’t get those horrible pictures of Conan and 1412 out of her mind. Anger began to curl in her chest once more, but she bottled it up for a later date so she could deal with the problem while it was new.

“And,” said Saguru, ignorant yet not oblivious to the beautiful brunette’s inner-storm, “while the seams of this problem may not be my business — from what I’ve gathered, Conan is very reserved about his past — I think I have something that might distract him from KID at least.”

Ran didn’t lean into the phone like she would of if she had been her normal, pleasant self because she was still as stiff as wood. She did, however, make an interested hum to encourage him and make sure he didn’t somehow lose all confidence in himself. It wasn’t a habit she had gotten from living around Shinichi — God knows he needs any support to flex — but instead one she had gotten from living around Conan.

It seemed to work nether-the-less, because Saguru soon said, “the answer lies in his clothes. Or, more specifically, his blazer. What sort of child is more comfortable in a stiff, formal blazer then, say, a polo? A child who used to live in a stiff, formal environment, that is. And I have felt the cuffs and stitching of his blazer before. I know expensive material when I feel it — I wear it everyday. The most likely deduction is that his home life was far more strict then his current one now so he his taking full advantage of it. Either that or American children think that this sort of behaviour is acceptable.”

“Damned Americans,” said Ran. “So your saying Conan’s problem is that he’s a rich LA eshay that has no sense of what’s correct behaviour and what isn’t despite the fact that he has saved me and possibly thousands of people many times over?” Oops, Ran might have been a little too bitter there. Maybe she was a little biased because even though she told her friends that Conan was like a little brother to her, she sometimes felt like he was her son.

“Er, yes, I suppose,” said Saguru. “I mean, he skateboards and wears backward caps too. Anyway, back to the topic at hand. Maybe you should do something you think might remind him of his old life-style.”

Ran frowned a little. “I don’t know about you, Saguru, but I don’t have money to throw around to buy a bunch of luxury mocktails and complimentary beachside villas. That’s the sort of thing that Sonoko would do.” Ran faltered. “Maybe he could stay with Sonoko for a while? No, she would be a terrible influence. She’s like the Kmart version of Jake Paul sometimes.” Then Ran paused for a while. “Wait. What about you, Saguru? You sure know a lot about child discipline and from the way you’re wording this, you must have experience with money.”

Oh no, this is bad, thought Saguru. Oh no.

“Huh. I suppose I do. People underestimate the fundamentals of having so much money you could live off interest. Well, we can’t just let him go on to Suzuki Sonoko, now can we?”

Oh no.
Conan looked up at Saguru with a complicated expression. Saguru looked down at him with an awkward and slanted smile. He would have leaned down a bit to ruffle the child’s hair — he had seen lots of people do that — but Conan was wearing a dark blue backwards Walkman cap and it would have been rude to knock it off. Conan just looked up at him through the bangs spilling out from the size-adjuster hole in his cap and from the hair falling out under that.

He had his hand ringed around a small suitcase — it obviously had very little material value to him as it was a little rugged up from being dragged lowly across the ground, and the biggest item in it appeared to be the skateboard backpacked and upturned across the suitcase’s front — and he had on an oversized navy blue top that was a shade or two darker than his backwards cap. The sleeves sagged down to his elbows in a way that seemed bothersome to Saguru. Saguru failed to understand street fashion, and why children were so obsessed with baggy clothes. He looked at Conan again and decided that baggy clothes were better then tight dress shirts and blazers, because in most of the Doujinshis Conan was sexualised in, he was wearing his blazer or dress shirt. "Um," said Conan, mildly disturbed, “Hello Saguru. Thanks for taking me in, though I’m not sure why. Ran’s threatened me with abandonment before but I never thought she’d actually do it until today.” Saguru coughed and moved out of the door way. He spread his arms in what he hoped was a welcoming gesture but instead it just reminded Conan of 1412 and the not-a-child had to hold back a shudder of unadulterated unhappiness. Instead of shuddering he stepped into the room and bathed in the semi-familiar fragrance of tanned leather and gimp.

“She didn’t abandon you,” promised Hakuba with a solemn nod that didn’t really comfort Conan at all. “She just thought you’d like a change of scenery for a few days.” Oh no, Conan thought, a few days in over twelve-years-old terminology meant a long time. Conan knew because he used it all the time as Shinichi trying to dissuade preachers attempting to crucify him and Conan saying oh yeah I’ll play Fortnight with you guys in a few days when I get out of the hospital to the Detective Boys.

“Why would she think I need a change of scenery for a few days?” Asked Conan, making sure to raise his voice a few octaves as to hide his procrastination from Saguru and himself. “I just got out of the hospital yesterday. No offence, Hakuba, but I was exited to spend some time with her. We could have played Kill Kogoro’s Cognac Cans or something.”

Saguru kneeled down in front of the six year old so they could look eye to eye and Conan could see how serious he was when he said, “she thinks it will help.” With what? Conan’s eyes asked but Saguru pretended not to notice. Conan’s silver necklace jangled a little when the child lifted his hands behind his head. “Doesn’t this remind you of your old home?” Saguru asked.

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“What would you want with Jenever? You realise alcohol at your age is illicit and illegal and against the law, right?” There was a strange, parental rage curling in Saguru’s belly and his head was pounding behind his eyes. Conan smiled inwardly. “You didn’t drink it back at your old home, did you?” That would require investigating. Conan knew that, however.

“Um, no, I’m six. I’m gonna wait till I’m fourteen or something.” Conan was in a bad mood, and when he was in a bad mood he liked to make life hard for others because his life was hard and it was rude not to share. “Heiji-nii did give me a cup of distilled Baijiu, though. It was really tasty so I drank a whole bottle when they left me alone.” There. Now both Saguru and Hattori’s lives would be hard.

“He gave you- a cup- bottle- Baijiu? That bouji bastard, I’ll boil his lily-ass on an Uzi!” Cried Saguru and then he instantly felt bad because he swore so passionately in front of a little boy. “I’m sorry, Conan, I didn’t mean that.” He tried to change the subject and the sandy blond stored the whole
Baijiu revelation for later. “What the devil would you need Jenever for if not to drink it?”

What a simple question, Conan thought. “To put in money. If you put in money in a Jenever bottle each time something happens then soon you’ll have enough money to buy cool toys.” There, now Saguru would feel bad for assuming a child was suckling Jenever necks before he was half way to thirty.

Saguru said, “o-oh. Well, I don’t have any.” At Conan’s look, he said, “in fact I don’t have any alcohol at all.”

“And I’ve had parties before. I throw them all the time. What sort of person has a house like this and doesn’t throw any parties?” Saguru paused and then wondered what he was doing, trying to justify himself to a deviating six-year-old. He was meant to be doing the opposite. “Never mind. How about we get you settled into your room upstairs.” And then he would have a nice long talk with Hattori Heiji.

“Ok,” yipped Conan, knowing full well Saguru would have a nice long talk with Heiji after. He leaned down and took his hands from behind his head. He picked up the handle of his suitcase again and rolled along after Saguru when the blond turned around and lead him towards a stair case. When they got to the base of the stairs Saguru paused for a few long minutes and then he changed directions to an elevator just off to the side of the staircase. Conan looked over the elevator appreciatively because the only house his family owned that had an elevator was their summer manor in Mexico and he hadn’t been there for a long time.

The ride in the elevator was short enough for the silence to be ignorable but the trip to Conan’s actual room was tense and filled with deep thoughts on Saguru’s end. Conan found that he was thinking about thinking nothing and then he felt weird and he accidentally confused himself. By the time they got to the door of his new room he realised he hadn’t memorised his path so he would probably get lost. He put it to the back of his mind for later, instead focusing on more important things like the salt lamp sitting on his new beside table. That was cool.

Saguru noticed his fixation with the grace of a teenage detective. “That is a salt lamp,” he said, and he took Conan’s suitcase from him and wheeled it over to the bedside table with the salt lamp. Conan looked at him and nodded. He realised just how bad Saguru was at interacting with children. That might be entertaining for a while, he thought, but then he got a KID-esque feeling and he decided he might have a superiority complex and no, KID was not rubbing off on him ew no thanks stop yourself.

“So,” Conan said, “am I just not going to go to school, or . . .”

Saguru looked at him weirdly. “I didn’t enrol you in Ekoda Primary because I thought the primary schools were having a family excursion to Hokkaido.” Oh yeah, Conan remembered. He couldn’t go because he didn’t have any family and his guardians were occupied. And then he felt happy because he wouldn’t have to mother-hen the detective boys for however long he was staying with Hakuba.

Conan said, “right,” and he stood in the doorway for a while before he walked over to where his suitcase was placed on the ground. “Guess I better unpack, huh?” He unzipped his suitcase and the
first thing Saguru saw was a soccer ball. The blond detective saw the muscles in Conan’s thin legs tighten and only then did he realise just how strong the boy’s lower body power must be.

And then, before he could stop it, he asked, “what do you think of KID?”

Conan looked at the pensive Londoner over his shoulder and for a moment Saguru thought the child wouldn’t answer. “He’s a thief.” Conan said simply, but the words didn’t quite feel right so he continued with, “I’ve had to deal with more important criminals then him because he doesn’t commit first or second degree murder. I don’t even think he’s committed voluntary or involuntary manslaughter yet.” There, that felt a little better.

Saguru looked a little disturbed for a moment, but then he gained a softer look. “I see,” he said and he nodded like an appraising cat. “I see,” he repeated, but it sounded like it was meant more for himself then the first one so Conan ignored it on behalf of internally cringing. Damned flirtatious thief making his life just that little bit harder. Conan unstrapped his honey-pot yellow skateboard from his suitcase and placed it carefully on his bed. He caressed it delicately and then he placed his soccer ball next to it on the bed. He made it a small bed-quilt crater sort of thing to keep it from rolling away and then he opened a separate compartment of his suitcase next to the clothes compartment. It was full of his books. He and Saguru both smiled a little.

3

It was at school the next morning, Saguru thought about parties. Kuroba next to him was cooking up something nasty with a crockpot and a few flowers he had swiped from the garden. He had claimed they were edible, but Saguru wasn’t really sure what to believe anymore. He felt very unsure with his place in the world. The guy a few seats next to then says, “what’s cooking?”

Kuroba made a shrugging noise that wasn’t quite a shrugging noise because his jaw didn’t move all the way and his shoulders were still and focused. “I might sniff a bag,” he said as he dipped his head down a little. “Or I might pop it. All sorts of options down in the storing room shooting gallery.” The guy a few seats down — Alfredo or some other ethnically foreign name, suffice to say Saguru was bad with names and faces when names and faces these days were as memorable as Ice Suckles — lifted a cigarette up to his lips and the smoke licked down his throat and fell from his lips with equal grace.

“And if your gonna pop it you may as well mainline,” he said, shifting the seat of his pants a little so that it wouldn’t dig into his pelvis each time he inhaled. Kuroba looked over at the man for a moment, looked into his sunken eyes and across his cheek bones which were almost as sharp as Saguru’s but a little more inclined to shadows.

Kaito weeded out some fabric-like lean meat from the soupy mixture inside the crockpot and held it up for the student to see. “This isn’t dope,” he said certainly. Alfredo blinked at him slowly, disappointed, and he lifted his cigar up to his lips again when he was sure the teacher wouldn’t come barging through the door. “I know you’re not in the mood for my dime-store phycology right now. You got your rich dilettante square-ass who dabbles now and then. But if he feels he’s fucking around to the danger point, he always has enough money to run off to the Riviera. They’re always suckers, and without their money they wouldn’t be tolerable. Then you got your upper-middle-class Westchester preppies. Same as the others, basically. What they’re good for is opening their mummy and daddy’s eyes to this social virus and putting pressure on the government to do something about it. Then there’s you street kids. Start fucking around very young, thirteen or so . . . You think you all got it under control, but this barely works. You’re living proof. But in the end, you just got to see the junk as another nine-to-five gig.”

If what Kaito was implying was true, Saguru agreed because it was only a matter of time before this
Alfredo character was arrested for possession of narcotics. The student looked at Kaito for a moment and huffed a little. He had lacquered hair and his nose and temples were bruised and everyone in class liked to sit a little way away from him besides his junkie friends. Saguru felt bad for him. He knew that with how far gone Alfredo was — for Heroin it was always *just one more time, it'll be the last time*, until the PD come about and bust their asses and they were fed some sick medicine — the once-scholar would be lost. And for a terrifying minute Saguru thought he could be looking into the future at Conan one day, who might have been afraid of needles but gave in anyway, and there would be a heatwave all through his body and any feeling of sadness or guilt would all wash away and then it would be *just one more time, it'll be the last time* for him too.

