## Project: Matchmakers

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**Summary**

*It was quite distressing, Pearl thought. For years previously, she had been quite fixated on the idea of her cousin and Mr. Nick living happily ever after. Even after she had accepted that this would never happen, she was always somewhat enamored of the idea that one of them would someday be caught up in a whirlwind romance, passionate and adventurous.*

*So she was rather surprised to find herself immensely enjoying the steady, familiar relationship she saw between a defense attorney and a prosecutor. It wasn't loud or flashy or wild, but calm and reliable and quiet. Rather than a blazing fire that consumed everything, theirs was an affection like a candle flame, bringing forth light and warmth.*

*Well, except for when they were in court. Then they were rather more like two overzealous flamethrowers.*

*An excitable group of girls (and a reluctant Apollo) team up to make Phoenix and Miles realize they're crazy about each other. But are such measures really necessary?*  

*Canon universe.*
Happy Valentine's Day, everyone (she says, while posting a fic that starts before Thanksgiving)!

I've been writing this for...about a year and a half now? I decided it was finally time to put up the first chapter. Usually I don't start posting a fic unless I'm 100% sure I'm going to finish it, but I really like this one, so I'm already pretty sure, even though it's the longest thing I've ever written (currently I'm sitting at 120 pages).

Also, in my story it gets cold and snows and stuff in Los Angeles, because this is Japanifornia, darn it, where there are apparently mountains right nearby as well as rivers and who knows what else... there are no rules.

Please enjoy my love letter to the Ace Attorney series!
Pearl Fey tried to remember how she had ended up hiding in the bushes, watching Mr. Nick have a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich by himself at the park.

It had probably started with that rumor Trucy had whispered to her one day after school. “Daddy's seemed unusually preoccupied lately,” she'd said behind her white-gloved hand. A mischievous glint appeared in her blue eyes. “I think he's dating someone.”

Now, Pearl was a young adult. At 18 years of age, she had long since outgrown her childish fantasies of Mr. Nick sweeping Mystic Maya off her feet and then the two of them getting married in a rose garden and leaving on the backs of winged horses to live in a castle. Completely. She was absolutely over entertaining such naive delusions.

But hearing that Mr. Nick was dating someone and knowing it wasn't Mystic Maya had made her a little more upset than she'd thought it would.

So she'd done something a little naughty. It had started off innocent enough: she happened to catch a glimpse of Mr. Nick walking down the street on her way to the bus station, and wondered briefly, I wonder if he's going to meet his girlfriend.

Before she knew it, she was quietly walking down the same street. She wasn't following him, she reasoned. Wasn't there an ice cream parlor on this street? Yes, that was it. She was going to get some ice cream, and Mr. Nick just happened to be walking down this same street. What a coincidence!

But as it turned out, Mr. Nick wasn't going for ice cream. He walked straight past the place, his pace constant and measured, the gait of someone who knows exactly where he is going. You know, I don't want to spoil my supper, she'd thought suddenly. I think I'll just...take a walk instead.

And so she'd followed him. All the way to the Prosecutor's Building.

Is his girlfriend a prosecutor? she had thought, a bit alarmed.

She'd waited out there, hiding behind the mailbox across the street from the Prosecutor's Building, until finally, two people came back through the front doors.

One of them wore blue. The other wore red.
Isn't that Mr. Edgeworth?

They made their way down the sidewalk, talking quietly. Pearl couldn't catch much of their conversation from across the street, but it sounded like they were talking about work. Ho hum.

She was just about to turn around to go home when she heard a certain phrase that made her reconsider:

“So, I hear you turned down yet another lovestruck lady. You're so cruel, Edgeworth.”

Well, of course Mr. Edgeworth would have the occasional admirer. He was dashing and smart and talented. But “yet another”? How often did this happen? Pearl cautiously looked both ways for traffic the way Mother had taught her and tiptoed across the street to follow the two men more closely.

“...make me out to be some kind of heartbreaker, Wright,” Edgeworth was replying, sounding both embarrassed and grumpy. Then again, he usually sounded grumpy.

Mr. Nick laughed, nudging Mr. Edgeworth's shoulder. “What's the matter? Afraid you're too out-of-practice? You want to go over some pickup lines?”

“You're one to talk. You haven't had a date since college,” grumbled Mr. Edgeworth. He walked a little further apart from Mr. Nick and changed his briefcase over to his other hand.

“Ouch.” Pearl saw that Mr. Nick was making a slightly pouty face that reminded her of Mystic Maya's face whenever she missed her favorite television programs. “How do you know I just haven't told you about all the dates I've had?”

“Because if you'd had any, I am sure your daughter would have told me.” Mr. Edgeworth's voice was smooth, matter-of-fact. “She seems to think it is her job to keep me updated on any and all developments in your life.” Switching to a light, nonchalant tone, he added: “How's that skin issue of yours, by the way?”

Mr. Nick's face flushed. “Damn it, Trucy,” he muttered under his breath.

Mr. Edgeworth laughed, though Pearl only knew this because his shoulders moved slightly and he made a small “Hmhmph” noise.

Pearl found a smile spreading across her face, too. There was something in their easy banter, the way everything bounced to and fro like when she used to toss her favorite ball at the wall: she knew it would always come back to her no matter how she threw it. Well, unless it ricocheted and smashed a sacred urn, but that hardly ever happened.

By the time Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth parted at the parking garage, Pearl had already been tailing Mr. Nick for an hour. She felt almost disappointed as she watched Mr. Edgeworth get into his stylish red sports car and drive away. What had she been doing this whole time? She could have been doing homework or refining her artistic skills!

She was mentally scolding herself for being so foolish when she walked right into Mr. Nick.

“Wah!” squawked Mr. Nick, whirling around. Evidently her sudden collision had startled him. He looked around wildly for a brief second before his gaze shot downwards and found her. “Pearls? What are you doing here?”

“Oh, I, um...” She averted her eyes and clutched the fabric of her yukata nervously. “I-I just was in the area to get some ice cream,” she finished lamely.
Mr. Nick eyed her searchingly, and then his eyebrows shot up as if he had suddenly seen something invisible to everyone else.

_Oh, rats_, she thought. _I almost forgot_. Thanks to the Magatama she and Mystic Maya had given him all those years ago, Mr. Nick always knew when someone was lying.

“Pearl...” His voice had taken on that particular chiding tone he usually reserved only for Trucy and Pearl herself. She winced. “Were you really here for ice cream?”

“Well...no,” she admitted, fidgeting and biting her thumb a little. She felt her heart sink a bit with guilt. What had she been thinking? She glanced up at Mr. Nick, who was patiently waiting. “I'm kind of...lost,” she said. It wasn't really a lie. She'd followed Mr. Nick for so long that she didn't know how to get back to the bus station.

Mr. Nick sighed, ran a hand through his spiky hair. But then he smiled at her warmly. “Don't worry, Pearls. I'll get you home.” He took her hand and started walking again, pulling her along after. As her tiny fingers gently wrapped around his larger ones, she had wondered briefly if this was what it felt like to have a father.

***

Since then, she'd found herself watching Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth closely. She didn't go out of her way to tail them anymore (well, not often), but whenever she happened to be walking along and spotted Mr. Nick apparently waiting for someone, she'd...also wait. Out of sight. Even when said waiting involved watching her older friend eat a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich alone on a park bench.

Mr. Nick was bundled up against the November chill in a blue fleecy jacket, but other than that he made no attempt to dress warmly. Pearl herself was wishing she had brought a scarf or some gloves. This waiting had gone on longer than she'd thought it would.

_Maybe Mr. Edgeworth isn't meeting him today?_ she thought, but then, as if in answer, the prosecutor appeared from around the corner of the footpath.

“Hey, there he is,” greeted Mr. Nick. “Geez, do you ever wear casual clothes?” He sounded almost disappointed. Indeed, Mr. Edgeworth was dressed in his usual maroon suit, though with the addition of a classy black double-breasted coat.

“Perhaps it is a luxury you may enjoy, but unfortunately, the Chief Prosecutor cannot be seen in public looking like a layabout.”

Pearl couldn't see it, but she was positive that Mr. Nick rolled his eyes at that. “Sure, blame it on the job,” he sighed. “I bet you don't own a single pair of jeans,” he said in a tone that sounded very much like a challenge.

Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth ignored this slight on his fashion sense. “Leaving the matter of attire aside,” Mr. Edgeworth said smoothly, sitting down beside the defense attorney. “what in the world possessed you to request that we meet here rather than at the Prosecutor's Building?”

Mr. Nick took the last bite of his sandwich, chewing thoughtfully. “You might think this is ridiculous,” he started.

“I usually do, when it comes to you,” Mr. Edgeworth said, a mixture of affection and exasperation in the wry smile Pearl could see from her vantage point.
“I…” The defense attorney hesitated. “I think I'm being followed, lately,” Mr. Nick finally said in a hushed tone.

Pearl felt like a bucket of ice had been poured on her. She was rooted to the spot. She willed her breathing to be as quiet as it possibly could. There was a moment of silence that seemed to stretch on for eternity.

Then Mr. Edgeworth started chuckling. Pearl didn't think she'd ever heard him laugh for so long before, hunching over slightly and bracing his palms on his knees. After a few seconds, he quieted, though his shoulders still quivered a little with suppressed laughter.

“Are you done?” Mr. Nick asked, annoyed.

“I'm not sure,” replied Mr. Edgeworth.

“Edgeworth, I'm being serious.”

“I'm sorry. You're right.” The prosecutor took a deep breath and let it out. “Please, do go on. Tell me who in the world would bother stalking you.” Though his tone still sounded amused, Pearl couldn't help but notice that his sharp eyes were locked onto his friend intently. She suspected that he was more concerned than he was letting on.

“It's a good thing I know you so well, or I'd say you were an absolute jerk,” Mr. Nick grumbled. “I don't know who would follow me, okay? It's...just a feeling I get. I can't describe it.” His voice had trailed off, as if he regretted bringing it up and wanted the words to just fade away.

“And...how exactly am I supposed to help here?” Mr. Edgeworth's voice was no longer mocking, but genuinely confused, as he pulled his glasses off and began to polish them with a cloth from his pocket. “After all, you haven't given me enough information to start an investigation, and it doesn't sound like you have any suspects.”

“I don't know,” the other man shrugged, an imitation of nonchalance. “I just felt like I had to tell you.” His words were so quiet that Pearl had to strain her ears to hear them.

Mr. Edgeworth pushed his glasses back up his nose and fixed his eyes on the defense attorney again. The normally fierce gray had softened with worry. “You...Would you feel more comfortable if you had police protection?” Pearl was rather startled at the offer. It seemed he was taking his friend's claim seriously after all.

“No, no, I don't think that's necessary.” Mr. Nick laughed a little awkwardly. “Sorry, I didn't mean to imply that you had to do something about it. I just wanted to...” He crumpled the wax paper that had held his sandwich in his hands. “I just wanted to tell someone, I guess. In case...anything happened.”

“Do not talk like that,” Mr. Edgeworth reprimanded sharply. “Nothing will happen to you, Wright.” A small pause. “I won't let it,” Pearl thought she heard him add in a mumble.

“What?” said Mr. Nick.

“Never mind that,” the prosecutor said briskly. “Was there anything else you wanted to tell me?”

“Um...no, not really, except maybe thank you for agreeing to meet me out here.”

“It was nothing.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, their soundless breaths puffing out in pale clouds.
“Well,” said Mr. Edgeworth finally, “I suppose I should get going, then.” He got to his feet.

“Right,” agreed Mr. Nick. “Thanks again for your time.” There was a sadness in his tone, and he slouched slightly, rubbing his ungloved hands together.

“Of course.” Mr. Edgeworth turned on his heel and began to walk away, his silver hair almost indistinguishable from the stormy gray winter sky. Suddenly, he stopped, and turned around. “Oh, and Wright?”

Mr. Nick straightened again, and turned to face the direction Mr. Edgeworth was headed. “Yeah?” Pearl could see his face now, and thought he looked rather hopeful.

“...Please...if you have any further concerns...call me anytime,” said the prosecutor. “I will help if ever and however I can.” He sounded uncharacteristically compassionate.

Perhaps it was the cold, but the girl hiding in the bushes thought that Mr. Nick's cheeks went slightly pink. “You will? Are you serious?”

A small smile spread across the other man's face. “Have you ever known me to be anything but, Wright?” Not waiting for an answer, he turned again and strolled out of the park.

Pearl had to remain crouched in the bushes for a while even after that, because Mr. Nick spent quite a while staring after him, a smile of appreciative wonder stuck on his face. Pearl's heart skipped a beat.

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It was quite distressing, Pearl thought. For years previously, she had been quite fixated on the idea of her cousin and Mr. Nick living happily ever after. Even after she had accepted that this would never happen, she was always somewhat enamored of the idea that one of them would someday be caught up in a whirlwind romance, passionate and adventurous.

So she was rather surprised to find herself immensely enjoying the steady, familiar relationship she saw between a defense attorney and a prosecutor. It wasn't loud or flashy or wild, but calm and reliable and quiet. Rather than a blazing fire that consumed everything, theirs was an affection like a candle flame, bringing forth light and warmth.

Well, except for when they were in court. Then they were rather more like two overzealous flamethrowers.

The interactions she observed between the two of them were that of two people who had known each other for a lifetime and who sought each other out regardless of situation. They didn't make grand gestures or bold statements (again, except in court). They were never overemotional or shmaltzy. There were no wasted words or actions between them.

Of course, this meant that whenever one of them did say or do something, it meant everything.

There had been the time she had seen Mr. Nick grab onto Mr. Edgeworth's arm when some construction had made the earth briefly shudder beneath them, a momentary and minute tremor that nevertheless had Mr. Edgeworth's knees buckling. Mr. Nick hauled him to his feet, rested his hand on the prosecutor's shoulder for a brief moment, and then released him, continuing to walk forward with him as if nothing had happened.

There was also the time months ago that Mr. Nick had neglected to bring an umbrella to court (Pearl had watched the day's proceedings from the gallery), and when he saw how it was pouring outside,
he ducked back into the courthouse with a groan. “Unprepared as usual, Wright?” Mr. Edgeworth had said mildly, smirking, and before Mr. Nick could protest he had tossed him a collapsible umbrella. “Keep it,” said Mr. Edgeworth, “and see that you don’t lose it.”

And then there was that moment last week that an angry ex-prosecutor had stopped them in the street to publicly and loudly yell at Mr. Edgeworth, and Mr. Nick had stepped in front of him to say “Unless you want to see us in court on charges of slander, I’m going to ask that you step away from Prosecutor Edgeworth.” The furious man had practically turned purple with suppressed rage, but stomped off, not wanting to face the wrath of both the Chief Prosecutor and the Turnabout Terror. “I know you didn’t need my help,” Mr. Nick had said afterward as Mr. Edgeworth opened his mouth to protest. “He was just annoying me, so I wanted to make him leave.”

On yet another occasion, Mr. Nick’s stomach had growled loudly in front of Mr. Edgeworth when they’d all run into each other outside People Park, and the prosecutor said not a word in reproach, but simply insisted that dinner at his usual (fancy, five-star) restaurant would be dreadfully boring without someone else there. Mr. Nick and she had returned to the Agency that night with four large styrofoam boxes full of gourmet food for Trucy, Mystic Maya, and Miss Athena. “I didn't think the really fancy places had these Styrofoam boxes;” Trucy had said, savoring her meal while Maya chewed loudly and Athena looked almost ready to cry at the wonderful taste. Mr. Nick had informed them that the restaurant did not, in fact, have Styrofoam boxes and that Mr. Edgeworth had helped them smuggle them in and out of the place.

There was just something about how Mr. Nick understood Mr. Edgeworth without even having to ask, dared to push the other man to open up where all others had given up, supported him without asking for anything in return. And Mr. Edgeworth allowed his humanity to show a little more around Mr. Nick: he smiled more, even laughed sometimes, and surprised her once in a while with frank and sincere gestures of concern or affection. They relied on each other, communicated without words, and stood up for one another.

As it stood now, Pearl found herself once again consumed with fantasies about soulmates and true love.

She just never expected that the flights of fancy would star Phoenix Wright and Miles Edgeworth.

He had the sensation again that he was being watched.

Phoenix Wright ran a hand through his hair, more out of nervousness than any need to adjust his spikes, and tried not to whip around every five seconds to try to catch someone staring. This had been going on for nigh on a month now, and he was beginning to wonder if he really should take Edgeworth up on his offer to provide him police protection. But he just couldn’t justify that kind of waste of resources.

He let himself sigh and slouch a little as he walked, jamming his hands into his jeans pockets for a little warmth. The orange glow of the streetlights illuminated the sidewalk, but Phoenix still felt like something was there, just outside the light.

For what felt like the tenth time already, he replayed his conversation with Edgeworth in his mind. *Call me anytime,* he'd said to him, and he'd sounded so...human. Concerned. Kind. Knowing that he cared for him, would go out of his way for him...Phoenix felt his heart glow like one of the streetlights. Edgeworth had really come a long way from the cold, almost robotic man he had met again as a rookie lawyer. Was he mellowing with age (Edgeworth would get really huffy if he said that), or was it because...?
No, he told himself yet again. *I can't take credit for Edgeworth's personal growth.* Still, a part of him wanted to believe that it was because of him that Edgeworth had started to change. Edgeworth had even told him as much, once or twice. He felt a smile spread across his face unbidden at the thought.

He was snapped out of his reverie by the very quiet sound of leaves rustling, and he whirled on the spot to look around. Nothing in the trees. The bushes were also clear. Perhaps it had been a bird? He hoped desperately it had been a bird.

It had been bad enough having Pearls suddenly start tailing him all the time for no apparent reason (none that he could ever get out of her, anyway), but this past month he was convinced someone else had been following him, too. Sometimes he thought he was imagining it—he didn't really have any evidence that it was happening. It was just a feeling he got, along with an occasional shadow darting past or a rustle behind him or the tiny sound of a twig snapping. It was enough to almost drive him nuts. He knew he should have confronted Pearls about the stalking a long time ago, but the truth was that he had no desire to. He actually preferred those times that Pearls was stalking him, with her clumsy hiding skills and, occasionally, almost endearingly loud steps (how could a person so tiny make so much noise just with sandals?). When he heard those footsteps or saw a little bit of a pretzel hairdo sticking out from behind a tree trunk, he felt reassured. He wasn't alone with whatever lurked just behind his back. If something happened to him, Pearl would surely call for help.

But the streets were empty now, except for the occasional passing car. He swallowed nervously and increased his pace, all too eager to get home to his apartment. Trucy was probably starving by now. Maybe he should call her, just to have someone to talk to? No, he was almost home. There was no need for that.

He broke into a light jog, and before he knew it, he had reached the door to the apartment building. He swung it open, and it creaked in protest. Panting slightly, he began the journey up the old stairwell to the third floor. Why did these three flights of stairs always feel more like ten at the end of the day?

Finally, he stopped in front of the familiar dark blue door with the peeling “311” sticker. He must have been making a lot of noise looking for his key, because he heard Trucy say “It's open, Daddy!” from inside. Gratefully, he turned the knob and pushed open the door.

“You're supposed to keep the door locked when I'm not home, Truce,” he said as he stepped inside.

Trucy was sitting on their beat-up brown couch in her pajamas, her feet propped up on the coffee table in front of the television. She popped a forkful of spaghetti into her mouth. “If I did that, I'd have to let you in all the time,” she pointed out.

“Well...I guess I can't deny that,” Phoenix admitted, kicking off his sneakers and hanging his jacket on the hook by the door, next to the one that held Trucy's cape and hat. It looked like his little girl hadn't been starving after all. When did she stop relying on her Daddy so much? He felt oddly wistful.

“So where were you this time, Daddy?” she asked as he dropped onto the couch next to her.

“The park,” he said, leaning his head back to rest on the top of the couch and letting the sounds of the cartoons Trucy was watching wash over him.

“The park?” Trucy twirled another bite of spaghetti around her fork. “What for?”

“To eat a sandwich,” he replied simply, propping his own feet on the coffee table as well. Once upon a time, there had been a strict “no feet on the coffee table” rule, but that had long since become a
thing of the past.

Trucy poked him with her toe. “Oh, sure, because sandwiches aren't any good unless enjoyed in nature,” she said, smirking at him. “Were you meeting Mr. Edgeworth?” On the television, a character was yelling out, “Absolutely!” as if in answer.

He looked at her in awe. How had she known that? “What makes you say that?” He tried keeping his voice casual.

“Magician's intuition,” she answered with a shrug. Even out of her hat and cape, Trucy was ever the budding magician. Even her white pajamas were covered in red and black card suit symbols. She held out her bowl to him. “Want some spaghetti?”

“Nah, I'll heat up some of the leftover chicken from yesterday later.” He glanced at the clock above the bookcase. It was actually only 7:30—he'd eaten his sandwich a mere three hours ago for a very late lunch. He was hungry again somehow (probably from all the walking), but he was feeling too drained to even pop the chicken in the microwave. The truth was that he hadn't been sleeping much lately—he'd been too paranoid to let down his guard often these days.

After a while, his daughter hopped up and rinsed her bowl in the sink. “Daddy, have you ever thought about maybe starting to...put yourself out there? Ask someone to dinner?” she said, glancing at him over her shoulder.

Unbidden, Edgeworth's face flashed through his mind. He shook his head, both to get rid of the thought and to answer Trucy's question. “Wh-where did this come from all of a sudden? That kind of thing is the last thing on my mind!”

“What a joke!” giggled a character on the television.

“Well, maybe you should,” said Trucy, walking back over to curl up next to him again on the couch. “I worry about you being alone.”

“I'm not alone,” he pointed out. “I've got my little girl!”

“Daddy, I'm almost 18,” she said sternly. “I'm not going to be around here forever.”

“Ouch!” yelled a cartoon character, having just been punched.

“Trucy,” Phoenix said dejectedly, slumping a little, “Daddy's not ready to hear you say things like that...”

“Oh, don't give me that,” his daughter said, nudging him with her bare foot. “Look, I'm not saying go and try to chat people up.” She glanced at the clock and flipped the channel with the remote, and the Steel Samurai theme song began to play—even now, the show was popular in reruns. “I'm just saying,” Trucy continued, putting the remote on the coffee table and leaning back, “that if there's already someone in front of you, maybe you shouldn't wait forever, hm?” She looked at him meaningfully, one dainty eyebrow raised.

Phoenix gulped, and refused to let a certain person come to mind again (though it was getting increasingly harder with the Steel Samurai blaring over the speakers). He broke their gaze and stared at the screen, unable to meet her blue eyes, which always seemed to see straight down into his soul. “You let Daddy worry about his love life, okay?” he said. “You should be focusing on your own life and your own friends. Don't worry about me.”

She flopped against his shoulder. “I'm always gonna worry about you,” she said simply.
Phoenix smiled and stroked her smooth brown hair, tousled the two little cowlicks that never seemed to lay flat. “I'm always gonna worry about you too,” he replied affectionately.

The two of them watched The Steel Samurai mostly in silence, and Phoenix found his thoughts drifting to that case he had worked all those years ago, defending Mr. Powers. That had been the first time Edgeworth had ever worked with him instead of merely against him. He smiled to himself at the memory. Gradually, he felt his memories and thoughts swirl and blend together to the familiar background noise of the television. He had been anxious and paranoid all day yet again, his thoughts fixed on this persistent feeling of being watched. But with the warmth of Trucy beside him, the comforting sounds of the television show around him, and the sweet nostalgia of fond memories within him, he finally began to let his eyes fall closed.

In the midst of a half-sleep haze, he felt a gentle peck being pressed to his forehead. “Good night, Daddy,” a beloved voice whispered in his ear. He smiled, eyes still shut.

He had a dream of walking alongside a figure in red, of his hand clasping the other's. The warm feeling that bloomed in his chest felt a lot like...bliss? Was that it? No, that wasn't quite right. Friendship? Solidarity? No. What was the word...

Love, that's what it was.

Wasn't it?

***

When Phoenix woke again, the apartment was dark, and the afghan they usually kept folded over the back of the sofa had been spread over him and pulled up to his chin. Trucy had tucked him in like a child, he realized.

He rubbed his eyes and turned on the light next to the couch to check the clock. 12:30 AM. He groaned as he got to his feet and arched his back, his spine crackling, and decided to forego the chicken for tonight in favor of getting ready for bed.

If he was lucky, he thought, sluggishly brushing his teeth, maybe his dream would pick up where it had left off.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Trucy goes to the zoo. Edgeworth slams his fingers in a filing cabinet.
It was 4:30 in the afternoon the next day, a Sunday, when Miles Edgeworth finally climbed into his car, where she had been waiting for the past half an hour. She remained silent when the engine roared to life, the only sound being the small *click* of her seatbelt fastening. But this small noise was all it took for him to notice her there.

“I suppose I shouldn't be surprised,” said the Chief Prosecutor flatly as he spotted her at last in the rearview mirror of his sports car. “This is the fourth time in two months.”

“Hehe, sorry, Mr. Edgeworth,” giggled Trucy Wright, knocking herself lightly on the head in a “silly me” gesture. “I knew you'd be going to the crime scene, so I decided to tag along.” The explanation wasn't really needed. She'd been doing this increasingly frequently, lately: Stowing along in Mr. Edgeworth's car to get a look at the crime scenes before they were even open to the Defense. It wasn't strictly illegal, as long as she didn't touch anything or manipulate the proceedings in any way, but she knew very well that Mr. Edgeworth did not approve. Then again, he didn't approve of much.

The prosecutor sighed. “You know, if you keep doing this, I will come under suspicion for aiding the Defense,” he told her.

Trucy frowned, slouching in the back seat. She *would* feel guilty if Mr. Edgeworth was criticized for her impulsivity, but... “You're not aiding Daddy,” she protested. “We don't even know for sure if he's taking this case to begin with.”

“I have a feeling that he will be, if you take all this sensitive information back to him,” said Mr. Edgeworth, his sharp gray eyes meeting hers as he glanced in the mirror again to check for traffic.

“Don't be silly, Uncle Edgeworth!” chirped Trucy innocently. “I'm just going to the zoo with you!” From many past experiences, she knew that Mr. Edgeworth was generally reluctant to refuse her requests (or demands).
“Yes, the zoo, which is currently closed to all visitors and covered in police tape,” grumbled Mr. Edgeworth. He flicked his turn signal and finally pulled into the zoo's parking lot. “You may accompany me,” he told her in a resigned tone as she eagerly unclicked her seatbelt, “So long as you do not—”

“—Touch anything or make any alterations! I know!” she finished for him, flinging open the door and hopping out. The air was cold, but clear, and she sucked in a deep breath of it. Mr. Edgeworth got out of the car, too, and together they walked past the palm trees and through the entrance, under the huge lettering which read LOS ANGELES ZOO.

They walked past the Sea Life Cliffs and the Desert Trail, making a left at the aviary and a right at the Australia House, and finally ducked under the police tape separating them from the elephant habitat. The creatures themselves were huddled off to the side, lumbering slowly near a thick tree stump in an apparent attempt to stay out of the way of the investigation. A woman in a lab coat was currently making notes on a digital tablet, but at the sound of footsteps, she pushed her goggles back up onto her head and walked over, her high-heeled shoes kicking up small clouds of dirt from the dusty ground.

“Glad you're here, Prosecutor Edgeworth!” she said, shooting him a smile. The forensic scientist had gotten back recently from the latest case Prosecutor Sadmadhi had dragged her along to, and seemed only too happy to be back working cases in the States.

“Hi, Ema!” said Trucy brightly, peeking out from behind the austere prosecutor.

Ema jumped a little. “Trucy! What brings you here,” here she paused briefly before adding, “again?” Her tone was light, but her blue-green eyes were darting around nervously and her brow was knitted.

The magician straightened her hat and beamed at Ema. “Don't worry, I've seen crime scenes before!” she reassured her. She had a hunch that Ema was worried about her being around so many dead bodies. “I'll be okay!”

“Miss Wright insisted that I take her to the zoo today,” Mr. Edgeworth interjected helpfully, pushing his glasses up his nose. “She has promised to not touch anything.”

The forensics expert looked a little relieved, and her smile smoothed out into a much more natural one. “Well then,” she said, allowing some excitement to creep into her voice, “I'll go ahead and show you the very interesting prints I lifted from this feeding bucket...” She turned and practically skipped away, her brunette ponytail bouncing with her enthusiastic steps.

“It must be nice to have a job you can love with all your heart,” mused Trucy, grinning up at Mr. Edgeworth.

He made a wry expression that was almost a smile in return. “I'm not so sure if one's dream job should typically involve homicides, but yes, I agree.”

And so they listened to Ema prattle on about her findings. Mr. Edgeworth eyed everything with clever scrutiny, arms often crossed in thought. Trucy, meanwhile, was following as close as a shadow and surreptitiously scrawling things down in a notepad. Once in a while, Mr. Edgeworth would deduce something about what had happened, and Trucy was sure he was deliberately doing it loud enough so that she could hear him and write it down.

The truth was, she really wasn't doing this for any secretive reasons. She honestly did just want to spend time with Mr. Edgeworth, and this was just the easiest way to do it. She liked learning more about him—the way he closed his eyes to think, the way he hid the fact that he was a giant Steel
Samurai fanboy, the way he pursued truth over victory.

She wanted to see Mr. Edgeworth the way her father did. Not the very same way, of course; that would be totally creepy. But she wanted to understand why (she was 97% sure) her Daddy had fallen for this man.

***

When she was little, she was always fascinated by the close bond that Phoenix Wright shared with Miles Edgeworth, and asked the defense attorney endless questions about the prosecutor. The words her daddy had used to respond were almost always complimentary and friendly, but she sensed in him an anxiousness, a frustration, a dissatisfaction. She was puzzled by the mix in emotions.

Whenever Mr. Edgeworth needed help with a case overseas, Daddy would always rush off to help (Trucy had stayed with Detective Gumshoe and Maggey a couple times when that happened). And on the few occasions that Trucy had ever gotten to spend any time with him, she had found him amusing—he was so stiff and formal that it was fun to tease him and make him a little uncomfortable.

The bond between her daddy and Mr. Edgeworth had only gotten stronger after the Turnabout Terror returned to the courtroom. Daddy had said once or twice that he owed his comeback largely to Mr. Edgeworth. He said it with such softness, such gratitude. It only made Trucy more determined to really know this mysterious man.

It had been a little easier to get to know him over the past two years. Trucy's high school wasn't all that close to their apartment, and Daddy often had trouble getting her to and from school. She had taken the bus for the first year, but when they moved to a different apartment, they discovered that the school bus did not stop there. Polly couldn't drive her because he didn't have a car, and Athena had neither a car nor a license (though she always insisted that she could totally drive if she wanted to). So Daddy had tried to send her to and from school in a cab, but that got expensive after a while. So one day when Daddy and Mr. Edgeworth and she were having coffee at the Agency, Trucy had popped the question. Well, a question.

"Daddy, you know how it's so expensive to get me to and from school in a taxi?" she'd said innocently, resting her arms and chin on the back of the sofa and peering at the two lawyers. "What if Mr. Edgeworth took me to and from school?"

Phoenix Wright nearly spat out his coffee. "T-Trucy, what are you asking?!" he had sputtered, taking the napkin Mr. Edgeworth had quietly offered him and wiping his mouth. "There's no way the Chief Prosecutor has time to drive you around!"

Trucy had pouted. "But I want to talk to him more. I like Mr. Edgeworth. And it would mean you'd see him more often too, Daddy. Don't you like Mr. Edgeworth too?"

She was fairly certain she'd seen his cheeks go pink. "Th-that's not the issue here!" he'd said evasively. "We can't just ask Edgeworth to be our own private taxi—"

Edgeworth cleared his throat quietly, and both Wrights turned their attention to him. "I...could probably do that, actually," he had said mildly.

"Great!" Trucy had sung at the same time Daddy had yelped "What?!"

"I do pass your place every time I go to and from work, and the school is a mere 5 miles from the Prosecutor's Building, so it wouldn't be much trouble." Maybe it was her romantic notions making the memory rosier, but Trucy was sure in later years that Mr. Edgeworth had blushed a little, too.

"And...far be it from me to let down a friend in need." He'd sounded so awkward. It was almost
adorable.

She had launched herself from the couch and run up to him, and flung her arms around him. “Oh, thank you, Mr. Edgeworth! We love you!” He had smelled like rose tea and something minty, and the stiff-looking vest beneath his suit jacket was surprisingly soft against her cheek.

Mr. Edgeworth had looked more like he’d been slapped than hugged, so clear was the shock and confusion on his face. He stared down at the teenage girl hugging him and awkwardly patted her head twice with about 90% less grace than he did anything else. “I, well,” he stammered, “It—it’s nothing. Er...” Any further words must’ve gotten trapped before they left his mouth, because he didn’t say anything else as Trucy released him.

“I’m gonna finish my homework!” she had declared before running off to the couch to gather her things in her schoolbag.

“Well, aren’t we popular,” Trucy had heard Daddy say teasingly. “You hear that? She loves you.”

“Oh, shut up, Wright,” Mr. Edgeworth said, and then, with more amusement, “Apparently she isn’t the only one. Miss Wright said ‘We love you.’”

“Shut up, Edgeworth,” Daddy had retorted lamely, and as Trucy looked over her shoulder on her way out the door, she'd seen her father blushing to the roots of his spiky hair.

***

Trucy had figured out very quickly after that day that she’d been more right than she knew—they both did love Mr. Edgeworth, albeit in different ways. Now that Mr. Edgeworth was all but a daily figure in their lives, she had ample opportunity to observe the way they interacted. They knew one another so well, understood each other intuitively. But however deep their friendship ran, she could always sense something unspoken between them, something rooted deeply in sadness and uncertainty and longing, and to watch the distance between them never close pulled on her heartstrings.

So of course, she became determined to pull off the greatest magic trick of all: Making Daddy and Mr. Edgeworth realize they were perfect for one another!

Gradually she started to invite the prosecutor to more and more occasions that the Wright Anything Agency usually celebrated on their own, and sometimes she'd even plan outings with only her father and Mr. Edgeworth. When the two of them came to see her magic shows together, or asked her how her day at school was, or reminded her to eat her vegetables, she felt something warm and safe in her chest. It felt like belonging. Like home.

***

“Well, that's about as much as I can get out of this crime scene,” Mr. Edgeworth finally said, snapping Trucy out of her memories. He sounded somewhat strained, and the way he was tapping his fingertip against his forearm as he crossed his arms told her that he was impatient.

“Aww, but I didn't tell you about the unusual soil traces I found in these footprints!” Ema whined, like a child who was being forced to leave the amusement park before riding the Ferris Wheel.

“Type up a report and send it to my office later if you think it will have any bearing on the case, Ms. Skye,” Mr. Edgeworth said sternly. Trucy wondered what was making him so restless—the Steel Samurai wasn’t on for another two hours. Perhaps Ema had just been talking nonstop about all the forensics data while Trucy had been zoned out?
Ema looked a little sulky, but nodded. “All right, sir. Drive home safely!”

“Thank you.” He inclined his head to the detective, and then glanced over at Trucy. “Well then, Miss Wright. Shall we?”

She grinned, closing her notebook. “We shall, Mr. Edgeworth.”

***

When Trucy closed the door to the apartment behind her, Daddy was already making supper. She knew more from the burning smell than by sight, though.

He glanced over his shoulder. “Oh, Truce! Perfect timing! Can you hand me some oven mitts before the smoke alarm goes off?”

She dropped her bag and notebook and shouldered her way between her father and the oven, quickly slipping on some oven mitts. “Daddy, why don’t you just stick to microwavable food?” she asked yet again, waving him off and removing the singed disaster from the oven. She flicked the oven off.

“I’m a grown man and I can use an oven, Trucy,” Daddy said petulantly.

“Yes, to make mac and cheese and like, three other things,” Trucy sighed, rolling her eyes a little.

“You love my mac and cheese,” he mumbled mournfully.

She smiled at him affectionately, scraping the burned portion off the top of the casserole. “Yes. I do.”

He smiled back. He sure was easy to cheer up. “I think this will be fine,” she diagnosed, turning her attention back to the food. “It was just the top that got scorched.”

“Oh, good.” The relief was evident in his voice. He grabbed two plates and two cups from the cupboard, filled the cups with some water, and laid them on the cluttered little kitchen table. He pulled out Trucy’s chair for her as she made her way over to sit down, holding the casserole dish with oven-mitted hands.

The casserole actually wasn't bad. Trucy guessed that Phoenix Wright handled cooking like he did being an attorney—keep pretending you know what you're doing, even if things start to look bad, and you'll probably be all right in the end.

“So,” she said through a mouthful of casserole. “I have some notes for you to look at.” She got up from the table and retrieved her notebook, flipping to the appropriate page and handing it to him across the table. He pushed aside some books and folders and laid the notebook next to his plate. His eyes scanned over the bubbly lettering, and finally shot up to meet hers.

“Trucy, where did you get all this information?” he asked, sounding worried.

She just grinned at him. “It's maaaaaagic!” she said, wiggling her fingertips (and her fork) at him.

He shook his head and flipped the notebook closed, then laying it to the side. “You can't keep using Edgeworth to find me cases, Truce. Don't keep coercing him to help us.”

She frowned. “How rude! I never have to coerce him!” She crossed her arms and glared at him.

He sighed. “I'm going to have to get him an even nicer fruit basket this year,” he mumbled, stabbing another forkful of casserole.

“Daddy, I didn't take these notes because I want an unfair advantage over Mr. Edgeworth,” Trucy
said seriously. “I did it because I like spending time with Mr. Edgeworth and I thought it would be something interesting to talk about.” She picked up her fork again and went back to eating. “Whether you take a case or not is entirely up to you,” she added between bites.

He gave her a slightly exasperated half-smile. “If you say so. Still, I appreciate you bringing these notes back to me.” He stared at his plate, flicking his thumb over the handle of his fork a little, an anxious gesture. “I'm sorry if we haven't had a lot of spending money lately. I know you're just trying to help.”

“No!” she yelped, slightly horrified. “I didn't do this because I think you need a job, Daddy! I just...” She took a bite to give herself time to think. “I wanted to keep you posted on what Mr. Edgeworth is up to,” she finished awkwardly.

He looked puzzled. “Um...okay? Is...should I be worried about what he's up to?”

“Well, kinda,” Trucy replied. “Aren't you usually?” She looked at him earnestly. “Aren't you always thinking about him?”

Phoenix cleared his throat and hid his slight flush by taking a sip of water and holding the glass in front of his mouth. “I...I wouldn't go that far,” he mumbled, not meeting her eyes.

She smirked through her next bite of casserole.

Miles Edgeworth sighed in relief as he watched Trucy safely enter the old apartment building, having just been dropped off and given him an enthusiastic wave good-bye. The young magician never asked unnecessary questions, or touched anything, or got in his way, but he couldn't help but feel nervous every time she insisted on tagging along to crime scenes. After she left, he always felt as drained as if he'd completed an entire day's worth of paperwork (not to mention the fact that it took quite a bit of patience to politely listen to all of Detective—no, she was no longer a Detective; she was a forensic scientist—Ms. Skye's enthusiastic lectures on forensic evidence). Perhaps some of it was wanting to spare a child the violence of a crime scene, but it wasn't as if he'd never had a teenage girl for an investigative assistant before, so it must have been Trucy herself. She was...special.

She was also the beloved daughter of his most formidable rival.

Thus far, Phoenix Wright had only taken one of the three previous cases Trucy had helped him investigate, and he, Miles, hadn't even been the prosecuting attorney assigned to the case in the end. Miles couldn't really figure out what her motivation was: as far as he could tell, the girl hadn't given Wright any information he shouldn't have. What could she possibly gain from this?

Actually, he had asked her as much the third time she had appeared in his car. She had just giggled and said sweetly, “I just wanted to spend time with my Uncle Edgeworth!”

Ridiculous child.

He checked the clock on his car's console: 6:37. If he hurried, he could still get back to the Prosecutor's Building and get some work done before 8. Not that he had to be anywhere by 8. He had seen every episode of the Steel Samurai numerous times. Really, there was no need. He could stay as long as he needed at his office. He drummed his fingertips on the steering wheel as he waited...
for the light to change.

Another glance at the clock. 6:45.

When the light turned green, he stepped on the gas pedal a little harder than he had been before.

***

He finally flicked on his office's lights and made his way to his desk chair. Despite the fact that he'd only been gone for a few hours, there were now 6 new investigation reports and 4 new case files on his desk. He took off his glasses and slipped them into his breast pocket, and then began flipping through the case files first. Two thefts, a kidnapping, and an assault. Well, at least they weren't more homicides.

Within a few minutes, the space between his eyes had begun to throb. He massaged above the bridge of his nose, shutting his eyes a moment. The darkness was soothing. *Perhaps this room is too bright?* he reasoned. He flicked on his desk light, and then turned off the overhead lights with a press of a remote. Much better. The yellow light was softer, and even made the text on the pages look more crisp. In addition, the building was very quiet at this hour, so he would be able to work in peace like this.

At least, he thought he would be able to.

“...that defense attorney's daughter again,” a deep male voice said from the hallway outside. Miles couldn't help but pause at that. He remained still, listening carefully.

“What does he think he's doing, getting that chummy with a defense attorney?” said another voice, this one higher-pitched but also male. “I mean, I knew they were friends, but now it's like he's under their thumb or something.”

“Watch what you say about that,” advised the first voice. “I've heard he gets really prickly if you bring up his relationship with Mr. Wright.”

Miles frowned. He did not get prickly. He simply did not care for people prying into his personal affairs. Deciding that the conversation was nonsense, he went back to his work, but the voices in the hall continued.

“Relationship, huh?” the second voice scoffed. “Yeah, that would explain it.”

At this, Miles nearly dropped the contents of the folder he was holding. What was that supposed to mean?! The first voice chuckled. “Pfff, you're terrible. But I can totally see that.”

“Me too! Do you know last year around this time he got a lavish fruit basket and...” The voices trailed off until even Miles' sharp ears could no longer distinguish the words.

He straightened his documents, trying not to let himself get cross with those gossipy janitors or whoever they were. They knew nothing of him and his life; it would be a waste of time to give their jests any thought.

Still, though, he thought, turning a page with rather more force than was probably necessary, how dare they make such...such *indecent* speculation? That fruit basket had been a thank-you gift for driving Trucy to and from school, for goodness’ sake. And “under the defense's thumb”? Ha! Perish the thought! *If anyone was under anyone's thumb*, Miles thought then, *it would surely be he under*
He then realized what it was that he had just thought.

Before he could make any further reflection, a sharp stinging sensation burned across his right index finger, and he sucked a breath in through his teeth, glaring at the paper cut and glaring at the blood that began to well up. He pulled open the bottom drawer of his desk and quickly wrapped a bandage around the injury. What was wrong with him? Miles Edgeworth did not get paper cuts! That was the kind of clumsy, laughable thing that he would do.

Miles shuffled through to the next case folder, smirking to himself. Yes, Wright would definitely be the type. He would paw through his disorganized stack of documents rapidly, that delightful desperate look on his face, and let out a yelp as the paper fought back, then popping the digit into his mouth to suck the wound mournfully—

Wait, what had he been reading this whole time? He blinked and refocused on the words in front of him. It wasn't like him to allow himself to be so easily distracted, especially not by foolish things like gossip and paper cuts and indulgent visions of Phoenix Wright floundering and breaking a sweat—wait, that was also poorly-worded. He was stricken with the realization that this room was uncomfortably warm, and shot a glance at the thermostat. It was still resting at a cozy 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Impossible, thought Miles, fanning himself briefly with one of the folders. It must be broken again. He made a mental note to tell Detective Gumshoe about the issue tomorrow.

He rose from his desk to place two of the case folders into his filing cabinet, unwittingly replaying the two unknown men's conversation in his mind again. A relationship? Wright and he? What a preposterous notion. Besides being wildly unprofessional, such an engagement would be unrealistic for a variety of reasons, not the least of which being that Wright was interested in women.

He remembered, suddenly, the sparkle in Wright's eyes when he had asked if Miles wanted to practice pick-up lines, and promptly accidentally closed his left middle and ring fingers in the filing cabinet.

It was a good thing that no one was present, because the Chief Prosecutor let loose with some very unprofessional vocabulary at that moment.

Cradling his now reddened fingertips, he glowered at his filing cabinet as if it was a naughty pet who had bitten its master. What was the matter with him tonight?! He sat back down at his desk, signing a stack of documents that had been awaiting his approval one by one. It was monotonous work, signing his own name over and over again.

Perhaps he ought to leave and get some rest. He glanced at the clock on the wall—7:45. The Steel Samurai would be on in fifteen minutes, not that it mattered. Still, he was rather tired... He quickly made up his mind to go home for the night. He left the last two case folders on his desk and flicked the desk light off, beginning to exit the office illuminated only by the moonlight from the large window.

But as he turned to close the door and lock it, a shadow dropped down directly in front of him.

He reeled backwards slightly, letting out a quiet gasp, but quickly recovered his composure. “Who is there?! he demanded. “Reveal yourself!”

“Why don't you just turn on the lights, silly?” said a familiar voice. Too familiar. Could it really be...? He fumbled for the lights, and when his fingers landed on the switch, he flipped them on.
A woman with raven-black hair, a dark blue scarf, and jade green eyes gave him a cheeky smile, resting a gloved hand on one hip.

“Kay,” Miles said, rather pointlessly.

“Hiya, Mr. Edgeworth!” replied Kay Faraday, her grin widening. “Did ya miss me?”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Kay reads a book. Phoenix and company go to the airport.
Recollections and Reunions

Chapter Summary

Kay reads a book. Phoenix and company go to the airport.

Chapter Notes

I love Kay Faraday and her relationship with Edgeworth is a beautiful gift. Thanks as always to my muses, Stormy and Mystic. I love you guys. <3

“H-How long have you been there?” was the first question that tumbled out of Mr. Edgeworth's mouth. Kay was expecting something more like “Where have you been?” or “How are you?” or “My, but you've grown into a beautiful woman!”

Okay, so that last one wasn't a question, but still. Ten years, and all he said was “How long have you been there?”

“Long enough to see your legendary battle against the filing cabinet,” she answered, and then added in the closest approximation to an innocent tone that she could muster, “Gee, Mr. Edgeworth. I didn't even think you knew words like that!”

She was rewarded with a delightful flush painting the prosecutor's pale cheeks. “Kindly explain why you are here!” he blustered.

She would have been hurt, but she knew it was just his way of deflecting his embarrassment, so she didn't hold it against him. She wasn't going to let him know that, though. She stuck out her lower lip. “Gosh...I've been gone for so long, and I finally get to come see my good old friend Prosecutor Edgeworth, and what does he do? Asks me why I'm in his office.” She toed the ground a little, her posture slumping.

Surprisingly, Mr. Edgeworth softened at that. “I'm sorry,” he said. “You are right; I'm being terribly inhospitable. You just surprised me.” He motioned to one of the couches in his stupidly big office. “Would you like to sit down?”

“Well! That's more like it!” Kay said, and threw herself on a couch with a flump. “To answer your question, I'm here because I want to be. I've been very busy these days, you know. But I wondered how you were doing, so a few weeks ago I flew in and started trying to track you down.” She propped her feet on the glossy, polished coffee table between the two sofas. “Chief Prosecutor, huh? Nice.”

“Please don't do that,” her old friend said, frowning at her.

She laughed, but removed her feet from the table as he asked. “Oh, man, I missed that disapproving face of yours! Looks a lot older than the last time I saw it, though.”
“Did you just come here to insult me, or do you have something you wanted to talk about?” Mr. Edgeworth sighed, sitting down on the couch opposite from her.

“Sure I do! I want to talk about everything!”

“I'm afraid I haven't enough time to cover all that,” Mr. Edgeworth said, quirking an eyebrow.

She smirked and leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees. She'd actually been in L.A. for weeks now, and the truth was that she already knew pretty much everything she needed to know about Mr. Edgeworth. And some besides. “All right, then. Let's just talk about what this Great Thief has been up to.”

“Still calling yourself that?” He took his glasses out of his breast pocket and put them back on.

“Well, no. Not as much.” She ran her fingers over the Yatagarasu pin on her scarf absentmindedly. “But it still kinda applies. I definitely still steal the truth!” She grinned, and awaited a reaction from him. When he continued to just stare at her austerely, his arms crossed, her face fell. “Aren't you going to ask me what my job is?”

“I assumed that you would tell me whether I asked or not.”

“Touché. All right, don't share this information with anyone, but...” she leaned forward further and motioned for him to do the same. The furrow between his eyebrows deepened, but he did lean forward across the table. “I've become a professional infiltrator,” she whispered excitedly. She was pretty psyched about her job. Not only did she get to steal the truth, but she got to hide in the shadows and fight crime, just like the Jammin' Ninja! Although learning guitar hadn't worked out for her. But that was beside the point.

“So...you're a spy,” Mr. Edgeworth said bluntly.

“Professional infiltrator!” she insisted, frowning and crossing her arms right back at him. Couldn't he see her awesome new outfit? The way her vest was actually a removable parachute harness? The kick-butt utility belt with a holster for Little Thief? The fashionably asymmetrical length of her gloves, with the right glove going up to her elbow and the left one only slightly past her wrist? The overall darker color scheme which allowed her to be less easily-seen? Heck, even the new key-shaped hairstick that didn't jangle as she walked anymore? Clearly she was dressed for slipping in under the radar, making as little noise as possible, and handling dangerous situations with the greatest of ease! She was no mere spy. Such unfortunate connotations would sully her good name!

“Such unfortunate connotations would sully my good name!” she declared.

Mr. Edgeworth's mouth quirked up on one side in a smirk. “Not any more than calling yourself a Great Thief would have,” he pointed out.

“You may be right about that,” she conceded. “But enough about me—“

“I thought we were only talking about you?”

“—I want to know what those guys were talking about earlier!” She smiled at him, hoping her eyes were sparkling innocently. Of course, she knew all about what they'd been talking about. But she wanted to see how Mr. Edgeworth would react to the question.

To her delight, he flushed again and flapped his mouth a few times soundlessly. “Th-they were speaking absolute nonsense,” he managed to get out. “What in the world were you doing listening to them? Where were you listening to them?”
“Sorry,” she said, shrugging. “Can't tell you. Trade secret.” He looked as if he was about to protest, so she cut him off. “So tell me about this 'Mr. Wright.' He wouldn't happen to have anything to do with that mysterious figure from your jour—“

“That's quite enough for tonight, Kay,” Mr. Edgeworth said forcefully, holding out one hand like a crossing guard and massaging the space between his eyes with the other. He sighed. “Please, can we pick this back up tomorrow? I'm quite tired and I'd like to get home.”

She nodded, trying not to let her amusement show too much on her face. Bulls-eye, she thought, remembering the incident from ten years ago.

***

“Hey Mr. Edgeworth, what's this?” a 17-year-old Kay Faraday asked, waving around a brown leather-bound notebook, which she'd found tucked between two law books.

“Please stop moving it, or I won't be able to tell you,” replied Mr. Edgeworth from his desk. They'd come back to his office so he could look over some old case files, but besides the unique chessboard (red and blue pieces; possibly specially-made) and the figurine of the Steel Samurai (psh, the Jammin' Ninja was way better), there wasn't much in the way of entertainment in this place. Even the tea the prosecutor had made hadn't kept her occupied for long. So naturally, Kay had started pulling down books at random. It was while she was pulling out one of those books that this little one had fallen, quite literally, into her lap.

Kay did as he asked and held the book still. Mr. Edgeworth's face froze in the briefest expression of horror, and then melted into his usual composed one as he brought his teacup to his mouth. “That is a journal in which I keep notes about past cases and my own actions,” he said smoothly after he'd taken a sip. “It helps to organize my thoughts.”

“Ohhh, so it's a diary, huh?” Kay sang knowingly, flipping to a random page eagerly.

“It's not a diary,” Mr. Edgeworth insisted. He looked as if he was trying very hard not to spring from his chair and rip the book out of her hands. “It is a journal.”

However, the book said otherwise. “So who's this 'P' person?” she asked with interest after reading several entries. “You sure write a lot about him!”

Mr. Edgeworth wore a face of mild panic, but he took another sip of tea to keep up the facade. “Yes, well, he's been involved in a lot of cases I've worked; it's only natural.” His voice was a little defensive, but disguised under layers of nonchalance.

Hm. These were all quite interesting reactions. A smile that was just a little evil spread across Kay's face. She leafed through the pages and stopped on an entry somewhere in the middle, pointing to the words, drawing in a deep breath, and then reading in a dramatic voice as loudly as she could:

“Friday, 23rd May. P was a marvel today, as usual. Everything I said, he handled with alarming dexterity and managed to respond in kind, refusing to allow me to lead, as if we two were danc—”

Faster than the Jammin' Ninja himself, Mr. Edgeworth had launched himself across the room and made a grab for the book. “Give me that!” His cheeks had gone rather pink.

But this thief was not going to give up her prize so easily. She turned to the side, dodging his swipe and angling her body around the book. Then she danced out of reach, flipping to another page and again reciting theatrically: “Friday, 23rd May. P was a marvel today, as usual. Everything I said, he handled with alarming dexterity and managed to respond in kind, refusing to allow me to lead, as if we two were danc—”

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But this thief was not going to give up her prize so easily. She turned to the side, dodging his swipe and angling her body around the book. Then she danced out of reach, flipping to another page and again reciting theatrically: “Saturday, 5th August. Ran into P at a café downtown. He was wearing a t-shirt and jeans, quite a change from his usual blue suit. I almost didn't recognize him except for
“What is that accent supposed to be? Is that supposed to be my voice?!” Mr. Edgeworth blustered indignantly.

Kay avoided another grab and held the book aloft, continuing her reading with as much emotion as she could put into it. “He has become a fixture in the courtroom for me, and I don't feel quite at home in it without him. But when he caught my eye and smiled, I realized it didn't really matter where we were—”

“Kay Faraday you give that back to me right this instant!” the prosecutor bellowed, reaching for the book again and again and having it repeatedly yanked out of the way. It was most undignified, and Kay couldn't remember the last time she'd had so much fun.

“MR. EDGEWORTH'S IN LOOOOOOOOOOOOVE!!~” she shouted gleefully, running around the office like a small child playing keep-away.

By the time Mr. Edgeworth had at last wrestled the book out of her grip, they were both gasping for breath. Kay had tears in the corners of her eyes from laughing, and Mr. Edgeworth was still red in the face, though from embarrassment or exertion Kay didn't know.

“What do I have to do to ensure that you never tell anyone about this journal, ever?” Mr. Edgeworth panted, glancing at her from where they were both slumped with their backs against the wall. His normally immaculate hair was a little mussed, and his cravat was crooked. Kay took a mental picture and told herself that whenever she thought of him as an austere, unshakable statue, she would always remind herself of Mr. Edgeworth as he was now: out of breath, a little unkempt, flushed like a normal human being, and embarrassed about having a crush.

“You don't have to do anything,” she responded, smirking. “Just the knowledge of this diary is priceless, and I want to keep this precious treasure all to myself.”

Mr. Edgeworth groaned and covered his face with his hands.

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Ten years had passed since then, and Kay was finally getting to the bottom of this mystery. She'd been away for quite a long time looking for her place in life and carving out a niche for herself, but now that she was fairly comfortable in her position, she had come back to visit her friend.

What she didn't tell him was that she definitely knew who P was now, because she had been tailing him for about three weeks now.

It wasn't constant, mind; just every once in a while when she saw the spiky-haired man out and about. He was remarkably easy to find, after all.

Even though the only things she had to go on about him from the journal were “blue suit,” “spiky hair,” and “worked on lots of cases with Mr. Edgeworth,” Gummy had been able to immediately identify someone matching that description when she'd listed off the descriptors to him.

“Oh, you must mean Mr. Wright,” he'd said without hesitation. “Yeah, those two go way back, I hear.” His voice then took on a disappointed tone as he gave her his trademark thick-browed puppy dog eyes. “But did you really track down your old friend Dick Gumshoe after all this time just to ask a question about Mr. Edgeworth, pal?...”
After a few days of staking out the courthouse, she'd at last seen the man from the journal.

Phoenix Wright didn't look like anything too special the first time she'd seen him. He was attractive enough, she guessed, though she had to question his taste in hairstyle. More than imposing and commanding of respect, he gave more the impression of being someone's bumbling young uncle or something. He walked at an easy pace as he approached the courthouse, followed by an athletic-looking orange-haired girl in a yellow suit, who ran ahead of him on the steps to the door and then turned to face him as if to say “What's taking you so long, old timer?” At least, that's what Kay would have said. All in all, she found herself a bit disappointed with the famous Phoenix Wright.

And then she sneaked in after him and watched him at work in the courtroom.

Gone was the air of awkwardness and hesitation from the blue-suited man. The way he squared his shoulders and stared down his opponent spoke nothing but self-assurance, and suddenly not even his hair seemed so goofy anymore. He said everything with so much conviction and confidence that it was hard not to have faith in his words, too. Even when evidence stacked up against him, and Kay glimpsed the faint shine of sweat on his brow, he offered no quarter and forged ahead. That tendency to move forward regardless of having not gotten the full picture yet, of making things up as he went along...it resembled the way Mr. Edgeworth would work when he was missing some links between pieces of evidence: keep trying to make connections until you find something that sticks.

Or perhaps it had been Mr. Edgeworth resembling Mr. Wright all along.

She could see why this man had inspired the prosecutor. He was loyal to his client and trustworthy with the evidence (as a former thief and current professional infiltrator, Kay had a knack for picking out untrustworthy people), but more than that, he pursued the truth with all his heart and would not stop fighting until everything was revealed, just like Mr. Edgeworth. He had none of Mr. Edgeworth's haughtiness or condescension, however. In fact, the way that he'd slump a little and look so utterly sheepish when the prosecution or the judge pointed out something faulty in his claims...it was so refreshingly humble and unpretentious. The girl next to him was obviously his apprentice of sorts, but Mr. Wright wasn't even afraid to be wrong in front of her.

That humility, that wearing his heart on his sleeve...it was...endearing.

Oh yes. She could definitely see how he'd captured even Miles Edgeworth's stone heart.

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Kay had been following Mr. Wright occasionally since then, though only when he was on his way to meet Mr. Edgeworth—if she discovered that he was merely out to get lunch or on his way home, she quickly lost interest and wandered off back to her hotel room. She learned things about him: His favorite order from the café (was it the same one from Mr. Edgeworth's journal entry, she wondered?), the names of the people he worked with, his preferred places to walk on days off. She had been fairly confident in her stealth skills during the whole operation, which made it something of a surprise when she'd heard Mr. Wright's pronouncement to Mr. Edgeworth on that day:

“I think I'm being followed, lately.”

Mr. Edgeworth had laughed, but she could tell that what the other man said had worried him. It worried her, too. Perhaps she was not as good a spy as she thought she was?

Nonsense. Mr. Wright must just be really good at sensing the presence of others, that was all.

Kay was even more cautious than usual as she followed Phoenix Wright half of the way home.
The morning after Kay had made her presence in the city known to Mr. Edgeworth, she decided she had to be more careful about her information-gathering. From what the prosecutor had told her after her 5 inquisitive texts, he was quite busy today and in no mood for Kay's relentless questions. Well, fine then. She'd just see what Mr. Wright was up to that evening. She knew he went to a small noodle stand every Monday and left with takeout. Once she'd seen Mr. Edgeworth meet him there, and she hoped today would be a similar occurrence. She'd see then if Mr. Edgeworth was so “busy,” wouldn't she?

The Great Thief lounged in the thick branches of an oak tree which hadn't lost all its leaves yet, snacking on an apple. Winter was a difficult time to use trees for cover—the bare branches didn't do a very good job at concealment, and if you used evergreen trees, the smell and the sap tended to cling to you afterward. Luckily, she'd found this tree still covered in colorful leaves, as if it was left just for her. It was a good 5 yards away from the noodle stand, but she had a pretty good vantage point from up here. The enticing, salty scent of the noodle broth wafted through the air. Hm. Perhaps after the lawyers left she would get some of those noodles for herself. She slipped the apple core into her bag and waited.

Like clockwork, Mr. Wright approached the noodle stand at 7:00, greeting the stand owner in a manner which suggested the two were well-acquainted. However, unlike the last two times she'd seen him come here, Mr. Wright sat down at one of the three small seats in front of the stand, the way he had on that other occasion...

Sure enough, a prosecutor in red soon turned the corner and sat down at the stand as well. He looked rather comical there, a frilly and fancily-dressed man waiting for a humble meal of noodles at a tiny mobile stand.

Kay struggled to control her breathing so she could hear the conversation better.

“Any developments?” Mr. Edgeworth said smoothly, handing the stand owner a bill to pay for his noodles. Kay was looking forward to seeing if he slurped his noodles like a normal person or if he cut them up into manageable pieces, but it looked like she'd have to wait a while, because the prosecutor merely took the plastic cover off the bowl and let the steam begin to escape. Kay's mouth watered. Her apple felt like a distant memory.

“No, but it's only been two days since I last spoke to you about it, so it would be stranger if there had been,” the defense attorney responded, gathering up some thin, wavy noodles with a pair of chopsticks and slurping them like a normal person. Well, no surprise there.

“You may be right there,” Mr. Edgeworth admitted.

“I'm always Wright, Edgeworth!” He flashed his companion a cheesy grin.

Mr. Edgeworth didn't offer him any more than an unimpressed eyebrow quirk in return. “That wasn't funny the first 10 times you said it, and it still isn't now,” he informed him.

Mr. Wright frowned. “Hey, humor me once in a while, why don't you?”

“I suppose one of us needs to know how to humor.”

“Hey!”

The girl in the tree smirked at the conversation. Being together was so easy for the two of them. It kind of baffled her that they weren't together together, so they could have these kinds of affectionate
teasing matches all the time. But then, that would require some kind of confession of feelings on the part of both parties, and as far as she knew Mr. Edgeworth had never confessed any kind of feeling (except to his diary).

After the two ate in silence a little while (Mr. Edgeworth did neither of Kay's two predicted eating methods, and instead twirled the noodles around a fork like spaghetti), Mr. Wright spoke again. "Aren't you going to ask me why I summoned you to this lowly noodle stand?"

"Who are you calling lowly?" the stand owner interjected in a gruff voice, leaning one elbow on the counter challengingly.

"Er, no one," the defense attorney backpedaled, looking sheepish. "It was just a joke because everywhere is lowly to the Chief Prosecutor. You know I love this place, Mr. Eldoon."

The stand owner—Mr. Eldoon—grunted in affirmation. "Suppose I can't argue with that," he said, and then ambled over to the other side of the stand to give the other two men their privacy.

"To answer your question," Mr. Edgeworth continued as if there had been no interruption, "I don't have to ask." He lowered his voice, leaned ever so slightly closer to Mr. Wright. Kay cupped a hand around her ear. "I know very well you don't feel safe walking around in the evening anymore," the prosecutor said in a tone that was almost gentle. "It's all right, Wright. I don't mind."

Mr. Wright's cheeks went pink. "W...Well, that's big of you," he attempted to play it off as a joke, but the words came out as an embarrassed mumble. He looked as if he was going to say something else, but then cut himself off and instead slurped some more noodles.

"How's Trucy?" Mr. Edgeworth asked, to spare his friend the embarrassment of silence.

"Oh, she's great!" The defense attorney's face lit up. From her expert intelligence gathering (which mostly involved asking Detective Gumshoe), Kay had discovered that Trucy Wright was Mr. Wright's adopted daughter. He always sounded so happy and proud whenever he talked about her. The Great Thief Yatagarasu felt a little pang in her heart, a longing for something she hadn't had since childhood. "Then again, you'd know that already, wouldn't you? You just took her to and from school today, and she hung out with you at that crime scene yesterday." Mr. Wright shot the man next to him a suspicious look. "You're really asking me if Trucy shared any of her notes with me, aren't you?"

"That's quite a leap in logic you just made. Though I suppose jumping to conclusions is your forté." When Mr. Wright just continued to stare at him promptly, the prosecutor shrugged in defeat. "All right, yes, that's what I'm asking. From what I could see of them, the girl was very thorough in her notes. I can't imagine she'd do it all just for fun."

"She did share the notes with me," Mr. Wright admitted, pushing around some noodles with his chopsticks. "But she didn't pressure me to take the case, and the notes weren't even written with any kind of favoritism for or against anyone. Has an arrest even been made?" he added, offhand.

"Yes," Mr. Edgeworth answered.

"Anyway," Mr. Wright continued, deciding that part wasn't as important, "when I asked her why she was always trying to get me cases through you, she said—get this—'I just wanted to spend time with Mr. Edgeworth and thought a case would be fun to talk about.'"

"Oh, yes," said the prosecutor, a little sardonically. "Corpses and foul play make for delightful dinner discussion."
“Yeah, really,” Mr. Wright chuckled.

They continued on in this manner for a while, and when they were both finished their meal, it was already about 8:30, and Kay's ankles ached from remaining in a crouched position for over an hour. Goodness, perhaps she really was out of practice—she used to be able to hold a position for over three hours!

“Well, I guess I better be getting home—Truce is probably eagerly awaiting her noodles,” Mr. Wright said, patting the takeout bowl he held after they both rose from their seats.

“Will you be all right on the way home?” Mr. Edgeworth asked, his tone sincere.

“Oh, Mr. Edgeworth,” said the defense attorney, teasing. “Are you offering to walk me home?”

“If necessary,” he answered plainly.

The other man flushed again. “N...no, that's all right,” he stuttered awkwardly. “Thank you, though.” He cleared his throat and shuffled his feet a little, but then he spoke again, attempting to regain his casual tone. “Sorry I made you miss the Steel Samurai. I know Maya never wants to go anywhere at 8 on weekdays, and you're even more of a fanboy of that show than she is.”

His gentle teasing had the desired effect: Mr. Edgeworth was the one blushing now. “I-I am not.” He then muttered in an undertone, “…Already have them all on DVD anyway.”

Mr. Wright laughed, and regarded his friend with poorly-concealed affection. “Thanks for coming out here, Edgeworth.”

“As I said before: Anytime, Wright.” He smiled. It was a very natural smile, one that made him look much younger and smoothed out the furrow between his brows. Mr. Wright smiled back, then turned around and waved as he walked away.

Mr. Edgeworth watched him go until he turned a corner and disappeared from sight.

“Still content with just watchin' him go, eh, Miles?” growled Mr. Eldoon good-naturedly, raising a dark eyebrow at the Chief Prosecutor.

“...I don't remember asking for your opinion,” he grumbled lamely, and Mr. Eldoon barked a laugh as the prosecutor stiffly walked away from the stand.

Kay finally slid down the tree as soundlessly as possible as soon as Mr. Edgeworth was out of sight, and quickly wondered whether she had time to buy some noodles before tailing Edgeworth back to his office. Perhaps if she ambushed him again tonight, he would be more willing to talk to her? She decided to forego the noodles for now, and rushed past the stand.

“Come back soon, lassie,” Mr. Eldoon called after her.

She hadn't gotten more than a few yards before she crashed headlong into someone who had already been hiding behind the building she dove behind for cover. She conked her head right into another girl's.

“Ow!” she wailed, clutching her head.

“Oh!” said the other, also holding her head. Kay squinted open one eye. The girl was very tiny, petite and delicate-featured, with pale skin, big gray eyes, and shiny light-brown hair done up into a strange pretzel hairdo, with a long strand in front hanging down and ending with a round bauble. She
was wearing clothing that was obviously Japanese-inspired, cream-colored and pink with a wide magenta obi. Her skinny legs were splayed at the knees as the girl rubbed her forehead, having been knocked on her rear.

“I...I'm sorry,” Kay said, offering a hand to the girl to help her up. She took it, and Kay was surprised by how light the other girl was when she hauled her to her feet. Gosh, and she was so short!

“Th-that's quite all right. It was my fault for not properly observing my surroundings,” the girl responded politely with a little bow. The formal manner of speech made Kay a little nervous. She never quite knew how to respond in situations like that.

“Uh, I'm pretty sure it was actually my fault for diving into you headfirst,” she said with an awkward chuckle, scratching her head. “I just needed a hiding place fast—I don't want to lose sight of that guy in the red suit,” she explained.

“You mean Mr. Edgeworth?” the girl asked, her voice raising in pitch with surprise.

“Yeah!” Kay said, just as surprised. She blinked. “Wait, how do you know Mr. Edgeworth?”

“Um, I hope you'll forgive me for prying, but I was about to ask you the same question,” the girl said humbly, nibbling on her thumb a little. Even her voice was dainty and girlish.

“I'm...kind of an old friend,” she said. “I worked a few cases with him way back when, and I flew back into town recently to check in on him.”

“Oh, I see,” said the girl, nodding. “I am also an old friend of Mr. Edgeworth's.” She stuck out her hand. “My name is Pearl Fey. It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss...?”

“Kay,” she responded, taking Pearl's hand and shaking it. “Kay Faraday.”

“Miss Kay,” Pearl repeated with a smile. “That's a nice name.”

“Yours too,” she complimented in return. “So, if you don't mind my asking, why are you following Mr. Edgeworth?”

She went a bit pink in the face. “Oh, um, well...I...happened to be following his friend, Mr. Wright, to that noodle stand back there—”

“What a coincidence,” Kay said with a grin. “Mine is too.” She held out her hand again. Pearl looked up inquisitively. “What do you say we get some noodles and swap tales?” she suggested.

A shy smile spread across Pearl's face, and she took Kay's hand, allowing the other girl to lead her off in the other direction. The questions for Mr. Edgeworth could wait.
“—So then, he got sooo embarrassed that he’d acted like a fanboy, since it was only Larry who was in the Steel Samurai suit!”

“I would have liked to have seen that!” Pearl giggled, setting aside her chopsticks. “Mr. Edgeworth being flustered like anyone else...it must have been so charming!”

“Well, I dunno if 'charming' is the word,” Kay mused, slurping up the last of her noodles. “But it was definitely hilarious.”

“It sounds like you are nearly as close with Mr. Edgeworth as I am with Mr. Nick,” Pearl said thoughtfully.

“Oh yeah, Mr. Edgeworth and I go way back!” Kay exclaimed. “I met him when I was 10 years old, y'know! 'Course, it was a lot longer ago than when you were 8,” she trailed off into a laugh. “How old are you, anyway, Pearl? 14?”

A blush came over Pearl's small, delicate cheeks. “I'm 18, actually.” She looked a little depressed, suddenly.

“O-Oh, I'm sorry!” Kay said, immediately feeling remorseful. “D-don't look sad! I only thought that because of, um...” She cast around for a reason besides the other girl's...undeveloped features. Or her height. She suspected Pearl was sensitive about that. “How clear your recollections about Mr. Wright are! I thought for sure they must have taken place only within the past few years, heheh!” She grinned, hoping it didn't look too forced.

Pearl must have been as innocent as she looked, because her face brightened up right away. “Oh, why thank you! But I must say your storytelling was quite good as well!”

“Hey, thanks!” They were quiet a brief moment, before Kay finally decided to ask what she wanted to ask: “So...any particular reason you were following Mr. Wright tonight?” Pearl looked evasive, so she clarified. “This stays strictly between you and me. I promise not to breathe a word to anyone else.” She leaned in closer, hoping it would seem more private that way.

Pearl glanced around like she was looking for professional infiltrators, and then leaned in close. “I think Mr. Nick is in love with Mr. Edgeworth, and I want to help them get together.”

Kay reeled back so fast she almost fell off her stool.

“You too?!” she exclaimed, apparently rather louder than she’d meant to, because Pearl looked startled. Kay tried dialing it down a bit. “You too?” she asked again. “I've been following Mr. Edgeworth for the exact same reason!” Suddenly, this was ten times more exciting. It felt like having a partner-in-crime! Especially if the crime was stalking!

“Really?” Pearl's eyes almost looked like they grew bigger with wonder and excitement. They shone with interest. “Oh, I am so glad it was not just me!” Suddenly, she blinked, and the huge smile she'd been wearing slid off her face. “Not...just me...” she repeated, looking off into the distance. Then she looked like she'd just put together two mental puzzle pieces. “Oh my,” she muttered, biting her thumb with a worried expression. “I shall have to assure Mr. Nick that he needn’t worry about someone following him...he's looked so tired lately; I think it's really affecting him...”

Kay abruptly remembered how worried Mr. Wright had been about being followed, even going so far as to tell Mr. Edgeworth in case anything happened to him, and felt like a real jerk. How much anxiety had she been causing over the past few weeks, and for what? She hadn't even come up with
a plan to get the two together yet. “No, that's okay,” she said, holding up a hand. “I should tell him. It's my fault he's been so uneasy lately. I guess it never really occurred to me that it would affect his life so much.” She slumped on her stool, hunching her shoulders. “If only I was better at my trade, he would have never detected my presence…”

“Oh, I'm sure it's nothing to do with your abilities!” Pearl said earnestly. She thought a moment, looking up at the dark sky, before lowering her gaze to Kay again. “Mr. Nick has been in lots of dangerous situations. I think he's just used to picking up on things other people miss!”

Kay broke into a smile. This kid really was sweet, wasn't she? “Thanks, Pearl. But I still feel bad for stressing him out so much, so could you introduce him to me sometime?”

Pearl nodded. “I'd be delighted!”

“Great!” said Kay. “So, what did you first notice that made you think they'd be good together?” she continued, switching to a mischievous tone.

A glimmer came into Pearl's eyes, too. “Well, I guess for me it started when Trucy told me she thought Mr. Nick was dating someone…”

Three days later, Phoenix sighed and checked his watch for like the twelfth time, and then looked at the arrivals schedule. It was already five minutes past when the flight was supposed to come in, and yet there had been no announcement over the speakers.

“It'll come, Daddy,” Trucy assured him at his side. He looked down and offered her a grateful smile in return. Her hold on his hand tightened a little, a squeeze of solidarity.

“Yeah, Mr. Wright,” Athena grinned at him from his other side, the little robotic pendant around her neck shining a cheerful green. “As he himself would say, 'It's fine!'”

“I know, I know,” Phoenix said quietly. “I just can't help but worry about the kid.”

Apollo was coming home for a whole month and a half from his extended stay in Khura'in. He'd had to practically bend over backwards to do it, but he'd managed to secure the time off to spend the holidays in the States. Only a year had gone by since he'd been gone, but it still felt like it had been an eternity since they'd heard his ridiculously loud voice.

Every time the chime came over the speakers, all three of them tensed up with anticipation. Their shoulders slumped when the flight number did not match the one they had on the paper in Phoenix's breast pocket.

Phoenix's eyes drifted around the airport, his gaze falling on families saying tearful farewells, businesspeople weavign through the crowd expertly, reuniting lovers flinging their arms around each others' necks... *Must be nice,* he found himself thinking, a little resentfully, to know *without a doubt exactly how someone feels about you.* He wondered what it would be like, having that easy intimacy all the time. He couldn't imagine it.

He blinked, and the airport came into focus again. He hadn't even realized that he'd let his eyelids fall half-closed. Phoenix sighed, rubbing his eyes with his free hand and attempting to keep his mind on-task.

But the more he looked around, saw all the love stories and heartwarming moments unfold in every direction, the lonelier it made him feel. Without noticing, he let his eyes glaze over again, and like a broken record, his mind replayed yet again yesterday's phone conversation with Edgeworth.
As soon as he saw the number displayed on the Caller ID, he scrambled to hit the correct button, nearly dropping his phone. *Be cool, Phoenix, be cool*, he told himself mentally before attempting a smooth, professional tone. “WrightAnythingAgencyPhoenixWrightspeaking,” was the jumbled mess that spilled out instead.

“Wright? It's Edgeworth,” came Edgeworth's voice, sounding smooth and professional without even trying, damn it.

“Oh, hi, Edgeworth!” said Phoenix, feigning surprise. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

There was a brief pause on the other end, though long enough for Phoenix to say “Edgeworth? You there?”

“I apologize,” said Edgeworth, sounding oddly hesitant. “I was attempting to find the best way to say what I want to say.”

Phoenix's heart gave a lurch. What could that mean? Instantly a thousand stupid thoughts zoomed through his mind. “W-well, take your time,” he said as calmly as he could, his pulse racing.

“Well...” Edgeworth started. Phoenix held his breath. “The thing is,” Edgeworth continued, “I'm...not so sure we should be so heavily involved in one another's lives.”

It felt like a heavy stone had been dropped into Phoenix's stomach. His racing heart juddered to a stop. He forced a little laugh. “E-Edgeworth, what brought this on?”

“It's nothing personal,” said the voice on the other end, “It's just...I've been hearing a lot of gossip lately. They keep saying that the Chief Prosecutor is...conspiring with a defense attorney.”

Phoenix felt his face flush, a little from embarrassment but mostly from irritation. “Since when have you ever cared about gossip?” he asked, sounding a little more snappish than he'd intended.

“Since my reputation became instrumental in holding the Prosecutor’s Office together,” said Edgeworth, his voice a mixture of exasperation and defensiveness. Phoenix heard him sigh. “I don't like this, either,” the prosecutor admitted, his tone softer and less guarded, “but the fact is that what people think about me does matter, at least to some degree.”

Phoenix felt a sting in his chest. “Well, clearly those people are idiots,” he said dismissively. “Doesn't everybody know how stingy you are with information?”

There was a huff over the line that might have been a small laugh. “Apparently not. But they do know about Trucy tagging along to crime scenes.”

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“Oh,” said Phoenix. “I can see how that might look suspicious.”

“Indeed,” Edgeworth said flatly. Another sigh. “It's not that I don't enjoy her presence, but could you please pass along to her that she mustn't do that anymore?” His tone was almost pleading.

Phoenix felt a smirk spread across his face. “Aww, are you too soft-hearted to disappoint that little girl?”

Evidently Edgeworth was not amused, because he sounded annoyed when he spoke again. “Well, I've wasted enough of my time—”
“N-no, don’t hang up yet!” Phoenix exclaimed. “I'm sorry. I'm just glad you hold Trucy in such high regard. It's...” He cast around for the right word, and then finally blurted “sweet.” He felt his cheeks flush again. *Sweet?* Why in the world had he said *sweet*? Anything would have been better: nice, good, even reassuring, but *sweet*? Who had ever applied that word to Miles Edgeworth?!

“Y-Yes, well, we shall see how 'sweet' I am the next time we meet in court,” Edgeworth challenged, but to Phoenix's surprise he actually sounded flustered. His heart did something that wasn't quite a somersault—more of a clumsy roll, really.

“So...are you still going to drive Trucy to and from school?” he said, attempting to not sound too desperate.

“Well, I can't exactly leave her with no transportation, can I?” the prosecutor responded, businesslike, and Phoenix broke into a grin. Others could say what they wanted about Edgeworth, but he always came through when Phoenix needed him. He felt the tension dissolve a little, and resisted the urge to laugh with relief. “That said, we should probably not act too friendly in public,” Edgeworth went on.


“Oh, stop,” said Edgeworth huffily, but Phoenix could hear the warmth behind it. “So, everything all clear?”

“Yup,” Phoenix answered, but then paused. “Seriously, I don't know what those rumor-spreaders are thinking,” he said, a little more subdued. “As if you'd ever let your personal feelings interfere with your job.”

Edgeworth hesitated. “I'm not a robot, Wright. It's a legitimate concern. Even I must struggle with my own feelings.” His voice was...quiet. Unsure.

And Phoenix's heart was instantly doing warm-ups for a marathon again. “W-well, well. That's news to me,” he joked.

“You're lucky, Wright,” the prosecutor said, suddenly with surprising candor. “You can feel whatever you want with no consequences. There is freedom in your public invisibility.”

“Wow,” said Phoenix, “Only you could express admiration while still insulting me.”

“Sorry,” said Edgeworth, surprising him again.