That particular thought process had continued far into the lesson when Alfredo had already butted his cigar on the side of the desk and Kaito had left his crockpot plugged to a power point near his desk to seep. Thoughts of Conan’s great mind divulging in first world deviancy by thirteen as most serfs In stations usually began rattled him. Mr Fren in front of him was droning on about supplementary and complimentary angles, of which Saguru had learnt a while back in the eighth grade, so the blond decided to use his forty-five minutes of third-period for something productive, as was his need.

Conan’s stay at Saguru’s house would need to be educational and it would have to highlight the bad aspects of becoming criminal or unjust. But if it were too unenjoyable, Conan wouldn’t regard any of Saguru’s teachings so it would have to also be fun. Saguru thought that maybe, Kuroba could help with that, but then he thought ill of it because he still couldn’t think of Conan and KID in the same sentence without either bursting with anger or turning five shades of claret. He knew it was inevitable Kuroba would find out about Conan’s stay at Saguru’s mansion and as both Kaito and KID were fond of Conan, there was bound to be interactions. However un-sexual those impending interactions may be, Saguru was still coping with a mind swollen with slightly-horrific child pornography and anything Kuroba was doing in real life somehow reminded Saguru of KID within the Doujinshis.

Most of period three and four was blank in his memory because by the time Saguru came back from the darkest depths of his mind, it was already half way through lunch or, as Conan had called it when explaining how the Detective Boys had almost broke a S.A.O window, Big-Break. He was growing fond. “—Piano and the violin, but I wanted to play the base,” he could hear Aoko say. “Bases are big and lumbering and they remind me of the heffalump. But Mrs Mason said it was to big for me and everyone laughed at me so I told her to execute herself and then I was suspended.”

The world around him became blurry for a moment as it attempted to temporarily discard any images of Conan being violated or a years-worth of documentation on school-age drug usage. When all the smog was gone, he stiffly turned his head to look around him. Aoko was the centre of attention, explaining to her class something Saguru didn’t know because he had missed a lot of the conversation. She was sitting next to him and about seven peers not including the KCB were standing around. The KCB had moved their desks around his in a way that made Saguru nostalgic because he remembered a similar situation when in primary school. He and his friends would all sit around in a circle and talk about books and COD even though he never really played it. Akako was sitting on the side of Kaito’s desk leaning on his shoulder and fondling a dead bird she had probably found outside in the car park or the rafters.

“Oh,” said Kaito, who was the first to see Saguru’s reemergence to sentience. “Welcome back Hakubitch, you were missed. I thought you died there for a moment and I was going to look for Mrs Cook but then I thought ‘mm, better not.’” Saguru blinked a little and at the change of conversation, the standing students listening to Aoko began to disperse. Aoko, who was standing next to Keiko, put her hands on her small hips and leaned forward.

She said, “yea, where were you? I poked you in the eye twice and you didn’t react. I thought you
were high or something.” Hakuba jolted at the mention of being high and how Aoko thought he was it. Kaito and Akako both noticed the reaction but Kaito was the only one who really cared. The attractive brunette leaned forward like Aoko had, a look of concern on his face that Saguru couldn’t list as mock or not.

“You didn’t take drugs did you, Saguru? Was it just a case that involves drugs, then?” Saguru didn’t answer, he just looked at Kaito all off guard and deer-in-the-headlights. Kaito put his hand supportingly on Saguru’s thigh. “It’s ok to not be ok but it’s not ok to stay that way.”

Saguru frowned. “I’m not taking drugs, nor am I on them. But I do need some help, actually. See, I’m taking care of this kid for a week or two because they’ve been acting out and their guardians are concerned about some personality traits. And I suppose I’m just concerned.” Aoko’s eyes widened at the new insight into her friend’s life.

She said, looking a little exited, “man, you, babysitting? I’m sure I could help!” She bundled her hands in a ball by her chest and quivered. “A he, right? Oh, this’ll be so fun, I’ve always loved kids. I could cook yummy meals for them and educate them on proper dining and catering manners like I’ve always wanted to and I could teach them the entire Fresh Prince intro and I can drag them shopping and ruffle their hair like I’ve always seen people do!”

Saguru smiled a little. “That sounds wonderful,” he said, but then he realised he was going to blow his cover too soon and he didn’t want Kuroba or Keiko near Conan at that point in time.

“What’s his name?” Asked Kuroba, ever inquisitive as to the personal affairs of his detectives. Saguru didn’t want to answer, but in that moment, there were four expectant stares his way and while Saguru could face off with a physiologically disturbed murderer, he was bad under peer pressure.

“His name? A-ah. Oh. It’s, ah, Conan. Edogawa.”

Chapter End Notes
Outfit inspiration: Conan was the only one who's outfit I described this chapter because it was important as to how Saguru regarded him. In an interview with Leo DiCaprio as a kid (12, 13?) he was wearing the outfit described. Someone said he looked like Ricky Schroder and he agreed even though he had no idea who that was.
She licked her lips, and winced a little at the dull throb left within them. “As I told you before, I can’t just hand you so much power with little to no experience on the playing field. You are a strong and capable young woman, but that doesn’t mean you can handle this.” Her tawny eyes narrowed into little slits. “The competition is tough this month, and, however egotistical it is of me to say, I have faith in my leadership skills to keep this community alive. You know I respect and care for you when I say this, but you are a control freak.”

The person she was addressing heaved, nails gripping at the table cloth.

“When you were a toddler, you were bossy. When you were a little kid, you were demanding. Now? You relish power. Something so unhealthy at your age. You would abuse your power within the community.” The nails clutching at the table cloth untightened ever so slightly, as if in acceptance. “So I will repeat this firmly; you are not a candidate for the up and coming election, Darl. And there is nothing you can do to change my mind.” She licked her lips again, and the same tingling sensation had returned but it had lasted longer than the first time.

It was an unpleasant feeling, being unsure in your own body. “Don’t be a cunt,” said a lighter voice. It was higher, but in a way, it had carried far more weight then hers. “Don’t be a cunt fucking asshole. You know I’m ready for this. I loved him far before you ever did. If it wasn’t for me, you wouldn’t have even heard of him until a few years ago.”

“Don’t take up that language with me, you little fuck,” she growled, and for once The Addressed didn’t speak back to her. With a grunt of frustration, she eyed her unfinished meal and then the knife and fork she used to eat it. Her brown eyes finally landed on her scalding cup of coffee and without any regard for its apparent heat, she laced her fingers within its stony handle and lifted it to her lips. She ground the piping liquid down her throat, barely feeling it at all. In fact, she didn’t feel any afterburn. Just that very same, insidious tingling. She set down her drink.

Quietly, slowly, she lifted her flip phone from her pocket and held it in front of her face, opening her mouth a little to inspect the redness of her tongue and lips, where the coffee had burnt. She lowered her flip phone, closing it again with a barely audible click. She squished some of her cheek fat
between her teeth and chewed it for a bit. She felt nothing, with the exception of the tingling feeling, the dull throb, a sort of numbness you could hear and taste because it was so horrible.

As if she had been reborn into a new perspective, she glanced at the world around her. Students from the local high school were dining on little treats just as she had been doing a few minutes prior, but their laughs and smiles were going in and out of focus and everything seemed dim and unimportant. “What have you done?” She said more then asked. It was an odd, detached way to speak. “Oh, Elysian, what have you done to me?”

There was a long period of silence before The Addressed spoke again. She said, “I’m not inclined to answer that,” and They sounded a little distant. As if they had the right to.

They didn’t look each other in the eyes. A few minutes passed and she was left to wallow in the feeling of tingling that was consuming her mouth and tongue; which was beginning to feel fat and unfitting between her teeth. A dripping noise alerted her to the saliva trickling from her parted lips. She lifted her pedicured hands to swipe away the salivation gathering around her mouth, and she tried to push as much of it as she could back into her mouth so she wouldn’t have to wipe it off on her sleeve. “I see,” she said after a moment, but the words came hard. It was tricky to pronounce things when you didn’t quite know if you were moving your mouth correctly or not. The pins and needles was quickly intensifying, as was the oral fluids. She wiped her mouth on her sleeve finally, and stared blankly at the punnet of liquid gathered in the Gia textile. “How much longer do I have?” She asked.

The Addressed took so long to answer she didn’t think they’d answer at all. “About ten to twenty minutes, depending on how fast the toxin shuts down your system. Paraesthesia will settle in soon.”

She said, a weak retaliation, “she will come back soon. How will you explain to her what has been lost?”

“Simple,” said The Addressed, gaining back her confidence lost. “I’ll tell her you fell asleep.”

“They’ll know it was a murder. You and her will both be suspects.”

“This isn’t a murder, My Dear. We just came back from the beach. We didn’t know it, but you’ve been bitten by a blue-ringed octopus or perhaps a xanthid crab or angelfish. A freak accident, but not the result of fowl play.” The Addressed sat back and the victim leaned forward, looking into her hands and pretending they were small and soft and childlike from a better time when she was but a worryless girl. The Addressed watched her, steady, if not to hide the unstableness behind their eyelashes. “We could have avoided this, Honey. You knew I was willing to dedicate everything to the community. I have nothing outside of that fucking unity, have no friends outside of the screen. I have no life without them.”

“Is that all?” She interrupted, voice cracking not out of fear but because she couldn’t really move her mouth any longer. As the addressed had said, paraesthesia was finally beginning its ascent up through her cheeks and down her neck. “Just because of Ka-“

“No. It’s not just because of that, dammit. This is business. I’d say don’t take it personally, but fuck it, it is personal. At least everyone will pity me and probably elect me in your place because of that. Fuck you. I hope the afterlife is cold and alone.”

Despite her lack of motion, she managed a rattled laugh. It was hollow and strangled, the sound you get when any noise had to be squeezed out of a withering respiratory system. “When you were a girl you believed, when we died, we would become butterflies.” The Addressed shrugged, eyeing their victim’s food for a moment, and then they looked after a second grader hurrying into the bathroom.
hallways with a phone pressed to his ears. They thought about the third party to their meet up that was still in those hallways somewhere. They were so nervous there were stars and colours all around their sight every time they closed their eyes. They wondered if She could see the phosphenes, too.

2

What had started with, “His name? A-ah. Oh. It’s, ah, Conan. Edogawa,” from Saguru Hakuba had ended with the Kid Capture Brigade plus A Complaining About Ostracism Keiko in a little bucolic bungalow a few yards off from Ekoda High. It was a little noisy from the students being flushed out of the school like rabbits with a stote in the warren and Hakuba had a bit of a headache, but that was ok because no one really cared about him anymore and all focus was on the six-year-old wiggling by his hip.

“No no,” Conan said like a grown-up scolding children, “you see, the officers active within the practical 1412 NATO Taskforce are assigned police grade, standard Smith & Wesson Model 100 Double Lock handcuffs.” Saguru didn’t know how or why Conan knew that. “And through a character study, I have concluded that, while most of KID’s classical issue tricks resemble famous illusionists such as Harry Bouton Blackstone And Kuroba Toichi, KID’s method of escaping handcuffs follows Harry Houdini’s instructable. People don’t realise this because Houdini’s method is impossible if your hands are at your back with the keyhole facing away, as is the case when a law enforcement officer makes an arrest. What they fail to note is that no one has yet been able to get KID’s hands behind his back. All instances in which he had been cuffed KID’s arms have been in front of him.”

The reactions to Conan’s brilliant observations had been varying. Keiko squealed when Conan got to the part about a character study — Saguru could guess why — Kuroba was nodding along supportingly because Conan kept glancing towards him with a look that was either specifically am I on the right track? or get absolutely fucked and Aoko was furiously writing down notes because she aggressively agreed with the little boy and thought everything he said was correct. Akako had been staring detachedly at Conan without blinking for thirty minutes and occasionally muttering about Christendom and biblical quotes but Saguru found if you left her alone for long enough she wouldn’t hurt anyone.

Conan sipped the hot-chocolate that smelt suspiciously like coffee he had ordered for himself from the counter under the guise of wanting to be a Big Boy in front of Saguru-niichan’s cool friends. He said, “all you need is a standard lock pick. Whatever the case, you make sure it’s bent at the sort of angle you get when you bend the end of a bobby pin, put it into the keyhole, take it out, and bend it the other way.” Aoko struggled to find a free page in the KCB’s official exercise book but Conan politely waited for her to find one so she wouldn’t miss any notes she wanted to take. He really was a good boy, under all the running-off-at-midnight-to-meet-a-criminal and getting ins with every young girl around his age ever, Saguru realised.