Well, as long as his friend was being this unguarded... “Hey, Edgeworth?” Phoenix started again, before he could lose his nerve. “I'm...I'm not as open with my feelings as you think. I...put things aside for work, too.” Was his heart actually trying to exit his body? It certainly felt that way.

“Oh?” said Edgeworth. “How curious. What things are these?”


*My feelings for you.*

Of course, like always, he chickened out. “My social life,” he quipped. *Bawk, bawk, bawk.*

Edgeworth chuckled. “I suppose that makes two of us,” he said. “Anyway, I really must go,
Wright.”

“All right, all right. Thanks again, Edgeworth.”

“Don't mention it...quite literally, at that. Goodbye for now.” Click. Phoenix was left listening to a dial tone.

He slumped, and ran both hands through his spiky hair.

If both he and Edgeworth were so committed to finding the truth, why could Phoenix never tell it to him when it came to how he felt?

***

Phoenix snapped back to alertness when the chime finally sounded again, followed by a voice over the speakers: “Flight 0691 from Khura’in, arriving at TBIT gate #10.”

“That's him, that's him!” Athena exclaimed, jumping up and down like she wasn't a 20-year-old woman. She tore off towards the gate, Trucy pulling Phoenix along after as if he wouldn't be able to find his way otherwise.

They watched as each person made their way through the gate and over to baggage claim, Trucy especially craning her neck and standing on her tiptoes to get the first look when Apollo finally stepped through.

However, Phoenix had the advantage of height. “There!” he said, pointing towards the third person back in line. “I'd recognize that hair anywhere!”

Sure enough, Apollo Justice shuffled through the gates, his distinctive “hair horns” drooping a little, making him look a little deflated and exhausted. Phoenix guessed he hadn't had time to apply the appropriate amount of gel to make the hairstyle endure for the whole day.

“Apollo! Over here! Apollo!” Trucy cried, jumping in the air and waving her arms around as if Apollo were on the other side of a football field instead of 20 feet away. Apollo's head jerked in the direction of her voice, though, and he offered them a tired smile in recognition. It wasn't just his hair making him look weary—even from here, Phoenix could see the dark circles under his eyes. Maybe Apollo wasn't good at sleeping on planes? Well, in any case, he suspected he had dark circles to match, what with his recent paranoia thing.

Athena all but jumped over someone who was crouched down adjusting their luggage and barreled her way through the throng of people, separating the crowd so effectively that Trucy was able to run after her mostly unimpeded.

“Girls, please! This is an airport!” Phoenix called, but they didn't seem to hear him, so he huffed a sigh and made his way over too, apologizing on the way for his charges' overenthusiasm.

By the time Phoenix got over to them, Trucy and Athena had already wrapped Apollo in a four-armed hug. Apollo looked as if he was struggling between exasperation and joy. “Come on, guys...I'm happy to see you too, but can we save all this for after I'm reunited with my stuff?” He looked up and saw Phoenix, and smiled again. “Finally,” he said. “Come to rescue me, Mr. Wright?”

A smile stretched across Phoenix's face, too. “Nope,” he said, and threw his arms around the whole bunch. However bad he was at expressing his feelings around Edgeworth, at least he could be open with this cobbled-together little family of his. Apollo groaned, but Phoenix knew he didn't really mind.
After they’d all pulled away from their reunion group hug, they shouldered their way towards the baggage claim carousel, Athena chattering excitedly to her senior colleague the whole time. “How was the flight? Did they have food? What did they serve? Oh, but why am I asking about the flight, haha! I should be asking about how things are in Khura’in! Did you—”

“Athena, please,” Apollo cut her off, holding up a hand. “I just got off a 14-hour flight, I haven’t slept since the day before yesterday, and right now it seems like light and sounds hate me.”

Athena bit her lip, looking a little ashamed. Widget also flashed a worried blue. “I’m sorry, Apollo...I’ll wait until we’re somewhere quieter.” Phoenix wasn’t surprised she had relented so quickly for once—he knew Athena was quite familiar with what it felt like to be overwhelmed by sensory input.

Before any of them knew she had been gone, Trucy rejoined them, dragging a huge, bright-red suitcase behind her. “Finally...got it,” she huffed, whipping off her hat to wipe her brow.

“Trucy, don't just take random luggage!” Apollo chided her, looking past Athena's shoulder towards where Trucy was now standing. “I haven't told you what mine even looks...” He trailed off as he caught sight of the suitcase, and his mouth dropped open. “Wha...how did you know which one was mine?!” he asked, bewildered.

Trucy giggled as Apollo grabbed the luggage's handle. “Magic!” she answered.

Apollo rolled his eyes. “That's your explanation for everything,” he sighed.

“Because it's the best one there is,” Trucy said with a shrug, following him as he began to wheel the suitcase towards the exit.

“I must admit, I'm curious too, Trucy,” said Phoenix, bringing up the rear of the group. “How did you know?”

“Ohay!” Apollo sounded defensive. “Red is a great color!”

“Okay, okay,” said Trucy. “The truth is, I just looked for a bag that was as loud as Polly is!” She smiled cheekily.

“Hey!” Apollo sounded defensive. “Red is a great color!”

“Well, I'll say this: it suits you,” said Athena, and in five more steps they were out the door.

“So,” said Phoenix once they’d all come to a halt at the bus stop, raising his eyebrows inquisitively at his protégé. “What next?” That was the ever-present question, wasn’t it?

Apollo leaned slightly on the extended handle of his suitcase. “This probably isn't kosher for someone of my profession to say,” he said with a familiar wide smile, “But I would kill for some Eldoon's.”

Noodles may not have been the answer to the questions that plagued Phoenix at night, but they sure were a good distraction.

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter: Maya makes a phone call. Miles is saddled with unnecessary feelings.
Mystics and Memories

Chapter Summary

Maya makes a phone call. Miles is saddled with unnecessary feelings.

Chapter Notes

I've decided to start posting on Sundays instead of Wednesdays, so hopefully this doesn't mix anybody up.

I would pay a small sum of money to see Phoenix as he appears in the last journal entry...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So, how is Ahlbi? Is Prosecutor Sahdmadhi still his same stuffy self? Do you ever get to hang out with Ema? How much has Rayfa grown?” Maya couldn’t wait to hear all about Apollo's stay in Khura’in. She'd waited until a few days after he got back to the States as Nick had requested, but now she would be denied no further! Maya Fey, Master of the Kurain Channeling Technique and Purveyor of Delicious Foodstuffs, was great at many things, but waiting was not one of them.

Apollo glanced in Nick's direction and raised an eyebrow. “Do I really have to answer these questions again?” he asked flatly.

“Ahlbi's good, Prosecutor Sahdmadhi isn't quite as severe as before, Ema's usually busy traveling everywhere but they occasionally shoot the breeze, and Rayfa is regrettably the same height she was last year,” Nick rattled off for him, counting off each answer on his fingers. He turned to Maya, who was diagonal from him on the sofa across the table. “Did I get them all?”

“Aww, I wanted to hear Apollo tell me,” Maya said with disappointment, resettling herself so she was leaning against one arm of the couch.

“Well, I'll be here until New Year's, so there will be plenty of time for me to tell you all about my year away from the Agency,” he looked at her pointedly, “gradually.”

Nick chuckled, but Maya couldn't help but notice that it sounded more tired than usual. “Hey, Nick, have you tried that tea I gave you?” she asked, concerned.

A brief look of confusion flickered over his face, and then vanished to be replaced by one of recognition. “Oh, uh, yeah,” he said absently. “Really tasty stuff.”

“It's not supposed to be 'tasty'! It's supposed to help you sleep!” she huffed, crossing her arms. “You know, for a guy whose job it is to find the truth, you sure are bad at telling it sometimes!”

Nick winced, and stared at his hands in his lap. “I'm sorry,” he mumbled. “You're right...”

Whoa. What? This was not the intended effect. She had expected him to say something more like
“Oh, how could I have squandered your thoughtful gift! I will enjoy it gratefully this evening, remembering your kindness!” Only, y’know, with more Nick-like words.

“Hey, hey,” she said. “Something wrong?”

He flapped a hand around dismissively. “No, no, I’m fine. Sorry, just thinking about something.”

“Well that’s vague,” said Maya. “What were you thinking about?”

“Uhhh...what we’re going to do for dinner?” Nick tried hopefully. Maya frowned harder. How dare he try to utilize her weakness for grub to distract her!

She stood up and put her hands on her hips. “Nice try, mister!”

“I was thinking maybe that place two blocks from the park,” Nick said thoughtfully.

Maya gasped, her eyes shining. “You mean that place that serves those milkshakes?!” Wait a minute. “I mean...Stop trying to dodge the question!”

Apollo, who had been watching the conversation unfold passively, suddenly spoke up. “Any chance you're thinking about Prosecutor Edgeworth, Mr. Wright?”

Nick blinked, but responded without hesitation. “What makes you think I am?”

Apollo crossed his arms and gave a cocky smirk. “That restaurant you mentioned is right across from the Prosecutor's Building.”

“Gghk,” was all Nick said in response as he winced.

“Wooooow!” Maya exclaimed appreciatively, clapping a little and sitting back down. “That was amazing, Apollo! How did you do that?”

Apollo's eyebrows shot up, evidently surprised by her reaction. “The short version of it is: I watch really closely,” he answered, looking pleased that someone was genuinely praising him. Gosh, he'd been gone for a year, and yet he was already this moved when someone made a fuss over him when he finally returned? Poor guy. She was going to have to scold Nick for not giving him enough attention later. “Anyway,” Apollo continued, looking at Nick now, “What's up between you and Mr. Edgeworth?”

Holy cow, was that a blush Maya saw emerging on Nick's face? “N-nothing's up,” he said. He hesitated, and then explained quickly, “I-I was just thinking that Edgeworth hasn't seen you since you've been back, Apollo.”

Maya may not have been as good as Apollo at watching people, but even she could tell that Nick had pulled that out of thin air. She exchanged a raised-eyebrow glance with the younger attorney. “I think the word here is 'Objection,’” she said.

“Look, don't we have more interesting things to talk about?” Nick said, annoyed.

“Yes,” said Maya, “But whenever I try, you always say 'Enough about the Steel Samurai, Maya!’”

“And I stand by that,” said Nick.

The door opened, and everyone turned their heads to see Athena bustle into the office, her orange ponytail whipping around expressively as usual. “Hey, everyone!” she said brightly, and upon seeing Maya, added “Oh, Ms. Fey! When did you get here?”
“About three hours ago!” Maya responded, returning Athena's bright smile.

“And she hasn't stopped talking since,” Nick informed Athena, smirking. Maya shot him a glare. It was mostly just for show, though—she knew Nick was just trying to push her buttons. Well, two could play at that game.

“That's right, and the current topic of conversation is how Nick is mooning over Edgeworth.”

“What?” he yelped, looking like he'd just been punched in the gut. That bug-eyed expression—haha, priceless! “I'm not *moon*ing over anybody! Least of all *Edgeworth*!”

“Whoa, no need to get so defensive then, Nick,” Maya said, not bothering to hide her triumphant smirk.

“I am not getting defensive,” Nick asserted, crossing his arms (defensively).

Athena looked like she was trying to stifle a giggle. “Your increased pulse says otherwise,” she said slyly, plopping herself on the couch next to Nick.

“Besides,” added Maya, “you're a defense lawyer. Shouldn't you always be defensive?”

Nick looked around at them all with a raised-eyebrowed expression of betrayal. “What is this, National Harass a Lawyer Day?” he protested, flinging up his hands in exasperation.

“Every day is that here,” Apollo said dryly, but he was smiling. Maya liked the kid. He had a wry sense of humor and was a bit of a smartass, but he had major guts and, like Nick, fought with all he had for his own beliefs. He could be awfully quiet during conversations sometimes, especially for someone with such a loud voice, but when he did speak, it was usually worth listening (not that you could tune him out since, y'know, again, really loud voice).

“So, Nick's fanboying over Edgeworth aside”—Maya ignored Phoenix's indignant cry of “Fanboying?!”—“Are we actually going to that restaurant across from the Prosecutor's Building? Ever since it was brought up my Dessert Stomach has been calling out for one of those milkshakes.”

“Ohhh!” Athena clasped her hands together and looked excited, as did the little robot around her neck, which had briefly flashed yellow before going back to green. “I haven't been to that place in ages!” She turned to Nick, her orange ponytail whipping. “Can we go, Boss? Can we?!”

“I'm the one who suggested it in the first place, so sure, why not?” he said with a shrug.

“Wahoo!” yelled Athena, pumping her fists in the air. “What time is it? Can we go now?” She sounded like a kid waiting in line for a merry-go-round. Maya had personal experience in what that sounded like.

“I think Trucy would be upset if we left her out,” Apollo pointed out, crossing his arms. “And besides that, it's only 2:30.”

“Awww,” said both Maya and Athena. Maya supposed she'd just have to raid Nick's stash of snacks. That might make him upset, though. Speaking of which... Maya glanced over at her old friend to gauge his expression. His brows were still knitted, but his mouth was quirked up on one side in a half-smile, half-grimace. He looked frustrated in an affectionate way, which was pretty much his default expression around all his wacky acquaintances, really. Well, at least he wasn't wearing that conflicted, troubled expression he had been earlier. That was not a face that Nick should be wearing. He seemed to have cheered up!
Suddenly, Nick rose from the couch. “You're all paying your own bills when we go out to eat,” he grumbled, going over to the bookcase to retrieve a file. Hm. Guess he was still annoyed. He ran his finger across the row of documents before apparently finding the binder he was looking for and pulling it down. “I've got to look this over; there are a few things I want to follow up on.”

Maya blinked. “Okay,” she said. “Why are you informing us of this again?”

Having walked over to the coat rack, Nick pulled his shabby blue coat onto one arm, then transferred the binder to his other arm so he could pull on the remaining sleeve. “Because I'm going to do it in the park.”

“What?” said Athena, swinging her legs out from under her on the couch to put her feet on the floor again. “But...it's cold out there!”

“The brisk air helps me think,” Nick said. Athena and Apollo glanced at each other with equally disbelieving faces.

Nick was making his way to the door, and Maya twisted around on the sofa and stood on her knees, peering over the top of the sofa back. “Hey...wait!” she said quickly, and he stopped, hand on the doorknob. Something that felt like guilt tumbled over in her belly. Had her well-intentioned teasing driven Nick away from his own office? “Nick...are you okay?”

Maya didn't like the brief pause that followed before Nick turned and faced them with a convincing smile. “Of course I am. I just want a change of scenery, okay?”

Maya chewed her lower lip a little, unsure of what to say. Apparently she took too long to find the words, because Nick continued. “I'll be back in time for supper.” He was still wearing that smile, the one that was supposed to tell her not to worry. But Maya knew better. That was the face he made when he was reassuring clients even when he didn't have any new leads. “You guys can busy yourselves by cleaning up this place,” he finished, giving a short wave. Before any of them could protest, he was out the door.

“Man, I haven't even been back a week and I'm already back on toilet duty?” Apollo groaned.

Maya wasn't so concerned about the toilets at the moment, however. She swung back around and flopped her butt back onto the couch, gripping the cushions with both hands at her sides. She widened her eyes at Athena. “You picked up on it too, right?” she said.

“Oh yeah,” said Athena, leaning forward and nodding, her blue eyes intense. “Something is definitely up.”

“What, with the toilets?” said Apollo from between them, resting his arms across the back of the couch. Well, at least one of them was relaxed here.

Athena rolled her eyes impatiently at him. “Aren't you the one who's good at reading people's body language?” she scolded. “Mr. Wright is obviously really troubled about something!”

Apollo snorted. “Yeah, he's probably troubled by how obsessed you guys are with him and Mr. Edgeworth.” He seemed to have forgotten that it was he who had brought up Edgeworth in the first place when Nick had still been here.

“Oh I don't think that's it,” Athena said, grimacing. She paused. “Or, at least, that's not all of it,” she added thoughtfully. “He's been kind of off all month, but this past week especially...”

“You know, Pearly said something to the same effect,” Maya threw in. She was of course in close
contact with her beloved cousin, who gave her steady updates on Nick when Maya was away. Sometimes her accounts were so detailed that Maya wondered exactly how much time Pearly spent observing him, but she didn't press the younger girl about it too much. After all, pressing was more Nick's thing. “She thinks Edgeworth has something to do with it.”

“Ugh, Edgeworth again?” Apollo said, resting the back of his head on the couch from where he sat. “Why does the conversation keep going back to Mr. Wright and Edgeworth?”

“Uh, because EVERYTHING always comes back to Nick and Edgeworth!” Maya said loudly. “Anyone with eyes can see that they mean the world to each other! So it's only natural that if one of them starts acting differently, we'd suspect something happened there!”

“I happen to have really good eyes,” Apollo mumbled.

“Yeah, but your eyes haven’t been around for the last year,” Athena pointed out, poking Apollo on the forehead. He swatted her hand away halfheartedly. “Besides, it's not just what you see. It's what you hear, too,” she continued.

“What you hear?” Maya prompted eagerly.

“Well yeah!” the other girl returned with equal enthusiasm. The little gadget around her neck had flashed green for a brief moment, accenting her forcefulness. “I mean, the way Mr. Wright's heart starts pounding whenever anyone mentions Mr. Edgeworth...something is definitely up!” Ah, the girl's special ability. Maya had heard stories, but had never actually seen it in action. She wondered if she'd have the opportunity soon.

“Maybe he's worried someone will start interrogating him whenever Edgeworth comes up,” Apollo suggested. This time it was Athena who swatted him.

“I've also heard that the Prosecutor's Office isn't too happy with Mr. Edgeworth for being so friendly with Mr. Wright,” Athena added, ducking her head a little and biting her lip. The thing around her neck was a sullen blue now. “They're saying he's going soft and letting his personal feelings get in the way of his job.”

Apollo's head rose off the couch. “Are you kidding me?” he said incredulously. “I can't imagine Edgeworth letting anything get in the way of his job, much less 'feelings'!”

Maya shot Apollo a glare. “Well, I'm not going to let Nick sit around and mope. Not when I can do something about it!” she finished dramatically.

It had been approximately 5 days and 16 hours since he had last talked to Phoenix Wright.

Not that he was counting of course; his phone just happened to have recorded the time he’d made the phone call to the defense attorney. He had much better things to do than sit around and think about Phoenix Wright.

So then why was he currently flipping through this damned journal again? It wasn't as if it held anything of true import. It was merely a way to record what had happened on each day. It was of course separate from his organizer, which held details about case developments. The entries in the journal were of a more personal and boring nature. This volume held only events from the past year.
Monday, 12 February. Went to park to take a stroll. Ran into L, who had evidently started some sort of dog walking business, no doubt to try and impress yet another girlfriend. He had no less than 4 dogs all attached to different leashes, and it rather looked like they were walking him instead.

Most of the entries were along these lines: brief descriptions of inane observations or small anecdotes that had no place in a formal organizer but which, for whatever reason, he didn't necessarily want to forget either. Sometimes he told himself that he kept the journals to provide himself with an alibi if he ever came to any trouble, but even to him that seemed like a weak excuse, and in any case the journal wouldn't qualify as an alibi unless someone else had seen the entry and could verify it had been written on the date indicated...

Thursday, 23 April. Cherry blossoms are in full bloom now. They are so numerous that one could almost slip on all the fallen petals. Seeing streets lined in soft pink like this always reminds me of that spring in fourth grade, walking home with L and P. L would kick a rock the whole way. P would walk backwards ahead of us so he could still face us as he talked. I kept warning him that he was going to walk into something, but he would just smile and say that if he were, surely I would warn him. He always was too trusting of others.

And then there were entries like that, indulgent recollections of especially fond memories, things that he'd recorded because he knew he would never tell them to anyone else.

Wednesday, 5 May. Was surprised to see P order a double espresso and drink it black. I'd always assumed he was the type to dump things into his beverage until it no longer resembled coffee. But I suppose now I know how he is always possessed of so much energy.

Monday, 10 June. Rainy season now. This morning was clear, but now the rain is coming down with a sudden fury. I of course carried my umbrella, but not all people plan ahead as I do. Spotted P soaked to the skin, droplets falling from his ridiculous hair as they would from blades of grass. He looked so miserable that I ended up sacrificing my umbrella. Now I must have my suit dry-cleaned, and I blame it entirely on him.

As his eyes scanned page after page, Miles felt an increasing wave of embarrassment and frustration at himself. Must so many of his observations be about Wright? Even entries about days he hadn't seen him were often linked to him in some way. Reading all the entries one after another like this, anyone would have pinned Miles immediately as a lovestruck fool.

P's daughter has picked up so many of his mannerisms. She laughs in that sheepish way of his, her big eyes shine with the same eager curiosity as his, even her cape and scarf mimic his blue-and-red color motif. However, she is far superior than her father at arguments, for I have never won a single one with her. I believe P enjoys this fact immensely.

P has taken to trying to make me laugh every time we meet. He threw several obviously rehearsed puns at me as we walked around the block today, each one worse than the last. We passed under a tunnel of tall, flowering shrubs, and at last, he drew a laugh from me. He smiled brilliantly at me and said “Well, I'm glad you're having fun for once.” I hadn't the heart to tell him that I was only laughing because a bright violet flower had dropped directly behind his ear like a hula dancer's decoration. The look suited him, somehow.

He felt himself flush a little, and closed the book abruptly. Good lord, his own sentimentality mortified him. What would Wright think if he knew how many times Miles had scrawled his initial in all of these books? He'd be glad they were keeping their distance. In fact, he'd probably never want to stand close to Miles again.

He plopped his forehead into his palm as his elbow rested on his desk. All those rumor-spreaders
were right: Miles Edgeworth was much too friendly with the defense attorney. He wondered when he had started letting down his guard around him, allowing himself to get too close. His friend used to keep a respectful distance and not seek contact with him outside of work, but over the past year or so they had seen each other nearly every day of the school year. And then even during summer vacation, Trucy would drag him to some event or another, sometimes with the rest of Wright's colleagues, but other times with just Wright and his daughter. Miles secretly preferred the latter; Wright always seemed much more at ease when it was just the three of them.

But maybe that was the problem. Perhaps if he and Wright were to continue associating outside of work, it should be among a larger group of people. Or perhaps he should invite someone from the Prosecutor's Office, so it didn't appear that he had any sort of favoritism towards defense attorneys?... He tried to imagine going to a restaurant alone with Simon Blackquill or Klavier Gavin. Both prospects made him equally uncomfortable for differing reasons. Franziska would have been all right, but she was working cases for Interpol and was not even in the country.

Well, no matter. Miles wasn't the type to overly enjoy socializing anyway. He could live without it. He had for many years, hadn't he?

He jumped slightly when his cell phone vibrated on his desk, and scrambled to pick it up. “Miles Edgeworth speaking,” he said after tapping the talk button.

“Yo, Mr. Edgeworth!” a familiar voice chirped over the line. “How are you today?”

He leaned back slightly in his chair. “I'm fine, Ms. Fey, although I suspect you haven't called me just to make small talk.”

“Sharp as ever!” Maya paused for a moment. Miles waited. “Listen,” she indeed continued, her tone more subdued, “We're all kinda worried about Nick. He's been so down lately, even though Apollo came home and the holidays are almost here.”

His heart clenched a little. “And...calling me solves this problem how exactly?”

He heard a noise that sounded like an impatient scoff. “Oh please. Calling you almost always solves the problem, on the job or off.”

He blinked at the unexpected praise. “I, ah...thank you, but...?”

“Oh, you heard me. Look, it'll be lots of fun and the place is right across from the Prosecutor's Building. We're going to go right after Trucy's off from school, so you can even drive her right over from there. I know Nick'll cheer right up if you're there! So please?”

He tapped his fingers anxiously on his desk with his free hand. “Maya, I'm really quite busy”— this was a lie; he was actually ahead on work for once—“and I haven't the time to just...” He imagined the pleading look Maya Fey would be wearing right now. He could see it in startling clarity. “Just...” He felt all the resistance drain out of him with a sigh. “Just...save a seat for me.”

“YES!” was the answering squeal, so cacophonous that he pulled the phone away from his ear momentarily. “Thanks Mr. Edgeworth! You're the best!” Then he heard a click. Miles supposed saying “good bye” was a dying formality.
Well. So much for keeping their distance. Not even a week had gone by and already he was going to see Wright again.

Frustratingly, he couldn't bring himself to mind it at all.

He checked the clock. 3:25. It was just about time to retrieve Trucy anyway, and he could stand to be away from work for an hour or two since he'd caught up on so much earlier today...

Miles stood up and walked towards the door, feelings of anticipation and worry wrestling within him.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Athena takes a stand. Phoenix takes an elevator.
Confessions and Confrontations

Chapter Summary

Athena takes a stand. Phoenix takes an elevator.

Chapter Notes

It's times like these that I wish I could make a game simulation...
Thanks as always to Stormy and Mystic, and also to everyone who's read and commented so far. You have no idea how much I cherish all of your words.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Athena Cykes was absolutely certain of three things in this moment: one, peppers were gross no matter what you stuffed them with; two, Maya used black magic to be able to eat that many hamburgers; and three, her boss was crazy in love with Miles Edgeworth.

His face lit up like Widget's “happy” expression when he saw the prosecutor walk through the door. Even though she was across the table from Mr. Wright, she could hear his heart rate pick up, the subtle intake of breath.

Mr. Edgeworth and Trucy seated themselves at the already crowded table, and the group exchanged greetings. Athena noticed that Edgeworth had (perhaps inadvertently?) placed himself directly across from Mr. Wright. Trucy, of course, wedged herself between her father and Apollo. The table was already covered in half-empty plates and water glasses, but everyone scooted their stuff aside enough to allow the newcomers a bit of room for whatever they ended up ordering (assuming what they ended up ordering was small). Trucy grinned around at everyone, while Mr. Edgeworth met Mr. Wright's eyes for a split second to slightly incline his head before looking away again. Athena heard his heart skip a beat too. He might always act like he had it together, but people's hearts never lied.

Conversation at the table was loud, excitable, and affectionate. Apollo assured Mr. Edgeworth that Ema was doing well despite traveling back and forth all the time and that Khura'in was now a much fairer nation; Trucy kept making her father's chicken wings “disappear;” Maya kept trying unsuccessfully to start a conversation about the Steel Samurai with Mr. Edgeworth.

But amidst all the clattering of tableware, the bursts of laughter, and the three times Maya held up an empty plate and said “More please!” to be met with a round of incredulous groans, Athena could hear the low buzz of anxiousness between the two older attorneys. Mr. Edgeworth's was a constant thrum of something that felt like guilt or frustration colored with concern; Mr. Wright's came in fluttering bursts of uncertainty and anticipation whenever he looked Edgeworth's way.

Of course, there was another feeling present in both parties: a quiet hum of happiness.

It was enough to make her want to whip Widget off her neck and start up the Mood Matrix to sort out all these jumbled-up feelings, but she found that her friends generally did not take very well to her attempting to Matrix them. Found it “invasive,” or “unnecessary,” or “completely uncalled for,
Athena, geez, I was just watching a sad movie.” Spoilsports.

But gosh darn it, she couldn't continue to just stand by while these two dopes made each other worried sick about...whatever it was. Talking about one's feelings always helped!

She vowed to herself that she would get her boss to open up if it killed her! Though hopefully it wouldn't come to that.

Everyone was quite surprised that Maya managed to down two milkshakes after all that food, but Athena couldn't bring herself to fill up on food or drink anymore. She was already full of ideas on how to get Mr. Wright to come clean...

***

Ideas weren't the same as plans.

It had been 6 more days, and no progress had been made in the Wright-Edgeworth Divide Debacle. She had tried to inch towards the subject of Edgeworth whenever she and Mr. Wright were alone. Oh, he was quite happy to talk about Edgeworth in general—although his voice always held a pang of sadness now that hadn't been there even just two weeks ago—but getting him to talk about what had happened between them was a different story. Whenever she started veering into that territory, he always skillfully deflected her efforts. She should have known he would—after all, he had taught her everything. But Athena was determined not to give up. It was almost painful listening to how lonely Mr. Wright sounded whenever he told her to stop worrying about him.

She had Trucy's support, too: she was keeping an eye on the Edgeworth side of things. “He's really defensive whenever I talk about Daddy,” she'd told her. “But I can tell from the way he taps the steering wheel or shifts his eyes that he feels bad about something. I wish he'd slip up a little and give me a hint!” But alas, Edgeworth slipping up was a rare occurrence.

Mr. Wright, however, was a different story.

It was for this reason that Athena found herself taking a walk with her boss on one of their days off. Phoenix had not invited her, but she'd taken it upon herself to keep him company, and he did not protest (well, not verbally. He did shoot her a bit of an annoyed look). She kept the conversation casual, talking about Apollo and Maya and even a few updates on Juniper, with whom she was of course in regular contact. He seemed to relax his guard a little after a while.

Athena was beginning to wonder when she would find an opening to talk about Mr. Edgeworth, but just as she was about to open her mouth, a sound caught her attention.

Wow, Mr. Wright's heartbeat suddenly rose to a fever pitch! she thought, surprised at the sudden thudding. And somehow I doubt it's because he's out of shape... “Uh, Boss?” she started, leaning forward a little to peek up at him sideways. “You okay?”

He seemed distracted, having stopped walking to focus his gaze at a spot in the distance. Hastily, Athena tried to follow his line of sight, and after searching the surroundings a bit, she caught a glimpse of a familiar wine-red suit.

“Wow, is that Mr. Edgeworth?” she said shielding her eyes from the sun and squinting. “I didn't even notice him all the way over there.”

Mr. Wright said nothing, but continued to walk. She followed, intrigued, as his heart rate slowly returned to normal. She tucked her hands into her coat pockets, and wondered how it was that her boss wasn't freezing—he hadn't even bothered to wear a jacket today. He was just wearing that beat-
up gray hoodie that Trucy kept trying to discreetly throw away but which somehow always escaped. She glanced at his face. His brow was slightly furrowed, and he looked distracted. Perfect. People were always easier to get information out of when they were distracted!

“So, Boss,” she started, quite bravely, if she did say so herself.

“Hm?” he grunted back.

“About Mr. Edgeworth...”

She heard his heart skip a beat, but then resume on as normal. “What about him?” he prompted, and Athena detected that strange mixture of happiness with a dull cloud of sadness clinging to it.

She suddenly realized she didn't know how to broach the subject without putting him on his guard. They had reached the park, and began to make their way down the footpath. “Um...” she hesitated. “N-nothing. Never mind.”

“Oh,” was all Mr. Wright said. “Okay.” Here his voice had sounded the kind of sad that always made Athena want to invade people's personal space and give them hugs. She stopped in her tracks and squared her shoulders, making Mr. Wright stop and look back at her curiously.

“No, you know what, it's not okay!” she said forcefully. He had the gall to blink at her as if he had no idea what she was talking about.

“I have no idea what you're talking about,” he confirmed.

“Mr. Wright, we need to talk about what happened with you and Mr. Edgeworth,” she asserted, balling her fists. Her breath was puffing out in front of her in clouds, as if she were literally steaming with how worked up she was about this. “We...we need to work things out!”

Instantly, Mr. Wright's face became a hardened mask of neutrality. “No, we don't,” he said. “I'm not one of your witnesses having a breakdown on the stand, Athena. I'm an adult who can deal with his own problems. Take your hands away from Widget.”

Indeed, she had reached up to activate the Mood Matrix. But Athena hadn't come this far to back down. She narrowed her eyes at him and pressed the button defiantly. The quiet whir of the Mood Matrix coming to life filled the chilly air, and a blue holographic screen popped up in front of her.

“Athena,” said Mr. Wright. His voice had taken on a hushed, slightly dangerous tone. “We are in public.” Beneath his anger and the ever-present sadness, though, Athena could clearly hear an even stronger emotion: fear.

“Then let's go somewhere private!” she retorted. Her hands were shaking slightly, conflicted at having to oppose him like this. But this was for his own good, she reminded herself. She took a breath to steady herself, and then continued. “Boss, your emotional defensiveness is causing your feelings to spiral out of control. We need to talk things through.”

She didn't look away or even blink when Mr. Wright's dark blue eyes bored into hers. She stood her ground, waiting.

At last, his shoulders slumped and he sighed. “If I do this,” he said in a defeated voice, “Will you stop bothering me about it all the time?”

“Of course,” she said, trying not to let her relief be too obvious in her voice.
“Let’s go back to the Agency,” he grumbled. “Apollo’s not in right now and Trucy’s at school, so at least I’ll only have one person interrogating me.”

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“All right,” Mr. Wright said with a sigh as he swung the door to the Agency closed. “Let’s get this over with.”

Athena frowned. This wasn’t the Phoenix Wright she looked up to and admired. This was a sad man who was desperate to hide his pain and frustrated with his circumstances. She hadn’t witnessed it firsthand, but the way he was acting reminded her a little of stories she’d heard about how he’d been before...when Apollo was a new attorney.

She wasted no time in firing up the Mood Matrix. Unsurprisingly, the screen was instantly obscured with squiggling, jagged blue lines. **Noise Level: 72%,** said Widget's display. “Okay,” she said. “Talk to me about Mr. Edgeworth.”

“I really don't want to waste my day off talking about Edgeworth,” Mr. Wright said, crossing his arms.

The Mood Matrix told a different story. Athena suppressed a knowing smirk. “Mr. Wright, you're setting off the 'happy' and 'sad' markers.”

He looked a little surprised, dropping his arms down by his sides and blinking. He looked down at his beat-up sneakers for a moment, and then finally threw himself onto a couch. “Fine,” he said. “What about Edgeworth?”

“Um...” she floundered a bit for a moment. “H-how did you meet?” was what tumbled out of her mouth next. She beat down the impulse to facepalm.

Her boss surprised her by answering. “We were childhood friends,” he said. A picture appeared on the Mood Matrix's screen: a much younger Miles Edgeworth and Phoenix Wright walking together, book-bags strapped to their backs. Athena's eyebrows shot up. The Miles in this memory looked so different, though he was still a snappy dresser with a little bow tie. This Edgeworth's expression was unguarded, happy. It was a look she'd never seen on the prosecutor's face before. Before she could scrutinize the image any further, it changed.

Now the screen showed a young Phoenix at the center of a room full of scary-looking kids, their faces all in shadow. The teacher was a looming, dark figure near the front of what she realized was a classroom. Everyone appeared to be shouting at Phoenix, who she realized with a jolt was crying, frantically wiping his eyes. The “fear” and “sadness” readings pulsed with equal intensity, waves of yellow and blue. It reminded Athena uncomfortably of a visually similar situation she'd been in herself as a child. “Edgeworth saved me when everyone was against me,” Mr. Wright continued, and at the statement there was a brief green flash of happiness. “But then...later that year...he disappeared.” The image faded away, the pulsing of the “sad” reading spreading out in wide ripples.

When another picture took its place, it was a scene she knew well: Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth facing one another in court. Both were pointing and shouting with their typical gusto. A strong mix of “happy” and “angry” washed down from the top of the screen. “After a long time, I finally met Edgeworth again in court,” said Mr. Wright. The “anger” reading momentarily overpowered the “happy” one. “He'd become a real jerk.”

Another image came into focus, this one showing the two of them shaking hands. The left side of the screen lit up with equal readings of happiness and sadness. “But we reconciled and now we're
friends again,” Mr. Wright finished, laying his head back on his crossed arms against the couch. “Or at least friendly enemies,” he added as an afterthought.

“Hmm...” Athena's eyes scanned the image, running through the rest of his statements in her mind. Most of the emotions made sense. Of course, anyone would be afraid and sad if their entire class was against them, and happy that someone had come to their rescue. Likewise, anyone would be devastated if their childhood friend suddenly left them. The “happy” and “angry” readings in court were easy to decipher: Mr. Wright had been happy to see Edgeworth again, but upset at how much he had changed and determined to face him down. But there was definitely an emotion at the end that didn't make sense.

She touched the pulsing “sad” reaction with a triumphant “Got it!” The forcefulness of her voice seemed to startle Phoenix, who sat up straight again.

“Mr. Wright, when you talk about how you and Mr. Edgeworth are friends again, you sound sad. Why is that?”

“Nnggh!” said Mr. Wright, jolting a little. It seemed he was hoping she wouldn't catch onto that. “I- I'm not sad about it!” he insisted, leaning forward to brace his hands on his knees and glaring. “What have I got to be sad about? Nothing!”

But Athena had some suspicions due to her keen powers of observation. Well, that and the fact that the Noise Level had gone up to 94%. She zoomed in on the image, and tapped on the two attorneys' clasped hands. “Got it,” she said again, not being able to entirely suppress a smile of triumph. She lifted her gaze back up to her mentor. “Mr. Wright, you can't fool me. There's something about this friendship that is hurting you!”

Phoenix rolled his eyes and dragged a hand through his spiky hair, exasperated. “I keep telling you, it doesn't!” he said loudly. “It's really good having him as a friend!”

“Then why do you feel sad when you shake his hand?” she retorted, raising an eyebrow. “Rrrgh,” was his only response as he buried his forehead in his hand.

A thousand thoughts zoomed through Athena's head, each vying for her attention. What could the reason for this be? Why shouldn't he like shaking the hand of someone he so obviously cared for?

“Could it be because...” she said, floundering for the best reason, “...Y-you're a germaphobe?”

A silence followed. Neither attorney even breathed.

“Athena,” Phoenix said slowly, as if speaking to someone who had just suffered a blow to the head, “Have you seen our Agency lately?” He looked honestly concerned for her.

Athena kicked herself mentally. Stupid, stupid! Why had she blurted that one out? No germaphobe could survive in these conditions! She'd said the wrong thing out of nervousness!

She likewise discarded the second wild thought she'd had—that Mr. Wright had never actually liked Edgeworth at all—as being utterly preposterous. Throwing out an accusation like that would be downright cruel as well as nonsensical.

That left her with the most probable explanation. She squared her shoulders and took a deep breath. “Right. The real reason is...”

You aren't satisfied with being just friends.
It was the simplest explanation, and also the one that rang true in her heart.

“Mr. Wright,” she started again, her tone even. “You know, if there's something you've been holding back from all of us...” She met his eyes. “You can tell me. I'd never judge you.”

Phoenix just slouched, suddenly looking very tired. “What are you talking about now?” he asked halfheartedly, his chin resting in his hand.

Well, that was it. It was time for her final deduction.

“Your friendship with Mr. Edgeworth makes you sad,” she declared, certain of her conclusion, “...because friendship isn't all you want!”

Mr. Wright made a noise that was half-yelp, half-choke as his elbow slipped off his knee and he nearly faceplanted into the floor.

“I'm right, aren't I?” Athena pressed him, though her voice was gentler now as she powered down the Mood Matrix. “Please, Mr. Wright, just be honest with me.”

The older attorney screwed his eyes shut and shook his head, then massaging the spot between his eyes. After a moment of silence, he sighed heavily and opened his eyes again to meet hers. “He said we can't be so friendly anymore,” he admitted, his tone resentful. “Says that people have been talking, saying he's conspiring with us. I've never known him to care what other people thought of him, so why...?” He trailed off and shook his head again, looking at the floor. “I shouldn't have let him become a part of daily life. It was bound to go wrong from the beginning, since I...” He closed his mouth, not finishing his statement.

Athena could guess how it would have ended: “since I have feelings for him.” Her heart squeezed in sympathy, and she cautiously walked over and hesitated before plopping down on the couch next to her mentor.

“I've never known either of you to stay down for long,” she said gently. “You'll work it out.”

He snorted disbelievingly. “I stayed down for seven years once,” he said bitterly. “That long enough for you?”

“And you came through that because you worked together with Mr. Edgeworth,” she pointed out firmly, inching closer to him until she could nudge her shoulder against his. “You had the whole of the legal system against you, but your teamwork still came out on top. Isn't a partnership like that worth protecting? Worth...putting yourself out there for?”

“How can I ask him to throw away his reputation?” Mr. Wright asked, his brows knit together. “It's fine for a lowly defense attorney to have his name dragged through the mud, but the Chief Prosecutor?...”

“Boss, pardon me, but you're far from a 'lowly defense attorney,'” she protested, crossing her arms. “There isn't a soul in the legal world who doesn't know your name!”

He shot her a lopsided smile. “That's nice of you to say, but also untrue.”

She rolled her eyes. “You know I'm right. Listen: some things are more important than other people's opinions. This is one of those things. If you have a problem with this new arrangement between you and Mr. Edgeworth, you need to tell him.” Her voice was insistent, but not aggressive.

Mr. Wright stared at his hands, which he'd clasped together in his lap, for a minute, silently. Finally,
he nodded, and stood. “Okay,” he said quietly. “I'll...I'll think about it.”

Athena felt lit up from the inside with happiness. He was actually considering her advice! And after he'd been so reluctant to even let her Matrix him! Her enthusiasm waned a little when she saw how conflicted and nervous her boss still looked, though. How to reassure him?...

“Oh, I know talking about this was...hard for you,” she piped up, running her hands through her ponytail as if stroking an animal to calm herself. “But...let me just add...all of this stays between us, okay, Boss? I won't breathe a bit of it to anyone.”

He favored her with a smile, then, and Athena knew that had done the trick.

Talk to Edgeworth, huh? It was easy enough for anyone to suggest. The problem was finding the words. He stared down at his contact page on his phone, unblinking, until his vision blurred.

It had been almost two weeks since they'd had that fateful conversation. True, it had been only a week since they'd exchanged words, but he hardly considered a group dinner where they barely looked at each other to be a successful interaction. He hadn't even known whether he should contact the prosecutor to tell him that the stalking seemed to have stopped without explanation. He should know that, right? Or would calling to inform him of that just seem like he was desperate to have an excuse?

He blinked, and his vision refocused. Edgeworth's face glared at him from the contact screen: it was a shot he'd taken one night they'd gone out for dinner with the whole gang after a case. Phoenix had just told him “Give me that famous smile, Edgeworth!” and of course Edgeworth had responded by frowning and trying to shove the phone out of his face. It was too late, though. He'd been captured: guard down, downturned mouth stuffed with food, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the viewer as he noticed he was being photographed. He had demanded that Phoenix erase the photo at once. Phoenix had instead made it his contact photo. It had been hilarious at the time.

Now he wished he'd caught a photo of him in different circumstances: those instances that he would glance over and see the crease between Edgeworth's brows relaxed, his face instead smoothened into a neutral expression that, in less guarded moments, turned into a smile. Maybe one of those times he'd caught him chuckling behind his hand, and Phoenix's heart had flipped upside down at the sound. Or even a picture of Edgeworth as Phoenix knew him best: asserting his convictions in court. How did someone look so refined and put-together even when they were shouting and pointing at people?

But if he could pick one Edgeworth expression he wished he'd been able to capture forever, it would have to be one of the times that pale face had blushed from something Phoenix had said. That was the expression he always found himself bending over backwards to elicit: his cheeks would flush ever so slightly, his jaw would clench, his eyes would dart away bashfully. Perhaps it was because it was the most human expression he had that Phoenix was so fond of it...or maybe it was a little bit because Edgeworth looked very good with pink cheeks.

He sighed and locked his phone. Just staring at that screen wasn't going to get him anywhere, he realized. No, if he wanted any development here, he was going to have to face this problem the way he'd always faced them: head-on.

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The elevator dinged softly as Phoenix stepped out onto the twelfth floor of the Prosecutor's Building.
It had been a while since he'd been in here—the last time had been about three months ago when they'd been comparing notes on a case that had just closed. His heart started pounding as he made his way down the hallway, his every footstep sounding magnified to his ears.

At last he found himself face to face with that familiar door that read 1202.

Of course, being Chief Prosecutor, Edgeworth could have any office he wanted, but for reasons Phoenix never quite understood, he'd chosen to stay in the same office he'd held when Phoenix had been a rookie attorney. He suspected Edgeworth had gotten attached to it.

He took a deep breath, and knocked on the door. “Come in,” said Edgeworth's voice on the other side, and he steeled his nerves before turning the knob and stepping in.

“If that's you, Detective Gumshoe, I've told you before, I don't—” The other man cut himself off as he lifted his gaze to his visitor, and fell silent, looking flabbergasted.

“Uh... h-hey, Edgeworth,” Phoenix said lamely, rubbing the back of his neck.

Edgeworth stared a moment. Phoenix tried not to notice the sweat that was starting to bead on his own forehead. At length, the prosecutor sighed and spoke. “Well, get on with it,” he said. “You must be here for a reason.”

The response hurt a little, but Phoenix knew better than to analyze Edgeworth's words. With him, it wasn't what he said so much as how he said it, and he had sounded cautious and unsure...just the same as Phoenix himself was. The realization made him feel a little braver.

“I...I don't want to do this anymore,” he found his voice, taking another step into the office.

Edgeworth raised an eyebrow. “Do...what?” he prompted.

Phoenix gestured to the space between them. “This!” he said. “This...whatever this new arrangement is! 'Acquaintances.' 'Peers.' Whatever you want to call it!”

“Oh, if only Phoenix had had his phone out at that moment. The blush that spread across Edgeworth's face was sublime. “Wr-Wright, I'm only trying to be professional and save both of our reputations,” he said, nervously pushing his glasses further up his face, though they hadn't really needed adjusting.

Phoenix scoffed, removing his hands from the desk and turning to pace the office. “You have enough power that you can pretty much ignore whatever any lowlife says about you. For someone who's worked so hard to attain a high status, you sure don't pull rank very often!”

“Okay, then I'll be as clear as I can be,” Phoenix cut him off with a surge of boldness, walking closer until he could brace both his hands on Edgeworth's stupidly large desk and look him in the eye. “I don't care what people say. Not being able to hang out with you sucks!”

The question seemed to disarm Edgeworth more than Phoenix had thought it would. His mouth dropped open and the pen he had been holding slipped from his grasp. This struck Phoenix as a
suspicious reaction, but he put that aside for now.

“I...I am not 'afraid' of anything in this Office,” he said, regaining his composure. “Has it ever
occurred to that sluggish brain of yours that I might be protecting you as well as myself?” His tone
was sharper now, his eyes narrowed.

Phoenix glared at the stupid frilly suit hung on the wall. “I don’t need you to protect me anymore,
Edgeworth. I can stick up for myself. I can make my own decisions.” He turned to face the
prosecutor, his heart starting to pound again. Was this the right moment? Now, when his pulse was
surg ing with adrenaline? Now, when they hadn't really spoken for two weeks? “And...and what I've
decided is...” He gulped. His face felt hot. Were his knees shaking? He couldn’t tell anymore. I have
to do it fast, he thought frantically, before my courage disappears! “What I've realized is that I—”

“Mr. Edgeworth, sir!” a voice proclaimed, throwing the door open. Ema Skye bustled in, looking
short of breath. “There's just been an incident! No one's been killed, but another girl has disapp—”
Abruptly, she fell silent as she noticed Phoenix’s presence, and froze. “I'm...I'm not interrupting
anything, am I?” she said timidly.

“N-No,” Edgeworth said, his voice faltering so subtly that Phoenix was sure he was the only one
who heard it. “No, please, Ms. Skye, if something requires my attention, I will give it freely.”

I kinda require your attention, Phoenix thought sulkily, but he said nothing as Ema smiled and
turned to go, and Edgeworth stood from his chair.

Ema briefly placed a hand on Phoenix’s arm as she passed him. “It was great to see you, even if just
for a moment, Mr. Wright!” she said, so brightly that Phoenix had to return the smile.

“You too, Ema,” he told her. She grinned even wider and then rushed from the office to lead the way
for Edgeworth. Phoenix felt his heart start to sink like a stone as the prosecutor began to follow, but
then Edgeworth hesitated, halfway out the door. He didn't turn around.

“Wright, I-I can't deal with this right now, but—” he said, his voice strained.

“Yeah, somehow I got that,” Phoenix cut him off, struggling to keep the resentment out of his voice.

“Let me finish!” Edgeworth snapped, gripping the doorframe so tightly his knuckles went white.
“If...If you want to go over some case files over lunch sometime, I am not opposed.”

Phoenix felt the knot of anxiety in his belly begin to unravel. “Really?...” He saw Edgeworth jerk his
head in a stiff nod. Phoenix couldn't help the broad smile that spread across his face. “Yeah... I'd like
that.”

The prosecutor shot him a quick glance over his shoulder, and Phoenix’s heart stuttered to see how
pink his cheeks were. “I’m...sorry I tried to make a decision for you,” he said carefully, as if each
word was chosen from hundreds of possibilities. “It was... wrong to not consider how my sudden
reclusiveness would affect you. And...” Here Edgeworth looked at the ground, his shoulders tensing
before he finally forced the words out: “I admit that not seeing you has been...unpleasant.”

Phoenix felt like his heart had stopped.

“Mr. Edgeworth! You coming?” came Ema’s voice from down the hall.

The other attorney gave him one more quick glance, managing something that resembled a half-
smile. “I'll...talk to you later, Wright,” he said before hurrying to catch up with Ema.
Phoenix could only think, as a huge dopey smile spread across his face, that he was going to have to buy Athena a fruit basket, too.

Chapter End Notes

So, initially, I wrote the Mood Matrix section as a game script to amuse Stormy. Here's how the "wrong answers" went:

Athena: Then why is it you feel sad when you shake his hand?
Phoenix: [flinch] Arrrrgh!
Athena: Could it be because...

CHOICE:
[You are a germaphobe?]
[You actually hate Edgeworth?]
[You want to be more than friends?]

Athena: I've got you now. You're a germaphobe!!
[Music stops]
Phoenix: ....
Athena: ....
Phoenix: ............
Athena: ................
[Music resumes]
Phoenix: ...Athena...have you seen our agency lately?
Athena: Grngk! (Now that you mention it, a germaphobe would never survive in these conditions...)

Athena: Could it be because...
[You actually hate Edgeworth?]
Athena: I've figured it out: You've never really liked Edgeworth, have you?!
Phoenix: ....Athena, that's downright cruel. I didn't think you were the kind of person to say things like that.
Athena: ACKKKK! (I guess that wasn't it...)

I hope you enjoyed this "Behind the Scenes" glimpse into my madness.

Next chapter: Pearl pours a drink. Edgeworth makes a joke.
Quite suddenly, Thanksgiving was upon them all. Pearl was startled that November was already almost over. She was excited at the prospect of so many of her friends and family members coming together to share a meal, however.

Mystic Maya was of course attending, as were Miss Athena and Mr. Apollo. Trucy and Mr. Nick were hosting, and Pearl had also heard that another special guest was to make an appearance...

“Mr. Edgeworth is coming to Thanksgiving?!” she'd shouted enthusiastically when her older cousin had let it slip during the train ride from Kurain Village. They’d become bored, so they were walking up and down the length of the train.

“Pearly, shhh!” Mystic Maya said, crouching slightly as if Pearl were still a small child. Well...as if she were still a child, anyway. “I just said that Nick invited him. No news on whether he's actually gonna show up!”

“Oh, I'm certain he'll come!” Pearl said passionately, clasping her hands together. “It will be lovely! Like a real family!” Already she was conjuring up images in her mind, of all of them seated around a table holding hands, Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth at the head of the table. “And I just know that Mr. Edgeworth won't seek out anybody else if he doesn't come to our Thanksgiving...Mr. Nick probably knows that too. I'm sure he won't let his special someone be alone on Thanksgiving!”

Maya giggled. “I'm so glad you finally see things my way on that front,” she said teasingly.

Pearl blushed. “I'm sorry I was always trying to make you and Mr. Nick into something you were not,” she mumbled at her feet, but Maya just waved her apology away.

“Don't worry about it! It was almost worth it to see the look on Nick's face, especially when you would start gunning for him...ha!” She snorted at the memory. “Boy, you'd really lay into him! That poor guy would get destroyed by those tiny hands.”
Pearl pouted, flushing darker. “M-Mystic Maya, that's enough! I feel really bad about it...”

Mystic Maya patted Pearl's head affectionately. “I know. Nick knows too. So don't worry.” She smiled at her younger cousin. Somehow Pearl didn't mind it when Mystic Maya patted her head, though she tended very much to mind if other people did it.

“So, speaking of Nick's 'special someone'...” Maya continued as they made their way back to their compartment and sat down, “Trucy and I have been entertaining an idea for a while on how to...” She searched for the right word, tapping her chin. “Nudge them into making some progress there.”

“Oh?” Pearl leaned forward, interested. “And what is that idea?”

Frustratingly, Mystic Maya only responded with a mischievous smile and a wink. “We'll tell you after supper.”

***

When Pearl and Maya walked through the door to Mr. Nick's apartment, it appeared that Mr. Edgeworth had not yet arrived.

Pearl was quite amazed that Mr. Nick and Trucy had managed to gather this many additional chairs, much less fit them all around their tiny kitchen table. Usually, there were only 4 chairs: enough for Mr. Nick and his daughter plus two other guests. But now there were 7 chairs crowded around the table messily—the additional chairs were old folding ones. Pearl wondered if they'd been borrowed for the occasion. She counted quickly in her head: Mr. Nick, Trucy, Mystic Maya, Mr. Apollo, Miss Athena, and herself...that left one more chair. It must be for Mr. Edgeworth! she thought excitedly.

There were stacks of papers, notebooks, and mail next to the couch that Pearl suspected had been hastily cleared from the table to make room for the Thanksgiving dinner.

“Hi guys!” said Trucy, shooting Mystic Maya and Pearl a smile when they walked in. She was bustling about setting the table, while Mr. Nick was peeking inside the oven at what had to be the turkey, judging from the heavenly aroma wafting through the apartment. Miss Athena and Mr. Apollo were nearby at the counter, bickering about which pie was more “Thanksgiving-y.”

“Come on, Apollo,” said Miss Athena, checking on the corn on the cob simmering on one of the burners, “When this time of year rolls around, what do people start thinking of? Pumpkin! It's everywhere! In coffee, in bread, in seasonal air fresheners! Thanksgiving isn't Thanksgiving without a good ol' pumpkin pie!”

“Gimme a break,” the other attorney snorted. He was apparently in charge of the stuffing, because he was adding more bread crumbs. “People might want pumpkin pie around Thanksgiving season, but after that, nobody cares about it. By the time Thanksgiving rolls around, everyone's had enough of pumpkin everything, and they're ready for a nice slice of pecan goodness.” He turned to face her, wiping his hands on a dish towel and smiling smugly. “And that is why I brought the pecan pie.”

“You're a monster,” Miss Athena said, pouting like someone younger than Pearl.

“Well, I have been noted to have horns,” Mr. Apollo said mildly, smoothing down his spiky bangs before letting them spring back up straight.

“So, what can we help with?” asked Mystic Maya, rubbing her hands together.

Mr. Nick was looking around the kitchen carefully, as if searching for something easy to give her to do. “Um...how about lining up all the drinks on the counter? They're all in the fridge right now, but we're going to eat in...” He checked the digital clock on the microwave. “…Ten minutes, so you
might as well get them out.”

“Ten minutes?” repeated Trucy, sliding on some oven mitts to remove the turkey from the oven. “But...not everyone is here yet!” She set the turkey down on the counter.

Mr. Nick shot his daughter a look. “We don't know that for sure, Truce. Maybe everyone is here,” he said as Maya breezed past him towards the fridge.

“Hmph. A magician always knows,” Trucy retorted with an air of finality, crossing her arms, which looked rather amusing with oven mitts.

“You're going to take that top hat off when we eat, right?” Mr. Nick prompted his daughter.

“Nope,” she replied sweetly, uncovering the turkey and letting the steam escape at last. She handed her father a carving knife.

“Well, at least she took off the gloves,” Mr. Nick sighed, beginning to cut into the turkey.

“Um...is there anything I can do to help, Mr. Nick?” Pearl asked timidly. She always felt a bit...overshadowed in large groups like this, but she was determined to be of use, especially if Mr. Edgeworth was going to show up.

“Hmm...” Mr. Nick's eyes scanned around for a moment before landing on the table. “Would you mind, uh...giving everyone a napkin, Pearls?”

She felt her heart sink a little. Surely she was capable of doing something more than that? But she nodded and began folding napkins into triangles, placing them next to each plate.

There was so much noise in the apartment that when a small sound came from around the door, Pearl thought it had been Maya dropping another can of soda. But when Pearl looked up towards the sound and saw everyone else looking at the door too, she knew what it had been.

Bouncing on her heels, Pearl reacted before anyone else. She trotted over to the door and flung it open, smiling brightly up at Mr. Edgeworth, who looked as usual like someone from a different era in his fancy clothes, even with the addition of his classy black coat. “Welcome, Mr. Edgeworth!” Pearl chirped, moving aside to let him in. “Happy Thanksgiving!”

“Thank you, Pearls,” he responded with a slight incline of his head, stepping in and looking around with an expression that was half-curious and half-embarrassed.

Pearl's heart gave a little flutter when she saw Mr. Nick straighten up and meet Mr. Edgeworth's gaze with a wide smile.

“You made it,” was all he said, though.

“I did,” Mr. Edgeworth confirmed, as if he wasn't sure what else to say.

“I knew you would!” exclaimed Trucy, and she seized Mr. Edgeworth by the hand and pulled him over to the table. Mr. Edgeworth looked surprised, but let her lead him without protest. After she had pulled out his chair for him, she rested her hands on her hips and smiled around at everyone. “Well, now that everyone is here, let's get everything on the table and eat!”

***

Mr. Edgeworth was pretty quiet during the dinner, which was all the more noticeable among all
Pearl's loud companions. He would politely ask that dishes be passed when necessary, and answer if spoken to, but otherwise it seemed he was content to just observe everyone. Pearl could appreciate that, really. That was how she tended to react in social situations as well. Seeing in him somewhat of a kindred spirit, Pearl resolved to keep an eye on him throughout the evening in case he needed something.

“Oh, I never asked what you wanted to drink,” Mr. Nick said to the prosecutor next to him a few minutes into the meal. Pearl had noticed right away that Trucy had sneakily seated Mr. Edgeworth right next to her father's seat.

“Ah...tea would be fine, if you have it,” Mr. Edgeworth responded quietly.

“I'll get it!” Pearl shouted, grabbing Mr. Edgeworth's glass and flinging herself from the table and over to the counter. Here was her first opportunity to make Mr. Edgeworth feel at home and more comfortable!

“Uh...thanks, Pearls,” Mr. Nick called after her, and she caught a glimpse of him and Mr. Edgeworth exchanging a questioning glance.

Pearl's eyes scanned the line of drinks. Grape juice, Mosquito—no, she corrected herself, Moscato—soda, a box of something called Earl Grey...finally her eyes found the tall bottle: Captain Morgan's Long Island Iced Tea. Perfect! She grabbed some ice cubes from the freezer and dropped them in the glass, and then carefully poured the dark amber liquid over them. It was a bit cold outside for an iced drink, Pearl thought, but it was what he had asked for.

She presented the glass proudly to him when she made her way back to the table.

"Thank you," said Mr. Edgeworth, taking a sip as Pearl sat down again. The prosecutor made a strange choking noise and a face like the one Mother used to make when Pearl got mud on her clothes. He swallowed the mouthful of beverage with effort, and after a moment said, “That...is the worst tea I've ever tasted. What is that, Wright?"

“I have no idea what you're talking about. It's perfectly good tea, although I don't usually have it iced,” Mr. Nick said, raising an eyebrow at Pearl. She just smiled at him sheepishly. How was she to know that iced tea wasn't actually served with ice? Adult drinks didn't make any sense.

Mr. Edgeworth looked into his glass as if he would find something floating there...besides ice, that is. He gave a small shrug and sipped from the glass again. This time his face only crinkled in distaste for a second before smoothing out again. Maybe he was getting used to it?

Oh well, Pearl thought. She'd done her duty to make Mr. Edgeworth feel more at home. Now it was time to just listen and enjoy the family conversation.

“Maya, please tell this blasphemer over here that pumpkin pie is the most Thanksgiving-y pie around,” Miss Athena implored Pearl's cousin. Mr. Apollo rolled his eyes but said nothing as he chewed his turkey slice.

“Actually,” said Mystic Maya, looking thoughtful as she held her soda can to her lips, “My sis always used to make apple pie around this time.”

“What?!” cried Miss Athena, her jaw dropping open comically. She looked around at them all incredulously. “This...this is madness!” She whipped her head around to face Mr. Edgeworth. “What about you, Mr. Edgeworth? You're a sensible guy! Surely you prefer pumpkin pie?"

“Much of my childhood was spent in Germany,” Mr. Edgeworth said. “Thanksgiving there is in
September or October...well, they call it Ertendankfest.”

“Okay,” prompted Miss Athena. “And what do they have over there for dessert?”

“Anything, really,” was Mr. Edgeworth's response. He took a sip of his tea, which he did not seem to dislike anymore. “The holiday is more of a festival than a meal. Lots of vegetables, some bread. That kind of thing.” Another sip. “We didn't really celebrate it that much.”

Everyone looked at him in amazement for a moment. Had they ever learned that much about Mr. Edgeworth in so short a time before? Pearl knew she hadn't. Maybe he felt even more comfortable here than she thought!

It seemed Miss Athena was still focused on pie, however. “I can't believe I'm the only one here who grew up having pumpkin pie every year,” she said forlornly, pushing around the cranberry sauce on her plate.

“Oh, we had it,” said Mr. Apollo dismissively. “I just never really liked it.”

The orange-haired attorney looked like she'd been punched. “It's like I don't even know you,” she murmured dramatically. Mr. Apollo rolled his eyes again.

“You know, this tea isn't so bad, actually,” Mr. Edgeworth noted suddenly, going to take another sip. The drink must have been gone, though, because he lowered his glass and looked down into it, an unusually unguarded expression of disappointment written on his face.

“Would you like some more tea?” Pearl asked him politely. He nodded, and she got up to fill his glass again.

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Pearl must have been doing an amazing job of making Mr. Edgeworth feel comfortable, because he seemed more relaxed than she had ever seen him. She'd even seen him laugh at things Mr. Nick said a few times, and his smiles had never been more genuine. He spoke up a lot more frequently than usual, too. Mr. Nick seemed really happy about this new, more open side of Mr. Edgeworth, and his eyes were all lit up when he spoke with the prosecutor. Pearl felt a warm glow of pride.

As the meal drew to a close, people started wandering around the apartment, sitting on the couch in the family room or chatting in front of the pictures on the walls. Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth still sat at the table, talking quietly. Trucy glanced Pearl's way and gave her a wink, then jerked her head towards the family room, which was separated from the kitchen by the wall next to the table.

Pearl nodded, and both girls excused themselves from the table, leaving the two attorneys bantering amiably.

When they reached the family room, Mystic Maya, Miss Athena, and Mr. Apollo were already crowded together on the couch. Trucy sat down on the floor near Mr. Apollo's feet; Pearl followed suit by sitting near Maya's.

“All right, everybody,” whispered Maya excitedly. “We have gathered in this Wright Family...Family Room,” she began, “to discuss the problem of Nick and Edgeworth.”

“Problem?” Mr. Apollo echoed, raising his eyebrows. “What problem?”

“The problem of them not being a couple yet!” Trucy said impatiently.
“What!” yelped Mr. Apollo, eliciting a chorus of “shhhh!”s. “What?” he repeated, quieter this time.

“Come on, Apollo, you know what we're talking about,” Mystic Maya said, rolling her eyes. “Those two are so gone for each other.”

Mr. Apollo braced his elbows on his knees to whisper intently to the young magician near his feet. When his brows were this furrowed, his funny hair spikes looked like giant angry eyebrows, Pearl thought. “Look, I might know what you're talking about, but why are you talking about it? It's none of our business!”

“See, I thought that too...” Mystic Maya looked nostalgic, resting her chin in her hand, “...ten years ago,” she finished, shooting Mr. Apollo an impatient look. “Now it's just getting ridiculous, and there has been zero progress.”

“Well, there's been a little progress,” Trucy protested. “Mostly because of me.”

“Fine,” conceded Maya. “There has been 8% progress. 12, tops.”

“What constitutes a percentage in this situation?” Mr. Apollo muttered to himself.

“Look,” sighed Trucy, not in the mood for Mr. Apollo's snark, “Maya and I had the idea that since we're all fed up with waiting for those two to make the first move...we should all join forces to get them together.” She looked around at them all, her eyes glittering with excitement.

“I'm out,” said Mr. Apollo after a short silence. He made as if to get up from the couch, but Trucy caught his hand.

“Wait, Polly!” she pleaded. “Please, just hear us out, okay?” She gave him her best puppy-dog eyes. Mr. Apollo sighed and sat down, powerless against her.

“This is ridiculous,” he grumbled. “You guys are jumping to conclusions and messing with things you should stay out of. Is there even any proof that they feel that way about each other? I mean, who can say for sure?”

Pearl thought she heard Miss Athena clear her throat, and looked over at her. She was fiddling with the little robot around her neck, which had turned dark blue. “Athena, you've been awfully quiet,” Maya pointed out, nudging the girl with her shoulder. “What's on your mind?”

Miss Athena jumped. “Mind? Me? Nothing! I'm just...nothing!” she blurted, her eyes darting around wildly, the robot necklace flashing yellow and dark blue.

Everyone stared at her.

“You look...awfully guilty, Athena,” Mr. Apollo said suspiciously, narrowing his eyes.

“I have nothing to be guilty about!” Miss Athena retorted, indignantly balling her fists by her sides. “I'm just...digesting, okay! I'm not feeling super talkative! It's the turkey!”

This was met with more silence.

“Anyway,” Maya said as if no interruption had occurred, “I thought we could get started by naming our little alliance. I was thinking something like 'the Edgeworth-Wright Union: Girl Heroes!'”

“Mystic Maya,” Pearl piped up at last, “That would spell 'EWUGH.'”

“Hm. Well that won't do,” her older cousin muttered.
“Look, guys, I am a grown man and I'm not taking part in this...schoolgirl sleepover stuff,” Mr. Apollo said firmly, rising from the couch once more. “Especially if I have to call myself a 'girl hero.'”

Trucy yanked him back down again.

“Ow!” Mr. Apollo protested. Mr. Nick's daughter was still holding onto his hand. He pulled at it. “Trucy, c'mon, let me—”

“Don't you want my Daddy to be happy?” she cut him off, staring at the floor.

“Wh—of course I do! I never said I didn't! I—”

Trucy lifted her face again, and Pearl was startled to realize that she looked like she had tears in her big blue eyes. “You know, Daddy never says anything about it, but he's getting older, and I know he's lonely,” she said, her voice shaking slightly. Her lower lip wobbled, but she looked Mr. Apollo right in the eye and spoke with conviction. “But he's always just worrying about how to help other people instead of himself!”

Mr. Apollo looked a little frantic. “I—I know that,” he said, his voice placating. “It's just...I...”

“This is our chance to help him!” Trucy continued, giving Mr. Apollo's arm a little shake, her expression earnest. “And Mr. Edgeworth...don't you think he looks lonely too?”

“Well, I—frankly the word I'd use is 'constipated,' but—”

“They always look so much happier when they're together!” Trucy insisted. “Even in the courtroom... I've never seen Daddy look so alive as when he's going up against Mr. Edgeworth!” Pearl felt very close to Trucy in this regard: they both had spent lots of time observing while being powerless to make much of a difference about the frustrating circumstance. Trucy looked up at Mr. Apollo beseeingly. “So please, Polly...it might just look like a stupid gossip club to you, but...to me, it's...all I can do to show my gratitude to Daddy.”

Mr. Apollo stared. “I...” Trucy sniffled and wiped her eyes with her free hand. Mr. Apollo's face looked like someone had punched him in the gut.

“...Damn it.” He sighed and hung his head, and flung himself back on the couch. “Fine,” he muttered. “I still think this is ridiculous, but fine. If you think I need to be here...whatever. Let's get this over with.”

Trucy was a really good magician, because it looked like her tears vanished into thin air. “Thanks, Polly!” she said brightly, releasing his hand and hugging his leg a little. “I knew I could count on you!”

Mr. Apollo covered his face with his newly-reclaimed hand and mumbled something like “Why me?” into it.

“Back to the matter at hand,” said Mystic Maya. It was quite unlike her to be the one keeping everyone on-task, but Pearl kept this observation to herself. “Naming the group.”

“Is that really the most important thing?” Miss Athena asked.

“Oh, of course! How else are we going to talk about it in...” She leaned closer towards the center of the group, her hair baubles hanging down on either side of her head. “...’Mixed company’?”

“How about we just don't talk about it?” snarked Mr. Apollo.
“This isn't a Fight Club, Apollo,” Miss Athena quipped.

“No. That would have been less painful,” the other attorney fired back, but was silenced by a quailing look from the young magician at his feet. He crossed his arms and curled in on himself like he was trying to dissolve into the couch.

“How about...the 'Phoenix Love Society for Nick Observation!'” Maya suggested, moving her raised arm with each word as if envisioning it on a great big sign.

“Um... That one would abbreviate to 'PLSNO,' Maya,” Miss Athena pointed out with a grimace.

“Oh, nice catch. Hmmmm. I got it! The 'Society for Tampering with Older People!'” She grinned in triumph, black eyes glittering.

“Stop,” said Mr. Apollo.

“Oh, fine,” Mystic Maya grumbled, crossing her arms and pouting. “Party pooper.”

“No, I mean that one spells STOP.”

“Oh,” said Maya.

“Um...I have an idea,” Pearl finally spoke up again, timidly. Everyone turned to look at her, and she bit her thumb nervously, uncomfortable with multiple people being focused on her.

“Well, what is it, Pearly?” her cousin prompted her.

“Well...” Pearl began, staring at the carpet, “M-Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth's first names start with P and M.” Her cheeks flushed, feeling everyone's eyes locked on her intently. “S-So...what if we called the club... Project: Matchmakers? That way...we would match their initials...” She twisted her hands in the fabric of her yukata in her lap, and finally chanced a glance up at everyone. To her horror, they were all staring at her with wide eyes. “I-I'm sorry; it was a silly suggestion,” she stammered, feeling dreadfully embarrassed. “We can—"

“Are you KIDDING?!” Maya exclaimed, prompting another round of “shhhh”s. “That is perfect! Nice work, Pearly!” She patted Pearl's head, and everyone murmured in agreement.

“That'll work,” said Miss Athena.

“I love it!” Trucy gushed.

“It could've been a lot worse,” grumped Mr. Apollo.

“So does that mean that if we send messages about the club, they'd be...PM PMs?” Maya quipped, grinning.

“I don't get it,” Pearl admitted.

“PM also stands for Private Message, usually on forums,” Miss Athena explained.

“Oh!” Pearl nodded. “That makes sense.” She decided now was not the time to ask what a forum was.

“Well, I declare tonight's PM meeting a resounding success!” Maya proclaimed, clapping her hands together.
“Agreed!” Trucy said with an enthusiastic nod.

“Does everybody have everyone’s contact information?” Maya asked, getting out her phone.

Contact information...that phrase brought to mind that encounter with that mysterious girl three weeks ago. You got a cell phone? she'd asked, grinning at her over her bowl of noodles. *I'll program in my contact information. Let's keep in touch!*

Pearl fumbled with the pocket in her sleeve, retrieving the little flip phone Mystic Maya had bought her recently. She hardly ever used it at home, since the reception there was terrible, but Maya thought that a “modern young lady” should have her own cell phone. “Um...Actually, I need Miss Athena's and Mr. Apollo's numbers,” she admitted.

“Sure! Give it here, Pearls!” Miss Athena wiggled her outstretched hand, and Pearl pressed the phone into her palm. Miss Athena tapped away at the buttons before handing it over to Mr. Apollo, who added his number as well before passing the phone back to Pearl.

“All right,” said Trucy when they'd all finished updating their contact information (and Maya had patiently shown Pearl how to access the Contacts List). “Project: Matchmakers...dismissed!”

“At last,” said Mr. Apollo. He glanced over at Miss Athena. “Need a ride home?”

“I thought you didn't have a car,” the orange-haired attorney responded, quirking an eyebrow.

“I don't. I rode my bicycle.”

Miss Athena smacked his arm. “I've ridden on your handlebars once, and that was more than enough for a lifetime!” she declared. “Never again!”

“All right, all right, geez. Anyone else?”

“Pearly and I are taking the train back,” Maya reminded him.

“I live here,” Trucy said, unnecessarily.

“Right, okay then. Well, this has been...something. Happy Thanksgiving, everybody!” Mr. Apollo smiled around at everyone before going back to the kitchen to say good-bye to Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth.

“What do you think, Pearly? Is it time to leave?” Maya asked her cousin with a smile.

“Well...” Pearl was turning over a possibility in her mind. Ever since everyone had mentioned using cell phones to keep in contact, she couldn't help remembering that night... remembering someone who might want to know about the formation of Project: Matchmakers.

Pearl made up her mind. “First, I would like to use the facilities!” she blurted, hurrying towards the hall.

“Take your time!” Mystic Maya called after her.

But when the bathroom door closed behind her, Pearl didn't use the facilities. What she did instead was sit on the edge of the bathtub and make a phone call from her Contacts List.

*CALLING KAY FARADAY...* the display read.

After three rings, Pearl heard someone pick up. “Is that you, Pearl?” came the other girl’s voice. “I
was starting to think you forgot about me!”

“I...I am sorry!” She chewed her thumb a little. “I'm still new to having a cell phone and I...didn't actually know how to find my Contacts List...” Her voice trailed off in embarrassment.

Miss Kay laughed on the other end of the line. “You are too much, Pearl Fey,” she told her. Too much what, Pearl didn't know. “So, to what do I owe the pleasure of this Thanksgiving phone call?”

“Um...I'm calling from Mr. Nick's,” she admitted.

“Ooh, naughty girl. Are you still stalking him?”

“N-no!” she said, flushing. “I haven't done that in a while now! I-I was invited. We all had Thanksgiving here. Including Mr. Edgeworth.”

“Oh?” Miss Kay's voice rose at the end with curiosity.

“Yes! He seemed so happy tonight, laughing and talking with Mr. Nick. It was wonderful. I wish you could have seen it!”

“Mr. Edgeworth...laughing? Hm...even if I had seen it, I don't know if I'd have believed it.”

“It was strange to see, but in a good way!” Pearl giggled. She shifted the phone to her other ear. “Anyway, I just wanted to inform you... we've all sort of...formed a club.”

“A club?”

“Yes. Miss Athena and Mr. Apollo, my cousin Mystic Maya, Mr. Nick's daughter Trucy, and myself.”

“What sort of club?”

She couldn't help the excitement that crept into her voice. “A club to get Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth together!”

The sheer joy that Pearl heard in Miss Kay's laugh made her own smile spread even wider. “Where do I sign up?” the other girl asked. “Do we get jackets?”

“I'm not sure we will have any club merchandise,” Pearl admitted. “But I did want to tell you about it. I consider you an honorary club member already. And since I know how now, I thought we could exchange updates on Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth.”

“That sounds great to me!” Miss Kay chirped. “So, what do I call this club of ours?”

“Oh, that's one of the best parts,” said Pearl. “I came up with the name! We're called Project: Matchmakers, because P and M are also Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth's first initials.”

“Ooh, I like it!” Miss Kay said enthusiastically. “Sounds like a top-secret mission, which is of course my favorite type of mission.” Pearl giggled into her hand, and then jumped about a foot in the air when there was a knock on the door.

“You okay, Pearly?” Maya's voice came from the other side of the door.

“Um, yes! I'm fine!” she squeaked back. “I'll be out in a moment!”

“Are you calling me from the bathroom?” Miss Kay inquired in a knowing tone.
“...Yes,” she admitted, hanging her head a little. “I'm sorry. It was the most convenient private place I could access.”

“Pffft, no problem. I'll let you get back to your friends now.”

“Okay!” Pearl agreed, nodding (though Kay couldn't see her do so). “Well, keep an eye on Mr. Edgeworth for us. And Happy Thanksgiving, Miss Kay!”

“Oh please, like I said before that night, you can drop the 'Miss.' Just Kay is fine!”

“All right. Happy Thanksgiving, Kay!”

“Happy Thanksgiving, Pearl. PM Operative #6...out!” There was a click as Kay hung up.

Pearl was still smiling a mile wide when she slipped the phone back into her sleeve pocket and made to open the bathroom door. It felt good to be part of a team.

Miles Edgeworth couldn't remember the last time he'd had this much fun.

When he had stepped into Wright's apartment, his first thought had been “How do all these people fit in this kitchen?” and his second thought had been “Maybe this was a bad idea.”

But of course, as soon as he saw the look on Phoenix Wright's face he knew he couldn't just turn around and leave.

And so he'd found himself at the Wright Family Thanksgiving Dinner, seated next to Wright himself, drinking the absolute worst-tasting tea he'd ever sampled and eating turkey that was only a little too dry. But as the meal had gone on, he'd found himself relaxing, bit by bit. It was easy to let himself disappear into the background, just sit and listen to the comforting, familial conversation all around him. He couldn't recall the last time he'd heard a conversation around a dinner table in the safety of somebody's home. After about an hour, even the dreadful tea seemed... wonderful.

And speaking of wonderful...

He glanced over at the man next to him. Everyone else had wandered into the next room, but Miles found that he was quite content to stay here with Phoenix Wright. He wasn't in his usual blue suit today, of course. He was wearing a light blue button-down, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and jeans. The casual look was good for him. Phoenix could say all he wanted about Miles seemingly not owning any casual clothes, but the truth was that Miles simply never thought any of them suited him. But Wright... he could make a plain pair of jeans look like a deliberate fashion choice. He looked good without trying. It was as fascinating as it was annoying.

Wright caught him looking, gave a self-conscious laugh. “Wh-what, do I have something on my face?” he joked.

His face. His infuriatingly wonderful face. “Yes,” Miles said, and when the other man lifted his hand to find the something, Miles snorted and said, “your nose.”

Phoenix stilled. “What?”

“Your nose,” Miles repeated, stifling giggles behind his fist, “is on your face.” It was probably the greatest joke Miles had ever made. Possibly the only one.
Phoenix looked utterly dumbfounded, but smiled, though it looked more worried than his usual smiles. “Are... are you okay, Edgeworth?”

“That's the sixth time you've asked me that this evening,” Miles informed him with a slight smile.

“Yeah, well...you're acting really weird,” Wright told him. He ran a hand through his spiky hair. Was it soft, Miles wondered, or was it stiff with gel? “I mean, not that it's been a bad thing,” Phoenix continued. “It's nice that you're actually talking a little about yourself, but, uh...you're sure you're okay?”

“I'm great,” Miles said, sipping his tea. “But it's very flattering that you spend so much time worrying about me.” He delighted in the perfect flush that bloomed on Wright's cheeks at that. The poor man looked absolutely befuddled. Good, Miles thought. Now he knows how he makes me feel when he says things like that to me.

“Hey, um, Edgeworth...” Phoenix was looking down at his hands, fidgeting. It was endearing. “I'm...really glad we're not keeping our distance anymore.” He glanced up at Miles. “What changed your mind?”

“You did,” Miles responded easily. “As usual.”

Wright's brow furrowed. “As usual?”

“But of course,” said Miles. “Whenever I start to do anything foolish that would inevitably lead to my own self-detriment, you always come along to change my mind,” he continued, shifting the ice cubes in his glass. “You seem to have a talent for it.”

Phoenix rubbed the back of his neck and looked away, presumably to hide the blush that had gotten even more noticeable. “I...I can't do anything like that,” he mumbled, embarrassed. “You're giving me too much credit.”

“Au contraire, my dear Wright,” Miles responded, plopping his chin in one hand as he rested his elbow on the table. “Nobody gives you enough credit, myself included.”

The defense attorney's eyes flickered from Miles' elbow on the table to the smile on his face. For some reason, it felt okay to smile around Phoenix at the moment. “Edgeworth, I'm seriously worried about you right now,” he managed, though it looked like he was still struggling with the bashfulness Miles' comments had caused.

“Oh, let me worry about you for once, would you?” Miles said. He wasn't sure what possessed him to do it then, but he butted his shoulder into Wright's affectionately.

Phoenix froze up like a taxidermy museum exhibit. An intriguing reaction. Miles filed it away for later reference. He lifted his glass to take another sip of tea, only to find that it was empty again. “Wright, could you refill this?” he asked, holding the glass out to him.

Wright's movements were as stiff as a marionette's as he rose from the table and went over to the counter. A few moments passed, and just as Miles was about to turn and ask if something was wrong, he heard a gasp from the counter.

“Oh crap,” said Phoenix.

“What?” prompted Miles, twisting in his chair to look.

“I should have known when she put ice in it,” the defense attorney muttered, shaking his head. “This
is all my fault..."

“Before you start assigning yourself the blame, perhaps you could tell me what the problem is?” Miles pointed out, raising his eyebrows.

Phoenix merely shook his head again and brought a large, tall brown bottle to the table. “Still want more tea now, Edgeworth?” he said grimly as he set the bottle down next to Miles.

*Captain Morgan's Long Island Iced Tea*, the label read.

“Oh crap indeed,” was all Miles could say.

Wright stifled a snort. “You said 'crap,’” he said, grinning.

“So did you.”

“Yeah, but *Miles Edgeworth* just said 'crap,’” Phoenix chuckled. God, Miles wished he would say his first name again. It had sounded so good in his voice. He couldn't help laughing along with the other man.

After a moment, Wright's laughter tapered off and he cleared his throat, still only keeping a straight face with effort. “So, uh...I guess you're the type that talks more when you're drunk,” he said.

“Who says I'm drunk?” retorted Miles. “Maybe I'm just feeling very open today.”

“You're drunk,” Phoenix repeated decisively.

Ordinarily, he would have been mortified. Miles Edgeworth did not get *drunk.* He drank a glass of wine 4 times a week with dinner and that was **it.** Getting *drunk* meant losing control, making bad decisions, leaving himself vulnerable...

But when he saw Wright looking at him with poorly-concealed affection, none of those things seemed so bad at the moment. “What kind are you?” Miles blurted.

Phoenix blinked. “Pardon?”

“What kind of drunk are you?” he clarified, pouring himself just a little bit more “tea.” Okay, it was a whole other glass.

“Oh, um...” The defense attorney’s gaze shifted around, sheepish. “I'm...probably the huggy kind. I don't know for sure. It's been a while.”

The huggy kind, eh? Miles admitted to himself that he wouldn't mind being around a huggy Phoenix Wright, but even drunk, he knew this would be incredibly embarrassing to say out loud, so he kept his mouth shut and instead gulped his beverage.

“How are you getting home?” Phoenix asked him. “Do you want me to call you a cab?”

Miles’ heart sank at the thought of leaving. He wasn't done talking to Wright yet. But the question had been a valid one. “I suppose that'd make the most sense,” he admitted, nursing the last bit of his drink.

Phoenix smiled at him fondly and rose to put the bottle of Captain Morgan back in the refrigerator. “I think you've had enough, sir,” he joked.

“I'll tell you when I've had enough,” Miles gave the expected response. They looked at each other,
and simultaneously started laughing.

“You're not mad at Pearls, are you?” asked Phoenix when they'd wound down. He sat down again next to Miles.

“Course not,” he said, waving away the notion. “It was an honest mistake. I'm sure tomorrow I'll be pretty horrified you saw me this way, though.”

“Please don't be,” Phoenix said quietly. He was smiling at him in a way that made Miles' heart beat irregularly.

Miles met his eyes, and it was like he could feel something gripping his heart and squeezing it. It was remarkable, really, how many sides of Miles Edgeworth this man could coax out of hiding, and then find it in him to smile at all of those sides. In that moment, there were so many things that he wanted to say to Phoenix Wright. Some were very complicated: *I didn't cry for 15 years when I left for Germany, but when you saved me from my own past, suddenly I could again. I've hated noodles since I was small and I only eat them with you so you can pay for dinner sometimes. Sometimes the world seems cruel and heartless, but every time I look at you is a reminder that people can be different.* And others were very simple: *Your eyes are ridiculously blue. I'm so glad I'm here. Thank you for everything. I adore you.*

He said none of these things. “No promises,” was what he murmured instead. Wright's mouth quirked up on one side. Miles' eyes followed the movement. He felt drawn in by some unstoppable force.

“All right, folks, I'm headed out,” came a sudden loud voice walking into the kitchen, startling both men at the table. Apollo Justice pulled his coat off the hook and smiled at both of them. “Happy Thanksgiving, both of you. Thanks for having me, Mr. Wright!”

“Of course, Apollo,” Wright responded, quickly regaining his composure. “Anytime.” Apollo gave them one last nod and then disappeared behind the door.

“I'm off too,” Athena Cykes said, retrieving her canary yellow pea-coat as well. “See ya later, Mr. Wright, Mr. Edgeworth! Thanks for inviting me!” She waved at them enthusiastically, and then she too was gone behind the door.

Maya and Pearl Fey appeared to still be within the apartment, but for the moment, he and Phoenix were alone again at the kitchen table. Miles wasn't sure how to pick back up from that moment. Evidently, Wright wasn't either. He cleared his throat, cheeks still dusted pink, and rose from the table. “I'll call your cab,” he said. Miles nodded, feeling his cheeks flush deeper as well. He shouldn't have had that last glass. If Apollo hadn't walked in when he did, he probably would have ended up trying to...

He shook the thought out of his head.

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*I should have said something,* Miles thought to himself for the tenth time since leaving Wright's apartment. Gone was the feeling of giddiness and relaxation he had felt in that kitchen. As he'd sat in the taxi, watching the lights pass outside the window in the blackness, he'd been seized with a growing feeling of impatience and frustration.

He stepped into his apartment building's stairwell, ignoring the elevator as usual. It was bad enough he had to take the elevator at work; he avoided it whenever possible at home. He let his thoughts
consume him as he climbed the stairs. *It was the perfect time. We were alone. My walls were down for once. Why can't I be honest even when all the circumstances are in my favor?* It reminded him of what Phoenix had asked in his office a few days ago: *What are you so afraid of?*

That was the big issue, he realized now. He wasn't really worried about his or Wright's reputation. As Wright had pointed out, he hardly needed to pay any mind to what people thought of his relationship with anyone.

It had been what *Phoenix* thought of his relationship with him that had scared him.

The stairs seemed so much longer than usual, but luckily Miles lived on only the second floor. He made his way down the ornate and lavishly-decorated hall to his solid mahogany door. For so long, Miles had convinced himself that his past actions had tainted him, made him unworthy to call someone like Phoenix Wright his friend, let alone anything more. But the more time they spent together, the more the defense attorney assured him that he didn't care what mistakes Miles had made. He just wanted to appreciate Miles as he was now.

How foolish. In what universe did someone like him deserve Phoenix Wright? He fumbled with his keys, and finally got the door to swing open.

Well, perhaps he didn't deserve Phoenix Wright, but hell, that didn't mean he had to stop trying to be the kind of person who did. A more honest, sincere, open Miles Edgeworth deserved Phoenix Wright...maybe the Miles Edgeworth that had been at that Thanksgiving dinner. But how often did he show up?

He felt angry at himself, ashamed. How in the world was he still so hung up on Wright, after all these years? Practically nothing had changed. He was still paralyzed with doubt and indecision, scrawling Phoenix's initial on page after page, burying himself in work and refusing to look his own loneliness in the face. And, for that matter, had Wright been any better? Always wanting Miles to spend time with him, dragging him into his messes, being *so friendly*, all the while ignorant about how being so close to him was torture for Miles sometimes. He couldn't help but feel a degree of frustration towards Wright as well.

All of a sudden, as he flicked on the lights in his foyer, he decided. It was time to be honest. *Really* honest. He dug his phone out of his coat pocket, then hung up the coat near the door. His heart pounded, a response that would have warned him this was a bad idea any other night, but tonight the beating of his heart sounded like a chant: *Do it. Call him. Tell him.*

Soon enough, the phone was ringing. Miles held his breath as it rang. He opened his mouth to speak when he heard Phoenix's voice, but it was only his voicemail.

“Hey, you've reached Phoenix Wright of the Wright Anything Agency,” said Miles' favorite voice in his ear. “I'm not here right now, but if you leave me your name and number, I'll get back to you as soon as I can! If this is about a case, please try my office phone. Have a good one!”

*Have a good one?* God, he was even unfailingly sunny in his voicemail greeting. There was a beep, and then suddenly Miles was talking.

“Wright? Y'know what, you're the worst,” he blurted. He blinked at himself, realizing his speech sounded a little slurred. Nevertheless, he persevered. He had to make things clear. “I never asked to have you show up in my life looking all bright and hopeful and... glowy,” he decided. That was a word, wasn't it? Yes, he was mostly positive it was. “Why'd you have to come along and flip everything upside-down?” Miles paced his hallway, flinging his free hand around with his words. “I haven't felt so confused about somethin' since I watched that bootleg Chinese version of the Shteel
“Shamurai.” He blinked again. “Steel Samurai,” he repeated carefully.

He sighed, turning in a circle, running a hand through his gray locks and remembering the way he'd felt tempted to touch Phoenix's hair earlier. “Your hair's so stupid,” he said aloud. “Why's it look so good on you?” He remembered the button-down and jeans. “Why's everything look so good on you,” he qualified. “I mean, how'm I supposed to concentrate on murder cases when you're standing there lookin' so good all the time?” Abruptly, there was the twin sensation of a thudding sound and a pain in his toes. “Ow,” he said, glaring at his own claw-footed wardrobe. “Blasted furniture...”

Oops. That would probably be audible on the message. He sighed again. Better wrap this up. “Okay,” he said. “I've said enough. Good night, Phoenix.” He squinted. No, that wasn't the right name, was it? “I mean Wright,” he corrected. “I love youuuun...” His eyes widened. What in the world was he about to say? Save it, Miles! Say something else! Anything else! “uuununicorns? Yeah. Sure. Them. Bye.” He clicked off the phone before he could say anything else.

Even now, as he brushed his teeth, haphazardly folded his glasses and put them on the nightstand, and flopped onto his four-poster bed, he knew calling had been a bad idea. But when he dropped off to sleep, he couldn't help feeling the tiniest bit satisfied that he had finally done something about all this. He smiled against his pillow.

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His eyes snapped open 9 hours later. Besides the pounding sensation behind his eyes, he felt an immediate sense of impending doom. Gradually, like nightmarish flashbacks from a gruesome battle, phrases and words began to race to the forefront of his memory, painting a ghastly picture.

...All bright and hopeful and...glowy...

...Shteeel Shamurai...

...Why's everything look so good on you?...

...I love youuuununicorns.

“No...” he whimpered, bolting straight up in bed and immediately yelping as he pressed a hand to his eyes. No, he had to have been misremembering. It was a horrible dream. A fantasy. He couldn't possibly have...could he?!

The sensation of dread seemed to trickle down inside his rib-cage like a sickly syrup. His stomach rolled over like a lazy dog. He reached for his phone, his hand shaking. He checked Recents.

*Phoenix Wright, his phone informed him. 2:46 AM.*

...Well, that was it. He'd had a good run, but now it was time to get moving and start a new life in a new country far, far away. Maybe he could get in touch with Shi-Long Lang. He probably knew some obscure, remote country Miles could live in.

Feeling like his lungs were crumbling into brittle rice paper and disintegrating, he noticed he had 3 new text messages as well.

*They'll be from him, he predicted. He's disgusted. He's appalled. He'll tell me to never call him again. What have I done?!* Almost as if to punish himself, he tapped the screen to view the messages.

A long moment passed. He blinked at the 3 text bubbles on his screen and reread them 5 times, but
no matter how many times he looked, the words stayed the same.

*Hope you're feeling better today. I think you better stick to red wine next time, buddy. Liquor is definitely not for you.*

*Get some rest, all right?*

But his eyes lingered the longest on the last message. He couldn't be sure if it really existed, or if he had fallen into some kind of alternate reality where horrible decisions led to... well... *this.*

*P.S.- I love unicorns too. Call me again soon, ok?*

He did.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Trucy makes a friend. Phoenix cleans his office.
The week after Thanksgiving, Trucy could tell something was different. Usually, she could pick out a minute change anywhere—a nervous twitch in an uncooperative witness, a fellow magician's sleight-of-hand during a card trick, and especially those Spot the Differences activities in magazines. But she couldn't quite put her finger on what had changed this time.

She and her fellow “PM Operatives” (Pearl had suggested that term. When asked where she got the idea, she had just flushed and averted her eyes. “A friend of mine thought of it,” was all she would say) were updating each other frequently on any and all developments regarding her father and Mr. Edgeworth, but there didn't appear to have been many. Mr. Edgeworth seemed in a better mood when he took her to and from school, and Daddy seemed pretty chipper these days as well, but living among so many lawyers had taught her that evidence was everything, and so far she had zero to indicate that anything had changed.

Sure, whenever her father and Mr. Edgeworth interacted there were gentle smiles, good-natured teasing, and meaningful looks that lasted perhaps longer than they needed to... but all of that had been going on for years. Trucy wanted something concrete—a love letter, a secret date, even an increased rate of phone calls!

Of course, Trucy was alone in her investigations for the greater portion of the time. Maya was quite busy in Kurain village, Apollo refused to take part in any shenanigans for the most part, and Athena was oddly guarded about the whole situation. Trucy suspected Athena knew something, but whenever she pressed the young attorney about it, she would simply clam up. It was very unlike her. She was usually so easy to see through.

“Look, I totally support Project: Matchmakers,” Athena would say, “and I'll help however I can, but as for intruding on Mr. Wright's privacy...I'm not going to do that.”

Hmph. Wet blanket.

So for the most part, Trucy's most frequent informant was Pearl. The other teenager seemed just as invested in this project as Trucy herself was. She was only learning how to text, but they kept up regular contact when Trucy wasn't in school.

In fact, as the young magician was in Mr. Edgeworth's car on the way home from school, her cell phone chimed, signaling a new text message. Trucy pulled the phone out of her pocket.
Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth just spoke on the phone for half an hour before he left to pick you up from school! said the message, with impeccable capitalization and no abbreviations as usual. Even in text messages, Pearl was ever the proper lady.

Trucy checked the rearview mirror to make sure Mr. Edgeworth wasn't looking, and then tapped out a reply: good tip! but how do u know this? i didn't know u were in the area... ;)

Oh! I received word from...a friend, Pearl replied. Trucy frowned. This was like the fifth time Pearl had mentioned “a friend” with regards to information relevant to Project: Matchmakers. She was getting a bit tired of having everyone keep things from her. She was the magician; she was the one who was supposed to have lots of secrets!

well i hope u intend on introducing this “friend” sometime... Trucy punched in.

Of course I do! In fact, I am going to meet her later today at the outlet stores, if you would like to join us?

Pearl going on a shopping trip with a friend? That was different. Trucy couldn't help but be curious about this friend of hers.

i'd love that! what time r u thinking?

“Popular today, are we?” came Mr. Edgeworth's voice suddenly. Even sitting down, Trucy managed to jump an impressive amount. Her eyes shot to the rearview mirror, where the prosecutor's keen gray eyes were regarding her, one eyebrow raised.

“Oh, haha, yeah, I guess I am getting more texts than usual,” Trucy replied, sending him a brief sheepish smile.

Edgeworth's eyes were focused on the road again, but she still felt like they were keeping close watch on her. “Everything all right?” he asked, and the question was so...fatherly that Trucy couldn't help the huge grin that spread across her face.

“Everything's great, Mr. Edgeworth,” she assured him, leaning forward in her seat. “Just talking to Pearl. You know, like teenagers do.”

This time, both of Mr. Edgeworth's eyebrows shot up. “Pearl's knows how to use a cell phone now?”

Come to think of it, I have heard him call Pearl by Daddy's nickname for her before...How did I never notice that? Trucy thought. But instead of voicing her thoughts, she just nodded. “Yeah! Maya bought her one. She's so formal in texts; it's so funny!” She rested her arms on the passenger seat in front of her. “Then again, you're probably the type to text like that too, aren't you?”

“You'll have to ask your father about that,” Mr. Edgeworth quipped, and then stiffened like he'd made a terrible mistake, his fingers tightening on the steering wheel and his mouth becoming a flat line.

Instantly, Trucy's senses went on high alert. What did this reaction mean? It was a fairly innocent comment, so why had he suddenly frozen up like that? “What do you mean by that?” she prompted innocently, resting her chin on her arms, which still sat atop the passenger seat.

“Sit back in your seat, Trucy,” Edgeworth barked at her.

Trucy did, but then folded her arms and pouted. “That's not an answer,” she grumbled.
“Fortunately, I am under no obligation to answer any of your questions,” Mr. Edgeworth replied smoothly. Trucy searched his face in the rearview mirror, but it was carefully blank and impassive again. Darn. It seemed he had regained his composure. Any chance Trucy had of getting more information out of him had passed.

Well, fine then, she thought. She'd just have to talk about this interesting tidbit with Pearl and her friend.

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“Sorry I'm late!” Trucy cried, running up to where Pearl was seated in the food court. She doubled over, bracing her hands on her thighs and panting. Daddy had only let her go out once she'd finished every last bit of her homework, and of course today had to be a day that Mrs. Bunsen had assigned all the extra Chemistry homework. But now she was free, and ready to discuss a different kind of chemistry!

“Oh, it's okay, Trucy! Are you all right? Why don't you sit down?” Pearl suggested politely. Trucy did, plopping onto the chair next to Pearl's.

“So...where's...your friend?” Trucy breathed, removing her hat and swiping her bangs aside. She finally gave Pearl a once-over. She was dressed in her spirit medium outfit as usual, which was something of a disappointment to Trucy. She'd been wondering if, now that Pearl was texting and going to outlet stores, she'd start dressing more modernly as well. Not that Pearl didn't look cute in her usual clothing, of course.

Pearl's face lit up at the mention of her friend. “Oh, she's over there getting us sodas!” The spirit medium glanced over in the direction of a long line of people in front of a restaurant. Trucy scanned all the people carefully, trying to pick out which of them was Pearl's friend. She didn't have to wonder for long, though, because at that moment a young lady with long black hair dressed in dark pink and navy glanced in their direction and waved crazily.

“The one with the really big ponytail?” Trucy guessed.

Pearl giggled. “That's her!” she said, waving back a little at the woman.

After a few more minutes, Pearl's friend finally made her way over to their table and set down the tray of three sodas. “Hi, Trucy!” she said, flashing a rather cheeky smile. “Good to finally meet you!”

“Finally?” Trucy repeated, blinking. She turned to Pearl. “How long have you been friends with her?”

Pearl flushed a little. “Um, I guess a few weeks before Thanksgiving?...” Her slight smile looked a little apologetic. Trucy decided to put aside all her questions about that for now and instead turned to face the newcomer again, popping her hat back onto her head now that she'd caught her breath.

“Um, it's good to meet you, too, uh...?” she prompted, extending her hand.

“Kay!” said the black-haired girl, seizing Trucy's hand and pumping it energetically. “Kay Faraday, Great Thief and longtime friend of Mr. Miles Edgeworth, at your service!”

Trucy blinked, even after Kay released her hand. “Thief?” she echoed. “Friend of Mr. Edgeworth?” She didn't know which part of her introduction was more suspicious.

Kay sat down across from her and rested both elbows on the table, pulling her soda towards herself.
“I don't steal **things,**” she assured the young magician. Well, okay. That cleared up nothing, Trucy thought. “And as for the other thing, I've known Edgeworth since I was...about ten years old, I'd say.” She slurped from her straw loudly.

“Wow,” was all Trucy could say. “Why didn't he ever mention you?”

Kay pouted. “Ouch,” she said.

“Oh, I'm sorry!” Trucy blurted, her hands flying over her mouth. “I didn't mean it like that! I'm sure Mr. Edgeworth cherishes the memories he made with you!” She fiddled with the clasp of her cloak. “I, I just, um...”

Kay waved off her stuttering apologies. “Aww, it's fine. Mr. Edgeworth doesn't talk about anything he does, much. I'm not exactly surprised. I did think it was a little strange that he didn't contact me the past ten years though...” She gestured to the other two sodas. “Well, aren't you two going to drink those?"

Pearl pulled her cup over and sipped from it daintily. Only she could make slurping from a straw look refined. Trucy followed suit, sipping the drink, which turned out to be grape soda. How in the world had this woman known her favorite soda?...

“Pearl told me,” Kay answered her unspoken question, her jade-green eyes glinting knowingly. “She said you love grape soda. Just like your dad likes grape juice.”

Trucy shifted a little uncomfortably. She wasn't sure how she felt about this stranger knowing so much about her and her father. “Um, great, thank you,” she mumbled, casting her gaze downward. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Kay shoot Pearl a concerned glance, as if silently asking *Is she okay?* Pearl gave a glance back that seemed to say *Give her a little time.* Trucy couldn't help but feel a little jealous that her good friend could suddenly have unspoken conversations with this person.

“I...I think we should discuss what we came here to discuss!” Pearl exclaimed suddenly. “Um, I mean, Project: Matchmakers, of course.” She fidgeted with her hair bauble.

“Right, of course!” replied Kay, sitting up straighter. “So, today, as I was hanging around the Prosecutor's Office—”

“Kay is a ninja,” Pearl explained helpfully.

“No, no, I'm a professional infiltrator, Pearl,” Kay corrected before continuing. “Anyway, I happened to hear a little bit of conversation. Well, one side of it, anyway.” A mischievous grin lit up her face.

“How did you hear it?” Trucy asked. “Were you...were you spying on Mr. Edgeworth?” Seriously, who was this suspicious woman?! Then again, she herself was known to pull mysterious objects out of her panties. She wasn't exactly a great judge of “strange.”

Kay looked sheepish. She fiddled with a strap on her belt, a holster of some kind. “N-No, I...I was actually there to visit Mr. Edgeworth this time,” she said.

“This time?*”* Trucy raised her eyebrows.

“Anyway,” Kay ignored her, her voice a little desperate, “I happened to hear something right before I was about to knock on the door. It was Mr. Edgeworth's voice. He was saying 'I really have to go now; I am not accustomed to half-hour phone calls.'”
"He could have been talking to anyone, though," Trucy pointed out.

Kay smirked. "He wasn't. The next thing he said was, 'Don't be ridiculous, Wright; it's not that I don't want to talk longer, it's just that your daughter is waiting to be picked up from school.' And then he said, 'I always drive safely. I'll talk to you soon.'"

"Oh," squeaked Trucy. "I guess it was Daddy he was talking to then."

"Pretty good, right?!" Kay said, leaning forward eagerly. One would have thought she was the youngest person among the three of them, rather than the oldest.

"Oh, yes!" Pearl replied, clasping her hands together dreamily. "I've never heard Mr. Edgeworth say outright that he wants to talk more to Mr. Nick! He's usually so...so..." Her little eyebrows drew together in concentration, and she stared at her soda, trying to think of an accurate description.

"Unfriendly?" Kay suggested, quirking an eyebrow.

Pearl's cheeks turned pink. "I wouldn't say that, exactly, but..." she trailed off. Apparently she couldn't think of what she would say, because then she merely sipped her soda.

"Well, I have a bit of an interesting tale as well," Trucy piped up, fiddling with her straw.

"Oh?" Pearl's big gray eyes looked even bigger when she widened them like that.

"Spill!" Kay commanded.

"Right," Trucy picked up where she left off. "And anyway, I said 'I bet you text that way too,' and he said—" she imitated Mr. Edgeworth's deeper, smooth voice—"'You'll have to ask your father about that!'" She giggled. The other two girls were smiling at her, encouraging her to continue. "That wasn't the best part, though. We all know they text each other; it's nothing new. It was more the fact that after he said that, he froze up with the greatest 'Oh, crap' expression I have ever seen."

"What could that mean?" Pearl asked eagerly.

"That's what I wondered!" Trucy replied.

"I bet I've seen an even better 'oh crap' expression from him, to be honest," Kay said thoughtfully, an expression of fond reminiscence on her face, "Buuut, I'm afraid I can't share that story with you guys. I've been sworn to secrecy." She smirked at them, her eyes lit up with amusement.

"Aw, Kay, that's not fair!" Trucy pleaded. "Come on, at least tell us a little!"

"Nope!" said Kay, crossing her arms firmly. She winked. "But if you ask me yes or no questions, I
might be persuaded to answer a couple of them..."

“Did this occur recently?” Pearl burst out.

“No,” Kay said at once.

Trucy and Pearl exchanged a slightly disappointed glance. If it wasn't recent, then it probably had nothing to do with what they were here to discuss.

“Did...did my Daddy factor into it at all?” Trucy tried.

Kay's smile grew three sizes. She tapped her nose, signaling a 'yes.' Pearl and Trucy looked at one another again excitedly.

“Okay, when did this happen? How long ago?!” Trucy pressed her.

“Ah-ah-ah,” Kay chided. “Those aren't yes or no questions.” She leaned back in her chair and grabbed her soda. “And anyway, I answered a couple of your questions, so that's all I can tell you.”

Trucy felt like grabbing her by the shoulders and shaking her, but instead she just gripped the table. “That's just cruel! It's my Daddy we're talking about; I deserve to know!”

Kay shook her head, furrowing her brow and looking serious for the first time since Trucy had met her. “Sorry, guys, but I really don't want to say any more. If it ever comes out, I want Mr. Edgeworth to be the one to tell you, or for you to find the...” she fumbled her words a little, “the thing yourself.” The other two girls groaned. “I don't want to betray Mr. Edgeworth's trust!” she insisted, defensively.

“No, you're right, Kay,” Pearl murmured sadly, staring at her lap. “It wouldn't be right to force you to tell us about something like that.”

Trucy tapped her chin, ruminating. “So, if it didn't happen recently...” she mused out loud, “And Mr. Edgeworth didn't contact you for ten years...” She fixed her eyes on Kay. “That has to mean that it happened over ten years ago.”

Kay's eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. “Whoa, you're as good as Mr. Edgeworth,” she breathed.

Pearl beamed. “She's spent a lot of time watching Mr. Nick at work.”

“What a coincidence,” Kay laughed nervously. “Um, recently...so have I.”

Trucy blinked. “What?”

Pearl bit her thumb a little, anxious. “That's the other reason I asked if you'd come with us today, Trucy... Kay here has a little bit of a confession to make.” She glanced at the black-haired woman, nodding encouragingly.

Kay sighed and stared at the table rather than at Trucy, but she spoke nevertheless. “During most of the past month...I was kind of...well, sometimes! Not all the time! I'm not some kind of weirdo, okay? I was just...curious, and...!”

“Kay, you're rambling,” Trucy pointed out.

“You're right; I'm sorry,” she groaned. “I just feel so bad...” She bit her lip, and then grit her teeth in determination. “I was...occasionally following your dad around. To gather information. Because...I'd heard so much about him, and...” She trailed off. Her expression was like a kid being forced to tell an
adult that they had eaten all the cookies from the cookie jar.

It took a moment for her words to sink in. “Wait,” said Trucy finally, “you were stalking my Daddy?!”

“It wasn't like that!” Kay exclaimed, holding up her hands in a placatory gesture. “Mr. Edgeworth was always so guarded whenever he mentioned him; I couldn't ever get him to talk about him in detail...” She pulled her scarf up over her mouth as if it could smother her own words. Her eyes were downcast. “I just...wanted to see this guy that my friend seemed so crazy about...I didn't mean to upset anyone...”

Trucy's heart softened at that. But still... “Kay, you could have just talked to him,” she sighed. “Daddy's really nice! And if you'd said you were a friend of Mr. Edgeworth's, he would have welcomed you with open arms.”

“It was force of habit!” Kay said miserably, sinking her forehead into her palms. “I'm used to gathering information like that, and I...” She sighed, lifted her head, and met Trucy's eyes. “What I did was so wrong, and I caused your dad a lot of worry for no reason, and I just wanted to say I'm really sorry.”

Trucy held her gaze for a while, but then she nodded. “I accept your apology,” she said quietly, “But I'm not the one you should be apologizing to, if what you said at the end there is true.”

Kay averted her eyes and fiddled with the oddly-shaped badge on her scarf, her expression still looking guiltier than a lot of people Trucy had seen in court. “I know,” she admitted. “…I was too ashamed to tell him directly right now, so...I wanted to start with you.” She sat up straight again. “Look, watching people is what I do. It's my job, basically. But...I will apologize to your father. Personally. I promise.” She glanced at Pearl, who smiled back with an expression that looked like pride. Kay offered a weak smile in return, but it looked more like a grimace.

“Daddy will forgive you,” Trucy assured her. “He's used to forgiving people that hide things from him. It's what he does. It's his job, basically.” She grinned at Kay, turning the other girl's words back to her. The smile Kay gave back was the brightest she'd smiled all evening.

“All right, girls,” Kay said, her happy-go-lucky attitude returning full-force. She tugged on the wrists of her gloves. “Who wants to go shopping?”

“I'm not sure I feel comfortable going shopping with a thief,” Trucy quipped.

Kay laughed. “Don't worry, Trucy. All this Great Thief steals is the truth...and maybe some hearts.”

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By the time Trucy was on the bus home, she and Kay had become friends. They had each other's numbers in their phones, and promised to keep in touch. Kay assured Trucy that she would arrange to formally meet the guy she'd followed around for weeks and apologize to him. Pearl was really some kind of girl, to get a professional spy to want to apologize for spying. Trucy smiled at the thought, and leaned against the window of the bus. This turned out to be a bad idea. It always looked so contemplative and deep in movies and stuff, but in reality the window vibrated fiercely when the bus was in motion. How did all those actors not get their brains scrambled?

Speaking of things vibrating, this was what Trucy's phone did now. She pulled it out of her pocket.

forgot to say this earlier, but... im glad you guys accepted me into project matchmakers! ill be sure to gather my information from now on in a RESPECTFUL and FORTHCOMING manner. ;)


Trucy grinned and typed in her response.

_sounds good. but...if u wanna occasionally keep an eye on mr. edgeworth, i don't have a problem with it. he's your friend after all..._ 

The reply was almost instantaneous.

_pshhh, of course. what do you take me for?_

Yep, Trucy decided. Kay was definitely suspicious, but she was also definitely a valuable ally.

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Not for the first time, Phoenix wasn't quite sure where he stood. Since that fateful Thanksgiving night, his relationship with Edgeworth was different, but also exactly the same. They were both acting the same as they always had, but with a certain amount of knowledge behind every action. Phoenix let himself be a little less careful in how often he contacted him, because now he knew for a fact that Edgeworth liked hearing from him. At least, he was pretty sure he knew that. Sometimes he was tempted to maybe say more playful things than usual to him, just to see how he'd react...

But the truth was, he wasn't sure how much of that voicemail had been Edgeworth and how much had been Captain Morgan.

Sure, Edgeworth had indeed called him the next day as Phoenix had asked. But other than requesting that he “please lower your voice, Wright; my head feels like it's in a compression vise,” and suggesting that he swing by to retrieve his car later that day, he hadn't really sounded any different than he had any other time they'd spoken on the phone. It was almost a little disappointing, after that sort-of love confession. That was what it had been, hadn't it? He had said it, clear as day. Okay, so it wasn't clear; it was actually really slurried, and it had been night. But still, the words had come out: “_I love you._” And yes, the last word might have been hastily changed to “unicorns,” but Phoenix wasn't an idiot. At least not all the time. He thought his response had been rather clever, but either Edgeworth didn't understand the defense attorney's sudden affection for horned equines, or he was refusing to acknowledge the meaning behind the words. Phoenix's money, if he had a little more, would be on the latter.

And so he found himself laying on his back on the couch in his apartment, flipping through an old newspaper idly, not really seeing any of the words on the page but instead going over all the recent ones he'd exchanged with the prosecutor. Just this afternoon, when Edgeworth had said he had to get off the phone, Phoenix had put on a pouty voice and said, “What, you don't want to talk to me anymore?”

He expected a scoff and a hang-up in response, but instead Edgeworth had surprised him by replying, “Don't be ridiculous, Wright; it's not that I don't want to talk more, it's just that your daughter is waiting to be picked up from school.”

Phoenix knew that, of course. He'd just wanted to shake the unflappable prosecutor up a little. But instead, Phoenix had been the one shaken up. “R-right,” he stammered. “Uh...drive safe, Edgeworth.”

“I always drive safely,” came the other man's voice, steady, reassuring. “I'll talk to you later.” Then he'd hung up.
He’d gotten to talk to Miles Edgeworth for an entire half-hour, and yet he still got an “I’ll talk to you later” at the end? Phoenix didn’t know whether to be ecstatic at the promise of further contact, or frustrated that it was only a phone call.

Trucy had insisted on going out after finishing her homework, saying she was going to meet some friends at the mall, and Phoenix had reluctantly let her go. She was a big girl; she could watch out for herself by now. So now the defense attorney was attempting to pass the time by reading this dumb newspaper, even though he was far too consumed in thought to read at the moment. Maybe he should go for a walk. Or watch TV. Or just...stare at this newspaper some more; whatever.

Suddenly, the Steel Samurai theme rang out into the quiet air. Phoenix nearly fell off the couch in alarm, flailing his arms and legs, before he fumbled his phone out of his pocket and answered the call.

“Ph-Phoenix Wright speaking,” he answered hastily.

“What's the matter, Wright? You sound like you just ran up a flight of stairs,” said the sardonic voice he loved so much.

“Edgeworth?” he said, sitting up straight. “Is something wrong? Not that I'm not glad to hear from you, but uh...it's only been a few hours.”

“Well, I did say I would talk to you later,” Edgeworth reminded him.

“Th-that's true,” Phoenix admitted.

“However, the actual reason I have called you is...” He paused. Phoenix knew better than to hold his breath. Edgeworth wasn't the type to randomly call and say romantic things. Well, not when he was sober anyway.

“Is...?” Phoenix prompted.

“May I...come in to your office to work for a few days?” Edgeworth's words came out in a rush, as if they'd been behind a dam and he had just forced them through a crack.

Phoenix froze. “I...” His mind raced. This was quite a move. Or was it? He'd mentioned work. It wasn't like he'd asked to stay over. Get ahold of yourself, Phoenix, he scolded himself. This is Edgeworth. Don't jump to any ridiculous conclusions. “I mean, you're always welcome at the Agency,” he finally got out. “But what brought this on?...”

Edgeworth gave a long-suffering sigh. “They are doing maintenance in my office. For about a week. They insist upon meddling with the air vents and the phone lines, and...essentially I won't get any peace and quiet there until they are done,” he explained. Phoenix could see him now, rubbing the spot between his eyes, his glasses halfway down his nose.

“Well, you're not likely to get any peace and quiet around here either,” he pointed out teasingly, resting his feet on the far arm of the couch.

“I know,” Edgeworth said with a groan, “So clearly, you must understand that I'm desperate.”

Well. There were several ways he could respond to that statement. Not that he was brave enough to try 90% of them. Instead, he stammered a very intelligent “Y-yeah, definitely,” followed by an awkward chuckle. He screwed his eyes shut. That had sounded so stupid. Damn it, there had pretty much been a mutual admission of feelings between them; why was throwing out a flirtatious line now and then so difficult?
Edgeworth sighed again, but this time it sounded relieved. “Thank you,” he said sincerely. He had come a long way from the guy who once needed instruction on how to express gratitude. Phoenix’s heart warmed at the thought.

“Hey, anytime,” he responded. Drat. His voice had come out all soft and sentimental. He cleared his throat, aiming for a more casual tone. “S-So, what time can I expect you tomorrow at the Agency?”

“I suppose around 8 o'clock.”

“8 o'clock?” Phoenix yelped, grabbing the back of the couch with one hand. “In the morning? Geez, Edgeworth, do you ever sleep?”

“Not much,” Edgeworth fired back easily, but then added, “and 8 o'clock is a perfectly ordinary time to start work, Wright. Many people start their workday at 8 o'clock.”

“Yeah, but I don't...” Phoenix mumbled.

“Most of the time you don't start your workday at all.” Phoenix could envision the smirk on his stupid, beautiful face at that comment.

“Hardy-har, let's all make fun of the defense attorney who doesn't have a case right now.”

Edgeworth's quiet chuckle sounded in his ear, and the hairs on the back of Phoenix's neck stood up. “What can I say?” said the prosecutor. “I have been described as 'a real stuck-up jerk.'”

“Boy, you're never gonna let her live that one down, are you?” Phoenix muttered. Poor Ema.

“Would you rather I come in at 9?” Edgeworth continued, not answering Phoenix's rhetorical question.

“N-No, it's okay, I'll...I'll be there at 8 to let you in,” Phoenix decided. “Wouldn't want to mess up the great Miles Edgeworth's work schedule.”

“All right.” A pause. Then, quietly, hesitantly, “I...I look forward to it.”

Phoenix’s stomach flipped over. Was Edgeworth actually attempting to express feelings right now? To him? While he was sober? “M-Me too,” he breathed. “Can't wait.”

“See you then.”

“Okay,” he said. Feeling a reckless surge of bravery, he added one last thing: “Bye, Miles.”

He ended the call before Edgeworth could respond, silently telling his heart to calm down already. It had been years of this. Gathering the courage to call his best friend by his first name should not make him feel like a teenager asking someone to prom. Hearing his voice in his ear should not make him feel higher-strung than a soprano violin. Promising to be there to open the door for him at 8 in the morning should not make him feel like he was preparing for a first date.

But whatever. Miles Edgeworth always seemed to make him feel things he never thought he’d feel.

***

It was 7:30 AM on Tuesday morning, and Phoenix was looking around at his office as if seeing it for the first time.

It really was a dump. A colorful, chaotic, wonderful dump, but still...a dump. Did he really expect
Edgeworth to be able to work in these conditions?

He yawned, his eyes tearing up at the corners. Well, he only had half an hour, but he supposed he should try to do what he could about this place.

Gathering up all of Trucy's magic props, he stacked them in one corner of the room. They took up much less space when they were all grouped together. At least, that was how his sleepy brain justified the magic miscellany migration. Trucy would probably get upset if she saw how many of her props he'd moved...he resolved to move everything back to where it had been once Edgeworth had gone.

He checked his watch. 7:43. Maybe he had some time to do some dusting? Sure, why not. He grabbed some supplies from the cabinet under the bathroom sink. Well, he thought, glancing around the bathroom, at least the toilet was always polished to gleaming perfection. He caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the bathroom mirror, and winced. He looked like a mess in his rumpled white button-down and worn jeans. Clearly, Phoenix Wright was never meant to be up this early. Turning on the sink, he attempted to adjust his hair a little bit. He gave himself another once-over afterward. Better. Not by much, but...better.

He was just finishing dusting off that pointless piano when there was a knock at the door. Phoenix jolted. He tried to keep his pace even as he went to answer the door.

Miles Edgeworth was impeccably dressed, composed, and did not look any more tired than usual. He inclined his head as Phoenix stepped aside to let him in. “Good morning, Wright,” he said. He didn't sound the least bit nervous. Well, that was fine. Phoenix was plenty nervous enough for both of them.

“Morning,” he replied, feeling jumpy. He decided not to tack on Edgeworth's name. The last time he'd said his name, it had been his first name. It seemed weird to switch back to a last-name basis after he'd put himself out there, but it would have been equally uncomfortable to take a risk like that again right in front of him. He stared at the floor, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. “Uh...go ahead and have a seat anywhere,” he told his guest. “Want some coffee? Our machine's a little...temperamental, but I can usually get it to behave.”

Edgeworth sat down primly on one of the couches, his wine-red suit seeming to blend right into the color of the couch. “Coffee sounds good,” he agreed.

“Hmmm,” Phoenix said as he turned on the coffeemaker. “It's hard to tell, since you never say any more words than you need to, but...you don't seem like a morning person, Edgeworth.” When he wasn't facing the prosecutor, it was a little easier to tease him like this.

“I've been kicked out of my own office,” the other man sighed. “Of course I'm not a morning person today.”

Phoenix hesitated, still facing away from him. He pressed the button to brew the coffee. “I mean, I would think seeing a good friend would perk you up a bit,” he ventured, keeping his voice steady.

“Believe it or not, I am indeed much more energetic now than I was an hour ago,” Edgeworth informed him. Phoenix glanced over his shoulder, and caught a glimpse of the prosecutor allowing himself to slouch a little on the couch. He suppressed a grin. The idea of Edgeworth feeling comfortable enough to relax on the couch in the Agency...it was a nice feeling.

“Well,” he said, pouring some steaming-hot, freshly-brewed liquid into a mug and bringing it over to the other man, “You better drink this. If you fell asleep on me I don't think I'd have the heart to kick
Both attorneys froze up.

“N-no, that's not what I meant!” Phoenix blurted, feeling his face radiate heat. His delicate composure went belly-up like a dead goldfish. “I meant, like, 'don't fall asleep on me here man,' like, that's an expression, I-I-I didn't, I mean—”

“Wright,” Edgeworth cut him off, lifting a hand for silence. His cheeks had gone the most perfect shade of pink. “Give me the coffee. And then make some for yourself. You seem quite tired.”

Phoenix surrendered the coffee mug. He wondered which was giving off the most heat right now: the coffee, or his face? “Um, yeah, I am,” he murmured, accepting the metaphorical lifeline Edgeworth had just thrown him. He was trying to save him from that amazingly embarrassing statement. Whatever anyone else said, Miles Edgeworth was a kind, merciful man when it counted. Before he could release any other horrifyingly revealing double entendres, he shuffled off, taking the opportunity while he was faced away from Edgeworth again to get his heart under control. Good God. He was amazed Edgeworth hadn't just stood up and walked out of the office after that train wreck of a line. But then he remembered: Edgeworth wasn't here to visit him. He was here because his office was currently out of commission. And instead of letting the man work, Phoenix had unintentionally harassed him. Fantastic. How was he going to recover from this one?

Even after he'd finished pouring his own coffee, he stood facing the coffeemaker, sipping occasionally from his mug.

Eventually, a great sigh arose from the couch. “For God's sake, Wright, sit down already.”

“Okay,” he said obediently, and plopped himself on the couch across from Edgeworth, who had gotten some papers out of his briefcase. He'd also removed his glasses and placed them on the clear glass coffee table. For a while, there was silence. Occasionally Edgeworth turned a page. Phoenix abruptly realized that he had nothing to do while Edgeworth was here, unless he wanted to dig out old case files and make notes.

“Well,” he said at length, “I-I can go now, since you're pretty much settled in. I mean...I don't have much to do here today, and you seem pretty busy, so...” He trailed off, staring at the haphazard pile of magic props in the corner. Why had he thought that was a good idea? Nice going, 7:30 AM Phoenix Wright.

“I'm not going to kick you out of your own office, Wright,” Edgeworth grumbled.

“Why not? You got kicked out of yours.”

Edgeworth rolled his eyes. He counted off some pages of the file he was going through and shoved half of them over the table towards Phoenix. “Here. Highlight all the times the letters HL-4 appear on these pages.”

Phoenix blinked down at the stack of papers. “You...want me to help?” he asked, glancing up at the prosecutor.

“You've already helped by lending me your office, but if you're going to mope around feeling bored, I may as well give you something to do,” Edgeworth said mildly, turning another page. “Bored” wasn't exactly the word Phoenix would have used, but his point was well taken.

“Okay,” the defense attorney said, shooting his friend a smile. “I'd be glad to help. But, y'know, if
you ever need a quieter workspace, just let me know and I can, uh...step out for lunch, or whatever. I
know you value your solitude.” He grabbed one of the highlighters Edgeworth had put on the coffee
table and dragged the bright yellow tip over the top of page 7.

Edgeworth paused in the middle of turning a page. “You aren't mistaken in saying that, but you're
not taking one thing into account,” he said. His voice was smooth, but Phoenix detected a hint of
something underneath, as if nervousness was only being covered by a thin layer of poise. But
perhaps that was wishful thinking.

“Well, go ahead, mighty Chief Prosecutor,” Phoenix goaded him. “What am I failing to consider?”
He glanced up to smirk at him challengingly, but was surprised to see that Edgeworth's face was a
little flushed again.

The prosecutor cleared his throat and opened up another folder, holding it way higher up than it
needed to be, as if trying to hide his face. “I may value my solitude,” Edgeworth said quietly, “but I
also value your company.”

A sparkler crackled in Phoenix's chest, a small, sputtering, joyful light. He couldn't help the wide
grin that spread over his face. “Thanks, Edgeworth,” he said, voice warm with sincerity. Edgeworth
flicked his eyes up to meet Phoenix's, and the ghost of a returning smile flitted across his face as well.

Phoenix had just highlighted the letters HL-4 for the sixth time (HL-4 turned out to be an as-yet
unsolved case of recent serial kidnappings...pretty scary stuff, Phoenix thought) when a thought
occurred to him. “Hey, Edgeworth,” he started.

“What,” the prosecutor said. He turned his page over.

“How come you didn't just bring your work home? Wouldn't that have been easier?”

Edgeworth shuffled his papers a little longer than he needed to. He uncapped his highlighter, but
didn't move to use it. “I didn't want to drive all the way home.”

“But...” Phoenix's brow furrowed in thought. “It's farther to the Agency from the Prosecutor's Office
than it is to your place, right?”

“Traffic's bad,” said the other man shortly, re-capping his unused highlighter.

“But it's really early. There aren't that many people on the road around this time.”

“My car's been acting up.”

Phoenix sat up straighter, alarmed. “It is? Why didn't you tell me before? Is it all right to be driving
around with Trucy in? Shouldn't you get it rep—”

“Are you completely obtuse, Phoenix?” Edgeworth burst out suddenly, letting the folder he'd been
holding drop onto the table with a *thwap*. “Do I really have to spell it out for you why I chose to do
my work here, even knowing what a circus this place usually is?” His brows were drawn together.
His cheeks were dusted pink. His gray eyes had slight dark circles under them, making him look
perpetually tired. His bangs were just a little crooked, which Phoenix hadn't noticed before.

“Apparently you do have to spell it out, because I don't unders...” Suddenly Phoenix stopped short.
He mentally rewound the prosecutor's words. “Wait,” he said. “What did you just say?”

“This place is a circus.”
“No, no, before that,” the defense attorney prompted, resting his palms on his knees and looking at the other man intently. “You said...” His heart thudded. “You said, ‘are you completely obtuse...’” He felt a giddy grin spread from ear to ear. “... *Phoenix.*”

Edgeworth looked like someone had told him there was a ghost behind him. Well, if he believed in ghosts, that's how he'd look, anyway. “N...No I didn't,” he said, burying his nose in another folder.

“Yes you did!” Phoenix insisted, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice.

“Go get another mug of coffee, Wright; you're still half-asleep,” Edgeworth muttered lamely.

“Edgeworth, we've known each other for over two decades. It's okay if you want to call me by my first name,” Phoenix said, coaxingly.

“Me?!” the prosecutor exclaimed, closing the file and flinging it onto the cushion next to him. He was blushing, and Phoenix thought it was precious. “You're the one who ended a phone call with *my* first name!”

It was Phoenix's turn to blush now. “Well, I...” He had no idea how to finish that sentence. He sunk back into the couch, suddenly timid again. He thought for a moment. “Well, I... I'm still waiting on that explanation,” he finally finished. *Nice save, Phoenix,* he thought.

“Explanation?” Edgeworth raised his eyebrows.

“You said you had to spell out why you chose to work here instead of at home or, y'know, anyplace quieter,” the defense attorney reminded him.

Miles—wait, no, Edgeworth, dammit—sighed and massaged his temples. Phoenix waited patiently. Edgeworth finally grabbed his folded glasses and started buffing them with a cloth from his pocket, looking at them intently instead of at Phoenix. He then put the glasses back on the table. Had he just polished them to have something to fidget with? “I... wanted to...” The prosecutor trailed off into words that were so quiet that Phoenix blinked and just leaned forward.

“What?”

Edgeworth glared at him. “I chose to come here because I just wanted to see you, Phoenix Wright!” he exploded.

The room was quiet, for several long seconds. The defense attorney stared at the prosecutor, who stared at the floor through the coffee table.

Phoenix was, of course, the first to open his mouth again to speak. How should he play this? Should he respond as earnestly as Miles had just done, or should he try to help him save face by making a joke? No; he couldn't make light of that. Not now. For Edgeworth, such a statement was as upfront as it got. He hadn't come here out of necessity after all. He had come here because he had wanted to be with him, Phoenix Wright. Alone. He felt as if he'd finally found the right prescription at the eye doctor's: the frustratingly blurry sight reading chart had rapidly come into sharp focus. He could see everything clearly now.

“You don't need an excuse to come see me, Miles Edgeworth,” he finally said. He intended it to sound a little teasing, but it had come out more gentle. Edgeworth hazarded a glance up at him, but the sappy smile on Phoenix's face must have been truly cloying, because he immediately groaned and sank his forehead into his palm, hiding his face.

“You're the worst,” Miles told him.
“So I've heard,” Phoenix responded, grinning at the memory of how that voicemail had started out.

“I walked right into that one,” Miles admitted, still covering his eyes, then jumped as a hand gently pried his own away from his face. Phoenix had sat down on the other couch next to him before the prosecutor had realized it. He was turned to the side to face the prosecutor, and unknowingly, Miles twisted in his seat to mirror the position.

“What...what are you doing,” stammered Miles, leaning backward away from the defense attorney, eyes searching anywhere but the face of the man looking at him. Despite this apparent frantic behavior, he made no attempt to pull his hand out of Phoenix's grasp.

“Don't hide yourself from me anymore,” Phoenix said. “You're always hiding. We're always hiding. What are we so afraid of?” He'd been leaning closer, and though Edgeworth was almost as red as his suit, he did not move away.

Instead, his slate-gray eyes finally met Phoenix's. “I'm afraid of everything about this,” he said, darting his gaze away again. His words were quieter than a whisper.

“It's just me,” Phoenix said. “There's nothing to be afraid of. Miles, look at me.”

He did. Phoenix felt his heart stop, and then kick into overdrive. Those gray eyes were dark, light irises swallowed in widened pupils and framed by jet-black lashes. He could feel Miles's racing pulse when he ran his fingers over the other man's wrist, interlaced their fingers. When he finally moved that extra bit and rested his forehead against the other's, he could feel how flushed and warm Miles was, and Phoenix smiled. Here he'd been thinking that he was the only one who went into a tizzy when they were close...it was quite satisfying to discover otherwise.

“Stop smirking,” Miles demanded, though without any force behind his words.

“Make me,” Phoenix smirked wider, but he tried to convey a second message with his searching eyes: This is up to you. I'm never going to force you.

Miles' eyes bored into Phoenix's, and he thought he got the return message: You don't have to force me. “I have to make you, huh?” the prosecutor repeated, tilting his head.

He did.

Phoenix certainly couldn't smirk anymore. He couldn't do anything but feel. In that moment, it was as if years of monochrome memories were replaced with brilliant color. From the days of watching the black-and-white newsprint sprawl across the page, his head filling with white noise wondering what had ever happened to Miles Edgeworth to turn him into a Demon Prosecutor; to seven dark years during which only two people ever really understood him; every memory seemed to lead up to this moment, which brought them all together and painted them with colors he had never seen until now.

He gripped Miles' hand tight, absentmindedly moving his thumb up and down the side of the other's index finger, a soothing touch. His other hand came up to trace the side of Miles' face with his fingertips, moving from his temple to his jawline. Miles responded by pulling away to suck in a breath before cradling Phoenix's head in his own free hand and bringing their mouths together again. Stars shot across the dark sky behind Phoenix's eyelids, red and blue and gold. He pressed his lips insistently against every touch, wanting Miles to understand how long he'd been waiting for this.

When they broke apart, their eyes met. Miles' irises were just a thin silver ring around his wide-blown pupils now, and they looked even darker when his eyes were half-lidded like that. His mouth was slightly open as he caught his breath, and feeling the puffs of air so close to him made Phoenix
want to capture him in another kiss. He restrained himself, though, as he was short of breath himself.

He should say something, he thought suddenly. You can't just kiss the guy you've been in love with for decades like 5 times and not say something meaningful afterward. But what should he say?

“Thank you for trusting me”? “You have no idea how long I have wanted to do that”? “I have never loved the taste of coffee more than right now”? 

Instead of any of these romantic sentiments, what he blurted out was “Wow.”

Miles just nodded. “Wow,” he agreed, and leaned close to him again. Phoenix let his eyes fall closed, and met him halfway.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Apollo dines with giggly girls. Miles interviews a bulldog.

(Also, I dunno if unsolved cases get a letter/number code designation, even in-universe, but I couldn't find any info on it online, so let's just say they do.)
Chapter Summary

Apollo dines with giggly girls. Miles interviews a bulldog.

Chapter Notes

I thought about writing an April Fool's Day chapter in which either ridiculous or bad things happen, but I realized that a) plenty of ridiculous things already happen in this story and b) I don't have the heart to be that cruel to all you wonderful people. So here, have your ordinary ol' chapter. Happy Easter, everyone!!

See if you can figure out where everyone is eating in the first half of the chapter... ;D As for the second half... please forgive me if the crime plot is contrived, predictable, boring, stupid, or any combination thereof. I've done my best and spent an inordinate amount of time thinking about this thing (like, the kind of extensive thinking where you just think and think until your brain hurts and you've been staring at an open planning document for literally four hours) but the fact is that since I'm not planning on writing any courtroom battles, there's only so many twists I can pull here, haha. As a result, the crime plot is rather more straightforward than I'd initially planned... But really, it's only there to pad all the fluff anyway. Why must I have a complexity addiction? Why must I assign meaning to every little thing?? (Oh right, because I'm a fangirl.)

(Also, I've broken 150 pages in the story by now! I'm in Chapter 11. I better get moving and write more, haha...)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were so many ways Apollo could be spending his Friday night back home in the States. He could be going to a movie. Or taking a long, hot shower. Or checking in with Nahyuta with a phone call.

Instead, he was hanging out with a bunch of girls, being forced to chaperone his former boss's daughter as she dragged him to a restaurant with the rest of her “club.”

He was pretty good at deflecting similar requests most of the time. Usually, whenever Trucy tried to bring up the “Project,” he'd suddenly get a convenient phone call or feel the sudden need to go home and take a nap. He became especially fake-busy on Friday evenings, when all those gossiping girls would gather at the Agency to discuss their nefarious plots. But this week, since Prosecutor Edgeworth had needed to use Mr. Wright's office for work, the girls had been unable to use the Agency for their “meeting.” Trucy had suggested Maya's favorite burger joint as an alternate meetup spot, and everyone had agreed. Everyone except him.

He'd really tried to get out of it. Please don't include me on these group texts anymore, guys, he'd texted. I told you before, I want no part of this conspiracy, and I am an adult who has his own life to worry about.
polly, u haven't been to a single meeting!!! Trucy had responded.

That's right, and I intend to keep it that way, he'd shot back.

meanie... u'll regret this, was the ominous reply.

Minutes later, he'd gotten a text from someone different.

Hi, Apollo! Trucy's really down that she can't use the Agency for her magic rehearsal,— ha! Was that what she called it to other people?!— so I was wondering if you'd help me out by taking her to meet her friends. This serial kidnapping case is a doozy, and I think Edgeworth would really appreciate a quiet work space right now.

Then why didn't he just go home, Apollo wondered. Not that he had to wonder too much. He wasn't completely blind. No, on the contrary, he had a rather excellent pair of eyes.

Can't she take the bus? he'd tried.

Ordinarily I'd say yes, but...it's Friday night, and helping out with all this paperwork about the kidnappings is kind of freaking me out, as a responsible parent.

Apollo sighed and rolled his eyes. Can't you go with her, then?

She insisted that I would embarrass her, Mr. Wright texted back. She also said the tricks she was working on were top-secret and I absolutely could not see them before they were ready. :( 

Ugh. A grown man using a frowny face emoticon. Sadly, even the little text representation of Mr. Wright's disappointed face made Apollo's heart clench. Well, at least he wasn't trying to foist Trucy off on him just to spend more time with Mr. Edgeworth.

Fine, he finally said back. But if she ruins another one of my ties performing a trick, I'm sending you the bill.

Please do! Thanks, Apollo!!

So here he was. At this dumb table in this dumb restaurant with all the dumb, colorful walls and booths. He sighed and stared at his salad. Trucy was sitting next to him, practically bouncing with excitement as she waited for her fellow club members to arrive. They'd asked for three extra glasses of water for the others, which were sweating condensation all over the table.

Athena was the first addition to show up. She slid into the red-and-black booth across from Trucy. “Hey guys! Am I early, or...?”

“Nah, everyone else is just late!” Trucy giggled. She pushed a plate of mozzarella sticks towards Athena. “I got appetizers!”

“I love these things!” the young attorney exclaimed, grabbing one of the little fried snacks and dipping it in the cup of marinara sauce. She popped the stick in her mouth, and then made a choked little yelping sound, opening her mouth a little to fan her tongue with her hand. “'Es hah!’” she complained.

“Oh, yeah... I guess they are still pretty hot,” Trucy said. “I haven't eaten any yet 'cause they were steaming so much.”

Athena must have been hungry, because she bravely swallowed the first bite of the mozzarella stick.
and then bit into it again anyway. “So, we're still waiting on Maya and Pearl, then?” she said, talking with her mouth full. Not even molten mozzarella or scalding marinara sauce could stand in the way of Athena Cykes and her endless chatter.

“Yup,” Trucy agreed, scanning the menu laying on the table. “We can't start without them, since so much happened this week.”

“Oh yeah, what with Prosecutor Edgeworth using Mr. Wright's office all week,” said Apollo's former colleague. “I'm sure you've got quite a scoop for us.”

A mischievous gleam came to Trucy's dark blue eyes, and her mouth quirked up on one side. Her expression was like the one she wore when she was about to pull something seemingly impossible out of those oversized bloomers. *Wait'll you see THIS*, that expression always seemed to say. “Maybe,” was all she said, though, her tone mock-innocent.

“We're here!” came Maya's voice from the entrance, and the three at the table turned to watch Ms. Maya Fey and Pearl Fey make their way to the booth. Pearl seated herself next to Trucy, and Athena slid over to allow Maya to sit down beside her on the other side of the table. “Man, I haven't been here in forever!” said the older spirit medium, grabbing her menu and looking over it eagerly.

“Um, actually... we were just here two weeks ago, Mystic Maya,” Pearl reminded her politely.

“Yeah!” Maya nodded. “Like I said! Forever!” She put a finger on the burger she probably intended to order, and then fixed her dark-gray eyes on Apollo. “Speaking of things we haven't seen in forever...”

“I'm not a thing,” protested Apollo. “And you saw me at Thanksgiving.”

“You're not a fan of having fun, are you, Apollo?” Maya asked, lifting an eyebrow teasingly.

“Wh...yes I am!” Apollo said, offended. “Maybe you and I just have different definitions of 'fun'!”

Maya giggled. “You react almost the same way Nick always did when I used to tell him he was a stuffy old man back in the day.”

“D-Did that happen a lot?...” Apollo asked faintly.

“Oh, yes, it did,” Pearl confirmed, nodding. “It still does.” Poor Mr. Wright, Apollo thought. Accused of being an old man in his twenties, and now still being accused of it in his thirties.

“Anyway,” Trucy said, grabbing a mozzarella stick, “Now that everyone is here, I move that we start this meeting.” She dipped the appetizer in the sauce. “All in favor, say 'aye.'

“Aye,” said three other people. Then they all looked at the fourth other person. Glared, even.

Apollo sighed and slumped. “Aye,” he muttered reluctantly.

“As you all know,” Trucy began in between munching, “Mr. Edgeworth has been at the Wright Anything Agency practically all week, from early morning to about 6 o'clock at night. Since I'm at school and Athena is out helping to talent-scout during the school year...” Here she glanced at Apollo. There was something almost accusing in her eyes. “...And Apollo never wants to help us out with any of this, I'm afraid I can't speak as to what they do all day. But one thing is certain: People don't spend that much time together if they don't want to!” She leaned back in the booth, crossing her arms and looking satisfied.
“Well, they might if their office was being torn apart,” Apollo pointed out. He poked at the lettuce in his salad. Where was the waiter already? Everyone was here; he wanted to eat.

Trucy shook her head and grinned. “Mr. Edgeworth could have gone home to work if he wanted. In fact, when I asked Daddy why he didn't just work at home, Daddy went red and said 'I dunno, you'll have to ask him that one of these days.'”

“Ooooh, that sounds pretty promising,” Athena said as their waitress finally appeared.

“Is everyone ready to order?” said the girl. She had to still be a teenager. She looked a little awkward, with thick purple glasses and her sandy hair in fraying pigtails, but the smile that spread across her freckled face was genuine, a rare trait in most adults Apollo had seen. Wow, maybe he was turning into an old man, to be so jaded.

“You bet!” exclaimed the esteemed Master of the Kurain Channeling Technique. “I'll have the Banzai Burger, and could I add bacon to it?”

“Sure!” their waitress—Maizy, her name tag said—chirped. She scrawled it down, and then turned to Athena. “And what will you have, miss?”

“Wellll...” Athena drew the word out, flipping through the pages of the menu. Apollo wondered if she'd filled up on too many mozzarella sticks. But then her blue eyes rested on the Wraps page. “Aha! I think I'll have the BLTA Croissant,” she said, folding the menu closed decisively.

“Okay...” The girl jotted it down. “And for you, sir?” She turned her attention to Apollo.

“Um...” He scanned the menu rapidly, having forgotten to decide on his order. “I'll go with the California Chicken burger, I guess.”

Maizy scribbled that down, too. “Okay! What about you, Miss Silk Hat?” she asked Trucy.

“Teriyaki Chicken, please!” Trucy answered right away, giggling a little at the waitress's nickname for her.

“All right, and for you, young lady?” the waitress asked, indicating Pearl with a bright tone one might use to address an elementary schooler.

Pearl winced a little, but made no comment. “Well...I think I'd like to try the, um...Arctic Cod fish and chips...?” Her voice sounded uncertain.

“Are you sure? We have a Kids' Menu!” Maizy informed her.

“I'm quite sure; thank you, Miss,” Pearl mumbled forlornly, staring at the table.

“All righty then!” said Maizy, holding out her hand to accept the menus that Trucy had just gathered up. “Any drink orders, or is the water fine?” she asked, pointing to the glasses of ice water with her pen.

“Water is fine,” said four fifths of the table. “Poppin' Purple Lemonade, please!” said the remaining one-fifth. They all looked at Maya. “What?” she said, looking around at them all with a little embarrassment. “She asked...”

Maizy was unfazed. She jotted down this last bit of information and gave them all a friendly smile. “Okay then! I'll be right back with your lemonade, and I'll let you know how long the food will take!”
“Thank you, Miss Maizy,” Pearl said politely.

The waitress blinked and looked surprised, but then looked down at her name badge, realizing the answer to her own unasked question. “Y-You're welcome!” she said back, smiling even brighter before turning to head to the kitchen.

“Aww, seeing young folk hard at work like that...it does my heart good,” said Athena, watching her go with a fond smile.

“Now you're the one who sounds like an old man,” laughed Maya. She faced Trucy. “Anyway, little miss Nick Junior here was just telling us some juicy info. Your dad said to ask Mr. Edgeworth why he didn't work at home, is that right?”

Trucy clapped her hands together once, her face lighting up. “Oh, yeah! That's right.”

“And did you?” Athena prompted, rattling the ice cubes in her cup. She was probably searching for a lemon slice. She loved fishing out the lemon slice from ice water in restaurants, and then eating it. Like most of the people in his life, Athena Cykes was a little strange.

“I sure did!” the magician sang. “I asked him on Wednesday. I said, 'wouldn't it be quicker for you to just go home after you drop me off?' And he said 'Well, I can't very well have your father waiting around for me to come back to the office; he'd be agitated if I didn't say good-bye.'”

Pearl sighed and cupped her cheeks with her hands, as if listening to an emotional love poem rather than...whatever the heck this was. “He didn't want to go home without saying good bye to Mr. Nick...!” She was practically swooning. Apollo rolled his eyes and stabbed a piece of spinach with his fork.

Trucy was nodding enthusiastically, though. “Yeah, and then I asked, 'How come you don't just bring your work home with you, Mr. Edgeworth' and he said real quietly, 'Not you, too.'”

“'Not you, too?'” Maya repeated, bringing her hand to her chin in thought. “What does that mean...?”

“I think he was saying that Daddy had asked him the same question,” Trucy replied.

“So the real question is, if that's the case, how did he respond when Mr. Wright asked that?” Athena wondered, tapping her earring in that way she always did when she was thinking something over.

“He probably said something really nice, like 'I came here because I wanted to see you,' or 'I'd much rather be here with you than at home all alone!'” Pearl said dreamily, staring off into the distance with her pink cheeks still resting in her hands. She was apparently still engrossed in her fantasy.

Everyone else present exchanged looks, and then burst out laughing. Even Apollo couldn’t suppress a chuckle behind his hand. Pearl looked around at everyone, hurt written all over her face. “What?” she said. “What did I say that was so funny?”

“Pearl, Pearl, Pearl,” Maya said, shaking her head and making her top-knot bob around. “The idea of that is pretty cute, but let's be realistic here: This is Mr. Edgeworth, Ice King Extraordinaire we're talking about.”

“It could happen!” Pearl insisted. She may have been tiny, but she looked like she was ready to fight anyone who challenged her delusions of romance, her dainty hands curled into fists atop the table.

“Sure, sure,” Athena said. “And then the Judge will take up ballet. And Larry Butz will get a stable job and a steady girlfriend.”
“Well that's a bit cruel,” Apollo said with a frown. But he had to admit, privately, that all those things did indeed seem to be the same level of impossible.

“I'm sure Mr. Edgeworth is just shy,” Pearl said, her lower lip sticking out a little. “He probably acts much different when he's alone with the person he loves...” She looked away, that dreamy expression coming over her face again.

“Well, I guess we'll never know that unless we make some progress here,” Maya said.

“Progress?” Athena repeated.

“Well yeah! Isn't that what we're here to discuss?” Maya responded, then pausing to accept the drink that Maizy had returned to give her. It was served in a strangely-shaped, lopsided-looking glass, but it did look pretty tasty. “Oh, thanks Maizy!”

“Of course!” said the waitress with another grin. “The food will be out in about 15 minutes. Let me know if there's anything else you need!” she chirped before trotting off again, her pigtails bouncing.

“Anyway,” continued Maya. “They're never going to make progress on their own. We need to inspire some progress.” She winked mischievously, and Apollo got a horrible feeling, much like the one he had gotten when Trucy had volunteered him to help her with her Sawing-The-Lovely-Assistant-In-Half trick.

“And...how do we do that?” Pearl asked the question Apollo dared not ask.

“Well, Christmas will be here in a few weeks,” Maya went on. She stopped to suck down approximately a third of her drink in one gulp. “And, as we all know, it's a very romantic time of year.” Personally, the word Apollo would have used was “cold,” but he supposed “romantic” wasn't exactly wrong.

“That's true,” Pearl agreed. “There are lots of nice songs on the radio about spending Christmas with your special someone. I like the one about building a snowman and sitting by the fireplace.”

“Yes, but I'm thinking about something even easier to stage than romantic Christmas songs,” Maya said dramatically, curling both hands into fists on top of the table much like her cousin had a few moments ago. “Something we can all work together to put in place! Something rooted in centuries of tradition! Something they can't avoid!” She looked so fired up that Apollo half-expected her hair bun to suddenly ignite like a candle flame.

“Please get to the point,” he said, crossing his arms.

Maya frowned at him. “Fiiine,” she sighed, sinking back against her seat. Her voice sounded deflated now. “I'm talking about mistletoe.”

“Missile tow...?” Pearl sounded out, biting her thumb and looking unsure. Occasionally, the small spirit medium still surprised everyone with the gaps in her ever-increasing knowledge of the outside world. She'd understand things like websites or department stores, but things like Halloween or mistletoe would somehow slip between the cracks.

“It's a plant associated with the holiday season,” Trucy clarified gently. She never judged Pearl at times like this, but always patiently explained the things her friend didn't understand. “When two people end up beneath a sprig of mistletoe, they're supposed to kiss, traditionally.”

“Oh!” Pearl exclaimed, a hand flying to her mouth. Her cheeks flushed. “I-I suppose that would be quite effective!”
“So that's why you've been stopping by to put up decorations so often lately!” Trucy realized, widening her eyes at Maya. Indeed, the spirit medium had been dropping in almost every day to add more “holiday cheer” to their office. Apollo hadn't known her intentions would be this...sinister.

“But would they really do it just because we ambush them with mistletoe?” Athena said doubtfully, tapping her earring again and looking away contemplatively. “I mean, it's not like we can force them...”

“Which is why we'll have to put up so much mistletoe that eventually they just give up and resign themselves to their fate!” Maya said, triumphant. She stirred her drink, diffusing the purplish syrup floating at the top.

“Giving up and resigning to your fate doesn't sound very romantic to me,” Apollo put in.

“Do you have a better idea, Apollo?” Maya challenged, crossing her arms.

“Yeah,” Apollo said with a shrug. “We leave them alone and let them figure this out themselves.”

“Polly, I love Daddy and Mr. Edgeworth, but when it comes to stuff like this, they're super slow!” Trucy reminded him with a glare. “If we let them handle things by themselves, we'll all be old and wrinly by the time they get together!”

“It's nice that you have such faith in them,” he responded sarcastically.

Just then, Maizy made her way over wheeling a cart of food. “Here we go, everyone!” she said brightly, beginning to pass the plates around. “A Banzai Burger for the lady in purple, BLTA Croissant for the lady in yellow, California Chicken for the gentleman here, Teriyaki Chicken for the young magician, and Arctic cod fish and chips for the little pink lady!”

“Thanks, Maizy! This all looks great!” Maya said excitedly, picking up her burger.

“You're welcome! Let me know if you need anything else, folks,” she said before bustling off.

“She's nice,” Trucy said, and then looked up at Apollo and smiled innocently. “Be sure to give her a nice tip, Polly!”

“Trucy,” he responded evenly, “You are absolutely insane if you think I am paying for all of you here.”

Trucy pouted. “I just said you should handle the tip, not the whole bill...”

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her. “You were angling to get me to pay for everyone. You can't fool me.” He bit into his chicken burger. It was delicious, of course, though he could have done without all the mayo.

The magician slumped in her seat. “Stingy,” she grumbled. Apollo snorted. As if he'd let himself get stuck paying for all these ridiculously expensive burgers!

“So this is why you wanted me to come back home,” he sighed in a melodramatic tone. “To make me pay for your meals.”

“Of course not, Mr. Apollo!” Pearl said earnestly. “We missed you! You're very important to us!” She looked devastated that Apollo could think such a thing.

“It's okay, Pearl; Apollo's just joking,” Trucy assured her friend, patting her on the back.
“Yeah, don't worry about it, Pearl,” Apollo agreed, although Pearl's words had caused about half of his insides to turn to mush. It was kind of nice to hear stuff like that once in a while...

“So,” said Maya, chomping on her burger voraciously. Apollo sincerely hoped she didn't inhale that toothpick they put in the bun to hold it together. “Besides the Mistletoe Mischief Mission, what else can we do around Christmas time?”

“Maybe we can get them to relax by a fire!” Pearl suggested.

“I'm pretty sure the only time Mr. Edgeworth cares about fire is when he's in charge of an arson case,” Trucy deflected with a grimace. “And I don't think I've ever seen him relax on purpose.”

“Hmmm...” Pearl agreed with a disappointed hum.

“We could arrange a Secret Santa gift exchange,” Athena put in. “And make sure they draw each other's names.”

“You mean rig it?” Trucy said. She seemed a little too excited about the idea.

“I guess...” Athena said, sounding a little uncomfortable with the wording.

“I like it!” Maya nodded. She went to sip more of her lemonade, only to discover that it was just ice in her glass. She frowned and put the cup aside.

“Excuse me, but why is the Santa a secret?” Pearl asked timidly.

“Secret Santa is when everyone puts their names into a hat—or any kind of container—and draws a name. Whoever they draw, they have to get a present or presents for anonymously,” Athena explained. “Usually, the Secret Santa also leaves clues about who they are, and on the last day of the exchange, they reveal their identity to the person they've been getting gifts for.”

“It's like a mystery!” Pearl said, her voice filled with wonder. “That sounds perfect for them! I'm sure they would leave each other very nice notes...” She smiled. Apollo wasn't so sure. Mr. Wright would only have to read one note that said “Wright: I got you this gift card to Lordly Tailor. Please select a nicer tie. Regards, your Secret Santa” to figure out who was sending him presents. Still, he thought, chewing on some pickles, it was a better idea than the whole mistletoe thing.

“Would that mean we would actually have to get presents for each other as well, then, to go along with the Secret Santa thing?” he asked.

“Well of course,” Trucy said. “It would be silly if the Secret Santa was just between two people!”

“What I mean is,” Apollo clarified, sipping his water, “If we're rigging the Secret Santa, we'd put just Mr. Wright's and Mr. Edgeworth's names in the hat, right?” Everyone nodded. “But if we participate, we'd end up drawing their names too. So shouldn't we all do a separate drawing beforehand?”

Everyone stared at him.

“What?” he said defensively. “I may not be into this whole matchmaking thing, but I can still point out flaws in a plan, guys!”

“Polly's right!” Trucy decided. “All right, then, everyone, tear off a piece of your straw wrappers! We're having a Secret Santa drawing right now!” She lifted her hat slightly off her head and pulled out some pencils from under it. Apollo didn't ask how. He had stopped asking years ago. She distributed the pencils, and everyone wrote their names on the straw wrappers and folded them.
“Um,” Pearl spoke up, “is it all right if I add someone else's name to the drawing? She's a club member too, but I haven't had the chance to introduce her to everyone here yet...” She bit her lip a little anxiously, but it wasn't hard to see the hope in her big gray eyes.

“Yeah, definitely put Kay in the drawing!” Trucy encouraged her. “Even though she couldn't be here tonight, it's like she'll have been here in spirit!”

Athena leaned forward with interest. “Kay, huh? So that's the name of your mysterious friend, Pearl?”

“Yes!” Pearl confirmed, nodding excitedly. She cut a small piece of her fish with her fork and knife and popped it daintily into her mouth. She did not resume talking until she had finished chewing, of course. “She might seem a little strange at first, but she really is a very nice person, and she cares a whole lot about Mr. Edgeworth!”

“Can't wait to meet her!” Athena said brightly, giving her traditional mile-wide smile.

“But wait, how is Kay going to draw a name?” Apollo asked.

“I'll draw an extra one, and give it to her later,” Pearl suggested.

“That works,” Maya nodded.

“Everyone done writing their names?” Trucy took off her hat (no pencils fell out of it, Apollo noted...he reminded himself again that he had given up trying to understand stuff like that) and held it out over the middle of the table upside-down. Everyone dropped their straw wrapper pieces into it.

“All righty, here we go~” Trucy sang. She threw the hat into the air, rolled it down her arm, spun it upside-down on the tip of her finger, and then grabbed it by the brim to flip it right-side up again. She shook it a few times and then showed them the empty inside of the hat. “Ta-daaa! They're gone!”

Apollo groaned, covering his eyes with his hand. “Trucy, we need the papers to be able to draw them. This isn't a magic trick.”

“Oh. Right,” Trucy said, chuckling a little sheepishly. She flipped the hat in the air again, and after it spun in the air and she’d caught it again, she held it out to everyone so they could grab the straw papers, which were somehow now in the hat again. Don't think about it, don't think about it, Apollo repeated to himself as he reached into the hat.

He unfolded the straw wrapper and read: TRUCY. Okay. He could pick something out for her, no problem.

“Yay, I got Pearly!” Maya exclaimed.

“I got Kay!” Pearl said, surprised.

“Apollo?” said Athena, staring at her straw paper in disappointment. “Aww, I wanted to get Trucy.”

“Well, you're out of luck,” said Trucy, leaning over to peer at Apollo's straw paper. “Apollo got me.”

Apollo stared at them for a long, silent moment. “...Are you guys for real?!” he finally shouted. “It's called Secret Santa! How is this supposed to be secret?!”

“Oh, Right,” Trucy said, chuckling a little sheepishly. She flipped the hat in the air again, and after it spun in the air and she’d caught it again, she held it out to everyone so they could grab the straw papers, which were somehow now in the hat again. Don't think about it, don't think about it, Apollo repeated to himself as he reached into the hat.

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“Oops,” said Maya. She shrugged. “Well, this was only so we could play along with the real
“So who did Kay get, Pearl?” Athena asked.

“Oh!” Pearl unfolded “Kay's” straw paper. “She got Athena!” she declared, smiling brightly.

Apollo covered his face again. “I can't believe this...” he groaned.

“Oh, don't be such a baby, Polly,” Trucy chided him, giving his shoulder a little shove. “This way we don't have to spend a lot of time trying to figure out what we all want. We can just ask each other.” She faced Maya. “Hey Maya, what do you want for Christmas?”

“I want Nick and Edgeworth to kiss under some mistletoe,” Maya replied immediately.

“Hey Maya, what do you want for Christmas that I can actually get you?” Trucy revised.

Maya pouted. “You could at least try...”

“Sorry; I just don't think it's going to happen that easily,” said Trucy, a little regretfully.

“Well, I bet any of you that they're gonna be a couple by the time Christmas rolls around!” Maya proclaimed, looking around at them all in challenge.

“How much are we betting?” Apollo shot back. Maya was always saying stuff like this, but she never seemed to put her money where her mouth was.

Maya leaned forward, bracing both hands on the table as she gripped it. “Two. Hundred. Dollars,” she intoned slowly, narrowing her eyes.

Apollo reeled backward, his back hitting the pleather of the booth. “Are you serious?!”

“I have never been more serious about anything in my life...except maybe that idea for the Plumed Punisher/Steel Samurai crossover special,” she replied, her mouth set in a determined line.

“That's pretty dang serious,” Trucy murmured in awe.

Apollo did some quick thinking. He had about 4 and a half more weeks of vacation here, Christmas was a mere three weeks away, and he could always use some extra spending money... This would be the easiest $200 he'd ever made!

He stuck his hand out across the table. “You're on,” he said.

Maya's glare was as steely as her beloved Samurai. “You're going down, Apollo Justice,” she said as she accepted his hand.

“Didn't you know? Justice always prevails,” he retorted with a smirk, giving her a firm shake before releasing her hand.

“But...what if Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth become a couple but don't tell anyone?” Pearl asked, her eyebrows drawn together in worry. “How will we know who won?”

Trucy scoffed. “Pearl, please. I am a professional. If Daddy and Mr. Edgeworth got together, I'd be the first to know.”
If Miles had thought Phoenix was a clingy friend, he was even more clingy as...whatever he was now.

He staunchly refused to use the term “boyfriend.” It was juvenile and unsightly and not at all indicative of the bond he shared with Phoenix Wright. Phoenix was neither a “boy” nor just a “friend.” But Miles had no idea what term did suit them now. The connotations behind the word “lover” did not exactly apply to them at the moment, and outdated language such as “suitor” or “beau” were almost laughably inaccurate. It wasn’t as if either of them were a Southern belle being courted.

Neither of them had brought up the topic of what to call what they were. They didn't need a word for it, really, he kept telling himself. It was just the natural continuation of what they'd had before, wasn’t it?

But if he had to call Phoenix something...he supposed the term he would use was one he'd been using in reference to Phoenix for years: “partner.” He'd called him that to his face back during the Hazakura Temple case, even. At the time, he'd meant it as a way to show that he would support the defense lawyer as best he could, and that he saw the other man as an equal. He also had happened to be in love with him, but that was beside the point. Until now, anyway.

Now, he was in quite the unusual state of affairs. Due to the dismantling of his office, he had found himself spending the greater part of the day with Phoenix, who didn't have to remain there with him, of course, but who always did anyway to offer his assistance (and, at times, his unneeded commentary on the work). Obviously, Miles rather enjoyed this arrangement, but having Phoenix nearby also made it extraordinarily difficult to focus on his work. He would sit there staring at the stacks of papers, those ridiculous eyebrows of his furrowed, his ocean-blue eyes scanning the pages, his jaw set and determined. Sometimes he'd wear those button-down shirts he looked so good in, and leave a few buttons at the top undone (which Miles thought rather unfair, really). And if he watched him for too long, Phoenix would inevitably look up and offer him that brilliant smile that always secretly made Miles long to grab him and kiss him silly. Instead of doing that, however, he would mutter “What are you smiling at, Wright?” and return his fragile attention to his paperwork.