“That’s a confusing shape,” Aoko frowned. She quivered her book and drew Conan’s attention to it. “Do you think you could draw what you mean? Mr Califla always says diagrams are good, anyway.” Conan nodded and gave a little smile that made Keiko and Aoko coo.

Conan took the pencil gently from Aoko’s hand and while he sketched, he said, “so anyway. What you want to do is insert the lock picker or bobby pin into the keyhole and then bend it down. That should release the hatches that will open the handcuffs. If it’s a double lock all you need to do is put the bobby pin in the keyhole on the other side and then turn it around again and release the hatches.” Saguru wondered if Conan knew he was saying this in
front of KID himself.

Kaito clapped so fast his hands barely had time to move apart from each other. “You’re so smart, Conan!” Conan twitched. Keiko squealed. “I bet you’ll have KID all wrapped around your finger in no time!”

Akako quivered and smirked. “Perhaps he already does. The wasted years, The wasted youth, The pretty lies, the ugly truth.”

“Oh, Akako,” Kaito sighed and pet her back, shaking his head a little. Akako opened her mouth to say something but Kaito covered her mouth carefully and said, “anyway, what’s your favourite aspect about KID? Is it that he’s devilishly handsome — no Akako I don’t mean that literally — incredibly talented or completely everything?”

“Oh oh,” Keiko sighed. She just had so many questions for the precious KID Killer. “And what does he look like?” She swooned. “Are you friends with him? Do you think about him a lot? Is he special to you? What does he look like???” Conan, like Akako, opened his mouth to say something but, like Akako, he was interrupted. They shared an understanding look.

“Why would Conan know that?” Hakuba asked. “It’s not like they’ve been close enough to see each other’s faces or anything of the like.” Conan looked at Hakuba for a few seconds that seemed longer then they actually were and took time out of his day to wonder if he should be concerned or not. After a period of silence, Hakuba saw it fit to continue; “if Conan ever knows what KID looks like, it would be because he discovered his identity outside of a heist, and not because he had been close to his face at any point in time.” Keiko looked betrayed — Conan wondered about the story behind that.

Side-eyeing Saguru rather heavily, Conan said, “he has messy brown hair and his eyes are blue. If light is feeling particularly bendy sometimes his eyes look purple, but they are blue nonetheless. He has straight white teeth but I don’t think he’s ever had braces, his skin is tannish from being outside enough for the sun to brown it, his eyebrows are well kept and from what I can tell, he doesn’t wear too much makeup. He could either be young or he has just aged really well. His jawline is like a V, I guess.” Saguru stared at Conan with a deranged look in his eyes.

Keiko leaned forward, meanwhile. “Do you think he’s handsome? On a scale of one to ten, how handsome is he?” She asked, and to his credit, Saguru observed Conan looked at least a little disturbed at the question. Something that either went unnoticed by Keiko or was ignored, because she had her own notepad in her hands at that point, twitching to write down his answer if it pleased her to do so. “For investigative purposes of course. There can’t be that many attractive people in Japan or elsewhere, can there?”

Conan went quiet for a moment, and Saguru wondered why he didn’t answer immediately. Aoko, despite herself, waited patiently for the answer to Keiko’s question, Akako still wasn’t paying attention and was looking at Conan’s left ear and Kuroba, Saguru noted, was bumbling in his seat and digging holes in poor Conan with his eyes alone. Eyes that were blue, that when light was feeling particularly bendy, would be purple, but blue nonetheless. Saguru wondered if he should be thinking more hardly on that, but as Conan opened his mouth to say something, he found the child more important.

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder . . .” Said Conan cautiously, suddenly eyeing Keiko in a judging manor and trying to decide if she was a threat to what was left of his pride. “It wouldn’t matter if I thought he was attractive or not. Some people wouldn’t find what I thought was attractive attractive, just as they may find something attractive that I dislike. This question is futile, so futile in fact that you either asked this for personal reasons or you didn’t factor the whole my type, not my
type.” Spoken like a true detective wofling for a motive, thought Saguru proudly.

Keiko had the decency to look floored. “Wow,” She said. “Who thought one question could tear apart the fabric of my poorly sewn reality? Ok, I surrender, Detective, you win. I asked it for personal reasons. You see, there is a sort of election coming up for a group I’m in and I thought I may as well participate. Your answer could greatly sway the competition.” Conan noticed that suddenly, Saguru was looking at Keiko far more intently then he had before.

Conan opened his mouth to say something, but he was interrupted by a drilling noise that made his ears want to bleed. All of the teens excluding Akako around him squished their hands into the pockets of their school uniforms and each pulled out their phones. One by one they frowned and replaced the phones in their pockets as they had been before. Gradually, they all turned to him. Slowly, Conan put his hand into the pocket of his navy Adidas jacket and pulled free his phone. As the buzzing of it suggested, it had been Conans’s phone that had been ringing the entire time. With a resigned sigh, Conan flipped it open to see Hattori Heiji’s profile. Conan briefly smiled up at Hakuba next to him. “Could you excuse me for a moment?” He asked and Hakuba shuffled back to make room for Conan to move past him, as was the child’s indirect request. Saguru tried to see who was calling Conan but was only able to see a H and a lot of Is.

Conan looked back at him and the KCB’s booth before scampering away down the hall to the male bathroom but not actually going in. He held the phone to his ear and allowed the connection to run through. “Hattori,” he greeted formally when he was sure no one was around to possibly overhear them. “Haven’t heard from you in a few days. Which is strange. You usually contact me every few hours in some way. Text, postcard, unorchestrated kidnapping, the like.”

He heard Hattori give a rattling, husky laugh over the phone that sounded a little distorted due to the poor connection. “Glad to know ya missed me, Kudou. How have ya been since yer were released from the hospital, by tha way?”

Conan kept the phone to his ear with his shoulder and used his freed hand to rub at his shoulder a few times. He made circular motions with it to make sure it didn’t get pins and needles. “They said it was fine, mostly. The gun wound required surgery and all. They said it took a while to get the remnants of the broken bullet parts out of the wound but there were overall no complications. The bullet severed tissue but no major arteries and they had to keep me in a few extra days to make sure there weren’t any complications, given how many times I’ve been referred.” Conan paused for a moment. “I snuck out at some point, it got so stuffy in there. Makes you wonder why the paediatrics wing wasn’t swarming with nurses. There were only about five doctors and medical staff I had to avoid to get out into the open air.”

Hattori shrugged. “Good to know yer’re doin’ ok. Sister told me yer’re with that cunty bastard Hakuba at the moment. That’s gotta be a worse fate then any bullet could ever hope to exact upon ya.”

Conan bit his lip. “He’s not all bad. To me, at least. I won’t deny he was a total dick to you. He literally called you a savage. Anyway, what did you call for, other then to describe to me your passionate hate for Hakuba Saguru?” Heiji didn’t answer at first, and Conan had this way of knowing the conversation was going to be serious for a while because Heiji never didn’t answer at first.

Conan had time to awkwardly look at a spidery paralian woman solivaganting past him who had probably heard him swear.

“I was thinkin’,” Heiji said, “thinkin’ real long an’ hard.” Conan nodded, reclaiming the phone with his hand so that he could hold it more stable then with his shoulder. Interruptions were intolerable.
"Have yer ever wondered why Gin n’ Vodka got on a roller coaster before an illegal transaction?"

Conan went quiet, and had Heiji been with the faux-child at that moment, he would have seen the uncountable times in which Conan blinked. "What?" Was all the brunette was able to say.

"Yer know," insisted Heiji. "Organisation members don’t usually take time out of th-"

"Shut the fuck up, Hattori, I didn’t mean what like that. I meant what as in why did you specifically call me for that you fat fucking retarded rock monster."

"What? So yer haven’t ever wondered?"

"... Well, yeah, I guess. I’ve had a lot of time to pinwheel that day around in my mind—“ before Conan could finish there was a sort of choked scream reverberating throughout the halls, not quite a cry but a horrible sound from the gut nonetheless. It was followed by the furry sound of commotion. Conan paused for a moment and listened for the sounds indicating his fears. “... Hattori, we’ll need to continue this conversation at a later date.” Conan could practically feel Heiji’s questioning stare through the phone signals. “Just...” Conan licked his lips indecisively. "Have your phone on stand by." Conan clicked off the call, not wanting to wait for Hattori’s response and deal with, ugh, questions.

He squished his phone into his Adidas jacket and took to sprinting out into the bungalow’s dining room where he could hear the cacophonous sounds. There was a small crowd amassing loosely around a booth off to the side of the bungalow, just dunking in a blind spot where cameras couldn’t quite reach. While the crowd was tight around the middle, there were various stragglers hanging about around the outside, all doing something distressing — trembling, crying, keening, desperate talking and explanation demanding. Out of the corner of his eye, Conan saw a group of girls, possibly eighth grade and in Ekoda High uniforms, dashing for the exit with some following their example and packing up to make a hurried departure. He saw Kaito Kuroba promptly locking the door with some contraption Conan didn’t know he would ever need to use.

There was a scream, and Conan turned to the crowd to see the silhouette of a girl down on her knees, clawing at the shoulder of an unmoving figure. Someone gentled her away and while she put up a fight, eventually she went flaccid and docile. Sprinting forward with a wood-hard look on his face, Conan shoved past pant cuffs and unshaved legs and stiff knees until he had a clear view of a body. "No one touch the carcass," Saguru announced, his voice harder then what he had ever used with Conan or even KID. "As of now, this is a crime scene and any contact with the body will be under immediate suspicion. Do not try to leave. You," Saguru said, pointing to a waitress who was all startled heaving and weak knees but still the most professional of the other workers. "Call the police immediately. No one leave the building."

Saguru’s eyes raked across the scene of the murder, watching with the professionalism of a business man as the crowd washed away and returned to their booth seats as was Saguru’s indirect request. They were all holding hands tightly and comforting each other, and in moments like this, Hakuba would brood on the connection formed between witnesses of a human death. Without so much as a sigh, the blond leaned down and gathered the dead female’s wrist in his hand and checked for a pulse one last time. Nothing, no movement. Conan, ever so light on his toes, approached Saguru.

"Do you know who she is? I can ask the little girl who tried to wake her for a name if you like. They may be personally connected."

Saguru said, “no, there is no need for that. I know this woman.” The Londoner stared down into her glazed, irritated eyes. They were grey from death but under her eyelids he could see a familiar, treacly brown. Locks of salty hair fell down her back and whisked around her cheeks; one of which was decorated with a distorted KID embolism. A cloak had fallen back from her head, gathered now
around her inner-elbows. It’s front was lost in the pool of stained material, but Saguru knew what
design was on the tip of the hood. “The victim’s name is Yoki Sasha.”

Unfortunately, Conan was unfamiliar with the EPD and therefore unable to participate within the
investigation actively for as long as the officers were weary of him. All he had been able to gather
from the brief period of time in which the occupants of the bungalow were waiting for the police was
the type of poison used to execute the murder. Her mouth and face had smelt of fish or old blood and
her mouth was almost scalded despite her showing no signs of burn-pain. Her lips and throat
appeared to be very slick, suggesting both salivation, regurgitation and the inability to swallow
mucus. Conan was well versed in neurology, and therefore, was able to determine the cause of death
as tetrodotoxin toxicity and the consequential binding of voltage-gated sodium channels. A slow,
terrifying and violent fate taking place right under the noses of the public over a period of time
ranging from twenty-minutes and four hours depending on the dosage the victim ingested.

Her plate of food was in a far-off, odd position, meaning someone had moved it to allow room for
the victim to lay as she was slowly paralysed.

Conan briefly looked to Saguru Hakuba worriedly and hoped his personal connections to one
deceased Yoki Sasha wouldn’t slander the investigation. On the other hand — a less professional
one — Conan felt deeply for the Londoner. He had solved cases with a less then desirable culprit
before, such as Ray, but never had he held a significant friendship with any of the victims. As of
5:37 PM, however, Conan didn’t know the extent of Saguru’s connections to the dead woman.

A quiet little sniffle alerted Conan to the shivering girl, Aoko, next to him. She had been crying into
KID’s shoulder a few minutes ago, but Kaito had to leave to answer some questions the officers
were hurling at him. The small brunette began alternating between crying to Keiko on one side of her
and attempting to comfort Conan — who was far more unfazed then her, not that she was in a state
to realise that — on the other. Akako seemed wholly unfazed. She kept looking at him with a
disturbed sort of look and at the body with a grim one, but she didn’t show any more emotions then
that. Conan wondered if she had experience with death or if she just had an admirable poker face.