On one occasion like this, Phoenix had just smirked at him infuriatingly and said, “You know, you don't have to hide the fact that you're looking at me. I don't mind.” Miles didn't even dare to look back over at him. He knew the teasing look in those eyes would make it impossible to concentrate.

“Well I do,” Miles retorted. “Stop being so distracting.”

“I'm just sitting here.”

“Yes, exactly,” he growled, turning a page violently, “Sitting there with your clothes a mess and—and that atrocious posture.”

“What, you wanna help me correct it?” he purred, and when Miles looked up at him, Phoenix had the audacity to waggle his eyebrows. At him. Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth.

Damn it, he wanted to correct it. But what he muttered instead was, “There's a lot about you that needs correcting, Wright.”

Phoenix made that pouty face he knew was an effective weapon against Miles. “That's not very nice...”

“I'm not a very nice man.”
“Yes you are.”

“You are the only person who thinks that.”

“Then everyone else is blind,” Phoenix said decisively. When Miles looked up at him, he looked so intent about this point that Miles felt embarrassingly melty inside. He did not deserve this man. Not even close. He looked away, continuing to make notes on the case file.

“I know that look,” Phoenix said warningly.

“What 'look' might that be?” was Miles' innocent reply.

“That's the 'I'm being hard on myself' look,” the other man observed, crossing his arms sternly. “Stop it.”

All right, enough of this. He glanced up again and decided to turn Phoenix's words from Tuesday morning back on him. “Make me.”

“Thought you'd never ask,” Phoenix said in a relieved voice, instantly rising from the couch and reaching for him.

Indeed, he then found it hard to continue thinking self-loathing thoughts. He found it hard to continue thinking at all, in fact.

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And so it was that on Monday morning, Miles Edgeworth was (for the first time) reluctant to go back to his office. This... thing he had with Wright was still fragile and new, and having so much time to let it develop had been...nice. He was happy, which was rather a foreign feeling to him. But Miles wasn't exactly an expert at being in a relationship, and so he was unsure of how to arrange to spend time with Phoenix when work was not involved. And of course, being around him all the time had made it rather difficult to remain focused on his work. No, this was for the best, he thought as he turned the knob to his office's door. He flicked on the lights.

His office was stark, empty and cold, much like the Chief Prosecutor himself had once been. It had none of the warmth and friendliness Wright's Agency had. But he wasn't here to feel warm and friendly; he was here to work. He made his way to his desk and set down his briefcase on top of it, then rounding to the other side of the desk to take his usual seat.

The case that most demanded his attention these days was that of the serial kidnappings that had begun about a month ago. Police had, until quite recently, still been trying to figure out if indeed this was a serial kidnapping, or merely a spate of kidnappings by different individuals. But Miles thought it had to be the latter; they were occurring too closely together to be just a coincidence and eyewitnesses all reported similar things. About one girl disappeared per week. Thus far, the only thing the abductees had in common was that they were all seventeen.

He shuffled through some papers, looking for the witnesses' statements he had grouped together. All witnesses reported seeing an orange pickup truck, which should have been very easy to find, but regrettably no one had been able to catch a license plate number. Perhaps the culprit was driving about without plates? No, Miles thought; surely that would make them even more conspicuous. The culprit's description was different every time: once he had been spotted in a red flannel shirt and jeans; the next in a sleek black business suit; the following time with a heavy coat and a winter hat. It seemed that if this was indeed the work of a single individual, he was taking great care to not leave a great impression on any casual onlookers. Because of this, the unusual sight of the orange truck was
typically the only thing witnesses remembered very well.

He flipped over to the victim profiles.

Courtney Hampton, the daughter of a florist and a civil law attorney. Last seen on a Friday, 3 and a half weeks ago. She had hazel eyes, a heart-shaped face with high cheekbones, and thick black hair that seemed to grow upwards in an almost rectangular shape. Her smile was mischievous yet sweet. It reminded Miles painfully of the one Maya Fey frequently wore.

Peri Plexus, the daughter of a paralegal and a toy shop owner. Last known appearance, Tuesday 2 weeks ago. Peri was a round-faced girl with a short bob of bright blue hair. She was grinning brightly in her school picture. It was jarring to imagine such a joyful-looking girl being kidnapped and thrown into such an unfortunate situation.

Tia Euler had been next, the child of a single father who was a former education lawyer and was currently on the school board. She had disappeared only a week ago. She was delicate-featured, large brown eyes looking even larger behind her thick glasses.

Miles squinted at the three girls’ backgrounds again, immediately seeing a connection he'd failed to make previously. Stupid, Miles scolded himself. Why didn't I see this before?!

All of their parents had careers in law. Surely this was significant. Could this mean the culprit was doing this out of hatred for lawyers? Had they been brought up on false charges, or been dissatisfied with the outcome of a case?...

He was just contemplating making a call to inform someone of his suspicions when his phone rang. “Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth speaking,” he said into his cell phone when he'd snatched it up and pressed the talk button.

“Mr. Edgeworth, sir!” came Detective Gumshoe's excitable voice. “Another kidnapping has happened! And this time there were plenty of witnesses!”

Miles sat up straighter. “Who? Where?”

“The girl's name is Maizy Conroe. She's a waitress at the burger restaurant on Sixth. She was seen being carried off by some suspicious guy in a trenchcoat at 11 o'clock last night.”

A trenchcoat? Well, that was rather cliché, Miles thought. “Orange pickup?” he prompted.

“Hoho, you bet, pal!” Gumshoe exclaimed. “And this time, one of the witnesses thinks they got a partial plate number!”

“At last,” Miles grumbled. “All right, I assume you're at the scene?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“Very well. I'll be over shortly.” He ended the call and rose from his desk. A small part of Miles was annoyed. He'd barely been here an hour, and already he'd been called away? It was no wonder the paperwork kept building up. But most of him was relieved—sitting in one place and sifting through papers was his least favorite part of his job. He much preferred to be taking action, and as Chief Prosecutor, usually all of his subordinates got to do the “action” part while he sat at a desk or flew all over the green earth.

He swung on his jacket and was just about to flick the lights off when a thought occurred to him. There was someone else who didn't get to be out in the field often enough nowadays...someone
who'd been helping him look into this very case. Would it be appropriate to contact him about this? He was the opposition, professionally. But still, he'd been a great help, and it would give him something to do (and lord knew that man needed something to do)...

He made up his mind, and pulled out his phone again. A few taps later, he listened to the phone ring before a bright voice greeted him. “Hey, I wasn't expecting a call this time of day! What's up; miss me already?” Miles swore he could almost hear him wiggling his eyebrows and grinning at him.

“Wright, there's been an incident regarding the serial kidnappings,” he rattled off, deflecting Phoenix's friendly tone. “Burger restaurant on Sixth. Will you meet me there? We have witnesses this time.”

“Absolutely. I'll be right there,” said Phoenix immediately, and then the phone clicked off. Ah, the remarkable ability to switch seamlessly between being a goofy flirt and a respectable professional. One of the many reasons Phoenix Wright was...well, important to him.

But he had no time to lose himself in thoughts like this. He shook his head and headed out of the office, closing the door behind him.

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When Miles arrived at the scene, he was somewhat startled to see that Wright was accompanied by his daughter, as well as Athena and Apollo. He approached the group cautiously, not sure how to announce his presence.

He didn't have to. Almost as if he could sense him, Phoenix whirled around just as Miles walked within 10 feet of them. He shot Miles a smile so bright it was almost...dazzling. Without meaning to, he found himself smiling a little back.

“You look happy for someone at a crime scene, pal,” Gumshoe pointed out, demonstrating his extraordinary talent to both state the obvious and ruin the atmosphere.

“Yes, well...it's about time some progress was made on this case. Perhaps I am just relieved that you can still get anything done,” he shot back, narrowing his eyes at the detective. Gumshoe's eyebrows drew up in that puppy dog expression he was so good at, and Miles instantly felt just a tiny bit bad.

“All right, point taken, sir...” he mumbled sadly, his large shoulders slumped.

“So...care to inform me why you brought the whole Agency with you, Wright?” Miles asked, quirking an eyebrow at the other man.

Phoenix looked a little sheepish. He rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably. “I...I'm not sure myself,” he admitted, glancing at his daughter questioningly. “But as soon as I said someone had been kidnapped from the burger place on Sixth, they all insisted they had to come with me.”

Trucy finally spoke up. “They took Maizy!” she exclaimed, her eyes filled with both sadness and an intense, angry fire. “When I find who did this...I'll make them disappear!” she continued, stomping her little foot.

Athena Cykes, too, looked troubled. Her robot companion, Widget, was a somber blue. “I can't believe it...we just saw her Friday night,” she said, her expression downcast as she held her arm in a gesture not unlike the one Miles himself had used to adopt whenever he felt vulnerable.

“Why would anyone want to kidnap her, though?” Apollo spoke up, crossing his arms and furrowing his brows. “She seemed so...normal.”
Trucy swatted him on the arm. “That's not nice, Apollo!”

“Ow, what? That's a compliment!” Apollo protested, rubbing his arm where Trucy had landed her blow.

“So...you all know the victim?” Miles prompted, looking around at them all.

Trucy looked evasive. “Well...sorta,” she said with a shrug.

“Trucy, if you want to help her, please tell us everything about how you know her,” Phoenix said gently, laying a hand on her shoulder.

Trucy sighed, but nodded. “Okay. So on Friday night, Maya, Pearl, Polly, Athena, and I all went to this place for dinner to talk about...” Here she cut herself off, but Miles did not miss the way her eyes darted over from her father to Miles. The prosecutor raised an eyebrow, but did not comment. He'd have to pry more out of her about that later.

“To talk about what?” Phoenix encouraged her. Miles was almost sure that Phoenix had noticed her glance, too, but perhaps he wanted to give his daughter the chance to explain on her own.

“T...To talk about my new act,” Trucy stammered, meeting Phoenix's eyes bravely.

Miles saw the way Phoenix's gaze moved around the air surrounding Trucy's head, and an old memory flashed into his mind—otherworldly chains and red-and-gold locks suddenly appearing around secretive people, a snowy temple, and a brief stint as a defense attorney.

_He must be seeing Psycholocks_, he realized. Sometimes it was hard to believe that such a thing was not just an odd dream Miles had once had.

Phoenix just looked a little disappointed. “Okay,” was all he said. “And Maizy was your waitress?”

“Yes,” Athena piped up, stepping forward a little. She seemed anxious to say something—perhaps to make up for Trucy's unwillingness to be forthcoming? “Maizy was our waitress. She was really nice, but she didn't strike me as the kind of person to have dangerous acquaintances. Her heart was really honest, and I didn't sense any duplicity in her.” She grasped her arm again, looking away. “I can't imagine why anyone would kidnap her or wish her harm...”

“The person who is doing this has a grudge against the courts,” Miles informed them, turning to Wright. “I realized it when I was looking over the other victims' backgrounds. All the girls had at least one parent with a career in law.”

Phoenix shook his head. “Why does it seem like being a lawyer is so dangerous in this world?”

Miles almost laughed. “It's not being a lawyer that's dangerous,” he said. “It's making enemies out of criminal minds. And you and I have had more than enough experience with people resenting the legal system.”

“Sure. Heck, I've definitely resented the legal system myself,” the defense attorney said with a shrug, jamming his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

“Me too,” Athena said quietly.

Miles supposed he himself should feel resentment towards the court—he'd been accused of crimes he hadn't committed and gotten in countless sticky situations due to his affiliation with the law. But he'd always seen such circumstances as being less a result of being a prosecutor and more a result of just
being...himself. Misfortune seemed to cling to Miles Edgeworth, no matter how successful he became.

“In any event,” he continued, trying to draw everyone's attention from their reminiscences on the failings of their legal system, “Where are the witnesses?”

Apollo, Phoenix, Trucy, and Athena all made varying expressions of discomfort, from grimaces to frowns and averted eyes. Miles felt an impending sense of dread. It was duty alone which forced him to ask again: “Everyone? The witnesses?”

Phoenix blew out a breath. He walked over and put a hand on Miles' shoulder, which the prosecutor tried very hard not to associate with all the other recent times Phoenix had touched him. They were in public now and Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth did not blush like a schoolboy when his childhood friend gave him a casual shoulder-touch. “Edgeworth...you're not going to like this.”

“I rarely do,” he responded, adjusting his glasses to give himself an excuse to not meet Phoenix's startlingly blue eyes.

Phoenix's mouth quirked on one side. “Yeah, but this time you're really not going to like this. Just...try to keep cool, all right? Gumshoe did his best.”

Miles felt the dread settle into the pit of his stomach. “It's not...that horrible old woman from way back when, is it?” he breathed, feeling the stirrings of genuine fear. Even now, he still got shipments of flowers on Valentine's Day and unwanted postcards and Steel Samurai memorabilia which he only hung onto because he was respectful, damn it. He had no idea how she was managing to keep it up—she had to be ancient by now, didn't she? But Miles was now convinced that Oldbag would outlive them all. It was the only thing that made sense for an eternal, destructive force of nature such as she.

At this, Phoenix actually laughed. “Oh, man. Good times,” was all he would say, pressing gently on Miles' back to lead him behind the crowd and police cars.

The prosecutor had to take a few moments to process the sight that greeted his eyes next. After all, he had never before seen a fat old lady in a black spandex bodysuit surrounded by what had to be at least twelve small dogs. As he stared, the woman, who was sitting on an outdoor bench, took a bite of a bologna sandwich, leaned over three of her wriggling dogs, and proceeded to spit out the chewed food like the most disgusting mother bird who had ever existed. The dogs wagged their poofy tails, eagerly accepting the offering. One of them licked at the corner of the old woman's lips. The woman did not push the dog away.

“Phoenix,” he murmured softly, struggling to make his mouth work. “What am I looking at?”

“These are our witnesses,” Phoenix said. “Meet Hippolyta Kuon and Bella, Stella, Ella, and...ah, forgive me, but I don't remember the names of the other fourteen.”

Miles tore his eyes away from the carnival of horror in front of him and stared fervently at Phoenix's face, hoping for any indication that this was a poorly-timed joke.

He just sighed and patted Miles' shoulder one more time before releasing him. “Sorry, Miles. It's not a bad dream or a joke. This is our biggest lead on this case right now.”

“I shouldn't have left the office,” Miles muttered. “No, never mind; I shouldn't have left my bed this morning.”

Phoenix gave him an endearing half-smile, and when he surreptitiously reached over and took Miles'
hand, the prosecutor only jumped a little bit. “If I can cross-examine a bird, you can talk to this old harpy,” he said gently, and with Phoenix’s warm hand around his, Miles almost believed it.

Miles exhaled, squared his shoulders, gave Wright's hand a brief squeeze before letting it go, and marched over to the nightmarish spectacle before him.

The old lady blinked at his approach. She was a living reminder of why no one over the age of 40 should wear pigtails. Her poofy white hair was done into small, puffy tails on either side of her head, and Miles was certain she’d chosen the hairstyle to match all the little beasts scurrying around her feet. Her lipstick was cheaper than Phoenix's old suit and more garish than the first suit Miles had ever worn to court. Her mascara was so clumpy that he was surprised her eyes didn't stick shut when she blinked them.

Seventeen little furry creatures clambered over each other to get closer to Miles, yipping and growling. Miles wrinkled his nose. These dogs had none of the dignity and grace of his dearly departed golden retriever, Pess. In her warm brown eyes he had often seen the wisdom and understanding seldom observed in those of human beings. In the beady eyes of these creatures, he saw suspicion, anger, and, most likely, hunger.

“Ms... Kuon, was it?” he forced himself to say, unsure whether to extend his hand. He then noticed that her long nails were painted black like those of her companions, and quickly decided to keep both hands in his pockets instead.

“Who wants to know?” the old lady croaked. Or barked, perhaps.

“Forgive me for not introducing myself,” he replied smoothly, bowing. “I am Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth, and for the time being I am in charge of the investigation on this case. If I may, I would like to hear your recollection of last evening’s events.”

She squinted her bleary blue eyes at him and then glanced at the defense attorney at his side. “’Sat supposed to mean something to me?” she asked as if Miles was not there.

“He’s, um, here to ask you some questions about what you saw. The girl getting carried off,” Phoenix explained, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

Hippolyta smiled a sharp-toothed smile at Phoenix, but the effect was more like a bulldog baring its teeth than an expression of friendliness. “Well, all right then. If you wanna know so bad.” She adjusted herself on the bench, turning a little to face the two of them better. “I was just across the way, there...we usually loop around the block, see, but Pepper suddenly ran off in this direction, so of course the rest followed suit. And since I hold the leashes, I was pulled along.”

“I beg your pardon for my interruption,” Miles interjected, “but...'kids'? Are there more witnesses?”

The old lady shot daggers with her eyes. “My dogs, you idiot!”

Miles wished he hadn't said anything. “Ah...yes...of course,” he mumbled weakly. At his side, Wright made a small noise which might have been a suppressed snort of laughter.

Hippolyta crossed her flabby arms and continued. “It was late at night, but the darlings insisted on going out for a stroll, and I obliged.” She looked off to the side, contemplative. “I was just across the way, there...we usually loop around the block, see, but Pepper suddenly ran off in this direction, so of course the rest followed suit. And since I hold the leashes, I was pulled along.”

Miles raised his eyebrows, surprised. “You mean to tell me that all of these dogs were leashed?”

“Of course they were! What kind of responsible owner would I be if I let my babies run around a
busy city without a leash?!” she shouted, sitting up a little to give him an unfortunate view of her waist, around which was some odd sort of belt with many leashes extending from it. A quick glance downward at the writhing mass of fur at their feet confirmed that, indeed, each of the dogs had a lead attached to its collar. The leashes had been so thin that he hadn't noticed them before. Miles still didn't quite understand how these tiny animals had pulled this woman around, no matter how many there were, but he wisely decided not to share this particular thought.

Instead, he cleared his throat. “And...the disturbance which caused the dog to run off was...?”

“Well, I guess it was the sound of a struggle? I don't know; I can't hear as well as they do,” the old woman grumbled.

“Any detail helps,” Phoenix pointed out. His tone was mild, coaxing. “What did you see when you arrived at the scene?”

The old woman stared at Wright's earnest face for a moment, her mouth set in a flat, violently-pink line. “The most obvious thing was that hideous orange truck,” she finally responded with distaste. Miles hardly thought this woman qualified as an adequate judge of what was hideous, but again kept his thoughts to himself. “It was idling right behind the restaurant.”

“You wound up behind the restaurant?” Miles asked.

“Ain't you been listening?” she said with a roll of her heavily-mascaraed eyes. “I said I saw it behind the restaurant, so yeah, I ended up behind the restaurant!” She eyed Miles up and down, scowling. “What, you got frills stuffed in your ears too or something?” Ah, yes, the classic “insult a man's jabot” tactic. It was a favorite among all of Miles' least-favorite witnesses.

“Do you mind telling us what happened when you got there?” Phoenix prompted, shooting the prosecutor a slightly amused glance.

“A man came around the corner, carrying that little waitress on his shoulder,” she replied, pursing her lips in thought. “His back was to us at first, but Dixie started barking, so he turned around.”

“Did you get a look at any distinguishing features?” asked Miles.

“It was pretty dark, but like I told the police, I think he was wearing a trenchcoat,” she said. One of the dogs stood on its hind legs and put its tiny white paws on her knee, and she absentmindedly patted its little domed head. “I didn't see his face, though; it was in shadow from my vantage point. I did see the girl's face. She was blonde, with big square glasses and her hair done up in pigtails. She was out like a light.”

Well, just their luck that she hadn't been in a position to see the kidnapper's face. “You say it was dark,” he began. “If that's the case, how did you see what you did manage to see?”

“There was one of them safety lights in back of the place,” she grunted. “But it was pretty dim. Once he knew we were there, he opened the door to the truck, shoved in the girl, and got the heck on out of there before I could even say anything.”

“I see...” Miles trailed off, crossing his arms. “Regrettable.”

“I think I overheard that you might have seen a partial plate number,” Phoenix reminded them. “Could you tell us what you remember about the plate?”

Hippolyta stared at Wright for a minute. Then she glanced at Miles and jabbed a thumb in Phoenix's direction. “Y'know, this one asks questions a lot more polite than you do,” she informed him.
Miles flinched. “Nnngh,” was all he got out in his own defense, though.

“Anyway, all I saw of it was ‘JB09,’” the old lady continued.

“That will do for now. Thank you for your assistance,” Miles said, bowing again. He made to move away, and then realized that two of the dogs were attached to his pant leg. They growled in high-pitched tones, baring their sharp, needle-like teeth. Miles shook his leg a little, unsure of how to handle this. His first instinct was to bellow something like “Nghoooh! My dry cleaning!” but he felt that would be quite undignified.

“Bella! Stella! Cut that out!” Hippolyta scolded her pets. The two Pomeranians backed off, whimpering sheepishly.

“Thanks,” Phoenix told the old woman, shooting her a grateful smile for calling off her tiny hellbeasts. The defense attorney then turned his attention back to Miles. “Shall we?” he asked, jerking his head in the direction of the others who had gathered.

“Y...Yes, indeed,” he got out, still a little ruffled from having his leg mauled. He suspected Wright was trying to remove him from the situation before his wardrobe suffered further injury, and was immensely grateful for his consideration. Brushing himself off a bit, he allowed himself to be led out of earshot of the dreadful woman and her still-more-dreadful creatures.

“Think the Hippo has one called Umbrella?” Phoenix muttered to the prosecutor as they made their way back to the group. He had leaned in close to whisper the question close to Miles' ear.

“Th-The Hippo?” Miles echoed, trying to ignore the way Phoenix's voice so close sent a shiver down his spine. After he'd taken a moment to analyze the other man's words rather than just the sensations caused by his proximity, he realized to whom Wright referred. “Ah,” he said, a tad belatedly. “That would be strange,” he added in answer to Phoenix's question.

“Or Hella,” Phoenix persisted, evidently paying Miles' hesitation no mind. The defense attorney snickered. “And then when she scolds it she can say 'Hella, bad!'”

“You are ridiculous,” Miles informed him, but he couldn't entirely suppress the smile that arose at his comment. Phoenix just grinned in response.

“Find out anything good?” Apollo asked when they'd regrouped.

“The license plate had 'JB09' on it, but that's about all we can use,” the prosecutor said, crossing his arms. He shot a glare at Detective Gumshoe. “And when you told me there were 'plenty of witnesses,' I didn't think you meant one human being and seventeen balls of fluff!”

Gumshoe winced as if Miles had glared actual daggers. “I-I'm sorry, sir...I'll keep investigating here,” he said, and scratched the back of his head. “I'll see if I can find anything else useful.”

“See that you do,” Miles grumbled as Gumshoe raced off to continue looking over the scene. He would have threatened the detective with a salary cut, but doing so would punish Maggey and their children as well, so he contented himself with just being annoyed at him.

The prosecutor stared at the ground in thought. Two letters, two numbers... He'd have to start a database search later. He was not even sure whether the letters and numbers were at the beginning of the plate or the end... or neither. It was going to be a long, arduous task. He sighed, already dreading it.

“Wanna look over plates at the Agency?” asked Wright, demonstrating his almost uncanny ability to
anticipate what he was thinking. He brought his gaze up to meet the defense attorney's, surprised.

“Would you mind?” he asked. “I could use an extra set of eyes…”

“Like I said before, you're always welcome at the Agency.” Phoenix's eyes were warm, inviting.

“Yeah, Uncle Edgeworth, come on over!” Trucy insisted, grabbing his hand. “We have to find Maizy as quickly as possible!”

“We'll all help however we can,” Athena told him, eyes alight with determination. Apollo nodded in agreement at her statement.

“Well…” Miles looked around at them all. “I suppose we'd better get started, then. I'll swing back by my office and pick up the necessary materials, and then I'll be right over.”

“Can I go with you?” asked Trucy eagerly. She was still clinging to his sleeve.

He exchanged a glance with Phoenix, who shrugged as if to say your call.

“I suppose it wouldn't be the first time you tagged along with me unnecessarily,” Miles said smoothly, focusing back on Trucy.

Trucy beamed, pumping her fist. “Yesss! Let's go!” She started to drag him off. She was alarmingly strong for a seventeen-year-old girl.

“Go easy on him, Truce! No magic tricks in the Prosecutor's Office!” Phoenix called after them.

They were just buckling up, Trucy in the front passenger seat this time, when she fixed her piercing blue eyes on him. Miles felt himself start to sweat. That was one intense gaze...

“I saw Daddy holding your hand,” she said, cutting right to the chase. She folded her arms, awaiting an explanation.

Miles averted his eyes. This was not how he had wanted this to come up. He had no idea how to approach this—what should he even tell her? Wright and he hadn't discussed whether to inform anyone of any developments. He was utterly unprepared for such a discussion!

“You'll wrinkle your suit,” Trucy pointed out, leaning forward and pointing to where Miles was grasping the sleeve of his jacket with his other hand. He’d been clutching his arm.

“W...What you saw was Wright handing me a memo he'd written,” he made up on the fly.

“Oh yeah?” said Trucy, quirking an eyebrow. She leaned back in her seat, folding her arms again. “Let me see it.”

“I already threw it away,” the prosecutor deflected.

Trucy sighed. “Okay, sure, whatever, Mr. Edgeworth,” she grumbled. She stuck out her lower lip. Miles had no idea whether she was doing it on purpose or not, but seeing her disappointed face made his heart clench.

“Oh, yes, he did take my hand,” he blurted out, not sure if he was crossing a line or not. Would Wright be all right with it if Trucy were to know what had happened? Would he want Miles to explain, or was he waiting for an opportunity to tell her himself? How could Miles possibly explain such a thing to her? What if Wright had already told her, and Miles was hiding things for no reason? Or, even worse, what if Wright never planned to tell anyone about this...whatever-it-was?
Realizing that his thoughts were quickly becoming frantic, he opted to slip back into what was comfortable: Denying his feelings. “I...I almost tripped,” he explained, trying to keep the nervousness out of his voice. “He was just helping me keep my balance.” He turned the keys in his ignition and checked his rearview mirror, preparing to back up. “What of it?” He scolded himself internally for not having properly considered this inevitability: that sooner or later, he would have to acknowledge this thing he had with Wright in front of other people. Of course it couldn't stay as simple as reassuring hands holding each other or secret kisses in secluded locations, if they wanted this to be a...lasting arrangement.

And Miles very much did want it to be.

But did Phoenix? Maybe he was glad they were keeping things under wraps...would he be ashamed to be seen in a romantic entanglement with another man, Miles wondered? Almost immediately, he disregarded this notion. Phoenix had been the one to take the first step (if you didn't count his own drunken voicemail, that was), and had just taken his hand in public not an hour earlier in order to show his support. He wasn't the type to do things halfway. So... what if Miles was actually the one doing things halfway by being so secretive? What if Phoenix thought Miles was ashamed of him? That just wouldn't do at all...

Trucy had been studying him for a long moment as he'd put the car in drive and started making his way back to the Prosecutor's Building. Miles kept his eyes on the road as he lost himself in thought, but he could feel her gaze practically burning into him. “If something happened with you two...you'd tell me...right?” she finally asked, her voice suddenly small.

He paused a moment, thinking, before responding. Regardless of how much he wanted to clear things up, it felt wrong to reveal anything without first consulting Wright. “If anything of note changed, one of us would certainly inform you,” he assured her. That wasn't necessarily a lie. Things weren't all that different. Their relationship was very much the same, but with the addition of increased time spent together and, all right, more bodily contact than he had ever allowed (or, indeed, desired) from anyone else.

She smiled at him, and he only felt a little guilty. He resolved to broach the daunting topic of “what happens next?” with Wright the next opportunity he got, even if the idea of asking those sorts of difficult questions was making his insides squirm with discomfort.

“I'm glad you're getting along again,” Trucy admitted to him. “For a while there before Thanksgiving, Daddy was really sad. And...you seemed sad, too.”

He felt a jolt of guilt. “Your father is the most important friend I have ever had,” he said sincerely, flicking his turn signal. “I realized it would be...difficult to remove him from my life. Impossible, even.”

“That's right; you're stuck with us!” Trucy beamed.

He shot a smile back. “Lucky me,” he quipped. She didn't have to know that he wasn't being the slightest bit sarcastic.

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter: Athena gives five dollars. Phoenix receives a confession.
Athena stretched her arms over her head, her back crackling a little.

“Owwwwch,” Widget complained.

“You're lucky you can't feel it, buddy,” she grumbled to her robot companion. Everyone had been searching through license plate numbers for hours yesterday, and she was still a little sore from poring over papers all evening. But it was Monday, and since she didn't have a case, she had another duty: Talent scouting for the Wright Anything Agency. It was a task that Trucy had roped her into during the school year, and most of the time, Athena didn't mind doing it at all. It gave her an excuse to get out there in lots of different settings and people-watch! As someone who had studied psychology, people watching was a valuable source of information. But today, she felt a little conflicted that she wasn't helping to find Maizy, and was instead at the mall, sitting on the edge of the fountain next to the food court.

She'd been walking around here for about three and a half hours, and was finally taking a break. Thus far, no one else had approached her, which was sort of a relief, as being in a crowded indoor place was already a challenge to navigate with her sensitive ears.

The mall was decorated for the holidays: faux-evergreen garlands and red bows hung up everywhere and displays rife with fake snow and Christmas lights. It kind of reminded her of the effort Maya and Pearl Fey had been putting into making the Agency look “Christmasy” the past few days—it seemed that each day there had been yet more decorations for Athena to navigate around. Athena had originally thought they just wanted to embrace the Yuletide spirit, but after that dinner at the burger place, she knew Maya's true motive: to put up as much mistletoe as possible. The two spirit mediums had been absent from the Agency on the day Maizy was discovered to have been missing, but evidently Trucy had called Pearl to inform them. They were supposed to come to the Agency today to discuss possible courses of action regarding the case, but Athena couldn't help but suspect that they (or at least Maya) were also there to Holly-Jolly up their office.

She let out a sigh, having caught her breath while caught up in her ruminations. Her feet still ached, though. She looked around furtively, wondering if anyone would mind if she dipped her aching feet
in the fountain for a moment.

“Dunk ’em!” Widget encouraged her cheerfully.

“You're a bad influence,” she told him.

She was just considering taking off one boot when a sound caught her attention. Sounds were obviously always catching her attention, but this one stuck out because it wasn’t just chatter or shoes clicking against the tiled floor or the bell that Salvation Army Santa had been ringing at the front entrance.

Athena sat up straighter, leaning in the direction the sound was coming from—it was a plaintive-sounding trill, a single sustained note. As she listened, another tone sounded, this one an octave higher, and she recognized the sound as being that of a violin being tuned. She cast her gaze around between throngs of people, finally catching a glimpse of a girl sitting over by one of the doors on the steps. A violin was indeed tucked beneath her chin. She wondered why anyone would tune a violin in a crowded mall.

And then she started to play.

The music was like a love poem, soft and gentle and warm, with all the emotion of a human voice. The way it rose and fell had wings; the way it lilted had a soul. Almost without thinking about it, Athena found herself rising from her seat and making her way through the maze of people that separated her from the melody. It was like a siren song, beckoning her forward.

The girl was petite, with chestnut-colored hair spilling over one shoulder. Her eyes were closed, completely focused on the sounds she was producing, her arm moving the bow smoothly forward and back. She was wearing a fluttery white top that was shoulderless on one side, and a gossamer olive-green skirt. She looked like a fairy. Or a Muse. Athena watched, spellbound, as the girl played a beautiful medley of Christmas songs. O Holy Night transitioned seamlessly into Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire, and then slowed down into quiet tremors before swelling back up into Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.

When she finished, the girl set her bow aside, and the small crowd of people who had gathered all clapped appreciatively and dropped small bills into her open violin case. Athena shouldered her way closer, digging through her pockets to find a 5 dollar bill.

“That was absolutely incredible,” she told the girl, dropping her bill into the case. “I felt like that violin was singing right to my soul!” She sniffled, having gotten a little teary-eyed. Just a bit.

“Thank you,” said the girl. Her voice was quiet and gentle.

“Hey, um...do you mind if I ask you some questions?” Athena continued, taking a risk and sitting down next to the girl.

The girl blinked her mahogany-colored eyes, mildly surprised. “No, that's all right. Go right ahead.”

The attorney stuck out her gloved hand. “First of all, hi! I'm Athena Cykes, and I work as a defense lawyer at the Wright Anything Agency. What's your name?”

She shook Athena's hand. “I've heard of that place...my mother is a lawyer too,” she said. “I'm Ariadne Stringer.”

“Ariadne...that's a pretty name,” Athena said with a nod. “So...” She rested her elbows on her knees. “Why are you here playing the violin at the mall, Ariadne?”
Ariadne looked away, playing with the Celtic knot necklace that Athena hadn't noticed until now. “I'm...trying to save up for something important,” she admitted quietly.

“That's really responsible of you,” Athena told her, smiling. Ariadne smiled shyly. A smile! She was starting to open up a little. Now was her chance to get a little more information... “I hope you don't mind my saying so, but...you look pretty young,” Athena said a little awkwardly. “Isn't it a school day?”

“Oh, I...” Ariadne's brows drew together. She looked down at the floor between her feet for a moment before meeting Athena's eyes again. “I...I graduated early,” she said.

Athena didn't need Apollo's tell-spotting power to figure out that she was lying. Her voice had sounded plenty unsure and conflicted. But if Ariadne didn't want to tell her why she wasn't at school, Athena wasn't going to press her.

“Listen,” Athena said, wondering if she was doing the right thing. “I came here today because I wanted to seek out talented people to bring to the Agency. And...I've never heard playing like yours.” She dug in her pocket for a business card from the Agency, and offered it to the girl. “If you're interested...I think Trucy Wright would be interested in recruiting you.”

Ariadne stared down at the card in Athena's hand. “Recruiting...me?” she echoed, glancing back up at Athena's face.

“Sure!” Athena responded, grinning. “I mean, we don't have musicians yet, but we have magicians! And lawyers, obviously. I bet Trucy's always wanted musical accompaniment to her magic act, and you'd be perfect!”

A faint pink dusted Ariadne's cheeks. “Oh, I don't know about that,” she said humbly, tucking a strand of wavy hair behind her ear. But Athena could tell from the way the girl's heart had fluttered at the compliment that she'd been pleased.

“Well, look at your violin case,” Athena pointed out, gesturing to all the change and dollar bills in the velvet lining. “People are already paying to hear you play, and you're not even represented by anyone yet!”

At this, Ariadne slumped a little. “They only pay because it's almost Christmas and people are feeling more generous,” she mumbled. “People see me playing here and think, 'Wow, she must be pretty desperate to play at a mall.’” She nestled her violin tenderly in its case and closed it, doing up the latches. On the outside, the case looked weathered, covered in scratches and scuffed up on the edges. Athena wondered if this girl was the opposite: Beautiful and classy on the outside, but worn down from many hardships on the inside. Ariadne turned and focused on Athena again. “Isn't that why you started talking to me, too?” the girl continued. “You feel bad for me.” The attorney heard a bit of accusation in her tone.

Athena was floored. “That isn't at all why I talked to you!” she said, waving her hands around frantically. “I'd really just never heard someone play the violin so beautifully, and...before I knew it, I was swept away by the sound.” She paused, looked down at her hands, and shrugged. “And I thought, 'This girl is going places.' So I wanted you to know about a place you could go...y'know, if you want to.” She lifted her head up again to search the other girl's face.

Ariadne's gaze was scrutinizing, her eyes slightly narrowed, her lips quirked up on one side in thought. But what she saw must have been reassuring, because after a moment, her face relaxed into a sweet smile. “Thank you, Athena,” she said. She extended her hand, and Athena pressed the business card into it. Ariadne slipped the card between the two halves of the closed case. She stood,
picking up her violin case in one hand.

“Off to find another impromptu stage?” Athena asked her, rising to her feet in turn.

Ariadne shook her head. “I'm going to go home for now. The mall will still be here tomorrow.” She extended her free hand again, and Athena stared down at it a moment before realizing that she was supposed to shake it. She hastened to grasp it.

“It was good to meet you, Athena,” Ariadne told her, and gave her one more kind smile before turning and walking out the entrance right next to them. Athena realized too late that the girl wasn't wearing a coat over her thin clothes, but when she looked through the glass door, Ariadne was walking with purpose, her shoulders back and her head held high. If she was cold, she gave no indication of it. Athena admired her strength, but even standing near the door was starting to make her feel cold, so she quickly decided to move away from it.

She whirled around, just considering rounding back to the food court to grab something to eat, when she crashed headlong into a figure in pink and dark blue.

“Oof!” said Athena, stumbling and windmilling her arms but managing (for once) to not fall over. She rubbed her sore forehead. “Owww,” she complained, and then glanced down at her unexpected obstacle, who had toppled to the ground.

“Why does this keep happening?!” the other girl groaned. She had a very tall black ponytail, and clothes that were stylish in a quirky kind of way: a long navy scarf and a shiny, oddly-shaped gold pin. The hand that was rubbing her head was gloved, and the one flung behind her to brace her weight was also gloved, but this one ran up nearly to her elbow.

The attorney realized that instead of staring at the stranger, she should be helping. “Ah, I-I'm sorry!” she blurted. She extended a hand, and the other girl accepted it and allowed herself to be pulled to her feet. “I shouldn't have turned around so fast in a crowded place,” she apologized, grimacing and petting her orange ponytail a little.

“Nah, it's all right,” the other girl said. She gave Athena a quick once-over, and then focused her olive green eyes on Widget. “Wait...that little robot...” Her eyes widened as they darted up to Athena's face. “Are you Athena Cykes?!”

“What?” responded Athena, taken aback. “I mean, yeah, I am, but...how do you know that?”

The other woman laughed. “Pearl told me about you!” She grinned cheekily, and Athena instantly understood who this must be.

“Are...are you Kay?!” she burst out excitedly.

“Guilty as charged!” Kay confirmed. “Nice to meet you, Athena!” She flung out a hand to shake Athena's.

“You too!” she replied, accepting the handshake. “So what brings you here?”

Kay's eyes twinkled. “Actually, you do,” she said, and before Athena could question further, she shrugged and explained: “I was seeing if I could find anything here that might be a good Secret Santa gift.”

“Oh!” Athena exclaimed. “That's so nice of you! But I don't really expect you to get me anything. I mean, before right now, you didn't even know me.”
Kay waved off her concerns. “I know plenty from what Pearl's told me.”

Well, that piqued her interest. “Really? What, uh...what did she say?” she inquired, trying not to sound too desperate for answers.

Kay counted traits off on her gloved fingers. “You're excitable and cheerful, you studied psychology, you have a robot around your neck, and you can hear a mouse clearing its throat from a mile away.” She crossed her arms and looked at Athena appraisingly, shrewdly. “Wish I had that talent, to be honest...”

Athena doubted that. “It's...not all good,” she admitted, uncomfortable. “In fact, a lot of the time it really gets in my way...” She averted her gaze, holding one arm with the other.

Kay's face was sympathetic. “Sorry, I didn't mean to be insensitive,” she said, her brows lifted in a worried expression.

“It's all right,” Athena replied with a bit of an awkward laugh. Way to introduce yourself, Athena, she scolded herself.

“No, let me make it up to you,” insisted Kay. She turned and beckoned Athena over her shoulder. “What do you want for lunch? My treat.”

Kay's stories about Mr. Edgeworth were just as often hilarious as they were heart-pounding exciting. “He gave up his badge for you?” she gasped.

“Well, it was only for like two days,” Kay admitted, eating her pork fried rice with her chopsticks. “But yeah, he was totally badgeless for those two days.”

“I can't imagine...!” Athena shook her head, shoving some orange chicken in her mouth. “What did he do with himself all that time?” she asked around her mouthful of food. She had to get the question out before it escaped her.

Kay shrugged. “He kept solving cases anyway,” she said simply.

Athena grinned. “Just like Mr. Wright did when he lost his badge.”

“Oh yeah, I heard about that from...” Here Kay looked around evasively. “...my sources. My intel says that even though Phoenix Wright didn't have his attorney's badge for seven long years, he frequently traveled all around solving cases...” She smiled widely. “...with Mr. Miles Edgeworth.”

Athena nodded enthusiastically. “It was during one of those cases that Mr. Wright met me for the first time,” she said. “He said he knew right away that I was something special... it was like destiny.” She slurped her root beer thoughtfully before continuing, quieter: “Or a really well-timed coincidence, because it happened just in time for me to save someone important to me.” She grimaced, shaking her head again. “Sorry, I don't know why I brought that up. It's not exactly good conversation for someone you just met...”

“There's probably a story there, but I won't pry it out of you,” the other girl assured her. “We can just keep talking about Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth.”

Athena smiled at her. “Thanks.”

“No problemo,” said Kay breezily. “So, shall I tell you about the time Mr. Edgeworth had a toupee
thrown in his face?”

The defense attorney laughed. “Oh, I have got to hear that one!” she admitted. “But first, can I just ask you...” She leaned in, resting her elbows on the table. “What made you want to be part of our little, uh, pet project?”

Kay crossed her arms, tilting her head in thought. “Well, like ten years ago, when Mr. Edgeworth and I were hanging out all the time, I kinda accidentally...” Her heart gave a loud thud, and her breathing picked up in pace. She was hiding something... but Athena didn't interrupt. “I-I overheard something that made me curious about a guy in Mr. Edgeworth's life,” the black-haired girl decided, flicking her gaze down to Athena again.

“And what was that?”

“Well, he was always muttering stuff like, 'what would that man do?' or 'I have to think like he does' whenever his back was to the wall,” Kay recalled. She played with the straw of her bubble tea, swirling around the tapioca pearls. “And, well, I'm really good at gathering information. So eventually I figured out who he was talking about.”

“It took you 10 years to figure it out?” Athena asked, nonplussed.

Kay's cheeks went pink. “Of course not! I...I was busy in those 10 years; I only just started trying to figure it out a couple months ago!”

Athena giggled. “All right, all right, I believe you,” she said. “But what made you realize, 'Hey, those two are nuts about each other'?”

“I think he's always on his mind,” Kay said seriously, folding her hands together. “Phoenix Wright, I mean. Mr. Edgeworth thinks about him all the time. I can tell because there are just certain questions he'll never answer even if I ask him, and he always looks like he's caught up in memories that make him sad and happy at the same time.” She half-smiled. “Well, that and I ended up getting some insider information ten years ago, but I'm not allowed to talk about that!” she added with a playful wink.

“The thing you overheard?” Athena remembered.

“Yeah, uh...that.” Her eyes were darting all over the place. Athena could hear the rustling of the other girl's clothing as she fidgeted under the table. The discord between what Kay was saying and what she was remembering made Athena want to fire up Widget's Mood Matrix, but she restrained herself. Maybe if she just thought things through, she could figure things out herself without Widget's help...

“Why are you touching your necklace like that?” Kay asked, raising an eyebrow. Oops. Athena guessed she wasn't restraining herself as well as she thought.

“Oh, heheh...” Her hands flew away from Widget. “S-Sorry, I...I just got the urge to use Widget's special power, but I'm told it's not really appropriate to use it outside the courtroom...”

“Actually,” said the other girl, her eyes glinting with excitement, “I'd really like to see your little toy, because...” She yanked something small and rectangular out of a holster on her side. It didn't exactly look sleek and modern like a cell phone, but it was higher-tech than a walkie-talkie at the very least. “I have one of my own,” Kay said proudly. She held out her prize. “This is Little Thief, my birthright as the successor of the noble thief Yatagarasu!”

“Ooooh!” Athena exclaimed, leaning forward for a closer look and gripping the table. “I mean, I
don't understand most of what you just said, but that looks really cool!”

Kay looked as proud as Mr. Wright did when he was showing off pictures of Trucy. “I know, right?! Wanna see it in action?”

“Yes please!” Athena clapped her hands together.

“All right!” Kay said eagerly, and then looked around, her excited grin fading a little. “Actually, we should probably go somewhere less crowded. I don't want to alarm anyone.”

Well, now Athena was twice as curious. She nodded, taking her last bite of chicken. “Okay. Lead the way.”

Three

They were walking in the courtyard of the mall, a small square of naked trees, frozen-over man-made water features, and frigid footpaths. Unsurprisingly, because of the weather, they were the only two enjoying the outdoors here today.

“Okay,” the black-haired girl said, looking around. She nodded. “This will do.” She fixed her jade-green eyes on Athena. “So Athena, how do you think this courtyard would look in the springtime?”

Athena blinked, confused at the question. “Uhh...I guess there would be more people here?”

Kay punched some buttons on her strange device. The beeping sounded loud in the quiet winter air. “Right, good. What else?”

“Well, those trees would be blooming instead of bare,” she continued thoughtfully, looking around. “And those fountains would be running.”

At each of her statements, Kay entered more data into her “Little Thief.” Athena watched, baffled, until the so-called Great Thief finally finished, looking up from the device and fixing her with a smile that was so excited it looked almost painful.

“Even in the depths of night,” she suddenly intoned dramatically, lifting Little Thief on high, “when no other bird dares to take flight... one alone soars to shine the light of righteousness on the world's blight!” Athena blinked, not quite sure what she was witnessing. Kay flung out her other arm arm while she held Little Thief up, looking like she was calling on the Power of the Moon or something. “And that one is me, for I am the Great Thief Yatagarasu!” she finished triumphantly.

She pressed one final button, and then a flash of green light emanated from the machine in her hands. The entire courtyard was suddenly covered in green images, which flickered slightly. They were a bit fuzzy around the edges, but they looked so incredibly real... Athena reached a hand out to touch the strange green blossoms on a nearby tree, whose leaves were rustling gently in a nonexistent breeze. Her hand phased right through the image.

“What...what is this?” she breathed in awe.

“This is Little Thief's special power,” Kay said proudly. “It can recreate any scene, provided I have the data to input.” She thrust her chest out and rested one hand on her hip, looking very pleased with herself. “I used to help Mr. Edgeworth out by recreating crime scenes as they were during the crime —it came in handy loads of times!”

“That's incredible...” Athena turned in a slow circle, staring around at the startling amount of detail. The water in the fountains was rippling softly, looking alive as anything, and there were little bright-
green birds resting in the branches of the trees. Her breath rising up in steady puffs of condensation and the biting cold were the only remnants of winter here, and the only things that didn’t look completely real were the occasional holographic passersby, which had no features. They were just human-shaped figures, like mannequins, walking along a predetermined path before disappearing and being replaced by new ones. “What’s the deal with the people, though?” she asked, facing Kay again.

“Well, if I don’t have all the data about something, the image isn’t totally accurate, or it might come out kind of strange,” Kay explained, smiling a little sheepishly. “I didn’t know what kind of people to add into the scene, so I just programmed Little Thief to project ‘people.’”

“So...if I told you to make Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth show up in the scene, you could do that?” Athena suggested, a grin spreading across her face.

The other girl’s eyes popped open wide. “That’s an amazing idea!” she exclaimed. She rapidly punched some more data into her device. “Okay, let’s see what happens when I run an update...” she muttered, pushing one more button.

The green flash spread across the surroundings again, and when it faded, a holographic green Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth appeared before them, walking along the footpath.

Athena laughed in delight. “That’s absolutely perfect!” she said, clapping her hands together. After a brief moment, a look of confusion flitted across her face. She turned to Kay. “But...how did you know how Mr. Wright looks? You’ve never met him, and you’ve been away for a long time, haven’t you?”

The other girl’s heart rate picked up anxiously. “O-oh, I, uh, I saw pictures!” she stammered out, ducking her head a little to avoid Athena’s eyes.

Athena studied her, but it didn't look like Kay was going to say any more at the moment, so she shrugged. “Well, at any rate...” She turned to the images of her boss and the Chief Prosecutor, her gaze moving over the perfect replicas appraisingly. “…the level of detail is astounding.”

Kay smiled deviously and tapped a few more buttons. Another flash. This time, the holographic Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth were holding hands as they strolled the square footpath.

“Oho,” said the attorney, resting her hands on her hips and regarding Kay slyly. “I like the way you think.”

“Of course you do,” the Great Thief said loftily, smirking back at her and giving a little bow. “Now, speaking of how I think... I believe you have some kind of device that enhances your psychological analysis talents?” Her eyes darted to the pendant around Athena’s neck.

“Well, it's kind of hard to use Widget unless I'm faced with someone who's hiding something from me or whose voice has a lot of discord in it,” Athena explained, touching her little robot companion with gentle fingertips.

“Oh, I see...” Kay folded her arms and closed her eyes in thought. The gesture was surprisingly similar to the one Mr. Edgeworth performed when he was turning something over in his mind. After a moment, she nodded, seemingly coming to some sort of decision. She pressed a button on Little Thief, and with one more green flash, the holographic springtime flickered out of existence. “Well then, I guess you’ll just have to start asking me questions I can't answer!” she said, putting both hands on her hips and looking at Athena expectantly.
The attorney gave her a half-smile. “I guess I could try that,” she agreed. “Hmm...” Athena crossed her arms, and felt herself start to subconsciously tap her crescent-moon earring. What should she ask? Kay seemed like a pretty honest person, despite her profession. She didn't have many secrets, as far as Athena could tell.

Then again...

There had been one thing she'd been keen on keeping to herself...

“How about I ask you about that thing you overheard 10 years ago?” she suggested.

Kay looked guarded. “If...if we talk about that, won't you find out the secret?” she said warily, her gloved hands coming together in front of her chest to grasp her scarf. It was a shy, defensive gesture. The timid look didn't suit her.

“Not necessarily,” Athena assured her. “I just have to point out discrepancies between what you describe and what you feel.” She smiled in what she hoped was a friendly, nonthreatening way. “And if you feel like I'm getting too close to it, we could always stop the analysis.”

The other girl still looked uneasy, shuffling her feet a little. “I don't know...I made a promise to never talk about it, and I want to keep that promise. Can we think of anything else?” The thief's eyes were beseeching.

Athena thought a long moment, running through their conversation in her mind. Was there anything else Kay seemed reluctant to talk about?...

Ah, she recalled suddenly, there was one other thing...

“Hey, Kay,” she began again, much more confident with this line of questioning. She crossed her arms and grinned. “How did you know how Mr. Wright looks?”

Ba-THUMP, Kay's heart responded. “I-I already told you, I saw a picture!” Kay said insistently, her pitch going up a half-octave.

“You saw a picture, huh?” Athena said smugly. “Well, a picture is worth a thousand words. Start talking.”

“A-about what?”

“The picture you saw,” the attorney clarified. “Where did you see it? What did it show? How long ago did you see it?” It was almost amusing, how much more panicked Kay looked at each of her subsequent questions.

“U-um,” Kay answered, biting her lip and very obviously trying to stall until she came up with a believable lie. “W-Well Pearl showed me the picture. On...her phone? Yeah. It was before Thanksgiving.” Her voice was rushed, exactly the tone of someone making things up on the fly. Athena would know—making things up on the fly was kind of the Secret Art of the Wright Anything Agency.
Regardless, an image appeared on the display. It showed Kay and Pearl sitting at a familiar noodle stand. Pearl was holding out her phone to the older girl. Both of them looked excited. The “happy” marker pulsed consistently, while the “surprised” marker registered only a little. “Hmm,” said Athena, lifting her gaze from Widget’s screen to Kay’s face, which appeared to be starting to sweat. “I don’t even need to analyze your feelings here to find the problem with this testimony,” she said, smirking.

“O-oh?” Kay said weakly. “And...what is the problem?” she asked, in a tone that suggested that she didn't really want the answer but knew she was going to get it anyway.

“Well, obviously, if she’d never been able to access her contacts list...” Athena pointed decisively at the thief with rather more gusto than was probably warranted. “...then she wouldn't have known how to use the phone's camera!”

“Arrrrgh!” Kay wailed, wincing as if she'd been struck. The Noise Level went down to 60%.

“However,” the attorney continued, touching the image on the screen to zoom in a little, “this image your memory is recreating doesn’t seem to be a lie...” She crossed her arms and cocked her head a little, and looked back up at Kay. “You really did go to Eldoon's with her at some point, didn't you?” she guessed.

Kay swallowed, but nodded. “Yes, I did,” she admitted. “And...you're right. Pearl didn't show me the picture.” She dropped her gaze, tucking her chin into her scarf.

Athena's eyes scanned over the image, taking in the rippling emotion readings. The “happy” reading was easy to figure out, since the two of them looked so excited. But what was making them so happy? And why had she also been surprised? Perhaps she should dig a little deeper. “So, I don't think you ever told me how you met Pearl...?” she ventured, fixing her eyes on Kay again.

More of Kay's face disappeared into her scarf. “We...just ran into each other,” she mumbled. Another image appeared on the Mood Matrix's display: Pearl and Kay, both sprawled out on the ground on their rears, holding their foreheads. “Surprise” and “sad” both rippled out... No, in this case the blue marker was “fear”; she was almost positive. It seemed they really had run into each other, and quite literally. “Why were you afraid when you ran into her?” she asked.

“Afraid?” Kay looked confused, but at least the question had made her lift her head again, emerging from her scarf like a turtle coming out of its shell. She closed her eyes, ruminating. “Hmm...I'd say I was more 'anxious' than 'afraid'...” she said slowly.

“’Afraid’? ” Athena pressed. “All right then, what were you anxious about?” Athena pressed.

“Noise Level: 45%,” read the Matrix's display. They were getting somewhere, it seemed. “Well...she wasn't supposed to see me. I was supposed to be hidden,” Kay explained absently, and then froze, her eyes flying open wide and her mouth snapping closed. Obviously, she'd realized that she had slipped up by answering that. But Athena wasn't going to let the information go unquestioned.


“I...” The thief was really uncomfortable now—her heart was thudding, her voice held nearly-imperceptible tremors, and she was shuffling her feet. “I was...doing my job,” she managed to get out.

“You mean spying?”
“I mean observing!” she insisted, balling her fists. She screwed her eyes shut and turned slightly away from Athena.

But Athena didn't need to be looking at Kay to analyze her responses. They were right there on the screen in front of her. The Matrix's display now showed a new image: Kay hidden in a tree, watching Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth as they sat at the noodle stand. “Happy” and “surprise” were registering again. It took a few moments to understand what she was looking at, but when she realized just what was happening in this image, Athena gasped.

“Kay!” she said, scandalized. “Were you spying on them?”

“Only sometimes!” Kay wailed, covering her face. “I didn't mean to! I was just curious! And...and then it turned into hours!”

Noise Level: 0%, said the Mood Matrix's display, and it shut itself down. It seemed the truth had finally been revealed.

Kay dropped her hands from her face, sighing. “I was just about to go talk to Mr. Edgeworth about what I saw when I ran into Pearl.” She hesitated, biting her lip, but then decided to go on anyway: “Sh-She'd been following them for a while, too, you know.”

“Pearl?” Athena's jaw dropped. Surely Little Miss Proper Lady would never...

Then again, she had been turning up more frequently than she had used to...and she did seem to be abnormally well-informed about Mr. Wright's whereabouts and daily activities... “Pearl, you naughty little imp,” Athena muttered, shaking her head. She didn't know whether to feel proud of her, or disappointed.

“She didn't do it to be naughty,” Kay protested. “She was doing it for the same reason I was: we wanted to help those two, but didn't know how!” Her voice was earnest, insistent.

“Those two? You mean Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth?” Athena asked.

“Yes.” Kay looked down at her feet and kicked a pebble. Her shoulders slumped. All of her Great Thief bravado seemed to have drained out of her at having been forced to admit to being a lowly stalker. “When I ran into Pearl, we discovered that we'd been doing the same thing for the same reason, and we became allies right there and then. We exchanged numbers, but like you said, Pearl didn't know how to access her contacts, so I didn't hear from her until Thanksgiving.” She plopped herself on the wrought-iron garden bench, resting her elbows on her knees and hanging her head a little. “I'm a failure at my job,” she said miserably. “I caused a lot of worry to a good man, and then I couldn't even escape from the scene without running into a little girl...”

Athena sat down next to her, gripping the cold metal bench beneath her with both hands. “What do you mean when you say you caused a good man to worry?” she asked gently.

“Mr. Wright,” Kay sighed. She ran a hand through her raven-dark bangs, and then lifted her head again. She didn't look at Athena, though. Instead, she gazed out over the courtyard, her expression pained. “I found out later that I'd been doing such a bad job of...observing him...” She stumbled over the phrase, and Athena wondered if she'd stopped herself from saying spying on him. “...that he was worried for weeks about feeling like someone was watching him. He had trouble sleeping!” She did look at Athena then, and the guilt in her slightly raised voice was enough to make Athena's own eyebrows draw together in empathy. “And I didn't even have a plan to get them together,” the thief continued, quieter. “I was just doing it because it was interesting and because I didn't have the guts to confront Mr. Edgeworth about him head-on.”
“Well, in your defense, I don't think Mr. Edgeworth would open up about him even if you did confront him,” Athena said, offering a slight smile. “And at least you met Pearl because of all this, right?”

“Yeah, that's true...” A lopsided smile spread across the other girl's face in return. She turned away again and stared at her lap. “I did tell Trucy what I did,” she admitted. “She forgave me, and encouraged me to apologize to Mr. Wright personally, because she was positive he'd forgive me too.”

“That was pretty brave of you, to apologize to Trucy.”

“I only managed to do it because of Pearl,” Kay said.

“Speaking of which, did Pearl ever apologize for her stalking?” Athena asked. She still had a little trouble wrapping her head around the idea of little Pearl as a stalker, but...

Kay laughed. “Apparently, when she tried to apologize to Mr. Wright about it, he just told her he'd known all along and that she's really bad at hiding!” The thief shook her head and smiled fondly. “That kid is so innocent, you just know that whatever she does, she's not doing it to hurt anybody. Who wouldn't forgive her?” Here she trailed off, her expression clouding over again. “Me, on the other hand...I'm...not so innocent.” Athena quickly reminded herself that hugging strangers was generally not appreciated, no matter how sad they sounded.

“I dunno about that,” Athena said, deciding to comfort her with words instead. “I don't think Mr. Edgeworth would give up his badge for a guilty person.”

The grateful, bright smile that Kay shot her then suited her much more than the expressions of worry and guilt she'd been wearing for a while now.

“You know, you're right...” she said, and stared up at the sky. For a moment they were both silent, their quiet inhales and exhales the only sound in the cold winter air, but then Athena saw a change come over the other girl's face. She looked like she had a new sense of resolve, her mouth flattening into a line and her eyebrows angling down slightly. She gripped the bench with her gloved hands. “And speaking of Wright...” She met Athena's eyes again, her own burning with determination. “I think it's time I apologized to the man himself.”

Phoenix had come to expect all sorts of shenanigans around his many wacky acquaintances and close friends. He expected people to drop into the Agency unannounced, he was not surprised when Pearls asked him what figgy pudding was and why people wouldn't leave until they had some, and he hardly batted an eye when Trucy started training to perform a new trick where she pulled all the items from “The 12 Days of Christmas” out of her Magic Panties.

What he did not expect was to walk into the Agency and find every single doorway plastered with enough mistletoe to equip a whole neighborhood with smooch incentive.

He blew out a sigh, trudging further into the building, and found Maya and Pearl on the couch. Maya was sprawled out like she owned the place (and to be fair, for a not-inconsequential amount of time, she sort of had. Well, co-owned. Unofficially), and Pearls was sitting primly, her small hands resting on her lap and her posture perfect. Phoenix looked around at the almost offensively festive room, and then back to the two young ladies on the couch.

“Why?” was all he said.

“I'm sure I have no idea what you're talking about, Nick,” Maya said in the worst attempt at an
innocent voice Phoenix had ever heard, and he worked in a damn courtroom.

“Look, guys, I appreciate you trying to...get me in the Christmas spirit, or whatever this is,” he said tiredly, gesturing around to all the red and green streamers and paper snowflakes that had been steadily accumulating over the past few days, “But this is where I come to work. It's not a department store display window.”

Pearls looked hurt. “You mean...you want us to take down the decorations, Mr. Nick?” Her eyes always looked like they got bigger when she gave him that pitiful expression, her lower lip quivering a bit. She wasn't playing fair, darn it.

“Well...no,” he admitted, and thankfully Pearls' expression smoothed out. “But don't put up any more, okay? I've already walked into the streamers like five times already,” he ended on a grumble, pushing aside a dangling paper snowflake which had just rotated and tapped him on the ear.

“Nick, we're just trying to make a little Christmas magic,” Maya said, and hoo boy, that mischievous look of hers had not changed in the many years Phoenix had known her. He had no idea what she had up her long floppy sleeves, but it was beginning to scare him. “Oh, but don't worry,” she added, reclining back on the couch lazily. “I'm definitely not gonna try to end up beneath any doorways with you.” She stuck her tongue out at him.

“I appreciate that,” Phoenix said flatly, arching an eyebrow at her childish behavior. “But can we please take some of the mistletoe down? It's really starting to stink up th—”

Suddenly, there was a small gasp from the other side of the couch. Both Phoenix and Maya looked over at Pearl, who was holding her phone. She realized they were staring, and immediately covered her mouth with an embarrassed squeak, her cheeks flushing.

“Is...something wrong, Pearls?” Phoenix asked suspiciously.

“N...no!” Phoenix didn't even need to touch the Magatama in his pocket to see that lie. She was twisting the fabric in her lap so much he was worried it might get stretched out.

“Pearl,” he started in a warning tone, crossing his arms. He wasn't above using the “Dad Voice” if he needed to. It was quite effective on Pearls.

Like always, the Dad Voice prevailed. “Um, I've, I've just received word,” Pearls started again, staring at her hands, “that someone is...heading over here right now. Someone who we've been hoping to introduce to you for a while now.” Her voice had started rising in pitch until it was a nervous whimper. “Oh, I wish I'd had more time to prepare...!” she continued, though this comment was obviously directed towards herself rather than Phoenix.

“We'? Who's 'we'?” Phoenix wasn't going to let her off this easy.

“Um...!” Pearls was actually starting to sweat. She bit her thumb, her eyes darting all over the place. “S-Some friends and myself! M-Mystic Maya, too.”

“Hey, don't drag me into this!” Maya protested. “I have no idea what you're talking about!”

In answer, Pearl merely placed her phone in Maya's lap. After the older spirit medium's eyes scanned the screen, Maya's face clouded over with an expression of suppressed panic. “Oh,” she choked out. “Right now?”

“Right now,” Pearls confirmed, nodding earnestly.
Maya drew in a deep breath and then released it in a whoosh. “All right then. We're really doing this right now. Oookay. I'll text Trucy.”

“Will someone please tell me what in the world is going on?” Phoenix exploded, throwing up his hands.

“Like Pearly said, there's someone we want you to meet,” was all his old friend would say, rapidly typing away on her phone. Before Phoenix could open his mouth to protest, there was a knock on the Agency's door. “Ah,” said Maya. “That would probably be her.”

Phoenix gritted his teeth, a little peeved that no one seemed willing to give him a straight answer. But that was hardly anything new, he supposed. He turned and approached the door, but before he could open it, it swung open anyway, and Athena almost crashed into him.

“I hate to disappoint you two,” Phoenix called over his shoulder to Maya and Pearls, “but I already know Athena.”

“Oh, good, you got the text,” Athena said breezily, and then stepped inside. She looked over her shoulder. “Kay, stop hiding and come in already,” she hissed, apparently to one of the shrubs.

But when there was a rustling noise, it wasn't a shrub who responded. Rather, it was a person coming out of the shrub. She was a rather pretty young woman with jet-black hair done up in a high ponytail, with a dark blue scarf and oddly asymmetrical gloves. Her jade-green eyes wouldn't rise to meet his, but were trained firmly on the doorstep of the Agency.

“Hi, Mr. Wright,” the girl mumbled, toeing the ground. “I'm...I'm Kay Faraday, and I'm an old friend of Mr. Edgeworth's.”

Phoenix blinked at her, a few disjointed memories flashing through his mind of conversations he'd had with Miles over the years. “She was certainly the most troublesome assistant anyone could have, but I must admit that I owe her much. I do hope she's doing well.” “She called herself a Great Thief, but in all the time I spent around her, she never stole a single thing. I think she must have a different definition for 'thief' than you or I may have.” “You know, it's quite a shame that she never met Maya Fey. I suspect they would get along famously.”

“You're Kay?” he repeated, and the girl finally met his eyes, her own wide with surprise.

“Um...you know who I am?” She sounded incredulous.

Phoenix couldn't help but beam at her. “What, you think he never mentioned you in all these years? Not a chance.” He stepped aside to welcome her inside. “Thanks for taking care of my friend back then. Any friend of Edgeworth's is a friend of mine,” he told her, and he meant it sincerely.

Kay had the rather unexpected reaction of staring at him with wide, shining eyes for a moment, wobbling her lower lip, and then bursting into tears. “I'm so sorryyyyy!” she wailed.

“Wah?” Phoenix spluttered, bewildered. He took a nervous step backward. Crap, what were you supposed to do when a lady started blubbering after just seeing your face once?

Athena gave the young woman a pitying look and tugged her inside and over to the couch. “Shhhh,” she soothed the older girl, patting Kay's gloved hand. “He'll forgive you.”

“Forgive you?” Phoenix echoed, cautiously approaching the couch and trying not to set off any further waterworks. “F-for what?”
Kay sniffled, wiping at her eyes. “You're every bit as nice as Mr. Edgeworth always described you,” she said, offering him a watery smile.

Phoenix felt his cheeks warm. “Uh...I have a hard time believing he'd describe anyone in those terms, but thanks,” he mumbled, scratching the back of his neck awkwardly.

“Well,” Kay said, dabbing at a corner of her eye with her scarf, “what he actually said was 'compassionate to the point of foolhardiness' and 'so trusting that it would be admirable if it weren't so idiotic.'”

“Ah,” said Phoenix, grimacing. He nodded. “Yeah, that sounds more like him.”

“Anyway...” Kay took a deep breath, and fixed those green eyes on him. She clenched her fists by her sides, and squared her shoulders. “I came here today to tell you that I did a really bad thing about a month ago, and it caused you a lot of unnecessary worry.”

“Um,” Phoenix said, hesitantly. “O-Okay?...”

Pearls laid a hand on Kay's shoulder. “You're doing fine,” she whispered encouragingly. Maya nodded, gesturing for Kay to keep talking. Since when were all these girls so close, he wondered?

“Last month, you felt like you were being followed a lot, right?” Kay asked him, her voice quiet. Phoenix froze. “How did you know that?” he asked sharply.

The black-haired girl's eyes started to swim again, and her mouth trembled. “That was me,” she finally choked out. “I was following you, and I didn't mean for it to make you so scared or worried, and I am so, so sorry.” And then she buried her face in her gloves, her shoulders trembling as the three other girls on the couch patted her and cooed words of support at her. Phoenix thought this was rather unfair. He was the one who had been stalked for a month; surely he was the one who deserved comfort here.

He considered this new information for a moment. He knew he should be angry at this girl, and to some extent, he was... but, well, hadn't the conversation he'd had with Edgeworth about the stalking been kind of a turning point for them? Hadn't it given Edgeworth a reason to worry about him and show concern? He couldn't find it in him to resent that, even if he had gotten weeks of terrible sleep and had felt nervous when he was alone. “That was really not cool of you,” he finally decided.

“I know,” Kay groaned, scrubbing her hands over her face before lifting it to look at him again. She looked utterly pitiful. Her jet-black bangs were askew now, and her eyes were a little puffy. “I'm not asking you to forgive me, but I felt like I owed you a confession and an explanation.”

“Well,” said Phoenix, crossing his arms, “Explain away.”

Just as Kay opened her mouth to speak, the door swung open again and Trucy bustled inside, her cheeks red from the cold. “I came over as quickly as I could!” she panted, making her way over to the other couch. She flopped onto it. “Have I missed much?” she asked Maya.

“Well, Kay showed up, started crying, came inside, and then confessed about the stalking,” the spirit medium summarized. Phoenix's eyebrows shot up. The way she had rattled that off so effortlessly seemed to confirm that she knew about all this beforehand.

“So I missed everything?” Trucy said, her eyebrows drawing together. Phoenix couldn't tell if she was worried or disappointed. He noted, somewhat distantly, that Trucy had seemed acquainted with this strange new girl, too.
“No, not quite...” Pearls shook her head. “Kay was just about to explain why she was following Mr. Nick around.”

“Oh, okay then.” Trucy looked satisfied, and Athena, Maya, Pearl, and she looked towards Kay expectantly. What was the deal with this big conspiracy among all these girls? Had they all known he was being followed, and said nothing?! He felt the beginnings of a feeling he hated more than any other stirring in his gut: The feeling of betrayal.

“Yes, an explanation would be good right about now,” Phoenix said darkly. Trucy patted the cushion next to her on the couch, but he made no move to sit down. Instead, he shifted his weight to his other foot, crossed his arms, and looked around at them all sternly. “Please, all of you, enlighten me as to why you all seem to have known about the problem I was having, and yet did not tell me that I had nothing to worry about.”

The others looked at each other guiltily, saying nothing, and suddenly the Agency was awash in red-and-gold locks and silver chains. Phoenix took a step back, nonplussed. “Wh...what the...?!” he mumbled. He'd never seen this many Psyche-Locks in one room before!

Pearls seemed to know what his strange reaction meant, if her tortured expression was anything to go by. “We didn't stay quiet about it to hurt you, Mr. Nick,” she said earnestly. “Please believe us when we say that we honestly thought it was best if we said nothing about it.”

He just shook his head. “I don't know how I'm supposed to believe you guys about anything right now, with all these Psyche-Locks all over the place.” He ran a hand through his hair and laughed a little bitterly. “My closest friends and my own daughter, hiding something like this from me...who'd have thought?”

Trucy looked heartbroken. “N-No, Daddy! We didn't know the whole time! The only one who knew at first was...” She cut herself off, her eyes widening in a clear oops expression. But Phoenix didn't miss how her gaze had darted to Pearls for a split second, nor how one of her two locks had shattered.

“Pearls knew,” he guessed, and focused on her. She flinched under his piercing gaze, one of the three locks across her chest breaking. His guess had been correct, evidently. “It's bad enough that you followed me around for seemingly no reason, Pearls...now I find out that you knew someone else was too, and you never told me?” Pearl's lower lip quivered, and she opened her mouth to speak, but then closed it again, averting her eyes.

“I asked her not to tell!” Kay blurted, rising from the couch and stepping in front of Pearls. “I-I told her I wanted to apologize to you personally...so please...don't be upset with Pearl!” Her face was so desperate that Phoenix felt himself soften a little. Anyone who defended Pearls like this couldn't be all bad, could they?

He let out the breath he'd been holding in a long sigh. “Fine,” he conceded. “I'll reserve all judgment of you four—” He pointed around at Maya, Athena, Pearl, and Trucy, “—until I've heard everything from Kay.” He turned to the girl in question again, his voice a little gentler now. “I can tell you really care about Pearls, and I don't think you meant any harm. I'm not going to say that what you did was okay, but I can forgive it. What I don't understand is why you all would hide it from me. That's the worst part, to me.”

Kay nodded, tugging at her scarf guiltily. “I—I can understand that, sir,” she stammered, and Phoenix's eyebrows shot up. Sir? Maybe he should dial it back a little on the righteous anger thing. “Th-the thing is, as you know, I've known Mr. Edgeworth a long time.” Phoenix nodded, gesturing for her to continue. “And when I was working cases with him...he would talk about this guy he
knew, and...” She bit her lip, and it looked to Phoenix like she was choosing each word carefully. “He always seemed...so...well... inspired by you,” she decided, bravely meeting Phoenix's eyes.

Phoenix dropped his arms to his sides, taken aback. “Huh?”

“He'd always talk about 'a certain friend who saved me' and how 'the sight of that man still shines brilliantly' and that 'thanks to that person, I have changed for the better,' and...” She shrugged and looked at the floor. “I was really curious about you.”

The defense attorney felt his cheeks blazing. “He...he said all that?” He felt a bit giddy inside. Had Edgeworth really felt that way about him all that time?...

Kay scoffed, sitting back down, this time next to Trucy. “Are you kidding? He wouldn't stop saying stuff like that. But whenever I asked him who he was talking about, he would clam right up. And I couldn't ever figure out why.” She lowered her head. “So...I took finding the answer into my own hands.”

He blinked at her. “Why didn't you just come to me directly?” he asked.

“Well...” She crossed her arms and quirked her mouth up on one side, thinking. “I guess I wanted to see for myself and form my own impressions. I thought if I observed you even as you were when you weren't putting up any fronts, I'd find out what kind of person you really were.” She offered him a sheepish smile. “It kinda worked...I found out you really are an honest, brave man who always does his best for his clients...”

“You flatter me,” Phoenix said, unimpressed.

Kay slumped, her attempt at buttering him up having been unsuccessful. “I...I really did just want to help my friend,” she mumbled. “He seems so uptight and cold, but I've seen the person he tries to hide. He feels just as deeply as anyone else.” She fixed her eyes back on Phoenix. “I wanted to see what made him feel so deeply about you.”

Well, that was unexpected. “What makes you think he felt... d-deeply for me?” Phoenix deflected, probably blushing enough to heat the Agency. Hearing her say that Edgeworth had thought so much of him even ten years ago...it was enough to make him feel a little wobbly-kneed. But then... “If he felt so inspired by me or whatever, why wouldn't he be willing to talk about me?”

Kay nodded. “That is what I was trying to find out.”

“Well?” Trucy goaded her, leaning towards the older girl. “What was your conclusion?”

“Mr. Edgeworth doesn't like to talk about things that make him too emotional,” Kay answered easily. “It's the same reason he refuses to talk about The Steel Samurai in front of strangers: he just gets too worked up and then he can't be all dignified and distant.”

“Did you just compare Edgeworth's opinion of me to his opinion of the Steel Samurai?” Phoenix asked weakly.

“Hmm...” Kay paused, considering, and then nodded decisively. “Yup.”

“Oh,” said Phoenix. “I see.” He didn't know whether to be flattered or disappointed. Clearly, Edgeworth thought quite highly of the Steel Samurai, but at the same time, Phoenix would have liked to have believed he meant more to Edgeworth than a fictional television show character, especially in light of...recent events.
“You forgive her, right, Daddy?” Trucy said coaxingly, giving him a truly dangerous puppy-eye expression. “She didn't mean to worry you...”

“I'm sorry, again,” Kay added with a little bow of her head.

Phoenix blew out another sigh. “Of course I forgive you,” he said, almost resentfully. His ability to forgive people was both a blessing and a curse. “I suppose you were only trying to help Edgeworth because that guy won't ever open up to people.” He gave Kay somewhat of an apologetic smile. “I'm glad we could meet face-to-face, instead of, y'know, your face to my back.”

Kay brightened up like the sun coming out from behind the clouds. “Yeah!” she said, grinning. “Me too!”

“And the rest of you,” Phoenix continued, looking around at all the other guilty faces, “I still don't know how you actually met this girl or why you were protecting her...” The locks on everybody's hearts rattled a little, but did not break. Guess it wouldn't be that easy. “…but next time I start feeling like I have a second shadow, I'd appreciate it if you all would tell me if I'm worrying about nothing.”

He was met with murmurs of apology and assent.

The awkward atmosphere was broken by the ringing of the Agency's phone. Everyone jumped a little. Maya, who was closest to the phone, picked it up and said in a practiced manner: “Wright Anything Agency; this is Maya Fey speaking.” She paused, and then her eyebrows furrowed. She locked her dark eyes on Phoenix, and beckoned him over.

“Edgeworth,” Maya whispered at his questioning glance, as she handed the phone off to him. Phoenix couldn't help the little flutter in his chest as he brought the phone up to his ear.

“Hey, what's up?” he asked. Ordinarily, Miles called Phoenix on his cell phone...the only conclusion he could draw for why the prosecutor would be using the office phone was that this was not a personal call.

“Wright, we've found one of the kidnapping victims.” Edgeworth's voice was more breathless than Phoenix was used to, his words coming out in a rush.

“You have?” Phoenix adjusted the phone against his ear with his shoulder. “Which one?”

“The first,” Edgeworth continued, “Courtney Hampton. She was found at J's Amusement Park, that old abandoned place near Guernville. She's alive, and is recovering in the hospital.”

“Th-that's fantastic!” Phoenix responded, hopeful that this meant the other victims would also turn up alive. “But, uh, that's quite a while away from here,” he realized, furrowing his brows. “How did you come to find out about this?”

“That's...that's just the thing,” Miles said, his voice strained. Phoenix was instantly put on his guard. When Miles Edgeworth sounded worried, there was definitely a big problem. “It would seem you and I are...personally involved in this case.”


“The girl was found with a note in her pocket,” Edgeworth explained, his voice grave. “And the note lists us both by name.”
Next chapter: Kay speaks up. Miles shuts Phoenix (and himself) up.
Kay wasn’t sure how she had managed to land herself in the midst of all this chaos, tagging along with the rest of the Wright Anything Agency (including Apollo, with whom she had exchanged quick and awkward introductions) to the Prosecutor's Building, where Mr. Edgeworth was waiting for them.

“Good, you're all here,” said the prosecutor briskly when he opened the door to his office for them. He turned to lead them inside, but then did a double-take, his sharp gray eyes locking onto her.

She valiantly did not flinch. “H...Heya, Mr. Edgeworth,” she choked out, smiling sheepishly and offering him a halfhearted wave.

“What...on earth... are you doing with...?!” If she wasn't so frightened of the prosecutor's terrible retribution, Kay might have found the way he was spluttering and flapping his mouth comical.

“Not now,” Trucy said firmly, barging in and evidently not the slightest bit intimidated by Edgeworth's fierce glare. Kay would have to ask her for pointers on how to wrap Mr. Edgeworth around her finger. From all the things Pearl and Trucy herself had told her, Mr. Edgeworth was surprisingly soft towards the magician. Trucy looked at Kay and then back to Mr. Edgeworth, offering an apologetic shrug. “Long story.”

“No kidding,” Mr. Wright muttered, shooting Mr. Edgeworth a glance that Kay could only interpret as a *We'll talk about this later* sort of look.

Mr. Edgeworth closed his eyes and shook his head, seeming to put aside the matter of her presence in favor of explaining their current situation.

“Detective Gumshoe just brought me the note a little while ago,” the prosecutor said, making his way over to his desk, where an evidence bag was laid out containing a torn-out square of white, unlined paper. “It's only been hours since the note was discovered, and it's already on the news.” Mr. Wright was the first to reach his side, blue standing next to red, as Mr. Edgeworth continued. “I trust you don't know what to make of this either?” he asked, glancing at the defense attorney.
“Wh...what the heck?” Mr. Wright breathed, staring down at the paper. Kay approached quietly and looked around the two attorneys to get a glimpse.

*MILES EDGEWORTH AND PHOENIX WRIGHT LET THIS HAPPEN*, the note said in slanted, angular handwriting.

“Who would write this?” Maya asked, having ducked under Mr. Wright's elbow to read the note. “Nick, did you even know the girl who was kidnapped?”

“Not even slightly!” Mr. Wright declared, shaking his head.

“Not to mention that as far as I know, none of us has ever been to J's Amusement Park,” Apollo pointed out.

“I didn't even know it existed,” Athena admitted.

“How is the girl who was found?” Pearl chimed in, sounding worried. “Is she all right?”

“She is disoriented, malnourished, and weak,” Mr. Edgeworth answered, grimacing, “but after a few days of recovery, she should be all right. We attempted to question her when we brought her back to the area, but...she was just too confused and fatigued to respond very much.”

“Poor thing,” Pearl whimpered, grabbing onto Maya's sleeve. The older spirit medium patted her cousin's back comforting.

“I just don't get it,” Mr. Wright said, lifting his eyes from the paper to Mr. Edgeworth's face. His brows were drawn together in an expression halfway between concern and fear. “Why name *us*?”

“I can think of many reasons criminals would want *me* gone,” Mr. Edgeworth grumbled, scowling, “but *you*?” He snorted. “You wouldn't 'let' a cat get stuck up a tree, much less a girl be kidnapped.”

“Well, I wouldn't go that far,” Mr. Wright mumbled, dropping his gaze and shuffling his feet in embarrassment. “I've got plenty of enemies too, you know.”

“Really,” said the prosecutor, raising an eyebrow in challenge. “Who, then.”

“Uh, well...” Mr. Wright rubbed the back of his neck, glancing around the room at length. “G-Godot wasn't very fond of me,” he tried.

“He's in jail,” Mr. Edgeworth countered, crossing his arms.

“What about all the witnesses I've accused over the years?” Mr. Wright pointed out, furrowing his brow.

“Most of them are in jail, too, and the ones that aren't are generally on friendly terms with you now. Didn't Ms. Andrews send you a Christmas card just last year?”

Mr. Wright looked almost disappointed that he couldn't come up with anyone who would want to implicate him. “Your sister hates me,” he pointed out, shooting a nervous smile at Mr. Edgeworth. Hm. So Mr. Wright had met Franziska von Karma.

“Not enough to implicate us both for kidnapping?” Mr. Edgeworth barked, glaring at the defense attorney. “And...she doesn't hate you,” he added as an afterthought. “She hates the idea of you.”

“Oh, great,” Mr. Wright said flatly, “that clears that up.”
“If you guys are done doing your Old Married Couple routine,” Maya interjected, causing both attorneys to jump a little, “maybe we should start brainstorming ideas about how the heck you guys could be related to this incident.”

Everyone stared at her.

“What?” she yelled defensively, throwing up her hands. “I can be task-oriented, too!”

“Maya’s right,” Apollo said. “Let’s start thinking about this. Mr. Edgeworth, you said you suspected the culprit was doing this out of resentment towards the courts?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Mr. Edgeworth agreed with a nod. “All of the victims had at least one parent in a legal profession. I suspect whoever is doing this holds a grudge towards the court, possibly for false charges or a disagreeable verdict.”

“And they’re mentioning you both at once,” Athena added, looking contemplative as she fiddled with her earring. “Maybe that means the case in question was one you both worked on...?”

Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth exchanged a surprised glance.

“Of...of course,” Mr. Wright stammered, bringing a palm to his forehead. “That would make sense...! Argh, that’s so obvious, now that you mention it...”

“So all we have to do,” Mr. Edgeworth reasoned, his expression smoothing into a look of fierce determination, “is review which cases we have both taken in the past few years!”

“But still, I can’t think of any I worked that were kidnapping cases...” Mr. Wright rubbed his chin with his hand, staring off into space in thought.

“No, I can’t either...” Suddenly, Mr. Edgeworth's face went slack. His eyes widened, and his mouth fell slightly open. “Wait!” he exclaimed, and Kay (as well as everyone else present, she'd guess) was immensely startled to see him grab both of Mr. Wright's arms in excitement. “Wright... One year ago! The Morris case!” He was practically shaking the other lawyer.

“Of course!” Mr. Wright responded, grabbing Mr. Edgeworth's arms in turn. “The kidnapping that wasn't really a kidnapping!” Kay thought they looked rather too revved up for two people discussing an apparent abduction. But then, people in law were like that. They loved putting together the pieces. She remembered her own father sporting a somewhat manic grin whenever he saw through the gaps in a story. Mr. Wright let out a laugh of relief, still not letting go of the prosecutor. “Finally, a lead!” Mr. Edgeworth was actually...kind of smiling back at the defense attorney. It was a good look for him. It made him look ten years younger, seeing that kind of hopeful expression on his face.

Apollo cleared his throat, and the two men froze, their enthusiasm switching off like someone had pressed a button. They released each other and stood a few feet apart, and Kay definitely saw some major blushing from both parties there...hmm. She'd have to discuss this with her fellow operatives later. “Would anyone care to explain what case you're talking about?” the younger attorney asked, crossing his arms.

“Oh, right, you had just left,” Athena remembered. “There was this girl who was apparently kidnapped and murdered, and her parents were convinced her boyfriend had done it. Mr. Edgeworth was on the prosecution, since the victim was the daughter of an important prosecutor. Mr. Wright was the boyfriend's defense.” She looked at them both for approval, and Mr. Wright nodded.

“Right,” he confirmed. “In the end, we found out...”
“No one had been murdered,” Edgeworth finished. His expression clouded over, recalling an unpleasant memory. “The girl had committed suicide.”

“Then...what would the revenge be for?” Kay finally piped up. She felt a little awkward being in the middle of this obviously well-acquainted group, but if she wanted to establish herself as part of it, she'd have to start speaking up.

“The girl's father, the prosecutor, wouldn't accept the truth we had found,” Mr. Edgeworth explained. “He insisted that his daughter's boyfriend had abducted her and murdered her. He...even tried to prepare a piece of false evidence to support his claim.”

Everyone winced. There was a topic no one wanted to get into.

“Of course, Edgeworth caught him,” Mr. Wright assured them all, shaking Mr. Edgeworth's shoulder amiably. “Like he always does.” The defense attorney's smile was brilliant.

Kay was positive she saw Mr. Edgeworth's cheeks darken in a blush. “Y-yes, well,” he grumbled, making no attempt to shake off Mr. Wright's hand and instead adjusting his glasses. “He was of course removed from the Prosecutor's Office after that.”

“Yeah, and he wasn't happy about it,” Mr. Wright remembered. “He tried to confront Edgeworth in the street once...it didn't go well.” He finally released the prosecutor's shoulder, and crossed his arms.

“Oh!” Kay heard Pearl squeak, and when she glanced over at her, the younger girl had covered her mouth with both hands, her expression wide-eyed. Athena looked over questioningly too, but from the looks of it, no one else had noticed Pearl's strange reaction.

“What about the boyfriend?” Maya asked. “What happened to him?”

“He was devastated that his girlfriend was gone, and heartbroken that her father had tried to frame him,” Mr. Wright recalled, frowning. “But he was really grateful to the two of us for getting to the bottom of the incident. He told me so personally.”

“So then...it has to be the father doing this, right?” Apollo pressed. “He thinks you guys left his daughter's murder unsolved, and then helped her murderer get off the hook. Plus you fired him.”

Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth exchanged grave looks. “I can't think of anyone else it could be,” Mr. Wright agreed.

“Time to go through that old file,” said Mr. Edgeworth, giving a stiff nod, “to reacquaint ourselves with a Mr. Hamilton Morris.”

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She should have known better than to think she was going to escape unscathed.

Everyone had only been looking through files for a few minutes when Mr. Edgeworth locked eyes with her and cleared his throat. She made her way over to him and smiled gingerly.

He crossed his arms and regarded her. His gaze wasn't as fierce as she had feared, but all the same, his calculating demeanor made talking to him intimidating sometimes... “Kay. Please explain,” he said finally, his voice quiet.

She sighed, her shoulders slumping. It seemed she'd been doing nothing but explaining all day. “Basically, I met Pearl Fey a month ago,” she started. She folded her arms right back at him and
attempted a glare. “And since you wouldn't return my calls, I found a new group of friends to hang out with. Hmph!”

He looked unmoved. “Well, I'm glad you're having fun,” he remarked. “Am I correct in assuming that you have only met some of these people today, however?”

Kay tapped her fingertips together sheepishly. “Yeah...you're correct...”

“One of them being Wright?”

Her uncomfortable smile turned into something more like a grimace. “More or less...”

Mr. Edgeworth raised an eyebrow. “And what does that mean?” Kay thought he sounded just a tiny bit nervous.

“Well, you could say I've heard enough accounts of him that I kind of already knew him,” she pointed out, glancing at Pearl and Trucy. She looked back up at the prosecutor knowingly. “I've read plenty about him too...” She directed her view over to Mr. Wright, who was squinting at a folder open in his lap. His blue eyes were intent as they moved over the page, scanning line by line. She looked back at Mr. Edgeworth, and chanced one of her trademark cheeky grins. “I must say, he really does live up to the hype.”

“Kkgh...!” Oh, it had been ten years since she'd seen Mr. Edgeworth blush so deeply. Kay savored the moment, trying to suppress the giggles that were trying to escape. “Kay, you...you won't forget about what you promised...?” He was casting his eyes around wildly, his voice having lowered into a desperate hiss.

She gave him an indignant look. “Of course not!” she said huffily, popping her hands on her hips. “I'd never betray your trust like that, Mr. Edgeworth!” Sure, she might have betrayed it in other ways, like stalking him and the object of his affections, but she had indeed not betrayed it in that particular manner! She had held the secret of the journal close to her heart and never told a soul.

His face relaxed. “I see. That's, um... fortunate,” he mumbled. He pushed his glasses up his nose. “I believe the phrase you're looking for is 'thank you,’” she told him smugly.

“Thank you,” he said immediately, and Kay blinked at him in amazement. And then she was blown away yet again when he actually offered her a smile. “Regardless of what circumstances have brought you, I am glad you are here,” he told her.

“Oh, um,” she choked out, feeling the backs of her eyes prickling. “R-right back at you.” Dang, what was it about these people today, making the Great Thief Yatagarasu get all misty-eyed over things like love and friendship?

“Well then,” said Mr. Edgeworth, taking on a brisk, businesslike tone. “Let us join in the perusal of these folders, Kay.”

“You got it!” she beamed back at him. It felt like she had never been gone.

“We need to talk, when you have a moment,” he finally forced himself to say after about a half-hour of group research, as he passed Wright on the way to retrieve another file.
Wright paused mid-page turn from where he sat on the couch, but didn't look up at Miles. He seemed to have gone very stiff. “Sh...Should I be worried?” he asked quietly, slowly. Miles furrowed his brow in confusion. Why did Wright suddenly seem so hesitant?

“I...don't think so?” he chanced. “I just wanted to talk to you about something Trucy observed, and...what you plan to do about it.” He opened the folder he was holding and stared at the page, not reading any of it, but just using it as a prop to disguise his conversation with Wright.

He saw Wright's posture relax again. “Oh,” he breathed. “Thank goodness.”

“Wright,” Miles murmured, concerned. “Are you all right? You went very pale there for a moment.”

The defense attorney chuckled a little, running a hand through his hair. “Y-Yeah, I'm fine. It's just...starting a conversation with ‘we need to talk’ when you're in a new... thing... is...” He trailed off, his cheeks flushing a little.

Instantly, Miles felt like an idiot. “I did not realize how that would sound,” he admitted. “I assure you, 'we' are...fine, as far as I am concerned.” He felt his own face warm a little, too. It was times like these that Miles wished he wasn't so pale; it was very hard to hide it if he got worked up in any way.

“Why yes, you are fine,” Phoenix murmured so that only Miles could hear, a familiar smirk spreading across his face. His uncertainty seemed to have vanished at Miles' reassurance.

Miles' face went much hotter. “Phoenix,” he hissed through clenched teeth, his hands shaking and making the folder he was holding tremble a little, “we are not alone.”

“Sorry,” said Phoenix. He didn't sound sorry at all. “I just wanted to see you blush.” Miles turned to glare at him, but all the biting words he'd been preparing to fire back died in his throat when he saw the soft smile on his face. Damn it, how was he supposed to get annoyed with him if he looked at Miles like that?

“The worst,” was all he muttered instead, adjusting his glasses and looking away. “The absolute worst, I tell you.”

“I think you mean ‘the best,’” Phoenix teased. He flipped a page over on the packet he had been reading, but Miles could tell he wasn't really absorbing it—much the same as Miles himself was doing with the folder in his hands. “So, as you may have noticed, I have several moments,” Wright continued. “The others are busy researching. Why not have that talk you wanted to have now?”

“Not here,” he said out of the corner of his mouth. “I don't want anyone to overhear. It's a private matter between the two of us alone.” He paused. “Phoenix Wright I don't even have to be looking at you to know that you are smirking about my use of the phrase 'private matter.' I demand that you cease the imminent eyebrow wiggling you will be tempted to engage in.”

Phoenix snickered. “You're incredible.”

“Don't be sarcastic.”

“I'm not.”

Miles rolled his eyes, though inside his chest it felt like it was filled with helium. Maybe it was, because his voice was about an octave higher when he hissed, “Wright. Please.”

“All right, all right,” Phoenix conceded. He looked around surreptitiously at the rest of Miles' office,
and Miles followed suit. Everyone seemed to be fairly engrossed in research. Pearl and Trucy were huddled together, looking over the same pages, and Kay was pulling down files from his bookshelf (Miles resisted the urge to go over and stop her—the last time she had gone through his files indiscriminately, it had resulted in a terrible secret being revealed). Athena seemed to be trying to convince Apollo of something, but the young man was shaking his head. And Miss Fey was...looking at his Steel Samurai figurine longingly. He winced internally. If he wanted to have a conversation with Wright, it would be best to not attract her attention, but that figurine was a priceless collector's item...he hoped she would be careful with it if she decided to touch it.

"Looks like we have a good opportunity to slip out," Phoenix whispered, rising from where he sat. Miles nodded. He didn't see how they could escape without being apprehended, but evidently Phoenix was something of an expert on going unnoticed, because in three or so steps he was out the door to the office, looking back at Miles and jerking his head in the direction of the hallway, indicating that he should follow.

Well, it might have been easy for Phoenix Wright, but Miles was quite used to drawing attention wherever he went, whether he wanted to or not (he almost never wanted to). So he felt a bit nervous as he took in a deep breath, held it, and marched as inconspicuously as possible towards the door.

"Where you headed, Mr. Edgeworth?" came Kay's question when he was just about to reach out to the doorknob. Miles froze in place and turned slowly on his heel.

"I'm...uh, restroom," he stammered.

Kay blinked at him. "Okay then." She grinned at him with that familiar "I know something you don't want me to know" expression on her face that always made him anxious. "Don't worry, I won't let Maya destroy your Steel Samurai."

Despite himself, he felt a wave of relief sweep through him. "Thank you," he murmured fervently, and nodded to her before exiting the office.

Phoenix was waiting a little ways down the hall, leaning against the wall and looking entirely unfairly good. His pose was nonchalant, but the elegance of the sharp blue 3-piece suit (Which Miles himself had helped him pick out, of course—the man's fashion sense was atrocious on his own) made it look like he was posing for a magazine or something. Miles stopped short, taking in the sight a moment.

Unfortunately, his suit wasn't the only thing that was sharp about Phoenix Wright. "So, did you just want to look at me, or were we going to talk?" said the defense attorney, half-smiling in a way that was probably supposed to look cocky but instead just looked bashful.

Nevertheless, his comment made Miles' cheeks flush, embarrassed at having been caught staring again. He'd gone for years and years hiding the glances he sent that man's way; why was it that now he couldn't look at Phoenix for one moment without him noticing? He cleared his throat. "Trucy confronted me in the car on the way back from Conroe's abduction site. She saw you holding my hand, and demanded an explanation."

Phoenix's eyes went wide. "Oh," he said. He rubbed the back of his neck, and let out an uncomfortable chuckle. "Whoops. Guess I should be a little more careful about that."

The prosecutor resisted the urge to hastily blurt out "No, please don't." Instead, he nodded and murmured, "Yes, perhaps." He closed the distance between Wright and himself and propped himself on the wall next to the other man. They stared at the floor side-by-side. "I assume Trucy has not been informed of our..." He trailed off, not knowing how to label this. Giving it a name seemed to Miles to
be a scary thing—it was something that would secure this in the realm of reality, and reality never seemed to go very well for him. Reality was a place where Miles had betrayed and hurt Phoenix many times. He wasn't used to it being a place where he was allowed to have a...

He furrowed his brows, staring holes into the carpet. How were they ever going to make this work if Miles couldn't even talk about this without assigning some sort of childish superstition to it?

“Relationship,” Phoenix finished for him quietly. Miles lifted his head and looked over at the defense attorney, who was regarding him with a mixture of apprehension and hope. “That's...that's what this is...right?” Miles was a little too slow gathering the words to respond, because Phoenix looked away and grimaced. “I... I didn't want to force anything on you that you weren't comfortable with,” he continued. “If you wanted to just...stay like we are now... that would have been okay.”

Miles felt his cheeks warm again. Just how much was Phoenix willing to sacrifice for Miles' comfort? Thinking back to what he knew about Phoenix, he scolded himself for not seeing this before. Of course Phoenix would have wanted to tell people. It was Miles who was uncomfortable about people knowing personal details about his life. As usual, Phoenix had been putting aside his own feelings for Miles' sake.

Before he could think about it, he'd reached over and taken Phoenix's hand. The defense attorney looked startled, his eyes flicking from their hands to Miles' face. “Obviously, if I was only comfortable with things 'staying like they were,' nothing would have changed,” Miles told him, his words tumbling out in a rush. Ordinarily, he would have stopped himself before anything else spilled out, but holding himself back in front of Phoenix had only ever led to misunderstandings between them. It was only on the rare occasions that Miles had been honest that anything had ever been different. “You should know by now that my feelings aren't the only ones that matter,” he continued. “You have every right to tell anyone you please about...o-our involvement.” He patted himself on the back a little internally for only stumbling once over that phrase.

The smile that spread across Phoenix's face was a little bit shy, a little bit relieved, and entirely endearing. “You might regret giving me that permission,” he said, turning a little to face him and reaching over to take Miles' other hand as well. “I can be pretty obnoxious about that kind of stuff.”

“I know,” Miles informed him bluntly. “I've seen all your photo albums of Trucy.”

Phoenix laughed. It was the kind of sound that he couldn't help reacting to with a smile of his own. He stepped closer to Miles, his expression soft. “So...you're really okay with...this?” He stroked his thumbs over the back of the prosecutor's hands. “With...me?”

Miles flushed a little, but scoffed. “Hmph. As if I would let anyone else get away with this.” What kind of question was that, anyway? It was Miles who ought to be asking Phoenix that question.

Phoenix's cocky smirk was back. “The illustrious Miles Edgeworth,” Phoenix teased. His deep blue eyes were dark. “Captured by a lowly defense att—”

Miles didn't let him finish. He had found suddenly pulling him into a kiss was the most effective way to shut Phoenix Wright up. Indeed, a brief muffled exclamation of surprise was his only resistance before Phoenix's hands were sliding up to grip Miles' shoulders and pull him closer. Miles obliged by wrapping one arm around his waist and burying the other in Phoenix's hair (spiky against his fingertips, but flattening into something soft and smooth against his palm). Phoenix always kissed like one of them was going off to war the next day—like he would never get the opportunity to hold him close again if he didn't put everything into it now. He was alarmingly responsive: merely running his hand through his hair caused him to shudder slightly and kiss Miles harder, and when Miles leaned into him more, he obligingly leaned backwards, bending a little at the knees and trusting
that Miles wouldn't let him fall. Miles would have taken the time to wonder if Phoenix kissed everyone like this or just him, but at that moment Phoenix angled his head and licked along the seam of his lips, and that abruptly cut off any and all trains of thought.

Both of them were gasping for air when they finally broke apart. Phoenix's hair was all mused, sticking up at odd angles, and at some point he must have grabbed Miles' cravat, because it was now angled towards his shoulder rather than sitting in the middle of his collar. Phoenix offered him a dazzling smile, still panting a little and searching Miles' face, and he returned it with a reluctant smile as well, adjusting his glasses with one hand since they'd gone a little askew. “I should be mad that you always cut me off like that,” the defense attorney breathed. He was still looking up at him a little due to the fact that Miles was supporting his back with one arm. “But I'm not,” he continued. “I'm so not mad at all.”

“Your hair is a mess,” Miles pointed out, finally releasing the other man. “Be mad at me about that instead.”

“Nope,” Phoenix responded, shaking his head. “There is no capacity in me to be mad about anything that just happened.” He did reach over and straighten Miles' cravat, however. “So, I probably should have asked this before, but...should I be worried about security cameras in this hallway?”

“I know where all of them are,” Miles said. “We happen to be in a blind spot.”

“Huh. Lucky us. And possibly unlucky for the Prosecutor Building’s security, if any unsavory characters break in.”

“This building's flaws aside,” Miles said, “it occurs to me that we did not fully discuss what I wanted to discuss.”

“Well, discuss away,” Phoenix said, straightening his spiky hair between the fingers of one hand in a practiced manner. It immediately and miraculously returned to its typical shape. What the devil did he put in it, Miles wondered? It hadn't been gel-stiff after all... His ruminations were cut off when Phoenix spoke again, giving him a playful smile. “This may be a surprise to you, but you have my full attention.”

“Very well,” he said with a nod. “What is our best course of action here, regarding our...” He cleared his throat. “R-relationship?”

Phoenix patted him on the back pityingly. “We'll work on that,” he said, offhand, before responding, “I know I'm the kind of person who doesn't hide stuff like that, but I meant what I said before: If you're more comfortable with keeping quiet about it for now, I'm okay with that.”

Miles' insides clenched a little with uncertainty. It was true that he wasn't comfortable having his personal life out on display for anyone to see, but... “I don't want you to think I am...ashamed of you,” he admitted quietly, averting his eyes. “My secretive nature has nothing to do with...how I feel towards you. It has everything to do with my own personal shortcomings.”

“Hey,” Phoenix said gently, angling Miles' head back up with an index finger crooked under his chin. “It's okay. I get that, really. I don't mind taking our time. I'll wait for years if I have to.” His reassuring expression faltered a little, and his eyebrows drew together a little in uncertainty. “I, I mean...not to be overly presumptuous,” he backpedaled, dropping his hand away from Miles' face. “It's probably really weird to say that not even two weeks into a relationship, haha...” He trailed off in embarrassment, angling his body away from Miles.

Miles angled him back towards himself, gripping both of his shoulders and pulling. “Please stop
“censoring yourself in the fear that you'll unnerve me,” he told him frankly. “I've known for quite some time that you are both exceedingly optimistic and intensely emotional. It neither surprises nor frightens me that you think about things long-term.” Of course, he had no idea whether Phoenix would really want him anymore after a few weeks, when the novelty wore off... He pushed the thought aside quickly.

“Is that your incredibly roundabout way of telling me that you want this to be long-term, too?” Phoenix asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No,” Miles said defensively, letting go of him. He set his mouth into a defiant line, pausing as he glared at the man in front of him. “Yes,” he revised. As he'd suspected, the defense attorney's mouth quirked up on one side in response. “Stop smirking,” Miles said lamely.

“Ah, two words that changed my life,” Phoenix sighed with a sort of purposefully infuriating melodrama, laying a hand over his heart.

“Oh, shut up.”

“So, what's your opinion on all this? Should I tell Trucy?” Phoenix asked, leaning against the wall again.

Miles thought a long moment, crossing his arms and leaning alongside Phoenix again. “Not yet,” he decided. “Ordinarily, I'd want her to know, since she is an alarmingly astute child and it is all but pointless to hide things from her.” He looked at Phoenix out of the corner of his eye. “But in light of this recent discovery...the note on the kidnapping victim...”

“You think us being in a relationship would draw too much media attention,” Phoenix realized. He crossed his arms, resting the back of his head against the wall and closing his eyes in thought. “Hmhm... Yeah, I can see how that would be a problem right now.” He opened his eyes again and sighed. “After all, only a few weeks ago, you were under so much suspicion for being seen with me in public that you tried to break up with me.”

“I—!” Miles sputtered, standing up straighter. “We were not involved at the time! It was nothing so dramatic as that!”

“Miles, please,” said Phoenix, unconvinced. “You basically said 'we can't see each other anymore' and gave me the 'it's not you, it's me' speech.”

The prosecutor's only response was an embarrassed “Hmph.” He pushed his glasses up his nose. “You were the one who came bursting into my office and started shouting about how I should throw away my reputation to keep 'hanging out' with you,” he reminded him.

“That's right,” Phoenix said, nodding decisively. “And I regret nothing about that.”

“Neither do I,” Miles admitted quietly.

They were silent a moment.

“So,” Phoenix spoke up, voice subdued. “We're...keeping this under wraps.” He fixed those blue eyes on Miles again. “How long?”

Miles felt his hands curl into fists. “I suppose...until our names are no longer in the headlines.” He stared at the ground, frustrated. Against all odds, Phoenix Wright had looked past all of his mistakes and was here beside him, holding his hand, and it just had to happen at a time when they had to keep it a secret. Phoenix deserved someone who could appreciate him out in the open, who was quicker
with a joke, who showered him with compliments, who was unfettered by a demanding job and
unreserved with their kisses. Miles was...none of those things.

He had the brief, unwanted thought that maybe Phoenix was secretly glad to be keeping their
relationship under the radar, but quickly pushed the notion aside again. “I don't know how long it's
going to take to find Morris,” he finished bitterly.

Phoenix's hand was warm around his, clasping it reassuringly. “Not long,” he promised. “I'll be with
you. And then we can both stop hiding.”

Miles squeezed his hand.

“Where have you guys been?!” Maya's voice suddenly startled them. They dropped each other's
hands faster than if they'd been burned. The spirit medium was making her way over to them, her
loose clothing flowing. Miles noticed with a surge of relief that she was not holding the broken
pieces of his Steel Samurai figurine—the magnificent representation of Neo Olde Tokyo's hero
would survive to another day unscathed, evidently.

“I went downstairs to the lunch room to get a snack,” Phoenix excused himself, “and M—
Edgeworth...” he glanced at Miles for a second, urging him to take over.

“I had to use the restroom,” he supplied.

“Right,” Phoenix picked it back up again. “And we ran into each other on the way back, so we
started talking.”

Maya narrowed her eyes at them suspiciously. “Hmmmm,” she said. Miles felt a bead of sweat
trickle down his neck.

“Oh okay,” she finally said with a shrug. She grabbed one of each of their hands and began dragging
them back to the office. “Anyway, come back in here; we all have an idea for a little something to
cheer everyone up from all this gloomy crime stuff.”

***

The “idea” turned out to be a Secret Santa drawing.

“Why?” was Wright's first comment.

“Because!” Maya retorted, her cheeks puffing up. Even as a 29-year-old woman, her mannerisms
had not changed in the slightest.

“Sorry, I'm afraid that's not a good enough reason,” said the defense attorney.

“Daddy, it's more economical like this,” Trucy reasoned. “This way, everyone will only have to get
one Christmas gift instead of something for everyone.” That sounded fairly convincing to Miles, if he
was being honest with himself, but it might have been due to the fact that Trucy made everything
sound convincing.

“I already planned on getting gifts for most of you,” Wright pointed out. As her father, Phoenix was
(mostly) immune to Trucy's powers of persuasion.

“Ooh, really? Like what?” prodded Athena, looking excited and clasping her hands together. The
device around her neck flashed green.
“Sorry, you'll have to wait,” said Phoenix, crossing his arms firmly.

“Awww,” said both Maya and Athena.

“Um, if I may,” Pearl Fey piped up. She winced a little when everyone turned to look at her. “I-I was thinking this would be a really good way for all of us to get to know each other better,” she squeaked, her cheeks going pink under all the scrutiny. “After all, Kay is new to our group of friends, and Mr. Apollo has been gone for a year, so he hasn't had much chance to get closer with us either.”

Phoenix stared at her for a second, and then turned to Miles. The prosecutor thought he understood the unspoken question he asked with his raised eyebrows: “What's your take on this?”

Looking at Phoenix evidently made him too optimistic. “I think...it's a good idea,” Miles found himself saying, surprising everyone (including himself).

“Wow, really, Mr. Edgeworth?!” Kay exclaimed, bouncing on the balls of her feet. “I never figured you were the type to get into the Christmas spirit!”

Yes, well, there were several complicated, trauma-ridden reasons for that, Miles thought. “What can I say?” he intoned flatly. “I'm in a generous mood.”

“Well...if Edgeworth is all right with it...” Phoenix sighed, turning to face Maya. “All right. You win.”

“YES!” Maya squealed, jumping into the air. “Get the hat, Trucy!” she commanded Wright's daughter.

“I'm wearing it, so I don't really need to 'get it','” Trucy pointed out, whipping her silk hat off her head, “but regardless...we've already prepared slips of paper with everyone's names on them!”

“Including Edgeworth's?” Phoenix asked, raising his eyebrows. “How'd you know he wouldn't just laugh in your face at this idea?”

“Do I really seem like the kind of person to do that?...” Miles wondered aloud.

“Yes,” answered Kay cheerily.

“Nnngh,” said Miles.

“Mr. Edgeworth's name is in there,” Trucy confirmed, beaming at them all. She flipped her hat into the air, where it spun around on its side, a blue circular blur, before being grabbed out of the air by the young magician. “And now...everyone, pick your names!”

They all shuffled forward to draw a name out of the hat. Maya was the first to draw. Miles thought she made rather a big show of unfolding the paper, nodding at it, and sticking it in her sleeve. He found the whole situation more than a little suspicious—they had had everything prepared already, and the presentation seemed almost rehearsed—but what harm could a Secret Santa drawing do? Kay drew next, and then Pearl, then Athena and Trucy herself, and then (after some prodding) Apollo. Finally, Trucy shoved the hat under Miles' nose.

“Go on, Mr. Edgeworth!” she told him, shaking the hat a little as if it would make it more enticing. He sighed and did as she told him, unfolding the paper and starring at the name written in pencil on it in Trucy's bubbly handwriting: PHOENIX. He continued to stare at the name for a moment, unblinking. Of course it would be Phoenix. Of course this silly little game would force him to select
a secret, anonymous gift for the person he was secretly in a relationship with. Miles wasn't great at
gifts at the best of times—if he was being honest, he hadn't even given any thought yet to what he
was going to give Phoenix for Christmas. Christmas wasn't exactly his favorite holiday, and he
usually spent it alone if he didn't go to Germany to spend it with Franziska. What benefit would there
have been in giving people gifts if he was not even in the country on the holiday half the time?

What in the world was he going to get for Phoenix?...

He chanced a glance over at the man, who hurriedly turned his face away, evidently having been
staring at Miles as well. Surely he hadn't also drawn Miles' name?...

Well, fantastic. Wright was exponentially more thoughtful than Miles was. His gift would no doubt
blow his own out of the water.

“All right, everyone!” Maya said loudly, clapping her hands together. “Remember, unless you drew
your own name, no switching!” She looked at Miles and Phoenix pointedly. “Nobody drew their
own names, right?…”

“No,” Phoenix and Miles said at the same time, both sounding rather defeated. Miles wondered if
Phoenix was just as nervous as he was about selecting a gift. The thought comforted him a little.

“Great!” Trucy chirped, popping her hat back onto her head. “Well then, I know we'll have a lot on
our minds with this case going on, but at least now we all have something to look forward to!”

Phoenix caught Miles' eye and offered him a secret smile. Miles smiled back and nodded. They did
indeed have something to look forward to when the case was closed, but it wasn't a Secret Santa gift.

“Oh, enough festivities,” Apollo said sternly. “I think a few of us found some info on the Morris
case, so we should probably go over everything.”

Everyone else nodded in agreement, and they began sharing what they'd gathered.

***

The defendant had been Algernon Barnes, a 20-year-old college student who had been dating
Cayley Morris, the victim, for two years. They frequently went for drives together, and seemed very
close. Barnes had testified that Cayley had been increasingly depressed in the months leading up to
her death, stating that her parents no longer had time for her, her schooling was difficult and boring,
and no one approved of her continuing to see a college student. Barnes had added that he had
attempted to bring Cayley to a therapist and a psychiatrist, but that her parents had been furious when
they found out, and had then forbidden Cayley to see him anymore. He had tried for two weeks to
get into contact with her with no success, and then was informed that she had been found several
miles from home, dead from drug overdose. He did not know how she had gotten hold of the drugs,
and swore he had played no part in it.

The victim's parents had been Hamilton Morris and Nadia Morris. They were both very busy people,
and were scarcely ever at home. Hamilton had been a highly-ranked prosecutor until his corruption
had been exposed. No one seemed to have much information on Nadia, except that she'd been
inconsolable at the loss of her daughter, she'd left Morris after the incident, and she had been a
pharmacist.

After a few calls to various record keepers, they had tracked down the full plate number for the
orange pickup truck: 1PJB091. Gumshoe had put out an APB on Morris, and everyone in the
department had been made aware of the situation. After what felt like a very long time, it seemed
they were finally getting somewhere.

***

By the time Miles' assorted guests were on the way out, it was already dark outside (although it did get darker earlier nowadays, being December) and Miles was quite tired.

“Are you suuuure we can't convince you to stop by the Agency just for a little while?” Maya said in a wheedling tone, nudging him with her elbow.

Miles arched an eyebrow at her. “It's quite late, Miss Fey. Surely whatever you have waiting there to startle me can wait until sometime next week.”

The spirit medium looked crestfallen, her shoulders slumping under her shawl. “It's not fair. You're way smarter than Nick.”

“Hey!” Phoenix protested, shooting Maya a look.

“Oh come on, Nick, we all know it,” she huffed impatiently.

“Ouch,” Phoenix remarked, frowning. He turned plaintive eyes onto Miles. “Aren't you going to stick up for me here?” he prompted.

“I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I haven't the evidence to disprove Miss Fey's theory,” Miles responded, giving Wright a smirk to match the one Wright had given him earlier in this office.

Phoenix brought a hand to his chest like he'd been stricken. “Oh, the sting of betrayal,” he said, but his tone was unemotional. Thankfully, he seemed to understand that Miles was attempting to tease him.

“All right, well, if you're not going to stop by the Agency, I guess we'll cut our losses and go,” Maya decided. She looked over at Pearls, who was hovering near the doorway. “Ready to go, Pearly?”

“Yes,” the smaller girl replied. She turned to face Kay, and gave a little bow. “It was nice to see you again, Kay,” she said politely.

Kay smiled, and pulled Pearl into a hug instead. “Thanks for everything,” she said, squeezing the tiny spirit medium and almost lifting her off her feet. She released her then, and Pearl blinked and regained her footing, staring after Kay with a small smile as the Great Thief proceeded to hug Trucy and Athena too, flinging one arm around each of them and hanging on. “Thanks to you two as well,” she said sincerely.

“Of course!” Athena chirped, throwing an arm around Kay's torso and returning the hug full-force. As Miles had always suspected, Athena Cykes was definitely a hugger. Trucy giggled and patted Kay's back a few times, and when Kay let go, the four girls all shared bright smiles. Miles wondered what in the world had happened between all these women—when had they all gotten so close?

“Okay, Truce, we're headed out,” Phoenix informed his daughter. He glanced at Kay. “Do you need a ride or anything?” he asked.

Kay shook her head. “No, I'll stay with Mr. Edgeworth a while. I don't need a ride,” she said. She bit her lip, looking around and fumbling with her scarf. “I do need something else, though...”

Wright blinked at her. “What's that?”
Kay lifted her head, her face that of someone who has made up their mind about something. She launched herself forward to embrace around Phoenix's torso for a brief moment. Phoenix jumped, but reflexively reached down to pat between the thief's shoulder blades. Kay released him and toed the ground, not looking up at him. “Thanks for everything, Mr. Wright,” she said bashfully. “I hope we can be friends, in spite of everything.”

Wright's face smoothed out into a gentle smile. “I already told you, any friend of Edgeworth's is a friend of mine. Take care, Kay.” He nodded to her, beckoned Athena and Apollo, and then gave Miles one more lingering glance. “Good night, Edgeworth,” he murmured to him, his deep blue eyes searching the prosecutor's face.

“Good night, Wright,” he responded softly. Phoenix smiled and turned around, leading the way for everyone else to follow. They filed out one by one, still chattering quietly amongst themselves.

In another few moments, he was alone in his office with Kay Faraday.

“So,” she said briskly after a few seconds of deafening silence during which they had both stared at the now-closed door. “You still haven't confessed your undying love to Mr. Wright, have you?”

Miles turned to face her so fast he almost stumbled. “Wh-What in the world are you saying, Kay?!”

“Oh, Mr. Edgeworth, please, can we stop with the denial?” she sighed, flopping on his couch rather harder than one was supposed to. “We both know I read the journal. I know things. And now I’ve met the mysterious P, and it's obvious from the way you look at him that you're still sweeter on him than icing on a cake.”

“I'll thank you to not compare me to confectionery,” Miles huffed, but he sat down next to her anyway. When Kay merely raised her eyebrows at him, her jade eyes searching his face, he let out a sigh and rested his elbows on his knees. “All right, yes, you're correct. I have never told Phoenix Wright all the dreadful things contained in that accursed book. Which is for the best, by the way.” If Phoenix knew half of what was in all those books, he would think Miles an obsessive freak. To impose that many years of conflicted emotions on him...that would be unthinkable, Miles thought. There were many entries about painful moments in their past, too, which would dredge up all the ways Miles had failed him over the years...

“I thought the stuff in there was really sweet, actually,” Kay said.

“I don't do 'sweet,’” he growled, crossing his arms. It wasn't the first time, however, that something he had said had been called 'sweet,' he remembered. He almost snorted at the memory. Only strange people like Phoenix Wright and Kay Faraday would ever dare to label any of his actions as “sweet.”

“You never would talk about him,” Kay started again, tapping her foot against the floor anxiously. “No matter how much I asked, you always kept quiet about him.”

Miles stared. “Your point being?” he prompted.

“I had to find out what he was like myself,” she clarified. “I started watching him. He really is a good man.”

“By 'watching,' I do hope you do not mean you utilized your professional skills to lurk about him.”

Her cheeks went pink, and she hid half her face in her scarf. “Um...The thing about that is...”

Miles held out a hand to halt her speech. “Stop right there,” he commanded. “Don't tell me any more. I don't want to know.”
She smiled at him sheepishly. “That's probably for the best,” she admitted. She seemed to regain her typical carefree attitude then, as she grinned at him in that mischievous manner he knew so well. “Anyway, he was kind to me from the moment I met him today, and he obviously cares for you a lot,” she remarked. “You should probably tell him you love him before someone else comes along to snatch him up.”

He glared at her. “I don't remember making you my life coach.”

“No one does,” Kay replied breezily, folding her arms behind her head.

Miles sighed and resigned himself to the fact that Kay Faraday would always know more about him than he wanted her to. It was just the way things were.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Maya does not speak Italian. Phoenix comes home.

(Also, why do I always blush like a 13-year-old whenever I write them smooching I'm so lame omg)
The Heart-to-Heart and the Homecoming

Chapter Summary

Maya does not speak Italian. Phoenix comes home.

Chapter Notes

That feel when you spend hours researching Italian cuisine just to make a ridiculous menu description...

Strap in everyone; we are approaching Maximum Sappiness Levels in this chapter.

Thank you to everyone who has read, kudos'd, and commented thus far, and to all of you who will in the future. I couldn't keep doing this without you. <3

ALSO. dogbuns has made the last restaurant scene in this chapter into a comic and it watered all of my crops and cleansed my pores and purified my soul and you should look at its perfection. WOW FANART

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was 15 days before Christmas, and Maya had still not seen Nick and Edgeworth under any mistletoe. Even though the two attorneys were around each other all the time now investigating this case, it was ridiculously difficult to get the Chief Prosecutor to stop by the Agency, since all of the relevant materials were over in Edgeworth's office. This was of course immensely frustrating. Maya always had a sizable Christmas list—this year she had her eye on the obscure, brand-new English dub of the Plumed Punisher series—but she had decided it was time for her dearest friend to get what he wanted for Christmas for once. And said Christmas gift was just not cooperating!

Pearly, on the other hand, seemed now convinced that Nick and Edgeworth were already an item. She and Trucy were continually gathering what they called “evidence,” but what Maya called “trash,” since it mostly consisted of crumpled-up pieces of paper and Post-It notes. Honestly, as much as Maya wanted to get Nick and Edgeworth together, Pearly's fixation on it had started to worry her. She suspected her cousin would be devastated if she found out that all of the things she had painstakingly gathered up were actually meaningless.

“Pearly, this one just says 'Call me; I have information about last year,'” she had pointed out on one occasion, staring down at the crinkled yellow square with Nick's terrible handwriting on it.

“It could mean something happened between them last year!” Pearly insisted, her eyes shining with emotion. She held that silly Post-It note like it was an important legal document, so carefully and delicately.

“Or it could mean they're doing work,” Maya sighed. That was all they ever wanted to do lately. Maya wanted to find Maizy and the other girls, too, of course, but as with Pearly's obsession with
gathering her ‘evidence,’ it was downright unhealthy to be so focused on one thing all the time.

So when Mr. Edgeworth, Nick, and the police worked together to find the second kidnapping victim, Peri Plexus, dazed and weakened but very much alive, Maya had made a somewhat sneaky suggestion.

“You two should grab a celebratory dinner!” she said eagerly, clapping her hands together and grinning a mile wide between the defense attorney and the prosecutor. They were convening in Mr. Edgeworth’s office as usual, because it was large enough to fit everyone comfortably, although this time only Nick, Edgeworth, Pearly, and she were here. Trucy and Athena were back at the Agency, and Apollo was spending the day doing who-knows-what-because-he-never-texted-her.

“But...there are still two girls missing,” Nick protested, looking confused. “Is it really respectful to be celebrating so prematurely?”

“Ugh, Nick, you don't always need a reason to have a nice meal with the people you love,” Maya told him impatiently, jamming her hands on her hips and not missing the way Edgeworth’s and Nick's cheeks went pink at her comment.

Pearly caught on fast, because she was basically a prodigy at everything. “I agree with Mystic Maya,” she piped up. Ah, what an angel. “You two need a break from all of this stress.”

“Yes!” Maya agreed. “Sometimes you gotta celebrate the small victories.”

Nick glanced over at Edgeworth, seemingly to gauge his reaction. The prosecutor looked pensive, tapping his index finger against his forearm as he crossed his arms. Either that or he had a song stuck in his head and he was keeping time to it, but Maya thought it was probably the first thing.

“I am not opposed,” he finally said in his typical dignified voice.

Nick's zig-zaggy eyebrows shot up. “Really?” he sputtered. He rubbed the back of his head, disrupting his trademark spiky 'do. “W-Well, I mean, I guess I am pretty hungry...”

“Fantastic!” Maya said cheerily, clapping her hands together. “Where are we going?”

Everyone turned to look at her, which Maya was totally used to, because she was the kind of person who attracted attention everywhere. But they were all strangely looking at her with confusion rather than affection.

“We’?” Pearly squeaked. She looked quite concerned, her little mouth turned down in a frown and her eyebrows drawn together.

“Well, yeah,” Maya replied, cocking her head. “I'm hungry too.”

“B-But...” Pearly stepped closer to her and reached up on her tiptoes to whisper into Maya's ear: “Didn't you want to give them 'alone time'?...”

Maya's eyes darted to the two lawyers, who were eyeing the two Feys with suspicion. “Oops,” she said. She turned to whisper back to Pearl. “Well, it's already out there. Might as well own it now,” she said, cupping a hand over her mouth to shield her words from prying eyes and ears.

Pearl made a disappointed sound and bit her lip, but didn't protest. She was such a good girl.

“I...I guess we can go to that place on Main,” Nick suggested awkwardly, sneaking another questioning glance at Mr. Edgeworth out of the corner of his eye.
“Ah, the Italian place,” Edgeworth recalled. He gave Nick an approving look (then again, he usually looked at Nick with approval when he thought no one was watching). “I must say, I’m somewhat surprised that you’re familiar with such an establishment, Wright. It’s a bit...shall we say...sophisticated.”

“What, are you trying to say I’m not sophisticated?” Nick pouted. He crossed his arms like an offended child. “I’ll have you know that I totally know what all the forks are for and when to use them. So...so there.”

Mr. Edgeworth looked amused, a familiar smug grin spreading across his face. “I stand corrected. Clearly I am in the presence of a very sophisticated and elegant man,” he said smoothly, nodding his head to Nick in playful mock-deference. Maya felt something bubbly in her chest. It was always so fun to see them this way—the way they bounced off each other so comfortably had always been entertaining, but lately their interactions were more akin to downright flirting.

Ugh. She had to get them under that darn mistletoe!

“Afterward,” she said innocently, “we can pop in to the Agency, because Pearly and I would love to show you all the decorations, Mr. Edgeworth.” She turned towards Pearly, raising her eyebrows meaningfully at her. “Riiight, Pearly?”

“Oh!” Pearl squeaked. She smiled brightly, bouncing a little in excitement. “Yes! The decorations are lovely!”

“I dunno, guys,” Nick said doubtfully. “Did you take down all the mis—”

“LET’S GO, EVERYONE,” Maya yelled out enthusiastically, cutting off Nick’s question and grabbing both lawyers by their sleeves.

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As she looked over the menu, Maya was reminded again why she never came to places like this: all the items on here had lavish descriptions but no pictures. Maya was the kind of person who liked to see the options before committing to eating something. And what in the world was antipasto? Was it like pasta's evil twin? Why were all the food names so long and unreadable? Worst of all, the descriptions themselves didn't really say anything much about what was in the meal—at least, not much that Maya could understand.

“Saltimbocca,” Maya read aloud, probably slaughtering the correct pronunciation. “Thinly-sliced veal blanketed with prosciutto di Parma and seasoned with fragrant herbs, gently marinated in our finest vintage Villa Bucci Verdicchio 2009, which provides a fresh, crisp taste that will transport your taste buds to the salty shores and sea breezes of the Mediterranean.” She stared at all the words on the menu for a moment, and then lifted her eyes to Nick and Edgeworth. “Can someone please tell me what the heck that means?”

“Uh,” said Nick, looking uncomfortable. He pulled at his collar a little. “It-It's baby cow, I can tell you that much.” Maya resisted the urge to sigh. If Nick hadn't been so intent on impressing Edgeworth with his (rather lacking) knowledge of fine dining establishments, they could have all gotten something simple and delicious from a familiar place, and Maya wouldn't be stuck here scrutinizing this dumb pretentious menu. She knew from the way Nick's eyes were roving around at all the other dining patrons—elegantly dressed, using all the utensils correctly, laughing in that sophisticated way that only fancy people can laugh—that he felt out of his element here. She felt the same way, honestly.
“It is indeed 'baby cow,'” Mr. Edgeworth picked up where Nick had left off. He raised his crystal glass of red wine to his lips and sipped from it. “Prosciutto di Parma is a special variety of ham. Saltimbocca is typically seasoned with sage. And the wine they are speaking of is a white wine from central Italy, I believe.”

“If it's got wine in it, you should probably stay away from it, Maya,” Nick informed her, giving her that concerned-big-brother look she was so familiar with.

She crossed her arms and glared at him. “I'm a 29-year-old woman, Nick; don't patronize me!” she growled.

“Yeah, a 29-year-old woman who cried when she met her favorite characters at Disneyland,” Nick muttered behind his own wineglass. She frowned harder at him.

“Um, Mr. Edgeworth,” Pearl's voice came from next to Maya. The younger spirit medium was sliding her menu over to the prosecutor, her expression embarrassed. “Could you please explain what this is?” She pointed out something on the menu with her dainty index finger.

“Veal scallopini?” Mr. Edgeworth read. “It's thin slices of veal, served with mushrooms and a sauce made of capers or lemons or the like.”

Pearly only looked more confused. “Capers?” she repeated, her eyebrows drawing together.

“Ah...perhaps you'd prefer something like the lasagna, Pearls?” the prosecutor suggested gently, handing the menu back to Maya's cousin.

“Oh, they have lasagna here?” Maya interjected, scanning the menu intently. Sure enough, there it was under the pasta section. She shouldn't have spent so much time looking at the anti-pasta, she supposed. “Finally, something I can work with!” she exclaimed eagerly. She flipped forward in the menu curiously. “Ooh, they have tiramisu and gelato!”

“Of course you know foreign foods if they're desserts,” Nick sighed.

“Oh hush,” she said, but she was smiling at him. He had a point.

“I think I'll just get spaghetti,” Pearl decided, closing her menu.

“Good choice, Pearly,” Maya said approvingly. She looked across the table at Nick. “So, Mr. Fancy Diner, what are you having?”

“I'm having lasagna too,” he said, and shot Maya a look. “Because I always planned on having it, not because I didn't read the menu,” he added pointedly. Sheesh, defensive-much? Maya was pretty sure the defense attorney was just as baffled by all this Italian stuff as she was. Ordinarily, she'd call him out on it, but embarrassing Nick in front of the secret love of his life was probably not the best course of action.

“Whatever you say, Nick,” she said with a shrug.

Nick raised his eyebrows at her, surprised that she was letting him get away with his obvious ignorance, but said nothing as their waiter approached.

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They were all chowing down on their chosen meals (Mr. Edgeworth had ordered a dish called gnocchi pomo...something-or-other) when Mr. Edgeworth and Nick started talking about the dang
“I'm thinking we should interview Hampton and Plexus as soon as we can,” Nick said, cutting into his lasagna. “Hampton's been out of the hospital for a while now, and Plexus wasn't nearly as bad off as Hampton was when we found her.”

“I agree,” said Mr. Edgeworth, nodding. “In fact, I had planned to question them tomorrow. Would you like to accompany me?”

“Of course,” Nick responded immediately, smiling softly at the other man. Maya had a feeling that he would have responded the same way if Mr. Edgeworth had asked him to follow him across a river of fire or through a devastating blizzard. She exchanged a glance with Pearl, whose excited expression seemed to say I know! I saw it too!

“Good,” Mr. Edgeworth said, shooting a brief smile at Phoenix in return. It was gone as quickly as it had appeared, however. Edgeworth's expressions were a lot more subtle than Nick's, but it seemed that he was letting them show more and more often, lately. Maya was sure it was because of all the time he'd been spending with the man next to him. She resolved to let the two of them conduct their questioning tomorrow alone, since she had kind of ruined this outing for them. Not that questioning kidnapping victims was a particularly romantic way to spend the day... Well, whatever, Maya thought. Knowing them, they'd still manage to make it a bonding experience.

“Besides, according to the last person we interviewed, I ask questions way more politely than you do.” Nick's tone was teasing as he regarded Edgeworth over the top of his water glass. His eyes were sparkling mischievously.

Mr. Edgeworth's cheeks turned pink. “Hmph,” he grunted in slight irritation. “I was only trying to be efficient. If my demeanor comes off as impolite, then...” He trailed off, deciding to abandon talking in favor of eating his gnocchi-stuff. His movements were kind of abrupt. Whatever incident Nick was referring to, the memory of it seemed to frustrate Mr. Edgeworth.

Nick laughed. He moved around a bit of lasagna on his plate, making sure it was covered in enough sauce, before popping the forkful in his mouth. He regarded his friend affectionately. “Relax, Edgeworth,” he said placatingly, patting the prosecutor on the shoulder before lowering his hand again. Contrary to Nick’s suggestion, Mr. Edgeworth’s shoulders stiffened, and he went very still. “No matter what that ol' Hippo says, everyone knows you're a gentleman.”

Edgeworth's cheeks went one shade darker, and he stared at the tablecloth hanging down between Nick and himself rather than at the man directly. “The gesture is appreciated, Wright, but I didn't really put that much stock in that woman's words.”

“Psh,” Nick scoffed. “Whatever. You totally can't stand it when people like me more than you.” His smile had widened, and he rested one elbow on the table, leaning a little closer to Mr. Edgeworth.

“That's ridiculous,” Mr. Edgeworth huffed, looking away and pushing his glasses up his nose with two fingers. The furrow between his eyebrows was in full force.

Nick quirked an eyebrow at the prosecutor disbelievingly, but sat back up straight. His expression was still half-playful, half-fond. “Whatever you say, Miles,” he said with a one-shouldered shrug.

Whoa. What?

Maya’s head whipped to the side, and her own widened eyes met Pearly's. Good, her cousin hadn't missed that first-name usage either. When in the world did that happen? she wondered. As far as she
knew, Nick and Edgeworth had been calling each other by their last names since grade school. What
could this mean?...

She chanced a glance at Phoenix, who was seated beside her on her left. His expression was kind of
hard to read—he'd gone a little red and his eyebrows had drawn together, but his smile was frozen
into something more like a grimace and his eyes were staring straight ahead at nothing. If Maya had
to sum up what his face was saying in one word, it would be “Oops.”

Her gaze drifted to Mr. Edgeworth next. Maybe it was the low light in this place, but his cheeks
looked even more flushed than before to Maya, and his face was definitely a little pained as he
sipped from his wineglass for way longer than it took a normal person to sip from a wineglass.

It was Pearly's little voice that broke the silence. “I...I've been meaning to say this for a while now,”
she said, setting down her fork, her tone a little nervous, “but...” She smiled brilliantly, her own
cheeks going a bit rosy. “Congratulations!”

Maya winced. Crap, she thought. Pearly's taken this as confirmation that they've gotten together! If
she starts talking about all this, they'll get suspicious...!

Maya widened her eyes at Pearl and, as
subtly as possible, shook her head, telepathically shouting at her to not say any more.

Nick just blinked at Pearly, confused, before glancing at Edgeworth, who shrugged.

“Congratulations for what?” the defense attorney prompted, returning his attention to Pearly. Maya
amped up the volume of her mental shouting, and reached over to grab her cousin's sleeve.

It was too late, though. Pearly flushed a bit deeper, her eyes sparkling. “Well, for finally finding your
special someone!”

“What?” Nick squeaked, his eyes flying open wide and his jaw dropping in a way that would have
been hilarious in different circumstances. As it stood now, though, the older spirit medium merely
groaned and sank her face into her open palm. “M-My 'special someone'?” Nick parroted. His eyes
darted over to Maya and back to Pearl. “I thought you were over that whole 'forcing Maya and me
together' thing,” he protested weakly. Maya almost jumped a little at the sound of her own name.
Wow, she hadn't even considered that he would misinterpret Pearly's intentions like that anymore.

Pearly giggled. “Not Mystic Maya, silly!” she chirped. “Mr. Edgeworth!” She pressed her hands to
her blushing cheeks, her eyes shimmering like someone admiring a night sky filled with shooting
stars.

Both lawyers stiffened like they'd been hit with an electric current. “U-Uh...” Phoenix cleared his
throat. His face had flushed quite darkly, and he pulled at his collar again. “Pearls... I-I don't know
where you heard such a thing, but...” Wow. Maya had only seen Nick turn that color when he'd
accidentally eaten a jalapeño pepper whole.

“We are most certainly not... involved,” Mr. Edgeworth finished, hiding his own impressive flush
behind his wineglass.

“What?” Pearly yelped. And then, sounding almost offended, “Why not?!”

“Why not?” Nick echoed weakly.

Pearly's expression had scrunchd up into one of frustration, her thin shoulders raising up and her
hands curled into fists. “Well you're always together!” she pointed out. “I even saw you holding
hands once!” Maya flapped her mouth soundlessly. This situation had rapidly spun out of her
control. What was the best course of action here? Should she back up Pearly's claims, or try to
convince her to dial it down a bit for now? She didn't want to be the one to disappoint her cousin, though, so she merely watched helplessly. *So help me, if she pulls that 'Evidence Scrapbook' out of her sleeve, I am going to scream,* she thought frantically.

Nick's brow had furrowed in confusion at Pearly's last statement. “What are you...” Suddenly, his eyes widened. “Oh! Wait... could you possibly be talking about last week, when Edgeworth almost slipped on some ice?” Maya tilted her head, considering. It was true that it had snowed last week, and ice had resulted. Maya herself hadn't observed this particular happenstance, though, which made her wonder whether Pearl had seen it herself or received intelligence from another Project: Matchmakers operative. “Pearly, Edgeworth was going to slip. I-I was just stopping him from falling,” Nick explained, his tone placatory—evidently he could tell how upset Pearly was.

Maya was startled to see tears well up in her big gray eyes. “No, Mr. Nick,” she said dramatically, pushing her chair away from the table. She glared at the defense attorney, her little fists trembling. “You're stopping *yourself* from falling! You'll never let yourself fall for *anyone!*** With that, she stormed out of the fancy dining hall, her unusual clothes drawing the usual stares and whispers from the other restaurant patrons. The loops of her hair bounced with every angry step.

The three remaining people at the table were left staring after her, stupefied.

“What...was that?” Nick finally said, looking at Maya in utter confusion.

Maya sighed. She didn't know how to answer that question. “I'll go talk to her,” she said instead, and rose from her chair.

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She found Pearly sitting on the steps right outside the restaurant, her legs folded up near her chest and her chin resting on her folded arms, with which she was hugging her knees. The pose made her look even tinier than usual.

“Hey, Pearly,” she said gently, sitting down next to her cousin.

Pearl didn't look at her, and instead glared at the passing cars in the street before them. She sniffled.

“We... we should talk about what just happened,” Maya started, bringing her own knees closer to her chest and lacing her fingers together, stretching out her arms on top of her knees.

Pearly just gave her a slightly puffy-eyed look. It seemed she wasn't in the talking mood.

“Okay, I'll do the talking,” the older spirit medium conceded with a sigh. “I understand that you're disappointed about...Nick and Edgeworth's situation,” she started.

“It's not fair,” Pearly suddenly spoke up, hugging her knees tighter. “All the signs are there. *I know* the feelings are there.” She looked over at Maya, her expression heartbroken. Just seeing her make a face like that made Maya's own heart clench painfully. “Mystic Maya... have we all been making a big deal out of nothing?”

“No,” Maya said right away. She scooted closer to Pearl and leaned against her shoulder. “I'm sure we're not wrong about them. They definitely have feelings for each other.” Pearly nodded against her own knees. “But,” Maya continued, “I think we *have* been in the wrong in one respect.”

Pearly pulled away a little to look at her in surprise, her hair bauble swinging around. “What's that?”

Maya sighed again, resting her hands on either side of her bottom and stretching her legs out to the
step below the one they were sitting on. She looked up at the gray clouds ahead. The air was sharp, making her nose tingle. It seemed like it would snow again soon. “When I was watching their reactions in there, it occurred to me: the idea needs to be theirs. We shouldn't be putting any ideas in their heads that weren't there to begin with,” she admitted. Or making money off them, she added to herself. She tapped the toes of her sandals together a few times, thinking. “It's all right to give them a little push,” she continued. “But if we force the idea into their heads, and succeed in getting them together sooner than they're ready to be...” She grimaced.

“They might not be happy,” Pearl finished glumly, her eyes downcast. Maya nodded. They were quiet a moment, but then Pearly spoke again. “Mystic Maya, why do these situations never turn out the way they do on television? Is real life just...not nice?”

The older spirit medium's brows furrowed. For all the dysfunction she had seen around her growing up, Pearly still believed so wholeheartedly in true love defeating all odds, in that perfect kind of love that could save anyone. Pearly was the kind of person who approached everything in life with the same wide-eyed earnestness, and put her all into everything she did. Having to watch her realize over and over again that life didn't always go as planned broke Maya's heart. She felt almost as conflicted as she had years ago when she had had to sit Pearly down and explain to her the various reasons why “Mr. Nick and Mystic Maya” would never get together.

“I think it can be,” she finally answered Pearly's question. “Real life is...more complicated than TV or books or movies, so sometimes it takes longer for things to change, or things change in ways we don't want them to...” She watched people pass by on the other side of the street, most of them walking briskly to get out of the cold. Maya suspected that her experiences at Hazakura Temple ten years ago had destroyed her ability to be cold ever again, though—she hardly even felt chilly. “But that can be good, too,” she continued, smiling at her cousin. “I mean, realizing that no matter what's supposed to happen, life can go any direction you decide to take it...that can be a nice feeling.”

“I like having a plan better,” Pearly said sulkily. She sniffled again, although Maya suspected this time was because her nose was running from the cold.

Maya wrapped an arm around her cousin. “It's okay to have a plan,” she told her. “We just need to be willing to keep adjusting it. Pearly, just because things don't happen when we want them to doesn't mean they never will.” She gave her shoulders a little shake. “You're not going to give up on them, are you?” Her voice was coaxing.

“No,” Pearly admitted.

“That's the spirit! We just need to let Nick and Mr. Edgeworth take some steps on their own.”

Pearly sniffed and wiped her eyes, then shooting Maya a dubious look. “Mystic Maya, wasn't it you who was hanging mistletoe up everywhere to force Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth together?”

“Well...yes,” Maya conceded awkwardly. It had seemed like a good idea at the time, but now, after that disastrously uncomfortable dinner incident, her own actions seemed immature and silly. She shrugged with the shoulder that was not against Pearly's. “But you know what?” she said, smiling down again at the smaller spirit medium. “I've always had faith in Nick. I know he'll get this right.” She paused. “Eventually,” she added. She supposed some things were more important than two hundred dollars.

Pearly smiled back. “I think so too,” she agreed, and for a while the two spirit mediums sat together, watching the snow start to fall.
Phoenix stared after where Pearls had stormed off to, his emotions warring inside his chest. He hadn't expected keeping his and Miles' relationship a secret to be so hard. After all, he had kept the fact that he was hopelessly in love with Miles a secret for decades; surely adding some secretive smooching to that shouldn't be so much more difficult. He looked down at the space between him and Miles, where their hands had been clasped together under the tablecloth since a few minutes before the two Feys had left.

He rested his eyes on Miles, whose whole face was still pink. The fingers of his free hand were trembling slightly on the stem of his wineglass, and he hadn't touched his gnocchi in several minutes.

Phoenix cleared his throat. “Well that was awkward,” he finally said to break the silence.

“'Awkward' doesn't even begin to describe it,” Miles snorted. Phoenix felt the prosecutor's hand twitch against his, and he loosened his hold on it to allow Miles to pull his hand away. Phoenix felt a sinking feeling of shame. Even though they had agreed to keep their relationship a secret for a while, he still couldn't resist doing stupid things like accidentally calling him by his first name or holding his hand under the table. Miles probably thought he was an idiot.

“I'm sorry,” Phoenix said somberly, staring at the napkin in his lap.

Miles looked surprised. “What for?”

Phoenix cringed. “Well, first I took...unnecessary risks... and then I called you by your first name,” he trailed off into a mumble, looking away and twiddling his thumbs.

“That was an unfortunate slip of the tongue,” Miles acknowledged. Phoenix felt a surge of relief when the prosecutor finally took another bite of his meal. “And while I agree that your preceding actions were risky, I also must confess that they were... not entirely unwelcome.” He didn't lift his eyes to meet Phoenix's, and his cheeks were still flushed, which was the only reason Phoenix knew Miles was feeling bashful at such an admission.

God, he was precious. “Aw, just say you wanted to hold my hand too,” he goaded with a grin. The other man just glared at him in response, but Miles Edgeworth's fierce glare had long since stopped being intimidating. He had known for a few years now that it was usually a defense mechanism to prevent people from getting too close. Phoenix felt his heart glow a little—he was the only person who Miles had ever let past that glare. Only him!

“Wright, you are making an unbearably embarrassing face,” Miles informed him. Phoenix straightened in his seat, composing his facial features into a more neutral expression. Apparently he had inadvertently entered Doting Boyfriend Mode.

“Sorry,” he mumbled, embarrassed.

“Don't be,” the prosecutor responded mildly, and Phoenix was suddenly reminded of their after-dinner conversation on Thanksgiving. At that moment, when Miles was so unguarded and open and honest, had looked at him with that soft expression, had been so close to him, he had been sure that he was about to...

“Hey, Miles,” he started quietly. Miles quirked an eyebrow as he sipped his wine, indicating that he was listening. “After dinner on Thanksgiving, right before Apollo came in...” He fiddled with his hands on the table, and glanced up at Miles a little shyly. “...Were you going to kiss me?”

Miles suddenly hunched over forward, making a wheezy noise and nearly sloshing his wine out of
its glass. He thumped himself on the chest.

“Y-You all right?” Phoenix asked, alarmed.

“Fine,” Miles choked out, his eyes watering. “You just...startled me.”

“Oh.” Phoenix waited while Miles regained his breath and his composure, but since no response seemed to be forthcoming, he tried again, this time a bit more reluctantly. “So then...what's the answer?” He felt foolish, asking such a meaningless question. Clearly he'd startled Miles with the notion, so the answer was probably not favorable. He almost wished he hadn't brought it up.

Miles stalled for time by chewing a bite of food way more slowly than he needed to. But Phoenix had come to understand, recently, that if he was patient, Miles usually answered his questions honestly.

Sure enough, his patience was rewarded. “I wanted to.” The prosecutor's voice was just a quiet murmur of baritone. He was staring at the tablecloth, looking caught somewhere between shame and embarrassment.

“Hey, you said you wouldn't be embarrassed that I had seen you like that,” Phoenix pointed out, though inside it felt like a balloon was inflating in his chest. Miles had wanted to kiss him! Right there in his kitchen, after Thanksgiving dinner! Him, Phoenix Wright! Every time he stopped and realized that Miles really, truly wanted to be with him, it felt like a life-changing discovery. He felt warmth spread through him, from his chest to the tips of his toes.

“If I remember correctly, I said that I would make no promises,” Miles recalled, still looking chagrined.

“Right,” Phoenix said, nodding. He nudged his shoulder against Miles'. “It was some time after you did that and nearly gave me a heart attack.”

Miles' posture relaxed a little, ruminating. “You froze up like a cheap computer,” he admitted, chuckling a little.

He laughed a little back. “Yeah, I was pretty startled,” he admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. He stared at the space on his plate which had once held lasagna but which now just held some leftover sauce. “I...I would have returned it, you know,” he admitted, feeling his cheeks burn. “If you'd kissed me then.”

“Wright,” Miles choked, his eyes darting around nervously. “This isn't the place to be...to be discussing such things,” he whispered.

Phoenix sighed. “I know, I know. Nowhere ever is. I just...wanted you to know.” He shrugged, feeling bashful now.

Despite his anxiousness and discomfort, the smile that Miles gave him then was one of the softest he'd ever seen. Phoenix felt his insides melt (in a good way). “Thank you,” said the prosecutor simply. He returned his attention to his food. “I must admit, though it is more difficult than I'd thought to be discreet, there is a certain comfort in not being under the scrutiny of others.” A pause. “But...it's only because of the case we're keeping quiet, right? You will want to tell the others, won't you?”

Phoenix blinked in surprise. Was Miles worried that Phoenix's feelings would diminish since he wasn't allowed to be openly affectionate? Well, that was a crazy notion. After all, they hadn't diminished even after years and years of him actively trying to excise them from his body like a
malignant tumor; why should a few months' secrecy have any effect? Or maybe he thought Phoenix was embarrassed about their relationship, which was also a silly idea. But from the way Miles was clenching his hands together atop the tablecloth, Phoenix could tell this question was important. “Are you kidding?” he answered softly, tapping his foot against Miles'. He fixed the prosecutor with a half-smile. “I'm barely restraining myself from shouting it out in this restaurant right now.”

Miles gave him a brief smirk, meeting Phoenix's eyes. “Thank you for exercising self-restraint,” he said. “I know that is something you struggle with.”

“Gee, thanks,” Phoenix grumbled.

The prosecutor's smirk widened before he dropped his gaze again. “You asked me this question before,” he continued, his voice subdued, “but...I never really asked you. Are you...really all right with me?” Phoenix blinked at the man beside him, taken aback by the question. Miles went on before he could respond: “Someone so emotionally distant, who is busy all the time with work, and who is...a man?”

Phoenix goggled at him like he'd started speaking in German, which had thankfully only happened a few times. “Are you trying to ask me if you're really my type?” he rephrased.

“Well...” Miles smoothed his already-smooth napkin in his lap. “In a sense, yes, I suppose that's what I'm asking.” The other man then jumped as Phoenix wrapped his hand around Miles' under the table again.

“Being busy with work has never stopped us from caring about each other,” Phoenix murmured intently. “I really couldn't care less that you're a guy, because you're not just a guy, you're Edgeworth. And...” He squeezed Miles' hand. “You don't feel so distant to me anymore.”

The prosecutor interlaced his fingers with Phoenix's, sighing. Every point of contact felt like a tiny, vibrant spark, and it felt like a gentle shock wave traveled up his arm when Miles stroked his thumb. “I've hurt you, you know,” the other man reminded him. His burgundy-clad shoulders were slumped, his face twisted with shame and grief that he usually kept hidden. “I've betrayed your trust before. I've disappointed you and...” The soothing motions of his thumb ceased. “...Run away,” Miles finished.

The memory of it felt razor-sharp in Phoenix's chest, but he squeezed Miles' hand tighter. “You came back every time,” he said firmly.

“But...” The prosecutor's voice was timid in a way Phoenix wasn't used to. It was emotionally raw...vulnerable. “How do you know I won't do something like that again?” he finally choked out.

Phoenix's grip tightened. “Because I'll be holding on the whole time,” he answered without hesitation.

Miles swallowed thickly. “Phoenix...”

“Sorry, Miles,” he whispered, giving him an affectionate half-smile. “I don't intend on letting you get away again.” He did a one-shouldered shrug. “I'm selfish like that.”

Miles opened his mouth again and then closed it, evidently not knowing how to respond. “Thank you,” he finally breathed.

As he watched this man struggle with the weight of his own past actions, Phoenix resolved to never let him suffer through emotional turmoil alone again, especially not with the anniversary of the worst day of Miles' life drawing closer. Despite all the years that had gone by, Miles obviously still felt like
he needed Phoenix's forgiveness before he allowed himself to be happy. Well, Phoenix had made plenty of mistakes too, but he fully intended on being happy, atonement or no.

He vowed to himself to communicate his devotion, his forgiveness, his complete adoration in every future kiss they shared.

Maybe one day he would even be able to say it with words.

He was jolted out of his thoughts when Miles' phone rang. The prosecutor retrieved the phone from his pocket and pressed a button. “Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth,” he said. His gray eyes were focused, but as Phoenix watched, they widened in dismay. “Another one?” he breathed.

Phoenix felt dread settle over his chest as he waited for Edgeworth to finish the phone call. When he put the phone back in his pocket, Phoenix leaned forward intently. “Who was it? What's wrong?”

“Another disappearance, a girl named Ariadne Stringer,” Miles said gravely. “Our questioning sessions with those two girls can't come soon enough.” His brows had furrowed again. He was probably feeling as guilty as Phoenix suddenly was, sitting here in a fancy restaurant while girls kept vanishing.

“We'll find them,” Phoenix assured the prosecutor, his voice determined. Miles just nodded.

“Let's go retrieve the Fey girls,” he said, his expression serious and businesslike again. “The celebration is over.”

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The following day was a Sunday, but Phoenix was still up bright and early. He met up with Edgeworth at the appointed time: 9 in the morning. It was kind of scary investigating this case, he thought yet again, when he himself had a teenage daughter... Trucy had promised to text him every hour and not leave the apartment, and Athena (who was more than capable of defending herself) was supposed to be staying with her today, so at least he felt secure about that.

Phoenix suppressed a yawn as he climbed into the passenger seat of Edgeworth's car. The effort made his jaw ache.

“Did you stay up late?” Miles asked him.

He smiled a little sheepishly. “Well... Not much past 2 o'clock...”

The prosecutor sighed and shook his head a little as he put the car in reverse, backing up. “You're not a college student anymore, Wright. You should establish a consistent sleep schedule.”

Phoenix snorted. “You're one to talk. You don't sleep much at all, by your own admission.”

“Touché,” Miles responded, smirking at him. Even small smiles like that made Phoenix's heart do little flips now. He told himself to get his jitters under control—it wouldn't do to be fawning over Miles when they were interviewing a kidnapping victim.

“Are Trucy and Ms. Cykes holding up well?” was the next question Miles asked him.

Phoenix couldn't help but smile a little. He had been asking the question about Trucy at least twice a day, but this time he'd asked about Athena, too. Athena had been dismayed when they'd revealed who the latest victim had been last night—apparently she had met Ariadne Stringer at the mall and was planning on introducing her to Trucy. “Let's ask them now,” Phoenix answered, and pulled out
his phone. He typed up a brief message and hit 'send.'

Hardly any time had elapsed before Trucy sent her response. Phoenix read it out loud for Miles: "Didn't you just leave a few minutes ago? Anyway, we're fine! Athena just made me eggs even though I know how to make them. We'll be good today, so go get 'em, Daddy, and send Mr. Edgeworth our love!" He looked over at Miles. "Trucy and Athena send their love," he repeated unnecessarily.

Miles made a "hmhmph" noise which Phoenix had come to recognize as the prosecutor's version of a reluctant chuckle. "Well, I'm glad Ms. Cykes seems to be in better spirits," he remarked.

Phoenix nodded in agreement. "Being around Trucy probably helps with that. It always does for me."

Soon enough, they were pulling in to the Police Headquarters' parking lot. "Remember to not overwhelm her," Edgeworth reminded him as he put the car in park and Phoenix unfastened his seatbelt. "She's been through quite an ordeal."

"Hey, I'm not the one who gets chewed out for being indelicate," Phoenix grumbled, pushing open the car door. He jammed his hands in the pockets of his suit jacket and followed closely behind Edgeworth as they entered the Police Department building.

Ms. Courtney Hampton was waiting for them in a small, private room used for questioning witnesses. She still had circles under her eyes; her tall, thick black hair was slightly lopsided; and the dark, smooth skin Phoenix had seen in her photo looked a bit more wan and washed-out than expected. Nevertheless, her posture straightened when Edgeworth opened the door, and she folded her hands in front of her, watching with keen eyes as the two lawyers seated themselves across from her.

"Ms. Hampton," Miles greeted, inclining his head. "Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us. I understand you must have been under a great deal of stress, and answering questions with such frequency must certainly be exhausting."

Courtney shook her head. "Actually, recovering at the hospital was pretty boring, so I'm glad I can walk around again," she responded, quirking her mouth up on one side. Her right cheek had a dimple.

Phoenix smiled at her. "You're tough," he realized.

Courtney puffed her chest out a little, a mischievous smile spreading across her face. "Thanks for noticing," she said, satisfied.

"Well, I hope you'll forgive us if the questions we ask are ones you've answered before," Edgeworth started, opening the folder he'd brought with him. "We simply want to corroborate the accounts you give us with the ones you've given to others, see if there are any unique details in each of them that might be of use."

The girl nodded. "I understand. My daddy might be a civil law attorney, but I still know about most criminal affairs procedures."

The prosecutor raised an eyebrow, increased respect flashing through his sharp gray eyes. Evidently, the girl's professional manner had impressed him. "Very good," he said. "All right then, let's begin: What were you doing when you were abducted?"

"I was walking home from school," Courtney said, resting her elbows on the table. "Well, actually I
was walking to my mama's flower shop, since I help her out after school, but it's attached to our house, so you might as well say I was walking home.”

Phoenix scribbled that down. “And where were you?”

“Along Van Ness Avenue.”

He scribbled that down, too. Edgeworth picked up the next question: “Do you remember anything about your abductor?”

The girl's full lips turned down in a frown, making the dimple reappear. “I wish I remembered more, but he approached me from behind and smothered my face with a cloth covered in some kind of knockout drug, so I lost consciousness almost immediately.” She hunched her shoulders a little, lacing her fingers and tapping her thumbs together. Her expression was a little embarrassed. “All I can tell you is that I caught a glimpse of a sleeve. A red, plaid flannel sleeve.” She sighed. “I'm sorry. I really wish I had more information for you.”

“It's not your fault,” Phoenix reassured her. “Everything you're telling us has meaning. From what you've told us so far, we know where the guy's been and how he incapacitates his victims.”

Edgeworth nodded. “Wright is correct,” he confirmed.

Courtney sat back in her seat, crossing her arms and moving her hazel eyes between the two attorneys. “So you're the two that were in that note they found on me, right?” Phoenix felt a little nervous under her shrewd gaze.

“Um...yes,” Phoenix admitted, “but...we had nothing to do with your abduction. We think the culprit just has a grudge against us.”

“Yes, before this incident, we were quite unaware of you,” Edgeworth continued.

“No offense, of course.” Phoenix shot a reprimanding glance at the prosecutor. Couldn't he phrase things a little politer?

“None taken,” the girl replied, waving her hand. Her nails were short and blunt, and her hands were covered in small scratches and scuffs—the mark of someone who worked with their hands. In her case, it was gardening and pulling weeds, Phoenix surmised.

“So...anything else you can think of that you remember?” Phoenix leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table like Courtney had been before.

The girl looked contemplative, squinting and looking off to the side as she tapped her chin. “Hmm...well, I don't know if this is relevant, but...” She crossed her arms decisively. “I never got the feeling that the person who kidnapped me wanted to do me harm.” Phoenix exchanged a glance with Miles, who looked equally confused as Phoenix felt. “He didn't handle me rough or anything, and even though he could have destroyed my phone and whatnot while I was out, he didn't.” She took in their befuddled expressions and sighed. “This is why I didn't mention it to the other people,” she muttered, shaking her head. “Look, I'm not saying he's a model citizen. He is a bad dude and he needs to go down.” She frowned at them. “I'm just saying, I don't think his goal is to traumatize teenage girls. I was a tool, not the objective.”
Miles met Phoenix’s eyes, and he knew Miles was thinking the same thing he was: Morris's objective indeed was not to traumatize teenage girls. It was to traumatize the two of them and make them uncertain about that case from a year ago. Well, Phoenix thought, it wasn't going to work. He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mr. Barnes had been innocent, and nothing was going to change his mind.

They asked her a few other questions and gained a wealth of information: She had been put under for almost two days straight. When she awoke, she was in J's Amusement Park. She had tried to use her phone, but the battery had died, and by the time she found a functioning plug in the abandoned park after wandering for an entire day, she found that there was no cell phone coverage in the area. She had thus been stuck there for days, unable to walk long enough to find civilization and too afraid to leave the area. She had survived off rabbits (“My mama used to take me camping,” she explained at their incredulous looks. “Those camping trips were a little more intense than your average Girl Scout fare.”), gradually gaining enough strength and confidence to leave the miles of wilderness and find a place with a cell phone signal. She'd called her parents, who had then alerted the police, and then went back to the park to await rescue. It had taken a while for them to show up, and she was exhausted from malnourishment and exposure to the cold by the time the police located her.

By the time Phoenix and Miles had shut the door to the questioning room, Phoenix was consumed with the realization that he wouldn't have thought to do any of those things if he had been in Courtney's situation. He would have simply wandered around, running on fumes and sheer willpower until he either reached an inhabited place, or collapsed and froze/starved to death. He felt great respect for this strong young woman—she was resourceful, intuitive, and resilient in a way that few people were. The occasional mischievous smiles the girl wore, as well as her ability to not be kept down for long, reminded him a lot of Maya. Come to think of it, Maya had been kidnapped before, too. That was a rather strange thing to have in common.

After Phoenix had checked in with Trucy and Athena (who were both fine, although they disagreed over what to watch on television, apparently), he and Miles moved on to questioning the second kidnapping victim.

Peri Plexus was a sweet-faced chubby girl, though she too looked a little drawn and weary when they approached. Her blue bobbed hair was duller than it had been in her picture.

“Morning,” she greeted, flashing them a cheerful grin regardless of her obvious fatigue. Her voice was bubbly and friendly.

“Good morning,” Phoenix responded, smiling back.

“Are you recovering well, Ms. Plexus?” Miles asked considerately. Without even thinking about it, the prosecutor pulled out Phoenix’s chair before sitting in his own. Phoenix shooed away the ensuing giddy feeling.

“Doc says I'm good to go,” Peri nodded in answer to Miles' question.

“So... you were gone for about two and a half weeks, but you recovered awfully fast,” Phoenix started, settling in his chair.

“Wellll,” Peri drew out the word. “See, the thing is...I was kinda kidnapped twice.”

“What?” Phoenix and Miles both burst out.

The girl chuckled a little, twirling a little of her bright hair between her fingers. “The bad guy got me two and a half weeks ago. He drove me far away, but I woke up during the ride. I pretended to be
asleep, and when he stopped for gas, I escaped. My phone was totally wrecked 'cuz I dropped it when I got carried off, so I didn't really have a plan of action,” she explained. “So even though I managed to get away for a few days, I couldn't find other people anywhere. Eventually I gave up trying to find people and just kinda waited around. Then he found me again.”