There was a heavy noise on Conan’s free side, and he stopped stroking circles on Aoko’s back to
look at whoever had sat next to him. “What happened to that girl?” Kaito swallowed when he knew
he had Conan’s attention. For an international criminal, he seemed very frightened at the prospect of
murder. The colder pat of Conan thought he ought to get used to it; if he continued his thievery to
Lupin’s level he would probably have a few malicious kills under his belt by twenty. “What
happened to that poor, poor girl?” The second time he asked that question Conan thought he
sounded far more afraid then before.

“She was poisoned by the neurotoxin TTX,” Conan said, looking at Kaito’s face. He would have
looked into the older brunette’s eyes, but they were clouded and troubled and, despite being directed
at him, were staring far off into the distance. “I’m sorry you had to see this. Poisoning is something
no one ever wants to see.” Kaito looked queasy, what with how pale he was. The teen looked down
at his feet.

Kaito said, “it isn’t your fault. I should be more composed. This — this isn’t the first time something
like this has happened to me. I’ve seen murders before.” The teen turtled into his black and orange
Culture Kings jacket. “You must be used to it, by now, what with how many dead bodies you’ve
seen and solved. I must look pitiful.” Conan looked over at Keiko, Aoko and Akako to make sure
they didn’t hear anything they weren’t meant to.

“No matter how many times I see dead bodies, I will never get used to it. You don’t get used to
witnessing a human remove another from this world.” Conan bunched his hands up in his pants and then stuffed them stiffly in his jacket. “I trust in Hakuba to solve this one,” Conan said after a moment of thick silence. “You know, people speak of clinical detachment, right? Secretly, I don’t know if it’s real. I don’t think I’ll ever get them out of my mind. The dead bodies, I mean. All the people that could have been saved. You can’t detach yourself from that. I don’t think you’re pitiful or pathetic or anything of the like, KID. If anything, this is solid proof of your humanity not yet lost.” Kuroba looked at the faux-child, bewildered and a little sparkly.

Together, they sat in silence. Kaito looked around the room at the friendships and at the families and at the other people trying to breathe in the airless tension of the bungalow. He felt a pressure on his side, a surge of warmth, and he looked down a little to see Conan hugging his side. “Are you gonna be ok?” He asked in a childish but not unserious voice. Kaito swallowed dryly and wrapped his own arms around Conan. It felt right.

He said, “. . . Yeah. I’ll be ok. I think I’ll be ok.”

From across the room, Hakuba watched them for a moment. He felt his throat constrict at the close contact, and at how scared Kuroba looked. For a little while Saguru watched them and Aoko, who was snuggling with Keiko and at Akako, who had refrained from staring at the empty space around Conan’s head and instead at the corpse. The blond detective shoved any thoughts of longing or yearning for comfort to the back of his mind and turned back to the scene of the crime.

The body was in the same position as it had been before — slumped over the booth table with mucus and saliva sheeting from her throat. He had spoken with the other officers and neurologists that had been called in and they deduced the cause of death to be tetrodotoxin poisoning from traces of the puffer fish toxin on her food, though they would have to wait for forensic results to confirm such a thing, for there was a large and essential difference between a theorem and a theory. The most disturbing part of the murder, something he thought Conan may have also picked up on, was the evidence leading them to believe Yoki was aware she was going to die. There were bite marks on her inner cheeks, too hard to be unintentional. Saguru avoided looking into Sasha’s shallow eyes, and he knew her eyes wouldn’t follow after him.

To distract himself, Saguru began to walk towards the two main suspects; an eldritch woman in her twenties and a ranga in middle school, around year seven or eight at the latest. The ranga, who’s name Saguru recorded as Delease Sasha, who bared facial resemblance to Yoki herself, was staring hauntingly at the body of her sister. She still had a disbelieving look in her eyes that you couldn’t really fake, and she kept looking down at her hand — the one she had been shaking Yoki with. She looked pathetic. The spidery woman, whose name was Kalmine Yarincha, looked to be of a Russian ethnic background and was wearing heavy, expensive fabric. She had her teeth gritted and struggled to maintain a poker face and a few times, Saguru caught her staring ruefully at Yoki’s corpse spaciously. Like she wasn’t quite there at all.

She didn’t smile at the officer who webbed away from her after he had finished questioning her, but she did nod at Saguru in a timid greeting when he approached. He tried to make his presence imposing, as to perhaps scare any information out of her. “Kalmine Yarincha,” Saguru greeted formally, saying her name aloud for the first time and consequently testing it on his tongue. She didn’t answer him, but she did maintain eye contact up until he stood in front of her. She averted her gaze to Delease and took hold of the child’s shaking hand. Hakuba was secretly glad. The more he watched her hand quiver pitifully the fatter and denser the rock in his belly grew. “Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?” Saguru asked, anyway.

Kalmine said, “it’s not as if I could refuse, now could I, Saguru Hakuba?” The words spoken, Saguru thought, were rather rude. The tone she used to say them wasn’t sarcastic, however. In a way
it sounded lost and alone like a child caught in a rip. “Ask away. I’ll try answer what I can as long as you don’t hassle Delease. I don’t think she can speak at the moment.” In fact, Kalmine thought she needed a hospital. The beautiful woman gathered the child in her arms and turned her away from Yoki’s flaccid form with a wince at the rank stench. The scent of death was slowly venting through the small, enclosed room and within the hour it would surely be unbearable. It was a salty, fishy smell.

“Of course,” Hakuba said. “Now, the time of the murder has been estimated to be about four-fifty. Where were you during this time?” Saguru watched her face with a light gaze that appeared to be friendly and trusting.

“I was walking out of the bathroom. I had gone into the bathroom to touch up my hair because Delease had unevened my middle parting,” she said as if she were embarrassed by the reason but also too disturbed to care. “I walked past a little boy who was on the phone to someone. They exchanged some rather prude language, but the boy was looking at the phone nonetheless. He would be able to confirm the time I walked past and the fact that I walked past in the first place.” Saguru twisted around instinctively to look at Conan. The boy was twisting his finger in his jacket and talking to the officer that had last talked to Kalmine. He was leaning his weight against Kuroba, who’s hand was curved around his waist, but he didn’t show any universal behavioural traits that insinuated lying. Kalmine continued after a short unthinking pause, “and when I got back Delease was looking at Yoki with this confused stare. She had asked if I thought Yoki was ok, and I smirked and pet Yoki’s cheek. I said she was probably just staying up late again, but then I realised just how cold her cheek was. I felt her pulse. I looked at her face. She was dead. Delease screamed.”

“. . . I see,” Saguru said. He turned and looked back at Delease. “So, if I’m correct, you touched The Victim’s cheek and her wrist with your bare hands?” Kalmine visibly clenched her teeth together, anger welling in her eyes before she stifled it. Saguru didn’t know why, but he decided it may be important so he put it to the back of his mind for later mulling-over. “Can you point to me those who were sitting in front of your booth, please?” Yoki’s booth was against the wall and tucked out of the way of cameras, meaning there weren’t many people who would be able to confirm the story. There were some, however.

Kalmine looked over at a couple cramped into a booth previously unused, embracing each other. They looked to be a little older than Hakuba, perhaps in college. Hakuba hoped they would take him seriously, as not everyone knew of his detective status and he was wearing a sophomore’s uniform. “Ok,” he said, and he turned back to Kalmine politely. “Please excuse me.” While he didn’t state what he was going to do, exactly, Yarincha seemed to understand. She gave him a sullen look and looked after him as he turned away from her. She looked down at Delease for a moment, and then her gaze darkened.

4

Yoki was beginning to find it hard to breath. “Whew- where is that damned girl when you need her?” She heaved after a moment, and it was a weak, rattling sound that one could have easily mistook for a boat propeller. She couldn’t feel her back or her shoulders any longer, and she had resorted to laying cheek down on her table. Her murderer had at least moved her food away so she wouldn’t lay in it.

“It wouldn’t matter, anyway.” They responded, trying to appear disinterested but Yoki knew otherwise. There was sweat beading on their forehead and her fingers kept twitching as they did when they were afraid something would go wrong. “You are too far gone for anyone to save you now. No hospitals will be able to revive you.” They looked down at Yoki’s stilling form with what could either be disdain or regret. “You should say your last words soon. Wouldn’t want them to be
something shitty like, *I really heckin wish that cunty yellow belly were here right now* or something equally worthless. At least you aren’t squabbling with fear.” Yoki mustered the energy to laugh, though she thought she must have sounded like shrieking kitchenware. She really ought to say her last words soon, before she descended into a mess of moans and muffled yips.

She said, “you know, I guess I saw this coming from a long way away. I knew I’d die soon. I suppose I juh- juh-st didn’t think it’d be you to spike my last meal.” It was the thought of food that initially sent nausea clawing up her throat like a cockroach scratching to climb out of her mouth. Her belly heaved and she felt a heat rush up her throat and tumble out of her mouth. It was something white and pasty around her lips. She shivered for a moment and They watched her with an emotion Yoki couldn’t describe. There was a moment of silence, and Yoki listened to the distant flirting of a young couple in the booth nearest to them. It was just far enough away from them that the couple had peace and that they couldn’t interfere with her death. While Yoki knew she was destined to die, she thought that perhaps it would be nice to have her reckoning bringer justified. It was a nice thought to think in her final hour. “You still care,” she whispered, and her voice was emotional and ugly and patchy. “If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t have moved that plate.”

They didn’t answer at first. “You ruined everything.” They said eventually. With finality. “I knew this day would come, sooner or later. The only question was who would be the one lying on a table dying.” Yoki felt another heat wave crawling up her throat, more car-sickness. But she swallowed it. There was quiet for a moment — or at least in their world. In their world, there were no happy conversations between waiters and customers or dates or get-togethers. “. . . I never would have done this, Elysian.”

“I know,” they said. “That’s why I’ll be the one crying at your grave.”

“I never would have done this, Elysian,” Yoki repeated. “Elysian? Elysian, I never would have. Never ever, just lis’en, Elysian, just . . .” The young girl trailed off, and They looked at her strongly for long enough to know Sasha’s perception of the world was distorting. “Elysian? Are you there?” De-” Yoki was interrupted by another nauseating heave, that one louder than the others and They hurriedly looked around to make sure no one had heard. No one had heard. No one would ever hear from Yoki Sasha again.

5

Conan’s eyes scraped through the suspects. Rastafarian, feminist, Metal Head, closet furry, Year Nine It Girls. His blue orbs landed on Hakuba as he questioned Kalmine Yarincha and followed him as the blond sauntered away to a college-age couple comforting each other in their arms. He knew they weren’t the murders, so Hakuba must be questioning them on something Kalmine, one of the main suspects, had said. Confirming a story, levelling up alibis, it was all the same, really. While Conan found it secretly nice to half-cuddle with Kaito, the thief was looking far more composed and they were already two-hours into the investigation with no real progress. It wasn’t that long, considering some investigations stretched on long into the night, but Conan was a little fed up with being all docile and nuzzles and huggies with International 1412 when there was a murder to solve.

With a new resolve in mind, Conan looked up to KID. The thief still had him squished up to his side and his longer arm was around his smaller waist — kinda uncomfortable, — and Aoko didn’t look like she would stop him from wondering away. She and Keiko were dozing on each other slightly, probably emotionally exhausted. Akako was staring directly at him but, whatever. Figuring he’d be fine, Conan pulled on Kaito’s black sleeve to get his attention. “Kuroba,” he hissed through his teeth. He didn’t want to wake the two sleeping girls, after all. Kuroba looked down at him. The teenage magician looked tired and his eyes were puffy. Conan swallowed his regret.
“You wanna go investigate, right?” Kaito asked. Conan got a grim look in his eyes and he nodded. “Oh,” Kaito said with a flat look, and he suddenly looked far more un-composed than he had before when he was staring off into the distance. “Right,” he said as he peeled his arm from Conan’s side. “I guess I should contact Nakamori, while you’re at it. I’m pretty sure Aoko hasn’t thought to call him yet. You never know, he might be able to come to the scene and get us out early, or something.”

Conan knew that that wasn’t allowed, even if Nakamori was a graduated officer and inspector.

“Okay,” Conan said a little awkwardly and he slipped down off the booth chair and under the table. He clambered away until he was standing outside of the booth and he looked at Kuroba again one last time. The thief was holding his phone to his ear pensively and fiddling with something in his pocket — likely tarot cards. Conan could feel more than see Akako smirk at him as the faux-child began padding over to the suspects.