“Wow,” Phoenix said. “So...each kidnapping lasted about a week, then?”

“Yeah, thereabouts,” Peri agreed. She grinned. “I was a difficult captive. I kept waking up, so he had to keep looking for a new place to drop me, since I recognized so many places. My dad has a toy shop, and he does a lot of demonstrations everywhere, so we travel a lot.”

This girl, too, was impressive in her own way, Phoenix thought.

“So...you were aware at times, in the presence of the kidnapper?” Edgeworth prompted.

“Oh yeah.” Peri looked satisfied with herself. “He never showed me his face, but he was wearing a business suit.” She squinted. “At least, I think he was. I had to look at him through the divider that was between the truck bed and the seats.”

“Did you ever hear him speak? Did he say anything notable?” Phoenix pressed her.

“I think he's probably a little...” Peri made a circular motion with one finger near her head. “I kept hearing him talk to himself. Saying stuff like 'Just one more,' or 'We'll ruin them, don't worry' or 'please, not this again.'”

Phoenix and Miles looked at each other meaningfully. This information was quite revealing. It seemed their ex-prosecutor had deteriorated since they'd seen him last.

They didn't get much more information after that, other than a few locations Peri had recognized that Morris had driven past. They touched on the subject of the note Peri had been inadvertently carrying in her pocket (This one said “The Dark Age of the Law is not over”... what a bunch of nonsense, Phoenix thought), but this yielded no useful information. Despite her terrible ordeal, Peri seemed like she would take it all in stride.

“When you grow up around as many bouncy-balls as I have, you learn pretty quick how important it is to be able to bounce back!” she'd exclaimed at them, grinning a mile wide.

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“I feel like these girls are way stronger than I am,” Phoenix confessed as he and Edgeworth climbed back into the car. “Just hearing about all they went through made me feel anxious and exhausted.”

Miles grunted in affirmation, turning the key in the ignition after fastening his seatbelt. “I concur,” he murmured. “But then, they do have parents in law. They've been raised around troubling incidents like this.”

Phoenix winced internally. Miles had had a parent in law, too...and it was the absence of that parent that had resulted in all of his suffering. He wondered if Miles would have been so cheerful or confident, if he'd been allowed to grow up with his father. A pang resonated in his heart.

“Why do you look so troubled, Phoenix?” Miles asked, glancing at him out of the corner of his eye.

Phoenix jumped a little. “Ah...no reason,” he said quickly. “I...was just thinking about how lucky those girls are.”
“Lucky?” Miles echoed. “Do try not to be insensitive, Wright. They were forcibly abducted and stranded away from civilization.”

“Well, yeah,” Phoenix conceded, “but...they still seem so happy. They knew that home was the best place to be, so...they found the strength to make it back there. Not everybody has...that kind of motivation.” He stared at his lap, unsure if he should say any more.

Miles glanced at him again, his gaze lingering a moment as they stopped at a traffic light. When it turned green, the prosecutor returned his attention to the road. “It is indeed comforting,” he said softly, “to feel like no matter how far away you stray, there will always be someone to come home to.”

Phoenix’s head whipped up, staring at the side of Miles’ face incredulously. The prosecutor’s cheeks had flushed, and he was gripping the steering wheel so tightly that Phoenix could see his fingers trembling. The defense attorney felt a smile spread across his face, his entire being filling with warmth at the realization of what Miles was trying to say to him.

There were so many things he could say back: “This is years late, but welcome home.” “I feel the same way.” Even simply “You’re welcome.”

But when Miles stopped in front of Phoenix’s apartment building and he unclicked his seatbelt, the response Phoenix chose was to lean over and give him a lingering kiss. Miles seemed surprised, but leaned into it anyway. His eyes were still closed when Phoenix opened his. He cradled Miles’ face in his hands, resting his forehead against the other man’s.

“What...what was that for?” murmured the prosecutor after his eyes opened again, going a little cross-eyed in an attempt to meet Phoenix’s.

“I dunno. No reason. Every reason.” He just grinned at Miles’ perplexed look after he’d released him. “Even though it was work stuff, I had fun today,” he said as he climbed out of the car. “We still make a really good team.”

Miles smiled. “That we do,” he agreed. “I’ll call you if I have any news.”

“I’ll call you if I get bored,” Phoenix countered, his smile turning playful.

“I haven’t the time to entertain you,” Miles protested.

“Oh, I think you can make time for me,” Phoenix said smugly.

“Close the door, Wright, it’s cold outside,” Miles grumbled, but he was smiling. Phoenix smiled back and closed the door, waving as Miles backed up and drove away.

He stood there a few minutes in the cold, just thinking. Miles honestly wanted to be with him on a long-term basis. Miles intended on telling everyone about their relationship after this case was over.

Miles thought of him as home.

He took most of the steps up to his apartment two at a time, the message he had been trying to convey with his kiss still stuck in his head:

You’re my home, too.
Next chapter: Pearl presents evidence. Miles drives a truck.
Evidence and Equilibrium

Chapter Summary

Pearl presents evidence. Miles drives a truck.

Chapter Notes

Shout-out to all the people who have been leaving such nice comments on so many of the chapters. I was literally starting to type out all of your usernames, but that would have made these notes really long. You know who you are, you lovely people. I read your comments whenever I feel sad. They mean more to me than you know. Thank you so much for getting me through every week. <333

In other news, have I ever told you guys that my cats are named Athena and Miles? Well... now you know. Anyway, please enjoy the Athena content. And the Gumshoe. Lots of Gumshoe for you too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the 15th of December, Pearl Fey had decided she'd been right all along: Mr. Nick and Mr. Edgeworth had definitely already gotten together.

Maybe it was something in the way they looked at each other: soft, meaningful. It might have been something about the way they spoke now, easily and with a comfortableness that was almost painfully domestic. It could have also been the way she'd caught them touching, over and over again: Mr. Nick's hand on Mr. Edgeworth's shoulder, Mr. Edgeworth guiding Mr. Nick with a hand to his lower back, both of them leaning against each other when they went through folders side-by-side in Mr. Edgeworth's office.

She wasn't being interfering, she reasoned. She no longer had any plans to force the two lawyers together.

No, there was no need for that, because she was 100% convinced they were already together.

It kind of hurt that Mystic Maya did not share her suspicions, nor did everyone else in Project: Matchmakers save Kay and Trucy, who had been instrumental in helping her gather all her new “evidence.” She flipped through the carefully organized binder, her eyes scanning the pages, her arguments solidifying in her mind as she waited at the Agency for Mr. Nick to return from his lunch. He was really busy always helping Mr. Edgeworth with this kidnapping case, and since Pearl was a teenage girl with connections to lawyers, she had been forbidden from wandering around alone. Thus, she had been instructed to stay here at the Agency until Mr. Nick came back.

The third kidnapping victim had been found a few days ago, Miss Tia Euler. Her questioning had been quite rewarding, from what Pearl understood: Police had been put in place at several locations around the more uninhabited areas around the state, waiting for any sign of the kidnapper and keeping an eye out for Miss Maizy and Miss Ariadne Stringer. Miss Athena had been quite upset
when she heard about the most recent kidnapping, Pearl remembered.

“I wondered why she never dropped by like she said she would!” she had yelled, her little robot friend flashing between red and blue. “I can't believe this! I should have warned her or something! I'm such an idiot, and now Trucy will never have a musical magical act!” Pearl didn't quite understand this last part, but she had patted Miss Athena on the back comfortably anyway.

The proactive measures had paid off, however: Miss Maizy had been found, too, just yesterday. As far as Pearl knew, her questioning was scheduled for the day after tomorrow. Mystic Maya, Trucy, and she had wanted to tag along, but Mr. Edgeworth had insisted that they mustn't overwhelm her, so they had reluctantly agreed to stay behind.

Pearl lifted her head at the sound of the door being opened, and steeled herself as she flipped her evidence binder closed. It was time, she thought as she stood. All the pretty paper snowflakes and Christmas garlands probably ruined the very serious nature of the confrontation that was to take place shortly, but it couldn't be helped. Her evidence was held behind her back, heavy in her hands.

“Hey, Pearls,” Mr. Nick greeted, dropping his briefcase near the coat rack. “Anything happen while I was out?”

“No,” Pearl said. “But I was wondering if I could have a moment of your time, Mr. Nick? It's very important.”

Her tone must have been too revealing, because Mr. Nick turned around slowly, his expression cautious. “I suppose,” he said warily, narrowing his eyes.

“Please have a seat, Mr. Nick,” she said stiffly, motioning towards the couch.

Mr. Nick eyed her, but sat. “All right, what's this all about, Pearls?”

Pushing aside her feelings of nervousness, she brought out the binder from behind her back and thrust it towards him. “T...Take that!” she squeaked. Oh, rats, that hadn't come out as forcefully as she had intended.

Mr. Nick blinked at the object under his nose, hesitantly accepting it into his hands. He flipped it open and turned a few pages, and then fixed Pearl with the most baffled expression she'd ever seen. “Pearls... what in the world am I looking at here?”

“It's my evidence that you and Mr. Edgeworth are in love!” she declared, widening her stance the way she had seen Mr. Nick do when he was making his cases in court. “It has every love letter you've written to Mr. Edgeworth in it, among other things!”

Mr. Nick was staring down at the binder. “Pearls, these aren't love letters,” he said gently. “These are reminders to call me about the case.” He looked back up at Pearl, his expression having cycled from suspicious to confused to almost pitying. “Edgeworth gets so many phone calls that sometimes I find leaving a Post-It note makes a bigger impression,” he explained.

She would not be deterred, however. “O-Objection!” she shouted. She pointed towards the bottom of page 3. “That one says 'Love always xoxoxo!'”

“That one was for Trucy!” the defense attorney refuted, frowning a little.

“Oh, is that so?” Pearl challenged, though her voice was a little shaky. “Wh-Where is your proof?”

Mr. Nick sighed and rolled his eyes, but held up the note in question, indicating the part above the bit
Pearl had focused on with his index finger. “It also says 'Back at 7. Lasagna in fridge,'” he pointed out.

Well, suddenly the note made much more sense. She had to admit to herself that sometimes she couldn't always read Mr. Nick's sloppy handwriting. “Th...That could still be for Mr. Edgeworth,” she said weakly.

The defense attorney just raised an eyebrow at her. He pointed to a different part of the note. “‘PS,’” he read off, “‘I washed your cape. It's hanging on the line.’”

“Oh.” Pearl felt her shoulders slump. Was all of her evidence going to turn out to be meaningless? She sighed, and plopped on the couch next to her older friend. “I guess I didn't prepare the right evidence,” she said mournfully.

“Pears, this is...really extensive,” Mr. Nick commented, turning a few more pages. His eyebrows were gradually rising higher and higher, and he shot a slightly nervous look at her. “Should I be worried about this?”

“No,” Pearl lamented. “I guess not.” She rested her chin in her hands, accepting her defeat.

Suddenly, Mr. Nick's hands stopped moving on the binder. He froze in place, and when Pearl looked up curiously, she saw that his eyes had gone wide. Hastily, she followed his gaze to the bit of evidence he was focused on: a short note Kay had found in Mr. Edgeworth's office just two days ago. It was one of Pearl's favorite pieces—a simple torn-out square of notebook paper which read:

_Edgeworth,
Got you some candy, since it's a nice safe boring gift and you already know it's me anyway. Hope you enjoy biting off the Steel Samurai's chocolate head. I know I would.
-Your “Secret” Santa

Pearl felt her old enthusiasm returning. Maybe Mr. Nick could explain away some of these notes, but there was no way he could invent an explanation for this one! It had to be for Mr. Edgeworth.

“Did...did you steal this?” Mr. Nick murmured, sounding anxious.

“Um...I'm not sure how to answer that,” she said evasively, biting her lip. After all, it had been Kay who had acquired this piece.

Mr. Nick sighed heavily again. “Well, I hope he at least got to read it first,” he grumbled, closing Pearl's binder and handing it back to her.

“So it was for Mr. Edgeworth!” she shouted triumphantly. “I knew it!”

“Well, yeah, it says his name right there at the top,” Mr. Nick reminded her. “But how do you know it's from me? It could be from anyone.”

Pearl couldn't very well tell him that she knew it was from him because they had rigged the Secret Santa drawing, so she instead fixed him with a gaze of steely confidence. “It's your handwriting!” she said.

He rubbed the back of his neck, casting his gaze around the festive room. “Guess you've got me there,” he admitted. Pearl's smile stretched wide.

“Pearl,” Mr. Nick started again after a moment, and she winced. He only said “Pearl” in that tone when he was about to get serious with her; she knew from experience. He had locked his eyes onto
her, his expression all gentle concern. “Does this have anything to do with why you were stalking me last month?”

“Um…” Pearl nibbled her thumb. Answering here would be too revealing, and yet not answering might be even more revealing, thanks to the Magatama. Was there a third option? Pearl wondered briefly what Mystic Maya would do. She would probably give her best smirk and say something like “Wouldn't you like to know?” Sadly, she did not think such a method would work for her. “Maybe?” she answered instead.

Mr. Nick sighed, resting his palms on his knees and closing his eyes. When he straightened again and looked back over at her, he looked stern. “Look, it's nice that you're trying so hard for my sake, but... I need you to be more considerate of other people's privacy, okay? Would you like it if people captured your every move on camera or recorded all the things you wrote?”

Pearl hung her head. “No...” she admitted. She grabbed the fabric of her yukata, twisting it in her lap. “I... I just thought I was gathering evidence, like you do,” she explained.

“That would be fine, but neither Edgeworth nor I have committed a crime, so I'm not really sure why evidence-gathering is necessary,” Mr. Nick responded, half-smiling. He was wearing the same expression Mystic Maya wore when Pearl had once mispronounced spaghetti as “pasketti”: It was a face which clearly meant “your ignorance is almost endearing.”

Pearl frowned at him. She was so tired of receiving looks like that! She stood again, balling her fists. “I was wrong to invade your privacy,” she conceded, her voice sounding firmer than it had so far. “But I think you're wrong to keep behaving as though all of this doesn't mean anything! I know it does. And I am not the only one who thinks so, either!”

The defense attorney blinked at her, having pressed himself up against the sofa's back in surprise at her forcefulness. She held his gaze, refusing to back down this time. Finally, he dropped his eyes down to the floor. Pearl's posture relaxed, though she was a little flabbergasted that she had apparently won this staredown. “I never said it didn't mean anything,” Mr. Nick said quietly, lacing his hands together between his knees. His eyebrows had drawn together, and he looked quite troubled.

Pearl abruptly felt guilty for making him make a face like that. “Is... is everything okay?” she asked worriedly, sitting back down beside him.

He just smiled at her. “It will be,” he answered mysteriously.

Suddenly, Pearl's phone vibrated. She pulled it out to find a message from Kay.

how did presenting your evidence go? it said.

Pearl pouted and tapped out a response: The evidence is... inconclusive.

awww, im sorry, girl. better luck next time!! we will find something totally decisive!!

“You guys are texting about me, aren't you,” Mr. Nick said flatly. Pearl jumped a little at the voice from right next to her.

“Well...” Pearl considered how best to deflect this question. She decided the best way was to just pretend she hadn't heard it. “Kay is helping Mr. Edgeworth out right now,” she explained instead.

Mr. Nick lifted his eyebrows and sat up straighter. “Oh, really?” he said. “Edgeworth didn't mention anything about that.”
Pearl nodded excitedly, turning towards her friend on the couch. “She said she's going to use her skills and her intelligence network to catch the criminal in the act!”

“Somehow I feel like Edgeworth didn't ask her to do that...” Mr. Nick looked doubtful, but shook his head, smiling. “Well, whatever. We can use all the help we can get. Tell her thanks from both of us.”

She beamed at him. It seemed Mr. Nick was not holding any grudges against Kay... he really was a generous, forgiving person. “Okay!” she chirped, typing the message up and sending it to Kay.

_is mr wright there?? tell him hi!! and that ive been on my best behavior! i dont even know what hes wearing today!

Pearl turned to Mr. Nick, smiling a little unsurely. “She says hello and that...she does not know what you are wearing?...”

“Um...” Mr. Nick blinked. “That's... good. I guess.”

“Should I tell her you're just wearing the blue suit?” Pearl inquired, texting fingers at the ready.

“Please don't.”

From his expert logic and skillful deductions, Miles drew two conclusions from the investigation of his office: One, the Secret Santa note Phoenix had written him two days ago had disappeared. Two, his chocolate Steel Samurai had also been stolen. It wasn't in his desk drawers, it wasn't on top of the desk where he'd left it, and it certainly wasn't in the safe behind his old prosecutor jacket.

The note had obviously been confiscated by Kay. Miles wasn't sure why, but she had taken to snatching up the various Post-It Notes that Wright frequently left in this office. At first, Miles had thought it had been the work of an overenthusiastic janitor aiming to eradicate any and all forms of litter, but he had caught Kay folding up a note last week and jamming it into her pocket, and he suspected the other notes had vanished the same way. He would have chided her for it, but the fact was that most of the communications from Phoenix he wished to keep were not delivered via Post-It Note, but through phone or text message. Thus, he found it most prudent to allow her to keep pilfering the rather boring scraps of paper, rather than letting on that a better source of intelligence existed.

As for the chocolate Samurai...

Miles turned around at the sound of his door opening, and the very suspect in this case tromped inside.

“You wanted to see me, sir?” Detective Gumshoe asked, slightly short of breath. He had, no doubt, run all the way here when Miles had summoned him.

“Sit down, Detective,” Miles intoned coolly, motioning to the sofa.

Gumshoe looked uncertain. “But sir, you said I shouldn't ever sit on—”

“Sit. Down. Detective.”

He sat.

Miles crossed his arms, wondering how best to broach the subject without putting the detective on
his guard. His deliberation had the added effect of making Gumshoe shift around nervously and begin to sweat.

“S-Sir, if this is about the time I tried to try on that jacket on the wall, I'm sorry. It won't happen again.”

Miles blinked, coming out of his thoughts. He hadn't been paying very much attention to Detective Gumshoe's words, but had the vague feeling that he had said something worrying. “What?”

“Uh...nothing, sir.”

“Very well.” He fixed the detective with his most penetrating stare, the one that made nearly everyone crack after only a few minutes. “The reason I have called you here today is to discuss the fate of a certain object that was in this office a few days ago but which has since disappeared from it.”

“Uh...you mean that case file you finished up with before?”

Miles narrowed his eyes. “No.”

Gumshoe seemed to shrink under the force of his glare. “Th-the teacup I broke yesterday?...”

“No, not that either,” Miles sighed, rubbing between his eyes. Luckily he always kept around spare teacups, since all of his subordinates and acquaintances seemed to be rather clumsy or move around too much.

The detective on his couch looked anxious, but baffled. “Then... I got no idea what you're talking about, sir.”

“Tell me, Detective,” Miles intoned dangerously, crossing his arms again. “Do you like chocolate?”

Gumshoe visibly relaxed and laughed, apparently clueless about the nature of his question. “You know I do, sir! And on that note...” He fixed Miles with a rather pitiful expression of gratitude. “I wanted to thank you for that present you left for me yesterday.”

Miles dropped his hands by his sides, blindsided. “Er...present?”

“You bet she will, pal!” The detective beamed at him. “Was that what you called me here to talk about, Mr. Edgeworth, sir?”

Miles didn't quite know how to react to this. It turned out his precious Secret Santa gift had not, in fact, been consumed by his suspect, but would be consumed by his suspect's 4-year-old daughter. Somehow, the righteous anger he had intended on visiting upon the detective seemed to evaporate. His shoulders slumped a little. “Of... of course,” he said in a defeated tone. “I... hope she enjoys it.” Well, at least this way the treat would get eaten. Miles had been largely planning on keeping it wrapped and putting it in a display case, as it was a limited-supply item made in honor of the show's 15-year anniversary.

“You bet she will, pal!” The detective beamed at him. “Was that what you called me here to talk about, Mr. Edgeworth, sir?”
“Well... yes, mostly,” Miles muttered, suddenly feeling a headache coming on. “Anyway, that aside, how is the search for Morris proceeding?”

Gumshoe’s goofy expression smoothed out into a determined, professional one. Or, at least, as close to professional as he could be. “I’ve got a guy stationed at every uninhabited place in the area, sir,” he assured the prosecutor. “There’s no way he’ll slip past us!”

“Very good,” Miles nodded. “You may go, then. Keep up the good work.”

The detective stood, and regarded Miles with an expression that was so moved and awed it was almost embarrassing. “Sir! Yes sir! I-I won’t let you down!” With that, he blustered out of the office, and Miles was left standing alone, chocolate-less.

He sighed and sat down at his desk, wondering if he should inform Phoenix of what had happened to his thoughtful gift. He pulled out his phone, but before he could even send anything, it buzzed in his hand. He nearly dropped it in surprise.

It was, of course, from Wright. The man texted him at all hours of the day, sometimes with updates about the case, but usually with silly observations or inane questions.

Did you know Kay has her “intelligence network” on the lookout for Morris? the message said.

Miles sighed. I did not know, but somehow this does not surprise me, he responded.

I knew it! If she'd asked you if she could help, you would have been like, “Leave this to the professionals, Kay.” ;)

He pointedly did not tell Phoenix that that would have been exactly what he would have said, and instead typed out Yes, yes, you're very clever, Phoenix Wright.

So... I've been meaning to ask...

Oh, god. Here it came: another perplexingly pointless question. What now, Wright? he typed out.

Dog person, or cat person?

Miles blinked at his screen, taking a few moments to interpret the question. Is this what you use the Chief Prosecutor's time for? He waited a few seconds. Dog person, he added.

Haha, no way! I totally had you pegged for a cat person!

Really? Why? he found himself asking.

Well... aloof, stand-offish, neat, doesn't get attached to too many people... you basically have “cat person” written all over you.

He frowned at his phone. Was this just a roundabout way to insult me?

What? No way, I love cats! And dogs. Really, both are great.

Wright, I have work to do.

Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh! But I do have one more bit of news. It's not exactly work-related, but... Can I call you?

Secretly, the prosecutor found it endearing that he still felt the need to ask. However, what he texted
back was *If you must.*

In two seconds, his phone was ringing. He pressed the Talk button and rose from his seat, finding it more comfortable to pace the office while on the phone.

“Hi!” Phoenix's voice said in his ear.

Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth positively did not grin at the sound. He may have smirked slightly, but that was it. “Hi yourself,” he said. “So, what is this news you have?”

“Well...” There was an awkward chuckle on the other end of the line. “This is kinda embarrassing, but...”

Miles stared out his window, eyeing the passing cars on the street below. “Oh? I've found you're usually an expert at saying embarrassing things,” he said, his voice taking on a light, almost teasing tone.

“All right, Mr. Wise Guy,” said Phoenix. “Pearls just confronted me with something a little...troubling.”

He felt his brows furrow. “Pearls did?”

“Yeah. I came back from lunch and she sat me down and then shoved this giant evidence scrapbook in my face, saying 'Take that!' and everything.”

“Well...” Miles blinked, beginning to pace again. “That's... rather out of character. What was this so-called evidence in reference to?”

He made a hesitant noise, but just before Miles could tell him to get on with it already, Phoenix found the words: “It was a bunch of notes she'd gathered that I'd written you. She called them 'love letters'.”

His cheeks warmed, and he nearly walked into his chessboard. “P-Pardon?” He felt fairly certain that he would remember if any such letters existed. “How would... I mean, what did...”

“Yeah, I had pretty much the same reaction,” Phoenix mercifully cut off his pathetic floundering. He chuckled. “Turns out most of the stuff was my Post-Its about the case. One of them was actually a note for Trucy, if you can believe that...”

“Kay,” Miles realized. “She's been collecting those case Post-Its from my office! That must have been why: to give them to Pearls for this...scrapbook.” What an absurd sequence of events...

“That was the conclusion I drew too,” Phoenix agreed. “Apparently we've inspired some kind of conspiracy here.”

The prosecutor leaned against his desk, sighing. “It's bad enough we're on the news every day now, being accused of covering up kidnappings and murders. Must our friends also gossip?” he grumbled.

“I'm sorry, Miles.” His voice was sympathetic. “I just wanted to let you know in case any more notes go missing.”

“I understand that,” Miles responded.

“Also...” There was a shuffling sound on the other end, probably from Phoenix shifting his phone to his other ear. He tended to do that when he was stalling for time.
“What is it?” he prompted.

“One of the pieces Pearl had in the scrapbook... it was... a certain note...” Phoenix sounded embarrassed. Miles said nothing, but simply waited. Phoenix would most likely take his silence as a cue to elaborate. Indeed, the defense attorney's voice continued: “A-A certain note about... chocolate?...”

“Ah, the note from my 'Secret' Santa,” Miles finished.

“Right! That one!” Phoenix exclaimed, sounding relieved. He trailed off into a mutter. “So you did get it...that's good.”

Miles couldn't fight the small smile that spread across his face. “I did. Thank you.”

“Psh, what are you talking about?” Phoenix said breezily. “I have nothing to do with that, remember?”

He chuckled, circling his desk. “Of course.”

“Well, I guess I should let you go, then, since it's almost time to go get Trucy.”

“Yes, that would be wise.”

There was a silence from over the line, so Miles spoke again: “Wright? Was there something else?”

“N-No, not really! I was just, uh, going to say, I...” Miles quirked an eyebrow and waited. Phoenix's voice had risen in pitch nervously, like it did when he was trying to force himself to be casual. “L, uh... later, Edgeworth!” Wright suddenly blurted, and hung up.

Miles blinked, listening to the dial tone for a second before locking his phone. Well, that was certainly odd. He had no time to think on it, however, as his phone started to vibrate once more just as he went to put it away.

“What is it now, Wright? Trucy will be waiting,” he answered.

“Mr. Edgeworth!” The voice on the other end was frantic. “I-I...!”

“Kay?” Miles straightened, his senses going on high-alert at the sound of her tone. “What's wrong?”

“I saw it!” the Great Thief exclaimed. “It was going down towards San Pedro! I'm sure of it! I couldn't get close enough in time!”

“Kay, please, calm down and explain,” Miles told her, keeping his voice even.

He heard her take a deep breath. “I'm near the Sunken City.”

“Sunken City?”

“I've been staking the place out today to look for leads. I was just about to try somewhere else, since it seems like this area is actually pretty popular to go for daredevils, but then I saw it!”

“Saw what?”

“The truck!” she yelled. “The orange truck! It sped right past the tree I was hiding in! I'm sure it's our guy! It was the right license plate and all!”
Miles felt his heart stop. “You mean to tell me that you've seen Morris?!”

“Yes!” Kay shouted. “And he's headed right for the Sunken City, on the lowest tip of LA!”

“Stay out of sight, Kay,” he told her sternly. “We're on our way.”

***

He hadn't planned on bringing more than just himself and Detective Gumshoe, but by the time Miles was on the way to the area Kay had indicated, the police car contained two additional people.

“Can't this thing go any faster?!?” Athena Cykes complained, leaning forward and sticking her head between the two front seats. “Ariadne needs us!” Miles had of course informed Wright immediately after Kay's tip, but he hadn't expected Wright or his hot-blooded associate to insist on accompanying them.

“I'm going as fast as the law allows, pal!” Gumshoe roared from the driver's seat. He was gripping the wheel fiercely and taking his turns rather more abruptly than Miles would have liked.

“Who cares what the law allows?!?” Athena shouted indignantly. “You ARE the law!”

“Athena, please sit properly!” Wright begged his subordinate, plastered against the other back seat and looking slightly panicked. He was evidently not enjoying the detective's driving, either. “We'll catch the guy, don't worry!” It was quite bold of him to reassure his protegé while he himself looked on the verge of screaming, Miles thought, before returning his attention to the road ahead.

Athena made a frustrated growling sound, but did as her boss asked.

Miles was worried about several things right now, one of which being that Gumshoe was going to crash into a tree, another being that Morris would get away in the midst of all the chaos these three others caused, and the last of which being that Athena Cykes would throttle their suspect before they could prosecute him. At least he had enlisted Ema Skye to retrieve Trucy from school—he had first contacted Apollo Justice, but then discovered that the young lawyer did not have a car. Ema had been only too happy to do him a favor, and had only asked in return that she be allowed to investigate the scene when they did find Morris.

“We've got to be getting closer,” Wright muttered from the seat behind Miles. “The amount of buildings is dwindling—we're getting further away from civilization.” Miles suspected that he was also just desperately hoping they were almost there so he could get out of the car.

Nevertheless, a quick glance at his cell phone told him that Wright's assessment was correct. “We are, according to the GPS,” he confirmed. “Just another mile or so. Although we'll have to take the last leg of the journey on foot, as there is no parking past a certain point.”

“Fine by me!” Athena exclaimed. “I'll run him down myself!”

Miles twisted in his seat slightly. “You will control your subordinate, won't you, Wright?” he asked pointedly.

Phoenix nodded. “I'll do my best.”

“I'm not a wild animal, guys,” Athena protested, although the discussion had the intended effect of the young woman calming herself down.

“All right, guys, it looks like we've driven as far as we can,” Gumshoe said suddenly, drawing
everyone's attention back to their surroundings. They were close to the ocean, Miles realized with a look out the windows. The soil had transitioned somewhere along the way to fine, dust-colored sand, and the only foliage remaining were scrubby bushes and crooked palm trees. “The area's technically closed to the public, so there's not exactly a parking lot,” the detective went on, pulling the car over near a tall chain-link fence.

“I think we're in the right area,” Wright said. “Look over there.” He pointed a distance off the path, where a large orange pickup truck with a black hood of some sort over the truck-bed was parked in the shade of a large palm tree.

“Plates match,” Miles remarked. “Let's go.”

Everyone got out of the car and started up the path near the truck, Gumshoe barreling forward in the lead initially, but soon being overtaken by Athena, who plunged ahead like a champion racehorse.

“Athena...!” Phoenix choked out, obviously not sure how wise it was to yell and risk spooking their criminal. “Slow down!” His plea fell on deaf ears, however—or more likely, she was just unwilling to heed him. That girl's ears didn't miss much, after all.

The path was somewhat steep. Large rocks jutted out of the sand everywhere, and the ground was littered with old liquor bottles, cigarette butts, and crumpled-up snack bags. Every surface that might have once been a building was covered entirely in colorful graffiti, a veritable landscape of vandalism. Though his steps were anything but careless or ungainly, the uneven ground and patches of cracked asphalt still tripped him up more than once, and Phoenix, who was keeping pace with him by his side, hastened to grab onto his arm to help him regain his footing.

“Thank you,” Miles panted, a little embarrassed to be caught stumbling like this.

“Anytime,” he replied, shooting him a quick smile, and suddenly Miles didn't mind being embarrassed.

Soon, the path reached a sudden drop-off, sloping severely downward. Miles could see water, could hear the ocean's ebb and flow...

“HOLD IT, PUNK!” Athena's voice sounded from up ahead. She disappeared over the precipice.

“ATHENA!” Phoenix exclaimed desperately.

“It's okay, pal, she's just sliding down the hill!” Gumshoe yelled back to them, before following behind her.

In another moment, Miles and Phoenix had reached the dropoff point as well. Phoenix looked down and gulped, and Miles remembered abruptly that the defense attorney had a quite well-hidden fear of heights. But this was no time for hesitation. He reached over and took Phoenix's hand, and locked eyes with him.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

Phoenix's look of uncertainty hardened into one of determination. He squeezed Miles' hand. “Yeah.”

Together, they braced their weight back on their heels and half-ran, half-slid down the incline. There were rocks everywhere here, too, but gravity would not let them slow their descent, so the two of them merely tried their best to stumble downward in a way that would not result in tripping headfirst and falling to their death. After 20 or so terrifying seconds, they had reached the bottom.
Phoenix's hand was shaking in his, but he gave Miles' one more squeeze before releasing it. They both immediately saw what they were seeking: A man in a black t-shirt and blue jeans, with a tall man in a trenchcoat and a woman in yellow in hot pursuit.

"FREEZE, PAL!" Detective Gumshoe bellowed, putting on a burst of speed Miles hadn't known he was capable of. He was still no match for Athena's boundless energy, however. As Miles and Phoenix struggled to catch up, Athena leaped into the air like something out of the Pink Princess and delivered a devastating kick to their criminal's left shoulder, catapulting him forward and allowing her to land with both knees on his back. She then pulled both of Morris's arms behind him, digging one knee into his spine and using the other to hold down his lower body.

"H-Hello, pal, detaining the suspect is my job," Gumshoe protested weakly when he caught up.

"Sorry," Athena said, though from the way she was grinding her knee into the guy's back, she didn't seem very sorry.

"You're takin' a trip downtown, bucko!" Athena's little robot, Widget, chimed in.

"Get the hell off me!" Morris choked, spitting out sand.

Gumshoe handcuffed the man as Miles and Phoenix finally caught up, and only then did Athena relinquish her hold on their criminal.

"You're under arrest on suspicion of serial abduction," Gumshoe began.

"I already know all my rights, so you can stuff it, detective," Morris spat. His posture was hunched as he was hauled to his feet, his restrained hands behind his back—Athena's assault probably still had him winded.

"Where's the girl?!" Athena demanded, widening her stance threateningly and looking ready to finish what she'd started.

"Athena, please," Phoenix begged, holding an arm in front of the young woman. "Leave this to the professionals!" Then he stepped up close to their wheezing suspect and narrowed his eyes. "Where's the girl?!" he demanded.

"Seriously, Boss?" Athena muttered.

Morris managed to straighten. He was a fairly short man, and his build was quite average, but he had broad shoulders and well-defined arms that suggested he was stronger than he appeared. His face was unremarkable: faintly lined with age; wispy, thinning light-brown hair sticking up all over the place from his struggle. His small, sunken eyes glittered with hate. "Well. I didn't expect the privilege of having you both show up," he hissed, glancing between Miles and Wright.

"Well, you did summon both of us. It would have been rude to ignore your invitation," Miles responded smoothly. His glasses had slipped partway down his nose during the chase, so he pushed them back up, the better to glare at his adversary.

"Is Ariadne safe?" Wright asked. He looked pretty fierce for someone who was still huffing and puffing from exertion. Miles was feeling a bit fatigued, himself: running on sand was a lot harder than he remembered.

"Well, you did summon both of us. It would have been rude to ignore your invitation," Miles responded smoothly. His glasses had slipped partway down his nose during the chase, so he pushed them back up, the better to glare at his adversary.

"Is Ariadne safe?" Wright asked. He looked pretty fierce for someone who was still huffing and puffing from exertion. Miles was feeling a bit fatigued, himself: running on sand was a lot harder than he remembered.

Morris rolled his eyes. "Don't you get by now that whether the girls survive or not has nothing to do with me?" When they just stared at him in response, he continued. "It's up to you to save them. You've been lucky so far. It's too bad you couldn't devote so much effort to saving Cayley."
“Your daughter committed suicide,” Miles reminded him. “Wright and I were not responsible for her death.”

“She didn't!” Morris surged forward in an apparent attempt to get up in Miles' face, but Detective Gumshoe restrained him. “You just didn't look hard enough,” he snarled, face contorted in anger. “If you'd done anything in the 5 days she was missing, she'd still be alive!”

“You didn't even report her missing until she'd been gone for 3 days!” Phoenix shouted, stepping between Miles and the kidnapper. “Maybe it was you who should have done something!”

“You son of a—!”

“That's enough, everybody!” Detective Gumshoe barked, that seldom-heard tone of genuine authority coming into his voice. “We have more important things to worry about, like the safety of that girl.”

“Detective Gumshoe is right,” Miles said, which was a rare sentence he only got to say every so often. “Can I trust you to watch over the suspect?” he asked his subordinate.

“Of course, sir! That's what I'm here for!” Gumshoe assured him.

“You're making a mistake, you know,” Morris said, his voice venomous. “This isn't over...!”


Miles nodded. He turned to Wright and Athena. “Come on,” he said briskly. “Let's locate Miss Ariadne Stringer.”

***

They found Ariadne behind a large rock, several yards away from the shore.

Her wrists and ankles had been bound, and a cloth had been tied around her head as a gag. Her clothes were tattered and a little soiled, and her skin looked deathly pale, stretched over prominent bones. Her head lolled limply when Phoenix rushed forward and pulled her into a sitting position, cradling her across his lap. He laid his index and middle fingers over the girl's pulse point under her ear where it met her jaw. Athena and Miles held their breath.

“Pulse is weak,” Phoenix said after a moment, “but it's there.”

“Thank goodness,” Athena breathed, her posture slumping with relief.

“She's not out of danger yet,” Miles reminded them. “We need to get her to the hospital right away.”

“How?” Phoenix asked, managing to untie the gag and pull it off her head. Her lips were cracked and dry. “We only brought the one car, and I don't think she'd fit in the police car if we're all piling in there!”

“Nngh,” Miles groaned. He really should have thought this through better...

“Well, what about Morris' truck?” Athena asked. “There would be plenty of space there for a few of us.”

“The truck, huh?” Phoenix's tone was contemplative. He fixed his eyes on Miles. “Well, as far as I know, only one of the three of us knows how to drive.”
Miles sighed. He wasn't exactly used to driving pickup trucks, but... “I suppose we have no other choice,” he admitted grudgingly. “I don't feel comfortable waiting around for an ambulance to arrive. This place is too out of the way, plus there's that cliff to contend with...”

“Oh, crap, that drop-off!” Athena remembered, stomping her foot. “That's going to be so tough to get out of, with her like this...!”

Miles cringed. Athena was correct.

“I'll carry her,” Phoenix asserted, his eyes hardening in determination. “I can do it.”

Miles opened his mouth to protest, but then remembered that this was a man who had run across a burning bridge, fallen through it into the water 40 feet below, and wound up with a cold and a few bruises. If anyone could carry about 80 pounds of dead weight up a steep incline, it was Phoenix Wright, he supposed. “All right,” he conceded. “We should hurry, then.”

“Got it. Athena, help me get her on my back.”

“Right!” Athena looped Ariadne's bound arms around Phoenix's neck as he crouched down, and then adjusted the girl's bent legs on either side of his torso. Phoenix rose to his feet, bracing his clasped hands underneath Ariadne's thighs.

“Urgh,” he groaned. “I feel like her ankles being bound makes this a lot more difficult somehow...” Nevertheless, he adjusted her weight briefly and then took a step forward. “But anyway... let's go.”

***

Getting Ariadne up the hill was indeed an ordeal. Her weight on Wright's back threw off his balance too much for him to move upward, and his needing to keep her level with his hands prevented him from using handholds.

After several false starts, they discovered a workaround: Miles followed behind and supported the girl's weight from the back, while also providing enough momentum for Wright to move forward up the hill. Athena, meanwhile, fretted and asked many concerned questions and shouted encouragement at them.

By the time they made it up the hill and looked back, both Miles and Phoenix were utterly exhausted.

“It's not... even... that big a hill,” Phoenix panted.

“No... but... steep,” Miles agreed.

“Want me to take her, guys?” Athena asked, brows knitted in worry.

Phoenix opened his mouth to refuse, but his knees started to buckle a little, so he gave in and sank to the ground on his knees. “Won't...say no,” he wheezed.

“'Scuse all the jostling, Ariadne,” Athena murmured to the unconscious girl after she'd lifted Ariadne's arms from around Wright's neck and gathered her in her arms bridal-style. With a groan of effort, she stumbled to her feet, her stance wide like she was lifting weights. “I got this,” she choked, and forged ahead laboriously, not even looking back.

“Always knew... she was strong... but not... like this,” Phoenix breathed, his face still red from exertion.
Miles' bangs, damp from the sea breeze and sweat, hung down in his face limply, and he swiped them aside. “Are we... getting old?...” he puffed, still bracing his palms on his thighs.

Phoenix made a sound that was half-laugh, half-wheeze. “Yes,” he replied simply. He took one more deep breath and let it out in a whoosh, standing up straight. “Lucky us.” He smiled, and extended his hand to Miles. “Come on, old-timer. We can make it.”

“Who are you calling old-timer?” Miles grumbled, but accepted his hand anyway.

***

“Wright,” Miles said, after the three of them (plus Ariadne) had piled into the truck and started making their way back home. “I need you to do me a favor.” He knew this was going to be rather difficult to ask, but he didn't have another option, as he'd forgotten to do it before they had left...

“Sure,” Phoenix said quickly, looking over at him from the passenger seat. “What is it?”

The truck jostled severely, and Miles struggled to keep his cool—it was just a vehicle, no reason to panic. “I need you to call Kay with my cell phone and tell her we've got Miss Stringer and that we'll be along shortly to pick her up.”

“Okay.” He waited a moment. “Um, where's your phone?”

Miles hesitated. “It's, ah... in my pocket,” he admitted.

“Oh, all right.” He held out his hand and waited.

“Wright, I...” He swallowed, and when he spoke again, he took great care to speak evenly. “This is my first time driving a truck. This terrain is rough and uneven. I'm afraid I... don't feel able to take my hands off the wheel...”

Phoenix's jaw dropped. “A-Are you serious? It's your first time driving a pickup?”

“Yes, and it's very unnerving, and the lives of several people are on my shoulders right now!” Miles said impatiently. He sighed. “Now can you please just... get my phone out of my pocket and call Kay?”

The defense attorney flapped his mouth a few times. “Y-You want me to, uh...” Even from the corner of his eye, Miles could see his cheeks flush. “Just...” Phoenix craned his head around to the seats behind them, where Athena was slouched over against the window, snoring loudly (she had fallen asleep almost immediately after buckling up, apparently exhausted), and Ariadne was still very much unconscious (although with her wrists and ankles now unbound). Phoenix returned his attention to Miles. “Just, reach right in there and...?”

“Phoenix, please, let's be adults about this,” Miles begged, ignoring the way his own cheeks had started to burn.

“Okay, okay,” said Phoenix. He gulped. Lifted his hand hesitantly. “All right, then, I'll just, uh...” His hand inched closer.

“Oh would you just grab it already,” Miles snapped. A brief pause ensued. “Not a word, Wright.” Great, now his whole face was radiating heat.

“Not saying anything,” Phoenix responded, his voice alight with suppressed laughter. At least Miles' unfortunate wording had broken the tension. He felt Phoenix's hand near his hip then, and struggled
not to move as his fingers dug into the pocket. “I'm, uh...not finding it, Miles,” said Phoenix.

“Just, um...” Well, he couldn't exactly say “go deeper” in this situation. Phoenix would never let him live it down. “It's there, I assure you,” he said instead.

“Whatever you say,” the defense attorney replied doubtfully, and shoved his hand further into the pocket and oh god Miles really hoped he found the damn phone soon because he had to focus on the road.

“You're enjoying this, aren't you,” Miles choked, feeling warm fingers on the top of his thigh through the fabric, wriggling around questingly. The heat from them seemed to seep into the entirety of Miles' lower body.

“I don't know how to answer that question,” Phoenix said, and finally his hand stopped moving as his fingertips found what they were looking for. “Ah! Here we go!” He pulled, and then finally (finally) he had extricated the phone from Miles' pocket. “Success!”

“Very good,” Miles responded, controlling his breathing. “Now find Kay in my Contacts and call her.”

“I know, I remember.” He heard a few taps on the phone, and then the faint sound of the phone dialing. Thankfully, the silence gave Miles a chance to regain his composure. “Kay?” Phoenix said into the phone when the ringing stopped. He could only just barely hear Kay's voice on the other end, though he couldn't make out what she was saying. “No, actually, it's Phoenix Wright. But Mi—Mr. Edgeworth is with me.” Miles shot him a glare out of the corner of his eye. He really had to be more careful, almost calling him by his first name all the time. Phoenix smiled at him sheepishly, and then continued into the phone: “Edgeworth wanted me to tell you that we've got Ariadne, Morris is under arrest, and we'll be along shortly to pick you up. We're in the orange truck.” Another pause. “Yeah, Morris's. Edgeworth's driving.” Phoenix glanced over at Miles, his eyes roving over him. “Pretty well, actually. He says it's his first time driving a truck, but I have my doubts.”

“Ask her where she is,” Miles said impatiently.

“Oh, Edgeworth wants to know exactly where you are so we can find you.” Another pause. “The corner of West Paseo Del Mar?” he repeated. “Okay. West Paseo Del Mar. Got it. Wait there, okay? And thanks for the tipoff, Kay. We couldn't have done it without you.” Another pause. Miles saw Phoenix's cheeks go a little pink. “I-I know,” he said, a bit quieter. Miles raised an eyebrow. “All right. See you in a few minutes. Bye.” He tapped the button to end the call.

“What did she say at the end?” Miles asked.

Phoenix shot him a slightly bashful half-smile. “She said we couldn't have done it without each other. And she's right.”

Miles allowed himself to smile back at him. “Yes, she is.”

***

It was a good thing this truck was so spacious; otherwise cramming three young women behind the front two seats might have been quite difficult.

“So...it's finally over,” Kay murmured from the seat behind Phoenix (they had shoved Athena to the middle).

“Not quite,” Miles said. “We still have to question Miss Conroe and follow up with Miss Stringer,
and of course Morris will go on trial for his crimes. Only after that process has concluded can we
truly say that justice has been served.” And only then could he disclose the nature of his relationship
with Phoenix, Miles thought.

“Well, yeah, I know that,” Kay said. “I just meant...all the worry. All the media gossip.”

Wright snorted. “The gossip never goes away. Eventually, you just learn to ignore it.” His voice held
a bitterness that Miles had become accustomed to hearing during the years Phoenix had been
disbarred.

“Our,” Miles suggested, “you give the people more reasons to trust in you. Isn't that what we strove to
do, Wright?” He glanced at the defense attorney, raising an eyebrow.

He sighed. “Yes. I know. It's just...” He looked out the window, resting his elbow against the door.
“Sometimes it feels like one little shred of doubt and suspicion can overthrow all the years of
trustworthiness you've built up. It shouldn't be that easy to stop trusting in someone.”

“You say that because trust is the more natural course of action for you,” Miles reminded him gently.
“For most people, myself included, it is our first instinct to doubt. Trust is...more complicated.”

“Do you guys always have philosophical discussions like this?” Kay piped up, eager to remind them
of her presence.

“No,” Miles and Phoenix responded at the same time.

***

Miss Ariadne Stringer was taken to the hospital, where she was given emergency care. They
discovered that besides the usual problems the kidnapping victims suffered—exhaustion,
malnourishment, and the like—this girl was even more delicate than the others. Her bones were
weak, her hair was thin, and her cheeks were hollow. According to Athena, Ariadne had been
skinny when she’d met her before, but she looked much worse now. Attempts to contact her parents
led them to discover that her mother, a single parent, had been out of work due to chronic illness, and
the two were in danger of being evicted from their apartment.

“She never said a word about any of it,” Athena remarked sadly, watching the wisp of a girl
currently hooked up to all the tubes on the hospital bed. They were standing in the hallway, but part
of the wall to the hospital room was glass, allowing them to look in on her. “She must have been
trying to save money for her mother... poor thing...”

“We'll encourage her to stop by the Agency when she's recovered,” Phoenix told his associate,
wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “I'm glad she made a connection with you. She's lucky she
had someone so determined to help her.”

Athena smiled, though it was a tired smile.

Kay, as usual, refused to be kept down for very long. “Hey, this means that we saved all the
kidnapping victims,” she pointed out, looping her arm through Athena's. “Now we can actually
celebrate Christmas!”

Miles felt a jolt of panic run through him. Christmas! In the midst of all this, and despite the Secret
Santa nonsense, it hadn't occurred to him to consider what he was doing for the holiday. He hadn't
even gotten Phoenix anything yet, come to think of it...

“I think we're all planning to celebrate at the Agency on Christmas Eve,” said Phoenix. He smiled at
Kay and Miles. “You two are joining us, right?”

Kay delivered one of her 1,000-watt grins. “You know it!” She turned her green eyes on Miles next and looked at him promptly. “You're coming too, riiiight, Mr. Edgeworth?”

“I...suppose I haven't made any other plans,” Miles admitted.

“Wunderbar!” Athena exclaimed, clasping her hands together. Her cheery yellow outfit looked so out of place in the stark hallway of this hospital, with its pastel-pink walls and white tile flooring. “It'll be just like Thanksgiving, only even better since Kay will be there too!”

“Hey, Mr. Edgeworth,” Kay said suddenly, “You promised Ms. Skye she could look over the crime scene as thanks for picking up Trucy, right?”

“Yes. What of it?”

“Wellll, you know, I haven't seen her in years, and it might be nice to do something else to say thank you...” Her beseeching gaze drifted from Miles to Wright.

“You know Ema?” Wright asked, lifting his eyebrows.

“Oh yeah!” Kay looked quite excited. “She used to help Mr. Edgeworth and me out on cases back in the day! She even helped save my skin once...” She trailed off, her expression expectant.

“If you're asking if we can invite Ema to the festivities, that's fine with me,” Wright said with a shrug.

Kay jumped into the air enthusiastically. “Yesss! Thanks, Mr. Wright!”

“But Kay, Ema doesn't have a Secret Santa,” Athena pointed out, looking a little worried. “We can't just let her not get a present...”

Kay grinned. “Well then you and I will have to go to the mall again together, won't we?”

“Again?” both Miles and Phoenix echoed.

The girls' only response was to laugh.

“We're going to have quite the gathering, aren't we?” Miles sighed, watching the two young women chatter away.

“Yeah,” Phoenix agreed. “But if it turns out anything like Thanksgiving did, I'm looking forward to it.” He then had the audacity to wink at him.

“Shut up, Wright,” Miles grumbled, giving him a little shove on the arm. He wasn't wrong, though, Miles thought, looking in on the frail girl they had saved. They had much to celebrate.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Apollo goes shopping. Phoenix gets several surprises.
The Sunken City of San Pedro is a real place, as are literally all the named streets/places in this fic. They probably aren't realistically placed most of the time, but I did hours of research anyway and I have visited the "Streets of Los Angeles" Wikipedia page like 20 times, so. Tune in again next time for Background Information No One Asked For! In Chapter 15, I'll explain my reasoning behind all the names of the OCs!

(Get ready guys. Next time, CHRISTMAS WILL BE HERE AND THERE WILL BE MUCH FLUFF)
The Magical Feat and the Mythical Beast

Chapter Summary

Apollo goes shopping. Phoenix gets several surprises.

Chapter Notes

Let's play a game called "Who Do You Think Wing Ships Apollo With?" I CHALLENGE YOU (hint: it's not his sister.)

Please enjoy the sappiest chapter to date. I've been waiting the entire fic to bring these scenes to you. I'm so glad the wait is over, because I was about to explode, man.

Also, you've probably all seen it by now, but LOOK WHAT DOGBUNS DREW FROM CHAPTER 11 I'M STILL LOSING IT OVER THIS. THE EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS. THE FLASHBACKS. THE PERFECT DIVISION INTO PANELS. EXQUISITE. SUBLIME

And secondly, look!!! Teotangerine from tumblr drew a scene from this chapter!! Will that suffice? YES IT WILL OMG LOOK AT THAT SWEATER.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was three days before Christmas, and Apollo was 99% sure he would soon be $200 richer.

Of course, a few sacrifices would have to be made. For one thing, he still hadn't gotten Trucy her Secret Santa gift (or was it just a Santa gift?). And for another, he had been planning on bringing a few things back for his friends in Khura'in. Still, if he was thrifty and made his purchases carefully, he could come away from this with a tidy profit.

Project: Matchmakers had continued to meet without him, and Apollo was fine with that. Maya had even seemed to come to her senses recently and had taken down the ridiculous amounts of mistletoe that had been decorating the Agency, which he was also fine with.

What he wasn't fine with was the amount of people at this mall.

He should have expected it, three days before Christmas. But between all the case work, meddling girls, and visits with old friends (He'd stopped in to see Mr. Starbuck, Vera Misham, Armie Buff, and Juniper Woods, and even managed a friendly conversation with Klavier Gavin), Apollo just hadn't gotten around to going Christmas shopping yet.

The other problem was that getting Trucy a gift was proving more difficult than he'd thought. He of course wanted to give her something she could use for her magic acts, but every time he thought he had a good idea, it turned out that Trucy already had something of the sort. She had at least 9 decks of cards. She had rubber swords, top hats, strange boxes and interlocking rings. She had all manner of silk handkerchiefs, coins, and trick handcuffs. And of course, she never went anywhere without
those Magic Panties.

Thus, he found himself here, being jostled around by the throngs of holiday shoppers, not really sure why he had come here in the first place.

And then he caught sight of a person he definitely hadn't expected to see: Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth was here as well, walking briskly through the crowds, which seemed to part naturally for him as if he radiated authority.

Well, heck, that was a power he could use right about now.

“Mr. Edgeworth!” he shouted over all the bustle. “Hey, Mr. Edgeworth!” He shouldered his way closer to the prosecutor, who had stopped in his tracks and was scanning the crowd attempting to locate him.

“Mr. Justice,” Edgeworth greeted him when Apollo finally managed to burst through the last people-barrier. Apollo gave him a once-over. Yup, it was the usual wine-red suit and cravat. Trucy, Athena, and he had had a long-standing contest to see who would be the first to catch him wearing more casual clothes, and thus far no one had won. “I'd ask what brings you here today, but I suspect it's the same thing that has brought me,” Mr. Edgeworth continued.

“You're looking for a present for Mr. Wright?” Well, of course he was. Why else would someone like him be at a mall?

The prosecutor raised his eyebrows. “I never said it was for Wright, but I suppose if you've figured it out, there's no sense in hiding it,” he said. “Yes, I am Wright's 'Secret Santa.'”

Apollo wondered, momentarily, if Mr. Wright had received any notes like the one he'd imagined at the burger place. “I'm trying to find something for Trucy,” he informed Mr. Edgeworth.

“Ah. Yes, she is a rather difficult one to shop for.” His normally-cold gray eyes had crinkled up a little at the corners, the barest hint of a smile.

Apollo blinked in surprise, stepping out of the way for a moment to allow a mother pushing a stroller to move past. “You've gotten her something too?”

“For the last several years, yes,” Mr. Edgeworth confirmed mildly. Hm. Maybe he could offer Apollo tips.

“Well, anyway,” Apollo spoke up, “Would you mind if I tagged along with you for a little while? You're... much more effective at parting crowds than I am.” He scratched the top of his head, a little embarrassed at the statement.

“Not at all,” said Mr. Edgeworth, shaking his head. “Although I'm afraid I won't be a very good shopping partner. I'm not even sure what I'm looking for.”

“Well, neither am I,” Apollo admitted. Mr. Edgeworth nodded and began to walk forward again, and Apollo followed closely behind.

***

An hour or so into following Mr. Edgeworth around the mall, Apollo concluded that the prosecutor was even more clueless about what he was going to buy than Apollo was.

Mr. Edgeworth stopped in front of several clothing stores, looking in at the window displays, but
seemed to find each and every one of them unsatisfactory, shaking his head and setting off once again. Apollo, for his part, just followed in his wake, peeking in at all the things that the prosecutor rejected. Apollo thought Mr. Wright would look quite good in some of the articles of clothing, but evidently Mr. Edgeworth did not share his opinion. Or maybe he was just overwhelmed at the number of options?...

He finally stopped in his tracks and voiced his concerns: “Mr. Edgeworth, it seems like we're not going to find the perfect gift just by looking around. How about a different perspective?”

Mr. Edgeworth looked as if he was coming out of a trance, surprised to see Apollo still there. “P-Perspective?” he repeated absently, turning away from another window display to face Apollo.

“Yes,” nodded Apollo, “like, I'll tell you what I think Mr. Wright would appreciate, and you give me some advice about Trucy.”

“Hmm...” The prosecutor looked contemplative, crossing his arms and tapping his index finger against them. “Yes, I suppose that would be a mutually beneficial arrangement.”

“Okay.” Apollo thought a moment, tapping his forehead. What was Mr. Wright lacking that was noticeable?...

“Oh! I've got it!” he exclaimed suddenly.

“Yes? What is it?” Mr. Edgeworth actually sounded eager for the answer.

“Cold weather stuff!” Apollo laughed. “As far as I know, the man does not have a single non-embarrassing coat, and I've never seen him wear a scarf or gloves.”

Mr. Edgeworth brought a hand to his forehead. “Of course,” he muttered. “Why didn't I think of that? He always goes around shivering everywhere...” The prosecutor trailed off, his brows knitting in a troubled expression and his eyes drifting somewhere off to the side. Apollo couldn't tell what he was looking at.

“Uh, Mr. Edgeworth?” he tried. “Do you have any ideas for Trucy?”

Again he seemed to catch the other man by surprise. “What's that? Oh! Yes, Trucy,” he blurted, and then hummed thoughtfully. “She possesses some of the same abilities as you do, yes?”

“From what I understand, yes,” Apollo answered, squinting. Where was he going with this?...

“Why not get her something like your bracelet, to help her focus her power?” the prosecutor suggested, indicating the thick gold band around Apollo's wrist.

Apollo's jaw dropped. That was... actually an amazing idea, one he'd never even considered. “Oh my gosh,” he breathed. “That's perfect...” He was a bit surprised at the suggestion. Mr. Edgeworth didn't seem the type to buy into special abilities like his or Trucy's, but Apollo guessed you could only deny something for so long when it kept staring you in the face.

A smile broke across Mr. Edgeworth's face, albeit a reluctant, wry one. “It would appear your idea was a success.”

The younger attorney nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah! Thanks a lot, Mr. Edgeworth!”

“You have my thanks as well, Mr. Justice,” replied Mr. Edgeworth graciously, inclining his head. “Well then, now that I know where I should go, and you have something in mind as well, shall we
"part ways?"

“I guess so.” He wasn’t exactly sure where to go to get a bracelet like his own, but he supposed there really wasn’t much point in continuing to follow Mr. Edgeworth around.

“Very well then. I shall see you on Christmas Eve,” Mr. Edgeworth said, offering him another half-smile.

“Yeah—see you then, Mr. Edgeworth!” Apollo turned, but looked over his shoulder, grinning back at the prosecutor. “Thanks again, and good luck!” he added with a wave before diving back into the sea of shoppers.

***

Christmas Eve had finally come, and despite all the craziness that always seemed to swirl around everyone Apollo knew, they had all managed to come together to celebrate it.

He had been surprised to see Ema Skye show up to the Agency. She looked a little timid as Mr. Wright invited her in warmly and showed her to the couches, where the Feys, Kay, and Athena were already sitting and chatting, most of them dressed for the occasion in the Christmas sweaters Trucy had knitted last year (Apollo had received his, but was saving it to wear for New Year’s).

The office definitely looked festive. The mistletoe may have disappeared, but the paper snowflakes and decorations and streamers had remained. Trucy had wrapped Christmas lights and faux-evergreen garlands around her magic-prop-turned-shelving-unit, and had designated it their “tree.” Thus, all the presents everyone had brought for the Secret Santa exchange were strewn around it on the floor, creating even more tripping hazards than usual in this place. Apollo had asked her why she hadn’t just used Mr. Charley, the plant next to the prop, as the “tree,” to which she had responded with an indignant “Charley’s part of the family here! He’s not a prop, Polly!”

Apollo’s eyes flickered again to the package he had lain beneath the “tree”: A small blue box-shaped package with a red curly ribbon. He’d had to look everywhere to find someone who could analyze his bracelet and make one similar to it—it turned out that it was made of a unique metal not typically used for jewelry. But after some good old-fashioned legwork (by which he meant bicycling to different jewelry workshops), he’d managed to get the raw materials needed to have one made. It looked very much like Apollo’s, but instead of having eye-shaped designs on it, it had sideways diamond shapes, like the broach Trucy wore on her cape. He was half-anxious to see her reaction to the gift, and half-terrified of how fearsome her perceptions would become with access to it.

“What’s the matter, Apollo? You look nervous,” Trucy’s voice chirped from behind him, and he jumped and whirled around. She was wearing blue as usual, although today it was a knit winter sweater with little snowmen on it. She held out a platter of sugar cookies that she and Athena had made (although from what Apollo heard, Trucy had made the cookies and Athena had mostly only flubbed up icing them). “Want a cookie?”

“Oh, no thanks,” Apollo said politely. “I’m not really into sweets.”

She wiggled the platter at him. “But Polly... it’s Christmas!”

Apollo wasn’t sure what that had to do with him not liking sweets, but when she looked at him with those wide, innocent eyes, he found himself saying, “Well, okay, maybe just one.”

He chewed the Christmas-tree shaped treat slowly (too cloying, the frosting too sticky) as he and Trucy surveyed the office. Kay and Ema were bantering like old friends, laughing and gesturing
animatedly. Maya and Athena appeared to be having a spirited discussion on the psychological motivations of the Evil Magistrate, while Pearl sat nearby and listened, a contented smile on her face.

But even Apollo couldn’t deny that the most interesting people to watch here were Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth.

The prosecutor had shown up a while ago, flinging the door open and carrying with him a bluster of icy winter air. There were snowflakes melting in his steel-gray hair, and his glasses fogged up a little when he shut the door behind him.

“Merry Christmas, Edgeworth,” Mr. Wright had said, his eyes crinkling up at the corners in a welcoming smile.

“Merry Christmas, Wright,” the other man had murmured in reply, his voice soft and warm in a way Apollo had never heard from him before. Trucy had bustled up and taken his coat for him, and then Mr. Wright had walked with him further into the office, where they had been moving about the room ever since, engaged in quiet conversation, never straying far from one another.

This, by itself, was not particularly fascinating. Those two always seemed to linger around each other when they were in the same place. But what kept grabbing Apollo's attention was the subtle movements they kept making. He just couldn't help but notice things like that. Mr. Edgeworth would shake some droplets of melting snow off his bangs, and Mr. Wright's fingers would twitch around his paper cup, a precursory motion in the direction of the prosecutor's movement. If it had been any other two people, Apollo would have interpreted it as the second party wanting to touch the first party’s hair. But of course, that couldn’t be the case here, could it?

And then there was the moment Mr. Wright dragged Mr. Edgeworth in front of Apollo and said, “Apollo, Edgeworth says this sweater doesn't suit me”—it was blue, too, but with fuzzy reindeer flying across the chest...it must have been one of Trucy’s earlier works, Apollo decided—“but clearly, this sweater is amazing. Tell him this sweater is amazing.”

“That sweater is amazing,” Apollo repeated flatly, and Mr. Edgeworth scoffed and rolled his eyes.

“See? The general consensus is that I totally pull this sweater off,” Mr. Wright said smugly, lifting his chin towards the prosecutor and crossing his arms with a smirk.

“You look ridiculous, and you should pull that sweater off,” Mr. Edgeworth grumbled, turning on his heel and walking away.

Mr. Wright followed after him, nudging him with an elbow and muttering something back that sounded suspiciously like “You'd like that, wouldn't you?” But of course, that couldn't be the case, could it?

The tips of the prosecutor's ears went pink. “Don't be silly; I would like no such thing,” he heard Mr. Edgeworth hiss back, and Apollo's bracelet tightened around his wrist, which would normally indicate that this was a lie. But of course, that also couldn't be the case, could it?

And now they were both sitting by the piano, Mr. Edgeworth gracefully moving his fingers over the scarcely-used keys in a lovely rendition of “O Tannenbaum,” his expression focused but relaxed, as if he were moving on autopilot. Mr. Wright sat beside him, leaning back on his hands and regarding the prosecutor with an expression that some might call “tender” or “adoring,” but which Apollo chose to interpret as “fond,” because those other descriptors didn't apply here, did they?

“Polly, level with me here,” Trucy murmured from beside him, startling him a little from his
contemplation. “You see it too, don't you?”

He didn't have to ask what she meant. “Just because I see something doesn't mean I have to do something about it,” he told her.

“You usually do, though,” Trucy reminded him, setting the cookie tray on the little folding table behind them. “That's kind of your thing. You see things, and then you tell people what you saw.”

Mr. Edgeworth finished playing his song. Athena clapped enthusiastically, and soon Kay, Maya, Pearl, and Ema had joined in. The prosecutor shot a glance at the girls over his shoulder, but then returned his attention to Mr. Wright, and the normally-stern man was wearing an expression so soft and gentle that Apollo had to look away, feeling like he was seeing something private.

“This isn't something that's for me to tell,” Apollo answered Trucy.

She knitted her eyebrows at him, and then glanced at her father and Mr. Edgeworth for a moment. “I guess I know what you mean,” she said quietly. Tilting her head back up to look at him again, she wore a conflicted expression. “I just... want them to be happy, you know?”

Apollo crossed his arms, regarding the two men sitting at the piano. Mr. Edgeworth murmured something to the man next to him, and Mr. Wright burst out laughing, grabbing the prosecutor's shoulder.

“They're already happy,” Apollo decided. “Like I've always said, we don't need to do a thing.”

***

When it came time for the Secret Santa exchange, Trucy gathered everyone in a circle. “We're going to list off everybody, and if you're that person's Secret Santa, come forward and collect the present you brought from the center of the circle and give it to its recipient,” she instructed. “That way, everyone gets to see what everybody gets!”

“Sounds good to me!” Maya said, clapping her hands together.

“Does it have to be quite so public?” Mr. Wright protested. He looked nervous. “Can't we just grab the gift we brought and, y'know, approach our person at our leisure?”

“Nope,” Trucy said cheerily.

“H-Hold on,” Apollo threw in, feeling flustered. “I agree with Mr. Wright. Can we please do it that way instead? Some of the gifts might be really personal.” He wanted to explain his gift's significance to Trucy and only to her, not to have his thoughtful gesture put on display for everyone!

Trucy looked troubled. “Hmmm...” she said, quirking up her mouth on one side. “All in favor of presenting gifts privately?” she prompted, looking around the circle.

Apollo, Mr. Wright, Pearl, and Mr. Edgeworth all put their hands up.

“All in favor of presenting gifts in front of everyone?”

Athena, Maya, and Kay put their hands up.

Trucy's gaze flitted over to the forensic scientist standing next to Apollo. “Ema, you didn't vote.”

“That's... because I didn't bring a present,” she admitted, hanging her head low and looking ashamed. Kay, standing on the other side of Ema, patted her reassuringly.
“Oh, that's right,” Trucy said. She nodded decisively. “All right, then, it looks like the majority has spoken. We'll present gifts to each other privately.” She clapped her hands twice. “Disperse!”

The group did, although several of them lingered long enough to snatch up the present they'd brought before wandering in different directions.

Apollo was about to walk up to Trucy when he felt a tap on the back of his shoulder. He whirled around to see Athena grinning up at him, looking quite festive in a sky blue sweater depicting Christmas light bulbs in red, blue, green, and yellow. She held out a sizable box to Apollo. “Merry Christmas, Apollo!” she exclaimed brightly.

He took the box into his hands. It was done up in red paper, with a teal ribbon. “Did you pick this paper and ribbon to match my suit?” he asked her suspiciously.

“Hehe,” Athena giggled, which wasn't really an answer. “Just open it, silly!” Her blue eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm.

Apollo did. His jaw dropped open as he found himself with 6 glossy-covered books in his hands. “Is this the full set of Western Star's Fist?” he breathed, running his fingers over the cover of Volume 1 reverently.

“Sure is!” Athena looked delighted, practically hopping up and down. “Didn't you wonder why Trucy kept asking you questions about your favorite series?”

Apollo spread out the books, a grin spreading wide across his face. “She asks me so many weird questions that it didn't even strike me as odd,” he admitted. He fixed his former colleague with his best grateful smile. “Thank you so much, Athena. This is awesome.”

She just laughed and launched herself at him in a hug, which Apollo tolerated since it was Christmas and everything.

After that, he kept his eyes peeled for other people's gifts. Kay had given Athena some unique faceplates for Widget, which would make him look like a tiny robotic dog, cat, bunny, or bear; as well as a strangely-shaped golden pin that matched the one Kay wore, which Athena exclaimed over and immediately pinned to her sweater. Apollo had caught Pearl unwrapping a rather cute but modest pink dress from Maya, which the younger spirit medium gasped at and held to her chest, looking both embarrassed and overjoyed while Maya laughed. Pearl had later held out a seemingly-handmade necklace to Kay, from which dangled a shape that Apollo recognized as a Magatama and which Kay squealed at, scooping Pearl up in a hug before looping the gift over her neck. He also caught Athena and Kay surprising Ema by holding out a package to her. She unwrapped it to reveal a Blood Spatter Analysis Kit, which Apollo thought was a rather grisly thing to give someone for Christmas, but which Ema looked at like she had seen the angel Gabriel himself, her mouth dropped open wide and her eyes shimmering with wonder. She flung an arm around each of the girls, making noises that Apollo could only describe as “grateful blubbering.” Following that, Trucy presented her with her own Trucy Style Christmas sweater (green, with little brown gingerbread men). She immediately pulled it on over her top.

He later found Trucy sitting beside Mr. Charley, looking at her father and Mr. Edgeworth again contemplatively. “Hey,” he announced his presence awkwardly. “Here,” he added, announcing his present (also awkwardly).

She blinked at the sloppily-wrapped package (hey, he'd wanted to do something for it by himself) and accepted it into her hands, tearing the paper and lifting the lid off the box. Her eyes popped open wide and she let out a gasp. “Oh, Polly,” she breathed, reaching in and pulling the bracelet out,
running her fingers over the designs. When she looked up at him again, her eyes were shining and moistened. “It’s so beautiful,” she choked out. “How did you ever...?”

“L-Let’s just say I got quite a workout on my bicycle,” he admitted, rubbing the top of his head in embarrassment. He wasn’t used to being looked at like he had placed stars in the sky (well, not since he’d seen Juniper last week, anyway). “I’m not sure it’ll work exactly like mine, but it should come close, at least.”

Trucy buried her face in his chest and held him tight. “Thank you so much, Apollo,” she mumbled into his tie. “I’ll treasure it forever.”

He wrapped one arm around her and placed the other on her head, ruffling her hair a little, because it was Christmas and that made it okay to get a little sappy. “Merry Christmas, Trucy,” he murmured.

When Trucy pulled away, she sniffled a little and then slipped the bracelet onto her wrist, then holding out her arm and admiring it from every angle. It definitely suited her, he thought. “Use its power only for good,” he told her, only half-joking.

She giggled. “You know I will!” she assured him, grinning. “And now, I have to go prepare my gift for Maya.”

Apollo blinked at her. “Prepare? You mean you came to this party without having your gift ready?”

Trucy winked. “It’s not that. It’s just that this particular gift is a little...tricky.”

Apollo felt a slight chill run down his spine. “Oh god,” he said. “What are you going to do?”

Her grin turned just a little evil. “I’m a magician, aren’t I?” she lilted. “So, I’m going to work some magic.”

And then she rushed off, Apollo watching her go and wondering how long they all had before Hurricane Trucy threw them all for a loop.

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The answer turned out to be ten minutes.

“Attention, ladies and gentlemen,” Trucy’s voice came from the front room. Everyone stopped talking and turned to face her. Apollo had been considering going over to talk to Ema, who was reading the instructions for her Blood Spatter Kit in a corner and not socializing like she should be, but when he heard that particular tone in Trucy’s voice, the one that said “hold onto your hats, everyone; this is going to be MAGICAL!”, he knew it would be safer to remain still. “You may have noticed that although this office is lushly decorated for the occasion, one iconic holiday staple is nowhere to be seen here. What, you may ask, am I referring to?”

“A snowman?” Pearl tried.

Trucy looked a little thrown off at having her rhetorical question answered. “N-No, Pearl, not a snowman. A snowman would melt,” she said gently before returning to her dramatic performer voice. “I refer, of course, to a plant that has inspired countless songs and poems,” she continued, sweeping her arms out wide, “which is said to ward off evil; which, despite its poisonous berries, is mostly only famous for the sweetness it evokes with its presence!”

Apollo got a horrible feeling of foreboding.
“Indeed, over the past few days, this plant has disappeared from this place. But what kind of magician would I be if I could not make things reappear? And so, Magical Girl Trucy Wright shall perform a grand re-appearing act right before your eyes.”

“Let's see it, Trucy!” Kay encouraged her from the couch.

Trucy nodded at her and pulled out a magic wand from one of her winter boots. “From the end to beginning, from dusk back to dawn...” she recited, twirling the wand around gracefully before pointing it above where Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth were standing a few feet in front of her. “...Look up and see what once was gone!”

A flash lit up the room for a second, accompanied with a sharp popping noise that may have made Apollo yelp in a manner reminiscent of one of that old lady Hippolyta's dogs. But when it was over and Apollo lowered his arms from his face, his gaze followed everyone else's to the ceiling above Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth.

A sprig of mistletoe hung innocently as if it had been there the entire time.

The room fell silent for a second.

Apollo was expecting a number of things to happen. He was expecting the girls to squeal and point, which a few of them did. He was expecting Mr. Wright to turn to gently chide his daughter with flushed cheeks, which he did. He was expecting Mr. Edgeworth to sigh and shake his head, which he also did.

What Apollo was not expecting—no, what no one was expecting—was for Mr. Edgeworth to then reach out, take Mr. Wright's hand, gently lift it, and press his lips to the knuckles softly before lowering it again and releasing it.

“Will that suffice?” he said in that smooth baritone.

Two things erupted then: the girls with renewed squeals and Mr. Wright's face in a furious blush.

“Way to go, Mr. Edgeworth!” Kay laughed, pumping her fists. She was holding her phone in one of them, Apollo noted.

“Like a fairytale!” Pearl swooned, holding her cheeks and blushing almost as much as Mr. Wright.

“How did you do that?!” exclaimed Athena to Trucy.

“H-Huh wuh buh wah,” Mr. Wright spluttered, or at least that was what it sounded like to Apollo.

“Merry Christmas, Maya,” Trucy said with a grandiose bow.

“You're the best,” Maya gushed, lifting the magician off the ground in a hug.

“What happened?” Ema shouted from her corner. “I missed it!” She still had her instruction manual open in her lap, and she looked rather upset that something had happened without her.

The tips of Mr. Edgeworth's ears had gone pink again, but Apollo thought he actually looked rather pleased with himself. “Nothing of note, Ms. Skye,” he answered. “I was merely upholding tradition in the spirit of the holiday.”

Apollo could only think, as he watched Mr. Wright's mouth flap open and closed as he tried to remember how to make words, that maybe there was such a thing as a Christmas miracle.
Phoenix's head was reeling.

Edgeworth had kissed him. Not that this was a first (his stomach fluttered a little at that thought), but... in front of everyone. Like it was totally normal. It had only been on the hand, but he still felt that feather-light touch on his knuckles like it had left a physical mark. His face felt like it was sunburned. His heart was flopping around so much that he wondered if it was just because he was happy or if it was something that he should have a doctor look at. He looked over again at Miles, who usually turned bright red whenever Phoenix initiated any kind of physical contact but who for some reason had remained all cool and collected in this situation. Phoenix wasn't sure how he felt about that. On one hand, the suave and debonair move was, all right, he'd admit it, totally swoonworthy. But on the other hand, the fact that Miles hadn't gotten all flustered this time made him burn with the need to get in close and make him flustered. He'd see then who would be left stammering and red as a tomato.

“Are you all right, Wright?” Miles murmured to him, quirking an eyebrow. He actually had the gall to look smug about all this. God, how could his smug look be so frustrating one way in court and yet so frustrating a few other ways outside court?

“What the heck was that?!” he hissed when he remembered how to speak, pulling the prosecutor aside by the arm. The whooping and whistling that had resulted at the display had thankfully subsided, and everyone was mostly back to talking to one another and eating again, allowing him to talk to Edgeworth semi-privately (Actually, he had glimpsed Trucy herding everyone away from them and they all appeared to be huddled up in conversation in the next room, which was frankly a little suspicious, but he could think about that later).

Miles shrugged at Phoenix's question. “There was mistletoe,” he said, as if that was all the explanation that was needed. “Would you have me spit in the face of hundreds of years of tradition?”

“Yeah, because you're totally all about tradition,” Phoenix snorted. “I thought we were, y’know, keeping things quiet for now?”

The sly grin that had been on Miles' face subsided a little. “We are,” he said. “I just... well. It felt like it might be safe to do that much, among friends and away from the public eye.” He met Phoenix's eyes, a worried look darkening his features. “Was...was what I did unacceptable to you...?” he murmured.

“Miles,” he choked, grabbing his sleeve with two fingers. “It was the most goddamn adorable thing I have ever experienced.” He intensified his gaze, leaning a bit closer meaningfully. “But...doing stuff like that in front of people is risky. You'll... you'll make me careless.”

Miles' eyes searched his, and then dropped down to Phoenix's lips before lifting back up again. “You're always careless,” he whispered, narrowing his eyes in challenge. The sly smile was creeping across his face again.

“You're playing a very dangerous game, Miles,” Phoenix warned him, though he couldn't resist smirking a little in return. “I've already called you by your first name in front of people and held your hand in public. What's gonna happen if you start in with that kind of thing, too?...”

“All I did was kiss your hand,” the prosecutor said innocently.

“Yeah, in front of our friends,” Phoenix replied, lifting an eyebrow. “And spent the whole night right next to me. And looked into my eyes. And stared at my mou——”

“All right, all right, shhh,” Miles cut him off, finally going red in the face. He glanced around a
moment before leaning in close to whisper to him. The motion made Phoenix want to grab his dumb cravat and kiss him stupid. “I-I wanted to surprise you and take you off-guard,” he admitted. “Your reaction did not disappoint.”

Yeah, well, those looks Miles kept giving him made Phoenix want to take him off-guard and surprise him too. Repeatedly. But they were among all their friends right now, and Phoenix knew he had to exercise restraint. He cleared his throat and leaned back from this annoyingly attractive man.

“Speaking of not disappointing,” he deflected, “This may come as a surprise to you, but I am your Secret Santa.”

“You don't say,” Miles deadpanned.

“And I have it on good authority that you were my Secret Santa as well.”

Miles snorted. “If all the foreign tea I sent wasn't enough to give it away, I may as well confess that the rumors are true.” He walked over to their “tree” and retrieved a small rectangular box wrapped up in blue paper. The round bow was yellow. Phoenix smiled at it, knowing that he'd chosen the bow because it resembled the sunflower on his attorney's badge. Miles could be unexpectedly sentimental like that.

“Merry Christmas, Wright,” said Miles, holding out the present to him.

Phoenix frowned. “Can't you call me by my first name even when you're giving me a gift?” He knew Miles was reluctant to use his first name when there were others present, but after the mistletoe thing, he thought he deserved to embarrass Miles a little. Besides, the others were barely present anyway.

Miles flushed. “M-Merry Christmas, Ph...phmnx,” he trailed off into a mumble.

The defense attorney cupped a hand around his ear. “I'm sorry, what was that?” he teased.

“I said open the damn present, Wright.”

“All right, all right,” he laughed, pulling off the bow and unwrapping the paper. When he lifted the top of the small box, a pair of handsome navy gloves sat nestled in some tissue paper. “Wow,” he breathed, lifting one up and inspecting it. It looked perfectly sized, and the material was soft and warm but not fuzzy or bulky. He pulled one on, flexing his fingers and grinning.

“I would have gotten you a coat as well,” Miles said, a bit awkwardly, “but I confess I wasn't completely sure which kind you'd like. In the meantime, I thought these would do...” He averted his eyes, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. “Are they, ah...satisfactory?”

“They're perfect,” Phoenix said. He looked down into the box, and saw a piece of paper sitting there that he hadn't noticed before. “Oh, a note, too!” He reached in retrieve it.

Miles reached out and grabbed his hand suddenly in both of his, stroking the material of the glove absently and looking him in the eye, a hint of desperation on his face. Phoenix blinked at him, still holding onto the open box. “Wright, I-I...” Miles closed his mouth, and dropped Phoenix's hand, going red. “Y-You don't have to read the note,” he muttered. “In fact, I'd really rather you just gave it to me; it's—it's not important—”

“Oh-uh,” Phoenix said, shaking his head. “This is my first Christmas gift from my boyfriend Miles Edgeworth, and I am reading the note he wrote me.”

Miles's face turned beetroot, and he adjusted his glasses about three times in a row. “K-Keep your
voice down,” he spat, and then turned away from Phoenix, apparently too embarrassed to show his face.

Phoenix smiled and rolled his eyes, and read the note:

Wright,

This is such a small thing, something that can't even begin to repay you for all the gifts you have given me over the years: your trust, your friendship, your loyalty, your conviction, your forgiveness, and your affection. It is by your hands that I have been molded into the man I am today, those same hands that reached out to me when everyone else had turned away. And so I have given you something with which to warm those hands when I cannot. Perhaps this is a foolish gesture, a meaningless and sentimental trifle, but I hope that every time you put on these gloves, you will feel a fraction of the comfort and warmth that you have always offered me.

Yours,
Miles

He didn't know what to say. It was probably more words than he had ever heard out of Miles in a row, and they were all arranged so sweetly, only for him. Phoenix thought the note might have been even more precious than the actual gift. He lifted his eyes to Miles. He still wasn’t looking at Phoenix, but was facing the other direction resolutely, the tips of his ears red, his shoulders stiff as if bracing for impact.

Phoenix laid his gloved hand on one of those shoulders, and Miles jumped. He pulled gently, turning Miles around to face him. He wanted more than anything to cradle his head in his hands and kiss him, but what he did instead was whisper, “Thank you, Miles.” He tried to put all the additional unspoken words into the way he looked at him.

Miles stared back, and smiled reluctantly, returning all the words Phoenix wasn't saying.

“I have something for you, too,” Phoenix said after a moment, “But...I can't give it to you here.” Miles raised his eyebrows, and Phoenix immediately realized how that had sounded. “N-No, not like that!” he backpedaled, waving his hands around. “I-I really do have a gift. Like, a physical gift.” The eyebrows raised higher. “TANGIBLE!” Phoenix tried again, feeling his face radiate heat. “A gift you can open!”

“And why should I not be able to open it here?” Miles asked him, sounding suspicious.

“I-It's nothing untoward!” he blurted, mortified. “I-It...just might raise a lot of questions if anyone else saw it.”

The prosecutor crossed his arms and searched Phoenix with calculating eyes. “You're not making this sound any better, Wright.”

Phoenix hung his head. “I know...”

Nevertheless, Miles sighed. “Very well,” he said. “As it is Christmas, I will agree to receive my gift at a later time.”

“You're the best,” Phoenix told him, smiling.

“And you're the worst,” he responded affectionately.

“You two done whispering sweet nothings to each other?” Maya's voice came out of nowhere. Well,
actually, it was from slightly to their right, as she was approaching them from that direction.

“Wh-what?” Phoenix stammered, stepping apart from Miles quickly. “Oh, um, hey Maya.” He hastily pulled off his glove and hid it away in its box along with the note.

“Hey yourself,” she said, tucking one of the strands of hair that usually hung down on either side of her head behind her ear. It was one of the few occasions Phoenix had ever seen her out of her spirit medium outfit: she had shown up, like most of the others, dressed in a warm winter sweater. Hers was lavender, with white snowflakes. Trucy had knitted the sweaters last year, but Apollo had been away and Pearl had been too bashful to wear hers this year except for the planned group photo. Phoenix wondered briefly if Miles still had the one Trucy had made him (red and white argyle). He had probably made it into a chessboard or something. “Listen, we were all wondering if there were any party games planned,” Maya continued.

“Party...games?” Phoenix echoed.

“Yeah Nick, party games!” Maya grinned. “Like, charades or Pictionary or Pin the Tail on the Santa!”

“I don't think that last one is a real game,” Phoenix pointed out.

“Not with that attitude it's not,” the spirit medium said, crossing her arms.

Phoenix blinked. “What?”

“I think what Wright is trying to say,” Edgeworth cut in, “is that he once again did not think things through, and did not plan any activities for his guests.”

“Hey, we had Secret Santa!” Phoenix protested.

Edgeworth looked unimpressed. “Your daughter arranged that.”

Phoenix pouted.

“Okay,” Maya shrugged. “I guess the girls and I will just come up with our own games, then. I brought some wrapping paper!” she suddenly remembered, her face lighting up. “We can compete to see who can wrap the most pieces of furniture in five minutes!”

“Please don't wrap my furniture,” Phoenix requested.

She looked disappointed. “Party pooper.”

“It's my party to poop,” he told her.

“Next time you plan a party, I'm planning the party games, mister,” she informed him, crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes at him.

Phoenix shrugged. “Be my guest.”

Ema wandered up next, looking a little uncertain. “Guys, this has been so much fun, and I'm so, so happy with my gifts, but I really should get going.” She glanced between Phoenix and Edgeworth, and then averted her eyes, her cheeks going pink. Hmm... that was an unusual reaction. Ema wasn't usually so shy, especially once she'd been able to fangirl about forensics, as the Blood Spatter Analysis Kit no doubt would have allowed her.

“Is something the matter, Ema?” he asked, concerned.
“N-Nope!” she squeaked. “I'm just feeling a little under the radar.” Her eyes widened, and she went a shade deeper. “I mean weather!”

“Be cool, Ema,” Maya hissed, nudging the scientist.

“Are you going to join us for dinner tomorrow, Ema?” Trucy asked, emerging next. “It's just going to be Daddy, Mr. Edgeworth, and me, but you're more than welcome if you've got no plans.”

“Oh, no, I couldn't intrude,” Ema said, accepting the little farewell hug Trucy gave her. “I think I'll just order makeout, I-I mean takeout!” Everyone stared at the furiously blushing forensics expert for a moment before returning to their conversation.

“I wasn't aware we were having dinner, Wright,” said Edgeworth.

“Heh, well, it was going to be a surprise invitation,” Phoenix admitted. He fidgeted a little, put on the spot. “But, uh, do you want to have dinner tomorrow?”

“I'd be delighted,” Miles responded graciously.

“Keep in touch, okay, Ema?” pleaded Kay, who had come to the front room as well, followed by Athena and the rest. The so-called “Great Thief” had a sweater now, too, he realized—pink, of course, with little wrapped candies across the chest and down by the hem.

“Of course I will,” Ema said warmly, hugging Kay and Athena in turn.

“Yeah, don't be a stranger, #7,” Athena added with a wink at Ema as she pulled away from her hug.

“Number seven?” Edgeworth echoed, confused.

“It's my lucky number!” Ema said quickly.

“Don't let it get to you too much,” Apollo said, mysteriously. “All this...” He raised his eyebrows meaningfully. “...stuff, I mean. You get used to it.”

Ema looked uncomfortable, adjusting her kit under her arm. “R-Right,” she replied. She was looking anywhere but at Phoenix or Edgeworth, which hurt Phoenix's feelings a little, really. Was the sweater he was wearing really that bad? Sure, Trucy had made it 5 years ago, and it had had some mishaps in the washing machine, but Phoenix thought it still looked festive enough. “Well, I guess I'm off, everyone.” She smiled around at everyone, finally bringing herself to meet Phoenix's eyes. They darted away almost immediately, but it had happened, so Phoenix felt a little better.

“Bye, everybody!” she called out, waving and opening the door. “Merry Kissmas!” She covered her mouth, turning red again. “I mean Christmas!” She hurried away before she could say anything else, closing the door behind her.

Phoenix looked down at his daughter and Maya, who wore equally guilty faces. “What in the world did you do to her?”

“Nothing!” Trucy said quickly. “We were just making her feel like part of the group!”

“Yeah, she'll fit right in,” Maya said.

Apollo sighed and shook his head, and Phoenix exchanged a confused glance with Edgeworth, who shrugged.
Dinner the next day went on without a hitch. Miles showed up at a quarter past six, and Trucy invited him inside and sat him down at the table. They found out, upon Edgeworth removing his coat, that he had actually worn the Christmas sweater Phoenix had been sure he would never wear, which delighted Trucy to no end (It delighted Phoenix, too, since it was one of only like, two times he’d ever seen Edgeworth not wearing maroon). They shared friendly conversation and the Christmas ham Trucy had helped Phoenix prepare, and Phoenix managed to restrain himself from holding Miles' hand the entire evening, because Trucy's powers of observation had increased tenfold with that bracelet Apollo had given her and she surely would have caught on.

But when Trucy yawned and loudly announced that she was going to bed and instructed them to “not stay up too late, you two!” with a wink before disappearing into her room, Phoenix looked over at the prosecutor on the couch with him and smiled, half-uneasy, half-giddy. “Hi,” he said.

“You're saying hi now?” Miles teased him. He craned his neck in the direction of the hallway, which branched off into Trucy's and Phoenix's rooms. “She went to bed awfully early, didn't she? Don't children typically spend Christmas night enjoying their new gifts?”

“Sh-she's seventeen, Miles, not eight,” Phoenix laughed. “Thanks for giving her that levitation table, by the way. I haven't seen her so excited about a new trick in quite a while.”

“Well, it was simply a matter of going to a magic supply store and finding something she didn't already have,” Miles said humbly. Despite how nonchalant he was acting about it, Phoenix suspected it had taken him quite a bit of time to find the gift.

“So.” Phoenix eyed him. “I still have that present for you.”

“I take it this is a suitable enough environment for me to receive it now?” he asked sardonically.

Phoenix chuckled, running a hand through his spikes nervously. “Well, we'll see...” He rose from the couch and reached behind the television, retrieving the red-and-gold gift bag he'd hidden there before sitting back down on the couch. He handed the bag out to him. “I spent a long time picking this out for you,” he announced, not being able to repress the smirk that arose on his face.

“Well, your thoughtfulness is appreciated,” Miles said, taking the gift bag into his hands and beginning to pull out the gold tissue paper. His expression was stoic, but Phoenix saw the excitement dancing in his eyes. “You really didn't have to get me anyth...” He cut himself off, staring down into the bag.

Phoenix stifled his laughter. “Pfft...”

Slowly, Miles reached his hand in and produced Phoenix's Christmas gift: a small white stuffed unicorn. It had beady blue eyes, an iridescent little horn, and a purple mane and tail, and it was probably the best thing Phoenix had ever given him or would ever give him. The prosecutor stared down at the little toy, having fallen silent, his face beet red. After a moment, he rose wordlessly from the couch and started towards the kitchen.

“Where are you going?” Phoenix asked, twisting around on the couch to look.

“I'm putting this thing where it belongs,” Miles said coldly, holding the unicorn over the trash can.

“W-Wait, no, don't, Miles, I really did spend a long time picking that out for you!” Phoenix protested, stumbling in his attempt to rush after him and save his thoughtful gift. “Come on, don't be embarrassed! That was a turning point for us!”

“I never want to think of that dreadful message ever again,” said Miles, covering his red face with
Phoenix noticed that he had lowered the hand holding the unicorn, though. It seemed he couldn't bring himself to throw it away after all.

Phoenix pried the other man's hand away from his face and kissed his palm. "Well I think about it all the time," he admitted. "I'm going to keep it forever."

His eyes widened. "You still have that thing?!" he choked. "G-Give me your phone at once!"

Phoenix put his hands over his jeans pocket protectively. "No way! It's mine! You left it for me and it's mine!"

Miles groaned, whirling away from Phoenix and resting his forehead against the refrigerator.

Phoenix wrapped his arms around his waist and rested his chin on Miles' shoulder. "Let me guess: I'm the worst, right?"

Miles just nodded. He was holding the unicorn to his chest.

"If it makes you feel any better, I also got you a pocket watch," Phoenix said coaxingly.

"I already have a pocket watch," Miles sighed, turning around to face Phoenix. He didn't bother to remove Phoenix's arms from around him, however.

Phoenix grinned. "I know. That's why I had to get the unicorn, too."

Miles' answering frown was adorable. "You didn't have to get the unicorn at all."

He rested his forehead against the prosecutor's. "But then how would you know that I love unicorns too?"

Miles turned a color reminiscent of a boiled lobster. "I-I, I wasn't in my right mind, it wasn't—" he stammered. He wouldn't meet Phoenix's eyes again, and he took a step back from Phoenix, apparently too overwhelmed with embarrassment to stand so close to him. "D-Don't presume to know what I can or cannot say," Miles spat out petulantly.

"Did you just say you love me out of spite, or do you really love me?" Phoenix asked, taking another step towards him. Miles moved another step back in response.

"I-I love you," he asserted nonetheless. He looked ready to bolt, but was bravely standing his ground.

The smile on Phoenix's face felt like it might stay there permanently. "I love you too, Miles," he said breathlessly. "I have for a really long time."

The poor man looked like he didn't know what to do with that information. He flapped his mouth a few times, looked down at his feet, shifted his weight around, polished his glasses, and cleared his throat a few times. He seemed to be moving down a checklist of "Things People Do When They're
Uncomfortable.” It was precious. “F-for ages,” he finally mumbled. “I... I as well.”

Phoenix felt an electric shock course through his body yet again, sparking down his spine and making his fingertips tingle. “Really?” he whispered. “You have?” He stepped closer to Miles again, and this time he did not move away.

“Please don't make me repeat it,” Miles begged, stuffing the unicorn in his suit jacket's pocket. “Can you not just take me at my word?”

“Sure, okay, I will,” Phoenix nodded, and then wrapped his arms around him again and kissed him fiercely. Kissing Miles was always amazing, but kissing him knowing that the other man loved him, had loved him for years... Phoenix poured everything he had into this kiss, pulling him tight against his chest. Miles seemed to get over his embarrassment pretty quickly then, flinging his arms around Phoenix's neck and tilting his head to deepen the kiss. Phoenix shuddered, pressing his fingertips into the small of Miles' back before moving them to his hips, inching them under the sweater to touch his burning skin and stroking gently. Miles made a sound in his throat in response and pressed closer to him.

He kissed the prosecutor's forehead, his cheeks, trailed kisses along his jaw, pressed his lips against the spot right beneath his ear. He felt Miles shiver in his arms, tightening his grip around him and letting Phoenix's name slip out in a breath. Phoenix murmured Miles' name back to him in encouragement, and then met his lips again, kissing him slower now before pulling back and looking at him.

Miles' eyes were dark, his pupils drawing Phoenix in. He said nothing, but the way he was trembling slightly in Phoenix's arms and raking his eyes across his face as they both caught their breath told Phoenix everything. He had been trying to communicate the same thing, after all: That he had wanted to do that for so long, that he had wanted nothing so badly as he had wanted Miles all these years.

Phoenix smiled at him giddily, and saw an answering smile spread across his face, too. He wanted to make that smile happen every day if he could. He pressed his lips to Miles' forehead. “I can't wait for that stupid trial to be over,” he mumbled against his bangs. Getting to kiss Miles like this was fantastic, but having to be so secretive about being with him was getting to be quite a problem, and made it rather inconvenient for them to secure any alone time. And to be frank, Phoenix was really starting to crave some alone time with him for more than a few minutes.

Miles lowered his head and rested it under Phoenix's chin. “I know,” he said. “It'll be over soon. And if that stunt your daughter pulled yesterday is any indication, I think we will have our friends' support.” His breath was warm on Phoenix's collar bones.

Phoenix laughed. “Pearl would want to throw another party. And I think Trucy was trying to be my wingman tonight or something.”

“Kay has been badgering me to 'confess my feelings before someone else snatches you up,’” Miles admitted.

Phoenix pulled away a little to look at the prosecutor's face. “She knew?”

Despite the rather intense expression of feelings they had just engaged in, Miles looked embarrassed. “She... has had some indication of my feelings for you for quite a while.”

“How long is 'quite a while'?”
“At least ten years.”

“Ten years?” Phoenix choked. Then he scrunched up his face, pondering. “Well, come to think of it, Maya's been encouraging me to 'kiss and make up' with you every time we had a spat since the Will Powers case.”

Miles chuckled, finally stepping away from Phoenix and beginning to gather up the dishes from their dinner. “It would appear that in this respect, we were slower on the uptake than everyone else.”

“Hey, I never expected you to be into the uptake in the first place,” Phoenix remarked.

Miles narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “And what is that supposed to mean?” He brought the dishes over to the sink and turned on the faucet.

Phoenix shrugged, feeling a little sheepish now as he joined Miles at the sink. “Well... I mean, come on, Miles, you don't exactly exude an air of 'warm and fuzzy.' I...kinda thought you would never be interested in a relationship of any kind.” This was kind of dangerous territory, Phoenix thought, but since they had just confessed their love and made out in his kitchen, he thought it was only fair to be completely honest.

“Well, ordinarily, you would not be wrong,” Miles conceded, scrubbing Phoenix's plate and then handing it to him. “But then, Phoenix Wright never seems to align to any standards I hold for other people.”

“Aw, are you saying I'm special?” Phoenix cooed, grabbing a dish towel and drying the plate.

“I'm saying you have the unique ability to keep surprising me,” Miles corrected, shooting him a glance that was half-amused and half-exasperated.

“You're being very open today,” the defense attorney noted, accepting the glass Miles handed him to dry next. “You didn't hit the egg nog, did you?”

Miles hmpfed in that dignified way of his. “No, Phoenix, I did not drink any egg nog. I just was thinking I can't let you be the only one with all the surprises.”

Phoenix felt lit up from the inside. He wanted to tell Miles everything he had ever kept from him. “I couldn't stop thinking about you after you moved away,” he suddenly confided. “Even as I went from middle school to high school to college, no one moved me the way you did.”

Miles' cheeks flushed. Apparently he hadn't been ready for quite that level of candor. “A-Am I supposed to respond with a confession of my own?”

He grinned. “Only if you want to.”

“All right then,” the prosecutor responded with a shrug, going back to washing dishes. It was sweet of him to help out, Phoenix noted absentmindedly. He never thought he'd see Miles doing something as domestic as washing dishes. But he was crazy if he thought washing dishes was going to get him out of this.

“Come on, Miiiiiles,” Phoenix wheedled. “Bare your soul to me.”

If Miles rolled his eyes any harder they might have fallen out of his head. He heaved a sigh. “I kept your letters,” he countered. “All of them.”

The butterflies in Phoenix's stomach were dancing in double-time. “You did?!”
“What did I say about making me repeat things, Wright.”

“Everyone thinks it's because Maya set it, but my ringtone is actually the Steel Samurai theme because it reminds me of you,” Phoenix said quickly, eager to hear what he would respond with.

“I had chess pieces personalized to look like you and myself,” Miles retorted.

“No fair; I already knew that one.”

“You did?” The prosecutor looked thrown off. He furrowed his brow, contemplating. “Hmm…” He was evidently having trouble thinking of another confession. “How about…” His eyes widened, and his face flushed for a moment, but then he cleared his throat and looked down at the soapy water in the sink, saying nothing.

“You thought of something,” Phoenix realized. “Tell me!”

“No.”

“Miiiles.”

“No. Stop whining; you're a grown man.”

“Miles, it's Christmaaaaas.”

He huffed impatiently. “Kay found out I had feelings for you because she read an old journal of mine in which I blathered on about you to a nauseating degree,” he finally said in a rush. He shoved another plate into Phoenix's hands. “Now don't ask me for any more secrets. I'm fresh out of both them and dignity.”

Phoenix grinned goofily. “You wrote about me? What did you say?” He put the plate away in the cupboard.

“I am absolutely under no obligation to answer that question.”

He crossed his arms. “Maybe I'll just ask Kay.”

Miles froze for a second, but then went back to scrubbing. “She promised to never tell a soul. I trust her.”

He pouted, because even though Miles always told him he found it annoying, it had worked on the prosecutor before. “Hmph. I'll just have to get my hands on that journal for myself, I guess.”

The other man sighed and mumbled something that sounded like “Not if I burn it first” before handing Phoenix another plate for him to put away.

“Hey,” Phoenix said after a while of companionable silence. “I'm really glad you came over tonight. This has been the best Christmas ever.”

“I'm glad, too.” Miles' expression was warm, his eyes soft behind his glasses.

“Take good care of that unicorn, okay?” Phoenix added, not being able to resist teasing him.

Miles flung some soapy water at him.
Next chapter: Ema makes a discovery. Miles hides a unicorn.

Also, please enjoy this crappy doodle I made at work a few weeks ago with pen (it's Phoenix giving Miles the unicorn).

Thanks again to all of you readers and commenters. I love you(nicorns).
If someone had told Ema Skye one year ago that Phoenix Wright and Miles Edgeworth were head-over-heels for each other, she would have just looked at them blankly or laughed in their face. But after that holiday party, after observing the way they acted around each other with a different perspective... She was wondering just how long she had failed to see the overwhelming amount of evidence. They had always had undeniable chemistry as rivals in court, but she was kicking herself for never realizing how well they clicked even outside the courtroom.

Not for the first time, it had been Trucy Wright who had opened her eyes.

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After the incident with the mistletoe (which Ema had missed because she was reading how to use the simulated blood in her amazing new kit), Trucy had grabbed Ema by the arm and dragged her into the next room at the Wright Anything Agency, and everyone else followed after. Trucy half-shut the door that had been open the entire party, closing them off somewhat from the front room.

“I will now call this emergency meeting of Project: Matchmakers to order,” Trucy said in a low tone, rejoining the others as they began to sit down.

“Project what?” Ema echoed, settling herself next to Apollo, who looked as if he’d rather be elsewhere, actually. “What's going on? Why are we all over here instead of in the front room all of a sudden?”

“Ema, you totally missed Mr. Edgeworth smooching Nick's hand,” Maya informed her, flopping down between Athena and Pearl. She looked so different just wearing a sweater and jeans, Ema noted absently, but she was still sporting the same unusual hairstyle. “Under some mistletoe.”

“Whaaaat?!” Ema exclaimed.
“Shhhh!” hissed about four other people.

“Okay, so here's the deal, Ema,” Trucy said, businesslike. She, too, looked different today. Without her top hat, it was easy to see how short she was, even when sitting down. “We've all formed an alliance to get Daddy and Mr. Edgeworth together.”

“T-Together for what?” Ema said blankly.

They all stared at her.

“Seriously?” Apollo said. She looked at him in exasperation. How was even he in on this while she was left in the dark?

“Y’know, together,” Athena said meaningfully, who was sitting across from Ema on the other couch. “As a couple.”

“A couple?!”

“Shhhhh!”

“Sorry,” Ema whispered, “it's just...Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth? A couple?!"

“Oh, come on, Ema, you've known them almost as long as I have,” Maya said, rolling her eyes. “Don't tell me you've never noticed them making goo-goo eyes at each other.”

“I-I haven't!” Ema said, feeling flustered. She looked around at them all. “Where in the world is this all coming from?”

“So you didn't notice the way Mr. Edgeworth looked at Mr. Wright after he played the piano?” Kay asked from Ema's other side, quirking one eyebrow. Kay and Athena were wearing matching Yatagarasu pins now, Ema observed to herself.

“Or the way Mr. Edgeworth dropped everything to go help Nick in Khura'in, dirty rebel hideouts and all?” Maya added.

“Or the way they're always finding little reasons to touch one another?” Pearl sighed dreamily.

“Or how the chess pieces in Mr. Edgeworth's office totally look like him and Mr. Wright?” Athena said incredulously. Widget was flashing green, sporting little kitty ears.

Ema was silent, thinking over their words. Honestly, though she had seen all those things, she had never really noticed them. She'd always been too busy fangirling over forensics (or Mr. Edgeworth).

“I... I feel pretty stupid now,” she admitted, hanging her head.

“You're not stupid, Ema,” Trucy said gently. “You're a scientist. You just get a little caught up on the details sometimes and need a little help seeing the big picture.”

“That's...very kind of you, Trucy,” Ema said weakly, her heart sinking as she clenched her hands in her lap. So this was where she was in life: being comforted by a seventeen-year-old and needing the help of six other people to see something that had been staring her in the face for a decade.

“So,” Maya said eagerly, sitting forward a little. “What do you say, Ema? You in?”

“In?”

“She means, do you want to be a part of Project: Matchmakers?” Kay rephrased. She was grinning at
“Even if you say no, you probably don’t have a choice in the matter,” Apollo informed her in a resigned tone.

“Um, it’s going to take a little while to wrap my head around all this,” Ema admitted, fidgeting with the hem of her new Christmas sweater. “But I do want Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth to be happy, and if they make each other happy, then... I guess I’ll do what I can to help.”

“Yesss!” Maya said, pumping her fists.

“We now appoint you Project: Matchmakers Operative #7,” Trucy said in an official sort of voice, clapping her hands together, which actually made a sound since she wasn't wearing gloves today. “And now, onto the next topic of discussion: that mistletoe kiss.”

“It happened a lot easier than I thought it would,” Athena confided. “I expected way more resistance. Possibly a scolding.”

“Me too,” Trucy agreed.

“I can still scold you if you want,” Apollo offered. Trucy shoved his shoulder, since she was sitting next to him.

“Mr. Edgeworth was like a prince from a storybook,” Pearl gushed, her eyes sparkling. She giggled. “And Mr. Nick looked so surprised!”

“Really?” Ema said, bringing a hand to her cheek in surprise. She was beginning to really wish she had seen this. “I-I missed it all...”

Kay nudged her shoulder against Ema's, giving her another 1000-watt grin. “Maybe you don’t have to miss it,” she said with a wink. She cleared her throat importantly. “You all happen to be in the presence of a professional information-gatherer.” She pulled her phone out of her pocket. “As soon as Trucy started talking, I pressed record. And here is what we all saw.”

She held the phone out to Ema and pressed Play.

The phone video was a little shaky, but there it was: muffled squealing from the room at large, the camera rapidly darting to the mistletoe above the two lawyers' heads before panning down to them; Mr. Wright turning to say something to Trucy but being held back by Mr. Edgeworth reaching out and taking his hand; Mr. Edgeworth pressing a chaste kiss to Mr. Wright's knuckles; the whole room exploding in catcalls and whistles; Mr. Wright's face going fire engine red as he flapped his jaw like a beached fish.

Kay pulled the phone away when the video had concluded, pretending to wipe a tear from her eye. “Ah, one of my finest works,” she said emotionally.

Ema's face burned in a blush. It had only been on the hand, true, but the tenderness with which Mr. Edgeworth had kissed Mr. Wright's hand had unquestionably been genuine, and Mr. Wright's reaction more than suggested how he felt about it. She'd never presumed to think of those two in that context before... It was undeniable that they were both attractive men. Sure, one was her impressive-yet-goofy friend of ten years and one was the cool and untouchable Chief Prosecutor, but she felt similar levels of admiration for them both, so she had never dared to contemplate them in anything other than a professional manner. But... if they were to be in a relationship with each other...

She felt her hands cover her intensely blushing cheeks. “Oh god,” she mumbled. They would make
quite a pretty picture indeed, albeit one that made her more than a little uncomfortable to think about.

“You definitely see the chemistry, right?” Maya prompted.

Ema just nodded mutely, and covered her face with her hands. Great. Now she wouldn't be able to get the image of her good friend smooching her legal world idol out of her head.

“Hehe, you're so cute, Ema,” Kay teased her.

“Yes, yes, Ema's innocence and naivete is quite precious,” Trucy agreed. Ema frowned at her. She didn't need to be made to feel like a child by this teenager! “But now I propose we discuss the implications of this recent development in Mr. Edgeworth and Daddy's relationship.”

“And what would those be?” Athena asked curiously, folding her arms.

Trucy practically bounced up and down in her seat. “It's obvious from the way they act that they wouldn't mind kissing kissing each other!”

“Ugh, Trucy, I didn't need that mental image,” Apollo groaned, holding his sizable forehead in his hands.

“Oh, grow up, Polly,” retorted the youngest person in the room.

Ema could kind of sympathize with Apollo, though. Though in her case the mental image might have been a little more appealing than she was willing to admit, she still felt like thinking about it was wrong somehow.

“Just, if those two get together, who knows how many more Dad Jokes we'll have to listen to?” Apollo continued, slumping over. “I mean, when he first asked me for my name and I blurted out 'I'm fine' instead, he said 'Mr. Fine, was it'! The guy's been pulling Dad Jokes since day one!”

“I dunno, I don't think Mr. Edgeworth is the Dad Joke type,” Maya remarked, tapping her chin.

Kay cleared her throat, and everyone turned their attention to her. Her smile was rueful as she played with the Magatama-shaped pendant she'd gotten from Pearl under her scarf. “I hate to break this to you all, but... he once ended an argument with 'You have MILES to go before you've reached my level!'”

This was met with an uncomfortable period of silence.

Trucy patted Apollo's shoulder, her new bracelet clinking gently on her wrist. “I'll help you endure the Dad Jokes, Apollo,” she told him soothingly.

“Thank you,” Apollo muttered helplessly.

“Anyway,” Trucy continued, “What I wanted to talk about next is: We need to start thinking about how we can proceed from here.”

“Athena repeated, crossing her arms again and looking perplexed. “What do you mean? It looks like things are already progressing smoothly...”

“Well, yes,” Trucy conceded, “But there is another holiday coming up: New Year's.”

“Wow, New Year's happens after Christmas? I had no idea,” Apollo deadpanned. Trucy shoved him again.

“Proceed?”
“I think I’m picking up what you’re putting down,” Maya said slyly, her smile knowing. “You’re thinking about setting them up for that particular tradition that happens at midnight, aren’t you.”

“How about it?” Trucy sang, pointing at Maya with both hands like she’d won a prize on a game show.

“What tradition are you talking about?” Pearl asked, looking a little lost.

“The one where you kiss someone right when the clock strikes midnight, right? To sort of ensure good fortune for the new year,” Kay put in.

“Oh!” Pearl exclaimed, covering her mouth with her hand. “Goodness, I had no idea there were so many holiday traditions that revolved around kissing!”

“Can we please stop trying to make them kiss all the time?” the attorney next to Ema pleaded. “If it happens, it happens; just...” He sighed. Ema wondered how long he had been suffering like this. “I'd like it to not happen in front of us.”

“Why are you so against love, Apollo?” Maya challenged, crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes.

“I'm not against love! I'm very much in favor of love! Just, y'know, privately!” Apollo retorted.

“You're such a prude, Polly,” Trucy reprimanded him in a disappointed sort of voice, shaking her head.

Apollo threw up his hands. “How does it not bother you to imagine your own dad making out with someone?”

“Um,” Ema started, and everyone's eyes instantly turned to her. “F-For what it's worth, I agree with Apollo. I think we should leave them alone.”

A brief silence followed. Ema almost wished she hadn't spoken.

“Interesting,” Trucy said, nodding. “Please explain your stance, Ema.”

“How come when she’s against it it's ‘interesting,’ but when I'm against it I'm a prude?” Apollo muttered resentfully, though he had shot Ema a grateful glance when she’d spoken up.

“Uh, well...” Ema cleared her throat, stalling for time as everyone looked at her expectantly. “Th-the thing is...” She looked around the room, as if she'd find some inspiration among all the Christmas garlands. “Sc-Scientifically speaking...” she stammered. Damn, why did that phrase always tumble out when she was trying to explain herself? But maybe she could work with this. She locked her eyes on Pearl, who looked the least likely to get angry with her if she said something weird.

“Scientifically speaking... Newton's first law states that ‘an object in motion tends to remain in motion.’ And...” Her eyes popped open. She could work with this! “A-And, you guys have already set something in motion here! So you don't have to keep pushing. They're moving on their own now.”

There was a general murmur around the room, most of the girls muttering things like “That makes sense” or “Well, that's true” under their breath. Ema felt rather pleased with herself. Not bad for something she had pulled out of nowhere! Encouraged, she continued. “And... the third law of motion states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, so, uh...” She fumbled a bit before thinking something up. “If one of them makes a move, the other is sure to react! Yeah!”

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“An opposite reaction?” Pearl repeated, looking worried. “Wouldn't that mean that if one of them
confessed their love, the other would confess their hate, or something like that?"

“N-No, it doesn't mean 'opposite' like that,” Ema said quickly. “It...It has to do with two forces colliding.” She demonstrated with her hands, bringing them together with a faint clap. “If my hands are moving at the same speed and weigh the same, then they both exhibit the same amount of force against one another,” she explained, not being able to keep the excitement out of her voice. This had taken an unexpectedly fun turn!

“So... if Mr. Nick started running at Mr. Edgeworth, Mr. Edgeworth would run into Mr. Nick...?” Pearl said, looking baffled. “That sounds like it might hurt... I don't know if I want that...”

Ema covered her face with her hands. Apollo patted her consolingly. “Wh-What I mean is,” Ema tried again, lifting her head, “If Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth feel the same way about each other... and they decide to do something about it at the same time...” She brought her hands together again slowly, and linked them, lacing her fingers. “...They'll come together on their own.”

“Wow,” Maya said, impressed. “She blinded us with science.”

“Well, I'm glad I'm no longer the only logical one in this group, I guess,” Apollo said. “Can we go back to the party now?”

Trucy shrugged. “Okay. But we should go back slowly. Who knows; maybe they're doing some more smooching while we're out of the room.”

Apollo didn't look convinced. “I will eat literally all of the cookies if that is happening.”

“But you hate cookies,” Trucy said, confused.

“Exactly.”

“Look, I'll go out first,” Maya suggested, rising from the couch. “I'll scout out the situation, and then you all can start coming in, too. I'll go up and ask them about party games, or something.”

“Good idea,” Kay agreed, nodding. “And if they are making out, get pictures.”

Ema's face heated up in another blush.

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Since then, Ema could not get the idea that the two lawyers were in love out of her head. It was so obvious, now that she went back and thought about all the times she'd seen them together. How in the world had she missed it? What other things had she been too caught up in her own little Forensics Fantasyland to notice? Maybe Trucy had been right, she thought morosely as she organized some soil samples she'd just taken.

She was currently investigating the scene that witnesses had reported seeing Ariadne get kidnapped from, a run-down part of town where even the houses looked tired and washed-out. Although Morris had been swiftly convicted and was in jail, the evidence having been incontrovertible, they still didn't have all the details on how the crime had happened. Morris wasn't talking, an investigation of Morris's family and acquaintances had dead-ended, and Ariadne herself had been too frail to give testimony at the time of the trial. She was recovering steadily, and was to be released from the hospital today, in fact, if she remembered correctly.

Morris's truck was nearby, parked at the scene to help recreate the conditions. It was unfortunate that she hadn't been able to investigate the truck when they'd apprehended the kidnapper, as Mr. Wright
and Mr. Edgeworth had needed it for transportation and it was now covered in their fingerprints. Morris's were still there as well, true, but any information she could glean from them was not very helpful, as the prints besides Mr. Wright's, Mr. Edgeworth's, and Athena's were too old or smudged to be of any use. Ema had found several hairs in the truck bed and on the seats, but she hadn't gotten any DNA analysis reports back yet. They could belong to any of the kidnapping victims, she thought helplessly.

The soil samples were from some footprints that had been covered up by a layer of ice the day after the incident. This left them well-preserved, but Ema wasn't sure why she was collecting samples if they'd already caught the criminal. Still, she was nothing if not thorough. The first set of footprints was obviously Morris's, but the second was totally different. It was smaller than Morris's, but larger than Ariadne's would have been. It might not have been related to the crime at all, in fact, and perhaps had just been left there by a passerby shortly before or after the crime. Was there even any point to investigating this?...

She shook her head. She didn't have time to get into a funk now. She was living her dream! She was helping to save people! She was a professional, and she was going to do her job, dammit! She stuck the pH tester into the soil sample she was currently holding.

Her phone vibrated in her pocket, startling her and almost causing her to drop the vial she'd been testing. She pulled the cell phone out, fumbling it a little since she was still wearing gloves. It was from Trucy, whose number, along with everyone else's in Project: Matchmakers, was now in her Contacts.

attention all p:m operatives-- this isn't really related to our mission, but i just wanted to tell u all that ariadne stringer is going to be stopping by the agency tomorrow!! she got the ok to leave the hospital and is doing well, and i look forward to hearing her apparently legendary violin skills!

Ema smiled at her phone. Even if those girls were kind of interfering and nosy, it was sweet that they were trying so hard to help Mr. Wright and Mr. Edgeworth out, and Ema sort of enjoyed getting updates, if she was being honest. The day after Christmas (Ema had spent a lovely, quiet Christmas with her sister), Trucy had written an excited message which had said ATTENTION!!! i went to bed early on christmas to give daddy and mr. edgeworth some “alone” time, and i didn't hear daddy go to bed until almost 2 AM!!! this is not a drill!!! i asked him what they were doing all that time and he just went super red and said they were WASHING DISHES!!! Kay had responded to that one with washing dishes??? thats a new one ;))))

On the 28\textsuperscript{th}, Ema had received an update from Kay: has anyone heard from mr edgeworth? i havent been able to contact him all day. athena cant get in touch with mr wright either. im getting kind of worried... and then later that day she had gotten another text, this one from Maya: Hey guys, I just realized what's been going on all day, and let me just tell you all: they're both fine, I promise. But leave them alone today ok? Im serious. Kay- no stalking. Pearly- stay home. Frankly, that one had made Ema more curious than ever, but as far as she could tell, everyone had listened to the warning, because when Maya Fey took that tone, things were clearly Very Serious.

Yesterday, the 29\textsuperscript{th}, Athena had sent them all a text to tell them Just talked to Mr Edgeworth and he won't tell me what Mr Wright got him for Christmas no matter how I asked but his voice was happy and angry at the same time what could that possibly mean?? to which Apollo had responded with Obviously it means he's happy about getting a gift but angry about being interrogated about it. Leave the poor guy alone! Ema was surprised Apollo was even a participant in these group texts, but it seemed he only responded to tell everyone else to stop texting so much.

Anyway, the news that Ariadne was visiting the Agency was welcome. Maybe Mr. Wright would
ask her some good questions while she was there, and pass along the information to Ema.

For now, though, all she could do was her job.

She pulled the hair samples out of her bag for what seemed like the tenth time and squinted at them. It was impossible to tell one from the others like this; they all looked similar in color when it was just single hairs. She'd have to wait for the analysts at the lab to call with their results to find out how many people these hairs belonged to, she reminded herself, stowing the samples away again. She wished she could do that part herself, but the truth was that she wasn't exactly an expert in DNA analysis. Staring at DNA charts in a lab for hours wasn't really her thing—she was more into being out there in the field and finding all the samples she could.

Which was why she was currently running all these tests on the soil samples. A thorough analysis would have required her to send them to the lab and have their chemical makeup broken down, but for right now she was just testing for certain substances that had been present in other locations the kidnapper had been—namely, the iron oxides that had been present in the samples taken around Guerneville, where they had found Courtney Hampton. It had been a forested area, rich with redwood tree leaves which created thick, loamy topsoil. But the soil underneath had been reddish and low in nutrients, and it was this lower layer of soil which Ema was hoping to find traces of. Soil could cling to the treads of a person's shoes for weeks, after all—it was very possible that they would still find some from his footprints. Most of the soil around the city was gray and dry, mostly made of clay, so any soil from densely wooded areas found here in the city would stick out like a sore thumb.

She took a look at the pH tester she'd stuck in the soil sample vial. 5, she read off. That was quite acidic, not at all like the typical soil around this area. It had also appeared rustier in color than was usual around here. It seemed this soil had indeed come from Morris's time in Guerneville.

Next, she removed the tester from the sample she'd gathered from this other, smaller footprint. 5, it said as well. Ema squinted at it. How had this soil from a forested area made it all the way over here, if it wasn't from Morris? What were the odds of a second person having recently taken a forest hike and then walking around an abduction scene? Not very high, she thought. This could be a valuable clue... She tried a colorimetric test on both samples next, testing for their nitrogen content. It turned out to be low in both. This only made her more sure that both samples were from the exact same area.

Her phone suddenly rang, and she hastened to answer it, since a glance at the caller ID told her it was from the forensics lab. “Ema Skye,” she said. “Tell me you have the DNA results.”

“We do,” said one of their lab analysts, Mike. “We found matches on most of the hairs. Some were Morris's; others belonged to Tia Euler, Courtney Hampton, Maizy Conroe, and Ariadne Stringer.”

Ema nodded. She hadn't bothered sending a sample of Peri's hair, since it was blue after all and easy enough to pick out. “Good. But you said 'most of the hairs.' What else do you have for me, Roscopé?” Throwing out the last names gave her an air of authority, she thought.

“Well...” She didn't like the hesitation in his voice. “See, the thing is, there were a few hairs that we couldn't identify.”

She adjusted the phone against her ear. “Was the hair follicle not fully present?” She knew that having a lack of living cells in the sample made it hard to analyze.

“No, no, the DNA was...mostly intact,” Roscopé assured her. “We just couldn't match it to anyone involved with the case.”
“Well that's not good...” Ema muttered. “I found a suspicious footprint here at the scene that's raising some questions, too... Could you determine anything about the donor from the hair sample? Sex, ethnicity, age?”

“Female,” the analyst said. “Caucasian. And as for age... looks like she might have been over seventeen.”

“Over seventeen?” Ema echoed, surprised. She started tugging off her latex gloves. “That would be strange... every other victim has been seventeen...”

“Well, technically Maizy Conroe turned eighteen while she was kidnapped,” Mike reminded her. Ema winced. What a way to celebrate your birthday! “But yeah, we thought it was odd, too. In any case, looks like there might be another kidnapping victim that we haven't found yet.”

“Or it could just be another person who's ridden in the car,” Ema pointed out.

“That's true,” Roscopé admitted. “We'll keep trying to find a match, but in the meantime, I'm thinking we should start poking into Morris's background a little more. Maybe he has a lady friend.”

“According to all his neighbors and the man himself, he's lived by himself since Cayley killed herself,” Ema remembered. She shoved the soil samples in her bag—she'd spent enough time here. It was time to give Mr. Edgeworth an update, she thought. She closed up her bag, and then continued speaking to the man on the phone. “He had no other children, his wife left him, and as far as we can tell he has no other living relatives, or even any friends who see him on a regular basis.”

“I know, I know,” the analyst sighed. “But maybe we missed something. It's possible. Or maybe it really is another kidnapping victim who just happens to not fit the usual criteria. Either way, it warrants looking into.”

“I agree,” Ema said, climbing into her car. “Tell the lab team nice work. And keep me posted if anything changes. I'm on my way to the Prosecutor's Office to give Mr. Edgeworth the lowdown.”

“Roger,” Mike told her, and hung up.

Ema turned the keys in the ignition and started off towards the Prosecutor's Building.

If this hair really did belong to another kidnapping victim, she thought as she drove, they had no leads. Morris definitely wouldn't tell them anything, and no other seventeen-year-olds had been reported missing. But then, if this girl was over seventeen, that meant they had to start considering other missing persons, too. How wide of an age range were they looking at now? This was an enormous city, an absolutely colossal state. There was no way they could launch an investigation into every woman over the age of seventeen who had gone missing since November... and that was only taking into account the people that were reported missing. What if this woman had lived alone, or had been homeless? Unless they could find out more information, they were basically up a creek without a paddle.

By the time she reached the Prosecutor's Office and rode the elevator to the twelfth floor, her thoughts were becoming frantic. She took a deep breath. Talking to Mr. Edgeworth would help to calm her down, she thought. He always had a plan. And Mr. Wright would be talking to Ariadne tomorrow, she reminded herself. This situation was not hopeless.

Things will work out, she repeated to herself like a mantra. We'll get through this. Things will work out.

The elevator dinged, and the doors opened. She rushed out into the hall and towards Mr.
Edgeworth’s door. Mr. Edgeworth will know what to do, she thought. Just seeing him sitting there, drinking some tea calmly, will help me calm down. She was starting to feel better already, a smile breaking across her face.

“Hey, Mr. Edgeworth, sir!” she called out cheerily as she pulled open the door, expecting to see him look up from his teacup as he sat at his desk.

The sight that greeted her eyes, however, was definitely not what she was expecting.

He was really beginning to hate the damn unicorn.

Ever since the day he had received it, it seemed yet another person discovered it in the bottom drawer of his desk. He kept it in there along with the stash of snacks he hid there for Wright (the man definitely had a sweet tooth), where it gazed up at him accusingly every time he opened the drawer.

The day after Christmas, it had been Detective Gumshoe who had discovered the plush. Miles had been looking over some files while he sat on his couch, and Gumshoe was there with him, helping him follow up with some case details. “Detective, could you hand me my pen from the second drawer of my desk?” he’d asked.

“Sure, sir!” he responded enthusiastically, tromping over to his desk. “Second drawer, that's the one on the bottom, right?”

“What?!” Miles exclaimed. “No! I said the second—” It was too late, though. Miles just brought his palm to his face as Gumshoe pulled open the drawer.

“Aww, Mr. Edgeworth,” he cooed, his face brightening as he pulled the little unicorn out of hiding. “It's so nice of you to have this here in case any kids come around. You’re a really thoughtful guy!”


The next person to snoop through his desk had been Detective Skye. She had happened to open his desk to look for some paper clips, and of course the drawer she opened just had to be the bottom one.

“No!” Miles sputtered, stumbling out of his chair and to his feet. “Don't look in there!”

But Ema had seen the drawer's contents. She squealed and reached in. “Oh my gosh, Mr. Edgeworth!”

Miles could already feel his face flushing. “Nnngh,” he groaned, “It's not what you th—”

Ema pulled out a bag of some type of chocolate snack, her eyes dancing with joy. “I didn't know you liked Snackoos too, Mr. Edgeworth!” she said excitedly.

“Hah?” Miles said eloquently. He stared at the bag in Ema’s hands, recognizing it as something he had been keeping for that troublesome man. “Oh,” he said. “Actually, those are for Wr...” Abruptly, he cut himself off as Ema met his eyes, her own wide with innocent wonder. Wouldn’t admitting that he kept a snack stash for Wright here be almost as revealing as if she had found the unicorn? Ema’s expression soon clouded over into concern at his silence, and she tilted her head slightly.

“Yes, okay, why not,” he said with a defeated sigh. “‘Snackoos,’ was it? Yes. Delicious.”
“You have such good taste, sir!” the forensics expert gushed.

The next day, Prosecutor Blackquill had stopped by his office asking to borrow his stapler. He hardly ever made any requests of Miles, so he had given permission at once and motioned him towards his desk.

“If I remember correctly,” Prosecutor Blackquill growled in his deep voice, “Your stapler was in this...” He stopped talking abruptly, staring down into the bottom drawer. He'd flung it open so fast that Miles hadn't even had time to protest.

Instead, Miles merely covered his face with both hands and sighed, already tired of this.

“Edgeworth-dono,” Blackquill intoned seriously, “I fear you have been made the victim of a prank.” He lifted the little toy out of the drawer. It looked comically tiny in his massive hands. “Though whoever thought this was amusing is truly simple of mind.”

Miles snorted. “Oh he's simple of mind all right...” he muttered testily.

“Hm?”

“Nothing. I didn't say anything,” said Miles. “Just... put the unicorn away.”

Prosecutor Gavin had been the only one to see the unicorn for what it truly was. It had happened yesterday, the 29th. Miles wasn't sure why everyone felt like they could just go rifling through his desk without asking, but one minute Gavin was at the door requesting a snack that he'd heard Herr Edgeworth kept in his desk (dammit, Ema, Miles thought), and the next the blonde prosecutor was holding that silly horse in his hands.

Klavier Gavin smirked down at the toy, stroking its fluffy purple mane. “A present from Herr Wright, was it?” he asked in that smooth, German-accented voice.

Miles was floored. “I...what...” He sputtered, flapping his mouth. “Wh-What... in the world makes you say that?” he finally got out.

The other prosecutor's smirk widened. “There is no way you would keep this thing otherwise.”

Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth flushed darkly, indignant that his subordinates should think he was so easy to read. “Yes, well, it wasn't from Wright,” he lied. “It was—”

“Well,” continued Klavier, turning the unicorn over in his hands, “That, and its tag says 'Love, Phoenix' on it.” His voice took on a nonchalant, light tone that did not match the knowing glint in his eyes. “My, his handwriting is rather sloppy, isn't it?”

“Please hand over the unicorn, Prosecutor Gavin.”

And so, here they were today: not even a week after Christmas, and nearly everyone Miles knew at the Prosecutor's Office had seen the damn unicorn.

Wright tossed a Snackoo into his mouth. He was taking up Miles' couch and just generally being a nuisance. Miles had been very grateful for his company a few days ago, on the anniversary of the worst day of his life—Phoenix had stayed with him the entire day, not saying anything about it or offering him the trite sympathy that Miles was so used to whenever they found out about DL-6, but merely remaining by his side, being there for him. He hadn't made a big deal about it when Miles had
called him at 5 in the morning that day, fresh off the heels of a particularly bad nightmare and still shaking and sweating. Phoenix had just said “I'll be right there” and had arrived at Miles' apartment in minutes. They'd spent the day in, watching the Steel Samurai, curled up on Miles' couch. Phoenix hadn't pressed him to open up, or told him to “let it all out,” or tried to soothe him like a fussing child. He'd just let Miles hold his hand, squeezing it slightly when Miles' wouldn't stop trembling.

Today, however, Miles did not require any moral support, and so he glared over at the man on his office couch, narrowing his eyes at him before returning his attention to the stuffed toy in his hands. “You know, another person saw this atrocious thing yesterday.”

“Really?” Phoenix asked, crunching on another Snackoo. “Who?”

“Prosecutor Gavin,” Miles informed him. “He actually figured out that it was you who'd given it to me, too.”

“How?”

“You wrote your name on its tag, Wright!” he exploded. “Honestly!”

“Oh yeah,” Phoenix chuckled. He gave Miles his best pleading look. “Sorry, Miles.”

“'Sorry' doesn't change the fact that at least one person now knows of our relationship,” Miles grumbled.

“Hey, not necessarily,” Phoenix said, folding up the snack bag. “Maybe I just write 'love' on all my presents. How would he know?”

“Hmm...” Miles pondered a bit. He had a point.

“And anyway, if you're so worried about people finding it, why don't you just keep it at my place?” the defense attorney suggested. “I know it wouldn't really go with your home décor. And there's plenty of your stuff at my place anyway.” It was true that Miles had been leaving the occasional pair of shoes or comb over at the Wright family apartment, but that was merely for convenience, Miles told himself. Well, all right, he supposed the entire boxed set of Pink Princess had no reason to be at Wright's apartment, but... leave the unicorn there?

“But it—!” Miles cut himself off, holding the unicorn to his chest. He had been about to childishly proclaim “But it's mine!” but that would have been embarrassing to the extreme. “I don't wish to further clutter your living room, Wright,” he started again instead. “There is enough mess there as it is.”

Phoenix waggled his eyebrows at him and smiled. “I like it when we make a mess of my living room,” he said slyly. A particular gleam had come into his eyes.

Miles rolled his eyes. “We never have to. The mess is already there when I get there.” Really, he was making it sound like Miles was over there all the time. He had only been over there about 5 times since he'd started seeing Phoenix—at least, 5 times that weren't for a social gathering including Trucy. True, he'd been over there 3 times in the past 4 days, but those visits had been innocent. Mostly, Wright had a daughter who was home most of the time, after all. It wasn't like they frequently got the opportunity to... to... He flushed at the thought, and opened his mouth to scold Wright for his comments, but...

Oh god, Phoenix had gotten up from the couch. He was sauntering over with that look. It was two in the afternoon and they were at Miles' place of work goddammit he was not allowed to give him that look here.
Miles tensed up as Phoenix leaned close, his cheek just brushing Miles'. Somehow Miles' back had wound up against the wall. Phoenix smelled faintly of cologne, a pleasantly fresh scent. Miles gulped, feeling the scrub of Phoenix's jaw against his.

“Hey Miles... do you want to make a mess of me?” Phoenix purred in his ear. Miles tried desperately not to be too obvious about the shiver that voice produced.

“Wr-Wright, please,” he stammered, trying to remember how to form words, “This is not advisable in this particular environMENT!” He ended on a choked syllable as Phoenix laid a wet kiss beneath his ear, where his jaw met his neck. The defense attorney disregarded his warning and trailed kisses down his neck, tugging at his cravat and loosening it to get access. Miles felt the other man's teeth barely scrape against his skin, and then Phoenix was sucking a kiss into the hollow of his throat. Miles' free hand flew to Phoenix's shoulder, and he let out a gasp. “Ph-Phoenix,” he whispered, intending it to come out as a reprimand but instead having the name emerge as a breathless encouragement. Phoenix made a contented hum in response, laying his hands on Miles' hips and leaning his body against him, pressing him to the wall as he flicked his tongue lightly over the spot he'd sucked. Miles felt heat erupt all over, coursing through his veins, every point of contact sparking like a livewire. He rested his head back against the wall, surrendering.

“Hey, Mr. Edgeworth, sir!” a bright, perky voice said from right outside the door. Before the two lawyers could do anything but freeze like statues, Ema Skye had swung open the door and burst inside. “We found out some new things about the c—” The rest of her words died in her throat. Her mouth dropped wide open.

There was a long, heavy silence. Phoenix still had his hands on Miles' hips. The prosecutor's cravat still hung loosely from his exposed neck. Miles was still holding the damn unicorn down by his side. Its beady little eyes were looking up at him tauntingly.

“I'm... oh, dear, I...” Ema was blushing furiously, fumbling with the doorknob. “I-I'll come back later!” she blurted. “S-Sorry!”

She flung the door shut and high-tailed it out of there with a speed Miles didn't think possible in those high heels.

No matter how many times Phoenix apologized after that, Miles was adamant that no messes would be made of Phoenix's living room for weeks.

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It turned out Ema had wanted to discuss a possible sixth kidnapping victim. It took a few hours before any person involved in the incident in Miles' office was composed enough to speak to one another again, but he and Phoenix had found that it was a lot easier to talk without dying of embarrassment if they spoke to her on the phone.

“It didn't match anyone involved with the case?” Phoenix asked, standing next to Miles' desk. Miles had put her on speakerphone so they could both talk to her.

“That's right,” Ema responded. “They told me the sample belonged to a Caucasian female older than seventeen.”

“Older?” Miles repeated. “But why? Everyone else has been the same age. Why would this one be different?”

“That's the part we're stumped on, too, sir,” the detective admitted. “If it's not a kidnapping victim, it
might be someone with a connection to Morris. The guys at the lab were wondering if it was a, um...” She cleared her throat. “A-a romantic partner.”

Miles and Phoenix both went a bit pink in the face, recent events still fresh in their memory. “Y-Yes, well,” Miles said briskly, clearing his throat, “You said you also found something interesting at the scene?”

“Oh, right,” said Ema. “I collected soil samples. I found a footprint that didn't match Morris's, but it had soil traces in it that were identical to the ones I pulled from Morris's footprints. That means they must have walked in the same area, and since the soil was probably from a redwood forest, that narrows things down considerably.”

Miles and Phoenix exchanged a glance. “Keep looking into things, Ms. Skye,” Miles instructed. “You've done excellent work thus far.”

“Th-Thank you, sir!” Ema responded giddily.

“And, uh...” Phoenix coughed. He blushed. “Y-You won't, uh, tell anyone about...what you saw...will you?”

A silence over the line. “I will take that secret to my grave,” Ema finally said, her voice deathly serious.

“N-No need to do that,” Phoenix assured her quickly. He looked at Miles for permission. Miles knew exactly what he wanted to do, and nodded, acquiescing. “W-We've, uh. Been together since a little after Thanksgiving. We were going to go public about it once this case wrapped up. It's just, uh, taking a little longer than we'd anticipated...”

“You should tell Trucy, at least,” Ema advised them quietly. “She deserves to know.”

Phoenix rested his hands on Miles' desk and sighed. “We want to,” he admitted.

“The news media has been saying for quite some time that we are both unscrupulous because we 'conspire' with one another,” Miles added. “We did not want to give them more ammunition with which to attack us. Trucy would be caught in the crossfires as well, if that were to happen.” Phoenix looked at him gratefully, half-smiling at him. Miles allowed himself a half-smile back.

“The news also won't shut up about how that note they found on Courtney called us both out,” Phoenix continued. “They're making it sound like we worked together to cover up a murder-abduction a year ago. If it came out that we're in a relationship now...”

“The people would be even less willing to trust that we were not, shall we say, in cahoots a year ago,” Miles finished for him.

“Trucy can keep a secret, though,” Ema said. “I still think you should tell her.”

Phoenix's eyes met his, the deep blue locking onto him intently. They were silent a moment. Finally, Miles nodded slowly. “W-We'll tell her,” Phoenix assured Ema, relief evident in his voice. “You're right; she should know. We'll tell her before New Year's!”

He sounded so excited about it that Miles couldn't help smiling. “Thank you for your discretion, Detective,” Miles said sincerely. “Your support is greatly appreciated.”

“Hey, you two have always supported me,” said the detective, her voice warm. “I'm happy for you both. You deserve each other.”
The smile that Phoenix gave him then was one that Miles might have called “soppy.” “Thanks, Ema,” he said.

“No problem,” she replied. “Well, back to work for me. I’ll call if I have any new information!”

“Please do,” Miles agreed. The phone clicked off.

“Well,” said Phoenix, sitting on Miles' desk and facing him. “That...could have gone worse, actually.”

“I don't want you sitting on my desk.”

He pouted. “You mean you don't like the idea of me up here? This is a pretty big desk, you know. Could be useful...” He trailed off meaningfully.

Miles glared at him. The thing he was suggesting was indeed appealing, but he had already gotten into trouble once because of this man's libido. “You're treading on thin ice, Wright.”

He grinned. “But you love me anyway, right?”

“Yes,” Miles confirmed. “Now get the hell off my desk.”

The evening of the 31st, Miles arrived at the Agency in somewhat high spirits. While it was true that they didn't have all the answers about the kidnapping case, surely talking to Ms. Stringer would enlighten them a bit.

“Welcome, Mr. Edgeworth!” Trucy chirped, inviting him inside. Miles was glad to get in from the cold; it had been starting to snow again, and with it getting dark outside, the temperature had begun to drop quickly. Trucy chattered away at him at his side. “Ariadne's already here, and holy cow, Athena wasn't kidding about her talent with the violin,” she told him as she accompanied him further into the office.

“With an endorsement like that, I'm quite eager to hear her play, myself,” Miles admitted, smiling down at the young magician.

Ariadne looked much healthier now, her skin having a bit of color and her eyes bright and alert. Her violin was laying across her lap as she sat on one of the couches. She smiled as she saw Trucy enter the room with Miles. Athena sat by the young girl's side, leaning against the other arm of the couch. Phoenix, Maya, and Pearl were seated across from them on the other sofa. Phoenix turned from where she sat to watch Miles join them, and sent him a look that some might call “adoring.” Maya waved enthusiastically, and Pearl inclined her head to him. Miles had to do a double-take when he saw Pearl: she was wearing a simple pink dress that ran down to her knees, presumably a Christmas gift. It suited her.

“Ms. Stringer,” Miles greeted, bowing to their guest. “It is a pleasure to see that you have recovered well.”

“Thank you, Mr. Edgeworth,” the girl responded politely. Even her voice was mellifluous and musical, Miles thought.

“We were just trying to convince Ariadne to help us ring in the new year by playing Auld Lang Syne at midnight,” Athena grinned, looking over at the other girl on the couch, “but she says she has to go home before then.”
“My mother will be expecting me,” Ariadne confirmed. She looked apologetically at her friend. “Sorry, Athena.”

“No need to be sorry,” Trucy assured her, sitting down between Athena and Ariadne. “But I do hope this won’t be the last time you visit us here at the Agency. After hearing you play...” Her blue eyes glittered with excitement. “I agree with what Athena told me: you would be an amazing addition to my magic acts, if you're interested.”

Ariadne looked down at her violin, her cheeks going slightly pink. “I-I think that would be absolutely lovely. Thank you very much for the opportunity...” She looked back up at Trucy, looking timid. “The truth is, I've seen your shows before...” The girl fiddled with her necklace, her eyes darting away again as she trailed off into a mumble. “I-I'm a big fan...”

Trucy's mouth fell open. “Really?!” She placed her hands on the couch and leaned in closer to Ariadne, who drew back in surprise. “That's so amazing! Wow, I have fans this talented...” She giggled. “I can't believe it!”

“Well, sure, Trucy,” Athena said with a shrug. “Why shouldn't you? You're the most talented magician of your generation.”

“Aww, stop,” Trucy said bashfully, shoving Athena's shoulder a little.

Miles sat himself down next to Phoenix, who casually moved his arm over the back of the couch above his partner in a move that would have made high school sophomore boys everywhere proud. The prosecutor shot him a warning look, but Phoenix just smirked at him. He winked. He actually winked, here, in front of several possible witnesses. Miles felt his cheeks go warm. Really, it was flattering that Phoenix felt the constant need to be close to him or touch him, but he had proven to be dreadful at showing any sort of restraint.

Luckily, everyone seemed to have not been paying attention. The prosecutor cleared his throat, and everyone focused on him now. “I hate to spoil what is no doubt a genial, festive atmosphere,” he started, “but if it wouldn't trouble you too much, Ms. Stringer, I was wondering if I might ask you a few questions?”

“Of course,” Ariadne acquiesced, nodding. She sat up straighter, squaring her delicate shoulders. “I'll answer anything you ask to the best of my ability.”

“Speaking of 'to the best of our ability,’” Maya interjected, “Trucy, shouldn't we get going?”

Trucy looked blankly at the spirit medium for a second, but then a look of realization crossed her face. “Oh! Oh yeah! We have to pick up the cake we ordered!” She rose from the sofa, as did Maya.

“You ordered cake?” Miles asked Phoenix, lifting an eyebrow at him.

“Ahaha, well, I'm pretty excited about tonight, after all,” he said, widening his eyes at Miles a little meaningfully. Miles understood what he meant: he had been planning on telling Trucy about their relationship tonight. But did such an occasion really require celebration with a cake?

“You really are a piece of work,” Miles muttered under his breath, shaking his head. Phoenix just chuckled, and briefly ran his fingers through some strands of Miles' hair at the back of his head, the motion subtle enough and quick enough that no one noticed. It had felt good, so Miles couldn't even be too upset with him about it.

“Okay, Daddy, we'll be back soon,” Trucy informed them, having grabbed her bag from the front room. She swooped down and kissed her father on the cheek. When she drew back, she looked at
Miles searchingly, her eyebrows drawing together and her mouth quirked up on one side, deliberating. Miles stared back, perplexed. Then she moved forward again and pecked him on the cheek too. “Be good, everyone!” Trucy giggled, as Miles touched the spot where Trucy had kissed, flabbergasted. He turned to watch as she went out the door.

Maya stood at the door as well. “I'm not smooching either of you,” she teased, sticking out her tongue at them before closing the door behind herself.

Phoenix looked like he had just seen a shooting star, so full of wonder was his expression. “That...was so cute,” he murmured, choked.

Miles said nothing. He did nod, though.

“So, um, I've been meaning to ask this,” Athena cut in. “But where the heck is Apollo?”

“Oh, uh, he's on his way,” Phoenix responded, shifting on the couch to face Athena across from him. “He texted about an hour ago. Since he's leaving for Khura'in tomorrow, he said he wanted to get his packing done ahead of time so he didn't have to do it after celebrating tonight.”

Athena and Widget both looked blue. The little robot pendant had what appeared to be dog ears today, Miles noted. “Oh, that's right...” Athena said morosely, slumping a little. “I almost forgot he's leaving right after New Year's...”

“Um, and what about Kay?” Pearls piped up, apparently taking the opportunity to speak since someone else had done so first. “I thought she was supposed to spend New Year's with us.”

“Ah,” Miles said, pleased that he was actually able to answer this question. “She was indeed going to celebrate with us, but she received a last-minute invitation from...an old friend of ours.” Kay hadn't seen Detective Badd in ages, after all, and he was getting on in years. Miles had encouraged her to enjoy a visit with the old retired detective when she'd told him about his invitation. They'd probably spend the whole evening swapping stories about Kay's father, Bryne. He really should drop in on Detective Badd sometime too, Miles thought...

“Oh,” Pearl said. She sounded a little disappointed. “Well, as long as she's having fun, I suppose.” Miles suspected that she'd wanted her older friend to see her in her new dress. It seemed like the kind of thing that would be important to Pearls.

“Anyway,” Wright said, “You were going to ask Ariadne some questions, Edgeworth?”

“Ah, yes,” Miles said, returning his attention to the violinist. “What were you doing when you were abducted?” That was always a good place to start.

“Well, I was on my way back from playing at the community center,” Ariadne answered, putting her violin away in the case at her feet. “Around Chesterfield Square.”

“That's a pretty dangerous part of town,” Wright pointed out.

“It's near where I live, so it was a convenient place to walk to,” Ariadne reasoned.

“I see,” Miles responded, nodding. The high crime rate in that area meant it would have been relatively easy for someone to snatch her up there.

“Do you remember anything from when you were kidnapped? Anything about that man?” Wright asked next.
“Well…” Ariadne scrunched up her face, trying to remember. “I was knocked out for most of it,” she confessed, but then crossed her legs, moving her foot a little at the ankle as she continued to think. “And that person never said much, either, so I didn't really overhear anything.”

Wright leaned forward, clasping his hands between his knees. “You were unconscious for a couple days, weren't you?”

“Yes,” Ariadne confirmed. “My surroundings were blurry and I was disoriented every time I woke up. And everything I heard sounded like it was underwater, or something. I just remember thinking how thirsty I was, a lot of the time.” She looked down at the floor, her expression troubled.

“You poor thing,” Pearl said. Athena had scooted over and laid a hand on Ariadne's shoulder as well.

There was a knock at the door. “That must be Apollo,” Wright said, getting to his feet and going to answer the door.

In a moment, Apollo Justice had joined them in the room. He looked a little tired, his characteristic bangs drooping just a little, but at least he looked festive in a red sweater with candy canes on it. “Hey, everyone,” he said breathlessly. He held up a glass bottle. “I brought sparkling grape juice.”

“Perfect!” Wright exclaimed, snatching the bottle away from Apollo and laying it on the coffee table.

“How come you didn't wear that sweater on Christmas Eve, Apollo?” Athena asked. “You missed the group photo we took of all of us in the Christmas sweaters!”

Apollo raised an eyebrow. “That's why I didn't wear the Christmas sweater then,” he said.

Athena frowned at him, Widget turning an irritated red as well. “Meanie. That was going to be next year's Christmas card. Even Pearly put on the sweater for the picture.”

Wright's oldest protegé ignored her and extended a hand to the chestnut-haired girl on the sofa. “You must be Ariadne,” he said, offering her a smile. “I'm Apollo Justice.”

“Hello, Mr. Justice,” Ariadne greeted him back, shaking his hand.

“Just 'Apollo’ is fine,” he said awkwardly, releasing her hand and then sitting next to Athena. He looked around the room. “Where’s Trucy? I figured she would freak once she saw me in this sweater.”

“Oh, she went with Mystic Maya to go pick up the cake,” Pearl informed him helpfully.

“I still don't get why we're getting a cake. Who gets a cake on New Year's?” Apollo shook his head. “Well, anyway, have I missed much?”

“You missed Ariadne's stunning display of musical mastery,” Athena said, grinning wide. “She totally wowed us all. She played like an angel.”

“A-Athena, please, you're embarrassing me,” Ariadne mumbled, blushing.

“Well, I guess I'll have to hear her play again later,” Apollo decided.

“You know, Maya and Trucy really have been gone for a while,” Phoenix noted. He pulled out his phone. “I'm going to try calling Trucy. They're probably stuck in a long line.”

But when he'd dialed her number and put the phone to his ear, everyone watched his face cloud over
in concern. He pressed the button to end the call. “I got voicemail,” he explained to everyone. “I guess the shop is too loud to hear the phone.”

“Maybe you should try Mystic Maya's phone, too,” Pearl suggested.

Phoenix nodded. “My thoughts exactly, Pearls,” he agreed, but before he could make the call, the front door opened with a sudden burst of cold air, and Maya Fey herself stumbled in.

“Maya!” Phoenix said. “We were just about to call you. Did you get the cake?”

“N-Nick,” Maya said, and her voice instantly put Miles on high alert. A look at her face revealed that it was streaked with tears and red in the cheeks. She was, strangely, carrying a familiar blue silk hat.

“Maya?” Phoenix said, getting to his feet and making his way over to her. “W-What's wrong? What happened?”

“Nick, I-I'm so sorry, it's all my fault!” the spirit medium sobbed, dropping the hat and grabbing Phoenix's shirt, burying her face into it. “I-I got hit on the head, a-and, b-before I knew it, I...!”

“Maya,” Phoenix said, placing his hands on the older Fey's shoulders, his voice shaking. “What's the matter?” A pause. Maya's lower lip trembled, and her face crumpled as more tears spilled from her eyes and she let out another broken sob. “Maya...” Phoenix's voice was a desperate murmur. “Where's Trucy?...”

The spirit medium let go of Phoenix's shirt and covered her face with her hands, taking a deep, shuddering breath. “I-I'm sorry, Phoenix,” she whimpered. “Th-They took her.”

Time stopped for Miles at that moment. It felt like his breath froze in his lungs. The edges of his vision blurred. His extremities went numb.

“What?!” Phoenix shouted, breaking the silence.

“Trucy's gone?!” Athena exploded.

“No...” Apollo muttered, stumbling to his feet. He looked like someone had kicked him in the gut. “Th-This can't be happening...”

“Trucy!” Pearl whimpered, unconsciously grabbing onto Miles' sleeve as if to maintain her balance, though they were both sitting. Her fingers were trembling. “I-I don't understand...!”

Phoenix grabbed Maya by the shoulders again. “Who?! When? How? Morris is in prison!”

“I d-don't know!” Maya wailed. “S-Someone came up behind us and h-hit me on the head, and I only caught a glimpse of someone g-grabbing Trucy before I fainted!” She pressed the heels of her hands to her eyes as if she could hold in any further tears. “She was... l-limp. I think they knocked her out. I d-don't know what happened...!” She burst into renewed sobs. “I'm s-so sorry, Nick, it's all my fault!”

“It's not your fault, Maya,” Phoenix told her, pulling her close for a moment and stroking her long, glossy hair. “You didn't do anything wrong. I'm glad you're okay.”

“N-Nick,” was all the spirit medium could murmur in reply, holding onto her friend like a lifeline.

“We need to fix this,” Phoenix said after a moment, releasing her. “What else do you remember? Anything. Anything at all!” Miles finally came out of his shock long enough to stand and make his
way over to Phoenix, to stand at his side. He knelt to the floor and picked up Trucy's top hat, holding onto it tightly.

Maya took another gulp of air, trying to compose herself. “We were walking back from the bakery,” she said, her voice calmer. “We were going to hail a taxi. I think we were approaching the corner of West Third Street.”

“West Third,” Phoenix repeated. He glanced at Miles, who nodded and produced a notepad from his pocket, jotting down the information. “Good, Maya. What else?”

“I-I remember hearing footsteps behind us,” Maya said, her brows coming together in thought. “Right before I got hit. They kinda went 'click, clack, click.'”

“Footsteps,” Miles acknowledged, scrawling it down. “Anything else? A voice? Other people on the street?”

“Hmm...” Maya thought for a moment. “I don't remember anyone else being there on the street. It was actually really quiet, I guess because people were having New Year's parties indoors or something...” Her lips started quivering again. “I'm so stupid. I can't even remember anything useful...”

“Streets were empty,” Miles wrote down. “It's all right, Maya. Everything you're saying is of use.”

“M-Maybe if we go back to the scene, we'll find someone who saw something?” Athena suggested.

“That sounds like a plan to me,” Apollo said, his expression all fierce determination. “Let's go.”

“Wait,” Phoenix stopped him. “There's... There's still something I don't understand about all this.” Everyone looked at him expectantly. “I... I just don't understand who would want to kidnap Trucy,” he admitted. His expression was devastated, helpless. “That guy is in prison, so how...?!?” He bit his lip and screwed his eyes shut. Miles put the notepad away, reached over, and took his hand, not even caring if anyone said anything about it. Phoenix squeezed his hand. He was shaking, Miles noted, and his grip was desperate, like Miles was stopping him from going over a cliff.

“Um,” Ariadne's timid little voice caught their attention. She looked confused. “Excuse me...when you say 'that guy,' you're talking about Mr. Morris, right?”

“Yes, of course,” Miles confirmed. “Who else would we be referring to?”

“Well, that's the thing...” Ariadne's look of uncertainty smoothed out. She looked deadly serious now. “I thought it was strange that you kept saying 'that man' and 'that guy'...”

“What do you mean?” Phoenix prompted her.

Ariadne turned her head to face him, her voice sure and full of purpose. “When I was kidnapped,” she said, “two people took me away: a man and a woman.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, in my defense, this has been planned for like a year. Please trust me to handle this
well, everyone... I'm sorry if it upsets anyone > <;; I was so nervous when you all were like "IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO TRUCY...." way back in like, chapter 8. But by then, the plot was set in stone, so... oof...

Ahem, anyway...

Next chapter: Trucy goes to the beach. Phoenix has a very happy New Year.
The Painter and the Promise

Chapter Summary

Trucy goes to the beach. Phoenix has a very happy New Year.

Chapter Notes

I sound like a broken record, but thanks again to all of you. This wouldn't have been finished without your kindness and enthusiasm.
I'll blather on about the names I gave all the victims and culprits after the chapter if you're interested!

Sorry this chapter is so ridiculously long. I blame Phoenix and Miles being too damn cute together.

Trucy blinked her eyes open, her vision seeming to swim back into focus despite the constant vibrations that were trying to scramble her brain.

She sat up and groaned, holding a hand to her head as she squinted around. She was in the backseat of some vehicle. She didn't remember getting into the vehicle, though. Her head felt fuzzy, her thoughts sluggish. What had she been doing a while ago? She couldn't remember.

“Awake, are you?” said a voice from the driver's seat. Trucy forced her eyes to focus on the source of the sound. “After only 5 hours?... Well, that's fine. It's better this way, anyway.”

“Wh...Where am I?” The words sounded strange to her ears, as if someone else had spoken them.

“You're taking a little trip with me,” said the voice, and Trucy noted absently that it sounded female. “We're going to the beach.”

“The beach...?” How strange. Trucy had no recollection of planning to go to the beach. “Um, I'm sorry if this sounds rude, but...who are you?”

The voice laughed. The woman had curly red hair, although it was the sort of red that was seldom natural. “Aw, you don't know who I am?” she cooed. “But I know who you are, Trucy Wright. You're full of so much potential, aren't you, young magician?” Trucy detected something dangerous in the deceptively gentle lilt of her voice. “All teenagers are, I'd say. They've got their whole lives ahead of them... until someone decides otherwise, that is.”

“Decides... otherwise?” Trucy squinted, trying to make her thoughts move faster. Her vision had mostly cleared up—she was able to look out the windows to see darkened scenery passing by in a blur. It was nighttime, she realized. Why in the world would they be going to the beach at night?

“Why, yes,” the unknown woman responded lightly. “You see, sometimes people decide that they...
want to snuff out that potential for no good reason.” The pink-painted nails on the steering wheel tightened, the knuckles going white. “And then other people decide they're fine with that. They help the people who take those young people away from the world.”

“Take the young people away...” Trucy repeated. That was a concept she'd heard a lot recently...

Suddenly, her eyes popped open wide, and her thoughts seemed to resume normal speed like they had been trying to run through molasses the whole time and had only now broken through. It was New Year's Eve, she remembered, and she'd been getting a cake with Aunt Maya...

“Where's the woman who was with me?” she asked sharply. The spirit medium had been struck, Trucy recalled...

“She should be awake by now,” the woman responded. “I only gave her a little bump on the head, after all.”

“Are you connected to Morris?” Trucy asked next.

“Oh, look at that, you're fully alert already.” The voice almost sounded impressed. “It's too bad your body won't have the strength to do much of anything.”

Trucy tried leaning forward in her seat, only to discover that the motion made her surroundings swirl around nauseatingly. “Ah...!” she whimpered, holding her head. Her hat was gone, she realized.

“To answer your question: yes. I am Nadia Gordian,” the woman continued. “I was married to that idiot ex-prosecutor. He wanted to teach those two monstrous lawyers a lesson, but I got sick and tired of the games he was playing, so I decided to stop helping him and take matters into my own hands.”

“How...did you escape being questioned when we investigated Morris's background?” Trucy panted, deciding it was safer to stay still for now. The room stopped spinning, fortunately.

Nadia laughed. “If you move away and change your last name, you can throw so many people off,” she said, shaking her head. “It's ridiculous, how easy it is to make people forget you.”

“Ema...found your footprint,” Trucy retorted, with effort. “And your hair. They'll find you.”

“Well, that's really of no concern to me,” said the woman in the front seat. “I don't really care anymore. I'm just so tired of letting them get away with it, you know? Pretending that my daughter's life didn't matter. It was like having one of my organs ripped out, the pain we went through. And then, Hamilton just wanted bring down everyone's opinion of Miles Edgeworth and Phoenix Wright?” She snorted derisively. “That's not justice. No, they should go through the pain that I went through. Miles Edgeworth may not have any children, but from what I understand, you're the closest thing to being a daughter to both of them, aren't you?”

Trucy's expression hardened. “Are you going to kill me?”

“Oh, you're such a smart young lady. It's almost a pity,” Nadia said simperingly. “Anyway, look, Trucy, we're here!”

Trucy glanced out the window. It was quite dark outside, so she wasn't sure what she was supposed to be looking at, but they appeared to be near the water. Nadia brought the car to a stop and turned off the engine, and Trucy heard the ocean.

“Lovely evening for a boat ride, isn't it?” Nadia sighed, glancing back at the rear seat. Trucy finally
got a look at her face: she was probably in her late 40s. Her skin was sun-damaged, and there were some wrinkles across her forehead and on either side of her mouth. Her brown eyes were bright, and her lips were elegantly painted a lush red. She didn't look evil, Trucy thought with surprise. But then, as a magician, she knew that things were not always what they appeared to be.

Ms. Gordian got out of the car, and then opened the rear door. She tenderly reached in and undid Trucy's seatbelt. “Try not to worry too much about this, dear,” she said as she pulled Trucy out of the car. Trucy winced as she spilled out onto the ground, unable to make a move to resist beyond vaguely flailing her arms. “The drugs have already slowed down your motor function, and I'll give you another dose soon, so you won't feel a thing.” Gordian was wearing two-inch heels, Trucy noticed, which couldn't have been easy to walk on sand with.

“Doing this... won't bring your daughter back!” Trucy told her, spitting some of her hair out of her mouth. Even lifting her head felt like a herculean effort. The ground was mostly flat, and the sand was sharp and gritty against her cheek and legs.

“Oh, I know,” Nadia acknowledged regretfully. She scooped Trucy into her arms, which surprised the teenager a little—Ms. Gordian hadn't appeared to be strong enough to lug her around. But then, Trucy was rather short and petite. “But I'm just trying to show them how much I suffered. They should understand. It's only fair. We'll be even, then—that's what they call justice.”

Trucy felt a flicker of rage spark inside her chest. “It's not justice,” she said sharply. “It's nothing but revenge, and it doesn't help anyone.”

“That's exactly it, Trucy,” Nadia said, shaking her head. Trucy felt her legs and arms dangle helplessly with every step the woman took. “The law, authority figures, every god you pray to... they don't help anyone. No one does. The world is a cruel place, taking things away without remorse.” Finally, the jostling stopped, and Ms. Gordian laid Trucy down in a small rowboat that was waiting there on the shore. She pulled some twine out of her blazer pocket and bound Trucy's wrists and ankles. “This is just a precaution,” she informed her. “You probably won't gain enough mobility to move around too much anyway, but you never can be too careful.” She climbed into the boat too, and took up the paddles.

“You know, I kept telling Hamilton that just dropping the girls in the wilderness wasn't going to make a difference,” she said mildly, apparently deciding that Trucy needed to hear all her sick motivations. “You really should just start killing them, Ham,’ I told him. 'Then they'd know exactly what it feels like.' But my husband was a weak man. Didn't want to hurt anyone. Ha! As if anyone's pain even matters.” She grinned down at Trucy. “This, though... even if they catch me, they won't be able to bring you back!” Her expression was lit up with excitement, like she was telling Trucy about a surprise party she was planning, not discussing the murder she was about to commit.