Conan was careful to avoid walking into the paths of any officers that might throw him right back to Kuroba and the girls, but he was still determined to cross the scene over to where Kalmine Yarincha and Delease Sasha were. He hoped they didn’t recognise him from any KID heists lest they treat him more like an investigator and shut him out a little. Delease seemed to notice his approach first, but she quickly averted her eyes to her hands again as if she were afraid he’d make eye contact with her. Kalmine looked to him with a little surprise. “Hi,” he said, giving a boyish grin.

“. . . KID Killer?” Kalmine asked with a perplexed frown, as if meeting Hakuba Saguru were enough. Delease jolted and looked at him as if noticing him for the first time even though Conan knew for a fact that wasn’t so. Maybe she was a little delirious.

Conan smiled a little and nodded his head, softening his eyes. Delease was fixated with him for a moment, and then she looked back up to Kalmine and then at her hand again. She had stopped crying, but her eyes were red and bloated and her eyelashes were stuck together. “I was just wondering what you were doing before you came here to the bungalow? Was it fun?” Conan said with a smile. He grabbed Delease’s hand and held it in his. She looked down at him, all deer-in-the-headlights and frightened damsel.

Conan looked into her eyes then, and he looked at her face closer. Her eyes were emerald and her hair colour was bordering between light brown and auburn. Her mascara was clearly water proof, but even then it was melting down her face like strips of hair and the concealer around her forehead was muddled like she had been sweating. Conan was taken away from his observations when he heard Kalmine say, “we were at-” but then the hauntingly beautiful woman was cut short by Delease.

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“I wish more than anything that I didn’t take the day off today,” she said. Conan’s smile disappeared immediately and he wilted, about to apologise like an idealistic suburban boy when Delease said, “but I did take the day off, didn’t I? We went to the beach because today was an anniversary of sorts.” Conan bit back his apology from before and decided to replace it with something more productive to the investigation.

He said, “what anniversary?” As he sat down to mimic Delease’s position on the floor. He crossed his legs like he and the other kids had to do at school when they sat on the carpet because it was polite. Delease’s posture changed and she looked awkward, as if it were an anniversary for something she didn’t want Conan to know about. Conan thought odd of that, and put it in a box to analyse later when he had time to sit back down alone and think about the case as he did sometimes. It calmed his mind and allowed him to think levelly and unbiased.

“The anniversary of a group she made. It’s a Kaitou KID fan group, nothing important. It was just a little something she enjoyed doing in her spare time.” Conan nodded along with her, relatively unfazed but now understanding why she didn’t want to tell him what they were celebrating. He figured she thought he’d be offended in some way because he chased KID and tried to arrest him. He tried to look interested and un-judgmental and he didn’t reply to what she had said at all. It was amazing what people could divulge in the extra minute of silence after they finished speaking. Conan wasn’t disappointed as she soon added, smiling softly, “oh she loved him. Sheh, I always fancied myself a bigger fan then her, though. It was a subject we constantly fought about.” She went quiet for a moment. “She just . . . Oh, Yoki, you didn’t deserve this — what ever did you do wrong? What did you do that would end in this?” Conan nodded his head along with her, a sad look on his face.

He said, “it might not have been something she done, Delease. People can be bad, sometimes. That’s what the police are for. They catch the bad people.” She only happened to look more distraught at that.

“But what if she was the bad person?” Delease asked. “What if she was the bad guy this whole time? Why else would somebody kill her?” Delease began to breathe through her teeth loudly. “We just wanted to go to a cafe. Just go to a cafe to talk about shit. Talk about shit.” Part of Conan wanted to lean back to give her space, but another part knew distance from other people would get her nowhere. Instead, he leaned in and embraced her neck. At first, she didn’t respond.

Kalmine, standing and looking down at them, still had wide eyes and her eyelids looked whiter than they had before. In fact, she looked deathly pale; as if she had painted her skin with party shop concealer. “Oh . . .” She said, leaning back like part of her wanted to bolt. Conan looked at her from where his head was buried in a mop of autumn hair. “Oh, Elysian,” she said, voice a clambering shadow cloaked in weakness. Conan looked at her with confusion that he thought she wouldn’t see. She must have, because she explained quietly, “Elysian. It means to be peaceful, creative, divinely inspired. Yoki always called her Elysian.”

Elysian, Conan repeated in his mind. He gentled away from Delease then, and he looked her in the eyes. The young girl’s fingers twitched like they wanted to grip something — an almost universal nervous tick. Conan wondered what had her so on edge, because there was a difference between nervousness and mourning. He made to pull away and he felt something dig into his thigh. Conan paused for a moment, and he slowly turned to look at Delease from where she had stopped rubbing her eyes. They stayed still for a moment before Conan cautiously pulled away, ending the embrace.

“I think,” he said, still close enough as to rub Delease’s back, “I think that you should get cleaned up. Or if the officers won’t let you into the bathroom without an escort, maybe just some water. They have really yummy ice tea there, and if you don’t have any money, I’m sure they’ll give it to you for
free. It’s been an emotional night for everyone, I’m sure they’d be kind enough.” He smiled at her.
“I’m pretty sure I felt something in your handbag compartment, though. That was a roll of cash,
right?” He grinned at her, beaming at his deduction. Delease struggled with a smile, but she nodded
nonetheless and shakily stood. Her knees quaked a little from stress and she was still weak from not
standing for a while.

“Yeah,” She said distantly. Like she wasn’t really there with them at all. “I’ll go do that. I do have
some cash on me, you know. I can probably get something for you.” Conan shook his head and
made an excuse of not wanting to be rude, but she insisted she’d get him a juice box anyway. Conan
watched after her as she limped over to a staff worker off to the side, probably to ask for service. The
waitress in question looked to be about fifteen herself, not to far away from Delease’s own age.

Both Conan and Kalmine watched the exchange between her and the waitress, watched as Delease
took her money from her phone case. Conan waited a moment before he said, “you didn’t really go
to the beach, did you?” The faux-child kept looking ahead, as did Kalmine when she eventually
replied.

“No, we didn’t,” she said. “As Delease said before —“ the blackette’s voice fell a few octaves until it
was a mere whisper. “We just came to talk about shit. Today was the day Yoki created the White
Knight Kites online forum two years ago.” There was a short, somber pause. “That wasn’t really
cash in her pocket, was it?” Conan finally looked at her. He smiled a little.

He said, “no, it wasn’t,” quietly. He began to walk away from the scene and he could feel Kalmine’s
eyes on his back when he departed her vicinity. He felt them divert when he realised just where he
was going. Conan padded quietly over to where Hakuba Saguru was mumbling to Yoki Sasha’s
corpse. It was probably an apology, or a promise. Conan watched from his place a few fox-leaps
away as Saguru felt the area around her cheeks, ears and then wrist. Conan didn’t know what the
Brit was looking for, but he sure knew what he was. Straining his ears to the side a little when he
invariably heard a few vital words, Conan overheard two officers talking about pufferfish poisoning.
He had heard enough after the first few sentences said by the two officers.

Conan was aware the case would be wrapped up soon. Kalmine and Delease had probably been
questioned with a One-Before-The-Other pattern, meaning the officers would assume the victim was
at the rock pools before they entered the cafe. They would assume she was intoxicated by a starfish
or pufferfish or octopus or perhaps a type of crab. Murder would be ruled out. With this in mind,
Conan made a beeline for Hakuba, a determined glint in his eyes as he neared.

Upon closer inspection, Saguru looked sickly. He clearly wasn’t dealing with analysing a friend’s
dead corpse. Conan drifted around until he was sure Saguru was finished. Conan watched as the
Londoner sauntered away over to Kalmine, likely to act upon his obvious suspicions towards her.
Conan let him go, and before any officer could stop him, Conan hurried over to Sasha’s inanimate
form. He set to work as soon as he was in arms reach, tugging aside her blackish, greyish cloak and
her I.AM.GIA Blaster Jacket so he could see her waist. He was glad she was only wearing a
cropped tank top under her layers of jackets — it would make his job quicker and easier. Conan
covered his hand with his shirt and he pinched around her mid-section for a while until he found a
pint-sized incision wound — one that was small enough to be almost un-spottable unless you knew
what you were looking for. He grinned, and there was an evil glint in his eyes. He had found the last
piece of his puzzle.

He took his hand away from Yoki’s side and offered her a quiet promise, one not unfamiliar to what
Saguru had said. “Your death will not go unpunished, Sasha,” he said and nodded at her even
though he knew she couldn’t see nor hear him. With that said, Conan swerved around and searched
the bungalow for one of the on-scene detectives. He felt a tug on his collar, then, and he heaved and
made a choking noise as he clawed at his neck.

Conan felt himself be dragged away from Yoki’s lifeless body and across to another booth. He hissed and turned around to face his assailter and saw a man in a Furla suit that smelled of canned noodles and bleach. “What do you think you’re doing, poking around a body, brat?” Conan blinked, but then he gathered himself.

He smiled a little. “What does it matter, Mister?” He said, one hand drifting to his watch. “The case has been solved now! Good job on it, by the way. You’re almost as good as my old man Kogoro!” Conan watched patiently as the man’s (*) face twisted into a look of misunderstanding. (*Conan had overheard his name before . . . Yaraki Cheng, was it?)

Yaraki opened his mouth to respond but the only noise that ultimately escaped was a gurgle and he convulsed and fell back into the booth seat. Conan looked around briefly and scampered to Yaraki’s slouched side, small, palpable hands falling from his watch as he did so. He propped Yaraki’s side forward so the man’s head fell forwards and then Conan rushed behind Yaraki’s booth, fumbling with the bow tie he pulled from his Adidas Jacket’s inner pocket. In his mind he chanted all he would need to solve the case — it wouldn’t do to mess up his convicting, after all.

Conan jumped when he heard a crusty voice implore, “Yaraki, What the hell? Are you asleep? Get up, Goddammit, before Ichirou notices and starts a petition to put you down. We need to wrap up this case, set out a team to find the animal responsible for a sixteen-year-old-girl’s death! God, Fortnight makes you sociopath-“

Conan held his bow to his mouth and therefore, Yaraki replied, “we’ll be catching the animal that killed her, alright,” in a tone that ultimately caught the attention of a few other officers.

“Unfortunately, the animal we speak of isn’t an animal at all. That girl was murdered.” Yaraki’s bold statement spread through the bungalow like wildfire. And soon enough, the scene of the murder was Conan’s stage once again.

“You can’t speak anymore, can you?” Delease said. Her voice wasn’t as strong as before. The redhead tapped her fingers, and Yoki’s unresponsiveness was her answer. Yoki always talked; to anything, anyone. Out of the two of them, Yoki had always been quite the social butterfly. Perhaps that was why everyone liked her more. Delease leaned over the table and twitched her sister’s shoulder. The dying girl wilted and shook a little, her muscles tightening and shaking spasmodically under her skin.

Delease lurched back and away from the quaking girl, once again casting a startled glance across the room. No one was looking their way yet. Delease looked at the young couple a few booths down from them, and then looked away again upon seeing them lip locked and enjoying each others company. The youngest sister got a disgusted look on her face and opened her mouth as to say something to Yoki. The red head was interrupted when Yoki cried out, moans of pain tumbling from her lips like kilograms.

The brunette convulsed and then finally, she stilled. A disturbed frown fell upon Delease’s face, and she stood a little as to look down on her sister. “Look at you,” she whispered. “You are so ugly. Just look at you. You can’t even close your mouth.” Yoki didn’t answer, but there was a distinctive wetness in her eyes. Delease watched as the wetness fattened and soon fell from the inert girl’s eye. “I guess your last words would be as ugly as you are right now, then,” Delease said, and her voice was neither cold nor warm. “I can’t have you making anymore noise,” she explained in that same medicinal voice. “You’ll attract attention when the convulsions get worse.”
Delease stood as discreetly as she could and she slowly moved over to her sister’s side. The red head touched her sister’s face, a surreal feeling washing over her for a long moment. “I-” she said, then closed her mouth to reevaluate what she was to say. “I’d say I’m sorry it had to end like this, but really, I’m not. You bitch, you, you bitch . . . You brought this on yourself. You should have just stayed away from my Kaitou KID, Yoki. You should have just-” and then Delease shook her head. She looked into Yoki’s eyes. Yoki was no longer able to move her face, but Delease saw all her sister felt in those soupy brown eyes of hers. Delease opted to say nothing else and she reached into her bag. She watched Yoki’s eyes spy the movement and the syringe Delease unsheathed from her bag’s inner pocket. “This is a sedative I got from daddy’s medicine cabinet. You know that one he uses when he comes back really late from surgery and he can’t sleep? Yeah.”