Trucy's stomach felt like it was filled with ice. She had no time to wait around for rescue—she had to take matters into her own hands. She was a magician, wasn't she? That meant she had experience in daring escapes. She wriggled her wrists behind her back, just subtle enough to not give the movement away. The only sounds were the paddles splashing gently as they sliced through the water, and the soothing sounds of the ocean. It was a calm sort of atmosphere, not at all matching the pounding of Trucy's heart or the thrum of the blood rushing through her head. She managed to reach the fingers of her right hand into the pocket of her skirt. Her phone had been there, she remembered. Maybe if she could type out an SOS, Daddy and the others could trace her cell phone signal back to her.

“So where are you taking me, anyway?” Trucy asked, trying to keep the woman distracted as she wriggled a bit and tried to inch the phone out of her pocket.
“It's a tiny little island that I thought was appropriate for the occasion,” Nadia answered excitedly. “It's even called Año Nuevo Island—New Year Island!” She laughed. “Isn't that perfect?”

“Yeah, delightful,” she spat.

Nadia made a *tsk tsk* sound. “Oh, now, don't take that tone, young lady. I spent a lot of time planning this little trip of ours.”

*Lucky me,* Trucy thought darkly. At last, she grasped her phone between her index and middle fingers. She tugged lightly, slowly extricating it from her pocket. They had to be out in the middle of nowhere, she thought frantically. Would they even be able to trace her cell signal? Maybe she should give them her exact location.

“New Year Island, huh?” she repeated, putting on a curious tone. “I've never heard of it.”

“That's because it's uninhabited,” said the red-haired woman with a wink. “It's closed to the public. But, well...” She shrugged, and rowed the boat some more. “Let's just say it's easy to get around such restrictions.”

Finally, the phone was in Trucy's hands. She unlocked it, knowing that she was already in her Messages menu. She tapped near the top of the screen. If she remembered correctly, the last person she'd texted had been Pearl. Pearl should still be there with everyone at the Agency, she reasoned. They'd definitely all be looking for her by now. All she had to do was tell them where she was. She prayed her blind texting skills wouldn't fail her now.

*Yes,* she thought, as she felt herself tapping the on-screen keyboard, the phone giving a minute vibrations every time she hit a letter. *I just have to type three words. Just three words. New... Year...*

“What are you doing?” Nadia suddenly demanded, standing up in the boat and looking behind Trucy's back.

“N-Nothing!” Trucy tried, though she knew instantly it was beyond hopeless. Desperately, she hit Send. The message would be incomplete, but at least it would get out, she thought frantically. She pressed the lock button before the phone could be taken away from her.

“You naughty, naughty girl!” Ms. Gordian scolded, yanking the phone out of her grasp. She had dropped the paddles momentarily. If she rolled out of the boat, could she swim, Trucy asked herself? She tried wiggling her legs. They responded feebly. No, it would be suicide to try to swim away now. She could try to capsize the boat and catch the woman off guard, but her inhibited movement would only mean that Trucy would drown. She resigned herself to simply staying put as she watched the red-haired woman squinting at her phone and trying to put in the correct passcode. After a few dozen taps, she scoffed, apparently locked out of the phone. Trucy repressed a satisfied grin, glad for her own quick thinking. She was still in a pretty bad situation, but at least she'd managed to do something. She had faith that everyone back home would be able to find her now.

“I hate these things,” Nadia spat, glowering at Trucy's cell phone. She held the phone over the water and parted her fingers. The phone disappeared into the black water with a *ploop.* “Oops,” said the woman, smiling maliciously. “Sorry about that.”

“No big deal. I'll get a new one,” Trucy told her defiantly, smiling with a lot more confidence than she felt. Her smile was, after all, her best weapon.

“Well, aren't you full of piss and vinegar,” Nadia snorted. “All right, I was going to be nice about all this, but your uppity attitude is starting to annoy me.”
“What can I say,” said Trucy innocently. “I'm a teenager.”

Her expression soured with distaste. “Hmph. You are nothing like my dear Cayley. She was always so sweet-natured, so obedient, so helpful.” Her fingers reached towards her neck, touching something there gently. “She was such a good girl. She always did whatever she was told.”

“Wasn't she always going for drives with her boyfriend?” Trucy retorted. “I bet she was happy to get out of the house with him, to be with someone who actually listened to her and cared about what she wanted!”

She saw the hand coming towards her, but she could do nothing to resist the sharp slap that seared across her cheek. Trucy's eye teared up at the sensation, but she refused to blink and let the tear fall. She glared unflinchingly instead. Her best bet right now was to keep the woman talking.

“You. Know. Nothing,” Ms. Gordian hissed. “Don't you dare presume to know anything about Cayley.” Her eyes had darkened into black holes, devoid of any light or warmth. She held a trembling fist near her chest. “She was my sunshine, my heart and soul!”

“You haven't got a heart anymore, Ms. Gordian,” Trucy said, struggling to keep her voice even. “I guess Cayley took it with her.”

The woman's face looked demented, twisted in rage. “Drowning is too peaceful a death for you,” she spat.

“Ms. Gordian, have you ever thought about what Cayley would want?” Trucy's eyes burned into the other woman's. “Would she want you to be so sad and angry? Would she want you to hurt people in her name?!”

“It doesn't matter what she would want!” Nadia screeched, stomping a foot and making the boat wobble precariously on the water. Vaguely, Trucy registered that the bracelet Apollo had given her was tightening around her arm. “It doesn't matter what she would want,” the woman repeated, clutching at her neck. “CAYLEY'S DEAD!”


Nadia froze. “What?”

“You do care about what Cayley would think,” Trucy repeated. “I can tell. You touch your neck whenever you talk about her.” She dropped her eyes to the area in question. “I'll bet you've got a locket. With her picture in it, right?”

“H-How did you know that?” Ms. Gordian murmured, her eyes wide as she squeezed the object hanging from her neck. She got over her awe quickly, though, screwing her eyes shut and shaking her head. She dropped her hand away from the necklace. “But you're wrong. No one can say what Cayley would want. She's gone. It doesn't matter anymore.”

“Yes it does,” Trucy insisted. “You loved her, didn't you? You cared about her dreams, her ideals, her ambitions!” She struggled to sit up a little, the better to stare the woman down. “That doesn't go away when someone dies. Holding onto those things... that's what keeps someone's memory alive.”

For a moment, Ms. Gordian was silent, staring at Trucy dumbly. “Keeps her memory alive,” she repeated blankly.

“Ms. Gordian, what did Cayley want to do with her life? What was it she was living for?” Trucy was raising her voice now. Her cheek stung, from the slap and from the salt on the sea breeze that
brushed against her sand-roughed skin.

“Sh... She wanted to paint,” Ms. Gordian muttered. She shook her head. “When she was a little girl, she innocently claimed that she would be a doctor someday. Her father and I latched onto the idea, and encouraged that from then on. But when she got older... she started painting all the time. We asked her, ‘Why are you wasting time doing that? You're going to be a doctor, aren't you?’ And she would just smile sadly and say, 'This world can be so ugly. I'm going to make a better one.'” She dropped her gaze, staring at the floor of the boat. “What a naive dream. What a simple, childish notion. As if one person could...” She shook her head.

“They can,” Trucy said. “Didn't you say it yourself? Cayley was your sunshine. She was the person who made the world better for you. Maybe she wanted to do that for other people, too.”

“Then why would she...?!?” The woman pulled at her hair, her expression tortured. “Why would she go away? Why would anyone kill a person like that?!”

Trucy felt her heart clench. She had a hunch that Ms. Gordian knew very well that Cayley hadn't been murdered, very deep down. “What happened to Cayley was very sad,” she admitted. “I don't think Cayley wanted people to see her being sad. She hid all her pain away.” She dragged her eyes across the broken form of the woman before her, who had sat back down heavily, her head in her hands. “Being someone who is relied on to bring smiles...I can sympathize with that,” Trucy continued. “I think Cayley was just... very tired. And lonely.”

“If she had just said something...!” Nadia choked. “Why would she hide from us? Were we really so ignorant?”

“It wasn't anyone's fault, I don't think,” Trucy said quietly. “Not Mr. Barnes's. Not yours. It was just...a tragedy.”

“She didn't deserve it,” the other woman said thickly, pulling the locket out of her collar and holding it. She had started to cry. “She deserved to paint like she wanted to...to travel all over the world... to bring her better world to life.”

“We've only got one world to live in,” Trucy murmured. “And it's up to all of us to make it better. You, me, Daddy, Mr. Edgeworth... all of us. That's how we honor the people who've gone away. We carry on in their place.” That was what Trucy had been doing her whole life, after all. The name of “Gramarye” would never die, thanks to her tireless efforts.

“The world is so much worse without her...” The woman wiped her eyes, opening up the silver locket and looking at the picture inside. “I wanted everyone to understand what the world lost when she died.”

“My Daddy has a locket like that too,” Trucy confessed. She was able to wriggle into a fully sitting position. “With my picture in it.” She paused. “I think if I died... Daddy would never be the same. But I would hope that he wouldn't hate the world.” Trucy smiled. “After all, he's living proof that the world can be a beautiful place, full of love. I wouldn't want that to go away.”

Ms. Gordian looked like an empty shell, staring at her locket soundlessly. The ocean swayed the boat gently, as if soothing a fussy child. “It's too late for me now,” she finally said, her voice emotionless. “I've already done too many ugly things. How can I possibly be relied on to make the world 'better' now?”

“I think anyone can do it, if they really try hard,” Trucy said resolutely. “It only takes helping one person, after all. One act of kindness might save someone's life. Or maybe just loving another person
Phoenix's thoughts were racing as fast as the blood pounding in his ears. Trucy had been missing for 5 hours. 5 entire hours! And they had no idea where this nut job had taken her.

Ariadne had returned home hours ago, but everyone else had rushed to the scene of the kidnapping. From what they gathered from questioning Ariadne, the abductor was most likely Morris's estranged wife, who had most likely been working with him to perform the kidnappings. No one had seen anything on the street at the scene, but after they'd called Ema, they were able to confirm that the footprint she'd found before had been that of a pair of ladies' heels, explaining the clicking footsteps Maya had heard. Gumshoe had alerted everyone in the precinct, and even Kay was doing her ninja thing all over the place to look for leads, but with every passing minute Phoenix was starting to get more and more panicked.

“I'm going to try her phone again,” Apollo announced, pulling out his cell.

“No, don't!” Phoenix begged. “If it goes off in the presence of the kidnapper, it'll be taken away from her!”

“Nngh,” Apollo groaned, lowering the phone again reluctantly. “I guess you're right...”

“Morris refuses to give any information,” Edgeworth said bitterly as he rejoined them on the street corner. He clicked off his phone. “It seems he either knows nothing of his wife's plan, or he simply wishes no further involvement.”

“Trucy,” Pearl whimpered, covering her face. Her shoulders shook. “I-I can't believe this...”

“Shhh, Pearly,” Maya soothed her. “We don't have time to cry right now. Trucy needs us.”

Pearls sniffled. “I-I know,” she said, and she took a deep breath and composed herself. “You're right. We can find her.”

“Trucy's a really smart girl,” Athena reminded them, although Widget's somber blue color gave away her true feelings. “She'll... she'll find a way to get some information to us.”

Phoenix knew that Athena was probably right—Trucy had once been held hostage and had used the few seconds she'd had to speak to him to give him valuable information about her situation—but it didn't change the fact that for right now, his little girl was missing and he had no clue how to find her.

“Are you doing all right, Wright?” Miles asked him quietly, laying a hand on his shoulder. His face was openly concerned, which was sweet, but all he could do to respond was sigh and slump his shoulders.

“I've been better,” he confessed, “but I'm glad you're here.”

Miles' eyes searched his. Phoenix had the suspicion that if they'd been alone, Miles would have
embraced him. But they had neither the time nor the opportunity to comfort one another now.

Suddenly, Pearl gasped loudly. Instantly, everyone's eyes were on her.

Maya was the first to react. “What is it, Pearly?”

“I-I just got a text,” the small spirit medium breathed. She looked up and met Phoenix's eyes, her own gray ones wide. “F-From Trucy!”

“What?!” Apollo shouted.

“She actually managed to send a text...” Athena muttered, shaking her head. “That girl really is incredible...”

“What does it say?” prompted Phoenix impatiently.

Pearl's expression fell in utter despair. “Wh...what is...?!” Her stomach dropped like a stone. Frantic, he rushed to Pearl's side and read the text over her shoulder.

new year is, it read simply.

“I-I don't understand,” Pearl's voice threatening tears again. “Wh-why would she wish us Happy New Year now? Wh-When she's...!” Her face crumpled, and she turned away to bury it in Maya's shoulder. Maya wrapped her arms around her smaller cousin, stroking Pearl's hair soothingly as the smaller girl sobbed. Maya herself still wore a face that spoke loudly of her feelings of guilt.

“Let's be rational about this,” Miles reminded them, though Phoenix didn't know how qualified he was to say that when the man was still clutching onto Trucy's hat desperately with one hand like it could lead them to its owner. “Trucy is a very bright girl. She would never use an opportunity to get a message to us to simply send us holiday greetings.” He turned his gray eyes onto Phoenix's, and the defense attorney saw the fire that burned behind them. “This must mean something,” he asserted.

Phoenix nodded. “I agree.”

“But what could it possibly mean?” Apollo said, throwing up his hands. He turned on his heel, running his hands through his hair roughly and screwing his eyes shut. He was acting almost as agitated as Phoenix was. Even if he had no idea Trucy was his little sister, he had always been such a loving, protective big brother to her. It usually warmed Phoenix's heart to see how much Apollo cared for her, but in this situation it was just another painful reminder of how much was at stake here. Apollo had already lost too much family.

“Argh, if only she'd sent us a photo instead!” Athena cried, clenching her hands into fists. “If she'd taken a photo, the GPS on her phone would have recorded where it was taken...!”

“We have no time to think about 'if only's,” said Edgeworth. “We must work with what we have.” He crossed his arms, shutting his eyes and tapping his fingertip in that way he always did when he was pondering something (although this time looked a little more frantic than usual). “New Year... New Year...”

“Well, let's think about this as if we were Trucy,” Maya suggested. “If you were kidnapped, and you only had one chance to get a message to someone who could help you, what would you tell them...”
Everyone looked at each other. “Location,” they all answered almost simultaneously.

“Location...!” Phoenix repeated, pacing back and forth anxiously. “Yes... I'm sure that's what Trucy would do, now that we've said that...!”

“I think so too,” Apollo said. “But New Year's is a time, not a place...”

“Maybe it's a place, too,” Pearl chimed in. “I mean, wherever she is, it's got to be within 5 hours of here, right?...”

“So then, all we have to do...” Edgeworth started.

“...Is find out if there's a place called New Year nearby,” Phoenix finished, digging out his phone and typing it into the browser. “I'm on it.”

“Anything?” Apollo asked after a moment.

Phoenix felt like throwing his phone across the street. “Just a bunch of articles about the best places in California to spend New Year's,” he spat out bitterly. “Useless...!” He clutched his hand around the phone. Squeezing his eyes shut, he felt himself begin to truly lose hope. What chance did they even have of finding her now? The kidnapper would destroy Trucy's phone. They had no idea whether this kidnapper would leave her alive like Hamilton Morris would have. She had had five hours to carry his daughter off in any direction she pleased. Phoenix felt sharp stinging sensations behind his tightly-closed eyes. They weren't tears, though, he told himself. He had no time to cry. He had no time for...

“Wright, please, calm down,” Miles said quietly. He laid his hand over top of Phoenix's, cradling the other underneath it. Phoenix jolted out of his thoughts, his eyes flying open again. “We are all here,” Miles continued. He pried Phoenix's index finger away from the phone he was clutching in a vice-grip. “This isn't the first time we have been faced with seemingly impossible odds.” The middle finger was next to be carefully pulled away. “We have always been able to pull through before,” he reminded him, prying off the ring finger next, “and we will do it again now.” Tenderly, he removed the remaining finger from around Phoenix's phone, allowing it to drop into Miles' hand. “The worst of times are when lawyers have to force their biggest smiles,” he said softly, replacing the phone with his own hand and holding Phoenix's tightly. “...Right, Phoenix?” he finished, one corner of his mouth tilting up in a smile he was forcing just for him.

Phoenix wiped away the moisture from his eyes with his free hand. “Y-yeah.” One half of his own mouth quirked up in a smile too. If Miles could do it, so could he, he told himself.

“Trucy is alive,” Pearls said quietly. She was holding Trucy's hat now, Phoenix noticed. Miles must have finally handed it off so he could snap Phoenix out of his despair. “She's alive,” Pearls asserted again, more certain this time. “I can feel it.” Phoenix wondered if she knew because she was a spirit medium. Perhaps, to see whether Trucy was still alive, Pearl had tried unsuccessfully to... The thought was so horrible that Phoenix couldn't finish it.

“Then we'll find her,” Phoenix said instead, giving Miles' hand one more squeeze before letting it drop. “We just have to think more carefully about her message, that's all.”

“We've only been focusing on 'New Year,'” Apollo pointed out. “But what about 'is'?""

“I kind of figured she meant 'New Year is here,' but couldn't finish the message,” Maya said, her face uncertain.

“Couldn't finish the...” Phoenix echoed, but then straightened suddenly, his eyes snapping open
wide. “Couldn't finish the message! Guys, what if... what if the third word just got cut off?”

“That would make sense, seeing as to how it's only ten-thirty,” Edgeworth pointed out with a glance at the pocket watch Phoenix had given him for Christmas. “She couldn't have been trying to say Happy New Year.”

“But what could the rest of the word be?” said Athena, her eyebrows knit in consternation. “Is... is...” She tapped her earring, biting her lip as she lost herself in thought.

“If we go with the theory that she is trying to tell us her location,” Miles said, crossing his arms again, “then that narrows down our choices considerably. We need only consider words that concern places and topographical features.” Leave it to Edgeworth to be able to talk so eloquently even when he was frantically worried (and Phoenix was positive that he was).

“So... isssssssosceles triangle?...” Athena tried.

“Sure, let's head right over to the world-famous Isosceles Triangle,” Apollo snapped.

“Hey, I'm trying my best!” Athena yelled.

“Cut it out, both of you,” Phoenix said sharply. They both shut their mouths immediately. The Dad Voice worked on more people than just Pearls, thankfully.

“Israel, isolation, issue,” Maya muttered. “I don't think the kidnapper took her to Israel...”

“How about isthmus?” Miles suggested.

“There is an isthmus near Los Angeles,” Phoenix admitted, typing 'new year isthmus california' into his phone. Unfortunately, it yielded him similar results to what it had before. “Nothing,” he sighed.

“Well then... island?” Pearl wondered.

“New Year island, California,” Phoenix mumbled, tapping it in and hitting 'Search.'” His eyes widened again as he saw the results. “Guys!” he exclaimed, holding his phone up for them all. “There's a New Year Island in California!”

“Really?” Miles said, reaching up to still Phoenix's phone, for he'd been flailing his arm about in excitement. He squinted at the phone screen. “Año Nuevo Island,” he read off, his own eyes going wide as well. “That has to be it!” For a moment, a dazzling smile lit up his face as he locked eyes with Phoenix. Phoenix smiled back hopefully.

“It's about 5 hours by car from where we are now, too,” Athena informed them. She was looking at a blue holographic screen and scrolling through a web page on it—she'd enlisted Widget's help to research the island, evidently. She raised her keen blue eyes to meet her boss's. “We should get moving immediately.”

Phoenix nodded. “I agree.” He looked at Edgeworth. “Are... are you driving again?”

He hmphed. “We are not driving,” he said resolutely. “It's 5 hours away, you say?” He narrowed his eyes behind his glasses. “I'll get us there in 2.”

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Phoenix wasn't used to being able to board a plane in minutes, but he supposed utilizing resources like this was just one of the luxuries that a man of status like Miles Edgeworth could enjoy. The
realization, on any other day, would have made him feel just a bit resentful towards his boyfriend. Today, though, he had never been more grateful for Miles’ influence.

It was a small plane, but they'd been able to prepare it in under an hour once Edgeworth had made some calls. Phoenix looked out the window, but the sky was so dark that there wasn't much scenery to enjoy. It was just as well, he thought. Being able to see outside would only remind him how very high up they were right now.

“We'll be there in less than an hour now, Phoenix,” Miles murmured to him from the next seat over. “Are you doing all right?”

Phoenix looked down at Miles' hand on the armrest. He was gripping it so hard his knuckles had gone white. “I'm fine, now that I know we'll find her,” Phoenix told him, and laid his hand on top of Miles’. “...Are you doing all right?”

“I'm... terrified,” Miles confessed, his face twisting briefly into a grimace. “I worry that... all of this was my fault.”

“What?” Phoenix blurted. He blinked. “What in the world would make you think this is your fault?!”

“Morris's wife... she was so upset when I fired her husband that she left him and disappeared,” answered Miles. He looked down at their joined hands. “She sent quite strongly-worded hate mail to me shortly after Morris was fired, but when she disappeared, so did the letters. I stopped worrying about her after that. But I was foolish to never consider her a suspect. And... if only I wasn't so closely associated with you, Trucy would...” He closed his eyes tightly, and turned his face away.

“I was part of that case too, you know,” Phoenix reminded him, frowning. “Don't take all the credit, Miles.” Miles' hand twitched under his in preparation to pull it away, but Phoenix held onto it, stopping the motion. “Look, Miles: maybe we're both magnets for trouble. I'm pretty sure that's been proven to us over and over. But... being able to face problems with you makes dealing with them a whole lot easier. I'm never going to regret being close to you.” Miles met his eyes, then. “Never,” Phoenix reasserted. He stared unblinking into the stormy gray.

“Then... I intend to face all of our problems by your side, from now on,” the prosecutor finally said quietly. “You—and Trucy as well—will never be alone. This I promise you.” His eyes were intense. He was loading these words with so many different meanings that Phoenix felt overwhelmed, like he was looking at a multiple choice question and all the answers seemed right. His heart started pounding, though really it had been pounding for most of the evening since Trucy had gone missing. He felt a bit lightheaded, suddenly.

“Why Mr. Edgeworth, are you asking me to move in with you, or was that a really awkwardly-worded proposal?” Phoenix joked, offering him a lopsided smile. There, that ought to break the tension a little.

Miles just looked at him a moment, and then brought Phoenix's hand to his lips and brushed a kiss across his knuckles before lowering their hands again. “You may interpret it however you wish,” he answered smoothly, but when he turned his face away again, Phoenix caught his ears turning beet red.

Phoenix felt his heart skip so many beats it might as well have been falling down some stairs, for all the juddering it did then. However he wished? What in the world did that mean? Did Miles really want to move in with him, or Phoenix to move in with Miles? Did he actually mean to...? He felt his own cheeks starting to warm as well, and hoped Miles wouldn't mind if his hand had started to sweat a little. Or a lot. He stared out the window at the blackness, listening to Athena and Apollo's quiet
chatter behind them.

Well, he thought, he might certainly have more to explain to Trucy than he’d originally expected, once this was all over.

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They arrived soon after that, touching down on a large, flat patch of land near the beach. Phoenix and Miles were the first off the plane, followed by Apollo and Athena, and finally Pearls and Maya. The terrain was sandy, but with lots of rocks. It reminded Phoenix very much of the beach on which they’d captured Morris and found Ariadne.

“According to the internet, this beach is usually covered in elephant seals,” Athena told them as they all ran closer to the shore. “I guess they don't like the cold weather.”

“Elephant seals and I have that in common,” Apollo commented, rolling his sweater’s sleeves all the way down. It was indeed quite chilly, and the sea breeze was strong.

“I-I should have changed shoes,” Pearls whimpered from the back of the group. She'd put on a fluffy white parka over her dress, but had not had occasion to change out of those sandals she always wore.

Phoenix himself almost twisted his ankle on a jutting stone, but didn't let it slow him down for long. Miles was keeping pace by his side, just as he'd promised.

“Kay says she wanted to call in our backup, but they wouldn't even get here until about two more hours from now,” Maya updated them. She slipped her cell phone back into her pocket. “We'll have to handle this nutbar on our own, at least for right now.”

“Gladly,” Phoenix growled, doubling his speed again.

“M-Mr. Wright, slow down!” Apollo protested. “The ground here is so uneven, and it's too dark to see very far in front of us!”

“Not a problem,” Miles said, turning on the flashlight feature of his phone. Phoenix shot him a grateful look, and he nodded briefly as they both forged ahead.

Soon enough, they had reached the edge of the shore. Salty water lapped up against their shoes, which probably wasn't good for them, but Phoenix could worry about that later. He cupped his hands around his mouth, took a deep breath, and bellowed as loudly as he could:

“TRUCYYYYYYY!”

They all stopped and listened intently for a moment, but heard only the soothing sounds of the ocean.

“Hey, Apollo, I think it's time for your Chords of Steel,” Athena said, pushing her former colleague closer to the water.

“H-Hey, all right, just don't push me into the ocean, please,” Apollo said. He drew in a huge breath, cupped his hands around his mouth like Phoenix had done, and...

“TRUUUUUUCYYYYYYYYYY!” He shouted as loudly as it is possible for a human voice to shout. Phoenix winced and covered his ears, and caught glimpses of the others doing the same—Athena in particular had cringed away and covered her whole head. Truly, Apollo's voice was a weapon to be feared.

They listened very closely.
Athena's head whipped over to their left, and she leaned over the water, scanning the horizon intently. "I heard her!" she said excitedly. "She said, 'Polly'?"

"Trucy!" Phoenix said brokenly, his knees weak with relief. He waded out into the ocean until the freezing water was up to his waist. "TRUCY! WE'RE ALL HERE! YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY!"

"Repeat the message, Apollo," Maya urged him.

Apollo nodded and delivered Phoenix's words out over the water. Then he reeled backward, his eyes going wide. "I-I see a boat! It's just a small outline, but...!" His voice sounded a bit hoarse now, or, judging by the desperate look on his face, perhaps it was just strained with emotion.

Phoenix was torn between the urge to burst into overjoyed laughter and the one to fall to his knees and cry. But seeing as to how he was standing in the ocean, he decided the latter of these two was not advisable. "Sh-She's alive," he murmured, his voice breaking. "Thank god...th-thank god...!"

Phoenix really had no idea if the sound coming out of his mouth was laughter or sobbing.

"The boat's getting closer; I can hear it!" Athena shouted, standing on her tiptoes as if it would let her see the approaching boat more quickly.

"Phoenix, come back to shore! The water is too cold!" Miles barked, though when Phoenix turned around to face him, he saw that his eyes were frantically searching the water as well. Phoenix acquiesced, if only because he found it very telling that Miles was worried enough to forget himself and use Phoenix's first name in front of the others. He sloshed his way back over to stand beside the prosecutor, and when he turned to face the ocean again, he saw the boat drawing closer.

"Trucy?!" he yelled.

"Daddy!" her little voice responded.

The sea breeze was suddenly not the only source of salt on his face. The tracks of his tears felt icy-cold when the wind blew against them.

Gradually, they came into view: A small rowboat, with just two people aboard. There was a middle-aged woman with wild red hair, who was moving the oars, and there was the little girl that meant everything to him. Her hair was a mess, blown about by the wind and no doubt roughed up in the kidnapping as well. One cheek looked a bit swollen, and it looked like her wrists were tied together from what he could see, but other than that she appeared unharmed.

When the boat finally thudded against the shore, everyone crowded around it. Phoenix and Miles were the first to reach Trucy, though, so the others just surrounded them as the two lawyers sank with her to the sand. Phoenix wasn't sure if it was because they had pulled her out of the boat with too much force, or because Trucy had tackled them in her enthusiasm, but either way, Trucy had looped her bound arms around his neck and was laughing, though Phoenix felt tears against his neck.

Phoenix embraced her and buried his nose in her hair, breathing in sea salt and the lingering scent of strawberry shampoo.

"You found me," Trucy murmured, and then threw her arms around Miles' neck as well. "I knew you would."

Miles blinked, suddenly finding his cheek smushed against Trucy's as she hugged them both. Phoenix glanced over Trucy's head in time to catch his look of surprise smoothing into a smile so loving and warm that he looked almost like a different person. He closed his eyes and wrapped his
arm around Trucy. For a moment, the three of them just held on.

“Trucyyyy!” Athena wailed, suddenly flinging her weight against the three of them. Tears were streaming down her face as she wrapped her arms around them all. “W-We were so worried!”

Another impact, this one smaller. “I-I knew you were alive!” Pearls sobbed, clutching onto Trucy’s cape.

“I'm so sorry, Trucy!” Maya exclaimed tearfully, getting in on the group hug as well and finally making them all lose their balance from where they sat. Phoenix and Miles toppled backward, their backs hitting the sand with a flump.

“You're all... crushing me,” Trucy wheezed, but it sounded like she was laughing. After a fair bit of maneuvering, they all managed to sit up, and Trucy extricated herself from her father and the prosecutor, only to be nearly knocked over again by another relieved person.

“Trucyyyyyy...!” Apollo blubbered, hugging her around her shoulders. Apparently, he hadn't wanted to share his reunion hug with the others. He could be selfish like that.

“Heehee, oh, Polly,” Trucy said affectionately, patting his back (a little awkwardly, as her wrists were still bound) as he held onto her. “It's okay. I'm all right, so don't cry.”

“I'm n-not c-crying,” Apollo sobbed, pulling away to wipe his nose.

“Hey, you're wearing the sweater!” Trucy noticed, her face lighting up.

“Oh, uh, yeah,” said Apollo, glancing down at himself. He seemed to have forgotten he was wearing it.

“Um,” said a voice from behind them all. Seven people's heads all whipped around to face the boat, where the unknown woman was still sitting. Her expression was so tired and wistful that it almost hurt to look at her face. “I hate to break up the party here, but... Aren't you going to arrest me?” She smiled, a brittle, empty smile. “I'm... I'm ready now.”

“You are Nadia Morris?” Edgeworth said, getting to his feet and brushing the sand off of his suit. Phoenix was amazed that he was able to look so dignified and authoritative after being group-hugged into the ground, but that was just part of what made him amazing.

“Nadia Gordian,” the woman corrected. “Kidnapping accomplice and attempted-murderer.” She stared down at her feet, falling silent.

Trucy looked conflicted, her eyebrows drawing together as she looked at the woman in the boat. She turned her big blue eyes onto Phoenix. “She didn't hurt me, Daddy. She's been suffering a long time.”

“Trucy, it's all right,” said Nadia. She brought her hand to her neck, holding something there. “I've done terrible things, and I need to pay for them. That's... how it works.” She looked over at Miles next. “Isn't that right... Chief Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth?”

“That is correct,” Edgeworth replied. He pulled a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket (how long had those been there, Phoenix wondered?) and made his way over to the boat. Ms. Gordian obligingly held out her wrists for the prosecutor to cuff.

“Trucy... what did she try to do to you?” Apollo asked Phoenix's daughter.
Trucy bit her lip, shifting her eyes around a little. “Well... at first she was going to kill me,” she admitted quietly.

“What?” Phoenix, Miles, and Apollo all shouted.

“B-But then, we talked!” Trucy hastened to add, holding up her still-bound hands placatingly. “And... and then she didn't want to hurt me anymore.” She glanced at the woman in the boat. “Right, Ms. Gordian?”

The woman just nodded. She looked at Phoenix next. “You have quite an incredible daughter, Phoenix Wright.”

“I know,” Phoenix replied honestly.

Miles helped Ms. Gordian to her feet and began to lead her out of the boat and towards the plane. Everyone else followed. Apollo pulled out a pocket knife and cut through Trucy's bindings, and she got to her feet and walked along with the rest of them. Pearls was still clutching onto Trucy's cape as if she'd disappear if she let go, sniffling occasionally. She'd returned Trucy's hat to her. The wind-ravaged mane of brown hair soon disappeared under the familiar blue silk, leaving Trucy looking much more like herself.

“So, you managed to make her not want to hurt you just by talking to her?” Athena asked the magician incredulously.

“Yeah, usually people just want to hurt you more when they talk to you too much, Athena,” Apollo quipped with a smirk. Athena shoved him.

“I guess that's how it went, yes,” Trucy responded.

“What in the world did you talk about?” Maya pressed her.

Trucy grinned. She grabbed onto Phoenix's sleeve with one hand, and Miles' with the other. “Oh, just about the magic of love.”

Ms. Gordian was silent for the whole plane ride, and submitted to her arrest without question. She looked so bereft that Phoenix was almost tempted to feel bad for her, but whenever he looked over at Trucy, he felt rage burn in his chest again. She had tried to kill his little girl, and that wasn't something he could forgive very easily.

“Since she's already confessing to her crimes, I doubt her trial will last very long,” Miles told Phoenix as they finally left the woman with the police. They were trailing behind the rest of their tag-alongs, just talking quietly. The first early morning of the new year was dark and cold and clear.

“Let's just hope that she can turn herself around like Trucy seems to think she can,” Phoenix grumbled. He was somewhat baffled by his daughter's ability to forgive and smile so cheerfully after that experience.

Miles observed him out of the corner of his eye. “Don't dwell on it for too long, Wright,” he told him. “Resentment and bitterness... they're not suited to a person like you.”

“What in the world is that supposed to mean?” Phoenix said, shooting him a look. “A person like me?”

Miles chuckled. “I mean, a person as...optimistic as you,” he rephrased. “Someone who sees the best
in others. Leave the ugly emotions like resentment to people like me. You don't need them...” He trailed off into a mumble. “...tarnishing your brilliance.”

Phoenix blinked and looked over at him. Miles wouldn't meet his eyes, apparently realizing that he'd said something rather sappy. He shoved his shoulder against the prosecutor. “You mean, I'm all bright and hopeful and glowy?” he teased.

“You're never going to let me live that voicemail down,” Miles sighed, and Phoenix saw his cheeks blushing under the light of the streetlamps along the sidewalk.

Phoenix smiled and reached over to take his hand. “Nope,” he agreed. “Not for the rest of our lives.”

Miles' ears went pink again, and Phoenix knew he hadn't missed the implication in Phoenix's words. “D-Do you still plan to tell Trucy tonight?” the prosecutor asked.

Phoenix watched her walk ahead of them, chatting animatedly to Pearl and Athena, her face glowing in soft orange light. Apollo and Maya followed behind, chiming in occasionally. Trucy smiled and laughed at something Athena said, and Phoenix felt a smile spread across his face too at the sight. “Yeah, I think it's time,” he finally answered.

Miles tightened his grip. “I think so too.”

***

“Daddy, not that I don't love spending the first three hours of the new year with you and Mr. Edgeworth, but I've been through a lot today.” Trucy yawned. She'd taken a shower, at least, and now was sitting in her pajamas on the Wright family couch, her hair damp and smelling like strawberries. She pulled one leg up under herself on the couch, holding onto her knee. “What's so important that you had to tell me before I caught some well-deserved z's?”

Phoenix cleared his throat awkwardly. “W-Well, Trucy,” he started. Somehow this seemed so much more difficult when she was right there in front of them. He glanced at the man beside him, who nodded reassuringly. “E-Edgeworth and I...” He hesitated. “...Miles and I had something we'd been planning on telling you tonight, and...well, things didn't exactly go as planned.” He rubbed the back of his head, dropping his gaze to his knees. “U-Uh, take it away, Miles,” he passed the buck.

Miles glared at him, but turned his head to face Trucy regardless. “What your father is trying to tell you is that... I... he and I, that is... we're, um.” He trailed off, adjusting his glasses and blushing. “Yeah, not as easy as you thought, is it?” Phoenix said.

“Daddy, I'm so tired,” Trucy sighed. “Please just say whatever it is you have to say.”

Phoenix gulped. He took a deep breath. He reached over to grab Miles' hand, but since he was gazing intently at Trucy, he ended up smacking him in the side instead. “Oops,” he mumbled, twisting around to properly grab his boyfriend's hand this time. Miles was frowning at him mutinously. “Sorry,” he said, offering his sweetest apology smile. Miles sighed, rolled his eyes, and intertwined his fingers with Phoenix's. Satisfied, the defense attorney turned to face his daughter again. She was resting her chin on her bent knee, raising an eyebrow at the proceedings. “M-Miles and I are... we're together!” he finally managed to get out.

Trucy blinked at him sleepily. “I can see that,” she said. “For what?”

Phoenix blinked right back. “Wh-what do you mean, for what?”
“I believe she is misunderstanding your terminology,” Miles said. He leaned around Phoenix to address Trucy. “Your father means that he and I are... um, romantically involved.”

Trucy sat up straight then. Her once-sleepy eyes were now bright and keen again. She moved them between the two lawyers, then narrowing them suspiciously. “Prove it,” she challenged.

“Uh, wh-what?” Phoenix stammered.

“Evidence is everything,” Trucy quoted, crossing her arms. “I won't believe what you've said until you can prove it to me.”

Phoenix opened his mouth to protest. “Wh-Why should we have to prove it to y—” And then Miles was crooking a finger underneath his chin, turning Phoenix's face towards him, tilting his own head slightly, and kissing him softly. Phoenix promptly melted and leaned into it, his eyes falling shut. He was only pulled out of his lovestruck haze when some kind of shutter noise filled the room. His eyes snapped open and he turned to face his daughter again.

Somehow, she was holding his phone. “Trucy, w-when did you—?!”

“Please; you guys are so easy to distract,” Trucy said, leaning back against the arm of the couch and tapping away at Phoenix's phone.

“What... what are you doing?” Phoenix said weakly, making a grab for his phone.

Trucy lifted it out of his reach. “Sorry, Daddy, but I don't have a phone anymore,” she told him. “So I just have to send this to Aunt Maya and have her pass it along to the other girls... and Apollo.”

“What?!” Miles spluttered. “T-Trucy, please, be reasonable...!”

“You don't seem nearly as surprised by this as I thought you'd be!” Phoenix said, standing and attempting to pull his phone away from her again.

“I've known you guys were a couple since Christmas Eve,” Trucy admitted, smirking at them and evading the grab easily.

“What? How did you know?” Phoenix's voice sounded more petulant than he'd meant it to.

“Well, if the mistletoe kiss wasn't enough to convince me, seeing you guys make eyes at each other all the time sure did.” She raised her wrist, on which glittered that gold bracelet Apollo had given her for Christmas. “I'll have to thank Polly again for this. It really came in handy for spotting all your tells!” She grinned at them cheekily.

“Trucy, hand over my phone or you're grounded!” Phoenix said desperately.

She pouted. “You'd ground a kidnap victim?” she asked sadly, her big blue eyes sorrowful.

Even though he knew she was playing him, Phoenix felt his heart clench. “N-No, I guess not, but—”

“If you really don't want me to tell the others, I won't,” Trucy cut him off, sitting up straight and hovering her hand over the button.

“I...!” Phoenix looked over at Miles, who had gotten up from the couch as well.

After a moment, Miles shrugged. “We... We were going to tell them anyway, right?” he finally said.

“I...I guess, but...!”
“Aaaaand, send!” Trucy sang, pressing down the button decisively.

Phoenix grabbed for his phone, and this time Trucy surrendered it without protest. “You really put Daddy through the wringer today, Trucy,” he said mournfully.

She looked at him endearingly, hopping to her feet. “I know. I'm sorry.” When she stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the cheek, Phoenix couldn't possibly stay upset with her, especially not when she kissed Miles on the cheek, too. “I love you,” she told Phoenix (or possibly both of them?), and smiled sweetly. 'I'm so happy for you two. And now I'm going to bed, so…” She winked. “Don't stay up too late, kids. Happy New Year!” With that, she turned on her heel and skipped off to her room.

“That little minx,” Miles muttered, but he sounded more impressed than frustrated.

“We're going to get bombarded with texts now, I hope you know,” Phoenix told him.

Miles sighed. “I do know.” As if in answer, the prosecutor's phone buzzed. He pulled it out. “Kay,” he announced, and then held out the phone for Phoenix to read.

AAAAAAAAAAAA OMG FINALLY!!! MR EDGEBORT IM SO HAPPY FOR YOU!!!!!!!!!!!! the screen read.

Miles typed out a response: Go to bed, Kay.

oh i will... but i guess you guys might be up a while yet, eh? eh?? ;)))))

Don't be crass, Miles responded, and then shoved his phone in his pocket.

Phoenix had gotten texts, too.

I KNEW IT!! OMG NICK!! YOU BETTER TELL ME EVERYTHING TOMORROW, YOU HEAR ME?!!?!? Maya demanded, and then, a second later: oh and I guess I still owe you 200 bucks, Apollo.

Whoohoo go Mr Wright!!!!! Athena proclaimed.

Um, I hope you'll forgive me for texting you this late, Mr. Nick, but... congratulations (again), Pearl had sent.

Well, I'm glad it's out in the open now, Ema said.

Guys, I have to be at the airport in 5 hours, Apollo complained, and then added But yeah, send the money, I guess, Maya.

Phoenix sighed and put away his phone as well. He'd deal with all their friends' probing questions later. For now, after the crazy day he had had, he just wanted to sit here on the couch with Miles. So he sat, and patted the cushion next to him. Miles followed suit, and Phoenix scooted closer to him and laid his head on the prosecutor's shoulder. “That...happened a lot quicker than I'd planned.”

Miles kissed the top of his head. “Mm,” he agreed. “But at least it's done now. No more hiding.”

Phoenix nuzzled into Miles' neck affectionately. “No more hiding,” he repeated back.

“Phoenix,” Miles said to get his attention, and Phoenix lifted his head. Miles placed a hand on the back of Phoenix's head and brought their lips together, kissing him soundly. Phoenix twisted in his seat to lean his chest against Miles, clutching at his lapels and angling his head to deepen their kiss. Miles didn't resist; rather, he made a noise of approval and met Phoenix's tongue with his own.
Phoenix hadn't realized he'd been gradually leaning back until he opened his eyes to find Miles gazing down at him, his bangs hanging down around his face like a halo. Miles' hand was still behind Phoenix's head, but his other hand now came up to touch Phoenix's face when he leaned over Phoenix and kissed him again. Phoenix twisted his hands in the fabric of Miles' suit, which probably would've usually upset the prosecutor, but he didn't seem to mind at the moment, focusing instead on kissing Phoenix insistently. His weight felt sublime on Phoenix's chest.

“M-Miles,” Phoenix breathed when next they broke apart, “Maybe you should go home now, before I start getting my hopes up.”

Miles sat up and ran one hand up Phoenix's chest, only his dress shirt between his hand and Phoenix's skin since he'd unbuttoned his vest earlier. Phoenix stifled an embarrassing noise. It wasn't that the action had been particularly exciting—rather, it was the way Miles was looking at him right now. His gray eyes were so dark they appeared black, and they were raking over Phoenix like he was a present he couldn't wait to open. “You're right,” Miles conceded, playing with the defense attorney's tie. His voice was in a lower register than usual. Phoenix shuddered and resisted the urge to pull him back down.

“Look at me like that is dangerous,” Phoenix confessed, gulping.

“Oh?” The prosecutor raised an eyebrow. He ran a hand through Phoenix's hair. Phoenix pushed up against his hand like a cat. “Why? What will you do, Phoenix?” His own voice had sunken into a purr.

“Oh my god, Miles, stop,” Phoenix laughed breathlessly. “Don't tease me like this.”

Miles smirked. “I never said I was teasing,” he said, but then shrugged and offered a hand to pull Phoenix back into a sitting position. “But I concede your point.”

“I mean, we do have my daughter's blessing, as well as... well, everyone's,” Phoenix said, letting himself be pulled up, “but... well, aren't you tired? I am.”

“I am tired,” Miles agreed. He looked down at Phoenix's suit. “And you... you're still in that half-damp suit. You'll catch cold if you don't change out of it soon.”

“You wanna help?” Phoenix said, wiggling his eyebrows at him.

From the way his eyes moved over Phoenix's form, he surmised that the suggestion was not unappealing to the prosecutor. “Now who's teasing,” Miles grumbled.

Phoenix grinned. He leaned over to give Miles a quick, innocent kiss. “Hey... do you want to stay here tonight? It's so late, and I know you're exhausted. You can have the couch.”

Miles looked unsure. “You don't think that would be... untoward?”

He laughed. “Untoward? Why would it be untoward for my boyfriend to stay on my couch for a night? It's 3:30 in the morning; I don't want you driving out there now anyway.”

Miles flushed. “I-I suppose if you don't mind, then I don't, but...”

“I have a new, extra toothbrush you can use, if that's what you're worried about.”

The prosecutor sighed and covered his face with his hand. “No, that is not what I was worried about,” he said. “But very well.”
“Finally, I got Miles Edgeworth to stay over,” Phoenix teased.

Miles was inspecting Phoenix's couch, feeling the material and testing its firmness. “I'm not sure how suited this is for sleeping...”

“Well, I love you, Miles, but I'm not giving up my bed,” Phoenix said, poking his boyfriend. “So if you want to sleep on a bed, you'll have to share.” He smirked.

Miles went the most delightful shade of pink. “-I think that would be...risky,” he mumbled. A pause. “And I love you too.”

Phoenix wrapped his arms around the prosecutor and kissed his jaw. “We can always share the bed another night,” he said, nuzzling him. “This won't be the last time you're over here, riiight?”

“I suppose not,” Miles replied.

“And maybe next time we can do more than just sleep,” Phoenix whispered near his ear.

Miles flushed a shade darker. “If you are clumsily trying to seduce me...” He looked down to meet Phoenix's eyes. “...it's working. I have no idea how it is working, since you have the subtlety of a freight train, but it's working.”

Phoenix laughed. “I've been saying stupid things for years with the intention of seducing you.” He repositioned himself and laid his head on Miles' lap, looking up at him and resting his arms on his stomach.

“You were never quite that up-front about it before,” Miles pointed out. “Perhaps you weren't being clear enough in the past.”

“What, you mean that if I had just marched up to you and shouted 'I love you; let's make out' ten years ago it would have worked?” Phoenix asked, giving him a dubious look.

“Well... no,” Miles admitted, looking contemplative. “I would have thought you'd gone crazy.”

“I am crazy...” He wiggled his eyebrows up at the prosecutor. “...for you.”

Miles rolled his eyes and groaned. “That was dreadful.”

“You loved it.”

“I most certainly did not.”

“You just got done telling me that the dumb stuff I say works for you; you can't fool m—” Miles leaned over him and shut him up with a quick kiss. “You know, interrupting people is usually considered rude,” Phoenix complained.

Miles gave him a smug smile. “As you would say, 'you loved it.'”

“Yes, I kinda did,” Phoenix admitted. He sat up. “Okay, well, it's way past my bedtime.” He rose from the couch reluctantly, and scanned the other man's face. “Let me know if you need anything, all right? I'll leave the extra toothbrush in the bathroom for you.” He scratched his head, thinking. “Oh, and, uh, I guess I'll leave you a change of clothes, too, since sleeping in your suit is probably not an option. I'll... see you in the morning, then.”

Phoenix could have sworn Miles looked a little disappointed. “Of course,” was what he said, though. “Thank you for your hospitality, Phoenix.”
“Sure. What's mine is yours,” Phoenix told him. With that, he left the family room and made his way down the hallway to his own room. The suit pants were peeled off and dumped on the floor, because they needed to be dry-cleaned anyway and Phoenix was tired, damn it. He changed into a white t-shirt and pajama pants. By the time he'd finished with his pre-bedtime routine, he'd started to feel anxious about Miles being out there on the couch. He really should have been a gentleman and offered Miles his bed. But on the other hand, he really was exhausted, and had been looking forward to collapsing on his pillow for hours now. Miles would be okay, wouldn't he? However... Miles was a little taller than him, and even Phoenix had trouble stretching out on that couch... But, Phoenix told himself, Miles really wouldn't have much more room if they shared the bed, honestly. Besides, if Miles was lying next to him in the dark, Phoenix didn't know how he could resist having him so close without reaching out to him or touching him. It had been hard enough sleeping next to him on a hard floor surrounded by strangers in Khura’in. Still...

He shuffled down the hall to the family room again to find Miles attempting to situate himself on his couch, laying his head against the armrest and facing away from him. Phoenix didn't know what he was expecting to see, but Miles actually wearing Phoenix's old beat-up navy t-shirt and pajama pants made his heart do an entire gymnastics routine. Holy crap, he could see his arms! And they were really nice arms!

“Hey,” he announced his presence.

Miles almost flailed off the couch. “Wr-Wright, don't sneak up on me like that!” he scolded Phoenix, sitting up and twisting around to face him.

“Sorry.”

They were both silent a moment.

“So... what is it? Or did you just want to give me a heart attack for fun?” Miles prompted him, crossing his arms (his bare arms!, Phoenix thought a little deliriously).

“Sleep with me,” Phoenix blurted. Immediately, he felt his face going warm. “I-I mean, no, that's not what I meant!” Miles looked surprised, but he didn't say anything, so Phoenix continued to blather on uncontrollably. “I'm not trying to suggest anything, um... well, you know; it's just, I was thinking, you're taller than I am and the couch isn't even comfortable for me, and...” He covered his face with his hand and sighed. “Just... please forget I worded it that way,” he pleaded.

“You... really wouldn't mind?” Miles asked. Phoenix's head snapped up, and he opened his eyes to see Miles looking at him a little hopefully. “I hate to be a bother, but you're right: this couch is uncomfortable for me.”

“Mind?” Phoenix laughed uncomfortably. “Of course I don't mind. ” What a ridiculous idea. He hadn't suggested Miles sleep on the couch because he'd wanted to keep Miles out of his bed; rather, the idea of Miles in his bed was a little too appealing, even though Phoenix was exhausted.

“You say we're... just going to sleep now,” Miles said slowly, getting up from the couch.

“Of course.” He extended his hand to the prosecutor.

Miles stepped forward and took his hand, letting Phoenix lead him down the hall. “Then I trust you,” Miles said simply.

And then they were both standing in Phoenix's bedroom, staring at each other.

“Uh,” Phoenix said intelligently. He motioned to the bed. “Th-That's the bed,” he said, as if Miles...
wouldn't be able to find it otherwise.

“‘Yes, thank you, Phoenix; I figured that out.’

“R-Right, sorry. I'm... ahaha, this is... so crazy,” Phoenix laughed a little hysterically as Miles made his way over to the bed and pulled back the covers. “I, I feel like I'm dreaming.”

“Not yet, you aren't.” Miles said. “So you should sleep.” He settled himself under the covers and looked over at Phoenix inquiringly. “What are you doing, standing over there?”

“I'm trying to ingrain what you look like there in my brain,” Phoenix answered. “You're sleeping in my bed. In my clothes.”

Miles' cheeks went dark. “O-Only out of necessity!” he defended himself. He took off his glasses and reached over to place them on Phoenix's nightstand. “Just... Shut up and come to bed, Phoenix.”

“Oh my god,” Phoenix choked, clutching his chest. “Hold on. I have to mentally record that, too.”

“Get over here before I decide to make this the last time I sleep here,” Miles grumbled, crossing his arms. Phoenix knew by now that it was an empty threat.

“Yes sir,” he replied immediately anyway, shutting off the light and hopping in beside him.

Phoenix stared at his ceiling, incredibly aware that the love of his life was lying right next to him, inches away. Hesitantly, he turned his head on his pillow. He thought he caught the shine of Miles' eyes. “I'm not going to lie,” he murmured into the blackness. “I'm trying as hard as I can to keep from kissing you right now.”

“Later,” Miles told him tiredly. “For now, we sleep.”

“Right,” Phoenix said. He rolled over and faced away from the other man, and screwed his eyes shut. Sleep was bound to come to him soon.

***

He awoke to an incredible feeling of security and warmth. Soft breathing sounded above his head, in and out. He blinked open his eyes.

He was nestled against Miles, his head tucked under Miles’ chin, his hands curled against Miles' chest. He would have thought it was a coincidence that they'd wound up this close, but when he tried to move, he found that Miles' arms were around him. The arm that laid over top of Phoenix was warm, and the hand rested near Phoenix's hip.

Well, if Miles could take liberties, Phoenix thought with a smirk, so could he.

He angled his head up and kissed Miles' neck, then his jaw, and then his cheeks. Miles made a reluctant noise, and Phoenix drew back far enough to see that the prosecutor's eyes were shut tightly as if he were resisting the light shining in through the window. He laid a hand on Miles' cheek. “Miles, it's morning,” he said quietly.

“Phoenix,” Miles half-mumbled, half-sighed. He sounded happy. The arms around Phoenix's back drifted up to his shoulder blades, and he tugged Phoenix closer to him like he was a teddy bear.

Well, that was way too adorable to be legal, Phoenix thought, but he really should wake Miles up before one of them embarrassed themselves. “Miiiiiles,” he tried again. “Rise and shine.”
“Nnn,” was Miles' only reply.

“I thought you weren't a very sound sleeper, but I guess maybe you sleep deeply when you're really exhausted,” Phoenix mused, propping himself up on an elbow. “Well, I learn something new about you every day.” For a few moments, he allowed himself to just watch Miles looking so peaceful.

Suddenly, Phoenix's door was flying open. “Hey Daddy, are we still going to the airport to—oh gosh, I'm sorry!” Trucy yelped, her eyes going wide as saucers.

“Trucy, no, wait, it's not what you think!” Phoenix protested, attempting to wriggle out of Miles' grip, but Trucy had already hastily closed the door again, and he heard her fleeing footsteps down the hall.

Miles jerked awake at the sound of the door closing. “Muh?” he said eloquently, squinting his eyes open.

“Well, good morning, sunshine,” Phoenix said.

“Ph-Phoenix,” Miles stammered, immediately releasing Phoenix and bolting upright. “I-I'm so sorry; I don't know what possessed me to—”

Phoenix held his fingers to Miles' mouth, silencing him. “Please don't apologize. That was the best way I have ever woken up.”

Miles gently removed Phoenix's hand from his mouth. “What... what was that door slam just now?” he asked next, looking around the room.

“Oh, yeah, about that...” Phoenix rubbed his head awkwardly. “I think we have some explaining to do to Trucy.”

Miles went pale. “Oh no. So she opened the door, and...”

“...Saw us all cuddled up together in bed, yeah.”

“So now she probably thinks...”

“That we, uh, got funky last night? Most likely.”

Miles gave him a what the hell is wrong with you face. “‘Got funky’? Really, Wright? How old are you?”

Phoenix hopped out of bed and grinned back at Miles. “This is who you've chosen, Miles,” he said teasingly.

The other man sighed heavily and plopped his forehead into his palm. “Yes, it is,” he admitted.

Phoenix could only give him an apologetic smile. “Well...what just happened was bound to happen sooner or later, I guess...”

“But we're being falsely accused,” Miles said mournfully.

“Well, I guess we have to go out there and plead our case then.” He extended his hand to Miles again.

Miles gave him a lopsided smile, and took his hand. “No objections here,” he said.
Well, it was bound to be a long, awkward conversation, Phoenix thought as they left the room together. But with Miles here by his side, holding his hand, no problem seemed insurmountable anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: A new beginning.

Okay, so. Names!!

Maizy was initially just named Maizy for no reason, but I decided to give her pigtails that looked like ears of corn on a whim. And then I started thinking about corn mazes. And everything spiraled from there.

Hippolyta was an Amazon queen. All of my character's dogs are female. Kuon comes from a Greek word meaning "dog."

Algernon Barnes is a reference to a certain book and a Barnes maze.

Courtney Hampton was named for the Hampton Court Maze.

Peri Plexus comes from Perplexus, which is a popular ball-in-maze toy.

Tia Euler is referencing T-mazes as well as Leonhard Euler, a mathematician who analyzed mazes.

Ariadne Stringer is of course a shout-out to the Greek myth about Ariadne and Theseus. Princess Ariadne gave Theseus some string to prevent him from getting lost in the Labyrinth. Also my character's a violinist, so. Stringer.

Hamilton Morris comes from both Hamilton cycles (they are really complicated pls look them up if you're curious LOL) and the Morris water maze.

Cayley Morris is referencing Cayley graphs, which are Hamiltonian.

Mike Roscopé is the best name I've ever come up with.

And lastly, Nadia Gordian is a reference to the Gordian Knot, which was a "maze" so complicated that the only solution was to cut it.

Also, Año Nuevo Island is, of course, a real place.

See you all again next time! I love you!! <3
Epilogue: The Truth and Tomorrow

Chapter Summary

A new beginning.

Chapter Notes

I owe this all to you, readers. Thank you so much. I love you(nicorns). Please enjoy this exceedingly cheesy epilogue.

Also, in case you all haven't seen it yet, LOOK AT THIS ART SPÖDIDDLY MADE!! AN ENTIRE COMIC FOR MILES' DRUNKEN VOICEMAIL IN CHAPTER SIX!! WOW!!! MY CROPS HAVE NEVER FELT MORE WATERED!!! THANK YOU FRIEND!!

ALSO ALSO!! MY DEAR HUMBLE ANON MADE!! THE CUTEST PICTURE!! LOOK!! IT'S GOT!! THE UNICORN! TRUCY'S BRACELET! THE JOURNAL! NADIA'S LOCKET! THE GLOVES!!!! MISTLETOE!! ARIADNE'S VIOLIN!! "CALLING MIKE ROSCOPE!" "NEW YEARS IS" (I think; it is very small rofl)!! OMG!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Miles tried to remember how he had ended up here, explaining his romantic life to a group of Wright's associates (and daughter). It really wasn't any of their business, but they had all been asking so many questions over the past week or so that it was really easier for both Wright and himself if they explained everything at once.

"So, are you going to tell us what happened to make you guys realize you were soulmates?" Maya Fey asked eagerly, looking as energized as she did whenever she talked about those Khura'inese soap operas she so enjoyed. She was on the sofa with Pearl Fey and Athena Cykes. Kay was sitting on the arm of the couch near Pearl, one leg crossed over the other.

"No," Miles said flatly, folding his arms. He had agreed to answer a few questions, not to tell an entirely too-long, complicated story (which spanned decades, if he were being honest with himself).

Trucy, sitting between himself and Phoenix, looked up at him and huffed. "Oh come on, we've been waiting ages to hear about that!" she complained. She crossed her arms, too. "You totally owe it to me to explain, after last Friday when I walked in on—"

"Whoaaaa, okay, let's not get into that!" Phoenix stopped her, flailing his hands and flushing. Miles felt his face heat up as well. The post-New Year's debacle aside, evidently he and Phoenix just had terrible luck and even worse timing when it came to... alone time (Miles' apartment was usually the location of choice from that disaster onward). "The story involves years of embarrassing letters, lots of courtroom drama, some Captain Morgan, and a mug of coffee," Phoenix went on. Well, at least he hadn't revealed too much. The defense attorney sat up straighter, his expression lighting up. "Oh!
And a unicorn,” he added with a grin. Ah. Miles had spoken too soon. He reached over and stepped on Wright's toes. “Ow,” said Phoenix.

“A unicorn?” Kay repeated, tilting her head and looking confused. Of course she would focus on the single most embarrassing part of that whole thing, Miles thought bitterly.

“There were absolutely no unicorns involved,” Miles asserted in a growl, shooting Wright a glare.

“Yes sir,” he said quickly. He was smiling at him, though. He then winked, because Phoenix Wright made it his goal in life to be simultaneously the most infuriating and amazing person in Miles' life.

“Wait... you said 'Captain Morgan',” Pearl pointed out. Her eyebrows drew together in thought. “Wasn't that the name on the bottle of funny tea at Thanksgiving?”

“Well, yes,” Pearl said, shrinking a little under Maya's intense gaze. “W-Was that not okay? Mr. Edgeworth asked for tea...I didn't see any green tea, so I just picked the only thing that said 'tea' on it.”

Phoenix put his arm around both his daughter and Miles. “I'm not,” he said, sounding rather pleased with himself. “It was thanks to that little slip-up that—”

“That's quite enough, Wright!” Miles interrupted frantically. “W-We really don't need to tell them everything, do we?” He gave him a look that he hoped was suitably intimidating, or at least beseeching.

Phoenix slumped, retracting his arm. “Aw, but I like that part,” he pouted. Well, of course he did. He wasn't the one who ended up looking like a drunken moron by the end of it.

“I'm just glad I don't have to keep your feelings for Mr. Edgeworth secret anymore,” Athena sighed in a relieved sort of voice. Widget resembled a green robotic rabbit today.

Miles glanced over in surprise at the other man on the couch. “Ms. Cykes knew?”

“Well,” Phoenix laughed awkwardly, “She, uh, may have Mood Matrixed me at some point in November and, uh...” He looked away and rubbed the back of his neck, his cheeks going pink. “…figured out more than I wanted her to.” Miles raised his eyebrows. He hadn't known that, either...

“As long as Wright is being honest, I suppose I should attempt to be as well,” he sighed, pushing his glasses up his nose. He locked eyes with the Great Thief sitting on the arm of the couch. “Kay also knew about my feelings towards Wright.”
“Psh, I'm pretty sure everybody did, but yeah,” Kay admitted with a shrug.

“None of us could ever get her to talk about why she was so sure you guys belonged together,” Trucy said, looking disappointed as she lowered her top-hatted head.

At this, both Miles and Phoenix looked down at the young magician. “What?” they both blurted.

“What do you mean, 'none of us'?!” demanded Phoenix.

“I never discovered how she came to know all of your associates in the first place, Wright,” Miles pointed out. All the girls seemed to stiffen up at his words.

“Oh yeah, good question,” said the defense attorney, nodding. He reached into his pocket, and looked around at the room. “Yup, you're all still swimming in Psyche-Locks,” he muttered. “All right, everyone: We're coming clean, so it's time for you to 'fess up, too.”

Trucy looked sheepish. “Oops,” she said, grimacing around at the other girls. “Sorry, everyone…”

“Meh, it's all right,” Maya said, waving her hand dismissively. “We've accomplished our mission, so we may as well tell them.”

“You think so?” Athena said, surprised.

Pearls nodded decisively. “Yes, I think we should tell the truth, too.”

“All righty then,” Kay said. She sounded a bit apprehensive, and she was biting her lip, but she motioned towards her small friend anyway. “T-Take it away then, Pearl…”

The small spirit medium took a deep breath. “We all—that is, myself, Mystic Maya, Trucy, Kay, Miss Athena, Mr. Apollo, and Miss Ema…” She looked down at her lap for a moment, but when she lifted her face again, she looked absolutely determined. “We all formed a sort of club to get the two of you together!”

Miles and Phoenix stared.

“A... a club?” Miles said blankly.

“Apollo too?” said Phoenix weakly.

“Yeah... he was probably our most reluctant member,” Trucy giggled. “But yep, that's our big secret: The existence of Project: Matchmakers!”

Phoenix reached into his pocket again, and his eyes widened. “Wow, I've never seen so many locks shatter at the same time.”

“Project... Matchmakers...” Miles parroted. “What... what in the world...?”

“Basically, we'd all get together and discuss ways we could hook you two up,” Maya said with a shrug, slouching against the back of the couch. “The mistletoe was my idea.”

“The Secret Santa drawing was mine,” Athena chimed in, raising her hand.

“Rigging it by only putting in your two names was Polly's idea!” Trucy chirped. Ah. So the Secret Santa drawing had been staged after all.

“And I, um... gathered information,” Pearls said, ducking her head, her cheeks going pink.
“The stalking!” Phoenix realized. He put a hand to his chin, considering. “That would explain that weird evidence scrapbook, too...”

“Stalking?” Miles thought a moment. “Wait,” he said. “In November... when you said you'd been feeling like someone was watching you... Surely you can't mean...!”

Phoenix sighed and shook his head. “Actually, no.” He looked over at Kay, resting his hands on his thighs. “Pearls did indeed start following me around then, but she was terrible at concealing herself. The feeling that I was being watched... That would be the work of one Miss Kay Faraday, I'm afraid.”

“Hehe...oopsie,” Kay giggled weakly, offering Miles a smile so cheesy it would have gone well with wine.

“Kay... you...!” Miles sputtered. “You were following Wright around?!”

“I already apologized to Mr. Wright!” she said, hiding her face. Pearl patted her back. “Please don't be too upset with me, Mr. Edgeworth...!”

Miles massaged the spot between his eyebrows and heaved a great sigh. “If Wright has forgiven you, I suppose I should as well,” he said resentfully.

“I've forgiven worse;” Phoenix said nonchalantly. He probably didn't mean it as a jab towards Miles—he definitely didn't—but Miles still felt a terrible shock of guilt anyway. He clenched his fists. He might be happy with Phoenix now, but it would take time to work through those issues, Miles thought.

“So wait,” Maya said suddenly, “It sounds like all of this started in November, including the Captain Morgan at Thanksgiving.” She rested her chin in her hand, her eyes drifting up to the side as she thought. “What happened with that to advance your relationship?”

“Aha, I think Edgeworth might hurt me if I answer that,” Phoenix said, glancing over at Miles with a guilty smile.

“Aww, you're no fun, Mr. Edgeworth,” Maya pouted, puffing up her cheeks.

Miles knew he would regret this, but he spoke. “I left Wright a voicemail on Thanksgiving,” he said. He felt his face burn. “In it, I... was rather more forthcoming than usual.”

“Oh, Mr. Edgeworth!” Kay said, practically bouncing right off the arm of the couch as she leaned forward intently. “Did you confess your love?!”

“No,” Miles said, at the same time that Phoenix said “Yes.” They looked at each other. “Yes,” said Miles, while Phoenix said “No.”

Everyone stared.

“So, um...which is it?” Pearl asked timidly, moving her gaze from Miles to Phoenix.

It was Phoenix who spoke up next. “I guess you could say the answer is... kind of?” He smiled, uncomfortably.

“No way,” the older Fey choked, her eyes going wide. “So... did you guys get together back then?”

Phoenix met Miles’ eyes, asking wordlessly if he could answer. Miles nodded, and Phoenix turned
his head to face Maya again. “I guess it was right after Thanksgiving, then, yeah.”

“NO WAY!” Maya shouted again, standing up from the couch. “So this means... all the time we were planning all these ways to get you together... you'd already gotten together?!”

“Um... I guess so?” Phoenix said, looking taken aback by her sudden intensity.

“So all of our efforts were for nothing? You didn't even need our help?” Maya lamented, hanging her head. Then, suddenly, her head snapped back up. She looked stricken. “Wait a minute... that means...” Her eyebrows angled down, and she clenched her fists. “I WON THE BET!” the Kurain Channeling Master bellowed. “I WON, AND I STILL PAID APOLLO TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS!” She stomped her foot.

“B-Bet?” Miles repeated.

“I have to make a phone call,” Maya muttered darkly, whipping out her cell phone and marching out of the room, a woman on a mission.

“Uh, anyone care to explain?” Phoenix asked, looking around at everyone. He looked as baffled as Miles felt.

“Maya and Apollo made a bet about when you'd get together,” Trucy explained. “Maya bet that you'd be together before Christmas. Apollo bet that you wouldn't. They wagered two hundred dollars.”

“T-Two hundred?!” Phoenix stammered, his eyes going wide. "I didn't even know Maya had money to throw around like that!"

“Well, she does perform channelings on request now,” Pearls reminded them.

“Hm, that's true,” the defense attorney conceded, rubbing his chin. “Wait, that's not what I should be focusing on!” he said next, shaking his head. “What were you guys doing making bets about Edgeworth and me?! That's pretty rude!” He had a point, Miles thought, although knowing these girls, he couldn't say he was surprised.

“Hey, it wasn't our idea,” Athena said, grimacing. “That was all Maya and Apollo.”

“So, does that mean...” Trucy looked up at Miles, her deep blue eyes disappointed. “When I caught you holding Daddy's hand, and you told me nothing had happened between you two... Did you lie to me?...”

Miles gulped. “I-I,” he started. He should have known this would come back to haunt him. He couldn't bear that look on Trucy's face, her lower lip sticking out and her eyebrows drawn up sadly. “It had just happened,” he finally blurted. “I didn't know whether Wright wanted you to know, so I...!” Trucy just looked more devastated. “I didn't mean to lie,” he said desperately. “P-Please, Trucy, don't make that face...”

She sighed and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, she still looked a little regretful, but at least she was smiling. “I understand why you didn't want to tell anyone right away. It's okay.” Miles let out a relieved breath. “But,” she said, a slow smile spreading across her face, “to make it up to me, I have a request.”

“O-Of course,” Miles prompted her, turning a little to face her better on the sofa. “I shall do my best to accommodate.” She was probably going to make Miles assist her in her magic show... surely that couldn't be too difficult, could it?
"You have to let me start calling you Papa," said Trucy, and her sweet smile had never looked so dangerous before.

"What?!" both he and Phoenix exclaimed.

"I'm tired of calling you 'Mr. Edgeworth' and 'Uncle Edgeworth' all the time," Trucy went on. "And since you're only going to get even more involved in Daddy's and my life..." She shrugged. "I'd say it's only fair, right?"

"T-Trucy, don't you think you're rushing things a little?" Phoenix said, his tone placating (or perhaps pleading). He had flushed rather deeply.

Trucy considered for a moment, squinting and tapping her chin. "Hmmm..." She smiled at her father. "Nope," she decided. "I've been waiting for a very long time, after all."

Phoenix flapped his jaw a few times. It reminded Miles of how he'd reacted after that mistletoe kiss. He repressed a smile at the memory.

"Very well," he said, and every person in the room turned to look at him. "If it would please you to call me that, you may." He glanced at Phoenix. "...Assuming your father is all right with it, that is."

"A-All right with it?!" Phoenix breathed, sounding almost offended that Miles had to ask. His brow was knitted in an emotional expression. His eyes looked moist. "I-I mean, yeah, that's okay with me," he muttered, and then turned his face away abruptly.

"There there, Daddy; don't cry," Trucy said soothingly, patting her father's shoulder.

"Trucy's not just a magician, she's a miracle-worker," Kay murmured in awe, her jaw dropped open wide.

Athena nodded fervently. "Brava, Trucy!" she cheered, clapping a few times.

Trucy stood and gave her best performer's bow. "Thank you, thank you."

"Hey, Mr. Edgeworth, can I call you that, too?" the Great Thief joked with a grin.

"No."

Kay laughed and turned to Trucy. "Maybe for your next trick you can get them to move in together,"

she quipped.

"Oh yeah, uh, about that..." Phoenix cleared his throat and turned to his daughter, who was sitting back down between them. "Um, Trucy, I know this is sudden, but..." He tapped his thumbs together nervously. "W-would you mind if we moved somewhere else? With...with Miles?..."

Trucy's jaw dropped like Phoenix's had done a minute ago. Her eyes bugged out, and she braced her weight on her hands, as if preventing herself from toppling off the couch. "F-For real?!" She darted her eyes back and forth from her father to Miles. Miles tried to suppress the flush that was emerging through sheer force of will, but sadly, as usual, he could not. "We're... we're really going to move somewhere with Mr... with Papa?" The name made something warm flicker in Miles' chest, even if it was strange to his ears.

"If you're okay with it," Phoenix said bashfully, staring down at his feet.

Trucy grabbed one of each of Phoenix's and Miles' arms. "Of course I'm okay with it, you sillies!"
she laughed. “I've only been wanting to for years now!”

“Wow,” Kay said, blinking her wide eyes. “You've really come a long way from the emotionally-
constipated guy I used to know, Mr. Edgeworth.”

“I-I beg your pardon?!” Miles responded sharply with a steely glare, though his intimidation factor
was probably diminished by the adorable teenage girl currently hugging his arm.

“Oh... this is just... so overwhelming,” Pearl murmured, clutching her pink cheeks. She'd been quiet
for a while now, Miles realized. Her large eyes swam with unshed tears. “It's all so romantic... I'm so
happy for you both...!” She wiped her eyes, for a tear or two had finally escaped.

“He already spent it! Can you believe that guy?! I want my money back!” Maya shouted, stomping
back into the room. She took a look around at everybody, her eyes then locking onto her cousin.
“Who made Pearly cry?” she said dangerously, her narrowed gaze shooting towards Phoenix.

Phoenix winced. “N-No one!” he yelped, putting up his hands like Maya was pointing a weapon.

“Wright and I were just discussing... future plans,” Miles explained awkwardly. It had been hard
enough getting through this once; did he really have to do it again?

“They're moving in together and Trucy's calling Mr. Edgeworth Papa now!” Athena exploded, and
then put her hands over her mouth, embarrassed at her loud outburst. Well, at least she had taken the
pressure off Wright and himself, Miles thought.

“What?!” Maya jammed her hands onto her hips. Miles had thought she would be thrilled, but
instead she frowned at them. “You guys, I am so happy for you, but don't you think you're being a
bad example for Pearly?!” She gestured to the younger spirit medium, who flinched. Her tone was
stern. “Don't you know that you're supposed to get married before you move in together?!”

“M-Maya,” Phoenix choked, covering his crimson face. “Please... my heart can only take so much in
one day...”

“Trucy has to finish the school year, and Wright had been wanting a place closer to the Agency as
well,” Miles said, attempting a nonchalant shrug that probably wound up looking more like a
nervous twitch. “It's merely more convenient for both of us if I can take Trucy straight to school and
Wright can walk to work.”

“Mr. Edgeworth, you don't have to come up with logical reasons for things like this,” Athena
grimaced. She looked almost embarrassed on his behalf. Miles guessed that his voice hadn't been
nearly as matter-of-fact as he'd intended it to be.

“Yeah, and the way you're blushing doesn't make those excuses very convincing,” Kay pointed out.

“I still say they should get married first,” Maya insisted, flinging herself back on the couch. “I mean,
I've never even heard Edgeworth call Nick by his first name, and now they're going to live together?
You guys have to be role models, you know!” She hugged a surprised Pearl to her chest protectively.
“Think of the children!”

“I'm eighteen, Mystic Maya,” Pearls reminded her, her voice muffled by Maya's clothing.

“Aunt Maya, don't pressure them so much,” Trucy scolded the older woman, which Miles thought
was quite rich coming from the interfering magician. “No matter what we did to force them together,
Ema was right: they were already moving on their own!” Miles didn't quite know what to make of
that reference, but decided it was probably not of import.
“Oh, fine,” Maya huffed, releasing Pearls. She pointed at Phoenix with all the force of a lawyer in the courtroom. “But when you two do tie the knot... you better make me your Best Man, Nick!”

“B-But Maya, you're a girl,” Phoenix sputtered weakly (That was the problem he had with this?).

“Who else are you going to pick?” the spirit medium exclaimed, throwing up her hands. “Larry?!"

Both Miles and Phoenix flinched. Indeed, that would be a disastrous situation. Miles wondered briefly who he would make his own best man, in such a situation. Inexplicably, Franziska's face flashed through his mind. He pushed the thought away; now wasn't the time to think about this. “M-Miss Fey, please, calm yourself,” Miles pleaded. Perhaps he could deal with having to pop the moving-in question to Trucy in front of other people, but popping any other questions... he would prefer very much to do that in private. He wasn't an expert in grand romantic gestures, but he had started to entertain a few possibilities in his mind over the past few weeks. They all seemed so... gaudy, however. Wright knew how he felt. He'd less-than-subtly even promised him to remain by his side forever. Surely, then, he could just... ask, sometime?... No, that was ridiculous. Phoenix deserved better than that...

“G-Guys, I don't think Miles is even a fan of marriage,” Phoenix said, face still aflame in a blush. “I mean, he told me himself last year that he 'wishes to remain unwed.'” He must have been referring to the Sprocket case, Miles realized.

“Th-That's right,” Miles picked up the lifeline Phoenix had thrown. Of course, back then, he hadn't dared to imagine that he'd ever get to be with Phoenix Wright. Phoenix Wright had been an unreachable, hopeless wish that he could scarcely even admit to himself. His affections for him were akin to someone wishing that they could suddenly sprout wings or gills: a fantastical idea that could never come to pass, something to be enjoyed only in dreams. The idea that he would ever reach a point in his life where he could hold Phoenix Wright in his arms at night would have made him burst into hysterical laughter even a year ago. Quite a bit had changed, and thanks to this emotional, honest, and optimistic man next to him, Miles had been forced to rethink his stance on this particular matter. But the others didn't need to know this. “I have no plans to get married,” he asserted.

“Um,” Athena piped up, her face suspicious, “Mr. Edgeworth... I'm hearing a lot of discord in your voice...”

“My bracelet's tightening, too,” Trucy added, holding the thick gold band. “You're lying, Papa.”

“Nggoooh!” Miles winced, bracing his hands on his knees.

“Everybody, please stop... I'm dying,” whimpered Phoenix, sinking his red face into his hands again.

“Oh, okay, we're a reasonable bunch,” Maya said, though Miles thought her expression looked a little too satisfied for someone who was letting a topic go. Evidently, she had gotten the answer she had been looking for. Had Miles really become so transparent?... “We'll leave you guys alone.” She winked. “For now.”

“Thanks a lot, Your Mercifulness,” Phoenix mumbled into his palms.

“Well, everybody,” Kay interjected, hopping off the sofa arm. “I think this news calls for a celebration. I'm thinking... noodles?” She grinned at Pearl.

“I think that sounds lovely,” Pearl responded, smiling brightly and standing. She patted the sides of her yukata searchingly. “Oh, but I didn't bring my purse, so...” She smiled up at Miles and Phoenix. “Thanks in advance!”
“Huh?” Phoenix blurted, sitting up again and dropping his hands.

“I'm always down for a bowl of ramen...or eight,” Maya threw in, clapping her hands together. She rose from her seat, and rested her hands on her hips, grinning at the two men on the sofa. “Courtesy of the happy couple, of course.”

“H-Huh? Huh?” Miles stammered.

“Ooh, I haven't had noodles in weeks!” Athena said excitedly, leaping to her feet. “I'm gonna gorge myself! Thanks, Mr. Wright, Mr. Edgeworth!”

“Huh? Huh? Huh?” Phoenix muttered helplessly, his eyes darting around at all the girls.

“I've been craving some noodles myself,” said Trucy, and she too hopped off the couch. “I'll call up Ema to come with us, too!” She looked over at her father and Miles. “You kept a really big secret from us, so I think you should treat us all to dessert, too, Daddy and Papa. There's a fancy cupcake place nearby.”

Phoenix looked over at him. “There's really only one thing we can say to all this,” he said seriously, getting to his feet.

“I concur,” Miles nodded gravely, standing up as well.

“Oh boy... Here it comes!” Maya said, excited. “Get ready, everyone!”

Miles smiled at the man he loved. “Together, then?” he said.

Phoenix smiled back, reached over, and took his hand, giving it a squeeze. “Always,” he said, his voice soft and his eyes warm. Then he nodded, and took a deep breath. Miles did as well.

“OBJECTION!” they both shouted.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Miles enlists the help of a spy.

Oh yes, that's right, I said "next time."

See you all again next week for the start of "Project: Matrimony." It'll be about 6-7 chapters, 5 of which are already written, and will be from only Phoenix's and Miles' points of view!

Thanks for sticking with me :)

(Also, the Narumitsu Discord is a horrible influence and I have, uh, kind of written a P:M-compliant smut a;skfslkf... I'm not sure if it'll ever get posted here but I just thought I'd let y'all know it exists. The Discord liked it at least :) Also, I coined the word uniporn. Be so proud of me.)

ANNNNNND IF THERE'S EVER MORE FANART I'M JUST GONNA DUMP IT
HERE SO FIRST UP WE HAVE A GORGEOUS THING DRAWN BY
SUDOGCOPTER ON TUMBLR!! LOOK AT ALL THEIR LITTLE FACES!!
THANK YOU SO MUCH FRIEND!!! <3333
NEXT WE HAVE A PIECE OF ART FROM CHAPTER THIRTEEN BY
TEOTANGERINE ON TUMBLR! LOOK AT THE REINDEER SWEATER
OMG!!!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!