Yoki just watched her.

Delease leaned down, but not too much, and she pinched the skin on her older sister’s side. The red head slid the needle head into the brunette’s body like oil and eased the potent dose of general anesthesia into her victim’s system as to make sure Yoki fell into a drug induced slumber soon enough. It made Delease feel strange; that Yoki would never awake again. She remembered being a young girl and sharing a bed with Yoki because she was scared of ghosts.

Delease held the needle in the other girl for longer than necessary as she couldn’t really bring herself to pull it out. When she finally did, Yoki’s muscles were already relaxing as they did when dying. The seventh grader got to work on rubbing the needle clean with a cloth she had also stored in her bag, and quickly she squished them into a secret compartment she sewed into her bag herself.

Delease raised herself to her full height again and looked into Yoki’s eyes for the last time. Small noises fell from the dying girl’s lips, noises that were meant to be words but couldn’t ever be. Delease moved her hand over to Yoki’s eyes and closed her eyelids and the girl only managed a smothered shriek of terror. “I won’t miss you, Yoki. Not really.” She said, and she waited for a moment. After a few minutes, Yoki slumped forward and quivered, and then she went completely still.
Some Theme Song Playlists (I'll get links to them):

Conan Edogawa \ Kudou Shinichi

**The Coast** Coolwater Set & Rac ft. JYZEL
**Copscame** Toby Randall (Tr3y Beatz ReTwist)
**All The Stars** Kendrick Lamar ft. SZA
**One Touch** Baauer ft. AlunaGeorge & Rae Sremmurd
**Wonderwall** Oasis
**ICY GRL** Saweetie
**Roll In Peace** Kodak Black ft. XXXTENTACION
**Shoop** Salt-N-Pepa
**Kiss It Better** Rihanna (Explicit)
**Skateboard P** Elijah Who
**Over You** Safia
**HUMBLE.** Kendrick Lamar
**Man Down** Rihanna
**Santa Claus Is Comin’ To Town** Jackson 5
**Wolves** Kanye West (Balmain Campaign)
**Childish Gambino** Redbone (Cover By Mudi)
**Mask Off** Future
**Shut Up And Drive** Rihanna
**Good Drank** 2 Chainz ft. Quavo, Gucci Mane

Kaitou Kid \ Kuroba Kaito

**No Type** Rae Sremmurd
**God’s Plan** Drake
**SAD!** XXXTENTACION
**Afterlife** XYLø (Ark Patrol Remix)
**Best Friend** Young Thug
**I Want You Back** Jackson 5
**Familiar (Remix)** Ty Dolla $ign ft. Travi$ Scott & Fredo Santana (Explicit)
**Mr. Clean** Yung Gravy
**Pretty Fly (For A White Guy)** The Offspring
**idfe** Blackbear
**High For Hours** J. Cole
**Bad Reputation** Joan Jett
**Can’t Help Falling In Love** Elvis Presley
**Flip Phone** Fetty Wap
**Fake Love** Drake
**Low Life** Future ft. The Weekend
**Lay It Down** Steelix
**Ex Calling** 6LACK
Shutdown Skepta
She Wolf (Falling To Pieces) David Guetta ft. Sia
A Letter To My Freshman Self Atlas (prod. purpan)

Kaishin

Cheap Thrills Sia
Wet Dreamz J. Cole
Dusk Till Dawn ZAYN ft. Sia
We Found Love Rihanna ft. Calvin Harris
Forest Fire Brighton (Hateful Remix)
Lay Up Future
U R A Fever The Kills
Not Above Love AlunaGeorge
Love Galore SZA ft. Travis Scott
Love The Way You Lie Eminem ft. Rihanna
Anywhere Rita Ora
Time Of Our Lives Pitbull ft. Ne-Yo
Rothco

Chapter Summary

Inevitable Trust Issues

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Fine, detective. I suppose you are right. I have nothing else to say to you. I killed my sister, Yoki Sasha, because I have lived in her shadow my entire life. Her taking of the White Knight Kites was the last straw. You can cuff me, condemn me, lock me up for all I care. It won’t make Yoki any more alive. You hear that, Yoki? I’ve finally won. I have finally won.”

1

There was a reigning silence within the Hakuba Manor that spoke louder than any voice could, and there was a ringing in Saguru’s ears that was, in a way, more of a pulsating feeling than a sound. He, Conan and Kuroba each sat around a single undesignated table within the Hakuba Manor’s large dining area, each to his own as they sat and tried to distract themselves with various ticks and nervous habits.

“This is Mikeru Saro, coming to you live from a small pop shop in the Ekoda district in fact only across the street from the main entrance of Ekoda High, where the premeditated murder and ultimate denouement of Yoki Sasha by the Detective Yaraki Cheng, has taken place. In light of this horrific public event, the pop shop, The Mocking Bird, will be put on a temporary hiatus until the prime suspect detained, Delease Sasha, is convicted or Yoki Sasha’s murderer is bought to justice,” said the radio jockey hurriedly and despite the time of night, they didn’t sound at all tired. Conan, who was half laying and half sulking on the table, turned the radio around in his hand a few times and fiddled with a nob that changed the podcast channel. He began to surf the channels in search of one appropriate for his mood, if Saguru was guessing correctly.

Kuroba wasn’t shuffling cards as he usually happened to do when he was in deep thought. Instead, he was using one of Saguru’s silver teaspoons to transport sugar cubes over from their little bowl in the middle of the table and into his hot chocolate. Occasionally, he would eat one or balance two on the same teaspoon. If Saguru closed his eyes and concentrated, he could hear the subtle plopping noise of the sugar cubes falling into the hot chocolate over the broadcasts Conan was jumping through. It was a noise that was either frustrating or peaceful, like the tick of a clock or the sound of a plastic-covered library book being pressed flat, crunching the binding. If the hard look in his eyes was anything to go by, Saguru deduced Kuroba was brooding.

Saguru himself was sitting with his back straight against the slightly uncomfortable spine of his chair, one hand flat on the table in front of him and his other, slightly raised so he could hold his cup high enough as to not cause heat damage to the varnish of the table. He found that his way of coping was to assess others’ way of coping, so he was carefully diverting his eyes between Conan and Kuroba. Saguru shot Conan a stern glance when the child came across a particularly vulgar N.W.A track, and he changed it quickly and shrank rather low on his chair like a sad snake.

“It is . . .” Saguru said cautiously, “rather late, wouldn’t you agree?” It was the first thing said
between them in a while, so both parties turned to regard him, as was his want.

And Conan would invariably say, “yes, it is,” like any child would when they wanted to get on a grown up’s good side but they didn’t quite know what said grown up was asking of them and if they’d like it. His radio was playing a soft track, still musical but not in the same category as Straight Outta Compton. Saguru distantly recognised the voice as Cyndi Lauper — Conan must have recognised the song through his sister, Ran, and probably found the familiarity comforting. He wondered how much he missed her.

“More like early,” Kaito said, because he could never just agree with what Hakuba had to say. “You ought to get some sleep, Conan,” he said again, and for reasons unknown to Saguru, Conan got a particularly betrayed look that made the corners of Kuroba’s mouth twitch. “Little boys shouldn’t be awake at such treacherous times. The night goblin might come and gobble them up, should they get lost in the shadows.”

“Night goblins,” Conan says with conviction, “aren’t real.”

“Yea well you know what is? Premature wrinkles.” Kaito sheeted his hand through his hair and then ran it through Conan’s in a way meant to mess it up. “Go get that beauty sleep of yours, ‘kay? You’ll thank me when you become a successful model and you make tons of money.” Conan glared at him but his eyes looked exhausted enough for the normally incriminating stare to be thinned out like sieved gravel.

“Alright,” he said eventually. When he was sure there wasn’t a fleeting chance Kaito would suffer from a stroke and die, therefore releasing him from the order of slumber, he sighed and trudged away. “G’night, Saguru, Kaito. I’ll see you in the morni- when I wake up.”

“Goodnight,” Saguru said sincerely, because he genuinely wished a pleasant sleep upon little Conan. He hoped there would be no bad dreams or the such — he had even in fact considered asking Conan if he wanted to sleep with a teddy bear or in the same room as him, but ultimately, the probability of that drawing Conan away even further due to a damaged pride was too great. When Conan was out of earshot, Saguru said conversationally, “I’m surprised he gave in so easily. From what I’ve heard from Ran Mouri, he’s usually quite stubborn and independent in that he likes to make his own decisions.”

“It’s simple,” Kuroba said in response as he leaned over the table and collected the cassette player Conan was handling. “He complied because even though he doesn’t like stuck-up, borderline jerks like me telling him what to do, he really was tired.” At Saguru’s cocked eyebrow he shrugged and said, “what? You don’t have to be a physiologist to understand the most basic fundamentals of human nature.” He changed the channel back to N.W.A’s broadcast, all the while looking Hakuba in the eye.

Mostly ignoring both Kuroba and Eazy-E, the blond detective took another sip of his tea. It was rather hot still, as when he brewed it he wasn’t quite monitoring the temperature with his usual precision.

While he found it a little bit challenging to understand American English, he could pick up some of the rude things in the song Kuroba was playing and he frowned. “If you don’t mind, Kuroba, I’m rather curious as to what your views on Yoki Sasha’s death are. More specifically, her murderer’s motive.” Saguru set his cup down on the table, its steam following gradually. He took the radio from Kaito’s person with a tug bordering on a snatch but not quite so fast, and he changed the radio a channel over so that it was playing more suitable music.

Kuroba didn’t sit back as Saguru thought he might. Instead, he leaned forward and intertwined his
long fingers in a basket-like design. Despite his admittedly cartoonish position, his mouth was pressed into a straight line and there was a vibe he emanated that contradicted all he usually stood to portray.

“The circumstances leading up to Yoki Sasha’s death were disgusting. They make me sick to my stomach—no, maybe even deeper than that,” he admitted. “And Delease Sasha, her own sister, deserves a just serve of life in prison. You heard what Mikeru Saro said before, didn’t you? Detective Yaraki Cheng was incredibly thorough in his explanations of how the murder was carried out and the presentation of the convicting evidence leading up to Delease’s confession. I hope she will be locked away forever, and I hope she comes to one day, regret her mistakes and seek forgiveness and reconciliation in the eyes of those who will listen.”

Hakuba’s eyes narrowed, not harshly but not kindly either.

He said, “what do you think of Delease’s motive? I think it would be interesting to derive an opinion from someone who may understand her perspective at least a little more than a complete stranger to the topic of Kaito KID in regards to a fandom. I’d ask Keiko, but as you know, she went home with Aoko and we are no longer in contact.”

The song that had been playing changed after a small break where the casters advertised an up and coming raffle. Saguru closed his eyes as he awaited Kuroba’s response and listened carefully to the opening beats of Bob Marley & The Wailers’s Could You Be Loved.

“I find it interesting that you have no filter when questioning me on this,” he said eventually. Hakuba opened his eyes again. “Just what are you hoping to achieve, Hakuba? And how can you talk so detachedly about a victim you claimed you knew? Don’t you have any emotions at all?” Then he reached over and took the radio back from Saguru more roughly than the first time, and he shoved it down on the table and tweaked one of its nobs so that it shut off abruptly.

Hakuba waited for the usually composed magician to calm himself after considering the possibility of using Kuroba’s muddled mindset against him. If Saguru’s evaluation was correct, and his evaluations usually were, than Kuroba was far more torn up about the murder than he had initially suspected. Well, Saguru thought, I would have felt the same way had I been in his situation.

“I’ve found that sometimes, it is best to put your personal emotions to the side in favour of the investigation,” Saguru said. “I had briefly shared a conversation topic with Yoki Sasha before, and she seemed like a kind, strong girl who had a bright future ahead of her. As a detective, it is my duty to make sure her murderer does not live through the bright future she deserved, but instead a gloomy and dull one in prison.”

Kuroba bunched up his hands in his slacks, muscles shifting under his skin. And then it was all gone—the tension, the anger, the worry, all conflated away in an instant like magic. Saguru supposed that was why Kaito referred to himself as a Magician Extraordinaire. Magicians lied for a living, and Kuroba had gotten so good at lying he could even lie to himself and tell himself that he was fine with Yoki’s death. Saguru had seen it all before. When he was twelve or so, he had been going through what Kuroba was now.

“I get it now,” Kaito said, voice exemplary in its forbearance. “Anyhow, it’s very late. You said it before yourself, didn’t you? If Conan gets his beauty sleep than I sure as hell get it too.” The thief made to stand, his chair shrieking as physics forced it backwards. Kuroba shotgunned his remaining chocolate beverage, and it was a wonder he didn’t get type two diabetes then and there because the amount of sugar cubes he had dropped in it before surely weren’t healthy.

Hakuba glanced down at his watch as he stood, also. 8:52 AM, it read. Really, it wasn’t that
surprising as they had been at the crime scene during the investigation for five hours at the most and that wasn’t including the post-investigation forums they had to fill and the time it took to settle Aoko, Keiko and . . . Well, not Akako. If anything she was more afraid of Conan than she was of the dead body because she kept flinching when he looked at her too suddenly or for longer than thirty seconds. “If you are too tired to get yourself home safely, I can always assign you one of the guest rooms. We have many vacant rooms here at the Hakuba Manor.”

Kuroba curled and stretched to further limber his stressed muscles. “No, it’s all good. Thanks for the offer, but I can never sleep right in beds other than my own.” And he wanted to spend some time to himself, to properly think and come to terms with the fact that it was likely his fault Yoki Sasha was dead but, you know, Hakuba didn’t need to know that. “And before you object and get all, oh but I insist, on me, you might want to think again. Who knows what I could do to this place while you sleep?”

Hakuba swallowed. “Oh,” he said, for he didn’t really know how to respond to that. “Very well.” Kuroba sent him a wry smile and began to skip towards one of the many hallways that eventually lead to one of the Hakuba Manor’s many exits. “I’m assuming you know where to go and don’t need to be shown out by anyone?” Because even though Hakuba wouldn’t mind Kuroba cutting off his hands and perhaps attempting to eat them afterwards, he was still a gentleman and a polite young man his father could be proud of.

“You’re quite right,” Kaito confirmed, slowing to an energised trot and not the half bound half sprint of before. “And make sure to tell Conan I said hello and farewell-for-now, ‘kay!”

2

Conan poked at his poached egg and watched as it wobbled in place. “So,” Conan piped up from where he was sitting across from Hakuba. “What’cha doing today? It’s Saturday, so you can go play with your friends, right?” Conan’s first Saturday at the Hakuba Manor and he was hoping to make it count and poke around a little, perhaps.

“A-ah,” Hakuba blinked, as if he was surprised he had been addressed. “Well actually, I was going to go to get some lunch with Aoko and Kuroba. Not at a cafe, as Aoko is still rather shaken up about our last experience, but at a small market place not to far from a nice park.” Conan looked at him and hummed interestedly. “I have been meaning to ask if you’d like to attend with me, actually. That way it’d be an even number and it would be rather rude of me to just leave you here, alone.”

Conan hummed again and used a collaborative effort between his butter knife and fork to manoeuvre his poached egg onto a slice of oatmeal bread and peppered kale. “No, it’s alright,” he eventually decided. “If I’m gonna be honest with you, I’m pretty tired. No offence but I don’t feel like dealing with your Kaito friend.” I also don’t like dealing with Hakuba’s suspicions towards my relationship with him. If he keeps trying to deconstruct my interactions with KID, he’s sure to notice Conan Edogawa is a fake identity sooner or later.

Saguru chuckled a little and then patted a tissue against his mouth to make sure there was no yolk on his lips. “Don’t let him hear you say that.”

Conan shook his head and promised that he wouldn’t, and then he cut a fine line on his egg and let the yolk soak into the bread for a moment so it wouldn’t go everywhere when he tried to eat it.

“Very well,” said Hakuba, wanting to respect Conan’s decision even if there were better options. “Do you know where to put your plate when you’re finished?”

Conan nodded vigorously. “Yes! On the kitchen counter. And if I can’t reach, I should get a maid or
butler to help me and I need to put my knife and fork next to each other on the plate like this when I’m finished because it’s polite mannerism in England! Did I get everything right?” Saguru nodded, a smile twitching on the corners of his mouth. Conan had so much energy it was no surprise the joy was beginning to spread to him.

“You got everything right, Conan. Well done.” Saguru stood and moved his knife and fork next to each other on his way to the kitchen, as was polite English mannerism.

Conan’s smile dropped when he heard the clang of dishes hitting the kitchen island and then it reappeared when Saguru padded back into the dining area. “I won’t be too long, Conan. A few hours at most. And if you need to talk to me for any reason, do not hesitate to call me. I swear on my pride as a detective I will pick up.”

Conan looked at him for a long moment. “Uh, right.” Then he attempted to shovel half of the toast and some of the unevenly distributed egg into his mouth. “You don’t need to worry about me, Saguru. I’ll keep faaaaarrr out of trouble. So far that trouble won’t even know where I am. Trouble will never find me!” Saguru laughed a little and excused himself to the bathroom.

Conan rubbed his cheeks. They hurt from grinning. Sulkily, he went over what Saguru had listed his plans to be — going to the Ekoda Farmers Market. He knew that would only take a few hours at most, even if Hakuba and his friends took a detour to the park because sometimes Ran would drag him off to the farmers market for lunch or to stock up on supplies. He was hoping to catch the train back to Beika so he could spend the day with Agasa and Haibara, for she also didn’t partake in the school trip the rest of their grade did. That would most certainly be a day trip, however, and Hakuba would probably freak out and lock him in a cage or something if he wasn’t home by the time he returned.

Conan angrily sipped his apple juice and tried to think of a way he could get back to Beika. Well, if he couldn’t go to Beika than he could at least get some fresh air outside. As long as he avoided the market’s general vicinity and the park, he shouldn’t run into Saguru by accident. He had free roam for about two hours. That would be long enough to clear his head.

Then again . . . Conan’s pallid eyes slitted and looked outside the closest window at the soupy sky. There is always the off chance that Saguru is lying about going to the market. I wouldn’t be surprised if he knew I would turn down his offer. He could perhaps be going to something investigative that he didn’t want me to know about due to my interest in detective work. Or, like, a strip club or something. That means he’d be gone for long enough that I might just be able to get to Beika after all.

“Hey, Saguru-niisan?” Conan quipped when the blond returned to the kitchen, probably to say goodbye. “I wanna show you something when you get back from the market, but it takes some time to prepare so I was wondering about how long you’ll be gone?” Saguru blinked at him a few times and walked over, placing his hand on Conan’s head as he thought for a moment. Conan smirked because he knew Saguru wouldn’t see it.

Saguru looked at his watch. 8:49, it read. “I believe I’ll be back it time for dinner, at around nineish PM.” Than he paused and attained a look Conan had seen on goldfish trying to swim away from those little green nets pet shop workers used to scoop out fish to put in transport bags.

Conan bit back a wow, that sure is a long time to be at the park, and reminded himself he was a little boy talking to a detective and not a detective talking to a criminal. “Oh, okay. That’s long enough then.” He proceeded to shove the rest of his eggy toast into his mouth to avoid further questioning on Hakuba’s part.
Suddenly sounding far more sceptical about leaving Conan alone than before, Saguru said, “well, I’ll be going now. Like I said before, if there is anything you need, don’t hesitate to ask a worker or call me if it is especially important. And of course—” Saguru ruffled Conan’s hair again, “—don’t get into any trouble.” There was a please that went unsaid but Conan heard it nonetheless.

“Bye Saguru!” Conan called, all smiley stickers and after sun spray. He leaned higher on his chair, almost on his knees as he waved Saguru out of the kitchen. Just to be safe, he stayed in his seat for a few minutes longer and shovelled the rest of the panned kale in his mouth. He only stood to put away his dining implements when he heard Saguru’s pre-called taxi grumble away. He put his knife and fork next to each other and put the plate on the kitchen counter, and then he smiled at a maid padding over to presumably wash the dishes.

She pets his hair and says, “aww, aren’t you cute?” And then she proceeds to ask if he needs anything, like a toy car or a puzzle, but he isn’t listing and he tells her he’s just gonna go to his room and toggle between procrastination and researching the different chemical makeups of tears divulged by different situations and conduct and experiment to see why he keeps crying so much. That must have been the correct thing to say, because she lets him go on to his room without another word.

After a few minutes of walking he realises he’s lost, and it takes another thirty minutes to get to his room. He passes time wondering how he had made it to his room last ni-morning when he was too tired to properly think straight. He decides it isn’t worth the stress and leaves it to decompose in the back of his mind, next to Thinking About Nothing and Why Did Gin And Vodka Get On The Rollercoaster.

He opened the door to his room and the collage strip he left in the door fell to the ground. He picked it up and placed it back in the door where he had left a specific, almost invisible mark. satisfied that no one had tried to snoop through his stuff and perhaps found his second phone, Conan trotted in and turned his salt lamp on. He jumped onto his bed and subtly bounced on it for a bit because jumping on the bed could be excused when you are a child but not when you are famous teenage detective Kudou Shinichi. He found that he was unsure what to do with himself.

He could call Saguru and ask if he could leave and go explore Ekoda, but if Saguru wouldn’t let him so much as talk to Kuroba without having a metaphysical charger cord for surprise strangulation, he would probably just say no and that would be that. Conan worried his lip as he slid off his bed, his slick, thin sheets allowing him to do so with ease. He trod over to his wardrobe and sieved through it in search of something wearable in the slightly chilly morning weather, but not too thick so if the temperature changed around midday he wouldn’t get hot.

He ended up with a white shirt and a red, blue and white Tommy Hilfiger jacket made out of sheeny material not unlike a windbreaker. It would suffice with the fragile weather, he supposed. Conan stuffed his voice changer tie in one of his many pockets and he quickly untied the laces of his shoes and put them on. It was awfully rude to wear shoes inside the house, but he may not have an opportunity to be politically correct when sneaking out of a mansion riddled with jumpy-rich-high-ranking-person security. You had to take what you could get when in his situation. He tucked his board under his arm.

He crawled along the walls and avoided routes leading towards Mr. Hakuba’s office, as Conan found security usually increased along such hallways and he couldn’t risk getting his ass busted so early on in the game. Saguru would freak out worse than a guinea pig in the clutches of a hawk. The faux-child had to go out of his way to avoid some houseworkers at some point, but he became more determined as he neared one of the back entrances.

He was rather well versed in the layout of expensive mansions, as not only had he grown up in one,
but he had been forced to attend many parties held in others because of his parents’ friends. Each one had a variety of distinct oddities, but he had spent enough time exploring them as a real child to know that there was always some sort of pattern in their layout.

It helped that the most complicated house he had ever explored had been his own; even as Conan, he would find out knew things every so often when visiting the Kudou Mansion. Hondou Eisuke had been complaining recently about some sinister doll he named Babadook appearing around the house in random places, but Conan didn’t really know what he was talking about so in that point of the conversation, he had probably spilled his drink or something so the conversation topic would change.

After a while Conan’s scripted march had descended into something more like a listless stroll and he was a little hopelessly lost. Time and normal social functionality felt dim and unimportant like someone had hit him over the head really hard and everything looked the same. At some point he may have come across something reminiscent of a window or a plot hole and he crawled through it and into the Hakuba Manor’s back garden. The natural fragrances of peat and meringue provided a type of aromatherapy that helped Conan’s sentience resurface. From there he was able to then make his way out of the large garden and to a road that, upon looking left, lead to a folksy roadside waystation and, upon looking right, lead to a bridge and then a freeway.

He dropped his skateboard on the ground and tightened the trucks. Conan looked behind him for a moment, waiting for a staff member to ambush him, and then he sped away off to the left to investigate the yonder waystation. Skating on a freeway would attract too much attention, after all.

Conan kicked the ground every so often to keep a leisurely pace, not seeing the point in using the speedy electronic function of his board and sometimes simply coasting along was relaxing. The wind licked his face and he could throw in shove its or ollies or kick flips to entertain his legs when they got tense from not moving and he felt a freedom you couldn’t get just hanging around in the agency or hospital or the Hakuba Manor. It was moments like that he lived for; feeling free. He was always an independent type of person. It was why he loved living alone so much.

He curved around a few pebbles (however small, pebbles could dog up any board or boy) and some occasional cracks in the road, and the scenery developed into dry tussocks and wire fences leading to nowhere. The Hakuba Manor was visible in the distance but becoming smaller with each second Conan glided along. The far off waystation approached, eventually.

He applied some pressure to the nose and manoeuvred the board into a vertical position against his knee. The waystation, upon closer inspection, was a peculiar place.

It was surrounded by so much land you’d get scared. The grass was red, and Conan felt like a tenuously small and fragile diorama placed on an endless pale bronze table and left there to dissolve. It was surrounded by large dinosaurs made out of scrap metal, and it looked like they moved.

Off to the side of the gas station there was a fruit stand that had shelves swelled with ripe strawberries and peaches and some others Conan couldn’t immediately name. There were lots of small black birds, some with gold eyes and some with iridescent ones. Some were black from head to toe. They all competed for crumbs with the sparrows. And if you looked close enough, they were all gathered around a puddle of Hawaiian license plates. He had no idea how cars had gotten across the ocean, and why anyone besides him would want to leave Hawaii for Japan.

There was an incredibly weird duck. Conan had no idea ducks could look so incredibly weird, and he wished he was still ignorant to how incredibly weird ducks could, apparently, look. If you looked far up the road you would see a completely empty rest stop. No one ate at the concrete tables, no one played in the tiny strip of grass or gravel. It looked like the sort of place you would find a small and beautiful stone.
Deciding it looked gruntled and harmless, Conan held his board under his arm and padded over to the waystation’s doors. They weren’t the automatic type, you had to push the handle to get in, and it was an instant relief from the sweltering heat Conan had experienced outside when he felt the air conditioning at his temple. There was no bell at the door that rang when he went in — it was probably heat damaged — and there was no one at the front desk.

Conan searched his pockets for change, anyway, and he found he had a few coins to spare from some unlisted time he put cash in his shorts and forgot to remove it. They were a little bent from the washing machine.

When he walked through the isles of products, he could see fudge and lychee and incredibly tacky statues of raccoon dogs and red-crowned cranes and cowboys. There was a section presumably dedicated to kids that Conan wondered to for the sake of childishness, with Gak and Kinder Surprise eggs with holes in them and if he looked directly forward while standing next to the Gak, he could see what was presumably the adult section with Panadol, condoms, lip-balm and anti-depressants. There was a liquor section, too, in a little fridge covered in stickers of vacuumed fruit and In Living Colour.

He padded to the isle between them and seized a packet of Extra off the hygiene shelf and a Coke from the small cooler by the counter because it didn’t have any lemon ice teas. There was a ringer on the counter that he reached by fifty-fiftying off the tea fridge and he had to wait a few minutes for the first sign of life to make itself apparent— the shuffling of long life tins in the back room with the rusty Staff Only sign on the door. And then out came an Italian-looking man with marathon blue 70s Nikes and an orange baseball jersey. He had lacquered hair and smelt of shellac but he had a happy smile that burned some red flags.

“Hello there,” he said honestly as his hands fell on the counter and he bent over to peer down at Conan. He had a tin of turtle wax in his left hand — Conan decided he had probably been sorting through undisplayed products or unpacking orders. “How can I help you?” He spoke with the enthusiasm of a shop owner that had dwindling consumers.

Conan put on his best smile and held up his gum and Coke, which was in a decent sized soda can. “Ah, I see,” said the man and he took the products from Conan and ran them through a few devices. In the end they were rather cheap, at least a better price than the supermarket. Conan payed with what little he had and ended up with change, after all. “So, what are you doing ‘round here? In a place like this?”

Conan shrugged. “I thought I’d give the area a wonder ‘round. I’m staying at the big fat Hakuba place, you see. It’s boring there, sometimes, and this place is very interesting.” The man nodded along interestedly.

He handed Conan back his Coke and gum in a tropical bag that wasn’t really needed. “Don’t know what you find interesting about this dumpster of a place. One way leads to miles of unprecedented land and a single vacant gas station, another to a freeway leading to the train station and the main town and school n’ stuff. And the trams.”

“I dunno,” Conan said and he took the loud bag from the man. “A vacant gas station sounds pretty cool. Like a lost ship, or something. With treasure.”

The man offered a weary laugh that made Conan wonder if he had history with the place. “I wouldn’t recommend you going there. All sorts of tripe there. I’m sure there’s plenty of trampy characters, too.” The faux-child shrugged.

Conan said, “See ya round, Mister!”
He left through the front door again and discarded the bag under a rock so it wouldn’t fly away. There weren’t any rubbish disposers in sight, after all.

He stood in the shadow of the waystation and popped his soda can open, taking a few long swigs of it and letting the sugar empower his small body like dynamite. In an uncareful sort of way, he shoved the gum box into his pocket so that it was a little less of a rectangle and more of a compressed cube, and he was off again with the click of his skateboard hitting the ground.

With not much left to do in terms of physical activity and still a lot of time to kill, Conan headed towards the lonely gas station a while up the road. Probably about half an hour or so if he kept his natural pace.

3

Okay, so, maybe Saguru had lied. He wasn’t actually going to the weekend market with Aoko and Kaito. He was with Aoko and Kaito, though. In fact, they were sitting right next to him in the back of a taxi. It bought back uncomfortable memories.

Kaito had been lecturing Saguru on being a horrible parental figure because he had left Conan at home to fend for himself with the eldritch human-robots Saguru called butlers, and Aoko had been praising her aviation and cooking skills. He didn’t try to understand what she meant.

He was in a Taxi suffering through that bullshit because he was required to attend his very first official KID Taskforce headquarters gathering. Apparently, Aoko and Kuroba had been attending the official KID Taskforce headquarters gathering for the past year or so, and they didn’t act like it was anything special, but to Saguru it was. In a way, the KID Taskforce was a clique, a family, and they wouldn’t just adopt foreign detectives off the street into it just like that. Saguru, however, felt like an adopted foreign detective off the street; finally accepted.

Nakamori would be the head of the house, the patriarch, the father, the puppa bear. The adult that all the children respected until they realised that adults were mostly just sad, angry coalesces of stress and anxiety.

The rest of the lower ranking Taskforce members would happen to be a variation of siblings and children and cousins. Each one competing for a special place in their parents’ hearts (or in this case, bosses’) so they could get more presents (or in this case, higher pay). They acted like they resented each other but in reality, they support each other and wouldn’t know what to do without each other.

Mr Suzuki was probably the crazy uncle — the one that didn’t take sides and cheered for the winner and was a complete wild card and trump card at the same time. He’d come and go mostly as he pleased and when he did show up, it was without warning and the expectation of hospitality, dinner and a place by the hearth. He’d be the most likely to bust the kids out of sticky situations, however.

Aoko would be the favourite child. And the other children aren’t even bothered to be jealous of her, because she’s also the favourite sibling. She feeds them and cares for them and tells the other children off when they bite each other. That sort of thing.

Kuroba would be the oldest sibling — the one that sneaks out every night to go to college parties and isn’t understood by the other children because they make no sense and have odd quirks and interests and they drive Nakamori to the Absolutely Fuck All stage of frustration.

KID would either be the entirety of the wealthy rival family or the friend of one of your children that you hate because they are a terrible influence.
Conan Edogawa would be the pet. Mouri would be the second uncle twice removed that has lost most contact with the family because he’s dealing with his own issues. The shady figures reported at the heist scenes would be the impending edgy fazes of the children.

Saguru was probably the outcast of the family. Like, the nephew. This official Taskforce assemblage may just be enough to change that, however.

Kuroba and Aoko had insisted that they leave an hour and a half after the meeting started and that Saguru could join their Kidchella club if he was lucky, and Saguru was beginning to regret ever joining their Kidchella club because he wanted to be precessional and they were now two hours late because Aoko kept requesting food stops.

“Oh, wait, just pull over there for a moment,” she’d cry. “Matsuda loves the meat pies from there. Yeah, that little pop shop there. Yea.” And with that times four hundred, they’d have another hour off the official taskforce headquarters gathering. “Hey, you don’t want anything to eat, do you Mister Taxi Driver? I might get a meat pie from there myself. Matsuda is right, after all. They have great meat pies.”

An hour later the taxi driver dropped them off at a rather ominous building as per Aoko’s request. It was very businesslike and reeked of all that was uninteresting and Kuroba seemed to deflate when he looked upon its cubed surface. Aoko wasn’t fazed, and she struggled with the fifty-forty or so packets of plastic cutlery and food. It ranged from sushi variations to beef salads and ramen, to meat pies and Twixes from the service station. There was a Coles brand icy pole bag and a single homemade bento that was presumably for Ginzo Nakamori. Aoko was a caring daughter.

Saguru offered to carry some and then all three of them walked into the building, Kaito running ahead to check for assassins.

The worker at the front desk immediately showed them up a floor or two and the trio of teenagers were left to fend for themselves in a kilometre of unlisted corridors that Aoko worked through very impressively. The first sign of life was an iconic shout, angry and bullish enough to be Nakamori. Aoko wasn’t fazed, and she struggled with the fifty-forty or so packets of plastic cutlery and food. It ranged from sushi variations to beef salads and ramen, to meat pies and Twixes from the service station. There was a Coles brand icy pole bag and a single homemade bento that was presumably for Ginzo Nakamori. Aoko was a caring daughter.

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“The Kidchellas are here!” She called and the officers scuttling around and making fearful noises abruptly stopped and looked at the food in Aoko and Saguru’s arms. They had an almost feral glaze in their eyes and salivation melting from their chops.

Aoko requested that they all sit around a large, liver-shaped table in the middle of the room, and when they were all out of the way, Saguru found that he could see the room much better.

While Nakamori’s daughter established relative order and began calling out names etched with permanent marker on certain boxes and packets of food, Saguru took his time to look over the official Taskforce headquarters.

There were many computers and electrical appliances moulded into the walls like doe, each coloured an intense navy blue and blinking rapidly with information. Where there weren’t computers, there were wires taped along open knolls on the wall, and where there wasn’t wires, there were Nickelback posters and bags of what could have been DNA or what could have been dead grass. Then there was the liver-shaped table in the middle of the room blanketed in a fresh sleet of paper and yellow folders and case files. To Saguru’s surprise, each original copy of KID’s heist notes were specially contained in delicate glass framing. They were white and as thin as moth wings, but the notes from the KID of eight years ago were a little beige and soggy from age.
Aoko and Inspector Nakamori sat at the head of the table, officers were strewn along the sides in school science room chairs and Kuroba was standing in the middle of the table passing Schroeder his delicious quinoa and hand sanitizer. By the end of it, Aoko gave him an orange he didn’t remember them purchasing.

“All right, men,” Nakamori announced as he took an impressive swing of his ginger ale. “Let’s get down to business. Tokigo, do you still have that shoe polish KID once pulled from his pocket?” Tokigo, a Chinese man with a friendly look, presented Tesson shoe polish in a rosin box very carefully. Nakamori took it from him. He said, “this here shoe polish may not look like much, but it is not only one of the few of KID’s implements we have acquired, but one of the even fewer brands we have acquired from him.”

There was a wave of murmuring through the gathered officers and Kaito let out a loud, thinking noise through his mouthful of expensive tea cake.

“Tesson is a distinctive Nic-Nac shop known by locals for producing shrinkable dinosaurs and fake message-in-bottle bottles. It is owned by an Afghanistan man who does not fit the profile we have so far gathered of KID’s supposed measurements, but his files show that he has been charged before. Records claim he was sued for using a Shuttershock photo he found on Safari for his shop sign without purchasing it first. He came to us about being the distributor of this Tesson shoe polish, and we have reason to believe him. I’ve sent Nohamakai and Loji to investigate everyone who he sold his Tesson shoe polish to. Let’s hope we get some results, men.”

A fairly large majority of the Taskforce men clapped and let out appreciative noises. One, however, meekly raised his hand, and Nakamori rolled his eyes exaggeratedly and mumbled out something reminiscent of a yes.

“Well,” said the member, worrying his lip. “Couldn’t KID have been in disguise? And used cash to pay? That way he’d almost be untraceable.”

Inspector Nakamori appeared to morph into an aggressive Alaskan Bullworm. “Absolutely fuck all then. Do you have any better ideas, cunt? No, I didn’t think so. Fuck you, Taka. Fuck you.”

Saguru rubbed his temples and felt less honoured, suddenly. And he wondered what Conan was doing. “N- Nakamori?” He said, a little loudly so he could be heard over the Taskforce’s banter. “I know this is awfully unprofessional of me, but I don’t think I should have left Conan home alone. Would you mind if I excused myself?”

Saguru was sure Conan would be pretty bored at home, anyway.
Well, this was painful. And I don’t even have an excuse for taking, like, three weeks to write this. I’ve been here and there with friends, trying to learn this new trick on my skateboard which looks incredibly fuckin simple but is not and if you throw in workouts and a few hours of cooking, suicide jokes and browsing spicy memes, you find you don’t have much spare time.

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